



EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

HIGH STAKES

- Recent federal child care initiatives, though positive, are too limited financially and policy-wise to deliver high quality, accessible, affordable and inclusive services.
- The international benchmark for public spending on early childhood education and child care is at least 1% of GDP for children aged 0–5; at an estimated 0.5% annually, Canada spends considerably less than this minimum benchmark.
- Child care fees for parents are prohibitively high for low- and middle-income families.

CLEAR CHOICES

- Over a 10-year period, increase conditional transfer payments to the provinces and territories to ensure that affordable, high quality child care becomes accessible to all.
- Increase federal child care funding by \$1 billion annually until the 1% of GDP benchmark is met, ensuring that new funding supports expansion only in public and non-profit services.
- Ensure public funding goes directly to child care programs that commit to reducing parent fees (to no more than 10% of after-tax household income) and raising staff wages — not to individual fee subsidies, cash transfers or tax breaks.

The AFB revises Canada’s approach to early learning and child care (ELCC) and increases government spending to establish universal, comprehensive, publicly funded and publicly managed child care systems in every province, territory and Indigenous community.

While respecting the key and unique role of provinces/territories in developing and delivering ELCC and other social programs, the AFB adopts a leadership role for the federal government in recognition of its greater fiscal capacity and unique responsibilities.

Building on the “calls to action” of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the AFB acknowledges that Indigenous communities should be supported to design, deliver and govern child care systems and services that meet their needs and aspirations for self-determination.

Under the AFB plan, within 10 years every child in Canada will be able to access high quality ELCC services regardless of where they live, their family income or other circumstances — if the family so chooses.

Action: In 2019-20, transfer \$1 billion to provinces, territories and Indigenous communities for the purpose of beginning to build accessible, affordable, high quality, inclusive ELCC systems. Funding for Indigenous communities will support the implementation of the Indigenous-led ELCC Framework.

Funding to provinces and territories will be conditional on subnational action plans meeting evidence-based standards and criteria for accessible, affordable, high quality, inclusive ELCC. For example, the plans must:

- Recognize that high quality ELCC is an entitlement for all children and families;
- Direct public funding to services (operational funding), not vouchers, tax breaks, fee subsidies or transfers to individuals;
- Adopt a planned, publicly managed approach to the expansion of regulated ELCC through public and non-profit services;
- Define affordability as there being no fees, or else fees that are geared to income, so no household is paying more than 10% of after-tax income for ELCC;
- Make the process of improving quality an ongoing, integral component of ELCC policy;
- Recognize that a well-educated, well-paid, well-recognized ELCC workforce is essential to ensuring that services are of high quality and are available;
- Commit to public accountability to ensure all public funds are used to improve the availability, affordability, quality and inclusiveness of ELCC;
- Commit to the full inclusion of children with disabilities, and recognize and celebrate cultural diversity;
- Commit to providing a comprehensive range of services to meet the needs of families and children at the community level, as one size does not fit all; and,
- Recognize that a universal, equitable system of high quality ELCC and a universal, equitable system of parental leave are complementary and key components of supportive family policy.

Action: Increase Canada’s ELCC budget each year until it reaches at least 1% of GDP—the international benchmark for government spending on child care and early learning—by the 2029-30 fiscal year.

Substantial annual increases in federal transfers to provinces, territories and Indigenous communities are required to maintain existing services while increasing the quality and affordability of existing spaces and creating new public and non-profit services that meet the diverse needs of families from coast to coast to coast.