

First Call's Weekly Announcements – March 11, 2010

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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. Federal Budget Disappointing for Children and Families

The federal budget announced last week includes little new spending, which is bad news for many children and families. Campaign 2000 responded to the budget, stating that it contains none of the social infrastructure and income support measures they were hoping for to prevent further poverty, such as expanding Employment Insurance eligibility, an increase to the Canada Child Tax Benefit, and investments in early childhood education and social housing. Read the rest of their response [here](#).

Campaign 2000 noted that the budget does include a change to the taxation of the Universal Child Care Benefit – single parents will be allowed to choose to include UCCB payments in their own income, or in the income of the dependant for whom an Eligible Dependant Credit is claimed, providing treatment comparable to single-earner two-parent families. This change will provide up to \$168 in tax reduction for single parents with one child under six in 2010.

In a pre-throne speech commentary, the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children called on the federal government to make young people, 25% of Canada's population, a priority in the throne speech and budget. CCRC called on government to:

1. Treat all children equitably in Canada's national income support programs;
2. Invest in early childhood development;
3. Close the gap between Aboriginal children and non-Aboriginal children;
4. Take into account the best interests in the child in youth justice cases;
5. Establish a National Children's Commissioner.

Read the details from the [Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children](#).

An analysis from the Caledon Institute of Social Policy says that this budget is essentially a continuation of last year's stimulus budget, with not enough money for income programs like the Canada Child Tax Benefit that put cash into the hands of those more likely to spend it right away and stimulate the economy, and no additional changes to the inadequate Employment Insurance system. The paper notes several new initiatives for youth, including funding for the Canadian Youth Business Foundation, Pathways to Education, and the Skills Link component of the federal Youth Employment Strategy. Read more [here](#).

Finally, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' alternative federal budget (AFB) proposes increased stimulus spending as a means of "Getting the Job Done Right":

Instead of re-investing in social and physical infrastructure, the Harper government is expected to begin a round of spending cuts in order to maintain its tax cut agenda. With both government revenues and expenditures near historic lows, there is little left to cut without further eroding the quality of the services Canadians rely on.

Rather than cut public spending, which could plunge Canada back into recession, AFB 2010 puts Canadians back to work and turns recession-hit communities into thriving, prosperous hubs. It takes seriously warnings by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank that the fragile global economic recovery could wilt if governments pull back on their stimulus efforts too quickly. AFB 2010 re-focuses the

stimulus and builds investments in public infrastructure and services that will create jobs and improve communities across Canada.

Whether it is a newly hired early learning professional easing the load of a hard-working mother or a construction worker restoring Canada's aging bridges and roads, federal money spent employing Canadians is an investment in our collective future. Physical and social infrastructure investments are key levers to create jobs and reduce unemployment in AFB 2010. Investing \$15 billion over three years to improve physical infrastructure in cities across Canada, as well as expanding social infrastructure such as health care (\$12 billion) and child care (\$8 billion), will create jobs and improve access to these cherished public services for all Canadians. AFB 2010 also invests \$5 billion over three years in arts, culture, and communications to allow Canadians to stay connected with one another, with their history, and with their culture.

Download the alternative federal budget [here](#).

First Call's [budget submission](#) had similarly asked for the federal budget to focus stimulus spending and tax policy reform on investments in early childhood development and the reduction in income inequality in Canada.

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2. Provincial Budget: Changes to Welfare Benefits

While the Ministry of Housing and Social Development has had a small budget increase to compensate for the increased demand for income assistance due to the recession, it is also cutting some of the benefits that have been available for income assistance clients and other low-income residents, and redirecting those savings to the basic welfare program of monthly support and shelter costs.

- Dental services: children in low-income families, income assistance clients and Persons with Disabilities can now claim \$1,400 for basic dental services every two years instead of \$700 per year. Regular dental examinations and cleanings will only be permitted once instead of twice a year.
- Diet supplements of \$40 per month will now be available for income assistance clients and Persons with Disabilities with children who have difficulty controlling epilepsy, and people who have phenylketonuria (a serious genetic disorder).
- Some medical equipment and supplies for Persons with Disabilities and income assistance clients will no longer be covered. They include contraceptives, diagnostic testing devices (such as glucometers) and medication delivery devices.
- The life-threatening health need program that supports low income British Columbians will no longer cover optical, dental, physiotherapy and chiropractic care. This program has a new income test, which is that the client must be in receipt of MSP premium assistance, or be an existing income assistance or Persons with a Disability client.

More details are available in this [press release](#).

In a commentary in the Victoria Times Colonist, Michael J. Prince writes:

...The way these cuts were announced is disturbing from a democratic perspective.

No mention was made in the Ministry of Housing and Social Development's service plan for 2010 to 2012 released with the budget. Cutting benefits to low-income citizens, including children and persons with disabilities, did not figure in the ministry's objectives, strategies or performance measures.

