

Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan 2025

January 2025

Sunshine Coast Joint Child Care Council



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of the 2025 Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan has been a collaborative effort, made possible through the dedication, expertise, and contributions of many individuals and organizations. We extend our deepest gratitude to the Child Care Action Plan Working Group, whose leadership and commitment have been instrumental in shaping this plan. We also thank the members of the Joint Child Care Council, whose ongoing work and invaluable insights continue to guide child care planning across the region. This plan has been further informed by contributions from child care providers, parents/caregivers, community partners, and stakeholders who shared their experiences, data, and perspectives to ensure the plan reflects the unique needs of families and communities on the Sunshine Coast.

Joint Child Care Council Members

- Capilano University College
- District of Sechelt
- Office of the MLA for Powell River – Sunshine Coast
- School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast)
- shíshálh Nation
- Sunshine Coast Community Services Society
- Sunshine Coast Regional District
- Town of Gibsons
- Vancouver Coastal Health
- YMCA BC

The work of the Sunshine Coast Joint Child Care Council takes place on the ancestral and unceded territories of shíshálh Nation and Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw. With deep gratitude, we honor the peoples who have been stewards of the lands, waters, and communities of what is presently known as the Sunshine Coast since time immemorial and who continue to guide us in understanding our shared responsibility to care for and respect the land and all who call it home.

We recognize that this acknowledgment comes with a responsibility to work toward truth and then reconciliation, as outlined in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action* and guided by the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. We are called to actively engage in the work of equity and inclusion, to reflect on our roles, and to collaborate with Indigenous partners as we strive to create a local child care system that is responsive, culturally safe, and grounded in respect for the history, teachings, and stewardship of these lands.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child care is foundational to the well-being of families, children, and communities. It enables parents and caregivers to fully participate in the workforce, supports gender equity, and strengthens the social and economic fabric of the Sunshine Coast. Quality child care plays a vital role in fostering early childhood development, providing children with a strong foundation to thrive.

Since the release of the 2019 Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan, significant progress has been made in expanding access to licensed child care spaces, addressing staffing challenges, and enhancing collaboration among community partners. Notably, the creation of new child care spaces for children aged 3 to 5 years has contributed to increased access rates, now at an estimated 64.9 spaces per 100 children (65%). Despite this progress, there remains a pressing need for additional spaces in Infant/Toddler and School Age care. While some growth has occurred in these areas, many families on the Sunshine Coast would benefit from further expansion to better meet their needs.

To address ongoing challenges, partnerships between local governments, community organizations, child care providers, and families remain critical. Collaboration has been central to recent successes, such as the expansion of child care spaces within School District No. 46 and the development of innovative programs like the \$10-a-Day initiative, which now benefits 16 programs across the Sunshine Coast.

Key barriers remain, including staffing shortages, insufficient access to inclusive care for children with support needs, and geographic disparities. Survey data from 2024 indicates that 16 of the 29 child care providers who responded are operating below their licensed capacity, primarily due to staffing constraints. In addition, families in smaller communities such as Madeira Park and Halfmoon Bay continue to face significant challenges accessing licensed care.

The 2025 Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan builds on past successes while addressing current needs. Grounded in local data and shaped by input from stakeholders, the plan outlines a roadmap to support the continued growth of a quality, inclusive, and affordable child care system. It highlights the importance of ongoing collaboration, advocacy, and targeted actions to ensure that families across the Sunshine Coast have equitable access to the care they need.

KEY PRIORITIES, GOALS & ACTIONS

The 2025 Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan focuses on five key priorities and goals to address the region's child care needs. These guide actionable strategies to ensure child care is accessible, inclusive, affordable, high-quality, and embedded within broader community planning efforts.

Increasing Access

- **Goal:** Coordinated and informed creation of new child care spaces that ensure equitable access to affordable, inclusive, quality child care for all families who want and need it

-
- **Action Strategies:** Identify and address barriers to IT and School Age care; work toward localized solutions in Pender Harbour; enhance guidance for providers; monitor access rates; and respond collaboratively to changes and emerging needs

Strengthening Inclusion

- **Goal:** Build sector-wide capacity to support inclusive child care, ensuring all children can fully participate and feel a true sense of belonging in environments that reflect their diverse identities, abilities, and needs
- **Actions Strategies:** Work to grow number of ECEs with SNE certification; develop inclusion-focused professional learning opportunities; strengthen alignment with regional accessibility initiatives; and strengthen collaboration around inclusion to better support families and providers

Improving Affordability

- **Goal:** Advocate for and support the expansion of affordability initiatives to ensure equitable access to child care that meets the needs of local families
- **Action Strategies:** Advocate for expansion of the \$10-a-Day program; support providers in accessing affordability initiatives; promote the ACCB; and strengthen provider capacity to implement affordability measures

Enhancing Quality

- **Goal:** Strengthen professional learning and capacity building opportunities to support child care educators in delivering high-quality programs that meet the needs of children and families
- **Action Strategies:** Facilitate professional learning and mentorship opportunities; support access to funding for quality improvement; promote and foster culturally responsive programming; and advocate for continue and enhanced quality-focused initiatives and educator supports

Deepening Collaboration

- **Goal:** Strengthen partnerships and integrate child care into community planning processes to ensure it remains a central consideration in local decision-making
- **Action Strategies:** Enhance collaboration with shíshálh Nation and Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw; engage families in planning and decision-making; prioritize child care in regional and local community planning; and enhance understanding of importance of child care through public awareness campaigns and community-based educator recognition

ABOUT THE CHILD CARE ACTION PLAN

SCOPE & PURPOSE

The 2025 Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan serves as a strategic tool for local government, health, education and community agencies, child care providers, and the community. to support and maintain a coordinated child care system across the Lower Sunshine Coast. The plan aims to foster a collaborative, cross-sector approach to addressing and meeting child care needs at both local and regional levels. It provides an overview of the current child care landscape on the Sunshine Coast, underpinned by key demographic data and insights from stakeholders.

The Action Plan sets actionable goals to ensure access to affordable, quality, inclusive, child care services that are responsive to the diverse needs of children, families, and educators in our communities. It is designed to support informed decision-making, strengthen partnerships and coordination, and promote collaborative dialogue, planning, and action.

The Action Plan is grounded in the knowledge that a thriving child care system is vital to the health, well-being, and resilience of communities, enabling children to reach their full potential, supporting families to balance work and home life, and contributing to the overall economic and social fabric of the region. As a living document, the Action Plan will be reviewed and updated annually, reflecting progress, evolving needs, and new opportunities.

BACKGROUND

Child care plays a foundational role in the development and well-being of children, the stability and growth of families, and the economic vitality of communities. The 2019 Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan was a pivotal step in addressing the pressing need for quality, affordable, and inclusive child care across the region. Since its release, the Plan has guided the collaborative efforts of local governments, child care providers, and community partners in addressing child care needs.

Significant progress has been made since 2019. The Sunshine Coast has seen the creation of new child care spaces, particularly for children aged 3 to 5 years, alongside notable reductions in staffing challenges. A concerted, collaborative effort by multiple community partners has ensured that child care remains a top priority, reflecting our shared commitment to supporting families and fostering a thriving community.

This progress has been bolstered by major investments and initiatives at the federal and provincial levels, notably the launch of the [ChildCareBC Plan](#), which includes new spaces funding, the \$10-a-Day program, fee reduction initiatives, and wage enhancements for Early Childhood Educators. These

initiatives have helped to expand access to affordable, quality, inclusive child care across the province and supported local efforts on the Sunshine Coast.

