

Setting the Stage

AECEA and Alberta's child care system

Alberta's Child Care Landscape

All children and families deserve accessible, affordable, high-quality child care: this is a fundamental right with far-reaching benefits for society as a whole. Unfortunately, the high cost of child care, the shortage of spaces, and the challenges of recruiting and retaining qualified staff mean that regulated, high-quality child care services are often not accessible to the children and families who need them. The majority of Alberta parents must turn to other child care options, including paid or unpaid relatives and unregulated babysitters.

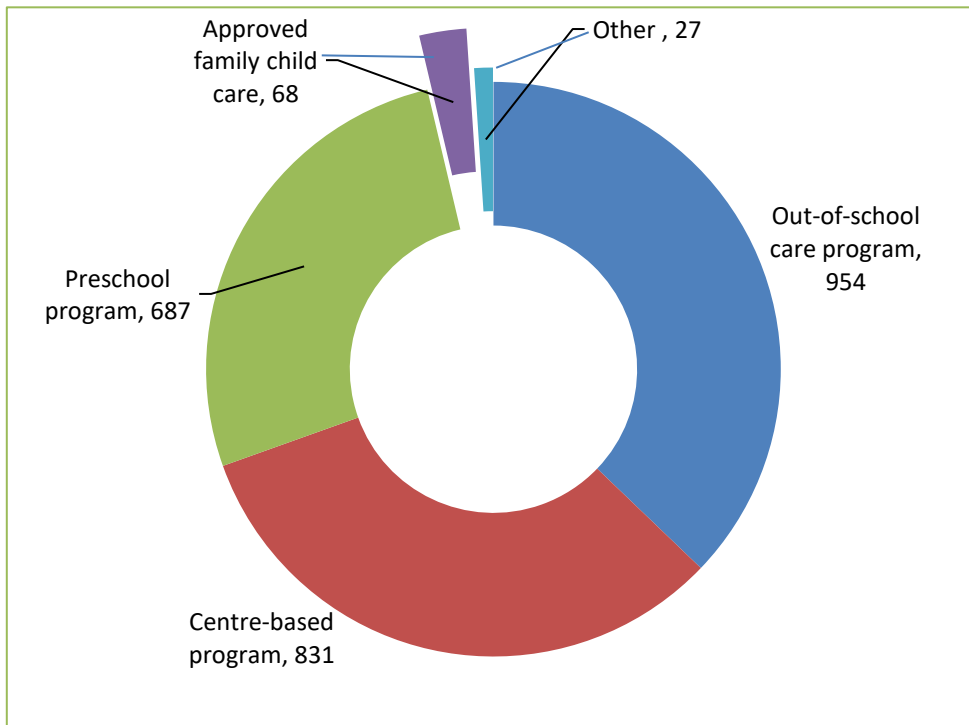


Figure 1. The distribution of licensed and approved child care programs in Alberta, March 2017

There were 2,567 licensed and approved child care programs in Alberta in March 2017.* As shown in Figure 1, the majority were centre-based child care programs (32%), preschools (27%) and out-of-school care programs (27%). Approved family child care programs constituted 3% of the total. Other programs (innovative child care programs and group family child care programs) constituted an additional 1%.

In March 2017, there were nearly 117,000 licensed and approved child care spaces in Alberta. Approximately 37% of these spaces (43,000) were in Edmonton; about 39% (45,000) were in Calgary. As shown in Figure 2, about 10% of the total available spaces were in family child care programs.

