

**B.C. Ministry of
Education and Child Care**

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Where All Children Belong: B.C. Inclusive Child Care Strategy



ChildCareBC

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Territorial Acknowledgment

The Ministry of Education and Child Care acknowledges the territories of First Nations around B.C. and is grateful to carry out our work on these lands.

As the ministry is committed to reconciliation, we acknowledge the rights, interests, priorities and concerns of all Indigenous Peoples – First Nations, Métis and Inuit – respecting and acknowledging their distinct cultures, histories, and rights. We are committed to building child care as a core service where all First Nations, Métis and Inuit children have access to inclusive, culturally safe care.

The ministry gratefully recognizes the honesty and vulnerability that so many child care providers, child care professionals, families and community members have offered in sharing their stories, experiences and ideas. The generous sharing of this lived and living experience has been foundational to the creation of this strategy.



Message from Mitzi Dean, Minister of State for Child Care

Child care is more than just a space for children to be cared for while their parents are working or going to school. A rich early learning environment provides opportunities for children to explore, investigate and learn about the world around them and to build connections with children who have diverse backgrounds and abilities. For school-aged children it is a chance to be active, try new things and build social connections before and after school. For families, access to affordable, quality, inclusive, culturally safe child care can have profound impacts on their lives. For our province, access to child care contributes to improved equality for women, a reduction in poverty and an increase in the well-being of future generations.

For too long, early learning and child care was not treated like a necessity, leaving families to bear the high costs of scarce, market-driven care. That is why in 2018, the Province of B.C. introduced the 10-year [ChildCareBC plan](#) which recognizes the critical role that access to affordable, quality, inclusive, culturally safe child care has in the lives of families and children. To date, the Province has invested \$4.4 billion to build a future where child care is a core service that families can rely on. Thanks to investments in space creation, the child care workforce and child care operations, the sector has grown significantly, and families and their children are benefitting every day.

The child care sector is complex, and the work of building child care into a sustainable core service is significant and long term. The historic investments into child care from the Province and the Government of Canada through two [early learning and child care agreements](#)¹ have resulted in provincewide mobilization to improve access to affordable, culturally-based, quality and inclusive child care. Families have seen life-changing reductions in their child care fees from \$45 a day to \$18 a day on our path to \$10 a day. Since the start of ChildCareBC, the number of licensed child care spaces participating in provincial programs has increased from 111,000 child care spaces in 2017-18 to 146,600 – an increase of approximately 32% licensed child care spaces, with more spaces opening every month.

¹ The development of the Inclusive Child Care Strategy supports a commitment under the [2021 to 2026 Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement](#) with Government of Canada to develop a plan and make progress to enable equitable access to licensed child care for diverse populations including but not limited to children living in low income; Indigenous children; Black and other racialized children; children with disabilities and children needing enhanced or individual supports; children of newcomers to Canada; and official language minorities, have equitable access to regulated child care spaces, in proportion to their presence in the population.

We know child care professionals are the heart of child care. Since 2018, early childhood educators are better supported to enter and remain in the workforce, with median wages growing from \$19 per hour to \$29 per hour. To help continue supporting the workforce into the future, B.C. has developed and is testing a first iteration of a wage grid with a selection of \$10 a Day ChildCareBC centers so that child care professionals are compensated fairly and recognized as skilled career professionals.

Families across the province are diverse, with a multitude of languages, cultures, identities and experiences, each bringing unique gifts, interests and perspectives to their communities. Government is committed to building a core service that removes barriers for families experiencing inequity and empowers child care professionals to engage with, and to reflect, the communities they serve within the early learning environments they create. Since 2018, government has invested in Indigenous-led spaces by funding the creation of more than 2,340, new licensed Indigenous-led child care spaces through the New Spaces Fund, and over 940 more through partnerships with the First Nations Health Authority, Métis Nation BC and the Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC. Through the Provincial Nominee Program, B.C. has supported over 1,260 child care professionals who are new to Canada to work in child care settings across the province. Diversity in the child care workforce supports connection and belonging in child care for all B.C. families and children.

Our continued investments, in partnership with the Government of Canada, in the Supported Child Development and Aboriginal Supported Child Development programs have resulted in an increase from 6,000 to more than 7,700 children receiving inclusive child care services per month. We continue to invest in resources to build child care providers' foundational knowledge and skills including the [Inclusive Child Care Toolkit](#) and the [Behaviour in the Early Years Initiative](#). Government is working to build the foundation for child care as a core service that families can rely on, however, there is much more work still to be done.

We know many families continue to face challenges in securing child care that meets their needs. Indigenous families, newcomers to Canada, Francophone families and racialized families experience more significant barriers than others in accessing and being meaningfully included in child care and may experience multiple challenges to securing child care for their children. Children with support needs are being disproportionately excluded from child care in comparison to their peers without support needs. True inclusion requires addressing these barriers and ultimately benefits everyone, enabling children, families and child care professionals to know that they belong.

Families of children with support and complex medical needs access services and supports through multiple ministries and organizations. Navigating these supports can be challenging and work is ongoing across government to make this process less burdensome for families. This strategy is our roadmap towards the ChildCareBC vision of child care as a core service. This vision will be achieved by working collaboratively with partners to enable child care providers to deliver quality, inclusive, culturally safe child care to all families and children. There is a lot of work to do to fulfill this vision and it cannot be done quickly or simply – but we remain committed to making this a reality for children and families in B.C. This continued effort requires a systemic approach and necessitates embedding inclusion and equity into all aspects of child care as a core service.

