



**Early Childhood  
Education Report  
2014**

# IT'S TIME FOR PRESCHOOL

The immediate and long-term benefits of quality early childhood education (ECE) for children and society are well documented. Early childhood education is a job creator in its own right, while supporting parents as they work or upgrade their skills. In addition to the welcome it provides for new Canadians, it also offers opportunities for community integration, and reduces inequalities that result from poverty.

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Early childhood education refers to programs for young children based on an explicit curriculum delivered by qualified staff and designed to support children's development and learning. Attendance is regular and children may participate with their parents/caregivers. ECE may be organized to support parents' labour force participation or to provide respite. ECE can be organized as a platform to effectively target early intervention and parenting resources.

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By identifying problems and intervening early, ECE decreases the number of children in special education classes. It gives all children a strong start for school and for life. Better education helps to reduce skills shortages, expenditures in health and social service costs. These, in turn, help to reduce income inequality and lead to a stronger society and economy. Importantly, ECE also offers preschool children a space and place to be and play with other children.

## THE POLICY GAP

Evidence suggests there is a serious policy gap in Canada that stands in the way of achieving these positive human and economic outcomes. Between the one-year parental leave for qualifying parents and the start of kindergarten, usually at age 5, there is no universal policy designed to support young children. The more than 50-year-old call for a pan-Canadian child care plan remains elusive. To date, the federal government has been an unreliable partner; the provinces and territories have been left to fill the void with varying capacities and results. As a result, we fail to realize our potential as a society, while governments and Canadians remain confused about how to help during the foundational years of human development.

In 2006, as part of its 20-country review of early education and care systems, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) exposed Canada as a policy laggard. Last in public spending on ECE, our children were least likely to attend an ECE program, program quality was poor and the ECE workforce was undertrained and under-resourced.

The OECD team left a prescription for Canada to improve its performance:

- Take a look at governance. Programs for young children are scattered—give one ministry the lead and hold it accountable.
- Invest more, but spend smart. Children need good early education, while the economy needs working parents. Put education and care together and watch the payoffs.
- Expand access, but do not take short cuts with quality. More poor quality child care benefits no one.
- Pay attention to the workforce. It needs better training and support. Give it the same level of leadership, career opportunities and curriculum supports that are provided for public school teachers.
- Invest in research to keep abreast with the burgeoning science and to create a quality improvement loop.

Finally, the OECD noted there was no appropriate monitoring measure across jurisdictions to assure Canadians of the value of their investments. The Early Childhood Education Report (ECER) was developed to fill this void. First released in 2011, the ECER is grounded in the OECD's recommendations and the knowledge that a strong and coherent public policy framework produces the best results for children and their families, uses public investments effectively and is accountable to Canadians for the well-being of children.





The ECER provides a snapshot of provincial ECE services through 19 benchmarks organized into five equally-weighted categories, reflecting a common set of core standards essential for the delivery of quality programming. Thresholds for each benchmark were established to reflect Canadian reality. Each has been achieved in at least one jurisdiction. As such, they are not aspirational goals, but rather the minimum standards for program delivery. Because there is insufficient data to populate all the benchmarks, we were unable to include First Nations, Yukon or Nunavut. However, we are very pleased to welcome the Northwest Territories as an addition to the ECER 2014. The data sources and rationale for the benchmarks are summarized in background reports and supplemented by profiles of each jurisdiction, posted at [www.TimeForPreschool.ca](http://www.TimeForPreschool.ca).

