



The State of Early Childhood Education in Canada:

Progress, Pressures, and the Rise of Market-Driven Systems

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P

Policy

Canada's
policy
Structure

F

Market

Mixed auspice
model

F

Funding

Funding and
accountability

W

Workforce

Workforce
capacity vs.
workforce
conditions

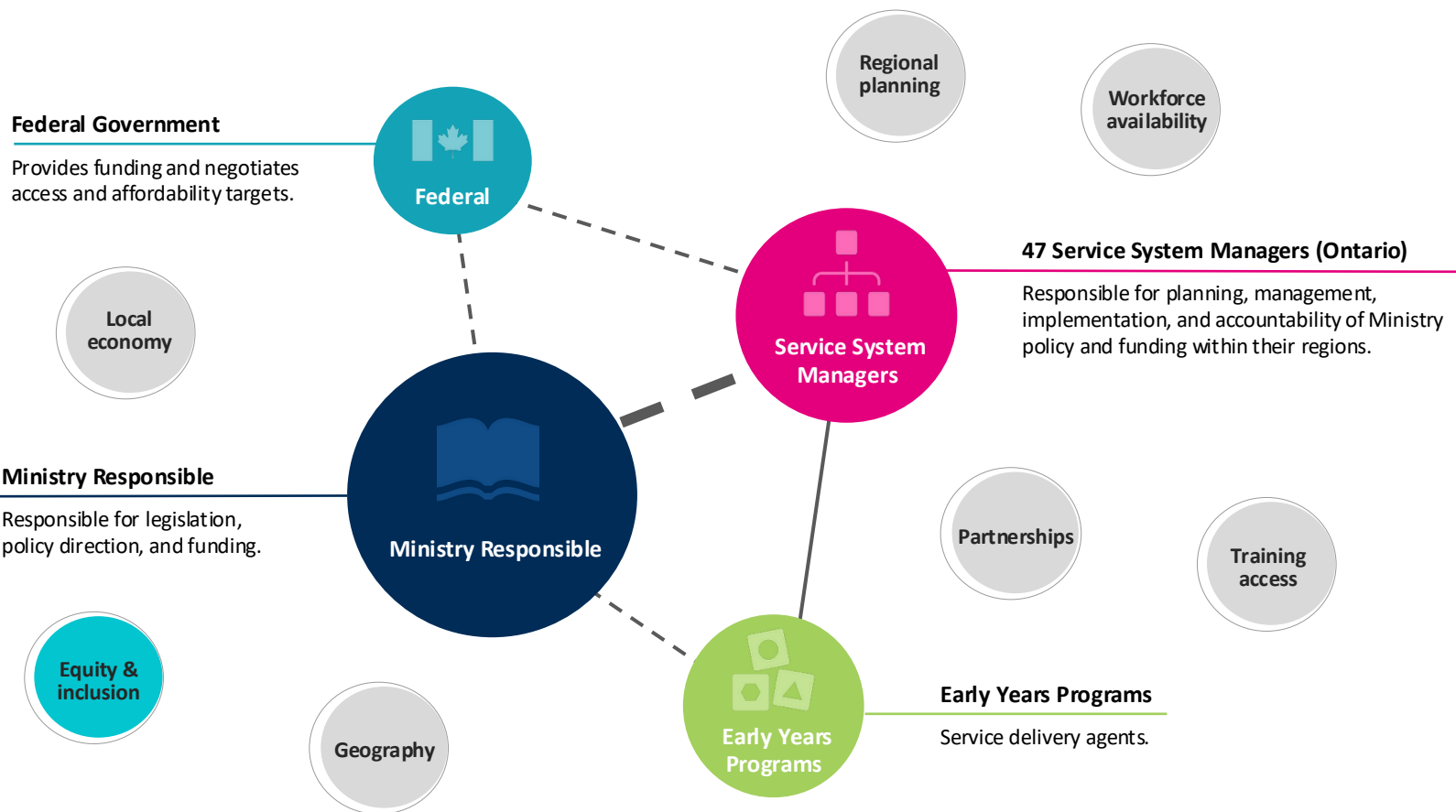
E

Equity

Equity beyond
access



Early Years Governance



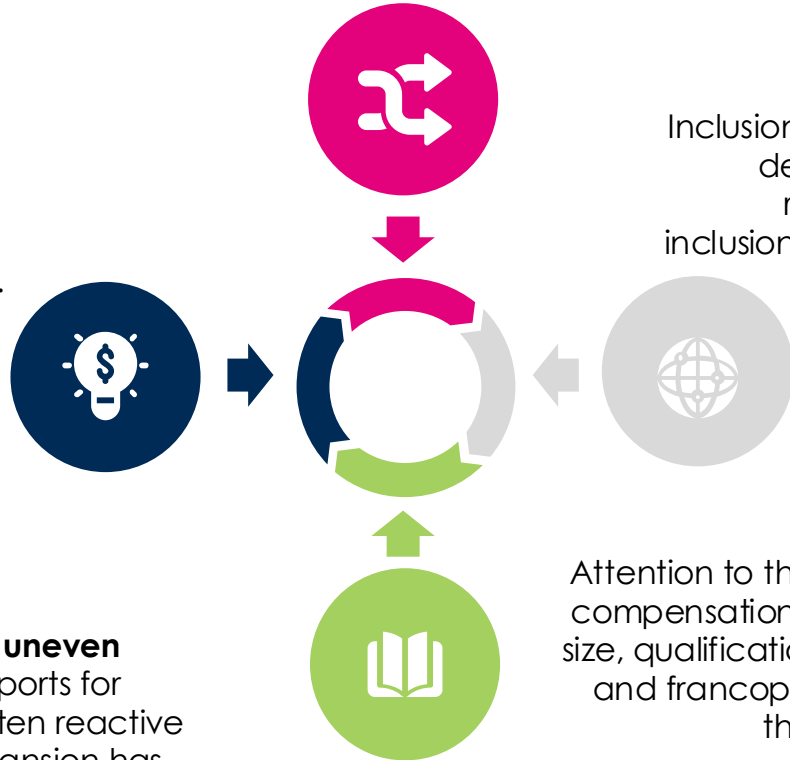
The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) Policy is one of the largest social policy investments in recent Canadian history

