

# AECEA

Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta

## A Rough Two Months and a Worrying Future

Results from a survey of Alberta early learning and child care programs  
during the fourth wave of COVID-19

Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta  
November 2021

## Introduction

In recent months, early learning and child care (ELCC) programs in Alberta have expressed concerns about both the effects of the fourth wave of COVID-19 and what the immediate future holds for them as COVID-19 continues to grip the province.

To better understand these concerns, the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA) conducted a survey of early learning and child care programs in Alberta. The survey contained questions about program characteristics, experiences during August and September 2021, and concerns about the future. The survey, which was open from September 29 to October 5, 2021, was sent out via email to the directors or manager of 1,809 licensed ELCC programs and was posted on AECEA's Facebook page. 430 responses were received, representing nearly 28,000 early learning and child care spaces (about 20% of the total licensed spaces in Alberta).

Three main concerns emerged from the responses to this survey:

- 1. Health of children.** About 3 in 10 programs reported at least one COVID-19 case among children in August or September, and 70% were concerned about how COVID would affect the mental or physical health of the children in their care in the coming months. This concern is made more salient given that a vaccine for younger children (below age 5) remains unavailable.
- 2. Health and morale of staff.** About 2 in 10 programs reported at least one COVID-19 case among staff in August or September, and 75% were concerned about how COVID would affect the mental or physical health of their staff in the coming months. Nearly half of programs were concerned about staff morale, and a third were concerned about staff leaving their positions in the next two months. As Alberta has lost 4,000 licenced early childhood educators (ECEs) since 2019, these trends are particularly concerning.
- 3. Program viability.** The median September enrollment rate among programs was 67%, considerably below pre-COVID levels of about 80%, and 31% of programs reported enrollment of 50% or less. The majority of programs (60%) had concerns about enrollment in the future, and about half of programs anticipated negative effects from the end of the federal Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, which ended on October 23.

Each of these patterns is explored in greater depth in its own section below, and an appendix contains a breakdown of the answers to each question on the survey itself.<sup>1</sup> Based on the results of this survey and the current ELCC context in Alberta, AECEA has two broad categories of policy recommendations for the Alberta government:

- 1. Immediately act to stabilize the sector and protect children and educators.** The province should provide direct funding to all ELCC programs so they can keep their doors open, their educators employed and ensure quality programs for children. The

province should also expand recruitment and retention incentives to encourage ECEs to stay in the field, and to reflect that they are spending their days with entirely unvaccinated groups of children. The province should also act to protect the physical and mental health of both children and staff by providing funding for cleaning and personal protective equipment, additional educators and mental health supports.

AECEA appreciates the one-time funding announced on November 8, 2021, to provide Covid-19 relief for programs however, additional funding will be necessary to stabilize programs through the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

2. **Sign a Canada-wide ELCC System Building Agreement, as soon as possible.** A good<sup>2</sup> agreement will transition ELCC in Alberta from being a sector to a system—akin to a public K-12 education that places children at the forefront of all decisions. Such an agreement would have a coherent vision, integrated set of principles and goals to produce a publicly planned and managed system robust against future shocks, whatever they may be.

AECEA appreciates that an agreement was signed on November 15, 2021 and looks forward to further details being released.

Within each section there are more specific policy suggestions, particularly for the first of these two categories. This report was authored by AECEA in collaboration with Rob Buschmann of the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families, School of Public Health, University of Alberta.

## 1. Concerns about the health of younger children

### August / September 2021

About 3 in 10 programs (29%) reported having at least one positive COVID-19 case among children from August 1 to September 27, 2021. While this might seem to be a relatively low number to some observers, it should be noted that this survey only asked about a short period—slightly less than two months—and that 30% of responding programs were not in operation in August.<sup>3</sup> That 3 in 10 programs *still* reported having at least one COVID-19 case among children in such a short period, and with many programs shut down for one of those two months, is alarming.

The percentage of programs reporting at least one case among children did not vary much based on the population setting (large urban, small urban, town, or rural) in which the program was located. There was some variation based on the region of Alberta in which the program was located, with a somewhat higher than average<sup>4</sup>

**3 of 10**  
programs had at least one  
COVID-19 case in a child in  
August or September.

percentage of programs reporting at least one case of COVID-19 among children in the South region (42%) and North regions (38%).<sup>5</sup> A slightly higher percentage (35%) of programs that did not share space with another organization or entity (such as a school, community centre, or religious institution) reported having at least one child with COVID-19 in the previous months.

