



MOVING FORWARD ON EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

**AGREEMENT-IN-PRINCIPLE BETWEEN
THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA
AND THE GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

September 29, 2005

Canada 



**BRITISH
COLUMBIA**

Preamble

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.

Parents and families have the primary responsibility for the care and nurturing of their children. British Columbia supports parents in this role through a wide range of family policies and programs, including early learning and child care. Together, these measures provide parents with a range of options and choices for caring for their children and balancing their family, work and community responsibilities.

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, building on the 2003 Early Learning and Child Care Agreement.

Guided by these principles, British Columbia and Canada agree to work over time to achieve broad long term goals that move towards a shared national vision for early learning and child care.

The governments of British Columbia and Canada agree that a national vision and significant new federal investments can complement existing federal and British Columbia investments, and would support the development of British Columbia's system of regulated early learning and child care as a key element of a comprehensive approach to supporting children and families.

Consistent with commitments made by First Ministers under the 2000 Early Childhood Development Agreement, governments will work together in full respect of each other's responsibilities, recognizing that British Columbia has the primary responsibility for early learning and child care. The Government of British Columbia will have the flexibility to determine its priorities within this initiative.

The Government of Canada and the Government of British Columbia 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, British Columbia 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.

British Columbia's vision for child care was articulated in the 2001 *Government Strategic Plan*: "Support a sustainable child care system in which families can choose from a range of affordable, safe, quality child care options that meet diverse needs."

British Columbia has agreed to adopt the principles negotiated by the federal, provincial and territorial governments to guide new federal investments: Quality, Universally Inclusive, Accessible and Developmental. In addition, the Government of British Columbia has adopted three British Columbia specific principles:

- Choice/Flexibility – Parents choose a service that works best for them, including care outside of traditional work hours.
- Targeted Investments – Targeting investments to low income families and families with children with special needs promotes better access for more parents to quality, inclusive care.
- Integrated Services – Child care is available in schools and is integrated with other community services like early childhood development programs.

The province's goals for early learning and child care are:

- More British Columbia families will have access to quality child care options in their communities;
- More children will enter school better prepared to succeed;
- More children with special needs will be included in quality community-based settings;
- More children will be cared for by qualified child care workers in regulated child care settings;
- More employment and business opportunities will be created for child care professionals, particularly women, and in Aboriginal and multicultural communities.

The federal budget announced that the Government of Canada is committing \$5 billion nationally over the next five years for investment in child care and early learning for children under 6. This agreement and the associated funding will assist the province in achieving these goals.

British Columbia will be committing all additional federal money for regulated early learning and child care to the fulfilment of the five-year plan. This further investment will complement existing federal and provincial investments and will support the expansion of regulated early learning and child care in both private and non-profit settings as a key element in developing a supportive social fabric for children and families in British Columbia.

This initiative builds on early learning and child care investments made in British Columbia by the Governments of British Columbia 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

The Governments of Canada and British Columbia believe 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.

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. In keeping with these principles, the Government of British Columbia agrees to work over time to achieve broad long term goals. British Columbia will establish its own targets.

Quality

Improve the quality of early learning and child care 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 regulation and monitoring of early learning and child care; and
- Promote community engagement and partnerships.

¹ Actions could address more than one goal.

Universally Inclusive

Increase the responsiveness of early learning and child care 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 reflecting the needs of each jurisdiction such as:

- 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 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, British Columbia, 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:

- Measurable and demonstrable improvements in the *quality and developmental components* of early learning and child care programs through:
 - strengthening safe, nurturing and stimulating environments for children;
 - promoting community partnerships in supporting early learning and child care opportunities and identification of child care needs;
 - developing training, education and supports for early childhood educators and child care providers; and
 - introducing new and improving existing early learning and child care facilities.
- Better *access* to early learning and child care, which is *universally inclusive*, by:
 - increasing the availability of regulated early learning and child care opportunities;
 - enhancing the range of quality early learning and child care options that are available to families across the province;
 - making early learning and child care more affordable for low income families;
 - strengthening supports for children with special needs to be included in local community child care settings;
 - working with the Government of Canada and Aboriginal people to find practical solutions to address the early learning and child care needs of Aboriginal children; and
 - promoting culturally and linguistically appropriate early learning and child care opportunities for multicultural communities and in French for francophones.