Sincerely,


Mitzi Dean

Minister of State for Child Care



ChildCareBC Vision for Affordable, Quality, Inclusive, Culturally Safe Child Care

Government is committed to building quality, inclusive, culturally safe child care as a core service – a service that is there for families when they need it, at a price they can afford.

The ChildCareBC vision of child care as a core service is a significant part of government’s cross-ministry commitment to improve outcomes for families and children. Research has demonstrated that participating in quality, inclusive, culturally safe early care and learning settings supports their long-term health and well-being, enabling all children to thrive. Equitable access to affordable, inclusive, culturally safe licensed child care contributes to a strong provincial economy and to the well-being of families who experience inequity, as described in [TogetherBC: British Columbia’s Poverty Reduction Strategy](#) and [Safe and Supported: British Columbia’s Gender-Based Violence Action Plan](#).

Multiple partners are needed to collectively make inclusion and equitable access to licensed child care a reality. The work towards the vision of child care as a core service is advanced under the Ministry of Education and Child Care in partnership with the Government of Canada as well as other B.C. ministries, such as the Ministry of Children and Family Development, local governments, First Nations governments, Indigenous communities, school boards and community partners.

Inclusive child care means that children of all abilities and backgrounds, including neurodiverse children, children with a disability and children with other support needs have equitable access to quality child care. Inclusive child care recognizes the individual strengths and inherent gifts of each child and all children are supported to belong and learn through play along with other children in a child care program of the family’s choosing.

Equity of access means that barriers to accessing inclusive, quality and affordable child care are removed for families from diverse populations, including but not limited to: low-income families, Black or other racialized populations, Indigenous populations, newcomers to Canada, families of children with disabilities or children needing enhanced supports and families experiencing vulnerability.

Culturally safe child care meets the distinct needs and interests of First Nations, Métis, Inuit people and Indigenous organizations with equitable access to affordable, inclusive, quality, culturally relevant programs and services.

Legislative Foundation for ChildCareBC

In 2020, the mandate letter for the Minister of State for Child Care stated a commitment to “enshrine the concept of universal child care in legislation to protect the principles of affordable, accessible, inclusive and quality child care.” The Early Childhood Educators Act (ECEA) and the Early Learning and Child Care Act (ELCCA) received Royal Assent on October 28, 2021. These Acts will be brought into force once the regulations are developed to support them. Together, these Acts form a legislative foundation to implement inclusive, quality, affordable child care.

The B.C. government is committed to taking action on reconciliation, as described in B.C.’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, which is why the Province is working to implement a meaningful consultation process to bring the ELCCA and the ECEA into force.

- The Early Learning and Child Care Act confirms government’s ongoing commitment to making child care more affordable and will improve the inclusiveness of B.C. child care programs.
- The Early Childhood Educators Act will support improved oversight of early childhood educators and educational programs to ensure standards of care and quality of practice for people working with young children.





Engagement Summary

To inform the development of the Inclusive Child Care Strategy, the Ministry of Education and Child Care completed a series of initial engagements to understand how inclusion is currently supported in licensed child care settings and determine what actions are needed to build a core service over the short and long term. Findings of these engagements are summarized in the Equity, Inclusion and Child Care in B.C.: Engagement Report available on the [ChildCareBC](#) website. The report provides an overview of the key themes heard during engagement, which draws on participants' experiences, insights and hopes for the future.

The work of building inclusive child care as a core service will take time. The Ministry of Education and Child Care will learn from partner ministry engagements and will continue to engage with First Nations, Indigenous communities and organizations, families, child care providers, child care professionals and the communities that support them to inform this ongoing work. This work will also require specific consultation with First Nations title and rights holders in alignment with B.C.'s obligations under the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Act](#).

Common and collective feedback heard throughout these initial engagement sessions includes:

- Families and children need to be at the centre of inclusive child care. Indigenous participants emphasized that children are at the centre of all things and there is a collective responsibility to care for them.
- Children need to feel like they belong, which means their needs are met, their unique identities and cultures are celebrated and their language is welcomed and shared.
- Families want to feel secure knowing that when their child is in an early learning and child care environment, they are safe, respected, and emotionally supported even if they are using big behaviors to communicate.
- Families want to know that any disruptions to the care of children with support needs will be well-informed, reasonable and like those experienced by other children without support needs.
- When families need supports or services they want them to be easy to find and access. It can be very challenging navigating different, but interrelated supports delivered through different ministries.
- Child care providers want to be empowered to provide inclusive, culturally safe child care services.

Engagement reflected three themes of barriers to truly inclusive child care as a core service:

1. **Inequity of access to child care:** Families are having difficulty finding and accessing care that meets their unique needs.
2. **Exclusion of children with support needs:** Children with support and complex needs are being disproportionately excluded from child care in comparison to their peers without support needs.
3. **Limited support for an inclusion- and equity-focused workforce:** The child care workforce is not well supported to deliver inclusive, culturally safe child care to families and children of all backgrounds and abilities.

The Inclusive Child Care Strategy identifies goals and early actions for the Province as it makes progress towards inclusive child care as a core service. Through this process, ongoing engagement,

including engagement and consultation with First Nations and Modern Treaty Nations, will inform the evolution of the early actions and development of further actions to support and enable child care providers to deliver quality, inclusive, culturally safe child care to all families.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is currently engaging with the public to inform the design of an effective service delivery model to support children and youth with support needs. Because this engagement is currently underway, learnings were not reflected in this report. The Ministry of Education and Child Care and MCFD will collaborate closely to develop further actions related to children with support needs in child care settings following MCFD's public engagement in order to realize a future where child care providers are empowered to deliver truly inclusive, culturally safe child care.



