



# INDIGENOUS EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

FRAMEWORK

*“ The Framework was co-developed with Indigenous partners following a comprehensive national engagement process... Through this process, thousands of Indigenous people provided their vision of ELCC for their children, families, communities and cultures. ”*

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

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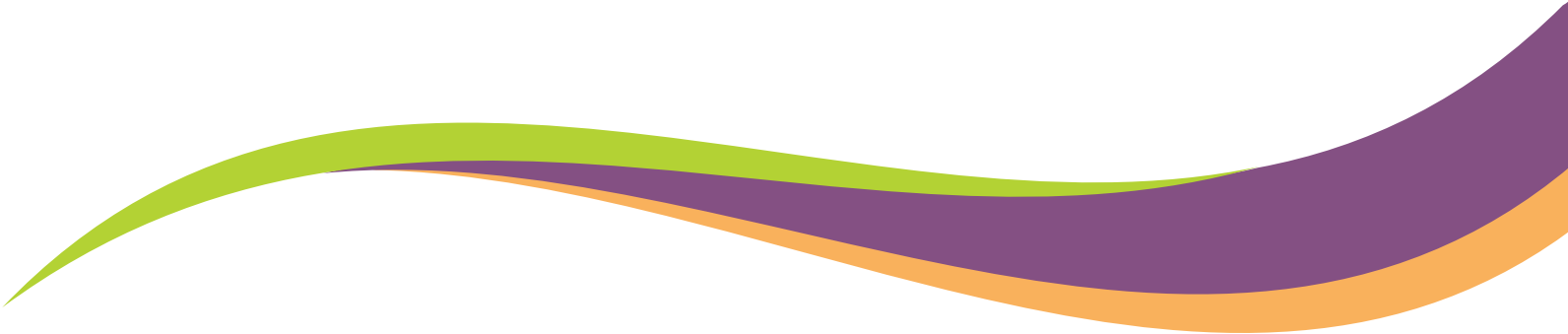
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# **INDIGENOUS EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE**

**FRAMEWORK**







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## PREAMBLE

The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework represents the Government of Canada and Indigenous peoples' work to co-develop a transformative Indigenous framework that reflects the unique cultures, aspirations and needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children across Canada.

The Framework sets out a shared vision, principles and a path forward for Indigenous early learning and child care—a Canada where all Indigenous children have the opportunity to experience high-quality, culturally rooted early learning and child care programming.

Alongside a distinctions-based approach that respects the specific priorities of First Nations, Inuit and the Métis Nation, the Framework describes an overarching vision for a comprehensive and coordinated early learning and child care system led by Indigenous peoples, establishes shared principles, and includes specific gender and geographic considerations that represent the views of all Indigenous children and families.

The Framework provides a commitment to collaborate, through real partnerships with Indigenous peoples, enabling Indigenous-led early learning and child care programming for their children and families. It points a way to a present and future where Indigenous peoples determine the programs and services their children need and where all Indigenous children grow up in an enriching environment that helps them meet their full potential.

This is the foundational, shared framework for what is a truly transformative path forward focused on fostering a network of supports for the unique aspirations and needs of Indigenous communities, families and their children. The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework is, and will continue to be, a shared journey towards transformation—in the spirit of partnership, respect and reconciliation.

## INTRODUCTION

Children hold a sacred place in the cultures of Indigenous peoples. With that comes a sacred responsibility to care for them. High-quality, culturally-specific and well-supported early learning and child care (ELCC) programs, services and supports that are specifically designed for and with Indigenous families and communities will make a genuine difference in the early experiences of children. This, in turn, will support children's development and life outcomes. High-quality Indigenous ELCC programming empowers young children with a strong sense of identity. It provides educational opportunities and school readiness and contributes to their overall health and wellness from early years into adulthood.

ELCC programs can holistically support parents and families to participate in their cultures and languages. Programs provide access to information and resources, connections to community, alignment to unique health, education and social needs, and child care for children while parents participate in traditional lifestyles, work, training, education and other facets of their lives. For the purposes of this Framework, Indigenous ELCC includes a wide range of programs and activities designed to support children aged 0 to 6 in their development, learning and cultural identity. Indigenous ELCC programs and activities aim to support culturally-based language, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and physical development in the home, in a preschool or nursery school, or in a home child care or daycare setting.

