

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

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# **Equity, Inclusion and Child Care in B.C. Engagement Report**



**ChildCareBC**

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## Introduction

The province of British Columbia (B.C.) is a place of diversity and growth. More than five million people<sup>1</sup>, over 620,000 of them children 12 and under<sup>2,3</sup>, live in communities across vast geographical and climate ranges. The province continues to welcome more people to its city centres and rural communities as the population continues to grow at unprecedented rates<sup>4</sup>.

B.C. families bring a multitude of languages, cultures, identities and backgrounds to their communities, work and schools. The province is home to many languages including over 34 First Nation languages, Métis languages such as Michif, Inuktitut<sup>5</sup>, French, Mandarin, Punjabi, American Sign Language (ASL) and many others. There are more than 200 distinct First Nations and more than 200,000 people who identify as First Nations, Inuit and/or Métis in all regions across the province. Nearly 30% of the province's population has immigrated from another country, and more than 40,000 new immigrants and refugees are welcomed each year<sup>6</sup>. A recent report from Statistics Canada shows that B.C. is home to a higher proportion of people who identify as gender diverse, including those who identify as non-binary,

than almost any other province in Canada<sup>7</sup>. B.C. families have multiple identities and multiple intersectional experiences, each with unique gifts, interests and perspectives.

B.C. families have diverse and evolving needs for services and supports including for child care. The early years of life, especially the first six years, are critical in the development and future well-being of children, including for their learning in school and beyond. Having access to quality, inclusive, culturally appropriate child care positively impacts child development outcomes, especially for children who experience vulnerability<sup>8</sup>. Many parents in B.C. work outside of standard hours<sup>9</sup>, work seasonal or variable hours and, increasingly, many need to work multiple jobs<sup>10</sup>. Families with young children, especially lone-parent families and newcomers to Canada, depend on their communities, family members and services like child care to work and go to school<sup>11</sup>. Many families experience periods of needing additional support to access child care, including help with the costs of care and supports for their children to fully participate. Some families may need care for their child(ren) past the age of 12.

Prior to 2018, child care in B.C. was market-driven, resulting in high child care fees and a limited supply of child care spaces. In 2018, the Province of B.C. introduced the ChildCareBC plan, which describes a historically significant policy shift and recognizes the critical role that access to affordable, quality, inclusive, culturally safe child care has for the lives of parents and children. It also recognizes the barriers families face in finding a space that meets their unique and diverse needs. This plan outlined the Province's intention to build a foundation for inclusive child care as a core service available to all families who want or need it, at a price they can afford.

To help build the foundation of child care as a core service, the Province has developed *Where All Children Belong: B.C.'s Inclusive Child Care Strategy* (the strategy) to provide guidance for current and future ChildCareBC programs<sup>12</sup>. The strategy identifies and articulates what B.C. is already doing to enable inclusion and equity of access in child care and identifies early actions that the Province will take to make progress towards the ChildCareBC vision of child care as a core service.

To inform the development of the strategy, the Ministry of Education and Child Care completed research and engagement to understand how inclusion is currently supported in child care settings and to determine what early actions are needed to build the foundation for inclusive child care as a core service. This report provides an overview of the key themes heard during engagement to date, which draws on participants' experiences, insights and hopes for the future. A list of those who shared their time and valuable insights is provided in the appendix.

The work of building inclusive child care as a sustainable 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](#).

The following section describes the current B.C. context and highlights key research findings.

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.



## B.C.'s Current Child Care Context

In contrast to the public education system, access to child care is not a legislated right in B.C. Finding a child care space that meets a family's particular needs is challenging for many families. In 2018, B.C. released the [Early Care and Learning Recruitment and Retention Strategy](#) to support child care professionals. Since then, the Province has made significant investments, supported by the federal government, to encourage new Early Childhood Educators (ECE) to join the workforce and retain those already working in the sector. The number of newly certified ECEs continues to trend upwards, with an 11% increase just in the last year<sup>13</sup>.

As of December 2023, there were 146,628 licensed child care spaces<sup>14</sup> participating in B.C. government child care funding programs, enough for 23% of children ages 12 and under<sup>15</sup>. This represents a substantial 32% increase in licensed spaces available to families since ChildCareBC was introduced in 2018, with many others still in various stages of 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. Under the ChildCareBC plan, B.C. has invested nearly \$4.4 billion between 2018 and 2024, and partnered with the Government of Canada to further increase these investments through [early learning and child care agreements](#).

