

# Provinces spend \$4.2B on child care: report <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Government spending on daycare has reached an all-time high with new data showing the provinces – with help from the federal government – are spending more than \$4.2 billion to provide regulated daycare spaces across the country.

Although the increase is driven largely by the almost \$2.5 billion Quebec spent on its child care program in 2014, the data compiled by the Toronto-based Childcare Resource and Research Unit also show year-over-year increases in spending in Ontario, Alberta, B.C. and Manitoba that has helped add more than \$602 million in daycare spending since 2012.

That spending has helped add some 200,000 regulated daycare spaces across the country, bringing the total inventory to more than 1.2 million spaces.

Those spaces would cover about 25 per cent of all children age 12 and under – an increase of four per cent from just two years ago.

Part of that spending is helped by transfer payments from the federal government that pay for myriad social programs across the country. Just how much of the Canada social transfer goes to child care is unknown as it competes with other needs – affordable housing, post-secondary education, social services – that provinces have to fund.

Combined, though, it adds up to an unconventional national child care program, said Martha Friendly, the organization's executive director.

The data suggest there is "fertile ground" for the next federal government to work with provinces on their daycare dilemmas, given the federal parties have talked to varying extents about how to pay for daycare, expanding parental leave, and income supplements in the form of child benefit payments.

"When I look at all this stuff, the provincial territorial stuff and the national stuff and you sort of mix it all together, I think, 'You know what, we might be talking about a real national child care program,'" she said.

The data from the biennial report on child care in Canada is being released Wednesday in the midst of an election campaign where the three major parties have put forward differing child care plans as they vie for family voters.

The platform promises remain broad brushstrokes and the devil is still in the details when it comes to turning a promise into an effective policy, said Friendly, a longtime advocate for a national daycare program.

The NDP has provided the most detailed promise, vowing to bring in a national daycare program that would cost parents no more than \$15 a day and cost the federal government \$5 billion – and the provinces \$3.3 billion more – once the program is fully ramped up after eight years.

Details like how the party will set quality and accessibility standards, for examples, are all issues that Friendly said would have to be addressed in a child care policy.

The Liberals have also promised to work with provinces to develop a "child care framework" with provinces that, the party's platform says, would meet "the needs of Canadian families, wherever they live" and provide "affordable, high-quality, flexible and fully inclusive child care." The platform doesn't put a specific dollar figure to the promise.

Other promises each party has made, like extending parental leave to 18 months and the value of monthly child benefits, can also be seen as part of a national daycare strategy, Friendly said.

The prospect of a national child care program has stirred debate about whether it would help Canadian children excel academically and socially, and whether it would be financially sustainable for the federal government.

-reprinted from The Canadian Press

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

**Tags:** spaces <sup>[4]</sup>

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