

Feds can't say for sure where \$2 billion in child care funding went [CA] ^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

More than \$2 billion in federal child care funding has flowed into a virtual accountability void in the last three years.

Officials in Ottawa have few clues as to how well the cash was spent by most provinces since 2004. Provincial reports are months or even years overdue - when they're provided at all.

It's a blind spot that critics loudly warned about when past Liberal governments first started funding a national child-care system that was seen by many as encroaching on provincial social-policy turf.

Tracking hundreds of millions of dollars across Canada is like "wandering through a maze blindfolded," says Monica Lysack, executive director of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

"There is an increasing lack of accountability for the transfer of federal funds," she said in an interview. "It was a problem under the Liberal government and is getting worse under this government."

Ottawa likes to say it's up to the provinces to publicly explain how they spend their money to their own constituents. But Lysack says such reports are outdated by the time they're finally released, or are missing altogether. "It's ridiculous."

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The federal government's own child-care reports are missing for 2004-05 and 2005-06 "for a number of reasons," said Glennie Graham, director of child and youth policy for Human Resources.

A combined publication "will be released when ready," said Lesley Harmer, spokeswoman for Human Resources Minister Monte Solberg.

Part of the problem is a glaring lack of consistent information gathering. National statistics are often sketchy at best.

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Lysack and NDP child-care critic Olivia Chow say legislation is needed to compel timely, detailed reporting.

In the meantime, federal cash will keep flowing.

The Conservatives, in their March budget, pledged another \$250 million in child-care money this year to be doled out to the provinces on a per capita basis - again with no strings attached, critics say.

Ottawa plans to continue that funding at \$250 million a year through the Canada Social Transfer but insists that, starting next year, it will ensure "reporting and accountability" from the provinces.

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The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care is among groups asking pointed questions about how provincial governments are spending federal cash. There are growing concerns about increasing fees, program funding cuts and lack of quality spaces.

"The most significant question is whether federal funds . . . will be used to support the Ontario child-care system, or instead be used for other programs," the coalition said after the province brought down its latest budget.

Anne Machowski, spokeswoman for the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, said the province hopes to publicly post its 2005-06 child-care report by this July. It will account for how Ontario spent \$87.4 million in federal funds, she said.

- reprinted from the Canadian Press

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