



Exploring Licensed Early Learning and Child Care in Edmonton Day Homes:

Interviews with Family Day Home Agencies

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Introduction

The experiences of licensed family day home agencies and approved family day homes are important for understanding the state of early learning and child care (ELCC) in Edmonton.¹

Some considerable variations exist between and within agencies and day homes in the city. The evolving situation of the COVID-19 pandemic and the numerous changes between March 2020 and October 2021 had effects on the accessibility, affordability, quality, flexibility, and inclusivity of ELCC in day homes.² These factors are important for Edmonton children and families, day home educators, agencies, and the early learning and child care sector.

Accessibility

Families need broadly available access to ELCC to promote early childhood development for children and to support participation in employment, education, and training for parents and guardians.³ Accessibility in this study refers to the supply and demand for licensed ELCC programs and spaces. The numbers and capacity of day home programs and day home spaces in Edmonton are relatively well understood through the interviews with agencies, but information is lacking about their location and availability.

In Edmonton, there have been no recent changes in the number of licensed agencies or their contracted maximum number of day home programs and day home spaces. Six agencies are located in Edmonton, 5 of which are for-profit and 1 of which is non-profit. Collectively, these agencies are authorized to oversee a maximum of 661 day home programs and a maximum of 2,400 day home spaces. Those totals remained the same between March 2020 and October 2021.

Across the province, however, there have been some recent changes to the overall number of licensed day home agencies and spaces.⁴ In Alberta, there were 59 agencies in June 2021, down from 61 in March 2020.⁵ The loss of 2 agencies is a 3.3% province-wide decrease in the number of agencies. The capacity of day home spaces in Alberta grew from 11,754 to 12,532 spaces over the same period, representing a 6.6% province-wide increase with the 778 spaces added.

Day Home Programs

It is important to note the difference between the maximum number of day home programs and the number of day homes in operation. Edmonton agencies are authorized to oversee a total of 661 day homes, of which 521 day homes were in operation as of October 2021. This represents overall utilization of 79% in Edmonton, ranging from 58% to 94% utilization across agencies. Two agencies operated near

¹ For definitions of licensed family day home agencies and approved family day homes in Alberta, please see the note at the end of this discussion paper. In this discussion paper, the term “agency” refers to licensed family day home agencies, and “day home” refers to approved family day homes.

² From October 5-19, 2021, agency directors and coordinators representing the six licensed family day home agencies in Edmonton participated in one-on-one telephone interviews about what their agencies and day homes were experiencing, as well as what they were hearing from families of children in their care. Interviewees were asked particular questions surrounding the accessibility, affordability, quality, flexibility, and inclusivity of early learning and care. Interviewees were also asked about the changes agencies and day homes may have undergone over the course of the pandemic (between March 2020 and October 2021), and what effects these changes may have now and in the future. Unless otherwise noted, the information in this discussion paper reflects what was reported during these interviews.

³ Government of Canada (2017)

⁴ Alberta Children’s Services releases quarterly (every three months) data on child care programs in the province. The province-wide comparison here uses March 2020 and June 2021 data, as the most recent publicly available data at the time of writing is from June 2021. For more information on child care programs in Alberta, see: Government of Alberta (2021j).

⁵ To the author’s knowledge, there is no publicly available information on whether agencies are for-profit or non-profit, or about the maximum number of day home programs that agencies are authorized to oversee across the province.



their contracted maximum day home programs, two agencies near the average, and two agencies at less than two-thirds of their maximum number.

Of the 521 day homes that Edmonton agencies oversee, an estimated 502 day homes were located within city limits.⁶ As of October 2021, the supply of day homes in operation with Edmonton agencies nearly returned to the pre-COVID total of 524 day homes. However, there have been fluctuations in the number of day homes opened and closed over that period. At the start of the pandemic, between March and April 2020, approximately 121 (23%) day homes closed their doors, in part due to fewer families requiring care and safety concerns of day home educators.⁷ Later in 2020, following the initial months of the pandemic, many day homes reopened after temporary closures as families returned to care, while some day homes closed permanently. In 2021, the number of new day homes increased, with more day home educators wanting to open and new families seeking care. Overall, between March 2020 and October 2021, the total number of day homes in operation decreased by 3, with about 55 day homes permanently closing and an estimated 52 new day homes opening.

Day Home Spaces

It is also important to note the difference between the licensed capacity of spaces and the number of spaces with children enrolled. Edmonton agencies are licensed to oversee a total maximum of 2,400 spaces, of which approximately 2,125 spaces had children enrolled as of October 2021. This represents overall utilization of 89% of licensed capacity in Edmonton, ranging from 47% to 96% utilization across agencies. Five agencies operated at four-fifths or more of their licensed capacity and one agency operated at less than half of their maximum number.

Day Home Enrollment

Of the 2,125 children enrolled in day homes with Edmonton agencies as of October 2021, an estimated 2,048 of those children were enrolled in day homes located within city limits. Over the course of the pandemic, there have been noticeable fluctuations in day home enrollment in Edmonton. At the start of the pandemic, between March and April 2020, enrollment in day homes sharply declined by an estimated 30%.⁸ Since then, enrollment has been trending up and down at various points over the course of the pandemic.⁹ Between March 2020 and October 2021, five agencies experienced an overall increase in enrollment compared to the initial two months of the pandemic. One agency experienced a return to about the same enrollment level as pre-pandemic.

The majority of the children in Edmonton day homes were enrolled in full time spots as of October 2021. Overall, nearly three-quarters of the children enrolled with Edmonton agencies attended care on a full time basis.¹⁰ Depending on the agency, between 70% and 87% of children attended care full time.

