

A Profile of Edmonton Child Care in 2019



Community-University Partnership
for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families

Authors

This document was prepared by Rob Buschmann and Erica Partridge of the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families, Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta (CUP).

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Glossary

Accredited Program

Any early learning and care program that has received accreditation in Alberta. Accreditation is a voluntary process through which licensed and approved child care programs in Alberta can demonstrate that they meet standards of excellence which are over and above the provincial licensing regulations.

Coverage Rate

Metric used to understand supply and demand in child care for a given area. Usually calculated by dividing a basic measure of supply (for example, licensed child care spaces) by a basic measure of demand (for example, population of pre-K children). For example, a neighborhood that had 50 licensed spaces and 100 children of pre-K age would have a coverage rate of 0.5, or 50%.

Child Care Desert

Area denoting “insufficient” access to child care. Often based on being below a certain coverage rate threshold (for example, fewer than 1 space for every 3 children of pre-K age, or a coverage rate of less than 0.33, or 33%).

Child Care Program / Child Care

A full-day, unparented program for children who are not yet attending Kindergarten. This definition includes only Day Care Programs, Family Day Homes, and Innovative Child Care Programs. Child care programs are the primary focus of this *Profile*.

Day Care Program / Day Care

A child care program provided to seven or more infants, toddlers, preschool and kindergarten children for four or more consecutive hours in each day that the program is provided. Operated under Schedule 1 of the Alberta Child Care Licensing Regulation.

Early Childhood Services (ECS)

Educational programs for children between 2 years 8 months and 6 years old that are the responsibility of the Alberta Ministry of Education and implemented by local school jurisdiction or school authorities. This includes both (1) Kindergarten and (2) a variety of other educational programming, including programs for young children with identified mild, moderate, or severe developmental delays, for gifted and talented children, or for English language learners.

Early Learning and Care (ELC)

A broad term that includes any program devoted to the care, development, and wellbeing of children who are not yet enrolled in kindergarten and are age 5 and under. Though this *Profile* focuses on *full day, unparented* programs (child care

programs), this term includes all programs licensed and regulated by the Alberta Ministry of Children’s Services, Early Childhood Services programs regulated by the Alberta Ministry of Education, and many other programs and services intended for the care and development of pre-K children.

Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Centres

Child care programs that are part of the Alberta Early Learning and Child Care program (also known informally as “\$25/day programs”). Such centres are required to limit their parent fees to a maximum of \$25 per day, but must also meet other requirements; in exchange, these centres receive additional funding from the provincial government. ELCC Centres must be not-for-profit.

Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELCC)

An organization composed of institutional and community partners in Edmonton tasked with improving early learning and care in the city of Edmonton, with a focus on vulnerable populations. The stated purpose of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care is “[t]o build on existing capacities and provide leadership in managing, planning, and supporting the development of a system of high-quality early learning and care services in Edmonton with an emphasis on meeting the needs of low-income and vulnerable families.”

EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE)

A community initiative in Edmonton working toward advancing reconciliation, the elimination of racism, livable incomes, affordable housing, accessible and affordable transit, affordable and quality child care, and access to mental health services and addiction supports. EPE seeks to end poverty in Edmonton within a generation.

Family Day Home Agency

An organization that is responsible for monitoring approved family day homes to ensure the safety and well-being of children in those homes. Family Day Home Agencies are contracted by the Government of Alberta to monitor day homes according to provincial laws and regulations, and must be licensed.

Family Day Home

A child care located in a private residence that provides care for six or fewer children, including the caregiver’s own children, and is monitored by a Family Day Home Agency. Also known as an “approved family day home.” This term does not include unlicensed child care in a private home.

Group Family Child Care Program

A child care program provided in the private residence of the license holder with a maximum of 10 children, including infants, preschool, kindergarten and school-aged children, and is operated under Schedule 2 of the Alberta Child Care Licensing Regulation. Group family child care programs must have two providers on record and both must be on the premises when seven or more children are in attendance.

Innovative Child Care Program

A child care program approved by the Minister of Alberta Children's Services that is designed to meet the unique child care needs of the community in which it is provided, and is operated under Schedule 3 of the Alberta Child Care Licensing Regulation.

Licensed Program

A program that meets the requirements of the Alberta Child Care Licensing Act and the Child Care Licensing Regulation.

Out Of School Care Program

A child care program provided to kindergarten-aged and school-aged children (under age 13) in any or all of the following periods: before and after school or kindergarten; during the school or kindergarten lunch hour; and when schools and kindergartens are closed. Operated under Schedule 4 of the Alberta Child Care Licensing Regulation.

Preschool Program

A child care program provided to preschool and kindergarten children for less than four hours per child in each day that the program is provided. Operated under Schedule 5 of the Alberta Child Care Licensing Regulation.

Summary

The Edmonton community, led by the City of Edmonton, has committed to end poverty in a generation through the EndPovertyEdmonton initiative (EPE). A pillar of EPE’s plan to end poverty is creating an integrated system of affordable and high-quality early learning and care. The organization currently charged with planning for and developing this system is the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC).

A Profile of Edmonton Child Care in 2019 (the *Profile*) was developed for the ECELC to provide a shared foundation of knowledge about the current state of licensed, full-day, unparented child care programs (“child care”) for children who have not yet entered kindergarten in the city of Edmonton. The *Profile* was also created to understand the gaps in our knowledge about child care in Edmonton, and to provide recommendations for filling those gaps.

The *Profile*, and this summary, should be read with two major caveats in mind:

1. The *Profile* does not explicitly account for Indigenous or newcomer perspectives on child care in Edmonton. This is a critical limitation, and the *Profile* should be considered incomplete without the results of two projects commissioned by the ECELC concurrent with the *Profile* that focus on these perspectives.
2. “Early learning and care” refers to a wide variety of programs and services for young children and their families that includes, but is not limited to, child care. However, full-day, unparented child care allows parents the opportunity to seek educational and employment opportunities that could help them move out of, or prevent them from falling into, poverty—while remaining assured that their children are being provided adequate care and learning opportunities. Given the ECELC’s connection to EPE, the authors of this *Profile* believe the path to developing an integrated system of early learning and care in Edmonton must begin with child care.

Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the supply and demand for child care programs and spaces in Edmonton. Key information about accessibility in Edmonton includes:

- Between June 2016 and March 2019, the number of child care programs in Edmonton increased 28.3 percent, from 290 to 372. Virtually all of this growth came from an increase in the number of “day care” programs, which are based in centres located outside of private homes.
- Between June 2016 and March 2019, the number of child care spaces in Edmonton increased 27.1 percent, from 16,787 to 21,334. Again, virtually all of this growth came from day care programs; there was no growth in day

- home spaces during that same time. However, these numbers likely overestimate the actual spaces available for pre-K children (children aged 0-4) in Edmonton because some child care programs do not operate at their full licensed capacity. There is no publicly available information about the extent to which child care programs in Edmonton are not operating at full capacity.
- The population of pre-K children in the city of Edmonton grew 18.8 percent from 2011 to 2016, from 50,555 to 60,070. If this trend continued into 2019 (there are no more recent population numbers for Edmonton than 2016), then the rate of growth in licensed spaces likely outpaced the rate of growth in pre-K children. For a variety of reasons, however, population growth in pre-K children is an imperfect measure of actual demand for child care—though there are currently few better measures available for Edmonton.
 - “Child care coverage rates” attempt to examine the match between supply and demand by combining licensed spaces (supply) and population (demand) into a single figure. For the city of Edmonton in 2016, the coverage rate for licensed, full-day, unparented child care program spaces was 0.28, meaning that there were just under three such spaces for every 10 children aged 0-4, though coverage rates varied considerably across the different areas of Edmonton. Coverage rates can vary dramatically based on the data chosen to calculate them.
 - Waitlists can also be used as a measure of the match between supply and demand. However, information on the number and length of waitlists for child care in Edmonton is inconsistent. Estimates vary, with most settling on between half and two-thirds of Edmonton child care programs having a waitlist in recent years. Because families can be on multiple waitlists, length of waitlists can be unreliable as an indicator of the match between supply and demand.

Affordability

Affordability of child care can be measured in at least three ways: monthly fees, simple affordability (fees divided by income), and complex affordability (fees divided by income, while accounting for programs that can reduce the cost of child care for some families, like Alberta’s child care subsidies). Key information about affordability in Edmonton includes:

- The median monthly fee for a child care space in Edmonton in 2018 was \$835 for preschool-age children, \$870 for toddlers, and \$975 for infants. Fees for day care were 10 to 25 percent higher than fees for day homes, depending on the age of the child.
- Fees in 2018 were down slightly from 2017, but since 2014, costs for child care in Edmonton have outpaced inflation. There are no data on how costs for child care varied across different areas of Edmonton.

- Using median fees, a family making the median income for a couple family in 2015 (\$106,474, the most recent year available for the city of Edmonton) would likely be spending about 10 percent of their income on child care for one child, and 20 percent for two children. For similar lone-parent families (median income \$56,914), the figures are 17 and 36 percent. For lower-income families, this percentage can increase quickly, especially if the family is not receiving provincial child care subsidies.
- Alberta's provincial child care subsidies can dramatically reduce the percentage of income that certain families spend on child care. However, because these subsidies are capped at a maximum monthly value, the lowest-income families with two children in care in Edmonton could still be expected to spend more than 20 percent of their incomes on child care. Across the province, about 34 percent of child care spaces are subsidized, but there is no publicly available information on subsidy use in Edmonton, or across its different areas.
- There is little agreement on what percentage of income is appropriate for typical families to be spending on child care, though most sources range from 7 percent to 15 percent. Generally, percentages above 15 are considered unaffordable, though there is limited research to support that conclusion, and this percentage would be expected to vary considerably with the number of children in the family.
- Alberta's provincial Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) initiative provides participating child care programs with additional funding used, in part, to cap fees at those programs to a maximum of \$25 per day. As of March 2019, there were 30 ELCC centres in Edmonton, representing 1,847 licensed spaces (about 8.7 percent of all full-day spaces in Edmonton). It is unclear whether the ELCC initiative will continue past March 2021, when the current funding arrangement for the initiative ends.
- Families attending ELCC centres remain eligible for child care subsidies. Families that receive the full subsidy with children attending ELCC centres can receive child care almost or completely cost-free. There is no publicly available information on how many families in Edmonton's ELCC centres are subsidized, though across Alberta the number is similar to non-ELCC child care programs (35 percent).

Quality

Key information about quality in Edmonton's child care programs includes:

- A baseline of child care quality in Edmonton—and Alberta—is provided through two Alberta Ministry of Children's Services programs: licensing and accreditation. Accreditation is intended to provide additional funding and technical support for licensed child care programs that choose to meet standards that go beyond those required for licensing. There are no additional quality standards for child care programs operating in the city of Edmonton.

- As of March 2019, 80 percent of Edmonton’s day care programs were accredited, as were all of its seven day home agencies (individual day homes are not eligible for accreditation). It is likely that some, perhaps even the majority, of the 20 percent of day care programs that were not accredited in Edmonton were in the process of becoming accredited, though no figures are publicly available.
- Across Alberta, about 70 percent of day care programs, and about 46 percent of day home agencies, were for-profit. There is some evidence that non-profit child care programs are, on average, higher quality than for-profit programs, though this is a disputed assertion. There is no publicly available information about the location or distribution of for-profit and non-profit child care programs in or across Edmonton.
- The ELCC initiative requires participating programs to use the Flight curriculum framework, and, as of August 2019, requires participating programs to be non-profit.
- Some other child care programs in Edmonton use a structured curriculum or curriculum framework (for example, Edmonton’s YMCA child care programs use the Playing to Learn curriculum, as do all other YMCA child care programs across Canada). There is, however, no publicly available inventory of what curricula are used in Edmonton’s child care programs, or to what extent those curricula are implemented.
- All individuals who work directly with children in a licensed day care are required to be certified by the province (individuals who work in day homes are not, though almost 90 percent are certified as at least the most basic level). Across Alberta’s day cares, 39 percent of staff are certified as Child Development Assistants, 17 percent as Child Development Workers, and 44 percent as Child Development Supervisors. There is some indication that child care workers in Edmonton may be more highly certified than child care workers in the rest of Alberta, and from more diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Flexibility and Inclusiveness

The *Profile’s* chapter on “flexibility and inclusiveness” is focused on the extent to which full-day, unparented child care programs can accommodate families who need child care during non-traditional hours (“flexibility”), and supports for children with disabilities in Edmonton’s child care programs (“inclusiveness”). This choice was made to reduce overlap with the ECELC’s other two concurrent projects, but it was also made because the concept of “inclusiveness” in child care is so broad—and so important—that it deserves entirely separate consideration by the ECELC. Nevertheless, some key information about flexibility and inclusiveness (specifically for children with disabilities) in child care Edmonton includes:

- Our understanding of child care flexibility in Edmonton in general is extremely limited. There is no source of public information on this topic; rather, our collective understanding of the extent of flexibility is now largely

based on individual knowledge of specific programs that provide care outside of typical hours.

- There are several agencies that provide supports for children with disabilities enrolled in Edmonton’s child care programs. These include Getting Ready for Inclusion Today (GRIT), which currently operates in 20 child care centres in Edmonton, and Community Options, which also provides supports but also operates its own child care program.
- Individual child care programs may choose to implement programs for children with disabilities, but there is no comprehensive list of such programs in Edmonton, or of the extent to which they are able to support children with disabilities.
- As part of building its information base through the recommendations below, the ECELC should strongly consider a project to more fully understand, and make recommendations for improving, early learning and care options for children with disabilities in Edmonton.

Recommendations

This *Profile* does not contain recommendations for specific actions that the ECELC should take to improve child care in Edmonton. The *Profile* is meant to inform current and future discussions, not push the ECELC toward any one solution. Rather, the recommendations below will help provide information the ECELC needs to guide the planning and development of an integrated early learning and care (and child care) system in an evidence-informed manner.

Overall, the ECELC should build upon the experiences of other municipalities while using the opportunities and resources that exist in Edmonton and Alberta to create a flexible, customized information system to better understand, monitor, and improve child care in Edmonton. Specific recommendations for building that information system are:

1. ***Gather More Existing Data.*** There is a considerable amount of information on child care in Edmonton that exists, but is not publicly available. The ECELC should create a list of key existing data, and acquire and analyze this information based on the ECELC’s short and long-term goals.
2. ***Conduct a Regular Survey of Edmonton’s Child Care Operators.*** Such a survey could provide important information that is not captured in existing data, particularly how aspects of child care, such as cost and quality, vary across Edmonton.
3. ***Conduct a Regular Survey of Edmonton’s Parents.*** Such a survey would help fill in gaps in our knowledge about parent perspectives and needs in Edmonton as a whole in a way that does not currently exist.
4. ***Conduct a Regular Survey of Edmonton’s Child Care Workforce.*** The workforce is a critical part of providing high-quality child care in Edmonton, but we are only now starting to understand key aspects of that workforce. Such a survey would fill this gap.

5. ***Gather Other Types of Original Data.*** The ECELC should consider using in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations, and other methods to look into the reasons behind some of the patterns that could emerge from surveys and/or administrative data. Qualitative work is also ideally suited for exploring topics where there is little to no existing information, such as unlicensed child care in Edmonton.
6. ***Create and Update Maps.*** The ECELC should regularly create, publish, and regularly update maps of child care information in Edmonton. Such maps can be used to illustrate and understand important variations in child care across areas of Edmonton.
7. ***Establish a Standing Subcommittee or Working Group on Data, Research, and Evaluation.*** The ECELC should establish a permanent subcommittee or working group that is devoted to data, research, and evaluation. This subcommittee or working group would be responsible for regularly gathering and interpreting child care trends in Edmonton, and for overseeing research projects that the ECELC chooses to undertake.

Introduction

In 2016, there were 71,515 children aged 5 and under living in the city of Edmonton. A full 17.2% were living in poverty.

Fortunately, the Edmonton community, led by the City of Edmonton, committed to end poverty in a generation by creating EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE).¹ Providing affordable and high-quality child care for children and their families is one of the six core game changers for EPE.² An important first step for EPE in this game changer was to form the Early Learning and Care Steering Committee, a group of highly experienced individuals from a variety of government and community organizations who came together to “guide the implementation of an integrated system and strategy for early learning and care in Edmonton.”³

The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) is the newly formed successor to the Early Learning and Care Steering Committee. This document, *A Profile of Child Care in Edmonton in 2019 (Profile)*, has been developed in partnership with the ECELC to address three goals: (1) provide a shared foundation of knowledge about the current state of child care in Edmonton, (2) understand the gaps in our knowledge about child care in Edmonton, and (3) provide recommendations for filling those gaps. The core audience for this *Profile* is the ECELC.

This *Profile* uses the Government of Canada’s Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework to organize its discussion.⁴ This can be seen in the chapters below, which are devoted to presenting information on accessibility, affordability, quality, flexibility, and inclusivity for the city of Edmonton, ending with a chapter on recommendations for improving our knowledge in each of those areas.⁵ However, before moving into specific areas, we provide below a brief overview of the governmental roles and responsibilities for early learning and care⁶ in Edmonton.

¹ EndPovertyEdmonton. (2019). *About Us*. Retrieved from <https://www.endpovertyedmonton.ca/about>.

² EndPovertyEdmonton. (2019). *Affordable and Quality Child Care*. Retrieved from <https://epyeg.squarespace.com/gamechanger5>.

³ EndPovertyEdmonton. (2019). *Road Map Action 29: Resource a new Early Learning and Care Steering Committee to guide the implementation of an integrated system and strategy for early learning and care in Edmonton*. Retrieved from <https://epyeg.squarespace.com/progress/action29>.

⁴ Government of Canada. (2018). *Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/early-learning-child-care/reports/2017-multilateral-framework.html>.

⁵ Throughout this document, the focus is on the *city* of Edmonton rather than the entire municipal area (which would include areas such as St. Albert and Leduc). This focus reflects the scope and programming of EPE, which is limited to the city of Edmonton.

