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and Social Development and the Status of
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Mr. Dean Allison

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•(1110)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), our study on the federal contribution to reducing poverty in Canada will continue today, and I want to thank the witnesses for taking time out of their busy schedules to be here.

With us today we have Andrew Lynk from the Canadian Paediatric Society. We have Jody Dallaire from the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, as well as Leilani Farha from the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action. I want to thank all of you for being here today and taking the time.

We're going to look at a presentation from each of you for up to 10 minutes. We'll start with you, Jody, and then we'll move across the table, then we'll start with a couple of rounds of questions. The first round will be seven minutes for questions and answers from the members, and we'll follow with a second round of five minutes, so if there are things on which you've been able to pique the curiosity of the members, I'm sure they'll ask you, or maybe they'll want to follow up on something you've suggested as we move forward.

Why don't we just get started. Jody, I'm going to start with you. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire (Chair, Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada): Thank you. I wanted to mention that we are going to be submitting a formal brief outlining all the points I'll be making today, with some precise recommendations.

I wanted to begin by thanking the committee for inviting us to come to inform the study on the federal government's role in reducing poverty in Canada. I represent an organization called the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. Our organization recommends that the federal government assume a leadership role in the development of a high-quality, universal, pan-Canadian child care system. This system will accomplish multiple social and economic benefits for children, families, and the economy. Chief among these benefits is poverty reduction.

Improving child care services will reduce poverty by increasing family incomes in three important ways. By improving child care availability, we support parents in maintaining and increasing their labour force attachment. Labour force attachment itself is essential to poverty reduction, although, as others will have described, it's in no way a guarantee. By improving child care affordability, we reduce parent fees, lowering the cost associated with increased labour force

attachment. By improving child care quality, we support children's healthy development. In the long term, this leads to improved educational outcomes and earnings.

We acknowledge up front that child care services is only one of several components that are essential in an effective poverty reduction strategy. The CCAAC supports the recommendations of our partner organizations, such as Campaign 2000 and others, who call for a federal role in the development of a set of complementary policies that together will increase family income and promote well-being.

Given the focus of our work, this presentation will focus specifically on child care's role within a poverty reduction strategy. It is based on what we've learned from parents, from caregivers, from communities across Canada, and from research in international studies.

We have four points to make: the parents approach to child care outside of Quebec is not working, quality universal access is essential, federal leadership is required, and accountability is key.

In terms of our first point, that Canada's approach is not working, outside of Quebec only 12% of children under the age of 12 have access to regulated child care. Parent fees are among the highest in the developed world, often exceeding the annual cost of university, and quality is constantly undermined by the low wages and poor retention rates of the college-trained early childhood educators.

Why is this happening? Canada relies on a market-based approach to child care. Community groups and entrepreneurs build and deliver services according to their priorities, with government involvement limited to fee subsidies for low-income parents and wage subsidies for low-income staff. But 30 years of experience with this approach in Canada confirms that the market has failed to deliver high-quality, affordable, accessible child care services for children, families, and communities.

The crisis in child care in Canada outside of Quebec has been confirmed by a series of international studies. In 2006 the OECD reported that Canada has the lowest early learning and child care access rate in 20 developed countries and invests the least public funds of the 14 reporting countries. In December 2008 the UNICEF research centre released report card eight, *The Child Care Transition*, which compared a range of family policies, including child care, in 25 rich countries. Once again, Canada ranks last.

Shamefully, we only achieved one out of ten benchmarks established based on commitments that Canada and most other nations have signed on to in order to uphold the rights of our youngest citizens. Canada fails on the most fundamental benchmark, as it does not have a national plan with priorities for the disadvantaged. Canada fails to provide enough early learning and child care spaces, fails to ensure that minimum quality standards are met, and fails to invest 1% of GDP in early childhood services. Canada also fails to ensure a near-universal access to the essential child care health services. As a result of these policy failures, it's not surprising to see that Canada fails to achieve a poverty rate of less than 10%.

• (1115)

The UNICEF report card adds to the body of evidence showing that jurisdictions that advance quality universal child care are more likely to have lower family poverty rates. While many European and Nordic countries are examples to look to, results in Quebec are also noteworthy. Since introducing its family policy in 1997, with child care as a key component, child and family poverty rates have dropped in Quebec, and women's labour force participation and incomes have risen substantially.

Quality is essential because good child care is good for all children, with additional benefits for vulnerable children, but poor-quality child care can cause harm. Evidence of the benefits of quality child care is so established in science that any claims to the contrary lack credibility. They're the equivalent of claiming that the earth is flat.

Child care in Canada is in crisis, which has been fuelled by the cutting of the bilateral agreements signed with the provincial and territorial governments. While progress in child care under these earlier agreements was painfully slow, it is clear that federal leadership did make a difference. As a result of the current federal cuts to child care funding transfer payments to provinces, B.C. has cut operating funding to child care programs, and today we're facing the potential loss of thousands of subsidized child care spaces in Ontario and cuts to child care programs in New Brunswick.

The problem with the dedicated child care transfer agreements established in 2003 and in 2005 under SUFA is that they neither required nor adequately funded a fundamental shift towards an accountable, publicly funded system. But replacing federal-provincial agreements with cash transfer payments—the UCCB—is not the answer to child care problems in Canada.

In 2007 the number of regulated spaces in Canada grew by only 3%, the lowest increase in a decade. Given the persistently high fees for parents and the ongoing problems with staff recruitment and retention, it is clear that the unaccountable universal child care

benefit is not building the range of affordable and available quality programs that parents need to support their labour force attachment.

While accountability for the federal child care transfers to provinces and territories has long been a concern of the CCAC, the current federal government's claim to be spending three times as much money on child care raises even more concerns. If the current federal government is spending three times more than the previous federal government, Canadians are justified in asking why access to quality affordable child care has not tripled as a result.

Why, in fact, is the child care crisis in Canada continuing to grow? The answer? None of the federal funding is accountable to improve quality affordable child care services. Therefore, in order to realize progress in child care services in Canada, and to fulfill our human rights obligations to children and women, accountability must be measured within conditional transfers to provinces and territories.

In conclusion, establishing a federal role in poverty reduction comes at the perfect time, as we are experiencing the worst economic slowdown since the Great Depression, with thousands of Canadians losing their jobs. This economic downturn provides Canada with the opportunity to catch up with our peer nations in supporting the employability of parents in a meaningful way and overcoming one of the most stubborn poverty traps: the lack of affordable and available child care services. A federal investment in child care will provide a double benefit. It will allow parents to work and upgrade their skills while compensating children at risk due to their family's social and economic circumstances.

We have four recommendations.

We recommend that the federal government take a leadership role in adopting a federal poverty reduction strategy and that child care be part of the strategy used.

