

**First Call's Early Childhood Development Roundtable  
Backgrounder for Mary Polak, Minister of Children and Family Development**

► **First Call's 4 Keys to Success for Children and Youth:**

- A strong commitment to early childhood development
- Support in transitions from childhood to youth and adulthood
- Increased economic equality
- Safe and caring communities

First Call's 90 coalition partner organizations work together on achieving these 4 keys to success for all of BC's children and youth.

- **First Call's ECD Roundtable:** The Roundtable serves as a provincial network of ECD representatives and experts from a full scope of community organizations, funders, ECD practitioners, local ECD planning tables, government agencies, research groups, and other organizations committed to enhancing early childhood development for all BC children. The Roundtable is committed to coordination and collaborative planning around public policy, and to using current information and research to assist communities to coordinate their action plans for local advocacy, in partnership with other communities and with government.
- **ECD in BC, First Call's Framework for Action:** Document produced by the ECD Roundtable partners that outlines a basket of supports and services needed by young children and their families, based on articulated principles of entitlement to access, inclusion, quality, adequate resourcing and public accountability, among others. The Framework recommends a strong population-wide investment with a targeted focus on those most at risk.
- **High levels of vulnerability:** At 29%, BC has high levels of child vulnerability as documented by the Early Development Instrument data gathered by BC's Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP). One in 5 BC children live in poverty, which is one of the strongest predictors of poorer outcomes in health, education and economic participation over their life course. Vulnerability is spread across income levels, with the majority of vulnerable children being in the middle class.
- **Early brain development:** Research evidence about human brain development in the first 5 to 6 years of life underscores the critical importance of meeting young children's needs in this window of opportunity. Young children are only young once and government policy must not turn the tap of support on and off in response to short-term economic trends.
- **Underinvestment in the early years:** BC lags behind the Canadian average in access to ECEC services and is far below international standards of percentage of GDP investment in the early years. Federal ECD transfers to BC have remained stable for the past few years.

- ▶ **Expert advice – invest now because neglect costs more:** The HELP *15 by 15* report for the Business Council of BC recommends an annual investment of \$3B to reduce children’s vulnerability through better supports for families in time to care, income and community services. There are staggering human, social and economic costs to failing to support young children well.
- ▶ **Cuts to already fragile early years services ignores this evidence and advice.** (See attached list for recently identified cuts that are undermining the well-being of young children and their families.) The ECD basket is already fragile and fraying. Cuts to the status quo are devastating and short-sighted.
- ▶ **Regional and local inequities:** Regionalized funding model has a history of exacerbating inequities in access to early years services, especially in the absence of a plan with recognized entitlements for children and families to supports and services. Remote and Aboriginal communities are highly under-served.
- ▶ **Absence of a comprehensive early years plan for BC:** It is hard for families, services providers and communities to work with government on ECD policy and practice when there is no overarching plan and commitment of resources that is known to MCFD staff at all levels and to communities. Provincial and local accountability suffers in this circumstance.
- ▶ **Policy split between MCFD and Education:** This split in responsibility and leadership is still causing concern, particularly in the absence of a comprehensive early years plan that is “owned” by multiple ministries. Early childhood development practitioners and families are concerned that government doesn’t understand that for young children, care and learning are not separate.
- ▶ **Political leadership and government commitment:** Reducing vulnerabilities and inequities in health status, educational success, employability prospects for BC children is urgent and needs a full-government commitment. All social ministries are needed to work together to align policy, marshal the needed resources, and set and monitor improvement targets.
- ▶ **The First Call ECD Roundtable partners are willing to help MCFD make the case for young children to the public and to other ministries.**