



**CCPA**

CANADIAN CENTRE  
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# The Roadmap is Clear, Detours are Risky

## Nova Scotia's Child Care System at a Crossroads



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# Summary

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In July of 2021, former Premier Iain Rankin and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau signed the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement in our province, with a historic investment of just under \$700 million over the following five years. The bilateral agreement was designed to reduce parent fees, increase regulated, licensed, non-profit child care spaces, and increase wages and support for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs).

This report applauds both the federal and provincial governments for setting important goals and targets in the bilateral agreement regarding fees, wages, and spaces. While many of those targets have been met, child care remains unaffordable and inaccessible for many families, and ECEs are still undervalued and underpaid. The authors find child care in Nova Scotia has still not been transformed into a child care system that sufficiently addresses the triple market failure of its longstanding patchwork of programs. Child care is still:

- Unaffordable, with some families paying \$5000-\$8000 a year
- Unavailable, with only 30 per cent of communities reaching the bilateral target of enough spaces for 59 per cent of kids under six, and,
- A difficult professional career choice for early childhood educators, some of whom continue to earn less than a living wage.

The authors make recommendations for what these governments must do to deliver a system of universal, comprehensive, publicly funded, high-quality, affordable, accessible, accountable, non-profit early learning and child care, while advancing social inclusion and creating the future all Nova Scotians deserve.

# Introduction

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In 2021, the federal government announced the historic Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) plan, which included significant multi-year funding to help provinces and territories implement a high-quality system of early learning and child care nationwide. By March 2022, bilateral agreements had been signed with all provinces and territories, based on the principles of “affordability, accessibility, quality, flexibility, and inclusivity.”<sup>1</sup>

While negotiations were underway, child care advocates in Nova Scotia sprang into action, mobilizing their strong community of evidence and expertise to ensure this historic opportunity to transform child care for children and families throughout Nova Scotia did not go to waste. We wrote an Open Letter to the Government of Nova Scotia with recommendations for building a strong child care system,<sup>2</sup> drawing on the Social Policy Framework for Nova Scotia, an evidence-based and intersectional roadmap to creating a prosperous future for our province.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Canada. (2021). Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan. <https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Findlay, T., & Saulnier, C. (2021). *Open Letter: Recommendations for Building Early Learning and Child Care in Nova Scotia*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - Nova Scotia (CCPA - NS).

<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/news-research/open-letter-recommendations-for-building-an-early-learning-and-child-care-system-in-nova-scotia/>

<sup>3</sup> Findlay, T., Saulnier, C., Hébert Boyd, M., & O’Keefe, J. (2020). *The future we all deserve: A social policy framework for Nova Scotia*. CCPA-NS. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/wp-content/uploads/attachments/SPF%20Final-5.pdf>

Nova Scotia's CWELCC agreement<sup>4</sup>—signed by former Premier Iain Rankin and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in July of 2021, a month after the Open Letter—made several key promises:

- A historic federal investment of \$604.9 million over the following five years (until 2026), with Nova Scotia contributing \$50 million.
- Nova Scotia commits that “federal funding will be used exclusively to support not-for-profit private and public child care providers/operations, as well as family-based child care,” and “federal funding will be exclusively used to support regulated child care.”<sup>5</sup>
- An average out-of-pocket parent child care fee reduction (for regulated child care spaces for under 6 years) of 50 per cent by January 2023, towards the goal of parents in Nova Scotia paying an average of \$10 daily by the end of March 2026.
- The creation of at least 9,500 new not-for-profit child care spaces by April 2026, including new spaces for infants and toddlers (4,000 within two years), to cover 59 per cent of children (under six) throughout the province.
- Nova Scotia would develop a workforce strategy for early childhood educators, including additional support for ECEs.
- Nova Scotia would create a central agency to oversee and manage the development of a coherent child care system province-wide.

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<sup>4</sup> Government of Canada & Government of Nova Scotia. (2021). Canada-Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. <https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement/agreements-provinces-territories/nova-scotia-canada-wide-2021.html>

<sup>5</sup>Government of Canada & Government of Nova Scotia. (2021). *Op. Cit.*

Shortly after the bilateral was signed, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Nova Scotia (CCPA-NS) released a brief report<sup>6</sup> outlining whether the recommendations from the Open Letter were incorporated into the agreement, and what this new agreement would mean for children, families, and educators throughout the province. As we outlined, the report welcomes Nova Scotia's progress toward a more accessible, affordable early-learning and child-care system, including lower parent fees, public expansion, and long-term federal investment. However, it stresses that true system-building requires fully publicly funded operations, a trained and fairly paid workforce, and prioritizing non-profit delivery so every family can access high-quality care regardless of income, location, or background.

This advocacy has continued. Both the CCPA-NS and Child Care Now Nova Scotia (CCN-NS) have been mobilizing child care advocates throughout the province and with partners nationally. They are monitoring the implementation of the CWELCC to ensure Nova Scotia is building a strong system of early learning and child care that will serve our children and families for generations to come.

Over the past five years, CCN-NS has played a central role in holding governments accountable to their commitments under the CWELCC agreement, by consistently amplifying the voices of educators, families, and operators across the province. From responding to the provincial Action Plan, to supporting the *ECEs Can't Wait* campaign demanding fair wages and a strong workforce strategy, rallies at Province House, ongoing centre visits, public education, and media engagement. Its advocacy has helped shape public understanding of what a true system requires: stable public funding, decent wages, community-based planning, and meaningful oversight.

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<sup>6</sup> CCPA-NS. (2021). *On the Right Track: Reflections on the Federal-Provincial Bilateral Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care*. CCPA - NS <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/news-research/on-the-right-track-reflections-on-the-federal-provincial-bilateral-agreement-on-early-learning-and-child-care-in-nova-scotia/> .



As we mark the progress made since 2021, this report reflects both how far we have come and how much remains at stake. In March 2025, Nova Scotia entered into an agreement with the federal government to extend the bilateral agreement to March 2031, for an additional \$1.05 billion, which is a three per cent increase each year for four years starting in 2027-28.<sup>7</sup> There are no new targets or promises; the extension is to protect the progress made under the 2021 bilateral agreement. Unfortunately, the newest federal budget only maintains those investments, when much more is needed to build a quality system.<sup>8</sup>

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) released two reports in 2025 that paint a picture of Canada's child care landscape. The first<sup>9</sup> examined the child care costs families are paying throughout Canada and whether those costs might decrease to the promised \$10 per day. The second<sup>10</sup> assessed the rate of space creation throughout Canada, and whether families can find spaces in their communities.

