

THE STATE OF ECEC IN CANADA: AN OVERVIEW

Each of Canada's 14 jurisdictions — 10 provinces, three territories and the federal government — has its own approach to early childhood education and care. Each has a number of programs for “care”, “education” and for meeting other objectives such as ameliorating the effects of poverty and supporting parents. Overall, Canada does not have a national strategy for early childhood education and care (ECEC).

Each of the provinces and territories has a provincial program of regulated child care that usually encompasses nursery or preschool, centre-based full-day child care, regulated family child care and school-age child care. The provincial child care programs provide legislated requirements for operation of services and a variety of funding arrangements, usually under a social or community services ministry. Provincial/territorial governments also have responsibility for public kindergartens that are usually part-day for five year olds under ministries of education. Generally, kindergarten programs for five year olds (or fours in Ontario and, to a more limited extent, elsewhere) are a public responsibility while “care” and early childhood education for children younger than age five is assumed to be a private, family responsibility. In addition to these provincial/territorial programs, there are a variety of care and education programs — for example, Aboriginal Head Start and the First Nations/Inuit Child Care Initiative — under the aegis of the federal government.

These programs — regulated child care and kindergarten — supplemented by family resource programs that are primarily intended to support parents, an assortment of cash payments to parents to pay for care, and maternity and parental leave, constitute ECEC in Canada.

In 2002, most children with working parents (more than 70% of children aged 3-5 years have mothers in the paid labour force) are cared for in unregulated child care while parents work, train or study. These arrangements are sometimes provided by a relative, by an unregulated family child care provider or in-home caregiver. Organized ECEC services across Canada are in short supply or — like public kindergarten — are not labour force sensitive. Some — like regulated child care — are too costly for ordinary families or not always sufficiently high quality to be “developmental”. Many young school-aged children are alone after school or attend recreation or other community programs that are not intended to provide “care”.

The range and of early childhood education and care services and access to them vary enormously by region and circumstances. However, no region of Canada yet provides a system of well-designed and funded early childhood education and care services to meet the needs of a majority of families and children.

HISTORY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

The history of early childhood education and care in Canada begins in the mid-19th century. Kindergartens were preceded by infant schools that developed in the first half of the 1800s in several provinces to offer care and instruction to poor children. The first private kindergartens — initially motivated by the idea that children benefit from formal education and then influenced by contemporary thinking about the importance of education in early childhood — began to appear and, in cities and larger towns, were commonplace by the end of the 1870s.

The kindergarten movement soon moved beyond its first middle and upper class clientele as private kindergartens spread across Canada. These included “free kindergartens”, run by missionary and charitable groups, that began to be used as a tool for social reform and as a way of assimilating immigrant children (Prochner, 2000). Following right on the heels of the first public kindergarten in the United States, the first Canadian public kindergarten opened in the Toronto Board of Education in 1883. Influenced by the work of European educational specialists like Pestalozzi and Froebel, the Ontario kindergartens were recognized officially in 1885 and were funded by the province two years later (Corbett, 1989). Intended for three-to-five year olds and full day, by 1900 there were kindergartens in towns and villages across Ontario (Mathien, 2000).

Some of the early kindergartens were used, in part, as “care” programs. As Toronto’s public school kindergartens were becoming more widespread, some were opened to look after children while their mothers were employed. Even before this, however, there were some “care” programs in Montreal, Toronto and, by 1920, in Halifax, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Vancouver and other cities; some of these accommodated infants. Throughout this period, these early childhood services were developed and run by charitable, mostly women’s, groups.

While there was organized child care in a number of Canada’s provinces early in the 1900s, there was little government involvement until World War II. A 1942 Order-in-Council established the Dominion-Provincial-War-time Agreement, the first — and still most direct — federal intervention into organized child care. It offered 50 % cost sharing to assist provinces to provide child care for children whose mothers were working in essential war industries. Only Ontario and Québec participated in this agreement. After the war, the federal government withdrew its support and all six of the Québec child care centres, and many of Ontario’s, closed.

Since World War II, the federal government’s role in child care has mostly been indirect and limited. Nevertheless, its second foray into the area in 1966 had an important impact on the way child care has developed since that time. The Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) was introduced in 1966 to ameliorate or prevent poverty. Through the provisions of CAP, the Government of Canada entered into cost sharing agreements with the provinces for welfare services, including child care. For the purpose of 50-50 cost sharing, CAP treated child care like other welfare services and established federal conditions for cost sharing. These conditions stipulated that federal funds were available to pay only for services for needy, or potentially needy, families, and that to be eligible for funding as a welfare service, child care had to be regulated and public or not-for-profit. The design of CAP meant that federal funds were used almost exclusively for fee subsidies for families who were income- or means-tested to determine eligibility.

