

**PRESENTATION
TO THE
FEDERAL STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE**

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Presented by:

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*In partnership with
The Child Care Advocacy Forum*

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C., the organization I am here representing today, has been advocating for over twenty years for a child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible, publicly funded and accountable. We are a voluntary organization of parents, child care providers, community organizations, unions and interested citizens.

The Coalition is also a founding and participating member of the Child Care Advocacy Forum which brings together six (6) provincial child care organizations and represents over 4,000 members.

Two years ago, the people of British Columbia responded in unprecedented numbers to a provincial child care discussion paper "Building a Better Future for British Columbia's Kids". More than 10,000 responses from the public indicated that over 94% of respondents supported an increase of public funding for child care programs. Indeed, as you know, the vast majority of Canadians believe that investing in the early years development of children is necessary for the good of our country.

Since the change in government in our province in the spring of 2001, British Columbians have again been asked to contribute to yet another child care survey. To date, the Minister of State for Women's Equality has received more than 3,400 surveys and more continue to arrive. There is no reason to believe that these respondents will not once again urge the government to spend more money on child care.

Child care advocates are calling for "enough to surveys". Time and time again Canadians have responded with overwhelming support for a coordinated range of services for children and their families

- recent polls indicate that 90% of Canadians believe high-quality child care is important to help ensure Canada's social and economic well-being
- 81% of those polled think governments should develop a plan for a comprehensive child care system
- another poll found that 76% of Canadians believe child care should be available to all families with costs shared by governments and families
- 65% of Canadians are willing to pay more taxes in order to ensure that children can access high quality child care programs.

(Angus Reid 1999 Environics and Insight Research 1996)

If those statistics won't convince you, let me point out a few more.

- More than three quarter of mothers with children aged 6-14 are in the workforce as are seven out of ten mothers with children under age 6 (Profiling Canada's Families II, Vanier Institute of the Family, 2000)
- Economists from Statistics Canada project that the labour participation of women aged 15-44 will rise from the current rate of approx. 71% to about 80% by the year 2011 (Our Child Care Workforce, Human Resource Sector Study on child care, 1998)

- Almost 400,000 children are born each year, and 86% of their mothers end up back in the workplace in a year. (February 25, 2000 – the Globe and Mail “A mother’s dilemma: children or job?”)
- The Vanier Institute of the Family estimates that women in the labour force contribute approximately \$25.5 billion dollars a year in federal and provincial taxes (Speech by Dr. Robert Glossop, Vanier Institute of the Family)
- There has been a 400% increase in the use of paid child care services by preschool children of families since 1967 (Our Child Care Workforce, Human Resource Sector Study on Child Care, 1998)
- For every \$1 spent on child care there is a \$2 economic benefit (The Benefits and Costs of Good Child Care, Gordon Cleveland and Michael Krashinsky, 1998)
- In 1998 the cost of raising a child from birth to age 18 was estimated to be \$160,000 – up by \$4000 from 1995. The largest proportion of this cost – 33% was attributed to child care and shelter was the next largest expenditure at 23% (The Progress of Canada’s Children 1998: Focus on Youth, Canadian Council on social Development, 1998)
- Between 1991 – 1998, the proportion of workers with dependants who reported excess tension due to family/work conflicts increased from 38% to 44% (The Progress of Canada’s Children: Into the Millennium, Canadian Council on social Development, 1999)
- A child’s brain development in the first six years of life sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour and health (The Early Years Study: Reversing the Real Brain Drain – Dr. Fraser Mustard and Hon. Margaret Norrie McCain, 1998)
- Children’s well-being and development suffer when they have poor quality care, and even an advantaged family background can’t protect them (Partners in Quality, Canadian Child Care Federation, 1999)

The message from the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C. and the Child Care Advocacy Forum is quite simple and straightforward.

1. The forecasted federal surpluses far exceed the relatively small investment that the federal government has committed to the Agreement on Early Childhood Development Services signed by federal, provincial and territorial governments in September 2000.
2. To date, action stemming from this Agreement clearly demonstrates that the level of funding is inadequate to meet the needs of Canada’s children and families. As a result, children and families across Canada still do not have equitable access to child care services.

We therefore recommend that the next federal budget include:

- An allocation of \$2 billion for Early Childhood Development Initiatives in each of the next five years. This will still leave the federal government with sufficient budgetary surpluses to meet its other objectives and will make a real difference in meeting the objectives of the Agreement on Early Childhood Development.
- Dedication of 2/3 of these funds to support provincial and territorial development of quality child care systems, within a mutually negotiated child care strategy for all of the children of Canada.

The time for action is long over due. The fragile child care program that exists in Canada has resulted in poor wages for child care workers, parents forced to settle for poor quality child care because they can’t afford high quality, and other parents scrambling to piece together ad hoc child care arrangements because no spaces are available at any price in their community.

And amidst it all, our children, who count on us to protect and cherish them, are the losers. All of Canada’s children deserve the very best start in life. Their parents deserve the right to go to work or school knowing that their children are safe and receiving high quality early childhood education and care. The future of Canada depends on the right decisions being made today.