

February 6, 2024

Received LCO
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Kelly Regan
MLA, Bedford Basin
Chair of the Standing Committee Public Accounts
C/O Legislative Committee Office

Dear Hon. Kelly Regan,

Thank you for your letter dated January 22, 2024, requesting supplemental information related to questions asked during the Department's attendance at the Committee on January 17, 2024. Responses to these questions are as follows:

- 1. How many spaces are there right now in Nova Scotia for infant and toddler? How many infant and toddler spaces opened in the last 2 years? How many spaces are needed by 2026? (see page 6/7 of transcript)**

The Department uses the AMANDA system to capture license types. License types refer to the age groups of children that an operator is allowed to care for in their centre, broken down by infant, toddler, pre-school and school-age.

AMANDA does not track the number of spaces per license type, but instead the overall total licensed capacity of an operator. For example, AMANDA would report a centre as holding a license for infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers, and a total licensed capacity of 80 children.

The Department can provide the total number of licensed child care spaces in the province and the number of providers who have licenses based on each age group, but not the number of spaces by age group.

AMANDA enhancements are planned to address reporting limitations.

As of November 2023, there were 17,618 licensed and funded spaces across 324 early learning and child care centres Nova Scotia. Of these, 111 centres are licensed for infant care.

There are an additional 1,300 spaces in licensed and funded family homes. The Department does not track program types for family home child care providers.

The Department tracks centre enrollment via an online reporting tool used by centres. Based on November 2023 enrolment data, there were:

- 1,206 infants (0-18 months) enrolled in centre-based child care, and 105 enrolled in family home based child care.
- 5,251 toddlers (19-34 months) enrolled in centre-based child care, and 298 in family home based child care.

The Department manually tracks the number and type of spaces created under space expansion initiatives. This is why the Department is able to break down the number of spaces created by age group.

To date, expansion projects have created:

- 149 new infant spaces (154 under development)
- 270 new toddler spaces (242 under development)
- 166 new preschool spaces (222 under development)
- 904 spaces new in family home (mixed ages)

Nova Scotia has a target of creating 9,500 spaces under the Canada - Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. This is the number of spaces needed to achieve 59 per cent coverage rate for children 0 to 5 years old and is based on 2021 census data. The 59 per cent coverage rate was set by the Government of Canada.

2. Where are the daycare deserts? What areas are in most desperate need for these spaces? (see page 6/7 of transcript)

“Daycare deserts” is not a term used by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Provincial population data suggests that all areas of Nova Scotia continue to require child care. The Department is able to estimate the number of 0 to 4-year-olds per county and compare that to the number of licensed child care spaces in that area. In terms of meeting our 59 per cent target, the counties with the lowest levels of coverage are:

- Guysborough
- Victoria
- Queens
- Annapolis
- Yarmouth
- Antigonish

Although not among counties with the lowest coverage rates, Halifax, Cape Breton and Kings County also require a significant number of spaces.

3. Of the 1,031 spaces that have closed, do you have a breakdown of infant and toddler and before-and after-school? (see page 23 of transcript)

As per the response to question one, the Department uses the AMANDA system to capture license types based on age groups (infant, toddler, pre-school and school-age), and tracks total licensed capacity which is not broken down by age group.

As a result of reporting limitations, the Department cannot provide a breakdown by age group of the 409 centre-based spaces that closed. However, of the centres that had program closures, only one was licensed to provide infant care, five were licensed for toddler care, and the remaining provided pre-school to school aged care.

Of total spaces that closed, 560 were in the family home child care setting. The Department does not track program types for family home child care providers.

AMANDA enhancements are planned to improve reporting capabilities.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will continue to work towards achieving our commitments under the Canada-Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, and to meeting the needs of Nova Scotia children and families.

I trust this information is satisfactory.

Sincerely,



Elwin LeRoux

Deputy Minister

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development