### **The Next 60 Days**

The majority of programs participating in this survey (70%) were worried about the physical or mental health of the children attending their programs in the next two months.<sup>6</sup> These health worries are particularly important to note for at least three reasons. First, although there appears to be a vaccine for children aged 5-12 on the horizon, a vaccine for children below the age of 5 continues to be months away.<sup>7</sup>

Second, there is no guarantee that even when a vaccine for the youngest children is available, parents will feel that the vaccine is safe for their children. A recent Angus Reid poll notes that only about half of parents of children aged 5 to 11 would get those children vaccinated as soon as possible, and about a quarter would *not* vaccinate their children at all.<sup>8</sup> It is reasonable to assume that parents would have similar sentiments about their younger children and may even be more reluctant to vaccinate their younger children. Together, this means that it is likely that ELCC programs in Alberta will likely continue to serve a largely unvaccinated population of children in the coming months. *This sets the ELCC sector apart from many other sectors in Alberta.* Programs are clearly aware of this issue, and many are worried about it.

Third, programs are worried about how COVID-19 issues will affect the mental health of children in the coming months, nearly to the same extent as they are worried about the physical health of children. Of course, that there is no vaccine that protects the mental health of children (or adults) from the many impacts of COVID-19.

Taken together, these survey results indicate that ELCC programs have seen the health of their children impacted heavily by the fourth wave of COVID-19, and they anticipate facing similar health problems—both physical and mental—continuing for some time. Actions suggested by the AECEA survey respondents that the Government of Alberta could take include:

- Highlight the importance of being vaccinated against COVID-19, particularly in more remote areas of the province and among parents of younger children (when a vaccine becomes available for younger children).
- Provide additional aid to ELCC programs for cleaning and COVID-19 prevention.
- Consult with ELCC programs on the effects of COVID-19 on the mental health of children in their programs, including asking programs for suggestions or examples on how to address any emerging issues (for example, a team of practitioners to support children's mental health accessible to child care providers).
- Monitor COVID-19 outbreaks until all children can be fully vaccinated.
- Consider requiring all staff in licensed ELCC programs be vaccinated against COVID-19 (though this should be balanced against the potential loss of staff that such a mandate could create). At the very least, encourage vaccination as much as possible among staff

and provide government support for rapid testing for staff who cannot or will not be vaccinated.

## 2. Concerns about the health and morale of staff

### Cases in Staff

Slightly under 2 in 10 programs (18%) reported having at least one positive COVID-19 case among staff in August and September 2021. Across all programs, a greater percentage of day care programs and family day homes / day home agencies reporting having at least one COVID-19 case among staff (24% for both) while a lower percentage of preschools reported the same (9%).<sup>9</sup> Combined with the information above about the higher percentage of day care and family day home programs with a positive COVID-19 case in the past two months, it does appear that among programs responding to this survey, day care and family day home staff bore more of the brunt of the fourth wave of COVID-19 in Alberta than their counterparts in out of school care and preschool programs.

The percentage of programs with at least one staff COVID-19 case did not vary appreciably by population setting, but there was some variation by region, with higher percentages of programs reporting at least one case among staff in the North regions (30%), Central region (28%), and the South region (24%) and a much lower percentage in the Calgary region (9%). It is worth noting that the North and South regions also reported having higher percentages of programs reporting at least one positive COVID-19 case among children, though only programs in the North reported partially or fully closing at a somewhat higher rate than the Alberta average (15% vs. 9%).

### The Next 60 Days: Concerns about Staff

A large majority—three out of four—of programs were concerned about their staff's health (physical, mental, or both) in the coming two months. There was generally little statistically significant variation in this concern by location, setting, shared status, or type of program, indicating that concerns about staff health were widespread among the programs responding to this survey.

# 75%

of programs were concerned about the health of staff in the coming months.

Nearly half (46%) of programs were concerned about employee morale in the next two months. There was little significant variation in concern about morale by region, shared setting, or population setting. There was, however, some variation in concerns about morale by type of program, with greater worries about morale among family day homes / day home agencies (59%) and daycares (52%, borderline statistically significant difference from 46%) but less concern

among preschools (29%, statistically significant difference from 46%.)

