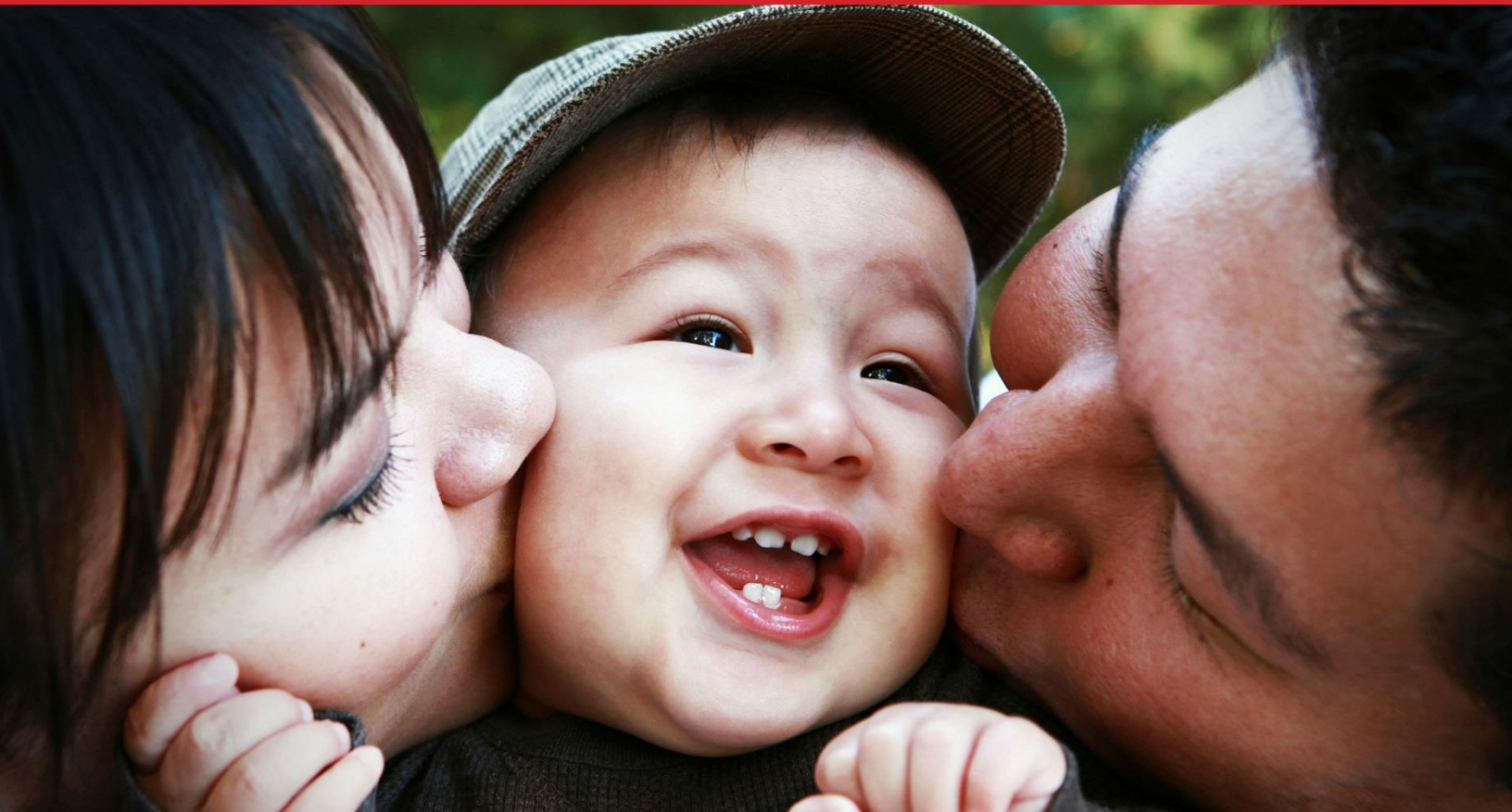




Make BC's Young Children and Families a Priority

A Call to Action



Published by First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
January 2015

Building on Early Childhood Development in BC: First Call's Framework for Action
Published March 2003, updated 2008



Make BC's Young Children and Families a Priority: A Call to Action

Published by: First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition

ISBN: 978-0-9730347-5-2

Contact Information

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition

810 – 815 West Hastings Street, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6C 1B4

Tel: 604.709.6962 • Toll Free: 1.800.307.1212

Email: info@firstcallbc.org

Web: www.firstcallbc.org

Dedication



*This call to action is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Clyde Hertzman (1953–2013), a passionate visionary, esteemed researcher and tireless advocate for young children. In Clyde’s words, “**it doesn’t have to be this way.**”*

Clyde Hertzman, a renowned advocate who delivered compelling, evidence-based arguments for why investment in the early years must become a major priority, believed in our collective responsibility for young children and their families.

Our call to action builds on Clyde’s legacy. It is a broad-based appeal to everyone (individual citizens, communities, businesses, policy makers and elected officials) to advocate for public policies and investments that are at the scale and scope required to help BC’s young children and their families thrive.

Acknowledgements

The development of this document and the *Framework for Action* which preceded it reflects the commitment and energy of many individuals and organizations widely respected for their knowledge and expertise.

First Call recognizes and acknowledges with thanks the historical funding support for the first version of *Early Childhood Development in BC: First Call’s Framework for Action* (2003) and its revisions (2004, 2008) from the following organizations:

- United Way of the Lower Mainland
- Vancouver Foundation
- Health Canada
- City of Vancouver
- Human Early Learning Partnership, UBC
- Success By 6

We are grateful to the United Way of the Lower Mainland and the Human Early Learning Partnership for financial and in-kind support to produce this document. Writing and editing credits go to Dawn Steele, Adrienne Montani, Lynell Anderson and Mab Oloman. We are also grateful for the advice and support provided so generously by members of the Project Advisory Committee and the Early Childhood Development Roundtable.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
First Call and Early Childhood Development	1
THE FOUNDATION FOR THE CALL TO ACTION	3
Vision	3
Guiding Principles and Key Assumptions	4
THE RATIONALE FOR THE CALL TO ACTION	7
Knowledge about the importance of the early years continues to grow	7
Consensus on the necessary policy interventions is widespread	8
The net benefits of effective government investments in the early years are affirmed	11
The state of Canada’s and BC’s policy and investment in the early years	13
<i>The International Perspective</i>	13
<i>The Perspective at Home</i>	15
A review of government actions and strategies over the past decade.....	16
<i>Federal Government</i>	16
<i>Provincial Government</i>	18
BC government strategies and investment in context.....	20
<i>Service Delivery</i>	20
<i>Service Affordability</i>	21
<i>Service Accessibility</i>	21
Support for First Call’s public policy recommendations is growing	23
THE CALL TO ACTION	27
Our call to action is simple.....	27
APPENDIX 1	29
Terms of Reference	29
APPENDIX 2	31
Public Investments in Early Years Programs Other Than Child Care (2001–2012).....	31
APPENDIX 3	32
First Call’s Central Hub: A Seamless Web of On- and Off-site ECD Services	32

Introduction

First Call and Early Childhood Development

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition emerged during the 1990s as a grassroots movement to advocate for the application of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It is a non-partisan, province-wide coalition of over 90 provincial and regional organizations, engaged communities and individuals who support strong public policies and the allocation of resources for the benefit of children and youth.

First Call is guided by the 4 Keys to Success for children and youth.

1. A strong commitment to early childhood development
2. Support in transitions from childhood to youth to adulthood
3. Increased economic equality
4. Safe and caring communities

Goals were established for each of the keys. For the development of young children they are:

- To improve pregnancy outcomes
- To support parents of young children
- To build a system of high quality, affordable, accessible child care services
- To develop and enhance a system of early identification, support and intervention for families with children at risk for developmental delay and children with disabilities



These goals shaped *Early Childhood Development in BC: First Call's Framework for Action*, first published in 2003. The purpose of the *Framework for Action* was to:

- Build commitment and agreement for action on early childhood development (ECD) to guide the ongoing advocacy work of First Call.
- Propose a province-wide action framework for early childhood development, within which communities can determine, develop and deliver the ECD supports and services that are needed by their young children and families.
- Clarify what fits specifically within the ECD action framework and determine the broader enabling factors that support all children, youth and families.
- Identify the range of ECD specific supports, services and strategies needed to foster the optimal healthy development of young children and families in British Columbia (BC).
- Provide First Call a basis for ongoing reflection, monitoring and updating of BC's progress in early childhood development.

In 2012–13, with support from the United Way of the Lower Mainland, First Call led an extensive provincial engagement and review process. The intent was to bring the *Framework for Action* up to date; to identify changes in public policy, investment, services and community development since the 2008 edition and to note new research as well as the diverse perspectives and collective wisdom of First Call’s early years partners.

As work progressed on the initial drafts of the proposed 2014 Framework for Action it became clear that since 2008 there has been more research about the importance of the early years; more evidence of Canada’s and BC’s policy and investment shortcomings; and growing broad-based public support for the implementation of new government policies and increasing investments that support young children and their families. Yet there has been little progress on the latter since the first edition of the *Framework for Action*. Therefore, with a sense of urgency, rather than updating the framework, (the bones of which, including the “Basket of Supports” and the consensus on key principles, still stand the test of time), First Call decided to publish this new document, *Make BC’s Young Children and Families a Priority: A Call to Action*.

