

CALEDON



INSTITUTE OF
SOCIAL POLICY

**A Proposed Model Framework
for Early Childhood Development Services
Within the National Children's Agenda**

**An Agreement between the Government
of Canada and the Governments
of the Provinces and Territories**

by

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1. Preamble

This agreement is based on mutual respect among orders of government and a willingness to work together to meet the needs of Canadian children and families.

This agreement acknowledges the primary role of parents, other family members and guardians in raising children, and seeks to support these primary caregivers.

The agreement recognizes that all jurisdictions currently invest in diverse services in respect of children and their families. The purpose of this agreement is to broaden the range of early childhood development services, to promote their integration at the community level and to ensure that these are accessible to all Canadian families that want to use them.

This agreement is in full accordance with the spirit and the letter of the Social Union Framework Agreement, a commitment to improve cooperation among governments in order to make social programs more effective and efficient.

The terms of this agreement are consistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Nothing in this agreement abrogates or derogates from any Aboriginal treaty or other rights of Aboriginal persons, including self-government.

2. Vision

This agreement embodies a clear vision in which all Canadian children are valued and encouraged to develop their unique physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and creative potential.

3. Values

Governments agree on a clear set of values that have guided the development of this agreement:

- We recognize children for their inherent worth and value them for who they are as much as who they will become.
- We respect the fact that children thrive within families and communities which

This proposed model framework between the federal and provincial/territorial governments on early childhood development services was prepared by the Caledon Institute of Social Policy in response to the 2000 federal Budget that committed Ottawa to convene a meeting with the provinces and territories in order to explore possible collaborative efforts around early childhood development. This proposed model framework is a follow-up to our February 2000 report entitled "Ottawa Should Help Build A National Early Childhood Development System."

meet their physical needs and provide security, nurturing, respect and love. We believe that children can be supported by helping parents, families and communities to provide the resources that children require.

- We acknowledge the important nurturing role of educators, caregivers and mentors and we encourage their involvement in achieving the goals of this agreement.
- We respect the central role that parents, guardians, elders and extended families play in nurturing children, and honour the traditions and spiritual significance of Aboriginal communities.
- We value the range of rich traditions and cultures in Canada and seek to reflect these in the services developed pursuant to this agreement.

4. Goals

This agreement sets out four key goals rooted in research evidence on the developmental needs of children. In pursuing these goals, governments recognize the central importance of strengthening the role of parents and families in child development. Governments also acknowledge the needs of parents as workers and appreciate the intrinsic links among children's health, security, learning and family income. Governments seek to achieve:

Children Who Are Healthy

- To ensure that children are as physically and emotionally healthy as they can be, with strong self-esteem and skills.

Children Who Are Safe and Secure

- To ensure that children grow up in safe and supportive environments for meeting basic needs, including learning, recreation and play.

Children Who Are Successful at Learning

- To ensure that children achieve physical, emotional and social development, and acquire language, literacy and numeracy skills to the best of their unique capabilities.
- To ensure that children are ready for learning throughout their lives so that they can gain the abilities for present and future fulfillment.

Children Who Are Socially Engaged and Responsible

- To ensure that children can form, when they are young, stable attachments to nurturing adults and develop supportive relationships within and outside their families.

5. Three Streams of Service

This agreement acknowledges that families and homes are the primary physical and social environments in which children develop. It also recognizes that all families with children, in all income groups, can benefit from early childhood development services. These services refer to a range of programs that provide care and education to young children and support for their parents and communities.

Substantial research evidence shows that early childhood development services can enhance children's growth and development along physical, emotional, social, linguistic and intellectual dimensions. These services have been found to improve children's subsequent performance in school, to lessen the learning risks linked to low income and to enhance parents' child rearing and coping skills.

This agreement supports the creation and expansion of three key streams of early childhood development services. Ideally, the programs within these three streams will be delivered as part of a coherent, holistic, seamless system serving all children and all parents, both in and out of the paid workforce.

Prenatal and Post-Natal Care

Pregnancy and early parenting services include early assessment of maternal and fetal health; screening, risk assessment and referral; pre- and post-natal nutrition; home visits; and infant stimulation.

Parenting and Community Supports

Parenting and community supports include an array of services such as home visits, parenting classes, family resource centres, play groups, toy and book lending libraries, and respite arrangements which provide occasional relief from caregiving responsibilities.

Early Childhood Learning and Care

Early childhood learning and care services include programs that provide opportunities for interaction and play, help prepare children for school, and provide care that promotes child development and supports parents in balancing employment and home responsibilities.

6. Guiding Principles

The creation and expansion of early childhood development services pursuant to this agreement will be guided by the following principles derived from a substantial body of scientific and practice knowledge:

Comprehensiveness: While provincial and territorial governments will determine the design of their respective early childhood development systems, this agreement is intended to encourage the growth over time of a comprehensive range of services from all three identified streams.

