

# The State of Early Childhood Education

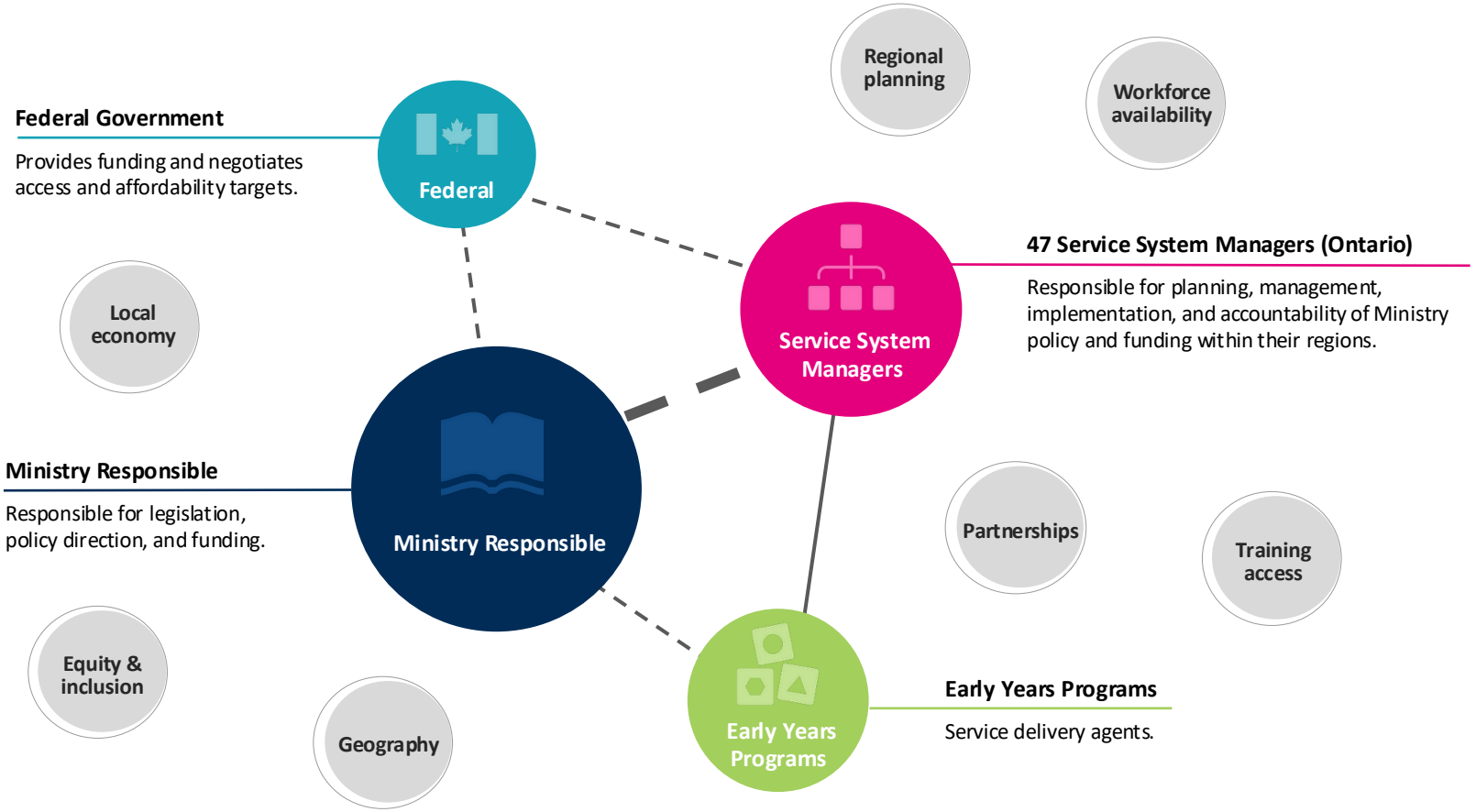
## Progress and Pressures


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for Society and Child Development
OISE | University of Toronto

The School of Early Childhood
George Brown Polytechnic

# Early Years Governance




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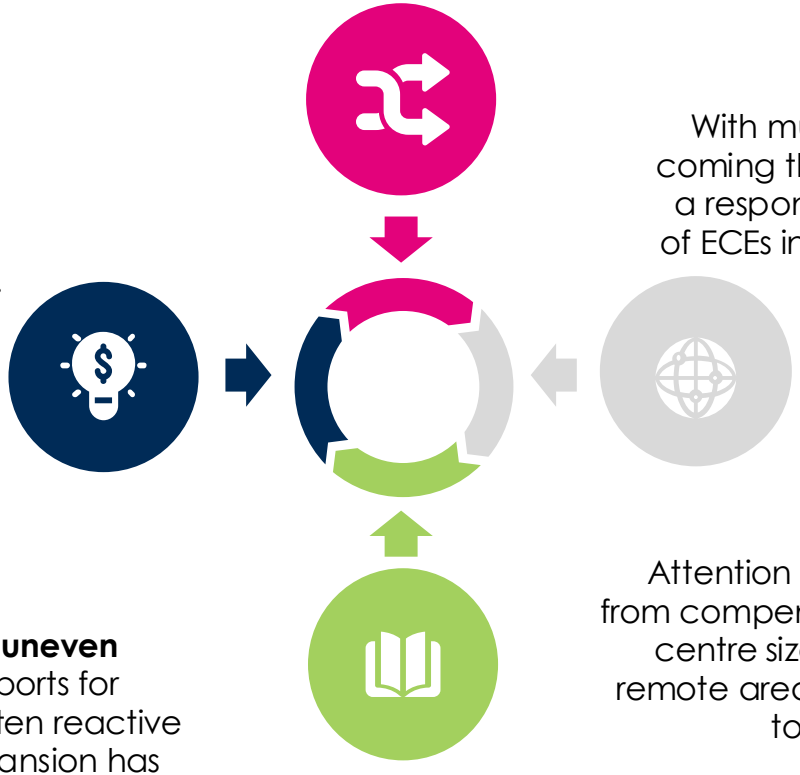
# The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) Policy is one of the largest social policy investments in recent Canadian history

## 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

With much of the operating funding coming through public dollars, there is a responsibility for pay equity. Wages of ECEs in many regions are under the living wage threshold

## 04

Attention to the workforce has ranged from compensation systems that consider centre size, qualifications, experience, remote area and francophone bonuses, to only a wage floor in Ontario