This *Call to Action* “builds on what exists” at First Call and is grounded in *what First Call and partners believe, what we know, what we do and what we have agreed on*, concepts outlined in the terms of reference¹ developed to provide clarity to First Call partners and other stakeholders about the mandate, scope and process of the work involved in moving from the *Framework* to this *Call to Action*.

1

We believe that all children and youth in BC should have first call on society’s resources. While the protection of children’s rights is the primary responsibility of governments at all levels, the UNCRC also acknowledges the important roles that community organizations and groups such as First Call play in monitoring and raising public awareness about our progress towards realizing children’s rights.

2

We know – from research, evidence and direct experience – that substantial public policy change in BC and Canada is required to advance healthy child development and address the scale and scope of the socioeconomic realities facing the majority of families with young children today, particularly those who face additional barriers.

3

We do public education, community mobilization and policy advocacy, driven by the evidence. Organizations that are concerned about child and youth rights and endorse our 4 Keys to Success are welcome to become partners in the First Call Coalition, and provide direct input on our priorities, positions, campaigns and endorsements.

4

We agree on and/or endorse a range of public policy initiatives that inform all of our work, including this ECD Framework for Action project. Relevant to our call to action and in addition to our foundational 4 Keys to Success, First Call supports the call for a provincial poverty reduction plan, the Living Wage for Families Campaign, Jordan’s Principle, the \$10/day Child Care Plan, the campaign to Repeal Section 43 (no physical punishment), the Seed to Cedar Campaign, the BC Child Rights Public Awareness Campaign, the call for a provincial ban on the sale and use of cosmetic pesticides and, of course, the original ECD Framework for Action.¹

¹ Full text of the terms of reference can be found in Appendix 1. They form the starting assumptions for the Framework for Action project and as many of the points in them are explored in a range of widely available documents, they may not be detailed in this report.

1

The Foundation for the Call to Action

Vision

The rights and well-being of all BC's young children are **valued and respected** in thriving families, nurturing communities and by well-resourced and comprehensive public policy.



Guiding Principles and Key Assumptions



Both the *Framework for Action* and this *Call to Action* build on a strong consensus about guiding principles and key assumptions; a consensus achieved through the engagement and review process. As a result, beginning with the individual child and family, and moving to the influence of communities and government policies, our call to action:

- **Advances children's rights**, including their right to be valued and respected as individuals and to be visible in and connected to their communities. Children have the right to live, play and learn in safe, inclusive, nurturing environments that help them realize their full potential in all realms of development. Children are also entitled to the progressive exercise of their rights, including the right to have their views heard, in accordance with their evolving capacities. Therefore, in all decisions that directly and indirectly affect their safety, well-being and healthy development, children's needs and interests come first.
- **Emphasizes the role of families** in realizing children's rights, affirming that parents and families – in all their diversities – are the first and primary teachers and caregivers of their children. Families are central to promoting children's healthy development, and must be supported by public policies that provide them with enough time, income and services to balance and fulfill their caring and earning responsibilities. Effective early years services welcome and support the engagement of families as key partners, including mothers, fathers, elders, extended and non-traditional families and caregivers.
- **Supports communities** in all their diversities and in their ongoing efforts to build safe and nurturing environments for young children. Knowing that community efforts are necessary and valued, but not sufficient on their own, the call to action also encourages community efforts to raise public awareness about and advocacy for the early years. It also promotes cross-sectoral community collaboration, coordination and (where appropriate) service integration in order to improve programs and services today, and to lay the foundation for effective implementation of new government policies and investments in the future.
- **Affirms society's collective responsibility** to support all young children's healthy development, without discrimination. This requires a foundation of universal supports and services, and additional strategies to address specific barriers facing certain families and population groups (such as those living in poverty and/or with mental health concerns) and systemic barriers that limit the overall availability, affordability and integration of early years programs. It also means taking action to support the *full inclusion* of young children at risk of developmental delay and children with additional support needs.

- **Highlights the importance of early years services and supports that are culturally safe, respectful and relevant.** This includes respecting the experiences, cultures and languages of children and families who are new to Canada and/or are members of diverse ethno-cultural communities.
- **Recognizes our unique relationship with, and responsibilities to, Aboriginal peoples²,** respecting the histories, status, cultures, customs, languages and rights of their children, families and communities. This includes advancing the right of Aboriginal peoples to have jurisdiction over their early years programs and services to ensure they best reflect community “needs, hopes and dreams”³. Specifically, this call to action affirms that early years programs and services are best developed through community and Nation-driven processes that “foster Aboriginal child and family wellness; build capacity within Aboriginal families, communities, and organizations, [and]; ensure that Aboriginal worldviews, cultures, and languages are integral in all programs and services.”⁴
- **Acknowledges that governments need to take decisive action** in order to meet our collective responsibilities to all families with young children, including Aboriginal families and communities. Population-wide, families with young children today are squeezed for time, incomes and/or services, and communities cannot reduce this pressure on their own. Only senior levels of government can introduce and sustain the policies and investments at the scale and scope required to significantly reverse the current trends and help young children and their families thrive. Moreover, it is senior levels of government – federal, provincial and territorial – who have assumed responsibility for advancing the rights of young children and their families, through the various UN conventions now in place.⁵
- **Prioritizes the supports and services that are unique to the early years,** while recognizing that there are broader enabling conditions that everyone needs to thrive. Specifically, and as outlined in detail in General Comment 7 of the UNCRC, this call to action affirms that “young children are holders of all rights enshrined in the Convention and that early childhood is a critical period for the realization of these rights.” Early childhood is also “the period of most extensive (and intensive) parental responsibilities related to all aspects of children’s well-being ... Accordingly, realizing children’s rights is in large measure dependent on the well-being and resources available to those with responsibility for their care.” In addition to supports and services tailored to the early years, however, young children and families – like everyone – thrive in societies that are characterized by greater social and economic equality,

² Aboriginal peoples refers to First Nations, Metis, Inuit, status and non-status, and individuals who self-identify as Aboriginal.

³ As described, for example, in the belief statements outlined by the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society. Downloaded July 9, 2014 from http://www.acc-society.bc.ca/files_2/who-we-are.php

⁴ As described, for example, in *BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework*, prepared for the BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Council, November 2009, p. 10. Downloaded July 9, 2014 from <http://www.fnesc.ca/Attachments/ECD/ECD%20Consultation%20Document%20Dec%202017%202009.pdf>

⁵ These include, but are not limited to, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) along with related General Comments (GC) that provide further information on specific aspects of children’s rights including early childhood (GC7), children with disabilities (GC9), indigenous children (GC11) and the impact of the business sector (GC16). All of the General Comments were available for download July 10, 2014 at http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=5&DocTypeID=11

environmental sustainability, good jobs that pay living wages, access to affordable and safe housing, nutritious food, accessible transportation, and universal health care and education, including post-secondary.

- ***Calls on governments to build from existing services***, wherever possible, when introducing new policies and investments. When additional public funds are available, community-based groups should have opportunities to access those funds and to be accountable for measurably increasing the quality and/or accessibility of their programs and services. This approach acknowledges and values the skills, knowledge, infrastructure and relationships with families that already exist in communities across the province.
- ***Affirms that we can afford to make substantial and meaningful public investments*** in young children and their families. The call to action draws on the overwhelming evidence showing that BC could choose to prioritize these public investments, and that doing so would provide substantial social and economic benefits throughout the province. In other words, the cost of underinvesting in families with young children today is actually higher than the public investment required to help them thrive.
- ***Provides First Call, other organizations, governments and communities with a tool*** for ongoing reflection, monitoring and advocacy to promote improved outcomes for BC's young children and their families. As this call to action complements existing and (to the best of our knowledge) emerging Aboriginal, provincial, regional, sectoral and community early years plans and strategies, it is also a tool for collaboration across BC.

With these guiding principles and key assumptions in hand, early years communities and individuals will find a place for everyone by embracing diversity and inclusion, ensuring that our actions and advocacy address everyone's needs, and by keeping the overarching Framework for Action and this Call to Action in our hearts, our minds, our words and our work. The rationale for doing so is profound.

Since both the original (2003) and updated (2008) *Framework* were written, the research, evidence and support for policy change and public investment has grown exponentially. This is why it is important to move from a *Framework for Action* to a *Call to Action*.

Specifically, BC now has:

- **More research** affirming the importance of the early years and widespread consensus on the necessary policy interventions and net benefits of effective government investments
- **More evidence** of Canada's and BC's policy and investment shortcomings to date
- **More support** for action from a range of individuals and groups, including several in the business community

Knowledge about the importance of the early years continues to grow

Learnings in the areas of child development, epidemiology, neuroscience, genetics, epigenetics and prevention have all contributed to our understanding of the early years as the most intensive and sensitive period for brain development. The complex mechanisms at work in this exceptionally dynamic period, conception to about six years of age, include the interaction between genes (nature) and environment (nurture). Research has provided conclusive evidence that many factors in a child's social and physical environment exert powerful effects, both positive and negative, with lifelong consequences for physical and mental health, behaviour and learning outcomes. For example, new studies suggest that chronic exposure to toxic stress and adverse environments (e.g., poverty, violence, pollution, neglect and other stressors) can alter the structure and function of the brain and biological stress responses throughout the life course.

