



BC Aboriginal  
Child Care Society

# 2024 First Nations Leadership Forum on Early Learning and Child Care

## What We Heard Report



# Background

In 2018, the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS) was mandated by the First Nations Leadership Council (Union of BC Indian Chiefs, First Nations Summit, and BC Assembly of First Nations) to be the regional coordinating structure for the implementation of the National First Nations Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Policy Framework in BC (“First Nations ELCC Framework”). Co-developed by the Assembly of First Nations and the Government of Canada, the First Nations ELCC Framework is part of a 10-year, \$1.1-billion investment by Canada to build and expand Indigenous early learning and child care programs, supports, and services that are inclusive and accessible to all First Nations’ children (birth to age 6) and their families. In BC, BCACCS provides leadership, oversight, and accountability for the annual funding allocated from the federal government through the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Transformation Initiative (“IELCC”). This funding is enhancing, expanding, and supporting innovation within existing First Nations early learning and child care programs, and prioritizes communities and regions where there are no programs/services, or where they are severely underfunded.

To begin the work, a First Nation Leadership Forum for Early Learning and Child Care was held in 2019. At this Forum, Nations provided direction for the work and shared what was crucial to create a First Nations early learning and child care system that holds the values, beliefs, and ways of First Nations communities. The 2019 Leadership Forum included 89 delegates representing 25 First Nations, including one First Nations Chief, three First Nations Councillors, and six First Nations ELCC Technical Leads. Additional participants represented Indigenous and early learning and child care sectoral organizations, as well as the provincial and federal governments.

***“All your words are in the  
wind now. We’re going to  
see where it goes now. We’re  
going to see who grabs on.”***

**— Elder Lekeyten, Kwantlen First Nation  
during the 2019 Leadership Forum**

In advance of the 2024 Leadership Forum on Early Learning and Child Care, BCACCS shared with participants the Forum Backgrounder, the First Nations ELCC Framework, the Elements of Quality Child Care from the Perspectives of Aboriginal Peoples in British Columbia, and the First Nation ELCC Framework Implementation in BC: Five Years of Growth and Capacity, 2018–2023 documents. These documents will be available on the BCACCS website, along with this report.



**Access all these documents [here](#):**

Forum Backgrounder, the First Nations ELCC Framework, the Elements of Quality Child Care from the Perspectives of Aboriginal Peoples in British Columbia, and the First Nation ELCC Framework Implementation in BC: Five Years of Growth and Capacity, 2018–2023

## Our Journey

BCACCS was established in 1996 to help BC First Nations establish early learning and child care programs and services which meet the needs of First Nations children and families.

We are committed to ensuring that communities are able to meet standards of care through the offering of high-quality early learning and child care programs and services that are culturally and linguistically valid, as well as affordable, accessible, and holistic. It is through this commitment that BCACCS has developed a variety of culturally based resources and training workshops, as well as considerable policy expertise and research experience in the field of early learning and child care.



BCACCS acknowledges that our office is located on the traditional lands of the Xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwx̱ wú7mesh (Squamish) and səɫilwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) People and we are privileged to do our work in Indigenous Territories all over BC.

### VISION

All Indigenous children in BC have the right to access holistic, culturally based early learning and development programs, services, and supports so they can reach their full potential.

### MISSION

As a Centre of Excellence, BCACCS provides training, resources, research and services that empower communities to increase capacity, quality, and access for early learning and development programs.

Through leadership and expertise, we champion the rights of Indigenous children.

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## Message from Co-Chairs

*We start by offering our gratitude to the elected leaders, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Witnesses, special guests, and presenters who gathered on May 16 and 17, 2024, for the First Nations Early Learning and Child Care Leadership Forum. We recognize that making the time to attend and participate may have been challenging, given the competing demands on your time, and we are grateful that you made this time together a priority. If you are reading this report and were not able to attend the forum, we extend our gratitude to you as well, for taking the time to listen, learn, and reflect.*

*We were pleased to be asked to co-chair the two-day event, as we both believe that this work—on jurisdiction of early learning and child care—is central to asserting what is ours and achieving the dreams we hold for our children.*

*We began the event with the hope of creating an inclusive space for important dialogue. Dialogue is the most important tool we have in grappling with the complex questions related to jurisdiction in the care and education of our youngest citizens. It is through dialogue that Nations are able to explore and identify what matters to them, the processes they will choose, and the resources they need to support this. At the end of the two days, with the support of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Witnesses, we hold immense hope and confidence with the gathering and dialogue that took place. It builds on the work that came before, and prepares us for the work that lies ahead.*

*This report is a record of proceedings at the two-day event; while all dialogue cannot, and often should not, be recorded for public consumption, it is important that delegates hold on to what was meaningful to them. As you review and consider this report, we urge you to consider what you take away and how it shapes your commitments and actions. We are committed to taking this work forward, in our respective roles and in our own home community to advance the work. We call on all First Nations leaders to continue reflecting and taking action, engaging and planning with community members, reaching out for support from BCACCS, and advancing your own commitments to community, families, and children.*

— Cheryl Casimer  
(?aq?smaknik pi?ak pa?kiy)

— Warner Adam



Co-Chairs Warner Adam &  
Cheryl Casimer (ʔaqʔsmaknik pičak paʔkiy)

*“Creating a safe space for children to grow and reach their full potential is crucial for our pathways moving forward. We are at the crux of a new era where Canada and BC have finally created space for First Nations to exercise their inherent rights. In order to take full advantage of this time we must grow our own professionals and institutions, what better way to accomplish this task than by creating space for the children to grow intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally. I firmly believe that we are creating the space now and children will flourish in the next 25 to 50 years.”*

— Warner Adam

*“Change requires more than good intentions. The First Nations Early Learning and Child Care Framework has been created to ensure a way forward that engages us all beyond the existing landscape. It is calling on us to create systemic change that honours and upholds our own ways of knowing and being, to ensure that the change we can make centres our children, our families, and our communities—now and for years to come.”*

— Cheryl Casimer  
(ʔaqʔsmaknik pičak paʔkiy)



# 2024 Forum Overview

## WHEN AND WHERE

May 16 and 17, 2024

Hyatt Regency Vancouver, 655 Burrard Street

Traditional territories of the Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səɪ ilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh)



## WHO

Hosted by BCACCS, with support from  
First Nations Leadership Council

Co-Chairs Cheryl Casimer (?aqʷsmaknik  
pičak paʷkiy) and Warner Adam.

239

Attendees

105

First Nations  
Represented

### Participants included:

**18** First Nations Chiefs  
(including National Chief Cindy  
Woodhouse Nepinak)

**48** First Nations Councillors

**66** First Nations Band  
Administrators

**107** First Nations ELCC Technical  
Leads & Sector Representatives



## WHY

The Forum was designed to create space that would support delegates in **three common objectives:**

- 1 Explore critical questions, needs, and strategic priorities related to jurisdiction in First Nations early learning and child care.**
- 2 Identify and confirm the resources, tools, and processes needed by First Nations leadership.**
- 3 Learn more about upcoming funding opportunities available under the IELCC Transformation Initiative.**

## HOW & WHAT

The two-day Forum included a range of scheduled activities, including:

- Information sharing and presentations, reflective questions, and dialogue tables.
- Accountability and discussion of funding and systems-building work.
- Relationship building and networking.

