

THE ALBERTA COMPENSATION FRAMEWORK REPORT

ECE WAGE GRID RECOMMENDATIONS

A compensation framework review
for the development of a target
values-based wage grid for early
childhood educators in Alberta

Phase 1: Target-values-based wage grid development
Phase 2: Refinement of wage grid based on community
engagement and inclusion of competencies (to be
completed in 2023)

Report completed November 2022, Released February 2023

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- Carolyn Ferns, Public Policy and Government Relations Coordinator, [Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care Ontario](#) (OCBCC)
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The research team that conducted this project was:

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AECEA

Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta



ecelec

Edmonton Council for
Early Learning and Care



Community-University Partnership
for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families



EVALUATION CAPACITY NETWORK

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge that what we call Alberta is the traditional and ancestral territory of many peoples, presently subject to Treaties 6, 7, and 8. Namely: the Blackfoot Confederacy – Kainai, Piikani, and Siksika – the Cree, Dene, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, Stoney Nakoda, and the Tsuu T’ina Nation and the Métis People of Alberta. This includes the Métis Settlements and the Six Regions of the Métis Nation of Alberta within the historical Northwest Metis Homeland. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations. We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on or are visiting.

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TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The following terms are used throughout this report:

Canada–Alberta Agreement	Canada–Alberta Canada–Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement
ECE	Early childhood educator
ELCC	Early learning and child care
Values–based wage grid	As a general term, this refers to a wage grid based on values rather than market–based concepts such as supply and demand. The authors of this report recommend a values–based wage grid for ECEs.
Target values–based wage grid	A wage grid contains the target wages that all ECEs should expect to earn if their education and experiences are accounted for. This report proposes and justifies a target values–based wage grid.
Base values	The entry–level wage an ECE should make upon entry into the ELCC sector.
Compensation framework	A broad term for all the elements of fair compensation recommended in this report, namely: 1) a compensation philosophy, 2) target wage–grid recommendations and 3) non–salaried compensation.
Compensation philosophy	The values and ideas provide the “why” behind the compensation framework, including the wage grid.

Non-salaried compensation	Indirect monetary benefits to an employee, such as health benefits, insurance, pension plans, and personal leaves
Education	The process of acquiring skills and knowledge through an accredited post-secondary institution resulting in a certificate, diploma, or degree.
Tenure	The length of time an employee has been working in the ELCC sector.
Training	Ongoing on-site learning that contributes to foundational knowledge already attained through experience and education.
Wage top-up	Funding is offered through the Alberta Child Care Grant Funding Program to certified ECEs who provide direct child care or supervision and meet other eligibility requirements. Wage top-up rates currently depend on certification level.

BACKGROUND

Over the past twelve months, a research team representing the Community–University Partnership (CUP), the Evaluation Capacity Network (ECN), and the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) has been working with the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA) on a community–engaged, qualitative research project. Together, they have been exploring how to achieve workforce stability for Alberta’s early learning and child care sector (ELCC).

The first stage of this project engaged Mount Royal University Bachelor of Early Education capstone students in a rapid literature review. The students discovered three overarching themes contributing to workforce stability in ELCC, which we call the three “pillars of stability”:

- 1) fair compensation,
- 2) supportive workplace conditions, and
- 3) consistent education and training.

The current research team was formed during the summer and autumn of 2022 to build off the literature review findings. They narrowed in on the topic of fair compensation with the goal of proposing a values–based wage grid for ECEs in Alberta.

This report outlines the research conducted for the first phase of the project. The next phase is to talk with ECEs about how our proposed wage grid will affect them and test the grid with facility owners and operators to track the path toward a smooth implementation.

This report is dedicated to the ECEs of Alberta. We hope that ECEs who read this document see their worth represented on our proposed grid.



FORWARD

Early childhood experiences, from birth to age twelve, are essential to a child's development and affect their long-term health and well-being (Phillips & Lowenstein, 2011). Early learning and child care (ELCC) programs can support families by improving children's healthy growth and development (Hamre et al., 2012).

ELCC is defined by the Government of Alberta as non-parental care provided by an individual other than the child's parent or guardian and includes facility-based and group-based care (i.e., daycare, out-of-school care, preschool, and family day home care). The federal government reports that 46% of households in Alberta will access ELCC by the time their children are five years old (Government of Canada, 2022). In addition, the ELCC sector employs over 20,000 frontline early childhood educators (ECEs) in Alberta (Alberta Government, n.d.).

Research shows that strong relationships and positive interactions are foundational to long-term outcomes for children. Therefore, adults working with children must use practices grounded in an understanding of children's development needs and supported by reflective pedagogical practice. The ECE who takes on this responsibility is an essential workforce in our society.

Canada-Alberta Child Care Agreement

Recognizing the significance of ELCC in supporting families and children, the federal government is investing \$3.8 billion in Alberta's ELCC sector as part of an effort to create a national system. The [Canada-Alberta Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement](#) (Canada-Alberta Agreement) aims to grow a skilled workforce and provide families equitable access to affordable, high-quality, and inclusive care (Government of Canada, 2021). For this system to be effective, however, Alberta needs a stable and educated ECE workforce.

The challenge to achieving this vision is that ECEs are leaving the sector in large numbers and being replaced by new hires, which limits efforts at building a stronger ELCC system (Community University Partnership & Flanagan, 2021). It is predicted that Alberta’s ELCC sector will need to recruit and maintain between 7,000 and 20,000 ECEs to meet the requirements of the Canada–Alberta Agreement. However, recruiting ECEs is complicated because ECE wages have remained stagnant since 2007, except for individual employers increasing wages and a modest increase in government top-ups announced at the end of 2022. The instability of ECEs exiting the sector results in weaker relationships between ECEs and the children they support.

The pertinent question arising from this instability is: how do we attract and retain a fairly compensated ECE workforce that is valued for the education and experience they bring to their daily practice? The authors of this report suggest that an ECE wage grid is a significant step toward achieving this vision.

Research Approach

The research team wanted to understand the needs of ECEs in order to chart a path toward the long-term goal of achieving a stable workforce composed of quality educators. To this end, we employed a qualitative community-engaged research approach, which combines academic rigour with an interest in the lived experiences of study participants and community needs. In this approach, researchers prioritize relationship-building and building capacity within the community. They discuss all stages of the research project with community partners before proceeding and working collaboratively to establish the project’s objectives.



Following a community-engaged approach means the research team remained flexible and open to the needs of ECEs and AECEA, our community partner, with their vision and mission statements being an obvious anchor point. We also understood that the project must be relevant to the current policy window opened by the Canada-Alberta Agreement.

With these concerns in mind, we signed an agreement with AECEA to ensure the project would:

- 1) remain anchored in AECEA's mission and vision,
- 2) consider the concerns of ECEs, and
- 3) incorporate data revealed through the research.



AECEA

The Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA) is a non-profit, member-based society comprising ECEs, out-of-school care staff, child care staff/contractors, post-secondary ELCC students and faculty members, and other groups and individuals who support the goals of AECEA. Born out of the Alberta Child Care Network Association, AECEA works to amplify the voice of Alberta's ELCC workforce. A proud affiliate member of the [Canadian Child Care Federation](#), AECEA aims to transform Alberta's ELCC workforce into a recognized profession.

AECEA wants ECEs to be empowered to deliver high-quality services to children in Alberta from birth to age 12 and acquire the appropriate support to do so. AECEA's mission is to advocate on behalf of ECEs to ensure the workforce is prioritized in all decisions regarding ELCC. Advocacy efforts include system building, funding, education, ongoing professional learning, fair wages, and other forms of support. Additionally, AECEA communicates on an ongoing basis with municipal, provincial, and federal governments on issues important to ECEs.

Because AECEA is a volunteer-run organization, its board members worked with the research team to determine the extent to which AECEA's policy committee could participate throughout the project. Ultimately, the committee held biweekly meetings with the team to ensure the project was on track and aligned with AECEA's mission and vision.

AECEA Mission and Vision Statements

Mission: AECEA amplifies the voice of early childhood educators by advocating for higher educational standards, better wages and working conditions, and comprehensive system supports. Its mission is to transform Alberta's ELCC workforce into a recognized profession.

Vision: Well-qualified, well-compensated ECEs are respected as professionals, valued for their important work, and supported in providing high-quality child care for Alberta's children and families.

Early in the project, the research team and our collaborators established that the wage grid recommendation would be based on values held by the ELCC sector rather than market indicators, where compensation is determined by supply and demand. We founded our wage grid recommendations on AECEA's mission and vision statements, which aspire toward a sector where ECEs feel valued and respected for their education, experience, and knowledge.

