



**Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report
48-19(2): Report on the Review of Bill 68: *An Act to Amend the Child Day Care Act***

BACKGROUND

The Standing Committee on Social Development (SCOSD, or Committee) presented Committee Report 48-19(2): “Report on the Review of Bill 68: *An Act to Amend the Child Day Care Act*” (Report) on March 09, 2023.

Bill 68 amended the Act to support implementation of the *Canada-NWT Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Agreement* with the federal government. The amendments provide the authority to establish a certification process and wage grid for early childhood educators in the NWT; increase inclusion and demographic reporting measures; establish cost control measures, including maximum fees charged to families; introduce enhanced protection for the rights of families, including a complaints process; and update and clarify language in the Act.

Committee’s Report contains nine (9) sets of recommendations for the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), many of which are each composed of multiple recommendations. The Report was considered in Committee of the Whole on March 28, 2023, and all recommendations were adopted.

Responses to the recommendations of SCOSD are outlined as follows.

Recommendation 1

The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends that the GNWT:

1. Form an advisory group including representation from all parties.
2. Review the 2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy on the inclusion of child care operators in goals and vision.
3. Establish and share an NWT vision and mission of early learning and child care sector, including principles and explaining where the federal child care agreements fit, requiring five-year reviews to check if NWT is fulfilling its vision.
4. Conduct an independent review of the roll-out of the Early Learning and Child Day Care agreement.
5. Conduct an independent review of the Child Day Care Act.
6. Address the crisis of confidence by reconciling with the NWT ELCC sector starting with:

- Improving communication by increasing responsiveness to clients and establishing client service standards.
- Committing to explaining processes to the public before implementation, providing plain language materials and designating communication channels for operators to access ECE specialists and information.

GNWT Response

1. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) engaged with Indigenous governments, the Northwest Territories Early Childhood Association (NWTECA) and licensed program operators to inform the development of the *2030 ELCC Strategy* and federal agreements and action plans. ECE will continue to engage with Indigenous governments and stakeholders over the next fiscal year to advise transformation of the system.

The NWTECA is an advocacy group representing licensed early learning and child care programs across the territory. ECE meets regularly with the NWTECA to distribute information and engage on key components of the early learning and child care system, and will continue to do so during the development of further changes or enhancements to the ELCC system.

2. The *2030 ELCC Strategy* (Strategy) was informed by multiple voices in the ELCC system, including licensed child care operators, at multiple points. The results of this work are detailed in a [What We Heard](#) report.

ECE led focused engagement with licensed ELCC operators specifically about the development of the Strategy. This engagement included government-to-government discussions with Indigenous governments and virtual engagement sessions with key stakeholders, including licensed ELCC program operators and early childhood educators. Key points of feedback raised during the discussions centred on: cultural programming, attendance-based funding, staff wages and benefits, staff qualifications and professional learning, and fees charged to families.

ECE also engaged with early childhood educators, post-secondary students, and licensed operators through interviews and a survey to discuss their awareness, experiences, and opinions of the existing GNWT funding programs.

Two events co-hosted by several licensed early learning and child care programs further promoted dialogue between various stakeholders involved with early learning and child care across the NWT and helped to inform the Strategy.

ECE used the information gathered during these discussions to inform the development of the *Strategy*, which includes the goals and vision of child care operators.

3. The NWT vision for early learning and child care is detailed in the [2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy: A Commitment and Vision for Action](#) and supported in the [Canada-Northwest Territories Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement](#). These documents are aligned around the stated vision to support children, families, and educators across the early learning and child care sector.

An explanation of how the federal child care agreement fits within the NWT's vision for the sector can be found in the [Canada-Northwest Territories Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement](#) and within the 2022-2023 Merged Action Plan (**ATTACHMENT**).

Review mechanisms, including an Implementation Committee comprised of officials from Canada and the NWT and stakeholders, as appropriate, is being developed as per the *Canada-wide ELCC Agreement*. This committee will meet at least twice a year to discuss issues related to the Agreement and monitor progress toward goals and the overall vision. An annual Implementation Committee progress report will be co-developed with Canada.

4. Increased data collection, reporting, and accountability are already a part of the NWT's agreement with Canada to receive federal funding to transform the early learning and child care system. As part of the Agreement, annual reporting of the data is required to be shared with Canada as such results and reporting will be regularly monitored and communicated throughout the life of the agreement.
5. Recent updates to the *Child Day Care Act* and *Standards Regulations* have been reviewed through the policy lens of the *Canada-wide ELCC Agreement* and during the many steps of the legislative process, which have included opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement (including with licensed programs), review by Cabinet, review by Standing Committee, and review by the Legislative Assembly. As further transformation of the system takes place, ECE will continue to consider any legislative and regulatory amendments required to support identified needs. Any further updates to legislation and regulations will continue to be supported by the same opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement.
6. The GNWT is committed to strengthening the confidence of the public and its relationship with the early learning and child care sector. ECE is actively working to enhance communication and hold regular meetings with the NWTECA, which represents ELCC operators across the territory. ECE will also:
 - Adhere to the existing [client service standards](#) for ECE when communicating with the public. ECE staff adhere to these standards to the best of their ability at all times, while recognizing there may occasionally be difficulties during high volume periods of incoming requests and/or depending on the complexity of the submission.
 - Continue to distribute plain language information with the NWTECA and licensed ELCC program operators in advance of program implementation and continue to keep channels of communication open for operators to access ECE specialists via the Regional Early Childhood Consultants.

Recommendation 2

The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends that ECE improve and provide clarity on how a person may complain about an organization's service to the public by:

1. Providing guidance material for the complaints process to support parents and staff.
2. Developing a policy on the complaints process.

GNWT Response

Policies and procedures exist to guide the complaint process; however, ECE will explore developing and publishing additional guiding materials to help inform the public and early learning and child care operators with respect to the process.

Recommendation 3

The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends that the GNWT:

- Provide investigative training to all staff involved in the complaints and appeals processes.
- Make this training obligatory for all staff involved.
- Build competence by ensuring that investigations are not vexatious and are appropriately carried out.

GNWT Response

Mandatory training for all Regional Early Childhood Consultants who carry out investigations is an existing part of the onboarding process when new employees are hired, and additional training is provided, as required, with the introduction of new programs and initiatives.

The role of ECE is to remain neutral during investigations, so vexatious actions or reactions are not a part of the process. While supporting families and operators, ECE's primary role is ensuring the safety of children attending licensed programs and ECE will continue to act in accordance with that role.

Recommendation 4

The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends that the GNWT ensures that administrative decisions are reasonable by considering the outcome of decisions and the process to come to the decisions.

GNWT Response

Agreed. ECE will continue to consider the possible ramifications of administrative decisions on every party involved. As indicated above, ECE's primary concern is with the safety of children attending licensed programs and ECE will continue to make decisions that prioritize this.

Recommendation 5

The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends that the GNWT review the appeals process in the Child Day Care Act,

a) in the short term with the view to:

1. Identify and make improvements to make sure that the Act clearly outlines how appeals can be requested and considered.
2. Clarify how complaints and appeal processes are distinguished in the Act.
3. Recommend how administrative decisions are made fairly, consistently, and in accordance with the legislation.

b) In the long term, with the view to:

1. Fully review the appeals section.
2. Include comparison with other jurisdictions.
3. Result in a modernized appeal section.

GNWT Response

While section 20 of the Act identifies the process by which an individual can request an appeal, the process which the appeal will follow is left to the discretion of the designated independent adjudicator, who is external to the GNWT. For this reason, the process varies depending on the perspective of the adjudicator and the situation at hand, while remaining in accordance with the regulations.

The GNWT agrees with the need for a complaint and appeal process to be clearly outlined within the *Child Day Care Act* and *Early Learning and Child Care Standards Regulations* and the importance of this area being easily understood by licensed early learning and child care program operators and the general public. Any future updates to the legislation will take into consideration the importance of ensuring clarity around the appeals process.

Recommendation 6

The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the GNWT include in its vision of a sustainable child care system information on the following:

- How to support the ELCC sector in its transition.
- How to embrace NWT realities without disadvantaging any of the existing parts of the child care sector.
- Considerations for licencing and supporting that proportion of the child care sector constituted by for-profit day homes.