The government's overall strategic plan contains no reference to program retrenchments in regard to the poor. It was after only the budget was presented that these cutbacks appeared in an information bulletin by the ministry.

...The cuts are indicative of the Campbell government's attitude toward the poor and of the future of the social safety net in our post-Olympics era.

Why is the Liberal government cutting essential services to those living on the edge in our province? How are these cuts moving B.C. forward toward the great goal of building the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, those with special needs and children at risk?

The ministry justifies these changes as necessary to ensure the province can manage an increased caseload, make certain income assistance programs sustainable and provide benefits to as many people as possible.

These are dubious and unsavory claims.

Caseloads have grown as a result of the recession, as they are intended to do. They will gradually ease as the economic recovery continues.

These program changes, described by the ministry as designed to "protect service for low-income clients" -- a phrase out of George Orwell's newspeak -- in fact involve tightening access to various benefits and reducing the number of items covered.

Read the rest of this article [here](#).

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3. Provincial Committee on Children and Youth to Meet with Stakeholders on Child Poverty

Last week, the province's Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth met for the first time since [the Representative for Children and Youth asked them to produce a child poverty plan](#). Committee chair and Liberal MLA Joan McIntyre opened the meeting with an update on this request, stating that the committee's terms of reference allow them to "explore the issue of child poverty with the objective of fostering greater awareness and understanding among the public and legislators." The committee will hold a meeting to consult with key stakeholders and expert witnesses on child poverty in BC. The committee clerk will be identifying possible stakeholders and witnesses for this meeting.

McIntyre also updated the committee on ongoing correspondence regarding the reporting relationship between MCFD and the office of the Representative for Children and Youth when responding to recommendations from the Rep.

MCFD Deputy Minister Lesley du Toit presented at this meeting, focusing on practice change within the Ministry, and MCFD formally responded to two recent reports from the Representative's office. The complete transcript is available [here](#).

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4. Update on Human Rights Tribunal for First Nations Child Welfare

A Human Rights Tribunal is underway regarding the provision of less funding for child welfare services to First Nations children on reserves than other children in Canada. The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada are posting regular updates about the tribunal. The government has been trying to have the complaint dismissed, and last week the top official on child welfare at Indian and Northern Affairs Canada took the stand in support of the government's position. Read more about it at www.fnwitness.ca.

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5. Michael Ignatieff on Child Care, Shelagh Day on Michael Ignatieff

In response to the [open letter](#) written by Campaign 2000 and the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada on a national child care program, the federal Liberal leader wrote the following:

I agree with you completely that Canada needs to have an early learning and child care program and I recently committed publicly that a future Liberal government would work to implement one. Currently, there are only enough child care spaces in Canada to meeting about 20% of the demand and this means that in effect there is no real choice for Canadian families. A National Child Care program would truly mean choice for parents.

Starting a child's education at an earlier stage gives them a head start – one they're going to need to reach their full potential and compete with kids around the world for the jobs of tomorrow. In study after study, the evidence is conclusive: early learning and child care programs only benefit our children's learning and development experience and will only help them excel later in life. Our children are the future of our country; they deserve the best possible start.

In addition, child care and early learning are a good investment in our economy: for each million invested in child care, there are 39.54 jobs created, almost 10 times the number of jobs generated by \$1 million invested in construction spending. Every dollar invested in child care and early learning increases the economy output (GDP) by approximately \$2.30.

Once again thank you for writing and I hope that we can work together to help build a National Child Care program that Canadians can be proud of.

In a letter published in a recent issue of Herizons magazine, Shelagh Day of the Feminist Alliance for International Action questioned Michael Ignatieff's commitment to standing up for women:

...Are you capable of being a leader for women? So far, I distrust your political judgment because of your support for the war in Iraq and your rationalization about the use of torture. The post facto explanations and apologies you have offered leave shadows. To defeat Mr. Harper, you will need to get us past these doubts, and show us that you are a stronger, more progressive political figure. One way to do this is to take women seriously. That is why I am writing this open letter to urge you to become what women need.

Women have a vision of Canada, too. Too often feminism is perceived to be about micropolitics - that is, about the relationships of individual women to individual men - and the core issue is thought to be who wipes up the vomit. But women have visions of nation, too, and have always had them. And a cornerstone of those visions is an equality that lessens the divisions that sex, race, disability and class create. We know from experience that some fundamental material equality is needed to make intimate relationships ones of choice and political power more equally shared.

I know that liberty is a primary value for you, but liberty, if it is simply defined as freedom from state interference, is not liberty for women. Women need governments to intervene in the family and the market to correct for long-standing discrimination, and to redistribute power and wealth so that women and men share more equally.

