

ACCESS

Child Care Access in BC — What's Working *(and What's Worrying)*

SINCE COMING TO OFFICE IN JULY 2017, BC's new provincial government has taken bold action to begin delivering on its commitment to implement a universal child care system over a 10 year period to provide affordable, accessible and high-quality child care for every family who wants or needs it. These actions build on the high level of public support for and the government's election commitment to the \$10aDay Child Care Plan as the best way to address the historic child care chaos in BC.

Government has taken significant steps, both large and small, toward its promise of making child care accessible.

BC Budget 2018 committed \$1 billion in new provincial funding over three years, with \$237 million allocated to create more licensed spaces and respond to the diverse needs of BC families. These commitments to improve accessibility are complemented by an additional \$77 million in funding provided through an agreement with the federal government.

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1. More licensed spaces

Most of the BC budget for child care accessibility is allocated to the New Space Fund, which provides \$221 million over the next three years to create 22,000 licensed spaces. Replacing the former Child Care Major Capital Grant program, the New Space Fund increases funding for priority projects, provides an open-ended, streamlined application process and requires fund recipients to make new spaces more affordable by participating in the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative. The BC government is also providing \$2.25 million in Start-Up Grants to support unlicensed family child care providers to become licensed.

With licensed child care spaces available today for only 18 per cent of children, these actions to create more licensed spaces will **WORK** to start growing the child care system we need.

Federal funding under the Early Learning and Child Care Agreement will bring the total projection of new licensed spaces to 24,000 over the next three years through partnerships with:

- **Aboriginal Head Start**, to expand the provision of culturally based inclusive child care and early learning, family bonding, and prevention services both on and off reserve. Total funding of \$30 million to First Nations Health Authority and Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC, the latter including funds to create new licensed child care spaces that will be free for First Nations families.
- **Union of BC Municipalities:**
 - (i) Community Child Care Space Creation Program provides \$13.7 million to create of 1,370 licensed child care spaces in local government-owned facilities, focusing on infants and toddlers.
 - (ii) Community Child Care Planning program provides \$2.85 million for local governments to engage in planning activities to develop a community child care space creation action plan. Eligible projects can receive up to \$25,000.

These actions to create more high quality licensed spaces build on the evidence-based lessons proposed in the \$10aDay Plan, and our subsequent custom-designed Modular Purchase Program proposal, including:

- Providing communities with the mandate and resources to develop child care expansion plans that meet their needs;

- A priority on creating new spaces with public partners like school districts, local governments, health authorities, and Indigenous communities to ensure that public investments create sustainable public assets; and
- Ensuring that public funds support expansion with partners and providers who want to be part of the new system as demonstrated by their participation in the Fee Reduction Initiative.

With licensed child care spaces available today for only 18 per cent of children, these actions to create more licensed spaces **will WORK to start growing the child care system we need.**

However, these actions also include some old approaches that are not consistent with this evidence and are **worrying**. Despite the encouraging new partnerships, government is still relying on individuals, not-for-profit organizations, and for-profit businesses (third parties) to lead the development of and contribute financially to creating new spaces.

It is particularly **worrying** that capital grants are available to for-profit businesses. Public funds will build facilities owned by individuals and corporations, rather than publicly-owned like schools and libraries. Also, for-profit businesses often assume significant debt to cover their share of costs. This comes with potential rewards for owners, should real estate values rise, and potential risks, should they fall. Neither of these outcomes is in the public interest.

Just imagine if we relied on reactive capital grants to fund schools — expecting groups of parents or teachers to identify and justify the need, find the location, develop and oversee the construction process, and come up with some of the required funding themselves.

No other province or territory in Canada provides such significant, open-ended public funding in the form of capital dollars for the expansion of privately-owned child care assets.

Relying on individuals, organizations, and businesses to create new spaces is also *worrying* because:

- It focuses on stand-alone projects — an expensive and inefficient process;
- Individuals, organizations, and businesses are not in the best position to determine overall community needs and priorities, so public funding may be used to develop new spaces that are not consistent with community priorities; and
- Not-for-profit organizations often have limited access to funds to cover their required share of total costs, so they cannot afford to apply for funding.

Just imagine if we relied on reactive capital grants to fund schools — expecting groups of parents or teachers to identify and justify the need, find the location, develop and oversee the construction process, and come up with some of the required funding themselves.

That's why the \$10aDay Plan calls for government to move toward an evidence-based approach that ensures publicly-funded spaces are planned in and by communities and are publicly-owned.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To build on the progressive features of the New Space Fund, government should develop a comprehensive provincial capital budget to support the full implementation of universal child care and:

- Phase out all one-off, major capital grants and instead fund capital expansion based on community plans, ensuring that public capital funding creates publicly-owned facilities;
- Support a consistent approach to local child care planning by providing a template for communities to use, along with assistance from provincial staff;
- Complete its review of existing and planned public and community facilities to identify opportunities to increase access to licensed child care, based on community plans; and
- Recognizing the urgent needs across the province today, work with public partners to begin adding custom-designed, cost-effective and high quality child care modular buildings for child care to public property.

The \$10aDay Plan calls for government to move toward an evidence-based approach that ensures publicly-funded spaces are planned in and by communities and are publicly-owned.

To ensure that spaces supported through public funds are affordable, government should make participation in the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative an eligibility condition for public funding.

2. Responding to the Diverse Needs of BC Families

BC Budget 2018 included funds to make licensed child care more accessible and inclusive for families, including:

- \$30 million to reduce waitlists for Supported Child Development and Aboriginal Supported Development programs to support children with special needs;
- \$3.6 million (assume annualized over three years) for a new Maintenance Fund, which expands and enhances funding available for facility maintenance and repair and contributes to relocation costs;
- \$3 million to increase support for young parents to access free child care while completing high school; and
- Additional resources, in 2019, for child care outside regular business hours for families with non-standard work schedules.

New funding for these programs provides a number of benefits that are consistent with the goals of the \$10aDay Child Care Plan including:

- Ensuring the emerging child care system is inclusive and welcoming for children and families with extra support needs;
- Building the system from what exists today, supporting existing programs to enhance quality and safety in licensed child care; and
- Meeting the diverse needs of BC families.

To the extent that these public funds sustain and strengthen existing spaces, and make them more inclusive and responsive, **they can WORK to help build the system that BC needs.**

However, it is *worrying* that government has not explicitly made participation in the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative, where applicable, a condition for all of these programs. This is the only way to ensure that public funds meet public goals.

RECOMMENDATION

To ensure that spaces supported through public funds are affordable, government should:

- Make participation in the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative an eligibility condition for public funding.¹

¹ Including licensed preschool and school-aged programs, when eligible for this Initiative.

COALITION OF
**child care
advocates**
OF BC



ECEBC | early childhood
educators of BC

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC advance the \$10aDay Plan in ways that are consistent with their respective mandates and applicable regulatory requirements. Both organizations individually and jointly provide public education about the Plan. As a registered charity, ECEBC also engages in a limited amount of permitted non-partisan advocacy which is directly connected to its charitable public education work. As a registered non-profit society, CCCABC advances the Plan through its advocacy campaign, and at www.10aDay.ca.