

No reason \$10-a-day childcare in BC can't start soon, says advocate ^[1]

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But New Democratic-Green coalition says subsidized universal plan will take 10 years.

New Democratic Party leader John Horgan reminded assembled parents and reporters at an East Vancouver playground this morning that an NDP-Green coalition government will implement a \$10-a-day childcare plan in British Columbia.

"I think it's critically important to our families, it's critically important to our economy, to ensure we get moving and we're providing quality accessible, affordable childcare," Horgan said, adding the plan will take a decade to implement.

The NDP has also promised 22,000 new childcare spaces by 2020, up to 65,000 new spaces by 2022.

Horgan wouldn't say how much parents would be paying for those initial new childcare spaces, nor how much the program would cost the province overall.

Estimates have pegged the cost of the NDP's plan at \$1.5 billion annually, with advocates saying the contributions of parents returning to the workforce will come close to paying for it.

But the government could start providing \$10-a-day childcare at existing childcare programs as early as next month, says Emily Mlieczko, executive director of the Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia, a professional organization that developed the initial \$10-a-day proposal with the Coalition of Childcare Advocates in 2011.

Provincial subsidies should start with all infant and toddler early childhood education programs, she said, "because that's the highest cost for families right now, and the greatest need."

The plan calls for eliminating fees altogether for families making \$40,000 or less.

The implementation of an Early Care and Learning Act stipulating the quality of care and rights of parents and children should also be introduced immediately, Mlieczko said.

She agrees with Horgan, however, that implementing other elements of the seven-stage plan, including amalgamating childcare responsibility under the B.C. Ministry of Education, increasing worker education and pay, and developing infrastructure required for a new public childcare system, will take a decade.

Unfortunately, that means parents in need of childcare today may not be helped by the plan.

"That's why we need government to work together — whoever they are — to really look at this issue and do something that's holistic and looks at all the issues, because we are in a childcare crisis," she said.

The BC Liberals, who won the most seats in the May election and remain in power for the time being, had pledged to create 13,000 new childcare spaces by 2020 while maintaining the current childcare subsidy capped at \$550 a month, a little over half the average monthly cost of care in Metro Vancouver.

The \$10-a-day plan would also invite existing private and non-profit providers to join a new public system, adopting the standards and practices established under the proposed Early Care and Learning Act.

New spaces means more early childhood educators are needed, and Horgan wants to increase the education standards for existing workers while training more educators for the coming need.

The \$10-a-day plan his party has endorsed includes lifting workers up from an average \$16.53 hourly pay to \$25 an hour, though Horgan would not speculate how much workers should be paid.

A pay increase is key to attracting and retaining educated workers, said Mlieczko.

“We lose close to 50 per cent of all qualified early childhood educators after five years because they can’t afford to stay in the sector, or they don’t feel valued for the work they’re doing,” she said, adding many early childhood educators can’t afford their own childcare.

Despite the difference in timelines, Horgan said he agrees with every step called for in the \$10-a-day childcare plan.

“We’ll modify it depending on implementation,” he said. “We agree with it today, and we’re going to implement it going forward.”

-reprinted from The Tyee

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