

# **'PLUS 5' REVIEW OF THE 2002 SPECIAL SESSION ON CHILDREN AND WORLD FIT FOR CHILDREN PLAN OF ACTION**

## **RESPONSE BY CANADA**

### **1. THE CANADIAN CONTEXT FIVE YEARS AFTER THE SPECIAL SESSION**

Canada is pleased to contribute to UNICEF's Plus 5 review of the United Nations Special Session on Children. Canada was an initiating country of the World Summit for Children in 1990 and participated actively in the preparations for the Special Session in 2002, including in the negotiations of the outcome document entitled *A World Fit for Children*.

As a State Party to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), as well as its Optional Protocols, Canada is strongly committed to promoting and safeguarding the rights of children. This commitment also reflects a broader movement toward increased engagement of all levels of government to ensure the well-being and development of children, in partnership with civil society and the private sector. Since the Special Session, Canada has taken a range of actions to implement policies, legislation and programs that yield positive outcomes for children. In general, these actions have been consistent with the four guiding principles of the UNCRC: the best interests of the child; survival and development; participation; and non-discrimination. Awareness of the UNCRC and the rights of children is also actively promoted.

Canada is making good progress in improving the well-being of children in this country. In this regard, the Government of Canada is committed to meeting the needs and interests of families, as well as building stronger communities. The Government also recognizes that parents have the primary responsibility to nurture and care for their children, and believes that strong families ensure a bright future for Canada. To this end, the Government is taking measures to support children, families and communities in ways that recognize and respect the diversity of their circumstances and needs. One example of this approach is the Universal Child Care Plan, which includes the Universal Child Care Benefit and proposed measures to support the creation of new child care spaces. Through this initiative, which is explained in further detail in section 4.1, the Government is providing supports to help families balance work and family life in ways that best fit their needs. Another example is increased financial support to families of children with disabilities, to help manage their unique challenges.

This document provides a brief description of key measures undertaken by the federal government since the Special Session. Section 4 highlights examples of domestic and international programs and initiatives for children in which the Government of Canada is involved or has made a contribution.

### **2. CANADA'S PLAN OF ACTION**

*A Canada Fit for Children: Canada's plan of action* in response to the Special Session on Children was developed with Canadians from various sectors of society, as well as children. It is a reflection of the priority that all Canadians place on the well-being of children and their families.

The development of *A Canada Fit for Children* was guided by the UNCRC and *A World Fit for Children*, while reflecting key priorities identified during an extensive consultation process.

*A Canada Fit for Children* is a call to action, identifying strategies to which all Canadians can contribute in order to improve the lives of children in Canada and the world. It outlines goals, strategies, and opportunities for action on key priorities within four central themes: supporting families and strengthening communities; promoting healthy lives; protecting from harm; and promoting education and learning. This includes Canada's international priorities.

Canada was one of the first industrialized countries to develop a plan of action following the Special Session and continues to share best practices with the aim of facilitating implementation of the UNCRC in other countries. For example, since its release in English and French, *A Canada Fit for Children* has been subsequently translated into Spanish and serves as a model for the member countries of the Organization of American States in drafting their own national plans of action.

### **3. CANADA'S PROVINCES, TERRITORIES AND ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES**

#### **3.1 THE ROLE OF CANADA'S PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES**

In Canada, all levels of government support the key role families play in ensuring the well-being of children. The Constitution defines the responsibilities of the federal, provincial and territorial governments and each level of government provides different supports for children depending on its jurisdictional responsibility.

All governments in Canada share a mutual concern for the well-being of children and agree that cooperation among jurisdictions is essential to ensure that children remain a priority. Federal, provincial and territorial governments continue to consult regularly on issues related to children through various forums, including the Continuing Committee of Officials on Human Rights, which serves as the principal intergovernmental mechanism for discussion of issues related to human rights treaties.

Across Canada, the provinces and territories have made progress in improving the lives of children. Key measures include enacting or amending legislation to protect children, and to reduce and prevent family violence; investing in programs to help Aboriginal children and families; implementing programs for early childhood development, including child care services; investing in education; and taking steps to reduce the number of Canadian children living in poverty.

In addition to *A Canada Fit for Children*, the government of the province of Quebec has also developed a plan of action entitled *Un Québec digne des enfants* which contains priorities over ten years to improve the health, well-being, development and success of children.

Further information on provincial and territorial initiatives can be found in Canada's most recent reports on the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, as well documents prepared for the review of these reports. Information can also be found in Canada's response to the questionnaire of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, on education of children with disabilities.

#### **3.2 CANADA'S ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES**

The Government of Canada, in collaboration with Aboriginal leaders and provincial and territorial governments, is striving to improve the socio-economic well-being of Aboriginal children and families

(First Nations on and off reserve, Métis, non-status Indians and Inuit). Anticipated results include that children and families enjoy social development outcomes that are reasonably comparable to those of other Canadians, and that social services on-reserve are culturally sensitive and reasonably comparable to those provided by the province or territory in which the reserve is located. More information on the Government of Canada's initiatives for Aboriginal children and families can be found in section 4.1 "National Priorities for Children."

#### 4. CANADA'S NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PRIORITIES FOR CHILDREN

##### 4.1 NATIONAL PRIORITIES FOR CHILDREN

This section provides a brief review of key national measures for children in Canada, and is organized to correspond to the four themes of *A Canada Fit for Children*. Key international actions taken by the Government of Canada are described in section 4.4.

##### a) Supporting Families and Strengthening Communities

Canadians recognize that strong families and communities are crucial to the well-being of children. All of society benefits when parents are supported in their ability to give their children the best possible start in life, and can make choices that best fit their needs as well as the needs of their children. The Government of Canada has undertaken many actions to support families in raising their children and continues to prioritize the well-being of children in the development of policies, legislation and programs.

***Universal Child Care Plan:*** Introduced in 2006, Canada's Universal Child Care Plan aims to help families balance work and family life as they see fit. Through this plan, comprised of the **Universal Child Care Benefit** and support for the creation of new child care spaces, the Government of Canada is recognizing and supporting the diverse needs and circumstances of parents with young children, whether they work in the paid labour force or stay at home with their children, live in a small town, rural community or large urban area.

The Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) provides direct financial assistance paid in monthly instalments of \$100 (up to \$1,200 a year) for each child under the age of six. All families with children under six can receive the benefit which they can use to offset the cost of child care, whether that care is provided in a daycare centre, by a friend or neighbour or by a parent at home.

The UCCB is in addition to existing federal supports such as the Canada Child Tax Benefit (which includes the National Child Benefit supplement). The UCCB does not affect the benefits families receive under the Canada Child Tax Benefit or other federal income tested programs. However, the Canada Child Tax Benefit supplement, a small monthly amount previously received by some families, has been rolled into the new UCCB.

Recognizing that the lack of availability of child care spaces is a challenge faced by many Canadian parents, the second part of the plan is to support the creation of new child care spaces across the country. To this end, the 2007 federal budget proposes a new tax credit to encourage businesses to create child care spaces for the children of their employees, and potentially for children in the surrounding community. It also proposes to provide funding of \$250 million per year to provinces and territories, which have the primary responsibility for child care services, to support the creation of

child care spaces that are responsive to the needs of parents and are administered in an efficient and accountable manner.

Canada's Universal Child Care Plan is in addition to existing federal initiatives in support of families with children. These include the Child Care Expense Deduction as well as intergovernmental initiatives to enhance programs and services. The deduction allows working parents to subtract child care expenses that arise as a result of pursuing an education, employment or carrying on a business, from income when determining personal income taxes. In addition, under the Early Childhood Development Agreement (September 2000) and the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care (March 2003), the Government of Canada provides annual cash transfers (amounting to \$850 million in 2007-08) through the Canada Social Transfer (CST) to the provinces and territories to support their investments in early childhood development, including child care. Budget 2007 announced the extension of this existing funding provided within the CST to 2013-14, and proposed to provide additional funding of \$250 million per year to the provinces and territories for the creation of new childcare spaces that are responsive to the needs of parents and administered in an accountable and efficient manner. In addition, Budget 2007 began identifying separately federal support for each priority area within the CST – post-secondary education, social programs, and support for children – to ensure greater transparency. Total CST funding of \$1.1 billion will continue to grow over time as a result of the annual 3% escalator that is part of the renewed CST, ensuring long-term, predictable and growing federal support for children.

***The Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB)*** is the main federal instrument for the provision of income assistance to families with children. It is a non-taxable, income-tested benefit based on family income, and has three components:

- the base benefit which provides assistance to low- and moderate-income families;
- the National Child Benefit supplement, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative which provides additional assistance to low-income families; and
- the Child Disability Benefit which provides a supplement to virtually all families with a child with a severe and prolonged disability.

In addition to the CCTB, a number of tax measures support families with children including the aforementioned Child Care Expense Deduction, the eligible dependant tax credit, and the Registered Education Savings Plans (RESPs). Initiatives undertaken since 2006 include an enhancement of the aforementioned Child Disability Benefit (CDB) and the introduction of the children's fitness tax credit (see page 6). The 2006 federal budget increased the maximum annual CDB from \$2,044 to \$2,300 per child, effective July 2006. In addition, changes to eligibility have been made so that more families caring for a child with a severe and prolonged disability are able to access the credit.

The 2007 federal budget proposed a new non-refundable child tax credit for parents based on an amount of \$2,000 (indexed) for each child under the age of 18. The tax credit will provide personal income tax relief of up to \$310 per child to more than 3 million Canadian families.

***Employment Insurance: Maternity and parental benefits*** provide temporary income replacement for working parents of newborn or newly-adopted children. These benefits are intended to support parents in balancing the demands of work and family by providing the flexibility they need to stay home during the child's first year of life with them.

Parents have the option to use these benefits as best suits their needs. Maternity benefits are available to mothers in the 15 weeks surrounding childbirth, and parents can access 35 weeks of parental benefits, for a combined total of 50 weeks. Over 200,000 Canadians received maternity and parental benefits in 2004/5. On average, parents use 92% of the full year available to them; over 90% of employees have sufficient insurable hours to qualify for benefits; and among women with children aged 12 months and under who had insurable employment in the year before childbirth, 85.6% received maternity or parental benefits in 2005.

***Understanding the Early Years Initiative*** (UEY) aims to strengthen families within communities. It recognizes the diversity of Canadian families by investing in urban and rural communities, as well as Aboriginal, Official Language Minority and new immigrant communities.

UEY recognizes that families and communities play an important role in the healthy development of children and that safe and secure communities can help children overcome potentially negative influences. The UEY initiative is a community learning process, through which parents, community organizations, educators and other concerned community members learn the value of working together and of community research as well as acquiring the capability of making decisions based on evidence.

UEY provides members of participating communities with quality information on family and community factors that influence children's development and on the availability of local programs and services to support young children and their families.

***Separation and divorce:*** Canada is committed to supporting families through the separation and divorce process. In this regard, the Government of Canada's Child-centred Family Justice Strategy will have allocated \$80 million in contribution funding over five years (2003/4 to 2007/8) to provinces, territories and non-governmental organizations for family justice services. Services include mediation, parent education and a range of court-based information and community support services to assist them in reaching child-focused parenting arrangements. These programs and services are required to be sensitive to the fact that children and youth experience separation and divorce at different stages of development and must aim to protect them from violence, conflict and abuse.

In addition, child support and support enforcement legislation and services are in place and monitored to ensure that children receive appropriate financial support from their parents and to reduce conflict between all parties involved in a separation or divorce. As well, public legal education and information material for parents and children and reference material for legal professionals are readily available. These are intended to encourage families and professionals to explore less adversarial means of resolving their disputes in a manner that advances the best interests of the children involved and to promote decisions that are tailored to the individual needs of the children.

***Aboriginal children and their families:*** While progress has been made in improving the life chances of Aboriginal peoples, the challenges the current social programs continue to face include increased children in care rate, increased income assistance rates, high levels of family violence and high levels of children with disabilities. The Government of Canada is working to partner with interested First Nations, provinces and territories to improve First Nation Child and Family Services programming and enhance prevention supports to ensure better outcomes for children and youth on reserve.