The B.C. child care landscape is quickly changing in response to these investments, and the Province is committed to continuing to invest in the ongoing work of building a future where quality and inclusive child care is a core service, available to every family that wants it, when they need it, at a price they can afford. Work towards this vision is a shared accountability for all levels of government and is advanced under the Ministry of Education and Child Care in partnership with the Government of Canada, as well as other B.C. ministries, local governments, First Nations governments, Indigenous communities, school boards and community partners.

## Accessing Child Care

B.C. child care providers are independent operators who are required to be licensed under the Community Care and Assisted Living Act and the Child Care Licensing Regulation if they care for more than two children or one sibling group. The Ministry of Health is responsible for the legislation and regulation governing child care facilities. Health Authorities carry out the day-to-day tasks of licensure and monitoring of child care facilities to ensure child care operations provide healthy and safe child care programs. The Ministry of Education and Child Care offers funding to enable new child care spaces to be created, to support participating licensed child care providers with their operations, enhance wages for early childhood educators and to reduce fees for parents while supporting child care professionals to deliver child care services.

This funding is available to child care providers through two pathways: the combined [Child Care Operating Funding](#), and [Early Childhood Educator Wage Enhancement](#), or child care providers may apply to participate in the \$10 a Day ChildCareBC program. Additionally, the [Affordable Child Care Benefit](#) is available, regardless of which pathway the child care provider takes, to further reduce fees for families with low- to middle-income. Child care providers in receipt of Child Care Operating Funding are expected to make every reasonable effort to provide an inclusive and supportive environment for all children, including children with support needs; child care providers participating in the \$10 a Day ChildCareBC program must be willing to accept children with support needs into their program. However, as child care providers and child care professionals have significantly varied capacity to deliver truly inclusive, culturally appropriate services, there are circumstances in which child care providers do not feel they have the capacity or skills to meet the needs of individual children and families.

While research suggests that quality, inclusive, culturally safe child care particularly benefits families experiencing vulnerability, it is these families who often have more difficulty accessing inclusive

child care compared to those not experiencing vulnerability. Research also indicates that some families experience multiple barriers in accessing child care, including those in rural communities, Indigenous families, families with low incomes, families with children with support needs, Black and other racialized families and newcomers to Canada<sup>16,17</sup>. 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<sup>18</sup>.

Like many other jurisdictions, B.C. currently has limited insight into the experiences of families and children accessing child care services. Families and community partners report that it is not unusual for children with support needs to experience exclusion and/or unexpected, permanent removal from child care. A 2016 study conducted in the United States<sup>19</sup> indicates that children attending preschool may be two to three times more likely to be excluded than their school-aged peers, particularly if they have support needs or are racialized<sup>20</sup>. Child care providers and families report that child care professionals' capacity to respond to a child's behaviours is the leading reason for a child to be temporarily sent home from, or permanently removed from, a child care program.

Excluding a child from their child care program may have negative impacts on the family and the child both in the short and long term. Parents may be left scrambling for care and may be forced to leave their jobs or educational programs. Children may miss out on opportunities for quality early learning and social development. Research indicates that when families can access supports that enable the full inclusion of their children in child care programs and school in the early years, they are more likely to access other resources to support their needs and experience academic success in the school-aged years and beyond<sup>21</sup>.

## Equity, Inclusion and the Child Care Workforce

Child care providers and child care professionals are a vital part of the community of support for families and their children, especially for families with children with support needs. Research indicates that their child care provider is often the first person parents go to for direction and support when they “notice something is wrong”, usually when their child is around age two or three<sup>22</sup>. However, in B.C. many child care providers may be working with outdated and culturally biased understandings<sup>23</sup> of inclusion of children with support needs. Misconceptions may include:

- “inclusion” only applies to some children (i.e., those with a diagnosed disability);
- all children with support needs require a support worker at all times;
- all cultures view disability the same way;
- the child should adapt to the environment; and,
- it is necessary to ensure special/different conditions for different children<sup>24,25</sup>.

Child care programs are most likely to be truly inclusive when they have enough well-trained, well-supported child care professionals to care for all children in the program<sup>26,27</sup>. In B.C., licensed child care programs range from small programs operated in a provider’s home to large centers with multiple child care professionals.

