

**The Canada-Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care  
Agreement**

**Action Plan 2025-2026**

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## **Introduction**

The Canada-Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (Bilateral Agreement) extension was signed in December 2024. This single year agreement extends the Bilateral Agreement into 2025-2026 and is the third extension of the original agreement that was signed in fiscal year 2017-2018. The agreement was further extended to 2030-2031 in February 2025. The agreement continues to support the long-term vision, principles and objectives for early learning and child care that are set out in the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework.

The 2025-2026 Action Plan under the Bilateral Agreement continues to serve as a mechanism to support short-term initiatives that can have long-term impacts on the early learning and child care (ELCC) workforce and the development of programs and services. The focus of this 2025-2026 Action Plan remains on delivering new and innovative solutions developed through consultation and sector feedback, driven by the multilateral principles of high quality and inclusion, while focusing on two key areas:

- Training and Workforce Development
- Services and Programming

## **Training and Workforce Development**

With the growing demand for affordable child care and Manitoba's ongoing efforts to increase available child care spaces, there is a clear need for a skilled ELCC workforce. To address this, Manitoba continues to direct Bilateral Agreement funding toward several initiatives, including offering training and education in identified areas of need and supporting recruitment and retention efforts.

Manitoba acknowledges the importance of building a diverse workforce that mirrors the diversity of the province's population. The Manitoba government is dedicated to expanding the child care workforce in a way that reflects the cultural richness of our Indigenous and Francophone communities. To support this, Manitoba continues to collaborate with Indigenous governing bodies and Francophone communities to explore opportunities for investing in training programs and professional development aimed at enhancing the recruitment and retention of Indigenous and Francophone child care providers. By strengthening the skills and expertise of the child care workforce, Manitoba aims to deliver culturally responsive care that fosters cultural growth of all children.

## **Science of Early Child Development (SECD)**

The Science of Early Child Development (SECD) is an online multimedia resource designed to make current research accessible to anyone interested in learning more about the impact of early experiences on lifelong health and well-being.

In 2025-2026, Manitoba will continue to allocate funding to support sector capacity and stability through initiatives under the SECD umbrella, including:

- Maintaining free, unlimited access to the SECD Manitoba Access Portal for the ELCC sector.
- Supporting the translation of SECD resources into French and ensuring their availability on the Manitoba Access Portal to better serve the Francophone ELCC community.
- Developing Self-Study Professional Development modules.
- Delivering the Enhanced Introduction to SECD tailored for newcomers to Canada in partnership with Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network.
- Maintaining expanded cohort sizes for the Introduction to SECD course.

### **Learning Lab PSIs**

Building on the work that has been completed in the previous action plan, Manitoba is allocating federal funding to support the development of eight Learning Labs in newly constructed child care facilities at Manitoba public post-secondary institutions. Learning Labs are demonstration sites that apply innovative methods, technologies and equipment to enhance learning outcomes for post-secondary students and for professional development of current centre staff. The sites will facilitate hands-on learning experiences and deepen connections between theory and practice.

Manitoba has conducted an extensive scan of potential models and best practices and consulted with universities and colleges across the province. In 2025-2026, policy development, feasibility and design work will occur, along with construction anticipated to begin.

### **Certification Modernization**

High-quality early childhood education and care requires professionals who are knowledgeable, educated and committed to fostering learning experiences that promote children's development.

In Manitoba, early childhood educator (ECE) is a regulated profession in which certification requirements are established in provincial regulations for classification as ECE II and ECE III. Those working in the sector who are not eligible for certification as an ECE are classified as Child Care Assistants (CCA). Licensed family and group home child care providers are exempt from classification requirements.

ECE II and III classification is determined by the completion of approved post-secondary training. The Child Care Qualifications and Training Committee (CCQTC) is established to research, review and make recommendations about any matter relating to the qualifications, preparation and training of ECEs and all staff working in ELCC facilities. This includes reviewing new and existing formal education programs offered at post-secondary institutions and making recommendations to the Provincial Director for program approvals.

Manitoba will continue to review the framework for ECE competencies, certification requirements and processes, with an aim to providing clear training pathways and supporting career laddering. Modest funding is allocated to this initiative to hire external expert support.

## **Workforce Engagement and Recognition**

Through consultations with internal and external stakeholders, including committees, staff, the Manitoba Child Care Association and other governments, the need to raise public awareness and recognition of the ELCC sector has been identified as a critical factor in improving recruitment and retention.

