



COALITION OF

child care advocates

OF BC



Working together for a community based, non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible, publicly funded and accountable.

Questions & Answers Prepared for **BC Provincial Budget** **September 1 2009**

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) is a voluntary, non-profit organization of parents, child care workers, interested citizens and community organizations. Our advocacy for a publicly funded, high quality, affordable child care system is based on extensive evidence and on the lived experiences of BC families. International and national research clearly demonstrates that a universal approach to quality child care promotes healthy child development at the same time as it supports families and their workforce participation, reduces child poverty, advances women's equality, and deepens social inclusion.

These goals are supported by a significant majority of British Columbians who recognize that what is good for children and families is also good for our economic, social and environmental well being.

Unfortunately, when it comes to child care, BC and Canada are far behind other developed countries. Reports by respected international bodies such as the OECD and UNICEF show that the federal and provincial governments of Canada, outside of Quebec, have the weakest approach to child care in the industrialized world. Even when we combine both federal and provincial child care funding, BC's \$300 million annual funding for child care translates into only about 0.2% of GDP invested in our young children's early care and learning – less than one-half of the OECD average of 0.7% and far less than the UNICEF benchmark of 1% of GDP.

What SHOULD the new provincial budget do for child care in BC?

BC should demonstrate its commitment to truly meeting the needs of children and families by increasing public investment in quality early care and learning services that are available to and affordable for all who need or want them. In particular, most families need full-time, year-round services that support their workforce participation. The provincial budget should ensure lower parent fees, more community-owned spaces and higher wages for professional early childhood educators.

But shouldn't child care share in the pain of the current economic situation, with a budget cut?

During difficult times, our collective responsibility to help each other is more important than ever. Maintaining and in fact strengthening public and community services is critical to supporting families through this economic downturn – this is no time to cut.

Furthermore, child care is not a fully-developed, funded system like health and education. Rather, it is a patchwork of isolated services that depend on parent fees, undervalued caregivers and community goodwill to keep the doors open. Child care has no infrastructure, no room to cut without directly and negatively impacting the lives of children, their families and their caregivers.

How much would a system of quality, universal child care services cost the provincial budget?

These services can be phased in. For example, over time, an estimated increase in annual funding of \$600 million would provide quality, affordable care and learning for all children aged three to five.

But BC is already running a significant deficit. How can we afford to invest in child care now?

As our counterparts in most other jurisdictions have realized, investment in quality child care reaps strong economic returns of at least \$2 for every \$1 invested — so the truth is we can't afford NOT to invest.

The current lack of public funding is hitting BC families with a triple whammy:

1. There are only enough regulated child care spaces for 14% of children under 12 in BC – leaving too many parents unable to work and achieve their career goals, and too many children in situations where the quality of their early care and learning is unknown. Wait times for licensed child care are years long.
2. After housing, child care is the second highest cost facing BC families. In 2008, an average Metro Vancouver family with a 4-year-old in full-time child care and a 7-year-old in after-school care paid 20% of their monthly expenditures, or \$12,000, for child care – if they could find it.
3. Staff wages are so low that recruiting and retaining professional early childhood educators is a well-documented concern across the province, undermining child care quality.

Multiple studies show that child care provides a higher economic multiplier than virtually any other sector. Investing in child care creates local jobs, generates local spending, and makes it possible for communities to attract and keep young families. Investing in child care will also help families who are struggling with the impacts of the economic down-turn. Affordable child care reduces poverty, thereby supporting young children's growth and development. Child care makes it possible for parents, particularly mothers, to train, retrain, seek and keep jobs.

Finally, investment in early care and learning has the long term benefit of ensuring that Canada's children get the best possible start. The evidence is clear that high quality experiences in the early years make a difference to children's long term health and well-being. While good experiences reduce social costs down the road – poor experiences can do harm and end up costing us all more.

What do BC families really want – more child care or all-day kindergarten?

The majority of British Columbians understand that current child care policies are failing families. In a September 2008 Environics poll, 77% of Canadians overall and 85% of BC respondents thought that the lack of affordable child care is a serious problem today. Furthermore, the same poll reported that 83% of respondents think government has an important role to play in helping parents meet their child care needs. More recently, an August 2009 Angus Reid poll showed that only 12% of British Columbians are satisfied with child care affordability and only 27% are satisfied with the quality of child care in BC. Satisfaction levels are higher in the rest of Canada, at 28% and 43% respectively.

Whether they're called child care or kindergarten, BC families want and need programs to be available when and where they need them, to be affordable, and to be good for their children. Through its study of All Day Kindergarten for 3-5 year olds, the BC government now recognizes, at least in theory, the importance of quality, universal, publicly funded and democratically controlled services. **If** done well, the expansion of All Day Kindergarten **can** meet the needs of children and families. A June 2009 Harris/Decima poll reported that 71% of respondents believe government plans (like in Ontario) to support full-day, integrated kindergarten/daycare programs for four and five year olds are a good idea. Again, support was even higher in BC.

Here are some fundamental requirements for effectively expanding All Day Kindergarten in BC:

1. **Significant, stable public investment with new dollars, not with cuts to existing services.**
2. **Play-based curriculum, not a downward extension of a testing-focused school system.**
3. **Hours of operation that support workforce participation, not just part workday, part-year programs.**
4. **Universal entitlement to free school hours, with affordable fees charged for extended program hours.**
5. **Integration of early care and learning, with respectful inclusion of early childhood educators and existing community services.**