



Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan 2026 Update

JANUARY 2026

Sunshine Coast Joint Child Care Council





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

Joint Child Care Council Members

- | | |
|---|---|
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| ▪ District of Sechelt | ▪ Town of Gibsons |
| ▪ School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast) | ▪ Vancouver Coastal Health |
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The work of the Sunshine Coast Joint Child Care Council takes place on the ancestral and unceded territories of shíshálh Nation and Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw. With deep gratitude, we honor the peoples who have been stewards of the lands, waters, and communities of what is presently known as the Sunshine Coast since time immemorial and who continue to guide us in understanding our shared responsibility to care for and respect the land and all who call it home.

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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child care is foundational to the well-being of children, families, and communities on the Sunshine Coast. It supports early childhood development, enables parents and caregivers to participate in the workforce, and contributes to the social and economic health of the region. As the community moves into 2026, access to quality, inclusive, and affordable child care remains essential to community resilience and family well-being. The 2026 update of the Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan incorporates updated data and provider input from 2025. It documents recent changes in licensed capacity, ongoing access gaps, and emerging system pressures, and uses this information to refine priorities and actions for the coming year.

Since the release of the 2019 Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan, access to licensed child care has improved most significantly for families with children aged 3 to 5 years, who continue to have the highest access rate in the region. At the same time, families continue to experience significant challenges accessing child care on the Coast. These challenges are most pronounced for those with infants and toddlers or children with support needs, those needing care during non-traditional hours, and families living in Halfmoon Bay and Pender Harbour.

Between November 2024 and October 2025, temporary program closures affected licensed spaces for children under 6. Almost half the program closures were driven by ongoing shortages of qualified Early Childhood Educators, which were intensified by federal immigration policy changes. The impacts were compounded by persistent challenges related to wages, housing availability, and access to training and certification pathways.

Importantly, provider survey data from 2025 highlights a growing gap between official licensed capacity and the number of spaces actually offered to families. 20 of the 29 providers who responded reported operating below their licensed capacity at least some of the time. Unlike in 2024, when staffing shortages were most often cited, providers in 2025 more frequently identified lack of family registration, program fit, age-group transitions, and intentional decisions to maintain smaller group sizes as factors influencing the number of spaces offered.

Affordability initiatives, including the \$10-a-Day Child Care Program and the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative, have improved affordability for many families, and the Sunshine Coast is now home to 16 \$10-a-Day programs. At the same time, 2025 surfaced new pressures for \$10-a-Day providers, particularly the introduction of a new Operating Funding Model. Providers reported concerns about wage funding, staffing flexibility, leadership compensation, and overall program sustainability.

In 2025, child care on the Sunshine Coast received increased local and provincial media attention following the temporary closure of YMCA Infant-Toddler programs. Coverage highlighted the impact on families and the pressures facing local providers. In response, parents became more visible advocates, and families, municipal leaders and community partners worked together to problem-solve with provincial decision-makers. This period of heightened attention reinforced the importance of coordinated, cross-sector action to address immediate pressures while supporting the longer-term stability of the local child care system.

KEY PRIORITIES, GOALS & ACTIONS

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

Increasing Access

- **Goal:** Coordinated and informed creation of new child care spaces that ensure equitable access to affordable, inclusive, quality child care for all families who want and need it
- **Action Strategies:** Identify and address barriers to IT and School Age care; work toward localized solutions in Pender Harbour; enhance guidance for providers; monitor access rates; and respond collaboratively to changes and emerging needs

Strengthening Inclusion

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

Improving Affordability

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

Enhancing Quality

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

Deepening Collaboration

- **Goal:** Strengthen partnerships and integrate child care into community planning processes to ensure it remains a central consideration in local decision-making
- **Action Strategies:** Enhance collaboration with shíshálh Nation and Sḵwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw; engage families in planning and decision-making; prioritize child care in regional and local

community planning; and enhance understanding of importance of child care through public awareness campaigns and community-based educator recognition

A Child Care Vision for the Sunshine Coast

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

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



ABOUT THE CHILD CARE ACTION PLAN

SCOPE & PURPOSE

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

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

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

BACKGROUND

Child care plays a foundational role in the development and well-being of children, the stability and growth of families, and the economic vitality of communities. The 2019 Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan, funded through a Union of BC Municipalities grant, was a pivotal step in addressing the pressing need for quality, affordable, and inclusive child care across the region. In 2025, a revised Action Plan was created, building on the foundation of the 2019 plan and providing new opportunities to celebrate successes as well as monitor and track change over time.

There has been notable progress in the local sector since the original Action Plan was created, including an overall net gain in spaces, particularly for children aged 3 to 5 years. At the same time, demand for child care continues to outpace supply, particularly in Infant/Toddler and School Age care and in specific communities. This year also saw a reduction in the number of licensed child care program and spaces along with a decline in access rates for children under the age of 6. There also continues to be significant gaps in access to care during non-traditional hours, and for children with support needs. Recruitment and retention of qualified Early Childhood Educators, while improved since 2019, remain a concern and led to temporary program closures this year. Thanks to the continued

efforts of many in our community and growing media attention over the last year, child care remains a top priority for the Sunshine Coast going into 2026.

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



I feel like I am offering a very valuable service to my community and can see that the children in my care are thriving. I would wish that every family would have the option to choose care that suits their child's and family's needs. Childcare is more than a commodity purchased by the working parent. It is an essential service for the well-being of children, their families and the entire community

~ Child Care Provider

POLICY CONTEXT

The Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan is informed by the evolving provincial child care landscape, guided by the *ChildCareBC* Plan. Launched in 2018, this comprehensive strategy focuses on expanding child care spaces, enhancing program quality, and fostering partnerships between governments, communities, and service providers. It aligns with broader national goals under the [*Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement*](#), positioning child care as a critical pillar for supporting families, promoting economic stability, and building thriving communities. In March 2025, BC and Canada signed a 5-year extension to the CW-ELCC Agreement, securing funding through to the end of March 2031.

The BC Early Learning and Child Care Act came into force in September 2024, replacing the Child Care Subsidy Act and Child Care BC Act. In December 2025, the Ministry of Education and Child Care released the first annual report under the Act, highlighting key milestones and activities in priority areas including collaboration with First Nations, Métis and Indigenous Organizations, affordability, inclusive child care, accessibility, workforce and quality, and transitions to the K-12 system. Highlights included expansion of the \$10 a Day program, elimination of waitlist fees, release of inclusive design guidelines, streamlined application processes for child care on school grounds, introduction of ECE Specialization Certification Grants and test of a new Operating Funding Model.

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

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

The Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan is further shaped by key frameworks that guide early learning and child care across British Columbia. The [*BC Early Learning Framework*](#) provides a vision for living and learning together respectfully, supporting educators, families, and professionals in creating meaningful early learning experiences. The [*Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework*](#) reflects the unique cultures, aspirations, and needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, while the [*Métis Nation Early Learning and Child Care Framework*](#) emphasizes culturally relevant programs that nurture Métis identity, family connections, and belonging.

A 10-year Plan for Local Child Care

Significant changes since 2020—including impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic—prompted the Joint Child Care Council to update the Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan in 2025. The plan, originally developed through a Union of BC Municipalities grant, now serves as a 10-year framework refreshed annually with local data, including licensed space counts and survey results. The updated plan was presented and endorsed by three local governments, and shared with provincial and federal government representatives. Further engagement is planned with the shíshálh Nation and local child care providers. The current Action Plan strengthens advocacy, supports grant applications for new facilities, and provides a shared roadmap for coordinated child care expansion across the region.

Learn more: [Updated Child Care Action Plan aims to address Sunshine Coast's growing demand - Coast Reporter](#)

CHILD CARE LANDSCAPE

DATA AND INSIGHTS

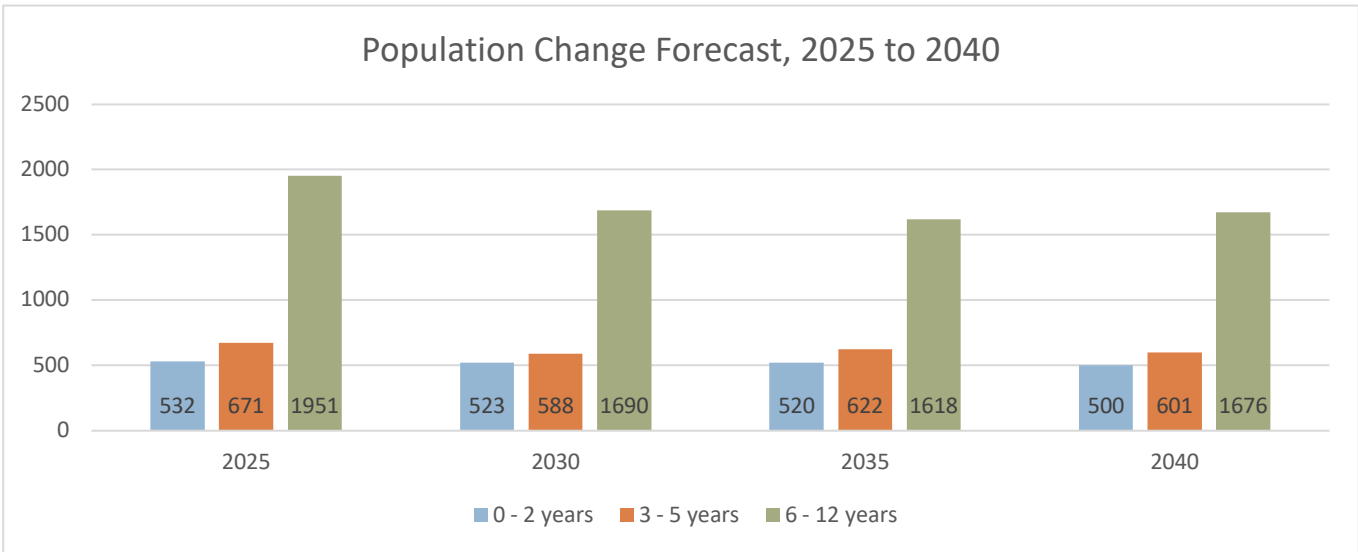
Understanding the child care landscape on the Sunshine Coast requires a comprehensive view of the community’s demographics, child care capacity, and key trends. This section provides an overview of the local context, highlighting critical data that informs the development of the Action Plan.

