

Hundreds of thousands of dollars meant for affordable child care left untouched: coalition ^[1]

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Hundreds of thousands of dollars, originally intended to help low and middle income families afford daycare, is sitting in the bank accounts of childcare centres. But, due to the large surplus, the funds could now be going to higher income families as well.

Lisa Hrechkosy, the executive director of Stanley Knowles Children's Centre, says they've encouraged families to apply for subsidized childcare fees but they still have tens of thousands of dollars untouched.

"I think affordability is crucial, and the subsidy advance didn't target families who really needed it the most. Families who could afford paying childcare were given direction to apply for subsidy are now getting credits," she said.

The Childcare Coalition of Manitoba says this is the only province to use the subsidy system for the credits.

Lori Isber, a parent with the coalition, says the subsidy is difficult to apply for, stigmatized, and communication about applying was limited.

"We were told by the government we couldn't disperse it unless families applied for subsidy, and families didn't apply for subsidy because there was no official Manitoba messaging around it," she said. "Messaging went out through daycare childcare centres."

The coalition says hundreds of thousands of dollars from a \$19 million Canada-Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Agreement is waiting to be used.

"We did have probably three quarters left in the subsidy advance that we were just advised that we needed to find out how we were going to spend that money moving forward," Hrechkosy said.

"Those dollars are going to childcare fees or reducing those childcare fees, and yes I'm assuming some of those higher income families will be receiving some dollars."

Jodie Kehl, executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association, said all families in the province of Manitoba were encouraged to apply for childcare subsidy regardless of their income.

"Again, if we are talking about affordability, we need to know which families really need childcare and affordable childcare," Kehl said, adding the current system is not equitable.

"Let's get rid of the subsidy system and let's use a sliding scale where families based on their net income would pay a percentage of that income up to a maximum fee."

She said the lowest amount a household using subsidy will pay for childcare is \$2 a day, but some cannot afford that.

Provincially funded facilities can charge up to \$42 a day for an infant and \$28.20 for school-aged children for full days.

The province says it will not require centers to return the remaining funds.

Region: Manitoba ^[3]

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