01

Moving from a largely parent funded system, with mixed auspice models, to a largely publicly funded model across 13 jurisdictions. 13 different **policy architectures**: from funding, staffing models, ratios, eligibility criteria, curriculum and policy frameworks

02

Fragmented systems create **uneven** access and inconsistent supports for children and families and often reactive instead of intentional as expansion has happened at unprecedented rates



03

Inclusion is largely an add on and not designed into the system. Many regions are re-evaluating their inclusion models and moving towards a tiered-system. Child care deserts continue.

04

Attention to the workforce has ranged from compensation systems that consider centre size, qualifications, experience, remote area and francophone bonuses, to wage floors that are under the poverty line.



CWELCC and \$10-a-day:

More families are accessing child care

Lower parent fees have removed financial barriers for many families



More families can afford care



Increased labour force participation especially for women



More children benefiting from early learning environments



Stronger foundation for children's well-being and development

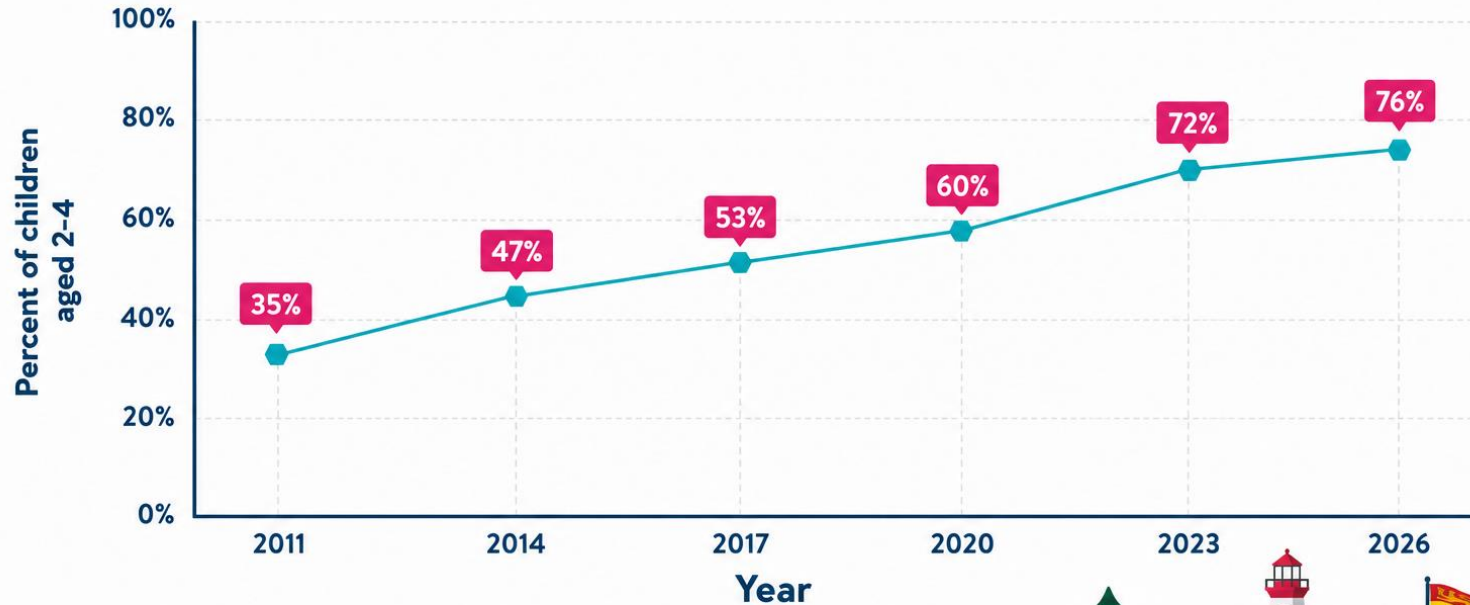
New Brunswick

Child Care Capacity for 2-4 Year Olds

ECER 2026

Early Childhood Education Report

Percent of children aged 2-4 with access to regulated child care spaces.



Source: Early Childhood Education Report,
Atkinson Centre of Society and Child Development.

