



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

March 29, 2018

BC Poverty Reduction Submission

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) is a membership-based organization comprised of individuals and groups including parents, grandparents, child care providers, community organizations, academics and unions. Through research, public education and mobilization, we work collectively to achieve a high-quality, affordable, accessible child care system that serves the public interest.

In 2010, together with the Early Childhood Educators of BC, we developed the *Community Plan for A Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning* - now widely known as the \$10aDay Child Care Plan. This Plan provides a concrete, evidence-based strategy for building a universal system of high quality, affordable child care in BC. It has garnered unprecedented levels of support from across civil society and is now driving new provincial policy.

We are long standing members of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition where we work to support a comprehensive strategy to eliminate poverty. We applaud this government's commitment to finally develop, adopt and implement a BC Poverty Reduction Plan and expect a robust, well-funded, integrated Plan to emerge through the current consultation process. To be effective, this strategy needs to address all of the 7 pillars advanced by the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition.

Within the Poverty Reduction Coalition and at other social justice tables, our particular focus is on the role that affordable, accessible quality child care plays in eliminating poverty. We highlight three key issues – all addressed within the \$10aDay Child Care Plan – that are central to poverty reduction.

- 1. The exorbitant cost of child care.** Child care fees for children are the second highest family expense after housing. BC has among the highest child care fees in the country. BC families with a 2 year old will pay on average \$10,800 annually, and those with a 4 year old will pay \$8,640 per year. Families in large cities such as Vancouver pay even more—\$14,160 in fees for a toddler. The high cost of child care puts it completely out of reach for those struggling financially.
- 2. Promoting healthy child development.** Poverty undermines children's healthy development. International research demonstrates that a high-quality early care and learning system has immense benefits for children's development in all key areas. This is true for all children, but in particular for those from families with lower socio-economic status. The research is clear that the quality of care children receive in their early years matters. Only quality child care delivers these developmental benefits.

- 3. Fair compensation for Early Childhood Educators.** On average, BC's college and university educated Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) earn less than a living wage. ECEs provide services that are vital to the health and well-being of children, families and communities yet too many of them are amongst BC's working poor. To attract and keep qualified ECEs, they need to earn wages and benefits that reflect the importance of the work they do and enable them to adequately support their own families.

The good news is that the recent BC Budget 2018 made an historic investment in child care! With more than \$1 billion in total committed over the next 3 years, government's new *Child Care BC Plan* has the potential to turn the corner on BC's child care chaos. The budget begins to address all three of the issues outlined above – lower fees, supporting the workforce and enhancing quality – at the same time as it commits to creating more quality, affordable, licensed spaces.

This is a significant development that will help reduce poverty and its social and developmental impacts on thousands of BC families and children.

Of particular note are the initiatives to reduce fees. One initiative will bring fees down across the board in licensed child care. Another will provide an income tested benefit that essentially eliminates parent fees in licensed child care for families earning under \$45,000 with smaller benefits for families earning up to \$110,000. The third initiative will test low-cost, universal child care service prototypes

To maximize the effectiveness of these new Child Care initiatives in eliminating poverty, we would highlight three areas for your particular attention:

1. Budget 2018 identifies the need to address inadequate wages for Early Childhood Educators – there is no immediate commitment to action. Rather, the issue of fair compensation is to be addressed as part of an overall Workforce Strategy. Yet, the building of a new quality system is based on the availability of a well-educated and respected workforce. We recommend that BC's new Poverty Reduction Plan include prompt action to improve ECE wages, starting in 2018.
2. Budget 2018 has 3 initiatives to reduce parent fees. We recommend that BC's new Poverty Reduction Plan prioritize expanding the fee reduction program so that the affordable child care benefit can be reduced over time. Further, we recommend that BC's new Poverty Reduction plan move quickly to implement the lessons learned through new child care prototypes for moving to universal, public funding of child care.
3. Budget 2018 recognizes the need to support unlicensed caregivers to become licensed. Given that unlicensed child care is not required to meet any standards for health and safety, it is often cheaper and attracts lower-income families with nowhere else to turn. These families need to have access to affordable, licensed care both to ensure high quality for their children and to ensure they benefit from government's new child care fee reduction initiatives. We recommend that BC's new Poverty Reduction Plan focus on the expansion of licensed, affordable high quality child care programs.

With careful attention to implementation to ensure that public funds achieve the desired public policy outcomes, Child Care BC is well on the way to being the strong, anti-poverty pillar that BC needs.

That said, child care cannot solve poverty on its own. Rather, it is part of a comprehensive plan to ensure people have the right to an adequate income and quality services that enable them to live with dignity. This Poverty Reduction Plan needs to boldly tackle the deep poverty that exists in our community by raising income assistance and disability rates. It needs to focus on the structural barriers faced by Indigenous and marginalized groups. It needs to ensure that workers can earn a living wage and it needs to ensure access to affordable housing, health services, education and transportation.

In short – the new BC Poverty Reduction Plan needs to break down the silos of programs operating in isolation and ensure every action taken by the BC government contributes to the reduction and elimination of poverty.

As government has pointed out, Budget 2018 has room for significant investments in future top priorities. Eliminating poverty should be at the top of government's priority list.

We look forward to working with government and the community to implement an effective Poverty Reduction Plan in which a universal, affordable, quality child care system plays its important role.