In the 2006 Budget, the federal government committed \$450 million for improving water supply and housing on reserve, education outcomes, and socio-economic conditions for Aboriginal women, children and families. In addition to the increased funding announced in the 2006 federal budget, the following are three examples of programs that also provide support to Aboriginal communities:

- **The Federal Strategy on Early Childhood Development for First Nations and other Aboriginal Children** complements the federal/provincial/territorial Early Childhood Development Agreement. The strategy seeks to improve existing early childhood development programs (Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve, Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities, and First Nations and Inuit Child Care); intensify efforts to address Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), with a particular focus on children on reserves; build capacity and networks; advance research and knowledge; and work towards better integration of federal early childhood development programs and services.
- **The Assisted Living Program** supports First Nations people who have functional limitations (because of age, health problems or disability) to maintain their independence, maximize their level of functioning and live in conditions of health and safety. Such supports are also available to children and youth. The program is divided into three components. The In-Home Care component provides financial assistance for non-medical personal care services, such as attendant care, short-term respite care, housekeeping, and meal preparation. The Institutional Care component reimburses some expenses for social support services in designated facilities. Finally, the Foster Care component provides funding for supervision and care in a family setting to individuals who do not require 24-hour care but are unable to live on their own.
- **First Nations National Child Benefit Reinvestment initiative:** Under the National Child Benefit, First Nations have been reinvesting \$52.7 million of income assistance savings in programs and services for low-income families with children in such areas as child care, nutrition, early childhood development, employment and training supports and community enrichment.

## b) Promoting Healthy Lives

Canada is committed to promoting and maintaining the physical and mental health of its children. Healthy living includes not only physical activity and good nutrition, but also participation in society and in other activities.

The 2007 federal budget proposed the creation of a **Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP)** commencing in 2008. It is aimed at helping parents and others save toward the long-term financial security of persons with severe disabilities.

**The Children's Fitness Tax Credit** will help make it possible for more young Canadians to be involved in sport and physical activity while giving their parents a financial break. This measure will help parents offset some of the costs and start children down the road to a lifetime of healthy, active living. As of January 1, 2007, the tax credit covers membership or registration fees for programs of physical activity and is available on up to \$500 per child. The tax credit has been enhanced specifically for children with disabilities to include a higher age limit and augmented credit amount to account for the particular challenges faced by children with disabilities.

The Government of Canada is providing \$10 million over the next two years and \$15 million per year starting in 2009-2010 for the establishment of a **Mental Health Commission**. The Commission will lead the development of a national strategy on mental health, conduct public education programs and serve as a knowledge exchange centre. Through a recommended advisory committee on children and youth, the commission could begin to address mental health issues affecting this age group.

On March 8, 2007, the federal Minister of Health announced the appointment of an ***Advisor on Healthy Children and Youth***. The Advisor will determine how the federal Health Portfolio can best contribute to enhancing the health of children and youth, by reviewing its current activities and programs with a view to assessing what should be maintained or created to effectively contribute to healthy living outcomes. In preparation for a report due in mid-2007, the Advisor intends to meet with a wide range of stakeholders, NGOs, provincial and territorial government, individuals and groups who benefit from children's programs and activities.

***Improving access to health care:*** In 2006, the Government of Canada announced funding of \$2.6 million for a 15-month pilot project that aims to improve access to medical services for children in need of surgery. The pilot project began in January 2007 and will improve health care access for children in six key surgical areas: cardiac, cancer, neurology, sight, spinal deformity and dental treatment requiring anaesthesia. Within one year, one of these areas will be chosen to test a guarantee that will include recourse for patients who are waiting too long to obtain health services.

The Government of Canada is providing up to \$612 million to support jurisdictions that have made commitments to implement patient wait times guarantees. This funding will be available to those provinces and territories that have publicly outlined their plans to implement a patient wait times guarantee in at least one of the five priority areas developed, namely cancer treatment, heart procedures, diagnostic imaging, joint replacement and sight restoration. While some of these areas are targeted towards older age groups, others are of particular relevance to children.

The Government of Canada is providing a one time \$30 million fund, to be spent over three years, to assist provinces and territories in the implementation of patient wait times guarantees pilot projects.

In July 2006, the Government of Canada approved a vaccine for use by young girls and women that provides protection against the two types of human papillomavirus (HPV) that are responsible for approximately 70 per cent of cancers of the cervix in Canada. The Government is providing \$300 million to the provinces and territories over the next three years to support the launch of a national program for the HPV vaccine that will focus on protecting women and girls from cancer of the cervix.

***Autism Spectrum Disorders Initiative:*** In 2006, the Government of Canada announced new initiatives on Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) including the sponsorship of an ASD stakeholder symposium in 2007. The objective of the symposium aims to further the development of ASD knowledge and dissemination. Canada recognizes the importance of research to better address the challenges of individuals with ASD.

***Awareness Campaign to Reduce Children's Exposure to Second-Hand Smoke:*** Children regularly exposed to second-hand smoke are at least 50 per cent more likely to suffer damage to their lungs and to develop breathing problems such as asthma, and have an increased risk of developing emphysema as an adult. In 2006, the Government of Canada launched a marketing campaign to raise awareness of the harmful health effects that second-hand smoke has on children and how to reduce exposure to second-hand smoke in homes and cars.

***Access to health care for Aboriginal children:*** In 2006-2007, the Government of Canada introduced a number of specific measures to improve access by Canadian families to health care services. Specifically, the Government is acting to improve access to some of the prenatal health care services it provides to Aboriginal (First Nations peoples, Inuit and Métis) communities. Pilot projects will be implemented in five to ten communities and will last approximately two years. The projects will work

to test that Aboriginal women who live on First Nations reserve territories across Canada have the opportunity to obtain an initial prenatal appointment scheduled within two weeks of a positive pregnancy test, that appointments are scheduled with a health care provider every four weeks after the initial visit, and that they obtain confirmation of a future appointment for specialist and diagnostic services made within two weeks of the decision to refer a woman with an at-risk pregnancy.

***Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being Program:*** Four Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-being, namely the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare, the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development, the Centre of Excellence for Children and Adolescents with Special Needs and the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, ensure that advanced knowledge and practical tools on key issues related to children's health are developed and disseminated in accessible formats to those who need them most. Their work supports knowledge translation and policy development across all sectors and government jurisdictions. Several of the Centres' products, including an on-line encyclopedia on early childhood development that was translated into Spanish for export to Latin America, are making an international contribution.

***Health Promotion and Vulnerable Populations:*** A number of major federal initiatives on children are intended to reach the most vulnerable, including those who cannot be reached through mainstream programming. These initiatives include Nobody's Perfect, Aboriginal Head Start, Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program and the Community Action Program for Children.

***Pan-Canadian Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Initiative:*** The Government of Canada's commitment to preventing and managing the impacts of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is evident through ongoing federal leadership activities such as the development of the Canadian Diagnostic Guidelines published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal in 2005. In February 2007, the FASD National Strategic Projects Fund will solicit projects in three areas: screening and recording data on alcohol use during pregnancy; FASD training opportunities Canada; and training for the implementation of the Diagnostic Guidelines.

***Canada's Food Guide:*** The Government of Canada released a revised edition of Canada's Food Guide in February 2007. It provides the best and most current information available for eating well and living healthy. The revised edition includes a new feature, offering Canadians information on the amount and types of food they should consume based on age and gender. The guidelines underpin nutrition and health policies, standards, programs, services and other initiatives across the country.

***Canada's Physical Activity and Food Guides for Children and Youth:*** The Government of Canada's initiatives on physical activity and nutrition address strengthening health and education systems relating to physical activity and nutrition; and through the dissemination of educational material to children and youth.

In 2002, the Government of Canada, in partnership with the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP), launched Canada's Physical Activity Guides for Children and Youth. The target audiences for these Guides include inactive children, youth and their teachers, families, physicians, and community leaders. The aim of these Guides is to create awareness and understanding about the importance of physical activity to healthy growth and development and facilitate increased levels of physical activity.

### **c) Protecting from Harm**

Canada is committed to protecting children from harm in Canada and abroad, and will continue to support approaches that promote effective prevention and intervention, recognizing the underlying factors that can contribute to situations of abuse, violence, exploitation or neglect.

***Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking:*** The Government of Canada continues to support a multi-faceted response to combat child sexual exploitation and human trafficking. These efforts focus on strengthening the criminal law to ensure strong denunciation and meaningful sanctions of these offences, effective law enforcement, prevention and victim support.

Numerous criminal law reforms have been enacted and proposed to further strengthen these protections. Recent *Criminal Code* reforms that came into effect on November 1, 2005 provide increased protection to children against abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation including through child pornography, and will facilitate testimony by child victims and witnesses in these cases.

More recently, the Government of Canada has proposed further criminal law reforms to better protect children against sexual exploitation including through Bill C-22, introduced in June 2006, which proposes to raise the age of consent to sexual activity from 14 to 16 years. Other related criminal law reform initiatives propose to provide increased protection to Canadians, including children, against known or repeat sex offenders.

Canada has also ratified the UN *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography* and the UN *Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* and its *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* (Trafficking Protocol).

Canada has strengthened its criminal law response to trafficking in persons through the enactment of three new indictable offences to specifically address trafficking in persons. These offences prohibit: trafficking in persons (punishable by a maximum of life imprisonment); the receipt of a financial or other material benefit for the purpose of committing or facilitating the trafficking of a person (punishable by a maximum of 10 years imprisonment); and withholding or destruction of documents, such as a victim's travel documents or documents establishing their identity, for the purpose of committing or facilitating the trafficking of that person (punishable by a maximum of five years imprisonment). These new human trafficking criminal law offences supplement existing *Criminal Code* offences that are used to address trafficking-related conduct as well as Canada's human trafficking offence enacted in 2002 in the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*.

***Youth Justice:*** Canada is committed to strengthening the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* and to promoting fairness and effectiveness in the application of the criminal law to young people. Enhanced options for police and Crown discretion at the front end, together with statutory presumptions about when the formal court process and custody are not to be used, has lead to meaningful, effective and faster resolutions of less serious offences. In addition, it is important that criminal behaviour be prevented before it has a chance to take root. To this end, the Government of Canada works with the provinces and territories to help communities support youth and promote safer communities.

***Violence, bullying and other forms of intimidation:*** The Government of Canada works closely with its provincial and territorial partners, as well as civil society, in addressing issues of violence, bullying and other forms of intimidation towards children, including effective intervention through laws and programs geared towards those who are victimized and those who are perpetrators.

***North American Consultation for the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children:***

In June 2005, Canada hosted the North American Consultation for the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children. The two-day meeting, held in Toronto, was the culmination of a series of activities that informed the North American contribution to the larger UN study. The meeting was coordinated by UNICEF Canada and included participation by federal government departments, provincial representatives, civil society, children and youth, from Canada and the United States. Also in attendance was the UN Secretary-General's Independent Expert, Mr. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro.

***Family violence:*** Canada is committed to the long-term goal of reducing the occurrence of all forms of family violence in Canada. The Public Health Agency of Canada is responsible for leading and coordinating the Family Violence Initiative (FVI) and for managing the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence (NCFV) on behalf of 15 departments, Crown corporations and agencies. The Government of Canada provides the FVI with \$7 million of permanent annual funding which supports and complements activities across seven departments and agencies. The eight additional federal partners address family violence issues through existing departmental programs and activities.

The FVI promotes public awareness of the risk factors of family violence, including child maltreatment, and the need for public involvement in responding to it; strengthens the capacity of the criminal justice, housing, and health systems to respond; and supports data collection, research and evaluation efforts to identify effective interventions. A broad range of information and educational tools relating to family violence are available from federal, provincial and territorial governments, including a recent Department of Justice website geared specifically towards youth ([www.familyviolencehurts.gc.ca](http://www.familyviolencehurts.gc.ca)).

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, a member of the FVI, also runs a **Family Violence Prevention program**. The department, in collaboration with National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence, the Assembly of First Nations, the provinces and territories and shelter directors, developed a new funding formula for all the shelters. In October 2006, the federal government announced an additional \$6 million in 2006/ 2007 to address the immediate needs of existing shelters and help First Nations communities improve family violence prevention programs and services. This is over and above the \$18.5 million of annual funding already in place. These shelters provide emergency and outreach services to First Nation women and children.

