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Fall economic statement recognizes needs of diverse families but some of the most vulnerable still left out

TORONTO – The federal fall economic statement released yesterday provides some needed support for families hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. It recognizes a myriad of ways in which vulnerable groups have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and subsequent emergency responses, which has shown us how clearly public health cannot be separated from a healthy economy. It calls for an intersectional, feminist and green recovery as the way to rebuild a new thriving future state in which no one is left behind.

Campaign 2000: End Child and Family poverty reacts to three areas in the fall economic statement:

Supports for Families

There are important new investments to the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) – four tax-free payments of up to \$1,200 for children under six available to families eligible for the CCB to be delivered in 2021. As well, quarterly payments of \$300 will be paid for each child under the age of six who is receiving the Children’s Special Allowance.

Families with young children have experienced disproportionate job loss and these temporary measures will provide some needed relief. But CCB investments need to be permanent increases, and work to bring families with children up to the Census Family Low Income Measure, After Tax as a target. Families with middle years and older children as well as children with disabilities need extra supports. They are currently left out of this plan, as are those with precarious immigration status who still cannot access these benefits.

Additional funding and accountability measures through the Canada Social Transfer are required to similarly support single individuals, particularly those depending on social and disability assistance, which remains well below poverty the poverty line in every province and territory.

Early Learning and Child Care

The federal government’s two-step plan to create a Canada-wide system of early learning and child care begins with the creation of the Federal Secretariat and continues with the implementation of the plan in the upcoming federal budget. Recognizing the need for a Canada-wide system of childcare to support women’s re-entry into the labour market, there are commitments to fund a Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Childcare with \$20 million over five years as well as investments to sustain the existing Indigenous Early Learning and Childcare Secretariat. The \$7.5 billion committed in 2016 and 2017 budgets over 11 years is proposed to become permanent instead of ending in 2027-2028 by providing \$870 million per year and ongoing, starting in 2028-29. Of this amount, \$210 million would support Indigenous early learning and child care programming.

Permanent funding with allocations for Indigenous early learning and child care programs are very important, but funding levels fall well below what is required. Child Care Now has advocated for a 2021-2022 budget allocation for early learning and child care of an additional \$2 billion to address the impact of the pandemic and strengthen the sectors capacity to serve families. The \$420 million allocated for training of early childhood

educators is an important recognition of the essential nature of the workforce and its major contribution to quality service. It is critical that the work of the Early Learning Secretariat begins immediately so that implementation moves forward with the provinces and territories.

Homelessness

The fall economic statement reiterates the promise from the September Throne Speech to end chronic homelessness and invest \$1 billion into the Rapid Housing Initiative through the Reaching Home Strategy to create 3,000 units across the country.

The definition of homelessness in this policy must be expanded to include the experiences of children and families experiencing homelessness including women, trans, gender non-conforming people fleeing violence, immigrants and refugees, Indigenous women, girls and Two Spirit Peoples. There is currently no plan to ensure that the Gender Based Plus (GBA+) commitments to allocate at a minimum 25% of resources through the National Housing Strategy are applied to the Rapid Housing Initiative, which would help women, gender diverse people and their dependents who are in immediate need. Targeted supports are required for communities over-represented in the homeless population, including youth with child welfare experience and Indigenous Peoples. Funding for wraparound supports to address complex needs and help people stay housed are also needed as part of this initiative.

Deeply affordable and safe housing is critical to build resilience against public health crises. It is also key to supporting an intersectional, feminist and green economy. Adequate housing is linked to job retention for marginalized women and low income families, and the development of new sustainable green supply can create decent work with community benefits agreements as we further our climate commitments.

For more information, please contact:

Leila Sarangi, National Coordinator, Campaign 2000

C: 647.393.1097

E: leilasa@familyservicetoronto.org

Campaign 2000 is a diverse pan-Canadian coalition working to end child and family poverty. We are generously hosted by Family Service Toronto. See www.campaign2000.ca for more information.