Pre-Budget submission to the Federal Standing Committee on Finance
2011 Federal Budget
August 2010

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 Canadians who recognize that what is good for children and families is also good for Canada's economic, social and environmental well being.

Regrettably, our submission to the 2011 Federal Pre-Budget Consultation repeats much of what we have said in previous years.

The evidence continues to mount that:

1. **Canada's approach to child care is not working**.

   Canadians are often shocked to learn that in 3 current international studies comparing the status of early care and learning in developed countries – Canada ranks last. The OECD reports that Canada ranks last of 14 developed countries in the percentage of GDP spent on young children's care and education. The same study shows us last of 20 countries in rates of access to pre-school programs. And, a recent UNICEF report again rates us last of 25 countries on 10 benchmarks to prepare children for the transition to school.

   In our own province of BC, the failure of Canada's approach is reflected in the current child care crisis experienced by families, children and communities.

   Child care costs accounted for 20% of families' monthly expenditures – the 2nd highest cost after housing. In 2008, a Metro Vancouver family with a 4-year-old in full-time child care and a 7-year-old in before and after-school care paid $1025 per month, or $12,300 per year for child care. Since then, fees have only continued to climb.

   Only 20% of BC children have access to a licensed child care space. From 2001 to 2006, many BC communities lost licensed child care spaces. Then, in 2007, BC offered some capital grants that may have reversed the downward trend but have not offset the losses of the previous 5 years.

And, college trained Early Childhood Educators still do not make a living wage. A recent survey of ECE wages in BC indicates that close to half of respondents make under $15 an hour.

All of these factors contribute to the fact that in BC, 29% of BC children enter Kindergarten developmentally vulnerable.

While Canada lagged for decades, the approach of the last 5 years has been particularly regressive. The cancellation of the federal-provincial-territorial Bi-Lateral Agreements on Early Learning and Child Care and their supposed replacement with a taxable $100 monthly stipend paid directly to families has not created higher quality, more affordable or accessible choices for families, nor has it provided the basis from which to begin building the system families need.

2. **The most important step the federal government can take in the 2011 budget is to invest in building and maintaining a high quality, universal system of early care and learning for Canada's children.**

   This measure will be an immediate stimulus to the economy by creating construction jobs, typically held by men, and by creating new and sustainable jobs for early childhood educators – jobs typically held by women. Multiple studies show that child care provides a higher economic stimulus return than any other sector.

   This measure will also immediately help families. It will help ameliorate negative impacts of poverty on young children's growth and development. It will also make it possible for parents, particularly mothers, to train, retrain, seek and keep jobs. Further, as the cost of child care declines, families will be able to reallocate their limited resources to other needs like housing, food and transportation.

   In addition – this measure has the long term benefit of ensuring that Canada's children get the best possible start. Not only is this the right thing to do for Canada's children – it also makes economic sense. 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 in special education, income assistance, prison and so on.

   As Dr. Fraser Mustard says so clearly, "the quality and capacity of our future population depends on what we do now to support early childhood development."[1]

3. **A significant majority of Canadians support government taking action.** A September 2008 Environics Poll reported that 77% of Canadians thought that the lack of affordable child care is a serious problem in Canada today. In BC, 85% of respondents saw lack of affordable child care as a serious problem.[2] The poll also reported that 83% of respondents think government has an important role to play in helping parents meet their child care needs.

   And, a June 2009 Harris/Decima poll reported that 71% of respondents believe government plans (like in Ontario) to support full-day kindergarten and daycare programs for four and five year olds are a good idea. Again, support was even higher in BC.[3]

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[1] Retrieved from http://www.councilecd.ca/

[2] Retrieved from http://www.ccaac.ca/pdf/resources/polls/2008EnvironicsReport_Attitudes_toward_child_care.pdf

[3] Retrieved from http://www.harrisdecima.com/en/downloads/pdf/news_releases/062609E.pdf

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Recommendations

We therefore recommend that the federal government:

Prioritize, in the 2011 Budget and beyond, significant and increasing new federal transfer payments to provinces and territories conditional upon their provision of a plan, with measurable targets and timelines and approval of provincial legislatures, to build an integrated system of early care and learning.

Specifically, as a condition of transfer, provinces and territories must agree to provide direct operating funding to existing and new regulated services that are, in turn, accountable for raising the wages of professional early childhood educators, lowering parent fees, and building democratically governed early learning and care services that meet the diverse needs of Canada's families, particularly those who participate in the paid labour force.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with your committee when you visit Surrey, BC so that we can further discuss these issues and better understand how to ensure that in the 2011 budget, Parliament implements our recommendation.

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