

# Engagement Summary

First Nations Early Learning and Child Care Engagement to Support Development of the 2023-24 to 2025-26 CW-ELCC Action Plan

The Ministry of Education and Child Care is committed to consultation and engagement with First Nations to inform development of the 2023-24 to 2025-26 Action Plan under the Canada-British Columbia Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CW-ELCC) Agreement. Learnings from this and future engagement will allow the ministry to target federal funds from the CW-ELCC Agreement towards priorities identified by First Nations to support a distinctions-based approach to First Nations-led child care.

This series of engagements invited First Nations, community members and early learning and child care professionals to participate in virtual sessions to share their experiences and insights related to early learning and child care, what they would like to see prioritized over the next three years, and to hear from Nations on how they would like to be engaged by the ministry going forward.

## ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY



### Sessions

- 3 sessions on April 18-19, 2023
- 10 breakout focus groups, each with 5-7 participants



### Engagement Questions

1. What are your priorities for early learning and child care in your community and what is needed to support those priorities?
2. How would you like to be engaged going forward?



### Participants

- 66 total participants representing:
  - 43 Nations, 3 Tribal Councils
  - 8 First Nations Partner Organizations
  - 1 School District

## Next Steps

The ministry's engagement plan with First Nations includes additional consultation (via webinars) with First Nations to continue to inform priorities for future federal funding opportunities, as well as the co-development of regulations to bring the Early Learning and Child Care Act and the Early Childhood Educator Act into force.

## What We Heard: Key Themes

Over the course of our three sessions, we heard a wide range of priorities, insights and ideas for First Nations early learning and child care. The following is a summary of key themes explored during these engagements.

### Funding

- Funding should be flexible to allow Nations to determine how they want to serve their distinct community. Operational funding should be provided through a single stream of annual funding that supports wages, covers fees, and accounts for inflation.
- Core funding should include language and culture programming, to ensure that First Nations can support their language teachers and pay for Elders' support.
- Infrastructure and capital funding is needed to support Nations with building new child care centres, expanding existing centres, repairs and renovations.
- Funding for transportation is needed to increase child care attendance, as parents do not always have a way to access the child care centre.

### Programs

- Converting to Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) is a priority for some communities, while other communities want a larger umbrella of programs and services beyond AHS. This includes outreach (in-home visits) and recreational care (drop-in, mom and tot, etc.)
- The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact ELCC programs, as families and Elders are hesitant to participate.
- Language teaching is a key priority for programs to support language revitalization and foster kinship care
- Land-based learning programs are also a key priority for programs, including cultural field trips.
- Programs need to be flexible on a year-to-year basis as Nations may have varying numbers of births per year.

### Staffing

- Staff recruitment and retention is a significant challenge for most communities. Due to a lack of staff capacity, some programs are closing or are not able to open. Inflation, lack of housing and affordability challenges are contributing factors.
- An early childhood professional's fit is not only about qualifications and credentials, but also their lived experiences, skills, and ability to meet the needs of children with a trauma-informed practice.
- More incentives and support are needed for individuals pursuing ECE programs. Becoming a fully certified ECE is a challenge for ECE Assistants (ECEAs) who cannot afford to leave their community to complete their training and practicums. Limited staffing at centres would cause programs to close if ECEAs decide to pursue their full ECE certificate.

- Support is needed for language training and training in trauma-informed practice for ECEs. This funding could be provided to First Nations who have capacity to conduct their own training.

### Inclusion

- It is challenging to find qualified staff to work with children with support needs.
- Assessments need to be done in a culturally appropriate manner without having to travel out of the community. The wait times for assessments and appointments are too long and Nations have had to rely on submitting requests under Jordan's Principle to ensure that children can access the services they need, when they need them.

### Systems

- There is a need for increased connections between early learning and child care and the K-12 sector. Some communities have begun this work and created these connections through shared staff (cultural advisors, speech and language pathologists, etc.), which supports the child when they enter kindergarten.
- Licensing regulations limits culturally appropriate care for First Nations. Because of this, some communities do not want to license their programs; however, there is limited funding available to support unlicensed programming.

### Engagement

- Virtual sessions are appreciated as an accessible form of engagement that does not require too much time, and small breakout rooms provide a more comfortable environment for sharing perspectives. Materials should be shared in advance.
- An opportunity for written engagement or a document submission would be appreciated, to outline needs in more detail.
- Regional outreach is a priority for engagement, such as in-person engagements or having dedicated ministry staff to support regions.
- There is a backlog of communication if all communication goes to Chief and Council. Contact information for each Nation needs to be developed to reach the staff responsible for early learning and child care in each Nation in a streamlined way.

## Stay Connected

[Join our Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Mailing List](#)

**Website:** [www.gov.bc.ca/childcare](http://www.gov.bc.ca/childcare)

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