

## Early Learning and Child Care in Alberta

### Facts and Figures

- Child care is an essential service for most Alberta families with young children. In 2016 (Friendly et al. 2018, 94 and 164–165)
  - 59% of Alberta children under 13 had working mothers (This represents approximately 405,000 children.)
  - 57% of children under six had working mothers (This represents approximately 181,000 children.)
  - 55% of children under three had working mothers (This represents approximately 86,500 children.)
  
- In early 2019, more than 54% of Alberta children under the age of six spent time in some sort of formal or informal non-parental child care (Findlay 2019). This represents more than 178,000 children of an estimated total of 330,000 children under six.
  
- In March 2019, there were 131,624 spaces in Alberta’s regulated early learning and child care system (Alberta Children’s Services 2019c).
  - Approximately 12,000 spaces (11% of the total) were available in approved family day homes.
  - 105,800 Alberta children under the age of 13 were enrolled in licensed or approved early learning and child care.
  
- In March 2018, there were 2,710 licensed and approved early learning and child care programs in Alberta (Alberta Children’s Services 2018a, 21). As shown in Figure 2, the majority were centre-based programs (33%), preschools (26%) and out-of-school care programs (38%). 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%.

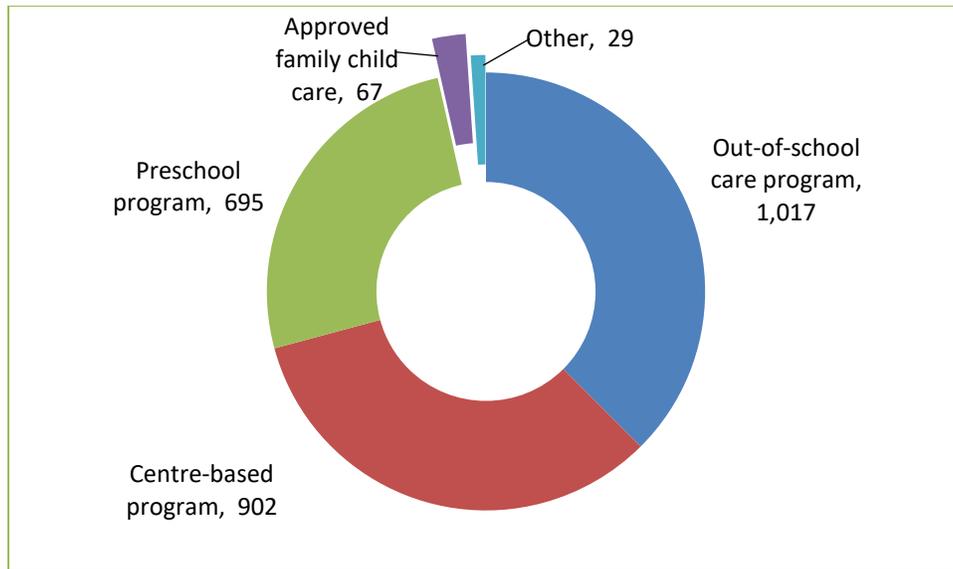


Figure 2. The distribution of licensed and approved child care programs in Alberta, March 2018

- 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 wait lists, with an average of 59 children per list.
- In 2018, 49% of child care centres in Edmonton and 74% of centres in Calgary had wait lists (Macdonald and Friendly 2019).<sup>\*</sup> In both cities, more than 40% of centres charged a fee for putting parents on a wait list. In Edmonton, wait list fees reached as high as \$200 or even the full first month's payment.

### Wait Lists and the Workforce

Alberta Children's Services (2019c) reports an 80% utilization rate for licensed child care spaces. At the same time, wait lists continue to grow.

One reason for the underutilization of available spaces may be a shortage of qualified early childhood educators to staff them. Another reason may be that spaces are not available where parents want or need them (Alberta Children's Services 2019c). Further research is required.

<sup>\*</sup> In Edmonton, 49% of centres reported waiting lists in 2016 and 66% reported wait lists in 2017. In Calgary, 60% of centres reported wait lists in 2016 and 63% reported wait lists in 2017 (Macdonald and Friendly 2016; 2017).

## Early Childhood Educators: A Profile

**There is a serious lack of current, detailed statistical data about Alberta's (and Canada's) early learning and child care workforce.**

The *2012 You Bet We Still Care!* survey\* of early childhood educators working in centre-based early learning and child care programs in Canada found the following (Flanagan et al., 2013):

- More than 98% of early childhood educators were female.
- About 82% were born in Canada. About 13% were Canadian citizens who were born in other countries. Less than 5% were permanent residents on work visas or other types of arrangements.
- The median age was 38, but close to 30% were over 45.
- Nearly 25% of early childhood educators worked at a second job, primarily because they needed the extra money.
- About 11% of early childhood educators had a university degree. About 59% had a two-year diploma, 10% had a one-year certificate and 10% had no post-secondary education.
  - The reported post-secondary credentials were not necessarily in the early learning and child care field.
- In 2012, the average wage for program staff in Canada was \$16.50, compared to \$15.33 in Alberta. The average wage for program directors in Canada was \$22, compared to \$20 in Alberta.
  - The reported wages for Alberta include government-funded wage enhancements.

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\* The survey was conducted online and is not a representative sample even though it included 3,480 early childhood educators and 1,145 employers.

### AECEA'S WORKFORCE SURVEY

AECEA conducted an online survey of Alberta's early childhood educators in late 2018 and early 2019 (Buschmann and Partridge 2019). The 1,228 survey respondents were not selected randomly, so the results are not necessarily representative of the approximately 16,600 early childhood educators in Alberta's regulated child care system.\* Nonetheless, the data represents an important start toward understanding the composition and needs of early childhood educators in the province.†

AECEA's survey found the following:

- About 97% of survey respondents were female.
- About 60% were born in Canada; of these, 10% identified as Indigenous. More than 96% of respondents were Canadian citizens or permanent residents.
- Survey respondents spoke 57 different languages. English (67%) and Tagalog (8%) were the two most common languages spoken at home.
- Survey respondents were between 16 and 76 years old. The median age was 40.
- About 10% of survey respondents worked at a second job because they needed the extra money.

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\* The Alberta Children's Services (2019c) annual report for 2018–2019 lists more than 16,000 early childhood educators in Alberta's regulated child care system. The Children's Services annual report for 2017–2018 records 16,568 early childhood educators in the system.

† The results of AECEA's survey are comparable to the national *You Bet We Still Care!* results (Flanagan et al., 2013) on a number of measures.

## AECEA's Position on Early Learning and Child Care\*

All children and their families deserve and have a right to accessible, affordable, high-quality early learning and care.

High-quality early learning and child care is the cornerstone of a caring, thriving society. It is a public good that must be supported by public investment.

High-quality early learning and child care depends on highly qualified early childhood educators who—like all Albertans—deserve fair wages, satisfying work and supportive working conditions.

The work of early childhood educators requires specialized knowledge and pedagogical practices that can only be acquired through formal education and ongoing professional learning.

Early childhood educators need different types of professional learning and support at different stages of their careers.

All Albertans have a stake in high-quality child care. Parents, families, communities, businesses, service agencies, governments and the public share responsibility for giving the children of our province the best possible early learning and child care experiences.

### **AECEA supports the vision of Canada's Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework.**

"All children can experience the enriching environment of quality early learning and child care that supports children's development to reach their full potential."

AECEA also supports the framework's five principles: quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity (Government of Canada 2017).

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\* These are AECEA's guiding principles as cited in the association's 2018 mandate document *Quality Educators, Quality Care*, p. 42.