



MOVING FORWARD ON EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

**AGREEMENT-IN-PRINCIPLE BETWEEN
THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA
AND THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA**

July 7, 2005

Canada 

Alberta

Introduction

Governments recognize that parents and families have the primary responsibility for supporting and nurturing children. Governments support parents in this role through a wide range of policies and programs including early learning and child care. These measures provide parents with a range of options and choices for caring for their children and balancing their family, work and community responsibilities.

Governments recognize that the early years of life are critically important for the development and future well-being of children. Research demonstrates early childhood development programs and services such as quality early learning and child care plays an important role in promoting the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of young children.

Governments agree to work towards a shared vision for regulated early learning and child care for young children. This agreement-in-principle reflects the Government of Canada's 2004 Throne Speech commitment to enhance early learning and child care across Canada. It builds on governments' commitments under the 2003 Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care and complements the 2000 Federal-Provincial-Territorial First Ministers Communique on Early Childhood Development.

Consistent with commitments made by First Ministers under the 2000 Early Childhood Development Agreement, the Governments of Canada and Alberta will work together in full respect of each other's responsibilities, recognizing that the province has responsibility for early learning and child care. The Government of Alberta will have the flexibility to determine its priorities within this initiative.

The Government of Alberta is committed to helping all the province's children get the best possible start in life. It supports parents, families and communities right from the start—through comprehensive early childhood development including child care programs.

The goal of these programs is healthy early childhood development. Because parents and caregivers play a critical role in fostering children's development, Alberta's programs and services include supports for parents and other adults who care for children.

There is often no clear line between "early childhood development" and "child care" programs and services. The two disciplines support and enhance one another as part of a broad spectrum of services. Both emphasize early learning and development. Early childhood development programs may contain child care elements and vice versa. Such overlaps are consistent with a holistic, non-compartmentalized approach to meeting children's needs.

Alberta's approach to early learning and child care provides a broad range of high-quality programs and services. It includes "reach forward" strategies that establish links between home and communities. Alberta provides parents and families with a variety of child care choices through programs and services such as:

- Regulated child care in government-licensed daycare centres or approved family day homes;
- Child care delivered through early childhood development programs such as Head Start;

- Child care provided by parents and families or through specialized kin child care programs; and
- Supports for parents and children through Parent Link Centers.

This agreement-in-principle will enable the Government of Canada to support elements of Alberta's programs and services as set out below.

NATIONALLY SHARED VISION

The Governments of Canada and Alberta believe young children will benefit from high quality early learning and child care that is grounded in the value and respect Canadians give to children and their families. Governments believe parental choice is a key consideration in the development of any new approaches to early childhood development including early learning and child care.

Parents who choose to use regulated early learning and child care in their communities will be confident that their children will experience high quality, inclusive, developmental programs and services that best meet the needs of their young children.

Quality early learning and child care will recognize the unique needs of every child. It will provide stimulating enriching experiences and healthy physical environments where children can develop and flourish to their full potential.

Early learning and child care reflects the value that parents and communities place on qualified and dedicated early childhood educators and child care providers.

Achieving this vision will require time, shared commitment and collaboration, as well as incremental, predictable and sustained investments over the long term.

PRINCIPLES

The principles set out below help shape a shared vision for the future, guiding investments and decisions regarding local needs and priorities under this initiative. They are reflective of, and build on, the principles for effective approaches established under the previous *Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care (2003)*. Although each of the principles is a critical component of effective early learning and child care, they are also related and need to be considered together. The following principles will help advance the vision for early learning and child care.

Quality

High quality early learning and child care supports optimal child development, by demonstrating evidence-based quality practices, including provincial regulation and monitoring, and an appropriate complement of staff and child care providers qualified in early learning and child care.

Universally Inclusive

Universally inclusive early learning and child care is open and responsive, without discrimination, to young children, including children with special needs, Aboriginal children, and children with various cultural and linguistic circumstances. Diversity is respected and valued.

Accessible

Accessible early learning and child care is broadly available to children and parents. It is also affordable to parents who choose to use it.

Developmental

Developmental early learning and child care demonstrates quality and contributes to improved lifetime outcomes for children by supporting social, emotional, physical and cognitive development and parents' knowledge and involvement. Developmental early learning and child care is child centred, reflects family and community contexts and encourages meaningful partnerships between parents and child care providers.

