



Early childhood education and care in Canada 2019

Summary and analysis of key findings

Childcare Resource and Research Unit February 15, 2021

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This summary and analysis of key findings and trends is based on [Early childhood education and care in Canada 2019](#) and its previous editions beginning in 1992.

ECEC in Canada 2019 is the Childcare Resource and Research Unit's 12th cross-Canada comprehensive report on early childhood education and care. The full report includes detailed sections on each province/territory, 34 comparative tables, sections about roles and responsibilities for Canadian ECEC, parental leave and Indigenous ECEC.

All publications are available for download on the [CRRU website](#).

There were significant Canada-wide ECEC developments in the period 2016 – 2020

The federal government and provinces/territories adopted the Multi-lateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC¹) in June 2017.

- The Framework states “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 sets out five ELCC principles – accessibility, affordability, high quality, flexibility and inclusivity.
- Three year bilateral agreements between Canada and provinces/territories² included action plans and transfer of federal funds totalling \$1.195 billion Canada-wide between 2017 and 2020. Funds for subsequent bilateral agreements are profiled through 2028.

The federal government also co-developed an Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (IELCC) with Indigenous governance organizations, announced in September 2018.

- Additional funds of \$1.7 billion over 10 years beginning in 2018 to implement the IELCC are transferred to Indigenous governance organizations.

An effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was to heighten government interest in early learning and child care. A plan for a “significant, long-term, sustained investment to create a Canada-wide early learning and child care system” is expected in the spring of 2021.

1 Early childhood education and care (ECEC), early learning and child care (ELCC) and child care are used interchangeably.

2 The first phase of three year bilateral agreements concluded March 30, 2020.

Indigenous early learning and child care

The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (IELCC), co-developed by the federal government and Indigenous governance organizations, was announced in September 2018.

- Almost all provinces and Yukon license child care centres in First Nations on reserve communities either upon request or always.
- There are three cross-Canada federal ECEC funding programs (First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative, Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve, Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities) as well as three province specific Indigenous ECEC programs.
- Early learning and child care programs including child care centres and Aboriginal Head Start off reserve lands are reported by almost all provinces.

Demographics

There were 5,976,000 children aged 0 – 12 years in 2019.

- There were 2,218,000 0 – 5 year olds across Canada, an increase of about 16,000 between 2016 and 2019.
- There were 2,858,000 6 – 12 year olds Canada-wide, an increase of 124,000 from 2016. The 2019 cohort of 6 – 12 year olds is the largest since 1992.
- Historically, the size of age cohorts has fluctuated rather than showing a one way trend.

The number of children with employed mothers was at a high point in 2019.

The number of children with employed mothers is a product of mothers' employment rate, which has increased steadily, and the number of children, which has fluctuated.

- There were 1,442,000 0 – 5 year olds and 1,975,000 6 – 12 year olds in Canada as a whole with employed mothers in 2019.
- The number of children with employed mothers has fluctuated over time, as the number of children in each age cohort has fluctuated.
- The number of 0 – 12 year olds in 2019 (5,076,000) is the highest since 1998, when it was 5,077,000.

Mothers' employment rates in 2019 were at the highest point since at least 1998³.

- The 2019 employment rate for women with a youngest child 0 – 2 years rose to 72% from 71% in 2016 (78% with a youngest child 3 – 5 years and 85% with a youngest child 6 – 15 years).
- These were the highest mothers' employment rates in all age categories since 1998³.
- Mothers' employment rates over the past decade or more have shown steady increases year after year.
- Between 1998 and 2019, the highest increases in mothers' employment rates were in Quebec, rising from 65% to 80% with a youngest child 0 - 2 years, and rising from 67% to 84% with a 3 – 5 year old. Over the same time period, the rate in Canada rose to 72% (0-2 years) and 78% (3-5 years).
- The number of children with employed mothers in 2019 was at its highest since 1995⁴.

