

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA RESPONSE

TO A *COMMON VISION: INTERIM REPORT*

**THE FOURTH REPORT OF
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT AND
THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

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Government of Canada Response to *A Common Vision: Interim Report* the Fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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The Government of Canada is committed to building a stronger, ever more inclusive society and to securing a higher quality of life for all Canadians.

1. BACKGROUND

The Joint Interim Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, *A Common Vision*, reflects the hearings and work of the Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and the Sub-Committee on Children and Youth at Risk. It demonstrates the commitment of Members of Parliament to ensure that Canada achieves meaningful progress on issues affecting Canadian children and persons with disabilities.

The Sub-Committee on Children and Youth at Risk and the Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities have shown leadership in examining issues affecting children and persons with disabilities. This is the first time the Sub-Committees have issued a joint report to outline successes and address common concerns. Specifically, the Report highlights key issues raised in a series of roundtables held with policy experts, Government of Canada officials and representatives of disability and children's

organizations across Canada in April and May 2001. These Roundtable discussions touched on a number of important issues linked to persons with disabilities and children such as employment, disability-related supports and services, income programs, the Early Childhood Development Agreement and benefits for families with children.

The Sub-Committees recognize that many reports and studies have highlighted the barriers that people with disabilities face in participating fully in Canadian life. Moreover they acknowledge that considerable progress has been made in the development and implementation of measures in support of children and families. For the purposes of this report, they focused their work on processes that the Government of Canada uses regarding disability and children's issues; they noted areas where further action is required; and they emphasized the role that Parliament and Parliamentarians can play in addressing these issues

A Common Vision: Interim Report

A Common Vision recognizes that issues affecting Canada's children and persons with disabilities reach across our entire society. "They cut across departmental lines, affect the operations of many federal agencies and are intimately interwoven into the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories as well as into the voluntary and private sectors. This means that no one jurisdiction – let alone one federal department – can control decisions, resources and activities."

The Sub-Committees stress the need to improve the horizontal management of disability and children's issues. They believe the key will be building greater accountability and the need for

both Government and Parliament to learn to work across mandates, processes and structures. They advocate strengthening existing processes and introducing new processes to improve horizontal management and ensure action on disability and children's issues.

This Response elaborates on the Government of Canada's vision and approach to moving forward on disability and children's issues, provides an overview of the Government's recent investments and planned initiatives in these two areas and responds to the specific recommendations of the Report and outlines how the Government's approach is addressing these important issues.

"They [issues affecting children and persons with disabilities] cut across departmental lines, affect the operations of many federal agencies and are intimately interwoven into the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories as well as into the voluntary and private sectors."

Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, *A Common Vision* (June 2001).

2. INTRODUCTION

The Government of Canada is committed to building a stronger, ever more inclusive society and to securing a higher quality of life for all Canadians. In this vision of an inclusive society, in which social and economic goals are pursued hand-in-hand, all Canadians will have the opportunity to contribute to, and share in, the benefits of our country's standard of living.

In order to achieve this goal the Government has identified children and persons with disabilities as priorities for action, and has implemented an approach based on:

- The development of shared visions and frameworks for action that help bring about the full inclusion of people with disabilities in Canadian life and to ensure that no child is left behind;
- A recognition that effectively addressing issues related to children and persons with disabilities requires close collaboration with provinces and territories as well as horizontal management across Government of Canada departments;

- A determination to engage all sectors of Canadian society in action on disability and children's issues;
- Investments in research and knowledge building as the basis for evidence-based policy and program development for children and persons with disabilities;
- A commitment to ongoing accountability, based on commonly agreed outcomes, and regular public reporting on progress for both of these priority areas.

Under this approach, the Government of Canada is working in new and different ways, across departments and across governments, drawing on the knowledge and expertise of its partners in private industry, academe and the voluntary and non-government sectors, as well as the experience of grassroots organizations working at the community level. It is developing and implementing collaborative approaches to address issues facing the disability community and children and their families, identifying knowledge gaps and developing strong and sustainable partnerships.

Shared Visions and Frameworks for Action

In 1996, First Ministers called for priority attention to issues relating to children and persons with disabilities as part of social policy renewal. Since then, the Government has worked collaboratively with provincial and territorial governments, and consulted with Canadians, to develop shared frameworks for action in these two areas.

In the area of disability, the federal, provincial and territorial Ministers responsible for Social Services have released a shared vision and policy framework for disability in the 1998 document, *In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues*¹. Although it preceded the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) signed in February 1999, *In Unison* represents an approach that is consistent with the SUFA, whereby governments agreed on shared principles and ways of working to advance social policies for all Canadians.

¹ Quebec shares the concerns raised in the *In Unison Report*. However, the Government of Quebec did not take part in the development of the document because it wishes to assume control over programs for persons with disabilities for Quebec. Consequently, any references to joint federal/provincial/territorial positions do not include Quebec.

The *In Unison* vision of full citizenship for persons with disabilities – a vision also shared by the 1996 Federal Task Force on Disability Issues (Scott Report) – reflected a new way of understanding disability issues and developing policy. The framework focuses on three building blocks: disability supports, employment, and income. The Government of Canada's disability agenda, outlined in *Future Directions* (1999), directly reflects these principles and provides for a combination of joint and collaborative actions and complementary initiatives between the different orders of government. The Government remains committed to act on disability issues and to ensure that persons with disabilities, including children and Aboriginal persons with disabilities and their families, are included in all aspects of Canadian society.