Roadmap to a Quality Early Learning and Child Care System in Alberta

In developing the wage grid recommendations, the research team also reviewed the [Roadmap to a Quality Early Learning and Child Care System in Alberta](#) released by the Canadian Child Care Federation, Child Care Now, The Muttart Foundation, and the YMCA of Northern Alberta to determine policy actions addressing staff compensation and working conditions. Section 4 of the roadmap, “Workforce development and support,” aligns with AECEA’s mission and vision and proposes ways to support the essential role of ECEs in delivering high-quality care.

Item 24 recommends the development of a “[c]ompetitive provincial wage scale for all early learning and care staff that reflects education, experience and role description and includes a common benefit package and pension plan” (Canadian Child Care Federation et al., 2021).

This project, including the present report and upcoming stages, is an effort to advance Item 24 of the Roadmap as well as AECEA’s mission and vision.

“The provincial salary scale should ensure that the wages and benefits for child care staff are competitive with those of related professions and reflect staff qualifications, experience and role responsibilities” (Canadian Child Care Federation et al., 2021, p. 28).

RESEARCH METHODS AND FINDINGS

Everything that follows in this report is considered preliminary research and reflects phase one of the overall project.

This section discusses the research that went into developing the values-based wage grid and compensation philosophy.

Below we outline the results of our environmental scan, define and elaborate on concepts discovered in the literature review, summarize our exploratory conversations with sister ELCC associations, and present the results of the critical assessments conducted by the research team and AECEA.



Purpose Statement:

AECEA's policy committee and the research team created the following purpose statement as a foundation for the project: To create a values-based wage grid focusing on workforce stability and professional career building for ECEs in Alberta.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research team endeavoured to answer the following questions:

Research Question	Research Approach
What is considered a fair wage in comparable sectors?	1. Environmental scan
What are the elements of a values-based wage grid?	2. Literature review
What is happening in other provinces?	3. Exploratory conversations
What can the sector bear in terms of a wage grid?	4. Critical assessment
What do ECEs say is fair compensation?	5. Stakeholder mapping and engagement

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The research team conducted an environmental scan before developing the wage grid in order to answer the research question: What is considered a fair wage in comparable sectors?

The environmental scan had three parts: A) a scan of the social development sector in Alberta, B) a scan of labour agreements from comparable social development sectors across Canada, and C) a scan of other ECE compensation agreements from across Canada.

The social development sectors the research team considered were health, education, and social work because these sectors are part of the care economy and have similar educational pathways and workplace conditions to the ELCC sector. Like ELCC, they are also predominantly female sectors. The scan sought to gain insight into objective factors, such as market wage research, and inform subjective considerations underpinning this project, such as how to develop a broader compensation philosophy that reimagines how to evaluate and compensate Alberta's care economy

The care economy is defined as “the informal and formal work provided in child care; early childhood education; and health, disability, long-term, and elder care” (IGI Global, n.d.). Workers in the care economy often have low wages, lack benefits or pensions, and have a high risk of exposure to harm or exploitation (International Labour Organization, n.d.).

A. Sectoral Comparisons

The research team drew comparisons between ELCC and other social development sectors. The table in Appendix A compares various social development sectors in Alberta and the education required to enter and remain in them. The data for these comparisons came from the [2019 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey](#), a yearly labour force survey conducted by the provincial government.

Note that the table is intended to provide surface-level comparisons because each occupation has unique challenges and offers unique benefits. The benefits, we discovered, depended on the profession, the strength of the negotiating parties, and other factors. For example, public employees are more likely to receive added benefits such as supplemental health insurance and a pension plan than employees working in the private social development sector.

The scan of social development sectors in Alberta revealed that ELCC stands out for several reasons. First, ECEs generally require less education to enter the sector compared to workers in similar sectors. In some cases, ECEs take less than half the time to complete their educational requirements. Additionally, ECEs get relatively few benefits.

The lack of benefits is significant because research suggests that added benefits could affect workers' well-being and produce second-order effects on the quality and continuity of care (Cumming, 2017). Improved quality and continuity in care have been shown to increase the developmental gains ELCC provides for children (Bridges et al., 2011).

B. Labour Agreements

Next, the research team reviewed labour agreements in similar social development sectors across Canada, such as health and education. We looked at labour agreements because they would have had a robust development stage and therefore reflect a consensus among members.

Several factors were reviewed, including benefits, vacation and holiday policies, professional development, wage scales, and overtime policies. We also examined agreements between nursing unions, public service unions, and health employers in the provinces of British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Alberta. The following section provides a sample of the process used during this scan.

Example: Labour Agreements in the Health Sector



In British Columbia, the [Health Employers Association of BC and Bargaining Agents agreements](#) (HEABC) lay out guidelines for appropriate work hours, such as the number of hours and days of work. These agreements apply to various roles, such as nurses, paramedics, dental assistants, healthcare facilities, and residents. Paid holidays are available to employees, with vacation time increasing as their time of service increases. Extensive health and welfare benefits exist, extending to dental coverage. Overtime pay must be at least 1.5 times to two times the standard payment an employee would receive. This overtime pay extends to meal allowance and transportation coverage outside regular hours. The HEABC emphasizes and encourages continuing education. The agreements lay out a clear and comprehensive grid, where related experiences can count toward credit for increasing salary range.

Similar labour agreements in the health care sector can be found in Ontario and New Brunswick. In Ontario, the **Ontario Public Service Employees Union** agreement follows many of the same principles as the HEABC agreements. For example, the agreement includes guidelines for work hours, overtime pay, vacation time off, and health and welfare benefits. It also lays out a comprehensive salary grid based on OPSEU Central Wage Rates. This grid contains specific salary rates for different health care professions, with increments for years of experience and separate “senior” and “charge” salary grids for certain professions. In New Brunswick, the **New Brunswick Nurses Union** has a collective agreement with guidelines for the number of hours worked and start and end times for shifts, overtime pay, and health benefits. In addition, the grid outlines pay rates for each profession—registered nurses (RNs) and licensed practical nurses (LPNs)—and are further broken down by years of experience.



In Alberta, **collective labour agreements** exist for health care roles such as health care aides, LPNs, RNs, housekeeping staff, food service workers, drivers, medical laboratory technologists, and paramedics. Each profession has a respective wage table, which differs by employer and region.

Based on this brief review of various labour agreements, it’s clear that the ELCC sector lags heavily behind comparable sectors. We recognize that some ELCC employers in Alberta offer benefits and follow policies like those mentioned in the labour agreements. However, no standardized agreement or practices exist, making it difficult for ECEs to find fair and equitable compensation across workplaces. With this in mind, we bring aspects of the reviewed agreements into our compensation philosophy and wage grid recommendations later in this report.

C. Other Provincial ECE Wage Grids

Finally, all the wage grids developed by child care associations across Canada were reviewed for philosophies, approaches, increment values, steps and levels, terminology, education, experience, and responsibilities. As a result, exploratory conversations were conducted with Manitoba, Ontario, and British Columbia. See the Exploratory Conversations section on page 28.



LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was conducted to answer the research question: What are the elements of a values-based wage grid? The review process discovered what is happening in other jurisdictions regarding workforce stability.

From January to March 2022, a team of Mount Royal University Bachelor of Early Education capstone students conducted a rapid literature review. They revealed general concerns and began developing possible themes to better conceptualize workforce stability for the ELCC sector. Then, over the summer of 2022, the current research team dug deeper, reading eighteen relevant articles and attending the [National Research Conference on Early Childhood \(NRCEC\) 2022](#). This process solidified three important themes that we came to refer to as the three “pillars of stability”: fair and equitable compensation, supportive workplace conditions, and consistent education and training. These pillars are detailed on page 24.



THE ECE WORKFORCE: PREDOMINANTLY FEMALE AND OFTEN EXPLOITED

Research suggests ECEs may enter the ELCC sector for two possible reasons: either they enjoy working with children and find direct care rewarding, or they are invested in children's rights and want to be a protective factor in their lives (The Early Years Workforce Study team et al., 2020). Supporting these motivations may attract engaged educators into the sector (Carroll et al., 2009). However, ECEs' strong motivation to work with children is not enough to provide stability, given that the work can also be highly stressful and often exploitative.

It is important to know that the ELCC workforce is predominantly female, with 96% of ECEs identifying as women and 21% as a member of a visible minority (StatsCan, 2021). The popular public perception is that working with children is "women's work" or "mothering" (Acker, 1995) and, therefore, enjoyable for women. This perception and the notion that working with children "should be enjoyable enough" disregards conversations about ECEs wanting to feel valued through equitable compensation. Such perceptions allow us to forget that ELCC is still work (Acker, 1995). Furthermore, working with multiple children can be tiring, and the emotional investment required for this work impacts the well-being of ECEs (Bigras et al., 2021; Boyd, 2015).