³ 1998 was the first year mothers' employment rates were reported in *ECEC in Canada*.

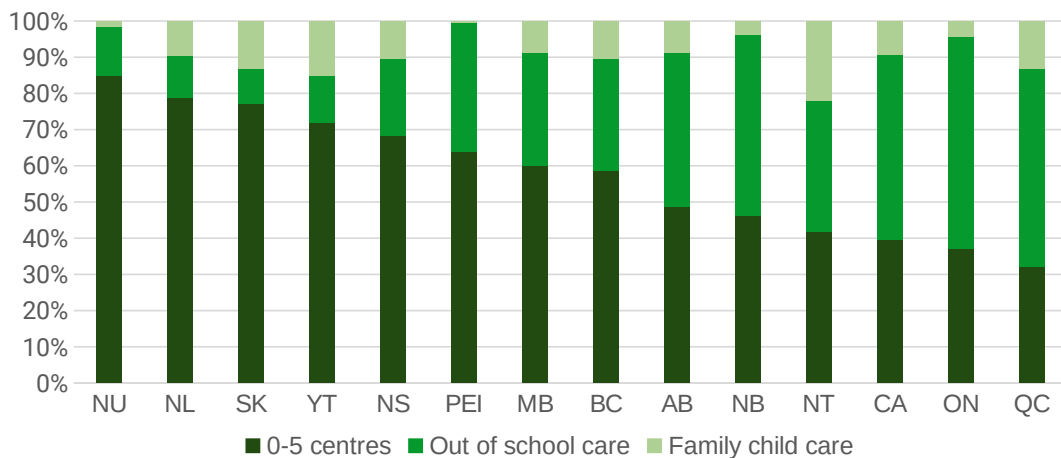
⁴ 1995 was the first year number of children with employed mothers was reported in *ECEC in Canada*.

Availability of regulated child care

There were more than 1,500,000 regulated child care spaces across Canada in 2019.

- There were 1,506,658 regulated spaces for 0 – 12 year olds Canada-wide.
- This includes 596,612 full and part day centre spaces for 0 – 5 year olds (not including out of school hours care), 768,342 centre spaces for 4 – 12 year olds outside regular school hours and 141,704 spaces for 0 – 12 year olds in regulated family child care.
- As Figure 1 shows, the proportion of spaces of each type varies considerably by province/territory.

FIGURE 1 Percent of spaces by child care program type by province/territory/Canada 2019.



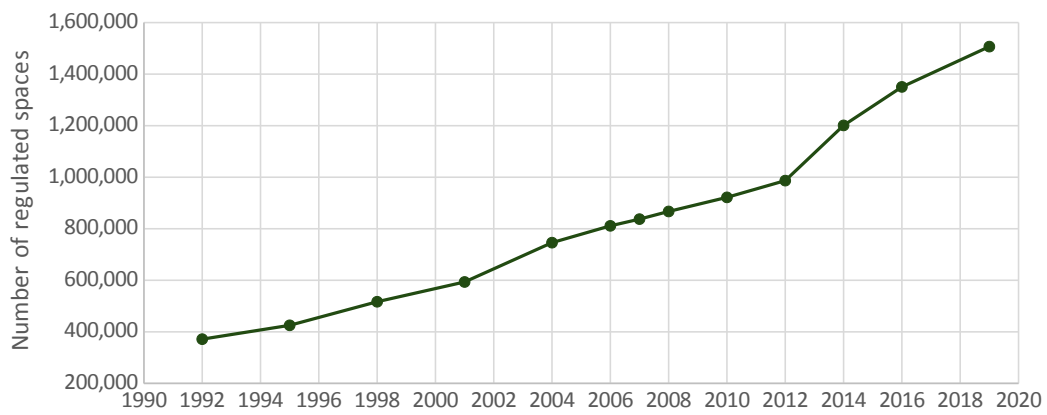
Regulated child care increased by more than 150,000 spaces between 2016 and 2019.

