

# knowing u numbers

A community approach to understanding the early childhood education workforce



The Knowing Our Numbers team would like to thank all the service system managers and their teams, as well as the educators and staff in early childhood programs across the province, who shared their time and insights with the goal of supporting a professional early childhood workforce in support of Ontario's children and families.

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*Knowing Our Numbers: A Provincial Study with a Local Lens on the Early Childhood Education Workforce in Ontario.*

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# Knowing Our Numbers

## CREATING KNOWING OUR NUMBERS

Three children’s service system managers are credited with launching [Knowing Our Numbers](#), taking it from a local effort to a province-wide initiative. The County of Simcoe, the Municipality of Chatham-Kent, and the County of Lambton joined forces to better understand the challenges of today’s early years workforce with the common goal of creating an evidence-based response. The project had traction, and soon 43 out of 47 Ontario service system managers (Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs)) joined in a province-wide study to evaluate early learning and child care (ELCC) through a local lens.

In Ontario, service system managers are designated under the [Child Care and Early Years Act](#) to manage child care services and early years programs, as well as social services. Unique in Canada, this model allows for policy planning at the local level.

**The County of Simcoe, the Municipality of Chatham-Kent, and the County of Lambton joined forces to better understand the challenges of today’s early years workforce.**

The [College of Early Childhood Educators \(CECE\)](#) joined the initiative and Knowing Our Numbers (KON) was officially founded in 2023. The CECE regulates and governs Ontario’s Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) in the public’s interest. The CECE was established under the [Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007 \(ECE Act\)](#) and came into existence in February 2009. With more than 61,000 members in good standing, the CECE is one of the largest professional self-regulatory bodies in Ontario and is the only professional self-regulatory body for early childhood educators in Canada.

## WHAT IS KNOWING OUR NUMBERS?

Knowing Our Numbers is a collaborative project that focuses on understanding the challenges faced by the early years workforce in Ontario. Information gathered about demographics, compensation, job satisfaction, working conditions, opportunities for career advancement, and professional learning, as well as experiences with workplace racism and discrimination, help inform workforce strategies and policy development across the province. Additional information such as regional living wage thresholds and local census data provide context for the results.







The authors of this report have a long history of [valued reciprocal relationships](#) with ELCC officials across Canada, developed through their work on the [Early Childhood Education Report \(ECER\)](#). They evaluate policies and programs at various levels of government and are frequent collaborators and contributors to knowledge mobilization and translation organizations, such as the [Abilio – Childhood Knowledge Dissemination Centre](#) at the Université Laval and Université de Montréal, the [Science of Early Childhood Development](#) at Red River College in Winnipeg, the [Early Childhood Collaborative Research Centre](#) at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, and [UNICEF](#) Canada.

The team is experienced in evaluating the impact of wages and benefits on the early education sector, as well as the social and [economic benefits](#) of public investments in early education and [universal child care](#).

### ABOUT THE KON TEAM

Work on the report was led by [Dr. Emis Akbari](#), Professor in the School of Early Childhood at George Brown College, Adjunct Professor in the Department of Applied Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (UT), and Senior Policy Fellow at the [Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development](#), and [Kerry McCuaig](#), Senior Fellow in Early Childhood Policy at the Atkinson Centre at UT. Work on this report was supported by Michelle Schurter, partnership liaison, Stacey Mudie, project coordinator, Dr. Petr Varmuza, quantitative data analyst, and Sophia Akbari, qualitative data analyst. The United Counties of Prescott and Russell generously oversaw the translation of select material. Dr. Shawnee Hardware reviewed the survey through an equity and anti-oppressive lens.

This report presents results at both the provincial and regional levels. For the purposes of the report, the authors created regions that consider both geographical and statistical factors. The rationale for regional assignments and details of the methods can be found in [Methodology](#). Throughout the report, all regional data is colour coordinated as shown in the chart below. All KON data presented in this report are statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level. Separate reports capture local nuances and can be found on the [Knowing Our Numbers](#) website.

	Central East		North
	Central West		West
	East		Lakeshore West

## ELCC WORKFORCE IN CANADA BY THE NUMBERS

# 302,000

work as early childhood educators,  
early childhood assistants, or  
home child care providers



**1.6%**

of Canadian workforce



**2.3%**

of Quebec workforce



**76%**

work full-time



**95%**

identify as  
female



**2/3**

have at least one  
child



**25%**

of child care workers  
are self-employed

**15%**

of workers in all other  
occupations are self-employed



**32**

average age



**50%**

are married or  
living common law



**1/3**

of child care workers  
are immigrants

**1/4**

of workers in all other  
occupations are immigrants



**5%**

of child care workers identify  
as Indigenous

**4%**

of workers in all other occupations  
identify as Indigenous



**90%**

of child care centres have difficulties  
filling vacant positions

# 5,150,110

children 0–12 years old in Canada

# 821,298

attend licensed child care centres

# 96,677

attend licensed home care

### Sources:

Seward, B., Dhuey, E., Pan, A. (2023). [The Big Short: Expansion of Early Childhood Education in Post-Pandemic Canada](#).

Statistics Canada. [Child care workers in Canada \(2021\)](#).

Statistics Canada. [Number of children in Canada \(2021\)](#).

Statistics Canada. [Canadian Survey on the Provision of Child Care Services \(2022\)](#).



# Introduction

In 2021, the Government of Canada committed to providing sustained funding to [expand access to more affordable child care](#). Agreements signed with the provinces and territories prioritize lowering parent fees to \$10 per day and expanding the number of child care spaces. The goal is to create a [Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care](#) (CWELCC) system to support women's workforce participation, drive economic growth, and give every child a head start.

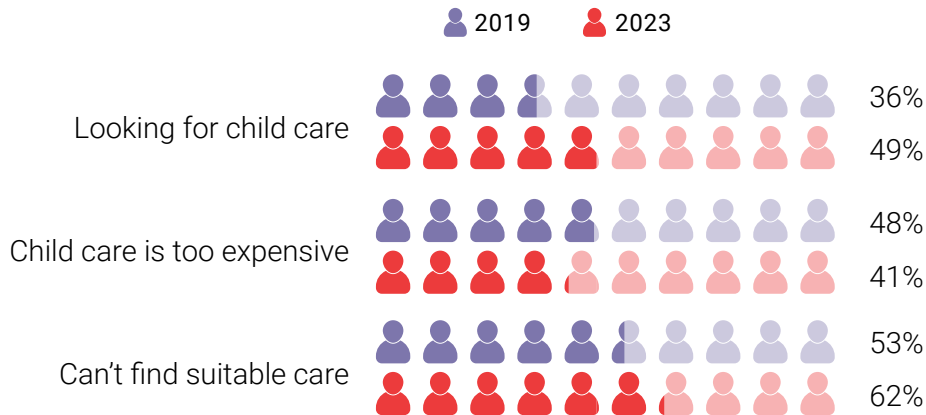
The global COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying shuttering of schools and child care had a direct impact on women's work. Across Canada, the portion of women aged 15 and over in paid work declined from 58% to [48.7%, a level last seen in 1984](#). Economists labelled it the "[she-cession](#)."

**More than 60% of parents wanting child care report difficulties finding it, up from 53% in 2019.**

As an industry, child care was particularly impacted. [Employment dropped 21%](#) compared to 3% among other sectors, and it has still not rebounded.

A December 2023 [Statistics Canada survey](#) found that while child care is getting more affordable for parents, accessing it is more challenging. More than 60% of parents wanting child care report difficulties finding it, up from 53% in 2019. As a result, roughly one in three respondents say they had to change their work or study schedules, take on fewer working hours, or delay their return to work.

## Parents Wanting, Affording, and Securing Child Care Canada 2019 and 2023

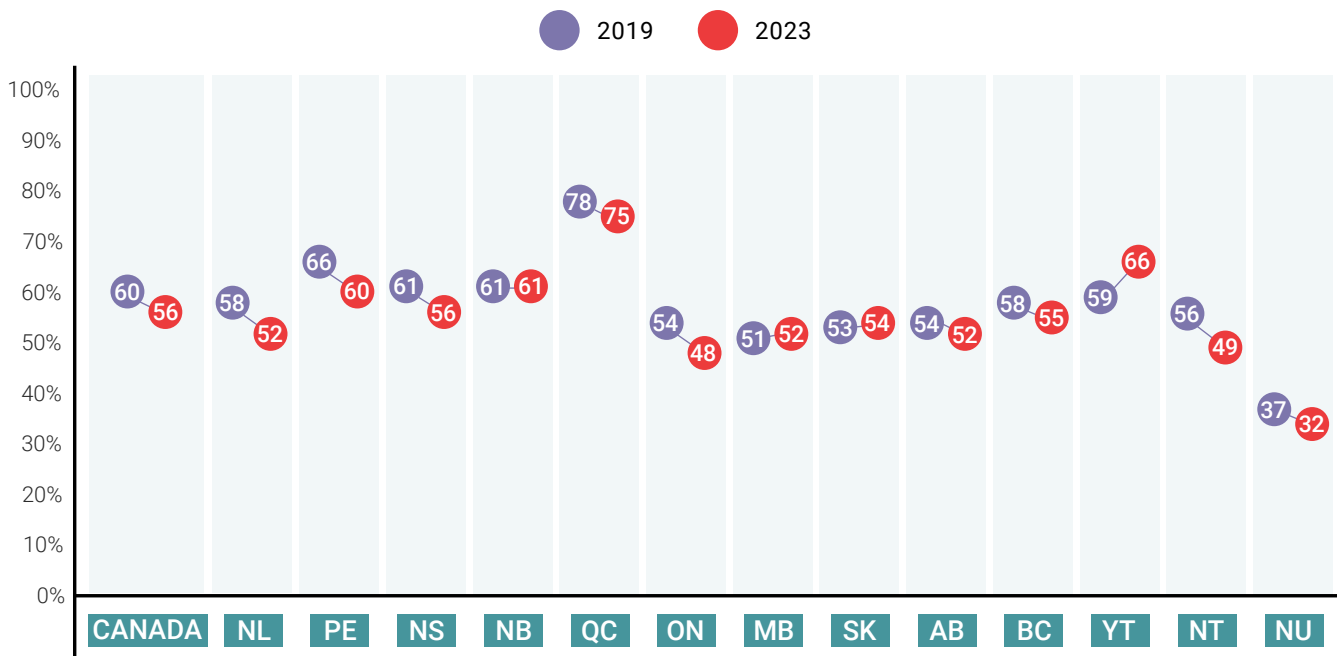


Source: Statistics Canada. Child care arrangements, 2023.

Among parents with children under the age of 5 years who are not in child care, over one in four have their child on a waitlist, up from roughly one in five the year prior. For parents of infants, that rate is 47%, up from 38% in 2022.

The CWELCC's plan is to add 250,000 new child care spaces between 2021 and 2026. Half-way through this timeframe, 97,859 spaces have been created. However, the portion of children from birth to 5 years of age participating in child care has flatlined or declined, with [Ontario falling the most](#) to 48%, six points below pre-pandemic enrolment.

## Per Cent of Children Ages 0 to 5 Years Participating in Child Care (2019 and 2023)



Source: Statistics Canada Table [42-10-0004-01](#).





Staffing shortages are curtailing space expansion and preventing child care programs from returning to pre-pandemic capacity. [New ECE graduates](#) are not looking to ELCC as a career path, and those working in child care are not staying. Staffing challenges directly impact program quality.

The federal government has given one-off infusions to help stem the workforce exodus.

In addition, some jurisdictions are using their CWELCC money to create more permanent solutions:

- Six jurisdictions have mandated wage grids.
- Four jurisdictions provide wage supplements.
- Manitoba pays operators to meet its wage guidelines.
- Ontario funds a wage floor.

However, implementation is uneven. Some apply their interventions to ECEs only, while others cover all staff working in licensed child care. Ontario's wage floor does not apply to educators working in EarlyON, school-based programs, or licensed home child care providers. Most others restrict payments to programs participating in CWELCC agreements.

The following table shows the impact of government wage policies. The amounts show the annual wages for full-time, centre-based educators holding a legislated credential, usually a two-year diploma.



### Policy and Per Cent Change in ECE Annual Wages (2020 to 2023)

Province/ territory	Annual wage rate 2020	Annual wage rate 2023	Per cent change	Policy
NL	\$37,253	\$50,915	37%	Mandated wage grid
PE	\$42,765	\$64,085	50%	Mandated wage grid
NS	\$34,196	\$48,727	42%	Mandated wage grid
NB	\$42,369	\$46,313	9%	Mandated wage grid
QC	\$52,312	\$56,655	4%	Mandated wage grid
<b>ON</b>	<b>\$43,243</b>	<b>\$44,512</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>Wage floor/ Wage Enhancement Grant</b>
MB	\$43,826	\$49,441	13%	Wage guidelines
SK	\$33,280	\$46,176	39%	Wage supplement
AB	\$34,691	\$56,140	62%	Wage supplement
BC	\$41,848	\$51,376	23%	Wage supplement
NU	\$50,502	\$71,531	42%	Mandated wage grid
NT	\$40,384	\$49,634	23%	Wage supplement <i>Wage grid in development</i>
YT	\$67,038	\$68,598	2%	Wage supplement

Note: ECE wages based on government-supported compensation for a FTE staff with legislated credentials with 5 years of experience.  
Source: Akbari, E., McCuaig, K., & Mehta, S. (2024). *The Early Childhood Education Report 2023*. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto.

Canada is producing [6,500 ECE graduates every year](#), the vast majority from colleges in Ontario and Quebec.<sup>1</sup> Many are international students who will be impacted by [new government limits on visa applications](#). If the federal government's commitment to a \$10-per-day child care system meets its five-year target, far more graduates will be needed than are being produced. In fact, [32,000 additional educators](#) are needed just to cover the planned expansion. This excludes replacing the one in five educators expected to retire over the next decade and those who leave for other reasons.

The high demand for educators is not creating corresponding job opportunities. [A year after graduation](#), 50% of new ECE grads are piecing together several part-time jobs when entering the labour market. This compares to 6.8% multiple jobholders among other working women—a staggering difference.

[Research suggests](#) that individual satisfaction with personal earnings is influenced by how they compare with others. The Government of Canada Job Bank reports a [median hourly wage of \\$21](#) for ECEs and assistants. This is substantially less than other sectors requiring comparable education (see [Wages](#)).

Such earning discrepancies may explain why, despite government efforts, child care staff are still exiting the workplace, while new graduates are gravitating to other career paths. Even ECE diploma holders who begin their post-graduate working lives in child care are moving on to education or other better-paying sectors.

[A study](#) looking into the post-graduate lives of ECE degree holders found that half go straight into education. But government wage policies are narrowing the earnings gap. Compared to elementary school teachers, who require four to five years of post-secondary training, ECE degree holders are closing the gap. In jurisdictions providing additional compensation for directors and staff with university degrees, salaries are comparable.

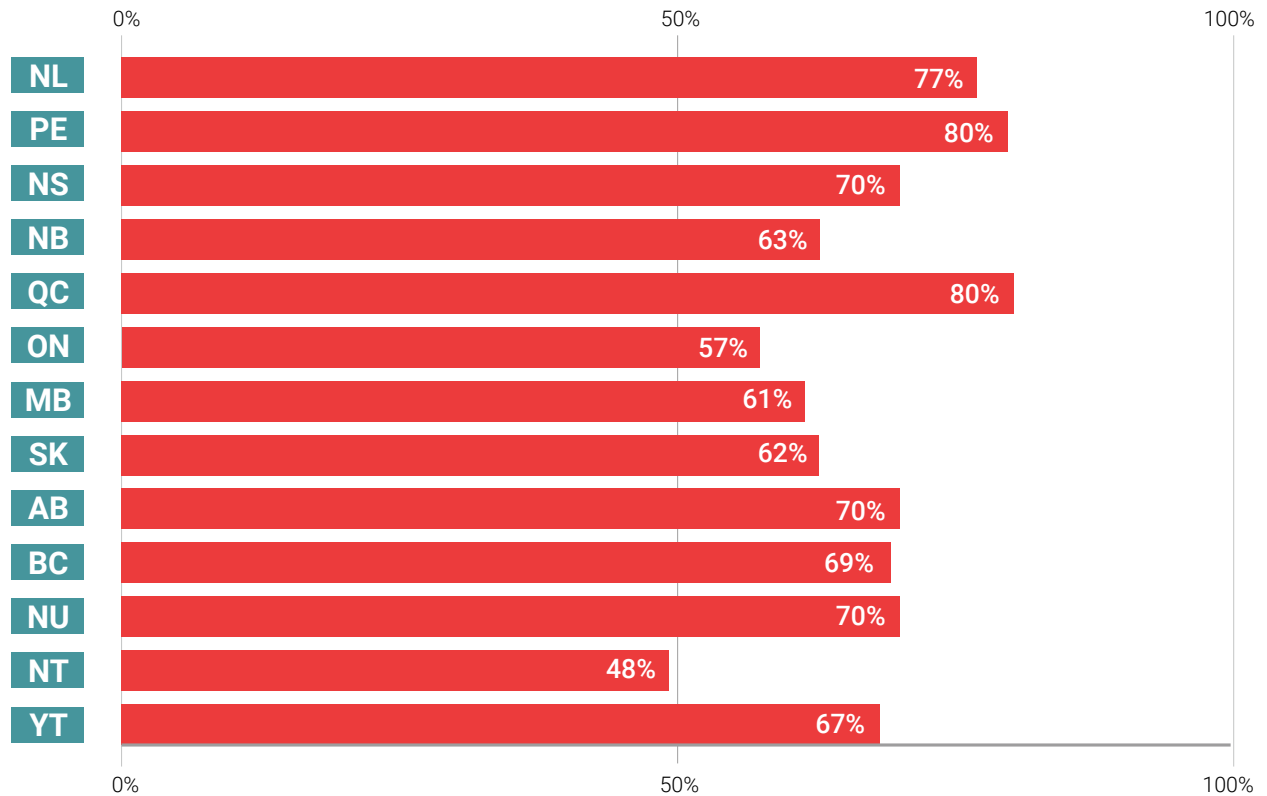
Pay equity evaluations, which account for educational differentials, establish a wage rate for ECE diploma holders that should be at least two-thirds of that of an elementary school teacher.



<sup>1</sup> Numbers do not include those from private post-secondary institutions. Sources: Post-Secondary Information System 2009–2018; Registered Apprenticeship Information System 2010–2017; Statistics Canada Table 39-10-0041-01.

The following graph shows the difference in wage rates for elementary school teachers with five years' of experience and ECEs with the same seniority. Of course, wage rates are only one pillar of a compensation system; ECEs still have a way to go to match teacher benefits. Nevertheless, the wage gap between the two professions is an indication of the relative value that policymakers ascribe to early education.

### ECE Annual Wage Rate as Per Cent of Teacher Wage 2023



<sup>a</sup> ECE wages based on government-supported compensation for an FTE staff with legislated credentials and five years of experience.

<sup>b</sup> Teacher wages are based on the latest collective agreement for staff at Level 5, with 5 years of experience.