**See *Appendix A: Agenda* for a full overview of activities and presentations.**



## Opening the Space

As hosts, BCACCS worked to establish a space that was reflective of the importance of gathering, and honouring traditional beliefs and cultural practices. As delegates entered the room, they passed through pillars and under a canoe as a reminder of the journey they were on together. Cedar was found throughout the space to symbolize the strength of the people in the room and to honour the work of revitalizing a First Nations system of early learning and child care.

## ELDER BLESSING AND WITNESSES CALLED

Elder Amelia Washington, a traditional nlekpmx Woman and a Knowledge Keeper, blessed the morning breakfast, signalling the start of the gathering and coming together of delegates to begin the day with a morning meal. As the meeting space was opened, Khelsilem, Council Chairperson of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw (the Squamish Nation), welcomed delegates to the territory. The Co-Chairs acknowledged the Elders in the room and thanked them for sharing their time, support, and knowledge over the two days.

Cultural and ceremonial practices continued with a traditional Witness Ceremony, supported by the guidance and leadership of Ray Harris (Shulqwilum), calling forward the following Witnesses:



**Councillor Simon Smith, Jr.**  
Tsartlip First Nation



**Hereditary Chief Mabel Louie**  
Stellat'en First Nation



**Judy Wilson**  
Neskonlith Indian Band



**Councillor Calvin Swustus Sr.**  
Cowichan Tribes



Blessing from Elder Amelia Washington

## POLITICAL LEADERS

Opening remarks were invited from National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak (Assembly of First Nations), Regional Chief Terry Teegee (BC Assembly of First Nations), Chief Don Tom (Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Vice President) and Hugh Braker (First Nations Summit, Political Executive). Leaders spoke about the urgency of jurisdiction, the importance of early learning and child care, the fact that First Nations hold children at the heart of their communities and know what is needed, and the hope that is held in the forthcoming tripartite agreement that will chart a new path for the future of early learning and child care.



Photo left to right:

**Warner Adam**, BCACCS Board Member and Forum Co-Chair, **Maurice Squires**, BCACCS Board Member, **Don Tom**, Vice President Union of BC Indian Chiefs, **Mary Teegee-Gray**, BCACCS Board Member, **Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak**, AFN National Chief, **Cheryl Casimer**, First Nations Summit Task Group and Forum Co-Chair, **Khelsilem**, Council Chairperson of Skwxwú7mesh, **Debra Foxcroft**, BCACCS Board Member, **Sue Sterling-Bur**, BCACCS Board Member, **Terry Teegee**, BC AFN Regional Chief, **Karen Isaac**, BCACCS Executive Director.





Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak, AFN National Chief



Don Tom, Vice President Union of BC Indian Chiefs

***“What you are doing here in BC, the work underway in early learning and child care, it is unique and it is important. We are all listening and learning.”***

— Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak, AFN National Chief

***“We must take up the space of jurisdiction—back home in our communities—this is our space to take up.”***

— Don Tom, Vice President Union of BC Indian Chiefs

***“This work in early learning and child care, including strong culture and language programs in community, are linked to lower rates of suicide. We need this for the health and well-being of our communities.”***

— Hugh Braker, First Nations Summit, Political Executive

***“BC has led the way in terms of self-determination and jurisdiction. This Leadership Gathering is indicative of our collective commitment to work together towards our shared vision of each child having the right to live up to their full potential.”***

— Terry Teegee, BCAFN Regional Chief

British Columbia Premier David Eby delivered opening remarks via a pre-recorded video, offering gratitude for delegates coming together to share and strengthen the work they do for First Nations children and communities:

***“...today, in an outstanding tribute to resilience, healing, cultural strength, and intergenerational love, First Nations children are being taught Indigenous ways of knowing, timeless and life-giving cultural traditions, and revitalized languages, with care and commitment, in their own communities... The education and care of First Nations children belongs in First Nations hands; this is true and with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, it is also the law of the land.”***

— Premier Eby

## HOST ORGANIZATION

Mary Teegee-Gray, President of BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, provided opening remarks and reminded delegates that while protecting land, resources, and fisheries is important, there is no more important fight than for our children. Mary also offered that as we care for and educate children, we remember that ceremony is jurisdiction.

*“I want to thank you for being fierce and fearless over the next two days. To say what needs to be said. To hear what needs to be heard. And above all—to feel what needs to be felt. I want to remind you, not only in this work but in all the courageous actions you take to better the lives of our children, that you are the Ancestors. Those not yet born will speak of us. Let’s promise to work together, so that they say ‘they did good.’”*

Mary Teegee-Gray, BCACCS Board of Directors President



## KEYNOTE

Khelsilem, Council Chairperson of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw (the Squamish Nation), welcomed delegates to the territory and offered an inspiring and insightful keynote address that spoke to the themes of identity, place, people, voice, power, planning, and governance. Khelsilem shared the three key ideas critical to advancing early learning and child care in the Squamish Nation:

1. Knowledge: ***“Our territory has been our identity for thousands of years.”***
2. Systems thinking and building: ***“We don’t rise to the level of our goals; we fall to the level of our processes.”***
3. Collectively determining our destination: ***“Are we bringing our children into the work we do? Are we speaking for them, or are we welcoming their voices in this work?”***

Khelsilem offered learning from the community’s experiences in developing and launching the Squamish Nation Generational Plan 2050, and reminded delegates that governance ***“...is the process for taking care of what is important.”*** The examples and wisdom shared, from the experiences of the Squamish Nation, offered space for delegates to begin digging deeper into the questions of governance, jurisdiction, and the care and education of young children.



Khelsilem, Council Chairperson of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw



# First Nations Early Learning and Child Care Framework in BC: Five Years of Capacity and Growth

***“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.”***

Karen Isaac, BCACCS Executive Director



Accountability is woven throughout the First Nations ELCC framework as part of the principles, goals, priorities, and strategic actions. BCACCS has maintained accountability to First Nations leadership through updates and dialogue with Chiefs in Assembly meetings, as well as the ongoing work to establish bilateral and tripartite spaces. The 2024 Leadership Forum was an important venue to offer an overarching update on the first five years of this work. In support of this accountability, BCACCS prepared and distributed the report *First Nations Early Learning and Child Care Framework Implementation: Five Years of Growth & Capacity 2018–2023*. This report contains important background/context for this

work, the vision and principles guiding the work, the challenges faced, and investment figures (e.g. overall amounts, regional analysis, funding stream analysis, recipients, etc.).

BCACCS Executive Director, Karen Isaac, presented information about the key lessons learned and the challenges faced (e.g. COVID-19, climate emergencies, community-based traumas and grief), and the critical importance of time, patience, flexibility, and relationship. In sharing the learning, Karen also offered insight into initial work on understanding “impact” through a principled approach that centres relationships with people and places. Dialogue with community, listening deeply and reflecting collaboratively, is a central part of understanding the impact of this work in relation to the overarching vision set out in the First Nations ELCC Framework.

The growing understanding of impact continues to highlight the need for systems change and transformation:

***“Funding alone will not achieve the vision that is set out for the work—first, it just isn’t enough to meet the needs—second, funding alone doesn’t create a sustainable system. You need policy, you need research, you need data, you need collaborations and partnerships, you need capacity.”***

— Karen Isaac, BCACCS Executive Director



A part of the mandate that drives BCACCS work is to support a systems approach by engaging with First Nations leaders, creating and contributing to bilateral and tripartite spaces with colleagues in the provincial and federal governments, collaborating with post-secondary colleagues on holistic approaches to workforce development, and initiating broader research and policy work related to jurisdiction, including hosting the Forum.

