

COVID-19 impacts on city-supported childcare providers and opportunities for future sectoral resilience ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Access online (Full PDF) ^[2]

Excerpt from Executive summary

Purpose

This exploratory research project is meant to provide insights and understanding into how the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, an unprecedented systemic shock, has impacted the childcare sector. The overarching purpose of this project is to understand how the City of Vancouver can better build resilience in the childcare sector.

Methodology

In terms of methodology, a literature review of the childcare sector within the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic was conducted and a subset of childcare operators were invited for an interview. These childcare operators were City-facilitated and offered programs for children less than 18 months, between 18 to 36 months, and 30-months to school age (including pre-school).

Literature review results

The province of B.C. declared that childcare was an essential service and therefore did not enforce a sector-wide closure of childcare centres. Ultimately, the Province gave the decision of closing or remaining open during the pandemic to the childcare operators. In the face of uncertainties and exacerbated pre-existing challenges, many childcare centres closed for a period of time. In Vancouver, two-thirds of the childcare programs closed temporarily in May.

While the ECE Wage Enhancement Funding (ECE-WE) and Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative (CCFRI) were not created specifically for the pandemic, the ECE-WE was doubled from \$1/hour to \$2/hour in light of the pandemic and the CCFRI was available during this time. The Temporary Emergency Funding (TEF) was meant to provide financial support for both closed and open childcare operators until the end of August whereas the Temporary Inclusion Support Fund was a one-time funding to support childcare operators who serve children with additional needs. The Temporary Pandemic Pay Program was created for essential workers, however, early childhood care professionals were not eligible.

Interview results

In total, 14 childcare operators participated in this project. Of the participating childcare operators, 71.4% (10/14) were closed for a period of time during the pandemic. As of July 21, 2020, there were two childcare centres that remained closed, one of which is a pre-school with a planned re-opening in September. The decision for childcare operators to remain closed or to re-open depended on both internal and external stakeholders as well as available resources and information. Internal stakeholders included the senior management team, organization or parent board, and the childcare staff. External stakeholders included the provincial government and their recommendations, Westcoast Child Care Resources Centre, and the families whom they serve.

In terms of financial support, the majority of the participating childcare operators (13/14) used the Affordable Child Care Benefit, ECE-WE, CCFRI, and TEF to support their operations during the pandemic

The results of this project also supports that staffing issues was a major concern during the pandemic. Almost all of the participating childcare operators (93%, 13/14) at least slightly agreed that they were concerned about the lack of staffing and difficult recruiting staff. Similarly, the majority (85.7%, 12/14) of childcare operators reported staffing to be a concern for future COVID-19-related closures. The staffing concerns reported can be broken down into four categories: recruitment and retainment of staff, layoffs and wages, staff morale and wellbeing, and staff safety.

The project results also suggested that 78.6% (11/14) childcare operators reported that they were not concerned about continued operations in the long-term. However, one of the childcare operators stated that in the case where childcare centres have to be closed again due to COVID-19, they would have to permanently close.

The childcare operators were also asked to share any measures of resiliency that they hope to apply moving forward. One childcare

operator reported that they were considering joining other childcare operators in creating one purchasing account for supplies (such as cleaning products) to increase their buying power. Two other childcare operators reported that they have embraced technology more during the pandemic and will continue to do so to stay connected with their staff, other childcare operators, and the families they serve. In terms of collaborations, many childcare operators have reported that they strengthened existing networks with childcare operators. A challenge that many childcare operators have mentioned is teaching young children how to socially distance from each other and the staff. Therefore, childcare operators have tried to include more outdoor activities and modify schedules to limit the number of children physically present in the childcare centres. A larger childcare operator who is involved in designing new childcare centres has suggested that new centres could be designed with elements that support the resiliency of childcare programs by encouraging social distancing and hygiene.

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

Tags: government ^[4]

COVID-19 ^[5]

policy ^[6]

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