

TD 506-18(3) TABLED ON AUGUST 20, 2019

Supporting Access to Child Care in the NWT
2019-2020
Supplementary Action Plan



Introduction

Parents and caregivers have the primary responsibility and the most influence and impact on a child's wellbeing, learning and development. Raising a child is one of the most rewarding life experiences and one that requires some level of support or access to community-based services at various points in a child's early years.

Building an effective and integrated early childhood development system recognizes the interconnectedness of supports and services available to support families with young children. As such, the departments of Health and Social Services (HSS) and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) continue to work together as part of the joint ten-year *Right from the Start: A Framework for Early Childhood Development in the NWT* (Framework), which was released in 2013.

This Framework signified the importance of early childhood development as an area of priority for the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and represented a major collaborative partnership to provide direct focus upon early childhood development for families in the NWT.

The *Supporting Access to Child Care in the NWT* Action Plan acts to extend current work being completed under the Framework commitment of:

Access to high quality, affordable, early learning programs and child care services will be enhanced.

The territorial implementation of Junior Kindergarten (JK) in 2018 was a significant step toward enhancing access to quality, affordable, early learning programming. JK now provides all families with four-year old children in the NWT with an option to access free, play-based early learning programming within their community school.

There is an inequity of access to early learning and child care services for families in the NWT, leaving too many children from birth to three years old without access. With a vision to provide equitable access to a continuum of quality, community-driven early learning and child care options, the *Supporting Access to Child Care in the NWT* Action Plan provides an outline of a phased-in approach to making child care more accessible and affordable for families throughout the NWT. As the current early childhood action plans come to an end in March 2020, the *Supporting Access to Child Care in the NWT* Action Plan outlines current work and highlights additional actions to align with and support the anticipated revision of both the *Right from the Start: Early Childhood Development* Action Plan and the *Canada-NWT Early Learning and Child Care* Bilateral Agreement and Action Plan.

Mandate of the 18th Legislative Assembly

The Supporting Access to Child Care Action Plan is directly related to the following Mandate Commitment:

Mandate Commitment 3.6.2 - We will improve the **accessibility, affordability** and **inclusivity** of child care in the NWT to allow all children aged zero to five to experience an enriching, **quality** early learning environment, by:

- supporting the creation of new child care spaces and programs in all communities
- ensuring the sustainability of existing early childhood development programs
- creating an action plan for a phased-in approach to making child care more accessible and affordable

Enhancing the accessibility, affordability and inclusivity of child care is an ongoing and continuous focus for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, as outlined in the figure below:



The Supporting Access to Child Care Action Plan outlines current work and includes additional actions to support a phased-in approach to making child care more accessible and affordable for families in the NWT, along with an implementation timeline and measures of success.

Current Status

As of April 2019, the NWT has licensed early childhood programs with a total of 1907 potential child care spaces available for children from birth to 5 years old, with 562 of these spaces representing out of school for children 5-11 years old. All 4 and 5 year old children in the NWT have the option to access to free Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten within their community schools. Licensed child care programs in the NWT consist of:

- Centre-based care for children from birth to school entry.
- Out-of-school (afterschool) care for school-aged children 4-11 years old.
- Family day homes for children from birth to 6 years old, which can also include out-of-school care for children 4-11 years old.
- Preschool care for children two years old until school entry.

Number Of Licensed Programs					
Region	Centre-based	Out of School	Family Day Home	Preschool	Total
Beaufort Delta	5	2	1	3	11
Deh Cho	2	1	0	2	5
North Slave	8	20	41	7	76
Sahtu	1	0	0	2	3
South Slave	4	3	10	3	20
Total	20	26	52	17	115

Data valid as of June 2019

Number of Child Spaces				
Region	Infant	Preschool	Out of School	Total
Beaufort Delta	47	147	112	306
Deh Cho	22	50	30	102
North Slave	178	442	525	1145
Sahtu	8	51	0	59
South Slave	31	141	95	267
Total	286	831	762	1879

Data valid as of June 19, 2019

2018-2019 Junior Kindergarten Enrollment	2018-2019 Kindergarten Enrollment
552	595

