

**A National Child Development Policy
Position Paper
Approved by the CPJ Board, May 2010**

Executive Summary

Currently, a lack of national policy on early childhood development is having a detrimental impact upon young children and their many families in Canada. It limits the developmental potential of young children, does not treat all children equitably, and it contributes to poverty and gender inequality. CPJ believes that a national child development policy, including a childcare program, should be established in Canada, on the basis that such a program would contribute to the dignity and well-being of young children and their families, particularly those who are poor and marginalized. A national childcare program would help promote child development, reduce poverty, strengthen women's equality and stimulate the economy.

While Canada's GDP ranks among the highest of all industrialized nations, investment in early childhood education and care is consistently among the lowest. Currently, the federal government provides a combination of programs and income support services for young children. However, income supports such as the Universal Child Care Benefit should not be mistaken for a childcare plan.

The current lack of a national childcare program in Canada stems in part from ambivalent attitudes regarding the roles of women in society and the role of government in helping provide childcare. Strong value is placed upon the autonomy of parents to care for their children. As well, both our market-based economy and our society systemically undervalue work traditionally performed by women. These attitudes have contributed to a lack of adequate policies to support families with young children.

CPJ began examining the issue of childcare in the 1980s when it submitted a statement to the Cooke Task Force on Childcare (1984 - 1986), recommending the implementation of a combination of policies to support families with emphasis on parental choice and a flexible, community-based, non-profit model for service delivery. When CPJ re-examined the issue again beginning in 1999, it recommended investment in Early Childhood Learning and Development as a component of a variety of family-oriented policies, recognizing the benefits of ECEC for children. CPJ believes that government can promote public justice by creating policies that help ensure that parents have sufficient resources and services to raise their children in dignity and well-being, and that provide children with opportunities that encourage their development.

In all policies that affect children, CPJ holds that the best interests of children should be a primary consideration, in keeping with a core principle of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Canada has ratified.

CPJ believes a national childcare program should be an important part of a broader comprehensive national strategy of family-oriented policies that aim to reduce poverty, help parents balance work and family life, engage men to a greater extent in care-giving responsibilities, and promote the value of caring labour in wider society. This strategy should include investment in adequate income supports, affordable housing, community support services, accessible and affordable health and educational services, and workplace policies such as flexible hours and on-site childcare.

CPJ recognizes that poverty robs individuals of dignity, and that women and children are disproportionately vulnerable to poverty. Therefore, childcare should be included as a component of any comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

In addition, the broader systemic causes for the high demand for childcare, such as gender and income inequalities, must be addressed through policies that facilitate greater redistribution of resources, limit growth of income inequality, and strengthen social and health programs.

Introduction: Early Childhood Education and Care

In past decades, childcare outside the home has been understood as “daycare” – an institution in which to place children while their parents worked. However, as scientific understanding of early childhood development has grown, it has been found that the experience of quality care combined with education – known as *Early Childhood Education and Care* (ECEC) – can provide multiple benefits for young children compared to other types of non-parental care.¹ In order for children to thrive, this education must be experienced within the context of loving, stable and secure relationships with family and caregivers. Therefore, when the term “childcare” is used in this policy paper, it is intended to be understood as ECEC. When the term “daycare” is used, it is intended to mean non-parental care outside the home that provides a caring environment for children, but is not necessarily educational.

Childcare in Canada today is characterized by high demand, low accessibility, high cost and uneven levels of quality. A lack of quality childcare contributes to poverty and gender inequality. Governments have a responsibility to ensure that parents have access to the resources they need to carry out their responsibilities as primary caregivers for their children. CPJ believes that a national childcare program should be established as an important part of a broader comprehensive national strategy of family-oriented policies that involves all levels of government. CPJ’s position on childcare is a component of our work on poverty reduction, income security, a guaranteed livable income and diversity.

