

ALP childcare plan costly [AU] ^[1]

Author: The Age

Source: The Age

Format: Article

Publication Date: 2 Feb 2004

AVAILABILITY
See text below.

EXCERPTS

A proposal for free childcare and preschool education being considered by the Labor Party would cost taxpayers \$3 billion, the government said.

Labor is nutting through its childcare policy but will not reveal details or costings until after the May budget.

Leader Mark Latham said it was speculation Labor would offer up to 10 hours a week of free childcare or one year of free preschool education.

He said Labor's childcare policy would improve access and affordability and would be fiscally responsible.

But Children's Minister Larry Anthony, sick of Mr Latham snatching all the headlines on childcare issues, said the Labor leader was not the new messiah.

He said the government had costed the plan at \$3 billion with the free childcare hours alone topping \$2.4 billion.

Mr Anthony said current policy was targeted at needy families and under Labor's plan, millionaires would receive free services at taxpayer expense.

Mr Latham said all of Labor's policies, including its plan for childcare and preschool, would be fully costed.

The Labor leader has made early childhood one of his priorities and announced at the ALP national conference that the party would spend \$80 million over four years giving free books to encourage parents to read to their kids.

In a bid to woo women voters, he also promised a Labor government would introduce paid maternity leave.

"We'll have a policy that improves quality and accessibility in childcare and preschool but only in a way that is very careful with the commonwealth finances," Mr Latham said. After the budget figures are revealed in May, Labor would detail its policy and costings.

- reprinted from The Age

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[2]

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