

Child Care Advocacy Forum

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Coalition of Child Care
Advocates of BC

Early Childhood Educators
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School Age Child Care
Association

Westcoast Child Care
Resource Centre

Western Canada Family
Child Care Association
of BC

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NEW CHILD CARE OPERATING GRANT MUST MOVE US FORWARD

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Minister Lynn Stephens, who is responsible for BC's child care policy, has made a commitment to develop and implement a new integrated operational grant to support licensed child care spaces in our province.

While details of the new operational grant are not yet final, at this point it seems that the new grant program will:

- be in place by April 1, 2003
- combine the existing Compensation Contribution Program, Infant/Toddler Incentive Grant and the Emergency, Repair, Relocation and Replacement Grants into one single grant
- be available to licensed group programs and licensed family child care providers caring for children from birth to age 12.

The Advocacy Forum is committed to working for a child care system in BC that meets the needs of all children, offers families choices from a range of quality, affordable programs and values those who provide care for our children. Based on these goals, the Advocacy Forum strives for:

- fair and equitable access to operating grants for a range of child care services, including full and part-time group programs, licensed family child care homes and license-not-required family child care providers registered with Child Care Resource and Referral Programs.
- administrative efficiencies through the consolidation of provincial child care dollars into a single, accountable funding program.

For a comprehensive, stable, quality child care system to be established in BC, there are several serious issues that government must address so that the new operating grant will move us forward.

1. Adequate Resources

Without an adequate budget, a new operating grant will not support quality, affordability or sustainability. Child care programs that access existing grants still struggle to stay afloat. Spreading existing dollars more thinly will not only fail to achieve a comprehensive, stable, quality child care system in BC but will in fact make things worse.

2. Promoting Affordability

Parents in BC pay over \$1.35 billion a year in child care fees. The cost of quality child care is out of reach for a growing number of families. Unless the new operating grant is tied to increased affordability, most children and families will still not be able to continue to be unable to afford quality care.

3. Valuing Caregivers

Research indicates that there is a direct link between caregiver salaries and the quality of child care. There is a direct link between the quality of child care and the wages and working conditions of caregivers. Without provincial funding, parent fees are the only source of revenue to support adequate compensation for those who care for our children. Parents can't afford to pay more. The loss of dedicated funding for caregiver compensation is likely to have a devastating effect on BC's child care system.

Putting Operating Grants in Context

The proposed new operating grant comes on the heels of other provincial decisions that are destabilizing child care in BC. For example,

- As of April 1, 2002 significant cuts were made to provincial Child Care Subsidies for low and moderate income families. Fewer families now qualify for subsidy and many families who still qualify receive less. Often families have no choice but to withdraw their children from their current child care arrangements because they are unable to pay the fees. While these families scramble to find cheaper and likely poorer quality care, the sustainability of existing child care programs is threatened because of impending vacancies.
- As of June 30, 2002, the current Funding Assistance Program (FAP) for school-aged child care will end. This program has made over 15,000 licensed school-aged child care spaces more affordable for BC families. The elimination of FAP will make licensed care for school aged children unaffordable for many families and our communities will see more 'latch key' children and program closures.
- As of March 31, 2004, the provincial government will no longer fund Child Care Resource and Referral Programs, One Stop Access sites and the provincial services of Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre. These programs provide essential supports to families and caregivers and play a key role in child care planning in BC communities. The dismantling of these programs will see a return to poor child care information for families and isolation for child care providers.
- As other public institutions wrestle with budget shortfalls, child care services in colleges, hospitals, and school sites are being closed or reduced. The loss of these spaces has a significant impact on families who rely on them in order to work or go to school and on the community at large who have seen them as models of seamless services for families.
- Single parents on income assistance are now required to seek work once their youngest child turns three. At a time when government policy has increased families' need for child care services, other government decisions are jeopardizing the viability of existing child care programs.

As a result of decisions across government, it is getting harder for children and families to access quality child care.

On its own - a new operating grant program will not fix the problem!

That is why the Child Care Advocacy Forum is calling on the provincial government to:

- Reverse the decisions that are destabilizing child care in BC
- Provide transition programs to support existing child care services
- Develop and implement a comprehensive 5-year plan that moves child care from the current user fee system to one funded, like other public programs, through the tax system.

As part of this 5 year plan, an adequately funded operating grant program can help move us forward!