

Impact Report 2022-2023

Advancing early learning and care in Edmonton through rigorous research, high-trust relationships, and policy leadership



ecelec
Edmonton Council for
Early Learning and Care



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Background

Since its first meeting in 2019, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC or “the Council”) has been dedicated to improving ELCC with support, funding, and guidance from EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE).

The Council includes 20 volunteer members from institutional and community organizations across the city and is led by two EPE Directors of Early Learning and Care. Members invest their time, resources, and expertise to advance the development of a formal, publicly managed, and integrated ELCC system in Edmonton, which would provide extraordinary benefits to children, parents, and the economy.

By partnering with other ELCC stakeholders, conducting community-engaged research, and publishing briefs and papers to inform stakeholders about current issues within the sector, the Council aims to be a widely recognized and credible source of information about ELCC in Edmonton. These efforts focus primarily on low-income families or those experiencing inequities. Thus, the ECELC’s work strongly supports EPE’s overarching goal of ending poverty within a generation.

In 2021, the federal government introduced the **Canada-Alberta Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (Canada-Alberta Agreement)**, which opened an important policy window for enhancing ELCC in Alberta. Under the Canada-Alberta Agreement, the federal government committed to investing in an ELCC system that satisfies the **Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework**, which sets the foundation for governments across Canada to build ELCC systems based in the principles of **high-quality, accessible, affordable, flexible, and inclusive care** (1).

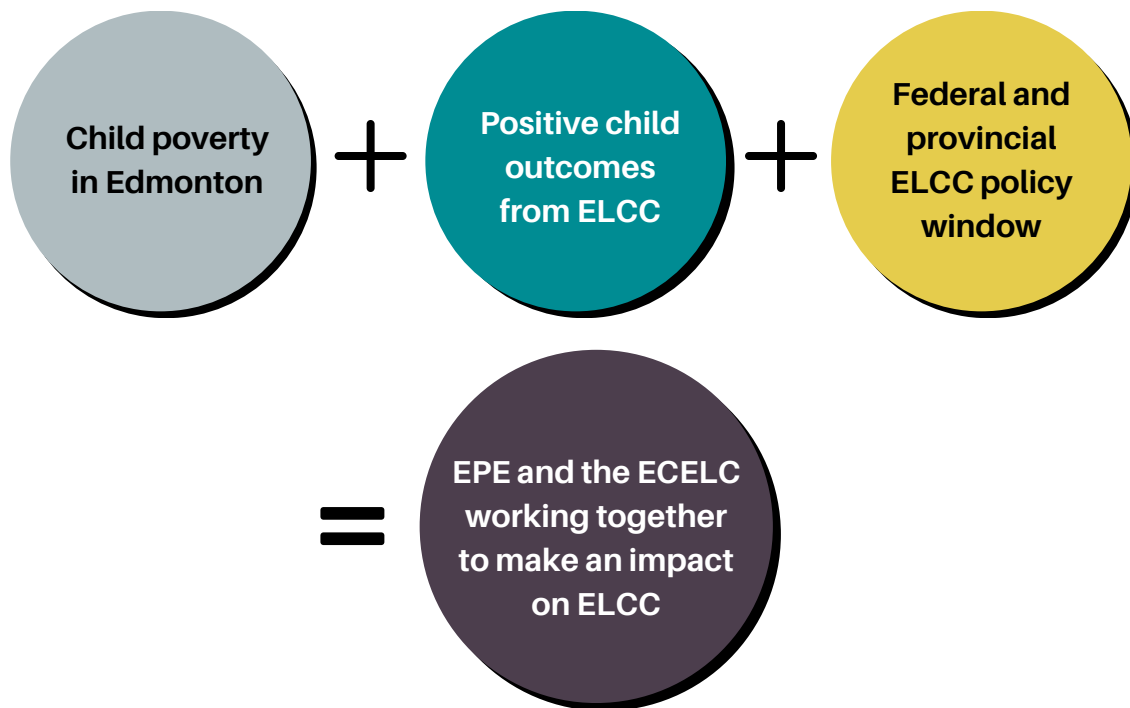
Improving ELCC in Edmonton is a long-term goal that requires the involvement of multiple systems and decision makers. In response to the ELCC policy environment, the Council has focused on building trusting relationships across communities, stakeholder groups, and different levels of government. These relationships strengthen the sector’s ability to leverage evidence and engage in advocacy, which the Council hopes will produce “incremental changes and successes” (2) and build the momentum needed to create a sustainable ELCC system for Alberta families.

Overall, the Council aims to strengthen support for an ELCC system that is publicly managed and supported by public funding. Such a system would recognize ELCC as a public good and minimize inequities in the delivery and availability of services. The Council also supports the development of an integrated ELCC system that emphasizes transparency and collaboration between stakeholders and streamlines the “piecemeal” initiatives that currently exist across Alberta. An integrated and publicly supported ELCC system would provide innumerable benefits to young children and their families, allow parents to participate in the workforce and achieve financial stability, and reduce overall stress and poverty (3).