Source: Akbari, E., McCuaig, K., & Mehta, S. (2024). *The Early Childhood Education Report 2023*. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto.

Helping parents reduce their child care bills will require increased cash infusions. Over the last decade, when inflation rates were at record lows, parent fees increased at double the rate of inflation. In today's inflationary environment, costs for rent, food, and supplies are escalating, driven by interest rates. This, in turn, is driving up parent fees and effectively wiping out the value of any educator pay increases.

Most provincial and territorial governments are using their federal funds to [stabilize parent](#)

[fees](#) or offset rising operating costs. Ottawa is committed to maintaining its funding at only [\\$9.2 billion annually](#) past the end of the agreements in 2026. This is not enough to support existing service levels, and it is certainly too little to spur expansion. Provinces and territories are left to deal with frustrated parents who cannot get their children into care. Provincial and territorial governments could, of course, add their own funding to cover shortfalls. While some have done so, a reliance on federal funds is now the norm.



# The Early Childhood Education Workforce in Ontario

In Ontario, registration with the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) is required to work in any position requiring an ECE designation. A two-year college diploma in early childhood education is required to register with the CECE. Centre directors require registration with the CECE and at least two years of work experience. Ontario's model does not recognize educators with degrees or additional specialized training.

Non-RECE positions require no child development training, compared to [eight other Canadian jurisdictions](#) that require entry-level training as a minimum for all staff who work directly with children. Additionally, Ontario requires EarlyON centres to have at least one RECE per centre.

**Ontario's model does not recognize educators with degrees or additional specialized training.**

>75,000

are employed in the early education workforce in Ontario, including home providers



Early childhood educators



All occupations

Full-time workers	77%	81%
Part-time workers	23%	19%

Work all year	36%	63%
Work part of year	64%	37%

Average weeks worked by those working part of the year	37	43
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Source: Job Bank Canada. Retrieved from: <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/outlookreport/occupation/5180>

## CECE MEMBERSHIP

The CECE collects various data from RECEs. It has no mechanism to collect information from non-RECE staff.

Over the last five years, the CECE has seen an increase in overall enrolment. However, among its members working in licensed child care, there has been a significant increase in those leaving the sector during the last two years relative to previous years. This is concerning in the context of the CWELCC, where the number of licensed child care spaces have increased but many rooms in child care centres remain closed due to staff shortages.

Registered early childhood educators (RECEs) in Ontario must be registered with the CECE. In Ontario, a two-year diploma in early childhood education is required for registration. Only College members can practise the profession of early childhood education and use the protected titles “early childhood educator” and “registered early childhood educator,” along with the professional designations ECE, RECE, and their French equivalents.

### Good Standing Registered Early Childhood Educators in Ontario Data from the CECE

Fiscal year <sup>a</sup>	# of employed CECE members <sup>b,c</sup>	# of CECE members working in LCC <sup>b</sup>	Percentage of employed members working in LCC	# of CECE members <sup>d</sup>	# of new members <sup>d</sup>	# of LCC members who left the sector that year <sup>d</sup>
2023–2024	52,038	28,776	55%	61,661 <sup>e</sup>	2,527 <sup>e</sup>	825 <sup>e</sup>
2022–2023	50,413	29,041	58%	61,171	5,192	2,463
2021–2022	48,555	27,005	56%	59,547	5,468	2,200
2020–2021	49,942	27,546	55%	58,867	4,335	421
2019–2020	49,939	29,070	58%	57,594	5,599	1,329

Note: LCC = licensed child care

<sup>a</sup> Begins July 1 and ends June 30.

<sup>b</sup> As of October 31 of each fiscal year.

<sup>c</sup> Captures only members who renew after their first year of registration. The CECE does not collect employment information from new members.

<sup>d</sup> As of June 30 of each fiscal year. Includes new members and unemployed members.

<sup>e</sup> As of December 2023.

The CECE's membership is divided into eight geographical areas for the purposes of elections to council. Districts are based on employment except for those who are currently unemployed and those who live outside of the province (District 99). These districts do not match the regions of the report. However, understanding the number of registrants per region across the variable of time is important for policy planning. The following table outlines each district's geographical area.

## Geographical Districts within the College of Early Childhood Educators

District	Description of geographic areas included in district
<b>1. North and Northeast Region</b>	Territorial Districts of Kenora, Rainy River, Thunder Bay, Cochrane, Timiskaming, Algoma, Manitoulin, Parry Sound, Nipissing, Sudbury, and Muskoka.
<b>2. East Region</b>	Territorial boundaries of the County of Renfrew, the United Counties of Prescott and Russell, the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, and the City of Ottawa.
<b>3. Southeast Region</b>	Territorial boundaries of the Counties of Hastings and Lanark, the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville, the United Counties of Lennox and Addington, the County of Prince Edward, the County of Frontenac, and the City of Kingston.
<b>4. Central East Region</b>	Territorial boundaries of the Counties of Haliburton, Peterborough, Northumberland, and Simcoe, the Regional Municipalities of Durham and York, and the City of Kawartha Lakes.
<b>5. Toronto Region</b>	Territorial boundary of the City of Toronto.
<b>6. Central West Region</b>	Territorial boundaries of the Regional Municipalities of Halton, Peel, and Waterloo, and the Counties of Dufferin and Wellington.
<b>7. Hamilton/Niagara Region</b>	Territorial boundaries of the Regional Municipality of Niagara, the County of Brant, Haldimand County, Norfolk County, and the City of Hamilton.
<b>8. Southwest Region</b>	Territorial boundaries of the Counties of Grey, Bruce, Huron, Perth, Middlesex, Oxford, Elgin, Lambton, and Essex, and the Municipality of Chatham-Kent.



## Number of CECE Members Working in Licensed Child Care by District

District	Fiscal year				
	2023–2024 <sup>a</sup>	2022–2023	2021–2022	2020–2021	2019–2020
1. North and Northeast Region	1,549	1,662	1,534	1,510	1,727
2. East Region	2,467	2,561	2,393	2,375	2,658
3. Southeast Region	892	949	881	918	992
4. Central East Region	4,919	5,026	4,674	4,823	5,361
5. Toronto Region	7,635	7,347	6,842	7,173	7,809
6. Central West Region	5,452	5,484	5,090	5,004	5,472
7. Hamilton/Niagara Region	2,611	2,631	2,447	2,568	2,841
8. Southwest Region	3,160	3,242	3,001	3,107	3,412
99. Members who work out of the province	91	139	143	68	136

Note: All data as of October 31 of each fiscal year.

<sup>a</sup> Data as of December 31, 2023.

### MEMBERSHIP ATTRITION

Members are considered no longer in good standing when their Certificate of Registration is suspended, resigned, or revoked. Of the more than 90,000 Certificates of Registration issued by the CECE since its inception, [34.5%](#) belong to RECEs whose membership has lapsed. This is a slight increase (approximately 2%) over the previous year.



# Study Results

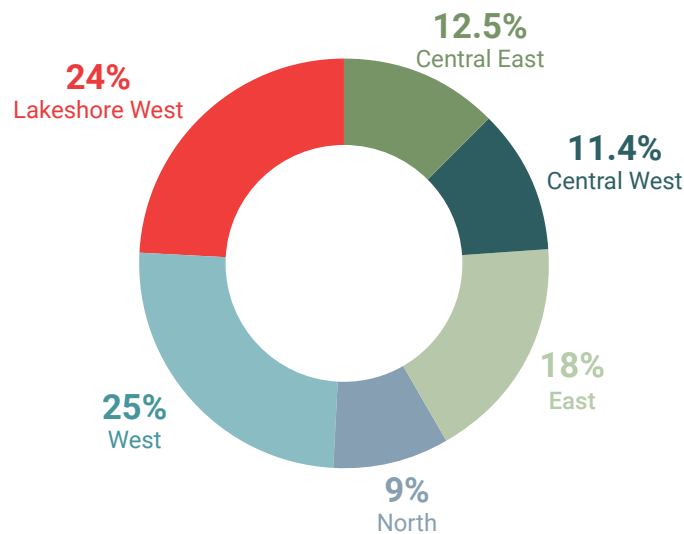
Separate surveys were administered to RECEs (n=3,292) and non-RECEs (n=1,311), including those working in licensed child care programs and full-day Kindergarten (total N=4,603), supervisors/directors (N=960), licensed home child care agencies (N=44), EarlyON centres (N=108), and licensed home child care providers (N=234). A total of 5,949 individuals across Ontario submitted responses. Regional participation numbers for RECEs and non-RECEs can be found [here](#). Details on survey administration can be found in [Methodology](#). Key terms can be found [here](#).

**A total of 5,949 individuals across Ontario submitted responses.**

## SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The chart below presents the percentage of total respondents by region. The West and the Lakeshore West regions together represent about half of all respondents of the workforce survey.

### Percentage of Study Respondents by Region

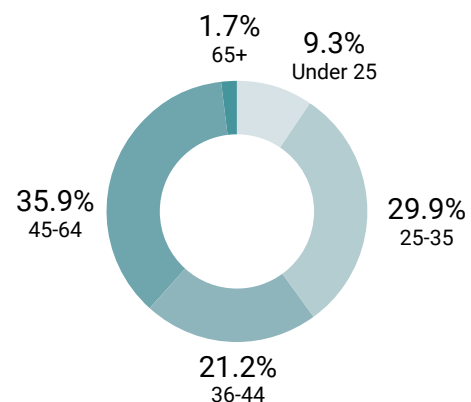


## AGE

A bimodal distribution can be seen for the age of respondents for the combined RECE and non-RECE sample, with most falling in the 45 to 64 years category (36%), followed by the 25 to 35 years category (30%). The data in the charts here and on the next page do not include centre directors or home child care providers.

The concentration of respondents in the 45+ age group has implications for professional learning, as this group likely obtained their ECE credentials prior to the 2014 implementation of [How Does Learning Happen?](#)

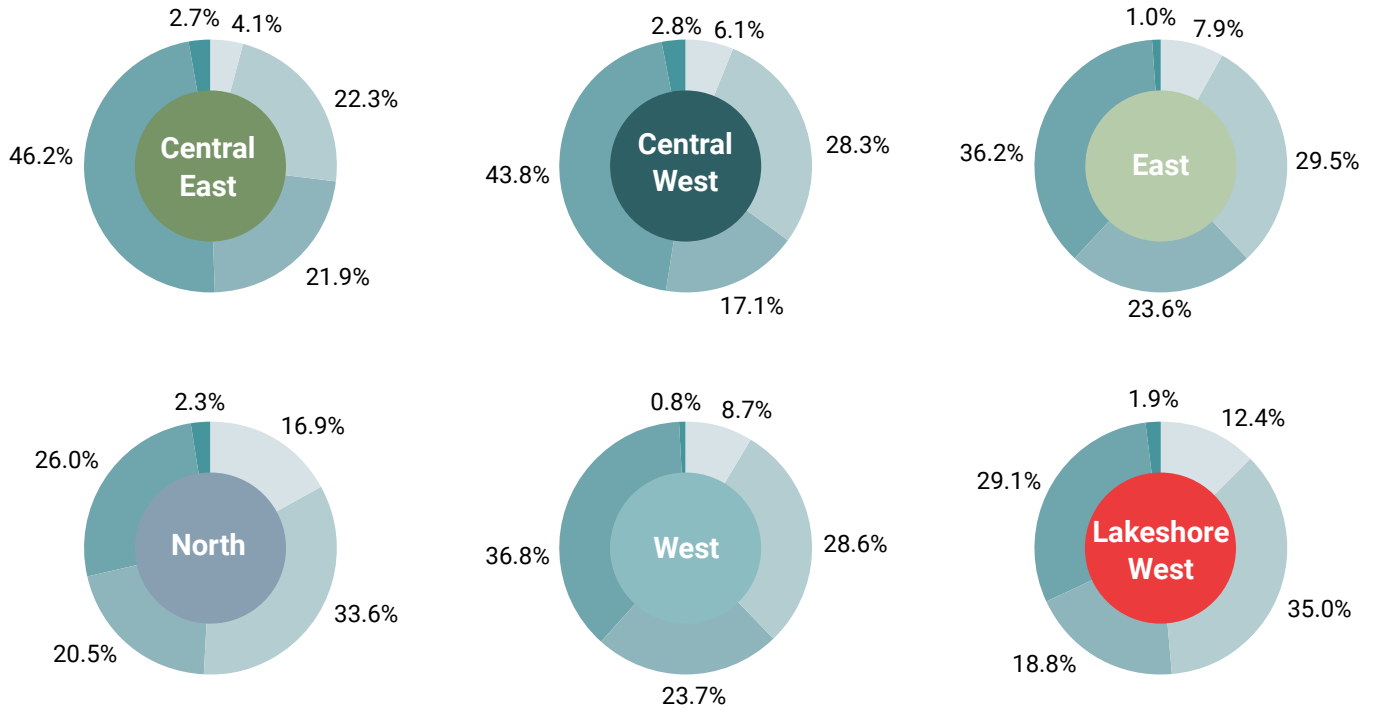
### Age Distribution of RECE and non-RECE Participants



There are significant regional variations in age distribution. The North and Lakeshore West regions have a younger workforce, with 51% and 47% of respondents under the age of 35 years respectively. Conversely, Central East has the oldest workforce, with 71% aged 36 years and older.

## Percentage Age Distribution by Region All Respondents

Under 25
  25-35
  36-44
  45-64
  Over 64



**Totals across regions:**

Under 25	25-35	36-44	45-64	Over 64
9.3%	29.9%	21.2%	35.9%	1.7%

Note: Numbers do not sum to 100% due to missing data.



## YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

Years of experience for RECEs vary widely by auspice and by region. RECEs within public programs (full-day Kindergarten and directly operated) have more years of experience than those in non-profit and for-profit programs. Those with the least years of experience are most likely to work in for-profit programs. Respondents in the North and Lakeshore West regions have the least number of years of experience. Similar patterns for age and auspice are seen with non-RECEs (data not shown).

**Auspice** refers to the financial and administrative operating structure of a child care centre. It is one of the factors that makes a difference to the quality of early learning and care services.<sup>2</sup>

### Years of Experience by Auspice and Region All Respondents

	Auspice				Average across auspice
	For-profit	Non-profit	CMSM/DSSAB	FDK	
Central East	10.8	15.6	18.0	18.3	15.1
Central West	10.5	15.1	20.9	18.5	14.9
East	11.0	14.6	15.6	19.1	14.7
North	5.2	13.4	13.8	16.7	12.9
West	10.7	15.4	18.8	17.8	15.2
Lakeshore West	10.4	12.5	20.9	18.9	12.7
<b>Average across regions</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>14.3</b>

CMSM/DSSAB programs are directly operated by the regional government. Staff are public employees.  
FDK = Full-day Kindergarten

<sup>2</sup> <https://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/Risky-business-chapter-4-auspice-literature-review.pdf>

## FAMILY STATUS

Most respondents are in couple families with dependents (44.6%). There are significant regional differences in family status, with respondents from Central East being more likely to be single with dependents (17.5%).

### Percentage Family Status by Region All Respondents

	Single No dependents	Single With dependents	Couple No dependents	Couple With dependents
Central East	22.1%	17.5%	19.1%	41.4%
Central West	23.2%	11.7%	15.8%	49.3%
East	18.5%	11.1%	23.2%	47.2%
North	26.7%	11.1%	21.8%	40.4%
West	22.2%	10.4%	20.7%	46.7%
Lakeshore West	26.5%	14.5%	17.8%	41.2%
<b>Average across regions</b>	<b>23.1%</b>	<b>12.6%</b>	<b>19.8%</b>	<b>44.6%</b>

Note: Couple represents married or common-law.





## HOME CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

The response rate of home child care providers is too low to provide regional breakdowns. A total of 234 survey participants are home child care providers. Just over a quarter (26%) are RECEs. An additional 12.45% have related credentials but are either ineligible or choose not to join the CECE. This is not representative of the sector. Although jurisdictions were asked to share the survey with their home child care agencies, the survey was distributed through the CECE, skewing the sample toward RECE members. In our sample, providers under 25 years of age are more likely to be RECEs.

### Percentage of Home Child Care Providers by Age and RECE Status

	25–35 years	36–44 years	45–64 years	65+ years
RECEs	27%	34%	38%	2%
Non-RECEs	6%	39%	48%	6%
<b>% of all home providers</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>3%</b>



# Wages

Increasing the wages of early childhood educators is critical to the success of the CWELCC. Ontario has used CWELCC funds to provide a wage floor for eligible RECEs at \$18 per hour in 2022, with \$1 added each year to a maximum wage rate of \$25 per hour. This amount is considerably less than the wage adjustments offered in other jurisdictions. Starting in January 2024, the wage floor for RECEs in Ontario working in programs participating in [CWELCC readjusted to \\$23.86](#) per hour. Although they comprise over half the workforce, educators working under director's approval and non-RECEs are not eligible for CWELCC wage adjustments.

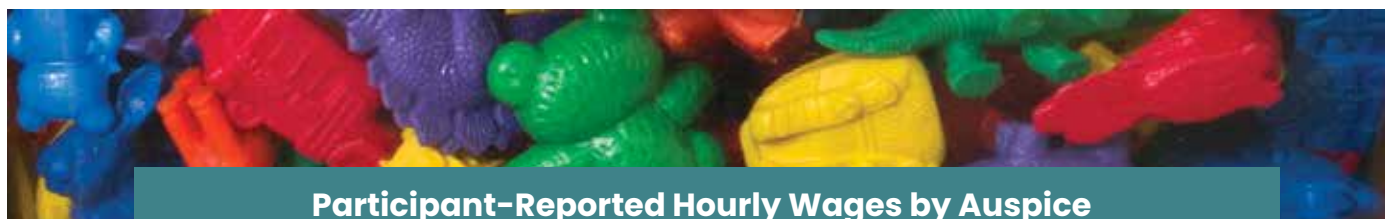
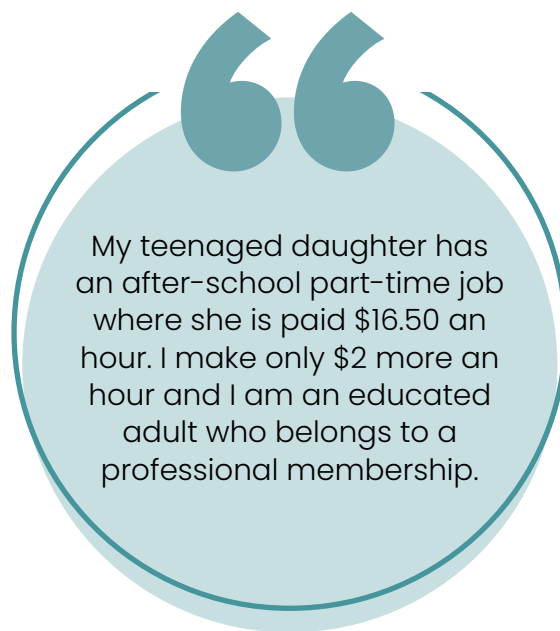
**Starting in January 2024, the wage floor for RECEs in Ontario working in programs participating in CWELCC readjusted to \$23.86 per hour.**

Program staff directly employed in a licensed child care centre or home child care agency may be eligible for the \$2/hour Wage Enhancement Grant (WEG). The maximum rate allowed, including WEG, is \$30.59/hour.

