

Play, Learn and Grow

Newfoundland and Labrador Early Learning Action Plan

2024-2026





Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Background	2
Vision	3
Governance	4
Five Key Priorities	5
1. Affordability	5
2. Access	6
3. Inclusion and Diversity	8
4. Quality	10
5. Accountability	12

Introduction

In the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, the Provincial Government committed to implementing a Minister's Advisory Committee on improving early learning and child care. This committee was commissioned to consult widely in the development of action items for five priority areas of the provincial early learning and child care system:

- 1. Affordability;**
- 2. Access;**
- 3. Inclusion and Diversity;**
- 4. Quality; and**
- 5. Accountability.**

In January 2023, the Department of Education began the development and of this action plan entitled Newfoundland and Labrador's **2024 to 2026 Early Learning Action Plan**. This action plan outlines 35 action items within the five priority areas to improve early learning and child care in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Government's commitment has been reflected in work completed to date, budget allocations, and the release of this action plan. The Department of Education has a mandate to promote a high-quality educational system in the province, from early learning and child care to K-12 education and post-secondary education. For early learning and child care, this goal is accomplished by implementing significant measures supporting the developmental potential of children, supporting parents/caregivers and early learning professionals, supporting child care operations and family resource centres, providing more available and affordable regulated childcare services, and facilitating a seamless transition into the K-12 education system.

Background

Extensive research has outlined the positive impact of high-quality early learning and child care (ELCC) experiences for children's development and their learning outcomes, as well as on society as a whole. High-quality ELCC leads to enhanced cognitive, physical, social-emotional, and academic skills, which in turn leads to positive impacts on social well-being and a healthier society. It includes many components, such as positive and responsive adult-to-child interactions, developmentally appropriate curriculum, low child-to-staff ratios, sufficient space and access to high quality resources, qualified and trained staff, appropriate wages and working conditions, integrated services, extensive parent and community supports and adequate funding for the provision of services.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has a long history of providing a range of ELCC programs and services for young children and their families. In 2005, the Department of Education expanded its role to bring early learning into the same department as kindergarten to grade 12, creating a Division of Early Childhood Learning. In 2014, the Division of Family and Child Development, which had mandates for regulated child care and family resource centres, moved from the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services into the renamed Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. In 2016, the Department implemented full-day kindergarten province-wide. In April 2017, the two divisions were merged to create the Early Learning and Child Development Division. This division has responsibility for regulated child care, parent supports, and community agencies such as family resource centres. In 2020, the Department acquired post-secondary education and became the Department of Education. This department now has programming to support learning from birth to older adults.



Newfoundland and Labrador Early Learning Action Plan

In 2021, Newfoundland and Labrador signed a Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (the “Agreement”) which committed over \$347 million for five years to invest in regulated child care. The Agreement requires each province and territory to develop action plans that outline the ELCC initiatives they intend to undertake, which inspired the creation of Newfoundland and Labrador’s own action plan. Newfoundland and Labrador’s action plan includes the initiatives set out in the Canada-Wide Action Plan, and also broader initiatives undertaken by the Department of Education to enhance family resource centers, parent supports, early literacy programs, and KinderStart.

Vision

All families in Newfoundland and Labrador will have access to a high-quality, affordable, flexible and inclusive early learning and child care system. With this access, children will enjoy responsive early childhood experiences supported by families and qualified early learning professionals who feel recognized, valued, and empowered.

Newfoundland and Labrador will be renowned for offering enriching environments where all children will thrive and reach their full potential, while embracing their unique developmental, cultural, and linguistic ways of being. Communities throughout the province are committed to developing optimal early learning environments that are locally meaningful and will have a lasting positive impact on the children and their development.

Governance

The Minister's ELCC Advisory Committee was created to oversee the implementation of Newfoundland and Labrador's 2024 to 2026 Early Learning Action Plan. The Advisory Committee consists of relevant stakeholders that represent different parts of the ELCC sector. For example, members include representatives from the Association of Early Childhood Educators Newfoundland and Labrador, Family and Child Care Connections, the Early Childhood Educators Human Resource Council, family resource centres, Francophone communities, the Department of Health and Community Services, and the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development. Additionally, the committee includes parent representatives, an administrator in child care settings, Indigenous partners, persons that provide inclusion supports for children, licensees, and post-secondary educators responsible for ELCC Implementation.



1. Affordability

Access to affordable child care is important for economic prosperity, social cohesion, and gender equity. Lack of access to affordable child care is a barrier to employment and social inclusion for many families. Research has shown that access to child care subsidies among single mothers is associated with higher employment rates compared to those who do not have access to subsidies. Women with this access are also more likely to be employed full time, as opposed to part time. Due to Newfoundland and Labrador's aging population, it is vital to support any initiative that enables economic growth.

To ensure affordable child care, Newfoundland and Labrador reduced parent fees to \$10 a day as of January 1, 2023 through the support of the Agreement. Additionally, the province provides the Child Care Subsidy program to assist eligible families with the cost of regulated child care services. The subsidy is paid to the parent's chosen child care service based on daily subsidy rates set under program policy. Child care services that are not participating in the Operating Grant Program may set their daily parent fee above the subsidy approved rate. A review will ensure that the goal of the program is being achieved and that all families are able to afford child care.