***The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence*** (NCFV) is Canada's resource centre for information on violence within relationships of kinship, intimacy, dependency or trust. The Clearinghouse has developed and published several child-specific publications including: "Aggressive Girls," "Perspectives on the Parent-Child Relationship," "Child Maltreatment: A What to Do Guide for Professionals Who Work with Children" and "Child Sexual Abuse." Additionally, the NCFV continues to disseminate and promote relevant publications developed by FVI member departments including the "Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect."

**d) Promoting Education and Learning**

Canadians place a high value on the importance of education and learning for all children in order to support their full participation in society. While formal schooling is crucial and can be received in a variety of settings, education and learning also refers to the broad range of life experiences and learning processes that enable children, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents and abilities, so as to live a full and satisfying life within society.

Canada's public education system falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories, and all have programs in place to promote education and learning. These are detailed in their sections of Canada's reports to the UN on the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

Federal measures to support children's education and learning include:

***The Canada Education Savings Program (CESP)*** which serves as the main Government of Canada instrument to encourage savings for post-secondary education. The CESP provides financial incentives through two grant programs; the Canada Education Savings Grant (CESG); and the Canada Learning Bond (CLB).

Under the current CESG, the Government of Canada contributes 20% on the first \$2,000 annual Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) contributions for eligible beneficiaries 0-17 years old. The 2007 federal budget proposed that the annual CESG matching limit be raised from \$400 to \$500. Higher CESG match rates of 30% and 40% are available for low-and medium-income families, providing greater recognition and support for parental savings efforts. To increase the attractiveness of saving with the RESP, the 2007 federal budget proposed to eliminate the \$4,000 limit on annual RESP contributions and increase the lifetime contribution limit to \$50,000.

The CLB provides additional support to lower-income families. For each child born on or after January 1, 2004, an initial CLB of \$500 is paid into a RESP for the first year they are in a low-income family. The government will continue to make annual CLB instalments of \$100 for each year the family remains low income, up to and including the year in which the child turns age 15.

To date, the CESP has paid out over \$3.2 billion in grants, helping to leverage over \$21 billion in private savings for post-secondary education.

The Government of Canada funds various family literacy projects and encourages other organizations throughout Canada to invest in literacy. For example, as part of the Government of Canada's Action Plan for Official Languages Minority Communities, the ***Family Literacy Initiative in Official Language Minority Communities*** includes a national commitment of \$7.4 million for the family literacy initiative in official language minority communities for a period of five years. The federal department of Human Resources and Social Development Canada works with these communities to develop and implement strategic action plans on family literacy in every province and territory, with the exception of Nunavut, as it does not have a Francophone organization that works in the area of literacy. It is anticipated that both children and their parents, especially those with poor literacy skills, will improve their literacy by means of enhanced access to high quality learning opportunities.

***New Initiatives in First Nation Education:*** The Government of Canada has launched an Education Action Plan, building on existing initiatives, to strengthen management and governance capacity, improve the quality of classroom instruction, increase parental and community involvement, and support school-to-work transitions. Additional recent initiatives include:

- **The New Paths Initiative**, with funding of \$40 million annually for five years which helps:
  - strengthen First Nation education management and governance capacity;
  - improve the effectiveness of classroom instruction through curriculum and language;
  - improve pedagogy, enhance school activities and the development of technological knowledge in the school;

- support community and parental involvement in the education of children and youth; and
  - facilitate school-to-work transition.
- **The Teacher Recruitment and Retention Initiative**, with funding of \$20 million annually for five years, helps band-operated schools recruit and retain qualified teachers and educators and provide them with professional development opportunities. This includes funding to enhance the salaries of teachers in First Nation schools.
  - **The Special Education Program** provides critical programs and supports to First Nations children residing on reserve who are affected with moderate, severe to profound behavioural and/or physical challenges such as autism, learning disabilities, deafness and blindness. Such programs and services are fundamental components of every elementary/secondary education program in Canada. In 2006/7, \$118 million in special education funding was provided to First Nations to support the delivery of appropriate school based programs and professional services for students identified with having high cost special education needs.
  - **The Parental and Community Engagement Strategy** aims to raise the awareness of parents and community members of their valuable role in their children's education and to support them in that role. It provides financial support to communities to support parents and caregivers in their role as a child's first and most influential teacher, to encourage community involvement in education, to promote a home environment that lays the groundwork for success in the classroom and to facilitate family literacy and native language and culture. Funding for this strategy is \$5 million annually for five years.

**National Child Day:** November 20 has been designated National Child Day. Each year on this day, the Government of Canada recognizes children's rights and promotes awareness of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) through the distribution of child-friendly educational materials. In 2006, Canada celebrated "The Right to Be Heard", based on Article 12 of the UNCRC.

#### 4.2 PROGRESS RELATED TO THE *CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD*

Canada ratified the United Nations *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography* on September 14, 2005, with the support of the provinces and territories. Along with ongoing measures aimed at the safety and well-being of children (described more fully in sections 4.1 and 4.4), the Government of Canada reaffirms its commitment to protect children from harm in Canada and abroad. Canada expects to submit its initial report on this Optional Protocol to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in September 2007, followed by the next report on the UNCRC in 2009.

Previously, Canada has also submitted its second periodic report on the UNCRC and its first report on the UNCRC *Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*.

#### 4.3 OTHER EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL PROGRESS OR ACTIVITIES

**Senate Human Rights Committee Report on Children's Rights:** In November 2004, the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights was authorized by the Senate of Canada to examine and report upon Canada's international obligations in regards to the rights and freedoms of children. The Committee heard testimony from Canadian and international witnesses. It released its interim report in November 2005 and expects to table its final report by the end of March 2007. It is expected that the

final report will summarize the testimony by witnesses who have appeared before the Committee since April 2006 and comment on specific children's issues such as Aboriginal children, youth justice and children with disabilities, including autism. This study has provided a forum for open dialogue and continuing discussion on children's rights in Canada.

