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BACKGROUND

Child care: supporting B.C. families now and into recovery

Quality, affordable and inclusive child care is critical to families, communities and the economy. The pandemic has reinforced the importance of child care as an economic driver. Without reliable access to child care, many parents have to put their careers on hold, move to a different community or decide against having more children. That's why government has made historic investments toward a universal and inclusive child care system in B.C. over the last three years. When families are able to fully participate in the economy, it supports businesses, helps families and lifts children out of poverty.

In 2018, government introduced a \$1-billion child care plan that was the most significant investment in child care in B.C.'s history. These investments in quality, affordable and close-to-home child care for thousands of children have made life better for families in every part of B.C. This included:

- Funding for nearly 26,000 new licensed child care spaces underway throughout B.C.
- Reducing parent fees by up to \$350 per month for more than 69,000 children and their families through the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative.
- Reducing fees by up to \$1,250 a month per child through the Affordable Child Care Benefit, which helps offset costs for 63,000 children from low- and middle-income families.
- A \$2-an-hour wage increase for early childhood educators (ECEs) in licensed facilities.

Budget 2021 builds on these improvements through an additional \$233 million over three years in base funding to advance Childcare BC, the Province's 10-year plan. On top of thousands of new spaces that will be funded each year under the New Spaces Fund, investments will increase the number of families getting child care that costs \$10 a day or less, increase no-cost child care spaces for Indigenous families, and further improve ECE wages to support the creation of high-quality spaces close to home. This brings total child care funding up to nearly \$2.3 billion over the fiscal plan.

Budget 2021 will:

- More than double the number of children who can get care for \$10 a day or less through an expansion of the Universal Child Care Prototype Program. This investment will add 75 more child care centres to the program, increasing the number of spaces by approximately 3,750.
- Help more families access child care on school grounds by expanding the Seamless Day pilot program from four school districts to 24.
- Support approximately 11,000 ECEs in licensed child care centres, and encourage better recruitment and retention in the sector by doubling the ECE wage enhancement to \$4 an hour.
 - These wage enhancements have helped increase ECE median wages to almost \$23 an hour, encouraging more people to pursue this work as a career.
- Support the creation of 400 new spaces for the Aboriginal Head Start program, for a total of 1,000 spaces in more than 30 communities throughout B.C. The program provides culturally relevant child care and early learning at no-cost to Indigenous families through partnerships with the Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC and the First Nations Health Authority.
- Support thousands of new child care spaces through the Childcare BC New Spaces Fund.
- Help almost 2,000 more families access Supported Child Development and Aboriginal Supported Child Development programs and increase the hours of support for children already enrolled to help ensure children with support needs can fully access, participate in and benefit from programming.
- Invest an additional \$20 million in health and safety grants to help child care providers with the cost of keeping centres safe through the pandemic.

When COVID-19 hit B.C., government had already been investing in the child care sector, recognizing how critical it was to families. The importance of these investments became even clearer at the start of the pandemic, when some parents, particularly women, had to quickly step away from work to care for children and senior parents. For others, the pandemic meant juggling caring for their children and supporting their education at home while trying to work. Building a universal and inclusive child care system for B.C. families will help ensure that parents who have stepped back from their employment or educational goals to perform crucial care work are able to return to their careers or training.

To help support child care providers and keep facilities from closing, government provided child care operators with nearly \$320 million in emergency funding between April 1 and Aug. 31, 2020. B.C. was the only jurisdiction in Canada to provide this level of support for the sector, regardless of whether families chose to temporarily withdraw their children or if operators chose to temporarily close.

An additional \$99 million in 2020-21 as part of the StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan helped families and child-care providers through Health and Safety Grants, a Child Care Rapid Renovation Fund and the Aboriginal Head Start Land-based Project, and accelerated more than 3,200 child care spaces through the New Spaces Fund.

Child care will continue to play a key role as B.C. moves toward recovery. The events of the past year have shone a light on how child care supports families, by enabling parents—especially women—to go back to work. It supports business owners who are able to hire parents as they re-enter the workforce, and it helps build strong local economies that benefit everyone in the community. Together, these investments have positioned the child care sector to support families and B.C.'s economic recovery.

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