The association of child care with the concept of "mothering" can also lead to the expectation that ECEs behave altruistically and engage in "benevolent caregiving," a term we use to refer to donated time, unpaid labour, and uncompensated energy and resources.



By some estimates, ECEs could generally donate between four and 20 hours per week after scheduled hours or on weekends (Bretherton, 2010). The expectation to donate time can be burdensome and stressful for ECEs, who may have multiple caregiving responsibilities outside of work (Scott, 2021). Additionally, educators may require other sources of income, either through a spouse, a parent, or additional employment, due to the low compensation. “Getting paid in smiles” is not enough (Murray, 2000).

In addition to the children and families in your program, who else do you care for regularly?



Furthermore, an expectation that ECEs engage in ongoing professional development is embedded in the Canada–Alberta Agreement, but programs may not supply the required resources or training. Without adequate on-site resources, ECEs may need to purchase their own resources and materials in order to implement new pedagogical practices. As a result, educators may be subsidizing the true cost of care to the detriment of their own financial well-being (Allen & Backes, 2008).

Lastly, female workers in the care economy may experience limitations as to where they can find employment because many are confined by economic conditions and the labour market and may face barriers to accessing education. When educators are already precariously employed, they may be reluctant to express their concerns or advocate for themselves. Precarious employment leaves ECEs in a position to be further exploited (Hebson et al., 2015).

“Research demonstrates that sustained increases to ECE compensation, both salary and benefits, has positive effects on teacher well-being, reducing turnover, and improving recruitment and retention, thereby promoting the quality and continuity of care for young children” (Vecchiotti et al., 2022).

In sum, low pay, unpaid hours, the need to seek additional sources of income, the expectation that ECEs behave benevolently, and the fact that ECEs often pay for their own materials and resources all add to their financial and personal stress. However, mediating factors such as fair compensation, supportive workplaces, and consistent education and training can help reduce stress and burnout, alleviating retention issues within the sector (Torquati et al., 2007).

**What do you think of
when you hear about
benevolent caregiving?**



THE THREE PILLARS OF STABILITY

Through the literature review, the research team identified three themes related to ELCC workforce stability. We refer to these as the three “pillars of stability.” As the team discussed these themes, we also found it helpful to develop analogies. The bridge analogy became a compelling way to consider the ELCC sector. A bridge connects people and allows the movement of ideas, culture, and commerce.



Under the bridge are pillars that uphold the whole structure. The entire bridge is unstable if any of these pillars are unbalanced. Considering the ELCC sector as a bridge, we can start to visualize what stability would look like. It will take all stakeholders in the ELCC system, including ECEs, owners and operators, and governments, to build the bridge and maintain the three pillars of stability.

Pillar 1: Fair Compensation

ECEs want to be fairly compensated for their education, training, and experience and may encounter unfair payment practices. Fair compensation was discussed in many articles about ELCC workforce stability (Ackerman, 2006; Allen & Backes, 2018; Bassok et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2018; Whitebook et al., 2014). The research team found little consistency among entry wages for ECEs or increases based on experience. In one case, an ECE 3 employed for a decade still made less than \$20.00 per hour.

Another element of this pillar, along with fair and equitable compensation, is non-salaried compensation.

Non-salaried compensation refers to indirect monetary benefits to an employee and includes health benefits, insurance, pension plans, and personal leaves (Granger & Marx, 1992; Grant et al., 2019; Halfon, 2021; Hanno et al., 2022; Torquati et al., 2007). Non-salaried compensation may reduce turnover as it provides stability when an ECE faces unexpected living costs. However, the type of non-salaried compensation an educator receives may be relative to their age and stage in their career (Canada, 2019). See page 45 for a list of types of non-salaried compensation.



Pillar 2: Education and Training

In similar social development sectors, such as education, health, and social work, we can see a distinct educational pathway to enter and progress through the sector. An educational pathway is a route a person must take to become qualified or certified for that sector. For example, earning a diploma or degree from an accredited institution that teaches foundational theory and practice is the only way to become a social worker, health practitioner, or teacher.

In contrast, there are multiple pathways to earning certification as an ECE in Alberta. While the process of advancing as an ECE is, in theory, based on educational progress, various certificates, diplomas, or degrees can be used for the certification process.

Because there are various educational pathways to advancing through ECE certification levels in Alberta, ECEs bring a diversity of knowledge and fields of expertise. As a result, there is no way of knowing what knowledge has been acquired by ECEs, resulting in inconsistent expectations about what an ECE should know. A competency framework, such as the Competency Profile developed for Nova Scotia, may help create consistency in the sector.

Additionally, there are currently no regulations or requirements for ECEs to engage in continuous professional learning. However, some ECEs are highly motivated to continue to deepen and evolve their practice, as seen in the implementation of the Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework training. Notably, Alberta is using the Canada-Alberta Agreement funds to encourage skill development through professional development funding and release time grant funding. This funding has created professional development opportunities by offsetting tuition fees and textbook costs. Likewise, AECEA endorses opportunities to deepen knowledge about the Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework and offers theory-to-practice sessions for ECEs on the Brain Story Certification, which helps ECEs apply brain development research to their practice. The province's time release grants offset the personal time required for this professional development.

It is worth noting that legislation and regulations exist for frontline ECE certification, but there are no regulations stipulating that owners or operators of child care facilities must be certified or have a background in child development.



Pillar 3: Supportive Workplace Conditions

Supportive workplace conditions were the last major pillar to emerge from the literature (Grant et al., 2019; Johnson, 2006; Shaheen, 2016; The Early Years Workforce Study team et al., 2020; Torquati et al., 2007; Whitebook & Sakai, 2003). This pillar includes ECEs having a supportive team and leadership, ensuring paid and protected time, a voice and agency in decision-making, and opportunities to gain leadership skills and progress in their careers.

A supportive workplace encourages relationship building, sharing of resources, and ongoing team building to produce a collegial and supportive environment. Leadership and administration can also ensure ECEs have paid and protected time to document children’s pedagogical progress and attend meetings and events. Additionally, when ECEs have a voice and agency over decisions that affect them, they are more willing to stay.

Like the other pillars of stability, supportive workplace conditions must work in conjunction with a proposed wage grid. If the grid shows ECEs that they will be fairly compensated, they may be more willing to invest time and energy in education, leadership opportunities, and professional development to advance their careers.



Did you know there are opportunities to access grant money to support your continued professional learning?

EXPLORATORY CONVERSATIONS

The research team conducted exploratory conversations with sister ELCC associations across Canada who have already created wage grids to answer our research question: What is happening in other provinces?

These conversations helped the research team understand how each province approached the wage grid question and revealed a series of unique approaches to creating wage grids.

A. Manitoba

Jodie Kehl from the [Manitoba Child Care Association \(MCCA\)](#) invited the research team into the process used to create the [Market Competitive Salary Guideline Scale for Early Learning and Child Care Centres \(MCSGS\)](#). MCCA has been creating salary guidelines since 1998 in response to a provincial minister asking how much ECEs should earn. As a result, a 5-point action plan was developed. People First HR Services was retained to help establish a market-competitive wage scale that would allow the sector to be more competitive with similar sectors. MCCA updates the scale yearly to remain current and adjust for inflation.

What makes MCSGS unique is that it:

- Is market-based,
- includes competencies (knowledge, skills, and abilities) with aligned job descriptions,
- recognizes variance between responsibilities and positions,
- includes minimum-target-maximum levels and
- advocates for a [Market Competitive Benefits Package](#).

MCCA continues to advocate for fair and competitive compensation and sees the MCSGS as a “north star” to aim towards. The association recognizes the ongoing recruitment challenges, but it remains hopeful in its mission as its advocacy efforts have resulted in the Government of Manitoba announcing a matching registered retirement plan for ECEs in 2010.

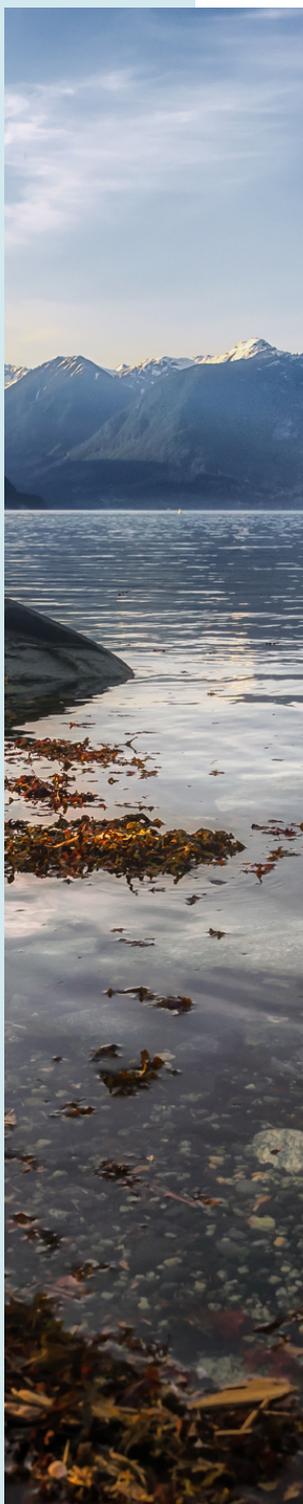
MCAA advised the research team to keep going, use good data as benchmarks, and ask stakeholders for input. They also advised being patient. MCCA has been creating guidelines for decades.

