

# Family Choices: Manitoba's Plan to Expand Early Learning and Child Care



*Focused on  
what matters most  
> to families.*

**Manitoba** 

# Introduction

Licensed early learning and child care is an important support for many Manitoba families. As more families choose to make Manitoba their home, we are continuing to build and look for ways to improve early learning and child care across our province.

Together, we have accomplished a lot in the past decade, thanks to the hard work of parents, community boards and those working in the licensed sector. Steady investments by government have created stability and given community partners the peace of mind that comes with knowing that government is on your side.

A little over five years ago, the global economy faltered. Governments, families and individuals around the world were faced with tough decisions. Here in Manitoba, we came up with a plan to protect families and jobs. This included protecting early learning and child care by increasing funding and setting up a capital building fund to build new and expand existing centres and by providing funding for 6,500 more spaces.

We are still dealing with the effects of the global economic downturn today. When faced with uncertainty, other governments have chosen to cut funding for child care. We are choosing to continue making steady investments because we know that if we want to continue building our province, there is no other way. Investing in early learning and child care is not only a smart economic decision – it is the right decision for Manitoba families.

**For parents**, having access to licensed, affordable, high quality early learning and child care makes a world of difference because it means:

- having the choice to go back to work or to get that first job
- upgrading skills, education and training
- not having to worry about the comfort, safety and well-being of children during the work or school day

**Children** benefit very much from having great places to learn and grow by:

- participating in fun, educational activities that will help lay the foundation for lifelong learning
- making friends and developing important social skills
- feeling the safety and security they need to learn and grow

Early learning and child care also does great things for **Manitoba's economy** by:

- getting people with the skills we need into jobs – and making sure employers don't lose them after they have children
- offering parents peace of mind during the work day, so that they can work hard, be creative and reach their full potential
- giving the next generation of skilled workers a strong start

As Manitoba's population and economy continue to grow, it is very important that we continue to invest for the future through a strong system of early learning and child care. These investments will pay off today and for years to come as, together, we raise the next generation of parents and skilled workers that will continue to build and grow our province.

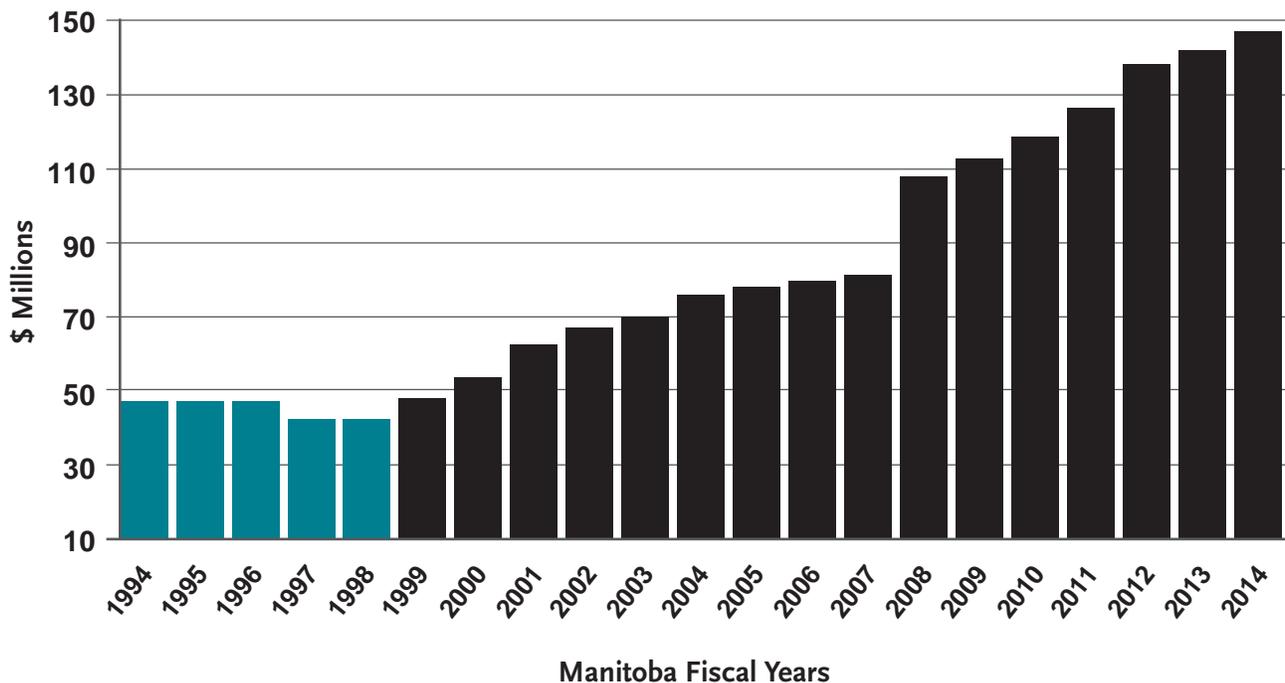
# Building on Past Successes

Over the course of Manitoba's previous multi-year plans, early learning and child care has grown and developed to help meet the needs of children and families across the province. Since 1999, the province has:

