



Child Care Act review Discussion document | **Affordable**

Vision for a modernized Child Care Act

The Yukon's *Child Care Act* came into force in 1990 and, like similar Canadian legislation of its era, it focuses on the health and safety of children and custodial care.

In the more than 30 years since the act became law, early learning experts across Canada have increasingly recognized children require much more than an emphasis on health and safety and custodial care.

Children need high-quality, varied and nurturing learning experiences that help them develop and grow.

Research in the area of early childhood education has clearly linked healthy child development with high-quality early learning opportunities. At the centre of high-quality programs are well-educated, well-qualified and well-supported early childhood educators.

Legislation is key to a high-quality early learning and child care system that is inclusive, affordable and accessible.

Why is early learning important?

Investments in early childhood education support the development of children and the future of a happier and healthier society. Results are best when pre-school-aged children have access to high-quality early learning and child care. It is during these early years that the youngest learners develop vital physical, learning and social skills needed to set them on a path to future health and success.

Learning through play nurtures a child's brain development. The design of early learning settings supports play, wonder, exploration and inquiry. These settings offer many ways to grow language and communication skills.

The goals of early learning programs include, but are not limited to:

- cultivating positive personal and cultural identities for children;
- fostering inclusive environments that respect, value and appreciate diversity;
- nurturing strong relationships with other children and caregivers;
- participating in literacy- and numeracy-rich environments;
- learning with others through play and inquiry;
- practising social-emotional and problem-solving abilities;
- developing and nurturing positive self-esteem;
- encouraging life-long learning and well-being; and
- improving fine and gross motor skills.

Affordable

During previous engagements, we heard that early learning and child care programs should be low cost for as many families as possible to access them, regardless of income or employment status. Child care providers told us providing low-cost care would need to be financially sustainable for operators. They should not see a reduction in revenues by participating in a new universal program.

The Government of Yukon introduced the universal child care program in 2021. This program is available to all Yukon families using participating licensed child care programs. The government provides funding to licensed operators to directly reduce the amount paid by parents and caregivers for early learning and child care services. The new program also includes rate increase limits to ensure fees for parents remain sustainable, affordable and in line with rates charged by other local providers delivering the same type of early learning and child care services.

Parents and caregivers pay the difference between the rate charged by the early learning and child care provider and the funding provided by the Yukon government. Under this program, average child care fees in the Yukon have dropped to below \$10 per day. Caregivers save up to \$8,400 for each child in licensed child care programs.

Child care subsidy

The Yukon Child Care Subsidy is a legislated grant that assists families who may not be able to afford the parent or caregiver portion of fees for their child to attend a licensed child care program. The amount of subsidy provided is based on the combined net income of the family. It also takes into account family size and geographic location.

Operators told us the Yukon Child Care Subsidy program is too administrative and is a burden on both providers and families. Amendments may be required to the Subsidy Regulation in order to simplify the subsidy and align the program with the universal early learning and child care program. The requirements for receiving the subsidy could be amended to reinforce the benefit of early learning for the child and not whether a parent is working, attending school or looking for work.

A review of the Child Care Subsidy program may consider simplifying the Yukon Child Care Subsidy program to align the program with the universal early learning and child care program and removing requirements tied to the status of the parent or caregiver.

Question:

1. What changes, if any, are needed to the child care subsidy program to meet the needs of Yukon families?



Maximum fees

Under the Yukon's universal early learning and child care program, the government currently limits the amount operators can raise fees on an annual basis. These limits are established under transfer payment agreements that set out terms and conditions for the funding of licensed programs. Under agreements with the Government of Canada, the Yukon has committed to child care fees not exceeding \$10 per day, on average.

In order to prevent fees from increasing too much over time and making sure the Yukon government can continue to meet its commitments to affordability, the *Child Care Act* might be amended to enable the Minister to establish maximum fees operators can charge parents. While transfer payment agreements can establish limits on fees, amendments to the Act will provide a more robust legislative framework to ensure affordability for families.

Questions:

1. Should the principle of affordability be included in the Act?
2. If yes, how should the principle of affordability be reflected in a modernized *Child Care Act*?
3. What are your thoughts or concerns about limiting fees in legislation?



If you have comments you would like to share with us, please send them to childcareactreview@yukon.ca.