

Day care bucks advanced despite reporting lapse [CA] ^[1]

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Source: Ottawa Citizen

Format: Article

Publication Date: 5 Apr 2004

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

More federal dollars aimed at increasing access to regulated child care began flowing to the provinces this month, even though only two met the requirement to report how past funds were spent on early childhood development.

The lack of reporting beyond British Columbia and Alberta has raised alarm bells among advocates of regulated child care. They say Ottawa shouldn't send another penny to the other provinces and territories until they detail how early childhood development money is spent.

But the money, a total of \$150 million announced in last month's federal budget, went automatically to the provinces and territories on April 1 as part of the multibillion-dollar transfer of funds for social programs at the beginning of the new fiscal year.

"I think you should have to demonstrate that you did something before you get the money," says Martha Friendly, co-ordinator of the University of Toronto's Childcare Resource and Research Unit. "The problem (with the block transfer) is there is no mechanism if the province basically wants to make off with the money for other purposes."

Friendly is among those pushing the federal government to separate the block transfer into separate funds, earmarking one specifically for early learning and child care.

Federal Social Development Minister Liza Frulla says she is concerned about the reporting gap. The minister said she wrote her provincial and territorial counterparts last week reminding them they were supposed to provide baseline reports on spending on early learning and child care to their populations by last November. Quebec, the only province with a universal child care program, is not part of the multilateral framework agreements on early learning and child care.

On Sunday, Frulla opened a three-day trip to the Maritimes to meet her counterparts and press them to make the reports, and commit to using the new money to enhance access to regulated child care.

Frulla argues there is intense grassroots pressure on provincial governments to account for how day care dollars are spent.

The budget ramped up child-care spending to \$1.050 billion over the five-year program, \$150 million more than the Chretien government promised in its last budget last year.

Frulla says she's giving the provinces and territories the benefit of the doubt because many had recent elections.

Frulla said she wants to use the talks to ensure "we are all committed to child care" and that "the money gets spent the right way."

Frulla says attaching strings to the money is not the answer because early learning and child care has to be a joint responsibility. The federal government cannot afford to fund a national program on its own so it cannot unilaterally call the shots, she said.

- reprinted from the Ottawa Citizen

Region: Canada ^[2]

British Columbia ^[3]

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