A third (33%) of programs were concerned about early childhood educators leaving their position. This percentage was much higher in family day homes / family day home agencies (47%) and day cares (41%) but quite low in preschools (11%). In addition, there seems to be much more concern about staff leaving in regions outside Edmonton and Calgary (Central 40%; North 40%; South 55%).

Overall, programs appear to be quite worried about what the coming months might mean for the health and morale of their staff. This concern certainly appears warranted given the loss of 20% of the workforce in the first year of the pandemic.<sup>10</sup> Actions suggested by the AECEA survey respondents that the Government of Alberta could take include:

- Consider requiring all staff in licensed ELCC programs be vaccinated against COVID-19 (though this should be balanced against the potential loss of staff that such a mandate could create). At the very least, encourage vaccination as much as possible among staff and provide government support for rapid testing for staff who cannot or will not be vaccinated.
- Offer additional financial incentives to keep ECEs in the field in the short term, as it is clear that many ECEs will be dealing with an unvaccinated population for some time. For example, Ontario provides an extra \$3 per hour for ECEs (a program that was recently extended to March 31, 2022).<sup>11</sup>
- In this survey, day cares and family day homes / agencies seemed particularly worried about employee morale and losing staff in the coming months; the Government of Alberta should investigate this issue further and consider targeted support for ECEs working in these settings.

### 3. Concerns about program viability

#### August / September 2021: Enrollment rates

The median enrollment rate reported by programs in August was 47%, rising to 67% in September.<sup>12</sup> The increase from August to September appears to have been driven largely by predictable increases in enrollment at preschools and out of school care programs at the beginning of the school year, though enrollment at all types of programs increased to some extent. Table 1 shows median enrollment rates by program type.

**Table 1: Median enrollment rate varied by program type more in August than in September.**

<i>Program Type</i>	<i>August</i>	<i>September</i>
Day care	56%	65%
Family day home	66%	72%
Out of school care	43%	65%
Preschool	0%	77%
Overall	47%	67%

Because many preschools and out of school care programs were closed in August, this section focuses largely on September enrollment rates. Median enrollment rates in September did not vary much by population setting, though in September it appears that rural programs' enrollment (60%) lagged a bit behind the other settings (68% for large urban, 65% for small urban, and 70% for towns.<sup>13</sup> There was little variation in September enrollment rates by region or shared status ("shared status" refers to whether the program shared its space with another entity, such as a school, community program, or religious institution).

# 31%

of programs reported a September enrollment of 50% or less.

These rates can be put in perspective by comparing them to the average enrollment rate in previous years, which hovered—in non-COVID times—at around 80% for all programs combined.<sup>14</sup> Most programs in this survey (65%) reported enrollment rates below 80%, and about 3 in 10 programs (31%) reported particularly low enrollment rates of 50% or below. The

problem of low enrollment appears to have been spread relatively equally among the province, with little variation by region, population setting, or shared status. Out of school programs were somewhat more likely to have low enrollment (39%), but this difference was not statistically significant from the overall average of 31%. Clearly, as a group, the programs that answered this survey were yet to recover from COVID-19, and many continued to struggle with particularly low enrollment. Moreover, low enrollment appeared to be a problem that struck programs of all types and locations equally.

### August / September 2021: Closing due to COVID-19

About 1 in 11 programs (9%) reported closing partially or fully due to a COVID-19 outbreak in August or September 2021. There was little variation by population setting or shared status in this number, though a somewhat higher percentage of programs located in small urban areas reported partially or fully closing (15%, not statistically significant different from the 9% average) compared to large urban areas, town, or rural areas.

Region of Alberta did seem to matter, with programs from the Calgary region reporting closure at a significantly lower rate (4%) and programs from the Central region reporting closure at a borderline significantly higher rate (17%). Table 2 shows the breakdown by region (as before, the three northern regions are combined into a single region for the purposes of this analysis).

**Table 2: Program closure due to COVID-19 varied by region.**

<i>Region (# of responses)</i>	<i>Programs partially or fully closed (%)</i>
Calgary (139)	4*
Central (47)	17*
Edmonton (163)	10

North (47)	15
South (33)	9
Overall (429)	9

\* Statistically significant from overall average at  $p < .05$  level (for Central,  $p = .057$ ).

