

# POSITION STATEMENT

## National Early Learning and Child Care in Canada



The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women

La Federation Canadienne des Femmes de Carrières Commerciales et Professionnelles

**Karin Gorgerat, President**

[www.bpwcanada.com](http://www.bpwcanada.com)

[president@bpwcanada.com](mailto:president@bpwcanada.com)

*Working towards improving economic, political, social and employment conditions for women*

*“Women working for working women”*

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The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) commends the Government of Canada's commitment to a "significant, long-term, sustained investment to create a Canada-wide early learning and child care system" and "subsidizing before- and after-school program costs" as announced in the Speech from the Throne on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020.

Over the past 50 years, there has been no shortage of calls for a national child care system, starting with the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1970. In 1972, BPW Canada passed the first of many resolutions to the federal government calling for national child care. Yet, we are not there.

Canada's child care system is fragmented and, outside of Quebec, is primarily funded by parents' fees which are often unaffordable. According to the Organization of Economic Development (OECD), Canada is falling behind. Canadian families spend almost one-quarter of their income on child care, a ratio that is much higher than in other parts of the world. For single parents, (which are more likely to be women), this number may rise to 32 per cent (Evans, 2016).

It is also important to note that a national child care system would bring the Government of Canada into alignment as a signatory to the United Nation 1989 *Convention on the Rights of the Child* ("right to benefit from child care") and 1979 *Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* ("everyone has the right to work").

There have been many reports on child care over the years, such as *Child Care in Canada by 2020* (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2014), *The Affordable Child Care for All Plan* (Child Care Now, 2019) and *A strategy for recovery. Making affordable child care for ALL a reality* (Child Care Now, 2020).

In 2017, the Government of Canada's *Federal-Provincial-Territorial Report: Multilateral Early Learning & Childcare Framework (ELCC)* set the foundation for a long-term investment in "local, regional and system priorities that have an impact on families more in need, such as lower-income families; Indigenous families; lone-parent families; families in underserved communities; those working non-standard hours; and/or families with children with varying abilities". Based on principles of quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity, the Framework addresses many issues which BPW Canada has raised in resolutions. The Framework also comes with a federal financial commitment of \$17.5B over 11 years with \$1.7B to the Indigenous ELCC Framework.

**COVID-19 Pandemic:** The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fragility of our child care system as well as its importance to our wellbeing and economic recovery (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives et al, 2020). Women have been disproportionately affected. They are more likely to bare the weight of human care, whether it is taking care of children or elderly. Without affordable, quality child care,



women who have worked hard for equality gains are now faced with the difficult choice of returning to work or raising their children.

Women are at the forefront of the pandemic as essential workers, many struggling to find safe affordable child care. And child care workers, also predominantly women, are in urgent need of safe and decent working conditions and compensation.

Child Care Now (2020) reported that during the pandemic, child care centres laid off 70% of their workforce and one-third are uncertain about re-opening. A survey by the Privy Council Office also noted that one in three families were not able to return to a child care program (Akin, 2021). Urgent attention to provide training and adjust compensation are critical to fill staffing quotas and provide quality child care spaces.

On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 Bank of Canada Governor, Tiff Macklin, urged governments to “increase access to child care and reduce its cost to help the labour market rebound, and reduce the risk of long-term economic scarring for women who have disproportionately felt the brunt of pandemic job losses” (The Canada Press).

**Conclusion and Recommendations:** BPW Canada commends the federal government’s commitment to a national ELCC system. Improved access to quality and affordable child care will support women in their right to work, children in their right to benefit from early education in child care, as well as provide an overall benefit to our economy.

The COVID-19 pandemic’s disproportionate impact on women in the workforce and loss of child care capacity has created utmost urgency around this critical issue.

BPW urges the federal government to:

- 1) accelerate federal spending to support a publicly managed and publicly funded national early learning and child care system, and
- 2) establish a federal Secretariat to advise, monitor, coordinate and evaluate best practices among provincial and territorial governments.

BPW urges the provincial and territorial governments, in partnership with the federal government, to:

- 3) prioritize human resource issues, in particular, the education and training of child care workers required to fill the workforce gap and increase ELCC spaces;
- 4) establish ELCC programs that accommodate the unique needs of their communities, including the needs of parents with non-traditional working hours and longer shifts; and
- 5) establish compensation for ELCC workers that is commensurate with their value.



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## Contacts:

Karin Gorgerat, President, BPW Canada [president@bpwcanada.com](mailto:president@bpwcanada.com)

Colleen Babiuk-Ilkiw, VP Resolutions & Advocacy, BPW Canada [resolutions@bpwcanada.com](mailto:resolutions@bpwcanada.com)