

# Federal child care subsidies to begin Oct. 1 [CA-BC] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Although British Columbia hasn't officially signed a child care deal with the federal government, the province's Minister of Children and Family Development yesterday announced \$32-million in federal money for child care subsidies for parents as well as operating and capital grants for daycares.

It is the first installment of federal funds from a national child care program, and will begin to flow on Oct. 1 -- two days after the Prime Minister arrives in Vancouver for the official signing of the deal.

"Early childhood experiences last a lifetime," said the minister, Stan Hagen. "We want these experiences to be nurturing, sustaining and as caring as possible."

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

Waiting lists can be as long as two years, according to some estimates, and many children are too old for the age group before a space opens up.

Starting next month, families with incomes of up to \$38,000 will be eligible for full subsidies, up from \$21,000, and partial subsidies will be available for parents making more. The number of children under six years of age eligible rises to 16,000 from 6,000.

Regulated daycares will receive \$7-million in operating grants, and \$6-million in capital funding to encourage them to increase spaces.

The province will receive \$92-million in the first year from a \$700-million fund set aside for all provinces and territories, but is waiting to consult with stakeholders before allocating it all.

Janet Austin, CEO of YWCA of Vancouver, said it can cost as much as \$1,600 a month for high-quality care for which trained staff are paid a living wage.

Research at the University of Toronto shows that for every dollar invested in child care, two dollars are saved because kids are better prepared for school and have higher literacy rates, while rates of juvenile delinquency and teen pregnancy drop, she said.

Sharon Gregson, of the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C., said the federal money would restore child care that the provincial government had cut, and the minister is in need of a bigger plan.

"The patchwork of services we call a child care system in B.C. over the past four years has been so destabilized that this new money is extremely welcome," she said.

The government needs to target increases in the number of spaces available, and must mesh the efforts by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Children and Family Development to encourage early learning and literacy, she said.

And care for school-aged children, who need somewhere to go before and after school, should have a commensurate increase in spending, she said.

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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