1. Policy Analysis

Current Reality: The Need for Childcare

The last two decades have seen a dramatic rise in the participation of women with young children in the labour force in Canada. In 2004, approximately 70 percent of mothers whose youngest child was between the ages of three to five were engaged in the paid employment, up from 37 percent in 1976.² This trend has similarly occurred in a majority of other industrialized nations over the last two decades.

Historically, women in Canadian society have largely been defined by their domestic roles as mother and homemaker. However, over the last half-century, social values and attitudes have changed significantly with regards to the types of activities that are considered socially acceptable for women to engage in. Women’s participation in the formal labour market is now considered by many to be a significant marker of progress towards the realization of gender equality.

However, for a majority of women, employment has also become a financial necessity. Over the past four decades, declining relative levels of income, a rising cost of living and growing inequality has placed increasing pressure on women with families to engage in paid employment. In the 1950s, a middle-class,

dual-parent family in Canada could often be supported on one income. Today, the majority of middle-class families must rely on two incomes instead of one in order to sustain their standard of living. This increase in formally employed mothers with children under the age of six has been closely followed by a rise in demand for non-parental childcare.

Currently, childcare in Canada for children younger than five years of age consists of a diverse patchwork of arrangements. Formal arrangements include licensed care in either childcare centres or within a home with a licensed childcare provider. Informal care – either within the child’s home or outside the home – is also increasingly common. Informal childcare may be provided by many different members of a family’s social circle and community, including neighbours, relatives and friends.

Childcare in Canada is characterized by high parent fees, low accessibility, little standardization and uneven levels of quality. The only exception to this is Quebec, which introduced an affordable, publicly-funded childcare program in 1998. Demand for childcare is extremely high, with waitlists as long as two to three years in some regions. A lack of access to regulated childcare has led to many families relying on informal care, which can vary significantly in quality. However, even the quality of regulated spaces is uneven and often low. As childcare licensing is a responsibility of each provincial or territorial government, regulations for standards such as health, safety and staff training vary across the country. The general quality of regulated childcare in Canada has been rated as “mediocre to poor,”³ and few programs have been found to achieve high quality standards. A shortage of childcare options can result in parents leaving their children in care that is of less than the highest quality in order to meet work and other responsibilities. Care that is lacking in quality can fail to engage the developmental potential of young children and, in severe cases, have a detrimental impact upon it.

The high cost of childcare also poses a significant barrier for low and middle-income families wishing to access it. On average, childcare costs range from \$850 to \$1,400 a month per child depending upon the region. This cost can severely limit the options of many parents seeking care for their children in order to work, which for many is a financial necessity. A lack of childcare disproportionately impacts women, particularly those who are sole earners. Many unattached mothers have little option but to rely on social assistance until their children enter school.

Other types of policies to assist parents with young children are also currently lacking. While there are many benefits to childcare for children ages three to five years, research has found these benefits to be limited for very young children. Therefore, adequate parental leave policies are crucial for parents of very young children. Currently, maternity and parental leave benefits are provided through the EI system. While the federal government is responsible for providing salary replacements, the provincial governments are responsible for determining the length of leave and conditions of eligibility. Providing benefits through the EI system has a significant impact on accessibility. The number of weeks a woman must work to be eligible and the level of job-protection offered varies by province. This creates inequalities between women living in different regions and marginalizes those who are unemployed or engaged in inconsistent or part-time employment.

Current Government Policies

While Canada’s GDP ranks among the highest of all industrialized nations, investment in early childhood education and care is consistently among the lowest. In 2006, the OECD reported that Canada has the lowest access rate for childcare in the industrialized world, and some of the highest parent fees.⁴ In

contrast to Canada, many countries in Europe provide free, universal pre-school for children beginning at the age of three.

Childcare advocacy groups have been lobbying the Canadian government for a national childcare program since the late 1960s. Over the past three decades, successive federal governments have announced intentions to invest in a national program, but these promises have never been delivered.

The federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal governments share responsibility for providing childcare and related support programs and services for families with children. The federal government provides a combination of child benefit programs and direct childcare subsidies in order to help reduce child poverty and to assist parents with the cost of raising children. The three child income benefit programs currently in place are the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CTTB), the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) and the non-refundable Child Tax Credit (CTC). In addition the federal government transfers funds to the provinces for the provision of services to support families. While earlier agreements with provinces such as the 1999 Children's Agenda provided accountability mechanisms for the use of funds intended for children, more recent social transfer agreements leave the use of such funds at the discretion of provinces. It is no longer possible to know with accuracy how much money in total is spent in support of children and families.

The Universal Child Care Benefit provides parents with \$100 a month for every child under the age of six and is taxable based on the income of the lower-income parent. While the UCCB is described by the federal government as a component of its "Universal Child Care Plan," it does nothing to create childcare spaces and does very little to relieve the high cost of care. It therefore should not be mistaken for a childcare plan. (See Appendix #1) In addition, under the current Universal Child Care Benefit program, some children in poor families receive less, after taxes, than children in wealthy families. This violates the principles of equity and non-discrimination in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The provincial and territorial governments are directly responsible for policies and regulations related to the provision of childcare services. Municipal governments may be responsible for providing childcare services at the direction of the provincial/territorial governments. In all provinces and territories, childcare policies and programs are separate from education for young children. Each provincial and territorial government also provides various types of income supports for families which supplement federal allowances and tax supports.

Policies Being Advocated

Public debates on childcare in Canada focus upon the role that parents, non-parental caregivers, public and private institutions and government should play in providing childcare. In the past, this debate has often been polarized between proponents of policies that provide direct income supports to families and advocates for the establishment of a national childcare program. A related debate centers upon whether childcare centres should be publicly or privately funded.

Case for a national childcare program

Childcare advocacy groups in Canada have been calling on the federal government for decades to introduce a national, publicly-funded, quality childcare program that is affordable, accessible, and promotes child development. The emphasis on these four principles is reflective of current barriers to

childcare. Current government income supplements such as the UCCB are rarely enough to cover the high cost of childcare, and do not create new childcare spaces. Direct income supplements can also encourage the growth of for-profit childcare, which has often been found to have higher staff turn-over rates and lower levels of quality.

Case for direct income supports

Policy institutes such as the Fraser Institute and the Institute for Marriage and the Family advocate in favour of tax breaks (including income-splitting) for parents with young children on the basis that direct income support enables parents to have more choice in what type of care they provide for their children. A primary argument put forth against a national childcare program is that it would do little to assist parents who chose to stay at home with their children or parents employed in shift work or during irregular hours. Concern has also been raised regarding the potential negative impact of non-maternal care outside the home on young children. These institutes advocate that ideally, the parent to stay home should be the mother, a view rooted in ideology regarding gender roles.

Options for Moving Forward

The polarization of this policy debate became most heated during the 1980s. Since then, a greater recognition has developed within child policy advocacy circles that these policies are not necessarily opposed, but can in fact complement one another. The implementation of a variety of child and family policies – including income supports, childcare services, and parental leave – can together broaden the range of options parents have and can help them make decisions that are in the best interests of their child. Essential to these policies is the government prioritization of families with young children, and a national strategy that recognizes the diversity of their needs.

Quebec's childcare program

In 1998, Quebec introduced a publicly-funded, affordable childcare program that provides care for children at the cost of \$7 per day per child. Since the program was introduced, child poverty rates have dropped by 50 percent, and school test scores have gone from among the lowest to among the highest in Canada. As well, the rate of women in both the formal workplace and enrolled in postsecondary education has risen. Generous parental leave was also introduced at the same time as the childcare program. Despite its widespread popularity, Quebec's childcare program has received criticism for its accessibility and quality. Waiting lists can still be long and standards of quality are often minimal. However, despite its shortcomings, Quebec's program goes far beyond any program in Canada to date in addressing the needs of parents for affordable childcare.