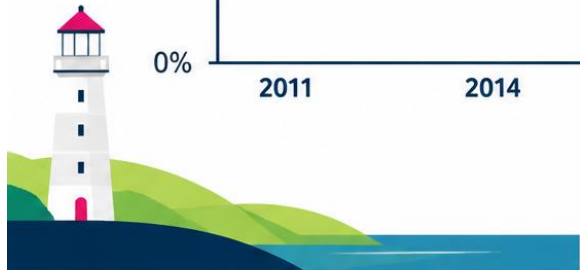
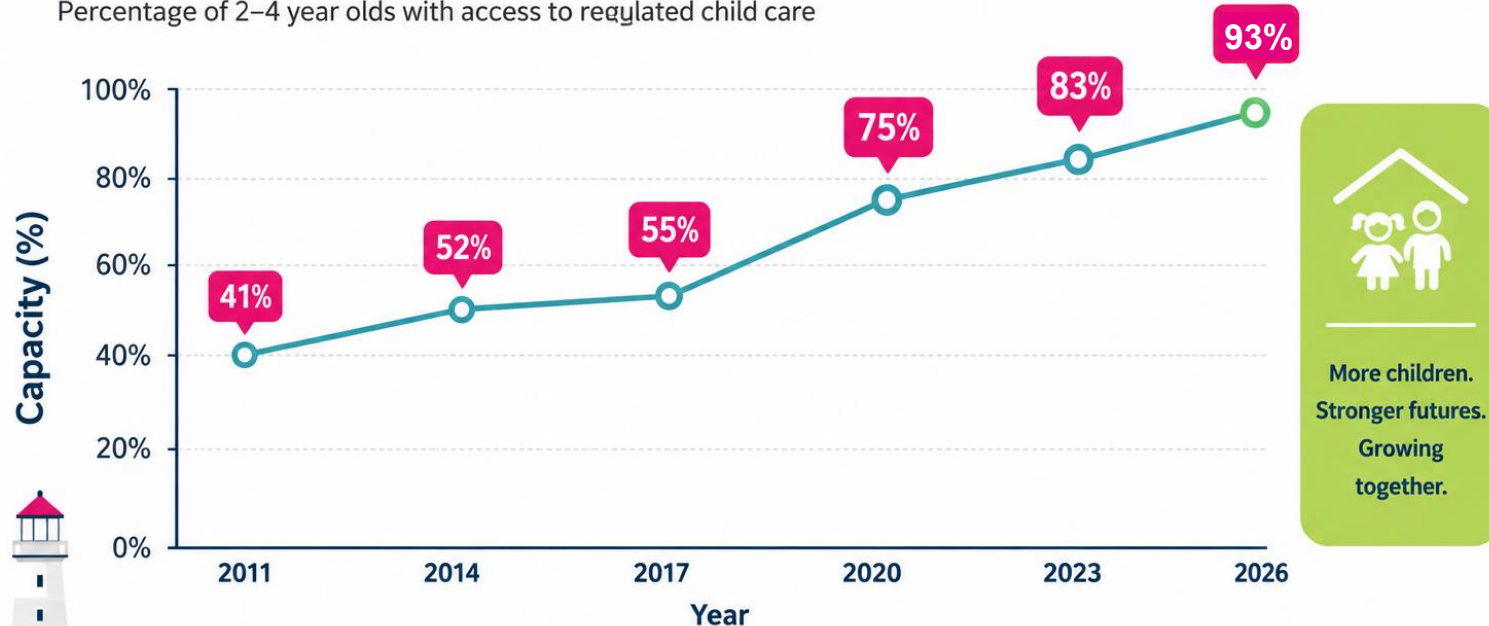


Prince Edward Island

Child Care Capacity for 2–4 Year Olds

ECER 2026
Early Childhood Education Report

Percentage of 2–4 year olds with access to regulated child care



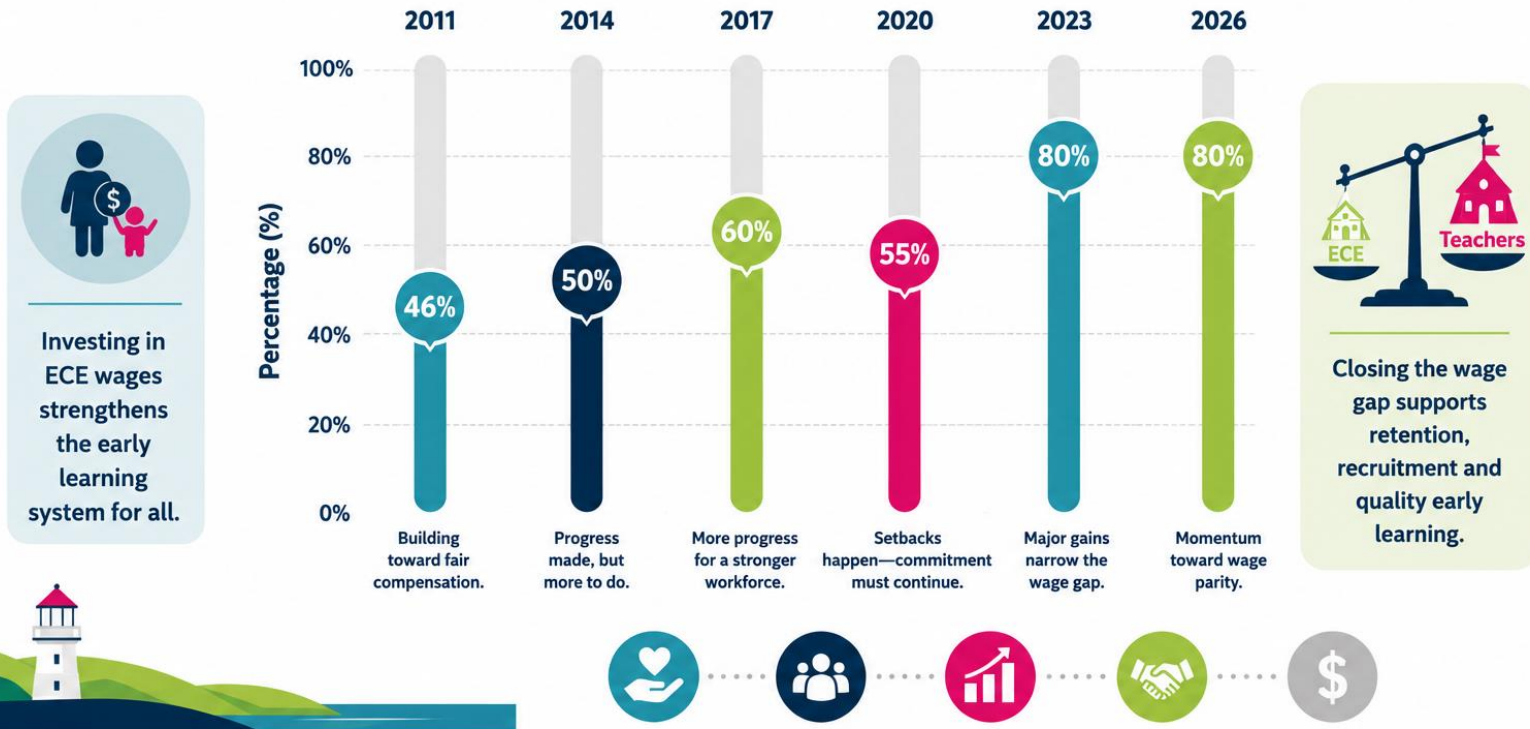
Source: Early Childhood Education Report, Atkinson Centre of Society and Child Development.

