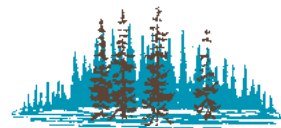


Engaging Alberta Municipal Level Governments in Support of Early Learning and Care



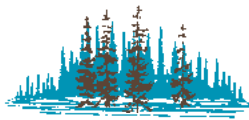
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Introduction

Over the last decade, Alberta, in common with other Canadian provinces and territories, has introduced initiatives to increase both the quality and quantity of early learning and care services for children below the mandatory school age and their families¹. These initiatives, and the public investments to support them, have come at the same time as the demand for services has increased and the expectations for what early learning and care might achieve have risen.

And yet in Alberta, as in the rest of Canada, early learning and care services continue, in the main, to be organized, funded and delivered in ways that limit their contribution to individual and community well-being. Despite the growing body of research on the benefits that flow from a more systematic approach to the delivery of services, with higher levels of public management and financing, Alberta, in common with other provinces and territories, relies on a mixed market of public, private-for-profit and not-for-profit providers for the organization, funding and delivery of services (Muttart Foundation et al, 2013; Penn, 2013; White and Friendly, 2012; OECD, 2006). The result is a complicated mix of services, many of a modest quality, that are unevenly distributed and not well-connected or organized at the local, regional and provincial levels.

The main purpose of the current paper is to raise questions and generate discussion on the possible roles Alberta municipal level governments might play, and

¹ Early learning and care in the current paper includes those programs and services for children below the mandatory school age that include the elements of physical care and education. In Alberta, these services include centre-based child care, preschool and family day home services provided under the Ministry of Human Services and Early Childhood Services (including kindergarten) provided under the Ministry of Education.

the responsibilities they might take on, to advance early learning and care² (ELC) in the province with a focus on the greater public management, planning and delivery of child care services.

To date, municipal level governments have largely been absent from discussions of how to advance early learning and care both in Alberta and beyond. This omission, while it reflects the limited roles they currently play, remains at odds with the arguments advanced by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and others for decentralizing the management and planning of early learning and care to a local level (OECD, 2004; Jenson and Mahon, 2002). It further overlooks the historic roles Alberta municipalities, at least, played in the development and delivery of child care services (Muttart Foundation, 2011; Langford, 2011).

The growing urbanization of Alberta, and Canada, means that small, medium and large urban centres are increasingly the places in which families seek out and access early learning and care services. The importance of place in social policy, and the understanding that it is at the local level that service delivery and integration takes place, demands an appropriate balance of decision-making and authority that reconciles centralized interests in consistency and equity with decentralized concerns around local needs and conditions. As Mahon and Jensen (2006) observe ‘cities matter’, and it is, therefore, important to at least consider how municipal governments might participate more fully in the management, planning and delivery of early learning and care in partnership with the provincial and federal governments.

² The paper concentrates on early learning and care for children below compulsory elementary school age, which is generally age six in Canada. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that good quality, affordable services for the six to twelve year old age group are also in short supply in most of Canada.

The paper includes three main sections. The first provides a brief overview of the organization, funding and delivery of early learning and care in Canada and Alberta. The second describes the limited roles municipal governments play in supporting early learning and care across Canada, as well as those they previously played in Alberta. The final section outlines the rationale for municipal government involvement in early learning and care, summarizes the context for a greater level of municipal engagement in Alberta and presents some options for the roles and responsibilities municipal governments might play to advance the field.

The options presented are not prescriptive; nor are they intended to serve as recommendations. Rather, they are ideas for consideration that draw on what remains a relatively under-developed area of policy research, with a limited number of current and previous Canadian examples to examine or explore.

The historic relationships between Canadian municipalities and the provincial and federal levels of government have not supported strong roles for municipal governments in either the development of social policy or the design and delivery of social infrastructure (Bradford, 2002) - including early learning and care (Mahon, 2014). And, while there are signs that these relationships may be subject to some rethinking, if not significant change, there is much that remains unconsidered and unresolved (Graham and Andrew, 2014). As Jenson and Mahon (2002) observe, however, the barriers to change may be political rather than constitutional, speaking to the influences of history and culture in shaping how potentially larger roles and responsibilities for municipal governments are considered and evaluated.



An Overview of Early Learning and Care in Canada and Alberta

Early Learning and Care in Canada

Perhaps more than any other, the term “patchwork” is used most often to describe the state of early learning and care in Canada. The use of this term reflects the largely incremental ways in which services have emerged in the absence of a national policy framework. The parallel absence of comprehensive approaches or frameworks at the provincial/territorial level – the level of government with primary responsibility for early learning and care – has contributed to further differences in how services are organized and delivered both within and between provinces (Muttart Foundation, 2010). The result is a patchwork of services that remains only loosely connected and which, for the most part, lacks a greater sense of integration or whole. Families’ access to early learning and care varies greatly, and is shaped, amongst other things, by where they live, the age and developmental level of their children and their household income rather than by their needs.

In comparison to public education, and to investments in early childhood education and care in other OECD countries, public funding for early learning and care in Canada remains low. Outside of kindergarten, which is available for all five-year olds (and all four-year olds in Ontario), parents, for the most part, have no entitlement to early learning and care for their pre-school age children. While there are targeted, publicly funded services for children under five years of age (such as Early Childhood Services (ECS) in Alberta and pre-kindergarten in Saskatchewan), these set out to address either an individual child’s disability or delay or the larger economic or social vulnerabilities families and their children face, and are not accessible to all children and their families.

In the absence of significant public investment, one of the defining characteristics of Canadian early learning and care, outside of kindergarten (and junior kindergarten in Ontario), remains the primary reliance on markets to organize, finance and deliver the services young children and their families require (White and Friendly, 2012). Families, voluntary organizations and private businesses assume much of the responsibility for child care services, with provincial and territorial governments playing regulatory and more limited funding roles.

Some researchers argue that the weak state of early learning and care policy, and the accompanying limited public investments, encourage a reliance on market models despite research findings that highlight the benefits that flow from public funding and management (see, for example, Beach and Ferns, 2015; Penn, 2013). As a result, families’ access to high-quality, affordable and accessible child care is limited given the challenges market models face in delivering services that meet the complex care and early learning needs of young children and their families (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2011; Friendly and Prentice, 2009; OECD, 2004).

Thus, despite increases in provincial investments, early learning and care for children below kindergarten age remains in short supply across Canada and even in Quebec, the province with the highest current levels of public investment. Nationally, there are regulated full-time child care and part-time (preschool) centre-based spaces³ for

³ Most provinces/territories provide preschool or nursery school programs (part-time) for children below kindergarten age as part of centre-based child care provision. All jurisdictions also provide regulated home child care (day homes) but these numbers are not available by age categories. See Friendly et al, 2015, Table 1.

only 24 percent of 0-5 year olds. This despite the fact that the majority of parents of young children are now in the workforce (national labour force participation rates for mothers of preschool age children are in the region of 70 percent) and presumably require access to some form of non-parental care for much of the working day (Friendly, et al, 2015).

Regulated child care services (outside of Quebec) are often out of the financial reach of the families who need them. Parent fee subsidy regimes, at provincial and territorial levels, are frequently insufficient to meet the needs of the lower-income families eligible to access them; while the cost of regulated child care places a significant financial burden on many middle-income families as well (MacDonald and Klinger, 2015; MacDonald and Friendly, 2014).

There are further questions about the quality of much of the regulated child care families access - which a number of researchers consider below the level required to support 'educational' benefits for children. In large measure, concerns around quality are linked to the low levels of public investment, minimal educational requirements for staff and the primary reliance on markets to organize and deliver services. The result is a modestly educated, undervalued, and poorly supported workforce, that is almost entirely female (Beach, 2013), and often ill-equipped (outside of publicly funded school-based programs) for the demanding work they undertake (Flanagan et al, 2013; Halfon and Langford, 2015). There are limited public investments in workforce planning and staff development (Muttart Foundation, 2014), high rates of staff turnover and often shortages of qualified staff to work in regulated child care settings (Fairholm and Davis, 2013; Fairholm, 2009).

