

Canada Nova Scotia  
Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement  
2023-2024 to 2025-2026 Action Plan

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Nova Scotia's Early Learning and Child Care Vision .....	5
Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (ELCCA).....	6
Early Learning and Child Care Landscape .....	6
Workforce .....	8
Support Systems Review.....	8
Engagement .....	9
The Commitment to Nova Scotians.....	10
2023-2026 CWELCCA Financial Investment.....	11
<b>Previous Achievements.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Affordability .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Reduced Child Care Fees.....	13
Child Care Subsidy Program.....	14
Operational Funding .....	14
<b>Access .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Operational Space Creation Initiatives .....	18
Wrap Around Program Expansion .....	18
Not For Profit Transition Pilot.....	19
Non-Traditional Hours Pilot .....	19
Strategic Infrastructure Initiatives .....	19
Public Partnerships .....	20
Space Expansion Funding.....	20
<b>Quality .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Compensation Framework.....	22
ECE Certification.....	23
Quality Matters.....	23
<b>Inclusion .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Inclusion Strategy.....	26
Inclusion Support .....	26
Development Intervention Services .....	27
Pyramid Model.....	27
Indigenous Partnership.....	29

<b>Administration.....</b>	<b>30</b>
Information Technology and Data Management .....	30
Annual Census.....	30
<b>Action Plan Investment Summary.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Nova Scotia’s Early Learning and Child Care Vision .....	5
Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (ELCCA).....	6
Early Learning and Child Care Landscape .....	6
Workforce .....	8
Support Systems Review.....	8
Engagement .....	9
The Commitment to Nova Scotians.....	10
2023 to 2026 CWELCCA Financial Investment.....	11
<b>Previous Achievements.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Affordability .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Reduced Child Care Fees.....	13
Child Care Subsidy Program.....	14
Operational Funding .....	14
<b>Access .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Operational Space Creation Initiatives .....	18
Wrap Around Program Expansion .....	18
Transition Support (Not-for-Profit Pilot).....	19
Non-Traditional Hours Pilot .....	19
Strategic Infrastructure Initiatives .....	19
Public Partnerships .....	20
Space Expansion Funding.....	20
<b>Quality .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Compensation Framework.....	22
ECE Certification.....	23
Quality Matters.....	23
<b>Inclusion .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Inclusion Strategy.....	26
Inclusion Support .....	26

Development Intervention Services .....	27
Pyramid Model.....	27
Indigenous Partnership.....	29
<b>Administration.....</b>	<b>30</b>
Information Technology and Data Management .....	30
Annual Census.....	30
<b>Action Plan Investment Summary.....</b>	<b>32</b>

## Introduction

Nova Scotia families deserve accessible, affordable, high-quality, and inclusive early learning and child care (ELCC). Nova Scotia's ELCC system is for children from infancy to age twelve and includes licensed child care in centre-based and family home settings, as well as before and after school care. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) holds the legislated authority under the Early Learning and Child Care Act and Regulations to deliver early learning and child care throughout Nova Scotia.

## Nova Scotia's Early Learning and Child Care Vision

Nova Scotia and Canada share common principles set out in the ELCC Multilateral Framework and a vision that all families have access to high-quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive ELCC spaces.

From 2023 to 2026, Canada will support Nova Scotia in working towards our shared vision by investing approximately \$440,447,617, including \$127,895,380 in 2023-2024 through the Canada-Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (CWELCCA).

The Indigenous ELCC Framework represents work by Canada and Indigenous peoples to co-develop a transformative Indigenous framework that reflects the unique cultures, aspirations and needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children across Canada. Nova Scotia acknowledges these existing partnerships and the work underway through this Framework and remains committed to working together to advance our shared priorities.

From 2023 to 2026, Nova Scotia will work through various initiatives outlined in its updated Action Plan to continue to work towards creating an inclusive culture within its ELCC system where every child, regardless of their ability, socioeconomic status, gender, or cultural background, can participate, learn, grow, and improve their well-being.

In collaboration with sector partners and the Minister's Engagement Table, a provincial vision for the future of Early Learning and Child Care in Nova Scotia is emerging that aligns with the Multilateral Framework but reflects guiding principles and long-term goals created for Nova Scotians. This vision is iterative and will adapt as the system evolves with ongoing input from the sector, partners, and families.

Figure 1 - Emerging Vision of Nova Scotia's Future ELCC System

Emerging Vision of Nova Scotia's Future ELCC System		
We have a publicly funded and managed ELCC system where ALL children have the opportunity to experience <b>high-quality, culturally responsive, accessible, affordable, and inclusive</b> early learning and child care programs that are reflective of community needs, values, priorities, and demographics.		
Society understands and values the importance of ELCC.	Diverse cultures, languages, and abilities are embraced and reflected.	Spaces are used efficiently and flexibly to maximize learning, well-being, safety, and inclusivity.
ECEs are well-qualified and fairly compensated professionals – supported with professional development.	ELCC programming reflects local community history and leverages expertise.	System decisions are based on data, evidence, and effective pedagogical practice.

### Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (ELCCA)

Nova Scotia continues to receive funding from Canada through the Nova Scotia Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (ELCCA). Annual funding is provided to Nova Scotia to support three key priority areas:

1. Making child care more **accessible** and **affordable** for Nova Scotian families
2. Supporting quality through **workforce** development
3. Imbedding **inclusion** in early learning and child care environments

Through this funding, Nova Scotia supports various initiatives that contribute to the ELCC system and align with the shared goals of the CWELCCA. It is essential to acknowledge the initiatives supported through this funding and their connection with those funded through the 2023 to 2026 CWELCCA Action Plan.

More information on the 2023-2024 ELCCA Action Plan is available on the [Government of Canada's](#) website. Future action plans for this annual funding will also be made available on this site.

### Early Learning and Child Care Landscape

With the support of federal and provincial funding, Nova Scotia's ELCC landscape continues to evolve in response to the needs of children 0-12 years of age and their families. In Nova Scotia, families can access various regulated programs and universal offerings through the public school system.

## **Regulated Child Care**

Regulated programs are licensed or guided by provincial legislation, regulations, and policies to support high-quality care. As of March 31, 2023, Nova Scotia had over 20,523 regulated child care spaces. A combination of provincial and federal funding, including the CWELCCA, provides support for these spaces in various ways.

