

Early Learning and Child Care Strategic Action Plan for Inclusion and Equity

2023-2026





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Nunavut's Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework guiding principles



Children are curious, capable, and competent



Children have social, emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions



Children want to belong and contribute to their families and communities



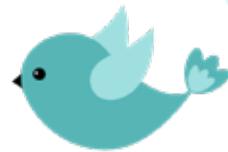
Children need to play, experiment, and practice



Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework

This Framework is to present a clear and accessible vision for ELCC in Nunavut, one that supports the development and delivery of all such programs and services across the territory.

Executive summary



The Early Learning and Child Care Strategic Action Plan for Inclusion and Equity is part of the Canada-wide Canada-Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Agreement and connects to actions in the Government of Nunavut's Katujjiluta Mandate that support inclusive early learning and transformation of the child care sector.

The purpose of the Strategic Action Plan is to provide guidance and direction on inclusion and equity to all early learning and child care stakeholders in Nunavut for three years from 2023-2026. Its scope includes enhancing inclusion and equity for children with disabilities, children needing enhanced or individual supports, Indigenous – in particular Inuit – children, Black and other racialized children, children in foster care, and official language minority children. This Strategic Action Plan also aims to ensure that vulnerable children and children from diverse backgrounds have access to licensed child care spaces. To achieve this, the Government of Nunavut is committed to work together with all partners and stakeholders, while also taking a leadership role in its sphere of responsibility.

The principles of the strategic action plan are that it:

- is inherently hopeful and connects Nunavummiut with a positive future vision for children
- is simple, clear, and helpful and uses language that is inclusive and speaks to positive change
- is based on Inuit worldview and Inuit policy documents
- recommends actions that are concrete and achievable, have short term time horizons, and have resources and accountability attached.

Six integrated strategic focus areas, within three broad categories of action, guide the proposed actions:

Improve the early learning and child care physical environment

- 1 Increase materials, equipment, supports, and program planning
- 2 Improve early learning and child care buildings and transportation

Support early learning and child care providers

- 3 Increase learning and training for early learning and child care providers
- 4 Improve employment conditions

Redesign early learning and child care systems

- 5 Change early learning and child care-related policies
- 6 Transform the early learning and child care system



Background

In January 2022, the Government of Nunavut signed the Canada-Nunavut Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement¹ ("Canada-wide Agreement") with the Government of Canada to improve Nunavut early learning and child care through actions on inclusion and equity, affordability of child care, access to child care spaces, quality of child care programs, and reporting.

This Early Learning and Child Care Strategic Action Plan for Inclusion and Equity is part of the Canada-wide Agreement and connects to actions in the Government of Nunavut's Katujjiluta Mandate², which was co-developed through a historic dialogue between all members of the Legislative Assembly, the leadership of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., and Nunavut's three Regional Inuit Associations.



The Katujjiluta Mandate: Reinvesting in education

Strategic outcome:

Enduring partnerships with Inuit organizations, education authorities, and other levels of government to encourage and support early learning, educational attainment, and career development

Actions to make progress towards the outcome:

- Invest in high quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive early learning and child care programs and services with federal funding partners.
- Prepare a new plan to develop and transform Nunavut's early learning and child care sector, with an emphasis on Inuit-centered early learning.
- Provide more financial, administrative, training, and Inuktitut learning resources to support early learning.

Purpose

The purpose of the Strategic Action Plan is to provide guidance and direction on inclusion and equity to all early learning and child care stakeholders in Nunavut for three years from 2023-2026. Its scope includes enhancing inclusion and equity for children with disabilities, children needing enhanced or individual supports, Indigenous - in particular Inuit - children Black and other racialized children, children in foster care, and official language minority children. This Strategic Plan also aims to ensure that vulnerable children and children from diverse backgrounds have access to licensed child care spaces. To achieve this, the Government of Nunavut is committed to work together with all partners and stakeholders, while also taking a leadership role in its sphere of responsibility.

As an outcome of a partnership with Inuit organizations, and in consultation with community experts and government departments, this Strategic Action Plan adopts an Inuit-centred approach to inclusion and equity, within the broad needs of early learning and child care programs and services in Nunavut.

¹Canada-Nunavut Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement – 2021 to 2026

²Government of Nunavut (2022b).

Partnership with Inuit organizations

The Government of Nunavut has a special relationship with representative Inuit organizations that is set out in the Nunavut Agreement. Under Article 32 of the Nunavut Agreement, the Government of Nunavut is obligated to provide Inuit with an opportunity to participate in the development of social and cultural policies, including early learning and child care. In this Strategic Action Plan, the Government of Nunavut has committed to work in ways that respect Inuit rights and continue to engage with Inuit in meaningful consultation and collaborative decision-making. For the development of this strategic action plan, representatives from Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Kivalliq Inuit Association, Kitikmeot Inuit Association, Qikiqtani Inuit Association, and Kakivak Association were invited to engage through group meetings, and one-on-one conversations.

Community expertise

Nunavut-based organizations that represent inclusion and equity-seeking groups, including the Association des francophones du Nunavut, Nunavummi Disabilities Makinnasuaqtiiit Society, and Nunavut Black History Society³ were consulted for this strategic action plan to speak to specific needs within the early learning and child care sector. Additionally, the Department of Family Services was included in the consultation to specifically address early learning and child care needs for children in foster care. Building on the strengths of local community-based knowledge, experience, and expertise from these groups helped inform the Government of Nunavut's strategic priorities and actions for early learning and child care in Nunavut.

Importance of quality early childhood development

As reported by the World Health Organization, early childhood is considered the most critical developmental phase^{4, 5}. Quality early childhood development directly influences a range of social and health outcomes across one's lifetime⁵. A strong and impactful early learning and child care strategy is essential to supporting positive outcomes for young Nunavummiut.



"Working together, as a united voice, makes us a stronger Nunavut. When we leverage all our resources towards a common cause we can have the strength to achieve unprecedented results for our people."

- Katujjiluta Mandate

³See Appendix for a list of partners and stakeholders.

⁴World Health Organization.

⁵World Health Organization.

Nunavut history and population

The area known as Nunavut has been populated by Inuit for over 4,500 years. Colonization by the Government of Canada is relatively recent history, with Inuit elders having living memories of leading a traditional life on the land in their childhood, prior to forced relocations into geopolitical settlements known as Nunavut's communities. Nunavut today is made up of 25 communities spread across 20% of Canada's landmass with limited and costly infrastructure.

Nunavut has Canada's youngest and one of the fastest growing populations.