There was also considerable variation in the answers to this question by type of program: 47% of family day homes and family day home agencies reported a partial or full closure in the last two months, while only 4% of preschools reported the same (both numbers are statistically different from the overall average of 9%). These results should be interpreted with great caution, however, for two reasons. First, as noted above, most preschools and many out of school care programs were not in operation in August. Second, it is likely that the family day home percentage is so high because agencies (which made up 76% of the programs self-identifying as “family day homes” in this survey) would report a closure if *any* of the family day homes they oversaw closed in August or September. This produces an unfair comparison; the better comparison would be against the percentage of individual family day homes closed rather than their overseeing agencies.<sup>15</sup>

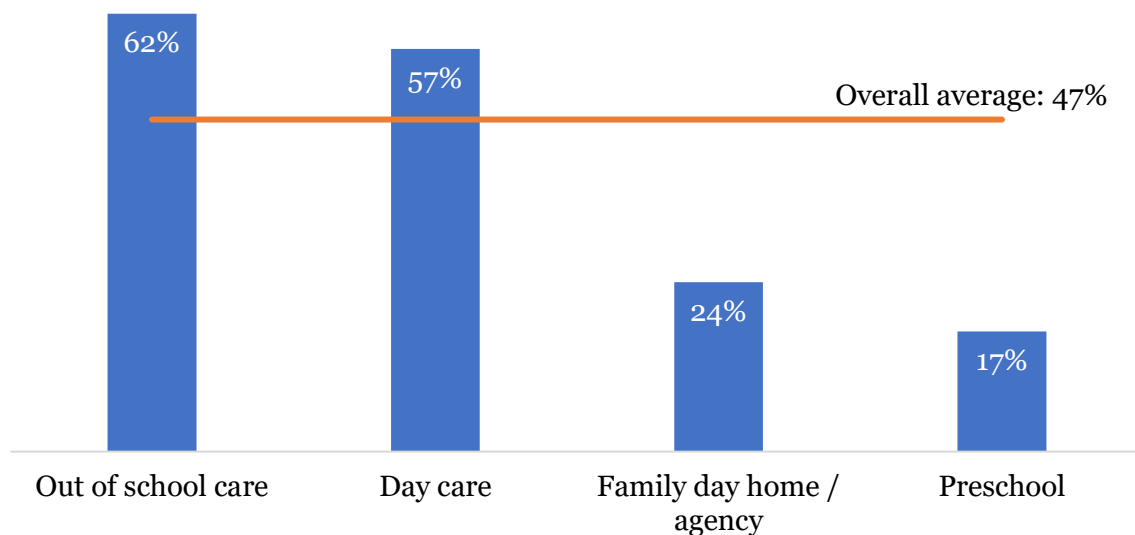
### **The Next 60 Days: The End of CEWS**

Nearly half of programs (47%) said the elimination of the CEWS program would affect their program negatively. The CEWS program was in fact discontinued on October 23, 2021, and it is unclear at this writing whether another any federal government program that partially or entirely replaces it will be open to ELCC programs in Alberta.

While shared status did not appear to affect the likelihood of a program being concerned about the end of CEWS, there was dramatic variation in the answers to this question by type of program, with out-of-school cares (62%) and day cares (57%) appearing to be far more concerned than family day homes (24%) and preschools (17%) (all differences were statistically significant).



**Figure: The percent of programs concerned about the end of CEWS varied dramatically by program type.**



Population setting and region also seemed to matter to whether a program reported concern about the end of CEWS. A higher percentage of programs located in large urban settings reported being concerned about the end of CEWS (56%, statistically significant) than programs in other settings, while concern about the end of CEWS also varied by region, with higher concern in the Edmonton (55%) region and lower concern in the Central region (32%) compared to the overall average (both rates were statistically different from the average of 47%).

Overall, the variation in concern about the end of the CEWS program suggests that there was considerable variation in which Alberta programs used CEWS, and possibly how much they depended on it for their continued survival.

