

# Speak up for universal child care in BC!

This community tool kit is designed to inform parents, families, workers, and child care providers of how a universal child care system can be established in BC.

Included are backgrounder sheets that outline how we can realize an **achievable, affordable, and accountable** child care system. There is also a sheet that addresses the **false fixes** to child care that others are promoting.

Please use the information in this toolkit for coffee break discussions in your workplace or kitchen table discussions in your community. Share this vision with parents, child care providers, and community leaders.

Provincial elections are coming in spring of 2009. A federal election will most likely be called by the fall of 2008. Municipal elections will be held across BC this fall. Please make appointments to talk with your local federal, provincial, and municipal politicians.

- Share your experiences.
- Ask your elected representatives or candidates to make a specific and firm commitment to:
  - ✓ setting targets and timelines for lowering fees,
  - ✓ raising wages, *and*
  - ✓ creating community-owned spaces.
- Let them know that funding a child care system is a top priority election issue, and that you will be voting for child care.

For more info, please see our *Child Care – Let's Make It Happen!* campaign page at [www.bcgeu.ca/campaigns/child\\_care](http://www.bcgeu.ca/campaigns/child_care) and more useful reference material at [www.cccabc.bc.ca](http://www.cccabc.bc.ca)

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## **Child care - let's make it happen!**

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# A universal system for every child in BC

The *Child Care - Let's Make It Happen!* campaign supports the right of every child and family in BC to access quality child care in their own community.

We believe this can only be delivered if the government commits stable, adequate funds to build a universal, high quality child care system.

## Government has created a child care crisis:

- Parent fees are going up
- Waitlists are growing
- Low wages are forcing many qualified early childhood educators to leave the field.

## A *Child Care Action Plan* is a key part of the solution to this crisis

An effective plan begins with provincial legislation that commits British Columbia to building a publicly-funded child care system based on the following principles:

Principle	What this means in plain language
Access must be universal and inclusive	Every child in BC should have access to child care - no matter their family's economic, cultural or linguistic circumstances, their developmental needs or whether their parents stay at home or work.
Affordable	Parent fees should be capped, reduced, or even eliminated so that cost is not a barrier to child care.
Quality	Regulations and adequate compensation are key ingredients to quality. Regulations promote healthy development of children. Adequate compensation helps recruit and retain qualified workers.
Publicly-funded and not for profit	Public funding is the only way to build a system that is stable, accountable and where decisions are based on the needs of children, families and communities – not the needs of shareholders.
Comprehensive	Any system must provide for a range of child care quality options including full and part time care in centre and family child care programs.
Developmental	Programs must be age-appropriate and responsive to the unique needs of individual children.
Accountable	Public funds must be spent in ways that achieve public goals. Governments and providers must be responsible to parents, children, and the public for the services provided.

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## Taking action to build the system

Legislation must be backed by concrete action in five key areas to achieve a fully-funded system in which every child age 0-12 has access to quality child care.

*Government must:*

1. Fund the system
2. Expand the system
3. Develop and support the workforce
4. Meet diverse needs
5. Enhance quality

### Some short-term goals and changes will put us on the right track

- ✓ Move the burden of child care funding from user fees to public funding.
- ✓ Set targets and timelines for:
  - lowering and capping parent fees,
  - raising wages to a fair wage,
  - building community-owned spaces to meet the needs of all.
- ✓ Develop community-controlled governing structures to plan, develop and deliver a child care system.
- ✓ Expand Early Childhood Educator (ECE) training.
- ✓ Ensure licensing standards and regulations are maintained, and not weakened in order to provide short cut solutions.

### Building a child care system makes sense

Building a child care system meets the needs of children and their families, advances women's rights, supports the economy, and helps build healthy communities

Building a child care system is a sound investment. Quality care promotes healthy development, and investing in children at an early age creates social benefits that far outweigh the costs.

For more information on a workable BC Child Care Action Plan, see [www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabdocs/pdf/cccabccplan.pdf](http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabdocs/pdf/cccabccplan.pdf)

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## Community controlled child care in BC

BC communities have the knowledge, experience, and commitment to build and govern a child care system. Now it's time to give them the power, mandate, resources, and tools to get the job done.

### Good governance is a basic building block for community controlled child care

In addition to establishing the policy, funding, and standards that will ensure a quality, universal, affordable child care system in BC, we also need to develop a governance model that will enable a child care system to operate effectively and accountably.