As we detail further in this report, we know Nova Scotia has made progress towards realizing \$10 per day child care, but it's still lagging behind. It is important to revisit these initial responses to the CWELCC, examining how our province has progressed in realizing this critical system for children and families nearly five years later.

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<sup>7</sup>Prime Minister of Canada. Press release: Affordable child care, a strong economy. March 2025.  
<https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2025/03/06/affordable-child-care-stronger-economy>

<sup>8</sup> Child Care Now. Media Advisory: Mark Carney's economic plan must expand child care system. 2025.  
<https://childcarenow.ca/2025/11/04/media-advisory-mark-carneys-economic-plan-must-expand-child-care-system/>

<sup>9</sup> Macdonald, D., & Friendly, M. (2025). *The price is not right (yet): \$10-a-day child care falling short of target. Child care fees in Canada, 2025*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA).  
<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/news-research/the-price-is-not-right-yet-10-a-day-child-care-falling-short-of-target/>

<sup>10</sup> Macdonald, D. (2025). *Cash Cow: Assessing Child Care Space Creation Progress*. CCPA.  
<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/news-research/cash-cow-assessing-child-care-space-creation-progress/>



Before the bilateral agreement, child care in Nova Scotia was a market-based patchwork of programs marked by high fees, low wages, and lack of spaces. The remainder of this brief outlines what we know about the government's ability to meet the goals outlined in the bilateral agreement signed in 2021 regarding fees, wages, and spaces, as well as whether Nova Scotia is still on track to transform this patchwork into a reliable system. We outline how our province can fulfill its promises, and what it still needs to do to deliver a system of universal, comprehensive, publicly funded, high-quality, affordable, accessible, accountable, non-profit early learning child care. We emphasize how this can be done while also advancing social inclusion, to create the future all Nova Scotians deserve.

# Investing in Families, Building a Universal, High-Quality, Affordable, Accessible System

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All children should have access to child care as a fundamental human right. Child care should be universally available to everyone who wants it regardless of income or employment status, not just targeted at "vulnerable" communities. Building a universal public child care system is very affordable, especially with federal funding through the CWELCC to support its creation. Nova Scotia only needs to make it a priority.

We know that high-quality early learning and child care is not only key to children's development but, like public education, it is also a worthwhile social investment that yields substantial economic returns. A strong child care system can help mothers, parents, and others with caregiving duties enter the workforce without sacrificing a significant portion of their income to pay for expensive care, which can have lifelong positive impacts on their earnings and pension benefits. The 2024 report card on child and family poverty in Nova Scotia also underlines why this investment is critical to support breaking the cycle of poverty.<sup>11</sup> These investments help address social inequality and support realizing equity and social justice.

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<sup>11</sup>Lesley Frank, Christine Saulnier & Ruby Harrington. (2024, Dec). *2024 Report card on child and family poverty in Nova Scotia: Swift action is needed for child and family wellbeing*. CCPA-NS.

Child care, like all social investments, should be funded primarily from a progressive tax system, and parent fees should not be relied upon for core operating funding. Research clearly demonstrates that child care more than pays for itself through job creation and increased tax revenue for governments. We only need to look to Quebec for an example of the substantial economic returns on building a public child care system. After launching a provincial child care program in 1997 with significant public funding, Quebec reaped tremendous social and economic benefits. Research demonstrates that for every dollar invested in early childhood education, the broader economy receives between \$2.00 and \$6.00 in return.<sup>12</sup>

International organizations recommend that governments allocate one per cent of their GDP to social policy for children aged 0-5. According to the CCPA, “Canada spends half the OECD average and one-third of the recommended minimum one per cent of GDP for children 0-5.”<sup>13</sup> This funding must support the expansion of non-profit and public child care, with allocation based on geography, age of child, family circumstances, learning requirements, cultural and linguistic considerations, and other equity considerations.

All governments must continue to intensify efforts to solve the child care crisis. More sustained, long-term investment is needed to ensure that families can access quality, licensed, and regulated, non-profit universal care in communities across all provinces and regions. In the following chapters, we outline what the status of child care is in Nova Scotia, and what needs to be done to create that system.

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<sup>12</sup> Early Childhood Education Report. *Early Childhood Education Pays Big Dividends*. Accessed on November 27, 2025, from <https://ecereport.ca/en/resources/charts-graphs-2023/workforce-report/ece-pays-big-dividends/>

<sup>13</sup> Macdonald & Friendly. (2025). *Op Cit*.

# Addressing Child Care Affordability

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At a time when too many families in Nova Scotia are struggling to make ends meet, affordable child care could be a game-changer. In our market-based system, parents still bear a significant portion of the costs of child care, which still remain too high. Building a real child care system will require lowering—if not eliminating—fees for families and shifting the costs to the public sector.

Here's the good news: for those families who can access licensed, regulated child care, costs have decreased significantly since 2019, thanks to provincial and federal investments. But that isn't the whole story.

Many families still cannot access licensed, non-profit centre-based care, the most affordable and highest-quality care available in their communities. These families are left to figure out how to pay for unlicensed care in the market. The Statistics Canada survey of parent fees does suggest that the reduction of fees for licensed spaces to an average of 50 per cent of 2019 fees has also put pressure on the market, and there is a downward trend for unlicensed care.

In most communities, the costs of Before and After School care have decreased but these programs are hard to come by, especially in rural and remote communities. In fact, the many holes in the patchwork of licensed programs mean that families with school-aged children as young as three are left to figure out child care for all the times when school is closed. Considering the

number of professional development days, March break, 8 weeks of summer holidays, and statutory and non-statutory holidays, this can prove challenging. As private providers offer care at higher costs to families, this takes up a large portion of a family's income. Most of these costs are rising as there are very few spaces for this care in the regulated, licensed market where fees are controlled.

### **Working Toward an average \$10 a day Licensed Child Care Fee**

Nova Scotia families who can access licensed, regulated child care have received a 50 per cent reduction of the average 2019 fees. The first 25 per cent reduction took effect on April 1, 2022, and the second took effect on December 31, 2022.<sup>14</sup> To reach the 50 per cent reduction target, Nova Scotia provided funding to licensed, funded child-care centres and regulated family home child-care programs to replace the revenue lost from the reduction in parent fees. This funding is based on providing parents with a daily reduction of \$18.25 per day for toddlers and preschoolers, and \$23 per day for infants.<sup>15</sup> Parents pay the market fee after subtracting the average fee reduction.

