

SECTION 4

Ensure Early Childhood Educators Are a Well Supported Profession



In 2011, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC created the *Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning*, popularly known and widely supported as the \$10aDay Plan. Ten years later we released our Roadmap; a framework detailing the next steps of \$10aDay implementation.

Now, with significant new \$10aDay child care commitments from the provincial and federal governments, we have updated the Roadmap and made it more accessible through individual, policy focused sections. This section details how government can ensure early childhood educators are a well supported profession.

The entire Roadmap to \$10aDay can be found at 10aday.ca/roadmap

THE PROMISE TO MAKE SURE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

are a well-supported profession, just like teachers and other professionals who work in BC's education system, is essential to achieving a high-quality child care system. As the system evolves, all educators who work in licensed programs, including school-age and family care, will be supported to hold a minimum two-year credential.

Since the 2020 provincial election, the recruitment and retention crisis in child care has only intensified and is now widely recognized as the most immediate challenge to achieving real progress.

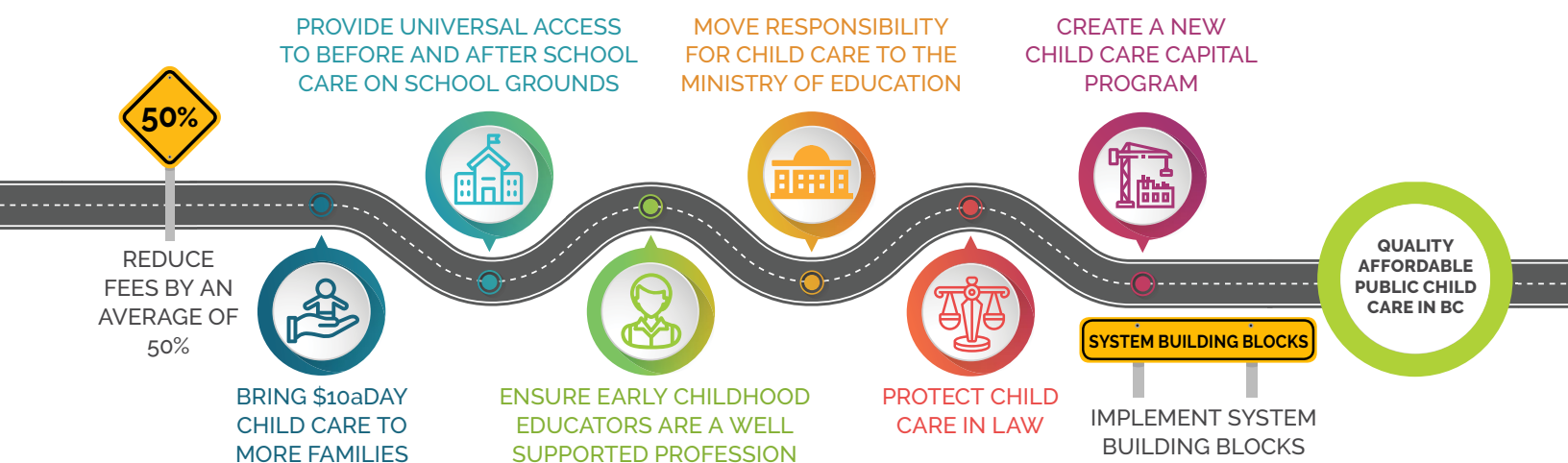
Government committed to a rapid expansion of spaces without a parallel commitment to ensure sufficient qualified early childhood educators. The current COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates the problem. ECEs continue to put their ethical responsibility for the health and safety of children and families

first, yet the profession has been deeply impacted by its own health and safety concerns as well as burnout and the ongoing attraction of higher wages and benefits and more supportive working conditions available outside of the child care sector.

Since the 2020 provincial election, the recruitment and retention crisis in child care has only intensified and is now widely recognized as the most immediate challenge to achieving real progress.

While welcome, the actions taken by government to address this crisis—including the \$4/hour wage enhancement—are proving to be insufficient to resolve the crisis.

It will take much more bold, swift action and accountability to the sector to provide competitive compensation, pathways to professional education/credentials, ongoing professional development, support, recognition, and respect.



The Roadmap providing a level of policy detail required to create a quality system for BC. Download it at 10aday.ca/roadmap

Given the current situation, we understand that a transition strategy, including the initiatives outlined below, will be required to staff current and new programs while moving toward a diploma as the minimum credential for all those working in licensed child care.

