

ENGAGING ON EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Working Together to Build a Canada-wide Early
Learning and Child Care System

July 2024



PURPOSE OF THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Government of Canada is committed to working with provincial, territorial, and Indigenous partners to create a Canada-wide system of high-quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive early learning and child care (ELCC) that all families can access no matter where they live.

To help inform continued progress, the Department of Employment and Social Development is **seeking input on what the [Canada-wide ELCC system](#) and its commitment to provide child care for \$10-a-day, on average, means to you.**

The purpose of this discussion guide is to provide you with a general update on the implementation of the Canada-wide ELCC system and to provide a framework to help us better **understand your experiences** with the system. Your **views** on the key challenges and successes to date are essential to support future and ongoing work. This guide is designed to be an open-ended tool that invites respondents to consider both universal and more targeted questions, as appropriate. This tool was designed with the understanding that all respondents will have different experiences with the Canada-wide ELCC system, and that their unique realities will shape their response.

While significant progress has been made, more work needs to be done to ensure the Canada-wide ELCC system is able to deliver high-quality, affordable, accessible, flexible and inclusive ELCC for all families. Respondents are invited to respond to whichever questions most align with their priorities, challenges, and experiences. Please send your feedback in a format you prefer to ESDC.ELCCER-AGJERE.EDSC@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca.

Core Questions

1. What does **access** to **high-quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive** ELCC mean to you?
2. What do you think a **successful** Canada-wide ELCC system looks like?
3. What **challenges** do you, your community, and/or your organization experience in accessing affordable ELCC?
4. What **priorities** would you, your community, and/or your organization like to see addressed by the Canada-wide ELCC system?
5. Are there other **initiatives** or **innovations** (e.g., that other governments, organizations, academia, or businesses have introduced or proposed) you think the Department of Employment and Social Development should be exploring to help build the Canada-wide ELCC system?
6. Do you have ideas on how the federal government could **support the ELCC workforce**?

EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE IN CANADA

Every family in Canada deserves access to high-quality child care when they need it and at an affordable price. That is why the Government of Canada is working closely with provincial, territorial, and Indigenous partners to make this a reality.

The vision for the Canada-wide ELCC system builds on the [Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#) that was agreed to with provinces and territories¹ in 2017, and the [Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care \(IELCC\) Framework](#) that was co-developed with Indigenous Peoples and endorsed in 2018. Both of those frameworks set out principles to guide joint investments in ELCC, and advance shared objectives.

As part of Budget 2021, and combined with other federal investments, including investments in Indigenous ELCC, up to \$30 billion over five years will be provided by the Government of Canada to build a Canada-wide ELCC system with provinces, territories, and Indigenous partners, with Budget 2022 adding a \$625 million over four years ELCC Infrastructure Fund. In addition, on March 28, 2024, the Government of Canada further committed to launching a Child Care Expansion Loan Program to provide \$1 billion in low-cost loans and \$60 million in non-repayable grants for public and not-for-profit child care providers.

On March 19th, 2024, the [Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act](#) received Royal Assent. This newly enacted legislation affirms a sustained and ongoing federal commitment to building and maintaining a Canada-wide ELCC system alongside provincial, territorial, and Indigenous partners.

In just three years, there has been incredible progress in building the Canada-wide ELCC system. Across the country, over 750,000 children are already benefiting from affordable, high-quality regulated child care.

The Government of Canada provides ELCC funding through negotiated bilateral [agreements with provinces and territories](#), with additional implementation details articulated in associated Action Plans. Commitments in the Agreements include achieving an average cost of \$10/day for regulated child care, and creating approximately 250,000 new child care spaces by 2025-26 (total across all provinces and territories) to increase access to affordable child care options for families, no matter where they live. The goal is for all families in Canada to have access to regulated, high-quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive ELCC.

Since the federal government investments in building a Canada-wide system began, eight provinces and territories are delivering regulated child care for an average fee of \$10-a-day or less, and all other jurisdictions have reduced fees by at least 50%. For families across Canada, this means significant savings –families could save up to \$14,300 per child per year depending on where they live.

¹ While the Government of Québec supports the general principles of the Early Learning and Child Care Framework, it does not adhere to the Framework as it intends to preserve its sole responsibility in this area on its territory. The Government of Québec expects to receive its share of the federal funding and will continue to invest significantly toward programs and services for families and children.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION AND QUESTIONS

The ELCC Workforce, Early Childhood Educators and Operators

A highly trained, qualified and well-compensated ELCC workforce is essential to ensure the availability of high-quality child care.

Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and other members of the ELCC workforce do important, skilled and essential work, but often earn low wages and lack benefits such as pensions, paid sick leave, and paid vacation. The recruitment and retention of qualified ECEs is a long-standing challenge across Canada, which has been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, general labour force shortages, and recent high inflation.