About 26% of children enrolled with Edmonton agencies attended care on a part time, drop-in, before and after school, or respite basis. Depending on the agency, between 13% and 30% of children were in other enrollment arrangements. Some agencies considered children who used drop-in care to be enrolled part time and thus their families paid part time rates. Conversely, some agencies considered children who attended part time to be enrolled on a drop-in basis and therefore their families paid daily rates.

As of October 2021, the vast majority of children (90%) enrolled in Edmonton day homes were 5-year-olds or younger and had not yet entered grade 1.¹¹ An estimated 10% were school age children between

⁶ Approximately 19 day homes overseen by Edmonton agencies were located in other municipalities in the Edmonton area, including St. Albert, Spruce Grove, Morinville, and Beaumont.

⁷ Fischer-Summers, J. and Buschmann, R. (2020)

⁸ Fischer-Summers, J. (2020a)

⁹ Fluctuations in enrollment in licensed and approved ELCC programs were also observed across Alberta throughout the pandemic. For province-wide information, see: Government of Alberta (2021a).

¹⁰ One agency was unable to provide a breakdown of their enrollment by type of enrollment.

¹¹ The birth to kindergarten and grades 1 to 6 age ranges used for the interviews in this study were chosen based on the Alberta Children's Services child care subsidy program as of October 2021: Government of Alberta (2021e). Age



the ages of 6 to 12 years old and in grades 1 to 6. Four agencies had more than 9 in 10 children enrolled that were kindergarten age or younger, and one agency's proportion was 8 in 10 and another's was 7 in 10.

The maximum number of children each day home can have in care is 6, although Edmonton agencies oversee day homes with varying numbers of children enrolled. Based on the total day homes in operation and total children enrolled in October 2021, there was an overall average of 4.1 children in care per day home, not including the educator's own children. Two agencies had a higher average of 4.5 children in care. Three agencies were at or near the average. One agency had a lower average of 3.0 children in care, which is reflective of their lower utilization rate of day home programs and spaces.

Locations

Determining where Edmonton day homes are operating and where day home spaces are available for enrollment in the city. Public information on the locations of day homes is limited, due to privacy reasons and to day home educators opening and closing. However, some Edmonton agencies provide a map of their day homes or a list of neighbourhoods where they have day homes on their websites. The public information on which day homes have open spots is also sparse, in part because the availability of ELCC is constantly changing as children join or leave ELCC programs.

Waitlists

Only one Edmonton agency had an agency waitlist for children requiring immediate enrollment in an ELCC spot. A few Edmonton agencies kept an agency waitlist of families that anticipated a need for child care in the near future, such as when families reported they were expecting a baby or were planning to return to in-person work or school on a specific date. In addition, day home educators could choose to keep their own day home educator waitlists.

Affordability

In order for children and families to have access to ELCC, programs must be affordable.¹² Affordability reflects, in part, the cost of ELCC in relation to the household income of families and any programs that reduce cost for some families. The October 2021 fees for a day home space in Edmonton were detailed in the interviews for this study, but information is lacking about the incomes of families that accessed day homes and the subsidies received by children enrolled in day homes.

Full Time Fees

In 2020, the median monthly fee for a full time space in an Edmonton day home was \$885 for infants, \$790 for toddlers, and \$885 for preschoolers.¹³ These figures include two separate parts: first, the educator fee for the day home itself (set by the operator of that day home) and second, the agency administration fee (set by the agency that monitors that day home). Together, the educator fee and the agency administration fee compose the total parent fee.

The monthly agency administration fee for full time care as of October 2021 ranged from \$120 to \$155 in Edmonton, depending on the agency. The \$35 monthly difference between the lower and higher agency administration fee translates to \$420 annually.

The monthly recommended educator fee schedule for full time care in Edmonton day homes as of October 2021 varied substantially within and across agencies, from a low of \$490 to a high of \$905.¹⁴

ranges for child care subsidy under the new provincial plan created new categories of birth to not yet in kindergarten and kindergarten to grade 6, in response to the November 15, 2021 signing of the federal-provincial child care agreement: Government of Alberta (2021h).

¹² Government of Canada (2017)

¹³ Macdonald, D. & Friendly, M. (2021)

¹⁴ Day home educators are self-employed individuals contracted with an agency and can use these suggested rates or set their own fees above or below the agency's recommendation.



The \$415 monthly difference between the lower and higher recommended educator fee translates to \$4,980 annually.

The agency administration fee and recommended educator fee combined represent the total monthly parent fee for full time ELCC in Edmonton day homes as of October 2021. The weighted average share of this parent fee that went to the educator was 83% to 84% and that went to the agency was 16% to 17%. In Edmonton, parent fees for full time care in day homes ranged from a low of \$610 to a high of \$1,060 monthly, or \$7,320 to \$12,720 annually. This difference means that some families paid \$5,400 more annually than others.

Parent fees are an important indicator of what families paid for full time ELCC in Edmonton day homes in October 2021, but considerable variation in the cost of a space is likely to exist beyond the figures shown in the table below. For example, within one Edmonton agency, actual monthly parent fees ranged from \$735 to \$950, where approximately 47% of day homes had fees lower than the recommended fee, 16% the same, and 37% higher.¹⁵ At another Edmonton agency, about 80% of day home educators used the recommended fee, however some charged fees of over \$1,000 monthly for a space in a French, Mandarin, or Cantonese bilingual day home program.

Monthly Fees for Full Time Enrollment in Day Homes¹⁶

Agency	Agency Administration Fee	Recommended Educator Fee	Total Parent Fee
1	\$135	\$700-\$750	\$835-\$885
2	\$120	\$490-\$790	\$610-\$910
3	\$150	\$675-\$700	\$825-\$850
4	\$155	\$750-\$905	\$905-\$1,060
5	\$120	\$770	\$890
6	\$150	\$590-\$640	\$740-\$790
Weighted Average	\$136	\$681-\$721	\$817-\$857

Part Time Fees

Three Edmonton agencies had monthly fees for part time enrollment in their day homes as of October 2021. The monthly agency administration fee for a part time spot ranged from \$70 to \$120. The monthly recommended educator fee for a part time spot ranged from \$400 to \$570. The weighted average share of that fee that went to the educator was 84% to 86% and that went to the agency was 14% to 16%.

The total monthly parent fee for part time ELCC in Edmonton day homes in October 2021 ranged from a low of \$470 to a high of \$690, or \$5,640 to \$8,280 annually. This difference between the lower and higher fees amounted to \$2,640 annually. In addition, wider variations than what is shown in the table on the next page likely exist because day home educators could set their own fees.

¹⁵ Fischer-Summers, J. (2020a)

¹⁶ The weighted average is calculated by weighting each agency’s agency administration fee, educator fee, and total parent fee by the percentage of full time children enrolled. For the agency that did not provide the number of full time children enrolled, the overall percentage for full time enrollment was used for the weighting.



Monthly Fees for Part Time Enrollment in Day Homes¹⁷

Agency	Agency Administration Fee	Recommended Educator Fee	Total Parent Fee
1	\$75	\$400-\$500	\$475-\$575
2	\$70	\$400-\$500	\$470-\$570
3	N/A	N/A	N/A
4	N/A	N/A	N/A
5	\$120	\$570	\$690
6	N/A	N/A	N/A
Weighted Average	\$88	\$453-\$528	\$542-\$617

Daily Fees

All Edmonton agencies had daily fees for drop-in enrollment in their day homes as of October 2021. The daily agency administration fee ranged from \$5 to \$11, depending on the agency. The recommended educator fee ranged from \$40 to \$88, depending on the agency. The weighted average share of that fee that went to the educator was 85% to 86% and that went to the agency was 14% to 15%.

The total daily parent fee for drop-in ELCC in Edmonton day homes in October 2021 ranged from a low of \$47 to a high of \$99. This variation means that some families were paying \$52 more per day, or more than double, what some other families paid for similar hours of care.

Daily Fees for Drop-In Enrollment in Day Homes¹⁸

Agency	Agency Administration Fee	Recommended Educator Fee	Total Parent Fee
1	\$10	\$40-\$45	\$50-\$55
2	\$7	\$40-\$50	\$47-\$57
3	-	-	\$50-\$60
4	\$5	\$45-\$55	\$50-\$60
5	\$11	\$88	\$99
6	\$7	\$42	\$49
Weighted Average	\$9	\$51-\$54	\$60-\$63

¹⁷ The weighted average is calculated by weighting each agency's agency administration fee, educator fee, and total parent fee by the percentage of children in other enrollment. The weighting does not include agencies that did not have a monthly rate for part time care (indicated by N/A in the table).

¹⁸ One agency did not provide a breakdown of the agency administration and recommended educator fees for their daily rates (indicated by - in the table). One agency used hourly rates for drop-in care; their fees shown in the table assume that families used 11 hours per day of drop-in care, based on that agency's typical hours of care. The weighted average is calculated by weighting each agency's agency administration fee, educator fee, and total parent fee by the percentage of children in other enrollment. For the agency that did not estimate other enrollment, the overall percentage for other enrollment was used for the weighting.



Sibling Discounts

Agencies and day home educators offered sibling discounts to reduce fees in some cases.¹⁹ Some agencies offered a sibling discount for the monthly agency administration fee, with one providing a \$20 reduction per child and another providing a \$55 reduction per child, although some agencies did not. Day home educators could decide whether to offer a sibling discount for their educator fee, regardless of the agency. The amount of that reduction to the monthly educator fee also varied widely, with day home educators at one agency providing a decrease of \$50 to \$100 per child on average.

Subsidies

In addition to the factors already mentioned that affect how much families paid for ELCC in Edmonton day homes, child care subsidies provided by Alberta Children's Services can offset the cost of licensed and approved ELCC for eligible lower-income families.²⁰ A child's subsidy rate is determined by their family's total income, the child's age, the type of child care program, and the number of hours of care the child attends in a month.²¹ As of October 2021, families with a household income under \$50,000 could qualify for full subsidy and families with a household income of \$50,000 to under \$90,000 could qualify for partial subsidy.²² The monthly maximum subsidy rates for day homes were \$614 per month for infants 18 months and under, \$516 for preschool age children 19 months to up to grade 1, and \$366 for school age children in grades 1 through 6.²³

A significantly higher proportion of children enrolled in Edmonton day homes received a subsidy as compared to the proportion of children enrolled in all types of ELCC programs province-wide. Between April 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021, of the children aged 0 to 12 years old enrolled in licensed and approved ELCC programs in Alberta, almost 23,000 (27%) received a subsidy.²⁴ Of those children, the majority (68%) received a full subsidy. An estimated overall total of 778 children (41%) enrolled in a day home program in Edmonton received a subsidy as of October 2021.²⁵ The number of children in Edmonton day homes that received a full subsidy is not publicly available.

