

# Federal Election Kit

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The purpose of this kit is to **provide an overview of issues and resources to support individuals and community groups in their advocacy for children, youth and families.** Our election kits can support you in promoting legislation, policy and practice that benefit children and youth. This particular package will prepare you for taking action and advocating for children and youth during the federal election taking place on October 14, 2008. **Visit [www.firstcallbc.org](http://www.firstcallbc.org) or e-mail us to sign up for our Weekly Announcements e-mail digest and receive the latest updates on election issues and more background materials on the topics presented in this kit.**

**First Call is a cross-sectoral, non-partisan coalition for children and youth** that is committed to supporting child and youth rights. We believe children and youth must have first call on society's resources because we value them as children and because they are our future. First Call has built a broad provincial consensus around the need to ensure all children and youth benefit from the following four **Keys to Success**:

1. A Strong Commitment to Early Childhood Development
2. Support in Transitions from Childhood to Youth and Adulthood
3. Increased Economic Equality
4. Safe and Caring Communities

## An Opportunity to Get Child, Youth and Family Issues on the Federal Agenda

We need to ensure that our politicians understand the impact of their policy and spending decisions on children and youth. The role of the federal government is to provide leadership, funding and commitment for a comprehensive, integrated strategy that ensures all children and youth receive the supports and protections they need for healthy development and to reach their full potential. It is our responsibility to raise concerns when policies are harmful or increase the risks facing children and youth and to put forward the solutions and ideas we know will make things better.

## You Can Make a Difference!

Elections are the perfect time to speak up because it is when your politicians are really listening. Here are some ways you can **make a positive change for the youth, children and families in your community during an election campaign**:

- Register to vote and find out which electoral district you're in at [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca). When the big day comes, **don't forget to vote and remind your friends and family to vote!**
- Investigate the candidates and parties represented in your electoral district. You can visit party web sites to explore their platforms.
- **Speak to your current Member of Parliament and candidates in your electoral district** about the types of programs and facilities for children, youth and families that you would like to see funded, as well as which ones they plan to fund. Candidates should be accessible through their web sites by e-mail or by phone number. Find your MP at [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca).
- **Attend meetings or candidate events prior to the election and raise issues you're concerned about.** Check candidate and party web sites and local newspapers for upcoming events.
- **Hold a public forum**, big or small. It could be as simple as gathering friends to talk about the issues over coffee. Or, hold a larger event and invite representatives from all parties. Include youth and marginalized groups in the planning and organizing if you can. Their input can add perspective and energy to the entire process.
- **Encourage any group of which you're a member, such as faith or cultural groups, to promote child and youth issues as a focus of the election campaign.** Or **Join a local advocacy group** that focuses on a child and youth issue of concern to you.
- **Write to your local newspaper** about your concerns and what you hope the federal government will do about them. **Speak with the media** and ask them to run a story on the needs of children, youth and families in your community and across the country.

## **A Strong Commitment to Early Childhood Development**

### **The Role of Federal Government**

- Through the Employment Insurance program, the federal government sets policy governing parental leave when children are born or adopted. There is room for improvement in extending eligibility for leave to more parents and raising benefit rates.
- Government can provide designated funding to the provinces and territories to support child care and early childhood development (ECD), and can choose to legislate a universal child care system in Canada that is accessible for all families.
- The federal government holds significant responsibility for funding services and supports for First Nations children and families, including funding for early childhood programs such as Aboriginal Head Start.

### **The Facts**

- Canada's spending on Early Childhood Development is the lowest out of 14 countries surveyed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2006)
- Only 10% of 3-5 year old Aboriginal children in Canada's urban centres have access to an Aboriginal Head Start Program. (Federal Advisor on Healthy Children and Youth, 2008)
- A majority of mothers of young children are in the workforce, yet wait lists for child care spaces average one to two years and are growing, according to a survey of 50 licensed child care centres. (BC Government and Service Employees' Union, 2007)
- Parents pay 80% of the cost of child care in BC, and average annual child care fees for pre-school aged children have gone up by \$672 from 2001 to 2006. While child care costs more than post-secondary education, wages for child care workers often fall below the poverty line. (Child Care Advocacy Forum, 2008)
- The current government provides a monthly Universal Child Care Benefit directly to parents, which they can spend on whatever they choose. Funding directed to parents does not solve the crisis in child care due to lack of spaces and low staff wages, and the \$100 taxable benefit only covers a fraction of the cost of full-time child care.

