

Early Learning and Child Care in Alberta:

Results from a National Survey During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The Muttart Foundation



**CANADIAN
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Early Learning and Child Care in Alberta: Results from a National Survey

During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In mid-March, the majority of provincial and territorial governments, including the government of Alberta, moved quickly to close centre-based early learning and child care in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Family child care homes were permitted to remain open in Alberta, as they were in other regions of Canada; although there was a significant decrease in the number of children accessing care as families withdrew their children for a combination of health and financial reasons.

In the following two months, provincial and territorial governments took very different approaches in their support for early learning and care.¹ Most put in place some form of regulated child care for the children of those workers deemed essential. Almost all provincial governments provided some form of continued provincial funding to either help services required to close meet a portion of operating costs or to help those that remained open address falling enrolments. A minority of provinces chose to fully fund their early learning and care sectors. For its part, the federal government rapidly introduced a series of measures to help individuals and organizations respond to the financial impacts of the economic shutdown, although it stopped short of dedicating specific funds for early learning and care sectors.

The following summary report uses data from a national survey, undertaken in mid-May, to compare the pandemic experiences of service providers in Alberta with those of service providers in other parts of Canada. The comparisons are important given the government of Alberta's decision to not provide direct financial assistance to centres required to close and to not provide additional funding for family child care homes that remained open but with lower enrolments. Indeed, with the exception of providing emergency child care for essential workers, the government of Alberta approached the early learning and child care sector in much the same way as it did other sectors of the economy. It declined the requests from early learning and care stakeholders for the kind of assistance provided in other provinces. Instead, it directed service providers to the various funding programs the federal government introduced for businesses and individuals.

The impacts of these government decisions are reflected in the survey results summarized below.

The Alberta Early Learning and Child Care Sector Heading into the Pandemic

The Alberta early learning and child care sector entered the pandemic in the midst of a provincial economic slowdown, while at the same time still adjusting to newly introduced changes in provincial funding and support.

In the final quarter of 2019, the Ministry of Children's Services announced the discontinuation of KinCare and the stay-at-home subsidy for parents whose children attend preschools. Further reductions in funding and supports were announced in the first quarter of 2020, including discontinuation of the long-established provincial accreditation process, cancellation of benefit contribution grants for service

¹ The Childcare Resource and Research Unit provides a summary of policy and guideline developments across Canada. <https://www.childcarecanada.org/resources/issue-files/child-care-and-covid-19-canada/current-status-reopening-canada-province-territory>

providers and elimination of the Northern Allowance for early childhood educators in the Wood Buffalo region.

These cuts took place against the backdrop of continued uncertainty surrounding the future of the 122 Early Learning and Child Care demonstration sites across the province, introduced under the previous government. The first phase of these sites was set to conclude at the end of June, 2020, with the second phase of 100 sites, funded primarily through federal investments under the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework Agreement, set to conclude at the end of March, 2021.

The provincial budget for 2020/21 fiscal year, introduced in February, estimated child care expenditures of \$394 million, a decrease of \$28.7 million (7%) from the forecast expenditures of \$422.7 million in 2019/20. The Ministry Business Plan reported the allocation of \$180 million for child care subsidies; \$123 million for wage enhancements, other staff incentives and staff certification; and \$10 million for specialized child care supports for children with unique needs.² The Business Plan did not provide information on how the balance of forecast expenditures would be used.

The Government of Alberta's Pandemic Response Timeline (March to Early May)

In mid-March, following the announcement of the pandemic, the Ministry of Children's Services required all centre-based child care services (comprising child care centres, out-of-school care programs and preschools) to close. The Ministry permitted approved family child care homes to remain open.

At the beginning of April, the Ministry announced plans to reopen a limited number of centre-based child cares for the children of essential workers. Close to 200 centres received Ministry approval to reopen serving newly defined smaller cohorts of children and their families. The enrolment rates for emergency child care remained very low.

At the beginning of May, the Ministry announced that child care centres (with the exception of preschools) would be eligible to reopen on May 14th, with new health and safety guidelines in place, including limits on the number of children and staff.

In early May, the Ministry of Children's Services announced a funding package of up to \$17.8 million, spread over three phases, to support the reopening and operation of centre-based child care services.³ As of the middle of June, the Ministry had disbursed monies under the first two phases of support.

