

2005/06 pre-budget consultation ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

Text of the presentation:

The Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (or CCAAC) is pleased to present to the Standing Committee on Finance. We are a pan-Canadian membership based organization, formed in 1982, and we believe that child care is a cornerstone of progressive family policies.

Child care is generally defined as a non-compulsory service that promotes the healthy development of children, at the same time as it provides parenting supports and resources and enables parents to work, study, care for other family members and/or to participate in their community.

Numerous studies, commissions and policy documents concur that quality child care is essential to addressing many of our most pressing societal challenges including promoting a healthy population, reducing child poverty, advancing women's equality, deepening social inclusion and building a knowledge economy.

The federal government's commitment to new investments in child care, based on the Quebec model, represent both a social victory and a priority for the 2005/2006 federal budget. The CCAAC respects Quebec's leadership in developing a quality, universal, publicly funded child care system, and supports Quebec's access to federal funding to further advance their comprehensive family policy.

New investments in child care are important, because Canada currently spends only about 0.2 % of GDP on educating its youngest children; about half the average spent by other industrialized countries in the OECD. We need to substantially increase our public funding for quality, universal child care in order to gain the proven social and economic benefits.

The CCAAC has developed a comprehensive policy framework in an effort to address the well known concerns about child care in Canada. Our strategy was developed out of a year-long citizen engagement process, and the findings are based on research documenting the essentials of good quality services and the lessons learned by other countries that have comprehensive early learning and child care systems. The proposals are directed to the government of Canada and are focused on action required outside Quebec.

From Patchwork to Framework: A Child Care Strategy for Canada (released by the CCAAC, November, 2004, copies provided today) lays out a detailed 15-year schedule for new federal child care funding and legislation tied to provincial and territorial plans for local delivery of quality, universal, publicly funded child care. The strategy also includes policies to help parents balance work and family responsibilities.

Our plan provides access to quality, regulated child care on a full-time or part-time basis for all children from birth to six years, with parents contributing 20% of the overall costs. It calls for staged increases in federal funding in five year increments that would reach an annual investment of about \$10 billion, or 1 % of Canada's GDP the minimum funding level recommended by the European Union Child Care Network for its member countries.

Our 15 year plan sees annual federal funding increase to \$5 billion by year 5, as compared to the current federal commitment that averages \$1 billion per year over the next 5 years.

But it's about more than money.

We've learned that effective early learning and child care systems can only exist in the presence of a strong public policy framework. Layering new funding on top of the current patchwork - in the absence of an adequate infrastructure, accountability mechanisms, and family supports - will not result in the desired outcomes that are urgently needed in Canada.

In addition, to ensure that all funding remains within the child care services and that Canada's trade commitments do not constrain our new child care system, we recommend a policy commitment to public and or non-profit delivery.

To summarize, while the current federal commitment of \$5 billion over 5 years is an important first step towards the building of a national child care system, in 2005/06 we specifically urge government to:

1. Increase this investment as outlined in our strategy, and ensure it is sustained over the long term.
2. Move from the current user pay and subsidy patchwork to publicly fund child care programs, as in Quebec and many OECD countries, with parents contributing 20% of the overall cost.

3. Enshrine the principles of child care in legislation and introduce standards that guarantee quality, universal, accessible, developmental and inclusive programs.
4. Agree that all expansion takes place through public and/or not for profit delivery.
5. Tie provincial and territorial accountability to five-year plans.

Canada's families can't wait any longer. A pan-Canadian child care system lays the foundation for our future economy and a sustainable quality of life for all Canadians.

Thank you.

Related link: From patchwork to framework: A child care strategy for Canada ^[2]

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