

Manitoba joins Ottawa's child care plan [CA-MB] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Ottawa and Manitoba signed an agreement for a national child care program Friday, the first deal of its kind in the country.

Prime Minister Paul Martin announced the deal during a campaign-style stop in Winnipeg. He's expected to make another child care deal announcement in Saskatchewan later in the day.

"A national child care program is one of the cornerstones of our commitment to Canadians," said Martin. "This will give children a tangible head start, and set them on the path to lifelong achievement."

Manitoba is to get \$26 million from Ottawa to pay for day-care programs and Saskatchewan will get \$22 million & provided a federal election doesn't interfere first.

Under the deal, Manitoba will add 5,000 new child care spaces, increase wages for workers in the industry, expand the nursery school program and train more early childhood educators.

The child care program was a key part of the Liberal election platform last year, and Social Development Minister Ken Dryden had hoped to persuade all 10 provinces and the three territories to sign one agreement to set a new national standard for child care.

Ontario is expected to sign a separate agreement for funding worth \$280 million within a few days, but Dryden has run into opposition from Quebec and Alberta, which want to be able to choose how to spend their share of the money.

The federal government has set aside \$700 million this year and \$5 billion over five years for the child care program.

But the money cannot be used until the House of Commons passes the federal budget. And that might not happen if Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois are able to bring down the minority government first.

Manitoba Premier Gary Doer said his government has pushed hard to take the lead on child care. "We were ready to go in November, before all that stuff happened in Ottawa."

- reprinted from CBC News

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