#### 4.4 CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL PRIORITIES FOR CHILDREN

Canadians recognize that the rights and protection of children everywhere are a priority. Challenges such as poverty, hunger, disease, natural disasters, armed conflict and terrorism remain the biggest obstacles to realizing the rights of children worldwide. Today, the Government of Canada is considered a leader in international children's rights programming, child protection and children's participation, integrating its learning and experience into each of its priority areas and through the dissemination of tools, research and resources.

***Children's Rights and Protection:*** Canada is actively involved in promoting the rights of children overseas and working for their protection from abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect. To achieve this, Canada explicitly adopts, in its focus on protection work with children, a human rights-based approach to development using the UNCRC and its optional protocols as its guiding framework. It also aligns its work on the Millennium Declaration and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Between 2000 and 2005 Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), invested \$171 million in new programming related to children's rights and protection.

***Children's and Young People's Participation:*** The right to participate in decision-making is viewed as a core principle of Canada's international development programming with children. The Government of Canada has supported the ground-breaking participation of children in several major international conferences, in policy dialogue, in bilateral projects and in research. Canada has been piloting five long-term projects on children and young people's participation in development initiatives. Lessons learned from these pilots are currently being compiled with a view to broadly sharing the experience of these projects.

***Child Protection Research Fund:*** Canada promotes evidence-based programming in children's rights and protection. Through the \$2 million Fund, Canada supported 13 research projects from 2002 to 2006. The core objectives of the Fund were, through targeted and participatory research, to influence policy making on children's issues and to identify practical and sustainable solutions to challenges related to the rights and protection of children. Dissemination and evaluation of the research findings began in 2006 and it is clear that this research has influenced not only Canada's, the UN's and NGOs' policy and programming, but also resource allocation and national policy reform in a number of developing countries.

***Working children:*** Canada considers the worst forms of child labour to be a violation of children's rights as identified in the UNCRC and ILO Convention 182. While Canada supports the abolition of hazardous and exploitative work, it recognizes that some children in developing countries choose to work to ensure their own and their families' economic survival. Non-harmful work that does not interfere with schooling or a child's health can be beneficial. For example, the "Promoting and Protecting the Interests of children who Work in Egypt" project seeks to improve working conditions and learning opportunities of girls and boys through enhancing stakeholders' abilities to act in the best

interests of working children, and assisting working girls and boys to act in their own interest. The Government of Canada is also considering the impact of micro finance programming on children's lives and how it influences children's work and education patterns. The results of a four-country study on this subject will be made available in 2007.

***Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC):*** *A Canada Fit for Children* has reiterated Canada's commitment to continuing to make the protection of children in armed conflict a priority in foreign policy. Efforts have concentrated on ensuring the establishment of a robust normative regime in the form of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005) and on the implementation of these Resolutions. Canada is also a strong supporter, and works in close coordination with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG).

To promote the effective implementation of Resolution 1612 by the Security Council and to maintain focussed attention on the issue, Canada has conducted a number of initiatives, the most notable of which has been undertaken as Chair of a Group of Friends on CAAC amongst non-Security Council members. The Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START) has funded close to \$1 million in 2006 in Northern Uganda for child protection related projects, including funding UNICEF Uganda for the establishment of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism under Resolution 1612.

The Government of Canada has supported over 120 projects addressing a broad range of areas from basic education for children affected by armed conflict, to demobilization and reintegration of former child soldiers, to conflict resolution and health. A prominent example of current programming is the Canada Fund for Africa's \$6 million program for war-affected youth. Canada has also supported research on war-affected children. The Child Protection Research Fund's first project, "Where Are the Girls?" was a ground-breaking and influential multi-country study on girls in fighting forces and was followed by four other projects with a specific focus on understanding the complexities and the differing experiences of boys and girls in situations of conflict.

***Humanitarian assistance:*** Canada strives to ensure that the rights and protection needs of children are included as part of planned humanitarian action. Over the past three years, Canada has provided over \$35 million to UNICEF alone for projects targeting children, and continues to support UN agencies, the Red Cross/Crescent Movement and NGOs working in zones of conflict and natural disaster in their efforts to meet the needs of children and their families. Canada has been a vocal advocate for the legal and physical protection of children in complex humanitarian emergencies and natural disaster contexts, ensuring that our humanitarian assistance partners account for the specific needs of children and youth, and that they are involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs for them. The Government has also pursued targeted diplomatic advocacy initiatives in support of crisis-affected children in various operational contexts. Since 2002, Canada has supported several policy initiatives that would help to enhance the rights and well being of crisis affected children, including: training on international humanitarian law and refugee law; the elaboration of the Minimum Standards on Education in Emergencies; the development of a methodology and handbook to improve the targeting of sanctions and mitigate unintended humanitarian implications; initiatives to prevent and effectively respond to sexual exploitation and abuse in emergency situations; and strengthened monitoring of the situation of internally displaced children and their communities. In addition, as part of its efforts to improve security in refugee camps, Canada sponsored the development by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, of a set of Operational Guidelines on Maintaining the Civilian and Humanitarian Character of Asylum, within which several issues of relevance to children were addressed, such as how best to address separation of armed elements - including child soldiers, as well

as approaches to unaccompanied children, and practical measures to prevent and address sexual abuse and exploitation.

**Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation:** Internationally, Canada supports the prevention of trafficking of persons by addressing many of the factors that contribute to the vulnerability of persons to being trafficked or involved in commercial sexual exploitation. Many initiatives are specifically targeted to the prevention of trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation of women and children, to assisting individuals and their families, and on the promotion and protection of human rights, particularly those of women and children.

**HIV/AIDS:** Canada recognizes the devastating global impact of HIV/AIDS, in particular its effect on women and children, the strain it places on health systems and the impact of the disease on socio-economic development. Through its multilateral and bilateral engagement, the Government of Canada takes a comprehensive approach to HIV/AIDS that recognizes the importance of promoting and protecting human rights, with a particular emphasis on the promotion and protection of the rights of children infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. This includes supporting HIV/AIDS prevention for children in the developing world, while recognizing children's contributions to their families and communities; their resiliency and agency; and also addressing the abuse, exploitation and discrimination experienced by HIV-affected children.

