

Elevating Early Learning and Child Care in Alberta: A Collective Responsibility

As a dedicated community of stakeholders in Alberta's early learning and child care sector, we have witnessed firsthand the pivotal role early learning plays in shaping the future of our society. With the recent implementation of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) agreement, we have an opportunity to build a system that meets the needs of children, families, communities and the economy. To do this, we must recognize and support the dedicated early childhood educator (ECE) professionals in our sector.

As we navigate the CWELCC in Alberta, we must prioritize the development of a robust and sustainable system that is in the best interest of the child and all Albertans for generations to come. This agreement presents a unique opportunity for us to collaborate and strengthen our approach to early learning and child care (ELCC), ensuring accessibility, affordability, and inclusivity without compromising a child's right to high-quality early learning and care. System building requires a collaboration of many integrated elements, diverse perspectives, and intentional decision-making that works towards an ELCC system that operates as a whole. That is why our community of stakeholders is invested in advancing public policy that enhances the planning, funding, and delivery of quality ELCC services.

A quality workforce and high-quality care go hand-in-hand.

At the heart of this endeavour is the dedication of ECEs, who are committed to providing nurturing attachments and stimulating environments for our youngest learners in a variety of early learning settings. Despite their invaluable contributions, ECEs often face challenges related to consistent educational standards, fair compensation, dependable mentorship and leadership, and supportive working conditions, all of which go hand-in-hand to support their growth, success, and ongoing efforts towards providing practice-based care that is in the best interests of each child.

To address these challenges, it is essential that we take concerted action to support the professional growth and well-being of ECEs. The Roadmap to Quality Early Learning and Child Care in Alberta outlines specific policy actions in Section 4: Workforce Development and Support aimed at advancing the qualifications, certification, and ongoing professional learning of ECEs. These include:

1. Strengthening staffing requirements to uphold international principles of quality in early learning settings.
2. Reviewing and refining certification processes to ensure alignment with best practices in inclusive early learning and child care.
3. Increasing educational and certification requirements to reflect the evolving demands of the profession.
4. Implementing ongoing professional development opportunities to support continuous learning and growth.

Simultaneously, we must address the issue of compensation and supportive working conditions for ECEs. Research has shown that by developing competitive wage scales and adding benefits

and pensions to compensation bundles, we can attract and retain skilled, knowledgeable professionals as we transform from a sector to a system. Additionally, ensuring supportive working conditions through reasonable workloads, protected and paid time during the day for planning and reflection, and onsite pedagogical mentorship contribute to the overall quality of early learning and child care.

"The working conditions of the educator are the learning conditions of the children."

Achieving these goals requires collaboration and commitment from all stakeholders, including government ministries, post-secondary institutions, service providers, community organizations, educators, families, owner/operators/agencies, and professional associations. Unifying our efforts amplifies our impact on everything from improving the lives of children and families to fostering the growth of our communities, strengthening equity and inclusion, and bolstering our provincial and national economies.

Together, we can create a more equitable and empowering environment for ECEs, thereby benefiting children, families, and society. The process of changing a system that has been in place for 40 years will take time and effort. We need to be patient and focused.

As we embark on this journey, let us reaffirm our collective responsibility to prioritize early learning and child care as a cornerstone of our communities. By investing in the professional development and well-being of ECEs, we can lay a strong foundation for the future success and prosperity of our children and communities. We look forward to working with our community partners and policymakers on a workforce strategy that meets the outcomes outlined above.

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