

# Not all support a national day care program [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

The Liberals have been promising Canadians a national child care program for more than 10 years. This year's federal budget appears to be the one that will provide the first funding. But while many parents think the program sounds like a great idea, not everyone agrees.

The conservative lobby group REAL Women of Canada says the Liberals' proposed program would discriminate against families with stay-at-home parents. The group's Diane Watts says the program would specifically favour two-income families while ignoring those families who choose to have one parent stay home to take care of children.

According to an Ekos poll released earlier this month, 28 per cent of Canadians say parents should get direct financial assistance for child care, 21 per cent preferred tax breaks, and 18 per cent said the federal government should simply offer information to help parents meet their own needs. Thirty per cent of those surveyed favoured more day care programs.

Monica Lysack, Executive Director of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, says her group believes in choice but says the first step is to make sure Canada has decent, regulated child care centres.

"If people have the option of family care, that's great. But most of us don't have that option & or we are forced to use that option because we don't access to a full range of early learning care centres. We don't have choices right now," she told CTV.ca

"When I had small children in Saskatchewan, we had the lowest per capita rate of child care spaces. I didn't have choice about whether to use those facilities, regardless of money."

The Conservatives' Intergovernmental Affairs Critic, Rona Ambrose, says she doesn't believe most parents want to send their kids to day care centres. She notes a poll for the Vanier Institute of the Family that found that most parents would prefer to stay at home with their kids rather than send them to day care if they could.

Social Development Minister Ken Dryden recently responded to that argument in question period.

"The question, as in all of these questions, is not what we would like to do, but what we will do, and what we do," he said. "We all want to spend more time with our kids for lots of reasons, economic, social, (but) for reasons of independence, we don't."

Rona Ambrose says her party is not against day care, she just don't believe that the federal government should be presenting institutional day care as the sole option.

"Of course parents need child care support, there's no doubt about that. But this will just scrape the surface," she told CTV.ca. "We think there needs to be options extended beyond what's on the table. It just won't meet the needs of parents."

Ambrose says the provinces and territories have already come up with their own solutions to meeting child care needs and don't want the federal government telling them the programs need to change.

The CCAC's Lysack says she doesn't believe that the federal government is attempting to dictate how programs would operate in each province and community. "What's coming from federal level is standards of care, which I think is reasonable."

And yet it appears that some of the provinces are readying for a battle with Ottawa. During a recent meeting in Vancouver of provincial and territorial social ministers, Alberta Children's Services Minister Heather Forsyth told the meeting that her province wants control of its own system.

Quebec too said it's already a national leader and shouldn't have to account to Ottawa for how it spends related federal funds.

Lysack says she's disappointed that the provinces seem to want to fight each other.

"It's amazing to me that we get ministers together in Vancouver to discuss this topic and somehow all they can do is focus on their differences.

"Those of us in the child care advocacy community who've been working for a generation; we've sorted out our differences. It's not as

though we think it's going to be all the same across all the provinces."

She says if it takes time to allow the federal government to work out all the kinks, they should take it. "Quite frankly, we were pleased that there was no agreement rather than a poor agreement."

She says she hopes the bickering will die down so that the federal government can move ahead with a program she says is long overdue.

"As a Canadian, I just think our children deserve this, they deserve the best, far above all this political wrangling."

- reprinted from CTV.ca

**Region:** Quebec <sup>[2]</sup>

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