By 2035, Nunavut's population is projected to reach 48,042, primarily through birth rate.

Inclusive and equitable early learning and child care will need to grow alongside Nunavut's rising population. Inuit are the majority of the population in the territory, and therefore Inuit language and culture require special considerations in a strategy for inclusion and equity⁶. Nunavut must create early learning and child care resources reflective of Inuit traditions, values, language, and physical landscape.



	Nunavut	Canada
Annual average population growth since 2007⁷	1.8%	1.1%
Total population growth since 2007⁸	23.5%	14.3%
Median age	25.6	41.6
% of population ages 0-4	12%	5%
Total population	36,855	36,991,980

⁶ Inuit represent approximately 85% of the total population of Nunavut. Inuit represent 90% to 95% of the residents except in the capital city of Iqaluit, which has an approximate population of 8,000, where 60% of residents are Inuit.

⁷ Government of Nunavut. (2021). piii-1.

⁸ Statistics Canada.

Relevant statistics for inclusion and equity⁹:

- It is estimated that **660** children in Nunavut between **0-4 years old** are living with disabilities (based on the medical model of disability and using the 15% national average)¹⁰. Consensus around disability in Nunavut is still underway, as awareness is enhanced around barriers to access and deepening knowledge of the details around disability in the territory. It is possible that the majority of children in the territory may experience a form of disability or barriers (temporary or permanent) in their early years (i.e. eyesight, dental, physical, mental etc.)
- As of March 31, 2022, **345** children and youth were living in foster homes or extended family placements¹¹.
- According to the 2021 census, **520** residents spoke French as their mother tongue, and **19,370** spoke Inuktitut.
- In the 2021 census, the racialized population in Nunavut was calculated to be **36,605**. Of the total racialized population in Nunavut (beyond the Inuit population), group data in the census included Black (**565**), Filipino (**315**), South Asian (**175**), Chinese (**65**), Latin American (**60**), multiple visible minorities (**50**), Arab (**35**), Japanese (**10**), Korean (**10**), and West Asian (**10**)¹².



⁹2021 census data had an overall response rate of 85% for Indigenous communities compared to the overall response rate of 98%. While this is the best data currently available, the response rate may affect its quality. See <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/indigenous-gaps-census-1.6419156>

¹⁰Council of Canadians with Disabilities.

¹¹Government of Nunavut (2022a).

¹²Statistics Canada.

Inunnguiniq as the foundation

Inclusion benefits everyone

Everyone benefits from an inclusive environment. The Inuit societal value of *Inunnguiniq* is strongly aligned with inclusion and equity practice and is the foundation of this strategic action plan.

Note: This material was developed by Qaujigiartit Health Research Centre for their Inunnguiniq Childrearing Program, which was successfully piloted for use in licensed child care centres in Nunavut¹³.

6 Foundational Inunnguiniq Principles

1 Develop habits for living a good life

- Finish what you start and persevere in life
- Continually plan ahead and be well-organized
- Take care of your belongings and develop strong skills
- Listen to the teachings and apply them in life

2 Rise above hardship by always looking for solutions

- Be adaptable and focus on the future
- Be capable so that others will have confidence in you
- Identify your needs and do not seek what you do not need
- Apply knowledge to experiences
- Seek understanding of the things around you

3 Be heart-centred (Build a strong moral character)

- Show humanity
- Behave ethically
- Be self-reliant
- Show respect, be responsible and be accountable



4 Show compassion, serve others and build relationships

- Anticipate the needs of others
- Serve willingly
- Show love that is enabling
- Discuss openly, communicate well

5 Recognize the uniqueness of each individual

- Set high expectations
- Identify skills and nurture them
- Never confuse the child
- Focus on strengths
- Be present in your community

6 Always take steps to make improvements

- Start with sewing the seeds of how to do something
- Start with where a person/child is at
- Expect progress
- Show how to do something and expect the person/child to do what is shown
- Never give up on the child/person learn

These Inunnguiniq principles are fundamentally inclusive and equitable. Inclusion and equity practices¹⁴:

- recognize the uniqueness of each individual
- are big-hearted and show humanity while behaving ethically
- show compassion and love that is enabling
- develop good habits to persevere in life and care for belongings
- apply learnings to life
- seek to rise above hardship and identify your needs
- start with where the child is at
- expect progress
- never give up on a person
- communicate well and discuss openly

Positive benefits of inclusion on children, families, child care providers, and communities:

Research on inclusion¹⁵ shows the positive impacts of inclusive child care on children with support needs, their family, their peers, and child care staff. This is because inclusive child care settings provide a higher quality of care compared to non-inclusive settings.

The benefits of inclusion listed below are not exhaustive, as inclusive child care uniquely benefits each child care centre, but it does illustrate some of the key benefits¹⁶:

Benefits for children

- Improves self-esteem, confidence, autonomy, and leadership skills
- Establishes new and diverse friendships among all children, strengthening social and emotional development
- Provides children with the opportunity to learn about the value of diversity
- Provides children with the opportunity to fully and meaningfully participate in their program
- Promotes social skills and peer interactions, improving language/communication skills

Benefits for families and caregivers

- Increases access to quality and accessible child care
- Improves relationships with child care staff
- Provides family members and caregivers the opportunity to remain employed or attend school
- Provides families the opportunity to see positive changes in their children
- Provides families with the opportunity to better advocate for their children
- Provides families with the opportunity to learn about early intervention services

Benefits for child care providers

- Provides staff with the opportunity to think more about Inunnguiniq as a strength-based model to understand how each child can contribute to the learning environment and social community
- Improves caregiver and staff relationships
- Increases the ability to problem-solve and develop new solutions to support children
- Improves interactions between children and child care staff
- Provides staff with the opportunity to gain new skills, knowledge and competencies
- Provides staff with the opportunity to build connections with early intervention services

Benefits for communities

- Enriches relationships within the community
- Promotes social inclusion for all people
- Provides the opportunity for increased diversity and inclusion
- Provides community members with the opportunity to learn about early intervention services

¹⁴Qaujigiaqt Health Research Centre, p111.

¹⁵Grisham-Brown et al.

¹⁶Government of British Columbia.

