

# Conservative minister touts increase in Universal Childcare Benefit in Scarborough <sup>[1]</sup>

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### EXCERPTS:

Canada's Conservative government is on a mission to find parents and give them money.

Employment and Social Development Minister Pierre Poilievre, visiting the West Scarborough Neighbourhood Community Centre with a federal election day less than six months away, talked about increases to the Universal Childcare Benefit.

The government is bumping up its \$100 support for children under six to \$160 a month, Poilievre said, and introducing \$60-a-month payments for children from ages six to 17.

But there was "troubling news," he said: around 200,000 families might not get a lump sum payment of \$500 in July, covering this year's increases, because they're not registered for the payments.

And they must register in the next month, said Poilievre, pledging to tour the country in coming weeks, "anywhere there are parents and kids," just to register families - including 32,000 in Toronto he said aren't in the database - for the program.

As some parents played quietly with their children behind him at the centre on Thursday, Poilievre also defended the Conservatives' decision to give Canadian families cash instead of a universal childcare program.

"We know that the real childcare experts are mom and dad," he said, adding the payments help every family while a childcare program does nothing for most.

Until Paul Martin's minority government fell in 2005, the federal Liberals promised and tried to arrange a national childcare program. Poilievre called this a "big government daycare program" and said it was an expensive bureaucracy which "ultimately did nothing" to help families with stay-at-home parents, or nannies or grandparents caring for their children.

Government-subsidized daycare only supports a small number of families, Roxanne James, the Conservative MP for Scarborough Centre, said at the announcement.

Asked if she thought every family in her riding which wants child care could get it, James said each family is different and has different needs.

"Scarborough is a very modest income area and the money the government is giving back to families is going to help them tremendously," James said.

Dan Harris, the New Democrat MP in the riding, Scarborough Southwest, which Poilievre visited, said the increased payments for children under six - \$1,920 a year - might buy parents a month of childcare in Toronto.

"What about the other 11 months?" he asked, adding the NDP would create a million childcare spaces at \$15 a day over the next four years, including 160,000 in Greater Toronto.

"That will actually give parents the chance to make the right choice for them."

Harris, however, said New Democrats would not stop the childcare benefit increase "because families are struggling."

Neither would the Liberals, though the amounts are not even close to what many parents need to afford childcare, Scarborough-Guildwood MP John McKay said on Friday.

"If we hadn't been defeated close to 10 years ago, the country would already have universal childcare," McKay said, adding his party hasn't changed its position.

"The more we look at it, the more it seems sensible."

Yesheworke Mogese, a parent Poilievre talked to during his visit, told the minister she was getting the childcare benefit already for both her children, a three-and-a-half-year-old son and a girl, almost one.

"It's nice to have extra money but I don't think it's going to make a difference," Mogese, who brings her children regularly to a play group at the centre, said afterwards. "It's expensive, the daycare."

- reprinted from the Scarborough Mirror

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