

# **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 of BC

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



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FOUNDATION

## **Child Care in the News November 2004**

In the summer of 2004, the new federal government reaffirmed its election promise to build a national child care system. This fall, a series of reports and events have kept child care and federal/provincial developments in the news.

1. Oct. 25, 2004 - the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) releases a comprehensive report on the troubling state of Canada's child care services.
2. Nov. 2, 2004 - the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC) releases "From Patchwork to Framework: A Child Care Strategy for Canada" outlining a 15-year plan for a child care system.
3. Nov. 3, 2004 - the federal/provincial/territorial ministers responsible for child care agree to move forwards with a national system of early learning and child care based on 4 principles of quality, universally inclusive, accessible and developmental child care.
4. Nov. 9, 2004 - the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council releases "Working for Change: Canada's Child Care Workforce", a comprehensive review of the regulated child care workforce.
5. Nov. 12-14, 2004 - over 600 delegates attend the "Child Care for A Change! *Shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*" conference in Winnipeg, the first such conference in over 20 years.

Given the speed with which events are unfolding, the Advocacy Forum has chosen to focus on the cumulative messages about the problem, the solutions, governments' responses and our child care advocacy agenda.

## **The Problem**

All of the reports issued this fall confirm what the child care community has been saying for a long time.

The **OECD** report is particularly noteworthy because it comes from Canada's trading partners and compares Canada's approach to young children with what is done in other countries with comparable levels of development.

The OECD describes the fragmented, poorly funded and marginalized state of child care services in most of Canada today. The report highlights the lack of growth in the system over the last decade (other than in Quebec); a general stagnation in quality (despite some high quality programs); low levels of public investment; excessive parental contributions; inefficient subsidy systems and problems associated with the separation of child care from early childhood. The report concludes that Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada "seems insufficient, inconsistent and underfunded."

BC was one of 4 provinces visited by the OECD team who affirmed that that the number of licensed child care spaces in BC still falls far short of the need. While noting some high quality programs, such as Langara Child Development Centre,

the OECD Team “was concerned in British Columbia by the apparent lack of coordination, by a failure to establish early childhood education and care as *the* mainstream services for children and families (through which special needs and vulnerable children could be served in an inclusive way) and the fragmentation of a relatively small budget among so many different groups and services.” (The OECD Report is available at <http://www11.sdc.gc.ca/en/cs/sp/socpol/publications/reports/2004-002623/english.pdf>)

The **CCAAC** highlights and describes 5 reasons for the current patchwork of child care services – poorly resourced and vulnerable services; an artificial distinction between child care and child development resulting in ‘anything but child care’ policies; continued ambivalence about the role of mothers in the paid labour force; and the absence of a public policy framework.

(The CCAAC’s report is available at [http://www.childcareadvocacy.ca/resources/pdf/framework\\_cc.pdf](http://www.childcareadvocacy.ca/resources/pdf/framework_cc.pdf))

The **Child Care Human Resources Sector Council** report focuses on those who work in the regulated child care sector and examines recruitment, retention and recognition issues over the last 6 years. The Sector Council’s media release about the report states that “wages and working conditions are so poor in many licensed child care settings that staff are taking their child development expertise elsewhere. Staff turnover has long plagued the child care sector but ... the situation has never been worse. Ironically, the recent influx of federal funding for early childhood initiatives has contributed to the problem. Many provinces have by-passed child care to use their federal funds to develop health and education programs for young children where early childhood educators can apply their training with less hassle and for more money.” (The Sector Council report is available at <http://www.ccsc-cssge.ca/english/pdf/workingforchange/CCHRSC%20MAIN-e.pdf>)

Regrettably none of this is news for child care advocates, parents or providers. Yet, these reports individually and collectively paint a picture that should make our politicians ashamed!

With a reported federal budget surplus of close to \$9 billion and a projected provincial budget surplus of over \$1 billion – there is no excuse for inaction.

**The Solutions** - Perhaps the ‘real news’ is that all of these reports recommend very similar things:

The **OECD** recommends:

1. A coherent vision for a publicly funded, universal system of early childhood learning and care.
2. A significant increase in public investment (funding) for child care delivered through supply side mechanisms (that is funding directly to services rather than through subsidies to parents).
3. Considerable effort to support and sustain quality.

The **CCAAC** provides a detailed 15 year strategy built around 3 main recommendations:

1. Enacting legislation with supporting agreements outlining service entitlement, standards, quality enhancements, and accountability and leadership responsibilities.
2. Establishing a schedule for federal funding to reach 1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2020 outlining goals and timelines for funding and service provision in 5-year increments over a 15-year period. (The report includes a detailed 15 year roll out.)
3. Supporting parents to balance work and family responsibilities by enhancing maternity/parental benefits and family responsibility leaves.

The **Child Care Sector Council** identifies 4 key policy areas that must be addressed:

1. A general policy framework that clearly recognizes the central role of child care to ECD strategies.
2. Coherent public policies across the sector to effectively manage the demand for child care and early childhood development educators.
3. Sufficient funding of the sector.
4. Labour market information to guide decision making.

