

Affordable, Quality Child Care: A Great Place to Grow!

June 2016



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INTRODUCTION

Nova Scotians want their children to have the best possible start in life, to support their success and reach their full potential.

Approximately 16,660 children currently attend regulated child care programs through 391 child care centres and 15 family home day care agencies that support 207 regulated family homes.

In 2015, Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Karen Casey launched the first in-depth review of regulated child care ever undertaken in the province.

For far too long, early learning and child care have been misunderstood, ignored, and underfunded in Nova Scotia.

In March 2016, Minister Casey released a report on the review, and accepted its 18 recommendations, shaped by more than 7,000 Nova Scotians.

Parents, early childhood educators, child care centre operators, family home day care owners, early intervention groups, and training institutions focused on five key priorities:

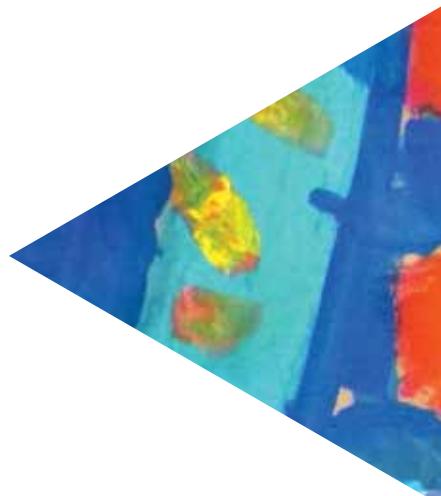
- ▶ affordability
- ▶ quality
- ▶ support and development of the workforce
- ▶ accessibility
- ▶ structure and governance of the system

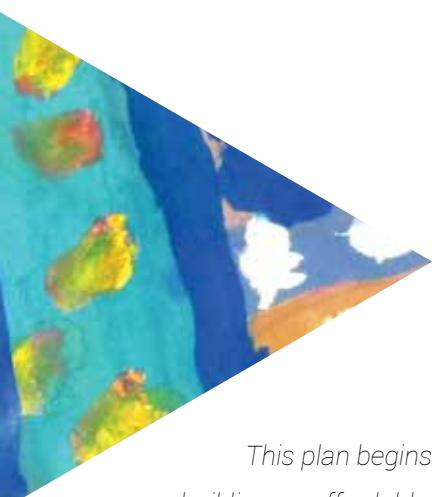
Research shows that early years are significant for lifelong health, well-being, and success. The trajectories for physical and mental health, future health concerns such as chronic disease and addictions, educational attainment, and potential later involvement with crime and the justice system are established early in life (McCain et al. 2007).

Studies also show that brain development proceeds at a faster pace between conception and the first day of elementary school than during any other life stage (Nelson, 1999).

Early Development Instrument (EDI) data shows that one in four Nova Scotian children now arrive at elementary school vulnerable in one or more developmental areas. Even with extra supports and remediation programs in school, it is often too late to change the learning trajectories established in early childhood (McCain et al. 2011).

For this reason, providing quality early learning environments prior to school entry is key in reducing vulnerabilities and giving children a strong start. Building the child care sector also supports the goals of the Education Action Plan (ednet.ns.ca).





This report presents actions to build regulated child care in Nova Scotia and focusses on concrete ways of providing quality, affordable, and accessible options for families while supporting and developing early childhood educators.

Studies show that access to quality early childhood education programs in the early years, and, especially prior to grade primary, has many benefits for children, including success in school and life. For that reason, improving the quality of child care programs is essential.

As well, the One Nova Scotia 10-year Collaborative Action Plan (onens.ca) identified the need to support children from cradle to career. High quality early childhood education and early childhood development have exceptionally high returns to society as a whole.

Child care is also a priority for the federal government and the other Atlantic provinces. Minister Casey is working closely with her Atlantic colleagues and the federal government to bring significant change to early learning and child care.

We can no longer make patchwork improvements. Achieving effective, sustainable child care requires a shift in how we view child care, and recognition that a strong child care sector is important to the development of our children.

It requires building the regulated child care sector. It also requires monitoring and evaluation that keeps pace with the realities of the sector so that adjustments can be made as needed as the industry grows and changes.

Children and families need Nova Scotia to lead the way.

Actions are presented under each of the five key priorities identified by Nova Scotians. Although each is listed separately, all are interconnected, strengthened by, and dependent on the others. To succeed, all five must be equally strong.