BC's own researchers, including the late Dr. Clyde Hertzman and colleagues at the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), have been leaders in building greater public awareness about these learnings and their implications for public policy.⁶

The science of child development now helps us to see healthy development as a causal chain – policies and programs across the public and private sectors affect the capacities of caregivers and communities to strengthen three foundations of healthy development: stable, responsive relationships; safe, supportive environments; and appropriate nutrition. These foundations, in turn, trigger physiological adaptations or disruptions that influence lifelong outcomes in health, learning and behaviour. Understanding how each link in this chain affects the others can provide a science-based framework for decisions about policies, systems, and practices that support the healthy development of all young children and their families.

*Harvard University,
Centre for the Developing Child*

⁶ See, for example, Human Early Learning Partnership's Research Brief (2013). *What makes a difference for early child development? Total Environment Assessment Model for Early Child Development (TEAM-ECD)*. Downloaded July 10, 2014 from http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/publications/team-eed_brief_final_2013-10-15.pdf

Consensus on the necessary policy interventions is widespread

There is also widespread and growing agreement about the government policies that most effectively support this crucial developmental period. Notably, a 2008 UNICEF report applied 10 family policy benchmarks, a set of “minimum standards for protecting the rights of children in their most vulnerable and formative years” to assess relevant policy in participating countries.⁷

The benchmarks, grounded in the UNCRC General Comment 7, were arrived at through consultation with government officials and academics from economically advanced countries in Asia, Europe and North America and with input from UNICEF and the World Bank. They evaluate parental leave policies, poverty rates and income support strategies, the quantity and quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, the availability of essential child health services, national plans for early childhood services and levels of public investment.

In other words, the benchmarks assess government plans, policies and investments that provide families with the time, incomes and services they need to balance and fulfill their caring and earning responsibilities, thereby helping their children thrive.

Time, Income, Services is the policy framework proposed by HELP in 2009⁸, and it is broadly consistent with the “basket of services” proposed in First Call’s *Framework for Action* and with a range of other recommended policy frameworks.⁹ HELP’s framework was subsequently clarified and published as *A New Deal for Families*.¹⁰ Its key elements are excerpted, summarized and adapted below as they relate to children by age:

⁷ See both UNICEF (2008). In *Innocenti Report Card 8*. Place published: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, and Bennett, John (2008). *Benchmarks for Early Childhood Services in OECD Countries*. *Innocenti Working Paper 2008-02*.

⁸ Kershaw P., Anderson L., Hertzman C., Warburton B. (2009). *15 by 15: A Comprehensive Policy Framework for Early Human Capital Investment in BC*. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, Human Early Learning Partnership.

⁹ See, for example, First Call’s *2013 Child Poverty Report Card* (p. 28, recommendations 11 and 14) and Pascal, C. *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, p. 5. Downloaded July 10, 2014 from <https://dr6j45jk9xcmk.cloudfront.net/documents/89/earlylearningreporten.pdf>

¹⁰ Human Early Learning Partnership Fact Sheet (2011). *A New Deal for Families*.

Time and Income



From Birth to 18 months:

Provide universal access to a benefit system that ensures all parents, whether in single or dual-earner households (including the self-employed) and regardless of attachment to the labour market, have the time and resources (incomes) to be home with their newborns. This would include:

- Extending parental leave from the current 12 months to 18 months, and generally reserving the extra time for dads (with exceptions for lone parents and same-sex couples).
- Increasing benefits to 80 percent of parents' income (maximum \$60,000 per year), making time at home affordable for families. This increase would double the existing maximum benefit. The new minimum benefit would be \$440 weekly, substantially reducing child and family poverty for this age group.

From 18 months to six years:

Whereas the period from birth to 18 months prioritizes (and financially supports) family time with young children, the policy recommendations after 18 months prioritize family income. Reduce early care and learning fees to no more than \$10/day (full-time) and \$7/day (part-time), making it free for families earning less than \$40,000 annually. At these fee levels, all families who currently pay at or near market rates for child care will have more income, and those with lower incomes will be better supported to remain out of poverty. In addition, the combination of reduced parent fees (along with widely available spaces, as outlined below) will provide families – traditionally, mothers – with more choices and flexibility in balancing caring and earning. On balance, after an extended and generous leave, more mothers can return to the paid labour force, or increase their paid hours, which again increases family incomes.

Services



Build on existing services¹¹ to provide universal and regular access to high quality, voluntary parent support programs and healthy child check-ins¹², consistent with the guiding principles outlined above. The purpose of healthy child check-ins is to promote access to and uptake of health-care services and programs (e.g., immunization, screening), and to answer questions about and help families understand, support and track their children's development. Where follow-up supports and services are needed, the goal is also to ensure they are available on a timely basis with no barriers to access.

Build on existing regulated child care programs to provide universal access to high quality, affordable early care and learning programs – available on a part-time or full-time and voluntary basis – that are integrated with kindergarten programs at age five and consistent with the guiding principles outlined above. Programs would support healthy child development by supplementing, but never replacing, the care that families provide directly. Families could choose to use the early care and learning programs, regardless of parental employment, and/or they could choose to continue accessing other parent support programs.

¹¹ First Call also supports families' right to access quality, affordable child care for children under 18 months.

¹² Originally described as "developmental monitoring" in *15 by 15*, p. 20 (footnote 8 above).

Along with other benefits, HELP projects that acting on these family policy recommendations would substantially reduce child and family poverty. International research documents the toxic effects of poverty on child development, and the resulting inequities in health and other areas of developmental vulnerability among BC children. Lower socioeconomic status is strongly related to poorer health and to a higher risk for suboptimal development among young children. These inequities are unfair and preventable, and can be addressed through prioritizing and increasing public investment in the early years.

Evidence also suggests that reducing the time and income stress on families helps to tackle the systemic pressures that are exacerbating mental health issues for many families today, issues that can lead to family breakdown and children being taken into government care¹³.

Research has also established that the essential elements for consistently achieving positive outcomes for children and families are high service quality and proportionately universal access.

- **High service quality**

Staff are key to success for early years services from parent support to early care and learning programs¹⁴. Specifically, well-trained, adequately compensated and socially valued early years staff are more likely to build respectful and trusting relationships with families and create nurturing and stimulating environments for young children. Therefore, HELP's proposed government policy recommendations incorporate increased public funding for staff training (specific to early child development) and staff compensation.

For families with young children, a firm foundation of time, income and service supports – including mental health services and supports for adults – will help families stay together and thrive together.



Unfair and preventable inequities in children's health and development created by poverty can be addressed through increasing public investment in the early years.

¹³ Kershaw P., Anderson L., Hertzman C., Warburton B. (2009). *15 by 15*, p. 48, 49.

¹⁴ Early years staff are important community assets. They bring a diversity of perspectives and experiences, drawing upon the expertise and experience of practitioners from a wide range of fields including – but not limited to – public health, family support, literacy, early childhood education, special education, speech and language, mental health, social work, community development, immigrant settlement, working with indigenous populations, and women's issues. Investing in practitioners builds community capacity, facilitates community planning and encourages an integrated family-centred service delivery approach.

- **Proportionately universal access**

Application of the principle of “proportionate universality” helps ensure that the benefits of universal supports and services reach *all* children and families, including those who may experience barriers to access. This is accomplished by layering targeted supports and services on top of a universal approach. “Within such a system, services may need to be provided at various levels of intensity and scale, tailored to the unique needs of certain populations and communities.”¹⁵ An effective approach to proportionate universality will also include a transparent, reliable and publicly accountable method of determining the need for targeted supports and services.

HELP researchers have identified “specific service barriers that occur most commonly for families. These include a shortage of available and/or affordable services; varying levels of parental knowledge and understanding of the importance of early child development; work-life and time conflicts that make it hard to access services/programs at the times they are offered; transportation constraints; language barriers and a lack of environments that are welcoming for all. Service barriers are [both] about concrete issues such as a lack of affordability [and] about people needing services that are welcoming and safe.”¹⁶

Well-resourced, community-based information and referral services are also essential for reducing barriers to access, and therefore an important component of the recommended policy framework. These services must be visible, interactive and child-and-family focused, quickly and efficiently connecting children, families and early years practitioners to supports, services and resources. Needless to say, the effectiveness of these services is maximized when there are quality, affordable, accessible programs to refer people to.

The net benefits of effective government investments in the early years are affirmed

Given the importance of the early years to human development, it is not surprising that many economic studies show that effective public investments in key family policies provide returns that far outweigh the costs. Equally, it follows that *failure to invest in families with young children imposes substantial long-term costs to our education, health care, social welfare and justice systems, as well as undermining economic productivity and social stability.*¹⁷ Early years-specific studies

“Investment in early education can help to address core economic and social challenges facing Canada. It can help reduce poverty, address skills shortages, improve productivity and innovation, and a host of other national priorities.”

TD Chief Economist Craig Alexander, TD Economics Special Report, *Early Childhood Education Has Widespread and Long Lasting Benefits*, November 27, 2012

¹⁵ Human Early Learning Partnership, Research Brief (2012). *Addressing Barriers to Access*, p. 1. Background information from HELP Policy Brief (2011) *Proportionate Universality*.

