



NDP PEI Statement on the future of childcare services on PEI

Prince Edward Island needs a publicly operated and managed childcare system. Families have been struggling with lack of local access, unaffordability and haphazard standards and programming in childcare services for too long.

The recently signed agreement between Ottawa and the PEI government, through which Ottawa grants PEI \$121.3 million to assist the province develop its childcare system, requires that federal funding is used predominantly “to support not-for-profit public early learning childcare providers/operations as well as family home childcare.” According to this agreement the PEI government has committed to “exploring options for the expansion of the not-for-profit component” of its system.

We haven’t seen any evidence of this yet. And there are no signs that the government is taking the steps necessary to develop the capacity of our communities to lead and participate in the creation of non-profit childcare services. Non-profit or locally run public services will not magically “pop up” in our underserved regions unless resources and funding is invested in the growth of non-profit, locally controlled, boards of directors or non-profit cooperative organizations.

For too long PEI governments have refused to invest in community-economic development based in a well-supported culture of community-based non-profit development. (The focus has been exclusively on support for “start ups” and for-profit business models)¹. In fact, of all of Canada’s provinces, PEI invests the least per capita in the non-profit sector.

Now the federal government is requiring PEI to make a shift and focus its efforts on developing non-profit childcare services. Relative to other provinces PEI has, so far, done a respectable job of regulating prices in a system which relies largely on for-profit providers. This new funding gives us a wonderful opportunity to improve our system further and continue to be a leader. Another stated goal of the funding is a reduction of daily fees to \$10 a day by 2025.

Here’s how NDP PEI sees this happening:

1. **The creation of a Government division mandated to develop community capacity to build non-profit or public childcare services.**

This division will promote and build the capacity of community members, municipalities and other non-profit agencies to develop community-based governance structures needed to run non-profit childcare services. Government staff will do this by providing hands on support and resources to community groups.

¹ Such a model is also much needed in the development of affordable housing and community-controlled alternative energy projects.

2. Increase childcare services including early learning centres in communities which are currently under served.

The new government division will focus on developing community-based boards of directors for non-profit childcare services in underserved regions. This would include francophone communities which are in particular need. It would also ensure that community boards represent the issues of gender diverse children and their families, the particular needs of newcomer, immigrant and refugee families and children with disabilities and challenges.

In addition, support and resources will be available to enable privately run childcare centres and before and after school programmes to transition to a non-profit organization.

3. Indigenous autonomy.

Government will provide funding to PEI's off reserve indigenous communities to create their own childcare services and early learning centres.

4. Improve the quality of family home childcare services and provide supports and benefits for in home providers.

Regional non-profit or public organizations will be funded by government to support family home childcare providers. These organizations will monitor standards, coordinate placements of children and provide professional development opportunities and relief to providers. Regulated fees will take the burden of negotiating rates off both providers and families. These non-profit bodies will also develop a roster of qualified childcare workers who wish to work as relief workers when a family home provider is unable to work or a childcare centre in the community is short of staff. This will reduce the tremendous pressure on childcare workers to work when they are sick.

The recent provincial government announcement of one-time grants to existing and potential home childcare providers exemplifies the current government's refusal to create a public program which will provide ongoing resources, coordination and support to home childcare providers and families looking to use them.

5. Province-wide before and after school care programs.

Before and after school childcare programs will be provided through the education system. These programs will open at 7 a.m. and end at 6 p.m. with a bus service to take children home at the end of the day.

6. Extended hours childcare.

Extended hours of opening will be offered in some childcare centres for parents who work evening or early morning shifts. Government will design a community-based education campaign to assure parents that using extended hours childcare does not make you a “bad parent”. Where demand grows tentatively government support will be provided to cover the cost of maintaining the service while it is in the growth stage.

7. Workplace childcare.

Government will provide incentives to large employers to contract with non-profit childcare providers to establish a childcare centre associated with their workplace.

8. Higher staff wages.

Child-care workers are among the most important front-line workers in our communities – taking care of our children as well as enabling parents to earn livings and contribute to the economy. However, they are among the least well paid and it is not surprising that childcare workers migrate to the kindergarten programs in the school system where wages are higher. Some important work has been done to address this situation, but still many workers in childcare centres are earning minimum wage. A new pay grid which applies to all workers in each centre must be developed while opportunities for upgrading levels of training and certification continue to be made available.

9. Public Transit

While a publicly owned and operated transit system cannot be funded through the federal government’s childcare grant, it is an essential service which enables parents to juggle dropping off of their children at their childcare provider and picking them up at the end of the day with their obligations to be at their jobs on-time.

NDP PEI policies and platforms have advocated for increased investments in childcare services, national childcare standards, and public infrastructure for many decades. We are long overdue for a well-resourced public sector with adequate investment to ensure our most vulnerable children and families receive quality, affordable and accessible childcare services across the province.