Manitoba has developed a multi-media public campaign to enhance the visibility and appeal of careers in early learning and child care, including through radio, print and social media advertising in various communities in Manitoba. Leveraging federal funding, Manitoba is expanding ECE training programs, increasing cohort sizes, and targeting rural areas where new facilities are being established. In 2025-2026, Manitoba will continue with the multi-media public information campaign to expand awareness of these initiatives, to inspire potential recruits representative and inclusive of Manitoba's diverse communities, and to present a career in ECE as a viable and rewarding option within a growing sector.

## **Rural and Northern Workforce Strategies**

Rural and Northern communities in Manitoba face unique challenges that impact regulated child care facilities, resulting in a higher turnover of trained staff and limited training opportunities. The Competency Based Assessment (CBA) program provides a pathway for CCAs in rural and Northern Manitoba to obtain an ECE II classification through recognition of education and experience in a licensed ELCC program. Participants receive guidance and mentorship from a contracted Advisor who is an established child care professional.

The CBA program allows participants to capture the story of their learning journey in a portfolio, which is developed in accordance with the Child Care Competency Framework, based on Manitoba's ECE II competencies. The portfolio showcases their knowledge, skills and judgement within each of the 13 focus areas.

A CBA Advisor is assigned to work with each participant as a subject matter expert to guide them through the assessment process. The Advisor provides comprehensive support to participants, including clarification of program expectations, guidance on portfolio development, research on best practices, identification of participants' skill gaps, written feedback and assessments, and recommendations for ECE II classification.

In 2025-2026, Manitoba will continue to offer the CBA program as a pathway for rural and northern CCAs to gain certification as an ECE.

Table 1 – Training and Workplace Development Investments

Program and Initiatives	Indicators	Targets	Funding	Actuals
Science of Early Child Development (SECD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of unique users</li> <li>Number of SECD modules translated into French and available on the Manitoba Access portal</li> <li>Number of CCAs to complete the Introduction to SECD course (achieving their 40-hour course requirement)</li> <li>Number of Introduction to SECD course cohorts offered</li> <li>Number of newcomers successful in attaining the 40-hour course requirements to be a trained CCA</li> <li>Number of additional Self Study Professional Development modules created</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5,000 unique users</li> <li>One SECD module translated into French and available on the Manitoba Access Portal</li> <li>75 additional CCAs attain 40-hour course requirement</li> <li>16 cohorts</li> <li>30 newcomer students complete the 40-hour course</li> <li>Two additional Self Study Professional Development modules are created</li> </ul>	\$567K	
Learning Labs PSIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress made toward Learning Labs development. End goal of Learning Labs opened as demonstration sites to enhance learning outcomes for students, and on-going professional development for current centre staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy and program development initiated or completed.</li> <li>Design/feasibility work initiated or completed.</li> <li>3 sites where construction underway.</li> </ul>	\$4.0M	
Certification Modernization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modernization of Manitoba's ELCC workforce certification levels and processes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of existing certification levels and processes, policy development, research completed.</li> </ul>	\$25K	

Workforce Engagement and Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multi-media public awareness campaign launched promoting ECE as a career.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multi-media public awareness campaign launched</li> </ul>	\$413K	
Rural and Northern Workforce Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of CCAs who enrol in the Competency Based Assessment (CBA) program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>25 participants in Competency Based Assessment (CBA) Program in Rural and Northern Manitoba.</li> </ul>	\$32K	

## Services and Programs

High-quality child care services and programming provided by trained and qualified staff that ensure inclusion and diversity are an essential component to Manitoba's Action Plan. Many of the initiatives within this category are continuing from previous Action Plans.

### Diversity and Inclusion Supports

Manitoba is committed to building a high-quality early learning and child care system that includes children with additional support needs, ensuring families have equitable access to licensed child care spaces.

#### ***Inclusion Support Program Review***

The Inclusion Support Program provides supports to eligible child care providers to remove barriers, ensuring children with a range of abilities can fully participate in facility programming. This includes grants for enhanced staffing ratios, equipment, renovations and specialized training.

The goals of the initiative are to assess the effectiveness of the Inclusion Support Program, and develop recommendations that will drive its evolution. Funding under this action plan will support hosting stakeholder engagement sessions and hiring professionals to provide research and analysis assistance.

#### ***The Francophone Governance Grant***

The Francophone Governance grant ensures that the Francophone child care community has access to resources that support professional development opportunities that align with the principles of diversity and inclusivity, high quality and accessibility.

