

First Call's Weekly Announcements – August 3, 2010

Next Coalition Meeting: September 8

Next ECD Roundtable: September 15

First Call for the Children Annual Dinner: October 28

Visit our [web site](#) for more information.

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We encourage you to forward and share the Weekly Announcements with your networks. If circulating excerpts from the Weekly Announcements, please acknowledge First Call as the source of the information.

We welcome your comments, suggestions and any research or event information you wish to have shared with the First Call network. Please let us know what's going on in your community so we can help spread the word!

Please visit our web site at www.firstcallbc.org for further details on upcoming First Call meetings, events, new publications and more.

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Advocacy/Calls to Action

1. Why the Census Long Form Matters

Linda McQuaig, a columnist with the Toronto Star, wrote last week that the elimination of the census long form will make it easier to ignore the poor:

As a number of experts have noted, the decision to replace the mandatory long-form census with a voluntary abbreviated survey will result in less reliable data collection, particularly from the poor and marginalized.

So, as income becomes ever more concentrated at the top, as it has in recent years, we'll know less and less about those at the bottom, making them easier to ignore.

Sam Boshra, a former analyst for Statistics Canada, puts it this way: "If this results in the poor and unemployed being undercounted, the government could justify reallocating resources away from programs targeting these disadvantaged groups."

Boshra notes that the long-form data is the basis for just about all of Statistics Canada's important social measurements. The unemployment rate, for instance, is compiled from the monthly Labour Force Survey, but the sample used in that survey is based on the census data. Once the census data becomes voluntary, the unemployment rate will be considered less reliable, taking the heat off governments in times of rising unemployment.

All this could enable the Harper government to put in place neo-conservative policies without suffering a backlash from Canadians.

Neo-conservative economic policies — notably, tax cuts for the rich, austerity for the rest — are intuitively unappealing to most Canadians, who tend to believe in fairness, social inclusion and equal opportunity.

But if Canadians are unaware of the extent of poverty, they won't be concerned about policies that fail to address the problem. Indeed, they'll be under the impression the problem is being addressed.

Read more [here](#).

Below is a message from the Canadian Council on Social Development on taking action to support the long form census:

As you all know we have been working with a number of our partners across the country coordinating a response to the Government decision to scrap the Mandatory Long Forum Census. I know I don't have to tell any of you just how catastrophic this decision will be for the country. The repercussions are wide spread and the voices against this have been broad, diverse and continue to grow.

As we enter the next phase of our work to keep this on the front burner, we need your support. We need to engage our grass roots, our communities, community

organizations and local media adding their important voices to this issue. We need your leadership to make this happen.

We have developed an information tool kit with templates for letters and background material to support local action lead by local leaders like you. We have also created a detailed strategy that includes a number of ideas and tactics you can use at the local level.

We want the impact of the loss of the Long Form Census to be understood in as many local communities as possible, especially those that are held by Conservative MPs. We need you to organize your partners and seek an audience with your MP --- they need to hear from you....from Service Agencies, United Ways, Social Planning Councils, from all of you on the ground. Call your MPs, write letters, put Op Eds in your local newspapers. They need to feel overwhelmed by this issue, and come back to Ottawa when parliament resumes September 20th with a clear message that Canadians want this misguided decision overturned.

What we need you to do:

Over the next month, pull your community leaders together including, service agencies, municipalities, social planning councils, business associations, chambers of commerce, bank, hospitals, physicians, schools teachers, universities and colleges and get them engaged in this issue. Give them the tool kit and other material, contact the media and start writing letters, calling and requesting meetings with their MPs. Hold town halls, round tables, whatever you can do to get this issue on your local radar.

Post and share letters on your websites and share them with your networks. Make your voice heard and help your communities understand that this will impact them, that their community, the services they rely on will be compromised without the critical information gathered in the Long Form. Use examples, tell stories, point to things in your communities that have improved due to information and planning derived from the Long Form.

Download the Canadian Council on Social Development's [toolkit](#) and their [statement on seeking an alternative to the long form census](#).

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2. The Children's Rep Speaks Out on Child in the Home of a Relative Audit

BC's Representative for Children and Youth has responded to an editorial in the Courier-Islander newspaper by Minister of Children and Family Development Mary Polak that contained erroneous information, according to the Representative. It is of great concern to advocates that the Ministry would misrepresent the safety of a program intended to protect vulnerable children.