On February 20, 2007, the Government of Canada announced a commitment of up to \$111 million to the Canadian HIV Vaccine Initiative, to which the Gates Foundation will also be contributing up to \$28 million. The initiative will support Canadian researchers and institutions to work with collaborators around the world, including in developing countries, on a range of HIV vaccine research activities. On World AIDS Day, December 1, 2006, the Government of Canada announced \$120 million for the first in a series of new and concrete initiatives to combat HIV/AIDS. Early in 2006, the Government also announced an additional \$250 million over two years for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, of which approximately 60 per cent will go towards HIV/AIDS. Since 2000, the Government has invested more than \$600 million to fight HIV/AIDS in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe.

**Education:** For Canada, basic education is a strategic international priority because of its direct impact on the lives and future of children. Canada is internationally recognized for its expertise in education services and systems and has been a leader in the concern for gender equality and for introducing child-friendly approaches in the classroom. Canada is an active member of the Education For All – Fast-Track Initiative. The Government of Canada's objective is to help countries accelerate their progress toward ensuring that every girl and boy is able to access and complete free, compulsory, quality basic education. Between 2000 and 2005, the Government quadrupled its international investments in basic education to \$555 million. The majority of this investment is made bilaterally, with a focus on Africa, reaching \$100 million annually by 2005. This has produced concrete results, contributing to at least 9 million additional children enrolled (52% of which are girls) in the nine African partner countries where education is a sector of focus.

**Health and nutrition:** In light of the MDGs, the emphasis on children's health and the promotion and protection of the rights of boys and girls to live in a safe and healthy environment continue to be a priority for Canada. On average, the Government contributes close to \$600 million per year to health and HIV/AIDS initiatives internationally, which includes significant investments to improve children's health. Canada is a leading donor to global child health programs in areas such as immunization, micronutrient supplementation and more recently children and HIV/AIDS. For example, Canada is leading the world effort to distribute vitamin A and contributes approximately \$29 million annually to

the Micronutrient Initiative, a global program dedicated to eliminating micronutrient deficiencies in children and women in developing countries. Most recently, Canada had committed \$110 million to the Canadian International Immunization Initiative. Canada is also a substantial supporter of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, providing more than \$200 million to date. Canada partnered with UNICEF for a contribution of \$26 million to deliver a package of life-saving health and nutrition services to children in 11 countries in Africa, which led to an estimated 20% decrease in child mortality. Canada has provided \$75 million over the past 3 years to the World Food Programme (WFP) in support of their school feeding programming in Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal and Tanzania, and helped to ensure that over 500,000 children had access to nutritious meals and a primary education. In these five countries, support from Canada contributed to an increase in the total enrolment of girls by 72% between 2003 and 2004. This translated to 278,000 more girls in WFP school programs. Additionally, each of the five countries which received support from Canada managed to surpass 80% attendance rates which is particularly noteworthy in areas which are normally plagued by high drop-out rates.

***Sharing of information in Latin America:*** Canada undertakes policy development, research, and strategic analysis of trends regarding broad determinants of health regarding children and youth in Canada, and has a number of program models which have been adapted for use in Latin America. Model examples include the Centres of Excellence, Nobody's Perfect Positive Parenting Program, Aboriginal Head Start, Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, and Evaluation. In 2004, the "Nobody's Perfect Tool Kit" was translated into Spanish, and it has since been widely distributed throughout the Americas. In addition, the "Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Guidelines" were translated into Spanish for promulgation in the Americas. These activities represent specific examples of information sharing and the exchange of technical expertise. The program will assist in enhancing parenting skills and improving health outcomes for children and families in the Americas.

***Organization of American States (OAS) Inter-American Children's Institute (IACI):*** The Government of Canada is a Permanent Delegate on the Directing Council of the IACI. The IACI is a specialized agency of the OAS that is charged with implementing the UNCRC in Latin America and the Caribbean. In this capacity, Canada helps foster the implementation of children's rights as set out in the UNCRC, and is a leader in encouraging international co-operation to this end.

## **5. GOVERNMENT OF CANADA INVESTMENTS FOR CHILDREN IN CANADA AND ABROAD**

Canada invests significant resources towards initiatives that are specifically targeted at children. However, children also benefit from investments in programs aimed at the wider Canadian population, such as health care and crime prevention. This section contains a brief summary of Canada's national and international investments for children.

### **5.1 NATIONAL INVESTMENTS**

The Government of Canada's investments in support of children and their families are significant and growing. In 2007 it is projected that spending on the major federal initiatives for children, including income and service supports as well as tax expenditures outlined in this report, will exceed \$17 billion for the first time. With implementation of the initiatives proposed in Budget 2007, Canada's investments for children will increase even further.

Canada's children also benefit from federal investments aimed at promoting the quality of life of the wider Canadian population, in areas such as health care, housing and infrastructure, environmental protection, economic development and justice.

In addition, other orders of government make their own investments in initiatives for children and families. For example, as noted earlier, the provinces and territories have primary responsibility for health, education and social services. Accordingly, they make significant investments in these areas which are of direct benefit to children and families.

Further information on the Government of Canada's investments in supports for children and families are included in federal departments' publicly available performance and expenditure reports, as well as in regular or occasional reports related to children, such as:

- Government of Canada Report on Early Childhood Development Activities and Expenditures (annual);
- Government of Canada Report on Early Learning and Child Care Activities and Expenditures (annual).

## 5.2 INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENTS

As part of its work in areas of children's rights and protection, basic education, health, and HIV/AIDS in developing countries, Canada recently announced major funding initiatives. The following are a few examples of Canada's international funding commitments:

At the G8 Summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2006, Canada pledged a \$24-million contribution to the Education for All Fast Track Initiative, \$1 million for the Global Monitoring Report as well as an increase in bilateral funding to Africa's education sector from \$100 million in 2005/06 to \$150 million annually by 2010/11.

Also at the 2006 G8 Summit, Canada announced \$450 million over 10 years towards the Africa Health Systems Initiative, which will help reduce high infant-, under-five-, and maternal mortality in Sub-Saharan Africa.

On World AIDS Day 2006, the Government announced an additional \$120 million that will be invested, among other things, in research for prevention technologies (vaccine, microbicides) and in support to developing countries' plans to provide treatment services and prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS.

