

Brief to the Standing Committee on Finance

Executive Summary

The Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP Canada) has nearly 40 years of experience serving the needs of 500+ member organizations who work with families and their children in communities across Canada. FRP Canada welcomes the opportunity to submit considerations to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance as to how the Government of Canada might best contribute to the well-being of families and children through Budget 2015. While respecting the federal constitutional role, the Government of Canada can demonstrate valued leadership in this policy domain, particularly around families living in conditions of risk.

If all levels of government want to reduce costs of systems such as health, child protection, education, social services and the criminal justice system, budget consideration should consistently focus on, and strengthen investment in, supports for families, especially those with young children. Positive transition through life stages leading to adulthood promotes quality of life for Canadians and encourages labour market attachment; healthy, literate, productive workers are essential to Canada's future economic development. Authoritative research has clearly demonstrated the association between adverse childhood experiences and higher rates of adult physical and social/emotional health and well-being challenges.

FRP Canada's member organizations offer an array of services to thousands of families each month, including: pre-natal and other child and mother health promotion programs, mental health promotion and interventions for infants, children, youth and caregivers; adult-child attachment-based activities; family literacy programs; clothing exchanges; toy and equipment exchanges; community kitchens; parenting groups; ESL groups; school readiness programs; referral to other services and more, as identified by community needs. The diversity of programs reflect the complexity of family composition and circumstance across the country. Together with provinces, territories and others, the Government of Canada has an important role to play with this demographic of Canadian society.

On the Right Track

We believe that this government is on the right track with initiatives such as:

- The Adoption Expense Tax Credit: recognizing the cost to families who offer "forever homes" for Canadian children who need them;
- Promoting community-based healthy living and physical activity initiatives like ParticipAction and Athletescan, especially when programs are made accessible to lower income families;
- The Universal Child Care Benefit and the annual transfer of funds to provinces and territories for new child care spaces which, while being steps in the right direction, are still not facilitating affordable child care for families in most communities;
- The Canada Learning Bond and Canada Education Savings Grant;



- Investments in *Housing First* undertakings;
- A focus on violence against women and girls; and,
- Settlement support for families new to Canada, as immigration can help to establish a pool of skilled young workers ready to assume employment as they transition from school to adulthood.

Recommendations

1. Appropriately resource a national family policy that is nested within a framework promoting social innovation and creative partnering:
 - Unlike many other countries, Canada does not have such a policy framework to capture and recognize the roles, capacities and obligations of all levels of government, sectors and partners aimed at ensuring the best possible beginnings for its youngest citizens.
2. Strengthen commitment and financial resources for federally-funded family support programs such as Community Action for Children (CAPC), Canada Pre-natal Nutrition Program (CPNP) and Aboriginal Head Start on and off reserve:
 - These maintain an outstanding programmatic record as well as a culture of longitudinal evaluation and audit;
 - While federal funding levels have remained stagnant, the breadth of CAPC and CPNP programming and the numbers of families served continue to increase, much due to inspired local host organizations and their strong efforts to attract a broader array of partners. Such efforts while laudable are not an option in all geographic areas;
 - Unfortunately federal funding uncertainty has fostered programmatic and organizational instability for small family-serving entities. This has made it difficult to attract substantive new partnerships.
3. Demonstrate national leadership by facilitating non-traditional, productive partnerships particularly among and between other levels of government, aboriginal organizations, not-for-profits and Corporate Canada. Federal leadership must include funding for initiatives that promote innovation:
 - Federal help is required to increase not-for-profit organizations' capacity in the areas of governance, policy and program development, community outreach and organizational administration and management; as well,
 - Not-for-profits can become effective brokers between government, Corporate Canada and other partners to ensure accountable, efficient and effective implementation of multi-partner initiatives with stewardship of funds.
4. Support for National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) collection and analysis:
 - The large data set, which follows approximately 20,000 children from an early age through young adulthood, has identified effective (and ineffective) parenting styles and has produced much insight about factors that contribute to healthy child development; and,
 - NLSCY data is at various points, constructively linked with broader social census data, thus presenting a more comprehensive picture of the growing up experience of Canadian children and youth within a family context.



Charitable Organizations Recommendations

FRP Canada joins other charitable organizations in offering more general recommendations that will help promote a Canadian culture of long-term and incremental giving and will further support Charities in terms of fully benefiting from donations as well as in honing their business practices.

