

THE METHODOLOGY

2023

Early childhood education (ECE) describes the period of learning that takes place from birth to 8 years of age. Although the curricula and approach often vary, there are generally agreed-upon standards for the types of learning addressed in ECE settings. These focus on the skills and concepts that children attain during this period of their lives, from social-emotional development to the beginnings of numeracy, literacy, and critical thinking. This foundational aspect of education directly contributes to better outcomes for children, leading to improvements in prosperity, social inclusion, and economic development. Early education is also woven into matters of equity, including women's employment, work and family balance, anti-poverty strategies, intergenerational fairness, and Canadian newcomer settlement.

The [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD) considers high-quality

early childhood education and care (ECEC) to be a key economic indicator when assessing the health and future positioning of a nation. Furthermore, [UNESCO](#) supports high-quality ECE as one of its sustainable development goals.

Reviews of ECE research in Canada have traditionally focused on counting child care spaces and funding levels. Research has concentrated primarily on either child outcomes or the quality of programming. Until the [OECD's 2006 review](#) of ECEC in Canada, there had not been a systematic evaluation of the policy frameworks that shape early education environments. The Early Childhood Education Report (ECER) was designed to fill this gap. ECER 2023 is the fifth edition update on the status of ECEC services in Canada. Foundational to the ECER is the premise that all children should have access to high-quality ECEC—a core recommendation of [Early Years Study 3](#).

This report defines ECEC as programs for young children based on an explicit curriculum, delivered by qualified staff, and designed to support children's development and learning. Settings include parent/child centres, child care centres, nursery schools, preschools, and school-operated programs such as pre- and junior Kindergarten, pre-primary, école maternelle, and Kindergarten. Attendance is regular and children may participate on their own or with a parent or caregiver. When organized to support parent employment as well as early identification and associated support, ECEC can be a very cost-effective policy lever and a prudent economic investment, providing returns far greater than the service cost.



DEVELOPING THE REPORT

The OECD's [Starting Strong II](#) analysis identified key elements of successful policy that were common to the 20 member countries who took part in the review of ECEC systems. The ECER is rooted in the recommendations from the OECD review.

Early education in Canada is under provincial and territorial jurisdiction, resulting in 13 different service models with varying data collection strategies and parameters. While the ECER is guided by the OECD directions, in consultation with experts, and follows extensive reviews of monitoring and evaluation tools developed in Canada and abroad, the benchmarks used in the report reflect only those that are regularly collected and reported across all 13 regions. In some important areas, consistent data are not available across Canada and thus cannot be included.

Earlier editions of the ECER identified 19 benchmarks that promote quality. In 2020, following roundtable discussions with provincial and territorial (P/T) officials, an additional two benchmarks were added to reflect the evolution of the early education system in Canada. Benchmark thresholds were influenced by those established by [UNICEF in 2008](#) to promote the potential for international comparisons, and those included in the [UNESCO 2010](#) cross-national study on the integration of ECEC.

ECER Benchmarks are populated using analyses of government publications and reports, Statistics Canada data (including population estimates and custom runs from the Labour Force Survey), and collective agreements. The authors use this data to develop a profile of each P/T, supplemented by key informant interviews with P/T officials. Quebec's 2023

profile is developed under the direction of the Abilio—Childhood Knowledge Dissemination Centre, formerly the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development, at the Université Laval and Université de Montréal. Draft profiles are provided to officials for comment and modifications are incorporated. Determining whether a jurisdiction has met the threshold for each of the 21 benchmarks is determined in consultation with P/T officials. Current and past P/T profiles may be found under *Provincial/Territorial Profiles* on the [ECEReport.ca](#) website.

In earlier editions of the ECER, insufficient data prevented the inclusion of the territories as well as First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. However, following a cross-Canadian roundtable in June 2016, and with a commitment from all P/Ts, the last three editions have included all territories, although some data may be suppressed due to sparse populations. Insufficient data continues to prevent the inclusion of ECEC programs in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. We are encouraged by the federal investments and agreements through the [Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care \(CWELCC\)](#) agreements and the government's commitment to data collection and reporting, which provides a step forward to help address this continued limitation.

Report authors meet with P/T ministry officials between reports to review the data collection process and update the benchmarks as new information and research emerge. ECER 2023, current to March 31, 2023, tracks the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and allows for the assessment of the CWELCC agreements at their halfway mark.