Universality: Early childhood development services will be available to all families throughout the income spectrum, although geared-to-income parental fees may be used to help finance the system. While these services will be universally available, families will be free to select whichever early childhood development services they wish, or none at all.

Accessibility: The early childhood development system should serve families with children of all ages, including infants. It should meet the additional needs of families with children with disabilities and/or identified special needs and of immigrant families. Services must be responsive to the special challenges facing Aboriginal households.

Quality: All streams within the early childhood development system will be subject to appropriate regulations established and applied by provincial and territorial governments – e.g., health and safety standards, staff-child ratios and curriculum. Clear monitoring and reporting requirements will be established to ensure quality.

Accountability: All early childhood development agencies and programs, including those operated by community organizations, will be accountable to governments and to the public for financial, administrative and service performance. The latter requires ongoing monitoring and periodic quantitative and qualitative assessment of inputs, outcomes and community decision-making processes.

7. Exemplary Practice

In addition to adhering to the principles identified in Section 6, governments agree that the creation or expansion of early childhood development services should be guided by the following exemplary practices identified in research and practice:

Service integration: The components of early childhood development should fit together into a coherent system, assuring seamless care and education to suit the diverse needs of all families with children.

Mixed delivery: Early childhood development covers a wide range of programs and services provided variously by all levels of government; the private sector including for-profit child care, nursery schools and not-for-profit workplace child care; and the voluntary sector. This diversity should be maintained, though federal funds are not to be invested in commercial child care and other for-profit family services.

Community base: A strong community base is required for designing, delivering and governing services for families with children. Parents and other community members should play an active role in the governance of early childhood development services and be consulted as part of ongoing monitoring and assessment efforts.

8. Partnerships

Governments acknowledge that they have primary responsibility for financing and overseeing the creation and expansion of early childhood development services. This agreement recognizes that parents, employers, unions and professional associations, schools, the voluntary sector, municipalities, social advocates and citizens have important roles to play as well. Governments agree to engage these parties in the creation and growth of early childhood development services.

Governments concur that there are substantial benefits to joint planning and mutual sharing of research and practice.

9. Financing

This agreement is predicated upon the principle of stable, predictable financing to support the growth of early childhood development services throughout the country.

The financing is structured on the basis of ongoing, increasing financial contribution over a five-year period.

The agreement recognizes that the federal, provincial and territorial governments already invest in a wide range of early childhood development services. This agreement is intended to generate new and continuing investment in these services over a sustained period of time.

The federal government agrees to contribute \$500 million for the first year and an additional \$500 million each year thereafter on the accumulating base, growing to \$2.5 billion for the fifth year and a cumulative total of \$7.5 billion over five years. The federal portion will be divided among the provinces and territories according to a formula based on projected population growth and economic need.

The federal investment is intended to lever similar provincial and territorial contributions derived from a combination of sources: provincial or territorial revenues, municipalities, business, community funds, private foundations and geared-to-income parental fees. Subsidized services will be available to low-income families.

The federal portion allocated to provinces and territories should be directed over the course of the agreement toward all three streams of early childhood development services, according to the priorities and preferences of each provincial and territorial government as set out in a clear annual plan made public by that jurisdiction.

The expenditure of funds by all governments must respect the guiding principles outlined in Section 6 of this agreement. Federal funds are not to be invested in commercial child care and other for-profit family services.

All governments will produce annual reports of their investments that identify the levels of their contribution and the nature of their initiatives, and that explain their compliance

with the identified principles and the public plans which they have developed.

The federal government may continue to make direct investments in early childhood development. These include services for Aboriginal children and for children at risk, and research on early childhood development.

10. Public Accountability

Governments agree to set up a federal/provincial/territorial working group to assume responsibility for implementing and monitoring progress concerning the provisions of this agreement.

Governments agree to organize in their respective jurisdictions an advisory group consisting of parents and representatives from the community, the research and policy sectors, and government. The role of the advisory group is to suggest priorities for the implementation of this agreement. The advisory group also will be responsible for monitoring progress in the creation/growth of early childhood development services and for determining adherence to the principles outlined in Section 6.

Governments agree to monitor their work and report publicly on their progress on an annual basis. Monitoring will include the gathering of quantitative and qualitative data on the development and effectiveness of early childhood development services. Governments agree

to coordinate efforts to collect and disseminate research and evaluation findings.

Governments agree to produce a joint annual report that identifies inputs, outputs and outcomes from the expansion and improved accessibility of early childhood development services across Canada.

11. Duration of Agreement

This agreement is in effect over a five-year period from the time of signing. By the end of the third year from the time of signing, governments will jointly undertake a review of the agreement and its implementation and will make adjustments as required.

12. Dispute Resolution

Governments are committed to work collaboratively to avoid and resolve disputes related to any of the provisions in this agreement.

The ongoing discussions of the federal/provincial/territorial working group will provide a means to avoid and resolve intergovernmental disputes. In the event that a given dispute cannot be resolved in this way, governments agree to act in accordance with the conflict resolution provisions of the Social Union Framework Agreement.