

The background features a stylized map of Canada in shades of green and blue. Overlaid on the map are several colorful silhouettes of people's heads in profile, facing right. The silhouettes are in various colors including orange, purple, blue, and green, representing diversity. The text is centered over the map.

Inclusive Child Care For All

SUMMIT REPORT



Overview

With support from Women and Gender Equality (WAGE), Oxfam Canada, Child Care Now and the Childcare Resource and Research Unit hosted the 2023 Inclusive Child Care for All Summit in Ottawa. Taking place on May 5-6, the summit brought together 90 women, child care advocates, community representatives, and parents, to focus on the question of what public policies are needed to include underrepresented women and children in licensed early learning and child care (ELCC) across Canada.

The purpose of the Summit was to strengthen the child care movement's intersectional understanding and analysis of inequitable access to early learning and child care services. The objectives of the summit were to:

Key Objectives

- Gain a deeper understanding of the current child care landscape
- Understand the different barriers to access and inclusion and the differential impact of these barriers on low-income, racialized, and otherwise marginalized groups of women.
- Identify ways to build a Canada-wide system of early learning and child care that is truly universal, inclusive and fully accessible to all
- Explore opportunities for collective action to make the early learning and child care inclusive of all children, families and communities
- Strengthen relationships between child care advocates and other community organizers.

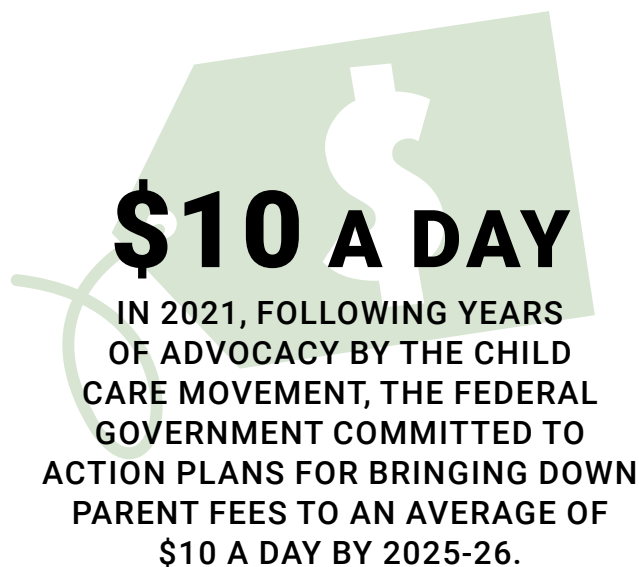
The summit was structured to include a combination of panels, table discussions, and group discussions.

Through presentations on the first day of the summit participants reviewed the federal government's early learning and child care policy initiative announced in the 2021 federal budget, and learned about the development of the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework. Also, through panel discussions, the summit heard from marginalized communities about the barriers preventing access to high quality and inclusive early learning and child care programs. Particularly, we learned about the experiences of immigrant and refugee women, women with disabilities, Black, Indigenous, and racialized women, and low-income women.

Also, on the first day of the Summit, Martha Friendly, Executive Director of Child Care Resources and Research Unit (CRRU), presented [a background paper](#) she and her CRRU colleagues prepared for the Summit, that discusses existing Canadian data on child care which corroborate that children from socially and economically disadvantaged households are less represented in regulated child care. The paper explains market-based approaches to the provision of child care, such as those in Canada, are less effective in including families living in poverty even when fee subsidies exist. However, unequal access is not limited to marketized child care. The most effective (and only) way to address inequitable access and inclusion is for governments to develop and implement public policies to address issues of availability, entitlement and child care costs.

On the second day, various organizations representing diverse communities in several geographical areas showcased their child care advocacy work, after which participants collaboratively explored initiatives to address unequal access to licensed ELCC.

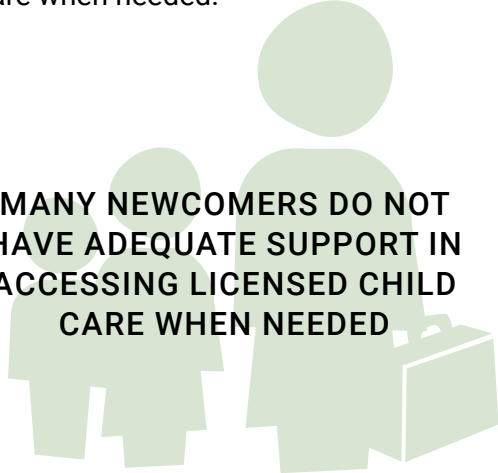
In 2021, following years of advocacy by the child care movement, the federal government committed to building a pan-Canadian ELCC system through a historic investment of \$30 billion over five years. The federal government has reached funding agreements with the provinces and territories that include action plans for bringing down parent fees to an average of \$10 a day by 2025-26, and for improving the availability and quality of licensed programs. The first action plans covered the first two years of the five-year agreements. Second action plans are now being negotiated. It is critical to bring the voices of underrepresented communities to the forefront of child care policy discussions as the implementation of the first action plans are being assessed, and as the second action plans are negotiated.