Prince Edward Island

ECE Wages as a Percent of Teacher Wages

ECER 2026

Early Childhood Education Report

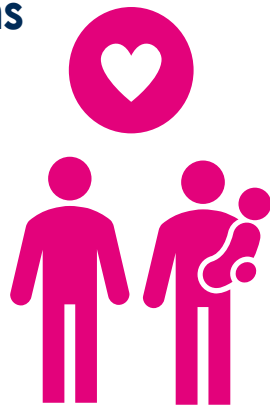


Source: Early Childhood Education Report, Atkinson Centre of Society and Child Development.



More Access Means More Children with Vulnerabilities

As access increases, so does the number of children with complex needs in programs



More vulnerable families that could not previously access child care

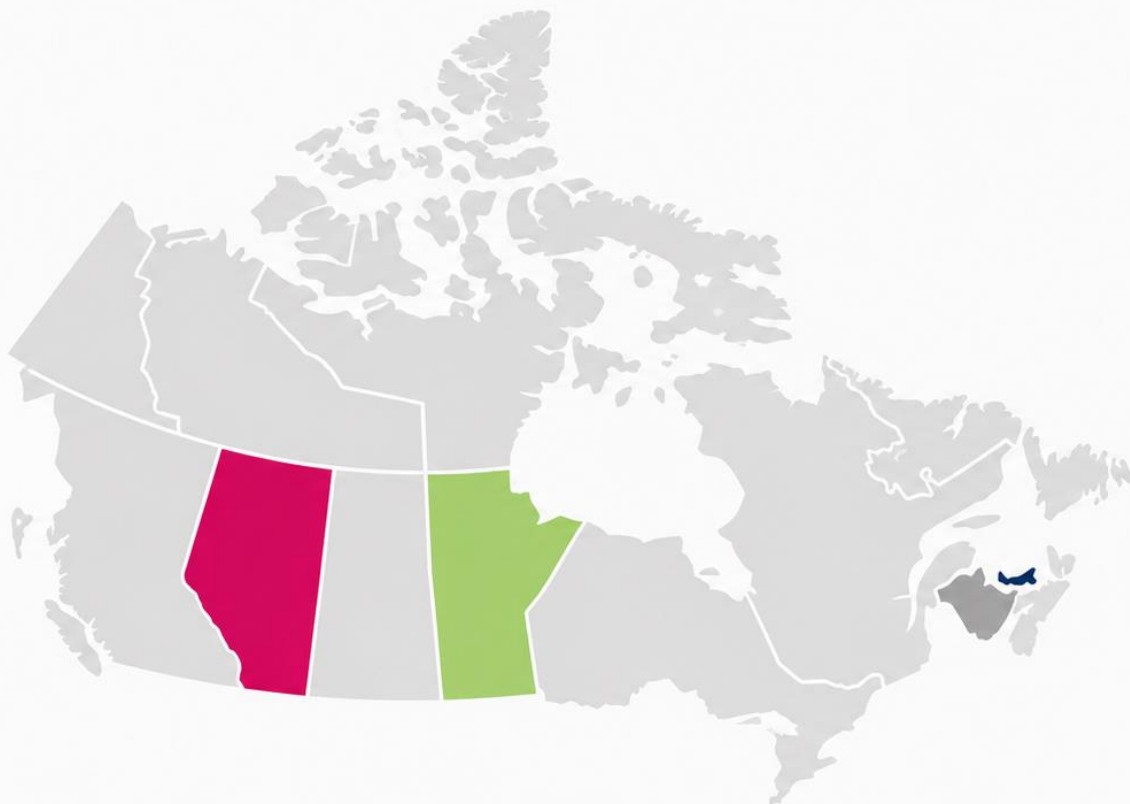


Exacerbated by world affairs – war, COVID-19, climate



More intensive needs requiring more time, staff, and resources

JURISDICTIONS WHERE PUBLIC FUNDING FOR CHILD CARE IS CONDITIONAL ON INCLUDING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