REFLECTING CANADIAN REALITY

In adapting the ECER to Canadian reality, all benchmark thresholds in the report have been achieved in at least one jurisdiction. The authors recognize that there is always sensitivity to monitoring and reluctance to make comparisons. Canada is a very large and highly diverse country. Regardless, there is remarkable similarity across the country in the development of other levels of education, from elementary through to post-secondary, based on shared values and research. Arm's length assessments are part of democratic oversight and allow for the sharing of best practices, the identification of gaps, and a push for better systems to improve

outcomes for children. A parallel rationale exists for ECEC. Indeed, all P/Ts already agree on several inputs to promote program quality, including the need for staff qualifications and training, child/staff ratios, group size limits, and facility safety.

It is important to note that the thresholds for the benchmarks are not aspirational, but instead are minimally foundational. The fact that no jurisdiction has attained all the benchmarks that support quality ECEC services illustrates the underdevelopment of early education in Canada.

THE ECER CATEGORIES

The 21 benchmarks selected for the ECER are organized into five categories:

Governance

Four benchmarks explore policy and operational oversight.

Funding

Three benchmarks examine the adequacy of funding and its influence on supporting program quality and equitable access. This includes federal investments.

Access

Three benchmarks assess the number of children attending ECEC programs and if barriers to participation are addressed.

Learning environment

Eight benchmarks examine whether curriculum and its use, program standards, and trained and adequately resourced staff support the quality of programming.

Accountability

Three benchmarks assess whether jurisdictions are meeting their reporting commitments, have standards for program quality, and are monitoring and reporting child outcomes.

Each of the five categories is assigned three points for a total of 15. Points are assigned to provide equal weight to each of the five categories.

ECER 2023

All data for this report are current to and include March 31, 2023.

ATTAINING THE BENCHMARKS

Partial marks are not assigned. For example, if a benchmark is weighted 0.5, the threshold is either attained (0.5) or not attained (0). A threshold is reached if policies were in place by March 31, 2023, or if the P/T has embarked on a particular initiative with a commitment to take it system-wide. Many jurisdictions have ambitious plans for their ECEC systems, however if these policies were still in development by the deadline, the threshold is considered not attained. Any upcoming policy changes are addressed in each P/T profile under *New Developments*.

I. Benchmarks focused on governance for integrated ECEC

The OECD recommended that Canadian jurisdictions take steps to “*build bridges between child care and Kindergarten education, with the aim of integrating ECEC both at ground level and at policy and management levels.*”¹ Evaluations demonstrate the importance of assigning responsibility for young children to one ministry with policymaking, funding, and regulatory powers. A single ministry/department facilitates the development of a common vision of early education, with agreed-upon objectives. Split governance structures tend to entrench child care as a welfare service with all its inherent weaknesses—poor public perception, poor funding, and underpaid and undertrained staff.

[Canadian research](#) reveals the cost returns from combining education and care at the service delivery level to support both child development

and parents’ workforce participation. Common oversight also avoids the duplication of administrations and costs. From a pedagogical perspective, integrating education and care allows administrators and educators to better address the continuum of learning that begins at birth and continues throughout life.

Four benchmarks are allocated to the governance of ECE systems:

Benchmark 1: ECEC is under a common department/ministry (0.5 point)

The minimum for the benchmark is a single ministry/department with oversight for child care as well as Kindergarten and other preschool programming.

Benchmark 2: There is a common ECEC supervisory unit (0.5 point)

This benchmark examines if integration has gone beyond co-locating child care and Kindergarten within the same ministry while still operating as distinct entities. It assesses whether all ECEC services are under a common supervisory unit, where specialized staff members have shared responsibilities for both public (school-offered) and private (child care/preschool) ECEC programs.

Benchmark 3: There is a common ECEC policy framework (1 point)

Administrators, systems managers, and educators require a clearly communicated policy direction, with vision, objectives, timelines, and benchmarks to guide their work. The minimum for this benchmark determines if policy directions encompass both education and child care/preschool, aligning them to support the learning continuum.

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Directorate for Education. (2004). Early Childhood Care and Education Policy: Canada Country Note. Paris, FR: OECD Secretariat (p. 6).

