

# Roadmap to a Quality Early Learning and Child Care System in Manitoba

 **Manitoba Child Care Association**

*In Partnership with*



Roadmap to a quality early learning and child care system in Manitoba  
Prepared by Jane Beach for the Manitoba Child Care Association and the roadmap partners  
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# Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that childcare is now much more visible to government and employers. It is being seen, as it wasn't before, as an essential and integral part of the education and employment infrastructure. If many childcare businesses fail, this will have far-reaching consequences for economic recovery. The muddle and contradictions of the sector – the variations in access, the lack of coordination, the high costs, the poor wages and low levels of qualification, the inconsistent funding, and the lack of accountability – are being highlighted as never before. The early education and childcare system needs a complete overhaul. As in so many other areas, the pandemic has illustrated the effects of austerity and neglect over many years. Let's hope we can learn from it.

Penn, P., Simon, A. & Lloyd, E. (2020, April 7) [COVID-19 and child care: why many nurseries will struggle to weather the storm](#). LSE BPP blogpost

Early learning and child care in Canada is at a historic turning point. Two significant events of the past two years have highlighted the need for fundamental change to the way early learning and child care is planned, delivered and funded.

The COVID 19 pandemic revealed the fragility of existing early learning and child care services. It resulted in massive disruptions to all aspects of life at work and at home. The closure of most child care programs across the country during the early months of the pandemic, had a significant and detrimental impact on parents, especially on mothers' ability to remain in or return to the workforce or place of study. It shone a light on the essential role of early learning and child care to the economy, gender equity, social inclusion, an equitable society, and the well-being and development of young children.

The [Federal Budget 2021 - A Recovery Plan for Jobs, Growth and Resilience](#) put support for early learning as a central part of country's economic and social recovery. The budget committed \$27.2 billion over the next five years to establish, in collaboration with provinces and territories, a Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care System, on a scale of the development of the public systems of education and health care. It outlines a framework for 'transformational change' and sets out the federal government's commitment to ensure all families, no matter where they live, have equitable access to high-quality, affordable and flexible early learning and care. Budget 2021 identified the need to build a 'quality system' across Canada to ensure that all families have equitable access to early learning and care now and in the future.

After more than 50 years of research and advocacy, with consistent calls for a national child care program, Canada is finally in a position to begin the process of building a publicly funded and managed, high-quality, affordable, accessible and inclusive system of early learning and child care in every province and territory.

On August 9, 2021, the Governments of Canada and Manitoba signed the Canada-Manitoba Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. The agreement will

bring \$1.2 billion in federal funds to Manitoba over the next five years, to increase the supply, affordability, inclusivity and quality of early learning and child care in the province. This significant infusion of federal funds provides Manitoba with the opportunity to develop and implement the transformative changes necessary to create a quality system, and to address the human resource challenges of ensuring a skilled and well compensated and respected workforce, essential to its provision.

## **Why do we need a system?**

While the supply of regulated child care has steadily grown over the years, it remains unaffordable for many low- and modest-income families, programs are inequitably and unevenly distributed across the province, and early childhood educators are under-valued and often underpaid. Under the current market approach, much of the responsibility to develop, operate and maintain licensed child care programs in Manitoba falls to parent groups, non-profit organizations and individuals. While the provincial government provides various grants that help support most child care programs and fee assistance to some low-income families, it plays a limited role in planning for and ensuring equitable access for families, and the skilled and well compensated workforce necessary to operate child care programs. The market approach relies on private individuals and organizations to develop and operate the programs children and families need. As a result, families have uneven and inequitable access to regulated child care, which they purchase as a service, with regulation used as a proxy for quality, and funding mechanisms that create barriers to participation for many children and families.

The federal government identified a number of priorities that guided negotiations with each province and territory as the Canada-wide agreements were developed. These priorities include:

- reducing parent fees in regulated child care by an average 50 percent by the end of 2022;
- reducing parent fees in regulated child care to an average of \$10 a day by 2025-26;
- valuing the work of early childhood educators (ECEs) and providing training and development opportunities to support quality in child care;
- building a strong baseline of publicly available data as a basis for monitoring and measuring progress; and
- expanding services primarily through non-profit and public delivery.

These priorities cannot be achieved by continuing with the current market approach, which will neither build a system nor meet the needs of most children and families. New government policies and approaches are needed in order to build Manitoba's early learning and child care system – one that is publicly funded, planned and managed. These new policies and approaches are the focus of this roadmap.

## **How the roadmap was developed**

The 'Roadmap to a quality early learning and child care system in Manitoba' is an initiative of the Manitoba Child Care Association, developed in collaboration with

Child Care Now, the Canadian Child Care Federation, the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba and the Muttart Foundation. In keeping with the Canada-wide agreement, the roadmap focuses on licensed child care for children under age seven, while also recognizing the importance of licensed child care for older school age children and early childhood programs delivered through the school system.

The roadmap reflects the findings from virtual engagement with a range of early learning and child care and related stakeholders in March 2022, as well as the considerable body of research and policy development about system building that has been conducted in Canada and internationally.

It follows a common format to and builds on similar roadmaps developed with stakeholders in Alberta and Saskatchewan<sup>1</sup>. It also incorporates some of the learnings from policy roadmaps previously developed by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and Early Childhood Educators of BC in spring 2021, and updated in spring 2022, [2022 Roadmap for \\$10aDay Child Care in BC](#) and by the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario in July 2021, [Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario](#). It aligns with the national policy roadmap developed by Child Care Now, [Canada's Roadmap to Affordable Child Care for All](#), and its 10 elements of system-building.

The roadmap recognizes and builds on the existing strengths of early learning and child care in Manitoba, including:

- the set maximum fee in funded centres, which has made child care affordable for some families, and fees stable and predictable;
- the unit funding model<sup>2</sup>, which provides operating funding to most non-profit centres. The amount of unit funding has not been increased since 2016, but it is an existing mechanism that can be easily adjusted to accommodate a universal funding formula;
- additional funding support for facilities that provide extended hour child care;
- funding for employer contributions to a registered pension plan for centre-based staff and matching RRSP contributions, to a maximum amount, for licensed family child care providers;
- the non-profit status of 95 percent of centre-based providers. A significant body of research has shown that on average, non-profit child care provides higher quality provision than programs operated as a commercial business. The Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement requires expansion primarily through public and non-profit programs; and
- Manitoba's highly successful Early Childhood Education Workplace Program which allows experienced but non ECE credentialed individuals working in early learning and child care to combine study with their employment to become certified as an Early Childhood Educator. An expansion of this model could help address the significant increase in the number of qualified ECEs that will be needed to meet the ambitious expansion targets for new spaces.

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<sup>1</sup> See the [Roadmap to a quality early learning and child care system in Saskatchewan](#) and the [Roadmap to a quality early learning and child care system in Alberta](#) for details.

<sup>2</sup> See Section 3, page 23 for a description of the unit funding model

## Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care

The roadmap does not propose specific policy actions linked to Indigenous early learning and child care. The roadmap partners recognize and affirm the rights of Indigenous governments and leadership to design and develop early learning and child care systems and services that are distinctions-based and self-governed, consistent with the vision and principles set out in the [Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#) and commitments under the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework lays out a shared vision, principles and a path forward for Indigenous early learning and child care across Canada. Its overarching vision includes a distinctions-based approach that recognizes the unique priorities of First Nations, Inuit and the Métis Nation.

Moving forward, the roadmap partners call on the Manitoba government and all early learning and child care stakeholders to ensure that provincial system building work is guided by meaningful and collaborative discussions with First Nations, Inuit and Métis governments, as well as with Indigenous organizations and communities. The work that lies ahead must be informed by [The Path to Reconciliation Act](#), and respond to the calls to action of the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#) and the calls for justice set out in the [Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#).

### The roadmap document

The roadmap is organized into four sections.

**Section 1: Ideas and vision** proposes a vision and principles to guide early learning and child care policy and provision.

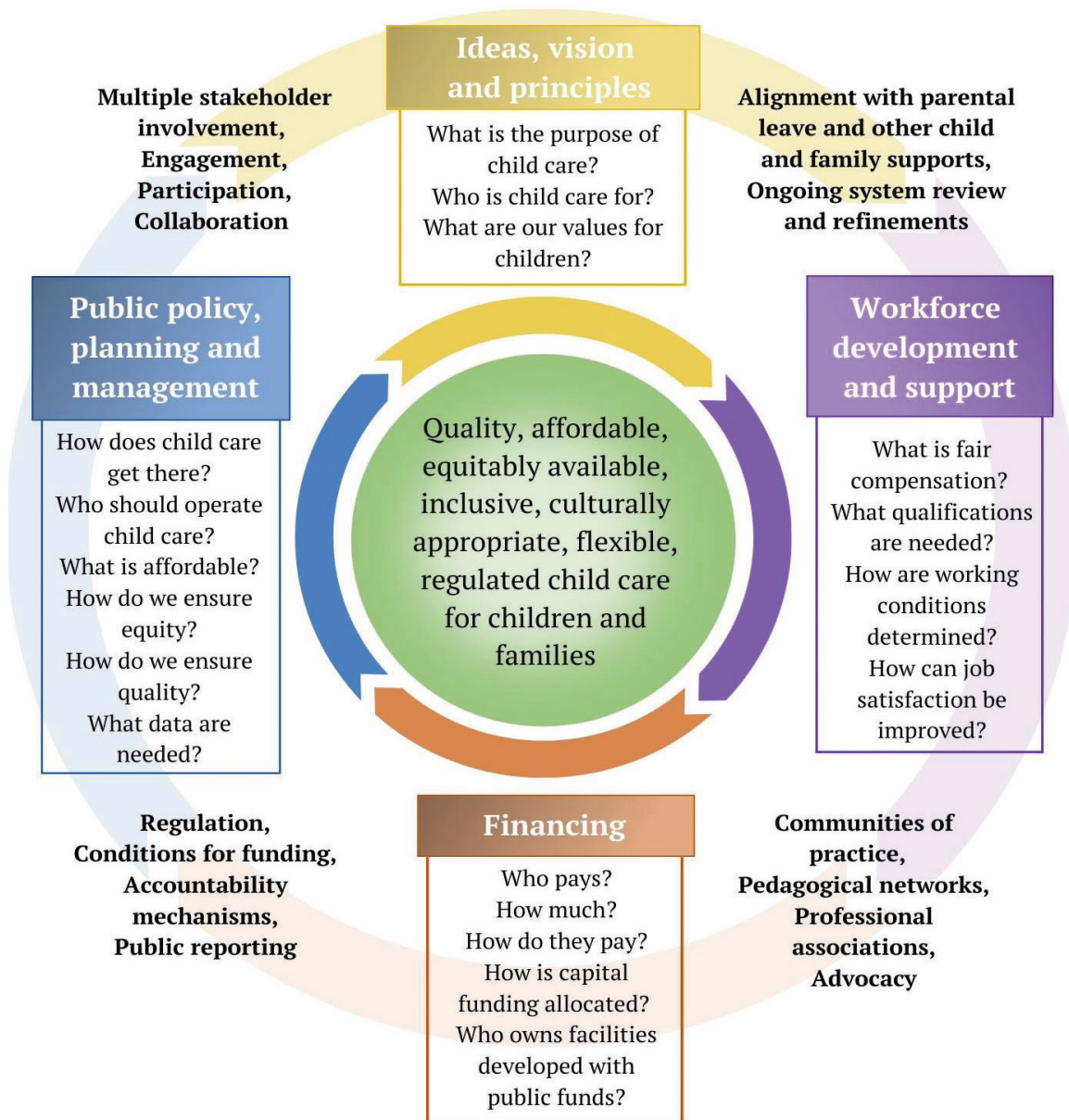
**Section 2: Public policy, planning and management** outlines the role of government in system building, including governance, expansion and service delivery.

