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# **CHILD CARE B.C. CARING FOR KIDS, LIFTING UP FAMILIES**

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**THE PATH TO UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE**

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*CHILD CARE B.C. CARING FOR KIDS, LIFTING UP FAMILIES :  
THE PATH TO UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE  
FEBRUARY, 2018*

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# MESSAGE FROM MINISTER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT KATRINE CONROY AND MINISTER OF STATE FOR CHILD CARE KATRINA CHEN

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MINISTER OF STATE FOR CHILD CARE, KATRINA CHEN

*Too many people in British Columbia are struggling to get by.*

People of all ages are falling behind, and families with young kids are among those finding it the hardest to make ends meet. Right now, for too many parents in too many communities, child care is almost as expensive as housing, and even harder to find.

The lack of affordable, quality, child care forces many people to either stay home from work, or pay more than they can afford for any care they can find. Some are even forced to leave their communities to find the care their children need.

The lack of affordable, quality child care is bad for businesses because they lose access to skilled workers, and it's bad for families.

Quality child care is more than a safe place for kids to spend the day. Our children's early years shape the rest of their lives. Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) are

trained to help kids make the most of this precious opportunity to learn.

That's why we are bringing universal child care to British Columbia. It will take time to deliver, but we're starting right away.

By adding \$1 billion over the next three years, Budget 2018 offers the biggest investment in child care in B.C. history – delivering swift relief for thousands of families, and laying the foundation for a service that will benefit people for decades to come.

By bringing fees down for parents, building more licensed spaces, and working to increase the number of qualified Early Childhood Educators – while better supporting ECEs already working in the field – we are taking the first important steps towards universal child care.

Offering universal child care will give our kids a head start and help families get ahead.

Our child care strategy is guided by three principles – quality, access and affordability. These principles reflect



MINISTER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT,  
KATRINE CONROY



our commitment to deliver the kind of care our kids deserve, where parents need it, and at a price they can afford.

Together, in partnership with Indigenous communities, other governments, the B.C. Green Caucus, families, advocates, and our hard-working child care providers, we're going to care for kids, lift up families, and advance reconciliation by delivering the affordable, quality child care people need.

## INTRODUCTION

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*Too few families in B.C. have access to affordable, quality child care that meets their needs. Existing supports and subsidies have not kept pace with the rising costs of care, leaving many families struggling to pay more than they can afford.*

In terms of quality, the lack of availability of licensed child care in B.C. is a major issue, with licensed spaces only available to a small percentage of all children aged 0-12 years. This has left many parents without the assurance that their child's care provider is regularly monitored and that staff have the required training to meet the needs of young kids.

The expansion of licensed child care and the overall improvement of care across the province are hampered by the fact that there are not enough certified Early Childhood Educators to adequately staff existing and future child care spaces.

Budget 2018 delivers over \$1 billion in new investments in child care and early learning over the next three years. This is the biggest commitment to child care in B.C. history and it lays the foundation for universal child care province-wide.

*Universal care can't be delivered overnight, but – done right – will mean that all children will be able to find space at licensed family homes and child care centres. What's more, their parents will be able to afford to send them there.*



It will take time to achieve this vision – just as it took time to create public health care and to deliver public education to all children. But, by bringing fees down for parents, building more licensed spaces, and increasing the number of qualified Early Childhood Educators to support young children's care and learning needs, we are bringing universal child care closer to reality.

With Budget 2018, we are delivering immediate relief to tens of thousands of families. A new child care fee reduction will mean that, overall, fees at licensed child care centres will drop significantly for infants and toddlers and for children between the ages of three and five years old.

For families in unlicensed child care, we will support their child care providers and encourage them to become licensed. Licensing means they will get funding for enhanced supports and will be able to offer parents discounted fees.

Additionally, thousands of eligible families with children in all kinds of care will be able to receive a new affordable child care benefit that will provide full or partial relief, depending on family income, to help further cover the cost of child care. More families using unlicensed care will also be eligible to receive a partial benefit.