Regional differences, operator auspice, and educator racialization are significant and independent factors contributing to wage disparity.



Although racialization is associated with wage disparity (see [Discrimination in the Workplace](#)), differences based on auspice across all indices are much larger and more significant. The highest median wages for all respondents (RECEs and non-RECEs) are in child care programs operated by colleges or universities and directly operated programs (i.e., operated by the CMSM/DSSAB). Non-profit and EarlyON centres fall midway, with for-profit programs having the lowest wages across all auspices. Since for-profit operators are most likely to pay below the 2024 wage floor, they are most likely to benefit from the government's wage subsidy.



**Participant-Reported Hourly Wages by Auspice**  
All respondents, in descending order, by median wage

	Average	Minimum	25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	Median	75 <sup>th</sup> percentile
Post-secondary institution	\$29.17	\$18.00	\$25.00	\$30.00	\$32.00
CMSM/DSSAB	\$30.02	\$17.00	\$25.00	\$29.00	\$34.00
Non-profit	\$24.54	\$16.00	\$22.00	\$24.00	\$27.00
EarlyON	\$23.79	\$17.00	\$22.00	\$24.00	\$25.00
<b>Provincial level</b>	<b>\$24.90</b>	<b>\$15.00</b>	<b>\$22.00</b>	<b>\$24.00</b>	<b>\$27.00</b>
For-profit	\$22.37	\$16.00	\$20.00	\$22.00	\$24.00

Starting in January 2024, the wage floor for RECEs in Ontario working in programs participating in CWELCC readjusted to \$23.86 per hour.



## REGIONAL WAGES

The wages of RECE survey respondents by auspice are consistent with the provincial pattern, although there are overall wage differences by region. Across all auspice types, Central East has the highest RECE wages (as well as the highest cost of living – see [The Living Hourly Wage by Region](#)), while the lowest RECE wages are found in the Lakeshore West region.

### Hourly Wages by Auspice and Region RECEs

	Auspice				Average across auspice
	For-profit	Non-profit	CMSM/DSSAB	FDK	
Central East	\$22.98	\$27.76	\$31.80	\$27.35	<b>\$27.23</b>
Central West	\$22.60	\$26.37	\$33.69	\$28.02	<b>\$26.06</b>
East	\$23.38	\$25.43	\$28.09	\$28.30	<b>\$25.65</b>
North	\$23.09	\$25.60	\$27.08	\$27.13	<b>\$25.69</b>
West	\$22.69	\$24.75	\$31.70	\$28.73	<b>\$25.27</b>
Lakeshore West	\$23.25	\$25.15	\$31.41	\$27.32	<b>\$25.06</b>
<b>Average across regions</b>	<b>\$22.99</b>	<b>\$25.53</b>	<b>\$30.37</b>	<b>\$27.95</b>	<b>\$25.64</b>

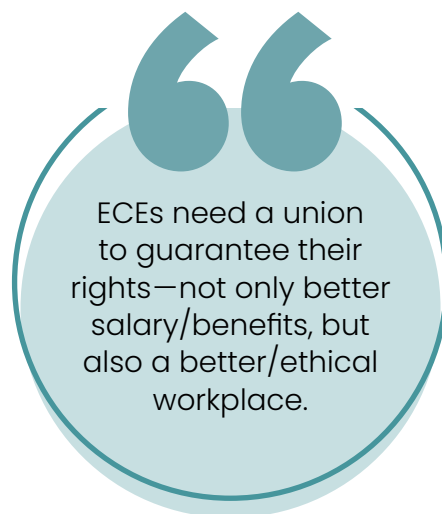
NOTE: Auspice breakdown by region does not include post-secondary due to low sample size.

Starting in January 2024, the wage floor for RECEs in Ontario working in programs participating in CWELCC readjusted to \$23.86 per hour.

## UNIONIZATION

Almost one-third of respondents say they belong to a union (31.9%). Among unionized employees, 51.3% work in licensed centres and 48.7% work in non-licensed environments. RECE respondents account for 71.5% of unionized child care staff.

Unionization has a positive impact on wages across all employer types in licensed child care. On average, being a member of a union adds \$2.20 to the hourly wage rate of RECEs working in licensed child care.



### Average Hourly Wage by Auspice and Union Status for RECE Respondents in Licensed Child Care

■ Unionized wage rate     Non-unionized wage rate



Starting in January 2024, the wage floor for RECEs in Ontario working in programs participating in CWELCC readjusted to \$23.86 per hour.



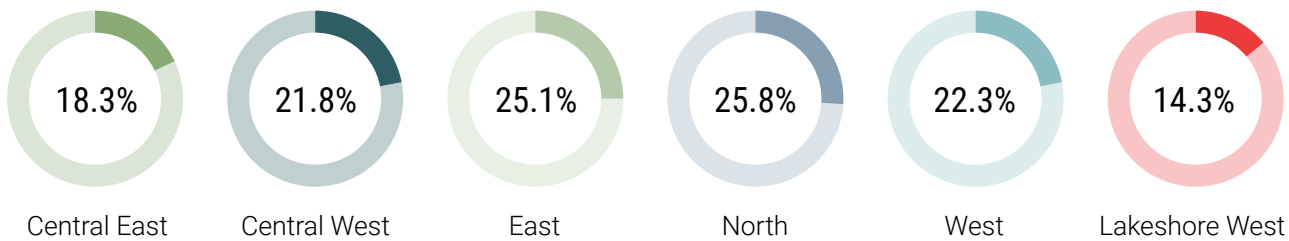
## MAKING ENDS MEET

Many respondents who report working in child care as their main income source also have earnings from other jobs. On average, 21% of RECEs and 19% of non-RECEs have secondary employment. The highest percentage of respondents with more than one source of income is in the North Region.

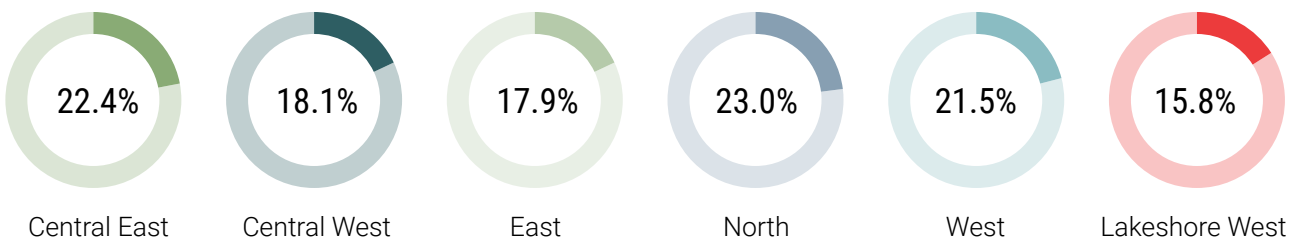


### Percentage of RECEs and Non-RECEs Reporting Additional Employment by Region

#### RECEs

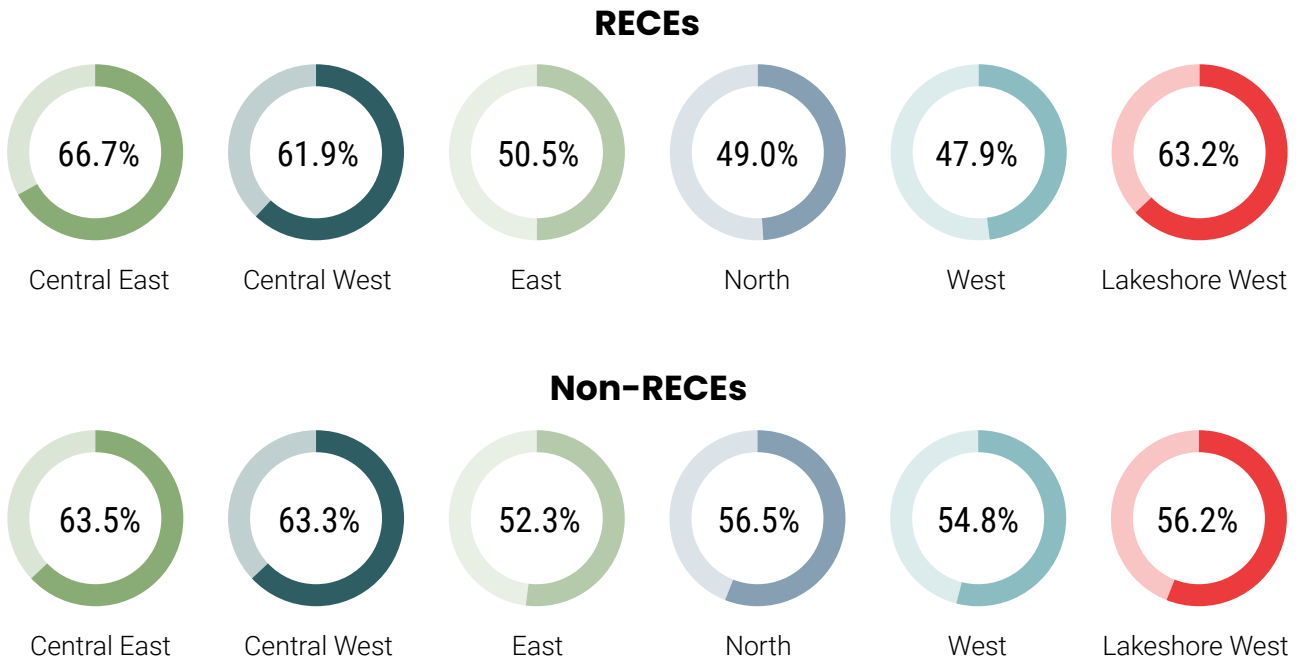


#### Non-RECEs



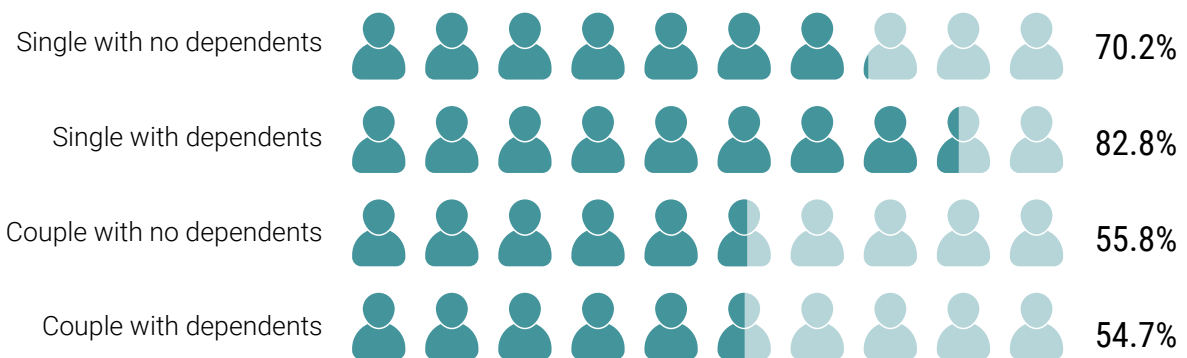
Housing security impacts RECEs and non-RECEs alike. Over 55% of RECEs and 57% of non-RECEs report concerns with housing security. Regional disparity can be attributed in part to variations in regional housing costs.

### Percentage of RECEs and Non-RECEs Reporting Housing Security Concerns by Region



Housing security concerns are also highest among those who are single with dependents. Almost 83% of respondents in this group report housing security concerns.

### Percentage with Housing Security Concerns by Family Status All Respondents

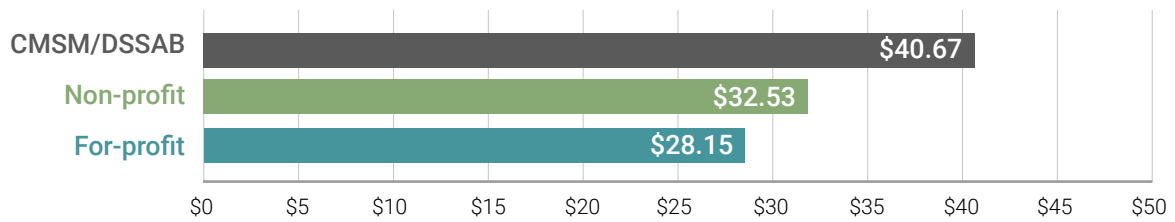


## DIRECTOR/SUPERVISOR WAGES

Director/supervisor wages follow the same trends as for RECEs and non-RECEs.

The highest wages are reported in public programs, while the lowest wages are seen in the for-profit sector. Many respondents did not provide an hourly breakdown.

### Participant Reported Hourly Wages by Auspice Directors/Supervisors



## WAGES IN CONTEXT

### The Minimum Wage

The Ontario [Employment Standards Act](#) establishes the minimum wage rate in the province: a basic labour standard that sets the lowest hourly wage an employer can pay an employee. The rate is adjusted annually based on the Ontario Consumer Price Index. Changes are published annually either on or before April 1; however, the change does not come into effect until October 1 of that year. Effective October 1, 2024, minimum wage rates in [Ontario will increase](#).

[Minimum wage rates across Canada](#) range from \$14.00 per hour in Saskatchewan to \$17.59 in the Yukon. At \$17.20 per hour, Ontario will have the third-highest minimum wage in the country.

The relationship between poverty and minimum wage is complex and multi-faceted. As a result, we cannot look at the minimum wage in isolation. Instead, issues of poverty demand a holistic approach. For example, increases in minimum wage could potentially affect other income-tested benefits, such as child care subsidies, prescription drug coverage, and rental supplements.



### The Living Wage

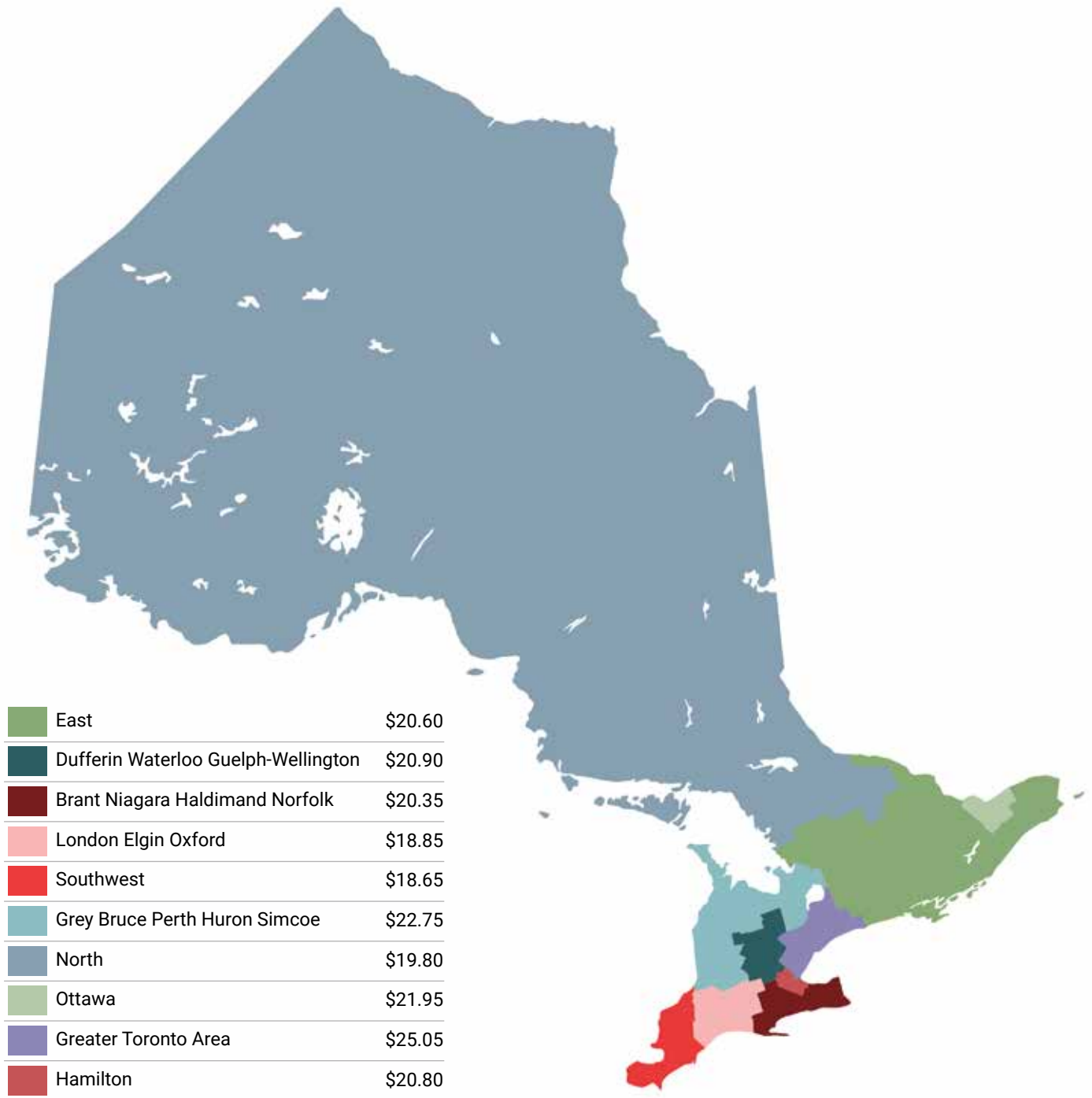
The living wage reflects what people need to earn to cover the costs of living in their community. The calculation pulls from community-level data to determine family expenses for two working adults and two children.

In Canada, the living wage movement curtailed discussions about child poverty in the early 2010s. A major contributor to child poverty is working parents who are still not able to make ends meet. Because of the focus on children, the calculation of living wages was originally based on a family of four with two working parents. Simultaneously, research showed that the living wage rate for single adults and single parents with one child is on par with that of the reference family of four. However, the gaps between the living wage rates for these different households have since grown.

In 2016, the federal government introduced the [Canada Child Benefit](#), which lowered living wage rates across the country. Ontario introduced the [CARE](#) credit in 2019. Both provide additional support to households with children. Those without children do not have access to these benefits. As a result, the gap between living wage rates for a family of four, a single parent with one child, and a single adult has grown significantly. Since 2021, living wage calculations are based on a weighted average of costs for these three different household types.

The [Ontario Living Wage Network](#) (OLWN) calculated the living wages presented in this report. OLWN focuses on the goal of eliminating working poverty. The following map demonstrates living wage rates by region. These rates are built from regional economies that are represented by geographical units defined by Statistics Canada. OLWN used commuting patterns from the 2016 census to validate these findings, taking into consideration whether people live and work in the same region.