Finally, both publicly funded kindergarten and privately purchased child care services are often unable to meet the increasingly varied nature of parents' work and family needs. Parents of young children struggle to balance the demands of work inside and outside of the home with those of raising a family, with early learning and care services commonly not designed, funded or delivered to meet these parents' needs. There are shortages of regulated child care services in many rural and remote communities and few services that can accommodate the care needs of parents who work non-standard hours (see, for example, Muttart Foundation et al, 2013a; UNICEF, 2008; ChildCare2020 Steering Committee, 2014; Ferns & Friendly, 2015; Friendly, 2015; Macdonald and Klinger, 2015). The result is additional demands and stresses on already overburdened, busy, and sometimes isolated parents and families.



Early Learning and Care in Alberta

The organization, funding and delivery of early learning and care in Alberta has much in common with that of other provinces and Canada as a whole. The landscape of services has evolved over time with services from the tradition of caring for young children while their parents work or undertake education or training expanding and coming together with those from early education, with a focus on preparation for formal schooling, without the guidance of a larger policy framework or design (Muttart Foundation, 2010; Muttart Foundation et al, 2013).

Early learning and care services in Alberta are the responsibility of two ministries. The Ministry of Human Services has jurisdiction over child care services (comprising full-time centre-based care, family day homes and part-time pre-school programs), as well as out-of-school child care programs for school-aged children up to age 12, while the Ministry of Education has responsibility for Early Childhood Services (ECS). ECS include part-day kindergarten for all five-year-olds as well as publicly funded services for those children from two-and-a-half years of age to five who have an identified special need or who require additional supports.

As in other provinces, there are significant differences in the funding and delivery of 'child care' and 'early education' (ECS). Child care is financed through parent fees with public investments covering a portion of accredited program costs (including staff wage enhancements) and providing fee subsidies for families with lower household incomes.

Alberta invests just over \$300 million in public funding for child care – approximately 60 percent of which is allocated to parent fee subsidies (Ferns and Friendly, 2014). Over the last decade, provincial investments have increased by close to 50 percent tracking, in large measure, the rise in the number of preschool-age children over the same period (Government of Alberta, 2015). There are regulated child care spaces (full-time centre-based, part-time preschool, and approved family day homes) for around one in three children below the mandatory school-age (Friendly et al, 2015).

Families purchase child care services directly from private for-profit businesses and non-profit community organizations and have no entitlement to service. Just over half of centre-based child care is provided by for-profit businesses (Friendly et al, 2015), with a recent increase in the services provided through large private and publicly traded companies. The YMCA is the single largest provider of child care services in the province. A small number of municipalities and school divisions also either support or provide pre-school, full-day child care and out-of-school care services (Muttart Foundation, 2011; Boodt and Farebrother, 2015).

Around 45 percent of the child care workforce hold a two-year early learning and child care diploma qualification or its equivalent (Muttart Foundation, 2014) while 40 percent hold an introductory qualification (having completed a 54-hour child care orientation course, five high school courses or a 45-hour (3 credit) college/university-level course related to child development). The median wage rates for early childhood educators are either higher or similar to those of equivalent staff in other provinces (the median hourly wage for staff holding a two-year diploma or equivalent after the accreditation wage enhancement is \$22.98) (Government of Alberta, 2015a).

Early Childhood Services (ECS) under the Ministry of Education are publicly funded and delivered through public, charter and private schools – as well as approved, private non-profit service providers (Friendly, Halfon, Beach and Forer, 2013). All children are entitled to attend a part-day kindergarten program in the year prior to school entry. An estimated one in eight kindergarten-aged children attend full-day programs that are funded through local school divisions with public and private philanthropic support. Children two-and-a-half years of age and over with special needs or delays are eligible to receive ECS from approved providers. An estimated 12,000 children access some level of specialized ECS.

Early Childhood Services are delivered by certificated teachers who hold a four-year degree qualification and educational assistants who hold diploma-level qualifications. Certificated teachers and the educational assistants who work in ECS programs are not required to hold a specialization in early childhood education. Salaries for certificated teachers are significantly higher than those of early childhood educators and their working environments are generally better resourced and supported.

Over the last decade, the Alberta government has sought to increase both the quantity and quality of early learning and care services driven by early childhood development and economic (labour force participation) arguments (Government of Alberta, 2006 and 2013). It has consulted stakeholders on how to more closely integrate services to better meet the needs of children and their families (Muttart Foundation et al, 2013a, Government of Alberta, 2013a); supported the development and demonstration of a common curriculum framework to shape practice across early learning and care settings; and sponsored a small-scale demonstration project to explore how the services supported through different ministries can be more closely integrated (Boodt and Farebrother, 2015).



Municipal Level Governments and Early Learning and Care

Municipal level governments across Canada play limited roles in the support or delivery of early learning and care. The provinces' jurisdiction over education and social services leaves municipal level governments (outside of Ontario) without mandated roles or responsibilities for the oversight or management of services, while the reliance on markets for the financing and delivery of child care presents them with organizational and funding barriers to overcome should they choose to take on more discretionary ones. This was not always the case in a small number of provinces, including Alberta.

Up until the 1960s, much of the limited public support for child care took place at the local level, with voluntary organizations and some municipal governments involved in the organization and delivery of services (Jenson and Mahon, 2002). While early education programs (kindergarten) were readily incorporated into publicly funded provincial education systems, and delivered through school boards, child care (social welfare services) was commonly organized at the community level until the introduction of a national welfare program, the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP), in 1966⁴.

The Canada Assistance Plan represented a major shift in policy to involve provincial governments in the provision of basic 'social welfare' services that were to be cost-shared with the federal government. Under the CAP, provincial governments had considerable discretion in how to support local services which resulted in differing public investments in a range of services including child care. This discretion was further extended when the federal government

cancelled the CAP in 1996 and replaced it with the Canada Health and Social Transfer.

While the intent of the CAP was not to remove municipal levels of government from the provision of social services (including child care), its structural engagement of the two 'senior levels' of government (Jenson and Mahon, 2002) resulted, over time, in almost all of the provinces assuming direct control of social services. As a result, municipal governments involved in supporting child care largely withdrew from the area (as they did from other social services as well) and provincial governments assumed responsibility for supporting and funding child care services based on their assessments of community needs and their determination of how best to meet these needs through a balancing of public and private responsibilities and costs. The federal government continued to play a more passive funding role, although it retained responsibility for services for many Aboriginal children and their families.

Municipal levels of government in two provinces remained actively engaged in the organization and delivery of child care services (Alberta and Ontario) after the introduction of the CAP in 1966, while in Manitoba the interest remained more passive. Subsequent federal and provincial policy changes resulted in municipal governments ending their interest in the field in Manitoba and significantly reducing their roles and support in Alberta.

Ontario stands out as the only province in which municipal levels of government have a mandated role for the planning, management and funding of early learning and care (specifically child care services). Municipal level governments in Alberta and Saskatchewan, as well as those in the Metro Vancouver region, play more limited, discretionary roles in support of child care services;

⁴ CAP was subsequently amended and expanded in 1972 to strengthen the provision for child care.

although these roles lack the stable financing and formal institutional support that comes with a mandated authority. Thus, while the demand for child care services continues to increase, and the importance of high-quality early learning and care is more widely understood, municipal level governments across Canada play only modest roles in supporting services at the local or community level (Jenson and Mahon, 2002).

Taking into account the above policy changes and their impact on local service landscapes, the following sections briefly describe the roles Alberta municipalities currently play (and formerly played) in the organization and delivery of child care, outline the unique mandated roles and responsibilities of Ontario municipal level governments and provide further examples of municipal support for child care from Saskatchewan and the City of Vancouver. Looking ahead, these descriptions provide some possible points of reference for rethinking how Alberta municipal governments might more actively support early learning and care at the local or regional level.