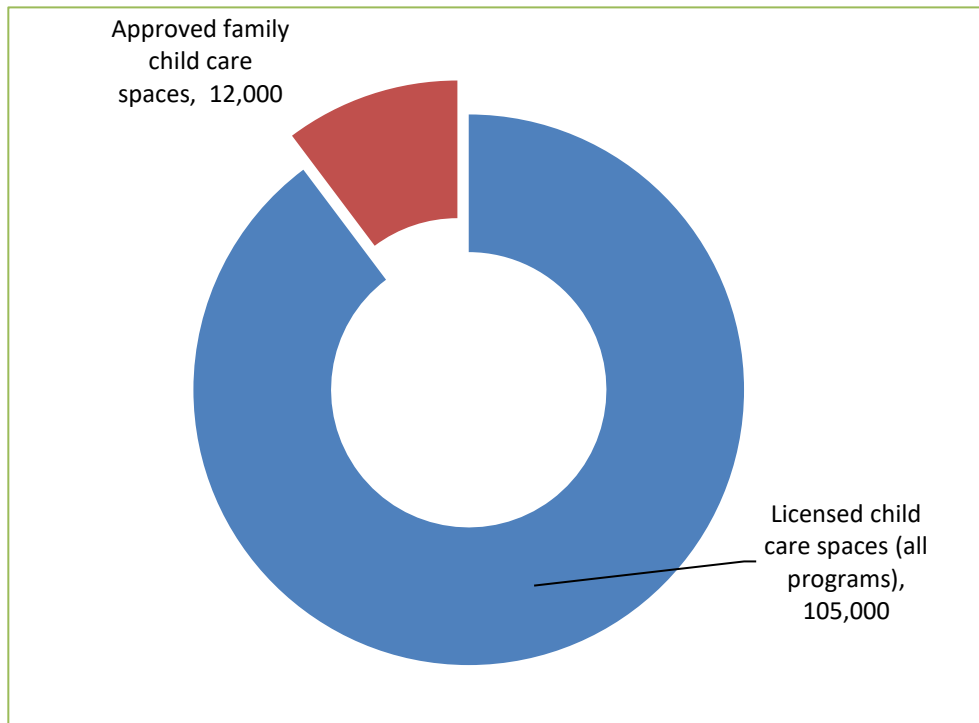


Figure 2. The distribution of licensed and approved child care spaces in Alberta, March 2017

* Alberta Children's Services, *Annual Report 2016–17*, p. 17.

Child care spaces are in short supply

In 2016, Alberta was home to more than 1.1 million families* and 333,254 children under the age of six.† An estimated 70% of these children have parents who work outside the home,‡ which means that most Alberta preschoolers—an estimated 233,278 children—spend some time in some sort of non-parental care.§

In Alberta and across Canada, the demand for child care “outstrips availability in most cases, especially for infants and toddlers.”** In 2014, only one in five Alberta preschoolers (20%) had access to child care within the province’s regulated system.** Regulated child care spaces were available for just 15.5% of children aged birth to 12.**

In 2016, a survey conducted by Public Interest Alberta found that 49% of the child care centres, day homes and out-of-school care programs that responded had waiting lists, with an average of 59 children per list. In 2017, 66% of child care centres in Edmonton and 63% of centres in Calgary had waiting lists.§§

* Statistics Canada, “Census Alberta [Province] and Canada [Country]” (table) in *Census Profile, 2016*.

† Alberta Children’s Services, *Business Plan 2017–20*, p. 21.

‡ Government of Alberta, *Together We Build Tomorrow*, p. 15. A recent Statistics Canada study (Drolet, Uppal, and LaRoche-Côté) reports that, in 2014, 70% of Canadian women with children under the age of three participated in the labour force.

§ Seventy per cent of 333,254 represents 233,278 children.

** Macdonald and Friendly, *Time Out*, p. 19.

** Friendly et al., *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada, 2014*, p. 124.

** Childcare Resource and Research Unit. “Finding Quality Child Care: A Guide for Parents in Canada–Alberta.”

§§ Macdonald and Friendly, *Time Out*, pp. 19–20. In Edmonton, 49% of centres reported waiting lists in 2016, compared to 66% in 2017.

Regulated child care is even more difficult to access in many rural and remote communities in Alberta, and few services “can accommodate the care needs of parents who work non-standard hours.”*

Child care costs are prohibitive for many Alberta families

Alberta provides subsidies to help low-income families cover child care fees. But child care affordability is a significant issue for modest- and middle-income as well as low-income families. The 2017 *Time Out* study† found that annual child care fees in the province’s major cities ranged from \$10,000 to \$15,000 per child.

