

Quality, Affordable Child Care Key to Addressing Child Poverty

Quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services are central in a strategy to reduce poverty. ECEC also strengthens the foundations of lifelong learning for all children, supports the social needs of families, and promotes equal opportunities for women in the labour market. While opportunities to participate in early childhood education and care should be available to all children, Canada's ECEC programs fall far short in meeting the needs of families and children.

Even though more than 70% of young children have mothers in the paid labor force, only 12% of children 0-12 have access to a regulated child care space. The supply of high quality spaces is woefully short in every province and territory. High costs prevent many moderate to low income families from enrolling their children in ECEC services; of those children who are in regulated child care, only 22% have a fee subsidy. And although the quality of services is key to meeting the developmental needs of children, quality - even in regulated settings - varies considerably across Canada.

The federal government must develop a National Strategy to ensure development of universally accessible, high quality ECEC services across Canada. In order to ensure that the right architecture for ECEC services is laid, federal funds should be transferred to participating jurisdictions within a framework of common principles. These should include universality; high quality, comprehensive service provision; responsiveness to community values and diversity; public accountability for financial, administrative and service performance to governments and the community; and integrated, coherent service provision.

Creating an effective ECEC system requires a process that begins with a vision of a pan-Canadian publicly funded system of universal ECEC that is shared by all levels of government. The policy process must include national legislation and principles with targets and timetables. This effective public policy framework should go hand in hand with sufficient funding to ensure high quality services that are universally accessible, inclusive, affordable, and not-for-profit. Over a period of time, all families would have access to seamless, high quality care and education services in their communities where services would respect cultural diversity and fully include children with disabilities.

Helpful Links:

Childcare Resource and Research Unit, University of Toronto

<http://www.childcarecanada.org/>

Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada

<http://www.childcareadvocacy.ca/>

Campaign 2000's Child Care Indicators Project Reports

<http://www.campaign2000.ca/ci/rep.html>

An Open Letter to John Manley, Finance Minister of Canada

http://action.web.ca/home/c2000/alerts.shtml?sh_itm=8c7fa35b48c269e0cf15f