

Child-care costs are dropping across Canada. But some families are still waiting years for spaces ^[1]

Some daycares are closing waitlists due to high demand, as advocates call for funds for more staff, expansion

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpts

Ashima Arora was three months pregnant when she began looking for child care in British Columbia's Lower Mainland.

Today, Arora's son is 15 months old, but she's still waiting for a space — on seven different waitlists. On the longest list she's No. 198 in line, while the earliest available space might not come until September, she says.

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In 2021, the federal government announced it would invest \$30 billion over five years to reduce fees for parents across Canada, earmarking about \$3.2 billion for B.C. The goal was to increase access to \$10-a-day child care.

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Advocates say these investments have been life-changing for many families, lowering some fees by half — but, ultimately, there still aren't enough spaces to meet demand.

Sharon Gregson with the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C. says while there are about 130,000 licensed child-care spaces in the province, 75 per cent of children age 0-12 aren't able to access them.

In fact, as fees dropped, waitlists lengthened, Gregson said. Now, some daycares are even closing their waitlists.

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Gregson said spaces sit empty because there aren't enough educators to staff them and many people are struggling financially, meaning they simply can't afford child care — which, outside of government programs, can cost a median of between \$1,000 and \$1,625 a month in B.C. for kids under 36 months, according to a provincial document from August 2023.

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Frustration with waits grows

The long waitlists are frustrating for child-care advocates as well as parents, despite acknowledgement that the price-reduction programs are a positive development.

In 2023, the average amount Canadian parents paid for their main full-time arrangement was \$544 per month, down from \$649 in 2022, according to a new Statistics Canada report.

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Calls to fund more staff

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She says about 200 families have not made it into their programs, and some parents are facing a three-year wait.

Along with more support for expansion, Johnson says the government needs to fund more child-care staff.

"If daycares can't find the spaces ... can't staff the spaces, all that money is not going to do any good," she said.

A November 2022 report by the Early Childhood Educators of B.C. (ECEBC) found 45 per cent of employers are losing more staff than

they can hire due to reasons such as low pay and a lack of benefits.

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More than 2,200 new \$10/day spaces by spring: province

The Ministry of Education and Child Care acknowledges there is still work to do.

One way it's reducing waits, it says, is with the New Spaces Fund where a local government or school can get funding to help open a new child-care centre if it offers reduced fees.

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B.C. will be funding more than 2,200 \$10-a-day spaces by the spring, it adds, bringing the total number of \$10-a-day spots to 15,000.

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But parents who are still waiting to access child care say those changes aren't happening fast enough, leaving them either unable to return to the workforce, working fewer hours, or scrambling to find babysitters.

"I have to stay home, I have no choice," Arora said, adding she's declined four job offers to care for her son.

"It hurts when you don't have enough resources."

Related link: Governments talk big about child care, but the struggle to find a spot is real, parents say ^[3]

Region: British Columbia ^[4]

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