

New child-care policy a step toward gender parity at Edmonton power tables ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A new child-care policy that could see the city organize employee daycares at up to six new locations is a step toward eventually achieving gender parity in leadership positions, Mayor Don Iveson says.

"It can support younger employees on the leadership track, in particular women," he said Wednesday. "This may help us over time support the ascension of more women into senior leadership positions. Child care is a consistent challenge for many of our employees with children."

The new child-care policy says Edmonton will investigate daycare options whenever it has at least 500 employees working or living within a five-kilometre radius of a city work location, such as an office or transit yard. The daycare would be provided by an external provider on city land, but not subsidized.

Coun. Bev Esslinger, the only woman on city council, has also argued for child care as one way to address the gender imbalance at the city. Edmonton has one woman on the seven-member corporate leadership team.

In Alberta, women still take on more child-care responsibilities than men. They also take more of the parental leave available to both parents. Gender experts say that can hurt their long-term career prospects.

Dawn Newton, a member of the city's Women's Advocacy Voice of Edmonton, said daycares will also help the city attract the best talent as an employer. "Employees are making choices about what's going to work for them as a family," she said. Child care is critical for many people.

Edmonton's policy includes a preference for not-for-profit, affordable care, which gives parents an opportunity to sit on an oversight board and that stresses quality in early childhood education, she said. "It's not just an issue for men. It's across the gender spectrum."

"It will help us with attraction and retention of staff," Iveson said. "But if it helps create, indirectly, the creation of more child-care spaces in the community, than that's also good because we know there's a huge need out there."

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