The National Canadian Child Care Survey

The Childcare Resource and Research Unit, the Canadian Child Care Federation, and Child Care Now distributed an online survey to regulated child care centres and family child care homes, in English and

² Ministry Business Plan Children's Services 2020-23. Retrieved at <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/cec324e7-e339-4254-a3e7-17471adec0d2/resource/8a6988c7-382d-4053-aa0e-396199d8358e/download/childrens-services-business-plan-2020-23.pdf>

³ Ministry of Children's Services. Relief for the Child Care Sector. Retrieved at <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=71285388C2A58-EBFA-E8E6-0CEDD4EDF6EB6965>

French, in April and May.⁴ The survey gathered information on the state of service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic for the reference week of April 27 to May 1. Respondents were also asked to comment on their anticipations around reopening.

Nationally, there were over 6,500 valid survey responses that provided comment on close to 8,300 services (69% child care centres and 31% family child care homes). There were responses for over 1,000 Alberta services (64% child care centres and 36% family child care homes).

The Alberta child care centres that responded to the survey provided full-day child care, part-day preschool and part-day out-of-school care. They serve children from below 18 months to those of school-age. There were also a number of centres that serve as multi-service organizations offering either centre-based child care and family child care or child care and other family and social services.

The family child care responses came from providers who also served children from below 18 months to school-age. Almost all of the family child care homes are supported by an approved family day home agency. A proportion are part of either multi-site or multi-service organizations.

Delivery of Child Care During the Pandemic

The vast majority of Alberta child care centres were closed (85%; question 7 on the national survey) during the survey reference week (April 27 to May 1). Those centres that reopened to provide care for the children of essential workers primarily reported the same hours of operation as prior to the pandemic (question 8). The reopened centres provided care to a very small number of children, however, with a median enrolment of only 5 children compared to a pre-pandemic median enrolment of 60 children (question 10).

The vast majority of family child care homes were open (85%; question 37) during the reference week, although the median number of children served (3.8) was lower by around one-third from median pre-COVID enrolment levels (question 40). Three of four family child care homes that were open reported maintaining the same hours of operation as before the pandemic (question 38).

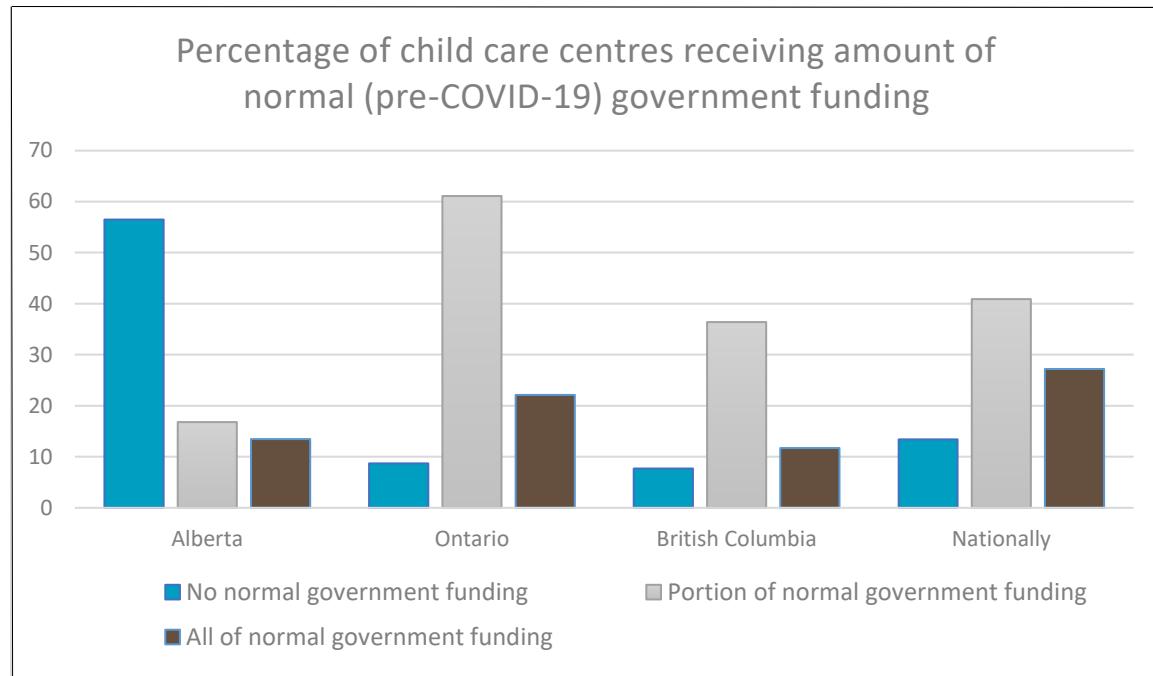
Provincial Funding Support for Child Care During the Pandemic

The Ministry of Children's Services provided limited funding support to child care centres required to close during the first two months of the pandemic. Centres which closed in mid-March received an automatic payment to cover subsidy amounts and wage enhancement payments for the month of March. Those centres which subsequently reopened, at reduced capacity, to provide child care for the children of essential workers were eligible for wage enhancement and parent subsidy funding, as well as a set payment for unfilled emergency spaces and a one-time payment of \$500 for health and safety costs.

