

Webinar: Subsidy Advance, Savings Investment Benefit: Follow Up Presentation-May 20, 2022

26:31

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

I want folks to know, I did see this popping up, we will make the slide decks available to all of you. I am looking at some of my staff and they're nodding their head because that's what they'll be doing to support all of this. So those will be sent out to everyone who's participated today.

26:58

Liz (Direct Message):

Why don't facilities get a confirmation letter for families who have applied and are awaiting for their results (for families who are already attending the facility).

27:12

Crystal Simmons

I guess I am not really understanding the question, you mean before we even assess the application you want something sent to you saying that we've received an application?

Yes

Well when you look at our turn around times and the way that we have removed barriers and gotten the applications done a lot faster, that's not really something that's required right now and also not something that the system is set up to do. Once we first touch an application, at that point and time you will receive documentation as to whether the families are approved or not. Once we assess it we do not have a way of letting the facility know- you gotta understand the volume of applications that we get, we get hundreds of applications a day. To be able to sit down and go through each application and say "by the way we received an application from this family", we're not able to do that but we are as fast as we can assessing the applications and getting a result out to the facilities.

28:14

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

Just to add to that question, which is a really good one, and I do understand why it's being asked. We have had times where- and Crystal will know this so I don't think I'm telling any tales out of school, there have been times where there have been long waits on our processing and subsidy and a lot of the changes we've made to the subsidy program is to directly address some of those issues so we're not in that situation again. So that's why Crystal spoke today about the actual processing time being five days currently for online applications that speaks to those improvements. We know that for some time- not too long ago, we were looking at almost a three or four week waiting period. Crystal is reminding me of a time where we apparently had an eight week waiting period for processing. So talking about with what

were trying to do with moving forward and maintaining this five day turn around, that is a really huge improvement. The other thing I wanted to say in relation to this question is I do understand that would be important for a facility to have that information, why they may want it, but this also leads into privacy law. Applications that people make that contains anything about personal of their family, their status, their income, anything like that is protected under FIPPA. The other reason why we cannot give you this letter is because of privacy legislation. Those are the two reasons why we can't give you that confirmation letter. That is the personal information of the family of the applicant. I don't see that changing for us. Even through this process, even before, that's why we've encouraged facilities because it is the only solution to have that conversation with their families to confirm or ask the families if they've made that application. Then it's up to them what level and what information they choose to share with you. I understand why that would be so helpful to facilities but unfortunately that is not possible.

31:39

Tara Mills (Direct Message):

How many times can a family seeking employment as an option for application?

31:44

Crystal Simmons

So I think I covered that in the slide but I'll go over it again. They are allowed to apply basically three times. The seeking employment can be for eighteen months in a row, but it is done in three intervals- six months at a time. They can apply once for six months, they can contact us and we can extend it for six months, after the one year is done they would have to send in a new application and we can do another six months. So three six months intervals that they can apply for seeking employment.

32:27

Bonnie Ash (Direct Message):

My question is related to some parents who have language barriers and need assistance from us. What if the parent writes a letter authorizing the centre to be privy to the information?

32:36

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

That's a really great question Bonnie, thank you for that one. When you have a formal letter and the family is saying to you, the director, "I need assistance" that is a form of consent. In that sense some level of information can be shared and you can assist them with their application. What is important for the subsidy program though, in order to give you any information back is that letter should itemize exactly what information the family is comfortable with the program sharing back to you. That's how privacy legislation and consent works under FIPPA. We understand we have many families that are coming into childcare where English is their second language and the subsidy application as it stands today- please don't take offense but we'll talk about this too, is a little bit confusing for sure, I think Crystal and I will both put that out there and admit to it, so they may need that help. The letter can be a

form of consent to you, but then what the subsidy program will need is some very clear indication on that letter about the information that they're allowed to speak to you about as the director.

34:20

Crystal Simmons

Just to confirm what Michelle was saying if you don't mind, it cannot be a blanket consent, it cannot be "this family gave me permission to speak to you so I can call about anything to do with the application. Like Michelle said, it has to be very specific and itemized.

34:59

Jennifer Couillard (Direct Message):

Please explain the difference between a single person household and a double person household income wise. The threshold has been moved to 85,000 per year but that is a two person household. How is it that a single mother who is making 70,000 is not eligible when she is the? ONLY one paying ALL the bills. She doesn't have a second household income and now she is being penalized for being single?