The *National Children's Agenda* (NCA), developed with provincial and territorial governments and launched in 1999, sets out a shared vision to ensure that all children in Canada have the best possible opportunity to realize their full potential. The NCA sets out four broad goals for Canada's children: health; safety and security; success at learning; and social engagement and responsibility

The Speech from the Throne (October 1999) announced a comprehensive and inclusive strategy to improve supports for Canadian families and children, based on the knowledge that childhood experiences establish the foundation for long-term outcomes. This strategy lays the foundation for the Government of Canada's contribution to advancing the *National*

Children's Agenda. It includes six key commitments: tax relief for families with children; enhanced investment in the *National Child Benefit*; improvements to *Employment Insurance* benefits for new parents; federal, provincial and territorial collaboration in the area of early childhood development; the development of family friendly workplace policies; and family law reform.

Canadians can also count on a significant legislative framework that reflects our shared commitment to equality and inclusion. At the federal level, this includes the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Canadian Human Rights Act* (CHRA), and the *Employment Equity Act* (EEA). Many provincial and territorial governments have complementary frameworks.

Working Within and Across Governments

Canada's shared visions for persons with disabilities and for children cut across departmental boundaries and federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions. Accordingly, the development and delivery of effective

government responses requires horizontal management across Government of Canada departments and close collaboration with provincial and territorial governments.

Federal, provincial and territorial collaboration has been, and continues to be, a cornerstone of the Government's work in the areas of children and disability.

Since the 1996 Deputy Ministers' Task Force report on *Managing Horizontal Policy Issues*, the Government has made significant strides in the development and implementation of horizontal management approaches – building supportive structures, creating opportunities for exchange and mobilizing interdepartmental teams to address concrete issues.

The Government's approach is to designate a lead Minister or Ministers for crosscutting issues, while recognizing that each Minister, department and agency is accountable for actions on children and disability issues within their own mandate.

For disability issues, the Minister for Human Resources Development has lead responsibility, with support from an Assistant Deputy Ministers Steering Committee, composed of representatives of

departments and agencies responsible for disability-related policies and programs. The Steering Committee is providing leadership on crosscutting disability issues in an effort to better align and monitor the progress of federal disability agenda priorities across departments and agencies. It will also ensure that federal policies and programs are developed and implemented in consultation with the disability community and other interested stakeholders and that linkages with provinces and territories are maintained.

The Minister of Human Resources Development has also identified a senior executive responsible for the coordination of disability issues within the department and upgraded the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) to a Directorate with a mandate to advance the implementation of the Disability Agenda, expand innovative partnerships and promote a better understanding of disability issues.

The Ministers of Human Resources Development and Health share lead responsibility for children's issues, with the support of the Secretary of State (Children and Youth). They work with a range of other departments actively engaged in interdepartmental processes that touch on their mandates, or leading on specific issues that fall within their areas of responsibility. The Minister of Labour has the lead responsibility for the promotion of family-friendly workplaces in federally regulated industries and in the private sector.

Federal, provincial and territorial collaboration has been, and continues to be, a cornerstone of the Government's work in the areas of children and disability. Both orders of government carry responsibility for essential elements of effective social policy, and they have a shared interest in the well-being of Canadian citizens. Federal, provincial and territorial governments are working

together in the development and implementation of key policy and program initiatives, from the identification of children and disability as social policy priorities to the elaboration of shared visions. They also share a commitment to evaluate and report on government progress in the areas of children and disability.

A range of federal, provincial and territorial mechanisms supports this collaborative work, from regular meetings of First Ministers and Ministers to task-oriented committees and working groups at the officials' level. Through horizontal management, federal, provincial and territorial governments strive to cross the boundaries of departments and ministries. For example, discussions on disability supports could involve officials from departments of Finance as well as those responsible for social development issues.

Engaging Stakeholders

Defining the real needs of individual Canadians and their families and developing solutions to address them requires the involvement of Canadians themselves, their communities, the voluntary sector, and the private sector, as well as all orders of government.

The principle of engagement with citizens is an integral aspect of the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA). The Government of Canada has fostered this collaborative approach to policy development in its work with provinces and territories and its own initiatives on disability and children's issues.

In 1999, for example, federal, provincial and territorial governments sponsored a public dialogue on the *National Children's Agenda*, which confirmed support for the vision and a strong appetite for follow up action by governments. A voluntary sector coalition, the National Children's Alliance, continues to play a constructive role in mobilizing public support for the *National Children's Agenda* and in ensuring ongoing input by key stakeholders on children's

issues. Federal, provincial and territorial officials have also established consultations with subject matter experts, including academics and key stakeholders, at key junctures in the reporting process on the *National Child Benefit*, and more recently, on early childhood development.

Similarly, the 1998 *In Unison* vision document was developed in consultation with members of the disability community, and in turn a coalition of disability organizations articulated their *Community Definition* and proposals for action in relation to the vision. Subsequently, members of the disability community and Aboriginal representatives were involved throughout the development of the *In Unison 2000* report, and provided much useful input on indicators, effective practices, and potential solutions to some of the issues discussed in the report. Ongoing informal working relations have been built through these experiences, so that as officials have embarked on policy analysis on labour market and disability supports they have the benefit of perspective and insights from community and Aboriginal members. The

Government of Canada has also carried the areas of federal work, for example, on the first federal report on disability.