¹⁶ Human Early Learning Partnership, Research Brief (2012). *Addressing Barriers to Access*, p. 2.

¹⁷ Kershaw P., Anderson L., Hertzman C., Warburton B. (2009). *15 by 15: A Comprehensive Policy Framework for Early Human Capital Investment in BC*. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, Human Early Learning Partnership.

complement and build on the growing body of evidence showing that inequality, overall, has substantial economic as well as social costs.¹⁸

While many of the early years studies show that the net benefits are achieved over time (i.e., as children age and enter the workforce), some recent studies and analyses point to more immediate returns.¹⁹ This is a helpful development because an emphasis on long-term impacts risks undermining children's right to be valued for who they are today, and families' right to public support as they nurture the next generation through the early years.

Economic analyses generally focus on programs for which the outcomes are measurable and reasonably attributable. They are not able to capture the impact of the many qualitative interactions that occur in early years programs – the ideas, options and links provided by a resource and referral staff that open new doors for a parent, or the friendships that an isolated mom develops in a family resource program. While we intuitively understand that these parents receive the information, strength and empowerment they need to better help their children and families thrive, it is difficult to measure the specific outcomes of these interactions or to fully evaluate their impact.

First Call believes that, while the economic rationale for increasing public investment in the early years is compelling, it does not replace the primary rationale founded on children's rights.

¹⁸ See, for example, Wilkinson R., Pickett K. (2009). *The spirit level: Why more equal societies almost always do better*. London, UK: Allen Lane-Penguin Books; Marmot Review Team (2010). *Fair society, healthy lives. The Marmot review*. London, UK: Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post-2010. Available from: <http://www.marmotreview.org/>; and the work carried out by the UK's Equality Trust, available from <http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/>

¹⁹ See, for example, Fortin, P., Godbout, L., St. Cerny, S. (2012). Impact of Quebec's Universal Low Fee Childcare Program on Female Labour Force Participation, Domestic Income, and Government Budgets. Working Paper 2012/02.

The state of Canada's and BC's policy and investment in the early years

The International Perspective

Canada ranked last out of the 25 developed countries assessed by UNICEF in the 2008 report card referenced earlier on page 8.

As illustrated below, Canada achieved only one out of the 10 family policy benchmarks. Sweden and other Nordic countries achieved between eight and 10 marks, and countries considered Canada's peer nations (Australia, New Zealand, US, UK, Ireland) achieved between one and six marks²⁰.

TABLE 1 Family Policy Benchmarks – Four Examples

		Sweden	New Zealand	United States	Canada
<i>Benchmark to be achieved</i>		<i>Maximum points = 10</i>			
Time and Income					
<i>Parental Leave</i>	1 year at 50% salary, with reserved time for fathers	1	0	0	0
<i>Income Supports</i>	Child poverty rate <10%	1	0	0	0
Services					
<i>ECEC Quality</i>	Majority of staff trained: Appropriate child:staff ratios	3	3	2	1
<i>ECEC Access</i>	80% 4 year olds; 25% under 3 years. Regulated, subsidized	2	2	1	0
<i>Other Early Years</i>	Universal outreach, essential health	1	0	0	0
Public Planning & Investment					
<i>Planning</i>	National plan with priority for disadvantaged	1	1	0	0
<i>Public Investment</i>	1% of GDP invested in ECEC	1	0	0	0
		10	6	3	1

Summarized and adapted from Figure 1, p. 2 UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 8.

²⁰ In UNICEF's *Report Card 8*, p. 2, Canada and Ireland were tied for last place, achieving one benchmark each. However, in the related Benchmark report (see Annex section, starting on p. 72) countries were originally assessed on 15 benchmarks, and in this earlier assessment Ireland achieved three benchmarks whereas Canada achieved only one. See both UNICEF. 2008. *The child care transition: A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries*. In *Innocenti Report Card 8*. Place Published: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, and Bennett, John 2008. *Benchmarks for Early Childhood Services in OECD Countries*. *Innocenti Working Paper 2008-02*.

This finding by UNICEF adds to the growing evidence, at home and abroad, of BC's and Canada's weak policies, investments and outcomes for families with young children.

Subsequently, in 2012, after considering progress reports by Canadian governments and non-governmental organizations on the status of children's rights in Canada, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noted in its concluding observations that, while some positive actions had been undertaken by Canada, many concerns remained. Examples of the concerns expressed by the committee can be seen in the following excerpts.²¹

- (32) [Regarding] the continued prevalence of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, gender, socio-economic background, national origin and other grounds. In particular, the Committee is concerned at ... the lack of action following the Auditor General's finding that less financial resources are provided for child welfare services to Aboriginal children than to non-Aboriginal children.
- (67) Income inequality is widespread and growing and that no national strategy has been developed to comprehensively address child poverty despite a commitment by Parliament to end child poverty by 2000. The Committee is especially concerned about the inequitable distribution of tax benefits and social transfers for children.
- (71) Despite the State party's significant resources, there has been a lack of funding directed towards the improvement of early childhood development and affordable and accessible early childhood care and services. The Committee is also concerned by the high cost of child care, the lack of available places for children, and the absence of uniform training requirements for all child care staff and of standards of quality care. The Committee notes that early childhood care and education continues to be inadequate for children under four years of age. Furthermore, the Committee is concerned that the majority of early childhood care and education services in the State party are provided by private, profit-driven institutions, resulting in such services being unaffordable for most families.

The resulting recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child are consistent with the vision and related policy recommendations made by UNICEF as well as others including the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)²², HELP and First Call. There is coherence in the chorus of voices that advocate for the well-being of young children.

²¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, October 5, 2012. Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention, Concluding observations: Canada. CRC/C/CAN/CO/3-4
http://rightsofchildren.ca/wp-content/uploads/Canada_CRC-Concluding-Observations_61.2012.pdf

²² For example, in October 2006 the Childcare Resource and Research Unit produced the briefing note, *Early learning and child care: How does Canada measure up?* The publication summarizes and discusses multiple international comparisons of child care and related family policies using data from *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care* (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006). *Starting Strong II* affirmed Canada's relatively high rates of child and family poverty and low rates of public investment in and access to child care, in comparison to other developed countries. The international comparisons also showed Canada's child care fees are relatively high, and access to maternity/parental leave is weaker than in many of our peer nations.

The Perspective at Home

While the international findings highlight Canada's relatively weak family policy overall, Canadian research shows that, among provinces, BC is particularly weak on several key family policy measures.

For example, throughout most of the last decade BC's child poverty rates have been consistently above the national average – for all children, and for children under age six. Furthermore, “there are significantly higher poverty rates for children of recent immigrants, children of Aboriginal identity, children of female lone-parent families, children in racialized families and children with a disability.”²³

Meanwhile, access to quality, affordable child care remains particularly problematic in BC. The most recent (2012) Canadian snapshot of child care²⁴ indicates that:

- Only 18% of children under 12 in BC had access to a regulated child care space (Canadian average, 20.5%). This means that many of our youngest children are in unregulated care arrangements, with no standards for or monitoring of safety or quality.
- The public investment per regulated child care space in BC was only \$398/year, whereas the Canadian average excluding Quebec was \$436/year and \$838/year including Quebec. In fact, the total BC public investment in regulated child care decreased by \$16 million between 2009/10 and 2011/12 (from \$243 million, after adjusting for inflation, to \$227 million).
- The relatively small public investment in child care in BC helps explain why parent fees continue to increase at rates that outpace inflation²⁵. BC fees are higher than the Canadian average across all age groups. For infants and toddlers, they are now the second highest in the country (after Ontario), and the second highest cost for families (after housing) in various living wage calculations.²⁶



²³ First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition (2013). *British Columbia 2013 Child and Family Poverty Report Card*, p. 8.

²⁴ Ferns, C., Friendly, M. (2014). *The state of early childhood education and care in Canada 2012*. <http://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/StateofECEC2012.pdf>

²⁵ The average annual inflation rate in BC from 2006 through 2012 was 1.4%. Calculated from Statistics Canada. Table 326-0021 - Consumer Price Index (CPI), CANSIM (database). (Accessed: 2014-07-29). Table 2 below shows that child care parent fees rose by an additional 3.7% to 4.6%, on average, over the same time period.

²⁶ See <http://www.livingwageforfamilies.ca/about/what-is-a-living-wage/>

Several reports point to the difficulty of recruiting and retaining qualified early years staff; the low level of public funding (and as one consequence, high parent fees for child care) leaves little room for appropriate staff compensation. A 2012 national survey conducted for the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council found that wages for BC child care staff remain below the Canada-wide average; “fewer than 50% of staff had access to most benefits”; and 63% of employers had challenges filling a vacant position²⁷.

