



Executive Summary

Specialink: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion works to expand the quality and quantity of opportunities for inclusion in child care, recreation, and other community settings, for young children with special support needs and their families.

Specialink offers the following specific recommendations for the 2008 Federal budget:

1. Include funding for a comprehensive Federal/ Provincial/ Territorial government agreement with effective monitoring and public accountability to advance the full inclusion of children with disabilities and to address child poverty.
2. Ensure entitlement and access to disability related supports for children will no longer be 'means tested' against household income.
3. Develop policies with congruent funding which support families in their care giving role and in the paid labour force.
4. Include a clear action plan with adequate resources to significantly move our country forward in building a publicly funded, pan Canadian inclusive child care system. Based on legislation now before Parliament (Bill C303), the next federal budget should make a significant down payment on a 4 year commitment to create a licensed child care space for every 3 to 5 year old child in the country – including the approximately 10% with special support needs-and consider this as the first rung towards a truly comprehensive and inclusive system for Canadian children ages 0-12 years wherever they may live in our country.
 - Specialink appreciates the parameters of Bill C303 as they relate to children with special needs because if law, provinces/territories would have to consider the needs of children who are frequently excluded from early learning and child care programs, including those with special needs and those in rural and northern communities; and federal funding would be directed only to provinces and territories with plans for providing comprehensive early learning and child care services that are of high quality, universal and accessible.
5. Make inclusion goal benchmarks a priority in allocating funding for facilities development and renovation.
 - Congruent with national and international legislation and conventions, the federal government's proposed incentives ensure that "builders" of the promised spaces incorporate best practices for accessible facilities in all stages of planning and implementation, inasmuch as making facilities truly accessible is much more difficult and expensive once classrooms and playgrounds are constructed. To accommodate access to children with disabilities the higher costs related to space creation for children with disabilities must be properly budgeted for; and specific dollars made available so that existing spaces can be retrofitted.
6. Launch a specific child care human resource and training strategy to support the inclusion of children with special needs.
 - Inclusive environment for children with disabilities require a workforce with appropriate developmental training, understanding and support. Yet a recent report¹ by the Child Care Human Resource Sector Council found that at least 1/3 of graduating ECE students did not feel well enough prepared to work with children with special needs. And of course, the overall shortage of well trained and fairly remunerated staff in the child care sector right across Canada weakens the community's ability to be fully inclusive.
 - To address similar concerns in the USA, where federal legislation entitles preschool children with disabilities to community based service, the Department of Education² recently awarded the National Professional Development Center on Inclusion a 5-year grant from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services to address policy needs, resource issues and practice concerns.

¹ Child Care Human Resource Sector Council, 2007 Spring Bulletin, Special Issue on Inclusion

² http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~npdci/assets/media/NPDCI_FactSheet_6-2007.pdf



Specialink: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion works to expand the quality and quantity of opportunities for inclusion in child care, recreation, and other community settings, for young children with special support needs and their families. Since our founding in 1989, we have put researchers, trainers, policy makers, parents, early childhood educators and centre directors in touch with the best inclusive practices on the frontlines of child care. As such, we address services, systems and policies related to our goals and our focus is on capacity development and knowledge exchange. Specialink has contributed to the research, the policy debate and the training of child care staff on strategies and practices that makes inclusion of children with special needs a more common reality.

Our membership is inclusive of a diverse range of affiliations in all regions of the country, including the north. These include parents, inclusion/intervention consultants, trainers and students, child care practitioners and disability organizations (Community Living Manitoba); ECE training institutions (Red River College); Family Resource agencies (Goose Bay Military Family Resource Centre); service providers (Island Montessori House School) ; Early Intervention programs (Cowichan Valley Supported Child Development Program, BC; Preschool Enrichment Program in Brandon, MB); Technical assistance providers (Partnerships for Inclusion Nova Scotia) Professional associations (Early Childhood Care And Education New Brunswick); Aboriginal/Inuit organizations (Mushuau Innu Child Care Centre in Labrador) and funders and licensing agencies such as Saskatchewan Learning, Nova Scotia Department of Community Services, Health and Community Services St. John's Region and Manitoba Children's Special Services.

You have asked Canadians to respond to a series of questions related to the kind of tax system the country needs for a prosperous future. Specialink holds no specific expertise on tax policy, but we do know a fair bit about the kind of inclusive early learning system our country needs for a prosperous future for children and families with special needs. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development uses the term special needs to encompass all children who require additional public or private resources beyond those normally required to support healthy development. This definition incorporates disabilities, difficulties and disadvantages and emphasizes the resources needed to compensate for any of these³ and it is these resources that we will focus upon in our presentation.

