

Canada must take a lesson from COVID-19 and build a child care system ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Child Care Now is urging the federal government to learn the lesson COVID-19 has offered and move to rapidly improve and expand the child care and early learning sector.

“Across the country governments had to re-open some child care centres at the height of the pandemic because without it, the health care system could not function and other vital services were at risk,” said Morna Ballantyne. “This is illustrative of how early childhood learning and child care underpins the rest of the country’s economy and human endeavours.”

Despite this, Ballantyne says, the sector is alarmingly fragile. “It’s completely market based. Wages are low, jobs precarious and any improvement to quality or availability come at direct cost to parents — mostly women — who must always engage in a bitter calculus of whether going to work is ‘worth it’.

Child Care Now is asking the Trudeau government to allocate to child care and early learning \$2.4 billion of the \$14 billion it recently announced to help provinces ‘re-open’ their economies.

“Child care providers need support to re-open safely so that they can be there for children and also for their parents, especially mothers who need access to the labour force after suffering disproportionate levels of job loss during the pandemic,” Ballantyne said.

“At the same time, the federal government must also start building a system of child care like what we have for other vital services including public education and health care. Without a system in place, child care will remain the improvised, uneven and inadequate collection of offerings that stress parents and hold them back at every turn,” she added.

Child Care Now’s plan ^[3] would see a second phase of federal investment after the initial re-opening investment: \$2 billion more per year to move Canada towards a fully publicly funded system, in partnership with the provinces/territories and Indigenous governments.

The federal government would also set up a secretariat to lead and co-ordinate its early learning and child care work and adopt legislation — similar to the Canada Health Act — to set out principles, conditions and accountability mechanisms for federal child care payments to provinces/territories.

“Seven out of every ten child care providers had doubts about re-opening after COVID-19 ^[4], Ballantyne said. “It’s inconceivable to think of any other essential service — water treatment, fire fighting or hospitals, say — being so precarious. We can learn the lesson this virus has taught us about the importance of crisis-proof systems. But we have to start now.”

Related link: A strategy for recovery: Making affordable child care for ALL a reality ^[5]

Region: Canada ^[6]

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