

Rise in for-profit child care is a cause for concern: expert ^[1]

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Interview with Martha Friendly [3:57] ^[2]

EXCERPTS:

A new report on the state of child care in Canada shows that privately run daycare spaces are growing at a faster pace than not-for-profit spaces, a trend that one expert says is a concern.

Child Care Canada executive director Martha Friendly says historically, privately run daycare centres provide a lower quality of care.

"The research shows there's less likely to be trained staff, less likely to have good working conditions and more turnover," Friendly told CTV News Channel on Wednesday. "It's really quite simple, if the bottom line is important, the money, which is already scare public dollars, is not going into the children but into shareholders or into somebody's pocket."

According to the latest national survey by Child Care Canada, an early childhood education and care research institute, since 2004 the number of regulated child care spaces Canada-wide has been increasing at a slower pace compared to past years. The same is true of public funding for child care, which has increased over the years, but at a slow rate.

Meanwhile, for-profit child care continues to expand at a higher rate than not-for-profit services. In 2010, the number of for-profit child care spaces hit 28 per cent of the total, up from 20 per cent in 2004.

The report states that the fees for child care in Canada are comparable to university tuition.

Quebec's child care fees are by far the lowest in the country, with an average monthly rate of \$154, followed by Manitoba, which sets a maximum monthly rate of \$414.

However, in other provinces, average monthly fees hover around \$850.

The report notes that public funding to help parents foot the bill for child care isn't keeping up.

"In a number of jurisdictions, subsidy programs fail to make child care financially accessible to eligible low income parents," reads the report. "In some parts of Canada, the number of children subsidized has grown little or has dropped, so the number of families assisted by fee subsidies has been generally static."

Stephen Harper's Conservative government replaced the \$5 billion national child care program in 2006 with the Universal Child Care Benefit -- a \$100-a-month payment to families for each child under the age of 6.

However Friendly said the program has failed to create new child care spaces or help parents with daycare costs.

“One hundred dollars doesn’t do anything for a parent that needs child care of any kind, even casual child care,” she said. “It’s not only that it’s not equitable, but it’s a very inefficient way to spend public dollars.”

She said the funding would be put to better use if it was re-invested into not-for-profit child care to make it more accessible for parents.

“Parents are working hard and they’re struggling and contributing to the economy, to the work force and to Canada,” she said. “They should really be supported...”

According to the report:

- There were 921,841 regulated child care spaces in 2010.
- Both 2009 and 2010 saw the smallest increase in child care spaces since 2001.
- Annual increases in public funding for child care in 2010 remained considerably below increase in 1998-2001.
- At the same time, 2011 census data shows the 0-4 age group growing at the highest rate in 50 years.

Opposition parties questioned the Conservatives in the House of Commons on Wednesday about their support for more regulated child-care spaces.

In response, Human Resources Minister Diane Finley said her party supports parents’ right to decide who looks after their children.

“We do have a national program that’s accessible by all parents. It allows them the freedom to choose whether they want to stay at home and raise their child, have granny look after them or go for traditional daycare.”

Finley added that the government has helped provinces fund child-care programs, which she said resulted in more than 100,000 new spaces.

-reprinted from CTV News

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