Data valid as of September 30, 2018

Feasibility Study on Universal Affordable Day Care

The *Feasibility Study on Universal Affordable Day Care in the NWT* (Feasibility Study) was completed in 2015 (Appendix A). The Study resulted from Motion 26-17(4) of the 17th Legislative Assembly calling for a feasibility study on the concept of universal and affordable child care delivered by people trained in early childhood development and education.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) contracted Better Child Care Education with the University of Toronto to complete the *Feasibility Study*, this study examined:

- The benefits of early education and care,
- The status of child care currently in the NWT,
- Potential costs and benefits of universal child care in the NWT; and
- Potential barriers to achieving universal child care in the NWT.

The economic analysis of the available information about the NWT found that universal affordable child care in the NWT could cost between \$20 million (reflecting Québec's level of spending) and \$45 million (reflecting Sweden's spending model) annually. This is in addition to ECE's current total investment in early childhood of \$8.9 million. It also predicted that there could be gains in employment, as caregivers are able to return to the workforce and corresponding increases in tax revenue.

The *Feasibility Study* indicated several significant barriers to achieving a universal child care system in the NWT in addition to the potential annual investment:

- The number of licensed child care spaces would need to increase. To provide child care with the same rate of enrolment as Québec, the NWT would require a 56 percent increase in full-time spaces.
- The number of trained early childhood workers would need to increase. Between 221 and 299 additional early childhood staff would need to be trained and hired to accommodate the increase in children enrolled in child care programs. This is in addition to the approximately 215 early childhood staff currently employed.
- Capital expenses, predicted at \$8-15 million, would be required if new child care centres were built to accommodate the increased demand.

Early Childhood Development and Learning Action Plans

The *Feasibility Study* also recognized that that the *NWT Right from the Start Early Childhood Development Framework* and associated Action Plans reflect global trends aimed at improving access to quality early childhood programs.

Since the release of the Feasibility Study in 2015, the Department of Education, Culture, and Employment has released three action plans:

- 2016 *Right from the Start: Early Childhood Development and Learning Bridge Action Plan*
- 2017-2020 *Right from the Start: Early Childhood Development Action Plan*
- 2017-2020 *Canada-NWT Bilateral ELCC Agreement and Action Plan*

Each of these Action Plans have considered the barriers identified within the Feasibility Study and attempt to remove barriers identified within the Study by focusing upon increasing licensed child care spaces, training existing early childhood staff, promoting the field of early childhood development and providing additional funding to support the sustainability of licensed early childhood programs.

The Canada-NWT Bilateral ELCC Agreement and 3-year Action plan prioritizes funding toward local, regional and system priorities that have an impact on families more in need by increasing the quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity in early learning and child care.

Toward Accessible Early Learning and Child Care in the NWT

Accessible early learning and child care means that **opportunities are available** to residents, regardless of income or geographic location. It also means that care is **non-compulsory** and offered through a **range of services** that are based on the needs identified by the community and parents.

The territorial implementation of JK provided free, play-based learning opportunities for all children in the NWT. This was a fiscally responsible and feasible option as all communities had the required infrastructure available in schools with utilization rates that provided enough space for JK students.

Following the successful territory-wide implementation of JK, the focus has shifted to support for accessible child care and early learning opportunities for children from 0-3. Adopting a phased-in approach considers the multiple elements involved with developing accessible and affordable early learning and child care system in the NWT. In order to be sustainable and effective, this shift requires quality infrastructure, time, community interest, trained early childhood staff, as well as financial investment.

Key Elements for Accessible Child Care in the NWT

The figure, below, illustrates the key elements that contribute to accessible early learning and child care in the NWT. It is a complex system with each factor directly related to and affecting the others.





Goal

Sustainable early learning and child care programs that reflect the unique needs of communities.

ECE licenses, funds, inspects and provides ongoing support to non-profit organizations, Indigenous governments, and individuals who operate early learning and child care programming. This work includes, connecting with communities to identify gaps and opportunities for early learning and child care options and assists with raising awareness and knowledge of the importance of early childhood development.

