

Province and city need to work together to solve child care crisis in HRM, says daycare director ^[1]

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Excerpts

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In 2021, one in two young children in Nova Scotia were living without adequate access to care, in what’s known as child care deserts. So, another 9,500 child care spots by March 2026 may sound like a lot—that’s what Nova Scotia and Ottawa promised to create as part of the Canada-Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement spanning 2021 to 2026. Nova Scotia and Ottawa say they’ve created 3,861 new spaces as of Dec. 31, 2023. But spaces can’t keep up with demand.

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Early childhood educators—ECEs—will receive wage increases and access to group benefits and pension plans starting this spring. Jenna Sudds, Canada’s minister of families, children and social development, says the new \$3 per hour wage increase, plus access to group benefits for ECEs, “makes your province quite frankly the envy of many,” at the joint federal-provincial child care announcement Feb. 16 at the Needham in Halifax’s north end.

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Sudds and Becky Druhan, Nova Scotia’s minister of education and early childhood development, were at Needham to announce a three-year Action Plan for how they would be spending the remaining \$440 million of the 2021-2026 child care agreement, including more than \$105 million toward ECE compensations, retirement and health benefits.

Level 1, 2 and 3 ECEs will see their wages rise to between \$22.91 and \$28.78 by April 1, 2024—which still keeps many below the living wage rates for 2023 in Nova Scotia, apart from Cape Breton.

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Nova Scotia’s population is experiencing rapid growth. As 2026 gets closer, Sudds says Canada will discuss how population growth is creating gaps in the action plan’s ability to adequately address the needs of families as “child care is a necessity—it’s not a luxury here in Canada.”

The three-year action plan is divided into five pillars of spending: affordability, access, quality, inclusion and administration. “With help from our federal partners...we now invest \$277 million annually in early learning and child care,” says Druhan.

Says Sudds, “We’re here announcing our \$440 million of continued investment...to make sure that it’s accessible, regardless of where you are in Nova Scotia. It’s important to drill that home– the action plan lays out these commitments to ensure that access is front and center, as we continue to work on all of the other pillars.”

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There’s a complex latticework of barriers when creating new child care spots within existing daycares, or expanding current centres to new locations. Daycares need to have enough trained staff and funding for their wages, adequate space that includes green space, administrative staff to support more families, and diverse and inclusive spaces that meet the needs of children and their families—including minority-language care, additional care needs, overnight care and infant care.

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Williams says part of the problem in finding solutions is that not everyone sees this as a crisis.

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“It’s only those that need child care that see this crisis as a crisis.” Williams hears comments from people saying, “We don’t have kids—why

are we paying for this?” In response, Williams says “Who's going to take care of you in your nursing home? The children that we're raising right now.”

On Wednesday, Feb. 21, the province announced an end to waitlist fees—before this moratorium takes effect, parents could be charged up to \$1,000 per child to stay on a for-profit daycare waitlist in case a spot opened up.

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