This report contains a snapshot of the Council’s work and the associated impacts between **September 2022 and August 2023**. It provides context to understand the significance of the ECELC’s advocacy and policy initiatives and demonstrates how they contributed to EPE’s focus areas of rigorous research and analysis, high-trust relationships, and policy thought leadership. This report also provides the City of Edmonton a transparent look at the Council’s work over the past year and describes its future plans.

Throughout this report, early learning and child care is referred to as “ELCC,” and parents and guardians are referred to as “parents.” The ECELC and EPE sometimes also refer to early learning and child care as “early learning and care.”

How does early learning and child care relate to poverty?



Child poverty

According to the 2021 Canadian census, **more than 160,000 children in Alberta are living in poverty** with limited access to basic needs, which is linked to numerous harms (4). Children who grow up in poverty may experience food insecurity and unsafe living conditions. They often lack access to a primary care provider, adequate medical services, and preventative measures such as dental screenings. They are also more likely to engage in risky behaviours such as substance use, leading to poor physical and mental health outcomes (4, 5). When parents are struggling financially, they may lack access to important educational resources for their children, and the compounding stress of living in poverty can make healthy parenting practices difficult (5). Thus, during school years, children may struggle to achieve educational milestones, which may lead to unemployment or lower income in adulthood, continuing the cycle of poverty (4). Although much is required to end child poverty, **ELCC can be a powerful force in promoting healthy child development and well-being.**

ELCC benefits

ELCC includes educational programming and care for children (birth to five years old) at child care centres, early education programs, preschools, and out-of-school care (e.g., day homes) by an individual other than the child's parent or guardian (3).

A high-quality ELCC system sets the stage for numerous lifelong benefits. **Children involved in ELCC can experience a positive influence on their cognitive and behavioural development; improve their skills in self-regulation, communication, and healthy relationship-building; and see better academic outcomes, higher graduation rates, and greater income in adulthood** (6, 7, 8). ELCC also allows more talent to enter the workforce by giving parents an opportunity to pursue educational and career goals, which leads to a stronger economy (6, 8, 9). It also increases women's participation in the workforce, promoting gender equality and financial security for families (6, 8, 9).

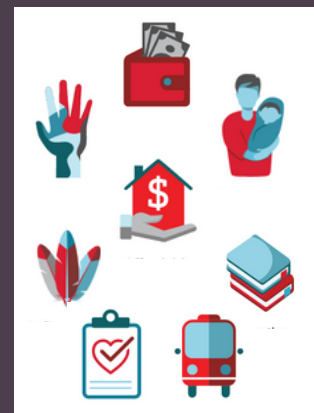
Policy window

Under the new Canada-Alberta Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (Canada-Alberta Agreement), **the federal government has committed to investing in an ELCC system that is aligned with the five principles outlined in the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework: quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility, and inclusivity** (1). The Canada-Alberta Agreement has already helped to reduce fees for Alberta parents by an average of 50% and will reduce fees to an average of \$10 per day for full-time licensed child care spaces by 2026 (1). In the Agreement, Alberta also commits to using federal funding to create 42,500 new non-profit child care spaces (1). Therefore, the Canada-Alberta Agreement presents an opportunity for the ECELC to establish strong relationships across the sector, which do not currently exist due to the lack of a formal system. These relationships are vital for partners to work together to develop a more equitable and evidence-based ELCC system in Edmonton and across Alberta.

The ECELC & EPE

EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE) is a city-wide initiative that aims to convene, coordinate, and broker innovative partnerships, advocate for policy changes, and build the capacity of Edmontonians to take action to end poverty. EPE's work revolves around using rigorous research and analysis, high-trust relationships, and policy thought leadership to address eight "game changers" critical to ending poverty.

EPE has identified Early Learning and Care as one of the game changers that must be addressed if poverty is to be eliminated in a generation. EPE defines poverty as "when [people] lack, or are denied, economic, social and cultural resources to fully and meaningfully participate in the community" (4). While poverty can affect people across all age groups, children are especially vulnerable to its effects. Fortunately, the ECELC addresses this important game changer.



EPE's game changer areas:
inclusive economy, anti-racism, affordable housing, Indigenization, early learning and care, education, health services, and transportation.

The ECELC's mission and vision

"It is only because we come together that we understand and improve the ecosystem of early learning and care." - Heather Raymond, EPE Director of Early Learning and Care

The ECELC builds on existing capacities and provides 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 the needs of low-income families and families experiencing vulnerabilities.



An ECELC gathering at EPE's downtown office in 2023

Mission

To design, promote, and build an integrated system of early learning and care that: is publicly managed; is supported by public funding; has a workforce that is appropriately educated and well supported; coordinates the range of services needed to support young children and their families; and contributes to eliminating poverty.

Vision

Early learning and care for all children that is high in quality, universally available, accessible, affordable, and responsive to the diversity of individual children and their families.