Wider Context

Childcare and Gender Equality

Women in Canada experience greater economic insecurity than men due to systemic discrimination in the formal labour market and because they take on an unequal share of unpaid domestic responsibilities. On average, women in Canada earn less than men, are more likely to live in poverty, and are more vulnerable to becoming poor. Despite the introduction of pay equity legislation, women in Canada still earn an average of 71 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts.⁵

Women also have lower earnings than men in large part due to their unpaid household responsibilities. While the majority of women of working age are engaged in the formal labour market, many also take

on the traditional role of caregiver and homemaker. In order to balance these tasks, women are more likely to be engaged in part-time, shift or contract work that offer lower wages and fewer benefits, but more flexibility. This has a significant impact on women's lifetime earnings. It also limits their likelihood of being eligible for unemployment benefits and for maternity and parental benefits.

The major factor in the gender wage gap has been identified as the presence of children. The cost of raising children, combined with a reduced capacity to engage in the paid workforce because of unpaid responsibilities can result in lower incomes for women with children. Affordable childcare has long been recognized as a policy that could have a positive impact on women's equality. Childcare programs can assist mothers with their caring responsibilities, enable them to engage in paid employment if they choose, and provide them with greater flexibility and choice in balancing the two.

Childcare as Poverty Reduction

As a result of their greater economic vulnerability, women with children experience a higher likelihood of living in poverty and a greater risk of falling into poverty. This is particularly true for lone mothers. The poverty experienced by women directly impacts their families, particularly their children. The detrimental impact that poverty has on human health and well-being is substantial and can be long-term. Children who grow up living in poverty are more likely to experience health problems throughout their lives, have lower incomes and be in trouble with the law. Access to affordable, quality childcare can help reduce child and family poverty by enabling women to pursue employment outside the home and reducing the currently high cost of care. As well, high quality care for children has been found to partially mitigate the effects of poverty and disadvantage for low-income children by promoting development and helping alleviate social exclusion.

Childcare and the Economy

Increasingly, economists are identifying investment in childcare programs as being a sound economic policy that can offer short, medium and long-term social and economic benefits to society. Affordable childcare programs can contribute to CPJ's vision of an economy of care by offering opportunities that help children and their families thrive. Promoting the learning and development of children at a young age has been shown to improve school performance and health, and reduce anti-social behavior over the child's lifetime. This not only benefits the child, but society as a whole through savings in health care, social services and the justice system. Childcare also helps enable women with young children to enter the workforce if they choose or pursue higher education, which contributes to a skilled workforce. As well, childcare is a sound investment in social infrastructure, as it creates jobs that are local and environmentally sustainable. Childcare can also encourage families to have more children, which could help ensure our birthrates in Canada remain sustainable as we face an aging population.

Core Principles and Values

Citizens for Public Justice grounds its work in the belief that the earth and all the life upon it are created and sustained by God. All people, including children, are created to live in dignity as God's image-bearers, are called to be stewards of creation and practice justice and compassion as the foundation for peace and joy in their relationships. CPJ believes that every person has a rightful claim to live in dignity, be respected by others and have access to resources needed to live out God's calling. They also have the responsibility to act justly, care for creation and work for peaceful and just relations within society at all levels. As CPJ understands it, the role of government is to promote just relations between people within

God's creation, correct injustice in a way that restores relationships, protect the environment and foster conditions that enhance the common good. Government can do this through adopting fair laws and enforcing them equitably, recognizing rights and responsibilities, identifying and resolving injustices and ensuring access to infrastructure and public services that benefit all.

Responsibility of Parenting

A religious understanding of parenting views children as a gift from God, and understands parents to be entrusted with the responsibility of caring for their children. There are also biological and emotional motivations for parents to provide care for their children. While fathers are taking on increasing responsibility in this regard, mothers generally still fill the role of primary caregiver. Strong value is placed upon the primary responsibility of parents to decide what is best for their children, with the expectation that they have the responsibility to provide their children with a loving, nurturing and stable home environment. However, it is also generally accepted that the state has a role to play in assisting parents with these responsibilities through creating, regulating and providing funding for social and physical infrastructure such as public education and health care.

