



MOVING FORWARD ON EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

**AGREEMENT-IN-PRINCIPLE BETWEEN
THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA
AND THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO**

May 6, 2005

Preamble

The early years of life are critically important for the development and future well-being of children.

"A society that wants to have a highly competent population for the future to cope with the demands of the emerging knowledge-based world and global economy will have to ensure that all its children have the best stimulation and nourishment during the critical early years of development, regardless of family circumstances. Investments in the early period of life are as important as investments in education, post secondary education, and health care.¹"

In June 2000, the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministerial Council on Social Policy Renewal articulated a shared vision for children in the National Children's Agenda. As part of this vision, governments set goals to help ensure that all children are healthy-physically and emotionally, safe and secure, successful at learning and socially engaged and responsible. Consistent with that vision, Ministers Responsible for Social Services have worked collaboratively to develop and implement a range of initiatives supportive of families with children, including the National Child Benefit, the Early Childhood Development Agreement, and the 2003 Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care.

The Government of Ontario has a demonstrated and clear commitment to children, youth and families. The province's vision is "*an Ontario where all children have the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential*".

In its October 2004 Speech from the Throne, the Government of Canada acknowledged that "*the time has come for a truly national system of early learning and child care*". In this Speech, the federal government committed to put the foundations in place with its provincial and territorial partners, charting a national course that focuses on results, builds on best practices and reports on progress to Canadians.

At their February 2005 meeting, Ministers Responsible for Social Services recognized the urgent need to accelerate development of quality early learning and child care across the country. To address that need, Quality, Universally Inclusive, Accessible and Developmental (QUAD) principles were developed for early learning and child care.

Governments have acknowledged that some jurisdictions have already made significant investments and are recognized as leaders in establishing quality regulated early learning and child care programs. New arrangements between governments must have the flexibility to acknowledge these successes, while ensuring that concrete, incremental results are achieved and reported to Canadians.

¹ *Reversing the Real Brain Drain, 1999* – Margaret McCain and J. Fraser Mustard, Co-chairs: Early Years Study.

The Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario have developed this Agreement to articulate their shared vision for early learning and child care and to describe specific objectives and investments to achieve this vision. At the same time, Ontario commits to participating with its federal, provincial and territorial partners in a multilateral process to create an overarching early learning and child care framework for all Canadians, which meets the unique circumstances and priorities of each jurisdiction.

Ontario's vision for families with young children is articulated through its Best Start Plan, announced in November 2004.

The vision of Best Start is:

Children in Ontario will be ready and eager to achieve success in school by the time they start Grade 1.

Best Start is a comprehensive, evidence-based early learning and care strategy designed to provide Ontario's children with the best possible start in life and help them to achieve success in school.

Best Start represents a major redesign of services in terms of how children and families are supported from the prenatal stage through to Grade 1. It is a partnership with parents and families that will:

- Enhance existing services and introduce innovative approaches to healthy child development and early learning and care;
- Help parents to help their children be successful in school; and
- Bring community services together in a comprehensive, flexible and seamless way so children and parents can access them at familiar neighbourhood locations.

Best Start is ambitious and will take at least ten years to implement. Funding to support Best Start will build on existing provincial investments as well as the funding outlined in this agreement.

Ontario will begin with the following key steps:

- A major expansion of child care with priority placed on children enrolled in Junior and Senior Kindergarten across the province during the non-school hours and the summer months in order to provide a full day of early learning and care;
- Quality improvements in the regulated early learning and child care system; and
- Implementation of the full Best Start vision in three demonstration communities in the province.

This Agreement will help the province achieve its early learning and child care objectives within the Best Start Plan.

The federal budget announced that the Government of Canada is committing \$5 billion nationally over the next five years. Ontario will be committing all additional federal money for its Best Start Plan over the next five years. This further investment will complement existing federal and provincial investments in Ontario and will support the development of regulated early learning and child care as a key element of a comprehensive approach to supporting children and families.

This initiative builds on early learning and child care investments made in Ontario by the Governments of Ontario and Canada and recognizes that flexibility is needed to address provincial priorities and circumstances.

Part 1 – A National Vision for Early Learning and Child Care

Canada's young children will benefit from high quality early learning and child care that is grounded in the value and respect Canadians give to children and their families.

Quality early learning and child care recognizes the unique needs of every child. It provides stimulating enriching experiences and healthy physical environments where children can develop and flourish to their full potential.

Across Canada, those parents who choose to use regulated early learning and child care in their communities can be confident that their children will experience high quality, inclusive, developmental programs and services that best meet the needs of their young children.

Early learning and child care reflects the value that parents and communities place on qualified and dedicated early childhood educators and child care providers.

Early learning and child care complements the array of supports available for children and families including other early childhood development programs and services.

Achieving this vision will require time, shared commitment, and collaboration, as well as incremental, predictable and sustained investments over the long term.