Some Edmonton agencies served a much larger proportion of children receiving a subsidy than other agencies. Depending on the agency, 25% to 65% of children enrolled received a subsidy. This proportion of children receiving a subsidy did not appear to be aligned with the cost of ELCC. The agency with the highest parent fees at \$905 to \$1,060 had the second highest proportion of children receiving a subsidy

¹⁹ Sibling discounts are fee reductions that agencies and/or educators may apply to lower the parent fee when a family has two or more children accessing care at the same day home agency or program.

²⁰ All information provided in the interviews for this study is from October 2021, before the new federal-provincial child care agreement was signed in November 2021 and prior to the subsidy changes implemented beginning in January 2022. For more information about the changes to Alberta's child care subsidies, see: Government of Alberta (2021h).

²¹ Note that child care subsidies in Alberta are paid directly to ELCC programs, not to families. For more information about child care subsidies in the province, see: Government of Alberta (2021e).

²² Government of Alberta (2021f)

²³ Rates are as of October 2021 and reflect attendance of 100 or more hours for infants and preschool age children and 50 or more hours for school age children.

²⁴ To the author's knowledge, there is no publicly available information about the number of children who received a subsidy in day homes in the province. For more information on Alberta's child care subsidy program, see: Government of Alberta (2021a).

²⁵ One agency did not estimate how many children received a subsidy. Therefore, the overall total and percentage of children that received a subsidy was calculated using figures from five agencies only. This subsidy information is based on the number of children receiving a subsidy with Edmonton agencies as of October 2021, when the threshold for full subsidy was under \$50,000 and the threshold for partial subsidy was \$50,000 to under \$90,000. These numbers do not include children who may be eligible for subsidy in January 2022 or after, when the threshold for full subsidy was increased to under \$120,000 and the threshold for partial subsidy was increased to \$120,000 to under \$180,000. For more information about the changes to Alberta's child care subsidies, see: Government of Alberta (2021h).



at 60%. The agency with some of the lowest parent fees at \$740 to \$790 had the second lowest proportion of children receiving a subsidy at 40%.

Of the children enrolled in Edmonton day homes as of October 2021, about 62% were receiving an infant or preschool age subsidy for younger children not yet in grade 1 and 48% were receiving a school age subsidy for children in grades 1 to 6.²⁶ Depending on the agency, 23% to 64% of younger children and 0% to 77% of school age children received a subsidy. A significant range also exists between agencies in terms of the ages of children receiving subsidy. For example, at one agency only 23% of younger children enrolled were receiving a subsidy compared to 77% of school age children. At another agency, 72% of younger children enrolled were receiving a subsidy compared to only 37% of school age children.

Quality

Quality is important for long term positive effects of ELCC for children, families, and communities. Quality includes, but is certainly not limited to, the qualifications and training for the early childhood workforce, the responsive and respectful relationships with families, and the early learning experiences and environments for children.²⁷ This study provides a brief overview of some elements of quality from the perspectives of Edmonton agencies, but much more information and engagement is required with day home educators, families, children, and others to understand the quality of ELCC in Edmonton day homes.

Day Home Educators

Day home educators are self-employed individuals and business owners contracted with a licensed agency.²⁸ In Alberta, day home educators do not need valid early childhood educator (ECE) certification to provide ELCC in their homes through an agency. However, the vast majority of day home educators with Edmonton agencies are certified ECEs. The level of certification is likely to reflect the extent to which day home educators are able to provide quality ELCC and can access government funding through wage top-ups and other programs.²⁹

Alberta has three levels of early childhood educator certification:

- Level 1 Early Childhood Educator (formerly Child Development Assistant) certification, which requires completion of a 45 hour 3-credit course in ELCC or equivalent.
- Level 2 Early Childhood Educator (formerly Child Development Worker) certification, which requires completion of a 720 hour 1-year ELCC Certificate or equivalent.
- Level 3 Early Childhood Educator (formerly Child Development Supervisor) certification, which requires completion of a 1,445 hour 2-year ELCC Diploma or equivalent.³⁰

There was a noticeably higher proportion of Level 3 ECEs working in Edmonton day homes as compared to the proportion of ECEs working in all types of ELCC programs province-wide. As of March 31, 2021, of the 14,984 ECEs working in licensed and approved ELCC programs in Alberta, 6,079 (41%) were certified

²⁶ Two agencies did not estimate how many children received a subsidy by age group. Therefore, the overall percentage of younger children and school aged children that received a subsidy was calculated using figures from four agencies only. This subsidy information is based on the number of children receiving a subsidy with Edmonton agencies as of October 2021, when the threshold for full subsidy was under \$50,000 and the threshold for partial subsidy was \$50,000 to under \$90,000. These numbers do not include children who may be eligible for subsidy in January 2022 or after, when the threshold for full subsidy was increased to under \$120,000 and the threshold for partial subsidy was increased to \$120,000 to under \$180,000. For more information about the changes to Alberta's child care subsidies, see: Government of Alberta (2021h).

²⁷ Government of Canada (2017)

²⁸ Government of Alberta (2021b)

²⁹ Government of Alberta (2021d)

³⁰ To the author's knowledge, there is no publicly available information on the certification levels of the early childhood educators working in day homes across the province. For more information on certification levels in Alberta, see: Government of Alberta (2021c).



as Level 1, 2,360 (16%) as Level 2, and 6,545 (44%) as Level 3.³¹ As of October 2021, an estimated 31% of Edmonton day home educators were certified as Level 1, 13% were certified as Level 2, and 55% were certified as Level 3. A small number of Edmonton day home educators (1%) had no ECE certification.³² Looking beyond the overall figures, a broad range of certification levels exist between and within Edmonton agencies, as shown in the table below.