# CWELCC and "$10-a-day":
## More families are accessing child care

**Lower parent fees have removed financial barriers for many families**

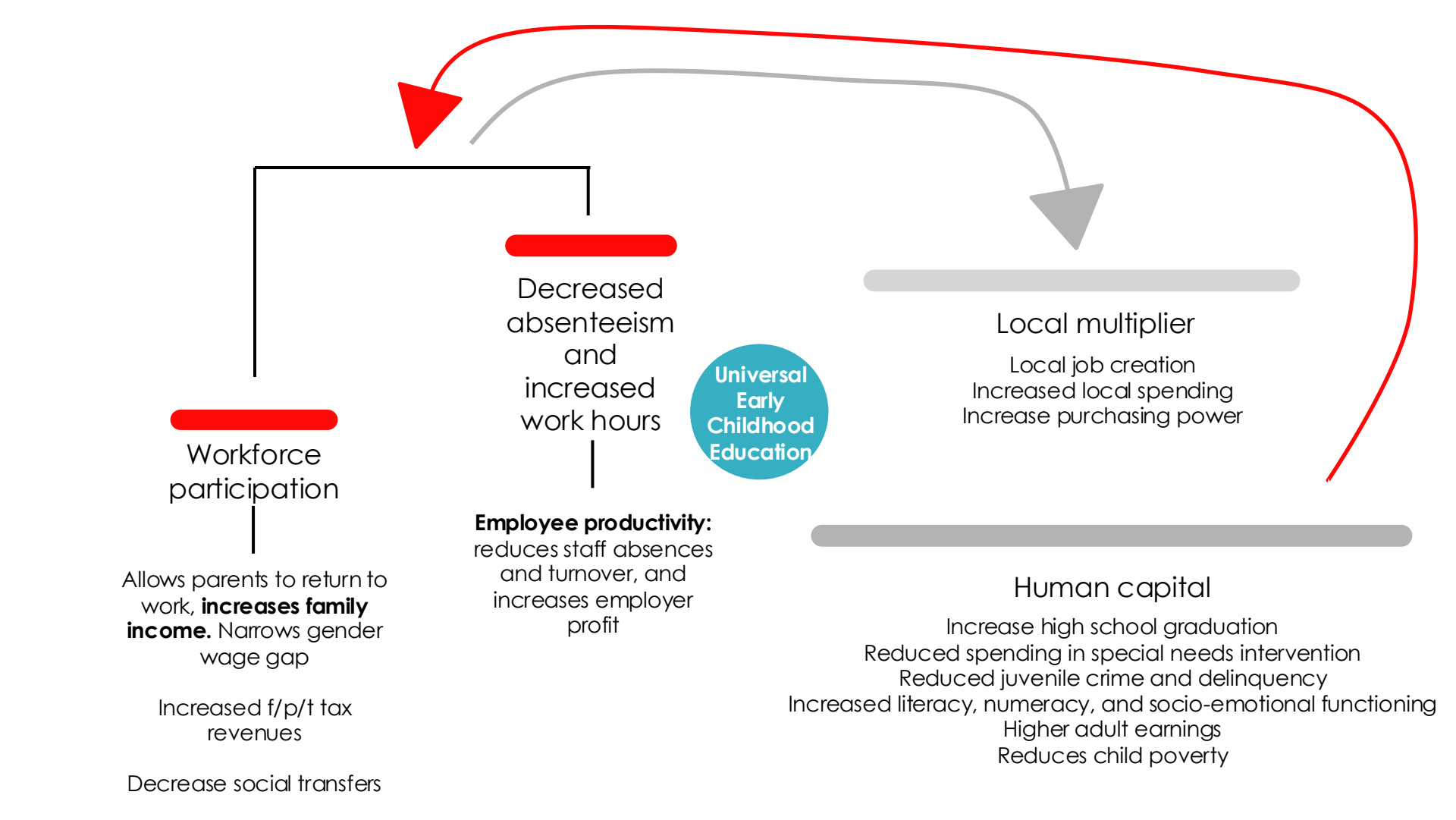



**More families can afford care, local economic develop't**

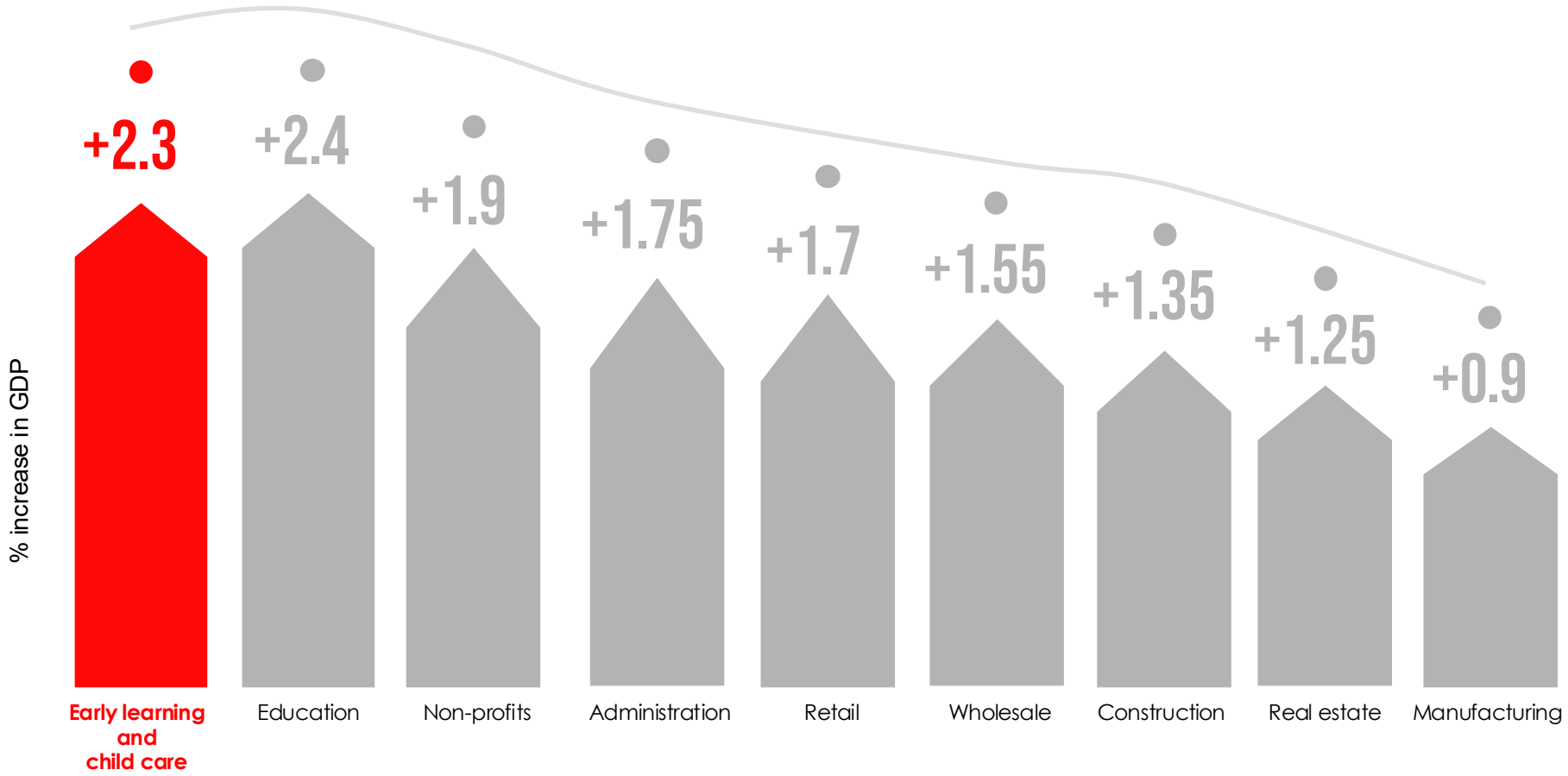
**Increased labour force participation especially for women**