Actions relating to children and to people with disabilities are stronger, and more effective, as a result of being based on a foundation of shared understanding of the issues and a shared definition of the goals. The process of identifying common values, finding and building consensus on key issues, and reaching agreement on desired outcomes is time-consuming, but crucial groundwork. Moreover, engagement, consensus building, and collaboration have to be ongoing,

Developing and Sharing Knowledge

Investments in research and knowledge development are essential to the Government's approach to social policy development. Developing effective policy and program initiatives to respond to the First Ministers' priorities in social policy renewal requires a solid and shared understanding of the issues, the possible solutions, and the implications of a range of options. Research and evaluation provide valuable information about the results of

principle of consultation and engagement into as policies and programs are implemented, results are reported on, improvements made, and new initiatives undertaken.

Progress on issues related to children and people with disabilities can be most meaningful through ongoing dialogue between all partners. The Standing Committee and the Sub-Committees have played a key role in facilitating dialogue on disability and children's issues, as *A Common Vision* attests, and the Government welcomes this involvement.

initiatives, and allow the Government to report back to Canadians on the impacts of investments.

The Government of Canada is committed to knowledge building and has made important investments in research and knowledge to expand our understanding on disability and children's issues.

In 1994, the Government of Canada launched the *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth* to gain more knowledge about Canada's children. This ongoing, groundbreaking survey is designed to measure and track the development and well-being of Canada's children and youth over time. It serves as the basis of a research agenda, which directly informs policy development for children and families.

Understanding the Early Years is a community-level research initiative that focuses on children under the age of six. It helps communities understand how their children are doing and how best to respond to their needs. With this information, communities can put in place specific action plans that will help their children reach their full potential.

Accountability

Citizens are increasingly holding governments accountable for their actions and for their investments. In turn, governments are increasingly focused on establishing effective

As recommended in the 1999 Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, the Government has launched the *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS)* to provide a better picture of persons with disabilities in Canada. The findings, to be released in 2003, will build a more comprehensive knowledge base about the challenges facing people with disabilities at home, at school, in the labour market and in the community.

The Government has also initiated a disability research strategy, including longitudinal research, which will help to create a broad knowledge base on which policy and new initiatives can be developed.

accountability mechanisms. For both children's issues and persons with disabilities, recent attention has focused on measuring progress and public reporting.

Focusing on Accountability

- Public reports:
 - Two progress reports on *National Child Benefit*
 - Commitment to report on *Early Childhood Development Agreement*
 - Ongoing evaluation of the Opportunities Fund for persons with disabilities
 - Federal, provincial, territorial *In Unison 2000* report
 - First comprehensive federal report on federal programs and services for persons with disabilities

Public reporting is a key element of the *National Child Benefit*, with two progress reports having been issued to date. Governments will continue to assess and report on the progress being made in achieving *National Child Benefit* objectives, including the reduction of child poverty and helping parents find and keep work.

The *Early Childhood Development Agreement*, concluded by First Ministers in September 2000, includes a commitment by governments to report on their progress to the public every year. Governments have agreed to report in three areas: baseline expenditures and activities;

progress in improving and expanding early childhood development programs and services; and child well-being.

Persons with disabilities and the organizations representing them are strongly involved in providing direction to Human Resources Development Canada on the implementation of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities. A Phase I evaluation of this funding program was completed in 1998. It provided useful information on program implementation and process issues. The results of Phase II, to be made public soon, will contribute to a better

understanding of the profile of participants, the impacts and effects of the program, and the types of interventions that have proven most successful for persons with disabilities.

Accountability and reporting have also been an important focus of federal, provincial and territorial work on disability. Ministers responsible for Social Services jointly released the *In Unison 2000* report, which for the first time brought together important information on societal indicators and effective practices related to disability in Canada.

The Government of Canada is currently developing the first comprehensive report on the results of federal programs and services for persons with disabilities. The report will go beyond the level of individual departmental performance reports to look at outcomes in relation to goals of *In Unison* and the Government of Canada agenda. The Government has also committed that, over the

longer term, the development of new policies, programs, and legislation will build in these accountability measures with the use of an “access and inclusion lens” approach, currently under development.

Developing outcomes indicators and pulling together meaningful data for comprehensive reporting involves discussion and collaborative work between officials in different departments and programs, and between community members, in a similar fashion to that of the Sub-committees’ work described in *A Common Vision*.

Reporting initiatives, at both the federal, provincial and territorial and federal interdepartmental levels, represents the beginning of an ongoing process from which policy-makers, program managers, stakeholders, and the Canadian public can learn about the impacts of programs and services and assess progress toward goals.

3. INVESTMENTS AND INITIATIVES

Shared visions and frameworks for action, collaboration within and across governments, engagement of key stakeholders, research and knowledge, and accountability to Canadians form the basis of the Government of Canada's

approach for investing in children and families and persons with disabilities. Building upon this foundation, the Government has made substantial investments and continues to pursue important new initiatives with its partners.