Principles, vision, and definitions

Principles

The strategic action plan:

- is inherently hopeful and connects Nunavummiut with a positive future vision for children
- is simple, clear, and helpful and uses language that is inclusive and speaks to positive change
- is based on Inuit worldview and Inuit policy documents
- recommends actions that are concrete and achievable, have short term time horizons, and have resources and accountability attached



Vision for inclusion and equity for early learning and child care in Nunavut

Early learning and child care in Nunavut will provide widespread access to licensed child care in Inuktitut, with high-quality programs that are grounded in Inuit culture, knowledge, tradition, and ways of being and knowing. Early learning and child care programs and services in Nunavut will be increasingly child and family-centred, and adapted to each community. Inuit-specific early learning and child care will be determined by Inuit and supported by the Government of Nunavut.

Early learning activities will nurture strong family and community relationships, dignity, interconnection and belonging, across all languages and cultures in Nunavut. Services will be inclusive and respect the diversity of children and families within Nunavut communities. Early learning and child care providers will recognize, acknowledge, and actively address inequities as they arise.

Child care centres will have the tools, resources, and training they need to respond to the developmental needs, unique capacities, and diverse identities of children and families, for Nunavummiut in all communities.

**This vision was influenced by conversations with Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., the Regional Inuit Associations, and Kakivak Association, in addition to policy documents from these groups and the GN. It takes into account the Inuit vision of the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework.*





Definition of *inclusion* for Early Learning and Child Care in Nunavut

Inclusion is a principle and practice that is grounded in Inunnguiniq and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit that validates and supports the diverse capacities of all Nunavummiut. It involves continuous effort to create safe and inclusive environments by reducing barriers to accessing early learning and child care and actively involving everyone. It promotes anti-racism, anti-bias, and an inclusive approach to difference.

Inclusive programs in Nunavut:

- Enable all children and their families to feel welcome and respected within the early learning and child care system, regardless of background or cultural identity.
- Commit to increasingly provide early learning and child care in Inuktitut, in addition to other languages.
- Develop life skills in children.
- Use foundational principles of Inunnguiniq as a core approach to applying inclusive practices within all licensed child care centres for all children in Nunavut.
- Nurture children through providing heart-centred experiences that respond to the whole child and are adaptable to each child, family, and community.

Definition of *equity* for Early Learning and Child Care in Nunavut

Equity is the fair and just management of early learning and child care for everyone in Nunavut. Equity is also a principled approach to justice and respect, and involves correcting gaps and inequities experienced by marginalized Nunavummiut in accessing high quality, flexible, and culturally strong early learning programs. This means providing additional supports and resources for families experiencing racial, financial, physical, and/or linguistic hardship, and delivering the supports and resources in a caring, responsive, and respectful way.

Equitable programs in Nunavut:

- Provide early learning and child care access for everyone, in the way they require it, and offer more to those who need more.
- Model acceptance, care, and respect, and celebrate a diversity of social values, beliefs, and practices.
- Recognize, acknowledge, and actively address inequities as they arise.
- Support cross-cultural understanding and friendship among children, families, communities, and early childhood educators across the early learning and child care sector.
- Emphasize collective sharing, recognizing individual and group needs and the role everyone has in meeting these collective needs.

{ The strategic action plan provides direction on how to apply the principles, vision, and defining concepts of inclusion and equity to early learning and child care in Nunavut over the next three years.

Applying inclusion and equity in Nunavut early learning and child care

Inclusion and equity in Nunavut early learning and child care are applicable to all Nunavummiut. Shared values and priorities are the foundation for collective working practices. As we move forward, the future of early learning and child care in Nunavut must be founded in inclusive and equitable practices, and supported by policies, materials and equipment, environmental conditions, additional supports, cultural and linguistic program planning, and professional development.

There are three ways inclusion is applied in this strategic action plan, for more inclusive and equitable early learning and child care in Nunavut:

- 1** Inuit-centered inclusion, with a cultural foundation (Inuit inclusion)
- 2** Safe and inclusive environments for all Nunavummiut (physical and material inclusion)
- 3** Actively involving everyone who plays a role in early learning and child care (broad participation)

Inuit-centered inclusion, with a cultural foundation

Inclusive and equitable early learning and child care in Nunavut begins with enabling Inuit children to be capable, strong, and resilient through actively practicing and being grounded in Inuktut and Inuit culture. It means developing a culturally strong, high quality early learning and child care system that honours the rights of Inuit, and is framed within Inuit worldview¹⁷.

This strategic action plan follows the Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework in recognizing Inunnguiniq as an inclusive approach to early learning and child care, for Inuit and for all Nunavummiut. Inunnguiniq is a strengths-based, individualized approach to raising children who are capable and resourceful, within and through their relationships with others. Inunnguiniq allows children to learn and develop at their own pace, be valued for their unique attributes and capacities, and encourages them to pursue areas where they show aptitude or interest¹⁸. This is a fundamentally inclusive approach. In this way, children are given the opportunity to live a good life, which means being able to contribute to the collective well-being of everyone¹⁹.

For the early learning and child care system to be broadly inclusive, it must be responsive to the diverse needs and identities of all children in Nunavut and their families. It must allow everyone to deepen their cultural competencies and grow their understanding of being in community together. It recognizes that Nunavut is made up of many families, dialects and languages, and traditional knowledge that everyone can benefit from learning. The vision for inclusive early learning and child care enables all children, families, and communities to be included and treated with kindness, respect, and care regardless of where they came from, what language they speak, and what they look like. Raising children into capable human beings benefits from modeling ethical behaviours of inclusion, openness, and continuous learning.

¹⁷Inuit Tapiriyat Kanatami (2017).

¹⁸Tagalik, S.

¹⁹Tagalik, S.



Safe and inclusive environments for all Nunavummiut

Creating safe and inclusive environments is about reducing barriers to access that are cultural, linguistic, physical, material, mental, and psychological. It means creating full and equitable access by overcoming resource deficiencies, simplifying processes and procedures, and providing additional supports to those that need them.

Children and families may be part of more than one marginalized group within the early learning and child care system and may experience exclusion or marginalization on multiple fronts. Therefore, an inclusive and equitable early learning and child care system must be able to address the complexity of this intersectionality, where people face discrimination and exclusion in overlapping social identities.

***"Inuit are welcoming
people. Our land is now
home to people from
diverse backgrounds who
recognize the opportunity
in Nunavut and are
contributing to a brighter
future for our territory."***

- Katujjiluta Mandate



Actively involving everyone who plays a role in early learning and child care

Everyone has a role to play with raising children in communities. Nunavut's population remains young, and communities are tightly woven with relations. Parents and families are recognized as the child's first teacher²⁰. Licensed child care centres support children, caregivers, and families, as well as the community as a whole. Early childhood education workers, centre managers, and boards of directors have direct roles in running the child care centres. Other support is provided by DEAs, municipalities, and service providers like maintainers and bookkeepers. Further support is delivered through the Government of Nunavut, the Regional Inuit Associations, Nunavut Arctic College, and more. Representative community organizations are necessary participants in the advancement of inclusion and equity in early learning and child care in Nunavut. The Nunavummi Disabilities Makinnasuaqtii Society, the Nunavut Black History Society, and the Association des francophones du Nunavut, and others have an important role to play in advocacy and representation. Actively involving everyone in the early learning and child care system connects us all, and this welcome involvement is another important part of inclusion.

