

FROM PATCHWORK TO FRAMEWORK

HIGHLIGHTS OF A CHILD CARE STRATEGY FOR CANADA

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The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child names child care as one of the fundamental rights all children should enjoy. In addition, numerous Canadian studies, commissions and policy documents concur that quality child care is essential to addressing many of our most pressing 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 election promises and commitment to new investments in child care represent a social victory. However, accessible, high quality child care can only exist in the presence of a strong public policy framework. New funding alone will not produce the desired outcomes in the absence of an adequate infrastructure, accountability mechanisms and accompanying family supports. Currently, the federal/provincial/territorial Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care (March, 2003) is the sole policy at the federal level dedicated to child care. While it is a start towards a Canadian strategy, it lacks the necessary legislative and funding components.

The Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada¹ (CCAAC) has therefore developed a comprehensive policy framework in an effort to address these deficits. It was developed out of a year-long citizen engagement process sponsored by the CCAAC and funded by the Women's Program, Status of Women Canada. The findings are based on research documenting the essentials of good quality services and the lessons learned by other countries that have had comprehensive early learning systems in place for decades. The proposals are directed to the Government of Canada and are focused on actions required outside Quebec.² The unique circumstances and relationship of First Nations and Aboriginal People with the federal government are also outside the scope of this paper.³

The CCAAC advocates for a child care system that meets the needs of children age 0-12 years. In this document, we outline a federal strategy to provide services for children 0-6 years — before entry to formal school. We are committed to developing a comprehensive policy strategy for school age child care in the near future.

From *Patchwork to Framework: A Child Care Strategy for Canada* is constructed around three main recommendations.

1. Enact legislation with supporting agreements outlining service entitlement, standards, quality enhancements, and accountability and leadership responsibilities.
2. Establish a schedule for federal funding to reach 1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2020 outlining goals and timelines for funding and service provision in 5-year increments over a 15-year period.
3. Support parents to balance work and family responsibilities by enhancing maternity/parental benefits and family responsibility leaves.

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

¹ Founded in 1982, the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC) is a non-profit, membership-based organization dedicated to promoting quality child care accessible to all.

² The CCAAC supports Quebec's access to federal funding to advance its comprehensive family policy.

³ The CCAAC urges the federal government to develop a funding and policy framework that meets the needs of First Nations and Aboriginal people for culturally responsive child care services.

1. ENTITLEMENT, STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- A. The creation and expansion of child care services are guided by the following standards identified in research and practice:
- **Universal entitlement** – Every child is entitled to high quality child care services regardless of their abilities, economic, cultural or linguistic circumstances, geographical location or parents' work status.
 - **High quality** – Services are governed by provincial/territorial regulations promoting the emotional, cognitive, social, cultural and healthy development of children.
 - **Inclusive** – Services are responsive to the needs of children with disabilities and are culturally responsive to Canada's diverse population.
 - **Comprehensive** – Service provision shall be integrated and coherent and enable parents to work or study and to participate in their children's early learning.
 - **Affordable** – Cost is not a barrier to participation.
 - **Public/non-profit administration** – Services operate under the auspice of public and non-profit administration as this contributes to community development and provides an accountability measure to ensure all funding remains within the service.
 - **Accountable** – Governments and service providers are responsible to parents, children and the public for child care quality, funding and service levels.
- B. Funding to Provincial/Territorial Governments is contingent on the development of child care service delivery plans consistent with the standards, service and quality goals and timelines outlined in legislation.
- C. Child care service delivery plans will include steps to recruit and retain a workforce that is qualified and diverse, afforded legislated protections, and is appropriately compensated.
- D. Governments, systems managers and child care programs are accountable for financial, administrative and service performance.
- E. Governments shall take steps to involve stakeholders in the planning and monitoring of child care services as appropriate to ensure community responsive service development and delivery.
- F. Governments shall monitor their work and report annually on their progress to Parliament, their respective Legislatures and the public. Annual reports will include quantitative and qualitative data on the development and effectiveness of child care services and an assessment of compliance with the standards contained in legislation.

2. FUNDING TARGETS AND TIMELINES

- A. Public investment in early education will be brought in line with funding for the education of older children by establishing a schedule for federal funding to reach 1% of Gross Domestic Product by 2020.
- B. The expenditure of funds by all governments must respect the standards, conditions and guidelines outlined in legislation.
- C. Federal funding will be directed to provincially/territorially regulated public and non-profit child care services.
- D. Should a provincial/territorial government decline to participate in the provision of the legislation, the Government of Canada may exercise its right to enter into direct agreements with regional governments.

One per cent of GDP represents about \$10-billion annually. While this may seem like a large sum, by comparison, public spending on education — primary, secondary and post secondary — is about 6% of GDP.⁴ Thus, 1% represents about a sixth of the public education budget — a modest and minimal share of public resources for the under six age group which accounts for one third of the child population.

Developing Canadian child care legislation that is trade sensitive will be critical. The availability of substantial sums of public funding for child care will be a draw, particularly for foreign corporate day care chains. Without a federal legislative restriction, provinces/territories choosing to grow their services in the public/non-profit sector would be open to a trade challenge.

The 15-year plan sees federal funding reach \$5-billion by year five; \$8-billion by year 10 and \$10-billion by year 15. To meet service goals an overall 20% parent contribution⁵ is required, accompanied by a phase out of the \$5.7-million now spent on the Child Care Expense Deduction⁶. The estimates assume an average of \$10,000 for a full-time, full-year space; staff salaries and benefits of \$36,000; and a child/staff ratio of 1:6. Accommodating children with disabilities is estimated at \$20,000 per full-time space.

The Federal government would assume funding responsibility for child care operations and expansion and would retain responsibility for Aboriginal and First Nations child care and family supports for the Canadian military. The provinces/territories would be required to retain the existing funding for child care, kindergarten and family support services and be responsible for the full cost of post secondary training and upgrading the qualifications of the child care workforce. By the end of year 15, 50% of 2.09 million children under 6 years would have full-time access to child care services; while the remaining 50% would use part-time care. 209,000 spaces would be designated for children with disabilities.

3. SUPPORT PARENTS TO BALANCE WORK AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

Child care services must be complemented by policies that enable parents to fulfill their parenting responsibilities. To this end, the federal government shall take steps to:

- A. Expand maternity/parental benefits to cover self-employed parents and parents enrolled in educational or training institutions.
- B. Enhance maternity/parental benefits to cover 75% of lost income⁷.
- C. Legislate 10 days of annual paid family responsibility leave.

* Copies of the full report *From Patchwork to Framework: A Child Care Strategy for Canada* are available at www.childcareadvocacy.ca and from the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

The opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily represent the official policy of Status of Women Canada.

⁴ Conference Board of Canada. *Investing in Innovation*, 2001.

⁵ The 20% parent contribution represents one fifth of global child care spending. Provinces/territories would determine the fee structure that could include an affordable flat fee, or a sliding scale fee geared-to-income. CCAAC's goal is that eventually child care as an educational program would have no parent fee as does the public school system.

⁶ Parents receiving publicly funded child care would not be eligible for the federal Child Care Expense Deduction.

⁷ Maternity/parental benefits will total \$5-billion by 2020 when full coverage is extended and payments enhanced.