

Public Childcare Delivery: Learning from BC Local Government Agencies



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Contents

Executive Summary	1
Background	2
Impact of childcare market on families and ECE workers	2
From childcare market to childcare system	3
Purpose of Study	4
Childcare Context	4
National and provincial context	4
Local context	5
Methodology	6
Limitations	6
Findings	7
Full-day childcare	8
Part-day preschool	10
School-age care	12
Interview Themes	13
Public delivery responds to childcare demand	13
Benefits of public delivery	14
Wages and working conditions	17
Challenges of public delivery	21
Future Opportunities	23
Future research	24
References	25
Appendix A	27

List of Figures

Table 1. Public Agencies in BC that deliver full-day childcare	8
Table 2. Public Agencies in BC that deliver preschool	10
Table 3. Public Agencies in BC that deliver school age care	12
Table 4. Wages of ECE's in BC's publicly delivered childcare	17

Executive Summary

Purpose

Research indicates that public delivery of childcare (childcare operated directly by local or senior government agencies) is one necessary component of achieving a system of universal childcare. This contrasts with a non-profit delivery model, whereby the childcare delivery is contracted out to a non-profit organization.

The purpose of this report is to inform local government approaches to supporting childcare in BC. This report asks the following questions:

- 1.) Are there any examples of licensed public childcare delivery within the province of BC?
- 2.) If so, what is the extent of public childcare delivery?
- 3.) What are relevant and important insights to be learned from these examples to inform local government approaches to childcare in BC?

Findings

Publicly delivered childcare exists in BC as a small but impactful component of the childcare landscape. Currently in BC, publicly delivered childcare is provided primarily by municipal Parks and Recreation departments, along with two School Districts.

Through interviews with key stakeholders working in childcare, the following **benefits** of public childcare delivery were identified:

- Provides a reliable and consistent quality service to the community
- Providing childcare in publicly owned buildings lowers cost of operation and can provide financial benefits to

operations (which can lead to increased affordability for families)

- Greater control and ability to leverage space for community needs
- Better wages and working conditions for Early Childhood Educators (ECE's) (as compared to counterparts in private and non-profit sectors)
- Greater integration of ECE's into the public agency (versus being outside the organization as contractor)
- Childcare delivered in schools has an added benefit of helping children transition into their K-12 education.

The following **challenges** were identified:

- In the absence of adequate funding from senior government, childcare operators struggle to balance affordability and quality.
- ECE wages are low across the profession, which impacts retention.
- ECE staff shortages limit the ability to retain and expand programs to meet demand.

Future Opportunities

Important opportunities exist at both the provincial and local levels of government to leverage resources towards building a system of universal access to childcare. This includes enhancing coordination and partnerships between local public agencies (i.e. Municipality or region, Parks Boards, School Boards) as well as advocating for increased senior government support in the funding of childcare.

Background

Impact of childcare market on families and ECE workers

Access to affordable, quality childcare is a struggle for most families in BC, and across Canada at large. Fees are unaffordable for many working families and continue to rise faster than the rate of inflation. Data from a 2017 report show in Vancouver, the median monthly fees for toddler care are \$1292 per month, and for infant care, the fees jump to \$1360 per month (Macdonald & Friendly, 2017).

In addition to unaffordable fees, demand far exceeds supply with regards to childcare spaces. For example, in Canada licensed childcare spaces are available for less than half of all children ages 0-12 who need one (Friendly, 2019; Friendly, Larsen, Feltham, Grady, Forer &, Jones, 2018). In Vancouver, there is an approximated shortage of more than 16,000 licensed childcare spaces (Primer for the Joint Council on Childcare, 2019).



Moreover, those who work in childcare as early childhood educators (ECE's) receive low wages and often do not have benefits. ECE's struggle to make ends meet on their low salaries, and this is especially the case in cities with high costs of living, like Vancouver (Forer, 2018). As a result, turnover is high in the field and childcare operators often struggle to retain ECE's.

Many of the childcare challenges families are experiencing- insufficient spaces and inequitable access to childcare, unaffordability, variation in quality- can be attributed to Canada's reliance on a market approach to childcare, whereby childcare is conceptualized as a market commodity, not a public good (Ballantyne & Beach, 2019; Sarosi & Adeland, 2019). A market approach to childcare means limited involvement from the state in the provision of childcare and instead, reliance on market forces to "create, maintain, deliver and finance" childcare services (Friendly, 2019, p.5). The result is a "patchwork" of "hit and miss" early childhood services in Canada (Friendly, 2019; Macdonald, 2018; Mahon, 2009). In contrast, when childcare is viewed as a public good, there is infrastructure set up to ensure universal access to all families who may need childcare services.

From childcare market to childcare system

Moving from a childcare market to a childcare system would help to ensure Canadian families have *universal access* to childcare, which not only ensures a level playing field of quality, access and affordability for all families, but also benefits children's social and cognitive development and helps close the gender wage gap and decrease gender discrimination in the labour market (Anderson, Ballantyne, & Friendly, 2016; Beach & Ferns, 2015; Coalition of Childcare Advocates of BC, 2019; Macdonald, 2018; Ivanova, 2015; Van Belle, 2016).

Research on childcare shows that achieving a quality, affordable, and universal childcare system requires¹:

- majority of services publicly delivered
- well-designed, comprehensive childcare policy
- system level planning
- adequate public funding
- strong public management and oversight at system level
- local management of childcare program delivery
- adaptability and accountability to communities
- parental and community involvement



Public delivery refers to services operated directly by local or senior government agencies, such as school districts, municipalities, regional districts or public health authority. The public agency holds the operating license and directly delivers the service to the community. Employees delivering the service are considered public employees, which, as will be discussed in more detail in this report, often means higher wages and benefits, and more job security, as compared to counterparts in the non-profit and private sectors. Public delivery contrasts with a non-profit delivery model, whereby the entity to hold the operating license and deliver a service is a non-profit organization. Employees delivering the service are considered employees of the non-profit operator.