\$10 A DAY
IN 2021, FOLLOWING YEARS
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\$10 A DAY BY 2025-26.

What was said about child care needs and gaps for marginalized communities

A major challenge for newcomers to Canada is the lack of timely and relevant information regarding the child care system. Securing a child care spot can be a complex process due to the limited availability of child care spaces. This may require extensive research into child care options, joining long waitlist(s), applying for child care subsidies, and other steps. As a result, many newcomers do not have adequate support in accessing licensed child care when needed.




MANY NEWCOMERS DO NOT HAVE ADEQUATE SUPPORT IN ACCESSING LICENSED CHILD CARE WHEN NEEDED

Deanne Howlett (Program Manager, YMCA St. John's) shared experiences in the context of Newfoundland and Labrador where there has been a strong push for immigration to solve labour market shortages. Yet, provincial policies in place do not address social barriers facing immigrants and refugees coming to the province. Accessing licensed child care is difficult since information and child care spaces are not easily available to newcomers.

Licensed child care programs that meet the specific needs of newcomer families are even harder to find across Canada. While racialized newcomers are more likely to work non-standard hour jobs, licensed child care programs that operate outside regular work hours¹ are limited. In addition, it is challenging for racialized newcomer parents to find child care programs that meet their cultural needs. Non-standard hour child care is crucial to ensuring that newcomers, night-shift workers, and precariously employed workers have access to ELCC. It is **evident** that non-standard hour child care operations are not sustainable in a market-based system. How to deliver and sustain non-standard hour child care must be considered while building a publicly funded and managed system of child care.


While there is ample research on children with disabilities in child care, little is known about mothers with disabilities who face unique and significant challenges in accessing licensed child care services. Mothers with disabilities experience disproportionate barriers to employment, higher rates of precarious work, and increased risks of involvement with the child protection system. Lack of access to affordable and accessible child care services further threatens their economic security all the while putting them in unsafe situations where they are left to care for their children without adequate support. To ensure their needs are met, mothers with disabilities must be involved in research and development of child care systems.

1 i.e. in the evening, on weekends, overnight or on a rotating or on-call basis.



MOTHERS WITH DISABILITIES EXPERIENCE DISPROPORTIONATE BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT, HIGHER RATES OF PRECARIOUS WORK, AND INCREASED RISKS OF INVOLVEMENT WITH THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM.

The summit also shed light on the lack of funding to support ELCC services for Indigenous communities. It is important to pay attention to the diverse experiences of Indigenous peoples within the child care system and to take a distinctions-based approach in addressing the child care needs of Inuit, Métis, and First Nations communities. The fastest-growing Indigenous population in Canada is the urban Indigenous population and Indigenous-led child care in urban areas is most often impossible to find. This makes it especially urgent for ELCC staff working in urban child care programs to have the support and training to deliver early childhood education and care that honours the distinct history and ways of living of Inuit, Métis, and First Nations peoples.



THE FASTEST-GROWING INDIGENOUS POPULATION IN CANADA IS THE URBAN INDIGENOUS POPULATION AND INDIGENOUS-LED CHILD CARE IN URBAN AREAS IS MOST OFTEN IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND.

Participants shared personal stories of having experienced discrimination, racism and prejudice based on their background. We heard stories of the criminalization of Black boys starting in child care settings when they are overly penalized for their behaviour. A general lack of trauma informed responses to behaviour is experienced by a wide range of groups in Canada. Also, euro-centric curriculum and a lack of diverse representation within the ELCC workforce tend to reinforce stereotypes. To strengthen inclusion in ELCC, it is critical to increase diversity in the workforce, conduct training on the impact of trauma and on trauma-informed early childhood education and care, and to integrate cultural practices to increase the sense of belonging.

There is a need to racialize the issue of child care access; yet, a literature review conducted as part of this project, yielded little data about child care usage by race. For example, one study found zero reports of racial incidents in the City of Toronto's ELCC system, which suggests a failure to monitor and address racial incidents. Child care policy at all levels should explicitly define and address race, racism, and racial incidents in ELCC settings. It is crucial that policy recognizes that staff need adequate support and training to deal with racial incidents. To address racism, child care policy must set out protocols and guidelines that support children, families and program staff to navigate through racial incidents.