The ChildCareBC plan recognizes that the Province is obligated to ensure that Indigenous children, families and communities have access to child care that meets their distinct needs. In 2019, B.C. became the first jurisdiction in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as the Province's framework to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples through the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Act](#). Under this Act, and in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples, in 2022 the Province released the Declaration Act Action Plan to achieve the objectives of UNDRIP. The [Declaration Act Action Plan](#) includes 89 priority actions to advance the work of reconciliation over a five year period, including action 4.19, which commits the Province to work in collaboration with B.C. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples to implement a distinctions-based approach to support and move forward jurisdiction over child care for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples who want and need it in B.C. Additionally, the approach to Indigenous-led, distinctions-based child care is informed by the federal Indigenous [Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#), anchored in self-determination, centered on children, and grounded in culture.

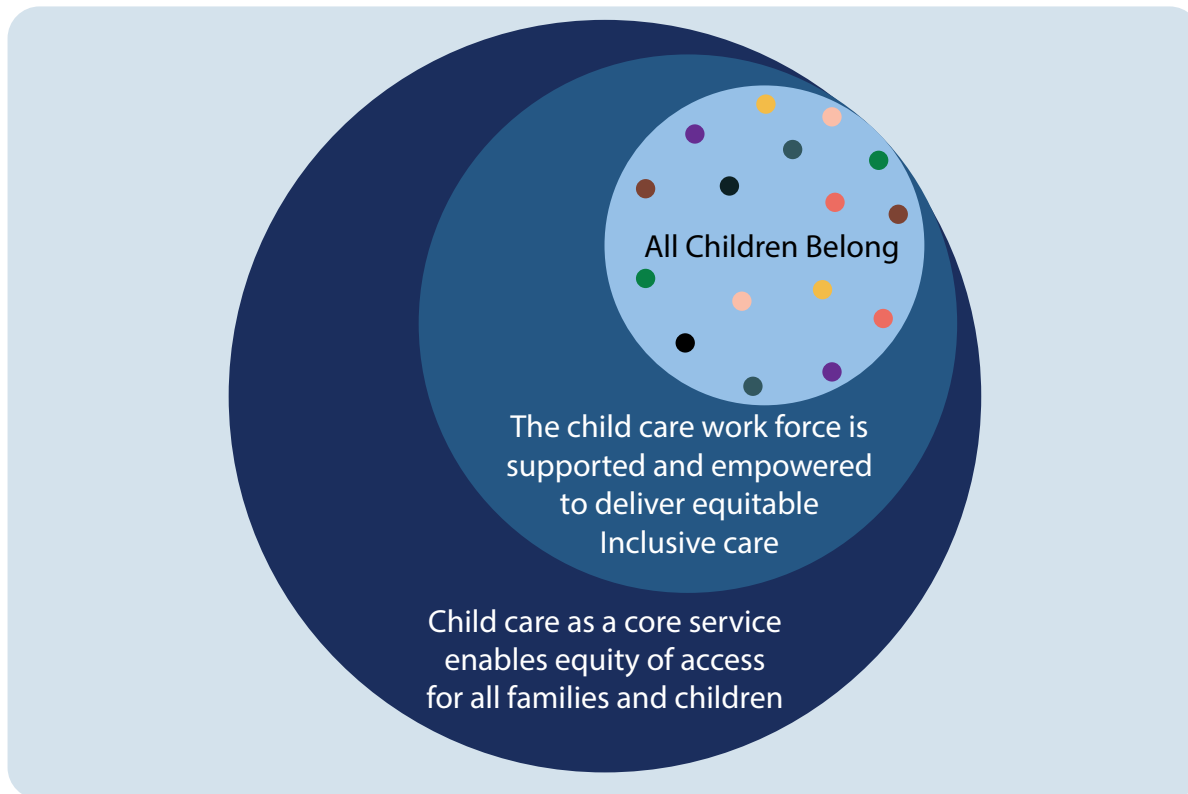
The Inclusive Child Care Strategy

The Inclusive Child Care Strategy places children at the centre. The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework asserts that “children hold a sacred place in the cultures of Indigenous Peoples. With that comes a sacred responsibility to care for them.”² Family, community and culture are critical to children’s well-being and belonging. Early childhood educators and other child care professionals care for children within a broad range of ages, stages, identities, needs and cultures, supporting their development and inclusion through play-based learning. To enable this important work, child care professionals must also be well supported.

This strategy is focused primarily on licensed child care but recognizes intersections with other early learning and care settings. It identifies the foundational building blocks needed to achieve inclusive child care as a core service, including:

- A set of guiding principles which government will use to inform current and future ChildCareBC initiatives.
- Three interrelated long-term goals each with multiple areas of focus and early actions - figure 1 shows how the three long-term goals fit together.
- A plan for updating and refreshing actions and reporting on progress towards the strategy’s long-term goal.

Figure 1. Inclusive Child Care Strategy Goals



² [Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#): The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework represents the Government of Canada and Indigenous peoples’ work to co-develop a transformative Indigenous framework that reflects the unique cultures, aspirations and needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children across Canada. The Framework sets out a shared vision, principles and a path forward for Indigenous early learning and child care—a Canada where all Indigenous children have the opportunity to experience high-quality, culturally rooted early learning and child care programming.



