
■ EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN CANADA: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

GOVERNMENT ROLES IN EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

Canada is a federation¹ in which 13 provinces and territories have the main responsibility for early learning and child care (ELCC). The division of powers between federal and provincial governments was established in the *Constitution Act of 1867* which identified some federal powers (for example, public debt, the criminal code, regulation of trade and commerce, taxation, defence) and some provincial powers (hospitals, justice, marriage, corporate affairs). Social programs such as child care not identified in 1867 are considered to be provincial matters. Education—especially education below post-secondary—is an entirely provincial responsibility in Canada with no federal funding and no national department of education². Canada’s main national social programs were primarily developed in the post-World War II period with the federal government often playing a lead or collaborative role.

Despite the barriers presented by Canadian federalism to the kind of social safety net developed more easily in unitary states, national social programs have been developed in a number of key areas under provincial jurisdiction in Canada. Most notable is Canada’s national health care program shaped by the overarching *Canada Health Act’s* (1987) five principles but designed and delivered by provinces/territories as thirteen relatively similar but separate health programs. Additionally, for 30 years (1966 to 1996), the Canada Assistance Plan set broad conditions and requirements for provincially designed and delivered social welfare programs that included cost-shared funds for child care and transferred money to provinces/territories to support them.

Distinctions between federal and provincial roles in social programs primarily under provincial/territorial jurisdiction in Canada such as health care, social welfare and early learning and child care have been described as:

Under the constitution, the federal government cannot set standards that amount to regulating a social service under provincial jurisdiction. It can, however, attach conditions to money transferred to the provinces for social welfare services...these conditions relate to the Canada wide social citizenship responsibilities of the federal government (Cameron, 2009: 130).

Additionally, a number of major social programs based on income transfers to individual Canadians such as unemployment insurance, pensions and the Canada Child Benefit that are largely defined and delivered by the federal government.

Despite the understanding that child care primarily falls under provincial jurisdiction, over the last 35 years federal governments under various political parties have attempted to advance child care (1984, 1987, 1993, 2003, 2005) as have federal parties in opposition. Although several of these initiatives were explicitly termed “national child care program”, a comprehensive national strategy or policy has not become a reality as political conditions such as changes in government have intervened again and again.

1 A federation is a system of government in which power and responsibility are shared between a national government and a number of sub-national state or regional governments.

2 Many other countries that are, as Canada is, federations in which education is a sub-national level responsibility (the United States, Australia, Austria and Germany) do have national education departments.

TWO DECADES OF FEDERAL CHILD CARE INITIATIVES 1984–2005

Year	Initiative	How the initiative concluded
1984	Task Force on Child Care (appointed ministerial task force under Minister Responsible for the Status of Women) (“Katie Cook Task Force”)	Liberal-commissioned report put forward a detailed plan for universal, affordable child care and improved parental leave was released and shelved in 1986 following a change in government.
1987	Parliamentary Special Committee on Child Care (Report - Sharing the Responsibility and Bill C-144)	Progressive Conservative initiative and report Associated legislation (Bill C-144) died on the order paper as a federal election was called. Was not re-introduced.
1993	Red Book (election platform)	Liberal commitments to improve and increase child care provision were not met.
2003	Multilateral Framework Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care (agreed to by all provinces but Quebec)	Liberal initiative, framed by the minister responsible as the “first step toward a national child care program”.
2005	Foundations Program (election platform put into place following the election)	Liberal government signed bilateral agreements with all provinces/territories, flowed first year of funding. Agreements in place were cancelled by incoming Conservative government.

Today each province/territory approaches ELCC in ways that are for the most part fundamentally similar, albeit with some key variations. A statement made by a 1988 Senate committee studying child care still rings true: “Provincial child care programs resemble each other...in what they lack” (Senate of Canada, 1988:1). Although most provincial/territorial governments in Canada today recognize that much more needs to be done to support families’—especially women’s—needs for care while they work or study and children’s healthy development, none of them have developed a full plan for comprehensive, universally accessible, affordable, high quality, inclusive ELCC.

In many countries, local governments play a significant role in child care provision. Canadian municipalities do not have their own powers but are subordinate to the provinces, which may delegate powers to them. Outside Ontario, where they play several important roles in child care, local governments have no mandated role in regulated child care. Nevertheless, some municipalities in Alberta and Saskatchewan have chosen to support or deliver child care services, while over a period of more than 20 years, the City of Vancouver has developed a significant planning and policy-setting role with respect to child care. Most recently, the provincial government in British Columbia has strengthened municipalities’ planning role through partnership and funding initiatives.

Local school boards (or school divisions), which usually have primary responsibility for operation of elementary schools including kindergarten are—like municipalities— subordinate to provincial governments. In several provinces such as Quebec and Ontario, school authorities are required by the provincial government to provide school-age child care in response to community demand while provincial capital funds to provide facilities for child care in schools have played a major role in expansion in several provinces, especially Ontario. As well, many schools Canada-wide host third party child care programs in a “landlord” role. School boards are also permitted to hold licenses for regulated child care centres in some provinces.

FEDERAL ROLE IN ELCC TODAY

After almost a decade of absence from the early learning and child care arena, the Government of Canada again engaged with provinces and territories following election of a Liberal government in 2015. A first result of this was the June 2017 announcement of a [Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care](#), which emphasizes collaboration between the federal government and

provinces/territories. The Framework states that governments “agree that the further development of early learning and child care systems is one of the best investments that governments can make to strengthen the social and economic fabric of our country” and states five principles for ELCC – accessibility, affordability, high quality, flexibility and inclusivity (Government of Canada, 2017). The federal government also developed a process to develop an Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (IELCC) working with Indigenous governance organizations. The co-developed IELCC was announced in September 2018 (see the section on INDIGENOUS ELCC).