⁴ Child Care Now, Canadian Child Care Federation & Childcare Resource and Research Unit. 2020. Canadian Child Care: Preliminary Results from a National Survey During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Retrieved at <https://www.childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/20/07/canadian-child-care-preliminary-results-national-survey-dur>

Family child care homes that remained open were eligible for wage enhancement and parent subsidy funding. They also received a one-time payment to cover additional health and safety costs. Family child care homes that closed during the pandemic were not eligible for provincial funding.

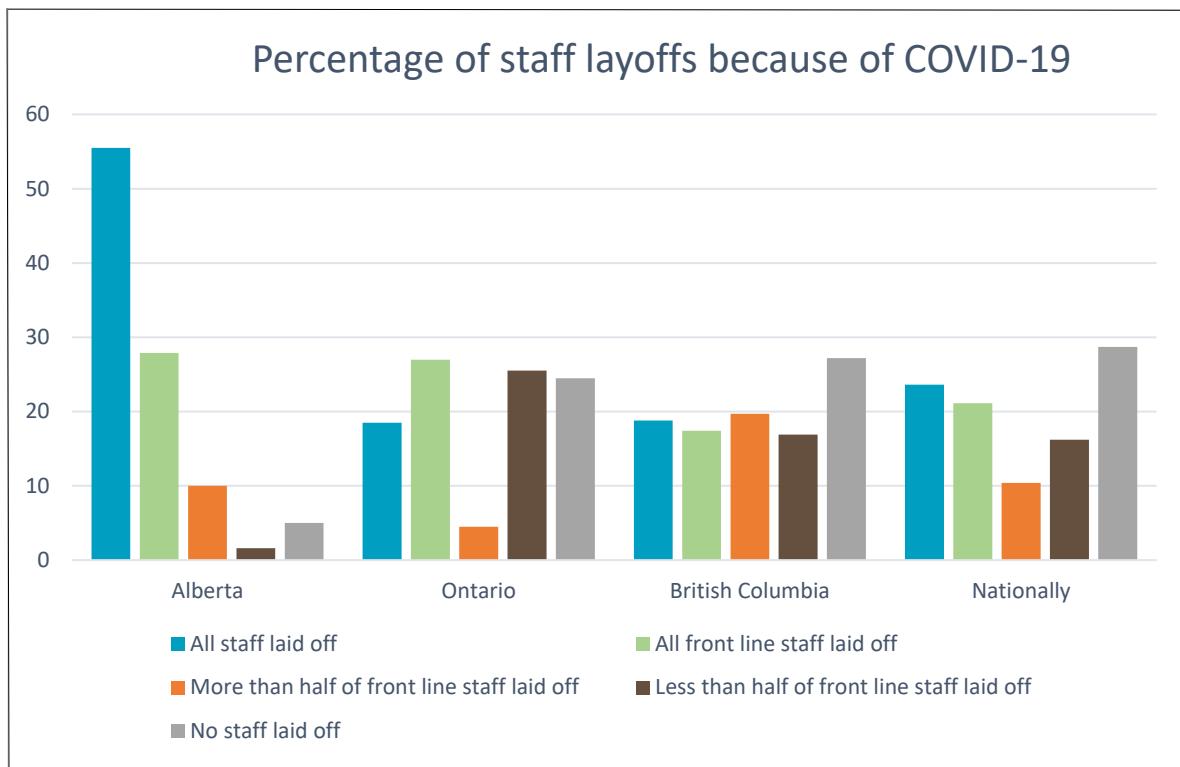
During the survey reference week, over half (56.5%; question 20) of child care centres reported receiving none of their normal government funding, by far the highest rate among all provinces. By comparison, 9% of centres in Ontario reported receiving none of their normal government funding as did 8% of centres in British Columbia.



Forty-five percent (question 50) of family child care homes in Alberta reported receiving all of their normal government funding during the reference week. This compares to 36% in Ontario and 19% in British Columbia. Conversely, 21% of family child care homes in Alberta reported receiving none of their normal government funding, the second highest rate among all provinces.

Child Care Centre Staff Layoffs and Family Child Care Provider Applications for Benefits

The closure of child care centres in Alberta resulted in significant staff layoffs. Over half of child care centres (55.5%; question 21) reported laying off all of their staff including directors and supervisors, as compared to 18.5% of centres in Ontario and 19% in British Columbia. Only 5% of centres in Alberta reported no staff layoffs compared to 24.5% in Ontario and 27% in British Columbia.



In Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, where the provincial governments provided significant support for their early learning and care sectors, 91% and 79% of centres reported no staff layoffs.

Among the small number of centres in which staff were not laid off in Alberta, one in four (25.5%; question 23) reported reductions in the hours staff worked during the reference week.

The majority of centre staff who received layoff notices in Alberta either applied for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (86%) or Employment Insurance (71.5%) (question 22).

Close to one in three (32%) Alberta family child care providers reported applying for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. This is a lower proportion than in Ontario (43%) and British Columbia (43%) (question 51).

Child Care Centre and Family Child Care Home Finances

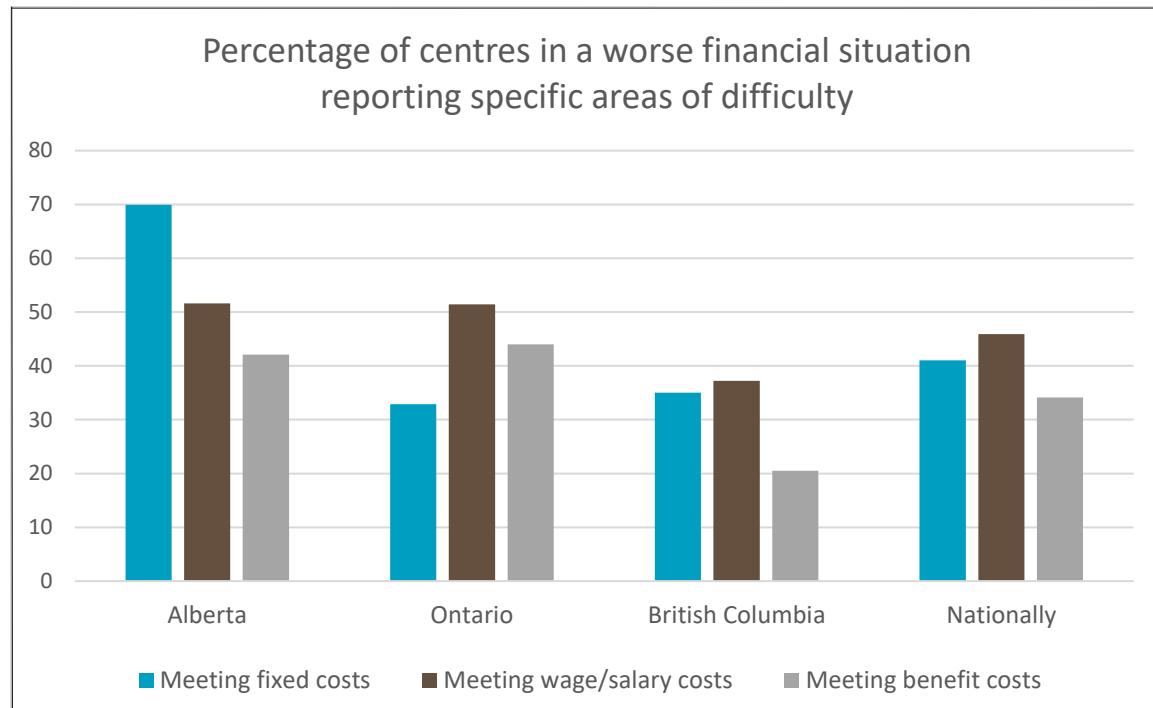
The majority of Alberta centres reported that their financial situation was either ‘somewhat worse’ or ‘much worse’ than before the pandemic (81%; question 25); this compares to a national rate of 68%.

The percentage of centres in Alberta that reported their financial situation as ‘much worse’ was the highest across Canada at 62.5% as compared to a national average of 38%. In British Columbia, where the government introduced temporary emergency funding for centres that closed, 29% of centres reported that their financial situation was ‘much worse’ than before the pandemic.

Nationally, child care centres that reported their financial situation as worse than before the pandemic identified the loss or reduction of parent fee revenues as the main reason for the decrease in financial health (question 26).

In Alberta, 68% of centres also reported the loss or reduction of government funding as a contributing factor to their worse financial health; this compares to 43% nationally, 53% in Ontario and 32% in British Columbia.

Among the four in five Alberta centres reporting that their financial situation was worse than before the pandemic, the three major areas of financial difficulty identified (question 27) were ‘meeting fixed costs’ (70% compared to 41% nationally); ‘meeting salary or wage costs’ (52%; 46% nationally) and ‘meeting benefit costs’ (42%; 34% nationally).