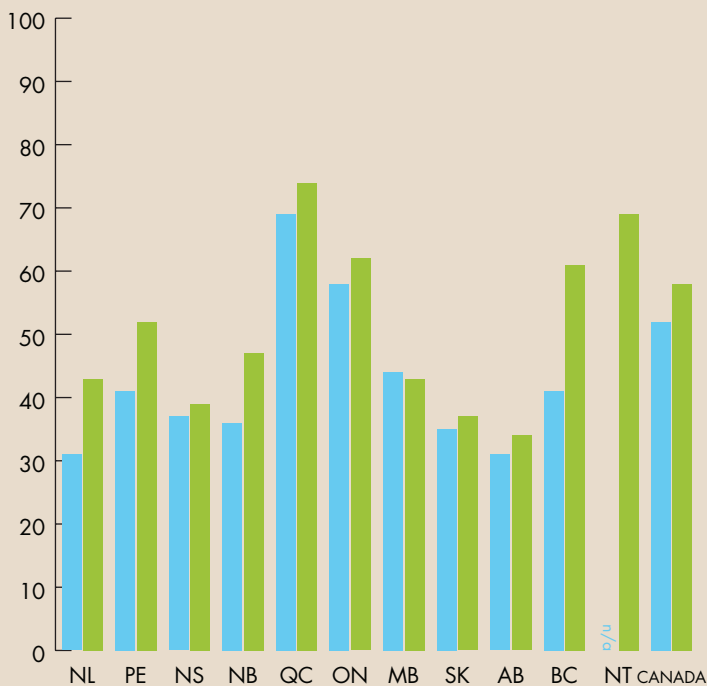
In 2011, provincial ECE policy trajectories were promising. Most jurisdictions had considered the OECD's advice and used their

modest federal investments remaining from the cancelled child care agreements to launch action plans. In 2014, that trend largely continues, with some jurisdictions leaping forward. The most noteworthy development is the decision of policy-makers to at least maintain, if not grow, funding to early education. This tendency has not been the norm. Governments have historically looked at funding for young children as expendable. It may be too early to say that early education is an issue that is sticking with decision-makers, but the news to date is promising.

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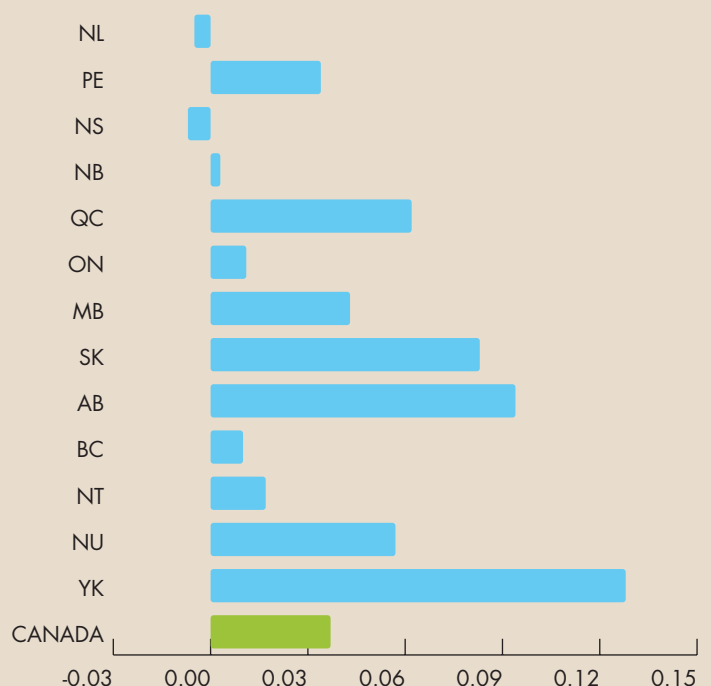
Policy-makers are also making better use of the existing infrastructure in public education to grow program opportunities for young children. Whether through the direct provision of expanded kindergarten and pre-kindergarten, linking child care growth to schools or putting processes in place to smooth transitions for young children into the school system, the direction points to a deeper understanding of the needs of young

### Percentage Change in ECE Attendance by Children 2 to 4 Years Old — 2011/2014



Source: Early Childhood Education Report 2014/Provincial and Northwest Territories profiles

### Proportion Change in Population of Children 0 to 5 years of age by Province/Territory (2010 to 2013)



Source: Statistics Canada Population Estimates 2013 CANSIM Table 051-0001

children and their families. Attention to quality is partnering with access, as jurisdictions enhance efforts to provide early childhood educators with the tools they need for the important work they do.

Progress is uneven across jurisdictions, and obviously much work remains to be done. While a celebration would be premature, these promising patterns may be viewed with cautious optimism. With staged prudent investments and an eye on systems management, every young child could have a place in an early childhood program in the decade to come.