# Future Paths in First Nations Early Learning and Child Care in BC

In support of the 2024 Leadership Forum, a background document was shared with participants and was the basis of a presentation from Co-Chairs Cheryl Casimer (?aq?smaknik pičak paḥkiy) and Warner Adam.

***“...when we talk about early learning and child care, we are talking about the future of our Nations, the future of our Peoples.”***

— Cheryl Casimer [?aq?smaknik pičak paḥkiy] & Warner Adam

Western/colonial models of human development propose hard numbers to indicate the period of ‘early childhood’ (e.g. zero–six years), yet on the Medicine Wheel, infants sit beside the Elders and both are close to the Spirit World. There are fundamentally different views that need to be understood in this work. From a policy perspective, while early learning and child care sits at the intersection of health, education, and child welfare, it is also a standalone profession with distinct training, credentialling, legislation, regulations, and funding models. What makes Indigenous early learning and child care even more distinct is the wholistic and interconnected lens (child, family, community), the focus on prevention, and the importance of place-based and responsive approaches. The opportunity is to build a system of early learning and child care that reflects what makes it unique, including how reconciliation and jurisdiction are centred.



BCACCS Forum 2024 participant

***“Indigenous Peoples have the inherent right of self-determination, including the right to care for our children in accordance with our cultures and traditions. Our children are at the center of our families and our communities, and our continued existence as Indigenous peoples requires the ability to pass on our languages, laws, culture, and knowledge systems through our children.”***

Cheryl and Warner situated the work in the context of Section 35 of the Constitution Act (1982), the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (2019), and the federal UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (2021). Additional examples, or supportive conditions, were highlighted, including the TRC Calls to Action, Action Plans related to UNDRIP legislation, the IELCC and First Nations ELCC Frameworks, and the emerging First Nations ELCC Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

***“For the first time ever, there is a commitment from both levels of government to support and move forward First Nations jurisdiction over ELCC, including by providing funding and resources to make this happen... There has also been support to move forward on this path by First Nations leadership in BC. Through Chiefs Assemblies, First Nations have provided a mandate and support for a tripartite MOU between Canada, BC, and the FNLC to develop a path forward for Indigenous jurisdiction over IELCC, with BCACCS and the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) providing technical support and guidance.”***



With this unprecedented level of support, it is also critical to consider what would be included in “jurisdiction over early learning and child care”:

- First Nations establishing and controlling our own early learning and child care systems and institutions.
- The ongoing teaching and exercising of Indigenous laws, practices, and protocols.
- Implementing Indigenous laws, teachings, and practices to facilitate child and family well-being and allow for the thriving of our children, families, and communities.
- First Nations making our own decisions about the care and education of our children in the early years.
- Coordinating with other jurisdictions, including other Nations.

This presentation ended by offering key reflective questions for First Nations political and technical leaders to contemplate, in relation to the exercise of jurisdiction:

1. What do you need in the current IELCC landscape to have a thriving early learning and child care system in your Nation?
2. Is jurisdiction over early learning and child care something your Nation has considered or is contemplating?
  - If so, what are some of the opportunities to implement jurisdiction over early learning and child care in your Nation?
  - What are/might be challenges or barriers to your Nation when exercising jurisdiction over early learning and child care?
3. What can First Nations early learning and child care organizations, such as BCACCS, do to support Nations to address challenges presented by the current early learning and child care landscape?
4. What can First Nations early learning and child care organizations, such as BCACCS, do to support the implementation of jurisdiction over early learning and child care, if that is a path that your Nation wishes to pursue?



Ihe hiwus yalxwemult (Chief Lenora Joe) offered a lunchtime presentation, offering delegates insights and learning from the shíhálh Nation's work establishing and growing their early learning and child care processes, programs, and governance. She reminded those in the room of the importance of patience, determination, and learning:

*"We've failed more than we've succeeded, but we never gave up. Sometimes a failure sends you on an unexpected path."*



Ihe hiwus yalxwemult (Chief Lenora Joe), shíhálh Nation



## EMERGING WISE PRACTICE AND INNOVATION IN EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

On the second day of the Forum, delegates were able to learn from a panel of guests, representing the work of early learning and child care in First Nations. Moderated by Danielle Alphonse (BC Regional Innovation Chair in Aboriginal ECD, Vancouver Island University), panellists were invited to share their perspectives on some of what makes early learning and child care distinct for First Nations in BC:



Danielle Alphonse, BC Regional Innovation Chair in Aboriginal ECD, Vancouver Island University



LeDonna Bussineau, Lhtako First Nation, shared about operating a family program that reflects the priorities of community, families, and children and how this builds a critical sense of belonging.

*"We are an unlicensed, multi-age, family program. Our vision didn't fit with what funders wanted to fund. We are grateful that BCACCS funded what was a priority for community—our vision."*



Linda Mitchell, Kwantlen First Nation, shared about her community's experiences with establishing and growing an unlicensed Head Start program that reflected the community's priorities, rather than colonial regulations, as well as the need for regional advocacy and multi-year funding agreements.

*"Just because we're not licensed doesn't mean we don't know how to care for our children. Part of our hopes and dreams is to have our own licensing, so we can raise children the way we want to raise our children."*



**Photo left to right:**

**Danielle Alphonse**, BC Regional Innovation Chair in Aboriginal ECD, Vancouver Island University

**Danielle Saddleman**, Acting Director of Education, Language, and Culture; Language & Culture Lead, Okanagan Indian Band

**Romona Baxter**, Executive Director, Nzen'man' Child and Family Development Centre Society

**LeDonna Bussineau**, Family Centre Coordinator, Lhtako First Nation

**Linda Mitchell**, Head Start Manager, Coordinator, Kwantlen First Nation



Danielle Saddleman, Okanagan Indian Band, shared about the experiences of offering a Language Nest program and the importance of viewing early learning and child care as part of the broader community, outside the walls of one given program.

*"We can't put all of the responsibility on the children, the staff and community members must also learn the language."*



Romona Baxter, Nzen'man' Child and Family Development Centre Society, spoke about operating a child care program that reflects and includes the diverse voices of five First Nations, the monumental challenges and opportunities that have arisen from the wildfire that destroyed their centre, and the importance of governance and jurisdiction in early learning and child care.

*"In exploring jurisdiction, you need to start by understanding the ground you are standing on. Take up the space and figure it out. What is helpful is both financial and human resources—we need PEOPLE to help us."*

## SUMMARY STATEMENTS FROM DAY ONE

“Jurisdiction is a big word and can mean so many things. Need to define this and the options.”

“Jurisdiction is only one step in self-determination, and it has many pathways. Our work needs to be collaborative and integrated.”

“We need fiscal jurisdiction to do this work.”

“We can’t talk about Indigenous jurisdiction without talking about Indigenous law, culture, and lands.”

“Our laws come to us from the Creator and from our lands that we call home.”