As social services are a provincial responsibility in Canada, the provinces were not compelled to participate. However, although it took a decade for them all to begin to use CAP’s child care provisions eventually, all the provinces cost shared their eligible child care costs through CAP. CAP thus began to spur the development of child care services throughout Canada and to shape their evolution throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The residual approach to funding meant that regulated child care emerged as a welfare rather than a universal or educational service.

But as mothers with young children entered the paid labour force in growing numbers, middle class families also began to use child care centres that usually served both subsidized and fee paying families. Although there were always difficulties with the limited funding arrangements, the supply of regulated child care services grew dramatically throughout Canada as most of the provinces developed and refined service delivery, regulation and funding in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1971, parental out-of-pocket child care expenses were allowed as a tax deduction under The Income Tax Act and maternity benefits for eligible new mothers were included under The Unemployment Insurance Act. The provinces — beginning with Québec in 1979 — began to provide funds to child care centres to offset their operating costs or to improve wages. Community demand for a national child care program — supported by the growing feminist movement — swelled throughout the 1980s.

At the same time — separated conceptually, administratively and programmatically from “care”, public kindergarten was established in almost every province and territory, becoming an entitlement in most jurisdictions. By the mid-1980s, most Canadian five year olds (and in Ontario, four year olds) were enrolled in public, mostly half-day, kindergarten programs.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN THE 1990s

Between 1984 and 1995, there were three significant attempts to develop a national approach to child care as successive federal governments announced that a national strategy for child care would be developed. Each of these — the Task Force on Child Care set up by the Trudeau government (1984), the Special Committee on Child Care of the Mulroney government (1986), and the initiative based on Jean Chrétien’s 1993 Red Book election commitment — was started by a federal government. Each recognized that social/educational services such as child care are areas of provincial jurisdiction. However, none of these

efforts was successful in producing a pan-Canadian strategy or approach to early childhood education and care.

In the mid-1990s, Canada's political arrangements (which had historically featured tensions between federal and provincial roles) tilted toward provincial domination. This shift very much impacted on the future of early childhood education and care. During this period, the Canada Assistance Plan was abolished (1996) and all federal dollars for provincial health, education and welfare programs were subsumed into a block fund, the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST). Social policy experts feared that, without conditions like those that had been part of the CAP agreement, provincial spending of the substantially reduced federal dollars in the CHST would become less accountable to either the federal government or the public.

A debate about what was termed "social policy renewal" arose in a climate of anxiety about Québec separation and the fiscal deficit. This was formalized in February 1999 as the federal government and the nine provinces comprising "the rest of Canada" outside Québec signed the Social Union Framework Agreement¹ (SUFA) (see below).

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ECEC

Federal role

That Canada is governed by a federal system is key in how responsibilities for ECEC are defined. The division of powers between federal and provincial governments was originally defined in the Constitution Act of 1867 and has evolved over the years. While (as the previous section describes) the federal government had at one time shared the cost of fee subsidies with the provinces, and successive federal governments in the 1980s and 1990s contemplated a national child care strategy, in 2002 the federal government's role in ECEC consists of several intergovernmental funding schemes that are not specific to ECEC (the Early Childhood Development Initiative, the National Child Benefit Reinvestment Strategy and the Canada Health and Social Transfer) and a number of ECEC programs that are targeted to particular populations and circumstances. These are described in Table 1 and Table 2.

There is no federal role in public education, including kindergarten. The federal government does not pay for education nor is there a national department of education.

Intergovernmental arrangements: SUFA, the National Children's Agenda and the Early Childhood Development Initiative

The Social Union Framework Agreement or A Framework to Improve the Social Union for Canadians (1999) is the most important current intergovernmental (federal/ provincial) arrangement for ECEC. SUFA sets out how federal or joint social programs will be constructed or modified. Beginning with a series of principles including that of "ensuring access for all Canadians wherever they live or move in Canada, to essential social programs and services of reasonably comparable quality", SUFA commits both levels of government to working in collaboration and to enhancing transparency and accountability. The federal government agrees not to introduce new social programs in areas of provincial jurisdiction without agreement of a majority of provinces and retains its spending powers. SUFA committed the governments to a full public review of the Agreement and its implementation "by the end of the third year", or February 4, 2002.

