

# Quality child care scarce: study: Problems traced to decreases in provincial funding [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

A new national study says there has been an alarming deterioration in the availability of quality child care outside of Quebec, a finding its lead author hopes next week's federal budget will begin to rectify.

Toronto researcher Martha Friendly, who has done five reports on the status of child care in Canada, said she was surprised by the dismal child-care picture the 2001 survey paints for most of the country. She traced the problems to a serious decline in provincial and territorial spending on regulated child care and a marked slowing in the growth of child-care spaces.

"It's a really big problem," Friendly said. "Child care is scarce and it's not good enough."

The exception is Quebec which has pumped significant amounts of money into a universal day-care program, she said. The report noted, for example, that Quebec's per capita spending on regulated child care in 2001 was \$980, compared with \$91 in Nova Scotia, the province with the lowest per capita spending.

Manitoba led the rest of the provinces with per capita spending of \$338, followed by B.C. at \$273, Ontario \$232, P.E.I. \$187, Alberta \$110, New Brunswick \$105, Newfoundland and Labrador \$101 and Saskatchewan \$97.

Friendly's survey reported that overall spending of \$1.9 billion by the provinces and territories outside Quebec represented a drop of about \$70 million, in constant 2001 dollars, since 1992.

During the same period, there was a dramatic decline in the growth of new child-care spaces outside Quebec. The number increased by only 65,340 to 358,525 between 1992 and 2001, whereas 160,000 new spaces were created between 1980 and 1990.

Friendly, co-ordinator of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit at the University of Toronto, said Finance Minister John Manley must earmark at least \$200 million in next Tuesday's budget to get the provinces on side for a national child-care program the Liberals promised as far back as 1993. She said \$200 million should be sufficient to get the ball rolling with the provinces.

The budget is expected to include initiatives aimed at children, among them a possible increase in the National Child Benefit to at least \$2,600 per child from \$2,400.

The prospect of a large budget surplus in the coming fiscal year has heightened hopes in some circles that Manley will be free to make good on Chretien's renewed promise in the October throne speech to do something about child care.

The Liberal government pledged then to "work with its partners to increase access to early learning opportunities and to quality child care, particularly for poor and lone-parent families."

Ms. Friendly said a national program that blends early childhood care and education will take years to build and hundreds of millions of dollars worth of federal and provincial investments.

"We're so far behind other countries that we could start tomorrow and start building this in the best possible way and it would still take 10 years," she said in an interview.

Other findings in the report:

- Median monthly fees for centre-based child care for pre-schoolers aged three to six ranged from \$514 in the Yukon to \$360 in Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick.

- In 2001, there were enough regulated child care spaces to accommodate 12.1 per cent of children aged 12 and under.

- By province, the percentage of children for whom there was a regulated space ranged from 4.2 per cent in Saskatchewan to 21.1 per cent in Quebec.

-Reprinted from the Ottawa Citizen

**Tags:** quality <sup>[2]</sup>

spaces <sup>[3]</sup>

availability <sup>[4]</sup>

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