Our second recommendation is that the government use federal spending power to establish, through legislation, an early learning and child care policy framework that will attain the goals of service affordability, universal entitlement, and quality non-profit and/or public delivery. This framework should set conditions under which provincial and territorial governments can access funding, while recognizing that Quebec has already the foundations of a provincial child care program and should receive its funding unconditionally.

• (1120)

Our third recommendation is to commit adequate and conditional funding to the provinces and territories, with accountability.

Thank you.

The Chair: Did you want to finish your other proposal?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Two components of the transfers should be direct operating funding and non-profit public delivery.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that presentation, which was right on the money and right on the time, Mrs. Dallaire.

We're now going to move to Ms. Farha. Thank you, and you have 10 minutes as well.

Ms. Leilani Farha (Member of the Steering Committee, Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action): Thank you. The Feminist Alliance for International Action very much appreciates this opportunity to appear before this committee and to make this submission.

For those of you who don't know, FAFIA is a coalition of over 75 Canadian women's equality-seeking and related organizations. We are interested in participating in this committee because poverty disproportionately affects women, and particular groups of women, and because in the face of the current economic crisis, we anticipate that women's poverty is worsening and will only continue to do so.

Our submissions this morning focus on the following three points: first, that the Government of Canada has a legal obligation to combat poverty; second, that the federal government has the jurisdiction and the resources to combat poverty; and third, any measures adopted to combat poverty must be clearly focused on addressing women's poverty, the distinct causes and consequences, and must be based on human rights principles.

Let me turn to the first. The Government of Canada has a legal obligation to combat poverty. This obligation comes from the international human rights treaties that Canada has signed and ratified, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights guarantees everyone the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food and housing. In that regard, in 2006 the committee at the UN responsible for monitoring Canada's compliance with that covenant expressed concern with the numbers of people living in poverty in Canada, and that poverty rates remain very high, particularly for low-income women and single mothers.

In 2008 when CEDAW reviewed Canada, they expressed similar concerns; in particular, that poverty is widespread among particular groups of women, including aboriginal women, minority women, and single mothers. The committee then linked women's poverty to four particular issues: one, a lack of affordable quality child care spaces; two, the absence of a national housing strategy and adequate housing; three, the cuts to and inadequacy of social assistance rates in relation to the actual cost of living; and finally, four, violence against women.

Most recently, the UN Human Rights Council, under the Universal Periodic Review where states are reviewing states, expressed concern regarding the high rates of poverty and homelessness in an affluent country like Canada. In turn, several very concrete recommendations as to how the Government of Canada might address poverty amid such affluence have emerged from the United Nations human rights system. For example, the Government of Canada has repeatedly been called on to develop a national

strategy to eliminate poverty; establish a national poverty line; integrate economic and social rights into poverty reduction strategies; establish minimum standards for the provision of funding to social assistance programs applicable at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels; and establish a monitoring mechanism to ensure the accountability of these mechanisms so these mechanisms work for women.

Let me move to my second point. The federal government has the jurisdiction and the resources to combat poverty. Under international human rights law and Canada's treaty obligations, ultimately the federal government has the primary responsibility for combatting poverty, notwithstanding the federalist structure of Canada. Treaty monitoring bodies have been clear about this.

The current government often rejects this obligation, arguing jurisdictional issues; in other words, that social and economic entitlements like social assistance are squarely within provincial jurisdiction and therefore not a federal responsibility. This position is not only contrary to international human rights law, but it also ignores the Government of Canada's spending power. This spending power allows a legislature—as I'm sure you all know—to spend the money it has the constitutional authority to collect and manage, including spending in areas for which it does not have legislative authority or jurisdiction. In other words, the Government of Canada can use its spending power to support a national strategy to combat poverty.

● (1125)

To ensure that any standards or strategies are national, the Government of Canada can attach conditions, of course, to the moneys it provides to the provinces and territories. This has been done historically. For example, the conditions attached to the transfer to the provinces for income support under the Canada assistance plan provide right-to-income support benefits based on need and are irrespective of province of residence.

On my third point, any measures adopted to combat poverty must be clearly focused on combatting women's poverty and based on human rights. Canada is one of the wealthiest countries in the world and yet, even when women's poverty rate is at its lowest, one woman in eight lives below the poverty line. Furthermore, there are high rates of poverty for particular groups of women.

The statistics are uncontested, and I'm not going to run through all of them for you. The Ontario plan, the Quebec plan, and the Newfoundland and Labrador plan outline and confirm that the statistics are bad. When you see numbers showing that 57% of African Canadian women are poor, you know this is an issue that is of huge concern to women.

We submit that a national strategy to combat poverty that is based on a social rights or human rights framework can challenge the systemic causes of poverty and provide concrete guidelines for assessment to ensure that the strategy actually meets the needs of those it is intended to benefit.

For example, a national poverty strategy based on human rights or social rights would be measured and measurable against the following standards: Does the strategy take into account the precarious situation of disadvantaged and marginalized individuals or groups such as women? Is the strategy comprehensive, coherent, and coordinated? For example, does the strategy address the significant determinants of women's poverty, such as violence, the availability of adequate housing, adequate social assistance rates, and adequate and affordable child care? Is the strategy non-discriminatory? Is priority given to grave situations or situations of risk?

There are other benchmarks that a human rights framework provides. I can speak to those if there are questions on that.

A human rights plan to combat poverty could also ensure a mechanism for individual entitlement claims, allowing those living in poverty to feel some individual ownership of the right to an adequate standard of living. It would keep parliamentarians in touch with people whose dignity interests are at stake. It would continually refashion and remodel the strategy to be inclusive of groups and individuals who are left out or neglected. It would allow an interpretation of entitlement, in light of women's actual circumstances.

FAFIA would like to make the following recommendations to this committee regarding the federal government's role in combatting poverty.

First, in keeping with Canada's international human rights obligations, the Government of Canada must show leadership on the issue of poverty in this country by exercising its spending power and adopting a national strategy to combat poverty that is focused on those experiencing the deepest poverty, namely, women and particular groups of women.

A national strategy to combat poverty must have conditions attached to it to ensure the compliance of provinces and territories, with the exception of Quebec. It must be based on a social rights framework. It must incorporate or somehow be directly linked to initiatives to ensure the key determinants of poverty for women are addressed, such as violence against women, adequate housing, adequate levels of social assistance, and access to affordable child care spaces. It must challenge and rectify the systemic inequalities that create women's poverty.

FAFIA thinks the time is ripe. We have provincial and territorial plans springing up across the country. We're in the midst of a severe economic crisis. We have plenty of direction from the international community and the UN human rights system.

Thank you.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to move to Mr. Lynk, for 10 minutes.