**More children benefiting from early learning environments**

**Stronger foundation for children's well-being and development**


Universal Early Childhood Education
Workforce participation
Allows parents to return to work, **increases family income.** Narrows gender wage gap
Increased f/p/t tax revenues
Decrease social transfers
Decreased absenteeism and increased work hours
**Employee productivity:** reduces staff absences and turnover, and increases employer profit
Local multiplier
Local job creation
Increased local spending
Increase purchasing power
Human capital
Increase high school graduation
Reduced spending in special needs intervention
Reduced juvenile crime and delinquency
Increased literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional functioning
Higher adult earnings
Reduces child poverty

# Effect on GDP by Public Investment by Sector



Politically convincing
Labour market
Labour force participation
Women's rights

Child/Educator



Politically convincing
Labour market
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Child/Educator



# 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**

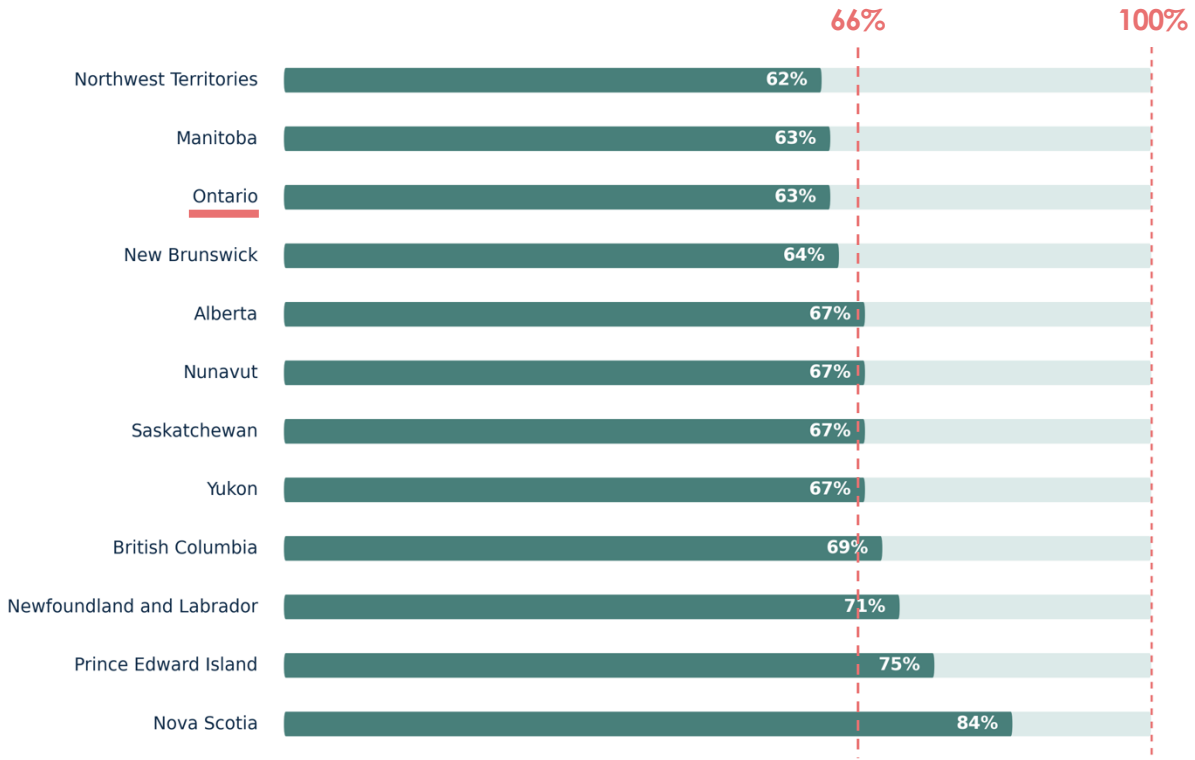
Early childhood educators lay the foundation for all future learning and all the benefits of quality early education.

Yet they remain among the most undervalued and underpaid professionals in our education system.