Under Nova Scotia's publicly managed and funded system, regulated child care is delivered by commercial and not-for-profit service providers. Revenue is generated through operating grants provided by the Department and fees collected from families and caregivers with children enrolled in programs. Since July 2021, daily program fees have been frozen, meaning operators cannot increase their fees. As a condition of funding, all operators must agree to maintain their fees, pay Early Childhood Educators in accordance with the Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Wage Scale, provide fee reductions directly to families, and abide by other terms and conditions of funding.

Nova Scotia is committed to creating inclusive spaces to support diverse and/or vulnerable children and families, including children with disabilities and children needing enhanced or individual supports, Indigenous children, Black and other racialized children, children of newcomers, and official language minorities. Nova Scotia does not currently have a mechanism to track the number of inclusive spaces with child care programming dedicated to children from diverse and/or vulnerable families. Nova Scotia will work on developing methods for capturing this data moving forward as part of ongoing Information Technology and Data initiatives.

Regulated programs are comprised of the following:

### **Child Care Centres**

Child care centres are licensed and provincially funded programs offering services for children, infants to school-age, dependent on the needs of families. As of March 31, 2023, 324 providers – 56% commercial and 44% not-for-profit – support 17,659 spaces. The province and CWELCCA financially support service providers and families through grants, including wage support, inclusion funding, infant incentives and fee reductions.

Nova Scotia has eight licensed service providers who have opted out of government funding. These programs follow licensing requirements for child care environments, but no funding is provided. Programs remain eligible for provincial funding programs if desired.

### **Family Home Child Care**

In Nova Scotia, 14 agencies provide administration and program support for service providers who host ELCC programs in their homes pursuant to provincial legislation and regulations. As of March 31, 2023, there were 1,269 family home spaces in Nova Scotia. Service providers are supported by CWELCCA funding through grants, including wage support and fee reductions. Agencies are operationally funded through a combination of CWELCCA and provincial funding.

### **Wrap-Around Programs**

There are 29 programs supporting over 1,600 Nova Scotia Before and After School spaces. These programs support families with young children attending programs in a school setting who want to access before and after-school programs to ensure a full day of seamless care. These programs are

supported by CWELCCA funding with grants, including fee reductions. Programs prioritize new admissions for 4 and 5-year-old children who attend Pre-Primary and Primary Programs.

Nova Scotia also has many community-based recreation, sport and other specialized programs that offer after-school care for children; however, they are not regulated by the province and are not supported by CWELCCA funding.

## **Public School Programs**

### **Pre-Primary Program**

The Pre-Primary Program is a universal and free early learning program offered on-site in public schools throughout the province for 4-year-old children. The program is provincially funded and in 2023 there were over 380 programs and more than 6,500 children enrolled. Over 1,000 Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) support the program's operation, focusing on the provincial ELCC curriculum framework. In some cases, 3-year-old children will be eligible to access this program when space is available. Participation supports the program's successful operation, ensuring enough children are registered to make the program viable in a community and when it is in the child's best interest to attend. Pre-Primary sites with historically fewer than ten children enrolled may open access with priority for diverse and/or vulnerable children and families and children in communities with limited or no access to other ELCC programs. Enrollment will be on a case-by-case basis and at the discretion of the Regional Centre for Education (RCE) or le Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial (CSAP).

### **Primary Program**

The Primary Program is a universal and free early learning program for all 5-year-old children in Nova Scotia on-site in public schools. The program is provincially funded and in 2023 had over 8,500 children enrolled.

## **Workforce**

In Nova Scotia, ELCC programs offered in licensed child care centres, family homes, and the Pre-Primary Program are supported by Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). The recruitment, retention, and recognition of ECEs are integral to a high-quality and inclusive ELCC system. Other support staff, including untrained and entry-level educators, cooks, cleaners, and administrative staff, are also critical to the successful daily operations of programs.

In 2023, over 2,600 ECEs worked in licensed child care programs and an additional 1,000 ECEs worked in the Pre-Primary Program.

## **Support Systems Review**

As part of the 2021 to 2023 CWELCCA Action Plan, Nova Scotia committed to the creation of a central organization to manage and support regulated child care services. Upon further review and engagement with the sector and others, the creation of a new central organization has been paused for the time being while options are being evaluated. As part of the 2023 to 2026 Action Plan, Nova Scotia will use funding provided by the CWELCCA to undertake work required to understand the supports and services needed under a publicly funded and managed system of early learning and child care that responds to the needs of children, families, service providers, and partners. Nova Scotia will consult with families, service providers and other partners, using the findings to inform options for future funding agreements, ongoing system change, and possible future system supports.



## Engagement

Nova Scotia is committed to ongoing engagement to inform system transformation and evaluate changes to date. Throughout the past two years, Nova Scotia has utilized various engagement mechanisms across projects to ensure options, recommendations, and implementation are informed by those who are knowledgeable and impacted by the changes.

Engagement included multiple sector working groups, focus groups, surveys, and interviews with impacted individuals and groups such as ECEs, parents and caregivers, providers, and other subject matter experts. Information gathered through these engagements was key to advancing work related to various initiatives, including compensation, retirement and benefits, space expansion, affordability, quality, and inclusion, as well as the development of the 2023 to 2026 Action Plan. Moving forward, Nova Scotia will continue to rely on sector engagement to ensure Action Plan initiatives are supported by the best information possible, adapting and adjusting to best meet the needs of families and children.

### Minister's Engagement Table

In March 2022, the Minister's Engagement Table was created to bring together a broad and diverse group of individuals from across the sector to inform and support initiatives related to the transformation of Nova Scotia's ELCC System. The group meets approximately once per quarter. A list of members and meeting notes is available at <https://childcarenovascotia.ca>.

Representation of individuals on this table allows for a wide diversity of voices and backgrounds to inform initiatives related to transformation, including African Nova Scotian, Acadian and Mi'kmaw representation, and first-voices from the ECE profession and multiple service providers, all providing input and advice. Individual terms are one year, and participation is voluntary.

Nova Scotia would like to thank the Minister's Engagement Table members for volunteering their time and continuously providing invaluable feedback on Nova Scotia's journey forward. The 2023 to 2026 CWELCCA Action Plan was significantly shaped by the advice and feedback provided by the individuals who have participated on this table. We look forward to continued engagement with this group as we work to implement the 2023 to 2026 CWELCCA Action Plan.

### Public Engagement

A key commitment of the CWELCCA is for Nova Scotia to undergo broad public engagement. The purpose is to gather diverse perspectives and ensure feedback is considered when developing future plans and strategies. To this end, Nova Scotia has created a public engagement approach focusing on those who experience the system - families and primary caregivers - and those who enable the system - ECEs, providers, and certain interest groups.