Implementing the fee reduction in this way also unfortunately froze the fee inequities across communities and between centres that existed in 2019. We know, for example, that fees were highest on average in Halifax, where for-profit centres were found to be charging as much as 35 per cent more than non-profit centres.<sup>16</sup> While licensed care fees were frozen in 2021, they could increase up to an annual capped maximum. This means average fees had already increased between 2019 and 2021, which the 2022 funding did not cover. Moreover, while Nova Scotia introduced a maximum annual cap on parent fees increases in 2016, corporate child care centres reportedly responded to this profit threat by

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<sup>14</sup> Education and Early Childhood Development (2022). *Lower Child-Care Fees for Nova Scotians* (News Release). Government of Nova Scotia. <https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20221128002>

<sup>15</sup> Child Care Nova Scotia. (2022). *How It Works: 50 Per Cent Fee Reduction*. <https://childcarenovascotia.ca/families/50-percent-fee-reduction>

<sup>16</sup> Macdonald, D., & Friendly, M. (2025). *Op Cit*.

hiking other fees like waitlist and other “premium” fees.<sup>17</sup> After pressure from Nova Scotia's child care advocacy community, the Province banned waitlist fees in its 2024-25 operating agreements signed with licensed centres.<sup>18</sup>

For these reasons, child care costs have not declined as rapidly as they could have in our communities. Many provinces have set fees, with six already reaching \$10 a day.<sup>19</sup> Without this effective approach to lowering fees, we are lagging behind the rest of the country. Halifax parents pay a median of \$24 per day for infants and \$22.25 per day for preschool-age children—among the highest rates in major cities nationally.<sup>20</sup>

We commend the Nova Scotia government for continuing to provide child care subsidies to eligible families based on their adjusted household income of less than \$70,000.<sup>21</sup> After sustained advocacy for changes to the program to emphasize children's universal access, the Province dropped the requirement for parents to either be employed or in school to be eligible for the subsidy. As of May 29, 2024, applicants are no longer required to provide a liquid asset value, allowing them to maintain their savings.<sup>22</sup> As reported in 2024, there were 4,000 families with

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<sup>17</sup> Richardson, B. (2023). *Finding (and Keeping) High-Quality Child Care in Nova Scotia: Guaranteed Disappointment with Corporate Child Care Chains*. Child Care Now Nova Scotia.

<https://novascotia.childcarenow.ca/2023/11/16/finding-and-keeping-high-quality-child-care-in-nova-scotia-guaranteed-disappointment-with-corporate-child-care-chains/>

<sup>18</sup> Education and Early Childhood Development. (2024). *Province Ensures Family-Centred Child-Care Policies, Helps Operators Manage Costs* (News Release). Government of Nova Scotia.

<https://news.novascotia.ca/en/2024/02/22/province-ensures-family-centred-child-care-policies-helps-operators-manage-costs>

<sup>19</sup> Macdonald, D., & Friendly, M. (2025). *Op Cit*.

<sup>20</sup> Macdonald, D., & Friendly, M. (2025). *Op Cit*.

<sup>21</sup> Patil, A. (2024, May 29). *Nova Scotia eases its child-care subsidy qualification*. CBC News.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/nova-scotia-eases-its-child-care-subsidy-qualifications-1.7218183>

<sup>22</sup> Child Care Nova Scotia. *Nova Scotia Child Care Subsidy Program*. Government of Nova Scotia. Child Care Subsidy Program Guidelines. Accessed on November 25, 2025, from <https://childcarenovascotia.ca/families/child-care-subsidy>

5,000 children receiving subsidies; of those, “more than 3,000 families in receipt of the subsidy access child care for free.”<sup>23</sup>

The child care subsidy can only be used for fees “charged by licensed child care facilities, approved family home child care agencies, and approved Nova Scotia Before and After Programs.” Child care fee reductions apply similarly. As mentioned previously, families with school-aged children have very few affordable, licensed options available when schools are closed. These options are limited outside of Halifax, and getting more expensive. Paying these steep costs is unfortunately a privilege for many—overnight summer camps are thought of as a right of passage for some families, but financially inaccessible to most.

As calculated in the living wage report for Halifax, the annual child care cost for a school-aged child was just over \$5,400. And families in Halifax, unlike most of the rest of the province, have access to affordable summer camp options through the Halifax Recreation Centres.<sup>24</sup> Statistics Canada surveyed Nova Scotian families to ask about the cost of child care in 2024; Table 1 shows those reported fees.

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<sup>23</sup> Education and Early Childhood Development. (2024, May 29). *Changes to Child-Care Subsidy Program* (News release). Government of Nova Scotia. <https://news.novascotia.ca/en/2024/05/29/changes-child-care-subsidy-program>

<sup>24</sup> Cerdas Sandí, D., Saulnier, C., & Williams, R. (2025). *2025 living wages for Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island: Too many workers struggle to make ends meet*. CCPA - NS. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/news-research/2025-living-wages-for-newfoundland-and-labrador-nova-scotia-and-prince-edward-island-too-many-workers-struggle-to-make-ends-meet/>



**Table 1 / Costs Reported by Nova Scotia Families, 2024<sup>25</sup>**

Group	Daily Fee	Annual Cost
Infants (under 18 months), centre-based	\$28.15	\$7,319.00
Toddlers (18 to <36 months), centre-based	\$26.46	\$6,879.60
Preschoolers (3+ years), centre-based	\$25.75	\$6,695.00
Licensed home-based (age ≤5, not in school)	\$35.29	\$9,175.40
Unlicensed home-based (age ≤5, not in school)	\$33.97	\$8,832.20

Thanks to the investments made to date, families who can access licensed care in Nova Scotia have saved a significant amount of money on child care. Families pay between \$370 to \$420 per month per child less than the 2019 fees, depending on the age of their child.<sup>26</sup>

The Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development recently cast doubt on whether Nova Scotia will meet the March 2026 deadline to lower parent fees to an average of \$10 a day.<sup>27</sup> It is important that the government stay on track to cap the fees and implement additional reductions that would provide further savings for families. However, as the next section outlines, there are not enough spaces to meet the high level of need for families throughout the province.

