

ADVANCING CHILD CARE IN B.C.

A Research Resource to
Inform Local Plan Updates



PURPOSE

This report examines changes in the child care planning landscape in British Columbia since 2020. It is designed as a research resource to support local governments that have child care plans in place and are seeking to refresh those plans. Based on a literature review, interviews, workshops and practitioner events, the report offers a context analysis that explores key policy developments, system conditions and practitioner perspectives. It also provides an industry scan that identifies best practices for strengthening plan quality and highlights innovative local child care projects.

A resource that examines space creation targets is included in the appendix.





AUTHOR

Kristina Shubert is a master's student in the School of Community & Regional Planning at the University of British Columbia. Before returning to school, Kristina worked in the municipal recreation and non-profit sectors as a program manager delivering community services.

Kristina is a mother of three with lived experience balancing the pressures of work and family. She has relied upon a mix of formal and informal child care over the years and understands the dynamic challenges inherent in securing and maintaining high-quality care. Her dream, like many, is for a fully funded public child care system that secures all children an equal start in life.

CREDITS

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INTRODUCTION

British Columbia has long been grappling with a child care crisis. Despite federal funding and provincial oversight, access to affordable, high-quality, inclusive and flexible child care continues to be a challenge for families throughout the Province. ChildCareBC, introduced in 2018, is a ten-year provincial plan focused on addressing these concerns. With a long-range aim to create a universal child care system, the plan introduced several policy and program initiatives. In order to activate child care planning at the local government level, the Province announced a one-time funding program administered through the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) in 2019 (Union of BC Municipalities, 2019). It funded child care planning projects that were community-driven, catalysts for action, coordinated with other levels of government and community partners, and that resulted in actionable plans with sustainable results. UBCM awarded sixty grants for planning and space creation projects at this time (Union of BC Municipalities, 2023), reflecting a strong uptake from local governments.

While local governments do not have an assigned responsibility in child care planning and provision, many assume a role as the level of government closest to the people. Child care is a critical infrastructure within every community. Access to affordable, high-quality, inclusive and flexible early learning and care impacts early childhood development and has subsequent impacts along the life course (Government of Canada, 2017). It also plays a significant role in the economy, increasing female labour force participation and employment, resulting in broader economic benefits. A local economist estimates that the expansion of child care between 2019 and 2024 boosted B.C.'s GDP by \$5.8 billion (Stanford, 2025). Child care planning is impactful work which influences community well-being and economic vitality. Keeping child care action plans current and monitoring and evaluating those plans is necessary to produce quality results.

Many local governments in B.C. have passed the five-year milestone in their child care plans. This presents an opportunity to assess progress toward space creation targets, monitor implementation and refresh plans. The following report offers a context analysis, examining both federal and provincial policy developments over the last five years, and practitioner experiences within the Metro Vancouver area. It also provides an industry scan offering insights into best practices for child care plan quality and innovative child care projects. A resource supporting updates to child care space creation targets is offered in the appendix. Ultimately, this report serves as a research resource to support local governments that wish to update and strengthen their child care plans.

Note: **Practitioners**, in the context of this report, refers to **professionals working to advance child care planning and provision**. These include representatives of public health, school districts, child care operators, child and family support organizations, child care advocates, and planners.

RESEARCH METHOD

This report draws on a literature review, interviews, group consultations, and participation at practitioner events in Metro Vancouver. Research activities were conducted between October 2025 and March 2026.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review included sixty provincial announcements and six reports from senior levels of government, along with forty-five additional grey and academic sources. These materials were reviewed to identify policy developments, systems conditions and emerging practices in child care planning.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews were conducted with subject matter experts with extensive experience in child care planning, policy and advocacy. Participants included:

- Margaret Manifold, a retired City of Burnaby senior planner who was involved with the development and implementation of Burnaby's Child Care Action Plan.
- Chris Duggan, Manager of Community and Social Development, City of Richmond. Ms. Duggan has a depth of experience working in child care provision, planning and policy development.
- Dr. Andi Binet, Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia. Their present research focusses on moving child care from a patchwork system to infrastructure.

GROUP CONSULTATIONS

Two group consultations were conducted with subject matter experts to explore child care planning context, best practices, challenges and opportunities.

CHILD CARE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

This group consists primarily of municipal planners working to advance child care in Metro Vancouver. It provides a forum for networking, knowledge sharing, and collaboration. The consultation was held on November 26, 2025.

BURNABY CHILD CARE RESOURCE GROUP (CCRG)

The CCRG is an advisory body that provides guidance to the City of Burnaby on child care policies, services and programs. It includes representatives from non-profit child care organizations, Fraser Health, the Burnaby School District, the YMCA Resource and Referral Program, and city planning staff. The group consultation was held on December 5, 2025.

PRACTITIONER EVENTS

Participation in child care and early childhood development tables also informed this research. These events brought together practitioners, planners, service providers, and government representatives to share knowledge, discuss systems conditions and identify opportunities.

CITY OF DELTA CHILD CARE FORUM

The City of Delta hosted a forum on November 5, 2025, bringing together planners, child care operators, health professionals, educators and other government representatives. The session included presentations, an expert panel, and World Café-style discussion. Participants shared experiences working in and supporting the sector including challenges, strategies and opportunities.