The majority of Alberta family child care providers (80%) reported that their financial situation was either ‘somewhat worse’ or ‘much worse’ than prior to the pandemic (question 52). This was higher than the national average of 67% and the reported rates in British Columbia (71%) and Ontario (75.5%).

The Possibility of Permanent Closure

The financial challenges Alberta centres faced during the first six weeks of the pandemic are reflected in their assessments of the possibility of permanent closure (question 17).

Just over half of Alberta centres (56%) closed during the reference week reported that they will ‘definitely reopen’ as compared to 64% nationally, 71% in British Columbia and 66% in Ontario. Centres in Saskatchewan were similarly more confident of definitely reopening (73%) than centres in Alberta.

One in five Alberta centres closed during the reference week reported that they are either ‘not sure’ of reopening or that they will ‘probably’ or ‘definitely’ remain permanently closed. This is double the

proportion reporting similar outcomes in British Columbia and Ontario, and close to three times the proportion in neighbouring Saskatchewan.

In those provinces in which the provincial government provided operational support during the closure centres were much more likely to report that they would ‘definitely reopen’ (Prince Edward Island, 81%; Nova Scotia, 72% and British Columbia, 71%) than centres in Alberta.

One in four (26%) Alberta family child care providers closed during the reference week reported that they were either ‘not sure’ of reopening or that they will ‘probably’ or ‘definitely’ remain permanently closed (question 47). This is higher than the national average of 18% and above the rates reported among family child care providers in Ontario (20%) and British Columbia (15%).

More positively, the proportion of Alberta family child care homes closed during the reference week reporting they would ‘definitely reopen’ (64%) was similar to that in Ontario (64.5%) and somewhat higher than that in British Columbia (59 %).

Anticipated Problems Around Reopening and the Resumption of Service Delivery

The vast majority of Alberta child care centres anticipated problems in both the short- and longer-terms around reopening and the resumption of service delivery (questions 28 and 29).

Alberta centres reported more problems than the national average in nine of the ten categories (columns) in the following two tables. Moreover, Alberta centres reported the most or second most problems of any province in nine of ten categories.

Anticipated Problems in the short-term (the first month or two) after reopening or resumption of services

Province	Staffing difficulties (%)	Reopening costs (%)	COVID Health/safety costs (%)	Lower enrollment (%)	Lack of reserve funds (%)
NL	57	38	86	76	29
PEI	25	36	75	78	19
NS	50	60	88	90	42
NB	43	55	88	85	33
QC	61	49	85	55	27
ON	75	80	96	93	45
MB	64	47	89	84	41
SK	53	33	81	88	44
AB	67	74	91	92	50
BC	61	30	77	84	31
National	65	59	88	85	40

Anticipated Problems in the longer term (up to six months) after resumption of services

Province	Staffing difficulties (%)	COVID Health/safety costs (%)	Lower enrollment (%)	Return to pre-COVID gov't funding (%)	Lack of reserve funds (%)
NL	52	76	71	33	19
PEI	31	60	54	26	23
NS	49	76	71	23	42
NB	45	81	80	28	35
QC	63	80	48	22	30
ON	71	92	85	35	46
MB	60	82	71	52	46
SK	51	69	74	24	47
AB	60	84	83	48	54
BC	58	70	62	39	32
National	62	82	73	36	41

Alberta family child care providers similarly reported anticipated problems around reopening or the resumption of services in both the short- (first month or two) and longer-terms (up to six months after reopening). The main problems family child care providers anticipated were lower enrollment (77% and 71%) and higher health and safety costs (48% and 49%) (questions 54 and 55).

Overall, family child care providers in Alberta reported anticipated problems around reopening and the resumption of services that were lower or on par with those reported by family child care providers nationally.

The Impact of Federal Government Benefits and Supports

During the period of centre closures, the Ministry of Children's Services directed eligible centres to apply for federal pandemic-related benefits and supports. The Ministry argued that these benefits and supports would be sufficient to meet organizations' fixed or core operational costs.

Six weeks into the pandemic, however, early learning and child care centres in Alberta reported only limited applications for these benefits (question 30). Centres further reported that they were uncertain that these benefits would, on their own, be sufficient to meet the financial challenges they faced.

As of the final week in April, and with the majority of staff given temporary layoff notices, 30% of centres had applied for the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), with a further 22% indicating that they planned to apply. Only 6% reported already receiving the CEWS.

Further, 16% of centres had applied for the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA), with a further 4.5% planning to apply. 22.5% reported receiving the benefit.