Action	2024-25	2025-26
Create designation criteria for child care services and maintain \$10 rates for all services that become designated.	✓	✓
Review the Child Care Services Subsidy program and increase salary threshold if required, and ensure it is available for all families who require it.		✓

2. Access

Access to early learning and child care means that parents have the ability to enroll their child in care that supports the child's development and meets parents' needs, with reasonable effort and affordability.

The large geographic area and the fiscal realities of Newfoundland and Labrador, combined with the small population, presents challenges in developing child care services that will meet the needs of smaller, rural communities. While 37 per cent of children in Newfoundland and Labrador aged birth to four years attend regulated programs in a child care centre or a family child care home, there is space for 41.6 per cent of children at a provincial level, with overcapacity in some areas and shortages in others. The availability of child care spaces varies greatly across the province, as accessibility challenges exist in some neighborhoods in urban communities, and in some rural and remote communities.

By working with municipalities and not-for-profit organizations under the Child Care Capacity Program, communities most in need of spaces will be identified and there will be an evidence informed approach to ensure there are spaces to meet demand. In addition, there will be more early learning opportunities for those families who do not chose regulated child care. The goal for access will be reflective of the diverse needs of families with respect to early learning and child care.

Creating more spaces is important, however, it is crucial that all families can access these spaces and other early learning environments, regardless of where they live. Options will be explored to ensure true access and reduce barriers related to transportation.

Newfoundland and Labrador Early Learning Action Plan

With an increase in spaces and early learning programs, the demand for early learning professionals (ELPs) will be higher. As with many other jurisdictions, Newfoundland and Labrador has had challenges in recruiting and retaining early childhood educators (ECEs) and other ELPs. Therefore, strategies to incentivize ECEs and other ELPs to work within the province are a priority.

Action	2024-25	2025-26
Improve the ECE workforce through the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Embed ECE career development activities in schools ▪ Further increase post-secondary seats based on demand ▪ Ensure child care services receiving the operating grant are supported to provide optimal workplace conditions for staff 	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
Develop and implement a rural and remote plan to increase access to early learning and child care services.	✓	✓
Explore transportation demand and develop innovative solutions so children can access all early learning environments.	✓	
Implement a new child care IT System to ensure families seeking child care are linked with child care spaces, and administration supports for child care services.	✓	
Explore public assets (e.g., schools, hospitals, municipalities) and determine the feasibility of using the locations to increase child care spaces.	✓	
Support child care centres and family child care providers to ensure they are operating at maximum capacity and provide business growth incentives.	✓	
Develop and implement a plan to encourage growth in not-for-profit and public ELCC spaces and ensure co-operatives are fully functioning to operate not-for-profit child care spaces.	✓	✓
Support family resource centres appropriately to ensure families have access to quality, evidence based early learning and parent support programs and approved food security initiatives.	✓	

These actions are in addition to the commitment to create 5895 spaces in the Canada Wide Early Learning Action Plan.

3. Inclusion and Diversity

Inclusive early learning and child care means that children of all abilities and diversities, and their families, have equitable access to quality programs and are supported in learning through play along with their peers. Inclusive early learning and child care supports the individual strengths and needs of each child to participate meaningfully in all aspects of their day. To achieve inclusivity, all ELPs and families work together as a respectful team to meet the needs of all of the children in their care.

The benefits of inclusion include the creation of meaningful friendships, opportunities to engage in diverse and shared play, better academic outcomes, increased celebration of diversity, better preparation for adult life in an inclusive society, and feelings of connectedness and support. Newfoundland and Labrador consists of children and families from diverse backgrounds and cultures and it is important that every child feel a sense of belonging. When children feel valued and accepted, it fosters their confidence to develop their identities, allows them to feel safe in expressing who they are, and helps them reach their learning potential. Supporting children's identity development is fundamental to realizing children's rights, and it is our responsibility to recognize and enforce these rights.

The Early Learning and Child Development division of the Department of Education offers an Inclusion Program, which provides supports to regulated child care services so that all children are able to participate to their fullest potential in any program. Supports include consultation, training, and grants. Fundamental to this program is the welcome of families as meaningful partners in all their children's learning contexts.

To improve upon the priority of inclusion and diversity, several actions are required. Firstly, a review of the Inclusion Program, as well as legislation surrounding inclusion and quality, needs to be conducted, and revisions need to be made based on the findings.

Newfoundland and Labrador Early Learning Action Plan

It is also important to increase the number of child care spaces and services that recognize the goals of the Inclusion Program, and to increase the number of child care spaces for rural, minority, and Indigenous communities. Conversations need to be had to ensure that ELCC services are delivered in a culturally competent way, and that providers receive cultural competency training.

Inclusion supports and practices should be implemented as early as possible and should be maintained as children transition to the school system. Curriculum should reflect inclusive and diverse principles.