Benchmark 4: There is common authority for ECEC management and administration (1 point)

The integration of policy frameworks at the P/T level should be reflected in service management and delivery on the ground, thereby removing the necessity for parents and children to navigate between service silos. All ECEC services, both public and private, should link to a common authority responsible for supporting standards reflected in P/T policies. Authorities would be responsible for organizing ECEC service delivery to facilitate smooth transitions from preschool into Kindergarten and the primary grades. It is acknowledged that there are many collaborative bodies, including education and children's service providers. These bodies are not mandated to direct systems delivery or enforce quality standards. The benchmark requires governance with this level of authority.

II. Benchmarks focused on funding to promote quality, access, and equity

The OECD noted that Canada's market-determined fee structure for child care results in high parent fees and an inefficient subsidy system with widely varying and complex eligibility criteria. It encouraged Canadian jurisdictions to "devise an efficient means of funding a universal early childhood service."² There is a general consensus across OECD countries that substantial government investment is necessary to support a sustainable system of high-quality, affordable services. Without strong government investment and involvement, it is difficult to achieve broad system aims, such as child health and well-being, equitable access, social inclusion, and quality learning goals. Federal funding and the [CWELCC](#) agreements have set the stage for such investments.

Funding levels are important, but how services are funded also makes a difference. A universal approach appears to be more effective at including children from low-income families. Mixed socio-economic enrolment in ECEC is also associated with better-quality outcomes than programs targeted to children from low-income families.

Direct funding to programs appears to have a positive impact on staff wages and program stability and quality, whereas funding through fee subsidies or tax transfers has fewer positive effects and drives market-based approaches. Since fee subsidies to parents seldom reflect the actual cost of child care, they tend to hold down staff wages and leave a gap between the subsidy parents receive and the fees programs must charge. Subsidies are also conditional on parental work and study, and this can exclude low-income families from using ECEC centres.

Three benchmarks are allocated to funding levels and how funds are directed:

Benchmark 5: At least two-thirds of child care funding goes to program operations (1 point)

Percentage allocations to program operations, special needs integration, and parent fee subsidies are determined through public reporting. Funding for children with special needs is included as part of operations, since most jurisdictions deliver this funding to child care programs rather than through direct subsidies to parents. The two-thirds benchmark for program funding was chosen because greater system stability and quality is associated with centres receiving direct operational funding.

² Ibid., p. 72.

Benchmark 6: There is a managed salary and fee scale (1 point)

Many jurisdictions subsidize staff wages. This benchmark reflects P/T policies establishing a parent maximum fee scale and a minimum wage scale for educators. Such policies emphasize the market nature of child care funding and delivery.

Benchmark 7: At least 3 per cent of P/T budget is devoted to early childhood education (1 point)

Spending on ECEC programs at 3 per cent of P/T budget was chosen as a benchmark because it approaches the 1 per cent of GDP that is considered a minimum investment for the care and education of young children.³ Three per cent represents a modest and fair share for children in their early years. Percentages were calculated using total 2022/2023 spending estimates to March 31, 2023, as stated in government budget documents. ECEC spending includes total 2022/2023 estimates for the operation of licensed child care for infants to school-aged, Kindergarten, pre-Kindergarten, and other early education services, including school-based parent/caregiver/child programs.

Following roundtable discussions with P/T officials, capital funding is now included. In addition, funding for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is included as part of the overall budget if ASD funding is allocated through the ECEC budget.

In Ontario, [47 service managers](#) (consolidated municipal service managers [CMSMs] and District Social Services Administration Boards [DSSABs]) are designated under the *Child Care and Early Years Act* to manage and contribute financially to child care services. The CMSMs/DSSABs portion of Ontario early years funding was calculated by reviewing their budgets and

is included as part of the province's total public expenditures on ECEC.

The 2023 estimates for Kindergarten and school-offered programs were obtained from government documents or key informant interviews. Where Kindergarten funding was not specified, estimates were made based on Kindergarten and pre-Kindergarten enrolment multiplied by per pupil spending and, if applicable, pro-rated for half-time programs.

III. Benchmarks focused on equitable access

The OECD recommended that Canada “*continue efforts to expand access while promoting greater equity.*”⁴ Equitable access is associated more with entitlement programs, such as Kindergarten. However, Kindergarten does not address parents' need for care beyond the school day/year. Equity is but one more of the benefits of organizing ECEC to meet the educational needs of children, while at the same time facilitating parents' workforce participation. Barriers to ECEC participation are many, and include economic, geographical, transportation, cultural, language, hours of service, and the special needs of children.