Manitoba partnered with the Fédération des Parents du Manitoba (FPFM) to support the Francophone child care sector. Under this model, the FPFM functions as an umbrella governance body for four francophone child care centres from across Manitoba that have voluntarily come under their structure. This inclusive model enables Francophone

communities to shape child care programs and policies that reflect their linguistic and cultural identity, while also meeting the highest standards of quality and safety. FPFM also provides professional support to facilities in the areas of facility management, training and development.

Funding under this Action Plan will continue to support the team of professionals available to provide resources to licensed centres and home-based care providers in the areas of accounting and human resources, with the capacity to support up to an additional two Francophone facilities within their governance model by the end of 2025-2026.

### **Ka Ni Kanichihk Grant (Program Funding)**

Ka Ni Kanichihk is a non-profit community organization with a long history of providing a range of supportive services to Indigenous peoples. Ka Ni Kanichihk is undergoing a significant \$9.3M expansion which includes an expansion of their child care centre. The expansion will result in an increase in service capacity for up to 3,000 individuals per year in the existing location in Winnipeg's West Alexander/Point Douglas neighbourhood and ensure that safe space and services are accessible in surrounding neighbourhoods.

The organization's child care centre expansion project will develop an additional 32 new child care spaces to their current 48-space child care centre upon completion. Under the Canada-Wide Action Plan 2022-2023, Ka Ni Kanichihk was approved funding of \$300K through a Development and Programming Grant to address the costs of integrating a full cultural-based curriculum in their child care program, however their expansion timeline was extended and the funding has been moved to the Bilateral Action Plan 2025-2026 to align with when the expansion is expected to be completed and they will be able to utilize the funding.

### **Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework**

In April 2022, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning released *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With* – An Indigenous Education Policy Framework. The goal of *Mamàhtawisiwin* is to support the holistic achievements of First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners in K-12 education by assisting Manitoba educators in incorporating Indigenous pedagogy, languages and culture into their teaching practices.

Building on this foundation and in alignment with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #12 and principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Manitoba is committed providing culturally safe spaces where Indigenous children can explore their identities and cultures and where non-Indigenous children and families can develop a deeper understanding and respect for the experiences, perspectives, traditions, and ways of life of Indigenous peoples. To advance these goals, Manitoba commits to developing a distinctions-based, Manitoba-specific Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Policy Framework. This framework aims to support Manitoba's youngest learners by ensuring Indigenous



worldviews and ways of being are embedded into early learning environments and curricula.

Funding under this action plan will support hosting community consultation sessions and the inclusion of professionals to provide research and analysis assistance, with the end goal being the development of Manitoba's Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework.

## **Early Learning and Development Approach**

Early Learning and Development Approach includes the implementation of curriculum approaches designed to bolster children's developmental outcomes through intentional activities focusing on literacy and numeracy, while developing social/emotional capacity through enriched relationships.

This initiative is comprised of the following two projects:

- Abecedarian Program Expansion
- ToyBox Project

### ***Abecedarian Program Expansion***

Abecedarian is an evidence-based early learning intervention proven to improve developmental and learning outcomes for children in under-served communities, such as low-income, Indigenous, newcomer, as well as rural, remote, and northern communities. The Abecedarian approach is centred on relationships as a foundation for strong language skills, greater cognitive and social/emotional development and focusing on increasing literacy and numeracy skills of young preschool children.

The continued investment will allow four participating child care facilities to provide full-day, year-round, centre-based programming that incorporates the four main components of the Abecedarian Approach – Learning Games®, Language Priority, Enriched Caregiving, and Conversational Reading.

Manitoba will continue to invest in staff training, mentorship and research, in partnership with Red River College Polytech, to support the Abecedarian Program expansion. Research will focus on the developmental and learning outcomes for children in high-risk communities.

### ***ToyBox Project***

ToyBox Project is an early learning intervention project that uses play-based learning to develop skills to promote literacy, numeracy, and wellness. The ToyBox outreach team provides 16-week early literacy/numeracy intervention programs to child care facilities, in both urban and rural areas. Additionally, the ToyBox outreach team organizes ToyBox events and workshops for educators, front-line staff, and caregivers in urban, rural, and Indigenous communities. Through these activities, the project aims to ensure caregivers have access to current research, pedagogy and support to introduce quality learning and experiences, and to provide a strong foundation for children's wellbeing.

## **Outdoor Early Childhood Education Initiative**

Manitoba and Canada recognize the value of incorporating outdoor education and active play into the daily curriculum for young children. Investing in quality outdoor play experiences fosters healthy child development that benefits children, families, educators and communities.

