

No Tory child care plan as parents face long waits, rising fees [CA] ^[1]

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Source: Canadian Press

Format: Article

Publication Date: 22 Jan 2007

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

There's no federal help in sight for frazzled parents facing years on waiting lists for child care.

One year after the Conservatives won power on a platform touting 125,000 new spaces over five years, there isn't even a clear plan on how to create them.

And there's uncertainty mixed with alarm across Canada over looming fee increases and program cuts since the Tories dropped the \$5-billion Liberal plan to build a national early learning system.

"They're really over a barrel," said Monica Lysack, executive director of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

"They don't have a plan. They haven't created a space. Parents are being caught in the middle of this cut-and-run approach."

Conservatives are handing out cheques worth \$1,200 a year (minus taxes) for each child under six. But they're running from the fact that there are registered spaces for fewer than 20 per cent of kids under 12, Lysack said.

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The Conservatives committed \$250 million in last year's budget to create new spaces in 2007-08. But their tax-incentive plan to lure employers and non-profit groups into the costly and bureaucratic child-care business has been widely panned. Similar efforts in Ontario under the former Mike Harris Tories failed badly when corporations didn't bite.

Former social development minister Diane Finley held talks with child-care groups last summer and was to draft space-creation recommendations by the fall. The report has still not been released.

Monte Solberg, who replaced Finley after a cabinet shuffle this month, was not available for comment Monday.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has conceded that his government's approach may need tweaking. Still, one of his first acts in power was to cancel \$5 billion in promised Liberal child-care funding as of March 31, 2007.

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- reprinted from the Canadian Press

Region: Canada ^[2]

Tags: funding ^[3]

spaces ^[4]

demand ^[5]

federal programs ^[6]

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Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/07/01/no-tory-child-care-plan-parents-face-long-waits-rising-fees-ca> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/spaces> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/demand> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federal-programs>