



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

Pre-Budget submission to the Federal Standing Committee on Finance 2009 Federal Budget

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 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, and
- deepens social inclusion.

These goals are supported by a significant majority of Canadians who recognize that what is good for children and their families is also good for Canada's economic and social well being.

Failed Policies

Regrettably, Canada's current policies do not meet the needs of Canadian families. Canada has lagged behind other developed countries in its investment in early learning and care for decades and now has the lowest rate of access to early learning and child care programs for pre-school children of 20 comparable countries.

Notably, the federal government's approach to supporting families with children, introduced in 2006, has not met its stated objective of providing families with choice. Canceling dedicated federal child care transfers to provinces and introducing a taxable family allowance has not addressed families' child care needs.

In fact, **the situation in BC is only getting worse**. The BC government cut operating funding to child care programs in 2007, attributing their decision to the current federal government's reduction in dedicated federal child care transfers. BC families were told to use their taxable family allowance to pay for resulting child care fee increases, saying "that was after all, its intended purpose"¹.

As a result of these federal and provincial actions, in BC, parent fees have gone up, wait lists have grown and caregiver wages, a key indicator of quality, have at best stagnated.

¹ See Minister Reid's March 16 2007 letter to parents regarding the terminated Agreement, downloaded at http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/pdfs/letter_child_care_providers_mar16_07.pdf

The Solution

Perhaps the greatest tragedy is that there are concrete and achievable solutions to Canada's shameful record on child care and early learning.

Our organization has developed a 5 point Child Care Plan (www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabcdocs/pdf/cccabccpplan.pdf); a Costing and Accountability Model for a child care system that provides an affordable, quality space for every BC child (www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabcdocs/pdf/cccabccosting_model.pdf) and a vision for a Community Controlled Child Care System that meets the needs of children, families and communities (www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabcdocs/governance/ggcc_final_report.pdf).

These solutions and the complementary work of our sister organization, the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC) at the federal level demonstrate that:

- Canada has the fiscal capacity to make targeted public investments in child care system building.
- With resources in place, communities have the capacity to plan, develop and deliver the system of services that meet the common and diverse child care and early learning needs of families and children.

In its 2009 budget, the federal government has the ability to act on these proposals, the international evidence and the lived experiences of Canadian families to ensure that Canadian children have access to comparable services no matter where they live or how their families make a living.

Recommendation

Our recommendation to the Standing Committee this year is consistent with our advice over the last number of years – it is time to invest in our children!

We recommend that based on the principles and accountability framework outlined in Bill C303, the next federal budget include 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 for 0-12 year olds.

The gross projected cost of meeting this first benchmark is \$5 billion. Based on experience elsewhere, Canada can expect an immediate return of 40% through increased income taxes from increased labour force participation. In addition, Canada can expect a longer term return of 2 to 1 on reduced social, educational and health care costs as children who get a good early start move through their life cycle.

The 2009 federal budget should therefore include an initial installment of \$1.25 billion. These funds should be transferred to provinces with clear accountability and public reporting measures in place to ensure the funds are used to build the child care system that Canadian families need and deserve.