

Federal ELCC initiatives: Imagining a blueprint

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...not just looking after children while mom works...

- **Middle class, poor, affluent families...**
- **Immigrants, Aboriginal, rural parents...**
- **All regions of Canada**



All seek “best start in life” for their children

Finally....

- **Serious federal commitment**
- **National ELCC program key Liberal commitment in 2004 federal election**

Pre-implementation stage

- **intensive discussion in the fall**
- **about the scope and nature of provincially/territorially delivered ELCC programs**
- **intergovernmental - among government officials (behind closed doors)**

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- **announcement expected in early/mid February**
 - **followed by federal budget**
 - **new federal dollars will be transferred to provinces/territories April 1**
 - **current commitment - \$1 billion a year for five years**

The devil is in the details

What will be the nature of the national ELCC program?

- **Who will use it, and why?**
- **Who will pay for it, and how?**
- **Who will run it?**

Long-term development

- **Promise of universal ELCC can be fulfilled only over a period of years**
- **Perhaps longer than a decade**

However....

- **Choices made now will shape future child care**

Three pieces of information useful for imagining a blueprint

1. Principles - Liberal election document

Foundations: A National Early Learning and Childcare System

2. How best to achieve the promises - Extensive ELCC research

3. Recommendations for getting from here to there - OECD analysis of Canadian ELCC (2004)

1. *Foundations* document

Commitment:

- “build for Canada’s children and parents an early learning and childcare system ...over the next decade”
- “enshrine..four principles..in legislation” – quality, universality, accessibility and “developmental” (the “QUAD”)

Also...recognizes that ELCC is a provincial responsibility

- **“...implementation and details of the new Foundations program will be worked out collaboratively with provinces and territories”.**
- **“ ...provided provincial early learning and childcare programs meet the QUAD principles, provinces will have flexibility to design a roll-out plan based on the most appropriate implementation to suit their circumstances”**

2. What does research say about the QUAD principles?

QUALITY:

- **staff well trained in early childhood education**
- **good support, leadership and remuneration**
- **not-for-profit operation**
- **adequate, well-directed financing**
- **government regulation for an acceptable “floor”**

UNIVERSALITY

- **Canadian economic research - government funding will eventually generate \$2 for every \$1 invested (in terms of better developmental outcomes AND mothers working outside home**

ACCESSIBILITY

- **Same study looks at accessibility through additional government funding**
- **Costs are consistent with public financing in countries have universal ELCC programs**

DEVELOPMENTAL [ness]

- Considerable research – extremely strong correlation between enhanced child development and ELCC programs

ONLY if they are high quality

3. Learning from the OECD

- **In-depth analysis of Canadian ELCC**
- **Part of the OECD's 20-nation *Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care* (2004)**
- **Comparative perspective and comprehensive recommendations**

“...policy for the early education and care of young children in Canada is still in its initial stages”

Over-arching issues in Canadian ELCC:

- national, provincial policy both incoherent and ineffective**
- severely under-financed**
- quality, access both inadequate**

Keeping QUAD principles in mind as starting point...

- **Quality, universality, accessibility and developmental[ness]**
- **Imagine policy framework based on evidence from research and OECD analysis**
- **Will grow over time**
- **Provinces at different stages**
- **but...common principles (like Medicare) appropriate**

A workable blueprint must include:

- 1. A planned – not a market – approach**
 - A well-resourced ELCC Secretariat in the federal government**
 - Preparation of provincial/territorial plans**
 - Participation of experts and community at federal and provincial levels**

2. Commitment to ongoing quality improvement

- **Key message of the OECD study:**
to have high quality programs needs a quality ELCC system, to have a quality ELCC system, good quality ELCC policy is needed

“Develop a national quality framework for early childhood services across all sectors, and the infrastructure at provincial level to ensure effective implementation”

“...key contributor to quality...is formulation of a *national quality framework document*:

- **statement of the values and goals that should guide early childhood centres;**
- **a summary of program standards (ratios, teacher qualifications...)**
- **pedagogical guidelines outlining processes through which children achieve developmental goals, and how educators should support them.**
- **focus on broad national aims, and on children’s holistic development and well-being, rather than on detailed curricular objectives”**

3. Transforming financing

- [funding] is *the* critical issue in Canada for affordability, access and quality

“Substantially increase public funding for services for young children.”

- Transforming financing, not only \$\$, also key

Sustainability

- **Sustained public financing is crucial for meeting the QUAD principles**
- **Long-term plan (10 years+) with phases**

More financing in the first phase

- **Need commitments to capital, infrastructure as well as operating funding**
- **Capital – one time only**
- **Operating funds must “ramp up”**
- **\$5 billion annually at the end of first five year phase**

Better spending of public dollars

- **Financing should be transformed from subsidies (demand-side) to operational global program funding (supply-side) (parent fees)**
- **Expansion through public and not-for-profit delivery (grand-parenting)**
- **Plans for integrating kindergarten, childcare and parenting supports into coherent ELCC programs**

In summary...

- **As the commitment to a national system of universal early learning and childcare moves into the implementation stage**
- **There is much knowledge about how to yield the best results**
- **Use the best available evidence for achieving the QUADS principles (fed and all P/Ts have agreed)**