

CHILD CARE IS A RIGHT



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A TALE OF TWO CANADAS

Implementing Rights in Early Childhood

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Child Care Advocacy
Association of Canada

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The Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC) and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) are non-profit, membership-based and regionally representative organizations working collaboratively to promote a publicly funded, inclusive, high-quality, affordable, publicly-owned and operated child care system. For more than 25 years, both organizations have worked with families, early childhood educators, community organizations and partners from multiple sectors in order to advance child care as a cornerstone of progressive family policy. The pan-Canadian CCAAC and the BC-based CCCABC have jointly undertaken the “Child Care is a Right” project, which seeks to raise public awareness about, and promote government action on, Canada’s commitments to child care services. For further information about this joint project, please see www.ccaac.ca/resources/projects/CCisaRight.php or www.cccabc.bc.ca/res/rights.html

All photos by Shawn Nygren

OVERVIEW

“A great change is coming over childhood in the world’s richest countries” (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre [IRC], 2008, p. 1).

So begins UNICEF’s 2008 Report Card 8, *The Child Care Transition*, which observes that “this is the first generation of children in which a majority will be in some form of out-of-home child care” (UNICEF Canada, 2008). UNICEF Canada’s (2008) comments on this Report Card advise that “this child care transition at once offers an enormous potential for the child and a risk if key quality issues are not considered in the planning and delivery of early childhood care and education.” Report Card 8 “advances the idea of a ... set of minimum standards by which the rights of young children might be protected as the transition to child care gathers momentum” (UNICEF IRC, 2008, p. 7).



So, how is Canada doing at protecting the rights of young children? To what extent does public policy in Canada recognize the social and economic changes and challenges facing families today? This paper explores two fundamentally different answers to this question which, together, tell *A Tale of Two Canadas*.

On the one hand, both federal and provincial governments suggest in their public reports that the measures they are taking to support young children and their families are generally adequate. For those families that may be struggling, governments indicate that (1) they’re doing as much as they can and (2) conditions are improving over time.

On the other hand, the evidence paints a different reality. The fact is that Canada’s public support for young children and their families is the weakest among the world’s rich countries, such that Canada’s policies and investments fall far short of the commitments made under multiple agreements. To highlight two key concerns:

1. Child and Family Poverty — almost 10% of young children and their families are living in poverty (LICO After-Tax), despite the fact that more than one-third of these families have at least one parent working full-time, full-year (Campaign 2000, 2010).
2. Lack of Access to Quality Early Care and Learning Programs — there are only enough regulated spaces for about 20% of young children, despite the fact that more than 70% of Canadian mothers are in the paid labour force (Beach, Friendly, Ferns, Prabhu, & Forer, 2009, Tables 6 & 9).

This paper organizes the evidence of Canada’s weak public policy for young children and their families as follows:

- Part 1 outlines the various commitments Canada has made to families with young children, both at home and abroad.
- Part 2 summarizes the findings of several international reports, including the UNICEF report referenced above, which rank Canada’s policy poorly relative to other developed nations.
- Part 3 highlights the public input shared by an unprecedented range of Canadian civil society groups in recent years, including recommendations for improving public support for the early years.

Taken together, these three parts tell a comprehensive and consistent tale of one Canada — a wealthy country whose support for young children is poor relative to identified family needs, international comparisons and signed commitments.

- Part 4 briefly reviews public reporting by Canadian governments, showing that their focus on promoting existing policies, rather than demonstrating the effectiveness of those policies, tells the tale of a different Canada. Furthermore, the lack of clear, relevant, timely and consistent information in Canada’s public reporting prevents both the Canadian public and the international community from reconciling and resolving the *Tale of Two Canadas*.

This paper’s analysis begins in 2003, when the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child issued ‘concluding observations’ on the implementation of child rights in Canada (Committee on the Rights of the Child [CRC], 2003).

These observations were based on reports issued prior to that time both by governments and by non-government or civil society organizations. The analysis in this paper includes public reports issued by both groups generally through November 2009, when the Governments of Canada filed the most recent report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child¹.

In order to resolve *A Tale of Two Canadas* and fulfill Canada's commitments to young children and their families, the paper concludes with comprehensive and integrated recommendations. With public funding support for meaningful involvement by non-government organizations, federal and provincial governments are urged to:

1. **Inform** — undertake a broad public education strategy to inform Canadians about Canada's commitments to early childhood, demonstrating the progress to date and acknowledging the areas that require further action.
2. **Plan** — develop comprehensive plans to realize the rights of young children, with timelines and targets to measure success along the way.
3. **Invest** — increase funding to both parents, particularly those with lower incomes, and to community services. Specifically, invest 1% of GDP in early care and learning, ensuring accountability for achieving service quality and access targets.
4. **Monitor** — publicly and transparently report on actual results compared to plans, incorporating key indicators of success.

1 However, this analysis only addresses actual program activity and expenditures between 2003 and 2007, which is the period covered by Canada's most recent reporting to the UN Committee.

PART 1

Canada's Commitments to Young Children and their Families

Children's rights exist within the context of other human rights commitments Canada has made to their parents and other caregivers. For example, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in general, and the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in particular, require Canada to ensure that mothers are supported to participate fully in society, including in the workforce, and that women are remunerated fairly for their work.



Both at home and abroad, Canada's commitments highlight the recognition that parents have primary responsibility for their children (with mothers and fathers recognized as equal caregivers) and that government's role is to ensure that families have the support necessary to carry out these responsibilities.

Internationally, these commitments were originally outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC), which Canada signed in 1991. By 2005, the Committee on the Rights of the Child determined that early childhood was not receiving adequate global attention in deliberations on the UN CRC. Furthermore, the Committee recognized that early childhood was a critical period for the realization of rights. These concerns led the Committee to assist countries which have adopted the CRC (frequently referred to in UN reports as 'states parties') to better understand their commitments to young children through the development of *General Comment 7 (GC7) — Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood* (CRC, 2005). Since GC7 lays out detailed expectations for governments, it will be the primary reference for discussion of Canada's international commitments in this paper.