POPULATION



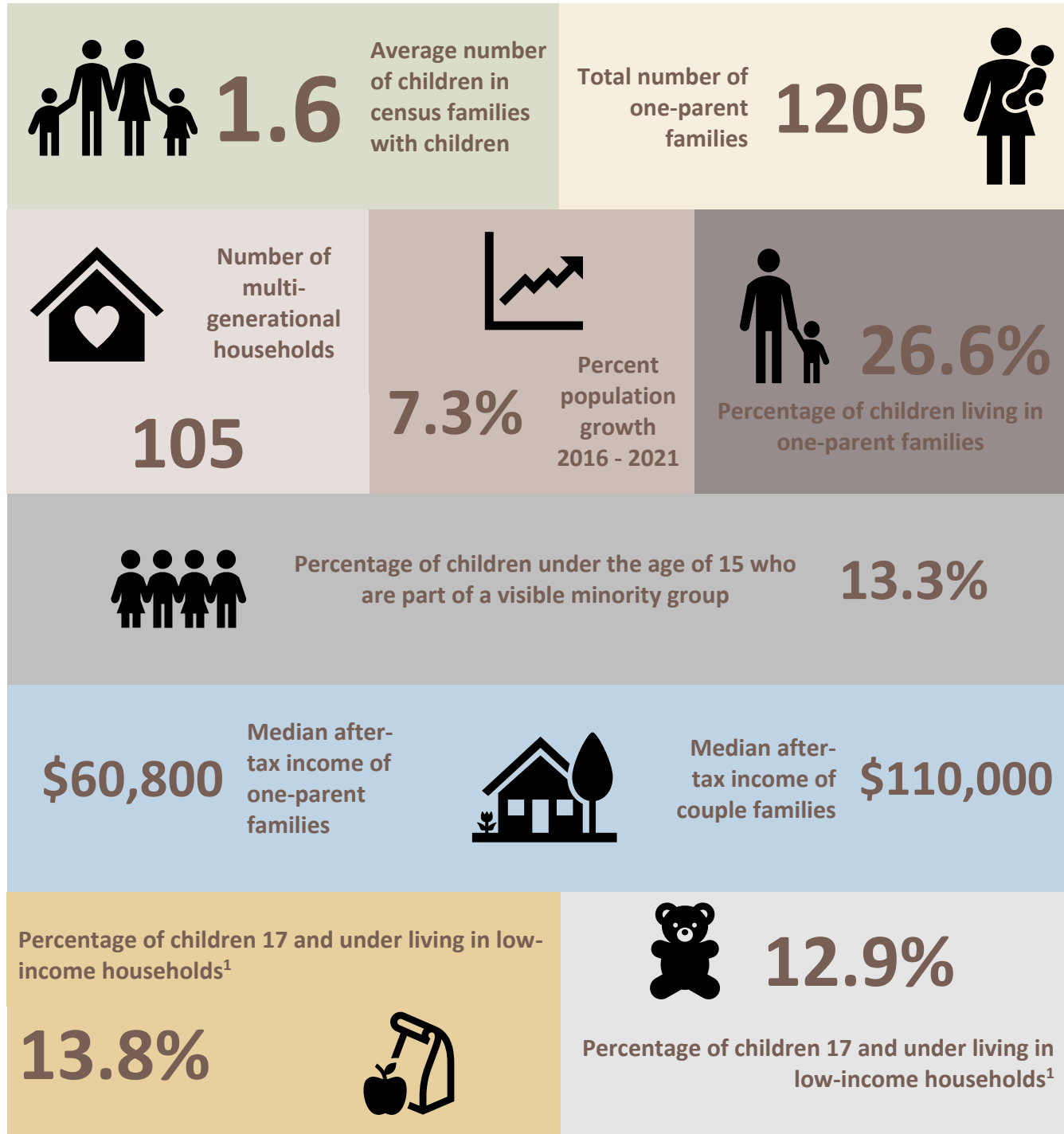
As of January 2026, BC Stats had not released final population estimates for 2025. Based on projections using 2021 Census data and demographic trends, BC Stats projected that approximately 3,154 children aged birth to 12 would be living on the Sunshine Coast in 2025, representing 9.4% of the total population (BC Stats, 2024). This reflects a slight decrease in the total population of both children and adults, while the proportion of residents under age 13 remains stable. Updated long-term projections, reflecting recent changes to immigration, now anticipate a gradual decline in the number of children across all child care age groups in the region (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Population Change Forecast, Children 0 - 12 years, updated July 1, 2025



Source: BC Stats, Population Estimates and Projections

Children and Families on the Sunshine Coast (2021)



Source: Statistics Canada, Census Profile, 2021 Census

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

CHILD CARE AVAILABILITY – A SNAPSHOT



48

Licensed Child Care Programs



785

Licensed Child Care Spaces

As of October 2025, there were 48 licensed child care programs operating on the Sunshine Coast, representing a total of 745 licensed child care spaces for an estimated population of 3,154 children.

Licensed child care programs fall into five general categories. Licensed Group Care includes programs that provide child care to infants and toddlers under 36 months of age, preschool aged children 30 months to school age, and school aged children aged 6 to 12 years. Multi-age care includes programs that care for children from birth to 12 years in a single group setting, either in community or in private homes. Preschool programs offer part-time care and early learning experiences for children aged 30 months to school age, typically operating for less than four hours per day. Between October 2024 and October 2025, there was a loss of licensed child care spaces in all categories except for In-Home Multi Age Care, which increased by 2 spaces, and School Age Group Child Care, which increased by 7 spaces.

ACCESS RATES

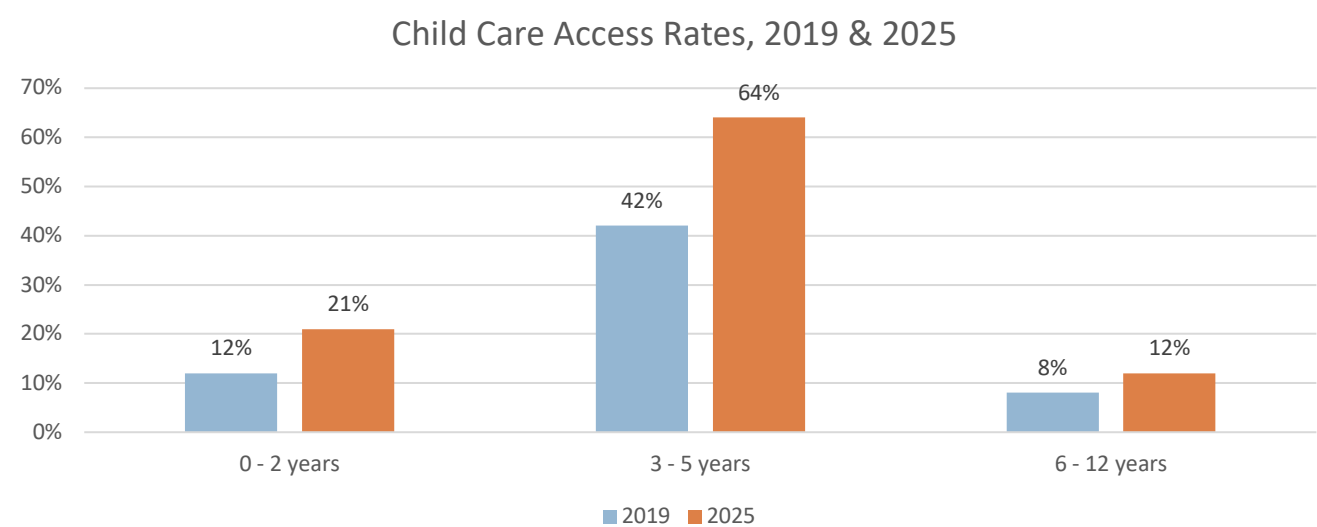
In 2025 child care access rates continued to be highest for children aged 3 to 5 years, with an estimated 63.6 spaces per 100 children (64% access rate). While this represents a one percent decrease from 2024, it remains a notable increase from the 42% access rate estimated in 2019. Long-term improvements have also been made for infants and toddlers, with access rising from an estimated 12% in 2019 to 21% in 2025, and for school-aged children, where estimated access increased from 8% in 2019 to 12% in 2025. Despite these gains, families continue to face substantial challenges in accessing Infant/Toddler and School Age child care and gains appear to have stalled, at least temporarily, for 3 to 5 care. While additional data is needed to fully understand and address these gaps on a local scale, it is generally assumed that low availability of Infant/Toddler spaces is primarily driven by systemic barriers such as staffing shortages, financial constraints, and the higher cost of operating spaces for this age group. Likewise, regulatory requirements for physical space, staffing shortages, space availability and transportation challenges are common barriers to providing school age care.