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond writes:

As B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth, I'm writing to correct erroneous information in a recent letter to the editor from the Children and Family Development minister, regarding my audit of government's Child in the Home of a Relative (CIHR) program. The audit was an in-depth examination of this financial assistance program, which helps relatives care for children who can't be cared for by their parents.

Today, about 4,500 B.C. children continue to live under this program.

The minister's letter incorrectly states that my audit "turned up concerns in four instances..." This statement misrepresents my audit findings, and seriously misinforms the public.

In reality we found that in 28 per cent of files audited, serious issues of safety and evidence of risk were identified, including relating to either a prior ministry child welfare contact or a criminal record of concern. Based on 4,500 children, this could equate to more than 1,000 cases with evidence of risk. Conclusions in this rigorous audit are reliable at a 95 per cent confidence level, giving us a precise overview of the risk this group of children face.

Most of the children in this program are safely supported by relatives, to whom we owe a deep debt of gratitude for their commitment and dedication to supporting a child in need, a child who might otherwise come into foster care.

While we all want to reduce the numbers of children in foster care, this can never happen at the cost of child safety and well-being. Safety must come first, and if system short-cuts result in risks to children, we need to tighten up that system. All caring relatives and foster parents are well aware how valuable it is to have good support for children, and to ensure the most vulnerable are treated in the best way.

This audit, which I encourage B.C. citizens to read at www.rcybc.ca, demonstrates clearly that the CIHR system for safety screening of children was inadequate. Although I was pleased the ministry made a change to its screening policies, it is concerning that the decision was made to only start applying these improvements forward, rather than going back, and doing the right thing and screening all the children...

Read [more](#).

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3. Mental Health has to Beg for Leftovers

Alan Campbell is the former director of mental health and addictions for the Vancouver Island Health Authority and has spent the last 34 years working in B.C.'s mental-health system. He was interviewed by Jody Paterson in the Victoria Times Columnist:

...Campbell retired from a field that is very nearly as underfunded, misunderstood and stigmatized as it was when he got into it in 1976.

Mental illness affects one in five people on Vancouver Island, 20 per cent, yet its share of health-care spending is a mere eight per cent. In B.C. overall, spending on mental health and addictions accounts for just six per cent of the health budget.

"We haven't figured out how to get behind mental health as a country," says Campbell. "It's not just a problem here. In other regions, other provinces, the same dynamic exists. When we compare ourselves to other countries, we don't look good."...

Campbell's final months at VIHA can't have been fun, what with the outrage building in the local psychiatric community over the loss of even more mental-health services...

...The fundamental problem plaguing mental-health services is that they are buried at the bottom of the priority list for health spending even in the best of economic times.

Once upon a time, cancer treatment was poorly funded and misunderstood as well. But brilliant minds as far back as 1938 saw a way to address that problem, and the foundations of what would eventually become the B.C. Cancer Agency were put in place.

Its mandate and practices are everything that health care should be: Consistent and thorough; well-resourced; research-based; thoughtful. It's a made-in-B.C. blueprint for doing things differently around mental health. So is the province's new 10-year mental-health plan, if it's able to become something more than just words on paper.

What can you do in the meantime? Write B.C. Health Minister Kevin Falcon (kevin.falcon.mla@leg.bc.ca) and Health Canada Minister Leona Aglukkaq (aglukkaq.l@parl.gc.ca) and tell them that mental-health care matters. Governments won't change unless we make them.

Read the full article [here](#).

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4. Civil and Political Rights in Schools

The Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) posted an article in their weekly publication around the rights of children globally once they are within the education system. This summary highlights some of the key points:

"Children do not lose their human rights by virtue of passing through the school gates...", the Committee on the Rights of the Child states optimistically in its first [General Comment](#) on "The Aims of Education".

But the problem is that in real life, all too often children do lose many of their rights during many years of their childhood that are spent under compulsion in schools. And in many countries, there are no real and accessible remedies for violations...

There is also an increased focus on challenging discrimination in the child's right to education and access to local schools: campaigning for equal access for girls and ending bias on grounds of race, colour, social origin, sexuality, HIV-status, pregnancy and so on...

But all this is about getting children through the school gates: what happens to their rights once they are through the gates?

In past decades, there have been a number of high-level legal action cases to assert children's rights within schools, including a number on corporal punishment and one on children's right to religious freedom in the US.

