



The Economic Benefits of Expanded Child Care Services in British Columbia

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Contents

Introduction and Summary	3
B.C.'s ELCC Expansion.....	5
Economic Impacts of ELCC Expansion in B.C.....	6
Conclusion and Policy Recommendations.....	15
References	16



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Introduction and Summary

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care program (CWELCC) began rolling out in all parts of Canada in 2022. The program is already having significant and positive economic impacts, including dramatic reductions in the average cost of child care services (and resulting reduction in overall consumer price inflation), significant increases in employment and earnings in the ELCC sector, and improvements in labour force participation and employment for women in the core parenting years. A recent report from the Centre for Future Work (Stanford, 2024) compiled and measured these impacts. It estimated that the expansion of ELCC services since 2019 (including through the CWELCC) had increased Canadian GDP by \$32 billion in 2024 (over what would have prevailed if the program were not in effect). The expansion of ELCC services even helped Canada avoid a technical recession in the second half of 2023.

This report considers the economic, labour market, and fiscal benefits being experienced in British Columbia as a result of the province's participation in the CWELCC program. It reviews provincial-level data for the same national indicators reported in the earlier report, and extrapolates likely GDP and fiscal benefits based on B.C.'s share of national economic activity. Data from various sources confirms that ELCC availability has been expanding rapidly in the province, at a pace matching or exceeding national averages.

The relatively rapid expansion of ELCC in B.C. has generated an economic boost to the province that is even greater (in proportionate terms) than the national economic impacts assessed by Stanford (2024). Benefits for B.C. from the growth of ELCC services include:

- Over 8,000 new jobs have been created in ELCC provision in B.C. since 2019. The pace of ELCC job-creation over this time has been stronger in B.C. than in Canada as a whole: with employment up 62% for B.C., twice as fast as the 31% growth in national ELCC employment.
- Average weekly earnings for ELCC workers have improved in B.C. thanks to stronger funding and the province's Wage Enhancement policy. Nominal weekly earnings in B.C.'s ELCC sector grew 40% between 2019 and 2024, slightly faster than the average for Canada (36%). Those wage gains surpassed inflation by a significant margin, producing a 17% gain in average real earnings for B.C.'s ELCC staff over that period. Average weekly ELCC earnings now broadly match Canadian averages, whereas until 2020 B.C. ELCC earnings were significantly below the national level.
- Average hours of work have increased in the ELCC sector—another indicator of improving job quality. Hours of work in the ELCC sector are now broadly comparable to average working hours in the wider labour market (in contrast to previous years, when ELCC jobs featured significantly shorter and more insecure hours). The combination of higher hourly wages with longer hours of work (in part

reflecting less reliance on part-time arrangements) produces a two-fold improvement in earnings.

- Total compensation of ELCC workers in B.C. will reach close to \$1 billion in 2025, more than double earnings paid out in 2019. That is much faster growth in ELCC earnings than has been experienced in Canada as a whole—thanks to much faster ELCC job creation in B.C., along with slightly stronger growth in average wages.
- A key economic benefit of more accessible ELCC services is its impact on labour force participation by women, who are better able to undertake paid work when child care is more affordable and available. This benefit is readily visible in B.C., where core-age (25-54) female labour force participation increased by over one full percentage point between 2019 and 2025 (broadly matching the similar experience in Canada as a whole).
- The incidence of part-time employment among core-age female workers has also trended downward as the ELCC system has been expanded. More accessible child care allows more women parents to work full-time (in addition to its positive impact on labour force participation), amplifying the benefits of ELCC for female labour supply. The part-time employment rate among women in B.C. declined by 1.5 percentage points between 2019 and 2025, slightly more than the average for Canada.
- The combination of increased labour force participation and increased full-time employment for core age women has increased B.C.'s provincial labour supply by some 33,000 full-time-equivalent workers over the five-year period ending in 2024.
- Expanded employment and output in the ELCC sector, indirect and induced activity in both 'upstream' supply industries and 'downstream' consumer industries, and the incremental output produced via greater female labour supply, have together provided a strong boost to provincial GDP. Based on B.C.'s likely share of national GDP gains (projected in Stanford, 2024), we estimate that provincial GDP in 2024 was \$5.8 billion higher in 2024 (measured in real 2024 dollar terms) than would have been the case without the expansion of ELCC services after 2019, reinforced by the CWELCC program.
- The provincial government itself harvests significant fiscal benefits thanks to that multidimensional growth in economic activity, employment, and incomes. The provincial government receives 17.5% of provincial GDP in the form of various own-source¹ revenue streams (such as provincial income taxes, the PST, and other sources). The improvement in GDP resulting from a stronger provincial ELCC sector thus translated into approximately \$1 billion in extra provincial revenue in 2024. That fiscal benefit will get larger, as the province's ELCC sector continues to expand.

