

April 2025



**State of the Sector. A
Childcare Ecosystem
Report for Oceanside,
Vancouver Island, B.C.**

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Disclaimer

This report is intended to provide a point-in-time assessment of the childcare sector in the Oceanside BC region. The content reflects the views, experiences, and opinions of individuals interviewed during the course of the project and is not intended to represent the views of any government body or organization unless specifically stated.

All efforts have been made to source and present data as accurately and transparently as possible, based on the information available at the time of writing. However, no guarantee is made regarding the completeness, accuracy, or reliability of the information provided.

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State of the Sector. A Childcare Ecosystem Report for Oceanside, Vancouver Island. April 2025.

Oceanside includes the lands also known as District 69 of the Regional District of Nanaimo - Parksville, Qualicum Beach and its surrounding areas. It is the traditional territory of the Coast Salish People, including Qualicum and Snaw-naw-as First Nation. We thank our first people and the land for this place where we live, work, play, and learn.

Introduction

In February 2025, the *Early Learning and Childcare Council of Oceanside (ELCCO)* launched a project funded by the **Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC)**, to assess the state of childcare in the Oceanside region, with a particular focus on workforce recruitment and retention.

The project began with a comprehensive review of existing reports, research, and guiding documents. This included an assessment of prior recommendations for the community, evaluating progress to date, current relevance, and outstanding gaps. Additionally, the project analyzed provincial government programs and subsidies available through *ChildCare BC* under the *Ministry of Education and Childcare*, as well as legislation, policies, and frameworks established by the government and supporting non-profits, including the *Early Childhood Educators of B.C. (ECEBC)*, *Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC)*, and the *Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR)* program.

In community, the project talked to stakeholders across the sector including parents, early childhood educators, operators of not-for-profit and private childcare centres, home care operators, and special service providers. The project was also invited to participate in two different Childcare Community Action Group meetings made up of key child and youth service providers in the Oceanside region. The feedback provided by community stakeholders was remarkably consistent, with most people expressing similar concerns. Where there was a difference in opinions all perspectives are shared in the interest of providing unbiased reporting.

The State of the Sector: A Childcare Ecosystem Report for Oceanside, Vancouver Island overviews components of the sector; funding programs, education and staffing, childcare and early learning providers, accessibility, and quality of care, with each section including a sector overview and community feedback section. The final section of the report offers a systems review of the local childcare ecosystem to capture a holistic view and big picture assessment of the state of the sector.

Project Reports

The findings from this project are presented in two reports:

1. **Recruitment and Retention in Oceanside's Childcare Sector: A Workforce Pipeline Analysis** – A focused examination of workforce challenges, trends, and potential solutions.
2. **State of the Sector: A Childcare Ecosystem Report for Oceanside, Vancouver Island** – A comprehensive review and systems assessment of the local childcare ecosystem.

Together, these reports provide a detailed overview of the childcare landscape in Oceanside, offering insights and recommendations to strengthen workforce sustainability and improve childcare services in the region.

A third report will be provided as guidance and direction to ELCCO with recommendations for moving forward.

Throughout this report, the term **Early Childcare and Learning (ECL)** will be used to refer broadly to the skills, services, and professionals supporting children and families within the sector.

Childcare Ecosystem Report



The childcare system in Oceanside is at a crossroads. While families, educators, and community leaders recognize its essential role, systemic challenges - including funding instability, workforce shortages, and inequitable access - are creating a system under pressure.



Individuals within the system are driven to this 'career of caring' out of a love of children and a belief in the importance of high-quality childcare and early years education. However, overwhelmingly, these childcare providers described a dysfunctional sector due to a systemic breakdown in coordination and direction by decision-makers, that ultimately end up impacting children, families, and educators. Provincial and federal funding flows into Oceanside, reducing ECL fees and supporting new childcare spaces, which is positive for the community. At the same time, a disproportionate and fragmented focus on reducing childcare fees, while undoubtedly important, has impacted the greater ECL system in Oceanside and province wide.

Funding Programs

In 2017, the Government of Canada entered into *the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Framework* with British Columbia, supporting the province's commitment to providing affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare.



The Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) objectives focus on:

- Affordability, with a goal of achieving \$10-a-day childcare
- Expanding the number of funded childcare spaces
- Developing and implementing an Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) quality framework and standards
- Establishing an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) wage grid
- Enhancing support for children with disabilities or additional needs
- Increasing access for Indigenous children and those from cultural and linguistic minority communities
- Improving data sharing and reporting to monitor sector progress and inform future investments. (20)

The B.C. Provincial Government's Early Learning and Child Care (BC-ELCC) Initiatives are prioritized as follows:

1. Affordability
2. Underserved Communities
3. Workforce Recruitment and Retention
4. Accessibility
5. Quality



[Canada-British Columbia Early Learning and Child Care Agreement: Report on Progress and Results Achieved in 2022–2023. \(9\)](#)

ChildCare BC Funding Streams

Based on the affordability priority, *ChildCare BC and the Child Care Operating Fund (CCOF)* offer two primary funding streams:

1. The Standard Funding Stream:

This stream includes multiple funding programs, beginning with Base Funding, with additional opportunities to access:

- [Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative \(CCFRI\) funding](#)
- [Early Childhood Educator Wage Enhancement \(ECE-WE\) funding](#)
- [New Spaces funding](#)
- Maintenance funding

Childcare providers who opt into this stream must comply with prescriptive conditions including caps on parent fees, limits on fee increases, wage formulas, restrictions or freezes on administrative fees, and strict reporting requirements. (9, 10) Funding distribution is not equal among providers, as allocations depend on the facility's prior operations, costs, and fees. Providers who do not meet eligibility requirements may be denied funding.

2. The \$10aDay Program:

This initiative is delivered through three separate funding models and aims to test new types of childcare operating funding while supporting affordability, accessibility, and quality. (9) The [2025 version](#) of this initiative provides **block funding** to operators, covering:

- Wages
- Infrastructure costs (rent, leases)
- Municipal fees
- Maintenance
- Business expenses
- Insurance
- Program costs for non-standard operating hours

This funding prioritizes large non-profit, publicly delivered, and Indigenous-led providers that primarily serve children up to five years old. (4) As a result, private childcare operators have limited access to the \$10aDay program. Currently, approximately 75% of childcare in Oceanside is provided by private operators (2025).