Beyond the funding provided in 2016-17 for the first phase, the plan will take additional time and investment to fully implement. Research, best practice, and evaluation will guide the implementation as we move forward together.

As we implement these actions, we must work together with families, early childhood education training institutions, regulated child care centre operators, early childhood educators, and key community partners. The next several months are going to be exciting and busy. We will make it a priority to find opportunities for engagement and ongoing communication to ensure success.

*This plan begins
building an affordable,
accessible, quality child care
system for
families—a system
that values and
supports early
childhood
educators.*

AFFORDABILITY

Many parents struggle with the cost of child care.

In partnership with the child care sector, government will

- ▶ increase the parent subsidy
- ▶ make more parents eligible for the subsidy
- ▶ cap increases in parent fees
- ▶ simplify and monitor the program

Increase the parent subsidy

The parent subsidy per diems in Nova Scotia are the lowest in the country.

The gap between the existing parent subsidy and cost of care is too wide.

The amount of subsidy that a family will receive will continue to be based on annual income.

ACTION 1: Increase the daily subsidy for parents so that eligible families pay less, and the gap between the subsidy and cost of care narrows.

The increase in the daily subsidy will come into effect on July 1, 2016. The actual amount families will pay will depend on the amount of subsidy the family receives and the daily parent fees their child care centre charges.

The example presented in the table shows the change for families eligible for maximum subsidy, with children in a centre that charges average parent fees.

NEW DAILY SUBSIDY COMPARED TO AVERAGE COST OF CARE

	Former Maximum Daily Subsidy	New Maximum Daily Subsidy	Average Daily Child Care Fees 2014/15	Parents eligible for maximum subsidy will pay on average
Infant	\$22	\$29	\$39	\$10
Toddler	\$20	\$24	\$34	\$10
Preschool	\$19	\$23	\$33	\$10

Based on the example, parents (receiving maximum subsidy at a centre charging average fees) could pay about \$140 less a month for infant care, and \$80 less a month for toddler and preschool care. That adds up to more than \$1,600 a year for infant care, and almost \$1,000 annually for toddlers and preschoolers.

The daily rates will be assessed annually to determine when another increase is needed.



"Make child care more affordable. Otherwise, people must decide between working or staying at home."
(Participant, Child Care Review Consultation, 2015)



Make more parents eligible for the subsidy

Income levels to qualify for maximum subsidy are too low. This can force parents out of the workforce because they simply cannot afford child care.

ACTION 2: Change subsidy eligibility criteria to enable hundreds more families to qualify.

Currently, families who earn more than \$20,880 are not eligible for the maximum child care subsidy. Moving forward, families will remain eligible for the maximum subsidy until they earn more than \$25,000 annually. This could benefit as many as 700 families who are currently in the program. The change could also attract 1,200 new families into the program.

The uptake of the program and changes for current families will be tracked to determine how well the program is working to support access to care.

Cap increases in parent fees

Any increase in subsidy must narrow the gap between the subsidy and cost of care.

ACTION 3: Limit fee increases for regulated child care programs receiving government funding from the department.

Parent fee increases will be capped at 3 per cent in the first year for centres charging within 10 per cent of the provincial average fee, and at 1 per cent for centres charging 10 per cent or more above the provincial average. The cap will be reviewed annually, at the same time the subsidy is reviewed. This will ensure that growth in fees does not eat up the growth in subsidy.

Simplify and monitor the program

The current 11-page application form (plus attachments) is complicated. Finding the time and figuring out how to complete the form can add stress for busy families.

ACTION 4: Simplify the application process. Review and evaluate the subsidy program annually to track the needs of families.

The current application process will be reviewed to make it simpler and clearer. Online support for families as they complete the form is also being evaluated.

The program will be tracked closely to ensure parent subsidy rates are making child care more affordable for more parents. Data, including parent utilization of subsidies, will be used to plan for further program improvement and investment.

QUALITY

High quality early learning programs are the foundation of successful lifelong learning, development, health, and well-being. Yet Nova Scotia is one of the only jurisdictions in Canada that has not developed a provincial early learning curriculum.

Without a common curriculum, the quality of programming is inconsistent across the province. As well, the lack of a provincial curriculum does not allow for effective, systematic evaluation of the quality of learning environments.

