

# Opinion: Universal child care will define generations in B.C. <sup>[1]</sup>

Universal, affordable child care is not just an issue of parental income or cost-savings, it's an economic game-changer

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## EXCERPT

Premier John Horgan's promise to deliver ten-dollar-a-day child care must be at the centre of British Columbia's post-pandemic economic recovery since it may be the most systemically transformative economic policy in the province's history.

"We need to do a better job to make sure people realize that connection," admits B.C. Minister of State for Child Care, Katrina Chen in Episode #110 of This is VANCOLOUR.

Under the BC NDP government, over 30,000 families now enjoy ten-dollar-a-day child care. Additionally, the Affordable Child Care Benefit program provides funding for families earning less than \$111,000 to offset some child care costs.

"But the goal is to make sure it is universal child care."

Readily accessible, affordable, and good quality child care affects parents, children, and the overall economy — much like public education.

Most obviously, universal child care frees up parents to pursue career advancement or education, leading to greater financial earnings that are not subsequently absorbed by child care costs.

For businesses across B.C., universal child care is not limited to improving the work-life well-being of employees who are parents. It can also improve productivity, employee retention, and, ultimately a company's bottom line. While some large companies may be able to roll out child care programs, smaller businesses — especially new businesses — may not have that capacity.

"We've got a lot of attention, even in the business community. I'm getting boards of trade and chambers of commerce saying that we need child care."

Moreover, according to Minister Chen, as a child's brain develops fastest before the age of five, early childhood education can enhance social and emotional learning that will increase the probability of better outcomes in the future. Early learning can also act as an intervention for children at a young age for behavioural patterns, which are much more difficult (and costly) to change once they are older.

These social outcomes yield incredible economic returns.

Analysis from the U.S. President's Council of Economic Advisors found that investment into child care and early learning initiatives provides \$8.60 into the economy, over a child's lifetime, for every \$1.00 invested. TD Economics estimates that this "return on investment" is even higher for disadvantaged children.

This social safety net may also narrow the widening inequality — the earnings gap between rich and poor — in B.C.

"For all that we could do to reduce wealth inequality, the main thing that we need to do is provide accessible, good quality, affordable child care," says Simon Fraser University lecturer, Dr. Amanda Watson. Dr. Watson recently released her first book, *The Juggling Mother: Coming Undone in the Age of Anxiety*, which explores the disproportional burden of raising children on working mothers.

"Feminists have been working on this for sixty years as the thing that could really help with gender inequality."

Minister Chen insists the province has focused on accessibility, affordability, and quality (including inclusion) in rolling out the government's plan modelled by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC. "It's a new social program and probably the biggest policy shift... to make sure we create a new system for B.C. families that can benefit generations to come."

In the aftermath of an economically devastating pandemic, with many sectors looking for support, the provincial government must double-down in creating this new system, as so much of the work is left to do.

While already a top priority for working parents with children, Premier Horgan's government must continue to pursue universal child care as the centrepiece of B.C.'s post-pandemic economic recovery.

Mo Amir is the host of *This is VANCOLOUR*, a politics and culture podcast available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and [www.thisisvancolour.com](http://www.thisisvancolour.com) [3]

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