

Child Care Advocacy Forum

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BC Association of
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Coalition of Child Care
Advocates of BC

Early Childhood
Educators of BC

School Age Child Care
Association of BC

Westcoast Child Care
Resource Centre

Western Canada Family
Child Care Association
of BC

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CHILD CARE IN THE FEDERAL THRONE SPEECH GOOD NEWS OR NOT?

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On February 2, 2004 Paul Martin tabled his first Throne Speech as Canada's Prime Minister. The Speech outlined the issues that the federal Liberal Party will likely take into the federal election campaign expected later this year.

Once again, the Throne Speech promised action on child care...

"We must ensure that every child gets the best possible start in life;...

That is the goal. And there are important steps we can take now – down payments on an enduring commitment.

First, in co-operation with the provinces and territories, the Government will accelerate initiatives under the existing Multilateral Framework for Early Learning and Child Care, which means more quality child care more quickly."

The Multilateral Framework was signed in 2003. Under the Framework, the federal government agreed to transfer \$935 million to provinces and territories for aboriginal child care (\$35 million) and for regulated early learning and child care programs for children under six (\$900 million).

The \$900 million was to be transferred over five years with \$25 million in 2003/04, \$75 million in 2004/05, and \$150 million, \$300 million and \$350 million in the third, fourth and fifth years respectively.

The Throne Speech suggests that the federal government will now allocate more of these funds in the first few years of the agreement.

A federal commitment to create 'more quality child care more quickly' is not to be taken lightly. Yet, before we can be sure if this 'accelerated' funding will mean real progress, we need to see proof in the upcoming federal budget that the Martin government will:

1. allocate enough money in years 2 and 3 to really make a difference.
2. commit sufficient federal funds over the long term to develop a publicly funded child care system that meets the needs of all of Canada's children from birth to twelve years of age.
3. require that, as a condition of receiving federal child care funds, provinces/territories use the funds to supplement rather than replace provincial/territorial spending on publicly funded, licensed and regulated child care systems.

Increased accountability **is essential in BC** where our government's use of federal funds for child care and early childhood development has been appallingly mismanaged! Government's own reports provide the proof...

Under the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Agreement, BC received \$39.9 million in 2001/02 and \$51 million in 2002/03 from the federal government for early childhood initiatives including child care.

The reasonable expectation was that the infusion of these federal funds would mean increased public investment in these aspects of early childhood development. So – what is BC's record?

When BC reported on its 'baseline' 2000/01 expenditures and its 2001/02 allocations, we were shocked to learn that BC **under spent** the first year federal allocation by over \$6 million.

We waited anxiously to learn how the 2002/03 funds were spent. Finally, BC's report for year 2 was posted at www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/early_childhood/pdf/ecd_annual02_03_final.pdf

The information in this report is even more shocking than we could have imagined!

While the federal government gave BC over \$90 million for Early Childhood Development including child care in the first 2 years of this ECD agreement, **BC spent \$18 million less on child care in 2002/03 than in the baseline year of 2000/01.**

It gets worse! Government's own report confirms that provincial spending specifically on the child care subsidy program, which serves low income families, was **down by \$23.6 million** in 2002/03. So, while the BC government remains under spent in its ECD allocations at the end of the first two years of the program, **the neediest children in our communities are WORSE OFF!**

Ignoring the \$23.6 million cut from child care subsidies, government says that it spent \$5.4 million of the federal ECD funds on child care in 2002/03. Clearly, **BC is using a small amount of federal funds to offset much bigger provincial funding cuts to child care.**

In 2003/04, BC received more federal funds through the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care. BC used its first year allocation of \$3.3 million to address wait lists in Supported Child Care. This year, BC expects to receive about \$10 million through this Framework. Again, \$3.3 million will go to the now renamed Supported Child Development Program. While we cannot get official confirmation, we expect that the rest is being used to replace some of the planned provincial funding cuts to Child Care Resource and Referral Programs. This Framework is the funding envelope that the federal Throne Speech promised to 'accelerate'.

We have not spent the last two decades urging the federal government to take a leadership role in funding child care only to have our provincial government misuse the funds this way. BC children, families and taxpayers deserve more. They deserve real accountability from their governments!

The Advocacy Forum is therefore calling on the provincial government to immediately:

- provide a full and complete accounting of all provincial cuts to child care expenditures.
- provide a full and complete accounting of how federal funds have been used to offset provincial cuts to child care.
- make a public commitment to stop all further cuts to child care funding.
- **table an expenditure plan for the next 3 fiscal years showing how funds received under the two federal transfer arrangements will be used to build a high quality child care system in BC.**