

Child care is on the ballot, an issue that will make a tangible difference to Canadian families ^[1]

Author: Friendly, Martha; Ferns, Carolyn & Mohamed, Sophia

Source:

Publication Date: 17 Sep 2021

AVAILABILITY

Toronto Star ^[2]

EXCERPTS

We are three generations of the Canadian child care movement: a grandmother, a mother and an early childhood educator. We are all policy researchers and advocates who believe that in this federal election Canada has a chance to solve its 50-year long child care challenge for good.

Martha became part of the Canadian child care movement as a young researcher and mother in the 1970s. She founded the Childcare Resource and Research Unit (CRRU) in 1981. For more than 40 years she has informed policy-makers in Canada and worked internationally on the benefits and elements of high quality child care for children, families, the economy and society.

Carolyn went to work at CRRU in 2004, just as Ken Dryden's national child care plan was getting off the ground and watched in horror as it was cancelled by the incoming Harper Conservatives.

Sophia joined CRRU in 2019 and has worked to inform the public and policy-makers about the importance of child care to Canada's social and economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. All three work with child care advocates across Canada with the aim of making a universal child care system a reality.

The Canadian child care movement has been indefatigable. For decades advocates have listened to and amplified the challenges faced by families, tried to support them through quality programs and worked toward a better future. Child care advocates have opened local centres, trained ECEs, visited successful programs all over the world and brought the lessons back to Canada. We have been engaged in research at many levels and have written brief after brief, year after year.

Finally, in the 2021 Federal Budget, years of work translated into federal government action on a serious scale. Federal Budget 2021 committed \$30 billion to transforming Canada's child care patchwork into a system. Eight provinces and territories (including Conservative-led ones) negotiated agreements with the Trudeau government to build thousands of regulated child care spaces, make them affordable and improve the wage and working conditions for staff. Other provinces, like Ontario, have said they want to sign on after the election.

So it's an election that will make a real, tangible difference to Canadian families. While the Liberals, NDP and Greens have promised to keep the national child care plan, Erin O'Toole's Conservatives have said they will scrap it. Their plan is nothing new — another child care tax credit worth one-tenth of the national child care strategy.

It would mean — for families — much less money than the cross-Canada child care plan. But it's not just the money that's different. The Conservatives also have no plan to make child care fees affordable or expand quality services and no plan to recognize the early childhood educators that are critical to quality programs.

Tax schemes for child care are a tried and failed policy. We've seen various tax and cash initiatives from provincial and federal governments over the decades and yet Canada's child care crisis grinds on. There is good agreement from parents, experts, business leaders and groups like the OECD: to meet families' and children's needs, affordable, accessible, quality child care needs a plan, not merely doling out small bits of money to parents.

It's been argued in this election that child care isn't a vote driver. If you are not in the thick of the child care crisis, you might reasonably ask: why should I care? The answer is simple. We all know someone who depends on child care. The pandemic laid bare how essential child care is to bring mothers back to the workforce. It's also critical if we care about a social recovery that supports young children. The eight agreements and \$30 billion in federal investment are aimed at ending the patchwork, piecemeal situation we have today.

We have an opportunity to build a real system, one that is high quality, regulated, flexible, equitable and affordable. If O'Toole's Conservatives win, it's déjà vu to 2004. If we see the \$10/day plan through, we have a real chance to develop a system that addresses child care needs across the country. We can achieve what the Canadian child care movement has been working more than 50 years toward: solving Canada's child care challenge for good.

Region: Canada ^[3]

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