



MOVING FORWARD ON EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

**AGREEMENT-IN-PRINCIPLE BETWEEN
THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA
AND THE GOVERNMENT OF NOVA SCOTIA**

May 16, 2005

Canada 


NOVA SCOTIA
NOUVELLE-ÉCOSSE

Introduction

The early years of life are critically important for the development and future well-being of children. Research demonstrates that high quality early learning and child care (ELCC) can play an important role in promoting social, emotional and cognitive development of young children. Promotion of learning and development in early childhood supports the participation of parents in employment and education, and supports parents in their primary responsibility for the care and nurturing of their children by improving early learning and child care for families with young children.

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.

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. Within these principles provinces and territories will have the flexibility to address their own particular needs and circumstances.

Nova Scotia and the Government of Canada will work together in full respect of each other's constitutional responsibilities; that is, provinces/territories have primary responsibility 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.

The Government of Canada and the Government of Nova Scotia have developed this Agreement to articulate their shared vision for early learning and child care. This agreement outlines objectives and investments to achieve that vision. Further to this the Government of Nova Scotia is holding meetings with representatives of the child care sector. These discussions will address improvements in the following areas:

1. Subsidy rates;
2. Operational grants;
3. Revised criteria for eligibility for families for subsidized spaces; and
4. Improved retention and training supports for early childhood educators and child care providers.

At the same time, Nova Scotia commits to participating with its federal, provincial and territorial partners in a multilateral process to create an overarching learning and child care framework for all Canadians, which meets the unique circumstances and priorities of each jurisdiction.

Nova Scotia's vision is to ensure all Nova Scotian children enjoy a good start in life and are nurtured and supported by caring families and communities. The province's goals for early learning and child care are that:

- Children have the best possible early learning and child care experiences and are safe and secure;
- Families have support and assistance from the people and communities around them to raise healthy children; and
- Families have practical solutions to the barriers they face.

This Agreement will help the province achieve these goals.

Nova Scotia's publication "*Our Children ... Today's Investment, Tomorrow's Promise*" (May 2001), outlined the province's vision for a comprehensive system of early childhood development. With financial support from the Government of Canada, Nova Scotia has provided wage grants to retain qualified and caring staff; made early learning and child care more affordable and accessible through an increased subsidy per diem and additional early learning and child care spaces including subsidized spaces; supported enhanced inclusive programming for children with special needs; and strengthened early childhood education training opportunities. The Nova Scotia Government continues to consult with the early learning childhood sector as is evident by the current Child Care Subsidy Program Review Stakeholder Working Group.

The federal budget announced that the Government of Canada is committing \$5 billion nationally over the next five years. Nova Scotia will be committing all additional federal money for early learning and child care to the fulfillment of the five-year plan. This further investment will complement existing federal and provincial investments in Nova Scotia and will support the development of regulated quality 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 Nova Scotia by the Governments of Nova Scotia 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 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 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 include¹:

- 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.

¹ Actions could address more than one goal.

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, Nova Scotia, with the financial support of the Government of Canada, will develop and enhance its regulated quality early learning and child care system towards achieving the following objectives:

- Measurable and demonstrable improvements in the *quality and developmental component* of early learning and child care programs through:
 - Increasing developmental experiences in early learning and child care settings;
 - Promoting safe, healthy, nurturing and secure environments for children;
 - Promoting community involvement in supporting early learning and child care opportunities and community networks;
 - Stabilizing and developing the workforce by attracting and retaining a qualified workforce through enhanced training opportunities;
 - Enhancing quality learning environments by supporting the further development of existing and new early learning and child care centres through measures such as supporting the improvement of infrastructure;