Funding to be transferred to provinces/territories to accompany these commitments through 2028, defined as social infrastructure, falls under the federal Infrastructure Fund. The total funding commitments were outlined in the 2017 federal budget: federal funding to the 13 provinces/territories and Indigenous communities of \$540 million in 2018-2019, rising to \$550 million in 2020-2021. According to this commitment, by 2026-2027, an annual amount of \$870 million would be transferred to provinces/territories/Indigenous organizations by the Government of Canada to fund child care services across Canada as per the Multilateral and Indigenous Frameworks on ELCC.

Federal government funds to child care services come not only from the bilateral agreements that accompany the Multilateral and Indigenous Frameworks on Early Learning and Child Care but through other federal transfers to provinces/territories, the most prominent of which for child care is the Canada Social Transfer, a block fund. This means that funds are not earmarked or reported upon with respect to specific purposes such as child care but are included in a “block” of funds that the province/territory may choose how to allocate among many social purposes including child care. Historically, in the 2000s, some funds for child care through the CST were earmarked as specified items.

The federal government reimburses parents (the lower income earner in a couple) for eligible child care expenses as a tax deduction under The *Income Tax Act*. The funds may be used for regulated or unregulated child care, and the parent needs to be employed. In 2020, the projected cost to the federal government of the Child Care Expense Deduction is \$1,455 billion (see the section on the CHILD CARE EXPENSE DEDUCTION). The federal government also funds child care services for newcomer parents engaged in federal language programs (see the section on CNC programs).

An array of ELCC services for Indigenous children and families are financially supported by the Government of Canada (see section on INDIGENOUS EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE).

The federal government also contributes to paid maternity and parental leave by providing benefits to eligible families under Employment Insurance (EI), while the provinces/territories determine the leave from work provisions. This applies across Canada outside Quebec, which has its own program covering both leave provisions and benefits, the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP). (See the PARENTAL LEAVE AND BENEFITS section in this report).

Canada has, in addition, other child or family-related programs, the most prominent of which is the Canada Child Benefit, an indexed, tax-free monthly payment for families to help with the general cost of raising children under 18 years of age. The Canada Child Benefit is intended to be income support, not an early learning and child care program.

HOW PROVINCES/TERRITORIES ORGANIZE EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

Each of Canada’s 13 jurisdictions – ten provinces and three territories – has several programs for early learning and child care with a variety of objectives such as “giving children the best start in life”, school readiness, early intervention, women’s equality, supporting families, supporting mother’s employment and reducing poverty.

Each province and territory has a program of regulated child care that includes centre based full day child care, regulated or approved family (home) child care, school-aged child care and, usually, nursery school or preschool (which is not regulated in several jurisdictions). Each of the provincial/territorial child care programs includes:

- legislated requirements under a provincial/territorial Act or law;
- regulations for service delivery including monitoring; and
- funding arrangements.

Canadian child care is now under an education ministry in most jurisdictions. Centre based child care services are staffed by college-trained early childhood educators, although none of the provinces/territories require all staff to have ECE training. In several jurisdictions, centre directors are not required to have early childhood training. Post secondary early childhood training is not required in regulated family child care, or home child care. A minority of child care staff are unionized with a sizeable unionized sector only in Quebec. None of the provinces/territories treats child care as an entitlement or a right.

Most Canadian child care services are initiated and maintained by not-for-profit voluntary boards of directors of many varieties including parent groups, multi-service and multi-site operations or by for-profit businesses or entrepreneurs. The not-for-profit child care sector represents about 64% of the total supply, with for-profits (ranging from one-centre operations to corporate type chains that may have more than 50 or even more locations) making up the rest. There are very few publicly delivered services.

All types of child care services in Canada (except operationally funded services in Quebec) are primarily paid for by parent fees. While all provinces/territories provide some operational funding, which sometimes takes the form of wage grants, it is usually too limited to have a substantial impact on parent fees and staff wages. A growing number of provinces combine operational funding with setting province-wide parent fees in some or most of their regulated child care programs. As a result, the [fees](#) in these services are lower than market-based fees, especially in Quebec, which provides substantial operational funding to some services but in Manitoba, and Newfoundland and Labrador as well. In Newfoundland and Labrador, PEI, Quebec and Manitoba, the province sets parent fees in more than half the centres.

As parent fees are the main source of revenue for child care services in most provinces/territories, [affording child care](#) is difficult for low, modest and middle income families. All provinces/territories except Quebec subsidize individual eligible low income families to use regulated child care by covering some or all of the fee on the parent's behalf; the fee subsidy is paid directly to the service provider in all provinces/territories. Parent fee subsidies are administered by provincial/territorial governments except in Ontario where local (municipal or regional) governments are mandated to manage administration of provincial child care funding including fee subsidies. Overall, provincial/territorial fee subsidy programs fail to alleviate financial barriers to child care for many eligible low income families.

Provincial/territorial governments all provide kindergarten programs for all five year olds. This is delivered at no fee to parents, and is almost always provided by public education authorities. Ontario, Nova Scotia, Quebec and the Northwest Territories now provide, or are phasing in, kindergarten for all four year olds. In other jurisdictions, kindergarten for four year olds has been growing, sometimes prioritizing or are phasing in those children considered to be “vulnerable”. Over the past decade, full school day services for four and five year olds have come to predominate in Canadian kindergarten provision, although kindergarten is still part day or part week in several provinces/territories. All jurisdictions treat kindergarten as an entitlement similar to elementary school although participation is not compulsory in most provinces/territories.

Provision, funding and operation of kindergarten is a public responsibility while finding and paying for child care for children younger than age five (or age four in Ontario and a growing number of other provinces) and child care outside school hours for school-aged children is primarily a private family responsibility.

ELCC AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT 2016–2020

Beginning in June 2017, the first three year phase of federal bilateral agreements with provinces/territories identified region specific areas of service gaps to be improved. There remained, however, widespread evidence and recognition that ELCC provision across Canada remained unavailable and unaffordable for many or most families. Services were inequitably distributed, insufficiently available and of uneven quality, while the mostly female child care workforce remained underpaid, underappreciated and inadequately supported.

