



sheldon kennedy child advocacy centre

James Rajotte MP
Chair, Standing Committee on Finance
c/o The Clerk of the Standing Committee on Finance
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

August 6, 2014

Re: Pre-budget Consultation Process

Dear Mr. Rajotte:

On behalf of the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre, I am pleased to provide our recommendations on budget priorities to the Standing Committee on Finance. The Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre is a not for profit organization working in a collaborative partnership with Calgary Police Service, Calgary Area Child and Family Services, Alberta Health Services, Alberta Justice - Calgary Crown Prosecutor's Office, the RCMP and Alberta Education to better serve children and families impacted by child abuse.

Child abuse is one of the most pressing public health issues of our time, the impacts are profound for victims, communities and our society. By taking action now and implementing the recommendations proposed in this submission, the federal government can position Canada as a global leader and more importantly, accelerate our efforts to end child abuse.

Sheldon Kennedy and I would appreciate the opportunity to appear in front of the committee when it hears from witnesses either in Ottawa or Edmonton. Thank you for the opportunity to put the critical issue of child abuse on the national agenda.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Johnston

CEO
Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre



**Pre-Budget Submission to the
Standing Committee on Finance**

August 6, 2014

Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child abuse – including sexual abuse, physical abuse and severe neglect – is one of the most pressing public health issues of our generation. The impacts are profound for victims, communities and our society. It is imperative that Canada take further action to prevent child abuse and to ensure that victims receive the best possible supports.

Ending child abuse and improving outcomes for victims will take coordinated and collective action by stakeholders across the country, including all levels of government, providers, communities and the private sector. Canada has an unprecedented opportunity to emerge as a global leader in addressing child abuse issues. As it relates to the federal government, we respectfully submit that there are four main areas where immediate action can have the greatest impact:

1. Committing to predictable and stable funding to address child abuse issues.
2. Engaging global colleagues to raise awareness, report on performance, and share innovative solutions.
3. Providing seed funding for an arms-length National Child Abuse Council.
4. Engaging research organizations such as the Canadian Institute of Health Research to focus and increase research into child abuse issues.

INTRODUCTION

Almost 200,000 child abuse investigations are conducted each year in Canada. About half are substantiated as cases of sexual abuse, physical abuse and/or severe neglect.ⁱ As it relates to sexual abuse, children and youth are far more likely than adults to become victims.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, evidence and experience both suggest that these statistics almost certainly underestimate the true incidence. Finally, Canada is not alone in this regard – indeed, child abuse occurs around the world.

The impact of child abuse is profound. We know that survivors suffer from post-traumatic stress with symptoms that include depression, anxiety, substance abuse, eating disorders, suicide attempts, and aggressiveness.ⁱⁱⁱ Many survivors of child abuse are more vulnerable to future sexual and physical abuse, and are more likely to become offenders themselves^{iv}. Children who are victims of child abuse are also more likely to suffer from learning disabilities^v, experience homelessness^{vi}, and use social supports at a much higher rate than the general population.^{vii}

Child abuse is rapidly becoming a defining issue of our generation. Similar to contemporary issues related to poverty, environmental sustainability, and human rights, we have a much better understanding of the scale, causes and impacts of child abuse. We know that child abuse is unacceptable, and increasingly we have the resources and know-how to prevent abuse and



support victims appropriately. Canada is very fortunate to have federal and provincial governments who recognize the importance of healthy child development. We also have key assets, including a number of Child Advocacy Centres in Canada who are leaders in supporting victims of child abuse.

Canada has both the responsibility to do more to end child abuse and support victims, as well as the opportunity to become a global leader in addressing this most important issue. The time to act is now and we are pleased to outline several recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee on Finance.

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

In Canada alone, millions of people are affected and billions of dollars are spent each year addressing the impacts of child abuse. It is clear that child abuse is a significant public health and economic issue for countries around the globe. The federal government has recognized the impacts of child abuse and has been instrumental in providing funding to establish and support the operations of Child Advocacy Centres across Canada.

Canada has a well-earned reputation for providing global leadership in addressing the most difficult of issues. As Canadians, we expect our federal government to protect the vulnerable and lead by example. No one is more vulnerable than victims of child abuse, and there is a tremendous opportunity for Canada to lead by addressing complex child abuse issues with global colleagues in an ambitious and transparent manner.

More specifically, there is a need to raise awareness, promote policy change, and direct resources to prevention of child abuse and stronger supports for victims. Progress can be accelerated by concerted efforts to report on performance at national levels, share leading practices and direct increased financial resources to address child abuse issues.