Internationally, the countries that have been able to achieve near universal access (such as the Nordic countries) have systems that are marked by the above features (Ballantyne & Beach, 2019; Cleveland, 2018; Cleveland & Colley, 2013). While those countries do have some combination of private and non-profit delivery in addition to public delivery, the fact that most of the childcare is publicly delivered ensures that such service can be accessible and universally

¹ For a more detailed explanation on building a universal childcare system, see Anderson, Ballantyne, & Friendly, 2016; Friendly & Beach, 2005; Friendly, 2019

guaranteed to families. In short, providing public delivery of childcare is a necessary step towards achieving universal access (Beach, 2019).

It is important to emphasize that public delivery is one vital part of the overall work towards building a public childcare *system*. The transformation of childcare in Canada away from a market-based approach towards a universally accessible childcare system will not only require adequate public funding and a large portion of childcare delivered by public agencies, but along with that, a comprehensive, robust public childcare policy (Friendly, 2019). Policy is needed to not only ensure that public funds are being effectively spent, but to also create the necessary infrastructure and planning to ensure that access is truly available to all families.

Purpose of Study

Grounded in the understanding that public delivery is a necessary step towards achieving universal access, this report is guided by the following questions:

- 4.) Are there any examples of licensed public childcare delivery within the province of BC?
- 5.) If so, what is the extent of public childcare delivery in BC?
- 6.) What are relevant and important insights to be learned from these examples to inform childcare policy in Vancouver?

This report focuses specifically on licensed childcare, although the City of Vancouver recognizes that many parents access unlicensed childcare, such as license-not required in-home childcare to meet their needs. Licensed childcare programs undergo monitoring and regular inspection by health authorities to ensure that the childcare operator is meeting minimum requirements for safety, staff-to-child ratios, appropriate program curriculum, among others. Research indicates that licensed childcare offers better quality as compared to more informal childcare arrangements (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998).

Childcare Context

National and Provincial Context

Childcare and education are the responsibility of provincial governments in Canada. Although historically, childcare has not been considered as education (but seen rather through the framework of family services), the provinces of Prince Edward Island (PEI), New Brunswick, Ontario and Saskatchewan have moved to recognize that childcare is early childhood learning and thus better suited under their Ministry of Education (Cleveland & Colley, 2013). However, in British Columbia, childcare still falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Children and Family

Development, although there is great momentum and policy recommendation for BC to follow suit and move childcare into the Ministry of Education (10aday.ca).

The current national childcare context in Canada is marked by great variation, with each province taking up its own initiatives most appropriate to its context. Apart from the rather well-known example of Quebec, other interesting initiatives are taking place to provide greater access and affordable childcare options for Canadian families. For example, the government of Ontario has taken steps by making 4-year-old kindergarten universal, which has helped reduce the time parents need to pay for childcare by one whole year. Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Manitoba have set parent fee caps in many of their licensed and regulated childcare programs. The result of such a measure is that parent fees in these provinces are much lower than in other parts of Canada (Friendly et al., 2018; Yarr, 2019).

The current BC provincial government has made childcare a key priority and has instituted a number of measures to help provide more affordable and quality services to families. Some of these include: The Childcare BC New Spaces Fund (which helps fund the creation of new spaces), The Child Care Operating Funding (CCOF) (grants to assist childcare providers in the overall operation of their centres and keeping parent fees affordable), ECE Wage Enhancement grants (to help attract and retain early child educators), and The Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative (fee reduction subsidies to families). In addition to these measures, the provincial government has created 53 universal childcare prototype sites at various childcare facilities throughout BC where parents pay \$10 per day, and care is available to low income families at no cost. These sites were launched in November of 2018.

Local Context- City of Vancouver



At the municipal level, the City of Vancouver is involved in the childcare landscape in several important ways. For example, the City funds non-profit operators to deliver childcare at City-owned facilities at very low cost. The City also provides a variety of grants to non-profit childcare providers, such as the Childcare Enhancement Grant Program, the Childcare Program Development Grant, among several others. As part of the Joint

Childcare Council, the City is collaborating with other public agencies, such as the Park Board and Vancouver Board of Education, to provide leadership, mentorship, advocacy, and support for the development of childcare services in Vancouver, with a focus on publicly owned childcare. The City of Vancouver also supports the Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning, also known as the \$10-a-Day Plan for a comprehensive childcare system in BC.

Methodology

The research presented in this report is based on both a review of literature on publicly delivered childcare policy and practices as well as in-depth phone interviews with key stakeholders working in/for public childcare delivery in BC. In reviewing the literature, I drew primarily from scholars and policy consultants within the Canadian context whose research supports and provides a rationale for public delivery of childcare. This literature underscores the need for a childcare system and provides insight into what features and policy measures are important for building a universally accessible childcare system. This literature served as an important foundation for my interviews with stakeholders and guided the questions I asked as part of the interview protocol. A total of 10 interviews were carried out between May and July 2019 with key stakeholders including childcare policy advisors, recreation managers overseeing public delivery of childcare programs, school principals, early childhood education program managers and coordinators, and city planners. All stakeholders were interviewed individually by phone and interviews lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. An interview protocol was developed with key questions that guided each conversation (see Appendix A). All interviews were recorded using an I-Phone, lightly transcribed, and then coded thematically. Following a brief overview of the public childcare delivery landscape in BC, the results of the thematic coding are discussed in detail.

Limitations

While this report provides an overview of publicly delivered childcare in BC at the moment, the scope and methods of this study present certain limitations. Most important, this research was carried out over a very short period of time, between May and July of 2019. There may be examples of public agencies delivering childcare that are not included in the tables, as this report does not present an exhaustive list of all examples of public childcare delivery in BC. Due to time constraints, only one stakeholder from each municipality or school district identified as providing some form of public childcare delivery in BC was able to be interviewed. As such, the perspectives and insights in this report should not be considered as totally representative of all those who work in public childcare delivery in some form or other.