- In Edmonton, median monthly fees were \$990 for infants, \$891 for toddlers and \$885 for preschoolers. This represents an annual child care cost of \$10,600 to \$11,880.
- In Calgary, median monthly fees were \$1,250 for infants, \$1,050 for toddlers and \$1,000 for preschoolers. This represents an annual child care cost of \$12,000 to \$15,000.

The Alberta Federation of Labour reports that child care fees in Alberta are among the highest in Canada.‡

Early childhood educators are poorly paid

The 2107 *Alberta Wage and Salary Survey* found that the average hourly wage for early childhood educators in Alberta was \$16.81. By comparison, the average hourly wage across all industries was \$28.39—69% higher.§

* Muttart Foundation and Martha Friendly, *Engaging Alberta Municipal Level Governments*, p. 5.

† Macdonald and Friendly, *Time Out*, 7, pp. 10–13. The 2017 *Time Out* study is the latest in a series of annual studies conducted since 2014.

The study defines infants as being under the age of two, toddlers as between 18 months and three years, and preschoolers as between 2.5 and kindergarten age.

‡ Alberta Federation of Labour, “For Kids.”

§ Government of Alberta, *2017 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey*.

The survey reported wages for early childhood educators working in five industries: educational services, health care and social assistance, other services (repair, personal and related services), information, culture, recreation, and public administration. As shown in Table 1, early childhood educators who work in the educational services sector are better paid than colleagues who work in other industries. However, as shown in Table 2, early childhood educators earn significantly less than other education sector workers with comparable training.

Early childhood educators earn one-third less than educational assistants—even though both occupations typically require at least one year of post-secondary education.* Early childhood educators must also be certified. Certification is not required for educational assistants, and there is no legislation regulating this profession.

NOTE: Statistics Canada's 2017 *Labour Force Survey* (as cited in the Government of Alberta's 2017 *Alberta Labour Force Profiles: Women*) reports that the average hourly wage in Alberta was \$30.01. The *Labour Force Survey* also reports that average hourly wages for Alberta women were \$26.86 compared to \$32.91 for men.

The difference between the average wages reported in the *Labour Force Survey* and the *Alberta Wage and Salary Survey* is attributable to different survey methodologies. The *Labour Force Survey* reports an annual average; the *Alberta Wage and Salary Survey* reports estimates from a specific point in time. In addition, participation in the former survey is compulsory, while participation in the latter is voluntary. *Labour Force Survey* data is therefore more reliable.

* Alis occupational profiles for "Early Childhood Educator" and "Educational Assistant." (Based on the Government of Alberta's 2017 *Alberta Wage and Salary Survey*.)

Industry	Average Salaries		
	Starting Salary	Overall Average	Top Salary
Educational Services	\$17.68	\$20.85	\$23.10
Health Care and Social Assistance	\$14.37	\$16.16	\$18.33
Other Services (Repair, Personal and Related Services)	\$12.95	\$16.17	\$19.92
Information, Culture, Recreation	\$13.31	\$15.36	\$18.52
Public Administration	\$17.82	\$18.66	\$19.93
All Industries	\$14.62	\$16.81	\$19.33

Table 1. Comparison of early childhood educators' salaries across different industries in Alberta, as reported in the Government of Alberta's *2017 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey*

Industry	Average Salaries		
	Starting Salary	Overall Average	Top Salary
Early Childhood Educator	\$14.62	\$16.81	\$19.33
Educational Assistant	\$18.22	\$22.19	\$26.20
Difference	24.6%	32.0%	35.5%

Table 2. Comparison of average hourly wages for early childhood educators and educational assistants, as reported in the Government of Alberta's *2017 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey*

Elementary school teachers have at least four years of post-secondary training and earn an average of \$41.01 per hour.* This is significantly more than the average wage of even the highest-paid early childhood educators.