²⁰Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (2017b).

Strategic focus Areas



A **principle-based shift** is needed to advance the vision of an inclusive and equitable early learning and child care system (or sector) in Nunavut. Six integrated strategic focus areas, within three broad categories of action, will guide our collective success.

These are key focus areas that emerged from strategic action plan consultations/engagement with Inuit Organizations and community experts and from many policy documents. They are all essential and integrated in achieving the vision.

Partnerships are an essential part of the development of the early learning and child care sector, extending from the child, family, and community, to the licensed child care setting, Inuit organizations, and the Government of Nunavut. The early learning and child care environment in Nunavut relies on people working together and enhancing strong relationships to achieve our goals in partnership.



Improve the early learning and child care physical environment

- 1 Increase materials, equipment, supports, and program planning
- 2 Improve early learning and child care buildings and transportation

Support early learning and child care providers

- 3 Increase learning and training for early learning and child care providers
- 4 Improve employment conditions

Redesign early learning and child care systems

- 5 Change early learning and child care-related policies
- 6 Transform the early learning and child care system

Strategic Focus 1: Increase materials, equipment, supports, and program planning

Early learning and child care stakeholders want to see the creation of learning materials in Inuktitut and French, including Inuit Sign Language, as well as equipment and additional supports and resources for inclusion and equity in early learning and child care settings.

Inclusive environments consider the unique needs of all children in the setup of the physical environment. Full and meaningful participation is only possible when the physical spaces provide for it. Addressing environmental considerations of the physical space benefits the child, the family, and the community.

Materials: Having a range of available learning materials helps all children – including those living with disabilities, from official language minorities, and from racialized families – to build skills, provide sensory learning, and opportunities to experiment and play. These materials are used by Early Childhood Educators to deliver programming, and guide children’s learning, and can also be used by families and caregivers in the child care centre and in the home. They can include toys and books, play tools, and cultural materials. The learning materials in child care centres provide the programming base, and provide learning about Inuit culture, inclusion, and equity. Accessories and equipment span the interests and skill sets of all children in the space, encourage solitary, parallel, and cooperative play, and promote social interactions among children of all abilities. How materials are shared, whether in person or virtually, must also consider accessibility and inclusion, for example screen readers and image descriptions.

Equipment: Having the right equipment in licensed child care centres is important for Early Childhood Educators to create safe environments for children and their families. This equipment is used for preparing food or for mobility to ensure all learning and play areas are accessible to all children. Having sufficient, appropriate equipment ensures inclusion and equity by meeting the needs of the children and their families. The equipment in a licensed child care centre should expand rather than limit inclusion within the centre.



Staffing support: Some children require more one-on-one support to be engaged in a child care setting, which means that enhanced staffing levels are required to offer high quality care. Flexible, reliable, and timely funding allows licensed child care centres to receive the additional support and expertise they need to meet the changing needs of the centre and its children, and to provide added support to children who require more, at the time they require it. These supports can also provide families with a way to participate fully in the encouragement of their children within an inclusive, supportive environment that is meeting their needs. Beyond enhanced staffing, licensed child care centres in Nunavut should have access to dedicated specialists, including speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, nutritionists, sign language specialists, and others.

Healthy food support: Supports in licensed child care centres also involves responsive funding for greater inclusive support. This can include a dedicated budget for ample healthy snacks – food and supplies are essential for the running of programs, with funding that keeps pace with the rate of inflation.



Program planning: Having program plans available, with training attached, is a pathway to greater inclusion. Adjustments are made to routines and transitions to make learning experiences positive for all children. Learning experiences respond to the children's unique needs (e.g. culture, interests, strengths, and passions). Additionally, having access to program and planning experts for consultation and feedback to further support these plans and the training is a holistic approach to integrating new programs into child care centres across Nunavut. Beyond this, having the right tools for the job can free up time and energy that can be redirected towards actions that increase inclusion and equity.

Materials, equipment, supports and program planning are recognized in the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework: recommendation #3 is to develop Inuit early learning and child care curriculum materials and teaching tools that are grounded in Inuit knowledge and approaches to childrearing, nurturing, and learning, and to increase the availability of educational resources, curriculum, and tools that are developed by Inuit.

Strategic Focus 2:

Improve early learning and child care buildings and transportation

Child care centres are important infrastructure within a community, which provide children with a developmental environment, families with options to work and study, and communities with support for everyone to learn and grow. Many child care centres in Nunavut require improvements for physical inclusion to ensure they are a safe, comfortable, and healthy environment for all.

Renovations and building upgrades

for inclusion: Inclusion involves creating physically accessible licensed child care centres. This includes building accessible centres and undertaking capital renovations. Efforts to meet sensory needs are met with softened noise and lights, quiet spaces, and active spaces.

Capital construction: There is an opportunity to work with the Inuit organizations to achieve more together, including in the capital construction of new licensed child care centres in Nunavut communities. Partnering in efforts to plan, design, construct, and launch new licensed child care centres is the path forward with the most potential momentum.

Coordinated approach to renovations

and upgrades: Upgrading the early learning and child care infrastructure in Nunavut to be physically accessible to all children and families is a significant undertaking that will require a unified approach.

Partners and Stakeholders may consider action regarding:

Coordinated approach to maintenance: Licensed child care centres have buildings that require regular and routine maintenance, and face significant operating costs. There are fundamental issues of physical access to child care related to centre maintenance (including snow removal, seasonal maintenance, etc.). Child care centre staff don't have the expertise in maintenance and infrastructure. Adopting a coordinated approach to organized maintenance, would reduce barriers and contribute significantly to increasing inclusion and equity for early learning and child care.

Transportation: Families are struggling with local transportation for their children to attend child care, especially when physical access is a barrier. Having an accessible bus in communities has been raised as a desired option.

Improving early learning and child care centres is recognized in the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework: recommendation #6 highlights the need to build new and renovate existing buildings and playgrounds, including improving infrastructure and upgrading and renovating centres.



