



## **Manitoba Child Care Association**

### **Provincial Election 2016 Early Learning and Child Care Issues**

The outcome of the next provincial election, April 19, 2016 will affect early learning and child care services. Political party support for child care can vary significantly so it's important to ask lots of questions to identify if the candidate represents a party that shares your own beliefs. Here are some sample questions about child care to consider asking provincial election candidates and canvassers that come to your door, call you on the phone, or when you attend candidate meetings. The responses to these questions will help you determine what the candidate knows about child care, how committed the party is to building a child care system that works for Manitoba – quality, accessible, affordable, inclusive, not for profit, a well-trained and compensated child care workforce. You can engage candidates in a dialogue by adding in your own personal stories and experiences to help them better understand the issues and your own priorities. Most candidates will welcome a few questions on your doorstep, so choose the ones most important to you.

#### **ISSUE: Young Families Can't Work Without Quality Child Care**

In Manitoba, 68% of mothers whose youngest child is 0-5 are in the workforce. There is serious shortage of child care spaces, which leaves over 12,000 children on Manitoba's online child care registry wait list. Young parents can't work without quality affordable child care, yet many are road-blocked in their goals because of multi-year wait times to access the licensed child care program of their choice – usually preferring one that is licensed, affordable, a reasonable commuting distance, and in their local school catchment area. Child care can be even harder to find for parents who work non standards hours, part time, live in rural areas or have a child with additional support needs.

Q1. How much do you know about Manitoba's child care system? Are you aware there is a serious shortage of licensed child care spaces that keeps parents out of the workforce and training programs? Do you believe child care is an essential public service? Where do you and your party stand on developing enough universal early learning and child care spaces for all families that choose to use the service? (If you are a parent, tell about your own child care needs and preferences.)

Q2. Will your party license and fund enough new spaces to end child care wait times in Manitoba and how long will it take? If not, how many new child care spaces are in your plan and over what time period?

Q3. What support will your party provide for construction of new child care centres and what plans do you have for training of Early Childhood Educators?

Q4. Why is your party platform for early learning and child care the best one for Manitoba?

Q5. For Conservative Party candidates: When your party was in power from 1983 – 1999, licensing of new funded spaces was frozen; there was a cap on the number of children eligible for subsidized child care; fee subsidy for parents looking for work was reduced from 8 weeks to 2 weeks; the additional parent fee not eligible for fee subsidy jumped from \$1.00 to \$2.40 per day; it eliminated the audit grant, and the operating grant was reduced and then frozen from 1993 – 1998. If your party forms government, will Manitoba families and child care service providers experience similar cutbacks?

#### **ISSUE: Parents Need Child Care to Be Affordable**

Child care fees for a preschooler range from a low of \$174.00 a month in Quebec to a high of \$1,033.00 a month in Toronto. [www.policyalternatives.ca/childcare2015](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/childcare2015) Manitoba parents will pay \$451.00 a month for a regulated preschool space in a child care centre. Manitoba has the second lowest regulated child care fees in Canada because government has put a cap on parent fees in licensed facilities, provides a direct operating grant to eligible facilities to help with the cost, and because most child care programs are not for profit. Parent fees in other provinces, like Ontario, without the cap on fees, the direct operating grant, and mostly private for profit operators, are much higher. Fee subsidy is available for the lowest income families in Manitoba but subsidy levels haven't been indexed in years.

- Q5. Parents need affordable child care. Ask the candidate how much he/she thinks parents pay per day for child care. Then ask, if your party forms government, how much can parents expect to pay for licensed child care for infants? For preschoolers? For school agers?
- Q6. Will your party commit to keep the cap on parent user fees and also increase base operating grant funding to licensed child care facilities annually?
- Q7. Very low income families can still struggle to pay for child care. What improvements will your party make to the child care subsidy system?
- Q8. Does your party plan to keep child care fees affordable by ensuring child care centres are not for profit?
- Q9. Does your party intend to make any changes to child care funding? If there will be cutbacks, where will they be made?
- Q10. If your party is elected, will parent fees be more affordable than they are now? Or will they be more expensive than they are now?

**ISSUE: Child Care Needs Early Childhood Educators (ECE's) to Work**

Research shows the quality of care children receive is important for healthy child outcomes. The quality of care in a child care centre or family child care home will be only as good as the skills of the educators. Early Childhood Educator (ECE) wages are 20-25% below market with a long standing reputation as a poorly paying sector. Turnover is high and employers frequently have to hire staff with lower qualifications than required by regulations. In 2013, almost 30% of centres and nursery schools were unable to recruit trained staff. The number of licensed family child care providers has been dropping steadily for more than a decade as incomes for the regulated provider are low.

- Q11. If your party forms government what will it do to ensure educators in licensed centres and licensed homes receive a fair wage? Will your party introduce a market competitive provincial wage scale for child care centre employees and how long will it take?

(If you work in child care or are a board of directors member, ask the candidate if the party will continue to provide funding for: the operating grant, the wage adjustment, the pension plan, tuition support grant for ECE training, the workplace program, annual training grant.

**ISSUE: Manitoba Needs a Strong, Long Term Commitment to Enhance and Expand Early Learning and Child Care**

Manitoba needs a plan to fund new spaces but also to recruit, train, and retain a child care workforce; available capital funding for infrastructure: and strong governance and administration. In January 2015, the report from the Commission on Early Learning and Child Care was released. It details how Manitoba can successfully develop a universally accessible child care system and fund 12,000 more child care spaces in five to seven years while also strengthening Manitoba's early child development framework.

- Q12. The Commission Report provided a comprehensive policy framework for moving forward. Are you familiar with the report and if so, what is your opinion of the options provided?
- Q13. If elected, will your party commit to implement the report, to review and consider the report, or will your party reject the report?
- Q14. Will your party commit to introduce multi-year plans to enhance and expand early learning and child care in Manitoba, and if so what will be the highlights in the first year?

**ISSUE: Manitoba Needs a Strong Federal/Provincial Partnership on Child Care**

Unlike many other Countries, Canada doesn't have a national child care system. The new federal government has committed to be a partner and work with provinces, territories and Indigenous communities to develop a child care framework to deliver more quality, affordable child care services.

Q15. Do you and your party agree with the need for a national child care program and if elected, will your party work with the federal government to dramatically increase the supply of quality early learning and child care spaces in Manitoba and across the country?

Q16. What will your party propose for a joint federal/provincial action plan on child care if your party forms government?

Q15. Manitoba is highly regarded across the country for its leadership on early child development initiatives, including early learning and child care. What will you and your party do to uphold that reputation?

Voter information is available at [www.electionsmanitoba.ca](http://www.electionsmanitoba.ca)

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