

Affordable Child Care Benefit's arrival applauded by advocates ^[1]

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Source: The Star Vancouver

Format: Article

Publication Date: 23 Aug 2018

AVAILABILITY

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The B.C. government is preparing to launch the second phase of its affordable child care initiative, and longtime child care advocates are thrilled.

A revamp of the province's child care subsidy, the Affordable Child Care Benefit, which starts on Sept. 1, is the second part of a comprehensive overhaul of the province's child care system. The income-based benefit will provide support to families who earn up to \$111,000 per year and comes in addition to the child-care fee reduction program that the province launched in April, which is provided regardless of income.

"I think there's going to be a lot of very happy families in B.C.," said Sharon Gregson, spokesperson for the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC.

A mother of four, Gregson first got involved in the fight for affordable child care in 1987 when her children were young.

"My kids are grown now, but I realized it's an issue linked to women's equality and healthy economies and healthy communities," she said. "The policies we've advocated for and developed and pushed government to implement really are making a concrete difference for families now," she said.

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.

When combining the two new programs, a family earning \$45,000 per year with an infant or toddler attending a licensed daycare, could receive up to \$1,600 per month to pay for child care (but if the daycare fees are lower than that, then they'll receive a lower amount).

"It's geared toward targeting more support, more affordability to families with the lowest incomes," Gregson explained. Plus, research has shown that affordable child care "allows parents to enter or re-enter the workforce, but also allows parents who have not been able to participate in the workforce to actually get a job," she said.

The ministry hopes to make the benefit easy to access through an online estimator and application process.

"It's a fairly straight forward process, and it has really changed from the previous subsidy process because that was paper-based and by fax," said Katrina Chen, the provincial Minister of State for Child Care.

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