

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE  
INFORMATION BRIEFING NOTE

**DATE:** June 1, 2023  
**CLIFF:** 290388

**PREPARED FOR:** Christina Zacharuk, Deputy Minister – **FOR ENDORSEMENT**

**SUBJECT:** Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) Approach for First Nations

**PURPOSE:** Ministry response to concerns raised by representatives from the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society and the First Nations Leadership Council regarding future investments in Aboriginal Head Start (AHS).

**BACKGROUND:**

- The AHS program is an evidence-based model supporting early learning and child care (ELCC) for Indigenous children from birth to age six with additional supports for their families. The program began in the 1990s as a preschool only program funded directly by the federal government.
- In 2018, through funding provided under the Canada-BC ELCC Agreement, the province began funding expansion of the AHS program for full-day child care in response to engagement with Indigenous partners and direct regional engagements with First Nations at the 2017 First Nations Health Caucus sessions.
- The province partnered with the experienced AHS federal administrators First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) for AHS on reserve (AHSOR) and Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC (AHSABC) for AHS in urban and northern communities (AHSUNC). Since 2018 the funding for AHS has been expanded through provincial and Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CW-ELCC) investments and has grown to provide almost 1,800 Indigenous families with no fee, high quality, culturally relevant child care. (See Attachment 1)

s.16; s.17

- The development of another Indigenous child care model will take years to complete, require Indigenous curriculum expertise and intensive co-development with Nations. Should the Ministry take on this initiative it would not be Indigenous-led.

s.13; s.16

#### DISCUSSION:

- Since 2018, the Ministry has held successful partnerships with FNHA and AHSABC to administer this funding in a way that seeks to de-colonize funding, with Indigenous people as the driving force in decision making and a supportive application process that is simplified using creative application techniques. These Indigenous funding partners recognize Indigenous interpretations for useful applications of funding differ from colonial ones, that there is a diverse set of needs in communities taking a holistic approach to each community's needs. By visiting communities, even those very remote, they take a "no-one left behind" approach, prioritizing communities that are traditionally excluded through top-down models.
- All FNHA AHS programs include community level design and delivery of the six AHS components: culture and language, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support, and parent and family involvement. The program is designed and delivered by First Nations communities to meet their unique needs and priorities.
- Evidence from the First Nations Regional Health Survey<sup>2</sup> suggests that AHSOR approach helps to instill a strong sense of cultural identity that will follow children throughout their lives, while also having a positive impact on the broader promotion of Indigenous languages and cultures. For example, a significantly higher percentage of children who had attended AHSOR had some knowledge of a First Nations language and were more likely to take part in traditional activities, such as singing, drumming, and dancing, than those who did not attend the program.<sup>3</sup>

s.13; s.16; s.17

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<sup>2</sup> Page 37 National Report of the First Nations Regional Health Survey July 2018

<sup>3</sup> The Government of Canada marks the 20th anniversary of Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve program - Canada.ca

s.13; s.16; s.17

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- 290388 IBN DM Attachment 1 AHS Funding 22/23 and 23/24 (See below)
- 290388 IBN DM Attachment 2 DBN 286297

- 290388 IBN DM Attachment 3 Summary of FNHA Reporting
- 290388 IBN DM Attachment 4 First Nations Virtual Engagement Summary
- 290388 IBN DM Attachment 5 BCACCS Background

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**Date:** June 1, 2023

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s.13 ; s.17

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE  
**DECISION BRIEFING NOTE**

**DATE:** February 9, 2023  
**CLIFF:** 286297

**PREPARED FOR:** Christina Zacharuk, Deputy Minister – **FOR DECISION**

**SUBJECT:** First Nation Health Authority (FNHA) request for increased funding

**PURPOSE:** FNHA requested additional funding to respond to funding requests from First Nations to convert and create Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) child care spaces

**BACKGROUND:**

- Since 2018, the Province has partnered with FNHA (for on-reserve AHS sites) and Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC (AHSABC) (for off-reserve AHS sites), to support the creation/conversion of approximately 1,500 AHS spaces province-wide. Funding for this expansion was provided through the two federal ELCC Agreements, as well as provincial budget.
- Under the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (CW-ELCC) in 2022/23 FNHA has received \$8.76 million to support 288 AHS spaces in First Nations, (\$7.71 million annualized in 2023/24, plus annual inflationary increases which will be built into the CW-ELCC Action Plan for 23/24-25/26).