The ECELC’s mission and values are supported by a large network of partners, internal and external to the Council. Since Alberta currently lacks a formal, publicly managed ELCC system, the network allows the Council to create and leverage opportunities to act as a voice for ELCC and strengthen support for an integrated ELCC system in Edmonton.

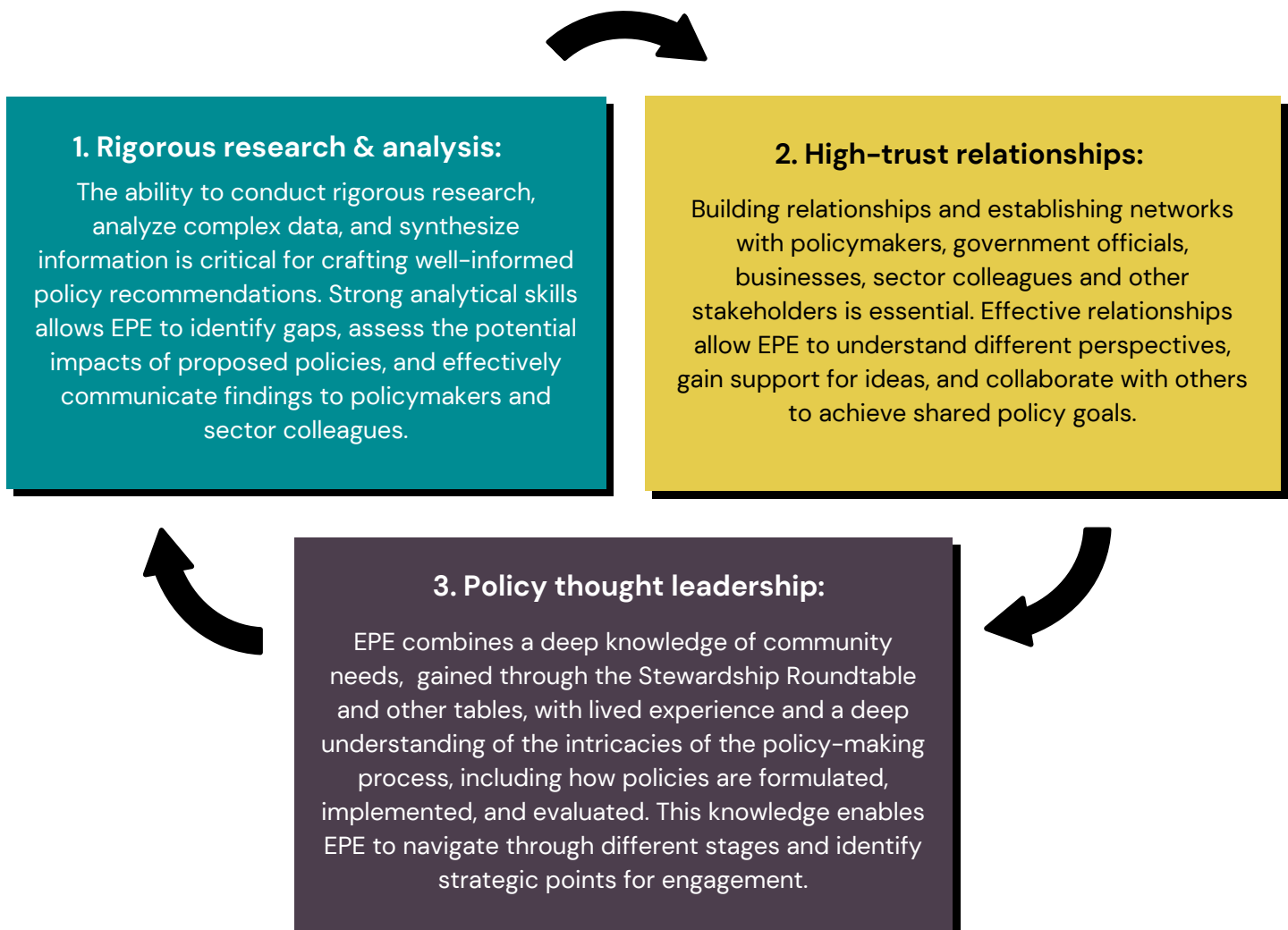
“Because we do not have a system of early learning and care, it is essential to have a collaborative entity to focus on, and problem solve, regarding the early years. Right now, the ECELC serves as this entity in the Edmonton region.” - ECELC member

All ECELC members participate in monthly meetings and contribute to at least one of three working groups that convene regularly to focus on different aspects of ELCC:

Strategic Advancement Working Group	Coordinating Community Action Working Group	Coordinating Data Working Group
<p><i>Objective:</i> To engage with and advocate to the municipal, provincial, and federal government for an integrated system of ELCC in Edmonton.</p>	<p><i>Objective:</i> To collaboratively develop a process to resolve issues of accessibility, affordability, quality, and inclusivity in ELCC.</p>	<p><i>Objective:</i> To provide data and evidence-based research to the ECELC and publish reports for the public and relevant stakeholders.</p>

How does the ECELC create impact across EPE's three anchors?