Strategic Focus 3: **Increase learning and training for early learning and child care providers**

The development of an Inuit-led sector that supports inclusion and equity will require broad core training for early learning and child care providers. This means creating new opportunities for knowledge sharing and skill development, focused on inclusion and equity and available in all official languages.

A priority for this strategic action plan is an investment in Nunavut-specific, culturally appropriate early learning and child care training across the sector. An effective training program can deepen relationships and build capacity to deliver high quality, inclusive early learning programs and services that respond to the diversity of Nunavut children and their families.

Training for early learning and child care providers (who): Training is needed for child care educators, but also other people involved in the child care system.

Early learning and child care providers benefitting from training:

centre managers, Early Childhood Educators, Board of Directors of licensed child care centres, District Education Authorities, caregivers/families, Government of Nunavut employees, Inuit organization employees, and municipal employees.

Varied methods of training (how): There can be informal or formal training programs (delivered by the Government of Nunavut or through other agencies), informal opportunities (e.g., Inunnguiniq learning nights provided to caregivers), or learning opportunities developed and delivered by Inuit partners.

Methods of learning include:

knowledge exchange and networking, mentorship or shadowing, Elder advisors, professional development programs, training courses (one-off or ongoing), virtual modules.

Content of training (what): Early childhood educators are central to the success of the planning and delivery of inclusive child care. Educated child care staff are better able to facilitate increased inclusion of all children regardless of their diverse abilities. Training and education about cultural competency and working with children with support needs can also improve inclusion of all children. Inclusion involves lifelong learning about how to develop, maintain, and approach accessible and inclusive child care spaces and workplaces.

Content of training includes:

Inunnguiniq pedagogy and practice, inclusion and equity-informed early learning and child care, trauma-informed early learning and child care, cultural competency, cross-cultural early learning and child care, managing children with special needs, managing children with trauma, teaching Inuktitut, how to handle lateral violence, and how to handle bullying.



Capacity building for child care educators, managers and board of directors is needed to achieve quality program delivery. Having training in inclusion, equity, specialized forms of difference or disability, cultural competency, cross-cultural understanding, and trauma-informed practice will contribute to higher capacity child care centres, as well as better employment conditions for early learning and child care providers.

Cultural competency is a central part of inclusive child care, and is for everyone²¹. Cultural competency is the ability to provide care to individuals with diverse values, beliefs, and behaviours to meet their social, cultural, and linguistic needs. To be culturally competent, it is necessary to be aware of and respectful towards the culture and belief of the communities where you work. Cultural safety means creating a space where all cultures are respected and upheld. Whether a child or family feels culturally safe in their child care setting is dependent in part on whether the child care provider is culturally competent. Cultural competency and safety are important when two or more cultures interact within the same space, as one culture is often dominant (this happens when the values of the dominant culture are placed above those of another group).

Early learning and child care providers need support and meaningful resources to provide culturally safe and respectful care to the many families they serve from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds in Nunavut. Offering culturally safe care does not require staff to become experts in cultures or languages different from their own, but instead encourages people to reflect on their interactions with others, understand and recognize racism, and learn how to create collective learning opportunities for everyone's benefit.

Learning and training for early learning and child care is recognized in the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework: recommendation #5 focuses on developing strategies and partnerships to build human resource capacity and training in early childhood education for educators, manager, directors, and other staff involved in Inuit early learning and child care, and grounded in Inuit knowledge.



²¹We all have individual and collective responsibilities under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Strategic Focus 4: Improve employment conditions

Improving employment conditions is part of inclusion and equity for the sector. Good employment conditions help to retain experienced and trained workers. In retaining these workers, the child care centres are able to provide a critical continuity of staffing that is particularly beneficial for those children who require stability. Therefore staff retention makes a significant impact on inclusion.

Fully-funded professional development time: Fully-funded professional development and training opportunities strengthens the individual early childhood education worker, their centre, and the workforce as a whole. When a worker is taking paid training, the centre must also be supplemented to replace that person for the duration of their training time. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami's recommendation is to "afford early childhood educators professional development days, as is the case with teachers²²".

Multi-year core funding: Delivering multi-year core funding commitments to child care centres for staff costs and operations/maintenance, in addition to supports for bookkeeping and payroll systems, is an investment in improving the conditions for employees. Beyond supporting retention, this is an act of equity: to pay a workforce of predominantly women a wage that is representative of their service. Multi-year funding also provides stability to hire workers on multi-year or permanent contracts, which increases retention.

Employee benefits: Benefits and pensions are part of stabilizing the workforce, and creating equitable conditions for working, and for treating staff well. They contribute to making recruiting and retaining staff easier. Providing additional mental health support (via on-demand counselling or employee assistance programs) is an additional benefit that can positively impact children and families in the centre. Modeling healing is an inclusive act, particularly in a place with significant direct and vicarious trauma. Employee accommodations that reduce barriers, for example priority child care policies for staff.

Increased number of staff in licensed child care centres:

Increasing funding to support more permanent staff to serve children in the centre is a step towards greater inclusion for all. Inclusion and equity issues are more able to be acknowledged and addressed when staff have more time to manage the situation. Increasing the number of staff in centres across the board is a significant investment in increased inclusion and equity for early learning and child care in Nunavut.

Wage scale: The wage scale can take into account experience and certifications, in addition to language and cultural skills, and expertise in inclusion and equity. Employment equity is a priority for Inuit, when transforming the sector to be more consistent in its inclusion goals. Index early learning and child care wage enhancement funding to inflation.

Raising the reputation: Increasing the reputation, perceived value, and recognition of the early learning and child care workers creates an environment of inclusion and respect. Providing staff with mentors to share is an added benefit.



Improving employment conditions for early learning and child care is recognized in the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework: recommendation #2 is to introduce policies and practices so that educators, child care managers, Elders, program providers and staff working in early learning and child care are valued, compensated and recognized for the integral role they play in supporting positive early childhood development.

²²Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. (2013), p.23.

Strategic Focus 5: Change early learning and child care-related policies

Revising acts, regulations, policies, and procedures is a necessary part of redesigning early learning and child care systems. These are the legislative and functional elements of the early learning and child care regulatory environment in Nunavut. Inclusion must be embedded in all plans and policies, even within adjacent processes, involving making connections and influencing a reduction of barriers and an increase in opportunity.

Act and Regulation: The Nunavut Child Day Care Act is scheduled for review, which will involve consultations with Inuit organizations and public engagement across Nunavut. Following the updating of the Act, the regulations will be revised. Being licensed is currently a requirement to receive funding and professional development through the Government of Nunavut. There is an opportunity to reduce barriers to licensing by significantly simplifying processes and forms (i.e., to include plain-language revisions).