Child care facilities in Manitoba offer outdoor programming in varying capacities, as it is impacted by a range of factors, including physical location (rural, urban), availability of a designated outdoor space and financial resources. The Outdoor Early Childhood Education Initiative aims to support the integration of daily outdoor play into children's curriculum, provide increased opportunity to enhance children's learning and develop a deeper understanding of self through outdoor exploration, and foster authentic connection with the land by incorporating First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories, cultures, traditional values, and knowledge.

To further build sector capacity in implementing outdoor and land-based pedagogies, Manitoba will partner with leaders in the field to develop a made-for-Manitoba professional learning opportunity for the early learning and child care workforce.

## **Curriculum Framework Redevelopment**

In Manitoba, regulated infant, preschool, and nursery school programs are required to have curriculum statements as part of their licensing requirements. Current curriculum statements are based on Manitoba's "Early Returns" curriculum framework for preschool and nursery school programs, which was developed in 2011, and in 2012 for infant programs.

To support Manitoba's commitment to ensuring that children from birth to school entry and their families have increased access to comprehensive, integrated and culturally responsive early childhood programs, the department will lead the redevelopment of an updated, adaptable curriculum framework that establishes a foundation on which child care providers can build their programming.

In the redevelopment of Manitoba's early year's curriculum, the province will ensure it is aligned with the principles outlined in Canada's Indigenous ELCC Framework, the priorities of Manitoba's Indigenous communities and Manitoba's ECE II competencies for ECE education and training programs by integrating Indigenous perspectives into culturally safe and inclusive programming.

Funding under this action plan will support hosting stakeholder engagement sessions and the inclusion of professionals to provide research and analysis assistance with the end goal being the redevelopment of the Curriculum Framework.

## **Childcare Attachment and Relationship Education**

Childcare Attachment and Relationship Education (CARE) offered through New Directions, provides Circle of Security training and leadership opportunities to support Early Childhood Educators in developing quality, healthy early learning environments where children can thrive.

CARE is based on the internationally recognized Circle of Security model of attachment, an early intervention program to strengthen the relationship between a caregiver and a child. This training provides caregivers including CCAs, home-based providers and ECEs a deeper understanding of concepts around attachment, and also highlights the caregiver's role in relationships. Circle of Security provides a clear model of children's attachment needs and highlights the importance of the caregiver's role in responding to these needs. CARE includes two streams:

- a) *The Attachment-Based Community Stream* to train facilitators in the attachment-based model (the training assists ECEs and CCAs to develop skills to respond to children's needs purposefully and empathically while gaining awareness of attachment dynamics, trauma, cultural safety, and significance of culture) and
- b) *The Attachment-Based Leadership Stream* focused on enhancing Human Resource practices, the training assists Childcare Directors in supporting and responding to the needs of ECEs and CCAs as they deliver care to children.

Table 2 – Services and Programming Investments

Program and Initiatives	Indicators	Targets	Funding	Actuals
Diversity and Inclusion Supports	<p><i>Inclusion Support Program Review:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete phase one of a review of the Inclusion Support Program supported by recommendations.</li> </ul> <p><i>Francophone Governance Model:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Francophone staff receiving training</li> <li>Francophone Facilities engage in training</li> </ul>	<p><i>Inclusion Support Program Review:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed phase one of a review of the Inclusion Support Program supported by recommendations.</li> </ul> <p><i>Francophone Governance Model:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10 home-based providers to participate in the home-based “pathway” initiative</li> <li>20 facilities to access resources to support French language programming or attend the annual directors conference</li> <li>4 professionals to provide resources to 20 Francophone facilities (4 of which are governed by FPFM)</li> </ul>	\$425K	
Ka Ni-Kanichihk (Program Funding)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support indigenous and supportive programming for children and families in the Indigenous community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide grant funding to support programming</li> </ul>	\$300K	
Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework for Manitoba</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy development, consultation, and initial draft of a Manitoba Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework</li> </ul>	\$200K	