“Much of the early learning and care workforce...has modest formal education, limited access to ongoing professional development and relatively low rates of remuneration. By comparison, staff in school-based programs...[have] higher levels of formal education (although not always in early childhood education), have access to ongoing professional development and enjoy competitive salaries and benefits.”

—Muttart Foundation, *Toward a Provincial Framework: Draft*, p. 14

* Alis occupational profile for “Elementary School Teacher.” (Based on the Government of Alberta’s *2017 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey*.)

Qualified early childhood educators are in short supply

For too long, the work of early childhood educators has been undervalued and underpaid. Low wages make it difficult for employers to attract qualified people, encourage them to upgrade their education and keep them in the field. Staff turnover is high and there is a shortage of qualified staff to work in regulated child care settings.*

The *2017 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey* reports that 62% of employers of early childhood educators had to recruit staff in the last two years. Of these, nearly 30% reported facing hiring difficulties and 6% had unfilled vacancies of over four months.†

A 2013 study found that 15% of the directors and 23% of the staff in Alberta child care programs were actively looking for new jobs.‡ For directors, this was the highest proportion in the country. For staff, it was the second-highest proportion—below Ontario. High staff turnover has a social and economic cost.

Another unfortunate consequence of poor wages is that a significant portion of Alberta’s child care workforce is poorly educated. As shown in Table 7 (p. 69) 39% of workers in the regulated sector are certified as child development assistants, which means they have completed a 54-hour course. By comparison, many entry-level dog groomers have completed a 160-hour course.§

Even qualified early childhood educators lack the funding and support they need for professional learning and growth.

* The Muttart Foundation and Martha Friendly, *Engaging Alberta Municipal Level Governments*, p. 5.

† Alis, Occupational profile for “Early Childhood Educator.” (Based on the Government of Alberta’s *2017 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey*.)

‡ From the national 2013 *You Bet We Still Care* study, cited by Flanagan and Beach, *Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Commission*, p. 69.

§ Alberta School of Dog Grooming, “Canine Stylist Technician.”

*A 2009 study conducted for the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council found a Canada-wide shortage of more than 4,800 staff to fill available positions. “As a result, employers were increasingly hiring staff with lower qualifications than required by regulation.”**

Building a High-Quality Early Learning and Child Care System

A well-functioning, high-quality early learning and child care system[†] includes the following components:

- individual early childhood educators
- teams and workplaces
- local, national and international inter-institutional partnerships
- governance systems, which include legislative and funding frameworks

As shown in Figure 3, these components are interlinked. In order to effect system-wide change, research, policy-making and practice must work in tandem across the system.

* Flanagan and Beach, *Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Commission*, p. 68.

† Peeters, “Competence Requirements” and “From Stories,” and Peeters and Peleman, “The Competent System.”