The first phase of public engagement is planned for October 2023. It will focus on families and primary caregivers who currently have children enrolled in ELCC and those who will have children enrolled in the future – including those trying to access care. Consultation will include in-person community conversations, a survey, and an online exchange of ideas. The second public engagement phase is planned and will focus on ECEs, service providers, and other partners. Activities for this phase will for 2024 be shared publicly on the Province of Nova Scotia website when available [www.childcarenovascotia.ca](http://www.childcarenovascotia.ca).

Public consultation has been designed to ensure the perspectives of diverse and/or vulnerable children and families are heard, including children with disabilities and children needing enhanced or individual supports, Indigenous children, Black and other racialized children, children of newcomers, and official language minorities . This includes tailored in-person and online community conversations that focus discussions on the needs of these groups.

Information obtained through both phases of public consultation will inform many initiatives related to ELCC transformation, specifically those planned through the 2023 to 2026 CWELCCA Action Plan.

## **The Commitment to Nova Scotians**

### **Families**

Nova Scotia’s commitment to families is to create a high-quality, publicly managed and funded ELCC system that is more accessible, affordable, and inclusive. Through all initiatives, including those in this Action Plan supported by the CWELCCA, Nova Scotia commits to ensuring decisions are made in the best interest of children and families. Furthermore, the province commits to an ongoing focus on improving access to ELCC programs for all children, specifically children from diverse and/or vulnerable families and communities, including children with disabilities and children needing enhanced or individual supports, Indigenous children, Black and other racialized children, children of newcomers, and official language minorities. Nova Scotia will ensure accountability for public funding and commit to ongoing engagement as the system changes to better meet the needs of families and communities.

### **Service Providers**

As the province moves towards the development of a publicly funded and managed ELCC system, we acknowledge and value the contributions of all service providers. Working together, we offer services to meet the needs of families and children and create supportive environments for their growth.

We commit to focusing on sustainability during a time of transformation and change and to ongoing funding eligibility for all existing service providers. We also commit to continuing consultation and engagement as we build a system together so all Nova Scotia children have the opportunity to experience high-quality, affordable, and inclusive ELCC programs.

## 2023 to 2026 CWELCCA Financial Investment

It is estimated that Nova Scotia will receive \$440.4 million under the CWELCCA over the last three years of the agreement, including \$127.9 million in 2023–2024. This investment includes a fixed base amount of \$2 million per year, with the balance of the funding allocated based on Nova Scotia’s share of the national population of children aged 0 to 12 years. Allocations will be adjusted annually based on updated population estimates released by Statistics Canada, as outlined in section 4.2.4 of the CWELCCA.

*Table 1 - Total Allocations*

Year	Final Allocation
2021-2022	\$ 68,262,378
2022-2023	\$ 103,937,579
Subtotal	\$172,199,957

*Table 2 - Remaining Allocations*

Year	Estimated Allocation <sup>1</sup>
2023-2024	\$127,895,380
2024-2025	\$143,474,017
2025-2026	\$169,078,220
Subtotal	\$ 440,447,617
5-year Total	\$612,647,574

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<sup>1</sup> The estimated allocations for fiscal year 2023-2024 uses Statistics Canada's population estimates as of July 1, 2022. Estimated allocations will be updated yearly based on Statistics Canada's population estimates as of July 1 of the preceding fiscal year. Final allocations will be calculated using Statistics Canada's population estimates on July 1 of that fiscal year

## Previous Achievements

### Canada-Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Agreement

The Canada-Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (CWELCCA) provided \$172.2 million over the first two years of the agreement from 2021 to 2023. During this time, Nova Scotia made significant progress toward key goals and objectives in support of a shared vision for ELCC transformation. Achievements included:

- Reducing fees by an average of 50% for families with children attending regulated early learning and child care programs, which, when combined with the Child Care Subsidy Program, resulted in more than 3,000 families paying \$0 a day.
- As of March 31, 2023, the creation of 1,691 new spaces throughout Nova Scotia. New spaces include 377 in child care centres, 546 in family homes, and 768 in wrap-around programming.
- Implementation of a provincial wage scale for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) reflective of education and years of experience. This included:
  - Between 14-43% wage increases for ECEs;
  - Retroactive payments back to July 4, 2022;
  - Predictable future wage increases in line with other public sector employees;
  - A wage premium for advanced ECE practitioners; and
  - A continued commitment to support health and retirement benefits for ECEs.
- Implementation of a grant to recognize ECEs who provide family home child care.
- Increased wages for inclusion coordinators supported by increased funding for the Inclusion Support Grant (ISG).
- Reviewed and began the re-design of the Quality Matters Program.
- Creation of the Minister's Engagement Table comprised of 21 representatives to support and inform ELCC transformation.
- Creation and implementation of professional development modules to support learning about outdoor play and culturally responsive practices for ECEs was achieved in 2023.
- Implementation of the Advanced Practitioner Program (APP), a postgraduate in-service certificate program designed and delivered by NSCC. The APP will allow qualified ECEs to specialize and advance their knowledge and competence in a particular area of practice, such as infant and toddler care and learning, outdoor play, or pedagogical leadership.
- Ongoing interim funding to providers to help address rising operational costs, as well as the creation of an Operational Support Fund to support providers with demonstrated operational or financial needs.
- Workforce initiatives, such as the successful implementation of new ways for ECEs to obtain a diploma, for example, accelerated diploma programs, a Recognition of Prior Learning, a Mi'kmaw ECE Diploma Program, an Africentric ECE Diploma Program, virtual programs for hard-to-recruit areas and ongoing bursary support have been vital to growing the ECE workforce, increasing quality, and supporting the successful implementation of all CWELCCA initiatives. Workforce initiatives are funded by ELCCA.

## Affordability

Through the 2021 to 2023 CWELCCA Action Plan, Nova Scotia reduced program fees by an average of 25% in January 2022 and reached an average of 50% fee reduction in December 2022. As a result of fee reductions and support from the child care subsidy program, more than 3,000 families in Nova Scotia now access free early learning and child care (ELCC).

Nova Scotia continues its commitment to further reducing fees to \$10-a-day, on average, by March 2026, a key priority on our path to making ELCC more affordable for families through the 2023 to 2026 CWELCCA Action Plan.

