

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 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



VANCOUVER
FOUNDATION

Submission to the BC Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services Pre-Budget Consultation, Fall 2003

INTRODUCTION

The Child Care Advocacy Forum is an alliance of 6 provincial child care organizations that brings together over 4000 individuals, groups and service providers in BC. Since 1999, the Advocacy Forum has worked to advance a "Common Vision and Agenda for Child Care Services in BC". (http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/forum/common_agenda.html)

The Advocacy Forum advocates for a publicly funded child care system that:

- Entitles all children to access quality child care programs regardless of their families' economic or employment status.
- Offers families choices from a range of coordinated, licensed, affordable, quality child care and early childhood programs.
- Provides early childhood educators with wages, benefits and working conditions that are commensurate with their responsibilities.
- Is the cornerstone of a comprehensive early childhood development strategy and a key piece of comprehensive family policy that includes extended parental leave and progressive family/work policies.

The work of the Advocacy Forum is based on the accumulated evidence of over three decades of research. This growing body of research confirms the need for a comprehensive child care system in BC; the benefits of public investment in quality child care for children, families, and society at large; and the degree to which our province and country are lagging behind other developed societies in addressing this issue.

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN BC

The Advocacy Forum is increasingly concerned about the negative impact that provincial cuts to child care funding are having on children, families and child care services across BC. Here is why:

1. The vast majority of BC mothers of young children work outside of the home. Statistics from 2001, indicate that 62.8% of mothers with children two years of age and younger, 69.4% of mothers of children from 3-5 years of age and 77.3% of mothers of children 6-15 participate in BC's workforce. In total, the mothers of 388,900 BC children aged 0-12 were in the paid labour force. ⁱ

2. There are not enough regulated child care spaces to meet the need. In 2001, BC had only 72,949 regulated child care spaces which meets the needs of 12.1% of children under the age of 12. As a result of this shortage, close to 317,000 children under the age of 12 whose mothers are in the paid labour force do NOT have access to a regulated child care space. ⁱⁱ

3. The quality of care that children receive in their early years affects their life long development. Quality care in children's early years promotes healthy development, while poor quality care can do harm. The factors associated with quality child care, including trained and adequately compensated staff, maximum group sizes, adult:child ratios and developmentally appropriate programming are more likely to be found in regulated child care. Yet, given the shortage of regulated child care spaces in BC, the majority of children with working mothers are in unregulated care.

4. The last two provincial budgets included significant cuts to child care funding – with more to come. Over a three year period, the provincial government has cut or has announced its intention to cut over \$50 million from an already inadequate child care budget.

5. Provincial cuts are eroding an already fragile child care system. A survey of 700 BC caregivers in the fall of 2002 indicated that as a result of provincial funding cuts, 57% of child care programs have fewer subsidized children, 49% have decreased enrolment, 31% have had to increase fees, 19% fear they may have to close their doors in the near future and 52% are concerned about their future viability. Across BC, fewer families can afford regulated care, caregiver wages are dropping and licensed child care spaces are being lostⁱⁱⁱ.

6. Provincial policies are creating a two-tiered child care system. As a result of cuts to the child care subsidy program, and other cuts that have led to increases in child care fees, many low and moderate income families have had to withdraw their children from licensed care. Programs that serve these families have vacancies and some have closed or reduced service. Yet, programs in more affluent communities, where families can pay full fees, are fully enrolled, often with long wait lists. The new provincial Child Care Operating Funding (CCOF) introduced in April 2003 is making things worse. Under CCOF, a program's grant is based on their actual enrolment. Programs that are fully enrolled, usually because they serve families who can afford to pay, receive the most money. Programs with vacancies, because the families they serve can't afford to enroll, receive less. This leads to quality care for those who can afford it and substandard care for the rest.

7. BC is not spending designated federal transfer payments on regulated child care. Under the Early Childhood Development Agreement, BC will receive \$291 million over 5 years (2000/01 –2004/05) from the federal government to spend on the early years. To date, BC has only reported on its first year's spending of which only \$6 million of a total \$39.9 million went to child care. The second source of federal funds is the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care through which BC will receive an additional \$121.6 million over 5 years. These funds are to be used 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".^{iv} Yet, BC is spending all of its first year Multilateral Framework allocation of \$3.3 million on Supported Child Care –a program that is simultaneously being redesigned by the Ministry of Children and Family Development to focus on child development rather than child care. While BC could invest an additional \$166.4 million of federal funds on regulated child care, instead the province is spending it on 'anything but child care' and to replace, rather than supplement, provincial spending.

RECOMMENDATIONS

BC can't work without child care. In the short term, BC's economy can only work when parents have access to quality, stable and affordable care for their children. In the long-term, BC's economy can only work when children have quality care during their critically important early years that helps them to become healthy, contributing members of our society. Like other economic and social stimuli, child care must be a priority area for investment in our future.

We therefore recommend that, in developing its 2004/05 budget, the provincial government:

1. Reverse child care funding cuts that are destabilizing child care in BC, withdraw plans to make further cuts and restore provincial spending on child care to 2001/02 levels.
2. Develop and implement a comprehensive 5-year plan that moves child care from a user fee system to one funded, like other public programs, through the tax system.
3. Use federal dollars to complement, not replace, provincial child care spending and ensure that federal dollars are spent on regulated child care programs that set a benchmark for quality care in BC.

ⁱ Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada, 2001, Childcare Resource and Research Unit, University of Toronto

ⁱⁱ Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada, 2001, Childcare Resource and Research Unit, University of Toronto

ⁱⁱⁱ Where Are The Children? 2002, BC Child Care Advocacy Forum

^{iv} Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, 2003