
■ EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE IN THE LATE 2000s

HOW EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE IS ORGANIZED IN CANADA

Each of Canada’s 14 jurisdictions—10 provinces, three territories, and the federal government—has several different programs for child care and early childhood education, each with a variety of objectives such as “giving children the best start in life,” school readiness, early intervention, women’s equality, supporting mother’s labour force participation, and poverty reduction.

Each province and territory provides regulated child care that includes centre-based full day child care, regulated home (family) child care, school-aged child care, and usually, nursery school or preschool². Each of these provincial/territorial child care options includes legislated requirements and regulations for service delivery, and each has a variety of funding arrangements. While in the past, child care typically fell under the aegis of a social or community service ministry, most provinces and territories have currently designated child care as a responsibility of their respective education ministries.

None of the provinces/territories treats access to child care as an entitlement or a right.

All provincial/territorial governments provide kindergarten programs for all five-year-olds, delivered at no fee to parents by public education authorities. Ontario is the sole province with kindergarten for all four-year-olds³, although a number of other jurisdictions have some kindergarten available for some four-year-olds and, in Saskatchewan, three-year-olds (usually those children considered to be “vulnerable”). In the last decade, full day school services have come to predominate in Canadian kindergarten provision. All jurisdictions treat kindergarten for five-year-olds as an entitlement similar to elementary school even though attendance is not compulsory in most provinces/territories.

Thus kindergarten is a public responsibility but finding and paying for child care for children younger than age five (or four in several provinces/territories) and child care outside school hours for school-aged children is primarily a private, family responsibility.

In addition to these provincial/territorial programs, the federal government directly funds several ECEC-type programs for special populations—Indigenous Canadians, military personnel, and newcomers to Canada. The Child Care Expense Deduction under *The Income Tax Act*, allows eligible parents to claim some employment-related child care expenses as a deduction from taxable income. (See FEDERAL ROLES section in this report).

The federal government also contributes to maternity and parental leave by providing benefits to eligible families under the Employment Insurance (EI) program; the provisions for job-protected leave from work are determined by each province/territory. This system applies to all of Canada outside Quebec, which has its own program covering both leave provisions and benefits, the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP). (See FAMILY LEAVES AND BENEFITS section in this report).

Historically, Canada has had limited federal policy pertaining to ECEC, although there have been multiple attempts to develop a national child care program. Following a decade-long hiatus in intergovernmental engagement on ECEC, the Government of Canada re-engaged in discussion about ECEC with provinces and territories following a change of government in the 2015 federal election. This culminated in a June 2017 announcement of a [“Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework,”](#) which emphasizes

² These services are not regulated in several jurisdictions.

³ Nova Scotia has begun developing universal four-year-old kindergarten.

collaboration between the federal government and the provinces/territories. It 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.](#)” There are five principles stated in this framework—high quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility, and inclusivity.

The framework specifies provinces/territories will use federal funding under the Multilateral Framework and bilateral agreements with consideration for families more in need, defined as lower-income families; Indigenous families; lone-parent families; families in underserved communities; those working non-standard hours; and/or families with children with varying abilities. Funding commitments were outlined in the 2017 federal budget and include \$540 million in 2018-2019, and \$550 million in 2020-2021. By 2026-2027, the Government of Canada’s child care funding through this fund is envisioned to reach \$870 million annually, as committed to in the 2017 federal budget.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ECEC

Government responsibility for Canada’s early childhood education and care services have largely been defined by Canada’s status as a federation. The division of powers between federal and provincial governments was originally defined in the *Constitution Act of 1867* and has evolved over the years. It is generally agreed that child care and early childhood education—like other social, educational, and health programs—are primarily under provincial/territorial jurisdiction in the Canadian federation. However, the federal government may, and does, play a variety of funding and policy roles in some of these programs.

