

Child-care framework to be developed with provinces: minister ^[1]

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Source: Winnipeg Free Press

Format: Article

Publication Date: 6 Apr 2016

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

The federal government does not seem intent on resurrecting child-care funding agreements the previous Liberals had with the provinces a decade ago, but the new national child-care and early learning framework will be based on similar principles.

There was \$400 million earmarked in the recent federal budget for the framework, and the money is set to flow next year. Another \$100 million is intended to be spent on child care on reserves.

In an interview with the Free Press, Families, Children and Social Development Minister Jean-Yves Duclos said the framework will be developed in consultation with the provinces and will reflect the different realities in each province with respect to existing child-care programs and needs.

But he consistently shied away from saying whether he expects to sign individual agreements with each province on child care as the former Liberal government did in 2005. That year, under Prime Minister Paul Martin, a five-year, \$5-billion child-care strategy was developed with each province being allowed to use the money how they saw fit, within a broad framework.

Those agreements were torn up when the government changed hands in 2006 in favour of the Universal Child Care Benefit, flowing money to parents. The new Liberal government is again moving in a different direction, eliminating the UCCB in favour of an income-based, tax-free Canada Child Benefit for parents, as well as funding directly for child-care programs.

Duclos said he's not even at the stage of determining whether the new framework will draw from those 2005 agreements, and wouldn't say whether it's likely Ottawa will end up having 10 different child-care agreements again.

"We're not there yet," he said, noting he met with his provincial counterparts in February where a committee was established to keep working on the issue. The ministers will meet again this fall.

Duclos said whatever framework does develop will follow four principles - quality, inclusivity, affordability and flexibility.

Those principles will ensure certain standards of care, will target funding to families who need help the most, will aim all funding at making child care more affordable and more reflective of the needs of modern families.

"Our current child-care circumstances in Canada almost everywhere need to be more flexible to the changing nature of the labour market," he said.

Don Giesbrecht, CEO of the Canadian Child Care Federation and formerly executive director of the Assiniboine Children's Centre in Winnipeg, said those principles sound very much like the QUAD principles which guided the Martin child-care plan 11 years ago.

QUAD stood for quality, universally inclusive, accessible and developmental.

Giesbrecht said he's thrilled to see money on the table for child care, but without any specifics it's hard to know what impact that money can have, or even if the provinces will be able to come to any agreement in time to see the money flow next year as promised.

"It's promising, but what exactly will it mean," he said.

Duclos was in Winnipeg Wednesday meeting with local social development agencies and announcing \$167,500 to help analyze and understand the homeless populations in Winnipeg and Brandon.

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minister

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