In order to improve access and support the transition to licensed care, we are:

- » boosting funding to build new licensed spaces province-wide,
- » working to increase the recruitment and retention of Early Childhood Educators, with training bursaries and other strategies aimed at boosting the availability of these important and valued child care experts,
- » providing start-up grants to unlicensed family providers to become licensed, and
- » enhancing the licensing capacity of Health Authorities to keep up with demand of new licensed spaces.

We invite all existing child care providers to join us on the path to universal child care. Budget 2018 includes many new supports to help them better serve their families and to maintain their operations.

These supports include:

- » an expanded and more flexible Child Care Major Capital program, an
- » an expanded Minor Capital program with a stream for family providers, and
- » an increase in operating funding for providers that offer the child care fee reduction.

## FROM A FRAGMENTED SYSTEM TO UNIVERSAL CARE

Currently, B.C. does not have a coordinated child care system. Child care providers operate independently and have to navigate their way through a range of provincial and municipal rules, an insufficient workforce, and rising costs. The current market-based system is not meeting the demand for spaces, resulting in higher prices, lower quality and fewer choices for parents.

Research indicates – and the current state of child care in B.C. confirms – that there are many challenges associated with market-based models when there is unmet demand, leaving them fragmented and unaccountable.





The Province's plan for early care and learning is to move from the current patchwork of programs and services – delivered with limited accountability and regulation, and with fees that are out of reach for many families – towards universal child care that is affordable and available for any family that wants or needs it.

## **OUR VALUES, OUR VISION**

Our kids are the future of our province – they will be our leaders, our entrepreneurs, and those who care for and build our communities. The care we give our kids in their early years will have deep and lasting effects, not just for people but for our province.

*Our vision of affordable, quality child care that is available to every family that wants or needs it was formed in response to advice from parents, child care providers, child care experts and Indigenous leaders.*



We have heard from people across the province and all wanted child care that was affordable and available for parents, and where all children, including those with diverse learning needs, are welcome. And they wanted child care that parents could trust, with rigorous quality

and accountability mechanisms in place for providers who are funded by government.

## **INCLUSIVE CARE, ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE**

Our vision for universal child care is inclusive. Our kids deserve to feel respected and included by those who are caring for them and teaching them. It's also important to recognize and address the needs of children who may be vulnerable and those of children with diverse learning needs.

## **CULTURALLY BASED CARE**

Connections to a child's home culture and language are critical to their long-term well-being. Universal care must honour and promote culture and language – this value must be at the core of all programs, supports and services.

## **CARE WHEN AND WHERE FAMILIES NEED IT**

Families are looking for flexible child care that meets their needs. As we work to deliver universal care, we will support a range of early care and learning programs located in schools, communities, workplaces and homes, so that parents – including parents who work irregular hours – can choose the options that work best for their family.



## CARE BUILT TOGETHER, IN PARTNERSHIP

Government can't deliver universal child care alone. We will need to support and encourage the expansion of community involvement and foster connections between government, Indigenous communities, non-profits and businesses in order to deliver the kind of care kids need and deserve, right across the province.

We will invite child care providers to be our partners in building our new universal system, and will offer expanded operating funds, minor and major capital grants and new supports for family child care providers.

## CARE BUILT FOR THE LONG-TERM

Given the time it takes to build new spaces, train workers, and deliver new services, our partners need to know that quality early care and learning programs will be supported with long-term funding.

We are committed to a sustainable path to universal child care, so that it's available for generations of kids to come.

## SAFE AND ACCOUNTABLE CARE

Creating universal child care is a major investment by government. It's important for outcomes to be monitored and reported, and for the quality of care being delivered to be consistently monitored so parents can breathe easy, knowing their kids are being well-cared for.

## EARLY LEARNING AND EDUCATION

There is significant support for doing more to integrate child care and education. Early Childhood Educators working in licensed child care settings are valuable educators who help children get a head start in life. Universal child care will offer better links between child care and our school system.