The Child Care Licensing Regulation<sup>28</sup> describes the minimum requirements for the certification of staff and the ratios of staff to children depending on the license type, the ages of the children and the group sizes. To be licensed under the regulations, some child care programs, including family/in-home licensed programs and school-aged care, require a minimum qualification level called “Responsible Adult” which requires 20 hours of online professional development. Licensed child care programs for children from birth to school age require staff to have one, or a combination of, Early Childhood Education

(ECE) certificate types ranging from ECE Assistant, to basic ECE, to post-basic Infant and Toddler ECE. To work as an ECE or ECE Assistant in a licensed child care facility in B.C., child care professionals must be certified by the Early Childhood Educator Registry, which is responsible for certification and oversees the regulation of and compliance for the ECE workforce.

Currently ECEs may take training specific to caring for children with support needs through a post-basic Special Needs Educator program, which leads to the Special Needs Educator certificate. However, a Special Needs Educator certificate is not required under the Child Care Licensing Regulation to work in any child care setting and must be pursued in addition to the basic ECE certificate. The other certification types do not require training to support inclusion, and none of the certificate types require training to support culturally responsive care in child care settings. As a result, many child care professionals do not have the skills or experience to work with diverse populations of families and children, including children with support needs.

For some child care providers, such as newcomers to Canada, those for whom English is a second language, individuals in rural and remote communities and Indigenous providers, there are additional barriers to becoming licensed. Indigenous communities in particular have identified that the Community Care and Assisted Living Act and the Child Care Licensing Regulation create obstacles to delivering culturally appropriate child care, including barriers for Elder participation<sup>29</sup>. These barriers mean that many child care providers are not able to seek the supportive benefits and resources that come with licensing, including public funding, and this limits the availability of inclusive, culturally appropriate child care services to families.

## Supports for Inclusion of Children with Support Needs

To date, B.C.'s main approach to enabling child care providers to deliver inclusive child care has been through supports provided by community-based Supported Child Development (SCD) and Aboriginal Supported Child Development (ASCD) programs. Through these programs, consultants work with child care professionals and families to develop strategies for the full participation of children with support needs. A diagnosis is not required, and families as well as child care providers may refer a child to SCD and ASCD programs to request support.

In 2022-23, an average of 7,704 children received SCD/ASCD supports each month, and a total of 12,552 unique children were served throughout the year. Additionally, many SCD and ASCD programs are supporting child care providers in building their foundational capacity for inclusive child care. Since 2018-19, the average number of service hours has increased; 1,729 more children are receiving inclusive child care services on average per month, and 2,690 more children are being served annually.

Where assessed as needed, these programs provide or fund enhanced staffing support. This enhanced staffing support is provided by a support worker, who is not a part of the staff to child ratio as defined in the Child Care Licensing Regulation. This means that a support worker provides support, but is not responsible for the supervision of children. Support workers are provided in one of the following ways:

- SCD and ASCD programs employ trained, qualified support workers who are assigned to support specific and environmental needs of individual children or groups of children with support needs, taking their cultural background and parent input into account where possible.
- The child care setting employs support workers and the SCD/ASCD program reimburses the child care program for the actual costs of the support worker. Support workers may provide individual or shared support considering the needs of the child(ren), environmental needs, cultural background and parent input where possible.

Child care providers may rely on support worker staff to care for children with support needs; however, in some cases this reliance can be a barrier to inclusion, where a child is shadowed by one staff person and is integrated in the program but not fully included. In many cases, a support worker may be shared by multiple children and may work across the program, enabling all staff to support all children in the program. A small proportion of children with highly complex needs require direct support for all or portions of their day while in child care.

In addition to the supports SCD and ASCD programs provide in child care settings, other professionals involved in a child's care may provide services in the child care setting such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists or speech-language pathologists. SCD and ASCD programs work collaboratively with these early intervention therapists.

Through B.C.'s bilateral Early Learning and Child Care Agreement and the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement with the Government of Canada, B.C. has made substantial increased investments in SCD and ASCD programs since 2018. However, these new investments are not fully meeting demand for supports and many families continue to experience long wait times. This demonstrates the need for government to take a systematic approach to building the foundations of child care as a core service, empowering child care providers to create truly inclusive and culturally safe early learning environments.

