



## **Media release**

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### **International report condemns Tory approach to child care**

Canada is in a free fall behind other industrialized nations when it comes to early learning and child care services, says a report released by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development.

*Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*, shows Canada languishes at the bottom in public spending on child care out of the 20 OECD member-states in the study. Canada spends a mere 0.3% of GDP on early childhood services, behind the 1% benchmark recommended by the Paris-based think tank.

Canada has also failed to make progress towards the other standards recommended by the OECD. Child care services outside Quebec remain fragmented, relying on underpaid child care workers and a combination of high parent fees and small subsidies doled out to low-income families. Under-resourced, stand-alone programs receive little to no support for staff training or other quality improvements.

“The report indicates Canada’s child care services are deteriorating as the Conservative government adopts the very policies the OECD is rejecting,” said Monica Lysack, executive director of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

In 2004 when the Canada report was released the pending federal/provincial/territorial child care agreements promised some optimism. The timing of the 2006 report offers no lifeline. The Canada section, signed off by the Conservative government, doesn’t mention the defunct child care agreements. Canada is the sole country without a goal for early learning and child care, and has not answered the OECD’s call for a policy framework and improved monitoring. Canada does not even appear in some of the report’s charts because the government could not provide data.

The report chastises countries like Canada that promote “choice for parents” to “hide a service patchwork”, and rely on the market to “promote the cheapest form of child care while professional services are cut back or made less accessible to moderate and low-income families”. A real choice for parents, it says, requires a service system based on professionally staffed child care centres capable of providing quality supports and training for family daycare networks and nannies.

“The OECD report confirms what child care supporters have been saying,” Lysack said. “The government ignored the hard evidence on the benefits of child care and was out of step when it cancelled federal funding for programs in favour of direct payments to parents.”

“It is also wrong to bypass the infrastructure supports that exist by directing public dollars to employers and individual agencies for child care construction instead of provincial and territorial governments that are responsible for planning, developing and monitoring services.”

Lysack challenged the opposition parties to “stand up for the well being of children, families and the country by reinstating the agreements as the first step to developing a national child care system.”

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