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**UBC SUSTAINABILITY  
SCHOLARS PROGRAM**

**COVID-19 Impacts on City-Supported  
Childcare Providers and Opportunities  
for Future Sectoral Resilience**

August 2020

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This report was produced as part of the Greenest City or Healthy City Scholars Program, a partnership between the City of Vancouver and the University of British Columbia, in support of the Greenest City Action Plan and the Healthy City Strategy.

This project was conducted under the mentorship of City staff. The opinions and recommendations in this report, and any errors, are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the City of Vancouver or The University of British Columbia.

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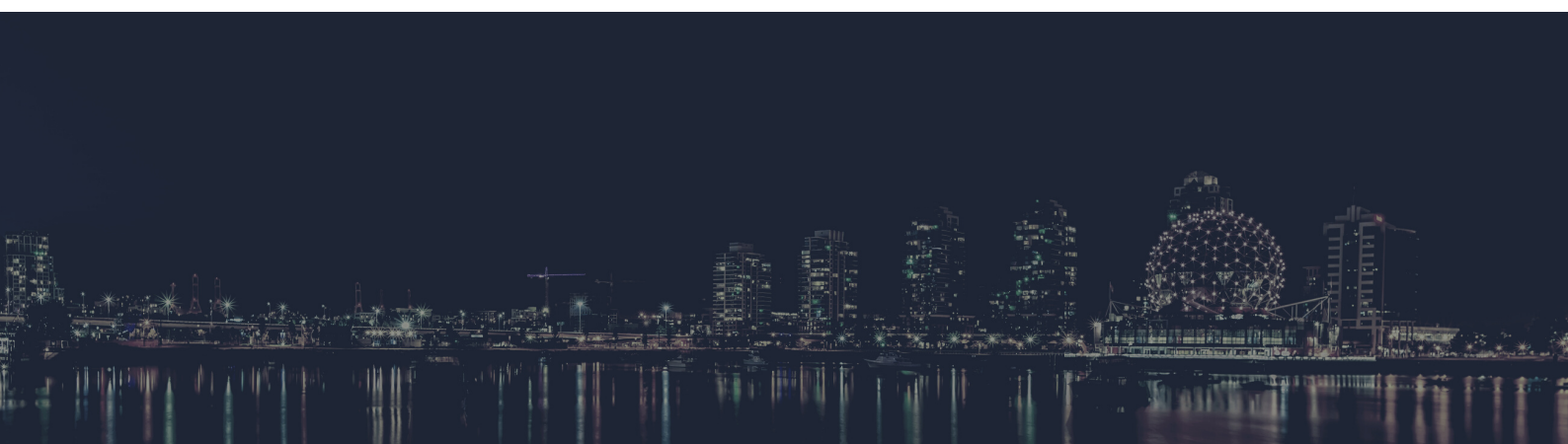
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank Andrea Haber and Vivian Wong for their mentorship, support, encouragement, and guidance throughout this project. Additionally, the author would like to thank Vanessa Kay and Eric Kowalski for their insights and advice. The author's grateful thanks are also extended to UBC Sustainability Initiative managers Tina Barisky and Karen Taylor for their ongoing support. Special thanks to all the participating childcare operators for sharing their valuable insights and experiences. This report would not have been possible without these individuals.

## TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was done on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded Indigenous territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔ / səliłwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) Peoples.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## PURPOSE

This exploratory research project is meant to provide insights and understanding into how the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, an unprecedented systemic shock, has impacted the childcare sector. The overarching purpose of this project is to understand how the City of Vancouver can better build resilience in the childcare sector.

## METHODOLOGY

In terms of methodology, a literature review of the childcare sector within the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic was conducted and a subset of childcare operators were invited for an interview. These childcare operators were City-facilitated and offered programs for children less than 18 months, between 18 to 36 months, and 30-months to school age (including pre-school).

## LITERATURE REVIEW RESULTS

The province of B.C. declared that childcare was an essential service and therefore did not enforce a sector-wide closure of childcare centres. Ultimately, the Province gave the decision of closing or remaining open during the pandemic to the childcare operators. In the face of uncertainties and exacerbated pre-existing challenges, many childcare centres closed for a period of time. In Vancouver, two-thirds of the childcare programs closed temporarily in May.



### PRE-COVID-19 CONTEXT

- **Existing challenges and long-standing issues within sector:**
  - Affordability (costly parent fees)
  - low ECE wages
  - Low retention rates, difficult staff recruitment
  - Access (insufficient licensed childcare spaces)
- **Underlying factors that impact these issues:**
  - lack of coordination within the sector
  - inadequate investment and support from senior government

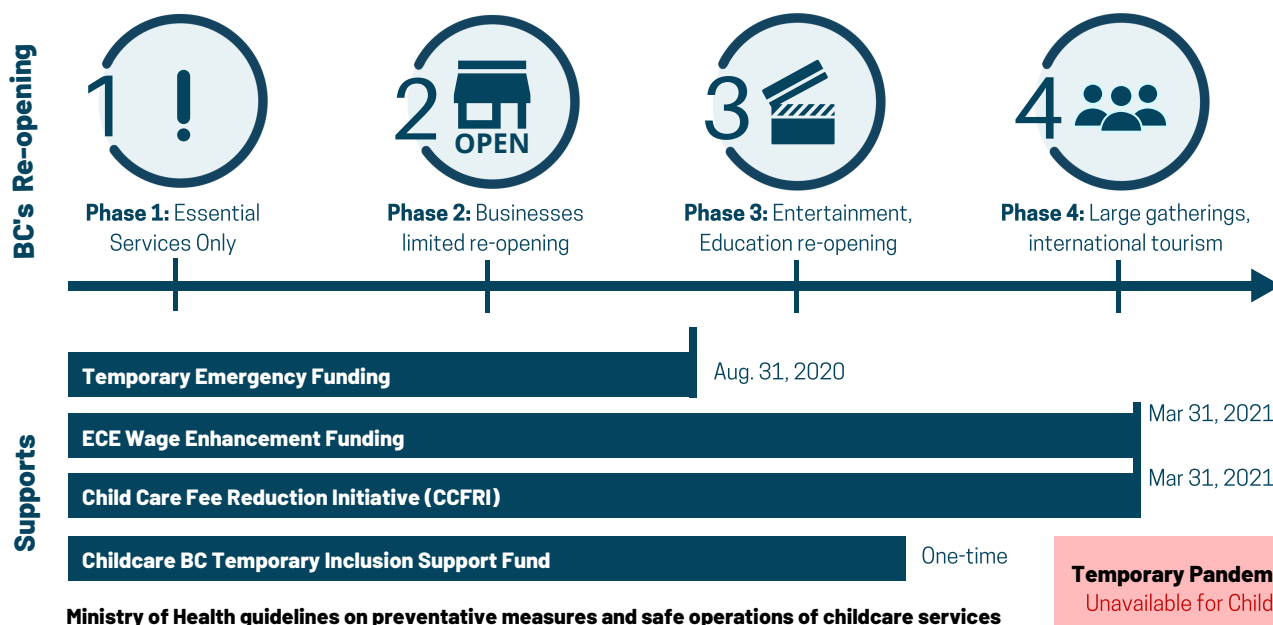


### COVID-19 CONTEXT

- **Existing challenges and long-standing issues exacerbated and amplified**
  - greater shortage of ECEs due to layoffs
- **Canada (Apr-May):** 72% of childcare facilities closed
  - 36% of closed facilities unsure about re-opening
- **Vancouver (May):** 10,000 childcare spaces (2/3 of childcare programs) temporarily unavailable
- **Childcare deemed as essential service**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following shows the available federal and provincial supports against the timeline of B.C.'s phased re-opening.



While the ECE Wage Enhancement Funding (ECE-WE) and Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative (CCFRI) were not created specifically for the pandemic, the ECE-WE was doubled from \$1/hour to \$2/hour in light of the pandemic and the CCFRI was available during this time. The Temporary Emergency Funding (TEF) was meant to provide financial support for both closed and open childcare operators until the end of August whereas the Temporary Inclusion Support Fund was a one-time funding to support childcare operators who serve children with additional needs. The Temporary Pandemic Pay Program was created for essential workers, however, early childhood care professionals were not eligible.

## INTERVIEW RESULTS

In total, 14 childcare operators participated in this project. Of the participating childcare operators, 71.4% (10/14) were closed for a period of time during the pandemic. As of July 21, 2020, there were two childcare centres that remained closed, one of which is a pre-school with a planned re-opening in September. The decision for childcare operators to remain closed or to re-open depended on both internal and external stakeholders as well as available resources and information. Internal stakeholders included the senior management team, organization or parent board, and the childcare staff. External stakeholders included the provincial government and their recommendations, Westcoast Child Care Resources Centre, and the families whom they serve.

In terms of financial support, the majority of the participating childcare operators (13/14) used the Affordable Child Care Benefit, ECE-WE, CCFRI, and TEF to support their operations during the pandemic.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The results of this project also supports that staffing issues was a major concern during the pandemic. Almost all of the participating childcare operators (93%, 13/14) at least slightly agreed that they were concerned about the lack of staffing and difficult recruiting staff. Similarly, the majority (85.7%, 12/14) of childcare operators reported staffing to be a concern for future COVID-19-related closures. The staffing concerns reported can be broken down into four categories: recruitment and retainment of staff, layoffs and wages, staff morale and well-being, and staff safety.

The project results also suggested that 78.6% (11/14) childcare operators reported that they were not concerned about continued operations in the long-term. However, one of the childcare operators stated that in the case where childcare centres have to be closed again due to COVID-19, they would have to permanently close.

