



Boys & Girls Clubs
of Canada

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A NATIONAL CHILD CARE PROGRAM





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Introduction

Boys and Girls Clubs across Canada look forward to working with the federal government to support the timely development and implementation of a national child care program. Clubs see the immense promise of a national child care program to improve program quality and equitable service delivery and support economic and social recovery as we rebuild from the COVID-19 crisis.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada is the largest child- and youth-serving organization in the country, serving 200,000 young people in 775 communities across Canada. High-quality early learning and child care and before and after school programs for children and youth are the foundation of Boys and Girls Clubs' work. Clubs support those who are at greatest risk, especially those from vulnerable communities —Indigenous and racialized children, newcomer youth, children with disabilities and low-income families.

A strong national child care program will strengthen the accessibility of high-quality programs, drive down the cost for families that need it most, improve staff recruitment and retention and support parents and caregivers, especially women, to get back into, and stay, in the workforce. This document lays out the guiding principles that Boys and Girls Clubs across Canada know are vital to the success of a national child care program that works for all children and families across our diverse country. These guiding principles are centered around the key principles of quality and equity, which should remain central to the development of a national program.

Guiding Principles

1. **Before and after school programs for children aged 6-12 must be included in a national child care program** – Boys and Girls Clubs provide high-quality child care for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, but families' needs don't stop when a child enters kindergarten. Many parents need support for school-aged children, 6 to 12 years of age, after the dismissal bell has rung; and particularly in rural communities, before school programs are just as important so that parents can commute to and from work. Evidence shows how important before and after school programs are to child development and to supporting our economy^{i,ii,iii,iv,v}. ***We are asking the federal government to include before and after school programs for children aged 6-12 in the development of a national child care program.***
2. **Parental choice must be maintained with a national child care program not being a one-size fits all approach** – The needs for child care and before and after school programs will look different for families that live in downtown Edmonton, or in Saddle Lake or in Wabana. Canada is a diverse country whose families require diverse kinds of child care and before and after school programs to meet their needs. Some families are looking for child care to be co-located within schools, while others, especially parents of school-aged children, may want to have their child attend a before or after school program where they can learn to cook one afternoon, be playing sand volleyball another and be learning robotics the day after that – at a community-based organization that offers developmentally appropriate skills based and academic programming. Clubs across the

country provide licenced care and other forms of high-quality and safe programming – driven by community and family need and are part of a national body, that ensures compliance with rigorous safety and quality operating standards. Clubs also know that needs change as children grow. ***We are asking the federal government to recognize the diversity of the country and allow room for parental choice within a national child care program for families to choose which kind of care or programming works best to meet their needs.***

3. **Child care and child and youth programs must be developmentally appropriate** – We know that children’s needs are diverse across the wide age range being considered within the national child care program. The developmental needs of children attending before and after school programs are important and need to be considered in addition to those of young children. When quality and regulatory standards don’t allow for the differentiation of young children and school aged children, older children will simply stop attending programming and lose the benefits that before and after school programming instils. Clubs and other community-based operators incorporate engaging and developmentally appropriate child care and recreation-based programs into our national curriculums. ***We are asking the federal government to work with provinces and territories to ensure that child care and child and youth programs’ quality and regulatory standards allow for developmentally appropriate programs and services.***
4. **Staffing models should also support developmental appropriateness** – For child care and before and after school programs to be developmentally appropriate, we need a variety of qualified professionals who specialize in working with specific age ranges. Service delivery and appropriate staffing models should be defined by developmental stages. Clubs employ and value the work of early childhood educators (ECEs), with ECEs specializing in working with children 5 and under. In addition to ECEs, however, Clubs employ a variety of other highly qualified professionals such as Child and Youth Workers, Teachers, and Recreation Specialists that are specialized in working with school-aged children. Many provinces already allow these and other cadres of staff to directly care for school-aged children. We believe that provinces and territories are well positioned to continue taking a leadership role in this aspect with input from providers. ***We are asking the federal government to include the ability for providers to work with several qualified cadres of staff who specialize in specific developmental stages.***
5. **The national child care program must include funding for non-profits** – We believe that investments in non-profit child care operators needs to be central to a high-quality national child care program. Non-profit child care puts quality, equity and safety first, at a time when we have seen other sectors, most notably, in the for-profit long-term care space, fail those who most need the support.

