

Nova Scotia increases wages for daycare workers to national average ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Daycare workers who are currently among the lowest-paid in Canada will get a raise and subsidies for parents will increase under a new plan to revamp Nova Scotia's early childhood education system.

The five-year plan announced Wednesday by Education Minister Karen Casey will also increase the number of daycare spaces, while boosting the threshold for families who are eligible for maximum subsidies.

"We can no longer make patchwork improvements," said Casey. "It was time and it is time for significant change."

As of October, early childhood education workers will see their pay rise in accordance with their level of training, from an average low of \$12.84 an hour to between \$15 and \$19 an hour.

Casey said the increases will push wages to the national average, but based on data from 2012.

"We needed a target. The 2012 statistics were the last national average that we have and I certainly made it clear in the legislature . . . that we would be using the 2012 statistics."

The department said the pay increases will affect 64 per cent of its level 1 trained workers, 85 per cent of level 2 workers and 82 per cent of level 3 workers. The remainder are already being paid at the increased levels and will not see a wage hike.

The money for the increases is included in \$6.6 million in funding for early childhood education in the spring budget.

Daily subsidies for parents will also be increased beginning July 1 and there will also be a cap of between one and three per cent placed on parents' fees. That means parents with a maximum subsidy could pay about \$140 less a month for infant care and \$80 less for toddler and preschool care.

Currently, families earning more than \$21,000 a year are not eligible for the maximum subsidy, but that threshold will be increased to \$25,000. As well, families with a total income of up to \$70,000 will be eligible for a partial subsidy.

The government said the changes could benefit up to 700 families currently in the program, while attracting an additional 1,200 new families.

Kelly Goulden, executive director of the Nova Scotia Childcare Association, said her organization is pleased with the changes announced in the plan.

"This is something that has been a long time coming," said Goulden. "We have worked very closely with the sector and the government and we are pleased with the commitment to recognize the value of the early childhood educators."

Goulden called the pay increases "a start" and said work would continue to see that veteran workers who already earn the maximum pay levels get increases in the future.

Margot Nickerson, president of CUPE's largest Halifax-area local representing early childhood educators, also welcomed the intent of the plan as "exciting" for the sector.

However, Nickerson said she was disappointed with a pay increase she likely wouldn't see as a worker employed with a non-profit daycare.

"I feel in some ways the people who work in those settings will be penalized, whereas people who work in the profit area . . . may be receiving the benefit of this increase," said Nickerson.

Under the plan, the government will develop an early learning curriculum and will require all early childhood educators to have a degree, diploma or certificate.

There will also be an initiative and direct funding to increase daycare spaces in communities that need them most, while the number of centres offering programs to children with special needs will also be expanded.

-reprinted from Cape Breton Post

Region: Nova Scotia ^[2]

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