

Group urges public to lobby government for better child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Now is the time for parents to speak up about childcare needs as the province develops a social policy framework.

That's the idea behind a new provincial advocacy campaign launched by Public Interest Alberta - to get Albertans to stand up and speak out for a public early childhood education system that is affordable, accessible and high quality, said Alison Van Dyke, Medicine Hat Community Mobilizer for PIA

"New statistics show that the childcare crisis is worsening," said Van Dyke. "There are more families unable to access or afford child care as the province underfunds the system."

This includes Alberta having the sixth lowest per capita funding for children 0-12 years old, not keeping pace with the number of childcare spaces needed, and subsidies for low-income families not keeping pace with increased childcare costs.

"These figures clearly show why so many young families in Medicine Hat are on wait lists and unable to afford the high costs of child care," said Van Dyke. "It's time that the Alberta government invest properly in building a quality public early childhood education and care system that will actually reduce the costs of quality care and address the critical needs of our growing population."

"Parents need to have a voice and express what they want for children," said Jennifer Usher, with the Medicine Hat & District Child Care Association. "The government has been listening to those in the field but this is the perfect time to hear from parents in Alberta."

The social policy framework coincides with discussions by various organizations to also develop an early learning and care framework.

MHDCCA has been taking part in discussions - including calling upon the government for greater investment in child care through operational base funding like what is found in the education system to ensure well-trained staff and enriched learning environments.

"I hope that parents will have a voice, because ultimately we're here to provide a service for parents and we need to have their voice heard about what is important to them," said Michelle May, chair of the MHDCCA and an early childhood educator. "They need to pay attention to this and care about this because it's affecting their most precious gift."

"Childcare is much more than custodial work, than babysitting," Usher said. "And early learning is much more than the pushing down of school subjects on very young children - learning starts at birth if not before, and care learning and development are integral to each other."

As part of PIA's campaign, they will be distributing postcards/brochures to various places in Medicine Hat with five priorities the government should address with childcare. People can fill out these postcards and mail them in, and they will then be sent along to the government.

-reprinted from Medicine Hat News

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