

BC's childcare investments are commendable. Now it's time to double down ^[1]

Taking stock of the government's efforts, and what's still needed.

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EXCERPTS

This month marks almost two years since the BC NDP government, supported by the Greens, launched "Childcare BC" to fulfill the campaign promise of providing universal, affordable childcare within 10 years.

So what has changed for children and families? For the first time in a generation, the childcare chaos is being addressed with new historic investments. More than 50,000 families are paying lower fees, and many are paying \$10 a day or less; 10,000 new licensed spaces have been created or are under development; and early childhood educators are receiving wage increases.

These essential investments were possible because in Budget 2018, Finance Minister Carole James (who fortunately understands childcare) and her colleagues prioritized three years of funding for childcare. As we enter the third year of that \$1.3-billion investment, it's time for government to look to Budget 2020 and beyond to build on their accomplishments. Much more remains to be done.

Government needs to strengthen its policies in order to fulfill its commitment to build a quality, affordable childcare system — a system that 90 per cent of British Columbians confirmed is important in a 2019 Research Co. poll.

There are solutions, based on research and evidence, that advocates used to create the \$10aDay Plan. They built province-wide, cross-sectoral support for public investment in a strong childcare system where educators are fairly paid.

The system detailed in the \$10aDay Plan serves children well with high-quality early care and learning opportunities, provides parents with the services they need and ensures respect for educators. It's also good for the economy as more parents, especially mothers, are able to fully participate in the workforce. To date, there have been significant new Indigenous childcare investments that respect Indigenous leadership. Government has also implemented five key public policy changes that will help B.C. achieve its goals and leave a lasting legacy.

1. **\$10aDay prototype sites:** 53 childcare programs across B.C. where families are already paying no more than \$10 a day.
2. **Fee reduction initiative:** An across-the-board reduction of fees for all families participating in full-day licensed childcare programs.
3. **Wage enhancements** and workforce investments for early childhood educators.
4. **Capital expansion** of licensed spaces that prioritize new spaces with public partners, like school districts.
5. **A minister** dedicated to leading the work on childcare.

But there are **two current provincial policies** that are worrying and will not achieve the goals for children, families or the economy. First, the government is still relying on a bureaucratic, means-tested parent fee subsidy that will not build a system. Nowhere in the world has a universal, affordable childcare system been built through vouchers for lower-income families. We don't give subsidies or vouchers for children to attend elementary school in B.C., and neither should we for childcare programs.

And the government is still giving capital grants of up to \$250,000 to for-profit, corporate child care to build up privately owned assets.

So what are the immediate doable priorities to achieve the 10-year childcare goals that British Columbians voted for in 2017, and continue to support?

First, the B.C. government must stop relying on means-tested parent fee subsidies and stop funding the expansion and private ownership of for-profit, corporate childcare.

Then it needs to take five concrete actions.

1. **Move childcare into the Ministry of Education**, where there is already a universal approach and capacity to create a new system. Education is the only ministry that delivers a universal public system for children. It has the capacity to develop and democratically govern the childcare services that B.C. needs. That is why the majority of Canadian provinces and territories deliver childcare through their

education ministries.

2. **Develop a publicly funded provincial wage grid** for early childhood educators to raise the average pay in the sector and mitigate the massive ECE recruitment and retention crisis. Currently, existing licensed childcare spaces in B.C. sit empty because there are no qualified educators to staff the programs. Low pay continues to drive educators out of the sector.
3. **Immediately expand the \$10aDay prototype sites** across the province. This is the way to make child care truly affordable for all families and provide the best model for building a system.
4. **Embark on a bulk purchase of quality, custom-designed modular buildings** to create thousands of new quality spaces on public land (schools, hospitals) across the province.
5. **Ensure every Indigenous child in B.C. has access to spiritually enriching, culturally relevant, quality childcare**, with direction from Indigenous leadership.

Accomplishing the government's 10-year childcare goals requires a dedicated capital budget to expand public childcare spaces and an increase of \$200 million annually in operating funds. This is entirely reasonable and doable. It benefits the economy, supports children and families, creates green jobs and advances gender equity.

The time is right for Premier John Horgan and James to build on their initial childcare success. They have the support of 63 local governments, 33 school districts, community organizations, unions, businesses, academics, and tens of thousands of individuals who support the \$10aDay Plan. There are also continuing federal childcare funds promised by the new federal government.

There have been substantive steps in the first two years and unprecedented public support for solving B.C.'s childcare chaos — now we need government to continue their investment in good public policy: the \$10aDay Plan.

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