**DISCUSSION:**

- As reflected in Table 1, in 2022/23, FNHA allocated the \$8.76 million in CW-ELCC to support:
  - \$1.05 million for Quality Improvement Grants at AHS facilities; and,
  - \$7.71 million to convert 288 spaces to the AHS model in 15 First Nations.

**s.12; s.13; s.16; s.17**

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s.12 ; s.13 ; s.16 ; s.17

## Summary Review of First Nations Health Authority Reporting

The Ministry of Education and Child Care works closely with the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) through the provision of federal and provincial funding to FNHA to administer and support the expansion of Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) in First Nations. This partnership began in 2018 with the Canada-BC bilateral Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (ELCC) to create new AHS spaces and more recently includes funding under the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CW-ELCC) Agreement and provincial funding for the conversion of Indigenous-led child care to AHS for a total of 954 SPACES. FNHA received \$24.19M in FY 22/23.

## s.16; s.17

### **Overview of successes/challenges in expanding AHS on reserve includes;**

- The AHS program is federally funded and has been operating since 1990's as a preschool program, it is well established and evaluated
- First Nations families now have access to no-fee child care in their community through this initiative

## s.16

- FNHA works closely with Nations to provide wrap around child and family supports for wellness and provides support and mentorship to the AHS sites
- AHS funding enables Nations to design and deliver culturally based ELCC that best meets their community needs
- Expanding AHS to include child care (provincially funded using provincial and federal investments) has caused some confusion about the difference between what is federally funded preschool and what is provincially funded AHS sites
- FNHA has a 'no one left behind' approach, meaning the funding is dispersed across as many Nations as possible, vs fully funding a limited number of programs which differs significantly from the approach taken by the urban AHS partner who provides fully funded operating funding to urban Indigenous providers. This has created inequity in how programs on and off-reserve are funded.

## s.16

### **Planned Mitigations to address challenges includes;**



Work is underway to address some of the inequities created in the AHS funding beginning with the inclusion of funding in the ELCC bi-lateral Agreement Action Plan to increase the funding level to the AHS sites that are underfunded through this agreement and 'make them whole.' Further discussion with FNHA is needed to evaluate what is working and what is not working for future planning.

**s.13; s.16; s.17**

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s.13 ; s.16 ; s.17

# First Nations Early Learning and Child Care Engagement to Support Development of the 2023-24 to 2025-26 CW-ELCC Action Plan

## Engagement Summary

The Ministry of Education and Child Care (the Ministry) is committed to consultation and engagement with First Nations to inform development of the 2023-24 to 2025-26 Action Plan under the Canada-British Columbia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CW-ELCC) Agreement. Learnings from this and future engagement will allow the Ministry to target federal funds from the CW-ELCC Agreement towards priorities identified by First Nations to support a distinctions-based approach to First Nations-led child care.

This series of engagements invited First Nations, community members and early learning and child care professionals to participate in virtual sessions to share their experiences and insights related to early learning and child care, what they would like to see prioritized over the next three years, and to hear from Nations on how they would like to be engaged by the Ministry going forward.

	<b>ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY</b> 3 sessions on April 18 and 19, 2023 66 Total Participants 10 breakout focus groups, each with 5-7 participants
<b>Engagement Questions:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What are your priorities for early learning and child care in your community and what is needed to support those priorities?</li><li>2. How would you like to be engaged going forward?</li></ol>
<b>Participants:</b>	66 total participants representing 43 Nations or organizations <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 43 Nations, 3 Tribal Councils</li><li>• 8 First Nations Partner Organizations</li><li>• 1 School District</li></ul>

### What We Heard – Key Themes

1. What are your priorities for early learning and child care in your community and what is needed to support those priorities?

