

Everybody's Child Is Yours: Early Learning, Shared Responsibility, and a Strong Economy

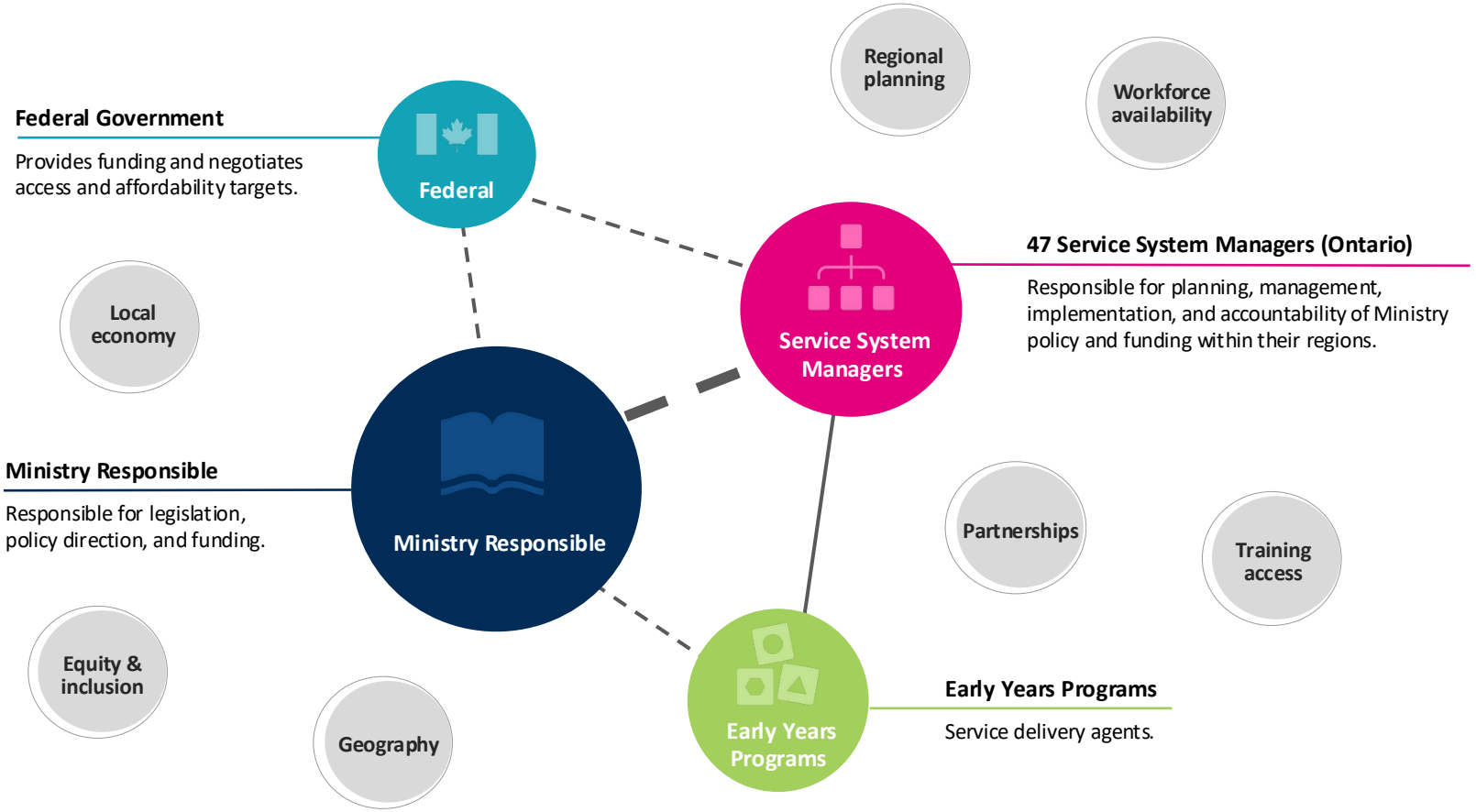
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The Atkinson Centre
for Society and Child Development
OISE | University of Toronto

