



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – March 31, 2016

FEDERAL BUDGET 2016 TAKES AIM AT CHILD POVERTY, MISSES EARLY CHILDHOOD URGENCY

First Call Coalition members were looking for a 2016 federal budget that put Canada's children and youth first and that ensured that BC's children and youth have the resources they need to thrive. We were heartened by a number of new commitments for families with young children, especially the Canada Child Benefit, but were disappointed in the delay and lack of concrete action on a national childcare plan.

The Canada Child Benefit:

- The more generous Canada Child Benefit is the highlight of the 2016 federal budget for low and moderate income families with children. This investment is predicted to lift 300,000 children out of poverty across the country. "We don't yet have a breakdown of how many children in BC will be lifted out of poverty, but with child poverty rates in BC above the Canadian average (20.4% overall and 50.3% for lone-parent families), we can assume it will be significant," said Adrienne Montani, First Call Provincial Coordinator.
- First Call was disappointed, however, that the budget delays the indexation of the Child Benefit to inflation until 2020, which will undermine its effectiveness in the intervening years.
- First Call had recommended scrapping the income splitting for families with children, as it disproportionately benefitted the wealthiest families in the country. The budget wisely commits to implement this change and redirect the tax revenue saved to the Child Benefit.

Early Childhood:

- Knowing how important the early years are for children's development, the biggest disappointment in the budget is the lack of urgency for investing more in critical social infrastructure for young children such as child care. There was no new money earmarked for this fiscal year, and it only offers \$500 million specifically for the development of a national framework on early learning and child care, but not until next fiscal year (2017/18), \$100 million of which is earmarked for Indigenous child care and early learning on reserve.
- Karen Isaac, Executive Director of First Call coalition member the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS) noted, "Despite the 2016 federal budget making some steps in the right direction it appears that First Nations without child care infrastructure will have to wait at least a year to create programs for their youngest citizens, an especially long time during early childhood development. Research conducted by BCACCS in 2007 and 2014 found that federal investment in early childhood development and child care for Indigenous children has remained stagnant since the mid-1990s. This budget does not show enough of an increase to support the kind of urgently required funding that would make a real difference this year."

putting children and youth first

810 - 815 W. Hastings St. Vancouver, BC V6C 1B4

604 709 6962

TOLL FREE 1 800 307 1212

info@firstcallbc.org

www.firstcallbc.org

Other Highlights:

- First Call applauds the move to continue the Child Disability Benefit and to add an additional amount of up to \$2,730 for each child who is eligible for the Disability Tax Credit.
- Increased funding for women's shelters and a national strategy to end violence against women should help to increase the safety of children whose mothers are fleeing domestic violence. Child rights advocates would like to see these efforts strengthened by adding a focus on ending all forms of violence against children, as part of our global commitments in the Sustainable Development Goals and a strong child focus in the promised review of Canada's international development program.
- The promised additional support for young adults and students through increasing non-repayable grants for post-secondary students by 50 percent, raising the loan repayment income threshold and investing an additional \$165 million towards the Youth Employment Strategy, are all welcome first steps to address the debt crisis facing too many young people.
- We also welcome increased funding for First Nations child welfare, education, housing and improved infrastructure on reserves. However, the funding announced for on-reserve child welfare service enhancements falls short of the amount the recent Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling identified was needed immediately to end discrimination against First Nations children.
- We applaud the significant funding for affordable housing, both for new construction and for much needed maintenance and repair, including energy-efficiency retrofits, for social housing units. It's apparent, however, that this funding falls short of what is needed to address the housing affordability crisis in BC.

Other missed opportunities

- First Call and many other advocates have been calling for years for enhanced and more equitable maternity and parental leave benefits. The proposed reforms to the employment insurance system failed to address this pressing issue.
- This budget makes no mention of establishing the long-sought office of a national children's commissioner to bring focus to child rights across government, but the promised appointment of a Prime Minister's Youth Advisory Council may prove useful for federal policy development, if taken seriously.
- The budget missed the opportunity to generate more revenue through progressive taxation, which could have supported more significant investments in the well-being of children, youth and their families.

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition is a non-partisan coalition of over 95 provincial and regional organizations who have united their voices to put children and youth first in BC through public education, community mobilization, and public policy advocacy. www.firstcallbc.org

-30-

Media inquiries:

Sarena Talbot, Communications and Development Coordinator, 604-709-6970