Consistent with a large body of evidence, GC7 notes that during early childhood, "young children experience the most rapid period of growth and change during the human lifespan; form strong emotional attachments to their parents or other caregivers; establish their own important relationships with [other] children, and; actively make sense of the physical, social and cultural dimensions of the world they inhabit... [Overall,] young children's earliest years are the foundation for their physical and mental health, emotional security, cultural and personal identity, and developing competencies" (p. 3).

GC7 elaborates on the UN CRC by reminding states parties that "a young child's health and psychosocial well-being are in many respects interdependent. Both may be put at risk by adverse living conditions, neglect, insensitive or abusive treatment and restricted opportunities for realizing human potential ... the right to survival and development can only be implemented in a holistic manner, through the enforcement of all the other provisions of the Convention, including rights to health, adequate nutrition, social security, an adequate standard of living, a healthy and a safe environment, education and play" (p. 4).

Furthermore, GC7 raises concerns that "insufficient account is taken of the resources, skills and personal commitment required of parents and others responsible for young children ... Early childhood is the period of most extensive (and intensive) parental responsibilities related to all aspects of children's well-being covered by the Convention" (pp. 9-10).

GC7 sets out specific expectations for government action², which can be organized as follows:

1. **Inform** — "conduct awareness-raising campaigns for the public at large [and] undertake systematic child rights training for children and their parents, as well as for all professionals working for and with children" (p. 19).
2. **Plan** — "adopt comprehensive, strategic and time-bound plans for early childhood" (p. 18).

2 See Appendix I for specific GC7 excerpts, and GC7 for the full document.

3. Invest — “increase...human and financial resource allocations” (p. 18) to provide:

- **Direct supports to families** — ensuring parental leave and adequate resources to avoid poverty (through tax policies, income transfers, employment standards (work hours, minimum wages, etc.)).
- **Service supports for families** — ensuring health, care and education services that reflect:
 - » Quality, with well-trained, socially valued and appropriately remunerated program staff
 - » Universal access, such that all children have the right to participate, particularly children of working parents, children who are vulnerable and disadvantaged, and children at risk of discrimination
 - » Parental involvement in planning and delivery
 - » Holistic approaches, including, as a primary example, the integration of early care and education.³

4. Monitor — “develop a system of data collection and indicators consistent with the Convention, [providing] comprehensive and up-to-date... data... for the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of progress achieved, and for assessment of the impact of policies” (p. 19).

GC7 also stresses the need for governments to provide “a legislative framework for the provision of quality, adequately resourced services” (p. 14). At the same time, governments should work with local communities as services are developed, rather than simply imposing a standardized approach.

Finally, GC7 reminds governments that they “are responsible for service provision for early childhood development. The role of civil society should be complementary to — not a substitute for — the role of the State. Where non-State services [i.e. non-profit or for-profit services] play a major role, the Committee reminds States parties that they have an obligation to monitor and regulate the quality of provision to ensure that children’s rights are protected and their best interests served” (p. 14).

The early childhood service commitments that Canada has made on the international stage are mirrored, to a limited extent, in a series of federal/provincial/territorial (FPT) agreements at home, beginning with the Social Union Framework Agreement in 1999. This agreement promotes: “access for all Canadians ... to essential social programs and services of reasonably comparable quality; adequate, affordable, stable and sustainable funding for social programs, and; effective mechanisms for Canadians to participate in developing social priorities and reviewing outcomes” (Government of Canada, 1999).

In 2000, in exchange for new federal transfers, provinces and territories (other than Quebec, which had already initiated a family policy plan) made specific early childhood agreements to:

- 1. Improve and expand early childhood services**, based on their own priorities, in four general areas: healthy pregnancy, infancy, and birth; parenting and family supports; early childhood development, learning and care (which typically includes regulated early care and learning services); and community supports.
- 2. Provide clear public reporting** so that the public can monitor progress towards this broad goal. Governments agreed to report on program indicators that described, among other things, improvements in service quality and access, including affordability (Government of Canada, 2000).

In summary, Canada has made both international and federal/provincial/territorial commitments to inform Canadians about, plan for, invest in and monitor the results of its support for young children and families. The next two sections of the paper provide assessments of the extent to which Canada is meeting these commitments, as determined by a range of international reports and Canadian civil society groups.

3 This recommendation is consistent with research confirming that, to quote Dr. Charles Pascal (2009) “good child care educates, and good education cares.” In order to promote the ‘care’ in ‘early learning’, for the balance of this report all regulated programs that provide children with early education and care (including child care, daycare, preschool, nursery school, kindergarten, junior or pre-kindergarten, etc.) will be referred to as ‘early care and learning programs.’

PART 2

International Assessments of Canada’s Family Policy pertaining to Young Children

In its 2003 concluding observations on Canada related to young children (pp. 8-9), the Committee on the Rights of the Child welcomed “measures taken by the Government to provide assistance to families through expanded parental leave, increased tax deductions, child benefits [i.e. direct supports for parents] and specific programmes for Aboriginal people”. However, the Committee expressed concern about child poverty and “the high cost of childcare, scarcity of places [i.e. access concerns] and lack of national standards [i.e. quality concerns]” (p.8).



Furthermore, “the Committee encourages the State party to undertake a comparative analysis at the provincial and territorial levels with a view to identifying variations in childcare provisions and their impact on children and to devise a coordinated approach [i.e. develop a plan] to ensuring that quality childcare is available to all children, regardless of their economic status or place of residence [i.e. address access]” (p. 8).