The School of Early Childhood
George Brown Polytechnic

Muskoka November 24, 2026

Early Years Governance



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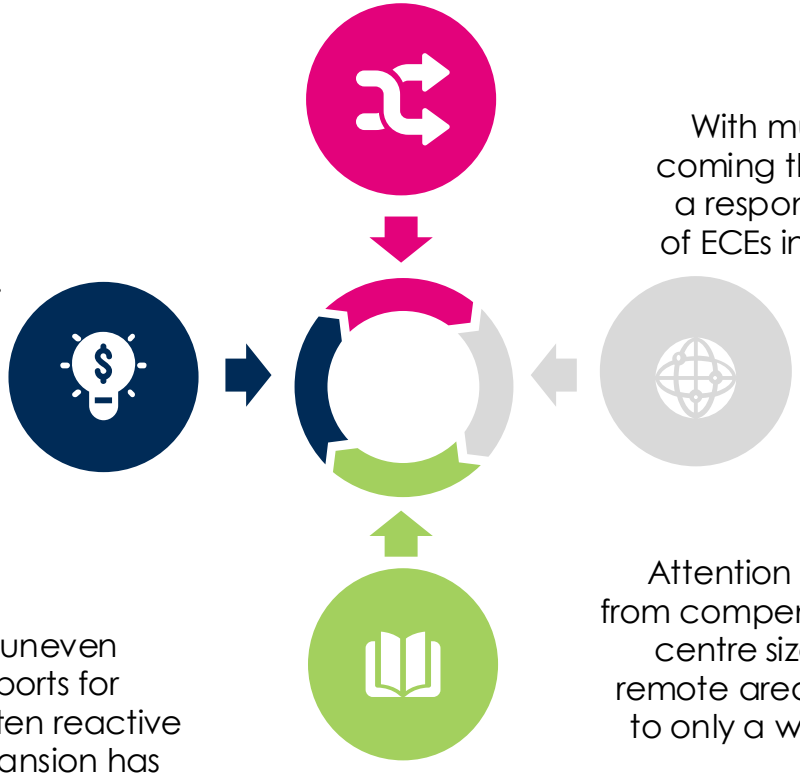
The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) Policy is one of the largest social policy investments in recent Canadian history

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 creating acute workforce shortages

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

Politically convincing
Labour force participation
Women's rights
Affordability and access

Child/Educator



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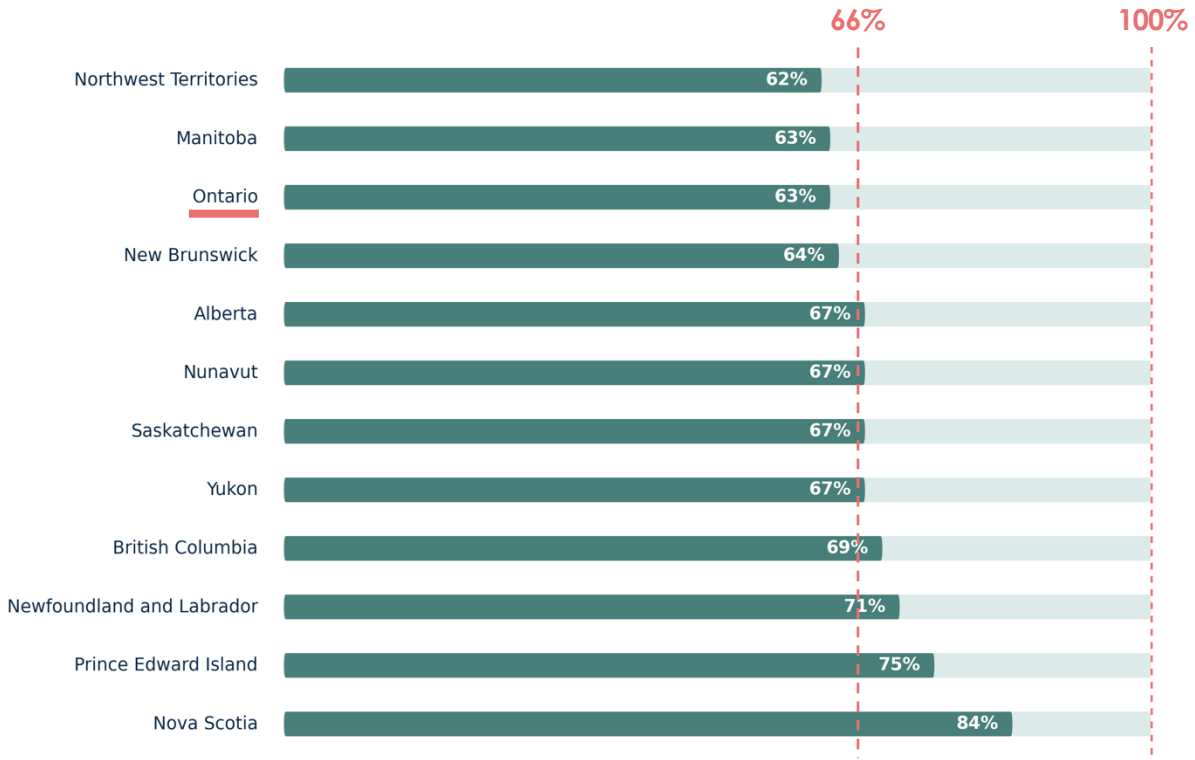
Early childhood educators lay the foundation for all future learning and all the benefits of quality early education.