Municipal Leadership and Support for Child Care in Alberta

Beginning in the 1970s and continuing through to the 1990s, Alberta municipalities played important leadership roles in developing and supporting high-quality child care services across the province (Muttart Foundation, 2011). This leadership was made possible through the alignment of the provisions of the provincial *Preventive Social Services Act* (PSS) with those of the federal Canada Assistance Plan (CAP), both introduced in 1966, which supported the development and financing of child care (social welfare) services as a shared provincial-municipal responsibility.

The PSS Act provided municipal level governments with the opportunity (but not the statutory obligation) to develop and support approved preventive social services (including child care) administered and delivered by either the municipality or a non-profit organization. The costs of eligible, provincially approved services were shared between the three levels government (municipal 20 percent, provincial 30 percent and federal 50 percent).



The positive response of municipal level governments to the opportunities presented through the PSS Act and the CAP led to the development of more than 60 municipally operated or supported preventive social service child care centres by the mid-1970s (Langford, 2011; Muttart Foundation, 2011). Municipally delivered or supported child care services were established in the major centres of Edmonton and Calgary as well as the secondary centres of Medicine Hat, Red Deer and Grande Prairie. Municipally supported child care centres, as well as family day homes, were also introduced in a number of smaller communities including Hythe and Beaverlodge in the northwest and Claresholm and Coaldale in the southern regions of the province. The City of Edmonton was the largest supporter of municipal child care during this period, funding up to 18 municipally approved centres. The City of Calgary supported up to 15 municipal centres as well as six family child care programs (Langford, 2011; Mahon, 2014).

Towards the end of the 1970s, the Alberta government changed its approach to child care. In response to the growing demand for services, increasing pressures on PSS funds and calls for access to public funding support from private for-profit child care providers (Langford, 2011; Jenson and Mahon, 2002), the province made child care ineligible for funding under the PSS Act and consolidated its own role in the administration and regulation of child care services (through *The Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, 1978*). As part of a series of changes during this time, the province centralized the regulatory and financial responsibility for child care (assuming full responsibility for fee subsidy funding) and introduced an operating allowance⁵ (base funding) for both non-profit and for-profit services⁶ (Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2009). The latter had the effect of supporting the rapid expansion of for-profit child care providers, particularly in the larger urban centres, to meet the growing demand for service (Langford, 2011).

The provincial government's consolidation of its authority over child care, and the accompanying changes to legislation, effectively ended the decade-old provincial-municipal partnership for preventive social service child care. Instead, the provincial government moved toward supporting child care as a private market-based service which parents purchased directly from licensed or approved service providers. Provincial funding was allocated to cover

a portion of the costs of service delivery and to provide lower income families with fee subsidies (Langford, 2011; Muttart Foundation, 2011; Jenson and Mahon, 2002). These changes largely removed the financial capacity of municipal level governments to develop, support and deliver child care services in response to community needs, and repositioned them as potential service providers or supporters of services, on a similar footing with private non-profit and for-profit organizations.

The municipalities of Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Red Deer and Medicine Hat responded to these changes by seeking continued federal funding for child care under the terms of the CAP. And, after initially covering the full costs of municipal child care services (Thomson, 1985), they reached an agreement with the federal and provincial governments in 1983 to receive a share of CAP child care funds directly. Under this new arrangement, the municipalities negotiated a "flow-through" provision,⁷ (Jenson & Mahon, 2002) which allowed them to receive federal funds without an accompanying provincial contribution. This resulted in municipal governments sharing the costs of eligible preventive child care services with the federal government in a 50/50 funding partnership. The municipalities then directed these public monies to high-quality child care services for eligible families, which exceeded provincial licensing requirements, resulting in municipally supported or operated centres becoming known as 'model child care centres' or 'lighthouse' services (Langford, 2011).

Some ten years after the province ended its formal partnership with municipalities to support preventive social service child care, there were still some 30 municipally supported child care programs across the province. While the majority continued to receive funding support through the CAP, until its replacement by the Canada Health and Social Transfer in 1996, a combination of the challenges of covering an increased share of service costs (50 percent compared to the previous 20 percent under the federal/provincial/municipal cost sharing agreement), local political pressures to dedicate resources to areas of municipal jurisdiction, and provincial cut-backs to municipal grants led to the conclusion of municipal support for the former PSS child care centres by the end of the 1990s (Mahon, 2014; Muttart Foundation, 2011; Langford, 2011; Jenson and Mahon, 2002).

⁵ A Calgary Herald article (1986) described how a child care business could make a profit of more than 100% in Alberta's generous funding and broad regulation regime at the time.

⁶ These were reduced in 1998 and eliminated in 1999.

⁷ This "flow-through" arrangement was unique to Alberta; all other CAP funds were paid to provincial governments.

Since the end of the legislative and financial arrangements that enabled municipal governments to develop, support and deliver preventive child care services, a number of smaller Alberta municipalities have developed their own municipally supported or operated child care services. Today, this includes the towns of Beaumont (which opened its child care centre in 1980), Jasper (which opened its centre in the early 1980s), Drayton Valley (which opened its centre in 2008) as well as the Municipal District of Opportunity (which opened its first municipally supported program in 2009).

These municipally supported or operated services have expanded since their inception to include a regulated day home agency in Drayton Valley as well as out-of-school care and additional centre-based spaces in the other three communities. While each municipal level government supports early learning and care in a different way, they all see child care as an important piece of their local social infrastructure. In three of the four municipalities (Drayton Valley, Jasper and the Municipal District of Opportunity), the municipal government moved to introduce licensed child care because of the absence or critical shortage of regulated services. In these communities the demands of providing high-quality, affordable child care could not be met through a market model with additional public investments required both to develop and sustain regulated services. Despite municipal investments, regulated child care remains in short supply in each of these three communities.

Municipal Management, Planning and Delivery of Child Care Services in Ontario

The role of municipal governments in child care has, over the years, become most developed in Ontario. Across the province, 47 municipal regions are the designated child care ‘system managers’ with responsibility for the planning and management of services at the local level (Government of Ontario, 2015). These municipal regions (classified as either Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) or District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs)) also share a portion of child care costs with the province. As recently as 2007, around half of the CMSMs and DSSABs delivered services through centres or family child care agencies which they directly operated, although the number of these services has declined over the last decade. The mandated roles Ontario municipal levels of government have for the oversight of social services (including child care) make the province “a clear outlier” in Canada.

Ontario is the only province in which the provincial level of government delegates authority and responsibility to the municipal level for the management and planning of child care services, albeit while, for the most part, retaining control over the allocation of provincial funding (Jenson and Mahon, 2001).

The involvement of Ontario municipalities in child care dates back to World War II when development of services began in earnest with the introduction of the first federal child care funding. The *Dominion-Provincial War Time Agreement* provided the provinces with a 50/50 cost-sharing arrangement with the federal government to deliver child care services for those children whose mothers were working in essential wartime industries. Quebec and Ontario were the only two provinces to participate in the agreement with most of the Ontario centres located in Toronto. While most were municipal a few were charitable (Friendly, 1995).

Although the federal government terminated its funding for child care at the end of the war, the province agreed to retain many of the centres after a strong regional lobby for their continued operation. The subsequent *Ontario Day Nurseries Act* in 1946 introduced a regulatory framework for services and established a cost-sharing mechanism that enabled municipal level governments and the provincial government to share the cost of services on a 50/50 basis (Friendly, 2011; Prentice, 1996). The supply of cost-shared municipally supported and operated child care services increased further with the introduction of the CAP in 1966 which included capital funding for the addition of new centres.

The mandated service management and planning roles Ontario municipal level governments have for child care (kindergarten and junior kindergarten remain the responsibility of local school boards) were introduced through the *Local Service Realignment Act* in 1998 (Province of Ontario, 1998). The Act established the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) system which gives Ontario municipal levels of government responsibility for social assistance, social housing and child care as well as other local services (Z.Spicer, 2015).