The childcare operators were also asked to share any measures of resiliency that they hope to apply moving forward. One childcare operator reported that they were considering joining other childcare operators in creating one purchasing account for supplies (such as cleaning products) to increase their buying power. Two other childcare operators reported that they have embraced technology more during the pandemic and will continue to do so to stay connected with their staff, other childcare operators, and the families they serve. In terms of collaborations, many childcare operators have reported that they strengthened existing networks with childcare operators. A challenge that many childcare operators have mentioned is teaching young children how to socially distance from each other and the staff. Therefore, childcare operators have tried to include more outdoor activities and modify schedules to limit the number of children physically present in the childcare centres. A larger childcare operator who is involved in designing new childcare centres has suggested that new centres could be designed with elements that support the resiliency of childcare programs by encouraging social distancing and hygiene.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the literature review and the interview responses from the participating childcare operators, the opportunities for resiliency include the following:

- City of Vancouver can take on convenor role to support existing networks of childcare operators and can consider creating an inclusive network for all childcare operators
- Senior levels of government can continue to recognize childcare as an essential service by providing support and resources that are proportionate to the title of "essential service"
- Childcare operators can consider implementing a system to maintain communication with all families, especially those who are marginalized and more vulnerable
- Pre-schools can consider offering full-day childcare on an emergency basis to better support working families in times of limited childcare spaces
- System for sharing the childcare workforce can potentially help the sector become more connected and resilient to sector-wide disruptions

# INTRODUCTION

The global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has significantly impacted the global economy and all sectors and industries worldwide. During these unprecedented and fluid times with continually emerging challenges, it is evident that resiliency for systemic shocks is critical for future sustainability of sectors. Therefore, the overarching purpose of this report is to understand how the City of Vancouver can better build resiliency into the childcare sector. Early learning and childcare play critical roles in children's physical and social-emotional development, which in turn promotes short-term and long-term benefits to their well-being and health (Government of Canada, 2018b). Thus, given the importance of childcare programs, increasing the resiliency of the childcare sector will serve to benefit society.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this project are two-fold:

- 1 To understand and document the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on City-supported childcare providers, including their responses to the pandemic and the available supports for the childcare facility operators
- 2 To summarize learnings from literature research and interviews and suggest recommendations to better support childcare facility operators in the future

Given the exploratory research design of this project, the purpose is not to provide final and conclusive solutions to the research topic at hand. This project is meant to provide deeper insights and understanding into the impacts of an unprecedented systemic shock and explore potential ways to increase resiliency of the childcare sector. This project will provide the foundation and basis for future research and endeavours to support greater resiliency within the childcare sector.

## SUSTAINABILITY

This project aims to explore potential areas for increasing resiliency of the childcare sector, and in this way supports the City of Vancouver's Greenest City and Healthy City action plans. A more resilient childcare sector can positively impact accessibility and affordability of childcare within communities and further promote the well-being of children and families. The particular goals that this project supports are listed below.

### GREENEST CITY ACTION PLAN

**Supported Goal:** Walkable Complete Communities

### HEALTHY CITY ACTION PLAN

**Supported Goals:** Good Start, Cultivating Connections, Healthy Human Services, Being and Feeling Safe and Included

# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

### FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL, AND MUNICIPAL RESPONSIBILITIES

In Canada, the responsibility and regulation of childcare falls mainly on the provinces and territories rather than the federal government (Finding Quality Child Care, n.d.). This means that provinces and territories are at liberty to launch their own childcare initiatives and programs. In B.C., childcare services, such as early learning, are regulated by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. The following graphic provides a general (non-exhaustive) comparison of childcare responsibilities among the federal, provincial, and municipal governments.

FEDERAL	PROVINCIAL	MUNICIPAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial support and tax benefits               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Canada Social Transfer (CST) federal contribution to provincial social programs</li> <li>◦ Canada Child Care Benefit</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Framework to support childcare within provinces/territories (see below)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial support (operating funds, childcare subsidies, capital funding)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Childcare BC Plan</li> <li>◦ Capital investment for development of new childcare spaces</li> <li>◦ Initiatives for affordable childcare</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Childcare Standards: License and regulation of childcare centres (via health authorities)</li> <li>• Liaise with municipal governments and childcare operators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grant funding</li> <li>• Land use planning, permitting, and development to facilitate more childcare centres across the city, including the process to secure new childcare facilities</li> <li>• Regulation of childcare spaces through the City of Vancouver Childcare Design Guideline</li> <li>• Liaise with senior government and stakeholders</li> <li>• Staff dedicated to work on supporting childcare</li> </ul>

(Metro Vancouver, 2019, City of Vancouver, 2020)

### FEDERAL-INITIATED FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT CHILDCARE

The Government of Canada has recognized that high quality childcare and early learning are important factors that positively impacts a child's development and well-being (Government of Canada, 2018b). Therefore, in 2017, the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Early Learning and Child Care put forth the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework (Government of Canada, 2018b). This framework was meant to encourage provincial governments to work together for the long-term goal of providing all children nation-wide with quality childcare and early learning (Government of Canada, 2018b). Through this framework, the Government of Canada will provide financial support amounting to \$1.2 billion over a period of three years for all provincial childcare programs that fall within the mandate of this framework (Government of Canada, 2018a).



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# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

### CHILDCARE SECTOR

Given the differing childcare systems within each province/territory and the limited coordination from the federal government, the landscape of the current childcare system in Canada is complex and disjointed (Piano, 2014). From an economics perspective, childcare within Canada is a market that treats childcare services as a commodity, rather than a unified and cohesive system that delivers childcare as a public good (Beach and Ferns, 2015, Friendly, 2019, Piano, 2014, Gautreaux, 2019). As a market, important aspects of childcare, such as equitable access, affordability, and quality, are negatively impacted by various market forces and externalities (Institute of Medicine, National Research Council, 2012, Friendly, 2019).

### UNIVERSAL CHILDCARE SYSTEM

For Canada, moving from a market model to a more cohesive universal system of childcare would require transformative changes and dedication with potentially a steep learning curve throughout the process. Implementing a national framework for childcare would require foundational measures such as developing nation-wide childcare policies, implementation of communication systems for stakeholder feedback, and imposing measures for accountability and quality improvement (Piano, 2014). However, since different provinces/territories have different childcare systems in place, some provinces may require a greater level of support from the federal government compared to others (Piano, 2014). While there are many more challenges and considerations for Canada to adopt a universal childcare system, research suggests that a universal childcare system can offer greater benefits compared to implementing policies (Piano, 2014).

### B.C.'s \$10-A-DAY PROGRAM

Within B.C., a universal daycare program, \$10-a-day childcare, is being offered at 50 sites (serving over 50,000 children) in B.C. as a pilot program (Coalition of Child Care Advocates [CCCABC], 2020b, Hunter, 2020). Advocacy groups, such as the CCCABC, believe that adopting the \$10-a-day childcare program at all childcare centres will provide the necessary childcare services to allow parents/guardians to return to the workforce, thereby supporting the economy's recovery (CCCABC, 2020b, Hunter, 2020).

### RESILIENCY

Ultimately, it is conceivable that a universal childcare system, with the participation and commitment of all provinces/territories, can increase the resiliency of the childcare sector not only within the City of Vancouver, but also potentially on a provincial and federal level.

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# INTRODUCTION

## CITY OF VANCOUVER RESPONSE

The following are actions taken by the City of Vancouver in response to the pandemic.

### TEMPORARY EMERGENCY CHILDCARE

In response to the pandemic and subsequent closure of childcare centres, the City of Vancouver took the initiative to assemble a task force to manage temporary emergency childcare for essential workers. This task force created a referral system to match essential service workers to available childcare services. In collaboration with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), the City's temporary emergency childcare referral system was aligned with province-wide initiatives and a B.C.-wide referral system was launched at the end of March. This referral system was subsequently managed by Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre (City of Vancouver, 2020, slide 19).

### SHORT TERM SUPPORT: RESTARTING CHILDCARE SECTOR

The City reached out and connected with various childcare operators throughout Vancouver to identify needs and priorities. Similarly, the City consulted and discussed with the Joint Childcare Council regarding childcare equity during the pandemic. The City is also working with the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) on a project that aims to support standalone childcare operators and address re-opening challenges. Furthermore, the City continues to provide on-going support for new childcare centres that are planning to open (City of Vancouver, 2020, slide 27).

### LONG TERM SUPPORT: RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

The City updated their priorities for childcare given the changes imposed by the pandemic and reframed their work to create new opportunities for resilience (City of Vancouver, 2020, slide 29). In their efforts to increase resiliency within this sector, the City will continue to carry out projects that support childcare and focus its work on childcare equity and strength for withstanding future systemic shocks and stressors (City of Vancouver, 2020, slide 30). The City is working to explore new ways to address equitable childcare access, especially for those who are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Moreover, the City's investment and support for childcare can further help Vancouver's economic recovery during the pandemic (City of Vancouver, 2020, slide 29).

Specifically, the City allowed for greater flexibility in grants for emergent needs due to the pandemic and expanded partnerships to address issues within the childcare sector (City of Vancouver, 2020, slide 31). Furthermore, due to greater financial support from the City's partnerships, the City is aiming to create up to 2300 new childcare spaces by 2024 (City of Vancouver, slide 33).

# CHILDCARE CONTEXT

## PRE-COVID-19 CONTEXT

### CHALLENGES IN CHILDCARE

As the population of children under the age of 12 continues to grow, the availability of licensed childcare in BC continues to be insufficient in meeting the demand of families who need childcare (Metro Vancouver, 2019). Moreover, families also face a multitude of challenges in accessing childcare, for example, finding quality and licensed childcare services that align well with work and study schedules (Metro Vancouver, 2019).

Furthermore, in terms of operational challenges within this sector, staff recruitment and retention presents a challenge as childcare professionals, such as early childhood educators (ECEs) are paid relatively low wages (Metro Vancouver, 2019).

Particularly for childcare programs, there are restrictions (space-child-staffing ratios) that dictate the required ratio of staff to the children and childcare space (Metro Vancouver, 2019). This further puts into perspective the implications of staff shortages and brings context behind childcare operators' concern for staffing.

**Insufficient supply  
to meet demand**

**Affordability &  
Access**

**Staffing Concerns  
(Low ECE wages)**

## WITHIN COVID-19 CONTEXT

### CHALLENGES IN CHILDCARE

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed many challenges for the childcare sector and the additional strain of the pandemic has amplified the pre-existing issues within the sector that include affordability, low Early Childhood Educator (ECE) wages, and insufficient licensed childcare spaces to meet demand (Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC [CCCABC], 2020a). Underlying factors that impact these long-standing issues are the lack of system building and coordination within the sector and inadequate investment and financial support from senior government (CCCABC, 2020a, City of Vancouver, 2020, slide 6). The existing issue of low retention rates and difficulty in staff recruitment is further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic as more than 10,000 childcare spaces (2/3 of childcare programs) in Vancouver are temporarily closed (City of Vancouver, 2020, slide 16, CCCABC, 2020a). This closure not only affects ECEs, many of whom were temporarily out of work, and childcare operators, but this also adversely impacts vulnerable families who are reliant on childcare services (City of Vancouver, 2020, slide 16).

