

Early learning and child care in New Brunswick

Provided to the Department of Education and
Early Childhood Development

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- a) to be an independent body that provides advice to the Minister on matters of importance to women and their substantive equality;
- b) to bring to the attention of government and the public issues of interest and concern to women and their substantive equality;
- c) to include and engage women of diverse identities, experiences and communities, women's groups and society in general;
- d) to be strategic and provide advice on emerging and future issues; and
- e) to represent New Brunswick women.

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About this submission

The Council welcomes the opportunity to provide input on early learning and child care (ELCC) for children ages 0-5 through the education plan consultations.¹ This submission examines many of the changes to ELCC in recent years, noting both successes and ongoing challenges. It also seeks to bring tensions in government's approach to ELCC to the foreground, as addressing these will be essential to the continued progress and long-term stability of the sector.

ELCC in New Brunswick

In New Brunswick, ELCC is regulated and licensed by government and delivered by private operators via for-profit centres, not-for-profit centres, and ELCC homes.² It is funded by significant public investment and fees paid by families.

Since 2018, government has been steadily moving the sector away from a patchwork of programs, policies, and providers toward a system of ELCC. This largely began with the introduction of the designation program for facilities in 2018 under the Canada-New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Agreement - 2017 to 2020. It has continued under various subsequent agreements, including the Canada-New Brunswick Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (Canada-Wide Agreement), which focuses only on designated spaces.³

The designation program was created to increase the quality, inclusivity, public funding, and public management of ELCC for children ages 0-5. Under the program, participating facilities receive increased funding and the families that use them are eligible for increased subsidies. In return, designated facilities follow policies that include capped fees and additional requirements on quality, training, and inclusion.

Participation is voluntary and government supports that existed before the designation program was created remain in place for non-designated facilities and the families that use them. Due to the significant benefits of designation, however, uptake was swift and significant. At the time of rollout, government's goal was for all facilities in the province to participate; by June 2019, government reported that nearly 90 per cent of centres and 70 per cent of homes were designated.⁴ Those numbers have only increased in subsequent years.⁵

¹ The Council's recommendations were originally submitted to government in 2025. This document contains the same analysis and recommendations, but a number of explanatory sections have been updated to ensure greater clarity for readers outside of GNB.

² This submission uses *facilities* when referring to all three types collectively; otherwise, references to specific types are intentional.

³ All the agreements referenced in this paragraph and elsewhere in this submission are available [online](#).

⁴ Government of New Brunswick, "[Government surpasses target of 30,000 licensed child care spaces](#)" (media release). June 6, 2019.

⁵ Government of New Brunswick, [Canada-New Brunswick Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care \(ELCC\) Agreement Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2023-2024](#) (March 2025), p. 4.

While the Council welcomed many aspects of the designation program, it noted⁶ that government was still not able to control where spaces were created across the province, posing a significant limitation to its public management of the sector. The Council also found that the designation program offered little to encourage the sector to shift toward not-for-profit delivery.

After signing the Canada-Wide Agreement in late 2021, many aspects of the designation program were enshrined in legislation and regulation in spring 2022. Government also introduced [Policy 901](#) to the program in November 2022. While Policy 901 has been revised multiple times, the following details were in place at the time of rollout and remain in place now. Under Policy 901, government outlined a new process for designating facilities that involved calls for proposals based on a Preschool Space Allocation Grid. These calls set the number of new designated spaces available in specific communities based on need and they include a breakdown of anglophone and francophone spaces. The process also prioritizes not-for-profit centres and ELCC homes. Other requirements, such as the provision of infant spaces, can be imposed under the policy as well. It also allows for temporary increases to spaces and reallocation of unused spaces.

It is critical to note that facilities cannot have both designated and undesignated spaces—either all spaces are designated or none are. Given this, under Policy 901, existing operators of designated facilities who want to expand must apply to do so. New or existing facilities that want to become designated must also apply. While a facility can always forgo designation, the benefits of the program are difficult to pass up. Additionally, designation appeals to families because of enhanced fee subsidies, creating further pressure on facilities to participate in the program.

With most facilities in the province participating in the designation program, the introduction of Policy 901 provided government with significant control over space creation—an important step in increasing its public management of the sector.