# First Nations Early Learning and Child Care and Future Directions in BC

On behalf of BCACCS, Lisa Fenton, IELCC Co-Manager, Engagement, offered a presentation on the second day of the Forum to provide delegates with information on the strategic plans that will shape the implementation of the First Nations ELCC Framework in BC. The strategic plans are in response to the feedback from leadership and community, as well as key principles of the Framework:



Lisa Fenton, IELCC Co-Manager, Engagement

- Indigenous knowledges, languages, and cultures
- First Nations governance
- Quality programs and services
- Inclusivity, accessibility, and flexibility
- Transparency and accountability
- Collaborations and partnerships
- Capacity development

Moving forward, the work will be shaped into three key areas:



Seeking input and ensuring investments (funding, time, energies) are responsive and impactful is an ongoing and relational process. The Forum provided additional space for delegates to consider and respond to the future directions outlined, particularly in light of discussions from the first day regarding jurisdiction.

## GOVERNANCE AND EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE: SOME THOUGHTS AND IDEAS

Lydia Hwitsum (Xtli'li'ye), BC Treaty Commissioner, generously stepped in to deliver a lunchtime presentation, prepared by Dr. Margo Greenwood (unable to attend due to illness), providing delegates with additional information and space for reflection on governance and jurisdiction.

***“The road to formalized early learning and child care for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada is long and complicated. This is a collective tale. One that is entwined with that of settlers to these lands, and one from which formalized early learning and child care programs and services emerged. This story has two important truths. First, we have the inherent right to care for our children. Second, children, and their care, is political.”***

— Lydia Hwitsum (Xtli'li'ye), for Dr. Margo Greenwood



Dr. Greenwood's presentation ended with an exploration of future possibilities and, citing the late Perry Shawana (2000), recapped the four categories of structural change mechanisms: (a) inherent rights to self-determination, (b) constitutional treaty rights, (c) federal and/or provincial legislation, and (d) memoranda of understanding, delegation agreements, and bilateral and trilateral agreements. Dr. Greenwood concluded by offering delegates opportunities for developing a system of early learning and child care:

1. Ongoing engagement, first, with First Nations communities to identify their early learning and child care needs and aspirations for their children.
2. Convening bilateral and/or trilateral tables to explore First Nations authority over early learning and child care, including:
  - authority to develop and implement First Nations early learning and child care standards and regulations; and
  - authority to create and implement standards for First Nations Early Childhood Education and Training.
3. Establishing a regional partnership roundtable of Indigenous early learning and child care programs and services, funding recipients, and key stakeholders to inform development and implementation of a coordinated Indigenous early learning and child care system in British Columbia.



# Dialogue Tables and What Was Heard Across Both Days

Following the speakers and presentations offered in the two-day Forum, dialogue tables were facilitated in the afternoons. At these dialogue tables, delegates were asked to provide their thoughts on several topics and respond to questions, highlighting potential gaps, opportunities, and challenges in current early learning and child care programming and implementation. Each table had a designated notetaker to capture these conversations and presented these insights to the other delegates in the room.

The same questions were displayed on the presentation screens through a polling platform, inviting delegates to provide their responses anonymously. This method was used to increase engagement overall, as well as to gather feedback from those who might not be comfortable speaking in large groups.

*Appendix B: What We Heard* contains a detailed account of the specific questions asked, the themes which emerged, key opportunities and challenges identified, and some specific quotes from delegates. High-level themes that were identified through analysis of the two days of dialogue amongst delegates, include:

## Holistic and First Nations approach:

The current early learning and child care landscape is rife with colonial practices and program models. Participants expressed the need for First Nations worldviews, cultures, languages, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and families to be at the heart of a holistic approach to services to bridge the gap between the currently siloed methods, since education, health care, child care, culture, and language are all intertwined. In particular, a theme emerged noting the need for mentorship opportunities for early childhood educators and community youth to create a space where they feel welcomed and knowledgeable in the culture and language of their communities.

## Relationship building:

Conversations about implementing early learning and child care programs in First Nations communities highlighted the importance of building relationships with other communities, regions, Nations, and governments. Through relationships, the sharing of information, resources, and learnings can continue to build and support the capacity of communities and the sector to strengthen local, regional, and provincial capacity in early learning and child care.



BCACCS Forum 2024 participant



**Streamlined processes:**

Participants spoke about the need for a coordinated approach across all funding partners (e.g., Canada, BC, First Nations Health Authority [FNHA], BCACCS, Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC), to achieve streamlined funding and reporting systems, including an application toolkit. Many felt this level of collaboration would reduce burdens (e.g., repetitiveness of reporting requirements) and make funding more accessible and manageable for communities.

**Capacity building:**

Many First Nations expressed a lack of capacity in their communities to offer early learning and child care programming for their children. They expressed the need for ongoing professional development programs to retain staff in early learning and child care and maintain their skills. Funding and processes that support mentoring and on-the-job training would help to create early learning and child care programs that are fulfilling for early childhood development workers and allow them to build deeper relationships with families. Furthermore, the theme of “capacity building” includes empowering individuals and groups with the knowledge and skills to effect change in their communities and families.

**Recruitment and retention:**

BC’s geography, coupled with a worsening housing crisis, is a challenge for recruitment and retention of qualified early childhood educators. Rural and remote First Nations communities find it difficult to find and retain qualified early childhood educators to support early learning and child care in their communities. Being able to offer competitive wages and staff housing are urgent needs in relation to both recruitment and retention of the workforce. Specific concerns included the exodus of early childhood educators from community programs to school-based programs and other organizations (and/or other professions) able to offer more competitive wages.

**Licensing and jurisdiction:**

A topic that arose in multiple discussions was the need for some form of First Nations-based licensing. Many participants were concerned with the impracticality/impossibility of having Nation-focused early learning and child care programs while having to fit within the confines of colonial legislation and regulations.

**Information sharing:**

There is opportunity to engage leadership, share knowledge, and bring Elders and Knowledge Keepers into the centre of early learning and child care development and programming. Furthermore, transparency in funding opportunities, wages, and reporting were important to many delegates. This theme of information sharing also refers to BCACCS providing spaces for community members to meet, ask questions, and discuss what IELCC might look like in their Nation.

## Closing the Space

The Co-Chairs, the four Witnesses, and Elder Victor Guerin offered summary statements of the key themes that emerged in dialogue and information sharing, commitments to what would be taken forward for sharing and action, gratitude to all participants, and a prayer that brought the Forum to a close.

***“First Nations have to stop going to court—you’ve already won. Just assert what is yours.”***

— Elder Victor Guerin

## THANK YOU

We offer immense gratitude to all delegates for their time, energy, and generosity in sharing their ideas, questions, concerns, needs, and hopes. Your active participation was the cornerstone of the Forum’s success.

This event would not have been possible without the unwavering dedication of our Co-Chairs. Your leadership and commitment were instrumental in bringing this Forum to life.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the political leaders, Elders, Witnesses, and speakers whose contributions enriched the discussions and provided valuable insights.

We also deeply appreciate the support offered by the First Nations Leadership Council, in particular for your promotion of the event which generated widespread interest and participation, ensuring strong attendance and inclusion of a diverse array of perspectives.

Our sincere appreciation goes to the Our Children Our Way Society and 50th Parallel Public Relations for their support to document what was shared throughout the event; this documentation assisted us in the completion of this report and will continue to guide the work as it moves forward.

Last but certainly not least, we wish to acknowledge and thank our staff for their tireless efforts in planning and hosting the event. Your time and energy were essential to the Forum’s success.