Canadian municipalities do not have powers assigned by constitutional arrangements, but are subordinate to the provinces which may delegate powers to them, including taxation. Outside Ontario, where they play several important mandated roles in child care, local governments generally have no role in regulated child care. There are some exceptions to this: the City of Vancouver has adopted a significant key planning and policy-setting role, and a small number of municipalities in Alberta and Saskatchewan support or deliver services. Local school boards (or school divisions) are also subordinate to provincial governments. They have primary responsibility for operation of elementary schools including kindergarten. In some jurisdictions, many schools host child care programs as landlords.

In Canada, there is no federal role in public education and no national department of education. This means that there is no Canada-wide approach to kindergarten, it is a provincial/territorial responsibility.

In addition to Canada’s status as a federation, another key political element with implications for ECEC roles and responsibilities is that Canada is considered a “liberal democracy” in the analysis of social welfare regimes developed by Danish sociologist Gøsta Esping-Andersen. This means that, consistent with Canada’s liberal-democratic orientation, Canadian child care is treated as a market commodity and is considered to be primarily a private family responsibility. Thus, parent-consumers, non-governmental organizations, and other community-based actors are a key part of Canadian ECEC.

In most parts of Canada, advocacy groups, ECEC professionals, the voluntary sector, and researchers make up what is often called “the child care community.” These groups are important providers of ECEC-related services such as professional development and in-service training and may develop and maintain child care services. In addition, advocacy for more and better child care—and now ECEC—has been a visible feature of the Canadian ECEC landscape for decades. Alliances with other groups with an interest in ECEC—the labour movement, anti-poverty activists and feminists, for example—have long been a fundamental element of Canadian advocacy for child care.

SERVICE OVERVIEW

Generally, regulated child care includes centres, nursery schools, and regulated home (family) child care are governed under the same legislation within the province or territory. All jurisdictions have public kindergarten for age-eligible children. Most provinces/territories also have other related services, such as family resource/support programs, and other child and family services.

Almost all jurisdictions require some of the staff working with children in regulated child care to have some early childhood education (ECE) schooling at the post-secondary level. Canadian requirements for early childhood training are commonly recognized as less than optimal (see Table 3 in this report which summarizes provincial/territorial child care staff qualification requirements).

Regulated home child care providers in most provinces/territories are required to have some (limited) ECE-related training. Kindergarten teachers are required to meet elementary teacher certification requirements, but are not required to have early childhood-related preparation in most jurisdictions.

Most regulated Canadian child care is initiated and maintained by volunteers, voluntary organizations, by parents or by entrepreneurs. The non-profit child care sector represents about 70% of the total supply, with for-profits (ranging from one-centre operations to corporate-type chains that may have multiple locations) making up the rest; there are very few publicly-delivered services. As recently as the 1990s, Ontario had a supply of municipally-operated child care services that represented more than 10% of regulated spaces; this has diminished to less than 3% of total spaces provincially in 2016.

As child care is not a service to which children or families have an entitlement (either legislated or understood), there are generally no commitments to ensure access to child care for under-represented groups or those who may be “harder to serve.” There are no current or recent data outside Quebec that tell us who is using child care, what kind of care it is, or how much is being used. However, anecdotal and local analysis suggest that while regulated child care is in short supply and unaffordable for many families across Canada—for some families, a “space” is especially hard to access. This includes families who are living in poverty, newcomers to Canada, Indigenous Canadians, children with disabilities, minority official language populations, rural families, and those working non-standard hours.

WHO PAYS FOR CHILD CARE, AND HOW?

Generally speaking, all types of child care in Canada (except in Quebec) are primarily paid for by parents, with most provinces/territories paying some (usually limited), operating costs for regulated child care. These operating funds, sometimes called “base funding” or “grants” of various kinds, reduce reduce parent fees.

While all provinces/territories provide regulated services with some operational funding, Quebec, Manitoba, and Prince Edward Island combine this with setting province-wide parent fees in some or most of their regulated child care programs. The result is that fees in these jurisdictions (especially in Quebec) are substantially lower than elsewhere. (See [Macdonald and Friendly, 2017](#), and Table 7 in this report for cross-Canada parent fees). Child care fees depend on the child’s age, the duration of care, and the amount of public operational funding provided by the specific province/territory.