Concerns about Canada’s approach to child care were reinforced by the UN CEDAW committee in its 2008 report on Canada’s progress towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women:

The Committee urges the State party to step up its efforts to provide a sufficient number of affordable childcare spaces and affordable and adequate housing options, including in aboriginal communities, with priority being given to low-income women, who are particularly disadvantaged in those areas. The Committee also recommends that the State party carry out a cost-benefit analysis to assess the impact of current living standards, housing and childcare situations on the economic empowerment of women and present the findings in its next report to the Committee. Such an analysis should have a special focus on low-income women, taking into account the amount of social assistance they receive from the State compared with the actual cost of living, including housing and childcare. (pp. 8-9)

These observations are consistent with other international reports which highlight the fact that, while pockets of progress exist — generally in terms of direct supports to families such as parental leave, income transfers and tax reductions — the lack of access to quality, affordable early care and learning services has been described as the biggest missing piece of the early childhood family support puzzle in Canada (Kershaw & Anderson, 2007).

For example, in 2006 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released the final report in its *Starting Strong* analysis of early care and learning programs. Of the 20 developed countries studied, Canada ranked lowest in both (Friendly, 2006):

1. Access to services — while “most European countries provide all children with at least two years of free, publicly-funded provision before they begin primary school... other than Quebec, there has been no significant expansion of the [early care and learning] system in Canada over the past decade. Less than 20% of [Canadian] children aged 0-6 years find a place in a regulated service...” (pp. 3-4).
2. Public investment — on average, OECD countries invest 0.7% of GDP in early care and learning — well short of the widely-recommended 1% of GDP (Bennett, 2008) but more than twice Canada’s investment of approximately 0.25% of GDP (Friendly, 2006). In fact, the OECD observed that “weak public funding, especially for children under 5 years, is a fundamental flaw in the early education and care system in Canada” (OECD, 2004, p. 56).

Starting Strong identified key policy elements that the analysis showed are likely to promote equitable access to high quality early care and learning services (OECD, 2001):

- Planning, including stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation
- Substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure
- Quality, including appropriate training and working conditions for staff and a strong and equal partnership with the education system
- Universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support
- Parental involvement through a participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance
- Holistic, or systemic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation
- Systematic attention to monitoring and data collection.

The OECD describes “a ‘growing consensus in OECD countries that ‘care’ and ‘education’ are inseparable concepts and that quality services for children necessarily provide both’ (OECD, 2001:14; OECD, 2006). A challenge facing countries is not just how to provide more services, but how to remedy a legacy of split services, one set of services providing childcare for working parents, the other set early education for children aged 3 up to compulsory school age” (Moss & Bennett, 2006).

In the Canada report, the OECD *Starting Strong* expert team made a series of recommendations tailored to Canada’s circumstances, including the need for: defined action plans; substantially increased and better focused public spending; a national framework for quality; much wider access, particularly for Aboriginal and disadvantaged children, and better inclusion of children with special needs; participation of parents and experts in quality framework.

Following on the heels of the *Starting Strong* reports, in 2008 UNICEF released the previously-noted Report Card 8. UNICEF developed a series of benchmarks that reflected minimum standards for comprehensive early childhood policy as outlined in GC7 and confirmed by research evidence. One mark was assigned for each benchmark, for a possible total of 10 marks. While Canada is one of the wealthiest of the 25 rich countries examined in the UNICEF study, Canada again ranked last, receiving only one mark in total.

Briefly, the 10 benchmarks were organized as follows (see Appendix 2 for more details):

1. National plan with priority for disadvantaged (1 mark), and
2. Adequate public investment (1 mark), in order to provide:
 - **Direct supports to families** — generous parental leave, with reserved time for fathers (1 mark) and adequate resources such that child and family poverty is less than 10% (1 mark)
 - **Service supports for families** — health, care and education services⁴ that reflect:
 - » Quality, including measures to ensure that early care and learning program staff are well-trained, with minimum staff-to-child ratios in place (3 marks)
 - » Near-Universal access to essential child health services⁵ (1 mark), and substantial access to publicly subsidized early care and learning (2 marks)

4 In developing these benchmarks, UNICEF recognized a broad array of family support services. In fact, the recommendation regarding essential child health services stems from a discussion about the importance of establishing an “effective public network of child and family health services... accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children... The network should maintain a strong focus on child and family health (e.g. pre- and postnatal health care), child development, parenting, and provide home-visiting and other outreach services to families with young children. In particular, families from disadvantaged backgrounds will receive first call on services... Families with disabilities or having a child with disabilities are also a priority for support. The network will offer parenting and child development information and support, with links to health care, home-visiting, counselling, vocational services and childcare services” (Bennett, 2008, p. 19).

Canada was close to achieving the benchmark for near-universal access to health services. However, in what appears to be a very generous interpretation of an established benchmark, Canada received its only mark in this report card for achieving an early care and learning quality measure. The benchmark requires that “at least 50 per cent of staff in early education centres supported and accredited by governmental agencies should have a minimum of three years tertiary education with a recognized qualification in early childhood studies or a related field” (UNICEF IRC, 2008, p. 14). Yet, *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2008* reports that, for example: there are no training requirements for child care staff in the Northwest Territories or Nunavut; only the Centre Director or one-quarter of the staff in New Brunswick require an ECE certificate or equivalent, and; only one staff per group (of usually three or four staff) providing early care and learning for three-to-five year olds requires an ECE certificate in BC (Beach et al, 2009). Furthermore, ECE training in most provinces falls short of the three year requirement (pp. 188-189, Table 14).

Thus, and consistent with the earlier OECD *Starting Strong* report, Canada ranked particularly poorly on early care and learning quality and access. Also, the related and relatively high levels of child and family poverty in Canada were of significant concern. High poverty and weak early care and learning services are directly linked to inadequate public investment and the lack of comprehensive planning.

Canada’s existing parental leave policy is not as generous as those offered in the Nordic countries, but it is more generous than that of the UK and Australia⁵, and the US does not have such policies. The latter English-speaking nations also tend to have weak standards for, and low access to, early care and learning programs relative to their Nordic counterparts.

The interaction between these two family support policies (parental leave and early care and learning) is important and instructive for Canada. UNICEF notes that in the United Kingdom, the United States and (if recent trends continue, soon) Australia, a majority of children under age one spend significant time in care outside the home. In other words, in these countries the very youngest of young children receive minimal or no public support for either parental care or high quality community-based care. Meanwhile, the uptake of the generous parental leave provisions in the Nordic countries is such that infants are rarely in out-of-home care.

Canada fell short of UNICEF’s parental leave benchmark because there is no time specifically reserved for fathers and because the benefit levels are too low. This results in a second *Tale of Two Canadas* — one for middle- and upper-income parents (primarily mothers⁶) who can afford to enjoy parental leave at home with their infants for the first year, as their Nordic counterparts do, and the other for lower-income families who either can’t afford to live on, or are not eligible for, the available parental leave benefits. For these lower income families, Canada looks more like the United States and the United Kingdom, where lack of access to either parental leave or quality early care and learning programs places children’s healthy development at risk and increases the stresses on families.

Nonetheless, once parental leave has expired, families from across the socioeconomic spectrum in Canada struggle to find quality, affordable early care and learning programs.

In summary, international assessments of Canada’s support for early childhood consistently point to a lack of comprehensive planning for, and inadequate public funding of, both direct and service supports for families. While more work is required to achieve international benchmarks for parental leave and health services, the most significant policy and funding gaps relate to child and family poverty and the lack of access to quality early care and learning services. In its *Starting Strong* report on Canada, the OECD concludes diplomatically that:

It is clear that national and provincial policy for the early education and care of young children in Canada is still in its initial stages. Care and education are still treated separately and coverage is low compared to other OECD countries. Over the coming years, significant energies and funding will need to be invested... to create a universal system in tune with the needs of a full employment economy, with gender equity and with new understandings of how young children develop and learn. (Friendly, 2006, p. 4)

5 The Paid Parental Leave scheme is an entitlement for working parents of children born or adopted from 1 January 2011. Eligible working parents can get government-funded Parental Leave Pay at the rate of the National Minimum Wage for a maximum period of 18 weeks. Parental Leave Pay is taxable. It’s a new entitlement for working parents funded by the Government (Family Assistance Office, 2011).

6 Unlike the Nordic countries, Canada’s policies (outside of Quebec) do not actively promote fathers’ access to parental leave.

PART 3

Observations and Recommendations from Canadian Civil Society Groups

Given the concerns about child poverty and the lack of access to quality early care and learning in Canada, this section prioritizes analyses and recommendations from two pan-Canadian civil society groups: Campaign 2000⁷ and the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. The two groups work with each other, and with a broad range of other civil society groups⁸, to advance the rights of young children, women and families to adequate resources and access to quality early care and learning programs.



In addition, Appendix 3 provides examples of complimentary analyses and recommendations from a range of sectors, including Aboriginal and other communities, health, education, research, business, labour and government. For example, the Canadian Pediatric Society and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce are just two of the many civil society groups that have produced public reports between 2003 and 2009 calling for government action on the early years. These reports may start from consideration of the social and/or economic benefits of public investment in young children and families, rather than consideration of Canada's human rights commitments. Still, they consistently suggest that federal and provincial governments implement policy changes which broadly reflect the requirements outlined in GC7 of the UN CRC, as well as the perspectives shared in the previously-referenced international reports. Various government committees and advisory bodies have also made similarly consistent recommendations.

Regarding poverty, Campaign 2000 (2010) releases an annual national *Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada* which measures the progress, or lack thereof, on the House of Commons' unanimous all-party resolution "to seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000" (p. 1).

Reporting on 2005 data, the 2007 Report Card noted that the poverty rate of 11.7% (after taxes and government transfers) was unchanged from 1989 — despite a 50% real increase in the size of Canada's economy over the same time period. At the height of Canada's economic boom (2007), the 2009 Report Card showed that the child and family poverty rate had only dropped to 9.5%⁹.

Furthermore, Campaign 2000 (2010) observes that "inequality between the rich and poor in Canada has grown more than in any other OECD country during the last decade, with the exception of Germany. For every dollar the average family with children had in the poorest 10% of the population, the average family in the richest tenth of the population possessed almost 13 times as much in 2008" (p. 5).

The Campaign 2000 Report Cards generally note that:

- more than one-third of children living in poverty live in families with at least one income earner working full-time all year
- more than 50% of children living in poverty live in two-parent families
- children are disproportionately high users of food banks: those under 18 make up about 20% of the population and almost 40% of food bank users

7 Campaign 2000 "began in 1991 out of concern about the lack of government progress in addressing child poverty, and now involves over 120 national, community and provincial partners [including the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada]. Campaign 2000 works to increase public awareness of the levels and consequences of child/family poverty by publishing research on the indicators of child poverty and developing public education resources." See <http://www.campaign2000.ca/index.html> for full details.

8 Civil society groups refers to non-government groups including, but not limited to, professional associations and labour unions, community and business organizations, advocacy groups and charities.

9 Reporting on 2008 data, the 2010 Report Card shows after-tax child and family poverty of 9.1%.

- More than half of female lone mothers with children under six live in poverty
- Children of immigrants, of Aboriginal identity, in racialized families and those with a disability are at a higher risk for poverty.

The Campaign 2000 analyses acknowledge the importance of the supports (government transfers) that have been provided directly to families. Without the GST credit, the Canada Child Tax Benefit, Employment Insurance and, starting in 2006, the Universal Child Care Benefit, child and family poverty would be at least one third higher. In addition, in recent years, several provinces have introduced poverty reduction strategies. Nonetheless, it is clear that these supports, on their own, are insufficient to “assure every parent working full time, full year a living standard out of poverty” (Novick, 2007, p.7).

