

# CUP IMPACTS 2023

A sustainable **early childhood educator (ECE) workforce** depends on a **WAGE GRID** and **COMPENSATION FRAMEWORK** that reflect ECE values, experience, education, and responsibilities.

## The state of Alberta's ELCC\* workforce

**20,000**

As of 2022, there were just over **20,000 ECEs** working in Alberta (Muttart Foundation 2023).

**46%**

**of Alberta children** under the age of 6 were participating in ELCC in 2022 (Statistics Canada, 2022).

**\$18.59**

In 2021, ECEs in Alberta made an **average of \$18.59/hour** or a \$33,564 yearly salary (2021 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey).

**96%**

**96% of ECEs** in Canada are women (Statistics Canada, 2021).

\*The Alberta government defines early learning and child care (ELCC) as non-parental care provided by someone other than the child's parent or guardian. This includes facility-based care, daycare, out-of-school care, and preschool.

## Compensation framework

AECEA and CUP suggest that a compensation framework for ECEs that deliberately reflects their values, education, experience, and responsibilities is the best way to achieve workforce retention. There are three elements to the proposed compensation framework.

A **WAGE GRID\*** that reflects experience, education, and responsibilities

**NON-SALARIED COMPENSATION** (ex. pension, benefits, personal leaves)

A **COMPENSATION PHILOSOPHY** that ensures policies reflect the values and lived experiences of ECEs

\*All provinces and territories were prompted by the bilateral agreements with the federal government to start developing ECE wage grids, which are often included in the Action Plan of the agreements. Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland have already launched their grids.

## Now is the right time to ensure stability in the ECE workforce

In 2021, the federal government committed \$27 billion over five years to build a Canada-wide early learning and care system and began negotiating multilateral deals with the provinces and territories. The Alberta government estimates an additional 7,000-9,500 ECEs are needed to staff up to 68,700 new licensed spaces to achieve the goals of the **Canada-Alberta Agreement**, which include reducing parent fees to an average of \$10/day by 2026 (Government of Alberta, n.d.).

The most significant barrier to achieving this ambitious goal is high instability and turnover in the ECE workforce, which results from factors including low pay and few benefits, better opportunities in other sectors, and a widespread sense among ECEs that they are not valued for the work they do. Turnover also results in weaker relationships between ECEs and children, poorer developmental outcomes, and lower quality care.

The province is currently working to implement the **Canada-Alberta Agreement**, which means policymakers have a time-sensitive window to ensure long-term stability in the ELCC sector.

## Who are AECEA and CUP?

The **Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA)** and the **Community-University Partnership (CUP) for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families** have partnered on various projects since 2017. These projects follow a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach that emphasizes close collaboration between researchers and the community. The AECEA-CUP partnership brings graduate students to projects affecting the ELCC sector and demonstrates that advocacy can be evidence-informed.

## A collaborative approach to research

An AECEA-CUP research team worked directly with sector stakeholders in developing a compensation framework. They also consulted with several Canadian child care associations that are in the process of developing ECE wage grids: the Manitoba Child Care Association (MCCA), Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia (ECEBC), the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (AECEO), and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC).

The team was also guided by the Canadian Child Care Federation's advice that a provincial wage scale should ensure wages and benefits are competitive with related professions and reflect staff qualifications, experience, and responsibilities ([Canadian Child Care Federation et al.](#)).

## Research questions and take-aways\*

\*This research represents Phase 1 of the team's overall research project.

Question	What was done	What did we learn
<b>What is considered a fair wage in comparable sectors?</b>	Reviewed compensation frameworks and labour agreements in similar sectors across Alberta and Canada	<p>ECEs require less education to enter the sector than their counterparts in health, education, and social work.</p> <p>ECEs have fewer benefits than comparable sectors.</p> <p>There are no standardized labour agreements for the ELCC sector in Alberta.</p>
<b>What elements go into a values-based wage grid?</b>	Reviewed academic literature to determine what ECEs value about their work and how those values should be reflected in a wage grid.	<p>Many ECEs enter the sector because they are strongly motivated to support children.</p> <p>ELCC is widely subject to stereotypes that devalue the work (ex. it is "women's work" or "mothering").</p> <p>As part of the "care economy," ECEs have low wages, few or no benefits, and a high risk of exposure to exploitation.</p> <p>ECEs can be expected to "donate" their time or pay for their own resources.</p> <p>ELCC work can be emotionally exhausting.</p>
<b>What is happening in other provinces?</b>	Consulted child care associations in Manitoba, British Columbia, and Ontario.	<p>All associations suggested an ECE wage grid for Alberta should reflect both education and experience.</p> <p>They also suggested compensation should reflect cost-of-living variations across the province.</p> <p>The ECE wage grids endorsed by Quebec, PEI, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland have been variously implemented and received.</p>
<b>What do ECEs say is fair compensation?</b>	Ongoing conversations with community and sector stakeholders	ECEs want to be fairly compensated for their experience, education, and responsibilities and valued for their work with children and families.