While considerable gains have been made on many fronts in ELCC in New Brunswick, tensions and challenges around for-profit vs. not-for-profit delivery persist. The following section delves deeper into this.

For-profit and not-for-profit ELCC

Broaching the topic of not-for-profit vs. for-profit ELCC in the province often leads to discussion about how most for-profit centres are not really making profit. Additionally, all facilities are guided by the regulations and most also follow the additional designation program requirements. Given this, does it matter if a facility is not-for-profit or for-profit?

To understand this issue, it helps to be clear that ELCC is a form of education. It is right there in the title: *early learning* and child care. It is why staff working directly with children are called educators and ELCC falls under the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development—that pairing with education is not a

⁶ New Brunswick Women's Council, [Submission on early learning and childcare in New Brunswick](#) (August 2022), p. 4.

coincidence. Given this, there is a tension around the fact that in a jurisdiction that believes in public universal education until grade 12, ELCC is privately delivered. In the absence of a public system, not-for-profit ELCC delivery is often uplifted for two main reasons: governance and quality.

In terms of governance, the not-for-profit model is about collectivity and social purpose. Not-for-profits have members; these members elect a board of directors to govern the organization according to its purpose for the benefit of the people and communities it serves. When there are surplus funds, they are reinvested in the organization. For-profits are structured differently. They allow for a concentration of decision-making and power in a single owner-operator. This simply does not align with our societal approach to education as a public good.

This is not a critique of the motivations or leadership of for-profit providers. Instead, it is the reality of the drawbacks of the for-profit structure that many centres opt to use, often for good reason—including the challenges not-for-profit governance, which will be explored later in this submission.

Research also consistently shows that not-for-profit centres provide higher quality than for-profit centres. Not-for-profit centres have been found to score higher on measures relating to classroom environment (including activities, materials, and teaching interactions) and workforce. Again, this is not a critique of any individual provider, but rather the findings of repeated analyses of the issue.⁷

Against this background, increasing the share of not-for-profit ELCC has long been a topic of discussion. In 2016, the Child Care Task Force that was convened to make independent recommendations on ELCC in the province proposed that licenses only be issued to not-for-profit facilities moving forward and that existing for-profit facilities be supported and encouraged to become not-for-profit.⁸ The Canada-Wide Agreement also focuses on “creating more high-quality, affordable regulated child care spaces, predominantly through not-for-profit and family child care homes.”⁹ Both the 2021-2023 and 2023-2026 action plans under the Canada-Wide Agreement reference supporting for-profit facilities to transition into not-for-profits.

Despite the Child Care Task Force’s recommendation and the commitments in the Canada-Wide Agreement, government’s 2021-2023 action plan hedged the shift toward not-for-profit centres. The action plan included a caveat to allow a larger number of new spaces to be for-profit if needed and did not provide

⁷ Gordon Cleveland and Michael Krashinsky, “The Nonprofit Advantage, Producing Quality in Thick and Thin Child Care Markets” (*Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 28, 3, 2009).

Martha Friendly et al., “Risky Business: Child care ownership in Canada, past, present and future” (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2021), p. 31-38.

David Macdonald, *Cash Cow: Assessing child care space creation progress* (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, August 2025), p. 20-21.

⁸ Province of New Brunswick, *Valuing Children, Families and Childcare. New Brunswick Child Care Review Task Force Final Report* (Child Care Task Force, August 2016), p. 41.

⁹ [Canada – New Brunswick Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement](#), 1.2 b.

details on how government would support the voluntary transition of existing for-profits into not-for-profits. The Council also noted that the action plan attempted to blur the line between not-for-profits and for-profits using the language of “social purpose organizations.”¹⁰

The 2023-2026 action plan reiterated the commitment to supporting the development of not-for-profit spaces and included some material supports to this end (e.g., while for-profit and not-for-profit centres are eligible for the same capital preconstruction funding under the Canada-Wide agreement, there is additional funding available exclusively to not-for-profits from the Regional Development Corporation and through the Canada-New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Infrastructure Agreement).¹¹ Despite this, the plan also significantly shifted the goal post for not-for-profit space creation.

