

# Children's groups expect funding deal: Stewart plans announcement next week [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

Human Resources Minister Jane Stewart is tentatively booked to brief national children's groups early Tuesday on a major funding deal for kids and families expected Monday.

The meeting would include leaders from 30 children's groups and social agencies, said Ellen Adelberg, spokeswoman for the Canadian Council on Social Development.

It's the strongest hint so far that Ottawa is ready to move on a promised national children's agenda.

Advocates are anticipating the federal government will announce up to \$500 million for provinces to spend on prenatal and postpartum services, child care and family resource centres.

Related talks had been stalled by federal-provincial squabbling but progress has been made, said a federal government source who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"We're hopeful that there will be an announcement Monday."

The source refused to discuss money or whether amounts initially committed will grow over time.

Estimates that between \$300 million and \$500 million will be offered by Ottawa in exchange for provincial reporting requirements have not been confirmed.

"That's the number that's been floating around in the media," said the federal source.

The announcement would be made during Prime Minister Jean Chretien's two-day meeting with Canada's premiers, which starts Sunday.

However, it's expected that if talks between Ottawa and the provinces on a new health agreement fail, the children's announcement will also be derailed.

Premiers are looking for \$4.2 billion annually in restored federal health funding.

In a worst case scenario, senior Human Resources officials will take Stewart's place Tuesday to brief children's advocates on why the deal fell through, said Adelberg.

Still, news that federal staff will work through the weekend on final touches was welcome, she added.

"We're really surprised to tell you the truth, because after the last budget we were really disappointed."

Critics took aim at February's federal budget for barely mentioning children's needs, while \$58 billion over five years was devoted to tax cuts.

A growing body of research stresses the need to invest in children early to save on social and crime-related costs later.

Western European countries spend more than Canada to make child care affordable and have lower child poverty rates. About one in five Canadian children lives below Statistics Canada's low-income cutoff.

-Reprinted from Canadian Press

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announcement-next

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