

A Policy Blueprint For Canada's Children

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Highlights

- Our research and dialogue identified three enabling conditions that underpin good child outcomes: adequate income, effective parenting and supportive community environments. By contributing to all three enabling conditions, policies for children and families form an important part of the blueprint for a coherent societal strategy for children.
- Adequate income, preferably earned income, can be assured by recognizing the cost of raising children, significantly reducing the cost of child care for employed parents, and providing additional income support to families with low earned incomes or maintenance payments.
- Effective parenting can be supported through improved paid and unpaid parental leaves, flexible employment hours and schedules, improved access to health and developmental programs as well as community resource centres, and enhanced availability of developmental child care and preschool for both employed and stay-at-home parents.
- Communities can provide supportive environments for children through access to reliable education, health, social, and recreational services, by providing integrated delivery for all of these services, by creating "child friendly" spaces and systems, and by collaborating across sectors to promote better outcomes for all children.
- It is essential to view these action steps as a "package" that will be fully implemented over time. The *entire* package is needed to ensure that the overall policy mix achieves and maintains a correct balance. The blueprint for action in this *REFLEXION* is meant to shape decisions over the next several years as funding can be allocated and as the capacity to provide key services are created.
- Governments remain key contributors by helping to build consensus through democratic practices and including other stakeholders in envisioning and shaping responses to the needs of families and children. Governments can also provide funding to help make things happen. However, it is employers, voluntary agencies, and public institutions, as well as parents in their many roles - as parents, community volunteers, board members, and so forth - that will determine the final outcome of a societal strategy for children and, in so doing, determine the extent to which Canada improves the outcomes achieved by its young children.
- Canada must stay within the bounds of fiscal prudence and there are other important claims on the public purse for tax cuts and other spending changes, as well as for debt reduction. Nonetheless, our extensive analysis of research evidence and dialogue with Canadians also makes it very clear that the time has come for a sustained societal investment in children and their families. Phased implementation of this blueprint for action will be necessary to sustain the current momentum and build the better outcomes we want for Canadian children.

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