

Child Care Advocacy Forum

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BC Association of
Child Care Employers

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

Funding and Support provided by:

Status of Women Canada
- BC/Yukon Region
through Coalition of Child
Care Advocates of BC



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Federal/Provincial Action on Child Care What's New and What's Next?

June 2005

Since the last federal election in June 2004, media reports suggest that Canada now has a national child care system. Many believe that child care has received \$5 billion in federal funds and that the job is done. But, the reality on the ground for families, children and caregivers is quite different.

What's New?

Here's an update on events to date:

1. During the June 2004 federal election, the federal Liberal Party promised to create a national child care system based on the principles of **Quality, Universality, Accessibility and Developmental (QUAD)** and to allocate an additional \$5 billion over the next 5 years to start building the system. They were elected to govern in a minority parliament and Ken Dryden became the federal minister responsible for child care.
2. In November 2004, Minister Dryden met with provincial/territorial ministers responsible for child care. They reached an agreement in principle to move forward on a child care system. At this meeting, the principle of Universality was changed to Universally Inclusive.
3. In February 2005, the federal/provincial/territorial ministers met again but were unable to conclude a multilateral agreement.
4. Later in February 2005, the federal government tabled a proposed 2005/06 budget that laid out a 5 year spending plan for the promised \$5 billion. The first year's payment of \$700 million was to be made available to provinces and territories through to March 31, 2006.
5. The federal government began negotiating individual Agreements-in-Principle with provinces that were prepared to move forward on Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC). Bi-lateral agreements were signed with Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia. These agreements rely on promised federal funding commitments over five years and were used to help build support for the federal budget.
6. In June 2005, Parliament approved the federal budget including the child care funding. Assuming the minority government continues, the \$700 million promised for this year should now be available to provinces and territories.
7. To date, BC has **not** signed an Agreement with the federal government and **no new** federal funds for Early Learning and Child Care have come to BC. However, prior to and during the recent provincial election, the BC Liberals indicated that an Agreement with the federal government was imminent.

The 5 existing Early Learning and Child Care Agreements-in-Principle give us some idea about what a BC/Canada Agreement might include. Read on...

What's In the Agreements?

All 5 Agreements contain some common elements including:

- ✓ A joint commitment to the 4 QUAD principles, revised to reflect 'universally inclusive'.
- ✓ A provincial commitment to make progress on two objectives – improving the quality and developmental component of early learning and child care programs and improving access to early learning and child care that is universally inclusive.
- ✓ A provincial commitment to spend federal funds on regulated child care for children under 6.
- ✓ A provincial commitment to develop, with community input, Action Plans that will be used to negotiate detailed multi-year funding agreements beyond 2005/06.
- ✓ A provincial commitment to include indicators of availability of spaces, affordability of spaces and improvements in quality in public reporting on existing federal/provincial agreements.
- ✓ Commitments to work together on research, knowledge and information.

Each Agreement also includes some distinct elements. For example:

- ✓ Agreements with Manitoba and Ontario reference existing provincial plans and include more details about how federal funding will be spent than do other agreements.
- ✓ Agreements include specific language on services for First Nations/Aboriginal/Francophone communities.
- ✓ Some Agreements require provincial Action Plans to demonstrate that federal funds will not displace existing provincial child care funding. Others do not.

(To view existing ELCC Agreements go to www.sdc.gc.ca/en/cs/comm/sd/news/agreements_principle/index.shtml.)

What's Next for BC?

Now that the provincial election is over, we expect BC to sign an Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care with the federal government as soon as possible. But – not just any agreement will do.

Some elements of existing ELCC Agreements reflect recommendations that the Advocacy Forum has been making for some time. They provide a basis from which BC can and should build. Specifically, the Child Care Advocacy Forum is looking for an Agreement that ensures:

- ✓ BC begins to build an integrated, high quality **system** of early learning and child care.
- ✓ BC develops and implements a **Child Care Action Plan** that moves us away from the current user fee system to a **publicly funded** system.
- ✓ BC uses federal funds to **supplement rather than replace** provincial child care spending.
- ✓ BC openly **consults** with families, providers and communities as the province moves forward.

Only an Agreement that achieves these ends will make a real difference on the ground for children, families, providers and communities.

What Can You Do?

Let your newly elected or re-elected MLA know that you are counting on them to support real progress on child care. Let them know what you expect from an ELCC Agreement-in-Principle and from a Child Care Action Plan.

For current MLA contact info go to www.legis.gov.bc.ca/mla/3-1-1.htm.