

Professional development goes virtual for child care professionals ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A new online learning hub is giving thousands of early care and learning (ECL) professionals an opportunity to take courses virtually at a time, pace and place that is convenient for them.

The BC Early Years Professional Development Hub is a shared platform where ECL professionals at any stage of their career can come together in virtual discussion forums, learn from each other and take courses from a distance. Course examples include learning the principles of the early childhood education's professional code of ethics and recognizing what they look like in practice, to leadership-development training to help ECL professionals improve or expand on their specific areas of expertise.

"As governments, our ability to ensure access to high-quality early learning and child care hinges on having a knowledgeable and experienced workforce," said Ahmed Hussen, federal Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, on Monday. "While the COVID-19 pandemic is creating challenges for all of us, it has also created an opportunity for our early learning and child care professionals to learn from each other and enhance the skills they need to care for our youngest citizens."

All ECL professionals will have access to the hub, including early childhood educators (ECEs), ECE assistants, and responsible adults (RAs) working throughout the province. ECEs require 40 hours of professional development every five years in order to renew and maintain their provincial certification, and RAs require a minimum of 20 hours of combined coursework in child development, guidance, health and safety, and/or nutrition to be eligible to work in licensed child care programs. The hub has the capacity to store users' professional-development certificates, allowing them to easily keep track of their hours and certificates.

"As a former ECE, I know how important continuous learning is to ensuring children are provided with the best care possible," said Katrine Conroy, Minister of Children and Family Development. "As the province continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, finding safe ways to provide education and training opportunities is more important than ever before, as many in-person trainings and conferences are not possible."

The hub was developed through a partnership between the Government of B.C., Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre, Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC) and BC Family Child Care Association, using funding from the Canada-British Columbia Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Agreement. The Early Childhood Pedagogy Network (ECPN) is also a key member of the partnership and has been using the platform to host an orientation course and facilitate online discussions for pedagogists.

"Many of us have been practising safe distancing during this time, but being apart should not put our learning and growth on hold, especially for those who continue to care for our children," said Katrina Chen, Minister of State for Child Care. "This platform will create an online community for early care and learning professionals to learn with and from each other, share knowledge and connect with others across the child care sector."

The hub is part of the Province's \$136-million Early Care and Learning Recruitment and Retention Strategy and is one of the first investments in professional development for the child care sector in more than a decade. By supporting the creation of an online platform, the government is improving access to high-quality learning opportunities for rural and remote ECL professionals and those who have barriers to accessing traditional face-to-face courses and conferences.

"Having a variety of options for professional development and learning programs, including online, is valuable to us as ECEs," said Katie Wahl, an ECE at Westview Child Care Centre in Prince Rupert. "Living in a rural community makes access to these difficult and sometimes unattainable. It helps to create a sense of community and belonging when we are able to learn with each other."

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