The National Children's Agenda (NCA) has been SUFA's primary activity. Consisting of a broad "vision" statement, the NCA was, in turn, signed by the nine provinces and the federal government in May 1999. A third federal/provincial agreement, also nested under SUFA, the Early Childhood Development Agreement (ECDI), emerged in September 2000 at the annual First Ministers' meeting². This initiative transferred federal dollars to the provinces for "early learning and care" as one of four program areas from which provinces may choose (See Table 14 for provincial/territorial spending under the ECDI).

In the October 2002 Throne Speech, the federal government made a commitment to "work with its partners to increase access to early learning opportunities and to quality child care, particularly for poor and lone-parent families".

Provincial/territorial jurisdiction

With few exceptions, Canadian ECEC services — child care, nursery schools, kindergarten — like health, social services, and elementary, secondary and post-secondary education, are under the jurisdiction of provinces and territories. Each of Canada's 10 provinces and three territories has developed a program of regulated child care and a program for public kindergartens. (These are summarized in more detail in the Service Overview section below).

Local governments, the community, parent-users and advocates

Canadian municipalities do not have powers assigned by constitutional arrangements but are rather subordinate to the provinces who delegate powers — including taxing powers — to them. Outside Ontario — where they play several important roles in child care (funding, operation of services (about 10% of regulated child care services) and some policy-setting) — municipal/regional governments generally do not have a role in regulated child care although Vancouver plays a key role as well.

Local school boards (or school divisions) — also subordinate to provincial governments — usually have primary responsibility for the operation of elementary schools including kindergarten.

“The community” and parent-users are also an important part of Canadian ECEC. At the service delivery level, the bulk of the supply of regulated child care is initiated and maintained by parent and/or voluntary boards of directors; these child care programs comprise most of the not-for-profit child care sector that represents more than 80% of the total supply. Otherwise parents generally have little specific role in regulated child care, although the bulk of child care services are paid for by parent fees (a 1998 national study found that an average of 49.2% of revenue for full-day child care centres came from parent fees (Doherty, Lero, Goelman, LaGrange and Tougas, 2000).

In most parts of Canada, advocacy, professional and service groups and, to some extent, organized parent groups where they exist, make up what is often called “the child care community”. These groups are important providers of services like professional development and in-service training.

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 — for example, the labour movement, anti-poverty activists and feminists — have long been a fundamental element of Canadian advocacy for child care.

SERVICE OVERVIEW

Most of Canada's ECEC programs are under provincial jurisdiction. Generally, regulated child care includes centres, usually nursery schools (except in Québec, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and the Yukon) or preschools (part-day centre-based programs) and regulated family child care under the same legislation. Overall, spaces in regulated child care services are available for almost 600,000 of Canada's almost 5,000,000 children aged 0-12, with substantial regional and age-related variations in availability.

Almost all jurisdictions now require at least some of the staff working in child care with children to have some training in early childhood education; however, Canadian requirements for early childhood training are generally acknowledged to be less than adequate (see Table 19 for a summary of ECE training requirements in regulated child care). Concerns about the quality of Canadian child care services were reinforced in the late 1990s with the publication of *You Bet I Care!*, a Canada-wide study of staffing and quality in child care centres (Goelman, Doherty, Lero, LaGrange and Tougas, 2000) and regulated family child care (Doherty, Lero, Goelman, Tougas, and LaGrange, 2000).

All jurisdictions subsidize some or all costs in regulated child care for low-income parents. However, in most cases, limitations on the number of these subsidies exclude many eligible parents; in other cases, the subsidy provided does not cover the whole fee. Some provinces also provide funds to support the overall operation of child care services; this may be in the form of wage grants to raise staff wages. Overall, though, except in Québec, child care is primarily a fee-paying service in Canada, with many families not able to access services due to costs. Only Québec has set out a goal of universal child care, designated substantial public funding and designed a multiyear plan to move towards it.

All of the provinces and territories also provide public kindergarten. In almost all cases (except Prince Edward Island) kindergarten is part of the public education system and in most jurisdictions it is an entitlement. All provinces/territories provide kindergarten for five year olds; in Ontario, most school boards offer universal four year old kindergarten too. Most kindergarten is part-day or part-time (in Québec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, full-day kindergarten is the norm). Attendance at kindergarten is compulsory in a number of jurisdictions (New Brunswick, BC, Nova Scotia and the territories); however, almost all eligible children in all jurisdictions attend public kindergarten when this is offered. Three provinces and the territories maintain more than one publicly funded school system (public and Catholic). All offer kindergarten in both official languages where population warrants. Nunavut, the newest jurisdiction, provides kindergarten in Inuktitut.