Guiding Principles for B.C.'s Inclusive Child Care Core Service

The principles for inclusive child care as a core service will guide the Ministry of Education and Child Care's work to enable child care providers, child care professionals and community organizations to improve access to quality, inclusive, culturally safe child care.

The principles are intended to complement the conventions³ and legislative frameworks that support inclusivity, accessibility and equity for B.C. children and families, including the Human Rights Code, the Accessibility Act, the Anti-Racism Act⁴ and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Act. These principles also align with the Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act,⁵ the B.C. Early Childhood Educator Act and the B.C. Early Learning and Child Care Act.

³ This includes the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Rights of Indigenous People and the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities

⁴ At the time of this writing, the B.C. Anti-Racism Act had completed its first reading as [Bill 23-2024: Anti-Racism Act](#).

⁵ At the time of this writing, the Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act had received royal assent as Bill C-59, an Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada.

Early Learning and Child Care Frameworks

provide guidance to educators and other child care professionals to help them create quality, inclusive, culturally appropriate environments in early years child care programs.

[BC Early Learning Framework \(ELF\)](#)

The BC ELF establishes a vision for respectfully living and learning together. It supports the rich early learning experiences of children, provides a focal point for dialogue among British Columbians, and creates a common language and greater understanding of the vital importance of early learning for all young children.

[Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework \(I-ELCC\)](#)

This overarching framework provides a guide for communities, program administrators, service providers, policy makers and governments to work towards achieving a shared vision that all Indigenous children have the opportunity to experience high-quality, culturally-strong early learning and child care. The overarching I-ELCC framework uses a distinctions-based approach that respects the specific priorities of First Nations, Inuit and the Métis Nation by supporting distinct First Nations, Métis, and Inuit frameworks.



Principles for Inclusive Child Care

These principles complement frameworks which guide child care providers and child care professionals in creating child care environments that provide enriching, inclusive, culturally rooted experiences that celebrate diversity. These frameworks include the [BC Early Learning Framework](#) and the [Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#). The principles for inclusive child care as a core service are:

Child and Family Centered

Inclusive child care as a core service recognizes and values the rights of children, focusing on their well-being and positive outcomes. Child care as a core service supports all families to access child care and enables their meaningful involvement.

Valuing and Supporting Child Care Providers and the Child Care Workforce

Inclusive child care as a core service recognizes the value of early childhood education and supports providers, educators and other child care professionals in building foundational skills, knowledge and capacity for equitable, inclusive and trauma-informed child care.

Meaningful and Effective Communication and Collaboration

Inclusive child care as a core service enables meaningful and effective communication and collaboration between provincial ministries; child care providers; child care professionals; families; Indigenous communities, partners, governments and title and rights holders; and agencies that support children, families and communities.

Actively Responsive to Diverse Identities

Inclusive child care as a core service enables child care providers and child care professionals to celebrate the diverse identities of children, families and staff, including their cultural identities, sexual orientation and gender identities, family structures, ethnicity, abilities and other ways of knowing and being.

Culturally Safe, Anti-Racist and Anti-Ableist

Inclusive child care as a core service enables child care providers and child care professionals to deliver inclusive, culturally safe environments that foster anti-racist, anti-ableist practice.

Evidence-Informed

Inclusive child care as a core service is evidence-informed, reflecting current knowledge, data and meaningful engagement to support continuous improvement.

Supporting Continuity of Care

Inclusive child care as a core service promotes continuity of care for children and supports families and children during times of transition.



Strategy Goals and Early Actions

Goal 1

Child care as a core service enables equity of access for all families and children



Finding a child care space in B.C. that meets a family's needs can be challenging. As of December 2023, there were over 146,000 licensed child care spaces participating in B.C. government child care funding programs, enough for 23% of children ages 12 and under. This represents a substantial 32% increase in licensed spaces available to families since ChildCareBC was introduced in 2018, with others still in development. However, demand continues to grow in many communities, while the province continues efforts to support and enable the expansion of available child care spaces.

Families throughout B.C. may experience multiple barriers to finding and accessing a child care space in their community that meets their needs and is truly inclusive and culturally relevant. Access to child care is particularly precarious for families of children with support needs who may be required to navigate multiple programs across different ministries and organizations to access needed supports. This challenge may be even greater for Indigenous

families, newcomers to Canada, racialized families and Francophone families with children with support needs who may experience overlapping barriers to securing child care.

As vital parts of their communities, child care professionals are encouraged to develop relationships with local resources and organizations that support families, such as Child Care Resource and Referral organizations, child development centres and multicultural centres. Child care providers are also encouraged to create connections with their local Indigenous communities and organizations, such as friendship centres. These relationships help minimize the barriers families experience in accessing truly inclusive, culturally appropriate child care.

Embedding inclusivity and equity in all aspects of child care as a core service will enable child care providers and child care professionals to create environments where staff, families and children of all backgrounds and abilities know that they belong. To make progress towards Goal 1 government will work to empower child care providers to deliver inclusive child care services, increase spaces when and where they are needed, continue to enhance affordability for families and support the provision of distinctions-based care.



