

# Canada's child care will improve, Dryden insists <sup>[1]</sup>

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EXCERPTS

Minister for Social Development Ken Dryden defended Canada's child care system Monday in the face of an international report that calls it a patchwork of dismal programs offering basic babysitting but not much more.

Dryden acknowledged that services were uneven, but said plans are underway to create a better network that gives parents common choices from coast to coast.

"It's like education 100 years ago, it's like health care 40 years ago... You were fragmented, you were patchwork," said Dryden, the rookie MP who has been handed responsibility for drafting a national child care plan.

"But you knew that you were going to get to something that was very much systematic and very different from that."

The Liberals first promised a national child care program 11 years ago, in the Red Book that Prime Minister Paul Martin co-authored leading up to the 1993 general election.

The Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reviewed 20 countries for the child care report, released Monday. It said Canada's system was chronically underfunded and found subsidies inequitably distributed to a small number of the poorest families.

As part of the report, four European investigators toured dozens of programs in Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, the only four provinces that agreed to be in the review.

While they did find several examples of well-run daycares, more often they came upon centres that were shabby, with workers who were poorly trained and who frequently quit.

In many centres, they found barren, poorly lit rooms with an abundance of plastic toys and games that were "of doubtful learning quality." Playgrounds were lacking as well.

Overprotective child care workers frequently forced youngsters to sit down and not move.

Unlike other cold-climate countries such as Sweden and Finland, which have highly rated systems where preschoolers spend hours at a time outdoors, the Canadian children spent almost all of their time inside.

The NDP lambasted the Liberal minority government over the report.

"The OECD report today is a stinging indictment of Paul Martin's choice to break his child care promises," said NDP leader Jack Layton. "If he had kept his first promise 11 years ago, the international community wouldn't be looking at Canada and saying we've failed. Now's the time to do better, and we expect a detailed plan soon."

The report recommended that federal and provincial governments each pay 40 per cent of day-care costs, with parents making up the remaining 20 per cent.

Canada has among the highest percentage of working mothers of young children, yet it invests less than half of what other developed nations in Europe devote on average to early-childhood education, says the report.

Canada has regulated child-care spaces for less than 20 per cent of children under six with working parents.

In comparison, 60 per cent of young children in the U.K. are in regulated care, and 78 per cent in Denmark.

- reprinted from CBC news

**Region:** Prince Edward Island <sup>[2]</sup>

Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

Saskatchewan <sup>[4]</sup>

**Tags:** Prince Edward Island <sup>[5]</sup>

federal programs <sup>[6]</sup>

international organizations <sup>[7]</sup>

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