

2018 budget has child-care rebates, spaces but not \$10-a-day child care ^[1]

Finance minister says government is still pursuing key 2017 election promise

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EXCERPTS

Those thumbs might be stained from finger painting, but still, child-care advocates are largely giving two thumbs up to the B.C. NDP's first budget.

One of the biggest items in Finance Minister Carole James' 2018 plan was \$1 billion in child-care spending over the next three years.

That includes a new child-care benefit available to 86,000 families worth \$1,250 per month, per child, starting in September.

The budget also includes 22,000 new child-care spaces, a reduction in fees and increased funding to license more providers.

"Child care is such a struggle for so many people across the province," Sharon Gregson, spokesperson for Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C. told On The Coast guest host Laura Lynch.

"To see some relief on affordability, to see investment in a substantial number of new spaces, to see investment in the early childhood educator workforce, it's very good news for B.C. families."

Gregson's praise was echoed by groups like Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the nurses' and teachers' union and even the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade, which was otherwise fairly critical of the spending plan.

But the budget was also notable for what it didn't include: a plan to make the promise of \$10-a-day daycare a reality.

'Major transformational shift'

\$10-a-day child care was a key promise from the NDP during and even before the 2017 provincial election.

James said today that the government was still pursuing the plan and added that because of the measures announced today, some families would soon, in fact, pay \$10 a day for child care.

"Families with incomes under \$40,000, many of them will receive free child care," she said.

"The plan is a 10-year-plan. It is a major investment, and a major transformational shift for families in our province that I was so proud to bring in today."

Gregson agrees such a plan can't happen overnight and said today's announcements were good first steps.

But one thing she says is still missing is improved wages for early childhood educators.

"They are some of the poorest-paid professionals in the province and we know with new spaces we need early childhood educators to work in them," she said.

Gregson said she's hoping to hear about improved pay for these workers as a universal daycare plan rolls out.

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