To address these challenges, work is underway with all provinces and territories to advance the development of a multilateral workforce strategy based on the pillars of recruitment, retention, and recognition. The strategy will help address challenges associated with recruiting a high-quality ELCC workforce, retaining ECEs in the sector, and recognizing the contribution of ECEs to the wellbeing of every child in their care.

Questions regarding the ELCC Workforce, ECEs and Operators

- What are the biggest challenges and opportunities facing the ELCC workforce? To what extent is it difficult/easy to recruit skilled educators, train them, and retain them?
- What are you hearing from your community about:
 - working conditions;
 - paid pedagogical support;
 - access to pre-service education;
 - competency development and professional learning;
 - inclusivity/discrimination?
- Are there innovative approaches for training programs and/or professional development opportunities that have proven successful for the ELCC workforce? If possible, please provide examples of those innovative approaches and/or training programs and tell us why you think they are successful.

ELCC for Indigenous Peoples and Organizations

All children deserve a real and fair chance to succeed, and high-quality ELCC provides a solid foundation for future success. Indigenous ELCC that is rooted in distinct Indigenous cultures, languages and knowledges is also of crucial importance as the foundation from which children form their individual and collective identity, and as an essential component of well-being.

Alongside the federal funding being provided through bilateral [agreements with provinces and territories](#) for ELCC, the Government of Canada also makes Indigenous-specific ELCC investments in programming and governance to advance the visions and principles outlined in the [Indigenous ELCC Framework](#). This funding is complementary to provincial/territorial funding and works together to improve ELCC programs and services for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children. The [Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act](#) also includes important federal commitments to supporting ELCC programs and services for Indigenous Peoples. Section 7 speaks to the principles that are to guide federal investments in ELCC, and section 8 enshrines a long-term funding commitment.

To understand how the Canada-wide ELCC system can better serve Indigenous children and families who are choosing to access it, the questions below focus on the broader Canada-wide ELCC system and how it has been implemented with provinces and territories rather than the Indigenous-specific investments through the IELCC Transformation Initiative.

Questions focused on ELCC for Indigenous Peoples and Organisations

- How can the Canada-wide ELCC system better support Indigenous families and children, including those living in urban areas, off-reserve and on-reserve, in accessing culturally relevant ELCC?
- What are the key challenges you and/or your organization are facing when it comes to accessing and/or benefiting from the Canada-wide ELCC system?
- Are there other initiatives or innovations (e.g., that other governments, organizations, academia, or businesses have introduced or proposed) you think the Department of Employment and Social Development should be exploring to ensure the Canada-wide ELCC system provides culturally relevant ELCC?
- What changes or improvements can be made to optimize the Government of Canada's ongoing consultation and collaboration (e.g. Permanent Bilateral Mechanisms, Technical Tables, Expert Working Groups, etc.) with Indigenous Peoples on the Canada-wide ELCC system?

ELCC for Official Language Minority Communities

Child care can have a profound influence on childhood development, including language skills and cultural identity. Bilateral agreements signed with all provinces and territories (except Quebec) include clauses that protect and respect the rights of official language minority communities (OLMCs) based on the specific priorities and context of each province or territory.

The [Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act](#) also includes important federal commitments to supporting ELCC programs and services for OLMCs. Section 7 speaks to the principles that are to guide federal investments in ELCC, section 8 enshrines a long-term funding commitment.

The [Action Plan for Official Languages 2023–2028: Protection – Promotion – Collaboration](#), which was announced last year, extends all the investments of the previous Action Plan—\$2.7 billion over five years that has now become ongoing funding—while injecting an additional \$1.4 billion over five years in new funding.

The Action Plan includes specific commitments and investments for ELCC, recognizing the importance of the education continuum, which includes early learning opportunities that are essential for linguistic vitality and cultural transfer.

Questions focused on ELCC for OLMCs

- In your view, what are the main challenges when it comes to accessing culturally and linguistically appropriate ELCC programs and services in OLMCs and/or benefiting from \$10-a-day child care?
- How can a Canada-wide ELCC system better serve OLMCs?
- What are the biggest challenges facing the ELCC workforce in official language minority communities? To what extent is it difficult/easy to recruit, train and retain skilled Early Childhood Educators who can provide linguistically-appropriate services in OLMCs?

An Inclusive Canada-wide ELCC System

The goal for a Canada-wide ELCC system is for families – no matter their socio-economic standing, cultural or racial identity, sexual orientation or identity, whether their child has a disability or needs enhanced or individualized support, or where they live in Canada – to have access to high quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive ELCC.

One of the objectives of the Canada-wide ELCC Agreements is to help address barriers to the provision of high-quality, accessible, affordable, flexible and inclusive child care in provinces and territories.