This Indigenous ELCC Framework sets the stage for Indigenous governance of improved and new systems of ELCC policy, programs and supports for Indigenous children and families, now and in the future. Its development has been informed by the extensive work of expert working groups, reports and engagement processes on Indigenous ELCC over many years. The Framework was co-developed with Indigenous partners following a comprehensive national engagement process during spring and summer 2017, which consisted of more than one hundred engagement sessions across the country. Through this process, thousands of Indigenous people provided their vision of ELCC for their children, families, communities and cultures.

The engagement sessions, events and activities were led by dozens of national, regional and community-level Indigenous governments and organizations, as well as by the Government of Canada. In order to hear the voices of a variety of people who participate in the complex system of Indigenous ELCC at many levels, the engagements invited a broad range of input from individuals, communities and families, including early childhood educators, service providers, and Indigenous leadership, governments and Elders. This process sought to inform a more comprehensive understanding of existing Indigenous ELCC systems and programs in order to identify their strengths and service gaps, and to articulate a vision that will guide new approaches for Indigenous ELCC.

Above all, the engagement process confirmed the value of ELCC programs to the health and wellbeing, the spiritual, social and educational development, and the language and cultural revitalization of Indigenous children and families. It also identified a range of complexities in the landscape for Indigenous ELCC, which is characterized by a number of policy regimes, programs, and supports across several jurisdictions, with differing benefits and challenges and variable levels of services and participation in different regions and communities. Participants in the engagement sessions spoke of the challenges of offering and accessing reliable, high-quality ELCC programs and services in a context of unstable or insufficient funding, and lack of continuity or alignment in a patchwork of programs or services offered by many different entities. Participants indicated that for many Indigenous children and families, there is limited availability of or lack of access to culturally-relevant ELCC.

The unanimous recognition of the importance of ELCC for Indigenous children and families throughout the engagement sessions reaffirms and echoes the findings of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the need to honour the rights and obligations set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration). In regards to children, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended that “all Aboriginal children, regardless of status or location, have access to dynamic, culture-based early childhood education.” The Declaration sets out the recognition “*in particular* [of] the right of indigenous families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child.” These principles and rights are reinforced by the finding of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures is critical to healing and reconciliation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls on all levels of government to “develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.” Overall, it describes reconciliation as a process of healing, creating a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health and economic outcomes, and taking constructive action in a new relationship. These actions require political will, Indigenous governance, joint leadership, trust-building, capacity development supports, accountability, transparency and significant new investment.

A photograph of several young children sitting around a table in a classroom or activity room, engaged in a craft or drawing project. They are focused on their work, with some looking at their drawings and others at their hands. The room is brightly lit and has a casual, educational atmosphere.

# PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK

This Framework provides a guide for communities, program administrators, service providers, policy makers and governments to work towards achieving a shared vision that all Indigenous children have the opportunity to experience high-quality, culturally-strong ELCC.

Alongside distinctions-based priorities and relationships, this Framework sets out principles and goals for Indigenous ELCC in order to better respond to and support the needs, responsibilities and aspirations of all Indigenous children and families across Canada regardless of where they live. It also recognizes the importance of implementing distinctions-based frameworks based on the rights, interests and circumstances of First Nations, Inuit and the Métis Nation.

This Framework is meant to support, coordinate and guide the design, delivery and governance of Indigenous ELCC that is anchored in self-determination, centred on children and grounded in culture, through new policies, processes, partnerships, authorities, capacities, programs and investments that will strengthen Indigenous ELCC in Canada.



## VISION

This Framework envisions First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and families as happy and safe, imbued with a strong cultural identity. It sees children and families supported by a comprehensive and coordinated system of ELCC policies, programs and services that are led by Indigenous peoples, rooted in Indigenous knowledges, cultures and languages, and supported by strong partnerships of holistic, accessible and flexible programming that is inclusive of the needs and aspirations of Indigenous children and families.





# PRINCIPLES

These cross-cutting and shared principles stem from national and regional engagement processes and aim to offer a foundation to collectively strengthen Indigenous ELCC.

