

**Early Years Study 4 Newsletter #21**  
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There are a number of Federal officials drafting legislation to guide the development of a Canada-wide early learning and child care system. An Early Learning and Child Care Act will reinforce the federal-provincial-territorial agreements, protect ongoing funding and support the development of early childhood education as a right for all children.

The Fall 2020 Speech from the Throne and Budget 2021 signalled a historic transformation for early learning and child care. The pandemic underscored that child care is an essential support for women in the workforce and for gender equity. Recovering from the pandemic, responding to international conflicts, and tackling climate challenges and an aging population are dependent on growing a competent workforce. Quality early learning is the foundation to securing a capable workforce and citizenry. It will be as important to the well-being of Canadians, and to our sense of self, as health care.

In less than a year, that included time out for a federal election, 12 provincial/territorial agreements were negotiated – and the final agreement with Ontario is expected before the end of March 2022. Federal legislation for a Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Act can catch the momentum and move forward with guiding principles for quality, inclusion, affordability, access and public infrastructure to promote a robust non-profit system that prioritizes early learning for all children.

Federal legislation can support the development of a quality system that will nurture people for the future through the following requirements:

**Effective Monitoring:** Monitoring the implementation of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements will allow cross-Canada learning while respecting provincial and territorial jurisdiction. Collecting uniform data about who participates in ELCC programs, how public funding is allocated and the qualifications of ELCC staff is a starting point. The analysis of the data and ongoing reporting is best conducted outside of government and the influence of early childhood professional and advocacy groups.

The [Early Childhood Education Report](#) produced by the Atkinson Centre, a research centre at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, is designed to track and assess how the provinces and territories fund and operate early childhood education (including regulated child care and public education for children before Grade 1). Released every three years, it is an independent and well-positioned monitoring mechanism that has earned the confidence of policy makers and researchers.

**Promote equity:** The provision of affordable early learning and child care requires metrics to promote equitable access to underserved groups including Indigenous children, children with special needs, those belonging to minority language and cultural communities and those living in lowered social and economic circumstances.

**The child at the centre:** Affordable child care has many beneficiaries but children are its primary users. Legislative language should reflect the goals of the [Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#), namely to ensure “all children can experience the enriching environment of quality early learning and child care that supports children’s development to reach their full potential.”

**Provisions for a qualified workforce:** A qualified early childhood workforce is the essential ingredient to quality early learning environments that promote children’s thinking, language and well-being – now and into the future. The federal legislation can recognize that qualifications and professional learning must proceed in tandem with improved compensation and professional working conditions.



Hon. Margaret Norrie McCain

Recommendations in the newsletter were submitted to the Federal Early Learning and Child Care Secretariat which is holding consultations on pending ELCC Legislation.