

EARLY LEARNING AND CARE IN EDMONTON:

Progress in Building an
Integrated System



eceLC

Edmonton Council for
Early Learning and Care



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Partners



Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care operates on Treaty 6 land, a traditional meeting ground and travelling route for many Indigenous peoples. A treaty is an inheritance, a responsibility, and a relationship. May recognizing our status as treaty people help us to be good neighbors to one another, good stewards of the land, and good ancestors to all our children.

Letter from the Co-Chairs

Current events and historical pressures are all aligning to underscore the enormous value of early learning and care, not only for providing stimulating and healthy environments for children but also for supporting families and building strong communities. Early learning and care that is high in quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive is now widely seen as a key element in ensuring healthy development for many children, specialized support of children with distinctive needs, access to career and educational opportunities for many women, and culturally appropriate support for children and families marginalized by social and economic factors. Most recently, early learning and care has been cited again and again as being essential for economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

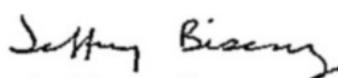
In Edmonton, early learning and care is not up to the task of meeting these challenges. For many families, child care is difficult to access, uneven in quality, and largely unaffordable. Delivery of child care services is highly fragmented, and many families fall through the cracks. These problems are amplified for families living on low income, including those living near or below the poverty line. Many people in the field of early learning and care work diligently and creatively to fix the problems that confront them daily, but they realize that finding patches for immediate and specific problems is not enough. Edmonton desperately needs a coordinated system of early learning and care for its young children, from infancy through kindergarten.

Inspired by EndPovertyEdmonton, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care is the only group working to assemble the elements needed to build a new system. The Council comprises almost two dozen institutional and community partners with expertise and experience in early learning and care. It has created a vision, mission, and principles to guide this work. The Council is assessing current conditions and needs, exploring options, developing partnerships, and identifying paths for moving forward.

Some of the progress we have made so far is described in this document, and more information is available on our website (ecele.ca). Our immediate task for the coming months is to construct a detailed set of actions for governments and school boards to undertake. These actions, taken together, will kickstart the process of building a system that will provide high-quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care for the children and families who need it. That is our shared goal.

We hope you find this report useful, and we look forward to your support in building this new system.

Sincerely,



Jeff Bisanz | Co-Chair



Natalie Prytuluk | Co-Chair



Jeff Bisanz | Co-Chair



Natalie Prytuluk | Co-Chair

Childcare is Essential to a Resilient and Strong Edmonton

20,600

Canadian women fell out of the workforce in 2020 (68,000 men joined).

(Source [Statistics Canada](#), [RBC Economics](#))

Universal Childcare could increase GDP by

13%

(as demonstrated in [Quebec](#) between 1998-2014)

3.7 spaces for every 10 children



Cost of Childcare in Edmonton:



Early learning and care produces a return of

\$6 for every \$1 invested

([Conference Board](#), 2017)

We know that women have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and the current economic downturn in our province. Especially the women who were previously working in low-wage positions. We know that women in the workforce means a stronger economy for everyone. A key factor to women rejoining and succeeding in the workforce is childcare. In the home, decisions about early learning and care are based on quality, affordability, and access. Trust and value-for-money are paramount. Among Edmonton’s diverse communities, trust is built by access to culturally appropriate early learning and care.

We know that poverty in childhood leads to lifelong challenges and reduced income, and can lead to generational poverty. Quality in childcare can mitigate the effects of poverty or other stressors in a child’s life, but many families cannot afford any early learning and care, let alone purchase based on quality, and even that assumes sufficient spaces exist. We know poverty affects 1 in 5 children in Edmonton.

Realizing a stronger and more robust economy while reducing the impact of poverty on our society hinges on having high-quality, affordable, and accessible childcare.

EDMONTONIANS ARE CALLING FOR EARLY LEARNING AND CARE

Edmonton Chamber of Commerce
 Business Council of Alberta
 YWCAs of Alberta/YWCA Edmonton
 Alberta Federation of Labour



Vision

Early learning and care for all children that is high in quality, universally available, accessible, and responsive to the diversity of individual children and their families.

Mission

To design, promote, and build an integrated system of early learning and care that

- is publicly managed,
- is supported by public funding,
- has a workforce that is appropriately educated and well supported,
- coordinates the range of services needed to support young children and their families, and
- contributes to eliminating poverty.