- Total regulated spaces⁵ for 0 – 12 year olds increased by 156,271 spaces between 2016 and 2019 (centres and family child care), a notional average of 52,090 spaces in each of the three years.
- This average annual increase was smaller than the average increase of 74,405 spaces each year between 2014 and 2016.

⁵ This includes centre spaces for 0 – 12 year olds and family child care.

- Between 2016 and 2019, growth in out of school hours care (111,864 spaces) was much greater than growth in centre spaces for 0 – 5 year olds (45,469 spaces)⁶.
- Regulated family child care decreased slightly by 1,944.
- Child care increased in every province/territory except Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, each of which lost a very small number of spaces. Ontario, Quebec and Alberta together accounted for 136,512 of the total space increase of 156,271.

FIGURE 2 Growth in total regulated child care spaces (centres and family child care) for children 0 – 12 years. Canada. 1992 - 2019.



Percent of 0 – 12 year olds for whom a regulated space was available increased by 11.6% between 2016 and 2019.

- The availability of spaces for 0 – 12 year olds increased from 27.2% (2016) to 29.7% (2019).
- The percent of 0 – 12 year olds for whom a space was available ranged from 9.5% in Saskatchewan to 57.4% in Quebec.

Percent of 0 – 5 year olds for whom a full or part day centre space was available grew 8.2% between 2016 and 2019.^{7 8}

- The availability of spaces for 0 – 5 year olds increased relatively modestly in most provinces/ territories between 2016 and 2019.

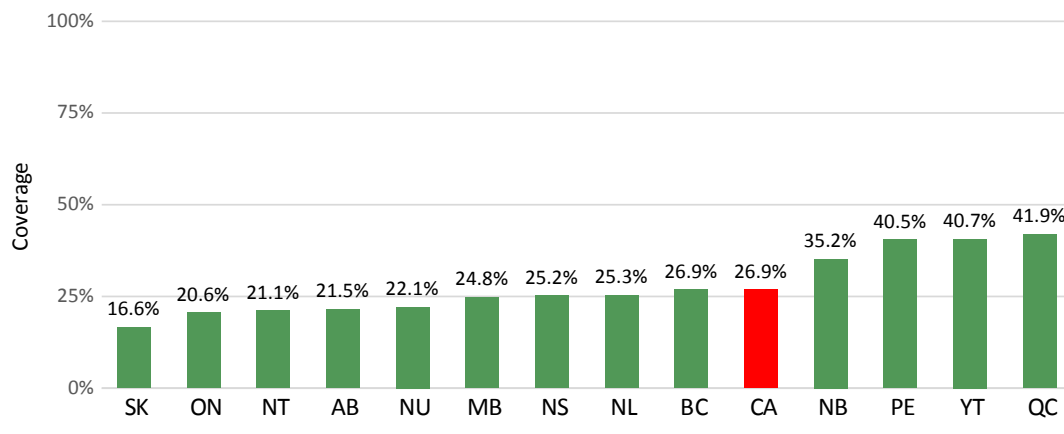
⁶ Ontario's kindergarten-age spaces, which were included as centre spaces for 0 – 5 year olds in 2016, have been reallocated to the out of school hours care category. See the discussion of the definition of out of school hours child care in this publication.

⁷ This does not include spaces for kindergarten-age children (4 and 5 year olds) outside regular school hours, which are counted in out of school hours spaces.

⁸ All provinces/territories cannot provide a breakdown into full day and part day centre spaces.

- There were enough centre spaces for 26.9% of 0 – 5 year olds in part and full day centres, up from 25% availability for the same age group in 2016.
- The percent of 0 – 5 year olds for whom a space was available ranged from a low of 16.6% in Saskatchewan to 41.9% in Quebec.

FIGURE 3 Percent of 0 – 5 year olds for whom a full or part day centre space was available. Provinces/territories/Canada. 2019.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Elements of ECEC

Kindergarten is playing a bigger role in ECEC provision.