Percentage of Day Home Educators by Level of Certification³³

Agency	No Level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
1	0%	30%	15%	55%
2	0%	40%	20%	40%
3	-	-	-	-
4	0%	47%	7%	47%
5	6%	30%	4%	60%
6	0%	25%	15%	60%
Overall	1%	31%	13%	55%

Agency Staff

Agencies employ management staff such as executive directors and agency coordinators, and office staff such as financial administrators and administrative support. Each agency must have on staff at least one individual who manages and coordinates the day-to-day operation, administration, and delivery of the family day home service. In Alberta, staff members are responsible for administering the program and are not required to have early childhood educator certification, although many do.³⁴ Across the six Edmonton agencies, there were a combined total of 23 management and office staff as of October 2021. There was an average of about 4 employees per agency, with one larger agency at 7 employees and one smaller agency with only 1 employee. Staff provide services to day home educators, including assistance with collecting parent fees, managing receipt of child care subsidy and wage top-up funding, and placing children in day homes.³⁵ Staff also provide services to parents and guardians, including acting as a contact for families in the community.³⁶

Agencies also employ or contract home visitors/consultants. Home visitors/consultants are responsible for monitoring and oversight of day home educators for compliance with the Family Day Home Standards, as well as for providing recruitment, approval, training, networking, and support to day home educators. Each agency must have on staff at least one individual who fulfills these responsibilities, although that person can also be the manager or coordinator.³⁷ In Alberta, home visitors/consultants must be certified at minimum as Level 2 ECEs. This certification helps to ensure that qualified agency staff are able to support day home educators to respond to children's individual needs and to support children's learning and development.³⁸ Home visitors/consultants work closely with day home educators and families to

³¹ Government of Alberta (2021a)

³² To the author's knowledge, there is no publicly available information on how many uncertified day home educators are working in day homes across Alberta.

³³ One agency did not provide information about the certification levels of their educators (indicated by - in the table). Therefore, the overall total and percentages of educators by certification level are calculated using figures from five agencies only.

³⁴ Government of Alberta (2021d)

³⁵ Government of Alberta (2021b)

³⁶ Government of Alberta (2021g)

³⁷ Government of Alberta (2021g)

³⁸ Government of Alberta (2021d)



support the safety and well-being of children in day homes.³⁹ Edmonton agencies employed a combined total of 26 home visitors/consultants to oversee 521 day homes as of October 2021. Overall, the caseload of each home visitor/consultant is an average of 20 day homes. However, a significant range exists between agencies in terms of the day home caseload of home visitors/consultants. For example, two agencies have one home visitor/consultant per 15 day homes and one agency had one home visitor/consultant per 25 day homes.

Adequate staffing levels at agencies are necessary for facilitating appropriate safety and quality of day homes. At the start of the pandemic, between March and April 2020, four agencies laid off one home visitor/consultant each, indicating a reduced ability among agencies to conduct monitoring and oversight.⁴⁰ By October 2021, two of those four layoffs had been hired back. However, the other two agencies had not returned to their pre-pandemic number of home visitors/consultants employed.

Professional Development, Training, and Networking Support

Along with providing monitoring and oversight, agencies offer day home educators access to resources and assistance such as consultation, information sharing, and problem solving and support through professional development, training, and networking opportunities.⁴¹ These opportunities help to ensure that day home educators use the most current practices, accepted theories, and informed approaches to early childhood development.⁴² Each agency must offer a minimum of six opportunities every year to their day home educators.⁴³ Opportunities may be provided directly by the agency, or may be provided in partnership with other organizations.⁴⁴ There were variations in the number of opportunities routinely provided by Edmonton agencies on an annual basis to day home educators – one agency provided 12 opportunities, another agency provided 9 opportunities, two agencies provided 8 opportunities, and two agencies provided only 6 opportunities. All agencies sometimes offered additional informal meetings or supplementary training outside of those opportunities, depending on the situation. In addition, some agencies regularly shared information with their day home educators about opportunities offered by outside organizations and encouraged their day home educators to take advantage of professional development funding through the provincial government. The differences in frequency and depth of professional development, training, and networking support provided by agencies to day home educators is an important factor to consider when evaluating the quality of ELCC in Edmonton day homes.

Edmonton agencies noted that the pandemic has changed how professional development, training, and networking opportunities are provided, with a shift towards more virtual and less in-person offerings. These opportunities for day home educators may be pre-recorded or live sessions. Some agencies said that online programming improved accessibility for day home educators because they did not have to travel or find child care to attend. Other agencies said that many day home educators felt quite isolated and that virtual meetings helped but did not fully replace face-to-face interaction. Some agencies talked about it being easier to coordinate opportunities in an online format, and others preferred hosting events and workshops at in-person venues.

Curriculum Frameworks

All Edmonton agencies said that a curriculum framework is important for quality ELCC, but no agency had a policy or standard that all their day home educators follow or implement one. Only two agencies

³⁹ Government of Alberta (2021g)

⁴⁰ Fischer-Summers, J. (2020b)

⁴¹ Government of Alberta (2021b)

⁴² Edmonton agencies had a range of offerings on topics including professional networking, social, emotional, physical, and intellectual child development, positive child behaviour and effective guidance, appropriate child supports, program planning and documentation, COVID information and guidelines, healthy child and family, nutrition and feeding, outdoor and risky play, literacy and numeracy, Indigenous awareness, and sleep tips.

