

Child Care Advocacy Forum

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BC Association of
Child Care Services

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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Care Advocates of BC



VANCOUVER
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BC's Child Care Action Plan Community Consultation

LET'S SEND A STRONG MESSAGE November 2005

On September 29, 2005, BC signed an Agreement in Principle on Early Learning and Child Care with the federal government. Under this Agreement, BC will receive \$633 million from the federal government for regulated child care for children from birth to six years of age. The federal transfer funds began to flow this year (2005/06) and will continue until 2009/10. The BC government has already announced how it will spend federal money this year. (For more information see www.cccabc.bc.ca/forum/pdf/AdvForum_fedfunds.pdf).

Under this agreement, BC is required to develop and release an Action Plan on Early Learning and Child Care. This will include a spending plan for the federal funds in Years 2–5. This Action Plan is to be completed by January 31, 2006.

Staff in the Ministry of Children and Family Development confirm that they will consult with communities about this Action Plan in November. Details about community meetings and background documents are to be posted on their website (see <http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/>). Once these are available, the Advocacy Forum will share our responses widely.

But — regardless of the way government shapes the consultations or the questions they ask — it is important they hear a consistent, strong message in every community. Here are 4 key messages to send:

Message #1 — BC needs to use the federal funds to move away from a user fee child care system to a publicly funded system.

BC spending priorities must shift from child care subsidies to an adequate, accountable direct operating program tied to affordability and quality.

For 30 years, most of BC's child care spending has gone into the child care subsidy program which is intended to help low income families cover the cost of child care. This program continues to be the BC government's priority for the new federal funds which, as of October 1, 2005 are already going into increased subsidy eligibility levels and rates.

In the short term, subsidy increases seem like good news for families and caregivers. But, the evidence is clear that they do not build a child care system. They do not guarantee families will find a quality space. They only have a short-term impact on affordability. Subsidies act as the 'bottom rate' for fees so increases in subsidy rates inevitably lead to increases in fees. Finally, they do nothing to promote financial stability for child care services.

The new federal funds provide an opportunity for BC to change its funding patterns by **investing significantly more in accountable, adequate direct operating funding**. This funding must be tied to affordable parent fees and improved quality through increased staff compensation and recognition. Subsidies for those who still cannot afford the reduced fees should continue. Over time, lower fees will reduce the need for subsidies.

Message #2 – BC needs an accountable and credible process for child care planning at the community level to set priorities for new growth and development.

BC's capital funding must be tied to community plans that meet immediate priorities and work towards developing a comprehensive range of quality child care services.

BC needs more quality child care spaces so significant increases in capital spending are required. But, government must ensure that these funds are spent to build stable spaces that meet community needs and priorities. This means moving away from the current 'reactive' approach where government has no capital plan but relies on requests for funding that may or may not reflect the greatest needs and priorities.

The new federal funds provide an opportunity for BC to establish a credible, transparent community-based child care planning process through which local and regional child care priorities are identified and long term plans developed.

Message #3 – BC needs to end the divide between early learning and child care.

The current separation between 'early learning' delivered through the Ministry of Education and 'child care' delivered through the Ministry of Children and Family Development is false and misleading. Quality child care IS early learning whether delivered in pre-school, group or family care settings. The main difference between pre-schools and licensed child care centres is that pre-schools are part-time programs that children attend for a few hours, 2 or 3 days a week. While pre-schools are an important part of a comprehensive range of child care services, they do not meet the needs of the vast majority of working BC families.

The new federal funds provide an opportunity for BC to improve access to high quality child care programs that promote children's development AND meet the needs of working and studying families.

Message #4 – BC needs to restore provincial child care funding cuts and make investments in licensed school aged child care the top priority for these funds.

Between 2001 and 2005, BC received close to \$250 million from the federal government for early childhood development including child care. Over the same period, BC cut \$40 million from its own annual spending on child care. All of the new and projected provincial spending comes from federal transfer payments. Even with the recently announced spending, overall child care spending is not back to where it was in 2001.

Further, federal funds are for regulated care for children under the age of six. As a result, access to affordable, quality school-age care in BC continues to be ignored by the province.

The BC government should restore its own child care spending to 2001/02 levels. The top priority for spending the restored provincial funds should be quality, licensed before and after school care.

No matter what questions government asks — send these 4 messages in the upcoming Child Care Community Consultations.

Check our website at www.cccabc.bc.ca/forum for updated information about ways to ensure BC's Child Care Action Plan meets the needs of children, families and caregivers.