

Toronto Children's Services

March 2023

# Early Years and Child Care Workforce Project:

Workforce Perspectives, Deepening  
Challenges, and Pressing Opportunities



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## Executive Summary

A thriving child care and early years workforce is essential for delivering high quality early childhood programs, which in turn are fundamental for achieving better socio-economic outcomes, increasing women's labour force participation, and supporting economic growth.

This report provides a summary of foundational workforce research, and an analysis of findings from two surveys circulated to staff and operators in the child care and early years sector in Toronto, from December 2021 to April 2022.

In total, 2,125 respondents completed the Workforce Survey, and 338 respondents completed the Operator Survey. 1,200 of the 2,125 respondents were early childhood educators (ECEs), representing approximately 9% of registered ECEs in Toronto. The Operator Survey received responses from 338 agencies, representing a 52% response rate.

This report includes a sociodemographic profile of staff survey respondents as well as key survey findings which highlight a series of significant challenges and opportunities reported by the sector. The majority of respondents for these surveys identified as women (97%). Forty one percent (41%) identified as racialized and of this group, 12% identified as Black, 10% identified as South Asian or Indo-Caribbean, 9% identified as South East Asian, and 4% identified as First Nations, Inuit or Metis.

Key opportunities highlighted in this report were related to job satisfaction and professional learning.

- Early learning and child care (ELCC) staff find working with children and families highly rewarding, and are passionate about working in the sector.
- Interactions with parents and families (62%), directly caring for children (57%), and interactions with other staff and professionals (52%) were cited as the three most rewarding aspects of working in early years and child care (Chart 2).
- 40% of survey respondents said they were satisfied with their job, and 19% said they are very satisfied (Chart 3).
- The top three areas of interest for professional development training were mental health (38%), behavioural guidance (38%), and leadership and management training (e.g., career advancement training) (36%). In addition, nearly one quarter of respondents indicated an interest in professional learning related to culturally safe and responsive programming (24%). (Chart 4).

Challenges outlined in this report speak to: pay and benefits; stress, work-life balance and burnout; public support and respect; COVID-19 impacts; administrative paperwork and record-keeping; experiences of discrimination; and career advancement and promotion.

- 70% of survey respondents identified pay and benefits as the most significant challenge of working in early years and child care. ELCC staff voiced that their wages are not sufficient to meet the cost of living in Toronto, and many lack workplace benefits such as health insurance, paid sick leave, and pension plans.
- Operators highlighted that ongoing low wages make it very difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff.
- 60% of ELCC staff identified burnout and stress as one of the most significant workforce challenges. ECEs shared their experiences working long hours, with few breaks, and demanding workloads.
- Over a third of respondents (37%) reported that lack of professional recognition was the most challenging aspect of working in child care.
- Over half (52%) of the workforce reported experiencing discrimination from: families (17%), colleagues (20%), or their employer (15%). This finding highlights the need for targeted interventions to support staff that experience discrimination
- 37% of ELCC staff reported feeling limited in terms of the options available to them to progress in the careers.

The early years and child care sector in Toronto also faces ongoing systemic workforce pressures that need to be addressed. These include:

#### **Staffing shortages:**

- Operators face shortages in job categories such as Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) Full Time, Early Childhood Assistant (ECA) Full Time, and Salaried Casual Full Time.
- 38% of agencies noted that workforce vacancies and shortages have somewhat limited their ability to enrol new children. 25% of respondents had temporarily reduced their operating capacity.
- The main causes of staffing shortages included: high staff absenteeism (41%), not finding enough qualified candidates (41%), and some staff being reassigned to fill additional roles related to Public Health protocol requirements (35%).

## **Retention and recruitment:**

- Nearly half (49%) of the ELCC staff indicated contemplating a career change within one year, and 36% after five years.
- When asked which strategies they had adopted to support and retain their staff, agencies' top three reported strategies were: offering financial incentives (e.g., increased salary, bonuses) (64%); full-time hours (52%); and professional training sessions during paid time (48%).
- Resources and supports that agencies would find helpful to support recruitment and retention (Chart 6), included: a career website for ECEs/child care (70%), a centralized job board and resume repository (60%), and professional development and mentorship opportunities for staff (40%).

In response to the challenges, needs, and opportunities voiced by survey respondents, the following sector-wide priorities were developed, and point to recommendations for action on the part of the Province and Toronto Children's Services:

## **Recommendations for the Province**

### **1. Establishing Fair Compensation, Benefits and Paid Time Off**

- It is recommended that the Province develop a set of guidelines for wages and benefits, to support the development of regional wage scales.
- It is further recommended that the funding required to implement these guidelines be an additional provincial investment, sufficient to address differences in regional costs of living, and support wages in the community-based sector, comparable to positions in the public sector.

### **2. Improving Working Conditions**

- It is recommended that the provincial government work with child care operators to develop innovative approaches to increase staff working full time hours in the sector.
- Additionally, it is recommended that the Province work with operators to sustain program quality through investments towards sufficient staffing and paid programming time apart from supervision duties and child contact time.

## Opportunities for Toronto Children’s Services

### 3. Addressing Recruitment and Retention Needs

- TCS will continue to collaborate with other Service System Managers and post-secondary institutions to utilize one-time funding to increase access to the ECE diploma for eligible students by covering the partial or full cost of tuition expenses.
- Explore the development of a workforce development hub to support recruitment.
- Commit to sustained survey dissemination to improve employer understanding of factors that impact job satisfaction.
- Consider supporting advertising vacancies to improve recruitment city-wide.