While many nonprofits deliver child care services to immigrants, migrants, refugees, and racialized communities, it is important to recognize that they too may operate within racist and colonial systems that play a role in causing inequitable access to child care. As an example, the YWCA St John's is working to address this problem through their federally funded project on home-based care for immigrant, refugee, and migrant women which is spearheaded by well-compensated immigrant, refugee, and migrant women.

Advocating for change: Showcase of projects

BUILDING A CHILD CARE SYSTEM THAT WORKS, PACIFIC IMMIGRANT RESOURCES SOCIETY

The [Pacific Immigrant Resources Society](#) observed that many women were having trouble participating in immigrant & newcomer support programs due to the lack of child care. This led PIRS to integrate child care into those programs using child care as an “access strategy.” PIRS has since provided childminding and [pop-up child care](#) to its program participants. The organization also recognized that users of PIRS services were stuck in low paid, precarious work. Therefore, PIRS created a project addressing child care access, living wage, and women’s work. PIRS uses the social enterprise model that provides both work experience and child care to immigrant women (addressing unemployment and child care needs for the newcomer population).

The [Building a Child Care System that Works for Immigrant and Refugee Women](#) project is a 2.5-year PIRS initiative funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) with the goal of forging a feminist response to the impact of COVID-19 through systemic change in the child care sector. To do so, PIRS convened a Childcare Leadership Group—a community of practice (CoP) of immigrant women with lived experience in child care (parents, advocates, child care professionals, etc.). This Childcare Leadership Group received capacity-building training in various subjects such as systems thinking, advocacy, and skills for actions, public speaking, community organizing, and working with governments. Through the Childcare Leadership Group, the voices representing immigrant women are brought to decision-making tables, coalition gatherings, and policy spaces.

Members of the Childcare Leadership Group took turns to share their stories.

- Narmela Rabirad (a nurse in her country who became an ECE in Canada) spoke about the need to increase access to knowledge for newcomers to understand their child care options, language barriers, and lack of flexible child care options for those with non-standard hour work.
- Amandeep Kaur shifted from school teaching/ being vice principal to child care as an immigrant because her Master’s degree was not recognized. She discussed challenges around diversity and inclusion, discrimination, and lack of cultural sensitivity. She highlighted the need to increase training for child care providers and increase representation of immigrant and Indigenous professionals. She also spoke about barriers for immigrants to join the workforce due to a lack of Canadian work experience, the cost of post-graduate education, working conditions and lack of child care for their own children.
- Mireille Keubou’s [story](#)

PIRS also showcased some of its [Photovoice project](#)—a photographic exploration of exclusion, inclusion, and belonging.



CENTERING THE VOICES OF RACIALIZED MOTHERS AND EDUCATORS, ONTARIO COALITION FOR BETTER CHILD CARE

The goal of the *Centering the Voices of Racialized Mothers and Educators* project is to understand the different experiences of diverse groups as well as the child care barriers that have been experienced during the pandemic.

The project focuses on building ongoing relationships and co-creating policy recommendations with racialized mothers and educators. The project is structured as a learning opportunity for both the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and participants. The project is designed to strengthen the voice and decision-making capacity among racialized mothers and educators, and to advance inclusive policies and practices at all levels. The areas of project focus include: understanding the experiences and policy changes that need to happen; engaging racialized folks and communities in change-making; building sustainable relationships with and amongst racialized communities; and providing opportunities for women to identify leadership capacity, develop leadership roles, to mobilize action and policy advocacy.

The project has three phases: (1) literature review and sector scans, (2) community consultations, and (3) co-creation and dissemination of recommendations through working groups. Finding few Canadian studies on the topic, the project turned to existing community relationships and community partnerships to generate knowledge. The project team decided to work with community partners with whom the Ontario Coalition had existing relationships to gather stories. The project invited nine community organizations to identify racialized mothers and educators willing to take part in the consultations. Consultations were held separately with ECEs, Francophone and minority language community members, and with the family support community.

Key learnings from this project include:

- Governments may not be aware of newcomers' experience of severe isolation and erosion of their mental health during the pandemic;
- Consultations and supports can help participants feel more hopeful about their power to take collective actions;
- Support, intervention, and policy change do not and cannot look the same for everyone but our common goal is to fight racism in the child care sector.

Finally, the OCBCC gave updates on ongoing projects around anti-racism work and policy recommendations and awareness of Indigenous perspectives.