#### Funding

- Funding should be flexible for Nations, as many funding programs are too restrictive and do not allow Nations to determine how they want to serve their distinct community.
  - Programs that do not fit into criteria boxes don't qualify for funding and miss opportunities.
  - Funding should support flexible care for communities that may not have licensed child care.
  - Support needs to be provided for applying and negotiating through different government programs, such as the \$10 a Day ChildCareBC program.
- Operational funding should be provided through a single stream of annual funding that supports wages, covers fees, and accounts for inflation.

- Many programs access a mix of federal and provincial funding, as well as additional grants.
  - Core funding must include language and culture programming, to ensure that First Nations can support their language teachers and pay for Elders' support.
  - Families have challenges accessing the Affordable Child Care Benefit program and providers spend hours supporting families to access the program.
  - Infrastructure funding is needed to support Nations with repairs and renovations, as many programs are located in old buildings.
  - Funding for transportation is needed to increase child care attendance, as parents do not always have a way to access the child care centre.
    - Transportation could also be used to help elders get to the child care centre or take the children on field trips.
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### Access

- Facilities are not designed by Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and lack storage and spaces designated for staff.
  - The New Spaces Fund (NSF) is not adequately priced for projects being built on reserves. First Nations were pushed onto reserves with poor quality land, and the cost of construction is high. Due to building and insurance costs, Nations cannot afford the capital costs of child care even with access to the NSF.
  - New child care centres or expansions of existing centres are needed. Some communities have outgrown existing child care buildings and cannot keep up with the community's growth, while other communities have witnessed closures of child care programs.
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### Programs

- The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact ELCC programs, as families are hesitant to send their children and Elders are hesitant to participate.
  - Converting to Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) is a priority for some communities, while other communities want a larger umbrella of programs and services beyond AHS. This includes outreach (in-home visits) and recreational care (drop-in, mom and tot, etc.)
    - In communities with family-based AHS programs, families would often like to have a child care program, so they can work while their child attends.
  - Language teaching is a key priority for programs to support language revitalization and foster kinship care.
    - There are capacity concerns for some communities as those who are able to support with language and culture revitalization are over-extended in capacity and may not be able to teach in child care settings.
  - Land-based learning programs are a priority for some communities, including cultural field trips.
  - Programs need to be flexible on a year-to-year basis as Nations may have varying numbers of births per year.
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## Staffing

- Staff recruitment and retention is a significant challenge for most communities. Due to a lack of staff capacity, some programs are closing or are not able to open.
  - An early childhood professional's fit is not only about qualifications and credentials, but also their lived experiences, skills, and ability to meet the needs of children with a trauma-informed practice. Programs are struggling to find ECEs who have the cultural background needed to support AHS programs.
  - Staffing is a particularly acute challenge for rural/remote communities, particularly with inflation and the lack of housing. Some Nations offer housing or living allowances, but ECEs are frequently moving out of community due to affordability challenges.
  - ECEs are burning out faster than they are joining the field.
    - ECEs are incentivized not to take their vacation due to the ECE Wage Enhancement only being limited to hours when staff are working with children.
  - Becoming a fully certified ECE is challenging for ECE Assistants (ECEAs) who cannot afford to leave their community to complete their training and practicums. Limited staffing at centres would cause programs to close if ECEAs decide to pursue their full ECE certificate.
  - Funding is needed to allow First Nations to conduct their own training, including language training for ECEs, as they often have capacity to train their own people but lack funding.
  - Some Nations are running ECE programs in partnership with a college or sister Nation; however, more incentives are needed to encourage enrolment, such as paid training, greater flexibility and training that is close to home or online.
  - Training in trauma-informed practice is needed for ECEs to support children with self-regulation and learning emotions.
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## Inclusion

