

Federal cash could help speed up B.C.'s child-care plans, minister says ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

VANCOUVER — Depending on how fast Ottawa moves on its budget pledge to create a Canada-wide child-care system, British Columbia could see the rollout of its own effort speed up, says the province's minister of state for child care.

Katrina Chen said a funding boost from Ottawa will help B.C., which rolled out its own plan for universal child care in 2018, reach its goals more quickly.

"I think our experience is fresh enough and also ready enough to be able to expand and see significant results right away," Chen said. "We already know the directions we're going toward and I think with the federal dollars coming in that would really help be able to expedite our provincial plan."

Chen said her province is ready to welcome the federal help and to work with Ottawa no matter the criteria it lays out for the system. She said any money coming from Ottawa can be quickly put to use, because the province already has data about its needs and a plan.

Last Monday's federal budget in Ottawa announced the creation of a national child-care plan. The federal government pledged \$30 billion to be spent over five years on the program. After 2026, an additional \$9.2 billion per year will be spent.

The money is meant to create more child-care spaces across the country and work toward a \$10-dollar-a-day model after five years.

Currently, Quebec and B.C. are the only provinces with provincial child-care plans. In B.C. daycare centres are run by a number of entities, including non-profits and private companies, with funding from the province, but the system is still being rolled out.

In 2018, the province earmarked \$1 billion over three years as part of its Childcare BC plan, then added more to the pot last year, bringing the investment to \$2 billion.

The money is administered via a dozen different supports and programs.

Chen said she had spoken to Ottawa about B.C.'s program prior to the announcement last week.

"We've been advocating for a national child-care plan," Chen said, "so we definitely were one of the first respondents to reach out and try to get more details."

Ottawa's plan is to create a 50-50 shared cost program, but federal Minister for Families, Children and Social Development Ahmed Hussen told the Star earlier this week the money will depend on certain targets laid out by the federal government being met.

Pierre Fortin, an emeritus professor of economics at Université du Québec à Montréal who has studied child-care, said while there may be some hurdles with a few provinces, the funding for child-care will likely be something all the provinces agree to.

"There's a lot of money at stake and I don't anticipate any province will turn away from the federal government's offer," Fortin said.

He said though he has been an advocate for free markets himself in the past, he supports non-profit models for daycare. He said research shows it leads to better quality of care.

Chen, meanwhile, said B.C. has a "diverse" range of models for offering child-care and said it is important to continue such diversity. She said, so far, the province shares a lot of common ground with the federal government on the issue.

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

Tags: federal budget ^[4]

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