⁶ Note that “early learning and care” is a broad term for a variety of programs and services for young children, of which “child care” is only one type.

We end this introduction with several very important caveats about this *Profile*—elements that must be kept in mind throughout reading it.

Roles and Responsibilities for Early Learning and Care in Edmonton

The most salient characteristic of ELC in Edmonton is that no single organization plans and manages it. Rather, many governmental organizations have responsibility for parts of it—or have policies that directly or indirectly affect it. But at its core, almost all ELC in Edmonton is provided through a market. For many families, key aspects of their ELC experience—for example, the location and cost of programs—are determined by market forces.

Federal Government. The federal government currently plays a role in early learning and care policy and programs that affect Edmontonians. These policies and programs generally either (1) affect Edmontonians as individuals or (2) provide funding to Alberta’s provincial government to enhance its early learning and care programs. Federal policies and programs that affect individuals include the child care expense tax deduction, which allows parents to claim child care expenses as a deduction from federal taxable income, and the Canada child benefit, which is a cash payment to families with children.⁷ Federal funding to Alberta for early learning and care comes through a bilateral agreement negotiated under the umbrella of the Multilateral Framework Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care, as well as regular transfer payments through the Canada Social Transfer—some of which can be used to support early learning and care, though there is no specific amount that is earmarked for that purpose. Finally, the federal government also oversees some programs for populations for whom the federal government has particular responsibility (i.e., Indigenous people, military families, and new immigrants and refugees).⁸

Provincial Government. Early learning and care in Canada is widely considered to be a provincial responsibility, with each province and territory developing its own

⁷ Government of Canada. (2019). *Line 214 - Child Care Expenses*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/individuals/topics/about-your-tax-return/tax-return/completing-a-tax-return/deductions-credits-expenses/line-214-child-care-expenses.html>. Also Government of Canada. (2019). *Child Care Benefits*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/child-family-benefits/canada-child-benefit-overview.html>. Note that the child benefit does not have to be used on child care, though the benefit is higher for children under the age of 6 than for older children.

⁸ Friendly, M., et al. (2018). *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2016*. Retrieved from <https://www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/ECEC-in-Canada-2016.pdf>. Also Muttart Foundation. (2016.) *Engaging Alberta Municipal Level Governments in Support of Early Learning and Care*. Retrieved from <https://www.muttart.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Engaging-Alberta-Municipal-Level-Governments-122016.pdf>.

approach.⁹ Alberta is no exception, with most of the responsibility for ELC falling under two ministries: Children’s Services and Education.¹⁰

The Child Care Licensing Act (CCLA) and the Child Care Licensing Regulation provide the Ministry of Children’s Services the basic authority to license and monitor multiple types of early learning and care programs. Five types of licensed child care are explicitly allowed in Alberta: day care, group family child care, preschool, out of school care, and innovative child care programs.¹¹ Children’s Services is also responsible for overseeing approved family day homes though it contracts with family day home agencies; this creates a sixth type of regulated early learning and care in Alberta.

Beyond its core function in licensing, Children’s Services also oversees several other programs that affect early learning and care in Alberta and Edmonton. First is the provincial accreditation program, a voluntary program through which three types of licensed programs (day cares, out of school care programs, and family day home agencies) can agree to meet higher standards in exchange for increased funding and access to technical assistance.¹² Second, in 2017, the bilateral agreement with the Federal government provided \$136 million in funding over three years to Alberta for its Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) initiative, which is administered by Children’s Services.¹³ Third, Children’s Services administers Alberta’s Child Care Subsidy program, which provides middle- to low-income families with additional support in paying for regulated child care.¹⁴

Alberta’s Ministry of Education also administers its own set of early learning and care programs. Education’s Early Childhood Services (ECS) program provides funding for school authorities to offer programming prior to compulsory schooling (which begins in Grade 1) that meets the diverse needs of young children and their

⁹ Japel, C., & Friendly, M. (2018). *Inequalities to Access to Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada: The Equal Access Study*. Retrieved from https://www.dji.de/fileadmin/user_upload/icec/Expertisen/WEB_DJI_Report_Canada.pdf.

¹⁰ The Ministries of Health and Family and Community Support Services also play roles in early learning and care; see Government of Alberta. (2019). *Early Childhood Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/early-childhood-education.aspx>.

¹¹ The CCLA and the Child Care Regulations for licensed child care also require support and collaboration with the Alberta Ministry of Health, Alberta Health Services, and the Alberta Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

¹² Government of Alberta. (2019). *Alberta Child Care Accreditation*. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-child-care-accreditation.aspx> and in Chapters 2 and 3 of this document.

¹³ The ELCC program is also colloquially known as the “\$25-a-day program” as it provided additional funding to centres in exchange for, among other things, limiting parent fees to a maximum of \$25 per day. See Government of Alberta. (2019). *Early Learning and Child Care Centres*. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/early-learning-child-care-centres.aspx> and Chapter 3 of this document.

¹⁴ Government of Alberta. (2019). *Child Care Subsidy*. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/child-care-subsidy.aspx> and in Chapter 2 of this document.

families.¹⁵ ECS includes funding for kindergarten, but also for educational programming for children as young as 2 years, 8 months old with special needs. Under ECS, Program Unit Funding (PUF) supports education programs for young children who have been assessed as having severe disabilities. PUF is one of a number of ECS grants provided to accredited private ECS operators and school authorities that operate an ECS program; other grants cover services for children with mild or moderate disabilities or delays, who are gifted or talented, and who are English language learners.

There are several other provincial ministries and programs that affect early learning care in Alberta.¹⁶ Alberta Community and Social Services, through its Family Support for Children with Disabilities program, works with Alberta Children's Services to provide support for families with children with disabilities as well as the Parent Link Centre program. Alberta Health provides care for pre-K aged children and their families, and works with Children's Services to ensure that child care centres meet certain health and safety standards. Finally, parents of young children in Alberta also receive additional individual supports that are not strictly related to child care: an additional child benefit (the Alberta Child Benefit) above and beyond the federal child benefit, and the Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit (AFETC), which provides some tax relief to working families with children under the age of 18.¹⁷

Local School Authorities. The *School Act* allows the provincial government to delegate responsibility for some of the governance of education to school authorities.¹⁸ Authorities may include school jurisdictions (public, separate, francophone school boards), accredited private schools, charter schools, and approved private ECS operators. The City of Edmonton contains three school authorities: Edmonton Catholic Schools, Edmonton Public Schools, and The Greater North Central Francophone Education Region No. 2, also known as Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord. All school authorities may implement ECS programs. Responsibilities among each authority include planning for its jurisdiction, setting goals, making policy, and budgeting.¹⁹ Funding for kindergarten and other ECS programs may be accessed by all school authorities. To enter kindergarten in Alberta for the 2019-2020 school year, children must be four years on or before March 1, 2019

¹⁵ Government of Alberta. (2018). *Early Childhood Programming*. Retrieved from <https://education.alberta.ca/media/3772341/ecs-early-childhood-programming.pdf> and in Chapter 4 of this document.

¹⁶ Government of Alberta. (2019). *Early Childhood Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/early-childhood-education.aspx>.

¹⁷ Government of Alberta. (2019). *Alberta Child Benefit (ACB)*. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-child-benefit.aspx>. Note: this is limited to families with a net income of less than \$42,255 per year. Government of Alberta. (2019). *Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit (AFETC)*. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-family-employment-tax-credit.aspx>. Note: this phases out at higher family incomes

¹⁸ Government of Alberta. (2000). *Province of Alberta School Act*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Queen's Printer. Retrieved from <http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/s03.pdf>.

¹⁹ Alberta School Council's Association. (2019). *Role of School Boards*. Retrieved from <https://www.albertaschoolcouncils.ca/education-in-alberta/role-of-school-boards>.

(meaning the youngest they can be is 4 years, 6 months old when beginning kindergarten). However, beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, children must be four years old on or before December 31 of the previous calendar year (meaning the youngest they can be is 4 years, 9 months old when beginning kindergarten). Attendance in kindergarten is not compulsory but most five-year-olds attend (an estimated 98% of age-eligible children in Alberta). Kindergarten is usually part day, every day totalling 475 hours throughout the school year. However, there are some schools in Edmonton that offer full-day kindergarten, as it is within the authority of school boards to decide which, if any, schools will do so. ECS programs for children with special needs, including the Edmonton Catholic Schools 100 Voices preschools, Edmonton Public Schools pre-kindergarten and specialized services, and the Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord prématernelles, are implemented through school authorities, giving them significant control over those programs.

Municipal Government. Municipal governments in Alberta currently play a relatively small role in early learning and care, especially compared to the provincial government. The lack of specific authority, however, does not mean that the City of Edmonton has *no* role in promoting and improving early learning and care.²⁰ While the City does not run any full-day, unparented child care programs, it does support early childhood development through Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), a joint municipal/provincial partnership. FCSS works with not-for-profit organizations in Edmonton that deliver early learning and care through a variety of child development and family support programs. The City is also in the process of reviewing city bylaws that unnecessarily hinder child care providers and has been making changes intended to reduce barriers.²¹

Two Major and Four Minor Caveats Before Reading the Rest of this Profile

Major Caveat 1: This Profile focuses almost entirely on full-day, unparented child care programs licensed and regulated by Alberta Children’s Services for children who have not yet entered kindergarten (referred to in this Profile as “child cares” or “child care programs”). This focus was a purposeful choice on behalf of the authors and is not meant to imply that any aspect of early learning and care is more important than any other in Edmonton. That said, this *Profile* focuses on a specific aspect of early learning and care—child care—within Edmonton for three reasons. The first is that full-day, unparented child care programs can allow parents to return to work—a key pathway out of poverty for low-income families.

²⁰ The Muttart Foundation. (2016). *Engaging Alberta Municipal Level Government in Support of Early Learning and Care*. Retrieved from <https://www.muttart.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Engaging-Alberta-Municipal-Level-Governments-122016.pdf>. Note that several municipalities in Alberta (Beaumont, Jasper, Drayton Valley, and the Municipal District of Opportunity) currently provide child care.

²¹ See, for example, https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/urban_planning_and_design/child-care-services-in-industrial-zones.aspx.

This focus grows out of the ECELC's origins in EndPovertyEdmonton and its ultimate goal of ending poverty. The second reason is that much of the recent public conversation around early learning and care in Alberta has focused on full-day, unparented child care programs and policies (for example, the ELCC Centre program) rather than other potential ELC options, such as discussing the expansion of kindergarten in Alberta to a full day throughout the province. The third reason is that this choice is meant to provoke discussion at the ECELC. The authors believe that the ECELC needs to open a conversation about its priorities for improving early learning and care in Edmonton, including where to focus its collective energies. This *Profile*, with its choice of focus on child care programs, is meant to start that conversation.

Major Caveat 2: This Profile does not explicitly account for Indigenous or newcomer perspectives on child care or ELC more generally in Edmonton. This is a clear and important limitation of this document, and its contents should therefore be considered incomplete. Fortunately, the ECELC has commissioned two projects meant to provide a better sense of those perspectives, and all of the information in this *Profile*—including its recommendations for further data gathering – should be examined in light of the results of those projects.²² Where appropriate, this *Profile* attempts to point out where our current knowledge either falls short in ways that specifically impact Indigenous or newcomer populations, or where the *Profile's* definition or understanding of a specific child care area might be changed or expanded by using a different perspective. Again, this cannot be stated strongly enough: *It would be a mistake for the ECELC to use this document without combining it with the information and perspectives from the other two projects.*

There are also four minor caveats to consider before reading this *Profile*. They are:

- This document contains no information on unlicensed child care in Edmonton. To our knowledge, there is no source of regular or systematic data on the accessibility, cost, quality, or any other aspects of unlicensed care in Edmonton or elsewhere in the province. This is an important gap in our understanding.
- This document is focused on the *city* of Edmonton, as that is the focus of the EndPovertyEdmonton initiative. This means that this document does not usually include information about early learning and care in areas adjacent to the city of Edmonton that are outside its boundaries, such as St. Albert, except where noted in the text. It is, of course, entirely possible that families in St. Albert are making use of child care programs in the city of Edmonton, and vice versa.
- Although we have attempted to be comprehensive in our search for information on child care in Edmonton, we may have overlooked important

²² Sumaru-Jurf, A., & Felix-Mah, R. (2019). *Newcomer consultations on the context of early learning and care in Edmonton* [Report for ECELC]. Also Kemble, T. (2019) *Indigenous Early Learning and Care in the city of Edmonton* [PowerPoint slides].

- sources or studies. Readers are encouraged to contact the authors with additional information.
- It is important to note that this *Profile* does not contain specific recommendations for actions that the ECELC should take to improve child care in Edmonton, aside from actions that can be taken to improve our *understanding* of child care in Edmonton. The *Profile* is meant to inform and provide evidence for current and future ECELC discussions, not push the Council toward specific actions.

Roadmap for the *Profile*

The rest of this document is presented in five chapters that match those used by the federal government in its Multilateral Framework for Early Learning and Care: accessibility, affordability, quality, flexibility, and inclusivity. A separate chapter is devoted to each of the first three categories, whereas flexibility and inclusivity are discussed together in the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter contains recommendations for the ECELC to improve its knowledge and monitoring of child care in Edmonton. The Appendix describes the methods the authors followed to construct this *Profile*.

Chapter 1: Accessibility

What do we mean by “accessibility” in child care?

In the Government of Canada’s Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework, there is no clear definition of “accessibility” for child care.²³ In this chapter we take some first steps toward defining and understanding child care accessibility in Edmonton. This section uses existing data and a few basic concepts, defined below, to take those first steps.

“Accessibility” here refers to the supply and demand for licensed, full-day, unparented child care programs and spaces in Edmonton, and the ways that we can try to measure the match, or mismatch, between supply and demand. Each of these pieces of accessibility is addressed in a separate section:

1. The *Supply* section describes the number, type, and location of child care programs in Edmonton, the spaces that appear to be available in those programs, and some of the issues raised with our current measures and understanding of supply.
2. The *Demand* section refers to how we currently measure (or attempt to estimate) the demand for child care spaces in Edmonton, along with issues raised with those measures and estimates.
3. The *Combining Supply and Demand* section describes ways to understand the state of the relationship between supply and demand in Edmonton, such as mapping “child care deserts” or examining waitlists, and again discusses the issues raised with those measures.

This chapter ends with a summary of our understanding of accessibility in Edmonton along with suggestions for gathering additional data that might help the ECELC better understand and monitor child care accessibility in Edmonton.

As a final note, although the cost of child care is sometimes included in conversations about accessibility, this *Profile* addresses cost, and affordability more broadly, in Chapter 2 to keep the issues conceptually separated and easier to understand.

²³ Government of Canada. (2018). *The Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/early-learning-child-care/reports/2017-multilateral-framework.html#h2.10>.

What does accessibility to child care look like in Edmonton?

Supply

The simplest way to examine supply is to look at the number of child care programs, and spaces in those programs, that exist in an area. Table 1.1 shows the number and type of licensed child care programs in Edmonton as of March 2019 (the latest publicly available data as of this writing) and the growth in those programs between June 2016 and March 2019.²⁴ In the last two and one-half years, practically all of the growth of child care programs in Edmonton has been in day care programs.²⁵

Table 1.1: Licensed Child Care Programs in the City of Edmonton, June 2016 and March 2019

<i>Program Type</i>	<i>June 2016</i>	<i>March 2019</i>	<i>Absolute Increase</i>	<i>Percent Increase</i>
Day Care	274	355	81	29.6
Family Day Home Agencies	7	7	0	0
Innovative Child Care	9	10	1	11.1
Total	290	372	82	28.3

Source: Government of Alberta Open Data Portal, Child Care section (available at <https://open.alberta.ca/opendata/childcareinformation>).

As of March 2019, there were seven family day home agencies located within the city of Edmonton (unchanged from June 2016), though the actual number of day homes in Edmonton is much more than that because each agency supervises multiple day homes.²⁶ Innovative child care programs are programs that are “designed to the unique child care needs of the community in which the program is provided;” 10 of these currently exist in Edmonton, up from nine in 2016.²⁷

Table 1.2 shows the number of child care spaces available in Edmonton in June 2016 and March 2019, along with the percent change in each over that period. Essentially all (99%) of the increase in licensed spaces since June 2016 has been in day care programs.

²⁴ June 2016 is used as a benchmark or baseline throughout this section to match population data from the latest federal and municipal censuses, which occurred in May and April 2016, respectively.

²⁵ See the Glossary of this *Profile* and Government of Alberta. (2019). *About Child Care in Alberta*. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/about-child-care-in-alberta.aspx>. The term “child care programs” here, and throughout the *Profile*, refers to full-day, unparented, licensed early learning and care programs.

²⁶ The exact number, location, and size of each of these individual family day homes is not publicly available information for both privacy and security concerns.

²⁷ Examples of “Innovative Child Care” listed in Edmonton are the Edmonton Mennonite Center for Newcomers’s LINC childminding program for care of newcomer children available at https://emcn.ab.ca/corporate/programs/language/care_for_newcomer_children.html or the Wings child care program available at <http://www.wingsofprovidence.ca/about-our-shelter.aspx>.

Table 1.2: Licensed Full-Time Child Care Capacity in the City of Edmonton, June 2016 and March 2019

<i>Program Type</i>	<i>June 2016</i>	<i>March 2019</i>	<i>Absolute Increase</i>	<i>Percent Increase</i>
Day Care	14,114	18,617	4,503	31.9
Family Day Home	2,435	2,435	0	0
Innovative Child Care	238	282	44	18.5
Total	16,787	21,334	4,547	27.1

Source: Government of Alberta Open Data Portal, Child Care section (available at <https://open.alberta.ca/opendata/childcareinformation>).