The UN has undertaken a review on school students' rights:

As a part of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, the [United Nations Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee](#) on Human Rights Education in the School System (UNIACC) was formed. It is an Alliance of 12 UN organisations, including UNICEF and UNESCO with its task being "to facilitate coordinated United Nations support to the national integration of human rights education in national school systems"...

An evaluation questionnaire from UNIACC had been filled in by 75 states by the deadline of March 2010.

The evaluation includes reviewing whether "the school environment itself respects and promotes human rights and fundamental freedoms; [whether] it provides the opportunity for all school actors (students, teachers, staff and administrators and parents) to practice human rights through real-life activities; [whether] it enables children to express their views freely and to participate in school life..."

Canada is not listed as having completed the evaluation. View the [responses](#) of other countries.

In their article CRIN gives brief summaries on a number of civil and political rights violations most often violated in school settings, including freedom of expression and freedom of religion. In later issues they hope to focus in more detail on each of the issues listed and to highlight successful advocacy to remedy violations.

They are asking to be sent information on any of the following:

- *Active campaigns working for children's rights within schools, including student-led campaigns;*
- *Schools which genuinely respect children's civil and political rights;*
- *Successful legal action and/or use of human rights mechanisms to defend children's rights in school.*

Contact information and the full editorial can be found [here](#).

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5. Join the Board Voice Society of BC

The Board Voice Society of BC is currently looking for new members. Board Voice is an organization dedicated to creating a clear and effective voice for volunteer community-based boards that support high-quality social services and strong, vibrant communities. They are comprised of board members of community-based social service agencies from across British Columbia.

Anyone who is part of a board of a non-profit, community-based social service agency in British Columbia is encouraged to become a member.

Board Voice will also be holding their annual conference and AGM in Vancouver on October 22nd and 23rd. All boards are welcome to attend.

For more information about Board Voice visit their [website](#).
For the membership application form click [here](#).

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Research & Resources

1. Explaining the Health Gap Experienced by Girls and Women in Canada

Excerpts from a report by researchers at the University of Victoria:

...In the last few decades there has been a resurgence of interest in the social causes of health inequities among and between individuals and populations. This "social determinants" perspective focuses on the myriad demographic and societal factors that shape health and well-being. Heeding calls for the mainstreaming of two very specific health determinants - sex and gender - we incorporate both into our analysis of the health gap experienced by girls and women in Canada...

Dimensions of the Health Gap Experienced by Girls and Women in Canada:

- *Socioeconomic Status (SES) Inequities*
Canadian women from low-SES backgrounds are more likely to smoke, be overweight, live in unsafe neighbourhoods, maintain greater or sole responsibility for child and/or elder care, and perform substantial amounts of unpaid domestic labour.
- *Inequities and Race, Ethnicity and Migrant Status*
Research shows that there are entrenched patriarchal structures that lead many immigrant women to neglect their own health, particularly breast cancer screening. This neglect arises from their obligation to fulfill multiple responsibilities that range from continuous care of children and frail older adults to sole responsibility for cooking and cleaning at home.

- *Inequities in Employment Security*
The literature on home-care workers provides a compelling example of how work is also highly gendered. The poor compensation, little or no health benefits, unsafe working conditions, unregulated hours, and discrimination that can define home care work helps maintain health inequities among certain groups of women ([Aronson and Neysmith 1996](#); [Zeytinoglu, Denton and Davies 2002](#)). In both Canada and the United States, these relatively undesirable jobs are held by lower-income, ethnic and immigrant women.
- *Inequities and Geographic Location*
As a recent Canadian study, How Healthy are Rural Canadians? ([CIHI 2006a](#)) reveals, health decreases the farther a person resides from a major urban centre. This can be especially true for rural women who have significantly higher mortality rates than urban women ([DesMeules, Manual and Cho 2003](#); [Dolan and Thien 2008](#)). A combination of factors are at play, including lower educational achievement and lower labour force participation among rural women as compared to those living in urban centres.

We focused on the intersection between some of the most important dimensions of the observed health gap experienced by girls and women in Canada – socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, immigrant status, employment and geographical location. Our findings suggest that certain groups of girls and women in Canada face a formidable cumulative disadvantage. This is particularly the case for those who are poor, of Aboriginal background or visible minority status, foreign-born, or reside in rural areas.