## The Living Hourly Wage by Region



Adapted from Coleman. *Calculating Ontario's Living Wages* November 2023. Ontario Living Wage Network. [https://assets.nationbuilder.com/ontariolivingwage/pages/110/attachments/original/1699276527/Calculating\\_Ontario's\\_Living\\_Wages\\_-\\_2023.pdf?1699276527](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/ontariolivingwage/pages/110/attachments/original/1699276527/Calculating_Ontario's_Living_Wages_-_2023.pdf?1699276527)



## Wages in Comparable Professions

In Ontario, an RECE [requires](#) a two-year college diploma in early childhood education. The early childhood educator workforce in the province is female-dominated, [with 98% identifying as female](#). This section compares the hourly wages of RECE respondents to those of two female-dominated professions that require similar education.

We selected comparable professions based on [Statistics Canada National Occupational Classification](#) (NOC) codes with a labour force

of more than 75% female. Licensed practical nurses in Ontario earn a median wage of \$30 per hour with regional variations—the only public sector comparator. Paralegals earn a median wage of \$32.44 per hour with regional variations. Regional comparisons are not exact because of differences between Statistics Canada and KON geographic divisions.


In Ontario, female-dominated professions with comparable educational requirements enjoy higher hourly wages compared to RECEs.

### Median Hourly Wages for Licensed Practical Nurses and Paralegals by Region

Community/area	Licensed practical nurses <sup>a</sup>	Paralegals <sup>b</sup>
Ontario	\$30.00	\$32.44
Hamilton–Niagara Peninsula	\$30.81	\$27.88
Kingston–Pembroke	\$28.00	\$32.44
Kitchener–Waterloo–Barrie	\$30.10	\$32.44
London	\$31.00	\$30.16
Muskoka–Kawartha	\$30.00	N/A
Northeast	\$28.00	\$27.67
Northwest	\$30.25	N/A
Ottawa	\$29.00	\$31.25
Stratford–Bruce Peninsula	\$30.10	\$32.44
Toronto	\$30.00	\$35.26
Windsor–Sarnia	\$26.00	N/A

<sup>a</sup> Government of Canada. Labour Force Survey. Licensed Practical Nurse (L.P.N.) in Ontario. NOC 32101. Reference period 2021–2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/marketreport/wages-occupation/4383/ON>

<sup>b</sup> Government of Canada. Labour Force Survey. Paralegal in Ontario. NOC 42200. Reference period 2021–2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/marketreport/wages-occupation/16074/ON>



# Non-Mandatory Benefits: Impact of Auspice and Unionization

## ACCESS TO NON-MANDATORY BENEFITS

The survey asked respondents about their access to 12 non-mandatory workplace benefits. The actual definitions for each benefit and how they are implemented were not specified.

Sick days are the most commonly available benefit, yet 21% of survey participants say they are not paid when absent due to illness. In addition, fewer than half receive paid health benefits. In a sector short of qualified educators, only 8.6% report receiving tuition assistance, while 13% receive a wage increase for earning additional qualifications while on the job.

**Sick days are the most common available benefit, yet 21% of survey participants say they are not paid when absent due to illness.**

Those that work in the for-profit sector have the lowest rates of non-mandatory benefits across auspice types. Those working in FDK have the lowest access to paid programming and meeting time during the workday (9.9% and 5.3% respectively). Those within FDK also are least likely to see pay increases for new ECE credentials.



## Percentage of Access to Non-Mandatory Benefits by Auspice All Respondents

Benefit	For-profit	Non-profit	CMSM/ DSSAB	FDK	Unknown auspice	Study total
Paid sick days	59.1%	83.3%	83.0%	88.6%	75.0%	79.0%
Extended health benefits	50.8%	66.7%	78.4%	82.9%	58.9%	65.4%
Paid professional development	45.7%	63.5%	74.1%	52.9%	62.5%	60.3%
Paid bereavement leave	31.8%	63.9%	74.8%	79.1%	51.8%	59.5%
Pension benefit or RRSP contribution	23.3%	53.3%	71.8%	76.8%	62.5%	50.5%
Paid personal or mental health days	27.0%	52.5%	41.6%	49.4%	46.4%	46.8%
Paid programming time during workday	37.3%	49.2%	52.8%	9.9%	46.4%	45.0%
Paid meeting time during workday	38.6%	46.0%	63.0%	5.3%	60.7%	43.7%
Salary scale reflecting qualifications, responsibility, and seniority	13.9%	23.2%	46.2%	18.3%	19.6%	22.7%
Pay increase for obtaining new credential or degree in ECE	14.0%	14.1%	9.8%	1.5%	7.1%	13.0%
Parental leave top-up	5.6%	11.7%	24.9%	29.3%	12.5%	12.5%
Tuition assistance	7.1%	8.2%	21.6%	1.9%	12.5%	8.6%

As the data in the following graph show, both auspice and union membership are associated with a wider range of benefits, independent of each other. Unionization has a positive impact on wages and benefit availability across all operator types. Unionized educators in licensed child care receive an average of 5.8 benefits compared to non-unionized workers, who receive an average of 5.

### Average Number of Benefits Received by RECEs by Auspice and Unionization

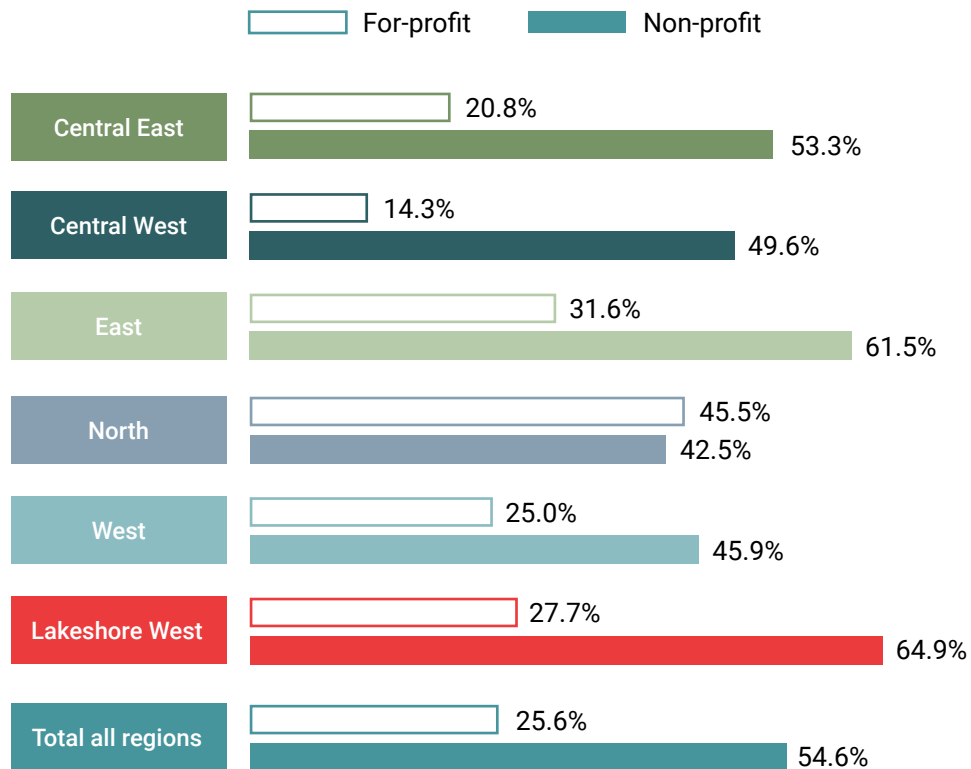


## PENSIONS

Over 60% of the RECE respondents in this study are over 35 years of age, but almost 50% have no employer-supported retirement income. Auspice is a highly influential factor. Defined pensions are generally available to educators working in public programs operated by regional governments, school boards, and colleges and universities.

RECEs in non-profit child care are more than twice as likely to have some type of retirement benefit compared to their associates working in for-profit centres. Employer contributions to registered retirement funds are the most common form of support.

### Availability of Retirement Benefits by Auspice and Region RECEs in licensed child care



Note: Northern findings should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size of for-profit providers.



# Professional Learning

## FORMS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Perhaps due to the pandemic and educator shortages, RECEs report few opportunities for group or face-to-face professional learning (PL). The most common form of PL is online, with a range of 76% of educators in the Central East region to 82% in the West participating in this form of training. By region, 55% (Central East) to 61% (West) of educators rely on self-study as the next-most-common form of PL.

Respondents across all regions are least likely to have attended a course over the past 12 months (16–22%), while fewer than half engage in communities of practice or team meetings, and only one in four access mentoring. Some 40% of respondents say they have not received a performance review in the past 12 months, perhaps an indication of the pressures on program directors to fill in for staff absences (see [Workforce Shortages](#)).

**40% of respondents say they have not received a performance review in the past 12 months.**

Of note is the low desire on the part of respondents to engage in any type of professional learning. This is not surprising, since [studies find that financially struggling, burnt-out staff](#) are less willing and able to learn new skills.

When asked what type of PL they would like, on average one-third indicated interest in any group learning (e.g., mentoring, coaching, communities of practice, conferences, workshops, or courses), while fewer than one-quarter expressed interest in online or self-study options. It is worth noting that although online delivery is the most common type of PL received, it remains one of the least desired.

## Forms of Professional Learning Received by Region in the Last 12 Months All Respondents

	Central East	Central West	East	North	West	Lakeshore West
Online training/webinars	76%	81%	81%	78%	82%	82%
Performance reviews	57%	59%	53%	58%	62%	60%
Structured mentoring	22%	26%	23%	32%	25%	33%
Small group coaching conversations	36%	36%	38%	46%	38%	45%
Ongoing communities of practice	24%	32%	35%	31%	39%	36%
Regular and scheduled opportunities for team discussions for reflective practice	35%	41%	45%	46%	43%	48%
In-person, one-time workshops	39%	40%	51%	49%	61%	52%
Attending a conference	30%	33%	41%	37%	41%	36%
Course	16%	20%	17%	22%	18%	20%
Self-study	55%	58%	60%	56%	61%	52%

## Forms of Professional Learning Desired by Region All Respondents

	Central East	Central West	East	North	West	Lakeshore West
Online training/webinars	21%	19%	17%	20%	18%	18%
Performance reviews	20%	17%	25%	24%	19%	22%
Structured mentoring	38%	32%	32%	34%	30%	29%
Small group coaching conversations	33%	32%	30%	30%	30%	27%
Ongoing communities of practice	38%	31%	31%	39%	28%	30%
Regular and scheduled opportunities for team discussions for reflective practice	33%	28%	30%	33%	30%	27%
In-person, one-time workshops	34%	32%	29%	37%	25%	27%
Attending a conference	36%	31%	32%	38%	29%	33%
Course	41%	31%	35%	34%	32%	31%
Self-study	23%	19%	19%	21%	18%	22%

## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CONTENT

A low number of respondents report participating in equity, diversity, and inclusion training during the preceding 12 months. This pattern holds across regions. The most common types of training, though received by fewer than half the respondents, are in anti-bias/racism approaches (46%) and support for children with disabilities (45%).

Respondents are least likely to report professional training in land-based learning (19%), a feature of Indigenous learning, and Afrocentric ways of being (10%). While local demographics may account for the lower numbers, even in the North – an area with large Indigenous populations – only 22% of educators have participated in this type of training. In regions with higher concentrations of Black families, involvement is also low: 17% in Central East and 15% Central West. However, educators are interested in learning more about these issues, with 39% wanting more training in land-based learning and Indigenous ways of knowing and being/decolonization. In addition, 42% are open to learning how to incorporate Afrocentric ways of being into their practice.





## Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Learning by Region All Respondents

Professional learning received in the previous 12 months	Central East	Central West	East	North	West	Lakeshore West	Ontario
Supporting vulnerable families	27%	27%	28%	23%	27%	28%	27%
Cultural diversity in early years settings	46%	44%	41%	35%	40%	46%	43%
Anti-bias/anti-racism/anti-oppression education	52%	48%	45%	37%	47%	46%	46%
Supporting newcomer families	19%	21%	14%	12%	18%	18%	17%
Critical trauma-informed practice	26%	27%	29%	23%	28%	25%	27%
Incorporating land-based learning	20%	20%	19%	22%	18%	18%	19%
Making workplaces more accessible	26%	27%	26%	20%	23%	28%	25%
Supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ children and families	27%	22%	25%	19%	25%	34%	27%
Indigenous ways of knowing and being and decolonization	27%	32%	31%	29%	30%	29%	30%
Incorporating Afrocentric way of being	17%	15%	7%	4%	8%	11%	10%
Supporting children with disabilities	44%	46%	46%	43%	45%	47%	45%
<b>Provincial average</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>29%</b>

Professional development wanted by study participants	Central East	Central West	East	North	West	Lakeshore West	Ontario
Supporting vulnerable families	48%	49%	50%	58%	47%	45%	49%
Cultural diversity in early years settings	33%	32%	36%	42%	35%	33%	35%
Anti-bias/anti-racism/anti-oppression education	28%	27%	31%	38%	29%	31%	30%
Supporting newcomer families	50%	43%	49%	53%	44%	47%	47%
Critical trauma-informed practice	41%	42%	44%	52%	43%	42%	44%
Incorporating land-based learning	39%	39%	40%	46%	38%	38%	39%
Making workplaces more accessible	33%	29%	32%	39%	33%	32%	33%
Supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ children and families	37%	38%	42%	48%	37%	34%	38%
Indigenous ways of knowing and being and decolonization	42%	36%	42%	44%	38%	36%	39%
Incorporating Afrocentric way of being	41%	38%	43%	48%	41%	42%	42%
Supporting children with disabilities	38%	38%	44%	48%	43%	38%	41%
<b>Provincial average</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>40%</b>

In the last 12 months, those working in for-profit programs report the lowest level of participation in all types of equity, diversity, and inclusion learning except for incorporating Afrocentric ways of being. In addition, across all auspices, incorporating Afrocentric ways of being and supporting newcomer families are the least likely types of PL received. The most common types of PL received by auspice are making workplaces more accessible for those working in for-profit and FDK programs, and anti-bias/anti-racism-anti-oppression education for those working in the non-profit sector and in directly operated programs.

Those working in for-profit programs are most likely to report wanting to receive most types of training, while those working in FDK are least likely to want most types of training. The highest ratings (around 50%) for respondents from for-profit programs are for supporting vulnerable and newcomer families, and critical trauma-informed practice. Respondents from non-profit and directly operated programs are also most likely to want training in supporting vulnerable and newcomer families. Those working in directly operated programs would also like training in incorporating Afrocentric ways of being.

## Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Learning by Auspice All Respondents

Professional development received in the last 12 months	For profit	Non-profit	CMSM / DSSAB	FDK	All
Supporting vulnerable families	20.4%	27.2%	36.4%	30.0%	26.7%
Cultural diversity in Early Years settings	35.4%	43.0%	51.5%	43.0%	42.2%
Anti-bias/anti-racism/anti-oppression education	34.9%	46.4%	55.7%	60.5%	45.7%
Supporting newcomer families	14.8%	17.8%	19.0%	19.4%	17.4%
Critical trauma-informed practice	18.5%	26.7%	37.4%	32.3%	26.2%
Incorporating land-based learning	15.0%	19.5%	24.9%	22.1%	19.2%
Making workplaces more accessible	22.5%	25.7%	34.1%	22.4%	25.5%
Supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ children and families	19.3%	27.1%	32.5%	29.3%	26.2%
Indigenous ways of knowing and being and decolonization	21.4%	29.0%	44.6%	40.3%	29.3%
Incorporating Afrocentric ways of being	10.3%	9.7%	12.1%	14.8%	10.3%
Supporting children with disabilities	38.1%	46.2%	53.8%	41.8%	45.0%

## Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Learning by Auspice (continued)

### All Respondents

Professional development wanted by study participants	For profit	Non-profit	CMMS / DSSAB	FDK	All
Supporting vulnerable families	51.5%	48.3%	47.5%	40.3%	48.3%
Cultural diversity in Early Years settings	39.8%	33.5%	35.4%	27.4%	34.4%
Anti-bias/anti-racism/anti-oppression education	36.6%	29.2%	29.5%	15.6%	29.8%
Supporting newcomer families	49.8%	46.0%	53.1%	36.1%	46.6%
Critical trauma-informed practice	48.5%	42.5%	45.3%	35.0%	43.4%
Incorporating land-based learning	43.0%	38.3%	43.6%	31.6%	39.2%
Making workplaces more accessible	37.2%	31.9%	32.1%	21.3%	32.3%
Supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ children and families	40.7%	37.4%	44.6%	30.8%	38.1%
Indigenous ways of knowing and being and decolonization	41.4%	38.9%	36.4%	29.3%	38.7%
Incorporating Afrocentric ways of being	42.4%	41.7%	49.8%	27.4%	41.6%
Supporting children with disabilities	44.0%	40.6%	37.4%	41.1%	41.1%

# Workforce Shortages

If Ontario meets its expansion goal of 86,000 more child care spaces under the CWELCC program, by its own estimates it will be [short 8,500 RECEs](#). Colleges are enrolling sufficient students to meet demand, but new graduates are not moving into licensed care in sufficient numbers. [About 4,200](#) students enroll in college early childhood education programs each year, with an average graduation rate of 72%.

Of those who do graduate, [less than 60%](#) begin work in licensed child care. In addition, their likelihood of remaining in the sector decreases over time, dropping to just over 40% still working in licensed child care by year five. ECE recruitment and retention are bigger problems in Ontario compared to the rest of Canada. Other jurisdictions are putting workforce dollars toward adding funded places in their training institutions. This creates sustainable capacity to grow and renew the workforce.

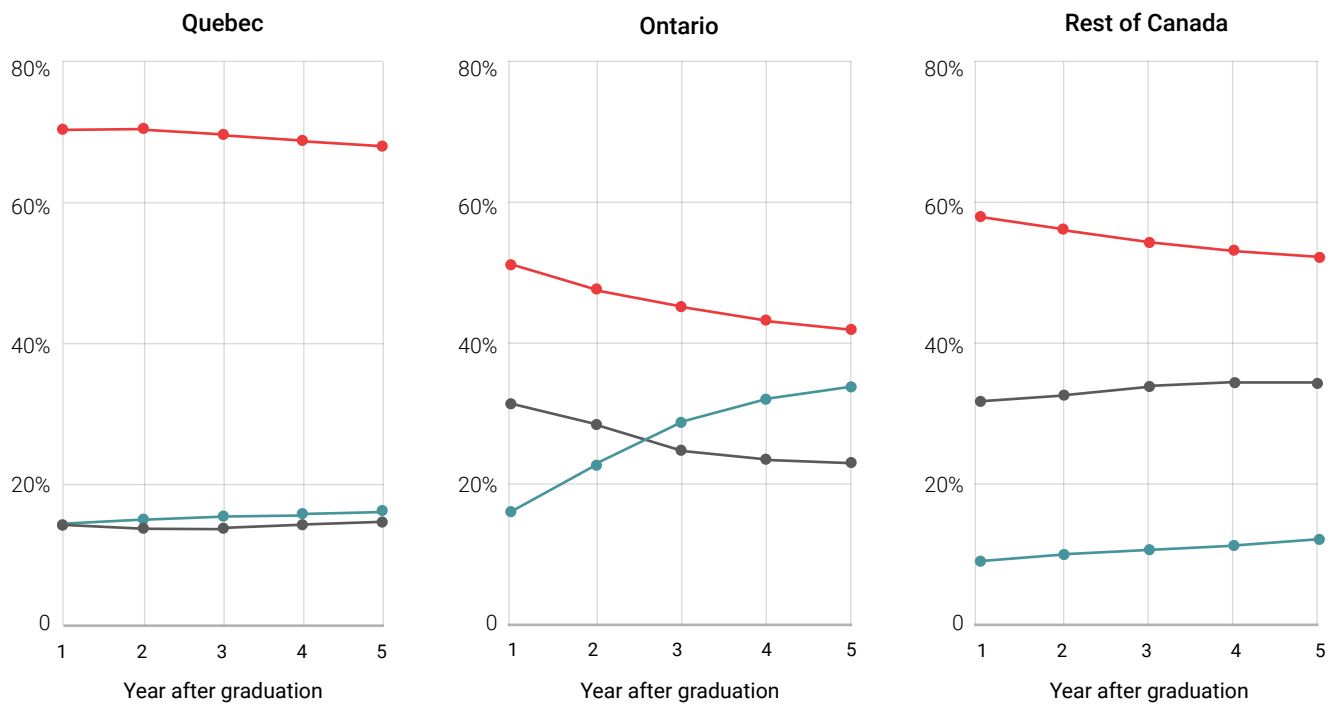
**If Ontario meets its expansion goal of 86,000 more child care spaces under the CWELCC program, by its own estimates it will be short 8,500 RECEs.**

“

Changes need to be made ASAP. I've only been in the field for three years, but I already feel like I'm done and can't do anymore.