Empowering child care providers to deliver equitable, inclusive child care

The B.C. government is committed to enabling child care providers and child care professionals to deliver quality, inclusive, affordable services to all families and children. Initiatives such as the \$10 a Day ChildCareBC program and the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative are helping families and child care providers see benefits now, while building the foundations for child care as a core service. To further enable child care providers to deliver quality, inclusive child care, government will take the following actions:

- **Action:** Examine options through the \$10 a Day program to enable child care providers to deliver quality, inclusive and culturally safe child care.
- **Action:** Support providers in developing and implementing an inclusion policy for their program.

Enabling equitable availability of child care programs

Finding a child care space that is available and meets a family's unique needs can be a challenge in B.C., in particular for rural and remote communities that face barriers recruiting and retaining sufficient child care professionals to operate licensed child care programs, limiting available child care spaces for families living there. Since the start of ChildCareBC

the sector has grown by over 35,000 licensed child care spaces thanks to combined provincial and federal investments in space creation, workforce supports and operational funding. B.C. is on track to meet its Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement commitments to create an additional 30,000 licensed spaces by spring 2026. However, demand is increasing as more affordable child care spaces become available to families. More work needs to be done to enable a future state where early learning and child care environments are designed to welcome and support the belonging of all families and children, and that enough spaces are created and distributed in ways that meet the diverse needs of B.C. families. To enable equitable availability of child care programs, government will take the following actions:

- **Action:** Continue to enable growth of child care spaces in the province and work towards a future state where licensed child care spaces are built where and when they are most needed using a data-informed approach to funding.
- **Action:** Explore opportunities to enhance accessibility and inclusivity in the physical, social and cultural environment.
- **Action:** Examine barriers to accessing child care services for families who may experience inequity such as Indigenous families, newcomers to Canada, racialized families and parents with disabilities.

Making child care affordable for all families

For too long child care costs have been unaffordable. That is why in 2018, government committed to taking action to reduce the cost of child care for families with the introduction of the ChildCareBC Plan. Since then, average child care fees have been reduced from \$45 a day to \$18 a day through combined provincial and federal investments in the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative, the \$10 a Day program, the Affordable Child Care Benefit and the Aboriginal Head Start program. Thousands of families across the province are paying \$10 a day, or less, through the combined investments in these programs. Now families are facing the additional pressures of balancing rising costs because of global inflation. To continue the work of enhancing affordability for families as access to child care grows across the province, government will take the following actions:

- **Action:** Continue to support B.C. families with reduced child care fees.
- **Action:** Examine barriers to accessing existing affordability programs for families experiencing inequity.

Supporting distinctions-based child care

Many families in B.C. experience inequitable access to child care and inclusive, culturally safe services. Indigenous families and children in the province may face additional barriers to accessing care that meets their distinct needs. Government will continue to take a distinctions-based approach to working alongside Indigenous Peoples to improve access to child care for First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and families. This includes investing in the creation of new, Indigenous-led child care spaces and supporting Early Childhood Educators and child care professionals to enhance their skills in creating inclusive, culturally safe environments. To continue supporting distinctions-based child care, government will take the following initial action:

- **Action:** Collaboratively plan with Indigenous Peoples to enable equitable access to inclusive, culturally safe child care for First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and families.



Goal 2

The child care workforce is supported and empowered to deliver equitable, inclusive, culturally safe care

The child care workforce is vital to the development of child care as a core service. Child Care professionals provide care, connection and guidance for children and are an important part of a wider community of supports that enable families to thrive. Early Childhood Educators and other child care professionals help prepare children for the future, providing important experiences and caring learning environments at some of the most important times in their lives. To make progress towards Goal 2, government is committed to supporting the work of training, recruiting and retaining a skilled, diverse and stable workforce of child care educators who are well-equipped to practice reflectively and deliver quality, inclusive and culturally appropriate child care services.

Since 2018, the B.C. government has increased wages through the Early Childhood Educator Wage Enhancement (ECE-WE) by up to \$6 per hour for eligible ECEs⁶ working in licensed child care facilities, bringing the median wage for ECEs up to \$29 per hour. Free professional development and resources, such as the Inclusive Child Care Toolkit and the Behaviour in the Early Years Initiative, are available through the [ChildCareBC](https://www.childcarebc.ca) website to support child care professionals to enhance their understanding of inclusive practices. While some child care providers and professionals are experts in inclusivity, many are in the early stages of their journey towards inclusive child care. A more comprehensive approach is needed to support both

new and experienced child care professionals in providing inclusive, culturally safe child care. This includes comprehensive education and professional development, as well as ongoing supports in the workplace that help child care professionals build their skills in providing inclusive child care.



⁶ In recognition of recent negotiated wage increases and to address inequities, ECEs in the non-public sector are eligible to receive a wage enhancement of \$6/hour and those in the public sector are eligible to receive \$4/hour.