Campaign 2000 (2010) recommends that federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and First Nations governments work with communities to develop a plan to eradicate poverty, including (p. 12):

- Legislation with targets, timelines, transparent accountability and citizen participation, in particular low-income people
- Resources, including: enhanced child benefit (maximum \$5,400/child); expanded Employment Insurance; increased federal work tax credits (\$2,400/year); action on minimum wages
- High-quality early care and learning services, affordable and available to all
- A strategy for affordable housing
- Appropriate poverty eradication targets, timetables and indicators for Aboriginal families developed in coordination with First Nations and urban Aboriginal communities.

As indicated above, the availability of quality, affordable early care and learning is critical to substantially improving conditions for children and families living in poverty. However, a universal (yet voluntary) approach is recommended because quality early environments promote healthy development for **all** children, the majority of whom already experience some form of care outside of their immediate family. Furthermore, broad access to quality early care and learning services promotes health, advances women’s equality, reduces crime, addresses child and family poverty, and deepens social inclusion in communities.

The critical importance of building a broadly accessible system of early care and learning services that meet established standards for quality, including well-trained, fairly-remunerated staff, cannot be overstated. Overall, about two-thirds of all young children with employed or studying mothers — and more than one-quarter of young children who do not have an employed or studying mother — experience care services outside of the immediate family and outside of kindergarten, in either regulated or unregulated programs (Cleveland, Forer, Hyatt, Japel, & Krashinsky, 2008). Simply put, children’s healthy development is at risk if these environments are not of consistently high quality.

This paper has already noted that there are only regulated early care and learning spaces, other than kindergarten, for about 20% of children under six. Available data suggest that those spaces are expensive for families: generally, the second highest cost of living, next to housing, and frequently exceeding the cost of post-secondary education (Richards et al, 2008). At the same time, the data also raises concerns about the quality of regulated care in Canada. Not only are staff training requirements generally lower than those recommended by UNICEF, there is evidence of significant shortages of trained early childhood educators, such that an increasing number of programs are hiring staff with little or no training (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council [CCHRSC], 2009a). Low wages help to explain these shortages: “full-year, full-time workers ... with a post-secondary certificate or diploma below a bachelor’s degree earn roughly 55% of workers in all occupations with this level of qualifications” (CCHRSC, 2009b, p. 2). Thus, it is not surprising that more than half of trained early childhood educators do not work in the child care sector.

While these points indicate serious concerns about the regulated child care sector in Canada, of even greater concern is the fact that so many young children are in unregulated care. For example, of children aged one and two years with employed or studying mothers, more than 20% are in unregulated care homes with non-relatives (Cleveland et al, 2008, p. 10, Table 7). Little is known about the quality of these services, but since there are no formal training requirements or program standards, it is not surprising that the evidence suggests they are generally of lower quality than regulated care

(OECD, 2004, p. 66). Furthermore, although these services are not publicly regulated or licensed, it is deeply concerning to observe that they may still receive some public subsidies in Canada through fee vouchers or tax credits.

Building on widespread concerns about the lack of access to quality, affordable early care and learning services, in 2004 the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada [CCAAC] released *From Patchwork to Framework: A Child Care Strategy for Canada*. This report provides a detailed blueprint outlining the funding and policy components essential to developing an accessible, effective and accountable system, including policies such as expanded parental leave to help parents balance work and family responsibilities (CCAAC, 2004).

The blueprint incorporates policy lessons of comparative studies, including those by the OECD, and of successful early care and learning systems in several jurisdictions. But first and foremost, it is grounded in the voices and views of parents, early childhood educators and other community members who continue to advocate for governments to build a system that supports children's healthy development while meeting the diverse needs of Canada's families, the majority of whom participate in the paid labour force.

The child care advocacy movement's recommendations have been refined since 2004 to reflect and respond to:

- The evolving evidence about the needs of children and families — especially the risks of poor quality care for children's healthy development and the increasing work/life balance challenges for parents.
- Advances in, and setbacks to, public investment — while described in more detail in Part 4, in 2006 the current federal government cancelled a significant FPT agreement established to increase access to regulated early care and learning spaces, replacing the agreement with a monthly cash payment to families. As a result, the advocacy movement had to shift the focus of its recommendations back from system implementation to system-building. At the same time, some provinces have been increasing their investments, particularly through education ministries as outlined below. While this is a positive development, it is clear that a comprehensive approach to planning for, integrating and adequately funding early care and learning services for **all** young children requires federal, as well as provincial, investment. Furthermore, provincial uptake is uneven, which further increases inequality in service quality and access across the country.
- The evolution of policy lessons — particularly the **growing international trend towards integrating, within education ministries, the early learning/kindergarten programs in public schools and child care in community settings**. This development has significant potential, given that the principles of education across Canada — universal entitlement to programs provided by reasonably paid and trained staff, with democratic governance — are consistent with those recommended for early care and learning.
- The need to protect Canadian children and families, and the public interest, from the growth of for-profit child care, especially Big Box child care chains. Between 2004 and 2008, the percentage of for-profit child care in Canada grew from about 20% of total spaces to 25%, and there is evidence that Big Box child care chains in particular are growing. Lessons from Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States should be instructive for Canada: while public investment has grown in those countries, the public goals of quality, affordability and access have not been met.¹⁰

Incorporating these refinements, the child care advocacy movement has consistently called for federal and provincial governments to stop relying primarily on parent fees to fund services and the private sector, whether non-profit or for-profit, to create them. Instead, advocates promote a leadership role for the federal government in:

1. **Public planning**, requiring provincial and territorial early care and learning plans, with timelines, targets and direct operating funding that will reduce parent fees, raise staff wages and training levels, promote inclusion and grow access through publicly-owned spaces
2. **Public funding**, providing adequate, dedicated and sustained transfers directly to provinces and territories, who will in turn directly fund accountable services

10 Find out more at <http://privatization.crru.ca/>, <http://www.ccaac.ca/action/HotTopics/warehousecc.php> and <http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/act/actions/2007/NFS/index.html>

3. Public reporting, to ensure accountability for the provision of quality, accessible, inclusive early care and learning services that support children’s healthy development and parents in all of their roles, including workforce participation.