GNWT Response

The NWT's vision for early learning and child care as outlined in the *2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy* reflects the voices of the early learning and child care sector, including for-profit day homes. Consideration of how to continue to enhance supports for the sector during transition and development of the early learning and child care system will continue to be included in planning and implementation.

Recommendation 7

The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the GNWT

- Recognize that the actions started under the federal agreement have initiated systems change in the NWT Early Learning and Child Care sector and require immediate action by the GNWT to reduce the volatility that may unfold;

And further,

- Identify shortfalls in funding targets outside of the federal agreement, focused on NWT needs, including but not limited to:
 - Capital and operating funding allocations;
 - Incentive loans for new buildings and retrofits;
 - Campaign action attracting potential child care educators;
 - Bonus for child care certificate completions; and
 - Strategies to support professional development for ELCC workers to allow training without impacting existing work schedules.

GNWT Response

The GNWT understands that actions under the federal agreement have initiated system level transformation required for the creation of an early learning and child care system, both within the NWT, as well as Canada-wide. In response, and to support this transformation, the Department has created a new unit with a specific focus on systems transformation. This new unit, in place for the current fiscal year (2023-2024), is dedicated to supporting work that results in system-level changes. In addition to assisting with the negotiation of a *2023-2026 Merged ELCC Action Plan*, the unit will lead engagement with the sector throughout the development of initiatives, such as the development of a wage grid, certification process, and changes to funding mechanisms.

Additionally, as per the *Canada-wide ELCC Agreement*, an Implementation Committee, comprised of officials from Canada and the NWT, as well as stakeholders, as appropriate, will meet at least twice a year to discuss and exchange on issues related to the Agreement and monitor progress toward goals. An annual Implementation Committee report will be co-developed with Canada. The Implementation Committee understands that building a new social program is complex, and that both governments are committed to achieving the objectives of the Canada-wide system.

Some of the work recommended by Committee has already been identified and/or had progress made towards accomplishing, including:

- The Early Childhood Infrastructure Fund (ECIF) allocates funding specifically to capital projects for licensed early learning and child care spaces.
- A campaign to attract people to open licensed family day homes has been publicly launched.
- The wage grid will take into account various considerations, including education, which will benefit those who complete certification in early childhood.
- Professional development plans for early childhood educators include exploring options for synchronous and asynchronous in-person and online delivery during varied scheduling to provide options for educators to attend.

Recommendation 8

The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the GNWT view the obligation to consult on regulations as an opportunity for innovation, inclusiveness, flexibility and reconciliation and be open to considering detailed feedback.

GNWT Response

Agreed. An engagement plan is in development to ensure that Indigenous governments, stakeholders and the public have opportunities to help inform the regulations.

Recommendation 9

The Standing Committee on Social Development urges the GNWT to be innovative and identify options for increasing child day care spots at no or little costs, including, but not limited to:

- Changing the ratio of educators to children under two years of age by reducing the age of the infant category to children under 18 months of age. This would create additional spaces for children 18 months and older.
- Completing negotiations with NWT Housing to allow licensed child care to operate in public housing.
- Creating subgroups or sublicences to allow child care centres, school-based child care and child care offered in homes to offer licensed spaces.
- Create substitute lists or licencing to back-fill so that if one educator gets sick, not all six kids must stay home.
- Create additional lists or licencing to enable before and after school day care, including evening care, so that educators who have time can take additional hours.

GNWT Response

The GNWT has worked to implement innovative options to help transform the early learning and child care system, while ensuring child safety is at the forefront of all decisions, and will continue to support this work by:

- Maintaining adequate supervision for all children attending licensed programs. The existing ratio has been established based on the development of infants and children and the capacity for individual operators in licensed family day homes to adequately supervise and safely respond in case of emergencies.
- Joint work between ECE and Housing NWT has been completed and individuals living in public housing have the ability to apply to operate a licensed family day home as part of a two-year pilot.
- Any changes to licensed program types that would support increased access for young children and families will be considered within the context of child health and safety.
- Licensed centre-based programs have substitute educators who fill in when an educator is absent from the program. Licensed home-based programs have an emergency contact identified during the licensing process to cover in the short term in the case of emergencies.
- Operators may choose to offer before and after school care, including evening care, under the existing *Child Day Care Act*.

Through engagement with key stakeholders, ECE will continue to explore innovative options that respond to the needs of the early learning and child care sector.

Canada-Northwest Territories Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement and Canada-Northwest Territories Early Learning and Child Care Agreement Merged 2022-2023 Action Plan

INTRODUCTION

The Government of Canada's Budgets 2016 and 2017 provided \$7.5 billion over 11 years to support and create more high-quality, affordable child care across the country, and to strengthen Indigenous early learning and child care. Since 2017–2018, the Government of Canada has provided funding to provinces and territories totalling \$1.6 billion over four years to support their unique early learning and child care needs. Between 2021-2022 and 2025-2026, an additional \$2.06 billion in federal funding to support the bilateral Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) agreements will be provided to provinces and territories. This investment includes no less than \$130 million per year beginning in 2018–2019 for Indigenous early learning and child care, provided directly to Indigenous Governments and organizations through the *Indigenous ELCC Agreements*. This is in addition to \$132 million in funding provided annually through Aboriginal Head Start and First Nation and Inuit Child Care programs.

The Federal Government's Budget 2021 provided further investments toward building a high-quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive early learning and child care system across Canada. These investments total up to \$30 billion over five years, and combined with previous investments announced since 2015, result in \$9.2 billion every year thereafter, permanently. Of that amount, \$27.2 billion over five years will support direct transfers to provinces and territories.

Current Early Learning and Child Care Agreements

As part of the Budget 2017 investment, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and the Government of Canada signed the 2021-22 to 2024-2025 Extension Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (Extension ELCC Agreement) providing the territory with approximately \$10.3 million over four years to support affordable, high-quality early learning and child care.

As part of the Budget 2021 investment, the GNWT and the Government of Canada signed the 2021-22 to 2025-26 Canada Northwest Territories Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (CW–ELCC Agreement), providing the territory with approximately \$51 million over five-years. As part of the Canada-wide Agreement, the territory commits to the Canada-wide vision, which includes:

- Reducing average child care fees for regulated early learning and child care by an average of 50% by the end of 2022, which has been achieved¹;
- Reducing out-of-pocket child care fees to an average of \$10 a day by 2025-2026 for all regulated child care spaces;
- Creating 300 more high-quality, affordable regulated (licensed) early learning and child care spaces, primarily through not-for-profit and public child care providers;
- Addressing barriers to provide inclusive and flexible child care; and,
- Valuing the early childhood workforce and providing them with training and development opportunities.

The funding allocations under this agreement will prioritize investment in licensed early learning and child care programs for children under age six. Investments directed toward increasing the number of high-quality early learning and child care spaces will support Indigenous Governments, non-profit organizations and individual operators to develop new spaces by creating new licensed programs or expanding existing programs to meet the growing demand for child care.

The GNWT has invested in development of the early learning and child care system in the Northwest Territories (NWT) with priorities identified in the 19th Legislative Assembly’s Mandate including universal child care. The GNWT will collaborate with the Government of Canada to help achieve this shared vision of a Canada-wide system that recognizes the territory’s particular context for early learning and child care.

EXISTING EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE SYSTEM IN THE NWT

The NWT has 33 vibrant communities, each with their own early learning and child care needs. Home to 11 official languages, the people of the NWT represent multiple cultural belief systems, values, and ways of life. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, it is important to develop a plan that is both flexible to meet

¹ On March 3, 2022, the Government of Canada and the Government of the Northwest Territories announced that child care fees for NWT families with children from birth to five years of age in licensed early learning and child care would be reduced, on average, by 50 per cent. The reduction was retroactive to January 1, 2022.

individual community needs and grounded by a common vision of supporting families with children from birth to five years of age to develop high quality early learning and child care that is accessible, affordable, and inclusive for all children and families in the NWT.

