

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

Westcoast Child Care
Resource Centre

Western Canada Family
Child Care Association
of BC

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VANCOUVER
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THE NEW INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT ON EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING AND CARE MARCH 2003

What does it say?

On March 13, 2003 the federal government signed a *Multilateral Framework on Early Childhood Learning and Care* with 9 provinces and 3 territories. (Quebec, while supporting the principles of this agreement, maintains sole responsibility over its social policy and makes significant provincial investments in child care.)

This agreement builds on the recent federal budget allocation of \$935 million to help improve access to quality child care and early learning opportunities for young children. \$35 million is for aboriginal child care and \$900 million will be transferred to provinces and territories to invest in regulated early learning and child care programs for children under six.

The \$900 million will be transferred to provinces and territories over a five year period. \$25 million is to be spent in the first year, (2003/04), \$75 million in the second, and \$150 million, \$300 million and \$350 million in the third, fourth and fifth years respectively.

These funds are over and above the federal dollars that provinces and territories currently receive under the Agreement on Early Childhood Development signed in September 2000.

The *Multilateral Framework of Early Childhood Learning and Care* includes objectives, areas of investment, effective approaches and public reporting requirements for the new funds.

Some of the key features of the agreement are:

- The federal funds are to be spent on regulated programs "...that meet quality standards that are established and monitored by provincial/ territorial governments."
- Primarily, funding is to go to direct care in settings such as child care centres, family child care homes and preschools.
- Types of investment can include capital and operating funds, fee subsidies, wage enhancements, training, professional development and support, quality assurance and parent information and referral.
- Using 2002/03 as a baseline, provinces and territories are to report annually on their progress. Public reporting will include information on provincial/territorial expenditures on all early learning and child care programs and services and on indicators of availability, affordability and quality.

What does it mean?

On the positive side, the new agreement means that:

- The federal government has acknowledged that it has a role to play in developing a national child care strategy – which we applaud.
- The federal government has heard our message that funds must be spent on regulated child care that meets standards associated with quality.
- The annual reporting requirements put some pressure on provinces to focus on direct care rather than exclusively on information and resources.

However, we have a number of remaining concerns:

- \$900 million does not come close to meeting the need. Even the Social Policy Committee of the National Liberal Party Caucus called for \$10.9 billion over 4 years for a child care program.
- Only \$100 million is allocated for the first two years. In BC, this means about \$2.5 million in year 1 and \$7.5 million in year 2 – not enough to be an effective incentive to reverse the province's plans for more child care cuts.
- The program only addresses child care for children under the age of six and is silent on school-aged care.
- There are no targets and timelines so provinces and territories are not accountable for meeting any benchmarks.

What is our response?

The Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care is a small but important first step in building a cross Canada child care program.

But, if this agreement is to meet its promise **the federal government** must:

- "Reprofile the funds" so that more is available in the first two years of the program.

And, **our provincial government** must:

- Use the federal dollars to complement, not replace, provincial child care spending.
- As a first step, direct new federal dollars to licensed family and group child care programs which meet the agreement's definition of 'regulated' and set the benchmark for quality care in BC.
- Ensure that a fair share of BC's Early Childhood Initiatives Funds are spent on child care – a cornerstones of a comprehensive early childhood strategy.