Principles for the Design of an Integrated System of Early Learning and Care

We talked to Edmontonians, sector representatives and other experts who told us what our city needs in quality, affordable and accessible early learning and care. The ECELC follows the principles below to build a system that meets these needs:

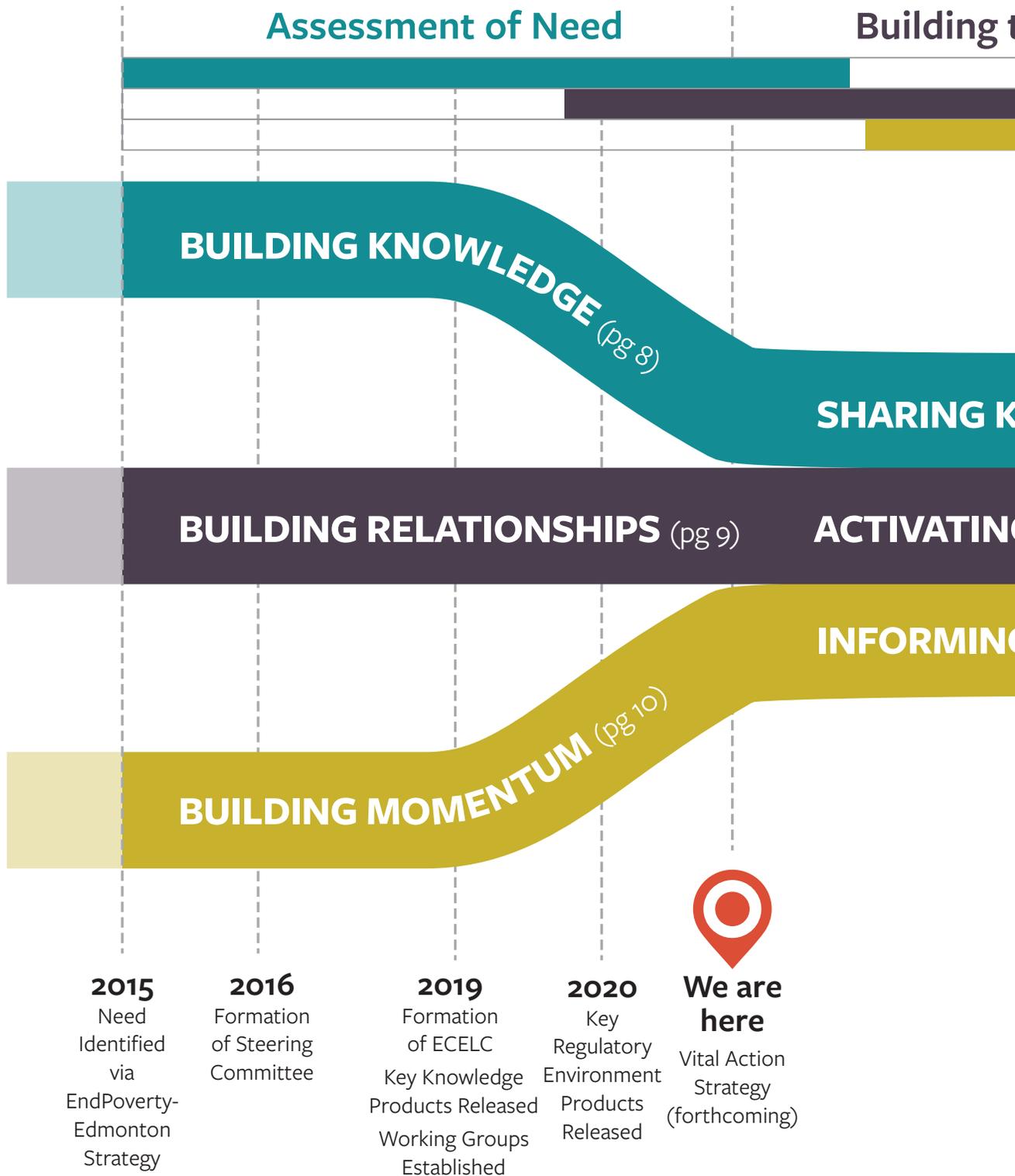
1. Work toward developing an integrated system of early learning and care must be informed by, and conform to, human rights principles.
2. Indigenous perspectives and guidance are required because of the structural conditions created by our long history of discrimination
3. Individuals and families from diverse cultures must be engaged in advisory, planning, service delivery, and regulatory roles.
4. Special efforts are required to identify, engage, and respond to families who may be in need of and entitled to services but who, for whatever reason, are not accessing services.
5. Supports that optimize early child development must be easily accessible as needed on a universal basis.
6. Supports must be adapted as necessary for the specific needs of children and their families.
7. Supports must be high in quality.

