

# Child-care crisis in B.C. election issue [CA-BC]<sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

The provincial election is off and running, and once again families and communities know that childcare should be a high priority for every candidate in every riding.

After eight years of failed policies, ad hoc decisions, and inadequate funding, B.C. childcare is in a crisis. Just ask any young family in your community about their struggle to find affordable, quality care, and you will hear: Parent fees are high and rising.

In urban areas like Vancouver and Victoria, child-care fees can account for 20 percent of families' total expenses—the second highest cost after housing. A Vancouver family with a four-year-old child in full-time childcare and a seven-year-old child in after-school care will pay at least \$982 a month or \$11,784 a year for childcare.

A large Vancouver-based child-care provider reports that without a significant increase in provincial funding, next year fees could be as high as \$1,000 a month for three- to five-year-old children.

But this is not just an urban issue. From 2001 to 2006, annual child-care fees for preschool-aged children in B.C. went up by \$672. For school-aged care, the increase was more than \$800.

The crisis doesn't stop there. There still aren't enough quality spaces.

Wait lists for quality childcare are years long. Only 14 percent of B.C. children under the age of 12 have access to a licensed child-care space. Despite government's claims that they are creating new spaces, this is only a two percent increase since 2001 and still falls far short of the need.

And, low wages have created a staffing crisis in child care.

A recent survey of B.C.'s early childhood educators reports that almost half of these college-trained professionals earn less than \$16 an hour. This includes people with 20 years experience in the field.

The B.C. child-care crisis didn't fall from the sky. The seeds were planted in 2002 when the newly elected provincial government scrapped the \$7-a-day school-aged child-care program that funded 15,000 affordable, quality spaces and cancelled plans to extend funding to care for other age groups.

Then, the government cut \$40 million from its own child-care budget. These dollars were only replaced when the federal government transferred funds to B.C. that could only be spent on child care. The reality is that B.C. is spending fewer provincial dollars on childcare than in 2001.

As a result, long-time providers are teetering on the brink of closing their doors because of lack of funding. The tragic irony is that despite demand, not all spaces are filled because parents cannot afford the high fees.

It is children and families who pay the price. Some children have already lost their only chance to get a good early start. In fact, the number of children entering kindergarten who are vulnerable went up in B.C. over the last nine years.

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Rather than implement a plan with targets and timelines for meeting B.C.'s child-care needs, the government held out the promise of all-day kindergarten but backed away because of the cost. Even this stalled initiative ignored the child-care needs of the majority of B.C. families who need full time early care and learning so that they can work.

The good news is that there are solutions. Other developed countries have systems that meet children's developmental needs and the needs of working families. Shamefully, Canada ranks last amongst developed countries on our investment in child care.

This provincial election is an ideal time to put this issue front and centre on every party's agenda and to find solutions for B.C.

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We are looking for candidates who understand that investment in childcare is an essential part of an economic recovery strategy. It creates jobs for women and men, helps families during stressful times, and promotes healthy child development which reduces costs down the road.

For any enlightened politician, it should be a no-brainer.

- reprinted from the Georgia Straight

**Region:** British Columbia <sup>[2]</sup>

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/09/04/child-care-crisis-bc-election-issue-ca-bc> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7860> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/affordability> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/election> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/availability>