**Section 3: Financing** examines system financing, considers affordability for parents and families, and proposes new funding approaches and accountability measures to support program sustainability and quality provision.

**Section 4: Workforce development and support** discusses and proposes policy actions to support the essential roles qualified, skilled and appropriately compensated early childhood educators play in the delivery of high-quality early learning and child care.

Each section includes background information, a summary of the Manitoba context and proposed policy actions that support system building.

## Components and considerations for building a quality early learning and child care system in Manitoba



The diagram above shows core components of an early learning and child care system and key questions that will need to be addressed as part of the process of system building. Early learning and child care is a complex area and involves both value-based and pragmatic considerations. It requires a vision and set of principles to guide the system as a whole, and a plan to ensure the different system elements are considered together. Engagement of stakeholders will ensure diverse perspectives and voices are heard and will strengthen the policy and planning process and will support transparency and accountability.



# Section 1. IDEAS AND VISION

A high quality early learning and child care system should begin by articulating the ideas that will define it. The ideas will be contained in a conceptual framework that begins with a statement of the values held by the society and what it wants for its children. The values statement is based on implicit societal values and beliefs about the nature of the child and childhood. It is coloured by the history, circumstances and context - economic, social and cultural - in which the society exists.

Childcare Resource and Research Unit (2006: 1) [Elements of a high quality early learning and child care system](#)

How and why countries invest in early learning and child care shapes the type of services provided, determines who can use them and how much they pay, and the degree to which governments are involved. In countries that view early learning and child care as primarily a private responsibility the supply, cost and quality of services is left to market forces, with government playing a limited role. This approach results in child care programs that are usually loosely organized, operate independently of each other, are often of varied quality, and the costs of their services are based on market supply and demand. Market failures are also common leaving harder to serve populations under-served, with a patchwork of fragmented and often unaffordable programs of varying quality. On the other hand, in countries in which early learning and child care is viewed as a public good, governments are involved in a more proactive way, with policies aimed at ensuring universal and equitable access to quality, affordable programs for all children and families. This approach results in a more coherent system, in which availability, affordability, equity, inclusion and quality provision are simultaneously planned for and supported.

Since early learning and child care programs and services were first established in Canada in the late 1800s, there have been two distinct approaches to provision. Usually child care has a focus on supporting parents' labour force attachment, is delivered by private non-profit and for-profit organizations and individuals, and is supported by parent fees and targeted public investments. Kindergarten and related early childhood programs delivered through the school system, are available to all children, regardless of family circumstance, at no direct cost to parents. In recent years, responsibility for child care in provinces and territories has moved from social services ministries to Education, most recently in Manitoba, but to date these moves have had little impact on the way child care is perceived, organized and funded.

Countries with well-developed early learning and child care systems have a more integrated approach. While their policies and programs promote gender equity among parents and support labour force participation, particularly of mothers, they recognize the importance of high-quality provision on the well-being and development of young children, and its role in promoting inclusion, social cohesion

and equity. The broad goals and visions of these countries, including the Scandinavian countries, have resulted in families having equitable access to affordable, quality provision, better integration of “early learning” and “care,” recognition of children as rights holders, and increasingly, legislated entitlements to service.

The rights of young children are an essential consideration in developing a quality early learning and child care system, and the degree to which their best interests take precedence in policy development will determine the type of programs developed, how they are funded and who can access them.

The 1989 [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), ratified by Canada in 1991, emphasizes that the best interests of the child are to be a primary consideration in early learning and child care, while the accompanying [General Comment No. 7](#) identifies children as rights holders, and the need for policies and programs to realize those rights during early childhood.

Since 1998, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has undertaken a numerous policy reviews of individual member countries, as well as comparative studies of specific policy areas. Its 2004 review of Canada highlighted the need for federal and provincial governments to develop a ‘coherent, long-term vision’ for services as the first step to system building. The 2021 Canada-wide agreement between Canada and Manitoba establishes a commitment to work collaboratively to transform early learning and child care into a coherent system. It then becomes increasingly important to develop a vision to guide the development of that system. It provides the opportunity to rethink both the goals and purposes of services as well as how they are delivered.

## **The Manitoba context**

Early learning and child care in Manitoba, as in much of Canada, has been shaped by the political priorities and policies of successive provincial governments. It has been advanced or supported by policies and through funding initiatives under one government which are then changed or reversed when a change in government occurs and political priorities change. As a result there has not been a consistent and sustained strategy to build a comprehensive early learning and child care system, but rather a series of individual initiatives implemented to address specific service needs or priorities shaped by different political views or preferences for how the organization and funding of programs. In recent years, the Government of Manitoba has undertaken a number of activities to define its role and its priorities for an early learning and child care system, including an in-depth review of its overall approach, a further review of its funding approach, revisions to legislation, and entering into two agreements with the federal government.

In March 2015, the government of the day established the Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Commission to move towards implementing a universally accessible system. Following broad consultation, a cross-jurisdictional review of existing structures and approaches, and an examination of Manitoba’s policies, procedures

and funding mechanisms, the Commission proposed an over-arching early learning and child care policy framework, built on a set of principles, to support and sustain a significant shift in public policy direction. The policy framework addressed four major areas: governance and infrastructure; availability, affordability and sustainability; quality, including pedagogy and human resources development; and data collection and analysis, research and evaluation. At the time, Manitoba had a Cabinet-level committee of Government, supported by provincial legislation, that focused on an integrated approach to issues related to children, including early learning and child care. The [Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Commission final report](#) articulated a vision for moving toward a universally accessible system of high-quality Early Learning and Child Care, built on a model of non-profit delivery. It proposed a plan to lead to the province's vision, that included a new governance model of regional infrastructure to ensure the development of a publicly managed system.

Following the 2016 provincial election and change of government, the implementation of the Commission report's recommendations was halted, and a new strategy was developed. This new strategy formed the basis of the action plan in the 2017 [Canada-Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Agreement](#). In its action plan, Manitoba's vision for early learning and child care and priorities was stated as follows.

The Manitoba government is committed to the ongoing development of new initiatives directed at advancing the quality of early learning and child care programs and helping to build accessible and affordable early learning and child care spaces to meet the changing needs of our province's diverse population. Manitoba's new early learning and child care strategy is focused on increasing child care options available to families and strengthening the capacity of the sector's workforce, particularly for groups that are most in need. As an example, the Indigenous population living off reserve is represented throughout the province and currently accesses regulated child care programs, will benefit from the planned investments, along with other higher need communities. The strategy is built on key priority areas known as pillars. Manitoba's Action Plan supports the following five pillars that are part of Manitoba's new early learning and child care strategy:

1. Supporting New and Newly Funded Affordable and Accessible Child Care Spaces
2. Building Sector Capacity and Stability
3. Rural and Northern Strategy
4. Diversity and Inclusion
5. Community Engagement and Public Reporting

In 2019 a review of early learning and child care funding was launched. The 2020, the KPMG report [Early Learning and Child Care Transformation](#) proposed a different route to achieve the government's desired outcomes of access, affordability, labour market support, sustainability and quality. It recommended that government act as a 'market steward', regulating and encouraging providers to deliver specified programs in a service market. Government would work with the early learning and child care sector

to increase the diversity of providers and types of child care offered, to transform the funding model, including revised financial assistance thresholds to reduce the disincentives for working. It further proposed enhanced approaches to streamline the licensing process and to reduce compliance reporting for providers.

In December 2019, the Manitoba government established the Minister's Consultation Table, the creation of which was part of the action plan in the 2017-2020 Canada-Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. The 12-member body was appointed by the minister to inform the government on issues related to early learning and child care. The work of the table was temporarily suspended as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, the Government of Manitoba committed to transforming the early learning and child care system over three years, indicating that a robust child care system was key to the province's and families' recovery from COVID-19. The transformation work focused on building on existing services to better support parents' ability to be employed or return to work. In December 2020, the government established the Child Care Parent Advisory Committee to help guide public engagement and provide advice on how to ensure child care programs meet the diverse needs of families.

