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# \$10 a day child care at risk from new government funding formula



*Many families experience wait times ranging from one to three years, depending on factors such as the child's age, type of care needed, and location. For example, the*

*YWCA Metro Vancouver reports an average waitlist of 20 months across its three \$10 a day childcare centres.*

**Child care advocates claim the provincial government's new funding formula is putting the \$10 a day child care program at risk.**

In a move to standardize their operating funding model (OFM), the Ministry of Education and Child Care is setting Early Childhood Educator (ECE) wages at \$28.50 per hour. But according to Sharon Gregson, of the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, the average wage in the industry is now \$29/hour and even that's too low. Gregson says accepting the new OFM would mean that to participate many child care providers would have to roll back wages for staff and face laying off qualified staff to hire unqualified ones.

Gregson is also concerned that, "they're basing their calculations on the most minimal staffing structure legally possible which is absolutely the opposite of what quality looks like for children." According to Gregson, in a typical program for three-five-year-olds, instead of having all three staff be qualified early childhood educators only one would have to be.

The new OMF also only allows for five sick days a year which, Gregson says "is ridiculous for this sector".

However, a spokesperson for the Ministry said that while providers are funded to \$28.50/hour, there is an additional \$2/hour premium that can be used to top up wages. They can choose to distribute this additional funding across their employees to pay higher rates for some, and lower for others as long as it's at least a minimum \$25/hr.

Gregson refutes this saying the assertion contradicts the Ministry's own Policy and Procedures Manual that expressly states this cannot be done without applying to the ministry for written permission.

The Ministry also pointed out that staffing requirements are "in alignment with the requirements established by the Ministry of Education and Child Care as listed in the

Child Care Licensing Regulation.

Building a universal \$10 a day child care system over 10 years was the BC government's commitment in their 2018 provincial budget. Back in 2021, British Columbia was the first province to sign onto the federal government's program that committed \$30 billion nationwide over five years to reduce childcare fees to an average of \$10 per day across Canada. BC's commitment to the federal agreement was to create 20,000, \$10 a day spaces by April 2026. Other specifics included 40,000 more spaces overall and the development and implementation of a wage grid for early childhood educators.

**BC has approximately 44,000 more licensed spaces operating now than in 2017 but only about half are funded by government and of the 160,000 total spaces currently operating only 10% of them are \$10 a day spaces.**

However, according to Gregson, the rollout of the \$10 a day program continues to be challenged in part due to infrastructure issues and workforce shortages. To meet the government's targets, B.C. would need to train and graduate approximately 3,750 new educators. This process could take up to eight years at the current pace as low wages in the sector continue to hamper recruitment and retention.

Nevertheless, the Ministry maintains they have been hitting targets on schedule and is on track to meet its next goal of 20,000, \$10 a day spaces by 2026.

BC has approximately 44,000 more licensed spaces operating now than in 2017 but only about half are funded by government and of the 160,000 total spaces currently

operating only 10% of them are \$10 a day spaces. With more than 600,000 children in BC and most mothers in the workforce, waiting lists across the province continue to be long.

It's important to note that while there are only approximately 16,000, \$10 a day child care spaces, families of more than 140,600 children are saving up to \$900 a month per child through the provincial government's Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative.

That still leaves a significant shortfall in spaces which, according to Gregson, has created "families who are winners and losers. Winners to even get a licensed space, and then lottery winners to have a space that's \$10 a day."

Now, in addition to limited availability, administrative hurdles, workforce shortages, and slow implementation, the provincial government's new OFM "is impossible for many organizations to participate in."

The predicament is childcare operators that initially entered into an agreement with the government to become a \$10 a day site had to lower their fees to \$10 a day and not raise them. The understanding was that government funding would increase to cover costs, not the parent fees.

While the government maintains that it "funds providers to cover their expenses, less the \$10 a day fee from enrolled families" and that funding "includes annual increases, hardship claims and more", it appears it's not sufficient for many providers. Their only choice, according to Gregson, may be to opt out of the \$10 a day program and, if they're eligible, return to other funding streams from the province – in addition to charging higher parent fees.

The net result of this funding dilemma could be even fewer \$10 a day sites resulting in higher childcare costs for already financially burdened families.