Generally, there is little connection between kindergarten programs and regulated child care services at either the policy or service delivery level. In some provinces, Ontario, for example, there are many child care centres located in schools. Except in Québec, where school-aged child care is under the aegis of the Ministère de l'Éducation, child care services are usually not the responsibility of the education system but are operated by community boards of directors, other institutions or organizations (such as the YMCA) or by for-profit operators. School-based child care often serves school-aged children but other age groups including infants and toddlers may be served in school locations also.

Provincial/territorial ECEC programs are covered in more detail in the individual section for each jurisdiction, and in the Big Picture and Long View tables. ECEC services for Aboriginal communities and those under federal aegis are described in the sections that follow.

Notes

1 Québec is not a signatory to the Social Union Framework Agreement

2 While sharing the same concerns on early childhood development, Québec does not adhere to these federal-provincial-territorial documents.

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FEDERAL ECEC PROGRAMS

Under Canadian constitutional arrangements, it is assumed that child care and early childhood education services (ECEC) fall under provincial/territorial jurisdiction and this is generally the practice. However, there are a number of ECEC services and programs for which the federal government takes responsibility. Although there are some exceptions, ECEC services under federal aegis are intended for populations for whom the federal government has particular responsibility – for example, Aboriginal people, military families, and new immigrants and refugees. Table 1 describes ECEC programs for which the federal government is responsible.

TABLE 1

Ecec And Related Programs Under Federal Aegis

Program	Department	Objective	Eligibility	Spending
Child-minding	Citizenship and Immigration Canada	Care while parents who are newcomers take language training; intended to "help children adapt to Canada, acquire language, socialization".	Serves primarily 6 months – 6 years. Service provider organizations that provide language instruction for Newcomers programs. Note that national requirements for these are in the development process. In 2001, there were approximately 220 programs across Canada.	n/a
Military Family Resource Centres	Department of National Defence	Promote health and well being, information and referral for parents, aid to families in distress. Mandated programs serve 0-6 years. (May include child care centres).	Member of a military family. Military family resource programs are incorporated as not-for-profit agencies governed by Boards of Directors. In 2001, there were 35 MFRCs in Canada, 3 in the US (and 7 in Europe).	\$4 M (Spending for 0-6 years) (2000-2001) (Additional funds were made available to support new initiatives in 2001–2002)
Child Care Expense Deduction	Canada Customs and Revenue Agency	Reduces income tax associated with child care costs (0-16 years).	Individual tax deduction. Parent with lower income may deduct \$7,000 for children under 7 and \$4,000 for children aged 7-16. Receipt may be requested by CCRA. Claimed by 1.2 million families.	\$424,000,000 (2000-2001)
Maternity/ Parental Leave Benefit	Human Resources Development Canada	Replace partial cost of provincially-determined maternity/parental leave for newborns and newly adopted children.	Female and male parents eligible under Employment Insurance rules.	\$1,763,776,110 (2001)

Community Action Program for Children	Health Canada (Note that CAPC provides a variety of programs which, in some regions, are family resource programs.)	Funds to deliver services to meet the developmental needs of children under age 6 living in conditions of risk.	Community coalitions providing specified programs for children: in low-income families; in teenage-parent families; at risk of, or having, developmental delays, social, emotional/behavioural problems; and /or neglected or abused. Special consideration is given to Métis, Inuit and off-reserve First Nations children, children of recent immigrants or refugees, children in lone-parent families and children in remote or isolated communities. There are 464 CAPC projects across Canada.	\$59,500,000 (2000-2001)
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Note: Federal ECEC programs for Aboriginal children are described in Table 2, Aboriginal ECEC programs.

Maternity and parental leave benefits

While the length of maternity and parental leaves and the conditions determining terms and eligibility are provincially determined under labour legislation, the benefit that pays eligible parents for portions of these leaves falls under the federal Employment Insurance legislation. First included in the then-Unemployment Insurance Act in 1971, the length of the federal benefit has increased a number of times in the intervening years. A notable increase occurred in 1989 when benefits for parental leave (either parent) were added to maternity leave benefits reserved for birth mothers.

Most recently, the federal government increased the parental leave portion of the benefit to 35 weeks. Under these new rules, maternity benefits of 15 weeks and the new parental benefit of 35 weeks to a total of 50 weeks will be paid at 55% of insured earnings up to a maximum of \$413 a week to eligible parents.

The eligibility requirement now is 600 hours of insured work within the past 52 weeks (this requirement was reduced from 700 hours).

In 2001, spending for the federal benefit was:

Maternity	\$831,938,660
Adoption	14,773,150
Parental	917,064,300

Total \$1,763,776,110 The number of initial maternity leave benefit claims (2000/2001) may be found in each provincial/territorial section together with the number of births for 2000, the latest year available. It should be noted that the most recent data available for maternity and parental leave benefit claims (2001/2002) (not used in this publication) indicate a considerable increase in take-up.