Supporting reflective practice and capacity building

To deliver quality, inclusive, culturally appropriate child care services ECEs and other child care professionals need the tools, guidance and professional development opportunities that enable them to practice reflectively and build their capacity over time. Since 2018, government has funded the development of free, online training and resources, access to mentorship and support for implementation of inclusive pedagogy. Specifically, government has funded the development of resources to support child care professionals in creating distinctions-based, culturally appropriate child care environments through the [BC Aboriginal Child Care Society \(BCACCS\)](#), the [Aboriginal Child Care Resource and Referral \(ACCRR\)](#) program and the [BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres](#). To further empower child care providers and professionals to enhance the inclusivity of their programs overall, many of the Supported Child Development (SCD) and Aboriginal Supported Child Development (ASCD) programs offer program-wide consultation to child care providers and child care professionals. To expand on these initiatives and further support child care professionals to more easily access resources that enable them to build their skills and knowledge, government will take the following actions:

Supporting a skilled, diverse and stable workforce

More skilled and experienced child care professionals are needed to ensure that child care environments are sufficiently staffed with people who have the skills and capacity to deliver inclusive, culturally appropriate child care services in all early learning and child care settings in B.C. More is needed to support child care professionals to feel that their work is valued and well-compensated. Released in 2018, the [Early Care and Learning Recruitment and Retention Strategy](#) set out government's plan to improve supports for current and prospective child care professionals in the child care sector. To build child care as a core service that supports a skilled, diverse and stable workforce with the capacity to provide inclusive child care, government will:

- **Action:** Continue to support programs and initiatives that work to improve compensation and working conditions for child care professionals.
- **Action:** Support recognized post-secondary programs to embed inclusion and cultural safety in early childhood education and care programs.
- **Action:** Explore updates to the B.C. Child Care Sector Occupational Competencies related to inclusivity and cultural safety.
- **Action:** Continue to support programs and initiatives that enable diverse representation of families and communities in the child care workforce.
- **Action:** Develop a quality guide/tool to support reflective practice and continuous improvement among child care professionals.
- **Action:** Increase access to quality professional development and mentorship opportunities, including but not limited to training in cultural safety, anti-racism, supporting children's mental health, understanding and responding to children's behaviours and providing trauma-informed care.
- **Action:** Continue to enable SCD and ASCD programs to increase their emphasis on capacity building in partnership with child care providers.

Goal 3

All children belong



B.C. children have multiple identities and intersectional experiences, each bringing their unique interests and perspectives to each day. Inclusive, culturally responsive child care recognizes that inclusion benefits everyone, celebrating the diverse identities and inherent gifts of each child while supporting their individual needs.

For many children, requiring some form of additional support to meaningfully participate is part of the makeup of their unique identities, background and experiences. In some cases, temporary or

ongoing accommodations or modifications are needed to provide children with support needs with the opportunities to participate in all activities meaningfully and authentically. Key to supporting children's inclusion in child care settings are the community-based SCD and ASCD programs. Through these programs, consultants work with child care professionals and families to develop strategies for full participation of children with support needs. Additionally, SCD and ASCD programs may connect families and providers to other support services such as early intervention therapies. In partnership with the Government of Canada, B.C. has made substantial increased investments in SCD and ASCD programs and significantly more children are being supported. However, these new investments are not fully meeting the demand for supports and many families continue to experience long wait times to access SCD or ASCD services.

This demonstrates the need for government to take a systematic approach to building the foundation for child care as a core service, empowering child care providers to create truly inclusive and culturally safe early learning and care environments. To make progress towards Goal 3, government is committed to working towards a future where there is clearer insight into the experiences of families and children accessing child care, that access to inclusive child care is equitable and children with support needs experience a smoother transition between child care programs and school

Enabling full inclusion of children with support needs

Child care providers in the current state have varied capacity to provide quality, inclusive child care services to children of all backgrounds and abilities. SCD and ASCD programs provide critical supports for inclusive child care, but these programs are not fully meeting demand across the province and many families face long wait times. Government is committed to taking a cross-ministry approach to removing barriers and increasing access to services that support inclusive child care for all families and children. MCFD is currently engaging with the public to inform the design of an effective service delivery model to support children and youth with support needs. This includes the delivery of SCD and ASCD programs. To build child care as a core service where all children are supported to belong the following early actions will be informed by MCFD's ongoing public engagement:

- **Action:** Continue to work with MCFD to provide inclusive child care supports through SCD and ASCD while examining what barriers families are experiencing in accessing these services
- **Action:** Collaborate with other ministries to identify strategies for inclusion of children with complex medical needs.
- **Action:** Explore opportunities to strengthen inclusion and cultural safety in school-aged child care (before- and after-school care).
- **Action:** Collaborate with other ministries to explore barriers to and opportunities for access to appropriate after-school care for children and youth over the age of 12.

The Ministry of Education and Child Care and MCFD will collaborate to develop further actions for children and youth with support needs in child care settings following MCFD's public engagement.



Understanding the experiences and outcomes for families and children

Like many other jurisdictions, B.C. currently has limited insight into the experiences of families and children accessing child care services. Since 2018, the Province has taken significant early steps to expand collection of meaningful information from child care providers, child care professionals and families and apply the learnings to evolving policy and programs. This includes the implementation of the annual Provider Profile Survey and the 2023/24 School-Aged Child Care Demand Parent Survey. However, more engagement with families is needed to understand how child care is impacting the well-being, cultural connectivity and belonging of B.C. children and their families. To further understand these impacts, government will take the following early action:

- **Action:** Explore options for understanding the experiences and outcomes for families and children participating in child care.

Strengthening transitions between child care and school

Making the transition from child care to school is a significant change for children and families. For families of children with support needs this transition can be especially challenging as they learn about new environments and new systems of support. While supports for transition to kindergarten are available provincewide, a successful transition from child care to school for children with support needs often requires individualized planning in advance of their school entry. Many school boards, ECEs and other child care professionals, SCD/ASCD workers and others have developed strong policies

and programs to support families of children with support needs in making these challenging transitions. However, B.C. does not currently have a provincially coordinated approach to support families of children with support needs in this transition from child care to school. To smooth this experience for families and children with support needs, government will take the following early action:

- **Action:** Develop a provincial approach for strengthening supports for transition from child care to kindergarten and beyond for children with support needs.