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



ECE wages relative to teacher wages

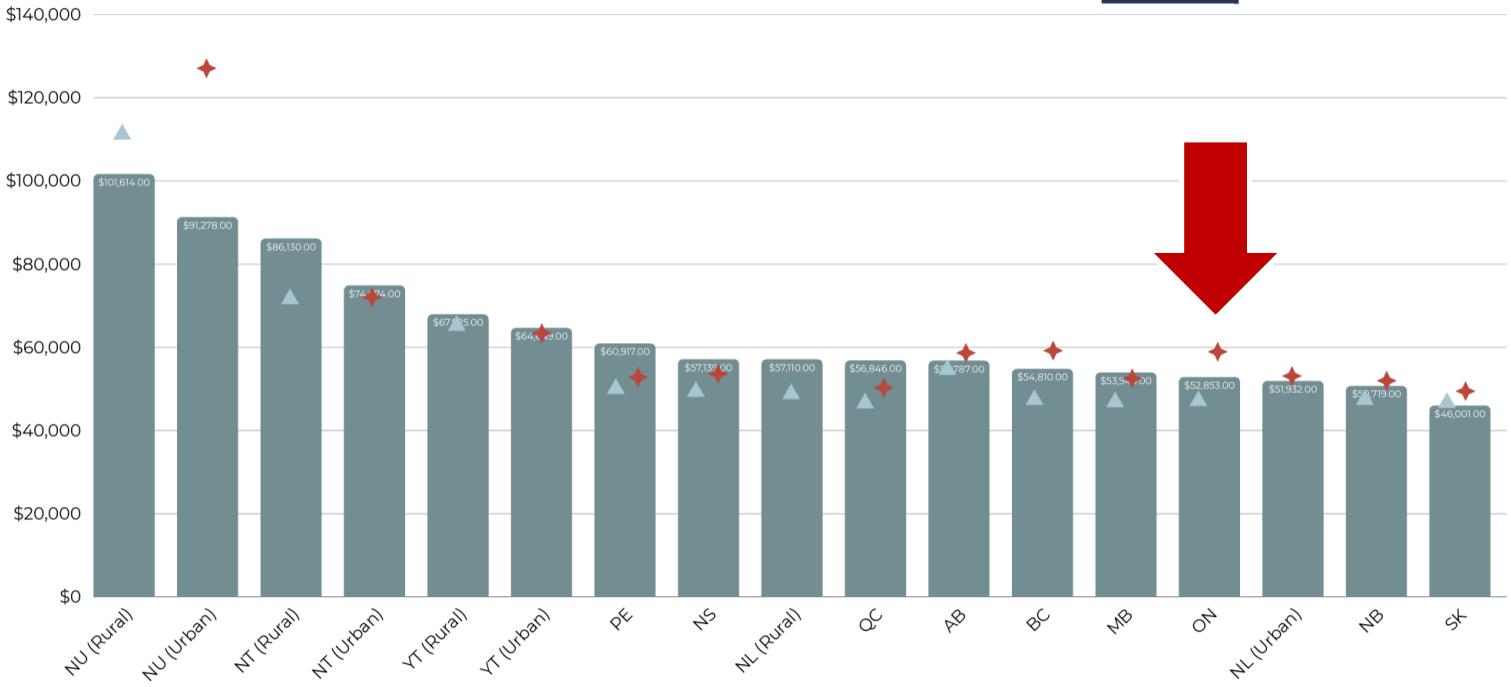
ECE wages as a percentage of teacher wages



