



What is the history of this issue and how does it impact First Nations?

First Nations children in their early years are served by three federal programs: Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve program, Aboriginal Head Start Urban and Northern Communities Program, and First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative. Many First Nations offer supplementary early learning and childcare (ELCC) programs, including home visiting, land-based programs, and Elder storytelling. The federal ELCC programs for First Nations have been historically underfunded, underserved and inadequate to meet the needs of First Nations, with outdated formulas and stagnant funding undermining the ability of these programs to truly support First Nations children and families. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has led calls for change in these services for decades to ensure that First Nations children are best prepared to live happy and healthy lives.

In 2016, the AFN First Nations-in-Assembly mandated a National Expert Working Group on First Nations Early Learning and Child Care to lead work on First Nations ELCC at the national level. The National Expert Working Group conducted two years of engagements to develop the First Nations ELCC Policy Framework, which outlined the vision, principles and goals of First Nations ELCC. The Framework envisioned happy, healthy First Nations children who are grounded and connected to their identity as First Nations, and who are supported by culturally and linguistically based programs and services that are determined by First Nations. This Framework was endorsed by AFN Resolution 83/2017, *Support for the National First Nations Early Learning and Child Care Policy Framework*, supporting it as the First Nations component of the Indigenous ELCC Framework. The Indigenous ELCC Framework was released in 2018 with \$1.02 billion for First Nations over 10 years to support its implementation.

How has the AFN's recent advocacy affected this area?

The AFN has advanced First Nations ELCC as a priority during the COVID-19 pandemic. First Nations ELCC programs, services and providers have been chronically underfunded for decades, and the challenges stemming from COVID-19 have caused further strain. First Nations ELCC programs have been innovative in their service delivery, preparing virtual programming, conducting home visits and providing food baskets, and National Chief Bellegarde has advocated for additional funds to support this work. The AFN advocated for support for First Nations ELCC providers, noting the exceptional role that providers have taken on during the pandemic. The AFN affirmed that First Nations must be supported to determine their ELCC reopening, recovery and stabilization priorities, and advocated for dedicated funds for First Nations ELCC as part of Canada's COVID-19 recovery strategy. As a result of this advocacy, Canada committed up to \$120

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million for emergency COVID-19 funding for Indigenous ELCC, with over \$71 million dedicated to First Nations, available immediately to support First Nations with COVID-19 ELCC-related needs.

In the 2020 Fall Economic Statement (FES), Canada proposed to make significant investments towards creating a national system of ELCC, including in Indigenous ELCC. The FES also builds on the 2018 investments in the Indigenous ELCC Framework by making permanent investments of \$210 million per year, starting in 2028-29, to continue the progress that the Indigenous ELCC Framework has made. The FES also proposes to invest \$75 million in 2021-22 to improve the quality and accessibility of Indigenous ELCC, including retaining Indigenous early childhood educators and offering flexible care.

Budget 2021 proposes to invest \$30 billion over five years, beginning in 2021-22, and \$8.3 billion ongoing in ELCC across Canada. Of this, \$2.5 billion over five years is dedicated to Indigenous ELCC, including funds for governance and capacity, increasing Indigenous ELCC spaces, supporting workforce development, and offering flexible care. It also includes investments in Indigenous ELCC infrastructure and a commitment to tabling federal ELCC legislation by Fall 2021 “to enshrine the principles of a Canada-wide child care system in law.”

Where do we hope to go in the future?

As the implementation of the First Nations and Indigenous ELCC Frameworks continues at the First Nation, regional and national levels, the AFN will continue to advocate for First Nations governance, determination and jurisdiction over ELCC. As work towards a national system of childcare advances, including federal ELCC legislation, the AFN will continue to advocate for First Nations to lead this work in accordance with the First Nations ELCC Framework.