

Lessons from down under ^[1]

Author: Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada

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AVAILABILITY

- Fact sheet in pdf (English) ^[2]

- Fact sheet in pdf (French) ^[2]

Excerpts:

A decade ago, Australia's national government introduced funding changes that allowed the growth of corporate child care chains and gave them access to public dollars. Today, Australia's private child care sector provides 67 per cent of the full day services in the country and is predominantly made up of large corporate chains making huge profits.

In Canada, the federal government has made \$5-billion available over the next five years to the provinces and territories for licensed child care. There are few restrictions on the funds, making Canada an easy target for corporate child care chains.

Critics argue that the success of the commercial sector is based on an unsustainably low wage structure and poor working conditions that have led to chronic staff shortages which impact on children. They say the commercial sector reduces staff costs by employing people who have fewer qualifications than required by regulation, and using higher numbers of casual staff.

Does Australia provide a cautionary tale for Canada? Yes. Eddie Groves says he is interested in expanding into Canada. Al Perkins, chief executive officer of North Carolina's Blackstocks Development Corp., has also said his company is "absolutely" interested in acquiring day-care centres in Canada or opening new ones as part of an international expansion plan. Blackstocks operates centres in Charlotte, Philadelphia and St. Louis and plans to open new branches at a rate of 83 a year.

The federal government has not ensured policies that will keep the door closed to corporate child care chains. As the Australian experience shows, the risks to Canada's children and families are huge. There is a real possibility that foreign big box commercial child care providers could use international trade agreements to get access to a new Canadian "child care market", and then force governments to lower regulatory standards by claiming such regulations are "barriers to trade."

Related link: ABC moves into US child care market [AU] ^[3]

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[4]

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