⁴³ Government of Alberta (2021g)

⁴⁴ Edmonton agencies mentioned they partner with organizations such as Alberta Health Services, Alberta Resource Center for Quality Enhancement, Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta, and MacEwan University.



required their day home educators to receive some form of training in a curriculum framework. However, all agencies encouraged their day home educators to adopt a curriculum framework. Numerous agencies noted that each day home educator using a curriculum framework implements it in their own way, depending on factors such as children in their care, their physical environment, and their knowledge and comfort level. The curriculum framework that agencies mentioned the most was *Flight*.⁴⁵ The more widespread promotion and use of *Flight* was likely due to the public availability of related resources, as well as the provincial funding for upgrading and training. Other curriculum frameworks or pedagogical philosophies that agencies mentioned their day home educators used included Learning through Play, Reggio Emilia, Montessori, Forest School, and interest-based planning.

Day Home Program Ratios

Agencies are responsible for ensuring that each day home is following the Family Day Home Standards for the number and ages of children per day home educator, known as the day home program ratio. A lower ratio of children to educator helps to ensure that day home educators are able to provide safe, quality ELCC. In Alberta, the number of children allowed in each day home recently increased from a maximum of 6 children *including* the educator's own children to 6 children *not including* the educator's own children. Prior to the pandemic, day home educators could care for up to 6 children between the ages of 0 to 12 including their own children, with a maximum of 3 children aged 36 months or younger and a maximum of 2 children aged 24 months or younger. Following the ratio change in March 2020, day home educators can care for up to 6 children between the ages of 0 to 12 not including their own children. However, no more than 3 children aged 36 months or younger and no more than 2 children aged 24 months or younger may be cared for at one time, including the educator's own children.⁴⁶

This change in the day home program ratio means that, in any day home in Alberta, the total number of children can increase by the number of the educator's own children between the ages of 3 to 12. In April 2020, about 30 (6%) of Edmonton day homes were operating at this new, higher ratio.⁴⁷ As of October 2021, approximately 110 (21%) Edmonton day homes had more than 6 children including the educator's own children.⁴⁸ Every Edmonton agency experienced an increase in proportion of their day homes operating at the new, higher ratio between March 2020 and October 2021, despite the pandemic. In the case of one agency, about half of their day homes had more than 6 children including the educator's own children. There were many more Edmonton day homes operating at higher ratios than before, a trend that must be monitored to ensure it does not adversely affect the safety and quality of ELCC in day homes.

Day Home Program Monitoring and Oversight

Agencies play a vital role in ensuring the safety and quality of ELCC in day homes. Agencies in Alberta are responsible for ensuring that day homes adhere to the requirements of the *Early Learning and Child Care Act* and Regulation and the Family Day Home Standards through day home program monitoring and oversight. Agencies must conduct home visits, safety checks, and screening of all their day homes on a regular basis. All Edmonton agencies clearly met the government guidelines and standards, and some went beyond the minimum requirements to provide increased levels of monitoring and oversight in Edmonton day homes.

Home Visits

Agencies must monitor all active day home program educators overseen by their agency a minimum of six times per year, or about once every two months, through a combination of scheduled and unscheduled home visits using the Family Day Home Agency Visitor/Consultant Checklist. This checklist

⁴⁵ Makovichuk, L., Hewes, J., Lirette, P., & Thomas, N. (2014)

⁴⁶ Government of Alberta (2021g)

⁴⁷ Fischer-Summers, J. (2020b)

⁴⁸ One agency did not estimate the number of their day homes with more than 6 children including the educator's own children in October 2021.



covers assessment of the physical day home facility, including indoor and outdoor space, toys, furnishings, and equipment; the day home program performance, including supervision of children, activities, daily routine, and child guidance practices; the day home safety, health, and emergency provisions; the day home environment, including the influence of other children or adults who may be in the home while children are in care; and the development and behaviour of children in the day home, including interactions between children and between child and educator.⁴⁹ In addition, agencies must increase the frequency, content, and duration of home visits based on the day home educator's experience and need for monitoring, training, and support; the number, ages, and needs of children in care; and the agency's history with the day home educator.⁵⁰

The regular frequency of scheduled and unscheduled home visits by home visitors/consultants varied by Edmonton agency. Four agencies had a policy to conduct monthly home visits with all their day homes, doubling the minimum required annual number. Two agencies had a policy to routinely conduct six home visits per year, with up to 12 home visits depending on the day home educator. Most of these home visits were unscheduled, but many agencies said that, depending on the situation, scheduled visits may be needed. Some examples provided for scheduling visits included to work around when a day home educator needs to transport children to and from school, to offer additional support to a child with exceptional needs, or to provide supplemental training to a new day home educator.

At various points throughout the pandemic, the ways in which home visitors/consultants at Edmonton agencies could conduct home visits of their day homes were modified. These modifications were made to follow Alberta Children's Services guidelines to cease or reduce in-person visits and in recognition that home visitors/consultants and day home educators had varying levels of comfort with in-person interactions. Edmonton agencies implemented a range of modifications to their routine home visits during the pandemic, including virtual visits by telephone or video and in-person visits outdoors or indoors. These modifications meant that Edmonton agencies conducted home visits with varying levels of frequency and depth. Some agencies said that virtual visits can be challenging for day home educators that are not technologically savvy. Some agencies said that home visitors/consultants can be uncomfortable with not having the opportunity to observe day homes in-person. As of October 2021, three agencies were conducting in-person home visits, two agencies were conducting remote home visits, and one agency was using a mix of both. Thus Edmonton agencies had not fully returned to their pre-pandemic operations in terms of monitoring and oversight of their day homes.