Action	2024-2025	2025-2026
Integrate new inclusion supports in child care for all children and families as required based on recommendations from the inclusion sub-committee and public consultations.	✓	✓
Explore and implement Pre-Kindergarten curriculum that promotes environmental stewardship, social, emotional, responsive, and play-based learning (e.g., the PATHS program and the Pyramid Model).	✓	
Enhance the KinderStart program, and align with Pre-Kindergarten, to ensure children and families receive the inclusion supports they need.	✓	✓
Provide cultural competency training opportunities and enhance inclusion practices for early learning professionals and embed these in post-secondary curriculums.	✓	
Provide centres/services on the Operating Grant Program with funding to support improvements in accessibility and ensure universal design for early learning environments.		✓
Support Indigenous communities to ensure Indigenous children and families have access to affordable, high quality, and culturally responsive ELCC services.	✓	
Support the implementation of a finalized plan that recognizes the various needs of diverse Indigenous communities in Newfoundland and Labrador.		✓
Provide inclusion supports for children and families to participate fully in family resource programs.		✓

4. Quality

Improvements in the quality of regulated child care is important for the growth and development of children. Access to quality and affordable child care is a pressing issue for many families in Newfoundland and Labrador. High quality early learning and child care sets the stage for life-long learning, provides children with a solid foundation for well-being, and supports more holistic mental, emotional and physical growth. Parents who can access affordable and high quality child care are able to partner with ECEs on children's overall development, and can focus on employment, training, and educational opportunities.

As Newfoundland and Labrador increases access to early learning and child care services, it is important to ensure that these services are of high quality. High quality is a dynamic concept based on a combination of suitable curriculum and nurturing pedagogical practices, well-resourced inclusive environments, and effective oversight.

Central to high-quality early learning and child care is the presence of suitably qualified and trained ECEs and other ELPs. To incentivize ECEs to further their education, increase retention and recruitment rates, and professionalize the sector, the Early Childhood Educator Wage Grid was developed and implemented as of April 1, 2023.

The Provincial Government has initiated a consultation process with select post-secondary institutions to discuss the introduction of an Accelerated Diploma Program for ECEs and to increase seats for both daytime and online certificate and diploma programs.

To move further towards the priority of high-quality early learning and child care services, several actions need to take place, such as providing more learning opportunities and training for ELPs, conducting quality assessments in all child care environments, and enhancing family resource centres.

Newfoundland and Labrador Early Learning **Action Plan**

Action	2024-25	2025-26
Implement approved recommendations from the external review of Operating Grant Program, and other grants, to modernize and improve the funding systems for child care.	✓	
Conduct an external review of the family resource centres and implement approved recommendations.	✓	✓
Increase the percentage of ECEs that are employed in regulated child care who fully meet the provinces legislated post-secondary qualifications required to work in the ELCC sector to 80 per cent.		✓
Review and modernize the ECE certification process to ensure it aligns with best practice and evidence, moving to a competency-based model of certification.	✓	✓
Develop and implement a workforce training program and ensure prior learning assessments and work experiences are part of post-secondary and recognized by certification processes.		✓
Increase the number of approved ECE placements in child care settings within the province.	✓	✓
Provide professional development and mentoring in brain science and responsivity training to early learning professionals.	✓	✓
Develop and implement a mentoring model for ECEs with designated mentors available to support ECEs within child care services.	✓	✓
Complete standardized quality assessments on all early learning and child care environments and use these assessments to track progress.		✓
Develop the Provincial Child Care curriculum and Pre-Kindergarten curriculum grounded in the updated Early Childhood Learning (ECL) Framework and expand the ECL Framework across home, child care, school and community.	✓	✓
Provide an Early Literacy Program through the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries, supporting early learning professionals to improve early literacy practices.	✓	
Create provincial post-secondary curriculum for ECEs and update related policies and standards.	✓	✓
Develop standards and policies for family resource centres and ensure an efficient funding model is in place to meet these standards.	✓	
Revise Parent Resource kits, include health and food literacy and expand evidence-based parenting supports (home visiting) through family resource centres.	✓	✓

5. Accountability

Monitoring and evaluating progress will ensure that the province is fulfilling the actions set out in the action plan. It is important that information be reported to the public to ensure resources are being deployed productively and distributed equitably.

Therefore, systems need to be put into place so that data can be tracked. This data collection will help monitor progress through an evaluation plan, identify gaps in the system, and inform policy development to support fulfilling these actions, as well as support early learning and child care services to self-evaluate and monitor performance. This plan will be monitored by the ELCC Minister's Advisory Committee.



Action	2024-25	2025-26
Implement an IT system to: capture ELCC data for evaluation and monitoring; ensure families seeking child care are linked with child care spaces; and provide administration supports for child care services.	✓	✓
Conduct regular town halls and engagement opportunities for early learning professionals, parents, and key stakeholders in the ELCC sector.	✓	
Develop evergreen approach to policies and standards with related accountability mechanisms for child care services and Family Resource Programs.		✓

