

Ten reasons why universality is important in public services ^[1]

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Introduction

In 2016, Charlotte Kiddell, of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), was one of ten Canadians selected to meet “face to face” with Prime Minister Trudeau. The CFS has been a key partner in the Nova Scotia Changing Public Services network, and Charlotte is the CFS representative on the project. Remarkable in many ways, one of the things that was striking in Charlotte’s conversation with the Prime Minister, was his resistance to the vital principle of universality in social programs. In the case of both child care and post-secondary education (PSE), Trudeau resorted to targeted solutions. Since this approach is at odd with our findings in CPS, we thought it provided an excellent opportunity to reflect on a significant theme in public services.

In the community-based conversations we held through CPS, the need to protect and develop universal public services was a recurring theme. Participants from a diversity of backgrounds and social locations noted that one of the ways that public services are changing is that governments are moving away from universal toward targeted approaches. However, publicly funded universal child care and PSE are essential elements of an equitable future for this country. Universality in child care and PSE means that everyone will have access, not only those who can afford it. As the Prime Minister’s comments reflect broader trends toward targeting and misconceptions about the delivery of public services, we would like to outline the importance of the principle of universality.

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