

Canadians speak out on child care

76% of Canadians outside of Quebec said the lack of affordable child care is a serious problem

83% believe the government has an important role to play in helping parents meet their child care needs.

2 to 1 Canadians prefer a national child care system to the Harper government's \$100 monthly cheque by a ratio of two to one.

Take Action

WRITE, call, fax and e-mail your local Member of Parliament. Tell them you want to put Canadian children first.

SHARE this leaflet widely with friends and colleagues. Encourage them to take action (order more at www.nupge.ca).

GET supportive organizations to publish your letters and articles.

CALL radio and TV phone-in programs.

SUPPORT your local child care advocacy groups.

LOG ON to www.nupge.ca for news and resources.

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NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES

- B. C. Government and Service Employees' Union
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta
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- Ontario Public Service Employees Union
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers
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The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of the Public Services International.

CAMPAIGN FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & CARE

Our
kids
gotta
come
first



Early

Why an Early Childhood Education and Care Program

Every kid should have an equal opportunity to get a head start in life. We know that children need a healthy and nurturing environment. When both parents are working, they need to know their children are receiving this type of care.

Accessible, high quality early childhood education should be available to all Canadian children, not just for those children whose parents have the financial resources and have been fortunate enough to find space. The pressure for parents to return to work at the earliest possible opportunity and the lack of financial resources to secure high quality child care are felt most by Canada's poorest families.

The History

In 2005, after 30 years of hard work and commitment by Canada's parents, communities, social justice groups, women's groups and unions, the dream of a universal, affordable early childhood education and care program was becoming a reality.

The Liberal government of Paul Martin had signed agreements with 10 provincial governments to pave the way to finally establishing a program that would be good for children and good for parents.

That reality was destroyed when, in 2006, the Stephen Harper Conservative government came

to power. Upon taking office, he cancelled the bilateral agreements with the provinces, eliminating \$5 billion over five years for early childhood education and funding.

Harper replaced the agreements with a \$1,200 annual taxable allowance to parents with children under the age of six and scaled-back funding for new spaces. The result of his plan has been no new child care spaces and, although welcomed by families with small children, the allowance has not offset the growing costs of child care.

Where we are today

In the last five years, two international reports on child care have pointed to Canada's lack of action on the issue. In 2004, the OECD ranked Canada last among developed countries in terms of access to early learning and child care spaces and last in terms of public investment. More recently, Canada tied for last with Ireland in the December 2008 UNICEF report card on child care, achieving only one of the 10 performance benchmarks.

In a nutshell, Canada has one of the lowest child care access rates in the industrialized world – with regulated spaces for less than 20% of children. Canadian parents pay child care fees among the highest in the world – the cost of annual child care can exceed the annual cost of university.

The lack of child care spaces is so dire in Canada, where close to 70% of mothers work outside the home, that parents are now placing their unborn children on waiting lists to ensure they can get a spot when they return to work. The cost of child care has become so large that parents in some parts of the country are finding the cost of their mortgage easier to manage than the cost of child care.

What Canadians Want

In recent polls Canadians have spoken out about child care: 76% of Canadians outside of Quebec said the lack of affordable child care is a serious problem; 83% believe the government has an important role to play in helping parents meet their child care needs and by a ratio of two to one, Canadians prefer a national child care system to the Harper government's \$100 monthly cheque.

Research shows that access to quality early learning and child care enhances children's development in every way – intellectually, physically, emotionally and linguistically.

Research shows that every dollar invested in high quality early learning and child care programs generates a three dollar return in social and economic benefits to children, parents and society. In fact, the returns on investment in the early child development period exceed investment in any other period of human development.

We know what Canadians want and we know the research supports it – why then is the Harper government not listening? The 2009 Conservative Federal Budget provided a \$40 billion stimulus to the economy based on infrastructure spending and tax cuts for individuals and corporations. Missing from the budget was money to support an early learning and child care program, relief for parents struggling to find licensed child care

spaces or assistance with the high cost of child care if they are fortunate to find space.

Child Care and the Economic Crisis

An early learning and child care program creates jobs and allows parents to work and pay taxes. It creates economic activity at the community level as the majority of child care dollars are spent locally and invested in people, since the sector is labour intensive. And it assists in reducing poverty.

As families experience job loss in the deepening economic crisis, access to child care is even more imperative as parents seek to further their education, train for work and find employment.

According to the OECD Canada Review of 2006, Canada invests 0.2% GDP in early child care and education. It would cost 1% of GDP to provide quality care and education to children who need it. If a universal early learning and child care program would help stimulate the economy at such a small cost, and most importantly be good for our children, why are we waiting?