The provincial government’s rationale for shifting authority for social services to the municipal level included the goal of ‘disentangling’ areas of confused policy responsibility between the provincial and municipal levels of government (Siegel, 2005), as well as an interest in supporting more integrated service delivery administered at the local level (Province of Ontario, 1999). Other interpretations of these changes, however, highlight a political agenda to

‘download’ a greater share of the responsibility and costs for social services to the local level of government, thus enabling the provincial government to reduce its own expenditures during a period of provincial deficits (Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 1997; Z.Spicer, 2015).

As part of the transfer of responsibility, the province provided the newly created municipal regions and districts with some flexibility in how social services might be funded and delivered – although this flexibility did not extend to child care. Consistent with the arguments of downloading, however, the province required that municipal level governments assume any additional service costs that arose as a result of the change (Graham and Phillips, 1998).

The 47 service administration units (CMSMs and DSSABs) established under the *Local Service Realignment Act* were drawn up to align with existing jurisdictional boundaries. In many cases, larger cities or urban centres formed the geographic bases for CMSMs. In others, however, particularly in the northern regions of the province, smaller municipalities, towns and counties were amalgamated into



single administrative units (DSSABs) with one municipal government assuming the role of service manager⁸. The amalgamation of smaller centres into new service regions was not without challenge, as previously separate municipal governments and surrounding counties were required to develop their own agreements for the distribution and funding of services (Sancton, 2000; Z.Spicer, 2015).

Under the Municipal Service Management model, the 37 CMSMs and 10 DSSABs are responsible for child care funding administration and a share of service costs, service planning and service management. As designated system managers (under *The Day Nurseries Act*⁹), they manage the public financing of child care, undertake planning for regulated child care services (as well as related services such as resourcing for special needs children and family resource programs) and administer the supply of services, which for some of the system managers includes municipally operated centre-based and regulated home child care. The Ministry of Education has for some time provided guidelines, recently incorporated into regulation, that outline municipal roles and responsibilities with regard to child care (Government of Ontario, 2015), the main features of which are described below.

Municipal Funding Roles and Responsibilities

CMSMs and DSSABs administer the public financing for non-profit, for-profit and municipally operated child care services. They also, in almost all municipal regions or districts, cost share service and administration costs. The cost-sharing arrangements follow the previous CAP model, in the main, for service costs (a 20 percent municipal cost share to the province’s 80 percent share) with a 50/50 sharing of administration costs.

CMSMs and DSSABs now receive provincial funding based on regional population data including the number of children below four years of age, the number of children between four and 12 years of age, the number of families with incomes below the Low Income Cut-off (LICO) and measures of population educational attainment (Government of Ontario, 2015). The funding includes three main allocations: Core Services Delivery, Special Purpose and Capital. Around 80 percent of the funding is allocated

⁸ Z.Spicer’s 2015 analysis outlines the difficulties including legal challenges created by the provincial government’s amalgamation and downloading in a process plagued by weak implementation and limited local consultation.

⁹ *The Day Nurseries Act* has been replaced by *The Child Care and Early Years Act*, 2014 as child care has been moved to the Ministry of Education; regulations to accompany the legislation are under development.

through the Core Services Delivery component which covers operational funding supports for approved service providers and fee subsidies for eligible parents. The Special Purpose allocation supports services in either unique regions or for specified populations and municipal service regions are not required to share these costs. The Capital allocation is for the maintenance of approved child care facilities and related infrastructure costs.

Up until 2014, the CMSMs and DSSABs were required to allocate provincial funds to closely prescribed categories. In 2015, under its “modernizing child care” initiative, the provincial government introduced the above three broader funding allocations which provide CMSMs and DSSABs with more discretion in their use of funding. Outside of these funding arrangements, the province has recently introduced wage enhancements for early childhood educators which service managers must allocate according to specific terms and conditions.

One of the key funding and administrative roles municipal level governments perform is that of managing the fee subsidy program using the provincial income test (parents are income-tested by the municipality). While the provincial government sets the criteria for parent or family eligibility for a fee subsidy, and which services are eligible to receive subsidized families, system managers can further define the operation of the subsidy program. For example, several municipal regions have restricted service contracts so as not to provide subsidies to new for-profits, while some require an annual line-by-line budget from the non-profit and for-profit contracted providers delivering subsidized child care. Municipal regions or districts also differ in the maximum amount of fee subsidy they provide.

Municipal Planning Roles and Responsibilities

In 2000, child care service planning became a mandated activity for CMSMs and DSSABs as part of their service management roles and responsibilities. The provincial government had previously outlined service planning roles in a policy paper, which the cities of Toronto and Ottawa significantly developed and advanced following local research and analysis (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1981). There was, thus, some precedent for the extension of this role to municipal level governments.

CMSMs and DSSABs are required to plan child care services through a regional (or local) planning process consistent with provincial regulations and any directives established through the Ministry of Education.

In conjunction with the recently introduced *Child Care Modernization Act, 2014*, the Ministry of Education has indicated its intention to seek input from CMSMs and DSSABs on the nature of future service planning processes including their form, content and timing (Government of Ontario, 2015).

Across the province, there is some variation in both the level and nature of service planning. In some CMSMs, such as the City of Toronto and the Regional Municipality of Waterloo, system managers have well-developed service plans, based on significant stakeholder consultation, that provide direction on the development, funding and support of services. These plans identify regional service needs and gaps and identify service priorities¹⁰. In others, including both larger and smaller regions, the service planning process is less well-developed.

Municipal Service Delivery Roles and Responsibilities

The third mandated responsibility for municipal levels of government is to manage service delivery in accordance with child care legislation, supporting regulations and directives (priority setting) provided through the Ministry of Education. In addition, some CMSMs and DSSABs also have responsibility for the management of family support programs (Government of Ontario, 2015).

A number of municipal governments operate child care centres and home child care agencies. In these instances, the CMSM or DSSAB is the license holder and the employer of the child care staff—essentially the service “owner”. Over time, the proportion of child care spaces delivered through municipally operated centres has declined. The federal government’s annual Status of Day Care in Canada (published from 1973 to 1992) reported 7,574 public child care spaces, or 21% of total Ontario centre spaces in 1980 as compared to a higher number but lower proportion in 1998 (18,143 spaces or 11 percent of the 167,090 spaces across the province) (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2000). More recently, following changes in provincial funding for CMSMs and DSSABs, the number of

10 Examples of several recent service plans can be found at <https://www1.toronto.ca/City%20of%20Toronto/Children's%20Services/Divisional%20Profile/Planning/Service%20Plan/pdf/CS-ServicePlan-2015-2019.pdf> (City of Toronto) and http://communityservices.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/childrensServices/resources/DOCS_ADMIN-1257452-v1-2012-2015_CHILDREN_S_SERIVCES_EARLY_LEARNING_AND_CHILD_CARE_SERVICE_PLAN_EXECUTIVE_SUMMARY.PDF (Region of Waterloo).



municipally operated child care spaces has further declined as municipal governments have sought to reallocate or reduce their own costs in supporting the delivery of services. There were an estimated 5,839 municipal child care spaces operational in 2014¹¹.

Some municipalities—notably Toronto—have introduced their own initiatives to raise revenues for municipal child care through the use of Community Benefit Contributions (under Section 37 of Ontario’s *Planning Act*) as well as long-term, in-kind contributions in commercial developments. These initiatives have enabled the City to increase the supply of non-profit child care in its urban core; although the level of supply still falls significantly short of the demand both for available spaces and for fee subsidies.

11 Childcare Resource and Research Unit (1998, 2010, 2012 data and 2014 estimate) municipally operated child care centre spaces in Ontario; 1998 – 18,143; 2010 – 10,230; 2012 – 7,192; 2014 – 5,839)

Municipal Government Support for Child Care in Other Provinces

Outside of Alberta and Ontario, municipal levels of government have played (and continue to play) more limited roles in support of child care. Currently, Saskatchewan is the only other province that explicitly permits municipalities to hold child care centre licenses. Nova Scotia and Quebec previously also allowed municipalities to hold licenses with the City of Verdun, Quebec (now part of Montreal) operating a municipal centre in the mid-1980s (Thomson, 1985). Both provinces have subsequently removed these provisions.