This is why the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) have opened up a conversation on a good governance model for a child care system in BC.

The purpose of good governance is to build and sustain the child care system that children, families and communities need. Good governance is a tool to this end – not an end in itself.

### A good governance model should:

- Be accountable to the community
- Coordinate and integrate services to ensure efficient use of resources
- Provide equitable access across regions and diverse groups
- Respect diversity

### What we've learned

The CCCABC studied and reported on five existing governance models – three child care models from other jurisdictions (Denmark, New Zealand, and Quebec), and two from other services in BC (school boards and Community Living BC).

Findings include:

1. Public policy and funding are essential
2. Governance mandates evolve over time
3. Supporting a range of diverse services is possible
4. Communities can exercise control differently

Based on these findings, the CCCABC suggests that a place to start is with Community Child Care Boards. Operating within a strong provincial public policy and budget, over time Community Child Care Boards would evolve into governing bodies that have the mandate and funds to plan, develop and deliver child care services that meet the needs of their community.

### It's an ongoing discussion

Rather than answering every question, the CCCABC's call for community controlled child care is the beginning of a conversation with communities about the best way to move forward.

Read the CCCABC governance report *The rEvolution of Community Controlled Child Care in BC* and take part in this important conversation.

[http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabdocs/governance/ggcc\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabdocs/governance/ggcc_final_report.pdf)

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## A universal child care system is affordable

**BC has the capacity to choose child care.** Last year the BC government had \$39.4 billion in revenue to use for different programs. This table shows some of those revenue sources. Spending on child care is a matter of making choices about where revenue will come from and what can be achieved each year.

BC government revenues	2007/08
Provincial sales tax	\$5.1 billion
Corporate taxes	\$2.2 billion
Natural gas royalties	\$1.2 billion
Other resource revenues	\$2.6 billion
BC Lotteries net income	\$1.1 billion
Federal transfers	\$5.8 billion

### How much of an investment is needed for child care?

Child care researchers have crunched the numbers on how much money is needed for a comprehensive child care system in BC— one that provides quality, affordable spaces for infants, toddlers, pre-schoolers, and children of working parents before and after regular school. ***They found a universal system is affordable.***

Their estimates assume very high levels of take-up for children under five, a total of up to 367,000 children twelve and under accessing a space, parent fees reduced to an average of 20% of the total costs, wages increased to the \$20/hour range, plus benefits, and 10% of spaces with additional supports and resources for children and families. (The estimates represent maximums and could turn out to be even lower.)

These estimates also look to the experience in Quebec, where every \$1 of public funding spent on child care immediately returns 40 cents the following year, mainly because more parents are able to work and contribute taxes.

**The bottom line?** The net new public investment required to operate quality affordable child care for children under age 12 in BC is \$1.2 billion a year. Capital funding for new spaces will be needed too, but is not included in this model as the need will vary significantly across communities.

On a per child basis, this is comparable to the education system. Researchers estimate it will take \$8,400 to operate a full-time child care space for a 3-5 year old, which compares to BC's K-12 education system operating grants of \$8,000/student.

### Funding can be phased in over time

The funding doesn't all need to be put in place in one budget year. In fact it will take five to ten years to fully phase in a child care system. What matters is that BC commit now to building a system and set targets and timelines to get there.

<b>Elements that can be phased in over time</b>	Shifting the burden from parent fees to public funding
	Improving wages and working conditions to attract and retain trained workers
	Adding both part-time and full-time licensed spaces in centres and family homes

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## A universal child care system is affordable / 2

**BC can also phase in funding by age group.** The goal is to eventually create a sufficient number of spaces for most children twelve and under.

The annual net public investment to provide child care for children in each age group is:

- For 1-2 yr olds                      \$540 million needed
- For 3-4 yr olds                      \$270 million needed

Out of school programs

- For 5 yr olds                         \$45 million needed
- For 6-12 yr olds                    \$345 million needed

### Funding must come with accountability

It is not just about the money – it's also about how the money is spent. Funding needs to go to child care programs tied to meeting three clear goals - lowering fees, raising wages and adding the spaces that the community plans and prioritizes.