The early childhood system in the NWT recognizes that a one-size-fits-all approach does not meet the needs for families in all communities. Rather, it is important to have flexibility within this system to support community members as they build early learning and child care programs that reflect their community’s unique contexts and meet child care needs. For example, some communities require additional licensed day care spaces, while others would benefit from a parent and tot drop-in program

ECE will prioritize engagement with the with the following eleven NWT communities that do not currently have access to licensed early childhood programs for children from birth to three years old: Colville Lake, Detah, Enterprise, Jean Marie River, Kakisa, Łutselk’e, Nahanni Butte, Norman Wells, Sambaa K’e, Tsiigehetchic, and Wrigley. Representatives from each of these communities have been invited to attend and participate in an engagement session at the *Learning Together: Right from the Start Early Childhood Symposium* taking place on August 21-23, 2019 in Yellowknife, NT.

Action	Source/Timeline
Support communities to identify gaps and opportunity for early learning and child care options and assist with raising awareness and knowledge of the importance of early childhood development and support communities with improving the accessibility of early learning and child care programs that best meet their needs.	2017-2020 ELCC Action Plan
Work with HSS to increase ECE early childhood representation at the community and regional level in the development of Community Wellness Plans and Community Healthy Living Fairs.	2017-2020 ECD Action Plan
Establish and maintain regular engagement with community leadership about early learning and child care; prioritizing communities in most need.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care



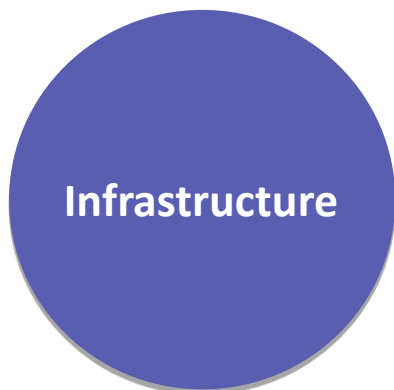
Goal

Families and Children from birth to 3 years old have access to licensed early childhood programming.

ECE provides licensed early childhood programs with financial support, training options and assistance throughout the licensing process. Licensed programs are initiated and maintained by local staff who are in the best position to meet the needs of the children and families they serve. Implementation of new licensed early childhood programs and other early learning programs is reliant on a number of factors, such as community interest, availability of qualified staff, and the availability of suitable locations; all of which are targets for this action plan.

All families with 4 and 5 year old children have an option to access early learning programming within their local schools, there is now a focus on child care for children from birth to 3 years old.

Action	Source/Timeline
Territorial Implementation of Junior Kindergarten for all 4-year olds in the NWT.	2017-2020 ECD Action Plan
Provide one-time access to funding that supports the creation of new licensed early childhood programs.	2017-2020 ELCC
Provide funding for licensed centre-based early childhood programs and family day homes (during the initial start-up phase) to offset costs associated with health and safety repairs and maintenance as directed by annual inspections.	2017-2020 ELCC
Increase funding for licensed centre-based early childhood programs to encourage the development of additional spaces for children from birth to 3 years old.	2017-2020 ELCC
Increase funding for licensed centre-based early childhood programs that offer out-of-school spaces for 4-11 year old children, including options to provide full-day funding to support programming for other times when schools may be closed (such as professional development days and school breaks).	2017-2020 ELCC
Raise awareness of the economic and entrepreneurial benefits of opening licensed early childhood programs, especially licensed family day homes.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care



Goal
 Investment in infrastructure for licensed early childhood programs.

Lack of infrastructure funding is a significant barrier to the development of licensed child care programs in the NWT. The GNWT does not directly operate licensed early childhood programs; but provides regulatory oversight and operations-based funding. As a result, the GNWT does not currently provide capital funding for licensed early childhood programs.

Infrastructure is one of the largest barriers for non-profit groups, Indigenous governments and community organizations attempting to develop a licensed child care program in many communities. Many community buildings will not pass the required inspections by the Office of the Fire Marshall, Environmental Health and ECE without significant repairs and/or renovations that current Health and Safety funding and Start-up funding do not adequately address.