The early years, from birth to age five, are among the most critical for a child's development. These early years provide an essential opportunity to nurture and support the healthy, social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of young children. Research tells us that positive experiences in early childhood directly impact children's chances to lead healthy, successful, and balanced lives. This entails a critical responsibility for the GNWT to take action and support families and children in their early years. There is a collective benefit in investing and supporting young children and their families. Supports provided now will benefit future generations in the NWT, as these young children will grow to become healthy, productive and contributing residents that are able to share their skills, talents and services. Parents and caregivers have the greatest influence and impact of a child's wellbeing, learning, and development. Raising a child requires support and access to community-based services at various points in a child's early years. The GNWT recognizes that early learning and child care opportunities can complement learning that occurs in the home or on the land and is an important example of community-based support for families with young children.

Enhancing the quality, accessibility, affordability and inclusivity of early learning and child care is an ongoing and continuous focus for the GNWT. *The 2013 Right from the Start: Framework for Early Childhood Developing in the Northwest Territories* and subsequent action plans marked an increased focus and investment within the early learning and child care sector in the NWT. This work included the territorial implementation of Junior Kindergarten (JK) in 2017, which was a significant step toward enhancing access to high quality early learning programming with no cost for families. JK and Kindergarten (K) provide all families of four-and-five –year-old children with an option to access free, play-based, early learning programming within their community school.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) provides funding and support for Indigenous governments, non-profit organizations, and individuals to provide a variety of early learning and child care programming that best meets their community's unique situation. For some communities, this means full-time licensed early learning and child care programs that are centre-based or family day homes; for others, the best way to support families with young children may be a part-time drop-in program offered several times per week. The Canada-wide vision recognizes the unique needs of communities and offers flexible options to provide affordable, accessible, inclusive, high-quality early learning and child care.

Since 2017, ongoing federal funding for early learning and child care has augmented territorial investment aimed at improving quality and access to licensed programs in the NWT. In February 2022, the GNWT released the *2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy (Strategy)*, representing a vision to transform the early learning and child care system in the NWT. The *Strategy* was designed to build upon current strengths within the sector and to support the GNWT's 19th Legislative Assembly's Mandate to advance universal child care by increasing availability and affordability of early learning and child care for families.

The Strategy includes the following broad-based commitments that align with the vision, as outlined within the *Multilateral Agreement for Early Learning and Child Care Framework* (Annex 1):

- Improving affordability of early learning and child care
- Supporting the creation and sustainability of licensed programs
- Enhancing inclusion and participation
- Fostering a qualified early childhood workforce

The specific steps and timelines related to the goals of the Strategy will be outlined within short-term actions as part of working with the federal government to develop a Canada-wide system of Early Learning and Child Care. This action plan merges the actions planned for 2022-2023 from the 2021- 2022 to 2025-2026 *Canada-Wide ELCC Agreement* and the 2021-2022 to 2024-2025 *Canada-NWT ELCC Bilateral Agreement* and assists with meeting these goals through targeted and specific actions.

As the NWT continues to invest and grow its early learning and child care sector, addressing the early learning and child care needs of Indigenous families and communities is a critical aspect toward reconciliation.

Transforming the system will take time and coordinated effort between the Government of Canada, the GNWT, Indigenous Governments, licensed early learning and child care programs, early childhood educators, post-secondary institutions, and other community partners. This is an opportunity to work together to make meaningful change for young children and families throughout the territory.

NWT CONTEXT

According to the NWT Bureau of Statistics, the total population of the NWT in 2022 was approximately 46,605, with Indigenous people representing approximately 50% of the population.

In the NWT, there are distinct variations between the capital city, regional centres, and small communities:

- in the capital city of Yellowknife (population of approximately 21,720), 25% of residents are Indigenous.
- in regional centres (Behchokò, Fort Simpson, Fort Smith, Hay River, Inuvik, Norman Wells), 65% of residents are Indigenous.
- outside of regional centres and the capital city, there are 26 small communities, where almost 90% of residents are Indigenous.

Throughout this action plan, the following should be considered:

- a significant proportion of the ELCC service population (children and families) in the NWT are Indigenous.
- a significant majority of early childhood educators (educators) in the NWT are Indigenous.

As such, every action listed in this action plan will have direct and often predominant application to Indigenous children, families, workers, and learners.

In 2022, the NWT was home to approximately 3,344 children aged five years and younger. Additionally, the NWT has one of the highest birth rates in Canada. In 2021, the NWT birth rate was 12 per 1,000 people, compared to the Canadian average of 9.6 births per 1,000 people.

OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL

Between April 2018 and December 2019, the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) completed a Performance Audit of both ECE's JK to Grade 12 public education system and the NWT's early learning and child care sector.

The OAG provided specific recommendations to enhance the quality of early learning and child care programs, including:

- Providing guidance that clearly sets out how licensed programs can develop programming that meets the *Child Day Care Standards Regulations'* education requirements;

- Tracking compliance with programming requirements and the training needs of center-based operators and early childhood educators and delivery of required training, as appropriate; and,
- Establishing a consistent method of assessing licensed early learning and child care programs who lack formal qualifications to ensure they understand developmentally appropriate child care practices and can apply that understanding to daycare programming.

Federal funding provided through both CW-ELCC Agreement and the Extension ELCC Agreement will be used to support the recommendations of the OAG given its alignment with the development of a territorial system that offers accessible and affordable quality early learning and child care for young children and families.

ENGAGEMENT

While evidence and research play a key role in shaping the GNWT's actions, so too does the knowledge and insight of Indigenous Governments and early childhood education stakeholders. The GNWT has engaged in public discussions on early childhood development, learning, and care through roundtable discussions, on-line surveys, webinars, home visits, regional meetings, focus groups, and sharing circles where families, community members, Elders, early childhood professionals and other stakeholders have provided their thoughts and ideas for the future of childhood development in the NWT. Within the NWT context, stakeholders are always representative and include Indigenous and French-speaking participants.

The NWT ELCC Funding Programs Review (2021) identified the need to consider alternative methods to subsidizing licensed early learning and child care programs to better support sustainability.

Most recently, in May and June 2021, ECE met with Indigenous Governments and held engagement sessions with licensed early learning and child care program operators and early childhood educators throughout the NWT to discuss a series of questions about the development of the *Strategy*. These discussions led to the development of a *What We Heard Report: Toward a 2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy (2021)* and informed the development of the *Strategy*, as well as this revised merged action plan.

This engagement and collaborative approach are in line with the Canada-wide commitment to develop a collaborative plan with relevant First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation organizations in the NWT to ensure that Indigenous children residing

in the NWT have access to affordable, high-quality, and culturally appropriate early learning and child care.

Through these discussions, the following themes were identified:

- the importance of grounding early learning and child care programs in local, Indigenous cultures and languages;
- balancing staff qualifications with formal post-secondary early childhood education with desirable qualities, such as local knowledge, commitment, and passion for working with children;
- supporting the sustainability of programs including suggestions to replace attendance-based funding with a model that provides more stability of payments;
- increasing wages and benefits for educators working in licensed centres to address the recruitment and retention of qualified staff; and
- addressing affordability for families. Some programs in small communities offer free programming for families; however, of those that do charge child care fees, it was recognized that costs are too high.

The recent *ELCC Review* and development of the *Strategy* represented opportunities to re-imagine the NWT's early learning and child care system and to support the GNWT's Mandate to advance universal child care through increased affordability and accessibility of quality early learning and child care. The commitment made through the *CW-ELCC and Extension ELCC Agreements* align with the areas of focus that the GNWT has identified through the *Strategy* and which ECE has heard from Indigenous Governments and licensed early learning and child care programs.

VISION FOR FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As we work collaboratively toward a Canada-wide system, the GNWT and Canada recognize the need for flexibility in responding to the evolving needs of existing early learning and child care programs and to support the establishment of new licensed programs

The *CW- ELCC Agreement* and the *ELCC Extension Agreement* support the development of a national early learning and child care system that provides an opportunity to re-imagine what early learning and child care looks like in the territory by incorporating innovative ideas.. It will take time to improve the outcomes for young children and will require coordination and planning within the GNWT, Government of Canada, Indigenous Governments, stakeholders and other partners.

Along with our community-based partners who provide early learning and child care, the Government of Canada and the GNWT will work together to provide opportunities that support transformational change and development of a system that promotes a community-driven, child and family-centered, culturally relevant system that provides high quality programs and services for all young children and their families across the NWT.

In addition to an ongoing understanding of community needs across the territory, investments in the early learning and child care sector are required to increase access and affordability of programs. This also includes the need for significant increase in capacity to support the planning and implementation of these innovative changes, including the need for additional positions within ECE.