¹ Excluding federal transfer payments.

This data confirms that expanded ELCC access under the CWELCC program has been an economic boon for B.C., at a fragile time in the province's economic history. Accelerating and strengthening the rollout of \$10-per-day spaces in the province, and improving the quality of care provided (including by reducing the province's heavy reliance on for-profit providers), will be important in ensuring these economic benefits continue to be reaped in the years to come.

B.C.'s ELCC Expansion

British Columbia was a leader among Canadian provinces in committing to the establishment of a universal, affordable ELCC system in the province. Its plan for providing \$10-per-day services began phasing-in starting in 2018. Provincial funding supported expansion of spaces, reduced fees for parents, and improvements in wages and job quality for ELCC staff.

Building on those earlier commitments, B.C. has also been an active participant in the national CWELCC program, which the federal government began implementing in 2022. However, there are unique features to B.C.'s ELCC strategy that have both strengths and weaknesses. In particular, the growth of ELCC services in B.C. has been among the most dependent on private for-profit centres of any province.

Data compiled by Friendly et al. (2024) show that between 2019 and 2023, B.C. created 16,659 new full- and part-day spaces for pre-school children (in the 0-5 age range). That represented a 25% increase from 2019—and that number grew further in 2024 and 2025. B.C. accounted for one-fifth of all new 0-5 spaces created in Canada in that four-year period, according to this data. However, the province still has far to go before realizing the goals of full coverage for preschool children. As of 2023, the province had full- or part-day spaces for only 33% of the province's 0-5 age group, only slightly better than the Canadian average (31%). The Friendly et al. (2024) data also highlights B.C.'s disproportionate reliance on private child care operators for these new spaces. As of 2024, two-thirds (67%) of B.C.'s 0-5 spaces were located in for-profit centres, significantly higher than the national average (52%).

More recent data is assembled by Macdonald (2025), on the basis of an original census of licensed child care centres. As of early 2025, B.C. had ELCC spaces available to provide for 44% of the province's children who are not yet eligible for a school-based program (including kindergarten), up from 32% in 2021. B.C. thus ranked fourth among provinces for pre-school coverage (behind Quebec, P.E.I., and New Brunswick, respectively), and the 12-percentage-point increase in coverage from 2021 through 2025 tied with Newfoundland for the fastest expansion in coverage.² The Macdonald (2025) data also confirms B.C.'s unusual reliance on private child care services: almost

² It should be noted that coverage rates can increase either because the number of spaces increases, and/or because the 0-5 population shrinks. Both have occurred in B.C. and Newfoundland (with the drop in Newfoundland's child population being especially rapid), and this has contributed to the above-par improvements in coverage rates in both provinces.

80% of the increase in child care spaces between 2022 and 2025 was located in for-profit centres. B.C. thus ranks with Alberta and P.E.I. as the provinces with the greatest dependence on private ELCC services, which have been criticized for inferior quality and poor employment conditions.³

According to the B.C. government, as of April 2025 there were 16,000 spaces offered under the \$10-per-day program, at some 334 different centres (Government of British Columbia, 2025). The province's approach to rolling out the CWELCC program has been complex and inconsistent, with access to \$10-per-day spaces uneven across different centres and regions. Beyond these CWELCC spaces, a potpourri of other initiatives to reduce fees at other child care centres, supplement ELCC worker wages, and provide other supports to the sector has also helped improve accessibility to care—albeit in a haphazard and inconsistent manner.

Statistics Canada has begun collecting Canada-wide and provincial data on child care services, although since its survey is new, it does not yet provide a perspective on the growth of the ELCC system. As of April 2024, it reports that B.C. provides centre-based ELCC services (not including home-based care) for 105,000 children, including about 74,000 who did not attend school.⁴

Looking forward, major questions are raised around the provincial government's uncertain commitment to the fiscal resources necessary to ensure the completion of the promised universal \$10-per-day system. The provincial government's most recent budget plan anticipates a freeze in nominal provincial spending on ELCC programs at its 2024/25 nominal level (\$866 million per year out to 2027/28).⁵ A nominal funding freeze, of course, translates into a steady erosion in the real resources dedicated to the program, as a result of population growth and inflation. The federal contribution to \$10-per-day spaces in B.C. is supporting improved accessibility to services, but the province needs to increase its own commitment to continue progress toward a fully universal system. If it fails to do so, then many of the economic gains from high-quality accessible ELCC services documented in this report will be squandered.

Economic Impacts of ELCC Expansion in B.C.

This section of the report reviews empirical data on the economic impacts of the expansion of ELCC services in B.C., supported by the CWELCC program and complementary provincial initiatives.