B. British Columbia

In our conversation with Emily Gawlick, the Executive Director of the Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC), she outlined how they created the comprehensive report **Next Step: A Competitive, Publicly Funded Provincial Wage Grid is the Solution to BC's ECE Shortage** in partnership with the Muttart Foundation, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, the YMCA of Metro Vancouver, and public health researchers. Emily disclosed that the idea of a wage grid had been in development for over ten years. The central message in ECEBC's report is that the \$10-dollar-a-day child care system must include high wages to “[r]etain qualified staff, recruit qualified staff into new programs, and encourage people to enter the field” (Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC & Early Childhood Educators of BC, 2020).

In developing their wage grid, ECEBC understood that the quality of child care depends on qualified and well-compensated ECEs. The wage grid needed to incorporate best practices, integrate policy and funding, recognize qualifications and experience, and set competitive wages while working within the existing certification legislation. The BC team took a compensation philosophy approach that “describes an organization's compensation objectives, values, and principles, and how they link to the organization's goals” (Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC & Early Childhood Educators of BC, 2020, p. 25).

Emily advised the research team to develop a wage grid supported by a compensation philosophy that reflects the unique needs and desires of ECEs in Alberta. She also urged the team to be patient as this process takes time.



C. Ontario

Rachel Vickerson from the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (AECEO) and Carolyn Ferns from the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care were also generous with their time and energy throughout our conversations. To understand the early learning and child care sector, the associations worked closely with one another and consulted with ECEs, partners, allies, and researchers to create a [Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario](#) and a [New Fact Sheet: CWELCC Wage Improvement Funds](#). They have continued to have conversations about decent work, Indigenous reconciliation, and advocacy for fair compensation for ECEs. The associations also knew that funding could be controversial and carefully considered how aspirational they could be in their recommendations.

Moreover, the associations understood that fair and equitable wage grid recommendations should include all ECEs having a wage floor. They also understood that the grid should include paid sick days, professional development time, and programming time.

They advised the research team to be bold in our asks and ground the work in consultations with the sector.



D. Summary of Conversations

Each association had a unique approach to wage grids with varying increments. However, they all suggested that the research team consider education and experience in our wage grid project. They told us to talk to various stakeholders while staying focused on how much ECEs are worth. Additionally, they suggested being aware of the cost of living, regional considerations, the scope of where ECEs work, and their range of responsibilities. Finally, they recommended staying focused on how essential ECEs are to children's experiences.

CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

The purpose of conducting a critical assessment of key issues related to implementing an ECE wage grid was to address our research question: What can the sector bear in terms of a wage grid?

To answer this, the research team and our partners had a series of conversations about cautions, questions, possible objections, assumptions, and hopes for a target wage grid for ECEs in Alberta. We also considered the potential impact of a wage grid and the concerns it might give rise to.



A. Concerns, Cautions, and Considerations for an ECE Wage Grid

Questions we asked	Concerns, cautions, considerations
What are our goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase retention in the ECE sector. • Contribute to professionalizing the sector. • Produce a high-quality and highly valued ECE workforce. • Make effective use of joint federal/provincial funding.

<p>Do we want to lead, match, or lag behind other sectors?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to lead in comparison to other entry-level positions We want to match other social development sectors. • We currently lag behind both industry and market relative to other provinces.
<p>What can we use to offset low pay if we don't have the ability to offer substantial wage increases?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some ECEs with tenure are making minimum wage and not being paid for their experience. • The cost of turnover in the form of onboarding and training is not fully understood. • Parent fees are perceived to be in direct conflict with ECE wages (i.e. raising ECE wages means raising parent fees). • We do not understand the true cost of care. • There are many pathways to funding ELCC. • The government can play a significant role.
<p>Have we considered the state of our sector, other industries, and the level of competition?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auspice, which refers to who owns and operates a child care program, varies across Alberta. For example, a child care license holder can be a municipal government, a private for-profit entity, or a not-for-profit organization. • ELCC is a part of the care economy; therefore, it is perceived to have a low value. • Would the grid have the unintended consequence of causing employers to prefer hiring ECE 1s, who would be "cheaper" than ECE 2s and 3s? • ECEs who move around the sector may remain unfairly compensated despite gaining experience and tenure.

How will we demonstrate fair, equitable, and competitive pay practices?

- Many highly educated ECEs work within the sector but are not frontline. How can they be included in the wage grid?
- Some owners/operators perceive experienced ECE 1s as more capable than new ECE 3s. Will this perception influence acceptance of the wage grid?
- Tenure and experience are not consistently compensated.
- Proficiency and competency are not currently considered in wage top-ups and need to be added to the wage grid.
- Supervision and leadership responsibilities are currently not considered in wage top-ups and need to be added to the wage grid.
- Acquiring new skills/professional development does not have a direct financial reward; there is no financial incentive for an ECE to engage in professional development.

Other considerations and cautions?

- The wage grid must be widely palatable and easy for owners and operators to integrate.



B. Compensation Principles and Their Perceived Objectives

Compensation principles	Perceived objectives and other considerations
Competitiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can the wage grid create an ELCC sector that can compete with sectors with higher earning potentials? • How would the wage grid compete with sectors with easier entry yet similar pay, such as the retail or hospitality sectors? • How does competition translate to retention issues in the care sector?
Pay for performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to incorporate a mechanism to determine how performance is evaluated and reflected in pay increases.
Internal equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to define reasons for pay differences between jobs, responsibilities, expectations, workload differences, experience, tenure, and seniority.
Government compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay should reflect how educators are responsible for complying with regulations while nurturing children.
Cost control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We must consider who will shoulder the cost of implementing a wage grid.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can the sector bear the wage grid? How would the grid be funded? • Would the administrative burden of the wage grid make it less likely to be adopted? • Would a wage grid lead to an increase in parent fees? How do we find alternate funding pathways that remove that possibility?
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wages and non-salaried compensation can help professionalize the sector. • The compensation philosophy can be used to reconceptualize how Alberta values the care sector. • ELCC can be used as a vehicle for women to participate in Alberta's labour market and economy. • Do ELCC stakeholders align with the values underpinning the wage grid recommendation, and will this affect the uptake of the grid?
Turnover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turnover is a significant issue in the ELCC sector. Will adding non-salaried compensation, such as a pension and benefits, compensate for other issues leading to turnover, such as ECEs having limited voice and agency and feeling undervalued? • Additionally, "turnover" does not have a consistent definition which may lead to a misrepresentation of ECEs movement around the sector. See Appendix D for definitions of "turnover."

Cost-effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implementation of the wage grid should consider how public funding of the grid might be misallocated and how the cost of administrating the grid may impact uptake.• What would the impact of the grid be if an ECE asked for a retroactive wage increase?• Can the wage grid stabilize the sector enough so owners and operators no longer fund perpetual training and onboarding cycles for ECEs likely to leave their employment?• How do we include non-salaried compensation, such as pensions or benefits, in the total compensation framework?
Concern for employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can ECEs feel valued for their caregiving work beyond the intrinsic value of helping children flourish?• ELCC is a foundational component of women being able to participate in the labour market.• If ECEs are not fairly compensated, what is the impact on employers?
Administrative ease	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The administrative burden of implementing and maintaining the wage grid should not fall on operators and families.• Administrative costs may make the wage grid less likely to be adopted or considered worth the effort, especially if it requires additional administrative capacity.• Automation should be built into the design of the grid, making it easier for employers to use it.

C. Assumptions About Developing a Wage Grid

Throughout the wage grid project, the policy committee of AECEA and the research team expressed their assumptions about the grid. This process is essential to qualitative research as it exposes hidden assumptions (Avci, 2016), reveals philosophical worldviews, and helps establish a unified direction for the project (Creswell, 2009).