In March 2021, [Bill 47 The Early Learning and Child Care Act](#) was introduced in the Legislative Assembly. It includes significant changes to the range of services that can be licensed and funded. It includes changes to the frequency of licensing and makes it easier for Child Care Assistants (CCAs) to become certified Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). The Act refers to the following principles:

1. Early learning and child care services should ensure the health, safety, development and well-being of children.
2. Access to early learning and child care services should enhance the economic opportunities available to parents.
3. Early learning and child care services should be available on a continuum that is responsive to the diverse needs of families.
4. Promoting inclusion and respect and accommodating diversity should be inherent in the provision of early learning and child care services.
5. Public funding should promote fiscal responsibility and the sustainability of early learning and child care services.

At the end of March 2021 the Minister's Consultation Table was re-established and given an expanded scope. The main table provides sector feedback on Bill 47 and the modernization of early learning and child care, and a newly created Bi-lateral Sub-Committee provides advice on Manitoba's Actions Plans in its multi-year agreements with the Government of Canada.

In December 2021, Manitoba released its action plan under the Manitoba Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. It includes six pillars to identify and guide Manitoba's priorities and commitments outlined in the 2021 Canada- Action Plan:

1. **accessibility:** improved responsiveness of the early learning and child care system (that is, greater flexibility in operational hours, wider array of child care choices) resulting in increased access to quality services and improved accountability of the system;
2. **affordability:** balanced affordability of child care fees with financial assistance for providers through a modernized, equitable funding approach;
3. **quality and inclusivity:** improved quality of services through creative recruitment and retention initiatives and a certification process that supports career laddering, and improved adaptable curriculum framework to integrated Indigenous, cultural and community perspectives;
4. **sustainability:** greater, longer-term sustainability of the early learning and child care sector through targeted funding supports, training, and shared service initiatives;
5. **reporting:** IT business solutions that better support internal functions, child care providers and parents; and
6. a **new legislative framework** (anchoring the other 5 pillars).

The Canada-wide agreement provides the opportunity to develop a coherent and integrated system of early learning and child care. The roadmap partners believe that the vision and principles for early learning and child care should be expanded and enhanced to address issues of universality, equity, quality, child rights, the workforce, and public management. They propose a new vision and guiding principles to support the development of such a system.

## Policy actions

1. [Develop and adopt a new vision and guiding principles for early learning and child care in Manitoba](#)

### Proposed vision

**All children** in Manitoba, regardless of their family background, circumstance, geography or parental activity are welcomed into and have access to high-quality, inclusive, consistent, nurturing, regulated early learning and child care that is responsive to their needs, cultures, and disposition, where they have opportunities to play and learn, develop friendships, and form meaningful relationships with their peers and the educators who care for them.

**All families** have access to affordable, high-quality, convenient, suitable early learning and child care that supports them in their parenting role, and enables them to work, study, or otherwise engage in and contribute to their communities. Parents have opportunities for meaningful involvement in their children's child care programs.

Early learning and child care programs are staffed by **well-educated, fairly-compensated educators**, who enjoy good working conditions, have opportunities for ongoing learning and career advancement, and are respected for their contributions to the well-being, education and development of children.

**Early learning and child care facilities** are located in well-designed, environmentally sustainable, safe and healthy buildings<sup>3</sup>; programs have adequate, stable funding to ensure stability, viability and security. Programs are informed by best and promising practice and contribute to our understanding of the importance of high-quality early learning and child care to a just and equitable society.

While early learning and child care must be **universal in approach**, additional supports and processes are needed to address and reduce barriers to access. Children with developmental delays or disabilities are welcomed into and are able to fully participate in all child care settings with the supports they require. Programs serving Indigenous families, newcomer families, francophone families, low-income families, and families living in conditions of risk have the resources necessary to provide the additional supports that may be needed.

### Guiding principles

Early Learning and child care services are:

- **focused on the best interests and rights of children** and the inherent value of childhood;
- **high-quality, play-based, and holistic**, welcoming children of different cultures and backgrounds, and making all children feel culturally supported and safe;
- **equitably available** to all Manitoba families, regardless of income, family status or characteristics or where they live, with particular attention given to families living in conditions of risk or vulnerability, and to families who have a child with a developmental delay or disability;
- **evidenced-based**, reflecting current knowledge and research on quality provision, and regularly adapting and evolving with new learning;
- **publicly planned, developed and managed** through meaningful and transparent collaboration and engagement with public and community partners and parents to advance the goals of a comprehensive child care system;
- **supported by public policy** that is informed by national and international benchmarks, with established targets for systems development;
- **delivered by non-profit and public entities** that are appropriately supported and funded;
- **comprehensive and integrated** across different levels of government, across provincial ministries that can facilitate the development of early learning and child care services, and within the Ministry of Education and Early Childhood Learning;
- **sustainable**, through sufficient and ongoing operating public funding, capital investments and appropriate human resources to deliver quality services; and
- **accountable**, through ongoing planning, data collection and analysis, monitoring, ongoing public participation and engagement, and public reporting.

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<sup>3</sup> See the Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment [Healthy and Sustainable Child Care Environments - A Vision for Canada](#) for further details on healthy and sustainable child care environments

## Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care

Indigenous governments will design and develop early learning and child care systems and services that are distinct and self-governed consistent with the vision and principles set out in the [Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#) and the commitments made under the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

Manitoba has the highest percentage of Indigenous people in its population among all 10 provinces, and Winnipeg has the largest number of Indigenous people among all Canadian cities. Thirty percent of children under the age of six in Manitoba are Indigenous, compared to eight percent in Canada overall.<sup>4</sup> Non-Indigenous early learning and care stakeholders must commit to listening to and engaging with Indigenous governments, leaders and families to understand the value of Indigenous ways of knowing and world views, and to address systemic racism and the impacts of colonialism. The increased understandings that result from these engagements will help respond to the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#), and honour and address the calls for justice set out in [Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#).

### 2. Amend Manitoba's early learning and child care legislation

The Government of Manitoba should, following consultations with early learning and child care stakeholders, amend the [Early Learning and Child Care Act](#) to reflect a new vision and guiding principles for a comprehensive, publicly funded and managed early learning and child care system. The proposed amendments to the legislation should include reference to the right of all young children to access regulated, inclusive and culturally safe early learning and child care, and set out the foundations required for the move toward a publicly planned and managed system.

Further changes to the child care legislation will be needed as Manitoba moves away from its current market approach to child care to a more public system, where the current grants and financial assistance for parents referenced in the legislation will be replaced by a new funding formula and other mechanisms in support of system building. The incorporation of a new vision and principles for early learning and child care in legislation will provide a framework for the subsequent development of new policies and regulations consistent with this new approach.

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<sup>4</sup> See Healthy Child Manitoba's [2017 Child and Youth Report - Executive Summary](#)

## Section 2. PUBLIC POLICY, PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

Across Canada, developing child care provision has most often been treated as a private responsibility, with government playing a regulatory, supporting and occasionally facilitating role for the creators and managers of most Canadian child care services— large and small non-profit “third sector” groups and large or small entrepreneurs— rather than by ensuring through ongoing public processes that child care services are available where, when and for whom they are needed like schools, roads, electricity or sewers — part of the infrastructure.

Friendly et al (2020: 10) [Moving from private to public processes to create child care in Canada](#)

In countries with comprehensive and robust early learning and child care systems, governments at both central and local levels play an active role in planning, developing and managing services. Local governments, which are often also responsible for education in the school system, are also responsible to make sure there is adequate supply of child care and a process for ensuring equitable access. Local governments usually operate some child care centres themselves, under the same conditions and with the same resources as centres operated by non-profit, community-based organizations. Public delivery is often essential in communities where there might not be a private provider to operate enough programs to meet demand. While there is some level of private delivery, the provision of services does not rely on a market approach, in which parent groups, non-profit organizations or businesses are solely responsible for developing and operating early learning and child care programs.

In much of Canada, provincial and territorial governments have more limited involvement in the planning and management of early learning and child care. They all regulate child care, provide a range of grants that may or may not be consistently available, and targeted supports for some low-income families. Priority for any available capital funding may be for communities with lower than average levels of supply, but governments generally do not have the responsibility to ensure that child care is available in any given community nor do they necessarily assume responsibility to support its provision and delivery where it is most needed.

### The Manitoba context

In Manitoba, as in all provinces and territories, there are two distinct approaches to early learning and care. There is primarily public delivery in the school system and largely private, fee-based delivery in child care. All children who are five years old by December 31 of the respective school year have access to part-day kindergarten delivered as part of the school system. It is not compulsory, nor is it a legislated entitlement, but it is widely available and almost all children attend.



In March 2021, Manitoba had a total of 39,214 licensed child care spaces. 35,902 of those spaces (91.6 percent) were in 718 full-day child care centres, school age programs and part-day nursery schools, and 3,312 (8.4 percent) were in 443 family child care homes and group family child care homes.<sup>5</sup> This means that there were enough licensed child care spaces for approximately 25 percent of children under the age of six in child care centres and nursery schools, and 19 percent of children up to age 12 in both centres and licensed homes. Ninety-five percent of all licensed child care spaces are operated by non-profit boards and organizations and by licensed family child care providers.

In the past 20 years there has been an overall net increase in spaces of 56.7 percent, all of which has been in centre-based provision. While many new family child care providers became licensed during this period, a larger number ceased providing care. In 2001-2002, licensed family child care spaces represented about 16 percent of all Manitoba spaces, dropping to 8.5 percent by 2021. There were 609 fewer family child care spaces in 2021 than in 2001.

For many years, the Early learning and Child Care Program maintained and managed a centralized child care registry and waitlist, to identify and track the unmet need for additional child care spaces. The registry reported quarterly on the numbers of children and families in need of licensed child care, by age group and region of the province, and the date by which care was needed. In June 2018, the last time information was publicly available, there were more than 16,000 names on the waitlist. About 40 percent of these children were under the age of two, and about seven percent of the centre-based spaces were licensed for that age group. The centralized registry was discontinued in August 2021.