### A sound investment

- Studies from Canada and around the world show that public spending on quality, universal early learning and child care programs is a social investment that returns upwards of \$2 for every \$1 invested.
- Providing quality, affordable child care increases the participation of mothers in the labour force. This contributes to their long-term economic security, and provides higher tax revenues and relief from current labour shortages.
- Research shows that children who receive high quality child care need less public funds later in life for education, employment, and social programs.
- High quality child care is good for children now and in the long term. It leads to early identification of extra support needs, improved social development and academic achievement, less problem behaviours, a lower likelihood of committing crimes or requiring public assistance and a higher likelihood of succeeding in school and the labour market.

For a detailed costing model of a universal child care system for BC please see: [http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabcdocs/pdf/cccabc\\_costing\\_model.pdf](http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabcdocs/pdf/cccabc_costing_model.pdf)

*Note: Figures presented above are net annual costs by age group and based on the model at the link provided, which provides gross annual costs by age group and net total costs.*

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**There are many suggestions for solving BC's child care crisis. But would they all work? Here's a look at the false fixes.**

## **1. Give the money to families**

The current federal government thinks it can solve the child care crisis by giving each family a small amount of money to use as it chooses. If only it were that easy.

There's no question many families with young children could use more money. BC's child poverty rate is shameful. According to Stats Canada, 20.9% of BC's children live in poverty. That's all the more reason for adequate social assistance, employment strategies, living wages and other initiatives to raise family incomes.

**But simply giving money to individuals is not a substitute for quality child care.**

Just look at the Conservative government's taxable benefit of \$100 a month. It hasn't created child care spaces. It doesn't come close to covering the actual cost of quality care. And, it hasn't made child care more affordable. What's more, as soon as BC families began to receive the federal benefit, the BC government cut provincial child care funding – saying that fees could be raised now that parents had \$100 more a month to spend on child care.

And fees have risen. From 2001 to 2006, average annual child care fees for pre-school aged children in BC increased by \$672.

**Increasing parent fees only pits providers and parents against each other. It's not an effective solution.**

**Neither is pouring money into child care subsidies.** For over 30 years, the BC government has allocated most of its child care budget to subsidies for low-income families. Unfortunately, subsidies don't create spaces. And they rarely cover the full cost of quality care, leaving low-income families to make up the difference (which they can't afford) or use cheaper, unregulated care.

**Simply increasing subsidy rates won't work either.** Subsidy increases are usually closely followed by increases to fees. And, eligibility rules exclude many families. If subsidies were the answer, BC child care would not be in the crisis it is today.

The solution is stable, adequate operating funds tied to lower fees and higher wages for child care workers. Some low-income families will still need help to cover the cost, but as fees are reduced so will the need for subsidies.

## **2. Cut red tape**

Some suggest the simple answer is to *"eliminate the red tape."* They say: *"Need more spaces? Easy. Increase the number of children providers can care for. Reduce the indoor and outdoor space required for each child."*

But what about the quality of care? Study after study has shown how important good child care is to healthy growth and development, and regulations are key. The total number of children in a group, the ratio of staff to children, the level of training of staff, and the quality of the physical space all make a difference.

**Reducing or weakening regulations might seem like a quick fix – but our children will pay the price.** BC's child care regulations are not just bureaucratic red tape. They set the minimum standard for our children's health and safety.

The real answer is sustained public investment in quality child care.

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### 3. *Build it and they'll come*

Some say capital grants are the answer – the Harper Conservatives, for example. They naively believed giving money directly to employers to build new spaces would be a quick fix. When they realized it wasn't, they transferred the funds to provinces to create spaces. The Campbell government allocated \$12 million to capital grants, out of the \$33 million BC received from the feds for 2008/09.

**The problem is, on their own, capital grants are not the solution.** The total funds available are nowhere near enough. The grants only cover a portion of total capital costs, leaving communities to make up the difference. Even if they can, more often than not there aren't enough qualified staff to operate the new spaces.

The tragic irony is that raising matching funds and attracting qualified staff are most difficult for the very communities that need child care the most. This is no way to ensure public spending matches community needs.

The problems with this particular false fix don't end here. For the first time, BC now gives capital grants to private child care companies, partnerships and proprietors. As public dollars go into privately owned and controlled properties and services, parents become customers rather than partners and citizens, and lose their ability to make sure that publicly funded services meet community needs.

The real answer is capital budgets tied to credible community plans that expand community-owned and controlled child care.

