

# Regulated child care spaces rising, but problems persist, report says [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

The number of regulated child care spaces across Canada has picked up significantly since 2001, but there are still gaping holes in the supply of affordable, quality spots, says a new report on the status of the country's programs.

The report, prepared by the Childcare Resource and Research Unit at the University of Toronto, traces the gaps in part to a dramatic disparity across the country in the amount of public money pumped into regulated child care spaces.

It says public funding per space has fallen in six provinces and territories since 2001. Last year, the funding per space ranged from a low of \$816 in Alberta to a high of \$4,800 in Quebec, which offers regulated child care at \$7 a day for about half the children under the age of 7.

Martha Friendly, a co-author of the report, says she is pleased the supply of regulated spaces has grown, especially because a good chunk of them were created outside of Quebec. Until recently, growth in Quebec's system was almost the sole cause of increases in the national numbers.

Friendly said the good news about expanding supply is offset by data showing public spending per space had fallen in British Columbia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Alberta, Nunavut and Yukon.

On top of that, she said, public funding per space was less than \$2,000 in five provinces - Alberta, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and B.C.

She says such low public funding makes it almost impossible to provide quality accessible care.

The report, a province-by-province analysis of child care programs and trends, lands as the minority Parliament is in the final throes of approving a budget that, among other things, contains \$700 million in promised child care spending this fiscal year.

The plan is opposed by the Conservatives, who used a special opposition day in the Commons on Tuesday to debate a motion condemning the approach. They accuse the Liberals of discriminating against parents who choose to stay at home or choose to find care outside of a publicly funded system.

The party advocates a \$2,000 tax deduction per child, and also promotes things such as tax incentives for employers and businesses to build on-site child care facilities.

Social Development Minister Ken Dryden counters a national system, which takes into account the different needs of provinces and territories, is the only way to deal with the reality that more than 70 per cent of parents with children under the age of 6 are both in the workforce.

Friendly says a \$2,000 tax deduction is a non-starter. It doesn't allow parents to stay at home, nor does it cover the cost of child care, she says.

"There is no evidence in the world that if you give parents money, you are going to develop early learning and high quality child care because you have to do that intentionally," Friendly said.

- reprinted from the Canadian Press

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