Employment in the provincial ELCC sector has grown strongly and steadily in recent years, apart from a temporary reduction in 2020 as a result of the COVID lockdowns (which required most centres to reduce services or close entirely). So far in 2025, over 21,000 workers are employed in B.C. ELCC services, an increase of over 8,000 since

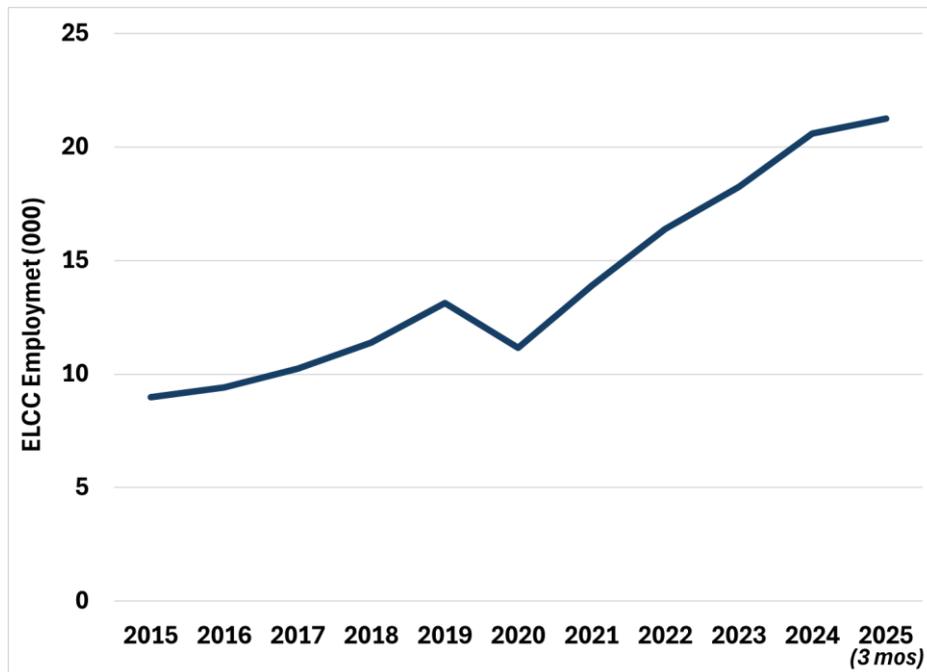
³ For example, see Cleveland (2021).

⁴ See Statistics Canada Table 42-10-0070-01.

⁵ See Ministry of Education and Child Care, "2025/26 – 2027/28 Service Plan," March 2025, <https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2025/sp/pdf/ministry/educ.pdf>, p. 18.

2019 (see Figure 1).⁶ The growth in ELCC employment in the province has been twice as fast since 2019 as in Canada as a whole: rising 62%, versus 31% for the national total. The ELCC sector has thus been an important source of new employment for B.C. during a turbulent time in the provincial economy (which has had to traverse the COVID pandemic, high interest rates in 2022 and 2023, and more recently the uncertainty arising from Donald Trump’s trade attacks).

Figure 1. Employment in ELCC, B.C., 2015-2025

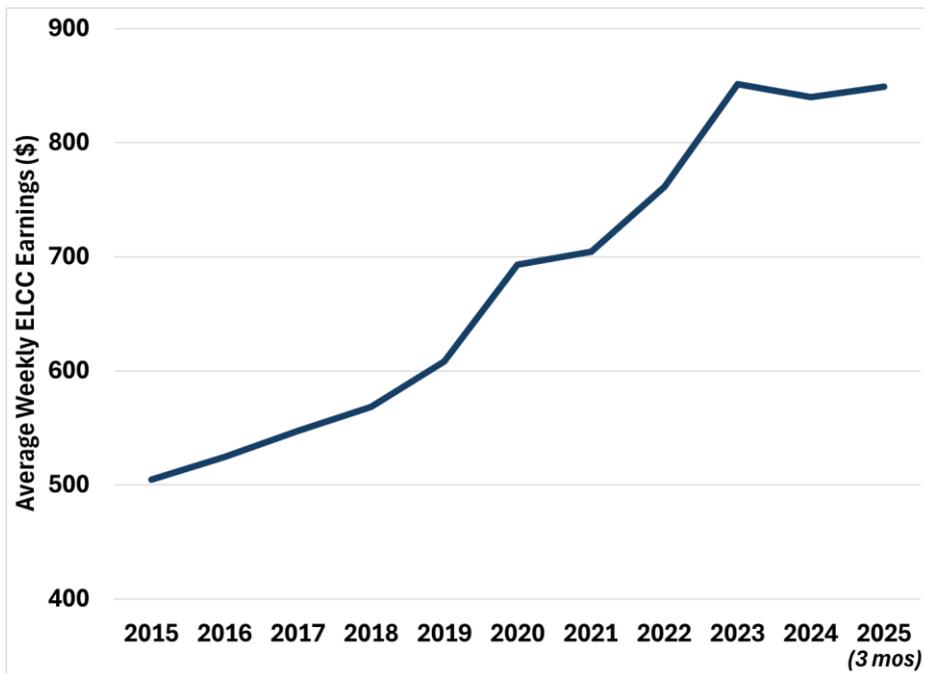


Source: Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0201-01.