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# CHILDCARE CONTEXT

## CHILDCARE AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE

Through this lens of a global pandemic, childcare services have received the Province of BC's recognition as an essential service (City of Vancouver, 2020, slide 4). While schools have closed due to the pandemic, childcare services remained open because, as Dr. Bonnie Henry stated, childcare services are critical and necessary for parents who are essential service workers and must continue to work during the pandemic (Ministry of Children and Family Development [MCFD], 2020b). Unlike other provinces, B.C. has decided not to enforce a system-wide closure for childcare spaces for two main reasons:

- 1** To better accommodate the need for childcare services for parents who are essential workers and unable to care for their children at home (MCFD, 2020b)
- 2** Under the recommendation from public health officials, including Dr. Henry, B.C. believes that under revised health protocols, the childcare centres that remain open can do so while ensuring the health and safety of the ECEs, children, and families.

Ultimately, B.C. decided not to enforce a sector-wide decision and allowed childcare operators to use their own judgment to make the best decision for their operations (MCFD, 2020a).

## CHILDCARE OPERATIONS DURING COVID-19

As previously mentioned, under these circumstances a significant number of childcare centres temporarily closed (CCCABC, 2020a, City of Vancouver, 2020, slide 16). The childcare centres that remained open continued operation at a reduced capacity to adhere to the prescribed health protocols (MCFD, 2020b). While the provincial government maintains that childcare services can and must be carried out in a safe manner and has put in place financial support programs (MCFD, 2020b), there were many concerns raised against this decision. The Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC, 2020a) wrote a letter to the Minister of Health to ask the provincial government to mandate the closure of all childcare centres immediately in order to ensure the health and safety of the children who would otherwise participate in childcare services (ECEBC, 2020a). Their reasoning behind this action was their responsibility to prioritize the health and safety of the children and families they serve and by carrying out regular childcare services, adhering to the appropriate physical distancing measures would be very difficult (ECEBC, 2020a).

In addition to the ECEBC, the Province's decision was met with concern from childcare centres and workers throughout the province and other advocacy groups such as the CCCABC, which reached out to Dr. Henry for a meeting to discuss the health and safety of this decision (Fletcher, 2020). As the CCCABC points out, all other provinces (excluding Saskatchewan) have clearly mandated a sector-wide closure of all childcare programs and facilities alongside school closures, thus B.C.'s decision to not close down all childcare services creates an untenable situation (BC Child and youth Advocacy Coalition, 2020).

# CHILDCARE IS THE WORKFORCE BEHIND THE WORKFORCE

Childcare services have also been more widely recognized as the “workforce behind the workforce” by childcare providers (Ryan, 2020), advocate groups (Child Care Canada, 2020), and the BC Minister of State for Child Care (Province of BC, 2020). This phrase emphasizes how foundational and essential the childcare sector is because parents rely on childcare services to care for their children while they work, which implies that by extension, the employers of parents also rely on childcare services (Friendly and Ballantyne, 2020).

While some families may have the option of asking relatives and grandparents to care for their children while the parents work, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, this option may not be very feasible and can potentially cause greater harm than good (Sherwood, 2020). This is because elderly individuals are at a greater risk of being infected with COVID-19, especially for individuals with pre-existing medical conditions (Sherwood, 2020).

The impact of this decreased capacity of childcare services has the potential to further decrease the labour force participation as family members may need to stay at home to care for their children (City of Vancouver, 2019, Sherwood, 2020).

# CHILDCARE CONTEXT

## OVERALL IMPACT

From a big-picture perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic adversely impacts the childcare sector by further limiting families' access for affordable and quality childcare due to the significant closure and reduced capacities of childcare spaces (City of Vancouver, 2020, slide 6, 16). This directly influences the developmental outcomes of affected children and adds to the stress faced by family members. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic raises concern for the workforce within the childcare sector, a sector where retention and recruitment are already challenging, because childcare professionals have been laid off and students have been unable to finish their practicums (Gallagher, 2020, Government of B.C., 2020c).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also significantly impacted the workforce and caused many people to be unemployed. However, this pandemic may not impose challenges equally throughout workforce (Qian and Fuller, 2020). As recent research shows, the pandemic has exacerbated the pre-existing, underlying gender inequalities, such as pay gaps, that exist in the workplace (Qian and Fuller, 2020). Qian and Fuller's (2020) research showed that mothers, especially those who have a lower level of education, and racialized groups have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. In support of this finding, the unemployment trends in May 2020 suggested that women were more likely to lose their jobs compared to men (Mangione, 2020). In particular, during May, two-thirds of the individuals who lost their jobs within the service industry were women (Mangione, 2020).



# SUPPORT FOR CHILDCARE

## CHILDCARE GUIDELINES

In addition to publicly-available general information regarding COVID-19, the Ministry of Health has provided guidelines on preventative measures and how to stay safe as an ECE as well as information regarding the spread of COVID-19 among children (BC Centre for Disease Control [BC CDC], 2020, Government of B.C., 2020b).

## FEDERAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion announced on July 24th, 2020 that the federal government will be providing \$625 million of financial support to the childcare sector (Government of Canada, 2020). This funding is meant to increase the number of available childcare spaces to support families as the economy restarts and more parents return to work (Government of Canada, 2020). Combined with the aforementioned Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework, the federal government is investing a total of almost \$1.2 billion into childcare for 2020-2021 (Government of Canada, 2020).

## TEMPORARY EMERGENCY FUNDING

Licensed childcare providers are able to receive Temporary Emergency Funding (TEF) provided by the ministry but the amount of funding received depends on if they are in operation (MCFD, 2020b). For licensed childcare providers who remain open and in operation, they can receive a TEF amount that covers up to approximately 75% of their operating expenses (at 7 times the rate of average monthly operating funding) whereas childcare providers who temporarily close due to the pandemic can receive a TEF amount that covers up to approximately 20% of their operating expenses (at 2 times the rate of their average monthly operating funding) (MCFD, 2020b).

In receiving the TEF, there are conditions and requirements for the childcare providers depending on their operation status. For childcare providers who are still open, they must agree to put in reasonable effort in meeting community needs for childcare services and facilitating an inclusive and supportive environment for participating children, to not charge fees for families who withdraw temporarily from childcare services, and to reserve a space for these families for after the pandemic (MCFD, 2020b). For childcare providers who are temporarily closed, in receiving the TEF, they must agree to not charge fees in the duration of their closure and to reserve a space for childcare services after the pandemic for children who were enrolled prior to the closure (MCFD, 2020b).

By April 16th, 2020, a total of 2530 childcare centres within B.C. (which offer up to 58,650 spaces) have received financial support from the TEF to continue operations (MCFD, 2020a).

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# SUPPORT FOR CHILDCARE

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR WAGE ENHANCEMENT (ECE-WE)

Childcare providers can apply for the ECE-WE to increase the wages of eligible ECEs by \$2/hour (Government of B.C., n.d.d). While the wage enhancement was not introduced as a result of the pandemic, the original wage enhancement of \$1/hour was doubled given the pandemic (MCFD, 2020a). This increase in the wage enhancement also served as a sign of recognition for the work and efforts of ECEs (MCFD, 2020a). It was reported that approximately 12,000 ECEs (as of April 23rd, 2020) have received this wage enhancement of \$2/hour (MCFD, 2020a), but childcare providers (and by extension their ECEs) who have temporarily closed are ineligible for this wage enhancement (MCFD, 2020b). Certain essential workers are eligible to receive a wage top-up of \$4/hour through the temporary pandemic pay program (discussed in later sections), but ECEs were deemed ineligible for this program

## CHILD CARE FEE REDUCTION INITIATIVE

The purpose of the CCFRI is to increase the affordability of childcare services by helping licensed childcare providers stabilize the monthly childcare fees they receive (Government of B.C., n.d.b). The amount that a childcare provider can receive (and use towards reducing parent fees) depends on the type of childcare they provide (Government of B.C., n.d.b). Eligible childcare providers can also receive a top-up funding equivalent to 20% of the childcare facility's average monthly cost of operations (CCOF) to balance the increase in costs of participating in CCFRI (Government of B.C., n.d.b). Similar to the ECE-WE, the CCFRI is also not available for closed childcare facilities (MCFD, 2020b).

## CHILDCARE BC TEMPORARY INCLUSION SUPPORT FUND

The purpose of this fund is to support childcare providers in creating an inclusive space for children (of essential service workers) who may need additional support (Government of B.C., n.d.c). In other words, childcare providers can use this fund for accessibility equipment such as wheelchair ramps, automated doors, and specialized seating equipment (Government of B.C., n.d.c). The maximum amount of funding available per childcare facility location is \$2000, but this is subject to the availability of funding and limited to a certain time-period (Government of B.C., n.d.c).



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# SUPPORT FOR CHILDCARE

## CERTIFICATE EXTENSIONS

Aside from the aforementioned financial support, the Ministry of Children and Family Development has allowed an extension for certain ECE and ECE Assistant certificates that may expire this year (Government of B.C., 2020c). In this way, the government hopes to support the ECEs and ECE Assistants by providing them additional time to complete their requirements (such as 500 work experience hours) to renew their certificates (Government of B.C., 2020c, Faulkner, 2020).

## TEMPORARY PANDEMIC PAY - UNAVAILABLE FOR CHILDCARE

In mid-April, the federal government announced that, in collaboration with each province, a temporary pandemic pay program will be put in place to top up selected essential workers' wages (BCGEU, 2020d). This temporary pandemic pay program is one of the initiatives related to the government's \$5-billion COVID-19 Action Plan and the purpose of this program is to recognize and provide support and relief for essential health and social service workers who have continued to work during the challenging pandemic (Government of B.C., 2020e). The details of this program were revealed on May 19th and the costs of the program was shared between the federal and provincial governments, with the federal government providing 75% of the funding and provincial governments providing 25% (BCGEU, 2020d). Eligible essential workers could receive a lump-sum payment from this program that amounts to an increase of \$4/hour for a 16-week period that is retroactive to March 15th, 2020 (BCGEU, 2020d). While the BCGEU advocated for this program to cover the widest range of essential workers possible, the pandemic pay program still excludes a subset of essential workers from receiving this financial support (BCGEU, 2020a). As of July 2020, childcare professionals, such as ECEs, have been excluded from this temporary pandemic pay program (BCGEU, 2020b, Government of BC, 2020i). At this time, the reason for their ineligibility is unknown.