Incremental investments over time, both territorial and federal, are required to move this work forward and create, expand and supplement supports and opportunities for early childhood education in the NWT.

Tables outlining the indicators, targets, and investments for the CW-ELCC and Extension ELCC Agreement can be found in Appendix A and B, respectively. The information contained in the tables will be discussed in more detail in the *Areas of Focus* section of this action plan.

Table 1. 2022-2023 Federal Investment – Early Learning and Child Care ²

Areas of Focus	2021-2022 Carry Forward			2022-2023 Investment		
	Extension ELCC Agreement (\$)	Canada-wide Agreement (\$)	Total (\$)	Extension ELCC Agreement (\$)	Canada-wide Agreement (\$)	Total (\$)
Affordability Child Care Fee Reduction (CCFR) Subsidy	0	4,377,000	4,377,000	0	5,859,000	10,236,000
Accessibility Enhanced Early Childhood Program (ECP)	33,000	113,000	146,000	887,000	\$189,000	1,222,000
Health and Safety Funding	78,000	0	78,000	60,000	70,000	208,000
New Child Care Spaces	0	0	0	55,000	50,000	105,000
Inclusion Current Inclusion Supports Analysis		0		0	0	

² Given the Northwest Territories' unique early learning and child care system, and the infrastructure and staffing challenges faced in the north, funding may move between the individual programming categories, as per section 4.8.2 of the Agreement

	0		0			0
Develop a renewed inclusion approach	0	0	0	0	0	0
Resources and Professional Learning related to equity, diversity and inclusion	50,000	0	50,000	0	0	50,000
High Quality Professional Learning and Development for Early Childhood Educators	248,000	0	248,000	322,000	100,000	670,000
Post-secondary Learning Opportunities	270,000	139,000	409,000	809,000	371,000	1,589,000
Early Childhood Scholarships	0	0	0	100,000	40,000	140,000
NWT Early Learning Framework	0	0	0	0	0	0
Retention Incentive	0	200,000	200,000	0	1,210,000	1,410,000
Program quality enhancement grants	0	0	0	\$100,000	0	\$100,000
Establish certification requirements	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reporting and Administration						
Enhance Human Resource Capacity	76,000	537,000	613,000	250,797	877,000	1,740,797
Develop an IT framework	0	0	0	0	0	0
Develop an annual census	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Investment for ELCC	755,000	5,366,000	6,121,000	2,583,797	8,766,000	17,470,797

* Note that all funding is expected to be spent during the terms of the agreements and any unexpended or placeholder funding is expected to be invested in the system in futures years. For 2022-2023, the Extension ELCC (Bilateral 1) has a carry forward of 10% and the CW-ELCC (Bilateral 2) has a carry forward of 85% for the fiscal year.

AREAS OF FOCUS

Affordability

As part of the *CW-ELCC Agreement*, the GNWT and Canada agree on the goal of working toward achieving an NWT average of \$10 per day for child care fees as a way to make licensed early learning and child care more affordable for all families, regardless of their income and/or location in the territory.

Access

There are many factors involved in increasing access to licensed programs, such as creating welcoming, culturally responsive environments for families, having qualified and trained staff available to work, and having access to high-quality infrastructure that is suitable and safe for early learning and child care programs. We know that creating new child care spaces takes time. In the NWT, licensed programs are community driven. They are initiated and maintained by Indigenous governments, non-profit organizations, and local individuals who are in the best position to meet the needs of children and families they serve. Improving access to early learning and child care requires working closely with operators of licensed programs and providing funding and various supports that are responsive to their needs.

Inclusion

All children and families deserve to feel welcomed and safe to enroll and participate in early learning and child care programs. Inclusive environments require an understanding of each child's background, interests, and abilities, as well as materials and resources that reflect these diverse experiences, interests, abilities, families, identities, and cultures. In the NWT, this also involves programming that is deeply rooted in the Indigenous cultures, languages, worldviews, and practices of the community.

Quality

One of the most significant elements affecting a child's early development, after the home environment and relationship with families, is the provision of high-quality, culturally responsive, early learning and child care. Quality early learning and child care programs, delivered by well-trained and knowledgeable educators, positively impact children's healthy development; allow family members who would otherwise not be able to work to return to the workforce; and reduce social, education and health care costs.

Increased reporting

To inform ongoing improvements to the early learning and child care system in the NWT and across Canada, substantial data collection and reporting is necessary. As part of the *CW- ELCC Agreement* and the *Extension ELCC Agreement*, increased data collection and reporting of financial and administrative requirements will occur within the territory.

AREA OF FOCUS: AFFORDABILITY

Total federal investment 2022-2023: \$10,236,000

Extension: \$0

Canada-wide: \$10,236,000

There is a wide range of fees charged to families throughout the NWT. Some licensed programs offer free access while others charge families monthly fees. Costs can be prohibitive and a barrier for many families who would otherwise choose to access early learning and child care programming.

Through the *CW-ELCC Agreement*, the GNWT agreed to use funding to reduce out-of-pocket child care fees for licensed early learning and child care spaces for children aged birth to 5 years:

- by an average of 50% from 2019 levels by the end of December 2022, which has been achieved³; and,
- to an average of \$10/day for all families needing child care, or lower for low-income families, by the end of fiscal year 2025-2026.

The GNWT provides funding for the two-year JK/K program for four- and five-year-old children in the NWT. Families have the option to access free, play based JK/K programming within schools in their community. For this age group, *CW-ELCC Agreement* funding lowers fees for families paying for out-of-school care (after school care) for children aged four and five.

ECE offers the Income Assistance (IA) program to individuals who require extra support to meet basic and enhanced needs. If someone qualifies for IA, they may be eligible for assistance with child care expenses to allow for participation in the labor force, a Productive Choice (PC)⁴, or education and training opportunities in the NWT. The issue of affordability is interconnected with other areas of advancing universal child care in the NWT. Although an important aspect, developing a system for early learning and child care in the NWT needs to consider affordability within the broader context of both high cost and free programming operated by non-profits, Indigenous Governments, and family day home operators.

With a goal of making fee based licensed early learning and child care more affordable for families, the GNWT proposes to incrementally reduce child care fees in licensed early learning and child care programs through the following actions:

CONTINUE TO IMPLEMENT THE CHILD CARE FEE REDUCTION SUBSIDY

³ On March 3, 2022, the Government of Canada and the Government of the Northwest Territories announced that child care fees for NWT families with children from birth to five years of age in licensed early learning and child care would be reduced, on average, by 50 per cent. The reduction was effective January 1, 2022.

⁴ A Productive Choice is an activity that encourages self-reliance, which IA recipients are expected to complete and report on. Seniors and persons with disabilities are excused from the PC requirement. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, reporting on a PC is not currently necessary and IA recipients are encouraged to practice self-care activities at their discretion.

Total investment: \$10,236,000

Extension: \$0

Canada-wide: \$10,236,000

The *Child Care Fee Reduction (CCFR)* subsidy was created as part of the *CW-ELCC Agreement* to provide funding to reduce the child care fees families pay for children five years of age and younger attending licensed programs. Families pay the difference between the fee charged by the child care provider and the funding provided by GNWT. This reduction in child care fees applies to licensed infant and preschool spaces and out-of-school spaces for children ages four and five. During the first two years (2021-2022 and 2022-2023) of the *CW-ELCC Agreement*, the CCFR Subsidy does not apply to out of school spaces for children over five years of age; this may be considered in future years once Canada-wide targets have been achieved.

During 2022-2023, licensed programs offering child care for children from birth to age five will continue to be provided with CCFR funding based on the child care fees charged to families in 2021 to maintain a 50% reduction in fees families pay.

During the second year of the *CW-ELCC Agreement*, the GNWT will continue to monitor child care fees for new and existing licensed early learning and child care programs and maintain the 50% child care fee reduction that was achieved in 2021-22. Averages will be based on a calculation of all programs in the NWT, regardless of cost.