When the coronavirus pandemic hit Canada in the spring of 2020, child care services were in an vulnerable financial and organizational situation, as a [national survey](#) described. The reliance on parent fees as the primary source of revenue for most child care services across Canada meant that staff could not be paid when most regulated child care was closed to regular use across Canada. Most child care centres laid off some or all of their staff, while for parents—especially mothers—the absence of reliable child care created daily struggles. Across Canada and across sectors, for the first time, the essential and central nature of child care for the economy's full functioning became apparent to a much broader population.

In the September 23, 2020 [Throne Speech](#), the federal government set out its plan for economic recovery. Under the heading Women in the Economy, which recognized that “Women – and in particular low-income women – have been hit hardest by COVID-19. This crisis has been described as a She-cession”, the Throne Speech stated that:

It has been nearly 50 years since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women outlined the necessity of child care services for women’s social and economic equality. We have long understood that Canada cannot succeed if half of the population is held back. Canadians need more accessible, affordable, inclusive, and high quality childcare.

Recognizing the urgency of this challenge, the Government will make a significant, long-term, sustained investment to create a Canada-wide early learning and childcare system.

The Government will build on previous investments, learn from the model that already exists in Quebec, and work with all provinces and territories to ensure that high-quality care is accessible to all. There is broad consensus from all parts of society, including business and labour leaders, that the time is now. (Government of Canada, 2020).

The September Throne Speech was followed in November by an Economic Update update. In it, the federal Finance Minister announced that “the government is committed to making historic investments to make this happen. Budget 2021 will lay out the plan to provide affordable, accessible, inclusive and high quality child care from coast to coast to coast”.

■ PARENTAL LEAVES AND BENEFITS¹

Canada has two parental leave and benefit regimes: one specific to Quebec and the second for the remaining 12 provinces/territories and workers under the Canada Labour Code. Maternity and parental leave benefits and leave provisions for all provinces/territories except Quebec are divided between federal and provincial/territorial governments; benefits are paid by the federal government while provincial /territorial provisions for job-protected leave are established in each jurisdiction's employment standards legislation.

BENEFITS: CANADA OUTSIDE QUEBEC

Maternity and parental leave benefits in Canada outside Quebec are under the Employment Insurance system. Employment Insurance is a contributory program to which employees and employers both contribute. Parental leave benefits have been amended by the federal government twice since 2016.

Under EI, the federal benefit covers 15 weeks of maternity leave for eligible employees who are birth mothers.

Until December 3, 2017, there was one Canada-wide option for parental leave benefits: 35 weeks of payment was available to cover parental leave for either eligible parent including adoptive parents. This was amended by the federal government in December 2017 to offer two options for new parents:

- The Standard parental benefit paid at 55% of wages (35 weeks of parental benefits for a total of 50 weeks total including 15 weeks of maternity benefits for birth mothers);
- The Extended parental benefit paid at 33% of wages (61 weeks of parental leave benefits for a total of 76 weeks including 15 weeks of maternity benefits for birth mothers). The Extended parental benefit is paid at a lower rate (33%) than the Standard benefit (55%), paying the same total benefit over a longer period of time.

Between December 2018 and December 2019, more than 31,910 parents (approximately 16% of total claims) established a claim for the new Extended parental benefit.

On March 17, 2019 an additional leave benefit was added. The Parental Sharing Benefit became available to non-birth (second) parents²; five additional weeks of benefits is now available under the Standard option if both parents share parental benefits (40 weeks total). An additional eight weeks of benefits is available under the Extended option when parents share parental leave under the Extended option (69 weeks total). There are no data available yet on the uptake rates of the Parental Sharing Benefit.

In 2020, maternity and the Standard parental benefits were paid at 55% of wages up to a ceiling of \$573 a week; the Extended parental benefit is paid at 33% of wages up to a ceiling of \$344 a week. Benefits can begin as long as 12 weeks before the actual birth. The maximum ceiling for maternity and parental leave benefits are indexed to increase annually.

Although the federal benefit provisions have changed, new parents cannot take job-protected leave to match until provinces/territories make changes to their leave provisions. Leave provisions under the Canada Labour Code have been amended to be consistent with the federal EI benefit changes. (See the provincial/territorial tables in this section for further details).

¹ Much of the data and information in this section comes from Doucet, Lero, McKay, & Tremblay's Canada chapter in the *16th International Review of leave policies and related research* (2020).

² This is equivalent to the paternity leave available in many countries but has been extended in Canada to same sex parents.

As of August 12, 2018, it became possible to receive EI maternity and parental leave benefits while continuing to work (“working on claim”). A new parent who is entitled to a maximum of 90% of previous earnings in the 52 weeks before going on leave (approximately four and a half days of work per week) will receive \$.50 for every eligible benefits dollar; those working more than 90% will have benefits deducted dollar-for-dollar. A person choosing to work a full-time week will no longer be eligible to receive benefits regardless of earnings, but this will not decrease the total amount of week’s payable on their claim. Working while on claim does not need a separate application; claimants already receiving maternity and/or parental benefits only need to declare their earnings online.

EI SPECIAL BENEFITS FOR SELF-EMPLOYED NEW PARENTS IN CANADA OUTSIDE QUEBEC

Eligibility for Special maternity and parental leave benefits requires:

- operating an independent business or working for a corporation but being unable to access EI benefits due to controlling more than 40% of the corporation’s voting shares;
- being either a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident of Canada.

An applicant for Special EI Benefits must wait 12 months from the date of confirmed registration before applying for EI Special Benefits. To apply for benefits in 2020, a minimum net income of \$7,279 in self-employed earnings in 2019 is required.

LEAVE PROVISIONS: CANADA OUTSIDE QUEBEC

Provisions for maternity and parental leave outside Quebec are the responsibility of provinces/territories. See the tables in this section for details.