Prince Edward Island

In Designated Early Years Centres only

New Brunswick

In Designated Early Learning and Child Care centres only

Manitoba



In all publicly funded child care programs

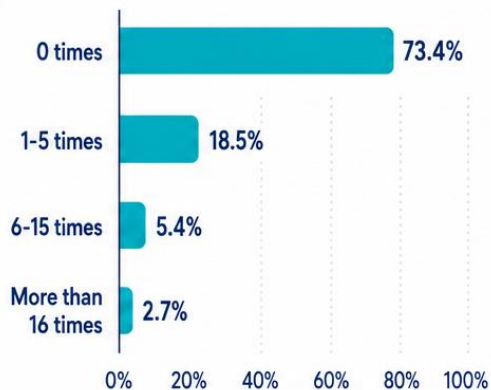
Alberta

In Early Childhood Services programs only

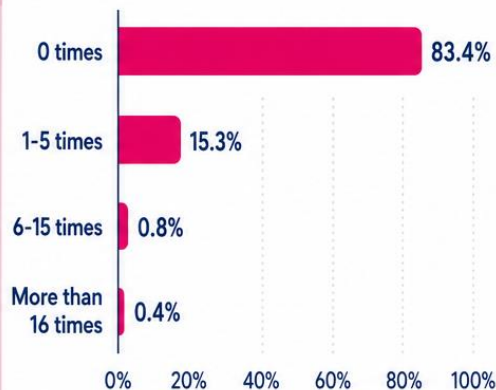
PERCENTAGE REPORTING FREQUENCY OF TIMES IN THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS DIRECTORS/SUPERVISORS EXPERIENCED STAFFING SHORTAGES



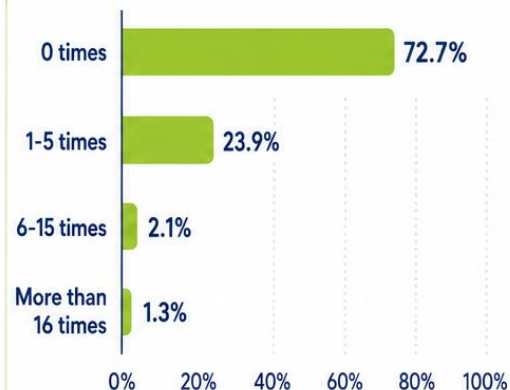
Sent Children with Disabilities Home Due to Staffing Shortages



De-enlisted Children with Disabilities Due to Staffing Shortages



Denied Admission to Children with Disabilities Due to Staffing Shortages



Staffing stability supports inclusion, access, and quality for all children.



Every child deserves consistent, high-quality care.



Stronger teams build stronger futures.



Data that informs action drives change.



When Inclusion Supports Become Ratio Coverage

Inclusion Disappears

PULLED INTO RATIO. CHILD SENT HOME.

When specialized support is used to maintain ratios, inclusion disappears.

1

INTENDED INCLUSION

Specialized support in place to enable inclusion.



Child receives the support they need to learn, participate and belong.

2

WORKFORCE SHORTAGE / RATIO CRISIS



Staff shortage.
Need to maintain legislated ratios.



SNRC is pulled from the child to maintain the required ratio.

3

SYSTEM FAILURE



Support removed.
Child sent home.



Inclusion cannot succeed when specialized supports are redirected to stabilize basic staffing.



Loss of individualized support



Disrupted inclusion and learning



Increased stress for educators



Children excluded. Families burdened.



Policy + Funding Fragmentation: 0 to 5 vs. 6-12 Years

**CWELLC supports children from
0 to 5 years only.**



0-5 YEARS



**CWELCC
subsidized**

\$10
a day

6-12 YEARS



**Limited or no
subsidies in most
jurisdictions**

\$20-\$30+
a day



Families often pay 2 to 3 times more once their child turns 6.
Inclusion support is often not carried through.



Provinces That Have Removed Low Income Parent Fee Subsidies

ECER 2026

Early Childhood Education Report



Alberta & Saskatchewan

Have removed low income parent fee subsidies.



Without income-based subsidies, many families face higher costs and fewer choices. This is not equitable.



Source: Early Childhood Education Report, Atkinson Centre of Society and Child Development.



An important stipulation of the CWELCC agreements is that newly created spaces be primarily non-profit or public, though jurisdictions operationalized this differently. For example, some committed to exclusively non-profit growth, while others set percentage-based targets for the share of non-profit spaces

