

# Child care program could take time: Dryden [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** Globe and Mail

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 29 Oct 2004

## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

Child care advocates are hoping that next week's federal-provincial meeting with Social Development Minister Ken Dryden will result in fundamental changes to how Canada's children are cared for.

"This could be a pivotal event for Canadians," Debra Mayer, board chairwoman for the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, told [globeandmail.com](#) Friday. Her organization represents more than 30 associations including unions, educational organizations and justice advocates across Canada.

Mr. Dryden warned in Ottawa on Friday, however, that it could take some time to implement a fundamental change in the system and months to build a new national child-care program.

He said he would like to see a wide-ranging system put in place and hinted that he would like agreements to provide child-care subsidies to low-income earners and more money to educate caregivers.

Mr. Dryden meets his provincial and territorial counterparts in Ottawa beginning Monday night to discuss approaches and strategies for related to his portfolio, his spokeswoman, Linda Kristal, told [globeandmail.com](#). The areas to be discussed include: early-childhood learning, disability issues, a national child-benefit discussion and &em; perhaps the item that has garnered the most interest nationally &em; the Speech from the Throne's commitments to create a national child care program.

Ms. Kristal said the meeting is part of a series of meetings between federal and provincial social service and social development ministers and its goal is to begin working immediately on action to improve child care.

Mr. Dryden hopes to hold another meeting in December or January, she said, where "hopefully they'll get back together to get an agreement."

Ms. Kristal said Mr. Dryden, as noted in the Throne Speech, wants the agreement put in place while respecting four key principles &em; quality, universality, accessibility and development.

Earlier this week, Mr. Dryden recognized a study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development that says the Canadian system provides mostly "babysitting" for children without real educational programs and is patchwork across the province.

Ms. Mayer of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada agrees.

"I think this is an opportunity to really advance in a significant way a pan-Canadian commitment to an investment in a child-care system," she said.

The organization sent an open letter to Mr. Dryden and the provincial and territorial ministers with a series of requests for a "plan of prompt action" with regard to improving child care.

They include asking for a shift from the current user fee/subsidy system to a publicly funded system, sufficient financial commitments from both the federal and provincial governments and accountability tied to a new child-care plan.

Ms. Mayer also warned the politicians against getting into a federal-provincial squabble, such as the one seen this week in talks on the federal equalization program or discussions on health-care funding in the past.

She said the OECD report makes it clear that the current system, where people are cobbling together their child care however possible, is not working and is not helpful to the long-term intellectual development of children in Canada.

"The goal would be to move toward a public system that is accountable," she said.

Tony Martin, the NDP critic for child care, said the meeting is a golden opportunity to change the system of child care, but only if provincial and federal governments make a commitment to proper funding.

"The time has come," he told [globeandmail.com](#). He said he senses high expectations and excitement regarding the meetings.

While it will not be easy, he said, it can be done. There are examples of successful systems both globally and in Canada, including in Quebec and Manitoba which have legislative framework in place on child care.

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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

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