8. Access to social, health, and educational systems must be equitable and timely.
9. Design, promotion, policy development, and implementation should be guided where possible by research-based evidence.
10. Eliminating childhood poverty requires the elimination of family poverty.
11. Eliminating the experience of poverty from childhood requires structural change and long-term commitments.
12. Edmonton can lead by example.

“As a newcomer, I needed to find child care for my daughter with a disability so I could attend language classes. Five daycare centres refused to accept my daughter because they said they could not provide the necessary supports to meet her needs.

- Edmonton Parent

Building an Integrated Early Learning and



Integrated System of Care in Edmonton

the System

Monitor and Learn

KNOWLEDGE (pg 12)

ADVOCATES (pg 12)

CHANGE (pg 12)

2025

What Early Learning and Care Looks Like in Edmonton

Building a system requires a good assessment of what exists. Based on a thorough analysis, researchers from the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families (CUP) produced for ECELC a comprehensive review of what is known, and not known, about early learning and care in Edmonton as of 2019.

[A Profile of Edmonton Child Care in 2019](#)

Who's Being Served (and Who Isn't)

To support Edmonton's diverse families, we must know what they want and need from a system of early learning and care. To kickstart work in this area, two studies were conducted to discover some of the needs for Indigenous and newcomer families.

[Indigenous Early Learning and Care in the City of Edmonton](#)

[Newcomer Consultation on the Context of Early Learning and Care in Edmonton](#)

Additional work is currently being undertaken for the ECELC by researchers at MacEwan University. Two new projects are being planned:

- One is a study to understand the needs, aspirations, and experiences of cultural minority families and to build upon the assets, resources and cultural knowledge of families.
- The other is a survey of what parents across the city need and want in a system of early learning and care.

What Edmontonians Need

Early learning and care must be high in quality, affordable and accessible for all the families who need it. ECELC has published three papers on quality, including an extensive analysis of what can be done, inside and outside of legislation, to support quality. Concerned about whether early learning and care is affordable, researchers from CUP have completed a revealing analysis on the implications for Alberta families of recent changes to provincial childcare subsidies.

[An Examination of Regulatory and Other Measures to Support Quality Early Learning and Care in Alberta](#)

[Regulations Can Support Quality Early Learning and Child Care](#)

[Quality Early Learning and Care Depends on Qualified Early Childhood Educators](#)

[More Work to Be Done: An Analysis of Child Care Subsidies in Alberta](#)

[More Work to Be Done: An Analysis of Child Care Subsidies in Alberta \(Summary\)](#)

[Fiscal Policy Trends: Analyzing Changes to Alberta's Child Care Subsidy](#)

Discover these and other publications, at eclc.ca/publications

“When we accessed the \$25 a day child care we finally were able to start putting money away for our child's post-secondary education.”

- Edmonton Parent

CHILD CARE VS UNIVERSITY FEES 2019



Graph courtesy Kathleen Flanagan



Building Relationships

Members



Gisèle Bourque
Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord



Rob Buschmann
Community-University Partnership



Gloria Chalmers
Community Member



Nicki Dublenko
Association of Early Childhood Educators of AB



Roxanne Felix-Mah & Ashima Sumaru-Jurf
Multicultural Family Res. Centre



Ilene Fleming
United Way



Jacqueline (Jackie) Foord
City of Edmonton



Martin Garber-Conrad
Edmonton Community Foundation



Colleen Geake
Children's Services



Kelly Hennig
GRIT Program



Kristen (Kris) Hodgins
Edmonton Catholic Schools



Elaine Jones
Edmonton Public Library



Tibetha Kemble (Stonechild)
Community Member



Patricia (Tricia) Lirette
MacEwan University



Christopher Smith
Muttart Foundation



Suzanne MacLean
Oliver Centre



Melissa Nollski
Aboriginal Head Start Edmonton



Anita Turna
Alberta Association of Child Care Operators



Shea Wicks
Child Care Association for Resources to Administrators



Annalise Yuzda
YMCA of Northern Alberta

Community Relationships

- Business Council of Alberta
- Edmonton Chamber of Commerce
- Public Interest Alberta
- Parkland Institute
- Edmonton Social Planning Council
- M.A.P.S. (Mapping and Planning Support) Alberta Capital Region
- First 2000 Days Early Child Development Network
- Calgary Reads
- YWCA Calgary
- Child Care Now Alberta
- School of Public Policy (Univ of Calgary)
- MAPS – Master of Arts, Policy Studies (Univ of Alberta)
- Governments – administration and elected representatives

“I feel privileged to serve alongside a diversity of knowledgeable and caring people to champion affordable quality childcare - a strategy that business and labour leaders agree would benefit children, parents, workers, employers, the economy and society as a whole.

