



Build Child Care

A national social program that's vital to strong communities

CUPE Research

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A high quality and affordable public early learning and child care system, accessible to all, benefits children, their parents, and the community. Canada was developing such a program. All the provinces had signed agreements with the federal government for a multi-year commitment to develop and expand child care services. Municipal governments across Canada had been strong advocates for a national early learning and child care system.

But, the Conservative federal government cancelled these agreements as one of their first acts after the election. Child care has become their defining issue.

The new federal government has essentially eradicated the first social program in a generation. The approach is to favour tax measures but do nothing to protect and develop high quality public services. Municipal governments know that public programs work for communities and they know the difference high quality affordable regulated child care can make.

The Federal Budget

The Harper budget took \$3.6 billion away from Canadian communities for child care — money needed to expand early learning and child care options for families, improve access, particularly for low-income and rural families, and for children with special needs.

Instead, the Conservatives introduced an allowance to the lowest income-earning spouse. An allowance to parents is not an early learning program for children. With this new

benefit, single-parent families end up with the smallest after-tax benefits. In the same budget, the government terminated the existing young child supplement that benefited low and modest income families, to pay for the new tax measure. This scheme means that high-income, one-earning couples get the most benefits at \$951. Modest earning two-income families get the least benefit at \$641.ⁱ

The federal budget introduced a five-year plan to support the creation of child care spaces by setting aside \$250 million per year beginning in 2007. The government says it will consult on delivery approaches, eligible costs, and addressing the needs of small business and rural communities as well as large business and cities. But Harper's plan to build new child care spaces simply won't work. Early learning and care programs need operational support, not just funding for capital expenses. It didn't work when some provinces tried it and it won't work today.

What The Cuts Mean for Communities

Municipal governments understand that social development is closely linked to economic development. Early learning and child care programs are a key investment in the future of our children and our communities. Early learning and child care programs also are a key aspect of neighbourhood revitalization. They understand that investment in regulated high-quality child care pays off in aces in long-term savings in health, education, social services and court costs and fosters social inclusion.

Many municipalities also deliver and fund child care programs. Municipal government programs have been pivotal in the delivery of high quality child care programs especially in communities with special needs. Extensive research has identified key indicators that must be present for high-quality child care to exist. The 2002 study, *The Influence of Unionization and of Being Operated by a Municipality*ⁱⁱ showed that municipal centres obtain higher scores on a number of variables that predict higher quality programs. These indicators include:

- Staff have two years or more training in early childhood education,
- Staff are better paid (leading to less turnover and more stability),
- Staff morale and satisfaction are high, and
- The centre is run as a non-profit organization.

The municipal centers studied also all had on-site training for their teaching staff. The majority of municipal centres are unionized and are seen as providing a benchmark of quality to which other centres aspire.

Early learning and child care are at risk of getting lost in the upcoming debate on the 'fiscal imbalance'.

Municipalities are an important voice to ensure early learning and care remains a priority as a social program.

Municipalities also provide services.

An Early Learning and Child Care System is Still Possible

The federal funding for the child care agreements was continued for 2006-07. This means the provinces can continue building a system and keep the pressure on the federal government to allocate funds in the next budget for a high quality, accessible, affordable, community-based child care system.

Moving forward with child care expansion by the provinces is one good way to keep the pressure on the federal government. Municipalities that deliver and fund child care can also move forward to develop and protect existing centers. Municipalities can also use their influence to put pressure on the provincial governments to continue their plans for expansion.

ⁱ *More Than a Name Change: The Universal Child Care Benefit*. The Caledon Institute (Battle, Torjman, Mendelson), May 2006

ⁱⁱ *The Influence of Unionization and of Being Operated by a Municipality*, Gillian Doherty and Barry Forer, March, 2002