



Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2024/2025

15TH EDITION

MARTHA FRIENDLY • JANE BEACH • GAYATHHIRI ARURAN
ALEXIE COSSETTE • LUYU HU • JADE LILLACE • BARRY FORER



CHILDCARE RESOURCE AND RESEARCH UNIT



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Early childhood education and care in Canada 2024/2025

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The Childcare Resource and Research Unit (CRRU) team lives and works across Turtle Island, on the land now known as Canada. The CRRU is located in downtown Toronto, the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, the Haudenosaunee, the Huron-Wendat, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. This territory is covered by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, a treaty between the Anishinaabeg, the Haudenosaunee, and allied nations that outlines a commitment to peacefully share and care for the land and resources around the Great Lakes.

A universally accessible, publicly funded, and inclusive early learning and child care system across Canada must be shaped in partnership with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives, ensuring it is responsive to the needs, values, and priorities of Indigenous children, families, and communities. As a Canada-wide policy research organization, CRRU is committed to working proactively with Indigenous partners to address systemic barriers and improve access to early childhood education and care services rooted in Indigenous knowledge, cultures, and ways of living.

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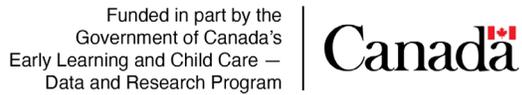
Since its beginnings in the late 1980s, this report has been developed through a collective effort, grounded in the knowledge and cooperation of a number of individuals and organizations. The Childcare Resource and Research Unit (CRRU) is deeply grateful for the contributions of the provincial and territorial early learning and child care officials who have provided the core data and information for this and previous editions of *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada*. This publication would not have been possible without the expertise and collaboration of these officials, who kindly and voluntarily put up with our numerous requests for data, information, and clarification.

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The look and conception of this edition of *ECEC in Canada* originates with Sonya V. Thursby's graphic design; Dana Lea Thompson did a superb job of updating and laying out this version. The content of the report was greatly improved by Eileen Hoftzyer's valuable copy editing services. Billie Carroll, CRRU's long-time webmaster and advisor, provided valuable expert advice on design features such as accessibility and developed the online interface. Jocelyne Tougas continues to be our skillful go-to translator.

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The ideas, views and opinions in this publication belong to the authors. They may not reflect those of the Government of Canada.

■ ABOUT THE CHILDCARE RESOURCE AND RESEARCH UNIT

The Childcare Resource and Research Unit (CRRU) is an independent, non-partisan policy research institute that conducts, curates, and disseminates research on early childhood education and care and related social and family policy issues. CRRU's mandate is to work toward a universal, high-quality, publicly funded, and inclusive early childhood education and care system. The CRRU team uses the best available evidence about policy and practice, drawn from multidisciplinary research and policy analysis, to inform public policy, advocacy, and early learning and child care system building across Canada. We collaborate with researchers, non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups, the early childhood education community, and policy-makers across multiple levels of government.

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■ ABOUT THIS REPORT

Between 1992 and 2025, the Childcare Resource and Research Unit (CRRU) has developed [fifteen editions](#) of *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada* and several smaller *ECEC in Canada* reports. These reports have served as Canada's sole source of consistent, reliably collected, cross-jurisdictional, and longitudinal data and policy information about regulated child care, kindergarten, and parental leave. The publications provide relevant demographic information, profiles of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services and policies in each province and territory, and information on kindergarten and child care, including spaces by age, type, and auspice, as well as enrolment, funding, eligibility, regulations, the workforce, governance, parental leave, and more. A series of summary tables synthesizes key information and data topics across Canada and over time, covering 2019 to the present. For longitudinal tables going back to 1992, see [ECEC in Canada 2021](#). Further details about *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada* can be found in the [Backgrounder](#).