Training policies: Introduce policy to provide training for early learning and child care providers (see strategic focus 3).

Financial policies: Review the Department of Education's Grants and Contributions Policy, allowing for multi-year funding agreements, streamlining and simplifying funding applications and reporting requirements wherever possible. Improve turnaround time for funding to reach early learning and child care centres. Index the payments to licensed child care centres for operations and maintenance to inflation to ensure funding keeps pace with rising costs.



Policy change is recognized in the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework: recommendation #7 is to work towards Inuit self-determination of early learning and child care licensing and regulations, to remove regulatory and licensing barriers, and to adopt standards and practices that support Inuit rights to practice and teach Inuit culture.



Strategic Focus 6: **Transform the early learning and child care system**

Inclusion and equity require system change. Achieving Inclusion and equity in early learning and child care will be connected to and contributing to sector transformation. This strategic action plan is focused on creating actions that improve the current system while also contributing to advancing transformation.

Over the past decade, critical policy frameworks and agreements have been created and negotiated across the country to amplify the importance of the sector. Nunavut's early learning and child care sector is undergoing a period of modernization and growth. During the past few years, Nunavut has experienced expansion across the early learning and child care sector and engaged in modernization initiatives. Through strong Inuit partnerships, the Department of Education's Early Learning and Child Care Division is contributing to an evolving system in Nunavut that will improve the quality, affordability, accessibility, and inclusivity of early learning and child care. Achieving inclusion and equity in early learning and child care is one component of sector modernization. There are connections between this strategic action plan and other commitments made under the Canada-Nunavut Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement.

The early learning and child care sector in Nunavut has the potential to undergo a broad transformation, to reconfigure how licensed child care centres are governed and funded. This has been a longstanding desire of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc and the Regional Inuit Associations, to reimagine how a transformed system can better support the early learning and child care sector as a whole. Inclusion and equity must take a prominent position in the planned transformation, in order for children, families, caregivers, licensed child care centres, and the community as a whole, to be better equipped and prepared to support and encourage everyone in early learning and child care in Nunavut.



Inuit organizations in Nunavut have expressed their desire to lead the transformation and realignment of the early learning and child care sector. The Katujjiluta Mandate includes a commitment to collaborate to prepare a plan to develop and transform Nunavut's early learning and child care sector, with an emphasis on Inuit-centered early learning. The transformation is a unique opportunity to reaffirm and advance inclusion and equity principles, perspectives, and practices.

More than the others, this strategic focus is founded upon a partnership with Inuit organizations and will gain clarity as it evolves. It will initiate as a relationship that will grow into shared planning towards transforming the sector through concrete actions.

The early learning and child care sector transformation could involve:

- more flexible, integrated, long term finance and funding approaches to early learning and child care
- policy and procedure changes within the Government of Nunavut
- a revised relationship with licensed child care centres, in terms of funding, responsibility, and support.

The Government of Nunavut can play a key role in this dialogue for transformation:

- support Inuit organizations in realigning the sector towards Inuit early learning and child care
- initiate collaboration and planning between multiple partners and stakeholders to ensure the needs of all Nunavummiut are met
- increase internal capacity to plan and enact change



Early learning and child care system transformation is recognized in the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework: recommendation #1 is to enable greater Inuit self-determination in Inuit early learning and child care.



Three-year actions

The intention of these three-year action plan is to set out a strengths-based, capacity-building, targeted approach to child care and partnerships across the sector, that includes feasible and concrete improvements to inclusion and equity in early learning and child care in Nunavut.

Some actions are a re-statement of existing commitments, for example through the Canada-Nunavut Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, because those actions will contribute to inclusion and equity.

Strategic Focus 1 - Increase materials, equipment, supports, and program planning

Action 1.1: Develop or identify materials and educational tools that relate to inclusion, equity, and cross-cultural understanding, in collaboration with subject matter experts.

Action 1.2: Increase availability of educational resources and tools promoting inclusion and equity in early learning and child care in Nunavut.

Action 1.3: Assist licensed child care centres to acquire more inclusive equipment to meet the needs of their centre and the children attending.

Action 1.4: Make a flexible funding program available to licensed child care centres to support the purchase of additional resources to increase inclusion and equity, raise awareness of funding programs, and provide support to access the programs.

Action 1.5: Collaborate with the Department of Family Services on the development of foster-care-specific child care.

Action 1.6: Develop Government of Nunavut early learning and child care division staff knowledge to support child care centres in identifying inclusive equipment and resources.

Action 1.7: Develop Inuit early learning and child care curriculum in partnership with Inuit organizations.

Action 1.8: Hire an Early learning and child care Specialist, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion to assist licensed child care centres in identifying and obtaining inclusive support for children in early learning and child care programs across Nunavut.

Strategic Focus 2 - Improve early learning and child care buildings

Action 2.1: Identify and pursue funding to improve the condition of existing licensed child care centres to provide accessible upgrades.

Action 2.2: Assess GN assets that early learning and child care centres operate out of and create a plan for accessibility.

Action 2.3: Partner with Inuit organizations to work together to improve early learning and child care buildings.

Strategic Focus 3 - Increase learning and training for early learning and child care providers

Action 3.1: Deliver a variety of early learning and child care training opportunities across Nunavut, including hands-on mentorship and application of skills support in licensed child care centres.

Action 3.2: Introduce an incentive program for early childhood training opportunities for staff and licensed child care centres.

Action 3.3: Raise awareness of a wide-range of early learning and child care-related training opportunities in Nunavut.

Action 3.4: Work with Nunavut Arctic College to increase the delivery of Early Childhood Education certification training in Nunavut communities.

Action 3.5: Partner with subject matter experts to develop and deliver specialized inclusion and equity training for early learning and child care in Nunavut.



Strategic Focus 4 – Improve employment conditions

Action 4.1: Stabilize the workforce by implementing a wage scale.

Action 4.2: Hire a Specialist, Workforce Development to expand the early learning and child care workforce and to support licensed child care centre management in recruiting new staff, retaining existing staff, and increasing participation in training and professional development.

Action 4.3: Increase public awareness of early childhood education, as a foundation of children's education that brings significant value to Nunavut families.

Strategic Focus 5 – Change early learning and child care-related policies

Action 5.1: Ensure inclusion and equity considerations are part of the review of the *Child Day Care Act* and *Regulations*.