### 4. Enhancing Skills and Professional Learning Opportunities

- TCS will contribute to the development of a Professional Learning Strategy, and expand access to opportunities during paid time, including in-service training, mentoring, coaching, and opportunities to increase knowledge and awareness on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### 5. Fostering Safe and Inclusive Working Environments

- TCS commits to using an anti-oppression and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) lens in working with operators, staff, and families to strengthen policies, training, complaints processes, and reporting mechanisms.
- Enable staff, supervisors, managers, and directors to strengthen their pedagogical leadership by offering professional learning for staff and ongoing training in the areas of Indigenous ways of learning and knowing, confronting anti Black-racism, mental health, 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion, and health & safety.

### 6. Increasing Public Recognition and Valuing Contributions

- TCS will develop a public education campaign to raise awareness about the value of quality child care and the importance of qualified early childhood educators.



## Introduction

A thriving child care and early years workforce is essential for delivering high quality early childhood programs, which in turn are fundamental for achieving better socio-economic outcomes, increasing women's labour force participation, and supporting economic growth. Toronto Children's Services (TCS) has heard from child care and early years staff and operators about a range of workforce related challenges which have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.



In 2022, the Ministry of Education invested more than \$2 billion in child care and early years programs. This investment includes funding for implementation of Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC). Separate from this investment, the City received \$37.6M in new, one-time funding from the Canada-Ontario Early Childhood Workforce Agreement for the retention and recruitment of a high-quality child care and early years workforce, including a professional learning strategy.

With an understanding of workforce challenges and in an effort to maximize this provincial investment, TCS has started to develop a comprehensive Workforce Development Strategy to support a high quality, thriving and diverse workforce in the city.



## The Importance of the Early Years and Child Care Workforce

Quality child care and early years programs are critical services that support positive developmental outcomes for children, parental employment and training/education, and in turn, redress the impact of inequities.<sup>i</sup> Equitable access to high quality, affordable early learning and child care (ELCC) is a factor in poverty reduction and recovery of workforce participation.<sup>ii</sup> Additionally, the benefits of quality child care on children's learning, health, and social development are greatest for communities experiencing high inequities.<sup>iii</sup>

The following is a short summary of the key benefits of investing in the early years and child care:

**Benefits to childhood outcomes:** A thriving early years and child care workforce contributes to children having positive childhood interactions and experiences. High-quality programs engage children in meaningful learning, and support their cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development.<sup>iv</sup>

**Benefits to families:** Families need support to raise children. Qualified staff deliver meaningful programs that help families build social support networks, provide them with tools and resources on child and family well-being, and help connect them to other services they might need. Accessible child care makes it possible for parents and caregivers to work or to focus on education and training.<sup>v</sup>

**Economic benefits:** Effective child and family services are vital to economic growth and sustainability. Affordable child care is central to the recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce.

Furthermore, the childcare sector itself is proven to stimulate the local economy through job creation. Overall child and family services demonstrate high returns on public investment, and improve health and education outcomes.<sup>vi</sup>

**Social benefits:** Supporting the ELCC workforce to deliver high quality child care advances the well-being of children and families by providing them with tools and opportunities to fully participate in social and public life. By supporting families who face more complex challenges, and promoting the inclusion of diverse communities in Toronto, child care serves to reduce systemic inequities. It contributes to gender equality by increasing women's participation in the workforce and in public life. Child care is an issue for most working parents; however, it can be especially challenging for women working in sectors with non-traditional hours.<sup>vii</sup>



### ***The Benefits of a Well-Compensated and Qualified Workforce***

A skilled, knowledgeable, and stable workforce is critical to the quality of child care and early years services, and therefore benefits children and families who use these services. <sup>viii</sup> Work environment factors such as fair wages and working conditions, and staff variables such as the level of Early Childhood Educator (ECE)-specific training and job satisfaction have statistically significant impacts on program quality and staff-child interactions.<sup>ix</sup> In addition, adequate staff compensation, professional development, and supervision is necessary to reduce staff turnover and maintain the stability and consistency that is essential for building supportive and trusting relationships with children and reducing risks for negative learning experiences.<sup>x</sup>

## ***Workforce Shortages in Ontario***

Staffing shortages are an increasingly critical challenge in the sector. According to Statistics Canada, employment among child care workers decreased by 21% during the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant drop compared to other sectors which declined by 3% over the same period.<sup>xi</sup> In addition, data from the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators indicates that of the 58,867 registrants across Ontario, 44% do not work in Licensed Child Care (centre-based, home-based child care).<sup>xii</sup> This is concerning as staffing requirements to meet child care expansion goals are estimated at nearly 9,000 ECEs in Ontario, in addition to child care workers needed to staff new kindergarten classrooms in schools.<sup>xiii</sup>



## ***Workforce Considerations for Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care and the Canada-Ontario Early Childhood Workforce Agreement***

On March 28, 2022 the Province of Ontario and Government of Canada signed the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care agreement (CWELCC). This agreement includes commitments from the Province to support the child care workforce, including measures to improve recruitment and retention of child care workforce, as well as professional development training opportunities.

Successful implementation of CWELCC depends on a well-trained and well-compensated workforce. Operators and agencies that apply – and are approved – to participate in the CWELCC program will receive funding to lower fees for families. As licensed participants in the program, they are also required to bring the wages of all eligible staff up to the wage floor. In 2022, the wage floor for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) was \$18, and for RECE Child Care Supervisors or RECE Home Child Care Visitors the wage floor was \$20. The wage floor will increase by \$1 every

year from 2023 to 2026. In addition, CWELCC includes up to 17.5% in benefits funding which will support Licensees meeting statutory benefit requirements.

In addition to CWELCC, in 2022, the City received one-time funding via the Canada-Ontario Early Childhood Workforce Agreement. This funding is intended to support the retention and recruitment of a high-quality child care and early years workforce. Targeted initiatives include the development of a Professional Learning Strategy that includes two professional learning days for eligible staff, mentorship opportunities, and a Workforce Capacity and Innovation Fund to support innovative recruitment and retention strategies.