This report is one of three *ECEC in Canada* reports covering 2022 to 2025. A shorter version that primarily features numerical data along with some descriptive policy and program information for 2022 to 2023 ([ECEC in Canada 2023](#)) was followed by a short report focused on 2024 numerical data ([Interim Space Statistics 2024](#)). The current report, *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2024/2025*, returns to the traditional “full report” format. In addition to data on child care spaces, enrolment, auspices, funding,

and kindergarten enrolment and provision, it covers policy and programs in detail, documenting changes from 2022 to 2025 that have occurred since CRRU's last [full report on 2021 data](#).

As this has been a period of unique change in Canadian child care, we have attempted to document as closely as possible the successive changes in key areas such as parent fees, the child care workforce, and funding, capturing the iterations of policy shifts and developments on key topics as much as possible. Generally, the descriptive information in this report covers 2022 to 2025, while the numerical information captures a point-in-time snapshot. Unless otherwise noted, the 2024 and 2025 numerical data reflect March 31 of that year.

We have made a number of changes to this report from previous editions, including:

- Adding a glossary of key terms to promote consistency in the development of information by provinces/territories;
- Reorganizing the format somewhat, moving data on spaces, enrolment, and funding to the end of each provincial/territorial section;
- Including more enrolment data that shows children's participation in licensed child care, as 11 of the 13 provinces and territories now provide this data for most types of child care;
- Leaving out a table of "coverage" (the percent of children for whom a licensed child care space is available) for 0 – 5 year olds, based on our concern that data gaps could lead to considerable under-reporting of coverage for 0 – 5 year olds, the target age group for the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care plan (CWELCC), in some provinces and territories;
- Adding new data specific to the introduction of CWELCC for each province and territory, such as the child care program types eligible for funding and the regulation of additional fees charged for some aspects of child care provision;
- Omitting a "State of early learning and care in Canada" section, due to rapid and ongoing policy changes (an up-to-date overview will be included in a separate summary report);
- Omitting a section on how early learning and child care is organized in Canada, which will be published in a separate report.

■ DATA SOURCES

Data sources for provincial/territorial data and information

Provincial and territorial officials provided and/or verified most of the provincial and territorial data in this report. Additional data and information included in provincial and territorial sections were provided by officials in the Early Learning and Child Care Secretariat, the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Secretariat, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and Indigenous Services Canada.

To improve the reliability of data across jurisdictions, this report uses the CRRU definition for each unit of measurement (centres, spaces, enrolments, etc.) for all provinces and territories. As a result, the data in this report may differ slightly from other sources, including information released by the provinces and territories, as each jurisdiction has its own methods for measuring and reporting on child care data.

Data sources for provincial and territorial demographic data tables

These data tables, prepared by Barry Forer, use:

- Special tabulation conducted by Statistics Canada, based on the Labour Force Survey, 2024 annual average;
- Statistics Canada, 2021 Census, Tables 98-10-0075-01, 98-10-0135-01, 98-10-0264-01, and 98-10-0169-01; and
- Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (2024 annual), Table 14-10-0396-01.

Data sources for the Parental Leave section

The Canadian chapter in *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2025* (McKay, L., Mathieu, S., Lero, D. S., Tremblay, D.-G., Doucet, A., Rague, S., and Thompson, K. [2025] in Dobrotić, I., Blum, S., Kaufmann, G., Koslowski, A., Moss, P., and Valentova, M. [eds]) contributed to the information in this section.

■ GLOSSARY

Auspice/ownership

Auspice refers to the ownership and operating model of child care centres or family child care agencies. Across Canada, operators (also referred to as “licence holders”) can be categorized by their legal status, which may be non-profit, for-profit, or publicly owned (by a government entity or education authority). Each of these categories includes multiple subtypes of ownership.

Before- and after-school child care (BASC)

Before- and after-school child care in centres may include children 4 – 12 years who are in kindergarten or school for part or most of the day. For the purposes of this report, BASC also includes licensed centre-based child care programs providing full- or part-day care for school-age children during summer and school holidays. BASC is licensed in most provinces/territories and must comply with child care regulations; however, there are some significant exceptions in which the programs are lightly regulated or “approved” but not licensed, although they may be publicly funded. Other BASC-type programs operate entirely outside child care regulation or funding.

