

Province targets \$114 million for young children: 'Glaring gap' in child care 'unforgiveable' [CA-ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Children's advocates are pleased the province has finally started spending federal transfer payments earmarked for early-years development, but are disappointed there's no money for child care.

"There are some huge glaring gaps and one of them is child care. It's the cornerstone of early childhood development," said Mary-Anne Bedard, executive-director of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

Children's Minister John Baird yesterday announced his government is spending \$114 million on programs and services to support young children and their families. That's the exact amount of money Ontario is receiving this year from Ottawa as part of a national initiative to promote early-childhood development.

Baird said some \$30 million will go to the creation of early-years centres across Ontario where parenting programs will be offered and where resources can be accessed on nurturing young children and helping them reach their potential.

"We want these centres to be a place where parents can go to find the answers to questions they may have about their children," Baird said.

"We know the early years centres will be a valued resource for parents, whether that means offering a literacy-training program on the premises, or helping them access a program for their special-needs child in the community," he added.

Investments will also be made into programs that support children with autism and mental health problems.

Bedard said she had hoped the province would have matched the federal funding in its budget.

"At a time when a record number of other provinces are acknowledging the importance of child care in their investment priorities, it is shocking that our government did not even include a token amount of money for child care in this budget," Bedard said.

"They're taking credit for something another government is doing because they don't have the political will to do something on their own," she added.

She noted that the highly touted Early Years Study - commissioned by the Mike Harris government and authored by Dr. Fraser Mustard and Margaret McCain - says that child care is a key component of early-years development.

"I'm very disappointed today," Bedard remarked. "I think it's unforgivable that they've left out the child-care piece. We have 70 per cent of mothers working in Ontario and they need child care."

-Reprinted from The Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

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