Three benchmarks are allocated to access to ECEC programs:

Benchmark 8: Full-day Kindergarten is offered (1 point)

Kindergarten is the sole early education program that is universally available across Canada. Full-day Kindergarten for 5-year-olds has become the norm across Canada; it is now offered by 9 out of 13 jurisdictions, with programs for at least some 4-year-olds offered in 10 of 13 regions.

³ UNICEF (2008). *The Child Care Transition. A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries.* Report Card 8. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. Florence.

⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Directorate for Education. (2004). *Early Childhood Care and Education Policy: Canada Country Note.* Paris, FR: OECD Secretariat (p. 8).

Kindergarten is now rolling out for 3-year-olds in Nova Scotia. Full-day Kindergarten also reflects the duration threshold (the minimum amount of time children spend in a program that is associated with positive outcomes), which [research](#) indicates is more likely to improve academic and social outcomes for children.

Benchmark 9: Licensed capacity for at least 50% of 2-4-year olds in ECEC programs (1 point)

This benchmark focuses on 2- to 4-year-olds, the group for which there is high unmet demand for ECEC. Five-year olds are excluded since the majority attend Kindergarten. Infants are less likely to participate in ECEC programs because of parental leave. Determining the accurate enrolment of children in ECEC programs is challenging. Schools report enrolment numbers, while child care counts spaces, which may be used by more than one child. Operational (the number of spaces in active use) versus licensed (the number of spaces on the operator's licence) capacities often result in an overestimation of child care availability. For example, due to ongoing educator shortages, some regions are reporting as high as 60 per cent vacancies in licensed spaces. Government reporting provides the number of licensed rather than operational spaces.

The number of 2- to 4-year-olds attending ECEC programs is estimated using government reports of school-offered pre-Kindergarten programs, including StrongStart programs in British Columbia, child care, nursery school, and Aboriginal Head Start availability. Early years programs that fall outside of public oversight are not included, such as unlicensed preschools in Saskatchewan.

The ECER collects access data using three age groups: birth to <24 months, 24 months to <5 years, and 5 years. Jurisdictions often collect

access data using different age groupings than those used in the ECER. Therefore, the report corrects for overlapping age groups.

The report also adjusts to avoid double counting children attending both school-based programs and licensed child care. Consider a jurisdiction where 50 per cent of 4-year-olds attend junior Kindergarten (JK). The 2- to 4-year-old group used in the report contains three age cohorts (2-, 3-, and 4-year-olds). Four-year-olds therefore occupy approximately one-third of all child care spaces in this age group. If 50 per cent of 4-year-old children attend JK, that percentage will be used and subtracted from the number of child care spaces for the associated age group.

For example, if a jurisdiction has 1,500 spaces for all 2- to 4-year-olds, approximately 500 (one-third) will be used by 4-year-olds. Based on the above formula, 50 per cent of the 4-year-old spaces, or 250 spaces, will be subtracted from the 1,500 total to ensure that the same child is not counted in child care and again in the school-based program.

If the number of spaces for Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) is not available in a jurisdiction, the number of spaces is estimated by multiplying the number of AHS centres by 25. The federal government funds a maximum of [25 spaces per centre](#).

UNICEF's⁵ benchmark is set at 80 per cent of 4-year-olds and 25 per cent of children under 3 years of age regularly attending an ECEC program. The ECER's benchmark of 50 per cent of 2- to 4-year-olds represents a reasonable and achievable interim benchmark for Canada, with the caveat that these numbers reflect licensed and not operational spaces.

⁵ Ibid, 3.

Benchmark 10: Funding is conditional on including children with special needs (1 point)

The threshold for this benchmark is P/T policy that requires programs to give equal consideration to the enrolment of children with special needs as a condition of funding. Many jurisdictions have dedicated grants to encourage operators to include children with special needs in their programs. Funding as an incentive without policy directions does not provide parents with recourse if their child is excluded from participation.

IV. Benchmarks focusing on quality in the early learning environment

Well-established research confirms that quality in early education programs depends on responsive staff trained in child development, and resourced and valued for the work they do. This part of the ECER looks at progress in this area. For instance, is there an evidence-based curriculum to guide the work of educators? Is the use of the curriculum mandatory? Is it aligned with the school curriculum to support children's transition into school? Are educators in all ECEC settings trained in early childhood development? Are salaries and recognition reflective of the important work educators do? Is professional certification and development required?