Child care centre

A child care centre is a facility providing early childhood education and care for children in a group setting. Centre-based child care is distinct from home-based child care (here called family child care). Child care centres in Canada, regulated and licensed by provincial/territorial governments, are staffed by multiple people. Most child care centres for 0 – 5 year olds in Canada are now publicly funded and have some parent fees in place. In some jurisdictions, multiple licences may be held at one facility by one or more operators.

For the purposes of this report, if multiple licences are held at a single address, each unique licence holder operating at that address is counted as one centre. For example, if one organization holds two licences located at the same address, it is considered to be one centre. If two separate organizations each hold licences located at the same address, they are considered to be two centres.

Enrolment

In child care, enrolment refers to the actual number of children being cared for at a regulated centre or family child care home.

Fee subsidy

Fee subsidies in licensed, regulated, or approved child care are associated with an individual child and family. The purpose is to replace all or some of the fee for eligible lower-income families. Parents must meet eligibility criteria to qualify. The criteria usually include maximum family income set by the province/territory and/or social eligibility criteria. In Canada, fee subsidy funds are sent to service providers, not parents.

For-profit child care

For-profit child care is a legal entity owned by an individual, a registered partnership, or a corporation. Any surplus funds exceeding the cost of operation are considered profits and may be distributed to the owner(s) or shareholders. For-profit child care operations include single owner-operator sites and small or large chains, including those owned by investors such as private equity firms. Also known as “commercial” child care, these operations are “private,” with decision-making authority and full responsibility resting solely with the individual owner or corporation.

Full-day centre

A full-day child care centre provides early childhood education and care for children from infancy to school-entry age. These centres typically serve children until they start kindergarten, prekindergarten, or Grade 1. Some full-day centres offer care to multiple age groups, while others care for specific age groups. Full-day centres generally operate year-round, with hours from approximately 8:00 am to 6:00 pm, although some provide care outside these times.

Indigenous governing body

An Indigenous governing body is an official entity legally authorized to represent an Indigenous group with rights recognized under Canada’s Constitution Act (1982). An Indigenous governing body acts as a government authority on behalf of an Indigenous group, community, or nation.

Kindergarten

Canadian kindergarten (“Grade Primary” in Nova Scotia and “*maternelle 5 ans*” in Quebec) is an early childhood education and care program usually delivered as part of the school system for all five-year-olds as an entitlement or quasi-entitlement. Depending on the province/territory, attendance in kindergarten may or may not be mandatory for children in the year before Grade 1. In most provinces and territories, kindergarten is full school-day, but it remains predominantly a part-day program in four jurisdictions in 2025. For the purposes of this report, “kindergarten” also includes kindergarten for four-year-olds (also called “prekindergarten,” “pre-primary,” or “*maternelle 4 ans*”), unless otherwise specified.

Licensed capacity

Licensed capacity refers to the legally permitted maximum number of children a child care centre or family child care home may care for at any one time. Defined by the terms of the licence, capacity is determined by factors such as the ages of the children, available physical space, and staff:child ratios.

Licensed/regulated/approved/recognized child care

Licensing is a form of regulation that provides a permit to operate. It applies to the vast majority of centre-based child care and some family child care in Canada. Some forms of organized centre-based child care are not licensed but have specified requirements for operation that may be in legislation, regulations, or guidelines (in some jurisdictions, these are said to be “regulated” or “authorized”). The terms “approved” and “recognized” are applied to family child care in some provinces/territories where the individual family child care home may not be licensed.

Municipality/municipal entity

Canadian municipalities are local-level governments for a defined geographic area. Provinces/territories may delegate the authority to these entities to manage services (such as fire or local roads) for the community or to carry out other functions. Municipal governments are led by elected officials and may encompass large cities, small villages, hamlets, and regional or amalgamated municipalities.