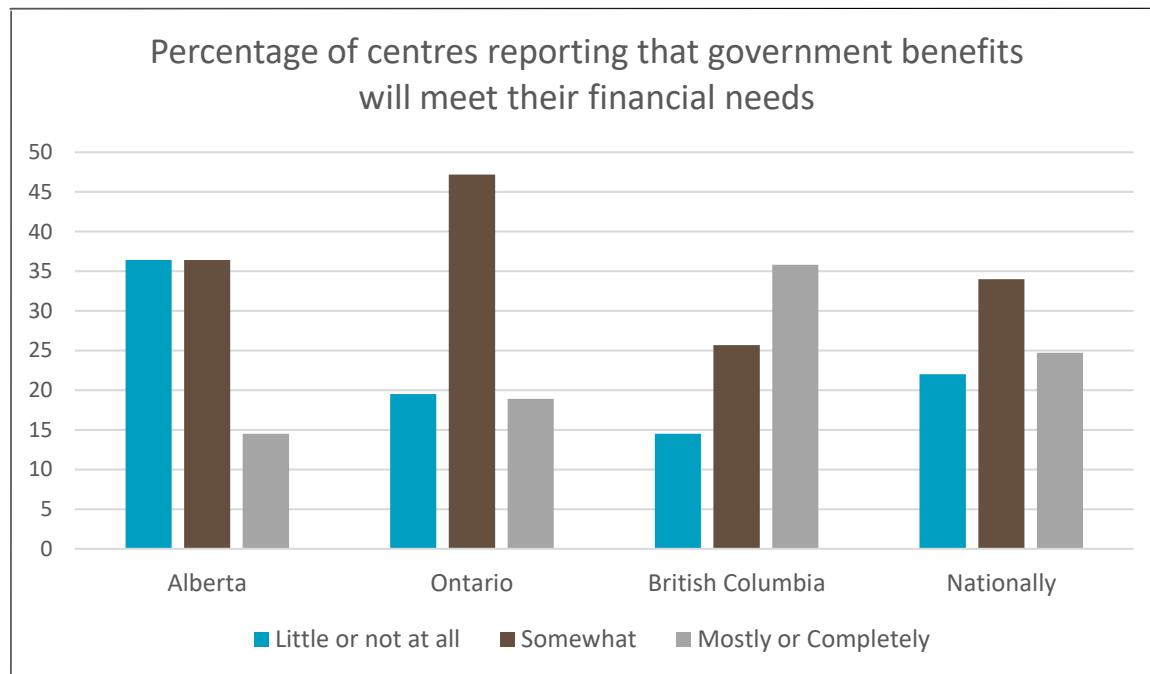
Only 19% of centres had either applied for or planned to apply for the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA) program, the final details of which had not been formally announced before the survey was administered.

The specific concerns centres reported in respect to the benefits (question 32) included the time it takes to receive the monies for the CEWS (22.5% of centres), their ineligibility for or the inadequate nature of

the funding amount for the CEBA (28% of centres), and their ineligibility for the CECRA (28%). Close to half of the centres, reported that the CECRA was not a good fit for their funding needs.

Government Benefits Meeting Financial Needs

Alberta centres were much less likely to report that government funding benefits (including federal, provincial and municipal governments) will meet their financial needs during the pandemic than centres across Canada (question 33).



One in seven Alberta centres (14.5 %) reported that government benefits will mostly or completely meet their financial needs as compared to one in three (36%) centres in British Columbia and one in five (19%) in Ontario.

Conversely, over one-third (36.4%) of Alberta centres reported that government funding will meet their financial needs either 'not at all' or 'a little' as compared to 15% of centres in British Columbia and 19.5% in Ontario.

Service Provider Comments

When asked for additional comments (questions 56), 244 Alberta-based respondents took the opportunity to identify concerns, many of which went beyond the questions addressed in the survey. Respondents' comments covered the following major areas and in almost all cases raised specific concerns or identified anticipated challenges.

Reopening and the resumption of services

Many respondents raised concerns relating to the reopening and resumption of services including the absence or delayed provision of guidelines for re-opening; challenges around accessing personal protective equipment; concerns around the health and well-being of children and staff; and the need for supports for staff.

Numerous concerns were expressed about the lack of government attention to these issues, including the following.

It is concerning that the guidelines were not in place before the government announced day cares and out of school cares will reopen as early as May 14. There is also a disconnect within the system. Schools and preschools are still closed, this will cause a huge strain on out of school care centres to now arrange full time care, lower ratios, parents already requesting we do school work with them, what children get to attend because of social distancing etc.

When we do re-open we will continue to strive to provide quality care, services and focus on the accessibility and affordability for our families, but in order to be successful we will need to feel protected and safe. I feel without knowing what our guidelines and restrictions look like that we are re-opening too soon. I also worry about not having all the safety protection in place so that we know we are not going to get the virus or spread it to the families, children, staff or bring it home to our own families.

