

## Solution to child care crisis a no-brainer

Low wages are one of the key contributors to the crisis in child care—something the BC government refuses to acknowledge. Early childhood educators, unable to make a decent living, are being forced out of their field. Employers of all sizes—from group centres to family providers—can't find or keep staff.

Quality child care promotes healthy development and enables working families to access the labour market. It helps build communities and supports the economy. So addressing child care shortages is in everyone's interest.

But until the government addresses this serious problem of recruitment and retention, any plans to create child care spaces will not succeed. You still need to staff the spaces. And the inability to find substitutes means what few staff there are do not take their vacation days or sick days, leading to overwork and burnout.

The minister of state for child care thinks doling out last fall's capital funding grants will create up to 2,200 spaces. But she shouldn't count these spaces before they've hatched—they still need to be built, staffed and stabilized.

The cause of this staffing crisis is inadequate pay. A survey recently conducted by First Call, a BC advocacy group, found qualified child care workers are leaving the field because the low wages and lack of benefits leave them unable to support themselves or a family.

New census data from Statistics Canada shows just how serious the problem is. There is a huge and growing gap between what the average worker in BC earns compared to most child care workers. Average annual earnings for full-time early childhood educators in BC actually fell by 12.3% between the years 2000 and 2005. The person who cares for your children now earns a paltry \$20,632.

The job numbers show the effect of these low wages. While the province's overall workforce grew by 8.7% over the same five-year period, the number of early childhood educators shrank by nearly 3%. This is hardly surprising. Why would someone stay working as an early childhood educator if they couldn't then financially provide for their own kids?

Without sufficient stable funding, spaces are vulnerable to closure, as we've seen happen across BC. A UBC-based network, the Consortium for Health, Intervention, Learning and Development (CHILD), calls this a "fragility" of service.

So what's the solution? Parent fees are already too high and families cannot be expected to subsidize their child care any further. We need government funding. And yet, government funding per regulated space in BC is down since 2001, according to data collected by the Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

In other provinces, governments have taken measures to address the child care crisis. Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta have all recently announced increased child care wages through wage supplements. Early childhood educators in Alberta will earn up to \$20.82 an hour. But here in BC, the government still has no plan to increase wages for early childhood educators.

Other provinces have figured out how to fix the problem. Why can't BC?

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**Child care - let's make it happen!**

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C.  
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