The Report also makes specific recommendations for addressing challenges in the regulated child care sector including increased pay and benefits; increased attachment to professional, labour and advocacy organizations; and reframing the 'child care' versus 'early child development' dialogue.

The **"Child Care For A Change! *Shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*" Conference** was not designed to make specific recommendations. Yet, the consistency in the evidence and experience shared by presenters and participants was note worthy. Marcel Lauziere, President of the CCSD, the organization that sponsored the Conference, said in an Open Letter to the Prime Minister, "It (the evidence and experience) points clearly to a publicly financed system – available and affordable by all families (like Quebec's \$7 a-day system) – as the way forward." At the Conference, the need to base a new child care system on the best, rather than on the failings of the old, was echoed consistently. (Conference proceedings will be available at <http://www.ccsd.ca/home.htm>)

Each of these reports contain recommendations that go beyond the "Common Vision and Agenda" endorsed by the six member organizations of the BC Child Care Advocacy Forum.

Yet, for us, the main lessons are clear:

- ✓ The research confirms and affirms the positions we have taken.
- ✓ For most of Canada's children, including those in BC, the situation has not gotten better.
- ✓ There are solutions. Other countries are doing it and so can we.

## Government's Response

During the last federal election, the federal Liberal party made child care a top priority. They promised to build a national child care system based on four principles – Quality, Universality, Accessibility, and Developmental programming (QUAD); to enshrine these principles in legislation and to provide \$5 billion over 5 years to provinces and territories to begin to build the system.

The Prime Minister named Ken Dryden as the new federal Minister for Social Development with responsibility for delivering on this promise. On Nov. 1 and 2, Minister Dryden met with provincial and territorial ministers responsible for child care to begin working on an agreement around child care. At the end of these meetings, ministers released a joint communiqué that provides the first indication of where federal/provincial/territorial discussions are headed. [Quebec did not sign the communiqué.] (See the full communiqué at [http://www.scics.gc.ca/cinfo04/830828004\\_e.html](http://www.scics.gc.ca/cinfo04/830828004_e.html)).

The communiqué states that the federal, provincial and territorial governments (excluding Quebec) "agree on shared principles to guide the development of a new national system of early learning and child care." These guiding principles are Quality, Universally Inclusive (which replaced universality), Accessible and Developmental. The ministers state they will "build on the success of the 2003 Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care,..." and will meet again in January 2005 to finalize an agreement so that funds can be available in the 2005-06 fiscal year.

On Nov. 15, BC's Minister of Children and Family Development, Stan Hagen, issued a media release reaffirming his support for the four principles of quality, universally inclusive, accessible and developmental child care and will use any new federal funds to support his government's current approach to child care. "Most notably, the agreed-upon principles respond to B.C.'s commitment to choice and flexibility for families, and to targeting families most in need, while ensuring our approach is fiscally responsible and sustainable." (See Hagen's statement at [http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/nrm\\_news\\_releases/2004MCF0029-000966.pdf](http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/nrm_news_releases/2004MCF0029-000966.pdf))

## Our Advocacy Agenda

We are at a critical moment in Canada's child care history. If we get the building blocks right, we may well be on our way to building a child care system we can all be proud of. But, if we get the fundamentals wrong, another generation of children and families will pay the price.

While we are encouraged that the ministers feel they made progress, the communiqué and media release indicate that they have a lot of work ahead of them to 'get it right'. Here's why.

1. The Advocacy Forum has repeatedly **called on the federal government to hold provinces accountable for the child care funds they receive**. Federal funds should be tied to provincial multiyear plans, with timelines and targets, for building a publicly funded child care system and should be used to supplement, not replace, provincial spending.

As a result, we are concerned that the ministers point to "the success of the 2003 Federal-Provincial-Territorial (F/P/T) Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care." In BC, existing federal/provincial agreements have **not** been successful. BC made significant cuts to its own child care funding and used federal funds to replace some of these cuts. In spite of having received almost \$250 million in the last 4 years under two F/P/T agreements for ECD and child care, child care in BC is worse off. A new federal/provincial agreement must ensure this cannot happen again.

2. The Advocacy Forum has repeatedly called on our provincial government **to develop and implement a five-year plan for moving away from the current user fee/subsidy system to a publicly funded, quality system for children from birth to twelve years of age**.

As a result, we are concerned that Minister Hagen is likely to spend new federal funds much as his government has to date. This approach is not supported by the evidence that demonstrates the need for coherent public policies, the integration of child care and early development; adequate, stable public funding and serious attention to quality.

3. The Advocacy Forum is working for a child care system that **entitles all children access to quality child care programs**.

As a result, we are confused by the decision to replace the principle of 'universality' with 'universally inclusive'. We fully support inclusive child care that meets the needs of children with a full range of abilities but expect Minister Dryden to keep his promise to build a system that works for **all**.

When Ministers Dryden and Hagen meet again in January, they need to build a system that:

- ✓ Moves away from the current user fee/subsidy patchwork to a publicly funded system.
- ✓ Ties federal funds to provincial plans for building a high quality, publicly funded system.
- ✓ Entitles all children access to quality child care and early childhood programs regardless of their families' income or employment status.