

Canada's debate over improving child care 'long overdue,' parents say ^[1]

Subsidized daycare spots and refundable tax credit are 2 options presented in election platforms

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EXCERPTS

Parents in the Ottawa area say discussions about child care in the federal election need to address both affordability and the availability of spots.

The Liberals and the NDP have both proposed a form of subsidized universal \$10-a-day child care and in the final weeks before the election call, the Trudeau government signed deals with provinces engineered toward its \$30-billion child-care plan.

The Conservatives, meanwhile, have promised to replace the Liberal plan by turning an existing child-care tax deduction into a tax credit that would cover up to 75 per cent of child-care costs for low-income families.

The Green Party platform promises increased federal funding toward a universal, affordable child-care system.

The availability and cost of daycare spots were both serious issues to consider for Katherine Meek, mom to three-year-old Leon, when she considered her own return to work, and she's glad the issue is getting attention.

"I think it's long overdue for this to be a hot topic," said Meek.

Waitlists in 2 provinces

During the pandemic, Meek's husband Jordan had to stay home from work with Leon for months because they couldn't find care in Napanee, Ont.

They hoped Leon would be able to get a subsidized spot in Centre de petit enfance (CPE) when they moved to Quebec last May, but they're still on a waiting list and have had to use a privately-run daycare.

"It was a struggle," said Meek. "I was kind of surprised that we're still waiting so long."

Gloria Izanson, whose child was born a week after Ontario went into its first COVID-19 lockdown, has a municipally-subsidized spot at a daycare on Maitland Avenue, but she knows many parents struggle to pay \$50 per day.

She supports the \$10-a-day proposal, but worries the plan won't ensure there are enough daycare spots.

"We still have not enough for most of the kids. Some kids are still on the wait list and those wait lists are like 100 kids," Izanson said.

The Conservatives say their plan would provide more flexibility to shift workers like Izanson's sister, who is a health-care worker with children, and people in other rural areas who may want to go with options outside of regulated daycares.

Advocates support national system

Alana Powell, executive director of the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, says the universal child-care plan is the best way to offer a wide range of options.

"The tax credit has been tried and tested and has not built the system that we need," said Powell, who is also expecting a child in March 2022.

"It certainly won't ensure that my baby has a child care spot available to them when I'm ready to return to work."

Powell is among those who signed an open letter calling for all parties to commit to a universal child-care system, which include economists who have raised concerns about how the pandemic has reduced women's participation in the workforce to a 30-year low.

Powell, who lives in Ottawa's south end, said a universal system would help maintain and open spots by keeping the more than 57,000 Ontario early childhood educators working.

"What we're seeing is that a lot of them are leaving the sector within the first five years. They're burnt out. They're overworked. They're underpaid. They're undervalued," she said.

Powell said this national attention gives her group hope they may get the support they need to turn the job they love into a career.

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