#### **The Next 60 Days: Concerns about enrollment, program change, and parent trust**

A full 60% of all programs were concerned about suffering a COVID-19-related enrollment decline in the coming two months. This concern did not vary much by shared status, but there seemed to be somewhat less concern about imminent enrollment declines for family day homes and agencies (41%) and preschools (46%) compared to out of school cares (64%) and day cares (67%). There was little significant variation in concerns about enrollment by population setting or region.

It should also be noted that many programs were also concerned about having to change or cut their programming (32%) and about 2 out of 5 programs were worried about losing parental trust and loyalty in the coming months (39%).

In sum, many programs continue to struggle with enrollment, and the majority anticipate that enrollment difficulties will continue to be an issue in the coming months, specifically due to the effects of COVID-19. Actions suggested by the AECEA survey respondents that the Government of Alberta could take include:

- With the exciting news to a signed agreement to the Federal Government the stabilization of the workforce will be crucial. Supply-side funding for programs, equity of access for children, high quality provision provided by qualified and supported early childhood educators and the building and sustainability of a system that supports all children and their families.
- In the short term, provide greater supply-side funding to ELCC programs to ensure greater stability for the sector, help retain qualified early childhood educators who are able to provide high quality child care for children who are presenting with more vulnerabilities and help programs continue so that parents are able to fully return to work following the 4th wave.
- Examine more closely why the end of CEWS appears to have left day cares and out of school care more concerned, and why these two types of programs seem to be more concerned about enrollment than other types of programs. Consider targeted support to those types of programs.

## Appendix: Survey Questions and Answers

Below are the specific questions asked in the survey, and the breakdown of the answers. Totals may not add to exactly 100% due to rounding. Any additional notes on the responses to the questions are added underneath the question.

### 1. What setting is this program located?

<b>Population Setting</b>	<b># of Programs</b>	<b>% of Programs</b>
Large Urban	214	49.8
Small Urban	68	15.8
Town	94	21.9
Rural	54	12.6
Total	430	100

### 2. In what region of Alberta is this program located?

<b>Region</b>	<b># of Programs</b>	<b>% of Programs</b>
Calgary	139	32.3
Central	47	10.9
Edmonton	163	37.9
Metis Settlement	1	0.2
North Central	17	4.0
Northeast	15	3.5
Northwest	15	3.5
South	33	7.7
Total	430	100

Note that for most of the analysis in this survey, the three North regions were combined into a single region simply called “North.” The “North” region had 47 respondents and represented 11% of the total survey sample.

### 3. What type of licensed early learning and child care program is this?

<b>Type</b>	<b># of Programs</b>	<b>% of Programs</b>
Day care	195	45.4
Family day home	17	4.0
Out-of-school care	106	24.7
Preschool	112	26.1
Total	430	100

Of the family day home respondents, 13 out of 17 indicated their licensed capacity was 45 or more, suggesting that those 13 respondents were actually family day home agencies overseeing multiple family day homes.

#### 4. Does this program operate in a shared space?

<i>Answer</i>	<i># of Programs</i>	<i>% of Programs</i>
No	187	43.5
Yes, a school	110	25.6
Yes, a post-secondary institution	3	0.7
Yes, a community facility or centre	51	11.9
Yes, a religious institution	47	10.9
Yes, a municipal building	4	0.9
Yes, other space (please specify)	28	6.5
Total	430	100

For analysis in this report, “shared status” was collapsed into five categories, the four most common categories and a combined “other” category: Not shared, school, community facility, religious institution, and other.

#### 5. How many spaces is this program licensed for?

The average (mean) number of spaces was 64.8, and the median program had 50 licensed spaces. The range of spaces was wide, with the largest program reported having 844 licensed spaces and twenty programs reporting a capacity of 10 or fewer spaces. Overall, the programs contained 27,879 spaces, about 20% of the total licensed spaces in Alberta.

#### 6. From August 1, 2021 up to September 27, 2021, how many positive cases of COVID-19 have you had in children?

<i>Answer</i>	<i># of Programs</i>	<i>% of Programs</i>
0	305	70.9
1	54	12.6
2	25	5.8
3	20	4.7
4	6	1.4
5	8	1.9
6+	12	2.8
Total	430	100

**7. From August 1, 2021, up to September 27, 2021, how many positive cases of COVID-19 have you had in your early childhood educators or other staff?**

<i>Answer</i>	<i># of Programs</i>	<i>% of Programs</i>
0	353	82.1
1	50	11.6
2	10	2.3
3	6	1.4
4	5	1.2
5+	6	1.4
Total	430	100

**8. What was this program's enrollment in August 2021?**

The average (mean) enrollment in August was 32.0, and the median program had an enrollment of 23 licensed spaces. The largest enrollment reported was 600, and many programs (130) reported an enrollment of zero.