CHILD CARE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

A session held on January 29, 2026, included planners and representatives from local school districts, child care operators, child care resource and referral programs, health authorities and advocates. Participants developed a shared understanding of the current child care landscape, and identified challenges, sought opportunities, and discussed priorities for planning and advocacy.

BURNABY EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD) TABLE - RESEARCH DAY

Research Day, hosted by Fraser Health on January 26, 2026, engaged representatives from public and non-profit organizations supporting early childhood development and families in the City of Burnaby. The session included presentations on demographic trends, the BC Child Poverty Report Card, and data from the Human Early Learning Partnership. Participants discussed trends, shared observations from practice, and identified potential actions as a table.



STATEMENT OF LIMITATIONS

While every effort was made to ensure report accuracy, its limitations should be noted.

Interviews and consultations were limited to planners and practitioners in the Metro Vancouver area. Planners and practitioners in small and rural communities in B.C. were not consulted.

Families with children were not consulted over the course of this project. This includes equity denied groups, children with extra support needs, and families facing barriers to accessing child care.

This report does not speak to progress on the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework established by the Federal Government nor provincial actions achieved in partnership with Indigenous Nations.

The literature review is not exhaustive and concentrated on publications produced in Canada within the last five years. Federal and provincial government reports were relied upon to inform the context analysis. These sources may report favourably on progress, while omitting gaps and challenges. Efforts were made to balance government reports with child care advocacy research publications.

Provincial policy developments since 2020 were too voluminous to fully document in this report. As a result, the context analysis highlights key developments with particular attention to those referenced during practitioner engagements.

Near the close of the project, the Province announced a three-year pause on funding programs including new \$10-a-day child care and new spaces funding. This is anticipated to impact local government and child care operators as it removes a critical funding source for an extended period. Due to the timing, this announcement was not captured during project interviews, workshops and events.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

The child care planning landscape in British Columbia has evolved since 2020. While federal funding has increased, and various provincial policy initiatives have been introduced, access to high-quality, inclusive and flexible child care remains a challenge for many British Columbians.

To understand developments over the last five years and the broader system conditions shaping the sector, this section examines key policy directions and reports on practitioner experiences within the field.

POLICY DEVELOPMENTS & SYSTEM CONDITIONS

The following section examines key developments in government policy, programs and funding that have directly influenced the local delivery of child care. It does not attempt to capture all government actions since 2020. Rather, it focusses on major funding initiatives, program changes and policy directions with supporting commentary on system results and impacts, where data was available.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS

Federal Funding Increases

Federal funding to the Province of British Columbia has increased over the last five years. For the period of 2021-2025, the federal government provided B.C. with \$3.21 billion through the Canada-British Columbia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (Government of Canada, 2021). Funding was provided to build a community-based system of quality, regulated early learning and child care. This agreement was later extended to 2031 increasing BC's funding to \$5.38 billion and demonstrating an ongoing federal commitment to improving child care access and affordability (Government of Canada, 2025).

Figure 1 illustrates the flow of funding from the Federal government to the Province and the downstream investments subsequently made by the Province through ChildCareBC.

Figure 1. BC CWELCC Funding



B.C. Space Creation Targets

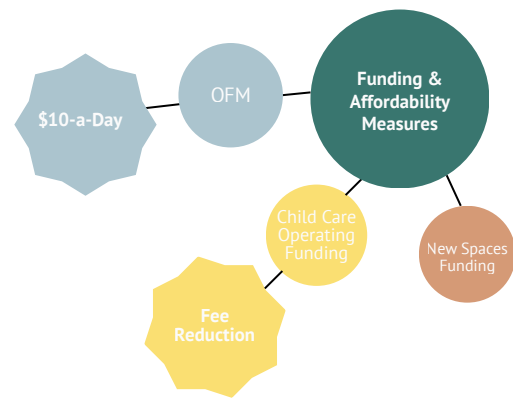
Most Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements set a target of 59 child care spaces per 100 children under six years (Macdonald, 2025a). British Columbia, however, committed to an absolute count of 30,000 new licensed spaces by 2026 and 40,000 new licensed spaces by 2028, rather than the 59% provision rate (City of Vancouver, 2022; Macdonald, 2025a). As of early 2026, B.C. has exceeded their targets, funding 42,200 new licensed child care spaces (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2026). At this time, only 27,700 of those spaces are operational while the rest remain in development. Despite space increases, B.C. falls short of the standard national target with a provision rate estimated at 47 spaces per 100 children (Macdonald, 2026).

Figure 2. Funding & Affordability Programs Under Discussion

PROVINCIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS

Funding & Affordability Measures

The Province has introduced ten funding and affordability measures through ChildCareBC since 2018. The following section discusses three of these - the Fee Reduction Initiative, the \$10-a-Day Program, and New Spaces funding. Figure 2 distinguishes the relationship between funding to the operator (circle) and end-user savings (star).



Fee Reduction Initiative

The Province introduced a Fee Reduction Initiative aimed to reduce parent fees by 50% by 2022 (Macdonald, 2025a). While this target was achieved, fees in B.C. remain high. Despite provincial policy directions, fees in B.C. remain largely market driven ranging anywhere from \$25-44/day depending on age category (Statistics Canada, 2025). In comparison, the national average in other provinces and territories receiving federal funding is approximately \$16.50/day (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2025).