The AECEA committee and the research team assumed that a values-based wage grid would:

- account for education, training, and experience,
- attract and retain motivated ECEs,
- be adopted and endorsed by the government,
- be an advocacy tool for ECEs to negotiate wages,
- be an equitable framework that accounts for the diversity within the predominantly female workforce,
- reflect the values AECEA upholds in their mission and vision,
- encourage attaining higher education and attach financial rewards to higher attainment,
- encourage the development of a high-quality and highly valued workforce of ECEs,
- promote supportive working conditions that help stabilize the sector,
- outline fair compensation,
- reduce the perception of ECEs as hourly employees and raise the perception of ECEs as salaried professionals,
- reduce the turnover of ECEs to other sectors such as retail, customer service, hospitality, health care, and education.

D. Summary of Critical Assessment

The team found value in critically assessing the wage grid. We wanted to ensure the grid included elements that would show an ECE is valued and encourage professionalism while anchoring the grid in the reality of the Alberta economy. We feel this helped make the project aspirational and grounded in what is achievable.



Think of your education, experience, training, and responsibilities. What do you think would be a fair hourly wage or salary? What wage would you need to receive to feel valued?

STAKEHOLDER MAPPING AND ENGAGEMENT

The purpose of stakeholder mapping and engagement was to answer the research question: What do ECEs say is fair compensation?

The team worked with AECEA to outline the key stakeholders in Alberta. Stakeholder mapping helped chart out the Alberta context and identified who may be invited to participate in focus groups and interviews during the upcoming stakeholder engagement phase of the project.

A. Stakeholder Map

The ELCC sector is complex and influenced by many stakeholders. Each stakeholder is an essential part of the sector and has a unique point of view. The stakeholder map in Appendix B points toward the sector's complexity and whose interests should be considered in discussions about a wage grid.

B. Stakeholder Engagement

The stakeholder engagement phase of the project is expected to be conducted in 2023. This engagement will include interviewing ECEs about how the wage grid would impact their well-being and testing the grid with owners and operators for feasibility. Additionally, we will explore alternate funding pathways to present to the government for consideration.

COMPENSATION FRAMEWORK

This report has so far outlined the groundwork undertaken by the research team in advance of developing an overarching compensation framework. The framework we are proposing has three components:

Compensation philosophy	A philosophy based on AECEA’s mission and vision that guides the “how” and “why” behind the wage grid
Target values-based wage grid	A recommended grid based on what research has revealed to be ECEs’ values and goals
Non-salaried compensation	Other indirect or non-monetary forms of compensation discovered in the research

We hope this compensation framework influences the field of ELCC at all levels and that ECEs can see their education and experience reflected in the wage grid recommendation. We also hope ECEs understand that the wage grid is only one factor of fair compensation, which must also include non-salaried compensation.

At the program level, we hope owners and operators applaud efforts to compensate ECEs fairly or see how they can help ECEs achieve fair compensation. Finally, on a broad scale, we hope this framework can be applied to policy to meet the requirements set out in the Canada–Alberta Agreement.

How would a pay increase lead to economic health for ECEs?

ECEs could:

- pay off debts,
- save money for the future,
- address emergency needs,
- plan and take vacations, and
- meet living wage standards in the province.



TARGET VALUES–BASED WAGE GRID

“The provincial salary scale should ensure that the wages and benefits for child care staff are competitive with those of related professions, and reflect staff qualifications, experience and role responsibilities” (Canadian Child Care Federation et al., 2021, p. 31).

Target Values–Based Wage Grid Recommendation

The following target values–based wage grid recommendation is the result of the research and effort up until this point and outlines the direct financial benefit an ECE should earn based on their education, tenure, and experience.

The numbers within this grid are based on the Alberta Labour survey from 2019 and will need to be adjusted as data is updated.

Level	Grade 1	Grade 2 +3%	Grade 3 +3%	Grade 4 +3%	Grade 5 +3%	Grade 6 +3%	Grade 7 +3%	Grade 8 +3%
ECE 1	20.20*	20.8	21.43	22.07	22.73	23.42	24.12	24.85
ECE 2 +12.9%	22.81	23.49	24.19	24.92	25.69	26.44	27.23	28.05
ECE 3 +12.9%	25.75	26.52	27.31	28.13	28.99	29.85	30.74	31.67

\$20.20 = Base entry wage**The average reported ECE wage in the province of Alberta, according to the Alberta Labour survey as reported on ALIS (2019).We recommend that Grade 1 is a base entry wage an ECE should earn upon entry into the sector and needs to align with their current certification level.

Target Values–Based Wage Grid Recommendation

Below is the target wage grid converted to a yearly salary. It assumes an ECE works full-time for roughly 50 weeks a year, or 2,080 hours. Part-time salaries can be derived from full-time equivalents.

Level	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
ECE 1	42,016	43,264	44,574	45,905	47,278	48,713	50,169	51,688
ECE 2	47,424	48,859	50,315	51,833	53,435	54,995	56,638	58,344
ECE 3	53,560	55,161	56,804	58,510	60,299	62,088	63,939	65,873

Elements of the Wage Grid

Levels

The levels align with the current [certification process for ECEs in Alberta](#).

Grades

The recommended grades represent tenure and professional experience and are more complex than simply years of employment. Tenure refers to the hours or years of working in ELCC. Experience is the competency and proficiency gained during a tenure that deepens an ECE's practice. Together, tenure and experience can account for movement along grades on the grid.

Increments

During the environmental scans and exploratory conversations, the research team found no consistency among increments currently used in wage grids in comparable sectors across Canada.

Increments ranged from 3% to 49% depending on the labour agreement, sector, or jurisdiction. As a result, the team chose a 12.9% increment for levels and a 3% increment for grades, which would move wages closer to what the **Alberta Living Wage Network** considers a living wage in the province.



Levels: increments are 12.9% as certification is attained.



Grades: increments are 3% across the grades as tenure and experience are attained.

The 12.9% increase between levels is based on the average increments used within other provinces' ECE wage grids.

The 3% increment between grades is based on inflationary and historical wage data from 1998 to 2011 (Morissette et al., 2012; Labour, 2022). This rate is consistent with jurisdictions where the minimum wage is tied to inflation. With Alberta facing similar inflation rates as other provinces, we felt it appropriate to have a 3% increase between grades.

The research team used the increments between levels and grades to showcase the importance of both education attainment and years of experience. We hope the wage grid invites stakeholders to develop assertive attraction and recruitment methods.

Do you feel a 12.9% increment is fair compensation for attaining higher certification?

Is a 3% increment fair for attaining experience and tenure?

Factoring in Wage Top-up Funding

The Government of Alberta currently provides wage top-up funding for certified frontline ECEs, which brings them above the wage paid by their employer. According to the [Alberta Government website](#), ECEs must be paid at least minimum wage by their employer before wage top-ups. This wage grid recommendation above shows the overall wages that ECEs should be earning, which may include the wage top-up funding and is considered a base wage. Owners and operators who pay above this grid are applauded for their progressive approach to wages.

Non-Salaried Compensation

Non-salaried compensation has been shown to support retention (Caven et al., 2021). The Alberta Living Wage Network includes benefits packages in their living wage calculations. A living wage with comprehensive benefits can improve employees' mental, physical, and economic well-being (Alberta Living Wage Network, 2021). In addition, non-salaried compensation can be an informal agreement between employees and employers that shows an ECE's well-being is essential and allows an educator to be prepared for unexpected expenses (Powell et al., 2022).

Non-salaried compensation can be a direct or indirect monetary value to an ECE and include benefits, leaves, insurance plans, pensions, or financial incentives (Compensation Philosophy, 2020 and Beyond, 2020). Non-salaried compensation can consist of indirect support, such as voice and agency, team support, and control over pedagogical decisions.



Examples of non-salaried compensation include:

Direct non-salaried compensation	Indirect non-salaried compensation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pension, RRSP contributions, or retirement plans Basic or extended Health Benefits plans that include dental and prescription coverage Extended vacation days Flexible schedules Health Spending Account Leaves: Personal Days, Mental Health Days, birthdays, or additional sick days Profit-sharing, bonuses Time in lieu Reduced child care fees for staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear career advancement and progression Leadership opportunities Educational support Leadership development Ongoing training and skill development Paid and protected time for planning and meetings Pedagogical coaching Professional development support Recognition Religious and cultural considerations Supportive team and collegiality Tuition coverage Voice and agency in daily decisions Work environment and conditions

Which of these non-salaried compensation benefits do you receive? Which benefits would you need or want?

It should be noted that not all non-salaried compensation has the same effect for all ECEs. For example, a young ECE entering the sector may prefer a higher paycheque over having access to benefits. In contrast, an ECE with a family may choose benefits over a higher paycheque depending on their family dynamics and access to spousal benefits. An ECE closer to retirement may also wish to access a pension plan. As we don't have good data about the ECE demographics in Alberta, it is hard to know what they need (Boyd, 2015).

What is Not Yet Included in the Grid?