## Reduced Child Care Fees

Nova Scotia remains focused on decreasing financial barriers for families to improve access to ELCC programming. Fee reductions are now being applied directly to child care fees for families in regulated programs based on a set fee reduction amount. Fee reductions are greatest for infant, toddler, and preschool-aged children and vary between program types, based on average fees, to increase system alignment. Through conditions in funding agreements with service providers, individual program fees previously determined by service providers were frozen in July 2021, and the fee reductions noted in Table 3 are deducted from these daily rates. Therefore, the reduced program fees paid by families after fee reductions vary based on the program fees that each service provider previously determined. The daily fee reduction amounts are:

*Table 3 - Fee Reduction Amounts as of December 31, 2022*

<b>50% Daily Fee Reduction Amounts</b>			
	<b>Child Care Centres</b>	<b>Family Home Child Care</b>	<b>Nova Scotia Before and After Program (NS-BAP)</b>
Infant	\$23.00	\$17.00	NA
Toddler	\$18.25	\$16.50	NA
Preschooler: Part Day	\$4.50	NA	NA
Preschooler: Full Day	\$18.25	\$16.50	NA
School Age: Full Day	\$10.00	\$16.50	NA
School Age: Before & After	\$6.00	\$6.00	\$4.25
School Age: After School	\$4.50	\$4.00	\$3.25
School Age: Before School	\$3.00	\$3.00	\$1.50

Based on enrollment and through the conditions of funding agreements, a bi-weekly fee reduction grant is provided to all funded service providers to fully cover the cost of fee reductions passed on to families. Funding for this grant is provided by the CWELCCA.

As part of the 2023 to 2026 Action Plan, Nova Scotia continues its commitment to families to implement an additional fee reduction by March 31, 2026, at which time it will target \$10-a-day, on average, for all regulated and funded programs. Implementation of this subsequent fee reduction will be coordinated with child care subsidy program changes and implementation of an operational funding model for service providers. Additional work on these programs will determine how the fee reduction is implemented and will be closely informed by input from families, service providers, and partners.

## Child Care Subsidy Program

While ongoing fee reductions have made accessing ELCC more affordable, financial barriers remain for many Nova Scotian families. The Child Care Subsidy Program assists eligible families with child care costs in licensed child care facilities, family homes, and the NSBAP. Families earning \$35,000/year or less are eligible for maximum per diems, while families earning between \$35,000-\$70,080/year are eligible for partial per diems. As of March 31, 2023, 5,400 children were supported to attend early learning and child care through this program, primarily due to provincial funding and supplemented by the ELCCA.

Nova Scotia initiated a review of the child care subsidy program in 2023, including its policies and processes, while considering future alignment with the commitment for \$10-a-day, on average, program fees. This review was supported by input from families, providers, partners, and program staff, including surveys and interviews.

The review is expected to be complete and recommendations targeted for implementation in 2024-2025. Usage of the program is expected to increase as new spaces become available through space expansion. Increased program usage will be funded by the 2023 to 2026 CWELCCA.

## Operational Funding

Currently, in Nova Scotia, service providers are funded through a series of annual grant programs related to fee reductions, wage compensation, inclusion support, and infant care. Since 2021, the province has implemented new funding for fee reduction grants and has increased funding for wages and infant care. In addition, funding has been provided to service providers to offset financial pressures related to the freeze on program fees.

As Nova Scotia moves towards creating an informed, coordinated, and accountable funding approach for child care centres, more work is planned to review, assess, and further determine funding required to support the delivery of high-quality and inclusive child care while ensuring the financial viability of service providers.

Beginning in 2024, Nova Scotia will engage a team of consultants to support the creation of a new operational funding model and plans to implement this new funding approach by March 2026 in alignment with the implementation of \$10-a-day, on average, program fees. Multiple factors, including sector and jurisdictional research, data analysis and modelling, consultation and engagement, and quality and service level standards, will inform this project. Given the landscape of the child care sector in Nova Scotia, with a mix of different provider types and service offerings, operational funding will need

to ensure appropriate levels of funding that allow for the continuation of quality programming to meet the needs of families.

While this funding model is developing, funding will continue to be available through the Operational Support Fund for service providers experiencing financial difficulties. This fund provides operational and/or financial assistance to centres when they have a demonstrated need. It is temporary support based on an operational and financial review.

*Table 4 - Affordability Investments*

<b>Program Initiative</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Fiscal year</b>	<b>Funding</b>
Fee Reduction	Average fee reduction	Maintain 50% on-average fee reduction until 2026. Implement \$10-a-day, on average, by March 31, 2026. <sup>4</sup>	2023 -2024	\$64,953,700
			2024-2025	\$76,702,850
			2025-2026	\$83,549,400
Child Care Subsidy Program	Number of incremental children receiving subsidy funding	780 children	2024-2025	\$4,881,000
		1,300 children	2025-2026	\$8,174,000
Operating Costs	Increased operational costs		2023-2024	\$12,694,000
			2024-2025	\$16,335,100
			2025-2026	\$18,664,400

<sup>4</sup> Following decision on the operational funding model, funding for implementation of \$10 a day, on average, post-March 31, 2026, will be reflected in future bilateral Agreements and Action Plans.





## Access

Ensuring families have the opportunity to access high-quality and inclusive ELCC programs is central to Nova Scotia’s vision for child care. Nova Scotia remains committed to the creation of 9,500 new regulated child care spaces by 2026. To achieve this, significant and strategic space creation is required. Successful space creation is the foundation of all 2023 to 2026 Action Plan commitments, requiring new expansion initiatives, partnerships, and increased focus on spaces in underserved and diverse and/or vulnerable communities who have historically been unable to access child care services.

In the fall of 2021, Nova Scotia issued an Expression of Interest (EOI) to existing not-for-profit service providers who wanted to expand. Through this process and other ongoing operational initiatives, as of March 31, 2023, Nova Scotia successfully created 1,691 spaces in regulated programs (377 in child care centres, 546 family homes, and 768 in wrap-around programs). As part of the original EOI process, many more spaces are expected to become operational over the 2023 to 2026 period. On a quarterly basis, Nova Scotia updates our progress towards achieving 9,500 new spaces on the Province of Nova Scotia’s website at [www.childcarenovascotia.ca](http://www.childcarenovascotia.ca).

Nova Scotia requires a multi-faceted strategy to meet our expansion goals. Nova Scotia has experienced challenges, including unprecedented construction costs, supply chain issues, and labour shortages in the construction industry, some of which have resulted in delays. However, Nova Scotia remains steadfast in finding creative and innovative solutions to ensure spaces become a reality as soon as possible for families.