Table 1: Estimated Access Rate by Age Group, October 2024 – October 2025²

AGE GROUP	# OF CHILDREN		# OF LICENSED SPACES		SPACES PER 100 CHILDREN		ESTIMATED ACCESS RATE	
	2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025
0 to 2 years	642	532	144	116	22	21	22%	21%
3 to 5 years	711	671	462	427	65	64	65%	64%
6 to 12 years	1951	1951	235	242	12	12	12%	12%
Total	3,304	3,154	832	785	-	-	-	-

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

Figure 2: Estimated Child Care Access Rates Over Time



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

² Access rates are calculated using number of licensed childcare spaces as the numerator (via VCH Licensing Data, Oct 2024 & 2025) and estimated number of children in the given age bracket as the denominator (via BC Population Estimates Dashboard accessed Nov 18, 2024 and January 5, 2026). Child care spaces dedicated to multi-age childcare are divided equally across the three age groups.

A NOTE ABOUT SPACES & ESTIMATED ACCESS RATES

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

In the 2025 Child Care Provider Survey, 20 out of 29 respondents reported operating below their licensed capacity at least some of the time. While in 2024 the majority of those operating below capacity cited staffing as the primary limiting factor, the 2025 survey pointed to a lack of families registering and/or better fit for the program as the primary reasons for not filling all licensed spaces.

PARENT/CAREGIVER EXPERIENCES



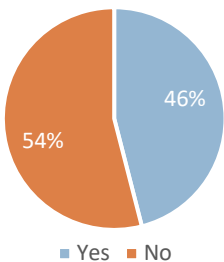
The Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (CHEQ) is a comprehensive tool designed to capture key insights into the early experiences of children before they enter kindergarten. Administered to families as part of the kindergarten registration process, the CHEQ collects data on various aspects of children's lives, including their health, well-being, and participation in early learning programs, such as licensed child care. On the Sunshine Coast, CHEQ data provides valuable information on child care access and utilization, helping to identify trends and gaps in care for children aged birth to 5 years. In 2025, 46 parents provided

information about their children's experience in child care (see Figure 3). As was the case in 2024, responses show that children beginning Kindergarten in 2025 were significantly more likely to have been in a child care setting during their preschool years than when they were a toddler. Preschool aged children were also more likely to have attended a licensed child care centre or preschool, while parents were more likely to rely on other forms of child care when the child was a toddler. Of those who completed the CHEQ, 86% reported having challenges accessing early learning and child care

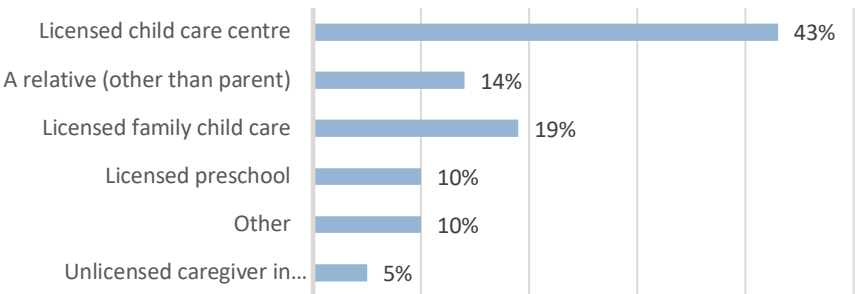
arrangements, with availability of spaces, being waitlisted and cost being the most frequently cited hurdles.

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

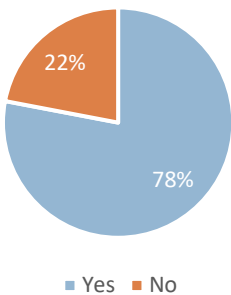
From 18 months to 3 years, was the child in a child care arrangement other than parental care



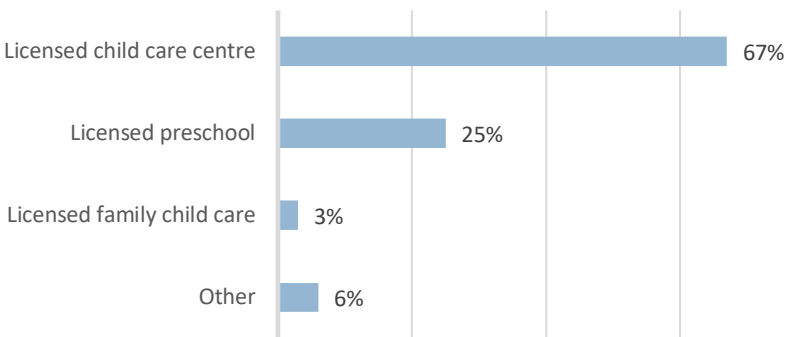
From 18 months to 3 years, Type of child care arrangement used most