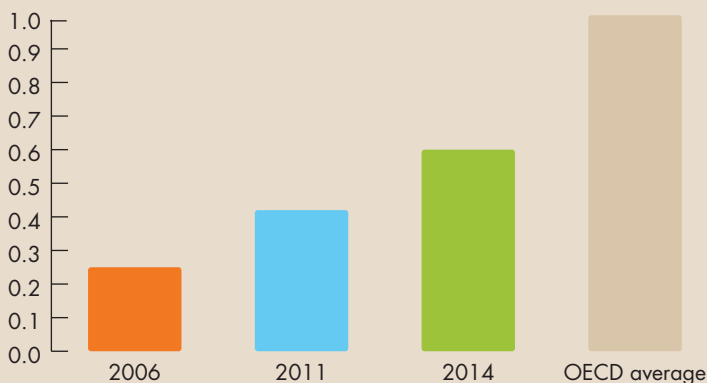
### ATTENTION TO GOVERNANCE

Many jurisdictions have reduced the adverse effects of split systems by merging their early education, child care and family support services. When the OECD visited Canada in 2004, no jurisdiction had merged departments; today, eight have done so. The Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Ontario, and most recently, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, have merged child care and related early years services into their education departments. Naturally, it is also important to look closely at what takes place within newly merged departments. Are things such as educator training and curriculum planning integrated, or do they remain isolated though existing in the same ministerial neighbourhood? Nevertheless, there are promising signs that centralized oversight is contributing to the development of more coherent policy frameworks and service delivery.

### MORE FUNDING

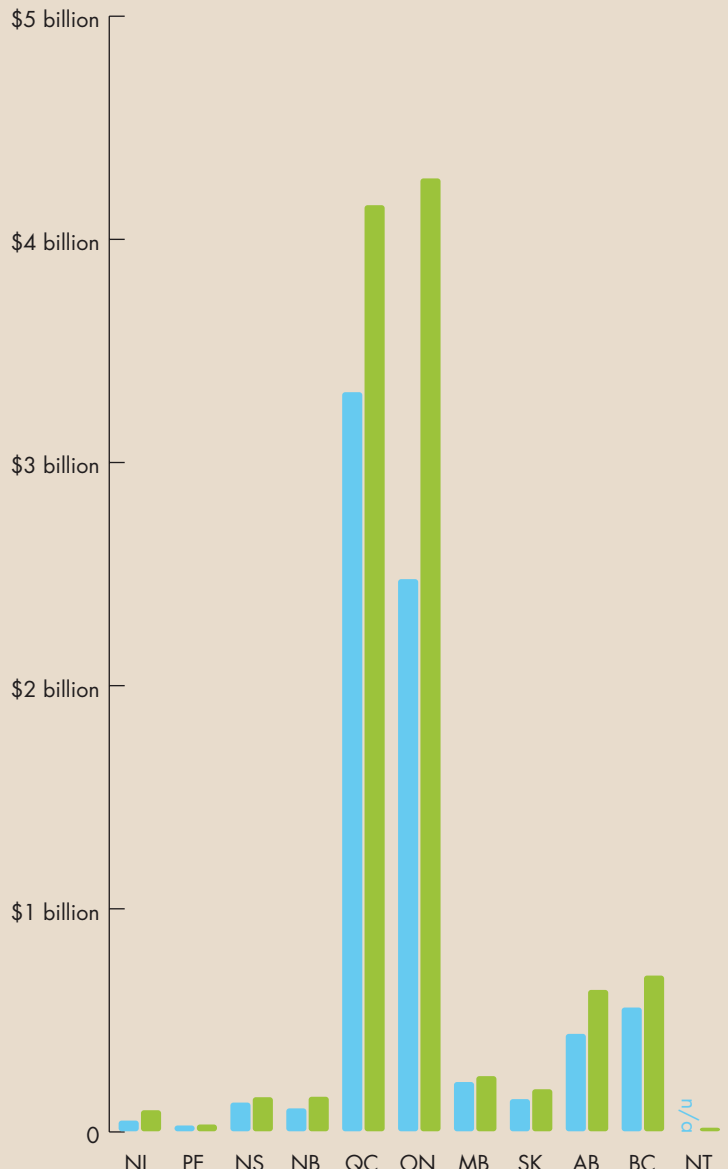
Since the OECD's embarrassing exposé, the provinces have upped their contribution from .25 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to .6 percent. This includes \$3 billion added to provincial/territorial ECE budgets since 2011. Canada is now on its way to spending the 1 percent of GDP that would bring it in line with early education investments made by other OECD countries.

