

Op/Ed: More child care spaces support families and strengthen economy ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

When I think about what child care means for families in B.C., I think of all the patchwork calendars stuck to fridges across the province telling the child care story of each household. The mother-in-law, the uncle and the best friend are on deck this week, and dad will have to leave work early next week. It's a puzzle of names, dates and times that only the family can understand.

For too long, child care has been so unaffordable and inaccessible that families have been forced to piece together care within their own networks. With the rising costs of housing, transportation and other monthly expenses, and the longer and longer waitlists for child care spaces, families have been making sacrifices to give their children the care they need.

Every parent and caregiver in British Columbia wants to give their child the best start in life. Families who have affordable, quality child care are often able to build their careers, have more quality time with their children and get ahead with their finances. No matter the circumstance, every parent deserves peace of mind knowing that their child is getting safe, quality and affordable care.

Our government is committed to making universal child care a reality in B.C. We are making the most significant investment in child care in B.C.'s history – \$1.3 billion over three years – to help families find a way forward each month.

On July 4, we announced, in partnership with the City of Vancouver, that approximately 2,300 new child care spaces are coming to public spaces across the city. The plan will add licensed child care spaces to schools, libraries and community centres.

By partnering with public sector organizations and local governments, we can quickly add child care spaces where they are needed. It gives parents access to multiple services in one convenient location, strengthens communities and provides generations of kids an easy transition from daycare to school.

The City of Vancouver has been forward-thinking in its approach to creating child care spaces. I look forward to working with other local governments in partnership to bring child care to the families in their communities.

These new spaces are all part of our government's three-year commitment to support the creation of 22,000 new licensed child care spaces around B.C. Already, we've funded more than 8,000 new licensed child care spaces across the province, with more spaces announced every month.

Child care providers can apply for funding to create new child care spaces at any time during the year, through our Childcare BC New Spaces Fund. There are also start-up grants to support unlicensed providers with the costs of becoming licensed and caring for more children.

As we create new spaces in all corners of the province, we are also working on making child care more affordable. Our Child Care Fee Reduction is saving families up to \$350 per child, per month for eligible child care spaces. As of July 2019, more than 54,000 spaces are eligible for a fee reduction. Our Affordable Child Care Benefit is already saving parents up to \$1,250 per month or \$15,000 per year, per child. More than 80,000 families are eligible for support with their monthly child care costs through this benefit.

Between the Child Care Fee Reduction and the Affordable Child Care Benefit, almost 18,000 children in B.C. have accessed child care for a daily cost of \$10 or less. This includes 7,500 children from low-income households whose families are now paying nothing at all for child care.

That's not including approximately 2,900 children who are attending one of our 53 universal child care prototype sites, where families are paying a maximum of \$200 per month, per child.

Our government looks at quality, affordable child care as a social policy and an economic one. It gives children the chance to play, learn and grow in a safe and supportive environment. For parents and caregivers, it means the chance to work and build a career, with the peace of mind that their children are cared for.

Our universal child care plan is part of our commitment to the people of British Columbia – especially young people – that we will do everything we can to bring down barriers to their success. Investing in child care makes our province stronger. That's good for people, good for communities and good for the economy.

John Horgan is a Canadian politician serving as the 36th and current premier of British Columbia since July 2017. He has been leader of the British Columbia New Democratic Party since 2014, and MLA for the constituency of Langford-Juan de Fuca since 2005.

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