Early Learning and Development Approach	<p><i>Abecedarian Program Expansion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of infant and preschool children receiving services at 4 child care facilities</li> <li>• Number of staff trained in the Abecedarian Approach</li> </ul> <p><i>ToyBox Project</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of outreach events</li> <li>• Number of workshops</li> <li>• Number of intervention programs</li> </ul>	<p><i>Abecedarian Program Expansion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 200 infant and preschool children benefiting from the program</li> <li>• 20 staff trained in the Abecedarian Approach</li> </ul> <p><i>ToyBox Project</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nine ToyBox outreach events</li> <li>• Three workshops</li> <li>• Six ToyBox intervention programs</li> </ul>	\$2.6M	
Outdoor Early Childhood Education Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of an outdoor learning opportunity focussed on outdoor and land-based pedagogies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete development of outdoor learning opportunity</li> </ul>	\$350K	
Curriculum Framework Redevelopment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a new culturally integrated curriculum framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy development and consultations regarding an updated curriculum framework</li> </ul>	\$125K	
Childcare Attachment and Relationship Education (CARE)	<p><i>Attachment-Based Community Stream</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate registration and access to COS virtual and in person groups</li> <li>• Facilitate Community of Practice sessions for ECEs who have participated in COS groups</li> <li>• Facilitate Mentorship meetings for facilitators</li> </ul>	<p><i>Attachment-Based Community Stream</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate registration and access to 28 COS virtual and in person groups</li> <li>• Facilitate four, Community of Practice sessions</li> <li>• Facilitate 9 mentorship meetings per season</li> </ul>	\$300K	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide contracts for Facilitators to run COS groups</li> <li>• Organize an appreciation event for facilitators as professional development</li> </ul> <p><i>Attachment-Based Leadership Stream</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide training on attachment lens for supervisors and leaders</li> <li>• Facilitate a weekly Community of Practice session with supervisors and leaders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide contracts for facilitators to run 30 COS groups up to 300 participants</li> <li>• Organize one appreciation event annually</li> </ul> <p><i>Attachment-Based Leadership Stream</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide 5 full day training sessions</li> <li>• Facilitate up to 10 weekly sessions</li> </ul>		
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## Public Reporting and Community Engagement

### Administration

Administration funding will be allocated to carry out the commitments identified in the action plan and may include: additional staff, equipment, information technology (IT) platforms, Minister's Consultation Table (MCT), communications, consultations and general administration.

### *Minister's Consultation Table (MCT)*

MCT was established in 2017-2018 to offer ongoing consultation on the bilateral agreement action plan with a membership that represents a wide range of provincial stakeholders. MCT will continue to meet monthly to provide valuable feedback, insight, and recommendations on planned initiatives and goals for the development of a Canada-wide early learning and child care system.

Table 3 – Public Reporting and Community Engagement Investments

Program Initiative	Fiscal year	Funding	Actuals
Administration	2025 - 2026	\$1.65M	

### Reporting

The Minister's Consultation Table (MCT) was initiated in 2017, with the intent of being the primary mechanism to regularly consult on the Bilateral Agreement action plan, with a membership that represents a wide range of provincial stakeholders. Manitoba is committed to continue the MCT committee and stakeholder engagement.

Federal investments will also be made to enhance Manitoba's information technology systems and staffing to help meet the progress tracking and public reporting commitments of the bilateral action plan.

Manitoba will continue to comply with the reporting requirements outlined in the Bilateral Agreement.

## Bilateral Agreement Summary for 2025-2026

Table 4 - Summary of Priorities and Investments under the Bilateral Agreement for fiscal year 2025-2026.

<b>Canada-Manitoba ELCC Agreement Action Plan 2025-2026</b>	
<b>Initiative</b>	<b>2025/26</b>
<b>Training and Workforce Development</b>	
Science of Early Child Development	\$567,000
Learning Labs PSIs	\$ 4,000,000
Certification Modernization	\$25,000
Workforce Engagement and Recognition	\$413,326
Rural & Northern Workforce Strategies	\$32,000
Wage Grid Supplement*	\$10,800,000
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>\$15,837,326</b>
<b>Services and Programming</b>	
Diversity and Inclusion Supports	\$425,000
Ka Ni Kanichihk (Program Funding)	\$300,000
Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework	\$200,000
Early Learning and Development Approach	\$2,600,000
Outdoor Early Childhood Education Initiative	\$350,000
Curriculum Framework Redevelopment	\$125,000
Childcare Attachment and Relationship Education (CARE)	\$300,000
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>\$4,300,000</b>
<b>Public Reporting and Community Engagement</b>	
Administration	\$1,650,000
<b>TOTALS</b>	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$21,787,326</b>
<b>TOTAL FUNDING FOR FISCAL YEAR</b>	<b>\$21,787,326</b>

\* Funds from the Bilateral Agreement will be used to support initiatives and targets that appear under the CW-ELCCA Action Plan.