Self-employed Canadians can access Employment Insurance Special Benefits by voluntarily registering, with the Canada Employment Insurance Commission. There are six types of EI Special Benefits including maternity and parental benefits.

BENEFITS AND LEAVE: QUEBEC

The Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) is also a contributory insurance program. It includes both benefit provisions and provisions for job-protected leave from work. It includes two options:

- Basic Plan totalling 55 weeks covers 18 weeks of maternity leave at 70% of wages, 32 weeks of parental leave (seven weeks at 70%, 25 weeks at 55%) and five weeks of paternity leave. In 2019/20, the Basic Plan paid a maximum of \$1,056.73/week for maternity leave, dropping to \$830.29 for the parental leave portion.
- Special Plan totalling 43 weeks covers 15 weeks of maternity leave at 75% of wages, 25 weeks of parental leave at 75% of wages and three weeks of paternity leave. The Special Plan benefit is paid a maximum of \$1,132.21 for all leave portions in 2020.

The creation of specific paternity leave has significantly increased the number of fathers claiming or intending to claim leave in Quebec since the introduction of the plan: from 27.8 % in 2005 to 89.6% in 2018/19.

Self-employed new parents in Quebec are eligible for paid parental leave under the QPIP. Self-employed workers are automatically covered in QPIP and are eligible for leave once they have stopped working or seen a reduction of at least 40% of usual income.

In 2018, the Quebec government proposed adding a third, longer option to give parents two years of leave with no additional benefits. However, after the October 2018 election of a new government, this plan was not acted upon.

See the tables in this section for further details about the QPIP.

TABLE I

Characteristics of Canadian and Quebec maternity and parental leave benefits (2020).

Benefit	Canada-wide leave benefits under Employment Insurance (EI)	Benefits under the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP)
<i>Maternity leave benefit</i> Birth mother only	15 wks at 55%	18 wks at 70%—Basic Plan 15 wks at 75%—Special Plan
<i>Parental leave benefit</i> Either parent	35 wks at 55%—Standard Parental Benefit 61 wks at 33%—Extended Parental Benefit	Basic Plan: 32 wks (7 at 70% + 25 at 55%) Special Plan: 25 wks at 75%
<i>Non-birth parent leave benefit</i>	<i>Second Parent leave</i> 5 wks Standard Parental Benefit 8 wks Extended Parental Benefit Non-birth parent	5 wks at 70%—Basic Plan 3 wks at 75%—Special Plan Father only—not transferable
Maternity + parental + paternity leave benefit total	50 wks—Standard Parental Benefit (55 if shared) 76 wks—Extended Parental Benefit (84 if shared)	55 wks—Basic Plan 43 wks—Special Plan
<i>Adoption leave benefit</i>	35 wks—Standard Parental Benefit 61wks—Extended Parental Benefit	37 wks—Basic Plan 28 wks—Special Plan
Max insurable earnings (2020) (indexed)	\$54,200	\$78,500
Payment ceiling/cap (2020) (indexed)	Basic Plan: \$573/week(indexed) Extended Plan: \$344/week (indexed)	<i>Basic Plan</i> Maternity, 7 weeks parental, paternity = \$1056.73/wk + 25 wks of parental = \$830.29/wk (indexed) <i>Special Plan</i> \$1,132.21/week all (indexed)
Eligibility	600 hrs continuous employment in previous year Self-employed eligible if registered one year previously (voluntary to register)	\$2000 earnings/contributions in previous year Self-employed eligible <i>if</i> registered one year previously (compulsory to register)
Low income supplement	Up to 80% of earnings	Up to 80% of earnings
Waiting period	1 week	None

TABLE II**Maternity, parental and adoption leave in weeks. Provinces/territories (2020).**

P/T	Maternity leave (weeks)	Parental leave (weeks)	Adoption leave (weeks) (in addition to parental leave)
NL	17	61	17
PE	17	62	No additional
NS	16	61	No additional
NB	17	62	No additional
QB	18 (Basic Plan) 15 (Special Plan)	32 weeks (Basic Plan) 25 weeks (Special Plan) Paternity leave: 5 weeks additional (Basic), 3 weeks additional (Special)	37 (Basic Plan) 28 (Special Plan)
ON	17	61 (birth mother) 63 (other parent)	No additional
MB	17	63	No additional
SK	19	59 (birth mother) 63 (other parent)	19
AB	16	62	No additional
BC	17	61 (birth mother) 62 (other parent)	No additional
NT	17	61	Two parent families, including adoptive parents, can access an additional eight weeks of unpaid leave for the second parent.
NU	17	37	37
YT	17	63	No additional

TABLE III

Name, duration and timing of maternity leave. Provinces/territories (2020).

P/T	Name	Length	Timing
NL	Pregnancy leave	17 weeks	Leave cannot start earlier than 17 weeks before the expected birth date.
PE	Maternity leave	17 weeks	Leave can start up to 13 weeks before expected date of delivery and include 6 weeks after the delivery date.
NS	Pregnancy leave	16 weeks	Leave can start up to 13 weeks before expected date of delivery and include 6 weeks after the delivery date.
NB	Maternity leave	17 weeks	Beginning no earlier than 13 weeks before probable delivery date.
QC	Special maternity	15 weeks	Maternity leave may be spread before or after the delivery date. It may not begin before the 16th week before expected delivery date and shall end not later than 18 weeks afterwards. If the leave begins at the time of delivery, the week of delivery is not included in the calculation.
	Basic maternity	18 weeks	
ON	Pregnancy leave	17 weeks	Starting up to 17 weeks before the due date.
MB	Maternity leave	17 weeks	Starting up to 17 weeks before expected due date.
SK	Maternity leave	19 weeks	Starting any time in the 12 weeks prior to estimated due date; 14 weeks if no written notice or failure to provide a medical certificate to begin any time in the 8 weeks prior to estimated date of birth.
AB	Maternity leave	16 weeks	Starting any time in the 13 weeks before the expected due date. Maternity leave must include a minimum of 6 weeks after birth unless agreed to and per a medical certificate.
BC	Maternity leave	17 weeks	Starting no earlier than 13 weeks before expected birth date and ending no earlier than 6 weeks after the birth date unless the employee requests a shorter period.
NT	Pregnancy leave	17 weeks	Commencing at any time during the 17 weeks immediately preceding estimated date of delivery.
NU	Pregnancy leave	17 weeks	Commencing any time during the 17 week period immediately preceding the estimated date of delivery.
YK	Maternity leave	17 weeks	An employer can require that the employee take maternity leave within the 6 weeks prior to her estimated due date (sooner if they cannot reasonably perform their duties due to the pregnancy). An employer may not require an employee to return earlier than 6 weeks after the birth or termination of a pregnancy.

