

Standing Senate Committee on National Finance

Question:

Senator Duncan (ISG) has requested more detail on the Indigenous-led early childhood program and how the funding is distributed, and involvement by provinces and territories.

Response:

The approach to Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care is grounded in the 2018 Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care framework co-developed with Indigenous partners. This emphasizes flexibility in the funding to support Indigenous-led governance, decision making and operations of early learning and child care for Indigenous communities across Canada.

Distinctions based allocations have been identified on the basis of population. First Nations, Inuit and Métis partnership tables have been established to further determine allocations and thus ensure that decisions are Indigenous-led. Indigenous communities determine implementation models based on their unique needs.

Investments included in Budget 2021 for Indigenous Early Learning and Childcare build from those announced in the 2020 Fall Economic Statement and Budget 2017. In addition to introducing Before and After School Care on-reserve in First Nations communities, this funding furthers Early Learning and Child Care program and service transformation by leveraging existing programs. Indigenous communities may choose to enhance existing programming (Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve, First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative, Aboriginal Health Start in Urban and Northern Communities) funded through Indigenous Services Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, and the Public Health Agency of Canada respectively.

Alternatively, First Nation communities might choose alternative service delivery models such as co-locating by delivering different models under one roof. Another option is using joint delivery of services by running concurrent programs within the same organization between daycares, Head Starts and/or Kindergarten K4/K5. Budget 2021 provides \$1.35 billion to support Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care programming and governance. These funds are in addition to those specifically for Capital Repairs and new Infrastructure.

These programs support hundreds of ELCC programs in Indigenous communities, reaching over 35,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis children who participate in IELCC programming in either a full- or a part-time capacity.

In addition, IELCC funding can support new ELCC priorities, programs and services under flexible, horizontal terms and conditions. For example, the Métis Nation is leading the implementation of new Métis-specific ELCC programs, while some communities are pursuing alternative service delivery models: co-locating and joint delivery of services between day cares, Head Starts and/or Kindergarten for 4 and 5 years old.

Indigenous communities and partnership tables may decide to prioritize and direct funding for the training and recruitment of First Nations, Métis and Inuit educators as part of their planning and allocate funds accordingly

The delivery of early learning and child care (ELCC) programs and services is primarily a provincial-territorial responsibility, though many Indigenous governments are working toward exercising greater jurisdiction in this area. Indigenous families access ELCC from both provincial/territorial and Indigenous governments.

In recognition of the shared commitment to increasing access to high quality, accessible, affordable, flexible and inclusive child care for Canadian children, federal, provincial and territorial governments signed the Multilateral ELCC Framework in 2017. This Framework prioritizes families most in need, including Indigenous families. Bilateral agreements between the federal and provincial/territorial governments have been in place since 2017-18 and negotiations are underway to extend those agreements for four years (2021-22 to 2024-25). Examples of provincial/territorial actions to support Indigenous families are provided in Annex A.

As a complement to the Multilateral ELCC Framework, Canada's approach to the Indigenous elements of the Canada-wide system is guided by the Indigenous ELCC (IELCC) Framework, a document that was co-developed with Indigenous Peoples and sets out the goals and principles for quality ELCC for all Indigenous children. The Indigenous ELCC Framework has been endorsed by Canada as the policy guide for federal Indigenous ELCC programs and funding. The IELCC Framework is implemented in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis, respecting leadership direction on priorities, program and funding allocations.

The IELCC Framework was informed by the extensive work of expert working groups, reports and engagement processes on Indigenous ELCC. It was co-developed with Indigenous partners following a comprehensive national engagement process during spring and summer of 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. Furthermore, 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.

Established in 2018, the Indigenous ELCC Secretariat is the federal focal point for Indigenous ELCC and is mandated to work in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation governance structures to advance the goals of the co-developed Framework. The IELCC Secretariat works closely with the newly established Federal ELCC Secretariat, both of which are housed at Employment and Social Development Canada.

The majority of federal funding for IELCC is allocated to three distinctions-based envelopes, for First Nations, Inuit and the Métis Nation. These funds are directed by Indigenous Peoples to support the development and implementation of comprehensive ELCC strategies, programs and services, consistent with the IELCC Framework.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis partnership tables have been established to enable Indigenous-led decision-making with respect to IELCC investments. These distinctions-based partnership tables are comprised of regional representatives mandated by Indigenous leaders to work in collaboration with the IELCC Secretariat at ESDC to facilitate Indigenous-led planning, priority setting and decision-making to advance priorities in ELCC. Alongside national tables, regional

and community-level partnership tables are currently being established with First Nations, Inuit and the Métis Nation in every relevant province and territory. In addition to planning and priority setting, they promote inter-sectoral coordination to strengthen collaboration among players in the ELCC sphere. These tables are a key platform for federal – Indigenous collaboration, and, at the regional level, they are envisioned to support collaboration with provincial/territorial ELCC representatives to improve the ELCC for Indigenous children and families. Indigenous communities determine implementation models based on their unique needs.

Annex A. Examples of Provincial and Territories Actions to Support Indigenous Families

Since 2017, investments through bilateral agreements have resulted in outcomes for Indigenous communities in a variety of ways. For example,

- As part of its 2017-2020 and 2020-2021 Canada-British Columbia Agreement, the province, in collaboration with Indigenous organizations, used federal funding to support new sites for the Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) program, which provide culturally-relevant early learning programming and support to over 643 Indigenous children in the province.
- In 2018-2019, Nova Scotia invested federal funds to support 16 Mi'kmaq educators in First Nation communities throughout the province to participate in a Mi'kmaq early childhood educator (ECE) diploma program, delivered by a Mi'kmaq instructor, and using a curriculum modified to reflect Mi'kmaq language, culture, and history.
- Yukon's 2017-2020 bilateral agreement initiatives included support to Yukon First Nation governments to better understand the early learning and child care needs of their citizens. In total, \$210,000 was allocated to this initiative with \$15,000 allocated to each of the 14 Yukon First Nations governments. Reports from First Nations will help provide direction for future investments in ELCC programming offered by and for Yukon First Nations.
- Between 2017 and 2020, Alberta used federal funding from the bilateral agreement to support \$25 per day pilot child care sites. Funding contributed specific benefits to Indigenous children and their families. For example, Opokaa'sin Early Intervention Society of Lethbridge and Métis Calgary Family Services Society were provided with enhanced operational funding, which could be used to support cultural programming, involvement of Elders and provision of cultural foods for children that meet Canada's Food Guide, First Nations, Inuit and Métis requirements. The society was also provided with access to Indigenous consultants and mentors to support all children to fully participate in the child care program, including children with diverse needs.