**9. What was this program's enrollment in September 2021?**

The average (mean) enrollment in September was 43.1, and the median program had an enrollment of 31 licensed spaces. The largest enrollment reported was 575, with 10 programs reporting an enrollment of zero.

**10. From August 1, 2021, up to September 27, 2021, have you had to close PART of your program down due to an outbreak?**

<i>Answer</i>	<i># of Programs</i>	<i>% of Programs</i>
Yes	35	8.1
No	395	91.2
Total	430	100

**11. From August 1, 2021, up to September 27, 2021, have you had to close ALL of your program down due to an outbreak?**

<i>Answer</i>	<i># of Programs</i>	<i>% of Programs</i>
Yes	14	3.3
No	416	96.7
Total	430	100

In the above analysis, the answers to questions 10 and 11 were combined to provide an answer to the question "did your program ever close partially or fully from August 1, 2021 to September 27, 2021 due to an outbreak?" A total of 39 programs (9.1% of the 430 programs in the survey) answered yes to either question 10, question 11, or answered yes to both.

**12. Will the end of the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) on October 23, 2021, affect your program negatively?**

<b>Answer</b>	<b># of Programs</b>	<b>% of Programs</b>
Yes	201	46.7
No	229	53.3
Total	430	100

Respondents that answered “yes” to this question were then asked “How will the end of CEWS affect your program negatively?” Respondents were able to write in their answers to that question. Those answers are not analyzed in this report.

**13. Are you concerned about the next 60 days in terms of how COVID-19 will affect your children, families, educators and program?**

<b>Answer</b>	<b># of Programs</b>	<b>% of Programs</b>
Yes	354	82.3
No	76	17.7
Total	430	100

Respondents who answered “yes” to this question were then asked question 13a.

**13a. What is concerning you? (Please select all that apply.)**

<b>Answer</b>	<b># of Programs</b>	<b>% of Programs Answering Yes to Q13</b>	<b>% of All Programs Answering the Survey</b>
Decline in enrollment	256	72.3	59.5
Loss of or change to programming	139	39.3	32.3
Physical health of children	249	70.3	57.9
Mental health of children	241	68.1	56.1
Physical health of educators and other staff	259	73.2	60.2
Mental health of educators and other staff	298	84.2	69.3
Cleaning	147	41.5	34.2
Employee morale	196	55.4	45.6
Educators leaving their position	141	39.8	32.8
Parent loyalty / trust / perception	168	47.5	39.1
Other (please specify)	21	5.9	4.9
Total	354	100% (of 354 programs)	100% (of 430 programs)

For the analysis in the report, for each of these questions, percentages of total programs (that is, out of the full 430) were calculated. This is somewhat different than what is often reported for these types of question, which is percent of only those answering that they had concerns. For

this survey, however, it was deemed more illuminating to gauge the importance of these concerns compared to all programs answering the survey rather than just those answering question 13.

**14. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience during the latest COVID-19 wave?**

Respondents were able to write in their answers to this question. Those answers are not analyzed in this report.

**15. Do you have suggestions on ways AECEA can support educators at this difficult time?**

Respondents were able to write in their answers to this question. Those answers are not analyzed in this report.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that several questions on this survey asked respondents to provide longer written responses; those responses are not examined in this report but may be explored in further reports on this survey.

<sup>2</sup> For more detail on AECEA's view of what a "good" agreement would include, see Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (2017). *Setting the stage: AECEA and Alberta's child care system*. <https://aecea.ca/sites/default/files/Setting%20stage%20updated%200926.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> The 30% of programs were likely not functioning in August because the school year had not yet started in many parts of Alberta. Of those 130 programs with no enrollment in August, only ten reported having no enrollment in September. This implies that most of those programs with no enrollment in August actually opened again and were providing services to children in September.

