

Advocate says universal child care long overdue in B.C. ^[1]

Lynell Anderson says \$3 billion child care investment positive first step

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It's long overdue but there will be some growing pains in developing a publicly funded universal child care system in B.C., says child care advocate Lynell Anderson.

Anderson, with the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C., says her research on developing a child care system for the provincial government 10 years ago led her to the belief that publicly funded daycare, as opposed to offering parents financial subsidies to off-set their costs, was the best solution.

"This is an interesting and exciting time as the new budget has unveiled substantive and investment changes with regards to the future direction of child care," said Anderson, referring to the NDP government's \$1 billion in new funding over the next three years to make substantial progress towards creating a universal child care system.

"We can begin to catch up to the 25 wealthiest countries in the world, of which Canada ranks the weakest, for child care support. Parents pay the highest fees and have the lowest access rate to child care. In Canada, B.C. falls behind most of the provinces, not just Quebec but also the eastern provinces, Ontario and Manitoba.

"We are in the place and space to turn the corner on the child care chaos that exists right now."

While the NDP trumpeted the \$10 a day child care fee promise during the election campaign, Anderson said it will take time to reach that ultimate goal. The initial strategy outlined in the budget calls for reduction of parent fees, to create 24,000 licensed daycare spaces, and improved wages for early childhood educators.

Among those first steps will be bringing down fees by \$10 a day for full-time care, \$7 for part-time care and no parent fees for families making under \$40,000 a year, which is considered below the poverty line.

To administer these changes, the province is asking licensed daycare operators to opt in to the newly created Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative, a process that is complicated for child care operators given some uncertainties over how the new accountability and oversight regulations the province will have over their businesses will work, and the timeframe of meeting the first program enrolment deadline of April 1.

Anderson met with child care operators in the Central Okanagan on Tuesday at the Kelowna Child Care Society office to discuss some of those issues.

"We are interested in sharing this new information provided by the B.C. budget announcement to our community and work together to understanding the similarities and differences between what has been proposed and what is being rolled out across the province," said Amanda Turner, early years community developer in the Central Okanagan.

Anderson said looking forward, her advocacy coalition will push for higher wages for child care educators, investment needed to provide quality programming, encourage local municipalities to build child care planning resources into future community planning and look at the existing public building inventory space across the province for potential child care location expansion.

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