- Undertaking public education campaigns about the importance of early learning and child care experiences and developing a marketing strategy to attract qualified child care providers;
- Enabling and encouraging family child care in partnership with the early learning and child care sector; and
- Developing a best practices framework to enhance developmental opportunities for children in early learning and child care settings.
- Better access to early learning and child care, which is *universally inclusive*, by:
 - Increasing the availability of regulated early learning and child care opportunities;
 - Increasing the number of subsidized, regulated child care spaces;
 - Increasing inclusive and supportive early learning and child care opportunities;
 - Increasing choice of early learning and child care opportunities that are responsive to family needs, preferences, and circumstances;
 - Enhancing affordability of early learning and child care through equitable funding models;
 - Enhancing access to early learning and child care opportunities that enable parents to pursue employment or education while supporting them in the care and nurturing of their children;
 - Addressing the needs of children with special needs, Aboriginal children and children with unique racial, cultural, linguistic needs; and
 - Addressing the needs of Acadians and Francophones for services in French consistent with Nova Scotia’s French Language Services Act so as to foster the vitality of the Francophone and Acadian communities of Nova Scotia.

2) Areas for Investment

Nova Scotia 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 Nova Scotia.
- 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 home child care programs, and pre-schools and nursery schools operated and administered as child care centres under the Day Care Act of Nova Scotia.

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.

3) Action Plan

Consistent with principles and goals set out above, and subject to availability of new federal funding, Nova Scotia agrees to develop and release by December 2005, a Five Year 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 the stage of development and the issues related to 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;
- Identify baseline expenditures for early learning and child care and areas for incremental investment; and
- Identify how Nova Scotia plans to address the ELCC needs of children with special needs, Aboriginal children, children in official language minority communities and, more generally, those with cultural, linguistic or other special needs.

Nova Scotia will continue to consult with the early learning childhood sector as is evident by the current Child Care Subsidy Program Review Stakeholder Working Group and seek the views of parents, early learning and child care providers, the education sector, experts, Aboriginal peoples, official language minority communities and other interested Nova Scotians. As committed in Budget 2005, the Government of Canada will work with First Nations organizations and communities 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 Nova Scotia 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, Nova Scotia will incorporate the following specific comparable indicators in its annual reports:

- Availability: the number of spaces in regulated early learning and child care spaces by type of setting and age group, and number of children receiving special needs services and the number of children receiving early learning and care in French.
- Affordability: the number of families and children receiving subsidies, and fee and subsidy levels.
- Quality: training requirements, child to staff ratios and group size in regulated programs.
- Nova Scotia may also include additional indicators as appropriate and as governments develop other comparable indicators, Nova Scotia will incorporate these indicators in its annual reports, to the extent to which data is available.

5) Funding

Nova Scotia 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 Nova Scotia, for the purpose of implementing its Five Year Action Plan:

	Funding under existing ELCC Agreement (CST) (\$ million)	New ELCC Funding (\$ million)	Total (\$ million)
2005-2006	6.6	20.4	27.0
2006-2007	8.7	18.8	27.5
2007-2008	10.0	33.0	43.0
2008-2009	9.9	32.7	42.6
2009-2010	9.9	32.4	42.3

The \$20.4 million indicated for 2005-06 is in recognition of amounts put in trust for Nova Scotia, which the province may draw in either 2004-05 or 2005-06. Nova Scotia will have the flexibility to draw down funds as they require up to the end of March 31, 2006.

Following completion of an Action Plan, Nova Scotia and Canada will work together to conclude a detailed multi-year funding agreement by February 15, 2006 for the period 2006-2007 to 2009-2010. 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 Nova Scotia 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.

A process for moving forward with these activities will be developed jointly by the Government of Canada, the Government of Nova Scotia and other interested provincial and territorial governments. With respect to each of the above activities, the Governments of Canada and Nova Scotia will move forward together in consultation with experts and other interested parties.

As mentioned in the federal Budget 2005, the Government of Canada is committing \$100 million for the development of a new accountability package, which could support the above mentioned activities.

7) Fair Treatment

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

Signed on _____ at _____

For Canada,

The Honourable Ken Dryden
Minister of Social Development

For Nova Scotia,

The Honourable David Morse
Minister of Community Services