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**

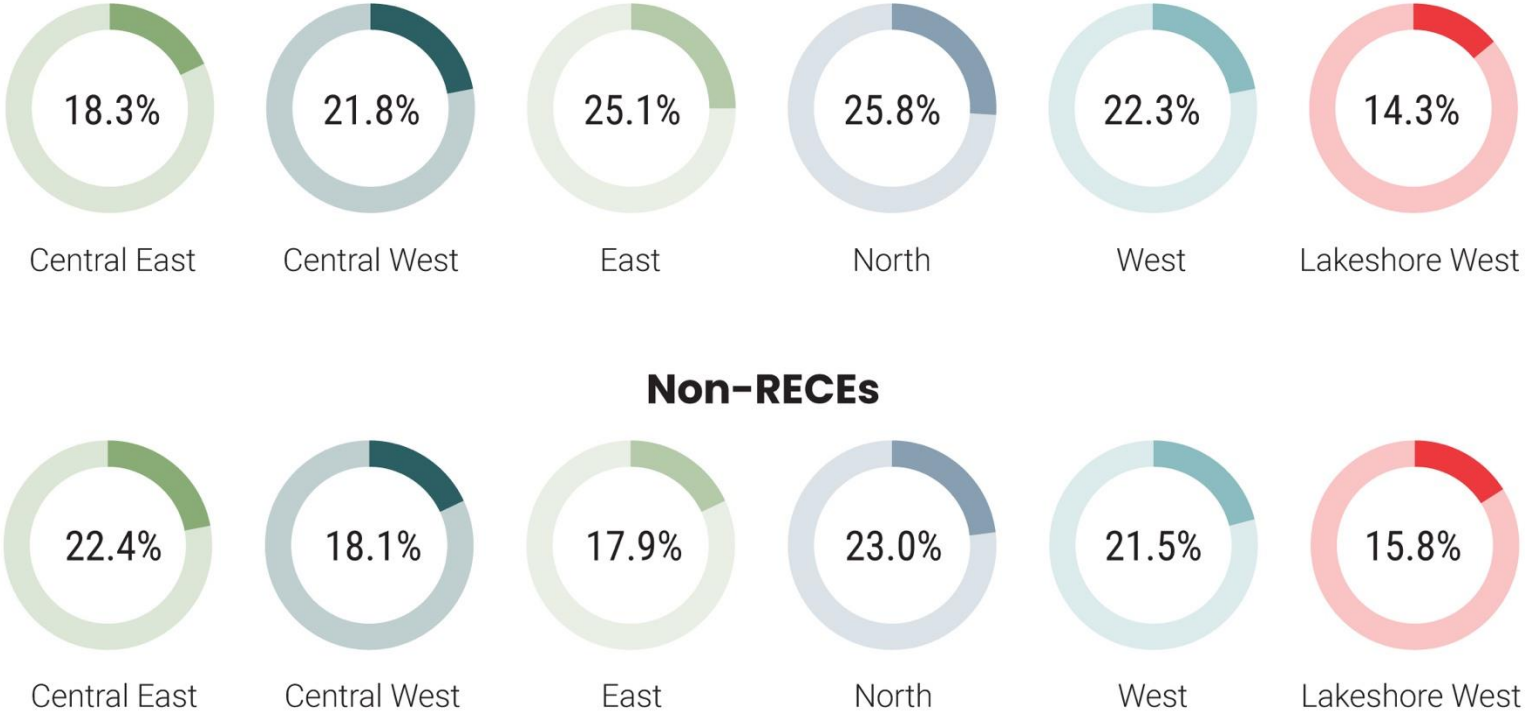
Wages are from 2023 Knowing Our Numbers Ontario Workforce Survey.

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.