Furthermore, to manage the scope of this project, this report does not include public university-run childcare (such as at UBC) or childcare delivered through First Nations (such as Smuyuq'wa' Lelum Early Childhood Development Centre through Tsawwassen First Nation). A more detailed exploration into these examples of childcare could be a line of inquiry for future research. Moreover, future research could include interviews with multiple childcare delivery stakeholders in each municipality/school district, including ECE's, other program staff, and parents to get a more detailed, fuller picture of public childcare delivery in each location. These stakeholders' 'on

the ground' perspective in program delivery is important insight for policy discussions around moving towards a system that incorporates public delivery of childcare.

Findings

Publicly delivered childcare exists in BC as a small but impactful component of the childcare landscape. Public delivery offers key differences from non-profit and private delivery, which include higher staff wages and benefits, job stability and security, and higher quality of programming. Public delivery also means that the public agency operating the service has greater control over the use of their space, programming, etc. These differences are discussed in more detail in this section.

The types of licensed childcare represented in this report are full-day childcare for children ages 0- 4, part-day preschool for children ages 3-4, and school age care for children in kindergarten to age 12.

Public agencies currently delivering some form of childcare in BC include:

- Recreation Oak Bay
- City of Surrey Community and Recreation
- District of Tofino
- Cowichan Valley Regional District Recreation and Culture Division
- Langley City Parks and recreation
- Delta Parks, Recreation and Culture
- Township of Langley Recreation and Culture
- Resort Municipality of Whistler
- School District 49 Central Coast
- School District 60 Peace River North



As the list indicates, publicly delivered childcare is provided primarily by municipal Parks and Recreation departments, along with two School Districts. The examples included in this report provide interesting and important considerations and possible lines of inquiry for public agencies in Vancouver and across BC as they work toward meeting childcare needs for BC families. What follows is a more detailed discussion of each type of childcare delivered publicly with details organized into tables.

A.) Full-Day Childcare (ages 0-4)

Four municipalities and one school district in BC currently offer full-day childcare for children ages 0- 4. Although the City of Surrey and School District 49 refer to their programs as extended-day preschool, they are considered full-day childcare because their programming extends more than 4 hours (licensing regulations in BC allow preschool to run up to a maximum of four hours).

As the table below shows, hours of operation for each full-day childcare vary, with some programs starting before 8:00 am and ending after 5:00 pm. For parents who start work before 9:00 am, the early hours allow them to drop their children off at childcare before work. The programs that finish after 5:00 pm (Oak Bay and CVRD) allow parents greater flexibility to work a full workday while their child is in childcare.

Table 1. Public Agencies in BC that deliver full-day childcare.

Full-day childcare (ages 0-4)				
Operating Agency	Number of Spaces	Ages, Days & hours of programming	Monthly Fees (before affordable childcare benefit)	Buildings/ location
Recreation Oak Bay 'Paddington Station'	25	3-5 yrs. M- F, 7:30 am- 5:30 pm	\$879	Neighbourhood Learning Centre at Oak Bay H.S.
SD 49 Central Coast daycare	Max 16, 8 enrolled	0-4 yrs. M-F, 8:00 am- 4:00 pm	\$800	Temporarily at Bella Coola Elementary (new daycare facility under construction opening Fall 2019)
SD 49 Central Coast Bella Coola Elementary extended day preschool	16	4 yr. old only M-F, 9:00 am- 3:00 pm	Free until this year; fees not yet published	Bella Coola Elementary
CVRD Recreation and Culture Division	Max 16, 8 enrolled	3-5 yrs., M-F 7:00 am- 6:00 pm	\$825	Shawnigan Lake Community Centre/ Elsie Miles building
Tofino Community Children's Centre	Max 18, 8 enrolled	30 months to school aged M-F, 8:30 AM -5:00 PM	3-4 yrs.: \$1,384 Toddler: \$1,660	Coastal Family Place (Health unit)
City of Surrey extended day preschool	Data unavailable	4 yr. old only M, W, F or T, TH 9:00 am- 2:00 pm	\$223- \$368	City-owned recreation centres and some schools

Enrolment

The number of childcare spaces that each public agency can accommodate in their programs ranges from 25 to 8, although Surrey's extended day preschool most likely accommodates many more children, but that data is not currently available.

While there is large demand for full-day childcare, not all of the programs are at full capacity. In the case of the childcare offered at Shawnigan Lake Community Centre through the Cowichan Valley Regional District Culture and Recreation Division, the program is not at full capacity due to ECE staffing shortages (a topic discussed in more detail in the challenges section).

Tofino's Community Children's Centre is also not at capacity, which as the interviewee explained, could partly be due to two factors. One inhibiting factor is the Centre's high cost. As the table shows, when compared with other public agencies, Tofino's childcare is the most expensive. To allow greater flexibility for parents to use the Community Children's Centre (with the hope of increasing enrolment), Tofino charges daily rates instead of monthly fees and parents can decide to drop their child off at the Centre and pay for either a half day or full day²². However, it is not certain whether this strategy is helping to increase enrolment at the Centre.

Care for children ages 0-3

A second inhibiting factor reported by the interviewee is that more parents in Tofino are looking for care for their younger children, ages 0-3, but at the moment, the Children's Centre only provides care for children as young as 2 ½ years.

SD 49: Central Coast

Provincial-School District Partnership

In November of 2019, a new purpose-built, standalone daycare facility will be completed in School District 49, to be directly operated by the school district.

The \$1 million funding for this space comes from the Province's Childcare BC New Spaces Fund.

SD49's full-day childcare program actually began in the Fall of 2018, and because the building was not yet complete, has been housed at Bella Coola Elementary temporarily.

