

FACT SHEET #3 What are Action Plans and Who Develops Them?

In the most recent Federal-Provincial-Territorial (FPT) Agreements-in-Principle on Early Learning and Child Care (or Bi-laterals), provinces and territories commit to developing Action Plans (or in Alberta – it is called a Strategic Plan) spelling out how the funds transferred from the federal government will be spent over the five years of this initiative (2005/06 – 2009/10).

These plans are critical to the development of a comprehensive child care system¹. They should identify each provincial/territorial government's long term vision for child care, and the strategies that will be used to move towards this vision. From the Action Plans, for example, we should be able to see whether governments are planning to make a coordinated and fundamental shift towards publicly funded child care, or if they plan to do more of the same — adding new federal funds to the existing patchwork of policies and services.

Building a pan-Canadian child care system requires governments to: collaborate with stakeholders; develop a vision, along with specific goals, objectives and policies; establish priorities and benchmarks for measuring progress along the way; and define roles and responsibilities.

Comprehensive and integrated provincial and territorial Action Plans form a series of road maps that **can** help us get to our final destination – a Canada where, in keeping with our commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children are entitled to high quality child care services regardless of their abilities, economic, cultural or linguistic circumstances, geographical location or parents' work status.

However, the Bi-laterals do not clearly **require** provinces and territories to adopt a comprehensive, publicly funded vision based on universal entitlement. Still, the Action Plans are important accountability mechanisms for both governments and the public, at least in relation to the objectives outlined in these agreements. Generally, the Bi-laterals require Action Plans to:

- identify specific priorities for investment based on the four QUAD principles for child care agreed to by FPT governments (quality, universally inclusive, accessible and developmental).
- establish measurable targets for tracking progress.
- indicate how services for children with disabilities, Aboriginal and Francophone communities and other multicultural or linguistic communities will be developed.

In addition, provincial/territorial governments agree to gather input from their communities in the development of these Action Plans. Generally, Plans are to be released beginning in December, 2005.

¹ In their international report, "Starting Strong, Early Childhood Education and Care," the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) stressed the importance of "developing a common policy framework with consistent goals across the system ... and clearly defined roles and responsibilities ... [to avoid] unacceptable variation in levels of quality and access" (127). (<http://www1.oecd.org/publications/e-book/9101011e.pdf>).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:*Will all of the provinces and territories have the same Action Plan?*

No – we don't expect all Action Plans to be the same. While all governments are committed to advancing early learning and child care based on the QUAD principles, there will be variations within the Action Plans to reflect the specific system development priorities and approaches of individual provinces and territories.

For example, some provinces and territories may choose to prioritize expansion, while others may first focus on quality and affordability within existing spaces. Some may choose to place more emphasis on services for rural communities, while others will be addressing the needs of a more urban context. Coordinated planning and implementation is required to ensure that current services remain stable while the child care system develops. And, variations between Action Plans should reflect the unique needs of children, parents, families and communities in different provinces and territories while also advancing the pan-Canadian child care goals. While diversity in planning approaches is to be expected, disparity in services for children, families and communities is not.

What should we be looking for in an Action Plan?

An ideal Action Plan that will meet the evidence-based child care goals will include a **Long Term Vision** for a publicly funded, accountable child care system that supports children's healthy development, women's equality, and parents in all of their roles. The Action Plan should concretely and measurably advance:

- **Quality**, including **Developmental** programming: through better wages, improved working conditions and enhanced training programs and supports, along with strengthened regulation and monitoring.
- **Universality**: promoting entitlement for all children with specific measures to address:
 - **Inclusion**: through comprehensive planning for children with disabilities; Aboriginal children and families; rural and remote, and various cultural and linguistic communities.
 - **Accessibility**, including **Affordability**: moving from current user fees to direct funding of services and lowering of user fees, and increasing, on an incremental basis, provincial investments.
 - **Accessibility**, including **Expansion**: with clear targets, timelines and funding to support expansion in the non-profit sector (community planning, service infrastructure, capital and operating funds).

In addition, Action Plans will promote **accountability** for public funds by:

- demonstrating that federal funds are supplementing, not replacing, provincial child care spending
- ensuring that services receiving public funds are accountable for standards of quality, inclusion and affordability.

We have summarized these elements in a Checklist that can be used by governments and communities as a guide to developing Action Plans. You can download the Checklist at www.childcareadvocacy.ca/mtc/en/pdf/checklist.pdf.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

The Bi-laterals generally commit to community participation in the development of their Action Plans. Most governments have *not* released complete Action Plans yet, but some consultation processes are underway. This means that you may have an opportunity to participate in planning processes. There should also be opportunities for ongoing input as the Plans unfold. You can have an influence by:

1. Finding out if your province or territory has a comprehensive long term vision for child care, with a goal of universal entitlement. Is this vision based on research, experience and evidence? Will the vision support children's healthy development, women's equality, and parents in all of their roles (working, studying, parenting)?
2. Asking your province or territory or provincial/territorial advocacy group how you can get involved in your government's planning process. Remind your government of its commitment to consult with communities in developing its Action Plan.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION/ADDITIONAL LINKS:**For information on Provincial/Territorial preliminary child care plans, go to:**

Alberta's preliminary Plan: www.gov.ab.ca/acn/200510/18900832D5392-5123-474D-8EE3F9D75A5CC4EC.html

Manitoba's Plan documents: www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/moving_forward_action_plan.pdf

Ontario's preliminary Plan: www.children.gov.on.ca/NR/CS/BestStart/ActionPlan.pdf

For information on municipal government child care plans, go to:

City of Toronto's child care service plan: www.toronto.ca/children/pdf/splan05.pdf

City of Vancouver's child care strategy: www.vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/020423/a13.pdf

For information on child care community's plans, go to:

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC's child care plan: www.cccabc.bc.ca/res/pdf/cccabcc_ccplan.pdf

Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care's strategic plan: www.childcareontario.org/library/OCBCC_ONpre_budget05.pdf

This project is funded by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the CCAAC and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.