A key priority in the rollout of CWELCC initiatives is the need to improve wages and working conditions in the ELCC sector, in order to attract and retain staff in a sector notorious for high turnover and labour shortages. Progress has clearly been made on this front in B.C., thanks both to CWELCC funding and provincial wage supplements—although that progress has stalled more recently.

⁶ Most time comparisons in this report are defined relative to a 2019 pre-pandemic starting point, in order to exclude the temporary impact of the pandemic on ELCC employment and output.

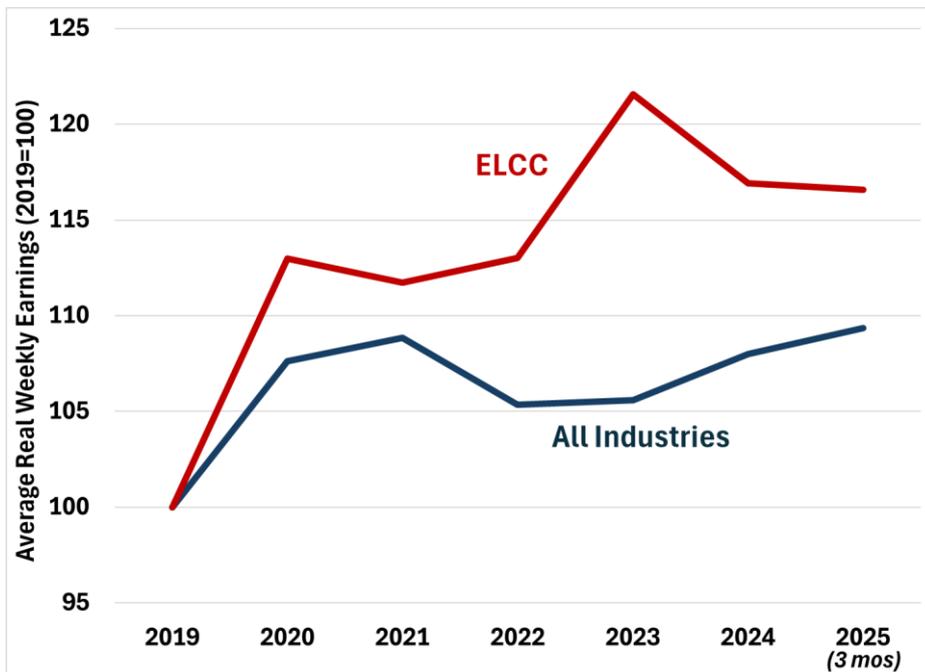
Figure 2. Average Weekly Wages in ELCC, B.C., 2015-2025



Source: Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0203-01.

Figure 2 illustrates the significant rise in average weekly earnings in the ELCC sector. So far in 2025, wages have averaged about \$850 per week. That’s up 40% since 2019 (but flat over the past two years). The increase in weekly wages has been slightly stronger than for Canada as a whole (where weekly wages grew by 36% in the same period).

