

# Enhancing policy to increase child care accessibility and affordability in British Columbia <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Full paper PDF <sup>[2]</sup>

## Introduction and Background

This report was prepared for the Early Years Policy branch to provide information about child care funding policy approaches used in jurisdictions similar to BC and to analyze the potential for shifting BC's approach to enhance accessibility and affordability for families who use child care services.

## Methodology

The overarching objective of this research was to make recommendations for implementing more effective child care funding policy in BC, to enhance accessibility and affordability for families who use child care services. A comparative analysis approach was used to describe the current policy used in BC and comparable jurisdictions, and to analyze the effectiveness and efficiency of the various approaches used.

The research objectives guiding this report are to:

- Provide a review of BC child care funding policy levers;
- Identify a spectrum of child care funding policy levers used by governments to help offset child care costs and support access for families;
- Document child care funding policy levers used across jurisdictions; and
- Provide a discussion and analysis of options and recommendations to enhance BC's child care funding policy by increasing accessibility and affordability for families.

Four methods were used to explore research objectives. A review of BC's child care funding policy shows government's current policy position and level of involvement in the sector. A literature review describes and discusses a variety of child care funding policy levers. A jurisdictional scan identifies child care policy used by selected governments to address accessibility and affordability for families who use child care services. A discussion and analysis consider the current context of child care in BC and the strengths and challenges of policy levers identified in the literature review and jurisdictional scan.

## BC Child Care Funding Policy

The review of BC's child care funding policy includes a description of two general categories for child care settings in the province, licensed and unlicensed. Descriptions are provided for each care type within the categories of licensed and unlicensed. An overview of BC's child care funding policy identified quality, accessibility, and affordability as the main areas of focus. Four child care programs that fund parents or operators to support accessibility and affordability were identified: Child Care Operating Funding Program, Child Care Major and Minor Capital Funding Programs, Child Care Subsidy Program. The BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit is another direct payment to parents. However, eligibility for the tax benefit does not require child care use. This payment assists parents with the costs of raising children under the age of six.

## Literature Review

The literature review of academic articles, books, and grey literature identifies and discusses a variety of child care funding policy levers used across jurisdictions to address accessibility and affordability. A summary table at the end of the section lists funding types, provides a brief description, and indicates which programs are available in BC with funding amounts for the 2012/13 fiscal year:

- universal and income-tested child benefits;
- tax credits and deductions;
- child care subsidies;
- operating and capital funding; and
- universal child care subsidies.

## Jurisdictional Scan of Child Care Funding Policy

A review of Canada, United States, Australia, and Sweden's child care funding policy programs provides a comprehensive review of how governments support accessibility and affordability of child care services in four different countries. Policy levers are identified at a federal government level and when applicable on a regional (i.e., provincial, territorial, or state) government level. Child care data is presented on a federal government and provincial- or state-level government for Canada, United States, and Australia. Lack of available data precludes Sweden from a thorough discussion. However, an overview of Sweden's fully funded, universally accessible child care funding model has been included as an example to demonstrate a range of policy approaches. The Quebec child care funding model has been included in the Canadian provinces subsection as a case of interest from BC's respective jurisdiction. Although funding amounts and policy terms vary, each country reviewed uses some form of child care subsidy program to support accessibility and affordability.

## Discussion and Analysis

The strengths and associated challenges of child care funding policy levers identified in the literature review and jurisdictional scan are discussed in comparison to the BC context. Findings are reviewed and analyzed in consideration of potential recommended options for enhancing current provincially funded programs that support child care accessibility and affordability.

## Recommendations

Information from the background and findings from the BC Child Care Funding Policy, Literature Review, and Jurisdictional Scan provides a basis for six recommendations:

1. Continue to use a combination of child care funding policy levers to support accessibility and affordability for families.
2. Continue to support the building of new licensed child care spaces in underserved areas to help increase access to child care services.
3. Enhance the current child care subsidy program to help more families offset the cost of child care.
4. Explore the potential for developing and implementing a universal child care subsidy program in BC.
5. Educate parents about the differences between child care types available in BC and the minimum health and safety standards set in the Community Care and Assisted Living Act (2002) and Child Care Licensing Regulation (2007) used to inform quality of care.
6. Educate parents about the child care funding policy benefits available to help meet their family's child care accessibility and affordability needs.

**Region:** British Columbia [3]

**Tags:** affordability [4]

accessibility [5]

policy [6]

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