

# Ontario inquests urge more rules for home daycares <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

Four Ontario inquests into child deaths in unregulated home daycares spanning almost 30 years have been unanimous in their call for more provincial oversight.

In the wake of two more troubling deaths in unregulated settings this past summer, child-care advocates say now is the time for action.

"In all of these cases, people recognized the lack of oversight as a significant problem," said Andrea Calver of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

"It's heartbreaking that this insight has come from more than one inquest, because we should have solved this problem the first time," she said.

Two-year-old Allison Tucker drowned in a bathtub on July 4 in a North York condo where she had been receiving care for the past year.

Less than a week later, on July 8, Eva Ravikovich, also 2, died at an illegal Vaughan home daycare where at least 35 children were registered for care.

The coroner has not yet determined a cause of death in either case. As a result, decisions on inquests are still pending.

But verdicts from coroner's juries looking into daycare deaths dating back to 1985 show little has changed to prevent these tragedies from happening again.

In 1985, four children, ranging in age from 5 months to 5 years, along with their caregiver, died of smoke inhalation in a Bolton house fire.

The unregulated home daycare operator, who was well-known and respected in the community, was drunk and asleep when the fire started, the jury heard.

In addition to recommending mandatory fire prevention and insurance in unregulated home daycares, the 1986 inquest called for more licensed options and federal tax breaks to make child care more affordable for families.

In 1995, 13-month-old Mercedes Fraser strangled on her undershirt when it caught on a bolt in a defective playpen in an unregulated Cambridge home.

The inquest that year heard that two complaints had been lodged against the operator in the previous two years and neither was adequately followed up.

The jury recommended surprise inspections for two years when operators have violated the Day Nurseries Act. Under the act, unregulated homes cannot have more than five children under age 10 who are not related to the caregiver.

The jury also called for a central registry of all validated complaints.

In August this year, Education Minister Liz Sandals promised a searchable online registry after news that provincial inspectors had ignored four out of five complaints against the Vaughan daycare where Eva died.

In 1997, toddler Zachary Rogers strangled on the strap of a car seat where he was secured for a nap in an unregulated home daycare in Mount Albert, Ont.

The 1999 inquest into his death called for a review of the Day Nurseries Act, noting the absence of regulations in daycare settings where the vast majority of children are cared for while their parents work or study.

There are licensed child care spots in Ontario for only about 21 per cent of children under age 12, a figure that has increased by just 7 percentage points in 30 years.

Sandals says the province's child care legislation is currently under review.

In 2010, 2-year-old Jeremie Audette drowned in a pool at an unregulated home daycare in Ottawa.

The jury last year called for more licensed home daycare, mandatory provincial registration for all unregulated settings, as well as first aid and CPR training for all operators.

Sandals has said the ministry's ongoing "transformation" of the child care sector in the wake of all-day kindergarten is looking at how to bring more home daycare operators into the licensed system.

Calver said the province need look no further than the system already in place for regulated homes.

Under the Day Nurseries Act, these homes are overseen by licensed agencies that are responsible for ensuring that facilities meet health and safety standards and that operators are capable. The act requires a minimum of three visits a year by agency staff, but many are visited more frequently, Calver said.

The current system is cost-effective because agencies are largely self-funded through fees paid by home daycare operators, she added.

"This is totally do-able," he said. "As these inquests show, no one in Ontario should be running a child-care business in their home without provincial oversight."

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

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

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

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