All provinces/territories except Quebec⁴ subsidize individual eligible, low-income families in regulated child care by covering some or all of the fees on the parent’s behalf. Parent fee subsidies are mostly administered by provincial/territorial governments; in Ontario, local (municipal or regional) governments manage the administration of provincial child care funding, including fee subsidies.

ACCESSIBILITY, AFFORDABILITY AND QUALITY

Canada, for the most part, takes a consumerist approach to child care—substantially relying on a market model. Consequently, the supply of regulated services covers only a minority of children, as this report documents. As parent fees are the main source of revenue for child care services in most provinces/territories, affording child care is difficult for many families across Canada, and the available research suggests that services may too often not be the high-quality “early childhood education” shown to benefit young children.

The key overarching characteristic that shapes and defines Canada’s child care approach and situation is its operation as a market system. Ten characteristics of Canada’s marketized child care provision have been described by [Beach and Ferns \(2015\)](#) as:

- Inequitable access
- Hit-and-miss service development
- Consumer-model financing
- Limited public management
- Limited planning

⁴ In Quebec, most of the cost of most regulated child care is covered by operational funds paid to child care programs by the Quebec government

- Programming aimed at the market
- Staffing to the minimum, at the lowest rate of pay possible
- Limited integration of care and education
- Relying on privatized services/arrangements
- Quality taking a backseat to budgets/profit.

Provincial/territorial and Indigenous ECEC programs are covered in more detail in the following individual sections.

FEDERAL ROLES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

According to Canadian constitutional arrangements, Canadian early childhood education and care programs generally fall under provincial/territorial jurisdiction. However, the federal government currently plays a number of key roles in ECEC policy and programs. These are as follows:

- a) The federal government provides transfer payments to provinces/territories under the [Multilateral Framework Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care](#) (announced June 12, 2017) and bilateral agreements negotiated with each province/territory. Annual federal funding is specified over the next decade, with the policy framework listing principles of high quality; accessibility; affordability; flexibility; and inclusiveness⁵. A parallel framework for agreements with and funding for Indigenous communities is anticipated.
- b) Under the Canada Social Transfer (CST), the federal government also provides more general transfer payments as a block fund for social programs in each province/territory. Funds used for child care are neither ear-marked nor identified.
- c) The Child Care Expense Deduction under *The Income Tax Act*, is a tax concession that allows the lower earning parent in a couple to claim some receipted, employment-related child care expenses as a deduction from taxable income. There are no criteria for the child care arrangements for which claims are made other than that a receipt is available. For more information on this, visit the government [website](#) pertaining to child care expenses.
- d) ECEC programs for populations for whom the federal government has particular responsibility, such as Indigenous people, military families, and new immigrants and refugees, may be directly funded by the federal government. In addition to the ECEC programs intended for Indigenous Canadians described in the INDIGENOUS ECEC section of this report, these include:
 - i. The Care for Newcomer Children component of Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC). See [here](#) for more information.
 - ii. Military Family Resource Centres, which may have an unfunded child care component. See [here](#) for more information.

In addition, under Employment Insurance, the federal government provides maternity/parental leave benefits to eligible new parents outside Quebec. (See the FAMILY LEAVES AND BENEFITS section of this report).

⁵ See Employment and Social Development, Government of Canada. (2017). Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/early-learning-child-care/reports/2017-multilateral-framework.html>.

FAMILY LEAVES AND BENEFITS

Canada has two family leave and benefit regimes, one specific to Quebec and the second for the remaining 12 provinces/territories. 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 under the Employment Insurance program (EI), while provincial /territorial provisions for job-protected leave are established in each jurisdiction’s employment standards legislation.