## **1. Indigenous Knowledges, Languages and Cultures**

Realizing the crucial importance of Indigenous ELCC that is rooted in distinct Indigenous cultures, languages and knowledges, as the foundation from which children form their individual and collective identity, and as an essential component of wellbeing.

## **2. First Nations, Inuit and Métis Determination**

Acknowledging that First Nations, Inuit and the Métis are distinct peoples with rights to self-determination including the right to control the design, delivery and administration of an Indigenous ELCC system that reflects their unique needs, priorities and aspirations.

## **3. Quality Programs and Services**

Led by Indigenous peoples, creating culturally-appropriate and distinct ELCC programs and services that are grounded in Indigenous cultures and delivered through a holistic approach that supports the wellness of children and families in safe, nurturing and well-resourced programs and environments. Providing culturally-competent, well-educated, trained and well-compensated early childhood educators in healthy, equitable and supportive work environments.

## **4. Child and Family-Centred**

Understanding the child in the context of family and prioritizing the direct involvement of families in the delivery of a continuum of programs, services and supports, from prenatal to school age and beyond. Supporting families to heal from past and present trauma.

**5. Inclusive**

Taking into account and building upon the diversity of Indigenous children and families, creating ELCC programs that include a range of supports to respond to children's, families' and communities' diverse abilities (including physical, psychological and developmental abilities), geographic locations and socio-economic circumstances.

**6. Flexible and Adaptable**

Enabling and supporting flexible ELCC programs and services that are responsive to the unique needs of a child, family or community.

**7. Accessible**

Supporting access to affordable ELCC programs and services for all Indigenous children and families who require them.

**8. Transparent and Accountable**

Designing, delivering and funding ELCC in ways that are accountable to children, families, communities and partners; sharing data in transparent and ethically appropriate ways, with reciprocal and mutual accountability between those who are collaborating to design, deliver and fund services.

**9. Respect, Collaboration and Partnerships**

With Indigenous peoples leading the way, strengthening and fostering new and emerging partnerships and collaborations at multiple levels, across sectors, with numerous players in program design and delivery to achieve shared goals. Recognizing that no one program can meet all the needs of children and their families, fostering a network of supports based on community needs and creating opportunities to support Indigenous families and communities to care for their children in more comprehensive, holistic, effective and efficient ways.



## **DISTINCTIONS-BASED FRAMEWORKS**

Recognizing the importance of a distinctions-based approach in ensuring that the rights, interests and circumstances of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation are acknowledged, affirmed, and implemented, this Framework supports distinct First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation frameworks that represent their respective vision, goals and priorities. Implementation will be a collaborative effort over several years, through ongoing, open dialogue and mutual effort with the many organizations, governments, and sectors involved in supporting improvements and changes to the governance, structures, systems, policies and content of ELCC programs and supports for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation children, families and communities.





LE DEBUT DU DAUPHIN

Le dauphin est un mammifère marin.

Il vit dans l'eau.







# FIRST NATIONS EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE FRAMEWORK

First Nations have an inherent and sacred responsibility for their children and families. Children hold a unique and sacred place in First Nations families, communities, and nations; they are gifts from the Creator. A First Nations ELCC framework must begin and end with children and their families, in the languages and cultures passed down through the generations, and through authorities governed by First Nations themselves for their own peoples and futures. They believe that children are imbued with the ways of knowing and being of their collectives, and in this way they ensure the survival of Indigenous cultures (Little Bear, 2000).

First Nations envision a system of diverse, high-quality programs and services that lays the foundation for the health and well-being of First Nations children, provides choices for families, and revitalizes and supports the cultural continuity of First Nations communities and nations. This vision is achieved through a First Nations-led ELCC system of programs and services that are designed and governed by First Nations; rooted in First Nations knowledge, language and culture; guided by Indigenous practices in childhood development; and strengthened by partnerships with governments, service delivery organizations and community members.