35:17

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

Subsidy eligibility is based on household income, so that's the income of the two primary earners in the household or the one primary earner, whatever that household income is as they would declare as on their tax information. The implications related to a single household or a double household comes in, in terms of the threshold and how it impacts the family is based on whether it's a one or two person household. Also the number of children and the age of their children are still factors in that. Why they become factors is those dependents and the identification of those dependents build in the calculation of determining what is the net household income. On the application, people apply and they give us information, their paystubs, and it identifies their gross income but what the subsidy eligibility is based on is the net household income. That is a calculation that is done and embedded in CCO. When the application comes in and the application lists the number of people in the house, it lists the number of children, it lists the ages of the children. The CCO system automatically does this calculation and puts in these deductions that result in a net household income. That is why there is varying levels based on the type of family for what will be covered as a full subsidy or what will be covered as a partial subsidy. There is no hard and fast rules and that's why we've given out and subsidized regularly- (*inaudible*) has provided tables I believe and the tables identify sort of a snapshot of what you can expect of who would be eligible. When you keep that in mind, we give that snapshot table but sometimes- very rarely, but sometimes we end up with very large families and so those thresholds go up even more, but because they are kind of exceptional, we don't usually put those on our tables. There's many factors that are considered but yes the threshold increase helps, that's going to get more low and middle income families eligible for subsidy. But then there's that whole family make up component and that just takes it to another level as well.

38:27

Crystal Simmons

There's also another component- I know many times facilities will say "well they make this much money and it's just like this family", remember there's also other things, whether or not there's disabilities in the family, whether or not their paying for private care costs, the size of the family, the age of the children, there are variations that are also taken into consideration when the calculation is done. Each family is treated very differently, but this calculation as Michelle said is embedded into the program and is done fairly for each person, it's done the same for each person across the board based on their family dynamic.

39:21

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

The other thing I wanted to say, there's so much that happens in the system and in the background, it is very complex. As we continue to try to address the complexity of the subsidy program- because we know our work is not done. We knew what we could tackle first was increasing the threshold and then simplifying some of the procedures and practices of the program which we talked about today. Where the work is continuing is we still continue work on our application, I'm looking back at my staff because I don't know the time I'm pushing here but we've been working this for some time. We have been working on a simplified subsidy application, it will cut the subsidy application- that people unfortunately currently have to fill out, essentially in half. I'm hoping that it's easier to understand and to fill out. So right now we're making improvements on CCO and we've been working on them for some time too and embed this new application into the system so it's online for families. I feel like this work has been going on forever and it won't come soon enough for us to have that simplified application available for everyone. That's one piece, the other piece I want to remind people of- or I maybe spoke about it last time but there's so much information going out right now. It's hard to recall everything, I mean I'm living, breathing, and dreaming about this as I'm sure all of you are and it's hard for me to remember as well. This subsidy threshold increase we've always identified this as sort of our first step towards improving the financial assistance that we give to families. We're building it within our current legislation and regulation. Our legislation and regulations are quite prescriptive so to really make changes we have to fall in line with that framework for now. The view for us and where we want to go after this in the next year or two is to further simplify this whole financial assistance program- that we know is childcare subsidy, in a way that a lot of these things that we're talking about the calculations to net household, all those factors that come in we're wanting to remove that complexity and just have it be as straight forward as possible- that work too is on going and what we also need, which whenever we make major changes- that is going to require new legislation and new regulatory framework for it. So it involves not only bills, but it involves changes to the legislation and regulation to make it happen. That's why we've started with what we have, and that's the subsidy program and the conditions outlined in the regulations as they are today. There is still so much more to come, I think I've said this often, over the next five years we're building and everything is a step towards hopefully the next improvement. This change is evolving into an improved system really is going to go the course of the next five years. This is the starting point with subsidy and what we're describing here today.

43:21

Crystal Simmons

Absolutely, and I just want to speak to and confirm what Michelle was speaking about the application, I actually need to (*inaudible*) wants every week and apart of the process of the new application, its going to be a one page very simplified application, very user friendly, and hoping for that to be live in the near future.

43:41

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

We both have our fingers crossed, both hands.

43:46

Crystal Simmons

Yes and I wanted you to know that we are actively apart of the application because we understand the needs of the applicants.

44:15

Tara Mills (Direct Message):

The 18 months is the maximum. Once that is up, they can never apply again?

44:25

Lois Coward (Direct Message):

After a family has exhausted the 18 months (3-6 month terms) of seeking employment, will there be a waiting period before they can re-apply for seeking employment? (1 year? 2 years? 6 months??)