\$10-a-Day Program

The Province continued to expand \$10-a-day child care spaces, achieving 17,500 spaces by September, 2025 - coming close to meeting their target of 20,000 spaces by March 2026 (Province of British Columbia, 2025b). Notably, \$10-a-day sites represent only 10% of B.C.'s child care landscape (Macdonald & Friendly, 2025), putting the Province a long way from achieving their vision for universal child care. Recently, with the release of B.C. Budget 2026, the Province announced a three year pause on expanding the \$10-a-day child care program in order to address concerns raised by industry professionals (Brougham, 2026). During this period, they will maintain funding for existing \$10-a-day spaces. Challenges with the current system, aside from inadequate supply, include uneven access, and insufficient funding through the Operating Funding Model (OFM).

Presently, \$10-a-day spaces are unevenly distributed within the Province and by region, with the greatest concentration in Metro Vancouver and Vancouver Island (Province of British Columbia, 2025a). The Province's centre-based funding approach also contributes to uneven access. Families have lucked into \$10-a-day sites when their centre applied for and was granted funding (Todd, 2026); There is no mechanism to allocate \$10-a-day spaces by income or vulnerability.

Within \$10-a-day programs, the Province has trialed a series of funding models. These include the Revenue Replacement model which ended in 2025, the Eligible Expenses model which continues in present day and the Operating Funding model which launched in 2023 (Province of British Columbia, 2025e). Under the Revenue Replacement model, funding was based on the provider's reported revenue, however, the model did not clearly define which expenses were eligible and allowed spending on loans for private assets. The Eligible Expenses model introduced rules about profits and surplus and established and limited ineligible expenses. Further funding refinements were introduced through the Operating Funding Model (OFM). This model funds providers on approved operating expenses and adds wage and compensation standards. As of March 2024, 37 child care providers were participating in a test to validate the OFM funding formula (Province of British Columbia, 2024a). As this new funding model continues to roll out, child care operators warn it will result in funding cuts that directly reduce staff, wages and training (DeRosa, 2026; Lazenby, 2026). Already, two centres in B.C. have had to opt out of the \$10-a-day program due to financial hardship (DeRosa, 2026).

New Spaces Fund

As noted previously, the Province has funded 42,200 new licensed child care spaces, 27,700 of which are operational (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2026). In recent years, demand for the new spaces program has exceeded available funding (Province of British Columbia, 2025d). In the last round of applications, the Province prioritized those applications which best met the criteria, program intent and available budget, paying particular attention to those that provided ‘good value for money’ and that were located in areas with the highest need (Province of British Columbia, 2025d).

An ongoing focus over the years has been funding new spaces on school grounds. As of October 2025, more than 14,700 new spaces on school grounds had been funded across 43 school districts. 7,600 of these are operational (Province of British Columbia, 2025c). Recently, with the release of B.C. Budget 2026, the Province paused new spaces funding citing a stabilization period (Judd & Stanton, 2026). They did, however, note that \$25 million has been earmarked to expand child care on school grounds during this time (Province of British Columbia, 2026).

Space Creation & Expansion on School Grounds

Expansion of License Types

In 2021, the Province added two new child care license categories – School Age Care on School Grounds, and Recreational Care to increase school age care options (Province of British Columbia, 2021c). The new School Age Care on School Grounds license exempts school facilities from requirements related to minimum amount of usable floor space, washroom facilities and outdoor play areas to facilitate more child care provision. Similarly, the Recreational Care license has fewer physical restrictions on space and programming and does not specify a maximum group size (but does account for a staff to child ratio) (Province of British Columbia, 2021c; Province of British Columbia, 2025f). Practitioners note challenges around minimum standards for school age care on school grounds which will be explored further in ‘Practitioner Perspectives.’

Ministry Transfer

In April 2022, accountability for child care transitioned from the Ministry of Children & Family Development to the Ministry of Education (Whiteside & Chen, 2022). According to the Ministers responsible, this change was made in response to advice from the child care sector and to align with other Canadian provinces and territories. Child Care advocates approved of the decision, noting the move offered “a means to strengthen child care infrastructure and stability for the sector” (Gawlick, 2022). Aligning early learning and child care with B.C.’s public education system is perceived as a positive direction for establishing a universal, public child care system (Carrigg, 2022).

School Amendment Act

In October 2025, the Provincial government proposed Bill 19, the School Amendment Act (Province of British Columbia, 2025c). This bill seeks to expand the authority of school boards to provide child care on school properties. It extends the allowable hours of child care on school grounds, expands the permitted ages of children in care, allows school districts to opt into the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative, and changes the description of fees that school boards may charge (Province of British Columbia, 2025c; Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2025). This amendment has been met with both enthusiasm and apprehension in the child care sector, and will be considered further in ‘Practitioner Perspectives.’

Workforce Expansion & Retention

The Province has undertaken numerous steps to increase the workforce and retain staff in the child care sector in recent years. They have instituted education bursaries, increased educational spaces, and added online training opportunities (Province of British Columbia, 2022). Through the Early Childhood Educator Wage Enhancement (ECE WE) program, Early Childhood Educator wages have steadily increased over time at participating centres. Presently, the increase stands at \$6/hour, bringing the median wage in B.C. to \$28/hour (Province of British Columbia, 2023b). The Province intended to establish a standardized wage grid, but this has been paused in connection to sector feedback and the stabilization period established alongside B.C. Budget 2026 (Gregson et al., 2026; Swanson, 2025).