Figure 3. Real Weekly Earnings, B.C., 2019-2025

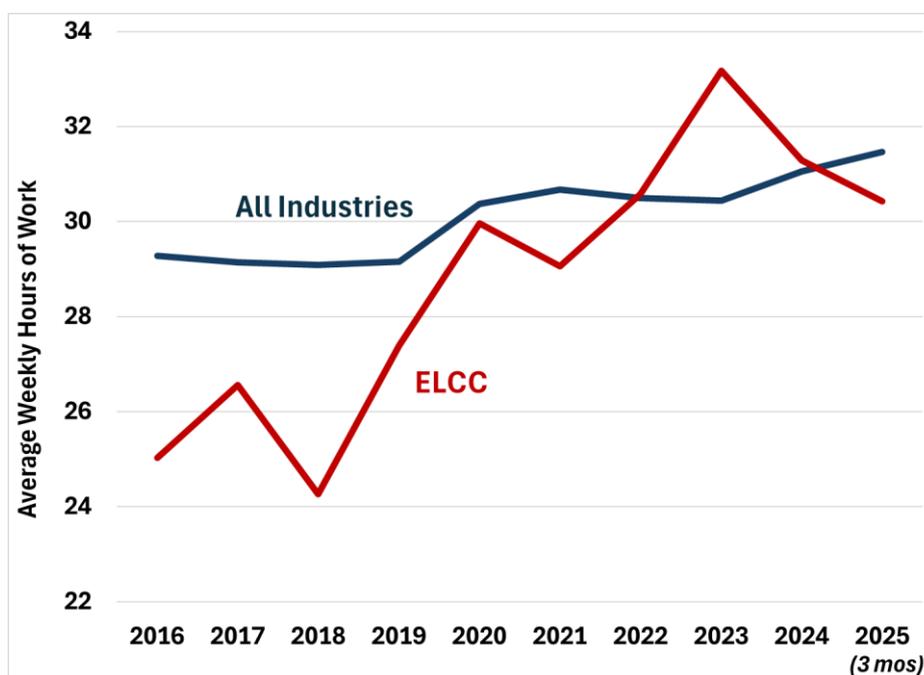


Source: Calculations from Statistics Canada Tables 14-10-0203-01 and 18-10-0004-01.

Those significant wage improvements have allowed ELCC earnings to stay well ahead of inflation, despite the temporary surge in inflation that occurred in the wake of the COVID pandemic. Adjusting for provincial consumer prices, real earnings in the ELCC sector are 16% higher in 2025 than they were in 2019 (see Figure 3). Real ELCC earnings have performed better than average wages in the overall B.C. labour market (which grew by 9%, adjusted for inflation, in the same period).

An important factor in the growth of average weekly earnings for ELCC workers has been a notable increase in average working hours. With more secure funding, the sector has been less reliant on part-time work (typified by insecure schedules and rapid turnover). Until 2019, average weekly hours of work in B.C.’s ELCC sector were significantly less than economy-wide averages—with a typical ELCC worker working just 25 hours per week. Since then hours of work have increased steadily (see Figure 4). By 2022 ELCC staff were working as long as other workers on average, and in some years slightly more than the average. Longer hours of work have reinforced the growth in average weekly earnings, important in recruiting and retaining ELCC staff.

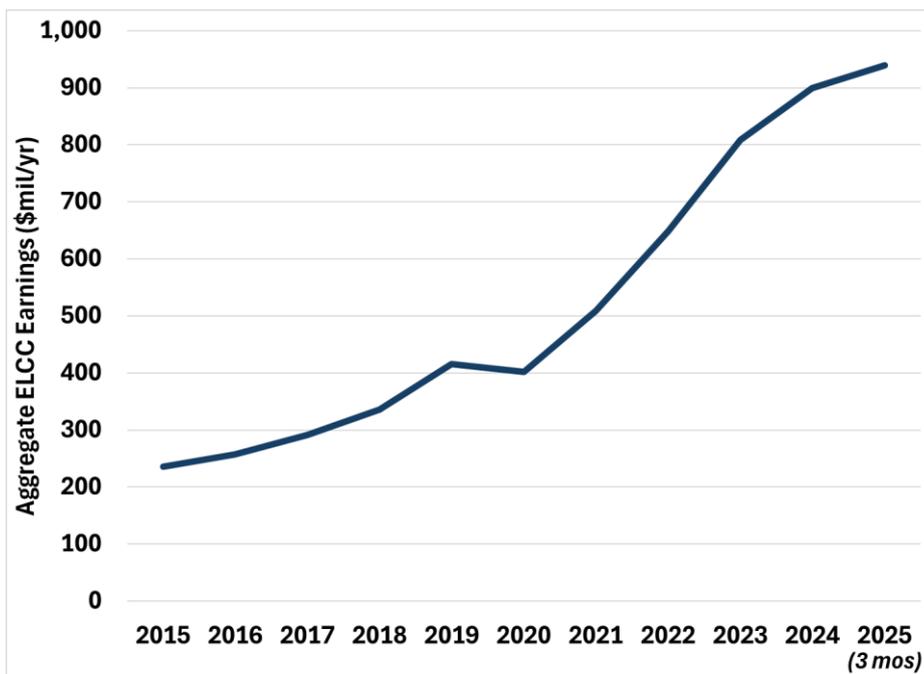
Figure 4. Average Weekly Hours of Work, B.C., 2016-2025.



Source: Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0255-01.

Thanks to higher employment, longer hours, and higher wages, aggregate wage payments in the ELCC sector in B.C. have grown strongly (Figure 5). As of 2025, overall wage payments in the sector will approach \$1 billion, more than double 2019 payouts. In this very labour-intensive sector, wage payments constitute the lion’s share of value-added in the sector. So this strong growth in labour compensation closely correlates with expansion in the direct contribution of the ELCC sector to provincial GDP.

