

Province announces \$33M to create 3,800 new child-care spaces ^[1]

Minister for children says spaces will come from 103 projects in 52 communities

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EXCERPTS

The provincial government announced Monday it will create more than 3,800 new licensed child-care spaces at a cost of \$33 million, which it says will help "thousands" of families.

Children and Family Development Minister Katrine Conroy made the announcement at the YMCA child-care centre in Vancouver's Woodward's building and was joined by fellow NDP MLAs Katrina Chen and Melanie Mark.

Conroy, in a news release, said the 3,806 spaces will come from 103 projects in 52 communities.

"We are speeding up the creation of new child-care spaces to address years of pent-up demand for child care," she said.

The government says the 3,806 spaces will focus on areas of greatest need: infant and toddler spaces, spaces on school grounds or in community hubs, "inclusive spaces in child-development centres," Indigenous child care and employer-based spaces.

Expect all spaces in 1 to 2 years

Conroy said she expected all 3,806 spaces to be in place within one to two years. She said the \$33 million would be spent on both renovating existing facilities and building new ones.

The NDP campaigned on a promise of bringing in \$10-a-day child care and Conroy said further details on "a system of child care" would be released in February's budget.

"It's going to take a little while to roll out a system of child care," she said. "We are doing a lot of work to ensure that we are meeting with advocates, with child care providers, with families, to ensure we're going to put a system in place that's going to work for families of British Columbia."

Communities desperate for spaces

Mary Clare Zak, managing director of social policy for the City of Vancouver, said the 453 child-care spaces the funding would provide for her city were "clearly not enough."

She says the city needs about 17,000 new spaces.

"It's a step in the right direction, and it's a start," she said. "What Vancouver's looking forward to is working with the province to fulfill its commitments ... to provide universal child care."

In Prince George, Correen Blischen, owner of the Duchess Park Early Learning Centre, said she was "so excited" that her facility would receive funding for 40 new spaces.

She says the need for child care in the community is reaching "critical mass."

"I've had parents calling me, desperately seeking spaces for their children," she said.

She says the lack of space is driving some parents to rely on unlicensed child care providers which she says have "issues" like poor oversight and accountability.

Sharon Gregson, an advocate for \$10-a-day child care, said she expects today's announcement to lead to bigger child-care investments.

"We need a province that's committed to building a system, and that's our expectation of what we'll hear in February," she said. "This is a very small announcement in the scheme of things but an important signal of new spaces to come."

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