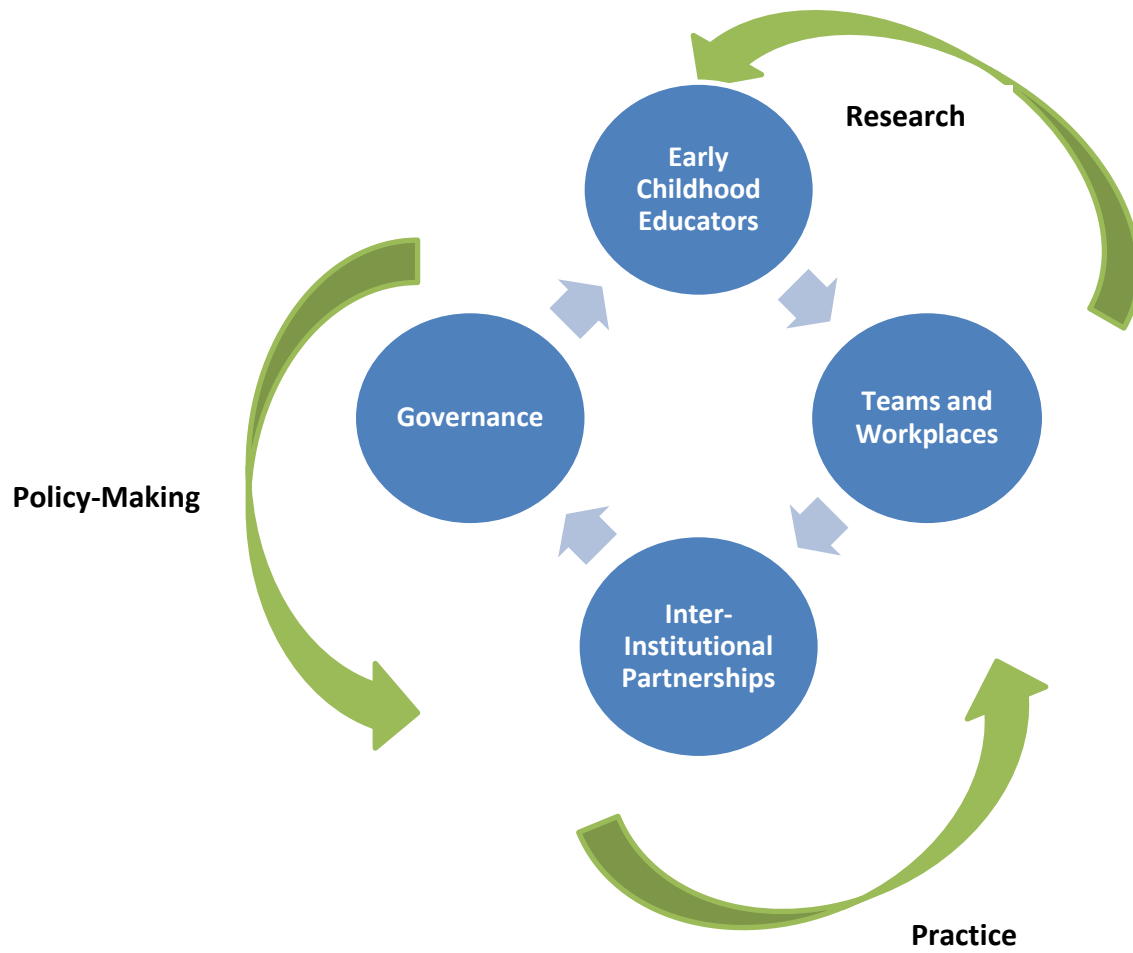


Figure 3. An integrated early learning and child care system

The Childcare Resource and Research Unit at the University of Toronto proposes that high-quality early learning and child care is founded on a system of seven interlinked elements, as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4. The elements of a high-quality child care system