For-profit vs. not-for-profit space creation

The Canada-Wide Agreement requires that New Brunswick create 3 400 new designated ELCC spaces. The first action plan under the agreement (2021-2023) specified that 2 400 of these spaces would be in not-for-profit centres and ELCC homes¹² and 1 000 spaces would be in for-profit centres—but it also included the aforementioned caveat that the number of for-profit spaces could be increased if needed, subject to discussion with the federal government.¹³

The second action plan under the Canada-Wide Agreement (2023-2026) remained committed to the creation of 3 400 spaces but adjusted the balance of for-profit and not-for-profit spaces. Under the second plan, the division of spaces is at least 1 735 in not-for-profit centres and ELCC homes and at most 1 665 in for-profit centres.¹⁴ This reduces the target for not-for-profit space creation from 70 per cent of new spaces to 51 per cent.

In addition to changing the balance of not-for-profit and for-profit space creation under the 2023-2026 action plan, government’s 2023-2024 budget invested \$4 million in for-profit designated space creation outside of the Canada-Wide Agreement.¹⁵

¹⁰ New Brunswick Women’s Council, [Submission on early learning and childcare in New Brunswick](#). August 2022, p. 8-9.

¹¹ Province of New Brunswick, [Canada-New Brunswick Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement New Brunswick Action Plan 2023-2026 Abridged Version](#) (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, August 2024), p. 10-11.

¹² Despite being grouped with not-for-profit centres in the agreement and related reporting, ELCC homes are for-profit.

¹³ Province of New Brunswick, [Canada-New Brunswick Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement New Brunswick Action Plan 2021-2023](#) (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development), p. 19.

¹⁴ Province of New Brunswick, [Canada-New Brunswick Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement New Brunswick Action Plan 2023-2026 Abridged Version](#) (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development), p. 10.

¹⁵ Government of New Brunswick, [“Education investments to support enrolment growth, inclusion and child care”](#) (media release). April 18, 2023.

Among other concerns this raises, the appearance of shifting priorities creates greater uncertainty and confusion for current and potential ELCC operators. Government's decision to increase for-profit spaces may ultimately disincentivize existing or future for-profit providers from shifting to a not-for-profit model.

The 2023-2024 annual report on the Canada-Wide Agreement is the most recent available reporting on space creation.¹⁶ It shares that 1 020 net new designated spaces¹⁷ have been created under the agreement.¹⁸ "Net new" means that this number accounts for openings minus closures. It also means that only actually new spaces are counted (i.e., spaces that existed *before* the agreement and became designated *after* it was signed are not counted as new spaces). Of these net new designated spaces created under the agreement, 70 per cent were in for-profit centres and 30 per cent in not-for-profit centres (none were in ELCC homes).¹⁹

The report also shares that as of March 31, 2024, an additional 1 986 spaces had been allocated under the agreement, meaning they were not actually created yet but had been approved for facilities. Of these, 51 per cent of these were in not-for-profit centres, 44 per cent were in for-profit centres, and 5 per cent were ELCC homes.²⁰

Neither the reported net new or allocated numbers for designated spaces under the agreement are broken down by part-time vs. full-time spaces in the report.

The report also includes an account of all licensed 0-5 spaces in the province as of March 31, 2024. It captures all licensed spaces, regardless of their designation status or whether they were created under the Canada-Wide Agreement or not. It reports 17 313 licensed spaces in the province, of which 67 per cent were in for-profit centres.²¹ A breakdown of part-time vs. full-time spaces is provided.

¹⁶ The [Cash Cow: Assessing child care space creation progress](#) report from the Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives published data on space creation under the Canada-Wide Agreement that captures up to Q1 of 2025 but the Council has opted against using it for two reasons. First, it counts spaces differently than the federal and provincial governments do for the purposes of the agreement. The report states that by the end of Q1 2025 New Brunswick had exceeded the Canada-Wide Agreement target of creating 3 400 net new spaces (p.13-15). In December 2025, however, government advised the Council that while all 3 400 net new spaces had been allocated, they have not yet all been created. Second, the report may have counted spaces that existed before the agreement but became designated under the agreement as new spaces.