In comparison to other provinces, B.C.'s pandemic pay program is more inclusive, but the BCGEU is still urging for a greater coverage of essential service workers because this exclusivity is creating "unnecessary divisions at a moment when unity and solidarity among workers is more important than ever" (BCGEU, 2020a). The BCGEU wrote to the Minister of Finance to request for a reconsideration in the eligibility of the pandemic pay program to cover the childcare professionals and other ECEs have echoed this sentiment (S. Smalls, personal communication, June 3, 2020) that childcare professionals are deserving of this support (BCGEU, 2020b).

# RESEARCH APPROACH



**LITERATURE  
REVIEW**



**INTERVIEWS**



**DATA  
ANALYSIS**



**FINAL  
REPORT**

A literature review was conducted to understand the childcare sector within the current context of the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the available federal, provincial, and municipal supports. The literature review provides a foundational understanding to the impact of the pandemic on the childcare sector and the interviews provide a more in-depth understanding of the challenges and concerns that are present for childcare operators in Vancouver. This exploratory project is meant to provide a basis for future strategies aimed to support sectoral resilience for childcare in Vancouver.

## INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY

### INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

Given the global pandemic, interviews were conducted through phone or video calls instead of in-person to ensure the health and safety of all participants. A semi-structured interview approach using a pre-planned set of open-ended and close-ended questions was chosen in order to focus on specific topics and be flexible in allowing participants to delve deeper into certain topics as needed. Participants were informed at the beginning of the interview that participation is completely voluntary and the interview will take approximately 20 minutes. However, no strict time constraints were enforced to allow participants to elaborate or further discuss topics they find important. The interviews ranged from approximately 15 to 60 minutes in length.

In total, 25 childcare operators were selected and invited to participate in this project and 14 childcare operators agreed to take part. Two childcare operators declined participation and nine childcare operators did not respond. These childcare operators were contacted initially via email and all interviews were conducted through phone or video call. The interviews were conducted between June 25th, 2020 to July 21st, 2020. All responses were transcribed during the interview, no recordings were made, and all participants were given the option to have their responses remain completely anonymous in any future public-facing reports.

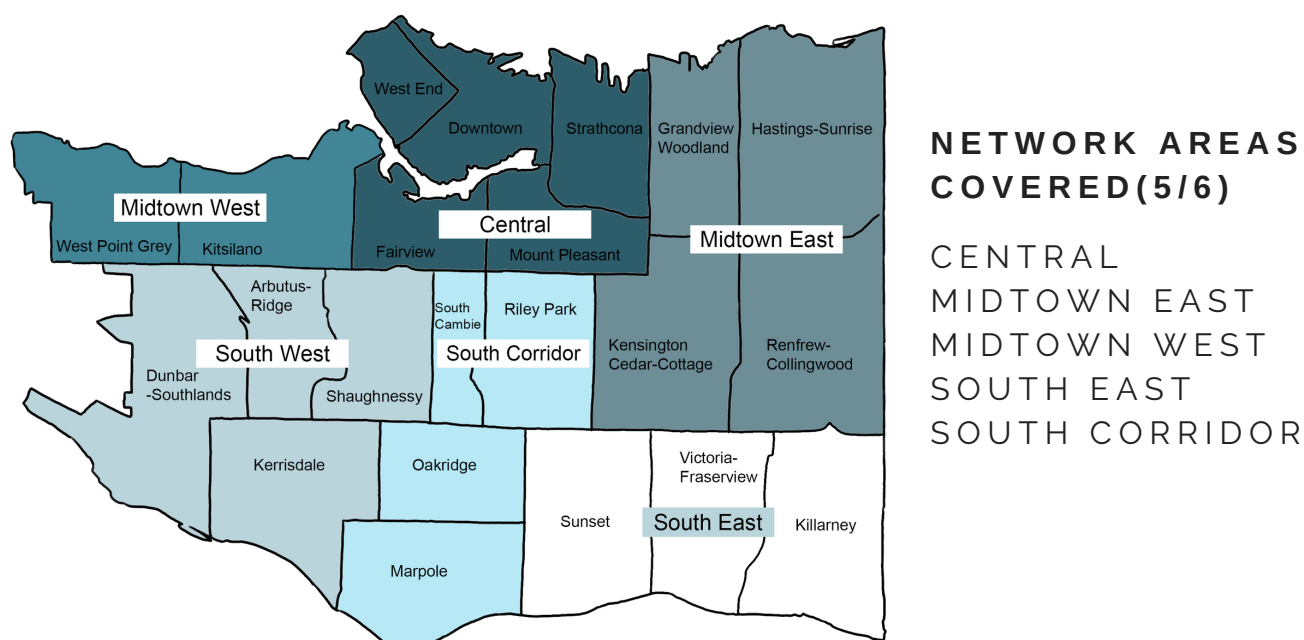
### DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet then analyzed using NVivo data analysis software to identify emerging themes. Tableau data visualization software was used to create the graphs included in this report.

# RESEARCH APPROACH

## SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The purposive sampling of childcare operators was based largely on three characteristics: size (large or small), status (closed, re-opened, or remained open), and location. There are six geographical network areas and 21 neighbourhoods (local areas) within Vancouver. The childcare operators were selected from each network area with the goal of covering the majority of neighbourhoods within each of the network areas. The selected childcare operators encompassed all six network areas and 18 neighbourhoods whereas the participating 14 childcare operators encompassed five geographical network areas and 12 neighbourhoods.



## INCLUSION/EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Given the timeline of this project, the scope was narrowed to include City-facilitated childcare centres that deliver the following childcare programs: less than 18-months old, 18- to 36-months old, 30-months to school age, and pre-school. Childcare centres that offer only school-age childcare programs and/or are not city-facilitated were excluded from this project. City-facilitated childcare centres are childcare centres that receive grants from the City or operate within a City-owned building (or land) and therefore receive nominal leases.

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

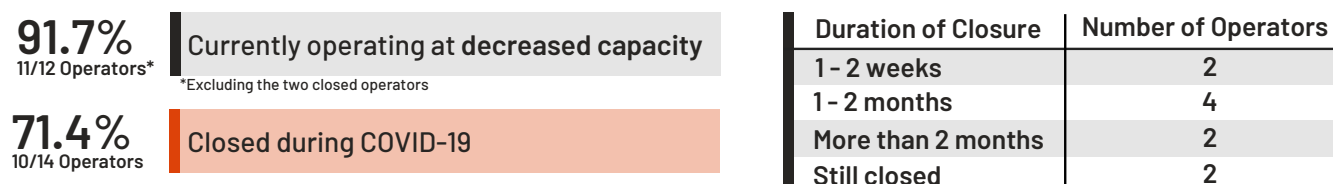
A set of 18 open-ended and close-ended questions were created. The questions were divided into four sections: demographics, childcare operations and re-opening, financial situation and supports accessed, and challenges and concerns. The semi-structured interview format allowed for further discussion and greater understanding of certain topics.

# RESULTS

## DEMOGRAPHICS

A majority of the participating childcare centres offered 30-months to school-age programs (Figure 1). Almost all (12/14) participating operators reported that there was no change in their program offerings. One childcare operator reported that they had to cancel their part-time 3-5 years program and modify their full-time 3-5 years program to allow part-time registration from April to August. Their reasoning behind this decision was to serve as many families as possible while operating with a reduced staff:child ratio. Another childcare operator reported that they are continuing to offer all their programs except for pre-school. Other changes in delivery of childcare were related to incorporating cleaning and health protocols, limiting parents' access inside the childcare centre, and changing hours of service.

The majority (10/14) of all participating childcare centres experienced a closure during the COVID-19 pandemic. The length of closure ranged from 1 week to more than 2.5 months. As of July 21, 2020, there were two childcare centres that remained closed. Out of the 14 participating childcare operators, almost all of the 12 re-opened operators (11/12) are operating at reduced capacity and reporting lower enrolment than usual. These operators also reported that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, they were usually at full capacity.