Reporting on Progress

The B.C. government is committed to working towards a future state where child care is a core service that families can rely on. While there has been significant progress made to reduce parent fees, increase the number of child care spaces and increase ECE wages, there is still a long way to go before quality, inclusive, culturally safe child care is equitably available to all families and children. The Inclusive Child Care Strategy describes the areas of focus and early actions government must now take to build the foundation for inclusive child care as a core service. As this work continues over the long term, government is committed to reporting on the progress of the early actions while updating the strategy’s areas of focus and actions as the way forward becomes clearer.

As part of this commitment to reporting on progress, the Ministry of Education and Child Care will continue to engage with partner ministries, First Nations, Indigenous communities and organizations, community partners and interested parties, child care providers and families. In alignment with government’s responsibilities under the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People Act, this includes taking a distinctions-based approach to engagement with Indigenous Peoples, to ensure that barriers to accessing quality, inclusive, culturally safe child care services are identified and removed for First Nations, Métis and Inuit families and children.

Strategy Release Summer 2024	Short-Term Spring 2026	Mid-Term 2028 and 2030	Long-Term 2032
Inclusive Child Care Strategy Released	Updated Actions & First Progress Report	Refreshed Actions & Progress Report	Renewed Inclusive Child Care Strategy

While there is a long way yet to go, there is reason to celebrate the progress that has been made so far by governments, child care providers and the many organizations that support child care professionals, families and children across the province. Included in the appendix are some early measures demonstrating that government is making progress towards a future state where child care is a core service that families can rely on. These measures will be updated and further refined in future Inclusive Child Care Strategy progress reports.



Conclusion

While significant progress has been made in reducing child care costs for families, finding a licensed child care space that meets their needs remains challenging for many B.C. families. Some families, such as those in rural communities, newcomers to Canada, Indigenous families, racialized families and others experience multiple barriers in accessing inclusive, culturally safe child care. Access to child care is particularly precarious for families of children with support needs who may be required to navigate multiple programs across multiple ministries and organizations to access needed supports.

Government is committed to building a future where quality, inclusive, culturally appropriate child care is a core service that families can rely on. This Inclusive Child Care Strategy affirms this commitment, demonstrates the early progress that has been made and identifies early actions that will help B.C. make progress towards the vision of child care as a core service where all children of every ability and background can fully participate and truly belong.

Glossary

Children with support needs

Children with support needs refers to children who are experiencing, or have an increased likelihood of experiencing, developmental delay or disability and who require support to optimize their development, functional abilities and quality of life. Children may be experiencing developmental delay as a result of neurobiological factors or as a result of social/environmental factors. This definition is not limited to children with a diagnosis. For many children, the need for support surrounds behaviours that challenge staff. Children communicate through behaviour, and big behaviours may be responses to factors in their environment. See the [Inclusive Child Care Toolkit](#) for more information.

Culturally safe child care

Culturally safe child care meets the distinct needs and interests of First Nations, Métis, Inuit people and Indigenous organizations with equitable access to affordable, inclusive, quality, culturally relevant programs and services.

A Distinctions-based approach

A distinctions-based approach, and appropriate respect for Indigenous laws and jurisdictions means that the scope of rights enjoyed by an Indigenous People is contextual and that the Province's relations and dealings with First Nations, Métis and Inuit will be conducted in a manner that is appropriate for the specific context, recognizing and respecting the distinct and different rights, laws, legal systems and systems of governance of each. See the [B.C. Government Distinctions-Based Approach Primer](#) (December 2023) for more information.

Equity of access

Equity of access means that barriers to accessing inclusive, quality and affordable child care are removed for families from diverse populations, including but not limited to: low-income families, Black or other racialized populations, Indigenous populations, newcomers to Canada, families of children with disabilities or children needing enhanced supports and families experiencing vulnerability.

Inclusive child care

Inclusive child care means that children of all abilities and backgrounds, including neurodiverse children, children with a disability and children with other support needs have equitable access to quality child care. Inclusive child care recognizes the individual strengths and inherent gifts of each child and all children are supported to belong and learn through play along with other children in a child care program of the family's choosing.

School-Aged child care

School-aged child care is a program that provides before or after school hours or on a day of school closure, care to children who attend school, including kindergarten. See the [Community Care and Assisted Living Act](#) and the Child Care Licensing Regulations for more information.



Appendix

Early Measurements of Progress

Goal 1: Child care as a core service enables equity of access for all families and children

Focus Area	ChildCareBC Work Completed or Underway	Early Measures of Progress	
		2018/2019	2023/2024 (all data YTD to Dec 2023)
Supporting child care providers to deliver equitable, inclusive child care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding the \$10 a Day ChildCareBC Program and testing an Operating Funding Model (OFM Test) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Testing a wage grid and compensation standard Testing how funding supports providers in providing quality, inclusive and culturally safe services Testing a requirement for OFM Test participants to develop and implement an inclusion policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of \$10 a Day ChildCareBC program spaces: Over 950 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of \$10 a Day ChildCareBC program spaces: Over 13,000
Enabling equitable availability of child care programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing to support and fund the growth of long-term licensed child care in the community that are operated by public organizations and not-for-profit organizations, including schools and school districts Exploring the development of a data-informed approach to enable child care expansion Developing child care design guidelines to support the creation of functional, safe, quality inclusive child care spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of child care spaces participating in ECC funding programs: 114,632 Coverage Rate (Space to Population Ratio) Ages 12 and Under: 19% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of child care spaces participating in ECC funding programs: 146,628 Coverage Rate (Space to Population Ratio) Ages 12 and Under: 23%
Making child care affordable for all families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative (CCFRI) Continuing to support families with low income to access affordable child care through the Affordable Child Care Benefit (ACCB) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percent of CCOF spaces accessing CCFRI: 83% Number of children accessing ACCB: 34,349 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percent of CCOF spaces accessing CCFRI: 96% Number of children accessing ACCB: 35,022