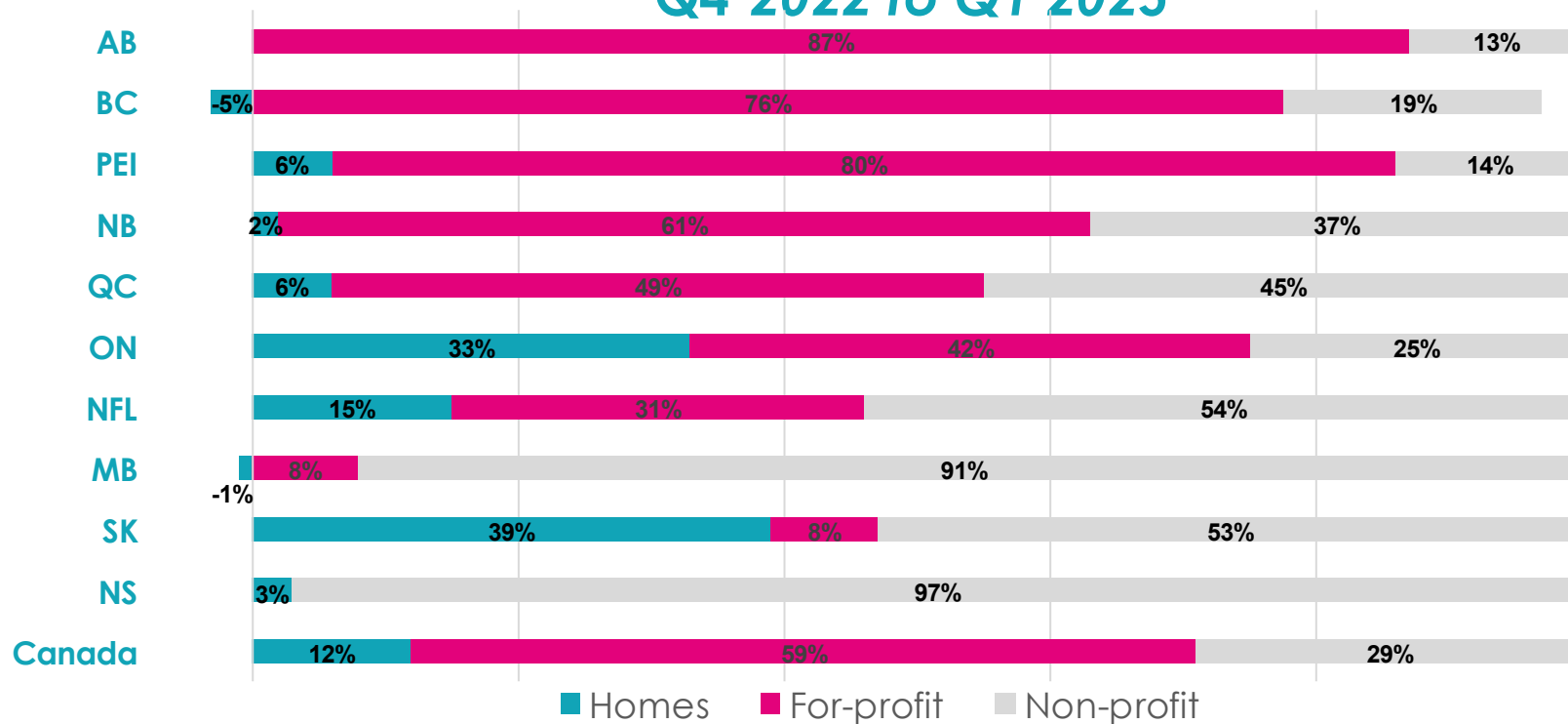
Share of Child Care Spaces for 0–5-Year-Olds by Province and Auspice (Q3, 2025)



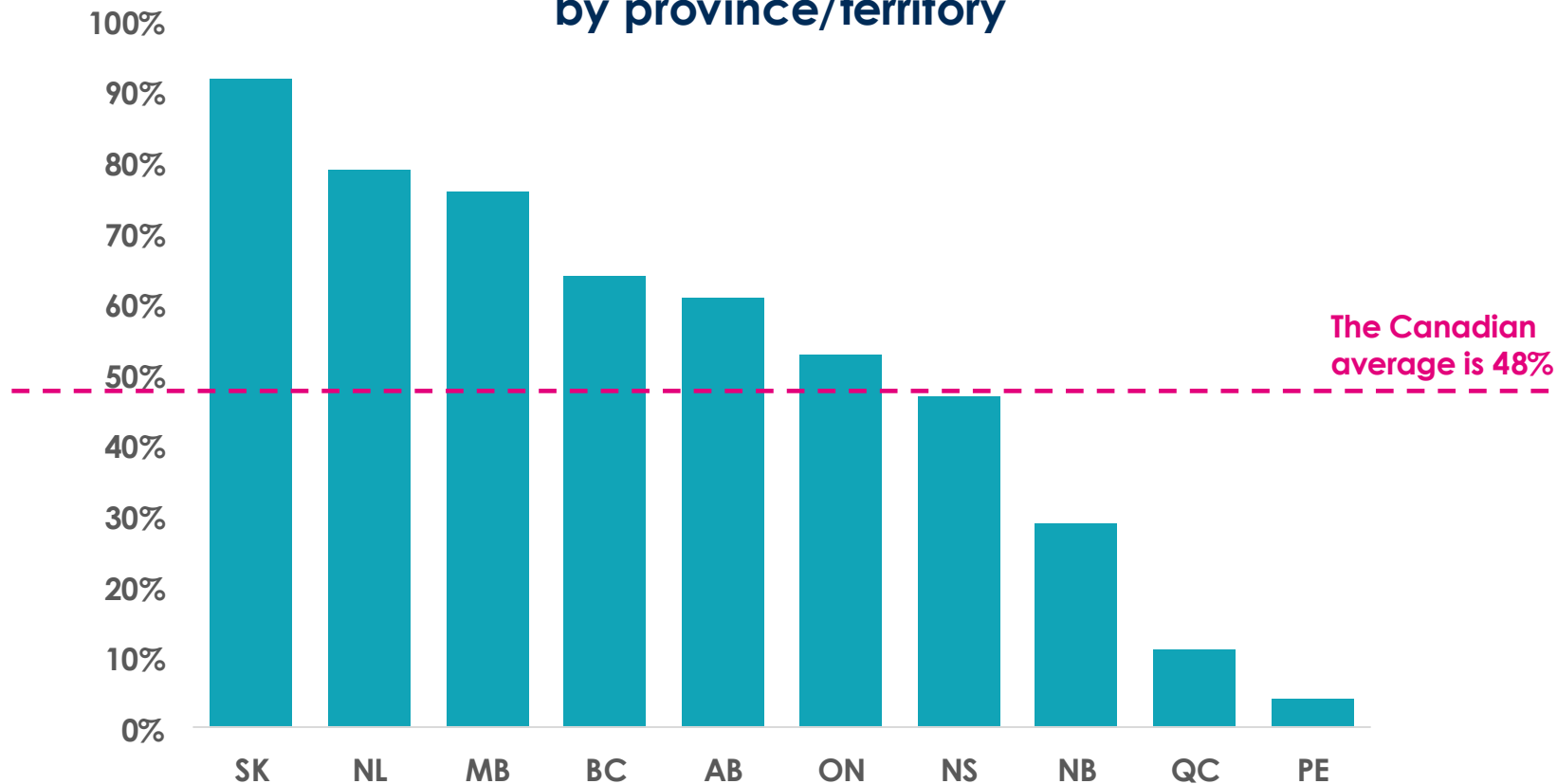
Note: All licensed child care spaces in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut are non-profit. Data for Yukon were not available. Source: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - Childcare Licensing and Accessibility by Region (CLAR) database.