### 4. *Leave it to the market*

Most of these false fixes share one thing in common – they're all market-based. The misguided belief is that if there's a big demand for child care, the market will supply the needed services. Supposedly, all government has to do is put dollars in the hands of the consumers (direct payments to families), make setting up shop cheaper and easier (deregulation), provide the same level of subsidy or incentive to non-profit and for-profit care (grants), and then get out of the way.

**But market-based solutions to child care don't work.** There is little room for profit when it comes to quality child care. Profit either comes out of wages of child care workers (affecting quality) or parent fees (making it less affordable). Services that are market-driven are more likely to be provided where it's easy to make a go of it, not where the need is greatest.

What's more, when market-driven child care providers decide to get out of the business, families and communities are left high and dry. We don't close libraries when librarians retire or move on. Why would we invest public funds in services that could be lost when operators move on or shareholders aren't happy with their rate of return?

The experience of other countries who have relied on this market-based false fix confirm it's not the way to go. In Australia, where for-profit corporations control 70% of child care spaces, fees have gone up 123% since 1990 (when the government began spending more on subsidies). Quality is a concern. Rural communities and families with children who require extra support are underserved. Choice – often touted as the main benefit of market systems – is limited as a few large companies control almost all of the care.

The real answer is stable, adequate operating and capital budgets that build and deliver community-owned and controlled child care.

***Child Care - Let's Make It Happen!*** campaign partners believe the best way to fix BC's child care crisis is by creating a community-controlled, universal, publicly funded, high quality child care system that meets the needs of children and working families.

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# Child care

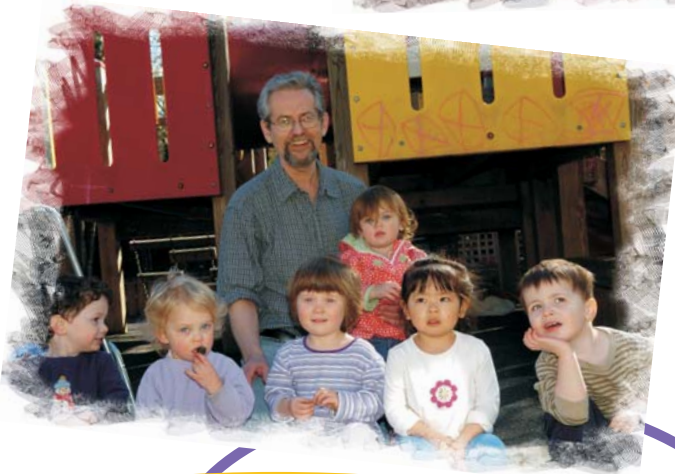


Families say...



90% of British Columbians surveyed say...

\*Ipsos Reid poll, April 2006



Child care workers say...



- let's make it happen!



## WHAT'S AT STAKE

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C. and the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union have joined together in the **Child care - let's make it happen!** campaign. This complements the national *Code Blue for Child Care* campaign.



The federal Conservative government has scrapped the federal-provincial child care agreements. B.C. has lost the allotted \$455 million in child care funding.

The B.C. Liberal government has cut child care spending by \$50 million annually, since 2002.

Unless federal funding is restored, or the provincial government is prepared to pick up the costs - child care centres across B.C. have little choice but to make up the funding shortfall by raising parent fees, reducing child care spaces, laying off workers, cutting programs, or closing their doors.

## HERE'S HOW you can help!

Our communities need affordable, accessible, publicly funded, quality non-profit child care now. Ask your elected government representatives to do the right thing.



Write them letters, or visit them in person. Ask them to work with our communities to:

- encourage the federal government to restore the federal-provincial child care funding agreement;
- ensure the B.C. government commits new money to child care.

## JOIN THE child care support network

Stay informed, stay connected. Join the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C. The CCCABC is a voluntary organization of parents, child care providers, community groups, unions, and interested citizens.

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[www.cccabc.bc.ca](http://www.cccabc.bc.ca)

If you are a child care worker, and not already a union member, sign up for a free *Special Associate Membership* with the BCGEU.

Take advantage of numerous benefits, but pay no dues.

Or, get information about taking the step to unionize to gain better working conditions. The BCGEU represents early childhood educators in over 100 child care organizations across the province.

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## FOR MORE campaign materials

Lawn signs, fact sheets, brochures, lobby kits and other resources are available. Please contact Communications at 604-291-9611 or toll-free 1-800-663-1674.