Table 2. 2022-2023 Summary of Indicators, Targets, Investments: Affordability

Initiative	Indicator(s)	Target	ELCC Investment	CW Investment
Child Care Fee Reduction (CCFR) subsidy	Average child care fees	50% reduction in average child care fees for licensed programs by December 2022; and reaching an average of \$10 per day per child by 2025-26 for all regulated child care spaces	\$0	\$10.24M (includes 4.38M carried forward from 2021-22)

CCFR was implemented during the last quarter of 2021-2022 and, accordingly, the low investment for that year created a significant carry forward which continues to be reflected in 2022-2023 despite the full annual investments for the program during the current period.

AREA OF FOCUS: ACCESS

Total federal investment 2022-2023: \$1,535,000

Extension investment: \$1,113,000

Canada-wide investment: \$422,000

Improving access to licensed early learning and child care programs continues to be a focus for the GNWT and key priority area under the federal agreements flowing from the *Framework*. Most recently, through the *Strategy*, the GNWT committed to supporting the creation and sustainability of licensed programming; recognizing that more spaces will mean more opportunities for families to access early learning and child care.

There are many factors involved with increasing access to licensed programs, such as creating welcoming, culturally responsive environments for families, having qualified and trained staff available to work, and having access to high-quality infrastructure that is suitable and safe for early learning and child care programs.

As of March 31, 2022, the NWT has 122 licensed early learning and child care programs with a total of 2,073 potential child care spaces available for children from birth to five years old, all within the non-profit sector. Of these spaces, 969 are designated as out-of-school spaces, providing afterschool care for children aged four to eleven years. The introduction of JK resulted in an increased need to expand out-of-school care programming to include four-year-old children. Some initiatives designed to benefit four- and five-year-olds may incidentally benefit older children due to limited child care program availability by community.

The tables below show the number of licensed early learning and child programs by space, type, and region, as of March 31, 2022:

Table 3. Number of Licensed Programs for Children from Birth to Age 11

Region	Centre	Out of School	Family Day Home	Preschool	Total
Beaufort Delta	6	2	2	2	12
Deh Cho	1	2	0	2	5
North Slave	9	28	39	6	82

Sahtu	2	0	0	1	3
South Slave	4	3	11	2	20
Total	22	35	52	13	122

Data valid as of March 31, 2022

Table 4. Number of Child Spaces for Children from Birth to Age 11

Region	Infant	Preschool	Out of School	Total
Beaufort Delta	59	143	114	316
Deh Cho	8	50	60	118
North Slave	177	444	686	1,307
Sahtu	16	52	0	68
South Slave	32	123	109	264
Total	292	812	969	2,073

Data valid as of March 31, 2022

Based on 2022 population estimates from the NWT Bureau of Statistics, the population of children aged birth to five years old in the NWT is approximately 3,344. Since the territorial implementation of JK in 2017-18, approximately 1,000 students per year have been enrolled in JK and K. In 2021-2022 Junior Kindergarten/Kindergarten (JK/K) provided free programming for 514 children in JK and 610 children in K. The JK/K program represents significant progress towards universal child care in the NWT. It should be noted, that JK/K are provided as optional programs for families, therefore not all four- and five-year-old children will be included in these calculations. It is also at the discretion of local education authorities whether to offer JK/K as a full or half-day program and this total includes both full and half-day programming, however, uptake for JK/K programming across the territory is consistently high.

A particular area of attention will be upon the communities that currently do not have access to any licensed early learning and child care programs. ECE will continue to work with Indigenous governments and community-based organizations to explore ways to create new spaces, particularly in communities that need it most.

Although the number and community locations fluctuate, there are currently 12 communities in the NWT that do not have licensed child care for children from birth to three years old. Each of these communities has specific circumstances that have led to a lack of child care, including:

- No or very few children in the birth to 5-year-old range (no demand).
- Difficulty operating a non-profit organization run by a volunteer society.
- No available space or infrastructure to hold such a program.
- A preference for extended family or a traditional cultural model of child care.
- No qualified or trained early childhood educators in the community.

With a goal of having more families access licensed early learning and child care programs, the GNWT will aim to increase the net number of regulated (licensed) child care spaces for children birth to age 5 by 300 full-time equivalent spaces to achieve a licensed early learning and child care coverage rate of 59% by 2025-2026. This figure does not include Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten programming that is offered in all NWT schools for four- and five-year-old children.

In addition to funding provided by the territorial government, through the *CW-ELCC Agreement*, the goal for 2022-2023 is to increase the net number of regulated (licensed) spaces for children from birth to age 5 by at least 75 full-time equivalent spaces operated by non-profits, family day homes and Indigenous Governments through the following actions:

ENHANCED EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM (ECP) FUNDING FOR CENTRE-BASED OUT-OF-SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL SPACES

Total investment: \$ \$1,222,000

Extension: \$920,000

Canada-wide: \$302,000

The GNWT provides licensed programs with the Early Childhood Program (ECP) operating subsidy to offset costs associated with maintaining quality environments and contribute to the financial viability and sustainability of licensed programs. This funding can be used for operational and maintenance costs, including staffing, rent, and utilities.

Through the CW-ELCC and the *Extension ELCC Agreement*, enhanced ECP funding provides licensed centre-based early learning and child care programs with increased ECP funding to support the sustainability of current programs, as well as offers more parents an option to access to preschool and out-of-school care, including before or after school care and increased access to full-day care during professional development days for children aged four and five. Although this funding is targeted to children five years of age and younger, children six-eleven years old attending out-of-school programs may also incidentally benefit.

Funding increases include:

- increased daily rates for before, after and out-of-school care (i.e., full day funding for professional development days and school breaks); and,
- additional funding for children with identified specific needs.

Enhanced ECP funding for centre-based preschool spaces may benefit as many as 35 licensed early learning and child care centre-based programs with preschool spaces and up to 604 children attending these programs.

Enhanced ECP funding for Centre-based out-of-school spaces may benefit as many as 35 licensed early learning and child care centre-based programs with out of school spaces and up to 969 children attending these programs.

ENHANCED FUNDING FOR NEW CHILD CARE SPACES

Total investment: \$105,000

Extension: \$55,000

Canada-wide: \$50,000

All new licensed programs, including those located in communities without licensed programs, are eligible to access this application-based funding. Funding provided through both the CW-ELCC and *Extension ELCC Agreements* assists with the creation of new licensed centre-based programs and family day homes by providing additional funding for the purchase of supplies, material and other costs incurred when setting up a new licensed program. This funding will also be available to programs who wish to re-profile spaces (i.e., preschool to infant, based on community need).

These investments provide continued support to offset start-up related costs for licensed early learning and child care programs with a target of creating at least 75 new child care spaces in 2022-2023.

HEALTH AND SAFETY FUNDING

Total investment: \$208,000

Extension: \$138,000

Canada-wide: \$70,000

This on-demand fund, provided through both the *CW-ELCC* and *Extension ELCC Agreements*, assists existing licensed centre-based early childhood programs and family day homes (in the start-up phase) with access of up to \$10,000 in additional funding toward repairs and maintenance, as required by annual inspections, for the cost of health and safety repairs and maintenance as required by annual inspections. These repairs and maintenance must be completed to maintain a license to operate an early childhood program in the NWT and can prove to be a costly endeavor in the north. In 2022-2023, this fund may benefit up to 15 licensed programs serving 245 children.

Table 6. 2022-2023 Canada-wide Summary of Indicators, Targets, Investments: Access

Initiative	Indicator(s)	Target	2022-23 ELCC Investment	2022-23 CW Investment
Enhanced Early Childhood Program Funding for Centre-based Out-of-School and Preschool Spaces	Number of centre-based out-of-school and preschool spaces for children 0-5	Creation of 75 high-quality, affordable, licensed early learning and child care spaces by 2022-23; and creation of 300 full time equivalent high-quality, affordable, licensed ELCC spaces by 2025-26	\$887,000 (includes \$33,000 carried forward from 2021-22)	1) \$302,000 (includes \$113,000 carried forward from 2021-22)
New Child Care Spaces	Number of licensed spaces in centre-based programs and family day homes	Creation of 75 high-quality, affordable, licensed early learning and child care spaces by 2022-23; and creation of 300 full time equivalent high-quality, affordable, licensed ELCC spaces by 2025-26	\$55,000	\$50,000
Health and Safety Funding	Number of licensed child care programs and spaces who accessed federal health and safety funding	May benefit up to 15 licensed programs serving 245 children in 2022-23	\$138,000 (includes \$78,000 carried forward from 2021-22)	\$70,000

AREA OF FOCUS: INCLUSION

Total federal investment 2022-2023: \$50,000

Extension: \$50,000

Canada-wide: \$0

With a focus upon diversity, equity, and inclusion, every child and family feels welcomed and safe to access and participate in early learning and child care programs. Central to this concept is providing all children with safe and nurturing environments that promote physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and cognitive development. Inclusive environments require an understanding of each child's background, interests, and abilities, as well as materials and resources that reflect diverse experiences, interests, families, identities, and cultures.

