



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS  
**Special Chiefs Assembly**

December 5-7, 2023

Shaw Centre – Ottawa, Ontario

*Ottawa is located on the unceded unsundered Territory of the Algonquin People.*

ASSEMBLÉE DES PREMIÈRES NATIONS  
**Assemblée extraordinaire des Chefs**

Du 5 au 7 décembre 2023 - Centre Shaw - Ottawa ( Ontario)

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## Early Learning & Child Care

### History

Federal programs for First Nations Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC)—including Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve, Aboriginal Head Start Urban and Northern Communities, and the First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative—have been historically underfunded, underserved, and inadequate to meet First Nations’ needs. Outdated and stagnant funding undermines the ability of these programs to meet the needs of First Nations children and families. For decades, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has led calls for change in these services to ensure First Nations children are properly supported in their early years.

In 2017, the National Expert Working Group (NEWG) on First Nations ELCC led engagement and the development of the First Nations ELCC Policy Framework. The Framework outlines the vision, principles, and goals of First Nations ELCC and envisions happy and healthy First Nations children who are grounded and connected to their identity as First Nations and are supported by culture and language-based programs and services determined by First Nations. The Framework was supported by the First Nations-in-Assembly as the First Nations component of the Indigenous ELCC Framework and was released in 2018 with a \$1.02 billion investment over ten years for First Nations ELCC. Pursuant to AFN advocacy, Budget 2021 proposed investing \$30 billion in ELCC across Canada over five years; of this, \$878.53 million is dedicated to First Nations ELCC, including service delivery and infrastructure.

### AFN’s recent advocacy

Pursuant to mandates given by the First Nations-in-Assembly, the AFN contracted the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy to lead research with First Nations to develop options for a funding model that reflects First Nations’ needs and priorities for ELCC. The NEWG oversees this work and will bring forward their recommendation on a First Nations-determined funding model to the First Nations-in-Assembly in 2024.

In December 2022, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development introduced Bill C-35, *An Act Respecting Early Learning and Child Care in Canada*. In 2022, the First Nations-in-Assembly passed AFN Resolution 08/2022, *Early Learning and Child Care Legislation*, asserting that federal ELCC legislation must respect First Nations’ rights to self-determination and jurisdiction over ELCC, and calling on Canada to engage directly with rights holders. In March 2023, the AFN, with input from the NEWG, made a submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. The AFN submission expressed concerns about the lack of engagement with First Nations in the development of Bill C-35 and the need to recognize First Nations jurisdiction and rights. The Submission also emphasized the importance of long-term funding for First Nations ELCC. On November 1, 2023, Interim National Chief Joanna Bernard appeared as a witness at the Senate’s Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, reiterating the AFN’s concerns and expressing the importance of upholding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and of obtaining free, prior, and informed consent when developing legislation that impacts First Nations.



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## Next Steps

The AFN continues to monitor the progress of Bill C-35 as it advances through the legislative process. The AFN will continue to monitor the implementation of Budget 2021 investments in First Nations ELCC to ensure that First Nations children, families, and communities are supported by First Nations-determined and delivered, high-quality, culture- and language-based ELCC. The AFN will continue to advocate for First Nations governance, self-determination, and jurisdiction over ELCC in the implementation of the First Nations and Indigenous ELCC Frameworks and in the development of a national child care system.

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