



# EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



## EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

*Investing  
in our  
Future*

SP-625-11-04

Canada

## WHY ARE THE EARLY YEARS IMPORTANT?

All children deserve a good start in life. They deserve to be healthy, safe and secure, and ready to learn. Research has shown that the first six years of life are crucial for future learning, behaviour and health. Therefore, when we invest in the early years, we are investing in the future of our children and our country.

## WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S ROLE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, AND EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE?

The Government of Canada recognizes that early childhood development and early learning prepares young children for success in school and later in life. That is why the government is building for the future by setting the right kind of conditions to help give children the best possible start in life. Recent initiatives, programs and services are described below.

### *Financial Support for Provinces and Territories*

The Government of Canada provides significant funding to provinces and territories to support their investments in early childhood development, and early learning and child care.

This funding is arranged under two separate but related federal/provincial/territorial agreements: the Early Childhood Development Agreement and the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care.<sup>1</sup>

Under both the ECD Agreement and the Multilateral Framework, all partners committed to report publicly on their investments in Canada's youngest citizens. Regular reporting allows Canadians to monitor progress in improving the well-being of our children.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT

September 2000

Under the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Agreement, the Government of Canada is providing \$2.2 billion in funding to provinces and territories over five years (from 2001–2002 to 2005–2006) and ongoing funding of \$500 million per year after 2005–2006.

The provinces and territories have agreed to use the funding to expand and improve programs and services for children under six and their families, in any or all of four key areas, including:

- ▶ promoting healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy;
- ▶ improving parenting and family supports;
- ▶ strengthening early childhood development, learning and care; and
- ▶ strengthening community supports.

For Canadian families, the ECD Agreement means better access to such services as prenatal classes, preschool programs, child care and family supports.

In October 2002, the Government of Canada announced a Federal Strategy on Early Childhood Development for First Nations and

Other Aboriginal Children. This strategy goes hand-in-hand with the ECD Agreement. It provides an additional \$320 million over five years to enhance programs and services that address the early childhood development needs of Aboriginal children.

March 2003

## MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORK ON EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

Under this framework, the Government of Canada is providing \$1.05 billion to provinces and territories over five years, starting in 2003–2004. This federal/provincial/territorial agreement builds on commitments in the ECD Agreement by enabling further investments in provincially/territorially regulated early learning and child care programs for children under six.

The objectives are:

- to further promote early childhood development; and
- to help parents participate in employment or training opportunities by improving access to affordable, quality early learning and child care programs and services.

For the most part, the funding is directed towards early learning and child care programs and services in such settings as child care centres, family child care homes, preschools and nursery schools. Programs and services that are part of the formal school system are not funded through this initiative.

The types of investments made under the Multilateral Framework include the following:

- capital and operating funding
- wage enhancements
- training, professional development and support
- fee subsidies
- parent information and referral
- quality assurance

To complement the Multilateral Framework, the Government of Canada committed an additional \$35 million over five years for early learning and child care services for First Nations children living on reserve. The March 2004 Budget made a commitment to add a further \$10 million to this funding over four years, bringing the total investment to \$45 million.

### *Investments in Programs and Services*

The Government of Canada also makes direct investments in the design and delivery of a wide range of programs and services for young children and families, including:

- targeted community-based programs for children and families at risk, such as the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, aimed at ensuring that children are born healthy;
- social, health and nutritional programs to improve outcomes for First Nations and Inuit children and families, such as Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve;

- programs that deliver early learning and child care services, such as the First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative and the Military Family Services Program;
- programs for at-risk Aboriginal children living off reserve, such as Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities, which helps prepare children for school;
- research and information activities, such as research into the health effects of family violence, literacy programs for minority language communities, and public safety campaigns that provide information to protect children from risks related to sun exposure, foodborne illnesses, consumer products (including toys) and household chemicals.

These activities, along with many other programs and services, are outlined in *Early Childhood Development Activities and Expenditures, Government of Canada Report 2003–2004* and *Early Learning and Child Care Activities and Expenditures, Government of Canada Report 2003–2004*. Overall investments in Government of Canada early childhood development and early learning and child care programs and services increased in 2003–2004.

These accountability reports deliver on the Government of Canada's commitment to report publicly on progress in improving and expanding programs and services for children under six and their families.

### ***Income Support and Tax Measures***

The Government of Canada also helps to enhance early childhood development and early learning and child care through various income support programs and tax measures. For example:

- *Maternity and parental leave benefits.* Through the Employment Insurance program, these benefits provide temporary income replacement for working parents of newborns or newly adopted children. In 2000, the Government of Canada extended parental benefits from 10 to 35 weeks so that, in combination with 15 weeks maternity benefits, parents can stay at home with their child for up to 50 weeks during the child's first year of life.
- *The Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) and the National Child Benefit Supplement that is paid to low-income families.* In 2004, these benefits will provide an estimated \$9.1 billion to 3.5 million families raising children.
- *The Child Disability Benefit (CDB).* This monthly benefit, implemented in March 2004, provides financial assistance to eligible families caring for children with severe, prolonged mental and/or physical impairments.
- *The Child Care Expense Deduction.* This income tax deduction helps eligible parents pay for child care while they work or go to school.

### ***Support for Non-governmental Organizations***

The Government of Canada provides support to organizations that work to advance children's health and well-being. For example, in 2003–2004, the government's Social Development Partnerships Program awarded more than \$5 million in grants and contributions to non-profit organizations that advance social development and inclusion of children and their families, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable or excluded population groups in Canadian society.

The Government of Canada also provided funding to help establish the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, which is working to develop a professional, skilled child care work force.

## **WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT GOVERNMENTS' INVESTMENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, AND EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE?**

For printed copies of the 2003–2004 Government of Canada reports on *Early Childhood Development Activities and Expenditures*, and *Early Learning and Child Care Activities and Expenditures*, call 1 800 O-Canada (1 800 622–6232). The Government of Canada reports are also available online at [www.socialunion.ca](http://www.socialunion.ca), along with background papers and previous reports on early childhood development, and early learning and child care.

Additionally, federal, provincial and territorial Ministers responsible for Social Services agreed to launch, on November 3, 2004, a new joint Web portal on early childhood development and early learning and child care ([www.ecd-elcc.ca](http://www.ecd-elcc.ca)). This site is intended as an access point to federal, provincial and territorial Web sites containing information about early childhood development, and early learning and child care initiatives, including their reports under the Early Childhood Development Agreement and Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care.

## **THE WAY FORWARD**

The reports *Early Childhood Development Activities and Expenditures, Government of Canada Report 2003–2004* and *Early Learning and Child Care Activities and Expenditures, Government of Canada Report 2003–2004* demonstrate the federal government's ongoing commitment to children and provide details on the progress that has been made since the ECD Agreement and the Multilateral Framework were put in place.

While the progress is encouraging, more needs to be done to help families who are raising young children. Parents must have real choices, and children must have real opportunities to learn. As part of its commitment to children and families, the Government of Canada continues to work with provincial and territorial partners to support investments in early childhood development, and early learning and child care, to help give children the best possible start in life.

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<sup>1</sup> While the Government of Québec supports the general principles of the Early Childhood Development Agreement and the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, it did not participate in developing these initiatives because it intends to preserve its sole responsibility on social matters. However, Québec receives its share of federal funding and the Government of Québec continues to make major investments in programs and services for families and children.