GOALS

In keeping with these principles, the Government of Alberta agrees to work over time to achieve broad long term goals. Alberta will establish its own targets.

Quality

Improve the quality of early learning and child care by investing in evidence-based quality practices such as:

- Support developmentally appropriate programs for children;
- Develop training and supports for early childhood educators and child care providers;
- Support recruitment and retention strategies for qualified early learning and child care providers;
- Strengthen and enhance provincial regulation and monitoring of early learning and child care; and
- Promote community engagement and partnerships that create more opportunities for children to participate in quality early learning and child care.

Universally Inclusive

Increase the responsiveness of early learning and child care to respond to the diverse needs of children by investing in evidence-based practices such as:

- Develop and strengthen programming and supports for children's cultural, linguistic and/or special needs; and
- Support the development of supports and resources for early learning educators and child care providers which recognize children's cultural, linguistic and/or special needs.

Accessible

Increase the availability and affordability of early learning and child care reflecting the needs of each jurisdiction such as:

- Develop innovative approaches to service provision in rural and underserved areas;
- Enable flexible approaches that address a range of family and employment circumstances;
- Enhance fee subsidies; and
- Increase early learning and child care opportunities.

Developmental

Strengthen the learning and developmental component of early learning and child care to meet more fully the cognitive, physical, emotional and social development needs of children by investing in evidence-based practices such as:

- Support developmentally appropriate early learning and child care for children;
- Support the development of appropriate child-centred activities;
- Support the engagement of parents in their children's early learning and child care; and
- Strengthen safe, secure, nurturing and stimulating early learning and child care environments.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives under this agreement-in-principle include improved outcomes for children and increased support to parents in their primary responsibility for the care and nurturing of their children.

Over the next five years, Alberta, subject to the availability of new federal funding will develop and enhance its regulated early learning and child care system towards achieving the following objectives:

- Measurable and demonstrable improvements in the *quality* and *developmental* components of early learning and child care programs through:
 - Strengthening safe, nurturing and stimulating environments for children;
 - Promoting community partnerships in supporting early learning and child care opportunities and identification of child care needs;
 - Developing training and supports for early childhood educators and child care providers; and
 - Promoting quality child care accreditation.

- Better access to early learning and child care, which is *universally inclusive*, by:
 - Increasing the availability of early learning and child care opportunities;
 - Enhancing the range of quality early learning and child care options that are available to families across the province;
 - Making early learning and child care more affordable;
 - Strengthening supports for children with special needs to be included in local community child care settings; and
 - Promoting culturally and linguistically appropriate early learning and child care opportunities for multicultural and linguistic communities, in particular for francophones.

AREAS FOR INVESTMENT

To advance the vision set out in this agreement, Alberta agrees to invest federal funds transferred to Alberta under this initiative in provincially regulated and approved early learning and child care programs and services, including public and private providers, for children under six.

In the context of this agreement, regulated programs are defined as programs and services that meet quality standards that are established and monitored by Alberta.

Early learning and child care programs and services funded under this agreement will primarily provide direct care for children in settings such as child care centers, family child care homes, preschools and nursery schools. Types of investments could include: capital and operating funding, fee subsidies, wage enhancements, training, professional development and support, quality assurance, and parent information and referral.

Programs and services that are part of the formal school system will not be included in this initiative.

ALBERTA'S STRATEGIC PLAN

Consistent with principles and goals set out above, and subject to availability of new federal funding, Alberta agrees to develop and release as part of its business planning cycle, a strategic plan on early learning and child care regarding the five years of new federal funding under this initiative.

The Strategic Plan will:

- Identify specific priorities for investment based on an assessment of progress to date in establishing quality, universally inclusive, accessible and developmental (QUAD) early learning and child care;
- Identify measurable targets for tracking progress in relations to the objectives of this Agreement-in-Principle;

- Identify baseline expenditures for early learning and child care and areas for incremental investment; and
- Identify and respond to the early learning and child care needs of:
 - Children with special needs;
 - Aboriginal children; and
 - Children from multicultural and linguistic communities, including francophone communities.

Alberta will continue to ensure mechanisms for consultation with Albertans to aid in the development of early learning and child care priorities.

Alberta will work with the Government of Canada and Aboriginal peoples to find practical solutions to address the early learning and child care needs of Aboriginal children in Alberta.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTING

Canada and Alberta agree that the purpose of public reporting is to be accountable to their publics, not to each other.