# ECE wages relative to teacher wages

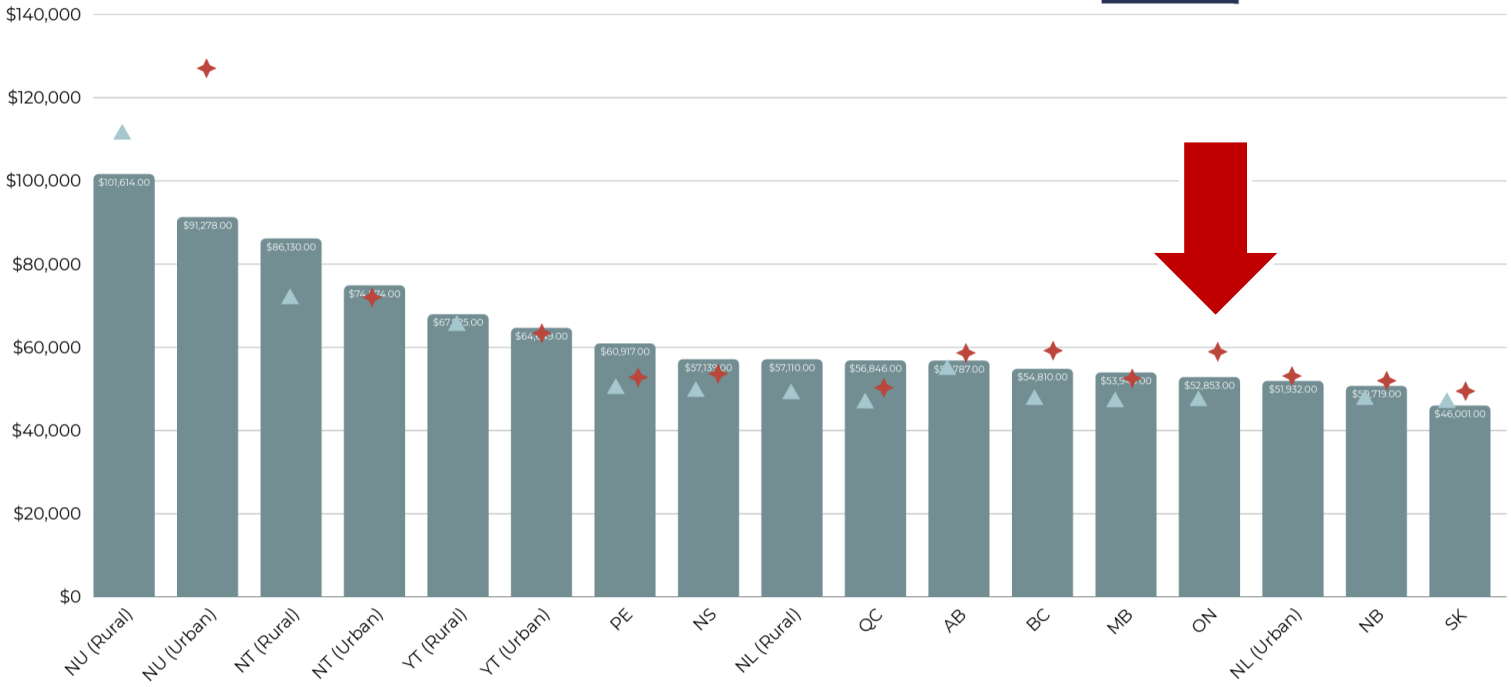
ECE wages as a percentage of teacher wages




Source: Akbari, E., McCuaig, K., Foster, D., and Mehta, S. Early Childhood Education Report 2026. In Press.

The pale segment shows the remaining gap to teacher wages.

# Earnings of ECEs across Canada compared to poverty thresholds in urban (✦) and rural (▲) regions




The territories and NL provide a higher rate for remote areas

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The Market Basket Measure (MBM) is used to establish poverty thresholds. The MBM is calculated based on the cost of a basket of food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and other items for a family of four that reflects a modest, basic standard of living.

For more detailed information:

Updated October 2025

# Wages by auspice

RECEs and directors / supervisors

## RECEs

Public **$30.37**

Non-profit **$25.53**

For-profit **$22.99**

## Directors / Supervisors

Public **$40.67**

Non-profit **$32.53**

For-profit **$28.15**

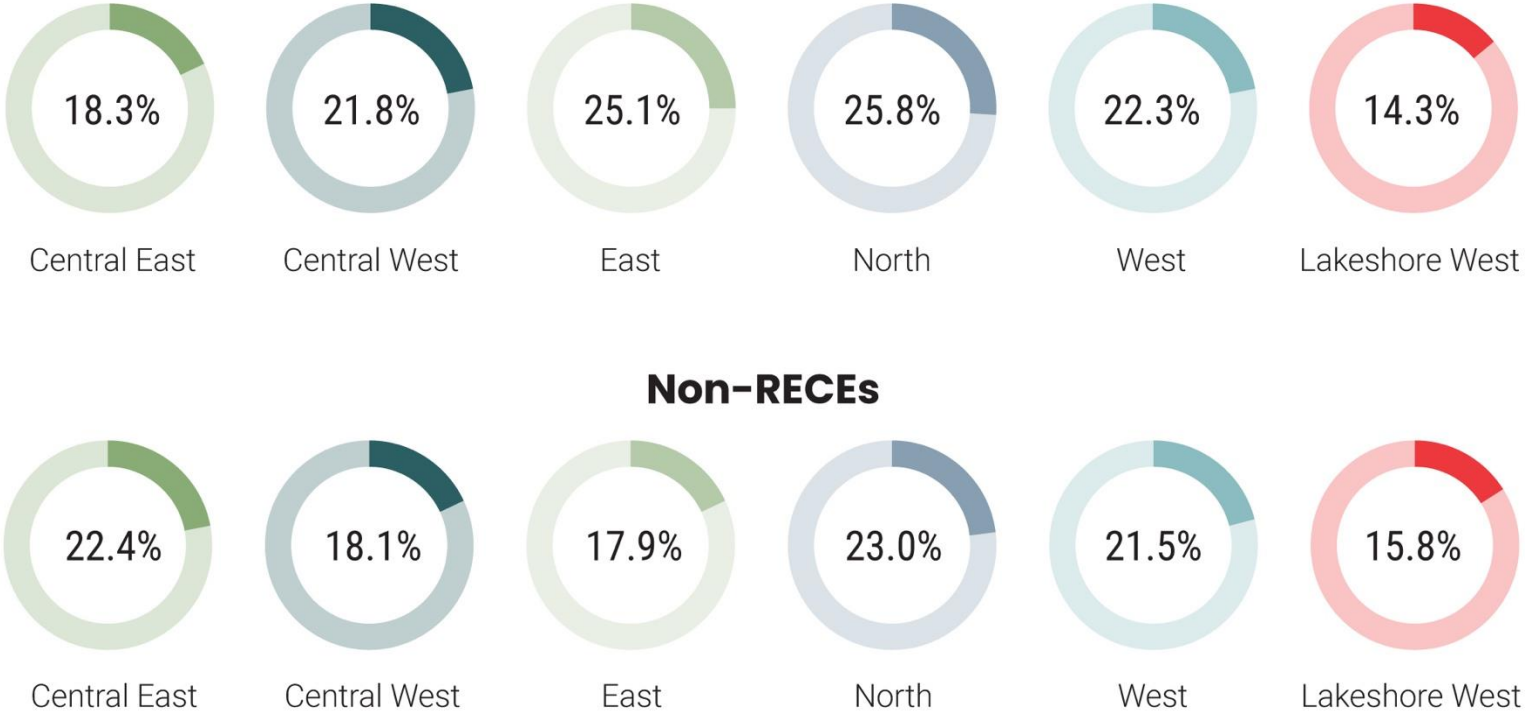
Wages are from 2023 Knowing Our Numbers Ontario Workforce Survey.

