



Federal Budget 2009 - Early Learning and Child Care

What's in the Budget?

There is *nothing* in the 2009 Federal Budget to advance a progressive early learning and child care policy agenda.

What does it mean?

The Harper government's lack of vision for early learning and child care fails the millions of Canadian families who cannot afford or find quality, affordable child care spaces for their children. Fewer than 20% of children in Canada have access to regulated child care spaces – the vast majority of children have to do without.

Before the Conservative government came to power, Canadians were very close to achieving a national child care program. Instead, Stephen Harper gave us a pitiful monthly allowance – and no new child care spaces. Child Care centres are closing due to a lack of funding, and the profession is losing trained staff because of low wages and poor working conditions.

The Conservative government has turned its back on women and working families. The lack of affordable, quality child care has a direct impact on the ability of working mothers to remain in the paid labour force. Approximately 75% of young mothers with children work outside the home. Many Aboriginal children do not have access to early learning and child care programs. And outside of Quebec, Canadians pay some of the highest child care fees in the world.

Without a cohesive framework and policy on early learning and child care, the Harper government has set out the welcome mat to large corporations to make profits from desperate parents while there is no plan to make programs accessible, available or affordable. Embarrassingly, Canada will remain at the bottom of the heap of all OECD

countries when it comes to investing in early learning and child care. We mustn't forget that the Harper government cut \$1 billion that was previously committed to early learning and child care.

What would be better choices?

A better choice would be to develop a pan-Canadian early learning and child care program. Such a program could deliver a framework and conditions that ensure quality, affordable, non-profit, accessible, and inclusive child care programs for parents and their children. Child care requires secure and adequate federal funding with legislation like Bill C303, the *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, to provide the framework for spending. Bill C303 lays the foundation for a high-quality, universal and accountable child care system. The Bill limits expansion of for-profit child care, a move that protects Canada from international trade disputes and ensures the highest quality care. A better choice for early learning and child care would include the following key elements:

- A national plan to make high quality, non-profit early childhood education and care a reality over the next decade.
- Increased federal funds, starting with an additional \$2.2 billion in transfers to provincial child care programs in 2009-10, and \$2.8 billion in 2010-11, with the goal of reaching \$5 billion by 2013.
- Federal legislation (recognizing Quebec's distinctiveness) to establish conditions, criteria and principles for the accountable use of federal funds in the provinces and territories.
- Improved maternity/parental leave policy to complement the child care program.