There are two important caveats about the numbers presented in Table 1.2.²⁸ First, unlike day care programs, both family day homes and Innovative Child Care programs *can* provide care for children up to age 12; no data are publicly available for how many children in either type of program are actually younger than kindergarten age. It is likely, therefore, that Table 1.2 somewhat overestimates the licensed spaces available for pre-K children.

Second, an increase in *licensed* spaces in Edmonton does not necessarily mean that there has been an equivalent increase in *available* spaces. It is common for child care programs to acquire a license for a higher number of spaces than the number of children that they are able to actually enroll at a given time; this results in “full” programs that actually have fewer children attending than the licensed number for that program. The reasons for this vary, but may include an inability to hire enough staff to meet provincial ratio requirements or a desire to have “room to grow” later without having to re-apply for a new license. For example, a child care program might be licensed for 80 spaces, but only be able to accommodate 60 children due to staffing limitations; any remaining applicants would be placed on a waitlist. This creates an apparent paradox: a child care program operating below its licensed capacity that also has a waitlist.

As a result of those two caveats, the numbers in Table 1.2 are likely to overestimate the number of spaces that are actually available for parents. In fact, Table 1.2 could be interpreted as the *best-case scenario* for licensed, full-day, unparented child care spaces. Despite their drawbacks, Tables 1.1 and 1.2 still allow for a basic understanding of child care supply in Edmonton.

Demand

Population. A common way to approximate demand for child care in a given area is simply to count the number of children of pre-Kindergarten age (pre-K) who live there.²⁹ One advantage of using this number for Edmonton is that it is easy to find

²⁸ Thank you to Alberta Children’s Services for insight on interpreting these numbers.

²⁹ “Pre-Kindergarten age” can vary in its exact definition based on a province’s age requirements for Kindergarten entry. In this *Profile*, children of pre-K age refers to children under the age of 5, as children can currently enter Kindergarten in Alberta as early as 4 years 6 months (changing to 4

and use, and is regularly updated through federal or municipal censuses. A second advantage is that increases or decreases in that number could reasonably be seen as correlating well with increases with general demand for child care, though it cannot be assumed that *every* child of pre-K age in Edmonton will require a space in a child care program. Table 1.3 shows the trends in the city of Edmonton's population of children aged 0-4 since 2006.

Table 1.3: Number of Children Aged 0-4 in the City of Edmonton and Percent Change, 2006-2016

Age Group	2006 Population	2011 Population (% increase from 2006)	2016 Population (% increase from 2011)
Under 1 year	8,535	10,525 (23.3)	12,595 (19.7)
1	8,480	10,405 (22.7)	12,265 (17.9)
2	8,215	10,125 (23.3)	11,925 (17.8)
3	7,815	9,965 (27.5)	11,720 (17.6)
4	7,700	9,540 (23.9)	11,565 (21.2)
0-4 (Edmonton)	40,740	50,555 (24.1)	60,070 (18.8)
0-4 (Alberta)	202,600	244,880 (20.9)	266,520 (8.8)
0-4 (Canada)	1,690,540	1,877,095 (11.0)	1,898,790 (1.2)

Source: Statistics Canada Tables: Age (in Single Years) and Average Age (127) and Sex (3) for the Population of Canada, Provinces and Territories, Census Divisions and Census Subdivisions, 2016 / 2011 / 2006 Census - 100% Data

As can be seen from Table 1.3, Edmonton has seen consistent growth in its population of children aged 0-4 since 2006. This growth is roughly equal at every age from under 1 year to age 4, is consistently above Alberta's overall growth rate, and has far outstripped growth in the same age brackets in Canada as a whole.³⁰ This growth trend suggests that the city of Edmonton will continue to face

years 9 months in 2020). Depending on their birth date, some children will turn age 5 before entering Kindergarten, and some will still be age 4 when they enter Kindergarten. Using the range of 0-4 (which here means all children who have not yet reached their 5th birthday) is likely the best estimate that balances this reality and best reflects the population of pre-K children in Alberta. In other provinces, age 0-5 is sometimes used, as some other provinces require children to be older before entering Kindergarten compared to Alberta.

³⁰ Edmonton's and Alberta's growth reflects not only new births and immigration from outside Canada to the city and province, but movement of populations with young children *within* Canada as well. Rates of population growth of children aged 0-4 in Canada as a whole do not reflect such within-country movements, but provide a useful baseline against which to compare provincial patterns.

considerable increases in demand for child care spaces, though more recent population data for the city of Edmonton are not yet available.³¹

Population Plus. While using population counts of children aged 0-4 can be helpful in understanding broad trends in an area's demand, but using these counts can be misleading. For example, if *none* of the families with young children in a particular area want to place their children in child care programs, then, from a planning and management perspective, the population of young children living in that area does not actually matter; the spaces required will be zero. However, if *all* of the children aged 0-4 in an area require a space, then that population number matters greatly. The demand for space in any given area is of course somewhere in between these two extremes—and where exactly that demand falls makes a big difference in planning and management for child care.

One option for refining our understanding of demand is to examine current child care use in Edmonton. A recent (2019) survey from Statistics Canada found that 54.1% of children in Alberta aged 0-5 were in some sort of “unparented early learning and child care arrangement”, lower than in Canada as a whole (59.9%).³² In addition, While the survey did not examine Edmonton specifically—or even drill down to Alberta specifics past the number presented above—the survey found considerable variation across Canada in the use of such “arrangements” based on the age of the child. Children under the age of 1 who were not being cared for by parents or guardians were more often cared for by relatives or non-relatives (for example, a nanny) in the parent’s home (60.7%); only 21.9% were at a centre-based program, and 24.4% were at a day home. Older children, however, had different patterns: of those aged 1-3, 58.2% percent were in a centre-based program, and only 29.5% percent were cared for by a relative or non-parent in the home. These patterns suggest that demand is both affected by region (Albertan families seem to demand fewer unparented “arrangements” than families in other provinces, though this likely varies within Alberta depending on whether families live in urban or rural areas) as well as the exact age distribution of the pre-K population in a given area (younger children tend to be cared for in the home, while older pre-K children are more likely to be cared for outside of their home).

Beyond region and age of children, however, there are other factors that can affect the demand for child care in a given area. Family structures and the employment status of parents can be critical as well; two-parent families where both parents

³¹ Federal data for the city of Edmonton are not available after 2016, but the city of Edmonton conducted a municipal census in April and May of 2019. As of this writing, those figures have not yet been released.

³² Statistics Canada. (2019.) *Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190410/dq190410a-eng.htm>. Note that in this survey, “early learning and child care arrangement” included *any* form of unparented care apart from occasional babysitting or Kindergarten—that is, licensed or unlicensed—and so likely overestimates the number of children who are in “child care” as it is defined in this *Profile*.

work, are looking for work, or are in full-time education are more likely to need some sort of child care arrangement, as are lone-parent families.³³ In Alberta in 2018, 70% of mothers with children 5 years old or younger were working or looking for work (66% with children under 3, and 75% with children aged 3-5); this figure has been slowly increasing for many years.³⁴ For lone-parent families, 66% of mothers and 90% of fathers were working or seeking work in 2018.

Using population numbers combined with surveys of current child care arrangements or current work status may not, however, be truly reflective of demand. Just because 54% of children aged 0-5 are in unparented care in Alberta does not mean that is what parents actually *want*, for themselves or their children. It is reasonable to assume that if parents in Alberta were provided more unparented care for their children, they might use it at a greater rate. For example, in Quebec—which heavily subsidizes child care, resulting in lower costs to families compared to Alberta—the same StatCan survey found that 78% of children aged 0-5 were in some sort of unparented care, the highest percentage of any province in Canada. This suggests that the idea of “if you build it (and make it affordable), children will come ... and their parents can work” might apply to child care in Alberta and perhaps Edmonton, though the specific numbers may vary based on the factors noted above, as well as other factors such as cultural expectations or attitudes about family structures and work.

Notably, few of the statistics or trends in the discussion above are specific to Edmonton. In fact, beyond the population of young children living in the city, there is little information that could be used to try to understand the nature of demand for child care specifically in Edmonton. The one exception comes from a survey conducted by the City of Edmonton with its employees (The Employee Engagement and Diversity Survey), which since 2016 has asked three questions about child care of city employees:

1. Do you use child care to attend work?
2. Do you prefer for your child care to be near home or near work?
3. Which type of child care do you use most often?

³³ Statistics Canada. (2015). Child Care in Canada. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-652-x/89-652-x2014005-eng.htm>.

³⁴ Statistics Canada. (2019). *Labour force characteristics by family age composition, annual - Table 14-10-0120-01*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410012001>. Note that participation rate, the number cited here, includes both people working (employed) and looking for work (not employed, but looking for work and available to work). Also Statistics Canada. (2018). Guide to the labour force survey. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-543-g/71-543-g2018001-eng.htm>.

In 2016, 18% of City employees used child care to attend work; this number remained essentially unchanged in the most recent survey in 2018 (19%).³⁵ In 2016 78% of those using child care preferred to have it close to home, with that number increasing slightly to 80% in 2018. The one change from 2016 seems to have been in the type of care City employees were using; in 2016, 69% were using centre-based care or family day homes, but this percentage dropped to 61% in 2018.³⁶

While not necessarily representative of the entire population of Edmonton, the City of Edmonton's survey can provide some insight into the concerns and preferences of parents. It can also give some sense of the magnitude of the demand for child care among its current employees. The City of Edmonton's short survey is a good start, and to its credit, can be used to do regular monitoring of basic needs and attitudes among its employees. To our knowledge, however, there is no comprehensive or regular survey that asks Edmontonians the same questions.³⁷ Also, as noted above, the City of Edmonton's survey questions focus on what *is* rather than what parents might *want or need*, were it available.

Combining Supply and Demand

Coverage Rates. One metric commonly used to measure and understand “accessibility” is the number of child care spaces per child aged 0-4 in a given area. This ratio, sometimes called a “child care coverage rate”, is a way to try to understand supply and demand in child care for a given area by dividing a basic measure of supply (licensed spaces) by a basic measure of demand (population of pre-K children). As noted above, however, both of these measures are at best imperfect approximations of supply and demand—and therefore their combination into a single figure should be used with caution, and any coverage rate should be carefully examined to understand how it was calculated.

For example, using the number of licensed, full-time child care spaces in Edmonton as of June 2016 (from Table 1.2) combined with the population of pre-K children in

³⁵ Results from the 2018 survey, along with comparisons from the 2016 survey, are available at https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/PDF/2018_Edmonton_ca_snapshots_FINAL.pdf

³⁶ Based on these results, City administration concluded that “employee child care was not highlighted as a significant area which Administration need to address within workplaces in order to attract and retain the best employees.” (CR_6130, report to Council, available at <http://sirepub.edmonton.ca/sirepub/mtgviewer.aspx?meetid=2343&doctype=MINUTES>). The report goes on to note that some further study and monitoring of child care as a human resources issue is warranted, though a specific business case on the issue was not needed.

³⁷ There may be other surveys similar to the City's that are conducted among other organizations in Edmonton, but the authors of this report are not aware of them. The University of Alberta, a major employer in the Edmonton area, does operate two child care centres, has affiliations with some child care organizations and provides a financial child care benefit to some employees; it is also investigating child care as an issue among student parents (see <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/student-parents-ask-for-supports-from-university-of-alberta-1.4686759>.) The authors are not aware of any regular surveys among University of Alberta staff that ask about child care use or needs.

Edmonton from the 2016 Census (from Table 1.3) results in a coverage rate of 0.28, or just under three full-time spaces for every 10 pre-K children living in Edmonton in 2016. However, if licensed preschool spaces are included, the coverage rate increases to 0.33, though now that rate includes spaces that are *not* full-time. If the latest numbers for licensed, full-time spaces (from March 2019) are used with the latest population numbers available (still from the 2016 federal Census) then the coverage rate for Edmonton increases to 0.36, though now that rate uses numbers that do not match chronologically.³⁸

To put these numbers in perspective, a recent report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) used a coverage rate cutoff of 0.33 to determine whether any particular area in Canada could be called a “child care desert,” denoting an area without sufficient access to child care.³⁹ According to the CCPA report, Edmonton was not considered a child care desert overall, with a coverage rate of 0.48 (though certain areas within Edmonton did qualify as child care deserts).⁴⁰ However, the coverage rate in this report was calculated using *both full-time and part-time* licensed spaces from March 2018, and population estimates from the 2016 Census for children aged 0-4. In other words, the CCPA report overestimates full-time spaces (supply) while underestimating the number of children currently aged 0-4 in Edmonton (demand). The result of these two choices made in the CCPA report likely creates a more optimistic picture of Edmonton than might be warranted, especially if the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care is primarily concerned at this point with full-time, unparented spaces for pre-K children.

That said, there is some reason to believe that the coverage rate for full-time licenced spaces for pre-K children has increased in Edmonton in the past three years. As seen in Table 1.2, the population of 0-4 year-olds in Edmonton grew 18.8% between 2011 and 2016. If we assume that this population growth continued in the past three years, the growth in child care spaces in Edmonton (27.1%) likely outpaced the growth in children aged 0-4 in the city in the same period (10.9%). Based on these assumptions, the estimated current coverage rate would be 0.32 (21,334 spaces in March 2019 divided by an estimated 66,620 children aged 0-4 in

³⁸ If 2016 Edmonton Municipal Census (instead of the federal Census) is used with June 2016 space figures, 40,014 children aged 0-4 were counted in Edmonton, making the coverage rate for full-time licensed spaces in the city 0.42. Given that 24% of individuals counted in the municipal census were missing a value for age (compared to a global non-response rate of 4.6% for the federal Census) federal Census numbers are used in this *Profile* whenever possible.

³⁹ MacDonald, D. (2018). *Child Care Deserts in Canada*. Retrieved from <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/child-care-deserts-canada>. Note: The 0.33 threshold is derived from the European Union’s “Barcelona targets” (see https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/bcn_objectives-report2018_web_en.pdf). and past U.S. research, though it does appear to be a “lowest common denominator” figure, as the Barcelona targets are actually much higher for preschool children aged 3 and above (0.90).

⁴⁰ The authors have not been able to reproduce this number using MacDonald’s methods; the coverage rate the authors calculated, using March 2018 data from Alberta Children’s Services and 2016 Census data for the city of Edmonton, is 0.37.

the city of Edmonton in 2019). It should be stressed that without more recent population data this number remains little more than an educated guess. It should also be emphasized that this coverage rate is still an optimistic estimate given that at least some of the licensed, full-time spaces in day homes and innovative programs are likely filled by children of kindergarten age or older (and that not every program is able to operate at its licensed capacity).

In addition, any coverage rate for Edmonton almost certainly masks considerable variation within specific areas of the city. To illustrate this, Table 1.4 shows coverage rates for each of Edmonton's 12 wards using only day care programs from June 2016.⁴¹ (Day care programs are the only licensed full-time programs that can be accurately located in Edmonton, which is why they are the only programs examined in this table.) The key point to draw from this table is that coverage rate varies extensively across the city, from 0.52 in Ward 6 (downtown and downtown-adjacent neighborhoods) to 0.07 in Ward 9.

Table 1.4: Child care coverage rate by Edmonton City Ward, licensed full-time centre-based programs only, June 2016

<i>Ward</i>	<i>Spaces</i>	<i>Children Aged 0-4</i>	<i>Coverage Rate</i>
1	1,263	4,710	0.27
2	1,007	5,170	0.19
3	671	5,065	0.13
4	1,134	6,110	0.19
5	1,077	5,145	0.21
6	1,516	2,880	0.52
7	1,534	3,810	0.40
8	1,444	2,890	0.50
9	598	8,140	0.07
10	1,223	3,370	0.36
11	1,661	3,865	0.43
12	986	8,860	0.11
Total	14,114	60,015	0.24

Source: Government of Alberta Open Data Portal; Statistics Canada; M.A.P.S.; author's calculations. Population estimates for children 0-4 vary slightly from overall estimates for the city due to limitations in data that prevented 55 children from being accurately placed in a specific ward.

Measuring coverage rates (both overall and by smaller areas) is a good start to understanding and monitoring child care accessibility in Edmonton. However, it is also reasonable to assume that what might be considered "adequate" child care coverage in a given area may vary with the characteristics and needs of the families and children in that area. For example, in a recent report for the government of Ontario, Dr. Gordon Cleveland estimated demand for child care across different ages of young children and types of child care arrangements in Ontario. He found greater

⁴¹ For a map of the City of Edmonton's wards, see https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/elections/City_Voting_Subdivision_City-wide.pdf.

demand for child care spaces as children age and in families with working mothers.⁴² This suggests that some areas of Edmonton might require a higher coverage rate than others for accessibility across the city to be truly adequate.

Waitlists and Waitlist Fees. Another way to think about the match, or mismatch, between supply and demand for child care in a given area is to look at waitlists. In 2017, the CCPA, as part of a series of annual studies, surveyed child care centres and family day homes across Canada about their fees and waitlists.⁴³ The authors estimated that 66% of centres or day homes in Edmonton had waitlists, up from 49% just one year before.⁴⁴ A survey conducted by the City of Edmonton in 2015 that found 67% of a selected group of child care programs maintained a waitlist, and that waitlists did not seem to be specific to any one age group.⁴⁵ However, that same City survey found that about half of the programs were operating below licensed capacity, and a third of programs were *both* operating below licensed capacity and yet maintained a waitlist. This latter finding supports the idea that licensed space totals can potentially be misleading if used as the sole indicator of supply.