Despite these successes, challenges persist. Demand for child care continues to outpace supply, particularly in Infant/Toddler and School Age care and in specific communities. There are also significant gaps in access to care during non-traditional hours, and for children with support needs. Recruitment and retention of qualified Early Childhood Educators, while improved since 2019, remain a concern.

The 2025 Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan builds on the foundation laid by the 2019 plan, celebrating achievements while addressing ongoing challenges. Grounded in data and shaped by input from stakeholders, this updated plan provides a roadmap for meeting current needs, pursuing future opportunities, and reaffirming the importance of an inclusive and sustainable child care system that benefits children, families, and the broader community.

A Child Care Vision for the Sunshine Coast

A community united, working together to create access to quality, affordable child care supporting children, families, educators & communities to thrive.

Guided by the BC Early Learning Framework and Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework, our child care community is staffed by qualified and fairly compensated educators who work with children in ways that are intentional, democratic, collaborative, respectful, inclusive, and joyful.

POLICY CONTEXT

The 2025 Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan is informed by the evolving provincial child care landscape, guided by the *ChildCareBC* Plan. Launched in 2018, this comprehensive strategy focuses on expanding child care spaces, enhancing program quality, and fostering partnerships between governments, communities, and service providers. It aligns with broader national goals under the [Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement](#), positioning child care as a critical pillar for supporting families, promoting economic stability, and building thriving communities.

The Action Plan is further shaped by key frameworks that guide early learning and child care across British Columbia. The [BC Early Learning Framework](#) provides a vision for living and learning together respectfully, supporting educators, families, and professionals in creating meaningful early learning experiences. The [Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#) reflects the unique cultures,

aspirations, and needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, while the [Métis Nation Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#) emphasizes culturally relevant programs that nurture Métis identity, family connections, and belonging.

A significant milestone was reached in 2024 with the signing of the first tripartite memorandum of understanding on early learning and child care for First Nations. Signed by the First Nations Leadership Council and the governments of British Columbia and Canada, the agreement advances First Nations' self-determination and jurisdiction over early learning and child care. These efforts align with the principles of British Columbia's [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act \(DRIPA\)](#), which upholds the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#) as the framework for reconciliation and ensures provincial policies respect Indigenous rights and inherent jurisdiction.

Additionally, the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care (MECC) released [Where All Children Belong: B.C. Inclusive Child Care Strategy](#) in June 2024. This strategy outlines clear goals and actions to create a child care system where all children and families experience a sense of belonging, with a focus on accessibility, inclusion, and equitable opportunities.

The 2025 Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan builds on these intergovernmental agreements and frameworks, providing a localized response to the unique child care needs and opportunities of the Sunshine Coast. It reflects a shared commitment to creating child care services that are inclusive, culturally affirming, and responsive to the diverse needs of families and communities.

Child Care Moves to the Ministry of Education

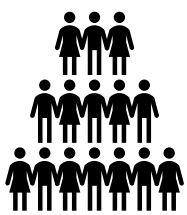
In February 2022, the Province of BC announced that child care and education would integrate to form the Ministry of Education and Child Care (MECC). By integrating child care services into the former Ministry of Education's mandate, the Province confirmed their commitment to create a more cohesive, accessible system that better supports parents, caregivers, and children during their formative years. The change is part of a broader vision to build an integrated, sustainable education and child care system that serves the best interests of children and families.

CHILD CARE LANDSCAPE

DATA AND INSIGHTS

Understanding the child care landscape on the Sunshine Coast requires a comprehensive view of the community’s demographics, child care capacity, and key trends. This section provides an overview of the local context, highlighting critical data that informs the development of the Action Plan.

POPULATION



34,787

Total Estimated Population (2024)