Inclusive ELCC systems value diversity, and strive to include, but are not limited to, the following populations:

- Black and racialized children and families;
- Children and parents/guardians with disabilities and with varying abilities who may need enhanced or individual supports;
- Children living in low-income families;
- Indigenous children;
- Children of newcomers to Canada;
- Children from 2SLGBTQI+ families; or
- Children in official language minority communities;
- Families with intersectional identities.

Questions focused on Inclusive ELCC

- What is your current experience in accessing ELCC? How does intersectionality (the ways diverse aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation) impact that experience, if it does?
- What does ELCC that meets your needs look like? How can a Canada-wide ELCC system work towards helping you access the care you need (e.g., location, hours of operation, affordability, culturally relevant, etc.)?
- What are the current barriers to access for children of diverse populations and their families that you experience or see in your community? What do you think is the cause?
- What are the current barriers to access for children with disabilities/varying abilities and their families that you experience or see in your community? What do you think is the cause?
- How can we collect better data about the ELCC needs of children and families from diverse populations in ways that empower these communities?

Expanding the Canada-wide ELCC System

As more and more families seek child care under a Canada-wide system, wait lists are continuing to grow, with some parents reporting that they remain unable to return to the workforce full time because of difficulties trying to secure a space for their child. The Government of Canada is working with provinces and territories to create 250,000 new regulated child care spaces across the country by March 2026 to increase access to affordable child care options for families, no matter where they live.

To support this goal, the federal government previously announced the [ELCC Infrastructure Fund](#). The Fund provides an additional \$625 million over four years to provinces and territories to support not-for-profit and public child care spaces in underserved communities, such as rural and remote regions, high-cost and low-income urban neighbourhoods, and communities that face barriers to access, including racialized groups, Indigenous Peoples, official language minority communities, newcomers, as well as parents, caregivers, and children with disabilities and parents working non-standard hours.

[New measures from Budget 2024](#) to build more affordable child care spaces and expand the Canada-wide ELCC system were announced in March 2024. These measures include:

- Launching a new Child Care Expansion Loan Program that will offer low-cost loans and non-repayable contributions to not-for-profit and public child care operators;
- Establishing a new capacity building program to help providers apply for funding through the Child Care Expansion Loan Program;
- Offering Canada Student Loan forgiveness for early childhood educators living in rural and remote communities; and
- Increasing training for early childhood educators.

Questions focused on Expanding a Canada-wide ELCC System

- How can the above Budget 2024 measures be best leveraged for expansion of the Canada-wide ELCC system in your, or your organisation's, experience and/or opinion? Please consider:
 - What supports are in place when ELCC providers in your community are trying to increase spaces or start a new ELCC service?
 - What barriers exist when ELCC providers in your community are trying to increase spaces or start a new ELCC service?
 - How can not-for-profit ELCC providers be better supported in expanding access to ELCC spaces?
 - What design features of the announced measures would be important to you?
- Are there innovative approaches to expansion that have proven successful for the ELCC workforce? If possible, please provide examples of those innovative approaches and tell us why you think they are successful.
- Has the introduction of wage supports, such as hourly increases, wage floors, wage top ups or wage grids helped to ensure the availability of the ELCC staff required to support expansion of ELCC spaces? Why or why not?

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Participation in this engagement is voluntary, and acceptance or refusal to participate will in no way affect any relationship with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) or the Government of Canada.

Information provided to ESDC related to this engagement can be subject to access to information and privacy requests and will be administered in accordance with the *Access to Information Act* and the *Privacy Act*.

The information is collected under the authority of the *Department of Employment and Social Development Act* (DESDA) to inform the ESDC's work on Early Learning and Child Care. It may be used by ESDC, by other Government of Canada departments or by other levels of government for policy analysis and research; however, these uses and/or disclosures of your personal information will never result in an administrative decision being made about you.

Any personal information provided will be administered in accordance with the DESDA, the *Privacy Act* and other applicable laws. However, those providing information are requested not to provide any identifying personal information about themselves or anyone else (other than name, organization and contact information). If you provide unsolicited personal information, your unsolicited personal information could be used in publicly available reports on the engagement and elsewhere as deemed appropriate by ESDC. If personal information is provided by an individual member of the general public (who is not an individual participating in the engagement on behalf of, or as a representative of, a stakeholder organization), ESDC shall make every effort to remove the identifying personal information prior to including the individual's responses in the data analysis, unless otherwise noted.

You have the right to the protection of, access to and correction of your personal information, which is described in Personal Information Banks ESDC-PSU-914 or ESDC-PSU-938. Instructions for obtaining this information are outlined in [Info Source](#). Info Source may also be accessed online at any Service Canada Centre.

You have the right to file a complaint with the [Privacy Commissioner of Canada](#) regarding the institution's handling of your personal information.

To obtain information related to this engagement, a request may be submitted in writing to ESDC pursuant to the *Access to Information Act*. When making a request, reference should be made to the name of this discussion paper.