

B.C. lacks sustainable daycare plan [CA-BC]^[1]

Author: O'Connor, Elaine

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EXCERPTS

Daycare workers and child care advocates are worried B.C.'s share of \$700 million in federal child care funding will do little to ease the daycare crunch unless the province commits to a sustainable spending plan -- and fast.

"The history in B.C. is not great in terms of spending the dollars on child care expanding services," said child care worker Stephanie Seaman of Shaughnessy Heights Daycare.

"I'm not sure how they'll provide accountability for provinces."

The federal government reaffirmed its commitment to a five-year, \$5-billion early-learning and child care initiative yesterday, starting with \$700 million in 2005. The cash is being held in trust to be drawn by provinces. B.C.'s share is estimated at up to \$90 million.

Vancouver child and youth advocate Sheila Davidson is also worried about how the cash will be distributed. She wants transparency from the province and reassurance the funds will all be spent on daycare infrastructure.

"The biggest challenge is we don't have a plan. All we have is ad hoc and patchwork," Davidson said, noting monthly daycare costs can run higher than mortgage payments.

Minister of Children and Family Development Stan Hagen said he's trying to meet with the feds in early March to get B.C.'s plan approved.

He said his priorities are to evaluate which daycares can expand and how many new ones must be built, and to ensure B.C. institutions can train enough new workers.

Langley daycare operator Susan Harney's top priority is to ease parents' stress about finding a space. In the Lower Mainland, the situation is so severe moms-to-be routinely put unborn children on waiting lists.

Monica Lysack, director of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, said a truly national program would take 15 years to create and \$10 billion annually to run.

Currently, there are about 77,058 licensed spaces in B.C., and costs can run \$850 to \$1,000 a month for just one child under three.

Less than 15 per cent of B.C. children under 13 are in daycare.

- reprinted from the Vancouver Province

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