As progress is made on the vision of quality, inclusive child care available to all families who want or need it, more research, data and information is becoming available about the provision of and access to quality, inclusive and culturally safe child care. This information and the ongoing engagement with child care providers, families and community partners will further inform what supports are most effective in enhancing inclusion and equity of access.





## Summary of Engagement

Since the release of the ChildCareBC plan, the Province has engaged with community partners, child care providers, child care professionals, families and many others about their experiences of supporting, providing and accessing affordable, quality, inclusive child care. From 2023 to early 2024, the Province organized a series of engagements to gain a deeper understanding of the existing barriers and opportunities to increasing access to licensed child care for those who are experiencing inequity, including children with support needs. A list of those who shared their time and valuable insights is provided in the appendix. These shared experiences and insights have informed the development of the goals and early actions described in the Inclusive Child Care Strategy.

Further development, engagement and consultation is needed and actions will be taken to collaboratively plan this with First Nations, including Modern Treaty Nations, the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC), as well as Indigenous communities and organizations including Métis Nation BC. Engagement with families and child care providers is also needed, to more deeply inform the specific work required to move towards an inclusive core service. The ministry is committed to working collaboratively to understand and address the distinct barriers First

Nations and Métis families and providers experience in accessing and providing inclusive, culturally-based child care and is seeking feedback from FNLC as to how best to engage with First Nations on implementing the early actions in the Inclusive Child Care Strategy. As the Province makes progress on the goals and early actions described in the Inclusive Child Care Strategy, further engagement and consultation will be needed to inform further actions, and to support and enable child care providers to deliver quality, inclusive child care to all children and 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 are not reflected in this report. The Ministry of Education and Child Care will collaborate closely With MCFD to develop further actions for 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.



## What We Heard

We heard from families and child care providers that the vision of child care as a core service, available to any family who wants or needs it, is a shared one. We heard that:

- 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, inclusive and culturally safe. It is challenging navigating different but interrelated supports delivered through different ministries and organizations.
- Child care providers want to be empowered to provide inclusive, culturally safe child care services.

We heard about positive experiences in child care from families, especially among those with children with support needs who found a child care program that had enough well-trained, well supported child care professionals who welcomed and included their children. We heard from child care providers and community partners who are dedicated to caring for children and who are motivated to advocate for child care as a core service that is equitable, culturally safe and inclusive.

We also heard about challenges child care providers, child care professionals, community partners and families face in delivering and accessing child care. These challenges were reflected in three overall themes: (1) inequity of access to child care; (2) exclusion of children with support needs; and (3) limited support for an inclusion- and equity-focused workforce.

# Theme 1

## Inequity of Access to Child Care

Families are having difficulty finding and accessing care that meets their unique needs.

### Lack of available spaces

**There is uneven availability in the province, meaning some families just can't find a child care space at all.**

We heard that some families are finding care in places that are not convenient, and they sometimes commute an hour from home and/or work to get to the child care facility.

We heard that families living in rural areas of the province have such limited child care options available that they feel they may never find a space that meets their needs.

For parents working non-traditional hours, such as hospital staff, tradespersons and those working in the service-industry, finding child care during their work hours is even more difficult. These parents report having to create a patchwork of care that relies on grandparents, friends and unlicensed care so that they can work.

### Barriers to access

**Where child care programs are available, they are easier for some to access than others.**

We heard that families who are newcomers to B.C. face additional challenges in finding a child care space such as language barriers. They also face barriers to accessing information on what child care spaces are available to them and how to access supports for child care, like the Affordable Child Care Benefit (ACCB) and the Supported Child Development program. These barriers add to what may be an already challenging process of finding belonging in a new place.

We heard that some families of children with support needs are afraid to provide complete information about their child's needs in case the provider is unwilling to accept them. Many providers only accept children with support needs if they have a support worker which may or may not be available through the SCD program when the child care space is needed by the family.

We heard about parents facing challenges in accessing the ACCB, including restrictive eligibility requirements, significant administrative requirements and delays in payment, making it harder for some families with low income to access a child care space. For example, we have heard that ACCB may not be easily accessible to parents experiencing significant vulnerability, such as sex workers or those fleeing violence.

## Compromised care

To secure a spot, some families may have to compromise their needs, choose a lower-quality program or pay extra fees.

We heard that some families who are asked to pay higher fees because of their child's support needs may choose to stay and pay more than they feel they can afford as there are no other options available to them. These families may already be facing extra costs in other aspects of their lives associated with caring for a child with support needs.