Many federal government departments provide programs and services to assist persons with disabilities. The following are some examples of Government of Canada support* for persons with disabilities:

- Taxation Assistance:
- Disability Tax Credit (\$385 million)
- Medical Expense Tax Credit (\$465 million) and its refundable supplement for low-income workers (\$40 million)
- Caregiver Tax Credit (\$29 million)
- Infirm Dependent Credit (\$10 million)

- Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities (\$193 million)
- Opportunities Fund (\$30 million)
- Canada Study Grants awarded in 1999-2000 to students with disabilities (\$9 million)
- Social Development Partnerships Program (\$12 million)
- Canada Pension Plan Disability benefits paid in 2000-2001 to contributors with disabilities (\$2.5 billion) and their children (\$232 million)

* Estimates for 2001, or the most recent year for which data is available.

Investing in Persons with Disabilities

The Government of Canada makes substantial investments in initiatives that enhance the full participation of persons with disabilities, both directly, and in partnership with provinces, territories, and the private and voluntary sectors.

Through the tax system, the Government of Canada provides assistance with the costs of disability to individuals and their families. As a result of recent changes, in 2001, the Government will provide an estimated \$385 million in tax assistance through the *Disability Tax Credit*; \$465 million through the *Medical Expense Tax Credit* (METC); \$40 million through the *Refundable Supplement to the METC* for low income workers; \$29 million through the *Caregiver Tax Credit*, and \$10 million through the *Infirm Dependent Credit*. There is also a deduction in place for attendant care expenses. In addition, the child care expense deduction limit was increased in recognition of higher costs of care for children with severe disabilities.

These figures include \$45 million in new assistance announced in *Budget 2000* (February

2000) primarily for children with severe disabilities and their caregivers. The *Economic Statement and Budget Update* (October 2000) further increased existing tax measures for persons with disabilities and caregivers by \$100 million, bringing the total new investments to \$145 million.

Canadians with disabilities and their families benefit from programs and services supported by federal transfers to provinces and territories through the *Canadian Health and Social Transfer*. In addition to this, the Government of Canada has committed \$193 million annually to the *Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities* (EAPD) initiative.

EAPD is a joint federal-provincial initiative in which the Government of Canada provides funding to the provinces to improve employability for persons with disabilities. The programs and services funded under EAPD vary among provinces to reflect local priorities and circumstances. Examples of interventions which provinces may choose to jointly fund through

EAPD include post-secondary education, employment counselling and assessment, pre-employment training, skills development, assistive aids and devices, wage subsidies or earnings supplements, and individualized funding.

Budget 2000 announced ongoing funding of \$30

effective and coordinated and that gaps can be addressed.

Federal, provincial and territorial officials have also been instructed by Ministers responsible for Social Services to examine the feasibility of a tax benefit for disability supports. The scope of this

Investing in Children and Families

Building on the strong foundations of Canada's social infrastructure, recent initiatives provide the building blocks for a comprehensive system of supports for children and families in Canada. The Government has taken action on each of the elements of the federal strategy for children and families set out in the Speech from the Throne (October 1999).

Budget 2000 and the October 2000 *Economic Statement and Budget Update* introduced and

study includes looking at mechanisms for improving the accessibility and availability of disability supports.

Reports on both of these projects will be submitted to the next meeting of the Ministers responsible for Social Services.

expanded upon a five-year plan to provide real and lasting tax relief for Canadians, with a special emphasis on the needs of families with children. Under the plan, which took effect January 1, 2001, the Government introduced the most important structural changes to the federal tax system in more than a decade, restoring full indexation and reducing Canadians' average personal income tax burden by 21 per cent, with even greater reductions for families with children – 27 per cent.

Examples of Government of Canada Support to Children and their Families

- Taxation measures
 - Restoration of indexation to personal income tax- reducing average personal income tax for families with children by 27%
- Canada Child Tax Benefit :
 - Increase in the maximum benefit paid to low-income families
 - Indexation of the benefit to protect against inflation
- Employment Insurance:
 - Easier to access maternity and parental benefits
 - Increased duration of parental benefits
- Early Childhood Development Agreement (\$2.2 billion over 5 years with \$300 million in 2001-2002)
- Aboriginal Head Start Program

The *National Child Benefit*, introduced in 1998, is a joint initiative with the provinces, territories and First Nations that provides a national platform of child benefits for low-income families. The *National Child Benefit* has three core objectives: to reduce the incidence and depth of child poverty; to promote attachment to the workforce by ensuring families will always be better off as a result of working; and, to reduce overlap and duplication of government programs.

As part of its contribution to the *National Child Benefit*, the Government has increased its investment in the *Canada Child Tax Benefit* each year since its introduction in 1998, with the latest increase taking effect on July 20, 2001. More than 80 per cent of families, with 5.9 million children, in Canada will receive the *Canada Child Tax Benefit* in 2001-2002. The maximum benefit level paid to low-income families has increased almost \$300 more per child this year, reaching \$2,372 annually for the first child. In addition, the *Canada Child*

Tax Benefit has been indexed to protect against inflation.

For their part, provinces, territories and First Nations have made adjustments to income support and are reinvesting these savings along with making additional new investments into programs and services for low-income families with children. These *National Child Benefit* initiatives include such things as child care, early childhood services, services for children at risk, child benefits, employment income supplements and supplementary health benefits.