Figure 5. Aggregate Earnings of ELCC Workers, B.C., 2015-2025



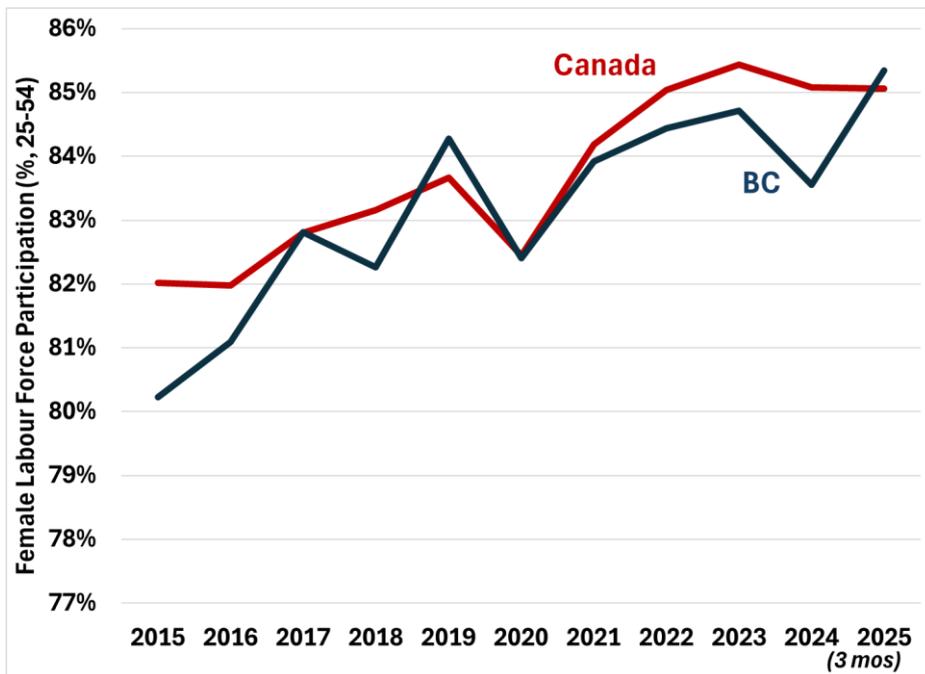
Source: Calculations from Statistics Canada Tables 14-10-0201-01 and 14-10-0203-01.

One of the biggest sources of economic benefit from expanded ELCC provision is the positive impact on labour force participation and employment by women in prime parenting ages. Previous research has confirmed a strong link between expanded ELCC access and higher female labour force participation.⁷ This positive relationship has been visible in Canada in recent years, both in cross-provincial comparisons (such as those reported in Stanford, 2020), and in the increase in participation rates over time that has occurred alongside the expansion of ELCC services.

Figure 6 indicates that this improvement in female labour force participation has been significant in B.C., as well. Core-age (age 25-54) female participation has grown by 5 percentage points since 2015, somewhat faster than the simultaneous increase in core-age female participation for Canada as a whole. For B.C. alone, the improvement in core-age female participation over the last five years translates into about 18,000 additional workers in the provincial labour force.

⁷ For example see Dixon (2020), Bivens et al. (2019), and Fortin et al. (2012).

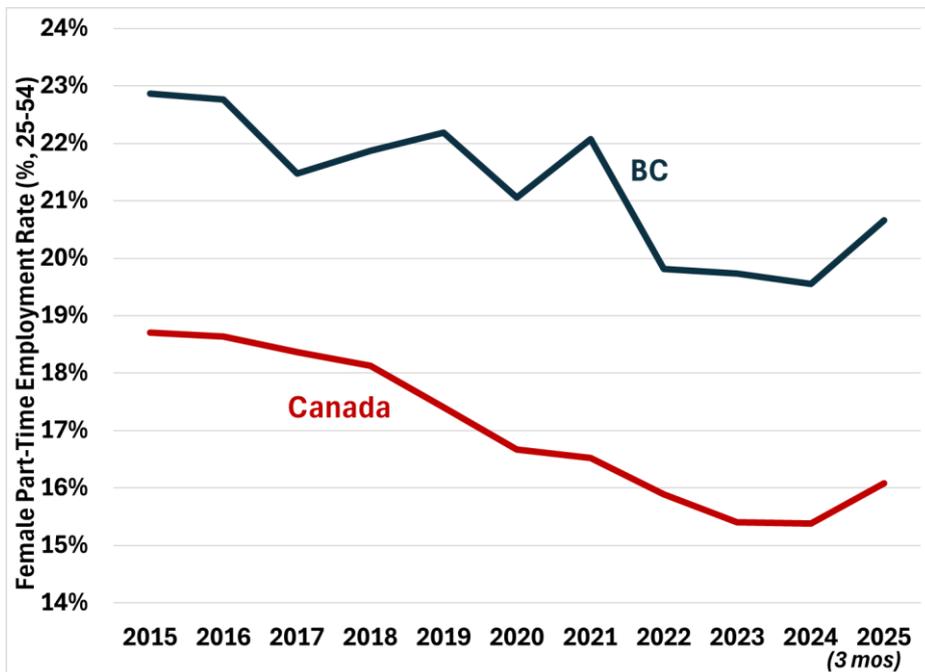
Figure 6. Female Core-Age Labour Force Participation, 2015-2025



Source: Calculations from Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0017-01.