This section demonstrates the depth and breadth of the Council's work this past year. It highlights three examples that illustrate how the ECELC complements EPE's three anchors of rigorous research and analysis, high-trust relationships, and policy thought leadership. Alongside the examples are lists of activities that the Council undertook from September 2022 to August 2023. While these activity lists are not comprehensive, they demonstrate the Council's ability to form strategic and responsive relationships, which are laying the groundwork for an integrated ELCC system.



1. Rigorous research and analysis

Rigorous research and analysis are essential to developing a strong, integrated ELCC system. For policymakers to maximize benefits of the ELCC sector for children and their parents, they must base their decisions on the best available evidence drawn from both research and local context and experiences. The Council helps advance this goal by contributing timely evidence to the broader sector.

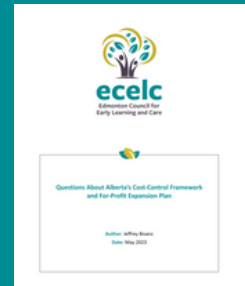
From September 2022 to August 2023, the ECELC:

Produced many briefs and reports, including:

- [“Journeys through early learning and child care in Edmonton: The experiences of ethnocultural families”](#) (January 2023)
- [“Quality and educator dispositions for Indigenous families in the urban early learning and child care context: A scoping review”](#) International Journal of Care and Education Policy (March 2023)
- [“The Alberta Compensation Framework Report: ECE Wage Grid Recommendations”](#) (March 2023)
- Briefing note to Councillor Aaron Paquette re: the Cost Control Framework (April 2023)
- Brief in support of Government of Canada’s Bill C-35 (April 2023)
- [“Questions About Alberta’s Cost-Control Framework and For-Profit Expansion Plan”](#) (May 2023)
- [“Summary: Questions About Alberta’s Cost- Control Framework and For-Profit Expansion Plan”](#) (May 2023)
- Briefing notes to Leela Aheer (former Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism, and Status of Women), Matt Jones (former Minister of Affordability and Utilities), and Mickey Amery (former Minister of Children and Family Services) about the affordability of quality learning and opportunities.

Began analysing data from the [Alberta Parent Survey on ELCC](#) about the quality, affordability, inclusivity, accessibility, and flexibility of ELCC.

Hosted focus groups with ELCC service providers to discuss Alberta’s Cost Control Framework and For-Profit Expansion Plan (June 1, 2023).



Example of rigorous research and analysis: *The Alberta Parent Survey on ELCC*

“The success of Canada’s initiative to meet high standards of quality, affordability, accessibility, inclusion, and flexibility will depend in part on the extent to which changes to ELCC meet the needs and expectations of parents. As a result, it is essential that we compile evidence on and learn from parents’ views and experiences with respect to ELCC in Alberta.” - CUP researcher

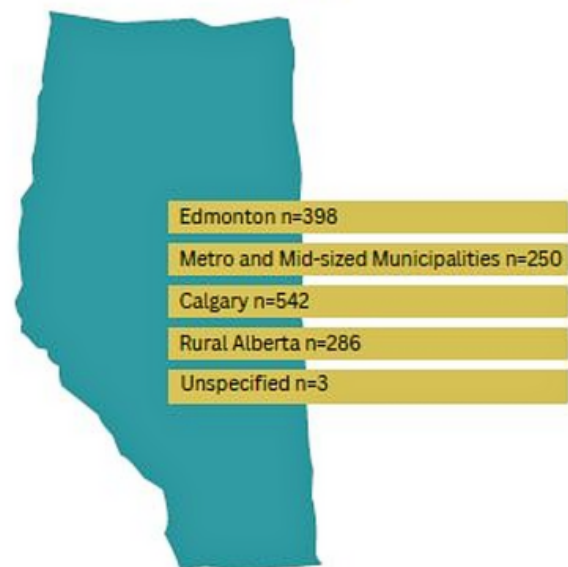
The federal government has committed funding to support ELCC through multilateral Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements, including the Canada-Alberta Agreement. These agreements will benefit many families who use formal child care arrangements. However, a lack of municipal or provincial data around parents’ needs and preferences for ELCC arrangements has prevented the Council from making well-informed recommendations, particularly to support families living in or near poverty or in areas where ELCC programs are scarce.

The ECELC, the Muttart Foundation, and the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth and Families (CUP) partnered to fill these knowledge gaps by creating a survey of Alberta parents.

The survey provides data on:

1. **the overall population of families with young children,**
2. **perspectives of families at different income levels, and**
3. **perspectives of families living in different parts of the province.**

Survey data was collected between May 30 and July 11, 2022. Parents were randomly recruited to complete the survey if they were at least 18 years old and had children between the ages of zero to five that live with them at least 50% of the time. The data was weighted using the 2021 federal census.



The survey collected data from 1,479 parents.

