

Gov't gives child-care huge boost [CA-SK] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Saskatchewan government announced what is believed to be the largest child-care expansion in the province's history on Thursday, one day before it was to deliver its provincial budget.

The plan will see the number of spaces increase to 8,600 from 7,400 over four years, Premier Lorne Calvert and Glenn Hagel, ministers of community resources and employment, said Thursday.

Hagel said \$3 million will be spent in the upcoming year on the expansion of service, which will be part of Friday's budget. The province is contributing \$2.2 million, and the federal government is committing \$800,000.

"Our whole agenda in the Department of Community Resources and Employment is supporting individuals and families to become as truly independent and self-determined as they can possibly be," said Hagel.

Approximately \$1.8 million will be used to create 500 licensed child-care spaces, which will be 50 per cent subsidized.

Another 250 existing licensed spaces that do not have funding will now be subsidized as of April 1.

Capital funding will also be increased. Early Childhood Services grant funding will receive a \$200,000 increase to cover wages.

An additional \$1 million will kick in on June 1 to increase child-care subsidies by an average of \$20 a month for each child.

Hagel said the federal government is expected to assist the province with the four-year program, providing up to \$20 million.

Donna Rice, director of the 24-Hour Co-op Day Care, said the increase in spaces and subsidies will be a relief to many of the day care's parents.

"I had a parent come in yesterday to pay her fees and she had loonies and toonies, she brought literally a jar full of money. She had no other money," said Rice.

The day care can presently handle 73 children, but Rice said with the space increase, they will add at least eight more spaces.

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