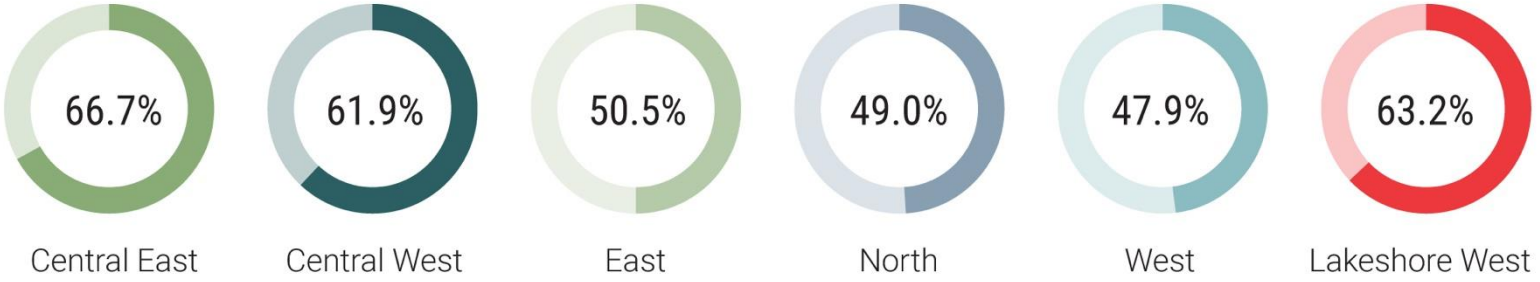
knowing numbers connaître chiffres

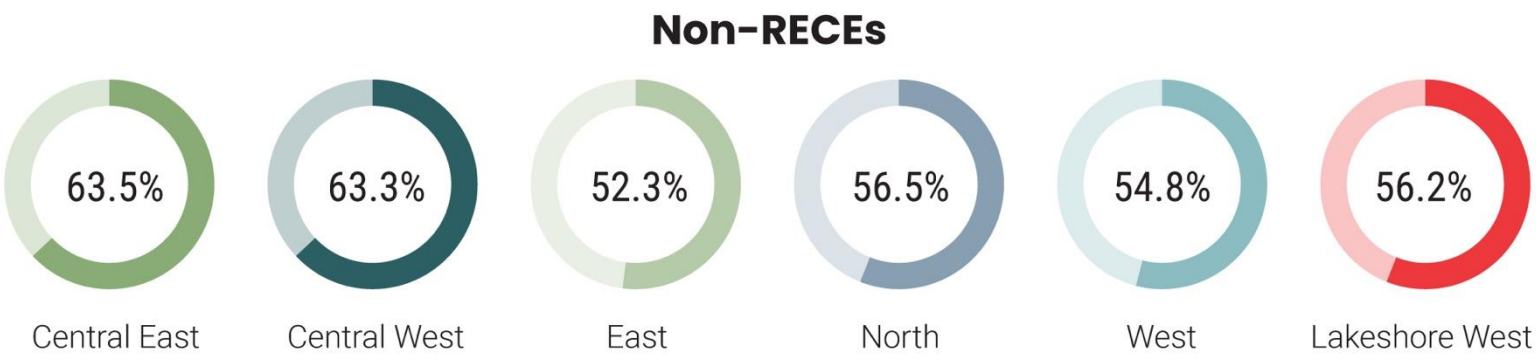


Percentage of RECEs and Non-RECEs Reporting Additional Employment by Region



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

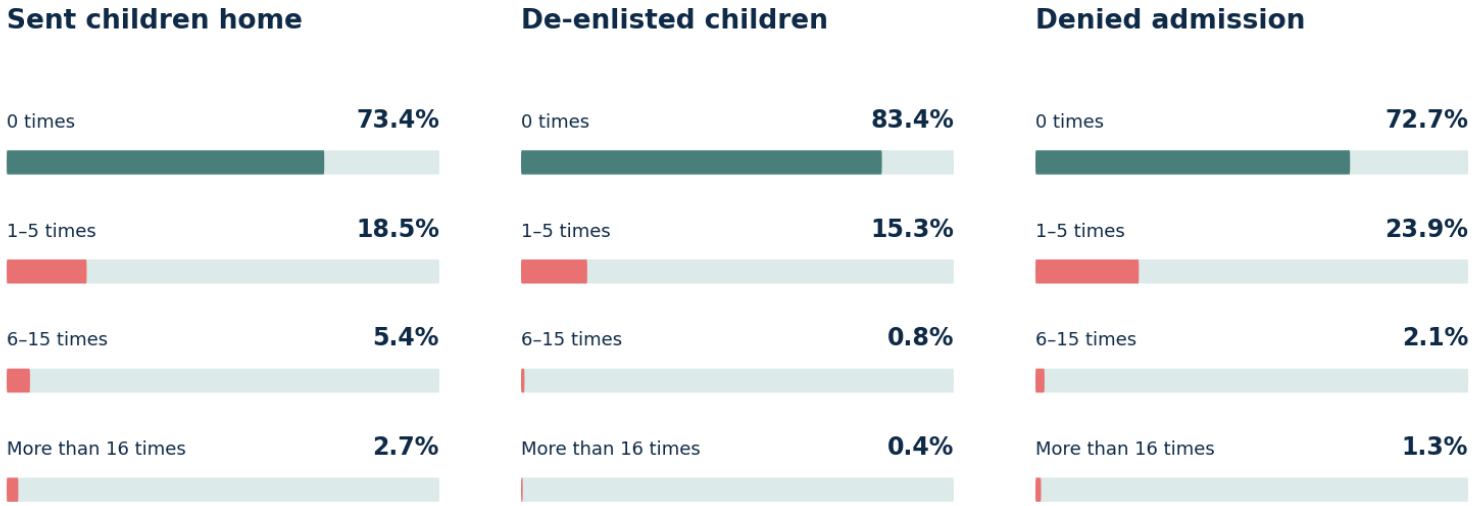


Individualized support is removed. The child cannot stay.

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

Staffing shortages limit access—and parents' return to work

60%

Capacity left unused

Some Ontario regions are operating at only 40% of licensed child care capacity.

Funding alone cannot fill vacancies

Regions with Jordan's Principle funding still struggle to find staff.

Infant rooms close first

When an educator calls in sick, infant rooms can be the first to close. Their higher staffing requirements mean an ECE may be reassigned to another room.

A disrupted return to work

Parents returning from parental leave face added pressure to take time off just as they re-enter the workforce—risking a wider gender gap.

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.

