

Child-care costs hurt families: Report [ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Child-care costs in Toronto and across Canada continue to be a significant barrier to lower-income families, says a report to be tabled today at a children's summit at city hall.

And until the provincial government starts spending the \$114 million it gets each year from the federal government's Early Childhood Development Agreement on subsidized day care, the situation isn't likely to get any better, say child-care advocates who plan to participate.

"The feds want one thing, but the province says, 'Don't tell us what to do, just give us the money,'" said Councillor Olivia Chow, city council's advocate for children and youth.

"The money gets passed on to the province, and the province does something completely different. As a result, most of the provinces end up spending very little of the money on child care. And in Ontario, we spend none of it on child care.

"We call it the ABC's of child care. Anything But Child care."

Campaign 2000, a coalition of 85 organizations that have been tracking Ottawa's United Nations commitment to eradicate child poverty, has released a report titled Diversity or Disparity, which highlights the shortcomings of child care in every province.

"Across the spectrum of indicators, whether it is providing spaces, affordable fees for parents or meeting quality standards, Canadian child care falls short," said Laurel Rothman, Campaign 2000's national co-ordinator.

To prepare the report, the coalition looked into child care in Ontario, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland. While child-care users and staff are "poorly served" throughout the country, the report notes that standards are dramatically different depending on the province.

In Newfoundland, for instance, an average family needs about 14 per cent of its income to pay for regulated day care, but the same family would pay 20 per cent of its income in British Columbia, the report says.

A childcare worker in Newfoundland earns an average of \$6.76 per hour, the report says, but the same worker in British Columbia would earn about \$12 an hour.

Rather than reducing such disparities, the report says, the provincial subsidy system aggravates them.

A single mother with an annual income of about \$10,000 would have her child-care fees covered in Ontario but would have to come up with \$3,500 in fees in Saskatchewan.

"Every year we come out with a report like this, every year we are asking for the same things, and as an issue, we are always struggling for recognition and a commitment," Chow added. "It's very frustrating."

The child-care summit begins at 9:30 a.m. today in council chambers at Toronto City Hall and is open to the public.

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