

B.C. child care budget template 'not quite what was promised,' advocates say ^[1]

The province will contribute \$24 million in new spending. In the last the election, the B.C. NDP promised to invest \$1.5 billion over three years.

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EXCERPTS

B.C.'s plan to expand affordable child care is being applauded by advocates but they complain that most of the funding in the new budget is coming from Ottawa, while the province has delayed making the larger investments needed for a \$10 a day system for all families.

"Without the federal money, we wouldn't be in as good a position," said Sharon Gregson, spokesperson for the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C.

"The provincial commitment is not quite what was promised in the 2020 election but because we've got the federal money we are still going to see a lot of action on child care."

The action promised in the 2022-23 budget will lead to the creation of 5,000 new child care spaces by the end of the fiscal year. By the end of December, 12,500 existing child care spaces will be converted to \$10 a day, while the fees for the remaining 116,000 child care spaces in B.C. will be cut in half to an average of \$20 a day.

The bulk of the cost of the conversion and new spaces will be borne by the federal government, which will contribute \$395 million in the new fiscal year, while the province will contribute \$24 million in new spending.

In the last the election, the B.C. NDP promised to invest \$1.5 billion over three years.

The coalition had hoped to see more provincial dollars in Tuesday's budget to accelerate the conversion.

"The 12,500 converted spaces represent about 10 per cent of all child care spaces in B.C. We would have liked to see the province invest in converting 50 per cent of all spaces and to commit to ensuring all new spaces would be \$10 a day," said Gregson.

The Liberal child care critic doubts the province will be able to keep its promises, given how it's rolled out past initiatives.

"In the past five years, the NDP has only been able to create 3,000 new \$10 spaces," said Karin Kirkpatrick.

"They promised to double that last year, but we haven't seen them provide those spaces yet."

The bilateral agreement that was signed in July provides no funding to reduce the cost of child care for school aged children and the budget contains no new provincial money for that.

B.C.'s Minister of Finance, Selina Robinson said families will have to wait until the fall of 2023 before they will see an average \$20 dollar a day fee for children older than five.

"At least we're seeing a recognition that the province has to invest in school aged child care expansion and we will be pushing them on that and on developing a wage grid for early childhood educators in the 2023-24 budget," said Gregson.

A provincial wage grid would set minimum hourly pay rates that would be tied to the education level of the child care worker.

Instead, the province decided to expand its \$4 an hour top-up to include more workers.

"That was a really positive step forward," said Emily Gawlick, the executive-director of Early Childhood Educators Association of B.C.

"Now people who supervise or have a leadership role in child care are also able to access that top-up, as well as people who are working directly in a supporting role for children who need extra support."

The province responded to the shortage of early childhood educators by announcing it will spend \$8 million this year "to create 130 more training seats in post-secondary institutions."

But Gawlick said the "dual credit program" doesn't actually create spaces in post-secondary institutions.

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

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\$10 a day ^[5]

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