Dr. Andrew Lynk (Chair, Action Committee for Children and Teens, Canadian Paediatric Society): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, members of the committee, for having us here today. My name is Andrew Link. I chair the Canadian Paediatric Society

advocacy committee and I'm a general pediatrician from Cape Breton. It's snowed in today, but I got out anyway.

We represent 2,000 pediatricians across the country. Every two years, we produce an annual report card on indicators of child health and well-being, comparing provinces and territories and the federal government on how they are doing. For this year, for 2009, we will be including how the different provinces and territories and the federal government are doing when it comes to child poverty.

I want to open with a statement from a UNICEF report on child poverty in rich countries back in 2006. It's something I think all pediatricians take to heart. It says: "The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children—their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialisation, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included" as valued citizens, regardless of the economic standing into which they were born.

I've worked as a physician in downtown Vancouver, looking after residents from the east side of Vancouver, where we have seen through the news and papers recently the terrible convergence of poverty, addiction, and mental illness. I worked in the refugee camps in Ethiopia back in the mid-1980s, during the famine, and saw the extreme effects of diseases, of poverty, and of hunger. I've worked in the small reserves of northern Ontario and have seen tuberculosis spread through overcrowded housing, with children and babies being affected. I've worked with immigrant families new to Canada in downtown Toronto. I've been in Cape Breton for 20 years.

I must say that if I had to take a choice between being a poor Ethiopian farmer and a homeless resident in downtown east Vancouver, I think I'd take my chances as the farmer. Just on Friday, before coming here, I saw a family in the office. The father is an out-of-work painter with two teenage sons who are learning disabled. They had a loaf of bread and a jar of jam to last them until payday on Wednesday. The parents were going to go without. The father had terrible dental disease and was putting pieces of onion into the cavities to take down some of the pain.

That's something pediatricians see every day across our wards, our emergency rooms, and our offices. We see the damage, both short-term and long-term. We see the lost opportunities for these children and their families. There are more than a million of them and their families out there. I know each of the MPs here around the table hear those same stories and see those same families, because they come to you as well.

I would like to say that poverty, and child poverty in particular, is more than just a social justice issue or a political embarrassment. We would frame it also as a public health issue.

Child poverty entails increased negative health outcomes for children: increased prematurity; low birth weight, which increases long-term developmental disability; increased obesity, because kids who are living in poverty often eat high-calorie, low-nutrient foods that are cheap; and all of the attendant problems that long-term obesity will bring upon themselves and the health care system. We see increased rates of injury and death from injury; teen pregnancies; delinquent behaviours; visual and hearing problems; and decreased academic outcomes, school readiness, post-secondary training and education, and participation in cultural and recreational opportunities. In other words, child poverty poisons the developing brain and the spirit.

We at the CPS are concerned that in the last 15 years before the recession hit, which was a long period of economic prosperity, the poverty rates in Canada actually increased and the gaps between rich and poor increased. We're very concerned, and I share the concern of the two speakers who have gone before me about what's going to happen to these kids and their families with the current recession.

One in six kids in Canada lives below the poverty line. One in two new Canadian kids lives below the poverty line. One in two kids with a single mom lives below the poverty line. One in four children with disabilities lives below the poverty line. One in four aboriginal children on reservations, and one in three off reservations, lives below the poverty line. That's a lot of children out there, a lot of potential harm, and a lot of long-term benefits and outcomes lost to our society and to the individuals themselves.

We at the CPS believe that child poverty rates and poverty rates in general should have the same political importance as rates of interest, employment, inflation, and wait times for adult health care. We're not experts on low-income cut-offs, pre-tax or post-tax. We're not experts on market basket measures. We're not experts on working income tax benefits, welfare walls, or federal-provincial transfers. However, we are experts on child health and well-being, and we're experts on designing interventions that work. That's what we do for a living.

● (1135)

We know that the resolution passed by the parliamentarians back in 1989, vowing to end child poverty by 2000, was unrealistic and it was empty political rhetoric at its worst. We shouldn't see that repeated here. There were a million kids without a voice hoping that something was going to happen, and as I said before, things did get worse. As was alluded to earlier, the 1999 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which we signed on to, asked for adequate standards of living for all children.

Whatever measures the federal government and the provincial and the territorial governments decide to include, they have to include income supports, affordable housing, education and training for parents, accessible mental health care, quality accessible child care and early learning, and recreational and cultural opportunities.

I just want to use a different model, if I can, a paradigm in pediatrics. I have an interest in childhood cancer. Back in the early 1960s, if you had childhood leukemia the death rate was 100%. You would last a few months and you would die. A group of dedicated pediatricians got together, and they had resources, they had targets, they had timelines, they took some low-technology drugs and tried

them. It worked, and they got the rate up to a 10% survival rate. Then they took a different group and they tried to tweak things a bit, and they got it up to 15%, then 20%. Now in 2009 the survival rate is over 92%.

That was because people set targets, they set timelines, they studied it, they thought about it, and they cared about it. We can do the same for child poverty.

Canada ranked 12th out of 21 in rich countries, under UNICEF's 2000 child poverty report, when it came to child poverty and well-being measures. We're well behind the Scandinavian countries, as usual, that have comparable measures of wealth. It really is a call for us to do better.

Ireland and the U.K. have poverty reduction strategies, and they have worked. There have been some bumps in the road. Quebec, I understand, in 2004, Newfoundland and Labrador in 2006, and this year Ontario have committed to do the same with targets and timelines and plans and resources—no more empty rhetoric.

We would argue that child poverty is a cancer in the Canadian body politic. You can't improve cure rates of child cancer without a plan, as we've said.

We would ask the federal government for four things—maybe more, but four today. We will provide you with a written report in both French and English. We were actually just writing it up when we got called to come before the committee, and it will be out in a few months. We will provide the committee with that.

There are four things we would ask. We would have the federal government insist, maybe by tying it to federal-provincial transfers—I don't know if you can do that or not, you're the experts—that all provinces and territories have poverty reduction strategies with targets and timelines and resources, aiming for the UNICEF goal of less than 10% in the next 10 years. That would also include regular progress reports to Canadians.

Second, we would ask that the federal government facilitate the sharing of evidence-based and best-practice social policy research when it comes to strategies and interventions.

Third, the federal government and the Assembly of First Nations should be jointly held accountable for the shameful level of child poverty among first nations children. We need to have resourced reduction programs for children living on reserves, again with targets and timelines.

Last, we would agree with our first speaker that high-quality child care improves the cognitive and behavioural outcomes of disadvantaged kids. We know that child care can be expensive and it's a barrier to employment for single mothers and low-income mothers and families. We know that Canada's own chief of public health, in his 2008 report, said that for every dollar you invest in the early years saves between \$3 to \$9 in future spending in the health and criminal justice systems, as well as in social assistance. The federal government must include the provision of affordable, accessible, and high-quality child care, and early learning is an integral part of any effective poverty reduction strategies.

