

National daycare proposal to be ready by summer, says minister

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EXCERPTS

The broad strokes of a national child care agreement, to be used as the basis for individual funding agreements between Ottawa and the provinces, will be available by summer, says the provincial minister in charge of the file.

P.E.I. Education Minister Doug Currie says every province is keen to create quality, affordable child-care spaces accessible to families that want them.

He says the bilateral agreements with each province would outline the areas of federal investment in early learning and child care based on principles adopted by each province.

The money tied to each provincial deal would likely top up a base amount of per capita funding to each province, much like the way social program money is doled out.

Currie says larger provinces with larger populations may need federal help to build new day care centres.

Smaller provinces like his may be more interested in using the money to expand existing centres.

The Liberals promised a national program in their campaign platform, but didn't tie it to any specific targets. Instead, the party agreed to work with provinces to come up with a system that would create affordable spaces accessible to all families.

The federal government promised to give \$400 million next year to provinces and territories for child care. That was conditional on the provinces and federal government agreeing on a national child-care framework that would establish ground rules for federal involvement in what is an area of provincial jurisdiction.

"We have limited resources, as you know, and that's the same thing for provinces and territories," federal Families Minister Jean-Yves Duclos said.

"We want to find ways to invest these limited resources in the most efficient manner and the most inclusive manner and that's why we have to talk very closely and very seriously with provinces and territories."

Negotiations on the framework started in February, when Duclos met his provincial and territorial counterparts.

Child-care advocates are closely watching the outcome of the talks, hoping to land a long-discussed national program that seemed a certainty in 2005, when the Paul Martin government came to agreements with provinces.

The federal Liberals have said they want to create a program that takes into account the work provinces have done in the last 10 years.

New research suggests most provinces were selective in the evidence they used in creating policies around early childhood education, specifically all-day kindergarten. A paper in the journal *Canadian Public Administration* says provinces outside Quebec looked at day care and kindergarten isolated from a broader family-based policy that experts say is needed for an integrated early childhood care and education system.

Any federal child-care framework would have to invest in buildings, wage enhancements for early childhood educators, operating grants to day care centres and subsidies to either put fees on a sliding scale based on income, or eliminate them altogether, said Linda White, interim director of the school of public policy and governance at the University of Toronto.

"If you want to get to accessible, inclusive, affordable and high quality (child care), it requires quite a massive infusion of cash into both the funding and the delivery of programs," White says.

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