Lack of or reduced public funding also limits access to other early years programs and services²⁸, particularly in rural and remote areas and for children with additional support needs. The use of wait-list strategies and/or restrictive eligibility criteria to ration access to needed interventions is inconsistent with the evidence showing that early interventions are most effective. The BC Association of Child Development and Intervention (BCACDI) notes that, as a result of the net decrease in funding, agencies must make cuts that directly impact the number of children that will receive service and the amount of service they will receive.²⁹

These restrictions contradict three of the four UNCRC guiding principles, which are key to realizing any and all rights: 1) non-discrimination 2) adherence to the best interests of the child 3) the right to life, survival and development.³⁰

A review of government actions and strategies over the past decade

Federal Government

First Call’s *Framework for Action* was first published when senior levels of government (federal, provincial and territorial (FPT)) were acknowledging the importance of the early years and recognizing the need to increase public investment. FPT transfer agreements were in place or under development, with provinces and territories agreeing to invest the federal funding in a range of early years programs and services and report annually to the public on their activities and expenditures.

However, in 2006 a new federal government terminated the most substantial early years agreement, which provided for direct investment in child care, and replaced it with a taxable payment to parents of \$100 per month per child under age six (UCCB)³¹, and the offer of a tax credit for employers who created new child care spaces for their employees. To date, there has been no substantive use of the

²⁷ Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (2013). *You Bet We Still Care! A Survey of Centre-Based Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada: Highlights Report*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, pp. 18-23, 32.

²⁸ See <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/bc-public-sector-raises-squeeze-services/article14717815/> for example, for a discussion of the impact of recent wage increases (for workers in the community services sector), which “were supposed to be offset by savings found elsewhere in the contract, without government putting in any additional money and without services being affected. But as wage increases . . . come into effect, some employers say it is difficult or impossible to cover increased wage costs without cutting staff or services.”

²⁹ PowerPoint presentation. ECD Roundtable. January 17, 2013.

³⁰ UNICEF, *The Convention on the Rights of the Child, Guiding principles: general requirements for all rights*. Downloaded July 15, 2014 from http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Guiding_Principles.pdf

³¹ For more information about the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB), see <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/bnfts/uccb-puge/tx-eng.html>

employer tax credit³² and it is unclear what impact, if any, the \$100 per month UCCB has had on child care affordability. In fact, as illustrated below, child care fees in BC have risen substantially more than the maximum amount a family would receive for one child via UCCB.

TABLE 2 Cost of Centre-Based Child Care in BC 2006–2012

Age Group	Median Annual Parent Fees (\$) Full-Time Centre-Based Child Care <i>Inflation adjusted</i>		Increase in Annual Parent Fees (\$)	Less: Maximum Annual UCCB <i>Inflation adjusted</i>	Net Increase in Annual Cost for Family	Average Annual Fee Increase <i>Inflation adjusted</i>
	2006 ³³	2012 ³⁴				
Infants (< 18 mths)	9,808	12,564	2,756	1,101 ³⁵	1,655	459
Toddlers (18 mths - 3 yrs)	8,892	10,884	1,992	1,101	891	332
Preschoolers (3-5 yrs)	7,192	9,132	1,940	1,101	839	323

It should be noted that in 2015, the BC government is introducing the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit “to improve the affordability of child care and assist families with the cost of raising young children”.³⁶ This income-tested tax-free payment of \$55 per month – or \$660 per year – for each child under the age of six is part of the Province’s Early Years Strategy. It will be combined with the federal Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) and the BC family bonus program into a single monthly payment, administered by the federal government.

Since 2006, the federal government has extended the remaining early years agreements and as of 2009/10 indexed them by 3% annually, but full responsibility and public accountability for expenditures and outcomes has been left with the provinces and territories.³⁷

32 Table 2, p. 22 of the 2013 Tax Expenditures Report of the Government of Canada indicates that the Investment Tax Credit for Child Care Spaces is “S” for small, meaning that the value of the tax expenditure is less than \$2.5 million, see <http://www.fin.gc.ca/taxexp-depfisc/2013/taxexp-depfisc13-eng.pdf>

33 Childcare Resource and Research Unit (CRRU). *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Canada 2006*, p. 153. <http://www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/British%20Columbia.pdf>

34 CRRU, *ECEC in Canada 2012*, p. 57. http://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/CRRU_ECEC_2012_revised_dec2013.pdf

35 Calculated from Statistics Canada. Table 326-0021 – Consumer Price Index (CPI), CANSIM (database). (Accessed: 2014-07-29).

36 http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/tax_benefit.htm

37 Gauthier, J. (2012). *The Canada Social Transfer: Past, Present and Future Considerations* (Background Paper, Library of Parliament). Publication No. 2012-48-E.

Provincial Government

Analysis of BC's annual reports to the public about the province's early years activities and expenditures³⁸ confirms that investments for programs and services other than child care increased between 2001 and 2012, and that this increase is in addition to the federal transfers, which account for approximately two-thirds of the spending growth.³⁹ (See Appendix 2.) These investments have supported communities to develop or expand a range of important early years programs in areas such as Aboriginal early childhood, parenting support, midwifery, adoption support and early intervention. They have also stimulated community capacity building by providing funds for local ECD tables or coalitions, which include core groups of child and family serving partners with increasingly diverse representation and often supported by early years community developers. The vast majority of ECD tables have plans in place which primarily focus on – and report success related to – “building collaboration amongst community partners, raising public awareness and expanding local engagement in planning.”⁴⁰

Federal transfers have also been directed to the development of the first of the following two new programs delivered through BC's public education system.

- **StrongStart BC** – Programs available at no cost to parents for a few hours each day. Parents (or caregivers) with children under age five are invited to drop in and participate in early learning programs led by qualified early childhood educators.
- **Full-School-Day Kindergarten** – An expansion from part-day to full school-day/school-year kindergarten programming for all five-year olds, taught by teaching professionals, again at no cost to parents.

GOVERNMENT /COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Several BC municipalities are helping to increase supports for families with young children through public education, participation at local ECD tables, collaborations with local organizations and financial tools (e.g., granting programs, new facility development). Recognizing the limitations of their mandate and access to resources, many municipalities are also actively encouraging senior levels of government to implement supportive family policies and investments.

Positive outcomes are resulting from collaborative work on several Early Years Refugee programs, jointly funded by the BC government and United Way of the Lower Mainland. The value of prioritizing families with young children became so apparent that when the federal government recently reassumed responsibility for settlement funding in BC they continued to include the early years as an area of funding focus – an outcome which, to date, is unique to BC.

³⁸ As of July 30, 2014 the most recent report available was for the year ended March 31, 2012. See http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/early_childhood/publications.htm?WT.svl=LeftNav for a list of the annual reports, which were used to generate the provincial early years spending estimates and related discussion in Appendix 2.

³⁹ BC's early years reports do not have adequate and consistent information to support a similar analysis for child care expenditures.

⁴⁰ Information on local ECD tables drawn from *Community Capacity Building for the Early Years in BC: highlights of the 2013 Progress Report*. This report is produced by the ECD Evaluation Project. http://www.mysuccessby6.ca/files/u66/Highlights_-_mgr__stakeholder_FINAL.pdf

Even with these investments BC research shows that nearly a third of all young children are vulnerable, or behind in some aspect of their development at age five, as measured by the Early Development Instrument (EDI)⁴¹.

The disturbing reality is that the level of vulnerability in BC has actually increased over the last decade, affirming multiple analyses showing that the public funding invested in BC families with young children remains woefully inadequate.

UNICEF and others recommend that countries invest at least 1% of GDP in early care and education (i.e., child care and kindergarten) for children under age six. Yet, the increased investment in kindergarten programming - the largest annual increase in funding for any BC early years service - moved BC from investing only 0.23% of GDP in early care and education to just 0.29%.

Sources: UNICEF benchmark report, *ibid* #2 and HELP Webinar: International <http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/blog/2014/feb/19/help-webinar-international-family-policy-comparisi/>



⁴¹ The EDI is a questionnaire that measures five core areas of early child development that are known to be good predictors of adult health, education and social outcomes: physical health and well-being; language and cognitive development; social competence; emotional maturity; communication skills and general knowledge. EDI questionnaires are completed by kindergarten teachers from across BC for all children in their classes. The resulting data allows researchers to measure population-based vulnerability rates by geographical area, where child vulnerability refers to the portion of the population which, without additional support and care, may experience future challenges in school and society.

BC government strategies and investment in context

Service Delivery

In February 2013, the BC Early Years Strategy was unveiled – “an eight-year government commitment to support early childhood development and help families with child care.”⁴² The foundation of the strategy has been the establishment of a Provincial Office for the Early Years “to coordinate all policy and service improvements” and to facilitate “improved integration, coordination, and a range of accessible quality programs and services while maintaining and, where necessary, developing a stronger focus on reaching out to higher-risk children and their families.”⁴³

While improving coordination, collaboration and integration are goals that First Call shares, they are a small component of what is required in a policy framework and, on their own, will not substantially address the issues facing families with young children today. As the BC Association for Child Development and Intervention (BCACDI) highlights in responding to the announcement of the Early Years Strategy:⁴⁴

The reality is that in many communities across BC there are existing services for children and youth with special needs that are already well-coordinated, yet simply under resourced. Additional funds specifically for services for children and youth with special needs in such communities would have an immediate and lasting effect. Wait-lists and wait times would improve, as would outcomes for children and families. We caution against too much time and resources for “coordination” type activities when the reality is in the vast majority of cases there are front line services already delivering effective and coordinated services that simply need more funding to meet the needs of their communities.



