

Liberals announce new child-care agreement, but who will it help? ^[1]

Author: Scotti, Monique

Source: Global News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 11 Jun 2017

AVAILABILITY

Read/watch/listen online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

The federal government will spend \$7 billion to create 40,000 new childcare spaces. Politicians meeting in Ottawa patted themselves on the back for this, but as David Akin reports, critics worry today's deal may actually be a step backward.

The federal government has come to an agreement with Canada's provinces and territories on funding for child care and early learning programs.

Because these social programs fall under provincial jurisdiction, the two levels of government have spent more than a year hammering out a national framework. Here's a look at what they've managed to agree on, and how it could affect the average family.

Who will it help?

This could depend largely on the needs of families in each province and territory. Now that the national framework is in place, each jurisdiction will need to sign a three-year, bilateral agreement with Ottawa that lays out exactly how they plan to use the money.

A province could choose, for instance, to increase the number of affordable daycare spaces for low-income families by supporting new subsidized spaces. Overall, Ottawa is aiming for 40,000 new subsidized spaces to be created across the country over the next three years.

But provinces and territories might also use the federal money for other things. Newfoundland or Nova Scotia might make their child-care programs more flexible for parents doing seasonal work in the fisheries industry, for instance.

A portion of the money will also need to be dedicated to improving access to "culturally appropriate early learning and child care programs for Indigenous children."

But while the government calls its plan "flexible," critics call it a "patchwork."

Instead of targeting specific groups and allowing the provinces to set different priorities, these critics argue that Canada needs a universal, equitable system — modelled on the government's approach to health care, primary or secondary education, and even affordable housing in Canada.

"The way you build really good systems that the public can support and the public can access is to make them universal, and then you fund them properly with public money," said Morna Ballantyne of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

The new ten-year framework is "too loose and not directive enough," she said, which may actually lead to greater disparities across the country.

Lisa Kelly, women's director with Canada's largest private-sector union (Unifor), agreed. In a release, she said that "all the evidence, research and international experience demonstrates that a targeted program cannot meet the development goals we wish for all children regardless of their family's social or economic status."

How much money are we talking about?

The government is planning to invest a grand total of \$7.5-billion over a decade to increase support for both early learning and child care across Canada.

The money has started flowing this year, with \$50-million earmarked for 2017-18. The annual amount is then expected to increase with each passing year, topping out at \$870-million in 2026.

Asked if that's really enough to improve access to child care across the entire country, Families Minister Jean-Yves Duclos argued that it's not the only funding that Ottawa is providing in this area.

The federal government also participates in other ways, he said, such as through the Canada social transfer program and a federal child-care tax deduction.

“We all have the responsibility to do even better,” Duclos acknowledged.

But NDP Leader Tom Mulcair, whose party laid out its own vision for improving child care in Canada during the 2015 election, said the Liberal plan “fails to deliver” financially.

“The sums in question are not enough to help Canadian families deal with the rising cost of child care in this country,” he said.

When will it start making a difference?

It’s difficult to say precisely when families will start seeing this funding translate into more money in their pockets or access to quality care for their kids.

The bilateral agreements are already moving ahead, and the provinces are expecting to start finalizing their plans in the weeks and months ahead. But all Duclos would say Monday on the subject of timelines was that “between now and approximately 2020, there will be significant impacts in our families and children.”

“There will be opportunities for stakeholders ... to make their own input into how fast and how well we can eventually achieve this long-term vision,” the minister added.

Is this what the Liberals promised?

No, it’s not exactly what the Liberals promised. In 2015, the party pledged during the election campaign “to create a new national early learning and child-care framework, to ensure that affordable, high-quality, fully inclusive child care is available to all families who need it.”

Ballantyne says that again, it’s the key principle of universality that’s missing in Monday’s announcement.

“We don’t see ... a solid commitment to build a universal child-care system that’s high quality and inclusive of all children, so that in ten years’ time a child in Newfoundland will have the same equal opportunity to access good early childhood education as a child in Toronto or one in Victoria.”

Mulcair was similarly skeptical.

“This is not at all what the Liberals promised,” he said.

-reprinted from Global News

Related link:

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: funding ^[4]

budget ^[5]

policy ^[6]

universal ^[7]

accessibility ^[8]

affordability ^[9]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/17/06/liberals-announce-new-child-care-agreement-who-will-it-help>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/17/06/liberals-announce-new-child-care-agreement-who-will-it-help> [2]

<https://globalnews.ca/news/3520212/liberals-announce-new-child-care-agreement-but-who-will-it-help/> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/budget> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/policy> [7]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/universal> [8] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/accessibility> [9]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/affordability>