

B.C. budget to expand \$10-a-day child care, but misses the mark on 'truly universal' system ^[1]

\$111 million will be used to fund 3,750 new \$10-a-day spaces though 75 additional ChildCareBC universal prototype sites over the next three years.

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EXCERPTS

The province will double the number of \$10-a-day child care spaces available to families in B.C. as part of its 2021 budget rolled out Tuesday (April 20).

The child care funding released in this budget totals \$223 million over three years. Of that money, \$111 million will be used to fund 3,750 new \$10-a-day spaces, across 75 additional ChildCareBC universal prototype sites over the next three years.

Viveca Ellis, provincial organizer at the Single Mothers' Alliance for Gender & Economic Justice, said the province missed out on an opportunity to commit to a "truly universal" child care system.

"At this time, the province is opting to continue with the subsidy application model, which is cumbersome and ineffective," Ellis said, particularly for single mothers who may struggle to find time to navigate the government's systems.

That issue hits some groups more than others, she added.

"The lone mother led families that are in some of the toughest situations and the most severe poverty do tend to be predominantly racialized and Indigenous lone mothers – and we do hear from these members that they find this system challenging to navigate and confusing."

Even when women can navigate the system of subsidies, Ellis said that just finding spots for their children proves to be another challenge.

"We need many more spots than just the couple of thousands that are being added at this time," she said. "We needed at least triple the amount of \$10 a day subsidized spaces that this budget is allowing."

Generation Squeeze founder Paul Kershaw said that the lack of across the board \$10-a-day child care is a compromise that will only increase the "generational squeeze" being felt by many young families.

"It's fair to say this provincial budget does not deliver on promises to child care," he told reporters, adding that the province needs to play an active role in bringing down the costs for young families.

"It is not enough for the province to simply bank on the big child care announcement made in the federal budget," he added. "Ottawa still requires an active provincial partner to bring about the \$10-a-day child care vision. BC Budget 2021 reveals that our government does not plan to be as active as it promised during the last election. That's a shame."

However, Ellis said the additional \$4-per-hour for early childcare educators is a "very welcome and necessary" move. The increase moves up early childhood educator salaries to as much as \$23-an-hour and will cost the B.C. government \$94 million.

"It is a predominantly female dominated sector and for far, far too long, the wages have been far too low," Ellis said, adding that she hopes to see "significant" future raises scheduled for upcoming years.

In a statement, Stephanie Smith, president of the BCGEU which represents many child care workers across B.C., also lauded the news.

The province's child care funding will also expand the Seamless Day Pilot to 20 additional school districts, up from the current four. The program, Finance Minister Selina Robinson said, will be a "life changer" for families with multiple children by allowing them to drop off both school and pre-school aged kids at the same facility.

Additional child care funding in the 2021 budget includes \$20 million in health and safety grants for child care providers, 110 new post-secondary seats for early childhood educators, and \$20 million over three years to add 400 spaces to Aboriginal Head Start program.

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

Tags: federal budget ^[4]
availability ^[5]
subsidies ^[6]

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