The state has a responsibility to promote and protect the best interests of all children. This is a primary consideration for all policies and programs that affect children, as recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Best Interests principle applies to all policies, not only when families fail, although then states have a particular responsibility to provide for the welfare of the children involved. In short, while parental roles are truly important, children are persons in their own right and their best interests cannot be totally subsumed within the private world of the family.

Gender and Work

Both our market-based economy and our society systemically undervalue work such as childcare that has traditionally been performed without pay by women within the home. Increasingly, this labour is being offered as services within the market economy. The predominance of women in these professions and the low monetary compensation that they often receive reflects the lack of value placed upon it by our society. This is in part due to underlying social misperceptions that childcare does not demand skill or education, and is not difficult work. If women are to achieve greater gender equality, work such as childcare must be valued by society, both within the formal labour market and beyond it.

Canadians' Current Beliefs on Childcare

In September 2008, Environics conducted a national poll on behalf of the Code Blue for Child Care Campaign. The poll surveyed Canadians' attitudes on the importance of quality childcare. It revealed that 77 percent of Canadians believe a lack of affordable childcare in Canada is a very (31 percent) or somewhat (46 percent) serious problem in Canada today. 83 percent of respondents believed that governments have a very important (35 percent) or somewhat important (48 percent) role to play in helping parents meet their childcare needs.⁶

Another poll conducted in October of 2008 by Nanos Research on behalf of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers revealed that almost twice as many Canadians were in support of a national childcare plan (58 percent) instead of the current Universal Child Care Benefit monthly allowance, which was supported by only 30 percent of respondents. Evidently, most Canadians believe that current government policy on childcare has not sufficiently met the needs of parents with young children in Canada.⁷

2. CPJ's Past Work on Childcare

- In February of 1986, CPJ submitted a pre-budget proposal to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. The document outlined CPJ's proposal for the creation of an \$11 billion Social Development and Job Creation Fund. The proposal included budgeting \$1.3 billion for non-profit daycare facilities, particularly for low-income people.
- During the Cooke Task Force (1984-1986), CPJ advocated for childcare assistance to be provided to families in a way that would respect parental choice in the care for their children. CPJ's statement to the Task Force recommended the implementation of a combination of policies to support families, including a guaranteed annual income, government standardization of childcare quality, and the encouragement of non-profit daycare programs.
- On June 12, 1986, CPJ presented a submission to the Federal Special Parliamentary Committee on Child Care. The submission advocates for the development of a "pluralistic approach to childcare" by strengthening "social infrastructure" to enable various bodies in society to play a role in promoting the well-being of children. CPJ expressed its concern about the creation of a national daycare program, stating that "direct funding to day care centres would restrict parental choice by financially encouraging parents to use the day care option."⁸
- In the 1988 Jan-Feb. issue of *Catalyst*, CPJ expanded its response to the Conservative government's National Child Care Strategy. It praised the strategy for recognizing a diversity of needs, but criticized it for not providing parents with enough choice, establishing quality standards or addressing the low pay and poor working conditions of daycare workers.
- On September 9, 1999, CPJ presented a submission to the Pre-Budget Consultations of the Standing Committee of Finance entitled *Fulfilling the Promise: Let's Invest in Canada's Children*. In it, CPJ recommended investment in Early Childhood Learning and Development.
- In September of 2000, a CPJ analysis entitled "An Early Childhood Development Agreement" states, "childcare should be a choice of parents, and whatever mix of childcare they choose, the government has a responsibility to offer affordable access to a range of early childhood development services, including community services for parents who stay home with their children and programs for children whose parents work."⁹

3. Public Justice Factors

CPJ's understanding of public justice is rooted in a vision for our society which heeds God's call to practice love, justice and stewardship and to work towards the common good. As God's image-bearers, we each have the right to live with well-being and dignity, and to have sufficient access to basic resources. We also share a responsibility to promote the well-being of one another in our society through showing care and respect for our neighbours, in particular for the vulnerable and marginalized. CPJ recognizes that citizens, governments, civil society organizations, and other bodies all have a role to play in promoting justice in society. CPJ believes that governments have a unique ability to promote justice through redistributing resources and providing services and support that encourage people to thrive in all areas of life, focusing particular care for the vulnerable and marginalized. In turn, citizens have a responsibility to call upon their governments to ensure that they fulfill these responsibilities.