Action 5.2: Ensure inclusion and equity considerations are part of the Department of Education's review of its Grants and Contributions Policy, including in relation to simplifying and streamlining funding and reporting requirements.

Strategic Focus 6 – Transform the early learning and child care system

Action 6.1: Foster a strong partnership with Inuit organizations to support transformation of the early learning and child care system.

Action 6.2: Coordinate discussions between federal early learning and child care funding partners, the Government of Nunavut, and Inuit organizations regarding funding needs and allocations in line with system transformation.

Action 6.3: Host an annual meeting on the topic of early learning and child care system transformation, inviting a range of partners and stakeholders.

Action 6.4: Report publicly on the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan for Inclusion and Equity on an annual basis, in addition to existing reporting requirements.

Action 6.5: Provide implementation updates to Inuit organizations detailing accomplishments in the first six months, nine months, and year.



Reporting

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning

Actions in this strategic action plan will need to be monitored regularly to ensure they are being achieved.

Transparency in the evaluation process is important. Evaluation looks at the outcomes of what has been done and determines next steps for improvement. Accountability ensures that the Government of Nunavut is fulfilling their commitments within this plan. Learning is about taking time to reflect and ask questions that will support future implementation of the plan leading to the greatest benefit.

Baseline data is important to collect so that Nunavut has a place to begin to assess the effectiveness of its strategies and actions over time toward inclusive and equitable early learning and child care. Collecting research is an opportunity to engage with children and families in each community, to build trust and strengthen relationships.

Reporting must also be inclusive and equitable. This means not placing a huge burden on small providers to collect data and report, unless absolutely necessary, and support monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning staff from the Department of Education to do the work.



Data Collection and Sharing

Create mechanisms and processes through which data can be collected and shared across the sector, and used to evaluate actions set out in this strategic action plan.

Early learning and child care data for information collection and inclusively sharing

- How will data be collected across the sector? What type of data will be collected? How will it be done respectfully with communities, licensed child care centres, families? How will it inform inclusion and equity?
- How often will actions be evaluated? How will the sector evaluate its efforts as a whole? How will it reveal inclusion and equity?
- How to involve community groups in collecting information and building trust?

Implementation supports

It is important to note that this plan provides a starting point, for which work plans will be created to achieve each subgoal within each priority. The funding provided by the Department of Education and the Government of Canada will maintain momentum towards achieving most goals, and accountability reporting to Nunavut Tunngavik Inc and the Regional Inuit Associations, community representative experts, and the general public will ensure achievement towards these goals are transparent. This strategic action plan was prepared in 2022-2023 based upon information available at the time. Over time, the Government of Nunavut, in partnership with Inuit organizations, will review the plan and make adjustments accordingly.

Continuous community engagement

The Government of Nunavut is committed to deepening partnership with Inuit organizations, and to continuous engagement with community members and service providers throughout the implementation of this plan. Continued engagement will help:

- Enhance service accessibility for all children and families, particularly vulnerable or racialized families.
- Actively engage partners in the planning, management, and delivery of responsive programs and services.
- Support local decision-making to enrich programs, facilitate smooth transitions, and enhance integration between licensed child care centres, schools, and specialized community services.
- Regularly collect insights from parents, caregivers, and children to inform the sector at a local and territorial level. The Government of Nunavut can collect local anecdotal information/insight to tailor the regional professional development workshops to their emerging needs, and potentially support helpful general communications that could be rolled out in the communities by the daycares (to reduce their workload).

Accountability

This plan will be presented to the Government of Nunavut Cabinet for approval in early 2023-2024. Following approval, a copy of the plan will be disseminated to all licensed child care centres in Nunavut. Additionally, the broader community will be updated about the approved plan by publicly posting the plan on the Government of Nunavut website in conjunction with a comprehensive communication strategy targeting licensed child care operators, early childhood education professionals, families, and communities.



Reporting is recognized in the National Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework: recommendation #9 highlights the need to establish monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks that value the knowledge, opinions, and perspectives of Inuit early learning and child care educators.



Conclusion



This plan is meant to be flexible, allowing for changes to timelines or priorities dependent on the dynamic needs of the children and families and those who care for them in Nunavut. The Government of Nunavut will voluntarily submit updates to Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. regarding the implementation of the plan as changes or updates arise throughout its lifespan.

The Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. together will strive to provide children and families with high-quality Inuit-centered early learning and child care programs that meet the individual needs of families, recognizing the diversity of Nunavut communities. The introduction of the priorities detailed in this strategy will strengthen the Government of Nunavut's role to ensure an early learning and child care system that is inclusive and equitable, in addition to being affordable, accessible, high-quality, and responsive to the dynamic needs of our growing territory.



Glossary

Early Learning and Child Care and Early Childhood Development

The terms early learning and child care and early childhood development are used throughout this report to describe initiatives that seek to foster the wellbeing, growth and education of young children aged 0-6. It is useful to specify that while the term ‘early learning and child care’ refers to early learning and care programs, ‘early childhood development’ is concerned with the overall development of young children more broadly.

Early Childhood Educator

Early Childhood Educators are the workforce of the early learning and child care system, and can include licensed child care centre managers and child care staff.

Inuit Early Learning and Child Care

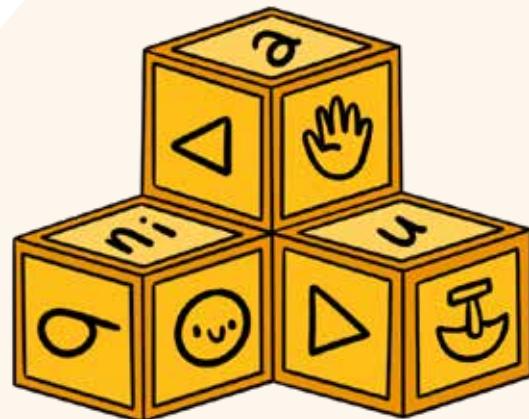
Inuit early learning and child care²³ is used to describe culturally and linguistically appropriate early learning programs and services designed for and with Inuit children and families. It is an Inuit-determined and led early learning and child care system that provides Inuit children with the opportunity to learn and speak Inuktut, and for their early learning experiences to be rooted in Inuit ways of knowing and living in the world.

Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care

Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care is a coordinated approach to policies, programs, and services that are Indigenous-led and grounded in Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and languages²⁴.

