

# Speedy treatment pledged for autistic kids under six

BY KIM PEMBERTON  
*Southam Newspapers*

VANCOUVER — All autistic children in B.C. under age six will get treatment by the end of the year, a lawyer for the Attorney General's Ministry promised Thursday.

But while the government is willing to provide early intervention services it doesn't believe the courts have the right to mandate such treatment, Lisa Mrozinski said.

Mrozinski made the pledge in an interview outside the B.C. Court of Appeal, where the province is appealing a ruling by B.C. Supreme Court Justice Marion Allan that the government is required to provide treatment for autistic children.

"The government will fund these services no matter what happens," she said. "The question is whether the government is constitutionally obligated to fund the services."

She added government must be able to determine what services it wants to fund because "clearly you can't fund every service."

In the appeal court Thursday, lawyer Chris Hinkson, who is representing four families who launched the original B.C. Supreme Court action, said after being ordered by the lower court to provide treatment, the government did so for only about 20 per

cent of children under the age of six, with "an ineffective program."

"Without some intervention by the courts, the breach (of the Constitution) found by Madame Justice Allan does and will continue," he said. "The government is concerned with the precedent ... it's not just the four petitioners who will benefit but many others."

Hinkson said the families are seeking Lovaas treatment for their children, which requires 20 to 40 hours a week of intensive one-to-one therapy costing \$45,000 to \$60,000 a year.

Hinkson said the Lovaas-style treatment, based on the work of Dr. Ivar Lovaas, a renowned PhD in psychology at UCLA, is the only treatment scientifically proven to work.

Lawyer Leah Greathead, who also represents the attorney general, said the treatment program provided by the government, while not the Lovaas method, did provide 20 hours minimum of service each week.

However, she acknowledged the children were not necessarily receiving one-to-one therapy in the early behavioral intervention program being phased in by the government.

"I'd submit it doesn't necessarily have to be one-to-one," Greathead said. "Those are decisions best left to government."