### Programs Offered (Participating Childcare Centres)

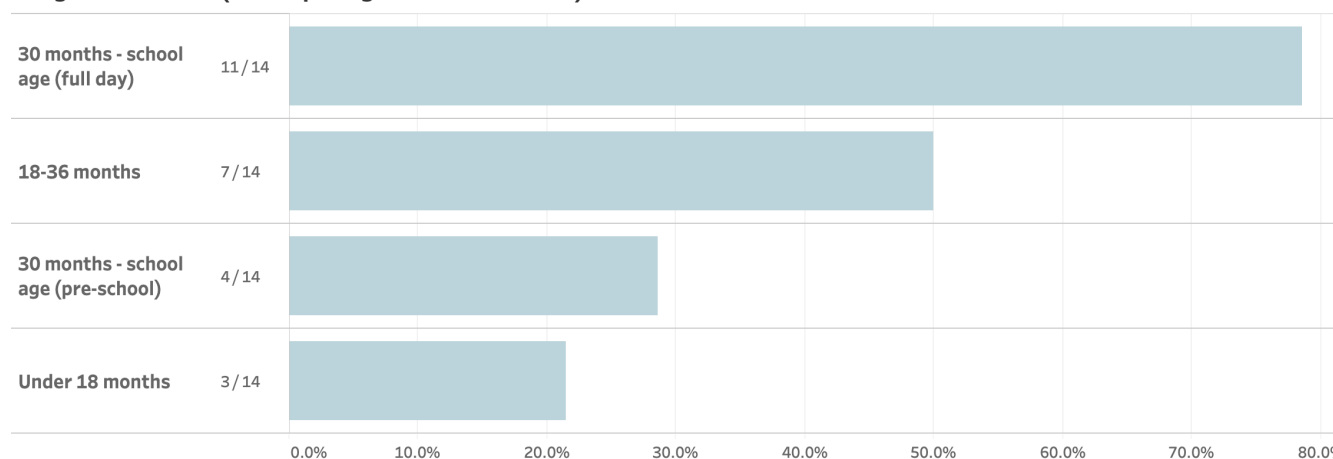


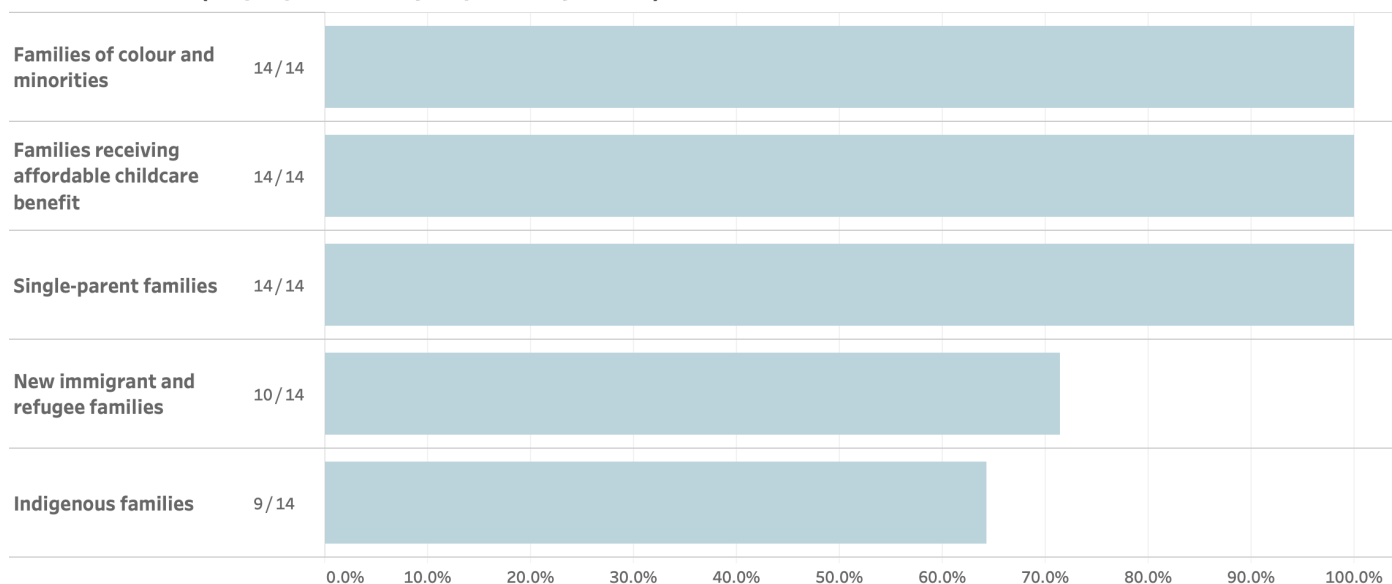
Figure 1. Programs offered by participating childcare operators

All participating childcare operators serve the following families that may be disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic: families of colour and minorities, families receiving the Affordable Child Care Benefit (ACCB), and single parent families. This is represented visually in Figure 2 below. Only three childcare operators reported the proportions of the families they serve. The childcare operators also identified essential workers, foster families, and extra-needs families as families they serve who are more vulnerable and potentially disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

# RESULTS

## DEMOGRAPHICS

### Families Served (Disproportionately Impacted by COVID)



**Figure 2.** Families served by participating childcare operators. Please note that this does not capture families for which multiple demographic categories apply.

## OPERATIONS

It is possible that where the childcare space is located within a building and how the space is secured plays a role in determining the operational status (open/closed) of the childcare centre. For example, one of the childcare centres is co-located within a community centre that is currently closed. Therefore, the childcare centre's re-opening depends on the re-opening of the community centre and if they wanted to re-open earlier than the community centre, they would need to secure maintenance and cleaning services.

### DEFINITIONS

**Embedded within the same building:** Shared access into the same building as other organizations, childcare services carried out in separate room(s)

**Co-located with another organization:** Separate access into the same building as other organizations, childcare services carried out in separate room(s)

**Shared space:** Childcare space/room(s) shared with other organizations

**Standalone Building:** Separate building for childcare services

More than half of the childcare centres were embedded within the same building as other organizations (8/14 operators) and five childcare centres operate within standalone buildings (Figure 3). In terms of how the childcare space is secured, the majority of childcare operators (9/14 operators) reported that they lease the childcare space from the City of Vancouver. This was to be expected since the scope of this project was limited to City-facilitated centres only.

# RESULTS

## OPERATIONS

### Childcare Centre Operations

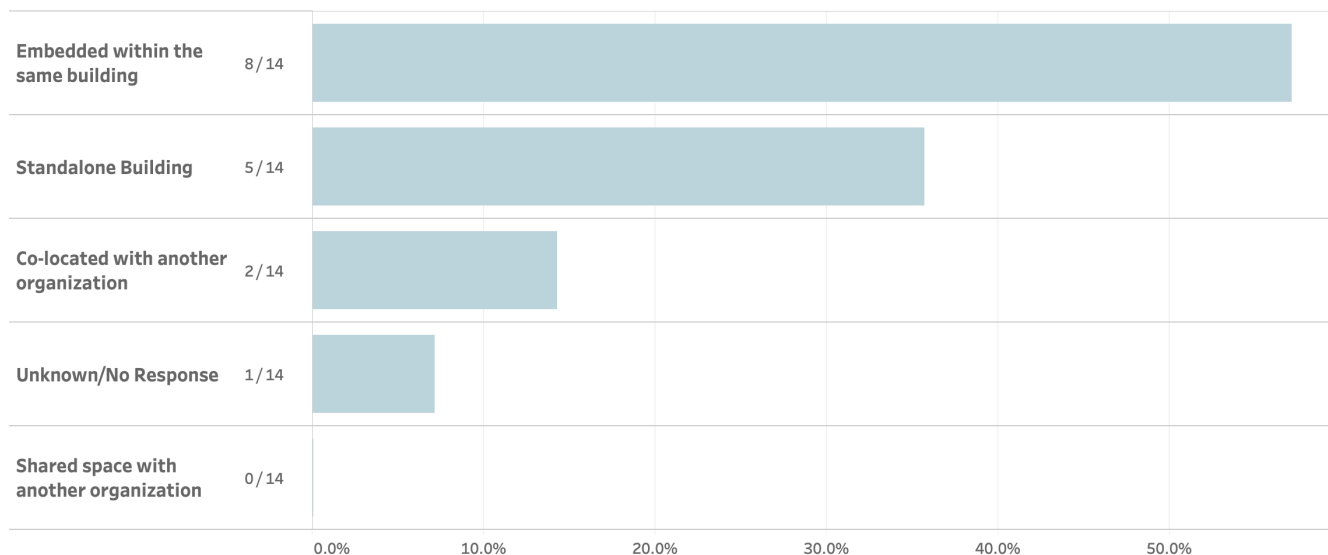


Figure 3. Childcare centre building operations

**64.3%**  
9/14 Operators

Leased childcare space

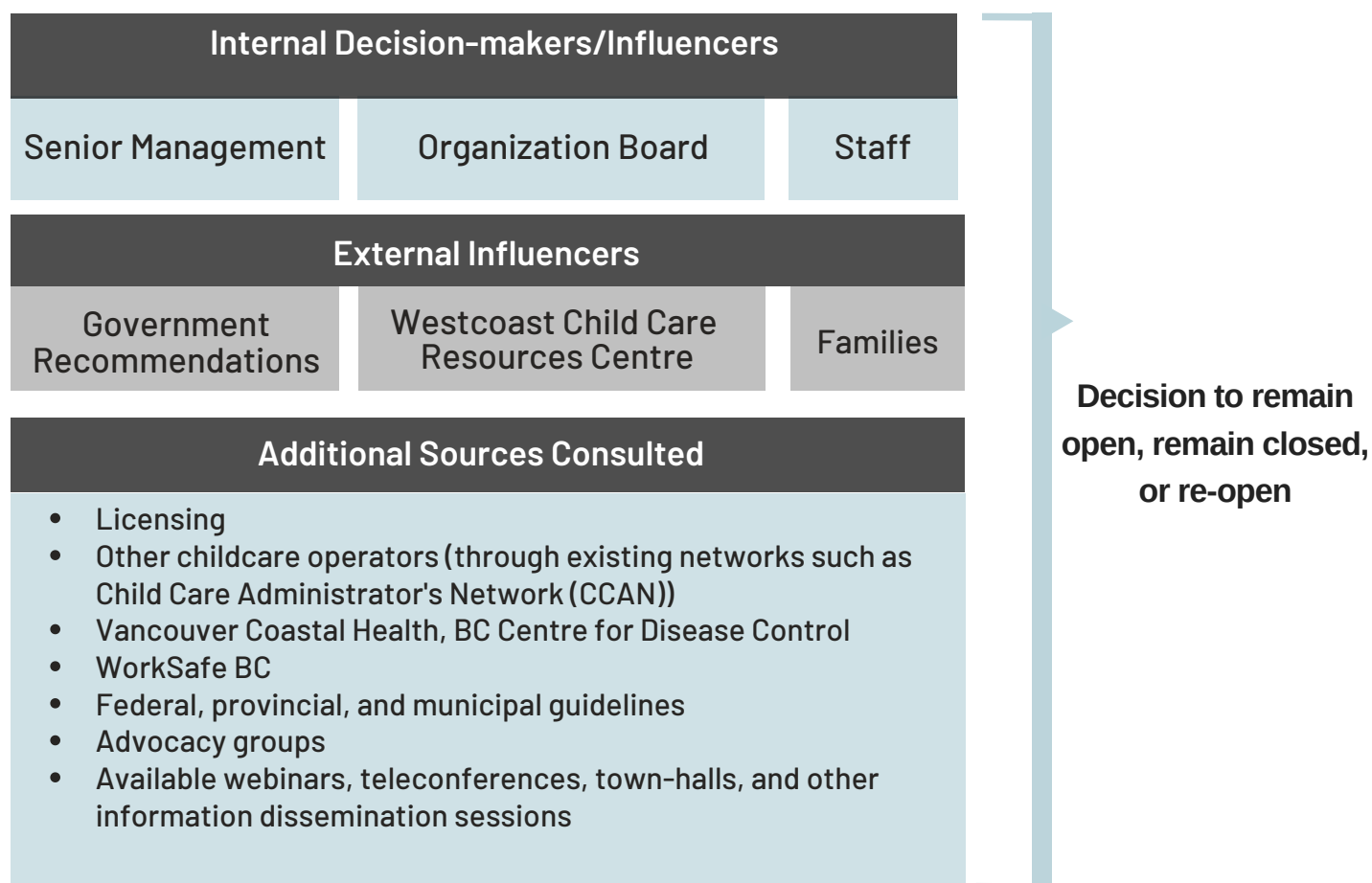
1/14 Operators: Privately-owned  
1/14 Operators: Rent  
1/14 Operators: Joint Operating Agreement  
2/14 Operators: Unsure/Unknown/No response

Almost all childcare operators reported that the COVID-19 pandemic did not cause any challenges to their childcare centre's space and that they had good working relationships with their landlord. There were two challenges reported, one of which is ongoing and the other has been resolved. The ongoing challenge was that the pandemic caused the closure of the community centre where a childcare operator was co-located with and this resulted in their closure. In terms of the resolved challenge, a large childcare operator stated that for some of their childcare programs that were further embedded into the buildings, they have had to coordinate with the building operators to gain access for their families and coordinate a location for pick-up and drop-off of their children. Due to the limited access of certain buildings, this childcare operator also had to install doorbells so their families could notify the building operators of their arrival. This suggests that, with some exceptions, the space arrangement of group childcares for ages 0-5 may not play a major role in childcare operators' decision to close, remain open, or re-open. There were two childcare operators who mentioned security issues that occurred during the period that the childcare centre was closed, however, both instances were resolved.