2) Areas for Investment

To advance the vision set out in this agreement, British Columbia agrees that funds provided by the Government of Canada over the life of this agreement will be invested in regulated early learning and child care programs and services for children under age six. Any British Columbia funding not spent in any given fiscal year will be spent in future fiscal years until the total amount is spent by 2009-2010, in accordance with the multi year action plan and subject to the terms defined subsequently in the multi-year funding agreement.

- Regulated programs and services are defined as those that meet quality standards that are established and monitored by the Government of British Columbia.
- 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. The Governments of Canada and British Columbia also support innovative programming that integrates early learning and child care with community and school-based programs and services.

Each government agrees to publicly recognize and explain the respective roles, responsibilities and contributions of governments to this initiative.

3) Action Plan

Consistent with principles and goals set out above, and subject to availability of new federal funding, British Columbia agrees to develop and release by January 31, 2006, an Action Plan on early learning and child care covering the five years of federal funding including its spending plan for the period 2005-2006 to 2009-2010. 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;
- Identify baseline expenditures for early learning and child care and areas for incremental investment; and
- Describe how British Columbia plans to address the early learning and child care needs of:
 - children with special needs;
 - Aboriginal children;
 - children from multicultural communities; and
 - children from francophone communities (consistent with the *Canada-British Columbia Agreement on Official Languages*).

British Columbia will continue to ensure effective mechanisms for its residents to participate in developing early learning and child care priorities and reviewing outcomes.

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.

The Governments of Canada and British Columbia will work collaboratively to ensure a coherent approach to early learning and child care for First Nations children.

4) Public Reporting

Canada and British Columbia agree that the purpose of public reporting is to be accountable to their publics, not to each other.

Under the existing 2003 Multilateral Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care, the Government of British Columbia 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, British Columbia 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 with special needs receiving extra

supports to participate in local child care settings.

- Affordability: the number of families and children receiving subsidies and subsidy levels.
- Quality: training requirements and regulatory requirements respecting child to staff ratios and group size.
- British Columbia may also include additional indicators as appropriate. As the Governments of Canada and British Columbia agree to other comparable indicators, British Columbia will incorporate these indicators in its annual reports, to the extent that data are available.

5) Funding

British Columbia and Canada agree that further investments in early learning and child care should be incremental, predictable and sustained over the long term. To accomplish these goals, British Columbia will implement spending initiatives in an incremental way to reach annualized funding level of \$152 million by 2007-2008, in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the multi year action plan. With regard to the funding allocated under the Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund, British Columbia will spend only a portion of the Trust Fund in 2005-2006 and gradually ramp up expenditures to the \$152 million annualized level by 2007-2008.

British Columbia and Canada recognize that achieving the national vision for early learning and child care will require additional funding in the future. 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 British Columbia, for the purpose of implementing its Action Plan:

	Funding under existing 2003 Multilateral Framework on ELCC (CST) ² (\$ million)	New ELCC Funding (\$ million)	Total (\$ million)
2005-2006	29.6	92.0	121.6
2006-2007	39.5	85.6	125.1
2007-2008	46.2	151.7	197.9
2008-2009	46.2	151.9	198.1
2009-2010	46.3	152.1	198.4

² Federal funding under the 2003 Multilateral Framework will continue to flow through the Canada Social Transfer.

All disbursements made under this agreement will be separate and distinct from Canada Social Transfer funding provided for under the 2003 Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care. The \$92 million indicated for 2005-2006 is in recognition of amounts put in trust for British Columbia for 2004-2005/2005-2006. British Columbia 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, British Columbia and Canada will work together to conclude a detailed multi-year funding agreement 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

British Columbia recognizes the importance of evaluation in determining the effectiveness and outcomes of initiatives in early learning and child care and agrees to pursue evaluations, where appropriate, in order to assess the impact of investments made under this agreement.

Canada and British Columbia agree to work together to share knowledge, research and information on effective practices in early learning and child care. The Government of British Columbia will work over time with the Government of Canada and other interested provincial and territorial governments to collaborate to:

- Develop a National Quality Framework, which governments would hope 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 nationally shared 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 British Columbia and other interested provincial and territorial governments. With respect to each of the above activities, the Governments of Canada and British Columbia will move forward in consultation with experts and other interested parties as mutually agreed.

7) Legislative Environment

British Columbia may wish to reconsider the agreement-in-principle in the event of federal legislation that substantially alters respective roles and responsibilities as they relate to early learning and child care.

Signed on _____ at _____

For Canada,

The Honourable Ken Dryden
Minister of Social Development

For British Columbia,

The Honourable Stanley B. Hagen
Minister of Children and Family Development