According to the World Health Organization (2008), we could close the health gap within and across countries in the next decade if, in addition to improving access to primary health care, we take concerted action on reducing the health gap caused by the intersection of fundamental factors, mentioned above. Progressive changes in the Canadian context that are likely to reduce such inequity include an increase in the minimum wage for private as well as public sector employment, equal pay for work of equal value, policies to raise the value of care work that is predominantly performed by girls and women, and establishment of a national childcare system...

View the full report [here](#).

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2. ANCIE Bulletin: Health and Wellness of Newcomer Children

The latest issue of the AMSSA Newcomer Children Information Exchange (ANCIE) bulletin examines the barriers faced by newcomer children in staying healthy and well:

Navigating the health care system in British Columbia is not an easy task for newcomer families. While there are specific programs available for newcomers, they are often difficult to access. It takes a good understanding of the system in order to identify them. It has been found that newcomer families are less likely to access health care services on a regular basis. This is due to a number of reasons:

- *Language / Communication Barriers – lack of fluency in English; unease in working with interpreters, especially for those with fewer immigrants from their cultural communities*
- *Geographical Barriers – lack of transportation to a health care service location; long wait times; hours of operation*
- *Socio-cultural Barriers – ethnocentric service providers; immigrants seen as one group; different beliefs about health, illness and treatment (traditional remedies vs. Western medicine); lack of female physicians*
- *Information Barriers – lack of knowledge of services available; different expectations of the health care system*
- *Economic Barriers – three-month waiting period for provincial health plan coverage in BC; cost of uninsured services (e.g. dental, counselling); indirect costs to health care access (e.g. unpaid leave to take children to medical appointments, transportation).*

[Download this and other issues of the ANCIE bulletin.](#)

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3. What's the DEAL.org

From the About Us section of DEAL.org:

DEAL.org is a by-youth for-youth web-based program that began in 1997. It is operated by the Youth Engagement Section of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and is part of the National Youth Services branch of the RCMP's Crime Prevention Services.

DEAL.org aims to help youth realize their full potential by building protective factors and promoting positive relationships with family, friends and community members. The main goal of the website is to provide resources to help youth make healthy, informed lifestyle choices and to encourage youth to think critically about issues and get involved in their communities.

The site includes a youth-related blog; The "Knowzone," an electronic library full of fact-sheets; and The Toolbox, which consists of resources for delivering presentations on various youth issues.

To view the website click [here](#).

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4. Pennies of Prosperity – Video Resource

A short video from the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) education team gives a brief overview of the wealth inequality that exists in Canada. The video uses the sound of pennies falling to demonstrate the difference in wealth between family units in the bottom 50% as compared to those in the top 1% in Canada.

Some facts from the video:

- *In Canada as a whole, there is a total of about \$4.9 trillion of wealth.*
- *If all of Canada's wealth was divided equally among 13.5 million family units in Canada, each family's net worth would be approximately \$360 000.*
- *The average net worth of the bottom 50% of Canadian families units is \$38 700. This is just \$100 more than the annual income that a family of four would need to stay above the poverty line.*
- *The average wealth of the top 1% of family units in Canada is about \$6 million.*
- *On average, the top 1% of family units in Canada is 155 times richer than the bottom 50% of family units.*
- *An estimated 3.5 million Canadians live below the poverty line. Almost 1 million of them are children.*

This is a great tool to be used in awareness and education campaigns as it uses powerful audio and visual cues to demonstrate wealth inequality in Canada.

To view the video on YouTube click [here](#).
Public Service Alliance of Canada [website](#).

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5. Fast Facts: Poor No More? The Long Hard Climb Back to Economic Justice

Excerpts from a recent article by Shauna MacKinnon, director of Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba:

Imagine a Canada where we all have a roof over our heads, childcare for our children, access to education and a job that pays a decent wage. Imagine a Canada where we all can look forward to retiring without financial worry...

As Deveaux Babin's recently released film 'Poor No More...there is a way out' shows us, we were on our way to fulfilling such a dream. The harsh lessons of the Great Depression led to the development of a social safety net that improved the quality of life of Canadians. But somewhere along the way our political leaders bought into the idea that too much social investment was a bad thing; that we were being over taxed; and that prosperity for all would come through a free market...

Facts:

- *Census data show the richest 20 percent of Canadians enjoyed median earnings increases of 16.4 percent but the poorest 20 per cent had a 20.6 percent drop in earnings since 1980.*
- *The total average compensation for Canada's highest paid 100 CEOs was \$7.3 million in 2008 compared with an average \$42.3 thousand for all Canadians.*

...Canada's policy to reduce government's role and give freer rein to the market has resulted in the loss of billions of dollars of annual revenue from the treasury that we could have used to develop a national homecare program, a national housing program, a national childcare program and made post secondary education more affordable. While we might not have wiped out poverty, we surely would have made a significant dent...