Until recently, responsibility for early learning and child care in Manitoba was split between two ministries, with the Early Childhood and Development Unit in Manitoba Education responsible for kindergarten, and the Early Learning and Child Care Program in the Ministry of Families responsible for child care. Announced with the Cabinet shuffle that took place on January 18, 2022, responsibility for child care moved to the newly named Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning. No details regarding any changes that will take place as a result of the move have yet been made public, and the implications for the early learning and child care sector and impacts on service provision are not yet known.

As part of the Canada-wide Early learning and Child Care Agreement, Manitoba has committed to creating 23,000 full-time equivalent new spaces by fiscal year 2025-2026, representing a 63 percent increase over current supply. Within the first two years, Manitoba has committed to create 1,700 extended hour care spaces offering evening and weekend child care, up to 1,450 part-time spaces for families not requiring full-time care, 100 guaranteed spaces in existing programs by late 2022 for parents transitioning from Employment and Income Assistance benefits to employment, and 300 guaranteed spaces per year going forward.

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<sup>5</sup> Manitoba Families [2021 Annual Report Manitoba Families](#)

The Government of Manitoba indicated that it will develop an expansion plan and strategy to guide the development of new spaces. The strategy will include exploring opportunities to locate new child care facilities in a variety of public buildings. In order for spaces to be developed where they are needed and that are affordable to all families, there will need to be adequate capital funding to build new facilities, enough qualified, well-compensated and supported staff available to ensure new centres can open, and ongoing and adequate operational funding for centres and homes to remain viable and affordable for parents. These activities cannot rely on or be subject to market forces. Public planning and management will be essential to ensure that these requirements or conditions are met.

## Policy actions related to governance and policy development

### 3. Review and implement changes in how the Early Learning and Child Care Program in the Ministry of Education and Early Childhood Learning governs, manages and supports early learning and child care

To ensure the development of a coherent, comprehensive and high-quality early learning and child care system, the Manitoba government will need to make fundamental and transformative changes to the way it plans for, manages and finances early learning and child care. These changes will require the government to play an expanded and active role in supporting early learning and child care in the following areas:

- **purposeful public planning** of services to meet community needs, in collaboration with other provincial ministries and other divisions within Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning;
- **meaningful and ongoing engagement** of a broad range of stakeholders during the system-building process, and the development and support of formalized structures to enable stakeholders to provide ongoing input on system management and oversight;
- **meaningful and ongoing dialogue with First Nations, Métis and Inuit leadership** to support Indigenous led, inclusive, culturally relevant and safe early learning and child care programs and reduce barriers to access;
- **development of a public infrastructure** to ensure services are developed where needed, with options for public delivery when a non-profit organization is not in place to operate needed programs;
- **development of comprehensive policies** that ensure child care is a strong and equal partner with other forms of early childhood provision in the ministry and that services are aligned with other child and family supports;
- **a hands-on role** in meeting policy objectives; ensuring targets and timetables are met, reducing barriers to access, and allocating adequate financing to meet objectives;
- **regular data collection, monitoring and evaluation** to assess the progress towards meeting system and service goals; and
- **development of strong accountability measures** for both government and the early learning and child care sector.

In order for the Early Learning and Child Care Program to effectively undertake its expanded role, additional departmental staff will be needed. Knowledgeable policy makers with content expertise, and additional technical and systems support will be essential to effectively implement, manage and monitor the transformational changes that will be taking place as the system evolves.

#### 4. Take a whole of government approach in the development and implementation of an early learning and child care system

An early learning and child care system needs to include a plan for capital development, expanding the workforce and providing appropriate opportunities for education and development, addressing issues of equity of access, local planning and public delivery. If early learning and child care is identified as a government priority, there are a number of ministries in addition to Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning that can play important roles if mandated to do so. Building a publicly managed and planned early learning and child care system is a large and complex undertaking that will require the support of different government departments. There is precedence in Manitoba for a whole of government approach to early learning and child care.

Between 2000 and 2020, Manitoba had the longest-standing cross departmental provincial structure that focused specifically on children. After its foundations were first established in 1994 by a previous Conservative government, in 2000, the Healthy Child Manitoba Strategy was developed. This resulted in the establishment of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, to develop child and youth centred public policy across government, legislated through the [Healthy Child Manitoba Act](#) in 2007.

Supported by legislation and the first Cabinet-level integrated committee in Canada, Healthy Child Manitoba was a government-wide initiative focused on a simple vision: The best possible outcomes for all of Manitoba's children. Healthy Child Manitoba provided integration of programs and services for children, including early learning and child care, with the goal of helping families and communities raise children who are healthy, safe and secure, successful at learning, and socially engaged and responsible.

The Act was repealed in 2020, the Cabinet committee was revoked, and the Healthy Child Manitoba Office and the Healthy Child Advisory Committee were dissolved. A new and bold vision for early learning and child care will benefit once again from the involvement of a number of provincial departments. The following have potential roles to play in building an early learning and child care system, working in partnership with sector stakeholders and other levels of government:

- **Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration** – responsible for postsecondary education, student access and success, student support, skills development, and administering economic immigration programs;

- **Economic Development, Investment and Trade** – responsible for the Sector Council Program, which currently supports organizations in a number of key Manitoba sectors to develop and deliver workforce training for new and existing employees;
- **Families** – responsible for child and family services, parenting resources, employment and income assistance;
- **Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations** – responsible for working to close the gap in quality of life between Indigenous people and other Manitobans, particularly in the areas of education, health, housing, economic opportunities and employment;
- **Intergovernmental Affairs and International Relations** – responsible for providing advice, analysis and support in managing Manitoba’s relations with the federal government and other provincial/territorial governments on matters of intergovernmental significance;
- **Municipal Relations** – responsible for strengthening community planning and development in neighborhoods, communities and regions across Manitoba by assisting municipalities and community organizations in undertaking projects that provide long-term benefits to their communities and encouraging regional approaches;
- **Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services** – responsible for capital planning, project delivery, and asset management for government infrastructure; and
- **The Status of Women Secretariat** – responsible for advancing gender equity across the province, and addressing the needs of women through government programs, policies and legislation.

The Manitoba government will need to determine the most appropriate ways in which these ministries might best work together to advance an early learning and child care system. In addition to recreating a special cabinet committee, other options include the formation of a dedicated early learning and child care Secretariat, or a formal cross-ministerial partnership.

## 5. Develop and fund a local infrastructure to ensure provincial plans can be implemented in all parts of the province

In Manitoba, as in much of Canada, there have been very few publicly managed or supported efforts to provide the local infrastructure necessary to plan for, establish and support the type of expansion called for, and to monitor and evaluate the results. Responsibility for developing and providing child care falls to parent volunteers and non-profit organizations who are often ill equipped to organize and coordinate the level of effort required to create and administer early learning and child care programs where they are needed, and to ensure their quality and ongoing stability. Although there are numerous types of established local infrastructure in Manitoba to manage other programs for children and families (such as school boards, health authorities, child and family services authorities and recreation commissions) there is no such infrastructure in place for early learning and child care.

Some form of local infrastructure for child care will be needed to ensure that expansion targets can be met and that sustainable, high-quality services are developed. It will be needed for local planning, to manage expansion, to provide administrative resources to licensed non-profit centres where needed, and in the absence of a non-profit organization to operate new facilities, to be the licence holder and deliver services.<sup>6</sup> This infrastructure could be created by mandating an expanded role for school boards, or by developing a new public or a quasi-public body, responsible to implement provincial policies and plans.

## Policy actions to support expansion

### 6. Develop a multi-year expansion plan

The federal and provincial governments' announcements in support of the Canada-wide agreement includes the commitment to create 23,000 new full-time equivalent regulated not-for-profit child care spaces in child care centres, nursery schools and family child care by 2025-2026. Manitoba's Action Plan noted that the previous provincial capital fund covered up to 40 percent of costs for eligible projects, to a maximum of \$600,000, limited expansion because non-profit organizations had to raise the 60 percent before any approval was given or government commitment made for the balance of funding. As part of the Canada-wide Agreement, the Manitoba government has allocated \$70.7 million in capital funding - up to \$12,000 per space to create up to 5,890 new spaces in higher needs communities. It is very unlikely that the capital allocation is adequate to create these new spaces, and it is not clear how the additional new spaces beyond the 5,890 will be created without capital dollars.

The Manitoba government will need to develop a comprehensive, multi-year expansion plan for regulated early learning and child care. However, simply expanding supply will not guarantee access. The plan must focus on ensuring that newly developed, regulated child care spaces are:

- **affordable** – for all parents, regardless of financial circumstances or parental activity;
- **suitable** – high quality, inclusive and welcoming of all children, responsive to the needs of parents and conveniently located;
- **sustainable** – with adequate, ongoing system-level funding and infrastructure supports; and
- **staffed** – with well-educated and fairly compensated educators.

To ensure that spaces are developed where they are needed and that service providers deliver high-quality, affordable child care, the engagement and input of a wide range of government and community partners will be essential.

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<sup>6</sup> Consistent with the principles set out in the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework, Indigenous governments will control the design, delivery and administration of an Indigenous early learning and child care system.

An expansion plan will need to include:

- targets and timetables for space creation, including an adequate capital funding program;
- targets and timetables for increasing the supply of qualified educators;
- a data collection and monitoring process;
- benchmarks to monitor progress;
- a process for evaluating the impacts of policy changes;
- accountability measures for public financing; and
- mechanisms to modify policies, amend regulations and standards as needed.

7. In collaboration with all orders of government, develop an inventory of public buildings and lands that have the potential to house child care centres, or to provide opportunities for the construction of new facilities

Manitoba's Action Plan under the Canada-wide agreement indicates that an expansion strategy will be developed to guide the development of new spaces, with a focus on publicly owned buildings. The public buildings considered in the Action Plan include schools, post secondary institutions, provincially owned buildings, and municipal buildings including libraries and community centres. The roadmap partners support the government's plan to focus expansion on child care in publicly owned buildings.