Debra Foxcroft, BCACCS Board Member, Tawni Jones, BCACCS Regional Community Facilitator, Shulqwilum (Ray Harris), First Nations Summit Co-Chair

## BCACCS Message on Next Steps

On both days of the Forum, we committed to ensuring that a report like this would be completed and distributed. We remain committed to taking the input and directions forward to implementation, including:

- Continuing to create and nurture space where all BC First Nations are supported in their consideration and exercise of jurisdiction over early learning and child care.
- Engaging with both political and technical leaders in all BC First Nations. This may include one-on-one visits in community, as well as standing up a series of regional and sub-regional meetings, to ensure dialogue continues and First Nations are supported in their priorities (e.g., licensing, capacity building, recruitment and retention, streamlining funding, exploring multi-year funding, etc.).
- Ongoing investment of financial and human resources in flexible, responsive, relational, and localized ways. In 2024–25, this will include (but not be limited to) new capital and workforce funding, and supporting First Nations in strengthening local capacity in meaningful ways.
- Ongoing systems-building work, including:
  - Bilateral and trilateral work that advances the Chiefs’ resolutions from 2022 and ensures First Nations rights and jurisdictions are protected and upheld in relation to the care and education of young children.
  - Research and policy analysis that supports advancing identified priorities (e.g., jurisdiction, licensing options, capacity building, funding, and procurement practices).



**We look forward to the next First Nations Leadership Forum on Early Learning and Child Care, tentatively planned for Spring 2026.**

# Appendices



# Appendix A: Agenda

## 2024 First Nations Leadership Forum on Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC)

Thursday May 16 & Friday May 17, 2024  
Hyatt Regency, 655 Burrard Street, Vancouver

### FORUM OBJECTIVES

As Nations contemplate and prepare for jurisdiction and governance over ELCC, it is important that the work is structured to support and advance local priorities. This forum is intended to allow delegates to explore and discuss the journey from current (colonial) systems and structures, towards a future state that centres jurisdiction and self-determination in the care and education of First Nations children.

Throughout the forum, the following objectives will guide the work:

- 1) **Explore** critical questions, needs, and strategic priorities related to jurisdiction in First Nations ELCC
- 2) **Identify** and confirm the resources, tools, and processes needed by First Nations leadership
- 3) **Learn** more about upcoming funding opportunities available under the IELCC Transformation Initiative

### DAY 1 AGENDA | Thursday, May 16 | Regency Ballroom (3<sup>rd</sup> floor)

8:00 – 9:00 am	Registration & Breakfast
9:00 – 9:20 am	Opening & Welcome
9:20 – 10:00 am	<b>Opening Remarks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-Chairs: ʔaqʔsmaknik pičak paʔkiy (Cheryl Casimer) and Warner Adam</li> <li>National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak</li> <li>BC First Nations Leadership Council (BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, Union of BC Indian Chiefs)</li> <li>BCACCS Board President, Maaxswxw Gibuu (Mary Teegee-Gray)</li> </ul>
10:00 – 10:40 am	<b>Keynote</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Khelsilem, Squamish Council Chairperson</li> </ul>
10:40 – 10:55 am	<b>HEALTH BREAK</b>
10:55 – 11:20 am	<b>Presentation: Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care in BC: 5-year update</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presented by Karen Isaac, BCACCS Executive Director</li> </ul>
11:20 am – 12:00 pm	<b>Presentation: Future Path in Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care in BC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is distinct about ELCC?</li> <li>Challenges and opportunities</li> <li>Governance and jurisdiction</li> <li>Presented by ʔaqʔsmaknik pičak paʔkiy (Cheryl Casimer) and Warner Adam</li> </ul>

<b>12:00 – 1:00 pm</b>	<b>LUNCH</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Luncheon speaker: Ihe hiwus yalxwemult (Chief Lenora Joe, shíshálh Nation)</li> </ul>
<b>1:00 – 2:00 pm</b>	<b>Dialogue Tables: Future Path in Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care in BC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delegates to discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do you need in the current Indigenous ELCC landscape to have a thriving ELCC system in your Nation?</li> <li>Is jurisdiction over ELCC something your Nation has considered or is contemplating? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If so, what are some of the opportunities to implement jurisdiction over ELCC in your Nation?</li> <li>What are/might be challenges or barriers to your Nation when exercising jurisdiction over ELCC?</li> </ul> </li> <li>What can First Nations ELCC organizations, such as BCACCS, do to support Nations to address challenges presented by the current ELCC landscape?</li> <li>What can First Nations ELCC organization, such as BCACCS, do to support the implementation of jurisdiction over ELCC, if that is a path that your Nation wishes to pursue?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>2:00 – 2:15 pm</b>	<b>HEALTH BREAK</b>
<b>2:15 – 3:15 pm</b>	<b>Dialogue Tables: Future Path in Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care in BC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delegates to share themes/highlights of table dialogue</li> </ul>
<b>3:15 – 4:00 pm</b>	<b>Closing Main Session</b>
<b>4:00 – 6:00 pm</b>	<b>Networking Reception: Hyatt Perspective Level (34<sup>th</sup> floor)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hosted by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sue Sterling-Bur, BCACCS Board of Directors, Nłeʔkepmx and Stó:lō Nations</li> <li>Debra Foxcroft, BCACCS Board of Directors, Tseshah First Nation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## DAY 2 AGENDA | Friday, May 17 | Regency Ballroom (3<sup>rd</sup> floor)

<b>8:00 – 9:00 am</b>	<b>Registration &amp; Breakfast</b>
<b>9:00 – 9:15 am</b>	<b>Opening &amp; Welcome</b>
<b>9:15 – 9:30 am</b>	<b>Opening Remarks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-Chairs: ʔaqʔsmaknik pičak paʔkiy (Cheryl Casimer) and Warner Adam</li> </ul>
<b>9:30 – 10:30 am</b>	<b>Panel Discussion: Emerging Wise Practice and Innovation in Early Learning and Child Care</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Panel Moderator: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Danielle Alphonse, Vancouver Island University Professor (Early Childhood Education and Care program) and BC Regional Innovation Chair in Aboriginal Early Childhood Development</li> </ul> </li> <li>Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LeDonna Bussineau, Lhtako First Nation</li> <li>Linda Mitchell, Kwantlen First Nation</li> <li>Danielle Saddleman, Okanagan Indian Band</li> <li>Romona Baxter, Nzen'man' Child and Family Development Centre</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



<b>10:30 – 10:45 am</b>	<b>HEALTH BREAK</b>
<b>10:45 – 11:15 am</b>	<b>Response to Panel Discussion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response/questions from delegates to panel discussion</li> </ul>
<b>11:15 am – 12:00 pm</b>	<b>Presentation: First Nation Early Learning and Child Care &amp; Future Directions in BC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presented by: Lisa Fenton, Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Transformation Initiative Co-Manager, Engagement (BCACCS)</li> </ul>
<b>12:00 – 1:00 pm</b>	<b>LUNCH</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luncheon speaker: Dr. Margo Greenwood, PhD, Professor, Education Program, University of Northern BC</li> </ul>
<b>1:00 – 2:15 pm</b>	<b>Dialogue Tables: First Nation Early Learning and Child Care &amp; Future Directions in BC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Panel Moderators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lisa Fenton, Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Transformation Initiative Co-Manager, Engagement (BCACCS)</li> <li>○ Alison Bledsoe, Early Learning and Child Care Consultant (BCACCS)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Delegates to discuss, followed by sharing of themes/highlights of table dialogue</li> </ul>
<b>2:15 – 2:45 pm</b>	<b>Closing</b>
<b>2:45 – 3:00 pm</b>	<b>HEALTH BREAK</b> (optional for those choosing to stay for final discussion/meetings)
<b>3:00 – 4:00 pm</b>	<b>Optional Discussions/Meetings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open dialogue table discussions on <i>IELCC Transformation Initiative</i> funding streams: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Capital Funding (Prince of Wales room)</li> <li>○ ECE Wage Enhancement (Regency Ballroom)</li> <li>○ Service Development and Enhancement (Regency Ballroom)</li> <li>○ Recruitment and Retention (Regency Ballroom)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Space available for individual meetings with regional <i>IELCC Transformation Initiative</i> staff (Oxford room)</li> </ul>

# Appendix B: What We Heard

What do you need in the current IELCC landscape to have a thriving early learning and child care system in your Nation?