As Canadian kindergarten has increasingly become a full-school day program, and includes a greater number of four year olds, it has come to play an increasingly key role in early learning and child care over the last decade.

- There were approximately⁹ 527,000 four and five year olds enrolled in kindergarten programs across Canada in 2019.
- In 2019, a majority of provinces/territories offered full-school day kindergarten programs for all five year olds.
- Kindergarten for all four year olds is now provided in Ontario, Nova Scotia and Northwest Territories. Other provinces and territories are phasing it in (Quebec) or are in a development stage (Newfoundland and Labrador and Yukon). In Prince Edward Island, free preschool for four year olds delivered in child care centres will begin in the fall of 2021. Saskatchewan includes three year olds

⁹ This number is approximate because one province did not provide kindergarten enrollment data.

in pre kindergartens targeted to vulnerable children, while Manitoba and Alberta have school-based ECEC programs for some four year olds.

- In almost all provinces/territories, kindergarten teachers are required to have a four year teaching degree but not an early childhood education background. There are several exceptions: Prince Edward Island and Quebec, which require a degree with an early childhood specialization, Ontario's team model of a regular teacher and a Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE), Nova Scotia's ECE credential required for Pre Primary for four year olds and Northwest Territories and Nunavut's acceptance of an ECE credential.

Out of school hours child care accounted for 51% of total regulated spaces in 2019.

The age boundaries of child care outside regular school hours have been evolving as provision of full-school day kindergarten for four and five year olds has increased. No-fee kindergartens have become widespread, with four and five year olds enrolled for the full school day, exiting from full day child care. As kindergarten covers a full school day, not regular parents' workdays, before and after school child care has expanded to cover the gaps. The term "out of school hours child care" as used here includes all child care before, after and outside regular school hours for children in kindergarten through elementary school – usually aged 4 – 12 years.

- Out of school hours care accounted for 51% of total regulated child care in 2019 (768,342 spaces of 1,506,658).
- As Figure 1 shows, out of hours care as a proportion of total spaces varies considerably by province/territory.
- Training requirements in out of school hours care are generally modest, with New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and Nunavut having no requirement for an out of school hours care staff person to have any training.
- Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan exempt some categories of out of school hours care from licensing. Conditions for exemption include services operated in schools or by school boards, or including instructional and recreational activities other than regular child care.

Regulated family child care provided 9% of all regulated child care in 2019.

- All provinces/territories provide regulated (licensed or approved) family child care in private homes.
- Provinces/territories use two different family child care governance models: a model in which an agency contracts with and monitors providers (who are not licensed) in their own homes and a model in which the province/territory directly licenses and monitors providers.

- Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta also have family child care featuring more than one provider in a private home.
- Family child care has been shrinking across Canada over time as a proportion of total regulated spaces. In 2019, it represented 9% of total child care provision, down from 16% in 2009.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Parent fees

Parent fees for an infant ranged from \$179/month in Quebec cities to \$1,774 per month in Toronto in 2019.

While some provinces/territories collect data on child care fees¹⁰, these are collected in different ways so they are not directly comparable. ECEC in Canada 2019 uses the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' 2019 [annual fee survey](#) of regulated child care in larger cities to provide comparable parent fees across Canada. The survey now includes at least one population centre in each province/territory and represents about 60% of full day centres and regulated family child care.

- In 2019, median parent fees for full day child care centres and regulated family child care in Canada's larger cities ranged from \$179/month in Quebec cities where the provincially set fees are the same for all age groups, to \$1,774/month (infant), \$1,457/month (toddler) in Toronto and \$1,213/month (preschooler) in Iqaluit.
- In 2019, with the exception of set fee services in Quebec cities and Winnipeg, infant fees were higher than \$700/month in all cities included.
- All cities except set fee services in Quebec cities, Winnipeg, Charlottetown, and Regina had toddler fees higher than \$700/month.
- In 2019, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Quebec and Manitoba set fees in at least 50% of centres. Alberta and British Columbia also had some centres in which fees were provincially set.
- In provinces in which more than 50% of centres charged set parent fees (Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island) fees in the market sector were all, except Prince Edward Island, substantially higher than the provincially set fees.