### Change in Canada's Early Childhood Education Spending as a Percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (2006, 2011, 2014)



Source: Early Childhood Education Report 2014/Provincial and Northwest Territories profiles

### Change in Provincial and Territorial Early Childhood Education Spending\* — 2011/2014



\*Budget estimates as reported by individual governments 2011/2014  
Source: Early Childhood Education Report 2014/Provincial and Northwest Territories profiles

### MORE PROGRAMMING

More than 50 percent of children aged 2–4 years regularly attended an early childhood education program in 2014, up from 20 percent of children under the age of 5 identified in 2006. Expanded access to school-operated programs accounts for much of the increase and builds on the infrastructure that already exists in public education. The Northwest Territories, British





Columbia, Ontario, Québec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island now offer full-day kindergarten for 5 year olds, with Newfoundland preparing for rollout in 2016. Full-day kindergarten for 4 and 5 year olds now includes 265,000 children in Ontario, while the Northwest Territories is also expanding its full-day kindergarten program to include 4 year olds. Free access to at least part-time programs has expanded for preschoolers in vulnerable circumstances in Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba and Québec. Nova Scotia is piloting universal programming for this age group.

Regulated childcare has also grown. Québec is expanding its system at the rate of 4,000 new spaces a year, while most provinces have made steady investments to expand enrolment.

While there is greater provision of early childhood programming, it has not kept pace with the mini-baby boom hitting some jurisdictions, particularly in the Prairies. As such, while there are more ECE spaces, the percentage of children served has remained largely unchanged.

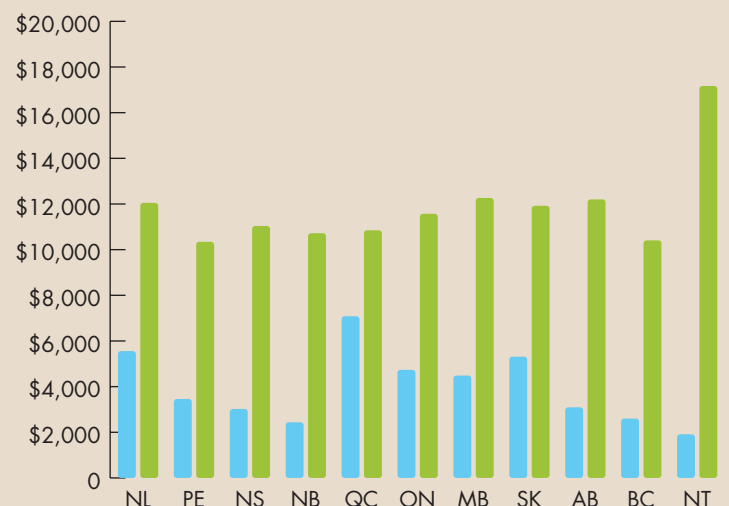
### IMPROVED QUALITY

Provincial and territorial governments are recognizing the importance of a professionally trained early childhood workforce and a curriculum grounded in children's natural exuberance for learning. In 2006,

only two provinces had early childhood curriculum frameworks—they are now in place or in development in every province and the Northwest Territories.

More attention is being paid to the ECE workforce, with enhanced professional development requirements for staff in New Brunswick, more density of trained staff in Saskatchewan and Newfoundland, and enhanced support for wages in the Northwest Territories, Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Newfoundland. In addition, Québec and Prince Edward Island maintain a province-wide wage scale.

### Operating Expenditures per Childcare Space\* and per Pupil in Schools\*\* by Province/Territory



\*Source: Early Childhood Education Report 2014/Provincial and Northwest Territories profiles

\*\*Summary Elementary and Secondary School Indicators for Canada, the Provinces and Territories, 2006/2007 to 2010/2011



## CHALLENGES REMAIN

Not only the level of investment but how investments are made will determine the success of ECE service development. Economic analyses find that when programs facilitate the workforce participation of the mothers of young children, working moms return the favour with their income and consumption taxes, a reduced draw on social transfers and enhanced economic growth through consumer spending. It is estimated that changes in maternal labour force participation in Québec attributed to low cost child care generates \$1.20 for every public dollar spent on the program. Meanwhile, the federal government gets \$0.55 in tax gains and saves on social transfers to Québec families.<sup>1</sup> These findings leave many questioning why the federal government does not compensate the provinces and territories for what it pockets from their early childhood investments.

