



Meeting Summary: The Canada Wide Early Learning Child Care Engagement Table (ELCCET)

Meeting 6: Nov 4th 2023, 9:15 – 4:00 pm

Background

The sixth meeting of the Minister’s Early Learning and Child Care Engagement Table (ELCCET) was held on November 4th, 2023. The meeting was focused on the following objectives:

- Early learning and child care (ELCC) expansion by gaining input on key expansion initiatives.
- Updates regarding quality, inclusion and professional learning (PL) and gaining feedback on PL options for the sector.
- The Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care updated on lessons learned and promising practices from across the country, followed by a request for feedback from the Engagement Table on their perspectives of successes and challenges regarding Nova Scotia’s Canada Wide Implementation thus far. Similar discussions are happening across Canada; feedback will be considered by the Federal government and will inform future planning.

Agenda

- 1) Introductory comments, check-in
- 2) Minister’s address
- 3) Health Park Extended Hours Pilot update
- 4) Feedback on criteria for a new expansion program (currently under development – details will be shared with the public and sector once finalized)
- 5) Updates on quality and inclusion initiatives
- 6) Professional learning presentation and feedback on options
- 7) Check-in with the Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care
- 8) Standing operational updates

Summary

The meeting began with Departmental updates and discussion on space creation progress. Families and the public can now track space creation progress at [Information for Families | Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement \(childcarenovascotia.ca\)](https://www.childcarenovascotia.ca/information-for-families) This portion of the agenda included an initial update on the extended hours pilot program for children of healthcare workers in Sydney from the Director of Health Park: [Extended Hours, Overnight Child-Care Pilot for Healthcare Workers in Sydney - Government of Nova Scotia, Canada.](https://www.governmentsc.ca/en/health-park/extended-hours-overnight-child-care-pilot-for-healthcare-workers-in-sydney)

Following expansion discussions, updates related to quality, inclusion and professional learning were shared. The Table was presented with emerging options for professional learning for the ELCC sector and asked to provide their feedback and recommended approach. Feedback will be considered carefully by the Department.



In the afternoon, partners from the Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care shared common challenges and promising solutions from across the Country as Provinces, Territories and the Federal Government work to collectively to build a national system of ELCC. Table members were asked to share their perspectives on the implementation of the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement in Nova Scotia, including its impact on families, communities and the sector.

Discussion Details: Expansion

Health Park Extended Hours Pilot

- 12 extended hours spaces have been prioritized for children of healthcare workers in the Sydney area; staffing is underway and registration has opened.
- Evening, weekend and overnight hours will be offered.
- The program will be reviewed at the 6-month mark.

The Department shared expansion progress to date and discussed key expansion considerations and challenges. The Table shared feedback on draft criteria and communication for an expansion program currently under development. Feedback was provided on key program criteria including: program quality, financial feasibility, community need and operational viability and readiness. Table members emphasized the increasingly high costs of renovating and operating child care spaces and the need for operational funding.

Discussion Details: Inclusion

The Department shared updates on a review of the Quality Matters assessment approach. A redesign of the Quality Matters assessment tool is underway; preliminary findings are being reviewed. Examples of findings include:

- An inconsistent understanding of the term “quality” in ELCC and the need for more objective measures.
- The need for equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility as core components of quality assessment and improvement.
- The need for greater quality accountability.
- The need for professional learning on inclusion and quality best practices.

The Department shared updates on the inclusion support grant review with Table members, including potential actions. The Department will be establishing a working group to advance this initiative and will be bringing the results of the working group to the Engagement Table. We look forward to sharing the results of this work with families and the sector as it progresses.

The Table provided feedback on professional learning options presented by the Department. The Table dissected the pros and cons of each option, with a focus on the anticipated benefits on quality and children’s early learning. The Table provided perspectives on scheduling PD to minimize impact on families and staff, funding PD to ensure it becomes an embedded enabler of quality, and structuring PD to ensure standardized learning outcomes are met while also providing staff with choice and flexibility. The concepts of communities of practice, leadership support, alignment with PD approaches in the P-12 system, and ensuring PD is part of a continuum of learning (in context and experientially) were



discussed. Each option was discussed from the lenses listed above, including the need to embed the appropriate professional learning accountability measures.

Discussion Details: Implementation of the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement in NS and Lessons Learned across the Country

The Table shared perspectives on how implementation of the Nova Scotia – Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement is going in Nova Scotia.

Members expressed a newfound appreciation for the breadth, depth and complexity of building a publicly managed and funded system and changing mindsets around early learning and child care. They acknowledged the positive impact of streamlined funding processes, and access to unique training opportunities aimed at increasing diversity, equity and inclusion and setting a foundation for future inclusion work. Examples include the Mi'kmaq ECE Training Program and the Africentric ECE Training Program offered in partnership with these communities and the NS Community College. They acknowledged that the pace and degree of change is sometimes overwhelming, but reiterated that this is a historical time for Early Learning and Child Care when it comes to investment, platforms and willingness to make positive change happen.

Key challenges reiterated include the ongoing need to improve wages and working conditions for staff in the sector. There was acknowledgement that rising capital and operating costs are hindering the ability to create spaces. These pressures are also causing day-to-day operating challenges. It was acknowledged that this is a very challenging environment in which to transform (high inflation, post-Covid labour shortages and change resiliency are major obstacles). It was also acknowledged that greater access and support is required for children with disabilities, along with increased workforce training opportunities related to inclusion and complex needs.

Session wrap-up

The day concluded with emerging updates on other operational and strategic initiatives. The Department looks forward to sharing these updates more broadly as details are finalized.

The next in-person table meeting will take place in January 2024.