



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.

October 2014

Submission to the BC Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

Whether government chooses to focus on resource sector development, a green economy or skills development – a prosperous British Columbia requires strong labour force participation and parents of young children need access to affordable, quality child care if they are to be part of that prosperity.

In its 2013 report, the Provincial Standing Committee on Finance acknowledged the concerns that we and many others have brought forward for decades, calling on the provincial government to “look at ways to provide more affordable and accessible quality child care” (recommendation 57). However, to date the provincial government has not responded in a meaningful way to the child care crisis, and BC remains one of the weakest provinces in the country, and Canada the weakest industrialized country, when it comes to access to affordable child care.

The BC child care crisis continues, despite widespread support for the solution outlined in our *Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning*, commonly known as the **\$10/day Child Care Plan**. Developed by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) in partnership with the Early Childhood Educators of BC, and supported by municipalities and organizations **representing almost 2 million British Columbians**, our \$10/day Plan provides for a quality, affordable and accessible child care system.

The only remaining obstacle to moving forward on the \$10/day Plan appears to be its price tag: ‘we just can’t afford it’, according to the provincial government. This response is completely inconsistent with the large body of evidence pointing to the economic benefits of public investment in quality, affordable child care. Moreover, we have always acknowledged that leadership and funding from the federal government is important, so we work with colleagues across the country to promote substantial federal investment in child care systems developed by individual provinces, territories and First Nations communities. Today, we are pleased to share that the federal NDP has announced a collaborative approach to funding affordable child care across Canada. Their proposed federal funding would make it possible for parents to pay no more than \$15/day for each child. The federal funding associated with this announcement would support BC in achieving our provincial affordability goal of \$10/day maximum.

\$10/day Child Care Plan for BC – It is Inevitable

Support for the \$10/day Child Care Plan is unprecedented in terms of any new program that British Columbians are calling on government to implement.

The success of the BC community campaign and the goal of affordable, accessible, quality child care are now corroborated by the Chief Economist of the TD Bank of Canada and are reflected in the recent unanimous resolution from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce calling on the federal government to examine a national child care plan. A September 2014 article from the Vancouver Sun Editorial Board also supports the call, with compelling economic arguments, for the \$10/day Child Care Plan (article attached).

Support for the \$10/day Plan includes: 31 municipal and regional governments, 22 Boards of Education, Vancity Credit Union, all major labour unions in BC, small businesses, thousands of parents and grandparents, Chambers of Commerce and Surrey Board of Trade, a long list of notable academics, federal politicians and senators, and a major media outlet (list of organizational supporters attached).

Backgrounder on the current child care crisis in BC, with BC / Manitoba comparison

In May 2014 we observed that the BC government's recent announcement of capital funding to support the creation of 1,000 new child care spaces by March 31, 2015, with an additional 1,000 the following year, highlights one of the major weaknesses of BC's existing 'Early Years Strategy'.

Only 18% of children under age 12 have access to a child care space in BC today. Given that the child population is expected to increase by at least 15,000 (2013–2016), adding only 2,000 spaces means overall access will be even lower, not higher. Plus, parent fees in BC currently range from an average of \$9,000 annually for preschoolers to almost \$13,000 for younger children.

Clearly, the BC government is not addressing the serious crisis in child care, and overall family affordability, in our province today.

To further illustrate the weakness of BC's 'Early Years Strategy' consider, by comparison, Manitoba's new Child Care Plan. While both provincial governments identify key issues that need action - access (spaces), affordability (parent fees) and quality (staff training, and wages that support recruitment and retention) - that's where the similarity ends:

Access - although Manitoba's child population is one-third of BC's, the Government of Manitoba's Plan commits to 5,000 new child care spaces over 5 years. The BC government commits 2,000 over 2 years.

Affordability – while affordability is a concern in both provinces, parent fees in Manitoba are capped at \$5,172 annually for children aged 2-5. BC fees are not capped. They're twice as high as Manitoba fees, and on average increasing at rates that far exceed inflation. The BC 'Early Years Strategy' does not make child care more affordable, as the promised introduction of an Early Childhood Tax Credit of \$55 per month starting in 2015 will barely cover the projected fee increase.

Quality - in addition to more training funds, the Manitoba Plan provides a 2% annual increase in operating funds to child care providers to further increase staff wages. The BC 'Early Years Strategy' re-introduces previously cancelled training funds (bursary program), with no increase to operating funds.

2014 Recommendations
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
to the
BC Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

- 1. Endorse the \$10/day Child Care Plan for BC.** *Be part of the growing cross-sectoral support for the Plan. Prepare BC to take advantage of new federal funds by immediately implementing the remaining recommended next steps:*
- 2. Put child care at the top of the agenda in discussions with the federal government, and call on all federal parties to make substantial child care commitments.** *Federal transfers of dedicated funds to build early care and learning systems will make implementation even more affordable for the provinces.*
- 3. Follow the lead of the majority of provinces and territories by moving the Child Care Branch out of the Ministry for Children and Family Development and into the Ministry of Education.** *This costs government little and ensures that, from the start, the Plan is implemented in a way that ends the false divide between ‘early care’ and ‘early learning’.*
- 4. Implement an immediate moratorium on public funds for commercial child care chain expansion.** *Rather, work with the many municipalities and school boards who have endorsed the Plan to expand access through public and community-owned spaces. The latter approach promotes public accountability for public funds.*
- 5. Immediately reduce fees to \$10/day in all licensed infant and toddler programs that embrace accountability requirements.** *This will create immediate relief for families who now pay some of the highest fees in the country. It is a better investment than the planned 2015 tax benefit for families, which will cost \$147 million but will not provide families enough to make a dent in their child care fees.*