On December 31, 2000, new legislation brought in by the Government of Canada took effect, making it easier to access maternity and parental benefits and extending parental benefits under the *Employment Insurance* program. In addition to 15 weeks of maternity benefits, the Government of Canada increased the duration of parental benefits to 35 weeks for biological and adoptive parents, effectively doubling the period of available benefits from six months to one year. In order to improve access to maternity and parental benefits, the number of hours of insured employment required to support a claim was reduced from 700 to 600 hours, only one two-week waiting period must be served for parents

who share parental benefits, and parents are able to continue some work activities without reduction in their benefits.

The federal, provincial and territorial *Early Childhood Development Agreement* announced by First Ministers in September 2000 represents a commitment by governments² to improve and expand services for young children and their families, through investments in four areas: healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy; parenting and family supports; early childhood development, learning and care; and community supports. The Government of Canada will transfer \$2.2 billion over five years to the provincial and territorial governments to support improvement and expansion of early childhood development programs across all four areas.

Implementation of this initiative is well underway. Federal transfers to provincial and territorial governments – a total of \$300 million in 2001-2002 – began to flow on April 1, 2001. Provincial

² While sharing the same concerns as other governments on early childhood development, Quebec is not participating in the Early Childhood Development Initiative. The Government of Quebec assumes sole responsibility for delivery of early childhood development programs in the province.

and territorial governments are taking a range of approaches to improving and expanding early childhood development programs. Investments have clustered around programs such as child care, parenting supports and services, prenatal education, support for children and families with special needs, and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

The Government of Canada is also working to build more family friendly workplaces for all Canadians, including its own employees and those of federally regulated employers through labour code amendments, the introduction of supportive workplace policies and programs, and the provision of information and tools to help employers, unions, managers and human resource practitioners design and implement their own measures.

The Government of Canada continues to work on family law reform with provinces and territories to ensure that the legal system encourages parents to meet their responsibilities to their children. The reforms will also help ensure that both parents can assume parental responsibilities, providing both parents with opportunities to guide and nurture their children. Together, the Government of

Canada and its provincial and territorial partners are consulting Canadians on important issues such as custody, access and child support.

The most recent Speech from the Throne (January 2001) reiterated the Government's commitment to children and families and indicated that additional efforts will be undertaken in key areas.

Of particular relevance to the Sub-Committees' interest in work-life balance and children with disabilities, the Government has committed to improve the support available to parents and caregivers in times of family crisis, enabling parents to care for a gravely ill child without fear of sudden income or job loss.

In addition, the Government has committed to work with First Nations to improve and expand early childhood development programs and services in their communities, significantly enhance the *Aboriginal Head Start Program*, and to work with Aboriginal communities and provincial and territorial governments on measures to reduce the incidence of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome among Aboriginal newborns.

Moving Forward

The Government of Canada will continue to play a leadership role in progress on meeting the needs of children and persons with disabilities and to support a collaborative approach that calls for all orders of government, the private and voluntary sectors, children's groups and the disability community to work together to achieve the greatest outcomes. Each has a part to play in creating an inclusive society, which provides the necessary supports to ensure that children, persons with disabilities, and their families across Canada have the opportunity to achieve their full potential and participate in the social and economic life of the country.

The Sub-Committees have an important role to play in providing all stakeholders with the opportunity to provide input and to share their knowledge and experiences in dealing with children and disability issues. They can help marshal the support of other sectors of Canadian society in addressing difficult, interdependent and complex issues. The Sub-Committee on the

Status of Persons with Disabilities can also help the disability community in defining outcomes and measures that will help Canada move more effectively toward an environment of access and inclusion for Canadians with disabilities.

The Sub-Committee on Children and Youth at Risk has made an important contribution to improving the well-being of Canadian children and families. It has identified and called attention to key issues, and its public reports have provided valuable advice in support of implementation of the Government's strategy, in particular with respect to early childhood development.

The Government of Canada would like to thank the Sub-Committees for their commitment to children and persons with disabilities and for their suggestions on how to ensure progress is made on issues that touch the lives of so many Canadians.

4. RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN A *COMMON VISION*: *INTERIM REPORT*

The Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities accepted the 11 recommendations submitted by its Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and its Sub-Committee on Children and Youth at Risk and tabled *A Common Vision: Interim Report* in the House of Commons in June 2001.

The federal disability and children's agenda and the approaches adopted by the Government of

Canada to implement them are consistent with the spirit of these recommendations. The Government recognizes that there is still much to be done on the disability and children's agenda in Canada and welcomes ongoing discussions on these issues. It looks to the views of Parliamentarians, governments, the disability community, the children and families community and the broader voluntary and business sector as Canada moves forward on disability and children's issues.

Recommendation 1

The Sub-Committee on Children and Youth at Risk and the Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities jointly recommend that the Standing Orders of the House of Commons be amended so that both Sub-Committees:

- a. *be constituted as a matter of course at the beginning of each session of Parliament.*
- b. *have the ability to set their own budgets, establish their own meeting schedule without restrictions, and report to the House of Commons.*

Government Response

The Government commends the Sub-Committees for their important work, which is of interest to all Canadians. The Committee's proposal to amend the Standing Orders to

recognize the two Sub-Committees, and its implications for the operations of the House of Commons, are matters for Parliament to decide.