Figure 5 shows the European Commission’s five-element variation on this system.*

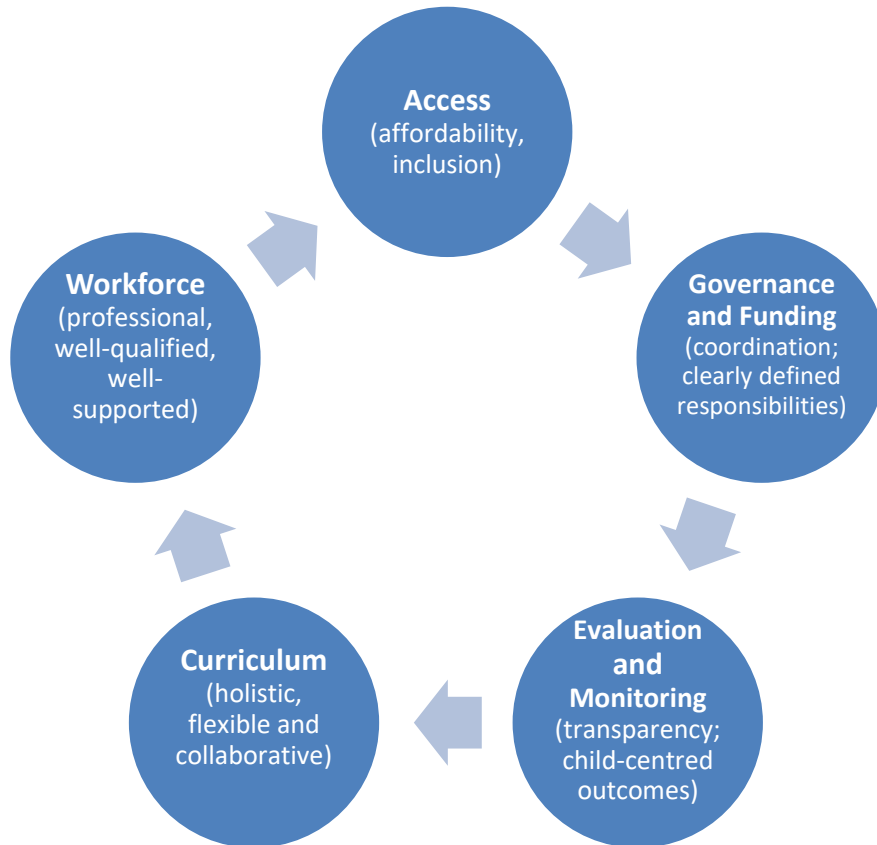


Figure 5. A quality framework for early learning and child care

The early learning and child care workforce is at the heart of all three system models.

* Milotay, “Proposal for a Quality Framework.”

The need for a professional workforce

The Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta believes that a well-qualified, well-remunerated and well-supported workforce is the heart of a high-quality early learning and child care system. Workforce-related system components include increased wages, higher educational standards, better working conditions and ongoing professional learning for Alberta’s early childhood educators.

As shown in Figure 6, higher standards and improved qualifications for early childhood educators result in higher quality care for children. Highly qualified early childhood educators command respect, recognition and professional wages. Professional wages require public investment and support for high-quality child care as a basic human right and a public good.

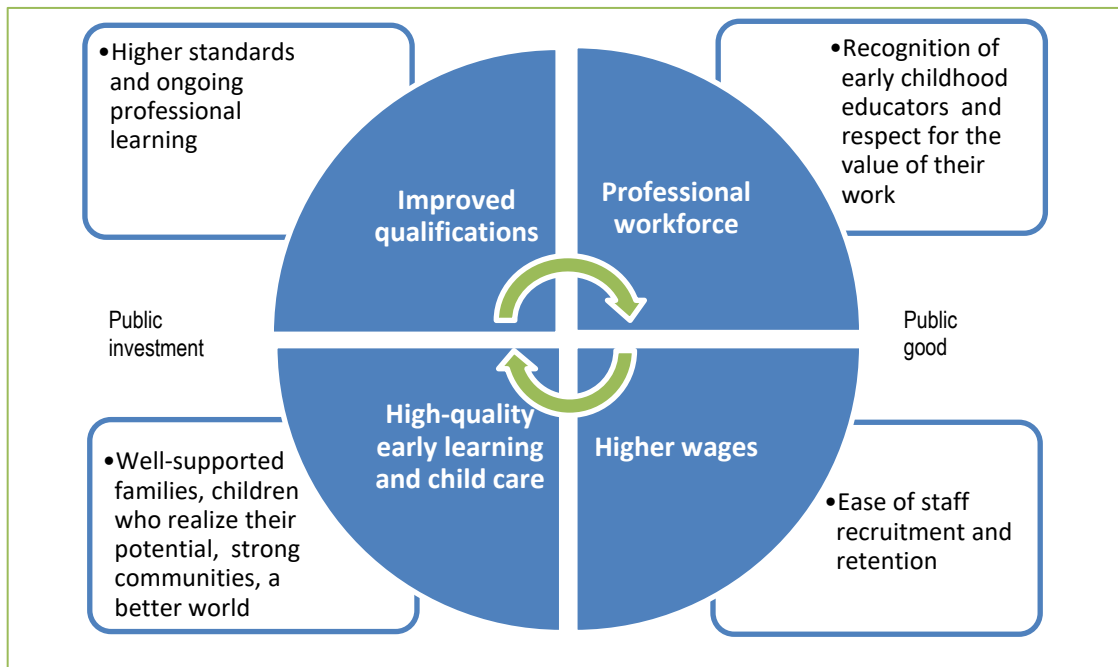


Figure 6. Workforce-related components of an effective early learning and child care system

A well-functioning early learning and child care system requires solid infrastructure. Developing this infrastructure requires substantial public investment in child care and in the early learning workforce that supports it. It requires long-term planning and an integrated, cross-ministry approach. It requires public and political recognition of the value of high-quality early learning and child care. And it requires a professional early learning and child care workforce.