## Career Trajectories of College ECE Graduates by Years Following Graduation

—•— Work in child care    —•— Work in education    —•— Work in other sectors



Dhuey, et al. 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.utpjournals.press/doi/pdf/10.3138/cpp.2022-059>

This report supports the above findings. One in three RECEs plan to stay in child care, while one in four say they will leave over the next five years. Slightly over 40% of RECEs and 38% of non-RECEs are undecided.

According to the CECE, among members who resigned from the college, the majority seek employment outside of the early learning and child care sector.

RECEs from Central East (34.2%) and Central West (30.4%) are significantly more likely to report plans to leave, while northern regions show the highest workforce stability.

A large portion of respondents remain unsure, which may be related to the perception of uncertainty in the sector. This eventually may increase the number who plan to leave the sector if significant policy changes are not made.

“

I will be forced to leave the early years field if pay does not increase to reflect the current cost of living.

“

I am thinking of leaving the field. I can earn a lot more for a lot less work in other fields, or at least equivalent for less work.

## Percentage of Respondents with Plans to Leave Sector within 5 Years by Region

	Plans to stay	Plans to leave	Not sure
	RECEs		
Central East	33.2%	34.2%	32.7%
Central West	33.6%	30.4%	36.0%
East	37.1%	21.6%	41.3%
North	38.5%	18.7%	42.8%
West	37.4%	20.8%	41.8%
Lakeshore West	36.6%	21.0%	42.4%
<b>Average</b>	<b>36.3%</b>	<b>23.7%</b>	<b>40.1%</b>

	Non-RECEs		
Central East	42.6%	22.8%	34.6%
Central West	39.5%	23.3%	37.2%
East	31.0%	26.9%	42.1%
North	45.7%	17.4%	37.0%
West	38.4%	23.5%	38.0%
Lakeshore West	38.3%	24.9%	36.8%
<b>Average</b>	<b>38.7%</b>	<b>23.7%</b>	<b>37.7%</b>

“ Save us before we all jump ship!

“ I would love to be able to afford my rent. I went to school for this [profession] and cannot even afford to visit a dentist. I am mentally and emotionally drained.

“ I think the morale of this workforce is dwindling.

Across all workplaces and regions, RECEs are more likely to report workplace stress and discrimination (see [Discrimination in the Workplace](#)) compared to non-RECEs.

## Mean Stress Level by RECE Status and Planning to Leave All Respondents

Scale of 1 (low stress) to 5 (high stress)

	Plans to leave sector			Total by qualifications
	Yes	No	Not sure	
Non-RECE	3.5	2.9	3.3	<b>3.2</b>
RECE	3.8	3.1	3.6	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Total by plans to leave</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.4*</b>

\*Total reported stress level of all participants.

RECEs working in licensed child care report higher levels of stress than non-RECEs. Those who have plans to leave the sector also report higher levels of stress.

## Mean Stress Level by RECE Status and Planning to Leave—Licensed Child Care

Scale of 1 (low stress) to 5 (high stress)

	Plans to leave sector			Average by RECE status
	Yes	No	Not sure	
Non-RECE	3.6	2.9	3.3	<b>3.2</b>
RECE	3.9	3.2	3.7	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Average by plans to leave</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.4*</b>

\*Average reported stress level of all participants.



Without any changes to this field, it will continue to go down. We are already seeing a high turnover rate. If we don't receive the assistance, resources, respect, and pay that follows, there will be no one left to do the job.



Those working in French language child care programs are more likely to report plans to leave compared to those in English centres. This is in line with findings from key informant interviews and focus group feedback, which reveal the unique recruitment and retention challenges for French language programs. Focus groups indicate that directors lose French language staff to government positions where their bilingualism is both valued and compensated.

### Percentage of Workforce Planning to Leave Sector by Program Language All Respondents

#### ANGLOPHONE

#### FRANCOPHONE





## CASUAL STAFF

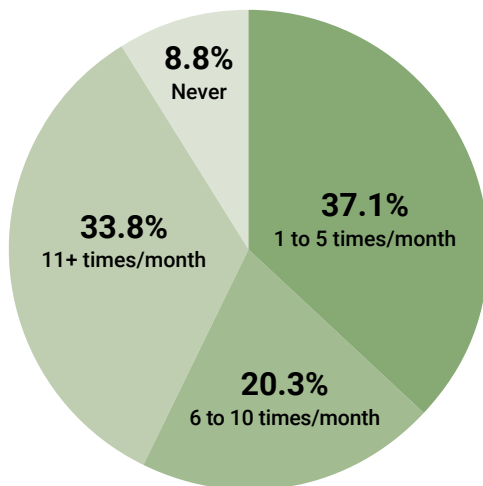
Substitute staff are important for program delivery. Over 86% of administrators say they need casual staff regularly or sometimes but encounter difficulties finding sufficient numbers. Directors, by necessity, stand in for absent staff, taking them away from their leadership and administrative duties.

### Access to Casual Staff All Respondents

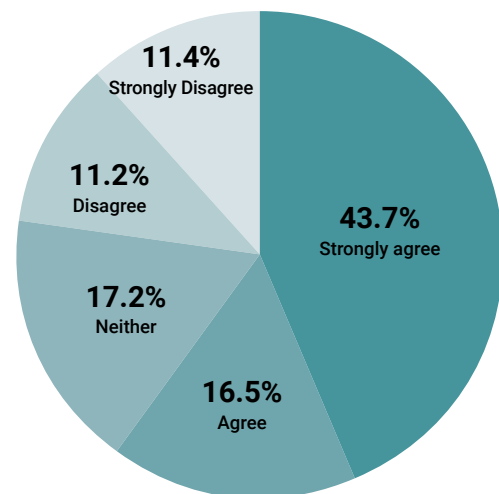
Frequency of casual staff required	Percent needing casual staff	Percent unable to find needed casual staff
Yes – regularly	72.8%	32.5%
Sometimes	14.5%	50.0%
No	12.8%	N/A

Just over one-third (33.8%) of management staff report having to fill in more than 11 times per month to maintain ratios. Educator shortages also have a direct impact on program delivery. Over 60% of administrators say staff shortages and vacancies impact their ability to offer activities, limit operating hours, and curtail their ability to enroll children.

### Number of Times per Month Directors/Supervisors Fill in Ratio



### Staff Shortages Limit Program Operations—Directors/Supervisor



## STAFF TURNOVER

Focus group feedback indicates that the lowest rate of staff turnover is within directly operated programs and those operated by universities or colleges. In these programs, wages are higher, positions are unionized, and pensions and non-mandatory benefits are common.

The most important aspects of quality in early education are warm, stimulating, responsive, and supportive interactions between educators and children, as well as the effective use of curricula. Legislation about the maximum number of children in a room, the ratio of staff to children, and staff qualifications helps increase the likelihood of, but does not assure, responsive and stimulating interactions. [When low wages and poor working conditions lead to high staff turnover](#), the benefits of early education become compromised.

## CAREER SATISFACTION

Generally, job satisfaction is low across all workplaces; however, auspice type again plays a significant role. Both RECEs and non-RECEs working in for-profit child care report the lowest levels of satisfaction, while those working in directly operated CSMS/DSSAB centres are generally more satisfied. RECEs working in full-day Kindergarten are on par with those working in non-profit programs. Across regions, RECEs demonstrate the lowest job satisfaction in Central East (2.7 out of 5) and Central West (2.6), while among non-RECEs, the lowest job satisfaction is reported in Central West (2.5) and West (2.6).

### Reported Job Satisfaction by Auspice and Region – RECEs

Scale of 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (highest satisfaction)

	Auspice				Average across auspice
	For-profit	Non-profit	CMSM/DSSAB	FDK	
Central East	2.4	2.8	2.7	2.3	2.7
Central West	2.2	2.8	3.3	2.4	2.6
East	2.3	2.7	3.1	2.8	2.7
North	2.4	2.7	3.0	2.8	2.7
West	2.5	2.6	3.4	2.9	2.7
Lakeshore West	2.5	2.7	3.4	2.6	2.7
<b>Average across regions</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2.7</b>

## Reported Job Satisfaction by Auspice and Region – Non-RECEs

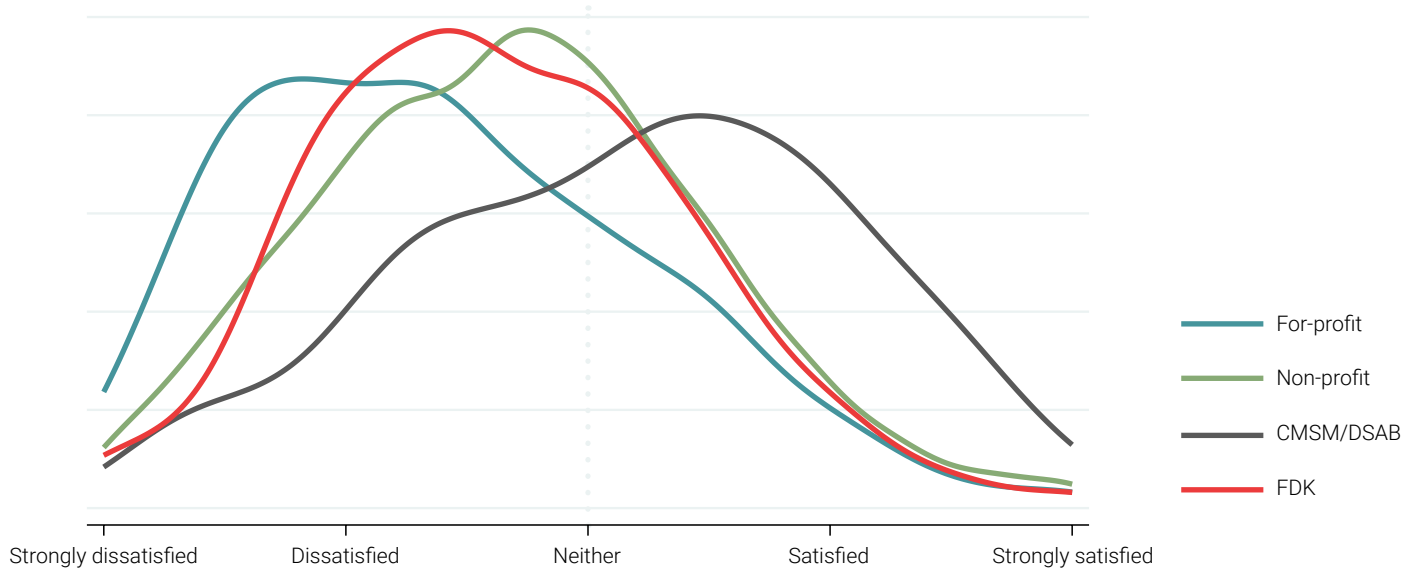
Scale of 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (highest satisfaction)

	Auspice				Total across auspice
	For-profit	Non-profit	CMSM/DSSAB	FDK	
Central East	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.0	2.8
Central West	2.2	2.6	2.9	3.5	2.5
East	2.6	2.6	3.2	2.6	2.6
North	2.3	2.7	3.0	5.0	2.7
West	2.5	2.6	3.1	2.8	2.6
Lakeshore West	2.4	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.7
<b>Total across regions</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.6</b>

Those who work in directly operated centres are more likely to be satisfied with their pay, benefits, and career opportunities.

## Satisfaction with Pay, Benefits, and Career Opportunities All Respondents

I have good pay, benefits, and career opportunities



Note: This is presented as a Kernel Density Plot in which the area below each of the individual lines equals to 1. It allows comparisons of the shape of individual distributions regardless of the total number of respondents in each group.

Educators report that the same factors would improve their personal job satisfaction as would improve the workforce as a whole, with appropriate salary being at the top of the list for both.

### Top 10 Reported Factors That Would Improve Personal Job Satisfaction All Respondents

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>01</b> <b>Appropriate salary</b><br>2,387 (52%)  | <b>06</b> <b>Respect for the work</b><br>1,355 (29%)           |
| <b>02</b> <b>Improved benefits</b><br>1,875 (41%)   | <b>07</b> <b>Improved career opportunities</b><br>1,289 (28%)  |
| <b>03</b> <b>Support for children with emotional and behavioural needs</b><br>1,544 (34%) | <b>08</b> <b>Lower child to educator ratios</b><br>1,194 (26%) |
| <b>04</b> <b>Supports for children with disabilities</b><br>1,366 (30%)                   | <b>09</b> <b>Educator mental health support</b><br>1,139 (25%) |
| <b>05</b> <b>Paid preparation time</b><br>1,366 (30%)                                     | <b>10</b> <b>Regular paid breaks</b><br>968 (21%)              |

### Top 10 Reported Factors That Would Improve Workforce Job Satisfaction All Respondents

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>01</b> <b>Appropriate salary</b><br>2,846 (62%)  | <b>06</b> <b>Lower child to educator ratios</b><br>2,256 (49%) |
| <b>02</b> <b>Respect for the work</b><br>2,798 (61%)                                      | <b>07</b> <b>Paid preparation time</b><br>2,034 (44%)          |
| <b>03</b> <b>Support for children with emotional and behavioural needs</b><br>2,412 (52%) | <b>08</b> <b>Improved career opportunities</b><br>1,816 (40%)  |
| <b>04</b> <b>Supports for children with disabilities</b><br>2,359 (51%)                   | <b>09</b> <b>More full-time positions</b><br>1,722 (37%)       |
| <b>05</b> <b>Improved benefits</b><br>2,355 (51%)   | <b>10</b> <b>Educator mental health support</b><br>1,633 (36%) |

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Despite overall poor wages and low levels of job satisfaction, respondents perceive their work is valuable, regardless of auspice or region. RECEs agree that the work they do is meaningful to the lives of children and families. There are no significant variations between auspice or region.

### RECEs Report the Work They do is Meaningful in the Lives of Children and Families

Scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

	Auspice				Average across auspice
	For-profit	Non-profit	CMSM/DSSAB	FDK	
Central East	4.1	4.2	4.1	4.2	4.2
Central West	4.2	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.2
East	4.4	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.3
North	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.2	4.4
West	4.3	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.3
Lakeshore West	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.3
<b>Average across regions</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>4.3</b>





# Discrimination in the Workplace

Canada has an increasingly diverse population, with approximately 2.2 million children under the age of 15 having at least one parent born outside of Canada. This comprises almost 38% of the population. By 2036, it is [projected](#) that this number will be between 39% and 49%. This growth demonstrates the increasing demand for child care programs and services to support the diverse needs of children and families.

The term “racialized” is a social concept closely linked to racism. In Canada, the term “racialized minority” usually refers to non-white people. Participants in this study self-identified race.

**Compared with non-racialized Canadians, racialized workers have both higher employment (66% versus 60.4%) and labour force participation rates (70.6% versus 63.4%).**

Canada also has a [diverse workforce](#). More than a quarter (28.2%) of working Canadians are racialized. Compared with non-racialized Canadians, racialized workers have both higher employment (66% versus 60.4%) and labour force participation rates (70.6% versus 63.4%).

## RACIALIZATION

Numerous studies reveal the percentage of racialized workers is much higher in early learning and child care than in the workforce as a whole. This study reaches similar conclusions, although there are large variations in the percent of racialized workers by region, auspice, age, years of experience, and position.

### Highlights of racialization findings:

- Race and auspice have impacts on almost every aspect of the ELCC workforce.
- Non-RECEs are more likely to be racialized (42.6%) than RECEs (22.9%).
- Program directors and supervisors are less likely to be racialized (24.6%) than non-RECEs (42.6%).
- Across all workforce groups, Central East and Central West have the highest percentage of racialized workers (data not shown). This may largely be due to variations in racialized populations across Ontario (see regional reports for census data).
- Regional disparity in populations does not account for the proportionately low numbers of racialized educators in leadership positions.
- Directors of single-site programs (28.9%) are more likely to be racialized than directors of multi-site programs (20.2%).
- Within single-site programs, racialized staff are more likely to work in for-profit programs.
- Racialized RECEs are more likely to be younger.
- RECEs with fewer than five years of experience are more likely to be racialized.
- Racialized staff are paid less on average than non-racialized staff.
- Almost half (48.9%) of licensed home child care providers are racialized (data not shown).

**Racialization:** the process by which societies construct races as real, different, and unequal in ways that matter and affect economic, political, and social life.<sup>3</sup>

- More than half (52.1%) of non-racialized home child care providers are under 45 years of age compared to racialized home providers (41.1%). The opposite pattern is found for the entire workforce where younger participants are more likely to be racialized.
- In the Central East and Central West regions, non-racialized staff are over-represented in the under 35 age group and under-represented in the 45-64 age group (data not shown).



<sup>3</sup> Reference: Ontario Human Rights Commission. Teaching Human Rights in Ontario—A Guide for Ontario Schools. Appendix 1. Retrieved from: <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/teaching-human-rights-ontario-guide-ontario-schools/appendix-1-glossary-human-rights-terms>

## Percentage of Racialization by Region and Position

District	Non-RECEs	RECEs	Centre directors/supervisors
Central East	72.6%	47.0%	38.1%
Central West	65.1%	37.8%	33.3%
East	29.2%	11.8%	18.6%
North	26.5%	21.1%	15.7%
West	29.4%	10.8%	21.3%
Lakeshore West	44.2%	26.7%	24.1%
<b>Average</b>	<b>42.6%</b>	<b>22.9%</b>	<b>24.6%</b>

Note: Data for Directors/Supervisors was collected in a separate survey.