BENEFITS: CANADA OUTSIDE QUEBEC

Employment Insurance is a contributory program; both employees and employers contribute. Under EI, the federal benefit covers 15 weeks of maternity leave for eligible employees who are birth mothers. Until December 3, 2017, there was only one option for parental leave benefits: 35 weeks of payment was available to cover parental leave for either eligible parents including adoptive parents. This has now been amended⁶ by the federal government to offer two options for new parents: a Standard Parental Benefit (35 weeks of parental benefits for a total of 50 weeks, including 15 weeks of maternity benefits) and a longer Extended Parental Benefit (15 weeks of maternity benefits and 61 weeks of parental leave benefits totalling 76 weeks).

These benefits are indexed annually. In 2017, maternity and the Standard Parental Benefit have been paid at 55% of wages up to \$543 a week, and the Extended Parental Benefit was to be paid at 33% of wages up to \$326 a week. Benefits can begin as long as 12 weeks before the actual birth.

Although the federal benefit provisions have changed, new parents cannot take job-protected leave until provinces/territories make changes to their own leave provisions. Leave provisions under the Canada Labour Code have been amended to be consistent with the federal EI benefit changes.

In addition, in the 2018 federal budget, the Government of Canada announced that it would introduce earmarked “second parent” or “non-birthing parent” (paternity) leave but it has not yet been implemented.

See the provincial/territorial tables in this section for further details.

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. QPIP includes two options: a Basic Plan that covers 18 weeks of maternity leave, 32 weeks of parental leave and five weeks of paternity leave (a total of 55 weeks) and a shorter Special Plan totalling 43 weeks to cover 15 weeks of maternity leave, 25 weeks of parental leave and three weeks of paternity leave at higher benefit rates. In 2017, the Basic Plan began at a maximum of \$975.96/week for maternity leave, dropping to a maximum of \$766.82/week for the parental leave portion. The Special Plan benefit was paid at \$1,045.67/week, or 75% of income, for all leave portions in 2017. These dollar amounts for the QPIP are indexed to inflation annually, as are the benefit payments under EI.

In 2018, Quebec added another option to its parental leaves: a longer or more flexible leave period. New parents are now permitted to spread parental leave over two years with their employer’s agreement, with no additional funding. The leave can be used to allow a part time return to work.

See the tables in this section for further details.

⁶ Note the information in this document about provincial/territorial job protected leave and benefit levels was up-to-date as of December 31 2017.

TABLE I

Characteristics of Canadian and Quebec family leave benefits (after December 3 2017).

	Canada—Employment Insurance (EI) benefits	Benefits under the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan ¹ (QPIP)
<i>Maternity benefit</i> Birth mother only	15 wks	18 wks—Basic Plan 15 wks—Special Plan
<i>Parental benefit</i> Either parent	35 wks—Standard Parental Benefit 61 wks—Extended Parental Benefit	32 wks—Basic Plan 25 wks—Special Plan
<i>Paternity benefit</i> Father only—not transferable	None ²	5 wks—Basic Plan 3 wks—Special Plan
Maternity + parental + paternity benefit TOTAL	50 wks—Standard Parental Benefit 76 wks—Extended Parental Benefit	55 wks—Basic Plan 43 wks—Special Plan
<i>Adoption benefit</i>	See parental benefits	37 wks—Basic Plan 28 wks—Special Plan
Benefit/payment = % of average earnings/week	<i>Maternity benefit</i> : 55%	<i>Maternity leave</i> Basic Plan: 70% Special Plan: 75%
	<i>Parental benefit</i> Standard Parental Benefit: 55% Extended Parental Benefit: 55%	<i>Parental leave</i> Basic Plan: 7 wks 70% + 25 wks 55% Special Plan: 25 wks 75%
	<i>Paternity benefit</i> ² None	<i>Paternity leave</i> Basic Plan: 5 wks 70% Special Plan: 3 wks 75%
	<i>Adoption benefit</i> Standard Parental Benefit: 55% Extended Parental Benefit: 33%	<i>Adoption leave</i> Basic Plan: 12 wks 70% + 25 wks 55% Special Plan: 28 wks 75%
Max insurable earnings (2017) (indexed)	\$51,300 (indexed)	\$72,500 (indexed)
Payment ceiling/cap (2017) (indexed)	\$543/week (indexed)	Basic Plan: Maternity, 7 weeks parental, paternity: 975.96/wk + 25 wks of parental: \$766.82 (indexed) Special Plan: \$1,045.67/wk all portions (indexed)
Eligibility	600 hrs continuous employment in previous year Self-employed workers are required to opt in at least one year prior to claiming EI benefits and have earned a minimum in self employment earnings in the previous taxation year of \$6,888 (2016 for claims in 2017) and meet other requirements.	\$2000 earnings/contributions in previous year Self-employed eligible if registered one year previously (compulsory to register)
EI Family Supplement	Up to 80% of earnings	Up to 80% of earnings
Waiting period	1 week	None