**DELIVERING  
AFFORDABLE  
CARE**

# DELIVERING AFFORDABLE CARE

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*Families across the province are struggling to find affordable child care, particularly infant and toddler care.*

Vancouver is one of the most expensive cities for child care in the country with a median fee of \$1,250 per month for infant and toddler care, but costs are high across the province. Fees for infant and toddler care average \$1,000 a month on south Vancouver Island and the Kootenays, and it's almost as high in the Okanagan and in the Interior. For many, the cost of child care is almost the same as their monthly rent.

Throughout our consultations, we heard people asking for government to focus on infant and toddler care first, where costs are the highest, and to make sure that child care is affordable for Indigenous families and for families whose children have extra support needs. People also asked for child care subsidies to be made better for families in the short-term, and phased out over time as affordable, licensed care becomes more available.

The focus of government's new investments is in reducing the cost of licensed care. This is so we can meet our commitment to quality care, and further our goal of replacing the current, fragmented system with universal care.

## IMMEDIATE RELIEF FOR PARENTS

*We know parents are struggling today. That's why we are investing \$630 million over 3 years to improve affordability, including a child care fee reduction that will offer immediate relief for parents with children up to age 5 in licensed care.*





In the first year, priority will be given to infant and toddler care and care for 3- to 5-year-olds, which are the most expensive types of child care.

Starting on April 1, 2018, parents with children in licensed care will be eligible for the following fee reductions if their child care provider opts in to the program:

- » up to \$350/month for group infant/toddler care
- » up to \$200/month for family infant/toddler care
- » up to \$100/month for group care for children aged 3-5
- » up to \$60/month for family care for children aged 3-5.

These fee reductions are expected to benefit up to 50,000 families.

## **A NEW AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE BENEFIT**

In addition to directly lowering fees for families with children in licensed care, Budget 2018 will also fund a new affordable child care benefit to help bring more relief to parents.

This new benefit, which families will be able to apply for beginning in September 2018, will significantly lower the cost of child care for more B.C. families. Families with pre-tax incomes of \$45,000 or less will receive the full

benefit, up to the cost of care, while those who make up to \$111,000 will receive a reduced amount, scaling according to income.

An online benefit calculator will help parents budget for what they will receive based on their income and the type of licensed care.

Benefit amounts will ramp up, helping up to 86,000 families by the end of 2020-21.

## **INCREASING AFFORDABILITY IN THE FUTURE**

As part of our funding agreement with the federal government on Early Learning and Child Care, we are exploring ways to make child care even more affordable for everyone.

Working with our federal partners, we will launch prototype projects that will offer families reduced-cost child care spaces regardless of their income.

The operators that are selected for these sites will be representative across the province, in both urban and rural settings, so that the prototype centres can build the model of reduced fees, supported ECE workers and early learning centres in a representative range of communities in B.C., including in more vulnerable or underserved communities. What we learn from these prototypes will inform the build out of universal child care across the province.





# **ACCESS FOR ALL FAMILIES**

# ACCESS FOR ALL FAMILIES

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*There has been a chronic shortage of licensed child care spaces in our province that has left many families struggling to find quality care. For families whose children have diverse needs, it is even more difficult to find the kind of care their kids need and deserve.*



Improving access isn't just about delivering more licensed child care spaces. It's about inclusion for all children. That means working with Indigenous communities to create culturally centred child care services, increasing access to specialized care for children with diverse needs, and making sure that our universal child care system is welcoming for children who may be vulnerable due to family circumstances.

Creating new spaces will take time, and it will take a plan. That's why we're focusing not just on helping to build new spaces, but on making sure child care providers can find the skilled child care workers they need, and parents can afford child care fees.

## LICENSED CHILD CARE FOR MORE KIDS

There are already too few licensed spaces for the number of children in need. Some parents even put their children on wait lists for child care before their children are born, and still don't get a space when they need one.

As part of Budget 2018, we're investing \$237 million to improve access, including delivering more

than 22,000 new spaces throughout the province. Combined with the new spaces we're creating with the federal government as part of the Early Learning and Child Care agreement, we are creating room for 24,000 more children to access quality, affordable child care, and laying a strong foundation for universal child care in B.C.

