

# Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework



Canada

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# Introduction

Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Most Responsible for Early Learning and Child Care agree<sup>1</sup> on the importance of supporting parents, families and communities in their efforts to ensure the best possible future for their children. Ministers also recognize that quality early learning and child care systems play an important role in promoting the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of young children and can support positive lifelong benefits.

The early years of life are critical in the development and future well-being of the child and continuum of learning. During this period, experiences influence children's rapid brain development. These experiences create the foundation for supporting competencies, including but not limited to the ability to regulate emotions and enjoy positive interactions with others. These foundational skills in turn impact learning, behaviour and health today and in the future; this is particularly true for children who are vulnerable. The evidence is clear that there are positive relationships between quality early learning and child care, especially for less advantaged children, parental labour market participation, especially for women, and child developmental outcomes.

## A long-term vision

This Framework sets the foundation for governments to work toward a shared long-term vision where all children can experience the enriching environment of quality early learning and child care that supports children's development to reach their full potential.

Ministers Most Responsible for Early Learning and Child Care agree that the further development of early learning and child care systems is one of the best investments that governments can make to strengthen the social and economic fabric of our country. Federal, provincial and territorial governments have important roles to play and provide investments to support the early learning and child care needs of families. They recognize the importance of collaborating with

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<sup>1</sup> While the Government of Québec supports the general principles of the Early Learning and Child Care Framework, it does not adhere to the Framework as it intends to preserve its sole responsibility in this area on its territory. The Government of Québec expects to receive its share of the federal funding and will continue to invest significantly toward programs and services for families and children.

stakeholders and may consider advice of subject matter experts in achieving the long term vision. This Framework sets the foundation for collaboration and additional federal investments in provincial and territorial early learning and child care systems. Governments recognize that each jurisdiction has the responsibility to develop systems that best responds to the needs and priorities of their communities.

## A set of principles

Guided by the following principles, this Framework supports a commitment by Governments to work towards investments to increase quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity in early learning and child care, with consideration for those more in need. Governments also recognize the diverse and multicultural fabric of Canada. Early learning and child care systems are respectful of language and culture and in particular recognize the unique needs of French and English linguistic minority communities and those identified by provinces and territories in their action plans, and of Indigenous peoples. Governments agree to work together over time to achieve broad long-term goals for early learning and child care systems that are:

- **High quality**

High-quality early learning and child care:

- Provides rich early learning experiences and environments and views children as capable, competent learners who are full of potential.
- Values the importance of building strong, responsive and respectful relationships in which purposeful interactions support optimal learning for children.
- Recognizes the importance of qualifications and training for the early childhood work force.

- **Accessible, affordable and flexible**

- High-quality early learning and child care should be flexible and broadly available to respond to the varying needs of children and families to promote early childhood development. Accessible, affordable and flexible early learning and child care also supports families participating in employment, education or training, and harder-to-serve populations.

- **Inclusive**

Inclusive early learning and child care systems respect and value diversity, which could include but is not limited to:

- Children and families who are experiencing vulnerability.
- Children with varying abilities.

# Objectives

Early learning and child care needs across the country are vast and diverse. Investments in early learning and child care benefit all children, particularly those who are vulnerable. In support of this Framework, the Government of Canada commits that the annual allocation until 2027–28 will be no less than the allocation of 2017–18. In keeping with the guiding principles of this Framework, provinces and territories will use investments allocated by the Government of Canada to further build early learning and child care systems by addressing local, regional and system priorities that have an impact on families more in need, such as lower-income families; Indigenous families; lone-parent families; families in underserved communities; those working non-standard hours; and/or families with children with varying abilities. The Government of Canada will work with provinces and territories over time to build long-term capacity in the early learning and child care sector.

## Scope of investments

To align with the guiding principles and advance the objectives set out above, funds provided under this initiative will build upon existing provincial and territorial investments in early learning and child care and will prioritize investments in regulated early learning and child care programs and services for children under age six.

- Regulated programs and services are defined as those that meet standards that are established and/or monitored by provincial and territorial governments.
- Early learning and child care programs and services are defined as those supporting direct care and early learning for children in settings including, but not limited to, regulated child care centres, regulated family child care homes, early learning centres, preschools and nursery schools.

