



July 8, 2022

Open letter to
Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers with primary responsibility for
early learning and child care
(sent in advance of the Ministers' meeting in Burnaby, BC on July 12, 2022)

Dear Ministers:

Child Care Now (Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada) was founded 40 years ago to advocate for a Canada-wide system of early learning and child care that is publicly funded and publicly managed to make high quality licenced early learning and child care programs accessible, affordable and inclusive of all children. Today we speak on behalf of millions of people across Canada who have joined us directly or through affiliated organizations to promote evidence-based child care policy changes.

Like you, we believe that the federal government's decision in Budget 2021 to make large on-going investments in early learning and child care, along with signed funding agreements, can make transformation of child care services possible. Like you, we believe such transformation can lead to a range of positive outcomes for Canada's children and families, economic and social and gender equity, as well as to significant growth in GDP. However, transformation and successful outcomes are dependent on each level of government taking effective steps forward, on all governments learning from each other, and on working collaboratively with child care advocates, the child care sector, public institutions including those in the post-secondary sector, employers, and civil society organizations.

We are taking the opportunity of your meeting on July 12, 2022 in Burnaby, British Columbia to express our deep appreciation for the many positive initiatives you have taken and to comment on some key policy considerations we know you are grappling with as you move forward.

Parent fees and affordability

We congratulate you for bringing down the cost of licensed child care for families and for your commitment to reduce parent fees to no more than \$10 a day on average by March 21, 2026.¹

¹ We understand and appreciate that the federal government's asymmetrical funding agreement with the Government of Quebec does not commit to the same numeric objectives as the other agreements, and that, in Quebec, parent fees for government-funded licensed child care programs already fall below the \$10 a day target.

We are particularly glad to see that the Yukon government has already achieved this target having brought down daily fees in line with those in Quebec. We are also very pleased to see real progress in almost every jurisdiction toward the objective set out in the federal government's 2021 budget of an average of 50% reduction in parent fees by the end of this year. We note that provincial and territorial governments have taken different approaches to this fee reduction. We urge that you collect and share data with each other, and with child care advocates, with respect to the impact of each approach on affordability and access, and consider which approach is most likely to contribute to building a sustainable, properly funded child care system going forward.

We believe, based on international evidence, that the best way to achieve an affordable and equitably accessible child care system is for governments to take the following actions simultaneously: set a low maximum fee for all families, further reduce or eliminate fees for low income families, and provide operational funding to operators that not only compensates them for reduced parental fee revenues but also ensures sufficient financial resources to operate high quality, fully inclusive, culturally-safe programs staffed by fairly compensated and appropriately qualified educators. Such an approach should replace the individual parent fee subsidy approach to affordability which most provinces and territories continue to use. First, eligibility for low-income families comes with restrictive, stigmatizing and often intrusive procedural requirements. Secondly, parent fee subsidy schemes usually exclude some of the very families for whom they are intended. But most important: parent fee subsidy schemes merely replace fees for individual eligible parents rather than ensuring that early learning and child care provision is designed to support access for all children regardless of their parents' circumstances.

Expansion and accessibility

As you know, the expectation is that demand for licensed early learning and child care will continue to increase as parent fees drop and programs become more affordable. You have recognized the importance of increasing the supply of early learning and child care to meet demand; we congratulate you for setting ambitious targets for substantial growth by 2025-26, primarily in the not-for-profit and public sectors.

Yet major obstacles stand in the way of expanding child care without compromising quality. These obstacles put at risk the promise of a system for all (and all its benefits). This can only be addressed by governments developing and implementing comprehensive, planned expansion strategies, in close collaboration with the child care sector, child care advocates and others who can play a role in making high quality licensed child care more available, especially where coverage is low for all or specific populations. Expansion strategies must ensure that the rights and jurisdiction of Indigenous governments and communities are respected and resourced.

The two major obstacles to expansion are: (1) the critical shortage of qualified early learning and child care educators in every province and territory, (2) insufficient government mechanisms to adequately plan and fund new child care infrastructure and ensure that viable,

sustainable not-for-profit and publicly operated licensed child care is equitably available to all segments of the population.

Workforce crisis

Each of your governments has acknowledged the problem of recruiting and retaining qualified staff in the child care sector, and each of your governments has acknowledged that the problem can only be solved by improving staff compensation and working conditions. Unfortunately, the measures taken so far are insufficient, particularly in these times of very high inflation and a highly competitive labour market. What is needed is a comprehensive transition strategy, supported by sufficient public funding, to raise wages, and to put in place decent pensions and employment benefits. This will help transform how early childhood education work is organized, raise the quality of early learning and care, and significantly increase job satisfaction. This is the way to make early learning and child care a desirable and sought-after profession. We urge you to address the workforce crisis as your top priority in the coming year. Also, because the workforce challenges vary little across the country, we strongly encourage you to work collaboratively on systemic solutions that could be supported by the new federal early learning and child care secretariat.

Public management of supply

Further, hand-in-hand with addressing the workforce crisis, we urge you to focus on increasing the availability of licensed child care and ensuring children have equitable access. In order to build a child care system for all, you must act assertively to ensure that licensed programs that meet the needs of children and families in all their diversities are put in place. We argue that building the ELCC system can no longer rely on “requests for proposals” to fill the gaps between demand for, and supply of, licensed child care. A publicly funded system that is responsive and accountable requires much stronger and concerted government involvement in the creation and provision of services. It is imperative to move away from the failed market-based approach of the past. Transformation of early learning and child care will not be possible without much greater public management of supply. Again, we believe every provincial and territorial government can benefit from collaboration, working with the federal government to share what you are doing, what is working, and what more can be done.

Indigenous rights and jurisdiction

Finally, but most important of all, we reiterate Child Care Now’s appeal that the transformation of early learning and child care must respect First Nations, Métis and Inuit rights and jurisdiction, including—but not limited to—fulfilling the distinctions-based obligations detailed in the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Frameworks.

In closing, we express our deepest appreciation for your leadership and commitment with respect to early learning and child care. We recognize that you and your officials are working at

unprecedented speed to make positive change. The system you are building is the first major public program in more than a generation and it will be your legacy. We remain committed to helping in this process every step of the way.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Morna Ballantyne', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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