More recent work on waitlists reveals other notable trends in Edmonton. The latest version of the CCPA report on annual fees found that in 2018, only 49% of Edmonton child care centres or day homes maintained a waitlist (the same proportion as in 2016).⁴⁶ The authors note that although this proportion is lower than in other major Canadian cities, it comes with a catch: 42% of child care centres in Edmonton charge a fee to be on their waiting list, the second-highest rate in the country (behind only Calgary). Charging a fee to be on a waitlist will obviously discourage families, particularly those with lower incomes, from getting on a waitlist. Waitlist fees in Edmonton, the study found, can be as high as \$200 or, in some cases, a full first month's payment. Finally, a small informal survey of nine day care programs in Edmonton generally considered to be high-quality found considerable variation in how long a parent would have to wait for a space depending on the age of the child, with younger children staying on the waitlist much longer than older children.⁴⁷

⁴² Cleveland, G. (2018). *Affordable for All: Making licensed child care affordable in Ontario*. Retrieved from <http://www.childcarepolicy.net/full-report-affordable-for-all/>.

⁴³ MacDonald, G., & Friendly, M. (2017). *Time Out: Child care fees in Canada 2017*. Retrieved from <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/timeout>.

⁴⁴ The authors of the CCPA report also noted that length of waitlists can be misleading, as a single child can be on multiple waitlists at once; therefore they did not ask respondents about the length of their waitlists, only whether they had one at the moment.

⁴⁵ Edmonton City Report. (2015). *Telephone Survey Results*. Retrieved from https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/PDF/Child%20Care%20Telephone%20Survey%20Results.PDF.

⁴⁶ MacDonald, D., & Friendly, M. (2019). *Developmental Milestones: Child care fees in Canada's big cities 2018*. Retrieved from <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/developmental-milestones>.

⁴⁷ This survey was done over the phone by the coordinator of the Edmonton Early Learning and Care Steering Committee, the predecessor to the ECELC. Additional results are available upon request.

What else do we need to know about accessibility in Edmonton?

Publicly available information from the Government of Alberta, Federal and Municipal censuses, and other governmental and non-governmental reports have been useful in starting to create a picture of accessibility in Edmonton. We have a general sense of supply and demand, and we can calculate coverage rates, though the data that go into those rates need to be closely examined. We also have some information on waitlists, though most of that information comes through reports conducted by an organization outside of Alberta. That said, our understanding of accessibility in Edmonton itself remains incomplete, which is a major concern for current and future planning and management. Below we summarize our information gaps in the category of accessibility, and suggest how to fill those gaps by linking to our recommendations in Chapter 5.

Although we can track licensed programs and spaces, along with some of their characteristics, there remain critical aspects of child care supply in Edmonton that we do not know or understand. Some of these aspects include: how many pre-K children are currently enrolled in innovative child care programs and day homes in Edmonton; how “full” child care programs actually are both across the entire city and in specific areas; the number of licensed spaces for different ages of children in Edmonton, broken out by sub-area of the city (perhaps postal code or neighborhood); and how “full” child care programs are in Edmonton (that is, to what extent licensed spaces numbers accurately reflect spaces that are actually available), also broken out by sub-area of the city. Some of this information might be obtained through specific requests to the Government of Alberta or Statistics Canada (see Chapter 5, Recommendation 1).

However, there are other important supply issues for which either no data exist or there is only anecdotal evidence. There are some basics that are unclear, such as how many individual day homes exist in Edmonton. For example, while we understand overall trends in spaces, it is unclear what forces might be driving those trends, or what we might expect in the future. Regular surveys with Edmonton child care operators (including day home agencies, and perhaps individual day homes) could be used to better understand supply, including plans for expansion or contraction in coming years, as has been done in other jurisdictions (Recommendation 2). More in-depth conversations with child care operators might help the ECELC understand the specifics of the child care market in Edmonton, along with those public policies that shape the choices that providers make. We also do not know anything about the supply of unlicensed full-day, unparented programs in Edmonton or have any estimates of how many children might be in such care (Recommendations 3 and 5).

For demand, we do not consistently ask Edmonton’s parents about their needs and preferences around accessibility. Having and using existing administrative data is helpful, but talking with Edmonton’s parents about their behavior and preferences

may be critical to future child care planning and management.⁴⁸ The City of Edmonton does survey its employees to get a basic sense of demand, but that survey is limited to three questions and focuses on current use rather than desired use or projected demand. Moreover, there are no existing data sources that allow us to understand demand in any meaningful way among specific sub-populations in Edmonton. For example, we are not aware of any way to know what percentage of low-income families use child care in Edmonton; this information is not gathered by the Government of Alberta through administrative data, nor are there any regular surveys to capture this information. In Chapter 5, we recommend regular surveys of Edmonton parents, and sub-populations of Edmonton parents, to remedy this situation (Recommendation 3).

Finally, we need to develop our understanding of the *relationship between supply and demand* of child care in Edmonton. This understanding will likely require both more basic information as well as more in-depth discussion and research into the concept of accessibility itself. For example, although there are currently some measures of coverage rates for many areas of Edmonton, we do not necessarily know how to interpret those rates—or what to do if they are problematic. Does a coverage rate of 0.50 (1 space for every 2 pre-K children) mean that accessibility for a given neighborhood is adequate? Why or why not? Are the thresholds for coverage rates that others have used in other contexts—0.33, or even 0.90 for ages 3 to 5—appropriate for Edmonton? How should we combine coverage rates with other measures, like waitlists, to fully understand accessibility in Edmonton? More basic information on supply and demand would certainly help with these questions, but wrestling with appropriate measures of accessibility for Edmonton demands more explicit exploration and discussion by the ECELC or a working group of the ECELC (Recommendation 7).

⁴⁸ For example, the City of Richmond regularly surveys parents to understand behavior and preferences around early learning and care and uses that information in five-year strategic planning; see https://www.richmond.ca/_shared/assets/2017-2022_Richmond_Child_Care_Needs_Assessment_and_Strategy48036.pdf.

Chapter 2: Affordability

What do we mean by “affordability” in child care?

The most basic measure of whether something is affordable is how much it costs. However, not every person or family has the same income, meaning that a better measure of whether something is affordable is to ask how much it costs compared to how much money a given person or family has to spend. This idea of affordability is often expressed as a *percentage of cost divided by income*. For example, if a family makes \$1000 per month and spends \$300 per month on child care, they are spending 30% of their income on child care. The higher this percentage, the less affordable something can be said to be. Although this calculation seems straightforward, it is often more complex than it looks at first glance, both from an individual and societal perspective.⁴⁹ Further complicating this calculation for child care in Edmonton are public policies within Canada and Alberta that provide money to individuals and families (and in the case of subsidies, directly to child care providers) based on income levels, ages of children, and whether children are enrolled in child care. As a final complication, there is no widely accepted cut point or percentage at which child care could generally be considered “affordable,” though recently there have been some suggestions in this area.

The following section describes the state of child care affordability in Edmonton in three progressively more complex – and arguably progressively more accurate – ways: cost, simple affordability (cost and income), and complex affordability (cost, income, and child care subsidies).

As a side note, this section does not address the reasons for poverty in Edmonton, either current or historical, or the reasons that child care costs what it does here. But readers should note that poverty is not distributed equally in Edmonton in any sense.⁵⁰ Therefore, if child care is unaffordable for low-income families as a whole, that also means certain types of families—for example, Indigenous families or families headed by a lone parent—will also be affected disproportionately. Reducing the cost of child care in Edmonton, especially for poorer families, may have the double effect of reducing inequities in child care by income but also some inequities along other characteristics as well.

⁴⁹ For example, “income” might refer to before- or after-tax income, or income available after other key necessities have been paid for (like housing or food). Child care “cost” might be altered by public policies such as child care subsidies or tax deductions for child care expenses.

⁵⁰ Edmonton Social Planning Council. (2019). *A Profile of Poverty in Edmonton: May 2019 Update*. Retrieved from <https://edmontonsocialplanning.ca/index.php/resources/digital-resources/a-espcc-documents/a06-newsletters/a06g-reports/1073-a-profile-of-poverty-in-edmonton-may-2019-update/file>.

What is the state of affordability in Edmonton?

Affordability: Cost

Table 2.1 shows median monthly fees for child care in Edmonton in 2018, as measured by the most recent Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) study.⁵¹ These are also the most recent data available for the city as a whole, and we are unaware of any other publicly available sources of information on child care fees in Edmonton at any level.⁵²

Table 2.1: Median Monthly Cost of Full-Day, Full-Time Licensed Child Care in Edmonton, 2018

<i>Age of Child</i>	<i>Overall</i>	<i>Day Care</i>	<i>Day Home</i>
Infant	\$975	\$1,010	\$760
Toddler	\$870	\$880	\$760
Preschool	\$835	\$850	\$760

Source: MacDonald & Friendly, 2019

Compared to other cities in Canada, 2018 fees for all ages and in all types of centres in Edmonton were roughly in the middle of the road; this statement has been true since 2014. In Edmonton, as in other cities across Canada, infant spaces tend to be the most expensive because more staff are required per infant than for older children in licensed care.⁵³ However, it appears that many people choose to put their infants in day homes: the most recent data (from 2016) indicate that while 16% of spaces in day care programs are for infant care, this number is 29% for day homes, resulting in one in five infant spaces in Edmonton being located in a day home.⁵⁴ The reasons for this might be that day home infant spaces are comparatively less expensive than similar day care infant spaces, but there may be other reasons as well; for example, some parents see day homes as more similar to their own homes, making the transition to unparented care easier for their young children.

⁵¹MacDonald, D., & Friendly, M. (2019). *Developmental Milestones: Child care fees in Canada's big cities 2018*. Retrieved from

<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/developmental-milestones>. Note: These numbers are the cost of child care for parents who do not receive a subsidy; the authors asked for this number to ensure that rates would be roughly comparable across the country. These numbers are likely the best estimate we have for the local "market price" of child care in various cities, including Edmonton.

⁵² This is in contrast to Ontario, where the Ministry of Education has done two surveys of child care operators in the province (2015 and 2017) to monitor trends in fees.

⁵³ MacDonald, D., & Friendly, M. (2019). *Developmental Milestones: Child care fees in Canada's big cities 2018*. Retrieved from

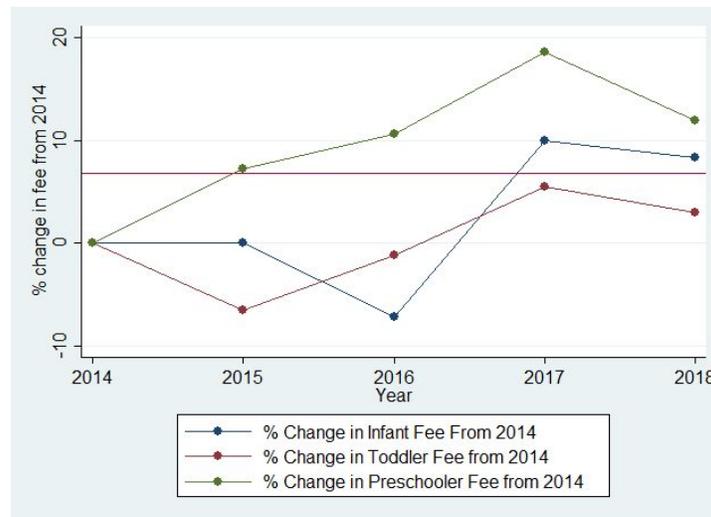
<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/developmental-milestones>.

⁵⁴ MacDonald, D., & Friendly, M. (2016). *A Growing Concern: 2016 child care fees in Canada's biggest cities*. Retrieved from <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/growing-concern>

Note that there are many more centre-based, full-day regulated spaces in Edmonton. If these percentages are the same for 2018 as they were in 2016, that would result in 706 infant spaces in home care and 2,720 infant spaces in centre-based care in Edmonton.

Compared to 2017, overall child care fees for all ages in Edmonton actually declined slightly in 2018 (decreases of 1.5% for infants, 2.4% for toddlers, and 5.6% for preschoolers). However, as illustrated in Figure 2.1, fees for all ages have risen in Edmonton since 2014, with fees for infant (8.3%) and preschool-age (11.9%) spaces outpacing the overall inflation rate in Canada (6.8%, red line in the figure) over that time.⁵⁵

Figure 2.1: Change in Median Child Care Fees in Edmonton, 2014-2018



Source: All CCPA reports 2014-2018; author's calculations.

Although some have suggested that the provincial Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) program may have contributed to the overall decline in costs for child care in Edmonton between 2017 and 2018, it is unclear to what extent ELCC centres in Edmonton were actually responsible for that decline.⁵⁶ Across Alberta in 2018, the average parent fee for a single child in an ELCC centre was \$474 per month, roughly half the median cost of preschool care in Edmonton.⁵⁷ It is clear from Figure 2.1 that fees since 2014 have a broad upward trend that reversed for all ages in 2018, but it is also clear that year-to-year fluctuations are common in the short time that fees in Edmonton have been regularly monitored by the CCPA. Given that one of the explicit goals of the ELCC program is to lower fees—and that about 8 to 10% of child care

⁵⁵ In Figure 2.1, “infant” refers to a child 18 months and younger; “toddler” is 19 months to 35 months; and “preschooler” is 36 months and older.

⁵⁶ MacDonald, D., & Friendly, M. (2019). *Developmental Milestones: child care fees in Canada's big cities 2018*, pp 19-20. Retrieved from <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/developmental-milestones>.

⁵⁷ Government of Alberta. (2019). *Early learning and child care pilot*. Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/elcc-care-centre-pilot-year-one-evaluation-summary>. Also MacDonald, D., & Friendly, M. (2019). *Developmental Milestones: Child care fees in Canada's big cities 2018*. Retrieved from <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/developmental-milestones>.

spaces in Edmonton in 2018 were in ELCC centres—it does stand to reason that the ELCC program would be part of the reason that median child care costs declined last year Edmonton. Alternatively, it is possible that fees increased in Edmonton’s *non-ELCC* child care centres while fees declined at the ELCC centres. If that were true, then Edmonton’s overall declines in median fees between 2017 and 2018 could be “masking” this trend. We have no data that allow us to compare the fee levels of ELCC versus non-ELCC centres, so this question cannot currently be resolved. Whether the one-year downward trend in fees will continue remains to be seen.

Affordability: Cost and Income

As noted above, cost is only a part of understanding affordability; we also need to look at income. As noted above, there is no established cut point or percentage for determining whether child care is affordable. We do, however, have some basis for comparison and some suggestions from recent reports and other sources. An OECD report from 2016 showed that across 30 countries, child care costs averaged 12.6% of net income for a two-parent family and 13.5% of net income for a lone parent family.⁵⁸ At that time, in Ontario, those figures were 22.2% and 32.3%, respectively.⁵⁹ In addition, a 2018 report from Ontario that closely examined affordability used cutoffs of spending less than 10% of net family income as affordable, 10 to 20% as unaffordable, and greater than 20% as completely unaffordable.⁶⁰ These figures were for a measure called the FIAM (Family Income Affordability Measure), which is the net price of licensed child care divided by the total income of a family after taxes and child or family benefits.

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommended that child care expenses not go beyond 7% of income for lower-income families.⁶¹ This number, in turn, is based on a report from the U.S. Census that found families who paid for child care spent an average of 7% of their monthly income on it, a figure that remained consistent from 1997 through 2011. That same report, however, found that families living in poverty paid a much larger percentage of their monthly income (30%) on child care than families who were not in poverty.⁶² This

⁵⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2019). *Society at a Glance 2016: OECD Social Indicators*. Paris, FR: OECD Publishing. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1787/soc_glance-2019-en.

⁵⁹ These figures come from the OECD report above, where Canada was represented by Ontario. To our knowledge, there is no other province or region of Canada for which these specific figures are available.

⁶⁰ Cleveland, G. (2018). *Affordable for All: Making licensed child care affordable in Ontario*, p. 118. Retrieved from <http://www.childcarepolicy.net/full-report-affordable-for-all/>. Note that the author of that report points out on that same page that “[i]t is not clear where the dividing line between ‘affordability’ and ‘unaffordability’ should be drawn. Ultimately, that is a question for politicians, policy makers, and advocates to answer.”

⁶¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2016). *Child Care and Development Fund Final Rule Frequently Asked Questions*. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/ccdf-final-rule-faq>.

⁶² Laughlin, L. (2013). *Who’s Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Spring 2011*. Retrieved from <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2013/demo/p70-135.pdf>.

demonstrates an important point: Simple affordability cutoffs, applied across all levels of income, are not necessarily the best way to understand affordability. Families with low incomes may already be spending a larger percentage of their income on necessities, such as food and shelter, forcing them to choose between child care and those basics, rather than reduce entertainment or travel expenses (which might be more the case with middle and upper-income families).

Table 2.2 uses a FIAM-like measure⁶³ to examine child care affordability for several different types of families in Edmonton in 2015 (the latest year for which data are available that can be used to construct this measure). Four example families at four income levels are shown in the first column: (1) a couple family at the city of Edmonton’s median income for couple families, (2) a lone-parent family at the median income for lone-parent families in the city of Edmonton, (3) a couple family at the Edmonton Metro Area low-income after-tax threshold, and (4) a lone-parent family at the Edmonton Metro Area low-income after-tax threshold.

Each of these families is assumed to have two children. In column two, affordability is shown if one of those children is of preschool age and in a day care program of average cost (\$800 per month in 2015); the other child is assumed to need no child care. In column three, affordability is shown if one child is in infant care at average cost (\$900 per month in 2015) and the other is in care at preschool age.⁶⁴

Table 2.2: Affordability of Child Care in Edmonton for Eight Family Types, 2015

<i>Type of Family (annual after-tax income)</i>	<i>Percent of Income Spent for 1 child, preschool age (\$9,600 annually)</i>	<i>Percent of Income Spent for 1 infant child and 1 preschool age child (\$20,400 annually)</i>
Couple family at median income (\$106,474)	9%	19%
Lone parent family at median income (\$56,914)	17%	36%
Couple family at low income after-tax threshold (\$36,426)	26%	56%
Lone parent family at low income after-tax threshold (\$30,962)	31%	66%

Source: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed March 22, 2019); MacDonald and Klinger 2015; Tracking the Trends, 2018; authors’ calculations.