¹⁷ Government of New Brunswick, [Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care \(ELCC\) Agreement Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2023-2024](#) (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, March 2025), p. 8

¹⁸ "Under the agreement" would mean that designated spaces created through the \$4 million dollar investment outside of the agreement would not be included in the count, though it is unlikely any spaces had been created from that funding in 2023-2024.

¹⁹ P. 8

²⁰ P. 9.

²¹ P. 26.

The following section explores the availability and distribution of spaces and how these tie into government's rationale for increasing for-profit space creation.

Availability and distribution of spaces

As the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) notes in their report *Cash Cow: Assessing child care space creation progress*, raw information about increased and total spaces alone does not provide adequate context. Evaluating space availability requires comparing the number of licensed spaces to the number of children who could potentially fill them; this is a coverage rate. It is expressed as the number of licensed spaces per ten children under age 6 in the province and it provides a clearer measure of whether families can realistically find care.²²

The CCPA reports²³ New Brunswick's overall coverage rate for spaces for children ages 0-5 at Q1 2025 was 4.6,²⁴ which is below the federal benchmark of 5.9 spaces per ten children.²⁵

Coverage also is not equal or equitable across the province. According to the CCPA, as of Q1 2025, 17 per cent of non-school age children live in so-called childcare deserts; 33 per cent live in areas with inadequate coverage; and 49 per cent live in areas at or above federal target.²⁶ This means that less than half of New Brunswick's non-school aged children live in communities with sufficient ELCC access.

Proportionally, 30 per cent of children in rural areas live in in childcare deserts, compared with 4 per cent of children in large cities (more than 100 000 people), 6 per cent in mid-sized communities (30 000-100 000), and 10 per cent in small towns (under 30 000).²⁷ As the CCPA observes, even with the ongoing expansion of ELCC since the start of the Canada-Wide Agreement in 2021, New Brunswick is unlikely to reach a level of

²² P. 15.

²³ While the Council opted against using the CCPA's *Cash Cow* report for space creation, it is using it for coverage rates as the nuances of what constitutes a new space under the Canada-Wide Agreement are not relevant here. It should be noted, however, that the CCPA calculates coverage rates differently than reporting on the Canada-Wide Agreement does. The CCPA uses Statistics Canada population projections for the calculation while the government uses census data. Given this, the [2023-2024 annual report on the Canada-Wide Agreement](#) provided a coverage rate of 55 per cent as of March 31, 2024 (p. 7). Both the CCPA and government count all spaces, not just those created under the agreement, for coverage rates.

²⁴ Figure 3, p. 17.

²⁵ As part of their Canada-Wide Agreements, New Brunswick and seven other provinces agreed to a coverage rate target of 5.9 full-time licensed spaces for every 10 children under age six. As Macdonald explains, "It is worth pointing out that a target child care coverage rate of 59 percent is relatively low and likely won't eliminate parent frustration about the difficulty finding a spot, but it would be a good start and is certainly a reasonable short-term goal" (p. 16).

²⁶ Figure 7, p. 26. *Child care desert* is less than 3 spaces per 10 children; *inadequate coverage* is between 3 and 5.8 spaces per 10 children; and *at or above the federal target* is at or over 5.9 spaces per 10 children.

²⁷ Figure 9, p. 30.

coverage that meaningfully eases the pressure on parents searching for care, particularly for families living outside of major and mid-sized cities.²⁸

Despite these challenges, New Brunswick's progress is significant and improving: between 2022 and 2025, the proportion of children living at or above the federal coverage target increased by roughly 10 percentage points, one of the strongest gains among provinces.²⁹

Additionally, while the proportion of children in childcare deserts in rural New Brunswick may seem high, it is among the lowest in Canada (on par with PEI and Quebec).³⁰

The challenges for ELCC in rural areas identified in the 2023-2026 action plan include “fewer not-for-profit child care providers and experienced individuals in the sector ready to expand or create new spaces, a lack of infrastructure that can be leveraged, and difficulty for not-for-profit providers to find individuals to partake in boards of directors due to the lower population density.”³¹ To encourage space creation in rural areas, the plan outlines measures including facilitating networking and knowledge-sharing sessions among rural stakeholders and amending space allocation under Policy 901 to ensure equitable access for rural communities.³² A number of capital and infrastructure investments outlined by the plan also focus on the creation of rural centres and spaces.³³ The plan also sets out a series of provisions to increase spaces in official language minority communities; for newcomer families; in low-income areas; and in support of parents who work non-traditional hours.³⁴

The need for spaces in rural areas is also one of the reasons government has provided to explain the increase in for-profit space creation.³⁵ The following section explores some of the barriers to not-for-profit space creation and what lessons should be drawn from these challenges.

