

# Child care deal official [CA-BC] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Spending for this year has been announced and parents have already filled out the paperwork for subsidies, but Prime Minister Paul Martin made B.C.'s child care deal with Ottawa official yesterday.

Likening it to one in a series of agreements that brought a national public medicare program to Canada, Mr. Martin said his government wants to focus on the first six years of a child's life.

But unlike medicare, which is regulated by the Canada Health Act, the national child care program's administration, and the choice about whether to spend money on for-profit or non-profit centres, is to be left to the provinces, he said.

In the first year of the deal, B.C. will get \$92-million of a \$700-million fund set aside for all provinces and territories. In the next five years, the province will receive \$633 million -- more than doubling what all levels of government are spending on child care in the province.

On Sept. 9, B.C. Minister of Children and Family Development Stan Hagen announced \$32-million of that spending: \$19-million for subsidies to parents, \$7-million in operating grants and \$6-million in capital funding for regulated daycares to encourage the creation of additional spaces.

Over the next five years, the Martin government plans to spend \$5-billion on this deal and similar deals with other provinces.

Sharon Gregson of the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C. said in an interview that with the current scheme, for-profit daycares can access the money, opening the door to make big-box daycare profitable, she said.

"We're worried that the devil's in the details," she said to Mr. Martin at a media scrum after the press conference.

B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell said he wasn't concerned about safeguarding money for non-profit over for-profit care.

"We do have well-run daycares in the province . . . they have been under-funded in the past, and this is a chance for us to provide more accessibility across the province," he said.

In a statement yesterday, Edmonton Conservative MP Rona Ambrose called the delay in the announcement nothing more than a "communications strategy," adding that her party would give cash subsidies directly to parents with young children.

Joy Groen, the director of the non-profit Broadway Daycare and Preschool, said some parents had already applied and received grants to be spent on daycare in October.

Right now, parents need to sign up for daycare as early as the conception of their child to get a space when their child is ready, she said.

The province has about 77,000 child care spaces, and fewer than 15 per cent of B.C. children under 13 are in daycare. Costs run between \$850 and \$1,000 per month per child.

A study at the University of Toronto, coauthored by Toronto economics professor Gordon Cleveland, suggested that for every dollar invested in child care, two dollars are saved across the system.

Another study, also by Dr. Cleveland, suggested that non-profit centres outperformed for-profit daycares by 10 per cent.

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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