Action	Source/Timeline
Complete a jurisdictional scan to determine to what extent other Canadian provinces and territories support capital investments in infrastructure for licensed early childhood programs.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care
Review the GNWT’s Capital Standards & Criteria for potential revisions.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care
Develop criteria and a payment policy to initiate a pilot to explore capital investment in licensed early childhood programs.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care
Explore the possibility of using school spaces and other government-owned buildings for the development of licensed early childhood program facilities.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care
Based on exploration of possibilities and pilot, develop a draft policy, including criteria and indicators for evaluation, related to investments in capital costs that support the establishment of licensed early childhood programs for consideration by other GNWT departments.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care



Goal
 Stabilizing parent fees for licensed early childhood programs.

According to the Feasibility Study, and more recently, the Statistics Canada Child Care Survey, parents reported difficulty finding and paying for child care.

The Income Assistance Program can assist individuals with their child care expenses so that they can participate in the labour force, participate in a Productive Choice, or pursue educational and training opportunities in the NWT. Through the Income Assistance Program, eligible parents are able to receive funding toward both licensed and unlicensed child care, including after-school programming.

Not all Jurisdictions in Canada have full-time Junior Kindergarten (JK) and Kindergarten (K) programming. Since the territorial implementation of JK, parents of four and five year old children in the NWT have an option to access free, play-based JK/K programming within their community school.

Although ECE does not currently track fees charged to parents from licensed early childhood programs, there seems to be a wide discrepancy of fees charged to parents throughout the NWT, with some licensed early childhood programs offering free access to others with fees of more than \$1000 per child.

As of 2019, as part of the licensing process, ECE will systematically collect information on the fees charged by licensed early childhood programs.

Action	Source/Timeline
As part of the annual licensing process, systematically collect information on the monthly amount charged to parents.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care
Complete a jurisdictional scan of initiatives and/or incentives other provinces and territories offer to reduce fees charged to parents.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care



Goal
 Early childhood programs provide support for children who are vulnerable or have specific developmental needs in their care.

Inclusion refers to true belonging. It is the ability for a child and their family to not only have access to a program, but to have the supports needed to be and feel successful. Supports may include:

- **People:** appropriately trained staff to support early childhood programs and keep spaces safe, caring and responsive to the varied needs of children.
- **Places:** modifying the physical environment to remove barriers and promote learning and development.
- **Things:** learning materials and methods, use of technology, alternative schedules and staff training.

This also includes the need for an integrated service delivery model to provide a team-based approach to working with families and other service providers.

Supporting Child Inclusion and Participation (SCIP) funding is a proposal-based funding option for licensed early childhood programs to support programming for children who may be at-risk, vulnerable or have identified developmental needs.

Action	Source/Timeline
Implement the Supporting Child Inclusion and Participation (SCIP) funding.	2017-2020 ECD Action Plan
Create training opportunities that include front line staff from various organizations and government departments working in early childhood to promote networking and collaboration between service providers towards enhanced communication and integrated service to better support vulnerable children.	2017-2020 ECD Action Plan
Develop an NWT integrated early childhood services delivery model for supporting children with complex needs and their families.	2017-2020 ECD Action Plan



Goal

Early childhood staff have post-secondary education credentials, such as a certificate, diploma and/or degree in early childhood education.

One way to foster high quality early learning and child care is to support the development of a qualified early childhood workforce. Through the *Right from the Start Framework* and subsequent action plans, as well as the *ELCC Action Plan*, the GNWT has committed to promoting future workforce development by supporting students currently enrolled in early childhood programs, as well as supporting Aurora College with the implementation of an Early Learning and Child Care Diploma Program in Yellowknife and delivering a dual credit course for interested senior secondary students, allowing students to earn both high school and college-level credits.