Regrettably, BC delayed the payment of a \$2 wage enhancement promised for September 2021 until March 2022, which undermined the sector's sense of optimism about the evolving system. And, while the new bilateral Early Learning and Child Care Agreement includes a commitment to develop a wage grid, it does not include the funds required to implement it. Nor does the agreement include a commitment to ensuring all educators have access to a comprehensive benefit package.

The interrelated factors underlying the ECE recruitment and retention crisis are well documented and include low wages, minimal or no benefits, limited access to post-secondary education, professional isolation, and widespread devaluing of the work of caring. Evidence shows that educators with higher pay and qualifications are more likely to interact with children in a stimulating and sensitive way, and that poor compensation can lead to high staff turnover, making it more difficult for staff and children to develop nurturing relationships.¹

Given the depth of the crisis in the sector, government must find creative approaches to recruit new students into the profession, encourage educators who have left to return, and retain current educators in the system. Just as the Health Career Access Program was developed and funded to meet challenges in long-term care/assisted living, a systemic strategy to support the ECE profession must be a cross-government priority.

All approaches must advance professionalization of the sector and bring early childhood educators into the broader learning environment as strong and equal partners. The BC Early Learning Framework "carries the hope of inspiring and supporting the creation of rich, joyful, early childhood spaces where children, adults, ideas and materials come together, where knowledge is constructed about learning and living in ways that are local, inclusive, ethical, and democratic."²

1 Lynell Anderson, Michelle Sing, and Rebecca Haber, *Next Step: A Competitive, Publicly Funded Provincial Wage Grid is the Solution to BC's ECE Shortage*, June 2020, CCCABC and ECEBC.

2 BC Early Learning Framework, p. 42.

As outlined in Section 6 on protecting child care in law, government must amend the recently enacted Early Childhood Educators Act to include the ECEBC Code of Ethics and recognize the unique professional perspectives ECEs bring to the implementation of BC's Early Learning Framework.

Investment in early childhood education professionals must also be a key element of government's overall pandemic recovery strategy. As women have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic, a significant investment in the predominantly female ECE sector will provide economic stability for existing ECEs, an attractive career opportunity for future ECEs, and an essential support to mothers returning to the labour force. Finally, "investing in the caring professions would greatly contribute to a just transition in Canada. It would provide more good, green jobs with minimal emissions and greater attention to societal wellbeing."³

We propose a **four-pronged approach** to make early childhood educators a well-supported profession.

1. Implement a transitional strategy to move forward

Grounded in the ECEBC Code of Ethics, a focused, funded initiative, similar in scale and scope to BC's Health Career Access Program, is required to support a transition from the current situation to a fully qualified, professional sector. This strategy should provide a centralized access point to the full range of career pathways and opportunities including:

- Incentives to welcome back qualified ECEs who have left the sector;
- Opportunities to be paid and/or undertake paid work while upgrading;
- Waiving tuition fees for public post-secondary education, and relief for student loan debt;
- Internships and other on-the-job approaches;⁴
- Expanding high school/post-secondary dual credential advanced placement options as a pathway toward ECE diploma completion;
- A requirement that ECE assistants currently working in the sector become credentialed through a public post-secondary institution within the existing five-year time frame;
- Opportunities for live-in caregivers to ladder into the ECE profession;
- Pathways for those already working in the sector to upgrade their credentials through recognition of prior education and on-the-job experience;
- Pathways for those working in related sectors to acquire a child care credential through recognition of prior education and on-the-job experience; and
- Expanded inclusive community-based pedagogical networks, communities of practice, and other professional development streams.

For this transition strategy to be effective, government will need to establish a clear target for the number of qualified ECEs required. Rigorous accountability is required to ensure funds intended to raise wages and benefits and improve working conditions are used for those purposes.

3 Karel Hermans, *Caring Jobs are Green Jobs*, July 10, 2020, Citizens for Public Justice.

4 New Zealand and Manitoba approaches merit further exploration.



2. Implement a publicly funded, provincial, competitive, and equitable wage grid

As part of an overall compensation strategy to improve wages, benefits, and working conditions in the child care sector, government must develop, fund, and implement a provincial, competitive, and equitable wage grid as proposed in *Next Step: A Competitive, Publicly Funded Provincial Wage Grid is the Solution to BC's ECE Shortage*. The wage grid must adopt the report's underlying policies and processes for implementation and its recommendation that qualified ECEs earn a minimum of \$26/hour (one-year college certificate) and \$29/hour (two-year post-secondary diploma) (2020 rates). The wage grid should also provide encouragement and incentives for those working in the sector to upgrade/complete their qualifications.