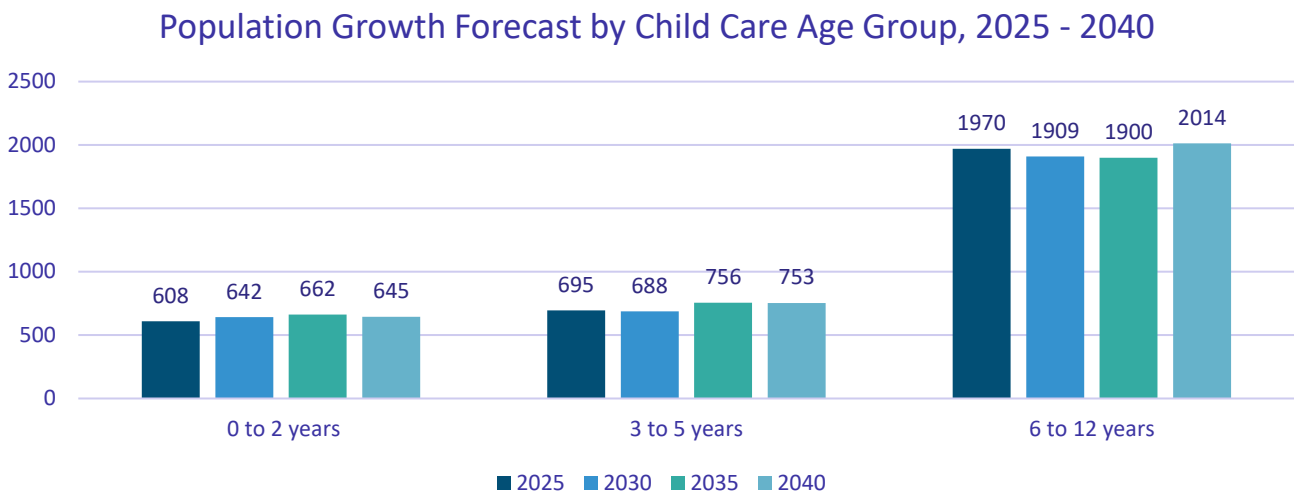


9.5%

Percentage of 2024 population aged 0 - 12

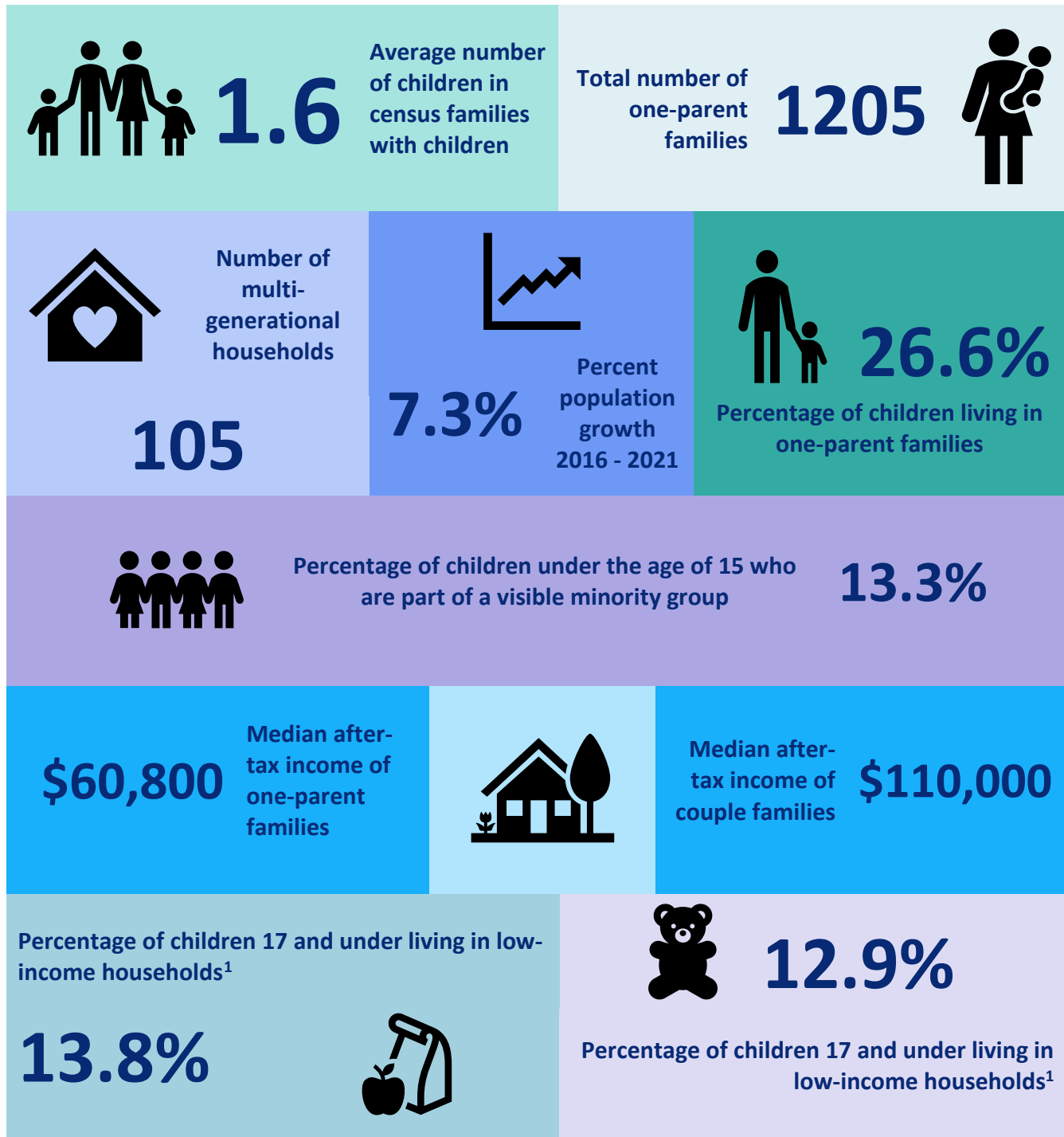
According to population estimates based on 2021 Census data, in 2024 there were 3,304 children aged birth to 12 years living in the Sunshine Coast, making up 9.5% of the total population (BC Stats, 2024). Population projections from BC Stats Population and Estimates predict a relatively stable but gradual increase in the number of children living in the region across all child care age groups (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Population Growth Forecast, Children 0 - 12 years



Source: BC Stats, Population Estimates and Projections

Children and Families on the Sunshine Coast (2021)



Source: Statistics Canada, Census Profile, 2021 Census

¹ The Low-Income Measure After Tax (LIM-AT) is a relative measure of low income, set at 50% of the median after-tax income of Canadian households, adjusted for household size.

CHILD CARE AVAILABILITY – A SNAPSHOT



54

Licensed Child Care Programs



832

Licensed Child Care Spaces

As of October 2024, there were 54 licensed child care programs operating on the Sunshine Coast, representing a total of 832 licensed child care spaces for an estimated population of 3,304 children. There was an increase of 179 spaces between September 2023 and October 2024. ²

Licensed child care programs fall into five general categories. Licensed Group Care includes programs that provide child care to infants and toddlers under 36 months of age, preschool aged children 30 months to school age, and school aged children aged 6 to 12 years. Multi-age care includes programs that care for children from birth to 12 years in a single group setting, either in community or in private homes. Preschool programs offer part-time care and early learning experiences for children aged 30 months to school age, typically operating for less than four hours per day.

ACCESS RATES

On the Sunshine Coast, child care access rates are highest for children aged 3 to 5 years, with an estimated 64.9 spaces per 100 children (65% access rate). This represents a notable increase from the 42% access rate estimated in 2019. Improvements have also been made for infants and toddlers, with access rising from an estimated 12% in 2019 to 22% in 2024, and for school-aged children, where estimated access increased from 8% in 2019 to 13% in 2024. Despite these gains, families continue to face substantial challenges in accessing Infant/Toddler and School Age child care. While additional data is needed to fully understand and address these gaps on a local scale, it is generally assumed that low availability of Infant/Toddler spaces is primarily driven by systemic barriers such as staffing shortages, financial constraints, and the higher cost of operating spaces for this age group. Likewise, regulatory requirements for physical space, staffing shortages, space availability and transportation challenges are common barriers to providing school age care.

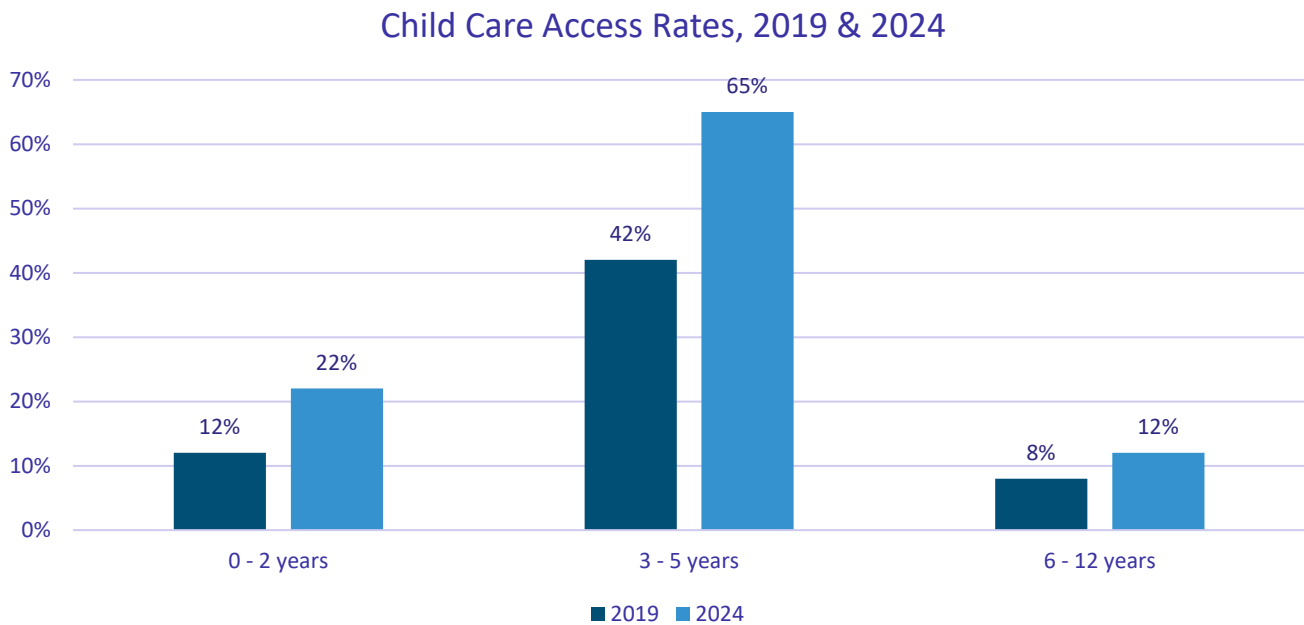
² Licensed child care programs are approved by Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) under the [Community Care and Assisted Living Act](#) and the [Child Care Licensing Regulation](#). These facilities meet strict standards for safety, staffing, child-to-educator ratios, programming, and hygiene. Data on licensed child care spaces and programs is collected and monitored by VCH. More information on the different types of child care in BC can be found on the [Government of BC website](#).