We heard that when some families have been able to secure a child care space, especially one with low fees, they have no ability to raise concerns or leave if they feel the quality, cultural safety or inclusiveness of the program isn't meeting their child's needs. We heard that families expressed frustration at not knowing where to turn for help and feeling powerless to accept child care that integrates their child rather than truly includes them.

# Theme 2

## Exclusion of Children with Support Needs

Children with support need are being disproportionately excluded from child care in comparison to their peers without support needs.

### Not a rights-based system

In contrast to the education system, children do not have a legislated entitlement to child care services in British Columbia. With a few exceptions, child care is delivered by independent child care providers who create their own program policies.

We heard that families who have children with support needs may find out their child has been permanently removed from the program suddenly, sometimes unexpectedly and with little communication from child care professionals. Parents wondered why child care providers receiving public funding can do this.

We heard that child care providers are worried about caring for children with increasingly complex needs without enough support. Child care professionals said they feel discouraged, as they want to care for all children, but do not feel equipped to do so.

We heard that many parents of children with support needs are frequently asked to pick up their child partway through the day because child care professionals do not feel equipped to support their child's behaviour. For some parents – particularly single parents, parents with lower income, precarious employment or students – this frequent disruption in their day is extremely stressful. Because of limited spaces available, parents feel like they have no choice but to miss work or school to meet the child care provider's requests and retain their space.

## Outdated and culturally biased understanding of inclusion

The current child care legislation, regulations and policies are based on outdated, colonial, deficit-based models of disability and support needs, which focus on the integration of those with support needs, not meaningful inclusion.

<p>We heard that the outdated understanding of disabilities, exceptionalities and other support needs often leads to children being labelled as having behaviour problems. Parents said that it is disheartening when this label or perception of their child limits their children's belonging in the child care program, and sometimes follows the child into school.</p>	<p>We heard from some Indigenous providers that current licensing requirements do not reflect Indigenous ways of caring for children, preventing some Indigenous child care providers from wanting to become licensed. For example, we heard that the separation of age groups in group child care is not consistent with many Indigenous cultures.</p>	<p>We heard from parents that current policies do not consider the needs of children with complex medical needs and that they are being excluded from child care. Child care providers shared that they did not feel they had the support or resources to care for children with complex medical needs. Overall, we heard that there is a desire for greater flexibility in caring for children with medical complexities.</p>
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## The current model of support is not meeting demand

The way child care providers and families access support for children with support needs is complex. Supports are inconsistently available across the province and are not meeting demand.

<p>We heard from families and child care providers that while SCD and ASCD programs are valued and appreciated, the services they offer are inconsistently available across the province. Some communities have extremely long wait times, and some have limited or no support for school-aged children. We also heard that families would like to be informed about how children are being prioritized for service.</p>	<p>We heard from families, child care providers and others that the transition from child care to kindergarten can be challenging for families of children with support needs. We heard that while sometimes the transition is well supported, the individualized support families of children with support needs receive in navigating this transition is inconsistent across the province.</p>
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# Theme 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.

### Challenges with staffing levels

Most child care providers experience challenges with recruitment and/or retention of child care professionals, and staffing models that enable inclusion are not well supported by the current system.

We heard that the lower wages that child care professionals receive are part of what prevents people from seeing the value of early childhood education as a viable profession. We also heard that for those who do enter the field, the working environment and low wages may soon leave them looking for other options, resulting in a high rate of staff turnover and difficulties recruiting and retaining skilled child care professionals who are able to develop meaningful connections with children in their care.

We heard that child care providers struggle to staff their programs with sufficient well-trained child care professionals to retain staff and enable inclusive programming. Child care providers note that the minimum staff-to-child ratios defined in the Child Care Licensing Regulation are not reflective of current inclusive best practices. We heard that not having enough skilled staff present makes it difficult for child care staff to take breaks and respond to children's individual support needs within a larger group.

### New Early Childhood Educators are not well equipped for inclusion and cultural safety

The basic ECE education requirements are outdated and do not require sufficient training on inclusive and culturally appropriate child care practices, leaving new graduates with insufficient knowledge of inclusion and cultural safety.

We heard that ECEs newly entering the field do not consistently have a strong understanding of how to work with children with support needs, leaving them unprepared and unequipped for the variety of situations they will encounter in practice. We also heard that many child care professionals find it difficult to find a skilled mentor with well-informed experience in working with children with support needs once they enter the field.