### **Sample Questions for Candidates**

- The research is clear that the impact of the early years has long-term effects on a child's future health and well-being. What will be your government's priorities to ensure that all children have access to programs and services they need?*
- Do you support a legislated federal commitment to build a high quality, universally accessible and publicly-funded not-for-profit child care system for Canada's children?*
- Are you in favour of expanding eligibility for parental leave under the EI program so more part-time, contract and self-employed caregivers can qualify?*
- Will you support increased and sustained funding for Aboriginal Head Start, Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program and the Community Action Program for Children?*

### **Great resources for more information on this issue:**

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC: [www.cccabc.ca](http://www.cccabc.ca)

Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada: [www.ccaac.ca](http://www.ccaac.ca)

Child Care Resource and Research Unit: [www.childcarecanada.org](http://www.childcarecanada.org)

Early Childhood Development in BC – First Call's Framework for Action:

[www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/EarlyChildhood/1-framework%202008.pdf](http://www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/EarlyChildhood/1-framework%202008.pdf)

Promoting Equity and Dignity for Aboriginal Children in Canada: [www.irpp.org](http://www.irpp.org)

## Support in Transitions from Childhood to Youth and Adulthood

### **The Role of Federal Government**

- Youth can be given a voice within government and be included in decisions that will affect them.
- Government can increase funding specifically for youth programs or programs that ease transitions, such as workforce entry.
- Government can increase funding for post-secondary education and provide greater financial supports to low income students.
- Education funding for First Nations communities, including supports and programs for students with special needs, can be increased. Access to recreational facilities and activities for children and youth on reserves can be significantly improved.
- Funding for the settlement and support services for refugee children and youth can be given greater priority.

### **The Facts**

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth in Canada. Aboriginal youth are 5-6 times more likely to commit suicide than other youth. Gay and lesbian youth are 6 times more likely to commit suicide than straight youth. (Crisis Centre of BC, 2008)
- Although Canada has a relatively low crime rate, it has one of the highest rates of imprisonment of young people in the world, twice that of the United States. (Campaign 2000, 2007)
- Young people who feel connected, valued and engaged are less likely to become involved in risky behaviours, and are more resilient and more likely to become involved in their communities. (McCreary Centre Society, 2007)
- Immigrant children and youth are a rapidly growing group with major barriers to their successful integration into Canadian society. School dropout rates for English as a second language learners are more than double the high school average, and poverty is a major issue for many immigrant families. (Canadian Coalition for Immigrant Children and Youth, 2006)
- Aboriginal youth between the ages of 20 – 24 are 2.5 times more likely to have dropped out of high school than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. (Canadian Council on Learning, 2005)
- 45% of students with a bachelor's degree graduate with student debt averaging \$19,500 (Statistics Canada, 2004). These graduates face interest rates of 7.5-8.5% on their student loans (Coalition for Student Loan Fairness, 2007).

### **Sample Questions for Candidates**

- *Students who don't graduate from high school are more likely to be male, Aboriginal or speak English as a Second Language. How will your government make educational investments for these youth?*
- *How will your government improve supports to ensure the successful integration of newcomer children and youth?*
- *Suicide is the second leading cause of death amongst youth, especially gay/lesbian and Aboriginal youth. What would your government do to address this issue?*
- *What will your government do to reduce student debt and make sure that post-secondary education is affordable to low-income young people?*

### **Great resources for more information on this issue:**

Canadian Council on Social Development: [www.ccsd.ca](http://www.ccsd.ca)

McCreary Centre Society: [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca)

Youth Suicide: It's Time to Get Involved: [www.cihir-irsc.gc.ca/e/32154.html](http://www.cihir-irsc.gc.ca/e/32154.html)

Canadian Coalition for Immigrant Children and Youth: [www.lerc.educ.ubc.ca/CCICY](http://www.lerc.educ.ubc.ca/CCICY)

## Increased Economic Equality

### The Role of Federal Government

- Changes to income tax law can decrease the gap between the rich and the poor and improve the lives of many low-income families.
- The federal government can invest in affordable and social housing to reduce the cost of shelter for low-income people.
- Employment Insurance can be vastly improved to give access to more people and increase benefits.
- The Child Care Tax Benefit and National Child Benefit Supplement (CCTB/NCBS) can have an enormous role in poverty reduction if they are increased from the current maximum of \$3,271 per child to \$5,200, a level that will help ensure a single parent with one child working full-time full-year is not below the poverty line. Many provinces claw the CCTB back from families on income assistance; this could be disallowed by the federal government.
- Federal government support for a universally accessible, affordable child care program can give working parents the chance to engage fully in the workforce. It can also address waitlists, poor wages for child care workers and lack of availability.