One way in which governments can promote human well-being is by supporting families. Families are a fundamental social unit in our society, and play an important role in nurturing and supporting the individuals within them. CPJ recognizes that families take on a diversity of forms that extend beyond the traditional nuclear family of a heterosexual couple and their children to include blended families, same-sex couples with children, children being raised by grandparents or other guardians, and other

variations. As primary caregivers for their children, parents have the very important responsibility of creating a warm, loving, stable and developmentally stimulating environment to help their children grow and thrive. In order to do so, parents must have adequate income for –and access to – sufficient resources, including access to adequate shelter, food and clothing as well as community, education and health services. CPJ believes that governments have a responsibility to ensure that parents have access to the resources they need to carry out their responsibilities as primary caregivers for their children.

Public justice, as CPJ understands it, also respects children as persons and citizens – not totally subsumed under families. States have responsibility to children as citizens as well.

Policies that provide affordable, quality childcare are one way that governments can fulfill this responsibility. Childcare can promote more equitable opportunities and relations within society. It can provide parents with greater flexibility and support in fulfilling their childrearing responsibilities and balancing these with paid employment and other activities. It can offer greater choice for parents and help enable them to make decisions that are in the best interests of their children and not because of financial or other circumstances. It can also contribute to the rights and dignity of children by offering valuable educational opportunities for them that promote their social, linguistic and cognitive development, and strengthen social inclusion.

Childcare is only one of many government policies that can promote public justice by supporting families. A guaranteed livable income, income supplements, extended maternity and parental leave benefits, affordable housing, community support services, accessible and affordable health and educational services, and workplace policies such as flexible hours and on-site childcare all can contribute to the well-being of families.

All levels of government have a role to play in seeking public justice through creating policies that support families with young children, and policies at various levels may be designed to complement one another. Each policy by itself can contribute to an economy of care in which human dignity for all is respected. And when implemented together, they can create a social context in which the health and well-being of children and their families are paramount.

4. CPJ's Position on Childcare

CPJ recognizes that families, in all their diverse forms, are a fundamental unit of society and play an important role in nurturing the individuals within them, particularly children.

As primary caregivers for their children, parents have the responsibility to make decisions for their children regarding the care they receive. CPJ believes that policies regarding childcare should be created with the intention of broadening choices for parents and providing opportunities for children. If children are entrusted to non-parental care, it should be of the highest quality, contribute to their well-being, and provide them with a caring and stimulating environment that encourages their growth and development.

CPJ believes that governments have a responsibility to ensure that parents have access to the resources they need to carry out their responsibilities as primary caregivers for their children. Currently in Canada, parents and guardians with young children often face significant challenges in balancing their children's need for quality care with their need to engage in paid employment and other activities. CPJ recognizes that these challenges stem in part from a lack of social, community and income supports for families

with young children, in particular a lack of quality childcare. Currently, an unclear division of responsibility for childcare between levels of government and an overall lack of prioritization of childcare has led to a failure to meet the needs of young children and their families.

CPJ believes that the best interests of children are a primary consideration for all policies and programs that affect children. While childcare serves many functions, the first priority must be respect for the rights of the children involved.

CPJ believes the need for childcare in Canada is best understood within a wider social, economic and cultural context. Women still face inequalities, in particular greater economic insecurity, as a result of their unequal responsibilities for childcare. Women and children are more likely to experience poverty, which is a violation of human dignity and has serious detrimental effects on both individuals and society at large. CPJ believes childcare is a significant component of any comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

CPJ believes that a national childcare program should be established in Canada. Such a program would significantly assist families with young children, particularly those who are poor and marginalized. The structural details of a childcare program would need to be negotiated between levels of government. However, CPJ recommends that the following principles guide the process of these negotiations.

