

March 25, 2020

Urgent Open Letter to Canada's P/T Ministers – Coordinated Early Learning and Child Care Planning on COVID-19:

“Why are child care programs.... not valued enough to get adequate funding, but too important to close?”

This comment made the rounds on social media early on in the COVID-19 pandemic and applies across Canada's Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) sector. This sector is in the midst of either being forced to close as a means of preventing transmission on one side, or is being called upon to support essential service workers on the other—or a combination of the two. Provinces and territories are responding diversely in terms of policy approach and funding of ELCC services for families. Importantly their respective communication of what is safe and what is not has been unclear and varied. It has left Canada's ELCC sector confused, anxious and wondering why one approach to the COVID-19 exists in one province, but is not the same as another.

As a sector, we appreciate the challenges and the hours politicians and government officials are having to put in as they navigate these uncharted challenges. Therefore, we are providing the following urgent recommendations for all levels of Canada's governments, specific to the safety and efficient operations of the ELCC sector during this time, to enable governments to streamline their responses in coordination and unity.

1. Coordinated approach with Canada's federal government.
 - This includes a call for the immediate closure of all ELCC programs that are currently open (focused specifically on jurisdictions that have not shut down child care programs) so that the varying and diverse public messaging about group sizes and physical/social distancing can be resolved. Currently, every jurisdiction is operating on what appears to be different public health messaging specific to acceptable group sizes for children and the risk they may pose to others.
 - Ensuring that regional regulations and licensing requirements are being followed.
 - Establish fee-free child care services supporting essential services workers, which will include training Early Childhood Educators (ECE's), specific to the mitigation, processes and procedures that they need to follow. This includes plans for providing child care programs with the proper personal protective equipment, supplies and supports, such as cleaning, required to keep everyone safe.
 - A principled and respectful call for ECE's who willingly, not forcibly, want to provide their expertise, care and professionalism in providing care for the children of essential services workers.

- Compensation for the ECE's and management of identified programs commensurate with the skills, professionalism required, urgency and seriousness of the crisis.
 - Mental health support services for ECE's and programs who are providing this essential service.
2. Federal funds in addition to provincial and territorial funding for the Canadian ELCC sector, both centre and family/home based, to enable financial capacity to sustain operating costs, including the wages and salaries of employees. This is especially critical during a time when fees to parents, which constitute a significant portion of operational funding, are generally not being charged to families across Canada.
 3. We also recommend in this time of crisis and Canadians pulling together that other sectors could be identified who can support the work being led by the ELCC sector. ECE professionals are willing and able to lead the additional support from sectors such as teachers, education students and ECE students in providing essential service workers with the care options they require.

It is a critical and urgent situation. Presently, many child care programs and providers across Canada have either laid off their employees, are considering doing so or have shut their programs down as they cannot afford to sustain the decrease in revenue derived from parent fees and other funding sources. Those programs and providers still operating and/or paying expenses can only manage to do so for a finite amount of time.

If child care programs are to open again and support children and families post-crisis and as Canada's economy recovers, they must remain viable. It is clear now more than ever that access to ELCC services are an essential service for Canadians. The economy depends on them as do families. They are integral to any rebuilding process as Canada recovers from the current crisis. It is imperative that the sector survives and the workforce remains intact so it can continue to provide Canada's families with the care and early years education they will require as we pivot back at the end of the pandemic.

On behalf of the CCCF and its affiliates from across Canada, we offer our collective assistance to your implementation of our urgent recommendations.

Your's truly,



CEO