

# Child Care Advocacy Forum

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## Participating Organizations:

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

## Child Care -- Why Should I Care? Current Facts and their Implications for Parents, Workers & Providers

We are very concerned over recent events in BC's child care sector. Here are a few reasons why you might share our concern.

### *As a parent, I care because...*

- ▶ *Children and parents need access to high quality, reliable child care.* The BC Child Care Funding Options Project (1998/99) reports that 31% of parents experienced a child care issue which interfered with finding or keeping a job, or pursuing education or training.
- ▶ *We can't afford higher fees.* BC parents already contribute \$1.3 billion annually to child care through fees; many are so over-burdened by the cost that they have no choice but to remove their children from high quality licensed, regulated programs and place them in less expensive but unregulated care.

### *As a child care worker, I care because...*

- ▶ *Our wages should reflect our training and responsibility.* Child care workers are among the best educated community social services professionals. Many providers in licensed or regulated settings complete post-secondary education in the field. Yet, whether in centre or family settings, they are among the poorest paid in this sector, earning lower wages than colleagues who do similar work in health or post-secondary education settings.
- ▶ *We should be treated like our colleagues throughout this sector.* Workers from across the community social services sector will benefit from the recent wage settlement, like all those who were involved in its negotiation -- except for child care workers. While other underpaid workers will get much-needed raises, most child care workers will stand alone at the bottom of the wage scale.

### *As a provider of licensed or regulated services, I care because...*

- ▶ *We cannot continue to balance the needs to pay our employees fairly and to keep fees affordable.* To attract and retain qualified, committed staff, employers must pay reasonable wages. Currently, the only way for employers to find the money to raise wages is to also raise parent fees. With higher parent fees, affordability is diminished.
- ▶ *We provide a valuable service to children, parents and the community.* Licensed, regulated child care enables parents to engage in work or study, helps children in their development and provides employment for skilled workers. It is truly a valuable community service, which requires money to pay for the trained staff and safe environment stipulated in provincial regulations. Without adequate funding, quality is compromised and licensed, regulated programs are vulnerable.

### *As a community, we care because...*

- ▶ *Children deserve the best.* Researchers identify caregivers' skills, caring and consistent relationship with the children in their care as the most important elements in determining quality of care. Inadequate funding for child care attacks those vital elements by preventing employers from being able to pay fair wages, and results in an inability to achieve stable program operation and staffing.

What has brought us to this critical concern?

On May 28, 1999, the BC government and community social services workers from 140 unionized agencies, including 18 child care agencies, reached an historic settlement. That settlement will now be used as a template in negotiations with **all other agencies in the community social services sector, except child care agencies.**

While staff at those child care agencies will benefit from the settlement, remaining child care agencies -- the vast majority of child care programs in this province -- will be shut out of deals which will be extended to their counterparts throughout the community social services sector.

Since the BC government established the Community Social Services Employers' Association (CSSEA) in 1994, child care has been defined as a division of the community social services sector. Now, government is contravening its own policy and commitment by excluding child care from the broader sector.

This move is occurring despite the following:

- ▶ consensus by researchers, policy makers and legislators that quality child care contributes to a child's social, emotional, physical and intellectual development
- ▶ research showing that every \$1 invested in Canadian child care yields a \$2 return for children, families and society (*The Benefits and Costs of Good Child Care*, 1998)
- ▶ guaranteed inclusion of child care as a CSSEA division under CSSEA by-laws, and approval of CSSEA divisions and constitutional items by the BC government

As a public service, child care receives BC government support in several ways. These include:

- ▶ subsidies to bridge the gap between what eligible parents can afford and what service providers need to charge to sustain their programs
- ▶ a low wage redress program to top up wages for low-paid child care workers
- ▶ programs providing funds to meet additional staffing needs for infants and toddlers, and for children with special needs
- ▶ resource and referral programs offering support, information and referrals to parents and care providers
- ▶ capital grants to help cover costs of emergency repairs, replacement of furnishings and relocation

While the BC government spends \$188.5 million on child care annually, most child care funding comes from individuals. Through service fees, parents contribute some \$1.3 billion annually to child care in BC. And, through low wages, child care workers also make a financial contribution to the services which employ them.

Our message is simple. By October 1, 1999, we are calling on the BC government to:

1. Provide fair and equitable access for the child care agencies to the wages and benefits established for the rest of the community social services sector
2. Commit to a publicly funded child care system that provides all children and families with access to a range of quality, regulated child care services

**Please join us!**