Another component of the strategy is the intent to establish a “provincially branded network of early years development centres.” The proposed centres appear to be consistent with the centralized “hub” approach described in First Call’s *Framework for Action*. (See Appendix 3.) First Call notes that there are several examples of hub-like approaches in place throughout the province already, and that more can be built from a range of existing programs and locations such as schools and community centres. Hubs have the potential to house the infrastructure required for community capacity building, service delivery planning and mobilizing communities around the needs of young children and families.

⁴² <http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2013/02/premier-unveils-bc-early-years-strategy.html>

⁴³ See *The Families Agenda for British Columbia*, available at http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/early_childhood/pdf/FamiliesAgenda_EarlyYearsStrategy_web.pdf

⁴⁴ <http://blog.bcacdi.org/2013/02/bc-budget-lacking-enough-investment-in.html>

However, in order to help children and families thrive, hubs need more than public investments in coordination. They need investments that increase access to quality early years services. But the Early Years Strategy does not specifically and/or significantly address key indicators of quality and access such as early years staff wages, child care parent fees, special needs wait lists and lack of child care spaces⁴⁵.

Service Affordability

The Early Childhood Tax Benefit of \$55 per month is the largest financial component of the BC government's Early Years Strategy. Yet, it does little to address our child poverty rate or, as noted earlier, alleviate the income squeeze on those families with young children, many of whom find their economic viability challenged by the cost of child care.

Service Accessibility

Under the heading of "Access" the Strategy refers to supporting the creation of new child care spaces through capital grants, but there is no mention of increasing the availability of other early years services and programs. With respect to the development of new child care spaces two concerns emerge. Without substantially addressing the fundamental issue of child care affordability, the new child care spaces will most likely be accessed only by those who can afford them. Despite the evidence-based concerns expressed by the UNCRC, First Call partners⁴⁶ and many others about for-profit child care in Canada, the BC government is providing capital grants to both commercial/for-profit and not-for-profit organizations.

The lack of comprehensive planning and public investment at the scale and scope required leaves many early years programs struggling to consistently provide high quality programming and equitable access for children and families, particularly in programs outside of the health and education sectors. While the latter public services also struggle with funding shortfalls, at least children are entitled, through legislation, to health care and school. Similar entitlements do not exist in child care⁴⁷ or the early years programs that fall under other ministries.

A comparison of key policy attributes of public education and child care provides further illustration of these important differences, and their impact on quality and access:

- **Public Education** – Once they enter kindergarten at around age five, BC's children are taught by professional educators working within a provincially approved curriculum. BC parents pay no user fees to access the public system and are entitled to enroll their children in a school in

⁴⁵ The Early Years Strategy allocates funds to support the creation of "up to 2,000 new licensed child care spaces" over the next three years, "with the goal of opening 13,000 new spaces over the next eight years." However, over the next three years alone, the population of BC children under age 10 (primary child care years) is projected to increase by almost 12,000 (calculated from BC Stats, April 2013, Table 6).

⁴⁶ For example, see 2012 correspondence between First Call ECD Roundtable and BC government at <http://www.firstcallbc.org/earlyChildhood-roundtable.html>

⁴⁷ Families who meet specific eligibility criteria, including criteria related to lower incomes, are entitled, through legislation, to access child care subsidy. But there is no requirement to ensure that there is a space available for the child, or that the difference between the subsidy and the parent fee is affordable.

their community. The education infrastructure includes responsibility for planning and related functions that are coordinated both provincially and locally. Any public funding provided outside of the public system goes only to independent non-profit schools, which receive up to 50% of the per child funding provided to public schools.⁴⁸

Outcome – Canada and BC consistently rank among the top jurisdictions in the world for their education systems.⁴⁹

- **Child Care** – Although a majority of mothers participate in the paid labour force,⁵⁰ families are not entitled to early care and learning services before age five or outside of school hours. Because child care is viewed by government as a commodity rather than a public service, few regulated spaces exist – particularly for children under age three.

In the absence of an affordable child care system with universal entitlement, community-based resource-and-referral program staff work hard to help families access child care services. However, parents have the primary responsibility for finding, paying for and assessing the quality of those services. If parents register in a licensed program, their child is more likely to receive their early care and learning from an early childhood educator with one or two years of college who makes, on average, about \$17/hour⁵¹. Licensed programs are required only to meet certain health and safety standards; there is no provincially mandated curriculum and adoption of BC’s well-respected Early Learning Framework is voluntary. With only enough licensed spaces for one in five children, and high parent fees, many parents actually rely on unregulated care – unmonitored for health and safety, and where care by a trained early childhood educator is much less likely.

While some municipalities and other groups work with child care providers to plan the location and ages served for new programs, there is no centralized planning infrastructure and child care providers who meet licensing standards are generally free to open programs wherever they choose. The provincial government provides the same small grants to both for-profit and non-profit child care providers,⁵² leaving parents to pay the majority of the operating costs.

Outcome – Child care in Canada, including BC, consistently ranks among the weakest in the industrialized world, as measured by public investment, access and quality.⁵³

⁴⁸ <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/topic.page?id=699A7E1C76EF494D9918D067921A86F1>

⁴⁹ <http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2013/12/bc-students-among-best-internationally.html>

⁵⁰ Ferns, C. and Friendly, M. (2014). *The state of early childhood education and care in Canada 2012*. Moving Childcare Forward Project. Toronto: Movingchildcareforward.ca. Report indicates (p. 2) that mothers labour force participation varies between 70% and 84%, depending on the age of their children.

⁵¹ Ferns, C. and Friendly, M. (2014). *The state of early childhood education and care in Canada 2012*. Moving Childcare Forward Project. Toronto: Movingchildcareforward.ca . p. 18.

⁵² http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/major_capital.htm

⁵³ In addition to the UNICEF reports referenced previously, see http://www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/BN_EarlyLearning06.pdf

Other early years programs fall between education and child care in regards to the attributes described above. Generally, they are delivered by non-profit rather than for-profit agencies. While some may charge families a nominal fee, they combine public and philanthropic funding to cover most of the costs of operating their programs. Service levels, hours of operation, staff compensation and service expansion are all limited more by access to funding than by concerns about the affordability of program user fees.

First Call partners are sometimes asked if we should look somewhere other than government for support: for example, to call on employers to reduce the time, income and service squeeze on families by providing more family-friendly workplaces, supporting improved work/life balance, providing child care services and/or paying living wages. While some employers have responded to some of these ideas the suggestion appears to view business as a single collaborative entity. It is not, and relying on business is no substitute for the systemic, rights-based investments which only government can make. Recognizing this reality, First Call encourages employers to support our public policy recommendations. Their businesses and the economy would benefit from a more skilled and less stressed workforce.

CAN BC BUSINESSES CLOSE THE FAMILY POLICY GAP?

There were approximately 385,900 small businesses operating in British Columbia in 2012, accounting for 98% of all businesses in the province. About 82% of these small businesses were micro-businesses with fewer than five employees. The jobs held by the estimated 1,032,700 people employed by small business accounted for 55% of private sector employment.

Small Business Profile 2013: British Columbia

Support for First Call's public policy recommendations is growing

Since the *Framework for Action* was first published, First Call and its partners have actively participated in efforts to raise public awareness about poverty and inequality in general, the importance of the early years specifically, and the interrelationships between many social policy issues and BC's economic and environmental health. It is now common for discussions about improving our economy to refer to what are called the social determinants of health.⁵⁴ Recognizing that our health is shaped more by the living conditions we experience, than by medical treatments or lifestyle choices, health-related organizations – such as the Health Officers Council of British Columbia⁵⁵ and BC Healthy Living Alliance⁵⁶ – are utilizing the research behind the social determinants of health to help the public understand health, effective prevention strategies and cost savings in a new way.

⁵⁴Mikkonen, J., & Raphael, D. (2010). *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts*. Toronto: York University School of Health Policy and Management. <http://www.thecanadianfacts.org/>

⁵⁵ See, for example, http://www.phabc.org/files/HOC_inequities_Report.pdf p. 12 and 13.

⁵⁶ See, for example, <http://www.bchealthyliving.ca/healthy-living/health-inequities/>

While early childhood development is specifically identified as one of the determinants, many others (including income and income distribution, social exclusion, Aboriginal status, gender, race and disability) affect children, youth and families and inform First Call's advocacy work.

Growing awareness is also bringing new voices to the table, including those from the business community. From the Surrey Board of Trade,⁵⁷ to the Conference Board of Canada,⁵⁸ to an editorial in the *Vancouver Sun*, calls for action signal the growing understanding that only by addressing the social determinants of health can we hope to achieve a strong economy and a healthy, productive society.

Evidence of the willingness of British Columbians to work on issues of importance, across and between sectors, continues to grow. For example, First Call and many others support a range of public campaigns seeking to advance government policy in ways that will benefit families with young children.

These campaigns include, but are not limited to:

BC'S CHILD RIGHTS PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN
EVERYCHILD.CA

Promotes child and youth rights in everyday life and the UNCRC as a model for all programs, services and support to children, youth, and families. The campaign was launched in 2010 by the Society for Children and Youth of BC and other partners.

BC POVERTY REDUCTION COALITION *BCPOVERTYREDUCTION.CA*

Includes community and non-profit groups, faith groups, health organizations, First Nations and Aboriginal organizations, businesses, labour organizations and social policy groups. With over 40 members and 400 supporting organizations, the coalition seeks a poverty reduction plan from the government of British Columbia that would include legislated targets and timelines to significantly reduce poverty and homelessness and improve the health and well-being of all British Columbians.