## KEY THEMES

- Streamlined and multi-year funding
- Accountability
- Flexibility
- Recruitment and retention
- First Nation leadership and involvement
- Infrastructure
- Holistic approach
- Multi-generational approach
- Capacity building
- Licensing

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- Training and education for staff to understand why culture, language, and traditions are important
- The recognition of the importance of ELCC
- Housing for staff and capital infrastructure to expand spaces
- One building to serve all early learning services
- Service and programming for weekends and evenings
- Sensitivity training for licensing officers/staff
- Separate First Nation jurisdiction and colonial child care systems/regulations
- Funding based on what it costs to run a program, not just how many children are in the program
- Funding connected to licensing is not feasible for all Nations
- Collaboration between daycare and Head Start programs
- Implementing a bus system to bring the community together

## CHALLENGES

- Transportation can be an issue
- Wage disparities—some Nations can't compete with other schools/programs
- Head Start and daycare centre funding come from different sources
- Lack of support for special needs services
- Programming varies on and off reserve

## PARTICIPANTS' QUOTES

*"The community needs to believe in what you are doing or it won't work."*

*"Support community in understanding the importance of seeing ELCC as educators (not just babysitters)."*

*"Funding agencies working together to ensure child care centres have all the info for all potential funding sources and avenues."*

*"It's the Elders' responsibilities to know which way you're going; they guide you and push you. We need to ensure everyone has the opportunity to try everything and find out what you like and don't like in community. When you are bound by licensing and procedures you don't have the freedom to explore."*

*"Capacity, homes for workers, good wages for remote community workers."*



**Is jurisdiction over early learning and child care something your Nation has considered or is contemplating? If so, what are some of the opportunities to implement jurisdiction over early learning and child care in your Nation? What are/might be some challenges or barriers to your Nation when exercising jurisdiction over early learning and child care?**

## KEY THEMES

- **Licensing/regulations**
- **Cultural focus**
- **Qualified workers**
- **Mentorship**
- **Collaboration**
- **Infrastructure**
- **Education/training**
- **Consistency**
- **Staff/capacity**

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- Potential for the Nation to take over licensing jurisdiction
- Need policies that support jurisdiction
- More opportunities for leadership to share best practices
- Potential for a partnership between First Nations to create an online portal to support early years' educators
- Making relationships with school and community member to help with school transition
- More information and clarity on the implementation process
- Open up opportunities to teach culture to non-Indigenous people/children
- We need to have time to understand jurisdiction for each community and how each community wants to define it
- Quality of services over quantity of service
- Bring in Knowledge Keepers to the centres

## CHALLENGES

- Too many policies and a lack of accountability
- Licensing done provincially, not Indigenously. Not focused on Indigenous teachings
- Lack of access and funding



## PARTICIPANTS' QUOTES

*"Are Nations ready? You need strong governments."*

*"We expect the work to happen, but nobody wants to step up to do it."*

*"How do you deal with your own issues when everything is in crisis?"*

*"We are just thinking about it."*

*"The lines get blurred when no one takes responsibility."*

*"It's huge. It will determine the future of our Nation and it gets put to the side because of the big list of projects and doesn't get the attention it needs."*

*"It would be cool if we had our own Indigenous licensing program. It would be easier and work better for us."*

*"Who gives us jurisdiction?"*

*"We are just 250 people trying to do our best."*



**What can First Nations early learning and child care organizations, such as BCACCS, do to support Nations to address challenges presented by the current early learning and child care landscape?**

## KEY THEMES

- **Advocacy**
- **Support**
- **Accessibility**
- **Collaboration**
- **Funding**
- **Conversations**
- **Licensing**
- **Capacity building**
- **Community engagement**

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- Create a best practices guide
- More regional support and offer consistent engagement online, in person, and/or on the phone
- Capacity to do in-community training
- Create more opportunities for networking
- Simplify reporting process to take load off the staff; unify different reporting processes
- Be advocates and work with communities to secure good conditions
- Promote the understanding that taking care of staff and educators is important
- Educate about a day in the life of an early childhood educator

## CHALLENGES

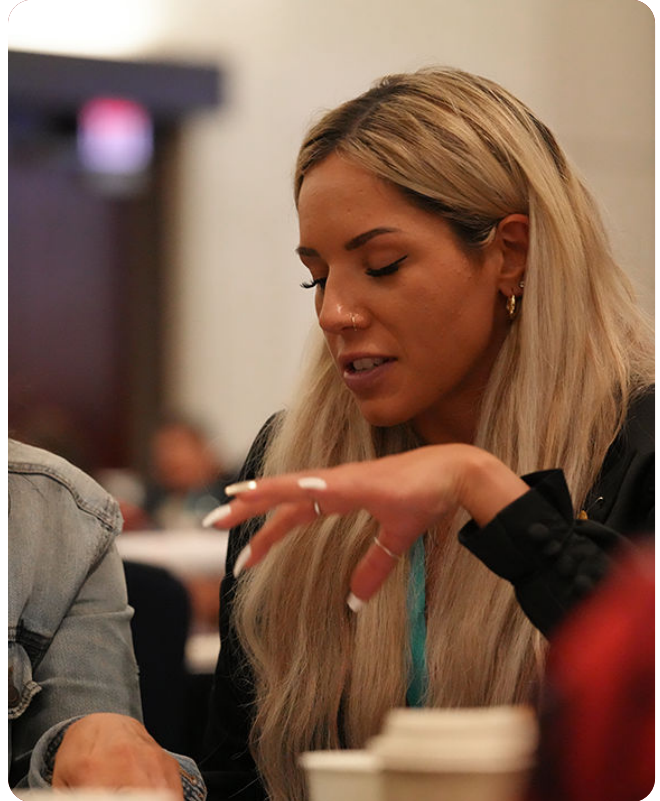
- Northern groups get less support despite higher costs
- Licensing is a barrier
- Skilled community members without formal education is a barrier to staffing and access to culturally-relevant and meaningful experiences for children
- Some staff members opt out of taking vacation time because they don't want to lose their wage enhancement support
- Training in a colonial world is a barrier

## PARTICIPANTS' QUOTES

***"Be a voice for those who wouldn't otherwise be heard."***

***"Create an Indigenous operational and practice standards with indicators framework for ELCC."***

***"Keeping leadership tables such as councils and other important tables involved in education by continuous events such as this event."***



***"Work together to develop a more comprehensive strategy for early learners and early learners to youth where we include health of our children justice for our children...Collaborate."***