1) Principles

The principles set out below help shape a shared vision for the future, guiding investments and decisions regarding local needs and priorities under this initiative. They are reflective of, and build on, the principles for effective approaches established under the previous *Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care (2003)*. Although each of the principles is a critical component of effective early learning and child care, they are also related and need to be considered together. The following principles will help advance the shared national vision for early learning and child care.

Quality

High quality early learning and child care supports optimal child development, by demonstrating evidence-based quality practices, including Provincial-Territorial regulation and monitoring, and an appropriate complement of staff and child care providers qualified in early learning and child care.

Universally Inclusive

Universally inclusive early learning and child care is open and responsive, without discrimination, to young children, including children with special needs, Aboriginal children, and children with various cultural and linguistic circumstances. Diversity is respected and valued.

Accessible

Accessible early learning and child care is broadly available to children and parents. It is also affordable to all parents who choose to use it.

Developmental

Developmental early learning and child care demonstrates quality and contributes to improved lifetime outcomes for children by supporting social, emotional, physical and cognitive development and parents' knowledge and involvement. Developmental early learning and child care is child centred, reflects family and community contexts and encourages meaningful partnerships between parents and child care providers.

2) Goals

The following goals will help advance the shared national vision for early learning and child care.

Quality

Improve the quality of early learning and child care across Canada by investing in evidence-based quality practices that could include²:

- Support developmentally appropriate programs for children;
- Develop training, education and supports for early childhood educators and child care providers;
- Support recruitment and retention strategies for qualified early childhood educators and child care providers;
- Strengthen and enhance Provincial-Territorial regulation and monitoring of early learning and child care; and
- Promote community engagement and partnerships.

Universally Inclusive

Increase the responsiveness of early learning and child care across Canada to respond to the diverse needs of children by investing in evidence-based practices that could include:

- Develop and strengthen programming and supports for children's cultural, linguistic and/or special needs; and
- Support the development of education, supports and resources for early childhood educators and child care providers which recognize children's cultural, linguistic and/or special needs.

Accessible

Increase the availability and affordability of early learning and child care across Canada, reflecting the needs of each region, which could include:

- Develop innovative approaches to service provision in rural and underserved areas;
- Enable flexible approaches that address a range of family and employment circumstances;
- Enhance operational funds and/or fee subsidies; and
- Increase early learning and child care opportunities.

Developmental

Strengthen the learning and developmental component of early learning and child care across Canada to meet more fully the cognitive, physical, emotional and social development needs of children by investing in evidence-based practices, which could include:

- Support developmentally appropriate early learning and child care for children;
- Support the development of appropriate child-centred activities;
- Support the engagement of parents in their children's early learning and child care; and
- Strengthen safe, secure, nurturing and stimulating early learning and child care environments.

Part 2 – Objectives and Investments

1) Objectives

Over the next five years, Ontario, subject to the availability of new federal funding will develop and enhance its regulated early learning and child care system towards achieving the following objectives:

² Actions could address more than one goal.

- Measurable and demonstrable improvements in the *quality and developmental component* of early learning and child care programs through:
 - The development of an integrated early learning program for young children informed by the recommendations of the Expert Panel on Early Learning Program.
 - The development and implementation of strategies to improve quality in early learning and care settings, including the stabilization of the workforce. These strategies will be informed by the Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources.
 - The establishment of a College of Early Childhood Educators (with approval of the Ontario Legislature), which will develop and monitor professional standards.
 - The implementation and evaluation of the expansion of child care and early learning and care hubs in the three Best Start demonstration communities.
- Better access to early learning and child care, which is *universally inclusive*, by working with Ontario Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) / District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) to:
 - Increase the availability of regulated early learning and child care opportunities, including children with special needs through increased spaces.
 - Enhance the affordability of early learning and child care opportunities including through increased subsidies, eliminating some eligibility restrictions.
 - Working with the Government of Canada and Aboriginal peoples to find practical solutions to address the early learning and child care needs of Aboriginal children in Ontario.
 - Continue to address the needs of Francophone children in early learning child care settings.
- Recognizing the need for services in French for Francophone children, Ontario will work with CMSMs and DSSABs to address those needs through the early learning and child care system in order to support the vitality of the French language and culture in Ontario.

2) Areas for Investment

Ontario agrees that funds provided by the Government of Canada under this initiative will be invested in regulated early learning and child care programs and services for children under age six.

- Regulated programs and services are defined as those that meet quality standards that are established and monitored by the Government of Ontario.
- Early learning and child care programs and services are defined as those supporting direct care and early learning for children in settings such as child care centres, family child care homes, preschools and nursery schools.

Types of investments could include: capital and operating funding, fee subsidies, wage enhancements, training, professional development and support, quality assurance, and parent information and referral. Programs and services that are part of the formal school system will not be included in this initiative. The Governments of Canada and Ontario also support innovative programming that integrates early learning and child care with community and school-based programs and services.

