

A Place to Learn, A Place to Belong:

Newcomer Experiences with Child Care in Edmonton, Alberta

A community-based research
summary exploring the child care
experiences of newcomer families

Context | Barriers | Solutions



OVERVIEW OF THE CONTEXT

WHAT IS EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE?

Early learning and child care, or simply “child care,” supports children’s development in the early years (ages 0-6). It includes services provided by individuals other than the children’s parents or guardians (e.g., child care centres, out-of-school care, preschools, and home-based care). Research shows that child care promotes children’s physical, emotional, and social development, laying the foundation for healthy futures.¹

CHALLENGES FOR NEWCOMER COMMUNITIES

For newcomer families, child care can support successful settlement in Canada.² However, these communities face significant barriers that put children at risk of falling behind. Research shows that child care can reduce inequities and allow parents to pursue education and work opportunities, but there is little research on the specific barriers faced by newcomer communities in general, and in the Alberta context in particular.³

LISTENING TO PARENTS

University of Alberta researchers partnered with the Multicultural Health Brokers (MCHB) to understand how families navigate child care services. We conducted focus groups with 21 parents from the Bangladeshi, Indian-Punjabi, and Nigerian communities in Edmonton to understand their experiences and solutions for change.

In 2017, federal, provincial, and territorial ministers agreed on a **Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework** based on five core principles for child care: **accessibility, affordability, flexibility, inclusion, and quality**. This was followed by individual agreements between the federal government and each province to develop equitable child care systems, including reducing costs and adding more spaces by the end of 2026. Governments are developing these systems, but much work is still needed to ensure they are equitable and evidence-based.

This work was led by Nashid Rahman, a recent graduate of the Master of Arts in Community Engagement (MACE) program at the University of Alberta. Before moving to Canada, Nashid worked with an international non-profit in Bangladesh, leading a community-based child care initiative for under-served families. He is deeply passionate about child care and the role of community engagement in creating change.

1. Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, 2024; Friendly et al., 2006; Swaye et al., 2023

2. Fakhari et al., 2025

3. Crossman, 2013; Fleury, 2007; Barnett & Masse, 2007; Beatson et al., 2022; Fortin, 2018; Fyall Cardenas & Colwell, 2024; Halim et al., 2023; Heckman, 2006; Moon & Hasan, 2024

UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS

MAIN BARRIERS TO CHILD CARE: WHAT DID FAMILIES SAY?

Researchers organized parents' insights into five themes, based on the Canadian government's framework for child care:



Accessibility



Flexibility



Affordability



Inclusion



Quality

The study's purpose was to gain insights into the experiences of newcomer ethnocultural families seeking ELCC services in Edmonton. Interviews were conducted in parents' preferred languages.

Through discussions with **Bangladeshi (Bengali-speaking)**, **Nigerian (English-speaking)**, and **Indian-Punjabi (Punjabi-speaking)** parents, two research questions were explored:

(1) What facilitators and barriers do newcomer ethnocultural parents of young children (birth to under six years old) experience when seeking ELCC services in Edmonton, Alberta?

(2) What are parents' suggestions for possible solutions to the barriers they identify?



ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility refers to the availability of child care spaces and how easy it is to “find a spot” in a welcoming child care environment.

Key Findings:

- **High wait times:** Many parents identified waitlists as a primary barrier to finding a spot.
- **Infant enrollment:** Families identified a lack of enrollment spaces for very young children.
- **Information gaps:** Parents mostly relied on informal networks for information about child care, including community groups, family, and Google Reviews.
- **Distance:** Some parents said there were few child care centres near their home or workplace, requiring them to make long commutes, sometimes without personal vehicles.

What did parents say about accessibility?

“The biggest challenge was that some centres that accepted infants did not offer part-time care, and those that did were not open to infants.”

“Muslim daycares are mostly on the south side of Edmonton, and I don’t have a car to access those. Now I am sending my child to the one that I don’t like so much.”



FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility refers to whether child care can be found outside standard hours, which is especially important for shift workers and students.

Key Findings:

- **Inflexible pick-up times:** Conventional hours work for parents with additional family support or flexible work arrangements, but create challenges for many working parents who do not have further family support.
- **Part-time challenges:** Part-time care is often more expensive than expected, while evening and weekend care is rarely available.

What did parents say about flexibility?

“Since we don’t have any family members here, in case of an emergency [...] we need to take our child with us. If there were any services available [...] we could leave our child for a couple of hours.”



