

Key Areas of Alignment on Child Care: BC Government and BC Green Caucus

The May 30, 2017 Confidence and Supply Agreement (CASA) between the BC NDP Caucus (now the BC Government) and the BC Green Caucus commits to:

*Invest in childcare and early childhood education to improve **quality**, expand **spaces**, increase **affordability** and ensure childcare is **accessible** for all families, with a focus on **early childhood education*** (p. 7, emphasis added).

These child care priorities are consistent with research and evidence, and demonstrate overall alignment between the BC government (and by extension the \$10aDay Child Care Plan) and the BC Green Caucus on child care.

In order to move from high-level alignment on paper to actual implementation on the ground, however, it is helpful to explore this alignment in more detail—to profile the specific policy areas for which there appears to be solid agreement, and to bring forward areas that may require further discussion.

Below we summarize the results of our alignment assessment to date, based on analysis of:

- **BC GOVERNMENT** — platform commitment to public investment in \$10aDay Child Care Plan, subsequently affirmed by government in public commentary, and the underlying *Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning* proposed by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC.
- **BC GREEN CAUCUS** — platform commitment to public investment in part-day preschool/ECE for children aged 3 and 4 and daycare for children under 3, public commentary by MLAs, and a discussion with senior staff.

Notably, we observe that both the BC government and the BC Green Caucus commit to building a universal, public system over time. By 2025, for example, both anticipate that 85% of children aged 3 and 4 will be participating in part-day programs (BC Green Caucus) or a combination of part-day and full-day programs (BC government and \$10aDay Plan).

We assessed the six key policy areas highlighted in the CASA:

1. Public investment

Recognizing the current child care chaos in BC, child care was the most significant area of new spending in both in both the BC NDP and BC Green Party election platforms. While multiple economic studies show that high quality, affordable child care is largely self-financing, even in the short-term, both party platforms acknowledged that public investment is required in order to generate these returns. More broadly, their platforms also acknowledged that our progressive tax system, where those who earn more pay more, is a reasonable source of the financing required for important services like child care.

In subsequent public commentary and discussion, both the BC government and representatives of the BC Green Caucus have affirmed the importance of investment in a universal system over time, and ensuring benefits for families with young children in the short term.

2. Quality

While the BC Green Party platform did not incorporate specific measures to address quality, it referenced research about the importance of the early years and the benefits of child care that are predicated on quality programming (whether labelled as child care, daycare, preschool, early childhood education, etc.). Subsequent commentary and discussion confirms their commitment to quality, and the understanding that high quality programs value Early Childhood Educators for the important work that they do, which means compensating them fairly and supporting their ongoing education. The \$10aDay Plan incorporates these commitments to quality, with specific details on, and targets for, increasing ECE compensation and achieving international benchmarks for education levels over time.

3. Spaces

Both the BC NDP and BC Green Party platforms committed to creating significant new spaces. The BC NDP platform committed to creating 22,500 new spaces within 3 years, which is consistent with the \$10aDay Plan proposal for full implementation for children under 6 over an 8-year period. The BC Greens' program will be phased in over at least 4 years, with space creation details to be developed with stakeholders.

In addition to creating new spaces, the \$10aDay Plan proposes to support existing licensed child care services to receive new, accountable direct operating funding in order to enhance quality and affordability. This approach appears to be supported by both the BC government and the BC Green Caucus.

Regarding spaces, there are 4 areas where it appears that further discussion between the BC Green Party platform and the BC government is suggested:

- i. Child care needs of families with children under age 3 with an at-home parent — the \$10aDay Plan supports families to access part- or full-day child care, as they choose, regardless of parents' labour force status. While it is likely that families with an at-home parent would most often choose part-day child care programs (and/or free early learning programs such as Strong Start) over full-day programs, the BC Green Party platform only describes child care for children under age 3 who have working parents.
- ii. Full-day child care needs of families with children aged 3 to 5 — the \$10aDay Plan proposes both part-day and full-day options whereas the BC Green Party platform only describes part-day care (up to 25 hours per week).
- iii. Child care needs of families with school-aged children — the \$10aDay Plan includes school-aged children up to age 12, acknowledging that more work is needed to deepen, and

cost, this component. The BC Green Party platform does not address care for school-age children.

- iv. Where to begin expanding spaces - the BC Green Party platform suggests starting with ECE/preschool for children aged 3 and 4. The BC government prioritizes children under 3, who are today most likely to be cared for in unregulated, unmonitored settings because there are so few licensed infant/toddler programs.

4. Affordability

Both the BC Green and BC NDP election platforms committed to lowering parent fees substantially, which is essential for effectively addressing affordability. However, there are differences between the proposed parent fee models in each platform:

- BC NDP — as proposed in the \$10aDay Plan, over time parent fees are reduced to \$10aDay for full-time care, \$7 per day for part-time care, and no fees for families earning less than \$40,000 annually.
- BC Green Party — no parent fees for families with a child under age 3, if parents are working, or for preschool (up to 25 hours per week) for families with children aged 3 and 4. This benefit will be taxable for families with incomes over \$80,000. The value of the benefit is not specified, so the actual cost to families is not clear. The platform does not discuss: parent fees for the extended hours of care that working parents of children aged 3 and 4 require; access to early care and learning programs for children under age 3 with an at-home parent, or; school-aged child care.

5. Accessibility

while the space and fee commitments in both the BC NDP and BC Green Party platforms would

substantially increase access to child care, the \$10aDay Plan also includes specific commitments to inclusion. For example, in order to receive new public funding, child care programs must welcome all children, including those with additional support needs. Furthermore, the costing of the \$10aDay Plan provides additional supports for families who might otherwise face economic, social or cultural barriers to access. The BC Green Party platform does not include explicit actions to address accessibility, beyond the commitments to spaces and fees as described above.

6. Early childhood education

The BC Green Party platform emphasizes the early childhood education associated with child care, which is consistent with the \$10aDay Plan — the full name for which is the *Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning*. Research confirms that we cannot — and should not — separate care from learning, as high quality child care = early care and learning = early childhood education. Given that the BC government and the BC Green Caucus share the goal of ensuring a focus on early childhood education and care, it may be helpful for them to have further discussions about terminology. Also, the \$10aDay Plan proposes moving child care from its current home in the Ministry of Children and Family Development into the Ministry of Education. This move is consistent with other Canadian provinces/territories as well as with international jurisdictions. It also recognizes the importance of integrating care and learning, and confirms the role that early childhood education plays in lifelong learning, as highlighted in the BC Green Party platform.

IN SUMMARY, there is substantive agreement between the BC government and the BC Green Caucus on building a quality, affordable child care system in BC. We look forward to working with all MLAs, and a broad range of stakeholders, on prompt implementation.