In partnership with the child care sector, government will

- ▶ develop a provincial early learning curriculum
- ▶ set quality standards, improve supports to centres and inspection processes
- ▶ link funding approvals to quality through implementation of recognized tools such as the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale*

These actions will be phased in, beginning this year.

Develop a provincial early learning curriculum

ACTION 5: Develop and implement an early learning curriculum for child care centres and regulated family home day care providers, including key components that support healthy child development outcomes and successful transitions into grade primary.

Early childhood educators and key partners will be actively involved in developing the curriculum using culturally-responsive approaches.

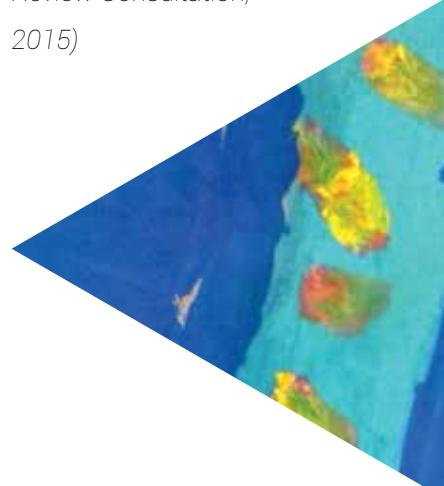
The implementation of the new curriculum will begin in 2016–17, and will include professional development for early childhood educators.

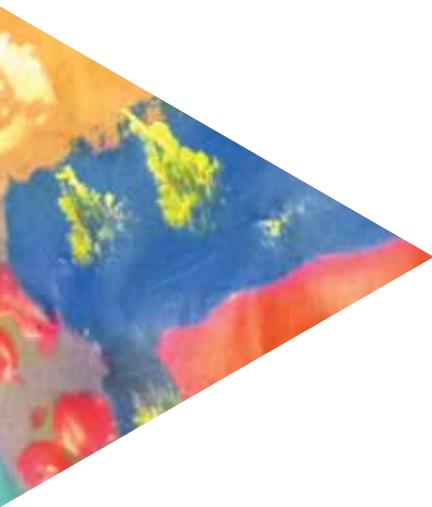
Set quality standards, improve supports to centres and inspection processes

Quality can be difficult to sustain when operators and staff must deal with competing pressures. On the one hand, operators and educators are expected to nurture children's healthy growth and development in warm, engaging, safe environments. On the other, they must deal with high staff turnover, low pay, and few incentives to build on quality beyond the minimum standards set within the regulations.

Providing operators and staff with clarity on expectations, assistance with their daily challenges, clear policies for compliance, and ongoing positive communication with the department will support operators and will be critical to enhanced and sustained quality.

"Develop and apply consistent standards of quality child care that reflect best practices and emergent, play-based learning principles."
(Participant, Child Care Review Consultation, 2015)





ACTION 6: Develop and implement a quality improvement model for regulated child care, including standards for program quality and evaluation.

Working with early childhood educators, directors, families, and training institutions, the department will set standards for program quality and develop indicators for assessment that include a focus on cultural and social inclusion and social-emotional development.

The department will consult with and support centres in implementing quality improvement processes, and in developing responsive learning environments that meet standards. This includes helping centres support healthy child development and nurture a love of learning by engaging children in meaningful, play-based experiences.

All child care centres and family home day care agencies will be regularly assessed based on the quality standards and indicators. Quality will also be measured through the use of recognized tools such as the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale*.

Linking funding approvals to quality

ACTION 7: Implement new criteria for funding approvals that drive quality.

The child care centre proposal process will be revised to include new requirements related to quality and sustainability. These will include engagement in quality monitoring and improvement processes, proximity to other centres, and the number of children in a centre.

ACTION 8: Enhance licensing and consultation supports to regulated child care programs.

The department will continue to provide support to child care centres and family home day care agencies and regulated homes. The goal is to improve understanding of the regulations and to provide coaching to support centres in sustaining compliance with the Day Care Act and Regulations as well as with quality improvement measures.

SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORKFORCE

Recruiting and retaining qualified staff is one of the biggest challenges facing child care centres. Wages are low, benefits are not generous, and professional development opportunities are limited.

Salaries, benefits, professional development, and training for early childhood educators must improve.

