

# The \$17.5 billion question: Has the Universal Child Care Benefit given families "choice in child care"? <sup>[1]</sup>

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7pp

In 2006, the Conservative government cancelled funds for a national child care program. Instead a taxable \$100 a month cheque mailed to families for each child age six and younger would deliver "choice in child care". Although the public cost of this Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) will reach \$17.5 billion in 2014, the federal government has not assessed the effectiveness of the program.

A new report uses current data to determine whether families' "choice in child care" has improved between 2006 and 2012. Based on available demographic, financial, coverage, and staffing information, the analysis finds that indicators of access and quality have remained static or weakened despite the public considerable expenditure. The report also points to the lost opportunity costs of the government's choice to cancel the national child care program funding.

It concludes that the evidence shows that the UCCB has not created or improved "choice in child care" and that the funds-if used for regulated child care instead-could modestly fund 700,000 additional spaces for children each year.

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