1 The Quebec government announced in January 2018 that a longer, more spread-out parental leave option would be made available under the QPIP. Details are not yet available.

2 In the 2018 federal budget, the Government of Canada stated that it would begin providing EI parental sharing benefit. Details are not yet available.

PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL LEAVE PROVISIONS

TABLE II Length and timing of maternity leave. Provinces/territories (2017).

NL	Length: 17 weeks Timing: Leave cannot start earlier than 17 weeks before the expected birth date.
PE	Length: 17 weeks Timing: Leave can start up to 11 weeks before expected date of delivery and include six weeks after the delivery date.
NS	Length: 17 weeks Timing: May start up to 16 weeks before expected due date. At least one week must be taken after the delivery.
NB	Length: 17 weeks Timing: Beginning no earlier than 11 weeks before probable delivery date.
QB	Length: 15 weeks (Special Plan), 18 weeks (Basic Plan).
ON	Length: 17 weeks Timing: Starting up to 17 weeks before the due date.
MB	Length: 17 weeks Timing: Starting up to 17 weeks before expected due date.
SK	Length: 18 weeks Timing: 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 eight weeks prior to estimated date of birth.
AB	Length: 15 weeks Timing: Starting any time in the 12 weeks before the expected due date. Maternity leave must include a minimum of six weeks after birth unless agreed to as per a medical certificate.
BC	Length: 17 weeks Timing: Starting no earlier than 11 weeks before expected birth date and ending no earlier than six weeks after the birth date unless the employee requests a shorter period.
NT	Length: 17 weeks Timing: Commencing at any time during the 17 weeks immediately preceding estimated date of delivery.
NU	Length: 17 weeks Timing: Commencing any time during the 17 week period immediately preceding the estimated date of delivery.
YK	Length: 17 weeks Timing: An employer can require that the employee take maternity leave within the six weeks prior to her estimated due date (sooner if she cannot reasonably perform her duties due to the pregnancy). An employer may not require an employee to return earlier than six weeks after the birth or termination of a pregnancy.

TABLE III**Maternity leave extensions and special circumstances. Provinces/territories (2017).**

NL	In the event of miscarriage or stillbirth, the mother is entitled to 17 weeks after the pregnancy leave began or six weeks after the stillbirth or miscarriage, whichever is later.
PE	Maternity/parental/adoption leave can be extended by an additional five weeks if a child has a physical, psychological or emotional condition requiring additional care. An employer can require that the employee take unpaid leave up to three months if her pregnancy interferes with her work.
NS	If a newly arrived child must go to hospital for more than one week, the employee can return to work and use the rest of parental leave after the child comes out of the hospital.
NB	An employer may impose leave if an employee can no longer reasonably perform her duties. Such leave would be in addition to maternity leave.
ON	Exceptions are made in cases of a delayed or premature birth, or a miscarriage or stillbirth.
MB	Can be extended by the number of days between the expected date and actual birth date.
SK	Can be extended for a late birth so employee receives six weeks after the date of birth.
NT	An extension of up to six weeks may be granted if the delivery is later than expected up to the date of delivery.
NU	An extension of up to six weeks may be granted if the delivery is later than expected.
YK	No provisions for extensions to maternity leave.
CA	Maternity-related reassignment /job modification may be requested by a pregnant or nursing mother with certificate from medical practitioner. If not reasonably practical, an employee may take unpaid leave from the beginning of pregnancy until the end of the 24 th week after birth with medical documentation of inability to work.