## FIRST NATIONS PRINCIPLES AND GOALS

First Nations propose the following principles and goals for a First Nations ELCC system:

- 1.** A First Nations ELCC system of programs and services that is anchored in distinct First Nations knowledges, languages and cultures and responds to First Nations priorities, needs and responsibilities.
- 2.** A First Nations ELCC system that is controlled and directed by First Nations, including authority and decision-making at all levels of policy development, and funding allocations and governance, with reciprocal accountability.
- 3.** Well-funded ELCC programs, services and supports that are diverse and of high quality, as evidenced in children's programming and learning, physical environments, Elders' leadership, well trained staff who earn equitable wages, and family and community engagement.
- 4.** ELCC programs and services that are available, affordable, flexible and responsive to the unique needs of First Nations children and their families, including flexible funding approaches that respond to community needs and provide supports for children and families with diverse and exceptional needs.
- 5.** Programs and services that are transparent and accountable.
- 6.** Collaborations and partnerships that support the establishment of a coordinated, integrated First Nations-led ELCC system of policies, programs, services and supports, including national and regional linkages between relevant departments, governments, nations, and related sectors.
- 7.** First Nations capacity that is supported at national, regional and community levels to successfully establish and guide a First Nations ELCC system.

## PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC ACTIONS

First Nations have identified priorities and strategic actions over the short, medium and long term for realizing change in ELCC structures, systems and programs. These priorities and strategic actions are likewise intended to achieve the goals identified above:

- 1.** Create regional ELCC structures to support and coordinate First Nations governance in ELCC. Coordination structures would be determined and mandated regionally.
- 2.** First Nations leadership to guide and direct regional coordination and support for programs and services, community engagement, quality support, partnerships and accountability.
- 3.** Articulate a formal statement of quality for First Nations ELCC.
- 4.** Enhance and expand existing ELCC programs for First Nations children and families, and create new ones according to First Nations priorities.
- 5.** Develop resources or curricula content for ELCC programs that convey the cultures, languages and developmental needs of children and families they serve.
- 6.** Establish standards, regulations and licensing based in First Nations knowledge systems.
- 7.** Create a First Nations human resource strategy that promotes and builds on the existing capacities of First Nations communities.
- 8.** Develop measures towards improved education and certification of early childhood educators in accredited First Nations ELCC programs, and provide culturally appropriate professional development opportunities for ELCC directors, managers, early childhood educators and other staff.
- 9.** Influence post-secondary institutions to include First Nations early childhood education ECE content and culturally appropriate curricula.
- 10.** Establish measures to maintain facilities in good repair and where necessary renovate or construct new ELCC facilities.
- 11.** Establish a process for ongoing community engagement to inform ELCC program and policy development and decision-making.



- 12.** Develop appropriate and long-term funding approaches and processes that support a high-quality, regionally-based First Nations ELCC system among its interconnected parts, based on communities' needs and priorities, and with First Nations-led funding allocations that are determined by First Nations at the national and regional levels.
- 13.** Create and promote respectful linkages and partnerships at multiple levels and in varied contexts that support a coordinated system of ELCC programs and services for First Nations children and families.
- 14.** Establish reciprocal accountability, research and evaluation frameworks to support promising practice and innovations in First Nations ELCC policies, programs and services.
- 15.** Support First Nations capacities development in ELCC systems, programs and practices at national, regional and local levels.





# INUIT EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE FRAMEWORK

Inuit view ELCC as an opportunity for cultural revitalization that holds the possibility of connecting Inuit with their land, culture, language, and histories. It is also a significant step towards self-determination, reconciliation, and cultural revitalization. The Inuit vision is an ELCC system that provides the best possible start to life for Inuit children, including the opportunity to learn and speak Inuktitut, to grow up prepared to live a harmonious life rooted in Inuit ways of knowing, and to be equipped to participate in Canadian society. The vision, guiding principles and recommendations from Inuit engagement sessions clearly articulated that an Inuit-centred ELCC system must be self-determined.

## INUIT GOALS AND PRINCIPLES

Inuit propose the following goals and principles to guide the creation of an Inuit ELCC system:

- 1.** An Inuit ELCC system that is grounded in Inuktut and Inuit culture.
- 2.** Inuit have self-determination in the development, design, and delivery of programs and services for Inuit children and families.
- 3.** ELCC programs that are high quality and are defined by Inuit; created by Inuit; rooted in Inuit culture, traditions and values; and are provided in Inuktut (the Inuit language).
- 4.** Flexible Inuit ELCC programming that is adaptable and respectful of regional and community diversity.
- 5.** Program design and planning that is inclusive of collaboration amongst Inuit and government stakeholders, and supports the best interests of Inuit children and families.
- 6.** Affordable Inuit ELCC programming that is available in all Inuit regions and communities, recognizing the high cost of living in remote and northern locations.
- 7.** All Inuit children and families have access to holistic ELCC programming (programs support families, and barriers to access are reduced), regardless of location or cost.

