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NEWS RELEASE

The Family Benefit Packages in Alberta and BC Do Not Measure Up

*Investing in universally accessible child care services would bring these
wealthy provinces closer to other industrialized countries in terms of
support for families*

Montreal – The Canadian economy is strong. This is particularly evident in the western provinces of British Columbia and Alberta. However, an IRPP study being released today argues that despite a favourable economic context, the benefits provided to families in BC and Alberta are not generous enough.

Author Paul Kershaw (University of British Columbia) examines overall family benefits packages in Alberta and BC for different types of families and then compares them with those of other industrialized countries. His findings show that Alberta and BC rank low by international standards in terms of their combined investment in family benefits. The study serves as a reminder that promoting gender equity, raising healthy children and supporting parents in the quest to balance work and family requires more than rhetoric, it requires real investment.

Kershaw's analysis is unique. He investigates a wide range of Canadian family policy measures, including tax expenditures, income-targeted benefits, parental leave benefits, public investment in child care service, health care, Pharmacare, and dental care subsidies, along with welfare. The results of his comparative study are telling:

- ◆ Alberta and BC rank 12th and 13th, respectively, relative to the 15 other countries examined in terms of average family benefits. Kershaw concludes that "providing support to families with children is therefore less of a public priority in these provinces than it is in many other countries."
- ◆ He argues that the situation is not much better in other Canadian provinces, as only Quebec has a policy approach that deviates significantly from those of BC and Alberta.

Kershaw contends that the creation of universally accessible child care systems in both provinces would be the effective way to improve the weak standing of Alberta and BC's current programs. He estimates that the net cost of such systems would be \$1.2 billion per year in BC and slightly lower in Alberta, in both cases well below the projected provincial budget surpluses.

Such a system would, he argues:

- ◆ Boost the maternal labour supply and also increase government revenues, since increased earnings for mothers means that they pay more in taxes
- ◆ Increase the number of women working full-time in the labour force and, in the process, bring both provinces closer to achieving the goal of gender equality
- ◆ Promote healthy child development that maximizes skills acquisition, thereby mitigating “the traps that shackle young citizens in poverty for extensive periods”

“Measuring Up: Family Benefits in British Columbia and Alberta in International Perspective,” by Paul Kershaw, can be downloaded for free from www.irpp.org

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Contact:

Jackson Wightman (jwightman@irpp.org)

Director of Communications (IRPP)

Office: (514) 985-2461, ext. 324

Cellular: (514) 235-8308