AECEA recognizes that the issues related to professionalizing the workforce are complex and that change will be costly. The association also recognizes that change is imperative. The need is urgent. And over the long-term, the returns on investing in a professional early childhood education workforce are well worth the effort.

The need for planning

The Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Commission estimates that 1,000 new child care spaces require between 100 and 150 early childhood educators (including program directors).^{*} In March 2017, about 15,500 early childhood educators provided care to children in 117,000 regulated spaces in Alberta.[†] This is a ratio of about 132 staff per 1,000 spaces, which is within Manitoba’s recommended ratio guidelines. However, assuming that 233,278 children (70% of the population) need access to a regulated child care space, Alberta currently has a shortfall of about 116,300 spaces and 7,800 to 19,500 qualified early childhood educators.[‡]

Between 2017 and 2041, Alberta’s population is expected to grow at a rate of about 1.4% per year. The province’s population of preschoolers (under the age of five) is expected to remain fairly stable until the 2030s,

^{*} Flanagan and Beach, *Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Commission*, p. 63

[†] Government of Alberta, *Children’s Services Annual Report 2016–17*, p. 17, and workforce data provided to AECEA. For details, see Table 7 on p. 69.

[‡] See Table 3. The figures in the table row that “assumes no increase from 2016” is a proxy for Alberta’s current child care situation.

and reach 345,000 by 2041. The population of children aged five to 17 is expected to grow by an average of 2.1% per year over this period.*

Preschoolers in Alberta	2030	Assume 70% need a full-time child care space	Assume 100 educators/ 1,000 spaces	Assume 150 educators/ 1,000 spaces
Assume no increase from 2016	333,254	233,278	23,328	34,992
Assume a 1.4% annual increase	404,862	283,403	28,340	42,510
Assume a 2.1% annual increase	445,796	312,057	31,200	46,800

Table 3. Preschool population projections and the need for early childhood educators, 2030

Table 3 shows various preschool population growth scenarios. It also shows the numbers of qualified early childhood educators that will be needed to serve the needs of a growing population by 2030. Without realistic plans for infrastructure development—including significant increases to the capacity of Alberta’s publicly funded post-secondary institutions to train early childhood educators—the province will have a serious shortage of qualified staff as the population grows.

As Alberta’s early learning and child care system grows, the province’s publicly funded post-secondary institutions will need to build the capacity to educate growing numbers of students entering the field.

The need for partnership

Developing an accessible, affordable, high-quality early learning and child care system is a shared responsibility. Governments, post-secondary institutions, corporations, community organizations, early childhood educators, early learning and child care programs and parents and families all play a role.

Building an effective early learning and child care system requires system-wide change and partnerships between stakeholders across jurisdictions and institutions.

* Alberta Treasury Board and Finance. *Population Projection, 2017–2041*, 1, pp. 4–5.

Growth in the preschool population segment is a function of birth rate. Growth in the school-age population segment is a function of birth rate and migration to Alberta.

On the provincial front, AECEA works closely with the following provincial government departments:

- Alberta Children’s Services, which sets health, safety and quality standards for child care services
- Alberta Education, which is responsible for Early Childhood Services, including kindergarten programs and programs for two-and-a-half- to five-year-old children with special needs
- Alberta Status of Women, which leads the government’s work to increase gender equality in Alberta

As AECEA implements its ten-year framework for professionalizing the early learning and child care workforce, it will build a strong relationship with Alberta Advanced Education, which is responsible for post-secondary education programs in early learning and child care.