Safety Checks

Agencies must complete two safety checks per year of all active day home program educators under their agency using the Home and Safety Inspection Checklist. This checklist outlines the health and safety requirements for day homes, such as emergency plans and evacuation procedures, medications and vitamins kept under lock and key, proper storage of potentially harmful products in an area inaccessible to children, and readily accessible working telephone and emergency numbers.⁵¹ These two annual safety checks may be scheduled or unscheduled and may be completed during the six required annual home visits.⁵²

The regular frequency of scheduled and unscheduled safety checks by home visitors/consultants was the same for most Edmonton agencies. One agency had a policy to conduct quarterly safety checks in all their day homes, doubling the minimum required. Five agencies had a policy to routinely conduct the two required safety checks annually. Similar to home visits, most of these safety checks were unscheduled. However, some were scheduled in order to work with specific situations of day home educators.

The ways in which home visitors/consultants at Edmonton agencies could conduct safety checks of their day homes were also modified. At various points over the course of the pandemic, Edmonton agencies

⁴⁹ Government of Alberta (2021d)

⁵⁰ Government of Alberta (2021g)

⁵¹ Government of Alberta (2021k)

⁵² Government of Alberta (2021g)



replaced in-person safety checks with video, telephone, or written safety checks. Some agencies said that this remote monitoring lessened the ability of home visitors/consultants to identify and address instances where day home educators may not be meeting standards and regulations.⁵³ However, as of October 2021, all Edmonton agencies were able to complete safety checks in-person and indoors.

Screening

Agencies must also conduct a performance assessment for all day home educators at least once annually and screen any new day home educator.⁵⁴ For performance assessment of day home educators, agencies must review the day home educator's history of compliance to standards, training and professional development, parent and guardian satisfaction, and history of complaints and incidents.⁵⁵

For recruitment and screening of new day home educators, agencies are to conduct two screening visits using the Family Day Home Program Initial Screening Checklist.⁵⁶ Background check documentation for the new day home educator must be received before care of children in the day home begins and includes a completed criminal record check, including vulnerable sector search, for themselves and anyone who is 18 years of age or older who resides in the day home; a statement signed by themselves disclosing any prior criminal involvement of any person under 18 years of age who resides in the day home; three satisfactory personal references from non-relatives that corroborate their suitability for working with children; and a physician's note stating they are mentally and physically able to care for children. First aid certification is required within three months of commencement of service.⁵⁷ Some agencies in Edmonton also required additional documentation, such as early childhood educator certification.

The ways in which home visitors/consultants at Edmonton agencies could conduct screening of new day homes was also affected by the pandemic. At the start of the pandemic, many agencies paused the processing of applications from new day home educators because remote screening was not seen to be as effective as in-person methods.⁵⁸ However, as of October 2021, Edmonton agencies were able to complete screening visits in-person and indoors at their new day homes.

Concerns

Significant policy changes were made by Alberta Children's Services between March 2020 and October 2021 that affected agency monitoring and oversight of day homes in Edmonton and across the province. Changes that Edmonton agencies discussed included the new *Early Learning and Child Care Act* and Regulation, the updated Family Day Home Standards, the frequently revised COVID-19 guidance, and the modifications to guidelines around monitoring and ratios. Many agencies were concerned about what they described as a lack of direct communication from the provincial government to provide them with clear, timely information and support. Some agencies reported spending a burdensome amount of time interpreting policy changes and communicating their effects to their day home educators and to the families accessing care in their day homes. Some agencies expressed that they would have appreciated it if they had been more engaged in the provincial government's decision making process and offered more opportunities to provide their feedback. Many agencies were concerned about the effects of the pandemic on financial viability and wanted to see more government funding made available for the sector, explaining that their agency and many of their day home educators have not fully recovered from the loss of income experienced most acutely at the start of the pandemic. Many agencies were also concerned about the ongoing effects of the pandemic on the health and safety of their agency staff, day home educators, and day home families, especially as younger children remained ineligible for COVID-19 vaccination.

⁵³ Fischer-Summers, J. (2020b)

⁵⁴ Government of Alberta (2021d)

⁵⁵ Government of Alberta (2021g)

⁵⁶ Government of Alberta (2021j)

⁵⁷ Government of Alberta (2021g)

⁵⁸ Fischer-Summers, J. (2020b)



Flexibility

In order for children and families to have access to ELCC, programs must be flexible.⁵⁹ Flexibility here refers to the ability of ELCC to meet the varied schedule needs of families and children. This study provides a brief overview of the typical days and hours of care and the extended hours care in Edmonton day homes, but to what degree these programs are meeting the needs of the families and children accessing ELCC in the city is unclear.

Typical Days and Hours of Care

The typical hours of operation for Edmonton day homes as of October 2021 varied somewhat by the agency and day home. The typical hours of care in Edmonton day homes were 10 to 12 hours on Monday through Friday, ranging from 6:00 to 7:30 am in the morning and 5:00 to 6:00 pm in the afternoon on weekdays. Within safety guidelines, the typical hours of care are ultimately determined by each day home educator.

Extended Hours Care

Extended hours care is ELCC provided between the hours of 6:00 pm to 12:00 am and/or 5:01 am to 6:00 am on weekdays or any hours on the weekend.⁶⁰ Overnight care is ELCC provided between the hours of 12:01 am and 5:00 am.⁶¹ As of October 2021, all Edmonton agencies were licensed to provide extended hours care and all had some day homes offering extended hours care. However, only two agencies had a few day homes offering overnight care. Day homes may offer overnight care if the agency has a contract with Alberta Children's Services and the proper insurance coverage to provide overnight care, if the day home educator is interested in and able to work overnight hours, and if families are in need of overnight care.

