

Watchdog criticizes system for tracking child care funding [CA] ^[1]

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Source: Ottawa Citizen

Format: Article

Publication Date: 16 Nov 2007

AVAILABILITY
See text below.

EXCERPTS

Canadians wanting to track what has happened to more than \$3 billion in federal funds earmarked for early childhood initiatives since 2001 have bumped up against incomplete and confusing reporting by most provinces and territories, says a major national study being released today.

The study, financed by federal funds, said eight of Canada's 13 provinces and territories were missing reports for one or more years on how the money was divvied up on child care and other child development initiatives within their borders from 2001 through 2006.

"Generally speaking, it would be unreasonable to expect a typical member of the public on their own time to be able to take these reports and assess programs," Lynell Anderson, a professional accountant and one of the report's authors, said in an interview from Vancouver.

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Ms. Anderson said that although the survey found pockets of good information and no evidence of the funds being siphoned off to unrelated programs, the overall reporting picture was weak.

She said some governments flooded their websites with pictures of smiling babies and pages and pages of data that were almost impossible to decipher. For example, she said, it took researchers up to 30 hours on some individual websites to pull the information they needed.

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The study is the final step of a three-year project by the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. It received \$687,000 to track the money and also help government officials and community groups come up with tools for measuring progress in developing and operating child care facilities and early learning programs.

Ms. Anderson said significant reporting gaps were found in Alberta, Ontario, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. The best performers were British Columbia, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Ms. Anderson said provincial, territorial and federal auditor generals should be asked to audit the reports and publish their findings so members of the public would be spared the hassle of trying to figure out what their governments are doing with any future money that gets earmarked for childhood initiatives.

The tracking project was initiated under the former Liberal government of Paul Martin, which had started to lay the groundwork for a national child-care program before it was defeated and replaced by Stephen Harper's Conservatives in January 2006. The new government cancelled the 5-year, \$5-billion Liberal program after one year, replacing it with a direct taxable payment of \$1,200 a year for each child under the age of six. It also split \$250 million among the provinces and territories that it said should be used to create child-care spaces, but no formal agreements and reporting requirements were attached to the funds.

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- reprinted from the Ottawa Citizen

Region: Canada ^[2]

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