

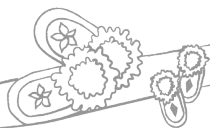
## What We Heard Report

# Approaches to Wage Grid, Certification and New Funding Mechanism for Early Learning and Child Care

May 2024

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## Executive Summary

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) has identified the commitments to develop a wage grid, certification process, and a new funding mechanism through the *2030 Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Strategy*.

This work aligns with the two federal funding agreements ECE has with the Department of Employment and Social Development (ESDC); the *Canada-Northwest Territories (NWT) ELCC Agreement* and the *Canada-NWT Canada-wide ELCC Agreement*.

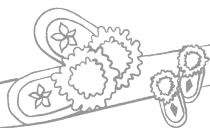
Following engagements on amendments to legislation and regulations, changes to the *Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Act*, *ELCC Standards Regulations* and *ELCC Funding Regulations* came into effect May 1, 2023. These changes were necessary to allow for implementation of a wage grid and certification process. Additional regulatory changes will be implemented to further support these initiatives, including the new funding mechanism being developed in response to the *ELCC Funding Program Review (2021)*.

ECE developed approaches to a wage grid, certification process, and a new funding mechanism with input and feedback received from community-based ELCC partners, including Indigenous Governments, the NWT Early Childhood Association (NWTECA), licensed early learning and child care program operators, and early childhood educators.

In January 2024, ECE invited community-based ELCC partners to share information on the proposed approaches to these initiatives. In total, there were eight virtual information sessions. Each session consisted of a presentation followed by opportunities to ask questions and discuss the information that has been shared.

This What We Heard Report provides a summary of the information sessions. As the presentation focused on the overview of the proposed approaches to the wage grid, certification, and new funding mechanism, most of the feedback received from participants involved clarification of the approaches in context-specific situations of individuals and programs.

ECE will use the information gathered to finalize the approaches and inform phase two of the proposed amendments to the Regulations in 2024-2025.



## Introduction

Amendments to the *Child Day Care Act* and regulations were determined necessary by ECE to ensure the implementation of the *2030 ELCC Strategy* and achievement of the targets identified within the *Canada-NWT ELCC Agreement* and the *Canada-NWT Canada-wide ELCC Agreement*.

ECE is taking a phased approach to develop amendments to the Regulations to ensure the legislative changes support and meet the needs of Indigenous Governments, licensed early learning and child care programs, early childhood educators, children and families.

Phase one of the amendments to the regulations focused on maximum fees, financial reporting, and reporting requirements. A summary of the findings from phase one has been captured in this [What We Heard Report](#).

Phase two is focused on proposed amendments to establishing a wage grid, certification process, and a new funding mechanism.

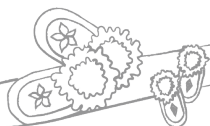
An important step towards developing these initiatives is collaboration with community-based ELCC partners, including Indigenous Governments, the NWTECA, licensed early learning and child care program operators, and early childhood educators.

To ensure community-based ELCC partners had the opportunity to provide their perspective, ECE created a presentation to share based on feedback gathered from previous engagement. The critical elements to be considered included:

- certification requirements built on the current credentialing requirements to consider education experience, and knowledge of local Indigenous culture, beliefs, language, and traditions;
- funding to support implementation of a wage grid to outline the minimum salaries for early childhood educators working in licensed centre-based programs; and,
- a new funding mechanism that shifts away from the attendance-based model for the Early Childhood Program (ECP) operating subsidy to a more predictable funding approach with less variability, less administrative complexity, offsetting costs but not fully funding, and with improvements to program sustainability.

From May and June 2023, ECE engaged with community-based ELCC partners to receive feedback on the critical elements and a summary of that engagement has been captured in this [What We Heard Report](#). Feedback from the engagement towards a wage grid, certification process, and new funding mechanism, along with the data received from licensed early learning and child care programs, was used to develop the proposed approaches to these commitments.

