

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

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

3rd Floor, 210 West Broadway, Vancouver, British Columbia V5Y 3W2
tel: 604.709.5661 www.cccabc.bc.ca fax: 604.709.5662

2005 Pre-Budget submission to the Federal Standing Committee on Finance, 2006 Federal Budget

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.

We applaud the 2004 Consultation (2005 Budget) and the Finance Committee's comments and recommendations that acknowledged:

- "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.

And specifically RECOMMENDATION 27,

- "The federal government, along with interested provincial/territorial governments, at the earliest opportunity announce initiatives to reduce child poverty. These initiatives should include a national, accessible, affordable, high-quality, publicly funded, publicly regulated, not-for-profit child care system. "

While the Finance Committee expressed confidence in the 2005 report that the "federal and provincial/territorial governments - which share the same goals regarding Canada's children - will be able to work together cooperatively", our experience and observations demonstrate to us that there is still more critical work for the federal government to accomplish in order to ensure that BC and other provinces are 100% accountable for the use of federal child care funding to:

- build a publicly funded quality child care system and
- supplement, rather than replace provincial expenditures.

Based on extensive research and experience we believe that building a sustainable pan Canadian child care system will take:

- a fundamental shift in the current approach to child care
- sustainable and sufficient federal funding and
- well designed policy to transform the current patchwork of services.

Building a pan Canadian child care system with comparative services across the country requires that we have a strong foundation and that each government:

- *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.
- *Guarantee* that new federal money will be provided in addition to existing federal commitments and that provincial and territorial governments will increase and supplement, not replace, existing provincial spending.
- *Enshrine* the principles of early learning and child care in legislation and introduce standards that guarantee quality, universal, accessible, developmental and inclusive programs.
- *Dedicate* a separate funding stream for a new federal transfer to provinces and territories to ensure stable and adequate funding.
- *Agree* that all expansion takes place through public and/or not for profit delivery. [Existing for-profit programs may be grand-parented.]
- *Tie* provincial and territorial accountability to five -year plans that include goals and objectives, timelines and targets, review and evaluation.

2006 Budget Recommendations

As the federal government is committed to “investing in lifelong learning” and “making our communities desirable places in which citizens want to live and work”, then a top priority will be to ensure the 2006 Federal Budget includes clear recommendations for an action plan that significantly moves our country forward in building a publicly funded, pan Canadian child care system.

In particular, we note the emphasis by the Standing Committee on physical infrastructure which we agree relates to healthy communities. Research based evidence clearly shows the advantages of non-profit, community-based child care in supporting women, families and children to be successful economically and socially.

You asked for our views about taxation

It isn't always popular to talk about taxes. We feel many Canadians have lost sight of the connection between the taxes we pay and the vital services we receive. But, as we have learned in BC, big tax cuts mean service cuts and increased user fees which impact negatively on low and moderate-income families.

We need to build a quality publicly funded, community-delivered child care system in Canada. We need to appreciate that sometimes it makes sense to pay for things collectively rather than individually and that as Canadians we have a long and proud history of collectively providing vital public services. We think it makes sense to invest in a child care system through the tax system now because:

- Families are usually at their lowest earning power when their children are young. When they most need child care, they are least likely to be able to afford it.
- Children's development is time sensitive and can't wait until their families can afford quality care.
- The benefits of investing in child care now outweigh the costs and will lead to future increased tax revenues.

- The earlier we invest in our children, the longer we all reap the benefits through economic contributions, a civil society and a healthier citizenry.

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. 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 to those countries around the world that have long recognized the importance of investing in early childhood education.

Accountability for public funds

Furthermore, we remain extremely concerned that more attention must be paid to provincial accountability for increased federal child care funds. We know the sad story in BC. Between 2001/02 and 2004/05, BC received a total of \$246 million in federal transfer funds for early childhood development, including child care. During the same period, BC cut its own funding for child care by 20%, or \$42 million annually.

We also remain concerned that our children are losing out because low child care wages are turning off well-qualified candidates who are ideal for child care jobs. In fact, many of BC's child care workers are earning less than they were four years ago.

Universality

Throughout Canada, effective universal programs and services that are funded through the tax system are available for anyone in the community who needs and/or wants to use them. While research affirms that access to quality child care provides benefits across all social and economic classes, the current child care patchwork is dependent upon user fees and subsidy systems which have income, employment or ability based eligibility criteria that restrict and limit access.

Research demonstrates that subsidy systems do not ensure:

- an adequate supply of quality child care;
- equitable access to existing child care spaces;
- public policy that entitles children equal access to child care.

A commitment to universality from coast to coast to coast requires a fundamental shift away from the current user fee and subsidy system to a system that is publicly funded through the tax system.

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