

# Child care advocates say parents have clear choice in next federal election <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

The battle lines for the hearts and minds of Canadian parents in next fall's federal election have been drawn.

On one side is the Harper government's new package of "family-friendly" tax measures, including income splitting and enhanced monthly child-care benefits. On the other is the NDP's promise of one million child-care spaces at no more than \$15 a day.

The Liberals, who are expected to release their own daycare plan in the coming months, have vowed to repeal income splitting if elected.

Amid this stark backdrop, more than 500 child-care advocates from across the country are gathering in Winnipeg next week to debate policy and plot strategy for what they believe will be a make-or-break year.

"The next federal election will deliver a strong message in terms of child care," says hockey great and former Liberal cabinet minister Ken Dryden. "It will either become something that will become significant in terms of federal priority. Or it won't."

Dryden was architect of the Liberal's ill-fated \$5-billion national child-care plan that was scrapped by Stephen Harper's Conservatives when they were elected in 2006.

Ten years ago, as a newly minted cabinet minister, Dryden attended the advocates' last national conference in Winnipeg to listen and learn.

He is attending again next week "as someone who cares about the issue" and is among several dozen child-care champions and experts from across Canada, the U.K. and Europe who will lead workshops and panel discussions. Federal NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair and Manitoba Premier Greg Selinger are also scheduled to speak. Federal Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau is sending a video message.

"Elections can be a moment of change," Dryden says. "If you are somebody for whom child care matters a lot, then this is a moment."

Child-care policy and understanding has matured considerably since the former Liberal government was crafting its national child-care plan in 2004, says Martha Friendly, executive director of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

Provinces are recognizing the educational benefits of early learning and child care, with most now offering full-day kindergarten for 5-year olds and Ontario extending the program to children as young as 4, she says.

Eight of the provinces and territories, including Ontario, have moved child care into their education ministries, Friendly notes.

The economic and societal importance of affordable, high quality child care is getting more attention, especially with the recent rash of deaths in unregulated home daycares in the Toronto area, she says.

New research by the TD Bank and others shows that investing in high quality child care has a direct impact on governments' fiscal bottom lines. For every dollar spent on child care, governments receive at least \$1.50 in increased tax revenue and lower welfare costs, the studies show.

Child care is now recognized as a fundamental plank of the anti-poverty movement, as well as a necessary mainstream middle-class issue, Friendly adds.

"I think there are enough people today who realize child care is something we should have," she says. "We see that reflected in the NDP's policy and I think we will see it in the Liberals' policy when it comes out."

By contrast, Harper says his plan will "put real dollars in the pockets of Canadian families" instead of into "more bureaucracy."

All families with children will benefit from the \$4.6-billion package of tax relief and benefits, with the average family seeing \$1,140 more in their pockets in 2015, the government says.

But the money "really doesn't make a dent" in the \$15,000 annual cost of child care for a baby in Toronto, says mother Brooke Richardson.

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[Read the full article at the Toronto Star](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

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