Non-profit child care

Non-profit child care may be delivered by any of three kinds of organizations – non-profit, co-operative, and charitable – all of which are legal entities with specific regulatory requirements. Non-profit child care operations may consist of a single program, multiple locations, or be part of a larger multiservice non-profit entity. They are distinct from for-profit operations in that any surplus funds must be used for the benefit of the service (i.e., they may not be distributed to the board of directors). In contrast to publicly operated child care, these operations are “private” in that their decision-making and governance rest with a board of directors composed of private individuals.

One-time funding

One-time funding is paid occasionally or just once to a child care service and is not part of the regular operating budget. It may include major capital, minor capital, start-up, and equipment or repair funding if it is one-time and not recurring.

Operational funding

Operational funding includes regularly paid public funding that contributes to the ongoing operation of the child care service. It may include operating grants, formula-based funding, family child care agency operating funds, wage grants or enhancement, disability funding, and other grants or funding paid on a recurring basis.

Other ELCC funding

“Other” early learning and child care (ELCC) funding may include contributions to an early childhood association, research, evaluation, professional development, training, tuition reimbursement and bursaries, funds for unregulated child care, and programs relevant to ELCC that do not fall into another category.

Parental leave

Any leave from work associated with the birth or adoption of a child (including maternity leave) is termed parental leave. Parental leave provision refers to the terms of an individual’s entitlement to job-protected leave from work, such as duration, timing in relation to the birth or adoption, and eligibility for job-protected leave.

Parental leave benefits

A parental leave benefit refers to government-funded financial support for individuals on parental leave to provide paid parental leave.

Part-day centre

A part-day child care centre is often called a nursery school or preschool. It provides early childhood education and care for several hours a day (usually 2.5 – 4 hours), and children may attend every day or two to three days a week. The children are usually toddler- or preschool-age (approximately 2 – 4 or 5 years old.) Part-day centre-based programs are licensed in most provinces/territories.

Prekindergarten

Prekindergarten (also known as junior kindergarten, four-year-old kindergarten, pre-primary, or *maternelle 4 ans*) is an early childhood education and care program usually delivered as part of the school system for four-year-olds. Depending on the province/territory, it may be provided for all children, a selected demographic group or region, include three-year-olds, or not be provided at all. Prekindergarten is not mandatory anywhere in Canada.

Public child care

Public child care refers to services owned and operated by a government entity such as a municipality, school board, or Indigenous governing body, rather than by a private non-profit or private for-profit entity. The public entity holds the licence for the child care service and is legally responsible for overseeing the operation of the child care program.

Regulated family child care

Regulated family child care (sometimes termed home child care or day home) is a child care service usually provided in a caregiver's private home. Regulated by provincial/territorial governments, each jurisdiction follows one of two models: a) an individual licensing model, wherein providers are licensed and inspected by the province/territory, or b) an agency model, wherein providers are approved, monitored, and supported by an agency, which is the responsible body. Regulated family child care may provide care for children from infancy through school-age. Most regulated family child care in Canada is now publicly funded, with some parent fees.

Set fee

Set parent fees are amounts that are fixed by provinces/territories, as opposed to fees that may be determined by the market or by child care operators. Fees may be set for all types of care or by age group.

School board/school authority

School boards, also known as school authorities or boards of education, are usually elected bodies to which provinces/territories have delegated specific responsibilities for education, such as governing and operating publicly funded schools. While traditionally local, some school authorities may now be responsible for larger jurisdictions, potentially spanning an entire province. Some school boards may also be responsible for education for specific demographic groups, such as a French or Catholic school board. School boards are public entities.



Unregulated child care

Care and supervision of children not under public regulation is legal Canada-wide if the provider meets specified minimum provisions outlined in legislation or regulations, namely the number of children cared for. Much, but not all, of the provision of unregulated child care is in providers' private homes. Care in a child's home (a nanny) or care by a relative is, strictly speaking, also unregulated child care. Unregulated child care may be indirectly funded through tax credits and deductions to parents but is not usually directly publicly funded.

Wage grid

A wage grid or wage scale is defined as a stepped scale outlining progressive salary levels based on factors including position, credentials, and experience/length of employment.