TABLE IV
Length and timing of parental /adoption leave. Provinces/territories (2017).

NL	<p>Length: 35 weeks</p> <p>Timing: Parental leave must begin within 35 weeks of the birth or when the child comes into the care and custody of the parent for the first time.</p> <p>Up to 17 weeks of adoption leave is available in addition to the period of parental leave.</p>
PE	<p>Length: 35 weeks of parental leave</p> <p>Timing: Total leave maternity and parental leave can not exceed 52 weeks.</p> <p>52 weeks maximum adoption leave can be taken by one parent or shared.</p> <p>Adoption leave must be taken within 12 months of the child’s arrival in the home.</p>
NS	<p>Length: 52 weeks; 35 weeks for birth mothers immediately following pregnancy leave; other parents can take up to 52 weeks leave.</p> <p>Timing: Parental leave must be completed within 52 weeks after the birth or child arrives in the home.</p>
NB	<p>Length: 37 weeks of “child care leave” can be taken by either parent or shared.</p> <p>Timing: It can begin no sooner than the day a newborn or adopted child comes into the care of the employee.</p>
QC	<p><i>Parental leave</i></p> <p>Length: Basic Plan: 32 weeks; Special Plan: 25 weeks</p> <p>Timing: 25 of the weeks may be shared between parents.</p> <p><i>Adoption leave</i></p> <p>Length: Basic Plan: 37 weeks; Special Plan: 28 weeks</p> <p>Timing: 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.</p> <p><i>Paternity leave (exclusively for fathers)</i></p> <p>Length: Basic Plan: five weeks; Special Plan: three weeks</p>
ON	<p>Length: 37 weeks for new parents other than birth mothers taking pregnancy leave (who may take 35 weeks).</p> <p>Timing: Parental leave must begin no later than 52 weeks after the birth date or date an adopted child first comes into care.</p> <p>BOTH new parents have the right to take parental leave following a birth or adoption</p>
MB	<p>Length: 37 weeks following birth or adoption.</p> <p>Timing: Must be taken in one continuous period. Parental leave can begin up to one year after the birth or adoption. The length of leave can be shortened if less than four weeks notice is given.</p>
SK	<p>Length: 34 weeks parental leave for the birth parent or primary caregiver in an adoption; 37 weeks parental leave for the parent who did not take maternity or adoption leave; 18 weeks adoption leave.</p> <p>Timing: Parental leave may be taken consecutively after maternity or adoption leave.</p> <p>A non-birth or non-adoptive parent’s leave can begin within 12 weeks preceding the estimated date of birth/ adoption and must end within 52 weeks after the actual date of birth or adoption.</p>
AB	<p>Length: For mothers on maternity leave, not more than 37 weeks following the last day of maternity leave.</p> <p>Parental leave for other parents, including adopting parents: max of 37 weeks within 52 weeks of the birth or placement.</p>

continued

TABLE IV *continued*. Length and timing of parental /adoption leave. Provinces/territories (2017).

BC	<p>Length: 35 weeks for birth mothers who take pregnancy leave; 37 weeks for a birth mother who does not take pregnancy leave as well as for fathers and for adopting parents. Timing: Parental leave can begin anytime within 52 weeks after the birth or placement of the child.</p>
NT	<p>Length: 37 weeks parental leave Timing: Must begin the day a child is born or arrives in the home for adoption.</p>
NU	<p>Length: 37 weeks parental leave for natural or adopting parents. Timing: Commencing on the day of birth or the day a child arrives at the employee’s home, and ending one year after that date.</p>
YK	<p>Length: 37 weeks of parental leave for birth or adoption Timing: Leave must be completed no later than 52 weeks after the birth or child comes into care. Parental leave can be taken by one spouse or shared, but the cumulative total leave period cannot exceed 37 weeks. Parental leave may not be taken by both parents at the same time unless one parent is unable to care for the child due to illness or other hardship for the family.</p>

TABLE V**Unique provisions of maternity/parental leave. Provinces/territories (2017).**

