

Alberta's Opportunity

CHILD CARE THAT WORKS

A CHILD CARE POLICY FOR ALBERTA

*Countless Alberta families
can't find or can't afford the child care they need.*

This situation is hurting Alberta's families, it's hurting Alberta's economy, and it mustn't continue. Alberta can afford to invest in quality child care—in fact, it can't afford *not* to make that investment.

Like our economy, our need for quality child care is growing faster than in any other province. And yet Alberta only has enough child care spaces to accommodate about ten percent of our children. And child care centres face a relentless uphill struggle to recruit and retain staff. It's an unsustainable situation that urgently requires solutions.

Every Alberta family should have access to quality child care, and families who care for their children at home should be supported in that choice.

The Alberta Liberal Caucus is committed to expanding child care: in quantity, in quality, and in the availability of spaces at a reasonable cost.



An Alberta Liberal government will provide:

- More high quality, diverse child care spaces
- A larger, more stable child care workforce
- Better support to parents and caregivers
- A commitment to the QUAD principles developed by child care experts: quality, accessibility, universality, and developmental benefits for children in care

ASSESSING THE NEED

Weslyn Mather, MLA and Alberta Liberal Shadow Minister for Children's Services, toured the province in 2006, hosting round-table discussions on child care in Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge and Camrose. Wherever she went, Albertans spoke out with their child care concerns, indicating four key problems:

- long wait lists for child care spaces
- difficulty retaining staff
- concerns about the quality of care and
- parents struggling to balance the demands of working and raising children.

Weslyn came away from these meetings convinced that Alberta was failing in its responsibility to meet the needs of children and families in our province.

Since then, Weslyn has kept in touch with the people she met during these discussions, and has made many connections with other people affected by this issue. In crafting this policy, she consulted extensively with child care providers, educators, policy makers and parents.



The Current Situation: An Unsustainable System

- Alberta has regulated child care spaces for about 10 percent of our children. Only Newfoundland and Saskatchewan have fewer. Quebec and Yukon can accommodate about 30 percent of their children.
- Alberta is the only province where the number of day care spaces dropped significantly between 1992 and 2004. During that same period, the number of spaces countrywide more than doubled.
- In 2004, Alberta had Canada's lowest percentage of women with preschool children in the work force. Many Alberta mothers simply can't return to work due to lack of child care options. If our participation had kept pace with Quebec, Alberta's economy would have 17,000 much-needed additional workers. If even half of these people decided to work, it would have a hugely beneficial impact on Alberta's labour shortage.
- In 2004, Alberta had the lowest public spending per child care space of any Canadian province. Our support level is about half of Newfoundland's or Saskatchewan's, and less than a fourth of Quebec's.
- Alberta is the only province or territory that invested less in child care in 2004 than it did in 1992, and there is no guarantee that the new funding, based on discontinued federal transfers, will be maintained.
- Alberta is the only province that does not offer parents subsidies for child care up to the age of 12.
- Alberta places harsher restrictions on maternity and parental leaves than any other province.

THE ALBERTA LIBERAL CAUCUS STRATEGY FOR CHILD CARE

1) More high quality, diverse child care spaces

Too many Alberta families can't find affordable, high quality child care. We need to find creative ways—including increased funding—to encourage private, public, and municipally operated child care, including options such as child care centres, day homes, out of school care, and respite care.

Better Funding

Fixed costs can pose a huge barrier to creating new child care centres and expanding existing ones. Through start-up funding, and operational funding for accredited centres, out-of-school care and day homes, we will trigger the creation of new centres and help existing centres to flourish.

Municipal Grants

Municipalities have a long history of providing excellent child care in our province. Our improved grants will encourage more municipalities to get involved in child care, while also supporting existing programs. Good child care makes a community a better place to live and work, attracting more citizens and businesses.

