

CCAAC presentation to FINA on the 2017 Federal Budget ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full video clip online (skip to 17:12:29) ^[2]

Full transcript

Thank you very much Mr. Chair and members of the Committee for the invitation to be here this afternoon.

There is no longer any dispute that parents in Canada with young children are in desperate need of greater government support.

High quality child care is limited and financially out of the reach of the great majority of families. Consequently, parents—and particularly mothers—are forced to find alternatives. They withdraw from the paid work force, or lessen their attachment to it, or delay entry. Or, they turn to more affordable, lower quality, makeshift child care arrangements. The damage to children's well-being, to women's economic equality, to family security, and to the Canadian economy is severe and well documented.

The Liberal Party of Canada's election platform promised economic security for the middle class and help for modern Canadian families. As part of this commitment, Canadians were told a Liberal government would "ensure the availability of affordable, high-quality, fully inclusive child care for all families who need it."

Yet, neither the Liberal government's first or second budget delivers on that promise. The 2016 budget gave only one-year of funding for early learning and care in 2017. The 2017 budget allocates funding in each subsequent year until 2028. Yet the sum of money to be transferred to the provinces and territories each year falls far, far short of what is required to build a fully-funded comprehensive child care system over the next ten years. The funding starts in 2017 at only \$500 million. By 2022, it will have increased by only \$50 million, and that amount must be divided up between ten provinces and three territories. To put this in perspective, the province of Quebec alone already spends \$2.5 billion a year on its child care program.

Further, following the tabling of the budget, both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development publicly stated that the government's intention is not to help all families access affordable child care, but rather to target support to those with low and modest-incomes.

In other words, when it comes to child care, they are abandoning the middle class. And they are acting in direct opposition to the contemporary international consensus and overwhelming research that affirms a universal approach is more effective than a targeted one.

Only a universal and comprehensive approach can:

- generate the well-documented economic benefits of early childhood education and care
- help all Canadian families and give them the choices in child care they seek,
- and sustain ongoing public support.

Most importantly, the research tells us that universal early childhood education and care is the best way to meet the development goals we wish for all children regardless of their family's social or economic status.

The direction the government is taking child care is not just insufficient. It runs contrary to evidence, and sets us back. This is also true of the related changes to the maternity and parental EI benefits set out in Bill C-44. During the public consultation process on these changes, the most common reason given by those who supported the government's proposal to extend the leave period to 18 months was the lack of available affordable child care for children under 18 months.

But reducing parents EI parental benefits so that they can stay on leave longer is a bad substitute for affordable quality child care for all.

What would really help working parents before and after the birth or adoption of children, in addition to affordable child care, is easier access to maternity and parental benefits, and higher benefits. As it is, too many parents don't qualify or can't afford to forfeit their regular pay cheques. Changing the EI program in line with the already tested Quebec Parental Insurance Program (QPIP) would be a much more positive step forward.

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: accessibility ^[4]

affordability ^[5]

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[6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/universal>

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