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<sup>25</sup>Statistics Canada. *Canadian Survey on the Provision of Child Care Services (CSPCCS)*:

<https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&Id=153503>

<sup>26</sup> Macdonald, D., & Friendly, M. (2025). *Op Cit*.

<sup>27</sup> Patil, A. (2025, July 10). *N.S. needs more help from Ottawa to hit \$10-a-day child care, says minister*. CBC News.  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/ns-needs-more-help-to-hit-child-care-10-dollar-target-1.7581862>

# Increasing the Availability of Child Care Spaces

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Affordability is only one of the challenges to accessing child care in Nova Scotia. Availability is another. When the federal government introduced its plan for affordable, high-quality child care, families nationwide eagerly opted in, wanting to take advantage of the social, economic and developmental benefits. Yet, governments were not ready for it. In the initial rollout of the CWELCC, the cost of child care had been so prohibitive that the fee reduction put more demand on a child care sector with too few spaces already. Has Nova Scotia made the necessary upfront investment to create the new spaces its families need?

The stated goal of the CWELCC is for 59 per cent of children (aged zero to six) in Nova Scotia to have access to a licensed child care space by March 2026. The government has stated it arrived at this coverage rate “based on community needs assessments, true cost of care and space planning/utilization,” though none of these details have been made public.<sup>28</sup>

A provincial coverage rate target doesn't tell us what care is actually needed or available at the community level. While the Nova Scotia government claims it is on track to reach the target provincial coverage rate, we question whether this target adequately or effectively captures what families need throughout the province.

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<sup>28</sup> Government of Canada & Government of Nova Scotia. (2021). *Op. Cit.*

The 59 per cent coverage rate is a modest goal when measured against other data points that indicate there is higher demand. All children should have access to early learning opportunities. And we know child care is crucial to gender equity: it plays a key role in ensuring equitable access to the labour market for women and helps them achieve a healthier work-life balance. One study conducted after the introduction of Nova Scotia's universal (no direct cost to parents) Provincial Pre-Primary Program found that the labour market participation rate of mothers with 4-year-old children increased by 21 per cent.<sup>29</sup> As shown in Table 2, women with young children have lower labour force participation rates than men. With rates ranging from 77 per cent to just over 87 per cent, these suggest that the coverage rate may not adequately meet the needs of women and families. The government also reports that 75 percent of children who are eligible for Pre-Primary are attending.<sup>30</sup> Taken together, and particularly considering the important financial decisions families (especially mothers) make based on the resources available to them to navigate work and care, there is reason to question whether the 59 per cent target for child care coverage is truly enough.

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas, J. (2024). *Free, full-day programming for four-year-old children in Nova Scotia and women's labour market outcomes*. Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue canadienne d'économie. <https://doi.org/10.1111/caje.12704>

<sup>30</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Nova Scotia. (2021). *Planning and implementation of the Pre-Primary Program*. Report to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. Pp. 9. [https://oag-ns.ca/sites/default/files/publications/Pre-Primary%202021%20%28inter active%29.pdf](https://oag-ns.ca/sites/default/files/publications/Pre-Primary%202021%20%28inter%20active%29.pdf)

**Table 2 / Labour Force Participation Rate (%), 24-54 years, Nova Scotia, 2024**

Family age composition	Men +	Women +
Youngest child less than 18 years	93.5	84.5
Youngest child 0 to 5 years	93.2	79.6
Youngest child 0 to 3 years	93.6	77.6
Youngest child 4 to 5 years	90.5	84.7
Youngest child 6 to 12 years	94.8	87.4
Youngest child 13 to 17 years	92.4	87.8

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0396-01 Labour force characteristics by family structure, annual, unadjusted for seasonality.

### What's happening at the community level?

The provincial coverage rate also does not tell us which families have access to care or where in the province they are located. Looking at what's happening at the community level, the CCPA found just 30 per cent of communities have reached the 59 per cent coverage target.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the CCPA also found that Nova Scotia is plagued by child care deserts—communities where at least three children are competing for a single child care space. Of all children in the province, 34 per cent live in a child care desert. The situation is worse in Nova Scotia's many rural communities, where nearly half of all children live in a child care desert, compared to the 19 per cent of children who live in a child care desert in Halifax.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Macdonald, D. (2025). *Op Cit.*

<sup>32</sup> See Figure 9, Proportion of children living in child care deserts by community size, Q1 2025 in: Macdonald, D. (2025). *Op Cit.* Pp. 30.

## What's behind the numbers?

Nova Scotia and Canada's commitment in the bilateral agreement was “to increase spaces for children from birth to age five by over 9,500.”<sup>33</sup> In November 2025, the Nova Scotia government stated, “We’re at 94 percent of that. Some of that, of course, is full-time child care, some of it is infant care, some is before- and after-school care, but we’re headed in the right direction.”<sup>34</sup> The planned targets were specific—the bilateral Nova Scotia committed to “increase the *net* number of regulated child care spaces”<sup>35</sup>—yet the government has focused on the *aggregate* total spaces created without also considering whether these represent net new spaces. The government’s accounting of how many spaces that have been lost is 1,653 since July 2021, with new spaces totalling 8,910, of which 4,160 are Before and After School spaces.<sup>36</sup> As is outlined in Table 3, net new spaces is 7,257, leaving 2,243 remaining to meet the 9,500 target number. At the end of March 2024, there was reported to be a total of 22,733 child care spaces (13,608 of which are for children zero to five in centre-based care).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Government of Canada & Government of Nova Scotia. (2021). *Op. Cit. Annex 2: Nova Scotia’s action plan for fiscal year 2021 to 2022 to fiscal year 2022 to 2023*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement/agreements-provinces-territories/nova-scotia-canada-wide-2021.html#h2.17>

<sup>34</sup> Nova Scotia House of Assembly, Standing Committee on Human Resources. (2025, November 4). *Capital plan updates on school development and maintenance initiatives and appointments to agencies, boards and commissions (Hansard transcript)*. Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services. Pp. 15. [https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/committees/hr/hr\\_20251104.pdf?20251106](https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/committees/hr/hr_20251104.pdf?20251106)

<sup>35</sup> Government of Canada and Government of Nova Scotia. (2021). *Op Cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Child Care Nova Scotia. *Early Learning & Child Care Space Creation Progress*. Government of Nova Scotia. Accessed on November 25, 2025, from <https://childcarenovascotia.ca/families/child-care-spaces>

<sup>37</sup> Friendly, M., Beach, J., Aruran, G., Cossette, A., Hu, L., Lillace, J., & Forer, B. (2024). *Op Cit.*

**Table 3 / Net Number of Child Care Spaces, Nova Scotia (Opened Minus Closed) 2021-2026**

Family age composition	2021-2023 <sup>(1)</sup>	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	Total net new
Licensed child care centres	-36	862	917	296	2039
Licensed family homes	113	357	336	252	1058
NS Before-and-After Program	768	1356	821	1215	4160
Total	845	2575	2074	1763	7257

**Notes:**

(1) 2021 to 2023 covers the time period from July 13, 2021 (when Nova Scotia signed the Canada-Nova Scotia Wide Agreement) to March 31, 2023.