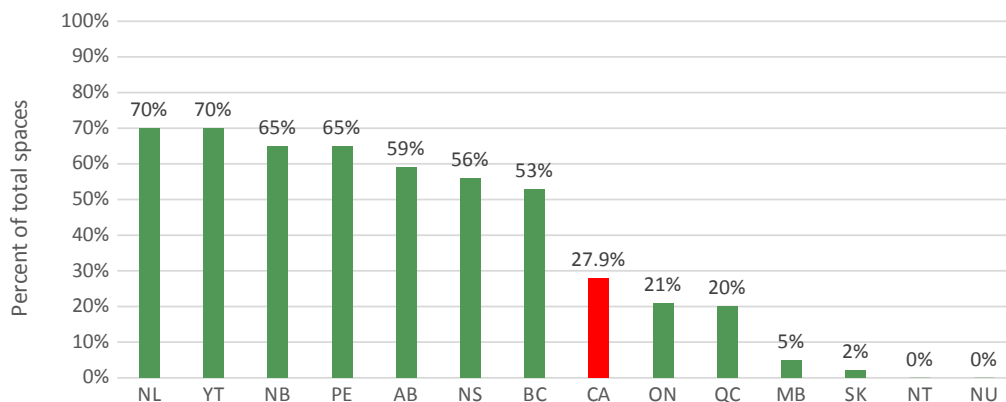
¹⁰ Provincial/territorial data on parental fees in regulated child care are provided in each P/T section of [ECEC in Canada 2019](#) and previous editions.

Sponsorship of services

Child care operated on a for-profit basis made up 28% of centre provision Canada-wide but varied significantly by province/territory in 2019.

- The proportion of child care centre spaces (full and part day) operated on a for-profit basis rose from 27% in 2016 to 28% in 2019.
- Canadian child care overall is predominantly not-for-profit but provinces/territories have substantially different shares of not-for-profit and for-profit provision.
- Newfoundland and Labrador and Yukon (70%) had the highest percentages of for-profit child care relative to total spaces, while Saskatchewan and Manitoba had very little, and the Northwest Territories and Nunavut had no for-profit child care.
- In jurisdictions using an agency model for family child care, agencies may be for-profit, non-profit or – in Ontario – municipal. In Alberta, 61% of family child care spaces are in for-profit agencies; in Ontario, 16% of family child care spaces are in for-profit agencies and 10% in municipal agencies.
- Canada has a small number of publicly delivered¹¹ child care programs. Provinces/territories with public child care services include Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. These all have small public child care sectors except Quebec, where a large out of school hours child care sector is delivered by school boards.

FIGURE 4 Percent of total full and part day centre spaces for 0 – 12 year olds that are for-profit. Provinces/territories/Canada. 2019.



11 Publicly delivered child care is a regulated child care service in which a public government body is the operator – usually the license holder. These are usually municipalities but may be school boards or other public entities.