Impact of Funding on Childcare Affordability

Data indicates that most childcare providers receive government funding, effectively reducing costs for families across B.C. This aligns with the B.C. Provincial Government's Early Learning and Child Care priorities. According to 2024/25 provincial data, there are:

- 5,778 childcare facilities receiving funding
- 159,018 childcare spaces subsidized by B.C. government programs

There is a continued effort to reduce childcare costs toward \$10 per day (5)

Receiving Fee Reductions (Monthly Average)							
Region	Fiscal Year	Facilities Approved for Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative	Spaces Approved for Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative	Facilities \$10 a Day ChildCareBC	Spaces \$10 a Day ChildCareBC	Total Reduced Facilities	Total Reduced Spaces
Province	2024/25 YTD	5,251	138,864	315	15,310	5,566	154,174
Vancouver Island	2024/25 YTD	915	26,322	41	2,779	956	29,101

Source: <https://studentsuccess.gov.bc.ca/childcare> (Accessed March 24th, 2025)

The Affordable Child Care Benefit (ACCB)

A third funding stream to offset childcare costs is the Affordable Child Care Benefit (ACCB). This benefit provides monthly financial assistance to eligible families based on:

- Household income
- Number and age of children
- Type of childcare required

Eligible families can apply annually, and funds are paid directly to childcare providers ([Information for Families](#)). (7)

What We've Heard

Feedback from stakeholders across Oceanside's childcare sector highlights that while affordability is a top priority for parents and a key objective of government programs, the current focus on cost reduction has introduced significant unintended challenges. Efforts to lower fees have undeniably improved access to childcare for many families. However, the implementation of subsidy programs and funding models has also created growing tensions within the system. Childcare providers report that government-imposed financial constraints and regulatory requirements leave them operating on razor-thin margins, with little flexibility to enhance services or support professional development.

Current funding systems, which mandate fee caps and fund only minimal child-to-caregiver staffing ratios, create operational challenges that undermine both service quality and workforce stability. Providers who receive funding must agree to fixed rate increases, limiting their ability to adjust parent fees. At the same time, government funding frequently does not sufficiently cover rising operational costs or allow childcare centres to pay staff a living wage, provide benefits or pensions, or offer pay that reflects higher education, leading to high turnover rates and persistent staffing shortages.

Many providers, particularly home-based operators and small private centres, feel disproportionately disadvantaged by the administrative and financial burdens imposed by government programs. They describe struggling with complex licensing processes, contract interpretation, government forms, funding formulas, and accounting practices -often without adequate support or guidance. Small non-profit centres, often run by volunteer board members, also face challenges in navigating funding systems that prioritize affordability over service quality.



Furthermore, disparities in funding models for different types of providers have created inconsistent support levels and deepened divisions within the sector. The variations between funding streams - such as the \$10aDay initiative and the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative - have resulted in uneven access to financial support. Funding prioritization goes to non-profit, public, and Indigenous childcare providers for \$10aDay funding which leaves many private operators excluded, despite the fact that 75% of early childcare providers in Oceanside are privately operated.

Even large or established non-profits face challenges within the current system. While they can fundraise and apply for community grants, funding formulas often redirect additional revenue toward base funding rather than program enhancements. New non-profits are ineligible for \$10aDay funding in their first year of operation, meaning they must hire staff, train employees, and establish operations without the assurance of long-term funding. Moreover, paid staff hours required to set up new centres are not covered under government funding.

As a result, childcare providers across all models find themselves adapting to ever-changing government policies at their own expense, while working within a system that often undervalues their expertise and hinders their ability to provide high-quality, family-centered care. On Vancouver Island, ECL Centers are declining \$10aDay funding after being approved, due to “unworkable” regulations and funding allocations.

Education and Staffing

*NOTE: For a more detailed assessment of education and staffing in Oceanside, please see the accompanying **Recruitment and Retention in Oceanside’s Childcare Sector: A Workforce Pipeline Analysis***

The *Evaluation of Early Care and Learning Recruitment and Retention Strategy – Evaluation Findings Report 2022* identifies three key goals.

- Building an adequate and stable workforce of qualified and skilled early care and learning professionals.
- Establishing early care and learning as a viable, sustainable, and valued career.
- Implementing appropriate compensation plans and human resource strategies.

(p.10) (21)



To support these goals, the province has increased efforts to train more Early Childhood Educator Assistants (ECE-As) and Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). Multiple educational institutions across British Columbia offer recognized ECE programs, which are available in in-person or virtual formats, with required in-person practicums. These programs can be completed on a full-time or part-time basis.

The *Early Childhood Educators of B.C. (ECEBC)* supports professional development through training, resources, and financial assistance. *The ECE Education Support Fund*, administered by ECEBC with provincial government funding, helps reduce tuition costs for students pursuing early childhood education and care studies. (6)

Growth in ECE Training and Specialized Funding

The number of individuals enrolling in ECE training programs in British Columbia has increased in recent years (p. 46.) (21). This growth has been attributed to the availability of funding support and the accessibility of recognized training institutions.

To further support professional development, the provincial government offers ECE Specialized Certification Grants for educators obtaining Infant Toddler Educator or Special Needs Educator certifications. These grants, administered by ECEBC, will remain available until 2026. (6)

Workforce Challenges: Ratios, Special Needs Support, and Wage Enhancements

Staff-to-child ratios vary depending on the type of care provided (e.g., group or family care) and the age of the children. In group care settings for children under 36 months, at least one educator must have Infant and Toddler training. However, while the sector recognizes the Special Needs Early Childhood Educator certificate, there are no provincial requirements for childcare centres to employ staff with specialized training to support children with disabilities - even when centres serve children with high care needs.



Childcare sector employees may be eligible for wage enhancement (ECE-WE) funding through the provincial government. Licensed childcare facilities participating in the Child Care Operating Funding Program can receive up to \$6 per hour in wage enhancements. However, facilities that are not approved for the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative (CCFRI) are ineligible for this funding. (11)

Despite provincial funding initiatives such as \$10aDay and CCFRI, wage subsidies do not cover costs for replacement or substitute employees when staff members are on paid leave for professional development, medical reasons, or vacation. Additionally, training days required for onboarding new employees are not covered. (8, 10)

The Need for a Competitive Wage Grid

Advocates across British Columbia emphasize the importance of implementing a standardized wage grid for early childhood educators. Currently, wages in the sector vary widely, with low compensation levels recognized as a significant concern.

A 2023 report on ECE wages recommends that BC's promised wage grid be competitive with comparable positions, stating:

“For BC’s promised ECE wage grid to be competitive, it needs to match or exceed these comparable positions, meaning it needs to include a range of at least \$30–\$40 per hour, reflecting qualifications, experience, and years of employment”

Early Childhood Educator Wages in British Columbia:

A Cross-Canada Scan of ECE Wages and Wage Grids, July 2023, p. 13 (22)

What We've Heard

Overwhelmingly, we heard that childcare centers must operate with minimal staffing to break even financially. There is no safety net, as funding is tied to child-to-caregiver ratios. For example, if a staff member takes maternity or medical leave, a replacement cannot be hired until the original employee officially leaves, as there is no funding for overlap or training during the transition. This lack of flexibility makes it difficult to plan for future recruitment, increasing the risk of staff shortages. As a result, transitions can be disruptive, with new staff members learning on the job while simultaneously building relationships with the children. These changes can be especially challenging for children, who must adjust to new caregivers.