Akbari, E., McCuaig, K., Schurter, M. Varmuza, P., Akbari, S., Mudie, S. (2024). Knowing Our Numbers: A Provincial Study with a Local Lens on the Early Childhood Education Workforce in Ontario.

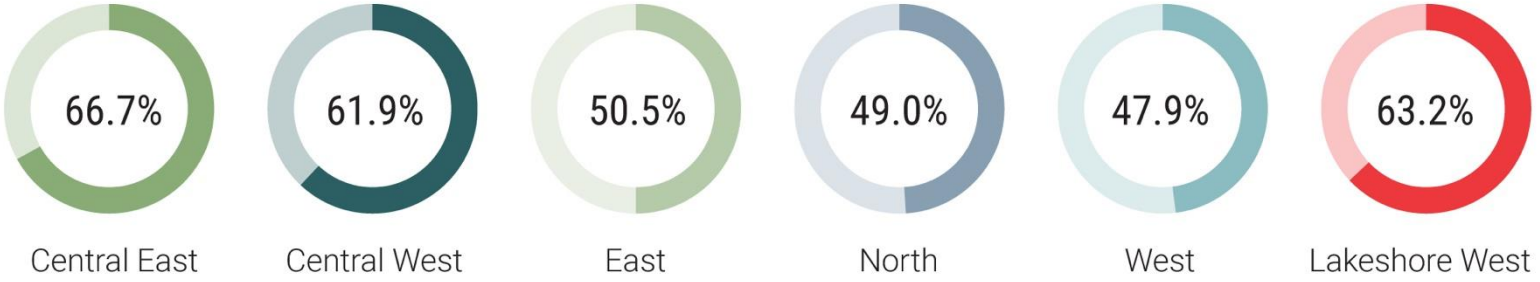
knowing numbers connaître chiffres

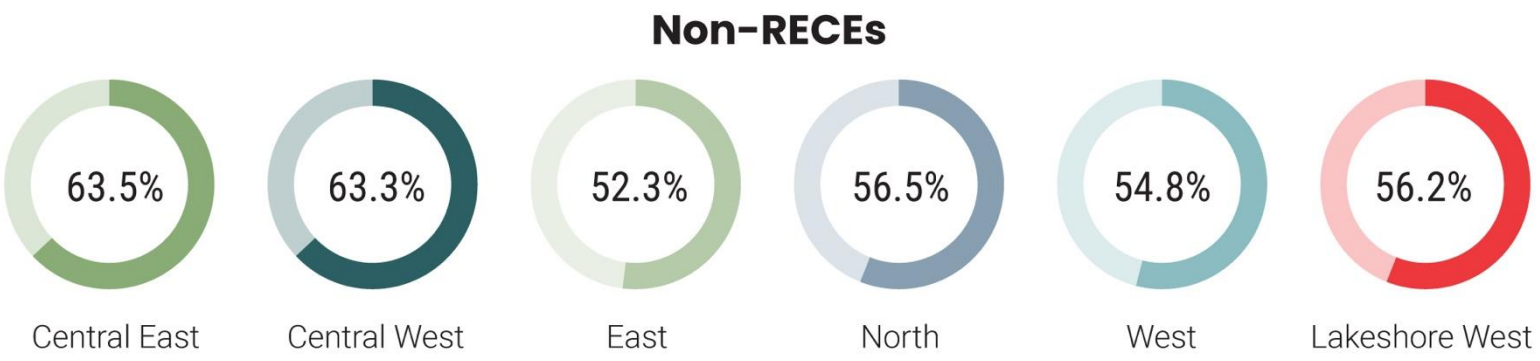


# Percentage of RECEs and Non-RECEs Reporting Additional Employment by Region



# Percentage of RECEs and Non-RECEs Reporting Housing Security Concerns



# 3-5 years

Average number of years ECEs stay in the field in Ontario



# Pulled into ratio. Child sent home.

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

## 1 INTENDED INCLUSION



Specialized support helps the child learn, participate and belong.

## 2 SUPPORT REDIRECTED



The support educator is pulled into ratio to cover a staffing shortage.

## 3 CHILD SENT HOME

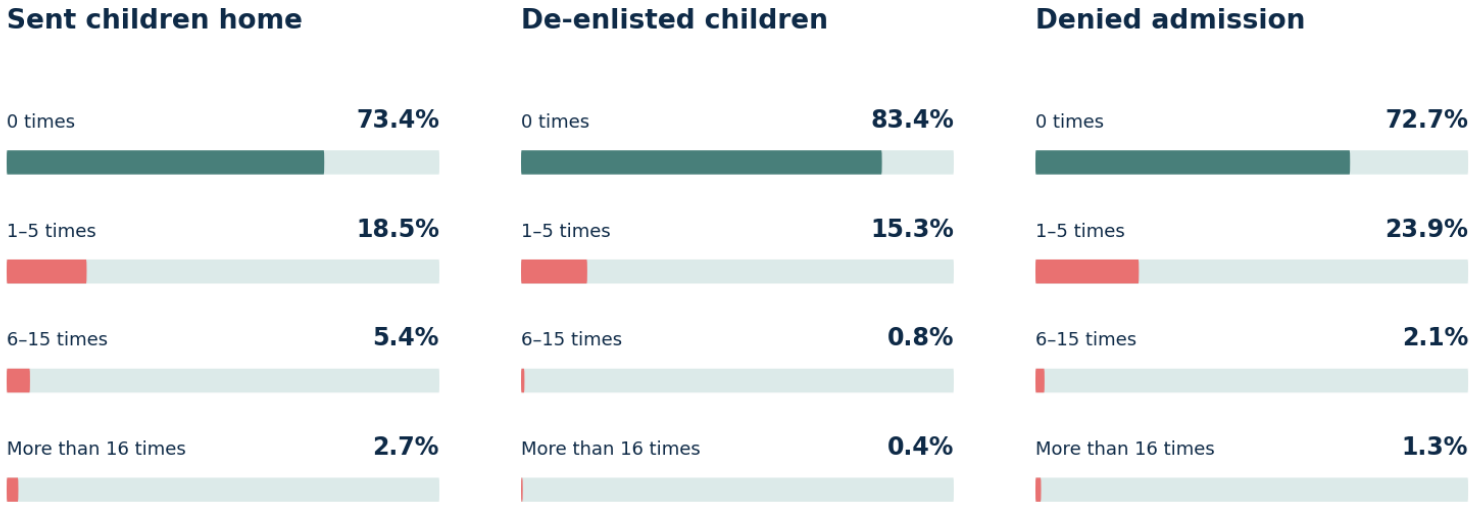


Individualized support is removed. The child cannot stay.