In partnership with the child care sector, government will

- ▶ increase historically low wages for early childhood educators to the national average*
- ▶ raise education and training standards
- ▶ value the experience and support the development of existing staff
- ▶ enable early childhood educators to maintain and develop their skills and expertise
- ▶ recognize credentials and experience of other professionals to work in centres
- ▶ support partnerships and information sharing

Increase historically low wages for early childhood educators to the national average *

Nova Scotian families entrust early childhood educators with their children, yet these educators are the lowest paid in Canada.

ACTION 9: Bring the provincial average wage for trained early childhood educators in Nova Scotia from \$12.84 to the national average* wage.

Beginning in October 2016, centres receiving provincial grant funding must pay early childhood educators (ECE) based on a wage floor that rises with the level of training:

- ▶ ECE Level 1—at least \$15/hr
- ▶ ECE Level 2—at least \$17/hr
- ▶ ECE Level 3—at least \$19/hr

Funding will be provided to help operators implement the wage floor. Over the next several months, the department will also develop, with input from the sector a new funding model. With the new wage floor and the new funding model, centres will be better able to recruit and retain staff and keep parent fees as low as possible.



* The national average for educator wages is based on the 2012 data from the "You Bet We Still Care!" Report: Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2013.



Raise education and training standards

Having staff with post-secondary training in early childhood development is a key indicator of quality in regulated early learning and child care programs. Current regulations allow for up to one-third of the staff to have no formal training.

Early childhood educators with a diploma or a degree have the kind of specialized training, skills, and expertise that ideally prepare them to work with children from birth to school entry.

Early childhood educators must also be recognized as professionals who play a critical role in early childhood development and family support. Having a degree or diploma will reinforce this.

ACTION 10: Raise training standards to require all early childhood educators entering the regulated child care profession to have a degree, diploma, certificate, or paraprofessional recognition through a competency-based assessment.

Require all directors to have either a diploma or degree plus post-diploma training in leadership/management by 2021.

By 2021, all early childhood educators working in a regulated child care centre will have completed one of the following:

- ▶ a one-year early childhood education certificate
- ▶ a two-year diploma
- ▶ a four-year degree
- ▶ paraprofessional recognition

A competency-based assessment process will be introduced to recognize staff who have relevant credentials and experience in the area of early childhood development and care. Employers will have options to offer conditional employment for staff who complete this process within two years of their hire date.

The training standards and classification requirements will be aligned with the new early learning curriculum and quality improvement process.

A one-year certificate in early childhood education, including opportunities for recognizing previous experience, training, and course work, will be developed.

New incentives will be provided for First Nations, African Nova Scotians, Acadians, Francophones, immigrants, and newcomers to complete early childhood educator training.

Value the experience and support the development of existing staff

The experience and commitment of current child care staff without formal training are also valued.

ACTION 11: Support current staff who do not have an early childhood credential by granting funds for training and by recognizing previous experience and training.

The department will provide grant funding to approximately 140 existing untrained staff per year to help complete a one-year certificate, two-year diploma, or degree.

Current requirements will also be changed to enable staff to complete more of their practicum experiences at their workplace.

Entry-level child care staff who are currently employed in a regulated child care centre and included in the staff-to-child ratio, but do not complete training, will be able to continue to work in their current role.

ACTION 12: Require all providers in regulated family homes to successfully complete all Family Home Day Care Providers training course modules with the goal of enhancing the quality of care.

Currently, regulated family home day care providers are required to complete Module 1 of the Family Home Day Care Providers training course. Moving forward, providers must complete all three modules.

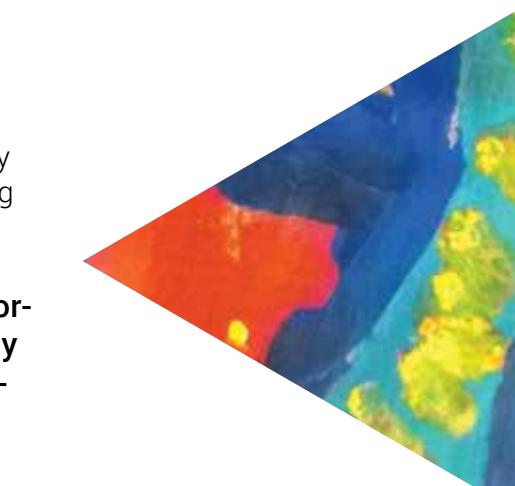
Additional professional development opportunities will also be designed for regulated family home day care providers.