The wage grid does not yet factor in competencies or supervision responsibilities. The research team is exploring this concept and will apply competencies to the grid as that next phase of the project progresses.

The grid also does not include higher educational attainment such as a bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, or PhDs. These degrees are not presently included in the Alberta certification process.

Did you know that MacEwan University, Mount Royal University, the University of Alberta, and the University of Calgary offer bachelor-level, masters-level, and doctoral-level degrees in areas of early childhood studies?



The Alberta government does not require ECEs to pursue professional development activities to maintain certification. As the grid was created to align with the current certification process, it does not yet account for professional development. However, efforts should be made to link ongoing professional learning to advancement across levels and grades. This could involve incorporating professional development into the certification process. Professional development can also be tied to advancement across levels and grades in the wage grid.

If professional development were required to maintain your certification and move up a grade on the wage grid, how many hours per year should be expected? What support would you need to meet professional development expectations?

At this point in the research project, we have not yet reached out to Indigenous communities for their input. However, we recognize the rights of Indigenous governments and communities to design ELCC services distinctive to their rights and principles.

Lastly, the grid does not include ECEs who are not yet certified as ECE 1.

All these aspects will be explored in the next phase of the project.

Conclusion

This section outlined the target wage grid. The grades and levels in the grid reflect the idea that ECEs should be fairly compensated for attaining higher certification levels and gaining experience through ongoing tenure in the ELCC sector. The following chapter further outlines the economic benefits of being fairly compensated.



ECONOMIC WELL-BEING AND TIME POVERTY

This section describes some of the economic considerations and benefits to overall well-being that fair compensation can provide to ECEs.

Increased wages have direct benefits, including increased disposable income and decreased economic insecurity. But a wage grid anchored in a compensation philosophy designed to value workers and their educational and professional development has immaterial and material benefits.



Some of these benefits include:

- decreasing time poverty for workers,
- reducing the need for multiple sources of income,
- addressing concerns over not having the financial capacity to take sick days, schedule appointments, or take vacation days,
- decreasing neglect for other care responsibilities or the need to work a double shift at the cost of workers' well-being, and
- reducing concerns about workers leaving paid employment because of external factors outside employers' control, such as excessive commuting time.

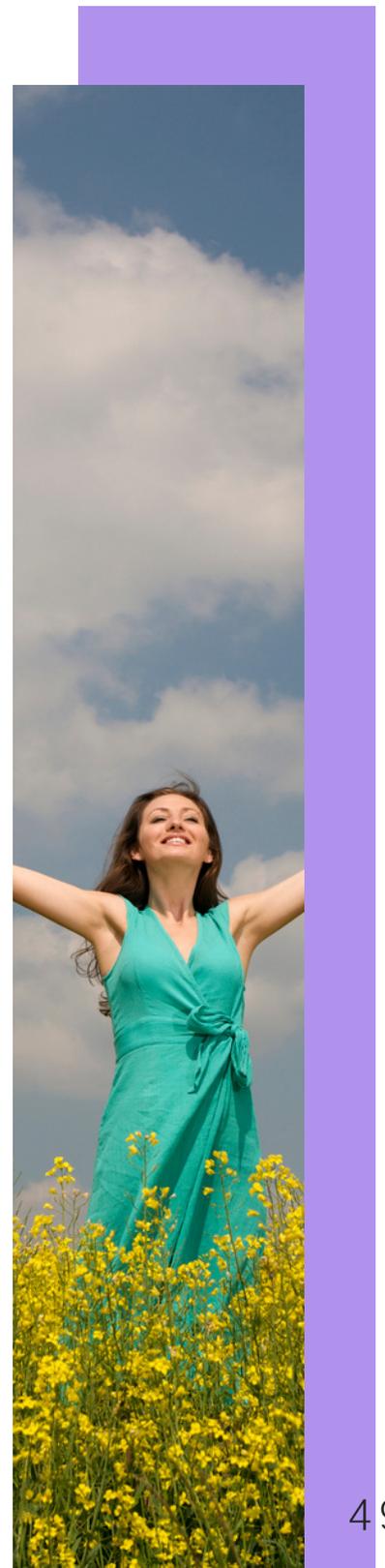
Economic Well-Being: What is it and Why Does it Matter?

Economic well-being is a concept and an index first defined by Canadian economists Lars Osberg and Andrew Sharpe in the 1990s. It provides a framework to reimagine how the care economy is valued. The index's rationale report outlined four "components" or dimensions that produce "economic well-being" as a conceptual whole. The components—consumption, wealth, equality, and economic security—are categorized in a way that aims to demystify the economic system and provide indicators that allow for a social analysis of economic processes. The idea of economic well-being enables researchers to analyze how an individual or a sector is faring relative to the economy. This project is particularly relevant to understanding how ECEs and the child care community are doing in Alberta's economy and how they benefit from its growth.

For example, if an economy is reportedly doing fantastic, but ECEs are paid so poorly that they cannot afford goods and services in that economy, there is inequality. As a result, they may not see direct or indirect benefits from that economic growth. That is where policy and tools, such as a wage grid and a compensation philosophy, are needed. Regulated and standardized compensation may help to distribute or equalize the market forces that may inhibit the benefits of economic growth from being available to a broader portion of the economy.

The research team considered these four major components of economic well-being when framing the wage grid:

Consumption considers the availability of "goods and services," household production, leisure, and non-marketed goods and services, which includes paid and unpaid care work performed by women.



Wealth is the total accumulation of productive resources in an economic system. Wealth, as an indicator, is usually not relevant in the scope of health research. However, as we can see during uncertain times, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-COVID inflationary period, wealth is a factor that should be more widely considered. These atypical stressors affect the cost and availability of goods and services. Due to its resource-based economy, Alberta tends to experience above-average inflation relative to the rest of Canada, significantly impacting low-income workers. This above-average inflation is particularly impactful in Calgary, and the tourism regions, where the cost of living is greater, and living wages are calculated to be higher than in other regions. The tools and policies governments use to control the disorienting effects of Alberta's natural resource economy in combination with global economic forces matter for the health and well-being of specific demographics. These aspects affect the population much more than in regions that are not subject to the unique forces in Alberta, such as the boom and bust cycles (Ascah, 2013; Osberg & Sharpe, 2014).



Equality is concerned with income distribution, the rate and depth of poverty across demographic groups, and the intensity of income inequality (Osberg & Sharpe 2014). Elevated levels of inequality can negatively impact social cohesion and productivity, creating market failures. For example, research from 2020 documented that parents do not consider the effect market failures, such as cyclical instability or being priced out, have on child care accessibility or affordability (Glomm & Meier, 2020).

Economic security encompasses a sense of “security” from job loss and unemployment, illness, and poverty in old age. Economic insecurity can produce anxiety and stress and have other deleterious effects on workers that can considerably reduce their quality of life (Osberg & Sharpe, 2014).

In theory, each component of economic well-being contributes to a more comprehensive view of how individuals benefit from overall economic growth and progress. Economic well-being as a concept and measurement tool was a response to the need to move past traditional economic indicators as a marker of the health and progress of society (Osberg & Sharpe, 2014). Considering Alberta's unique economic challenges, particularly those associated with gender inequality and female participation in the labour market (Lahey, 2015), we feel this is an appropriate way to highlight the value that the ECE workforce brings to Alberta's economy. ELCC is a cornerstone of the economy, ensuring women can return to work and participate in the labour market as the province navigates the challenges of COVID-19 and boom-and-bust cycles.

Economic Well-Being: What is it and Why Does it Matter?

Time poverty is when “an individual does not have enough time for rest or leisure” due to working excessively long hours to fulfil obligations. Obligations may include paid or unpaid work, caregiving responsibilities, or domestic duties (Whillans & West, 2022). Women are the most likely to get stuck in reinforcing cycles of time poverty. The significant impacts of time poverty on women have been documented globally. Still, the adverse effects are compounded in women classified as the “working poor” (Hyde et al., 2020). Time poverty methodologies were developed as “a response to the failure of income-based measures of poverty” to encapsulate gendered components of economic well-being (Walker, 2013). Time poverty is associated with lower reported well-being, physical health, and productivity (Giurge et al., 2020). Time poverty is essential for overall workforce stability, as we suspect this is a prevailing constraint for ECEs. Therefore, incorporating policy mechanisms to redress time poverty could have second-order effects.

Benefits of Improved Economic Well-Being

There are clear direct and indirect health benefits to improving workers' economic well-being by reducing known stressors. For example, limited economic security, inflexible or stressful working conditions, low income, excessive commuting time, and little leisure time can significantly impact workers' health, which in turn can negatively affect worker performance.

In addition, indirect health benefits, such as pension plans, retirement savings plans, health insurance, allotted time off, or added perks, improve an individual's economic well-being. These increased benefits, in theory, contribute to decreased external pressure on the employee, allowing workers to be more present and effective for better outcomes for children.