## INUIT PRIORITIES, STRATEGIES, AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Inuit have identified the following priorities and strategies to reach the above goals:

- 1.** Enable greater Inuit self-determination by exploring renewed fiscal policies, including the Inuit Nunangat Fiscal Policy Space, which supports flexible, integrated, long-term funding approaches that are directed by Inuit and enhance Inuit ELCC and family wellness, and provide choice and autonomy for Inuit in meeting the needs of their communities.
- 2.** Introduce policies and practices so that educators, child care managers, Elders, program providers and staff working in ELCC are valued, compensated and recognized for the integral role they play in supporting positive early childhood development. Inuit ELCC programs and services should be supported by reliable and consistent funding, taking into account the high cost of living in Inuit Nunangat. ELCC programs should aim to model employer best practices, including equitable compensation for women, provision of benefits and stability, as well as a pay scale based on education and experience.
- 3.** Develop Inuit-specific early childhood development curriculum materials and teaching tools that are grounded in Inuit knowledge and approaches to childrearing, nurturing and learning. Increase availability of educational resources, curriculum, and tools that are developed by Inuit, which are flexible and adaptable for use in current programs such as Aboriginal Head Start or other centres that wish to offer Inuit cultural programming. ELCC resource and curriculum development will take place through meaningful collaboration with Inuit knowledge-holders, Elders, educators and parents. Curriculum should also integrate a trauma-informed approach to help mitigate adverse childhood experiences and support children as they grow.
- 4.** Increase access to Inuit-specific ELCC programming to include all communities in Inuit Nunangat, especially those that currently have no licensed child care centres or Aboriginal Head Start programs, as well as Inuit who are living in urban centres across Canada. Where possible, Inuit-specific ELCC programs and services should be available to Inuit families in urban and rural areas.
- 5.** Develop strategies and partnerships to build human resource capacity and training in early childhood education for educators, managers, directors, and other staff involved in Inuit ELCC that are accessible (both financially and geographically) and grounded in Inuit knowledge. This includes both certified training and ongoing professional development.
- 6.** Build new and renovate existing buildings and playgrounds where needed, as determined by communities. Improve infrastructure and facilities construction, upgrades and renovations, taking into account that the northern reality requires more time and increased costs. Long-term planning and funding approaches should be developed that can address the complexity of building in Inuit Nunangat. In urban contexts, dedicated Inuit-specific facilities and spaces support overall wellbeing and health.



7. Work towards Inuit self-determination of ELCC licensing and regulations. Work with provinces and territories to remove regulatory and licensing barriers and adopt standards and practices that support Inuit rights to practice and teach Inuit culture.
8. Recognize and support Inuit children and families who are living outside of Inuit Nunangat by funding the creation and operation of Inuit-centred ELCC programs and family resource centres in urban areas.
9. Establish monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks designed to ensure that programs are consistent with the original goals and objectives identified by communities of learning, reflection and growth. The knowledge, opinions and perspectives of Inuit ELCC educators should be valued in spaces of collective reflection and experience-sharing within and between regions. Evaluation efforts should be led by Inuit and guided by Inuit knowledge and values.





# MÉTIS NATION EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE FRAMEWORK

The Métis Nation has a vision for ELCC in which Métis children and families throughout the Homeland are provided with culturally-relevant, self-empowering ELCC programming and services that focus on the development and maintenance of strong Métis families and communities across the lifespan, beginning at birth. Métis Nation ELCC will promote the healthy growth and development of children and families through experiences grounded in Métis culture and community ways while Métis-specific wrap around services, programs and policies will support their ongoing well-being.