Action	Source/Timeline
Continue to offer a dual-credit early childhood development program for interested senior secondary students and explore options for expansion.	2017-2020 ECD Action Plan
Support Aurora College to deliver part-time distance delivery and full-time on-site Diploma programs in Early Childhood Education.	2017-2020 ECD & ELCC Action Plan
Increase the number of \$5000 scholarships offered to support students from the NWT who are enrolled in post-secondary early childhood education programs.	2017-2020 ELCC
Continue to offer the Early Childhood Staff Grant, which increases the earning potential for eligible licensed day care staff. This grant provides up to \$12,000 annually for eligible staff, based on a combination of post-secondary education and hours worked.	On-going
Expand flexible training opportunities, such as face-to-face and online/distance-based training, for staff working within licensed centre-based early childhood programs.	ELCC/2017-2020 ECD & ELCC Action Plan

Measures of Success

The Supporting Access to Child Care action plan acts to supplement and extend current actions within both the *2017-2020 Canada-NWT Bilateral Agreement and ELCC Action Plan* and the *2017-2020 Right from the Start: Early Childhood Action Plan*. The primary measure of success will be comparing the number of licensed early childhood programs and spaces throughout the NWT over time. This information will be available through the annual reporting of the *Canada-NWT Bilateral Agreement and Action Plan* and the results will be included in ECE's evaluation schedule for early childhood development and learning programs. Specific measures of success, related to the goal indicated for each key element are highlighted within the summary table, below.

While increasing the number of licensed child care spaces has been defined as a measure of success, it is important to note that some communities in the NWT may never have the population or desire to maintain a licensed child care program in the community. This could be due to a number of factors, such as community population, birth rate, employment rate, and cultural child-rearing preferences.

In this way, increased access to quality early childhood experiences will vary greatly across the territory and may not always result in licensed care. Increased access may include additional early learning and education, such as the support for parent-child drop-in programs.

Summary Table of Actions

Supporting Access to Child Care in the NWT Action Plan				
Element	Goal	Action	Source	Measures of Success
Community Driven	Sustainable early learning and child care programs that reflect the unique needs of communities.	Support communities to identify gaps and opportunity for early learning and child care options and assist with raising awareness and knowledge of the importance of early childhood development and support communities with improving the accessibility of early learning and child care programs that best meet their needs.	ELCC Action Plan 2018-2020	Number and type of event that ECE early childhood staff attended. Communication with community leadership within the 11 communities without licensed early childhood programming is established.
		Work with HSS to increase ECE early childhood representation at the community and regional level in the development of Community Wellness Plans and Community Healthy Living Fairs.	2017-20 ECD Action Plan	
		Establish and maintain regular engagement with community leadership about early learning and child care, prioritizing communities in most need.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care Action Plan	
Available Spaces	Families and Children from birth to 3 years old have access to licensed early childhood programming.	Territorial Implementation of Junior Kindergarten for all 4-year olds in the NWT.	2017-20 ECD Action Plan	Number and percentage of children from birth to 3 years old who have access to licensed early childhood infant and preschool spaces.
		Provide one-time access to Start-up Funding to support the creation of new licensed early childhood programs.	2017-2020 ELCC Action Plan	
		Provide funding for licensed centre-based early childhood programs and family day homes (during the initial start-up phase) to offset costs associated with health and safety repairs and maintenance as directed by annual inspections.	2017-2020 ELCC Action Plan	
		Increase funding for licensed centre-based early childhood programs to encourage the development of additional spaces for children from birth to 3 years old.	2017-2020 ELCC Action Plan	