<sup>4</sup> Although this survey did not necessarily contain a representative sample of programs in Alberta, we do point out when there is a statistically significant difference in the responses to questions between groups using a conventional marker ( $p < .05$ ). Most statistical tests were performed using one-sample tests of proportions against the population average (the "prtest" command in the statistical program Stata). Such a test is often only seen as valid when the sample is randomly drawn from a population—which this sample was not—but statistical testing can still be useful as a way to detect meaningful differences between groups. All that said, in this case, although there were differences between regions in programs reporting at least one case of COVID-19 among children, none rose to that level of statistical significance. Therefore, here the term "somewhat higher than average" is used rather than calling the difference "statistically significant." Throughout this report, when differences are statistically significant, we point that fact out.

<sup>5</sup> All respondents were asked in which of the seven Children's Services region their program was located (a map of these regions can be found at <https://www.ahvna.org/members/alberta-health-and-wellness-health-regions/>) or whether the program was in a Metis settlement. These numbers for both children and staff COVID-19 cases should be used with some caution, as the number of programs reporting from outside of the Calgary or Edmonton regions could be somewhat low; see the "Program Characteristics" section below. For this comparison, the three Northern regions (Northeast, North Central, and Northwest) were combined into a single region called "North."

<sup>6</sup> Specifically, 44% of all programs were concerned about both mental and physical health, 14% about physical health only, and 12% about mental health only. This is remarkable because a small number (about 20%) of all programs in this survey actually said they had no COVID-related concerns about the next 60 days at all. If we examine just the programs that had concerns, 70% said they were concerned about the physical health of children in their program, with nearly the same percentage—68%—being concerned about the mental health of their program's children.

<sup>7</sup> See CBC News (2021, 18 October). *Pfizer asks Health Canada to approve COVID-19 vaccine for kids 5 to 11 years old*. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/pfizer-seeks-kids-covid-vaccine-approval-health-canada-1.6215547>. Most children in early learning and care programs in Alberta are, of course, below the age of 5.

<sup>8</sup> See Angus Reid Institute (2021, 18 October). *Kids and COVID: Half of Canadian parents with children aged 5-11 ready to vaccinate their little ones ASAP*. Angus Reid Institute. <https://angusreid.org/covid-kids-vaccine/>.

<sup>9</sup> The same caveats apply here as with the reporting of cases of COVID-19 in children—that is, most preschools and many out of school care programs reported not being in operation for August 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Dubois, S. (2021, 13 August). *Alberta lost one in five licensed early childhood educators during 1st year of pandemic, data shows*. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-child-care-educators-federal-covid-19-1.6139406>

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/specialneeds/temp-wage-increase.aspx>.

<sup>12</sup> Enrollment rates were calculated by dividing the program's reported enrollment in each month by the program's reported licensed capacity. Medians are reported here rather than means because the median is less susceptible to being skewed by the number and size of outliers (very large or very small numbers in the dataset, like 0% or 100% enrollment, and large numbers of each). It should be noted that this September median rate for Alberta overall is higher than what the province has reported publicly as an



---

average (mean) rate in Alberta (50% in February 2021; see <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=7774390D0420F-0CB2-CD53-68DBAF39DF30A26C>). There are a number of reasons that these numbers might be different, including that enrollment might have gone up since February 2021, the mean and median rates might differ because they are different central tendency measures, and that the respondents to this survey actually had higher enrollments as a group.

<sup>13</sup> Statistical testing of medians was done using the “median” command in Stata.

<sup>14</sup> The province of Alberta does not publicly report enrollment rates by program type, nor does it report median enrollment rates, so the comparison here is imperfect. It should also be noted that the average enrollment rate can be misleading as a measure of how “full” programs are, as many programs never actually operate at their full licensed capacity. Nevertheless, a comparison with an 80% average enrollment that is typical during “normal times” is useful as a measure of how the sector, and specific parts of the sector, are doing now compared with the pre-COVID-19 situation in Alberta.

<sup>15</sup> Of the 17 programs that identified as “family day homes” in this survey, 13 of them stated they had licensed capacities of 45 or above, which indicates that they were family day home *agencies*, not individual family day homes. Of the four programs with capacities below 45 (4, 6, 6, and 6 spaces) none noted that they had closed at all in August or September.