ECE would like to thank all who participated in the information sessions. Your input is valued and will help inform the phase two of the proposed amendments to the regulations.



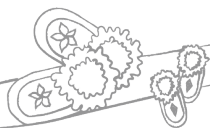
# Methodology

The information sessions on the proposed approaches were developed separately for centre-based program operators, early childhood educators, and home-based operators.

Each session consisted of a virtual engagement facilitated by ECE staff members. A notetaker was in attendance to accurately capture all discussions. Each session consisted of a PowerPoint presentation outlining the three approaches but based on the audience and likelihood of interest in more details in some areas (e.g., certification and wages for educators; all three topics for centre-based; funding mechanism for family day homes). ECE tailored the presentation to each group while providing all of the information more generally. Table 1 lays out the critical elements and the proposed approaches.

**Table 1: Critical Elements and Proposed Approaches**

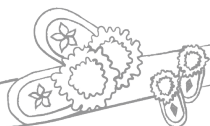
Key Outcome	Critical Elements	Proposed Approaches
<b>Wage Grid</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new funding mechanism that shifts away from attendance-based model for Early Childhood Program (ECP) operating subsidy</li> <li>• Funding to support implementation of a wage grid for early childhood educators working directly with children in licensed centre-based programs</li> <li>• Consideration of certification process (i.e., education, experience)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prescribes the minimum that an educator must be paid, but allows for higher wages to be paid</li> <li>• Considers roles and responsibilities within licensed programs, length of time working, education level, and geographic location</li> <li>• Annual retention allowance for individuals choosing to remain in the sector long-term.</li> <li>• Acknowledges the knowledge and experiences of individuals who are Indigenous</li> </ul>
<b>Certification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certification requirements that consider education experience, and knowledge of local Indigenous knowledge, culture, beliefs, language, and traditions</li> <li>• Credentialing documents (i.e., Criminal Record Check with Vulnerable Sector Search, immunizations, primary staff education requirements) are still required to work in a licensed program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows for all current and future educators employed by a centre-based program to become certified</li> <li>• Recognizes knowledge, post-secondary education specific to early child development, and time spent working in ELCC programs in the NWT, Canada and internationally</li> <li>• Consists of five pathways and a provisional pathway</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires recertification every three years</li> </ul>
<p><b>New Funding Mechanism</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shifts away from attendance-based to more predictable funding with less variability</li> <li>• Fewer funding streams</li> <li>• Less administratively complex</li> <li>• Improved sustainability but does not fully fund</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre-based programs:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Dedicated Funding for staff wages and employer related cost</li> <li>○ Flexible Funding that can be used for operating cost</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Home-based program:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enrolled space-based funding</li> <li>○ Annual retention allowance for individuals who have operated continuously for 5 or more years</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Streamlined reporting with 3 quarterly reports and 1 annual report (includes 4<sup>th</sup> quarter report)</li> <li>• Funding provided in advance of quarterly payment, with retroactive adjustments based on actuals</li> </ul>

A total of eight sessions were held between January 19 and January 24, 2024 with a total of 64 participants representing Indigenous Governments, centre-based program operators, home-based operators, and early childhood educators. Some participants attended multiple information sessions, where additional insight was provided, or initial perspectives were reinforced.

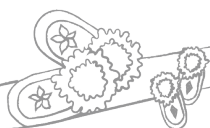
A summary of the findings from the information session period is provided below. All findings in this report are presented to ensure that each participant’s feedback is reflected accurately in a comprehensive and equitable manner.



## Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

**Table 2: Limitations, Impacts, and Mitigations for Limitations**

Limitation	Impact	Mitigation Strategy
<p><b>Relatively small size of community based ELCC partners posed threats to confidentiality of participants.</b></p>	<p>The limitation does not directly impact validity or reliability of the findings.</p>	<p>In the process of transcription and reporting, summary of discussions was edited to exclude identifiers in the document.</p>
<p><b>Dependence on voluntary participation of community based ELCC partners.</b></p>	<p>Low participation rates in the engagement may adversely affect the reliability and representativeness of the data. Unrepresentative and unreliable data cannot be used to confidently make decisions on this basis.</p>	<p>To create favourable conditions for participation, ECE sent invitation and reminder emails to target audiences and hosted multiple engagement opportunities during various times of day, and days of the week for all sessions.</p>
<p><b>Engagement and report conducted internally by ECE.</b></p>	<p>Engagements coordinated and facilitated by those (ECE) seeking feedback may receive more positive feedback than an external facilitator, as respondents feel less anonymous.</p>	<p>The findings as presented in this report were provided to all participants, wherever possible, for review for accuracy and additional input. This provided participants the opportunity to reconsider or add to their feedback with more anonymity.</p>

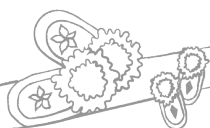


# What We Heard

## Wage Grid

Critical Elements	Proposed Approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new funding mechanism that shifts away from attendance-based model for Early Childhood Program (ECP) operating subsidy</li> <li>• Funding to support implementation of a wage grid for early childhood educators working directly with children in licensed centre-based programs Consideration of certification process (i.e., education, experience)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prescribes the minimum that an educator must be paid, but allows for higher wages to be paid</li> <li>• Considers roles and responsibilities within licensed programs, length of time working, education level, and geographic location</li> <li>• Annual retention allowance for individuals choosing to remain in the sector long-term</li> <li>• Acknowledges the knowledge and experiences of individuals who are Indigenous</li> </ul>

The feedback regarding the wage grid were mostly focused on participants asking clarifying questions to the developed approach. Some participants commented on how the wage grid would work for employees that have obtained education but do not necessarily fit into the identified common roles provided, such as administration staff, finance staff, and casual staff as well as the specified role they are currently in. There was a concern raised by a participant that the rate between educator roles and management positions does not provide a reasonable amount and concerned this may pose a challenge in encouraging individuals into leadership positions. A clarifying question was raised around the years of service and if it would be cumulative in the sector or within a specific program.





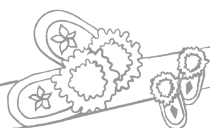
## Certification

Critical Elements	Proposed Approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certification requirements that consider education experience, and knowledge of local Indigenous knowledge, culture, beliefs, language, and traditions</li> <li>• Credentialing documents (i.e., Criminal Record Check with Vulnerable Sector Search, immunizations, primary staff education requirements) are still required to work in a licensed program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows for all current and future educators employed by a centre-based program to become certified</li> <li>• Recognizes knowledge, post-secondary education specific to early child development, and time spent working in ELCC programs in the NWT, Canada and internationally</li> <li>• Consists of five pathways and a provisional pathway</li> <li>• Requires recertification every three years</li> </ul>

Similar to the wage grid, most of the feedback focused on clarifying the proposed approach to a certification process. Some participants asked which pathway they would be on using their specific context or how the process would work for individuals new to the north wanting to work in a licensed program. A few individuals wanted clarification on how the certification and wage grid aligned. As well, participants asked about what post-secondary education requirements were being considered in the process and if equivalencies in a similar field would be considered. Questions regarding the timeline for certification, including re-certification, were put forward for discussion, including who at ECE would certify educators.

Some participants expressed their concerns as to whether the certification process may impose on current employed staff, especially for staff working in out-of-school programs. Of these respondents, some noted this could potentially discourage staff from working, especially considering retention of staff is an existing challenge at a program and national level.

Lastly, there were a few comments on the requirement for all individuals working with children in a licensed ELCC program to complete the NWT Early Childhood Essentials online training course. Many participants have expressed they have completed it already and a couple respondents wanted more information on how to start. One participant recommended opportunities for the online training course to be guided by a staff member at ECE.



