

Provide quality, affordable child care for all [CA-NB]^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

Imagine a New Brunswick where parents no longer struggle to find child care services because they exist in every community...where all families can afford these services because they are government funded... and where those day care services are adapted for all children: for all levels of ability, for those living in rural areas as well as in larger cities, and for all linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Our children are the future of our communities. We often hear about the importance of treasuring children and promoting their rights as citizens. Our actions do not always follow our words, especially when it comes time to invest and establish public policies to meet our children's needs.

A self-sufficient New Brunswick must invest in a child care system that includes a range of quality programs available to all children and affordable to their parents. It is the province's duty to offer our children the best start in life, by providing them with what they need and deserve.

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Although the provincial government has made some strides in improving the quality of care in New Brunswick, child care is still seen as a market commodity to be purchased by parents. It has not yet made the transition to a public good that merits significant public policy development and a substantial public funding investment.

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The government's market approach to child care has led and continues to lead to several of gaps: gaps in availability, gaps in affordability and gaps in the quality of programs.

In New Brunswick there are over 99,000 children under 12 years of age. However, there are only 14,170 licensed child care spaces, meaning that 86 per cent of children cannot access programs that meet minimum health and safety standards.

Parents seeking licensed infant care face the largest gap in availability. There are only enough licensed family and centre-based programs to meet the needs of five per cent of the 13,000 infants living in New Brunswick.

According to the Department of Family and Community Services' data, child care fees in New Brunswick range between just under \$3,000 per year for after school care to over \$6,000 per year for infant care. Thus, the two biggest costs faced by families in raising their children are child care fees and housing costs.

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If we want to move away from the current situation -- where only the lucky few can find and afford quality programs, things need to change in New Brunswick.

At the beginning of the month, the provincial government launched a public consultation process on early learning and child care. This consultation is a step in the right direction because, for the first time, the government is asking parents and community members to provide input on child care.

To have an impact, this process must lead to action. The government must develop a policy framework and investment plan to create a universal, publicly-funded child care system that is available to all children in all communities and where programs are affordable to their parents. If New Brunswick wants to truthfully say that we value children, families and communities, we must invest in them.

There is no magic bullet or shortcuts. The elements of a high quality child care system operate as a whole. For the system to function well and to provide quality programs, attention must be paid to all elements. To be successful, New Brunswick must learn from the experience in other provinces and countries where they have made child care a public policy and investment priority.

If New Brunswick follows through and makes child care a priority, we will no longer need to imagine a New Brunswick where quality programs are available and affordable to children, families and communities because it will be a reality. Our children deserve no less.

- reprinted from the Moncton Times and Transcript

Region: Canada ^[2]

New Brunswick ^[3]

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