The ECELC is working with 2 CUP researchers, 1 graduate student, and 1 postdoctoral fellow on a series of reports aligned with the five principles of child care included in the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework (quality, affordability, inclusivity, accessibility, and flexibility). At the time of writing, researchers have completed data analysis and begun writing the five reports. Once the reports are complete, the ECELC will share them with the Ministry of Children and Family Services, make them available to its network, and present the findings to Child Care Now in February 2024.

Impacts

The survey collected the perspectives of Alberta parents regarding their current ELCC arrangements and preferences. This unique data can provide policymakers with a better understanding of the five principles of child care included in the Canada–Alberta Agreement and help them determine steps needed to develop an integrated ELCC system.

- **Quality:** The Canada–Alberta Agreement aims to improve quality by developing evidence-based frameworks, standards, and tools for ELCC; using Alberta’s existing wage scale with wage top-ups for ECEs; and increasing the percentage of ECEs who meet Alberta’s certification requirements. However, quality is a subjective term that has not yet been defined in the Agreement. The survey findings can help the province define quality by providing insight into how Alberta parents themselves understand quality in the context of ELCC. For example, quality may include centres that provide meals and snacks or a minimum level of education ECEs should obtain.
- **Affordability:** The Canada–Alberta Agreement has already reduced fees by an average of 50% and aims to reach an average of \$10 per day by 2026. The survey collected information from parents about their views on the affordability of ELCC in the province, which can inform recommendations to make ELCC more affordable, especially for low-income families.
- **Inclusivity:** The Canada–Alberta Agreement aims to make ELCC more inclusive by ensuring families facing barriers have equitable access to child care spaces. The survey findings include the perspectives of parents from equity-deserving groups, which can inform decision-making around the cultural appropriateness and inclusivity of ELCC in Alberta.
- **Accessibility:** The Canada–Alberta Agreement aims to ensure families can access ELCC by increasing the number of licensed spaces. The survey will help illuminate the views and preferences of parents around accessibility and accessibility-related barriers.
- **Flexibility:** The Canada–Alberta Agreement aims to make ELCC flexible to the needs of families. Flexible ELCC may include drop-in or extended child care hours beyond normal business times. The survey will provide insight into current challenges to flexible child care and the extent to which flexibility is an important factor for parents making decisions around ELCC.

2. High-trust relationships

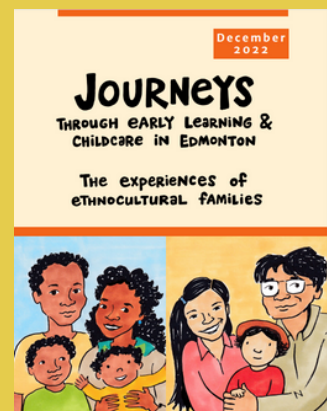
The ELCC sector includes numerous organizations that need to collaborate on an integrated system that benefits all families, including children and families experiencing vulnerabilities. To effectively collaborate and share information, the ECELC establishes high-trust relationships where all individuals are respected for their knowledge, expertise, and experience. High-trust relationships that promote supportive, safe, non-judgemental environments are especially important when working with people from equity-deserving groups or people who have experienced discrimination or poverty

“The ECELC brings together many different perspectives and makes visible the work being done on behalf of and alongside children and families.” - ECELC member

From September 2022 to August 2023, the ECELC:

Collaborated with CUP and Dr. Pieter de Vos to support the Multicultural Health Brokers (MCHB) to develop composite stories about accessing ELCC in Edmonton, which involved engaging 30 parents from ethnocultural communities.

- [The Journeys Project](#) was launched in April 2023 with a public presentation and report. CBC News provided [media coverage of the event](#).



Connected with partners from municipal, provincial, and federal governments to discuss topics related to ELCC, such as:

- Underutilized spaces in the City of Edmonton
- The Cost Control Framework and For-Profit Expansion Plan
- Micro-credentialing for ECEs

Collaborated with the Association of Early Child Care Educators of Alberta (AECEA) to conduct research and develop [“The Alberta Compensation Framework Report: ECE Wage Grid Recommendations”](#)

Collaborated with Rupertsland Institute to share connections, learn more about authentic Métis ways of being, and participate in the Early Learning Education Childcare Training (ELECT) program.

Drafted a proposed “Engaging the City” plan to support the City of Edmonton in advocating for ELCC.

Examples of high-trust relationships: *CUP, Rupertsand Institute, AECEA*

The Council actively develops relationships with institutional and community partners that are not already represented in its membership. Establishing high-trust relationships is time-intensive and requires patience; however, it results in many mutual benefits and leads to collective impact. These examples demonstrate that relationships are the lifeblood of the ECELC. As articulated recently by an ECELC member: **“the Council can only do the work we do because of the network we have created. We need a network because we don’t have an ELCC system.”**

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

CUP has been a member of the ECELC since its inception in 2019 and has played a key role in supporting and generating rigorous research and analysis. Over the past four years, CUP has funded a full-time Research Associate to provide expertise, capacity, and resources to the Council. This staff member has worked in lockstep with the Council to produce over 20 briefs, papers, and reports; bring evidence to discussions; and leverage additional research capacity by bringing in knowledge mobilization experts, research assistants, undergraduate and graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows.

