

# Universal child care urged in report [CA-MB] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

After years of cuts to the child care system, a \$9-million NDP investment in child care is a good first step towards rebuilding it, a Winnipeg sociologist says.

But the province should move towards a universal, publicly funded system, says Susan Prentice, who just completed a study of child care in the province over the past 10 years for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Prentice's study found from 1989 to 1999, years when the Conservative government was in power, funding for child care was reduced by 14 per cent, fees increased by 21 per cent for school age children, 39 per cent for preschoolers and 75 per cent for infants, and that one-third of day-care centres don't have enough trained staff.

But she says that the first NDP budget didn't do enough to redress the situation.

Family Services Minister Tim Sale said there were no surprises in Prentice's findings, and that the action his government has taken are the necessary first steps.

In its first budget this spring, the NDP included \$9.1 million for increasing the wages of day-care workers and adding 364 spaces.

"From a very practical point of view, one-third of the (child care) centres don't have the staff they need to operate," Sale said. "We were finding for the first time ever we couldn't fill the training (classes). We did what the day-care system told us to do."

Prentice said when the new \$9.1 million is factored in -- using 1990 as a baseline, with no inflation -- it equals an eight per cent increase.

"But eight per cent growth over 12 years is nothing to brag about," she said. "I'd be more reassured if it were part of a plan, with a year two, year three; if there were benchmarks, a move towards public funding."

Prentice wants to see a program such as the ones implemented in Quebec and B.C., where the day-care system is publicly funded. She said she doesn't know what that would cost to put in place here.

"But I challenge the government it would be appropriate to cost that out," she said.

Sale said a fully funded system can't happen until they've stabilized the program already here, with enough well-paid staff to cover the additional spaces needed.

Prentice's report found that in 1998 there were 132,000 children in the province, under the age of 12, with a working mother. At the same time, there were only 22,112 spaces available.

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**Region:** Manitoba <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** funding <sup>[3]</sup>

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