Eight benchmarks are allocated to the learning environment of ECEC programs:

Benchmark 11: There is an early childhood curriculum framework (0.25 point)

ECE curriculum frameworks are organic documents resulting from the best available research and broad consultations. They are holistic and child-centred, with clear goals across a range of developmental areas to which educators and children can aspire. The framework recognizes the primary role of

parents, and parents are welcomed as partners in their children's learning. This benchmark is attained if jurisdictions have developed a curriculum framework for early education settings. The threshold does not require the use of the curriculum in all ECEC settings.

Benchmark 12: Use of the ECE curriculum framework is mandatory (0.25 point)

The benefits of a curriculum framework occur only if their guidance is used. This benchmark is reached if the curriculum framework is required for use in at least designated licensed child care programs.

Benchmark 13: The early childhood framework aligns with Kindergarten (0.5 point)

Children move from preschool into Kindergarten at different ages and stages of development. The Kindergarten and child care curriculum frameworks should align to reflect this. This benchmark is reached if the curricula for both Kindergarten and child care acknowledge the need to support the transition and/or if there are standalone guides to support the transition.

Benchmark 14: Programs for 2- to 4-year-olds require at least two-thirds of staff to have ECE qualifications (0.5 point)

Child-to-staff ratios across Canadian jurisdictions are quite similar, but the number of *qualified* staff required by policy or regulation varies widely. For this benchmark, *qualified* represents the period of post-secondary training P/T regulations consider necessary to be recognized as a qualified staff member in an ECEC setting. It is acknowledged that ECE qualifications are not standard across jurisdictions. UNICEF⁶ recommends that at least 50 per cent of staff have three or more years of post-secondary training and 80 per cent of staff working directly with children have post-

⁶ Ibid.

secondary training in child development. No Canadian jurisdiction meets this standard. This benchmark requires two-thirds of staff to have a minimum of one year of post-secondary level training in early childhood development.

Benchmark 15: Kindergarten educators require ECE qualifications (0.5 point)

Kindergarten is the dominant form of ECEC and is the only preschool experience for many children. Quality in ECEC settings depends on educators being trained to understand the developmental needs of young children. A review of P/T policies determined if ECE training is required for educators in Kindergarten classrooms. For example, Prince Edward Island requires its Kindergarten educators to obtain a teaching certificate with an ECE specialty. Ontario and Quebec are recognized because their staffing models include ECEs. A two-year ECE diploma is the recognized qualification to teach junior Kindergarten in the Northwest Territories and Nova Scotia.

Benchmark 16: Salaries of early childhood educators are at least two-thirds of teacher salaries (0.5 point)

[Research](#) recognizes that low compensation levels for early childhood educators contribute to recruitment and retention challenges, which in turn impact the quality of ECEC programming. The compensation gap between elementary school teachers and early childhood educators reflects the challenge. These issues become more evident as early childhood educators move into school settings to work alongside teachers.

This benchmark looks at the salary gap between teachers and early childhood educators by jurisdiction as an indicator of the relative value placed on the professions. In previous editions of the ECER, teacher salaries were selected from the top of negotiated salary grids. However, this is not representative of most teachers. The rates for teacher salaries for the 2017, 2020, and 2023 ECER were therefore obtained from available current

P/T collective agreements for educators at Level 5 of the wage grid for full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers with at least five years' experience.

Early childhood educator salaries were obtained from government sources. Where information was not available, Job Bank Canada data was used where applicable or a custom run of the Labour Force Survey provided 2021 hourly wages for self-identified early childhood educators and assistants with post-secondary qualifications employed in the sector. The hourly rate was used to estimate full-time annual salaries (40 hours × 52 weeks). The two-thirds benchmark reflects a salary gap between the two professions based on differences in educational requirements. ECER 2020 used the British Columbia Teacher's Federation for teacher salaries when collective agreements were not available; this benchmark is therefore not comparable to ECER 2023. Health benefits and pension packages are not included in the analysis.

Benchmark 17: ECE professional certification is required (0.25 point)

Registration, certification, and classification are all processes that provide official recognition as an early childhood educator and enable the registrant to work in an ECE program. These processes are proxies for the value placed on the profession. This benchmark reflects P/T policies requiring professional registration of early childhood educators as a condition of practice.

