

## Family Day Home and Agency Funding and Support: Questions and Options

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The Ministry of Children's Services announced on May 6 that it will provide family day home agencies and approved family day homes with up to \$1 million in grants to support operations, supplies and equipment.<sup>1</sup> This is a potentially valuable commitment to the 61 family day home agencies and their 11,754 approved family day home spaces across Alberta, of which 7 agencies serve Edmonton with 2,973 spaces.<sup>2</sup>

These grants are helpful, but key concerns remain for family day home agencies, approved family day home educators, and families of young children:<sup>3</sup>

- Edmonton agencies are concerned about their operating costs, such as staffing, rent, leases, and insurance. The sudden decline in parental fee revenue due to decreased enrollment presents financial challenges to agency operations.
- Edmonton agencies cannot assume that day home educators will enroll new children, accept families returning to their care, or keep their day homes open. For example, day home educators may be concerned about themselves and their families contracting COVID-19 from children in care or they may decide to close due to reduction in income from lower enrollment.
- Families, particularly low-income and vulnerable families, are concerned about maintaining employment and paying for child care. Families who have temporarily withdrawn their children from family day homes are also concerned about guaranteeing their spots and paying holding fees until they can return to care.

At least two major questions remain about whether family day homes and agencies in Edmonton and Alberta have what they need to continue to safely provide high-quality, accessible, and affordable early learning and care to families during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

**Question 1: Will these grants be sufficient to ensure that approved family day homes and agencies—and the families that use them—will be adequately protected from COVID-19?**

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<sup>1</sup> *Relief for the child care sector*. Retrieved May 6, 2020 from <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=71285388C2A58-EBFA-E8E6-0CEDD4EDF6EB6965>.

<sup>2</sup> *Child Care Information March 2020*. Retrieved May 7, 2020 from <https://open.alberta.ca/opendata/childcareinformation>.

<sup>3</sup> From April 17-28, 2020, agency directors and coordinators representing the seven Edmonton family day home agencies participated in one-on-one telephone interviews about what their agencies and day homes are experiencing.

Day homes in Alberta were directed to follow enhanced sanitation practices on March 15.<sup>4</sup> Family day home agencies and approved family day homes have struggled to afford and find cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) for new public health guidelines over a period of nearly two months. The approved family day homes in the province have been provided access to one-time grants for supplies and equipment. Still, they may continue to face challenges procuring and paying for supplies and equipment as the COVID-19 situation continues, including in the coming months as the economy recovers.

**Options.** Ongoing funding and support for the length of time that enhanced sanitation practices are in place could help ensure family day homes and agencies have the necessary PPE and other supplies for public health and safety. A one-time payment may not be enough for many programs, especially if COVID-19 restrictions continue in some form for a long period.

**Question 2: Will these grants be enough to ensure that family day homes and agencies can continue to operate and provide affordable child care, both now and as the post-COVID relaunch progresses in Alberta?**

Many approved family day homes have closed their doors since the COVID-19 crisis began, reducing the spaces available for families now and potentially making it harder for parents to return to work later. Despite provincial rules allowing approved family day homes to continue to operate—and even to take more children in some cases—overall enrollment in Edmonton’s approved family day homes has decreased an estimated 30%. As a result, approximately 23% of Edmonton’s approved family day homes have closed since the crisis began and four of the seven Edmonton family day home agencies have laid off one home visitor/consultant each. Family day homes and agencies, which have been open throughout the crisis, have not received funding for unfilled spaces.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, day home educators and agency staff everywhere are taking increased risks by working during the crisis. Many day home educators and agency staff face potential exposure to COVID-19 in their everyday interactions with children and parents. If day home educators and agency staff feel that they are not compensated for that increased risk (including having access to adequate cleaning supplies and PPE), then they may leave their positions or close their day homes, further reducing the supply of spaces available.

**Options.** Additional targeted funding for family day homes and agencies could help ensure their survival. For approved family day homes currently providing child care, funding to cover the daily cost of unfilled spaces could prevent day homes from closing due to lower enrollment. Such financial assistance could also allow day homes and agencies to guarantee spaces for families to return to care without charging holding fees.

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<sup>4</sup> *Update 2: COVID-19 pandemic in Alberta (March 15 at 4:30 p.m.)*. Retrieved April 1, 2020 from <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=69818C355F188-C2A3-F5C6-875A2A33929D5C05>.

<sup>5</sup> In contrast, centre-based early learning and care programs (day cares and out-of-school cares) that re-opened for essential workers from April 1 to May 13 received some limited funding for unfilled spaces. This funding allowed those programs to continue operating even with significantly diminished enrollment. Enrollment was necessarily diminished due to COVID-related provincial restrictions on the number of people (adults and children) who could be in a room.

In the longer term, ongoing temporary funding to family day homes and agencies could help support their operations and keep their fees affordable for families throughout Alberta's phased relaunch. Supporting approved family day homes is a key part of ensuring there is an adequate supply of affordable, regulated child care spaces for parents who are returning to work or seeking new employment as more businesses are able to reopen.

Analyses of uptake of and barriers to federal support for businesses could determine if and how those programs are helping family day home agencies. For example, such analyses could be used to investigate how many agencies qualify for the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy; how much wage support are those agencies eligible to receive; which agencies have applied for or chosen not to apply for the Canada Emergency Business Account and what have been their experiences; how many agencies qualify for the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance relief program; and whether any agencies been unable to access this program because their landlords did not agree to participate. Answers to these questions could guide any additional funding that might be directed to approved family day homes and agencies, and provide feedback to the federal government.

Finally, designating the entire child care workforce as essential, in order that they can be included in temporary wage top-ups to compensate for the risks they are taking, could ensure that approved family day homes and agencies have the staff to continue to offer high-quality child care.<sup>6</sup>

### **Looking Ahead**

The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care believes that increasing access to affordable, high-quality early learning and care is a key element in our community's effort to reduce and eliminate poverty. Family day home agencies and approved family day homes play a vital role in providing regulated, approved early learning and care in Edmonton and Alberta. By addressing the questions and options described above, steps can be taken to ensure availability, affordability, and quality of early learning and care in approved family day homes and across the child care sector during the pandemic period.

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<sup>6</sup> *Expanding access to the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and proposing a new wage boost for essential workers.* Retrieved May 22, 2020 from <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2020/04/expanding-access-to-the-canada-emergency-response-benefit-and-proposing-a-new-wage-boost-for-essential-workers.html>.