In the NWT, this involves programming that is deeply rooted in the cultures, languages, worldviews, and practices of the community. The history and legacy of residential schools requires the GNWT to work with Indigenous Governments and local communities to collaboratively build an early learning and child care system that provides Indigenous families with access to culturally responsive and culturally safe programming. As investments continue to expand the early learning and child care system, addressing the early learning and child care needs of Indigenous families and communities is a critical part of reconciliation.

The GNWT currently provides the Supporting Child Inclusion and Participation (SCIP) program, which is an annual proposal-based territorial funding in the amount of \$1.7M designed to support licensed early learning and child care programs, as well as other early learning opportunities to include children who may be vulnerable to or who have identified developmental needs. Child care providers and community members may apply for SCIP funding to support family and tot programs, hiring staff and accessing resources to support child participation, and providing professional learning opportunities to expand early childhood educators' knowledge and understanding of working with children of different abilities.

In addition to this work, the 19th Mandate of the Legislative Assembly aims to improve early childhood development indicators, in part by shifting to an Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) approach for early childhood programs and services.

In this approach, governments, non-profit organizations, agencies, and communities work collaboratively to co-create and provide services and remove barriers that complicate access to those services. This way of working together ensures the family's voice is held throughout the process

and is known to help timely and seamless access to required services that support children and their families.

With a goal of more children participating in early learning and child care, through this action plan, the GNWT proposes to increase inclusion in licensed early learning and child care programs through the following actions:

COMPLETE AN ANALYSIS OF CURRENT INCLUSION SUPPORTS

Total investment: \$0

Through the *CW-ELCC Agreement*, beginning in 2022-2023, the GNWT will complete an analysis of the current approach to inclusion programs and services within the NWT and use it to develop a targeted approach to supporting all children, including those with developmental disabilities and/or from vulnerable or equity seeking families. This will include consideration of children needing enhanced or individualized supports to participate in early learning and child care programming. This work will be influenced by the current GNWT-wide ISD initiatives.

DEVELOP A RENEWED INCLUSION APPROACH

Total investment: \$0

Through the *CW-ELCC Agreement*, the GNWT will develop an approach, with consideration of funding needs, to ensure that all children from all families in the NWT feel welcomed and supported with early learning and child care programming. This includes but is not limited to children with disabilities and/or specific developmental needs; equity seeking families; children living in low income; Indigenous children; Black and other racialized children; children of newcomers of Canada, and official language minorities, have equitable access to regulated child care spaces, in proportion to their presence in the NWT's population. This approach will recognize the NWT as largely an Indigenous population with diversity in cultures and languages.

In 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, ECE will complete an analysis of the current knowledge, practices, and resources available to support inclusion of children within early learning and child care across the NWT. This information will be used to develop a targeted approach to supporting all children, including those with disabilities and/or developmental needs that require enhanced or individual supports to access and fully participate in licensed early learning and child care.

Inclusion supports may involve general program-wide approaches and/or particular practices that meet the developmental, emotional, behavioral, physical, and/or personal care needs of children within their program and require additional skills, knowledge, or responsibilities on the part of the provider.

The renewed approach to inclusion will be developed following the analysis of inclusion supports with implementation beginning in 2024-2025.

RESOURCES AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING RELATED TO EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Total investment: \$50,000

Extension: \$50,000

Canada-wide: \$0

Through funding for Professional Learning and Development for Early Childhood Educators from the *Extension ELCC Agreement*, in 2022-2023, ECE proposes to support the development of professional learning and distribution of resources specifically related to equity, diversity, and inclusion for all children, families, and early childhood educators. In 2022-2023 identified learning areas including, but not limited to, 2SLGBTQIPA+ inclusion, speech and language development in early childhood, and supporting self-regulation. In 2022-2023, this work also includes the distribution of a mini library of 10 children’s books related to 2SLGBTQIPA+ content.

Resources and professional learning opportunities related to equity, diversity, and inclusion will be available to all educators working within licensed early learning and child care programs in the NWT, benefitting as many as 312 early childhood educators.

Table 7. 2022-2023 Canada-wide Summary of Indicators, Targets, Investments: Inclusion

Initiative	Indicator(s)	Target	2022-23 ELCC Investment	2022-23 CW Investment
Complete an analysis of current inclusion supports	Develop a targeted approach to supporting all children, including those with developmental disabilities and/or from vulnerable or equity seeking families	Complete an analysis to examine how vulnerable children, including those with specific developmental needs, are currently included in early learning opportunities across the territory	\$0	\$0
Develop a renewed inclusion approach	Develop an approach to ensure that all children from all	Renewed approach to inclusion will be developed following the	\$0	\$0

	families in the NWT feel welcomed and supported with ELCC programming	analysis of inclusion supports with implementation beginning in 2024-2025		
Resources and Professional Learning related to equity, diversity and inclusion	Number and proportion of providers adopting innovative new tools; and/or number of children participating in ELCC programs that have access to culturally appropriate resources	Benefit up to 312 early childhood educators	\$50,000 (including \$50,000 carried forward from 2021-22)	\$0

AREA OF FOCUS: QUALITY

Total federal investment 2022-2023: \$3,909,000

Extension: \$1,849,000

Canada-wide: \$2,060,000

A key way to foster high quality early learning and child care is to support the development of a qualified early childhood workforce. Well-trained early childhood educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to deliver high quality programs, make a significant difference in the development of children in their care. The NWT is home to approximately 300 staff working within licensed early childhood programs. Many of the staff working within these licensed programs are from the local community, providing an invaluable connection, not only to the community, but also to its local culture and language.

Currently, a large proportion of staff working in licensed early learning and child care programs do not have formal post-secondary training in early childhood development. While a certification process does not exist, the GNWT does have a credentialing process. This includes the need for a current criminal records check, First Aid training, and an individualized plan of support where they are retained as primary staff in centre-based programs but lack completion of formal post-secondary education in the field of early childhood.

There are several challenges with pursuing post-secondary education when living and working in the NWT. Challenges with leaving their community, as well as with bandwidth issues when accessing distance studies, have historically been barriers to those wishing to seek post-secondary education opportunities.

Through this action plan, funding from both the *CW-ELCC* and the *Extension ELCC Agreements* assists the GNWT with supporting the development of a qualified workforce by providing early learning educators with professional learning opportunities, as well as encouraging Northerners to pursue post-secondary education in the field of early childhood development.

During meetings with Indigenous Governments and engagement with licensed early learning and child care programs, participants stressed the high turnover of staff in the early learning sector who ultimately leave the field to assume other employment in the community that come with a higher wage and benefits. They explained that this is exacerbated by increased education since staff members often leave once they receive more training and education. The impact of recruitment and retention efforts to support high quality programming, including access to scholarships, professional learning, and post-secondary education opportunities, are ultimately limited by low wages.

Going forward, the GNWT and the federal government will work together to explore key issues, such as low wages and other issues related to the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators.

With a goal of having more qualified early childhood educators enter and remain working in the early learning and child care sector, the GNWT proposes improving quality through the following actions:

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Total investment: \$ \$670,000

Extension: \$570,000

Canada-wide: \$100,000

Coordinated and consistent training is essential to improve quality in licensed early childhood programs. Through the *Extension ELCC Agreement*, the GNWT will provide professional learning opportunities for early childhood educators. These opportunities will include regional professional learning opportunities with content related to early childhood development and other topics raised by licensed programs.

The GNWT recognizes that annual spending will need to increase for professional learning at least in proportion to the increase in regulated child care spaces; as more spaces are created and more early childhood educators are hired and working in these programs, more professional learning will be required.

