

Fund autism therapy: MLA

By Barbara McIntock
Victoria Bureau

Independent MLA Jack Weisgerber is taking up the cause of parents of autistic children who are going to court to try to force the B.C. government to pay for an expensive treatment for them.

The treatment — known as the Lovaas treatment in honour of its California founder — can cost up to \$60,000 a year. But parents say it's proven to be effective with autistic children who have severe communication and social disabilities.

In question period in the legislature yesterday, Weisgerber said it makes no sense for B.C. to refuse to cover the treatment while Alberta provides full coverage.

"About 150 families in B.C. today are bankrupting themselves to pay for the Lovaas therapy," Weisgerber said. "It seems to me that this government ... is letting down those children, is abandoning those autistic children."

Health Minister Mike Farnworth said he's prepared to sit down and talk with the parents about the best way to handle the problem.

But, he said, that can't happen as long as the court case is going ahead, although he'll be watching the case with great interest.

Farnworth said the government does have a complex system for approving new treatments for medicare payment, a system involving doctors.

"It should be decided on the basis of what is appropriate treatment," he said.

Four Lower Mainland couples are fighting a legal battle on behalf of their autistic children that could benefit

up to 1,200 families in B.C.

The families are suing the B.C. ministries of children and families, health and education in a bid to get the B.C. government to pick up the tab for the costly but proven method of intensive therapy pioneered by psychologist Dr. Ivar Lovaas.



WEISGERBER