⁶³ The FIAM described above was calculated for all families in Ontario using a more complex model and multiple datasets. The figures used in the table below are rough estimates meant to approximate that model, but more work would need to be done to have comparable numbers to Dr. Cleveland’s work.

⁶⁴ In Table 2, low-income cut-offs are not available at the city level so 2015 metro area cut-offs were used. Median incomes are figures for the city of Edmonton in 2015.

Using this relatively simple measure of affordability reveals that child care can be a major expense for Edmonton families. At median incomes, the affordability of having one child of preschool age in child care in Edmonton is roughly below or near the 15% average that emerged from the OECD report (with the exception of lone-parent families with two children in care), but once a family reaches low income thresholds, having even one child in care becomes a very large part of the family budget. Moreover, most low-income families in Edmonton actually lived well below that threshold—the median income of low-income families in Edmonton was roughly just 60 percent of the threshold in 2015 and 2016.⁶⁵ In other words, the table above gives the most optimistic view of affordability for low-income families, the vast majority of whom live well below the low-income cut-off. Finally, the figures in Table 2.2 do *not* take Alberta child-care subsidies into account. As will be seen in the next section, subsidies can make a substantial impact on the affordability of child care.

Affordability: Cost, Income, Subsidies, and More

To more accurately understand the affordability of child care in Edmonton, we need to add in the effects of a key government policy. Families in Alberta can take advantage of a child care subsidy for certain types of child care; the amount of this subsidy varies based on the income of the family, number of children, and type of child care chosen.⁶⁶ Child care subsidies are a direct attempt to make child care more affordable by lowering the cost of childcare relative to family income. In Alberta child care subsidies are not paid to parents; rather, they are paid directly to the child care program that parents choose, with parents paying the remainder of the cost not covered by the subsidy. According to Alberta Children’s Services latest annual report (2018-2019), 28,000 children were being provided subsidies, with 80 percent of those receiving the full (maximum) subsidy.⁶⁷

Using the same eight situations from Table 2.2 above, Table 2.3 adds in the effects of Alberta’s subsidies on the costs of child care on Edmonton families.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Edmonton Social Planning Council (2019.) *A Profile of Poverty in Edmonton: May 2019 Update*. Retrieved from

<https://edmontonsocialplanning.ca/index.php/resources/digital-resources/a-espcc-documents/a06-newsletters/a06g-reports/1073-a-profile-of-poverty-in-edmonton-may-2019-update/file>. Note that the difference between the income thresholds for being considered “low income” and the actual incomes of low-income families is often referred to as the “poverty gap” (see page 10 of the *Profile of Poverty in Edmonton: May 2019 Update*).

⁶⁶ Government of Alberta. (2019). *Child Care Subsidy*. Retrieved from

<https://www.alberta.ca/child-care-subsidy.aspx>. Note that child care subsidies can be used to pay for a variety of early learning and care options in Alberta, not just full-day unparented child care.

⁶⁷ Government of Alberta. (2019). *Children’s Services Annual Report 2018-2019*. Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/476d1e4b-bdfa-4330-a88a-79bdacee1a9a/resource/27f9738e-5146-434b-9a3e-a70eee1431d4/download/children-services-annual-report-2018-2019-web.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Alberta’s child care subsidy is calculated on before-tax income rather than after-tax income, but figures for before-tax income are not available for low-income families. For comparability, after-tax income is used to calculate the subsidy, which somewhat overestimates the amount of subsidy that

Table 2.3: Cost and Affordability of Child Care in Edmonton for Eight Family Types, Including Child Care Subsidies, 2015

<i>Family situation (annual after-tax income)</i>	<i>Cost (Affordability) for 1 preschool-age child</i>	<i>Cost (Affordability) for 1 preschool-age child, after subsidy</i>	<i>Cost (Affordability) for 1 infant and 1 pre-school age child</i>	<i>Cost (Affordability) for 1 infant and 1 pre-school age child, after subsidy</i>
Couple family at median income (\$106,474)	\$9,600 (9%)	\$9,600 (9%)	\$20,400 (19%)	\$20,400 (19%)
Lone parent family at median income (\$56,914)	\$9,600 (17%)	\$6,504 (11%)	\$20,400 (36%)	\$8,868 (16%)
Couple family at low income after-tax threshold (\$36,426)	\$9,600 (26%)	\$3,048 (8%)	\$20,400 (56%)	\$6,312 (17%)
Lone parent family at low income after-tax threshold (\$30,962)	\$9,600 (31%)	\$3,048 (10%)	\$20,400 (66%)	\$6,312 (20%)

Sources: Statcan Table no. 98-400-X2016099

(<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed March 22, 2019); MacDonald and Klinger 2015; Tracking the Trends, 2018; Alberta childcare subsidy calculator (2019); author's calculations.

As can be seen from Table 2.3, subsidies can make child care much more affordable, sometimes dramatically so, especially for low-income families. Across Alberta, about 35% of families receive some amount of subsidy.⁶⁹ Families in the ELCC centres also qualify for subsidies, meaning that for some low-income families in those centres receiving the maximum subsidy amount, the combined effects of these two policies render child care essentially cost-free.

Table 2.4 takes another angle by showing how affordable day care would be for a specific type of family in Edmonton at a range of different incomes in 2018. The family type examined in the table is a couple family with two preschool-aged

families qualify for (because after-tax income is almost always lower than before-tax income). It should also be noted that low-income families, both single parent and couple parent families, qualify for the maximum subsidy in Table 2.3, and that the current (2019) subsidy calculator was used for these calculations (using the current calculator is appropriate, as subsidy amounts have not changed since 2015).

⁶⁹ This number is from the ELCC Centre Pilot Interim evaluation. This figure is the same for families in ELCC centres and in non-ELCC centres across the province.

children in day care. As in Table 2.3, this table also attempts to account for child care subsidies offered by the Government of Alberta.

Table 2.4: Affordability of Day Care for Two Preschool-Aged Children in Edmonton at Median Cost (\$20,400 per year) for a Couple Family at Various Income Levels in 2018

<i>Annual Income</i>	<i>% of Annual Income Spent on Child Care Before Subsidy</i>	<i>Annual Subsidy</i>	<i>Amount Spent on Child Care After Subsidy</i>	<i>% of Income Spent on Child Care After Subsidy</i>
\$10,000	204%	\$13,104	\$7,296	73%
\$20,000	102	13,104	7,296	36
\$30,000	68	13,104	7,296	24
\$40,000	51	13,104	7,296	18
\$50,000	41	13,104	7,296	15
\$60,000	34	10,452	9,948	17
\$70,000	29	5,460	14,940	21
\$80,000	26	456	19,944	25
\$90,000	23	0	20,400	23
\$100,000	20	0	20,400	20
\$125,000	16	0	20,400	16
\$150,000	14	0	20,400	14

Source: MacDonald & Friendly, 2019; Government of Alberta Subsidy Calculator; author's calculations.

Several important patterns can be seen in Table 2.4. The first is that without subsidies, placing two children in day care at the median cost in Edmonton is impossible for very low-income families. Even for families making \$50,000 per year, such care would be practically out of reach (consuming 41% of their monthly income). This column is important for comparing the effects of subsidies, but it is also important for newcomer families that are not yet Canadian citizens or permanent residents and who are therefore not eligible for the provincial subsidy.

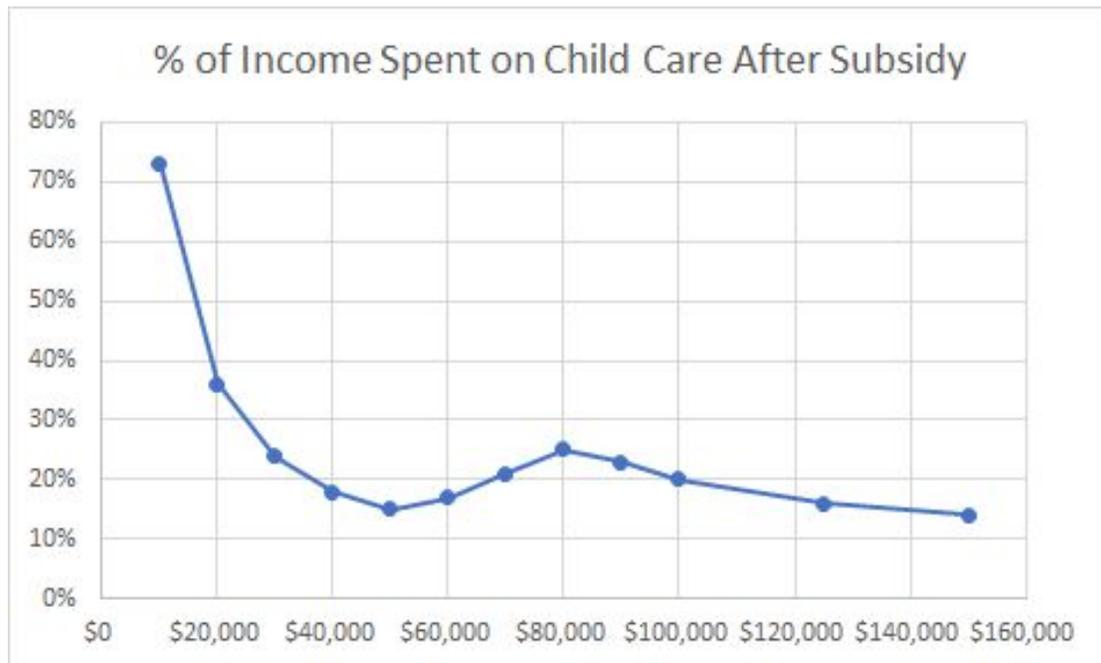
Second, subsidies lower the cost of child care, but for very low-income families day care for two children would still take up a very large percentage of monthly income. This happens because subsidies are capped at a maximum dollar amount in Alberta—notice that in Table 2.4, the subsidy amount is the same for our example family whether that family makes \$50,000 per year or \$10,000 per year. For very low income families, that likely means looking for care that costs below the median in Edmonton, cutting back on expenses in other areas, or finding alternative (perhaps unlicensed) care options.⁷⁰ For the example family depicted in Table 2.4, the low-income threshold in the Edmonton metropolitan area in 2016 was \$40,848 (but note that half of couple families with two children who were living at or below the low-income threshold were actually making at or under \$27,790).⁷¹

⁷⁰ Breikreuz, R., & Colen, K. (2018). Who Cares? Motivations for Unregulated Child Care Use. *Journal of Family Issues*, 37(17), 4066-4088. doi: [10.1177/0192513X18806025](https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X18806025).

⁷¹ Edmonton Social Planning Council. (2019). *A Profile of Poverty in Edmonton: May 2019 Update* (p. 10). Retrieved from <https://edmontonsocialplanning.ca/index.php/resources/digital-resources/a-espcc-documents/a06-newsletters/a06g-reports/1073-a-profile-of-poverty-in-edmonton-may-2019-update/file>.

Figure 2.2 further illustrates the effects of subsidies by graphing the relationship between the first and last columns in Table 2.4.

Figure 2.2: Percent of Family Income Spent on Child Care for A Couple Family with Two Children in Alberta After Subsidy at Different Income Levels, 2018



A third pattern can be seen clearly in Figure 2.2: as income increases past \$50,000, there is an uptick in the percentage that this family would spend on child care. As can be seen in Figure 2.2, at an annual income of \$80,000 a family would be spending the same percentage on care as if that family made \$30,000 per year. This happens because the subsidy slowly phases out as income rises, with the subsidy disappearing at income levels slightly past \$80,000 per year for our example family. As the province pays less through subsidies, families at middle levels of income have to pick up more of the cost of care. Then, as income rises past \$90,000 per year, child care once again becomes more affordable for our example family (because their income is rising, but the cost for child care remains the same, and there is no longer any effect of subsidies).

What else do we need to know about affordability in Edmonton?

This chapter has shown that we do have a basic understanding of child care affordability in Edmonton. However, all the information on cost that we currently have is aggregated at the city level, and we only know the differences in cost between two types of full-day care (licensed day care and day homes) and three age categories (infant, toddler, and preschooler). In addition, all of these cost numbers above come from a yearly national survey of child care operators across Canada

conducted by a non-governmental organization located outside of Alberta. There is no other regular source of public information on the cost of child care programs in Edmonton, either through administrative data, surveys of operators, surveys of parents, or any other method. On the positive side, those existing data now go back five years, which gives us a limited ability to track some cost and affordability trends in Edmonton overall; we also know how many \$25-a-day centres there are in Edmonton, and their locations, though this does not necessarily tell us all we need to know about overall affordability. Below we summarize our current information gaps in the category of affordability, and suggest how to fill those gaps by linking to our recommendations in Chapter 5.

Taken together, this lack of information prevents us from understanding any cost or affordability variation or patterns *within* the city itself. For example, we know very little about the distribution of cost and affordability across Edmonton's neighborhoods, and nothing about that distribution across different populations (not just low-income populations, but newcomers, Indigenous families, or any others). We also do not know to what extent different populations in Edmonton are using subsidies, what types of child care options they are choosing, and to what extent the affordability of child care is forcing them into certain types and methods of child care. The best we have at the current time are hints from a recent StatCan survey; this survey indicated that parents in Alberta who choose not to use outside-the-home child care arrangements do so because the cost is high, and one of the major reasons that parents chose their particular arrangement for their young children—whatever that arrangement might be—was because it was the most affordable option.⁷² These issues could be resolved in part through requesting some existing information on the location of subsidy users in Edmonton and perhaps using Children's Services data to re-examine fees (Chapter 5, Recommendation 1) but most of this information would need to be generated through surveys of child care operators in Edmonton and surveys of Edmonton parents (Recommendations 2 and 3). As is the case in Canada more generally, we know little to nothing about the cost of unlicensed care in Edmonton, other than it is likely perceived as being lower cost than licensed care (Recommendation 5).⁷³

Related to that last point, we also do not have any information on the *impacts* of the affordability of child care on parents and families in Edmonton that is systematically and regularly gathered from parents and families themselves; rather, information about impacts tends to come from anecdotes about the effects of high costs.⁷⁴ The

⁷² Statistics Canada. (2019). *Early Learning and Child Care for Children aged 0 to 5 years: A Provincial / Territorial Portrait*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/11-626-x/11-626-x2019013-eng.pdf?st=u8gQxtZu>.

⁷³ Breitzkreuz, R., & Colen, K. (2018). Who Cares? Motivations for Unregulated Child Care Use. *Journal of Family Issues*, 37(17), 4066-4088. doi: [10.1177/0192513X18806025](https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X18806025).

⁷⁴ For an example, see EndPovertyEdmonton. (2019). *Affordable and Quality Child Care Benefits Everyone*. Retrieved from <https://www.endpovertyedmonton.ca/news-blog/2019/3/21/affordable-and-quality-child-care-benefits-everyone>.

recent interim report on the first year of the ELCC program noted that 98% of the parents and caregivers at ELCC centres who answered the evaluation survey were satisfied or very satisfied with the cost of child care at their centre; this number was only 52% for those at non-ELCC centres.⁷⁵ Beyond this, we know of no other ways that the voices of families or parents are represented in understanding the impacts of affordability patterns in Edmonton. This continues a general pattern for child care information in Edmonton wherein the concerns and preferences of most parents are largely unknown.

Finally, there are important discussions that the ECELC should have if it seeks to address affordability in Edmonton. Perhaps the most important is how to define “affordable” and what the goals of the ECELC for affordability should be. One way to start this conversation would be to discuss what percentage, or percentages, of income spent on child care would be reasonable. Such a discussion might include more explorations in a working group of why certain numbers—seven percent, 15 percent, 20 percent, or more—might be appropriate as goals in Edmonton (Recommendation 7).

⁷⁵ Government of Alberta. (2019). *Early Learning and Child Care Centre Pilot*. Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/218b06b9-2845-472a-b2b9-85db073088f6/resource/a2c1f4ce-bca9-43f8-8a2a-b61332731958/download/elcc-centre-pilot-year-one-evaluation-summary.pdf>. Note that no response rate was given for the survey.

Chapter 3: Quality

What do we mean by “quality” in child care?

Quality in child care is a much debated concept. This chapter does not attempt to resolve those debates. Rather, it focuses on how certain commonly accepted aspects of quality in child care programs are intended to be assured in Edmonton, and discusses several other quality-related issues, mostly related to the child care workforce.

This chapter addresses two broad types of quality: *structural quality* and *process quality*.⁷⁶ The former is named because it refers to the “structural” components of programs, such as the amount of square footage per child that exists in a child care program’s physical space, the education or training levels of staff, or the ratio of staff to children in a program. Structural quality is often assessed using objective measures and therefore is often more easily defined and regulated by governments. Process quality, in contrast, refers to the quality and depth of the actual interactions between early childhood educators and children and families. Process quality is much more difficult (and expensive) to measure and therefore regulate, but is often seen as ultimately more important to the development of children and families; having the proper structural quality in place is often seen as necessary but not sufficient for creating process quality.⁷⁷

It is also important to realize that the concept of quality addressed in this section generally applies to *individual child care programs*. Measures of the quality of a *child care system* would certainly include the quality of the individual programs in that system, but also elements such as the amount and consistency of funding, monitoring and evaluation, and several others.⁷⁸ That being said, this chapter also includes a discussion of what we know about the child care workforce in Edmonton, as the characteristics of the workforce—that is, the people who are actually working with children, day in and day out—are often closely linked to quality for both individual programs and child care systems.

⁷⁶ Slot, P. (2018). *Structural characteristics and process quality in early childhood education and care: A literature review*. OECD Education Working Paper No. 176. Retrieved from [http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=EDU/WKP\(2018\)12&docLanguage=En](http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=EDU/WKP(2018)12&docLanguage=En).

⁷⁷ Ibid., page 8.

⁷⁸ Friendly, M., & Beach, J. (2005). *Elements of a High-Quality Early Learning and Child Care System*. Retrieved from <https://www.childcarecanada.org/publications/quality-design/05/03/elements-high-quality-early-learning-and-child-care-system>. Note that this is similar to talking about the quality of a school system versus the quality of a single school. A high-quality individual school could exist within a generally low-quality school system, and vice versa.

