

Editorial: Daycare relief likely not on the horizon any time soon ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Families seeking daycare relief may be watching their child graduate from high school before seeing any meaningful changes in B.C.

This wouldn't be a big deal if young families weren't already tapped out paying for mortgages and other bills, and child-care fees makes life even less affordable.

What's more, there is a daycare shortage in the Fraser Valley, with many families struggling just to find a spot.

The truth is Canadians aren't big on paying for other kids' daycare and that's why we have such a patchwork system. Even the federal government's much vaunted daycare plan is targeted mostly to low-income and marginal communities. While that's good and needed, your average family is not likely to see much benefit.

The great ambivalence towards universal child care support here is unlike some European countries, where it's seen as an important pillar of society. Here, child care is seen as an individual responsibility.

Thus, tax credits are typically used to transfer money to families instead of a break on daycare fees. Subsidies are only for those in the lowest income brackets while efforts are made to boost the number of daycare spaces through grants to operators, but those amounts rise and fall depending on the economy, government commitment, election cycle, etc.

In B.C., the \$10-a-day plan proposed by the New Democrats is in jeopardy because of what is likely to be a short-lived NDP-Green partnership. Even if that plan were to succeed, it will take years to fully roll out, and a switch back to a BC Liberal government, or any downturn in the economy, would surely kill it.

In Quebec, where a \$7-a-day plan gets the most attention, the realities of such a scheme have not lived up to the promise. Public daycare spots are limited, just as they are here, because governments are only willing to put so much money into daycare; thus, only about a third of families get access to them, creating long waiting lists and concerns about substandard care.

Meanwhile, the Quebec government has slowly increased fees while even modestly higher-income families are taxed back on the subsidies. While it does seem that Quebec's system has reduced costs for daycare for more families than those who get subsidies in B.C., it is a less than perfect system.

So for B.C., a long-term, universal daycare plan is a tricky proposal at best and, sadly for thousands of families, may even be a non-starter.

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