CUP researchers are also active members of the Coordinating Community Action Working Group and Coordinating Data Working Group.

The long-term relationship between the ECELC and CUP demonstrates the mutual benefit resulting from partnerships between community organizations and research institutions.



These papers (Headed Up, But Still Behind; Still Unaffordable for Low-Income Families?; Still More Work to be Done; and A Profile of Edmonton Child Care in 2019) are a sample of the ones written by CUP researchers in collaboration with the ECELC.

Rupertsland Institute (Métis Centre of Excellence)

This year, the EPE Directors of Early Learning and Care met with the Métis Early Learning staff at Rupertsland Institute to learn more about their work related to ELCC and to assist in connecting them with post-secondary institutions that offer ELCC instruction. Rupertsland Institute also attended an ECELC meeting to present an overview of their Early Learning Education Childcare Training (ELECT) program and find candidates to join the program. ECELC members shared the program within their respective networks, resulting in additional participants joining Rupertsland's first year of training.

This new and emerging relationship has expanded Rupertsland Institute's knowledge and connections while improving the ECELC's understanding of Métis ways of being and how to weave Métis education into early learning centres.

Association of Early Childhood Educators (AECEA)

“ECEs are leaving the sector in large numbers and being replaced by new hires, which limits efforts at building a stronger ELCC system” (10)

Alberta needs a stable and educated early childhood educator (ECE) workforce for the Canada-Alberta Agreement to be successful. However, ECE wages have largely remained stagnant since 2007 and many ECEs work without non-salaried compensation (e.g., benefits, insurance plans, etc.), which contributes to high rates of turnover in the sector (10). Many child care operators in Edmonton have voiced that they are struggling to hire and retain well-educated ECEs. To maintain the workforce both in Edmonton and Alberta, ECEs need to feel valued and respected for their education, knowledge, and experience.

The ECELC, CUP, and AECEA are collaborating to propose a wage grid for Alberta ECEs that is based on ECE values and aims to address stability issues in the sector. The project, guided by a CUP research team, requires all partners to contribute expertise, time, and resources while maintaining open communication about the work, progress, and reception of the wage grid. Partners have demonstrated professionalism and commitment to ongoing engagement, strengthening trust between them and broadening the project's scope. The project has also led to new partnerships as researchers connected with child care organizations across Canada to discuss ECE wage grids.

In Phase 1 of the project, researchers developed an innovative values-based wage grid in which the grades and increments capture the education, experience, and knowledge of ECEs. Partners used the research team's first report, [“The Alberta Compensation Framework Report: ECE Wage Grid Recommendations,”](#) to advocate to the province for the development of a values-based wage grid informed by research literature and ECEs' lived experiences. Researchers also presented the proposed wage grid at an AECEA connect webinar, emphasizing how the grid seeks to provide fair compensation and improve workforce stability.

Level	Grade 1	Grade 2 +3%	Grade 3 +3%	Grade 4 +3%	Grade 5 +3%	Grade 6 +3%	Grade 7 +3%	Grade 8 +3%
ECE 1	20.20*	20.8	21.43	22.07	22.73	23.42	24.12	24.85
ECE 2 +12.9%	22.81	23.49	24.19	24.92	25.69	26.44	27.23	28.05
ECE 3 +12.9%	25.75	26.52	27.31	28.13	28.99	29.85	30.74	31.67

\$20.20 = Base entry wage, based on average reported ECE wage in Alberta, according to the Alberta Labour Survey as reported by ALIS in 2019. Researchers recommend that Grade 1 is the base entry an ECE should earn upon entry into the sector and needs to align with their current certification level

Phase 2 of the project, which took place in summer 2023, saw researchers using a community-engaged research approach to test the grid with owners/operators and ECEs. They found that most owners/operators supported a wage grid; however, are uncertain about how it would be funded, while ECEs indicated that it would contribute to the professionalism of the sector. In upcoming phases, researchers will refine the grid with current living wage data, regional considerations, and inflation indexing as well as add workforce competencies to each of the grades.

In remaining phases of the project, partners will continue working closely to amplify the voices of ECEs and advocate for the province to endorse a wage grid that offers fair compensation. To retain ECEs, the Government of Alberta must pay attention to the lived experiences of those involved in the ELCC sector and learn from the examples set by other Canadian provinces that have implemented ECE wage grids, including Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.

The research team's ability to propose a wage grid that reflects the needs and values of ECEs, operators, and other ELCC stakeholders depends on high-trust relationships between the ECELC, the AECEA, and CUP.

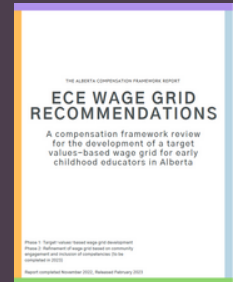
3. Policy thought leadership

The ECELC has worked to become a trusted source of information and ideas within the complicated policy domain of ELCC in Edmonton and Alberta. As a policy thought leader, the ECELC pulls together community knowledge with a deep understanding of the policy-making process. For example, the Council has been providing evidence-based recommendations around funding \$10-a-day child care in Alberta.