Nova Scotia’s path forward involves diversifying space creation efforts through operational and strategic approaches and emphasizes partnerships with the public sector. In the short term, the province will focus on space creation efforts with not-for-profit service providers to utilize existing system capacity, increase public sector partnerships and continue investment in major infrastructure to create spaces in communities where ELCC is most needed. Additionally, Nova Scotia will continue improving its data management abilities to standardize and manage all available data to inform expansion efforts.

Table 5 – Space Creation Targets 2023-2026

<b>Child Care Setting</b>	<b>2023-2024</b>	<b>2024-2025</b>	<b>2025-2026</b>	<b>2023-2026 New spaces</b>
Centre-based spaces	1,302	1,055	450	2,807
Family Home spaces	402	550	600	1,552
Wrap-around spaces	1,296	1,500	1,500	4,296
<b>New Spaces</b>	<b>3,000</b>	<b>3,105</b>	<b>2,550</b>	<b>8,655*</b>
<i>*Combined with the 845 net new spaces created to March 31, 2023, achieves the goal of 9,500 new spaces.</i>				

While space expansion will continue to be focused on new not-for-profit spaces, existing commercial service providers remain integral to delivering high-quality child care services to Nova Scotia families. As the province continues its transition from a market-based child care system to one that is publicly

managed and funded, all current service providers will be supported to maintain their services and will continue to be eligible for operational funding. Additionally, all service providers will continue to be supported to adapt their existing spaces to best meet the needs of children and families.

## **Operational Space Creation Initiatives**

To achieve our space creation goals, Nova Scotia is continuing its focus on expansion initiatives aimed at increasing capacity with existing service providers and partners. Some service providers need smaller investments to increase spaces and rapidly expand. Projects supported through these initiatives will be of low to moderate complexity and leverage existing operational processes and system capacity. Nova Scotia will prioritize these service providers' willingness to expand to optimize and expedite space creation.

As part of this work, Nova Scotia will create an ongoing minor infrastructure funding program that will support expansion within existing child care facilities (including but not limited to minor renovations of new rooms, new equipment/fixtures/fittings that enable effective use of space), as well as review and assess additional offsite space for limited expansions. Nova Scotia will review the need for other expansion initiatives dependent on interest, successes, and assessments of changing conditions and opportunities.

Quality and affordable family home child care is a crucial pathway to care for many families, especially in more rural communities throughout the province. Through this Action Plan, Nova Scotia has targeted creating an additional 1,552 family home child care spaces. With the support of the CWELCCA, Nova Scotia will launch a recruitment campaign in 2023-2024 and a targeted financial incentive program to encourage new providers to join the system.

## **Wrap Around Program Expansion**

The Pre-Primary Program is a universal early learning program for 4-year-olds offered in the public school system and funded by the provincial government. To ensure families can enroll their children in this universally available and free program, families require quality wrap-around programming allowing for full-day care. Therefore, a key component of Nova Scotia's child care system is wrap-around programs offered through the Nova Scotia Before-and-After School Program (NSBAP). The NSBAP is a partnership between the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism, and Heritage and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD). The NSBAP provides affordable wrap-around care for families through fee reductions and child care subsidy program access.

As of March 31, 2023, the NSBAP has successfully expanded to create 768 new spaces. As part of the 2023 to 2026 CWELCCA, Nova Scotia continues to be focused on the growth of the NSBAP to support the creation of full day care for families. This is particularly important for children in the Pre-Primary and Primary Programs due to their inability to access many other before and after-school programs. This is why the NSBAP prioritizes 4-and 5-year-olds for all new admissions.

In the Halifax Regional Municipality, wrap-around program services are primarily provided by the EXCEL before-and-after-school program. This program supports over 4,000 children and is an integral part of existing wrap-around programming in the region. It has become evident that alignment between the

NSBAP and EXCEL programs is critical to building a healthy and thriving child care system that ensures families have equal access to the high-quality, inclusive, and affordable wrap-around care program that works best for them.

Therefore, the EXCEL program will become part of the NSBAP system. Fees will be aligned, and families will be eligible to apply for financial support through the child care subsidy program. New admissions will prioritize 4 and 5-year-old children. Aligning these programs is essential for ongoing child care system alignment and further supports the availability of full-day programming for families, particularly for those whose children attend or would like the opportunity to attend the Pre-Primary and Primary Programs.

Nova Scotia has targeted the creation of 4,296 new wrap-around program spaces through this Action Plan.

### **Transition Support (Not-for-Profit Pilot)**

The Not-for-Profit Transition Pilot will continue to support the province in stabilizing the ELCC system by maintaining existing spaces and preventing closures when a commercial service provider is looking to exit the system. Additionally, the program will support service providers who want to transition to a not-for-profit operating model, in some cases to set themselves up for future expansion. Nova Scotia does not require commercial service providers to transition to a not-for-profit model as a condition of funding. This pilot exists only to support those interested in exploring this model of service provision.

### **Non-Traditional Hours Pilot**

In 2023, Nova Scotia began work to develop a non-traditional hours of care pilot. This pilot will explore the feasibility of a new program model that supports extended and flexible hours of care for families who work non-traditional hours, including overnight and weekend hours. The pilot will explore how an extended care model could be implemented and funded in Nova Scotia. Evaluation of this pilot is ongoing.

### **Strategic Infrastructure Initiatives**

Initiatives that support long-term and sustainable strategic space expansion need to be flexible, adaptable, and creative to meet the needs of communities in a manner that ensures quality and inclusivity for families. Nova Scotia has been actively working towards identifying underserved regions and communities in the province with low ELCC coverage, particularly diverse and/or vulnerable populations and areas of high population growth. To target space creation in these areas, we will undertake major infrastructure funding initiatives prioritizing these regions and communities.

Through this work, Nova Scotia will support moderate to high-complexity initiatives that require partnership development and leverage existing public resources. Initiatives are currently under development that will support the creation of long-term and sustainable child care spaces.

In interviews and discussions with subject matter experts, it has been recognized that certain key enablers are essential to support long-term and sustainable space growth. These include the establishment of a child care demand planning model and continuous data management, planning toolkits for public partners and ongoing not-for-profit development to support their ability to undertake

and sustain space growth. Design guidelines have also been identified as key to supporting space expansion while ensuring spaces have purpose-built designs to allow for high-quality programs; these guidelines are currently under development.

## Public Partnerships

Public partnerships are critical to Nova Scotia’s future success in expanding quality and inclusive ELCC spaces. Access is a collective responsibility; therefore, we have increased focus on developing partnerships. We will work with public partners to optimize public investments, find efficiencies, leverage resources, and share existing knowledge when it comes to improving access. Taking a systematic and scalable approach is key to successful expansion; support from others outside of the existing sector will be needed. Partnership opportunities are currently being explored with other public sector organizations interested in space creation, including the healthcare sector, the public school system (through Regional Centres for Education and le Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial), public post-secondary institutions, and municipal governments.