Table 1: Estimated Access Rate by Age Group, October 2024³

AGE GROUP	# OF CHILDREN	# OF LICENSED SPACES	SPACES PER 100 CHILDREN	ESTIMATED ACCESS RATE
0 to 2 years	642	144	22.4	22%
3 to 5 years	711	462	64.9	65%
6 to 12 years	1951	235	12.0	12%
Total	3,304	832		

Source: BC Stats, Population Estimates and Projections; Vancouver Coastal Health, Child Care Licensing Data

Figure 2: Estimated Child Care Access Rates Over Time



Source: BC Stats, Population Estimates and Projections; Vancouver Coastal Health, Child Care Licensing Data

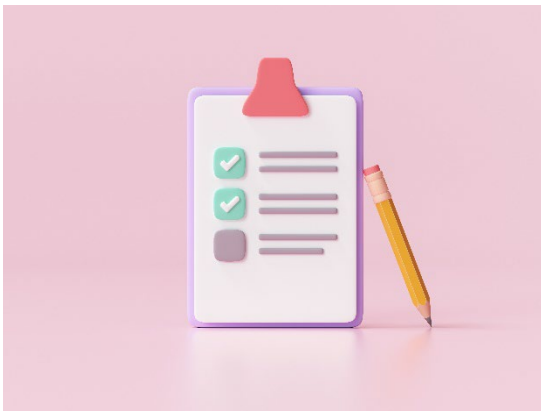
³ Access rates are calculated using number of licensed childcare spaces as the numerator (via VCH Licensing Data, Oct 2024) and estimated number of children in the given age bracket as the denominator (via BC Population Estimates Dashboard accessed Nov 18, 2024). Child care spaces dedicated to multi-age childcare are divided equally across the three age groups.

A NOTE ABOUT SPACES & ESTIMATED ACCESS RATES

The child care availability data and estimated access rates reported here are calculated using the maximum number of spaces each child care program is licensed to provide. However, this may not provide a fully accurate picture of actual program capacity or access rates, as some providers choose not to operate at their maximum licensed capacity and instead offer a smaller number of spaces to families. In other cases, providers would like to operate at full licensed capacity but are unable to due to staffing shortages that prevent them from meeting the required child-to-educator ratios.

In the 2024 Child Care Provider Survey, 16 out of 29 respondents reported operating below their licensed capacity at least some of the time, with the majority citing staffing as the primary limiting factor.

PARENT/CAREGIVER EXPERIENCES

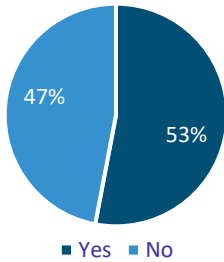


The Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (CHEQ) is a comprehensive tool designed to capture key insights into the early experiences of children before they enter kindergarten. Administered to families as part of the kindergarten registration process, the CHEQ collects data on various aspects of children’s lives, including their health, well-being, and participation in early learning programs, such as licensed child care. On the Sunshine Coast, CHEQ data provides valuable information on child care access and utilization, helping to identify trends and gaps in care for children aged birth to 5 years. In 2024/2025, 83 parents

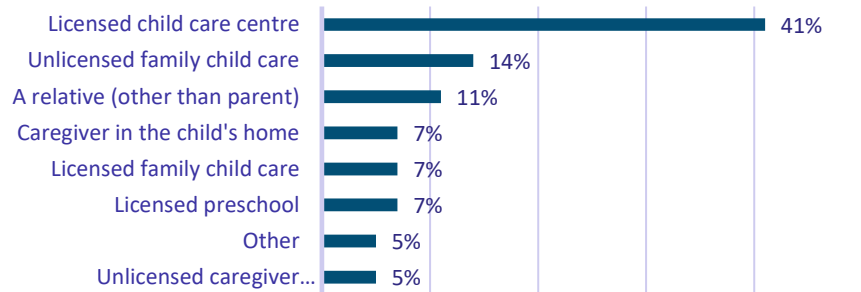
provided information about their children’s experience in child care (see Figure 3). Responses show that children were significantly more likely to have been in a child care setting during their preschool years than when they were a toddler. Preschool aged children were also more likely to attend a licensed child care centre or preschool, while parents were more likely to rely on other forms of child care when the child was a toddler.

Figure 3: Child Care Experiences, 18 months to Kindergarten Entry

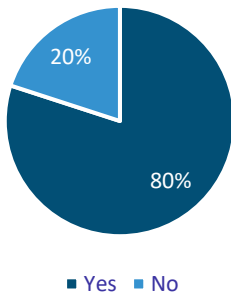
From 18 months to 3 years, was the child in a child care arrangement other than parental care



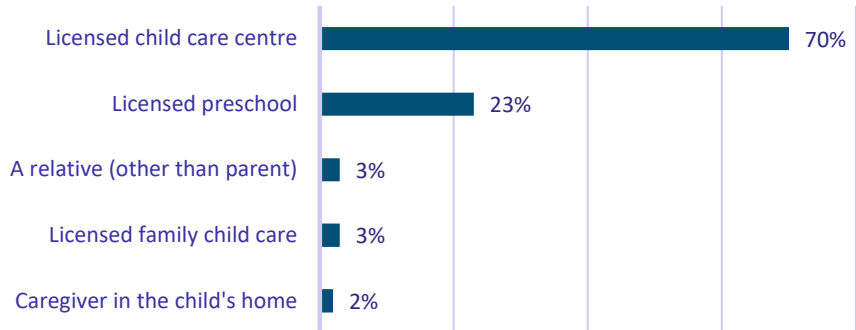
From 18 months to 3 years, Type of child care arrangement used most



From 3 years to Kindergarten entry, was the child in a child care arrangement other than parental care



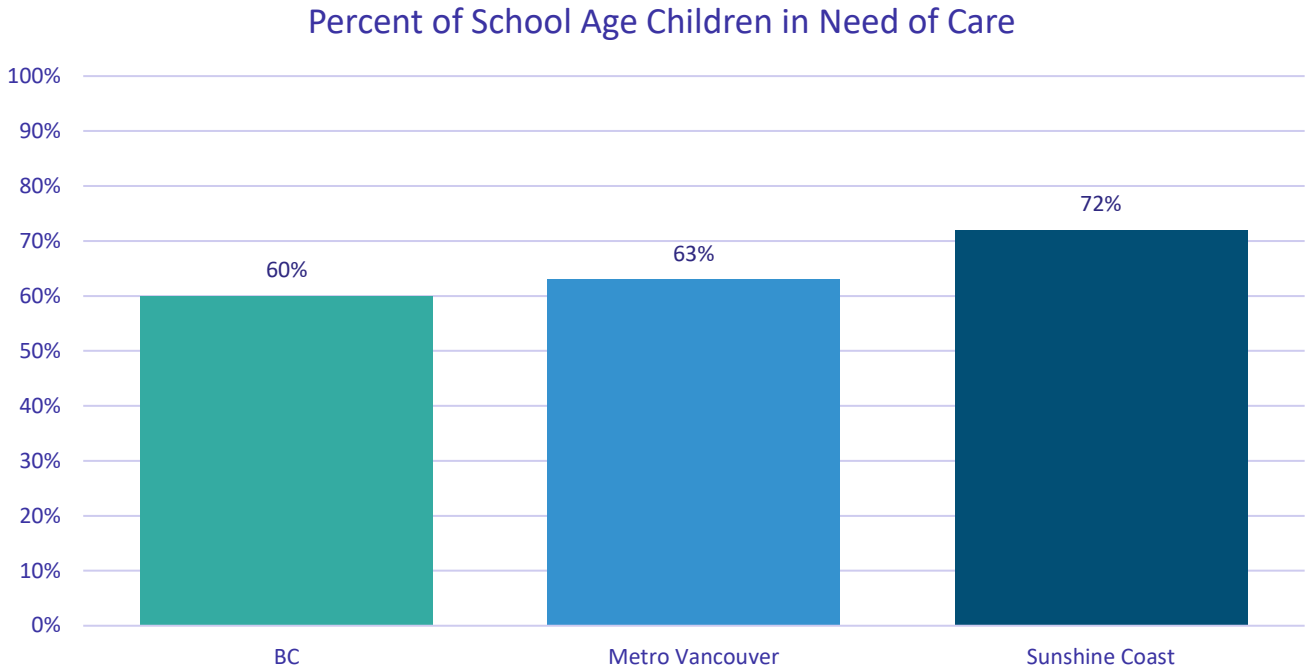
From 3 years to Kindergarten entry, Type of child care arrangement used most



