

# Advocates criticize Liberals for touting Canada Child Benefit boost as daycare cash <sup>[1]</sup>

They say fees will just keep rising.

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## EXCERPTS

OTTAWA — Federal officials went looking for Canadian daycares to help promote a Liberal government plan to increase the Canada child benefit — but instead found opposition to the idea of touting the benefit as key to defraying the cost of child care.

The government had some difficulty finding suitable backdrops for this week's promotional events, sources say — evidence of the tensions that have emerged over the latest Liberal messaging on the changes to one of the government's flagship spending initiatives.

Until recently, the Liberals were being careful about linking child care to the benefit, but that caution appears to have vanished as the government aims to use Tuesday's economic update to douse a controversy that's threatened to engulf Finance Minister Bill Morneau.

Child care groups say the extra cash will indeed help families pay the bills, but they point to research that shows such cash payments to parents don't make child care cheaper or more available to families that need a space.

Indeed, child care fees will continue to rise, likely wiping out any extra cash the government puts into the pockets of parents starting next year, they warn.

Advocates have been pushing the government to sweeten the \$7.5 billion over 11 years it aside in this year's budget for child care across Canada, "and we've been met with a lot of silence on that," said Don Giesbrecht, CEO of the Canadian Child Care Federation.

"It comes down, I guess, clearly to a political priority in terms of the Canada child benefit perhaps taking a bigger role in their thinking ... for child care."

"All the evidence shows that cash payments to parents will not make child care services any more accessible." Morna Ballantyne, Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada

The income-tested benefit will increase next July so it keeps pace with inflation, a change that wasn't supposed to come before the 2019 election.

The benefit will increase by 1.5 per cent next year and as much as two per cent the year after; actual payments will depend on a family's income. The cost is projected at \$5.6 billion over five years, bringing the program's annual cost to about \$25.2 billion by 2023, up from \$23.2 billion budgeted for this fiscal year.

Following Tuesday's economic update, the prime minister and key ministers involved in the file fanned out to sell the changes, saying the extra cash will help parents afford child care and get into the workforce.

"All the evidence shows that cash payments to parents will not make child care services any more accessible and will not resolve the child care crisis that is putting children, families and economic growth at risk," said Morna Ballantyne, executive director of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

"The only way governments can meet those objectives is to create a sufficient number of quality spaces and fund their ongoing operation."

Internal surveys playing a part?

Part of the rationale for the current sales job may have been tied to internal surveys that showed more Canadians were aware of the government's plans to legalize marijuana than were aware of the benefit itself.

Survey data from the Privy Council Office, the central bureaucracy that aids the prime minister and cabinet, showed about three-quarters of those surveyed were aware of the benefit, while some 93 per cent knew about plans to legalize marijuana, according to a presentation from September 2016.

One reason: most payments are made through direct deposit and aren't clearly identified as the child benefit, said a briefing note to Social

Development Minister Jean-Yves Duclos. The information was obtained by The Canadian Press under the Access to Information Act.

-reprinted from Huffington Post

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