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		Increase funding for licensed centre-based early childhood programs that offer out-of-school spaces for 4-11 year old children, including additional funding for children with identified specific needs; and include options to provide full-day funding to support programming for other times when schools may be closed (such as professional development days and school breaks).	2017-2020 ELCC Action Plan	
		Raise awareness of the economic and entrepreneurial benefits of opening licensed early childhood programs, especially licensed family day homes.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care Action Plan	
Infrastructure	Investment in infrastructure for licensed early childhood programs.	Complete a jurisdictional scan to determine to what extent other Canadian provinces and territories support capital investments in infrastructure for licensed early childhood programs.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care Action Plan	Number and percentage of children from birth to 3 years old who have access to licensed early childhood infant and preschool spaces.
		Review the GNWT's Capital Standards & Criteria for potential revisions.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care Action Plan	
		Develop criteria and a payment policy to fund a pilot project that supports the exploration for capital investment in licensed early childhood programs.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care Action Plan	
		Explore the possibility of using school spaces and other government-owned buildings for the development of licensed early childhood programs.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care Action Plan	
		Based on exploration of possibilities and pilot, develop a draft policy, including criteria and indicators for evaluation, related to investments in capital costs that support the establishment of licensed early childhood programs for consideration by other GNWT departments.	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care Action Plan	
Affordable	Stabilizing parent fees for licensed early childhood programs.	Systematically collect the monthly amount charged to parents as part of the annual licensing process	2019-2020 Supporting Access to Child Care Action Plan	Increased awareness of the range of fees licensed early childhood programs charge to parents in the NWT.
		Complete a jurisdictional scan of initiatives and/or incentives other Provinces and Territories offer to reduce fees charged to	2019-2020 Supporting Access	

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Inclusive	Early childhood programs provide support for children who are vulnerable or have specific developmental needs in their care.	Implement the Supporting Child Inclusion and Participation (SCIP) funding.	2017-2020 ECD Action Plan	Number of licensed early childhood programs receiving SCIP funding.
		Create training opportunities that include front line staff from various organizations and government departments working in early childhood to promote networking and collaboration between service providers toward enhanced communication and integrated service to better support vulnerable children.	2017-2020 ECD Action Plan	Percent of SCIP funding received by licensed early childhood programs. Percent of SCIP funding received by unlicensed early childhood programs.
		Develop an NWT integrated early childhood services delivery model for supporting children with complex needs and their families.	2017-2020 ECD Action Plan	
Qualified Early Childhood Staff	Early childhood staff have post-secondary education credentials, such as a certificate, diploma and/or degree in early childhood education.	Continue to offer a dual-credit early childhood development program for interested senior secondary students and explore options for expansion.	2017-2020 ECD Action Plan	Percentage of early childhood staff with post-secondary credentials, such as a certificate, diploma and/or degree in early childhood education.
		Support Aurora College to deliver part-time distance delivery and full-time on-site Diploma programs in Early Childhood Education.	2017-2020 ECD & ELCC Action Plan	
		Increase the number of \$5000 scholarships offered to support students from the NWT who are enrolled in post-secondary early childhood education programs.	2017-2020 ELCC	
		Continue to offer the Early Childhood Staff Grant, which increases the earning potential for eligible licensed day care staff. This grant provides up to \$12,000 annually for eligible staff, based on a combination of post-secondary education and hours worked.	On-going	
		Expand flexible training opportunities, such as face-to-face and online/distance-based training, for staff working within licensed centre-based early childhood programs.	2017-2020 ECD & ELCC Action Plan	

APPENDIX A:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Feasibility study of universal, affordable daycare in the Northwest Territories

The study format

This study responds to Motion 26-17(4) of the Government of the Northwest Territories calling for a feasibility study on the concept of universal and affordable child care delivered by people trained in early childhood development and education, similar to the systems in Québec and Scandinavia.

The study used a mixed methodology. Qualitative data was gathered through an online parent survey and focus groups and interviews. Child care service systems in the NWT, Québec and the Scandinavian countries were profiled. A cost/benefit analysis was developed using data provided by the NWT Bureau of Statistics and the Department of Education, Culture, and Employment.

Benefits of early education and care

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) provides multiple benefits to children, families and societies. By identifying problems and intervening early, ECEC decreases special education costs. Improved education ultimately helps to reduce skills shortages and expenditures in health, justice and social services. These, in turn, have a positive effect on income inequality leading to a stronger society and economy. ECEC is also a job creator in its own right, while supporting parents as they work or upgrade their skills.

Assessments of kindergarten-aged children in the NWT using the Early Development Instrument (EDI) indicate 38 percent of children are vulnerable in terms of development delays. Small delays in early childhood often increase if unattended. Research from the University of British Columbia and Healthy Child Manitoba documented poorer academic outcomes, grade repetition and early school leaving for children showing vulnerability at kindergarten as measured by the EDI. Reducing academics gaps and their resulting long-term social inequities are dependent on improving the competencies of children before they start school.