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



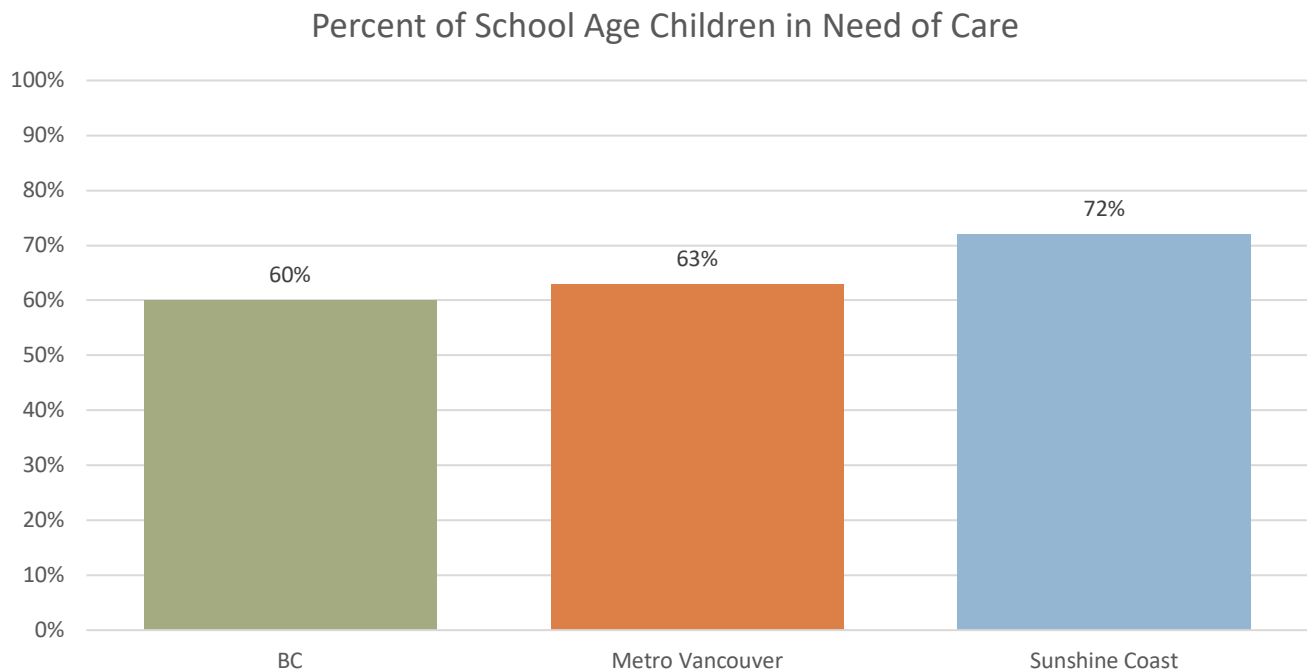
From 3 years to Kindergarten entry, Type of child care arrangement used most



Source: Human Early Learning Partnership, CHEQ 2025 School District Report, Sunshine Coast

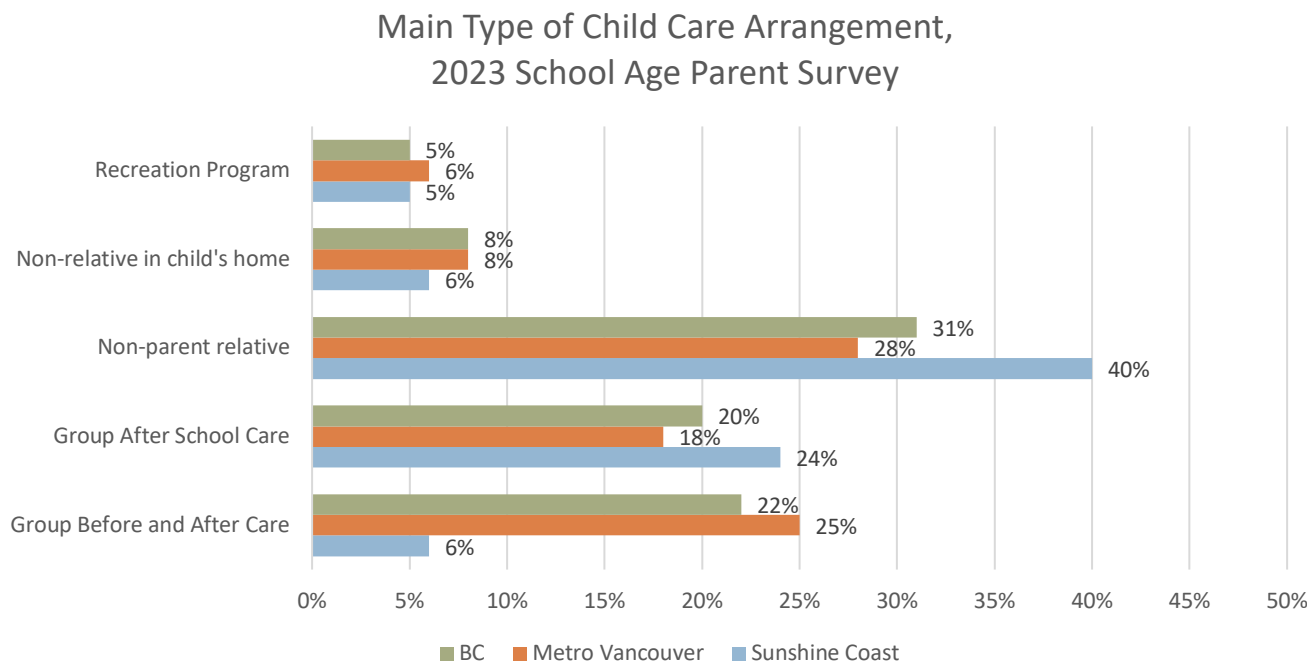
In 2023, the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care carried out a province-wide survey of parents and guardians of students in kindergarten through grade seven in order to better understand the demands for school age child care on school grounds. 80% of Sunshine Coast School District Elementary Schools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

