

# Day care plan good stop-gap [CA-AB] <sup>[1]</sup>

Editorial

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

In a day-care system struggling with long waiting lists, high fees and staff turnover that's hard on children, any new government assistance is welcome.

By that standard, Children's Services Minister Janis Tarchuk's \$8-million injection to open additional spaces and attract workers is a help, but can't be seen as the final fix.

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To stem that outflow of employees, Tarchuk will pay \$5,000 to day-care workers to who return to child-care work for two years. Also, earlier this month she added \$8 million to subsidize wages.

The new program will also provide a \$1,500 grant for each new day-care space created -- also a sound short-term measure to ease the crisis. Low-income parents will get a 5.6-per-cent increase in their subsidies.

But a closer look at day-care spending shows the government assistance isn't as generous as it could be.

The day-care budget for 2007-08 is \$134 million, less than the \$147-million budget for last year.

There's also \$25 million in federal money aimed for day care. The province has not yet said what it intends to do with it.

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Tarchuk should move as quickly as possible to put those funds to work. The province has already lost a year waiting for the Harper government to realize its mistake.

There's another question for Tarchuk. In 2006, the province spent only \$118 million of the \$147 million budgeted in the federal-provincial agreement.

What happened to the unspent \$29 million?

Why not put that money into creating new spaces or subsidizing day-care fees to low-income people?

Children's services spokesman Jodi Korchinski says the department did not spend the \$29 million because fewer families took advantage of provincial programs, mainly the offer of \$100 a month for stay-at-home parents who want to put their children in play schools. But that could hardly account for the entire sum.

Alberta had fewer day-care spaces in 2004 than in 1992, according to Statistics Canada. Parents are still waiting up to two years in some places.

The shortage of spaces is aggravated by the failure of the federal Tory plan. Alberta needs to take those dollars and step into the breach.

- reprinted from the Edmonton Journal

**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

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