

B.C. extends emergency child-care funding through the summer

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Province has already provided \$150 million in emergency funding since April

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EXCERPTS

The provincial government has announced it will be extending its temporary emergency funding to licensed child-care centres across B.C. until the end of August.

The province has spent \$150 million since April to help cover costs for both open and closed child-care centres and says approximately 90 per cent of eligible providers have received support.

Katrina Chen, the minister of state for child care, said it was important to continue the funding to retain as much of B.C.'s child-care spaces as possible as the economy opens up.

"A lot of closed centres continue to have ongoing costs, such as Hydro and rent, and we need to make sure they can come back in service when parents are returning to work and needing child-care services in the coming weeks and months," Chen said.

According to the parameters of the funding, the province will require operators to use any surplus funding — after meeting funding and health guidelines — to provide their early childhood educators with temporary wage enhancements or other compensation, such as training or benefits.

Megan Brame operates a daycare in Esquimalt, where she's also a municipal councillor. Brame says she'll be partaking in the funding, so she can keep up with all the new cleaning requirements due to the pandemic.

"I'm going to bring somebody in that can help us clean, so that the staff can focus on the children," she said. "It's hard to do in-depth cleaning and keep a bunch of preschoolers busy as every parent that has worked from home can tell you in the last three, four months."

Chen says child care is an important priority for getting the economy back up and running.

"We're expecting more and more parents coming back [to work]," she said "I am expecting [child care] needs are going to increase very significantly in the coming weeks and months.

Brame, who currently has four of her usual 16 children at her centre, is preparing for that increase. She's gradually building up her capacity as the summer progresses.

"It's a slow build, so we can work through any kinks and learn as safely as possible," she said. "We're learning how we can support our families and run a safe business during COVID."

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