

Child-care centres win \$30,000 grants [AU] ^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

Community child-care centres are set to win a Federal Government gift of up to \$30,000 each to carry out urgent repairs and improvements as the Coalition steps up its family-friendly election pitch.

Victoria's 341 non-profit childcare centres will be the biggest winners from the \$3 million spending boost to be announced today by Children and Youth Affairs Minister Larry Anthony. The money can be used to install shade cloths over outdoor play areas, upgrade kitchens, bathrooms and toilets, and meet new fire safety rules.

The Government will also give \$300,000 to a Victorian-based project to develop a national blueprint for child protection standards for organisations working with children.

The Government and Labor have both marked out child care and policies for the under-fives and their parents as a key election battleground. Prime Minister John Howard said he wanted to "do more" to increase the number of child-care places in the May budget. But he has faced criticism for not yet delivering on a promised work and family package he flagged two years ago.

Opposition Leader Mark Latham, who has made childhood issues a hallmark of his leadership, has foreshadowed a multimillion-dollar plan to increase the number of child-care places, reduce the cost for parents and pay child-care workers more. But he has been unable to say how this would be funded.

Mr Anthony said community child-care centres could apply for grants of between \$5000 and \$30,000 to carry out minor capital works. "This is to meet immediate needs for the welfare of children and emergency repairs they haven't been able to do because of a lack of funds."

But not all centres will be guaranteed money as they will have to compete in a tender. The Government will favour urgent projects, those needed to meet health, safety or licensing standards and those where the cost can not be met from within a centre's budget.

"This is a framework for ensuring that children and young people are safe in the care of others," Mr Hermann said. "This is a major step towards consistent national child-care protection standards for organisations working with children and young people."

- reprinted from The Age

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[2]

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