44:32

Crystal Simmons

There could be, and ideally that's the way its set up but it's also a case by case basis, we'll have a conversation with the family and see what their circumstances are and see where we can go from there but ideally there is an expectation that there is some type of break between the eighteen month period.

44:50

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

I wanted to speak to that too because- Crystal remind me, what used to be the length of time that families could be approved for seeking employment.

45:01

Crystal Simmons

Families used to get seeking employment for twelve weeks and they were only able to apply for it every six months.

45:08

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

So twelve weeks versus eighteen months. I just want to point that out that that is a significant increase. I think what it demonstrates is the change for all of us in the program that we realize that seeking employment is important, but it's complicated for families often because they have to look and are looking for employment that really fits their family's goals and needs. With recognition of that, that's why the extension has been made and why we try to simplify that reason for care. The other thing I wanted to say about- what Crystal just said about a further extension and its exactly that, were open and Crystal and her team is that first point of contact for those questions, we want to hear and we'll consider for a further extension. The real goal is to support our Manitoba families, to get them employed, to increase their self sufficiency, and while they're doing all that, knowing that their kids are getting some amazing early learning experiences and some top notch care for them from the regulated system. We will entertain those conversations and based on those personal circumstances we might just say "okay let's just take a little break", but if there is still something very active happening, we will have no problem giving a further extension.

46:56

Melanie Fraser (Direct Message):

Why can the system be changed and Parents get paid the subsidy and then they pay us?

47:03

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

That's a great question and thank you for asking it. That could be a future improvement, the reason why it can't happen at this point and time is the childcare legislation and regulations only provides authority for the minister or the minister's delegates to give payments directly to childcare facilities. It's built into the legislation right now that we cannot make direct payments to parents. That's another barrier we're trying to overcome, we're hoping to overcome in the future. Like I said as we work towards the next steps of improving financial assistance for families it will need for there to be very significant changes to the legislations and regulations and the authorities established in that for grants and payments that the minister can make. Right now it's very restrictive and that it has to go to facilities, all payments, and then payments distributed on behalf of whomever. So the parallel to that is also the training grants that we have for your staff, we give those funds to yourselves as well to distribute to your staff in the way you seek suitable based on the training that they've gone to. That's why we can't give those directly to those employees, because there's the restrictions in the current community childcare standards act and regulation, where the minister only has authority to give grants directly to regulated licensed providers.

49:17

Bright Beginnings for Inc (Direct Message):

Should families apply for subsidy before starting a centre with the short turn around time? Or can they start before applying and will subsidy be dated back to their first day?

49:28

Crystal Simmons

A family can apply for a subsidy even if they do not have a daycare spot so that part is fine. We do have backdating procedures that we follow so depending on when the application is received, will depend on how far back we can backdate the application. The reporting periods that we give to you, we use that as our guidelines. If we receive an application in what we call the current reporting period that we're in, we can go back one more reporting period but we are limited to how far back we can go. So please let your families know to apply for subsidy as soon as they have a daycare spot or even before.

50:25

Lois Coward (Direct Message):

In the case of a family who asks for help with the application, the supporting documents (pay stubs) will be sent in through the centre's email address. Are these emails/attachments accepted as a part of the family's application?

50:39

Crystal Simmons

Yes, those are accepted. The only thing that won't happen if we see that it came from a facility email address we won't reply to that email address- you'll get the automatic email reply that'll say we've received it and its taking us two weeks to process the application. We definitely will accept it but we will not respond to that email address directly.

51:04

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

That was a very good question and I think that happens quite frequently, and we do know we have a number of families that don't have perhaps the resources to do that personally for themselves. I know the program really appreciates that bubble of support the facilities are giving to the families.

1:29:26

Andree Remillard (Direct Message):

If a child changes centers, how do we as a center know if they received the 3 month subsidy from their previous center (if they are ineligible)

1:29:39

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

That's a great question Andree, I would assume that they have, but all you can do is ask. If they are ineligible, I don't understand that piece its in brackets. So I think what you're saying-

1:30:00

Crystal Simmons

So if a family is deemed ineligible in a previous facility, they're still ineligible we won't receive anything new. That would have been dealt with at the previous facility, it would not have any bearing on the

facility they are now transferring to. The ineligibility will still stand at the facility that they are currently at.

1:30:20

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

Their eligibility doesn't change just because they changed facilities.