A total of \$45 million over five years will be provided to UNICEF and UNFPA to provide essential drugs and vaccines to prevent and treat common childhood infections in poor Bangladeshi children, as well as reproductive health commodities to improve the health of their mothers, which has a direct impact on the well-being of children. This funding will help to reduce deaths among mothers and children in Bangladesh.

Special attention will be paid in the next few years to children in Afghanistan, including:

- Girls' access to primary education is supported through a \$14.5 million project with Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee – Afghanistan (BRAC). The project will establish up to 4,000 community-based schools and after-school learning programs and train 9,000 new

female schoolteachers. It will reach some 120,000 children in 11 provinces, 85 percent of them girls.

- \$5 million to immunize over 7 million children. These funds will be allocated to the World Health Organization and UNICEF as part of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative.
- A contribution of \$4.5 million has been allocated to UNICEF for a project to assist vulnerable families in Kandahar Province. UNICEF will provide some 20,000 families with non-food items such as tents, blankets and warm jackets, micronutrients for children and pregnant women, as well as health and medical supplies for hospitals and clinics.
- A contribution of \$750,000 to the Micronutrient Initiative to improve the health of Afghan children. This initiative will specifically help reduce iodine deficiency and anemia that hinders childhood development.

## 6. MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

Knowledge development is an essential part of the Government of Canada's approach to supporting the well-being of children and their families, enabling evidence-based decision-making and public accountability.

Developing and sustaining effective policy and program initiatives requires a solid understanding of how children are doing, the issues and factors affecting them, and the real or potential impact of efforts to improve their lives. To this end, the Government of Canada continues to make significant investments in policy-relevant data, research and evaluation. In turn, these investments provide valuable information about what works best for children. In addition, the Government of Canada has made accountability a priority, establishing a number of mechanisms to measure and report on progress.

While it is not feasible to provide a comprehensive overview of all federal data collection, research and evaluation activities related to children, key initiatives which serve as the basis for research and analysis that directly informs policy and program development for children and families include:

- the **National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY)**, a long-term study of Canadian children that follows their well-being and the factors affecting their development from birth to early adulthood;
- the **Aboriginal Children's Survey (ACS)**, designed to provide a picture of the early childhood development of First Nations/North American Indian, Inuit and Métis children under the age of six;
- the **Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS)**, looking at the challenges facing people with disabilities, including children and youth, at home, at school, in the labour market and in the community;
- the **Canadian Incidence Study (CIS) of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect**, examining the incidence of reported child maltreatment and the characteristics of children and families investigated by Canadian child welfare services;
- the **Health Behaviour of School-Aged Children (HBSC) Study**, a cross national school-based survey conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organization on the health attitudes and behaviours of young people aged 11, 13 and 15 from Canada and over 40 other countries;
- **Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile** is published annually and examines the nature and extent of family violence, including violence against children, as well as trends over time; and

- a large-scale evaluation of the Family Violence Initiative involving 15 federal partner departments, to assess how family violence interventions support common objectives of the initiative and enable departments to coordinate programs to improve outcomes, including increased public awareness.

Public reporting initiatives help policy-makers, program managers, stakeholders and the Canadian public learn about the impacts of programs and services and assess progress toward goals. For example:

- The Government of Canada, together with the provinces and territories, continues to assess and report on the progress being made in achieving National Child Benefit objectives, including the reduction of child poverty and helping parents find and keep work.
- Under the 2000 Early Childhood Development Agreement and 2003 Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, the federal, provincial and territorial governments report regularly to the public on their activities and expenditures, progress in improving and expanding early childhood development programs, including child care and child well-being.
- More generally, federal departments report annually to Parliament on their plans and priorities as well as performance, including with respect to initiatives for children. These reports are made available to the public and constitute a key means of ensuring the transparency and accountability of federal activities and expenditure.

The monitoring and reporting of *A Canada Fit for Children* is linked to that of the UNCRC, to be reported on jointly in 2009. Within this reporting format, a review of *A Canada Fit for Children* is conducted periodically with all relevant departments.

## 7. THE WAY FORWARD

The concerted effort on the part of decision-makers to take direct action on their respective areas of responsibility, as well as to foster partnerships and coordination across all levels of government, with civil society and the private sector, have been crucial in order to develop initiatives that are truly beneficial to children across the country. As well, efforts continue to ensure the meaningful participation of children in decisions that affect them.

Since the Special Session, many of Canada's initiatives have made a real difference in the lives of our children and families. Through initiatives such as the Universal Child Care Plan, the Child Fitness Tax Credit and improving access to health care for children, the Government of Canada is committed to working as effectively and efficiently as possible to produce real results to support families in their efforts to ensure all children have the opportunity to grow up healthy and be able to reach their full potential. Furthermore, the Government is committed to fulfilling its international commitments to protect the rights of children.

The Government of Canada is also dedicated to helping children in developing countries. Children represent approximately 50% of the world population and this proportion is higher in HIV/AIDS and conflict-affected countries. From its work for and with children in developing countries, Canada has drawn two major lessons related to participation and research inspired by the Millennium Development Goals:

- The meaningful participation of children in development initiatives may mean that more time will be needed for each stage of programming, but the end result is worthwhile.

- Evidenced-based participatory research shows that it can have a deep impact on national governments policies and on international community actions. For example, research done in recent years on children affected by armed conflict has been instrumental in ensuring that the situation of girls is equally considered in conflict, peacekeeping and peacebuilding initiatives.

In the 2006 Budget, the Government restated its intention to double the international assistance budget by 2010-2011, compared with the 2001-2002 level. Canada's international development assistance will continue to work toward objectives such as those set up by the Millennium Development Goals and will build on and integrate the leadership it has demonstrated in promoting the rights and protection of children.

The Government of Canada is committed to supporting children and their families. The Government will continue to work directly, as well as with partners, including the provinces and territories, civil society and international partners, to advance policies and programs that support parents and children and take their best interests into account. Knowledge gained through lessons learned, best practices, research and tools will guide the continuous improvement of supports that can help to ensure children have the best start in life, no matter where they live. Canada will continue to strengthen its efforts to ensure the well-being, healthy development, protection and participation of children and youth.