Figure 4: School Age Children in Need of Care



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

Figure 5: School Age Child Care Arrangements



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



Policy Changes Create New Pressures and Partnerships

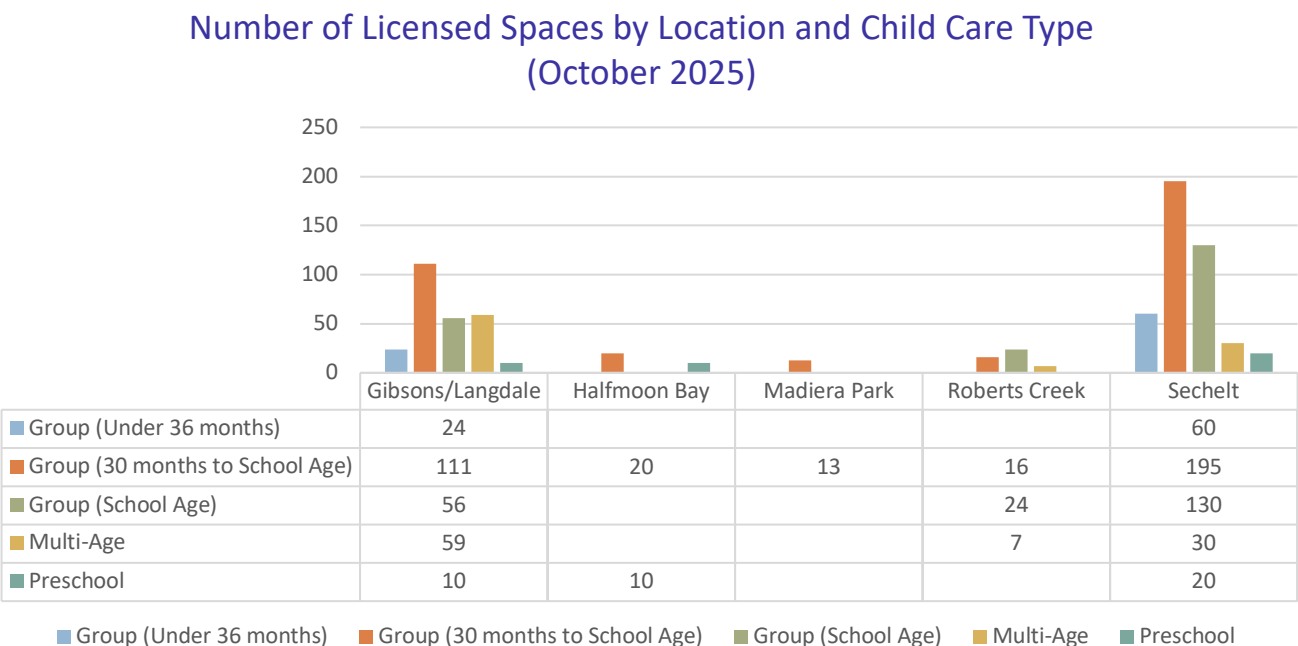
In 2025, the Sunshine Coast saw temporary closures of YMCA Infant–Toddler programs due to a shortage of qualified staff. A key factor was a federal change to the Provincial Nominee Program, which removed the region from eligibility for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) seeking permanent residency points. These impacts were compounded by longstanding challenges such as low wages, housing shortages, and limited training supports. Parents affected by closures became strong advocates, prompting the formation of a multi-sector working group that includes parent representatives, local governments, YMCA BC, School District 46, and the Ministry of Education and Child Care. This collaboration reflects a shared commitment to addressing systemic challenges and ensuring reliable access to quality child care.

Learn more: [How Immigration Cuts Added to the Sunshine Coast's Child-Care Problem | The Tyee](#)

CHILD CARE AVAILABILITY ACROSS THE REGION

Child care availability varies greatly across the region (see Figure 4). Access is greatest in Sechelt, which has 435 licensed spaces, and Gibsons, with 260 spaces. However, the availability of licensed care in both these communities declined in 2025, with 40 fewer spaces in Sechelt and 7 fewer spaces in Gibsons. While there has been no change in the number of spaces in other areas of the Coast, there continues to be significantly fewer options available in Roberts Creek (47 spaces), Madeira Park (13 spaces), and Halfmoon Bay (30 spaces). The types of care also vary by location. For instance, Sechelt has the highest number of spaces across all categories, including a substantial share of the regions' spaces for preschool and school-aged children. Conversely, Madeira Park and Halfmoon Bay have minimal access to licensed care, and no spaces for children under 3 or over 6.

Figure 6: Geographical Distribution of Licensed Child Care Spaces



Source: Vancouver Coastal Health, Child Care Licensing Data



Over the past few years ... I have observed a significant gap between perceived and actual demand for childcare spaces. While many families express difficulty finding care, the highest demand I see in practice is specifically for infants and children under age three, especially around one year old.

~ Child Care Provider

BUILDING QUALITY & INCLUSION

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

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

CAPACITY & CONNECTIONS

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



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

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

SUPPORTING LOCAL EDUCATORS

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

- The **ECE Wage Enhancement Program** provides eligible ECEs working in licensed child care facilities with a \$4 to \$6 per hour wage enhancement, bringing the median wage for ECEs to approximately \$29 per hour. The wage enhancement applies to certified ECEs working in licensed group care, family care, multi-age, and in-home settings. By increasing wages, the program seeks to attract new educators, retain existing professionals, and stabilize the workforce, ensuring families have access to consistent, high-quality child care services.
- The **ECE Education Support Fund**, commonly referred to as the ECE Bursary Program, provides financial assistance to individuals pursuing education in early childhood care. By reducing financial barriers to education, the program encourages more individuals to enter the field and complete their ECE certifications. This investment in education not only expands the workforce but also ensures that future educators are equipped with the skills and knowledge to deliver high-quality early learning experiences for children.
- Introduced in January 2024, the **ECE Specialized Grant Program** is designed to incentivize ECEs to upskill and obtain their Specialized Certificate(s) – Infant and Toddler Educator (ITE) and/or Special Needs Early Childhood Educator (SNE) – and to address workforce shortages in the sector. The ECE Specialized Certification Grant also recognizes long-standing educators holding their Specialized Certificate(s) for their continued commitment to providing specialized child care.

As of September 2025, 51 Sunshine Coast educators were receiving the ECE wage enhancement

In 2024, 8368 BC ECE students accessed the ECE Bursary Program

In 2025, 50 educators from the Sunshine Coast received a Specialized Grant.