Read more from this letter [here](#).

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6. New Westminster Supports Parking Revenue for Child Care

From the New Westminster Record, via the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC:

New Westminster city council is still backing a proposal to use Sunday revenues from parking meters to fund a child-care grant program.

A staff report states that child-care operators face a number of obstacles that can threaten their sustainability, including uncertain lease arrangements, building deficiencies, equipment or future replacement and high staffing costs. The report stated that the province recently reduced grant amounts for emergency repairs, replacement and relocation.

"The development of a child-care grant program will provide assistance to childcare operators to address issues related to building deficiencies and equipment or furniture replacement," said the report to council.

"It will also enable child-care operators to improve the physical accessibility of their facilities, enable them to better meet the needs of children with extra support needs, and possibly expand their operations, which could lead to an increase in spaces."

[Read more.](#)

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Research & Resources

1. BCRPA Survey on After-School Hours

BC Recreation and Parks Association has been contracted by the Public Health Association of Canada (PHAC) to conduct an environmental scan of after-school programming for children aged 6 to 12 years old in British Columbia. We need your help to discern what is working in serving children in the after-school hours outside of licensed child care, what gaps need to be addressed, who should be included in future discussions of after-school issues and what future work in this area should entail. The critical after-school hours are defined as 3 - 6:00pm.

This survey will take approximately 25 minutes to complete. To complete the survey, [click here](#). The deadline for survey completion is **Wednesday, March 17**.

For more information, contact Jessica Chant, Awareness Campaigns Coordinator, at jchant@bcrpa.bc.ca or 604-629-0965, ext. 224.

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2. Preventing Suicide in Children and Youth - Video

The Children's Mental Health Research Quarterly has released a set of videos related to an earlier publication, Preventing Suicide in Children and Youth:

Even One is Too Many: Director of the Children's Health Policy Centre and child psychiatrist Charlotte Waddell speaks with scientific writer and registered psychologist Christine Schwartz about key factors relating to -- and the warning signs for -- suicide in children and youth.

Native Youth Suicide: Behind the Statistics: Charlotte Waddell speaks with Bill Mussell, Chairman of the Native Mental Health Association of Canada and Principal Educator of the Sal'i'shan Institute. They discuss some of the special issues facing First Nations youth.

Answering Your Questions about Preventing Suicide: Charlotte Waddell and Christine Schwartz respond to questions from practitioners and the public.

All three videos can be viewed [here](#).

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3. Reforming Social Assistance Rules that Punish the Poor for Saving

The C.D Howe Institute has released a policy brief by John Stapleton on the benefits of allowing Canadians who are receiving social assistance to accumulate savings. Existing rules for welfare and disability programs usually deny or cancel benefits if applicants have even a small amount of savings:

One of the goals of social assistance programs in Canada is to put in place measures to break the cycle of welfare dependency. Savings, however small, can provide a cushion against unforeseen circumstances or provide the foundation for later choices about education or work. When governments penalize welfare applicants or recipients for saving by denying program benefits – as happens in the case of savings in Registered Retirement Savings Plans (RRSPs) and Tax Free Savings Accounts (TFSA) – social assistance programs may become traps.

On the other hand, by helping to meet contingencies and pay the additional costs associated with moving toward self-reliance, measures that promote asset-building can help people to save, invest in skills and education, and facilitate labour-force entry. Encouraging asset accumulation, even in small amounts, is crucial in helping to lift people out of poverty.

Read the rest of the brief [here](#).

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4. A Timeline of Cuts to Legal Aid

PovNet has posted a timeline of cuts to legal aid in BC, showing how cuts have decimated the legal aid system over the last 8 years, with the latest round of cuts coming into effect in April. Family law is one area that has been decimated by these cuts. Read the timeline [here](#).

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5. Pesticides and Your Health – A Family Physician’s Perspective

“Doc’s Talk” is a new blog from the David Suzuki Foundation on the environment and health. A recent post looks at the impacts of pesticides on health by Dr. Cathy Vakil:

Ultimately, the controversy surrounding pesticide use comes down to health - if these chemicals are harmful, they should be banned; if they are safe they can be used widely and freely without restriction. However, determining whether a chemical is harmful or not is not always easy or straightforward. The studies that can be done

on pesticides are mostly population studies looking at whether people with increased exposure to multiple pesticides develop illnesses more than the average. The studies have some limitations, and cannot always draw unequivocal conclusions.

In 2004, I co-authored a scientific review of published research examining the human health effects of pesticides for the Ontario College of Family Physicians. We searched commonly used medical databases and reviewed 265 studies on cancer, and neurological, dermatological, reproductive and immunological/genotoxic disorders that met our strict criteria for methodological quality.