1:30:34

Marifel (Direct Message):

I received a subsidized grant but I don't have a subsidized child yet. What will happen to that grant?

1:30:42

Monique Gagnon (Direct Message):

Many home childcare facilities are not subsidized but have received advanced payment cheques for subsidy. What do we do with these cheques? Many are choosing not to cash them. Who/ should we contact about these uncashed cheques?

1:30:50

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

I talked about this while presenting but I would be absolutely happy to repeat it, everyone who received an advance received one because on CCO they had marked the indicator that they would accept subsidized families, so that's how the payments were made and identified of where they need to go up to. If you are an unfunded- let's say family home, and that indicator was on, then you would've gotten a subsidy advance. If you are choosing or want to discuss the impact on your business, whether you should accept subsidized children, what that means for you. I would encourage you and everyone to have those discussions with their Child Care Coordinator. There is no black and white answer, it's really dependant upon you and your business. Have those discussions with your Child Care coordinator and to make your plan if you're going forward and we'll be able to help you out and figure out what to do based on the decision you're making for yourself.

1:32:22

Rhonda Kenning (Direct Message):

A little confusion, I thought you just said that unused monies would be left to boards to decide how to support families and then in the next slide said that unused advances would be clawed back through future subsidy payments.

1:32:37

Janice Falco (Direct Message):

After July 23, the Advance money left over- is used at the Centre's discretion?

1:32:43

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

There's two different types of advances, so I appreciate the question and I understand how it can be confusing. The Parent Fee Advance, that is the advance to cover the parent fees, the two dollar unsubsidized portion that is not being taken back. That is the money that I was referring to if there's remaining funds in the parent fee advance, you can continue to use those funds at the centres discretion, to support families that are applying for subsidy, absolutely that can still occur. Where the adjustments will be made is to the Subsidy Advance, that's on the traditional subsidy payments that you will receive. That will be based on the analysis of the attendance records that you've submitted over the six month period, and then adjustments to that advance may be made after that assessment is done. You will be contacted and we'll talk to you about what adjustment- if any, needs to be made. Like I said, adjustments can happen in both directions, there may be- likely will be some facilities we may have given too much of an advance to, in that situation and based on their current enrollment- that's why the attendance sheets are so important, we will make future adjustments to payments. That will be in a way that is least disruptive to the centre and that's going to be part of the conversation. There will be likely as well- no doubt a couple or some facilities that we've not given enough of an advance to and in those situations the adjustment will be an additional or increase and it will be through your traditional monthly subsidy payments.

1:35:04

Jackie Mighty (Direct Message):

As a smaller home based daycare, we received the subsidy advance. It was accumulated into our everyday financial account where bills/expenses are taken out. If after the deadline no families are eligible for subsidy, could you clarify what will/should be done with the funds?

1:35:20

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

After the six month period, that will be planning we will do with you. We will know exactly what the assessment is and what the impact is for your business and we will be reaching out to you to make adjustments in whatever way makes sense for you. They will be based on subsidy payments, if you have no subsidized children and none of them are enrolled or in the six month period, we'll have that discussion and work with that very exceptional or unique situation. We will be doing it with the intent we don't want to leave anybody in any level of financial distress.

1:36:12

Szilvie Carriere

I am very confused! We had information coming from ELCC that we can provide free care for family's regardless whether they applied for subsidy or not. Please answer with a yes or no whether we are allowed to do that. Thank you!

1:36:25

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

I think I've said it a few times in the presentation, and we'll share the whole deck with all of you, Crystal's deck as well as the subsidy advance deck after this. The answer to that is the subsidy advance and parent fee advance are intended for those families that are already receiving subsidy and were reassessed because they were reenrolled in the program, and for those making applications to subsidy. It's not a generalized coverage of parent fees, it's really to support this transition of a subsidy program to the higher threshold increase levels and of course as we talked, those levels also are impacted by the make up of the family.

1:37:26

Teresa Schamber

Can we please be emailed a recording of this important presentation? I had far too much trouble hearing it for a variety of reasons, so I really want the info.

1:37:34

Michelle Stephen-Wiens

I'm looking at my staff Teresa because I don't know the answer to this and technology admittedly. I will figure this out with them, I don't have that immediate answer. Minimally we can commit to posting it on the website, we know we can do that, and then in terms of your more detailed question, we'll have to get back to you on that we just don't know what the technology for us is capable of. We can- I know we can post it on the website so we'll make sure we get that done.