On behalf of the nation's 2,000 pediatricians and the children and families and youth whom we serve, we really appreciate the opportunity to present before you today. Thank you very much.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lynk. We appreciate that.

As a matter of housekeeping, some of the questions will be asked in French. I don't believe Ms. Minna will be asking questions in French this round, but there will be French on the next round for sure. English translation will be on either channel one or two.

We're going to start with our first round, which will be seven minutes for questions and answers. We're going to start with Ms. Minna.

The floor is yours.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I thank all of you.

I have to say that everything you said this group has heard over and over again. I am not saying this to belittle what you said. I am saying this to kick all of us in the pants and to say let's shake our heads. What are we doing? This is 2009 now.

I have to say that because I sat here listening to the three—and I've met some of you before—feeling extremely frustrated and thinking to myself, I know this stuff already. We all do. It's not that I don't have to hear it again, because it is good to hear it again. I only say that maybe as a message to ourselves that we really have to get on with it.

I want to ask a couple of things. The last comment you made, Mr. Lynk, which was also mentioned earlier by Jody Dallaire, was with respect to the cognitive outcomes and the assistance.

I am assuming that when you talk about child care, Ms. Dallaire, you're talking about early education and child care; you're not just talking about child care. I assume that you are talking about quality, accessible child care and the cognitive development aspect of it as well. That makes a big difference.

I want us to get down to some nitty-gritty. We have now what is called a universal child care program of \$1,200. Does that do it? I think we need to get to some clear answers on what's working and what's not. Does that do it? I don't call it child care, but that's what it's called right now.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: As I mentioned in our presentation, it hasn't been working. We've seen some of the lowest growth rates in early learning and child care in the past decade, since the implementation

of the universal child care benefit. The challenge with the benefit is that it is unaccountable to actually create child care spaces unless parents pool their money together to actually build programs. It's not going to create the spaces that are lacking in communities.

• (1145)

Hon. Maria Minna: When we had the Caledon Institute and a couple of others here, one of the things that were discussed was the pooling of money that we are now spending, like the child tax credit, the child care tax credit, and other moneys that we are spending in bits and pieces all over, pooling it into a strong national program for early education and child care and income support. Is that something you would be in support of looking at? I was just going to ask both of you, from your perspective, if you would take the child care tax credit, take all of that, and lump it together to create a national child care program as opposed to having the tax credit process at all—to just have direct funding.

I'll ask that question, and then I will ask those on the poverty side.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: I guess there are two issues with the child tax credit. It aims to attain a different objective, which is providing families with adequate income, which is important. But with early learning and child care, what we have been advocating for the past 25 years as an organization is that unless we fundamentally shift—

Hon. Maria Minna: I am sorry to interrupt. I am not talking about the \$1,200. I am talking about the child care tax credit.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: I understand. I guess what I am saying is that as a society we need to decide if we want to provide adequate income as well. I know some other organizations have been calling to continue—

Hon. Maria Minna: That would be the child tax benefit, though, which is less extreme.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Yes, that's correct, but in terms of child care, unless we fundamentally shift the way we do things, so that we provide direct operating grants to programs—

Hon. Maria Minna: So you are saying we ought to have a national program rather than a tax credit system, and direct funding—

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Directly, with accountability.

Hon. Maria Minna: Of course. That is a given for me. I fully understand that.

Mr. Lynk, did you want to add to that?

Dr. Andrew Lynk: I would agree with that.

There are two issues. One is that there are not enough spaces especially to help lift low-income families and low-income moms out of poverty.

Second, if you really want to make a difference when it comes to improving outcomes for early child care and learning, that is, cognitive outcomes of school readiness—being ready to go when you start primary or grade one—and also behavioural and socialization outcomes, there have to be standards. That is where the federal government comes in. There has to be quality day care. There cannot be 20 kids and one person who is underpaid and overwhelmed looking after 20 small toddlers, some in diapers. That's not going to cut it. So there have to be national standards and moneys attached to that.

Hon. Maria Minna: I understand that.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: If I could add one last thing, the CCAAC does have a model out there. It's called "From Patchwork to Framework". We outline a 15-year strategy, because it's not something that's built overnight.

Hon. Maria Minna: Do you want to share that with us?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Absolutely, I can certainly forward that after today. It provides an example, over 15 years, of how you actually build a national child care program.

Hon. Maria Minna: Could you comment on what you thought of the last national child care agreement we had with the provinces, which was then cancelled?

I know you mentioned, Ms. Dallaire, that you wanted it to be only not-for-profit, although sometimes when you're negotiating—because we don't deliver it directly; it's delivered by the provinces—there are a lot of differences. Could you comment on the quality, if you like, of the previous agreements that had been established with provinces? If we're going to go into it, we might as well deal with what was good or not from the other ones.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: As I mentioned in my presentation, the agreements did effect change. Since the cut of the agreements, we have seen some cuts at the provincial level, with the possible loss of subsidized spaces in Ontario and cuts in direct grants to programs in B.C. In this most recent budget in New Brunswick, the provincial government is announcing that it's cutting transfer payments to child care programs as a direct result of a lack of that funding.

What we are calling for goes further than those agreements. We need to provide clear benchmarks and timelines to provinces, and if they do not meet them, they do not access the funding. We need to really use our spending power to make sure we're going in the direction we want, because if not, we won't get there.

Hon. Maria Minna: So you want us to be more directive or more aggressive. That's fair.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Hon. Maria Minna: Go ahead, why don't you use it?

• (1150)

Ms. Leilani Farha: I'm not a child care person. I work for a broader feminist organization. One of the things we have seen that are somewhat problematic in those federal-provincial agreements on child care has been that they have not always extended those child care benefits to women in receipt of social assistance, who really do need access to child care, and affordable child care, obviously. If they're going to leave welfare and get into paid employment, child care would be essential.

Hon. Maria Minna: That's great. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We're right on time. Thank you.

We're going to move to Madame Beaudin. You have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you for being here today.

You mentioned the Quebec model a few times. I would like you to talk about its advantages in terms of child care and poverty reduction programs.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Child care services have made a real difference in people's lives. Some data on the Quebec model shows, among other things, that there is an incredible return on the investment: more and more women are entering the labour market and accepting positions with greater responsibilities. Each year, every \$1 spent by the Quebec government generates \$0.40 in economic benefits.

There has been a reduction in the level of poverty in Quebec as a result of the establishment of the family policy, which contains many more measures than just child care. Canada could learn much from this model.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Thank you.

