

National Child Care Advocacy Assembly

On Saturday November 18 and Sunday November 19, [Child Care Now](#)—a partner on the Reimagining Care/Work Policies Project—hosted the National Child Care Advocacy Assembly in Ottawa, ON. The first national meeting since 2014, this event brought together child care advocates from across the country—both in person and online—to assess the progress of the Canada-wide system of early learning and child care, and discuss next steps to support an inclusive, accessible, affordable, and high quality system.



Morna Ballantyne gives opening remarks

In her opening remarks, Morna Ballantyne, Executive Director of Child Care Now, looked back on the progress made on early learning and child care since the last national assembly—feminist organizations echoing the child care movement to tell the Trudeau government that “you can’t call yourself a feminist government if you don’t fund early learning and child care,” leading up to the implementation of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care plan (CWELCC) in 2021, when the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated it is possible to mobilize fiscal capacity to urgently meet the needs of families. Morna underscored the importance of proudly defending the work that has been done so far, and mobilizing a strong, diverse movement moving forward to ensure the successful implementation of the CWELCC into the next federal election and beyond.

As Morna said, “we are becoming a diverse movement—we need to be more diverse. That’s a test for all of us.”

The weekend kicked off with a panel involving Susan Prentice and Martha Friendly—who co-lead the Child Care cluster of the Reimagining Care/Work Policies project. They addressed critical challenges facing the child care movement:

- 1. More Funding for Improved Expansion and Access:** Though many provinces and territories have met their fee targets, reducing fees to an average of \$10 per day, too many families cannot access child care spaces across the country.

Susan and Martha stressed how, to build a supply of child care, it needs to be publicly led—without additional funding from the federal, provincial, and territorial



Morna Ballantyne, Susan Prentice, and Martha Friendly

governments to create more spaces, the “popcorn provision” of for-profit childcare will persist, producing inequities for families across the country. Corporate centres that charge exorbitant extraneous fees are liable to swoop in to meet increased demand created by the CWELCC, offering poor pay and working conditions to early childhood educators and poor quality care to children.

2. **Addressing the Early Childhood Education Workforce Crisis:** To build a strong system of early learning and child care, a strong workforce is necessary—after all, new spaces cannot be created without more early childhood educators (ECEs) to provide early learning opportunities and care to the children who will occupy that space. The early learning and child care sector is in crisis across the country, characterized by poor working conditions, minimal wages, and high turnover. Susan and Martha spoke to the importance of strong wages and working conditions for workers in the sector, to ensure the recruitment and retention of ECEs and other child care workers to build a strong child care system.
3. **Swift Action:** Bill C-35, national legislation on early learning and child care is currently in its third reading in the Senate, which will enshrine long-term, ongoing federal investments in early learning and child care. However, legislation will not be enough to ensure federal commitments. It is critical that, moving forward and especially leading up to the next federal election, access to child care is expanded so that more families can experience the positive impacts of having access to high-quality, affordable child care. As Susan said, this is necessary to ensure the CWELCC cannot be repealed without major political pushback.

After some initial brainstorming on key successes and challenges facing the child care movement, employees from Statistics Canada presented their findings since CWELCC was established, and spoke of the need for more data, and coordination between provinces and territories on data collection. Public servants from Employment and Social Development Canada also gave presentations on the CWELCC, and how the federal government works with provincial and territorial partners.

At the end of the first day of the Assembly, attendees collaboratively established key strategic demands the movement should prioritize as they push local, provincial, territorial, and the federal government to build a strong system of early learning and child care across the country. Key among these were strengthening wages and working conditions for workers in the early learning and child care sector, pushing for more funding for inclusive and accessible spaces, and challenging the expansion of for-profit care.



Facilitator Cathy Remus summarizing findings from small groups

The second day of the Assembly kicked off with a presentation from SpecialLink on the importance of ensuring child care centres are inclusive of children with disabilities, built with universal design principles in mind.

Advocates then organized in small groups to think through how to increase the capacity of the child care movement—across the early learning and child care sector, as well as allies in the public and business sectors—and coordinate advocacy and tactics nationwide and at different levels of government.

Jenna Sudds—Minister of Families, Children and Social Development of Canada—also joined the Assembly to present on the implementation of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care plan, and the federal government’s work with provincial and territorial governments. Attendees had the opportunity to ask questions and stress the importance of additional federal funding in the Plan to ensure its successful implementation.

Throughout the Assembly, there was also ample opportunity for chatting and networking, giving advocates around the country the opportunity to share the work and challenges specific to their region.



Kenya Thompson and Sara Fehr, two Research Assistants on the RC/W Policies Project



Susan Prentice asks Minister Sudds about increased investments in the CWELCC



Minister Jenna Sudds and Vicky Smallman

Morna concluded the Assembly by synthesizing the strategic demands and advocacy strategy, and critical steps moving forward. Though, as she noted, the movement is in a different place than when national advocates last met in 2014, many critical challenges on access, affordability, and the workforce remain.

She highlighted how the [National Day of Action for Early Learning and Child Care](#), which took place on November 30th, presents an opportunity to act. In addition to events, campaigns, and actions planned by Child Care Now’s provincial chapters across the country, Child Care Now organized the following:

- An Open Letter to show support for equitable educator wages and adequate funding to cover the capital costs of increasing licensed, not-for-profit child care programs. [Click here to read it](#)
- A national Phone Zap for Child Care Access on November 30th at 3pm EST and 7pm EST where, via Zoom, advocates came together to call MPs and push for action. Participants were given a script and information on which MPs to call.