NL	Parents may take both parental leave and adoption leave.
PE	Adoption leave may be shared by parents but cannot exceed a total of 52 weeks.
QB	Paternity leave is in addition to maternity and parental leave. Self employed Quebecers are required to register and are eligible for paid family leave.
ON	Both parents can take parental leave as long as they meet the eligibility requirement and do not exceed the 35 or 37 weeks cumulatively, between them.
SK	Adoption leave is a unique leave; it is not synonymous with parental leave but—like maternity leave—must be taken by one parent—the primary caregiver.
AB	Parental leave may be taken wholly by one of the employees or shared. When both parents work for the same employer, the employer is not required to grant parental leave to more than one employee at a time.
BC	If pregnancy leave is not requested until after the birth or termination of the pregnancy, the employee is entitled to up to six weeks of leave beginning on the date of birth or termination date.

TABLE VI Other restrictions of maternity/parental leave. Provinces/territories (2017).

PEI	Parental leave, if taken by the birth mother must immediately follow mat leave.
NB	Parental leave, if taken must immediately follow maternity leave.
QB	Parental leave, if taken by birth mothers must immediately follow pregnancy leave.
ON	Parental leave, if taken must immediately follow maternity leave unless the child is hospitalized.
MB	Parental leave, if taken must immediately follow maternity leave unless the employer agrees to a different arrangement.
SK	Parental leave, if taken by the birth mother must immediately follow maternity leave.
NT	Unless the employer and employee agree otherwise, parental leave must immediately follow maternity leave.
NU	Parental leave, if taken must immediately follow maternity leave.
YK	Unless the employer and employee agree otherwise, parental leave must immediately follow maternity leave.
CA	If female employees take both maternity and parental leave, they must do so consecutively in one block.

Note: Provincial/territorial tables were developed from information provided by by Donna S. Lero, Ph.D. Professor Emerita, Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph.

INDIGENOUS EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

CONTEXT

In 2016, there were 1,673,785 self-identified Indigenous people living in Canada, up almost 30% from the last long-form census in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2017a). Accounting for 4.9% of the Canadian population, the Indigenous (or Aboriginal) population includes First Nations and Métis (living on- and off-reserve), and Inuit persons.

Many Indigenous Canadians live in remote and/or northern areas, and some First Nations people live in communities “on-reserve”. There are also large southern and urban Indigenous populations. 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).

CULTURAL INTEGRITY

Maintenance of their cultures is a major concern for Indigenous peoples. Culturally sensitive early childhood education and the implications of this for staff training and service delivery are of special concern. Indigenous organizations point out that general standards for child care centres are sometimes too rigid or otherwise inappropriate for northern and/or remote communities, and that they may not reflect traditional cultural norms and practices. Thus, there is a strong interest among Indigenous groups in developing ECEC programs that are 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).

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

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

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) sent out a broad call for action. The TRC sought action in multiple areas, citing Canada’s history of appropriation of Indigenous lands, the separation of children from their families and cultures through residential schools and child welfare, cultural assimilation, and genocide, to support their recommendations. The call to action specified the need for “federal, provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments to work together to develop culturally-appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families”. Recommendations included that the “federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments [develop] culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Executive Summary, 2015).

After the TRC report was released and the October 2015 federal election led to a change of government, cross-Canada consultations among Indigenous groups yielded the development of a national Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (IELCCF). It is expected that the IELCCF will be finalized between the federal government and Indigenous groups in 2018.

CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICY

Generally, funding for social programs for Indigenous communities on-reserve is the responsibility of the Government of Canada, while social programs for Indigenous people living off-reserve may be either a federal or a provincial responsibility.

Although some provincial governments carry out regulation of on-reserve Indigenous child care, others do not (this information can be found in each provincial/territorial section in this report). In some provinces, First Nations communities do not recognize provincial jurisdiction in Indigenous communities on reserve land. Generally, First Nations and Inuit organizations have responsibility for the administration of funds and development of services.