## Methodology

This report is based on a mixed methods approach including collection of both quantitative and qualitative data:

- a literature review that provides a comprehensive understanding of the child care labour market and identified pertinent survey content;
- consultations and meetings with community stakeholders which elucidated challenges, trends, and interventions that can support a healthy workforce held between September 2021 to June 2022;
- a child care operator survey conducted in Toronto between December 2021 and February 2022; and
- a child care staff survey conducted of Toronto-based ECEs March to February 2022.

### Toronto Children's Services Operator Survey

The Operator Survey was launched in December 2021 and ran through February 2022 with the purpose of collecting information from licensed child care operators, to better understand current workforce needs, challenges, and opportunities, and to inform the development of a child care and early years workforce strategy. The survey content was developed based on findings from a literature review on the concerns and issues facing the early learning and child care workforce as well as engagement with licensed child care operators in Toronto. In particular, the survey collected data on current staff vacancies/shortages, and the recruitment and retention needs of licensed child care agencies. The survey was disseminated in both English and French via email to approximately 650 centre-based operators as well as four school boards in Toronto. The online survey had 14 questions including a combination of quantitative, Likert-scale, multiple choice, ranking and open-ended questions.



## Toronto Children Services Workforce Survey

The Workforce Survey was open from March 2022 and ran through April 2022 to better understand the experiences of ELCC staff in areas such as job satisfaction, working conditions, and professional development. This survey also included socio-demographic questions to help understand workforce composition in the early years sector in Toronto. This survey was developed based on the same literature review which informed the Operator Survey, as well as through consultation with the College of Early Childhood Educators. The survey was disseminated to an estimated 13,000 staff, through circulation by the College of Early

Childhood Educators, licensed centre and home child care agencies in Toronto, school boards, and to the division's database of EarlyON and Resource Consultation agencies. The target audiences were ECEs and child care workers in Toronto. The online survey consisted of 40 questions including a combination of quantitative, Likert-scale, multiple choice, ranking and open-ended questions.

Quantitative data from these samples were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics and qualitative data from open-ended responses were analyzed thematically.





## Survey Results

In total, 2,125 respondents completed the ELCC Workforce Survey and the Operator Survey had 338 respondents. According to the College of Early Childhood Educators, approximately 13,593 members work in the Toronto Region.<sup>xiv</sup> Considering 1,200 of the 2,125 respondents were ECEs, this represents approximately 9% of registered ECEs in Toronto. The Operator Survey received responses from 338 agencies, representing a 52% response rate.



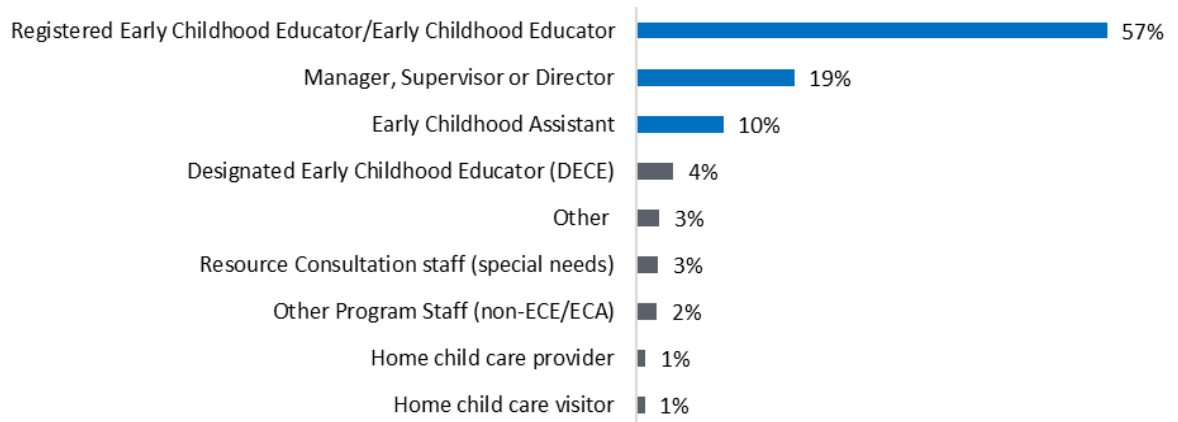
### The Composition of the Early Years and Child Care Workforce

#### Toronto's Early Childhood Education Workforce

The majority of the workforce survey respondents were employed in child care centres operated by non-profit agencies (66%). Fourteen percent of respondents were working in for-profit or commercial centres, 13% in City-operated centres, and 11% in child cares operated by school boards. Respondents were least likely to say they worked in other public sector auspices such as post-secondary institutions or hospitals (3%). (Early years and child care workers may have multiple jobs and as a result, can work in more than one care setting. To reflect this, respondents were able to choose more than one answer for this survey question).

Staff with various roles participated in the workforce survey (Chart 1). The majority of respondents identified their role as a Registered Early Childhood Educator (57%). Other survey respondents included Managers, Supervisors and Directors (19%), Early Childhood Assistants (10%), Designated Early Childhood Education (DECE) Staff (4%), Resource Consultation (special needs) Staff (3%), other Program Staff (2%), Home Child Care Providers (1%), and Home Child Care Visitors (1%).