3. Raise educational and professional standards for early childhood educators

Timelines, supports, occupational competencies and standards of practice are required to achieve:

- A diploma (two years) as the minimum credential for those entering the profession, including those working in school-age and family child care;⁵ and
- A Bachelor of Early Childhood Education as the new educational standard for the profession.

(For recommended timelines and targets see *ECEBC's Position Paper for: Integrating the Early Childhood Education Professional and Programs into the Ministry of Education*, November 13, 2020, ecebc.ca).

To support increased professionalism, membership in the Early Childhood Educators of BC should become a requirement for all those licensed to practice as early childhood educators in BC. Membership in ECEBC aligns with the current ECE Code of Ethics in British Columbia and is one of the key elements

⁵ The "responsible adult" designation for those entering the licensed child care system will be phased out. Mature providers who do not upgrade their qualifications will be able to remain in current positions with current qualifications, with ongoing professional development.

that separates a profession from a job. As public policy is informed by this collective voice, membership in this professional association⁶ supports the advancement of professional standards for ECEs.

4. Increase access to public post-secondary education

To support the ECE workforce and ensure existing and new child care programs can recruit qualified professionals, bold action is required by the Ministry of Advanced Education to ensure access to public post-secondary education. These steps include:

- Rapid approval of and funding for new and expanded early childhood education programs in public post-secondary institutions, including diploma and bachelor degree programs;
- Rapid expansion of and funding for online, part time, and distance education options delivered by public post-secondary institutions; and
- Free tuition and/or student-debt relief for students completing ECE programs in public post-secondary institutions.

As part of an overall compensation strategy to improve wages, benefits, and working conditions in the child care sector, government must develop, fund, and implement a provincial, competitive, and equitable wage grid.

Clear and transparent communication between the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the Ministry of Education, and the child care and education sectors is essential as the profession evolves. Government must send a strong public message about the value of early childhood educators and, most importantly, ensure that, when making decisions that impact early childhood educators, they consult with ECEBC and the other organizations representing the professionals in the sector.

TIMELINE for ensuring early childhood educators are a well supported profession

PHASE 1 (January to December 2022)

BC should reverse its decision to delay the promised additional \$2/hour wage enhancement for ECEs and begin immediate payments. BC must also:

- Implement the transition strategy, as above;
- Develop the wage grid and implementation plan;
- Develop annual targets to recruit, educate, and compensate additional ECEs, as required for the growing system;
- Draft amendments to BC's Early Childhood Educators Act (see Section 6 of the Roadmap); and
- Require that all early childhood educators and child care professionals working in \$10aDay child care sites become members of the Early Childhood Educators of BC professional association.

⁶ A professional organization exists to advance a particular profession, support the interests of people working in that profession, and imbed strong standards for ECEs working in a new BC child care system.

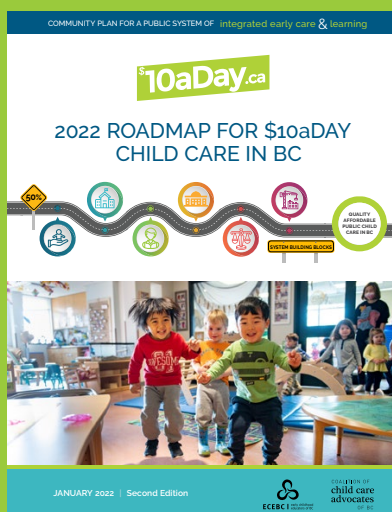
PHASE 2 (January 2023 to March 2026)

As child care moves to the Ministry of Education, government must support a respectful dialogue between ECEs and teachers so that ECEs come to the table as strong and equal partners. BC must also:

- Implement the provincial ECE wage grid;
- Integrate funds to support the wage grid into a funding formula and provide these funds to programs as they transition to \$10aDay programs;
- Enact further amendments to the BC Early Childhood Educators Act (see Section 6);
- Implement the ECE diploma as a minimum requirement for those entering the sector, including school-age and family child care;
- Support expanded access to, and compensation for, Bachelor of ECE degrees; and
- Require that all licensed early childhood educators and professionals working in licensed child care become members of the Early Childhood Educators of BC, their professional association. ■



Download the full timeline for the Roadmap at 10aday.ca/roadmap



2022 ROADMAP FOR \$10aDAY CHILD CARE IN BC

Second Edition | January 2022

We put the Roadmap forward in full support of the rights and jurisdiction of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples to design, develop, and deliver early care and learning services that meet their needs. We commit to listen and learn in our ongoing work to decolonize our own practices and perspectives.

COALITION OF
**child care
advocates**
OF BC



ECEBC | early childhood
educators of BC

Download the full Roadmap at
10aday.ca/roadmap

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