Research has made it clear that quality ECEC programs benefit all children and help lessen the negative effects of adverse home and neighbourhood environments. Such benefits provide a strong rationale for an efficient, high-quality service system accessible to all children and affordable for parents. The NWT's *Right from the Start Early Childhood Development Framework* and associated Action Plan attempt to realize many of these benefits by improving access to quality early childhood programs. The deliverables outlined in the Action Plan are steps on the journey of providing greater access to quality child care, a journey not without its challenges.

The status of child care in the NWT

The parents surveyed for this study reported difficulty finding and paying for child care. At the time of this study, there was only space in licensed care for 39 percent of 0–4 year olds and 13 percent of 5-11 year olds in the NWT. In eight small communities, there were 162 children ages 0–4 years with no access to licensed care. Parents described being forced to move from their communities to find care. They provided accounts of long wait lists, particularly for infant spaces, care for children with complex needs, part-time care and care in their neighbourhood.

Coupled with the limited availability of child care, parents cited the high cost of care as problematic. Despite the overrepresentation of highly educated parents from Yellowknife in the study, many of whom were unlikely to qualify for child care fee subsidies, 38 percent of respondents still found it very difficult to access a fee subsidy. Respondents reported spending up to half their income on child care. Some changed their work or left jobs because of costs. Others

took on debt, while still others struggled to complete their own education as they tried to pay for their children's care. Parents who had managed care with one child found the complications of finding and paying for care for two or more children difficult. Among those using child care only 55 percent were satisfied with the quality of their child's program.

The above suggests that the GNWT spends much less on child care than any other jurisdiction in Canada. The NWT spends below the Canadian average on child care as a portion of its GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and far below Québec and the Scandinavian countries. To meet Québec's level of spending, the NWT's child care budget would need to increase 175 percent. To spend at the same rate as Sweden, it would need to increase by 375 percent. To reach the Canadian average, the NWT would need to increase spending by 50 percent. In terms of spending per child care space, the NWT allocates an average of \$2,000 per space compared to the Canadian average of \$4,100.

Costs, potential gains and barriers to universal child care in the NWT

The study estimates the costs of universal child care for the NWT and provides a range of access and funding options based on the experiences of Quebec and Sweden. Due to differences in policies and geography, it is impossible to predict precisely what would occur if universal child care was implemented in the NWT. However, the study was able to provide a sense of the potential costs, gains and barriers to implementation.

Costs of implementing universal childcare in the NWT

- Predicted total yearly public expenditures would be between \$20 million (reflecting Québec's level of spending of \$12,000 per child care space and 61 percent enrolment of children 0-4 years) and \$45 million (reflecting Sweden's level of spending of \$17,000 per space and 70 percent enrolment). This reflects approximately \$17 - \$43 million of new expenditures. This is in addition to the current budget allocation of \$2.1 million for child care.

Potential Gains of implementing universal childcare in the NWT

- Every \$1 million spent on child care in the Northwest Territories is predicted to have an \$800,000 impact on GDP, a \$740,000 impact on labour and the potential creation of 9.86 person-years of employment.
- The employment rate of mothers is predicted to increase between 1 and 7 percentage points, which translates to 76 to 727 more mothers in the workforce. Some of these new entrants would be women with low educational backgrounds. Skills upgrading would be needed to support their transition into the workforce. Many of the new workforce entrants could find employment within the newly expanded child care sector.
- An increase in tax revenue of between \$59,748 and \$561,971 is predicted if all new workers did not complete high school. The increase in tax revenue would range from \$214,700 to \$2,052,775 if all new workers were similar to the average NWT worker.
- Due to the predicted increase in employment based on experiences in comparable jurisdictions and assuming job availability, GDP is calculated to increase by between \$17,576,300 and \$123,034,100 with the most conservative estimates and between \$35,870,000 and \$251,090,000 with upper bound estimates.