Numerous studies and policy analyses on child care quality, conducted in Canada and other OECD countries, highlight that a non-profit model delivers higher quality, more affordable, and more equitable care and programming than a for-profit model^{vi}. Economists Cleveland and Krashinsky (2004), analyzing a Canada-wide child care dataset, found that non-profits rated about 10% higher in quality than for-profit centres and that for-profit centres were overrepresented among lower quality centres^{vii}. There is also evidence that, as a group, for-profit centres are less likely to provide services for children with special needs^{viii}. This is particularly important within the context of COVID-19 as these are the children who are falling through the cracks.

Charities fundraise to subsidize many of the children using services – making them more affordable and accessible than other child care or before and after school models. In addition, charities, due to their grassroots nature, have strong connections with parents and communities, having built up interconnected wrap around service and support for all ages. Importantly, sustainable levels of direct funding from government will ensure non-profit and charitable child care and before and after school programs’ long-term financial and programmatic health. ***We are asking the federal government to ensure that non-profit and charitable child care and before and after school operators are included, prioritized and well funded within the planned national child care program.***

6. **Non-standard hours - before, during and after school - are vital to a flexible and accessible program** – Families across the country don’t all have the same needs, often requiring different kinds of child care or programming as well as requiring care or programming during non-traditional hours. Families that need non-standard hour programming are often the ones that need support the most. Provincial and territorial regulations will need to be adjusted in some cases to allow operators to provide non-standard hour programming. ***We are asking the federal government to work with provinces and territories to provide flexibility within a national child care program to provide care and programming during non-traditional hours.***
7. **Culturally appropriate programming should be prioritized** – Early learning and child care and before and after school systems must be respectful of language and culture and recognize the unique needs of French and English linguistic minority communities, as well as of newcomers, racialized Canadians and Indigenous peoples. Many Clubs across Canada are leaders in this work, and we would welcome the opportunity to share approaches and resources. ***We are asking the federal government to prioritize the further development of culturally appropriate care within a national child care program.***
8. **Research, innovation, and evaluation are more important than ever** – Clubs across the country are always learning and innovating to ensure we provide the children, youth and families we serve with safe, high-quality, flexible, accessible and affordable child care and child and youth programming. A national child care program must be a learning system. ***Clubs know the importance of resourcing on-going research, innovation and evaluation in this sector and are asking the federal government to expand funding to further this important work during this time of change.***

Conclusion

Boys and Girls Clubs welcomes the opportunity to support and work with the Federal Government in the development of a national child care program. As a large provider of early learning and child care and before and after school programs across Canada, Clubs support those who are at greatest risk, especially those from vulnerable communities. We see historic opportunities for families and our economy as Canada develops a national child care program and appreciate the opportunity to share our guiding principles that we believe must inform a high-quality and equitable national child care program. Clubs look forward to continuing to engage in this critical process.

ⁱ https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson/UserFiles/File/News/Fortin-Godbout-St_Cerny_eng.pdf

ⁱⁱ <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/afterschool-programs/benefits-youth-families-and-communities>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://umanitoba.ca/faculties/health_sciences/medicine/units/chs/departamental_units/mchp/projects/media/Final_BGCW_MCHP_research_project_summary.pdf

^{iv} <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/middleyears/On-MY-Way-Middle-Years.pdf>

^v <https://bgcbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-Impact-Report-Clubs.pdf>

^{vi} <https://theonnc.ca/our-work/our-people/decent-work/supporting-universal-childcare/>

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Ibid.