The program should aim to provide childcare based upon the principles of the best interest of children as a primary consideration, affordability, accessibility, quality, and the promotion of child development and learning. It should be publicly-funded and non-profit. The program should recognize the diversity of families and their needs, and be flexible in design and responsive to changes in demand in order to meet these needs to the greatest extent possible.

A national early childhood development policy will need to recognize cultural and religious diversity, including the perspectives of aboriginal people on early childhood development and sensitivity to the importance of cultural and religious values, as also recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The program should be a joint responsibility of the federal and provincial governments, with individual agreements negotiated for each province if required. As the federal government possesses a much larger tax revenue base than each province or territory alone, it should take on the responsibility of providing the majority of funding for the program, with provinces supplementing these funds as needed. Financial arrangements should take into account recent social transfer funds to provinces for this purpose, with mechanisms to ensure that funds allocated to support children are used for that purpose. The federal government should also establish national minimum standards for childcare regulation to ensure uniformity of standards across the country, to be accompanied by additional provincial regulations. It should also set an adequate salary scale for childcare workers, to be enforced and supplemented at the provincial level.

While the provision of childcare would fall under provincial jurisdiction, to the greatest extent possible the creation of regulated centre and home-based childcare should be focused at the local level, taking into account the demographics and needs of families in the surrounding community.

While there are many benefits to childcare for children ages three to five years, research has found these benefits to be limited for very young children. Therefore, a national childcare program should be

accompanied by extended maternity and parental benefits and other income supports to enable parents with very young children to be cared for at home. Maternity and parental benefits should be universally accessible and provide an adequate level of income to meet basic needs. Benefits should be inclusive of non-birth and adoptive parents as well.

CPJ believes a national childcare program should be an important part of a broader comprehensive national strategy of family-oriented policies that involves all levels of government. This strategy should promote policies that help families make decisions about childcare that are in the best interests of their children and themselves, and not because of financial or other reasons. Policies within this strategy should aim to reduce poverty, help parents balance work and family life, engage men to a greater extent in caregiving responsibilities, and promote the value of caring labour in wider society. Investment in adequate income supports, affordable housing, community support services, accessible and affordable health and educational services, and workplace policies such as flexible hours and on-site childcare should make up the core of this strategy.

Debates over the optimal kinds of policies regarding care for young children – and particularly debates between the merits of childcare versus income supports – often stem from ideological perspectives about gender and parenting roles. However, childcare and family policies must move beyond these ideological frameworks to focus primarily on the needs of children and their parents if their well-being is to be paramount.

Therefore, CPJ recommends that both childcare and income supports be offered as viable, affordable options for parents. The extent to which each is provided should be in accordance to demand from parents for each, and options for combining both types of programs should be offered. In addition to income supports, community services and programs for stay-at-home parents and their children would provide them with opportunities to engage in educational activities and participate in the community.

CPJ also believes that the broader systemic causes for the high demand for childcare – such as gender and income inequality – must be addressed through policies that facilitate greater redistribution of resources, limit growth of income inequality, and strengthen social and health programs in order to value and foster child and family well-being to a greater extent.

5. Activity Strategy

CPJ will consider the issue of childcare as part of our ongoing work on poverty reduction, income security and guaranteed livable incomes. As previously noted, CPJ believes investment in quality childcare to be an essential component of any effective poverty reduction strategy. Therefore, CPJ's position on childcare is an important component of discussions, policy recommendations and public education facilitated by CPJ on poverty and poverty reduction in Canada. In addition, as childcare is considered to be a policy that can strengthen income security, it should also be included in CPJ's work on the topic. It will also be a component of CPJ's work on a Guaranteed Livable Income, as the creation of a GLI would help relieve the poverty experienced by many families with young children and help support them in caring for their children. However, the need for public child care programs remains clear, even within the context of income security programs.