The full-day childcare has run alongside Bella Coola's already existing extended-day preschool, which has been running at the school for more than 10 years.

²² The prices listed in the table above were calculated by taking the daily rate for toddler care (\$72.21) and 3-4 year old care (\$60.18) and multiplying that amount by 23, which is on average the number of days a child would attend the centre in any given month.

As the table above shows, the provision of care serving children under age 3 is very limited. This corroborates other research that illustrates that infant care is the most expensive and difficult form of childcare for parents to find (Macdonald & Friendly, 2017). School District 49, which began offering full-day daycare this past academic year (2018-19) at Bella Coola Elementary, is the only public agency delivering infant and toddler care as part of their daycare.

Fees

Monthly fees range from \$800- \$1400 per month for publicly delivered full day childcare, before subsidy. School District 49 is the least expensive, with parents paying \$800 per month before subsidy, for infant-toddler care, which as mentioned above, is generally the most expensive type of childcare.

With the exception of Tofino, the other full daycare monthly fees are lower than the average in Vancouver, which hovers around \$ 1,000 per month for toddlers and \$1400 for infant full day care (Yarr, 2019).

B.) Part-day preschools

Five municipalities and one school district provide part-day preschool. As the table indicates, most of the preschools offer both Monday, Wednesday, Friday programming and Tuesday, Thursday programming options. Moreover, most preschools run both morning and afternoon sessions. Recreation Oak Bay, however, offers preschool five days a week, which provides greater childcare support for parents, albeit for limited hours each day.

Table 2. Public Agencies in BC that directly deliver preschool programming.

Part- Day Preschools (ages 3-4)				
Operating Agency	Number of Spaces	Days & Hours	Monthly Fees (fees below are ranges)	Buildings/ location
City of Surrey, Community and recreation services	1284	Programs M, W, F or T/TH Morning and afternoon sessions	\$140- \$222	City-owned recreation centres and Public elementary schools
Langley City Parks and recreation	40	Programs M,W, F or T/ TH Morning and afternoon sessions	\$120- \$165	City-owned Recreation Centres
Township of Langley Recreation and Culture	80	Programs M,W, F or T/ TH Morning and afternoon sessions	\$141.57- \$204.40	City-owned recreation centres
Recreation Oak Bay	16	Programs M-F Morning session only	\$442	City-owned recreation centre
CVRD Recreation and Culture Division	40	Programs M, W, F Morning session only	\$125- \$170	Elise Miles building (former school building, now city owned)
School District 60 Peace River North	20	Programs M, W, TH Morning and afternoon sessions	\$130- \$170	Robert Ogilvie Elementary, Duncan Cran Elementary

Enrolment

The designated spaces available for preschools in each municipality depends on a variety of factors including size of the community, licensing agreements, availability of space to hold classes, staff available to run classes, among others. Surrey has the highest number of spaces dedicated for preschool, totalling almost 1,300 spots. After Surrey, however, there's a substantial drop and the next largest preschool program is offered through Township of Langley, offering 4 sessions with a maximum of 20 students in each session.

Location of childcare

In School District 60, preschool programs are run at two elementary schools, Robert Ogilvie and Duncan Cran, with a maximum of 10 spots available at each school. At both schools in SD 60, the preschool program takes place in the designated Strong Start classrooms at each school (after the Strong Start programming is finished for the day).

Whereas the School District-run preschools are delivered at elementary schools, many of the preschools run by Parks and Recreation departments in the table above are delivered inside multipurpose rooms at city-owned recreation centres. These preschools programs run alongside other programming that may be offered to the community. Surrey, as the largest municipality represented, offers preschool programming at its recreation centres, as well as several local public elementary schools.

Additionally, some municipalities have either repurposed older buildings or had new buildings constructed to house preschool and/or other childcare programming. For example, in 2005 the District of Oak Bay Parks and Recreation completely rebuilt one of their facilities. As part of the rebuild, a children's program room was created to serve as the space for their 'Pre-School Playhouse' program.

In Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), the preschool (and other childcare programs) run through the South Cowichan Recreation Department are all housed in one building that used to

Space in Schools

At both schools in SD 60 (Peace River North), the space and scheduling work well between the Strong Start and licensed preschool programs at each school. But in other schools, such a seamless transition between programming may not be possible, particularly if there are multiple programs with different hours of operation that are required to share their space with the rest of the school.

This is the case in Surrey, where school space is in high demand and there are multiple competing programs utilizing classroom space at the same time. Surrey Parks and Recreation has increasingly less space in schools to operate their programs.

be a small elementary school. As the CVRD childcare coordinator explained in an interview, when the school closed several years ago, the recreation department paid the school board rent and then eventually bought the 4-room school to house all of its childcare programs, including its preschool, full day childcare and after school childcare. These examples illustrate the potential opportunities for innovation and planning for childcare space creation that may be present with existing publicly owned facilities.

Fees

Compared with the median monthly preschool fees charged by childcare centres in BC, which range from \$180 to \$455 depending on the days per week a child is attending the program, as the table shows, the monthly fees parents pay for publicly delivered preschool in BC are less expensive (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2018).

C.) School-Age Care

School age care, offered to children before and after school, is provided in five municipalities. As the table below shows, currently in BC, publicly delivered school age care is provided solely by Parks and Recreation departments. No school districts operate school age care at the moment.

Table 3. Public Agencies in BC that deliver school-age care.

