

Why Manitobans should vote child care in 2015^[1]

Opinion

Author: Prentice, Susan

Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 24 Sep 2015

AVAILABILITY

Read online^[2]

EXCERPTS

A national child-care program was first recommended by the 1970 Royal Commission on the Status of Women -- 13 federal elections ago. Fast-forward to 2015, and Canadian parents are more desperate than ever for affordable, quality child care.

Up to 85 per cent of all households with children have a mother in the paid labour force, making child care an issue for nearly all young families. Canada, with its nearly 5 million children under 12, has just under 1 million licensed regulated child care spaces; spaces that are unequally spread across the provinces, with varying quality and regulatory standards, at hugely unequal costs ranging from just \$7 a day to well over \$74 a day. Where child-care spaces don't exist or aren't accessible, families are forced to resort to unregulated options - from family care (often by grandparents) to unlicensed and often expensive 'informal' care.

Given these realities, a national child-care system is long overdue. Many European countries meet or exceed the European Union targets of an early learning and care space for at least 33 per cent of youngsters under three and 90 per cent of preschoolers. Canada, which averages out at services for 20.5 per cent of children under 12, lags far behind.

Over the past decade, the Conservative government has failed to improve child-care services and has actually made things worse. In 2006, the freshly elected Conservatives cancelled five-year agreements Ottawa had signed with each of the provinces. These bilateral agreements would have transferred \$5 billion to provinces to expand quality, universally inclusive, accessible and developmental child care. Over the term of the agreement, Manitoba would have received \$176 million, funds it lost in what then family services minister Gord Mackintosh called "one of the biggest U-turns in Canadian social policy history." In the first and only year of the agreement before it was cancelled, \$34 million was transferred to Manitoba, making up a full 33 per cent of our province's 2005-06 child-care budget, a sign of how important Ottawa's decisions are to Manitoba child care.

After cancelling the bilateral agreements, the Conservatives launched the misleadingly named Choice in Child Care Allowance, since renamed the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB), which initially provided a taxable \$100 a month for each child under six. In 2015, Ottawa boosted the amount to \$160 a month and added \$60 a month for each child up to the age of 17. The cost of the UCCB will be \$6.7 billion in 2015-16. Most researchers agree that Canadians need a family allowance (something Conservative prime minister Brian Mulroney terminated in 1992), but the UCCB is a poor substitute. Because it is taxable, the UCCB triggers a bill at income-tax time -- on average, Canadian parents keep less than one-third of their benefit. Economic analysis shows the program disproportionately benefits higher- over lower-income earners. Inefficient UCCB spending is compounded by another tax program, the Child Care Expense Deduction, worth \$900 million in 2014-15. Combined, the federal government will spent \$7.6 billion, but none of these funds will grow child care services or increase quality.

While the Conservatives have not directly addressed the shortage of child-care spaces, the NDP, Liberals and Green Party have each proposed a different way to help parents. Each has suggested ways the federal government can proactively expand the supply of spaces, increase quality and ensure services are affordable. The NDP has proposed a five-year plan to build 1 million new spaces at a maximum cost of \$15/day -- doubling the national total. The Greens have proposed a universal child-care program, the reinstatement of the bilateral agreements and prioritized workplace child care. The Liberals have said that within 100 days of forming government, they would work in partnerships with provinces, territories and indigenous people to develop a national framework for child care.

Three of the four national parties have platforms that address the needs of working families with young children. The NDP, Liberals and Green Party envisage an engaged federal government working in partnership with provinces to build actual services. Conservatives, in contrast, prefer a hands-off fiscal policy that does nothing to grow the stock of child care spaces.

Here in Manitoba, there are approximately 32,500 spaces for our 187,400 children aged 12 and younger. Manitoba's ability to grow child care, increase its quality and accessibility and ensure worthy wages for early childhood educators is closely tied to decisions made in Ottawa. How Manitoba child care fares in the upcoming year will depend in great part on the outcome of election 2015.

-reprinted from CBC News

Region: Manitoba ^[3]

Tags: federal election ^[4]

federal benefits ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/15/09/why-manitobans-should-vote-child-care-2015>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/15/09/why-manitobans-should-vote-child-care-2015> [2]

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/why-manitobans-should-vote-child-care-in-2015-1.3242082> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7857> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federal-election> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federal-benefits>