

B.C. to start \$200-a-month child-care pilot to prepare for universal system ^[1]

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Source: The Star Vancouver

Format: Article

Publication Date: 7 Jun 2018

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

The B.C. government is going to test out how a \$10-a-day child-care system would work by pulling 1,800 existing daycare spots into a new prototype program.

Child-care centres have to apply for the program, which will run from Sept. 1, 2018 to March 31, 2019. Families who are eligible for the spots would pay no more than \$200 a month, or nothing if their income is below \$45,000 a year.

Child-care advocate Sharon Gregson said the test period will provide important information.

“How are families positively impacted when their child-care fees are \$200 a month instead of \$1,200 a month? How are workers impacted when their wages are an average of \$25 an hour, not \$18 an hour? What does it look like to extend hours to meet the needs of families working shift work?” Gregson asked.

“This is going to create the ability for government to monitor outcomes.”

Participating daycare centres must agree to “open their books” to the government during the evaluation period, Gregson said.

In 2017, Alberta started running a similar prototype program with an initial 22 child-care centres — increased to 100 centres this year — as the province prepares for a \$25-a-day child-care system. The province will evaluate the program over a three-year period and will soon release an update on the first year of the program.

The daycares in Alberta’s programs aren’t just located in major cities but throughout the province. That’s going to be important for B.C. as well, Gregson said. B.C. will aim the prototype spots toward Indigenous children, families new to Canada, francophone families and young parents.

The B.C. government is using \$60 million of a \$153-million funding commitment from the federal government to run the prototype program.

Vancouver currently has some of the most expensive daycare costs in Canada, with parents paying an average of \$1,292 a month for a spot for toddler-aged children, according to a 2017 study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

B.C.’s NDP government introduced a child-care fee-reduction program in the February budget. Starting this April, child-care providers could opt in to the program. Parents are then supposed to see savings of between \$60 and \$350 a month, depending on the age of their child and the type of care they use.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives estimates a \$10-a-day universal child-care program for B.C. would cost \$1.5 billion a year. But the left-leaning think tank argues the cost would largely be made up through increased tax revenues as more women enter and remain in the workforce.

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