

A Series of Bad Decisions for Women's Equality

Child Care Cuts: for equality now, we need child care now

Quality child care has been called the “ramp’ to women’s equality. Without it, women can’t participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life. That’s why Canadian women need – and deserve - a **publicly-funded and publicly accountable, non-profit, pan-Canadian child care system.**

More and more women with children are working (72%). They need quality child care to study, train for jobs and work with peace of mind. Women working in the home need quality developmental experiences for their children too. All women want to know their children are in good hands.

One in six children in Canada (15.6%) lives in poverty. More than 50% of female lone parents are poor. Access to dependable, affordable child care can help mothers improve the lives of their families. It allows them to train for jobs, and to get decent jobs and keep them. Child care contributes to women’s economic independence, and that means they can more easily take themselves and their children out of abusive relationships. **Child care supports the employability of mothers** while at the same time helping provide children with the foundations for lifelong health, learning and skill development. **A Child care program also benefits childcare workers who only earn 62% of what most women earn.**

In 2003, the previous federal government dedicated federal funds for early learning and child care programs and then continued to build a child care system through bilateral agreements with provinces and territories that provided an additional \$5 billion commitment over five years. **The current federal government has announced the cancellation of these bilateral agreements on March 31 2007.** This results in **cuts of \$1.2 billion** that was committed to provinces and territories to invest in their own communities, families, and children. Instead of funding child care services in communities, the current federal government has introduced a taxable family allowance and announced a \$250 million incentive-based child care spaces initiative – an approach tried and abandoned by other governments because it simply doesn’t work.

Canada’s productivity relies on working mothers with young children, who contribute \$53 billion annually to Canada’s GDP. Canadian economists identified a \$2 benefit for every \$1 invested in a high quality child care system. Quebec which has introduced a comprehensive child care system is already seeing a return of forty cents on every dollar invested. Child care is a tremendous support to families because it allows parents, particularly women, to increase their labour force attachment. Two recent international studies show that Canada is well behind other countries when it comes to early learning and child care services. While Canada is one of the wealthiest countries, we rate at the very bottom when it comes to investing in child care, and investments in maternity / parental leave and other social programs don’t rate much better. We have a long way to go to begin to achieve the equity, social justice and enlightened self-interest that most Canadians appear to want.

Reversing the cuts: what's required

- 1. Restore and increase sustained, long-term federal funding to the provinces and Territories.** Federal transfers must be specifically dedicated to improving and expanding child care services, based on provincial and territorial plans to advance quality, inclusion and affordability. Ongoing operating funds such as those committed in the bilateral agreements must be ensured.
- 2. Enact federal child care legislation** that recognizes the principles of a pan-Canadian child care system, makes the federal government accountable to Parliament with respect to child care funding and policy, and respects Quebec and First Nations' rights to establish their own child care systems.
- 3. Replace the capital incentives for child care spaces with dedicated capital transfers to the provinces and territories** to be used to build child care services that communities prioritize, own, deliver and account for.
- 4. Provide effective income supports for Canadian families** by incorporating the current taxable family allowance into the Canada Child Tax Benefit.