TABLE IV Duration and timing of parental /adoption leave. Provinces/territories (2020).

P/T	Duration	Timing
NL	Standard leave—35 weeks Extended leave—61 weeks Up to 17 weeks of adoption leave is available in addition to the period of parental leave.	Parental leave must begin within 61 weeks of the birth or when the child comes into the care and custody of the parent for the first time.
PE	35 weeks 62 weeks with extended EI parental benefits Parental leave may be taken by one or both parents and combined with maternity leave.	Total leave maternity and parental leave cannot exceed 78 weeks Adoption leave is a maximum of 62 weeks and can be taken by one parent or shared. Adoption leave must be taken within 12 months of the child’s arrival in the home.
NS	61 weeks	Parental leave must be completed within 77 weeks after the birth or child arrives in the home. For employees taking parental leave but not pregnancy leave, the employee can take a total of up to 77 weeks’ leave in the time after the child is born or arrives in the home.
NB	62 weeks The maximum combined duration of maternity and child care leave is 78 weeks.	Can begin no sooner than the day a newborn or adopted child comes into the care of the employee.
QC	<i>Parental leave</i> Basic Plan: 32 weeks Special Plan: 25 weeks	Twenty-five of the weeks can be shared by the parents. Cannot begin before the week of the birth of the newborn or in an adoption, before the week when the child is entrusted to the employee. It may end no later than 70 weeks after the birth or 70 weeks after an adoptive child was entrusted to the employee.
	<i>Adoption leave</i> Basic Plan: 37 weeks total Special Plan: 28 weeks total	Both parental leave and adoption leave may be taken by one parent or shared as they see fit and may be taken simultaneously or in succession.
	<i>Paternity leave</i> Basic Plan: 5 weeks Special Plan: 3 weeks	Exclusively for fathers Paternity leave may begin no earlier than the week of the birth of the child and end no later than 52 weeks later.
ON	61 weeks 63 weeks for new parents other than birth mothers taking pregnancy leave (who may take 61 weeks).	Parental leave must begin no later than 78 weeks after the birth date or date an adopted child first comes into care Both new parents have the right to take parental leave following a birth or adoption
MB	63 weeks following birth or adoption.	To be taken in one continuous period, Parental leave can begin up to 1 year after the birth or adoption. The length of leave can be shortened if less than four weeks’ notice is given.

TABLE IV *continued*. Duration and timing of parental /adoption leave. Provinces/territories (2020)

SK	59 weeks parental leave for the birth parent or primary caregiver in an adoption. 63 weeks parental leave for the parent who did not take maternity or adoption leave. 19 weeks adoption leave additional.	Parental leave may be taken consecutively after maternity or adoption leave. Non-birth or non-adoptive parent’s leave can begin within 13 weeks preceding the estimated date of birth/ adoption and must end within 78 weeks after the actual date of birth or adoption.
AB	62 weeks	For mothers on maternity leave, not more than 62 weeks following the last day of maternity leave. Parental leave for other parents, including adopting parents: max of 62 weeks within 78 weeks of the birth or placement.
BC	61 weeks for birth mothers who take pregnancy leave; 62 weeks for a parent who does not take pregnancy leave, including adopting parents.	Parental leave can begin anytime within 78 weeks after the birth or placement of the child
NT	61 weeks	Must begin the day a child is born or arrives in the home for adoption. Two parent families, including adoptive parents, can access an additional 8 weeks of unpaid leave for the second parent.
NU	37 weeks for natural or adopting parents	Commencing on the day of birth or the day a child arrives at the employee’s home, and ending one year after that date.
YK	63 weeks for birth or adoption.	Leave must be completed no later than 78 weeks after the birth or child comes into care. If a second parent is sharing either the standard or extended parental leave they may take an additional five or eight weeks, depending on the type of parental leave selected.

FEDERAL EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE PROGRAMS¹

CHILD CARE EXPENSE DEDUCTION (CCED)

Department

Canadian Revenue Agency

Description

The Child Care Expense Deduction (CCED) “provides some relief for taxpayers who incur child care expenses in order to work, carry on a business or undertake certain educational activities”. In two parent families (married or common-law) the taxpayer with the lower income may make the claim for child care expenses incurred in the tax year.

Annual child care expense amount allowed for an eligible child:

- \$11,000 for a child with a disability eligible for the Disability Tax Credit;
- \$8,000 for a child under seven years at the end of the year;
- \$5,000 for a child aged seven to 16 years.

Other information

An eligible child of a taxpayer for a tax year is defined as:

- a child of the taxpayer or of the taxpayer’s spouse or common-law partner; or
- a child who is dependent on the taxpayer or on the taxpayer’s spouse or common-law partner for support and whose income for the year does not exceed the basic personal amount for the year;
- under 16 years of age at some time in the year;
- dependent on the taxpayer or on the taxpayer’s spouse or common-law partner and have a mental or physical infirmity.