## Racialization by Program Type Directors/Supervisors

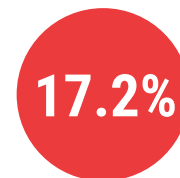
Single-site programs



Multi-site programs

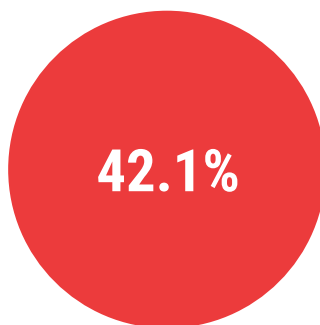


Multi-service agencies

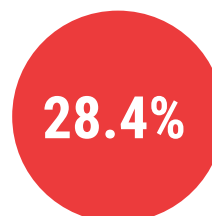


## Racialization by Auspice in Single-Site Programs All Respondents

For-profit



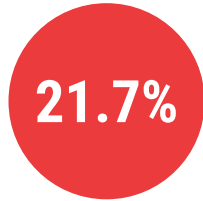
Non-profit



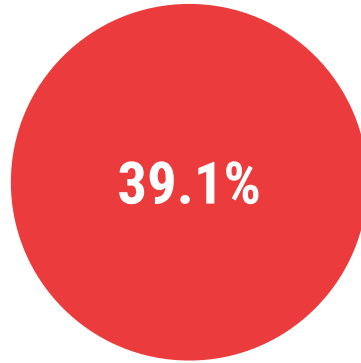


## Racialization by Age RECEs

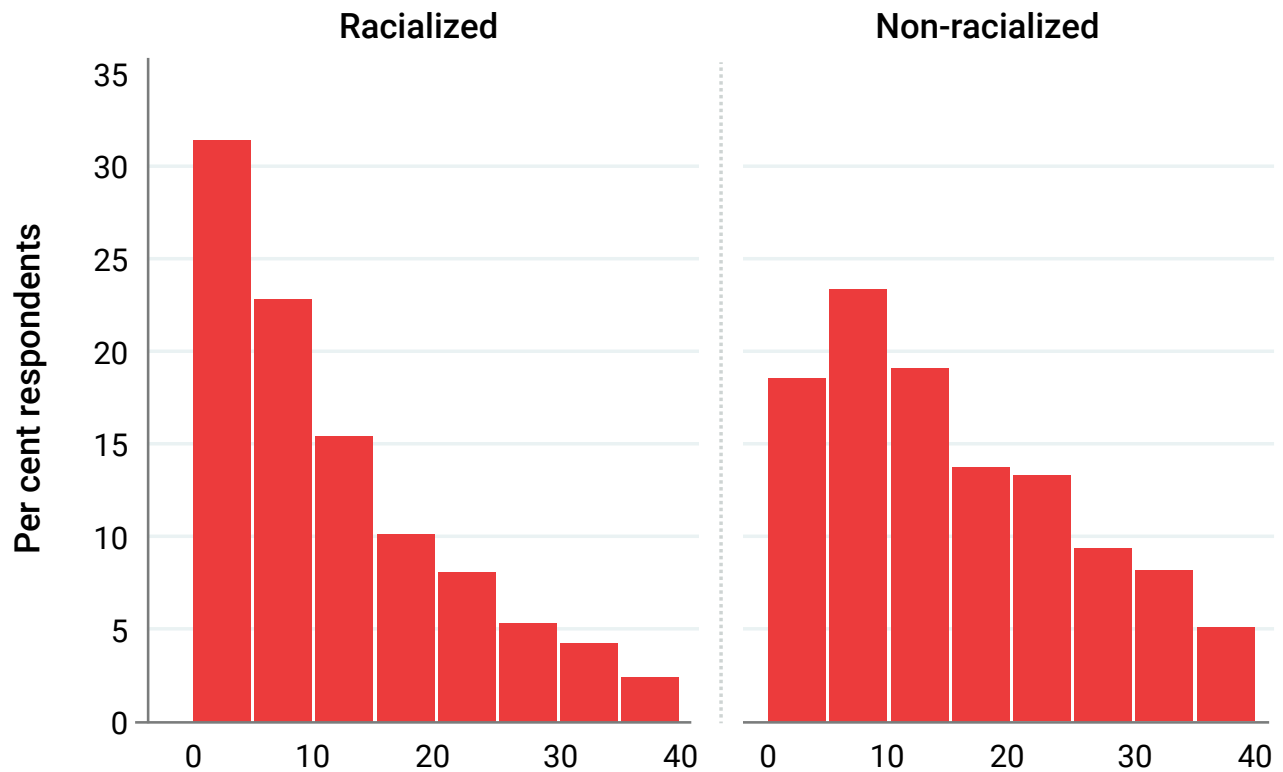
25+ years old



Under 25 years old



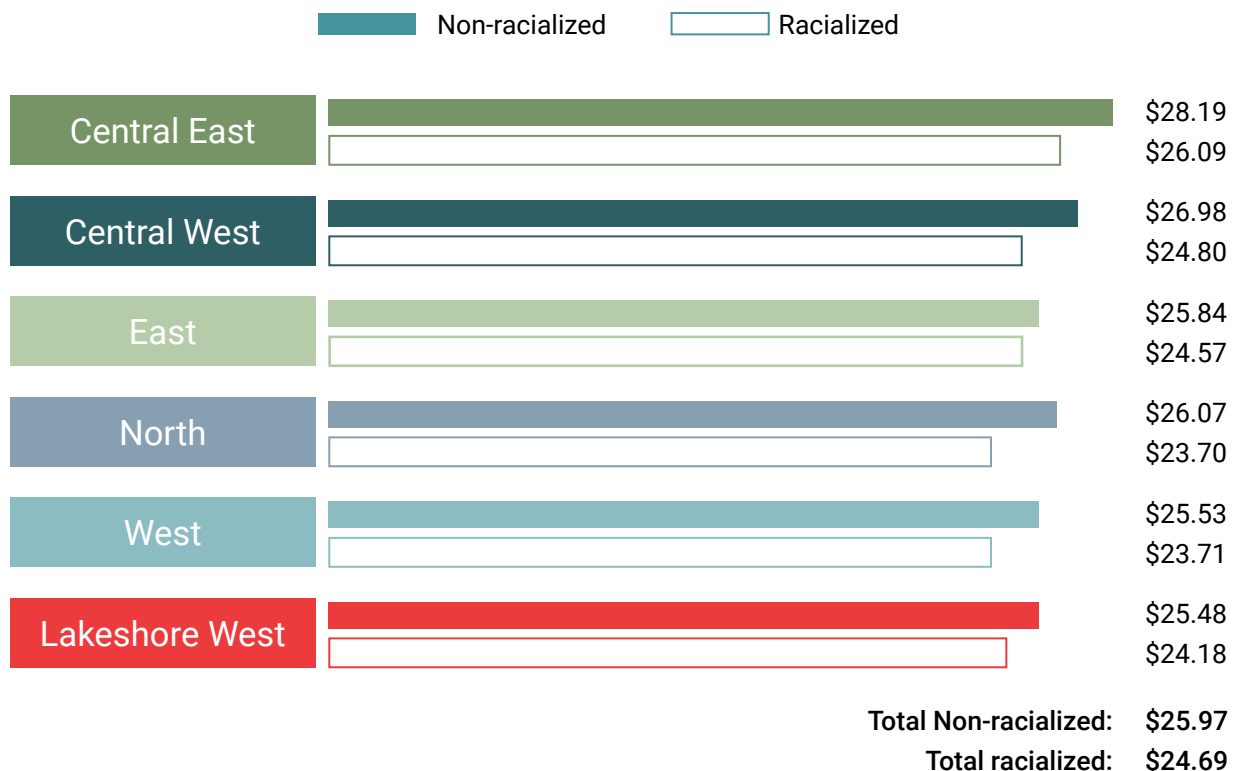
## Years of Experience by Racialization RECEs





There is a statistically significant difference in the average hourly wage between racialized (\$24.69) and non-racialized (\$25.97) RECEs. However, this wage difference is no longer significant after 10 years of experience.

### Wage Rate Per Hour by Racialization and Region



## DISCRIMINATION

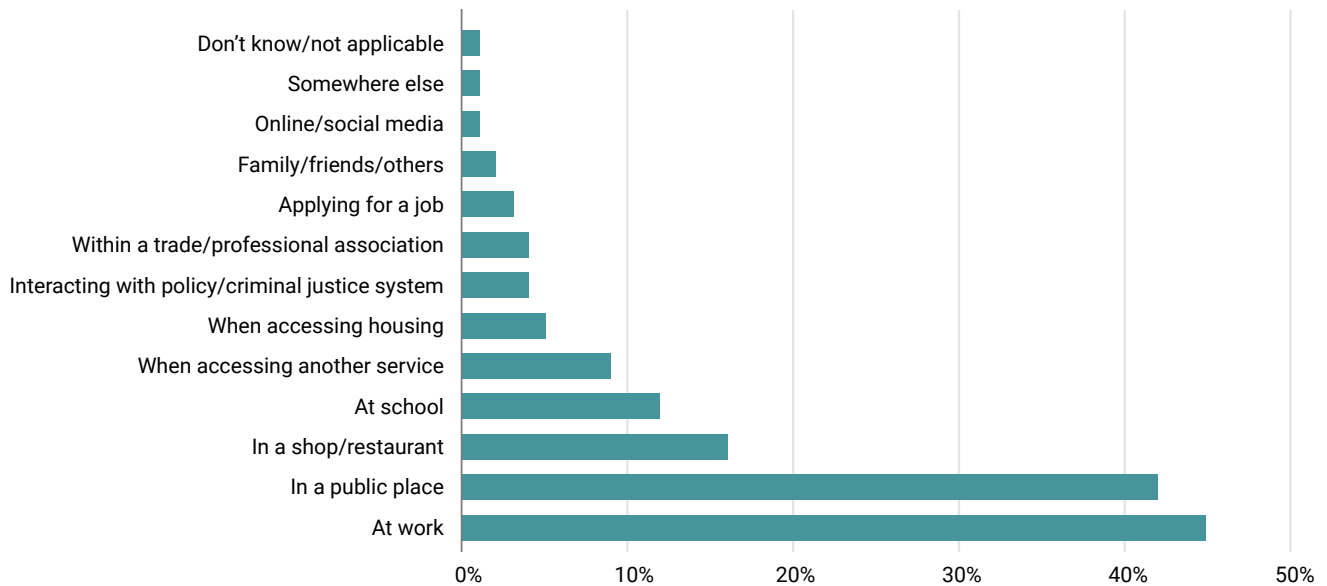
Discrimination is a [pervasive issue in Canada](#), increasing and intensifying in severity with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2019, there has been an [increase in perceptions of unequal treatment](#) in the workplace for various racialized groups and for those with disabilities. Despite advancements in policy and legislation, along with cultural shifts engendered by social movements such as [#MeToo](#) and [Black Lives Matter](#), gender and racial discrimination persist.

The workplace is the most commonly reported environment where discrimination occurs. The [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#) indicates that of those who report experiences of discrimination, 45% say it occurred in the workplace. Indigenous and Muslim communities, along with those with disabilities, are most likely to report experiences of discrimination. Workplace discrimination is even more common for those at the intersection of multiple [equity-deserving groups](#). Those that are racialized are also [less likely to find good jobs](#), even though on average they have higher levels of education and are more likely to be employed.



## Location of Most Recent Experiences of Discrimination in Ontario

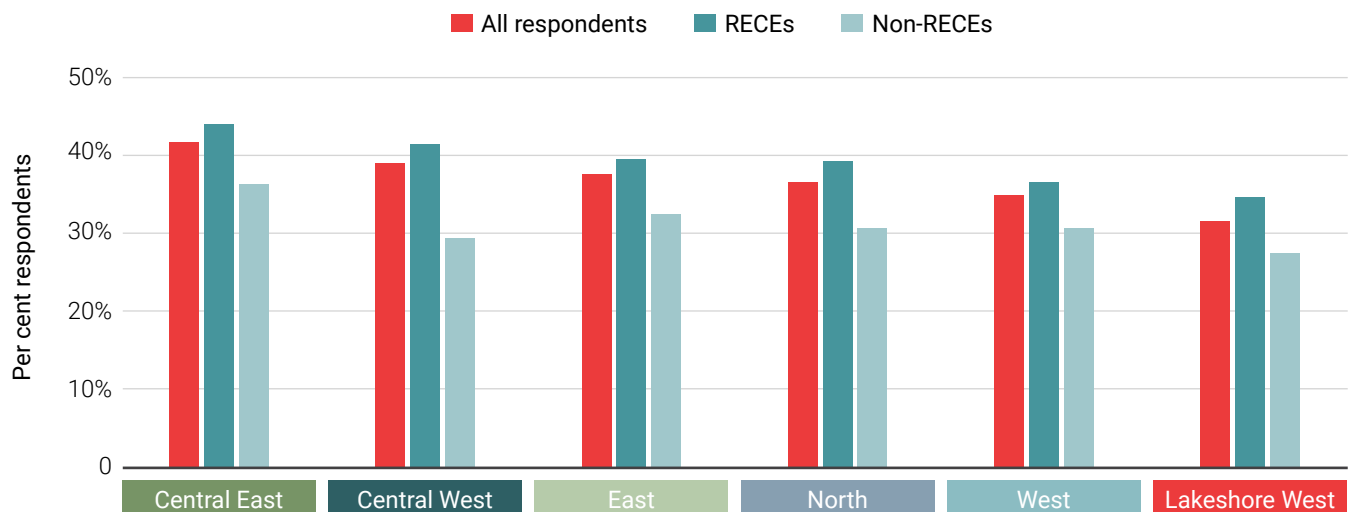
Study by the Ontario Human Rights Commission



Adapted from: The Ontario Human Rights Commission. *TAKING THE PULSE People's opinions on human rights in Ontario*. Retrieved from: [https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Taking%20the%20pulse\\_Peoples%20opinions%20on%20human%20rights%20in%20Ontario\\_accessible\\_2017\\_2.pdf](https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Taking%20the%20pulse_Peoples%20opinions%20on%20human%20rights%20in%20Ontario_accessible_2017_2.pdf)

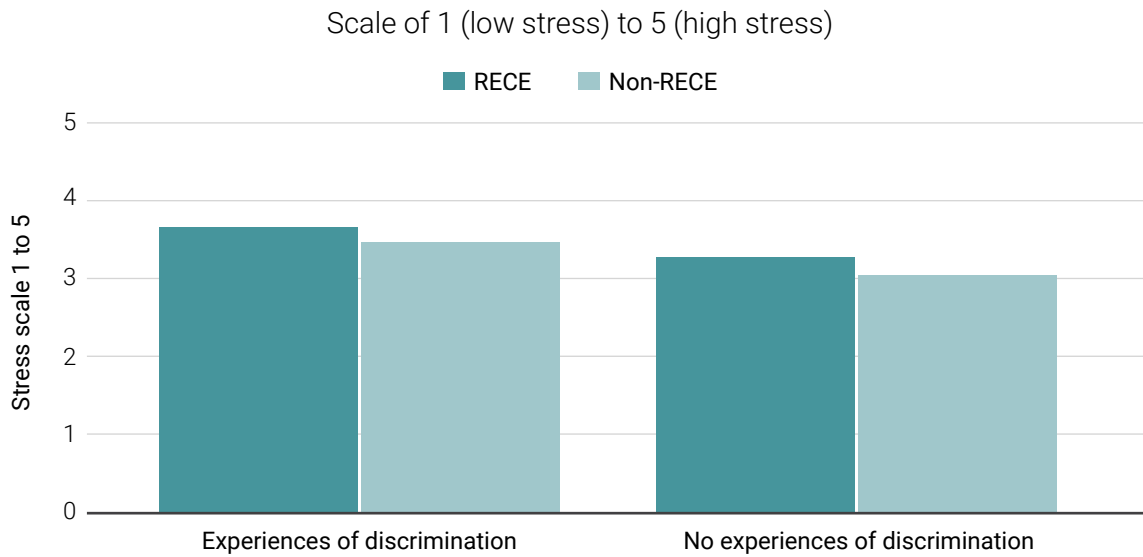
**Nearly half** (47.3%) of those who face discrimination at work experience more than one type of discrimination. The early childhood education sector is no exception. Just over 36% of frontline respondents report experiences of discrimination in their place of work—this is higher for RECEs (38%) versus non-RECEs (30%). For all respondents, rates are higher in the Central East (42%) and Central West (39%) regions where cultural and ethnic diversity are also higher.

## Percentage of Respondents Reporting Experiences of Workplace Discrimination by Region



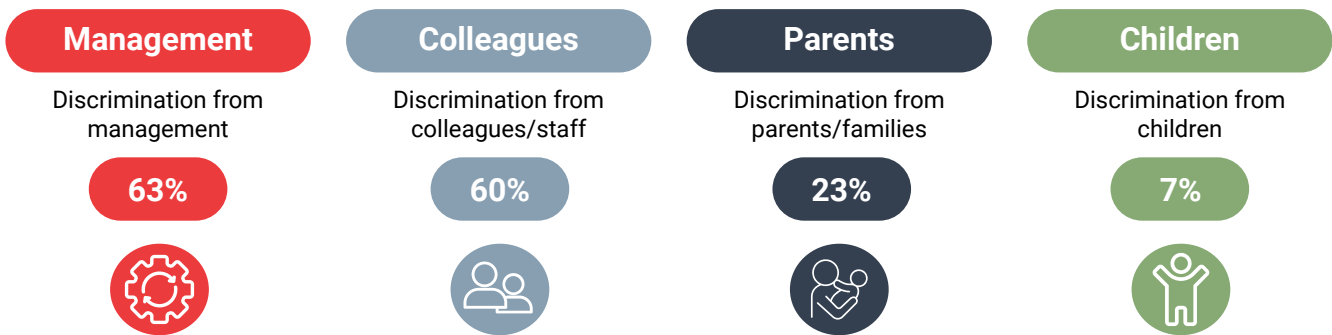
Compared to non-RECEs, RECEs are more likely to report experiences of discrimination and higher levels of job-related stress.

## Stress Level by RECE Status and Discrimination Experience



The most common source of discrimination is from people in management positions and colleagues, although participants report that parents are also sources and, more rarely, children.