Chart 1: Staff Roles (N=2,067)

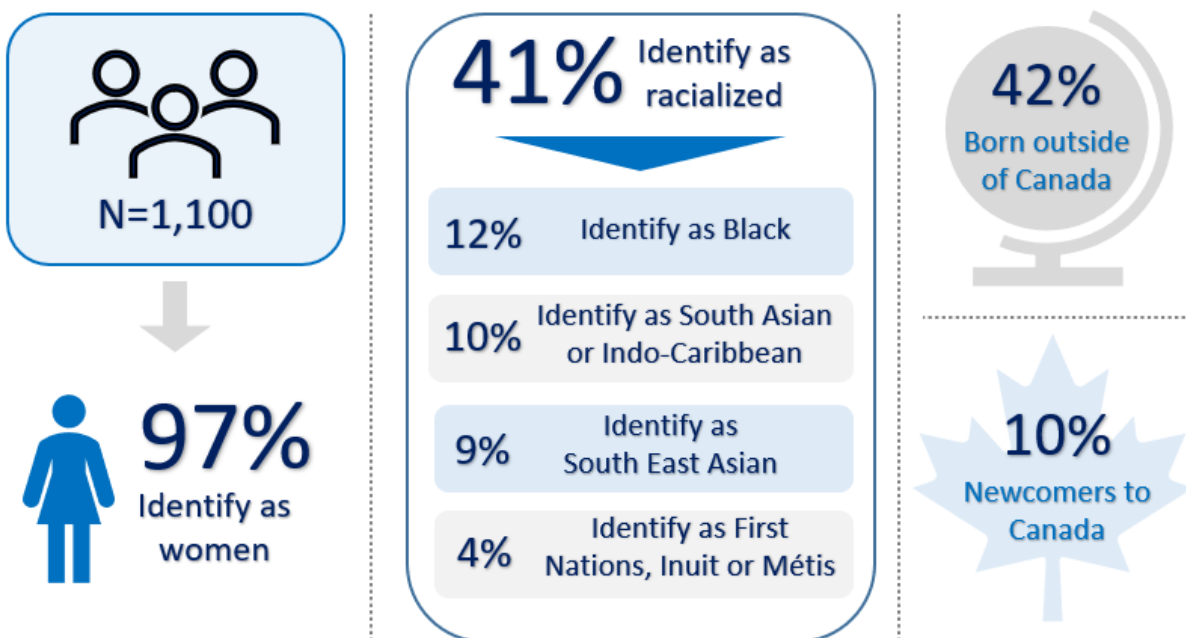


## Demographics by the Numbers

There were 1,100 survey participants that responded to sociodemographic questions. These responses were used to compile a demographic profile of the early years workforce that completed the survey. The majority of respondents identified as women (97%). Forty one percent (41%) identified as racialized and of this group, 12% identified as

Black, 10% identified as South Asian or Indo-Caribbean, 9% identified as South East Asian, and 4% identified as First Nations, Inuit or Metis. A significant proportion of the sample was born outside of Canada (42%) and 10% were newcomers. This profile is visually depicted in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Demographics by the Numbers (N=1,100)



The early years and child care workforce is a highly feminized and racialized workforce. Many ELCC staff identify as women, racialized, and immigrants. One in ten indicated they were new to Canada. The historical and pervasive undervaluing of labour performed by women, and especially women of colour, has resulted in an underpaid, and undervalued workforce. This is a gender equity issue: Professions that are seen as feminine—including those that involve caring for others—are historically undercompensated and are viewed as making less valuable economic contributions.<sup>xv</sup> However, research previously highlighted on both the complexity and importance of early learning environments and the socioeconomic necessity of

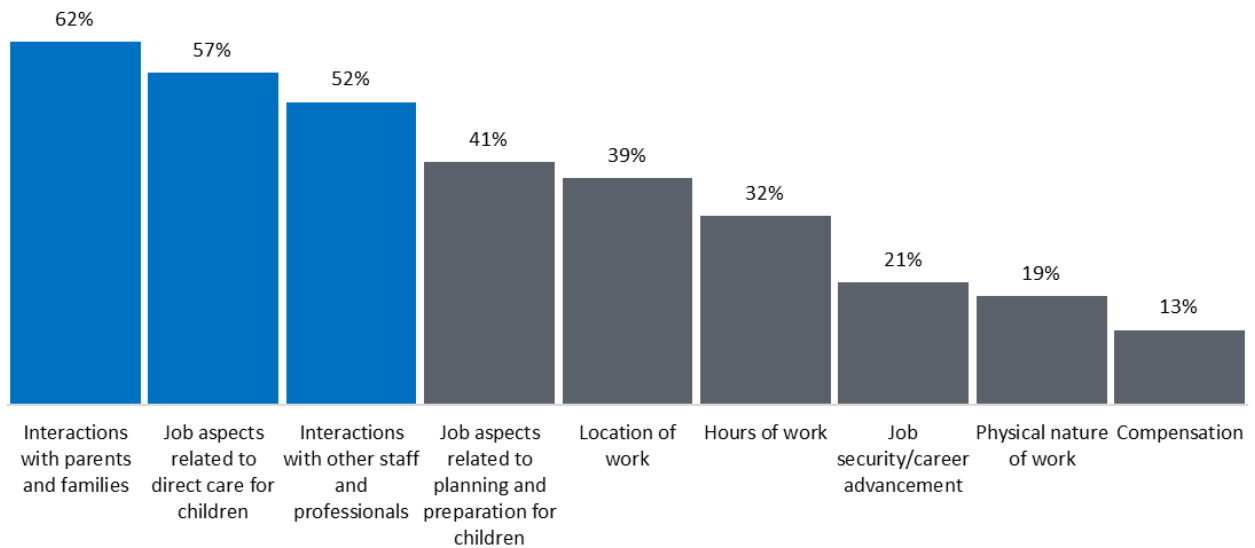
accessible child care make clear that child care workers are extremely valuable to the economy and building healthy communities.

## Voices of the ELCC Workforce – Opportunities and Key Issues

### Opportunities

ELCC staff find working with children and families highly rewarding, and are passionate about working in early learning and child care. Interactions with parents and families (62%), directly caring for children (57%), and interactions with other staff and professionals (52%) were cited as the three most rewarding aspects of working in early years and child care (Chart 2).