We heard a desire that the basic educational competencies to become an ECE should include requirements for distinctions-based learning that reflects and celebrates the distinct First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures and languages in B.C.

## Challenges with access to professional development

**Child care professionals face barriers in accessing professional development that supports their understanding of inclusion and cultural safety, including pressure to find and attend courses outside of work hours and inconsistent direction regarding what training should be prioritized.**

We heard that child care professionals are often not able to participate in professional development during work hours, which means that they attend on their own time, often without pay.

We heard that while there are available resources and professional development opportunities online, there is no guidance for what qualifies as high-quality training or for what child care professionals should prioritize.

## Limited diverse representation among child care professionals

**There are additional barriers to becoming an ECE in B.C., limiting the availability of skilled child care professionals that represent the diversity of the community they serve.**

We heard that newcomers to Canada who come with their ECE certification face barriers to choosing ECE as a profession, including the time commitment and costs to get certified as an ECE in B.C., in addition to the language barriers and low wages. As a result, providers may have challenges recruiting certified child care professionals that are representative of the communities they serve, which limits families' ability to see their own culture and worldviews reflected in the programs.

We heard that the presence of child care professionals with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations supports families in feeling represented and safe in child care settings. We heard that books by 2SLGBTQ+<sup>30</sup> authors and use of gender-neutral language also supports families and children to belong in child care settings.

We heard that there are very few ECEs who are deaf or who are immersed in deaf culture and language. We heard that this is partly because there is little incentive for hearing people to take additional training and little support for deaf people to become ECEs. This means that children who are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf/blind are less likely to be immersed in their culture and language in the early years – which is a critical time for language and social development.



# Conclusion

While significant progress has been made in reducing child care costs for families, many families in B.C. still experience challenges with finding a child care space that meets their needs. For some families, especially those who have children with support needs, finding a child care space with enough well-trained, well-supported child care professionals that will accept and meaningfully include their children can be very challenging and even unattainable.

Government is committed to building a future where quality, inclusive and culturally safe child care is a core service that families can rely on. To further this commitment, the Province has developed Where All Children Belong: B.C.'s Inclusive Child Care Strategy. This strategy describes how the Province will make progress towards equitable access to inclusive child care where 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.

# Endnotes

- 1 [StatsCanada: 2021 Census population and dwelling counts, Canada, provinces and territories](#) (2024)
- 2 Population projections from [B.C.'s PEOPLE 2022](#), as of January 2023. In 2022, there were 624,906 children aged 0-12 in B.C.—44% aged 0-5 and 56% aged 6-12.
- 3 In B.C. the [Community Care and Assisted Living \(CCAL\) Act](#), the legislation governing child care licensing, defines a “child” as being a person under the age of 13 years old.
- 4 [BC Stats: Sustaining Growth – Population and Demography for B.C. and Canada](#) (January 2024). Using 2021 Census data, B.C.'s population is expected to reach 7.9 million in 2046 and is expected to continue to be driven largely by migration.
- 5 [B.C. Government Indigenous Language and Culture](#) (2023)
- 6 [B.C. Government: Audience Diversity in B.C.](#) (2022). 30% represents individuals who were born in another country and immigrated to Canada.
- 7 [StatsCanada: Filling Gaps in Gender Diversity Data in Canada](#) (2022)
- 8 [Government of Canada Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#) (2017).
- 9 [StatsCanada Census of Population](#) (2022). Standard Hours here are defined as beginning prior to 6am and/or after 7pm.
- 10 Halfon, S. & Friendly, M. (2015). [Work Around the Clock: A snapshot of non-standard hours child care in Canada](#). Occasional paper no.29. CRRU.
- 11 StatsCanada: [Labour Market Participation of parents with young children](#) (2023)
- 12 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 ensure vulnerable children and children from 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; and to develop and fund a plan to enhance inclusion of children with disabilities and children needing enhanced or individual supports.
- 13 By the end of December 2023, there were more than 27,000 ECEs with active certifications with the Registry – over 2,600 more than in March 2023.
- 14 Licensed child care spaces participating in B.C. government child care funding programs include group child care for children aged 0 to school age, group child care for school age children, preschool, multi-age child care, in-home multi-age child care and family child care. Private, public and not-for-profit child care – including Indigenous-led child care - spaces are eligible to receive funding.
- 15 There are other types of child care available to parents, such as care by a relative, or care by a non-relative in the child's home. The child care coverage rate is used here as a measure of the licensed child care sector. More information about child care data can be found at [B.C. Child Care Data and Reports](#).
- 16 Ineese-Nash, N., Bomberry, Y., Underwood K., Hache, A. “Raising with Early Childhood Disability Supports Shakonehya:ra's ne shakoyen'okon:a G'chi-gshkewesiwad binoonhyag”. *Indigenous Policy Journal* Vol. XXVIII, No. 3 (Winter 2018).
- 17 Friendly, Nguyễn, and Taylor. “Child Care For Whom? A background paper for the Inclusive child care for all project”. Childcare Resource and Research Unit (November 2023).
- 18 The RCY. “Still Left Out: Children and youth with disabilities in B.C.” (November 2023).

