

\$10aday Child Care and ECEs in BC

A Message from the Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC) and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC)

For over 40 years, our two organizations have advanced the development of a well-educated, fairly compensated, and highly respected early childhood educator (ECE) profession. We have always known that ECEs are essential to achieving a high quality, affordable child care system that meets the needs of BC families and communities.

Our broadly-supported research and advocacy over the last 10 years, as reflected in the evolving \$10aDay Child Care Plan, created the conditions that made recent progress in BC possible, with much more to come.

The **Next Step** report, incorporating research, analysis and recommendations for a provincial ECE wage grid, is the latest example of our ongoing commitment to advancing your important work.

By 2007, the failure of BC's (and much of Canada's) longstanding market approach to child care was abundantly clear to us. Without public funding, parent fees were too high for most families, but too low to compensate ECEs fairly. The inextricable, problematic link between parent fees and ECE wages made expansion of quality child care difficult. As few could afford to access or work in child care, there were licensed spaces for less than 20 per cent of young children.

So, we began to develop concrete solutions. CCCABC detailed the estimated costs and benefits of a publicly-funded system. ECEBC initiated the \$20/hour Wage Strategy based, in part, on the wages paid to ECEs working in BC's StrongStart programs. These publicly-funded early learning programs are delivered through the Ministry of Education and provided at no cost to parents, who attend the programs with their children.



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Our two organizations remain committed to working together to make the goal of a respected, well educated, and fairly compensated ECE profession a reality.

In 2011 we jointly published the first edition of the *Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning*. This Plan is grounded in research, informed by policy lessons from other jurisdictions, and strengthened through extensive and ongoing consultation across BC. Incorporating additional research led by UBC's Dr. Paul Kershaw, our Plan is now popularly known as the \$10aDay Plan. It is consistent with the national *Affordable Child Care for All Plan* and is an example of how a national approach can be implemented at the provincial level. The Plan also supports the rights of Indigenous Peoples to Indigenous-led child care.

The \$10aDay Plan called for public funding and accountability to achieve an average ECE wage of \$25/hour (adjusted for inflation over time) and maximum parent fees of \$10/day.

Since 2011 we have refined and updated the Plan to incorporate new research and input from communities. The Plan now clearly calls for a provincial wage grid. The Plan has broad public support, with endorsements from 64 local governments, 34 school districts, 20,000 individuals and hundreds of community organizations, businesses, labour groups and academics.

This broad base of public support made child care a key issue in the 2017 provincial election. BC's newly-elected minority government committed to building a quality, universal child care system based on the \$10aDay Plan. In 2018 government began to fund the first steps of implementation by reducing parent fees, creating new licensed spaces and introducing wage enhancements for ECEs.

By 2019 a province-wide poll confirmed significant support for these actions, across all regions, ages and political affiliations. In fact, most British Columbians (76 per cent) said they thought government should move more quickly to achieve the \$10aDay Plan goals.

However, ongoing challenges with ECE recruitment and retention — largely attributed to low wages — make the goal of expanding access to quality child care difficult to achieve. While wage enhancements were a helpful first step, BC needs to implement a systemic, province-wide and equitable approach to ECE compensation. We recommend that qualified ECEs earn a minimum of \$26/hour (one-year college certificate) and \$29/hour (two-year college diploma).

The current pandemic highlights the importance of prompt action. BC's Provincial Health Officer confirmed what our sector has long known — child care is an essential service for families and our economy. Our province needs and relies on ECEs to support families to work and, most importantly, to provide high quality, responsive and caring environments for young children, especially during times of uncertainty.

Our recommendation for a provincial ECE wage grid builds on the BC context — a government committed to building a public system, unprecedented levels of public support, and a new recognition of the essential work done by early childhood educators. Our two organizations remain committed to working together to make the goal of a respected, well educated, and fairly compensated ECE profession a reality.