Strengthening human capacity within the department is also a priority for the GNWT as part of both federal agreements. This has included additional positions that were created as part of the *Extension ELCC Agreement* to support the increased ongoing need for quality program development and implementation, including professional learning opportunities.

Professional learning opportunities will be available to all educators working within licensed early learning and child care programs in the NWT, benefitting as many as 312 early childhood educators during the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

SUPPORT POST-SECONDAY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE NWT

Total investment: \$1,589,000

Extension: \$1,079,000

Canada-wide: \$510,000

Over the past five years, ELCC funding provided through the *Extension ELCC Agreement*, and the one-time federal workforce development funding provided in 2021-2022 supported Aurora College to successfully deliver a full-time face-to-face two-year diploma program in Early Learning and Child Care, with both year one and year two intake in fall 2021, as well as continued to support the part-time distance-based certificate and diploma program delivery of the Early Learning and Child Care Program.

In 2021-2022, the one-time federal workforce development funding supported Collège Nordique Francophone to collaborate with Collège La Cité to develop a diploma program in French in preparation for program delivery beginning in September 2022. Collège Nordique Francophone also worked with Collège La Cité to explore and develop a model for recognition of professional experience, prior learning, and skills for early childhood educators in the NWT, as well as delivered professional learning in French and developed a Massive Open Online Course that is available in both French and English for early childhood educators and parents to access for free.

In 2022-2023, the *Extension ELCC Agreement* will continue to support both Aurora College and Collège Nordique Francophone to offer post-secondary ELCC education programs, including certificate and diploma courses in person and online. In 2022-2023, Collège Nordique Francophone will also offer up to four targeted professional learning sessions in French for early childhood educators.

Providing post-secondary learning opportunities in the NWT may result in the potential of hiring staff with post-secondary education in early childhood with credentials that allow them to work in licensed programs throughout the NWT.

As many as 90 students stand to benefit from post-secondary program delivery options (face-to-face and distance-based), including 10 Francophone early childhood educators.

PROVIDE ADDITIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD SCHOLARSHIPS

Total	investment:	\$140,000
Extension:		\$100,000
Canada-wide:		\$40,000

Prior to the federal ELCC Agreements, ECE offered up to ten Early Childhood Scholarships to post-secondary students enrolled in full-time early childhood post-secondary programs at the diploma level or above. These scholarships were oversubscribed. ECE anticipated the demand to further increase with the expansion of offering a full-time post-secondary diploma program through Aurora College.

Through the *Extension ELCC Agreement*, the number of scholarships offered to support students enrolled in early childhood education programs has increased from ten up to a total of thirty annual scholarships.

As many as twenty additional students pursuing post-secondary education in early childhood development stand to benefit from this action annually (i.e., 20 scholarships awarded in 2021-2022).

DEVELOP AN NWT EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Total investment: \$100,000
Extension: \$100,000
Canada-wide: \$0

To align the *NWT Early Learning Framework (ELF)* with the new JK-12 Curriculum, the pilot of ELF and *Handbook* was postponed in 2021-2022. Through funding for

Professional Learning and Development for Early Childhood Educators from the *Extension ELCC Agreement*, in 2022-2023, ECE will be reviewing and adapting the British Columbia ELF to align with the NWT context and meet the needs of early childhood educators. The revised approach will be piloted and finalized in 2022-2023.

CONTINUE TO IMPLEMENT THE RETENTION INCENTIVE

Total investment: \$1,410,000

Extension: \$0

Canada-wide: \$1,410,000

While the GNWT develops a wage grid, funding from the *CW-ELCC Agreement* supports the implementation of the Retention Incentive, with the intention of bridging the wage gap for early childhood educators working in licensed centre-based programs for 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The Retention Incentive is intended to support the NWT early childhood workforce by recognizing the valuable role early childhood educators hold within licensed centre-based programs and support increased professionalization of their role. The Retention Incentive will be paid directly to licensed centre-based programs, who will then administer the incentive to educators on a quarterly/bi-annually basis.

In 2022-2023, as many as 312 early childhood educators stand to benefit from increased wages through the Retention Incentive.

PROGRAM QUALITY ENHANCEMENT GRANTS

Total investment: \$100,000

Extension: \$100,000

Canada-wide: \$0

Program Quality Enhancement Grants include three grants: the Provider Enhancement Grant (PEG), the Cultural Resource Grant, and the Technology Grant. These grants are provided to new licensed early learning and child care programs.

PEG assists licensed programs with the purchase or replacement of equipment, such as high chairs, car seats, playground equipment, furniture and other learning materials that support quality play-based environments. PEG will be available to both licensed centre-based and family day homes.

The Cultural Resource Grant provides licensed programs with funding to purchase culturally relevant materials and resources to support quality early learning.

The Technology Grant is provided as a one-time grant to licensed centre-based programs for the purchase of equipment such as computers and printers to support daily operations and participate in online learning opportunities.

ESTABLISH CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Total investment: \$0

Through the *CW-ELCC Agreement*, in 2022-2023, the GNWT will begin development of a certification process for early childhood educators. This will be supported through an online certification platform, with a goal of implementing certification in 2024-2025.

The certification process is meant to support early childhood educators working in licensed centre-based programs by recognizing their education and experience, both formal and informal, and will support early childhood educators to meet regulation requirements in the NWT. Until the certification process is developed, an annual credentialing as part of the licensing and inspection process will continue to be used to support compliance with the NWT's *Child Day Care Act and Standards Regulations*.

The credentialing and certification processes are intended to support development and recognition of a qualified workforce by increasing the percentage of early childhood educators providing regulated child care in the territory who fully meet the NWT's certification requirements to at least 30% by 2025-2026 and to 60% by the end of the ten-year *2030 ELCC Strategy's* implementation.

DEVELOP A WAGE GRID

Total investment: \$0

Through the *CW-ELCC Agreement*, the GNWT will develop a wage grid with consideration for progress toward implementation within the life of the *CW-ELCC Agreement*, which concludes in 2026. The wage grid will be informed by the recent engagement on both the *ELCC Funding Programs Review* and *2030 ELCC Strategy*, and with models developed by other Canadian jurisdictions. The ultimate goal of the wage grid is to incrementally increase wages for early childhood educators over time and recognize a combination of education and experience.

In 2022-2023, ECE will gather baseline data on wages across the jurisdiction and will implement a wage grid within the life of the *CW-ELCC Agreement (2021-2026)*.

Table 8. 2022-2023 Canada-wide Summary of Indicators, Targets, Investments: Quality

Initiative	Indicator(s)	Target	2022-23 ELCC Investment	2022-23 CW Investment
Professional Learning and Development for early childhood educators	Number and proportion of providers participating in professional learning opportunities in French and English;	Benefitting as many as 312 early childhood educators during the 2022-2023 fiscal year	\$670,000 (including \$248,000 carried forward from 2021-22)	\$0
Support post-Secondary Learning Opportunities in the NWT	Number and proportion of licensed early childhood centre staff with postsecondary Early Childhood Education	As many as 90 students stand to benefit from post-secondary program delivery options, including 10 Francophone educators.	\$1,079,000 (including \$270,000 carried forward from 2021-22)	\$510,000 (including \$139,000 carried forward from 2021-22)
Provide Additional Early Childhood Scholarships	Number of scholarships offered to support students enrolled in early childhood education programs	As many as 20 additional students pursuing post-secondary education in early childhood development stand to benefit from this action annually	\$100,000	\$40,000
Develop an NWT Early Learning Framework	Review and adaptation of the British Columbia ELF to align with the NWT context and meet the needs of early childhood educators by ECE	Revised approach will be piloted and finalized in 2022-2023	\$0	\$0
Continue to implement the Retention Incentive	Number of early childhood educators working in licensed centre-based early learning and child care programs who receive a retention incentive by end of fiscal year 2022 to 2023	As many as 312 early childhood educators stand to benefit from increased wages through the Retention Incentive in 2022-23	\$0	\$1,410,000 (including \$200,000 carried forward from 2021-22)