Municipal Child Care Delivery in Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, municipally operated or supported child care centres make up a small portion of the province’s close to 300 licensed non-profit child care centres (Friendly et al, 2015). They are located in the small, rural centres of the Village of Vibank, the Town of Carnduff and the Village of Hazlet. All three of the centres were developed with the support of the local municipal level government.

The first municipally supported centre opened in the Village of Vibank in 1993, which is located southeast of Regina. It serves the local community and surrounding residents, a number of whom commute to Regina. The Town of Carnduff municipal centre serves local families and those in surrounding communities who work in oil service industries and agriculture. The Village of Hazlet Early Learning Centre serves similar populations in the rural municipality of Pittville. In addition to the above, a small number of other rural municipal level governments have also supported the operation or development of non-profit child care centres through planning support, assistance with facility construction and/or the leasing of space at a reduced cost. In two further cases, a municipal level government was the initial license holder for a child care centre, responsibility for the operation of which was subsequently transferred to a community non-profit organization.

The Ministry of Education, which has jurisdiction over child care (as well as kindergarten and pre-kindergarten delivered through the public education system), treats municipalities in the same way as other eligible license holders. Municipal level governments do not perform the local management or service planning roles mandated as part of the Ontario service management model, nor are they eligible to cost-share service or planning costs with the

provincial government. Municipal child care services are thus discretionary services that local governments develop and deliver to meet community needs, often with some form of municipal support. The municipal level governments which operate or support child care centres view them as important social and economic infrastructure which helps both to attract and retain families with young children.

Municipal Child Care Leadership in the City of Vancouver

In British Columbia, as in the other provinces (with the exception of Ontario), the licensing, funding and oversight of child care services are the responsibility of the provincial government. The City of Vancouver, however, has chosen to work actively with other local elected bodies and community partners to plan, coordinate, support and advocate for child care and other related early learning programs and services (Mahon, 2014; City of Vancouver, 2015). While the City's assumption of these roles and responsibilities sets it apart from other major urban centres across Canada, in the larger Metro Vancouver Region a number of municipalities also support child care services through planning and development strategies (N.Spicer, 2015).

Vancouver's support for child care was given formal shape in 1990, when the City Council endorsed a civic child

care strategy, developed by the Vancouver Children's Advocate. Prior to this date, the City had supported child care through individual initiatives including the installation of portable structures for child care on city-owned land and the provision of facility space for non-profit child cares at nominal rates.

The civic child care strategy committed the City to become an "active partner" with the senior levels of government and early learning and care stakeholders in the "development and maintenance of a comprehensive child care system in Vancouver" (Griffen, 1992, P.97). As part of this commitment, the City has introduced a series of strategies to develop and enhance child care services supported through its Social Planning Department. These strategies involve collaboration with other local levels of government (including the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation and the Vancouver Board of Education) as well as community organizations.

In 2002, Vancouver City Council approved a policy document to guide the City's work in support of child care: *'Moving Forward'. Childcare: A Cornerstone of Child Development Services* (City of Vancouver, Social Planning Department, 2002). The *Moving Forward* report emphasized the role child care could play as the 'cornerstone' upon which other services and programs supporting child development might be based. It outlined what it described



as a 'more holistic and integrated approach' to services for young children and their families, seeking to build on the existing facilities and expertise already in place in child care to develop a continuum of services for families and children. The report was approved by City Council after significant community and stakeholder consultation and support.

In 2004, the City established the Joint Childcare Council to provide leadership and planning support for the development of 'accessible, affordable, quality child care spaces'. The Council membership includes officials and staff from the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation and the Vancouver Board of Education as well as representatives from the early learning and care community and the Vancouver Public Library (Mahon, 2014; City of Vancouver, 2016). In conjunction with establishing the Council, the City developed a joint civic childcare protocol to expand the supply of child care spaces. The protocol set out a framework for increasing child care spaces with a focus on building a continuum of services. City Council initially committed to a five percent increase in child care spaces over the first two years of the protocol, while the most recently updated expansion target involves the creation of 1,000 new spaces between 2015 and 2018.

The City's current supports for child care include funding for two non-profit community organizations: The Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre¹², which provides information and resources for families and organizations and the Vancouver Society of Children's Centres (VSOCC), one of the largest non-profit child care providers in the province which serves families in the downtown peninsula area of the City. The City established the VSOCC in 1994 following Council's approval for the formation and administrative support of a single-purpose child care organization to operate city-owned child care facilities located in the downtown area.

The City also provides funding to eligible non-profit child care organizations through a series of granting programs. The grant programs focus on social innovation, child care enhancement, program stabilization, program development and capital projects (City of Vancouver, 2016a). In addition, the City's Community Services Department reviews development applications for new child care facilities against Municipal Child Care Design Guidelines. The Guidelines set standards that exceed provincial licensing requirements to promote the development of higher quality child care centres (City of Vancouver, 2016a).

¹² Westcoast is a non-profit organization that has supported, helped to develop, and provided information and resources for/about community-based non-profit child care in Vancouver since the 1980s.

To increase the supply of high-quality spaces the City has worked with service providers to place non-profit child care centres in City community centres, neighbourhood houses and other public buildings. It has also included purpose-built family child care units in a number of recent affordable housing developments built on city-owned land. These units are reserved for occupancy by licensed family child care providers.

The City finances its child care investments (as well as other social infrastructure investments) in part through land use development planning tools such as Community Amenity Contributions and Development Cost Levies. The City applies Development Cost Levies to all new developments to cover the costs of social infrastructure including non-profit child care while it attaches Community Amenity Contributions to developments that require a rezoning. In return for approval for density increases, for example, the City has received from developers purpose-built child care spaces which are then 'turned over' rent-free to eligible non-profit service operators. Where possible, interested non-profit service providers are involved in the facility design process. The VSOCC operates these City facilitated centres in the downtown area. As a further form of financing, City Council has previously chosen to invest portions of its own budgetary surpluses in its Childcare Reserve with a focus on supporting affordable infant and toddler care (City of Vancouver, 2014).

The City of Vancouver's role as an "active partner" in support of early learning and care and its political, financial and other human resources investments in developing high-quality, affordable and accessible child care sets it apart from most other large urban centres outside of those in Ontario (which have a legislated mandate to support the management, planning and partial funding of early learning and care). The City's support for early learning and care is discretionary and rests, in large measure, on its continuing political commitment to child care as a social and economic priority at the municipal level. While the significant pressures for development in the downtown core and surrounding neighbourhoods have provided the City with the financial means to support its child care strategies, families continue to face challenges in accessing high-quality, affordable and accessible early learning and care across the City and the larger Metro Vancouver Region. In the face of the growing need for child care services, the provincial government's recent modest increases in funding have proven insufficient to meet demand as new developments continue to attract families to the Vancouver region and the costs of delivering high-quality early learning and care rise (Mahon, 2014).



Municipal Government Support for Early Learning and Care in Alberta: Arguments, Opportunities and Options

In Alberta, as in much of Canada, early learning and care policies and practice are the subject of much discussion and attention. The increasing demand for services, matched by the growing understanding of the benefits that flow from high-quality early learning and care, has prompted the provincial government and community stakeholders to examine how to best organize, fund and deliver services for preschool-age children and their families. To date, municipal governments have played only a small part in these discussions. As a result, in the roles they might play to advance services have been largely overlooked, despite Alberta's history of strong municipal leadership in support of child care and the presence of a number of actively engaged municipal level governments (the Towns of Beaumont, Jasper, and Drayton Valley and the Municipal District of Opportunity).

This final section seeks to remedy this oversight through a discussion of three related areas: first, the main arguments for the engagement of municipal level governments in early learning and care; second, the current drivers for change creating opportunities for them to re-engage in the field; and third, the possible forms this re-engagement might take and the roles and responsibilities municipal level governments could assume in partnership with the provincial government and other stakeholders.

Arguments for Municipal Government Engagement in Early Learning and Care

The rationale for municipal level government support of early learning and care draw on two related lines of argument: first, the significant benefits that flow from government support for, and investments in, early learning and care given its value as a public good, with attendant public benefits; and second, the important roles local governments play in ensuring that centrally designed policies are translated into services that meet community needs. While the two arguments are related they are discussed separately below for ease of discussion.