School Age Care (Kindergarten and up)				
Operating Agency	Number of Spaces	Ages, Days & hours of programming	Monthly Fees	Buildings/ location
Recreation Oak Bay	25 (Henderson) 120 (NLC)	K- Grade 5 M-F, dismissal -5:15 pm	Before school: \$190 After school: \$320	Henderson recreation center, Neighbourhood Learning Centre
City of Surrey, Community and Recreation	1,374	K- Grade 7 M-F, 7:00- first bell, dismissal- 6:00 pm	Before school: \$ 194 After school: \$442.75	Various elementary schools
Delta Parks, Recreation and Culture	48 (South Delta) 3 (Pinewood)	K- grade 6 M-F, 7am-9am, 3pm-6pm	Before school: \$190 After school: \$320	South Delta Recreation Centre, Pinewood Leisure Centre
CVRD Recreation and Culture Division	78 (with 1-2 year wait list)	K- grade 6 M-F, 7:00 am- 8:45 am Dismissal until 6 pm	Before and after school: \$431.25 After school only: \$356	Shawnigan Lake Community Centre/ Elsie Miles building
Municipality of Whistler	54	K- age 12 M-F, Dismissal until 6 pm	Junior program (K - grade 1): \$448 Senior program (grade 2-6): \$402	Myrtle Philip Community School

Oak Bay's school age care program, along with its full-day daycare, takes place in the Neighbourhood Learning Centre, which is a purpose built-space for childcare inside Oak Bay High School. According to a manager at Recreation Oak Bay, Oak Bay High School needed to be rebuilt, which provided an opportunity for the municipality and the school district to collaborate and redesign the new space to include the dedicated childcare space. The municipality provided

partial funding for the space, along with funds from a provincial grant. The Oak Bay Neighbourhood Learning Centre illustrates the potential for collaborative partnerships between public agencies to create spaces for publicly delivered childcare.

Interview Themes

Public delivery responds to childcare demand

All stakeholders who were interviewed expressed that they see their role as serving the community and being as responsive to community needs as possible.

Although the provision of childcare is not their mandate per se, through their programs, each public agency is trying to do its part to fill the gap in childcare that currently exists for families in the communities they serve.

We started noticing that parents were using our recreation programs as childcare, and over the years, the city has come to realize how dependent families are on them to ensure their kids are ready for school. As preschool providers, we realized that we were becoming essentially childcare providers”.
- City of Surrey Recreation Manager

As discussed in Section 1 above, relying on the market for childcare has resulted in a large gap between supply and demand, whereby there aren't

“We do not make a profit at the end of the day, but we run this program solely because the community needs it”.
-Childcare Coordinator CVRD

enough facilities to provide childcare for all who need it and/or the cost is out of reach for many families. This in turn has meant families are turning to local public agencies like Parks and Recreation departments to provide childcare services.

“Our preschool used to have a waitlist and there was a huge demand for it, but now that is changing because both parents are working and they need more day-care like settings with longer extended hours, as opposed to pre-school settings with limited hours”

-Recreation Manager, Township of Langley

Parents are looking for full day options

Parents are looking for full day childcare options for children younger than school age, and recreation departments are noticing that preschool hours are not long enough. In most municipalities and districts, full-day childcare programs have waitlists of up to 2 years. Moreover, in some places preschool enrolment has been declining while demands for full-day and school age care options are increasing.

As a response, some public agencies have moved to offering extended hours preschool that lasts 4 to 6 hours. This is the case in Surrey and School District 49, which offer extended preschool and full-day preschool, respectively. However, as mentioned above, both programs are licensed as group care for ages 30 months to school age, although their programs are called “preschool”.

The benefits of public childcare delivery:

1.) Publicly delivered services offer consistency and reliability

“The fact that it’s a consistent reliable service is a huge benefit to the community. With multiple staff and not just relying on one staff person, you can guarantee that the centre will never close. I think a privately owned/run daycare is less reliable. The privately-run daycare my child attended 3 days a week closed more frequently, like when the teacher was sick, but I never had that happen at the public facility.”

- Director of Financial Services, District of Tofino

Public delivery allows for childcare to become embedded into community services and the strength and sustainability of the childcare service can be better supported. Interviewees explained that one important benefit of childcare programs delivered by local public agencies is the consistency and reliability that such programs bring.



2.) Public delivery of quality programs facilitates trust

The reliability and consistency mentioned above also facilitate public agencies’ connection to the communities they serve, which helps build trust with the community. Many of these programs are coming to be known as longstanding programs in the community.

Furthermore, positive reputations based on consistency and trust also help to ensure the longevity of such publicly delivered programs, as elected officials are generally inclined to preserve a service that is so popular and embedded in the community.

“It’s become well known for the quality place for childcare and I think that you know from a parent’s perspective you’ve sort of got that reputation of the district behind it and there’s sort of that trust level with the district”.

– Manager, Recreation Oak Bay

3.) *Public delivery has financial advantages.*

Public agencies have the benefit of having publicly owned facilities, such as recreation centres, schools, or other facilities where childcare spaces can potentially be located. In cities with high rental costs, like Vancouver, being able to deliver programming in publicly owned facilities can represent a significant reduction in operating expenses. Moreover, in publicly- owned facilities with multiple ongoing programs, infrastructure costs (i.e., lights, water, heat, building maintenance, administration costs, etc...) can be shared amongst all programs, thereby reducing the operating costs for each individual program.

Furthermore, profit is not the overarching motive in the operation of public agency programming. Because of this, often agreements are made between two public agencies, whereby the public agency owning a facility leases it to another to operate childcare at little to no cost. This is the case in Tofino, where Island Health leases out a designated part of its facility (Coastal Family Place) to the municipality of Tofino for \$0 to run its Tofino Community Children’s Centre. The financial advantages of public delivery for childcare operators (cost sharing amongst programs and nominal or non-existent space rental costs) can support increased affordability for parents.



4.) *Public delivery facilitates greater control and ability to leverage space for community needs*

Direct program delivery means that the local public agency has a certain level of control over the program operation and delivery that isn’t always possible when a service is delivered within a

They [a contracted operator] would have to work with us quite extensively as far as management of the space, so we would have to be involved anyway. If it’s contracted out, you lose the opportunity to use the space in other ways and make adjustments on the fly if needed”.