Inunnguiniq

Translated as “the making of a capable human being,” Inunnguiniq is the Inuit approach to socialization and education that enables people to live a good, culturally strong life. A good life is one in which people are enabled to contribute to collective wellbeing. Inunnguiniq is a shared responsibility to nurture children so they can develop in their own unique way, and become resilient and capable human beings. Nunavut’s Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework recognizes it as “a model that holds the child within their family, their community, and their learning environments. Inunnguiniq promotes a heart-centred approach to early learning and child care that focuses on nurturing children’s compassion, resilience, and their ability to continually learn and grow as they develop habits for living a good life²⁵.”



²³There are currently two ways of referring to Inuit early learning and child care, one specific and centred around Inuit, and the other broader and serves as an umbrella term for Indigenous peoples in which Inuit are included. While both share an acronym, this strategy refers to Inuit-specific Early learning and child care unless otherwise stated.

²⁴Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2017).

²⁵Government of Nunavut (2023).

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and Inuit Societal Values

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and Inuit Societal Values are a body of accumulated Inuit knowledge of the land, sea, animals, and environment, one that emphasizes an interrelationship between the elements, animals, people and family. These value systems and practices have survived for many generations and are transferred both orally and through active observation of intentional non-verbal communication. This transfer takes place through studying people and their interactions, and then applying this learning with humility, diligence, and patience. It is the “past, present and future knowledge, experience and values of Inuit Society²⁶”.

Licensed child care centres

Licensed child care centres include full-time and part-time care provided by licensed family day homes, daycares, preschools, nursery schools, and afterschool programs.

Early Learning and Child Care sector

A sector describes a large segment of the economy that is working in the same field. The early learning and child care sector operates and is managed in a way that is specific to Nunavut, within a broader system of governance and funding.

Early Learning and Child Care system

The early learning and child care system is the way early learning and child care is governed and funded in Nunavut. It is a set way of doing things, or an organized framework by which something is done.



²⁶Government of Nunavut (2002).

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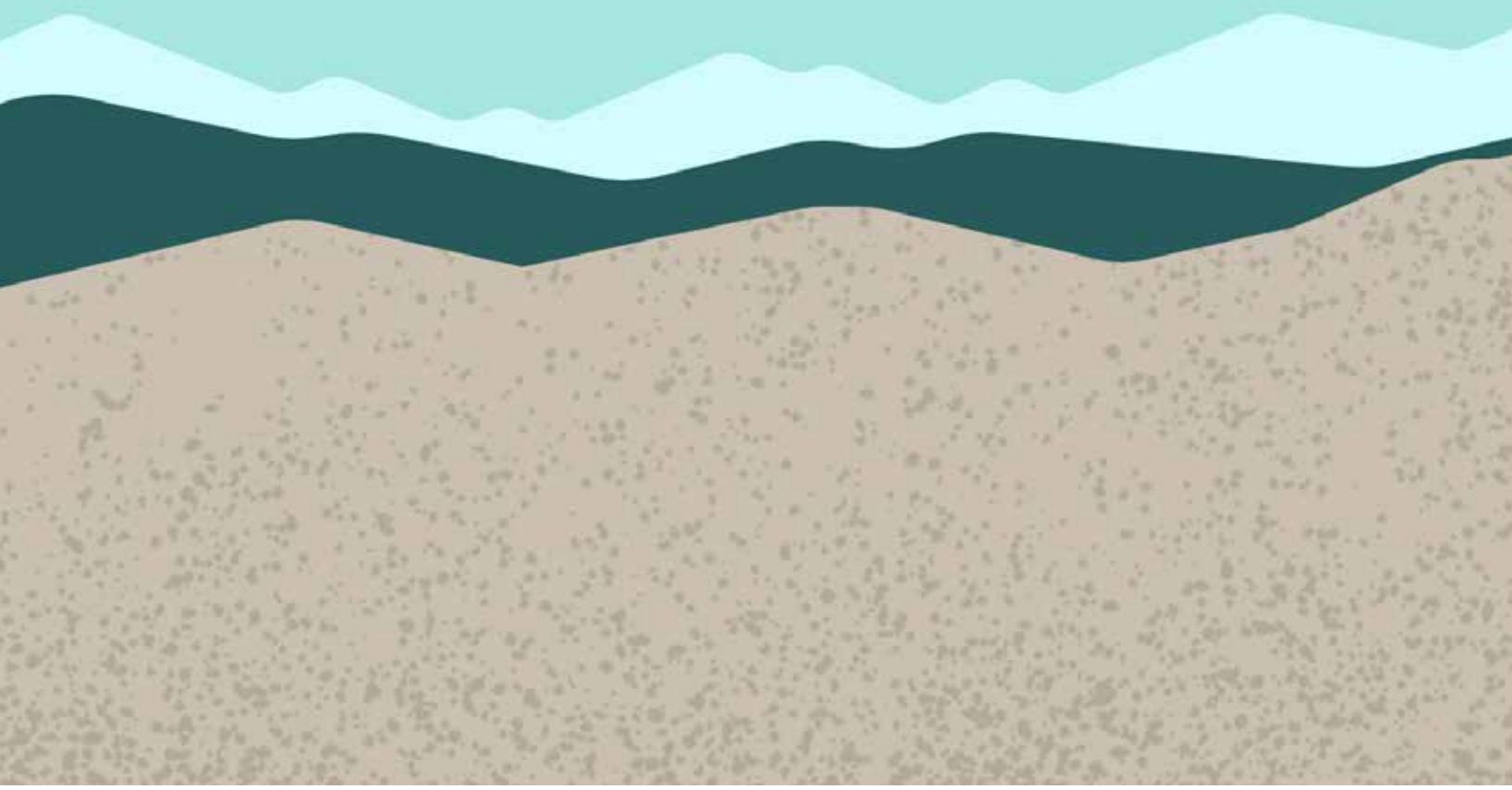
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Appendix - Partners and Stakeholders

There are many people and organizations who are interconnected in providing early learning and child care in Nunavut:

- Licensed non-profit child care centres
- Preschools
- Aboriginal Head Start programs
- Early Childhood Educators
- Families and caregivers
- Elders
- District Education Authorities
- Mentors, knowledge-holders, and educators
- Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. leadership and staff
- Regional Inuit Associations leadership and staff
- Nunavut Black History Society leadership and staff
- Nunavummi Disabilities Makinnasuaqtuit Society leadership and staff
- Association des francophones du Nunavut leadership and staff
- Government of Nunavut, Department of Education, Early learning and Child Care Division
- Government of Nunavut, Department of Family Services, Family Wellness Division
- Nunavut Arctic College
- Municipalities
- Service providers: bookkeepers, maintainers, construction companies
- Government of Canada



Canada