In 2021, the Province passed the Early Childhood Educators Act which established a public registry of Early Childhood Educators (ECE) and post-secondary ECE programs (Province of British Columbia, 2021). In 2024, the Province began offering certification grants to encourage early childhood educators to become certified as infant/toddler and special needs ECEs (Province of British Columbia, 2024b).

The Province has also launched initiatives to attract internationally trained early childhood educators to the field. The Early Childhood Educators Act reduced barriers for internationally trained ECEs to become certified in B.C. (Province of British Columbia, 2021). In 2022, the Province began giving international ECEs and ECE assistants priority access to apply for Permanent Residence (Province of British Columbia, 2023a). They also offer translation service grants to translate non-English certifications.

PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES IN THE FIELD

PLANNER PERSPECTIVES

During project interviews and group consultations, planners commonly identified the following challenges to child care planning: A lack of resources, insufficient staff capacity, and changes in political will and/or local government priorities. The role of for-profit child care in meeting space creation targets was also identified as a concern as was child care preservation.

Local Government Challenges

Lack of Resources & Staff Capacity

Local governments do not have direct and ongoing funding to conduct child care planning which results in mixed levels of local government participation across the Province. In many communities, planners have a multitude of planning responsibilities among which child care is a small part. Only the City of Vancouver and City of Richmond are known to have dedicated child care planner position(s).

Creating new child care spaces is costly without direct funding from senior levels of government. As such, local governments rely on operators to provide space. In Metro Vancouver, operators have a hard time finding space that is both suitable and affordable. Local governments who choose to build child care centres, often rely on development financing or provincial new spaces funding, competing for a limited pool of funds. As noted previously, BC Budget 2026 has paused new spaces funding for the next three years.

Shifting Local Government Priorities

Priorities within local government shift over time. This can be driven by changes in leadership, times of austerity or large-scale planning initiatives. As an example, recent provincial housing legislation and official community plan updates have taken a high priority over the last two years in B.C., sometimes drawing on staff resources and organizational focus. During consultations, planners noted a potential lag between new housing development and planning for supporting social infrastructure including child care.

Child Care Auspice

During the course of this research, planners observed that for-profit child care providers have played a significant role in helping communities meet child care space creation targets. While senior levels of government have identified public and non-profit providers as the preferred path forward, for-profit child care centres continue to access provincial funding programs including the fee reduction initiative and \$10-a-day program. In some urban areas, large for-profit operators have contributed substantially to overall space count. In rural and small communities, small private centres often provide essential local supply (Ensuring Equitable Access to Child Care Funding, n.d.).

Since 2021, growth in for-profit child care spaces in B.C. has significantly outpaced the non-profit and public sectors. A recent report found that 72% of new child care spaces in B.C. between 2021 and 2025 were achieved by for-profit centres (Friendly et al., 2026). This trend presents an ongoing tension within the field between an urgency to expand supply and a concern for auspice. Research consistently demonstrates that non-profit providers deliver higher levels of quality (Macdonald, 2025a). Moreover, they are generally considered the more affordable option for families since they operate on a cost-recovery basis (\$10-a-Day programs notwithstanding). This trend of for-profit growth signals a misalignment between strategy, policy and funding implementation.

Preservation

While space creation is a significant focus in child care planning, preservation must also factor into child care plans. Planners note that new developments can result in a loss of older, more affordable lease spaces. Aging infrastructure also results in loss of affordable lease spaces and loss of child care centres.

Local Government Opportunities

Local governments engage in a range of activities to support and create child care spaces including: zoning and land-use planning, streamlining development permitting and business licensing, contributing capital to new facilities, leveraging development financing tools like density bonusing and amenity cost charges to establish new centres, leasing public land or assets at no or low-cost, awarding child care grants, and encouraging high-quality building design and co-location.

In addition to local government tools, planners rely on relationships, partnerships, and data to achieve new child care spaces. During interviews and group consultations, planners readily shared innovative child care projects that apply these tools and draw on connections to the broader community. Ongoing advocacy also emerged as a central theme; Planners emphasized the need to build and sustain momentum for child care planning through continuous advocacy. They draw on research, data, storytelling and celebrations to activate and sustain initiatives within their organizations and beyond them - across city departments, with elected officials, senior levels of government and the broader community.

BROADER PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES

The following section reports on sector shifts, challenges and opportunities most commonly identified across group consultations and practitioner events in Metro Vancouver over the course of this project. It highlights frequently raised topics but is not exhaustive. To maintain confidentiality, participants are referred to simply as practitioners. Practitioner perspectives are informed by a wide variety of actors supporting and advancing child care including child care operators, public health officials, non-profit organizations, school district representatives, child care advocates and planners. Operators are referenced individually at times, when the perspective relates directly to their experiences providing child care.

Sector Shifts

Throughout consultations and events, practitioners noted sector intensifications over the last five years. These include intensified need and reduced resilience in the families they serve, and within the child care workforce.

