

February 7, 2016

Hon. Christy Clark, Premier
Victoria, British Columbia

Dear Premier Clark,

We are writing to seek your leadership and support in working with us to resolve urgent challenges in BC's early childhood intervention (ECI) services for preschoolers. We also wish to share with you the preliminary results of our ongoing work to document systemic gaps. Our request stems from a year-long collaboration with families, community ECI agencies, professionals and provincial partner groups. This work was captured in two reports that we released January 4 to start a broader discussion about how we can all work together to advance solutions.

The Challenges

[A BC-wide initiative](#) to capture parent feedback on ECI services identified three main issues: wait times, lack of family supports, and challenges navigating the complex provincial ECI system. Families are overwhelmed and ECI providers confirm they are seeing more families under severe stress or in crisis.

The second report, [Kids Can't Wait](#), identifies challenges and solutions from the perspective of ECI leaders and professionals who assembled last fall for our [Provincial Summit](#). Challenges include expanding MCFD mandates, unclear policy frameworks, increasingly complex needs, staffing shortages and burnout. Compounding this are operating budgets frozen since 2006 and provincial data gaps.

Too many BC preschoolers can't get the help they need when they need it. Some "age out" while they wait – becoming ineligible at age 6 – or receive watered-down supports as agencies are forced to stretch resources past capacity. Many families don't know these programs exist or how to access them.

Our partnership is now working to fill the provincial data gap on service outcomes, and we wish to bring to your attention first the deeply troubling results of our initial work: **some 5,000 BC preschoolers with special needs are currently waiting for critical ECI services.**

The opportunity

Our community-based ECI providers have the expertise to transform the lives of children with special needs and their families, with significant long-term social and economic benefits for British Columbia. The early years offer a critical window, but too many children are missing the chance to achieve their full potential because we are trying to stretch too little to meet the needs of too many.

The solutions

An urgent and immediate Provincial investment can end waitlists and service dilution, thus ensuring that every BC preschooler starts school ready to learn. **We therefore urge an immediate investment of \$15 million in new dollars for Ministry for Children & Family Development CYSN services in 2017-18, with additional increases of \$10 million annually for the next two fiscal years and future CYSN budgets indexed to inflation.**

This stepped approach will allow the ECI sector to work with government to strengthen data systems, needs assessment and planning, with updated fiscal and policy reform recommendations for future years based on solid evidence.

We applauded your promise to make BC the most inclusive province by 2024. But our young children and their families can't wait that long. We also need to safeguard and strengthen the amazing and committed community programs that have served BC children and families for decades.

We've taken the first steps and are fully committed to continuing our efforts. But we also want to work in full partnership with the Provincial government because we know this is a success story just waiting to unfold, and one that we will all be truly proud of, if we seize this opportunity.

Yours very truly,



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CC: Michael de Jong, Minister of Finance
Stephanie Cadieux, Minister for Children and Family Development