Recommendation 2

The Sub-Committee on Children and Youth at Risk and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Recommendation 3

The Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities recommends that the Department of Human Resources Development explore practices to change the funding cycle for organizations receiving grants and contributions so that disability organizations can plan their activities appropriately. The Department should consider multi-year funding (as is already in place in the Canadian International Development Agency). It should also consider the desirability of providing funds to cover the core operating costs of national disability organizations.

Government Response

With regard to the Sub-Committee specific concerns for the funding of national disability organizations, the *Social Development Partnerships Program* (SDPP) is the major funding mechanism for national disability organizations. SDPP allows funding for up to five years and multi-year agreements are normally permitted. However, funding for disability organizations is currently being approved on a yearly basis while the disability component of the SDPP is under review.

National disability organizations are also eligible to apply to other Human Resources Development Canada contribution programs with funding that can last up to three years.

Human Resources Development Canada recognizes that its sponsors strive to achieve results in difficult or demanding circumstances. The Department's discussions with stakeholders and sponsors have highlighted the challenges some organizations face in responding to departmental expectations for documentation and reporting. As a result, the Department recognizes that it needs to constantly examine and reduce paper burden while at the same time ensuring the retention of the controls that are necessary for good management and accountability.

Human Resources Development Canada is reviewing the administration of grants and

contributions programs with input from the voluntary sector.

The Government of Canada is committed to building a new relationship with Canada's entire voluntary sector, including disability organizations. That commitment was affirmed in *Securing Our Future Together*, and in the Speech from the Throne (January 2001). It was reaffirmed last year with the Government's announcement of a \$94.6 million investment over five years to support the *Voluntary Sector Initiative* (VSI), a joint undertaking between the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector to strengthen the sector's capacity to meet the demands of our society and create new ways for the Government and the voluntary sector to work together.

To ensure a wide variety of input from voluntary organizations and the Government of Canada, the VSI established several "Joint Tables" that

will address key areas of concern. The mandate of the Capacity Joint Table, co-chaired by representatives from the voluntary sector and Human Resources Development Canada, includes among other facets of capacity, the exploration of new approaches to provide financial stability and sustainability for the voluntary sector. This area of capacity was clearly articulated as an important issue for the voluntary sector as a whole, including disability organizations.

In Fall 2000, the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS), as part of the Voluntary Sector Initiative, embarked on a *Study of Funding Practices and Policies*. The TBS has conducted consultations with voluntary organizations across Canada and federal departments that work closely with voluntary organizations to identify impediments and propose solutions in current funding arrangements.

Further information on the Voluntary Sector Initiative is available at <http://www.vsi-isbc.ca> or at (613) 238-1591.

Recommendation 4

The Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities recommends that the federal government fulfil its commitments in the Speech from the Throne for persons with disabilities as soon as possible. Specifically, the Sub-Committee recommends that:

- funds be allocated as soon as possible for the investment in new technologies to assist persons with disabilities that was promised in the Speech from the Throne;**
- the federal strategy paper on innovation and job skills include persons with disabilities in any comprehensive framework;**
- a comprehensive labour market strategy for persons with disabilities should build on the existing activities of the organizations that assist people with disabilities gain employment while avoiding any duplication or overlap.**

Government Response

New technologies show great potential for enhancing the participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities – they can increase their capacity for independent living, for learning, for becoming active members of their communities and for holding a job or pursuing a career.

In the Speech from the Throne (January 2001), the Government identified the development of new technologies to assist Canadians with disabilities as one of the new research and

development initiatives that will be incorporated in the global strategy for Canadian science and technology. Industry Canada is working toward a program to develop new technologies to assist people with disabilities.

Human Resources Development Canada's Office of Learning Technologies is supporting new partnerships and innovative uses of technologies for lifelong learning by diverse groups of Canadians, including persons with disabilities.

The Office helps disability organizations conduct studies and learning needs assessments that guide the implementation and use of technologies for the education and training of persons with disabilities. It supports the development of community learning networks, including networks that serve the disability community. It also helps test and assess the effective and appropriate use of information and communication technologies as popular education tools for disability organizations and as assistive learning tools for persons with specific disabilities.

The Government of Canada has identified skills and learning as priority areas for realizing the vision of a more successful, competitive and inclusive society. With the development of new federal strategies and initiatives on innovation and skills and learning, the government wants to ensure that Canadians of all ages and regions of

the country can equip themselves with the education and skills they need to succeed in the new economy.

The Government of Canada is working to fulfil its Speech from the Throne (January 2001) commitment regarding the development of a comprehensive labour market strategy for persons with disabilities. Federal, provincial and territorial governments are currently working together on the development of this strategy. Work is underway to assess current programs and services, identify gaps, and develop a comprehensive response. This work will be accomplished with input from the disability community and other key stakeholders such as business and labour. This concerted approach will ensure that efforts to improve the employment situation of persons with disabilities are coordinated and effective.

Recommendation 5

The Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities recommends that Income Security Programs Branch of Human Resources Development Canada should create an expert panel including representatives of disability organizations to provide an ongoing forum for a dialogue over the ways and means of providing income to people with disabilities through the Canada Pensions Plan (Disability).