Source: Human Early Learning Partnership, CHEQ 2024-25 SD46 Child Care Question Results

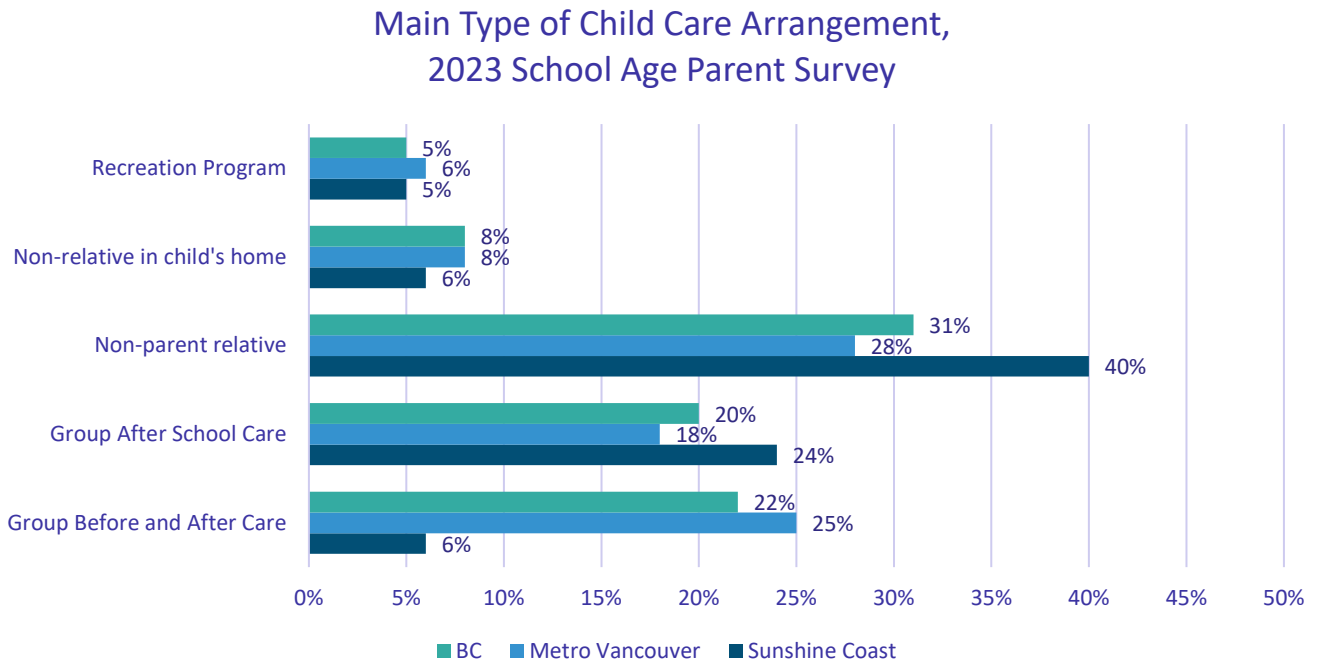
In 2023, the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care carried out a province-wide survey of parents and guardians of students in kindergarten through grade seven in order to better understand the demands for school age child care on school grounds. 80% of Sunshine Coast School District Elementary Schools participated and surveys were completed by 12% of families. The results support the estimated access rate reported above, with 72% of children in need of care (see Figure 4). Only 6% of the parents who completed the survey reported having access to group before and after school care; 24% had access to after school care only. The remaining families relied on relatives (40%), in-home caregivers (6%), and recreational programs (5%) to address their child care needs (see Figure 5).

Figure 4: School Age Children in Need of Care



Source: Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2023 School Age Parent Survey Results – SD46

Figure 5: School Age Child Care Arrangements



Source: Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2023 School Age Parent Survey Results – SD46

Child Care in Schools

School District No. 46 has been steadily growing child care provided in schools. Through Province of BC New Spaces Child Care Funding and partnerships with the YMCA, the District has built child care for infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children in Gibsons, Sechelt and West Sechelt Elementary schools.

The District has also been a provincial leader by offering more Seamless Day Child Care and Just B4 Preschool Programs than any other district. As the second district in the province to launch these board-operated programs, hundreds of parents across the Sunshine Coast have benefited from this affordable \$10-a-day child care option.

Providing child care directly within neighborhood schools offers numerous advantages. Children remain in one familiar location without the need for bus rides to different sites, while families enjoy the convenience of a single drop-off and pick-up point. This model not only supports children's continuity of care but also helps reduce transportation time and stress for families. The District's commitment to accessible, high-quality child care has had a meaningful impact on the community, supporting both parents and young children.

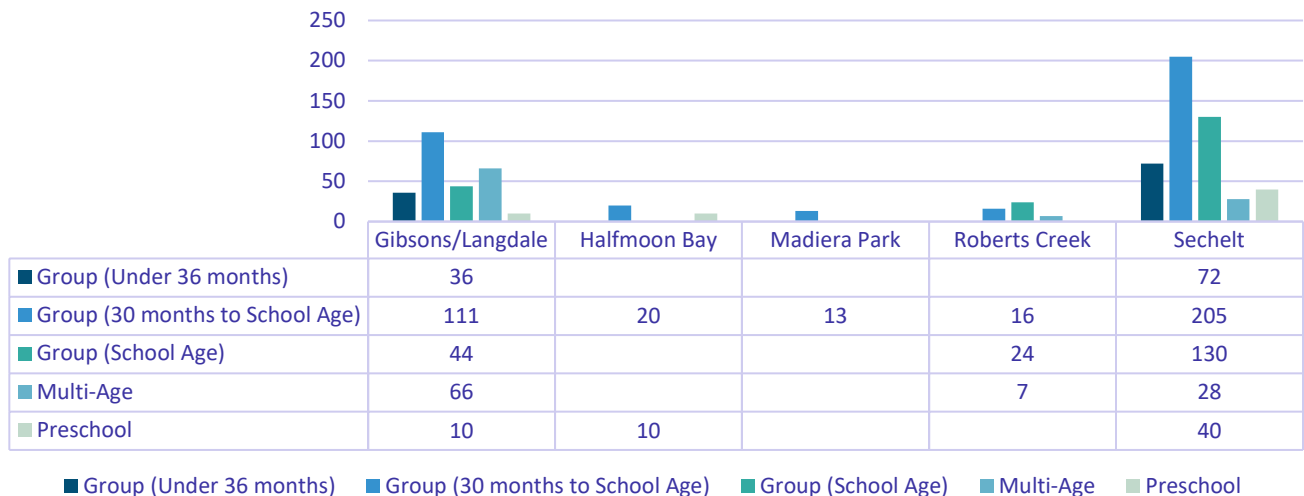


CHILD CARE AVAILABILITY ACROSS THE REGION

Child care availability varies greatly across the region (see Figure 4). Access is greatest in Sechelt, which has 475 licensed spaces, and Gibsons, with 267 spaces. However, significantly fewer options are available in Roberts Creek (47 spaces), Halfmoon Bay (30 spaces), and Madeira Park (13 spaces), limiting families' choices in these communities. The types of care also vary by location. For instance, Sechelt has the highest number of spaces across all categories, including a substantial share of the regions' spaces for preschool and school-aged children. Conversely, Madeira Park and Halfmoon Bay have minimal access to licensed group care for infants and toddlers or school aged children.