## Why a wage grid should reflect education and experience

The expectation that ECEs engage in ongoing training and development is embedded in the *Canada-Alberta Agreement*, which envisions an ECE workforce with strong professional development opportunities. Research confirms that children benefit from participating in high-quality ELCC programs but experience

little or no benefit from poor-quality ones. It is also widely agreed that child care is specialized work and that high-quality programming requires a supported workforce with appropriate educational preparedness ([Canadian Childcare Federation et al.](#)). The provinces that implemented ECE wage grids as of May 2023 have all decided on a pay scale that considers both education and experience.

As of May 2023, the Alberta government suggests the base wage for ECEs. The province's number is derived from reported averages from child care programs that offer wage top-up funding. This model offers little incentive for ECEs to further their education or training. It also reinforces notions that child care is low-skill work and hinders the professionalization of the sector.

## Pillars of stability

The research team identified three essential elements to ECE workforce stability, called the “pillars of stability.” Each pillar reflects the lived experiences and values of ECEs. Like a bridge, the workforce becomes unstable if any pillar is missing or weak. A compensation framework that reinforces these pillars will lead to long-term workforce satisfaction and retention.

Pillar 1: Fair compensation	Pillar 2: Education and training	Pillar 3: Supportive workplace conditions
<p><b>ECEs want...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to be fairly compensated for experience, tenure, and responsibilities.</li> <li>to see progression in their pay and be rewarded for remaining in the sector.</li> <li>to avoid remaining at base pay if they move around the sector seeking more satisfying workplace conditions.</li> <li>access to non-salaried compensation such as pensions and benefits.</li> </ul>	<p><b>ECEs want...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to see a distinctive pathway to becoming certified as an ECE.</li> <li>to see a barrier-free pathway to attain higher education.</li> <li>to be rewarded for attaining higher certification and credentials.</li> <li>to be rewarded for pursuing professional learning.</li> <li>to see career progression and leadership opportunities.</li> </ul>	<p><b>ECEs want...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a supportive team and colleagues that they can rely on.</li> <li>supportive leadership and administration who ensure staff have paid and protected time.</li> <li>voice and agency in daily decision-making that affects them.</li> <li>a supportive workplace that encourages relationship-building, sharing resources, and ongoing team development.</li> </ul>

## Wage grid

The proposed wage grid has two dimensions. “Levels,” along the vertical axis, represents the **current ECE certification process** in Alberta, which includes ECE 1, ECE 2, and ECE 3. “Grades,” along the horizontal axis, is a newly proposed category that represents ECE experience, education, and responsibilities.

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
ECE 1					
ECE 2					
ECE 3					

Levels  +X%

Grades  +X%

The research team found no consistency among percentage increments used in wage grids in comparable sectors across Canada. Depending on the labour agreement, sector, or jurisdiction, increments range from 3-49%. Further consultation and community engagement will determine the values in the grid.

## Non-salaried compensation

The wage grid is only one component of a compensation framework. The other key element is non-salaried compensation.

### Direct non-salaried compensation

- Pension, RRSP contributions, retirement plans
- Health benefits plans
- Health Spending Accounts
- Extended vacation days
- Flexible schedules
- Leaves
- Reduced child care fees for staff

### Indirect non-salaried compensation

- Clear career advancement and progression
- Leadership opportunities
- Educational support
- Ongoing training
- Coaching
- Supportive team environment
- Paid and protected time for planning and meetings

*“Research demonstrates that sustained increases to ECE compensation, both salary and benefits, has positive effects on teacher well-being, reducing turnover, and improving recruitment and retention, thereby promoting the quality and continuity of care for young children”*

(Vecchiotti et al., 2022)

## Next steps

Phase 1 of this research project is complete. The next step is to work with ECEs, owners, operators, and stakeholders to refine the proposal and ensure it reflects what is achievable and desirable within the sector.

## Project trajectory

<b>Phase 1: Preliminary research</b>	May 2022 to February 2023	Goal: create a wage grid and compensation framework recommendation.
<b>Phase 2: Stakeholder engagement</b>	March 2023 to August 2023	Goal: test the grid with owners and operators, learn from ECEs about the potential impact of the grid, refine the grid to reflect living wage data.
<b>Phase 3: Further engagement as needed</b>	2023-2026	Goal: ongoing evidence-based research to support objectives of the <i>Canada-Alberta Agreement</i> and continue the professionalization of the ECE workforce

## How can you get involved?

<b>Facility owners and operators</b>	Take part in stakeholder engagement, work with the team to test and refine the wage grid and compensation framework.
<b>ECEs</b>	Take part in stakeholder engagement, help researchers understand your values and needs.
<b>Policymakers</b>	Raise dialogue within your network about the importance of ECE compensation, education, and working conditions, especially in light of the <i>Canada-Alberta Agreement</i> .
<b>Everybody</b>	Help raise awareness about the importance of fair compensation for ECEs and other care workers.

Implementing a wage grid and compensation philosophy may be difficult at first. However, effort invested today will yield extraordinary long-term results for Alberta children, families, ECEs, and society at large.

## Read the full report

The full report developed by AECEA and CUP is available online:

**ECE Wage Grid Recommendations: A compensation framework review for the development of a target values-based wage grid for early childhood educators in Alberta**

For more information please contact us at:



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