- Gloria Chalmers
Community Member



Building Momentum



Rapid Responses

Last year, many factors—from the COVID pandemic to legislative changes—contributed to the need for insights into impacts on early learning and care. ECELC mobilized quickly to provide timely analyses and reports, and initiated new relationships that would help promote a clear understanding of Edmonton’s needs for early learning and care. This included:

- Establishing an integrated structure for rapid response work
- Knowledge gathering and mobilization to address emerging issues

Relationship Building and Advocacy

Much of what was identified through knowledge building has implications for policies, regulations, and practices that affect early learning and care. To increase uptake, ECELC has broadened relationships for advocacy work:

- Founding member of Child Care Now Alberta
- Expanding government relationships at all levels
- Engaging the business community
- Deepening sector collaboration

Reflecting Community Needs

Reflecting the needs of our community requires a platform. We invite you to learn more at eclc.ca, where an ever-expanding suite of information and community goals will be coming online in coming months. The site was launched late last year and is in the process of becoming a hub for tracking progress in building Edmonton’s early learning and care system.



My son refuses to go to his day care because he has braids and is bullied every day for wearing his hair long. The day care had no understanding of why my son chooses to wear braids and its significance. I want others to know and value our traditions.

- Edmonton Parent





What Needs to Be Done

1

Broad Policy and Strategy in Support of Early Learning and Care

This applies at all levels of government and institutional and community partners. Through policy adoption, governments and groups can express and direct support for the community goals developed.

2

Problem-Solving Partnerships

Early learning and care has a distributed model of regulation and legislation. Where authorities are distributed, responsibility must be shared by partners at all levels of government and community to benefit children and families in our city.

3

Coordinated Data Collection, Analysis and Sharing

Good data supports great system design and evidence-based decision making. We all need to come together to support collection, analysis and sharing of data in order to realize more efficiency and reduce duplication of effort in early learning and care.

4

Become an Advocate

The value of early learning and care to a stronger and more resilient Edmonton cannot be understated. Sharing the knowledge gained by conversations happening at ECELC and using it to inform your change-making activities benefits all Edmontonians as we build a strong recovery and create an early learning and care system that will better serve families in the future.

Action Plans

Sharing Knowledge

Knowledge must be diffused and delivered throughout the community. It has to be spread to the people that can use it, in ways that make sense to them. It has to be relevant and timely. As ECELC moves forward, we've identified ways to:

- Deliver timely and relevant information to current conversations
- Connect interested parties for efficient knowledge gathering and research
- Bring together representative groups for the analysis of information gathered
- Centre the experience of those not currently served by existing early learning and care in our community
- Ensure alignment of work across the community toward goals

Activating Advocates

Strong relationships form the basis of collaborative work for the good of all Edmontonians. Through broadening representation and deepening relationships, ECELC will undertake:

- Activities to recruit more representation
- Support conversations in political realms about early learning and care, with a focus on what Edmontonians want

Informing Change

The work of informing change requires that a strong structure be maintained and resourced and that a clear vision be articulated. ECELC will continue to:

- Build a shared view of what early learning and care in Edmonton should look like based on evidence and the needs of Edmonton's communities
- Assess existing policies in multiple sectors – education, government, early learning and care
- Identify practices that present an opportunity to better reflect principles of the systems (as described on Page 5)
- Inform change-makers and decision-makers, provide support for them to use the information provided



“As an Indigenous parent I wanted my child to grow up knowing her culture. We have a culture and traditions. It’s important for me that my child, at a young age, learns her traditions. I don’t want her to feel shame. I want her to hold her head up high.

- Edmonton Parent



“ECELC is a table where multiple perspectives are shared, and especially during the past year, we are able to hear about the impact of changes in service delivery and policy for programs and families. Through this group, possible system solutions demonstrated elsewhere are considered. This information is made public so everyone has access. With a focus on eliminating poverty, the barriers to accessing high quality childcare are top of mind. We know that access to childcare is essential for many families to work or go to school. High quality, affordability and accessibility are essential elements we hold as non-negotiables...

- Ilene Fleming
United Way of the Alberta Capital Region

“No one wants to leave their child with a stranger. I want to make new connections and grow friendships and my child’s day care is a source for me to do this. I want to connect with the teachers and director directly. But I also want my child to be able to make friends too. I need an environment that encourages acceptance, inclusion, and community-building for me as a parent and for my child.

- Edmonton Parent



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