A second source of labour supply benefit from expanded access to ELCC services results from the greater capacity of women to work full-time (instead of part-time) when their families can access affordable, quality ELCC services. This has also been important in B.C. as the province's ELCC system is expanded.

Figure 7. Part-Time Employment Rate, Female Core-Age Workers, 2015-2025



Source: Calculations from Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0017-01.

Figure 7 illustrates the declining incidence of part-time employment among core-age (25 to 54) women workers in the province. It is interesting to note that the incidence of part-time work has long been higher for B.C. women than the national average. But that incidence has declined over recent years (as it has in Canada as a whole), falling by over 2 percentage points since 2015. For B.C., the increase in the incidence of full-time employment among employed women over the last five years is equivalent to an increase in full-time-equivalent labour supply of some 15,000 additional workers.⁸

It is notable that by most of the economic and labour market indicators reviewed above, the relative improvement in performance in B.C. has been somewhat stronger than the improvement in overall national statistics. This is consistent with the evidence presented at the outset of this paper that the rollout of new spaces under the CWELCC strategy has proceeded somewhat faster in B.C. than in many other provinces.

Table 1		
Improvements in ELCC Indicators 2019-2025		
	Canada	B.C.
Growth in ELCC Employment (%)	31.4%	61.8%
Growth in ELCC Weekly Wage (%)	36.2%	39.6%
Growth in ELCC Real Weekly Wage (%)	13.8%	16.6%
Growth in ELCC Weekly Hours (hrs)	2.3	3.0
Growth in ELCC Aggregate Earnings	78.9%	125.8%
Growth in Core Age Female Labour Force Participation (%pts)	1.4%	1.1%
Decline in Core Age Female Part-Time Employment Rate (%pts)	-1.3%	-1.5%
Source: Calculations from Statistics Canada data as described in text. 2025 data for first three months.		

As indicated in Table 1, using 2019 as the starting point, improvements in ELCC employment, weekly earnings, hours of work, aggregate earnings, and incidence of full-time work in B.C. have all exceeded national averages. In the case of female labour force participation, the improvement in B.C. was slightly less than the national average. The weight of evidence therefore suggests that B.C.'s economy has benefited disproportionately from the expansion of accessible ELCC services under the CWELCC program, in part because B.C. has worked to implement expanded access relatively ambitiously. By the same token, therefore, the faster B.C. can proceed with further ELCC

⁸ This estimate assumes that previously part-time-employed women worked half-time on average (see footnote 9 for more detail).

expansion in coming years (including by making access to \$10-per-day spaces more uniformly available), those provincial economic benefits will grow even further.

The previously-cited review of national economic benefits arising from the CWELCC (Stanford, 2024) also developed an estimate of the nation-wide GDP impacts of the new program. That estimate considered three distinct categories of benefit: the direct economic footprint of expanded ELCC service provision, the stimulus to indirect (upstream supply chain) and induced (downstream consumer spending) activity resulting from larger ELCC provision, and the extra production arising from expanded female labour supply and employment.

Table 2			
GDP Gains from ELCC Expansion 2019-2024			
Component	Canada (\$b)	Estimated B.C. Share (%)	B.C. Gain (\$b)
Direct ELCC Production	\$4.3	14.6%	\$0.6
Induced and Indirect Activity	\$4.2	17.8%	\$0.7
Female Labour Supply	\$24.1	18.5%	\$4.5
Total Impact	\$32.6	17.9%	\$5.8
Source: Calculations as described in text.			

Lack of province-level data on GDP by industry and component prevents us from conducting a parallel direct estimate of the impact of ELCC expansion on provincial GDP. However, on the basis of reasonable assumptions about B.C.'s share of the national impacts reported in Stanford (2024), an approximate measure of provincial GDP benefits can be derived. This allocation is described in Table 2, which preserves the same time comparison as the original report (2019 through 2024). For the new GDP directly produced by the growing ELCC sector, we apply B.C.'s share of the increase in total national ELCC wage payments (just under 15%), since labour compensation constitutes the dominant share of GDP in this labour-intensive sector of the economy. B.C.'s share of induced and indirect activity is estimated on the basis of the share of new national ELCC employment created in B.C. in this period (close to 18%), since it is the scale of production that will be the key determinant of new supply chain demand arising from growth in the ELCC sector. Finally, for the female labour supply category, we estimate B.C.'s share of additional GDP on the basis of the province's growth in female labour force participation and full-time work, again expressed as a proportion of the total improvement in labour supply generated nationally.⁹