-Recreation manager, Township of Langley

publicly owned facility but contracted out to an outside provider. Direct delivery facilitates the public agency’s ability to be more involved in the programs delivered in their facility. For example, they can leverage space and adapt programming when needed, thereby allowing for greater ability to meet the community’s needs.

5.) Public delivery facilitates staff integration and collaboration

Direct delivery by public agencies allows for collaboration and connection between program managers and program employees. Rather than being seen as external to a district or municipality (as is the case with external contractors), ECE's are considered employees of the local governments and school districts where they work. Moreover, the sense of connection that public delivery can potentially facilitate applies not only to other employees, but to community members as well. Particularly for Parks and Recreation departments, families whose children enrol in any of their childcare programs become better acquainted with recreation programming and services, which often results in a boost in enrolment in other programs.

"It's really nice to know exactly what's going on, who's there, and collaborate with them too. If it was contracted out, I don't know if there would be that same connection and collaboration. I spend a lot of time with the ECE's and I think they feel a part of the district. Whereas when I've seen the daycare that's at the new school, they [the ECE's] are there, but it doesn't seem like they're as connected to the school".

-Early Childhood Learning Coordinator, SD 60

6.) Childcare delivered at schools helps children transition into K-12 education

"If it's all in the same school...there is the comfort, familiarity. Students and parents already know what's in the school, who the staff are, other children that are there, so they become part of that community school at a much earlier age and that transition seems to be very helpful for students that move on to kindergarten, there are less struggles in that transition".

-Early Childhood Coordinator, SD 60

Fostering a sense of connection and serving as a transition into other programs offered by the public agency is especially the case with childcare delivered by school districts. As the interest by the Ministry of Education to get involved in childcare continues to grow, testimony from two school districts currently provided direct delivery of childcare provides encouraging insight.



Childcare centre at Lord Nelson elementary school in Vancouver

Wages and Working Conditions

1.) ECE's in publicly delivered programs are often unionized and have higher hourly salaries

ECE workers in the publicly delivered programs included in this report are considered municipal, regional district, or school district employees, in the case of SD 49 and 60. As the table below shows, many ECE's are unionized staff with varying degrees of job security and benefits packages. For example, some ECE's receive benefits pro-rated on the hours they work each week, while others get a percentage wage increase in lieu of benefits. In addition to compensation, the public agencies support ECE's in maintaining their ECE certification and will either bring professional development training to the centre (for which ECEs are compensated for attending) or provide funding for the ECE's to attend professional development workshops off site.

Table 4. Wages of ECE's in BC's publicly delivered childcare

ECE Wages and Benefits				
Public Agency	Position category	Union?	Wage (hourly)	Living Wage of Region
Tofino	Full-time	Yes	\$20.11 with benefits	\$20.11
Oak Bay	Full-time, part-time regular, some auxiliary positions	Yes	Full-time daycare ECE: \$28 with benefits Part-time: wage and benefits pro-rated Auxiliary: N/A	\$19.39
CVRD	Part-time regular	No	\$23.85 plus benefits	\$19.05
City of Langley	Casual	Yes	\$21.66 - \$23.26; 12.5% in lieu of benefits	\$20.91
Surrey	Regular part-time	Yes	\$25.68 (ECE facilitator)/ \$20.78 (ECE lead) with benefits pro-rated	\$20.91
SD 60 Fort St. John	Full-time	Yes	\$21.36 with benefits	\$18.29
SD 49 Bella Coola	Full-time	Yes	\$21.50 with benefits	\$16.51
Township of Langley	Casual	No	\$24.13 with 13% in lieu of benefits	\$20.91
Delta	Auxiliary	Yes	\$22.48- 26.36; %12-16 in lieu of benefits	\$20.91
Whistler	Casual auxiliary, some permanent part time	No	\$18 12% in lieu of benefits	\$16.40

Table 4 above shows the wages for the ECE's in each of the publicly delivered childcare examples included in this research. Results from the *2018 Wages and Working Conditions Survey of Vancouver Centre-Based Child Care Programs* indicate that the average wage for an ECE who works solely with children in either a preschool or group care setting (i.e., no administration or supervisory duties) is \$20.00 per hour. The wage for a school age care worker is lower (\$17/hour), while the wage for infant toddler ECE's is slightly higher at \$21.00 per hour. As the

table shows, the wages of ECE's working at the public agencies included in this report (in all three types of childcare settings) are all higher than the average, with some wages reaching as high as \$28 per hour, as in Oak Bay's full-day childcare. Moreover, as the table shows, all of the wages in publicly delivered programs meet or surpass the living wage in each region, according to most recent data (<http://www.livingwagecanada.ca/index.php/living-wage-communities/british-columbia/>).

2.) Greater flexibility in creating staff roles and schedules to meet needs of ECE's

Direct delivery allows public agencies greater flexibility in creating program staff roles and schedules that better meet the needs of their programs as well as employees. In programs that are contracted out, the ECE's are not considered employees of the city/district, and thus only work in the program they are contracted to work in for the specified hours. In publicly delivered programs, all ECE's are employees of the local government (or school district, in the case of SD 49 and 60), and there is greater opportunity to have ECE's work in other recreation or childcare programs to create a more full-time work week (although the opportunity to do so varies across locations). Two examples from BC are worth noting:

School District 60 in Fort St. John offers school district provided preschool at two elementary schools. This preschool program was created not only to meet the need in the district for preschool, but to also provide a way to retain good ECE staff (working in the school's Strong Start program) who needed full-time work.

"We have two certified ECE's who were only working part time as Strong Start facilitators and they were looking for more hours and were prepared to leave Strong Start because they wanted more. So the district developed this idea to keep them employed pretty well full-time. Now, they still do Strong Start 18 hours a week and then the remaining hours are made up with the preschool hours. They're both excellent educators and we didn't want to lose them and ECE's are not easy to get up here, to keep them is sometimes challenging so this was a win-win situation for us."

