



Day Care Assistance Program

Suggestions for redesigning the program

Introduction

The New Brunswick Women's Council appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the proposed redesign of the Government of New Brunswick's (GNB) Day Care Assistance Program (DAP).

Please note that due to time constraints, the council was unable to consult with New Brunswickers while preparing this submission. The input provided in this submission is based on discussions that council members' have had to date on child care in New Brunswick and we encourage the Early Childhood Development Division of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to consult with stakeholders (specifically, families benefiting from this program as well as families who may become in/eligible for this program if it is redesigned) before implementing any changes.

We also recommend that the division consider feedback on the DAP that parents and children provided to the Child Care Review Task Force, which can be found in the task force's final report, *Families, and Childcare*. The report also suggests that a child care task force forum be held to discuss its findings and recommendations — this could be an opportunity to engage stakeholders before implementing any changes to the DAP.

Lastly, please note that the council is meeting in mid-October and child care will be an agenda item. Council staff will make themselves available to you after this meeting for any follow up conversation that may assist you in the DAP redesign.

Background

The council has recommended that government approach early learning and childcare as a form of infrastructure and increase its investment in the sector. Increased investment would focus on moving the sector away from patchwork, market-driven services and toward a vibrant, responsive system of accessible, affordable, high-quality early childhood education and care.

DAP Redesign

The council provides the following suggestions for redesigning the DAP while maintaining our position that government should consider initiating higher-level, systemic changes to the sector.

- If government's investment in day care subsidies will remain at the current level, explore if the lower-rate subsidies actually make a difference in access for families in the higher eligible income brackets (i.e. does less than a dollar a day in subsidies actually make the difference between accessing and not accessing daycare for a family?). Consider whether the DAP would have a stronger impact if the cut off was lowered and rates were increased for families that remained eligible. A rate increase may ease the financial burden on these families significantly. A rate increase may also make daycare a viable option for families who are eligible for the DAP but not accessing it presently because they cannot afford to pay the balance of the cost.

- If government's investment in day care subsidies will be increasing, explore which scenario will allow more families to access day care: maintaining the current cut off and increasing rates or raising the cut off and maintaining rates.
- Explore allowing parents/guardians to use the DAP benefit for seeking employment more than once. Re-entering the workforce can be challenging and individuals may need to exit and re-enter the workforce a number of times before they find employment that meets their needs and provides pay that they can subsist on.
- Explore if it would be useful to extend the High School Student Daycare Assistance Subsidy post-graduation benefit to six months instead of three (i.e. look at whether or not most beneficiaries are finding employment within three months).
- Identify more eligible deductions to be considered when assessing family income. Examples:
 - recent or upcoming extraordinary expenditures (medical care, relocation, costs associated with leaving a partner or family home);
 - payment of arrears to NB Housing, NB Power, etc.; and
 - family size and additional children in daycare.

Promotion

This redesign offers an excellent opportunity to improve promotion of the DAP. We encourage the development of client-friendly promotional materials (i.e. brochures, a webpage) that are accessible to those with limited literacy and numeracy skills. A strategy to increase awareness of the availability of this program among parents and guardians is also advisable. An online calculator that helps parents and guardians determine if they may be eligible for the program, and if so at what rates, could be a useful tool.

Because this program is income-tested, administered through the Department of Social Development, and, in some instances, targets individuals experiencing challenging circumstances (unemployment, parenting while completing secondary schooling), special care must be taken to mitigate any shame or humiliation clients may be experiencing in accessing this program. This is also an important consideration for GNB staff who serve as first points of contact for individuals inquiring about this program. An online application form may increase the real or perceived accessibility of the DAP.

Please note that the suggestions for an online calculator and an online application are supported by the Child Care Review Task Force's final report.