

Early Learning and Child Care: What the Auditors Are Telling Us

Findings from four key sources: Auditor Generals of Canada (2025), Ontario (2025), Québec (2023 & 2025), and Statistics Canada (SELCCA 2025)



Common Themes: Affordability, Access, Equity, Quality, For-Profit Growth, Accountability Challenges

Affordability

CWELCC has reduced parent fees nationwide for 0-5 years age group – average now \$435/month (down from \$663 in 2022).

Five provinces and three territories have reached \$10/day fee (NL, PE, QC, SK, MB).

Sustainability risks: inflation, workforce costs, slower federal funding after 2026.

Provinces/territories will need to invest to maintain **current** service levels.

Lower fees won't ensure equity or quality unless the system is stabilized and quality and access issues addressed.

Access

Space creation behind schedule – 112,000 of 250,000 new spaces built by March 2024.

Access challenges increasing: 50% of parents report difficulty finding care (up from 46% in 2023); 31% of children aged 0–5 on waitlists. 56% of infants needing care are waitlisted, up from 47% in 2023.

Vacant licensed spaces persist – poor alignment between funding, demand and workforce capacity.

Access challenges greatest in low-income, rural, and equity-seeking communities.

Equity

Ontario AG: 31% decline in low-income families accessing subsidized care since introduction of CWELCC.

Québec AG: Low-income children under-represented; higher quality care in affluent areas.

Statistics Canada: Affordability gains bypass Indigenous, racialized, rural, and low-income families.

As fees decrease, demand increases and the most marginalized families get pushed further behind.

AB, SK, NT have eliminated subsidies entirely.

Quality

Workforce shortages threaten program quality.

Ontario needs 10,000 more qualified ECEs by 2026.

Québec: 46% of facilities lack required numbers of qualified educators; 41% failed quality assessments.

Lowering educator standards (ON, AB) further undermines quality.

For-Profit Growth

Ontario: For-profit share rose from 36% (2022) to 43% (2023). FP providers locate in regions where other FPs are concentrated, rather than targeting underserved communities

Ontario has not assessed how for-profit growth impacts equity or quality.

Ontario AG: Unchecked for-profit expansion could undermine CWELCC's equity goals

Québec: Quality failure rates (60%) and required qualified educators (14%) in for-profit centres

Three provinces have not signed their CWELCC extensions, insisting the feds remove any restrictions on for-profit growth.

Accountability and Data

All reports highlight major data and transparency gaps.

No consistent tracking of beneficiaries, new spaces, or quality outcomes.

Indigenous early learning lacks sufficient reporting.

Auditors call for robust data, public reporting, and equity-focused monitoring.

Common Messages From the Reports

“It’s not just about how much money is spent — but how it’s spent.”

Affordability gains are real, but access, equity, and quality lag behind.

Stronger public management and data transparency needed to ensure sustainability.

Implication for MWMFF

These findings support MWMFF's efforts to integrate ELCC into public education.

Public delivery responds to challenges of access and workforce shortages.

Public systems provide accountability and stability – every child participates.

What to Watch for in the Federal Budget

Will promised funding levels (\$9.2B annually) be maintained?

Will \$1-billion loan program under CMHC materialize?

Will promised workforce strategy materialize?

References

Report to the Board:
Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation.
October 29, 2025.

Kerry McCuaig:
Email: Kerry.McCuaig@utoronto.ca

- [2025 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada](#)
- Office of the Auditor General, Ontario. [Performance Audit Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Program:](#)
- [Qualité des services de garde éducatifs à l'enfance-Audit de performance](#)
- Statistics Canada. *The Daily*, [Child care arrangements, 2025](#)