Barriers to not-for-profit space creation

Government has identified difficulty finding board members as a barrier to rural not-for-profit space creation.³⁶ The reality is that the not-for-profit structure adds complexity and requires additional labour, both at the time of a centre's creation and on an ongoing basis. This can make the for-profit structure more

²⁸ P. 17-18.

²⁹ P. 27-28 (figure 8).

³⁰ Figure 9, p. 30.

³¹ P. 9.

³² P. 9.

³³ P. 10-11.

³⁴ P. 11.

³⁵ P. 10.

³⁶ P. 9.

appealing, particularly as potential and established operators are already navigating the complexities of licensing and designation.

This challenge was foreseeable—and solutions have been proposed in the past. The 2016 Child Care Task Force suggested the creation of regional boards, allowing a single board of directors for all ELCC centres in a given elementary school catchment area.³⁷ This would not only reduce the amount of volunteer labour required, it would also further align ELCC with the public school system.

Instead of offering structural solutions or material supports to address the demands of not-for-profit governance, measures in the 2023-26 action plan include a handbook and training for board members of not-for-profit organizations.³⁸ While these may be helpful tools, they do not meaningfully address the challenges of recruitment and building governance capacity. Hands-on support and access to practical tools such as pro bono legal assistance or mentorship would likely be more effective in reducing the workload for staff and volunteers and make not-for-profit models more feasible and appealing.

The challenges of creating not-for-profit centres and spaces, particularly in rural communities, has been used by government as a reason to reduce its goals for not-for-profit space creation. The root issue here, however, is not that not-for-profit governance is difficult but that private delivery of what should be a public service—education to non-school aged children—results in significant challenges.

Government must confront this reality and create conditions for ELCC to eventually not only be publicly managed but also publicly delivered. Investing in not-for-profit ELCC—with structural solutions and material supports in place to address challenges—is more conducive to this than ongoing expansion of for-profit capacity.

In pursuing public delivery in the long-term, government must acknowledge and support the realities of existing for-profit operators, many of whom are women entrepreneurs who have built facilities in response to community needs, often with substantial personal and financial investment.

Policy decisions that encourage or require transitions to not-for-profit status in the near-term must be accompanied by clear, fair, and transparent transition supports for these operators, including legal and technical guidance and financial compensation. Without such measures, the burden of system transformation will disproportionately fall on the very individuals who have sustained ELCC through years of underfunding and policy uncertainty.

³⁷ Recommendation 1.1, p. 41.

³⁸ P. 8.

Material supports and compensation are not all that is required: respect and recognition of for-profit providers' expertise and contributions to meeting the needs of their communities is also essential. This requirement also extends to not-for-profit providers and all educators. As New Brunswick continues to expand and evolve its ELCC system, the quality of relationships between government, educators, and operators will be as important as programs and policies. Success depends not only on technical tools but also on transparent communication, shared decision-making, and mutual accountability. ELCC educators and operators bring deep, practice-based insight into how policies function in real-world contexts and these insights should inform the development of the sector.

Co-creation will be an important approach for this work. Co-creation means involving the people and communities who are impacted by a situation in the process of identifying the problem, designing the solutions to address it, and establishing how the outcomes will be evaluated. It is an approach that is rooted in sharing power and requires those in decision-making positions to approach the work with humility.

Quality

New Brunswick's reliance on for-profit expansion has been justified as a temporary necessity driven by space shortages and not-for-profit governance hurdles. This direction has been supported by government's assertion that whether a centre is for-profit or not-for-profit does not impact its quality. While ELCC ultimately requires a shift to public delivery, this issue still merits examination.

The 2021-2023 action plan made frequent references to measures that are in place to ensure quality ELCC across-the-board. The 2023-2026 action plan makes a stronger claim, stating that "New Brunswick's ELCC system is of high quality and sustainable, regardless of auspice, through a set of quality and cost controls that are part of New Brunswick's Designation Program of Early Learning Centres and Homes."³⁹ (Auspice refers to whether a provider is a not-for-profit centre, a for-profit centre, or a home.)