## Space Expansion Funding

As Nova Scotia creates more spaces, ongoing operational funding will be available through CWELCCA, for service providers to support fee reductions, wages, operations and child care subsidies.

Table 6 - Access Investments

Program Initiative	Indicators	Targets*	Fiscal year	Funding
Space Expansion	Number of new licensed ELCC spaces (Child Care Centres and Family Home Child Care)	1,302 Centre Based Spaces	2023-2024	\$14,627,129
		402 Family Home Spaces		
	Number of new wrap-around spaces in regulated programs	1,296 Wrap-Around Program Spaces		
		1,055 Centre Based Spaces	2024-2025	
550 Family Home Spaces				
1,500 Wrap-Around Program Spaces				

		450 Centre Based Spaces 600 Family Home Spaces 1,500 Wrap-Around Program Spaces	2025-2026	\$13,197,727
Transition Support	Number of spaces supported through transition.	Transitions are voluntary.	2023-2024	\$4,000,000
			2024-2025	\$2,000,000
			2025-2026	\$2,000,000

\*Space targets are dependent upon access to contractors, skilled trades, building materials, and workforce.

## Quality

High-quality ELCC programs have a significant impact on the trajectory of young children. Quality must be at the forefront as Nova Scotia expands opportunities for children to access these programs. Highly educated, well-trained, and adequately compensated Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) play a pivotal role in establishing a high-quality ELCC system both provincially and nationwide.

Professional Development for ECEs remains a key focus to ensure continued education and ongoing professional growth. Funding to increase access to existing programs and create new initiatives is provided annually through the Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (ELCCA). Nova Scotia will continue to monitor the ECE workforce and support ongoing recruitment and retention initiatives and workforce programming, adapting and adjusting when possible and required.

## Compensation Framework

The Early Childhood Educator (ECE) workforce is critical to sustainably growing a quality ELCC system. In early 2023, Nova Scotia had over 2,695 ECEs working throughout the province in licensed child care centres and an additional 1,000 ECEs working in the Pre-Primary Program.

For ECEs working in provincially funded and licensed child care centres, as part of early commitments in November 2022, Nova Scotia successfully implemented a provincial wage scale that reflects education and years of experience. Most ECEs received a wage increase in the range of 14-43%, retroactive to July 4, 2022. Additionally, ECEs will now experience wage adjustments in line with the broader public sector.

Wages for ECEs who work in the provincial Pre-Primary Program are set through collective bargaining and vary across Nova Scotia.

*Table 7- Provincial ECE Wage Scale*

<b>Provincial ECE Wage Scale</b>					
<b>(Effective April 1, 2023)</b>					
<b>Position and Level</b>	<b>Years of Experience</b>				
	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>1-2</b>	<b>2-3</b>	<b>3-4</b>	<b>4-5+</b>
Director - Level 1	\$23.61	\$24.31	\$25.04	\$25.79	\$26.56
Director - Level 2 / School Age	\$25.73	\$26.50	\$27.30	\$28.11	\$28.95
Director - Level 3	\$26.79	\$27.59	\$28.42	\$29.27	\$30.15
Assistant Director / Inclusion Coordinator - Level 1	\$21.64	\$22.29	\$22.96	\$23.65	\$24.35
Assistant Director / Inclusion Coordinator /	\$23.59	\$24.29	\$25.02	\$25.77	\$26.54

Home Consultant - Level 2 / School Age					
Assistant Director / Inclusion Coordinator / Home Consultant - Level 3	\$24.56	\$25.29	\$26.05	\$26.83	\$27.63
ECE - Level 1	\$19.67	\$20.26	\$20.87	\$21.50	\$22.13
ECE - Level 2 / School Age	\$21.43	\$22.08	\$22.74	\$23.42	\$24.13
ECE - Level 3	\$22.32	\$22.99	\$23.68	\$24.39	\$25.12

As part of providing a comprehensive compensation framework to support the recruitment and retention of qualified staff, Nova Scotia has committed to implementing employee health and retirement benefits for ECEs. Planning is ongoing and being informed by a sector working group that has broad representation. Public announcement is targeted for 2023-2024.

### ECE Certification

Currently, Nova Scotia has an ECE classification system, and through the support of the ELCCA and Early Childhood Workforce funding, the province has been on the path to exploring a new ECE certification model. Options have been developed, and implementation planning will be done in close consultation with ECEs, post-secondary institutions, service providers, and other partners.

As part of professionalizing the ECE workforce, Nova Scotia has also continued to focus on increasing the percentage of classified ECEs working in regulated child care to 70% by 2025-2026. Through various workforce funding initiatives, partnerships with post-secondary institutions, bursaries and recruitment campaigns, and the introduction of a wage scale for ECEs in November 2022, Nova Scotia is expected to continue to increase the number of classified ECEs working in the sector.

### Quality Matters

Quality Matters (QM) is a provincial quality improvement program created in 2018 for provincially funded and licensed child care centres. This evidence-based program is used to ensure that centres receiving funding meet specific requirements related to regulatory compliance, funding accountability and program quality. QM was developed to reflect research and international best practices to support quality improvements in regulated child care environments and ensure children’s high-quality early childhood education experiences.

Through support provided by 2021 to 2023 CWELCCA funding, an evaluation of the QM program was completed, with results recommending a re-design of the program, including a greater focus on cultural responsiveness, additional quantitative measures of quality, and expansion of the self-reflection and goal-setting processes. The re-designed program will be piloted across licensed child care settings in 2023-2024.

Moving forward, Nova Scotia will implement these new programs and increase participation. Sector engagement occurring in 2023-2024 will support the QM implementation planned for 2024-2025.

