



Funding for Canadian childcare declining: Report.

BY TIFFANY CRAWFORD, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE SEPTEMBER 15, 2009

OTTAWA - Funding for childcare in Canada's provinces and territories has sharply decreased, leading to fewer spaces for children while the number of mothers in the workforce continues to rise, suggests a new report on Canadian childcare.

Tuesday's report - titled Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada - tracks trends in childcare and kindergarten, using data from the provinces and Statistics Canada.

The snapshot of Canadian childcare is released every two years by Toronto's Childcare Resource and Research Unit and found that 77 per cent of mothers with children between the ages of three and five now work, up from 75 per cent in 2006.

But as the number of mothers in the labour force continues to grow, data shows funding for childcare has seen a slowdown over the last five years. The report finds there was a \$147.3-million increase in childcare budgets between 2006 and 2008, compared to \$538.3 million between 2004 and 2006 and \$512.1 million between 2002 and 2004.

"Provincial budget increases have really slowed down and spaces have slowed," said researcher Martha Friendly. "We're seeing very little progress. There are so many families that are still scrambling for childcare."

Friendly believes Canada's system is disjointed and the country needs to have a national early education program that is overseen by the federal government, but run by the provinces, similar to Canada's health-care program.

"We are kind of at this point where we know we need mothers to work . . . and it's clear that Canada is lagging behind in early childcare education. But it is just not coming together," she said, adding that research shows early childhood development has a direct impact on how children learn in elementary school and can affect their learning abilities as adults.

"It's not going to happen without a national program," she said, citing a UNICEF report that ranked Canada at the bottom of 25 developed countries in terms of providing early childhood education and care.

The report also found the number of childcare spaces in 2008 could accommodate only 20.3 per cent of kids from birth to five years old, an increase of one per cent from 2006.

Growth in childcare spaces has dropped by nearly half since 2003, with a growth of 29,791 spaces in 2008, compared 50,831 spaces in 2003.

The report found for-profit childcare grew sharply, now accounting for 25 per cent of centres, up from

21 per cent in 2006.

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