

Child-care report shows N.L. only has enough registered care spaces for 14% of children ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpts

A new report on child care shows Newfoundland and Labrador only has enough regulated child-care spaces for 14 per cent of children under the age of 12 — half the national average.

The report was authored by the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, a non-profit research institute based in Toronto that advocates for an equitable child-care system in Canada.

The report shows Newfoundland and Labrador ranks among the lowest provinces in Canada when measuring the percentage of children who have access to regulated child-care spaces, lower than only Nunavut and Saskatchewan. The national average is 29 per cent.

"Newfoundland has a fair amount of school-age child care, and very little regulated family child care relative to some of the other provinces," Martha Friendly, the unit's executive director, said Tuesday.

While the report is new, the data in it was collected in 2021.

In terms of daycare coverage, Friendly said, the province has always ranked low but the situation has improved in recent years.

"Newfoundland is one of the lower provinces, not the lowest in terms of coverage, but the direction is up. And I think that's really the important thing to think about, is where is it going," she said.

"Now that we have this opportunity with the fees having dropped and the commitment to long-term federal funding, the question is how are we going to build this system in a province that's always had low child-care coverage?"

Friendly said the switch to \$10-a-day child care in Newfoundland and Labrador is encouraging for parents who want to avail of child care but noted it also adds pressure to a system unable to meet the demand.

That could be caused by the pandemic closures of daycare centres around the country, she said, but work needs to be done at the provincial and municipal level to improve access further.

Friendly said the most important thing was reducing the fees for child care but that's just the beginning.

"Then the second and the important phase that has to be ... starting to build those services so that parents can actually use the affordable child care," she said.

"Building a public and non-profit child-care system is something that is really worth doing, but it takes that kind of planning effort.... Unfortunately [it] should have gotten started, you know, like, 40 years ago. But it didn't, so we're starting from now. We really need to put a big push on so parents can get the child care they need."

Education Minister John Haggie has said the provincial government is working to improve the situation and plans to add 700 seats to the College of the North Atlantic's early childhood education program.

Friendly said the government also needs to address the daycare policies that cover children with exceptionalities and inclusion needs to be a core component of any daycare program.

"People are just going to have to keep making better policy. Making good policy decisions about how to be more inclusive, more equitable, and actually make this a program that more parents can use."

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