Specific recommendations include the following:

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the federal government demonstrates global leadership by committing to predictable and stable funding to address child abuse issues. This should begin with increased funding in Budget 2014, including but not limited to continuing to support the development and operations of Child Advocacy Centres across Canada.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the federal government leverages its membership in international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to engage its global



colleagues to raise awareness, report on performance in a consistent and standardized way, and share innovative solutions related to prevention of child abuse and support for victims.

ACCELERATE ADOPTION OF LEADING PRACTICES

Canada has made significant progress in the development and implementation of models to support victims and promote prevention of child abuse. There are now more than 20 Child Advocacy Centres in Canada, including the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre. While the models vary, most are staffed with highly trained and experienced professionals and all strive to ensure that victims receive coordinated and effective supports in a child-friendly environment.

Although child abuse is not a new issue, most Child Advocacy Centres are still relatively new and are evolving rapidly as new information about leading practices becomes available. Child Advocacy Centres would most definitely benefit from targeted efforts to identify and accelerate the adoption of leading practices.

In support of this direction, the federal government and Child Advocacy Centres (including the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre) across Canada will work together to lead the development of Canadian standards for Child Advocacy Centres. The federal government also has an important role to play by directing resources to initiatives that focus attention and expertise to the development of leading practices.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the federal government provide seed funding for an arms-length National Child Abuse Council. The Council would exist to identify leading practices, enable collaboration among stakeholders working to address child abuse issues, support public awareness and education efforts, and facilitate implementation of leading practices. A Board composed of experts from across the country would be supported by a staff with expertise in the core functions of the Council.

INNOVATION THROUGH COLLABORATION

Innovation in the public sector is about finding ways to achieve better outcomes for citizens at a lower cost than our current models allow. As it relates to child abuse, significant expertise exists within individual sectors such as health or justice, but we do not yet have a systems approach that produces the best possible outcomes and optimizes the use of public resources.



We need to develop different business models that bring experts from multiple systems together in new ways. We need to both support victims and engage the community, including the private sector, to prevent abuse from occurring in the first place. And finally, we must demonstrate the impact of new business models in terms of higher quality services and supports; better outcomes for victims and communities; and a more efficient model that improves sustainability of health care, social services, police and justice systems across the country.

The Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre is one example of a new, highly collaborative model that we believe captures the immense potential of inter-professional practice and community engagement. We are also exploring alternative funding models that use social innovation principles to leverage private capital and more fully engage private sector partners in accepting shared responsibility to end child abuse.

Over the next several years, we are deeply committed to demonstrating the social and economic benefits of our model, continually improving the services we offer, and working with governments and other funders to increase the level of support for Child Advocacy Centres across Canada. As a result, we are partnering with funders, universities, and global consulting firm KPMG to develop and begin to implement a comprehensive evaluation strategy for the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre.

The federal government can significantly enhance these efforts by facilitating innovation related to prevention of child abuse and support for victims.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That the federal government engages its research organizations such as the Canadian Institute of Health Research to focus and increase research into child abuse issues, including the social and economic impact of collaborative models of service delivery.

CONCLUSION

Child abuse is one of the most pressing public health issues of our time; the impacts are profound for victims, communities and our society. No child should be abused, but if abuse does occur we have an obligation to support that child and their family to ensure the best possible outcome. Building on current commitments and resources like Child Advocacy Centres, Canada has an unprecedented opportunity to lead on the global stage.

By taking action now and implementing the recommendations in this submission, the federal government can position Canada as a global leader, and more importantly, accelerate our efforts to end child abuse.



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- ⁱ Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (2010).
- ⁱⁱ Barnes J, Noll J, Putnam F, Trickett P. 2009. "Sexual and physical revictimization among victims of severe childhood sexual abuse." *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 33, 412-420.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Maniglio, R. 2009. "The impact of child sexual abuse on health: a systematic review of reviews." *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29, 647-657.
- ^{iv} Jespersen, A.F.; Lalumiere, M.L.; Seto, M.C. 2009. "Sexual abuse history among adult sex offenders and non-sex offenders: A meta-analysis." *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 33, 179-192.
- ^v Slade, E. P., & Wissow, L. S. 2007. "The influence of childhood maltreatment on adolescents' academic performance." *Economics of Education Review*, 26, 604-614
- ^{vi} Pluck G, Girgis S, Lee KH & Parks RW. 2013. "Childhood abuse and adult Homelessness." In S. Kimura & A. Miyazaki (Eds.), *Physical and Emotional Abuse: Triggers, Short and Long-Term Consequences and Prevention Methods*. Hauppauge, NY: Nova Publishers.
- ^{vii} Spataro, J., Mullen, P., Burgess, P., Wells, D., & Moss, S. 2004. "Impact of Child Sexual Abuse on Mental Health." *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 184, 4160421.