These conditions also place additional pressure on site supervisors, who are often required to work on the floor to cover staff shortages while also managing administrative tasks. If an employee is sick, a replacement may not be available, and in cases where one is found, there may be no funding to pay them. Some childcare centres have been forced to close temporarily due to staff absences, leaving parents without care options.

Childcare centres have operational requirements such as preparing snacks, sanitizing toys, and completing paperwork, all of which require staff to be "off the floor" and unavailable for direct childcare. Without funding for additional staff, early childhood educators (ECEs) must juggle these responsibilities, sometimes during unpaid hours or by working through breaks to maintain the quality and standards of care. These conditions were commonly described as challenging and even 'brutal', being physically and emotionally demanding and chaotic.

Some government funding programs that increase wages have also resulted in reduced working hours. Staff members may find themselves adjusting to part-time work with lower income security, inconsistent hours, or the loss of benefits.

Barriers to Training & Professional Development

Current infant and toddler training requirements, particularly offsite practicums, were identified as a significant barrier to continued education. The required unpaid five-week practicum for the Infant and Toddler Certification (I.T) often must be completed at a facility other than the educator's usual workplace. During this period, the employer must find a replacement, which is not always feasible. This creates a barrier to professional advancement and limits the number of available infant-toddler educators in the community. I.T certified staff are not guaranteed wages equal to their training.

Challenges also extend to inadequate support for administrative tasks and professional development. Providers struggle with navigating complex government forms, licensing requirements, and contracts while also managing daily operational duties such as cleaning, paperwork, and parent communication - tasks that are often unfunded unless staff are directly engaged with children.

The absence of a reliable substitute ECE system or an established ECE sub-bank further exacerbates staffing challenges. At times, childcare centres must operate with reduced staff or temporarily cut services, jeopardizing both the quality of care and staff well-being.

Funding & Wage Instability

Concerns were raised about inconsistent government funding and wage policies. While wage enhancement programs have successfully increased ECE wages in centres that receive fee reduction funding, compensation remains insufficient, with few incentives or recognition for seniority or credentials. Government-funded ECE Wage Enhancement top-ups are dependent on childcare centres meeting eligibility criteria, raising concerns that

future policy or funding changes could jeopardize these wage supports. If funding were reduced or removed, many centres would be unable to sustain current wages, leading to fears about job security, financial instability, and unclear wage growth prospects.

Currently, ECL centres may pay staff based on funding formulas rather than education. For example, if two staff have ECE-IT specialization but only one position is funded, one may receive the ECE-IT wage while the other is paid less.

Concerns About Post-Secondary Training & Workforce Retention

Stakeholders expressed concerns that post-secondary ECE training programs are not consistently reviewed for quality, leading to new graduates who may lack the skills needed to meet evolving best practices in early learning. Seasoned educators report increased pressure to support and train new staff, while inconsistent curricula across institutions result in varied approaches to childcare and education. This inconsistency can create confusion for both educators and children.

To address this, stakeholders suggested that the government implement a mix of incentives and regulations to standardize ECE credentials, including clearer program entrance requirements, standardized learning outcomes, and consistent assessments including an increase in experienced mentorship or in-house pedagogists.

Unfortunately, wage instability, increasing job demands, limited career advancement opportunities, and systemic inequities have contributed to both new graduates and experienced staff leaving the childcare sector. [The Evaluation of Early Care and Learning Recruitment and Retention Strategy – Evaluation Findings Report \(2022\)](#) supports this concern. Provincially, nearly half of employers reported a net loss of experienced staff (p. 69), with more ECEs leaving the field than entering it.

“The number of professionals with ECL-related qualifications appears to be increasing annually, but the proportion of the workforce holding ECE or ECE specialty certification is declining.” (p. 87) Early Care and Learning Recruitment and Retention Strategy – Evaluation Findings Report (2022)

These systemic challenges contribute to a fragmented childcare landscape that fails to fully support early childhood educators, children, and families. Without long-term solutions to staffing shortages, funding inconsistencies, and training barriers, the sector will continue to struggle to provide stable, high-quality care.

Child Care and Early Learning Providers.

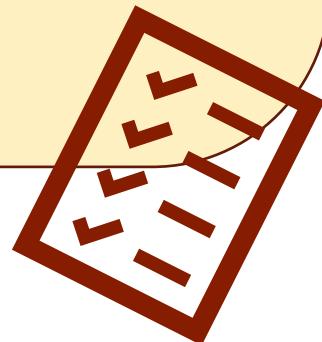
The Childcare Landscape in British Columbia

Types of Licensed Childcare Providers in Oceanside

Childcare in British Columbia is diverse, offering various options for families. The province recognizes four types of childcare providers:

1. **Licensed Childcare** – Includes group care, multi-age care, in-home multi-age care, family childcare, preschool, occasional childcare, and recreational care.
2. **Registered License-Not-Required Childcare** – Home-based care that meets basic health and safety requirements but is not eligible for government subsidies. As of March 15, 2024, the government has stopped approving new license-not-required childcare, though existing providers may continue operations.
3. **License-Not-Required Childcare** – Home-based care that does not meet registration requirements.
4. **Childcare Provided in the Child's Home** – Typically a nanny or caregiver hired directly by the family.

SOURCE: [Government of British Columbia. Licensed and Unlicensed Child Care.](#)



Private Operators (Entrepreneurial Childcare)

As of March 2025, approximately 75% of childcare services in Oceanside for infants to school-age children are run by small private operators. These include both group care centers and licensed home-based services. These operators aim to cover wages and overhead costs but are not motivated by large profits. They are eligible for provincial childcare operating funding but are not prioritized for the \$10aDay government funding program.

In some jurisdictions, childcare is operated by corporate for-profit centers, which include national and international chains and franchises. These businesses seek profit beyond wages and operational costs. However, at this time, large corporate childcare centers do not operate in Oceanside.

For clarity, this report distinguishes private operators (small, local childcare businesses) from corporate for-profit centers (large, profit-driven entities).