***"Not enough information [on] supporting our kids with support challenges."***

***"Capacity is a huge hurdle..."***



**What can First Nations early learning and child care organizations, such as BCACCS, do to support the implementation of jurisdiction over early learning and child care, if that is a path that your Nation wishes to pursue?**

## KEY THEMES

- Streamline processes
- Facilitation
- Community engagement
- Training/workshops
- Licensing

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- Include opinions and experiences from Councillors
- Establish toolkits to assist with applications, reporting, etc.
- Have an advisor join jurisdiction meetings
- Push licensing to recognize culture in written policies; two options for licensing, First Nations and non-First Nations
- Jurisdiction implementation must be Nation-specific and Nation-driven to account for local circumstances
- Provide information for Chief and Council who are just starting out
- Educating both youth and elders
- Benchmark what other Nations are doing, not just in BC, but, across Canada and around the world (i.e., Maori language programs)
- More support for parents

## CHALLENGES

- Lack of resources for capacity building
- Resources and supports are not readily available to guide/inform Nations as they undertake this work
- Challenging work for small communities to undertake in isolation



## PARTICIPANTS' QUOTES

*"Community engagement will be really important."*

*"Helping nations create traditional and cultural 'licensing.'"*

*"Support on training and planning for law and policy development."*

*"Meet with each community and see what their needs are."*

*"Identify and remove barriers to early learning/child care for implementation of Right Holder jurisdiction, both in communities and in territories."*

*"Collection of statistics and data annually, share back and comparison for departments"*

*"Sharing examples, language, examples of policies you may have."*

*"ECE—Daycare, Early years, programs need to have strong relationship with leadership, leadership who is willing to engage—recognize how powerful statistics are to be able to lobby for further funding and support."*



*"Help understanding what opportunities are available in terms of jurisdiction."*

*What is jurisdiction, what does it mean, and what are the benefits?*

*Community definition vs government definition—coordination agreement*

*Our own law, and our way, but big question is always—what are the funding parameters?"*

*"The BCACCS website, grant writing workshop—good resource."*

*"Capacity building and the community healing that needs to happen—is not funded."*

How are we (BCACCS) doing so far with our funding strategy? Is it meeting your needs? Are there elements we are missing that would make it more impactful for your local work? Are there any gaps? Workforce development strategies and the “entry to practice funding”—does this offer the flexibility your community needs?

## KEY THEMES

- Streamline reporting
- Cumbersome
- Updated salaries
- Application toolkit
- Training
- Need multi-year funding

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- Clear communication on funding amounts being disbursed to communities
- An information hub to help with staff turnover, funding, reporting
- Transparency with funding opportunities offered across multiple funders, so Nations can fill gaps in funding
- Need a committed wage enhancement amount for consistency for staff
- Nations should determine who within membership has access to funds, not other governments
- Creation of a needs-based strategy with one funding stream

## CHALLENGES

- Reporting is too repetitive, making it time-consuming
- Lack of multi-year funding makes planning for and sustainability of programs difficult
- Greater transparency needed in funding allocation decisions
- Wage enhancements do not recognize all staff needed to run an early learning and child care program
- Lack of capacity to apply for funding

## PARTICIPANTS' QUOTES

*"Understanding what the criteria is for approvals is important too. Lots of people in the back room who make approvals for the funding, but how are they deciding which programs to fund. That transparency piece needs to be discussed. In some cases, it's not what you know, but who you know. Access to information the 'insider' report to what the guidelines really are."*

*"Regional presence is important to understand these aspects that we don't know."*

*"Multi-year funding and help with applications for other funds."*

*"Wage enhancement, important to recognize that cannot run a organization without cooks, janitor, doesn't allow us to pay them what they are worth."*

*"We all apply for funding against each other and some communities are more advanced and others can't deliver services in their community without major capital funding available to them. So there's a funding model that isn't capturing or catching up to those rural and remote communities. Need to have that strategy developed for the long term, so helping communities catch up to the rest."*

*"When initially the dollars were released, was government setting us up to fail?"*

*"The funding is meeting our needs. We have been able to access this funding quite often."*

*"Can we talk more about the Master Funding Agreement?"*

*"Lack of funding, lack of capacity to apply."*

*"So what is the action and who is responsible for the action? We have a lot of what is not working but who is responsible for moving it and getting it working. So having sub-regional prior meetings before the forum where our voices are really heard."*

*"Reporting is cumbersome and repetitive."*

*"We've got leaders, representatives, these organizations, big input spots and the document generated after this will secure funding for long term for this organization which is crucial to helping nations and organizations down the line. It's crucial for the nations itself. Because if it ends up just helping BCACCS then how does the nation benefit? If it's just drafted for this organization?"*

Where do you think there are gaps and strengths in knowledge for early learning and child care? Are there topics that need more research? Are you able to access information you need easily? What needs to be added to local knowledge to support local priorities?

## KEY THEMES

- Research
- Language and culture
- Parenting workshops
- Special needs support
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Adjustments needed to licensing and regulations
- Regulations need to incorporate/be informed by First Nations worldview, approaches, and priorities

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- Need to look through different lenses—not only from colonial developmental perspective
- Developing program guidelines that incorporate traditional roles, including Elders, that help our kids understand how our government system used to work
- Attract people to go into the early learning field
- Partner with FNHA to create an early learning and child care program
- Support for families struggling with substance abuse
- Trauma training to help educators better support children
- Indigenize licensing

## CHALLENGES

- Special needs services unavailable due to lack of funding, capacity, and space
- What happens when children outgrow early learning and child care services is unknown
- Not being able to use funds where Nations/members need
- Licensing officers need to deepen understanding of cultures and cultural sensitivity
- Regulations need to incorporate/be informed by First Nations worldview, approaches, and priorities

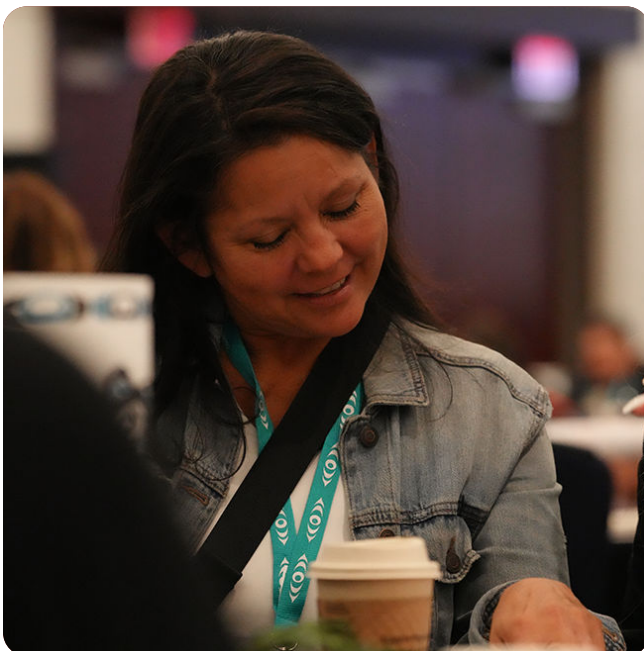
## PARTICIPANTS' QUOTES

*"Our worldview is different and doesn't align with licensing regulations."*

*"Schooling is not education. It diminishes their qualities. Traditionally, you would flow with what the child needed."*

*"Discussion today and yesterday, want an Indigenous licensing policy, for community-based programming."*

*"Gaps leadership is too busy focusing on others, leaving it up to ECE in community, and don't engage, trust into education departments to identify the gaps, disconnect is not good short and long term."*



*"A huge gap is the relationship with First Nation Health Authority. They are the funding agency for Head Start and early learning is listed as a social determinant of health priority in the First Nations Health Council's 10-Year Strategy on the Social Determinants of Health. They need to be a true partner in these discussions."*

*"How do we show that we believe children are gifts from the Creator?"*

*"Through BCACSS information is accessible, initially all of their information was going through Chief and Council, difficult when changeover is every two years, and also need buy-in from new members, often 50% new reps 12 members in total."*



How can we (BCACCS) support you to be an early learning and child care champion for your community? What opportunities do you need? What tools/learning do you need?