- nearly tripled annual funding for child care to more than \$147 million
- funded more than 12,600 child care spaces, an increase of over 80 per cent
- committed funding to build or expand more than 100 child care centres
- increased wages by nearly 60 per cent and introduced a province-wide pension plan for child care workers
- introduced age-appropriate curricula and enhanced quality programming
- kept Manitoba child care the most affordable in Canada outside of Quebec

These investments are paying off, but we know that it is essential to keep building, even in times of economic uncertainty. Faced with a major recession, other governments have chosen to cut funding for child care and the whole system suffered. We are listening to Manitoba families and know that this is not an option. *Family Choices: Manitoba's Plan to Expand Early Learning and Child Care* is our commitment to continue working together with other areas of government and community partners to enhance and improve Manitobans' access to licensed early learning and child care.

## Steady Growth in Child Care Funding



# Listening to Manitobans

In fall 2013, Deanne Crothers, MLA for St. James, undertook a series of public consultations on behalf of Minister Kerri Irvin-Ross, visiting communities across the province to hear Manitobans' ideas about how to build a stronger system. Across the province, families told us that they need high quality, accessible and affordable care for their children. Parents of children who require additional support want to know their children's needs will continue to be met within licensed child care programs. Many parents and providers also want assurance that spaces for child care in schools will continue to be protected. We also heard from the workforce and other important stakeholders, and their message was clear – we must continue to grow and develop the early learning and child care system.

The advice from parents, early childhood educators, centre directors, home-based providers and other important stakeholders has helped to form the basis for Manitoba's new multi-year child care plan that will help build a stronger Manitoba for everyone. *Family Choices: Manitoba's Plan to Expand Early Learning and Child Care* is the Manitoba government's plan to continue to build on past successes while growing and developing licensed early learning and child care for the future. The new six-point plan will help to enhance the current system and explore options for greater success in the future, while setting a target for thousands more spaces over the next five years.



## What We Heard:

- **Keep building the system, including new and expanded centres and more spaces** to ensure licensed child care is available to families when they need it.
- **Child care workers need better wages and more opportunities for training and professional development** to be able to continue providing the best possible care and learning opportunities for Manitoba children. Trained staff that stay long-term should be rewarded for their continued commitment to the field and to Manitoba children.
- **Consistent, parent-friendly resources and supports** help families find a child care spot and let individuals access supports, services and information quickly and easily.
- **Licensed home-based child care can be expanded** through better services and supports for providers, making it easier for families to find a child care space.
- **Keep improving quality, diversity and inclusion** for all Manitobans needing licensed early learning and child care services.
- **The way the system operates needs to be reviewed and revised** to meet the evolving and diverse needs of Manitoba families.



# 1. Building and Expanding

Manitobans have told us that continuing to build the licensed early learning and child care system is a priority for them, even in these uncertain economic times. We will not put the gains that have been made over the past decade at risk by making cuts that might help the government's bottom line today but would hurt families well into the future.

Because so many Manitoba families rely on quality early learning and child care to help them be successful and contribute to the economy by working or furthering their education, we know that we must continue to grow the number of child care spaces. Over the next five years, we will invest in over 5,000 new and newly funded spaces. More families will have access to an early learning experience for their preschool children through Manitoba's enhanced nursery schools, with a goal of 200 more funded spaces.

An additional \$25 million will allow us to continue building and expanding school-based early learning and child care centres. Building on our past successes, we have set a new goal of at least 20 new or expanded centres in schools over the next five years. With our education partners, we will also look for ways to expand access to school age care. We are also committed to continuing to work with our education partners to ensure that child care centres located in schools are not displaced.

We will also continue funding the development of community-based centres that are not located in schools, using revised project criteria. Manitoba will also explore the possibility of using new models and partnerships to support centre development. New community development support will be provided to boards of directors, communities and centres with the start-up and management of their programs.



## 2. Supporting the Workforce

Nearly two decades ago, when Manitoba faced a recession, the decision was made to cut funding for child care centres, putting a strain on the workforce and causing the whole system to suffer. We know the impact of these types of cuts and reject that approach.

The hard work and dedication of the early learning and child care sector in Manitoba has helped to build a quality system that is safe, affordable and emphasizes early childhood learning. We know that to support the growth of the early learning and child care system, we need to continue to support and grow the workforce.