Additionally, in September 2025, government introduced the [New Brunswick Quality Framework](#) (NBQF), which applies to all ELCC facilities. The NBQF is rooted in four guiding principles: a continuous cycle of quality improvement, children's rights, diverse identities, and high expectations. It identifies seven quality areas and sixteen quality indicators.

Clearly, there are many measures in place or being rolled out to ensure comparable quality among all ELCC facilities. The issue is that government has not yet provided any data that confirms that these measures are having the desired effect.

The introduction of the NBQF is an opportunity for government to examine the impacts of its quality measures, including whether they ensure comparable quality between not-for-profits and for-profits. It is also an opportunity to compare data on quality based on regions, language curriculum, rural vs. urban

³⁹ P. 9.

delivery, facilities primarily serving newcomers versus those that are not, etc. Producing data from the NBQF—and using it to drive equitable enhancements to quality now while also gaining valuable insights for a longer-term transition to public delivery—will help ensure that the NBQF is not a mere compliance burden for providers but serves as a critical capacity-building tool for the sector. To fulfill its potential, the NBQF must be accompanied by adequate resourcing and transparency practices.

Conditions of work and compensation for early childhood educators

This submission has largely focused on the structure of the ELCC sector in New Brunswick and making a case for moving toward public delivery long-term. Another critical component of ELCC is its educators and the compensation, conditions of work, and respect that are provided to them.

Having a well-supported and justly compensated ELCC workforce is critical—not just for the staff themselves but also for the children they educate and care for. As caregiving and disability justice advocates have long noted, the conditions of work are also the conditions of care.

Sectors where care is the primary service provided are disproportionately staffed by women—and the ELCC sector is no exception with women comprising 95 per cent of the Canadian workforce.⁴⁰ Jobs and sectors that are dominated by women are typically both undervalued and underpaid.⁴¹ Given this, it is unsurprising that training and professional development, low wages, and limited recognition for educators are longstanding challenges that need to be addressed. This section of the submission explores this, with a focus on professional development, wages, and recognition.

Professional development

The 2023-2026 action plan outlines new opportunities for training, professional development, and up-skilling. This includes including offering a tuition reimbursement for administrators and educators pursuing their college certificate and diploma in early childhood education and a micro-credentialing program for those currently employed in ELCC facilities.⁴² These initiatives address some of the structural barriers that might limit access to training and professional development.

In addition, the NBQF positions professional learning as key to continuous ELCC improvement and quality, listing it as one of the indicators under its quality area of leadership and the professional environment. The explicit link between professional training and development and quality is encouraging.

Government, however, remains non-committal about facilitating other professional development opportunities. For instance, while the 2023-2026 action plan suggests it will “explore the feasibility of

⁴⁰ Sharanjit Uppal and Katherine Savage, “[Child care workers in Canada](#)” (*Insights on Canadian Society*, Statistics Canada, June 2021), p. 3.

⁴¹ Melissa Moyser, “[Women and Paid Work](#)” (*Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, Statistics Canada, March 2017).

⁴² P. 13.

implementing a paid provincial learning day for [early childhood educators],⁴³ it makes no firm commitment and in doing so appears to largely leave it up to educators to pursue these opportunities on their own time. Government must continue to create low-barrier opportunities for such training and professional development that take into consideration the cost, time, and labour required of educators to meet evolving requirements.

It is concerning that the only reference to compensation in the 2023-2026 action plan is a single bullet committing government to “reviewing the [Early Childhood Educator] Wage Grid at least once a year.”⁴⁴ This cursory mention signals an absence of strategic attention to one of the ELCC system’s most urgent issues. The annual review of the wage grid is not accompanied by requirements to ensure that increases align with inflation, changes to cost of living, or parity with comparable public-sector roles (e.g., educational assistants). Without such standards, wage adjustments risk remaining ad hoc and insufficient to address chronic turnover, burnout, and staffing shortages.