# RESULTS

## RE-OPENING

Different childcare operators have different considerations and decision-making processes that led them to choose how they were going to operate, if at all, during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the decision-makers and influencing factors impacting this decision can be divided generally into three categories: internal decision-makers and influencers, external influencers, and additional sources consulted. Internal decision-makers and influencers are individuals and parties who are directly involved in the childcare centre's operations or in decision-making positions. External influencers are individuals and parties who are stakeholders within the childcare sector and can influence the decisions of childcare operators. In addition to both internal and external stakeholders, the decision to close, remain open, or re-open was also made with consultation to various sources. For larger childcare operators such as the Vancouver Society of Children's Centres (VSOCC) and the YMCA of Greater Vancouver, the decisions are made by the senior management team and board of directors and cascaded down to associated childcare centres. However, the internal and external stakeholders and the sources consulted were similar among large and small operators.



**Figure 4.** Stakeholders impacting operational decisions

# RESULTS

## RE-OPENING

### Internal Stakeholders

Internal decision-makers and influencers are generally comprised of the senior management team, the board of directors or parent board, and the staff who work at the childcare centre. As various childcare centres mentioned, they involved their staff members, especially those who are carrying out the childcare services, in this operational decision because the availability of staff was a crucial factor. If staff were unable or uncomfortable working during the pandemic, then the childcare centre would not be able to resume operations.

### External Stakeholders

External influencers included government recommendations and direction such as the provincial decision to allow childcare centres to remain open during the pandemic. The referral system with Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre was also a factor that impacted the decision-making of some childcare centres because this referral process matched essential families in need of childcare to open childcare centres. While "families" are listed as an external stakeholder, they can also be considered as an internal stakeholder. Five childcare operators reported that they reached out to their families to understand their childcare needs and to gauge how many families would be interested in enrolling in their childcare programs if they were to remain open/re-open. Four childcare operators reported that a factor motivating their decision to re-open was to continue to serve their community and families in need of childcare, especially essential workers' families.

## SUPPORT NEEDED

Childcare operators were also asked what kind of support, financial or non-financial, would be needed for them to re-open or continue operations.

**50%**  
7/14 Operators

Cleaning equipment, supplies, and custodial services

Half of the participating childcare operators reported that they would need financial support for cleaning equipment, supplies (such as masks), and custodial services. Similarly, six childcare operators have reported that they need additional staffing support to lower the staff:child ratio, help with social distancing, and cover for staff who take sick days.

**43%**  
6/14 Operators

Staffing support (or financial support for staffing)

**43%**  
6/14 Operators

Continued governmental financial support (i.e. TEF)

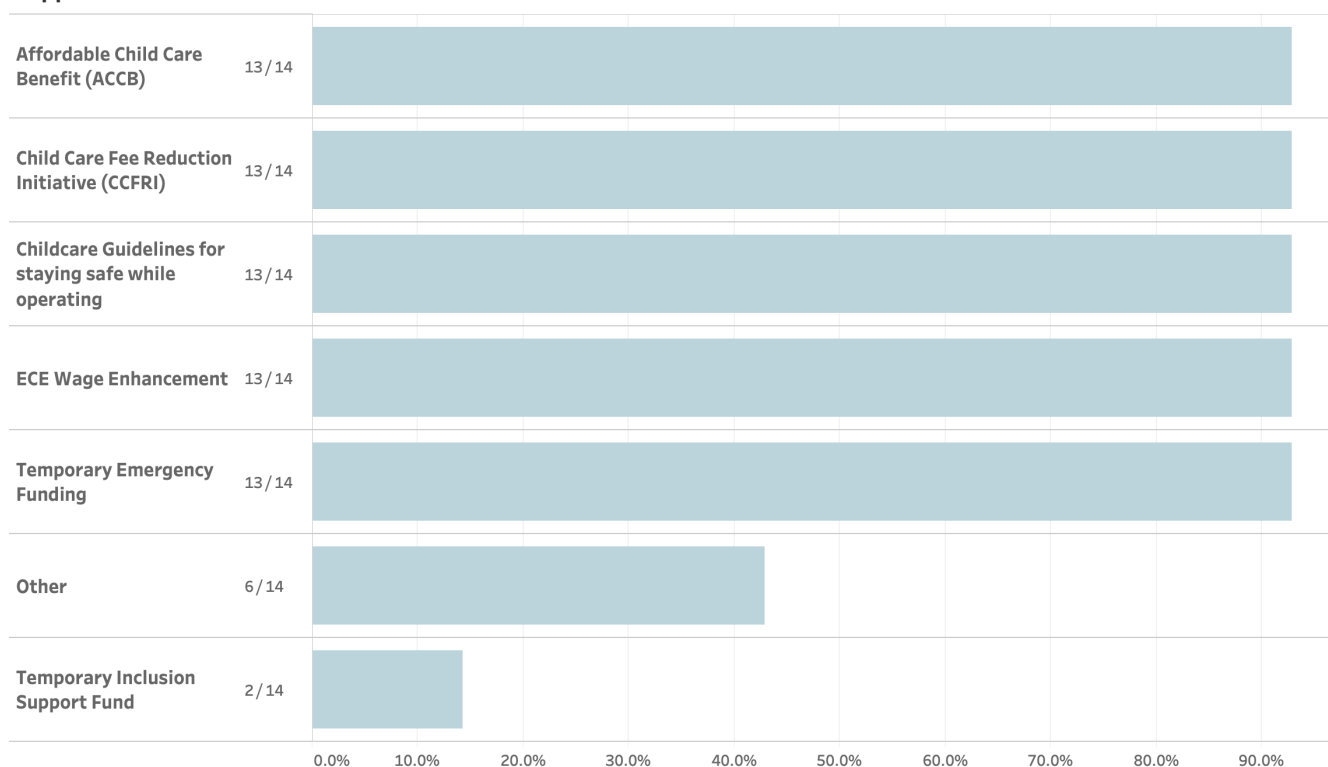
Nearly half (6/14) of the childcare operators also stated that they would need continued governmental financial support, such as the TEF and ECE-WE, especially if they are unable to operate at full capacity in the near future. Furthermore, one of the childcare operators reported feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information and number of people or groups reaching out to them.



# RESULTS

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT

### Support Accessed



**Figure 5.** Financial and non-financial support accessed

The majority of childcare centres benefited from the Affordable Child Care Benefit (ACCB), Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative (CCFRI), ECE Wage Enhancement, and Temporary Emergency Funding (TEF). In particular, TEF was the funding that childcare operators relied most on. For the childcare operators who were unable to access these sources of funding, the reasoning was because they were currently closed or they did not qualify. The childcare operators were very aware of the funding available to them, and only two childcare operators reported that they were not aware of the temporary inclusion support fund.

Additional sources of funding that childcare operators reported using include: Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) loans, Community Gaming Grants, Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), Childcare BC Maintenance Fund, and family donations and fees.

There were two childcare operators who reported that they had contingency and emergency funding, which they used to continue operations and pay their staff. However, one of these operators also stated that in the case where childcare centres have to close again due to the pandemic, they would not be able to financially sustain operations. Concerns for future closures is further discussed in later sections.

# RESULTS

## IMPACT OF COVID

Six of the childcare operators agreed that this pandemic has raised the profile for childcare services and programs and shone a light on the importance of childcare. It increased awareness for the childcare sector and brought childcare to the forefront of the news and discussions. As one childcare operator stated, these discussions have subsequently raised the question that if childcare is essential, why are childcare professionals not recognized as such and why is the childcare sector not better funded? On a similar note, another childcare operator raised the concern that even though ECEs were deemed essential service workers, they were excluded from the pandemic pay available to other essential service workers.

"I THINK THIS [PANDEMIC] BROUGHT TO LIGHT,  
THE **SIGNIFICANCE AND**  
THE **IMPORTANCE OF CHILDCARE**"

-Kitsilano Neighborhood House

As two of the respondents stated, the new designation of childcare professionals as essential service workers surprised many childcare operators. One of the respondents was hopeful that this new designation could garner greater advocacy and support for the sector.

"THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME WE HEARD THAT  
**WE WERE ESSENTIAL SERVICE WORKERS**"

-Learning Tree Day Care

From an operations standpoint, two childcare operators stated that the pandemic caused childcare centres to close and/or operate at reduced capacity (low enrolment). In particular one childcare operator was concerned that some childcare centres may not have the financial means to re-open.

Furthermore, another childcare operator stated that the pandemic also served to show that the childcare sector was fractured and moving towards a model of universal childcare can better support and meet families' needs.

# RESULTS

## CONCERNS

From the Canada-wide survey conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (Friendly, et. al, 2020), the results showed that the three greatest problems for childcare centres after re-opening are health and safety-related costs, low enrolment, and staffing difficulties. Similar to the Canada-wide survey, this project asked operators to rank their concern for staffing. However, instead of asking operators to rank their concern for health and safety-related costs, this project asked operators to rank their concern for potential health risks of continued operations. Since health and safety-related costs and low enrolment are both factors that impact the financial and operational situation of a childcare centre, this project also asked operators to rank their concern for maintaining future operations.

The concerns were phrased into three statements and the operators were asked to rank, from 1 to 7, the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. In other words, a lower rank represents a lower level of concern and a higher rank represents a higher level of concern.

The following divergent stacked bar chart of the rankings (Figure 6) shows that recruitment and staffing difficulties are the greatest concerns among the childcare operators.