Figure 4: Geographical Distribution of Licensed Child Care Spaces

Number of Licensed Spaces by Location and Child Care Type
(October 2024)



Source: Vancouver Coastal Health, Child Care Licensing Data

Partnerships are key to improving access to licensed care

A partnership between the Town of Gibsons and the Sunshine Coast Affordable Housing Society (SCAHS), along with innovative funding from two provincial ministries, led to plans to integrate a child care centre into development plans for Phase Two of the society's Shaw Place affordable housing project.

BUILDING QUALITY & INCLUSION

“In a quality program, each child feels accepted, understood, supported and respected by the adults, enjoys positive relationships with the other children and generally finds the activities interesting, engaging, and satisfying. Each family feels confident that the program promotes their child’s well-being and optimal development and experiences its relationship with the program as respectful of its culture, traditions, values and goals for its child, supportive of its parenting role and collaborative.”

~ Canadian Child Care Federation, What is Quality Child Care?

CAPACITY & CONNECTIONS

On the Sunshine Coast, the local child care sector demonstrates a strong commitment to professional growth and capacity building, ensuring educators are equipped with the knowledge and skills to meet the diverse needs of children and families. Every year the Sunshine Coast Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) program and School District No. 46 collaborate to offer professional development opportunities for local child care professionals. These classes, workshops, and courses come in many different formats: online and in-person, during weekdays, evenings and weekends. They offer a wide range of subjects, including professional ethics and practice, child growth and development, curriculum ideas, communication techniques, child care administration, and family support.

2024 ECE and Child Care Professional Development

Number of local workshops,
courses and events **22**

345 Total attendance at 2024 ProD
events (including repeat
participants)

Total number of
professional development
hours offered **62.5**

To uphold their certification, Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) must complete 40 hours of professional development every five years.

Thanks to the Sunshine Coast CCRR and School District No. 46, local ECEs are able to complete all their professional development hours without leaving the Coast.

SUPPORTING LOCAL EDUCATORS

Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) play a vital role in building quality care, establishing meaningful connections with families, and creating supportive learning environments for children. To recognize their critical contributions and help stabilize the provincial sector, in 2018 the Province of BC launched an [Early Care and Learning Recruitment and Retention Strategy](#) including a number of key initiatives:

- The **ECE Wage Enhancement Program** provides eligible ECEs working in licensed child care facilities with a \$6 per hour wage enhancement, bringing the median wage for ECEs to approximately \$29 per hour. The wage enhancement applies to certified ECEs working in licensed group care, family care, multi-age, and in-home settings. By increasing wages, the program seeks to attract new educators, retain existing professionals, and stabilize the workforce, ensuring families have access to consistent, high-quality child care services.
- The **ECE Education Support Fund**, commonly referred to as the ECE Bursary Program, provides financial assistance to individuals pursuing education in early childhood care. By reducing financial barriers to education, the program encourages more individuals to enter the field and complete their ECE certifications. This investment in education not only expands the workforce but also ensures that future educators are equipped with the skills and knowledge to deliver high-quality early learning experiences for children.
- Introduced in January 2024, the **ECE Specialized Grant Program** is designed to incentivize ECEs to upskill and obtain their Specialized Certificate(s) – Infant and Toddler Educator (ITE) and/or Special Needs Early Childhood Educator (SNE) – and to address workforce shortages in the sector. The ECE Specialized Certification Grant also recognizes long-standing educators holding their Specialized Certificate(s) for their continued commitment to providing specialized child care.

As of November 2024, 54 Sunshine Coast educators were receiving the ECE wage enhancement

In 2024, 6470 BC ECE students accessed the ECE Bursary Program

Since its launch, 6012 educators across the province have been approved for the Specialized Grant.

"Quality child care depends on quality educators. BC's Early Childhood Educators are highly skilled and have specialized education. They are equipped to provide the high quality, play-based child care that is critical for children's social, emotional and cognitive development during their early years."

~ Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC) Position Paper:
Role of the Early Childhood Educator in British Columbia



CCRR Outreach

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) programs build relationships within the child care sector to support the advancement of the *ChildCareBC* Plan. The Sunshine Coast CCRR provides this support to local educators and child care providers as a way of consultation and mentoring, primarily through extensive outreach where the CCRR's experienced and qualified staff visit child care centres big and small. During these visits, staff engage in discussion and support in many areas including how to apply for funding, assistance in programming and curriculum, staff development and professionalism, child care policy, and building inclusive child care communities.

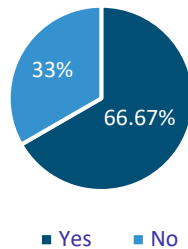
The CCRR team finds that visiting educators at their own centres is the most effective way to provide support. In 2024, the CCRR made 145 visits to local child care programs.

The Sunshine Coast CCRR Program is operated by Sunshine Coast Community Services Society and funded by the Province of British Columbia

INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

Creating inclusive child care environments is a cornerstone of ensuring all children and their families feel they belong, are seen, can actively participate, and thrive in the programs that they attend. All families and their children have the right to access quality childcare, regardless of their abilities or needs. While there is strong commitment to fostering equitable access to quality care, reducing barriers and promoting inclusive practices across the local child care sector, data from the 2024 Child Care Provider Survey suggests that one third of the providers who responded feel they do not have adequate resources and staff to provide inclusive child care for children with support needs. Space challenges and a lack of specialized ECEs continue to limit the ability of many providers to fully support inclusive practices.

Do you have adequate resources and trained staff to provide inclusive services to families with children who have special needs?



“I [had] a child requiring extra support in the past year but didn’t have the staff or extra space to support [the child]. Fortunately [the child] got a spot at a larger center.”

~ Child Care Provider

Source: Sunshine Coast Child Care Resource and Referral, 2024 Sunshine Coast Child Care Provider Survey

“[Inclusive learning and care is] the principle that children of all abilities, including children with diverse abilities and needs have equitable access to quality learning and childcare and are supported in play and learning along with other children in a regular program. Inclusive learning and care supports the individual strengths and needs of each child allowing them to meaningfully engage, learn and contribute to the community and culture of their program. All educators, providers and parents/caregivers collaborate as a team to meet the needs of children in their programs. The presence and engagement of a diverse group of children provides significant opportunities to learn about, value and celebrate diversity in communities”

~ BC Early Learning Framework

The Sunshine Coast Early Intervention Team (EIT) consists of 5 programs that work together to supporting inclusive practices and provide wrap around supports for families, children, educators, and the larger community by providing consultation services, therapy services and resources for children who require support in child care programs. Programs include the Infant Development Program (IDP), the Early Intervention Physiotherapy Program (EI PT), and the Supported Child Development Program (SCD), hosted by Sunshine Coast Community Services Society, as well the Early Intervention Speech and Language Pathology Program (SLP), and The Early Intervention Occupational Therapy Program (OT), hosted by VCH. Recognizing that every child is diverse and has their own journey, the EIT supports inclusive wraparound practices that are led by the families' decisions for their child.

