

A copy of MCFD's on-line Feedback Form follows. To provide your feedback, go to <http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/questionnaire.asp>. The Advocacy Forum's responses to the questions are in the light blue boxes below. You can cut and paste or build on these responses by adding your own so that government gets clear and consistent messages.

Early Learning and Child Care in BC Consultation Paper

We Want Your Input

We want your feedback and input on the direction and priorities for early learning and child care set out in the November 2005 *Early Learning and Child Care in British Columbia* consultation paper. Please read the consultation paper and take a few minutes to fill in the following response sheet. Please provide comments on all or any of the following areas.

1. BC's VISION FOR CHILDREN

British Columbia is committed to giving children the best future possible by increasing supports available for child care, early childhood development programs and early learning programs, all of which should increase the proportion of children entering school ready to learn.

"VISION" for Early Learning and Child Care in BC

Access to quality early learning and child care in all BC communities that meet the needs of all young children and their families.

What, if any, are your views on the "vision" statement for early learning and child care?

To meet the needs of all young children and families, we need a publicly funded child care system. Building this system should be BC's vision.

2. "GOALS" for Early Learning and Child Care in BC

- more children will enter school better prepared to succeed
- more BC families will have access to quality child care
- more families will have access to a range of early learning programs and services
- more children with special needs will be supported in order to be included in quality community-based child care settings
- more children will be cared for by qualified child care workers in regulated child care spaces
- more BC families will have access to community hubs where a range of integrated family services are located

What, if any, are your views on the "goals" for early learning and child care? Is a goal missing or does something need to be changed, added or deleted? And, if so, why?

These goals are too vague. Clear timelines and targets for increasing access to affordable, high quality child care over the next 5 years are required. These goals continue the false divide between child care and early learning. Quality child care IS early learning.

3. "PRINCIPLES" for Early Learning and Child Care as agreed to by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments:

- Quality
- Universally Inclusive
- Accessible
- Developmental

In addition to these four principles, the BC government had adopted the following:

- Choice and Flexibility
- Targeted Investments (to low income families and children with special needs)
- Integrated Services

If you have any comments on the principles, please indicate below.

CHOICE - Real choice depends on a comprehensive range of available, affordable, quality child care options. Current usage patterns do not reflect 'real choice'.
TARGETED INVESTMENTS – For 30 years, BC has put most of its child care spending into targeted child care programs. This approach has NOT built an equitable system. Now is the time to put public funds into building a system that entitles access for all.

4. Towards Quality Early Learning and Child Care: Building Blocks

Enhancements to Child Care Subsidy - Effective October 1, 2005

- increase in income threshold from approximately \$21,000 to approximately \$38,000 depending on individual circumstances;
- increase in subsidy rates to better reflect the cost of care;
- funding for children who do not attend a licensed group or preschool setting to allow them to benefit from a preschool experience

What, if any, are your views on the changes to enhance the child care subsidy program. Is there some way the program could be improved or changed?

Subsidies do not mean that families will be able to find a space.
Increases in subsidy rates lead to increases in fees.
Subsidies do not promote sustainable child care services.
Now is the time to shift funding priorities from subsidies to adequate and accountable operating funding.

Enhancements to Child Care Operating Funding - Effective October 1, 2005

- increase of 36.6% in operating funding for eligible licensed child care providers for services to children under six to support a stable supply of child care spaces
- link future operating funding increases to quality enhancement

What, if any, are your views on the changes to enhance the child care operator funding program. Is there some way the program could be improved or changed?

This should be government's top priority. Increase Child Care Operating Funding to adequate levels and tie it to affordability for families and increased staff compensation and recognition.
This is the only way to achieve the QUAD principles and to ensure accountability for public funds.