As a final note, readers should understand that “quality” in child care can mean very different things to different groups of people. This is particularly important when considering child care from a newcomer or an Indigenous perspective, as noted by the authors of the two projects commissioned by the ECELC to provide insights into those perspectives. For example, a child care program might need to adopt a trauma-informed curriculum to be considered high-quality through an Indigenous lens, or it may need to include early childhood educators who are themselves Indigenous. The ECELC should strongly consider expanding both its structural and process quality indicators for child care in Edmonton beyond the “usual suspects” that are listed and discussed below.

What is the state of quality in Edmonton?

Structural Quality

In Alberta, provincial licensing and accreditation regulations provide a baseline standard of quality. Meeting licensing requirements serves as a proxy to providing the fundamental components necessary for operation, rather than a strict indication of program quality. Rules for both licensing and accreditation are consistent throughout the province.

Licensing. Licenses are required for any child care program that provides spaces and care for more than six children, with some exceptions.⁷⁹ The Edmonton Region Child and Family Services Child Care Services licenses, monitors, and enforces provincial regulations in Edmonton. Ideally, through the licensing process, certain minimum levels of quality are present in Edmonton and throughout the province.

Part of licensing requirements are regular inspection visits. Each licensed day care and innovative child care program is usually inspected at least twice during any 12-month period, though there may be more frequent visits if there are any problems identified during those visits or if there are complaints lodged against the program.⁸⁰ The results of these inspections are available for each day care and innovative child care program in Alberta for the preceding 18 months, though interpreting those results—especially as a way of evaluating the quality of individual programs—can be difficult, especially without considerable experience in the inspection process.⁸¹ Licensing works somewhat differently for day homes, with

⁷⁹ Government of Alberta (2019). *Starting a child care program*. Retrieved from <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/family-community/child-care-providers-licensing.html>.

⁸⁰ Government of Alberta. (2019). *Family Day Home Standards Manual for Alberta*. Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/bf8ece5b-ed29-4b42-b064-b30f3ca4a8ee/resource/2ad3a811-4f20-4427-abda-523b3d8b81f5/download/fdh-manual-update-2019-03-06.pdf>. Note that monitoring and enforcement—including inspections—are handled differently for family day homes, as these functions are performed by the family day home agencies that oversee those homes.

⁸¹ For example, simply counting the number of inspections or violations a given program has had in the last 18 months as an indicator of problems may be misleading, as some programs can request visits by inspectors, inspectors have considerable discretion in the number of inspections that they choose to conduct and violations that they record, and it can be difficult to tell the seriousness of

day home agencies taking on inspection and other regulatory duties for individual day homes on behalf of Children's Services.

Accreditation. Some licensed child care programs in Alberta also have the option to seek accreditation, which provides additional funding and technical support from the province to day care programs, out-of-school care programs, and family day home agencies in exchange for meeting higher standards of outcomes for children, families, program staff, and the community surrounding the program.⁸² The Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services, on behalf of the Alberta Government, provides province-wide child care accreditation services for licensed day care centres, approved family day home agencies and licensed out-of-school care programs in Alberta. Accredited programs must submit annual reports and are subject to unscheduled status verification visits. Presumably, because they have to meet higher standards, accredited programs provide higher quality child care, so a higher percentage of accredited programs in a given area would be expected to indicate a generally higher level of quality in that area.

As of March 2019, 80.0% of Edmonton's day care programs and all seven of its family day home agencies were accredited. This is quite similar to Alberta as a whole (78.7 and 89.4%, respectively). Not included in these numbers are out of school care programs (because they are for older children), preschools, innovative child care programs, or group family day homes (these types of programs cannot apply for accreditation). It should be noted that some child care programs that are listed as "not accredited" are actually in the process of obtaining accreditation, but there is no indication in public data of which programs are in that "pending" situation.⁸³

Auspice. Another potential structural indicator of quality for child care programs is what is often referred to as "auspice"—that is, what kind of organization operates the program. There is some evidence that non-profit and public (governmental)

violations from the publicly available data. The authors of this report are continuing to investigate whether looking at inspections is a feasible way to understand quality variations within Edmonton.

⁸² For more specifics on accreditation standards, see Government of Alberta. (2019). Alberta Child Care Accreditation. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-child-care-accreditation.aspx>. Additional funding to programs comes in the form of staff wage top-ups, professional development grants, and resources to help with staff attraction, recruitment, and retention.

⁸³ The accreditation process can take a long time to complete; the self-evaluation process alone is estimated to take 15 months or more. This means that many programs that are in the process of obtaining accreditation could be listed as "unaccredited" in public data. This gap can be considerable; for example, in March 2019, the Government of Alberta claimed that 96% of day care programs and family day homes were *participating* in the accreditation program, but the authors' analysis of open data at that time shows that the percentage of those programs *actually listed as accredited* to be 79%. See

https://www.aelcs.ca/for-programs/Process/Decision/Documents/DP_HS_Accred_Eval_Scoring_Framework_Apr-15.pdf and <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/476d1e4b-bdfa-4330-a88a-79bdacee1a9a/resource/4954b31c-add8-429f-91d5-57462c148cf9/download/childrensservices-annual-report-2017-2018.pdf>.

operators may provide higher-quality child care on average than for-profit organizations.⁸⁴ This suggests that auspice might be one structural indicator of the quality of a program—and by extension, a higher number of nonprofit providers in an area might mean a higher general level of quality (much like accreditation above). The latest numbers, from 2016, show that the great majority of day care programs across Alberta are for-profit (70%) and those for-profit programs account for 72% of the licensed day care spaces in Alberta; in contrast, about 46% of day home agencies are for-profit.⁸⁵ No similar data are publicly available for Edmonton.

ELCC Programs in Edmonton. In 2017, the Government of Alberta introduced the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) initiative, beginning with 22 child care programs and later expanding it to 122 the following year.⁸⁶ As noted in Chapter 2, one of the signature characteristics of ELCC centres (“ELCC centres” is used here as a general term for any child care program that is taking part in the ELCC initiative) is that, as a condition of funding received from the Government of Alberta, they must limit their per-child fees to a maximum of \$25 per day. However, ELCC centres are intended to be more than simply low-cost child care; they must also adhere to a series of requirements intended to ensure that they are providing high-quality services, including:

- Implementing *Flight: Alberta’s Early Learning and Care Framework*,⁸⁷
- Ensuring that they are accredited within 18 months of being awarded an ELCC grant,
- Being a not-for-profit (or converting to not-for-profit status), and
- Participating in other general governance, professional development, and community engagement activities, many of which are unique to the ELCC program itself.

Of the initial 22 ELCC centres, four were located in the city of Edmonton (and a fifth in Fort Saskatchewan), with three open as of March 31, 2018. By March of 2019, there were 30 ELCC centres in the Edmonton area, representing 1,847 licensed spaces. Of these spaces, 250 are in the initial five Edmonton-area pilot centres (including the centre in Fort Saskatchewan); 1,521 are in already existing day care programs that “converted” to ELCC centres; and 76 are from two new programs that were named under the second wave of ELCC awards. A small percentage of spaces in

⁸⁴ Child Care Resource and Research Unit. (2011). *What research says about quality in for-profit, non-profit and public child care*. Retrieved from <https://www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/What%20research%20says%20about%20quality%20in%20fp%20np%20and%20p%20child%20care.pdf>.

⁸⁵ Friendly, M., et al. (2016). *Early childhood education and care in Canada 2016*. Retrieved from <https://www.childcarecanada.org/publications/ecec-canada/early-childhood-education-and-care-canada-2016>. Note that all of the numbers on auspice in this paragraph are from this document.

⁸⁶ Government of Alberta. (2019). *Early learning and child care centres*. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/early-learning-child-care-centres.aspx>.

⁸⁷ Makovichuk, L., Hewes, J., Lirette, P., & Thomas, N. (2014). *Flight: Alberta’s early learning and care framework*. Retrieved from <https://flightframework.ca/>.

the ELCC centres may not be available (as their programs are still in the process of opening) as of the writing of this report, and some ELCC centres prioritize spaces for certain populations (for example, children of full-time serving members of the military or employees of specific hospitals).⁸⁸ Based on the province's initial evaluation of the 22 pilot sites, it appears that ELCC centres are successfully implementing the *Flight* curriculum, though possibly unevenly, and many are also starting to incorporate inclusiveness training and practices, such as the Access, Support, and Participation (ASaP) Continuum Project.⁸⁹ In this initial evaluation, parents also appeared quite satisfied with the quality of ELCC programs, though it is not clear how parents were defining quality.⁹⁰

The long-term future of the ELCC initiative in Alberta is unclear. In the spring of 2019, Alberta's provincial elections resulted in a new United Conservative Party (UCP) government, replacing the former New Democratic Party (NDP) government. During the election, the NDP had made expanding the ELCC initiative to all child care programs province-wide a promise of their platform, while the UCP was largely silent on the future of the initiative. With the UCP victory, there was some worry that the ELCC initiative would be discontinued, with one ELCC centre publicly announcing in July 2019 that it would stop participating when its three-year ELCC grant runs out in 2021.⁹¹ As a result, Alberta's Minister of Children's Services, Rebecca Schulz, sent a letter to all ELCC centres confirming that the "... terms of the pilot agreements have not changed from the original terms. We are partway through the pilot projects for ELCC Centres and are committed to maintain them through their third year. Those Centres expecting to receive their next round of funding by March 2020 will do so."⁹² Of the 122 ELCC centres, the initial 22 have grant funding

⁸⁸ Government of Alberta. (2019). *ELCC Centres across Alberta*. Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/9b091afb-8866-4a33-935b-43bf120d35f4/resource/bf8c4822-29aa-4a81-bff6-00202b8dd672/download/elcc-centre-full-list-2019-03.pdf>. Note that space totals are from April 2018, available at Government of Alberta. (2018). *ELCC Centres By the Numbers*. Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/79d4a4f2-e4a1-436d-84b6-86e8eaa6eca2/resource/3294f2b3-4aae-4945-b959-375257756357/download/elcc-centres-by-the-numbers-april-2018.pdf>.

⁸⁹ More information on ASaP is available at <https://www.gritprogram.ca/asap/>.

⁹⁰ Government of Alberta. (2018). *Evaluation of early learning and child care centres: Final report - year one (2017-2018)*. Retrieved from

<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/evaluation-of-elcc-centres-final-report-year-one-2017-2018>. Note that this is full year 1 evaluation of the ELCC program, which presents results from the first 22 centres along with a comparison to 22 non-ELCC centres.

⁹¹ Maimann, K. (2019). *Alberta child care centre announces its \$25-a-day program will end, raising questions about pilot project's future*. July 16, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com/edmonton/2019/07/16/alberta-child-care-centre-announces-its-25-a-day-program-will-end-raising-questions-about-pilot-projects-future.html>.

⁹² Schultz, R. (as Minister of Children's Services, Government of Alberta). (2019). *Letter to ELCC Centres, July 19, 2019*. Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/b72a0446-7053-4c25-b374-3569fefc2d10/resource/c00efede-30b7-497b-960e-22a84f27e336/download/mrs-letter-to-elcc-centre-operators-july222019-nosignature.pdf>.

that ends in March 2020, while the 100 of the second phase have funding until March 2021.

The ELC Workforce

Yet another way to explore quality that applies at both an individual program level and at a system level is to examine the characteristics of the workforce. This is as true in child care as it is in any other sector, from information technology to construction to higher education. As in previous chapters, this chapter is focused on the workforce in child care programs that are regulated by the provincial Ministry of Children's Services, and so does not specifically address the workforce in programs regulated by the Ministry of Education, such as Early Childhood Services (ECS)-funded programs for children of pre-K age.

In Alberta, all staff that work directly with children in a licensed day care, out of school care, or preschool program must obtain certification within six months of starting employment.⁹³ There are three certification levels in Alberta: Child Development Assistant, Child Development Worker, and Child Development Supervisor. Each requires progressively more specific education in early learning and care, with Child Development Supervisors (the highest level of certification) requiring a 2-year diploma in early learning and child care or its equivalent.⁹⁴ Table 3.1 shows the most recent numbers for certified staff by level in day care programs and family day homes across Alberta.

Table 3.1: Number and Percent of Certified Staff, By Level, in Day Cares and Family Day Homes in Alberta, March 2018

<i>Certification Level</i>	<i>Day Care Staff at Level (Percent of all Day Care Staff)</i>	<i>Family Day Home Staff at Level (Percent of all Day Home Staff)</i>
Not Certified	1 (<.1)	237 (11.0)
Child Development Assistant	3,929 (39.1)	742 (34.4)
Child Development Worker	1,665 (16.6)	292 (13.5)
Child Development Supervisor	4,458 (44.3)	885 (41.0)
Total	10,053	2,156

Source: 2017-2018 Children's Services Annual Report, available at <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/476d1e4b-bdfa-4330-a88a-79bdacee1a9a/resource/4954b31c-add8-429f-91d5-57462c148cf9/download/childrensservices-annual-report-2017-2018.pdf>, and author's calculations.

⁹³ Family day home staff are not required to be certified, though they need to acquire certification to be eligible for much of the provincial assistance offered by Children's Services.

⁹⁴ Government of Alberta. (2018). *Child Care Staff Certification Guide*. Retrieved from <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/child-care-staff-certification-guide.pdf>.

For both day cares and day homes, the most common certification level is Child Development Supervisor. However, the workforce in day homes overall tends to have lower levels of certification than those who are working in day cares, which is unsurprising given the fact that day home staff who work with children are not required to hold certification. Other than what is presented above, there is currently no other publicly available information from the Government of Alberta on the child care workforce, and the above information is not publicly available for any area smaller than the province as a whole. In other words, we do not know anything about the certification levels of child care program staff in Edmonton, or other relevant information on the Edmonton child care workforce, such as average wage (or the range of wages paid), how long they have been working in the field, or turnover rates.

However, it is possible to learn something about the child care workforce in Edmonton, and in other parts of Alberta, through information from a recent survey conducted by the Alberta Early Childhood Educators' Association (AECEA).⁹⁵ From the fall of 2018 through spring of 2019, AECEA surveyed its members, which consist of individuals working in many different capacities at a variety of early learning and care programs across Alberta. Preliminary analysis of the survey found that of the 1228 respondents to that survey, 177 of those were living in Edmonton and working primarily as early childhood educators (that is, their day-to-day position was to work directly with children as “front line” educators). AECEA’s survey focused on training and education, though it also asked several key questions that allow us to understand the outlines of the Edmonton early learning and care workforce.⁹⁶ Table 3.2 compares results of the AECEA survey for the educators living in Edmonton to educators in the rest of Alberta.

In some key respects, it appears that Edmonton’s early childhood educators are similar to those in the rest of Alberta. There are, however, at least two important differences. First, fewer educators in this survey living in Edmonton were born in Canada (37.3% vs. 57.1%) and fewer grew up in a household with either English or French as the primary spoken language (45.8% vs. 68.4%) compared to their colleagues elsewhere in Alberta. In this sense, early childhood educators in Edmonton seem to have more varied cultural backgrounds than those living in other parts of Alberta. Second, in this survey, more early childhood educators living in Edmonton – nearly 4 in 5 – have achieved the highest certification level compared to

⁹⁵ For more information about AECEA, see <https://aecea.ca/>. Note that AECEA’s membership includes early learning and care professionals working in a broad array of programs and areas, not just child care as it is defined in this *Profile*.

⁹⁶ It should be noted that the AECEA survey is not necessarily representative of the child care workforce in Edmonton or Alberta as a whole. It is, however, the only source of information for child care workers in Alberta and Edmonton on many topics. The AECEA survey also was targeted toward the entire early learning and care workforce, not just those individuals working in child care (as defined in this *Profile*).

educators elsewhere in Alberta (77.6 percent vs. 61.5 percent; note that this survey sample appears to be more highly certified than the workforce in Alberta as a whole, based on the provincial statistics seen in Table 3.1, where certification at the highest level is in the 40 to 45 percent range). Together, this presents some evidence that the front line of the Edmonton workforce is both more diverse and possessed of a higher level of ELC-specific education (or equivalent experience) compared to the rest of Alberta.

Table 3.2: Characteristics of Front Line Early Childhood Educators in Edmonton and the Rest of Alberta, 2019

	Edmonton (n=177)	Rest of Alberta (n=487)
Employed Full Time	87.0	84.6
Worked Outside ELC in the past 12 months	15.3	17.7
Felt Valued / Respected by Parents	91.0	90.4
Felt Valued / Respected by General Public	58.2	59.6
Worked 5+ Years in ELC	63.8	58.5
Female	99.4	96.7
<i>Born in Canada</i>	<i>37.3</i>	<i>57.1</i>
<i>Primary Childhood Language English or French</i>	<i>45.8</i>	<i>68.4</i>
<i>Child Development Supervisor Certification</i>	<i>77.6</i>	<i>61.5</i>

Source: Author's preliminary analysis of AECEA 2018-2019 survey data. Large (10 percentage points or more) differences are emphasized with bold italics; all three of these differences are statistically significant using Pearson's chi-squared test ($p < .001$).

Apart from the differences noted above, there are several general trends that are similar in both Edmonton and the rest of Alberta that stand out in the table above. The front line workforce is almost entirely female, and most are employed full time, though a considerable minority have also worked outside of the ELC field in the past year.⁹⁷ Around 3 in 5 frontline educators have been in the field for 5 or more years (and 1 in 3 have been in the field for 10 years or more). The vast majority of respondents felt valued and respected by parents (around 90%) but considerably fewer felt valued and respected by the general public (around 60%).

