



## Childcare workforce in crisis:

Our economy won't work without ELCC workers

Published by the [City of Greater Sudbury](#) in collaboration with [Workforce Collective](#)

Over the past two years, conversations about Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) have been at the forefront. **Quality childcare has been emphasized as essential for economic recovery** and development as well as familial wellbeing. More resources for ELCC would improve educational outcomes for children, reduce income inequality, and increase workforce participation – especially of working mothers<sup>i</sup>. Despite these benefits, Canada is behind its international peers and has an \$8 billion gap in childcare and early learning spending<sup>ii</sup>.

The childcare system has been characterized by uneven access, affordability, and quality and a generally low-waged female labour force<sup>iii</sup>. The pandemic exacerbated these challenges. Through the COVID-19 crisis, employment losses were seen more strongly for women than for men (she-cession)<sup>iii,iv</sup> and family care defaulted largely to women<sup>v</sup>. These outcomes have significant consequences at the household and macroeconomic levels, including decreased tax revenues for governments, and increased poverty for women and children<sup>iii</sup>.

**Childcare system interventions increase GDP and get mothers back into the workforce.** With Quebec's universal childcare system reform, approximately 69,700 more mothers were able to hold jobs than if the province had continued to follow the traditional approach. This addition of mothers to the labour market led to an increase of \$5.1 billion (or 1.7%) in Quebec's internal income (GDP)<sup>vi</sup>.

**For every dollar invested in childcare, the broader economy receives a return of \$1.60<sup>vii</sup>.** When taking a longer view, considering the benefits to children over their educational journeys and into their careers, the anticipated **return increases to almost \$6.00**. Also, as barriers to low-income families, such as finding and accessing quality childcare, are removed their income goes up which generates more economic activity and tax revenue<sup>viii</sup>.

Since 2014, publicly funded schools have provided early learning to 90% of Ontario's four- and five-year-olds through full day kindergarten (FDK). The FDK program is delivered in conjunction with designated Early Childhood Educator staff, who on average, earn notably less than teacher positions. The teacher positions in this sector can be classified as decent, with kindergarten teachers earning an average salary of closer to \$43.96 per hour<sup>ix</sup>, being recognized as valued professionals, and working in quality work environments<sup>x</sup>. Ontario's implementation of **FDK, as a childcare system intervention, contributed to a boost of \$5.6 billion** to Canada's GDP in one year<sup>xi</sup>.

The federal government recently promised to invest more than \$30 billion to extend an ELCC system across Canada<sup>xii</sup>; however, the current workforce cannot support this plan. **Early Childhood Educator (ECE) staffing shortages are a known issue**, with high turnover rates of existing employees<sup>xiii</sup> and not enough students graduating and entering into the field.<sup>xiv</sup>

In Northern communities like Greater Sudbury, various sectors have reported ongoing labour shortages<sup>xv</sup>. These labour shortages have significantly impacted the ELCC sector in Greater Sudbury, with a 17% decrease in Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and assistants working in the field between 2019 and 2021<sup>xvi</sup>.

In Greater Sudbury, there are 18 childcare operators in the community with a total of 75 childcare sites. From now to the end of 2027, 3,406 children are on the waitlist for licensed childcare<sup>xvii</sup> – that's 36% of children aged 0-5 in Greater Sudbury<sup>xviii</sup> and **thousands of working parents who are experiencing a lack of childcare.**



workforce  
COLLECTIVE

children  
services  
aux enfants

Sudbury  
Every Child



In the current system, 64% of Greater Sudbury's licensed childcare spaces<sup>xix</sup> are operational due to various reasons, including labour shortages and available space to operate programs<sup>xx</sup>. Operational challenges vary between types of childcare programs, with 82% of full day infant to preschool programs operating, compared to only 54% of before and after school programs for school aged children. Currently, at least 267 additional ECEs are needed to meet demand and capacity within the ELCC system, a 33% increase of the current workforce<sup>xix</sup>.

**Staffing shortages are in part attributed to financial concerns** which ranked high among challenges for childcare operators across Canada, with over 40% of providers reporting difficulties meeting wage and salary costs<sup>xxi</sup>. Table 1 shows median annual and hourly wages for ECE/assistant jobs in Greater Sudbury and Ontario. In Greater Sudbury, **ECEs and Assistants earn only slightly above living wage** (\$19.70/hour)<sup>xxii</sup>. In 2021, a Workforce Survey completed among staff in the ELCC sector showed the factors staff were least satisfied with regarding their position were wages/compensation, and benefits<sup>xix</sup>.

**Table 1. Wages for early childhood educators and assistants, Greater Sudbury and Ontario<sup>xxiii, xxiv</sup>**

	Median annual wage (2021)	Median hourly wage (2021)
<b>Sudbury</b>	\$45,156	\$21.71
<b>Ontario</b>	\$41,600	\$20.00

*Note: Designated Early Childhood Educators in FDK in Greater Sudbury earn between \$19.59-\$35.97 per hour.<sup>xxiii</sup>*

In 2021, there were approximately 230 graduates from ECE programs in Greater Sudbury, offered by Cambrian College and College Boreal<sup>xxv,xxvi</sup>. Prior research on ECE program graduates shows not all graduates stay in the field with one potential reason being the low rate of pay<sup>xiv</sup>. Both Cambrian College and College Boreal ECE programs offer placement opportunities for students to gain experience in the field. Following completion of the program, many graduates relocate from Greater Sudbury to other communities or continue their education and enter other sectors. In addition, attracting French language students to ECE programs has been a long-standing challenge, which exacerbates the shortage of ECEs in Francophone childcare centres. Many of the 230 graduates mentioned above attended the English language ECE program.