1. Implement the Stretch Tax Credit for Charitable Giving as an effective way for the Government of Canada to:
 - Strengthen charities' engagement with and ability to serve communities
 - Deliver tax relief to Canadians who make increased personal investments in their communities by recognizing cash donations at any level, large or small, to one charity or to many; and,
 - Encourage engagement with donors of any age group or income level in new and ongoing ways within the communities that Charities serve, recognizing that all causes that Canadians support would benefit from a Stretch Tax Credit.
2. Take action to reduce merchant fees paid when credit cards are used to make donations, or purchase goods or services from registered Charities to ensure donors' dollars go to charitable causes rather than to those same credit card companies:
 - Donors seldom realize that their entire donation is not going to the charity;
 - Charities must report the fees as administrative costs, although never handling the money, at a time of increasing concern about efficiency; and,
 - A federal tax credit is provided based on the entire donation, even though a portion of that donation does not go to the charity.
3. Continue to expand charities' and nonprofits' access to federal business development services to enhance their capacity to generate earned income and serve their communities in a financially sustainable way:
 - The Business Development Bank of Canada, in particular, helps create and develop Canadian businesses through financing, venture capital and consulting services, focusing specifically on small and medium-sized enterprises;
 - These services would be extremely useful to Charities and nonprofits looking to develop or expand earned income activities; and,
 - This would not require significant new federal investment, beyond funds to equip program officers with the tools and knowledge necessary to serve Charities and nonprofits effectively.

Comment

FRP Canada acknowledges the challenges faced by the Standing Committee on Finance as Budget 2015 is developed. The Government of Canada must encourage continued growth and prosperity, while at the same time trying to ensure the well-being of all Canadians. We believe that Canadian families deserve a budget which focuses on strengthening the basic structures of society and uses incremental approaches to reach desired outcomes. Budget 2015 is an opportunity to demonstrate the ability of this government to firmly plan for the long term, laying new pathways toward a strong future for our children and grandchildren; this aligns to core *whole of government* outcomes associated with the 2014/15 Plans and Priorities process, namely:



- A diverse society that promotes linguistic duality and social inclusion
- Healthy Canadians
- Strong economic growth

Our personal experience tells us, and many studies confirm, that parents and families exert far greater influence on their children's well-being than any other individual or institution including child-care providers, health professionals, teachers or schools. If a child is well-supported, especially from conception to about age three, he or she is likely to do well in life and contribute to, rather than draw upon, the financial resources of the nation. Factors such as parental warmth, structure and understanding of child development contribute to healthy child development; factors such as poverty, depression, harsh parenting, poor nutrition, lack of social support, child abuse and neglect often lead to costly negative outcomes.

Families are integral to health promotion, the ability to reach one's own potential and to enjoy the best possible quality of life. All parents benefit from resources and services that help with life transitions especially in the early years. Vulnerable and marginalized families may need specific programs and services to support them in building a healthy foundation. Family resource programs across Canada reduce short and long-term expenditures in the mental and physical health systems, in the child protection system, in the educational system and in the criminal justice system by assisting parents facing tough challenges while raising young children. Although some of these responsibilities are outside federal jurisdiction, leadership from the Government of Canada, buttressed by fairly modest financial contributions, could have an enormous societal ripple effect.

About FRP Canada and its Members

Since 1976, FRP Canada (www.frp.ca) has provided information, resources and learning opportunities to staff members at hundreds of community-based organizations across Canada. The earliest family resource pilot programs in Canada were supported by funding from Health and Welfare Canada in the mid 1970s. These practitioners in turn offer services to many thousands of families with infants and pre-schoolers. Family resource programs or centres are known by many names such as Early Years Centre, Parent Link Centre, Military Family Resource Centre, Family Place and organisme communautaire à la famille. These organizations support families during the stages of pregnancy and early childhood development, periods so critical to long-term outcomes for children. For many parents, the local family resource centre takes the place of the traditional extended family. It becomes their trusted source for parenting information, a friendly access point to other community services, and a place to build skills and confidence.

FRP Canada has a history of collaborative work and leveraging partnerships for initiatives that promote positive health and development for all children and their families. Recent FRP Canada led projects have focussed on positive discipline, family mental health and financial literacy appropriate for newcomers, immigrants and refugees, Aboriginal families and those facing the challenges of life transitions.





National leadership that supports a vibrant network of family resource agencies

Un leadership national au soutien d'un réseau dynamique d'organismes communautaires de soutien à la famille

Next Steps Regarding Budget 2015

FRP Canada would be pleased to take part in further Budget discussions which aim to identify options to support all Canadian families, including parents and caregivers who need the support to raise healthy children and to build resilient communities.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kelly Stone', is written over a faint, illegible printed name.

Kelly Stone

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