Government Roles and Responsibilities in Support of Early Learning and Care

Across jurisdictions, early learning and care policies and service delivery remain in a 'state of flux' (Lloyd, 2013). Despite the findings from comparative research that highlight the benefits that flow from significant levels of public management and investment, only a small number of Nordic countries have service systems that embody these approaches (OECD, 2001 and 2006). In most jurisdictions, including Canada, there are limits on the public nature of early learning and care and a strong reliance instead on markets to allocate and deliver services, especially for very young children. Governments, at different levels, thus, continue to examine how best to balance public and market-based approaches to early learning and care, with variations both within and between jurisdictions in how services are organized, financed and delivered.

The growing understanding of early learning and care as a public good, with attendant public benefits, is seen by a number of researchers to demand a stronger, more active role for governments and public institutions in shaping how services are organized, financed, managed and delivered (OECD, 2001, 2006 and 2012). Although a more public approach does not preclude the delivery of services through private organizations, nor some reliance on ‘markets’ to shape how access to services is rationalized, it places a greater emphasis on ensuring that all children and their families have equitable access to high-quality, affordable services (Lloyd and Penn, 2013).

Consistent with this analysis, municipal levels of government represent a potentially ‘new’ public partner to help reshape child care markets through the assumption of a number of ‘public’ roles and responsibilities including the management and planning of services as well as their delivery. The engagement of municipal levels of government in these roles, with the support of senior levels of government, has the potential to reduce the instability and variations in families’ access to high-quality services that child care markets generate and to mitigate the risks of market failure (Cleveland, 2008; Jensen and Mahon, 2002; Mahon and Jenson 2006; Penn, 2013).

The ability of municipal level governments to assume these greater roles, however, remains contingent on both their access to new streams of revenue and their development of new administrative powers and capacities. The limited roles Alberta municipal level governments have played in support of early learning and care over the last two or more decades will need to be replaced by more active ones that require a broad degree of political and stakeholder support. The move toward higher levels of public management and planning for early learning and care services represents a significant change from the current mixed child care markets and as a result will require time and resources to implement—in what will be a complex process of change.

The Reconciliation of Policy, Financing and Service Delivery at the Local Level

The second related public argument for the greater engagement of municipal level governments in early learning and care draws on research that examines the relationships between different levels of government in the development of policy and the funding, design and delivery of services. In broad terms, local governments are seen to have the best knowledge of community needs, while the local level is considered the most effective scale at which the integration of services can meaningfully take place

(Bradford, 2002; Jenson and Mahon, 2002; Mahon, 2004; Mahon and Jenson, 2006).

Aligning the centralized design of policy and system-wide planning, undertaken by senior level governments, with the organization and delivery of services at the local level thus becomes one of the central tasks of effective government with differing models proposed for how this might best be achieved (Bradford, 2014; Mueleman, 2008; OECD, 2001a). An acknowledgement of the challenges senior governments face in responding to the increasingly “differentiated” and “spatially-sensitive” needs of local communities in complex areas of service such as early learning and care is common across different models of government, as is the delegation of some decision-making authority to the local level (Mahon and Jenson, 2006, OECD, 2001a and 2004).

The transfer of responsibility for the management or delivery of services from the two senior levels of government to municipal level governments in Canada, including for child care and other social services in Ontario, has been the subject of debate, with some arguments that these transfers have not always been supported by the fiscal resources and enlarged policy capacity local governments require to meet community needs (Siegel, 2005; Slack, 2002; Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2002). The absence of a constitutional standing for municipal level governments has left them reliant, in the main, on provincial and federal governments for the economic and social policies they require to meet the needs of their citizens as well as the financing to implement these policies. And, while municipal governments are considered to have benefitted from ‘relatively comprehensive social programs, infrastructure investments, and metropolitan governance frameworks in the past’ (Bradford, 2002), more recent policy and fiscal changes at the federal and provincial levels are seen to have left some struggling to respond to the diverse and growing needs of their residents (Graham and Andrew, 2014; Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2012; Lidstone, 2001).

Nevertheless, there are examples of federal government support for local government structures, developed under the former ‘New Deal for Communities’, to support community-organized responses to complex social problems (Bradford, 2005 and 2014). Similarly, provincial governments have made parallel efforts to develop and support regional bodies in planning and managing services and their delivery (Mahon and Jenson, 2006). In Alberta, for example, the former Child and Family Service Authorities were charged with managing and planning a range of

social services consistent with provincial policy direction and with provincial funding support, while also remaining responsive to local community needs and input. Although these Authorities have now been replaced by service regions (with less autonomy and decision-making authority), the provincial government continues to support the delivery of preventive social services through partnerships with municipal governments under the *Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) Act*.

Through the FCSS program, participating municipal governments and the provincial government share the costs of eligible services in a 20/80 funding partnership. Central to the FCSS program is the responsibility of the municipal government to identify community needs and to allocate resources based on these needs consistent with the supporting legislation and regulation. Thus, municipal level governments determine how the provincial funding they receive is best allocated at the local level.

While the regional management, planning and support of services is complex in the mixed markets that characterize child care in Alberta, such an approach is championed by a number of commentators (Mahon and Jensen, 2006; Beach and Ferns, 2015), as well as the OECD as part of its 2004 study of early childhood education and care in Canada (OECD, 2004). Indeed, the OECD sees the regional management and planning of services as a key requirement to advance early learning and care. Municipal level governments, with their close proximity to the populations they serve, represent one possible regional or local public body that might manage, plan and support the delivery of early learning and care services - albeit with the appropriate supports (including policy, infrastructure and financing) from the senior levels of government.

Opportunities for Municipal Government Engagement in Early Learning and Care

As previously outlined, municipal governments in Alberta played important roles in the development and support of child care services across the province from the late 1960s into the 1990s. Changes in provincial legislation and funding models, beginning in the late 1970s, and the replacement of the CAP with the Canada Health and Social Transfer in the mid-1990s, however, resulted in the majority of municipal governments discontinuing their support for child care and the move toward a primary reliance on markets to organize and deliver services through non-profit and for-profit organizations (Muttart Foundation, 2011).

Four recent developments in the province, however, suggest possible new opportunities for Alberta municipal governments to re-engage in early learning and care and take on new public roles and responsibilities to support child care services and their delivery.

- The development of a framework agreement between the province and the cities of Edmonton and Calgary for the negotiation of 'Big City Charters';
- The emergence of local or regional interests in early learning and care as part of municipal strategies to address family and child poverty;
- The election of a provincial government in spring 2015 with both a commitment to ensure that quality child care is more accessible and affordable for families and an interest in public services, their support and delivery;
- And, the commitment of the federal Liberal government, elected in fall 2015, to develop and implement a National Early Learning and Child Care Framework based on discussions with the provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples.

These four developments and the possible opportunities they present for municipal level governments are discussed further below.

A Framework Agreement for the Development of Big City Charters

In 2014, the provincial government and the cities of Edmonton and Calgary entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to 'explore options for a legislative

framework' that accommodates the cities' changing needs as major metropolitan centres (Government of Alberta, 2014). The provincial and municipal governments envision the proposed new legislation, supporting regulations and other protocols, reshaping the relationship between the two levels of government. Negotiations on the terms and scope of the new legislative framework are currently ongoing.

The process to develop what are termed 'City Charters' involves three phases of negotiations that include discussions of the terms and provisions of the *Municipal Government Act* as well as the broader relationships between the cities and government ministries. The potential areas for discussion include greater roles and responsibilities for the two cities in social and economic policy. The provincial government has committed to engage or consult with the two cities in provincial-federal negotiations that have a direct impact on the cities themselves, while the province and the cities have further agreed to examine the nature and adequacy of current revenue streams and develop a 'new fiscal framework' that responds to the 'needs and challenges' confronting the three parties.