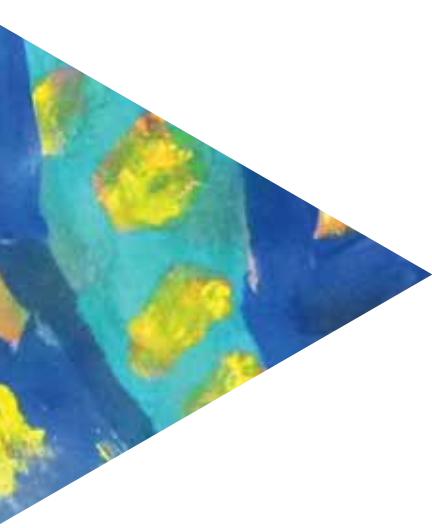
Enable early childhood educators to maintain and develop their skills and expertise

Many early childhood educators have to take unpaid time off to pursue further education and training opportunities. At the same time, staff who want to pursue additional post-secondary education and training do not find many training opportunities available to them. Operators also have difficulty finding qualified substitutes.

ACTION 13: Increase and coordinate professional development opportunities for early childhood educators, directors, and regulated family home day care providers in Nova Scotia in priority areas for development.

A coordinated approach will be implemented for annual professional development for early childhood educators and regulated family home day care providers, including specific training on the new early learning curriculum.





Professional development specializations will be developed and implemented in key areas including infant and toddler care, leadership, social-emotional learning, special needs, diversity and cultural inclusion, and child-centred and play-based programming.

Leadership and administration/management training for child care centre directors will also be implemented across the province.

A substitute system will be put in place so educators can participate in professional development during the work day, and employers will have easier access to trained staff.

Recognize credentials and experience of other professionals to work in centres

Few opportunities exist for professionals with related training to work in a regulated child care centre. Regulations also provide little flexibility in recognizing training from outside of Canada.

ACTION 14: Introduce new standards and competency-based assessment to assess and recognize professionals with relevant post-secondary training to work in regulated child care.

In 2017, the Regulations will be amended to recognize new standards and a competency-based assessment process. The assessment process will allow individuals with relevant post-secondary training to be eligible to work in regulated child care.

The new assessment process will also support individuals who arrive with credentials from other countries to have their academic and workplace experience assessed in a timely and meaningful way.

Support partnerships and information sharing

Like all professionals, early childhood educators can learn from each other, and from those who work in related fields.

ACTION 15: Expand the mandate for the Early Childhood Development Support Sites to provide leadership at the community level in the areas of building partnerships, as well as information and resource sharing for early childhood educators and other early years professionals.

ACTION 16: Introduce an online portal for child care staff to engage in ongoing communication and information sharing regarding departmental initiatives.

ACCESSIBILITY

During the consultations, parents described how hard it is to find quality, affordable child care, especially in rural communities, and for infants and children with special needs.

Some parents do not have access to current, reliable information about existing child care options.

In partnership with the child care sector, government will

- ▶ grow child care in communities that need it most
- ▶ expand infant care
- ▶ increase child care options and flexibility for families
- ▶ improve support for children with special needs
- ▶ give parents more information to help them find quality care

Grow child care in communities that need it most

Government-funded growth must occur where child care is now lacking. Funding will only be approved for new centres or family home day cares in communities with a demonstrated need.

ACTION 17: Increase the number of child care spaces in communities that need them most.

Expand infant care

Approval for growth and funding for infant spaces will be tied to areas of greatest need.

ACTION 18: Increase the number of infant spaces in child care centres. Infant care will also be a focus for regulated family home programs.

Increase child care options and flexibility for families

Regulated family home day cares often provide more flexibility to parents, including more flexible hours. Currently, 15 licensed agencies with 207 regulated family home day care programs operate in Nova Scotia.

ACTION 19: Increase options and flexibility for child care by expanding the number of regulated family home day care programs.

Family home programs regulated through a licensed family home day care agency will now be able to care for more children. Currently, the regulations allow for regulated family home providers to care for a maximum of six children of mixed ages and a maximum of eight children when they are all school age. This will be increased to a maximum of seven children of mixed ages and a maximum of nine children when they are all school age.