UNDERSTANDING THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL IMPACT OF COVID-19, SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN AND IMMIGRANT SERVICES (FORMERLY SAWRO)

Since SAWIS/SAWRO was founded in 2008, the South Asian community has been demanding that the Ontario government provide full child care subsidies for low-income parents. Currently subsidies are given only to those who are employed or in full-time studies. \SAWIS/SAWRO advocates for free, publicly funded child care for low-income women, insisting that child care access can only be truly “universal” if it is made available at no cost, similar to the public school system. Publicly funded child care should eliminate waitlists which are currently a major barrier for families. Many women may resort to unregulated child care options due to the absence of licensed child care. While unregulated child care options may be less expensive, the safety of children and families attending unregulated care is at risk because there is no public oversight or monitoring, no support system and no staff qualification requirements.

SAWIS/SAWRO surveyed 150 Bangladeshi immigrant women living in the East-Danforth neighborhood of Toronto to understand how they were impacted by the pandemic. Key findings were: loss of employment and income, lack of adequate and affordable housing, lack of child care, and an increase in gender-based violence. For many women, the factors intersect in their daily reality. The findings are summarized in SAWIS/SAWRO’s [Understanding the Multi-dimensional Impact of COVID-19](#) report.

In addition, SAWIS/SAWRO works to promote women’s leadership and women’s economic inclusion within their community. As many women experience isolation due to the lack of affordable child care, universal child care is an important policy solution that would help give back time during the day for women to take care of themselves and engage in their communities and social activities. Many South Asian women in Canada are facing underemployment (not working based on skill and experience) and precarious work. Those employed through Temporary Staffing Agencies as child care workers and in other occupations are also stuck in low-paid, precarious working conditions. Child care jobs through these staffing agencies are often precarious with split shifts, far work locations, low pay and no benefits/pensions.

Collective actions for more equitable access and inclusion

A key goal of the summit was for participants to gain a better understanding of the intersectional barriers to inclusion faced by those historically underrepresented in early learning and child care in Canada, as well as to explore tools and strategies to influence policy discussions and decision-making spaces.

The toolkit on [Early Learning and Child Care for All: A tool kit to bring about public policy change](#), developed through this project, provides background information on the state of ELCC in Canada and sets out policy proposals to make licensed child care programs more equitably accessible and inclusive of all children, parents, and child care workers. Additionally, the toolkit provides tips on how to advocate for these changes. The toolkit was presented to participants to spark motivation and ideas for collective actions.

The following are some highlights from the summit discussions on how to make the child care advocacy movement more inclusive.

- 1** There are various ways to showcase the strength of the sector, including letter-writing campaigns, petitions, rallies, and boycotts. Participants stressed the need to increase the number of supporters through outreach and education and to mobilize them to take action for equitable, accessible ELCCs, and to particularly pay attention to the voices who are currently missing from these conversations.
- 2** Participants spoke about being intentionally inclusive and mindful of who is invited to participate in collective actions knowing that educators and parents are already stretched thin through work and family responsibilities. They cautioned that this work must be done by creating spaces that build up people and relationships before inviting them to take action. Of course, actions must be decided in an inclusive way.
- 3** The movement should tap into the power of parents who currently do not have access to child care. An example of this is for ELCC programs to use waitlists as a communication tool to invite parents who face challenges in accessing child care into advocacy activities.
- 4** When influencing government, it is strategic to tailor messaging to the priorities of governments. An example of this is making a strong case between child care access and economic growth which would draw governments' attention.

5 It was highlighted that the BC \$10/day child care campaign was successful due to its simple message to draw people in and help them quickly understand what's needed. However, it is important to clarify that \$10 is the maximum, not average, with a sliding scale starting at \$0 for those with low incomes.

6 Child care advocates from across the country need more opportunities, nationally and locally, to connect and determine common recommendations and strategies to be aligned nationally while still honouring unique challenges/experiences. Local networking opportunities are key.

7 Participants also discussed how to bring parents who are not getting what they need from the current system to these policy tables and discussions, to collectively envision a system that will include them.

8 All agreed that more research and data is needed to monitor and evaluate the national child care system as it is rolled out. The Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care should be pressed to prioritize data collection at federal and provincial levels and to engage in consultations with civil society.

9 Participants called on each other to hold each other accountable for taking action to win equitable access to child care, to stay connected and to keep each other informed.

10 Participants agreed that there is much more need to meaningfully involve First Nations, Inuit, Métis peoples, parents with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQ+ communities in policy discussions and influencing through compensated, proactive, on-going consultations.



Markus Spiske-Unsplash