## MÉTIS NATION EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE PRINCIPLES

The Métis Nation proposes that a Métis Nation ELCC system be built on the basis of the following principles:

1. A nation to nation and government to government approach.
2. This Framework aims to build on and support existing or future bilateral and tripartite processes that are in place between Canada and the Métis Nation as a part of ongoing work to address pressing socio-economic issues of the Métis Nation.
3. Métis Nation communities that have decision-making authority over areas that impact them are most likely to be successful at closing socio-economic gaps for children and families.
4. Métis Nation ELCC programs and services will support improved education, health and social outcomes for young Métis children, rooted in Métis culture.
5. Métis Nation ELCC programs and services will be delivered by the Métis Nation, through existing well-developed governing bodies that have accountable, effective program delivery infrastructures in each of its regions and can ensure the design and delivery of Métis-specific programs and services for its youngest citizens and their families.
6. Métis Nation ELCC programs and services will promote the self-governance and self-determination of the Métis Nation.
7. Métis Nation ELCC programs and services will be guided by considerations of efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, relevance, inclusivity, and strengthening of Métis culture, language and community.
8. Métis Nation ELCC programs and services will be informed by evidence and knowledge that includes traditional and community-based knowledge, best practice information, and data gathered from research and evaluation.
9. Métis Nation ELCC program and service implementation will be collaborative in nature, characterized by a shared commitment to partnering, developing and leveraging existing and new networks, and fostering linkages to improve overall program coordination, connection and continuity in programming and services.
10. Partnerships and collaborations will be undertaken in a climate of mutual respect, relationship building, renewal and cooperation.
11. The Métis Nation expects a shared accountability with other levels of governments and ELCC service providers to maximize opportunities for Métis citizens, communities and the Nation.

## MÉTIS NATION EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE GOALS

The overarching goal of a Métis Nation ELCC system is to create and enhance early learning supports for Métis children and their families by ensuring ELCC programming is anchored in Métis culture and the unique needs of Métis children and families. Realizing this goal involves a focus on:

1. Creating Métis-specific programming and services to support the early learning and developmental needs of Métis children and families, developed and delivered by the Métis Nation, through its Governing Members.
2. Supporting improved access to existing programs for Métis Nation children and families.
3. Creating program flexibility that is appropriately tailored to regional characteristics and distinct needs of local families and communities.
4. Supporting Métis Nation-building, and promoting self-governance and self-determination, with ELCC as a critical step to this end.
5. Integrating Métis culture, languages and values into the design and delivery of ELCC programs for Métis Nation children and families.
6. Promoting, whenever possible, the employment of Métis Nation individuals as early childhood providers.
7. Supporting ELCC providers, from inside or outside the Métis Nation, to be trained and educated in early childhood education and the cultural ways of the Métis Nation, thereby enhancing their competency in working with Métis Nation children and their families.
8. Supporting improved education, health and social outcomes for young Métis Nation children with a focus on health promotion, nutrition, education, Métis culture, parental involvement and social support.
9. Offering transparency and accountability to Métis Nation citizens, communities, government partners and other stakeholders.

## MÉTIS NATION PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES

The Métis Nation has identified the following priorities and strategies:

1. Operationalize responsive and effective ELCC policies and programming to be designed and delivered by the Métis Nation for Métis children and their families that is focused on long term (10+ years), sustainable transformation and change.
2. Create new culturally relevant and supportive ELCC spaces for young Métis Nation children and their families supported by predictable, flexible, long-term and sustainable funding approaches.



3. Establish and staff Métis Nation ELCC facilities with specific mandates to deliver Métis culture-based ELCC programming for Métis Nation children and families.
4. Identify and draw upon evidence-based, research-informed best practices that are grounded in Métis Nation traditional knowledge so that ELCC experiences and opportunities are responsive to Métis children and their families.
5. Develop and implement Métis-specific curricula and training programs that provide accredited educational opportunities to develop the knowledge and competencies of teachers, early learning specialists, and child care providers working with Métis Nation children and their families, developed with and delivered through Métis Nation institutions.
6. Create Métis Nation specific culture-based resources and materials to support the training of early childhood educators in post-secondary programs and the recipients of ELCC programs and service.
7. Establish learning and information-sharing mechanisms focusing on Métis Nation knowledge, best practices and relevant research.
8. Work collaboratively to develop a performance measurement approach to track and monitor program activities impacts over the short, medium and longer terms.
9. Provide programs and services that prevent Métis children being taken into care and that support Métis children in care as part of more comprehensive Métis Nation wrap-around supports.