Enhancements to Child Care Capital Funding - Effective October 1, 2005

- increase in maximum Major Capital Funding Program for the creation of new licensed group child care spaces from \$250,000 to \$300,000 with a provincial contribution of 50%;
- new Targeted Major Capital Funding Program for Aboriginal communities and priority communities identified with the Early Development Instrument (EDI) to a maximum of \$500,000 with a provincial contribution of 90%;
- increase in the Minor Capital Funding Program for emergency repair and replacement from \$4000 to \$5000; child care providers with multiple licensed care types at the same facility are eligible for up to \$10,000.

What, if any, are your views on the changes to enhance the Child Care Capital Funding Program. Is there some way the program could be improved or changed?

Tie capital funding to credible community plans that identify short and long term priorities.
Once plans are developed, adequate capital funding must be provided to ensure that publicly developed child care is a permanent community asset.
Reacting to 'proposals' is not the way to go.

Supported Child Development - Supported Child Development (SCD) provides support to children with special needs to participate in child care and preschool programs in their communities.

- improve access to child care for children with special needs
- reduce wait times
- access to culturally appropriate SCD services for Aboriginal children

What do you think about these changes to improve access and reduce waiting times and build partnerships with Aboriginal communities to deliver Supported Child Development Services? Is there some way the program could be improved or changed?

Culturally appropriate services are essential.
To achieve real inclusion we need a strong, accessible system that meets the needs of all. Keep the SCD focus on supporting children's participation in regulated child care.

Community Planning and Partnerships

- community grant funding for community planning and development
- greater support and resources for Child Care Resource and Referral Centres (CCRR)
- integrated service delivery models for child care and early childhood development programs

What do you think about this proposal to work with communities to build child care planning capacity and to identify and develop early learning and child care programs that meet specific community needs? Is something missing or does something need to be changed or added? And, if so, why?

Do you have some specific ideas about how we should partner with communities to ensure that individual needs are identified and met?

A credible, transparent, community-based child care planning process through which local and regional child care priorities are identified is essential.
This requires the clear identification of a child care planning mandate and resourced community structures through which child care plans are developed.
The broad directions outlined above do not yet constitute a 'workable proposal'.

Human Resource Development

- establish a body of knowledge about the provincial child care sector
- develop strategies to recruit, train and retain new and existing workers

What do you think about this proposal to enhance child care human resource planning and development? Is something missing or does something need to be changed or added? And, if so, why?

The key problem is wages. Public funds must be used to bring caregiver wages, benefits and working conditions up to levels that match the education, experience and responsibilities required on the job.

Once these issues are addressed, access to training that leads to credentials is essential. But, without addressing these issues, public investment in training will not work as caregivers will continue to leave the field.

Early Learning Initiatives:

- families of preschool children have increased choice for early learning programs
- new options for families

What suggestions do you have for other early learning opportunities for children in BC?

End the false and dangerous separation between early learning and child care. Quality child care IS early learning whether delivered in family, group or pre-school settings.

Narrowly defined, part-time early literacy programs that focus on 'school readiness' do not meet children's developmental needs and do not meet the needs of the majority of BC's working and studying families.

5. "PRIORITIES" for improving quality of Early Learning and Child Care in BC.

Based on the Building Blocks or other ideas you may have, please indicate your five major priorities for early learning and child care in BC for the next five years. Please indicate why these priorities are important and list them in order of their importance to you (for example, the first item on the list should be the one that you consider the most important).

List of Priorities in order of importance:

Priority #1

Develop an adequate, accountable operating funding program that makes child care affordable for parents and provides caregivers with adequate incomes and recognition. This is the way to move away from the current user fee child care system to a publicly funded system.

Priority #2

End the false and dangerous divide between child care and early learning. Invest federal child care funds in quality, regulated child care programs that promote children's holistic development AND meet the needs of working and studying families.

Priority #3

Develop an accountable and credible process for child care planning at the community level to set priorities for new growth and development.

Priority #4

Restore provincial child care funding to 2001/02 levels and make investment in licensed school age child care the top priority for these funds.
Federal funds are for regulated child care for children under the age of 6. As a result, access to affordable, quality school-age care in BC needs to be a provincial priority.