Employer Involvement

We will work with employers and industry to develop a set of best practices to improve conditions for employees with children, and to increase understanding between employers and the parents who work for them. Employers will also be eligible to benefit from start-up funding and operating funding once accredited.

2) A larger, better trained, more stable child care workforce

With our province's booming economy, good workers are hard to find and hard to keep, especially in the child care sector. Child care workers traditionally face low wages, high stress, and little professional respect. Staff shortages place a strain on existing operators and discourage potential new ones. Many workers would like to pursue additional training to improve their

skills as early childhood educators, but cannot afford to do so. An Alberta Liberal government would do a better job in sharing the costs of child care wages and education with the following measures:

Wage Enhancements in Accredited Centres

Alberta already helps to pay the wages of child care staff, but we can do much better. We will boost wage enhancements at every level to help centres recruit and retain staff.

Child Care Bursary Program

We will provide annual financial support for students in early childhood education. Graduating students who remain in Alberta as child care workers for three years after graduating won't have to repay those funds.

3) More options for parents and caregivers

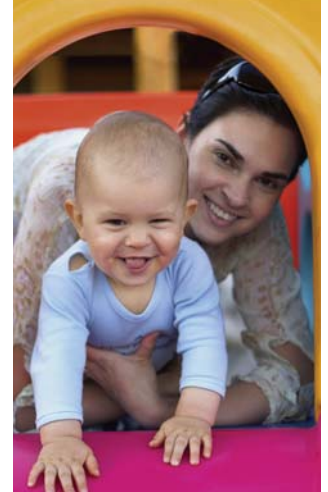
Alberta is the only province in Canada that cuts off child care support for children at age six, and current eligibility cut-offs mean that there aren't subsidies available for respite care. At the same time, many families with infants and toddlers can't find child care spaces for their children. The Alberta Liberals will address these major shortcomings.

Increased Subsidy Eligibility

With an Alberta Liberal government, children aged 6–12 will be eligible for subsidies—as they already are in every other Canadian province. We will also reduce the minimum number of hours required for subsidy eligibility. With this support, more families will be able to afford out-of-school care and respite care for their children.

Infant and Toddler Space Incentives

We will provide specialized financial assistance to centres and day homes that offer infant and toddler care, to address their higher staffing costs and to encourage more centres to create spaces for very young children.



From *Alberta Horizons* to *Alberta's Opportunity*

In the spring of 2006, Team Taft introduced Alberta Horizons, a discussion of Alberta's future. Ideas arising from two of the four themes of Alberta Horizons—economic sustainability and social development—have led to “Child Care that Works” the Alberta Liberal Caucus plan to create safe, affordable child care spaces for Alberta families.

“Alberta’s prosperity and growth as a healthy society depend absolutely upon the way we raise our children. Providing safe, affordable child care is essential if we hope to help Alberta grow to its full potential.”

— Kevin Taft, MLA
Leader of the Alberta Liberal Caucus

“Alberta needs affordable child care solutions that put children and their families first. For the sake of a happy, sustainable and healthy future, we must invest in the next generation of Albertans.”

—Weslyn Mather, MLA
Shadow Minister for Children’s Services

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Vision and Values of the Alberta Liberal Caucus

Our Vision

The Alberta Liberal Caucus looks ahead to an amazing future for Alberta. We see:

- unparalleled opportunity and enduring prosperity,
- fairness, humanity and generosity,
- citizens flourishing in a healthy environment, and
- open, accountable government.

Our Values

We Value:

- an Alberta that works for all Albertans,
- individual rights and freedoms,
- building strong communities,
- sustaining our natural environment for future generations,
- universal, excellent public health care,
- flexible, exceptional public education,
- a flourishing economy based on an energetic private sector and an effective public sector,
- equity, care and compassion
- the nurturing of every Albertan’s talents and aspirations,
- the courage and foresight to grasp great possibilities,
- thrift and stewardship,
- imagination and initiative,
- sound planning and management, and
- democracy with room for dissent.

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