

Child-care costs rise in Canada's major cities as Liberals craft plan ^[1]

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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says his government wants to ensure Canadians can raise their families in the way that they want, but acknowledged that different provincial perspectives make it tough to craft a child-care strategy for the country.

The federal Liberals have talking child care with the provinces and territories for the last year after vowing during the 2015 election to bring down the cost and increase the availability and quality of daycare spaces nationwide.

The plan is supposed to be finalized and made public next year -- just in time for a budget that promises to have a long-term commitment to the provinces.

"Any national perspective on child care will have 10, possibly plus three, very different ways of approaching it and that's one of the strengths and challenges of our federal system," Trudeau said Monday during a year-end press conference.

"I look forward to engaging with premiers and the provinces on these issues to ensure that all Canadians across the country have an opportunity to both work and raise their families in the way that they want to."

A study released Monday suggests the cost of child-care fees in some of Canada's biggest cities has risen faster than the cost of living, having jumped an average of more than twice the rate of inflation since 2014. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives says the average monthly cost for full-time child care has gone up by more than eight per cent across the country over the last three years.

The study says the three provinces that set fees and directly fund services -- Quebec, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island -- have the lowest costs in the country, compared with provinces that let the market dictate fees.

The study says families can end up paying more than \$12,000 a year in some cities for a single child in daycare, depending on the age of the child.

"This rivals the cost of housing," NDP status of women critic Sheila Malcolmson said during the daily question period.

"Liberals failed to produce the child-care spaces that they promised. They failed to tackle growing child-care costs and their child benefit will lose its value by 2021. Why is this government breaking its promises and failing children?"

Social Development Minister Jean-Yves Duclos pointed to the 2016 budget and the money promised there as the Liberals' response to the child-care conundrum.

The 2016 federal budget earmarked \$400 million next year for the child-care framework, a carrot the Liberals dangled to convince provinces and territories to sign on to the national program. A further \$100 million was set aside for aboriginal child care and a plan for that will take a little longer to complete.

Not everyone agrees that federal funding to child care programs is the way to go. The right-leaning think-tank Cardus pointed to Nanos Research survey results earlier this year that found 62 per cent of respondents called for policy measures that involve helping parents directly, rather than giving money to centres, spaces, or schools.

The hybrid telephone and online random survey of 1,000 Canadians conducted between April 28 and May 3 is considered accurate to within 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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