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

# Staffing shortages and access for children with disabilities

Percentage of directors / supervisors reporting each frequency in the previous 12 months




All three outcomes were reported as occurring due to staffing shortages.

knowing numbers connaître chiffres

# What is Director's Approval?

## Ontario's licensed child care centres



**Ministry permission for a person who does not meet the usual qualified-staff requirements to count as qualified staff.**

### WHO APPROVES?

A Ministry of Education director—not the centre's director.

### WHAT DOES IT ALLOW?

The person can count toward the required qualified staff in the approved centre and age group.

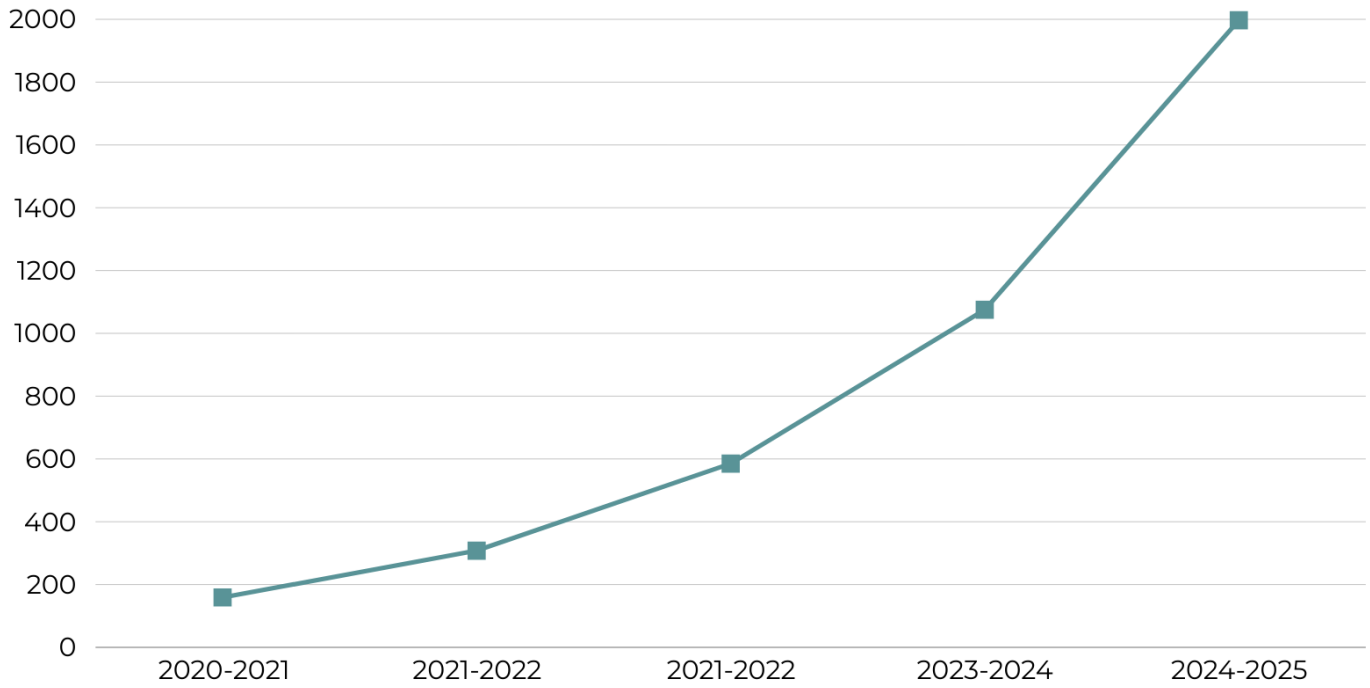
### WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

It does not grant an ECE diploma or registration with the College of Early Childhood Educators.

Approval is specific to the centre and age group. Conditions may apply.

All centre supervisors also require ministry approval, including RECEs.

# Director's Approval Granted Annually from 2020-2024

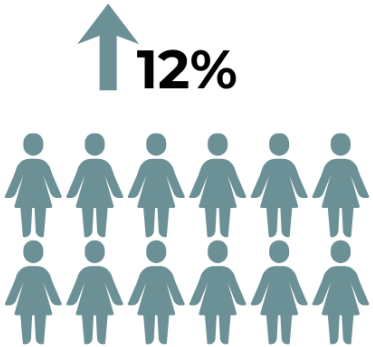


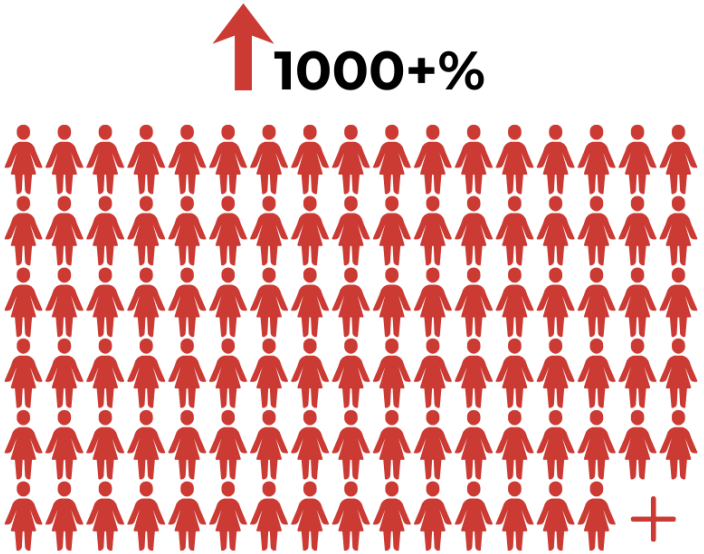

**Source**: Lee, M., Uthayakumaran, A., & Varmuza, P. (draft). Draft Report: Analysis of Director Approvals in Ontario's Licensed Child Care System (2020-21 to 2024-25) Based on FOI Data from the Ministry of Education. Building Blocks for Child Care.