The above framework agreement provides an opportunity for the two levels of government to consider possible new roles and responsibilities for the cities of Edmonton

and Calgary in support of early learning and care, as well as other areas of social and economic policy currently under provincial jurisdiction. Depending on the interests of the respective parties, the proposed City Charters could include new 'legislated' relationships between the cities and the province that provide for a greater level of municipal oversight and planning of services, as well as new provincial-municipal funding partnerships for service delivery and service infrastructure. To date, the two cities and the provincial government have not publicly shared their interest in considering greater municipal roles and responsibilities in support of early learning and care.

Community Stakeholder Interests in Early Learning and Care

In both Edmonton and Calgary, community interest in early learning and care has recently been raised through the work of groups seeking to reduce or eliminate poverty. In Edmonton, the report of the *EndPoverty Edmonton* Task Force, released in September 2015, identifies three strategies to advance early learning and care. First, the planning and implementation of an early learning and child care system; second, the reduction of barriers for children and their families to access services, including out-of-school care and respite services; and third, advocacy with



the provincial government for culturally sensitive curricula and for standards that require well-educated staff in all early learning and care centres (EndPoverty Edmonton, 2015).

The Task Force, co-chaired by the City of Edmonton Mayor, identified affordable, accessible, high-quality child care as a critical part of the social infrastructure required to eliminate poverty. Since the release of the report, a planning team has worked to identify how the City of Edmonton can advance the report's strategic priorities with the support of other community stakeholders as well as the different levels of government.

In spring 2016, three community partners in Calgary, The First 2000 Days Network, Vibrant Communities Calgary and the Women's Centre of Calgary, received funding to identify strategies to improve families' access to child care services in the city. The three groups came together in response to the challenges families face in accessing high-quality, affordable and accessible early learning and care (Women's Centre of Calgary, 2015). The partners convened a stakeholder group to identify possible strategies to increase families' access to early learning and care services with the results of the stakeholder group's initial discussions scheduled for release in fall, 2016.

The above two initiatives represent community-based efforts to advance early learning and care at the local or regional level. The City of Edmonton is actively engaged in shaping the responses to the Task Force's report, and has committed resources to advance the work. In Calgary, City of Calgary staff are members of the community stakeholder group seeking to develop strategies to advance the field. Both initiatives parallel the more formal discussions underway as part of the Big City Charter negotiations between the two cities and the provincial government.

Provincial Government Support for Early Learning and Care

The election of the provincial NDP government in spring 2015 has also served to elevate the profile of early learning and care. Alberta's first NDP government has indicated its intention to improve families' access to affordable high-quality child care and has begun to consider how to advance this work. Previous Progressive Conservative governments placed a strong focus on early childhood development (Government of Alberta, 2013), starting in 2011 with the election of a new provincial premier, although this focus was reduced somewhat in advance of the provincial election in 2015.

In 2012 and 2013, as part of the development of a provincial social policy framework, the Ministries of Human Services and Education supported a series of meetings of early learning and care stakeholders to examine how best to advance services for young children and their families (Muttart Foundation et al, 2013 and 2013a). The government subsequently released a broad provincial strategy document aimed at advancing early childhood development including a specific focus on support for high-quality early learning and care environments for children and their families (Government of Alberta, 2013).

Arguments for increased public investments in early learning and care, allied with a stronger emphasis on the public management and planning of services, align closely with the current provincial government's interests. There, therefore, appears to be a political opportunity to consider possible larger roles for municipal governments in support of early learning and care, although the challenges of financing, as well as defining and organizing these roles have yet to be addressed.

A National Early Learning and Child Care Framework

The federal Liberal government, elected in October 2015, has committed to work with provincial and territorial governments as well as Indigenous people to develop a new National Early Learning and Child Care Framework (Liberal Party of Canada, 2015). The government argues that the Framework will provide Canadian families with access to affordable, high-quality child care that is flexible and inclusive. The federal budget released in March, 2016 includes \$500 million in new funding to support the strategies identified under the National Framework. The initial release of funds in support of these strategies is scheduled for April 1, 2017.¹³

To date, the federal government has not provided information on the principles or ideas that will guide the National Framework – and is looking to develop these through discussions with the provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples. As part of its fall 2015 election platform, the government positioned its support for ELC within broader social and economic arguments that focus on the financial well-being of middle class and low-income families. This, together with the government's other interests of supporting women's equality and a commitment

¹³ It is noteworthy that municipalities have often had a role in federal infrastructure initiatives.

to “research, evidence-based policy, and best practices in the delivery of early learning and care” provides some possible insights into how it proposes to approach its support for ELC.

A cross-Canada working group of ELC community members, researchers and advocates has drafted a three part “shared framework” to move Canada towards an equitable, accessible, high-quality ELC system. The shared framework, which proposes roles for all levels of government in developing and sustaining “equitable and excellent early childhood education and care (ECEC) for all” (Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, 2016), was shared with the federal minister responsible for early learning and care in early 2016.

To date, possible roles for municipal level governments in supporting early learning and care have not been discussed at the national level. Both the previous federal funding support for municipal early learning and care through the CAP and the current Alberta government’s commitment, as part of the Big City Charter negotiations, to engage the cities of Edmonton and Calgary in federal-provincial discussions, provide an opportunity for some portion of new federal funding identified for early learning and care to be dedicated to municipal level initiatives.

New Roles and Responsibilities for Municipal Governments in Support of Early Learning and Care – Options for Consideration

Drawing on the findings from comparative research, and examples from other service models, this final section outlines some possible options for the engagement of Alberta municipal governments in support of early learning and care – with a specific focus on child care services under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Human Services. The options presented are consistent with a greater level of public management and planning of services, increased public investments in service delivery, and the move, over time, to the closer integration of services at both the provincial and local levels. Some of the options depend on new relationships between the provincial and municipal level governments, such as those contemplated under the framework agreement for Big City Charters. Others require municipal level governments to develop new partnerships with early learning and care stakeholders and school divisions responsible for the organization and delivery of publicly funded Early Childhood Services under the

jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

The feasibility of implementing the described options will depend on a number of factors: first, the provincial government’s willingness to enter into new partnerships with municipal level governments; second, the interest of municipal level governments in assuming new roles and responsibilities in support of early learning and care and the development of their capacity to undertake these roles; and third, the support of other stakeholders, including service providers, for a more public approach to the organization, funding and delivery of services.

The options presented cover three areas of support: regional management and planning; service delivery (including infrastructure) and research and public awareness. Municipal governments might assume different roles in all three areas depending on their interest and capacity, their assessment of community needs and their development of new agreements or partnerships with the provincial government and other early learning and care stakeholders.

Regional Management and Planning

Despite the findings from comparative research on the benefits of regional service management and planning, there is limited public management or planning of early learning and care services outside of publicly funded ECS under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. The planning and development of child care services primarily takes place at the individual organization level, with little formal infrastructure or processes in place either to match services to community needs or to connect or integrate services across organizations. Large service providers such as the YMCA, which deliver multiple programs in a number of urban centres, and have some capacity to connect services at a local level are the exception.

The Regional Management and Planning of Early Learning and Care Services

To support the increased public management of early learning and care, the provincial government would work with interested municipal level governments to develop and support a regional management role for them (with a focus on child care services). The terms and conditions of regional management would be set-out in legislation and/or regulation and supported through new provincial-municipal funding partnerships. The main goal of regional management and planning would be to ensure the effective implementation of provincial early learning and care policies and priorities at the local level consistent with community needs.



As regional service managers, municipal level governments would assume responsibility for service planning, and other related areas of service support or infrastructure including the operation of a centralized wait list for services, and the collection and reporting of system data on service delivery and service quality. Based on formal agreements with the provincial government, municipal regional managers may also assume some level of delegated authority for the administration of parent fee subsidies, the disbursement of program funding consistent with provincial policies, as well as the oversight of service delivery to ensure that it meets provincial licensing requirements.