3) Action Plan

In 2004, Ontario announced its Best Start Plan, which outlines the Government of Ontario's commitment to families with young children including the expansion of early learning and child care. Consistent with principles and goals set out above, and subject to availability of new federal funding, Ontario agrees to develop and release by December 2005, an Action Plan on ELCC covering the five years of federal funding. The Action Plan will:

- Identify specific priorities for investment, based on an assessment of progress to date in establishing quality, universally inclusive, accessible and developmental (QUAD) early learning and child care;
- Identify measurable targets for tracking progress in relation to the objectives of this Agreement;
- Demonstrate that federal investments will be incremental, and will not displace existing provincial spending; and
- Describe how Ontario plans to address the ELCC needs of its children including Francophones and more generally, those with cultural, linguistic or other special needs.

Ontario will continue to consult with parents, early learning and child care providers, the education sector, experts, Aboriginal peoples, Francophone communities and other interested Canadians.

In parallel, as committed in the federal Budget 2005, the Government of Canada will work with First Nations organizations and communities in Ontario to meet the early learning and child care needs of First Nations people living on reserve.

4) Public Reporting

Under the existing 2003 Multilateral Agreement on ELCC, the Government of Ontario releases an annual public report that includes descriptive and expenditure information on all early learning and child care programs and services, as well as broad indicators of availability, affordability and quality. Building upon that commitment, beginning with the 2005-2006 Annual Report, to be released by November 2006, Ontario will incorporate the following specific comparable indicators in its annual reports:

- Availability: the number of regulated early learning and child care spaces by type of setting and age group, and number of children receiving special needs services, and number of centres providing services in French.
- Affordability: the number of families and children receiving subsidies.
- Quality: training requirements, child to staff ratios and group size in regulated programs.

Ontario may also include additional indicators as appropriate and as governments develop other comparable indicators, Ontario, working in collaboration with CMSMs / DSSABs, will incorporate these indicators in its annual reports, to the extent to which data is available.

5) Funding

Ontario and Canada agree that further investments in early learning and child care should be incremental, predictable and sustained over the long term. New federal funding provided under this initiative is in addition to funds already committed under the previous Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care. The Government of Canada will transfer the following amounts to the Government of Ontario for the purpose of implementing its Action Plan:

	Funding under 2003 Multilateral Framework on ELCC* (CST) (\$ million)	New ELCC Funding (\$ million)	Total (\$ million)
2005-2006	87.4	271.9	359.1
2006-2007	116.8	253.2	370.0
2007-2008	136.6	448.9	585.5
2008-2009	136.9	449.8	586.4
2009-2010	137.2	450.8	586.4

* Federal funding under the 2003 Multilateral Framework will continue to flow through the Canada Social Transfer.

The \$271.9 million indicated for 2005-06 is in recognition of amounts put in trust for Ontario, which the province may draw in either 2004-05 or 2005-06. Ontario will have the flexibility to draw down funds as they require up to the end of March 31, 2006.

Exact per capita amounts are to be more fully defined in a detailed multi-year funding agreement.

Parliament of Canada approval is required before federal funding is available and may be disbursed.

6) Working Together on Knowledge and Information

Research, knowledge and information are the foundations of evidence-based decision-making and are critical to informed policy development, strong accountability and program planning. In this context, and to support the development of strong systems of early learning and child care, the Government of Ontario will work over time with the Government of Canada and other interested provincial and territorial governments to:

- Develop a National Quality Framework, which will identify best practices in quality, developmental early learning and child care, and provide the basis for research and development of guidelines and forward-looking, evidence-based benchmarks to guide future programming.
- Adapt and finalize the Evaluation Framework initiated under the previous Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, to serve as a tool and guide to assess program effectiveness.
- Develop and implement an enhanced knowledge, information and data strategy, including data to support comparable program indicators.
- Develop additional comparable program and child outcome indicators.
- Undertake a review of this initiative, to be completed by March 31, 2009, to take stock of progress towards the realization of the national vision, consider any adjustments, and establish next steps.

With respect to each of the above activities, the Governments of Canada and Ontario will move forward in consultation with experts and other interested parties.

7) Fair Treatment

Amendments to this Agreement-in-Principle may be made if the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario mutually agree that changes are required to ensure fair treatment of participating provinces and territories.

8) Next Steps

Ontario will complete a preliminary Action Plan covering the timeframe for new federal funding by June 30, 2005.

Ontario and Canada will work together to conclude a multi-year funding agreement by June 30, 2005 for the period of 2006-07 to 2009-2010.

Signed on _____ at _____

For Canada,

The Honourable Ken Dryden
Minister of Social Development

For Ontario,

The Honourable Dr. Marie Bountrogianni
Minister of Children and Youth Services