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Alberta spends less on daycare than it gets in federal funding [CA-AB] [1]

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EXCERPTS

Some families wait years for space in day cares, but the province has been spending far less than its budget for child care.

That was evident in 2005-2006 when the Alberta government got $14.9 million more from Ottawa than it spent on child care, says Bill Moore-Kilgannon, director of Public Interest Alberta.

Documents obtained by his lobby organization through a Freedom of Information request show that in that fiscal year, federal contributions for child care were $93.2 million from two programs, while the province spent $78.3 million.

"In a province screaming for child care, with long wait lists and workers earning much less than they should, spending is much less than they had budgeted for," Moore said Thursday. "They have been getting money from the feds, but haven't been developing a child-care system with core provincial funding."

The budget for child care that year was $100.4 million. Department spokeswoman Mary Lou Reeleder said it wasn't all spent because the province was still in the process of developing a plan which included improved subsidies for parents and more money for workers. That plar wasn't completed until October 2005, about halfway through the fiscal year.

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As well, $22.8 million of that $93.2 million was part of the Canadian Social Transfer, which can be put into general revenue, she said. The following year, 2006-07, spending rose to $103.7 million, far less than the $147 million budgeted. Federal transfers accounted for all but $6.8 million of the spending in 2006-07.

The agreement with Ottawa, which accounted for about three-quarters of the federal money in those years, ended in 2007. The rest came from the Canadian Social Transfer, which the Harper government has slowly increased.

Last year, Ottawa changed direction somewhat with a $250-million national fund to create more child-care spaces through transfers to the provinces, of which $25.9 million went to Alberta.

Children's Services has maintained the federal money was included in the 2007-08 budget for child care, which was up to $134 million.

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