Exclusions

CCED cannot be deducted against:

- medical expenses;
- clothing, transportation or education costs;
- board and lodging expenses.

Federal spending (Estimates and projections: millions of dollars, 1995–2021)

Year	Estimates (\$)	Projection (\$)
1995	365	
1996	420	
1997	480	
1998		515
1999		520
2000		515
2001		500
2002		495
2003		500
2004		495
2005	570	
2006	740	
2007	750	
2008		770
2009		755
2010		770
2011	900	
2012	960	
2013		980
2014	1,080	
2015	1,345	
2016	1,295	
2017	1,320	
2018		1,365
2019		1,415
2020		1,455
2021		1,500

Source: Report on Federal Tax Expenditures: pg 33
<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/fin/publ>

CARE FOR NEWCOMER CHILDREN (CNC)

Department

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

Description

Launched in 1992, the [Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada](#) (LINC) program supports a variety of settlement services to help permanent resident newcomers integrate into Canada and their communities. Approximately 20,000 newcomer children under five years of age arrive in Canada annually. Through Care for Newcomer Children (CNC), these children may participate in free, on-site child care while their parents are engaged in LINC programs that provide information, language acquisition and other assistance at settlement agencies across the country.

[Care for Newcomer Children](#) (CNC) is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) as a support to these settlement services at locations in every province except Quebec. In 2020, there are more than 250 CNC locations across the country caring for more than 6,000 children while their parents participate in settlement services.

CNC structure and operations vary based on provincial specifications. While some programs are licensed under provincial/territorial child care regulations, the majority are unlicensed and operate under the [Care for Newcomer Children Requirements](#).

Quebec has a separate agreement for services to newcomers. A Canada-Quebec Accord gives Quebec exclusive responsibility for choosing immigrants and refugees, in addition to funding to help with their settlement in the province.

History

Child care programs associated with LINC have been provided since the 1990s, with approximately 200 such programs identified in 2001.

[Childminding Monitoring, Advisory and Support](#) (CMAS) is an organization funded through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). It was founded in 2000 to monitor and support LINC child care services. The process of developing standards for all LINC (then “childminding” programs began with CMAS’ development of standards in Ontario. In 2001, IRCC worked with CMAS to develop a national set of standards. The National LINC Childminding Requirements were released the following year to help organizations providing LINC services across Canada with implementation of programs to look after children.

Since then, CMAS has helped programs move from a “childminding” model into the Care for Newcomer Children model introduced in 2013 and continuing today; thus, the word “childminding” is no longer used. Requirements for what are now called Care for Newcomer Children programs, developed by CMAS and community stakeholder organizations across Canada, were released in 2013. These requirements make it possible for community providers of settlement services to offer safe and healthy programs within a comprehensive and flexible system to meet the needs of parents, and provide effective, efficient standards that manage risks and support newcomer child development.

Types of care offered by Care for Newcomer Children programs

There are three types of child care offered under the Care for Newcomer Children requirements: Long Term, Short Term, and Combined, offered individually or in combination, depending on client needs.

Eligibility requirements

All permanent residents and accepted refugees to Canada have access to free settlement services including CNC programs prior to obtaining citizenship. Non-permanent residents or immigrants who have obtained citizenship cannot access these services.

Significant funding is in place to operate English and French CNC programs in urban and rural areas but there can be wait times to access them. Fewer programs offer infant care, so wait times for these services tend to be longer.

Care for Newcomer Children funding

CNC services are funded as a component of the financial agreements by which IRCC funds LINC programs. Non-governmental organizations submit proposals for funding to deliver a range of services to newcomers and many of these proposals include requests for CNC funding as part of their settlement services. CNC is provided and funded as one of the supports to six LINC primary service streams: Needs Assessment, Information and Orientation, Language Assessments, Language Training, Employment related services, and Community Connections.

Monitoring and supporting Care for Newcomer Children programs by CMAS

CMAS is funded by the federal government to work with CNC programs to build quality through research-backed standards development, assessments, resources, and professional development. CMAS consultants conduct an annual review of all CNC programs to ensure health, safety, and program quality standards are met. The review includes program observations, interviews with staff members, and review of documentation including fire safety plans, enrollment forms, policies and procedures. The CMAS process uses an 80 point checklist to review all aspects of the care. If a site fails to meet a requirement, the CMAS consultant works with program staff to develop an action plan.

CMAS also develops resources and training to help community settlement programs meet the unique needs of newcomer families, including:

- multilingual tip sheets for CNC staff and newcomer parents.
- program guides on caring for refugee children and managing trauma.
- workshops, webinars, tutorials, and courses for the newcomer child care sector. With both in-person and online options, training covers a range of topics, from creating inclusive environments and supporting the use of home languages to managing life-threatening allergies and helping to prevent child abuse.
- professional development conferences for caregivers and administrators, where attendees learn about subjects related to the support of young immigrant and refugee children.

The [CMAS website](#) provides a wide range of resources related to supporting newcomer children and families. These range from CMAS-developed resources to the most current news on the early years and newcomer sectors. CMAS' own resources include articles, interviews and online tutorials, many of which are translated into French; some resources are available in over 40 languages. CMAS consultants are available for onsite support across the country to help programs with any specific issues they encounter. A special needs consultant offers guidance, site visits, and lunch and learn sessions to assist in the support of children who are suspected of having or have an identified special need.

INDIGENOUS EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

CONTEXT

In 2016, there were 1,673,785 people self-identified as Indigenous living in Canada, up almost 30% from the most recent previous mandatory census in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2017a). Accounting for 4.9% of the Canadian population, the Indigenous population includes First Nations, Inuit and Métis people.

