

Childcare advocates disagree with Fraser Institute's report on subsidized daycare ^[1]

On Thursday, the Fraser Institute releases a report that was critical of Quebec's subsidized daycare plan. A view that's not held by Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C.

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EXCERPTS

Supporters of B.C.'s move toward universal daycare defended the plan this week as one group said the government should look at a more targeted approach.

On Thursday, the Fraser Institute released a report titled "Subsidized Daycare — What British Columbia Can Learn from Quebec's 20-Year Experiment," critiquing that province's system and making a number of recommendation for the B.C. government. According to Vincent Geloso, a Quebec-based Fraser Institute researcher and author of the report, "[B.C. should] provide resources directly to families to help cover the costs of whatever individual approach to daycare works best for them."

"Quebec's experience is pretty unique in providing universal daycare," he said. "The idea behind it was to provide a very stimulating experience for kids and at the same time it was hoped that it would stimulate the participation in the labour market of mothers."

"The idea was this overall would be beneficial to kids and beneficial in terms of a fiscal policy because the amount of extra mothers in the labour market would provide extra revenue to the government."

Geloso goes on to say the daycare cost per child has doubled since the program was introduced in 1997, costing the government \$2.3 billion last year. There are also long waitlists for subsidized spots, he added, and there is a growing number of parents turning to unsubsidized spots.

"Even though parents are paying taxes for this... and they have access to the service they actually prefer to go to unsubsidized daycare at \$30-\$35 dollars a day," he said. "The unsubsidized daycare accounts for the majority of the growth in daycare services in Quebec."

He said today about 20 per cent of daycare spaces in the province are unsubsidized, when the program started almost every spot was subsidized.

Geloso argues that B.C. should look at a program that targets those most in need based on income.

"Programs that are targeted are generally more efficient," he said. "You have a limited amount of resources and you just put all the resources where they're needed rather than trying to cover people with a blanket that will not cover those who actually need the help the most and cover people who don't need the help."

"It would be completely absurd to give, like it was in Quebec back then, \$7-a-day daycare [to people] with household incomes above \$1

million. It would be stupendously absurd.”

Lynell Anderson, a certified general accountant and lead researcher with the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C.’s \$10-a-day campaign, argued that most academics and economists confirm the benefits of quality universal childcare.

She has been involved with four different studies of the matter in recent years, working with four different economists using different methodology — but the results were the same.

“All have shown that a universal system like \$10-a-day that is really affordable for families, high quality for children and available to all who choose it, when that’s in place then the cost of the program it tends to be what we call self-financing,” she said.

Anderson added that an increased investment in childcare needs to be coupled with both lower fees for parents and increased wages and education levels for staff, while creating more availability.

“The lessons we learned from Quebec, and from other provinces and from other countries, is we need to make sure it’s affordable in order for parents to be able to actually use it, we need to make sure it’s high quality, it needs to be available, and those are all the three key elements that were in the \$10-a-day plan and they’re reflected in government’s plan, which is similar to but not exactly the \$10-a-day plan but the key elements are there,” she said, adding that implementation of the B.C. plan will be much more staged than Quebec’s approach 20 years ago.

“B.C. talks about its plan being a 10 year plan — it’s hard for people to wait, I know that — but we want to take the time to do it really well and make sure that as we go along we’re making care more affordable, we are addressing quality, investing in the workforce right from the get go, and that we’re building good, sustainable, long-standing and much needed spaces in the right places.”

British Columbia has some catching up to do when it comes to public spending on childcare, Anderson said.

“This is really long overdue because right now, just to put this in context, Canada has the lowest public investment in childcare among wealthy countries, we have consistently for several years, and within Canada B.C. spends less than the Canadian average and in fact only New Brunswick spends less than B.C.”

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