

March 20, 2020

Dear friends and supporters:

We hope that you and your family are safe and well-supported during this critical time.

As the public health emergency unfolds, we are reminding ourselves to approach our advocacy with the 'generosity of spirit' that's essential to achieving the child care system BC needs. We acknowledge that government is working hard to address the COVID-19 pandemic. And, the need for a systematic, province-wide approach to child care services and the health of children, families and early childhood educators remains our top priority.

We have repeatedly asked for a clear and consistent public health rationale for keeping child care programs open while schools are closed, as almost all other provinces have closed both schools and regular child care programs. Yet, as of March 19, child care programs in BC are still being encouraged and 'incentivized' to remain open so that front line essential workers from other sectors can access child care. Parents 'who can' are advised to care for their children at home. Families are confused by mixed messages, educators are worried to be at work, and government has not yet clarified policies on parent fees, educator wages and the financial viability of child care programs.

We fully appreciate and support the need to ensure that designated essential workers can continue to provide the critical services our communities need. However, with licensed spaces for only 20% of children and almost no licensed care for shift workers, BC does not currently have a province-wide system in place to address these needs.

We have always known that child care is essential!

The child care needs of essential workers and the health and safety of children, families and early childhood educators will NOT be achieved through a fragmented approach. Expecting already under-supported child care programs, dedicated early childhood educators and stressed parents to make individual decisions about whether to stay open, work in or attend child care is not the way forward. Therefore, we support the provincial government to immediately:

1. **Implement an emergency child care plan** to provide free age-appropriate child care services for all children whose parents are designated as essential workers.
2. **Close community-based programs** that are not required to care for the children of designated essential workers.
3. **Continue to pay all** child care staff.
4. **Suspend all parent fees** while programs are closed.
5. **Maintain all government funding** to service providers during closures and provide additional funding to compensate for the loss of income from parent fees and/or parent subsidies.

BC's plan should be informed by the province-wide plan Quebec has implemented to address these needs. It is a tragic irony indeed that it has taken this public health crisis for the essential nature of child care to be recognized. Now it's time for the province to respond to the urgent challenges facing child care services, and the children and families they serve, with a province-wide coordinated plan and the supports required to make it a reality.

The \$10aday Team