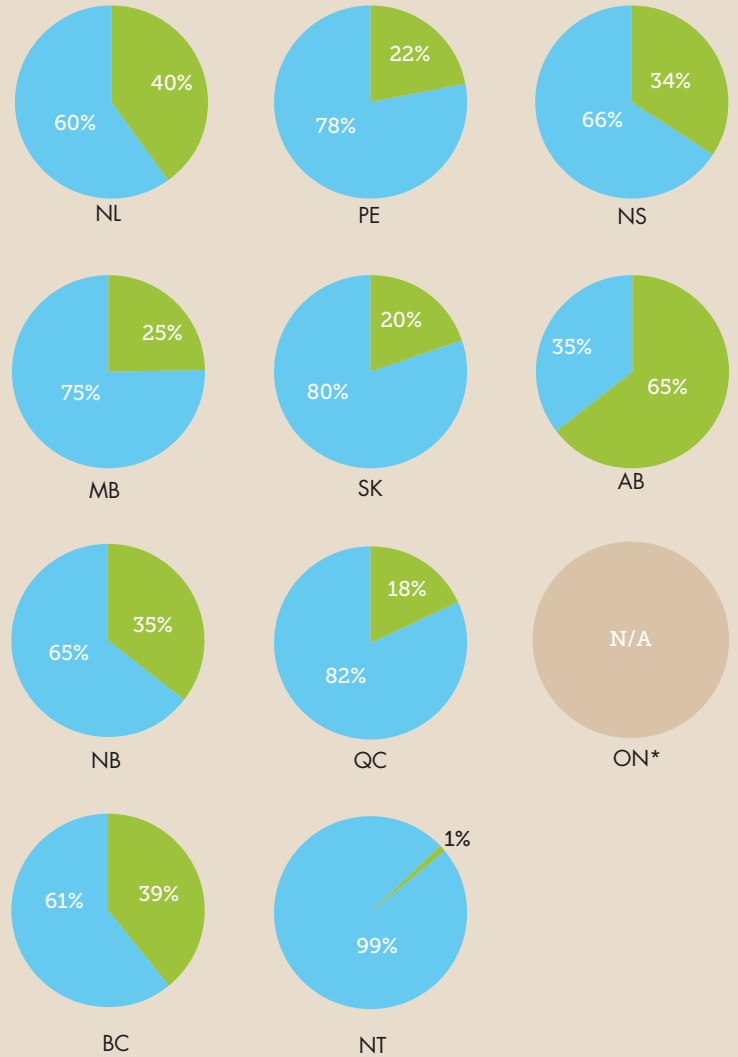
While it is promising to see publicly-funded education provide more ECE opportunities for youngsters, the divide between education and child care persists. Child care is left to top and tail the school day and fill in during holidays. This is a poor business model that leaves too many families on wait-lists for child care and creates split-shift, dead end jobs for early childhood educators. When early childhood education is organized so it simultaneously supports children's development and parents' labour force participation, it provides its biggest economic benefit, more than paying for itself in both the short and long term. Integrating education and care allows more parents to work, while creating good jobs for educators and enhanced opportunities for children.

## ACCESS MATTERS, BUT SO DOES QUALITY

The quest to meet the demand for child care sometimes leads to short cuts. An overreliance on the private sector to create programs also creates market competition along with service overlaps, gaps and failures. The public interest is not aided by funding the growth of private operators who then choose where, how and whom to serve. Public investments are lost when commercial programs close, taking their publicly-financed assets with them. Family child care is often seen as a fast and less expensive way to expand services. But few jurisdictions require family caregivers to hold ECE qualifications, and home-based childcare does not build an early childhood service infrastructure. When caregivers leave the business, not only the service but the public start-up and support costs leave as well. Most critically, children do not appear to receive the same benefits from private care. One Québec study found little to no advantage in school readiness for children who attend private centres or family daycare homes

“Family and commercial care may offer a benefit to parents...but they do not seem to deliver the same school readiness advantages to children.”

