

Three Point Plan for Child Care: *Investing to Achieve BC's Goals*

In September 2005 the Governments of British Columbia and Canada signed an Agreement-in-Principle that provides BC with 5 year federal funding for early learning and child care totaling \$633 million. These funds, which are in addition to federal transfers already committed for early childhood development, learning and care, provide an unprecedented opportunity to advance *BC's Goals* for the next decade.

Achieving BC's Goals

Child care in BC is currently at a crossroads. Without a focused investment strategy in quality child care, BC runs the risk of dispersing these substantial new federal funds into a range of fragmented, short-term and/or single-purpose programs that don't meet the needs of BC families or support the province's vision of becoming the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent; leading the way in healthy living; building the best system of support in Canada for vulnerable populations; and creating more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada.¹

Quality child care is early learning, and "a cornerstone of early childhood development."² With more than 70% of BC's mothers in the work force, and regulated child care spaces available for less than 20% of their children, it's clear that BC children need child care more than any other early childhood development program.

All children in BC have access to our internationally renowned public education system. Unlike our schools, libraries, and other early

childhood development programs, however, child care in BC has not benefited from the long-term public investment needed to support children, families and communities. As a result, families in BC struggle to access quality, affordable child care, and the province's goals are compromised.

High quality, affordable and accessible child care services are essential to achieving BC's goals as they promote literacy and healthy living (BC Goals 1 & 2), support children with diverse needs (BC Goal 3) and enable parents to fully participate in the workforce (BC Goal 5). Child care also advances women's equality and helps parents achieve work-life balance.

The YWCA of Vancouver has provided licensed, quality child care services in Vancouver for over 23 years. We understand the challenges that both families and care providers experience in their efforts to access and sustain high quality, affordable care. Accordingly, we are calling on the provincial government to invest federal child care funds in ways that will be accountable for advancing the goals of our province. Grounded in experience³ and research evidence,⁴ our *Three Point Plan for Child Care* outlines priority investments that will advance a range of high quality, affordable and accessible child care services for BC families.

Three Point Plan for Child Care

Utilizing federal funds provided through the *Multilateral Framework and Agreement-in-Principle on Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC)*, the YWCA of Vancouver calls for increased and direct public investment to:

1. Strengthen our licensed family and centre-based child care services, ensuring accountability for improved quality for children, affordability for families, and accessibility for all.

2. Expand the number of accountable, licensed family and centre-based child care spaces in BC, based on community plans and priority setting.

Utilizing federal funds provided through the *Early Childhood Development Agreement*, the YWCA of Vancouver also calls for:

3. Development of a comprehensive, integrated family policy for BC that enhances publicly funded early childhood development programs, with particular emphasis on family literacy, and integrates these programs with the publicly funded child care system as it develops.

Our *Three Point Plan for Child Care* reflects a change from BC's historical child care investment strategy. For more than 20 years, BC has relied on user fees, with public subsidies for lower income families; yet, research⁵ shows that these methods do not ensure that high quality child care is available and affordable.

While the Province has recently introduced direct funding to child care programs,⁶ currently these funds lack accountability for ensuring that: quality is advanced (by investing in a trained and appropriately-compensated child care workforce); parent fees are reduced; and more spaces are developed according to community needs.

A focused investment strategy is therefore needed to ensure that:

- **Increased federal early learning and child care funds will demonstrably advance high quality child care that is affordable, accessible and inclusive; and**
- **Existing federal early childhood development funds will continue to advance other early childhood programs, with a particular emphasis on family literacy.**

The YWCA's *Three Point Plan* supports government and communities in assessing the incremental progress that BC can and should achieve with new public investments in child care.

Table 1. *Three Point Plan for Child Care* recommended allocation of federal transfers available under Federal /Provincial/ Territorial Agreements for children under six

(\$ in millions)	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Focused investment in quality child care:			
Multilateral Framework on ELCC	30	40	46
Agreement-in-Principle on ELCC	<u>92</u>	<u>86</u>	<u>152</u>
	122	126	198
Further investment in other early childhood development services:*			
Early Childhood Development Agreement	<u>66</u>	<u>66</u>	<u>66</u>
Total federal transfers available for children under 6			
	\$188	\$192	\$264

*BC's public reporting to date under the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Agreement indicates that approximately \$14 million in unspent federal transfers from previous years is available to address BC's ECD priorities, such as family literacy.

In our report *Lots to Build On, More to Do*⁷ we developed a **planning tool** for an evidence-based accountability framework. As public funding for child care increases, this tool calculates the expected progress on financial indicators for quality (investment in human resources), affordability (reduced parent fees) and accessibility (inclusion, and additional spaces). **We are pleased to present this report and our *Three Point Plan* as references for planning public investment in child care.**

Now is our chance to advance quality child care in BC. While there is not yet enough public funding in place to build a full child care system, a focused investment strategy can and should measurably strengthen and expand the child care services that already exist in communities across our province. Working together, government and communities can demonstrate incremental improvements in BC's child care system – advancing BC's *Goals* and providing a sound rationale for continued federal funding.

For more information regarding the *Three Point Plan for Child Care* contact Janet Austin, CEO, YWCA of Vancouver at (604) 895-5751.

Endnotes

- 1 Quoted here are four of *Five Goals for a Golden Decade*, Premier Campbell www.gov.bc.ca
- 2 Annual Report 2003/2004 *Activities and Expenditures on Early Childhood Development and Learning and Child Care*. Government of British Columbia, Page 28.
- 3 Anderson, Lynell. (2005) *Lots to Build On, More to Do*. A report to the YWCA of Canada
- 4 See, for example, "What does the research say about the QUAD child care principles?" Human Early Learning Partnership, (UBC, 2005) available at http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca/documents/HELPS_QUAD_Research_Summary.pdf and "Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care", Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, June 2001.
- 5 See, for example, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Early Childhood Education and Care Policy: Canada*. Country Note 2004. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/42/34/33850725.pdf> Pages 58, 73 & 76.
- 6 BC's Child Care Operating Fund provides limited direct funding to licensed centre and family-based child care services
- 7 Full report available at www.ywcavan.org/