- It is challenging to find qualified staff, to work with children with support needs, and assessments need to be done in a culturally appropriate manner without having to travel out of the community.
  - The wait times for assessments and appointments are too long and Nations have had to rely on submitting requests under Jordan's Principle to ensure that children can access the services they need, when they need them.
    - There is a shortage of experts, such as speech therapists, and it is very costly to access contracted experts.
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## Overall Child Care System

- There is a need for increased connections between early learning and child care and the K-12 sector. Some communities have begun this work and created these connections through shared staff (cultural advisors, speech and language pathologists, etc.), which supports the child when they enter kindergarten.
  - This includes a need for a better understanding of the transition of child care into the Ministry.
- Licensing regulations limits culturally appropriate care for First Nations. Therefore, some communities do not want to license their programs; however, there is limited funding available to support unlicensed programming.

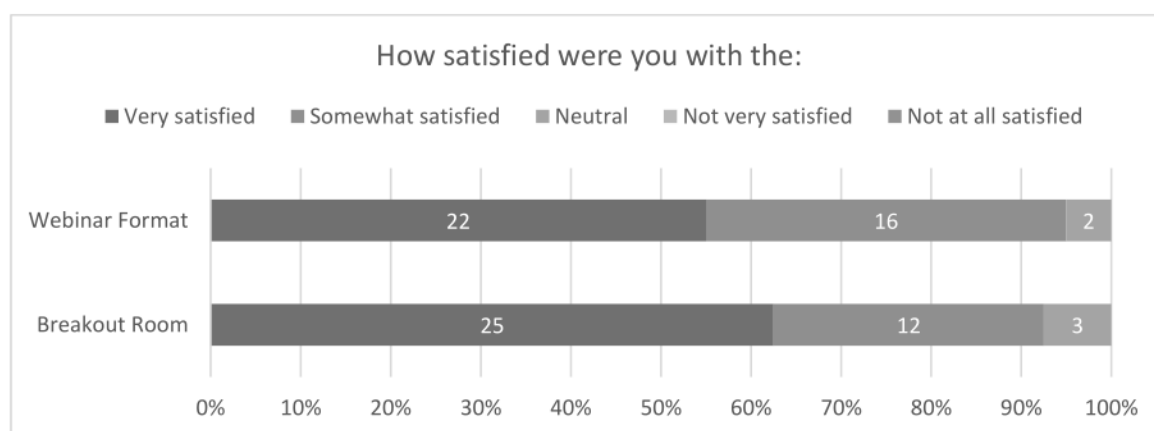
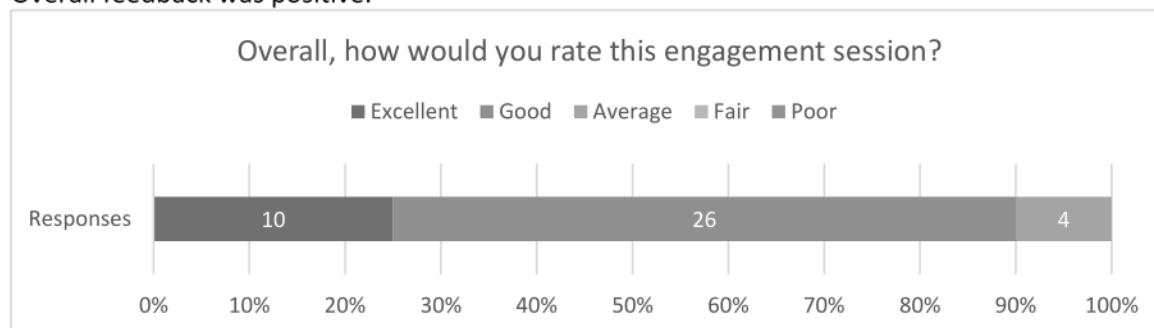
- The age categories for licensed care separates children, notably siblings. This is a colonial practice that reminds elders of residential school treatment.
  - Licensing regulations often create barriers for the inclusion of traditional foods.
  - Nations want to make their own determinations about staffing exemptions, instead of someone outside of the community making the decision.
  - More flexibility around ratios would support quality and help adapt to staffing shortages.
  - Programs that seek licensing are faced with barriers and frustration.  
Lack of housing causes families to leave for larger city centres, lowering the number of children in the community.
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## 2. How would you like to be engaged going forward?