As the families and children slowly return they will be challenged by anxiety and added stress. ECE staff will need to have special training to face these situations to support the needs of our families. There should be proper health and safety training for all educators prior to re-opening. All centres need time to prepare/set up the environment to ensure that proper guidelines are being followed.

No staff must feel forced to come to work if they do not feel safe especially if their health is compromised and/or due to the fear that they would not be financially supported by the government.

While I am happy that we could re-open my concern is that we are still looked at solely for providing a place to "put" children and no real investment and authentic interaction or acknowledgement of our work is happening. In Alberta it was announced publicly that we would reopen May 14 but as of today we still have yet to get any indicator of rules, supports etc. they don't seem to care and yet publicly the messages are we value you. So frustrating and disheartening to our team.

Ministry of Children's Services management, planning, and communication during the pandemic

Respondents identified significant challenges around the Ministry of Children's Services' management of the pandemic including concerns around the inequitable treatment of different types of services (particularly preschools and family child care compared to centre-based child care); the lack of coordination with other government ministries; and inconsistent and limited Ministry communications.

The specific comments respondents made include the following.

As a preschool owner, it is very concerning that my program is not included with the other child care programs that offer child care. . . I don't know when I will have the opportunity to open again. If it isn't in September, I don't know how much longer I can continue to pay the costs associated with having a program.

As Alberta day homes stayed open when everything else closed, I have felt like a fish out of water with little to no information from our minister which has been extremely frustrating. I hope we get information now that day cares are opening.

It is frustrating that both the shut down and reopening of child care facilities happened without any apparent consultation with Early Childhood Educators. It is doubly frustrating that the government announced the reopening of child care facilities to the public prior to notifying Centres and WITHOUT any enhanced safety protocols in place for programs.

If a child is a child, why would they allow child care centers to reopen when schools are staying closed until September in Alberta? At least school-aged children are developmentally able to understand the concept of social distancing.

We feel contracted Day Home agencies have not received the assistance offered Day Care Centers. We have heard business as usual however it has been anything but. Providers have remained open for families despite their fear for their themselves and families. They appreciate still being able to work however some compensation for their lost attendance is necessary.

Organizational financial health and the anticipated costs of future service delivery

Respondents raised concerns about funding or financing including the lack of direct government support and the requirement that services seek loans and payment deferrals; increased costs to meet new health and safety requirements; anticipated challenges around providing families with access to high-quality, affordable child care - especially for families with lower incomes or children with unique needs; challenges in accessing federal support programs; the previous cancellation of the northern allowance and the benefit contribution grant; the depletion of organization reserves and the accumulation of debt; and fears around organization financial health including the risk of bankruptcy.

The specific comments respondents made include the following.

Alberta chose not to pay staff, (or to) put any type of financial assistance in place for child care centers, they have simply directed centers to use federal financial supports.

After polling my parents, only about 3 are willing or able to bring their kids back to our programs. This is a significant decline and many of our parents are currently laid off or not working because of COVID-19.

I'm losing money each day I'm open as an emergency site. I don't qualify for the rent program and I fear I won't be able to recover. . . It's so frustrating. We have only been given a loan from the province and no other support. Everyone wants childcare to be here to help rebuild but no one wants to help us keep our doors open or our families and staff stay afloat. I don't feel the province has done anything to support us at this time.

Increased expectations of lower ratios but not supporting any cost is discouraging. Not paying staff support funding to directors who have remained working to connect families, share resources, support staff to get financial aid and pay bills, clean etc. is also insulting in this field. This was done without any explanation to Directors or written notice.

Wishing the provincial government provided some supports to centres choosing to remain closed, such as 25% of program's budget to allow them to cover fixed expenses and not defer, since that will increase fees once they do reopen.

Already the qualified staff members are quitting their jobs to go and work in the camps and for some cleaning companies where they can get better salaries and medical coverage. The morale is low for these teachers since the Northern Allowance that they were being given is going to stop in July. Most child care workers also work two jobs because the money they get is not enough.

I don't suspect we will go back to what was normal when things start up. There will still be a great deal of people laid off and there will be various restrictions on enrollment and extra rules to help keep children and families safe. This will result in lower enrollment. The budget plan for our organization doesn't have surplus. Less children will mean less revenue and less staffing. The lesser amount of staffing will not offset the lost revenue. I am worried about future financial viability.

Our provincial government should be using their approved budget to continue providing supports for our programs. There is 25 million in the budget - why are we being shorted? There is no reason that they could not continue providing this funding while programs are closed - the money is there - and this would be a huge support for programs!