ABORIGINAL ECEC

CONTEXT

Canada's Aboriginal populations include First Nations and non-status native people (on- and off-reserve), Métis and Inuit. Although many Aboriginal people live in remote and/or northern areas, there are large southern, urban populations as well.

Number of children 0-12 years identifying with an Aboriginal group, Canada (1996)

Age	North American Indian	Métis	Inuit
0-4	106,370	25,800	7,325
5-9	101,415	24,220	7,025
10-14	91,880	22,605	5,560

Note: These 1996 data are the most recent currently available. New data from the 2001 census are expected to become available in the spring of 2003.

ISSUES

Flexibility/accessibility

All Aboriginal groups have larger than average child populations, making early childhood education and care an especially important issue. There is a particular need for a wide range of flexible services to accommodate the diverse needs of the Aboriginal community.

Cultural integrity

The maintenance of indigenous culture is a major concern for all Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal organizations point out that general standards for child care centres are sometimes too rigid for northern and/or remote communities and that they may not reflect traditional cultural norms and practices. Culturally sensitive early childhood education as it pertains to training and service delivery is of special concern. There is a strong interest among Aboriginal groups in developing ECEC programs that are operated and controlled by the communities themselves.

Government policy

Generally, funding for on-reserve social programs is the responsibility of the Government of Canada. In 1996 the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended that

federal, provincial, and territorial governments co-operate 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, reducing 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.

Although provincial governments in some provinces carry out regulation of on-reserve Aboriginal child care, other provincial governments have not regulated it. In some provinces, First Nations communities do not recognize provincial jurisdiction on reserves. First Nations and Inuit organizations have responsibility for administration of funds and for developing services.

In the past, funding for child care was limited to First Nations in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, in Ontario and Alberta where the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) covered costs in accordance with provincial funding policies, and in Québec where child care programs for First Nations children received national funding through the James Bay Northern Québec Agreement. Until 1995,

when the First Nations Inuit Child Care Initiative and Aboriginal Head Start were announced, there was relatively little spending for Aboriginal ECEC in much of Canada.

TABLE 2

Federal Aboriginal ECEC programs

Program	Department	Objective(s)	Eligibility	Spending (2001)
First Nations/ Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI)	Human Resources Development Canada	Intended to achieve levels of quality and quantity of child care in First Nations and Inuit communities that are comparable to those available to the general population (ages 0-12 years).	On-reserve First Nations and Inuit communities. FNICCI funds child care in 389 First Nation and Inuit communities. FNICCI directly supports 6,833 child care spaces. In collaboration with First Nations Head Start and Aboriginal Head Start, FNICCI funds 14,237 spaces.	\$41 M
Child Day Care Program Alberta	Indian and Northern Affairs	Child care for parents' employment/training (ages 0-12 years)	On-reserve First Nations in Alberta (as a result of the 1992 Administrative Reform Agreement (Canada and Alberta).	\$2.7 M
Child Day Care Program Ontario	Indian and Northern Affairs	Child care for parents' employment/training (ages 0-12 years)	On-reserve First Nations in Ontario (as a result of a 1965 agreement between Canada and Ontario).	\$12 M (2000-2001)
Aboriginal Head Start	Health Canada	Child's intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical growth (ages 2-6 years).	Urban and northern First Nations off-reserve, Métis and Inuit communities. In 2000, there were AHS sites in 8 provinces and 3 territories, 3126 children.	\$22.5 M
First Nations Head Start	Health Canada	Prepares children for schooling by meeting intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical needs (ages 0-6 years).	On-reserve First Nations communities. As of December 2000, there were 168 funded First Nations Head Start projects (305 communities, 7,000 children).	\$22.9 M
Aboriginal Head Start New Brunswick	Indian and Northern Affairs	Child's social development (ages 0-6 years).	Eleven agencies in New Brunswick.	\$1.8 M (2000-2001)
First Nations Elementary Education (including pre-K and kindergarten)	Indian and Northern Affairs	To provide access to elementary First Nations students on-reserve including pre-K and kindergarten		\$65 M

Note: See provincial/territorial Aboriginal ECEC programs, Table 11.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In November 2002, the federal government announced a funding allocation of \$320 million over the next five years “to improve and expand” Early Child Development (ECD) programs and services for First Nations and other Aboriginal children. The funds will expand both Aboriginal Head Start programs, and the First Nations and Inuit Child Care Program; work toward development of a “single window” approach to ensure better integration and coordination; and introduce new research initiatives. These funds were announced in the 2001 federal budget.