Alberta is committed to being accountable to its citizens for the provision of early learning and child care programs and services.

Clear public reporting will enhance accountability and will allow Albertans to track progress in early learning and child care and the impact of early learning and child care on outcomes for children. It will also allow Albertans to monitor their government's progress.

Under the existing 2003 Multilateral Agreement on ELCC, the Government of Alberta releases an annual public report that includes descriptive and expenditure information on all early learning and child care programs and services, as well as broad indicators of availability, affordability and quality.

Building upon that commitment, beginning with the 2005-2006 Annual Report, to be released by November 2006, Alberta will incorporate the following specific comparable indicators in its annual report to Albertans:

- Availability: the number of regulated early learning and child care spaces by type of setting and age group, and number of children receiving special needs services, and number of centres providing services in other languages.
- Affordability: the number of families and children receiving subsidies.
- Quality: training requirements, child to staff ratios and group size in regulated programs.

Alberta may also include additional indicators, as appropriate. As the Governments of Canada and Alberta agree to other comparable indicators, Alberta will incorporate these indicators in annual reports, to the extent that data is available.

FUNDING

Funding under this agreement-in-principle flows from the Government of Canada's commitment to invest, across the country, \$5 billion over 5 years and builds on the existing significant investments made by the Government of Alberta in early learning and child care.

Canada and Alberta agree that any additional investments in early learning and child care should be incremental, predictable and sustained over the long-term.

New federal funding provided under this agreement is in addition to funds already committed under the previous Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Early learning and child care.

	Estimated Funding under 2003 Multilateral Framework on ELCC* (CST) (\$ million)	Estimated New ELCC Funding (\$ million)	Estimated Total (\$ million)
2005-2006	22.6	70.4	93.0
2006-2007	30.3	65.7	96.0
2007-2008	35.6	116.8	152.4
2008-2009	35.7	117.3	153.0
2009-2010	35.9	117.9	153.8

* Federal funding under the 2003 Multilateral Framework will continue to flow through the Canada Social Transfer.

The \$70.4 million indicated for 2005-06 is in recognition of amounts put in trust for Alberta, which the province may draw in either 2004-05 or 2005-06. Alberta will have the flexibility to draw down funds as they require up to the end of March 31, 2006.

Exact per capita amounts are to be more fully defined in a detailed multi-year funding agreement.

Parliament of Canada approval of federal funding is required before funding is available and can be disbursed.

KNOWLEDGE, INFORMATION AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Alberta recognizes the importance of evaluation in determining the effectiveness and outcomes of initiatives in early learning and child care and agrees to pursue evaluations, where appropriate, in order to assess the impact of investments made under this agreement.

Canada and Alberta agree to work together to share knowledge, research and information on effective practices in early learning and child care. The Government of Alberta will work over time with the Government of Canada and other interested provincial and territorial governments to collaborate to:

- Develop a National Quality Framework, which governments would hope will identify best practices in quality, developmental early learning and child care, and provide the basis for research and development of guidelines and forward-looking, evidence-based benchmarks to guide future programming.
- Adapt and finalize the Evaluation Framework initiated under the previous Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, to serve as a tool and guide to assess program effectiveness.
- Develop and implement an enhanced knowledge, information and data strategy, including data to support comparable program indicators.
- Develop additional comparable program and child outcome indicators.
- Undertake a review of this initiative, to be completed by March 31, 2009, to take stock of progress towards the realization of the nationally shared vision, consider any adjustments, and establish next steps.

A process for moving forward with these activities will be developed jointly by the Government of Canada, the Government of Alberta and other interested provincial and territorial governments. With respect to each of the above activities, the Governments of Canada and Alberta will move forward in consultation with experts and other interested parties as mutually agreed.

LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT

Alberta may wish to reconsider the agreement-in-principle in the event of federal legislation that substantially alters respective roles and responsibilities as they relate to early learning and child care.

NEXT STEPS

Alberta and Canada will work together to conclude a multi-year funding agreement for the period of 2006-07 to 2009-2010 following the release of Alberta's Strategic Plan as described above.

Signed on _____ at _____

For Canada,

The Honourable Ken Dryden
Minister of Social Development

For Alberta,

The Honourable Heather Forsyth
Minister of Children's Services

And,

The Honourable Ed Stelmach
Minister for International and Intergovernmental Relations