While programs for which the federal government takes responsibility includes Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (off-reserve), generally speaking, regulated child care for Indigenous people living off-reserve has no special status with the federal government.

FEDERAL INDIGENOUS ECEC PROGRAMS

At one time, federal funding for child care was limited to First Nations in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, Ontario and Alberta where the then-Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) covered some costs in accordance with provincial funding policies. In Quebec, child care programs for First Nations children received Quebec funding through the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. Until 1995, when the first Aboriginal Head Start program was announced, there was relatively little spending earmarked for Indigenous ECEC in much of Canada. Since that time, several different federal programs have funded Indigenous ECEC across Canada directly in addition to those arrangements available to specific provinces.

ABORIGINAL HEAD START IN URBAN AND NORTHERN COMMUNITIES (AHSUNC) (PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF CANADA)

In 1995, the Government of Canada established this Aboriginal Head Start 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 with a goal to support the healthy development of Indigenous children living off-reserve. The Public Health Agency of Canada provides funding to local Indigenous organizations to develop and deliver culturally appropriate programming. AHSUNC is typically part day, and is centred on six components: education, health promotion, culture and language, nutrition, social support, and parental/family involvement.

AHSUNC is described by the federal government as having, “113 sites that reach 4600-4800 children annually through a majority of part day preschool programs” (Public Health Service of Canada, 2017).

A 2017 report, [Evaluation of the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities Program 2011-2012 to 2015-2016](#) is available online.

ABORIGINAL HEAD START ON-RESERVE (AHSOR) (HEALTH CANADA)

Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve (AHSOR) was initiated in 1998, building on the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities program. AHSOR funds early intervention strategies organized and delivered by First Nation communities to support the learning and development of Indigenous children living on-reserve.

Like AHSUNC, AHSOR is centred on six components: education, health promotion, culture and language, nutrition, social support, and parental/family involvement. The Government of Canada reported that over 14,000 First Nations children on reserve (not including BC) participated in AHSOR in 2015-2016, and that \$47.37 million is provided annually for the program (Health Canada, 2017).

FIRST NATIONS AND INUIT CHILD CARE INITIATIVE (FNICCI) (EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CANADA)

The First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI) was 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 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017).

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 Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) as part of the mandate of Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). The intention of the program is to provide "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." According to the Government of Canada, FNICCI is a "\$50-million program that has supported over 8,500 child care spaces in 486 First Nations and Inuit communities across Canada" (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017).

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.

FEDERAL PROVINCE-SPECIFIC INDIGENOUS ECEC PROGRAMS

In addition to the three Canada-wide Indigenous ECEC programs mentioned above, there have also been several province-specific programs in place for some years.

Regulated child care centres and home day care in Ontario First Nations communities (reserves) have had federal funding since the 1960s under the 1965 "Indian Welfare Agreement." These are delivered by First Nations under contracts with the Ontario government (Ministry of Education) and are regulated under Ontario's provincial child care legislation and regulations.

The federal government reimburses the province for most of the program costs (reportedly to be approximately 93%). The Ontario government reports funding 77 First Nations and three transfer payment agencies in order to support on-reserve child care (see the ONTARIO section of this report).

For further information about ECEC in Ontario First Nations communities, see [Ontario First Nations Early Learning Asset Mapping Project: Addendum to Final Report](#).

The federal government has also funded Indigenous ECEC programs identified as First Nations Child & Family Service Head Start (New Brunswick), and the Child/Day Care Program (Alberta).

INDIGENOUS POLICY FRAMEWORK

When the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework was released in summer 2017, the federal government also proposed the development of a parallel Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework. The Indigenous framework was to be co-developed with "Indigenous organizations and parents to determine the best approach to delivering high quality early learning and child care on reserve" (Government of Canada, 2016).

According to the federal government, this document is to be "separate and parallel" to the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework to "reflect the unique cultures and needs of First Nations, Inuit and Metis children across the country" (Government of Canada, 2017). The community feedback process closed at the beginning of August 2017. The release date of the framework document has not yet been announced.

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