Do you have something to add, Mr. Lynk?

[*English*]

Dr. Andrew Lynk: Yes, Madame Beaudin.

The Canadian Paediatric Society, when we were reviewing the literature on poverty in Canada, was also very impressed with Quebec being the only province to have reduced child poverty rates during the 10- to 15-year period of recent economic prosperity. So something is working well in Quebec, and we need to pay attention to it.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: You emphasize the fact that child care services make it possible for women to enter the labour market. Is it also a means of ensuring that very young children up to the age of five can escape the cycle of poverty?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Research clearly shows that when these children have access to quality early childhood services, they are better equipped socially. Quality is important because services of poor quality can hinder the development of children. In terms of cognitive skills, they arrive at school ready to learn, which can break the cycle of poverty for children. Education begins in early childhood. There is an incredible return on the investment.

The economist Eckman showed that investing in early childhood education results in incredible returns.

Dr. Andrew Lynk: I agree.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Do you have something to add?

Dr. Andrew Lynk: No.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: You have spoken a great deal about provincial spending power. A number of provinces already have poverty reduction programs. You also spoke about social housing, among other things, as a means of helping families escape poverty. Housing is a large expense for a family. Please talk about your views on the federal government's contribution in this area.

[English]

Dr. Andrew Lynk: Madame, I'm not an expert in the social policy areas. As I said in my report, if you were giving money to the provinces for things like housing and other poverty reduction strategies, you have to ask the provinces to be accountable for that money and to have targets and timelines. I really think that's one thing the federal government should do and can do.

We know that probably about 70%, at least in Atlantic Canada, of low-income families live in unaffordable housing. They pay too much for their housing. That has direct effects on food insecurity. Like the family I mentioned in my report, there are many families living on corn flakes the last few days of the month before the welfare cheque comes out. So housing is critical to this whole problem.

• (1155)

[Translation]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Go ahead.

[English]

Ms. Leilani Farha: I sit on the steering committee of CFAIA, but I actually am the executive director of a housing organization in Ontario and I run a national women's housing network, so I can speak directly to the issue of how the federal government is faring with respect to housing.

It is true that under the most recent economic action plan there were dollars for social housing. Obviously social housing is a very important part of dealing with poverty, but it's not the only way the federal government should be looking at housing to alleviate poverty. If you're a woman right now and you're in receipt of social assistance, and you live in Toronto and you don't have public housing or access to social housing, there is a seven- to nine-year wait. With these new dollars you're still going to have to wait, because it takes a long time to build social housing. So the federal government hasn't been as good at looking at other creative means of ensuring that low-income women can access units that are actually out there.

There are vacancy rates in many cities and smaller cities across Canada. If women and other low-income people were given other options besides social housing to access those available units, that would go some distance. I'm talking about things like rent supplements, we call them, or portable shelter allowances, or portable housing allowances, where you top up a person's income so that they can afford the available market value unit. The criticism of that is normally, "Well, we don't want to line the pockets of landlords." There is no empirical evidence that landlords will increase rents based on rent supplement programs. It just hasn't happened, for whatever reason. I am not an economist, but for whatever reason, it just doesn't happen.

Also, the federal-provincial agreements in housing that exist at this point in time are a patchwork. Some provinces are very slow at rolling out the dollars, and Ontario is a very good example.

First of all, we don't have a national housing strategy. The United Nations has been clear that Canada is one of the only developed countries that does not have a national housing strategy and that this would go some distance to addressing that issue, particularly for low-income people. But it's also clear that we need some kind of accountability mechanism to see where those dollars are going, what the provinces and territories are doing with those dollars, and who is benefiting from those dollars.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. You are right on time.

Ms. Chow, welcome. You have seven minutes. The floor is yours.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Thank you. It's nice to be visiting.

We know that in 1995 the cap on the Canada assistance plan began the downward spiral all across this country. Whether it's the cancellation of the national housing program or the welfare rates plummeting, you don't need me to go on about the destruction that occurred.

Also during that period we saw the beginning of block funding, the social transfer and the college and universities grants being lumped together and cut by a dramatic percentage. I've often thought that if we are to move forward to talk about having conditions on the various funding transfers, even if it is a national housing strategy, an anti-poverty strategy, early childhood education and care, somehow there needs to be a recreation of some kind of plan. For argument's sake, we can call it the Canada prosperity plan or Canada anti-poverty plan. Whatever we call it, it would bring back or recreate the kind of structure that we had many years ago when the federal government first created social transfers. It's really about dealing with the social safety net.

With the social safety net now mostly gone, we have no conditions attached to any of these transfers. It's close to impossible to have a discussion about any of these issues, given that it's a direct transfer and the federal government has no role to play, other than occasionally receiving a report here or there.

Is that the direction we are talking about? Minus Quebec, because Quebec is different; Quebec has no problem with block transfers. They are miles ahead on their housing, their early childhood education and care, and their anti-poverty plan. Is that what we are talking about?

Is there a proposal on housing, child care, poverty, child benefits, minimum wage, welfare rates? Have you gotten together to say, here is the kind of proposal we are looking for? It's in different pieces out there, and unless we bring them together.... We can say the national housing program needs to build affordable housing, and then the housing allowance and the rent supplements.... We know all that. How do we do it?

It's a bigger question. Does anyone care to comment?

•(1200)

Ms. Leilani Farha: It's not an easy thing to comment on, but I will try.

I mentioned in my presentation this process called the universal periodic review of Canada, which happened at the United Nations. But before the United Nations review of Canada, there was a mobilization of human rights and other social service organizations across the country that were interested in grappling with the human rights reality in Canada. There were five meetings across the country and there was a mobilization of over 125 organizations from all different realms—people dealing with housing, employment, education, security issues, the whole realm. One consistent message that came out of those meetings was that we need implementation mechanisms in this country to implement all rights—social and economic rights, as well as civil and political rights. I think this goes to your question.

People are starting to see that the different sectors and stakeholders need to come together to try to develop, in a very complicated federalist system, some mechanism that will be accountable to all stakeholders, that will take all of these silo areas—housing, day care, child care, etc.—and bring them together under one implementation mechanism.

That's where we really need federal government leadership. I have yet to see that kind of leadership in my work. I have yet to hear federal government representatives saying this is the implementation mechanism we are going to use and this is how we're going to interact with the provinces and territories, and this is how rights holders will be able to claim their rights. I've not seen that on the political landscape. There are people agitating, but I'm not seeing that yet.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: We did a study about the accountability in the previous child care agreements that were signed. We found that when you required the provincial governments to be accountable to their publics, because that was the requirement under the previous agreements that were signed, there was no accountability from the provinces to the federal government. The provinces needed to account to their publics.