Licensed Space Expansion by Ownership Type

Q4 2022 to Q1 2025



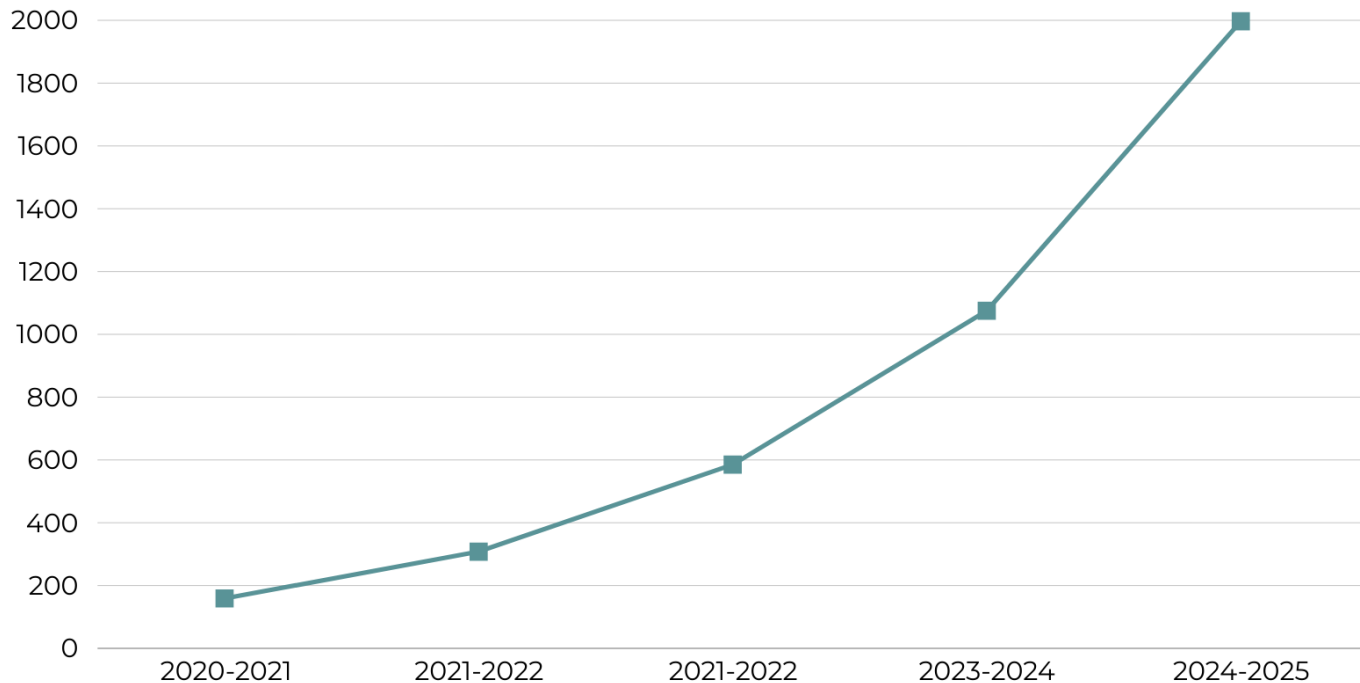
Proportion of children living in child care deserts by province/territory





Professional development received in the last 12 months	For profit	Non-profit	CMSM / DSSAB
Supporting vulnerable families	20.4%	27.2%	36.4%
Cultural diversity in Early Years settings	35.4%	43.0%	51.5%
Anti-bias/anti-racism/anti-oppression education	34.9%	46.4%	55.7%
Supporting newcomer families	14.8%	17.8%	19.0%
Critical trauma-informed practice	18.5%	26.7%	37.4%
Incorporating land-based learning	15.0%	19.5%	24.9%
Making workplaces more accessible	22.5%	25.7%	34.1%
Supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ children and families	19.3%	27.1%	32.5%
Indigenous ways of knowing and being and decolonization	21.4%	29.0%	44.6%
Incorporating Afrocentric ways of being	10.3%	9.7%	12.1%
Supporting children with disabilities	38.1%	46.2%	53.8%

