

**2003 Pre Budget Consultation
to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance
September 2003**

Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada

323 Rue Chapel Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7Z2
Telephone: (613) 594-3196 Fax: (613) 594-9375
e-mail: ccaac@istar.ca

Introduction:

The Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC) is a non-profit membership-based organization dedicated to promoting quality child care accessible to all.

The CCAAC works for:

- the right of all children to access publicly funded child care;
- a child care system that is comprehensive, accessible, affordable, high quality and non-profit;
- a range of child care services for children 12 and under, including full- and part-time care; group, family, school age, pre school (nursery school) and in home care; rural care; care for children with extra support needs; and culturally sensitive care;
- child care that complements other policies and services for families, including those with a parent at home; and
- improved parental rights and benefits.

The Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada is pleased to submit this written response to the 2003 pre budget discussions of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance.

Canada's reality:

Canada remains one of the few highly developed industrialized countries in the world that does not have a federally led, publicly funded child care policy and sustainable child care system.

The majority of Canada's young children (infants to twelve year olds) are still cared for in unregulated care arrangements:

- there are only enough licensed and regulated spaces for 12.1% of Canada's children (the numbers range from only 4.2 % of children in Saskatchewan having access to licensed and regulated spaces to 21.1 % of children in Quebec having access to licensed and regulated care) *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2001: Summary, Childcare Resource and Research Unit;*
- many families cannot afford the current costs of using licensed child care; and
- the current funding fragility makes it impossible for providers to meet the flexible and diverse needs of children and families (e.g., inclusive care that is part-time and full-time; shift/ seasonal/ rural care available in home communities).

Over the last three years, federal, provincial and territorial governments (except Quebec) have negotiated two separate agreements related to young children and child care. And these are important first steps. Regrettably, neither agreement has led to the progress that Canada's children and families need and deserve.

- First, the **Early Childhood Development Agreement** (ECDA), 2000, provides \$500 million per year to enable provincial and territorial governments to “improve and expand early childhood development programs and services, including child care”.

With so much flexibility under this agreement, only some provinces/territories are using this money to fund improvements that are modestly contributing to certain aspects of regulated child care. In some regions, provincial/territorial governments have ensured that none, or very little of the ECDA funds, are spent to improve provincially/territorially regulated child care. And the child care crisis is evident.

- Second, the **Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care**, 2003, promises to “improve access to affordable, quality, provincially and territorially regulated early learning and child care programs” (*for children up to six years of age only*) ... and to “provide direct care in settings such as child care centres, family child care homes, preschools, and nursery schools.” The CCAAC welcomes that the federal government has accepted more leadership in establishing a multilateral framework agreement for developing a pan-Canadian child care system, but a pan-Canadian child care system must include quality child care for children from birth to twelve years of age.

As each province/territory develops and implements its own annual spending plan, it is obvious that there are some significant weaknesses and challenges. There must be more federal/provincial/territorial responsibility, accountability and compliance for spending the money as intended - on direct care in provincially/territorially regulated early learning and child care programs and services. And all provincial/territorial governments should be expected to use the new federal dollars to supplement provincial/territorial spending on child care, rather than using it to replace provincial/territorial child care spending.

The funding levels and transfer arrangements announced for the next five years fall dramatically short of what is really needed to finally start building a pan-Canadian child care system, with access to quality, regulated child care as an entitlement for all children.

What we know:

International research indicates that access to affordable, quality, regulated child care: contributes to healthy child development; enables parents to work, study and participate in communities; and promotes gender equality in employment opportunities. Our children and families need more federal leadership, a social policy framework and funding for high quality, regulated, inclusive and affordable child care that reflects the real needs of today's families.

Recommendations to the House of Commons
Standing Committee on Finance:

We urge the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance to recommend that the upcoming federal budget:

1. Commit sufficient federal funds to develop a publicly funded, pan-Canadian child care system (for children from birth to twelve years of age) that is fully inclusive and meets the needs of every child - regardless of their family's income and employment status, where they live, their ability, language, or culture.

- In November 2002, the national Liberal caucus social policy committee recommended: \$1 billion in year one; \$2.2 billion in year two; \$3.2 billion in year three; and \$4.5 billion in year four, specifically to expand spaces and cover operating costs for children 3-6 years of age.
- The European Union recommends at least one percent of GDP be targeted to publicly fund child care. For Canada, 1% of GDP would mean approximately \$10 billion to be spent annually.

2. Provide federal leadership in developing a federal/provincial/territorial social policy framework with licensed and regulated child care as the cornerstone of Canada's "family friendly" policies.

- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development defines family friendly policies as policies that "facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life by fostering adequacy of family resources and child development, favour the parental choice about work and care, and promote gender equality in employment opportunities."
- After almost three decades of child care promises, Canada must move from a fragile patchwork of child care programs and services that vary from community to community and across the country to the development of a publicly funded child care system.

3. Require provincial/territorial governments receiving designated federal funds to spend them directly on improving and increasing access to affordable, quality, regulated, not for profit, universal and inclusive child care.

- enhancing the quality in existing licensed and regulated child care programs such as child care centres, family child care homes, preschools, nursery schools, and school aged programs;
- creating new programs that meet quality standards and are monitored by provincial/territorial governments;
- addressing affordability for all families; and
- addressing the wages and working conditions, training/professional development and retention requirements of the child care sector.

4. Require all provincial/territorial governments receiving federal funds designated for child care to maintain or increase their spending on child care and use the federal funds to supplement, not replace, provincial/territorial child care funding.

5. Establish mechanisms to ensure monitoring and compliance with the terms of the federal/provincial/territorial agreements, develop obligations for public reporting that will ensure clear data detailing improvements and progress, and develop effective processes for dispute resolution.

Respectfully submitted by:

Christine McLean, Chairperson, Board of Directors
Maryann Bird, Executive Director
on behalf of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada

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