We found there were inconsistencies. Sometimes there was a baseline established, it was reported on, and then the following year there was a report done, but it didn't report on the progress on specific programs and how they were meeting children's needs. What we need are specific targets and timelines, such as how many child care spaces are in a province to date, as a baseline. In year one, how many additional spaces have we created? Has the provincial government capped fees as they're making funding available to the program? We need clear benchmarks and timelines that the provincial governments do report back to the federal government. Ideally, that would be enshrined in legislation.

Dr. Andrew Lynk: I'll add one thing. When it comes to giving the provinces and territories money, which we have to do and I'm glad we do, that money isn't always well spent, although it may be spent with the best of intentions. I'll just give you two examples.

One, you may have heard of the old head start program that was supposed to help children and families who are poor. They would use lay visitors to go into homes. It was shown in the States, at least

in the early models, that it made no difference at all to long-term outcomes when it came to school readiness, decreased teen pregnancy rates, issues with the justice system, etc. When they actually used public health nurses to go into the homes of low-income families and help out in the first couple of years with parenting advice, that did make a positive difference. Yet very few provinces, if any—really, none of them—have adopted it. They tend to spend it on the lay visitors in the old head start models, and that's concerning if there's no accountability. We're giving money for doing a good thing to help low-income families, but if it's not being measured and there are no targets, how do we know if it's working or not? How do we know if kids with cancer are going to do better if we don't find out who is living and who is dying at the end of the year? It's the same thing. There is no scientific rigour or accountability in that.

The other issue I can speak to that caused us some frustration was that in Nova Scotia our start date for grade primary used to be September 1 as opposed to December 31. Last year the provincial government thought they would put it in line with the rest of the country. They spent a lot of money hiring a lot of extra teachers, and they're having a lot of immature grade 4s coming in. That money could have been better spent on more preschool programs for the four- and five-year-olds in areas where there were a lot of low-income families around the schools, where we know those schools don't do as well and the kids don't come to school better prepared. It's those sorts of things, and the government is really not held accountable, because no one is checking to see if their school readiness and outcomes are a little better than other provinces. We intend to do that at the CPS and hold all the provinces accountable for that reason, to make sure they're spending money based on interventions that are evidence based and best practice.

Yes, if the federal government can help tie those transfers to accountability standards, I'm all for that. I know it's complicated, as was mentioned. Unfortunately, not all provinces and territories spend their money wisely.

•(1205)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lynk and Ms. Chow.

We're going to move to the Conservatives, with Mr. Komarnicki, for seven minutes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will share my time with Mr. Cannan.

I have a few questions and I'll start with Jody Dallaire.

I understand from Andrew, with respect to federal transfers to provinces, that although Canada's social transfer increases every year, you'd like to see conditions attached to those transfers. Is that correct?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Absolutely, and we'd like to see the transfer amounts increased as well.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Even more than we're already increasing it.

The second thing is that we are transferring \$250 million annually to the provinces and territories specifically for child care spaces. You agree that's good, but you'd like to see more and you'd like to see some conditions added as well. Is that correct?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: If I had to choose between more and conditions, I'd choose conditions, in that we'd be measuring what those dollars are actually achieving.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: If we weren't going to increase the \$250 million we are transferring to provinces and territories, you'd like to see conditions imposed on it.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: I'd like to see conditions to make sure we measure how those dollars are being spent and if they're meeting specific benchmarks and timelines to meet children's needs in communities, yes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I understand that you also thought that money could perhaps be better spent by directing it specifically to child care.

We have a national child care benefit that goes to families, about \$3.6 billion, and we have a Canada child tax benefit, which together with the national child benefit amounts to about \$9.4 billion. The Canada child tax benefit for a two-child low-income family is about \$6,431 a year. You're not suggesting that those moneys would be better spent by targeting them to child care. Are you saying that aspect of it is working well and you're happy with it and you'd like to see more dollars spent in a different way?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Could you repeat which benefits you referenced?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: The national child benefit and the Canadian child tax benefit, totally, encompass about \$9.4 billion, which puts a two-child low-income family in a position of receiving of \$6,431. You're not saying those funds should be reallocated somehow to child care spaces or benefits. Are you saying that? Or are you happy with what is being done and you'd like to see more done?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: I think we're talking about two different things. Income supports to families are important. We recognize that as part of a poverty reduction strategy.

•(1210)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Are you happy with that?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: We do recognize the importance of that. We need to make sure the money is actually making it to families and to measure that it is making a difference.

But in terms of early learning and child care, Canada finishes last in international studies by the OECD, by UNICEF. We have a lot of ground to catch up. I think it's very important that we allocate funds to child care as well, to actually catch up to the international community and meet the needs of our children.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Thank you.

I will pass it on to Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, colleagues and Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses.

Poverty is a very important issue to all Canadians and each one of us around this room. It has a non-partisan effect in every constituency, no matter what race, religion, sex, demographic. We could all share all kinds of stories, from young to old....

I represent a riding in the interior of British Columbia that has a high number of seniors. It's a serious issue. Within our budget, we have addressed the age credit and trying to find ways to help people get off the welfare wall. Mr. Flaherty relayed the working income tax benefit.

I want to clarify something. I spent nine years in local government working on the social planning committees and with the province of British Columbia on programs for housing and child care initiatives. Federally, we are restricted. There are difficulties within the Constitution, and we have to clarify the divisions. If we wanted to automatically set up a national standard, there would be some roadblocks, obviously, set up by our friends in Quebec and other communities. We have to recognize that we work within the Constitution.

Our government has re-established stable and predictable funding to the provinces. As my colleague mentioned, there is the annual Canada health transfer at 6% per annum until 2014, a 3% increase to our social transfer and child care funding, and housing agreements with the territories and the provinces. In British Columbia, there's a 30-year agreement. That's about \$2.2 billion over the 30 years. And we continue to work with programs.

Specifically from Dr. Lynk, I liked your analogy as far as setting goals for reducing leukemia down to 92% goes. There's a similar initiative to eradicate polio around the world, with the Rotary. Our government has invested in Afghanistan. It's one of the four countries left in the world....

In your opinion, what measures have we taken today, as a government, to help reduce and hopefully eradicate child poverty or to move in that direction?

Dr. Andrew Lynk: This may be a philosophical argument, and I'm not an expert in some of the policy research in which my colleagues here are. But take, for example, the heavy emphasis by Parliament in the last two to three years on health care waiting times—for cancer treatment, for hips and knees, I think for diagnostic imaging, and for cataracts. I might be missing one or two points, but those were the main ones, I think. Nowhere there was there any mention of mental health.

