

# Will western provinces ban 'unfair' child care wait list fees? <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

When parents in downtown Edmonton discover they're expecting, one of their first calls is to Suzanne MacLean. She isn't part of a large family, nor is she a midwife or an obstetrician. She's the gatekeeper to one of the most sought-after child care centres in Alberta's capital.

"They still phone in when they conceive, looking to find space for their 12-month-old child," MacLean says. "Many times I can't get them in."

The waiting list for child care at Edmonton's Oliver Centre, which MacLean oversees, has held steady at 300 kids for two years. As a result, MacLean refuses to charge parents a fee to hold a spot on the list.

Between licensed and unlicensed, for-profit and not-for-profit centres, day care operators across the western provinces are all over the map when it comes to wait list fees. Some charge. Some don't. Some charge but refund parents who find care elsewhere. Costs can range from \$10 to more than \$100.

It's a practice about to be banned in Ontario. Calling the fees unfair, Ontario Education Minister Mitzie Hunter announced a ban last week on all child care wait list fees at licensed day cares and home agencies as of Sept. 1.

Global News checked to see if other provinces, west of Ontario, plan to follow suit.

Alberta:

In Alberta, child care providers maintain their own wait lists, which includes deciding whether to charge wait list fees. In downtown Edmonton, where child care can run parents north of \$1,000 per month, non-refundable registration fees can cost as much as \$150.

According to Aaron Manton, spokesperson for Alberta's Human Services ministry: "We currently have no plans to follow Ontario but we remain committed to finding ways to ease the burden of child care costs on parents."

For the Alberta government, that means working towards \$25-a-day child care "when finances improve."

British Columbia:

Child care centres in B.C. are considered independent businesses so each provider determines if it keeps a wait list and whether to charge a fee. In an email to Global News, a spokesperson for the B.C. Ministry of Children and Family Development writes that wait list data is kept by individual providers and not tracked provincially.

"As such, the B.C. government is not currently considering changes to legislation that could impact the ability of child care providers to effectively manage their operations," the spokesperson said.

Manitoba:

According to Pat Wege, executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association, it is not common for operators in Manitoba to charge a wait list fee. The province is unique in that it has a central online child care registry. Parents can apply for space in licensed facilities and add their child to more than one list at a time. David von Meyenfeldt, a press secretary for the Manitoba government, says any fees charged by provincially-funded facilities must be refunded.

"Fees are typically applied to the first child care bill," von Meyenfeldt said. "The vast majority of licensed child care centres are bound by maximum regulated child care fees and therefore any such registration or administration fees charged are required to be refunded to parents."

Saskatchewan:

The Ministry of Education oversees child care in Saskatchewan. Spokesperson Chris Hodges tells Global News the province isn't aware of instances where wait list fees are being charged and as a result, "does not currently have a policy in place banning wait-list fees for child care spaces."

At the University of British Columbia's Child Care Services, a manager is employed full-time to oversee a waiting list which includes more than 1,000 families, all hoping to secure one of the centres 600 spaces. The centre charges a \$15 non-refundable waiting list fee, which pays for the time to manage the database.

Darcelle Cottons, the centre's director, says while fees can be abused by "unscrupulous operators" who use it as a revenue stream, they also create a paper trail which protects staff from parents desperate to find a space for their child.

"In times of extremely long lists and high parent stress we have been accused of losing people's applications," Cottons writes. "Money creates a paper trail so all applications are traceable and there is always proof if an application has indeed been received."

MacLean has had her share of phone calls from angry parents who are desperate to find a daycare space for their child.

"They're frustrated," MacLean says. "Having no space or no quality care for a child to be able to go to it's a little bit ridiculous actually."

While MacLean believes Ontario's ban on wait list fees will alleviate some of the stress parents face in finding child care, she considers it a Band-Aid.

-reprinted from Global News

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** cost <sup>[4]</sup>

wait list fees <sup>[5]</sup>

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