As part of the Action Plan, Manitoba has committed to conduct an inventory of space in provincially owned buildings to explore co-locating child care. This inventory should extend to publicly owned lands suitable for construction of new child care facilities, or the co-location of child care, such as in new schools, housing and community developments.

Locating new child care centres in publicly owned buildings and their development on publicly owned lands has the potential to support the expansion of services, and would ensure that child care centres developed with public funds remain public assets.

8. Develop a policy to support stable and standardized occupancy agreements for child care centres located in schools and other publicly-owned buildings

Close to half of all licensed centre-based spaces in Manitoba are currently located in schools or on school property. While school sites are available in every community and are considered a desirable location for child care, including infant and preschool spaces, security of tenure can be a challenge. Child care centres often have year-to-year leases and if the space needs of the school changes, the child care centres often have to move, creating instability for both child care operators and families. Lease arrangements and amounts vary across school divisions, and the degree to which the child care centre is considered an integral part of the school community and has access to school facilities and spaces, is largely left to the school principal.

To address these variations, and support more stable and standardized occupancy agreements, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning should work with

local school boards and child care service providers to develop a policy that establishes common guidelines and occupancy arrangements for child care centres located in school buildings and support positive and consistent relationships between child care providers and schools. This policy could inform the development of further occupancy policies that would apply to child care in other public buildings. These policies and agreements should be developed in partnership with other departments in the provincial government and other public entities that may house child care programs.

## **Policy actions related to partnerships and engagement**

### **9. Work with school divisions and the Manitoba School Boards Association to better align kindergarten, pre-kindergarten and child care programs to ensure family needs are met**

Kindergarten operates for a full school day in most provinces and territories. In addition, a number offer full-day or part-day pre-kindergarten for all or some four-year-old children.<sup>7</sup> In Manitoba, publicly funded, part-day kindergarten for five-year-olds is offered in all 613 public elementary schools, across all school boards in the province. Some school divisions allocate additional funding to provide full-day kindergarten as well as part-day pre-kindergarten (nurseries) for four-year-olds.

Early learning and child care programs delivered through the school system are established and operated without the benefit of collaborative planning to identify what types of programs may be needed, and to identify where duplication may occur. For example, half-day programs for four-year-olds in schools, developed and operated by school boards, are generally not established in consultation with other early learning and child care programs that may already exist, and which at times, even operate in the same building.

Children who attend both part-day kindergarten or pre-kindergarten and a regulated child care program must transition between the two programs and accommodate changes in pedagogy as well as changes in the staff supporting their early learning and care.

To support better alignment of early learning and child care services and to provide children and their families with continuity, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning should develop guidelines and supports to reduce the challenges children and their families face in transitioning between early learning and child care and school. With input from school districts and community-based child care programs, the ministry should explore options to minimize transitions between kindergarten and

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<sup>7</sup> Full-day kindergarten is provided in the four Atlantic provinces, Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories. Yukon has both full-day and part-day kindergarten. Full-day kindergarten is available for all four-year olds in Nova Scotia, Ontario and the Northwest Territories, and is expanding throughout Quebec and Yukon. Part-day pre- kindergarten for three- and four-year-olds is available for some children in Saskatchewan and Alberta. Free, part day universal preschool is available for all four-year-olds in PEI, delivered in child care centres. Newfoundland and Labrador will be begin piloting a pre-kindergarten program in September 2022.

before-and-after school child care, and greater continuity of pedagogy and staffing. In the medium term, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning should explore the introduction of province-wide full-day kindergarten for at least all five-year-olds. Nine of the 13 provinces and territories provide and fund full-day kindergarten for five-year-olds, and seven provide and fund kindergarten for all or some four-year-olds.

#### 10. Ensure and support ongoing engagement of stakeholders in the development and monitoring of an early learning and child care strategy, system and services

Input of content experts, representatives of the early learning and child care sector, postsecondary institutions, advocacy organizations, organized labour, newcomer organizations, anti-poverty groups, the francophone community and parents will strengthen the policy and planning process and make it more transparent. It will also make for a more informed early learning and child care community, as well as build broad-based support for early learning and child care.

The Manitoba government will need to provide the infrastructure necessary for meaningful participation, along with mechanisms that will ensure diverse perspectives and voices are considered, and that government policy decisions are widely shared. Engaging with multiple stakeholders within and outside government will help develop an effective expansion plan, essential for achieving Manitoba's commitments under the Canada-wide agreement and the province's own early years plan.

The ongoing and meaningful engagement of stakeholders at both the system and service levels will support accountability and transparency, and help build and maintain public support for early learning and child care. It will also help ensure that the best interests of children and other principles for the early learning and child care system will guide system building and service delivery.



## Section 3. FINANCING

Evidence suggests that significant public funding is necessary to support a sustainable and equitable early childhood system. Without this investment, there is likely to be a shortage of good quality programmes, unequal access, and the segregation of children according to income. The key is therefore to invest not only in expanding access, but also in improving the quality of ECEC services that is affordable for all children.

OECD (2017: 34) Starting Strong 2017: [Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care](#)

The amount and type of public funding for early learning and child care impacts the availability, affordability and quality of provision. High-quality early learning and child care programs require adequate, sustainable funding to ensure that staff have good wages and working conditions, and access to ongoing in-service education, that child care centres are located in environmentally friendly, well-designed and located physical spaces, there is adequate administrative and program support, and the additional supports needed for children with additional support needs and those from vulnerable or at-risk populations. Funding is also required for infrastructure, planning, data collection, monitoring and evaluation.

A number of international bodies have established targets and benchmarks for investments in early learning and child care and recommended a minimum of 1 percent of GDP.<sup>8</sup> Canada spends, on average much less than its peer nations. [Starting Strong II](#), the OECD report prepared upon completion of the review of early learning and child care in 20 countries, found that Canada ranked last in public expenditures, and in its review of Canada, the OECD found the weak public funding, especially for children younger than five, to be a “fundamental flaw” in early learning and child care provision. The [Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Canada: Country Note](#) reported, among other things, excessive parent fees, an inefficient subsidy system, chronic underfunding for materials, physical infrastructure and infrastructure of planning, administration, data collection, monitoring and evaluation.

Governments support early learning and child care through two main types of funding: demand-side and supply-side. Demand-side funding provided through tax credits, tax deductions, and fee subsidies is directed to or provided on behalf of individual parents who meet certain eligibility criteria. It is typically based on household income, and parents may have to meet additional criteria, such as being employed or attending school. This type of funding is intended to make child care more affordable for families while also providing them with the ‘choice’ to purchase the child care that works best for their family’s needs in the market place. However,

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<sup>8</sup> See [Quality Targets in Services for Young Children; Starting Strong II; Innocenti Report Card 8](#)

demand-side funding does little to ensure the creation of high-quality early learning and child care, and does not necessarily make child care affordable. It can further result in low-income families having to “choose” the cheapest child care available to them, which is also often of the poorest quality. Supply-side funding, the predominant funding model in early learning and child care systems, covers all or part of the costs associated with operating a regulated early learning and child care program. If the funding is adequate and ongoing, it provides services with financial stability, and the ability to pay fair wages to staff, without the burden falling on parents. It can also help governments support quality through the conditions they attach to funding.

To reduce barriers to access, several OECD countries offer some free provision to some or all families, have low set fees, and limit the percentage of household income that parents must pay. New Zealand provides up to 20 hours week of free early learning and child care for all children age three to five, England provides all three- and four-year-olds 15 hours/week free child care, and 30 hours if the parent is working or attending school. In Norway, families with incomes below a certain level are entitled to 20 hours of free child care per week for children two to five years, and parents pay no more than six percent of household income, up to a maximum monthly fee of about \$400. In Germany, some municipalities have eliminated all child care fees, and Malta offers free child care to children younger than kindergarten age whose parents are working or attending school. The US Department of Health and Human Services has set a benchmark for affordability of 7% of household income for low-income families receiving a government subsidy. In his extensive analysis and economic modeling on affordability for the Government of Ontario in 2018, [Affordable for all: Making licensed child care affordable in Ontario](#), Gordon Cleveland recommended that child care be free for preschool age children, with sliding fee scales for younger children.

## The Manitoba context

The majority of child care funding in Manitoba is allocated to operating grants provided to eligible non-profit child care centres, nursery schools and licensed family child care homes. Since 2000, operating grants to funded centres have been based on a “unit” model, which was developed using the child to staff ratio for each age group.<sup>9</sup> The unit funding rate is the daily revenue generated through parent fees (and fee subsidies) and operating grants per space, multiplied by the number of children in the unit, based on legislated child to staff ratios. The current unit rate (as of April 2022), which, except for nursery schools, has remained the same since 2016 is \$295 a day. It provides per space annual operating grants of \$11,375 per infant space, \$4,180 per preschool space and \$1,664 per school age space. Operating grants for nursery schools changed in January 2021, from \$528 per space to \$1,045 per space for up to 5 sessions per week, plus an additional \$209 per session for 6 to 10 sessions, to a maximum of \$2,090 per space.

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<sup>9</sup> The staff to child ratios used to calculate the funding amounts are 1:4 for infants, 1:8 for preschoolers and 1:15 for school age children.

Manitoba also provides operating grants to licensed family child care providers, based on the age of children in their care. Operating grants are not necessarily available for new centres or an expansion of spaces in an existing centre. In its 2020-2021 annual report, Manitoba Families noted that 650 non-profit centres were funded and 32 were unfunded. However, it is important to note that new spaces in funded centres are not necessarily funded, making it particularly difficult for those centres to maintain the same rates of pay for staff working with children in spaces that are unfunded. The amount of the operating grant has been frozen since 2016. In the six years since, the value of the operating grant has fallen 16.4 percent in real purchasing power resulting in stagnant wages and challenges for centres in meeting increased operating costs.