Director's Approval Granted Annually from 2020-2024

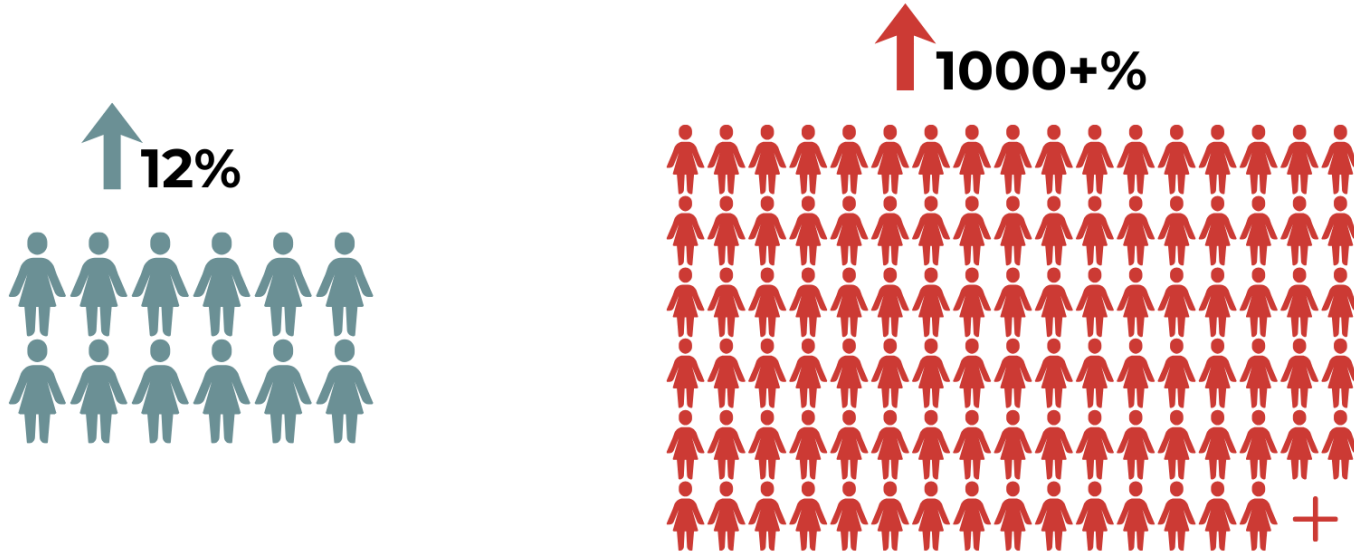


Source: Lee, M., Uthayakumaran, A., & Varmuza, P. (draft). Draft Report: Analysis of Director Approvals in Ontario's Licensed Child Care System (2020-21 to 2024-25) Based on FOI Data from the Ministry of Education. Building Blocks for Child Care.

Data obtained through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to the Ministry of Education on the use of Director Approvals (DAs) under O. Reg. 137/15, s. 54(1), item 2 of Ontario's Child Care and Early Years Act between 2020 and 2025 (as of May 30).

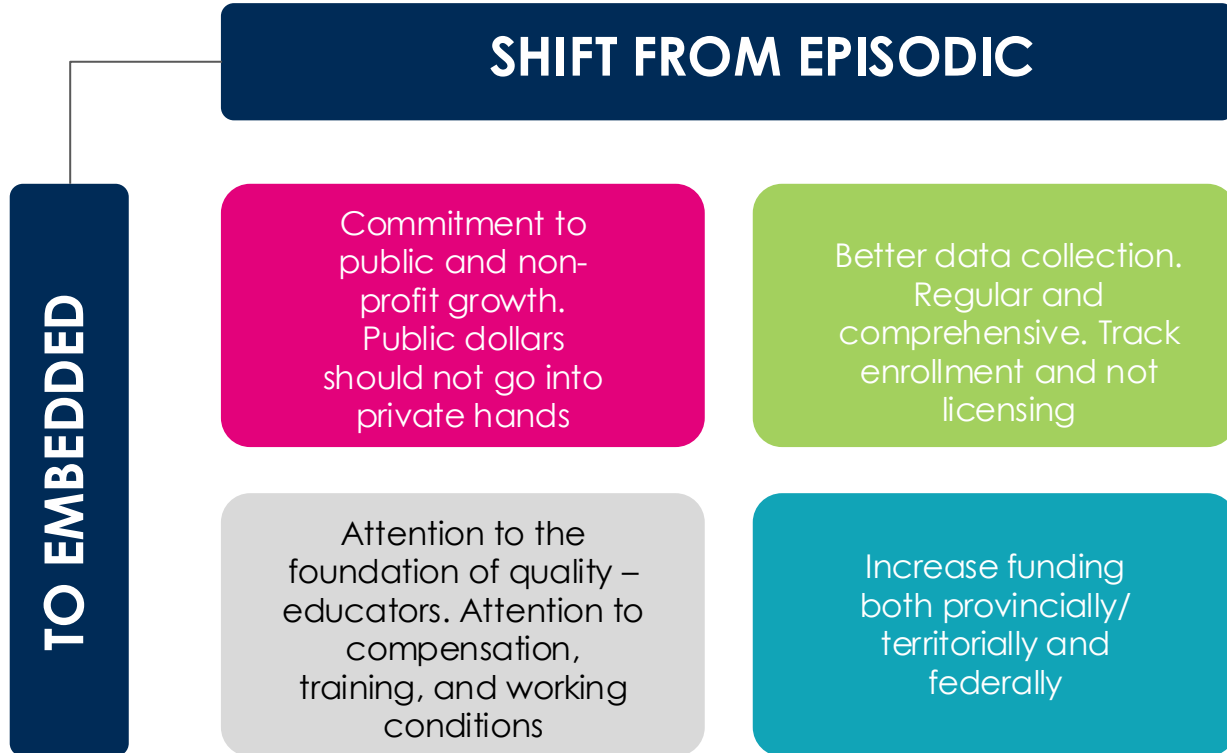


RECE Membership Growth vs Director's Approval Explosion



Source: Lee, M., Uthayakumaran, A., & Varmuza, P. (draft). Draft Report: Analysis of Director Approvals in Ontario's Licensed Child Care System (2020-21 to 2024-25) Based on FOI Data from the Ministry of Education. Building Blocks for Child Care.

Change takes time.....



THANK

YOU

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