Feedback about the early learning and child care workforce is clear – wages need to increase. We will support higher wages for child care workers by:

- providing annual revenue increases via operating grants to centres and home providers in specific support of wages/incomes
- establishing a wage enhancement grant to support long-term early childhood educators for their commitment to the field and to Manitoba children

We also recognize the importance of making training and professional development opportunities available and accessible to staff to be able to continue to upgrade their skills. We will provide more opportunities to increase the number of qualified early childhood educators to grow the system and for skill development and training by:

- expanding the number of college seats with a specific focus on workplace training to increase the number of early childhood educators
- offering more substitute grants so that existing workers may upgrade their skills and training while continuing to receive their full salary
- increasing our training grant to better reflect the current cost of courses
- providing mentorship to centre directors to strengthen management and leadership
- introducing support for professional development

Manitoba will also establish a new practice to engage community stakeholders and experts in early learning and child care to examine recruitment and retention strategies facing the early learning and child care field and to make recommendations for future planning. We are committed to address current shortages and to build on efforts to promote meaningful careers for Manitoba early childhood educators and the early learning and child care field.

### 3. Supporting Families and the Licensed System They Depend On

For Manitoba's early learning and child care system to run efficiently and effectively, we know that we must focus attention on families and the licensed homes and centres they rely on. Parents want to know that their children are receiving the best possible care and early learning opportunities, but they also need these services and supports to be affordable and easy to use.

Nobody should ever feel like they are being priced out of parenthood by the cost of child care. We are very proud that Manitoba continues to have the most affordable child care in Canada, outside of Quebec.

Manitoba is committed to service excellence and will continue working to ensure that the system is as consistent and user-friendly as possible for both families and child care providers:

- Improvements will be made to Manitoba's Online Child Care Registry (OCCR) – Canada's first province-wide registry of its kind – to help parents register their child care needs and to make it easier for licensed providers to use the registry to fill available spaces. We will also work with providers to support province-wide use of the system so that parents can be sure their registrations are being considered.
- Information on the Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care website will be improved to help parents, child care staff and applicants find the information they need, quickly and easily.

Moving forward, we will work toward setting up new approaches to licensing and monitoring centres and homes to provide programs with the support they need to ensure the best possible early learning and care for Manitoba's children.

We are committed to improving and enhancing information to parents about licensed early learning and child care services. Feedback from parents, providers, the workforce, stakeholders and other partners will be taken into consideration as part of our commitment to continual improvement and strong customer service.





## 4. Supporting Licensed Child Care in Homes

Manitobans know that quality early learning and child care happens in a variety of settings, including licensed homes. Home-based child care is an important component of Manitoba's child care system, one that we would like to see grow. Starting a licensed family child care home is a great way for parents who want to stay at home with their children to start their own business and contribute to their communities.

To help grow the early learning and child care system, Manitoba will work toward expanding and better supporting home-based family and group child care. We are committed to increasing support for new and established home providers, recognizing that they face unique challenges.

Streamlined processes, start-up training, workshops and other supports will be made available to new providers becoming licensed. We will also explore options for connecting home-based providers with centres to enhance programming. Mentorship support, for new and existing licensed home-based providers, will also be offered. Partner agencies and other government departments will be included in efforts to establish and provide additional language supports, where needed.

Start-up grants for home providers will continue to be offered and Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care (MELCC) will work with unlicensed providers to encourage them to pursue licensing to expand licensed options for families.

We will also explore a school age-only model for family child care homes.

## 5. Improving Quality, Diversity and Inclusion

Together, we have made great strides in improving quality and maintaining high standards of care in recent years. The Manitoba government is committed to supporting high quality, inclusive practices in licensed early learning and child care centres, nursery schools and family and group child care homes. Quality programs address the individual abilities and needs of each child and community.

Diversity and inclusion will continue to be a key focus of our early learning and child care system.

We will continue to enhance quality programming for children in licensed early learning and child care settings with the support of a centralized quality enhancement team.

New resources will be made available to help providers meet regulated standards but also, to continue to improve the quality of their programs.

We will explore opportunities with post-secondary institutions teaching early childhood education for ways to enhance high quality programming by supporting demonstration sites where students can experience quality programming in action.

We know that children who need additional supports must be included and accommodated in the early learning and child care system. To further support their inclusion, Manitoba will develop new models and practices to support these important services.

We will also explore, with stakeholders, ways to support quality early learning programs for Aboriginal children.

While the delivery of early learning and child care programs in First Nations communities remains the jurisdiction of the federal government in conjunction with First Nations, Manitoba will continue discussions with these partners to work together to improve child care standards in Manitoba First Nations communities.



## 6. Exploring Future Change

Over time, the needs of families change. Systems must be reviewed and revised to meet these diverse and evolving needs.

The Manitoba government will establish a Commission on Early Learning and Child Care to explore the needs of families and the delivery of early learning and child care in the province. The commission will look at ways to re-design Manitoba's system of early learning child care and guide our future plans.

Consideration will also be given to ways to create stronger links between our early learning and child care centres and our schools to help make life easier for working families. We are committed to strengthening these connections, which is why we already require that all new schools must include child care centres. More than 16 projects are currently underway to create or expand child care centres in schools. Since 2008, 30 child care centre projects have been completed in Manitoba schools.

The commission will ensure the voices of parents, the workforce and stakeholders help guide the system's future development.



For more information visit:  
[www.manitoba.ca/childcare](http://www.manitoba.ca/childcare)