

Bill C-35 An Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada
Prepared for the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology
October 24, 2023

The Child Care Providers Resource Network (CCPRN) is committed to and focused on the well-being and safety of all children. We are a non-profit, charitable organization with a network reach of more than 5100 parents and caregivers across the province and beyond. It is our mission to provide information, training, resources, and support to those providing child care in a home setting. Child care is the care of a child, regardless of who provides the care: parents, grandparents, friends or relatives, centre-based educators, in-home nannies, and/or home child care providers—both licensed and unlicensed.

We know that when parents and caregivers have access to information and feel supported in their roles, they are better able to provide safe and nurturing environments for children to learn, play, and grow.

With less than 25% of children accessing licensed child care, CWELCC excludes more than 75% of Ontario children and families:

- Those choosing unlicensed home child care or an in-home nanny,
- those choosing informal care arrangements with a friend or relative,
- And those choosing to stay home with their own young children.

CCPRN believes that parents are competent and capable of making child care choices best suited to meet their child's and family's needs.

It is a critical time for child care in Canada. Statistics Canada data show that Canadians rely on varied forms of care to meet their needs. Parents continue to choose diverse forms of child care -including home child care (licensed and unlicensed) and/or choosing to stay at home during the early years. Parents need to know that their children and choices are valued by the government. Policies, support, and funding for child care need to be inclusive and respectful of all choices.

Current Challenges:

Capacity: Not enough spaces exist to meet the current demand. Ontario's Financial Accountability Office reports that by 2026, there will not be enough spaces in the licensed sector to meet the needs of all Ontario families. Constructing, opening, and staffing larger centres often takes years and costs millions of dollars. Furthermore, quality and integrity are stifled when building a child care industry based on "big box" child care.

To meet the current and expanding demand, Canadian families need all forms of child care to be accessible and affordable. Limiting parental choice to one type of care conflicts with the notion of a "national" child care plan and hinders access.

Staffing: Across the country, centre-based programs are struggling to recruit and retain staff. With a skewed focus on Early Childhood Educators, the CWELCC ignores the experience and unique qualities of child care workers and home child care entrepreneurs who provide essential services in their communities.

Home child care (licensed and unlicensed) provides a long-term career option for Early Childhood Educators as well as other diversely qualified individuals dedicated to supporting and enriching the lives of young children.

Lack of Inclusivity: By focusing solely on licensed child care (and predominantly the public and “not-for-profit” institutional sectors) CWELCC currently excludes a significant part of the system—unlicensed care.

Unlicensed child care, also known as informal care, allows families to choose a relative, friend, or home child care provider with similar values; a shared language; and/or a shared culture. These shared commonalities facilitate a sense of belonging and connection.

In addition, this type of child care arrangement meets the needs of families requiring flexible hours beyond the traditional 9-5 model. It also offers continuity of care with one primary caregiver—a feature which is not available in larger centres. Located either in the child's home or in the caregiver's home, these low-ratio, authentic and nurturing environments are found in neighbourhoods and communities across Canada.

Including the unlicensed sector under the CWELCC program would increase access to a diverse array of child care options. It would also support women entrepreneurs, including newcomers to Canada, racialized women, and women from vulnerable communities.

The CWELCC program cannot claim to support all families and be truly inclusive until all child care choices are included.

Recommendation:

To increase capacity, mitigate staffing challenges, and be truly respectful of all child care choices, the CWELCC funding agreements need to be flexible and inclusive. Allowing the provinces to transfer funds directly to parents would be the most effective and efficient way to achieve these goals. Reducing administrative overhead, including wasteful and redundant practices, leaves more money available to fulfil the CWELCC objective of reduced child care expenses for all families.