

'Stroller brigades' across B.C. make plea for national child-care strategy^[1]

All the major federal parties have committed to current levels of funding, but B.C. group wants more

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Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 15 Oct 2019

AVAILABILITY

Access online^[2]

EXCERPTED

Parents and their supporters in 21 communities across British Columbia rallied on Saturday morning to call for a national child-care strategy.

The protesters, many of them with strollers in tow, want the federal government to provide affordable, universal child care for parents across the country.

"Everybody depends on somebody who depends on child care," said Sharon Gregson at the rally in Vancouver. She is an event organizer and provincial spokesperson for the \$10 a day child-care plan in B.C.

"It's part of keeping our society functioning, people in the workforce and growing a healthy next generation."

Marches were held in Vancouver, Kelowna, Penticton, Campbell River and other communities around the province to draw attention to the issue during the lead-up to the upcoming federal election on Oct. 21.

The protesters specifically called for \$10 a day child care and for better wages for early childhood educators.

Gregson says there are 575,000 children under 12 in B.C., but only 100,000 licensed child-care spaces. Child care is the second highest expense for families after housing, she added.

"We know that we need more spaces in British Columbia," Gregson said.

"But more than just spaces. We need them to be high quality, we need them to be affordable and we need to have well-paid staff to work in those programs."

Gregson and other members of her group commended the provincial NDP government for its role in supporting affordable childcare in B.C., but they said it's time for the federal government to do its part.

The group wants to protect the \$50 million the federal government currently hands to the province for childcare and increase it. Gregson said one per cent of GDP is the international benchmark for childcare funding.

In terms of ranking the federal parties, Gregson says the NDP has the most family-friendly platform because it supports creating legislation to fund a \$10 a day childcare program.

Gregson places the Greens in second because they have committed to the one per cent of GDP benchmark, the Liberals third because of their commitment to school age care and the Conservatives last because they aren't committing to any new funding for child care.

All the parties have committed to current levels of funding, Gregson said.

Kate Spence, a member of the coalition of child care advocates, as well as a parent and teacher, was also at the rally in Vancouver on Saturday.

"This is a crisis that continues to build," she said. "It's time for the federal government to step up."

Spence also highlighted the need for safe daycare spaces — an issue she says has personally touched her family because her daughter went to the same unlicensed daycare where toddler Macallan Wayne Saini, known as Baby Mac, died in 2017.

"It's shameful that a system exists that would allow that to happen," she said.

Spence said her struggle to find affordable, reliable daycare means she isn't able to work full time as a teacher, despite a province-wide shortage of educators.

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

Tags: advocacy ^[4]

national child care ^[5]

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<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/advocacy> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/national-child-care>