“Substantial public investment in human capital [public health and education] yields far greater social and economic returns, both private and public, both in the tangibles of profits and tax revenues and the intangibles of employee and family well-being, than we might otherwise achieve.”

Source: “Affordable child care can bring economic and social benefits. Time for government, business and labour to explore options.” Vancouver Sun, July 24, 2014



⁵⁷ See, for example, Papadionissiou, Susan (2012). Surrey Board of Trade & Children's Partnership of Surrey-White Rock: Business & Families Position Paper.

⁵⁸ See, for example, <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/networks/rsedh/default.aspx>

CAMPAIGN TO REPEAL S.43 REPEAL43.ORG

Section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada provides a legal defense for parents and teachers to hit children, within limitations related to age, degrees of force and parts of the body. This is contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the UNCRC, so advocates aim to persuade Parliament and the Courts to repeal this defense of physical punishment.

COMMUNITY PLAN FOR A PUBLIC SYSTEM OF INTEGRATED EARLY CARE AND LEARNING (\$10/DAY CHILD CARE PLAN) WWW.CCCABC.BC.CA/plan

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC released the \$10/day Plan in response to the deepening child care crisis facing BC families. The plan has been supported by families and organizations including local governments, boards of education, labour, social justice, seniors', women's and community groups, businesses and chambers of commerce.

GENERATION SQUEEZE CAMPAIGN GENSQUEEZE.CA

In 2009 the Business Council of BC commissioned the UBC HELP report *15 by 15: A Comprehensive Policy Framework for Early Human Capital Investment*. The report highlighted the science of early child development, along with the benefits and costs of public investments in policies to reduce early vulnerability. The New Deal for Families emerged from that work and evolved into the movement-building Generation Squeeze campaign, recognizing that younger generations today are particularly squeezed for time, income and services when they have young children.

JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE

FNCARINGSOCIETY.COM/JORDANS-PRINCIPLE

Led by the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, this campaign is named in memory of a First Nations child born with complex medical needs in Manitoba. Jordan died in hospital, never having spent a day in a family home, because of a jurisdictional dispute over funding for his home care. Jordan's Principle calls on the government of first contact to pay for the services and seek reimbursement later. The principle was unanimously endorsed in the House of Commons in 2007 and by BC's premier in 2008, but the Canadian Paediatric Society reports that implementation has been inadequate.

LIVING WAGE FOR FAMILIES CAMPAIGN LIVINGWAGEFORFAMILIES.CA

The 2008 report *Working for a Living Wage* outlined the rationale and principles behind promoting regional living wage standards as a significant child poverty reduction strategy. While focused originally on Greater Vancouver and Victoria, the resulting Campaign – which is led by First Call, in collaboration with a range of partners – has attracted interest from communities across BC and Canada. The campaign is also generating interest from businesses who see the benefits of becoming certified Living Wage Employers.

In April 2010, the City of New Westminster became the first municipality in BC and Canada to pass a living wage policy, a move that proved popular with residents, judging from the 2011 election results.

PROVINCIAL BAN ON SALE AND USE OF PESTICIDES

FIRSTCALLBC.ORG/pdfs/communities/4-pesticidebanstatement.pdf

Because young children are particularly at risk from exposures to environmental toxins, more than 20 health and environmental organizations have issued a joint statement calling on the BC government

to bring in new legislation that prohibits the use, sale and retail display of chemical pesticides for lawns, gardens and non-agricultural landscaping and that provides for public education about the ban and alternatives to chemical pesticides. They have also been working successfully at the municipal level to enact local bans.

SEED TO CEDAR CAMPAIGN SEEDTOCEDAR.COM

The BC Aboriginal Child Care Society promotes this campaign to raise awareness about and support for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development and Care; to recognize the work of early childhood educators; and to advocate they be paid a living wage. The campaign highlights the need for expanded, comprehensive and culturally affirming Aboriginal programs and for stable funding to support existing programs and create new ones in under-served communities.

All these campaigns share a common concern –the well-being of young children and their families – and they complement our call on governments to prioritize the family policy recommendations outlined in this paper.

Our call to action is simple.

Substantial new public policy and investment is required to advance healthy child development and address the scale and scope of the socioeconomic realities facing the majority of families with young children today. Collectively we must work toward this goal.

As research about the importance of the early years continues to grow, the ongoing policy and investment shortcomings in our province and Canada as a whole remain very troubling. Child poverty and early vulnerability rates are still high, access to quality, affordable child care remains out of sight for most families, and long wait times for early intervention services pose serious challenges for families with children who require additional supports.

In short, BC families with young children need more time, income and/or services in order to balance and fulfill their caring and earning responsibilities and to help their children thrive.

Many communities have taken leadership and are working hard to respond to the well-documented needs. While their initiatives are valued and necessary, communities cannot do it alone. And, while governments now acknowledge the need for action, their response to date has been relatively small public investment delivered in an ad hoc manner. This is not enough.

In BC and Canada, significant changes to public policy and substantial investments are required to advance healthy child development and to address the scale and scope of the socioeconomic realities confronting the majority of families with young children today, particularly those who face additional barriers.

FIRST CALL'S - CALL TO ACTION:

- Advances children's rights
- Emphasizes the primary role of families
- Supports communities
- Affirms society's collective responsibility
- Highlights the importance of culturally safe, respectful and relevant services and supports
- Recognizes our unique relationship with, and responsibilities to, Aboriginal peoples
- Prioritizes the supports and services that are unique to the early years
- Calls on governments to build from existing services
- Affirms that we can afford to make substantial and meaningful public investments
- Provides First Call, other organizations, governments and communities with an advocacy tool

THIS CALL TO ACTION:

- Requires governments to take decisive action to fulfill our collective responsibilities to all BC's families with young children.

This *Call to Action* builds on the previously published *Framework for Action*, a framework which defines the components that are essential for an effective early years strategy and recommends ways that those components can “be interwoven, strengthened, enhanced and transformed into an intentionally integrated, adequately resourced province-wide” approach to ensuring healthy child development in BC. These recommendations are still valid today; the Framework is still a blueprint for action, but what is now needed is the political will and commitment to build.

Since the *Framework* was first published (2003) no substantive progress has been achieved because senior levels of government have chosen not to prioritize the required public investments or make necessary public policy changes. In fact, they plead scarcity of resources.

They also divert attention from the need for substantive action by engaging in polarizing debates about how best to support children and families. For example:

- 1 **Should BC introduce more universal programs or more targeted programs for families with young children?**
We need both, and without a universal foundation, targeted programs are less effective.
- 2 **Should we prioritize programs for at-home parents or those in the work force?**
We need both, and they’re not necessarily different. For example, most parents value improved parental leave programs, so they have more paid time at home. And, whether or not they are in the workforce, most parents value high quality, affordable early care and learning opportunities for their young children.
- 3 **Should we focus on strengthening services in local communities or advocate for policy change by senior levels of government?**
We need both, and significant progress cannot be achieved without the latter.

Making children a priority requires bold leadership from governments, so we must intensify our collective efforts to raise public awareness and build the demand that drives the political will needed for change. Making children a priority also requires leadership and advocacy from the business and broader community sectors, not just from the early years sector, where the impacts of inaction are experienced daily.

This Call to Action is a reminder that the research and evidence is now so compelling and widely available that key influencers ignore it at the peril of young children and their families. What is most needed is for governments to make the conscientious choice to prioritize differently. It is time for everyone to responsibly incorporate the need for action on the early years into their public commentary and their recommendations to government.

In the words of author Thomas King (2003): “**Take this story. It’s yours. Do with it what you will . . . But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now.**”

We call on our federal and provincial governments to step up, invest and scale up. Inaction is no longer a choice we can afford or condone.

Appendix 1

Terms of Reference

In March 2003 First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition published *Early Childhood Development in BC: First Call's Framework for Action*. Small revisions were made to this framework in 2004 and 2008. Then, in 2012/13, with support from the United Way of the Lower Mainland, First Call led an extensive provincial engagement process to update and build on the original framework. This process enabled First Call to consider relevant changes in public policies and investments, services and community development; integrate new research and evidence, and draw on the diverse perspectives and collective wisdom of First Call's partners in early childhood development.

These terms of reference were then developed in order to provide clarity to First Call partners and other stakeholders about the framework update project mandate and scope. Specifically, this project “builds from what exists” at First Call: it is grounded in *what we believe, what we know, what we do and what we've already agreed on*.