## Reported Sources of Discrimination All Respondents



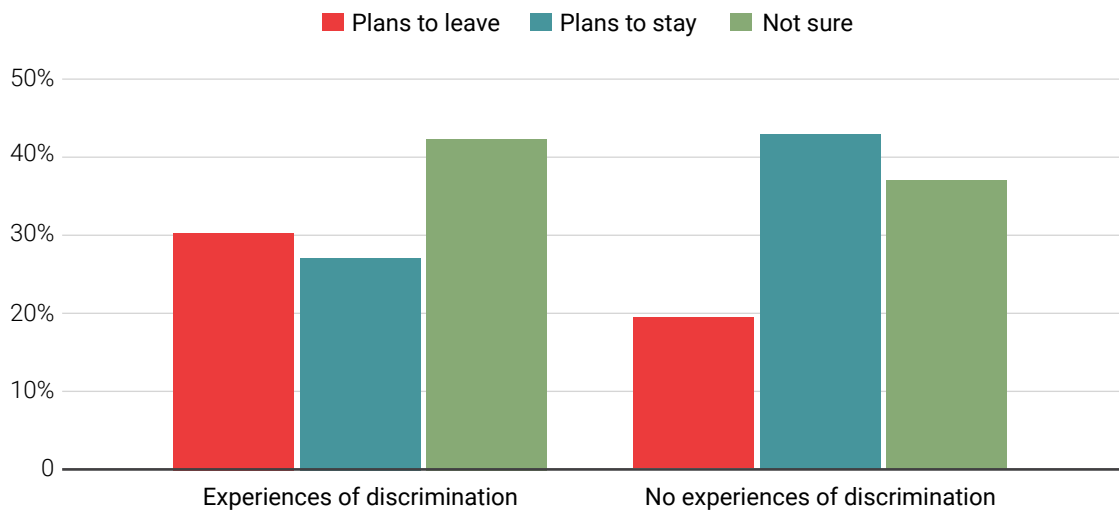
The types of discrimination experienced vary, with bullying being the most reported, followed by education or seniority level. Bullying may involve, or be rooted in, other forms of discrimination (e.g., rooted in racism or ageism).

## Types of Discrimination All Respondents

	% of those who reported discrimination	% of total sample
Bullying	54.3%	19.2%
Education or seniority	40.0%	14.1%
Mental health	21.8%	7.7%
Ageism	20.3%	7.2%
Racism	17.7%	6.3%
Weight/body prejudice	13.8%	4.9%
Language/accent	10.6%	3.8%
Sexism	8.2%	2.9%
Ableism	7.2%	2.6%
Religion or dress	7.1%	2.5%
Immigration	6.5%	2.3%
Homophobia	4.4%	1.6%

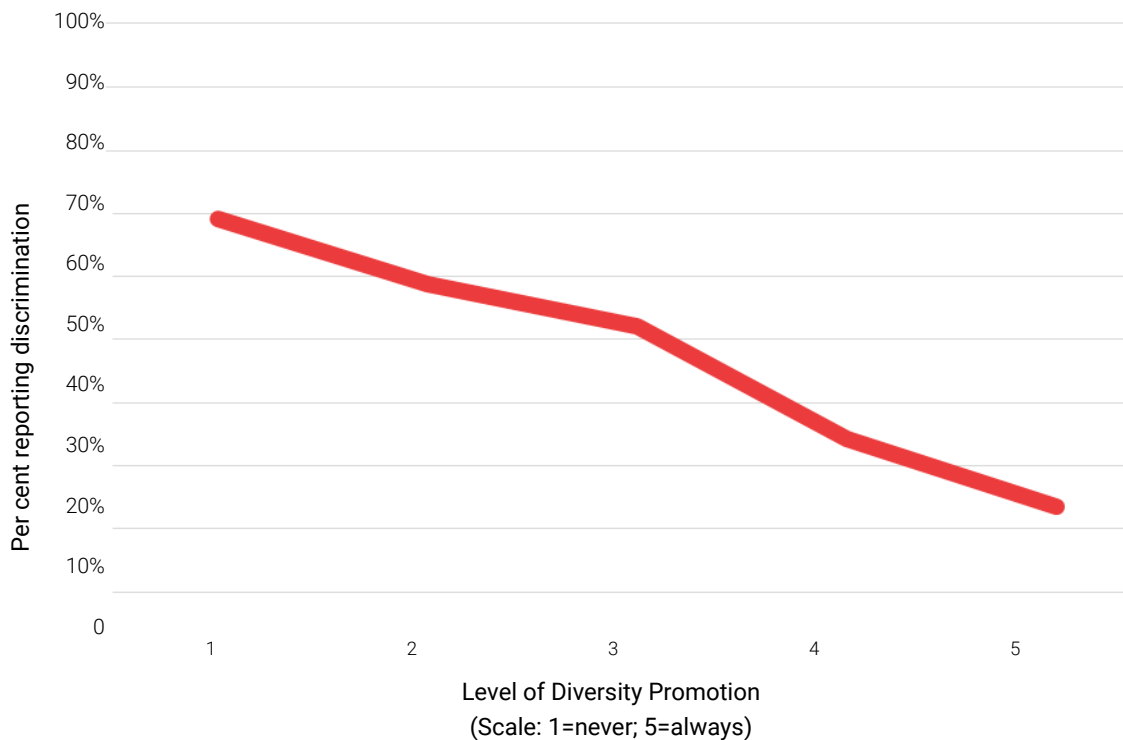
Those who report experiencing discrimination are more likely to state that they are planning to leave the sector. These findings may shed light on study results that report Central East and Central West regions have the highest reports of discrimination. ECEs from these regions are also most likely to report they plan to leave the sector.

## Percentage Experiencing Discrimination and Plans to Leave Sector



Attention to equity, diversity, and inclusion makes a difference. Respondents who report that their place of work promotes equity, diversity, and inclusion are less likely to report discrimination.

## Discrimination by Level of Program Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Promotion All Respondents





In addition to impacting workplace stability, discriminatory experiences have been shown to have [adverse effects](#) on hiring practices, opportunities for promotion, and, importantly, children’s learning environments and developmental outcomes.

Discrimination lives within individuals and between them, across institutions and societies. At every level, children are affected by discriminatory beliefs and practices around them. Children pick up on what educators say (and do not say) and do (and do not do). Racism and other forms of discrimination are [learned in the early years](#).

The early childhood education workforce is in a unique position to change developmental trajectories of learned discrimination. It is therefore vitally important to address such challenges in the workplace. The findings in this study have important implications for ongoing professional learning and pre-service training, as well as support for leadership and hiring practices, to ensure equal opportunity for racialized educators to hold positions of leadership.





# Impact on Quality

Knowing Our Numbers reveals a sector at its breaking point. Wages are low, with only publicly operated program wages nearing other comparable professions. Non-mandatory benefits are thin, and pensions are rare except in public and/or unionized programs. This is contributing to recruitment and retention challenges, with key informant interviews revealing as low as 40% operational versus licensed capacity in some regions. Job satisfaction is also low, while staff turnover is high and burnout is climbing. In turn, working conditions for the early childhood education workforce affect the quality of learning children receive.

**Knowing Our Numbers reveals a sector at its breaking point. Working conditions for the early childhood education workforce affect the quality of learning children receive.**

## STAFF SHORTAGES AND TURNOVER

A director's approval issued by the Ministry of Education allows non-RECE staff to work in licensed programs in positions where early childhood knowledge and qualifications are required. RECEs must have, at minimum, a two-year early childhood education diploma. They have pre-service training in curriculum development, working with children with disabilities, and working with diverse families. Course work includes policy and legislation pertaining to the sector, infant and child development, anti-racism, and Indigenous ways of knowing and being, among many other areas. Registration with the CECE requires adherence to the profession's [code of ethics and standards of practice](#) as a condition of employment. Staff with other qualifications or experiences can complement, but should not replace, qualified staff.

Key informant interviews reveal regions where there are no qualified RECEs for over 3,000 children attending licensed child care. Several regions report that their French programs are primarily operated by a non-RECE workforce. Many program directors, who are responsible for pedagogical leadership, also work under a director's approval. Without qualified RECEs, mentorship for new staff suffers, and many programs are no longer able or eligible to take on placement students, further impeding workforce numbers and opportunities. The divide between how society and the government value the early learning sector compared to the K-12 system is clear.



**The working environment of educators is the learning environment of children.**

—McCuaig, Akbari, and Correia





Staff are moved from one room to another to handle shortages. As a result, children must often contend with new faces and staff changes daily.

Jurisdictions report low operational versus licensed capacity, with educator shortages as the leading culprit.

“

Children see a new face every day. An educator goes into a room to cover ratio, [for] a group of children they don't know. They don't know their interests, their personalities, or what they have been working on and striving to achieve. This is not quality ECE.



Directors and supervisors are reporting extended time on the floor, with some reporting that they spend 100% of their time covering for absent staff. This leaves no time for administrative work and pedagogical leadership.

“

I don't remember the last time I had a day where I wasn't on the floor taking over for shortages.

“

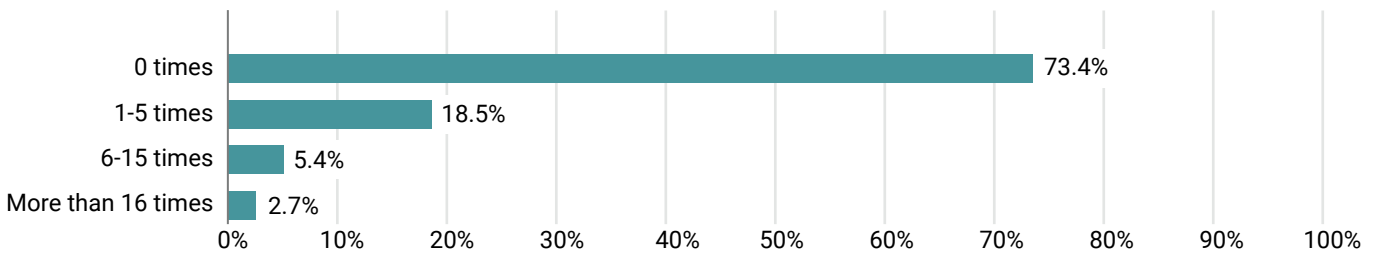
With CWELCC<sup>4</sup> I have so many more responsibilities, yet I am also spending a lot more time on the floor. This isn't sustainable.

<sup>4</sup> The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement.

### Infants and Children with Disabilities Most Penalized

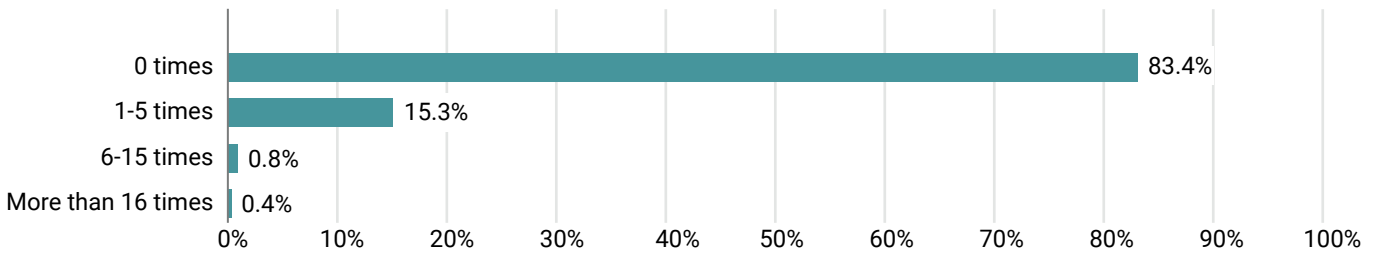
Staff shortages also have deleterious effects on the inclusion of children with disabilities or varying needs. Almost 27% of director/supervisor respondents report they have had to send a child(ren) with a disability home due to staffing shortages.

#### Percentage Reporting Frequency of Times in the Previous 12 Months Directors/ Supervisors Sent Children with Disabilities Home Due to Staffing Shortages

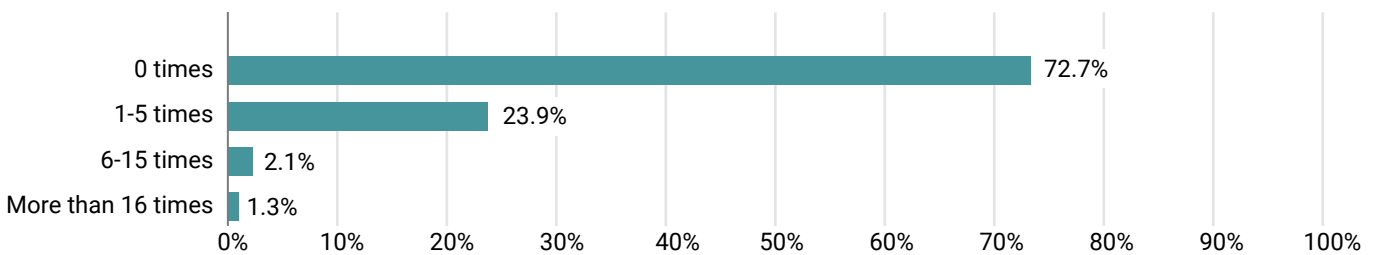


Almost 17% of director/supervisor respondents report they have de-enlisted at least one child with a disability from their program in the previous 12 months due to staffing shortages. Furthermore, 27.3% report they have refused admission to a child with a disability in the previous 12 months due to workforce shortages.

#### Percentage Reporting Frequency of Times in the Previous 12 Months Directors/ Supervisors De-enlisted Children with Disabilities Due to Staffing Shortages



#### Percentage Reporting Frequency of Times in the Previous 12 Months Directors/ Supervisors Denied Admission to Children with Disabilities Due to Staffing Shortages



Focus group findings further confirm these results. Educators report that children with disabilities are being sent home as their special needs resource (SNR) consultants are pulled to cover ratios. In addition, many children with disabilities are being turned away and de-enlisted due to staffing shortages. Even families who have funding through [Jordan's Principle](#) are not getting the support their children need because of workforce shortages. Serious occurrences, especially in behaviour guidance, are reportedly climbing – further supported by data from the CECE.

When staff call in sick, infant rooms are the first to close because they have the lowest number of children. This leaves parents of infants, often just returning from parental leave, regularly searching for last-minute child care or reducing their working hours, further contributing to gender workforce gaps.

“

We want to be inclusive, but the reality is we can't. We have no staff. We have had to de-enlist children. We have to say no to families with children with special needs. Parents are hiding their children's diagnosis in fear of being rejected. This is not right.

“

The numbers just tell us it is better to disappoint six families than 16. But then the parents of infants are always dealing with room closures and their children are being sent home.

---

### Staff Burnout

Focus groups reveal high levels of staff burn out.

“

You don't have the opportunity to take 5 minutes to yourself to pull yourself together, so now you're standing in front of 5-year-old children, anxiety-ridden, in tears, with no support, no nothing.

“

There's never enough. There's never enough time. There's never enough patience. There's never enough staff. There's never enough space. There's never enough.

“

The word “burnout” makes it about the feelings of staff. “Exploitation” draws our attention to, and emphasizes, employer practices and government policies that require structural solutions.

—Dr. Emis Akbari

“

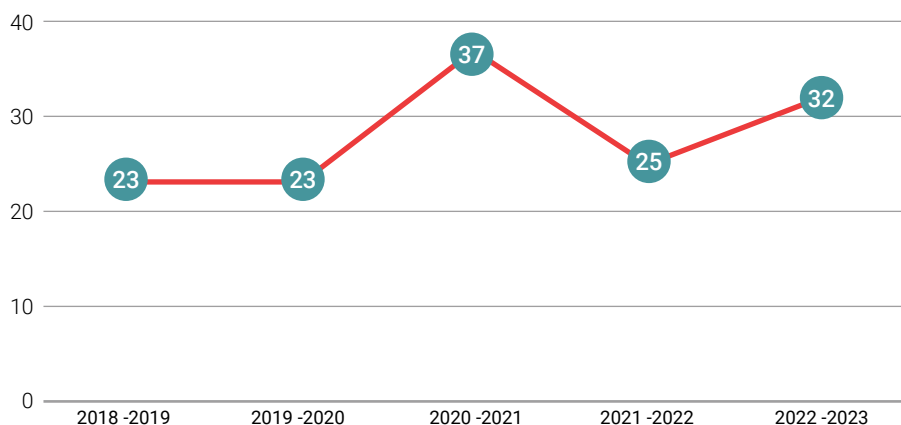
I have nothing left to give, but I keep giving.

## SERIOUS OCCURRENCES

Key Informant interviews across regions indicate a rise in serious occurrences, primarily concerning the behaviour guidance by staff. Data from the CECE also demonstrate an upward trend between 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 in complaints and disciplinary processes of behaviour guidance as a per cent of all professional infractions.

**Serious Occurrence of Behaviour Guidance:** RECEs not knowing how to deal with diverse child behaviours, exhibiting frustration, and forcefully redirecting children’s behaviour.

### Number of Behaviour Guidance Complaints to the CECE as a Percentage of all Complaints (2018 to 2023)



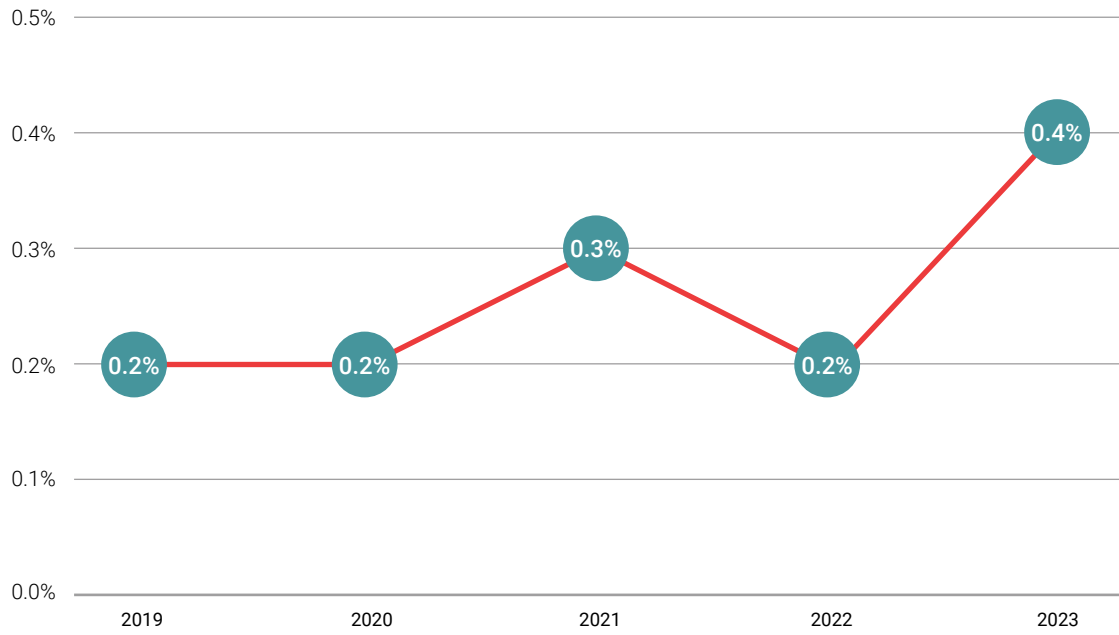
Source: College of Early Childhood Educators. Annual Reports. Retrieved from: <https://www.college-ece.ca/about-us/annual-reports/>

A peak in behaviour guidance complaints in 2020–2021 may be attributed to the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> The trend, however, may be a proxy for staff burnout and the impact of the preponderance of undertrained staff.



<sup>5</sup> Although the data presented belong to the CECE, the authors take responsibility for data interpretation.

## Percentage of Behaviour Guidance Concerns Compared to Total CECE Membership (2019 to 2023)



Source: Data provided by the College of Early Childhood Educators.