Families & Children

Practitioners observed that families have become more stressed and stretched since the pandemic, necessitating more support within child care settings. Families are facing increased pressures on both time and resources which has changed their ability to access parental and early childhood development supports such as parenting programs and Strong Start. The Early Development Instrument (EDI) issued by the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at the University of British Columbia corroborates these experiences. The most recent EDI report notes growing early childhood vulnerability across the Province, especially in areas of social and emotional development (Nigelkehrer, 2025). Coincidentally, many B.C. families reported barriers to accessing community supports and services in the 2024 Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (Nigelkehrer, 2025).

Workforce

Alongside intensified family needs, practitioners report intensified workforce needs. Operators voiced concerns about a decrease in job readiness following Early Childhood Educator (ECE) certification. They note that online programs are particularly problematic since educators emerge from training with little experience working with children and families. Operators frequently bear the cost of this education gap as they must then supplement with increased on-the-job training. There is a need for more standardization and practical training within ECE certification programs.

Turnover in the sector persists. A recent report from the Early Childhood Educators of B.C. (2025) notes that the number of educators expecting to leave the field has increased since 2019. Operators in urban centres report a high proportion of newcomers within their staff teams. Some operators have found that this demographic requires additional supports as they transition to life in Canada. However, once workers achieve permanent resident status, some opt to move out of the sector. Practitioners observed that sector wages have improved but are not competitive enough to produce career professionals. Moreover, wage inequities persist, especially between unionized and non-unionized child care centres.

Practitioner Challenges

Provincial Coordination & Funding

Practitioners identify a lack of intentional coordination and insufficient funding as major stumbling blocks in the current child care system. Without strong provincial coordination or an assigned mandate, child care planning remains fragmented, driven by the market rather than a deliberate systems-wide approach. Increased provincial leadership and investment is needed to build an effective and sustainable system.

Operating Funding & Fees

Practitioners report a misalignment between provincial funding and rising operating costs, especially in \$10-a-day centres. The Operating Funding Model (related to \$10-a-day child care centres) is a central point of concern. Practitioners report that the model covers minimum licensing staff ratios, however, operators frequently staff above these minimum standards to ensure quality care within their centres. As an example, they may require higher ratios to conduct staff training or care for children with extra support needs (outside of the Supported Child Development program).

Further, operators report a need for increased funding support for capital repairs and improvements over time such as playground repairs and upgrades. Additionally, they noted that recent updates to the Maintenance and Emergency Repair and Replacement fund may result in less emergency funding opportunities.

Centres enrolled in the Fee Reduction Initiative report tensions related to restrictions on fee increases. While limits on annual fee increases support affordability, they create financial challenges when operating costs soar. Without the ability to align fees to cost pressures, and without adequate provincial supplements, centres are poorly positioned to respond to inflation, emergent needs and unanticipated costs such as repairs.

Continuum of Care

Practitioners report challenges across the continuum of care. An acute need for infant/toddler and school age care persists in urban centres. Continuity of care is affected by maximum licensed spaces across care types and age groups. Infant/toddler programs are permitted a maximum of 12 children, while 3-5 care programs are permitted a maximum of 25 children (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2025). The result is insufficient infant/toddler spaces, followed by an increase of 3-5 spaces. School age care programs, on the other hand, allow 24-30 children depending on group composition and license type.¹ Because children remain in school age care programs the longest, it creates a high demand for these spaces.

Among operators, 3-5 care is generally a preferred business model due to staff ratios and hours. Infant/toddler care is more expensive to operate since it requires a lower ratio of staff to children. Reportedly, school age care receives less provincial funding and faces challenges securing and retaining staff due to the split shift model inherent in before and after school care.

\$10-a-Day Child Care

Practitioners note that the implementation of \$10-a-day child care is slow and unevenly distributed throughout the Province. Allocation by centre rather than agency is also problematic. Moreover, the requisite one year waiting period for newly opened centres to apply is restrictive to agencies who already have a proven track record operating \$10-a-day centres.

Operators report unused \$10-a-day spaces due to a lack of flexibility. Families needing part-time care may consume full-time spots in order to access the program. And families taking parental leave may hold an unused spot to ensure access upon their return to the workforce. These practices create vacant \$10-a-day spaces that cannot be otherwise allocated.

School Age Care on School Grounds

Practitioners expressed concern over the minimum floor space ratio related to school age care on school grounds. Children need a mix of spaces for quiet down time and active play. Limiting floor space ratio is not conducive to achieving quality care. Moreover, classrooms designed for education purposes do not make ideal child care spaces, and sharing already-in-use classrooms is problematic. Educators and child care providers require different supplies. Aside from furnishings, teachers (not school boards), typically own the classroom contents. Moreover, ongoing projects that support student learning would be extremely challenging to maintain between uses. Practitioners identified a need for thoughtful, purpose-built child care spaces on school grounds.

Child Care Deserts

While this topic came up less frequently, child care deserts are a significant consideration in a poorly coordinated child care system. According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 14% of B.C. children live in a child care desert meaning there are less than 3 spaces per 10 children in their neighbourhood (Macdonald, 2026). Child care deserts are more common in rural (39%) and small (22%) towns (Macdonald, 2025a), however, they exist in urban neighbourhoods too. For example, in Metro Vancouver, South West Downtown Vancouver, Outer East North Vancouver, and Lower West Surrey are considered child care deserts (Macdonald, 2025b).

Overall, 64% of B.C. children have inadequate access to child care, meaning there are between only 3 to 5.8 spaces per 10 children in their neighbourhood (Macdonald, 2026).

