

B.C. to roll out child-care plan next year, even without extra federal money ^[1]

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VICTORIA — Premier John Horgan says his government will push forward with the first phase of its universal child care program next year, even if it can't squeeze more money out of Ottawa.

"I think the fact I said I welcomed federal participation led people to the conclusion that if we didn't get it we weren't proceeding," Horgan said Tuesday in a year-end interview with Postmedia News. "We're proceeding. We'll have a better program. It will be more comprehensive if we have federal participation."

Horgan said after a November meeting with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau that if B.C. was to proceed with its planned \$10-a-day child care program, it would need a willing federal partner to offer up more money. But in clarifying his remarks Tuesday, Horgan made clear the province will charge forward with the plan alone if need be.

Ottawa announced this year \$7.5 billion over 11 years split among provinces for child care. Horgan said he's spoken to Trudeau about increasing B.C.'s share, given the prime minister's personal roots in the province.

"I'm hopeful that he and his finance minister will be able to find a way to make a bigger contribution to our program as we unveil with it starting in February," said Horgan. "But we will proceed regardless."

The NDP promised \$10-a-day child care during the spring election, to be phased in over 10 years. Initially, the government's plan was to use the first phase to build thousands of new child care spaces, followed by a second phase that would open those spots for infant-toddlers (children aged zero to three) for \$10 a day.

Subsequent ages would be added in future years, with costs beginning at \$280 million in 2018-19, \$400 million in 2019-20, and \$1.5 billion a year when fully operational, according to the party's election platform.

However, the NDP's September budget update did not contain any new money for the child care program, amid a dispute with the Greens over the program. The Greens, whose power-sharing deal keeps the NDP in government, had proposed a different universal child care promise involving hours per week, credits for stay-at-home parents and taxable benefits.

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