Childcare Operator Concerns

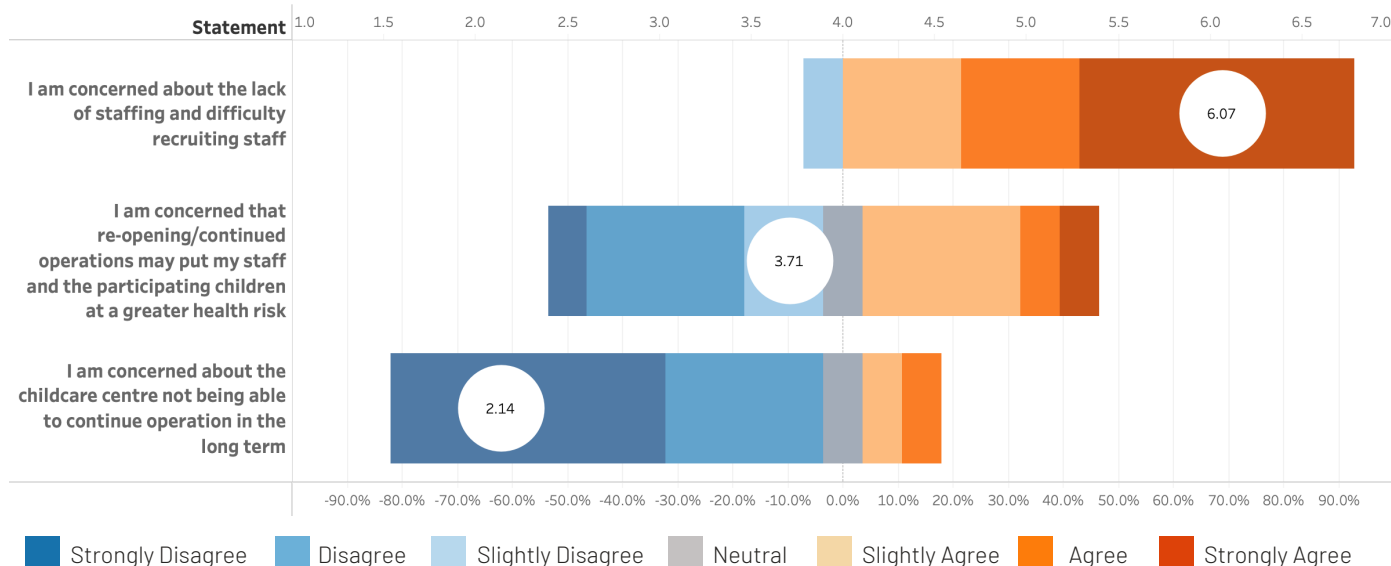


Figure 6. Childcare operator concerns

**93%**  
13/14 Operators  
at least slightly agree that they are concerned with staffing

**78.6%**  
11/14 Operators  
are not concerned about continuing operations long term

# RESULTS

## CONCERNS

In the case where childcare centres have to be closed again due to COVID-19, the most common concern among the childcare operators was related to staffing. The other concerns include financial concerns, concern for families who are in need of childcare, low enrolment, concerns for continued operations/re-opening, keeping up to date with required health and safety equipment and protocols, and considerations for changing the program mandate to include full-day childcare programs. Financial concerns included concerns for continuance of funding such as TEF. Focusing on the two cases of operational concerns, one childcare centre stated that they wouldn't be able to financially sustain operations and would have to close and the other childcare centre stated that they would permanently close.

### Concerns for Future Childcare Closures

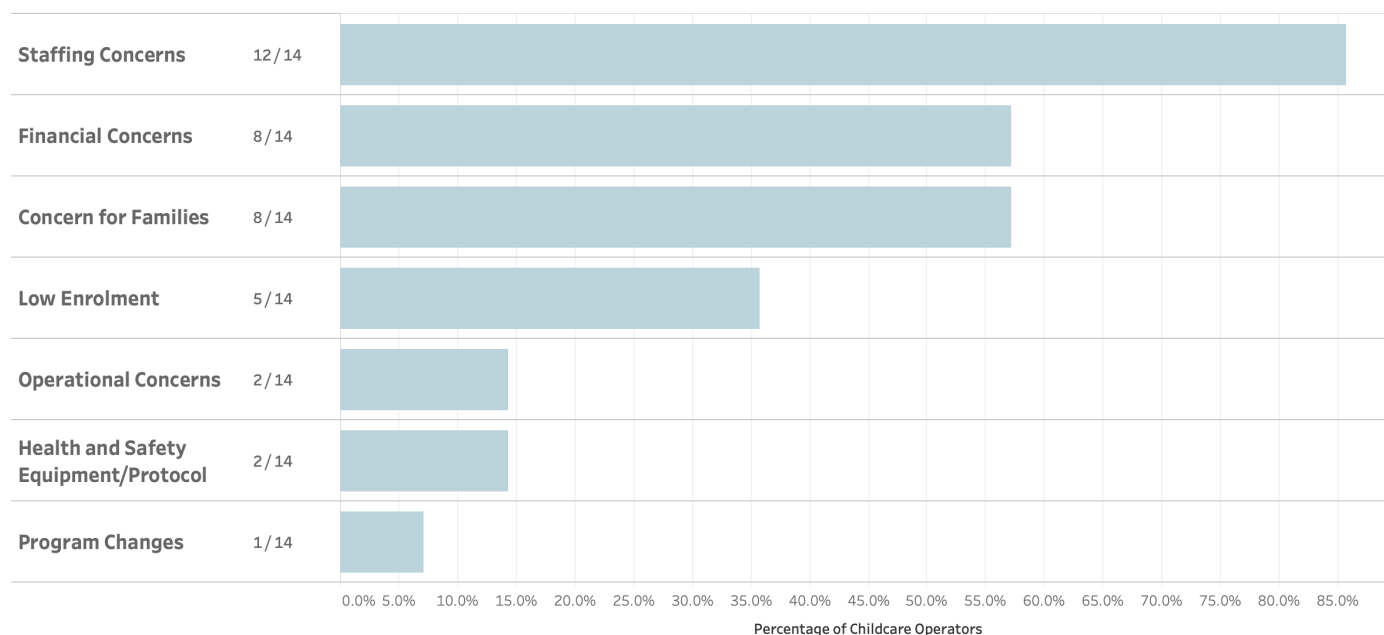


Figure 7. Childcare operator concerns for future closures

"WE HAVE **VULNERABLE FAMILIES AND ESSENTIAL WORKER FAMILIES WHO COUNT ON US FOR CHILDCARE** AND WE WORRY ABOUT THEM IF WE CLOSE."

- Shannon Day Care Centre

"IF I CAN'T KEEP THE PROGRAMS OPEN, I CAN'T KEEP STAFF WORKING, SO I HAVE **MAJOR CONCERNS ABOUT MY STAFF BEING OUT OF A JOB AGAIN.**"

-YMCA

# RESULTS

The reported staffing concerns can be further broken down into four categories:

## STAFFING CONCERNS

### Recruitment and Retaining Staff

- Concerns for recruitment of staff after closure
- Concerns for retaining staff throughout closure

### Layoffs and Wages

- Concerned about staff layoffs and ability to pay staff during closure

### Staff Morale and Well-being

- Given challenging times, concern for staff's mental well-being and staff morale

### Staff Safety

- Staying healthy in the childcare centre when it's difficult to physically distance
- Ensuring staff feel safe and comfortable returning to work

## OPERATIONAL CONCERNS

In comparing the operational concerns and challenges pre-COVID-19 and during COVID-19, seven childcare operators reported that their operational status has worsened due to COVID-19. Similar to the previous section, staffing challenges were reported to be worsened due to the pandemic. Furthermore, three childcare operators identified purchasing cleaning materials and keeping up with more rigorous cleaning protocols to be new operational challenges during the pandemic.

"WE WERE DOING REALLY WELL BEFORE THE PANDEMIC. WE WERE ALWAYS AT FULL CAPACITY."

"RE-OPENING HAS BEEN CHALLENGING, AND WE ARE LOSING FAMILIES, I HAD 14 WITHDRAWALS TO DATE."

- Sunset Community Centre

"STAFFING WAS WORSE DURING THE PANDEMIC. A LOT OF MY STAFF WERE HESITANT TO COME BACK TO WORK AT THE START. STAFF DEFINITELY HAD FEARS ABOUT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO THEM IF THEY STARTED DOING FRONTLINE WORK."

- Kitsilano Neighborhood House

As of August 2020, the number of withdrawals at Sunset Community Centre has increased to 22.

# RESULTS

## RESILIENCY

The childcare operators were also asked to share any measures for resilience that they will apply moving forward. The following is a summary of some of the measures listed by childcare operators.

### BUYING POWER

One childcare operator reported that they were considering joining other childcare operators in creating one account for purchasing supplies and equipment (such as cleaning supplies) to increase their buying power and therefore improve their childcare centres' resiliency. From further discussions with participating childcare operators, this strategy may be beneficial for smaller operators. For larger operators, this strategy is less appealing because they already make large volume purchases.

"SOME OF THE DAY CARES AND PRESCHOOLS ARE CONSIDERING CREATING ONE ACCOUNT FOR PURCHASING POWER. SO, IF YOU HAVE 10 AGENCIES WHO ARE PURCHASING FROM ONE ACCOUNT, IT ALLOWS THEM TO **PURCHASE GREATER AMOUNTS FOR LESS COST.**"

- South Vancouver Family Place

### TECHNOLOGY

Two childcare operators reported that they have been using technology to stay connected to their childcare team, families, and other childcare operators. Both childcare operators have stated that they will embrace technology more and continue to hold virtual meetings. However, another childcare operator has reported that there is a learning curve in incorporating technology and virtual meetings into their operations.

"**VIRTUAL MEETINGS.** THEY HAVE BEEN GREAT FOR MEETING NEW PROVIDERS AND ITS SO MUCH EASIER TO MEET WITH PEOPLE."

-Champlain Child Development Centre

# RESULTS

## RESILIENCY

### COLLABORATIONS

The majority of childcare operators reported that throughout the pandemic, they strengthened their connections and existing collaborations among operators and advocacy groups. From the discussions with the childcare operators, it seems that many childcare operators are involved in various collaborations, groups, and networks but there does not seem to be one extensive network for all operators.

**"WE'VE HAD LOTS OF COLLABORATIONS WITH OTHER CENTRES THAT HAS BEEN REALLY CRUCIAL DURING THIS TIME. [WE] TALK ABOUT ISSUES THAT ARE COMING UP, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES, AND DURING COVID, IT HAS BEEN REALLY CRUCIAL TO HAVE ALL THESE PEOPLE TO DISCUSS WITH"**

- Shannon Day Care Centre

### CHILDCARE PROGRAMMING

The challenge of teaching young children to socially distance is one that is echoed by many childcare operators. Therefore, childcare operators have been modifying how they carry out their programs to encourage social distancing. These methods can be categorized into changes in space utilization (outdoors and indoors) and changes in scheduling to limit the number of children physically present. To elaborate on space utilization, some childcare centres have increased their outdoor activities and a larger childcare operator, with substantial outdoor and indoor space, has been able to separate children into groups for indoors and outdoors activities. This childcare operator is also involved in designing new childcare centres and suggested that new centres could include elements that support the resiliency of the childcare programs that take place there. For example, half walls can help children physically distance and installation of more hand sinks can encourage better hand hygiene.