AFFORDABILITY

Affordability refers to the ability of families to pay for high-quality child care without incurring financial hardships or sacrificing basic needs.

Key Findings:

- **Loss of subsidy:** Most parents reported negative impacts due to the removal of Alberta's child care subsidy grant in 2025, with the new \$326.25 monthly fee especially challenging for families with limited financial flexibility. Some families with multiple children or single incomes reported that their costs have tripled or quadrupled since the removal of the subsidy.
- **Extra costs:** Families are often required to pay out of pocket for "extra" services (e.g., food, field trips) on top of the base fee.
- **Multiple children:** Families with two or more children often incur costs that are unsustainable on a limited income

What did parents say about affordability?

"Those who have one child might feel it's okay, but for those with two or three kids like me, it's quite a significant amount for us to pay."

"The government has also reduced the assistance, and the impact of that is that we have to work overtime to afford the fees for all three kids. As a consequence, we've had to reduce our quality family time."



INCLUSION

Inclusion refers to whether children's religious and community identities are reflected in child care services.

Key Findings:

- **Cultural alignment:** Most parents expressed a concern about a lack of culturally relevant child care options, and some identified cultural mismatches in child care settings (e.g., no halal food options, shared toilet facilities without partitions).
- **Representation gap:** Some parents expressed a desire for more cultural diversity to support their children's learning while maintaining a connection to their roots.

What did parents say about inclusion?

"I wanted someone from [my cultural community]. I felt that, even though I can't be there, my child would be taken care of."

"I wanted a day home in the Punjabi community [...], but now I got a Muslim one. Now, I am worried, will he be comfortable or not?"



QUALITY

Quality refers to the overall state and effectiveness of child care. It can include factors such as staff qualifications, working conditions, safety standards, staff-to-child ratios, curricula, regulatory practices, and whether child care protects children's wellbeing and happiness.

Key Findings:

- **Health and safety:** For some parents, health and safety concerns (e.g., cleanliness, regulatory oversight) served as barriers to accessing child care.
- **Past experience:** Some parents shared upsetting stories about past child care experiences that caused them to lose trust.
- **Security:** The most frequently mentioned quality-related factor was security, with several parents rejecting facilities without CCTV cameras.

What did parents say about quality?

"When I used to [pick up my daughter], she was super scared [...] I noticed that she continuously cried inside the daycare, and the staff ignored her. It made me extremely angry. That was the last day of my daughter at that daycare."



COMMUNITY-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS

Parents identified numerous ways to make child care work better for newcomer families.

1. BRIDGING THE INFORMATION GAP

Parents shared that reliable information is key for newcomer parents to make decisions about child care.

Key Recommendations:

- **Centralized information hub:** Developing a reliable, government-supported information hub with real-time data on enrollment, waitlists, costs, quality indicators, and culturally responsive practices. Ideally, it would be co-designed with communities.
- **Stronger outreach:** Sharing information about child care in multiple languages and across multiple channels, such as community workshops, translated materials, and partnerships with organizations that support newcomer families.

2. RETHINKING AFFORDABILITY THROUGH EQUITY

Alberta's move toward a flat-rate fee model does not account for the unique financial pressures on newcomer families. Solutions parents suggested include:

Key Recommendations:

- **Equity-based funding:** Prioritizing public funding and subsidy models over “one-size-fits-all” solutions. This can include income-based contributions models (similar to Quebec).
- **Targeted support for newcomers:** Implementing financial support specifically for newcomer families, such as “fee waivers” during the initial settlement period.
- **Cap extra costs:** Creating limits on out-of-pocket costs for food, field trips, and registration that can push “affordable” care out of reach.
- **Flexible opt-outs:** Allowing families to opt out of non-essential services (e.g., provided meals).





Alberta Child Care Subsidy Grant

In April 2025, the Alberta government shifted to an approximately \$15.00 flat-rate fee for licensed child care, discontinuing the Alberta Child Care Subsidy Grant that was being used by many low-income families. Lowest-income families were previously paying \$0 for care. The government also moved to allow operators to charge supplementary fees beyond “core” child care service costs. Families told researchers that the change significantly worsened the affordability of child care services.