Unfortunately most studies examined occupational exposure of only adult males, with a paucity of studies looking at women and children. Yet the few studies available suggested that pregnant women and children are particularly vulnerable. My colleagues and I concluded that there was enough evidence of the harmful effects of these chemicals that doctors should advise their patients to avoid all possible exposure. Here's a look at what we found.

There were 104 studies looking at a number of different cancers. Most of these found a link between pesticide exposure and cancer, many of them reaching statistical significance (meaning the associations found were unlikely to be by chance). Increases in Non-Hodgkin lymphoma were found in farmers, pesticide production workers and golf course superintendents, and one study in children found elevated rates of the cancer when pesticides were used in the home and when parents had occupational exposure.

[Read more.](#)

First Call endorsed a call by the Canadian Cancer Society and Toxic Free Canada to [ban the use of cosmetic pesticides in BC](#). Let the BC government and your MLA know that you too support the proposed BC ban as it is currently being considered by government.

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Announcements

1. Why Child Care Matters – CFUW Forum in North Vancouver

On March 29, the Canadian Federation of University Women are presenting a forum on child care on the North Shore, featuring Dr. Paul Kershaw of Human Early Learning Partnership and Jean Bennett, Dean of Capilano University's Faculty of Health and Education.

The event takes place at Highlands United Church, 3255 Edgemont Boulevard from 7:30 – 9:30 pm. The event is free, but please register by contacting cfuwnorthshore@shaw.ca or 604-924-0121.

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2. BCACL's National Family Conference – Call for Proposals

The 2010 Joint British Columbia Association for Community Living (BCACL), Family Focus Society (FFS) and Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) Conference - "*Families, a Journey of Generations Moving Mountains*" - is seeking workshop topics and presenters for its 2010 Conference which will take place October 22-24 at the Fairmont Chateau Whistler in Whistler, B.C. If you are interested in presenting or co-presenting a workshop, please [submit your proposal online](#). Visit www.familyfocusconference.com or www.bcacl.org for more information.

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3. Upcoming BC Council for Families Trainings

The BC Council for Families is hosting three trainings this March and April for family service professionals to expand and develop their skills in assisting families.

My Tween and Me Leader Training

March 29-30 in Vancouver

Become a leader in helping parents build influential relationships with their tweens and prevent risky behaviour in the teen years.

Nobody's Perfect Facilitator Training

April 12-15 in Vancouver

Develop your skills in effectively assisting young families at risk.

Parenting Through Separation and Divorce

April 30 in Vancouver

A new seminar on helping families manage the process of separation and divorce, and their childrens' adjustment to a new family structure.

Expand your skills and resources to help families. Find out more about our trainings and register online at the BC Council for Families website: www.bccf.ca.

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4. Learning Disabilities Association Parent Training

Do you want to know how to tell if a child has learning disabilities or requires additional support because English is a second language? Language development is crucial to young children and delays in acquiring language can be the result of a number of issues. Join us as we uncover the differences and similarities between English language learners and those with language based learning disabilities.

Topic: Language Development - Is it learning disabilities or ESL?

Speaker: Stefka Marinova-Todd

Location: The Learning Center: 3292 East Broadway, Vancouver (Corner of East Broadway and Rupert – ½ block from the Rupert Skytrain Station)

Date and Time: Monday, March 22, 2010- 7:00 to 8:00 pm

This meeting is free and open to the public. RSVP's are appreciated to info@ldav.ca.

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5. International Children's Peace Prize

Last year, KidsRights had the honour of presenting the International Children's Peace Prize to Baruani Ndume, a 16 year old boy from The Democratic Republic of Congo who is now living in a refugee camp in Tanzania. He was awarded this Prize for his ongoing efforts in giving other children a platform to discuss their daily struggles and worries. In addition, he gives these children the opportunity to call out to their parents, whom they lost during the war. He does all this through his radio show that airs from the refugee camp.

The KidsRights Foundation organizes the International Children's Peace Prize, which is awarded annually to a child whose courageous or otherwise extraordinary efforts have made an impact on behalf of the Rights of the Child.

This year, the International Children's Peace Prize will be celebrated on the Day of the Rights of the Child: the 20th of November 2010. Nominations are now open for children that have a history of standing up and fighting for their and other children's rights. Find out more at www.childrenspeaceprize.org.

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6. Dialogue for a Better BC

On Saturday, March 20 the Coalition to Build a Better BC is holding an event to discuss the recent provincial budget in the context of a decade of shrinking government investment in public services. Representatives of different communities affected by cuts to services will share information, and participants will work with each other to develop a shared vision for the province and strategize for a rally on April 10.

The conference will take place from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in the Alice MacKay Room, Vancouver Public Library, 350 W. Georgia St. in Vancouver. Lunch is provided.

Click [here](#) or call 604-216-7233 to register. Registration is limited for this free event so register soon.

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