Government Response

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation. Human Resources Development Canada has taken steps to create an advisory roundtable to gain the perspective of the disability community on the delivery of the *Canada Pension Plan* (CPP) disability benefits.

an interest in disability issues or with expertise in serving or representing members of the disability community. Human Resources Development Canada welcomes the perspective of these participants in efforts to modernize service delivery

Participants in the CPP Disability Advisory Group are being drawn from national organizations with

Recommendation 6

The Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities recommends that the Government of Canada convene a taskforce of relevant departments and agencies as well as representatives from the disability community to study the harmonization of definitions of “disability” in place in federally-administered, disability programs and services. This taskforce should provide this Sub-Committee with a progress report in June 2002 and the results of its work should be included in the Report on Plans and Priorities and in its Departmental Performance Report in 2002 and annually thereafter.

Government Response

The Government agrees with the recommendation to study the definitions of disability in federal disability programs.

Human Resources Development Canada will undertake a review of the definitions of disability with all federal departments involved in disability issues and will report on its progress on a regular basis.

Recommendation 7

The Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and the Sub-Committee on Children and Youth at Risk jointly recommend that the Government of Canada should develop a strategy to address directly the need for supports and services for children with disabilities and their families.

Government Response

The Government's strategy for children and families is an inclusive one, with supports for children with disabilities cutting across many of its elements. The shared vision of the *National Children's Agenda* clearly calls for every child to be valued and to develop his or her unique capacities. The *National Child Benefit*, recent tax relief measures for families with children and the extension of parental benefits under *Employment Insurance* all make a contribution toward supporting children with disabilities and their families.

The federal, provincial and territorial *Early Childhood Development Agreement* recognizes that effective early childhood development programming should be inclusive of children with different abilities. Many provinces are investing a portion of the funds provided by the Government

of Canada for early childhood development programs in services for children with special needs.

Health Canada programs provide a range of supports for children and families at risk. Programs such as the *Community Action Program for Children*, *Aboriginal Head Start* and the *Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program* all use an inclusive approach to prevention and early intervention programming.

In addition to these inclusive measures, in recent years the Government of Canada has significantly enhanced tax-based support to persons with disabilities, including families of children with disabilities.

In addition, the Government is cooperating with Aboriginal communities and provinces and territories on the measures required to significantly reduce the incidence of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effect in Aboriginal populations.

The inclusive vision of the *National Children's Agenda* will continue to be applied to new

initiatives developed in support of children and families. Similarly, the Government will continue to use an across the lifespan approach when addressing disability issues. The Government is committed to addressing the needs of children with disabilities through these integrated approaches.

Recommendation 8

The Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and the Sub-Committee on Children and Youth at Risk jointly recommend that the government consider ways to make qualification for *Employment Insurance* benefits more flexible to enable a broader number of parents to qualify for maternity and parental leave. Some members suggest that the government consider negotiating with the provinces that wish to establish a parental insurance plan as an extension of their family policy because they believe that an insurance plan that is reserved strictly for parental leave would be much more accessible and much more generous.

Government Response

The Government of Canada has been providing maternity benefits to Canadians for close to 30 years and parental benefits for a decade. The Government recently improved maternity and parental leave, extending it from six months to one full year, to ensure that Canadians have adequate time to nurture young children.

The extension of maternity and parental benefits is provided to Canadians at no additional costs; in fact, for the last seven years, premiums have come down. Currently, some employers, including federal and provincial governments, provide top-ups to *Employment Insurance* (EI)

benefits. There is nothing that prevents any province from doing the same, building on the solid platform of the EI program.

In the last Speech from the Throne (January 2001), the Government committed to improving support for parents and caregivers in times of family crisis. As mentioned in the Speech, “No Canadian should have to choose between keeping their job and providing palliative care to a child. The Government will take steps to enable parents to provide care to a gravely ill child without fear of sudden income or job loss.”

Workplaces and employment relationships are changing rapidly. A growing number of Canadians now work in non-standard or alternative employment and have a labour market profile that makes them ineligible for EI benefits or job protection provisions in labour legislation. Human Resources Development Canada is researching the nature of these changing relationships and their impact on workers, their families and society.

EI coverage for self-employed workers is a recurring policy challenge for Government. Self-employed workers have a greater degree of control over their employment and it is difficult to identify when a self-employed person is involuntarily unemployed or without work by choice.

The diversity among the self-employed is another major challenge for Government. While some

self-employed workers want access to EI coverage, most oppose mandatory inclusion. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 80 per cent of self-employed Canadians are opposed to a mandatory program for maternity and parental benefits.

The EI plan provides 55 per cent of the salary of recipients of parental benefits. A recent Statistics Canada study found that this salary replacement rate is not a barrier for low-income parents taking maternity and parental leave. About 82 per cent of eligible low-income earners claim parental benefits and use almost all of the weeks available. The Family Supplement provides additional benefits for families with children, with incomes under \$26,000. For these parents, benefits could be as high as 80 per cent of their average weekly earnings.

Recommendation 9

The Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and the Sub-Committee on Children and Youth at Risk jointly recommend that the Government of Canada should report to the Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and the Sub-Committee on Children and Youth at Risk to outline its progress in developing its family friendly workplace policy by 30 September 2001 and provide an implementation date to Parliament for its full family friendly workplace policy. We also recommend that the government's family friendly workplace policy include specific provisions for the needs of all families, including those with children with disabilities and those with elderly members in need of care.