While we appreciate the important policy goal of offering families direct financial support to help raise their preschool children, Canadian research shows that an estimated 10% of children have special support needs that require some level of additional supports and/or consultation and training to assure their full participation in community based, "regular" programs. Canadian and international research confirms the extraordinary struggle their parents face in juggling work, family and child care. Their children with disabilities are frequently denied service by child care centres, preschools, family resource programs, and other community supports for young families, for a variety of reasons, including lack of trained staff, attitude and bias, inaccessible spaces, and lack of professional resource consultation (such as speech therapists, physiotherapists etc).

There is little doubt that parents increasingly seek inclusive early childhood services (Bailey, Blasco & Simeonsson, 1992; Freedman, Litchfield and Warfield, 1995; Llewellyn, Fante & Thompson, 1999). Over a decade of research outlines the many positive outcomes related to inclusion (Buysee & Bailey, 1993; Guralinck, 2001; McLean & Hanline, 1990). Qualifiers to this

³ OECD: Diversity, Inclusion and Equity: Insights from Special Needs Provision, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/27/30/26527517.pdf>

positive body of knowledge include having high quality programs and appropriate curricula (Kontos, Moore & Giorgetti, 1998); providing opportunities for incidental learning, role modelling and interaction, particularly for the younger age group (e.g. Carta, Schwartz, Atwater, & McConnell, 1991); and promoting family-centred practices to ensure that families are an integral part of their child's early childhood experience (Bjorck-Akesson, 1997).

Inclusion is not a Canadian entitlement leaving parents and early childhood professionals to rely on inconsistent policy leadership and practice initiatives to make this process successful. There are significant gaps in service. For example, many children and youth with special needs in rural and northern Canada lack essential services⁴. Where services do exist, they are often culturally or linguistically inappropriate. Meeting the needs of children with special needs in rural, northern and First Nations communities in Canada deserves special attention by the federal government.

Our recommendations to the Standing Committee on Finance, found on the first page of this brief, are predicated on the following beliefs:

- i. Children with special needs are entitled to attend inclusive early childhood education programs.
- ii. Early childhood education programs should receive adequate human, financial and equipment resources to support children with special needs.
- iii. Children with special needs should be provided sufficient support to enable them to participate fully and successfully in inclusive early childhood education programs.
- iv. The extra cost of supports required by a child to participate in an early childhood education program that meets their unique needs and/or their family's needs, should not be borne by the family.
- v. To ensure all children with special needs benefit from early childhood programs regardless of their families' financial situation, governments should provide fee subsidies to parents of children with special needs. Families should not be responsible for additional costs related to extra staffing, transportation or other intervention costs.
- vi. While the provinces and territories have jurisdiction over child care service design, the federal government has a duty to be proactive on pan-Canadian issues, especially when those are directly related to international and national conventions and legislation that support inclusion. These include The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 23) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

- All individuals must be treated equally, regardless of their race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.
- Section 15 of the Charter permits "any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups ..."

Canadian Human Rights Act

- Amendments in 1998 to the Canadian Human Rights Act require employers and service providers to accommodate special needs *short of undue hardship*, including those of people with disabilities.

Through these various mechanisms, Canada commits to full citizenship for persons with disabilities. However, full citizenship can only be made real by ensuring *all* citizens, (including our children) have access to the resources they require. Only then, will they experience the true sense of belonging that comes with inclusion.

When Canada compares favourably on international indicators we are all very proud, yet we ignore our shameful standings on international assessments of the rate of child poverty and the

⁴ Summary Report of a Roundtable for Canadian Policy-makers co-hosted by CPRN and CECASN, 2006

fragmented and under resourced nature of our early learning and child care system. Canada spends less on early childhood development than 14 other OECD countries. Ongoing inaction on this key policy front is a long standing barrier to healthy children and communities and the buoyant economy our Finance Minister and Prime Minister strive to attain. Governments must address the issue of child poverty, which is especially pressing for families raising children with special support needs. In fact, Campaign 2000 states that 28 per cent of children with disabilities live in poverty, compared to the national rate of 18 per cent.⁵

When we accept the lowest common denominator, we agree that the majority of families will be unable to access the type of quality early learning and care offered to children in other wealthy countries, and in many we would consider to be at a much lower level than our own. Furthermore, we choose to accept our under-performing economy and concurrent limited progress on critical social issues. Without a clear, legislative framework (as reflected in Bill C303) the unaccountable federal transfers to individuals (as in the Universal Child Care Benefit) and to provinces (as in the 2007 budget) do not build the inclusive system that children, families and communities need.

Canada's debt is lower than the OECD average. Indeed, we are the only G7 country to have a federal budget surplus every year since 1997, ending in fiscal year 2005-06 with a \$13 billion surplus! If we were to commit to building the national system of early learning promoted by families, disability groups and child care supporters this would take up \$5 billion of these already available funds. Even economic conservatives would rejoice at the kind of 2:1 return we can anticipate over the long term.

