

October 6, 2022

**To: Child Care Operators**

**Subject: Supporting Early Childhood Educators (ECEs)**

Dear Operator,

The Government of Alberta understands that high-quality child care starts with qualified ECEs. As part of our commitment to support the quality and professionalism of the childcare workforce, we would like to share with you the following information about what we are doing to invest in the training recruitment, and certification and retention of early childhood educators.

**Expanding wage top ups to include all paid hours worked and new wage top ups for employer-paid vacation time off**

Effective October 1, 2022, Children's Services is expanding the existing wage top-up program to include all paid time worked during operational hours up to a maximum of 181 hours per month by eligible certified ECEs responsible for the frontline child care and supervision of children.

Wage top up can now be claimed for hours the ECE is assisting with other duties related to the ECE role (such a cleaning, cooking, planning, organizing, completing administrative duties, programming, setting up/taking down playrooms, purchasing toys and playroom supplies, participating in staff meetings, etc.).

In addition, effective October 1, 2022, wage top-ups for employer-paid vacation time are now eligible. This applies to hours taken off from work by employees for annual vacation time they are entitled to under Alberta's Employment Standards Code up to a maximum of three weeks, and will be paid based on the hours for which the employer pays an ECE their regular wage while they are away from work. Programs need to keep attendance and payroll records for these hours.

For the November claim, child care operators will report indirect hours worked for paid time during operational hours, up to a maximum of 181 hours per month, by eligible certified ECEs responsible for the frontline child care and supervision of children

Vacation hours up to a maximum of three weeks will be paid as a part of ECEs monthly claims under "direct child care hours" in the online Child Care Claims Payment (C3P) system, and wage top-ups on vacation time needs to be claimed in the month it was taken. The number of vacation wage top up hours is dependent on the number of weeks of annual vacation time ECEs are entitled to under Alberta's Employment Standards Code, based on their length of employment. Wage top ups for vacation time can only be claimed for vacation time that is taken

for the year it is earned, and cannot be banked or carried forward for future years. System enhancements will be made in the future to make a separate record of vacation time.

### **Competency Based Model for ECEs**

We heard through Spring 2022 stakeholder engagement that there is a need for ECEs to have an easier pathway for entry into the sector and to further their career advancement. We also heard that there is a desire to recognize the skills, knowledge, competencies and experience of ECEs, along with their educational credentials, to support areas of the province where recruitment is more challenging.

Children's Services is in the process of procuring for the development of a competency-based model for ECEs to further professionalize the early learning and child care sector. This competency-based model will include a competency framework, progressive ECE career map, total compensation review, evaluation tools, and ongoing competency requirements and professional development standards that will support core credentials needed for ECEs.

Children's Services will be working collaboratively with a consultant, subject matter experts, child care stakeholders, and the sector to ensure that the competency-based model is developed to meet the needs of ECEs and to ensure quality for Alberta children and families and ready to be implemented in 2023.

### **ECE Substitute/Casual Pool Pilot Project**

During stakeholder engagements in the Spring of 2022, feedback from the sector suggested that establishing an ECE substitute/casual pool would be helpful in supporting a positive work environment and work/life balance.

The province is procuring for a pilot project for a substitute /casual pool in targeted communities where programs have expressed challenges in ensuring they have the staffing resources to provide cover off to meet ratio requirements. The pilot will provide a pre-screened, qualified pool of substitute/casual ECEs to provide coverage for ELCC centres for staff during planned and unplanned absences due to illness, vacation and training.

Procurement for a vendor to create this ECE substitute/casual pool will be posted on the Alberta Purchasing Connection website in the next month, and will start in targeted communities who have expressed challenges in staffing, such as rural northern communities.

### **ECE Website Portal**

We are making it easier for ECEs to find and access all of the information they may be looking for regarding job opportunities, professional development, training, news and announcements and other resources.

Children's Services is in the process of procuring for a vendor (to be posed on the Alberta Purchasing Connection website in the next month) to develop and create an online portal that will provide a common place for ECEs, program owners/operators and other stakeholders to find information and resources for the child care sector. The ECE portal is intended to be an interactive hub that is free to use, and will not require a membership.

### **Level 1 Orientation Course Updates**

Effective October 1, 2022, we are taking steps to make it easier for people to enter the child care field by expanding eligibility to register for the Child Care Orientation course as well as expanding opportunities for approved equivalency courses for Level 1 certification.

Individuals that are not employed in child care settings will now be eligible to take the orientation course as long as they are Canadian citizens, permanent residents or valid work permit holders that reside in Alberta. This expansion in eligibility will make it easier for child care operators to recruit certified ECEs and for ECEs to seek certification before they are employed by a child care program.

We heard your feedback during the Spring 2022 engagements and survey that the Level 1 Orientation course requires some modernization. As part of our commitment to advance the quality of care and professionalization of the child care workforce, we will be working with the sector and content experts to review the language and elements of the course. The modernization will involve adding content to reflect the current research and best practices, along with developing new modules that reflect all types of licensed child care including school-age children and family day homes. Updates will be made to course learning outcomes, readings, videos, assignments, quizzes, and resources.

There is also an opportunity for organizations to request a course be considered for an equivalency for Level 1 ECE certification. More information is available in the certification guide on the Alberta.ca website.

### **Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework (Flight)**

Children's Services has funded the development and delivery of Flight, to increase child development outcomes and the quality of early learning and child care programs, by enabling educators to maximize learning and development opportunities using children's play and care experiences. All levels of certified early learning and child care staff have opportunities to participate in Flight-related training.

Effective October 1, 2022, ECEs are eligible for release time grant funding for attending the Flight curriculum training offered at no cost for ECEs through the Alberta child care funding program.

### **Post-Secondary Training**

Children's Services is working with Advanced Education to engage with post-secondary institutions in areas of need across the province.

As a way to attract, retain, train and certify sufficient ECEs to support future growth of the child care system, we will be encouraging expansion of post-secondary training opportunities in early learning and child care. We will be creating new pathways for ECEs to level up and looking at ways to incentivize increased enrolment in ECE programs through bursaries or other mechanisms. More information will be shared as it becomes available on these initiatives.

### **Skill Development in Leadership and Management**

We heard through stakeholder engagement that Level 3 ECEs, license holders, and owners want more access to professional development opportunities that will assist them to advance their careers.

To support this, additional investments have been made to the overall professional development grant budget to allow more Level 3 ECEs access this funding to acquire additional skills in leadership and management to help build capacity in managing and sustaining child care operations.

Level 3 ECEs will remain eligible for a maximum of \$1500 annually for their post-secondary training. Information for how to access professional funding can be found in the Alberta child care grant funding guide: <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/alberta-child-care-grant-funding-guide>.

As always, if you have any questions or require additional information, please contact the Children's Services Child Care mailbox at [CS.Childcare@gov.ab.ca](mailto:CS.Childcare@gov.ab.ca).

Sincerely,

Jerri Chugg  
Acting Executive Director  
Child Care Branch  
Children's Services