



FASTFACTS



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Believe it or not – this time it's not just about the money By Lynell Anderson and Rita Chudnovsky

On Feb 11, Ken Dryden, the federal Minister of Social Development, will meet in Vancouver with his provincial and territorial counterparts to finalize the agreement for a new national child care program.

Minister Dryden is optimistic and said recently in Regina that "Canadians are one step closer to having a national early learning and child care system."

One should hope so. Canada remains one of the few developed countries without a national system for our young children. A 2004 report from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) concluded that in Canada, outside of Quebec:

"Early Childhood Education and Care services seem insufficient, inconsistent and under-funded. They vary a great deal between provinces and territories, and between different kinds of provision...Yet, the research is fairly unanimous that the systematic provision of early childhood services, subsidised and properly supervised by government, yields better results for both mainstream and disadvantaged children than a multiplicity of special services funded in response to family crisis or social pressures."

On Feb. 11, Minister Dryden's job is to deliver on his government's promises. In the last election the federal Liberals promised a national child care system based on the principles of quality, universality, accessibility and developmental programming. They promised to enshrine these principles in legislation, and to urge provinces and territories to do the same. And they promised \$5 billion in new federal dollars over the next 5 years to do it.

So what's needed for Minister Dryden and his counterparts to keep the promises? There's no question that financing is critical. Canada's spending on early childhood education is among the lowest of major industrialized nations. Even the US spends 1.5 times as much as Canada (as a percentage of GDP). A fully

funded child care system will eventually cost at least 1% of GDP — about \$10 billion per year.

But money alone will not do the trick.

Canadians expect that Minister Dryden and his counterparts will do better by our children. More than two decades of national and international research show us what these conditions should look like, and give us the building blocks for developing a real child care system in Canada:

- **A publicly funded, sustainable system** for quality child care parents can count on and afford. Government provides most of the funding directly to programs, giving them a stable operating base.
- **A Child Care Act** that guarantees standards and the principles of *quality, universality, accessibility, developmental programming and inclusiveness*.
- **Public accountability** tied to provincial and territorial five-year plans that contain goals, timelines and targets, and a way to measure real progress in developing comprehensive family and centre-based child care services in communities.
- **Money for children**, with increased public funding available to existing licensed providers (including family child care, private and non-profit programs) who will be accountable for providing quality, affordable, accessible services. New spaces, however, should be created exclusively in the non-profit sector.

Let's do this right. In order to build a pan-Canadian child care system, we need two things - the solid foundation that these building blocks will provide, and the federal funding commitment. On February 11, we'll be looking for both.

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