Manitoba was the first province to introduce a flat (maximum) fee that funded centres and homes can charge parents. The fee has increased only marginally in the past 15 years, and after accounting for increases in the cost of living, today's fees are between 76 to 96 percent of the fees charged in 1986. As a result, prior to the implementation of the Canada-wide agreements, Manitoba had among the lowest child care fees outside Quebec. (As of January 2022, only Newfoundland and Labrador had province-wide fees lower than Manitoba, while British Columbia has a small number of \$10/day sites). The current maximum fees of \$30/day for infants, \$20.80 for preschoolers and between \$6.15 and \$20.80 for school age children, depending on their periods of attendance and whether or not school is in session, remain unchanged since 2013. Family child care providers who are classified as an ECE II (requiring completion of a two-year ECE diploma or equivalent) may charge the same parent fee as centre-based programs. The maximum fee for nursery school is \$10.40/day.

While the fees may be affordable for higher income families, the financial eligibility for fee subsidy in Manitoba (a reduced fee for eligible parents, with the balance paid by government) is among the stringent in the country, making licensed child care unaffordable for most low-income families. To be eligible for a fee subsidy, low-income families must meet both financial eligibility and social criteria, demonstrating a "need" for service. Usually this means they must be working, looking for work, attending school, or they or their child has a medical need. There is one exception: a reason for care is not needed to be eligible for a subsidy in nursery school. Fully subsidized parents must pay an unsubsidized fee of \$2/day per child for full-day child care.

The percentage of families receiving a full or partial fee subsidy has declined significantly over the last two decades. In 2001, 47.6 percent of spaces were occupied by a child receiving a fee subsidy; by 2020 the percentage had dropped to 16.8 percent, and in actual numbers, there are now approximately 4,500 fewer children receiving any form of fee subsidy than there were twenty years ago.

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to capital grants of up to \$600,000 for community-based programs, the Manitoba Child Care in Schools Policy allows for 100% funding for child care facilities created in school space or on school property.

In 2019, the last year before the pandemic significantly changed the financial landscape for child care, Manitoba allocated \$156.8 million in provincial funding to regulated child care. The funding allocation fell into three main categories:

- **one-time capital funding and start up grants** (\$2.8 million) to create new facilities and spaces. Manitoba provides two types of major capital funding to support the expansion of child care spaces:<sup>10</sup>
  - Up to 40% funding to a maximum of \$600,000 for renovation or new construction of community facilities
  - Per space start up grants, as funding permits, for child care centres, nursery schools, and family and group family child care homes;
- **supply-side funding** in the form of operating grants. (\$127.1 million). These grants include:
  - unit funding to most non-profit centres. Increased operating grants are available for funded programs that offer extended hour care
  - funding for registered pension funds. The Early learning and Child Care Program reimburses non-profit centre-based employers up to four percent of employees' wages to cover the employer contribution. It also provides matching RRSP contributions for family child care providers up to a maximum of \$1,700 per year
  - annual operating grants to funded family child care homes of \$2,693 per infant space, \$2,068 per preschool space and \$880 per school age space
  - staff replacement grants, available to non-profit centres and home-based facilities, to offset the cost of substitute staff when a child care assistant (CCA) participates in an approved Early Childhood Education Workplace Program
  - training and tuition support
  - inclusion support grants; and
- **fee subsidies** for low-income families who meet the eligibility criteria (\$26.9 million).

In addition to provincial allocations for regulated child care, Manitoba received \$46.8 million over three years through the 2017-2020 Canada-Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. Federal funds were allocated in the following areas:

- capital funding for new spaces and operating funding for the new spaces;
- a group family child care home pilot project in isolated communities;
- block funding grants for rural and Northern communities;
- professional development, online training, board governance training and a mentorship program for family child care providers;
- a competency-based assessment program for rural and Northern communities;
- diversity and inclusion initiatives; and
- community engagement and public reporting.

As part of its Action Plan under the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, Manitoba has made the following financial commitments to 2023:

- capital funding of up to \$12,000 per space to create up to 5,890 new spaces in higher need communities;
- increasing the income threshold for eligibility to fee subsidies;
- a financial assistance system for parent fees based on household income; and
- a revenue supplement for service providers to offset the lost revenue from lower parent fees.

More than 90 percent of the \$314.2 million in federal funding is allocated to three main areas:

- Affordability (57.2 percent);
- Capital expansion (22.5 percent); and
- A minimum wage grid supplement through operating funding to increase average wages (10.6 percent).

To date, details of some of these initiatives are not available, but it does appear that the initial affordability provisions implemented as of February 2022 do not support a reduction of the current child care fees, but a reduction in the out-of-pocket portion of the child care fees parents pay based on expanded eligibility for parent fee subsidies. This means that the first affordability measure will take the form of demand-side funding on behalf of individual families and not through supply-side funding to support child care operations. It is also not clear if Manitoba remains committed to mandating a set parent fee. The Action Plan indicates that by March 2022, Manitoba will outline for the Government of Canada the results and next steps of its updated fee structure modelling.

## **Policy actions to fund and support child care services and ensure accountability**

### **11. Fully and directly fund all spaces in non-profit licensed child care centres, nursery schools and licensed family child care homes.**

The unit funding model provides a good framework upon which to build more a secure and adequate funding base for child care operations. The Early Learning and Child Care Program should immediately fund all unfunded non-profit centres and spaces to ensure equitable funding across similar services. It should also amend the unit funding formula for licensed child care centres, nursery schools and school age programs to take into account true operating costs including:

- wages and benefits of program and non program staff, according to a province-wide wage scale based on the Manitoba Child Care Association's Market Competitive Salary Guideline Scale;
- provision for substitute staff, particularly for centres with staff enrolled in a workplace program;
- professional ongoing learning and tuition support;
- hours of operation and average enrolment;

- occupancy costs, including utilities and regular maintenance;
- administration and program costs;

and additional funding as appropriate to cover the additional costs of meeting the needs of:

- children and their families living in isolated rural and northern communities;
- English language learners and minority language children;
- children living in vulnerable circumstances who experience barriers to full participation; and
- children with developmental delays or disabilities who require additional support to fully participate in their early learning and child care program.

The funding should be adequate to cover all operational expenses, including wages and benefits, administration, program and occupancy costs. The ministry should explore alternatives to parent fee collection by individual centres and homes, so programs are not dependent on revenue from parent fees in order to maintain financial stability. The funding formula should be reviewed annually and adjusted as appropriate. All existing unfunded non-profit spaces should be prioritized for funding ahead of any expansion of new child care spaces.

## 12. Develop a funding formula for licensed family child care homes and group family child care homes

Manitoba will need to develop a funding formula for both individually licensed family child care providers and those operating group family child care homes, as well as for any family child care agencies that are developed as part of the Canada-wide Agreement. The formula will need to reflect:

- the early childhood education and experience of family child care providers and of agency staff;
- professional learning costs;
- agency administration costs;
- the ages of children served and average enrolment;
- program delivery costs; and
- additional costs associated with the provision of care for children with additional support needs.

## 13. Develop conditions for licensed centres and homes to receive core funding

The Early Learning and Child Care Program will need to establish conditions that licensed centres and homes must meet to be eligible to receive core funding. The conditions are intended to ensure transparent and accountable use of public funds, equitable access to high-quality services for children and families, and fair compensation and support for educators and other staff. Mandated participation in evaluation and regular data collection will help assess the effectiveness of the revised approach.

The conditions to receive core funding could include requirements to:

- comply with all requirements under Manitoba's [Child Care Regulation](#);
- pay staff according to a provincial wage scale based on the Manitoba Child Care Association's Market Competitive Salary Guideline Scale, and provide a comprehensive benefit package;
- charge no more than any established provincial or regional parent fee, and apply any fee reduction established for lower income families;
- report on expenditures and revenues;
- welcome all children into the program regardless of family circumstance or employment;
- have an equity plan that indicates how barriers to a child's participation or additional needs will be addressed, and how children from diverse backgrounds and identities, including Indigenous children, Francophone children, racialized children, LGBTQ2+ families and newcomers to Canada will be welcomed, supported and provided with culturally safe early learning and child care;
- have an inclusion plan that details the measures in place to ensure children with additional support needs are able to fully participate in the program with their peers;
- develop an annual quality plan in collaboration with staff and parents, including how opportunities for continuous learning will be provided;
- have an induction or mentoring plan for all newly hired educators and other staff;
- accept and supervise practicum students to support the expansion of the qualified early childhood workforce; and
- provide operational data and participate in any evaluation activities required by government.

#### 14. Determine the infrastructure required to support local public planning and management and provide funding for its implementation and ongoing operation

In addition to providing funding support for child care programs and for reduced parent fees, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning will need to determine what structures will be developed to support local planning, public management of services, build capacity in the non-profit sector, and for data collection, monitoring and evaluation at a local level. It will also need to support any formalized structures that provide avenues for engagement and participation of stakeholders.

### **Policy actions to support affordability for families**

#### 15. Develop a definition of affordability

A major priority in the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements is to make child care more affordable for families. The Government of Manitoba has committed to reducing parent fees by an average of 50 percent by the end of 2022 and to an average of \$10 a day by 2026. Manitoba has the advantage of already having a set fee that is lower than fees currently charged in most provinces and

territories. With all funded programs charging a common fee, reducing those fees should be a straightforward procedure with an appropriate increase in operating funding that enables centres to both reduce fees and pay fair wages for staff.

Unlike other provinces with set fees, parents in Manitoba pay more for child care for children under two years than for older children. It would be more equitable to transition to a flat parent fee across age groups.

While the child care fees in Manitoba are more affordable for families at or above the median household income, than they are in most other provinces, they are still unaffordable for many low and modest income families. Neither the federal nor the Manitoba governments have developed a definition of affordability to guide the development of a sliding fee scale for lower income families.

A number of countries have addressed affordability by introducing a number of free core hours for families below a certain income, by establishing a maximum percent of household income to be spent on child care to a maximum set fee, and in some locations eliminating child care fees altogether.