## IMPROVING FLEXIBILITY FOR FAMILIES

Right now, there are simply not enough licensed child care spaces for everyone. Families who have different needs, such as irregular work hours, have even less access.

*As we build more spaces throughout the province, we will provide grants to communities to create plans to inform local needs and priorities for child care spaces.*





We will make it easier for family child care providers to receive support for their operations and to accelerate the availability of child care that is co-located on school grounds so we can deliver more spaces in more neighbourhoods and more communities. This includes bringing in full-day early care and learning centres at up to eight existing StrongStart BC Centres.

## **IMPROVING ACCESS FOR ALL CHILDREN**

We recognize that child care needs to meet the needs of kids and their families. These needs differ depending on the circumstances of the child and, in many cases, the situation in their home community.

Recognizing that one size doesn't fit all, and with the support of the federal government, we're taking action to make our child care supports more inclusive for every family.

By providing additional funding to reduce waitlists for Supported Child Development and Aboriginal Supported Development programs, we are helping children access the services they need to succeed.

We're also lifting up vulnerable families by increasing supports for young parents as they complete their secondary-school education, including providing access to no-fee child care.

## **INDIGENOUS-LED CHILD CARE**

While Indigenous children and families are expected to have full access to the enhancements made to the provincial child care system, there is also recognition that we have an obligation to ensure that Indigenous kids, their families and their communities have access to child care that meets their specific needs.

The B.C. government is guided by its commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) – supporting Indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination and governance. In addition, staff in all ministries are reviewing policies, programs and legislation to

implement the principles of the Declaration and the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These steps are especially important when it comes to designing services for Indigenous children.

Transformation will take time and considerable effort on behalf of all levels of government and all partners. We support this process; true and lasting reconciliation is a priority for this government.

But we also know there are Indigenous children and families throughout B.C. that are facing service gaps – they need access to supports and services today. So while we engage in longer-term transformative and systemic change with our partners, we are also acting quickly to offer more supports to Indigenous children and families.

We're starting by investing significant new funding from the federal government into an expansion of the Head Start program both on and off reserve. We know this family-focused program has a big impact on the kids that use it, and it's a great resource for families.

Expansion of Head Start programming is just the beginning. We will work in full partnership with Indigenous communities and leaders throughout B.C. to determine how we can deliver universal child care in a way that meets the needs of Indigenous families and our commitment to UNDRIP.







**QUALITY CARE  
FOR OUR KIDS**



## QUALITY CARE FOR OUR KIDS

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*Kids are precious and irreplaceable. That's why our plan for universal child care is focused on delivering quality, licensed spaces across the province.*

By working to bring care providers into our licensed system, we can provide the accountability, oversight and monitoring needed to give parents confidence that their children are being well cared for.

But quality is about more than licensing. It's also about supporting children's healthy development and early learning. Child care can and should be an important part of a child's learning journey.

### **SUPPORTING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS THROUGH RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

The backbone of quality child care is quality staff. Like most Canadian provinces, British Columbia's early care and learning sector faces chronic challenges, including high employee turnover, and workforce shortages, especially in licensed, centre-based programs.

Early Childhood Educators are critical to the quality of care and learning in licensed facilities. Budget 2018

provides \$136 million over three years to enhance quality of care, including important new supports for training and development, as well as a workforce development strategy. Working with our partners in child care, we will establish the human resource strategies needed to attract and retain skilled and experienced early learning and child care workers, including consideration of appropriate remuneration.

The recruitment and retention of qualified Early Childhood Educators and other child care providers is one of the most pressing challenges to developing universal child care. Low wages and lack of benefits is common across the sector. Early Childhood Educators have in-demand skills, and many experienced educators are moving to more lucrative careers in other sectors.

Our immediate actions will include increasing the number of spaces available to train these early-learning experts, including exploring innovative ways to deliver training. Expanded access to grants and bursaries will support certification for new

Early Childhood Educators and professional development opportunities for people already in the sector, while the existing Early Childhood Educator Bursary Program will be improved to better address the costs associated with training for this career.