From September 2022 to August 2023, the ECELC:

Advocated for an integrated ELCC system through numerous meetings with:

- Edmonton City Councillors – including Tim Cartmell, Andrew Knack, Aaron Paquette, Jennifer Rice, Sarah Hamilton, and Bailey Daines (Erin Rutherford’s Executive Assistant)
- Provincial government stakeholders – including MLA Sarah Hoffman; Sherri Wilson, Deputy Minister of Children and Family Services; Stephanie Clarke, Deputy Minister of Affordability and Utilities; and Wendy Doyle, Executive Director of Child Care Policy
- Federal government stakeholders – including Randy Boissonnault, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development, and Official Languages; and Karina Gould, Minister of Families, Children, and Social Development
- Various community organizations (e.g., Indigenous Childcare Centre, Child Care Now, Multicultural Health Brokers, Vibrant Communities Calgary, Alberta Community and Cooperative Association, Rupertsland Institute, and New Zealand’s early childhood education micro-credentialing program)



Hosted a Lunch and Learn to provide an overview of ELCC in Edmonton to City Councillors (January 2023)

Wrote briefing notes about:

- The Cost Control Framework, submitted to Councillor Aaron Paquette (April 2023)
- Bill C-35, submitted to the federal government (April 2023)
- Affordability of quality learning opportunities, submitted to Matt Jones (former Minister of Affordability and Utilities) and Mickey Amery (former Minister of Children and Family Services)

Participated in a consultation with Edmonton City Council regarding 15-minute cities and child care.

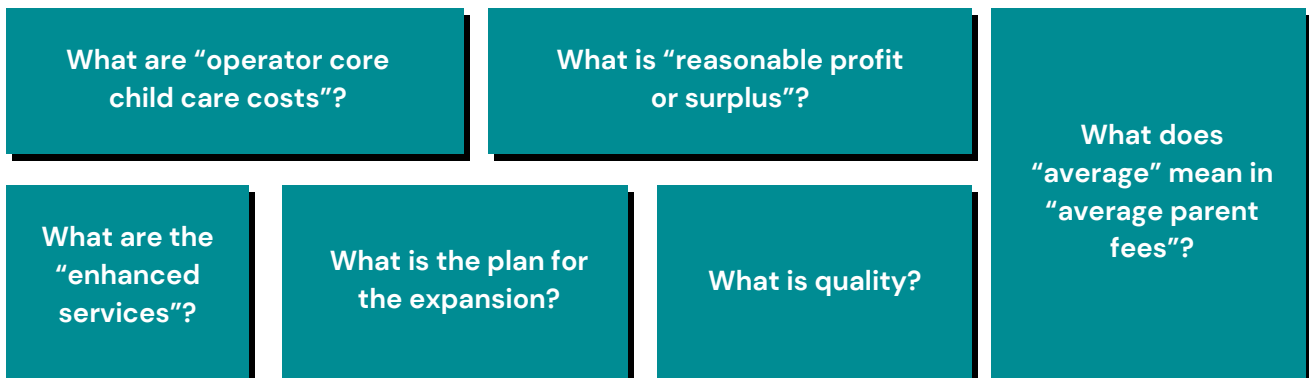
Participated in the Child Care Now Day of Action, which advocates for affordable, quality, accessible, and inclusive child care for all.

Collaborated with the Association of Early Child Care Educators of Alberta (AECEA) to publish the [ECE Wage Grid Recommendations](#) (February 2023), which were also presented by researchers at an [AECEA Connect webinar](#) for ECEs (March 2023).

Example of policy thought leadership: *Alberta's Cost Control Framework and For-Profit Expansion Plan*

On January 31, 2023, the Ministry of Children's Services released its [Cost Control Framework and For-Profit Expansion Plan](#) to support the development of an ELCC system that will provide services at an average cost of \$10 per day by 2026 (11). The Cost Control Framework will "guide the sound and reasonable use of public funds," while the For-Profit Expansion Plan will allow for up to 22,500 additional licensed private child care spaces to be eligible for funding supports by 2025-26 (11), on top of the 42,500 non-profit child care spaces outlined in Canada-Alberta Agreement (1).

In response, ECELC member Dr. Jeffrey Bisanz published "[Questions About Alberta's Cost-Control Framework and For-Profit Expansion Plan](#)" and "[Summary: Questions About Alberta's Cost-Control Framework and For-Profit Expansion Plan](#)," which were sent to the Ministry of Children and Family Services. The publications highlight six critical questions that must be addressed as Alberta attempts to build an effective ELCC system:



To ensure the implementation of the Cost Control Framework is rooted in the experiences and expertise of ELCC providers, the ECELC's Coordinating Community Action Working Group partnered with Child Care Association for Resources to Administrators (CAFRA) to host a focus group about the framework on June 1.

