

Does Canada need a program of subsidized universal daycare? ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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Summary:

Quebec has long been held up as an example of how to do daycare right.

The province has had a system of "universal" day care since 1997. It costs parents just seven dollars a day, per child. The idea was to create an incentive for women to enter the workforce, and to make childcare affordable for everyone.

But now, Quebec's new government is looking for ways to cut costs. There are whispers that it might shift away from the one-price-fits-all model and ask higher-income families to pay a larger share.

Still, universal daycare proponents say it's time to spend more on daycare in Canada, not less.

Sharon Gregson says that while the Quebec system is not perfect, it's a step in the right direction because it promotes positive lifelong outcomes for children and encourages women to enter the labour force.

"It's very clear that the current market-based non-system that we have in Canada outside of Quebec is not serving children and families and ultimately not serving our economy very well at all. We need to make sure that it isn't just wealthy families who can afford high quality care and get that advantage. So we need to start building a childcare system and we think the flat fee is the way to go."

Sharon Gregson

But Ben Eisen of the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies says that universal subsidies are an inefficient way to deliver childcare. He argues that scarce government money should be spent on support for the families that need the help most.

"Our first top priority in this area should be for providing access to high quality childcare for lower income families. The evidence for positive lifelong developmental effects from childcare participation is much much stronger for low income families than it is for middle income families."

Region: Canada ^[3]

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