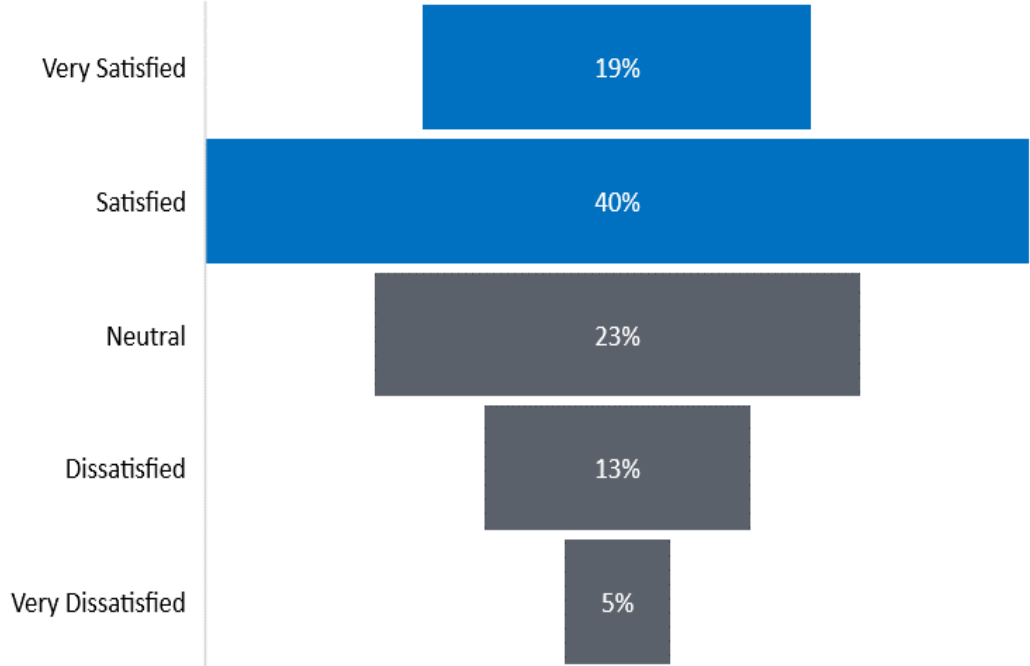
*Chart 2: Rewarding aspects of working in early years and child care (N=2,125 and more than one selection was allowed for this question)*





Survey results showed that the majority of respondents found some degree of satisfaction in their work: 40% of survey respondents said they were satisfied with their job, and 19% said they are very satisfied (Chart 3).

Chart 3: Job Satisfaction (N=2,056)



*“I genuinely love my line of work where both children and their parents/caregivers are present. The wealth of knowledge and the importance of building trustful relationships with so many cultures add to my own development and growth.”*

*“I love what I do and I know I make a difference for many of the families I work with.”*

The workforce survey results highlight a significant desire for further professional development opportunities. The top three areas of interest for professional development training were mental health (38%), behaviour guidance (38%), and leadership and management training (e.g., career advancement training) (36%). In addition, nearly one quarter of respondents indicated an interest in professional learning related to culturally safe and responsive programming (24%). (Chart 4).

*Chart 4: Areas of Interest for Professional Learning (N=2,125 and more than one selection was allowed for this question)*





## Workforce Challenges

### Pay and Benefits

Seventy percent of survey respondents identified pay and benefits as the most significant challenge of working in early years and child care. ELCC staff voiced that their wages are not sufficient to meet the cost of living in Toronto, and many lack workplace benefits such as health insurance, paid sick leave, and pension plans.

Additionally, the Operator Survey highlighted that ongoing low wages make it very difficult for child care operators to recruit and retain qualified staff. These low wages likely contribute to respondent experiences of precarious work: 19% of staff reported that they have to work more than one job.

*“I’m so tired. I am very good at what I do. And every year they want more and more from me. I’ve been in this field for over 30 years. 25 at my current employer. No pension. I live off of CPP when I retire. I’m wary of how the government is going to allocate the funding to maintain the cost of living. We had a decent raise but the cost of living went up almost 10%.”*

*“If I could find a job in another field easily, I probably would because RECE's especially during the pandemic have had too much responsibility for too little pay and it is taking a huge mental and physical toll.”*

*I am getting burnt out in this field, especially with COVID & after 20+ years I need a second job just to pay bills, very unrewarding financially.*



## Stress, Work-Life Balance, and Burnout

Early childhood educators typically work long hours, with few breaks, and experience demanding workloads, all of which contribute to many staff reporting burnout, stress, and mental health issues. Additionally, many staff do not have paid time off, have to work precarious hours, and have long commutes, negatively impacting work-life balance. The Staff Survey found that 60% of ELCC staff identified burnout and stress as one of the most significant workforce challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated burnout since ELCC staff have faced added duties and increased work-related stress without commensurate recognition or compensation.

*“The last two years have been stressful physically and mentally. As a supervisor in a child care centre who has a compromised immune system, it has taken its toll (both mentally and physically). If the child care industry does get more challenging then I may have to find an alternate profession that is less demanding.”*

*“I intend to have children of my own in the near future and believe I won’t have the energy mentally nor physically for my own family if I continue in this field. If it were better compensated I would likely continue part time otherwise I would have to find something less demanding.”*

## Public Support and Respect

Over a third of respondents (37%) reported that lack of professional recognition was the most challenging aspect of working in child care. There is a lack of understanding among the general public of the value of work in early years and child care, especially when compared to other regulated professions such as teaching, nursing, and social work. This lack of public support and recognition leaves many ELCC staff feeling disrespected and undervalued in their profession.