## New Funding Mechanism

Critical Elements	Proposed Approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift away from attendance-based to more predictable funding with less variability</li> <li>• Fewer funding streams</li> <li>• Less administratively complex</li> <li>• Improved sustainability but does not fully fund</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre-based programs:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Dedicated Funding for staff wages and employer related cost</li> <li>○ Flexible Funding that can be used for operating cost</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Home-based program:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enrolled space-based funding</li> <li>○ Annual retention allowance for individuals who have operated continuously for 5 or more years</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Streamlined reporting with 3 quarterly reports and 1 annual report (includes 4<sup>th</sup> quarter report)</li> <li>• Funding provided in advance of quarterly payment, with retroactive adjustments based on actuals</li> </ul>

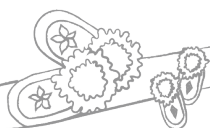
### Dedicated and Flexible Funding for Centre-Based Programs

The feedback related to the Dedicated and Flexible funding included comments related to clarifying the formulas and how much the funding would cover employee wages. Many participants referred to their program-specific context and highlighted the need to ensure the new funding streams would be considerate of programs who employ short-term staff during spring and summer breaks, provide multiple licensed programs, and coordinate with Indigenous governments' systems.

While most centre-based program operators appreciated the information on the proposed approaches to the new funding mechanism, many stated their anticipation of receiving a breakdown of their program-specific funding to fully understand its implications for their operations. A few participants expressed scepticism that they would receive more funding due the Child Care Fee Reduction (CCFR) Subsidy merging into the Dedicated and Flexible funding programs.

### Family Day Home Operational Funding

Feedback on the Family Day Home Operational Funding centered around how the approach would work for individual program context, including how it would work for program operator's children

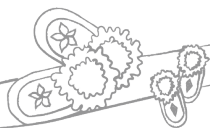


or for child care fees being paid through a third-party service, such as the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority.

Many participants indicated that the rates for the types of enrolled spaces (i.e., rates for infant, preschool, school-aged, and children with specific needs) in the proposed approach are less than the maximum rates currently identified for the Early Childhood Program (ECP) operating subsidy and expressed concern that changes would result in home-based programs receiving less funding than existing model. Participants who expressed their concerns also requested clarification on the support being provided for inclusion and the process of the calculation method to ensure there would be an increase in funding under the new funding mechanism.

## Reporting

The feedback on reporting for the new funding mechanism focused on questions about what financial information would be required. Some participants suggested the reporting should consider the overlap of information to streamline administrative processes. A few individuals stated their confusion about the reporting and payment schedule, with suggestions to consider reporting on the calendar year over the fiscal year. Lastly, communication documents for families from the GNWT regarding the collection of information about the demographic of children enrolled in licensed program as a part of the *Canada-NWT Canada-wide ELCC Agreement* was requested.

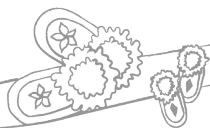


## General Findings

Overall, while we did hear concerns around specific funding amounts for programs, the information sessions on the proposed approaches for a wage grid, certification process, and new funding mechanism were generally well-received,

Most participants' feedback and discussion were interested in understanding the proposed approaches to the wage grid, certification, and new funding mechanism. Some participants requested a copy of the presentation or proposed meetings with individual program operators.

In addition to the feedback gathered, some participants acknowledged appreciation around ECE's efforts to collaborate with community-based ELCC partners, as well the support provided by the regional Early Childhood Consultants throughout the transformation process.



## Next Steps

The feedback gathered in this What We Heard report will help finalize the approaches and inform the draft regulations related to wage grid, certification process, and funding mechanism for licensed programs and early childhood educators across the NWT.

ECE shared the projected specific program funding amounts for the 2024-2025 fiscal year to all licensed early learning and child care programs on February 23, 2024.

Engagement with community-based ELCC partners, including weekly meetings with the NWTECA, on the draft regulations related to these initiatives will occur in advance of the public engagement.

ECE will develop supporting documentation for centre-based programs, family day homes, and early childhood educators in advance of implementation in 2024-2025.