Policy analysts and economists have already demonstrated that tax cuts, rebates and fiscal incentives will never build the child care system that Canadians want and need. While the Finance Minister may prefer to target collected revenues towards debt reduction in order to be fair and equitable to our 'future generations' we at SpecialLink know that all families, and especially those with children with special support needs, need some of that fairness and equity now. A monthly taxable cheque for \$100 does not provide the kind of early intervention and early learning needed now by families who prefer to have their children participate in developmentally appropriate, high quality and inclusive early learning programs.

The federal government's *Advantage Canada* economic development strategy makes clear its expectation that "as many Canadians as possible have the opportunity to participate in the workforce." Further, "programs need to help people who have traditionally been underrepresented in the workforce" including "Aboriginal Canadians, older workers and persons with disabilities." SpecialLink respectfully points out the apparent contradiction between the federal government's workforce participation goals and its lack of commitment to inclusive early learning and child care services. Child care supports employability for all, immediately and on an ongoing basis-- especially salient for families raising a child with disabilities. To meet this need, Canadians require focused action that will create enough new community-owned part-time and full-time spaces, in licensed family homes and centres, to provide broad access to quality, affordable, inclusive spaces. Furthermore, child care expansion plans in provinces and territories should reflect the needs of children with disabilities.

In last year's submission we shared results of our national study on workforce barriers faced by parents of children with special needs⁶, now 10 years old but still as relevant as ever. We recommended the development of progressive public policies to help parents juggle family and work such as a comprehensive national child care program, promotion of pay equity, honouring ILO conventions on the rights of workers with family responsibilities to equitable treatment in the workplace, and equitable treatment of persons with disabilities. The basic child care issues

5 Campaign 2000 2005. Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada. Decision Time for Canada: Let's Make Poverty History

6 Lero and Irwin 1997. In Our Way: Child Care Barriers To Full Workplace Participation Experienced By Parents Of Children With Special Needs -And Potential Remedies

parents face in today's social and economic climate, and the additional challenges faced by parents of children with special needs, require much more than ad hoc solutions.

We need strong, comprehensive family-supportive policies that help all families in Canada meet their work and family obligations. As a corollary SpecialLink encourages the federal government to measure the inclusivity of their child and family social policy decisions to ensure these family realities are finally addressed.

We choose not to comment directly upon the appropriate form and level of corporate taxes, fees, and other charges, but will share information of interest should you consider mechanisms such as payroll taxes. Columbia has a 30 year history of financing its ECD program through income from payroll taxes with important policy lessons for Canada. According to UNESCO, the mechanism has specific limitations. Firstly, a payroll tax to finance childcare means that revenues rise and fall according to national employment levels and economic crises so funding can never be certain or sustainable in its growth. Secondly, some organizations resent and evade their tax payments; and thirdly, income instability has made programs' own budget preparation and financial reporting difficult. Some business people claim that payroll taxes keep them from increasing corporate profit. A few economic planners assert payroll taxes reduce employment, increase labour costs, and retard private sector development.⁷ UNESCO advises that ECD payroll taxes might complement but not replace national education and health budgets for ECD.

We believe that a collective responsibility must be assigned to Canadian citizens (not just Canadian parents) and businesses to fund those public goods. Despite the 2007 Budget commitment to a 25 per-cent investment tax credit to businesses who would create new child care spaces for their employees, to a maximum of \$10,000 per space—not one business stepped forward to take up this opportunity. The Report from the Federal Government's Ministerial Advisory Committee on the Child Care Spaces Initiative confirmed the unwillingness of the business community to embrace this particular approach to building a child care system. And as we have noted earlier, our recommendation would be to use available surplus dollars rather than increasing taxes to grow the inclusive child care system we can already afford.

We know that children with disabilities have never had “first call” when political spending decisions are made, and that as a result, their parents are regularly denied opportunities to participate in the workforce. International research confirms this conclusion, noting that those parents who are able to work often do so below their skill level and capacity, because of their need to find work compatible with the requirements of caring.

Families with young children, who are often at the early stages of their career ladders (or under or unemployed due to child care access issues) already pay a disproportionate share of the cost of care which should be publicly funded. And as we have shown earlier, Canada already has enough in its surplus to fund inclusive early learning services without the need to levy additional taxes or surcharges upon its citizens.

We call upon the federal government to ensure that Budget 2008 includes a comprehensive and inclusive strategy that moves beyond tax measures and focuses on programme expenditures and that there be very specific direction to community groups and governments that ensure the needs of children with disabilities and their parents are not overlooked in the focus on the universal child care benefit and the unrealized space creation initiative.

⁷ UNESCO Policy Brief on Early Childhood Payroll Taxes for Child Development: Lessons from Colombia Nov-Dec. 2006, No. 35