The following points describe the terms of reference in more detail:

1. **We believe** that all children and youth in BC should have first call on society's resources. First Call emerged during the 1990's following Canada's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. As the protection of children's rights is the primary responsibility of governments at all levels, we believe that organizations and groups such as First Call have important roles to play in monitoring and raising public awareness about governments' progress towards realizing children's rights. Through community consultation and mobilization campaigns, First Call identified and affirmed 4 Keys to Success in achieving children's rights, three of which are particularly relevant to the ECD framework update: a strong commitment to early childhood development (improving pregnancy outcomes, identifying developmental risks early and providing supports, supporting parents of young children, building a system of high quality, affordable, accessible child care); increased economic equality (ending child and youth poverty, reducing the gap between high- and low-income earners, creating more jobs with a living wage); safe and caring communities.
2. **We know** - from research, evidence and lived experience - that substantial public policy change in BC and Canada is required to advance healthy child development and address the scale and scope of the socioeconomic realities facing the majority of families with young children today, particularly those who face additional barriers. Many communities have taken leadership and worked hard to make a difference. While their initiative is valued and necessary, communities cannot do it alone. And, while governments now acknowledge the need for action, their response to date – relatively small public investments in relatively small programs - is not sufficient. Child poverty and early vulnerability rates are still high; access to quality, affordable child care remains out of sight for most families, and long wait-lists for early intervention supports are ongoing.

3. **We do** public education, community mobilization and policy advocacy, driven by the evidence. Organizations that are concerned about child and youth issues and endorse our 4 Keys to Success are welcome to become partners in the First Call Coalition, and provide direct input on our priorities, positions, campaigns and endorsements. While positions and campaigns endorsed by First Call are typically also endorsed by many individual partner organizations, we understand that some organizations do not carry out their own public-policy advocacy activities and campaigns. First Call provides an advocacy space for these partners.

We also invite other interested individuals and organizations to participate in our coalition in a range of ways, including attending our meetings, signing up for our newsletter, volunteering, following us on social media and taking up our calls to action. While we welcome input from everyone, voting on our major positions, campaigns and endorsements is limited to our partner organizations.

4. To date, we **have agreed on** and/or endorsed a range of campaigns and actions that inform all of our work. Related to this project, and in addition to our foundational 4 Keys to Success, First Call supports the call for a provincial poverty reduction plan, the Living Wage for Families Campaign, Jordan's Principle, BC's \$10/day Child Care Plan, Repeal Section 43 (no corporal punishment), BC's Child Rights Public Awareness Campaign, the Seed to Cedar Campaign, the call for BC to ban the sale and use of cosmetic pesticides, and others - including of course, the original ECD Framework.

These terms of reference – what we believe, what we know, what we do and what we've already agreed on – form the starting assumptions for the ECD framework update. The framework builds from this starting place to outline a positive updated agenda that values and supports the rights and well-being of all BC's young children through significant commitments to effective policies and public investments that enable families and children to thrive in nurturing communities.

Appendix 2

Public Investments in Early Years Programs Other Than Child Care (2001–2012)

In recent years, federal transfers to provinces and territories in support of post-secondary education, social assistance and social services, early childhood development and early learning and child care have been consolidated into the Canada Social Transfer.

Although there is no specific requirement for the provinces to continue to spend the same (or any) portion of these transfers on early years programs, the level of funding for early years programs (other than child care) has been maintained and increased by 3% annually (as of 2009/2010). Therefore this analysis allocates the same portion of the Canada Social Transfer to the non-child care early years programs as in the past.

TABLE 3 Public Investments in Early Years Programs Other Than Child Care (2001–2012)

Year (ending March 31)	Total Expenditures Early years programs, other than child care (\$ millions)	Federal Transfers On early years programs, other than child care (\$ millions)	Net Provincial Expenditures On early years programs, other than child care (\$ millions)
2001	150	0	150
2012	289	72	217
Increase in expenditures before inflation	139	72	67
Increase in expenditures adjusted for inflation	91	61	30
Percent of total increase	100%	67%	33%

Notes:

For descriptions of the federal transfers to BC:

<http://www.fin.gc.ca/fedprov/mtp-eng.asp#BritishColumbia>

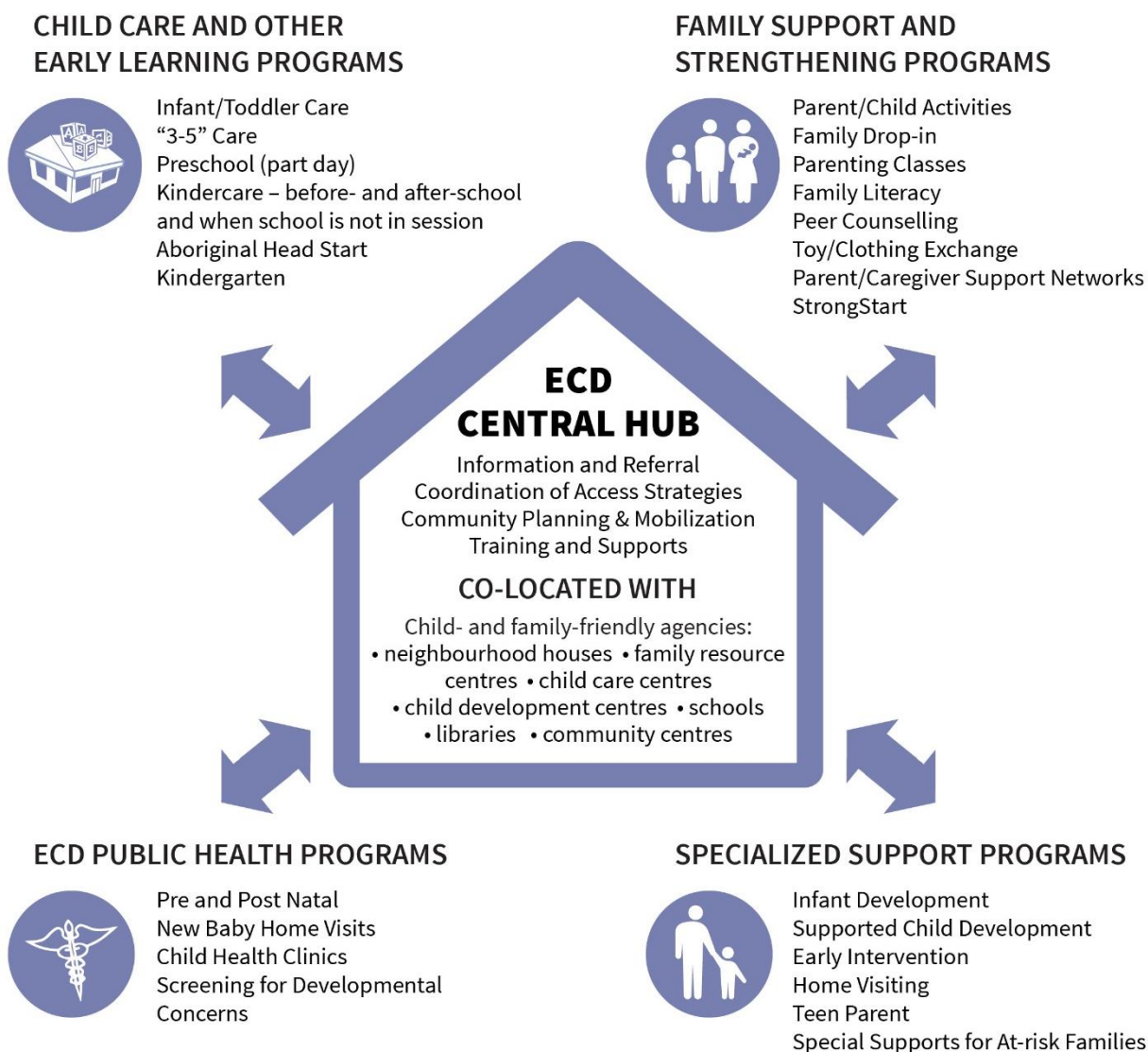
For descriptions of the federal transfers for early years programs:

<http://www.fin.gc.ca/fedprov/cst-eng.asp>

Appendix 3

First Call's Central Hub: A Seamless Web of On- and Off-site ECD Services⁵⁹

Families and young children access ECD services as needed, directly or through referral from the central hub and are involved in community-wide planning for ECD services.



⁵⁹ updated graphic November 2014



WHAT IS FIRST CALL?

First Call is a non-partisan, province-wide coalition of over 90 provincial and regional organizations, engaged communities and hundreds of individuals who come together to mobilize British Columbians in support of strong public policies and social investments for the benefit of children, youth and families.

Our coalition partners are committed to the 4 Keys to Success for Children and Youth:

A Strong Commitment to Early Childhood Development

- Improve pregnancy outcomes (healthy babies)
- Identify developmental risks early and provide supports
- Support parents of young children
- Build a public system of high quality, affordable, accessible early care and learning

Support in Transitions from Childhood to Youth and Adulthood

- Enhance resiliency and reduce risk
- Increase the success of youth in high school
- Increase the readiness of older youth for adult roles

Increased Economic Equality

- End child and youth poverty
- Reduce the gap between the high- and low-income earners
- Create more living wage jobs

Safe and Caring Communities

- Make each community a better place to live for families with children
- Create youth-friendly spaces and supports
- Build safe, violence-free communities
- Increase opportunities for participation and involvement

First Call's charitable activities are hosted by the Vancity Community Foundation and the Coalition is supported by the United Way of the Lower Mainland, the Vancouver Foundation, Vancity, the Health Sciences Association of BC and contributions from individuals and our coalition partners.

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
#810 – 815 West Hastings Street, Vancouver BC V6C 1B4
Phone: (604) 709-6962 / 1-800-307-1212
info@firstcallbc.org • www.firstcallbc.org

Graphic design by
Emilia Walton
Human Early Learning Partnership