New and existing regulated family home day cares will be expected to offer infant spaces and flexible hours for families.

Improve support for children with special needs

ACTION 20: Expand the number of centres offering inclusive programming for children with special and complex needs.

Discussions with partners in the child care sector and early childhood development interventionists will begin this year to plan the best way to support children with special needs, particularly those with complex needs. Enhanced programming for children with complex needs in regulated child care will be developed through consultation.

Give parents more information to help them find quality care

ACTION 21: Improve the online directory of regulated child care centres to make it easier for families to find the quality child care they need.

By 2018, the improved directory will include the location of child care centres, daily fees, current available spaces, and the professional credentials of staff.

The online directory will continue to include information on compliance with provincial Day Care Regulations.

More information will also be available online about the child care subsidy program.

STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF THE SYSTEM

Structural, system-wide changes in the child care sector are long overdue.

While the need for more funding was often heard during the consultation, changes must be made to ensure additional tax dollars support quality programming, provide improved wages, benefits, and supports to early childhood educators, and make child care more accessible and affordable for parents.

In partnership with the child care sector, government will

- ▶ ensure tax dollars support accessibility, affordability, quality, and early childhood educators through new funding criteria, reporting requirements, and audits
- ▶ direct funding to communities where child care is needed most
- ▶ expand community involvement and partnerships
- ▶ build public understanding of the importance of quality early learning

Ensure tax dollars support accessibility, affordability, quality, and early childhood educators

ACTION 22: Implement new funding criteria that will require existing child care centres to

- ▶ cap parent fee increases
- ▶ pay wages to early childhood educators, based on the wage floor
- ▶ deliver the new provincial early learning curriculum
- ▶ provide inclusive programming to support children with special needs
- ▶ meet quality standards and comply with the Day Care Act and Regulations

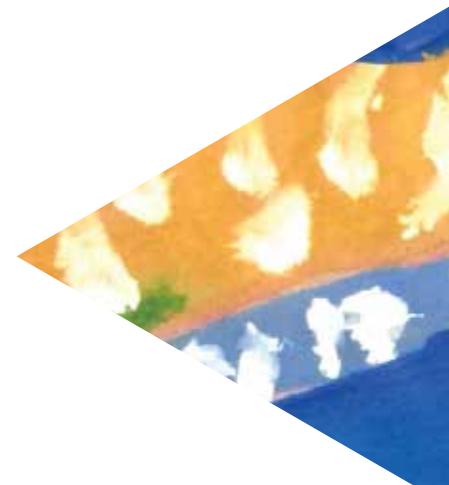
ACTION 23: Implement new reporting requirements, accountability measures, and random audits to ensure grants are utilized as required by policy and criteria.

Direct funding to where child care is needed most

ACTION 24: Work with community networks to identify which communities need child care most, based on existing data and available resources. Direct new funding to these communities.

Strategic growth committees, composed of department staff and key partners, will be created to identify communities with priority needs. Special attention will be placed on identifying rural, urban, cultural, and linguistic needs.

As part of this work, possibilities for implementing a registry or waitlist tool for families looking for child care will be explored.



Expand community involvement and partnerships

ACTION 25: Support a non-profit network to provide leadership and support for capacity building in the non-profit child care sector.

As funding becomes available, support will be provided to create a network and provide resources for non-profit child care operators. The network will have responsibilities to provide community boards with expert advice, resources, and consultation services.

Building partnerships based on expertise, resources, and services existing in communities will also benefit families and children.

ACTION 26: Create opportunities for early childhood educators, early elementary teachers, and other early years professionals to collaborate on issues related to complex needs and school transition, and to participate in joint professional learning opportunities.

Build public understanding of the importance of quality early learning

Many people do not have a full understanding of the importance of quality early learning and the growth and development of children in the early years. It is time for this to change.

ACTION 27: Launch a public awareness campaign that highlights the importance of high quality regulated child care for child development and families.

The department will develop and implement a communications plan to inform families about the importance of the early years to a child's long-term health, success, and well-being. A legislative amendment to rename the Day Care Act will be introduced to better reflect the importance of early learning, quality care, and child development.

The investments that we are making and the actions we are undertaking are major steps towards the building of the child care system in Nova Scotia. We recognize the many contributions of existing operators and early childhood educators, and we see the actions in this report as an important step in moving forward together to ensure the system is strong and sustainable for many years to come.