-Early Childhood Coordinator, SD 60

Moreover, SD 60 is able to pay the ECE teacher wages and sustain both programs due to financial support by the provincial government. SD 60 can access two sources of funding. One source of funding comes from the Ministry of Education, which covers the ECEs' wages for the Strong Start

program. The other source of funding comes from the provincial Childcare Operating Fund (CCOF) grant. The CCOF grant along with parent fees over the ECEs' wages for the preschool portion of their work week. This example illustrates what innovation and collaboration between a local public agency and senior government can achieve.

Recreation Oak Bay provides another interesting example. The Parks and Recreation department was able to adjust the hours they offer part-time daycare to create a better timetable for a hard to staff position and move it into the union structure, with the hope of attracting people to the role. As she explained:

“We've had some challenges staffing the part-time daycare that currently operates. We've had a really difficult time staffing that because of the hours. And also, they are auxiliary positions, not a regular [part-time] position. So we've moved it to Monday to Friday mornings now, which has enabled us to create a regular part-time position within our union structure which will then also have benefits, will have the wage rate commensurate with our other regular full-time folks. So we're hoping that helps us attract staff to those positions.”

– Oak Bay Recreation Manager

As will be discussed below, staff recruitment and retention- especially for part-time programs such as school age care- is a big challenge that childcare operators face. These two examples illustrate some of the opportunities for creativity and adaptations that public agencies more readily have at their discretion than non-profit or private operators.



YMCA Nanook House Childcare outdoor play area

3.) Publicly delivered programs have indirectly helped raise ECE wages in the non-profit sector.

Some interviewees explained that the higher wages in the public sector have also had a ripple effect in certain areas, helping to raise the wages of ECE's in the non-profit and private sectors.

For example, in Tofino, the municipality decided to raise their ECE wages to be higher than other childcare centres in the region to accomplish two goals: increase wages in the region as well as ensure staff retention in their programs.

We just increased all our childcare wages to our region's living wage... By doing that, it meant that the cost of the centre increased quite a bit. But what we were finding is that in this field of work, more and more people are leaving the profession because the wages are so low. And so to encourage employment in the region and try to get others in the region to increase their wages, we increased ours to a living wage and now we are fully staffed and that's no longer an issue for us [...] and we have made a bit of an impact here in the region".

Director of Financial Services, Tofino (oversees Tofino's Community Children's Centre)

In Surrey, some publicly delivered preschools operate in community centres, alongside childcare programs operated by non-profit organizations. Because the city of Surrey pays a higher hourly rate, the non-profits have also had to raise their hourly ECE wages in order to retain their workers (who may otherwise go to work for the City of Surrey's program).

However, it is important to note, while this has helped raise the wages of ECE's in some non-profits, it has also surfaced some tension between the City of Surrey and non-profit childcare operators. This is particularly true at co-location sites, where non-profit operators may face financial challenges in having to raise wages to compete with wages of publicly delivered programs. In the case of Surrey, as the table shows, the hourly wage for an ECE facilitator is \$25.68 with pro-rated benefits; matching that may be a challenge for some non-profits. More research is warranted into examining the impacts of policy changes in the childcare landscape on non-profit providers and ways these can be navigated.



Challenges of public delivery

1.) Although wages are higher for ECE's working in publicly delivered programs, these wages are often not enough to live on, and programs struggle with retaining staff.

As several interviewees explained, although the wages are higher in public sector delivered childcare than in the non-profit and private sectors, ECE's still struggle to make ends meet. Moreover, low wages impact staff recruitment and retention. This is particularly the case in places with a high cost of living.

"They [preschool educators] do get good wages, but at end of the day, that still puts them on the cusp of the poverty line".

- Recreation manager, Township of Langley

School age care has some of the highest staff turnover

The childcare sector has a high turnover rate, and this is especially the case with school age care. The hours of school age care make it more challenging. Staff in these programs often work two hours before school and then resume work at 3pm, which prevents them from working in other role (although many municipalities try to have school age care staff work in other programs to create a more full-time workload).

The high rate of turnover often causes a large administrative challenge and can impact overall program delivery, as program managers are always in a process of recruitment and hiring and a lot of time and energy is dedicated to training and mentoring new employees.

Public delivery doesn't necessarily solve the issue of low ECE wages and high turnover. As agencies are often mandated to run childcare programs at cost recovery, they are consistently trying to ensure their fees remain generally affordable while also paying decent wages to childcare staff.



2.) In the absence of adequate funding from senior government, childcare operators struggle to balance affordability and quality.

As mentioned above, parent fees are often in tension with ECE wages. Childcare operators consistently struggle to maintain affordable parent fees while also ensuring their ECE's receive adequate compensation for their work and their programs deliver high quality childcare. This balancing act is a continual challenge for all interviewees with whom I spoke.

Without adequate support from senior government, program coordinators have to find ways to find a balance. Some are forced to cut in certain areas to maintain good wages and relatively low parent fees. For example, the CVRD program coordinator explained that their program invests less in cutting edge supplies and works with what they have so as to stay within budget and ensure good ECE wages. Moreover, CVRD tries to keep parent fee increases to every few years (not yearly), while staff get annual wage increases of only 1% (which does not keep in pace with inflation).

Provincial Wage Enhancement Grants are not enough

While most of the public agencies receive provincial wage enhancement funding to help pay their staff wages, wages still account for the vast majority of program costs (75-90%).

Although wage enhancements help, they often aren't enough. Moreover, wage enhancement grants do not help solve the challenge of retaining staff in programs with non-traditional hours, such as school age care programs. While public agencies do their best to have staff work in different roles to make a more or less full-time schedule, this isn't always possible.