Overall, the availability of extended hours care was limited in Edmonton day homes. Approximately 39 (8%) of Edmonton day homes offered extended hours care as of October 2021, including early morning, late evening, or weekend care. Options for extended care ranged from 15% of day homes with one agency to only 4% of day homes with another agency.

The recommended fees for extended hours care in Edmonton are based on the type of extended hours care offered and the number of hours required, and day home educators could set their own fees on a case by case basis. The rates for extended hours care are in addition to the monthly fees that families pay for typical days and hours of care. As of October 2021, the recommended monthly extended hours fee was \$100 at three agencies, for either early morning and late evening care or weekend care. One agency had recommended monthly extended hours fees of \$35 for care before 7:00 am, \$30 for care after 6:00 pm, and \$40 to \$80 for weekend care. Two Edmonton agencies did not have a recommended educator fee for extended hours care. No agency provided information on fees for overnight care.

The extended hours fees in Edmonton day homes appear to follow the extended hours subsidy rate to some degree. The extended hours subsidy, which applies to at least 8 hours of care per month outside of the regular hours of 6:00 am to 6:00 pm or on weekends, is a monthly flat rate of an additional \$100 per child.⁶² The number of children in Edmonton day homes that received an extended hours subsidy is not publicly available.⁶³

⁵⁹ Government of Canada (2017)

⁶⁰ Government of Alberta (2021g)

⁶¹ Government of Alberta (2021d)

⁶² Note that child care subsidies in Alberta are paid directly to ELCC programs, not to families. For more information about child care subsidies in the province, see: Government of Alberta (2021e).

⁶³ To the author's knowledge, there is no publicly available information on the number of children who received an extended hours subsidy in the province, either in day homes specifically or in licensed and approved ELCC programs as a whole.



Inclusivity

Inclusivity is vital for the equitable provision of ELCC for children, families, and communities. Inclusivity reflects, in part, the diversity of appropriate supports and the cultural responsiveness of care for all children and families, in particular for Indigenous children and families, refugee and immigrant children and families, and children with varying abilities.⁶⁴ This study provides a brief overview of some elements of inclusivity for children with varying abilities from the perspective of interviews with Edmonton agencies, however much more information and engagement is required from day home educators, families, children, and others to understand the inclusivity of ELCC in day homes.

Children with Disabilities

All Edmonton agencies had children with disabilities that accessed ELCC in their day homes, although no agency was able to provide a total number of children with disabilities enrolled in their day homes.⁶⁵ Some agencies noted that often the children in their care are too young to have received formal diagnoses and this was part of the reason why they did not formally track this information. A few agencies raised concerns about preschool age children in their day homes not being assessed as readily due to access issues caused by the ongoing pandemic and by provincial changes to Program Unit Funding (PUF) in Alberta.

Many agencies offered some training and support to day home educators who have children with disabilities in their care. For example, one agency was supporting a day home educator to receive sign language training for a child in their care with a hearing impairment. Another agency was supporting day home educators to receive autism awareness training for children in their care who are on the spectrum.

Some agencies noted their day home educators have access to specialized training through partnerships with organizations such as Getting Ready for Inclusion Today (GRIT) and through provincial programs such as the Inclusive Child Care Program, the Supported Child Care Program, Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD), and the Child Care Respite Program. Specifically, four Edmonton agencies were contracted by Alberta Children's Services to provide respite care and two agencies did not provide respite care.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to provide a snapshot of accessibility, affordability, quality, flexibility, and inclusivity of ELCC in licensed family day home agencies and their approved family day homes in Edmonton. In addition, this study provides some insight and commentary on experiences of agencies and day homes during the COVID-19 crisis, between March 2020 and October 2021.

The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care believes that increasing the accessibility, affordability, quality, flexibility, and inclusivity of ELCC is a key element in our community's effort to reduce and eliminate poverty. Day homes and agencies play a vital role in providing licensed ELCC in Edmonton and Alberta. The accessibility, affordability, quality, flexibility, and inclusivity between and within agencies and day homes is an important factor to consider in implementation of the new federal-provincial child care agreement.

⁶⁴ Government of Canada (2017)

⁶⁵ To the author's knowledge, there is no publicly available information on the number of children with disabilities who attend care in the province, either in day homes specifically or in licensed and approved ELCC programs as a whole.



This discussion paper is part of a series of documents created by the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care to address current topics in early learning and care that impact Edmonton and Alberta. Jennifer Fischer-Summers, MA, is a Research Assistant at the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families at the University of Alberta. Correspondence can be sent to info@ecelc.ca.

Definitions

Licensed family day home agencies are organizations licensed by the Government of Alberta to monitor approved family day homes according to provincial laws and regulations.⁶⁶ Each agency employs administrative staff and home visitors/consultants that work closely with day home educators and families to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of children and the program quality standards of early learning and child care in approved family day homes.⁶⁷

Approved family day homes offer early learning and child care in an individual's private residence to children under the age of 13 years with one day home educator.⁶⁸ Each day home educator is contracted with and overseen by a licensed family day home agency. This is in contrast to unlicensed, unregulated home-based child care, where there is no government oversight of care arrangements and providers are not monitored.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Government of Alberta (2021i)

⁶⁷ Government of Alberta (2021g)

⁶⁸ Government of Alberta (2021d)

⁶⁹ Government of Alberta (2021b)



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