

# Need for child care vastly exceeds availability, report shows [CA]

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Quebec is leaving the rest of the country in the dust when it comes to child care and early childhood education spending, a report released Monday reveals.

But while the authors applauded Quebec's efforts, they were quick to point out it's not that the province is doing such a spectacular job in providing day-care funding. Rather, the rest of the country is doing a dismal job of it.

"If you look at Quebec since they started developing the new program, they've put in a huge number of spaces. Now do I think it's exactly been done right? Well no, I don't really. But it's been done in the right ballpark," said Martha Friendly, one of the report's authors.

"You can't make it spring up from nothing. You have to have people and you have to have places to put it and all that stuff. And the problem is the rest of Canada has not started essentially."

The report was produced by the childcare resource and research unit of the University of Toronto, a group which Friendly heads. The report, which is based on data from 2001, is the fourth looking at the early childhood education and care sector in the country. Earlier reports were released in 1992, 1995 and 1998.

The latest shows that spending on child care outside of Quebec has actually decreased over the past decade, dropping by about \$70 million in 2001 constant dollars.

"The deterioration & especially in some provinces & is alarming," Friendly said.

Successive federal governments have promised a national child-care program but have failed to deliver. With Finance Minister John Manley set to table a new budget next week, hopes are again rising that there will be new federal money for child care.

But those who have followed the debate over the years are tempering their optimism.

"You can't hold your breath in this business," said Katherine Scott, a senior policy associate specializing in child and family issues with the Canadian Council on Social Development in Ottawa.

Some worry Prime Minister Jean Chretien's dogged pursuit of a legacy that focuses sharply on fixing the ailing health-care system may eclipse the need for child care funding.

"Once again, child care will fall off the table? I think that's a very real possibility," Scott agreed.

According to the report, the vast majority & 70 per cent & of the new child care spots that have opened up since 1992 have been in Quebec. In fact, Quebec & which has 23 per cent of the country's children & has 40 per cent of the regulated child care spaces.

Only 65,000 new spaces were created in the rest of the country during that period. While there was a slight decline in the number of young children in the country during that period, the slight drop in numbers and the small increase in spaces did little to narrow the gulf between what's available and what's needed.

"We're nowhere close to having enough," Friendly said.

Quebec spent 58 per cent of the \$1.9 billion devoted by the provinces and territories in 2001 to regulated child care, the report showed. The province's per child spending & \$980 & was 10 times that of the lowest spending province, Nova Scotia, which spent \$91 per child. Saskatchewan, Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Alberta were keeping Nova Scotia close company, the report showed.

Despite its efforts, Quebec has regulated child care spaces for only 21 per cent of the children who need them. But Saskatchewan had regulated spaces for only 4.2 per cent of children who need child care and the national average was 12.1 per cent.

"There's a real disparity here between what's going on in Quebec and what's going on in the rest of the country," Scott said.

Friendly agreed.

"It's not that Quebec is perfect. It's not even that Sweden," &mdash; viewed as the global leader on child care &mdash; "is perfect. Or France. But it's better. And they're taking it seriously."

The research was funded by Human Resources Development Canada.

-Reprinted from CP Wire Service

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