¹ Group maximum in school age care and school age care on school grounds licensed is 24 when children in grades Kindergarten and 1 are included. Group maximums are 30 when children in grades 2+ are present. Recreational care has no maximum group size provided the usable floor space area is sufficient and staff ratios are met (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2025).

Sector Opportunities

Across planner and practitioner engagements, opportunities were more challenging to identify in the current context. Still, those that emerged centred around relationship building, advocacy, and coordination.

Planners and practitioners recognize the leverage they have when they work together. They recognize the need to not only build relationships inside and outside of their organizations but also to maintain them. Having allies who will be the voice in the room when opportunities present themselves is essential. Practitioners also note the significance of being prepared with supporting data, ideas, relationships and plans when the right moment arrives. Overall, maintaining relationships and advocacy efforts is essential to advancing child care.

Practitioners identified a need for coordination among local governments and the broader child care sector. In the absence of formal, systems-wide coordination, communities of practice are an ideal forum for knowledge-sharing and coordinated advocacy to senior levels of government. Planners and practitioners with a shared understanding of the child care landscape feel better prepared to contribute to systems planning and respond to local child care need.

INDUSTRY SCAN

During project engagements, planners and practitioners were invited to share insights and examples from their work. These contributions reflect on-the-ground experience navigating local government processes, partnerships and execution. International case studies were not sought, as authority over systems design, policy direction and funding in British Columbia lies predominantly with the Province, ultimately informing local government purview.

The following section offers insights into strengthening local government child care plans and highlights some innovative child care projects that demonstrate the value of co-location, partnerships and relationships.

ENHANCING PLAN QUALITY

High-quality child care plans lead to stronger outcomes. Local governments wishing to strengthen their plans, should consider plan quality. Dr. Andi Binet and a team of students at the University of British Columbia, conducted a review of forty-eight BC child care plans. Their research evaluated plans based on groups of indicators, considering whether plans (1) were fact based – grounded in the causes and effects of insufficient child care supply, (2) included stated goals for equity, accessibility, affordability, availability, appropriateness and auspice, (3) included a series of policies and strategies available to local governments, (4) practiced coordination and engagement – coordination at the local level, with senior levels of government and First Nations and engagement of interest-holders and community, (5) employed implementation, monitoring and evaluation strategies (Binet et. al, 2025)..

Their research found that plans could generally be improved in four key areas.

1. Equity Analysis: child care plans should include an equity analysis with consideration to spatial, economic and social equity.
2. Goals: plans should include goals related to access, affordability, availability and equity. Further, these goals should be clear, specific and measurable.

3. Monitoring and evaluation: Plans should include monitoring and evaluation frameworks that employ indicators and assign timelines and responsibility.

4. Plans should generally be expanded to include policies and strategies that foster:

- economic development in the child care sector,
- municipal ownership and operation,
- a greater attention to Indigenous-led child care, and
- inclusion of children with extra support needs

Their research also identified new planning developments that could be incorporated into local plans. These included consideration to new legislation around amenity cost charges which allows local governments to finance new child care with development costs (Binet et. al, 2025). They also identified the Province's new Child Care Design Guidelines which, when adopted by local governments, helps achieve higher quality child care spaces. Since the Province has made several moves to enable and encourage child care on school grounds, local governments should seek to coordinate their child care planning efforts with local school districts. Coordination with public health continues to be advised.

Overall, child care plans can be strengthened with greater attention to equity, actionability, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. Updating plans to reflect policy developments and partnership opportunities will further enhance outcomes.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT INNOVATIONS

Throughout the course of this project, practitioners emphasized the significance of co-location, partnerships and relationships to advance child care in their communities. The following section highlights some innovative approaches that local governments and public/non-profit partners have taken to maintain and secure quality child care. These examples are illustrative only and do not constitute a comprehensive inventory of innovative child care projects in British Columbia.

CO-LOCATION

The following offer examples of projects that address community needs by co-locating child care with other social infrastructures.

City of Richmond - Early Childhood Development Hubs

Seedlings – 6380 No. 3 Road, Richmond, BC
Sprouts – 3368 Carscallen Road, Richmond, BC

Early Childhood Development (ECD) hubs bring integrated community services for young children and families together in one location. The City of Richmond has two ECD Hubs which are designed to include licensed child care, early childhood development services, family support services, and community program spaces (Duggan, 2022).

City of North Vancouver - Innova Development

422 East 3rd Street, North Vancouver, BC

This development co-locates a mixed-use, multi-family development along a transit corridor with a non-profit child care centre. The centre was achieved through an amenity agreement between the City and developer (City of North Vancouver, 2025).

***District of North Vancouver -
Lynn Creek Town Centre***

1491 Hunter Street, North Vancouver, BC

Lynn Creek Town Centre is a newly planned community in a mixed-use, transit-oriented area. The development co-locates housing and community amenities including a compact community centre, an automated library kiosk and a roof top child care centre operated by a non-profit (District of North Vancouver, 2025).

***Town of Gibsons -
O'Shea Place***

901 O'Shea Road, Gibsons, BC

This affordable housing development contains 33 units and is intended to attract and retain essential workers, particularly ECEs. The project includes a child care centre for 0-12yrs. It is a collaboration between the Sunshine Coast Affordable Housing Society and the municipality, funded by CMHC, BC Housing's BC Builds program and New Spaces funding from the Province (CMHC, 2025; Sunshine Coast Affordable Housing Society, n.d.). The land was contributed by the Town of Gibsons.