Process Quality

Research shows that high-quality early learning programs staffed by warm and responsive adults offer a safe and predictable learning environment that fosters

⁹⁷ Among those who worked outside of ELC in the past 12 months, the most common reason was to supplement income (61.4% Alberta-wide, and 57.1% in Edmonton).

children’s development.⁹⁸ Quality of programs can be dependent on three key factors: interpersonal interactions, physical environment, and program support structure.⁹⁹ First, interpersonal interactions refers to how well-trained staff members tailor their interactions to fit the needs of each child (and their families) using responsive language, engaging in activities, and fostering independence, and creating a rich, stimulating environment. Second, physical environment denotes indoor and outdoor spaces where children can play, explore, and learn safely, including developmentally appropriate materials. Lastly, program support considers the incorporation of effective leaders, access to resources and funding, as well as professional development opportunities. While some of these three factors can be approached in structural ways—for example, by requiring a minimum area of playspace per child—the *quality* of the play that happens in that playspace is much more difficult to measure and regulate.

Alberta-wide, one major initiative that appears to be aimed at improving process quality is the *Flight* curriculum framework.¹⁰⁰ Released in 2014 and updated in 2018, the framework is not intended to be a heavily prescriptive document, but rather

to guide the significant work of early learning and child care educators with young children (ages 0 – before 6 years) and their families in centre-based child care and family day home settings. This is a flexible framework for thinking about how children learn and experience their worlds, as well as a guide that fosters strong early childhood communities.¹⁰¹

Flight is required to be implemented at ELCC centres, but it is not required for non-ELCC child care programs in Alberta (though it is available free of charge online). As noted above, the year 1 evaluation of the ELCC centres found the *Flight* framework to be implemented somewhat unevenly across the initial 22 pilot sites.

It should also be noted that *Flight* is not the only curriculum framework that exists for child care programs in Alberta. For example, the YMCA—the single largest non-profit provider of child care in Western Canada—has used its own curriculum, called *Playing to Learn*, since 2007.¹⁰² Again, to our knowledge, there does not

⁹⁸ Thompson, R.A., & Haskins, R. (2014). *Early stress gets under the skin: Promising initiatives to help children facing chronic adversity*. Retrieved from http://futureofchildren.org/publications/docs/24_01_Pol-icy_Brief.pdf.

⁹⁹ Workman, S., & Ullrich, R. (2017). *Quality 101: Identifying the core components of a high-quality early childhood program*. Retrieved from <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2017/02/10063958/QualityEarlyChildhood101-brief.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ Makovichuk, L., Hewes, J., Lirette, P., & Thomas, N. (2014). *Flight: Alberta’s early learning and care framework*. Retrieved from <https://flightframework.ca/>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² YMCA of Northern Alberta. (2019). *YMCA Playing to Learn*. Retrieved from <https://northernalberta.ymca.ca/Programs/Categories/Child-Care/YMCA-Playing-To-Learn>. Note:

appear to be any information on the extent to which *Flight* or other curricula have been implemented more broadly across the province or in Edmonton in particular (other than the aforementioned ELCC and YMCA curriculum framework/curriculum requirements).

Alberta's accreditation program appears to address both structural and process quality. Accreditation requirements include six standards that programs are held to; as an example, the first standard is to ensure "Positive, supportive relationships and enriched physical and emotional environments" for children, which could be seen as a process quality standard.¹⁰³ In addition, accredited programs in Alberta qualify for technical assistance grants that can be used to pay for advice, training, and monitoring through the Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement (ARCQE). The Government of Alberta contracts with ARCQE, which began operations in 2004, an agency that provides assistance to early learning and care programs through coaching and mentorship, professional development, resources, and community connections.¹⁰⁴ Services may be free to programs that are seeking accreditation or re-accreditation; however, access to the ARCQE's resources do require memberships (currently \$77.25 per year for individuals and starting at \$51.50 for agencies) and individual ARCQE programs or workshops have separate charges.¹⁰⁵ Accredited ELC programs in Alberta are not required to use ARCQE's services.

What else do we need to understand about quality in Edmonton?

Alberta's licensing and accreditation systems are fundamental to establishing and monitoring quality for child care programs in Alberta and Edmonton. Much like health permits and inspection requirements for restaurants and food services, licensing establishes minimum standards and inspections that are intended to make sure those standards are being consistently upheld. Accreditation establishes another layer, similar to licensing but requiring and supporting higher levels of both structural and process quality.

However, both licensing and accreditation are set up as "pass/fail" systems. This makes it difficult, especially using publicly available data, to distinguish levels of quality among licensed programs or among accredited programs in Alberta and Edmonton (there is no score on a license or accreditation certificate). Given these issues, it is difficult to understand how the quality of child care programs in the city of Edmonton varies, beyond counts of accredited programs and the knowledge that

YMCA child care programs using *Playing to Learn* are evaluated on an annual basis by an external auditor to ensure that they are meeting the quality standards of the curriculum.

¹⁰³ Government of Alberta. (2017). *Alberta Child Care Accreditation Standards* (p. 1). Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/f2b6208c-9835-4211-b45a-703835556344/resource/3117394a-8faa-4e54-997b-95554f3bdc71/download/accreditation-standards.pdf>.

¹⁰⁴ Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement. (2019). *About Us*. Retrieved from <https://arcqe.ca/about-us/>.

¹⁰⁵ ARCQE. (2019). *Regional Workshops*. Retrieved from <https://arcqe.ca/services/professional-development/individuals/regional-workshops/>.

licensed programs in the city, as in the rest of Alberta, must meet minimum standards. Below we summarize the information gaps in the category of quality, and suggest how to fill those gaps by linking to our recommendations in Chapter 5.

One way to attempt to understand variations in child care program quality across Edmonton might be to explore inspection reports. However, obtaining and aggregating the results of licensing inspection reports—which are available and required to be posted at each program, but are not online or entered into any single electronic database—would be time-intensive and would likely require the assistance of experts in the licensing process for proper interpretation. Even the publicly available inspection summary reports, updated every three months for every program in Alberta, are difficult to interpret in a way that could be confidently used to understand variations in quality across Edmonton.

It is possible that accreditation data could be used to understand variations in quality across Edmonton. For instance, accreditation uses a scoring system from -1 (opposite practice) to 2 (consistent evidence). Knowledge of accredited child care programs' individual scores could be used to better understand quality,¹⁰⁶ as opposed to only knowing whether they surpassed the cut-off scores under each standard (in other words, whether the program was accredited or not). However, these scores would need to be interpreted with caution, as differences in scores might not signal any substantive difference in quality. At the moment, accreditation scores are not publicly available, nor are the results of the required unannounced status verification visits; this information would need to be requested through Alberta Children's Services (Chapter 5, Recommendation 1).

Aside from accreditation information, additional information may exist on quality in Edmonton that the ECELC could request from Alberta Children's Services. This includes some information on auspice in child care¹⁰⁷ as well as some information about the workforce, including certification levels of staff, by program and program type; turnover of staff, by program and program type; and wages and hours worked by program, program type, and worker certification. It may also be possible to gather information about child care programs from business permits in Edmonton, though that possibility needs to be investigated further. (Recommendation 1).

Surveys of providers within Edmonton could also be effective in gathering information, such as auspice, that is not currently available (or not easily available)

¹⁰⁶ Government of Alberta. (2015). *Alberta child care accreditation: Evaluation and scoring framework (for the Aligned Accreditation Standards)*. Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/alberta-child-care-accreditation-evaluation-and-scoring-framework>

¹⁰⁷ Friendly, M., et al. (2016). *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2016* (p. 100). Retrieved from <https://www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/ECEC-in-Canada-2016.pdf>. Note that Martha Friendly obtained this information at the provincial level for Alberta, broken down by type of program, for her report on the state of Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada in 2016.

through any existing administrative data, but would be relevant to understanding both structural and process quality. Survey questions might include topics such as the use of the *Flight* curriculum framework (or other curricula or curriculum frameworks) as well as workforce information, including challenges and successes in finding and retaining qualified staff and salary / benefit levels (Recommendation 2).¹⁰⁸

To our knowledge there is no regular survey of parents in Edmonton that examines their perceptions of the *quality* of their childcare. Several other jurisdictions, such as Toronto and several Vancouver-area municipalities, include questions meant to address process quality—or at minimum a related topic, satisfaction—in periodic surveys with parents.¹⁰⁹ Such a survey in Edmonton could be conducted as a stand-alone project, as it is in Richmond, or it could be conducted using existing avenues, such as the city of Edmonton’s Insight Community. Upcoming EPE research projects may also be able to gather information on ELC program quality from lower-income individuals and families as well (Recommendation 3).¹¹⁰

The Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA) survey cited above revealed several key aspects of Edmonton workforce. However, the AECEA survey was intended to explore patterns—particularly education and training needs—across the province, not for Edmonton specifically. It may be particularly important to understand the needs of the workforce in Edmonton from their perspective, and not just from the perspective of their employers, as would be explored in the survey of child care programs above (Recommendation 4).

There are other options for measuring quality in Edmonton’s child care programs that are not administered as a survey, but rather are more involved, such as observational techniques that go beyond the existing requirements for accreditation and licensing. For example, Toronto uses its Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI), which asks questions under three sections: programming, learning, environment, and interactions. Results for each program are posted publicly for parents.¹¹¹ Other similar measures of quality can be administered, though like the

¹⁰⁸ For examples of such questions, see City of Richmond. (2019). *2017-2022 Richmond Child Care Needs Assessment and Strategy* (pp. 116-119). Retrieved from <https://www.richmond.ca/plandev/socialplan/childcare/needs.htm>.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 86, pp. 97-106 and City of Toronto. (2019). *Children, Youth, and Parenting*. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/children-parenting/>.

¹¹⁰ City of Edmonton. (2019). *The Edmonton Insight Community*. Retrieved from https://www.edmonton.ca/programs_services/public_engagement/edmonton-insight-community.aspx. Note: As of June 2019, a research project examining the progress of EndPovertyEdmonton had been approved; this project includes both qualitative interviews and a survey of individuals living in poverty in Edmonton. Questions on early learning and care experiences could be included in this survey. This information could complement similar questions asked through a city of Edmonton Insight Community survey, as the Insight Community participants tend to be higher income.

¹¹¹ City of Toronto. (2019). *Quality Ratings for Child Care Centres*. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/children-parenting/children-programs-activities/licensed-child-care/quality-ratings-for-child-care-centres/>.

AQI they require training of fieldworkers and some require repeated visits over time. Examples include the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), and various quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) used across the United States.¹¹² These observational techniques for quality are intensive, and use of them would need to be carefully considered by the ECELC or an ECELC working group (Recommendations 5 and 7).

And as with accessibility and affordability, we know nothing about the quality of unlicensed child care programs in Edmonton. As there is no existing information on these programs, such information would need to be gathered from scratch (Recommendation 5).

Finally, it should be noted that some of the information above, particularly information can be linked to individual child care programs, could be used to create maps of program quality in Edmonton. It has been noted in the Australian context that neighborhoods of lower socioeconomic status have both fewer child care programs and programs of lower quality than neighborhoods of higher socioeconomic status.¹¹³ Maps of quality in Edmonton could be used to attempt to detect whether similar patterns hold here. Some of these maps can be created using current data (for example, the locations of accredited programs in Edmonton, or the locations of ELCC programs in Edmonton) but as noted above, those maps would likely need to be combined with maps of other potential quality indicators like auspice, accreditation scores, or worker turnover and education levels—all of which we cannot currently map for or within Edmonton, given available public data (Recommendation 6).

¹¹² Workman, S., & Ullrich, R. (2017). *Quality 101: Identifying the Core Components of a High-Quality Early Childhood Program* (p. 6) Retrieved from <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2017/02/10063958/QualityEarlyChildhood101-brief.pdf>.

¹¹³ Cloney, D., Cleveland, G., Hattie, J., & Tayler, C. (2016). Variations in the Availability and Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care by Socioeconomic Status of Neighborhoods. *Early Education and Development*, 27(3), 384-401, DOI: [10.1080/10409289.2015.1076674](https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2015.1076674).

Chapter 4: Flexibility and Inclusiveness

To match the Multilateral Framework, we have included a chapter in this *Profile* that addresses flexibility and inclusiveness in child care. This chapter is brief, perhaps paradoxically, because both of those concepts are remarkably complex. A single chapter—and, in fact, a single report—cannot hope to capture the full complexity of both these topics. As a result, we limit our discussion of flexibility to what we know about the hours that full-day, unparented child care programs in Edmonton are open beyond traditional hours (defined here as 7 am to 6 pm). A fuller discussion of flexibility is beyond the scope of this *Profile*, though the ECELC should engage in such a discussion, as greater flexibility in child care throughout Edmonton may help parents—particularly low-income parents—who struggle with unpredictable and uncontrollable work schedules.

What do we mean by “flexibility” in child care?

Flexibility here is defined as the extent to which child care programs can accommodate families with parents or caregivers who work nontraditional hours or weekend shifts.¹¹⁴ As this *Profile* does not generally focus on programs that provide only part-day, drop-in, or emergency services, those programs are not included in this section—though as noted in the Introduction, such programs are certainly part of early learning and care in Edmonton.

What is the state of flexibility in Edmonton?

Our understanding of flexibility in Edmonton as a whole is extremely limited. For example, there is no single list of child care programs in Edmonton that operate beyond Monday-Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (what might be called “typical” hours for a full-day child care program). It follows that we also do not know the location, number of spaces, or fees associated with such programs. The ECELC’s collective understanding of flexibility is now largely based on members’ individual knowledge of specific programs that provide care outside of typical hours, such as the Edmonton Hospital Workers Child Care Society located within the Glenrose Hospital, or of particular day homes that might offer longer hours.¹¹⁵ In addition to an almost complete lack of systematic information on how flexible child care programs are, to our knowledge there is also no information on the specific needs or preferences of families in Edmonton for more flexible hours or options in child care programs.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. Note: This is a purposefully narrow definition meant to match the rest of the information in this *Profile*.

¹¹⁵ EHWCCS. (2018). *Edmonton Hospital Workers Child Care Society*. Retrieved from <http://www.ehwccs.com/>. Note: To our knowledge, there is no existing list of day homes that offer longer hours, weekend options, or drop-in care to families in Edmonton; this information would need to be obtained by asking each individual day home agency operating in Edmonton.

What else do we need to understand about flexibility in Edmonton?

A basic inventory of child care programs that offer services beyond traditional hours would be a good first step in understanding how flexible child care is in Edmonton. Though some of this information might be able to be garnered from provincial data sources or a review of child care program websites, it is likely that such information would be better gathered through direct questions on a survey of Edmonton's child care operators (see Chapter 5, Recommendation 2).

As with accessibility, cost, and quality, there is a lack of parents' voices on the need for greater flexibility in Edmonton. Other municipalities have attempted to gather such information. For example, through their Needs Assessment (2017) the City of Richmond asked parents whether they needed child care for their children during different hours or days than their current arrangement, with 16% reporting that they did.¹¹⁶ Questions surrounding alternative child care times, reasons for not being able to secure care during desired times, and questions on alternate child care arrangements were also asked of families in that survey. Gathering such data from parents through a parental survey (Recommendation 3) may help inform the ECELC of both the current state of child care flexibility, and to what extent there is a greater need for flexible arrangements in Edmonton.

What do we mean by “inclusiveness” in child care?

The Multilateral Framework suggests that “inclusive” early learning and child care systems “respect and value diversity, which could include but is not limited to: Children and families who are experiencing vulnerability [and] children with varying abilities”; the Framework also makes specific mention of linguistic minority communities, Indigenous people off-reserve, and recent immigrants and refugees.¹¹⁷ The ECELC has commissioned two projects that thoroughly address early learning and care from the perspective of Indigenous families as well as recent immigrants and refugees. These perspectives are undoubtedly critical to creating a more inclusive child care system in Edmonton, and we will not repeat their work here.

In fact, we do not attempt a full discussion of this concept of inclusiveness in this chapter. Instead, we briefly describe some of the programs that are available for children with disabilities within child care programs in Edmonton. The authors of this report are aware that this is at best an incomplete way to think about the

¹¹⁶ City of Richmond. (2017). *2017-2022 Richmond Child Care Needs Assessment and Strategy*.

Retrieved from

https://www.richmond.ca/_shared/assets/2017-2022_Richmond_Child_Care_Needs_Assessment_and_Strategy48036.pdf. Note that the operator survey for this needs assessment asked for hours of operation, along with details on weekend care on and in other special circumstances.

¹¹⁷ Government of Canada. (2018). *Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework*. Retrieved from

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/early-learning-child-care/reports/2017-multilateral-framework.html>.

concept of “inclusiveness” in child care. We are also aware that a full exploration of all of the services and programs to assist young children with disabilities in Edmonton deserves its own treatment on the same level as the two reports on Indigenous and newcomer perspectives described above. The authors of this *Profile* do not have the collective expertise necessary to undertake such a deep treatment at this time, though we believe that the ECELC, as a group, does.

Moreover, any definition of “inclusiveness” in child care (and ELC more broadly) needs to recognize the fundamental rights of all children and families to education, care, and support.¹¹⁸ The exact definition of inclusiveness remains undefined for child care in Edmonton, but it is important enough that it needs to be discussed and defined by the ECELC. Once such a discussion takes place, additional work on what we know and do not know about inclusiveness in Edmonton can continue.

Given the above issues, the definition of inclusiveness used here is quite narrow, limited to a brief accounting of those services available for children with disabilities that happen within full-day, unparented child care programs in Edmonton.¹¹⁹ As noted above, we recommend the ECELC undertake an entirely separate report on all supports available for pre-K children with disabilities and their families in Edmonton.

What is the state of inclusiveness in Edmonton?