The current Wage Grid Guidelines for educators set out minimum hourly wages for eligible “educators working in designated NB Early Learning Centres and NB Early Learning Homes with children 0-5 years and for school age educators working in licenced early learning and childcare facilities in New Brunswick.”⁴⁵ Despite recent increases, the pay scale remains low relative to the skill, responsibility, and value of this work. At the highest step, the typical annual salary for an entry-level educator under the Grid is set at \$37 590 and a Level 1 educator is \$51 162.⁴⁶

The provision of paid time off and benefits, such as group health plans and pensions, for educators is not discussed in the action plan.

Valuing educators

To support recruitment and retention of early childhood educators, the 2023-2026 action plan speaks to a strategy that is designed to “attract new talent to the sector and elevate the recognition of this profession” and includes “various initiatives to effectively promote the rewarding and vital role of early childhood professionals.”⁴⁷ It also commits to “[l]aunching promotional campaigns to promote, raise awareness of and recognize the profession[.]”⁴⁸

⁴³ P. 13.

⁴⁴ P. 13.

⁴⁵ Government of New Brunswick, [WSP-ECE Handbook Insert for: ECE Wage Grid Guidelines](#) (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, September 2025), p. 2.

⁴⁶ P. 4.

⁴⁷ P. 12.

⁴⁸ P. 13.

Public recognition and awareness campaigns cannot substitute for structural change to how educators' work is compensated and supported. The reliance on promotion, awareness, and recognition without material improvements to working conditions reflects broader gendered assumptions about care labour: that it is performed as an extension of women's presumed caregiving nature rather than as a skilled, professional practice deserving of fair pay. Under this framing, non-material recognition is enough—after all, providing care is women's natural calling. To expect educators to engage in ongoing professional learning and pedagogical improvement without corresponding compensation or advancement opportunities reinforces the devaluation of care work and undermines recruitment, retention, and the sector more broadly.

Here, too, is a case for shifting to public delivery of ELCC. As public employees, educators would likely not only see improvements to their wages, but have access to paid time off, benefits, and opportunities to become unionized. The CCPA explains that wage gaps based on gender and race are smaller in the public sector than they are in the private sector. Their research demonstrates that “salaries are higher in the public sector precisely for those groups of people who experience the greatest discrimination in the private sector—because the public sector goes further in correcting those discriminatory practices”⁴⁹ They attribute this to a few factors:

Unionization and access to collective bargaining is strongly correlated with a reduction in wage inequality. Access to benefits such as paid parental leave, family leave and sick leave also reduce the gender wage gap by addressing the double burden of unpaid care work borne by female workers. Finally, pay equity legislation has an evident impact on reducing discrimination and inequality. None of these elements are found exclusively in the public sector. However, the public sector has a higher concentration of all three factors—with higher rates of unionization, family leave benefits, and the legislated monitoring and regulation of pay equity.⁵⁰

Recommendations

The Council recommends that government:

- Begin to plan for a long-term shift toward public delivery of ELCC that will be co-created with the ELCC sector.
- Focus on not-for-profit space creation to facilitate this long-term shift toward publicly delivered ELCC.
- Provide structural solutions and material supports to support not-for-profit space creation, particularly in rural areas and other underserved communities.

⁴⁹ Kate McInturff and Paul Tulloch, *Narrowing the gap: The difference that public sector wages make* (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2014), p. 5.

⁵⁰ P. 6.

- Continue to provide targeted capital and infrastructure investments to increase not-for-profit spaces in rural areas; in official language minority communities; for newcomer families; in low-income areas; and for parents who work non-traditional hours.
- Appropriately resource facilities to implement the NBQF. Use the NBQF to produce and share data on quality in ELCC, including comparative data based on regions, language curriculum, rural vs. urban delivery, facilities that are primarily serving newcomers versus those that are not, etc.
- Create low-barrier opportunities for training and professional development that take into consideration the cost, time, and labour required of educators to meet evolving requirements.
- Develop a strategy for reviews of the Wage Grid that are accompanied by clear requirements to ensure increases align with inflation, changes to cost of living, and parity with comparable public-sector roles. Explore mechanisms and funding to support access to paid time off and benefits for educators.
- Do not engage in public recognition and awareness campaigns in place of structural and material changes to how educators' work is compensated and supported.