All of us who work with families and children of low income and even high income know that mental health services, especially for people in smaller areas, are sparse and hard to access, and that this lack causes tremendous impact. I see families and children in my office, and the mother is depressed and can't function, and the child is not functioning at school, and we can't get her in to see somebody, or she can't afford medications. When you ask what we can do federally, those are the types of things, I guess. I think it's placing the emphasis on the right areas and measuring the right things.

All of us baby boomers want to have our hips replaced within a month or two, when the time comes for all of us to have that done. Maybe there needs to be an emphasis on our having to wait a little bit longer and on that money and emphasis going to more important programs that are actually going to pay bigger dividends.

So in response to your question, it's a philosophical emphasis, if you're asking me. We were concerned, from the Canadian Paediatric Society, that child mental health and adult mental health were left out of the wait time issue.

Mr. Ron Cannan: I appreciate that. Mental health is crucial. Senator Kirby's report was tabled, and we're working with our government to have Senator Kirby lead the way. And accountability is crucial.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cannan and Dr. Lynk.

We're going to move to our second round, which will be five minutes of questions and answers. I'm going to turn the floor over to Madame Folco.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

In my opinion, that was a good answer Ms. Dallaire. I would like to remind committee members that there is presently a tax assistance program for children. We also have what is known as the Canada Child Tax Benefit.

•(1215)

[*English*]

This is the child tax benefit, and it is not the same thing. It is not included in what we call the child care programs. I would like to make that very clear.

I'd like to go back a little bit in terms of fundamental—what can I say?—

[*Translation*]

—in terms of fundamental principles with respect to poverty in Canada. As my colleague, Ms. Minna, stated earlier, what you told us today is not new to anyone around this table.

I would like to hear you speak again about some things for the benefit of certain persons and perhaps even for certain parties present today. For example, I would like you to talk about family benefits provided through direct financial assistance, or the \$6,000 that Mr. Komarnicki spoke about just now.

Do you believe that this had significant benefits for families in terms of the health of families and children especially?

Even more important, more fundamental, is the responsibility of the Government of Canada. What is your perspective? I would like you to comment in detail. I hope this will be recorded in the minutes of our meetings.

What do you believe is the federal government's responsibility in this area? We know that it is shared with the provinces. Given the lack of time, I would appreciate it if you would not speak about provincial responsibilities, but speak strictly about the responsibilities of the federal government.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: First of all, I will answer the second question. The federal government's responsibility is to establish

national criteria. For example, what are the objectives of a child care system?

The government must draft either legislation or criteria for a national policy, which obviously excludes Quebec since it already has a provincial child care system. The provinces could access this funding if they meet the criteria and report annually to the federal government. This allows for diversity in the delivery of services.

New Brunswick has a lot of catching up to do. I am from New Brunswick.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Your accent gave it away, Mrs. Dallaire. It is very pleasant.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: At the outset, it may wish to invest in creating more spaces; other provinces, where more spaces exist, may wish to focus on accessibility. Nonetheless, this allows for flexibility in the provincial approaches to the problem but there are basic criteria that must be met.

With regard to direct funding to families, I can speak more specifically about the program for families: \$100 a month per child under the age of six. Families have told us that they do appreciate the program. There might be enough left over after taxes to pay for the gas to take their children to child care but it does not in any way help them find a space when none are available. Even when they find a space, the cost of child care is about \$12,000 a year. There is a large gap between these amounts.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Thank you.

Mr. Lynk?

[*English*]

Dr. Andrew Lynk: I don't want to repeat myself, but I would respectfully and humbly add one plea to all the members of Parliament here, when you go back and talk in caucus to your leaders. As I recall watching the last televised leaders debate during the election, I did not hear the issue of poverty being raised once by any of the four or five leaders that I heard. You can correct me if I'm wrong, but I thought I listened pretty carefully. I think if the inflation rate or the interest rate had been 15% or 17%, that would have been discussed, but the fact that the child poverty rate is about 17%...I don't understand why it wasn't discussed. So I think that needs to be up front and centre.

If you want to be selfish, it's not just an issue of social justice for the people who are disadvantaged. It doesn't help any of our society in the present or the future if we don't help lift these people up. It's an important thing to be debated.

Thank you.

•(1220)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Lynk.

We're out of time. We're going to move to the next round. Mr. Vellacott, five minutes, please.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): I appreciate the discussion, and I think all of us who have worked with children over the years.... Some have children and grandchildren. I appreciate Andrew's reference to a child who has some health difficulties now and then; it must be difficult. But I do want to quickly get some background here, because I think that actually does add when we bring these personal experiences in, so I'll ask direct questions to Jody and Leilani as well.

Are you a mom, have a family, kids, several children?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Yes, I have two sons. One is 14. He is out of child care. I have a 10-year-old son as well, yes.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: So they keep your life full, I'm sure.

Leilani, you have a family, children?

Ms. Leilani Farha: I have two children. One is three and one is five, and they are not in public school.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: So they are in a child care situation.

In my case, I have children and grandchildren as well.

As we come to these areas, after hearing a little bit of the testimony, I want you to respond to this. I'm sure this is not what we mean to convey, but sometimes when I hear testimony, even again today, some of the citations in terms of our having to absolutely increase to x numbers or whatever—I guess we all have different numbers there—of women in the workforce, it does give an impression, and I think you'll understand what I'm saying here, that unless a woman is always out in the paid workforce or unless she is there at the current time to add to whatever that percentage in the workforce might be, there's something inferior about that: if a woman is not in the paid workforce. And I've had women tell me this.

You made comments here today, and I don't know that you meant that, but I need to probe that a bit with you.

I have a wife who has been in the paid workforce and has been out of it, and hopefully she doesn't feel at all demeaned or diminished at points when she's not able to be in the paid workforce. I have a daughter now—

A voice: None of us said that.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Sure. I'll tell you in a second whether it's a point of order or not.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Okay. I would really strongly suggest to the member that he make no personal remarks to the witnesses. The witnesses are here professionally, and their personal life is their own business. I would really suggest that these remarks be withdrawn.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I have asked questions. My questions right now are in respect to comments that were made—

The Chair: Continue.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: On that question, then. A young mom who now presently is at home taking care of her children, doing the best she can during that period of time—is that an acceptable choice for her to be making at that juncture? Do you have a problem with that?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Absolutely not. I don't have a problem with that.

As for the reason I joined the child care advocacy movement as the volunteer chairperson of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, this is true with many moms I've met in the community: our roles change as our children grow.

I know many moms personally, and many moms in our community and across Canada. We've been stay-at-home moms when our children were at a young age. We've chosen to work part-time when that best met our family's needs. Some of us have chosen to work full-time. But what has been absent in all of those roles as we've changed is available and affordable programs, such as drop-in centres, part-time care, or full-time care, because we don't have a national strategy to meet women's needs in all of their roles and to meet the child development needs of our children.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Thank you. I appreciate that. I think that needs to come across, if I can be so humble as to suggest this, in terms of remarks, public and otherwise, that the choice of those gals or you at that particular time is a valid choice and a good choice. I think that needs to be more publicly acknowledged, because sometimes the impression I get from talking to women is that they don't feel that choice is much respected or recognized and honoured in our country.