Benchmark 18: Early childhood educator professional development is required (0.25 point)

Ongoing professional development is critical to maintaining a workforce that is knowledgeable about current child development and educational practices and is closely associated with high-quality early childhood settings. This benchmark reflects regular professional development as a condition of maintaining good standing in the profession.

V. Benchmarks focused on accountability

Monitoring is an integral part of democratic accountability to children, families, and the public. It is essential for informed decision-making, ensuring that societal resources are deployed productively, resources distributed equitably, and social goals reached. The challenge is to develop monitoring systems that capture how programs are operating, how children are developing, and if system goals are being met. Monitoring on its own does not deliver results, although it is a crucial part of a larger system designed to achieve them.

Three benchmarks are allocated to accountability for ECE systems/programs:

Benchmark 19: Annual progress reports are current and posted (yearly) (1 point)

The minimum benchmark requires the responsible ministry/department to post a comprehensive report on ECEC services current to at least fiscal year 2021/22.

Benchmark 20: There are facilities standards for ECEC programs (including Kindergarten) (1 point)

Learning outcomes cannot be considered separate from children's experience in ECEC

settings. Standards governing health, safety, and facilities are important minimums for all ECEC programs. Also important are standards outlining class size, pedagogical practices, implementation of curriculum goals, and the set-up of the learning environment that are reflected in other benchmarks of quality therein. The benchmark proposes that jurisdictions recognize facility standards for all ECEC settings, including Kindergarten.

Benchmark 21: Population measures for preschool children are collected and reported (1 point)

Public reporting informs communities about how their children are doing and what can be done to improve children's early learning environments. The minimum benchmark is that a jurisdiction has used the Early Development Instrument (EDI) or an equivalent tool and reported on the findings at least once in the past three years.

Due to COVID-19 pandemic related delays in population monitoring data collection, for this edition of the ECER this benchmark will be considered reached if data has been collected within the last three years, regardless of public reporting.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION REPORT

The ECER is housed at the [Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, Ontario Institute of Studies in Education](#) at the University of Toronto. The Centre regularly brings together academic expertise to further review the ECER and improve aspects of its validity. It hosts several conferences, roundtables, and reviews to delve more deeply into the individual benchmarks. To date, the Centre has reviewed integrated governance, population monitoring, early learning curriculum frameworks, quality monitoring, funding, access, impact of auspice type, and the status of the early childhood workforce. Reports and presentations are on the [Atkinson Centre website](#).

The five equally weighted categories in the ECER and their benchmarks reflect current research and international reports. System-level indices comparing jurisdictions must balance the desire for appropriate, comparable data and the reality of what is available. The content validity of the ECER appears to be good. It is a tool for conversations about success and challenges and supports advocacy efforts and tracking of policy changes over time.

An arm's length [evaluation](#) of the impact of the ECER was conducted in 2022. The report concluded that officials monitor the report, and it is routinely used and referred to in department presentations, policy planning, and cabinet papers. The evaluation highlighted that the ECER has achieved significant distribution and usage, both nationally and internationally. It has also informed other research and has contributed to an interest in ECE outside of the sector, including among business organizations such as the Conference Board of Canada, the TD Bank, the Prosperity Project, and Deloitte.

The evaluation concluded with five key recommendations moving forward:

1. Align the ECER indicators with CWELCC Agreements and pending legislation to track policy changes and investments over time.
2. Maintain neutrality through arm's length relationships with government and sector professional and advocacy organizations.
3. Create modules describing how to use the ECER in post-secondary education and professional learning.
4. Initiate conversations with Indigenous communities to capture the nuances of their cultural practices, teachings, and beliefs in the ECER.
5. Seek out print, broadcast, and social media strategies to further facilitate the ECER's use.

The CWELCC agreements have begun a national conversation about access and affordability of early learning for Canadian children. This is an important start. Continued investment, public oversight, and consistent and reliable data collection are necessary to ensure that the visions set out in the agreements are actualized.

We cannot overlook the limited number of benchmarks the report is able to populate based on lack of available data and constraints that exclude First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. In addition, the modesty of the ECER's thresholds reflects the persistence of low standards and investments in ECEC across the country. Yet there are reasons for optimism. Much progress has been made since the OECD's international review exposed Canada as an ECE laggard, not all of which can be captured in a single report. The CWELCC agreements set the foundation for a national vision of early learning embedded in accountability mechanisms.