

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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Anything But Child Care BC's New ABC's June 2003

The government of BC has once again demonstrated its complete lack of commitment to a quality, inclusive child care system that meets the needs of **all** children and their families. The latest evidence is found in the mixed messages government is sending about its decision to reduce budget cuts in the Ministry to Children and Family Development (MCFD) from 23% to 11%.

On the one hand, government promises that programs and initiatives supporting early childhood development will be exempt from budget cuts. Their investments in MCFD's Supported Child Care (SCC) Program, which provides for the inclusion of 6000 children in regulated child care and pre-school settings, are protected with no reduction in funding or service.

Recent government documents further indicate that \$3.3 million for SCC will come from BC's share of new federal funding negotiated under the recent provincial/ territorial/ federal agreement on "Early Learning and Child Care".

Given the Advocacy Forum's long standing position supporting a regulated child care system that is fully inclusive and meets the needs of every child - regardless of their ability, language, culture, family income and status or other differences – one might expect us to applaud MCFD's decision.

Regrettably, here is why we can't:

- The very documents that outline the BC government's decision to use new federal child care dollars for SCC, also announce that SCC will now **"focus on child development rather than childcare"**.
- MCFD's announcement comes on the heels of provincial budget cuts that continue to devastate child care in BC. Over a 3 year period, the province is cutting close to \$50 million from its spending on regulated child care. All over BC, fewer families can afford regulated care, caregiver wages are dropping, and licensed child care programs are closing.
- On top of cuts to its own funding for child care, BC refuses to spend federal 'early childhood' funds that it receives through two separate provincial/territorial/federal agreements on regulated child care.

- The first source of federal funds is the Early Childhood Development Agreement (ECD). Under this agreement, BC is receiving \$291 million over 5 years (2000/01 - 2004/05).
- The province has only reported on how it spent the first year's ECD allocation of \$39.9 million. Despite wide spread community consensus that 2/3 of these funds should go to child care, BC only spent \$6 million on child care. Shockingly, the government underspent its total ECD budget that year by \$6 million and has not yet said how it is spending the \$119.6 that it received under this agreement in years 2 and 3.
- The second source of federal funds comes through the recently negotiated Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care. This new federal/provincial/territorial agreement grew out of the failure of the ECD agreement to improve child care in many parts of Canada, including BC. As a result, advocates convinced the federal government to commit new funds over and above the ECD budget for regulated child care.
- Under this new agreement, BC will receive an additional \$121.6 million over 5 years starting with this year's installment of \$3.3 million.
- BC, along with the other provinces and territories who signed on, agreed to "further invest in provincially/territorially **regulated early learning and child care programs** for children under six (which) ... meet quality standards that are established and monitored by provincial/territorial governments".
- The Agreement also says that the federal funding initiatives "will **primarily provide direct care and early learning** for children in settings such **as child care centres, family child care homes, preschools, and nursery schools**. Types of investments could include capital and operating funding, fee subsidies, wage enhancements, training, professional development and support, quality assurance, and parent information and referral".

Yet, in spite of having signed this agreement, BC plans to spend these dollars on its refocused SCC program that will no longer focus on child care!

The actions of the province speak louder than their words. Its actions tell us that it will continue to:

- Ignore the needs of close to 389,000 BC children under the age of 12 whose mothers are in the paid labour force.
- Insist on making a false and dangerous separation between childhood development and regulated child care.
- Implement an ABC policy of "Anything But Child Care" that will only lead to reduced access to licensed child care for children with extra support needs, especially for those whose parents are in the paid labour force.

Let **US** be clear where we stand:

- We **oppose cuts in services** for children, youth and their families. An 11% cut to MCFD is not ok, especially when some services are 'protected' at the expense of others. **All** BC children are entitled to have their needs met.
- We **fully support an inclusive child care system** that provides all children access to a full range of quality, licensed child care programs. Successful inclusion depends on a strong 'typical', regulated child care system that is complemented and supplemented by dedicated resources through Supported Child Care programs for those with additional needs. We will continue to work towards this vision.
- We **respect the families and services providers in the community living sector** who are tireless and effective advocates for their children and will continue to work with them to build communities that nurture every child.

We continue to call on the provincial government to:

1. Direct the new federal funds to regulated child care as stipulated in the Multilateral Framework.
2. Restore provincial funding for regulated child care and early learning programs.
3. Use federal dollars to complement, not replace, provincial spending on regulated child care and early learning programs.
4. Spend a fair share of BC's Early Childhood Development Agreement funds on regulated child care – a cornerstone of a comprehensive early childhood strategy.