⁹ This calculation assumes that a shift from part-time to full-time work results in an improvement in FTE labour supply one-half as large (equivalent to the assumption that part-time workers, on average, work half-time). This

On this basis, Table 2 estimates that B.C.'s GDP in 2024 was \$5.8 billion larger in 2024 than it would have been, were it not for the growth in the province's ELCC sector during that 2019-2024 period. That impact represents an improvement of about 1.3% in provincial GDP (with the increment accumulated over five years since 2019). By this methodology, we estimate that B.C. captured just under 18% of the total national improvement in GDP resulting from CWELCC and the broader expansion of ELCC services. That is larger than B.C.'s share of Canadian GDP (which was 14% in 2023, most recent data available¹⁰), precisely because B.C. has been rolling out new ELCC spaces faster than the national average.

Faster job-creation, wage growth, and GDP expansion generates important fiscal benefits flowing back to the government sector—including the provincial government. The approximate scale of these fiscal returns can be estimated on the basis of the share of own-source provincial government revenue (excluding federal transfers) in provincial GDP. In 2023 (most recent data¹¹) that share was 17.5%. Applying that ratio to the incremental provincial GDP generated thanks to the expansion of ELCC services, results in an estimated \$1.0 billion in extra revenue received by the provincial government in 2024 thanks to the progress attained in expanding the scale and accessibility of the ELCC system. That is more than the \$866 million annual contribution the province is making to ELCC services (discussed above), suggesting that the province is generating a 'profit' from the program.

One other economic benefit from the CWELCC rollout in B.C. is not measurable on the basis of Statistics Canada data: the decline in the average cost of ELCC services paid by parents. As reported by Statistics Canada,¹² on a nation-wide basis, average ELCC costs declined by 33% between early 2022 and April 2025 (most recent data). This historic decline made a measurable difference in reducing inflation in Canada—especially in 2022 and 2023, when the prices of other consumer prices surged in the wake of economic reopening after the COVID pandemic.¹³ Data restrictions prevent Statistics Canada from reporting this data on a provincial basis, but there is no doubt that the decline in ELCC costs for parents in B.C. broadly parallels this historic reduction. Thousands of B.C. families saved thousands of dollars thanks to more affordable ELCC, and the resulting reduction in overall inflation was important in helping to stabilize the province's price level after the disruptions of the pandemic.

calculation also used a three-year moving average of female labour force participation in B.C., to correct for significant year-to-year variations in the reported provincial rate arising from the smaller sample size used to calculate provincial participation rates.

¹⁰ Statistics Canada Table 36-10-0221-01.

¹¹ Statistics Canada Table 36-10-0221-01.

¹² Statistics Canada Table 18-10-0004-01.

¹³ Stanford (2024) reported that lower ELCC costs reduced the overall national inflation rate by 0.13 percentage points in 2023. That was a small proportion of the total inflation experienced in 2023 (the overall year-average CPI increased 3.9% in 2023). But in a time of great disruption and challenge for household budgets, every bit of cost of living relief counts. This deflationary impact also likely incrementally influenced the Bank of Canada's judgments regarding interest rates: marginally limiting the increases in 2023, and accelerating the rate cuts which began in 2024.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

B.C. has been an important participant in the rollout of the national CWELCC program, making significant progress toward its goals of improved coverage and more affordable, quality ELCC services. B.C. has increased ELCC spaces, and hired workers to care for program participants, more quickly than many other provinces, and faster than the Canada-wide average. At the same time, the haphazard and inconsistent nature of some aspects of B.C.'s rollout (including uneven access to \$10-per-day spaces), and its risky reliance on private for-profit centres to provide the vast majority of new spaces, undermines the province's progress.

Nevertheless, the expansion of ELCC services in B.C. has generated important economic gains for the province, its residents, and its provincial government. Employment growth, earnings, and labour supply have all been boosted by the direct and indirect effects of the enhanced ELCC system. The provincial government has reaped significant incremental revenues as a result of that economic progress.

The key lesson arising from this review is clear. Quality, accessible, universal ELCC services are a vital precondition for economic progress. The faster B.C. can move toward that goal, by improving both the quantity and the quality of ELCC services, the greater will be the future economic gains for all sectors of the provincial economy.

In this regard, the provincial government's current plans to freeze ELCC spending in nominal terms for the next four years raises significant concerns. Continuing the progress toward fuller ELCC coverage, more uniform fees, and addressing the problem of child care 'deserts' in many parts of the province,¹⁴ will certainly require an expanded investment by the provincial government—alongside the resources flowing from the federal government under the CWELCC program. To fully realize the substantial economic benefits that a strong and accessible ELCC system can generate (including job-creation, labour force participation, GDP expansion, and fiscal returns), a full commitment by both levels of government to financing continued expansion of the system is required.

¹⁴ See Macdonald (2018).

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