### The Facts

- According to the most recent statistics (2006), 15.8% of children in Canada are living in poverty, calculated after government transfers and before income taxes. (Statistics Canada, 2008)
- 40% of First Nations children living outside of First Nations communities and 28% of children living in First Nations communities live in poverty, as do 49% of children in recent immigrant families and 35% of children in racialized families. (Campaign 2000, 2007)
- 38% of women don't pay taxes – tax cuts are not an effective means of equalizing income for families. Women benefit most from investments in child care, housing, and post-secondary education. Women have been disproportionately affected by funding cuts to social programs in Canada. (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2008)
- Children make up 38.7% of food bank users in Canada. Over half of food bank clients are families with children. (Canadian Association of Food Banks, 2007)
- Parental income is positively correlated with good health, healthy and safe physical environments, improved school achievement, and future employment outcomes for children and youth. (BC Progress Board, 2006)

### Sample Questions for Candidates

- Do you support a national poverty reduction strategy? What would be important components of this strategy for your government?*
- The CCTB/NCBS does not bring many families above the low-income cut off. Will your government commit to raising it to \$5,200 to help raise many children out of poverty? If not, why not?*
- Are you in favour of raising the federal minimum wage? What will your government do to expand Employment Insurance eligibility?*

#### Great resources for more information on this issue:

Campaign 2000: [www.campaign2000.ca](http://www.campaign2000.ca)

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: [www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca)

SPARC BC: [www.sparc.bc.ca/resources-and-publications/category/43/poverty](http://www.sparc.bc.ca/resources-and-publications/category/43/poverty)

## Safe and Caring Communities

### The Role of Federal Government

- The federal government could repeal section 43 of the criminal code which allows for physical “correction” of children.
- Federal funds can be made available to municipalities and non-profit organizations to enable them to make structural transformations in their communities to enhance child and youth friendliness of the physical environment.
- The federal government is responsible for supporting Aboriginal peoples in Canada; they could work with the provincial government to improve education, health care, and the child welfare system for Aboriginal Canadians and implement the Kelowna Accord (2005) which promised \$5 billion over 10 years to achieve these improvements.
- The federal government, in signing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, has a responsibility to promote and monitor the implementation of the rights and protections it promises in all Canadian jurisdictions.
- The federal government monitors the safety of food, drugs and other products, and sets guidelines for safe exposure levels for chemicals and other substances. They can improve attention to the special vulnerabilities of children.

### The Facts

- Under Section 43 of the Criminal Code, parents, teachers and other caregivers are “justified in using force by way of correction toward a pupil or child”. (Repeal 43 Committee, 2008). This is a violation of children’s right to physical safety and integrity. Many countries around the world have already banned corporal punishment of children.
- First Nations children living on reserves are eight times more likely to enter foster care than other children in Canada. (Office of the Auditor General, 2008)
- Internet safety is an emerging issue, especially for girls. Almost one in four girls has been in contact with a stranger on the internet who made her feel unsafe (McCreary Centre Society, 2003)
- Canada has not put in place a National Children’s Commissioner or other mechanism to monitor the federal implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, speak on behalf of children and youth, and bring focus to national accountability and responsibility. (UNICEF Canada, 2007)

### Sample Questions for Candidates

- Do you support the repeal of section 43 of the criminal code, which allows parents, teachers and other caregivers to use corporal punishment on children? Why or why not?*
- Would you support the creation of a National Children’s Commissioner to advocate for the rights of children and youth?*
- Aboriginal children are many times more likely to end up in foster care than other children. What will your government do to support Aboriginal families and communities to keep their children safe and their families intact?*
- What will your government do to better prevent children’s exposure to toxins and other harmful chemicals?*

#### Great resources for more information on this issue:

First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada: [www.fncfcs.com](http://www.fncfcs.com)

Repeal 43 Committee: [www.repeal43.org](http://www.repeal43.org)

Child and Youth Friendly Land Use and Transport Planning: [www.kidsonthemove.ca](http://www.kidsonthemove.ca)

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: [www.unicef.org/crc](http://www.unicef.org/crc)

Toxic Free Canada: [www.toxicfreecanada.ca](http://www.toxicfreecanada.ca)

**Don’t forget to visit [www.firstcallbc.org](http://www.firstcallbc.org) for up-to-date information on election issues and background materials from First Call and other organizations!**