Government Response

The Government of Canada, as an employer, is committed to enhancing workplace well-being, which includes work-life balance for all employees. This is viewed as a key factor in the recruitment of new employees and the retention of skilled Public Service employees of all ages.

A recent Treasury Board Secretariat discussion paper entitled *Towards an Exemplary Workplace: Our Obligation to Promote and Ensure Work/Life Balance in the Federal Public Service* outlines the flexible working arrangements and family-friendly policies available to employees of the Public Service of Canada.

As an employer, the Public Service offers an extensive continuum of policies, programs and services to support employees and bring about workplace well-being. Since 1999, policy enhancements together reflect substantial change focusing on families and children. For example, the Telework, Pre-retirement Transition Leave and, Leave with Income Averaging Policies have been promulgated. Changes to the Travel Policy, Relocation Directive, Career Assignment Program, Policy on the Prevention and Resolution of Harassment in the Workplace, Performance Pay Policy and the Isolated Post Directive have also demonstrated commitment

to employees and their families. As an employer, we have also extended the maternity and parental benefits to Public Sector employees in line with changes to the EI Program.

In implementing employment equity in the federal workplace, organizations continue to identify and remove barriers faced by employees with disabilities and every effort is made in the provision of accommodations to facilitate the full participation of employees with disabilities within the workplace. The values and principles inherent in employment equity provide an important framework for helping to create a work environment that is responsive to the individual needs of employees and supportive of the balance between their work and family responsibilities.

The Government of Canada has also been working to fulfil its 1999 commitment toward making Canadian workplaces more family-friendly. It reinforced this commitment in the Speech from the Throne (January 2001) with a commitment to improve job protection for parents and caregivers providing care to a gravely ill

child. This will be another important contribution to help Canadian families as they strive to better balance their work and family responsibilities.

Since 1999, initiatives that foster family-friendly workplaces have been broadened to include work-life measures that support a positive balance between work and other life responsibilities such as child care, elder care and community responsibilities. Recent amendments to the Canada Labour Code will increase the period of job protection to a full year for parents who choose to take maternity or parental leave. All provincial and territorial governments have made similar amendments to their labour legislation.

The Labour Program consults with business and labour clients on a regular basis about changes to labour standards that would improve the balance between work and home life for workers. The Department also maintains an interdepartmental Work-Life Balance Policy Network to address work-life issues that cut across federal departments and agencies.

The Government of Canada – through Human Resources Development Canada, Health Canada and the Status of Women – is also very active in researching work-life balance issues. Human Resources Development Canada recently released *The Work-Life Compendium 2001 – 150 Canadian Statistics on Work, Family, and Well-Being*.

A Work-Life Advisory Group, composed of members from both inside and outside of government, helped Human Resources Development Canada develop a new website, *Work-Life Balance in Canadian Workplaces*, to provide information to employers, unions and human resource professionals.

The *Work-Life Balance* site is available at <http://labour-travail.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/worklife>.

Recommendation 10

The Sub-Committee on Children and Youth at Risk and the Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities jointly recommend that the government provide the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities with a clear statement of how it intends to proceed with this review, what timeframe the Committee can expect the government to follow and what process this review will take.

Recommendation 11

The Sub-Committee on Children and Youth at Risk and the Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities jointly recommend that the government support a review of the Social Union Framework Agreement by the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities and our two Sub-Committees.

Government Response

The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs has been asked to lead the three-year review of the Social Union Framework Agreement on behalf of the Government of Canada. The Minister will work closely with the members of the Ministerial Council on Social Policy Renewal in carrying out this intergovernmental exercise. The Government of Canada favours a comprehensive joint evaluation of how effective all participating

governments have been, over the past three years, in their implementation of SUFA, not a renegotiation of the terms of the Agreement.

In September, the Government of Canada signalled to provinces and territories its readiness to begin the joint review of SUFA. Since that time, governments have been working

together to develop the federal, provincial and territorial process for the review.

One of the key issues governments are examining is how best to fulfil their commitment to ensure significant opportunities for input and feedback, during the review, from Canadians and

all interested parties. The Government of Canada believes that this is an important element of the review and is seeking the most effective way to carry out this commitment on a joint-basis. The Government of Canada favours completing the review early in 2002, coinciding with the third anniversary of the Agreement.

5. CONCLUSION

The Government of Canada is making meaningful progress to meet the needs of children, persons with disabilities and their families. There is a widespread, concerted effort to build consensus and move forward on these issues that are important to so many Canadians.

These are complex, interdependent and challenging issues. They require the cooperation and efforts of many players – governments, the private sector, and the voluntary sector, non-governmental organizations, community groups, families and persons with disabilities themselves.

There is still a great deal of work ahead. But Canada is building momentum, and significant

gains are being made. The Government is working with its partners to implement measures that will bring real, practical improvements to the quality of life of children, persons with disabilities and their families.

The Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities and its Sub-Committees have demonstrated the valuable parts they can play. The Government of Canada will continue to look to the Committee for guidance on the horizontal management of these critical issues and on overall progress in achieving its goals