

# B.C. pledges \$5M to expand day-care spaces, but advocate says too little [CA-BC] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

The B.C. government will spend almost \$5 million to expand day-care spaces in the province and improve other child care programs, but a child care advocate says it's only a tiny fraction of the money the Liberals have cut from such services.

Christy Clark, minister of Children and Families, said \$1 million will go to create 200 new child care spaces in eight centres. Another \$2 million will go to upgrade other centres and help them create more spaces, while \$1.7 million will be spent to allow non-working families to send their kids to pre-school, a move that will affect about 2,000 kids.

"We know all children can benefit from early childhood education and we are providing non-working parents with access to programs that help prepare children for school," said Clark.

"This is one step of many our government intends to take over the next few months to improve early childhood and child care programs."

But Sharon Gregson, of the Coalition of Childcare Advocates of British Columbia, said the money comes from a federal-provincial fund. She said the Liberals have cut \$42 million from the province's child care budget.

"What's happening right now is federal funds are coming to all of the provinces and unfortunately, B.C. is using federal funds to replace provincial cuts and not even at the amount they've been cutting.

"This announcement is certainly a relief, but it's encouragement, not praise, at this point."

Clark, however, disputes Gregson's claims.

The minister said in 2001 the budget spent was \$180 million. This year, it is \$172 million and will be \$182 million in 2005.

"Those are what advocates would recognize as the actual child care spending numbers," Clark said. "That doesn't include the addition \$50 million we're spending on early childhood development and all of those other array of services that are really important for the early learning years that don't happen in child care centres."

Gregson said only between 10 and 12 per cent of children have access to licensed child care spaces.

What's needed, she said, is a five-year plan to ensure quality child care is available without the shortage of spaces that currently exists.

Clark readily admits there were cuts, changes that had to be made to get the province's fiscal house in order. In child care, she said the government had to limit access to such care to control spending.

"We made some really difficult decisions over the last three years," she said. "We're starting to put that back now."

Clark said the province has set aside \$1 million to supplement the operating funding for more than 600 licensed child care centres that provide before and after school care.

Another \$700,000 will enhance funding to register non-licensed child care providers that meet safety and training requirements.

- reprinted from the Canadian Press

**Related link:** Government press release: BC families to benefit from child care spending <sup>[2]</sup>

**Region:** British Columbia <sup>[3]</sup>

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