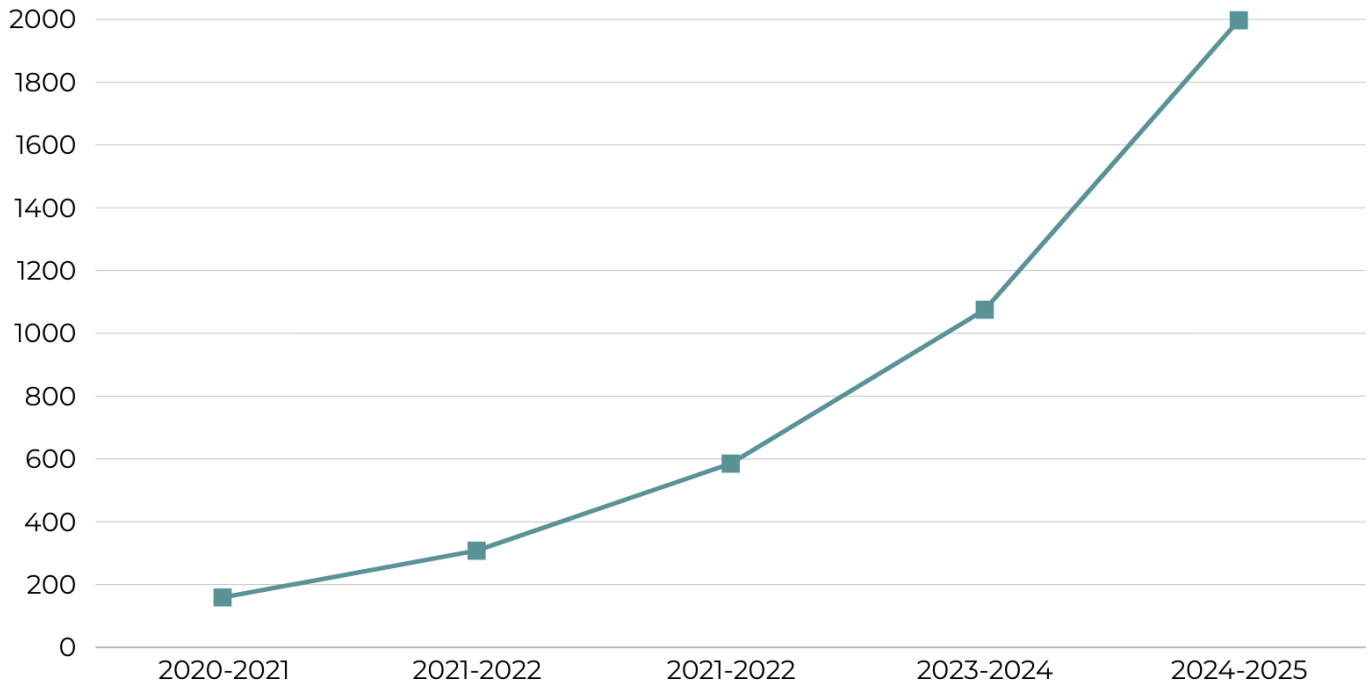
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

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

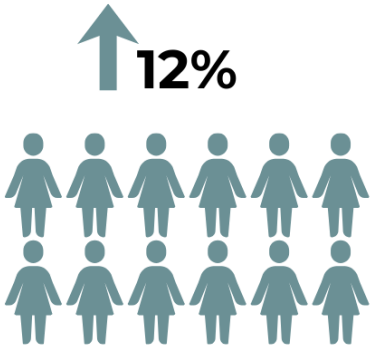


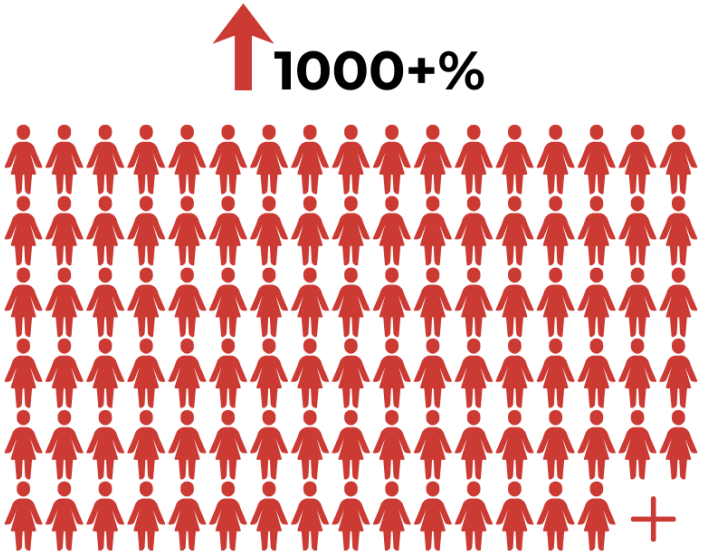
Source: Lee, M., Uthayakumaran, A., & Varmuza, P. (draft). Draft Report: Analysis of Director Approvals in Ontario's Licensed Child Care System (2020-21 to 2024-25) Based on FOI Data from the Ministry of Education. Building Blocks for Child Care.