Table 8 - Quality Investments

<b>Program Initiative</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Fiscal year</b>	<b>Funding</b>
ECE Certification	Percentage of ECEs providing regulated child care in the province who fully meet certification requirements	70% of ECEs providing regulated child care in the province who fully meet certification requirements by 2025-2026	2023-2024 to 2025-2026	From ELCCA
Compensation Framework	Implementation of ECE health and retirement benefits for all ECEs working in licensed programs	Implementation of health and retirement benefits for all provincially licensed and funded child care centres by 2024-2025	2023-2024	\$35,165,000
	Number and percentage of child care centres participating in the benefits program	All provincially licensed and funded child care centres have access to a health and retirement benefits plan by 2024-2025	2024-2025	\$35,299,000
	Number and percentage of child care centres participating in the retirement savings program	All provincially licensed and funded child care centres and family home agencies receive wage support funding	2025-2026	\$35,436,000
	Number of child care centres and family home agencies receiving wage support funding			



	Continued maintenance and enhancement of the wage scale for all ECEs, directors, inclusion coordinators, assistant directors, and family home consultants	Continued maintenance and enhancement of the wage scale for all ECEs, directors, inclusion coordinators, assistant directors, and family home consultants		
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## Inclusion

When children participate in quality and inclusive ELCC programs, they develop confidence, creativity, problem-solving skills, and healthy relationships with others by actively exploring their environment through play. Nova Scotia continues its commitment to creating an inclusive culture within its ELCC system where every child, regardless of their ability, socioeconomic status, gender, or cultural background, can participate, learn, and grow.

Nova Scotia has invested in ELCC programs to help them be more inclusive, such as the inclusion support grant (ISG) and pyramid model training. However, there is still work to be done to ensure that all children, including children with disabilities and children needing enhanced or individual supports, Indigenous children, Black and other racialized children, children of newcomers, and official language minorities have the support and opportunity to participate in high-quality ELCC programs. While data infrastructure is developed and implemented, Nova Scotia commits to continued dialogue with diverse and/or vulnerable families and communities to ensure the early learning and child care system meets their needs and becomes increasingly inclusive.

## Inclusion Strategy

To date, inclusion initiatives have included funding for developmental intervention services, professional development, and grants for individual service providers to deliver inclusive programming and support to children and families. However, a provincial plan is required to ensure support achieves our intended inclusion outcomes for children.

A key element of Nova Scotia's 2023-2024 ELCCA Action Plan includes the creation of a provincial inclusion strategy. Beginning in 2024, Nova Scotia will create a long-term inclusion strategy that focuses on respect for diversity and strives for equity, inclusion, and accessibility across the ELCC system. The results of this strategy will support ongoing professional learning for educators and leaders and program and policy changes to ensure all children have access to, can participate in, and develop a sense of belonging within ELCC programs.

Nova Scotia does not collect personal information on children attending ELCC programs. As we work to better support the needs of families and children, Nova Scotia will need to collect the personal information necessary to ensure programs and services are responsive to the needs of those we serve and that early learning and child care spaces are available for all children. Data collection will be enabled through the development of information technology (IT) solutions to ensure the consistent and confidential collection of information. More information on the creation of new IT systems is available in the administration section of this Action Plan.

## Inclusion Support

Since 2018, Nova Scotia has offered the Inclusion Support Grant (ISG) to over 300 child care centres each year. The grant is intended to facilitate the participation of all children in their community by providing funding to service providers to create and sustain inclusive programs focusing on diversity, equity, and quality through enhanced ratios and targeted training.

In 2022, Nova Scotia raised wages and implemented a new wage scale that recognized education and years of experience for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) working in provincially funded child care

centres. Funded by and as part of this work, an increased wage was created for Inclusion coordinators supported by the ISG. The wage scale for Inclusion Coordinators is available below:

Table 9 - Wage Scale

<b>Inclusion Coordinator Wage Scale</b>					
<b>(Effective April 1, 2023)</b>					
<b>ECE Level</b>	<b>Years of Experience</b>				
	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>1-2</b>	<b>2-3</b>	<b>3-4</b>	<b>4-5+</b>
Level 1	\$21.64	\$22.29	\$22.96	\$23.65	\$24.35
Level 2	\$23.59	\$24.29	\$25.02	\$25.77	\$26.54
Level 3	\$24.56	\$25.29	\$26.05	\$26.83	\$27.63

Moving forward, Nova Scotia will continue to provide the ISG for all existing and new provincially funded child care centres that are eligible. As part of developing the provincial inclusion strategy, this grant will be reviewed to ensure it meets its objectives and adequately funds service providers to achieve intended goals.

### Development Intervention Services

Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services (NSECDIS) provides province-wide specialized services to families of young children (birth to school entry) who either have a biological risk for or a diagnosis of developmental delay. NSECDIS is fully funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development with support from the CWELCCA and ELCCA.

NSECDIS serves thousands of families each year through the provision of four core services: child development support, case coordination and partnerships, family support, and capacity-building transition support. Through the first two years of the CWELCCA, Nova Scotia was able to support NSECDIS to increase services for families and plans to continue this support into the future.

### Pyramid Model

Since 2018, Nova Scotia has supported the implementation of the Pyramid Model, an evidenced-based, positive behaviour support framework for the early years to support and promote social and emotional development and address challenging behaviours. The Pyramid Model organizes evidence-based practices that include:

1. Universal promotion practices for all children
2. Practices for children who need targeted social-emotional supports
3. Supports for children demonstrating persistent challenging behaviour.

Implementing the Pyramid Model will build the ability of staff, administrators, and parents to support and enhance children’s development and skills. Currently, 112 licensed child care and Pre-Primary

Programs are at various stages of Pyramid Model implementation, and it can take up to five (5) years to reach program-wide implementation.

As part of the CWELCCA, Nova Scotia will further expand the pyramid model by onboarding new sites, supporting existing sites to reach program-wide implementation, and creating a plan to fully implement the Pyramid Model in every licensed child care, Pre-Primary Program and family home child care program across the province, including offering training to NSBAP staff working at Pyramid Model sites.

Table 10 - Inclusion Investments

<b>Program Initiative</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Fiscal year</b>	<b>Funding</b>
Inclusion Support	Number of licensed child care centres supported by the ISG	95% of all provincially funded child care centres by 2025-2026	2024-2025	\$8,608,910
			2025-2026	\$8,608,910
Development Intervention Services and Pyramid Model	ELCC participation rate of children on ECDIS caseload	50% of children participating in ELCC programs by 2025-2026	2023-2024	\$5,411,000
			2024-2025	\$7,303,000
	Number of new ELCC program participating in Pyramid Model training	30 new ELCC programs participating in Pyramid Model training by 2025-2026	2025-2026	\$8,053,00
	Number of ELCC programs participating in Pyramid Model and reaching program wide implementation	30 sites reach program wide implementation and 2 demonstration sites by 2025-2026		

## Indigenous Partnership

To support Nova Scotia's First Nations/Indigenous communities' right to self-governance and self-determination, Nova Scotia remains committed to working in collaboration with First Nations and other relevant partners (federal partners and provincial partners) toward a plan to ensure that First Nations/Indigenous children in Nova Scotia, both on and off Indigenous communities, have access to affordable, high-quality, inclusive, and culturally appropriate ELCC. Nova Scotia will continue to engage key partners in ongoing conversations to share resources and work together on a path forward to explore shared priorities under the CWELCCA and the Indigenous ELCC framework. Since the beginning of the CWELCCA in 2021, Nova Scotia has been working to improve professional education and coordination in partnership with Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK), and through discussions with Tajikeyimik, and the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat to support an understanding of partnership opportunities.

