

B.C. government not 'setting a target' to get child care providers to opt in to new benefit ^[1]

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The B.C. government says it doesn't have a firm goal for how many child care providers it wants to register for the province's new program for reduced fees at licensed child care facilities.

The province kicked off child care month in the province on Tuesday by releasing new numbers that show 25,309 of the 50,000 spaces available for the financial support have been approved.

"We are still working on the application, staff are even working on evenings and weekends," Minister of State for Child Care Katrina Chen said. "We have to work hard to engage with providers, which is what we are doing every day."

Child care providers started receiving government support on April 1, that in turn was funneled to parents. The province has been widely criticized for the flawed roll-out that had providers concerned about signing a contract with the government.

But even if providers did not register in the first month of the program, they can still sign up. The province is not setting a deadline, nor will it set an end target for how many spaces it wants to have approved. The money is slated to be distributed to eligible, licensed care facilities after going through a registration and application process with the government.

"We are not setting a target. I think the key is we want to encourage providers to enter the program and we think providers will enter the program," Chen said. "This free initiative program providers can enter any time."

Chen was at the Hastings Park Childcare Centre on Tuesday to meet with a select group of parents who have so far benefited from the government's program. The program is designed to save parents up to \$350 per month per space, depending on the age of the child and whether they are in licensed family or group daycare.

One of the parents on hand for the event was Olivia Bornik. Bornik's youngest child attends the child care facility and says her family now pays \$700 a month, down from close to \$900 a month before the government program.

"Couple hundred dollars a month makes a big change on what we can do as a family and how we can organize our finances," Bornik said.

Bornik says the child care was very clear on how much money a family would save and has been told that further discounts may be coming. But the mother of two understands that she is lucky to even have gotten her second child in. The Bornik family was never able to get the older child into the popular care facility.

"I think absolutely more is needed. I know there is talk about \$10-a-day child care and that is how it is in other parts of the country," said Bornik. "It is a huge issue for young families in Vancouver. Young families are being driven out for a number of reasons not the least of which is child care is not affordable. And it's next to impossible to find spots."

The B.C. government is also planning on adding new licensed child care spaces. The province has pledged \$237 million to fund more than 22,000 spots over the next three months.

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