Not-for-Profit Childcare

Non-profit childcare centers are run by registered societies with volunteer boards of directors. These may operate as standalone centers or as part of a larger organization with multiple locations across a region or province. In Oceanside, some not-for-profit childcare is administered through the School District. Not-for-profit childcare providers are eligible for provincial childcare operating funding and are prioritized for \$10aDay government funding. (4)

Publicly Run Childcare

Some public schools offer childcare services, primarily before and after school care. These programs are operated by school districts or government agencies, with staff hired under established employment standards and wages. Oceanside provides before- and- after school care in elementary schools throughout the district. Publicly run childcare services are eligible for provincial operating funding and are prioritized for \$10aDay funding. (4)

Indigenous Childcare Programs

The provincial government prioritizes Indigenous childcare services across the province. [Aboriginal Head Start](#) is a fully funded early learning program for children of Aboriginal ancestry, supported by the First Nations Health Authority. Indigenous childcare programs

are eligible for provincial childcare operating funding and are prioritized for \$10aDay funding. (4)

The government also provides funding for the construction, expansion, and relocation of childcare centers through the [New Spaces Fund](#). Eligible applicants include:

- Indigenous governing entities
- Local governments
- Public bodies (e.g., health authorities, school boards, public post-secondary institutions, Crown corporations)
- Non-profit and Indigenous non-profit organizations
- First Nations schools and other eligible independent schools

Private operators are not eligible to apply for New Spaces funding. (18)

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) Services

The provincial government funds [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCRR\)](#) programs to support childcare providers, families, and the workforce. These programs offer mentorship, professional development, referrals, and assistance in accessing government resources. On central Vancouver Island, CCRR services are provided through PacificCARE, with an office in Qualicum Beach at the Qualicum Commons. (17)

What We've Heard



Non-Profit Childcare Centers

Many non-profits rely on fundraising and external grants to cover operating costs or enhance program delivery. However, applying for these funds requires substantial administrative effort, including completing grant applications, progress reports, and other documentation. Provincial childcare funding does not cover these administrative tasks, meaning wages for this work must be deducted from the funds raised. Board composition can further complicate decision-making in non-profits. Some boards include parents whose primary concern is keeping fees low, which can lead to decisions that prioritize cost-cutting over fair wages and operational sustainability. Further complications arise when board members lack expertise in child development or the complexities of running a childcare center, yet are required to make important decisions for the centre.

Challenges also arise when board members - sometimes with personal agendas or conflicts of interest - become too involved in daily operations. This can undermine professional staff and disrupt best practices in childcare. While larger non-profits may attract more experienced board members, there is still a risk that influential individuals shift the organization's focus away from its core mission. Additionally, an overemphasis on volunteerism within some non-profits can inadvertently lead to ECL operations and management falling on un-paid labour if funding and income do not fully cover operational wages or the non-profit centre lacks management staff.

During interviews, some non-profit sector leaders questioned the government's preference for non-profit centers, noting that both non-profit and private centers face similar operational challenges. These interviewees reported that the quality of care is more dependent on the skills and values of individual childcare providers and leadership than on the organizational model itself.

Private Childcare Operators

Some private childcare operators expressed reluctance to accept government funding, citing concerns that such agreements reduce their business autonomy. Many reported feeling like they were "*signing their business over to the government*" and found the reporting requirements unnecessarily intrusive.

There is also a widespread perception among private operators that government funding favours non-profit centers. Many questioned long-term universal childcare plans that aim to transition all centers to \$10-a-day childcare while restricting or eliminating funding for private operators. (1, 15) Private operators stated that while they would like to offer \$10-a-day fees to parents, they are not willing to convert their businesses into non-profits.

Government reports and statements indicate that public \$10-a-day funds should not be used to generate profit for private businesses, and that private operators should be encouraged to transition into non-profits. (1, 15) However, many private operators argue that their businesses often run at a loss despite government support. Some have even used their own wages to ensure their early childhood educators are paid fairly, underscoring the financial difficulties they face. These operators take issue with being labeled as "for-profit," as it inaccurately implies their primary motive is financial gain rather than quality childcare. One provider summarized this sentiment: "*We are definitely not in this to get rich. If we wanted to be rich, we wouldn't have chosen childcare.*"

Entrepreneurial and specialized private providers emphasized the vital role they play in the childcare ecosystem. They argue that not all children thrive in large group settings and that private and home-based care offer flexibility and personalized services that larger centers often cannot. They believe a diverse range of childcare options is essential for a healthy community.

None of the private childcare operators interviewed, expected government funding to provide personal profit. Instead, they shared the same priorities as others in the sector: ensuring early childhood educators receive fair wages, making childcare more affordable for parents, and maintaining high-quality early education and care.

Recent changes in provider referral systems have also caused frustration. For example, the traditional Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) service, which helped match parents with providers, has been replaced by an online "map" system that many stakeholders find ineffective. As more processes shift online, an increasing number of parents are turning to social media to find childcare options, highlighting a gap between government-provided resources and the actual needs of families.



Accessibility

Childcare Availability in Oceanside

As of February 2025, there are 39 childcare centers operating in Oceanside, including 24 Group Child Care Centers and 15 In-Home Care Providers. Many centers hold multiple licenses, offering various types of care such as:

- Preschool
- Group Care (under 36 months)
- Group Care (30 months to school age)
- Family Child Care
- In-Home Multi-Age Care
- Multi-Age Care
- School-Age Care (including care on school grounds)



In total, Oceanside has approximately 870 licensed childcare spaces, with 530 spaces designated for early years childcare. However, these numbers are estimated, as official records list the maximum number of licensed spaces rather than the actual number in use.

Some centers are currently operating below capacity due to a shortage of available Early Childhood Educators.

In smaller communities like Oceanside, where only a handful of childcare providers operate, the overall availability of childcare can shift dramatically with the opening or closing of a single center or provider.

Waitlists and Staffing Challenges

Waitlist numbers are difficult to verify. While all childcare centers interviewed reported long waitlists, it is unclear how many families remain on multiple lists despite securing childcare elsewhere.

Before- and after-school care is available at four elementary schools in the district. As of this writing, the two rural schools had no waitlists, while the two schools in Parksville and Qualicum Beach had long waitlists.

The Impact of School District Properties on Childcare

Several large early-years group-care centers operate on properties owned or managed by the Qualicum School District. Some of these programs are coordinated directly through the school district and run as non-profits, while others lease space in two decommissioned elementary schools, now known as Craig Street Commons and Qualicum Commons.

In 2024, the school district announced plans to disinvest in these properties, citing concerns about maintenance costs and capital upgrades. As of this report, the future of these properties remains uncertain, putting the childcare centers housed within them at risk of closure within the next year. These two sites provide approximately 25% of early years childcare spaces in Oceanside.

Financial Barriers to Expanding Childcare

Rising rent and infrastructure costs - both in Oceanside and across the province - have made it difficult for childcare centers to expand or secure new locations. While New Spaces funding from the provincial government helps offset these costs, it is primarily allocated to non-profit and public childcare centers, limiting support for private operators.

