

Daycare workers getting second pay raise in two years ^[1]

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Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 22 Jan 2016

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

For the second year in a row, thousands of chronically underpaid workers in Ontario's licensed child care centres and home daycares will be getting a pay hike under a provincial plan to boost wages by up to \$2-an-hour.

Education Minister Liz Sandals announced the second \$1-an-hour pay increase at a Guelph daycare centre Friday. It took effect Jan. 1 this year.

But just like last year, most child care workers will have to wait months to get their money because of the administratively cumbersome payment system that requires centres and home daycare agencies to apply for the cash through their local municipality.

"It's too bad it has to be so complicated," said Toronto early childhood educator Kristen Varley, who earns \$18.50 an hour at a non-profit centre downtown. She received her 2015 provincial wage enhancement grant of \$700 in a lump sum in December.

While the cash helped with the holidays, Varley, 29, said she would rather see the money included in her regular paycheck.

"At the end of the day you don't really feel like you have gotten a raise," she said. "It's more like a bonus."

The increase, announced in the Liberals' 2014 budget, is aimed at closing the wage gap between early childhood educators (ECEs) working in full-day kindergarten who earn between \$20 and \$26 an hour and those in the community where median wages are about \$16.30 an hour.

It applies only to workers making less than \$26.27 an hour.

The \$269 million three-year initiative is part of the province's plan to shore up licensed child care programs serving children from infancy to age 4 that have been reeling from the loss of kindergarten-age kids and the exodus of qualified staff to better-paying jobs in the school system.

"Ontario's Registered Early Childhood Educators and child care professionals are passionate, hard-working, and dedicated," Sandals told reporters at Guelph's Parkview Daycare. "We want to recruit and retain these talented caregivers to ensure stable, licensed child care programs for Ontario's children and families."

Last year, 94 per cent of centres and 91 per cent of home daycare agencies applied for the grant. Centres and agencies have until March 31 to apply for the money this year.

In response to complaints about the roll-out from municipalities and daycare operators last year, the province has provided more flexibility in administering the wage grant for 2016, said a spokeswoman for Sandals.

The province is also encouraging centres to provide this year's wage enhancement as part of workers' regular pay or in quarterly lump sum payments.

"It is our expectation that the wage enhancement will be rolled into child care workers' pay cheques eventually," said Alessandra Fusco.

"But at this time we are working . . . to ensure that we don't create too large of an administrative burden in moving to a live payment model too quickly."

For Varley, who has a university degree as well as a two-year college diploma in early childhood education, the wage grant is a welcome acknowledgement of the work she does in a job she loves.

"I'm a young professional. I'm getting married this year and I have gazillions of bills to pay, so the raise is great from a personal perspective," she said. "But from a professional perspective it's only fair that we should get as much as ECEs in the school system."

Daycare wage grant by the numbers

\$2 an hour: Maximum increase for workers in licensed centres;

\$20 per day: Maximum increase for workers in licensed homes;

28,827: number of workers in daycare centres who got the grant in 2015;

4,296: number of workers in home daycares who got the grant in 2015;

\$269 million: Cost of grant over three years;

351,000: number of licensed child care spaces in Ontario;

\$1 billion: provincial funding for daycare in 2015;

\$16.30: median hourly wage of daycare worker in 2014.

Source: Ontario Ministry of Education

-reprinted from Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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