Provincial and territorial governments will use federal funding under this agreement to support the delivery of early learning and child care systems that reflect their particular local and regional needs in support of the objectives of this Framework.

# Innovation and knowledge

## Innovation

Early learning and child care systems are operating in increasingly complex and challenging environments. Innovative practices can help develop solutions that better meet the complex needs of children and families, and can support more integrated and higher-quality early learning and child care systems. In keeping with the guiding principles and investment areas identified in the Objectives section of this Framework, as part of the funding provided under this Framework, provincial and territorial governments will, as identified in bilateral agreements, promote, define and deliver identifiable innovative approaches to enhance the quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity of early learning and child care systems, with consideration for those more in need.

## Knowledge

Research, knowledge and information are the foundations of evidence-based decision-making and are critical to informed policy development, strong accountability and encouraging innovation. Governments agree to work together to share and release data as available, and knowledge, research and information on effective and innovative practices in early learning and child care, to further support the development of and reporting on quality and outcomes. Governments also agree to work together to improve data collection and dissemination on key early learning and child care information for children under age six (e.g. number of children receiving subsidies, number of licensed early learning and child care spaces broken down by age of child and type of setting).

# Working together

Governments will work together in full respect of their responsibilities to their citizens, recognizing that provinces and territories have the primary responsibility for the design and delivery of early learning and child care systems. Each provincial and territorial government determines its own priorities for early learning and child care, and the Framework provides flexibility on how provinces and territories will meet objectives as defined in this Framework.

This Framework acknowledges the successes achieved by jurisdictions in developing their early learning and child care systems. Governments will work together to ensure that concrete, incremental results are achieved and reported to Canadians. New federal funding under this Framework will not displace existing federal, provincial and territorial funding in support of early childhood development and early learning and child care.

This Framework is intended to be complementary to the proposed development of a separate framework for Indigenous early learning and child care. Governments acknowledge the mutual impact of both streams of investment into early learning and child care within Canada. While respecting the federal/Indigenous partnership in the proposed development and implementation of an Indigenous early learning and child care framework, federal, provincial and territorial governments agree to ongoing discussions regarding the two frameworks.

This Framework will form the basis for the development of subsequent early learning and child care bilateral funding agreements between the Government of Canada and provinces and territories. As part of bilateral funding agreements with each province and territory, action plans will demonstrate how federal investments under this Framework will be used and identify the associated indicators from the list below. Action plans will also make specific reference to innovation. Federal funding will be provided following the approval and signature of bilateral agreements. The first bilateral agreements with provinces and territories will be for three years and will be updated and renewed as necessary.

The Government of Canada will make publicly available up-to-date early learning and child care bilateral agreements entered into with all provinces and territories under this Framework, including any amendments, by posting them on a Government of Canada website.

## Public reporting

Governments will report annually on progress made in relation to the Framework and the impact of federal funding, while reflecting the priorities of each jurisdiction in early learning and child care. Reporting and data build knowledge and disseminate information to families, communities and service providers.

Governments agree to demonstrate progress based on the principles outlined in the Framework for early learning and child care programs set out in the Scope of Investments section of the Framework.

Provinces and territories will choose from the following list of indicators all those which reflect their areas of investment. Additional indicators may be agreed to under bilateral agreements:

- **High quality**

- Number and proportion of providers with early childhood education (ECE) certification and/or participating in professional development or training.
- Number and proportion of providers adopting innovative new tools, such as an evidence-based curriculum framework for early learning and child care.

- **Accessible, affordable and flexible**

- Number and percentage of children who have access to regulated child care spaces and/or early learning programs.
- Number of children receiving subsidies or other financial supports.
- Number of flexible early learning and child care arrangements (e.g. non-traditional arrangements such as flexible/irregular hours, weekend and emergency services; and geographic distribution of spaces) for harder-to-serve populations of children.

- **Inclusive**

- Number of children benefiting from programs and/or a number of programs designed to serve children from diverse populations, which could include but not limited to: children from French and English linguistic minority communities, Indigenous people off-reserve, recent immigrants and refugees.
- Number of children with additional support needs participating in early learning and child care programs.
- The number and proportion of children from low-income and middle-class families participating in early learning and child care programs.

Governments also agree to work together, and with stakeholders, towards the development of common quality and outcome measures that could be included in bilateral agreements in the future that could reinforce the Framework's long-term vision.