

B.C. election: Penticton mother urges all political parties to embrace \$10-per-day child-care plan ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Amanda Burnett, a Penticton, B.C., mother of two, turned her child-care frustrations into action by launching the Waitlisted Project B.C., featuring stories from parents across the province who want access to affordable, quality child care.

Burnett is urging all provincial political parties to embrace the \$10-per-day child-care plan ahead of this fall's B.C. election.

"The \$10-per-day plan meets all of the international standards for quality for a child-care system. It does meet the Greens' request that it move into the Ministry of Education," she said.

"It also addresses issues around affordability and quality and the workforce by making sure that there is a provincial wage grade for the early childhood educators, to ensure that there is proper retention and recruitment."

On Sept. 24 during a campaign stop in Maple Ridge, BC NDP Leader John Horgan committed to expanding the limited number of \$10-per-day spots available in the province if re-elected.

There are currently 50 prototype sites across the province, and 2,500 licensed child-care spaces — with a priority on infant and toddler spaces — have been converted into low-cost spaces at existing facilities.

Families pay no more than \$200 a month per child for full-time enrolment at the \$10-per-day test sites.

"People rushed to those spaces. There is not enough for the demand. We are going to focus on increasing the number of seats available for \$10 per day and it's a 10-year plan," Horgan said.

The BC NDP campaigned on a universal child-care plan during the 2017 election but blamed a lack of support from the BC Green Party for failing to follow through on expanding the \$10-per-day program.

BC Green Leader Sonia Furstenuau fired back, saying the B.C. Green caucus worked collaboratively with the NDP to build quality, universal early childhood education in B.C.

"Investing in child care and early childhood education is a shared priority between the BC Green Party caucus and the B.C. NDP government and was part of the Confidence and Supply Agreement," Furstenuau said in a statement.

The BC Liberal Party plans to reveal its child-care strategy in the coming weeks, but Liberal Leader Andrew Wilkinson acknowledged on the campaign trail that the previous Liberal government was focused on creating new child-care spaces.

The Liberals created 39,959 spaces from 2005 to 2017, a party spokesperson said.

Burnett said in communities like Penticton, where waitlists for licensed child-care spaces can be up to two years long, an overhaul of B.C.'s child-care system can't come soon enough.

"I think it's a huge problem, not just for cities like Penticton but for cities all over British Columbia and Canada, because without families paying taxes and income taxes, if you only have one parent in the workforce while the other parent is at home, that impacts the entire community as far as the economic health and vibrancy of diverse communities," she said.

Local governments are also attempting to tackle the problem.

The City of Penticton is developing a child-care action plan, while the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen launched its own survey to gauge the seriousness of the child-care shortage.

That survey, available to parents, guardians and child-care providers in the South Okanagan, excluding Penticton, can be filled out here.

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