*“The lack of respect and ignorance regarding this sector coupled with the expectation of legislated bodies is too much and it's heartbreaking that child care is not a bigger priority.”*

*“Lack of respect for the field. Unfortunately its very demotivating when were still being called 'babysitters' and also paid just as much.”*

*“It takes a lot of emotional energy, and although rewarding the pay and benefits don't reflect this and it leads to overwork and under appreciation.”*

### **COVID-19 Impacts**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had inequitable impacts on Black, Indigenous, racialized, and equity-denied communities. In addition, the early years workforce is comprised of many immigrant, racialized women earning low wages who have worked tirelessly through the pandemic. They have faced additional stress and greater risks of contracting COVID-19, while not receiving adequate recognition or compensation for their essential role in supporting children, families, and the economy.

*“The last 18 months has been the hardest in mine 28 years of ECE experience. High staff turnover, low pay and high stress level from parents.”*

### **Administrative Paperwork and Record Keeping**

ELCC staff have voiced that they are over-burdened with administrative paperwork and record keeping. Often, ELCC staff noted that they have to complete administrative work during unpaid overtime. Additionally, ELCC staff respondents stated that administrative work resulted in decreased time spent with children.

*“Burn out. High stress. Low pay. Excessive demands: I spend so much of my own time on documentation and other paperwork.”*

### **Experiences of Discrimination**

Respondents were asked about whether they had ever been (or felt) discriminated against, harassed, or bullied at work. Over half (52%) of the workforce reported experiencing discrimination from: families (17%), colleagues (20%), or their employer (15%). This finding highlights the need for targeted interventions to support staff that experience discrimination such as training and reporting mechanisms.

## Career Advancement and Promotion

Thirty seven percent of ELCC staff reported feeling limited in terms of the options available to them to progress in the careers. Staff have expressed a need for career opportunities and an infrastructure that supports professional practice.

Early childhood educators need career pathways options that support continuous progression in learning and career advancement. This may include working directly with children while pursuing flexible advancement opportunities and related career paths in the early years and child care sector.





## Systemic Workforce Pressures in the Early Years and Child Care Sector

### Staffing Shortages

The Operator Survey collected data regarding staffing vacancies and shortages at licensed child care agencies and also gauged how these vacancies and shortages have impacted enrolment and operating capacity of the agencies. It was found that operators faced shortages in job categories such as Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) Full Time, Early Childhood Assistant (ECA) Full Time, and Salaried Casual Full Time.

For RECE Full Time, only 56% agencies reported zero vacancies while 20% of the agencies reported two to five vacancies for this position. For the ECA Full Time position 14% of agencies reported two to five vacancies and for the Salaried Casual Full Time 20% of the agencies reported two to five vacancies. With respect to contracted casuals, 45% of the respondents said that they do use casual supply but have not been able to access the number of staff they need.



Agencies were also asked if their current staff vacancies and shortages were limiting their ability to enrol new children at their centre(s) and if the agencies have temporarily reduced their operating capacity specifically due to current shortages. It was found that for 38% of the agencies, workforce vacancies and shortages have somewhat limited their ability to enrol new children. Additionally, 25% of the respondents had temporarily reduced their operating capacity due to staffing vacancies and shortages.

Operators were asked to identify the main causes of the staffing shortages. The major reasons identified were high staff absenteeism (i.e., challenges related to finding staff backfills) (41%), not finding enough qualified candidates (41%), and some staff being reassigned to fill additional roles related to Public Health protocol requirements (i.e., screeners, runners, cleaners) (35%).

## Retention and Recruitment

The workforce survey also asked questions to better understand how to recruit and retain staff over time. ELCC staff were asked whether they planned to work in the early years and child care field in the future, specifically one and five years in the future, with the option to explain their answer (Chart 5).

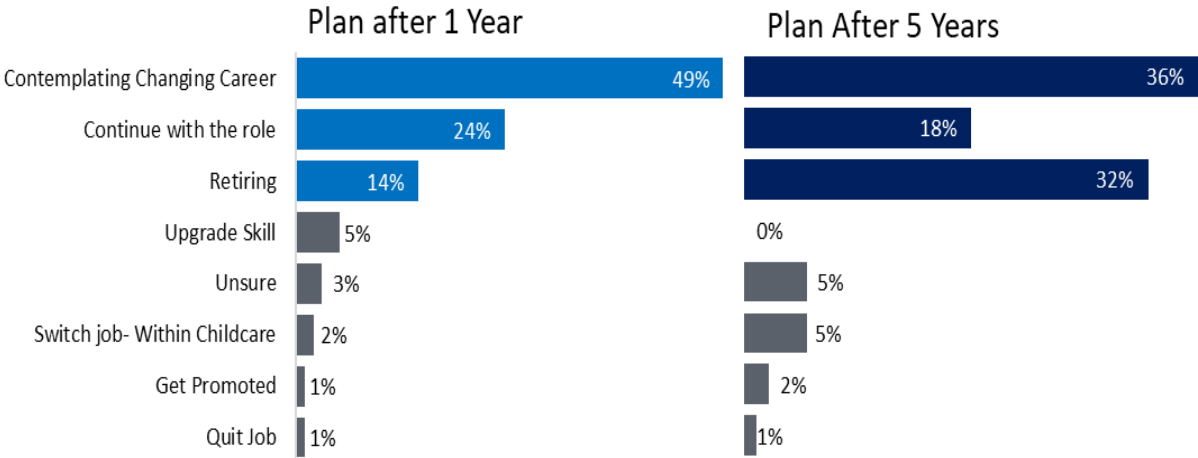
Many reported that they were contemplating changing their career within the next one to five years. Specifically, nearly half (49%) indicated contemplating a career change within one year and 36% after five years. About a quarter of respondents (24%) planned to continue in their role in the next year. Fewer (18%) planned to continue in their role after five years. In terms of retirement, 14% were planning to retire in one year and 32% were planning for retirement within five years. These findings demonstrate a significant and concerning retention issue as the majority of staff are contemplating leaving the sector or are near retirement.