A lack of childcare disproportionately impacts vulnerable and marginalized families in our society. Recent immigrant families with young children are more likely to experience poverty and social exclusion, and therefore are in need of special supports and resources. CPJ's policy on childcare is

considered to be a component of our work on diversity. Childcare can assist new Canadians by helping parents find employment, strengthening social inclusion and engaging both parents and children in community-based educational activities.

As previously noted, a lack of adequate childcare policies in Canada stems in part from the presence of ambivalent attitudes in society regarding responsibilities for childcare. Public education is an important method of helping shape and change these attitudes. CPJ can communicate our position on childcare and facilitate dialogue on the issue through web features, Catalyst articles, newspaper opinion-editorials, letters to the editor and other forms of communication.

CPJ's *Dignity for All* Campaign for a Poverty-Free Canada envisions the creation of a federal poverty reduction strategy with the goal of eliminating poverty in Canada by the year 2020. As childcare is an important policy in reducing poverty, CPJ's position on childcare can be considered a component of the poverty reduction strategy advocated for by the *Dignity for All* Campaign. Public education and advocacy materials for the campaign can include information on the importance of childcare as a method for reducing poverty.

End Notes

¹ Child and Youth Officer for British Columbia, "Special Report on Healthy Early Childhood Development in B.C.," 2005, 1, http://www.rcybc.ca/Groups/Archived%20Reports/cyo_edc_report.pdf.

² Statistics Canada. "Women in Canada: A gender-based statistical report 2005," 105, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/89-503-x2005001-eng.pdf>.

³ Childcare Resource and Research Unit, "Trends and Analysis 2007: Early Childhood Education and Care," 2006, http://www.childcarecanada.org/pubs/other/TandA/Trends_Analysis07.pdf.

⁴ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care," 2006, 299, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/16/44/37423348.pdf>.

⁵ Canadian Labour Congress, "Women in the Labour Force: Still a Long Way From Equality," 2008, www.canadianlabour.ca.

⁶ Environics Survey, "Canada Still Needs Child Care," retained by Code Blue for Child Care, Oct. 2008, www.buildchildcare.ca.

⁷ Canadian Union of Postal Employees, "Most prefer childcare to cheques: poll," October 9, 2008.

⁸ Citizens for Public Justice, "Submission to the Federal Special Parliamentary Committee on Child Care," June 12, 1986.

⁹ Citizens for Public Justice, "An Early Childhood Development Agreement," September 2000.

Appendix 1:

The Universal Child Care Benefit – An Adequate Response?

The Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB), which came into effect in July 2006, provides parents with \$100 a month for every child under the age of six, for a total of \$1,200.00 annually per child. (See: <http://www.universalchildcare.ca/eng/support/>)

The government argued that the UCCB gives families maximum choice in deciding how they would choose to spend money on their children's needs.

As it is provided directly by the federal government, it is not subject to provincial or territorial clawbacks. However, no family actually receives the full \$1,200 annual amount. The benefit is subject to both federal and provincial/territorial taxes in the hands of the lower-income spouse. Thus, the true benefit of the UCCB is substantially less than the monthly cheque received.

As well, the UCCB was quickly criticized for creating serious inequities in the distribution of net benefits according to income level and family type. For example, a one-earner family with one spouse staying at home pays taxes on the UCCB, but usually has no income to speak of, while a two-earner family will pay more tax when they receive the UCCB. (See: <http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/589ENG.pdf>) Other critics argued that the \$2.5 billion spent by government on the UCCB could be more effectively redirected to enrich benefits for families who need income most, as well as to fund the first phase of a national early learning program.

The UCCB is described by the federal government as a component of its “Universal Child Care Plan,” which includes the Canada Child Tax Benefit, the National Child Benefit Supplement and the Child Care Expense Deduction.

However, the UCCB does nothing to create childcare spaces and does very little to relieve the high cost of care. Parents often end up using the UCCB for education savings or financing activities for their children.

While the UCCB can support families with these legitimate needs, it should not be mistaken for a universal childcare plan. The low level monetary compensation the UCCB provides is also reflective of the low value placed upon childcare and caring labour in our society.