# The Northern Perspective

Ontario is Canada's most populous province, with nearly [40%](#) of the country's population. Most of [Ontario's 14.2 million](#) people live in southern communities along the Windsor–Quebec corridor. Northern Ontario's small population is spread across a vast geographical area spanning two time zones. Northern Ontario covers 90% of the area of Ontario, but has only 5.1% of its population—about 725,000 people. Workforce challenges in the north may be unique as a result of geographical variations, sparse and spread populations, weather conditions, workforce shortages in other sectors that may impact child care operations, and seasonal and shift work that is the status quo in many areas.

The authors conducted focus groups in five northern areas to ensure that the conditions in these communities are considered and that the voices of the people who live and work in these

**The authors conducted focus groups in five northern areas to ensure that the conditions in northern communities are considered and that the voices of the people who live and work in these regions are heard and included.**

regions are heard and included. This strategy was used to ensure that the survey responses from this region were not lost in the average of the more populous areas. Although results presented here encompass responses across the entire province, a [stand-alone report](#) on the northern experience is provided that captures the unique experiences of Ontario's northern early childhood education workforce.





# Voices of RECEs

The survey provided opportunities for respondents to include comments and concerns above and beyond the specified survey questions. Along with focus group qualitative analyses, several themes emerged that are supported by the quantitative data reported.

Comments address areas of concern such as educator shortages, burnout, wages, and the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (CWELCC).

“

Decent pay for the work that we do. We are undervalued by society as a whole and that must change. We need to be recognized and valued for the professionals we are, and be paid accordingly.

## EDUCATOR SHORTAGES

When an educator calls in sick, you look at the highest staff-to-child ratio versus the lowest [ratio] room. So instead of closing the preschool room with 24 children, we'll close our infant room that only has six [children], but then it's continually hitting those infants and families and that is just not right.

Supervisors are on the floor full time.

I am predicting we will give back \$8 million from CWELCC because I can't spend it because of under utilization and rooms that are just not operational because of shortages.

We have no on-call staff. If someone calls in sick, we close a room and families are left scrambling at the last minute.

We have had to turn away children with special needs because we are understaffed, even those that have funding through Jordan's Principle. We just can't find anyone. People are quitting. Staff are lacking basic early years knowledge because of high rates of director's approval. People are leaving the sector and moving to a completely different job area with more pay and less stress.

I have not seen educator shortages like this in all my 30 years [in the sector].

Parents are desperate. They are calling and saying I can't go to work. They are begging for spaces.

We have a problem with high turnover for a reason.

Waitlists since Canada-wide have gone up drastically, but there are no educators.

There are no casuals available. We use in-house—so it's a swapping game like I think [it was] mentioned that you're pulling on who's available. We used to have a call-in list, but now we pull staff from wherever we can and you immediately see behaviours go up because their person [staff] is no longer there.

I had one parent that called in to check to see where they were on the waitlist. There was no movement, and when I told her, I was met with a kind of pause and then she said, "90% of my problems would go away if I could just get my child in care." How do you respond to that?

In rural areas we can't find RECEs or non-RECEs.

Our francophone and Indigenous-led centres are really struggling. We can't find staff, let alone staff that are French speaking and Indigenous. Not with these wages.

## WAGES

RECEs are taught to be professional, but we have never been paid as a professional or treated with respect.

I always wanted to be an ECE. I want to go and get my diploma, but how do I take that risk, to leave to go to school, and maybe risk not being hired back, because I need the financial security being a single parent. So I feel like I don't even have an option to move up.

Decent pay for the work that we do. We are undervalued by society as a whole and that must change. We need to be recognized and valued for the professionals we are, and be paid accordingly.

We've had a handful now, I can easily say a handful of interviews, where everybody's there right to the bitter end and excited about the job. Then comes the question: "How much do you pay?" And we give them the wage grid and you can see visibly over the Zoom their blood leaves their face as like "oh." Then we get ghosted. One person full on said, "I make double that right now, why would I stay an ECE?"

I am one of the lucky ones to have a partner with benefits and a pension. I have been working in this sector for over 20 years. I am a supervisor, and if it wasn't for my partner I would never be able to retire.

My staff deserve more than this.

It took a pandemic to hear that the province understood [that] front line workers couldn't have done their jobs without RECEs and child care. Why don't the pay and respect reflect this?

The current salaries are way too low for the majority of ECEs. They *must* be increased to retain qualified, committed people.

Unless the provincial government makes a commitment to improving the pay/compensation for *licensed not-for-profit* child care, this will only get worse. This is systematically destroying an already precarious situation.

The sector needs to invest in long-term staff retention strategies. Many people leave the field due to low wages and lack of pension.

RECEs should earn at least a living salary. Struggling to live while doing such an important role for our future generation is not okay. Child care should be a public right and not privatized. The salary should reflect the importance of the work.

## STAFF BURNOUT

We're so involved dealing with behavioural challenges with no support that we can no longer be educators.

My staff say they don't want to be an RECE anymore.

We are seeing levels of mental health issues from children and families like we have never seen before.

I come home exhausted, yet I somehow feel like I haven't given enough.

## CWELCC

CWELCC is exciting. It is exciting to have value put on this sector. But the devil is in the details. There has to be an easier and more streamlined way. The implementation of CWELCC will be its failure.

This isn't to say child care operators aren't doing well—it is set up not to do well.

So, our bookkeeper, when she first started, was working 10 hours a week, 15 at the most during the busier times. Since CWELCC, she is now anywhere between 20 to 40 hours a week just with the extra admin piece of it. And that's not even including my time to go through it with her.



# Best Practices

Key informant interviews with representatives from all jurisdictions provide insight into operational and policy differences. This section highlights some unique practices supporting quality in the early years sector.

## **ADDRESSING WAGES ACROSS THE PROVINCE**

As CWELCC funding is both limited in amount and defined use, many service systems managers are getting creative in how to offset low wages for those in the sector.

Leeds and Grenville are using non-CWELCC dollars to fully fund child care costs for staff that work in licensed child care. Starting in December 2023, the funding was extended to *all* those who work in licensed child care and who have children attending a licensed program. This includes non-RECEs, administrative staff, and cooks.

**As CWELCC funding is both limited in amount and defined use, many service systems managers are getting creative in how to offset low wages for those in the sector.**

## **WORKING ACROSS SILOS**

Several service system managers are joining forces with other departments to address workforce shortages. Some are working with their economic development teams as child care shortages are hindering workforce attraction to other sectors and stifling regional economic growth. For example, Grey County meets quarterly with their economic development department. These Care Economy meetings support policy development and municipal planning and include the long-term care sector.

Some jurisdictions have shared Data Analysis Coordinators (DACs), who sit on the city planning committee, bringing a child care lens to the work. Some service managers report that since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been increased cross-departmental collaboration. Kingston says bridging social services with economic development departments has addressed many gaps in the system.

Chatham-Kent, Dufferin County, Simcoe County, St. Thomas, Sudbury, and Timiskaming have come together and formed “Better Together,” a collaborative, strategic change and capacity-building initiative designed to create conditions for a thriving and sustainable ELCC workforce. Children’s services leaders, along with external strategy leads, are collectively advancing three projects:

- **New Allies:** Involves strengthening alignment with economic development colleagues, and raising awareness and fostering new collaboration regarding quality child care as economic development infrastructure.
- **New Models:** Relates to uncovering and assessing options that improve ECE employee packages (e.g., benefits, pension, and other “shared service” advantages), along with helping to promote ECE as a sought-after career.
- **New Narratives:** Includes co-creating innovative messaging around the ECE profession to promote early years and ECE among targeted audiences.

Two neighbouring jurisdictions, Lanark and Renfrew, have worked together to develop a video series to attract ECEs into their regions. The yearly Labour Market of Renfrew and Lanark covers the population of and employment opportunities for the entire labour market in the regions. The regions regularly use this data to support their service plans. They also work closely with Employment Ontario and participate in their job fairs, sharing information on ECE as a career path.

Northumberland has developed an internal data catalogue across social services. All DACs and managers may input and pull data to support service planning. In addition, this jurisdiction uses their EDI data to build professional learning around identified vulnerabilities.

Nipissing integrates data across indices to support planning at all levels for the early years. The jurisdiction has developed neighbourhood profiles that consider various data indices for service system planning. Neighbourhood profiles include child care, EDI results, income, census demographics (low income, family make-up), francophone status, Indigeneity, racialization, and immigrant population, among others. Their EarlyON locations collect data including demographics from families, frequency of attendance, and which sites families are using. Along with [EDI](#) mapping, EarlyON centres support identified neighbourhood vulnerabilities.

Chatham-Kent is [developing](#) a portal for the Child and Youth Planning Network with the goal of bringing together data from various child and youth agencies. The idea is to link publicly available data with information provided by network members to support evidence-based investment planning. The data will be reviewed in relation to [UNICEF Canada’s Index of Child and Youth Well-being](#), which includes the pillars of security, health, and connection to the environment.

Prescott and Russell have a newly developed Early Years Information Hub, a data-sharing strategy that overlays child care data with that of the EDI and census. EDI results demonstrate vulnerabilities for socio-emotional development in the jurisdiction, which has resulted in the cross-departmental launch of an [online resource](#) to support mental health in children.

Toronto has long used data for planning and program improvement. They regularly collect detailed [information](#) to inform systems management.

Windsor has partnered with Workforce Windsor Essex, a resumé repository that also provides resumé workshops.



## WORKFORCE STRATEGY

Many jurisdictions have used the one-time workforce funding to fund cohorts of students to complete their diploma in early childhood education. Some provide an open call with no conditions attached to the funding. Others place conditions on tuition funding, requiring new graduates to work in the field for a determined period. One region only provides funding to non-ECEs or ECAs already in the sector. Those that put conditions on the funding are more likely to report increases in the number of qualified educators entering the workforce. For example, Ottawa chose not to allocate funding to tuition grants as they were concerned that pulling students from rural neighbouring areas would further add to workforce shortages for their rural partners.

Lanark has developed succession planning and mentorship for directors. An eight-week training module focuses on finance, training and working with a board of directors, the role of systems managers, human resources, and inclusion. It is designed to support child care directors in pedagogical leadership and program supervision. Guidance on how to interview for leadership roles is also included.

Lennox and Addington have launched a mentorship program to build capacity for RECEs and aspiring program supervisors.

The jurisdiction also supports time off the floor to engage in reflective practice, professional learning, and capacity building (mentoring students, meeting with families, etc.).

Manitoulin-Sudbury has worked with a human resource firm and funded hours for each agency for consultation services to support non-profit boards to better understand the child care sector. This includes the importance of a well-compensated workforce.

Northumberland has partnered with the local community college and Ontario Works to fund three courses to support job seekers to enter the sector. It has produced a small, yet successful, cohort.

Ottawa has conducted a pilot for professional learning leadership where participants take back learned material to their respective organizations and lead further learning. It tracks progress and includes the development of a community of practice.

Prescott and Russell are using evidence-based practice to develop a professional learning series. Using the best available scientific data on effective professional learning, they have developed spaced learning strategies and a community of practice, and support centre directors in incorporating learned materials into their programs.

Waterloo provides a bursary program for students in the Early Childhood Development Apprenticeship Program to support those working in the sector in their journey toward becoming an RECE.

Windsor has taken a multi-faceted approach to workforce challenges. It has allocated funding to advertising campaigns, created resource bags for all local college graduates to support success in the sector, and developed a resource lending library to support educators. It has also established a mentoring program that is showing success. In a partnership with a local special needs resource agency, it provides students with placement experience in inclusive practice.

Many jurisdictions, including Muskoka and Timiskaming, are developing video series to educate the public on the value of early childhood education and the importance of ECEs to program quality.

System-wide professional development supports ongoing professional learning and provides value to the workforce.

On May 9, 2022, twelve communities partnered with Chatham-Kent and shared the cost of a virtual day of learning. [Heartwork and So Much More](#) brought together over 4,000 early years educators. Chatham-Kent continues to provide [free professional learning opportunities](#) to those working with children.

Prior to entering into direct delivery of child care, Rainy River sought to identify opportunities to standardize practice in the district, strengthen service coordination and system-wide partnerships, improve flexibility, increase responsiveness for meeting the needs of children and families, and increase access to special needs resourcing (SNR) services. The amount of time SNR staff spend working in ratio was identified as a concern. In response, Rainy River has centralized SNR in the district to prevent programs from pulling SNR staff into ratio.

## DIRECTLY OPERATED CHILD CARE

Public child care is able to set a standard for the community sector. As part of a public infrastructure, staff are generally better paid and have enhanced access to benefits, professional learning opportunities, and career advancement.

Publicly operated centres tend to have higher concentrations of ECE-qualified staff and enjoy sufficient staffing levels to allow educators to focus on their professional duties.

Service managers can locate public centres in neighbourhoods with higher inequities and lower service levels. They focus on care for infants and children with special needs, who are costlier to serve and are underserved by other operators.

Staff in public centres provide support to community child care agencies through mentoring, resource sharing, training, and other approaches. They are positioned to respond to emergencies, such as responding to refugees, families displaced by fires or other disasters, or women fleeing domestic violence. They pilot and refine new initiatives before they are scaled to full implementation across the sector.

Many local governments and training colleges have divested their directly operated programs, purportedly as cost saving measures. [An extensive analysis comparing public to community operations](#) finds that public programs, despite providing better compensation for staff, do not charge higher parent fees. They operate very efficiently, with fewer resources allocated for administration and other costs not associated with the care of children. The province of Ontario is requiring that all regions with directly operated programs conduct a value-for-money audit in 2024. The benefits of directly operated programs go well beyond parent fees in and expenditures out. A value-for-money audit would mask many of the benefits outlined above and thus should include long-term return on investments and community support value.



## Hamilton

Hamilton's directly operated Red Hill Centre sets a benchmark for wages and working conditions, as well as modelling best practices for community operators, particularly when working with vulnerable and diverse communities. Fees at Red Hill have long been comparable to other Hamilton centres, yet RECEs are paid approximately \$10 per hour more than staff working in community centres.

## Rainy River

Since assuming direct operations of four child care centres and two EarlyON centres, Rainy River has been able to pay wages in licensed child care on par with RECEs working in full-day Kindergarten. As public sector employees, child care staff are enrolled in the OMERS pension and benefit plans. Staff also benefit from standardized human resource supports and policies. A pool of resource teachers and supply staff is available to cover staff absences or leaves for professional training, as well as offer extra support for children with exceptional needs.

The DSSAB has a single public governance model, with parent advisory councils at each centre. The district prioritizes adapting operating hours to address families working shifts or with non-standard schedules.

The early childhood workforce in the DSSAB is young, with a mean age of 36 years. About half do not hold ECE qualifications. They have been given four years to obtain their diploma to maintain their employment with the DSSAB. The district works with the local training college to design accessible in-service training.

The district population is approximately 29.8% Indigenous. One new centre has been designed to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and healing. Educators from other locations do placements in the centre to learn Indigenous perspectives that they are then able to incorporate into their own programming.

## Toronto

The [value](#) of public child care was made clear during the unprecedented circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. The capacity of a municipality to respond in an emergency was not paralleled in the community sector. Toronto's ability to leverage its highly trained and experienced workforce, the ease of collaboration between Children's Services and Public Health to implement health and safety protocols, and a direct government-to-government relationship with the province were all vital to the speed of implementing emergency child care.

Toronto's directly operated child care was emergency ready, while other jurisdictions that do not run their own child care centres relied on community providers that struggled to find space and staff. Some provinces and territories, by necessity, turned to schools or established their own emergency programs.

## Peterborough

There are reoccurring proposals to privatize the city's four directly operated child care centres. During the last attempt, community operators told city council that they would not take over the city's programs. The CEO of Compass Early Learning and Care, a large non-profit agency, was among those in support of city-operated child care: *"There is value in having decent jobs in child care in this community. The city centres have the salaries and working conditions we aspire to,"* she said. Advocates appreciate that local governments face hard choices in an era of provincial constraints, but note that the prime outcome of divestment today and historically *"... has been the elimination of good jobs for women and poorer services for poor people."*



## ADVANTAGE OF CENTRALIZED WAITLISTS

Ontario's child care sector is largely publicly funded, but privately operated. Voluntary boards start up child care when and where community initiatives exist, rather than on the basis of need or planning. [Research demonstrates](#) that neighbourhoods with the highest concentration of child care are the most affluent, whereas poorer neighbourhoods have considerably less access. This is not solely a reflection of the differential ability of families to pay for care; rather, affluent neighbourhoods are more likely to have the social and economic resources that enable them to create and sustain services. This challenges children's services managers, who can only provide incentives to service providers to locate in vulnerable communities.

Centralized waitlists are not a solution to service inequalities, but they can quantify it for the public and for policymakers. Participants in this study with centralized waitlists have ready access to the number of families seeking care, the type of care they want, and where. They are also able to track seasonal and other factors affecting demand, track vacancies, and hold operators to their contractual commitments.

Waitlists play a major role in their systems planning and are used to address discrimination. When operators are required to provide the first offer of a space to the family at the top list, it helps address the conscious and unconscious biases that exclude some families from regulated care.

## KEY TERMS AND ACRONYMS

**All respondents:** RECEs and non-RECES. Does not include directors/supervisors or licensed home child care providers.

**Census:** A periodic governmental count of a population that usually includes social and economic information.

**CMSM/DSSAB:** Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs). Service system managers are designated under the [Child Care and Early Years Act](#) to manage child care services and early years programs and services across the province.

**CWELCC:** Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement.

**DAC:** Data Analysis Coordinator.

**Directly operated program:** Public programs that are operated by the CMSM/DSSAB.

**Discrimination:** The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of ethnicity, age, sex, or disability.

**ECE:** Early Childhood Educator.

**EarlyON:** Free, high-quality programs for families and children from birth to 6 years of age.

**EDI:** The Early Development Instrument is a questionnaire developed by Dr. Dan Offord and Dr. Magdalena Janus at the [Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University](#). It consists of a 103-item questionnaire completed by Kindergarten teachers in the second half of the school year. The EDI measures children's ability to meet age-appropriate developmental expectations in five general developmental domains.

**FDK:** Full-day Kindergarten.

**Intersectionality:** The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

**Non-RECE:** A person who does not meet the definition of the protected and regulated term, Registered Early Childhood Educator.

**Racialized person/racialization:** The [process](#) by which societies construct races as real, different, and unequal in ways that matter to economic, political, and social life.

**RECE:** A person who is qualified as a Registered Early Childhood Educator. RECEs hold at least a two-year diploma in early childhood education and are registered with the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators.

**Local government:** Used interchangeably with CMSM/DSSAB for the purposes of this report.

**Service system manager:** Service system managers play a central role in the planning, funding, administration, and operation of early years and licensed early years services in Ontario.

**SNR consultants:** Special Needs Resource consultants.

**Wage supplement:** Additional government payments made to an employee outside of their regular wages.

**Wage floor:** A required minimum wage in a sector.

**Wage grid:** A system that determines how much an employee is paid, usually based on factors such as qualifications and years of service.