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building blocks for child care

# RECE Membership Growth vs Director's Approval Explosion



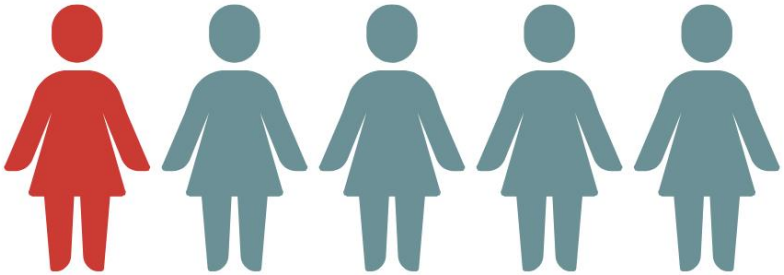

**Source**: Lee, M., Uthayakumaran, A., & Varmuza, P. (draft). Draft Report: Analysis of Director Approvals in Ontario's Licensed Child Care System (2020-21 to 2024-25) Based on FOI Data from the Ministry of Education. Building Blocks for Child Care.

ECE Workforce Knowledge HUB

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# The Shift from RECEs to Director's Approvals



**By 2024-25, nearly 1 in 5 supervisors (21.1%) held a DA rather than an RECE qualification**

**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.

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# Lessons from PEI

## Key Highlights from their recent survey and findings

**Job Satisfaction:** Director satisfaction increased by 19%, while staff satisfaction increased by 44%.

**Benefits from Wage Increases:** In 2019, 50% of individuals left the sector seeking better wages. In 2024, that number dropped to just 2%.

**Recruitment Improvements:** 88% of directors believe that recruitment and retention in the sector has improved since 2019.

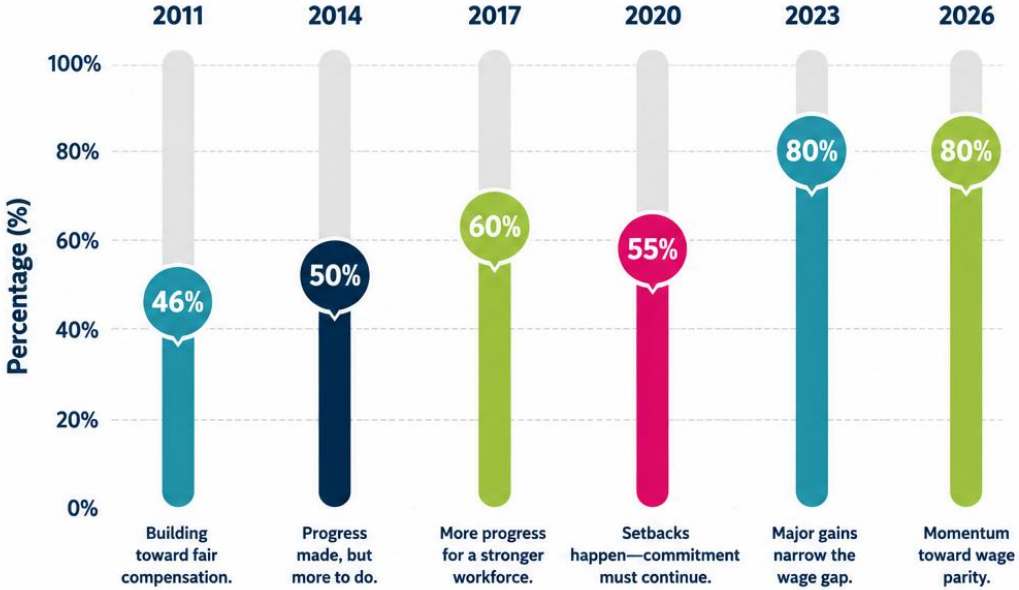
# Prince Edward Island

## ECE Wages as a Percent of Teacher Wages

**ECER 2026**
Early Childhood Education Report



Investing in ECE wages strengthens the early learning system for all.







Closing the wage gap supports retention, recruitment and quality early learning.





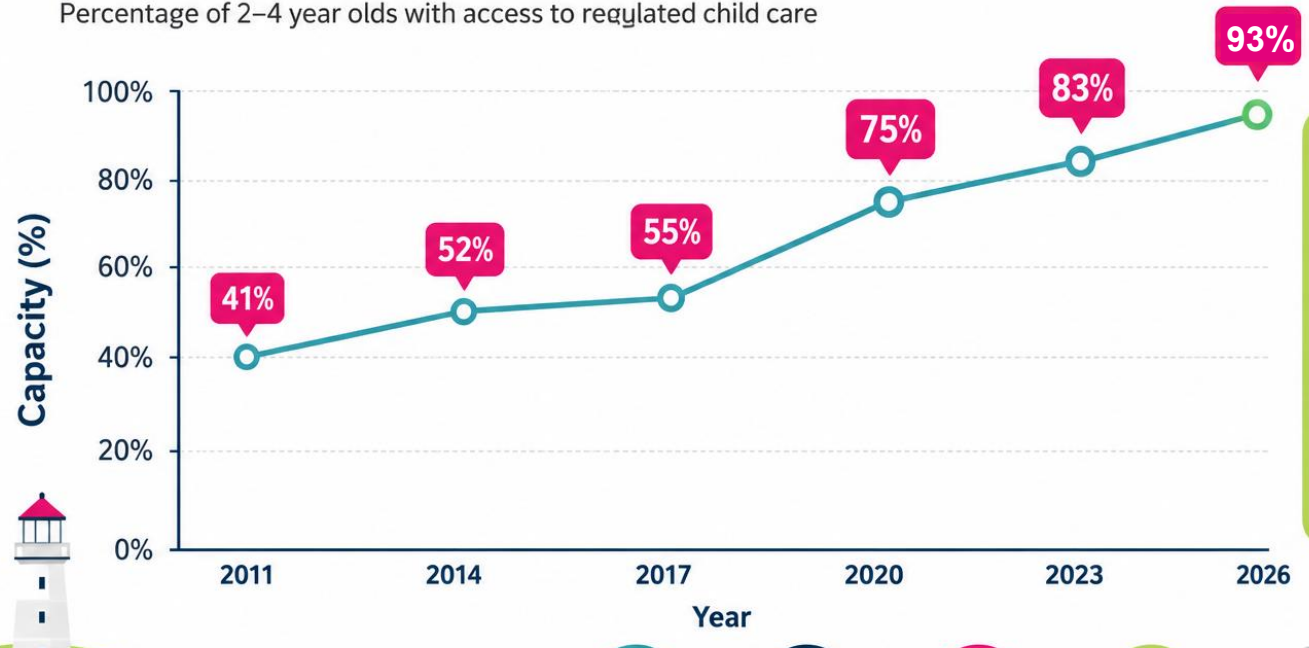
**Source:** Early Childhood Education Report, Atkinson Centre of Society and Child Development.