# GENDER AND FAMILY DIVERSITY

In traditional Indigenous societies, all members of the collective contribute in diverse and valued roles in the raising of children. Although these roles have been altered with the breakdown of traditional community life, the work of re-valuing and recognizing caregiving roles is critical to children, families, communities and cultures. Regardless of who performs caregiving roles, raising healthy, happy and whole children is at the centre of healthy, happy and whole communities and nations.

The inherent responsibilities of and towards women have deep roots in the protocols embedded in First Nation, Inuit and Métis traditional laws. However, colonization of traditional governance systems and the poverty and marginalization of Indigenous economies have eroded many of these protocols and laws. This has had a negative influence on the safety, security and wellbeing of Indigenous women and Two-Spirited people in Canada, as seen in the high numbers of murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirited people. The safety and well-being of children is directly linked to the safety and security of women.

Given that Indigenous women are most often primary caregivers, it is important that they are empowered to participate fully in the labour force, as well as in community governance systems and leadership. Improved economic security of women has a direct impact on Indigenous communities, and supports better outcomes for their children. ELCC programs and services also offer formal employment for women and all genders. Wage equity and stability derived from these employment opportunities can have a direct impact on the wellbeing of ELCC employees and their families.

Fathers and male caregivers have important roles to play in strengthening children, families and communities. In committing to the healing necessary to overcome the intergenerational trauma of colonialism, men and male-identifying Two-Spirited people can strengthen the circle of care for their families and communities. Fathers and male caregivers need to be valued, encouraged, supported and educated in their roles as vital contributors to child rearing and family life. Active involvement of fathers and male caregivers in child rearing and unpaid domestic work is good for children, and also increases the ability of women and female caregivers to participate more fully in education, cultural leadership, and labour market opportunities, leading to stronger Indigenous families and communities.

This national Indigenous ELCC Framework will contribute to the revival of critical caregiving roles in First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. By providing comprehensive, wrap-around supports to families, Indigenous ELCC programs affirm caregivers of any gender as valued members of their communities.



# SERVING FAMILIES WHERE THEY LIVE

Indigenous families and children live in diverse settings and locations, including urban, rural, remote and isolated places. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended that early childhood strategies extend “early childhood education to all Aboriginal children regardless of residence.”

Over half of Indigenous children and families in Canada are resident for some or much of the time in urban settings. The proportion of Indigenous people residing in urban areas has grown over the last few decades to just over half of the population. Many of the Indigenous families living in urban areas are highly mobile and often dispersed across Canada and therefore face unique challenges. For example, while some families residing in urban settings are afforded the opportunity to access a variety of services provided by Indigenous-specific governments organizations or provincial and federal programming, the cultural safety of these services is variable. Provision of culturally-specific ELCC programs and services in urban areas is challenged by the diversity of Indigenous families’ cultures and languages, making it difficult to offer curricula reflecting the unique and distinct cultures of families. It is important to support urban Indigenous children at a young age, in culturally-safe spaces surrounded by culturally-appropriate leaders and opportunities, so they feel connected to their languages and cultures.

In rural, remote and isolated settings, Indigenous children and families often lack available ELCC programs and services and the need for supports for children and families is often critical. Making ELCC programs and services available where there are none is an important goal for a national Indigenous ELCC Framework, and requires innovative approaches and alliances, and support for local leadership.

Regardless of where families live, there are often social, economic and logistical realities that pose significant challenges in accessing Indigenous ELCC programs and services. Barriers identified through engagement include: an absence of culturally-appropriate facilities or programming; lack of transportation; lack of knowledge about available programming; intimidating or unclear bureaucracies and processes; providers’ lack of awareness of Indigenous cultures and families; as well as mental health challenges, poverty, social isolation, and the loss of connection to Indigenous identity. These challenges need to be addressed and will rely on the continued work, collaboration and advocacy of all levels of government (including Indigenous governments), organizations, communities and individuals.





