

Preliminary plans for Quebec day care all include more money from parents [CA-QC] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Early plans to revamp Quebec's popular \$5-a-day day-care program are sure to take millions more from parents, according to a discussion paper released by the Liberal government Wednesday.

The government unveiled three new scenarios to finance the program that will force parents to contribute \$50 million to \$130 million more each year. However, even under the most expensive plan for parents, families with an income of \$100,000 would only pay \$10-per-day for day care, about one-third of the actual cost.

"These are only ideas to spark discussion, but it's also to give an idea of where we want things to go," said Employment and Family Minister Claude Bechard.

About 168,000 children take part in the \$1.3 billion program. The government is reviewing the program amid soaring costs and waiting lists up to three years long. The program cost \$250 million when it was introduced by the Parti Quebecois in 1997 as a cornerstone social policy.

The government has promised to make a decision about the program's future in the fall.

The government put forward three ideas for financing the system Wednesday. In one proposal, the cost would simply rise from \$5 to \$7 per day. That scenario would cost the same for parents of all income levels.

The government also floated a plan where families earning under \$70,000 would still pay \$5, while families earning between \$70,000 and \$100,000 would pay up to \$10 per day.

The final proposal would see parents pay 20 per cent of the day care cost, with the government covering 80 per cent. The effect of that proposal would raise the cost to \$6 per day now and \$7.50 by 2006. Bechard seemed to favour fixing parental contributions to total cost.

"We don't want to have to relive this process every two or three years," he said. "We want to make sure that this process provides a solid footing for the future."

-Reprinted from Canadian Press.

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