Governments should also provide public funding to fulfill the rights of First Nations and Aboriginal communities to design and deliver services that meet their needs.

Most Canadians agree with the recommendations stemming from the anti-poverty and child care advocacy movements, as outlined in public reports shared by Campaign 2000 and the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. A series of recent polls shows that at least three-quarters of Canadians support a national child care program, considering the lack of affordable child care to be a serious problem. And, 80% of voters say that creating more affordable child care spaces for working Canadians is an effective way to reduce the growing gap between rich and poor (CCAAC, 2008).

PART 4

Governments of Canada — Public Reporting on the Early Years

As Part 2 and Part 3 of this paper highlighted, multiple reports prepared by international bodies and Canadian civil society groups indicate that Canada is not fulfilling the commitments made, through its governments, to young children and families. This section of the paper reviews public reports issued by Canadian governments, to see if they are providing clear, relevant, timely, consistent and comprehensive information as recommended by generally-accepted public reporting standards (Anderson & Findlay, 2007). Specifically, the paper considers the extent to which Canada's public reporting:



- Provides comparative data that helps readers understand actual results: (1) relative to a comprehensive public plan; (2) in relation to Canada's human rights commitments, and to policies in other developed countries; (3) as they vary across the country
- Includes key indicators commonly used across developed countries to monitor progress, highlighting trends over time
- Discusses the breadth and depth of cross-sectoral input available from civil society groups
- Discloses in a transparent fashion the changes in public investment, the public accountability requirements related to those investments, and an assessment of the extent to which those public accountability requirements have been met.

A complete review of all public reporting by Canadian governments, for all areas of policy related to young children and their families, is beyond the scope of this paper. The analysis therefore focuses on early care and learning, consistently identified as a policy priority by communities and in the research. The following key documents are considered:

1. Canada's *Third and Fourth Reports on the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (November 2009), prepared by federal, provincial and territorial governments
1. Government of Canada Report 2008, *The Well-Being of Canada's Young Children* (July 2009), and annual reporting of *Federal Activities and Expenditures for Young Children*¹¹.

Summary of Analysis of Public Reporting on Early Care and Learning:

1. Canada's *Third and Fourth Reports on the Convention on the Rights of the Child*

- **Regarding comparative data:** Canada's report does not include data that compares early care and learning service attributes between provinces, among industrialized countries, over time or in relation to a comprehensive plan or to UN CRC/GC7 commitments. The federal government defers most of the responsibility for public reporting on early care and learning to the provinces and territories, each of whom provide individualized, largely descriptive comments. As a result, Canada's report appears to promote existing policies, instead of evaluating the effectiveness of those policies. The following excerpt of the information provided by one province is typical of provincial/territorial reporting to the international community through this document. Note the lack of measurable, comparable data:

"The Government of... has implemented an Early Learning and Child Care Plan which will add more day care spaces, increase subsidized spaces, and provide ongoing support for the province's child care sector over 10 years... In addition, partial funding is available to eligible lower-income families who require child care" (NSCS, 2008).

11 The federal government's web site is set up to include links to all provincial reports as well – <http://www.ecd-elcc.ca/eng/home.shtml>

- **Regarding key indicators:** Neither the federal nor the provincial/territorial components of Canada’s report consistently include common key indicators for early care and learning quality (such as staff training, compensation), access (such as average parent fees, coverage [i.e. per cent of children with access to regulated spaces]) or public investment (such as public funding per space or per child, per cent of GDP invested). The links in the provincial comments, excerpted above, require the reader to go to separate reports, the first of which is a summarized 10-year plan that was established in 2006. This plan appears to have a few targets and indicators, such as a goal of increasing access to infant child care spaces (i.e. coverage) from 4% to 6%. However, the rationale behind and timelines for achieving this target are not clear, nor does there appear to be public reporting of actual results compared to this plan.
- **Regarding civil society input:** Canada’s report lists the organizations that gave direct input to governments, and provides information on government consultation processes. However, Canada’s report does not synthesize the evidence or policy recommendations emerging from this input. Furthermore, Canada’s report does not demonstrate efforts to broadly canvas input from civil society groups that is publicly accessible (as shown in Part 3 of this report, and listed in Appendix 3), even if not provided directly to government.
- **Regarding public investment:** Canada’s report does not summarize and total its investments in early care and learning, instead directing readers to a range of other reports to gather this information. For example, the federal government’s 2007 introduction of a 25 per cent investment tax credit for businesses to create new licensed child care spaces is highlighted in Canada’s report, but the resulting uptake and corresponding federal investment is not provided. However, a review of the detailed tax expenditures data linked from Canada’s report shows minimal investment to date (less than \$2.5 million per year) (Department of Finance, 2009b).

Furthermore, the limited financial information that Canada’s report does provide on public investment in early care and learning raises concerns about transparency in public reporting. Appendix 5 of Canada’s report states that “there is now \$1.1 billion in federal transfers to the provinces and territories to support early childhood development programs and services for children, including an additional \$250 million **added** to annual funding for new child care spaces” (Government of Canada, 2009, p. 181, emphasis added).

However, the figure of \$1.1 billion represents a reduction of \$350 million (24%) in actual transfers between 2006/07 and 2007/08, and a reduction of \$950 million (46%) in planned transfers for 2007/08 onwards. These reductions result from the federal government’s decision — not mentioned in Canada’s report — to terminate the largest federal transfer agreement on early care and learning ever reached with provincial/territorial governments (referred to in Table 1 as the 2005 Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care). The actual federal transfers over time are summarized in Table 1 below, in comparison to plan.