Barriers to implementing universal childcare in the NWT

- Depending on access targets, between 221 and 299 additional early childhood educators would need to be trained and hired to accommodate the increase in children enrolled in child care programs. This in addition to the approximately 215 early childhood staff currently working.
- Existing child care availability is also low in the NWT. In 2014, child care was available for only 39 percent of 0-4 year olds and 13 percent of 5-11 year olds. Providing child care with the same rate of enrolment as Québec would require a 56 percent increase in spaces; at the same rate as Sweden would require a 111 percent increase.
- Predicted capital expenses of \$8-\$15 million would be required if new child care centres were built to accommodate all increased demand. However, most increased demand could potentially be housed in surplus space in elementary schools.

The early childhood workforce

Concerted efforts are underway in the NWT to raise the qualifications of the early childhood workforce. This is being done in a variety of ways including the introduction of generous post-secondary scholarships for NWT students enrolled in accredited southern early childhood development or child studies diploma, degree or graduate degree programs. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment is also working towards the development and implementation of a series of Senior Secondary dual credit early childhood development courses that would also help high school students earn post-secondary early childhood development certificate credits at the same time.

However, the task of building a qualified early childhood workforce will take time and will require considerable attention. Day care programs in the NWT also lack some of the basic infrastructure supports found elsewhere, such as a common curriculum guide and programming materials, professional associations, public quality assurance systems and regulatory control over parent fees and staff salaries. This is not to say the NWT lacks quality child care programs. However, without a highly trained and resourced workforce the expansion of these programs will be unsustainable.

Bridging early education and care

A distinguishing feature of universal ECEC is the successful amalgamation of “education” and “care.” Equity of access requires that all children be exposed to a core program while at the same time accommodating parents’ workforce needs.

Partnerships between early childhood programs and schools are becoming the norm among economically developed countries. Three of the four jurisdictions in the study have been building on their school systems to provide universal preschool for children as early as age 3. Many NWT schools also hold considerable surplus space. This space is a public asset that, in some cases, could be repurposed to meet the education and care needs of younger children.

Many of the parent comments were concerned about the debate around Junior Kindergarten (JK). While only a few parents had a child attending JK, support for the program was high among research participants. Almost three quarters would like to see JK in their local school. The majority felt children would benefit from JK, and said it would be a support to their family and help reduce the high costs of child care. Those with reservations supported the concept but want increased resources for JK so it does not detract from existing school programs or add to the workload of teachers.

Moving forward

Building a universal child care system in the NWT may be achievable, but faces many significant challenges. Experiences in Quebec suggest that these challenges can be overcome in the NWT. For instance, the NWT already has a higher proportion of children using licensed day care today than Québec did when it launched its plan for universal care in 1997. Two decades ago, fewer than one in three staff in Québec child care programs had any early childhood training. Québec mothers had a lower labour force participation rate in 1997 than NWT mothers do today. Québec’s 1997 child poverty rates equalled those for the NWT in 2014 and its budget was in deep deficit, staggering under major cuts in federal transfer payments.

A clear plan and a major commitment of resources set Québec on the road to universal child care, but their journey continues to face challenges. For instance, the centerpiece of Quebec’s plan was first \$5 a day, and then \$7 a day, child care. The low fees created hyper-demand leading to unintended consequences. Québec’s original vision was to grow a system of non-profit child care. Community agencies could not keep pace, and by 2003 the government turned to commercial and home child care to speed expansion. Québec has been struggling with issues of equity, quality and cost containment ever since. The lesson learned from Quebec is that the road to universal child care is fraught with adversity, but the public interest and potential gains are significant.

Supporting Access to Child Care in the NWT
Supplementary Action Plan

Predictions regarding the costs and benefits of universal child care made in this study should not be interpreted as guarantees. However, there is overwhelming evidence that the introduction of universal child care will benefit the NWT both socially and economically. Going forward, information contained in this report will help to establish a broader appreciation for the fundamental importance of promoting accessible and high quality child care. No society can prosper when such a huge portion of its youngsters are left behind.

Readers of this report are encouraged to also review the *Right from the Start Early Childhood Development Framework* and associated Action Plan in order to learn about steps that have already been taken to strengthen early childhood supports in the NWT