*"Educate the public on what we do, its value.
We're not just babysitters."*

*(Participant, Child Care
Review Consultation,
2015)*

Timeline for Actions

AFFORDABILITY

Phase 1: 2016-2017

- Increase daily subsidy for parents so that eligible families pay less, and the gap between the subsidy and cost of care narrows.
- Change subsidy eligibility criteria to enable hundreds more families to qualify for maximum subsidy.
- Cap parent fee increases for regulated child care programs receiving government funding.
- Simplify subsidy application process.

Phase 2: 2018-2021

- Evaluate the subsidy program and parent fee cap annually.

SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORKFORCE

Phase 1: 2016-2017

- Bring the provincial average wage for trained ECEs in Nova Scotia to the national average* wage.
- Support current staff who do not have an early childhood credential by granting funds for training and by recognizing previous experience and training.

Phase 2: 2018-2021

- Increase and coordinate PD opportunities for ECEs, directors, and regulated family home day care providers in Nova Scotia in priority areas for development.
- Introduce new standards and competency-based assessments to assess and recognize professionals with relevant post-secondary training to work in regulated child care.
- Require all providers in regulated family homes to successfully complete all FHDC Provider training course modules with the goal of enhancing the quality of care.
- Continue to support current staff who do not have an ECE credential by granting funds for training and by recognizing previous experience and training.
- Raise training standards to require all ECEs entering the regulated child care profession to have a degree, diploma, certificate, or paraprofessional recognition. Require all directors to



* The national average for educator wages is based on the 2012 data from the "You Bet We Still Care!" Report: Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2013.



have either a diploma or degree plus post-diploma training in leadership/management by 2021.

- Provide incentives for First Nations, African Nova Scotians, Acadians, Francophones, immigrants, and newcomers to complete early childhood educator training.
- Expand the mandate for the Early Childhood Development Support sites to provide leadership at the community level in the areas of building partnerships, as well as information and resource sharing for early childhood educators and other early years professionals.
- Introduce an online portal for child care staff to engage in ongoing communication and information sharing regarding departmental initiatives.

QUALITY

Phase 1: 2016-2017

- Develop and implement an early learning curriculum for child care centres and regulated family home day care providers, including key components that support healthy child development outcomes and successful transitions into grade primary.
- Develop a quality improvement model for regulated child care, including standards for program quality and evaluation.

Phase 2: 2018-2021

- Implement a quality improvement model for regulated child care, including standards for program quality and evaluation.
- Continue implementing all other quality actions.

Changes to the Day Care Act and Regulations are required in the following areas:

- ▶ Training to recognize new standards and a competency-based assessment process
- ▶ Family Home Day Care program ratios and increased monitoring
- ▶ The name of the Day Care Act to reflect the importance of early learning, quality child care and child development.

Further regulatory changes may be required as this work moves forward.

STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF THE SYSTEM

Phase 1: 2016-2017

- Begin implementing new funding criteria.
- Implement new reporting requirements, accountability measures, and random audits to ensure grants are utilized as required by policy and criteria.
- Work with community networks to identify which communities need child care most, based on existing data and available resources.
Direct new funding for new centres to those communities.

Phase 2: 2018-2021

- Support a non-profit network to provide leadership and support for capacity building in the non-profit child care sector.
- Create opportunities for early childhood educators, early elementary teachers, and other early years professionals to collaborate on issues related to complex needs and school transition, and to participate in joint professional learning opportunities.
- Continue to work with community networks to identify which communities need child care most.
- Launch a public awareness campaign that highlights the importance of high quality regulated child care for child development and families.

ACCESSIBILITY

Phase 1: 2016-17

- Work with communities to identify where child care is needed most, including care for infants and children with special needs.
- Release map identifying priority communities for expansion.
- Work with child care providers and early childhood development interventionists to plan the best way to support children with special needs, particularly those with complex needs.

Phase 2: 2018-2021

- Increase the number of child care spaces in communities that need them most.
- Increase the number of infant spaces in child care centres. Infant care will also be a focus for family home programs.
- Increase options and flexibility for child care by expanding regulated family home day cares.
- Improve the online directory of regulated child care centres to make it easier for families to find the quality child care they need.
- Expand the number of centres offering inclusive programming for children with special and complex needs.

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