Source: <https://childcarenovascotia.ca/families/child-care-spaces>

These space expansions—including the major expansion to the Before and After School Program<sup>38</sup>—should be applauded. However, these before and after school programs should have been expanded using staff from regulated centres, so educators could have been employed full-time and children would have been cared for by qualified educators. As it stands, these spaces are not licensed or registered. With only a few hours of work per day, it is challenging to recruit candidates to staff these spaces, even without specific qualifications.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Education and Early Childhood Development. (2025, August 26). *Province expands before, after school child care across Nova Scotia (News release)*. Government of Nova Scotia.

<https://news.novascotia.ca/en/2025/08/26/province-expands-after-school-child-care-across-nova-scotia>

<sup>39</sup> Aalders, C. (2025, September 18). *After-school care shortage leaves Halifax parents scrambling despite program expansion*. CBC News.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/after-school-care-shortage-leaves-halifax-parents-scrambling-despite-program-expansion-1.7635959>

According to the CCPA's analysis, as of the end of 2024, only 38 per cent of young children in the province have access to licensed full-time child care.<sup>40</sup> Between August and November of 2025, Nova Scotia announced the creation of 1,600 new spaces—but these space announcements do not provide details on the timeline for families to access them. To allow for the democratic oversight and monitoring of this publicly-funded child care system, the government should make it much easier to find data on child care, without having to comb through press releases and media reports. It is also important to consider *how* spaces are counted. Full-day spaces in centres and Before and After school spaces, though both critical for families, are not interchangeable and should not be considered equivalent in publicly reporting on the number of spaces created throughout the province.

### Continued Expansion Needed

It appears that, technically, the government will meet the 59 per cent coverage target by April 2026 for those aged under six, provided they create enough additional spaces. But, it's critical to keep in mind that a provincial coverage rate does not indicate whether spaces are available *where* families need them, nor that they are the type of spaces families need. Child care spots are not one-size-fits-all: a family with a child needing a full-day spot cannot make do with a spot in the Before and After School Program. A more detailed needs-based assessment should be done, so that families get access to the child care spaces they need beyond the original targets for under six, with more investment needed also for school-aged children as well (see Table 4 for estimates of children by age and possible child care need).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See Figure 3 Full-time child care coverage rates in: Macdonald, D. (2025). *Op Cit*. Pp. 17.

<sup>41</sup> Friendly, M., Beach, J., Aruran, G., Cossette, A., Hu, L., Lillace, J., & Forer, B. (2024). *Interim space statistics 2024: Early childhood education and care in Canada*. Childcare Resource and Research Unit. [https://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/Interim-Space-Statistics-2024-ECEC-in-Canada\\_0.pdf](https://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/Interim-Space-Statistics-2024-ECEC-in-Canada_0.pdf)



Too many families are not able to find licensed child care, leaving many with precarious, unregulated, unlicensed, for-profit, private child care options. As we explain in the next section, even for those who have access to licensed child care, 46 per cent are still for-profit, meaning these are likely unstable child care solutions for families.

**Table 4 / Children in Nova Scotia, 2024**

Age Range	Number of Children	Typical Care Needs
0- <4	33,200	Child care
4	7,000	Mix of pre-primary plus before and after school care, or full-day child care
5	8,400	Primarily before and after school care (Grade Primary students)
Total Under 6	48,600	Very mixed needs
Total 6 to 12	73,200	Primarily before and after school care
Total 0 to 12	121,800	Very mixed needs

Source: Based on Friendly, M., Beach, J., Aruran, G., Cossette, A., Hu, L., Lillace, J., &Forer, B. (2024). *Interim space statistics 2024: Early childhood education and care in Canada*. Childcare Resource and Research Unit. pp. 16

# Planning Inclusive, Quality Child Care Expansion

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We know more child care spots are needed. How to expand, however, is the critical policy challenge.

Following the evidence of child care researchers and examples of successful public child care systems internationally, the CWELCC agreements prioritize non-profit expansion and building a public system. Yet, it doesn't go far enough. The federal government has neglected to adopt the policy mechanisms necessary to ensure that this public funding is spent towards the expansion of high-quality, non-profit child care options for children and families.

The problems that come with for-profit care are well-documented.

1. For-profit centres can close without warning, leaving families suddenly in the lurch without child care options. This often puts their employment at risk as they scramble to find alternate child care.
2. For-profit centres are increasingly being identified as commercial ventures by large corporations, who use them to profit from technologies, real estate, and curricula used in child care programs instead of focusing on providing high-quality early learning and care.<sup>42</sup>
3. In any for-profit care sector, the research shows that providing quality care takes a backseat to maximizing profits, often by cutting corners. For example, Nova Scotia's current funding structure disincentivizes hiring the most qualified staff, as it costs programs \$4 more per hour to hire Level 3 versus Level 2 ECEs.

Current funding is tied to regulations that are not stringent enough to ensure that quality is not compromised because they do not require a minimum number of Level 2s and 3s. Canadian research shows that, compared to other types of ownership (non-profit or public), for-profit centres are more likely to pay poorer wages and have fewer trained ECE staff, more non-compliance with legislated staff/child ratios, poorer process quality scores, and higher likelihood of closure.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Richardson, B. (2023) Op Cit.

