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# Backgrounder

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## INDIGENOUS EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE FRAMEWORK

On September 17, 2018, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), the Métis National Council (MNC) and the Government of Canada jointly released a co-developed Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Framework. The Framework will help strengthen early learning and child care programs for Indigenous children and families, with the goal of providing Indigenous children with the best possible start in life.

This Framework is meant as a guide for all actors in the ELCC sphere to work towards achieving a shared vision that all Indigenous children have the opportunity to experience high-quality, culturally strong ELCC, built on a foundation of shared principles, rooted in Indigenous knowledge, cultures and languages, and supported by strong partnerships. The Framework establishes overarching principles and sets a vision for happy and safe Indigenous children and families, strong cultural identity, and a comprehensive and coordinated system that is anchored in self-determination, centred on children and grounded in culture.

The Framework was informed by comprehensive engagement undertaken in 2017 by the Government and Indigenous partners. Over 100 engagement activities were conducted across the country by Indigenous organizations and the Government of Canada, reaching over 3,000 participants through town halls, regional and national meetings, and online surveys. The Indigenous ELCC Framework captures the views and recommendations of the many Indigenous peoples that participated in the engagement and is a guide for the provision of ELCC service to all Indigenous peoples.

This engagement identified the following main themes:

- Indigenous peoples place a very high value on access to quality early learning and child care services.
- Indigenous peoples should have greater control over the early learning and child care services provided to their children.
- Indigenous early learning and child care programs should include strong cultural and language content that is appropriate to the specific cultures and languages of Indigenous peoples.
- There are gaps in the availability of early learning and child care services.
- Overall funding is inadequate to meet the needs of Indigenous children and families.
- There are quality concerns about current Indigenous early learning and child care programs.
- There is a need for greater integration of the many federal and provincial/territorial programs.
- Current federal programs (Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve, Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities and First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative) are valuable but should be built upon to provide better access to all Indigenous peoples, inclusion of the full scope of early learning and child care services and greater financial and administrative flexibility.

The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework is supportive and consistent with the following:

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Call to Action #12 directs federal, provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments to work together to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families.
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing

education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Early Learning and Child Care for Indigenous children should be grounded in their identity as Indigenous peoples. All Indigenous children, regardless of status or location, should have access to dynamic, culture-based early childhood education.
- Principle 10 of the Principles Respecting the Government of Canada's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples: "a distinctions-based approach is needed to ensure that the unique rights, interests and circumstances of the First Nations, the Métis Nation and Inuit are acknowledged, affirmed, and implemented."

Alongside distinctions-based priorities and relationships, the Framework sets out principles and goals for Indigenous early learning and child care in order to better respond to and support the needs, responsibilities and aspirations of all Indigenous children and families across Canada regardless of where they live. It also recognizes the importance of implementing distinctions-based frameworks based on the rights, interests and circumstances of First Nations, Inuit and the Métis Nation.

The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework contains the:

- First Nations Framework which envisions a system of diverse, high-quality programs and services that lays the foundation for the health and well-being of First Nations children, provides choices for families, and revitalizes and supports the cultural continuity of First Nations communities and nations.
- Inuit Framework which identifies early learning and child care as an opportunity for cultural revitalization that can connect Inuit with their land, culture, language, and histories. Inuit early learning and child care is also a significant step towards self-determination and reconciliation.
- Métis Nation Framework which identifies a vision for early learning and child care in which Métis children and families throughout the Homeland are provided with culturally relevant, self-empowering early learning and child care programming and services that focus on the development and maintenance of strong Métis families and communities across the lifespan, beginning at birth.

Federal partners in engagement and framework development include:

- [Employment and Social Development Canada](#)
- [Indigenous Services Canada](#)
- [Health Canada](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada](#)
- [Status of Women Canada](#)

#### *Budget 2017 and Budget 2018 funding towards the Indigenous ELCC Framework*

In support of the Indigenous ELCC Framework, the Government of Canada is committing up to \$1.7 billion over 10 years to strengthen early learning and child care programs and services for Indigenous children and families starting in 2018-19. This is part of the commitment of \$7.5 billion over 11 years the Government has made to support and create more high-quality, affordable child care across the country. Over the next 10 years, up to \$1.02 billion will support ELCC for First Nations and will be managed in partnership with First Nations. Up to \$111 million will support ELCC for Inuit and will be managed in partnership with Inuit. Up to \$450 million will support ELCC for the Métis Nation and will be managed in partnership with the Métis Nation.

### *Existing federally-funded Indigenous early learning and child care programs*

The federal government has an established role in Indigenous early learning and child care both on- and off-reserve, currently spending approximately \$132.6 million annually in three main programs:

- The First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI) is administered by Employment and Social Development Canada. FNICCI provides full-time, year-round early learning and child care to First Nations and Inuit children up to age 12, including after-school care. In many northern communities, FNICCI is the only program offering child care.
- Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve (AHSOR) is administered by Indigenous Services Canada (transitioning from Health Canada) and offers half-day programming focused on early learning and child development, including early intervention and screening for developmental difficulties. The program is built on six components (e.g., parental involvement, Indigenous languages and cultures, school readiness) that are highly linked to community needs.
- Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) is administered by the Public Health Agency of Canada. AHSUNC is similar to AHSOR in design, but is delivered largely off-reserve in urban and northern communities.

The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework and the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework complement one another. The Multilateral Framework was signed in June 2017 by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Early Learning and Child Care; governments agreed to work together to address some of the key early learning and child care issues across the country.

### *Investments in Indigenous ELCC will complement investments in First Nations education*

Budget 2016 announced an unprecedented funding increase of \$2.6 billion over five years for primary and secondary education on reserve, including support for the transformation of on-reserve education.

Coinciding transformation of both Indigenous ELCC and on-reserve elementary and secondary education, including kindergarten, will help increase the options available to First Nations communities to support their children's learning and development.

Find information about the [engagement process with Canadians on Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care](#) to develop an Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework.