

## Headed Up, But Still Behind

### Child Care Coverage Rates in Alberta's Top Ten Largest Cities, 2016 – 2021: One-Page Summary

**Author:** Rob Buschmann

**Date:** July 2022

#### *What is happening?*

Child care coverage rates are an important way to understand the availability of child care, with higher rates generally meaning child care is more available in a given area.<sup>1</sup> Coverage rates are calculated as a percent, but it is often easier to understand them as “spaces per child”—for example, a 30% coverage rate for a city means there are 3 child care spaces available for every 10 children.

From 2016 to 2021, coverage rates for children under the age of six increased in Alberta's ten largest cities and in Alberta as a whole. However, these increases were uneven, and there remains considerable variation in coverage rates between Alberta's ten largest cities.<sup>2</sup>

City	Child Care Coverage Rate, 2021
Calgary	34.1
Edmonton	34.3
Red Deer	27.9
Lethbridge	44.3
Airdrie	31.3
St. Albert	46.8
Grande Prairie	22.8
Medicine Hat	48.7
Spruce Grove	37.5
Leduc	18.6
<b>Average for the Ten Cities</b>	34.6
<b>Alberta Overall</b>	29.9

#### *Why is this an issue?*

Alberta's uneven coverage rates suggest that child care is not equally available for all Alberta families. In addition, compared to international standards, coverage rates almost everywhere in Alberta are low. The signing of the Canada-Alberta Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement provides an opportunity to make high-quality, affordable child care available for all Albertans.<sup>3</sup>

#### *What can be done?*

Ensuring that all Alberta families have access to quality, affordable, regulated child care is a big job, and almost certainly cannot be achieved by one level of government acting alone. Municipalities can help by **(1) understanding and monitoring child care in their jurisdictions** and **(2) taking proactive steps to increase child care availability in their communities**. The Government of Alberta can help by **(3) providing comprehensive child care data to municipalities**, **(4) regularly and meaningfully consulting with municipalities about child care**, and **(5) using data and consultation to continually refine provincial policies meant to improve child care availability**.

<sup>1</sup> This document is a one-page summary of “[Headed Up, But Still Behind: Child Care Coverage Rates in Alberta's Top Ten Largest Cities, 2016-2021](https://www.ecelec.ca/)”, available at the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care's website (<https://www.ecelec.ca/>).

<sup>2</sup> Previous work from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (<https://policyalternatives.ca/childcaredeserts>) suggests that coverage rates in Alberta's small towns and rural communities also vary greatly, and can be very low.

<sup>3</sup> The text of the Canada-Alberta agreement can be found at <https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement/agreements-provinces-territories.html>, and more details on the Government of Alberta's actions are available at <https://www.alberta.ca/federal-provincial-child-care-agreement.aspx>.