

The families agenda for British Columbia: Building a sustainable quality early years strategy to support BC families ^[1]

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Source: Government of British Columbia

Format: government document

Publication Date: 20 Feb 2013

AVAILABILITY

Full document in pdf ^[2]

Reactions to child care in the BC budget ^[3]

Excerpts from media release:

VICTORIA - A provincial early years office, a provincewide network of local early years centres, a new child tax benefit and more child-care spaces are all part of a provincial plan Premier Christy Clark unveiled today to offer B.C. families with young children more accessible, affordable and high-quality services.

"To build a strategy to improve child care, early childhood development and learning opportunities, we consulted with those who know best: parents and early childhood experts," said Premier Christy Clark.

"Their ideas led directly to our provincial Early Years Strategy. It's about helping parents balance the demands of work and raising a family, and setting children up for lifelong success."

The B.C. Early Years Strategy is an eight-year government commitment to support early childhood development and help families with child care. Government spending on early years services will increase by \$76 million in the first three years of the strategy:

- \$32 million to support the creation of new child-care spaces.
- \$37 million in support of improving the overall quality of early years services, including child care.
- \$7 million to strengthen the co-ordination of early childhood development programs and child-care services.

The foundation of the strategy is the establishment this year of a Provincial Office for Early Years to co-ordinate all policy and service improvements. Working closely with communities and the early years sector, the office will lead the implementation of a network of early years centres throughout the province that will offer one-stop access to a range of services.

"As our government has increased services for young children over the last several years, the system has grown somewhat fragmented," said Stephanie Cadieux, Minister of Children and Family Development. "Now, as we implement the Early Years Strategy, we'll be able to offer convenient access to up-to-date child care and early childhood development information, advice and referral services for parents."

"We are pleased that government has announced an Early Years Strategy for B.C.," said Sandra Menzer, executive director, Vancouver Society of Children's Centres. "A more co-ordinated and integrated system of services can have a positive impact on children and families."

As part of the strategy, a new BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit will provide \$146 million to approximately 180,000 families with children under the age of six. Starting in 2015, eligible families with net

incomes under \$100,000 will receive the maximum refundable tax credit of \$55 a month or \$660 a year per child.

Families with net earnings between \$100,000 and \$150,000 will be eligible for partial payments. The monthly payments will supplement the current B.C. Child Care Subsidy program for low-income families and existing federal benefits including the Universal Child Care Benefit, the Canada Child Tax Benefit, and the National Child Benefit Supplement.

"In the Families First Agenda, government was clear that supporting British Columbia's children is an essential part of our plan to help vulnerable families. This is an important investment in our children and part of the broader plan to address access and affordability to child care and early years services in B.C.," said Premier Clark. "To support parental choice, the tax benefit will be available to all families with young children whether they are working or staying at home during their children's formative early years."

New supports will also make it easier for families to access high-quality child care.

- An amendment to the School Act will ensure boards of education promote the use of their property for child-care purposes to support a seamless day of school and child care.
- The Province will invest \$32 million over the next three years to create up to 2,000 new licensed child-care spaces, with the goal of opening 13,000 additional spaces over the next eight years. Emphasis will be placed on creating spaces on school grounds and in areas currently underserved by child care. This initiative will build on the more than 100,000 spaces currently supported by government.
- Over the next three years government will also provide an additional \$37 million to strengthen and enhance the overall quality of early years services and encourage child-care providers to improve the quality of their services.

Other measures include:

- Strategies to support stronger links between child-care services, early years programs such as StrongStart BC and Ready, Set Learn as well as early childhood mental health and special needs programs.
- Creating a provincial child-care registry to provide parents with better information about the availability of spaces in their communities.
- Working with the sector to further improve Early Childhood Educator and out-of-school care provider training.
- Exploring licensing changes for child-care spaces to better serve the needs of parents and child care providers while maintaining health and safety standards.

The B.C. Early Years Strategy builds on the \$1 billion per year government currently spends on early childhood development, child care and early learning, which includes a range of Children and Youth with Special Needs supports and full-day kindergarten for five year-olds.

Related link: Child care in the BC budget ^[3]

Region: British Columbia ^[4]

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