



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 early learning and child care (ELCC) programs: Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve, Aboriginal Head Start Urban and Northern Communities, and First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative. Many First Nations offer supplementary 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First Nations have been historically underfunded, underserved and inadequate to meet the needs of First Nations, with outdated formulas and stagnant funding undermining the ability of these programs to truly support First Nations children and families.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 properly supported in their early years.

In 2016, the AFN Chiefs-in-Assembly mandated the National Expert Working Group (NEWG) on First Nations Early Learning and Child Care to lead work on First Nations ELCC at the national level. The NEWG 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.

The First Nations ELCC 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 long advocated for increased supports for First Nations ELCC programs and services, including addressing historic funding gaps. Budget 2021 proposed to invest \$30 billion over five years, beginning in 2021-22, and \$8.3 billion ongoing in ELCC across Canada. Of this, \$878.53 million over five years is dedicated to First Nations ELCC programs, services and governance, and additional investments in before- and after-school care and infrastructure were also committed. Budget 2021 also proposed to legislate a Canada-wide system of child care. In July 2021, the Chiefs-in-Assembly passed AFN Resolution 05/2021, *Allocation of Early Learning and Child Care Investments in Budget 2021*, affirming the regional allocation of funding under Budget 2021.



SECTOR UPDATE
SOCIAL BRANCH: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SECTOR
ISSUE: EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE
July 2022

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau reaffirmed his government's commitment to childcare in his December 2021 mandate letters, which mandated the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to work with Indigenous partners on an Indigenous ELCC system that is culturally-appropriate and high quality, including the creation of new spaces on-reserve, and to continue work towards federal ELCC legislation. In early 2022, the Minister sought feedback on the federal government's approach to legislation, which was not considerate of First Nations' processes or priorities. The AFN advocated to the Minister that First Nations leadership must be directly engaged in this process for accountability, and to ensure that the priorities and perspectives of First Nations are properly reflected in the legislation.

In April 2022, the AFN secured a commitment from Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) to fund the work of the AFN on ELCC. The AFN is working with the NEWG to prepare a proposal that reflects First Nations' priorities for ELCC, including: development of a First Nations-determined funding model for ELCC, including research and engagement; establishing a path forward on federal ELCC legislation; providing national-level coordination and collaboration on First Nations ELCC; and continuing to support implementation of the First Nations ELCC Framework priorities.

Where do we hope to go in the future?

As 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 child care 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, and to ensure that First Nations' voices are properly heard and reflected in this work.