## KEY THEMES

- Mentorship and training
- Accessibility
- Capacity building
- Collaboration
- Recruitment and retention

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- Learn preventative measures to help support families
- A place for knowledge sharing/resource sharing
- Increased accessibility
- Support in implementation—most are unsure of where to start
- Children must be at the centre
- Community-driven funding
- Educational opportunities in community

## CHALLENGES

- Many Nations do not have capacity to engage deeply
- Systemic barriers to Indigenization of training and regulations
- Administrative funding is in short supply for Nations to undertake the work (particularly around jurisdiction and governance)



## PARTICIPANTS' QUOTES

*"BCACCS needs to be on our agenda.  
They need to present IELCC to us.  
They need to be a partner in this."*

*"We need ECE certification that is  
customized for Indigenous learners. An FN-  
specific certification program. Consideration  
of connecting with the First Nations Health  
Director's Association. They have a Health  
Director Certification Program and created  
the Centre for Indigenous Health Leadership.  
Perhaps the ECE certification program can  
be offered by their institution."*

*"Own licensing brings more trust into the  
Nations, ownership lays in the Nation's hands,  
distinction based, every nation has different  
needs and opportunity to incorporate culture  
and language, for example in the north not  
every nation has the clan system, or doesn't  
practice the feast system. Need to indigenize  
the licensing."*

*"ELCC needs to restructure the funding  
agreements to support the 204 nations in BC  
to have champions in each community."*

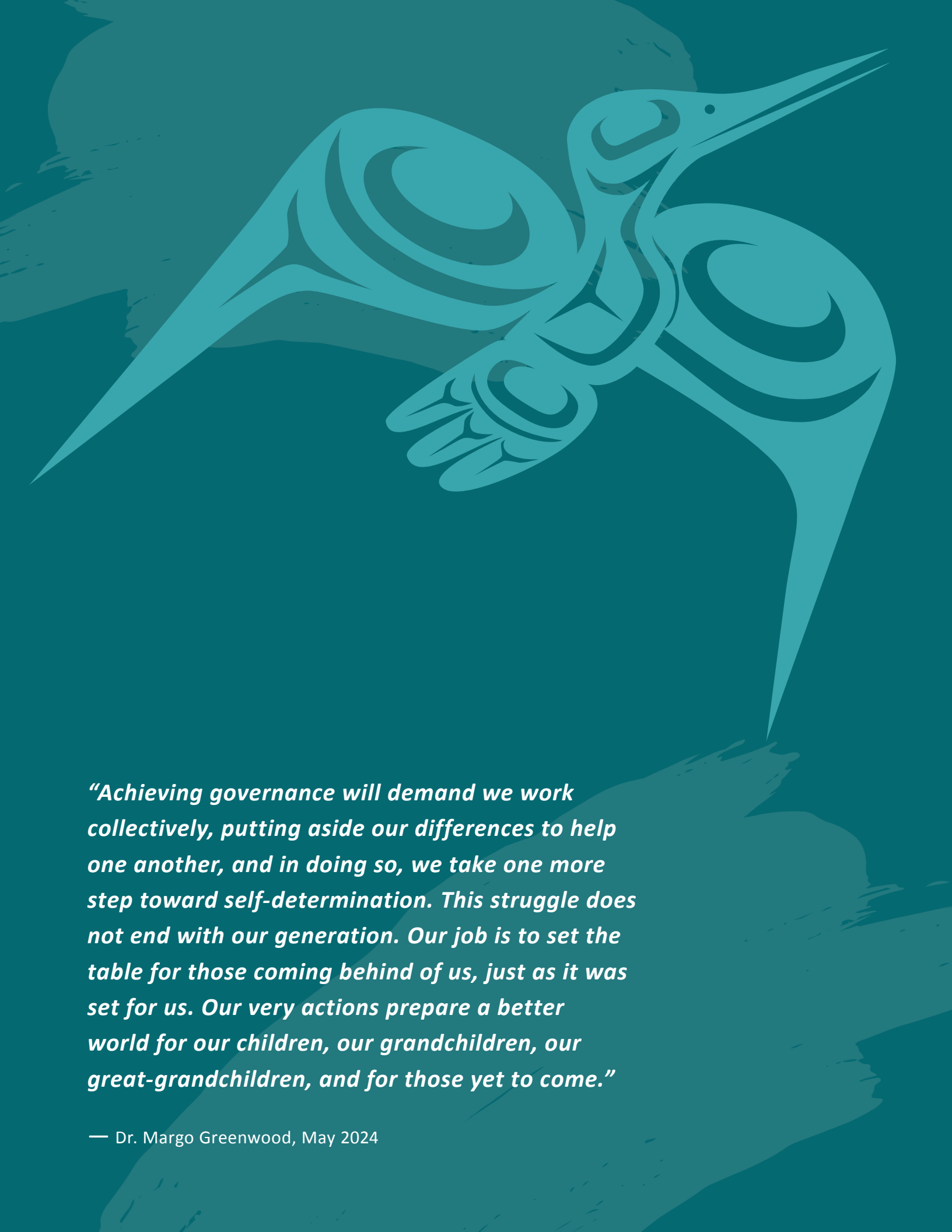
*"Portal on BCACCS for communities to upload  
materials, resources, programs and what's  
worked, so information can be shared and  
deeper follow-up conversations can occur."*

*"On the ECE training—how do we get the  
BC guidelines to influence them to have  
culturally appropriate trainings introduced  
to the model that they are delivering?  
How do we get teachers or universities  
to add curriculum in regard to aboriginal  
community and kids? How do we get  
that change? That needs to be changed.  
Employee retention is one thing, but  
training people properly is another piece.  
Because ECEs coming out of school don't  
have that knowledge of our people. So our  
ways need to be introduced to the way  
ECEs learn."*

*"We need the administrative dollars from  
BCACCS to go straight to community. I don't  
know anyone from home who can afford to do  
this work for free, even though we always have  
to do it for free."*

*"Elder mentorship programs—they hold the  
PhD's to rearing our children."*

*"So many communities are not  
engaging, only 25 chiefs, 50 councils, 200  
representatives from communities. If this so  
important, then how do we do that better?  
Inject resources into community so they can  
have presence at these events."*



*“Achieving governance will demand we work collectively, putting aside our differences to help one another, and in doing so, we take one more step toward self-determination. This struggle does not end with our generation. Our job is to set the table for those coming behind of us, just as it was set for us. Our very actions prepare a better world for our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren, and for those yet to come.”*

— Dr. Margo Greenwood, May 2024