Program quality enhancement grants	Program Quality Enhancement Grants (PQEG) funding will be based on demand and 100% of existing licensed early learning and childcare programs who are approved for the PQEG will benefit.		\$100,000	\$0
Establish certification requirements	Number of early childhood educators as a percentage of the total number of staff in licensed centre-based programs who meet the minimum post-secondary education requirements legislated in the NWT's Child Day Care Act and Standards Regulations as of end of fiscal year 2022 to 2023 and ongoing	Establish a baseline number of educators who meet the education requirements legislated in the NWT's Child Day Care Act and Standards Regulations by end of fiscal year 2022 to 2023; increase the percentage of educators providing regulated child care who fully meet the NWT's certification requirements to at least 30% by 2025-2026 and to 60% by the end of the ten-year 2030 ELCC Strategy's implementation	\$0	\$0
Develop a wage grid	Average wage per hour of early childhood educators by position type working in licensed centre-based early learning and child care programs as of end of fiscal year 2022 to 2023	Establish a baseline average wage per hour of early childhood educators by position type working in licensed centre-based early learning and child care programs as of end of fiscal year 2022 to 2023; and create and implement a wage grid for early childhood educators by fiscal year 2025 to 2026	\$0	\$0

AREA OF FOCUS: REPORTING AND ADMINISTRATION

Total federal investment 2022-2023: \$1,740,797

Extension: \$326,797

Canada-wide: 1,414,000

The *CW-ELCC Agreement* has significantly increased requirements for data collection and reporting, in many cases for the first time. ECE recognizes the importance of accurate data and analysis to inform change, as well as the need to expand dedicated human capacity to implement the commitments under both federal *Agreements*, including the required annual progress reports.

With increased reporting requirements, the GNWT will need to consider additional infrastructure and technology (IT) supports needed to systematically collect and report on existing and new data included in the *CW-ELCC Agreement* and this action plan. Analysis of IT needs and costing will be completed during the first two years of the *CW-ELCC Agreement* with a plan to address ongoing data collection and reporting needs through IT improvement, as appropriate, beginning no later than Year 3 of the *CW-ELCC Agreement*.

Additional human resources are required to administer the federal agreements, including expertise for licensing and program support, financial planning, analysis and reporting; and policy development. These costs are identified in the budget and are anticipated to be ongoing.

Through this action plan, the GNWT proposes to increase reporting in licensed early learning and child care programs through the following actions:

ENHANCE HUMAN RESOURCE CAPACITY

Through the *CW-ELCC Agreement*, divisions within ECE will need to establish an enhanced, more strategic and integrated approach to administrative operations to work towards a Canada-wide child care system and ensure better program development and implementation, policy coordination, financial planning, and data and reporting. This team will be responsible for:

- Developing standards of practice, promoting information-sharing across jurisdictions and continuing work on the development of a Canada-wide early learning and child care system.
- Design and implement funding changes in response to the ELCC Funding Programs Review (2021), including consideration of affordability.

- Launching an Early Learning Framework to support children and families with enhanced support needs.
- Complete analysis, develop and implement a plan for inclusion of diverse and vulnerable populations in licensed early learning and child care programming.
- Support establishment of new child care spaces through support of the non-profit early learning and child care sector in NWT.
- Program management and designing mechanisms to reduce administrative burden for recipients of early learning and child care funding.

In 2022-2023, the GNWT will outline specific plans to increase the human resource capacity within ECE and begin human resource expansion, including:

- Identification of new positions to support the creation of licensed spaces and quality program development and implementation
- New positions to support financial planning and reporting
- Identification of new positions to support data collection, monitoring, and evaluation of the system.

To support the implementation of the Canada-wide system, the expansion of human resources capacity within ECE will allow for quantitative and qualitative analysis in support of policy development, research, and evaluation to support access to high quality programming and fulfill the requirements of the *CW-ELCC Agreement* through:

- Working with the Office of the Chief Information Officer to determine and create a data system to improve early learning and child care data capture in the territory.
- A plan to establish a data collection and reporting system that can collect and dynamically report on the following:
 - average daily out-of-pocket fees for families accessing licensed child care spaces at the end of each Fiscal Year;
 - number of children from birth to age 5 receiving child care fee reductions;
 - number of net new spaces created during the Fiscal Year - broken down by age groups of child and type of setting;
 - number and percentage of staff working in regulated child care programs who fully meet the credentialing and/or certification requirements;

- wages of the early childhood workforce according to the categories of credentialing and/or certification, including any wage enhancements, top-ups and/or supplements;
 - annual public expenditure on post-secondary education and professional learning opportunities of the early childhood workforce;
 - number of inclusive spaces supported through professional learning, resources and/or funding for staffing to support child participation – broken down by age group of child and type of program and location;
 - number and proportion of children from birth to age 5 and 6-12 years in flexible regulated early learning and child care arrangements;
 - number of children from birth to age 5 and 6-12 years with specific developmental needs that are in licensed early learning and child care spaces;
 - number or proportion of child care service programs who provide services that are adapted to the needs of children with exceptionalities or special needs;
 - number of Indigenous children from birth to age 5 in licensed early learning and child care programs, where possible broken down by distinction (i.e., First Nation, Metis, Inuit); or
 - number of racialized Canadian children, including Black children, from birth to age 5 in licensed early learning and child care spaces.
- Applied research to:
 - Collect and report national and international data to inform program and policy change; and
 - Review early learning and child care data and identify territorial gaps for future program development and policy change.
 - Undertake an annual census/survey of early learning and child care programs and other participants in the sector in the NWT to collect information.
 - Contracting external auditing services to meet the auditing requirements of the bilateral agreements.
 - Data sharing with Canada and timely reporting as outlined under Section 5.2 of the *Agreement*.

DEVELOP AN IT FRAMEWORK

Total investment: \$0

The *CW-ELCC Agreement* requires increased reporting requirements, as noted above. The GNWT will need to consider additional infrastructure and technology (IT) supports needed to systematically collect and report on existing and new data included in the both the *CW-ELCC* and *Extension ELCC Agreements*. Analysis of IT needs and costing will be completed during the first two years of the *CW-ELCC Agreement* and in 2022-2023 ECE will develop a plan to address ongoing data collection and reporting needs through IT improvement, as appropriate, and the implementation of IT support systems to capture increased data collection and reporting and an outline of costing to implement IT improvements that will occur from 2023-2024 to 2025-2026.

DEVELOP AN ANNUAL CENSUS

Total investment: \$0

Through the *CW-ELCC Agreement*, by March 31, 2023, the GNWT will develop a standardized annual census of licensed early learning and child care programs and other participants in the sector to gather data that will be used to inform program and policy development within NWT as for the larger Canada-wide early learning and child care system, including the creation of systematic licensing and monitoring, and professional development reporting processes by 2025-2026.

By March 31, 2024, NWT will have begun implementation of an annual census/survey of child care providers and other participants in the sector, including consistent licensed early learning and child care baseline data, including:

- number of children enrolled
- capacity (number of spaces)
- number of early childhood educators
- early childhood educators' wages and qualifications
- fees charged to families
- licensed program funding
- number of First Nations, Inuit or Metis child care spaces supported
- number or proportion of child care service providers who provide services that are adapted to the needs of children, five years of age and under, with disabilities and children needing enhanced or individual supports.

Table 9. 2022-2023 Canada-wide Summary of Indicators, Targets, Investments: Reporting and Administration

Initiative	Indicator(s)	Target	ELCC Investment	CW Investment
Enhance Human Resource Capacity	Number of human resources	TBC	\$326,797 (including \$76,000 carried forward from 2021-22)	\$1,414,000 (including \$537,000 carried forward from 2021-22)
Develop an IT framework	Additional infrastructure and technology (IT) supports	In 2022-2023 ECE will develop a plan to address ongoing data collection and reporting needs through IT improvement, as appropriate, and the implementation of IT support systems to capture increased data collection and reporting	\$0	\$0
Develop an annual census	Increased data collection and reporting of financial and administrative requirements through an annual census of child care providers	Develop an annual census or survey of child care providers and other participants in the sector by fiscal year 2022 to 2023; and implement an annual census/survey of child care providers and other participants in the sector by fiscal year 2023 to 2024	\$0	\$0

*The tables above shows the areas of investment for the Canada-wide ELCC Bilateral Agreement (2021-2022 to 2025-2026) and the two-year Action Plan (2021-2022 to 2022-2023). These investments compliment investments identified through the Canada-NWT ELCC Bilateral Agreement (2021-2022 to 2024-2025) and one-year Action Plan (2021-2022).

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