## Licensed Childcare Program Funding versus Fee Subsidy Spending 2014



\*Ontario no longer specifies a funding breakdown for operations or fee subsidies in its transfers to regional children's service managers.  
Source: Early Childhood Education Report 2014/Provincial and Northwest Territories profiles

compared to children attending non-profit and publicly-operated early childhood centres. Family and commercial care may offer a benefit to parents by supporting workforce participation, but they do not seem to deliver the same school readiness advantages to children. This leaves society recouping only a portion of its early childhood investments.<sup>11</sup>

## FUNDING METHODOLOGY MATTERS

How child care is funded also makes a difference. All provinces and territories provide some form of direct operating support to child care programs. Direct funding takes the pressure off parent fees and provides a level of stability to programs that parent fees alone cannot provide.

How child care is funded determines who participates in programs. Government subsidy levels often do not match the fees licensed programs must charge to attract and keep qualified staff. Low-income families are unable to cover the gap between the fees programs charge and the subsidies governments provide, forcing them to settle for unregulated options.

While funding for child care has increased since last reported in 2011, the percentage of operating funding to fee subsidy spending has remained relatively constant.

### THE EDUCATION/CARE GAP

While there is more support for early education, investments and access are uneven. Spending on a full-time student in public education is relatively comparable across the country, with the exception of the territories where facility costs are high.

By contrast, spending on child care varies widely, and the gap between what is spent on education and on child care is considerable. Spending per child care space also varies across the country, from a high of over \$7,000 per space to under \$2,000.

Access varies by jurisdiction, from approximately one out of three preschoolers regularly attending an early education program in the Prairies, to three out of four in Québec.

Another quality indicator is the wage gap between educators teaching in the public school system and those working with

preschool-aged children. While a university trained teacher can be expected to earn more than a college educated ECE, the size of the differential reflects the value placed on the latter profession. Despite efforts in most jurisdictions to improve the wages of early childhood educators, the gap remains constant.

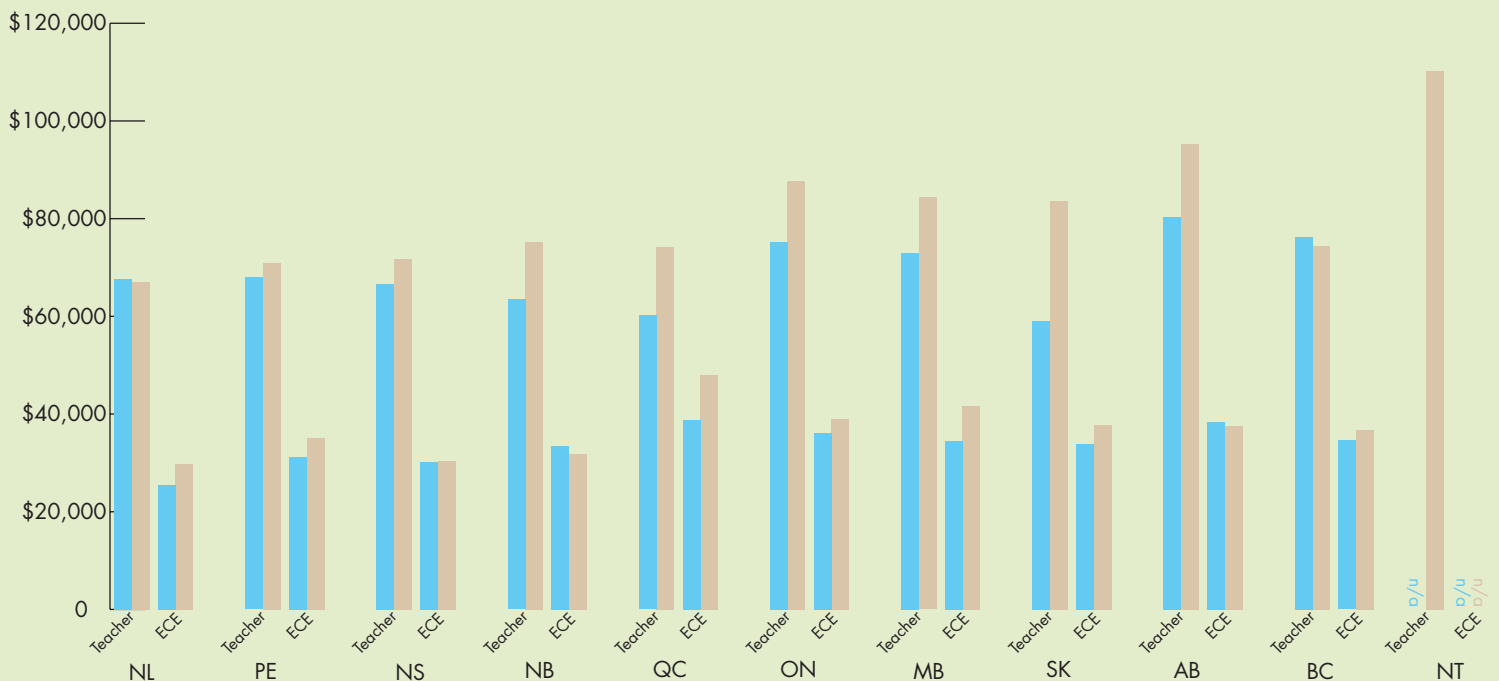
No jurisdiction requires all staff in licensed child care or preschool centres to have a post-secondary credential in ECE, but all require some qualified staff. Several provinces have adopted minimum “entry level” training requirements, which vary from 40 to 120 hours of ECE course work. While child/staff ratios are consistent across the country, the number of early childhood educators required varies widely. Working in a sector dominated by under-trained staff becomes another burden for an already over-burdened profession.