Although New Spaces funding has been secured for Oceanside, it may take several years before these additional childcare spaces become available. If a center loses its lease or if rental costs become unaffordable, childcare centers may be forced to close due to a lack of affordable and suitable locations.

Childcare Fees and Subsidies

Government initiatives have significantly reduced childcare costs across the province. The \$10-a-Day program is the most affordable and straightforward option, capping full-time early years childcare fees at \$200 per month per child. In late March 2025, Oceanside received its first \$10-a-Day funded childcare site, converting 111 spaces to this new funding model.

Other childcare centers in the community receive funding through the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative (CCFRI), which lowers childcare costs for parents based on the child's age and type of care provided. The amount of financial support varies across different centers.

Additional Financial Assistance

The Affordable Child Care Benefit (ACCB) is an additional subsidy that eligible families can apply for through ChildCare BC. This benefit provides a monthly payment to assist with childcare costs, with eligibility based on:

- Household income
- Age of the child
- Type of childcare required
- Family size

With [Child Care Operating funding](#) and [CCFRI funding](#), “monthly maximum parent fee reductions range from \$320 to \$900, per full-time enrolment, depending on the type of care accessed.” The ACCB may provide additional cost savings. The Government provides an [Affordable Child Care Benefit Estimator](#) online.

Families must reapply annually, and funds are paid directly to the childcare provider. More details can be found at: [ChildCare BC – Affordable Child Care Benefit](#).

Variability in Childcare Costs

Due to the variety of funding models and eligibility criteria, childcare fees in Oceanside vary widely:

- Families at fully funded \$10aDay centers pay no more than \$200 per month for full-time care.
- At other centres, childcare fees range from several hundred to over a thousand dollars per month, depending on the level of government support.
- Provincially, full-time childcare costs can exceed \$3,000 per month per child.

What We've Heard

ECL operator/administrators phone the waitlists when a space becomes available and find that many of the people on the waitlist no longer need care, have moved, or don't return the calls. We heard that the administration of waitlists can be time consuming as it can require phoning dozens of people to find a single child who is still looking for care and the current systems tend to be inefficient. Other communities have centralized waitlists, run through a not-for-profit that allows for efficiently connecting families with childcare.

The CCRR centre previously supported parents in finding childcare in their community but have recently been directed that parents instead use the mapping system available through the Government ChildCare BC webpage. <https://maps.gov.bc.ca/ess/hm/ccf/> This mapping system does not give reliable or accurate data, and it is not a useful resource for people seeking childcare in the community.

Many parents and some ECL providers have turned to large social media groups to find childcare by posting a request for childcare, or the availability of open spaces.

Families have become creative about childcare due to a lack of access or affordability. Use of family, friends, and unregistered childcare may be filling the gaps in the community, although it is impossible to confirm the numbers of people relying on alternative childcare arrangements.



Quality of Care

Those passionate about ECL speak of the importance of providing caring, safe, nurturing, inclusive, and thoughtfully developed programs to foster flourishing in children and families. It is the heart of the work and many ECL professionals live this passion every day as they care for and educate the youngest in our communities. However, provincially, while quality of care is deemed to be important, the government prioritizes this 5th on its list of 5.

According to available information, Provincial criteria for measuring quality include:

1. **Hosting an Early Care and Learning Summit** - The two day summit was hosted in October 2023.
2. **The creation of a Quality Assessment Framework for Child Care** – the most recent report indicates “Initial drafting of the quality assessment tool began in 2022/23. The tool will be completed in 2023/24 with a corresponding implementation plan.”

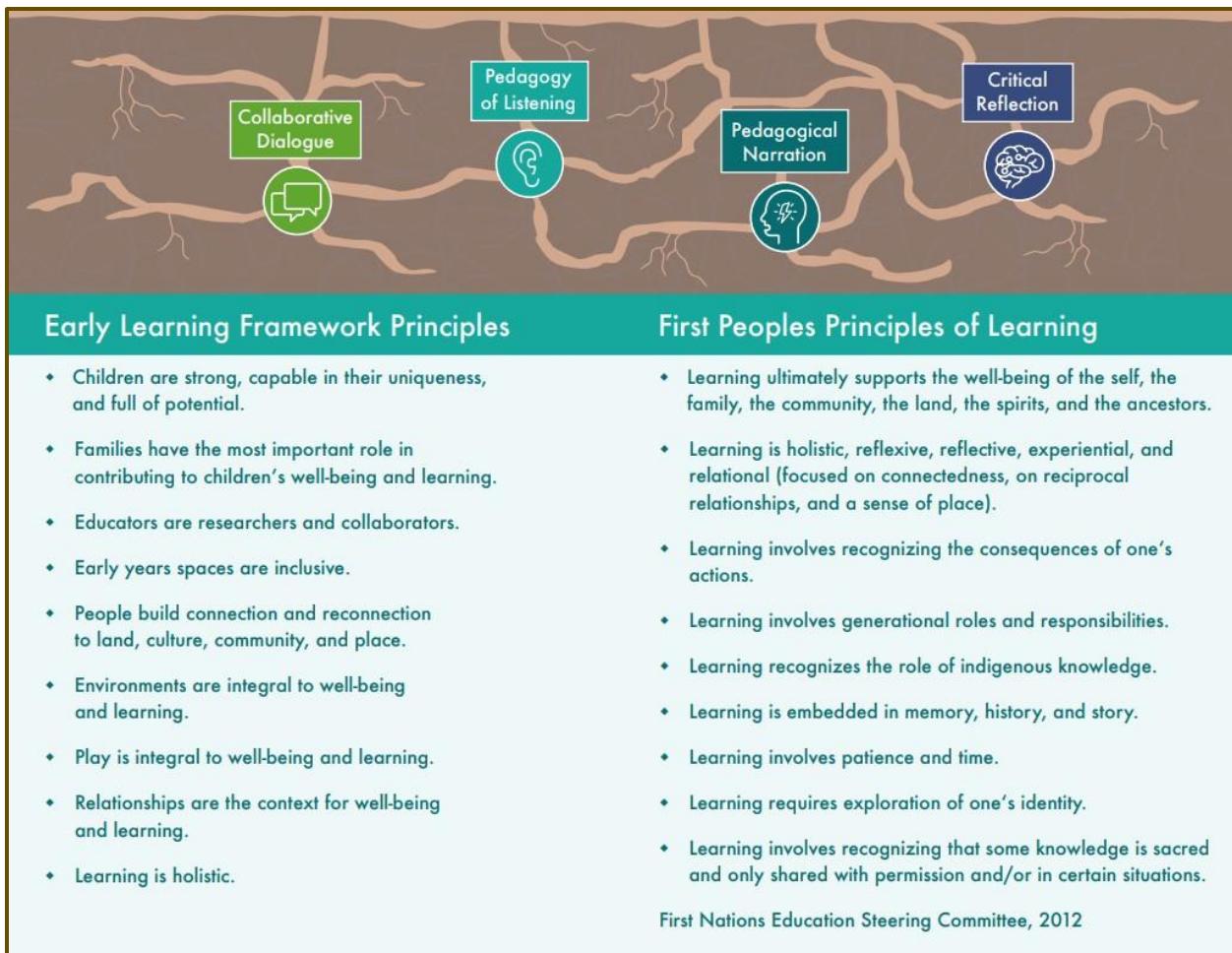
Canada-British Columbia Early Learning and Child Care Agreement: Report on Progress and Results Achieved in 2022-2023 p.15

As of April 2025, there is no indication that the Quality Assessment Framework has been completed or is available for use.