Pension or Retirement Savings Plans

A pension plan generally refers to a scheduled contribution made by the government, the employer, or the employee. A set amount is held for the employee's professional career. It serves as a safety net once the employee enters retirement. A retirement savings plan works similarly but with a few distinctions. Retirement savings plans are usually contributed to exclusively by the employee, who gains certain tax benefits. However, both plans assume a certain level of recurring disposable income that may not be available to all workers, especially workers whose costs of living are consistently higher than their earned income. Therefore, although these benefits are valuable, considerations should be taken to ensure that workers have the means to contribute to these long-term benefits. Again, the onus isn't placed exclusively on the employer or the employee.

Health Insurance or Insurance Benefits

Health insurance or insurance benefits are policies purchased by the employer, including coverage for services not covered by universal health care in Canada. Benefits can include coverage for dental, pharmaceutical drugs, physical therapy, massage therapy, optometry, psychological services, life insurance packages, and more. These benefits safeguard employee health and well-being, potentially limiting unplanned absences and improving economic well-being. Increasing employees' access to disposable income can reduce out-of-pocket costs for some essential services.



Personal Days – Beyond Legal Requirements

Personal days beyond the legal requirement provide employees increased flexibility over time, which some studies have suggested contributes to increased job satisfaction (Kashdan 2011). Increased flexibility for workers can also contribute to an increased sense of being valued by their employers and a sense of autonomy in the work environment (Kashdan 2011). Based on these findings, we highly suggest considering three main types of personal days: sick days, vacation days, and mental health days. After discussions with an owner-operator, we contend that the distinction of the types of personal days will allow for more flexibility for both the employer and the employee. In addition, this flexibility can alleviate scheduling concerns due to staff shortages or external factors such as the impact of flu season.

Sick days are allotted days when employees can call in without needing a note from a doctor and can focus on recovering without fear of punitive measures when they return to work. Sick days are necessary for environments like ELCC workplaces because of the increased presence of infection. Employees should not feel pressured to return to work prematurely. Therefore, we recommend that these days be paid, or at least that a specific number of sick days each year are for paid absences.

Vacation days are a set of days each year that an employee can request paid time off from work. We recommend that each employee be able and encouraged to take paid time off each year. Time off can improve retention by decreasing burnout and allowing paid time away to decompress and regenerate as an alternative to simply exiting the sector. In addition, checking out of a place of employment for an extended period has been shown to have a more positive impact than workers who opt to take vacation days in a piecemeal fashion or a few days at a time (de Bloom et al., 2013).

Mental health days are a relatively new concept, wherein the employee is allocated a few days per year to call in without punitive measures or explanation. Given the stress of COVID-19 on the ELCC sector and the pressures from staffing shortages, mental health days are more important when considering ways to improve retention while preventing burnout.

Conclusion

Increasing economic well-being is a pathway to increasing stability in the ECE workforce because it addresses identified “push factors,” or factors that push workers out of the sector. The push factors are numerous, and due to the data deserts that exist (see the Considerations section below), it is hard to pinpoint all of them definitively. However, some major push factors are financial concerns, working environment concerns and lack of flexibility or limited opportunity for advancement. Moreover, as argued in other sections of this report, Alberta desperately needs to recruit ECEs to create the spaces mandated by the bilateral Canada–Alberta Agreement. Not only does Alberta need to recruit new workers, but it also needs to retain the workers it already has. Care is year-round and cannot be shipped overseas and offered remotely.



Careful considerations must be made to address the causes of turnover effectively. Alberta can no longer afford to rely on the stereotype of women as benevolent caregivers as a retention strategy. Instead, we must shift our focus to ascribing value to these workers as the professionals who provide a service that is fundamental to the cohesive functioning of Alberta’s labour market. As evidenced by the aftermath of the initial pandemic shutdown in 2020, child care is a foundational component of the economy as it enables parents to participate in the labour market. A wage grid and a values-based compensation philosophy allow the start of a conversation that reinforces the necessity of these working professionals as vital to a functioning labour market that keeps the economy in motion.

CONSIDERATIONS

As this project was underway, we realized there are factors that we still need to fully understand that may impact the implementation of the wage grid recommendation and overall compensation framework. While these factors may be outside the scope of the research team, they still require some attention. First, Alberta has a data desert. Secondly, we need to clearly understand the extent of turnover in the ELCC sector. Third, the true cost of care is also still being determined. Fourth, varied retention strategies have been tried in other jurisdictions with inconsistent results. Similar strategies are currently being used to address the requirements of the Canada–Alberta Agreement. Lastly, efforts to implement a wage grid must consider employer costs and other regional considerations in Alberta.

Data Desert – Alberta Context

There is a data desert in other Canadian jurisdictions and a clear data desert in Alberta (Community University Partnership & Flanagan, 2021; Whitebook et al., 2018). Publically accessible data about the demographics of ECEs in Alberta is limited. As a result, many questions and concerns remain about what ECEs might be experiencing. For example, we do not fully understand the extent to which ECEs face racism, ageism, classism, or exploitation. Creating solutions to problems we do not understand is difficult.

Additionally, once ECEs leave frontline care and no longer receive wage top-up funding, they are not tracked in the government’s data indicating how many ECEs are currently employed in ELCC. As a result, when an ECE no longer receives wage top-up funding, we do not know if they have been promoted, returned to school, moved into an adjacent agency, or exited the sector. This lack of data leaves us unable to fully understand the implications of turnover. Additionally, we cannot measure the return on investment of knowledge gained through professional development initiatives once an ECE is no longer engaged in frontline care.

Retention is an effort undertaken by an organization to motivate employees to retain their employment with the organization for as long as possible (James & Mathew, 2012; Ratna & Chawla, 2012).

Turnover

Turnover is a complex issue, with the research showing no clear definition of turnover (Bassok et al., 2021; Leifield, 2020). Words used to describe turnover included churn, leave, promote, exit, bounce, or shift, which all have different meanings. The lack of definition leaves questions about the true nature of workforce stability. For example, we cannot distinguish between leaving a program for another center, getting promoted to a leadership position, returning to school, having a child, or exiting the sector entirely. See Appendix C: Definitions of Turnover.

Cost of Care

Funding pathways for ELCC are complex. We often think of the cost of care as simply parent fees in and wages and operating costs out. In Alberta, however, funding comes from multiple sources. The table Funding Pathways in the Appendix to this report shows some funding sources that assist in operating an ELCC program in Alberta. Quality care has a higher cost associated with it, with most of the money spent on staffing and programming. The complexity of the ELCC sector further hinders our ability to understand the true cost of care. See Appendix D: Funding Pathways.

Varied Retention Strategies

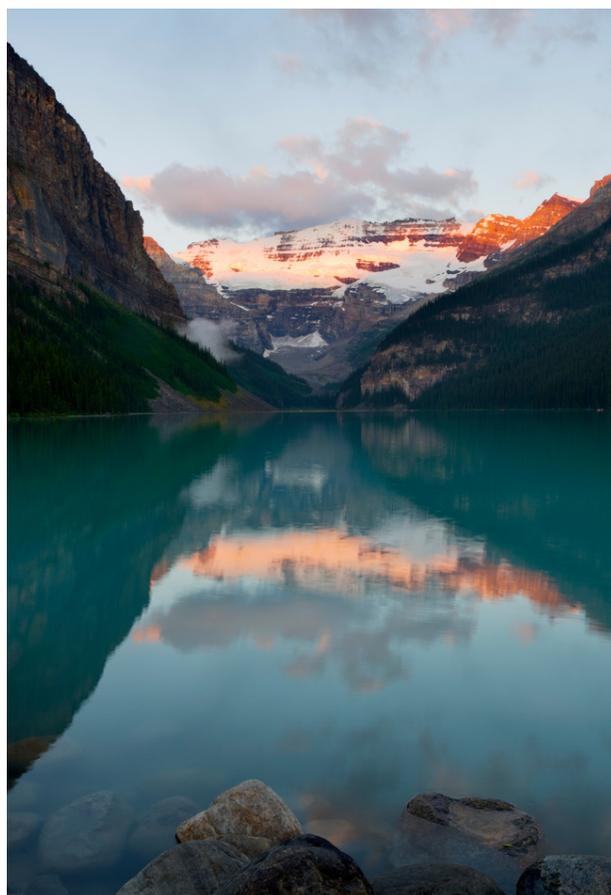
Many strategies for retention are attempted, often in the form of one-time payment strategies, professional development support, or wage top-ups. For example, a study out of Virginia studied the impact of a one-time payment to ECEs (Vecchiotti et al., 2022). The study showed that a slight increase in compensation (\$1500/year) could directly improve teacher retention (it reduced turnover by 30%) in the short term. Moreover, a study out of Missouri assessed a bi-annual incentive and its relationship to turnover, with varied results depending on the position held by the participant (Gable et al., 2007). However, educators needed more than a one-time payment when faced with atypical stress (such as COVID-19). One-time payment incentives had a limited impact on long-term stability, but they did help in the short-term.