3. CENTERING CULTURE IN CHILD CARE

Parents in this study emphasized the need for child care environments that reflect their values, languages, and traditions, which are key to building trust and a sense of belonging. Solutions parents suggested included:

Key Recommendations:

- **Diverse hiring:** Creating policies that prioritize hiring and retaining educators from diverse backgrounds, so children can see their identities reflected in the educators.
- **Community-led programs:** Expanding support for programs run by local communities, which are more likely to reflect cultural values, languages, and care practices.
- **Professional standards:** Implementing government mandates for cultural competency and anti-bias training, fair pay for educators, and professional development for educators from underrepresented groups.



CONCLUSION

This document is a call-to-action for policymakers, providers, and community advocates to create a child care system that meets the unique needs of Edmonton's newcomer communities.

This research shows that, while progress is being made, existing child care systems do not yet meet the needs of many newcomer families. By focusing on the solutions identified by families, we can move beyond a “one-size-fits all” solution and toward an equitable child care system that is truly accessible, affordable, flexible, inclusive, and high quality.

To advocate more, here are some actions you can take:

- Join or create a parent group and speak together with your child care service provider about your concerns.
- Attend community meetings or fill out government surveys about child care and share your opinion.
- Contact your local Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), Member of Parliament (MP), or city councillor and share your experience with child care services as a newcomer parent.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE RESEARCH:

Click the link or use the QR code below to read [Understanding the experiences of newcomer ethnocultural families seeking early learning and child care services in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada](#) by Nashid Rahman. 



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank participating parents as well as our partners for making this research possible:



REFERENCES

- Barnett, W. S., & Masse, L. N. (2007). Comparative benefit–cost analysis of the Abecedarian program and its policy implications. *Economics of Education Review*, 26(1), 113–125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2005.10.007>
- Beatson, R., Molloy, C., Fehlberg, Z., Perini, N., Harrop, C., & Goldfeld, S. (2022). Early childhood education participation: A mixed-methods study of parent and provider perceived barriers and facilitators. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 31(11), 2929–2946. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-022-02274-5>
- Crossman, E. (2013). Low-income and immigration: An overview and future directions for research. Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/research/low-income-immigration-overview-future-directions-research.html>
- Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care. (2024). Impact Report 2022-2023: Advancing early learning and care in Edmonton through rigorous research, high-trust relationships, and policy leadership. <https://www.ecelc.ca/publications-archive/impact-report-2022-2023-advancing-early-learning-and-care-in-edmonton-through-rigorous-research-high-trust-relationships-and-policy-leadership>
- Fakhari, N., Pimentel, M. & McIsaac, J.-L. D. (2025) Early Learning and Child Care for Immigrant Families and Children: A Pan-Canadian Jurisdictional Scan of Settlement Agencies. *International Journal of Child, Youth, and Family Studies*, 16(4), 76–98, <https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs164202522589>
- Fortin, P. (2018). Quebec’s childcare program at 20. *Inroads: The Canadian Journal of Opinion*, 42, 52–64. <https://inroadsjournal.ca/archives/16951>
- Fleury, D. (2007). A study of poverty and working poverty among recent immigrants to Canada. Human Resources and Social Development Canada. Government of Canada. https://publications.gc.ca/site/archiveee-archived.html?url=https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2008/hrsd-rhdsc/HS28-121-2007E.pdf
- Friendly, M., Doherty, G., & Beach, J. (2006). Quality by design: What do we know about quality in early learning and child care and what do we think? A literature review. Child Resource and Research Unit. <http://www.childcarecanada.org/publications/quality-design/06/01/quality-designwhat-do-we-know-about-quality-early-learning-and-ch>
- Fyall Cardenas, J., & Colwell, M. J. (2024). Maternal well-being and the transition to childcare: Impact of caregiver support. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 56(1), 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-022-00339-6>
- Halim, D., Perova, E., & Reynolds, S. (2023). Childcare and mothers’ labor market outcomes in lower- and middle-income countries. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 38(1), 73–114. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/lkac003>
- Heckman, J. (2006). The economics of investing in children. http://www.ucd.ie/geary/static/publications/policybriefings/geary_report1.pdf
- Moon, Z. K., & Hasan, M. M. (2024). Childcare centre for work efficiency of employed parents: Perception analysis for business prospects. *South Asian Journal of Marketing*, 5(1), 32–46. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SAJM-04-2022-0028>
- Swaye, M., Mazrouei, S., & McLeod, C. (2023). Inclusion & access pathway for early learning and child care (ELCC). City of Brantford. <https://www.brantford.ca/en/living-here/resources/Documents/ChildCare/Inclusion-and-Access-Pathway-for-Early-Learning-and-Child-Care-ELCC.pdf>