

Conservatives say child care is big priority ^[1]

Leader David Alward says Conservatives would increase number of child-care spaces across the province

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EXCERPTS

Tory Leader David Alward's promise to invest up to \$35 million over four years to revamp the child-care system in New Brunswick would be a step in the right direction for families struggling to make ends meet, but doesn't come close to the recommendation of \$106 million per year made by the New Brunswick Child Care Coalition.

Alward said his plan would cost about \$35 million over four years: \$6 million for training and \$29 million to support the child-care system.

Jody Dallaire, executive-director of the coalition said the investment promised by the Tories would be a good start, even though the coalition had recommended the province try to achieve the national average of \$106 million annually provided by other provinces.

Alward made a campaign stop at a Dieppe daycare yesterday where he unveiled a new plan focused on increasing accessibility, affordability, quality and inclusivity in the child-care system. Alward said his plan is a high priority for the Conservatives, who want to make life better for families of all income brackets who depend on child care, especially for parents on shift work and those who live in rural communities. Alward said child care for working families has been a hot topic of discussion during his trips around the province.

The NB Child Care Coalition recently presented the results of a study indicating that the current system forces many women to make a choice between having a family and having a career because a large portion of their salary would simply go straight into paying for daycare.

The Childcare and Early Learning Plan proposes to increase the number of childcare spaces by 50 per cent, bringing the total to 30,000, increasing the total number of infant spaces by 50 per cent to 2,100 and to make sure daycare is affordable for families who earn less than \$30,000 per year. He said the program would raise the ceiling for the early learning and childcare subsidy from the current \$42,000 to \$55,000.

Alward said the program would be a priority and be phased in during the first four years of a Conservative government. He said child care needs in both rural and urban communities would be addressed on a case-by-case basis. The program would also focus on families living in rural areas, children with special needs and parents who perform shift work or seasonal work. He said that could mean more funding for existing daycare centres, help for new ones and working with businesses to set up daycare facilities on site that would make it more convenient for employees.

"The needs of people in rural New Brunswick are very different than the needs of people in urban areas. We're also prepared to shift away from how child care has been financed historically, which has created a systemic approach. What we know right now is that we have a crisis in access, especially in both urban centres and especially for children who are very young and especially for children with special needs, and that is not acceptable," Alward told reporters as a group of children seated on a table between him and the media drew pictures with crayons.

"One size does not fit all. Every community is different ... We believe that we need to be flexible as a province.

"As we go forward, we have to continue to improve the quality that is being provided in these centres."

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-reprinted from the Times and Transcript

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