

Feb.  
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Edmonton Social Planning Council

## Open letter on child care

To The Honourable Heather Forsyth  
Minister of Alberta Children's Services

February 14, 2005

Dear Minister

We are writing to express our disappointment with the inability of the ministers responsible for social development in Canada to reach an agreement at this time to implement a national child care program.

We appreciate your government's determination to push for provincial flexibility in the national strategy in order to meet unique local needs. However, we strongly urge you to balance this position with the paramount need for a national child care strategy based on the principles of universality, quality, accessibility, inclusion and is developmentally-focused.

Our work with local and national partners on a number of initiatives convinces us that a national child care strategy needs to be adopted now.

In a recent local initiative we heard from over 200 Edmontonians about issues related to social inclusion through our involvement in *Inclusive Cities Canada*, a local/national inclusion initiative with partners in five cities. We heard that a key outcome of an inclusive Edmonton is creating a child-friendly community in which all families have the capacity and supports to nurture their children.

To achieve this outcome, Edmontonians recommended that *the Federal government introduce and fund a universal, high quality and affordable child care program with Alberta government support* (emphasis added).

Through the ICC initiative, Edmontonians told us that income and employment were the two most important barriers to fostering social inclusion. Health Canada has identified social inclusion/exclusion and early childhood education/care as two of the nine social determinants of health. Adopting a national child care program is a recognized population health strategy to address the complex and interconnected issues of poverty, inclusion and child development.

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The Council has also been working with local, provincial and national partners to support Campaign 2000's goal of eliminating child poverty. We learned that 98,000 children in Alberta (13.3%) lived in poverty in 2002. That same year, 14.8% of children in Calgary and 18.1% of children in Edmonton lived in poverty. In 2002, the majority (57.9%) of Alberta children living in poverty lived in working families. (All figures are based on Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Offs (LICO pre-tax.)

Campaign 2000 has developed five core elements to address child poverty in Canada. One of these core elements is the adoption of a *universally accessible system of quality early childhood education and care*. In our experience, adopting this core recommendation is essential to eliminating child poverty and creating a more inclusive Alberta.

The development of a publicly supported, quality system of child care is an investment in our children, our families and our future. It is an opportunity to transform our society in the same way that the introduction of our public education and universal health care systems helped to build our caring and compassionate country. We urge you and your government to seize this opportunity and build on this legacy for the future of all Canadians.

Sincerely,

Bryan Sandilands  
President  
Edmonton Social Planning Council

Nicola Fairbrother  
Executive Director  
Edmonton Social Planning Council

cc: The Honourable Ralph Klein, Premier of Alberta  
The Honourable Ken Dryden, Minister of Social Development, Social Development Canada