<sup>43</sup> Friendly, Martha; Vickerson, Rachel; Mohamed, Sophia S.; Rothman, Laurel; Nguyen, Ngoc Tho (Tegan). June 2021. Risky business: Child care ownership in Canada past, present and future.  
<https://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/Risky-business-main%20report.pdf>

The Nova Scotia bilateral funding agreement with the federal government stipulates that for-profit centres can access all the operating grants available to non-profit and public institutions to support paying for operation expenses. However, up until now, for-profits are not able to apply for funding to expand in Nova Scotia.<sup>44</sup> There was also a pilot program to provide funding to support for-profit centres to become non-profit providers, but it will take more than a pilot project to ensure the effective transformation of Nova Scotia's longstanding for-profit child care market.<sup>45</sup>

It's good news that the vast majority (97 per cent) of new spaces in Nova Scotia are non-profit spaces.<sup>46</sup> But under the current model, expansion is left to overworked child care directors or non-profit volunteer boards who must submit requests for funding to expand their centres. And, if successful, these boards must also privately fundraise a portion of what is needed. This isn't how you build a comprehensive system. Expansion needs to be carefully planned with community- and neighbourhood-level targets to eliminate child care deserts and ensure spots are located where families need them. Timing is also key. Working families must have access to wraparound child care that covers the full working day and offers flexible schedules, with a variety of options for parents who work shifts or other atypical schedules.

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<sup>44</sup>Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Create Child Care Spaces-Funding programs.Government of Nova Scotia.  
<https://childcarenovascotia.ca/creating-spaces>

<sup>45</sup>Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Information for operators.Government of Nova Scotia.  
<https://childcarenovascotia.ca/operators#003>

<sup>46</sup> Macdonald, D. (2025). *Op Cit*.

This doesn't mean reinventing the wheel. Governments have led this type of planning for other public services like education and healthcare. Nova Scotia is on the right track—of the 19 new public schools announced in 2023, 15 include planned child care centres.<sup>47</sup> Capital investments to build new child care centres must be public assets, with priority given to using existing public spaces and properties like schools, universities, and hospitals. We know all children in the Atlantic region live within 10 kilometres of an elementary school.<sup>48</sup> These existing schools could serve as sites to support future planning to improve child care access throughout the province.

Public child care comes with public accountability. Ensuring the successful design and delivery of an integrated public child care system requires meaningful involvement from a diverse array of voices, including Indigenous communities, service providers, early childhood educators, parents, advocacy organizations, unions, and researchers.

In its initial bilateral agreement, Nova Scotia committed to establishing a central organization to manage system-building. This unique innovation was celebrated by child care policy experts nationwide. Unfortunately, Nova Scotia has since quashed this critical part of its plan, that would have helped to systematically plan for continued expansion.

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<sup>47</sup> MacDonald, G. (2025, November 5). *Will Nova Scotia have \$10-a-day child care and reach its daycare target?*. The Chronicle Herald.  
<https://www.saltwire.com/nova-scotia/will-nova-scotia-have-10-a-day-child-care-and-reach-its-daycare-target>

<sup>48</sup> Macdonald, D. (2025). Op Cit.

Instead, the Province implemented an Engagement Table, an advisory board consisting of volunteer early learning and child care advocates, operators, educators, and researchers. The Engagement Table offers an important space for ongoing community input, and is another novel Nova Scotia engagement mechanism that has not been replicated in other jurisdictions. However, because it meets infrequently and lacks official authority, it cannot play the role of effectively ensuring the equitable rollout of child care throughout the province. The promised central agency could have done so.

It's not too late to honour the original promise. Nova Scotia can still establish a central organization with the capacity to provide the oversight and accountability needed to ensure the implementation of a public system of this scope and scale. This agency would prove an indispensable democratic mechanism to guide the continuous development of a public, quality, affordable, and accessible system of child care, one that meets the diverse needs of families in every community.

The CWELCC is an opportunity not only to transform child care, but to build a network of strong public services and think creatively about how to provide significant and life-changing services *to* the public *from* the public. This could include providing holistic and integrated services that combine hospitals and child care, post-secondary education and child care, or care for the elderly and child care. Nova Scotia has already made strides in this area by announcing the expansion of child care at several universities and newly built schools throughout the province.<sup>49</sup> Yet, we will need more of these investments to build a truly high-quality system.

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<sup>49</sup> See press releases by the Department of Education and Early Childhood: [https://news.novascotia.ca/search/all?search\\_keyword=&created=&created\\_1=&field\\_category=All&field\\_topics=300](https://news.novascotia.ca/search/all?search_keyword=&created=&created_1=&field_category=All&field_topics=300)

# Recognizing and Rewarding Early Childhood Educators as Skilled-Professionals

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Nova Scotia's child care workforce deserves fair wages and benefits that reflect the value of their skills and contributions. ECEs are not "daycare" workers or babysitters. They are trained educators who deliver quality child care and early learning opportunities to our youngest community members during the most crucial years of their development.

The CWELCC promised high-quality care and enriching opportunities to support children's growth and development, *and* to value the early childhood workforce. Expansion cannot come at the expense of care quality. Nova Scotia must invest in the ECEs who provide care in new and existing spaces throughout the province, and has thankfully made some significant strides in this direction.

In 2023, after years of community advocacy, Nova Scotia became the first province to introduce a defined benefits and pension plan for all full- and part-time employees in the early learning and child care sector, with additional promises for funding towards health and retirement savings plans (RSPs) to family home child care providers. According to the Province, about 3,000 ECEs and other child care professionals working in licensed centres across Nova Scotia benefited from this pension.



This was a groundbreaking move that makes Nova Scotia a standout nationally among advocates. Finally, new ECEs in Nova Scotia could foresee a career in the field. However, contribution rates for both employees and employers (i.e., educators and the Government of Nova Scotia) are five per cent. Pensions are only as strong as the contributions made to them, and the Province's employer contributions remain too low, as do educators' wages.

Nova Scotia's ECE wage grid—the scale determining pay based on qualifications and experience—remains insufficient to attract and retain workers, particularly given that the province has historically had among the lowest average annual earnings for educators in Canada. However, some ECEs whose wages exceeded those in the wage grid (notably at unionized centres) had their wages “red-circled” in 2022, meaning their existing base wages were frozen, with annual percentage adjustments applied to the equivalent wage on the grid (not their base wage) for their experience and credentials.<sup>50</sup> This freeze can result in a significant loss of wages over their career. That red-circling is unfair to those workers, many of whom have won those gains through collective bargaining at unionized workplaces. Should a centre choose to pay the percentage increase based on the red-circled wage, the government will not cover it, meaning centres would need to fundraise the additional resources to do so. In summary, while the Province increased the wage grid by roughly 15 per cent in 2024 to offset the addition of pension contributions,<sup>51</sup> and have since provided additional increases, many ECEs still earn below a provincial weighted living wage of \$27.60/hour.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Early Learning and Child Care.(2025, March). Quality Investment Grant Operator Guide. Government of Nova Scotia. [https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/qigoperatorguide\\_en.pdf](https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/qigoperatorguide_en.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> CBC News. (2023, December 20). *N.S. announces wage hikes, benefits and pension for child-care workers*. CBC News.<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/wage-increases-benefits-pension-package-child-care-workers-1.7064933>

<sup>52</sup> Cerdas Sandí, D., Saulnier, C., & Williams, R. (2025). Op Cit.