**Strategies to attract and retain ECE grads and ELCC workers should focus on wage increases**, with a salary scale starting at \$25 per hour for all childcare workers and \$30 per hour for Registered/Designated ECEs<sup>xxvii</sup>. At the local level, expanding access to a variety of quality professional learning opportunities (e.g., workshops, conferences, professional communities) will also be critical to build the required ELCC workforce<sup>x</sup>. Through Workforce Funding provided by the provincial government, the City of Greater Sudbury has provided paid professional development for staff working in the childcare sector and supports for agencies and staff. These efforts have been designed to assist with staff feeling supported in their work, which impacts retention in the field.

The need to attract and enable young families to move to and work in Greater Sudbury is increasing due to changing population dynamics and an aging workforce. A significant factor impacting the ability to attract young families to move to and work in Greater Sudbury is access to quality childcare. Without the workforce to support adequate childcare spaces, the availability of childcare is limited for families seeking to relocate to the community. **Supporting the creation of decent jobs within childcare will support Greater Sudbury's economy (and beyond) now and into the future.**

“Childcare requires more government investment but crucially, it requires a comprehensive vision to build a system that shifts from a patchwork market approach to a publicly managed system.”<sup>iii</sup> Without concerted action on childcare, pandemic recovery will be slower, gender regressive and nationally uneven. A portion of the current stock of childcare risks permanent closure, with near-term consequences for women, children, families, and the economy<sup>iii</sup>.



## REFERENCES

- <sup>i</sup> Alexander, Beckman, Macdonald, Renner, & Stewart (Conference Board of Canada, 2017). Ready for life: A socio-economic analysis of Early Childhood Education and Care. Available [here](#).
- <sup>ii</sup> Armine & McCuaig with input from Ballantyne & Bezanson (2020). Investing in early learning and childcare: A framework for federal financing - A memorandum to the Ministry of Finance, the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office. Available [here](#).
- <sup>iii</sup> Bezanson, Bevan, & Lysac (2020) Childcare for Recovery and Rebuilding. Available [here](#).
- <sup>iv</sup> Grekou & Lu (Statistics Canada, 2021). Gender differences in employment one year into the COVID-19 pandemic: An analysis by industrial sector and firm size. Available [here](#).
- <sup>v</sup> LeClerc (Statistics Canada, 2020). Caring for their children: Impacts of COVID-19 on parents. Available [here](#).
- <sup>vi</sup> Fortin, Godbout & St-Cerny (2013). The Impact of Quebec's Low-Cost Child Care on Women's Participation Rates, Domestic Income and Government Budgets. Available [here](#).
- <sup>vii</sup> Prime Minister of Canada. \$10 a day Childcare for Canadian Families. Available [here](#).
- <sup>viii</sup> The Peak. Why Early Childhood Education is Important for You, Yes you. Available [here](#).
- <sup>ix</sup> Government of Canada Job Bank. Elementary school and kindergarten teachers (NOC 4032) prevailing wages. Available [here](#).
- <sup>x</sup> Ontario Early Childhood Sector Decent Work Charter (AECEO). Transforming work in Ontario's early years and child care sector: Workforce strategy recommendations. Available [here](#).
- <sup>xi</sup> Archer, Duhamel, Macdonald, Watt & Yam (Statistics Canada, 2021). The early learning and childcare industry in Canada: Business characteristics and industry gross domestic product. Available [here](#).
- <sup>xii</sup> Department of Finance Canada (April 7, 2022). Supporting early learning and childcare. Available [here](#).
- <sup>xiii</sup> Statistics Canada. The Early Learning and Child Care Industry in Canada: Business Characteristics and Gross Domestic Product. Available [here](#).
- <sup>xiv</sup> Dhuey, Pan and Seward (revise and re-submit from Canadian Public Policy). The big short: Early childhood education expansion in post-pandemic Canada. Available [here](#).
- <sup>xv</sup> Greater Sudbury Development Corporation. Economic Recovery Strategic Plan (2021). Available [here](#).
- <sup>xvi</sup> Data provided by Workforce Planning for Sudbury & Manitoulin; numbers sourced from Lightcast.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Data provided by City of Greater Sudbury Children's Services, sourced from OneHSN.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Statistics Canada. 2023. (table) Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released March 29, 2023. Available [here](#).
- <sup>xix</sup> Data provided by City of Greater Sudbury Children's Services.
- <sup>xx</sup> Data provided by City of Greater Sudbury Children's Services; numbers sourced from the Ontario Child Care Management System (OCCMS)
- <sup>xxi</sup> Friendly, Forer, Vickerson, & Mohamed (2020) Canadian child care: Preliminary results from a national survey during the COVID-19 pandemic. Available [here](#).
- <sup>xxii</sup> Coleman & Shaban (November 2022) Calculating Ontario's Living Wages. Available [here](#).
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Data provided by City of Greater Sudbury Children's Services; numbers sourced from 2021 Workforce Data Collection.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Lightcast™.(2023) [Occupations Table-Q3 2022 Dataset], accessed May 4, 2023. Access to Lightcast is supported through the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of OMAFRA.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Data provided by College Boreal (2022).
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Data provided by Cambrian College (2022).
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Fact Sheet: CWELCC Wage Improvement Funds (2022). Available [here](#).