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).

building blocks for child care

RECE Membership Growth vs Director's Approval Explosion





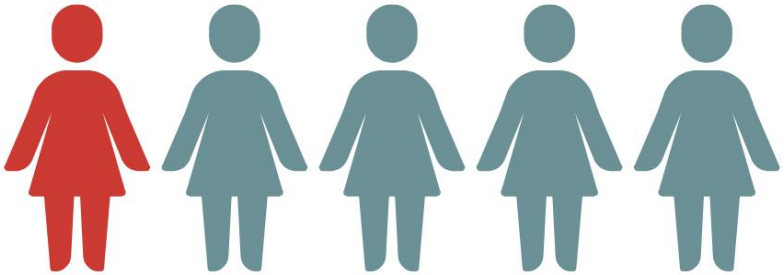
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ECE Workforce Knowledge HUB

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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.

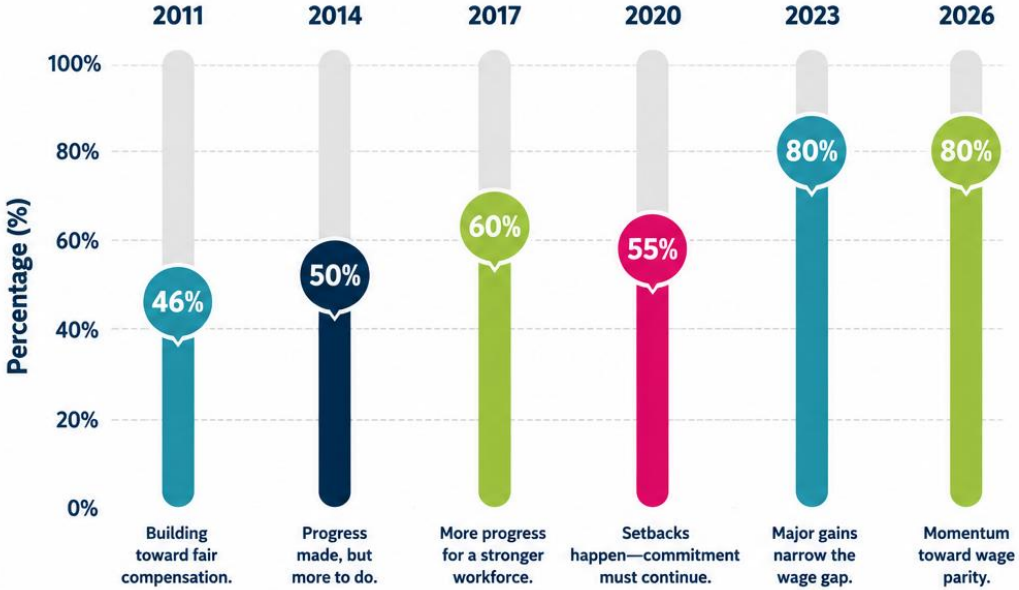
Prince Edward Island

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.





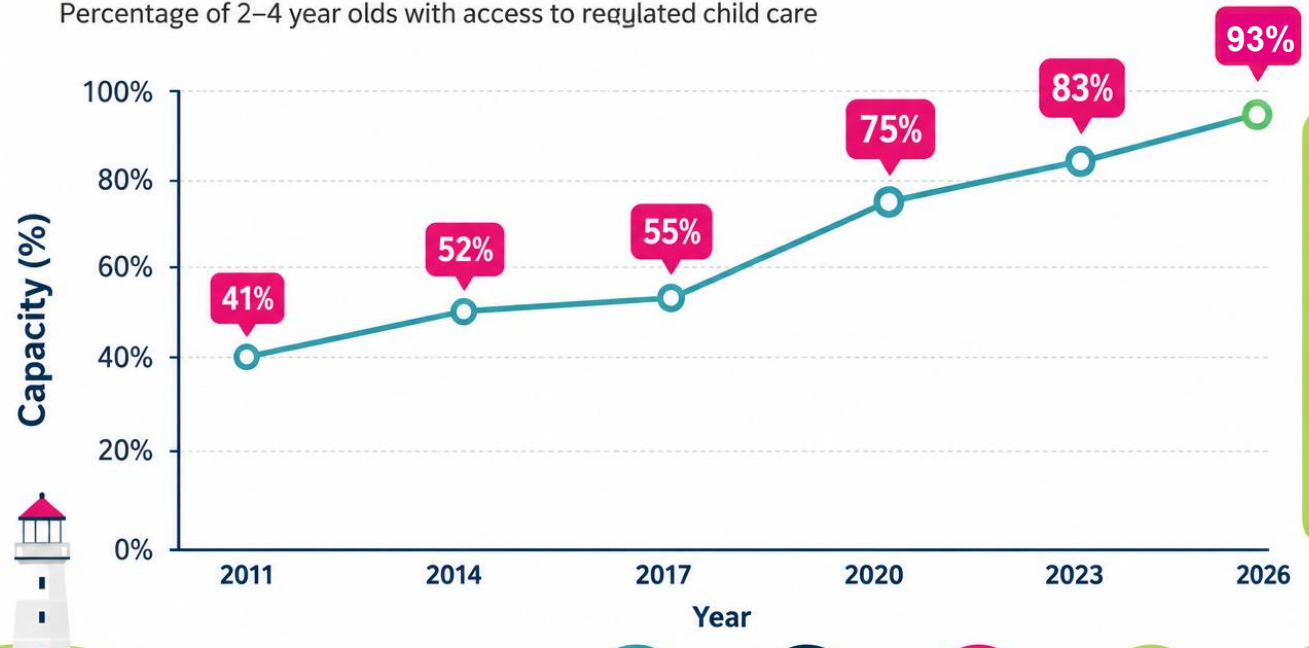
Source: Early Childhood Education Report, Atkinson Centre of Society and Child Development.