The event brought together 46 child care centre directors and early childhood leaders to discuss core services they believe should be funded under the Cost Control Framework and shared insight into what constitutes high-quality ELCC. Service providers emphasized the importance of covering human resources, administrative, programming, operational, and facility costs. For example, they want opportunities for ECEs to advance their education without it costing providers or parents, new learning aids and materials, and a standardized ECE wage grid (such as described on page 13)



“[If these recommendations were adopted, I would have] freedom to truly apply my training, expertise, and seasoned experience to passionately, positively impact children and families, setting them up for success to become outstanding adults in society.” - Focus group participant

EPE’s Executive Director, Erick Ambtman, submitted a report to the provincial ministries encouraging the province to adopt the recommended core services identified by attendees of the focus group. The report outlined specific core services and their justification. EPE’s Director of Early Learning and Care, Leah Oakley, also submitted a briefing note to Edmonton City Councillor Aaron Paquette.

This example illustrates the ECELC’s impact as a policy thought leader. By engaging in ongoing strategic dialogue with stakeholders across the sector, the Council responds to issues proactively and reactively. In the future, ECELC members intend to participate in government consultations with respect to the Cost Control Framework and For-Profit Expansion Plan to ensure that the voices of service providers are heard and included in the planning process.

Focus for the coming year

The ECELC is continuing the work necessary to design, promote, and build an integrated ELCC system in Edmonton that is publicly managed and funded, has an educated and well-supported workforce, coordinates services needed to support young children and their families, and contributes to poverty elimination.

In the coming year, the ECELC will:

1. Engage in further **rigorous research and analysis**, including:

- Working with the Multicultural Health Brokers and the 30 parents from different ethnocultural backgrounds who participated in the Journeys project to determine next steps for mobilizing knowledge
- Having meaningful dialogue with child care operators and ECEs through focus groups and other means
- Preparing papers and resources based on emergent research and ECEs' lived experience to be shared with practitioners and the Minister of Children and Family Services
- Publishing five reports based on the Alberta Parent Survey on ELCC, which will provide recommendations to improve quality, affordability, inclusivity, and accessibility in the ELCC system

2. Maintain **high-trust relationships** with community members, and municipal, provincial, and federal stakeholders, including:

- New ECELC members from racialized and Indigenous communities
- Searle Turton, Minister of Children and Family Services, and his administrative staff
- Diana Batten, Member of the Legislative Assembly and Opposition Critic for Child Care
- Mayor Amarjeet Sohi and Edmonton City Councillors

3. Continue its **policy thought leadership** and advocacy for an integrated ELCC system, including by:

- Engaging with Edmonton City Council and administration ("Engaging the City" plan) to obtain support for activities that will help the ECELC build an integrated ELCC system, including the development of a city policy related to ELCC, and build strong working relationships
- Advocating for the provincial and federal governments to encourage and allow municipal governments to play a role in planning, implementing, and allocation of ELCC funding for Edmonton
- Recommending city-wide planning and management of ELCC spaces
- Advocating to the province for an ELCC system that includes input into a local workforce plan, provides adequate funding for both for-profit and not-for-profit operators, supports low-income families and families experiencing vulnerabilities, and reflects the unique needs of individual municipalities
- Seeking strategies to bridge the divide between for-profit and non-profit child care providers by emphasizing common interests and a focus on quality provision.

Summary

From September 2022 to August 2023, the ECELC was active across all aspects of the ELCC sector through advocacy, data collection and analysis, community engagement, partnership building, knowledge gathering, and knowledge mobilization. Although establishing an integrated ELCC system is a long-term goal, each of these activities contributes to incremental shifts toward the development of such a system.

Many families use formal child care arrangements to care for their young children. A strong ELCC system will allow these children to experience better cognitive and behavioural development, attain higher education, and have a greater income in adulthood. Meanwhile, parents will be able to contribute to the workforce and strengthen the economy. Thus, an integrated ELCC system will help to reduce poverty in Edmonton.

The ECELC will continue to work with EPE and the seven other “game changers” for a systems-level approach to eliminating poverty within a generation.

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Glossary of terms

Early learning and child care (ELCC): ELCC, which is also known as “early learning and care,” refers to educational programming and care for children (birth to five years old) at child care centres, early education programs, preschools, and out-of-school care (e.g., day homes) by an individual other than the child’s parent or guardian.³

Early childhood educator (ECE): ECES are educators that help to plan, organize, and initiate activities to help children develop and learn intellectually, physically, and emotionally. ECEs work with infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-aged children in a variety of settings.

Young child: “Young children” or “younger children” generally refers to those between 0 and 5 years of age.

Canada–Alberta Canada–Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, 2021–2026 (Canada–Alberta Agreement): The Canada–Alberta Agreement is a commitment between the Government of Canada and province of Alberta that outlines the vision and objectives for ELCC, as well as the investment of funds.¹

Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework : This framework outlines guiding principles and objectives to prioritize investments in regulated early learning and child care programs and services for children under age six.¹

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