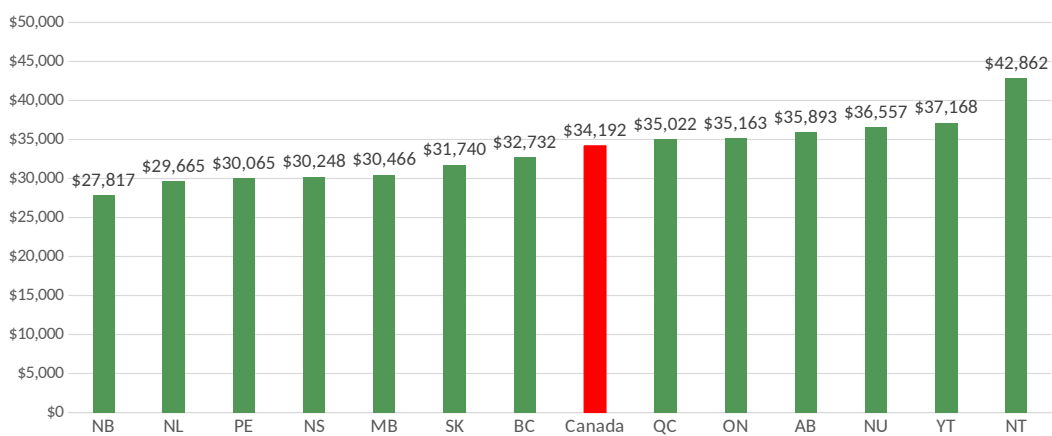
Child care workforce

The child care workforce is key to quality and availability.

Comparable data on child care workforce wages are not available. ECEC in Canada 2019 uses Statistics Canada data derived from the 2016 long form Census as a proxy (2015 data).

- The Canada-wide median annual employment income for staff working in child care services full time full year was \$34,192¹² in 2015. Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut had the highest annual mean staff incomes.
- A majority of provinces/territories have mechanisms for enhancing staff wages– some using wage enhancement grants, some including wages as part of operational funding. Wage enhancement may be tied to requirements such as being a “designated” centre with additional requirements, staff having further education or other requirements.
- Prince Edward Island and Quebec have provincially set wage scales for child care staff and Nova Scotia has set a wage floor.
- Centre directors are usually required to have at least a one or two year early childhood education diploma. Quebec, British Columbia, Northwest Territories and Nunavut have no specific or additional requirements for centre directors.

FIGURE 5 Median annual full time employment income: Early childhood educators and assistants. Provinces/territories/Canada. 2015.



12 These data were calculated using the 2016 Canadian Census and represents the most recently available income data. It uses the NOC category Early Childhood Educators and Assistants, as defined in NOC 4214, and the NAICS category – working in the day care services industry in centre based environments with children aged 0–12 years (NAICS 6244). Included as individuals who worked full-time and full-year who did not work at home, and were not self-employed. It included supervisors but not managers, and accounts for all jobs, even second jobs of ECE/As providing a wage, salary or commissions.

Public funding for regulated child care

Public budget allocations for regulated child care including provincial and federal funding totaled \$5.880 billion in 2019.

- Total allocations to regulated child care were \$5.880 billion in the 2018/2019 fiscal year. This included both provincial/territorial budget allocations and federal funds transferred to provinces under the federal bilateral agreements 2017 - 2020.
- In the 2015/2016 fiscal year before federal funds from 2017's bilateral agreements began, provincial/territorial allocations to regulated child care had totaled \$4.596 billion¹³.
- Federal funds transferred to provinces/territories under bilateral agreements totaled \$398 million in 2018/2019.
- The Canada-wide national average spending per regulated space has increased \$498 per space since 2016¹⁴. In 2016, public spending was \$3,405 per regulated space; this has increased to \$3,903 in 2019. In most jurisdictions, spending per space increased, with the exceptions of Manitoba and Quebec¹⁵, where it decreased slightly.

13 All allocations represent budgeted amounts in unadjusted dollars.

14 The calculation of public spending per regulated space is merely notional, for the purposes of comparison over time and jurisdictions. These amounts are based on total provincial/territorial spending on regulated child care including one time funding, and total number of children, not on budgeted public spending per space. Based on other data such as parent fees, it is assumed that the primary source of funding to operate Canadian child care services is parent fees.

15 Quebec is not a signatory to the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework but has signed an Asymmetrical Agreement noting that Quebec's ELCC is under Quebec jurisdiction.



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225 Brunswick Ave., Toronto, Ontario Canada M5S 2M6 [Contact form](#)