

# Child care funding falls short of hopes but could relieve frazzled parents [CA]<sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Like scores of stressed-out parents across Canada, the search for quality child care has sometimes frayed the nerves of Lesley Lopez.

The Vancouver resident, desperate to hold a teaching job, once had to leave her six-month-old son with the friend of a relative. Her three children are now in regulated spaces, but she worries that rising fees will force her back on welfare.

The federal budget released Tuesday commits \$935 million over five years to fulfil a 1993 Liberal promise of national day care.

But the money is much less than the \$1 billion annual commitment that a group of Liberal MPs had pushed their government to spend.

And any new funding depends on whether Ottawa can get provinces to agree to devote the cash specifically to day care, since such social policy falls under provincial jurisdiction.

Talks are ongoing but no timeline for a deal has been set.

Ottawa and the provinces tried and failed to work together on the issue in the mid-1990s.

Lopez hopes that more federal cash could keep provincial child-care fees from rising beyond her reach.

"Things are tight," says the single mom of three. "Groceries will sometimes go on the credit card because there just isn't the money."

Welfare is a dreaded last resort.

Lopez, 28, juggled family demands to go back to school. She now teaches kindergarten part-time and works as a substitute instructor.

Child care for her children, aged three, four and six, costs \$1,000 a month - after subsidies.

That will go up another \$30 on April 1, she said.

And while her children are thriving in licensed care, many others aren't so lucky.

A University of Toronto study released last week showed that spending on regulated child care has dropped by about \$70 million (in 2001 dollars) in the last 10 years across Canada.

Only Quebec has increased such investment, said the report by the University's Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

Quebec paid 58 per cent of \$1.9 billion spent in 2001 by the provinces and territories on regulated child care, the report showed.

Even with these efforts, the province has regulated spaces for just 21 per cent of kids who need them. Saskatchewan had room for 4.2 per cent, and the national average was just over 12 per cent.

That leaves the vast majority of parents scrambling to line up informal care.

"They've gone through multiple arrangements," says Laurel Rothman, national co-ordinator for Campaign 2000, a coalition of groups fighting child poverty.

"Most people don't have extended family to rely on."

Campaign 2000 and other groups have argued for years that prohibitive child-care costs and lack of spaces are keeping some families, especially single moms, in poverty.

Ottawa's biggest effort to help children - the \$2.2-billion Early Childhood Development Initiative - was noble but flawed, critics say.

The five-year program, introduced in 2000, allows provinces to spend the money on four broad areas of early childhood education. No cash was specifically tagged for child care.

Some provinces, notably Ontario, have been criticized for not creating more regulated spaces despite pressing needs.

- reprinted from Canadian Press

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

**Tags:** budget <sup>[3]</sup>

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