Currently the *BC Child Care Sector Occupational Competencies* guide professional development and some quality measurements in BC. The BC Government website states “In March 2017, a hold was placed on new applications for proposed ECE programs. The hold was put in place when the Province began exploring options to update the [B.C. Child Care Sector Occupational Competencies](#). Post-secondary institutions align their ECE curriculum with these competencies to ensure consistent quality programming. Interested parties were placed on a waitlist.” *Early Childhood Educator Post-Secondary Program Recognition*. (6)

The [Mid-Island Child Care Action Plan](#), completed in 2021, identified four priorities: (1) Assessment, (2) Affordability, (3) Quality, and (4) Strengthening Partnerships. The plan outlines quality-focused recommendations, including the development of more not-for-profit and publicly operated childcare spaces, support for the province’s Early Care and Learning Recruitment and Retention Strategy, and leadership in increasing the number of well-qualified ECE staff and expanded training opportunities. (14)

The [British Columbia Early Learning Framework](#) “is intended to inspire pedagogical approaches” (p. 6) for use by early years professionals in BC. The framework identifies First Peoples Principles of Learning and Early Learning Framework Principles and describes practices for quality and program design. (13)



Source: [The British Columbia Early Learning Framework](#) . p. 43

The [Aboriginal Head Start Program](#) is offered throughout BC and has a centre operating at Qualicum First Nations. The program aims to *“deliver holistic programs to enhance the spiritual, emotional, physical and social wellbeing of Indigenous children aged 0-6 and their families while supporting their parents and guardians as their primary teachers.”* (p. 7) (2)

The Aboriginal Head Start program includes components such as culture and language, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support programming, and parental involvement. Its principles include, in part: 1. supporting the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical growth of each Aboriginal child; 2. supporting and encouraging each Aboriginal child to enjoy lifelong learning; and 3. supporting parents and guardians as the primary teachers and caregivers of their children. (2) See the [full list and program here](#).

[Aboriginal Head Start Program](#)

The Aboriginal Head Start Program is offered to Indigenous and non-Indigenous children enrolled in the program. In British Columbia, Aboriginal Head Start is administered through a separate funding stream from other ECL programs. (2)

The [Early Childhood Pedagogy Network \(ECPN\)](#) champions transformational change in early childhood education in British Columbia. Its Early Childhood Pedagogist Program, funded by the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care, supports early childhood educators by placing professional ECE pedagogists in ECL centres to work with and support staff. (16)

What We've Heard

Dedicated ECL professionals believe deeply in the importance of their work to nurture and guide children. This commitment is what draws them to the field and motivates them to continue working and advocating, despite the strains on the system. Their ability to offer the highest quality of care is supported, or limited, by broader social and political frameworks. While the current provincial government has focused on affordability and related childcare programs, the quality of care has been deprioritized.

ECL providers described their desire to uphold high standards, but their efforts are often restricted by regulations, funding criteria, child-to-ECL ratios, and limited educational opportunities. Some professionals described the workforce as uninspired or disheartened. Those who remain highly passionate expressed feeling as though they are “fighting against forces” that interfere with their ability to provide the best possible care for children.



Many ECL professionals noted that access to quality educational tools and toys is limited, as higher-quality supplies, which can allow for higher quality engagement with the children, often fall outside the budget constraints of their centres.

Registered post-secondary institutions offering ECL programs are not consistently held to strict academic or curriculum standards, resulting in graduates with inconsistent skill sets or knowledge gaps. This inconsistency was disrupting workflow and diminishing the quality of care, as educators may offer contradictory practices within the same centre.

Current government funding programs cover base employment and wages, but often only support minimal staffing with fewer ECEs or ECE+ professionals in certain age groupings.

As a result, staff with lower levels of training and experience are often responsible for care and teaching, simply because the funding is not available to hire more qualified staff.



Across the sector, professionals report that children's needs are changing and becoming more complex. More children are demonstrating social, language, and mental health concerns - challenges believed to be influenced, in part, by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased use of technology as a caregiving tool. These children

require a higher level of care and teaching, yet current ECL curricula do not widely address these emerging needs. While the sector recognizes a Special Needs Early Childhood Educator certificate, there are no requirements for centres to employ staff with this specialization - even when children with high care needs are present. Because of this, sometimes children with higher care and learning needs are turned away from centres, with few (or no) other options for childcare in the community.

Trauma-informed care, along with *inclusion training* to support diverse abilities, languages, and cultures, was consistently described as essential to delivering quality care, yet many ECL professionals lack training in these areas. While there are many opportunities for continued professional education in the province, participation varies. Those who do access ongoing training, report that it is highly beneficial in maintaining their skills. Research confirms that higher levels of training and continued professional development are closely linked to improved care quality, greater job satisfaction, and better staff retention (21)

ECE' professionals recognized the importance of education in providing quality care, however, they shared that the government funding prioritized 'getting people back to work', over quality education and ECL programming. Often higher education is not reflected in wages, disincentivizing or disregarding specialization training.

The Aboriginal Head Start program offers a model that centers quality of care and the holistic well-being of the child, family, and community. As a government-funded program, it is rooted in principles and values developed by stakeholders to create a rich and meaningful childcare environment and ECL providers shared their optimism in this program.

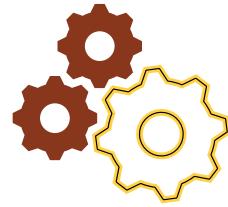
ECL Providers told us that Provincial licencing requirements are strict about the physical space and safety of the children, but there is no oversight as to the care and education that children are provided. The [British Columbia Early Learning Framework](#) provides meaningful guidance towards quality care, but ECL employees are not required to study or follow the framework in BC centres.

