



Shared framework for building an early childhood education and care¹ (ECEC) system for all

PREAMBLE

This document is addressed to all levels of governments across Canada. It references a shared vision² anchored in an evidence-based framework for federal, provincial and territorial governments to use in the building of equitable early childhood education and care (ECEC) for all.

Canada's child care community, spanning coast to coast to coast, acknowledges that Indigenous communities should be supported to design, deliver and govern ECEC systems and services that meet their needs and aspirations for self-determination. While there are many points of commonality in our shared vision, we recognize that Indigenous communities may choose unique approaches and content. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has called on federal, provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families as a part of healing and reconciliation.

We begin with evidence highlighting high quality ECEC as an integral part of a holistic approach to social policy, cutting across multiple domains, including labour, social development, health, family and social infrastructure. ECEC plays a crucial role in supporting children, families and communities, promoting social inclusion, combating child and family poverty, stimulating the economy and promoting women's equality. Thus, the Canadian status quo of high parent fees and limited access to quality child care impedes a number of important social and economic agendas.

ECEC is demonstrably an issue for Canada's middle class as even in 2015, most middle class families cannot find or afford the high quality child care they need and want. Yet for families living in poverty it is an especially critical issue. In a country in which 40% of Indigenous children living on- and off-reserve are growing up in poverty, the urgency of acting decisively on ECEC for all cannot be overstated.

Finally, we recognize that putting this kind of framework in place is a journey, not an event. While our vision is aspirational and ambitious and will therefore take time, we submit that— although building an excellent ECEC system is complex—it will be well worth it if we are able to get it right from the start.

¹ Early childhood education and care includes centre-based child care, regulated home child care, preschools/nursery schools and kindergarten; it has the same meaning as early learning and care.

² The 'shared vision' upon which this document is based was originally developed for the ChildCare2020 conference (November, 2014, Winnipeg, Manitoba) available online in [English](#) and [French](#).

1) Common federal/provincial/territorial policy frameworks:

- Founded on the assumption that ECEC is a public good and a human right, not a commodity;
- Based on the idea that equity is a core value for ECEC policy and services;
- Supported by the key principles of universality³, high quality and comprehensiveness;
- Recognizing that access requires both a supply of high quality services and fees that all families can afford (or no fee);
- Expanding the supply of programs through a variety of regulated services delivered by public and not-for-profit providers;
- Seamlessly incorporating care and early childhood education in a strong and equal partnership;
- Employing a well-compensated, well-supported, well-educated early childhood workforce, which is recognized and appreciated for the importance of its work;
- Taking a comprehensive approach to ECEC services so as to include a variety of service types to meet families' differing needs/preferences and a package of family policies such as improved maternity/parental leave, workplace practices that are responsive to family needs and direct income support to families such as a child benefit;
- Recognizing and appreciating cultural and linguistic diversity and the diversity of individual families;
- Recognizing the importance of full inclusion of children and parents with disabilities;
- Incorporating systems for public accountability including data, research, democratic participation and public reporting;
- Based firmly on the best available knowledge and evidence about public policy and early childhood education and care;
- Acknowledging the key roles of federal/provincial/territorial/Indigenous governments in designing programs across Canada with a shared vision as well as appropriate differences.

2) A plan for long-term sustained funding comprising:

- Core (base) funding to support affordable, high quality services directly;
- A capital plan designed to maintain and expand services;
- Funding and resources to support the system infrastructure including civil society organizations, data, research, support to the workforce and ongoing support to services.

3) System-building and policy and system development shared by federal/provincial/territorial and local governments, with the participation of key stakeholder groups such as educators, researchers, and parents, including:

- Shared initiatives, such as national quality goals, a national strategy for the child care workforce, a data/research/innovation agenda and plans for public reporting;
- Work on other key family policies such as maternity/parental leave, workplace flexibility, etc;
- Democratic participation of child care and other civil society organizations made possible through the restoration of the federal funding that is required to support appropriate participation and input;
- Solid knowledge derived from data/research/evaluation to support and assess comprehensive policy development based on evidence and best practices;
- Recognition that Indigenous peoples will define and describe quality care and unique workforce strategies and will require adequate resourcing to address current inequities.

³ 'Universal' is understood to mean non-compulsory (at parents' discretion) – equitable, affordable, available and appropriate.