*“I give myself 2 to 6 years [in the field] because there is no respect and financial security”*





Chart 5: Future Aspirations (N=2,125)

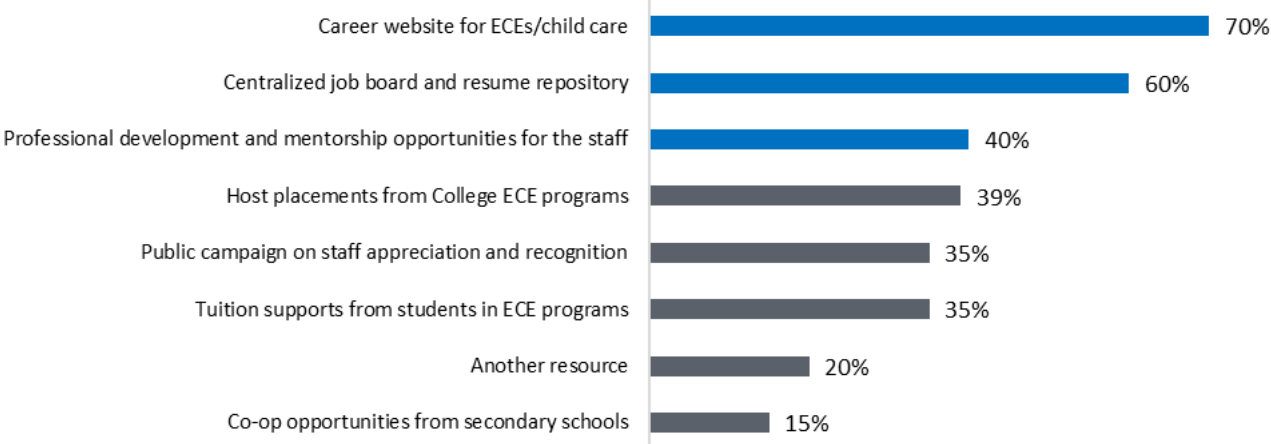


The agencies were asked what strategies they had adopted to support and retain their staff and the top three strategies that emerged in the results were offering financial incentives (e.g., increased salary, bonuses) (64%); full-time hours (52%) and professional training sessions during paid time (48%) to the staff.

With respect to resources and supports that agencies would find helpful to support recruitment and retention (Chart 6), the top cited responses included: Career website for ECEs/child care (70%), centralized job board and resume repository (60%) and professional development and mentorship opportunities for staff (40%). In the open text under this question, the top demands of the agencies were competitive wages/benefits, more full time jobs rather than part time or split shifts, and professional recognition for the field of early learning and child care.

Additional workforce strategy priorities identified by agencies included higher and standardized wages/benefits/pensions matching that of school boards, a centralised supply staff pool available to all centres, as well as advocacy efforts for better recognition of the profession.

Chart 6: Resources and Supports Agencies find helpful (N=296 and more than one selection was allowed for this question)



**Survey Limitations**

These methods reflect best efforts to reach staff across Toronto's ELCC sector. However, it is important to note limitations, such as some staff lacking access to computers during work hours, preventing them from completing the survey online. As well, some survey respondents indicated they were uncomfortable completing the survey online (although the option of completing the survey over the phone was offered).

In addition, the number of respondents working in home child care was low despite outreach efforts. Lastly, while the survey generated a partial representation of sector workforce demographics based on participant responses, the sample data cannot be assumed to be representative of the entire sector.



## Summary-Voices from Early Years and Child Care Community

Early Childhood Educators and other child care staff clearly identified a lack of adequate wages and benefits as a significant challenge of working in the child care and early years sector in Toronto. This was echoed by operators reporting ongoing difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified staff due to low wages and benefits. Going forward, addressing wages and benefits will be a crucial component of meeting the immediate needs of the workforce.

Staff also reported burnout and stress as challenges, which coincided with long hours, lack of paid time off, demanding workloads with unpaid administrative time, and few breaks. On top of these demanding working conditions, a significant proportion of staff reported discrimination, harassment or bullying by employers, colleagues, and families. This highlights that staff safety and well-being must be prioritized in the sector's workforce strategy.



Lack of public recognition for the value of the work being done in the early years and child care sector was also considered a top challenge among respondents. Staff also reported feeling limited in career progression options and expressed a desire for career advancement training.

Finally, it is essential to recognize that these challenges preceded the COVID-19 pandemic, and have only worsened since. Early years and child care staff have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic which brought additional stress and greater risks, without commensurate recognition or compensation for their essential role in supporting children, families, and the economy.

## Sector-Wide Priorities:

In response to the challenges, needs, and opportunities voiced by survey respondents, the following sector-wide priorities were developed and point to recommendations for action on the part of the Province and Toronto Children's Services:

### Recommendations for the Province

1. Establishing Fair Compensation, Benefits and Paid Time Off
2. Improving Working Conditions

### Opportunities for Toronto Children's Services

3. Enhancing Skills and Professional Learning Opportunities
4. Fostering Safe and Inclusive Working Environments
5. Addressing Recruitment and Retention Needs
6. Increasing Public Recognition and Valuing Contributions





## How Governments Can Respond: Government of Ontario

### 1. Establishing Fair Compensation, Benefits and Paid Time Off

It is recommended that the Province develop a set of guidelines for wages and benefits, to support the development of regional wage scales. It is further recommended that the funding required to implement these guidelines be an additional provincial investment, sufficient to address differences in regional costs of living, and support wages in the community-based sector, comparable to positions in the public sector.

The sector is asking the Province to recognize that a well-compensated and highly trained workforce is essential to delivering high quality child care that leads to positive outcomes for children. A thriving workforce is also crucial to expanding programs to serve more families.



