



## Recommended Actions for the City of Edmonton in Support of Early Learning and Care



May 7, 2021

*The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care recommends 10 actions that can be taken by the City of Edmonton and that will support many families, contribute to economic and social recovery from the COVID pandemic, and help to address some of the critical priorities found in the City Plan, the Economic Action Plan, and the ongoing work of EndPovertyEdmonton.*

EndPovertyEdmonton identified early learning and care as one of six “game changers” that must be addressed if poverty is to be eliminated from Edmonton in a generation. EndPovertyEdmonton also recognized the need to work toward an integrated system of high quality and affordable early learning and care. The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELc) was created to pursue this work. It comprises eighteen institutional and community partners with expertise and experience in early learning and care.

The ECELc has worked diligently to assess current conditions and needs, to develop partnerships, to explore options, and to identify paths for moving forward. It is time to act. Based on its work to date, the ECELc recommends to the City of Edmonton actions in three categories (Policy, Initial Strategy, and Advocacy) that, together, constitute initial steps toward building a system that will

- provide high quality early learning and care that is affordable, accessible, and inclusive for all families that need it, including low-income and vulnerable families,
- nurture healthy social, emotional, and intellectual development in children, preparing them for success in school and in their communities,
- support families who need or want to improve their employment status and/or advance their education or training,
- advance the City of Edmonton’s commitments to economic recovery from the pandemic, to gender equity, to elimination of poverty, and to the wellbeing of Indigenous, newcomer, low-income, and homeless families,
- support specific objectives in the Edmonton City Plan (Direction 1.2.2, 1.3.3) and the Edmonton Economic Action Plan (Action 17),
- position Edmonton to benefit from the plan for a national system of early learning and child care, as described in the federal budget of April, 2021, and
- support the rights of children and parents (as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) and advance reconciliation (as prescribed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in its Calls to Action).

To build a system that can accomplish these outcomes, patchwork responses to immediate, short-term problems will not be sufficient. Systemic, coordinated solutions are required to meet the needs of the city’s growing population and diverse communities. Edmonton desperately needs an integrated system of early learning and care for its young children, from infancy to kindergarten.

### Policy and Strategy

City Council has endorsed the EndPovertyEdmonton strategy, but Edmonton lacks an overarching early learning and care policy and strategy of the sort that provides strong guidance in municipalities elsewhere. Actions 1 and 2 will ensure that the City develops, implements, and monitors a clear policy



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and strategy that will guide the development of an integrated system of early learning and care in the years to come.

### Action 1:

That designated City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care and partners to create a policy and strategy to promote high quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care in Edmonton, and that this policy and strategy be presented to City Council for endorsement.

### Action 2:

That City staff and the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care report on progress to City Council annually and revise the strategy as necessary.

## Elements of an Initial Strategy

Municipal governments in Canada typically are not primarily responsible for early learning and care. Nevertheless, many municipalities have chosen to improve the delivery of early learning and care services because they recognize its importance to the vitality of their cities and the wellbeing of their citizens.

In our review of municipal actions elsewhere, one key ingredient is the City's role in establishing partnerships with local school boards and other levels of government to address barriers to high quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care. These barriers include lack of coordinated planning, inadequate assessment of needs, challenges to ensuring quality, lack of space, lack of affordable options, challenges to ensuring cultural responsiveness, and more. Actions 3-8 target some pressing issues and will create and strengthen the partnerships and capacities necessary for building a system. Implementing these actions will require active input from Indigenous and newcomer families and those marginalized by economic and social factors.

### Action 3:

That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care and partners to ensure that high quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care is part of ongoing plans regarding zoning (such as the Zoning Bylaw Renewal Initiative), space (such as the Joint Use Agreement), and neighbourhood development (including 15-minute districts).

### Action 4:

That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care and partners to ensure that high quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care is included in implementing elements of the City Plan and the Economic Action Plan that involve the development of healthy, vibrant communities.

### Action 5:

That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, local school boards, and other levels of government to convene and resource a Data Working Group to ensure that the data required for needs assessments and for planning and managing a system of early learning and care are collected, analyzed, and shared.

### Action 6:

That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, local school boards, and the provincial government to convene and resource a Problem-Solving Working Group to address problems in finding space, co-locating services, and addressing issues of affordability, quality, and inclusiveness in early learning and care.



## Recommended Actions for the City of Edmonton in Support of Early Learning and Care

### Action 7:

That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care and partners in other levels of government, postsecondary education, and community organizations to plan the development of two high quality early learning and care demonstration centres. These centres will help early childhood educators build the culturally sensitive competencies and dispositions needed to work effectively with diverse children and families. One centre would be devoted to meeting the needs of Indigenous children and families, and the other to meeting the needs of refugee and immigrant children and families.

### Action 8:

That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, and possibly with other levels of government, to create and fund a grant program designed to help early learning and care centres meet the needs of Indigenous and newcomer children and families and those marginalized by economic and social factors.

## Advocacy

The City has been very effective in advocating for increased support for critical social development goals, such as improving transit and increasing the supply of affordable housing. Municipal governments can be powerful advocates to other levels of government and local school boards in support of high quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care. Implementing Actions 9 and 10 will allow the City to capitalize on opportunities related to building an integrated system of early learning and care by advocating in a timely and targeted fashion.

### Action 9:

That the City, with advice from the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, advocate to the federal and provincial governments for a role in planning, implementing, and allocating federal funding for the anticipated national system of early learning and child care as it applies to Edmonton.

### Action 10:

That the City, with advice from the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, advocate strongly for an integrated system of early learning and care that is high in quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive for all families that need it, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of low-income and vulnerable families.

## Conclusion

These actions can be initiated immediately, and subsequent actions can take place over the next few years after an overarching early learning and care policy and strategy are developed. The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care looks forward to working with City Council and administration to implement these actions. More detailed support for these actions will be available at [ecelc.ca](http://ecelc.ca), the website for the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care.

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*For questions or further discussion, please contact [info@ecelc.ca](mailto:info@ecelc.ca).*