The Lower Sunshine Coast SCD program supports children aged birth to 12 years with support needs to fully participate in child care programs using universal joint supports, modeling strategies, facilitating meetings, fostering individualized plans, and encouraging the use of inclusive practices, strategies and resource. SCD also provides training and educational opportunities for child care educators. In 2024, the Lower Sunshine Coast SCD Program provided support to over 125 families/children and supported over 41 child care centers.



IMPROVING AFFORDABILITY

Affordability is a cornerstone of a strong, equitable child care system, ensuring that families of all income levels can access quality care without facing financial hardship. Recognizing this, the Province of British Columbia has introduced two key initiatives under the *ChildCareBC* Plan to make child care more accessible and affordable for families.

The **\$10-a-Day Child Care Program** is a flagship affordability initiative that significantly reduces costs for families. Participating licensed child care providers offer spaces where parents pay a maximum of \$10 per day per child. This program provides immediate financial relief for families, enabling access to high-quality child care while freeing up household resources for other essentials.

Since 2021, School District No. 46 has been ahead of the curve in prioritizing affordable care by providing \$10-a-Day childcare options for families even before the provincial \$10aDay initiative was rolled out province wide. Today, the Sunshine Coast is home to sixteen \$10-a-Day programs.

The **Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative (CCFRI)** further supports affordability by reducing monthly child care fees for families with children in participating licensed child care programs. Providers who opt into the initiative receive funding to lower parent fees directly, benefiting families with children under the age of 6. Through the CCFRI, families experience tangible cost savings while providers remain financially supported. This program plays a key role in bridging the gap between current child care costs and the longer-term vision of universal, affordable child care.

As of June 2024, 29 Sunshine Coast child care programs (representing 457 licensed spaces) were participating in the CCFRI.



The \$10-a-Day childcare program has been a game-changer for our family. It has significantly reduced our monthly financial stress, allowing both of us to return to work rather than one parent taking extended leave to care for our child. Our toddler is thriving in a nurturing environment with children his age and excellent caregivers. The program has also freed up resources for us to invest in extracurricular activities like swimming lessons, gymnastics, and more for our children. We feel less stressed about raising a growing family, especially with another child on the way.

~ Sechelt Parent



Continuum of Care

The Sunshine Coast School District, the Sunshine Coast Early Intervention Team and other community partners are partnering in *Strengthening Early Years to Kindergarten*. Via this collaborative initiative, the local sector is working to address community needs and foster connections between children, families, child care and schools.

Together they developed the WonderFULL Me strategy, which celebrates the unique strengths and gifts of young children. Through the KinderSPARK! program, all children are encouraged to share their personal "WonderFULL Me" stories, which are then passed on to their new Kindergarten teachers each September. This initiative helps create a strong foundation of connection and understanding as children transition into formal schooling.

The Creative Community Connections series brings together child care providers, the CCRR and school district educators for 5 evenings of professional development and inspiration throughout the year. These gatherings inspire a shared vision of early learning, creating a powerful network of support and continuity for children.

LEARNING FROM PROVIDERS – KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE 2024 CHILD CARE PROVIDER SURVEY

The Sunshine Coast CCRR conducted an online survey of licensed child care providers across the Sunshine Coast from October 28 to November 25, 2024. A total of 29 child care providers participated, sharing data about capacity, waitlists, staffing, child care fees and wages. Key insights from the survey include:

- **Staffing Challenges:** Many child care providers reported operating below their licensed capacity due to staffing shortages. This was the most cited reason for not meeting their preferred operational capacity.
- **Access to Spaces:** Only 58% of providers reported operating at full capacity, with 16 of 29 respondents indicating that they were not operating at their licensed capacity, primarily due to staffing constraints.
- **Waitlists:** The majority of providers (72%) maintained waitlists for upcoming spaces, with some lists numbering over 100 children. However, only a small percentage of children on waitlists are expected to secure a spot within the year.
- **Funding:** Most respondents benefited from government initiatives such as the Child Care Operating Funding, Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative, and Early Childhood Educator Wage Enhancement. However, some providers expressed concerns about funding limitations and challenges in navigating grant requirements.
- **Fees and Affordability:** Monthly fees varied significantly among providers and age groups, reflecting differences in funding structures and operational models. Some providers highlighted affordability as a challenge for families.
- **Inclusive Services:** Approximately one third of providers reported inadequate resources and trained staff to deliver inclusive services for children with support needs. Key barriers included a lack of additional staff, training, and appropriate facilities.
- **Operational Challenges:** Providers noted difficulties with licensing changes, navigating funding regulations, and maintaining facilities. For example, outdoor play structures in some centres were deemed unsafe due to disrepair.
- **Family Needs:** Providers observed a mismatch between available care and family requirements, such as part-time care requests conflicting with the financial viability of offering full-time spaces.

KEY PRIORITIES, GOALS & ACTION STRATEGIES

Priority: Increasing Access

Why it Matters

Access to child care is foundational to the well-being of families and the strength of communities. It allows parents and caregivers to participate fully in the workforce, supports economic stability, and fosters gender equity. High-quality child care also promotes healthy early childhood development, providing children with the tools they need to thrive. While progress has been made, there remains a significant need for Infant/Toddler and School Age care, particularly in ensuring equitable access across all communities on the Sunshine Coast. Addressing these gaps is essential to supporting families, strengthening the local economy, and building a resilient, inclusive region.

Goal: Coordinated and informed creation of new child care spaces that ensure equitable access to affordable, inclusive, quality child care for all families who want and need it

Accomplishments

- Increased the access rates across all age groups:
 - Infant/Toddler spaces from 12% in 2019 to 20% in 2024.
- In the last 12 months creation of new licensed spaces across all age groups:
 - 56 new Infant/Toddler spaces
 - 30 space of school age
- Creation of two new child care centres serving families with infants, toddlers and preschool aged children in high-priority areas (Sechelt/West Sechelt)
- Improved coordination across the region, ensuring creation of new spaces are in response to identified needs
- Collaborated with local and provincial government partners to identify funding opportunities and solutions to address child care needs in the region

Action Strategies (2025 – 2035)

- Identify and address barriers and challenges to providing Infant/Toddler care (e.g. staffing, financial constraints, space, etc.)
 - Seek opportunities to increase number of local ECEs seeking Infant Toddler Educator (ITE) Certification
 - Work with post-secondary institutions to explore options for expanding local ITE training opportunities

- Support ECEs studying towards ITE with mentorship opportunities, peer-led study groups, and other community-based supports
- Promote the Early Childhood Educator Specialized Certification Grant
- Work towards conducting a collaborative School Age Care Needs Assessment, including:
 - Activities children aged 6–12 engage in during out-of-school hours
 - Demand for licensed school aged care and geographic gaps in services
 - Asset mapping of existing programs (e.g., libraries, SCRD programming, tween club, etc.)
 - Develop a targeted strategy to address gaps in School Age care
- Continue to work towards localized child care solutions in Pender Harbour
- Create a localized guidance document for new child care providers to streamline processes and ensure alignment with community needs
- Survey parents using preschool to build understanding of the role it plays in the local child care system
- Continue to monitor access rates for all age groups across the region to ensure alignment with shifting demographics and population growth

Priority: Strengthening Inclusion

Why it Matters

Inclusive child care ensures that all children, regardless of their abilities, needs, or identities have equitable access to safe, supportive, and enriching environments. This fosters a sense of belonging for children and families, while empowering educators to meet diverse needs effectively. However, space challenges and a lack of qualified ECEs continue to limit the ability of many providers to fully support inclusive practices. Addressing these barriers and building sector capacity are critical to creating an inclusive child care system that benefits the entire community.