In 2021, a new bursary program was introduced to provide financial support to students in ECE diploma programs. Students in underrepresented groups, including Mi'kmaw students, receive supplemental funding and continue to be prioritized for bursary funding to support their Early Childhood Education diploma/degree studies. Also, in 2021, EECD provided funding to local colleges to offer an accelerated diploma program for early childhood educators (ECEs) working in the sector. This included funding the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) to provide free diploma training to Mi'kmaw ECEs working across the province. The Mi'kmaw program was developed in collaboration with NSCC's Mi'kmaw faculty and partners.

In 2022-2023, EECD partnered with MK and the NSCC to fund, develop and launch a Mi'kmaw Early Childhood Development Diploma program (launched September 2023). MK supported the recruitment for this program in Mi'kmaw nations across the province. EECD provided full bursaries for students in this first cohort.

Furthermore, as part of EECD's professional development initiatives for ECEs, Nova Scotia partnered with the EECD's Mi'kmaw Services Branch in 2022 to provide the Mi'kmaw Ways of Being and Knowing workshop to ECE's across the province, an initiative that will continue to be offered in 2023-2024.

In January 2023, EECD launched the Culturally Responsive Practice modules for ECEs, which support the Early Learning Curriculum Framework. The modules were developed in collaboration with and are being delivered by Nova Scotia's Mi'kmaw and African Nova Scotia community partners. In 2023-2024, EECD is partnering with Indigenous consultants to create two additional professional development modules: Culturally Responsive Practice for Leaders and Land-based Learning. These modules support Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework, which is currently being reviewed to reflect principles of culturally responsive practice. Mi'kmaw scholars and community partners have been involved as part of the working group. This revision work started in 2021, and the revised framework will be implemented in 2023-2024.

## Administration

Up to 10% of the CWELCCA Federal funding may be used to support the implementation and administration of the agreement. Administration includes costs such as auditing, additional staffing to support the implementation of initiatives, engagement to ensure ongoing consultation and discussion, including the Minister's Engagement Table, and marketing-related expenses.

Consulting services for ongoing project support have also been included and will cost about \$5M over the next three years; this support will help projects such as operational funding, support systems review, and project management. Depending on the project and topic, subject matter expertise is required to supplement available resources and ensure the most informed outcomes are achieved.

All funding will be allocated to carry out initiatives outlined within the 2023 to 2026 CWELCCA Action Plan.

## Information Technology and Data Management

Implementing the Canada-Wide agreement is driving a transformational shift in how service providers are funded, moving from a primarily privately funded model to a publicly funded one. The type and nature of data collection are changing, new programming and service offerings are being explored, the level of funding is expanding, and new expectations are driving a need for greater transparency and accountability.

CWELCCA commits Nova Scotia to share financial and administrative data needed to monitor progress in establishing the Canada-wide system.

Nova Scotia's existing technology system is outdated and cannot be modified to meet the requirements of a publicly funded system of child care. Significant investments are planned to acquire and implement a new technology solution that will provide enhanced digital capabilities to improve service delivery and administration, communication, case management, workforce and professional learning, access to data and information, and reporting and evaluation.

Detailed business requirements will be drafted during the 2023-2024 fiscal year and will inform a procurement process to secure a technology solution. Pending the successful completion of the process, Nova Scotia will work with the solution provider to design, configure, test, and implement the new system.

## Annual Census

Nova Scotia employs a variety of data collection methods to fulfill the CWELCCA's annual requirement to conduct a comprehensive census of service providers. Each year, service providers must submit detailed annual financial reports to account for funding utilization, income, and expenditures. Additionally, Nova Scotia collects bi-weekly data from service providers through the fee reduction and wage support grant submission process, which includes information on children enrolled in and staff employed by these programs.

Engagement with service providers has been key to our success thus far and remains a fundamental component of our future strategy. All projects and initiatives affecting service providers incorporate targeted or widespread engagement plans, which play a crucial role in guiding our future direction. Additionally, as information management systems continue to evolve, the ease of obtaining data from

service providers will increase, further enhancing our ability to share current state information and inform the next steps. Information received through these efforts will be shared with Canada through the annual reporting process.

*Table 11 - Administration Investments*

<b>Program Initiative</b>	<b>Fiscal year</b>	<b>Funding</b>
Administration (Audit, Marketing, Staffing, Consulting Support, Engagement)	2023-2024	\$5,393,245
	2024-2025	\$6,257,773
	2025-2026	\$6,391,145
Information Technology and Data Management	2024-2025	\$3,000,000
	2025-2026	\$2,000,000

## Action Plan Investment Summary

Summary of initiatives and investments supported by the CWELCCA for fiscal years 2023-2024, 2024-2025 and 2025-2026.

Table 12 – Summary of Investments

<b>CWELCCA 2023 to 2026 Action Plan Initiatives</b>			
<b>Initiative</b>	<b>2023-2024</b>	<b>2024-2025</b>	<b>2025-2026</b>
<b>Affordability</b>			
Fee Reduction	\$64,953,700	\$76,702,850	\$83,549,400
Child Care Subsidy Program		\$4,881,000	\$8,174,000
Operating Costs	\$12,694,000	\$16,335,100	\$18,664,400
<b>Access</b>			
Space Expansion	\$14,627,129	\$16,620,000	\$13,197,727
Transition Support	\$4,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000
<b>Quality</b>			
Compensation Framework	\$35,165,000	\$35,299,000	\$35,436,000
<b>Inclusion</b>			
Inclusion Support		\$8,608,910	\$8,608,910
Development Intervention Service and Pyramid Model	\$5,411,000	\$7,303,000	\$8,053,000
<b>Administration</b>			
Administration	\$5,393,245	\$6,257,773	\$6,391,145
Information Technology		\$3,000,000	\$2,000,000
<b>Totals</b>			
Expenditures	\$142,244,074	\$177,007,633	\$186,074,582
Carry Forward Allocation Prior Year	\$64,878,672	\$50,529,978	\$16,996,362