Tax break up to \$310 to be given for children under 18 [CA]

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EXCERPTS

Parents of all children under the age of 18 will get a tax break of up to \$310 per child under a new tax credit announced in the budget yesterday by the federal government.

While last year's budget provided direct funding of \$1,200 per child to parents of preschoolers, this year's Child Tax Credit is aimed at a much broader base -- the middle-income families that are the stated targets of Conservative election strategy.

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As for child care, the payments to parents of preschoolers will continue, but the Conservatives have ended the \$1.2-billion in annual funding the previous Liberal government gave to the provinces to create regulated spaces.

In its place, Ottawa will now provide \$250-million annually to the provinces, on a per-capita basis, to help them develop preschool care.

"It's a cut of 80 per cent, so they have basically said to the provinces, 'Back over to you, it's your problem to meet the need of your own provincial citizens with 20 per cent of the money,' " said Monica Lysack, the executive director of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

There are 10,000 children on the waiting list for child care in Ottawa alone, Ms. Lysack said. "This money isn't enough to address that need, let alone the rest of the country."

The \$250-million will be turned over to the provinces and territories this year with essentially no strings attached.

Next year, however, it will be included in the Canada Social Transfer after the rules governing reporting and accountability have been negotiated between the federal government and the provinces.

When the Conservatives first announced their child-care plans in the days after they took office, there was much talk about giving money to small and large businesses to help them create child care for their employees.

After a year of consultation, those plans have been scaled way back.

In this budget, the Conservatives say they will give a tax credit of up to \$10,000 to companies for every child-care space they create. But federal officials said yesterday that they don't believe the initiative will cost the government more than \$5-million -- an indication of just how little interest has been expressed by Canadian business.

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1