

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

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

The Child Care Advocacy Forum Responds to Provincial "Survey on Child Care Options" September 2001

Dear friends and colleagues,

This week, the Honourable Lynn Stephens, Minister of State for Women's Equality, released a "**Survey on Child Care Options**". The survey is on-line (see *Child Care Survey* link at www.gov.bc.ca/mcaws) and available at libraries, Child Care Resource and Referral Programs, Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre and other locations. The Survey results will "contribute to the development of a new vision for child care in British Columbia". Responses to the Survey need to be returned by **Oct. 15, 2001**.

Many of you have already told government what needs to be done on child care and we are confident that the continuing strength of our voices has 'kept child care on the provincial agenda'. Once again we are calling on you to help build a broad based response in your community to this Survey. **Minister Stephens needs to hear consistent messages from as many families, child care providers, organizations, and concerned residents as possible.**

You will see that the Survey questions are posed within the Liberal government's New Era promises on child care: "to target child care funding to help parents who need it most and to increase child care choices for parents by encouraging expansion of safe, affordable child care spaces".

While it is important for government to hear about current and immediate needs, it is equally important for government to hear that we are still **seeking their commitment to a 5 year plan that will move us towards a comprehensive system of quality, affordable, stable child care services for all of B.C.'s children and their families.** Without this commitment, government actions will be, at best, short-term solutions that will not build the child care system families need.

The Forum has developed some Key Messages (attached) that may help you answer the questions on the Survey. These Key Messages are directed at both long and short term solutions. We encourage you to build on our messages by adding as much localized and personalized information.

By **October 15**, here's what you can do:

1. Distribute copies of the Survey and the Forum's Key Messages broadly in your community.
2. Support parents, child care providers and others to complete the Survey by setting aside time at meetings or events for participants to fill out the Survey.
3. Volunteer to mail completed responses on behalf of those who took the time to respond.
4. Let us know if there are other ways in which we can help

Remember, when we speak together, we make a difference!

Child Care Advocacy Forum
Key Messages in Response to
Minister Lynn Stephens' "Survey on Child Care Options"

Below, are Key Messages and comments (in italics) from the Child Care Advocacy Forum that we hope will support a broad based community response to the provincial "Survey on Child Care Options". We encourage you to include both the Key Messages below and personal, local and regional information in your responses.

Minister Stephens needs to hear consistent messages from a many of us as possible. Time is short – so complete and return your Survey by Oct. 15!

Question 1: **Where do you live?**

Response: *This requires a personal response*

Question 2: **Are you: Currently using child care? A child care provider? Other?**

Response: *Again, this requires a personal response*

Question 3: **Within the fiscal realities of the province, the government wants to work with community to develop a long-term sustainable play for child care that targets funding to help parents who need to most.**

3a): **In your opinion, where is the need the greatest?** *Please rank priorities 1, 2, 3, etc (1 = highest)*

Response: *Here's our list of some of the greatest needs. In your list, be sure to include the **need for a plan to build a system**. If we had that, all needs could be met.*

1. A five year plan to build a comprehensive, quality, affordable child care system that meets the needs of all B.C. families and children.
2. Immediate action to address the lack of affordability and availability of Infant-Toddler care in centre and family based services.
3. Stable and affordable school-aged care, after the current Financial Assistance Program (FAP) contracts expire in June 2002.
4. Appropriate licensing, registration and training processes to protect and improve the quality of care children receive.
5. Maintenance of all existing child care programs while a new vision and system are under development.

3b) **What would be your priorities for child care funding?** Please rank...

Response: *This is a difficult question, because without a long range plan, small amounts of money in any one area won't fix the problem. Instead, we encourage you to emphasize the need for stable long term funding to build an affordable child care system and then to identify some immediate needs. For example:*

1. Stable multi-year funding to support a comprehensive child care system.
2. Funding to make Infant-Toddler care in centres and family child care homes affordable and accessible.
3. Funding to support affordability and stability of school-aged care after June 2002 in both centre and family child care programs.
4. Funding to maintain all existing child care funding programs, develop additional child care spaces and provide cost-of-living increases for all child care settings.

Question 4: **Are you aware of situations where there were too few child care spaces to meet the need?**

Response: *We are sure that you can all answer YES to this one.*

4a) **If so, what ages of children were most affected?**

Response: *Provincially, the **lack of quality, affordable care for children under 36 months** is the biggest problem (the first two categories on the Survey). Check off these two groups and all others where there are particular shortages in your community. Your answer might include all age groups.*

4b) **Are you aware of other situations that have prevented parents from accessing child care?**

Response: ***COST** is the biggest barrier provincially so check this in your response and add other factors that are problems in your community. Again, it might be all of them.*

4c) **What solutions would you suggest to address these challenges?**

Response: *Solutions require a commitment to build a comprehensive system that meets the diverse needs of B.C. families and children. Based on this commitment, we need an incremental implementation plan, with adequate funding attached, to make a range of quality, inclusive child care programs affordable and accessible across the province.*

Question 5 Within current fiscal realities, what is the best way... to assist in keeping and/or expanding existing spaces for infants and toddlers? What options would you suggest?

Response: Government should provide direct operating funds to infant-toddler programs in centres and family child care settings in order to reduce parent fees and address the real cost of providing this type of care. Capital funding, based on community plans, should be available to expand services. Employers can help by adopting family friendly policies. Municipalities and cities can facilitate the development process and community funders can support initiatives that respond to the unique needs of their communities. With these things in place, communities will be able to develop and deliver the services that families need.

Question 6: (With regard to existing programs) What do you believe is working well? What is not working?

Response: While improvements are always possible, in the current situation, **all** existing child care programs need to be maintained and provided with realistic cost of living increases. However, current funding programs are fragmented. Administrative efficiencies at the community and governmental levels could be achieved if some of them were streamlined into one combined operating grant.

Please note that some government-funded child care programs and supports are missing from the list on the Survey form. These include the provincial programs of West coast Child Care Resource Centre (including Westcoast Library, Westcoast Multicultural and Diversity Services, Child Care INFORM) and the BC Association of Child Care Services. We encourage those of you who use any of these services and supports to add your comments about the value of them to you, your programs and your community.

Finally, while government has not asked for Additional Comments, we encourage you to add them! Short, personal statements, especially from parents, about the difference that access to quality child care has made in your life and/or the problems you have experienced because you can't access child care have the greatest impact.

Remember, Surveys need to be returned by Oct. 15, 2001.

By mail to: Director of Child Care Policy
Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services
PO Box 9899, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, B.C. V8W 9T9

By Fax to: 250-356-1396

Or, you can complete the Survey on-line from the "Child Care Survey" link at www.gov.bc.ca/mcaaws.