We will also invest in the University of Victoria's Community Facilitators Program to provide support and mentorship for Early Childhood Educators, and engage Deans of Education to include early learning in elementary teacher training programs.

## **HELPING EXISTING CHILD CARE PROVIDERS BECOME LICENSED**

One of the most efficient and effective ways to expand licensed child care across British Columbia is to help existing providers become licensed.

Recognizing the cost of this change, we will provide start-up grants to offset the cost of becoming licensed for these providers. Once they become licensed, they will be able to pass on a child care fee reduction to parents using their services, as part of our affordability commitments under Child Care B.C.

Family providers will also be supported with a new training model to deliver quality care.

## **PROTECTING KIDS WITH ENHANCED ACCOUNTABILITY**

One of the biggest benefits to moving to universal child care will be enhanced safety and improved accountability from child care providers.

As our licensed system grows, we must scale up our efforts to maintain the quality of care offered to kids. To do that, we will increase capacity in Health Authorities to license new spaces, conduct investigations and monitor compliance.

Our laws will also be strengthened to make sure that unlicensed child care providers who are acting outside of their legal operating mandate are identified and held accountable.

## **JOINING PROVIDERS IN CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

As part of improvements to quality, we will update the Early Learning Framework that guides programs for children up to the age of eight years in both early care and learning facilities and in schools. This will help children be better prepared for the transition to kindergarten and ensures that they are well supported once they get there.



Child Care Resource and Referral programs are already doing valuable work to improve the quality of child care available in B.C., and we will work closely with these community organizations as we improve our child care system.

Quality decisions are guided by quality information. We will upgrade and enhance data collection through the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) to help us better understand the child care and early learning system as it currently exists and make evidence-informed policy decisions as we move forward.

## **BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS, DELIVERING CARE**

We are working closely with other governments, child care providers, parents and communities to strengthen early childhood development and early learning care as we lay the groundwork for universal child care.

The federal government is a valuable partner in child care. They are investing \$153 million into Child Care B.C. as part of the Early Learning and Child Care Framework. This funding will be put towards increasing the number of infant and toddler child care spaces in areas of highest need and providing low-cost infant and toddler care spaces, supporting culturally appropriate care for Indigenous families, as well as other initiatives meant to support vulnerable families.

Local governments can also be valuable partners. They know their communities well and they are well placed to help plan the expansion of licensed child care. Through grants, we will support them to build more spaces and create plans to inform their local needs and priorities for child care. By enhancing collaboration between provincial and local governments, we will streamline the process of creating child care for families in communities that need it.

Child care has a long-standing relationship with school districts in our province, and many school districts already support child care in their schools. Child care in schools or on school grounds supports seamless transitions for children between programs and into school. It also reduces the burden on parents in dropping off and picking up children, and it effectively utilizes public resources through the use and retrofitting of existing buildings and infrastructure.

In the coming years, we will build more relationships with school districts to create space and infrastructure plans that enable us to know where space exists, and to prioritize communities that need child care.

Child care partners, parents and other stakeholders have been critical to the development of this strategy to address B.C.'s child care needs. Engagement will continue in the coming months and years as we move towards our goal of universal child care. The goal is to monitor and track the impacts of investments and to continually improve as we move forward with developing a system that works for B.C. families.





# **CONCLUSION**

## CONCLUSION

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*We are confident in our plan, as it provides the first concrete steps towards our long-term vision of universal child care in B.C. Under Budget 2018, significant benefits will begin flowing to families immediately and over the next three years.*

Families can look forward to funding for more than 24,000 new child care spaces over the next three years.

Up to 50,000 families will benefit from child care fee reductions, with thousands of families seeing reduced costs starting in April 2018.

Nearly 27,000 families with incomes below \$45,000 will pay little or nothing for licensed care. And 21,000 families using unlicensed care will be eligible for full or partial benefits from the affordable child care benefit.

Early Childhood Educators will receive enhanced support for their education and development.

We look forward to working with our many partners to realize our vision and establish a system of governance for universal child care in British Columbia. The path won't be short and it won't be easy, but we're working hard to make it a reality, and to make a real difference in the lives of B.C. families today.







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