Indigenous peoples live in remote and/or northern areas and in urban areas and in the south. Some First Nations people live on reserves but according to data from the 2016 Census, “867, 415 Indigenous people lived in a metropolitan area of at least 30,000 people, accounting for over half (51.8%) of the total Indigenous population” (Statistics Canada, 2017b). Thus, early learning and child care for Indigenous children and families in all sorts of communities – Indigenous lands and communities, rural, remote and northern, towns, suburbs and large cities – is of interest from an Indigenous perspective.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

In 1996, [the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#) had recommended that federal, provincial, and territorial governments cooperate to support an integrated early childhood funding strategy that a) extends early childhood education to all Indigenous children regardless of residence; b) encourages programs that foster the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual development of children, reducing distinctions between child care, prevention and education; c) maximizes Indigenous control over service design and administration; d) offers one stop accessible funding; and e) promotes parental involvement and choice in early childhood education options (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Vol 5: 208).

The [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) (TRC) was initiated in 2008 and gathered information and consulted until it reported in 2015. Its creation was part of a settlement of the “largest class action in Canadian history” between the federal government and four national churches and Indigenous Canadians who— as children— had been removed from their families to live at residential schools. Citing the Canadian history of forced separation of children from their families to send them residential schools, appropriation of Indigenous lands and cultural assimilation, the TRC called [for action](#) in 94 areas including “federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments developing culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, Calls to action).

Following release of the TRC report, the October 2015 federal election led to a change of government. The Liberal government has made a commitment to work towards redressing the historical wrongs to Indigenous peoples.

CULTURAL INTEGRITY

A huge concern for Indigenous people is maintenance of their culture and cultural identity. Thus, culturally sensitive early childhood education, which for some Indigenous groups means “distinctions based” education (that is, early childhood education designed to reflect the unique needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis, including their history, cultures, languages and traditions, and the implications of this for staff training and service delivery) is of special concern. [Indigenous early childhood experts](#) also point out that general standards for child care centres are sometimes too rigid or otherwise inappropriate for northern and/or remote communities as well as not reflecting traditional Indigenous cultural norms and practices.

There is a strong emphasis among Indigenous groups in developing ELCC programs operated and controlled by Indigenous communities themselves.

The health and well-being of Indigenous peoples is rooted in a unique relationship between the people, the land, and the cultures and languages that connect us to the land. For Indigenous children in particular, their understanding of who they are and their connections with Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world is integrally interconnected with their early life experiences. Developing an understanding of one's self, individually and as part of a collective, is a learning process that begins at birth (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2016).

FEDERAL INDIGENOUS ELCC PROGRAMS

At one time, federal funding for Indigenous child care was limited to First Nations in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, in Ontario and Alberta, where the then-Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) covered costs in accordance with provincial funding policies. Until 1995, when the time the first Aboriginal Head Start program was announced, there was relatively little earmarked federal (or any) spending for Indigenous ELCC in much of Canada (See Beach, Friendly, Ferns, Prabhu, and Forer, 2009).

Historically, on reserve social programs have been the responsibility of the Government of Canada while social programs for Indigenous people living off reserve have been either a federal or a provincial responsibility. Although some provincial governments regulate some Indigenous child care including on reserve services, others do not; in some provinces, First Nations communities do not recognize provincial jurisdiction on reserves. Generally, Indigenous organizations, sometimes at the regional level and sometimes at the community level ([Friendship Centres](#), for example) have had responsibility for the administration of funds and development of services.

A number of federally funded programs have been launched since the mid 1990s that provide ELCC for on reserve First Nations, Métis and Inuit people and urban and northern Indigenous people.

THE INDIGENOUS EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVE AND THE INDIGENOUS EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE (IELCC) FRAMEWORK

The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Transformation Initiative supported the implementation of the co-developed [Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework \(2018\)](#) (IELCC). This framework reflects the unique cultures and priorities of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children across Canada. The Transformation Initiative enables greater Indigenous control in IELCC through a new partnership model to facilitate Indigenous led decision making to advance national and regional priorities. Indigenous children and families will have greater access to ELCC programs and services that are holistic, accessible, inclusive, and flexible, culturally appropriate and improve children's outcomes.

Employment and Social Development Canada is the federal focal point guiding this horizontal initiative, with Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) as co-signatories to the horizontal terms and conditions of the IELCC Transformation Initiative.

At the time the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework was released in June 2017, the federal government announced co-development of a separate Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework to begin with extensive cross-Canada engagement with Indigenous peoples across the country.

Recognizing the distinct needs and goals of Indigenous peoples, in September 2018, the Government of Canada, Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) and the Métis National Council (MNC) released a co-developed [Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#) (IELCC). It was to complement the 2017 Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework (MLF) between the Government of Canada and provinces/territories.

The IELCC Framework states that:

It envisions First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and families as happy and safe, imbued with a strong cultural identity... children and families supported by a comprehensive and coordinated system of ELCC policies, programs and services led by Indigenous peoples, rooted in Indigenous knowledges, cultures and languages, and supported by strong partnerships of holistic, accessible and flexible programming that is inclusive of the needs and aspirations of Indigenous children and families ([Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#)).

The Framework outlines nine principles, each of which flows from engagement with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation communities and leadership:

1. Indigenous knowledges, languages and cultures;
2. First Nations, Inuit and Métis self-determination;
3. High quality programs and services;
4. Child and family-centred;
5. Inclusiveness;
6. Flexibility and adaptability;
7. Accessibility;
8. Transparency and accountability;
9. Respect, collaboration and partnership

The Indigenous ELCC Framework acknowledges that First Nations, Inuit and the Métis are distinct peoples with rights to self-determination, including the right to control the design, delivery and administration of an Indigenous ELCC system. To enable greater self-determination and control of Indigenous ELCC priorities, a partnership model has been adopted to implement the Indigenous ELCC Framework in which the Government of Canada, First Nations, Inuit and Métis are working together to establish ELCC priorities, policies and funding allocations. The Indigenous ELCC Secretariat at Employment and Social Development Canada acts as a focal point within the federal government to implement the IELCC Framework.