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Variations in regional funding, access and workforce qualifications suggest there is a role for the federal government in supporting equity for children and families. Nowhere is this more evident than in the dearth of

data. For all its other failings on this file, the federal government had at least supported research and data collection. However, the demise of the National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth and its successor, the forced extinction of the Canadian Council on Learning and the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, and the restrictions placed on Statistics Canada are but a few recent federal actions aimed at undermining accountability to the public and stifling democratic discourse.

### Change in Teacher / ECE Remuneration by Province/Territory in 2011 / 2014



Source: Early Childhood Education Report 2014/Provincial and Territorial Profiles; Early Years Study 3/Provincial and Territorial Profiles.



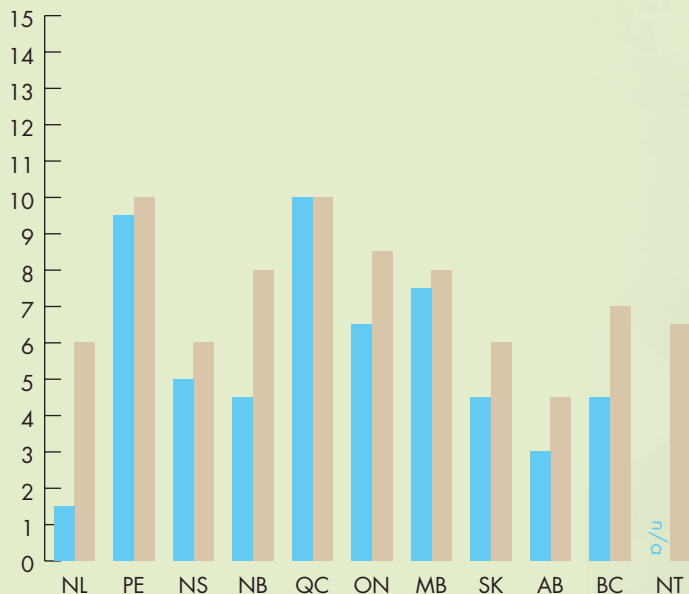
## Early Childhood Education (ECE) Report 2014