AECEA works with a broad range of community partners and stakeholders across the early learning and child care sector. Please see Appendix 3 (p. 100) for details.

High-Quality Child Care Is a Public Good

Alberta’s children deserve high-quality child care

Children’s early experiences have a powerful, lasting effect on their future success as individuals and on their ability to contribute to society.

High-quality early learning and child care plays a crucial role in healthy child development. It improves cognitive abilities, fosters language development and improves future economic well-being and social outcomes. It improves children’s physical and mental health later in life, and reduces the likelihood of poverty, criminality and addiction. It increases the likelihood that children will succeed at school and grow up to be productive, well-adjusted adults.

Everyone benefits

The impact of high-quality child care cuts across numerous social policy domains, including workforce development, social development and infrastructure, health and family. High-quality child care is an important component of communities' capacity to meet their citizens' needs. It promotes social inclusion, combats poverty, stimulates the economy and promotes women's equality.

Research shows that accessible, affordable, high-quality early learning and child care results in a host of social benefits.

Investments in child care increase female labour force participation. In 2015, labour force participation for women in Alberta was 77%, compared to 88.3% for men.*

High-quality child care stimulates economic development and growth. In Quebec, the economic activity generated by the child care system generated GDP growth of 1.7% in and an extra \$2.2 billion in tax revenue.† Another Quebec study shows that every dollar invested in child care has a net return of \$.20 for the province and \$.55 for the federal government.‡

Investment in child care creates jobs. The Alberta Federation of Labour reports that investments in child care generate 44% more direct and indirect jobs than the closest industry.§

Accessible, affordable, high-quality child care improves the status of women. The Alberta Federation of Labour reports that affordable child care for single mothers increased these women's labour force

* Moyser, *Women and Paid Work*, p. 7.

† Alberta Federation of Labour, "For Families."

‡ Flanagan and Beach, *Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Commission*, p. 32.

§ Alberta Federation of Labour, "For Workers."

participation by 22%, decreased their relative poverty rate by 14% and increased their median after-tax income by 81%.*

A 2017 International Monetary Fund working paper reports that a 1% increase in the labour force participation of educated women would increase Canada's productivity growth by 0.2–0.3 percentage points per year. Eliminating the current 7% gap between male and female labour force participation would increase Canada's GDP by about 4%.†

Accessible, affordable, high-quality child care is an important tool for eliminating poverty. The City of Edmonton has identified affordable quality child care as one of six game-changers in its *End Poverty in a Generation* strategy.‡

High-quality child care helps to build strong communities. It helps newcomers integrate into their new neighbourhoods, and fosters appreciation and respect for diversity.

High-quality child care helps to build strong families. It helps parents and families link to community resources and supports and find a fulfilling work–life balance.

High-quality child care means...

...that children feel accepted, understood and supported. They enjoy interesting, engaging activities and positive relationships with other children.

...that parents feel confident that their children's development and well-being is nurtured in ways that respect their family's culture, traditions, values and goals. Parents are partners in their children's care, and have good relationships with their children's care providers.§

* Alberta Federation of Labour, "For Families."

† Petersson, Mariscal, and Ishi, *Women Are Key*, pp. 24–33.

‡ End Poverty Edmonton, *End Poverty in a Generation*, p. 45.

§ Canadian Child Care Federation, "Quality Learning and Child Care: A Parent's Guide."

High-quality early learning and child care is a function of three interrelated components:

1. well-run **programs** based on a coherent curriculum and pedagogical approach
2. safe, nurturing **places** (learning and play environments) that give children the confidence they need to learn and explore
3. qualified **people**—early childhood educators who have the knowledge, skills and abilities to do their jobs well and to develop positive relationships with the children and families they serve

Recruiting and retaining excellent people means supporting “the early learning and child care workforce, ensuring appropriate remuneration levels, benefits and working conditions and striving to be sure that providers are seen as a respected group of professionals.”*

Qualified early childhood educators are masters of a wide range of core competencies.

Please see p. 80 for details.

* Canadian Child Care Federation, “Quality Learning and Child Care: A Parent’s Guide.”