Goal 1: Child care as a core service enables equity of access for all families and children

Focus Area	ChildCareBC Work Completed or Underway	Early Measures of Progress	
		2018/2019	2023/2024 (all data YTD to Dec 2023)
Supporting distinctions-based child care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding the availability of culturally appropriate child care through the Aboriginal Head Start Initiative and Métis Nation BC Continued investments in ASCD Provision of First Nations’ Grants to support child care Enhancing consultation and collaborative engagement with First Nations title and rights holders, Indigenous organizations and partners and Indigenous child care providers and families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Aboriginal Head Start spaces: Over 643 spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Aboriginal Head Start spaces: Over 1,700 spaces More than 90% of First Nations in B.C. received the 2022/23 First Nations Early Learning and Child Care Grant

Goal 2: The child care workforce is supported and empowered to deliver equitable, inclusive care

Focus Area	ChildCareBC Work Completed or Underway	Early Measures of Progress	
		2018/2019	2023/2024 (all data YTD to Dec 2023)
Supporting a skilled, diverse and stable workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing to support the recruitment and retention of skilled, certified early childhood professionals through a series of initiatives that increase wages, support access to and recognize education and training, and support professionals in the province to enter the workforce. Continuing to support the Work Integrated Learning (WIL) program, which enables students to obtain or upgrade their provincial ECE certification while remaining employed. Continuing to support immigration pathways for ECEs and ECE Assistants through the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Aboriginal Head Start spaces: Over 643 spaces Number of Active Child Care Worker Registry Certifications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic: 19,298 SN Educator: 3,544 I/T Educator: 5,520 ECE-A: 7,073 ECE-WE: \$1/hour for eligible ECEs Number of ECEs receiving ECE-WE (monthly average): 7,668 Number of people participating in WIL Pilot: 76 Number of new student spaces created in public post-secondary ECE programs: 182 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Active Child Care Worker Registry Certifications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic: 27,416 SN Educator: 5,710 I/T Educator: 9,278 ECE-A: 12,921 ECE-WE: \$6/hour for eligible ECEs Number of ECEs receiving ECE-WE (monthly average): 13,536 Number of people have participated WIL Program to date: 308 Number of new student spaces created in public post-secondary ECE programs: 2,237 Number of child care workers supported through PNP to date:¹ 1,269

¹ Early childhood educators and early childhood educator assistants became eligible for the Provincial Nominee Program in 2021. Data includes nominees from 2021 to 2023.

Goal 2: The child care workforce is supported and empowered to deliver equitable, inclusive care

Focus Area	ChildCareBC Work Completed or Underway	Early Measures of Progress	
		2018/2019	2023/2024 (all data YTD to Dec 2023)
Supporting reflective practice and capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing and highlighting resources available to child care professionals to enhance inclusive practices such as the Inclusive Child Care Toolkit Developing and implementing free, online training to support child care professionals' capacity for inclusive practice, including the Foundations of Inclusive Child Care and Behaviour in the Early Years courses Enabling SCD/ASCD programs to partner with child care providers to build capacity for inclusive child care programming through new investments 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of participants who have registered for the Foundations of Inclusive Child Care online training: 2,847 Number of participants who have registered for the Behaviour in the Early Years online training: 1,121

Goal 3: All children belong

Focus Area	ChildCareBC Work Completed or Underway	Early Measures of Progress	
		2018/2019	2023/2024 (all data YTD to Dec 2023)
Understanding the experiences and outcomes for families and children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing to inform programs and policies using data from the annual Provider Profile Survey completed by child care providers participating in the Child Care Operating Fund program and \$10 a Day program Understanding the child care needs of families of school-aged children through a family school-age survey Continuing to engage with the sector to understand how ChildCareBC can make progress towards child care as an inclusive, quality core service 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For data and information about child care in BC, including space creation, see the BC Child Care Data & Reports site. For information about where to find child care programs in B.C., see the BC Child Care Map. For information about how B.C. is making progress on the ChildCareBC Plan, see the ChildCareBC: Our Plan site.
Enabling full inclusion of children with support needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased investments in the SCD and ASCD programs to enable more children to be supported Working collaboratively with the Ministry of Health to explore how children with complex health needs can be supported in child care settings Exploring barriers and opportunities to enhance supports for children with support needs in school age child care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average number of children served by SCD/ASCD per month: 5,975 Number of unique children served by SCD/ASCD annually: 9,862 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average number of children served by SCD/ASCD per month: 7,704 Number of unique children served by SCD/ASCD annually: 12,552 Percent of licensed child care facilities receiving operating funding that serve at least one child with support needs: 48%
Strengthening transitions between child care and school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring barriers and opportunities to enhance transitions to kindergarten for children with support needs 		This work is too early in progress to demonstrate measures at this time.