- 19** Gilliam, W.S., Maupin, A.N., Reyes, C.R, Accivitti, M., Shic, F. "Do Early Educators' Implicit Biases Regarding Sex and Race Relate to Behaviour Expectations and Recommendations of Preschool Expulsions and Suspensions?". Yale University Child Study Center (September 28, 2016).
- 20** Doubet, L.S., Ostrosky, M.M. "Parents' Experiences When Seeking Assistance for Their Children With Challenging Behaviours". Sage Journals, Volume 36, Issue 3 (2016).
- 21** The Representative for Children and Youth. "Still Left Out: Children and youth with disabilities in B.C." (November 2023).
- 22** Doubet, L.S., Ostrosky, M.M. "Parents' Experiences When Seeking Assistance for Their Children With Challenging Behaviours". Sage Journals, Volume 36, Issue 3 (2016).
- 23** Ineese-Nash, N., Bomberry, Y., Underwood K., Hache, A. "Raising with Early Childhood Dis-ability Supports Shakonehya:ra's ne shakoyen'okon:a G'chi-gshkewesiwad binoonhyag." Indigenous Policy Journal Vol. XXVIII, No. 3 (Winter 2018).
- 24** Gerlach & Newbury. "I just want to see my child thrive: A summary of research of young children with support needs". University of Victoria, School of Child & Youth Care, (2022).
- 25** Bouillet & Domovic. "Capacities of Early Childhood Education Professionals for the Prevention of Social Exclusion of Children". World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology International Journal of Educational and Pedagogical Sciences, Vol:15, No:11 (2021).
- 26** Steed, E.A., Strain, P.S., Rausch, A. et al. Early Childhood Administrator Perspectives About Preschool Inclusion: A Qualitative Interview Study. Early Childhood Education Journal (2023).
- 27** Employment and Social Development Canada. "Defining and measuring the quality of Early Learning and Child Care: A literature review" (2019).
- 28** The minimum certification and qualification requirements are described in [Schedule E of the CCLR](#).
- 29** British Columbia Aboriginal Child Care Society. "[Research Report: Licensing First Nations Early Childhood Programs](#)" (2013); and "[Advancing Indigenous Jurisdiction over Indigenous Childcare in British Columbia: A Community Engagement Project to Explore Opportunities for Legal Change](#)" (2020).
- 30** 2-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other sexual orientations and expressions of gender. See the SOGI website for more information: <https://bc.sogieducation.org/q-a>

# Appendix: 2023-24 Engagement Participants

From 2023 to early 2024, the Province organized a series of engagements to gain a deeper understanding of the existing barriers and opportunities to increasing access to child care for those who are experiencing inequity, including children with support needs.

The work of building inclusive child care as a sustainable 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 rightsholders, in alignment with B.C.'s obligations under the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Act](#).

Groups engaged included the following:

- Child care providers, including representation from Aboriginal Head Start sites
- Families
- Indigenous partners including BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, Métis Nation BC and the provincial advisor for Aboriginal Supported Child Development
- Cross-ministry partners
- School districts
- Organizations responsible for advocating for and supporting the following groups:
  - Indigenous families
  - Families of children with support needs
  - Families in need
  - Francophone language and culture
  - Newcomer families
  - Families and children with specific diagnoses
- Child care associations
- Child care licensing officers
- Child Care Resource and Referral Centres
- Supported Child Development and Aboriginal Supported Child Development programs
- Provincial Child Care Council
- Ministry of Children and Family Development Advisory Council on Children and Youth with Support Needs