Go ahead, Ms. Farha.

Ms. Leilani Farha: I think you've used the perfect word. I think that what we're on about is that word, which is “choice”, but we expect, and the government has an obligation to ensure, that women have real choices. When women are offered twelve hundred bucks over the course of a year in terms of a child care benefit, we have to ask ourselves, and you have to ask yourselves, are you creating choices for women? I think that's up for a big question at this point.

● (1225)

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Okay. Exactly.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Very quickly, then, this is to all three of you across the table.

A previous witness indicated that if the amounts could be increased, as you just in fact referred to.... But allowed that choice, then, you can put it into direct day care or into the possibility of an increased amount on income support so that you can have an aunt, a grandparent.... I appreciate that not everybody has that choice, as I think you implied in your response, but some may. Would you be open to that if those dollars increased, maybe with some going to direct child care places and maybe some in the way of a choice to have a grandparent or whoever do that child care?

The Chair: We're out of time. We're going to have to move on, in fairness to everybody, Maurice.

Mr. Nadeau, welcome.

You have five minutes. The floor is yours, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Chair.

Hello, Mrs. Dallaire, Ms. Farha and Mr. Lynk.

Ms. Farha, you stated that poverty in general is a systemic problem. We are in the midst of an economic crisis, which is hitting some areas harder than others. The optimists believe that it will last a few years; the realists believe it will last longer. We hope that the realists are wrong. We know what this crisis will do in terms of poverty.

We live in a society, in an economic system, that experienced a crisis in the 1930's and that recovered after WWII. It is basically a capitalist system, where maximum profit is the religion. Those who manage to make a lot of money in this society are supposed to have the good will to spread it around among citizens. I am getting to the issue of state intervention. In any case, the state does intervene.

Canada's oil companies are entitled to tax credits. We all agree that they are not the poorest in the family. As for the employment insurance fund, in the past ten years, over \$57 million has been withdrawn and used for other purposes, rather than being paid to workers entitled to those monies in difficult times. Depriving workers of that money does not help in any way to eliminate poverty; it impoverishes them.

The state intervenes in other ways. Just think of the \$3 billion discretionary fund that was just approved in the House of Commons by the Liberals and the Conservatives as part of the last budget. In English it has been called a slush fund—I do not know the exact French translation, but you know what I mean—and there is no primary accountability. You ask and you are given, that is all.

According to the statistics provided by Mr. Lynk, 17% of children live in poverty. I assume that is across Canada. Our children represent the future of this country. We do not talk about it a great deal, but we are aware that that is the reality.

Even if you work in a specific area you can contribute an answer. I will ask the question of our three witnesses: are there concrete and tangible solutions? There are 208 countries in the world and in a few weeks there will be 209. Can we suggest potential solutions to this government to which we all belong as legislators? Are there measures that, when we think about it, are obvious and have been proven to move things forward?

That is my question.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: That is a multi-faceted question and one that is difficult to answer. You mentioned that poverty is systemic, and that is true. Tackling this issue is very complicated. Child care services are just one means of dealing with the crisis.

You stated that we live in a market economy. That is true, but the market does not meet all the needs of citizens. The market has gaps, especially in child care services outside Quebec, an area with which I am very familiar.

Quebec recognized that the market would not deliver high-quality child care services needed by parents. The government had to intervene to acknowledge and tackle this problem. When the problem was acknowledged, the Quebec government introduced measures to deal with it. To date, federal governments have not been able to develop national policies with criteria applicable to provinces other than Quebec. They do not acknowledge the problems and do not know where to start in order to solve them.

The government of my province, New Brunswick, obviously will not tackle this issue without the federal government taking the lead. For example, we immediately think of reducing taxes. However, in New Brunswick, 40% of women and 27% of men do not pay taxes because their income is too low. Such measures will not solve the poverty crisis. Rather, we need to invest in programs that will benefit people. This data is similar across Canada.

When you consider that 38.7% of women, compared to 24.4% of men, in Canada do not pay taxes because their income is too low, it is clear that we must invest in programs that will support these people, not offer them tax cuts that do not meet their needs.

• (1230)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's all the time we have.

We're going to move over to Mr. Lobb. We're not going to have a full round here. We have only a couple of minutes, because we have other business to take care of.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you for your time. I'll ask my questions quickly, and hopefully you can answer them quickly.

Ms. Dallaire, does your group have a costed plan for your ultimate vision for child care, and what is that?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Absolutely, we do. MP Minna asked about it. It's called "From Patchwork to Framework". It establishes benchmarks and timelines over a 15-year period, and I'll be providing that to the committee for your consideration.

Mr. Ben Lobb: So it has a cost?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Yes, it has a cost.

Mr. Ben Lobb: And then would you also want to see the \$13 billion we currently contribute towards the other initiatives we have to combat child poverty, with all the different dollars that Mr. Komarnicki mentioned before? Is that cost for child care in addition to that?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Our plan actually costed a universal child care system for all children aged zero to six. It didn't base it on full-time care for all children because, as mentioned, some parents will choose drop-in centres, for stay-at-home parents, and some will choose part-time care. It's based on 1% of GDP. We didn't look at the global poverty reduction strategy. We focused our energy specifically on child care.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Thank you. We'll have to cross that at another time, then.

I'm from a rural area, so I guess it's only prudent that I ask a question about rural Ontario, or rural Canada. There just aren't enough children to attend day cares to have them in all the communities in the riding in which I live. How does your strategy address those issues in rural Ontario, rural Canada? I'm sure your group dealt with that.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: That's a very good question.

I live in New Brunswick, which is a very rural province, and we work with an organization called Rural Voices. They've done some amazing creative things. Child care in rural communities does look different, but it is doable. Often you have multi-age groups, and you pair it with other services. It's really from the ground up. It's not something that's imposed by the provincial or the federal governments. It's the community that looks at what is needed and actually builds the services.

In rural New Brunswick, for example, we have community schools, and a lot of them are at risk of closing. So it makes sense that early learning and child care would be part of the school building, to be able to, first of all, save the school and to provide that

essential service in the community. If at a certain time there are fewer children, we can do another service instead.

The Chair: Thank you. That's all the time we have today.

I do want to thank our witnesses for taking time to be here. Thank you very much.

I'm going to tell the committee, while we're handing out other committee business, we're going to go in camera, so we're going to take about a two-minute break.

Once again, thank you for being here today.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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