

A roadmap to quality child care [CA-ON] ^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

Ontario is facing a severe child-care crisis. Child-care services are fragmented, there simply aren't enough spaces and most of them are not affordable.

Right now, almost 2 million children require some form of day care but there are only 167,000 regulated spaces available.

The provincial government is mainly responsible for this crisis.

Its funding cuts and policies of downloading child care onto municipalities have been disastrous.

But the federal government is not blameless. When it abandoned the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) in 1996, it not only cut transfer dollars earmarked specifically for child care and other social programs, but also ended any active federal role in social policy.

These government actions must be re-evaluated. Recent news that the provincial and territorial and the federal governments are moving closer on devising and implementing a national child-care plan is encouraging.

The question now is, how much will they agree on, and what will the terms of the agreement be?

Research shows that child care is good for children, their families and society. This means providing high quality services that further children's development, support parents and women's equality, help reduce poverty, foster social inclusion and provide equity for diverse groups in society.

Getting to a comprehensive, high quality system of early childhood education and care requires leadership and co-operation.

The federal and provincial and territorial governments have a chance in current negotiations to get the architecture of their new national child-care plan right.

What are some of the principles that must make up this new architecture for a national child-care program? Ontarians advocating for better child care in Ontario and Canada believe it must include, at a minimum, the following

All participating provinces and territories must be held accountable for using designated child-care plan funds to deliver quality day care.

Under recent federal initiatives that have attempted to increase support for child care, such as the Early Childhood Development Agenda (ECDA), provinces have been able to choose for themselves how to use the monies allotted.

Ontario has yet to put 1 cent of the more than \$250 million sent from Ottawa into child care. Without federal leadership in requiring provincial levels of participation we will never have a national child-care program, as services will develop unevenly - if at all - in each province.

Any new agreement must hold Ontario accountable.

In other words, if the government of Ontario does not put the proposed funds into child care it simply must not get any.

The plan must deliver high quality child care, supporting developmental environments for children and decent working conditions for workers.

The plan must deliver regulated, not-for-profit care.

Not-for-profit care is almost always of higher quality than commercial care.

Simply put, this is because all available resources are used for delivering care, instead of setting aside some for profit. Regulated care also means safer care parents can trust.

The federal government must commit 1 per cent of Canada's gross domestic product to make any new child-care strategy effective.

This matches the European Union standard of spending. Investing properly in quality care now will result in at least double the return later.

Economists have calculated that every \$1 invested in child care brings \$2 in social benefits.

Ontario cannot hope to come anywhere near to fulfilling its stated commitment to the early years of childhood development without substantially investing in child care.

Working co-operatively with the federal government on developing the right architecture required for an effective national child care-plan is its chance to finally do so.

-Reprinted from The Toronto Star

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