Wilkinson and Pickett, authors of The Spirit Level, Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better, clearly show that the more equal the society, the better outcomes on several fronts. For example, more equal societies have lower levels of violence, lower incarceration rates, higher educational attainment, better health outcomes and the list goes on...

So if we are not concerned about inequality on a moral level, we should be concerned because the effects cost us dearly in terms of social and health outcomes.

View the full report [here](#), and visit the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives [website](#).

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Announcements

1. Surrey Multifaith ECD Film Project Looking for Participants

The Surrey Neighbouring Faiths Program builds community capacity for multifaith learning and dialogue with a focus on children and families. The program has partnered with Himar Productions to create a documentary titled: "Families and Faith: Raising Children in a Multifaith Community." The documentary will follow a group of families and young children as they visit and learn about a number of faith communities in Surrey. [Read a description of the documentary](#).

The program is looking for families and ECE professionals to help with this project. If you are interested in participating, please contact David Dalley, Program Coordinator, at davidanderin@dalley.ca or (604) 502-8661.

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2. Next Up Leadership Program for Social and Environmental Justice

Applications are now being accepted for the fourth year of Next Up: A Leadership Program for Young People Committed to Social and Environmental Justice.

This is an amazing, intensive and transformative program for young social change activists between the ages of 18 and 32. This year we're excited to announce that the program will operate in three provinces: Next Up BC in Vancouver, Next Up Alberta in Edmonton, and Next Up Saskatchewan in Saskatoon - so please forward this call to your friends and colleagues in those regions.

In each province, 13 young people will be selected. Participants will develop life-long relationships, explore different leadership styles, meet some of the province's leading change-makers, learn new leadership and organizing skills, and be exposed to current and topical social justice issues and progressive governance.

The application deadline for Next Up BC is Sunday Sept 12. The program runs between October 2010 and April 2011.

Please forward this call far and wide -- to individuals, organizations, institutions and your progressive networks. Encourage young people you know to apply. Thank you in advance for helping us find the fabulous young leaders for Next Up 2010/11 -- you'll be thankful you did years from now.

Application forms and more information can be found at www.nextup.ca.

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3. International Youth Internship Program from the Canadian Co-operative Association

See the world! Get work experience! Work with co-ops in developing countries! The Canadian Co-operative Association is seeking participants for the International Youth Internship Program. Applicants must be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident, a post-secondary graduate, aged 19-30 and unemployed or underemployed. The application deadline is August 13. Find out more [here](#).

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4. BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs Conference

The BCAPOP annual conference and general meeting will take place October 13-15 at the Hilton Vancouver Airport in Richmond. There will be a variety of speakers and activities related to prenatal and early parenting support for women who experience health or lifestyle challenges during pregnancy, birth and the transition to parenting. Featured presentations will include "When Survivors Give Birth" by Penny Simkin, doula and author, and "Problematic Substance Use in Pregnancy" by Pregnancy-Related Issues in the Management of Addictions. More information on the program is available at www.bcapop.ca/news.php.

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5. Volunteer with Big Sisters!

"Showing a young girl that she is worth spending time with...I think that alone has the power to make a difference in her life," says Sheila, a proud Big Sister volunteer.

Did you know that Big Sisters currently has around 175 girls waiting to be matched with either a Big Sister or Study Buddy volunteer across the Lower Mainland?

[Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland](#) knows that many young girls who are struggling with low self-esteem, family issues or problems at school could benefit from the support of a positive role model. For 50 years, Big Sisters has been providing these girls with a true friend – a mentor who is there to simply listen to them and cheer them on! You can choose to volunteer as a [Big Sister mentor](#), [Study Buddy tutor](#), or [Go Girls mentor](#). So if you've always thought about volunteering with Big Sisters and you are age 19 or older, now's the time! Visit www.bigsisters.bc.ca or call 604-873-4525 ext. 300 to find out more about becoming a mentor! If you have questions about our mentoring programs, how you can get involved, or if you'd like Big Sisters to come talk to your group about the benefits of volunteering, contact Jordana Zbarsky at jzbarsky@bigsisters.bc.ca or call 604-873-4525 ext. 303.

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