

Liberal MPs call for billions in national child care spending [CA] ^[1]

Author: Baily, Sue

Source: Canadian Press

Format: Article

Publication Date: 24 Nov 2002

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Federal children's programs worth \$2.2 billion are doomed to fail without dramatic spending hikes on quality child care, says a Liberal social policy committee.

"Unless progress is made on child care, no early years' strategy can be successful," says a new committee report backed by at least 25 Liberal MPs. "And it will be impossible to reach the goals governments have set for Canada's children."

The report, called *A National Child Care Strategy: Getting the Architecture Right Now*, calls for \$1 billion in new spending next year.

Annual funding should increase within four years to \$4.5 billion so that, by 2007, "every three- to five-year-old child who needs it should have a preschool place."

The report is before Finance Minister John Manley as he juggles competing priorities for a new federal budget, likely in February.

Dollars specifically targeted for child care should flow to provinces and territories that agree to account for it, says the report.

"Some may feel that this approach is too directive or intrusive" into provincial jurisdiction over social programs, it concedes. If a national agreement can't be reached, Ottawa could strike deals with individual provinces or even municipalities, the report concludes.

Quebec's push to provide affordable day care for all young children is cited as a model worth following.

Canada trails European countries that provide state-run, early-learning spaces to all preschoolers regardless of income.

"We're way behind," said Toronto MP John Godfrey, chairman of the Liberal caucus social policy committee. "It's one of the big gaps we can see . . . in our social system."

State supports have not kept pace with societal changes that see 65 per cent of mothers with preschool children working outside the home, he said in an interview.

"That's hard on parents and the child. We're forcing people to make these terrible choices."

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

"We didn't get it right," he said of the much-touted five-year program introduced in 2000.

At least some of that money should have been earmarked for increasing child care spaces and enhancing services, Godfrey explained.

Instead, Ottawa only required that provinces spend the money in any of four loosely defined areas: prenatal and postpartum care, parenting services, pre-school and child care, and community supports.

Some provinces - notably Ontario - haven't used the funds for child care despite dire needs expressed by parents.

Federal money has instead gone to children's health and other services that critics say should have come from provincial coffers.

Ottawa must show leadership by increasing money for child care, and demanding provinces properly account for it, said Laurel Rothman, national co-ordinator of Campaign 2000.

The coalition of 85 groups fighting child poverty says universal child care would be a powerful weapon in its battle.

"It's more than 30 years since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommended a national plan."

The federal Liberals also promised on the election trail in 1993 to work with the provinces on a national daycare program.

Deficit-cutting in the mid-1990s and a lack of provincial co-operation helped derail the plan.

Campaign 2000 released a national study last month showing that just 18 per cent of Canadian children under six had access to a regulated space in 2001.

-Reprinted from Canadian Press

Tags: physical environment ^[2]

funding ^[3]

federal programs ^[4]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/03/07/liberal-mps-call-billions-national-child-care-spending-ca>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/03/07/liberal-mps-call-billions-national-child-care-spending-ca> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/physical-environment> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federal-programs>