The Early Childhood Pedagogy Network (ECPN) is funding pedagogists to guide and mentor in some ECL centres in Oceanside which is enhancing the level of training, early learning, and support of ECL staff in participating centres.



Part Two

Systems Review



Childcare is not a collection of separate programs, isolated priorities, or individual problems to solve. Rather, it functions more like an ecosystem - an interconnected web of relationships, resources, and roles. The childcare ecosystem includes foundational elements such as policy, funding, training, compensation, infrastructure, and the interdependent relationships between children and families, educators, employers, governments, and community organizations. For the system to thrive, these elements must be in balance.

A well-supported childcare ecosystem is resilient and adaptive. It can respond to changing needs and pressures, grow in diversity and strength, and support the well-being of children, families, and the professionals who care for them. When any part of the system is under strain, whether due to workforce burnout, inadequate compensation, or regulatory bottlenecks, the stress reverberates throughout the entire network, weakening its overall ability to function effectively.

A systems approach to reporting, allows us to move beyond isolated data points, siloed thinking, or narrow, policy-focused narratives. It enables a more holistic understanding of the sector by identifying patterns, root causes, and the cumulative impact of policies and practices. It also opens the door to new perspectives and lines of inquiry, inviting more innovative and transformative solutions to emerge.

The outcomes of a systems assessment are shaped by the questions that guide the inquiry. For this assessment, we explored the following key questions:

- *What are the payoffs and results of the current model? What are its unintended negative consequences?*
- *What incentives drive behaviours and shape outcomes?*
- *What are the relationships between different parts of the sector, and how do they influence one another?*
- *How do funding guidelines and government programs influence the childcare ecosystem as a whole?*
- *In what ways does the current childcare system contribute to - or restrict - a child's ability to learn, grow, and thrive in Oceanside?*

Which Needs Are the Most Important? (And what do we prioritize?)



Key Stakeholders in the Oceanside Childcare Ecosystem

The childcare ecosystem in Oceanside is composed of several integrated stakeholder groups, each with varying degrees of influence and decision-making power.

Children, families, and guardians make up the largest stakeholder group and are impacted by nearly every decision made by other groups, including those related to the cost, availability, and quality of childcare services. While central to the purpose of the ecosystem, this group is generally seen as consumers of services and typically has the least direct influence on decision-making processes, outside of participating in elections.



Early Childcare and Learning (ECL) employees represent the second-largest component of the childcare ecosystem. With diverse skill sets, educational backgrounds, and experiences, this group provides both the direct care and education to children, as well as the operations that support ECL work. These professionals are directly affected by decisions made by others, particularly in relation to wages, work hours, conditions, and career advancement opportunities. Unless organized through a union or other collective, ECL employees often have limited direct influence on policy or operational decisions.

Childcare providers range from small, home-based businesses to large corporate or not-for-profit organizations. Their operations are shaped significantly by regulations, policies, and economic conditions. Small, private, licensed providers often have limited resources and little influence on broader decision-making. In contrast, larger centres - particularly those engaged in advocacy or research - may have more influence on policy development and are better positioned to absorb the impacts of changes to funding, programs, or regulations. Regardless of size, all providers are impacted by government ideology and decisions that shape the broader childcare landscape.

Municipal governments play a vital role in local planning and childcare expansion. Through zoning bylaws, Official Community Plans, land use decisions, and capital investments, municipalities can either support or restrict the development of new childcare spaces. Municipalities may also operate or fund childcare programs, conduct local needs assessments, and offer grants or facilities. The Union of BC

Municipalities (UBCM) provides guidance to municipalities on how to support childcare in their communities through policy and advocacy. (23)

Not-for-profit advocacy and support organizations shape and sustain the childcare ecosystem by conducting research, lobbying government, supporting workforce development, and amplifying the voices of less-influential stakeholders. These organizations typically represent specific parts of the sector, or populations such as early childhood educators, Indigenous communities, children with disabilities, or proponents of particular pedagogical approaches. While some work collaboratively, others operate in silos. Many not-for-profits receive government funding to deliver services or conduct research. Larger organizations can be highly influential in shaping public policy and guiding sector-wide ideologies. There is currently no single organization that represents the entire ECL sector.

Provincial and federal governments create the legislation, policies, funding structures, and programs that form the backbone of the childcare ecosystem. The degree to which governments support or constrain the sector depends, largely on their political priorities and the value they place on early learning and care. At the federal level, programs such as the [Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement](#) have funneled significant investments into provinces to support initiatives like the \$10aDay program. Provinces have some flexibility in how they allocate and implement these funds.

In British Columbia, multiple ministries contribute to the childcare ecosystem, including the *Ministry of Education and Child Care*, the *Ministry of Health* (via local health authorities), and the *Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction*. Coordination between these ministries varies. Most childcare-related funding programs and resources are administered through *ChildCare BC*, which, at the time of writing, offered thirteen separate funding streams for ECL providers and families. The policies and programs developed at the provincial and federal levels are among the most influential forces in shaping outcomes across the entire childcare ecosystem.

The Childcare Ecosystem – Cause and Consequence

Note: This review acknowledges that Early Childcare and Learning (ECL) providers are committed to offering accessible and high-quality services. The following overview is not intended to discredit the skill or dedication of those working in the field. Rather, it provides a systemic lens to explain how specific structural breakdowns can lead to widespread dysfunction across the entire childcare ecosystem.

The childcare ecosystem begins with a need or desire for a child to be cared for by someone other than a parent or guardian. Frequently, this need arises because of work or other responsibilities. In other cases, caregivers may seek ECL services to enrich their child's social, developmental, or learning experiences.

Parents and guardians search for care options that are affordable, accessible, and convenient in terms of location and hours, while also providing a nurturing and high-quality environment for their child. When families are unable to find childcare that meets these criteria, the system begins to break down.

In today's ecosystem, when enough parents and guardians face barriers to accessing childcare, pressure builds on government to respond. Historically, childcare was often the responsibility of families and communities. However, increasing demand and social shifts have moved this responsibility to the public realm. Electors and advocacy groups may influence policymakers to act through elections or lobbying.

Recognizing affordability and the shortage of available ECL spaces as primary issues, the federal and provincial governments created programs aimed at reducing costs for families and expanding childcare infrastructure. These programs provide public funding to childcare providers to offset the costs of service delivery, with the goal of making fees more affordable.

To ensure accountability, governments implement restrictions on how funding is used. Fiscal responsibility is also a concern, so subsidies are often limited to core operations and basic services. At the same time, public officials or bureaucrats may lack the sector-specific knowledge needed to understand the full systemic impacts of their policy choices, or the authority to manage effective program rollouts.

