

# Ottawa must keep child care promises [CA]<sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

At the recent conference of child advocates in Winnipeg, Social Development Minister Ken Dryden stated, "It's not a question of if, but a matter of when a national child-care program becomes a reality."

This is welcome news and we, along with thousands of people who care about Canada's children, must impress upon the federal government the need to follow through on this announcement.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development has just released its report on early childhood education and care policy, and has given Canada an abysmal rating.

"There is, in reality, no room for indecision if Canadian governments wish to invest in human capital at this age, and lift child care out of mediocrity and weak access," it said.

Unlike other countries that may not have scored well, Canada has the resources to implement a quality system -- but has quite simply lacked the political commitment at all levels of government.

The report gives British Columbia the worst assessment of all the provinces, saying that there appears to be a lack of clarity about policy, strategies and implementation.

The reality is that there are only 25 licensed day-care spots for children under 36 months in Victoria.

The Greater Victoria Early Childhood Community Coalition represents more than 85 agencies that promote the rights, interests and needs of children up to six years old.

Our local community work reveals the same weaknesses and problems identified elsewhere in the country, and the negative consequences for children if we fail to respond to the research that tells us how to maximize the physical, emotional and social development and well-being of young children.

Often the lack of political action results from lack of information about solutions.

The irony in the case of young children is this: What needs to be in place for children to develop is absolutely clear, and has been for some time.

We need a universal system of child care, including pre-school and day care equivalent to a public school system, for young children available to all parents.

The system must be publicly funded, with money put into licensed regulated day-cares and pre-schools, providing a continuum of options for parents.

Any cost to the parents, regardless of income, should be minimal, as is the case in Quebec. The long-term benefits on all fronts -- such as health, education and justice -- if children have access to quality care, which means inclusive, nurturing support and education, cannot be understated.

The irony is that everyone understands so clearly what needs to be done and yet nothing happens.

A holistic approach is needed, with attention paid to adequate funding for training in post-secondary institutions and funding for suitable wages of early childhood educators.

It has been said that the stars are aligned for real change for our youngest. The research, public's understanding, goodwill amongst community partners and a commitment by government are all now in place.

There is an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of Canadian children -- if government acts upon its promises.

- reprinted from the Victoria Times Colonist

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British Columbia [3]

**Tags:** advocacy [4]

federalism [5]

international organizations [6]

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/04/11/ottawa-must-keep-child-care-promises-ca> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7860> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/advocacy> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federalism> [6]

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