

More reason to act on national child care: Editorial ^[1]

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If the Liberal government needed more reason to move quickly on its pledge to deliver “affordable, high-quality, flexible and fully inclusive child care,” it could well look to a new study that finds average families with two children in Toronto pay a staggering 48 per cent of after-tax income on child care.

That’s a full \$28,300 for a family with a median income, making Toronto’s fees the most expensive in the country. And it’s expected to get worse. Fast.

Last year, child-care fees rose by an average of 5 per cent, or \$56 per month, in Toronto, according to the report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. That’s well above the rate of inflation, and arguably unsustainable for families.

The fees are “tantamount to a second mortgage,” notes Carolyn Ferns of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

It’s not just the cost of child care that is challenging families. It’s the availability. Last year, the centre reported that 75 per cent of mothers of young children are in the workforce, but licensed spots exist for just 22 per cent of children under 5.

And low-income parents face an uphill battle to find subsidized day care, with 17,000 children on the waiting list in Toronto.

No wonder, then, that under the Harper government the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development ranked Canada dead last out of 25 states for the quality and accessibility of its child-care programs.

Indeed, last week’s study tops off a raft recent reports that underlines the dire need for affordable, universal child care to ease the burden on families, society in general — and even government coffers.

For example, a TD Bank study found that for every \$1 invested in child care, provincial and federal governments receive \$1.50 in increased tax revenues, alone.

Another study from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada concluded that the lack of affordable child care was putting the health and well-being of children at risk.

And a report from the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development found that early childhood education reduces inequalities resulting from poverty and decreases the number of children in special education classes by identifying problems and encouraging early intervention.

It’s been almost 10 years since the Harper government scrapped a planned \$5 billion, federal-provincial national child-care program.

Now there’s hope, at last, for a new one. Last month, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau asked two of his ministers to launch consultations to establish a National Early Learning and Childcare Framework. For families across Canada, and especially those in Toronto, it cannot come fast enough.

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