

Alberta poised to sign child care funding deal with Ottawa this week [CA-AB] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

After threatening to walk away from new federal child care funding if too many strings were attached, Alberta expects to sign a deal with Ottawa this week after all.

Negotiations had hung up over a federal preference that the money not go to for-profit day-care centres. It was a key point for Alberta, since two-thirds of day cares in the province are commercial operations.

Under the deal, the province will get \$70 million in this fiscal year, and \$500 million over five years. It's part of a total \$5 billion the Liberal government has promised the provinces over five years to fund regulated day care across the country.

Heather Forsyth, minister of children's services, suggested earlier this year that Alberta could decide not to participate in the program if the federal government imposed onerous restrictions.

Exactly how Alberta spends the money won't be announced until fall, Fritzsche said. The department got about 3,500 suggestions in an online consultation with parents and also gathered input from child care advocates and professionals.

"Options like improving or enhancing some of the existing programs we have, or bringing in new ones, improving wages for staff at child care centres, improving quality of centres, helping parents with alternative options for child care - these are all things we've heard from the public," he said.

Assistance for parents who choose to stay at home with their children - a concept supported by the federal Opposition Conservatives - isn't being ruled out.

Child care services - and the level to which they are funded - vary widely across the country. A recent study by the Childcare Resource and Research Unit at the University of Toronto found that Alberta spends \$816 annually on each regulated day-care space compared with a high in Quebec of \$4,856.

- reprinted from Canadian Press

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