Consistent with a regional management role, municipal level governments would be required to develop regional service plans and report on these plans to community stakeholders, service delivery partners and the provincial government. Municipal level governments, working in partnership with service providers, would also develop and implement strategies to ensure that services best meet community needs (geographic and population based) drawing on dedicated provincial and municipal funding support. As the regional manager for child care services, municipal level governments would work in partnership with local school

divisions to more closely integrate child care and Early Childhood Services (ECS).

The Framework Agreement for the 'Big City Charters', currently under negotiation between the Government of Alberta and the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, provides an opportunity for the two largest urban centres in the province to explore a regional management role for early learning and care services. The provincial government and other municipal level governments may see value in entering into related discussions around similar regional agreements for child care services outside of the two major urban centres.

The Regional Coordination or Planning of Early Learning and Care Services

As an alternative to a regional management role set out in legislation and/or regulation, the provincial government would work with interested municipal level governments to support them in more limited regional service planning and coordination roles through the creation and operation of regional advisory councils. Again, the main goal of municipal level planning and coordination would be to ensure the effective implementation of provincial early learning and care policies and priorities at the local level



consistent with community needs.

Municipally struck advisory councils would include representatives from the municipal level government, public school boards, early learning and care service providers as well as parents. The provincial government would allocate dedicated funding to regional advisory councils to support their work. This work would include a focus on the development of regional service plans, based on stakeholder input, that identify key areas of unmet service need and service strategies to address these needs.

Depending on their capacity (including access to municipal and or other funding sources), regional advisory councils may extend their work to include direct support for eligible early learning and care services through both service and infrastructure related investments. Possible areas or types of support may include the development and management of centralized wait lists, the provision of small grants to eligible programs or services, as well as the development of resources that support services in areas such as professional development, facility design, organizational governance and financial management.

The provincial government would not delegate the responsibility for areas of service oversight and management currently under provincial jurisdiction (for example, the administration of parent subsidies or the licensing of child care services) to the proposed regional advisory councils.

Support for Services and Service Delivery

Private for-profit businesses and community-based non-profit organizations organize and deliver the vast majority of child care services in Alberta. Parents and families purchase services directly from these organizations which must balance the demands of providing high-quality, affordable, accessible early learning and care with those of remaining operationally and financially sustainable. The current relatively low levels of public investment, allied with the significant reliance on market forces to shape the development and delivery services, means that families' access to early learning and care varies based on their household income, the age and needs of their children and where they live. The addition of new publicly delivered or publicly supported child care services has the potential to increase families' access to high-quality, affordable early learning and care.

New Provincial-Municipal Partnerships to Support the Expansion and Enhancement of Early Learning and Care Services

To meet the growing demand for early learning and care across the province, the provincial government would enter into new provincial-municipal partnerships with interested municipal level governments to increase the supply of high-quality child care services. Through these partnerships, the provincial government would designate eligible municipal level governments as the preferred partners for the expansion and enhancement of child care services in those regions or communities in which families have the lowest levels of access to affordable, high-quality early learning and care.

The proposed new provincial-municipal partnerships would provide eligible municipal level governments with access to capital funding or grants to create or enhance existing child care spaces, and operating support to maintain new or enhanced child care spaces. The capital and operating costs for new or enhanced services would be cost-shared between the provincial and municipal governments based on an agreed cost-sharing formula (the current Family Community Support Services legislation provides one possible funding model).

Municipal level governments would either operate new or enhanced services directly or through a partnership with an eligible, non-profit, community-based organization. New or enhanced services developed and/or supported with provincial funding would be required to meet agreed standards in terms of accessibility, affordability and quality. In those instances in which a municipal level of government works with a community-based service provider to either expand or enhance services, eligible providers would need to meet an agreed set of criteria including non-profit status, governance by a community board and a commitment to provide equitable access to children and families considered vulnerable or at-risk, as well as children living with a disability or delay and their families.

One potential option under the proposed new provincial-municipal service delivery partnerships could be the introduction of integrated service delivery models (or 'hubs') that bring together traditional early learning and care services with those of family support programs and perhaps community health services in a single location or service centre. These new service 'hubs' could link with, or build upon, the network of provincially supported, community-based Parent Link Centres. New integrated service 'hubs' might also be attached to or linked with school sites and school-based ECS including kindergarten.



Municipal Government Led Initiatives to Expand and Enhance Early Learning and Care

Outside of the proposed new provincial-municipal partnerships outlined above, municipal level governments have some capacity, which varies between municipalities, to support the expansion and enhancement of eligible early learning and care services through existing development and planning tools. Drawing on municipal practices in other provinces, two specific areas of support stand-out that have the potential for further development.

First, municipal level governments would formally commit to dedicate space for eligible child care services in city-owned, or city-leased buildings and facilities, including community centres, libraries and other municipal buildings. Municipalities would lease these designated spaces, at a nominal cost or no cost, to eligible service providers which commit to provide services that are affordable, of a high-quality and accessible for local children and their families.

Second, Alberta municipalities, under the provincial *Municipal Government Act* (which is currently under review with a new *Modernized Municipal Government Act* introduced in the legislature on May 31, 2016), have the authority to levy charges on developments and redevelopments to cover infrastructure costs. While these charges have traditionally focused on ‘hard’ infrastructure

costs (such as sewers and roads), there are emerging arguments in municipal planning research to expand these costs to also include ‘soft’ infrastructure costs such as policing, parks and community infrastructure (Galley, 2015; Garvey, 2014; Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2012). The inclusion of new provisions for development infrastructure costs is one area for discussion within the current review of the *Municipal Government Act* (Government of Alberta, Municipal Affairs, 2013). There are already similar provisions in place for areas designated for redevelopment.

Based on the findings from the review of the *Municipal Government Act* and the provisions of the proposed new *Modernized Municipal Government Act*, and learning from the strategies the cities of Vancouver and Toronto employ, municipalities interested in supporting early learning and care would explore the options available to them to levy off-site development charges that cover a portion of the costs of community services such as child care. The monies raised through these levies would be dedicated to support the expansion or enhancement of local services through capital and operational grants to eligible service providers.

The capacity of individual municipal governments to generate revenue through community benefit provisions will depend on the level and nature of development and redevelopment at the community level. This capacity will

be greater in those municipal regions undergoing growth or expansion.

The framework agreement for the Big City Charter negotiations provides the cities of Edmonton and Calgary with a specific vehicle through which to explore options for additional off-site development charges to support municipal investments in support of child care services. The first phase of these negotiations has focused on the *Municipal Government Act*.

Research and Public Awareness

The stronger public management and planning of high-quality, affordable and accessible early learning and care depends on the availability of reliable information on the current nature, distribution and capacity of services to meet families' and children's needs. Regional or local data on the capacity of services to meet community needs would support more informed decision-making on the development and expansion of services, while also increasing stakeholder awareness of the value of public investments in high-quality early learning and care.

Currently, service data are not available either for regional planning purposes or for helping to identify broader community trends and developments in respect to early learning and care needs.

Regional Level Research and Needs Assessment

Municipal level governments would finance and or undertake ongoing research on local/regional early learning and care needs. This research, undertaken with the support of the Ministry of Human Services and the Ministry of Education, would provide reliable regional data on the nature and distribution of early learning and care services, the number and profiles of families with young children, as well as regional population health data on child outcomes.

Municipal level governments would make these data publicly available and use them to identify regional service needs (and progress in meeting these needs) as well as to raise stakeholder and community awareness of early learning and care needs at the regional and local levels.

Partnerships with Regional Early Childhood Development Coalitions

Municipal level governments would further work in partnership with the local Early Childhood Development coalitions, previously developed through the provincial Early Childhood Development Mapping project, to raise public

knowledge and awareness of early childhood development at the community level. These coalitions are currently supported through the Family and Community Support Services program and so are well-placed to connect with local communities.

Municipal level governments, drawing on their own regional research and analysis of early learning and care and the provincial results from the Early Development Instrument, could help establish a strong and consistent voice for public investments in high-quality, affordable and accessible early learning and care delivered through an integrated system of supports and services.



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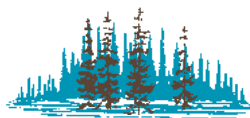
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