As confirmed in the province's latest directive in November 2025, future wage increases are now aligned with broader public-sector compensation. This means ECEs will receive the same annual adjustments as management and non-union government-funded positions, including the 2024 directive that authorized a three per cent increase for the 2024-25 fiscal year and a two per cent increase for the 2025-26 fiscal year. The 2025 directive provided another 2.5 per cent retroactive increase for 2024, and a further two per cent in both 2026-27 and 2027-28.<sup>53</sup> The newest memo did not include a note about unionized centres, which in previous memos stipulated that wages of ECEs working in unionized centres will be addressed through collective bargaining with through a collective agreement or memoranda of understanding that includes terms agreeing to these wage increases.

Nova Scotia's pension and benefits plan is a strong recruitment and retention policy—but it isn't enough. Expansion of spaces will require significant increases in staffing, and the leadership and mentorship of experienced educators will be needed to orient new workers and keep centres afloat. The recruitment and retention of ECEs relies on continued improvement in compensation, support for training, and meaningful professional development opportunities. We know funding quality child care brings better wages and working conditions for the female-dominated early childhood education workforce.

In their latest Action Plan, the Province promises to pursue a new ECE certification model that recognizes the knowledge and skills educators need to acquire during their training to perform their roles effectively. The details are vague, but shouldn't be. We know international benchmarks identify a post-secondary education as the gold standard for ELCC training, and a minimum of two-thirds of staff working directly with children should hold qualifying post-secondary credentials.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Early Learning and Child Care. (2025, November 10). *Early Childhood Educator Wage Rates*. Government of Nova Scotia. <https://childcarenovascotia.ca/ececompensation>

<sup>54</sup> UNICEF. (2008). The Child Care Transition. A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries. Innocenti Report Card 8.

The government must invest in post-secondary education to support Nova Scotia's ECE workforce, providing affordable (if not free) educational opportunities in our province's public post-secondary programs.<sup>55</sup> Workforce retraining and skills development programs must prioritize inclusion by providing opportunities for migrant and racialized workers, offering secure employment options for migrant caregivers which would also serve to diversify the child care sector. These investments can also be seen as part of a green jobs strategy, supporting workers (especially women) in the just transition to the green economy.

Like teachers, ECEs need opportunities to participate in paid ongoing professional development, and to receive inclusion training as part of their degrees—not on the job, tacked onto the end of a busy work day—to support the needs of all children of all racial and cultural backgrounds and across the spectrum of needs and abilities.

Capital, public planning, and funding for stronger wages and benefits for ECEs to recruit and retain the workforce to staff new spaces will be critical to expanding child care across Nova Scotia. These choices can't be made in isolation. Policy decisions about wages, benefits, and pensions for our ECE workforce must be made collaboratively, with direct involvement of labour unions and other organizations representing these workers, and could be coordinated through the promised central agency discussed above.

A strong workforce strategy can be a boon to skills training and job development for the ECEs who provide that care. By supporting educators, Nova Scotia can take full advantage of this critical opportunity to build a sustainable child care system that will serve its children for generations to come.

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UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. Florence.  
<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/659895?v=pdf#files>

<sup>55</sup> Child Care Now (2024). *A summary of early learning and child care workforce policies as of December 2023 under the Canada-wide child care system*. Child Care Now.  
[https://childcarenow.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2024/07/CCN\\_workforce-policy-report\\_EN.pdf](https://childcarenow.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2024/07/CCN_workforce-policy-report_EN.pdf)

Thanks to recent developments, new educators will have a predictable retirement benefit based on their pre-retirement salary and years of service, but the same can't be said for the veteran ECEs who have been paid poor wages throughout their careers. The pension comes too late for those nearing retirement, who will have to pay into a pension for the rest of their careers—likely struggling to do so—and still retire with little support. Amidst the current cost of living crisis, five per cent is a steep price to pay for many. The plan is also only available to those in licensed centres, meaning educators in the unlicensed Before and After School program cannot participate, despite this being where most new child care spaces—and jobs for workers in the child care sector—are being created. These programs should have been expanded under the auspices of regulated centres where educators could have been employed full-time and accessed associated benefits.

# Recommendations

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The roadmap to deliver a system of universal, comprehensive, publicly funded, high-quality, affordable, accessible, accountable, non-profit early learning and child care, is clear. These recommendations explain in detail what is needed to build this system, advancing social inclusion and creating the future all Nova Scotians deserve.

- **Increased Investment: More sustained, long-term investment** is necessary to ensure that families can access high-quality, licensed, and regulated, non-profit universal care in communities across all provinces and regions. We need likely **three times more** than what is being spent nationally. The current funding model used for child care operations does not address all of the financial obligations necessary for the delivery of quality child care services.
- **Affordable Fees:** Public funding should be provided to cover **100 per cent of the operating costs** of licensed child care. Parent fees should be collected centrally, working towards a capped, regulated, and set provincial fee of \$10 per day by April 2026, with free access to those whose incomes make them eligible for Nova Scotia's subsidy program.

- **Planned Space Expansion:** The CWELCC target provincial coverage rate of 59 per cent is inadequate. Child care should be seen as an investment in children with a target of universal coverage, like for public schools. We also need **community-level targets** based on family needs.
  - **Equitable Expansion:** The expansion of non-profit and public child care must be supported by **public capital funding and determined based on need and equity considerations**, including geography, age of child, family needs, learning requirements, and cultural and linguistic needs. Capital investments to build new child care centres must be public assets, and priority should be placed in public spaces and properties.
  - **Public/Non-profit Expansion:** Funding should be provided to encourage for-profit providers to become non-profit, supporting existing non-profit organizations to assume operations, and the government should have the **right of first refusal** before any for-profit child care centre is sold. An evidence-based approach ensures all further expansion of early learning and child care services are only public and non-profit.