Goal: Build sector-wide capacity to support inclusive child care, ensuring all children can fully participate and feel a true sense of belonging in environments that reflect their diverse identities, abilities, and needs

Accomplishments

- School District No. 46 launched two innovative pilot child care programs that are meeting needs of children who require support
- Community-wide promotion and awareness raising of the BC Inclusive Child Care Strategy
- Provided many hours of professional development intentionally focused on increasing understanding of inclusive child care and fostering belonging for children and families, including hosting internationally renowned experts on inclusive child care practices
- Continued cross-sector collaboration and partnership via the Early Intervention Team

Action Strategies (2025 – 2035)

- Seek opportunities to increase number of local ECEs seeking Special Needs Educator (SNE) Certification
 - Work with post-secondary institutions to explore options for expanding local SNE training opportunities
 - Support ECEs studying towards SNE with mentorship, peer support and study groups
 - Promote the Early Childhood Educator Specialized Certification Grant
- Develop community-wide professional learning opportunities focused on inclusive program design:
 - Host workshops and training sessions in collaboration with the Early Intervention Team, prioritizing topics that address inclusive practices and program design for children with diverse needs
 - Explore the possibility of hosting an annual Strategies Fair to showcase inclusive practices, share resources, and build connections among child care providers, professionals, and families
- Strengthen alignment with broader accessibility and planning initiatives:
 - Collaborate with the Regional Accessibility Committee to ensure inclusive child care aligns with larger community goals
 - Advocate for increased provincial support and funding to enhance inclusive child care programs, including resources for staffing, training, and specialized supports.
- Support the development of child care environments that reflect and celebrate the cultural diversity of families and children, ensuring a focus on cultural safety and inclusion.
 - Provide professional learning opportunities that emphasize culturally responsive practices and creating a sense of belonging for all children.
 - Encourage the integration of land-based learning practices that support children’s relationships with the natural world, while respecting Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing
- Expand collaboration with the SCD Program to gather regular feedback from providers about their challenges, successes, and emerging needs related to inclusive practices
- Support child care providers in identifying and applying for funding opportunities to create more welcoming and accessible environments for children of all abilities, needs and identities

Priority: Improving Affordability

Why it Matters

Affordable child care is critical for families to access the support they need without financial strain, allowing parents and caregivers to work or pursue education. It also reduces economic inequities and fosters greater participation in the workforce, particularly among women. While recent provincial initiatives, such as the \$10-a-Day Child Care program and the Affordable Child Care Benefit (ACCB), have eased the financial burden for many families, gaps remain. Expanding access

to these programs and ensuring providers are supported in implementing affordability measures are essential steps in creating an equitable child care system.

Goal: Advocate for and support the expansion of affordability initiatives to ensure equitable access to child care that meets the needs of local families

Accomplishments

- Since 2019, 16 local child care programs have successfully transitioned to the \$10-a-Day Child Care model.
- As of June 2024, 29 local child care programs are participating in the provincial Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative, lowering costs for Sunshine Coast parents and caregivers
- School District No. 46 has led the way in affordability by offering \$10-a-Day child care for local families before the launch of the provincial program

Action Strategies (2025 – 2035)

- Advocate to provincial ministries for continued expansion of the \$10-a-Day Child Care program to support an increase in \$10-a-Day program providers on the Sunshine Coast
- Support providers in navigating the application process for the \$10-a-Day program and other affordability initiatives.
- Facilitate sector-wide promotion of the ACCB
- Strengthen provider capacity to implement affordability initiatives
 - Create a guidance document on available provincial initiatives
 - Provide training and resources for providers on accessing and utilizing government funding for affordability measures.
- Advocate for additional provincial funding to offset operational costs associated with affordability programs.

Priority: Enhancing Quality

Why it Matters

High-quality child care fosters optimal development for children, ensuring they are nurtured in safe, engaging, and developmentally appropriate environments. Quality child care supports children’s cognitive, emotional, and social growth while building trust and confidence among families. On the Sunshine Coast, providers have demonstrated a strong commitment to professional development and collaboration, contributing to the overall strength of the sector. However, challenges remain, including ensuring consistent access to training opportunities, addressing ongoing staffing gaps, and supporting providers in meeting evolving standards. Investing in quality improvement is key to sustaining a thriving child care system that meets the diverse needs of the community.

Goal: Strengthen professional learning and capacity building opportunities to support child care educators in delivering high-quality programs that meet the needs of children and families

Accomplishments

- In 2024, CCRR and School District No. 46 hosted 22 professional learning and capacity building events for local educators, offering 62.5 hours of professional development
- As of June 2024, 55 local educators accessing the provincial ECE Wage Enhancement, increasing their wage by \$6 per hour
- Since 2020, CCRR and School District No. 46 have significantly increased access to high-quality professional development for local educators by providing virtual learning and networking opportunities

Action Strategies (2025 – 2035)

- Facilitate community-wide professional learning opportunities:
 - Partner with organizations such as BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS) to deliver training based on the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework and Quality Enhancement strategies
 - Support land-based learning and culturally responsive programming through targeted workshops
 - Highlight local expertise by organizing “in-service” events that showcase proven and promising practices from providers
- Increase awareness of funding opportunities for quality improvement:
 - Provide grant writing support to help providers access capital funding and quality enhancement grants.
 - Promote available resources through networks such as the CCRR
- Build collaborative networks among child care providers to facilitate peer learning and mentorship
- Explore opportunities to increase local training for ECEs and ECEAs seeking to upgrade certifications
- Advocate for provincial and federal policies that support quality-focused initiatives, such as continued wage enhancements for ECEs, bursaries, and specialized grants; and support efforts toward a Provincial Wage Grid for ECEs.

Priority: Deepening Collaboration

Why it Matters

Strong collaboration between child care providers, local government, community organizations, schools and families is essential for building a resilient and integrated child care system. Collaboration fosters shared learning, maximizes resources, and ensures a coordinated approach to

addressing the complex challenges facing the sector. By deepening partnerships and strengthening communication, the Sunshine Coast can create a more cohesive and effective network of care, improving outcomes for children and families. Expanding collaboration will also enhance advocacy efforts, helping to secure additional resources and align child care services with broader community needs.

Goal: Strengthen partnerships and integrate child care into community planning processes to ensure it remains a central consideration in local decision-making

Accomplishments

- Established regular meetings of the Sunshine Coast Joint Child Care Council to align efforts across the region
- Working with local governments to integrate child care considerations into community development projects
- Developed and administered an annual Child Care Provider Survey, completed by 29 child care providers in 2024

Action Strategies (2025 – 2035)

- Continue to build supportive and learning relationships with shíshálh Nation and Sk̓wxwú7mesh Úxwumixw to support the creation of culturally affirming and supportive child care in the region
- Work with local governments to ensure child care remains a key priority in community planning and development projects
- Advocate for continued provincial funding for ELCC Lead positions in school districts
- Facilitate regular local working group meetings to monitor needs, share updates, and identify collaborative solutions
- Engage with families to include their perspectives in planning and decision-making processes
- Develop and launch a community awareness campaign to highlight the importance of affordable, quality, inclusive child care for healthy communities
- Collectively honour Sunshine Coast educators during May is Childcare Month, including municipal proclamations
- Consider ways to support educators interested in moving to the Sunshine Coast via housing and/or transportation supports

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