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\$10aDay Child Care NOW – for BC's COVID-19 Recovery

For British Columbia and Canada to forge a resilient and just future, building a quality, affordable child care system with fairly compensated early childhood educators must be a priority. Increasing the public investment in child care now will play a central role in building a sustainable economy - an economy that mitigates climate change, creates green jobs, supports Indigenous peoples on and off reserve, and undoes many inequities in our communities.

That is why, effective July 1st, **we call on the BC government to begin moving all currently licensed child care programs to \$10aDay child care sites.** We call on the federal government to share in the costs of this move as part of a Canada-wide recovery plan. And, we call on both levels of government to prioritize and increase funding for Indigenous-led child care services.

During the COVID-19 pandemic it became abundantly obvious that child care is an **essential service.** This fact was clearly articulated by provincial and federal leaders including Dr. Bonnie Henry and Premier Horgan and is the basis for taking decisive action on child care in BC's recovery plan. The pandemic laid bare two undeniable realities about child care.

First, thousands of families have recently lost their jobs and income. They are now facing more financial hardship than ever. To return to work, they need access to affordable child care. A sustainable economic recovery relies on families being able to regain their earning power, rebuild confidence in their future and spend money in their local economy. Access to affordable child care is essential for families to re-enter the labour force. They need access to quality, affordable programs that meet diverse needs, are culturally relevant, and offer non-traditional hours of care for shift/part-time workers.

Second, the pandemic served to highlight that BC needs a publicly-funded and publicly-managed system of child care. While public systems like schools were able to respond to the pandemic crisis with clear provincial policy and decision-making, child care services in BC had no reliable or coherent system of communication or coordination. Public funding is essential to make child care affordable and to compensate early childhood educators fairly. Public management is critical to ensure that the fragile, disconnected child care sector is supported to consistently deliver quality, affordable child care.

Even with spaces available for children of essential workers, families were too often unable to find or afford child care to meet their needs. And, while we all know that public schools will eventually reopen, many child care programs may not as they depend on the decisions made by individual operators who are in turn dependent on market forces.

While government can't fix everything – it can move to \$10aDay Child Care NOW – this will have a huge impact on the economic and social recovery of families and communities.

There are 3 essential child care actions to include in BC's recovery plan.

1. Move NOW to \$10aDay child care.

Effective July 1, 2020, government should begin funding the transition of existing and willing child care programs to \$10aDay sites where parents pay a maximum of \$10/day for full-time child care and \$7/day for part-time care, with no fees for families earning under \$45,000/year. Early childhood educators will be paid according to a competitive, publicly-funded provincial wage grid. Program participation would be voluntary, with clear accountability measures.

*There are currently fifty \$10aDay Prototype sites operating across BC. **We need far more!** Reduced parent fees are offset by enhanced government funding to the child care operator. This funding model is consistent with other public services that British Columbians rely on, like schools and hospitals.*

To begin, government should prioritize child care programs located in facilities that are already publicly-owned, such as schools and community centres. This ensures that new public funding goes directly to lowering parent fees and raising educator wages rather than to leasing or mortgage costs for privately-owned facilities.

In the 2017 provincial election, BC's government made a commitment to the goals of the \$10aDay Plan. While implementation of government's Childcare BC plan is underway, in these unprecedented times there's an even more urgent need for immediate and bold action to deliver on the \$10aDay promise.

2. Implement a competitive provincial wide wage grid for early childhood educators

Early childhood educators throughout BC and the entire child care workforce demonstrated professionalism and dedication as essential workers throughout the pandemic, despite earning a median wage of only about \$20/hour. They are the workforce behind the workforce but without the wages to recognize their important contributions.

***This must change!** The recruitment and retention crisis that existed in the child care sector pre-pandemic is already predicted to be far worse post-pandemic. Implementing our recommendations for a competitive provincial wage grid is the vehicle to ensure BC has the educators needed to not only reopen existing child care programs but to expand to meet demand.*

3. Expand public child care spaces through infrastructure investments

Moving to \$10aDay in existing programs will help many families, but there remains a chronic shortage of child care spaces. So, a key element of BC's new infrastructure investments must be 'shovel-worthy' child care construction projects as identified by public sector partners through the Union of BC Municipalities Community Child Care Planning Program. This will require a dedicated child care capital budget.

Child care investments help BC build green infrastructure and create short- and long-term jobs. The immediate goal for new spaces should be a school-age child care program in every BC elementary school and modular child care facilities on the grounds of every BC hospital and post-secondary institution, with each new facility opening their doors as a \$10aDay program.

With these 3 actions, BC will see families immediately start to recover from the economic and social impacts of the pandemic. As more families and educators benefit from \$10aDay expansion the impacts will be life-changing – as it is for families in existing \$10aDay sites.

Fundamental system change for child care is long overdue – and NOW is the time. \$10aDay child care will ensure that BC's families, communities and economy not only survive COVID-19, but thrive.