At this stage, a **systemic breakdown** begins to take hold. Several interrelated issues emerge:

- **Government funding focuses primarily on affordability**, covering only basic services. This leads to strain across the childcare sector.
- **Quality of care becomes a lower priority** as the system emphasizes fee reduction and increased space availability.
- **Childcare providers operate under significant financial constraints**, often with low wages and benefits, minimal staffing, and limited programming. The affordability-focused model results in staffing shortages, high turnover, and an inability to invest in training, infrastructure, or professional development.
- **Complex licensing, reporting, and accountability measures** consume provider time and resources, detracting from their core mission of providing high-quality care.
- **Private and non-profit providers are subject to different programs and requirements**, creating inconsistent supports and growing tensions within the sector.
- **The entire sector becomes dependent** on a funding model that is insufficient, unpredictable, and vulnerable to political change.
- **ECL workers experience burnout and low morale**, as compensation, recognition, and working conditions fail to match the demands of their roles. Many leave the sector entirely.
- **Government interventions to expand the workforce, prioritize quantity over quality**, resulting in a pipeline of new workers who may lack experience, motivation, or long-term commitment to the field.
- **Wage subsidies offer temporary relief** but do not provide long-term financial security, as these programs are not guaranteed and are often insufficient.
- While the government may succeed in **increasing the number of affordable childcare spaces**, the overall ecosystem remains fragile and strained.
- **Parents may access more affordable childcare**, but it may not align with their needs in terms of hours, location, or the quality of care and learning.

Despite large public investments aimed at improving affordability, wages, and training, the outcome of these targeted efforts were described by stakeholders as “broken,” “in crisis,” or simply “a mess.”

Childcare Ecosystem

Cause and Consequence

Summary Table

Stage	Description
1. Initial Need	Parents/guardians need childcare due to work or developmental goals for the child.
2. Search for Care	Families seek affordable, accessible, high-quality care that meets their scheduling needs.
3. Barriers Encountered	If parents needs are unmet, the system starts to fail, leading to broader accessibility issues.
4. Government Response	Government develops affordability programs in response to public pressure.
5. Funding Allocation	Funding is directed to ECL providers to reduce costs and expand services.
6. Funding Restrictions	Programs come with strict rules and only cover basic operations.
7. Sector Strain	Centres operate with limited staff and resources; quality declines.
8. Workforce Turnover	Low wages and stress drive ECL workers out of the field.
9. Training Mismatch	Government prioritizes educational incentives to increase the number of workers, not quality.
10. Temporary Relief	Wage subsidies are introduced, but they are not guaranteed long-term.
11. Persistent Gaps	Some care becomes more affordable, but not fully accessible or high-quality.
12. Systemic Vulnerability	The ECL system becomes strained, fragile and dependent on unstable funding.

Systems are perfectly designed to achieve the results they are getting right now.

How Systems Shape Behaviours - and Maintain the Status Quo

Current systems and funding guidelines significantly shape provider behaviours and institutional outcomes:

- Some initiatives, while well-intentioned, have fostered dependency without addressing underlying structural issues. Rather than solving root problems, these programs contribute to systemic dysfunctions.
- Funding models that reward cost-cutting and strict adherence to administrative requirements tend to shape provider practices in ways that limit innovation and compromise quality of care.
- Decision-makers often favour formalized solutions, such as legislation or institutional mandates, over more adaptive, community-led approaches that could respond more effectively to local needs.

Despite clear and persistent challenges, the system continues to function due to several stabilizing factors:

Existing funding mechanisms and regulatory frameworks create a baseline of support, fostering equilibrium around current (though limited) goals—often reinforced by a mindset that “something is better than nothing.”

These frameworks offer a degree of predictability, even as they inadvertently lock the system into underinvestment and low performance.

There is a subtle but pervasive acceptance among some stakeholders that current service levels are “good enough,” reducing the urgency for transformative change - even when it is clearly needed.

Deeply embedded beliefs and assumptions about responsibility, funding, and the role of government, shape policy and reinforce the status quo, making meaningful reform difficult without deliberate, coordinated efforts.

With limited accountability mechanisms in place, the rollout of new funding programs often relies on trial and error, meaning that dysfunction is built into the system. Therefore,

meaningful structural change is unlikely to occur without a significant breakdown in the system resulting in sustained public pressure.

Building a Shared Social Childcare Infrastructure

This crisis is not the result of a lack of care. It is a failure to organize care in a way that allows families, providers, and communities to thrive. The current system attempts to patch deep systemic issues by grafting subsidies onto a fundamentally broken foundation, adding pressure, rather than relieving it.

What is needed now is a paradigm shift: to move away from treating childcare as an individual financial burden, and instead, to recognize and invest in it as shared social infrastructure.

A shared social childcare infrastructure means that early care and learning is treated as an essential public good - intentionally designed, adequately funded, and equitably managed to meet the needs of children, families, educators, and communities. This approach moves beyond fragmented subsidies and short-term fixes, instead building a system grounded in equity, stability, and care.

Key Principles of a Functional Childcare Infrastructure

Stable Public Funding

Reliable, direct operational funding ensures sustainable wages, quality facilities, and equitable access, without dependence on fluctuating or conditional subsidies.

Local and Community-Led Governance

Decisions and commitments prioritizing childcare and early education are made at the community level, allowing for responsiveness and flexibility that top-down models cannot provide.

Integrated Support Networks

ECL systems are connected with other family and community supports, such as schools, health care, workplaces, and housing, so families are supported holistically rather than in isolation.

Employer and Government Collaboration

Employers are active participants in solutions through workplace policies and co-investment strategies, while governments provide the policy frameworks, oversight, and public funding to ensure consistency and access.

Flexibility and Accessibility

Childcare services are designed to meet diverse family needs, offering a range of hours, culturally appropriate care, and inclusive programming for different child needs, income levels, and life circumstances.

Commitment to Quality and Learning

High-quality care and evidence-based early learning practices remain foundational. Funding, staff training, operational supports, and program design are all guided by principles of quality, inclusion, and child development.

Author's Note

The British Columbia Early Learning Framework (p.15) describes children as curious, capable, and full of potential. It's a reminder of the possibilities within every child and the importance of nurturing these capacities so they may grow and thrive.

Likewise, those working in early childhood education are also curious, capable, and full of potential. They demonstrate this daily, in countless and powerful ways, as they care for and teach our children. We must listen to the voices of those who spend their days on their knees, eye-to-eye with our youngest learners - they hold truths we can't afford to ignore.

Let us not lose sight of our shared goal: to build communities that allow all of us to flourish, as we care for children, families, and those who care for them.

**Prepared for the Early Learning and Childcare Council of Oceanside (ELCCO)
by Sharon Tomczyk. 2025**

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