

Child care funding will focus on kids aged 0-4 ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Liberal government's plan to add 100,000 child care spaces over the next five years is focusing on kids ages 0-4, two provincial cabinet ministers said in Sudbury on Friday.

Sudbury MPP Glenn Thibeault, who's the energy minister, and Deputy Premier Deb Matthews made the announcement at Teddy Bear Day Care in New Sudbury.

"It's helping to make child care more accessible to families in the province and, of course, right here in Sudbury," Thibeault said. "We know that helping parents find quality, affordable child care is what people expect of us. We're going to deliver on that."

Matthews said Ontarians have said "loud and clear" that finding affordable, quality child care is difficult.

"In our Throne Speech, we made a historic commitment to increase the number of child care spaces, just like here at Teddy Bear, by 100,000," she said.

Starting next year, there will be more spaces for infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers, Matthews said, because that's where the greatest demand is from families.

Only about 20 per cent of children aged 0-4 are in licensed care, she said.

"Our province is changing, and it's important that we, as government, is there helping working families access high-quality affordable care," Matthews said. "We heard and confirmed that demand is much higher than that. Parents want to put their kids in licensed child care.

"This major investment will double capacity for those 0-4 year-olds, providing access to 40 per cent of the children who need it."

It will cost between \$1 billion and \$3 billion to create the new spaces, and operating costs will be between \$600 million and \$750 million a year.

"There is money in this announcement for new construction, for updating existing space and, working with municipalities, we will also support increased spaces in community and workplace settings," Matthews said. "This will require ongoing work with our municipal partners, and with the federal government."

Exactly how the funding will be allocated and how much Northern communities such as Sudbury will receive still has to be determined, she said. The next step to talk to people in the child-care sector to find out what the specific needs are.

"We have a lot of work ahead of us," Matthews said. "We have to consult with our partners and people who are actually on the front lines, because they know best what the need is."

Tracy Saarikoski, executive director of the Teddy Bear Day Care, said Friday's announcement is welcome.

"This announcement is very good news for Ontario families," Saarikoski said. "There appears to be a renewed focus on early learning and care in our province where all families can access quality child care programs.

"This government is building the foundation for a better system, a new system for our youngest learners and professionals in Ontario. But there is more work to be done."

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