- **Valuing Educators:** Early Childhood Educators deserve guaranteed decent wages that recognize the value of their work. More investment is needed to retain current ECEs and recruit new ones, with publicly-funded wage grids that start at a wage no lower than the calculated living wage rate. ECEs whose wages were above the grid should not have had their wages frozen (“red-circled”), and receive percentage increases based on their actual salary.
  - **Recognizing Pay Equity for ECEs:** Following the lead of New Brunswick,<sup>56</sup> the government should recognize how the current grid underplays the value of this work, and undertake an examination of gender wage differentials compared to male-dominated jobs of equal value.
  - **Professional Development:** Nova Scotia needs to allocate adequate resources for paid professional development, and additional training spaces and bursaries to offer affordable (if not free) **educational opportunities** in our public post-secondary programs.

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<sup>56</sup> Government of New Brunswick. *Pay Equity Program – Child Care Sector*. Accessed on November 27, 2025, from [https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/services/services\\_renderer.201246.Pay\\_Equity\\_Program\\_-\\_Child\\_Care\\_Sector.html](https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/services/services_renderer.201246.Pay_Equity_Program_-_Child_Care_Sector.html)



- **System Transformation:** There needs to be a **fundamental system change** where the government directly funds services, rather than providers relying on parent fees to cover operating costs. Nova Scotia should end the call for proposals-style expansion, and instead implement a central body to be responsible for system planning.
  - **Wraparound Care:** Families need access to wraparound quality education and care—all year, every day—to ensure a seamless system that is not dependent on public schools being open.
  - **High-Quality Care:** Minimum legislated requirements should be strengthened for post-secondary education, training and experience to better reflect the best practice evidence of credentials needed for all, ensuring all those working with young children in regulated child care settings have **appropriate credentials**. Both ratios and credentials must be strengthened, recognizing ages 0 to 5 as the most critical developmental stage for children. Minimal standards should also be developed for support staff and those in before and afterschool care.
  - **Minimum Staffing Requirements:** Recognizing children's inclusion needs and high supervisory loads for staff, the **legislated minimal staffing requirements need to be strengthened** with lower ratios of children per educator. There should also be mandated minimums for the numbers of minimum Level 2 and 3 educators required in each classroom.

- **More Community Engagement:** There should be **more meaningful opportunities for involvement** in decision-making in the development of Nova Scotia's child care program. The Province's Engagement Table has been important, but there is still a need for enhanced engagement from Indigenous communities, service providers, early childhood educators, parent and community groups, unions, and researchers.
- **Better Oversight and Monitoring:** Funding should be allocated for data collection, research, and **ongoing evaluation** to ensure the long-term sustainability and viability of Nova Scotia's child care program, so it can serve our province for generations to come.

# Conclusion

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Child care, like other social policies, falls under the responsibility of the provinces. Yet, the federal government has a key role to play in providing and funding a coherent framework of principles and standards for child care administration throughout Canada.

*Bill C-35: An Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada* passed through the Senate and received Royal Assent in 2024, enshrining the federal government's commitment to sustaining a universal child care system through continued funding to provinces into law. This was a key step, ensuring the CWELCC will live on for years to come.

However, Bill C-35 unfortunately does not enshrine any model of principles and standards for a non-profit pan-Canadian child care system, nor does it include any accountability measures to ensure federal funding is allocated to expand licensed and public, non-profit child care programs and services.<sup>57</sup> As a result, public funding could continue to be invested in the creation of poorer-quality child care.

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<sup>57</sup> Child Care Now. (2023, November 7). *Senate should amend Child Care Act to rule out federal funding for informal arrangements*. <https://childcarenow.ca/2023/11/07/senate-should-amend-child-care-act-to-rule-out-federal-funding-for-informal-arrangements/>

Bill C-35 also doesn't specify *how much* funding the federal government needs to provide provinces and territories to sustain their child care program, meaning federal support could be insufficient to sustain a high-quality child care system nationwide. A major barrier to progress in Canadian social policy is fear of provincial and territorial governments that the federal government will launch new social programs but fail to help sustain them. We must continue to push for stable and sufficient federal funding to be provided on an ongoing basis, and advocate that the Bill be amended to ensure this funding is tied to conditions for accountability.

In March 2025, Nova Scotia's bilateral agreement with the federal government was extended until 2031, meaning the Province can continue building a strong system of early learning and child care for its children, families, and educators.

The federal government must work to build and maintain trust with the provinces and territories by ensuring sustained, predictable and lasting funding for early learning and child care. The lack of new funding in the 2025 federal budget is not going to foster this trust.

Though there have been many promising steps forward in the implementation of the CWELCC so far, some critical concerns and questions remain:

- Will the Province take the lead in building a non-profit child care system by minimizing barriers to non-profit and public expansion of the CWELCC?
- Will it support participatory, centralized planning based on community needs, and reduce individual operators' fundraising requirements?
- Will the Province ensure there are meaningful opportunities for ongoing community input from parents, families, and educators, beyond the Engagement Table?

- Have the federal and provincial governments made significant investments in early childhood educators—the backbone of any child care system—to ensure both the retention of our current workforce and recruitment of additional educators?
- Will the federal government and the Province continue to invest in child care beyond the initial bilateral commitments, to improve and expand this crucial system?
- Does the CWELCC represent a fundamental system change, transforming the patchwork system of early learning and child care that has failed to support families in Nova Scotia for years adequately? Or will it ultimately end up just tinkering with the market-based system?
- Will Nova Scotia successfully build a child care system that is universal, comprehensive, and truly inclusive?

By signing the bilateral agreement with the federal government to create a child care system, the Province committed to providing this public good of early learning and child care opportunities. If done correctly, Nova Scotia will reap its benefits for generations to come.

In 2021, we shared with excitement that, after decades of advocacy, a universal, comprehensive, publicly funded, high-quality, affordable, accessible, accountable, and non-profit system of Early Learning and Child Care was finally on the horizon. Still, today, we are at that horizon. We are still excited by the opportunities the CWELCC presents to transform the lives of children and families across our province—and there is still a growing community of evidence and expertise mobilized to move this vision forward.

Indeed, this is a historic moment for social policy in Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia has the responsibility and the opportunity to develop a high-quality public system of early learning and child care. The government is on the right track, and we have outlined the roadmap to follow to take full advantage of the investments that have been made. Any detours would risk depriving Nova Scotia's children of the early learning, care, and child development opportunities they deserve, and its cascading benefits for our province for years to come.

## About the authors

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