



Working together for a community based, non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible, publicly funded and accountable.

Will Coordination Solve BC's Child Care Crisis?

The momentum behind the \$10 A Day Child Care Plan put child care on the front burner in BC's May 2013 election. With support for the Plan representing over 1.6 million British Columbians, every political party in the running found it necessary to address child care in their platform.

The governing Liberal Party promised an Early Years Strategy that was supposed to help "parents balance the demands of work and raising a family, and setting children up for lifelong success."

But their proposed strategy is actually an early years **false promise**. It contains none of the key elements required to make substantive progress towards helping families with work/life balance.

In their platform, the Liberals promised to direct funds to:

- Create 2000 new child care spaces - *but have no plans to address the affordability of those spaces, or how community needs will be identified.*
- Improve quality of early childhood educators and school age providers – *but have no plans to ensure that early childhood educators earn a living wage.*
- Strengthen the coordination of early childhood development programs and child care services – *but it isn't coordination that will fix the worsening child care crisis. Building a system is what is needed.*

The Liberals also promised to improve coordination of early years services through:

- **A new office** – a Provincial Office for Early Years to coordinate all policy and service improvements.
- **Information and referral** – a network of early years centres across BC to offer one-stop access to a range of services and access to up-to-date child care and early childhood development information, advice and referral services for parents *even though Child Care Resource and Referral Services are already doing that job.*
- **Stronger links** – between child care services and early years programs such as StrongStart BC; Ready, Set, Learn; and early childhood mental health and special needs programs.
- **A provincial child care registry** – to provide parents with better information about the availability (*or lack*) of spaces in their community *even though the MCFD website already has made an online searchable child care programs and services map available to parents.*

There are benefits to some of the proposed initiatives, but a new government office, a registry, and the provision of more information about and stronger links between *existing* early years services will not address the desperate need for affordable, accessible child care services. Currently, only 20% of BC's children have access to a regulated child care space, yet the majority of parents are in the labour force, and many are paying annual child care fees greater than annual university fees.

Since the election, the Liberals have recommitted to the Early Years Strategy. Stephanie Cadieux has been re-appointed Minister for Children and Family Development (MCFD). Her mandate letter from the Premier begins with the following cross-ministry list of priorities: passing Budget 2013, ensuring government doesn't grow, conducting a core review, and eliminating red tape. (See www.gov.bc.ca/premier/cabinet_ministers/stephanie_cadieux_mandate_letter.pdf)

One of the four initiatives that the Premier expects the Minister and Ministry to complete is the implementation of the Early Years Strategy. This means that over the next four years the Ministry's focus will be on 'strengthening coordination' and growing the bureaucracy instead of addressing the lack of affordable child care services. In fact, although child care is within Minister Cadieux's mandate, it is not mentioned in the mandate letter. The child care crisis that has been building over the past 12 years will worsen. The majority of BC parents with young children are in or need to be in the labour force. Parents need a child care system that supports them as they contribute to the provincial economy.

Why the Focus on Coordination?

There are two reasons why government would choose to focus on 'coordination'.

First, it costs relatively little money - only \$7 million is promised. And, it is possible that government expects a 'coordination' agenda to save money down the road as discreet, specialized programs are consolidated.

Second, as explained by Minister Cadieux in February 2013 when plans for the Early Years Strategy were announced, there is fragmentation in the sector:

"As our government has increased services for young children over the last several years, the system has grown somewhat fragmented. Now as we implement the Early Years Strategy, we'll be able to offer convenient access to up-to-date child care and early childhood development information, advice and referral services for parents."

In many ways, we agree. Over the past 10 years the BC government has used federal transfer payments intended for early childhood programs, including child care, to fund a number of non-child care Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs: Children First, Success by Six, StrongStart, Family Resource Programs,

Nobody's Perfect, etc. While each of the ECD programs make important contributions, they were not introduced into communities in a coherent way. This has resulted in fragmentation and in some cases duplication.

BC's non-child care ECD programs may in fact benefit from better coordination as long as coordination is not simply a cover for budget cuts. An enhanced role for community-based ECD tables makes sense. The vital role that BC's Child Care Resource and Referral Programs already play in providing parents with up-to-date child care information and referral in over 400 communities across the province must also be respected and not diminished.

***Coordination is NOT a child care problem.
It will NOT solve BC's child care crisis.***

What's Needed to Solve the Child Care Crisis?

Solving the child care crisis requires **systemic change** that goes far beyond the coordination, collaboration and integration proposed in the Early Years Strategy. That's because there are fundamental differences between child care and BC's other ECD services.

Other non-child care ECD services are:

- Funded directly by government to cover a majority of their operating costs.
- Affordable for all families – with nominal or no fee regardless of family income.
- Accessible to families who have a parent at home to attend programs with children.
- Planned by government to ensure communities are served equitably.
- Delivered by non-profit organizations and school boards that are accountable to their members and communities.

These ECD services are an accepted part of government's services for families with young children. So, suggested improvements can be achieved within the existing system. That is why improvements to non-child care ECD services require **service advocacy** that focuses on coordinating, strengthening and extending existing services within the existing system.

Regrettably, child care does not yet benefit from the conditions that government affords other ECD services. This puts working families and their children at a distinct disadvantage.

Child care services:

- Only receive government funds to cover about 10% of their budgets – the rest comes from parent user fees. Fees have reached a high of \$1915/month

per child, and in 2012 the BC median annual child care fee for a toddler was \$10,884.

- There is only a licensed space for about 20% of BC children.
- No level of government is responsible for child care planning. Development is ad hoc with most services clustered in areas where families can afford to pay high fees. As a result, most BC families cannot find or afford a quality, licensed space.
- A growing number of BC's child care spaces are delivered by corporations, companies, and individuals who are responsible to their shareholders and owners – not the community.

In short, government has not yet accepted responsibility for building and maintaining a quality child care system that meets the needs of families with young children – predominantly parents in the labour force.

That is why solving the child care crisis requires **systemic advocacy** – advocacy directed at the fundamental change, as proposed in the \$10/a Day Child Care Plan.

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC supports the **service advocacy** undertaken by those in the non-child care ECD sector to better coordinate their services. We trust the non-child care ECD sector will support our focus on the child care sector's need for systemic change as outlined in the \$10/Day Plan.

This includes:

- Moving responsibility for child care into the Ministry of Education.
- A new BC Early Care and Learning Act to enshrine families' right to access quality, play-based early care and learning programs on a voluntary basis.
- A stable and adequate 5 year budget with public funds to lower fees, raise wages and increase access to quality programs.

**Something that doesn't exist can't be coordinated.
Building a child care system is what BC families need their
government to do.**