- Webinars are appreciated as an accessible form of engagement that does not require too much time. Materials should be shared in advance.
    - Breakout rooms are helpful in allowing small-group discussions where participants feel comfortable voicing their perspectives.
    - Online gatherings could be regional-based to reflect similar situations within regions.
  - Regional outreach is a priority for engagement. One participant suggested including a designated staff person per region who could build relationships with Nations and who Nations could reach out with questions and feedback.
    - In-person engagements could be held regionally to share ideas and feedback.
    - Regional representation is important for supporting First Nations from different parts of the province, as some may not participate if they don't feel represented.
  - Engage on a Nation-level and bring citizens from the community together to honour their unique needs.
  - An opportunity for written engagement or a document submission would be appreciated, to outline needs in more detail.
  - There is a backlog of communication if all communication goes to Chief and Council. Contact information for each Nation needs to be developed to reach the staff responsible for early learning and child care in each Nation in a streamlined way.
  - Participants would like to receive an update on how their feedback has been received and what has been included in the CW-ELCC Action Plan.
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## Lessons Learned

40 participants completed a post-session survey to provide feedback on the engagement session. Overall feedback was positive.



Overall, participant feedback affirmed the virtual webinar approach to engagement with a focus on small group discussions to ensure that all participants feel heard. Based on written feedback from participants, future sessions should consider sharing more written materials in advance and balance opportunities for large group discussions.

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## Next Steps

Many participants requested a report of this engagement with key findings and an update on what is implemented in the CW-ELCC Action Plan. The Ministry will create a public-facing report of this summary that can be sent to the participants and posted on the ChildCareBC website.

The Ministry's Engagement Plan with First Nations includes additional consultation (via webinars) with First Nations to continue to inform priorities for future federal funding opportunities, as well as the co-development of regulations to bring the Early Learning and Child Care Act and the Early Childhood Educator Act into force. Future in person sessions are also recommended.

## BC Aboriginal Child Care Society(BCACCS)

### Background

- BCACCS currently operates two existing federally funded AHS preschools (off-reserve) in Vancouver. All the federally funded preschools receive their funding directly from the Public Health Agency Canada. Both BCACCS AHS preschools are located in Vancouver and receive no AHS funding from the provincial government.
- A BCACCS staff member is a Board Member of the Aboriginal Head Start Association BC (AHSABC) for off-reserve AHS. AHSABC is governed by the AHS site Coordinators with an Advisory Elders Circle. Should BCACCS have concerns/issues with the AHS model, as an AHSABC board member there is opportunity to promote change.
- BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS) has been providing child care supports to Indigenous children and families in British Columbia through the Aboriginal Child Care Resource and Referral Centre (ACCRR)

s.13; s.16; s.17



- BCACCS has a direct relationship with the Canada as the Regional First Nations ELCC Coordinating Structure for the development and implementation of the First Nations Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care (IELCC) Framework in BC. BCACCS is directing the I-ELCC funding to support a First Nations ECE Wage Enhancement program, a Minor Capital program and starting this fiscal, a Service Development and Enhancement program.
- For recent Repair and Renovation funding available under I-ELCC Canada has chosen to federally manage and deliver this funding through the three existing legacy programs Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) administered by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve (AHSOR) administered by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and the First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI) administered by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). Although the federal First Nations ELCC partner, BCACCS was not chosen to administer this program.

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