In March 2022, the US Senate began deliberations on the [Child Care and Development Block Grant Reauthorization Act of 2022](#). The proposed legislation includes a sliding fee scale as follows. Families earning:

- at or below 75 percent of a state's median income (SMI) would pay nothing;
- between 75 and 100 percent of SMI would pay no more than 2 percent of annual income;
- between 100 and 125 percent of SMI would pay between 2 and 4 percent of annual income; and
- between 125 and 150 percent of SMI would pay between 4 and 7 percent of annual income.

To ensure that Manitoba families have equitable access to high-quality early learning and child care, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning should work with early childhood researchers, anti-poverty organizations and parent groups to develop an affordability measure for families at different household incomes that would guide the development of a sliding fee scale based on a percentage of household income to a maximum set fee.

## 16. Replace parent fee subsidies with a sliding fee scale to a maximum set fee

The Government of Manitoba has indicated a desire to “modernize” early learning and child care in the province. The current subsidy system has changed little since subsidies were first introduced as part of the Canada Assistance Plan in 1966, which created a 50-50 cost-sharing arrangement between the federal government and the provinces and territories to partially pay for social assistance and welfare services, including child care fee subsidies.



The system of fee subsidies does not serve low- and modest-income families well. In addition to meeting financial eligibility criteria, almost all parents must be working or attending school to receive a fee subsidy. Many children who would benefit from regular participation in a full-day child care program cannot participate if their parents do not meet the social criteria. Families without regular, stable income fluctuate between being eligible and not eligible for fee subsidy as their income changes. For example, parents who are students may be eligible for fee subsidy during the school year, then lose their eligibility over the summer if they are employed. They may not be able to afford child care, remove their child from licensed child care and then lose their space when school starts again and they are once again eligible for subsidy. The maximum income levels at which parents may receive a full or partial subsidy were raised as of February 6, 2022, but are still low, and remain intrusive for families who have to prove a “need” for child care and financial assistance.

The ministry should modernize the affordability mechanisms and move to a simple sliding scale, based on annual tax returns, with low-income parents paying no fee. The ministry should also eliminate the requirement that only parents who work or attend education or training programs are eligible for fee support, so that affordable early learning and child care is available for all children and families.

## Section 4. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

There are significant challenges for the childcare workforce in Canada. However, many of the solutions are quite clear. All the available data and research indicates that if wages and working conditions improve, there are real opportunities to improve and sustain the quality of the childcare workforce and, therefore, the quality of childcare programs. The evidence has clearly indicated that with enhanced resources and on-going training and support, the childcare workforce is fundamental to delivering high quality childcare.

Halfon, S. (2014: 16) [Canada's child care workforce](#)

There is a substantial body of compelling evidence that high-quality early learning and child care programs benefit children, while programs of poor quality may have negative effects. A number of studies show that the level of qualification of early childhood educators and their participation in ongoing profession learning are key predictors of quality, and that specific knowledge and skills related to early childhood education are associated with higher quality provision.

In Canada, as in many other peer nations, the recruitment and retention of qualified, capable educators is an ongoing challenge. Low pay, challenging working conditions and lack of respect for their work contribute to low job satisfaction and high turnover of both qualified and unqualified staff. In addition, when employment opportunities within the school system are available, qualified early childhood educators are often drawn to them because they are better compensated, require shorter working hours, and provide better access to ongoing professional learning.

The 2008 [UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 8](#) proposed 10 internationally applicable benchmarks for early learning and child care as a set of minimum standards to protect the interests of young children. Benchmark number 6 proposed that a minimum of 50 percent in early childhood centres should have at least three years of tertiary education with a specialization in early childhood studies or a related field.

Among European countries, about 75 percent require a degree in early childhood education for a percentage of core educators working with children over the age of three, and about one-third require a degree for those working with children younger than three. Some countries require Master's level degree qualifications for core educators.<sup>11</sup> Family child care providers, who are typically fewer in number, may not require formal early childhood qualifications. They are, however, usually supported by pedagogues and in some jurisdictions may be municipal employees, rather than

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<sup>11</sup> For example, Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Greece, France, Croatia, Cyprus, Lithuania, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and Finland require bachelor's degrees for core practitioners working with children younger than three. A master's degree is required in Portugal and Iceland. The number of countries requiring a bachelor's degree is considerably higher for educators working with children three years and older.

operating as small independent businesses as they do in a majority of Canadian jurisdictions.

The quality of provision is negatively affected by high turnover or inadequate numbers of qualified educators. The OECD's [Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care](#) notes that, in addition to competitive wages and other benefits, job satisfaction and retention can be improved by low child-to-staff ratios and low group size, reasonable schedules and workload, good physical environment, and a competent and supportive centre manager.

The disruption resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, with centre closures, often accompanied by staff layoffs during the period of closures, and increasing responsibilities for those providing care when centres reopened, has shone a spotlight on the importance of early learning and child care and its essential role in the country's economic recovery. Early childhood educators are the main contributor to quality provision, and there can be no expansion without a qualified, consistent and capable workforce. To meet expansion targets and the developmental needs of young children, investing in the workforce to ensure fair wages and working conditions, job security and stability, and access to pre-service and in-service education will be essential.

## The Manitoba context

Manitoba's requirement for two thirds of staff (and at least one per group) to have a two-year ECE diploma in full time child care centres, and half of staff in part-day nursery schools and school age programs, are among the strongest in the country. Manitoba is also the only province to require either post-diploma study or degree credentials for directors of preschool child care centres.

All centre-based staff must be classified by the Early Learning and Child Care Program at one of three levels, determined by their educational qualifications.

- **Child Care Assistant (CCA):** requires completion of 40-hours of approved early childhood training within the first year of employment.
- **ECE II:** requires completion of an approved two-year ECE diploma program, or an assessment program offered by the Early Learning and Child Care Program.<sup>12</sup>
- **ECE III:** requires a degree in an approved program, or ECE II classification and a post-diploma certificate in an approved area of specialization.

Manitoba's commitment to increase the supply of child care by 23,000 spaces will require about 5,000 additional staff and directors. With the current regulatory requirements for qualified staff, more than 3,000 will need to be certified as ECE IIs or ECE IIIs. There is already a shortage of ECEs to meet the regulatory requirements

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<sup>12</sup> Previously, the Child Care Education Program Approval Committee approved ECE programs delivered in community colleges. This committee has been replaced with the Child Care Qualifications and Training Committee, which provides advice and makes recommendations related to training and qualifications.

in centre-based programs; the Manitoba Child Care Association estimates about 30 percent of centres do not have enough certified ECEs to meet requirements.

Manitoba's Early Childhood Education Workplace Program, an accelerated postsecondary diploma-level course of study that allows experienced CCAs to attend class for two days per week, while working in their licensed early learning and child care program for the remainder of the week and continuing to earn their regular salary. The centre is funded by the Early Learning and Child Care Program with a Staff Replacement Grant to cover the cost of substitute staff during the time that the employee is in class. Practicum placements are done in the centre where the employee works. Employees are responsible for tuition and related costs. Eligibility requirements include high school completion and a minimum of one year of employment in a licensed early learning and child care setting. This program is highly successful and valued by the child care sector. Expanded access to a workplace program will be an important part of any workforce strategy to increase the supply and retention of qualified educators.

In common with other provinces and territories, Manitoba's historically low wages and poor benefits have been a characteristic of the child care sector and have resulted in ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. The challenge has been compounded by increased opportunities for ECEs in the Education sector at higher wages, increased benefits and shorter working hours.

For many years, the Manitoba Child Care Association has produced salary guidelines, and since 2008, has a Market Competitive Salary Guideline Scale, based on competitive rates of pay within comparable positions in various sectors. The formula for funded child care centres has remained the same since 2016, making it challenging for centres to raise wages, maintain job satisfaction and retain staff. There is little incentive for staff to pursue additional training or certification, as there is no funding available to increase wages for staff who voluntarily attain higher credentials.

In 2022, the average hourly rate of pay in Manitoba was \$19.53/hour for an ECE and \$21.50 for a supervisor. The Manitoba Child Care Association 2022-2023 Market Competitive Salary Guideline Scale calls for a range between \$24.36- \$29.61/hour for an ECE and between \$26.48 and \$32.37 for a supervisor. In March 2019, the Manitoba Child Care Association submitted a petition with more than 26,000 signatures, gathered in a four-week period, urging the provincial government to increase funding for non-profit child care programs in recognition of the importance of early learning and child care and to improve quality and stability in the workforce.

In its Action Plan under the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement Manitoba committed to:

- develop a minimum wage grid to provide guidance to non-profit boards in developing equitable wage scales, supported by a wage grid supplement to address these increased operational costs;<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Note – that in the Canada-wide Agreement Manitoba commits to developing and implementing a wage grid; However, in the Action Plan (Annex 2 to the agreement) the commitment is only to a minimum wage grid.

- modernize the workforce certification requirements and process, and identify requirements to support on-going professional development;
- develop an updated curriculum framework, that will integrate Indigenous perspectives into culturally safe and inclusive programming;
- work with community organizations to establish a local agency-based model for recruiting, licensing, monitoring and supporting family child care providers;
- develop a continuum of competencies addressing the full early learning and child care career landscape; and
- increase the percentage of staff who fully meet certification requirements by 15 percentage points by 2025-2026.

The early childhood workforce is key to the province's ability to meet its expansion targets and to ensure quality provision. A comprehensive, coordinated workforce strategy is needed to address the many issues facing the sector.

Early childhood education needs to be an attractive and viable, well-supported career option, where ECEs are valued and recognized for their essential contribution to the well-being and development of young children and support to families.

Based on the consultation with stakeholders, the Canadian research on the early learning and child care workforce, and international benchmarks and targets, the roadmap partners propose the following policy actions.

### **Policy actions related to qualifications, certification and ongoing professional learning of the early learning and child care workforce**

Manitoba has strong regulatory requirements for early childhood educators relative to other Canadian jurisdictions. However, these requirements remain below the international benchmarks that call for 50 percent of staff to have degree level qualifications. About one-third of all child care centres in Manitoba do not meet current regulations for the required number of educators certified as an ECE II or an ECE III. A long-term workforce strategy will require a plan to enhance the educational and certification requirements. In the short-term, Manitoba should focus on increasing the qualifications of existing CCAs and family child care providers, and developing a recruitment and retention plan to ensure an adequate supply of qualified ECEs to meet expansion targets.

