

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

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

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The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC is a voluntary, non-profit organization of parents, child care workers, interested citizens and community organizations. Our advocacy is substantiated by international and local research that shows 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,
- deepens social inclusion and
- builds a knowledge-based economy.

The 2007 Budget stated that, "the most important investment we can make as a country is to help families raise their children." We agree with this sentiment and believe that:

- Governments must work together in funding and delivering initiatives that will meet the needs of children.
- Canadians expect, and deserve, a coordinated effort by governments.
- Many of the initiatives require that the federal and provincial/territorial governments work together to implement needed solutions, since initiatives involve a shared jurisdiction.

Canada's standing internationally on early learning and child care is not only a source of national shame but a current and long term barrier to promoting healthy children, communities and a vibrant economy.

Building a pan Canadian child care system with comparable services across the country is achievable but requires that we have a strong foundation, and that the federal government:

- *Enshrines* the principles of early learning and child care in Bill C-303 and introduce standards that guarantee quality, universality, accessibility, developmental and inclusive programs.
- *Encourages* provinces to move from the current user pay and subsidy patchwork to publicly funded early learning and child care programs as in Quebec and many OECD countries.
- *Guarantees* that new federal money will be provided in addition to existing federal commitments and will be dispensed with the caveat that provincial and territorial governments will use these funds to increase and supplement, not replace, existing provincial spending.
- *Agrees* that all expansion takes place through public and/or not for profit delivery. [Existing for-profit programs may be grand-parented.]

- *Is accountable* to the tax payer by tying funding to the provinces and territories to five - year plans for building a child care system that include goals and objectives, timelines and targets, review and evaluation.

The Tax System the Country Needs for a Prosperous Future.

Without a clear, legislative framework (as reflected in Bill C303) the recent unaccountable federal transfers to individuals (as in the Universal Child Care Benefit) and to provinces (as in the 2007 budget) do not build the system that children, families and communities need. The federal government's plan to include child care with other social transfer payments in the CST will only make matters worse.

The current government came to power with an ill conceived notion that Canada's child care crisis could be solved by giving employers tax credits to build child care spaces. Even its own advisory committee confirmed that this approach cannot and will not work. There is however an approach that will work. Given the benefits that child care provides to employers, both now and in the future, the corporate sector's role is to contribute their fair share of their profits to support the development of high quality child care services. This is best done through a transparent tax system. And, given the size of current federal and provincial surpluses and the economic returns generated from child care services, Canada doesn't even have to raise taxes to build this system.

We believe that the current federal government has lost sight of the connection between the taxes we pay and the vital services we receive. As we have learned from experience in BC and across Canada over the last decade, tax cuts do not create affordable high quality child care spaces. While government has a responsibility to ensure that families with young children have adequate incomes - income support measures are not a substitute for a pan Canadian child care system.

A quality publicly funded, community-delivered child care system must be developed in Canada. Sometimes it makes sense to pay for things collectively rather than individually and as Canadians we have a long and proud history of collectively providing vital public services. We believe it makes sense to invest in a child care system now because:

- Statistics Canada confirms that over 70% of women with young children are in the paid workforce and yet we have only enough licensed child care spaces for approximately 12% of Canada's children. Most of those spaces are in Quebec.
- Even with this level of labour force participation by mothers, Canada is facing a growing labour shortage. Lack of access to quality child care remains the top barrier parents, especially mothers, face in entering the paid labour force.
- In spite of significant federal and provincial surpluses, Canada spends less on early childhood development than 14 other OECD countries. As a wealthy country, committed to life-long learning and economic and social health, we can do better. A quality pan Canadian child care system will help give Canada an equal footing with those countries around the world that have long recognized the importance of investing in early childhood education.

Accountability for public funds

Regrettably, BC is the best 'worst' example of why Canadians need real accountability mechanisms for federal child care transfers. **Between 2001/02 and 2007/08, BC received a**

total of \$770 million in federal transfer funds for early childhood development, including child care. During the same period, BC cut its own annual child care budget by 20%, using federal transfers to replace these cuts.

When the federal government cancelled the 2005 bilateral ELCC Agreements, the BC government cut funding for licensed child care and resource and referral programs across the province. As a result, fees are going up and fewer families can access quality care. BC spent the remaining ELCC federal funds - \$95.6 million - on one time only expenditures that are not tied to creating spaces, lowering fees, or raising wages.

2008 Budget Recommendations

Based on more than two decades of national and international research and the lived experience of Canadian families, children and communities, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC recommends that

1. The 2008 Federal Budget include a clear action plan with adequate resources to significantly move our country forward in building a publicly funded, pan Canadian child care system.
2. Based on legislation now before Parliament (Bill C303), the next federal budget make the first installment on a 4 year commitment to create a licensed child care space for every 3 to 5 year old child in the country - as the first phase in building a comprehensive system from 0-12 year olds.
3. Furthermore, the federal government, in exchange for its investment, establish clear provincial accountability measures which include targets and monitors progress on specific service indicators such as number of quality spaces, reduced parental fees and improved training and compensation for early childhood educators. **Federal transfers must enhance, not replace, provincial funding for child care.**

To truly help families raise children, a high quality, publicly funded child care system as recommended above must be a cornerstone of a comprehensive family policy. Tax breaks and taxable family allowance programs are not a substitute for providing quality, child care services that children and families need and deserve.