# 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




More children.
Stronger futures.
Growing
together.

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

# Examples From Across the Province

## SNR Models

Many regions have re-evaluated their SNR models

## Compensation

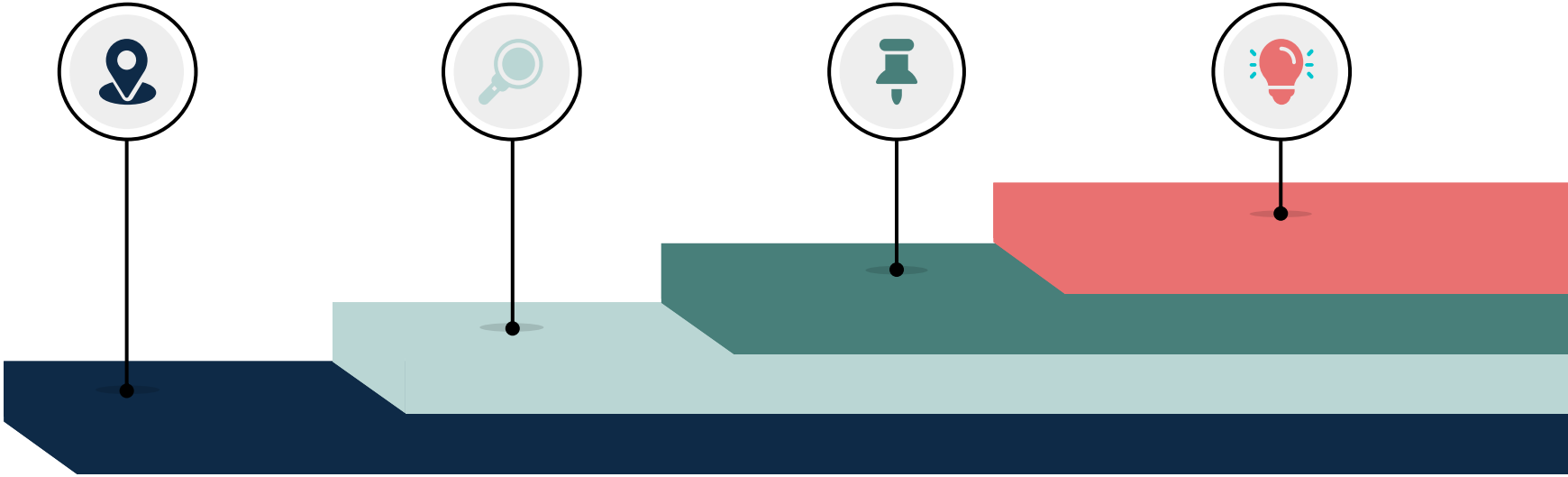
Cover all child care costs for those in the sector

## Mentorship

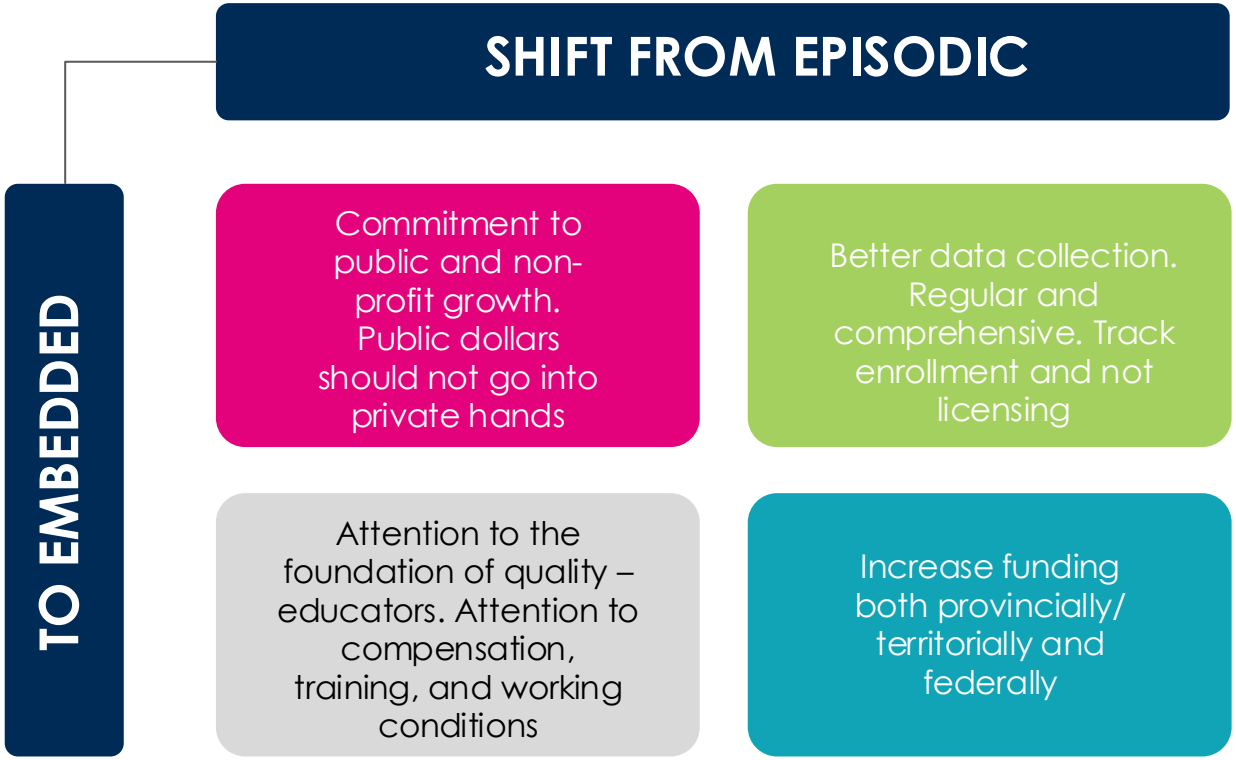
Collective innovations *Mentorship Framework*

## Data

KON II launches October 21



# Change takes time……



# THANK YOU

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