BUDGET 2017 AND BUDGET 2018 FUNDING ASSOCIATED WITH THE INDIGENOUS ELCC FRAMEWORK

New funding of \$1.7 billion over 10 years, starting in 2018-19, is being invested to support Indigenous led early learning and child care priorities and to advance the vision of the IELCC Framework. These funds, profiled over 10 years, will be guided by the principles of the IELCC Framework and include:

- Distinction-based funding envelopes:
 - Up to \$1.02 billion will support ELCC for First Nations and will be managed in partnership with First Nations;
 - Up to \$111 million will support ELCC for Inuit and will be managed in partnership with Inuit; and,
 - Up to \$450.7 million will support ELCC for the Métis Nation and will be managed in partnership with the Métis Nation.
- These distinctions-based funds are in addition to federal funding for the three existing federal Indigenous ELCC programs described in the following section, with approximate annual investments of \$132.6 million (2018).

In addition to distinctions-based funding, \$34 million per year over 10 years has been invested to enhance the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) program. Indigenous ELCC Quality Improvement Project funding of \$44 million per year over 10 years has also been invested to fund application-based, Indigenous-led projects to advance foundational elements of Indigenous ELCC, (e.g., cultural and languages resources; professional capacity, centres of excellence or networks; data, research reporting or evaluation activities; or, links to provincial/territorial service delivery).

Since 2018-2019, new national and regional partnership tables have started to emerge to facilitate Indigenous led decision-making to advance national and regional ELCC priorities. Alongside national tables, regional partnership tables are currently being established to support planning and priority setting and promote inter-sectoral coordination to strengthen collaboration among players in the ELCC sphere.

CANADA WIDE FEDERAL INDIGENOUS ELCC PROGRAMS

Canada wide federal ELCC programs are under the new umbrella horizontal Terms and Conditions of the Indigenous ELCC Transformation Initiative. This Initiative enables horizontal coordination of federal investments in Indigenous early learning and child care through flexible, Indigenous led approaches.

Three federal departments and agencies are the federal partners that may use these terms and conditions to participate in the Indigenous ELCC Initiative:

- Employment and Social Development Canada;
- Indigenous Services Canada;
- Public Health Agency of Canada.

ABORIGINAL HEAD START IN URBAN AND NORTHERN COMMUNITIES ([AHSUNC](#))

Public Health Agency of Canada

In 1995, the Government of Canada established the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities program to fulfill an election commitment to establish early intervention programs for Indigenous children.

Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) is a national early intervention initiative to support healthy development of Indigenous children not living on reserve. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) provides funding to local Indigenous organizations to develop and deliver culturally appropriate programming. AHSUNC sites typically offer part time programming for multiple cohorts of children to expand reach. The program is centered on six components: education, health promotion, culture and language, nutrition, social support, and parental/family involvement.

Currently, AHSUNC has 134 sites that reach approximately 4,600 children annually through a majority of part-day preschool programs. An [evaluation of AHSUNC](#) was published online in 2017.

ABORIGINAL HEAD START ON RESERVE (AHSOR)

Indigenous Services Canada

Indigenous Services Canada [Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve](#) was initiated in 1998, building on Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities. AHSOR funds activities that support learning and developmental needs of young children living in First Nations communities.

Like AHSUNC, AHSOR is centred on six components: education, health promotion, culture and language, nutrition, social support, and parental/family involvement. Currently, there are 363 programs (excluding BC) that include outreach and centres. AHSOR programs are located in 356 First Nations communities.

FIRST NATIONS AND INUIT CHILD CARE INITIATIVE (FNICCI)

The First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI) was first established in 1995 through Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) to provide First Nations children living on-reserve and in Inuit communities with similar access to affordable, quality child care as non-Indigenous children. According to a federal government report:

[FNICCI] had a goal of creating 6,000 child care spaces in First Nations reserves and in the Territories based on a government commitment from 1993. Additionally, FNICCI was intended to provide culturally-appropriate, affordable, quality child care services comparable to what is available to other Canadian children. In 1999, FNICCI was bundled into the Aboriginal human resource development agreements with First Nations and with service providers in the Territories to take advantage of the agreement holders' delivery networks (Government of Canada: 2018).

Originally funded through one of then-HRSDC's labour market development programs, FNICCI was developed at least in part to support parental employment. Since 2011, FNICCI has been funded under the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program (ISET) under the mandate of Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). It is described as "providing access to quality child care services for First Nations and Inuit children whose parents are starting a new job or participating in a training program". Currently, there are 463 FNICCI child care centres across Canada.

A report of a research project by Inuit Tapirit Katami, [Assessing the Impact of the First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative across Inuit Nunanga](#) was published in 2014.

FEDERALLY FUNDED INDIGENOUS PROGRAMS FOR INDIVIDUAL PROVINCES

FIRST NATIONS ON RESERVE CHILD CARE – ONTARIO

Regulated child care centres and family child care in Ontario First Nations communities (reserves) have had federal funding for many years under the 1965 Indian Welfare Agreement. These are delivered by First Nations under agreements with the Ontario government (Ministry of Education) and are regulated under Ontario's provincial child care legislation and regulations.

In 2019, the Ontario government reported funding 99 First Nations and three transfer payment agencies to support 75 licensed on reserve child care centres. (See the ONTARIO section of this report for further details).

CHILD DAY CARE PROGRAM – ALBERTA

Child care centres on reserve are not normally licensed in Alberta. However, under an agreement between Alberta and the federal government, on reserve child care centres are eligible for federal government funding equivalent to parent fee subsidies when programs demonstrate to the federal government that they achieve provincial licensing standards. (See the ALBERTA section of this report for further details).

HEAD START – NEW BRUNSWICK

New Brunswick has 15 Head Start programs that receive funding through an agreement between the First Nations of New Brunswick and Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development Services Canada. None of the 15 Head Start programs currently operating in New Brunswick under this agreement is licensed by the province. (See the NEW BRUNSWICK section of this report for further details).

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