



The Muttart Foundation

Highlights

A Roadmap to Quality Early Learning and Child Care in Saskatchewan

A renewed vision

- All children in Saskatchewan have access to high-quality, inclusive, regulated early learning and child care programs that are responsive to their needs, cultures, and disposition.
- Child care programs provide children opportunities to play and learn, develop friendship, and form meaningful relationship with their peers and the educators who care for them.
- All families have access to an affordable, high quality, convenient, suitable early learning and child care program that supports them. Parents have opportunities for meaningful involvement in their children's child care programs.
- Early learning and child care programs are staffed by well-educated, fairly-compensated educators, who enjoy good working conditions, have opportunities for ongoing learning and career advancement, and are respected for their contributions to the well-being, education and development of children.
- Early learning and child care services are located in well-designed and situated buildings; programs have adequate, stable funding to ensure stability, viability and security. Services are informed by best practice and contribute to our understanding of the importance of high-quality early learning and child care to a just and equitable society.
- While early learning and child care must be universal in approach, additional supports and processes are needed to address and reduce barriers to access. Children with developmental delays or disabilities are welcomed into and are able to fully participate in all child care settings with the supports they require. Programs serving newcomer families, low-income families, and families living in conditions of risk have the resources necessary to provide the additional supports that may be needed.

Key guiding principles to transforming child care

- Indigenous governments will design and develop ELCC systems and services that are distinctions- based and self-governed consistent with the vision and principles set out in the [*Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework*](#) and the commitments made under the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.
- All early learning and child care services must be:
 - o Focused on the best interests and rights of children and the inherent value of childhood;
 - o Equitably available to all Saskatchewan families, with particular attention given to families living in conditions of risk or vulnerability, and to families who have a child with a developmental
 - o Provided by non-profit and public entities, supported by public policy and funding, content experts, professional associations and parents;
 - o Publicly planned, developed and managed through collaboration and consultation with public and community partners to advance the objectives of a comprehensive child care system;

- Sustainable, ensuring capital investments are sustained with adequate ongoing operating funds, and adequate human resources to deliver quality services; and
- Accountable, through ongoing planning, data collection and analysis, monitoring, ongoing public participation and engagement, and public reporting.

What's needed from Saskatchewan government

- Purposeful public planning of services to meet community needs
- Encouragement of public delivery of child care services (for example, by municipal government) when a non-profit organization is not in place or able to meet needed service
- Development of coherent policies that reduce the barriers to children's participation in ELCC
- Development of timetables and targets for system-building and allocation of adequate public financial and other resources
- Active involvement of service providers, child care advocates and communities in the transformation of early learning and child care
- Regular data collection, monitoring and evaluation of progress; full transparency and accountability including the public sharing of information on progress

How to make child care services affordable for families and improve quality at the same time

- The provincial government should implement a funding model for regulated services that allocates sufficient public funding to provider to cover the cost of providing high quality programs, including the cost of fair wages and improved working conditions for educators and other staff. It is impossible to recruit and retain qualified early childhood educators if they are not compensated properly. Compensation (and related public funding) should be determined according to a provincial wage grid.
- Parents or guardians of children in regulated programs should contribute to the provincial government's costs based on household income. Parent fees must be affordable as determined by the government in consultation with early learning and child care stakeholders, advocates and social justice groups.
- Regulated child care providers receiving public funding must be accountable for the funds they spend and meet funding criteria established by the provincial government. For example, publicly-funded providers must conform to regulations, they must welcome all children into the program, they must pay staff in accordance with any established provincial wage scale and benefit package.

How to increase access to affordable high quality child care services

- The provincial government must develop in consultation with the child care sector, advocates and community partners (including municipalities), a comprehensive, multi-year expansion plan for regulated early learning and child care in the province
- The plan must give priority to making child care services available and accessible to under-served communities and population
- The Ministry of Education, working in partnership with other government ministries, should develop an inventory of existing and proposed new public buildings and facilities that have space that could be repurposed or developed to house a licensed child care program. The Ministry should further review and consider the potential for new purpose-built child care facilities to be developed on publicly owned land. There may also be existing school buildings that have space that could be re-purposed to house a child care program, or school lands on which a child care centre might be developed.
- The provincial government should develop a "child care in schools" policy to support more stable and standardized occupancy agreements for child care centres located in schools.

- The provincial government should review and assess the potential merits of supporting the transition of existing unlicensed centre-based programs, part-day preschools and school age programs located in schools, into a regulated child care system. Where feasible and desirable, bringing unlicensed programs into the regulated sector has the potential to expand provision, provide funding to facilities and increase affordability for parents.
- Prior to any expansion of family child care, the Ministry of Education should undertake a formal review of the models for family child care delivery to determine how best family child care can form part of a publicly managed early learning and child care system.