3.) ECE shortage limits program expansion

A few interviewees explained that while their programs are in high demand and there is a need for more programming, particularly in school age care, staffing shortages have prevented them from expanding their programs. In some cases, grant money may be available to expand programs and create more spaces, but as some program coordinators explained, they decide not to pursue the grant because they don't have enough staffing.

"If you don't have the staffing, what's the point in having the spaces?"

Childcare coordinator, CVRD

Future Opportunities:

All stakeholders interviewed believe that important opportunities exist at both the provincial and local levels of government to leverage resources towards building a system of universal access to childcare.

Senior Government:

- Sustainable supply-side funding to public agencies to directly operate childcare would ensure childcare stability and longevity

As discussed in the introduction, public delivery is one vital part of the path towards achieving a universal system of childcare. However, many BC local public agencies do not directly deliver childcare, which may be due to the lack of financial capacity.” As stakeholders emphasized in their interviews, without adequate financial support from senior government, sustainable delivery of childcare remains very challenging for public agencies, as it is for childcare operators in all sectors. Adequate and sustainable funding from both the provincial and federal governments would help create long-term stability and alleviate financial pressure on local public agencies.

- Provincial responsibility for childcare should be housed within the Ministry of Education

In addition to funding, interviewees from both school districts 49 and 60 emphasized the important role that moving childcare to the Ministry of Education could play in ensuring the sustainability of childcare initiatives, as childcare would have a ‘home’ and thus a mandate in a Ministry. This legislative change would simplify and expedite location of childcare programs in BC public schools, and delivery by school districts.

Local Government:

Local public agencies play a key role in the local childcare landscape. The current moment could provide opportunities for local public agencies to contemplate any existing opportunities within the current infrastructure that can be leveraged to work towards achieving some of the key benefits of universal childcare without full senior government support. This may include:

“I think you’d end up with more secure preschools and daycares for a longer period of time. They’re popping up as trial situations...but if it became a responsibility of the school systems to provide it [childcare], I think just the longevity of things would last for longer because ... if it was a part of our mandate no matter what leadership came in and out or whatever budgetary restrictions came and we would have the responsibility to maintain the program”

-Principal of Bella Coola Elementary (SD 49)

- Enhancing coordination and partnerships between local public agencies (i.e. Municipalities/districts, Parks Boards, School Boards) to identify possible public spaces suitable for childcare
- (With public partners) Identify roles each public agency could play in the local management and provision of childcare
- Increased coordination between public and non-profit agencies to work towards a more comprehensive system of childcare delivery, marked by similar standards in quality, comparable wages and benefits for ECE's, to name a few
- (With public partners) advocate at the provincial level for increased senior government support in the funding of childcare and supports for public delivery
- Pilot publicly delivered childcare in different types of publicly owned buildings (schools, community centres, etc). The time may be particularly right for school districts to pilot operating school aged care, given the interest already displayed by the Ministry of Education, and no BC school district yet directly operates school age care.
- Conduct feasibility studies for piloting public delivery. For school districts, such a feasibility study could explore the potential of combining staffing requirements for publicly delivered school aged childcare with existing school district staff, such as educational assistants.

Further Research

Future research could include the following topics:

- Childcare directly delivered through First Nations (such as the example of Smuyuq'wa' Lelum Early Childhood Development Centre through Tsawwassen First Nation) to better understand public delivery from an Indigenous Early Learning and Childcare Framework.
- Childcare delivered through public universities (such as UBC Childcare Services) to better understand public delivery via public institutions.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Nuts and Bolts questions:

- 1.) What types of childcare does your public agency deliver?
- 2.) What type of building is your childcare located in?
 - a. Is it co-located with other public uses? If so, do you share any physical space (e.g. outdoor space, washrooms, office, occasional use of a gym)?
 - b. Does the childcare share any other resources with other publicly delivered services (e.g. uses the same online registration system)

Process/Strategy:

- 3.) Can you talk about the process of how (name of city/municipality) came to have a role in directly operating childcare?
 - a. What was the rationale/motivation behind operating the first public childcare program, and who were the key drivers (e.g. elected council, community members, ECE workers)?
 - b. What general strategy/approach was taken to operate municipal centres? (developing a strategy, building partnerships, etc),
 - c. Do you have any plans to expand childcare delivery in any way?

Funding/ financing:

- 4.) How does (name of city/municipality) fund childcare centre operations?
 - a. What was the source of capital funding? (i.e. how was the building project/renovation funded to create the childcare space?)
 - b. What direct funding supports, if any, does the public agency provide to operations?
 - c. Does the childcare operate on a cost recovery basis?
 - d. What is the ownership model for the childcare facility/building?

Quality Assurance and inclusion:

- 5.) Are any standards or monitoring mechanisms in place to measure and assess the quality of the municipally run childcare centres?
 - a. What criteria are used to measure quality (i.e., outdoor play area, design guidelines, play equipment, nutrition of food provided, ECE- child ratio, etc...)?
- 6.) Can you speak to your childcare's approach to inclusion of children with varying types of needs?

Wages and working conditions:

- 7.) Can you speak to working conditions and wages and benefits for early childhood educator s (ECE) and staff who work at municipally run childcare centres?
 - a. Do you know how they compare to wages and conditions of ECE's in non-profit and for-profit childcare centres?
 - b. Do staff have other work benefits (i.e., healthy benefits, professional development, etc)
 - c. Do the staff work exclusively at the childcare program, or do they also work in other programs (e.g. preschool or school age care staff working full shifts by combining these part-day programs with other work at a community centre,)

Moving forward:

- 8.) What lessons have you learned that would be helpful to other municipalities?
 - a. What works well?
 - b. Common/ potential pitfalls to look out for?
- 9.) What advice would you give to other public agencies (municipalities, school boards) considering providing publicly delivered childcare?
- 10.) What do you see as potential opportunities where senior (provincial) government could support childcare delivery?