Prince Edward Island

Child Care Capacity for 2–4 Year Olds

ECER 2026
Early Childhood Education Report

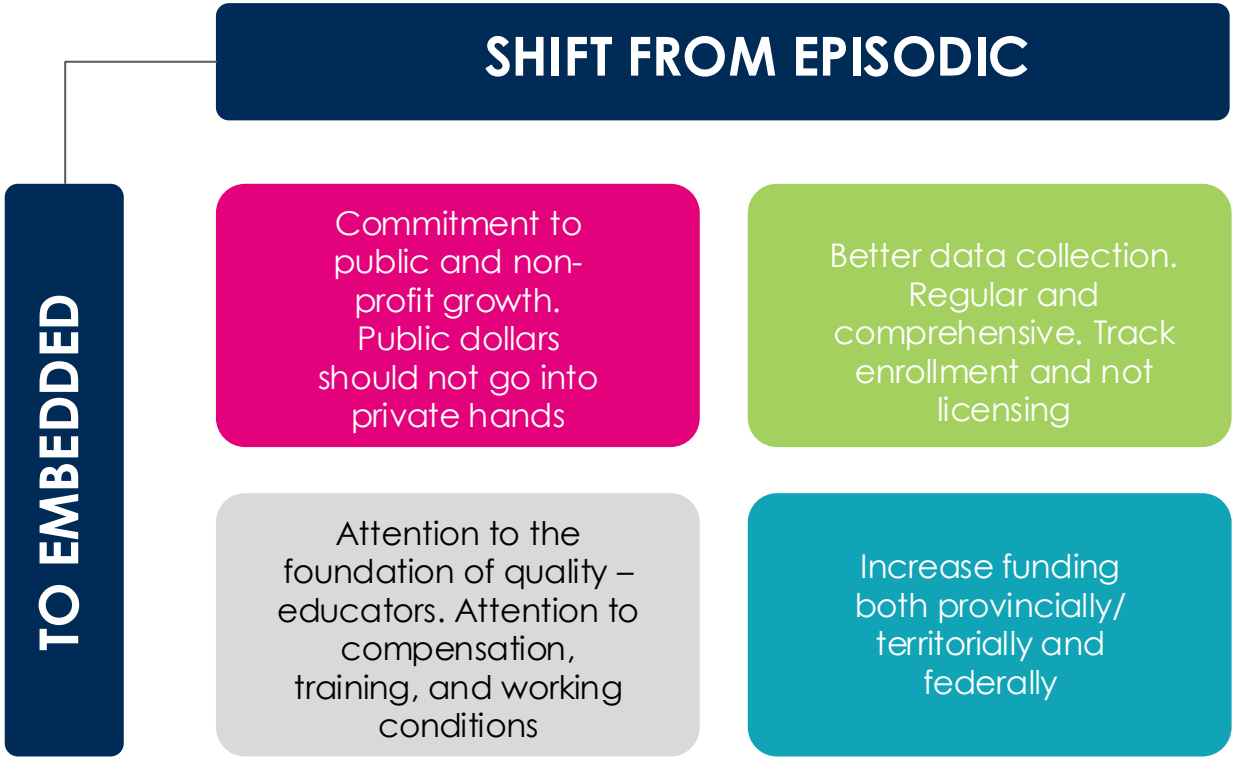
Percentage of 2–4 year olds with access to regulated child care



More children.
Stronger futures.
Growing
together.

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

Change takes time……



THANK YOU

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