A recent (2013) province-wide survey assessed the state of inclusion in child care programs, finding that the vast majority of responding day cares (91%) and most responding day home agencies (68%) had provided care to children with special needs in the past two years.¹²⁰ In addition, a majority of day cares (57%) and day home agencies (58%) responding to the survey received requests to provide care for a child with a disability within the last two years. However, 36% of day cares, and 29% of day homes, reported being unable to accept children with disabilities; reasons for this included being at capacity for all children (66%), inadequate staffing levels (34%), lack of training (27%) and unsuitable physical environment (22%). Additionally, 19% of day care programs, and 13% of day homes, indicated

¹¹⁸ See, for example, National Association for the Inclusion of Young Children and Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children. (2009). *A Joint Position Statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)*. Retrieved from https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/DEC_NAEYC_EC_updatedKS.pdf.

¹¹⁹ More information on services for children with disabilities in Alberta can be found at <https://www.alberta.ca/early-childhood-education.aspx>, <https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/ed-ecs-sn-programming.pdf>, and <https://www.alberta.ca/fscd.aspx>.

¹²⁰ Lesley Wiart, Heather Kehler, Gwen Rempel & Suzanne Tough. (2014). *Current state of inclusion of children with special needs in child care programmes in one Canadian province*. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 18:4, 345-358, DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2013.767386.

they have asked families to withdraw their child from care because the centre was felt they were unable to support the child in their programs. To the authors' knowledge, there is no comparable information on the state of inclusion in child care programs for Edmonton.

Child care programs within Edmonton—and Alberta—are not required to accept children with disabilities; it is up to an individual program's discretion, based on their resources, expertise, and desire.¹²¹ There are no full-day, unparented child care programs within Edmonton that are exclusively devoted to serving young children with disabilities, though at least one organization, Community Options, offers child care with “[i]nclusive supports for children with diverse needs.”¹²² More commonly, though, child care programs seeking to provide supports for children with disabilities generally collaborate with outside providers.

Two outside providers that have worked with Edmonton child cares to provide services for children with disabilities are Getting Ready for Inclusion Today (GRIT) and Community Options.¹²³ Both GRIT and Community Options are non-profit agencies that do not have physical centres in the City of Edmonton that children attend. Rather, both programs provide supports to children and families in their home, school, or community environments, meaning that children with disabilities have their needs met within the child care program they attend.

Since 2012, GRIT has also implemented the Access, Support and Participation (ASaP) project in Edmonton to increase access to inclusive child care environments by “providing educators and families with access to the right supports at the right time ... to ensure the meaningful participation and inclusion of all children.”¹²⁴ The ASaP project started with funding by Alberta Education in five child care programs in Edmonton, and is now supported by Children's Services province-wide. As of September 2019, 154 child care programs are actively participating in the project across Alberta, with 20 currently participating in Edmonton.

¹²¹ See, for example, Canada Place Child Care Society. (2017). *Admission Policy*. Retrieved from <https://www.cpcs.org/public/download/documents/52223>. This Edmonton child care program's policy states that “children with special needs will be accommodated subject to operational constraints.”

¹²² Community Options. (2017). *Programs: Edmonton Northwest Child Care Centre*. Retrieved from <https://www.communityoptions.ab.ca/programs/edmonton-northwest-child-care-centre>. Note that Community Options, as an organization, also provides services for young children with disabilities through Alberta Education's Program Unit Funding (see footnote below). In addition, it should be noted that individual child care programs devoted exclusively to children with disabilities would likely not be considered “inclusive”.

¹²³ See Getting Ready for Inclusion Today. (2018). *Early Childhood Education (Program Unit Funding)*. Retrieved from <https://www.gritprogram.ca/early-childhood-education/> and Community Options. (2017). *Community Preschool Education (CPE)*. Retrieved from <https://www.communityoptions.ab.ca/programs/community-preschool-education-cpe>.

¹²⁴ Getting Ready for Inclusion Today. (2017). *ASaP Continuum Project: Creating High Quality and Inclusive Early Learning and Care Environments Through Adult Capacity Building*. Retrieved from https://www.gritprogram.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ASaP_Summary_2015-17.pdf.

What else do we need to understand about inclusiveness in Edmonton?

The ECELC's first action on inclusiveness must be to define it. That conversation needs to focus on what it would mean for Edmonton to have an "inclusive" child care system (or, more broadly, an inclusive early learning and care system) and what the key indicators of such inclusiveness might be. Without this definition, there is no way to figure out what we know, or don't know, about inclusiveness in Edmonton. Alberta Education's *Indicators of Inclusive Schools: Continuing the Conversation* might be used as a starting point to guide this discussion, either in the full ECELC or in a working group (Chapter 5, Recommendation 7—however, the ECELC might also consider an entirely separate working group devoted to increasing inclusiveness in child care in Edmonton).¹²⁵

It would also be beneficial for the ECELC to conduct another project, similar to those already done on Indigenous and newcomer perspectives, that is dedicated to understanding what is available in Edmonton for young children with disabilities. The majority of programs and supports for young children with disabilities in Edmonton, and their families, are not managed and delivered by child care programs. This *Profile*, however, is solely focused on such programs, so it misses most, if not all, of what is actually available for children with disabilities and their families in Edmonton. A project to lay out and understand the full extent of what is available for children with disabilities in Edmonton could fill that gap (Recommendation 1, and to the extent that interviews or other original data-gathering is needed, Recommendation 5).

Finally, as with accessibility, affordability, and quality, there may be additional sources of existing information on child care inclusiveness in Edmonton. In particular, Alberta Education may be able to provide information on aspects of community-based Early Childhood Services providers, as well as the number of children served by those programs (Recommendation 1). This information could be incorporated in the larger report focusing on children with disabilities in Edmonton described above.

¹²⁵ Government of Alberta. (2013). *Indicators of Inclusive Schools: Continuing the Conversation*. Retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/media/482253/indicators_of_inclusive_schools.pdf.

Chapter 5: A Good Start, But We Need More

Examining the data available for child care in Edmonton leads to a clear conclusion:

Although we have some information, we do not know enough to guide the planning and management of child care in Edmonton, especially if the goal is to end poverty.

In some ways, this state of information in Edmonton is unsurprising. Child care in Edmonton is a market-based, regulated system with no central planning.¹²⁶ Because there has been no single entity with responsibility for understanding and planning for child care at the municipal level, there has been little impetus for data to be gathered and analyzed at that level. In other words, we do not have all the information we need on child care in Edmonton because there has been no good reason to gather it. With the creation of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, there is now an organization with a need for that information.

Four Key Areas

Below, we give our recommendations for seven specific actions that the ECELC could take to fill in the gaps in our current knowledge. These recommendations are meant to gather specific pieces of information so we can understand more about accessibility, affordability, quality, inclusiveness, and flexibility in Edmonton. But they are also meant to fill in gaps in four broader areas: the voice of parents, our knowledge of key populations, our understanding of patterns within Edmonton, and building a foundation for a high-quality child care system in Edmonton.

Voice of Parents. As noted throughout this document, there is no information on or monitoring of the child care needs of the parents of Edmonton as a whole. There are occasional targeted surveys of certain groups of parents (the largest being the city of Edmonton’s Employee Engagement and Diversity Survey), but as an entire group, the parents of Edmonton do not have a consistent way to express their satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, with child care in Edmonton. Other jurisdictions regularly survey or otherwise engage parents on child care, and it is important for the ECELC to follow their lead in having the voice of parents guide the improvement of child care in Edmonton.

Knowledge About Key Populations. The ECELC is closely tied to EndPovertyEdmonton, as affordable and quality child care is one of six “game changers” critical for ending poverty in Edmonton within a generation. Moreover, the ECELC’s Guiding Principles make specific reference to focusing on Indigenous perspectives, individuals and families from diverse cultures, and families living in

¹²⁶ In this way, child care in Edmonton more resembles the restaurant industry than what otherwise might be seen as its closest analog, the public school systems.

poverty. The ECELC has already commissioned two projects intended to understand the perspectives of newcomers and Indigenous Edmontonians, but the work cannot stop there; we know very little, for example, about child care use, needs, and challenges of Edmonton’s low-income families. The ECELC should devote resources to understanding and continuing to monitor the child care needs of—at a bare minimum—newcomer, low-income, and Indigenous families.

Patterns Within Edmonton. Much of the existing information we have on child care in Edmonton is about Edmonton as a whole, rather than about sub-areas within Edmonton (such as neighborhoods). For example, we only know the average cost of child care across the entire city, not for specific areas. Managing and planning child care within Edmonton will require a better understanding of variations *within* the city, much like school systems need to understand specific neighborhoods to understand where new schools need to be built or existing programs need to be altered. One significant benefit of having information on child care within areas of Edmonton would be the ability to map patterns *within* the city and track changes in them over time.

A Foundation for a High-Quality System. In the long term, consistent, ongoing gathering of reliable data will form a solid foundation for creating high-quality child care system in Edmonton. As noted by Martha Friendly, “[s]trong basic data will contribute to effective monitoring at the system level to track whether policies are meeting their intended purpose, to identify problems or emerging needs, and make adjustments as indicated.”¹²⁷ Taking action on the recommendations below will help the ECELC create one of the key elements of a high-quality child care system in Edmonton; just as critical will be *maintaining* that information system on an ongoing basis.

Recommendations

This section describes seven actions that the ECELC should take to have the information it needs to help plan and manage child care in Edmonton. Together, these recommendations boil down to a single statement:

The ECELC should build upon the experiences of other municipalities while using the unique opportunities and resources that exist here to create a flexible, customized information system that will help the ECELC understand, monitor, and improve child care in Edmonton.

Note that recommendations for specific information that should be gathered under each area are listed at the end of each corresponding chapter; the recommendations below are for major actions intended to obtain information in multiple areas. None

¹²⁷ Friendly, M. (2005). *Elements of a high quality early learning and child care system: Data, research, and evaluation*. Retrieved from <http://www.childcarequality.ca/sys/data.html>.

of the actions listed below are “free”; to a greater or lesser extent, they all require resources and effort from one or more members of the ECELC.

1. Gather More Existing Data

There is a considerable amount of information on child care in Edmonton that exists, but is not currently publicly available. Some of this information is held by government sources, such as the Ministry of Children’s Services or Education, though there is also information from other sources, such as municipal business registries, Statistics Canada, or even some day home agencies that could also be used to better understand and monitor child care in Edmonton. The ECELC should work to create a list of existing data that could be requested, through formal or informal channels, from these sources, beginning with the information suggested at the end of Chapters 1-4. This list could initially be prioritized based on the short term needs of the ECELC, but in the long term the ECELC should develop a list of existing data to gather or request on a regular basis. Finally, the focused report on services for children with disabilities in Edmonton recommended at the end of Chapter 4 comes under this category (and Recommendation 5 to some extent).

2. Conduct a Regular Survey of Edmonton’s Child Care Operators

The ECELC should undertake a regularly occurring survey of child care program operators in Edmonton.¹²⁸ This survey might include questions on fees, waitlist lengths and policies, demographics of the parents and children served, operational challenges, and future plans. Such a survey could provide important information that is not gathered in current administrative datasets (or that administrative data is not fully able to answer well). Currently, this survey would be much easier to conduct if it were limited to licensed operators, as a list of those operators is publicly available, but eventually this survey could be expanded to unlicensed operators as well.¹²⁹ There is no existing ongoing survey of operators in Edmonton other than the CCPA yearly surveys (which are narrowly focused on topics of the CCPA’s choosing) so the ECELC would have to start this survey from scratch.

3. Conduct a Regular Survey of Edmonton’s Parents

The ECELC should undertake a regularly occurring survey of parents of pre-K children in child care in Edmonton. This survey could include questions on experiences finding child care, satisfaction with child care, and a wide variety of other topics that would help in developing and refining strategies for improving

¹²⁸ City of Richmond. (2017). *2017-2022 Richmond Child Care Needs Assessment and Strategy* (pp.107-120). Retrieved from https://www.richmond.ca/_shared/assets/2017-2022_Richmond_Child_Care_Needs_Assessment_and_Strategy48036.pdf. Note that such a survey is part of some other cities’ needs assessments for early learning and care. Also see Cattoretti, G., Paull, G., & Marshall, L. (2019). *Provider’s finances: Evidence from the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers 2018*. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/795332/Frontier_-_SCEYP_2018_Finance_Report_v2.pdf.

¹²⁹ It is possible that business licenses or registries some could be used to find and survey unlicensed operators; the ECELC might want to continue to explore this option.

child care in Edmonton. As noted in the chapters above, this survey would help fill in multiple gaps in our knowledge as well as help the ECELC monitor emerging trends and needs for Edmonton parents as a whole.

In contrast to the operator survey, there are several ways in which this survey could be implemented. First, a survey of parents could be done relatively quickly through the city of Edmonton's Insight Community. However, it appears that certain groups—particularly low-income individuals—are under-represented in the Insight Community panel, so it would benefit the ECELC to consider how to get information on those groups.¹³⁰ Fortunately, there may be an opportunity in the next two years to “piggyback” child care questions on an upcoming EndPovertyEdmonton research project that will include a survey focused entirely on people living in or near poverty. A second technique would be to add child care questions to the municipal census (or to a sample of the municipal census), which has contact with households of all types across the city of Edmonton. Third, the ECELC could conduct an entirely separate survey of Edmontonian parents, with a focus on oversampling parents from certain groups (newcomers, Indigenous, low-income). This option would put the survey under the full control of the ECELC rather than use the first “cobbling together” method described above or by using the municipal census, but it would almost certainly require greater resources from the ECELC itself. Whatever the choice in the short term, the ECELC should eventually decide the key information that would be regularly gathered from parents and ensure that a reliable method or methods exist to gather that information.

4. Conduct a Regular Survey of Edmonton's Child Care Workforce

The workforce is a critical part of child care in Edmonton. We are only now, with the recent AECEA survey, starting to understand the basic demographics of that workforce, along with its educational and training needs. The ECELC should conduct, or contribute to, a regular survey of the Edmonton child care workforce.

As with the survey of parents, there are several options for conducting this survey. The first is to conduct a survey for child care staff in Edmonton in conjunction with the survey of operators proposed above, essentially creating a “2 for 1” effort that would save on many of the typical costs of conducting a survey (particularly recruiting and follow-up). Second, the ECELC could contribute resources to expanding the next AECEA workforce survey so that it includes a much higher number of child care workers from Edmonton.¹³¹ Given that both of these options are relatively inexpensive and that there may be existing information on the

¹³⁰ City of Edmonton. (2017). Edmonton Insight Community - Snapshot. Retrieved from https://www.edmonton.ca/programs_services/documents/EdmontonInsightCommunity-Snapshot.pdf.

¹³¹ Future versions of the AECEA survey may include more refined information on where ELC staff are employed (perhaps at the postal code level), which could be useful in exploring differences in the workforce – and by extension, quality – in different areas of Edmonton.

Edmonton workforce that could be gathered from the Ministry of Children’s Services, it seems unnecessary for the ECELC to undertake a separate survey.

5. Gather Other Types of Original Data

The first four recommendations have focused on gathering what are largely quantitative data on child care in Edmonton. However, there is great value in using other types of investigations to complement the surveys proposed above. In other jurisdictions, qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and even informal “coffee chats” have been used to more fully understand and explore emerging child care issues; these methods are particularly useful for looking into the *reasons* behind some of the results that could emerge from the surveys or patterns that exist in administrative data. For example, the ECELC could conduct in-depth interviews with child care program operators that could be useful for understanding both market forces and specific public policies that affect the supply of spaces in Edmonton (this is, in fact, what was done to create the Southside Mother’s Day Out case study scheduled for discussion by the ECELC in September 2019). Qualitative work might be ideally suited for exploring areas of ELC where there is little to no existing information as well, such as unlicensed care.

It may also benefit the ECELC to consider gathering observational data on child care programs in Edmonton, either through original projects or by requesting existing licensing or accreditation observational data.¹³² Such information could be useful in understanding variations in quality among programs, or in seeking out and publicising innovative ELC practices.

6. Create and Update Maps

The ECELC should create, publish, and regularly update maps of child care information in Edmonton. Such maps are used regularly in other jurisdictions to illustrate variations within municipal boundaries of child care supply and demand, but they can also be used in a variety of other ways, such as illustrating variations in quality or in fees. The predecessor to the ECELC, the Early Learning and Care Steering Committee, engaged Mapping and Planning Support Alberta Capital Region (M.A.P.S.) in creating several maps of child care in Edmonton; the ECELC should consider continuing this relationship.

7. Establish a Standing Subcommittee or Working Group on Data, Research, and Evaluation

Finally, the ECELC should establish a single permanent committee or working group that is devoted to data, research, and evaluation. This subcommittee or working group would be responsible for monitoring and interpreting trends and reporting back to the full ECELC on a regular basis, and for overseeing research projects that the ECELC chooses to undertake.

¹³² See Chapter 3 of this *Profile* on quality for references to tools that can be used to examine quality in child care programs.

Appendix: Methods

The project was led by a research team consisting of a primary investigator (Rob Buschmann) and one graduate research assistant (Erica Partridge) at the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth and Families in the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta (CUP).

The research team began with material created by the Early Learning and Care Steering Committee (ELCSC) which was organized much in the same manner as this *Profile*. The research team then conducted a variety of searches of existing literature and public data to supplement, expand upon, and update on that core material. Due to the breadth of the subjects to be covered, there were no formal systematic literature reviews conducted in the course of constructing this *Profile*. Where appropriate, the research team accessed public data and performed basic statistical analysis to produce the tables and figures presented in the *Profile*.

The research team also conducted a series of formal and informal in-person interviews with members of the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) and a number of other experts in early learning and care in Alberta to confirm and in many cases more deeply interpret existing information. Often these interviews led to additional written sources of information or relevant datasets that have been included in this document.

To aid in the development of this *Profile*, a sub-committee (the Data Committee) was formed with volunteers from the ELCSC (now the ECELC). The Data Committee, which met monthly from February to August 2019 with the research team, played a key role in creating the *Profile* by brainstorming ideas to include; refining the concepts to be covered; guiding the research team to appropriate sources of information; and reviewing and editing numerous drafts of chapters and the overall *Profile*. (Please see the acknowledgements section for data committee members.)