	Benchmarks	Value	NL	PE	NS	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC	NT
INTEGRATED GOVERNANCE	ECE under common department or ministry	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5		0.5		0.5			0.5
	Common ECE supervisory unit	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5		0.5		0.5			0.5
	Common ECE policy framework	1	1	1		1	1	1	1		1	1	1
	Common local authority for ECE administration and delivery	1				1							
FUNDING	At least 2/3 of child care funding goes to program operations <sup>a</sup>	1		1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1			1
	Mandated salary and fee scale	1		1			1		1				
	At least 3% of overall budget devoted to ECE	1					1	1					
ACCESS	Full day kindergarten offered	1		1	1	1	1	1				1	1
	50% of 2–4 year olds regularly attend an ECE program	1		1			1	1				1	1
	Funding conditional on including children with special needs	1		1 <sup>b</sup>					1				
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	ECE curriculum framework	0.5	0.5	0.5		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
	Alignment of ECE programs with kindergarten	0.5	0.5	0.5		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
	At least 2/3 of staff in programs for 2–4 year olds are qualified	0.5	0.5		0.5		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5		0.5	
	Kindergarten educators require ECE qualifications	0.5		0.5				0.5 <sup>d</sup>					0.5
	Salaries of ECEs at least 2/3 of teachers	0.5					0.5						n/a
	ECE professional certification/professional development required	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
ACCOUNTABILITY	Annual progress reports posted (2011 or later)	1			1	1	1 <sup>c</sup>		1	1	1	1	
	Standards for ECE programs including kindergarten	1	1										
	Population measures for preschool collected and reported	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6.5</b>

Benchmarks	Value	NL	PE	NS	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC	NT
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Source: Early Childhood Education Report 2014/Provincial and Northwest Territories profiles; <sup>a</sup>Amount includes funding for special needs; <sup>b</sup>In Early Years Centres only; <sup>c</sup>Québec was not a signatory to the federal/provincial/territorial early childhood development agreements where the parties agreed to regular standardized reporting. Québec has its own mechanisms for public reporting; <sup>d</sup>ECEs are part of an educator team

## Change in Early Childhood Education Report Results 2011/2014



Source: Early Childhood Education Report 2014/Provincial and Northwest Territories profiles





## RESULTS

The Early Childhood Education Report 2014 is a blunt instrument. It is able to track trends, but not the advocacy, consultations, drafting, redrafting, debates, compromises and hard choices that go into the creation of public policy. Behind every score on every benchmark is the incredible work carried out daily by parents, educators, administrators, officials and decision-makers who create the environments where young children learn and grow.

Available, affordable, top-quality and voluntary preschool education for all Canada's children is an ambitious, promising and fundamentally progressive goal. It is also realistic. By broadening education's mandate to include younger children, we can bridge the gap between parental leave and formal schooling. By including the option of extended-day activities for families who request it, Canada can have its long-demanded early learning and care program.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Early Childhood Education Report moves beyond counting child care spaces to assess the policy frameworks that support services for young children and their families.

Our research team at the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development selected and populated 19 internationally derived benchmarks, using an analysis of government publications and reports, and custom runs from Statistics Canada's Survey of Young Canadians and Labour Force Survey. Profiles were developed for all 10 provinces plus the Northwest Territories using the above data, supplemented by key informant interviews. The results and draft profiles were provided to provincial and territorial officials for comment.

The long version of the Report includes the background data and rationale, charts and figures, methodology, complete references and profiles of each jurisdiction. All are available online, together with presentations and media materials. To download the long version of the ECE Report 2014, visit: [www.TimeForPreschool.ca](http://www.TimeForPreschool.ca). You may also follow us on Twitter [@AtkinsonCentre](https://twitter.com/AtkinsonCentre).



The Atkinson Centre is a research centre at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. By linking research to practice and public policy, it seeks to improve outcomes for young children.

The Atkinson Centre relies on its strategic partners who play a critical role in the research, content development and communication of the Early Childhood Education Report 2014. It would like to thank its funders listed on the right.

It would also like to thank the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation and the Jimmy Pratt Foundation for their support in the launch and dissemination of the Report.

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<sup>1</sup>Fortin, P., Godbout, L., & St-Cerny, S. (2012). *Impact of Québec's low fee child care program on female labour force participation, domestic income, and government budgets*. Research Chair in Taxation and Public Finance. University of Sherbrooke.

<sup>2</sup>Institut de la statistique du Québec (2013). *Québec Survey of Child Development in Kindergarten 2012*. Retrieved from [www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/statistiques/sante/enfants-ados/developpement-enfants-maternelle\\_an.html](http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/statistiques/sante/enfants-ados/developpement-enfants-maternelle_an.html).