

Early learning and child care funding programs review ^[1]

Author:

Source: Government of Northwest Territories

Format: government document

Publication Date: 22 Dec 2021

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpted from executive summary

Early learning and child care programs provide care and development opportunities for children from birth to 5 years of age. These programs can provide tremendous individual, community, and territorial value; high quality early childhood education programs have been found to benefit children, parents and the economy as a whole.

To do this, early learning and child care programs need appropriate, effective supports. Supports include funding to achieve the territorial early learning and child care goals of:

1. Accessibility, so that all families have the opportunity for their children to participate in early learning opportunities, and
2. Quality, so that all programs can provide excellent care and development opportunities for children and families.

Funding supports are the subject of this evaluation. Specifically, the funding programs being evaluated are offered through the Government of the Northwest Territories' (GNWT) Department of Education, Culture and Employment's (ECE) Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Division. The programs evaluated are:

- Right from the Start Early Childhood Scholarship
- Early Childhood Staff Grant
- Early Childhood Program Operating Subsidy
- Health and Safety Grant
- New Child Care Spaces Fund

This evaluation outlines the short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals of these programs. It draws from multiple lines of evidence to determine the extent to which the outcomes of these programs are being achieved. This evaluation explores existing literature, and includes a jurisdictional scan of early learning and child care funding. It reviews ELCC divisional administration records including financial statements from recipients of ELCC funding. As well, it provides analyses of interviews with stakeholders including post-secondary students enrolled in post-secondary education in the field of early childhood development, early childhood educators currently working in the NWT, and operators of early learning and child care programs.

The results of this evaluation highlight a struggling early childhood sector that is somewhat supported by the funding ECE offers but not to a level that enables the sector to thrive. While records show an increase in students participating in post-secondary education in the field of early childhood, these students do not seem to be staying in the NWT or taking steps to work in NWT daycares or other early childhood programs. There is also a notable decrease in the number of early childhood educators with post-secondary education over time. This evaluation explores possible reasons for the decrease and presents current data on early childhood educator wages, which fall below living wages in the NWT. The Early Childhood Staff Grant was designed to recognize and address the problem of low wages in the early childhood education sector. However, this evaluation found that the Staff Grant is not adequately addressing the challenges of low sector wages. This evaluation outlines a recommendation for legislating minimum wage standards for early childhood educators.

The evaluation also looked at subsidy, funding, and grant programs designed to help early childhood programs with operational and startup costs. The results pointed to needed changes to some of the funding programs; it is recommended that the Early Childhood Staff Grant be discontinued in favour of legislating early childhood educator wages, and the Early Childhood Program operating subsidy (ECP-ECP-OS) is greatly increased and remodeled away from the current attendance based approach. The increase in funding for the Operating Subsidy will help offset the cost to early childhood programs that would result from the recommended new wage legislation. The remodeling of the ECP-ECP-OS will allow for a more equitable distribution of funds, and a distribution that is more in line with the financial structuring of early childhood programs. This evaluation also recommends setting maximums on fees charged to families or guardians for participation in early childhood programs, typically called 'parent fees'. Setting maximums for parent fees will allow for a more equitable financial modeling for the ECP-ECP-OS and support ELCC's long term goal of accessibility in the early learning and child care programs.

Finally, this evaluation lays out still unanswered questions regarding the success of the funding programs. Responses to interviews with ELCC program operators reveal some confusion about the Health and Safety Grant and the New Child Care Spaces Fund. Because

operators are not clear about the benefits of these programs, this evaluation cannot draw conclusions about their effectiveness. Similarly, the evaluation was challenged by small sample sizes, particularly for financial records. It is recommended that early learning and child care programs be required to submit financial statements to ECE, following mutually agreed upon schedules, so that ECE has the information it requires to appropriately and regularly monitor the effectiveness of its funding programs.

The early learning and child care sector in the NWT is not alone in the challenges identified through this evaluation. Across Canada, early learning and child care programs and sectors face similar situations. The jurisdictional scan conducted as part of this evaluation identified those similar challenges as well as various ways that provinces and territories are working to address them. Indigenous Governments and early learning and child care programs have also identified their challenges and solutions and continue to do so through close dialogue with the GNWT. The Federal Government of Canada is also investing work in this field through bilateral funding and support to Indigenous Governments, provinces, and territories. Addressing the challenges identified in this evaluation will require coordinated work, including funding, across all parties moving forward.

Region: Northwest Territories ^[3]

Tags: child care funding ^[4]

Source URL (modified on 5 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/22/01/early-learning-and-child-care-funding-programs-review>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/22/01/early-learning-and-child-care-funding-programs-review> ^[2]

https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/ece_early_learning_and_child_care_funding_programs_review.pdf ^[3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7861> ^[4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-care-funding>