Table 1 — Dedicated Federal Child Care Transfers to Provinces and Territories
(Department of Finance, 2009a; Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives [CCPA], 2010)

<i>\$ millions</i>	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
2000 Agreement on Early Childhood Development (ECD)	500	500	500	500	500	500
2003 Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC)	25	150	225	300	350	350
2005 Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC)	0	200	500	650	1,200	1,200
Total Committed, Dedicated Child Care Transfers/Funding, 2005	525	850	1,225	1,450	2,050	2,050
Less: 2005 ELCC Agreement terminated effective April 2007					-1,200	-1,200
Add: 2007 Federal Child Care Space Transfer					250	250
Total Actual, Dedicated Child Care Transfers/Funding, 2007	525	850	1,225	1,450	1,100	1,100

In addition to the above-noted concerns, Canada's public reporting to the United Nations in relation to early care and learning does not discuss: Canada's performance relative to specific commitments outlined in GC7; the OECD *Starting Strong* review that was completed during the reporting period; or the UNICEF Report Card 8 which was published almost one year prior to the filing of Canada's report. In summary, Canada's *Third and Fourth Reports on the Convention on the Rights of the Child* relies primarily on descriptive information that does not paint a clear, relevant, comparable and comprehensive picture of early care and learning in Canada.

2. Government of Canada Report 2008, *The Well-Being of Canada's Young Children*, and annual reporting of *Federal Activities and Expenditures for Young Children*

Under the federal/provincial/territorial (F/P/T) agreements related to early childhood development (ECD), in general, and early care and learning specifically, all governments made overarching commitments to:

- "Improve and expand ECD programs for Canadian families, including child care services; and
- Provide clear reporting so that the public can track progress towards this broad goal" (Anderson & Findlay, 2007, emphasis in original).

The child well-being and activities and expenditures reports relate to the federal government's contribution to the public reporting commitments made by federal, provincial and territorial governments under these agreements. Together, these reports seek to inform Canadians about the increasing public investments and programs provided for young children and their families in Canada, and the resulting outcomes.

In addition, the federal government indicates that these two reports also support other government commitments, as stated in the preface to the child well-being report:

In addition to fulfilling the reporting commitments of the F/P/T ECD Agreement, this report contributes to Canada's obligations to report on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Together with the Federal Activities and Expenditures for Young Children database, this report exemplifies Canada's commitment to transparent accountability and reporting related to young children. (Government of Canada, 2008, p. 7)

Yet, a review of the sections related to early care and learning in both of these reports reinforces the concerns outlined in relation to Canada's report to the UN, as discussed in the previous section of this paper, suggesting systemic and significant weaknesses in public reporting on early care and learning in Canada.

The child well-being report frames early care and learning as a support to parental labour force attachment, commenting only on the primary care arrangements for children of working or studying parents. For these children, the report notes that: the use of daycare centres has grown over time; the number of hours in child care arrangements is also increasing, and; children with disabilities are slightly less likely to be in child care.

Despite the well-established risk of poor quality care environments for children's healthy development, the above information is presented without consideration of a public responsibility for ensuring service quality, affordability or accessibility — for all families, irrespective of labour force participation. Rather, the report infers that the primary consideration is parental choice, and that current usage patterns reflect that choice, as evidenced by the report section's concluding statement that:

With the increased pressure on families to find a balance between their earnings and caring roles, parents with young children are making use of a wide range of child care options. (Government of Canada, 2008, p. 39)

Moving on to the federal government's reporting on activities and expenditures (Government of Canada, database), the most recent information available (as of December 11, 2010) is for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2007. The on-line reporting describes a number of programs provided directly by the federal government, ranging from public education programs such as "Food Safety Activity Book" (total cost: \$18,500) and "Parents Guide to Sun Protection" (total cost: \$3,500) to Parental Leave (cost: approximately \$2 billion annually). Similar information is provided for each program, large and small: a brief description and activity summary as well as public investments and selected indicators (e.g. number of children served) over time. Consistent with previous public reporting observations identified in this paper, the information does not compare actual results to a plan with benchmarks, to GC7/UNCRC commitments, or to other jurisdictions.

The federal government also provides transfers to provinces and territories to help them improve their early years services. The reporting on activities and expenditures includes tables summarizing the annual amounts for each of the transfer agreements. Oddly, the table that contains transfers provided under the now-terminated 2005 Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care is renamed 'Development of Child Care Spaces.' This new name sounds more like the program that subsequently replaced the 2005 Agreement, with significantly less funding attached (see Table 1). The renaming of the 2005 Agreement, and the fact that its termination is again not disclosed in the 2006/07 report on federal activities and expenditures, exemplifies the lack of transparency that leads to systemic concerns about public reporting.

In order to learn about how federal transfers are improving early childhood services in Canada, readers must refer to individual provincial and territorial public reporting. Unfortunately, this is not a simple task.

In 2007, the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC) completed a three year citizen engagement project designed to support communities in reviewing and providing feedback on government's public reports, particularly related to the activities and expenditures reporting on early care and learning. The CCAAC's project findings showed that:

few governments have clear public reporting that allows the public to easily track progress throughout the required reporting period (2000/01 through 2005/06). None meet all of the performance and reporting requirements outlined in the FPT Agreements. This central finding is highlighted by the fact that of the 13 jurisdictions reviewed, 8 are missing reports for one or more of the required years so the public cannot track all of the federal transfers and total investments in child care services...

One of this project's goals is to help communities to understand public reporting, but our experience indicates that not all reports are understandable. Project staff spent over 30 hours analyzing some governments' reporting, trying to extract both financial and non-financial information that was not clearly and consistently presented and/or comparable from year to year. These problems were also reflected in feedback from a range of stakeholders — including parents, child care workers and academics — who view the reports as too long, confusing and difficult to understand. (Anderson & Findlay, 2007)

A more recent review of the federal government's ECD-ELCC internet portal¹², which is designed to provide easy access to public reporting through direct links to relevant web sites, indicates that, of the 14 Canadian jurisdictions, including the federal government¹³:

- 7 have incorrect or inactive links, or links that don't enable reports to be easily found (e.g. within 2 'clicks' on the site)
- 7 have easily accessible reports of which the most recent available are 2008/09 (1), 2007/08 (2), 2006/07 (3), 2005 (1).

