

Ontario Budget: Parents decry lack of new child care funding^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Tammy Miller's dream of finding affordable child care were dashed in Tuesday's provincial budget which provided no new funding for the cash-strapped sector.

"I've been looking and there are no spots. Just long waiting lists and the prices are outrageous," says the Toronto mother whose son, Hunter, turns six months Wednesday. With infants fees as high as \$1,800 a month, Miller has also added her name to the city's daycare subsidy waiting list. Currently, more than 21,000 children are waiting.

"The second I can get daycare, the second I can be out working," says Miller, 29, who once earned more than \$18 an hour, plus commission in marketing and administration.

Her partner, Jesse Taylor, 30, works six days a week as a pastry chef. But he brings home just \$1,100 every two weeks which is quickly gobbled up in the family's \$1,000 monthly rent.

"We don't have cable or internet access or a home phone," she said, adding that she is careful to only use her cell phone in the evenings.

Adding to the family's woes is Finance Minister Dwight Duncan's plan to delay a promised \$200 annual increase to the Ontario Child Benefit in 2013.

The benefit, part of the province's Poverty Reduction Strategy, has lifted 20,000 kids out of poverty since 2008. But without child care, Miller doesn't see her family moving out of poverty any time soon.

"I certainly don't see anything in this budget for us," she said.

Child care advocates were shocked there was no lifeline in the budget to chronically underfunded daycares, now scrambling to serve younger children as 4- and 5-year-olds enter all-day kindergarten.

Advocates had been calling for an immediate infusion of \$287 million and a new funding model pegged to inflation.

"With half of the children in full-day kindergarten programs starting in September, we will literally see hundreds of child care programs at risk of closing," said Andrea Calver of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. "Parents tell us Ontario needs more child care, not less."

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

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