I feel that we will experience challenges staffing our centre. Many staff will not return in fear of increased exposure to the COVID virus. Other staff have found other employment while waiting to be rehired.

Just worried about the length of time it will take for us to get back to pre-COVID. We were profitable prior to our closure, and now with the added loan repayment for CEBA, and backed up bills etc. We don't know if we can recover fast enough to keep us afloat. We haven't heard the requirements to re-open, how many kids can we have? Is the income from those returning able to meet our debt load and the CEBA Repayment?

The quality of early learning and child care

Respondents raised concerns around quality in early learning and care including the ability to interact with children in ways that are safe and nurturing given new health and safety requirements; the additional costs of providing high-quality early learning with lower enrolments; the extra demands placed on staff and the pressures to re-open.

The specific comments respondents made include the following.

Staff have also made it known that they are unsure of what to do when a child needs comforting, as they are young and growing and learning and to not receive comfort in a way that will entail social distancing doesn't work, especially for infants/toddlers.

We are unable to assist families who struggle to meet the needs of their children who have a diagnosis due to the removal of funding to support staffing for inclusion. Lack of funding is also affecting the quality of care we are able to provide with all the additional time committed to cleaning. Funding is often removed without a plan for sustainable future. Information is not shared from the government to the organizations.

We are operating with minimal staffing, caring for stressed-out children (most of whom are new to us), with restrictions on outdoor play/playground access, increased housekeeping workload, and rapidly fluctuating instructions.

Going back to providing quality affordable care will be extremely challenging and a DELICATE balance that will have expenses attached. We NEED a universal child care plan to support families required to return back to work.

The learning that we are doing with the children will be affected because the stress of the health parameters that are put on us will always be on the forefront for all of us and it will change how we interact with the children. The educators will not be able to implement all the learning we have been taught and just started to use with Flight (Alberta's Curriculum Framework) and may be somewhat of a setback on going forward.

We are concerned about the social distancing for staff and children, also the quality of care and meeting the ratios with the unknown guidelines that we must follow. We worry about the mental and physical health of children, parents and staff. We are unsure of what revenues will come in to meet all expenses including rent, wages, food, equipment etc.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The results from the national survey show the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on early learning and care sectors across the country. The decisions of provincial governments in eight of the ten provinces to close the majority of centre-based child cares, and the lower enrolments in those services that remained open, contributed to dramatic reductions in revenues.

The emergency or temporary investments the majority of provincial and territorial governments made in their early learning and care sectors during the first six weeks of the pandemic partially insulated service providers from the impacts of the pandemic. Outside of a minority of provinces, however, the depths of the financial and organizational challenges child care services face in advance of reopening and recovery remain significant.

The government of Alberta decided to provide limited support to child care centres required to close and to family child care homes that remained open during the first two months of the pandemic. The funding provided for emergency child care was similarly modest. These decisions left the early learning and care sector significantly more exposed to the economic and social impacts of the pandemic than the sector in other provinces.

Six weeks into the pandemic, centre-based child care services in Alberta were much more likely both to report financial challenges than their counterparts across much of the rest of Canada, and to have laid-off the bulk of their staff team. Further, Alberta child care centres were less confident than centres in

other provinces in their capacity to reopen and more likely to identify anticipated problems around reopening and the resumption of services.

Family child care providers in Alberta, many of which remained open, reported similar levels of impact from the pandemic as family child cares in other regions of the country. They also anticipated similar challenges to their national counterparts in moving forward.

Looking ahead, the impacts of the pandemic on centre-based child cares in Alberta, and to a lesser degree family child care homes, appear likely to make the reopening and longer-term recovery of the sector more challenging than in other regions of the country. The large numbers of centres that laid-off either all or most of their staff, and that received no revenue or government funding during the first six weeks of the pandemic, will need significant time and resources to recover and rebuild their organizational capacity.

The Ministry of Children's Services would be well advised to engage quickly with early learning and care stakeholders to determine the level and nature of provincial investments required to stabilize child care services across the province and to begin the process of rebuilding service levels to something approaching those prior to the pandemic.

In the medium- to long-term, the Ministry should also determine the additional supports and resources child care providers (centre-based and family child care homes) and early childhood educators will need to deliver high-quality, affordable early learning and care in the changed service environments brought on by the pandemic. Child care centres and family child care homes anticipate longer-term challenges in respect to higher health and safety costs and lower enrolment numbers than pre-pandemic levels. These challenges will require additional provincial funding if services are to remain financially viable and parent fees are not to increase significantly.

The broader recovery of Alberta's economy will rest, in significant measure, on the successful reopening and resumption of child care services across the province as parents of young children return to the workforce.