The City of Toronto's Licensed Child Care Growth Strategy<sup>xvi</sup> envisions increases to the average wages of child care workers in Toronto to reach the threshold set by the Provincial Wage Enhancement (PWE) Program. The PWE wage threshold is meant to assist in closing the gap between Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) wages in school board full-day kindergarten programs and RECE wages in licensed child care settings. In 2022 the PWE cap was set at \$28.59 per hour. Toronto Children's Services

has the mechanisms to meet this target in improving wages; however, increased investments and guidelines for a wage grid from the provincial government is required.

The introduction of CWELCC includes some new Workforce Compensation funds for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) working in licensed child care agencies that opt-in to the CWELCC system, and for RECE staff in licensed child care programs serving children aged 6 to 12, who are currently ineligible to apply to the CWELCC System. Staff who are non-RECEs are not currently eligible for Workforce Compensation funds. Canada Wide Early Learning Child Care (CWELCC) requires that an operator have PWE to be eligible for the new workforce funding.



The 2022 wage floor for CWELCC is listed as \$18.00 per hour for RECEs and \$20.00 per hour for RECE Child Care Supervisors / RECE Home Child Care Visitors with yearly one dollar increases until 2026. According to the Ontario Living Wage Network<sup>xvii</sup>, the living wage for Toronto region was \$23.15 per hour, as calculated in November 2022. As well, the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario and Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care have called for a \$30 an hour wage floor for registered ECEs and a \$25 minimum wage for non-ECE child care workers<sup>xviii</sup>.

Additionally, the *Early Childhood Education 2022* report found that one-third of the licensed early childhood education workforce receives no health benefits. Additionally, an equal number receive no paid leave or overtime pay, and 70% have no pensions. Among those with benefits, half cite them as a reason for staying with their current employer – thus highlighting the impact benefits and paid time off have on the retention of staff<sup>xix</sup>.

Given findings from both the Staff and Operators Surveys, current efforts to address wages and benefits are not sufficient to address the ongoing recruitment and retention crisis in the child care and early years' system. A crisis which is driven by poor compensation and insufficient recognition of this work is especially concerning as an equity issue given that the workforce is predominantly women, many of whom are members of racialized, immigrant, and newcomer communities.



## 2. Improve Working Conditions

It is recommended that the provincial government work with child care operators to develop innovative approaches to increase staff working full time hours in the sector.

ELCC educators need positive, stable working conditions. Educators currently feel overworked, with many working long hours or in split shifts. The survey results demonstrate that many ELCC staff are not satisfied with working part time hours, and split shifts.

Additionally, it is recommended that the Province work with operators to sustain program quality through investments towards sufficient staffing and paid programming time apart from supervision duties and child contact time. Staff want support to be able to do their jobs effectively and advance pedagogical leadership. This recommendation is consistent with the Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI) Guidelines which outline the intent for staff to be given paid time away from supervision duties to prepare the materials needed for planned learning experiences and program space set-up.<sup>xx</sup> The survey results highlight the need for sufficient staffing, including providing paid non-child contact time for the completion of professional responsibilities, reflection with colleagues, professional learning, and opportunities to provide input into decisions that affect in-program practices.



## Opportunities for Toronto Children's Services (TCS)

As part of maximizing funding from the Canada-Ontario Early Childhood Workforce Agreement, Toronto Children's Services has a number of initiatives underway. These include:

- partnering with local Service System Managers and post-secondary institutions to offer full and partial tuition grants for students earning an ECE diploma at participating colleges in the GTA
- organizing a Professional Learning Conference for child care and EarlyON staff focused on Indigenous Worldviews, Confronting Anti-Black Racism, 2SLGBTQ+ Inclusion, Mental Health & Well Being
- advancing a sector-wide learning management system
- building a career-development webpage

These activities and additional opportunities are described below.



### **3. Addressing Recruitment and Retention Needs**

In response to the challenges of recruiting and retaining staff in the sector, Toronto Children's Services (TCS) will continue to collaborate with other Service System Managers and post-secondary institutions in the GTA to utilize one-time funding to increase access to the ECE diploma for eligible students by covering the partial or full cost of tuition expenses. TCS will also explore the development of a workforce development hub for ECEs and child care staff to support recruitment activities.

In addition, to improve employer understanding of the factors that affect job satisfaction, TCS will commit to sustained survey dissemination on job satisfaction, safety and working conditions on a scheduled cycle.

Lastly, to assist operators with staffing pressures, TCS will consider supporting advertising vacancies to improve recruitment city-wide. Timeline: Medium – Long Term

### **4. Enhancing Skills and Professional Learning Opportunities**

Demand for professional learning was apparent, and Toronto Children's Services can contribute to the development of a Professional Learning Strategy which includes improving the provision of professional learning opportunities and expanding access to

such opportunities during paid time, including in-service training, mentoring, coaching, and opportunities to increase knowledge and awareness on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Timeline: Medium – Long Term

### **5. Fostering Safe and Inclusive Working Environments**

To advance positive, safe, and inclusive working environments, TCS commits to using an anti-oppression and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) lens in working with operators, staff, and families to strengthen policies, training, complaints processes, and reporting mechanisms.

Additionally, TCS will enable staff, supervisors, managers, and directors to strengthen their pedagogical leadership by offering professional learning for staff and ongoing training in the areas of Indigenous ways of learning and knowing, confronting anti Black-racism, mental health, 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion, and health & safety. Timeline: Short – Medium Term

### **6. Increasing Public Recognition and Valuing Contributions**

To address staff concerns about lack of public recognition for the ELCC workforce, TCS will develop a public education campaign to raise awareness about the value of quality child care and the importance of qualified early childhood educators. Timeline: Short – Medium Term



## Conclusion

The findings included in this report add to the substantial body of research detailing the experiences of the early years and child care workforce, long-standing challenges of working in child care and early learning, and pressing opportunities for action and change in the sector. It is clear that without ECEs and child care staff, there is no child care. If the implementation of Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care is to succeed, system leaders must act so that the workforce is valued and supported through sustained investment and ongoing recognition.



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