#### **17. Review and expand pathways to early childhood certification**

Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning could increase opportunities for individuals to become certified ECEs by:

- immediately starting work with postsecondary institutions to identify their capacity for increased student enrolment in full time ECE diploma, post-diploma and degree-level programs;

- expanding the enrolment capacity in workplace programs for CCAs working in child care centres and licensed homes, and exploring the viability of developing a non-profit agency to provide substitute staff, hired on a permanent basis, to replace CCAs and providers while they are in class;
- requiring, in addition to the current requirement for a 40-hour course to be taken within the first year of employment, all CCAs to enrol in a postsecondary ECE program after one year of employment, either through a workplace program, or by taking individual courses, until they meet the requirements for ECE II certification;
- reimbursing any student for tuition paid for a completed ECE diploma or post diploma program who commits to working in a licensed child care program for a specified period after graduation; and
- working with postsecondary institutions to promote and enhance articulation agreements between colleges and universities to provide early childhood educators with ECE diplomas the opportunity to move seamlessly into degree granting programs.

#### 18. Invest in the expansion of postsecondary ECE programs

Given the substantial shortage of certified ECEs to meet the regulatory requirements in existing centres, and the estimated need for more than 3,000 additional certified ECE IIs and ECE IIIs to meet Manitoba's expansion targets, additional spaces in postsecondary ECE programs, as well as additional postsecondary educators to teach in those programs will be needed.

The Early learning and Child Care Program should work with Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, the Child Care Qualifications and Training Committee and postsecondary institutions to assess current capacity and develop a plan to meet the current and future needs for certified ECEs.

#### 19. Review and strengthen the educational requirements for licensed family child care providers

Individually licensed family child care providers, who can care for up to eight children depending on their ages, are required to complete 40 hours of approved early childhood training within the first year of employment. While some licensed providers are certified ECEs, they are not required to be so. Individually licensed providers most often work alone, without peer interaction and support, and with limited monitoring from government licensing officials. Manitoba has committed to piloting an agency model of family child care, where providers are approved, supported and monitored by Early Childhood Educators in a licensed agency. The Early Learning and Child Care Commission found that licensed providers valued their independence, autonomy and operating a small business. Many individually licensed providers may not choose to become part of agency. If Manitoba continues to have the option of individually licensed providers, requirements for increased levels of ECE-specific education and

certification would enhance the quality of provision. The Early Learning and Child Care Program should explore with Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration the options for specific family child care certificate programs that can articulate to a two-year ECE diploma.

#### 20. Require regular renewal of certification and associated ongoing professional learning requirements

Once an individual is certified as an Early Childhood Educator there are no requirements to either renew the certification or complete any ongoing professional learning. This means that experienced early childhood educators, who were certified many years ago, may not have completed any further education or training since they were certified. It is essential that educators, and especially centre directors, be familiar with current approaches to pedagogy, leadership and management practices. The Manitoba Child Care Association's Human Resource Management Guide recommends a minimum of 24 hours professional learning a year, as does the ministry's Best Practice Licensing Manual for Early Learning and Child Care Centres.

The introduction of requirements that certification be renewed at least every five years, and that participation in professional learning be mandatory to maintain certification, will help ensure certified early childhood educators continue to gain new skills and knowledge which, in some instances, may make them eligible for higher levels of certification. As part of the certification renewal process, the Early Learning and Child Care Program could collect information on an early childhood educator's current place of employment and position, which would help provide data on the workforce for planning purposes. They could also collect information on educators who choose not to renew their certification, to determine their reasons for doing so, which may help inform an ongoing recruitment and retention strategy.

### **Policy actions to address staff compensation and working conditions**

#### 21. Develop and fund a common provincial salary scale and benefit package for all certified early childhood educators that reflects their level of education, experience and job function, based on the Manitoba Child Care Association's Market Competitive Salary Guideline Scale

The amount of unit funding provided through operating grants has been frozen since 2016, and not all spaces or all eligible centres are funded. This has resulted in continued low compensation and poor benefits for many centre-based staff. Increased wages and benefits will be essential to attracting and retaining a well-qualified workforce.

A funded wage scale should result in increased job security, improved compensation and access to a comprehensive benefit package. A common wage scale is likely result in less turnover within the sector if staff no longer move from centres paying lower wages to centres that may be able to pay more.

The Early Learning and Child Care Program should work with the Manitoba Child Care Association and other sector stakeholders to develop and implement a provincial salary scale based on the Market Competitive Salary Guideline Scale. The provincial salary scale also should take into account other scales either being developed or proposed in other provinces and territories. A starting wage of at least \$25/hour for a recent graduate with a two-year diploma and \$29/hour for an educator with a post diploma credential would be in keeping with proposed wage scales in other provinces and territories. In addition, the proposed provincial salary scale should include provisions for comprehensive benefits and a more comprehensive pension plan.

A wage scale for CCAs, and compensation for licensed family child care providers should reflect the postsecondary ECE courses taken and participation in ongoing professional development.

## 22. Review and address working conditions for staff

In addition to increasing wages and benefits, improvements in the working conditions of early childhood educators are required to improve job satisfaction and morale, help reduce staff turnover and to encourage qualified staff to remain in the field. In consultation with sector and other relevant stakeholders, The Early Learning and Child Care Program should introduce the following initiatives or make the following changes to child care regulation and funding:

- induction and mentoring support provided by experienced directors and senior staff for all new early childhood educators and assistants;
- introduction of paid non-contact time during the workday to allow for program planning, staff meetings, documentation, and meeting with parents;
- provision of paid release time during the work-day for all staff to have opportunities to participate in ongoing professional learning;
- well-designed and equipped physical space, with immediate access to outdoor play space; and
- opportunities for certified early childhood educators to provide input into program decisions.

## 23. Develop professional profiles for educators and relevant job descriptions

In many instances, program staff have similar day to day responsibilities, regardless of education and level of certification. This can negate the value of education and act as a disincentive to acquiring higher credentials. Establishing defined roles for educators should recognize the value of different levels of certification, and provide incentives for increased education and opportunities for advancement.

The Early Learning and Child Care Program should build on the job descriptions contained in the Manitoba Child Care Association's Human Resource Management Guide and work with the the Manitoba Child Care Association, the Canadian Child Care Federation, the Child Care Qualifications and Training Committee to confirm core



competencies and standards of practice for different front line and supervisory roles in centre-based child care programs.

## **Policy actions related to data collection, monitoring and evaluation**

Regularly collected and compiled data on the workforce, including information on turnover within the sector or on those leaving the sector altogether will be important to inform a comprehensive workforce strategy, and for the ministry to assess the effectiveness of an interventions or policy changes.

### **24. Compile and analyze human resources information collected from centre directors**

Regular reporting on staff qualifications, the staffing complement within the centre, professional development opportunities provided, wages and benefits, turnover, and human resources practices should be required of all centres as a condition of core funding.

### **25. Conduct regular surveys of staff and providers**

Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning should conduct regular surveys of centre staff and licensed family child care providers to assess factors related to turnover, including staff and provider job satisfaction, participation in professional development, wages and benefits, and future intentions, including plans for retirement. The regular collection of such data will contribute to evaluating the impact of policy changes on recruitment and retention and on quality provision.

## Conclusion And Next Steps

Federal Budget 2021 committed significant funds to establish, in collaboration with provinces and territories, a Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care System, on a scale of the development of the public systems of education and health care. It outlines a framework for 'transformational change' and sets out the federal government's commitment to ensure all families, no matter where they live, have equitable access to high-quality, affordable and flexible early learning and care. Budget 2021 critically identifies the need to build a 'quality system' across Canada to ensure that all families have equitable access to early learning and care now and into the future.

The *Canada-Manitoba Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement* signed on August 9, 2021, provides a historic opportunity to build on existing strengths and to create, over time, a coherent, comprehensive and sustainable early learning and child care system. As part of the agreement, Manitoba commits to reducing fees by an average of 50% by the end of 2022, and to an average of \$10 a day by 2025-2026. The agreement sets an ambitious expansion target of an additional 23,000 licensed non-profit and public child care spaces for children 0-7 years; it commits to develop and implement a wage grid for early childhood educators through increased operating funding, and to increase the percentage of the workforce that fully meets Manitoba's certification requirements. An expanded role for the provincial government will be essential to realizing these commitments. Public planning and management, new funding models, a workforce strategy, and meaningful stakeholder engagement will all be important components of system-building.

This roadmap is based on the input from a virtual consultation with stakeholders held in March 2022, and draws on a substantial body of Canadian and international research, as well as on historical and recent relevant Manitoba early learning and child care policy and regulatory documents, and ministry reports. It outlines key actions needed to begin the process of system-building and identifies key issues that will need to be addressed and considered as the Early Learning and Child Care Program develops its implementation plan under the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. The roadmap is intended to be a forward-looking document that provides stakeholders with information and policy ideas to support their active and informed participation in in system-building discussions and engagement, and to monitor government progress in meeting the objectives of its agreement with the federal government.

Over the coming months, the roadmap partners will share the roadmap and further discuss the ideas, principles and proposed policy actions it contains with a broad range of stakeholders across the province. They will also share the roadmap with elected officials and government staff. The partners recognize that all levels of government will need to consult with content experts, early learning and child care and other stakeholders through transparent and meaningful engagement throughout the transformation process. As appropriate, the roadmap partners may draft short

overviews of the roadmap, as well as more detailed policy briefs on specific elements of system building. Building a system will take time and require the involvement and active participation of federal, provincial, Indigenous and municipal governments, elected school boards, service providers, researchers, advocates, organized labour, parents and other interested organizations. The roadmap is intended as a tool to support such engagement and discussion.