Employer Costs

There are employer costs associated with implementing the wage grid. Costs include Mandatory Employment Related Costs (MERC) and administering benefit and pension plans for employees. Additionally, the current 3% cost control framework within the Canada–Alberta Agreement is a significant concern for owners. We also need to fully understand the costs associated with constant turnover and training cycles when the workforce is unstable and the impact of paying minimum wage plus top-ups. These concepts will be explored during the next phase of this project.

Regional Considerations and Living Wages

Areas around Alberta have significant external concerns that make a living wage vary across the province. For example, natural resources and tourism impact the cost of goods and services. For this reason, regional living wages will influence the base target wage. For the project's next phase, the team will consider the base value for regions such as Canmore, Calgary, Fort McMurray, and Rocky Mountain House. Regions with lower living wages (according to the [Living Wage Network](#)) are encouraged to use this Target Wage Grid as their starting base value.



CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

We realize a wage grid will not be the singular solution to the systemic concerns of workforce stability in the ELCC sector. The sector is far too complex for one recommendation to solve attraction, recruitment, and retention worries. A wage grid can also not sway public opinion about the value of ELCC. Additionally, a wage grid won't solve poor working conditions or a lack of collegial support and effective leadership. These are separate yet connected concerns. The wage grid must work with the three pillars of stability outlined in this report: fair compensation, workplace conditions, and education and training. Together, these pillars promote educator well-being in the hopes of better workforce retention for long-term stability (Allen & Backes, 2018).

Our hope for a wage grid is to create a respected and professional sector.

A wage grid might reduce the perception of ECEs as hourly employees and raise their acceptance as salaried professionals. The wage grid may keep educators in the field as they see themselves as having a future in the sector. It may help educators see they can have economic stability and not need a second or third source of income. It may build on ECEs' internal motivation to enter the field. Educators may see their desire to work with children as leading to a career with opportunities for progression and financial reward. Finally, it may show educators that education is an investment in their future and worth the effort, time, and resources.

Let's start talking about ECEs and their value. The wage grid is the beginning of this conversation, a starting place to discuss professionalizing the sector and putting numbers to the value ECEs bring to our community. Then, hand-in-hand, we can cross this bridge together.

**What motivated you to begin working as an ECE?
What motivates you to stay in the sector?**

NEXT STEPS

This compensation framework is an iterative project. The ELCC sector is fluid and requires reflexivity as we build a comprehensive sector in Alberta.

Therefore, the next steps for this research project are:

- conduct stakeholder engagement to test the grid with owners/operators and relevant stakeholders,
- conduct interviews with ECEs about the impact of a wage grid on them,
- define what supports are needed to implement the wage grid,
- refine the grid with current living wage data, regional considerations, and indexing,
- add competencies to the grades that show professional expertise gained during years of experience,
- create aligned job descriptions,
- investigate and create a career map,
- add Levels 4, 5, and 6 that recognize relevant post-graduate studies, such as the early learning and child care bachelor's degrees offered by MacEwan University and Mount Royal University,
- consider how the wage grid applies to family day home educators, preschool educators, and out-of-school care educators,
- account for ongoing professional development,
- encourage better data collection, and
- incorporate time-use surveys from ECEs to gain a better insight into time dynamics and their role in the well-being of the ELCC workforce.

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APPENDIX A: CHART FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Occupation	Entry education requirements	Education duration	Starting median wage	Starting median annual	Overall median wage	Overall median annual	Added benefits
Health Care Aide	At least grade 10	No education or certification requirement	\$19.76	\$42,100	\$24.95	\$51,896	Varies with the employer
Educational Assistant	High school diploma and 1-year post-secondary	1 year of post-secondary	\$18.67	\$38,833	\$24.32	\$50,585	Varies with employer Benefits Vacation pays Sick days Summers off
Community Disability Services Practitioner	High school diploma and 1-year post-secondary	1 year of post-secondary	\$17.67	\$36,753	\$23.50	\$48,880	Varies with employer Public employees receive benefits and pension plans in some instances

Licensed Practical Nurse	High school diploma and 2-year post-secondary	2 years of post-secondary	\$26.45	\$55,016	\$31.04	\$64,563	Varies with employer but can include: (a) Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan. (b) Health Benefits Trust of Alberta (HBTA), or equivalent, inclusive of: (i) Group Life Insurance (Basic). (ii) Accidental Death and Dismemberment (Basic). (iii) Short-term Disability Sick leave Pension Plan Overtime Vacation Educational Allowance
Child and Youth Care Worker	High school diploma and 1-year post-secondary	1 year of post-secondary	\$17.67	\$36,753	\$23.50	\$48,880	Varies with employer
Mental Health Worker	High school diploma and 2-year post-secondary	2 years of post-secondary	\$17.67	\$36,753	\$23.50	\$48,880	Varies with employer

APPENDIX B: STAKEHOLDER MAP



APPENDIX C: DEFINITIONS OF TURNOVER

The research conducted by the team showed that there is no consistent definition of turnover. When reporting on turnover, one should be careful to indicate specifically what they mean by this term. The following definitions may clarify the meaning of turnover:

Turnover	When an employee voluntarily, involuntarily, temporarily or permanently leaves an organization or sector.
Bounce	An ECE may bounce from program to program until they find satisfactory workplace conditions. In doing so, an ECE may still receive wage top-ups but may not retain their tenure, preventing them from advancing in the wage grid despite accumulated experience.
Churn	An ECE may churn within the broader ELCC sector, which means they remain in the sector but work in a peripheral or allied organization rather than a licensed child care program. Once an ECE is no longer working in licensed child care, there is nowhere to track where they go.
Exit	An ECE may exit the sector entirely. Once an ECE exits the sector, it is impossible to track where they go.
Promote	An ECE may be promoted within a program. An ECE promoted into leadership within the same program remains in the sector but may not be eligible to claim wage top-ups.
Leave	An ECE may take a leave from the sector for medical, personal, or educational reasons. Leaves are often temporary.

APPENDIX D: FUNDING PATHWAYS

The actual cost of child care is difficult to map as there are multiple funding sources beyond parent fees. However, some examples of funding sources for ELCC in Alberta are listed below.



Funding Source	Funding Type	Description	Examples
Parent	Parent Fees	Direct fees paid to the program	
	Family Subsidy	Support with child care fees for eligible families	
Canada–Alberta Agreement	Federal funding	A bilateral agreement to reduce daily child care fees for families	
Alberta Child Care Grant Funding Program (Affordability Supports)	Wage Top-up Funding	Top-up wages provided to the front line, certified educators in Alberta.	
	Professional Development Funding	Funding to support the professional development of certified frontline educators.	AECEA: Brain Certification, ARCQE : Developmental Screening Training, Other Professional Development opportunities
	Paid Release Time	“Funding that allows their certified educators to be paid while studying, completing post-secondary coursework, and attending workshops or conferences.”	
Sponsored Support (ARCQE, n.d.)	Curriculum Framework Supports	Support for educators to apply Flight Framework principles and concepts to their daily practice	Macewan: Flight: Alberta’s Early Learning and Care Framework ARCQE: Pedagogical Partner Supports, Supporting Curriculum Practice, Possibilities for Practice,

	Child Development Supports	Supporting Outcomes for Children	JOIN: support for the implementation of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) GRASP: coaching to implement the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) REACH: online support in using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)
	Program Supports	Support to “assist programs that require support with meeting regulatory requirements (ARCQE, n.d.).”	LINK: supports programs in meeting Licensing Requirements
	Creating Cultural Connections	Supporting educators with connecting to the cultural practices of their families	Creating Cultural Connections
Children’s Services	Inclusive Child Care Program	Supports for Inclusion – support for programs to ensure all children are included in daily activities	Access Support and Participation (ASaP) (GRIT)
Alberta Education	Inclusive Child Care	Funding for designated ECS operators to support children with a diagnosed severe disability or language delay (Alberta Education, 2022)	Program Unit Funding (PUF)
Educators	Unpaid Labour	working uncompensated hours to complete planning, documentation, purchasing of supplies, meetings, and events	
		Educators buying supplies for their daily activities	
		Completing own education and professional development	

Owners	Space Creation Grant	Funding offered to open new child care programs	
Other	Non-salaried compensation	Health Wellness Account Health Benefits Bonuses or profit sharing	
	Rent subsidies or owning the property		