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

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

CCRR Outreach

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

The CCRR team finds that visiting educators at their own centres is the most effective way to provide support. In 2025, the CCRR made 206 visits to local child care programs, up from 145 in 2024.

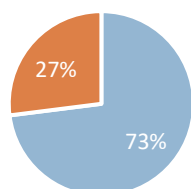
The Sunshine Coast CCRR Program is operated by Sunshine Coast Community Services Society and funded by the Province of British Columbia



INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

Creating inclusive child care environments is a cornerstone of ensuring all children and their families feel they belong, are seen, can actively participate, and thrive in the programs that they attend. All families and their children have the right to access quality childcare, regardless of their abilities or needs. While there is strong commitment to fostering equitable access to quality care, reducing barriers and promoting inclusive practices across the local child care sector, data from the 2025 Child Care Provider Survey suggests that just over one quarter of the providers who responded feel they do not have adequate resources and staff to provide inclusive child care for children with support needs. This represents a 6 percent decrease from 2024, suggesting that more providers feel prepared to meet the needs of all children. For those who responded “no” to the question, space challenges, need for physical changes to the centre or program, and a lack of specialized staff were noted as barriers.

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



■ Yes ■ No

“[Some of the children] have challenges that are obvious but we don't get any financial support because our healthcare system doesn't even have the capacity to designate them. I am very grateful for the support I get through Supported Child Development and SLP and OT services through VCH but it simply is not enough!”

~ Child Care Provider

Source: Sunshine Coast Child Care Resource and Referral, 2025 Sunshine Coast Child Care Provider Survey

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

~ BC Early Learning Framework

Advocating for Provincial Action for Rural Communities

Rural communities like the Sunshine Coast are experiencing a child care crisis driven by severe shortages of early childhood educators. Low wages, housing pressures, and limited supports contribute to high turnover, burnout, and program closures, affecting families, local economies, and essential services. In September 2025, Joint Child Care Council members co-developed regional priorities focused on provincial funding and policy solutions. These priorities were advanced by local elected officials in discussions with Ministry of Education and Child Care ministers, the Parliamentary Secretary, and staff at the 2025 Union of BC Municipalities Conference. Key recommendations included a province-wide, publicly funded wage grid tied to credentialing that ensures pay at or above a living wage and competitive with similar roles, alongside coordinated expansion of the \$10aDay system with sustainable operational funding. Together, these measures would help stabilize the workforce, expand affordable child care, and support rural communities in retaining qualified educators.

The Sunshine Coast Early Intervention Team (EIT) consists of agencies & programs that work together to supporting inclusive practices and provide wrap around supports for families, children, educators, and the larger community by providing consultation services, therapy services and resources for children who require support in child care programs. Programs include the Infant Development Program (IDP), the Early Intervention Physiotherapy Program (EI PT), and the Supported Child Development Program (SCD), hosted by Sunshine Coast Community Services Society, as well the Early Intervention Speech and Language Pathology Program (SLP), and The Early Intervention Occupational Therapy Program (OT), hosted by VCH. School District 46 Early Years staff host regular meetings with the Early Intervention Team to strengthen early years to kindergarten support. Recognizing that every child is diverse and has their own journey, the EIT supports inclusive wraparound practices that are led by the families' decisions for their child.

The Lower Sunshine Coast SCD program supports children aged birth to 12 years with support needs to fully participate in child care programs using universal joint supports, modeling strategies, facilitating

meetings, fostering individualized plans, and encouraging the use of inclusive practices, strategies and resource. SCD also provides training and educational opportunities for child care educators. Annually, the Lower Sunshine Coast SCD Program provides support to over 125 families/children and over 41 child care centers.

New \$10aDay Funding Model Creates Challenges

The expansion of \$10aDay child care has significantly improved affordability and access for families on the Sunshine Coast. At the same time, local \$10aDay providers report challenges with the new Operating Funding Model, particularly related to wage funding. Providers note that funded wage rates for qualified Early Childhood Educators can be lower than under previous models, sometimes requiring reduced hours, wage adjustments, or operating at a deficit. The wage grid does not reflect years of experience, specialized credentials, or leadership responsibilities, and funding is based on minimum staffing levels, limiting program flexibility. These pressures have contributed to local concerns about long-term program sustainability, including warnings from some providers about the risk of exiting the \$10aDay program.

IMPROVING AFFORDABILITY

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

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

The **Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative (CCFRI)** further supports affordability by reducing monthly child care fees for families with children in participating licensed child care programs. Providers who opt into the initiative receive funding to lower parent fees directly, benefiting families with children under the age of 6. Through the CCFRI, families experience tangible cost savings while providers

remain financially supported. This program plays a key role in bridging the gap between current child care costs and the longer-term vision of universal, affordable child care.

As of September 2025, 36 Sunshine Coast child care programs (representing 560 licensed spaces) were participating in the CCFRI. This represents an increase of 21 programs and 317 spaces since the program began in 2018.

LEARNING FROM PROVIDERS – KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE 2025 CHILD CARE PROVIDER SURVEY

The Sunshine Coast CCRR conducted an online survey of licensed child care providers across the Sunshine Coast from November 13 to December 4, 2025. A total of 29 providers completed the survey, the same number as in 2024, though not necessarily the same providers. Respondents may operate more than one licensed program. The survey provides updated insight into capacity, staffing, wages, waitlists, and operational conditions, highlighting both continuity and change over the last year. Key insights from the survey include:

- **Access to Spaces:** Only 29% of providers reported operating at full licensed capacity, compared with 58% in 2024. While staffing presented the largest challenge in 2024, the most commonly cited reason for operating under capacity in 2025 was lack of families registering (50%), followed by other operational considerations (35%), including wanting to maintain smaller group sizes to better support children, physical space limitations, and accommodating children moving between age groups. Lack of qualified staff was cited by 15% of respondents.
- **Waitlists:** In 2025, 60.7% of providers maintained waitlists, down from 72% in 2024. Waitlist sizes ranged greatly, with many centres reporting lists under 20 children while \$10-a-Day providers reported waitlists of 200 to 300.
- **Funding:** Most providers reported continuing to access core provincial funding programs, including Child Care Operating Funding, the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative, the ECE Wage Enhancement, and participation in \$10aDay. In 2025, more providers raised concerns about funding adequacy, particularly in relation to wage funding, minimum staffing assumptions, and the administrative burden associated with grants.
- **Fees and Affordability:** Monthly fees varied widely in 2025. Full-time care for children aged 3 to 5 ranged from approximately \$200 to \$1,380 per month. Full-time toddler care ranged from approximately \$200 to \$1,480 per month.
- **Wages:** The range of hourly wages for educators with Basic ECE certification widened in 2025. Unlike 2024, some providers reported wages below \$25 per hour, while a substantially larger share reported wages above \$35 per hour.
- **Inclusive Services:** In 2025, just over one quarter of providers reported insufficient staffing, training, or resources to adequately support children with additional needs. While this represents a modest improvement from 2024, qualitative responses indicate that staffing availability and limited support funding continue to constrain providers' ability to care for children requiring additional support, even when physical space is available.

- **Family Needs:** Consistent with 2024 findings, providers in 2025 observed ongoing challenges aligning family demand for part-time, flexible, or irregular care with the financial realities of operating full-time spaces. Several providers indicated that accommodating these needs without additional staffing or funding places programs at risk of running deficits.

KEY PRIORITIES, GOALS & ACTION STRATEGIES

Priority: Increasing Access

Why it Matters

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

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

Annual Highlights

- Expanded overall access across all age groups since 2019, with notable growth in infant-toddler, preschool, and school-age spaces despite a short-term dip for children under six. Changes to the federal immigration policy, combined with the long-standing challenges of finding qualified staff in small, rural communities has impacted the infant-toddler sector this year.
- Added new school-age spaces on school grounds, increasing availability where families need it most.
- Strengthened regional planning and government collaboration, aiming to align new spaces and funding opportunities with identified community needs.

Action Strategies (2025 – 2035)

- Identify and address barriers and challenges to providing Infant/Toddler care (e.g. staffing, financial constraints, space, etc.)

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

Priority: Strengthening Inclusion

Why it Matters

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

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

Annual Highlights

- Advanced inclusive practice across the region through extensive professional development, hands-on workshops, and access to specialized tools such as Inclusive Story-Telling Kits and Indigenous Culture Kits.

- Expanded cross-sector partnerships, including the Early Intervention Team and collaborations with School District No. 46, Sunshine Coast Community Services Society, and Indigenous partners.
- Improved supports for children requiring additional assistance, including innovative pilot programs and increased wages support for inclusion support workers.

Action Strategies (2025 – 2035)

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

Priority: Improving Affordability

Why it Matters

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

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

Annual Highlights

- Increased affordability for families through broad participation in the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative across 36 local programs.
- Strengthened local advocacy on rural child care issues, supporting government engagement on policy and funding challenges, including concerns related to the Operating Funding Model.
- Enhanced family access to financial supports, with CCRR assisting more than 60 families with ACCB applications, including targeted outreach to First Nation-led programs.

Action Strategies (2025 – 2035)

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

Priority: Enhancing Quality

Why it Matters

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

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

Annual Highlights

- Expanded professional learning opportunities, offering 15 events and nearly 50 hours of training, alongside continued virtual learning access since 2020.
- Improved educator compensation and workforce stability, with 51 local educators receiving the provincial ECE Wage Enhancement.
- Strengthened quality practice through partnerships and resources including licensing-focused training, WorkBC collaboration, and a well-used resource library with over 1,200 visits.

Action Strategies (2025 – 2035)

- Facilitate community-wide professional learning opportunities:
 - Partner with organizations such as BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS) to deliver training based on the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework and Quality Enhancement strategies
 - Support land-based learning and culturally responsive programming through targeted workshops
 - Highlight local expertise by organizing “in-service” events that showcase proven and promising practices from providers
- Increase awareness of funding opportunities for quality improvement:
 - Provide grant writing support to help providers access capital funding and quality enhancement grants.
 - Promote available resources through networks such as the CCRR
- Build collaborative networks among child care providers to facilitate peer learning and mentorship

- Explore opportunities to increase local training for ECEs and ECEAs seeking to upgrade certifications
- Advocate for provincial and federal policies that support quality-focused initiatives, such as continued wage enhancements for ECEs, bursaries, and specialized grants; and support efforts toward a Provincial Wage Grid for ECEs.

Priority: Deepening Collaboration

Why it Matters

Strong collaboration between child care providers, local government, community organizations, schools and families is essential for building a resilient and integrated child care system. Collaboration fosters shared learning, maximizes resources, and ensures a coordinated approach to addressing the complex challenges facing the sector. By deepening partnerships and strengthening communication, the Sunshine Coast can create a more cohesive and effective network of care, improving outcomes for children and families. Expanding collaboration will also enhance advocacy efforts, helping to secure additional resources and align child care services with broader community needs.

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

Annual Highlights

- Deepened regional alignment through on-going Joint Child Care Council meetings and adoption of the updated Child Care Action Plan by three local governments.
- Expanded multi-sector engagement, including a new parent-led working group including parent representatives, local governments, YMCA BC, School District 46, and the Ministry of Education and Child Care.
- Strengthened relationships with the shíshálh Nation Strengthening Family Team and mem7iman Child Development Centre.
- Advanced cross-sector initiatives, exploring economic development strategies, business supports for operators, and connections between child care and housing sectors.

Action Strategies (2025 – 2035)

- Continue to build relationships with shíshálh Nation and Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw to support the creation of culturally affirming child care in the region
- Work with local governments to ensure child care remains a key priority in community planning and development projects
- Advocate for continued provincial funding for ELCC Lead positions in school districts

- Facilitate regular local working group meetings to monitor needs, share updates, and identify collaborative solutions
- Engage with families to include their perspectives in planning and decision-making processes
- Develop and launch a community awareness campaign to highlight the importance of affordable, quality, inclusive child care for healthy communities
- Collectively honour Sunshine Coast educators during May is Childcare Month, including municipal proclamations
- Consider ways to support educators interested in moving to the Sunshine Coast via housing and/or transportation supports

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