PARTNERSHIP & RELATIONSHIPS

The following offer examples of partnerships and relationships that have achieved and preserved child care spaces. Co-location is an added outcome of these relationships.

***City of Burnaby & Burnaby School District
Memorandum of Agreement***

The City of Burnaby and Burnaby School District signed a memorandum of understanding in 2014 to jointly establish twelve child care centres for children 0-5 years on school grounds (City of Burnaby, n.d.). This joint initiative combining land and funding contributions, has resulted in eight child care centres to date which are operated by non-profit societies.

***City of Vancouver & Vancouver School Board
- Rooftop Child Care Centres***

The City of Vancouver in partnership with the Vancouver School Board has established seven rooftop child care centres. Capitalizing on seismic upgrades and new school builds, this initiative co-locates child care with education offering a "one-stop neighbourhood hub" for local families (City of Vancouver, 2025a, para 7).

***Atira Women's Resource Society –
The Alex in Port Coquitlam***

100-3235 Flint Street, Port Coquitlam

The Alex is an 83-unit non-market housing development for single moms and women-headed households (Atira Women's Resource Society, 2025). It includes a 45 space child care centre, and health clinic, serving residents of the Alex and the broader community (Stranberg, 2021). This project was developed through a multi-agency partnership between Metro Vancouver, BC Housing, City of Port Coquitlam, Fraser Health and Atira Women's Resource Society (TL Housing Solutions, 2025). The land was provided by Metro Vancouver through a 60-year no-cost lease (Stranberg, 2021). The City of Port Coquitlam contributed \$83,000 toward the estimated \$28 million project, and BC Housing provided the mortgage with forgivable construction loans (Stranberg, 2021).

Little Friends at George Derby Centre

7550 Cumberland Street, Burnaby, BC

This centre pairs seniors care and child care under one roof. It's a wonderful example of how inter-agency collaboration can preserve child care and enhance community infrastructures of care. When the Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion (BACI) were notified of a lease termination on Little Friends Child Care, a \$10-a-day centre, they reached out to their partners for help (Broomhall, 2025). City of Burnaby planners connected them with the George Derby Care Society. Through the combined efforts of BACI, the George Derby Care Society, the City of Burnaby, the Province and Fraser Health, the child care centre was relocated. This co-location offers opportunities for cross-programming and intergenerational connections benefiting all ages under one roof (BACI, n.d.).

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLAN UPDATES

This report is structured as a research resource to support plan updates, but does not offer community specific recommendations. Planners wanting to further this work are encouraged to:

- Connect with practitioners and child care operators in the community to better understand the unique challenges and opportunities in their community. Establishing or connecting with a practitioner committee can offer ongoing insights and collaborative approaches.
- Refresh child care specific data for their area, incorporating a spatial, economic and social analysis of child care provision.
- Evaluate plan quality, ensuring specific and measurable goals are in place with clearly assigned responsibility. Ensure monitoring and evaluation indicators are established to strengthen accountability and support effective plan implementation.
- Connect with other Planners advancing child care in their region. Consider forming a community of practice to create a formal venue for knowledge sharing, practical support, inspiration and problem solving.

CONCLUSION

Looking back over the last five years, the child care planning landscape has evolved with new policy developments and funding changes. The Province has made progress increasing child care spaces, reducing child care fees, and increasing employment and earnings in the sector, but significant work remains to enhance child care access, affordability, inclusion and flexibility. The child care system in BC remains fragmented, underfunded and largely market driven. With the three-year pause on provincial funding programs, local governments and child care operators will have less access to critical new spaces funding. External funding sources like development financing and partnership will play an important role in child care space creation. As local governments deliver on mandated housing targets, social infrastructure like child care is essential to foster community well-being and make cities attractive places to live. Planners will need to wield local government tools effectively and double down on advocacy, relationships, and partnerships to establish new child care spaces. Updating and strengthening plans, grounded in the current context, will enable local governments to respond to sector needs and seize opportunities as they arise.

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APPENDIX

CONSIDERATIONS FOR UPDATING LOCAL CHILD CARE TARGETS

The Province of British Columbia, through the Canada-British Columbia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (B.C. CWELCC), committed to an overall count of new child care spaces - 30,000 by March 31, 2026 and 40,000 by 2028 (City of Vancouver, 2022). This count leaves ambiguity at the local level when setting child care targets. Nationally, most CWELCC agreements set a standard target of 59 spaces per 100 (Macdonald, 2026). This establishes clear targets for actors within the child care system. In B.C., no standard provision rate is established, leaving local governments to establish their own method for producing child care targets. Among Metro Vancouver planners, there is an expressed desire for a standard method for determining space provision.

In 2023, Metro Vancouver Regional Planning (2023) conducted a survey of licensed child care spaces in Metro Vancouver. *Table 1* illustrates their findings at that time, reporting on spaces per 100 children in the rightmost column. All municipalities sat below the national target at that time.

Table 1. Metro Vancouver Estimated Child Care Spaces 2023

GEOGRAPHIC AREA	2023 ESTIMATED NO. OF CHILDREN 12 AND UNDER*		ESTIMATED NO. OF CHILD CARE SPACES **		CHILD CARE SPACES PER 100 CHILDREN 12 AND UNDER
	No.	%	No.	%	
Anmore	266	0.1%	91	0.1%	34.2
Belcarra	25	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0
Burnaby	29,056	9.0%	6,433	7.9%	22.1
Coquitlam	19,118	5.9%	5,299	6.5%	27.7
Delta	13,573	4.2%	3,041	3.7%	22.4
Langley City	4301	1.3%	1,280	1.6%	29.8
Langley Township	21,108	6.5%	5,303	6.5%	25.1
Lions Bay	165	0.1%	40	0.0%	24.2
Maple Ridge	13,954	4.3%	3,316	4.1%	23.8
New Westminster	9206	2.8%	3,164	3.9%	34.4
North Vancouver City	6,832	2.1%	1,930	2.4%	28.2
North Vancouver District	12,267	3.8%	4,156	5.1%	33.9
Pitt Meadows	2,858	0.9%	1,260	1.6%	44.1
Port Coquitlam	8207	2.5%	2,794	3.4%	34.0
Port Moody	4,519	1.4%	1,277	1.6%	28.3
Richmond	24,507	7.6%	8,521	10.5%	34.8
Surrey	81,034	25.0%	14,795	18.2%	18.3
Tsawwassen First Nation	334	0.1%	164	0.2%	49.1
UBC	1,951	0.6%	996	1.2%	51.1
UEL***	394	0.1%	32	0.0%	8.1
Vancouver	63,300	19.5%	15,203	18.7%	24.0
West Vancouver	5114	1.6%	1,732	2.1%	33.9
White Rock	1,707	0.5%	437	0.5%	25.6
Vancouver CMA	323,796	100.0%	81,264	100.0%	25.1

Note. Reproduced from Metro Vancouver, 2023, p15

In B.C. overall, the current rate of provision is estimated at 47 spaces per 100 children (Macdonald, 2026). Across Canada, only PEI (59) and Quebec (66) meet or exceed the national standard.

Recently, the City of Vancouver has revised their child care targets to match the national standard of 59 spaces per 100 children (City of Vancouver, 2025b). Internationally, the European Union adopted a space creation target of 45 spaces (per 100) for children under 3 years and 96 spaces (per 100) for children 3 years to school age (Council of the European Union, 2022).

All this begs the question, what is the right child care space provision ratio for local governments in B.C.? Ultimately, child care targets must be informed by a local child care needs assessment that considers existing spaces and their spatial, economic and social distribution. These may also consider demand factors like workforce participation, household composition (eg. lone-parent households) and development. While the ultimate goal is space provision of 59%, local governments may need to develop an incremental plan to achieve it.

The City of Burnaby is in the process of updating their child care targets with refreshed population data provided by Metro Vancouver (based on the 2021 Census). They have chosen to use high growth population data to align with population projections in *Burnaby 2050*, their official community plan. As part of this internship project, the following scenarios were developed for consideration.

HOLDING SCENARIO

Child care targets are established in *table 2*, using high growth population data and applying 2030 space provision rates from the original Burnaby Child Care Action Plan (2021).

Table2 - 'Holding Scenario' - 2030 Space Creation Targets using New Population Data

Age Group	2030 Child Population	Provision Rate (Spaces per 100)	New 2030 Targets	Difference from Original 2030 Targets
0-2 yrs	8,187	33	2,702	284
3-5 years	7,592	50	3,796	14
6-9yrs	9,366	33	3,091	-31
Total	25,145	~38	9,589	267

INCREASED PROVISION SCENARIO

This scenario takes Burnaby's priority to expand infant/toddler and school age care spaces into account. It aligns 3-5 Care and School Age Care space provision rates to 50 spaces per 100 and increases the infant/toddler space provision rate to 40 spaces per 100 children. This lower infant/toddler rate accounts for potential impacts from extended paternal leave on demand for infant child care. Child care targets are established in *table 3*, using high growth population data and the proposed space provision ratios.

While the national CWELCC benchmark of 59 spaces per 100 was considered for this 'increased provision scenario,' it was not advanced in this project, as it represents a substantially larger increase over the original Child Care Action Plan targets for 2030. This benchmark should, however, be considered in the development of future targets (eg. 2035).

Table 3- 'Increased Provision Scenario' - 2030 Space Creation Targets using New Population Data & Provision Rates

Age Group	2030 Child Population	Provision Rate (Spaces per 100)	New 2030 Targets	Difference from Original 2030 Targets
0-2 yrs	8,187	40	3,275	857
3-5 years	7,592	50	3,796	14
6-9yrs	9,366	50	4,683	1,561
Total	25,145	~46	11,754	2,432

Burnaby will need to consider which scenario best suits the current child care climate. The temporary pause on provincial new spaces funding significantly reduces a key source of capital for developing new child care spaces. From this perspective, the holding scenario is attractive. On the other hand, space creation targets are a crucial component to expanding and advocating for child care. They play an important role in communicating and reporting on unmet need to stimulate action.

Ultimately, local governments should refresh their child care targets every five years, considering progress to date and applying updated population projections. While 59% space provision is the national standard, local governments may need to achieve this incrementally over time. A balance of advocacy and achievability must inform space provision targets. This approach supports both long-term system transformation and realistic, locally responsive implementation.