# ACCOUNTABILITY, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

An important finding of the Indigenous ELCC engagement process was limited information available to parents, service providers and governments about Indigenous ELCC. Among a complex patchwork of Indigenous ELCC, there is limited information about the ELCC programs that Indigenous children are attending, access or barriers to accessing services, the training of staff, the language and cultural content, and the quality of the services available. Many organizations providing ELCC services to Indigenous children and families reported an inability to undertake community-based evaluation, and also reported difficulty in accessing expert advice and knowledge of promising practices.

Better documentation of children's experiences and learning, alongside community-based review or evaluation, is necessary to address data gaps, provide evidence for planning and create greater accountability to children, families and other partners. To determine whether Indigenous ELCC programs are meeting the needs of Indigenous children and the expectations of their parents and communities, a responsive approach to supporting improved documentation, program planning, data collection, performance measurement, and multiple levels of evaluation (particularly Indigenous-developed) will need to be created. New approaches for sharing this information with program administrators, parents and communities for decision-making purposes are also needed.

These approaches should be developed through a joint consultative process that involves federal, provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, service providers, and early childhood development experts, as well as centred around the experiences of those being served – Indigenous children and families.





# A SHARED PATH FORWARD FOR INDIGENOUS EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

The path forward is grounded in the Government of Canada's commitment to achieving reconciliation through a renewed relationship with Indigenous Peoples, based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership. Canada's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and its implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples will require transformative change in the relationships with Indigenous peoples.

This Framework and its implementation will respect both of these commitments through a distinctions-based approach and aligned with Canada's ten *Principles respecting the Government of Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples*. As such, partners in this Framework are committed to ongoing collaborative working relationships with Indigenous governments, provincial and territorial governments, and with Indigenous organizations and service providers to support the improvement of ELCC for Indigenous children and families.

To realize the goals of this Framework, funding is required that is stable, sustainable, flexible and appropriate to national, regional and local Indigenous realities and responsibilities in order to strengthen Indigenous ELCC, as well as the Indigenous capacities required to support and govern it.

## **In working together, this Framework guides us to:**

Support and share this Framework as a guide to support Indigenous nations, communities, organizations and governments in applying its principles, goals and strategies in a way that best meets the unique needs of communities, families and children.

Renew relationships amongst and between governments, participate in partnerships bilaterally or in tripartite ways, maintain an open dialogue, and continue to identify opportunities for joint action.

Support and strengthen Indigenous ELCC governance in a manner that empowers the organizations and structures established by Indigenous peoples, with requisite capacity supports.

Recognize that alongside this Indigenous ELCC Framework there is a Multilateral ELCC Framework developed by the federal, provincial and territorial governments and that the two embody a relationship of respect and reciprocity.

## **To foster change, this Framework guides us to:**

Lead by example and leverage influence in ways that engage a variety of partners (such as national and regional Indigenous organizations, service delivery organizations, provincial and territorial governments, and others) by convening and facilitating partnerships and working in harmony.

Enable and support the implementation of identified best practices in design and delivery of Indigenous ELCC programs and services.

Identify and develop opportunities for capacity development for an Indigenous ELCC system and enable greater self-determination, as prioritized by First Nations, Inuit and Métis, through new ways of doing things, new approaches, new governance supports, and new mechanisms and instruments to be designed and implemented in Indigenous-led collaborations and partnerships.

## **To measure progress and learn as we go, this Framework guides us to:**

Engage continuously with children, families and communities, in Indigenous ways, to develop programming that is informed by the knowledge and experience of those who know their needs and responsibilities best: mothers and fathers, aunties and uncles, grandparents, Elders, caregivers – and children themselves.

Explore and fund Indigenous methods and processes for documentation and the collection, availability and ethical sharing of data and information through research and evaluation.

Demonstrate progress through jointly-developed reporting processes that align with the overarching vision and principles as well as with the distinctions-based frameworks and that demonstrate how the vision, principles, and distinctions-based goals, priorities and strategies are being realized and supported by a range of partners, including provincial and territorial governments (where desired by Indigenous partners).

Reflect an approach of reciprocal accountability, whereby all participants in Indigenous ELCC systems take responsibility for their roles in the support of Indigenous children and families as a shared and sacred commitment.