Building on the previously referenced provincial example, this province's recent public reporting is quite clear and more easily accessible and current (2008) than many others (NSCS, 2008). However, the province's reporting suggests that, at least in one key program area, some of the federal transfer funds were used to partially replace rather than increase the provincial contribution.

This conclusion is not explicitly stated in the report. However, the annual columns in the table below summarize the expenditures on child care subsidies for lower-income families, directly from the report (p. 34). The addition, in this paper, of the final 'change' column suggests that, while federal transfers of almost \$1.4 million were allocated to child care subsidies, the provincial contribution was reduced by almost 40% of this amount (\$539,217 / \$1,381,409), for a net increase in child care subsidies of only \$842,409. The suggestion that federal funds partially replaced provincial funds undermines both the spirit and intent of the transfer agreement and the support which could have been provided to lower-income families with young children, even within existing resources.

12 <http://www.ecd-elcc.ca/eng/home.shtml>

13 As of December 8, 2010

Table 2: NCSC, Public Reporting on Child Care Subsidy Expenditures, 2005-2008

Funding Source	2005/06	2007/08	Change: 2005/06 to 2007/08
Provincial	7,713,525	7,174,308	(539,217)
Federal	2,395,366	3,776,992	1,381,626
Total	10,108,891	10,951,300	842,409

Furthermore, the discussion of the provincial plan in this public report does not include timelines, nor does it include key indicators such as staff compensation, average parent fees and per cent of children with access to regulated spaces. In the absence of the latter indicator, for example, the commitment to build 500 new spaces lacks comparative context (p. 60).

In summary, a brief review of Canada's public reporting, related both to the UN CRC and the federal/provincial/territorial agreement commitments, shows that key elements which are essential to fully understanding the current status of early care and learning are either not provided, or not easily accessible. As a result, those who rely solely on government's public reporting may conclude that early care and learning in Canada is performing at generally acceptable levels, and steadily improving.

This conclusion would not be consistent with the observations of a broad range of civil society groups, as discussed in Part 3 of this paper. For example, a 2007 report of the federal government's Ministerial Advisory Committee on Child Care Spaces (2007) indicated that there are problems faced by Canadian families seeking child care services including: the recruitment and retention of trained staff and the resulting effect on quality; the lack of affordability, and; the lack of access. Overall, the lack of comprehensive planning, comparative data, consistent use of key indicators, discussion of civil society input, and transparent sharing of changes in public investment means that public reporting by federal, provincial and territorial governments does not help Canadians and other observers reconcile *A Tale of Two Canadas* for early care and learning.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As quoted at the outset of this paper, “a great change is coming over childhood in the world’s richest countries.” UNICEF observes that this is the first generation of children in which a majority will experience some form of out-of-home child care. UNICEF recommends that the response should “begin with increased concern for, and closer monitoring of, this great change as it gathers momentum and begins to spread to other parts of the world” (UNICEF IRC, 2008, p.7).

This paper shows that a range of Canadian and international civil society groups, including the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, are concerned about how this change is unfolding in Canada. In 2003, the Committee recommended that Canada “undertake a comparative analysis at the provincial and territorial levels with a view to identifying variations in childcare provisions and their impact on children and to devise a coordinated approach to ensuring that quality childcare is available to all children, regardless of their economic status or place of residence” (p. 8).

Yet, the government reports reviewed in this paper, including Canada’s public response to the Committee, suggest that these concerns are not shared by federal, provincial and territorial governments. On one level, the evidence for this conclusion is obvious — clearly, the reports do not include a comparative analysis of early care and learning across the country, nor do they include a coordinated plan to ensure access for all.

But this paper also raises deeper questions: Why is there *A Tale of Two Canadas*? Why are governments essentially ignoring the reporting recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, at least regarding early care and learning? Does the apparent lack of concern in governments reflect that the broader public is not fully aware of the changes and challenges facing families with young children today? Because when the public is concerned, they call on their government to act — and it can.

Consider, for example, the Auditor General for Canada’s analysis of government action related to the recent economic recession. After reviewing Canada’s Economic Action Plan, a two-year, \$47 billion federal stimulus investment that involved: an additional “\$14 billion from the provinces and territories; more than 35 federal entities working with provinces, territories, municipalities, non-government organizations, and the private sector; close to 90 programs,” the Auditor General concluded that:

It is encouraging to note that when tasked with rolling out a complex and time-sensitive initiative, central agencies and departments worked together to achieve timely implementation while paying considerable attention to risk ...

This report is evidence that when senior officials give priority to large initiatives like the Economic Action Plan, public servants rise to the challenge (Fraser, 2010, emphasis added).

Canada’s Economic Action Plan combined significant public investment and federal/provincial collaboration: two of the key ingredients required to effectively implement rights in early childhood. Done well, the latter will also strengthen the economy — according to multiple economists, even more so than many of the Action Plan projects (CCHRSC, 2009a).

But the economic downturn was front page news on a daily basis; the rights of young children are not. Thus, in order to resolve *A Tale of Two Canadas* and fulfill Canada’s commitments to young children and their families, the paper concludes with comprehensive and integrated recommendations. With public funding support for meaningful involvement by non-government organizations, federal and provincial governments are urged to:

- 1. Inform** — undertake a broad public education strategy to inform Canadians about Canada’s commitments to early childhood, demonstrating the progress to date and acknowledging the areas that require further action.
- 2. Plan** — develop comprehensive plans to realize the rights of young children, with timelines and targets to measure success along the way.
- 3. Invest** — increase funding to both parents, particularly those with lower incomes, and to community services. Specifically, invest 1% of GDP in early care and learning, ensuring accountability for achieving service quality and access targets.
- 4. Monitor** — publicly and transparently report on actual results compared to plans, incorporating key indicators of success.

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