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# DISCUSSION

## PROJECT LIMITATIONS

The scope and methodology introduces certain limitations for the project. Given the time constraints of this project, only a subset of eligible City-facilitated childcare centres were invited to participate and school-age childcare programs were excluded. Therefore, the modest sample that participated in this project does not adequately represent the target population and is subject to convenience sampling bias. Furthermore, there were no recordings of the interviews to encourage open and informal discussions, and the collected data was coded by one individual. Therefore, the data is also subject to bias in this regard. As such, the insights and results in this report cannot be generalized to the larger population and thus in interpreting this report, these limitations should be taken into account.

The Indigenous community represents an important community within Vancouver and they are disproportionately impacted during COVID-19. Therefore, this project was intended to include the experiences of Indigenous families accessing childcare during the pandemic. The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Planning and Capacity Development Person was invited to to share their insights. However, due to the time constraints of this project, no interview was ultimately scheduled. Suggestions to continue on this topic and research can be found in the Future Directions section of the report.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESILIENCY

### CITY OF VANCOUVER AND SENIOR LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

#### NETWORKS

As previously mentioned, when asked about collaborations during the pandemic, the majority of childcare operators stated that they reached out to other childcare operators or were part of networks. Therefore, the City can take on a convenor role to further support these networks that have been established or maintained among the childcare operators. There is no single network that encompasses all childcare operators, therefore, an opportunity for resiliency against future system shocks and disruptions may be creating an all-encompassing network of childcare operators within Vancouver. An inclusive network can serve as an efficient means of information sharing and help childcare operators manage uncertainties posed by systemic shocks. Moreover, it can support childcare operators during the recovery process by fostering a sense of trust within the network (Renjen, 2020). Trust can act as a catalyst in recovering from system shocks and disruptions because trust allows for effective communication and cohesiveness in navigating through unpredictable circumstances (Renjen, 2020). Ultimately, an inclusive network can potentially be a step towards a more connected and strengthened childcare sector.



# DISCUSSION

## CITY OF VANCOUVER AND SENIOR LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

### CHILDCARE AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE

At the start of the pandemic, there were concerns and unclear communication regarding childcare operations during the pandemic. This is evident through the open letters sent by the advocacy group, Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC). The ECEBC voiced concerns on behalf of childcare professionals and called for direction, feedback, and answers from leaders of senior levels of government (ECEBC, 2020b, 2020c). To quote the ECEBC, "In the absence of definitive and coordinated leadership from the government, front-line educators and licensees have been burdened with the responsibilities of making ad hoc decisions and providing a patchwork of care." Moreover, the results of this project suggests that many childcare operators were surprised that they were essential workers. Two childcare operators raised the concern childcare operators are not being recognized as essential workers due to the lack of funding. Therefore, senior levels of government can continue to recognize childcare as an essential service through the provision of supports and resources that are proportionate to the title of "essential service workers". The City, in its role as the liaison between senior government and stakeholders, including childcare operators, can help facilitate efficient and timely communication.

Furthermore, senior levels of government can consider a cross-sectional approach when making decisions about childcare and consider the downstream effects of these decisions on sectors that are connected to childcare, such as education. Childcare also has significant socio-economic impacts from aiding the restart of the economy by supporting parents re-entering the workforce to promoting the well-being of children and disproportionately affected families.

### CHILDCARE SECTOR

In addition to strengthening connections among childcare operators, it is also essential to develop strong relationships with the families. Many childcare operators have voiced their concerns for the families they serve and are working hard to support these families during the pandemic. By putting in place a system to maintain communication with all families, especially those who are marginalized or more vulnerable and may require additional support, childcare operators can be more resilient to future shocks and disruptions.

### PRE-SCHOOLS THAT OFFER FULL-DAY CHILDCARE PROGRAMS

One of the childcare operators reported that they would consider changing their mandate from a pre-school to a full-day childcare so that they can better support their community on an emergency basis. In comparison to pre-school programs, which are half-day in duration, full-

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# DISCUSSION

day childcare can better support working families. Therefore, under circumstances such as the pandemic, where childcare spaces were drastically reduced due to closures, pre-schools that can offer full-day childcare can help increase access to childcare services, thereby contributing to the resiliency of the sector.

## SYSTEM FOR CONNECTING OPERATORS WITH SUBSTITUTE STAFF

Staffing concerns existed within the childcare sector pre-COVID-19, however, the results of this project suggests that staffing concerns remain the greatest concern for childcare operators during the pandemic. During discussion of staffing concerns, two childcare operators specifically stated that finding substitute or casual staff was challenging during the pandemic. Tangent to this topic, one childcare operator suggested that an initiative to improve resiliency may be to develop a means for childcare operators to share staff when dealing with periods of staff shortages.

Building onto this idea, an opportunity for improving resiliency within the childcare sector may be to develop a system for childcare operators to share staffing resources or to easily connect with available substitute staff. In this way, if a childcare centre is struggling temporarily with staffing shortages, they can use this system to hire substitute staff.

However, in the current circumstances, ECEs are paid varying wages, which adds to the complexity and difficulty for maintaining a system that connects childcare operators with available substitute staff. Therefore, implementing a wage grid that standardizes ECE wages, such as the one proposed by the ECEBC and Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) (2020c), can provide the necessary foundation in which to build this system. As the ECEBC and CCCABC (2020c) stated, a province-wide ECE wage grid (based on the level of ECE certification) can help resolve staffing concerns regarding recruitment, staff retention, and insufficient workforce. Furthermore, greater staff retention and competitive wages have been associated with higher quality childcare (ECEBC and CCCABC, 2020c).

Therefore, implementing a wage grid for ECEs can increase the resiliency of the childcare sector by strengthening the workforce and reducing turnover. By developing a means for sharing the workforce, it helps the sector become more connected and potentially more resilient to disruptions in the sector. For example, having a system in place to easily connect available ECEs or substitute staff from closed childcare centres to operating childcare centres that are understaffed can better support the staff and childcare operators.

# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

## FUTURE RESEARCH

### CHILDCARE CENTRE BUILDINGS

As previously mentioned, one of the childcare operators suggested that new childcare centres can be designed with elements that better support recommended safety measures such as physical distancing and hand hygiene, which in turn supports the well-being of the children and staff. Building on this, future research may include exploring physical adjustments to existing childcare spaces that make them healthier, safer, and more resilient to emergency situations. A topic for further exploration may be the incorporation of modular walls to help with physical distancing among young children.

On a similar note, three childcare operators stated that they no longer allow family members inside the building or program rooms, so the pick-up and drop-off of children are arranged outside. Another childcare operator stated that the family members will be physically distanced in their waiting rooms and their entry into the program rooms will be staggered and limited to 5 minutes per family. Therefore, future research may also include exploration of methods that allow families to have some social interaction while being physically distanced during the pick-up and drop-off process.

"FAMILIES HAVE TO DROP OFF THEIR CHILDREN OUTSIDE OF THE PROGRAM ROOMS...WHEREAS BEFORE, FAMILIES WERE ABLE TO COME IN, SIT, RELAX, AND ENGAGE WITH THE STAFF AND CHILDREN. WE'RE EFFICIENT IN TERMS OF DROP-OFF AND PICK-UP, BUT IT MEANS THAT **FAMILIES DON'T HAVE THAT TYPE OF INTERACTION THAT THEY HAD BEFORE.**

**OUR CENTRES ARE NOT DESIGNED FOR THAT KIND OF PICK-UP/DROP-OFF."**

- VSOCC

# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

## FUTURE RESEARCH

### SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAMS

Since the scope of this project included only a subset of the City-facilitated childcare operators in Vancouver, future research can expand the scope to include more childcare operators. In particular, since childcare operators who offer only school-age programs have been excluded from this project, future research could focus on understanding how the school-age programs have been affected by the pandemic, especially those that operate within Vancouver School Board spaces.

In a discussion with a childcare operator who offers only school-age care, a challenge they faced during the pandemic was providing continuous care. Since their school-age programs are shared space rentals within school board property, their program offerings depend greatly on the school's operations (whether they are open or operating at reduced capacities). Therefore, disruptions in school operations are reflected in the school-age childcare programs.

Furthermore, this childcare operator stated that there was a need for better communication between the school board and school-age programs to allow for delivery of high-quality childcare in emergency circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The need for more communication is echoed by another childcare operator who had to close one of their school-age programs. They reported that it has been frustrating without clear direction on what will happen in the Fall for school, and they need more information before they can re-open their school-age program. This suggests that there could be opportunities for school-age childcare operators to work in close collaboration with the Vancouver School Board to continue delivering quality childcare to families during emergencies.

### GROUPS DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED BY COVID-19

As the results suggested, the majority of the childcare centres are serving vulnerable and disproportionately impacted families. In particular, all the participating childcare operators reported that they serve families of colour and minorities and nine of the childcare operators serve indigenous families. In the context of the pandemic, individuals of racial and ethnic minority, women, and Indigenous communities have been disproportionately impacted because COVID-19 has further amplified pre-existing challenges and inequalities (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2020b, Qian and Fuller, 2020). These groups are more likely to experience inequities in social determinants of health, including discrimination, income disparities, and limited access to services such as healthcare and childcare (CDC, 2020). Individuals in these circumstances may not be able to afford basic needs, such as food (CDC, 2020). Food security was also a concern that three of the participating childcare operators shared. Moreover, individuals who identify as belonging to more than one of these vulnerable groups, such as minority women, are confronted with compounded challenges (OHCHR, 2020a). Therefore, future research may delve deeper into the impacts of COVID-19 on these disproportionately impacted families and explore ways to better support them, especially in the realm of childcare.

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# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

## FUTURE RESEARCH

### CULTURAL RELEVANCE IN CHILDCARE

While the scope of this research topic focuses on the childcare sectoral resilience, there is an existing need to also build cultural and community resilience, especially through an Indigenous lens. Childcare has the opportunity to be a key part of this with its connection to early learning, children, families, supporting gender equity, and workforce participation.

A topic for further exploration would be to support Indigenous families such that they feel safe and empowered in the realm of childcare and early learning. As the First Nationals Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) found, a higher quality of childcare and a greater amount of traditional teachings incorporated in the childcare were associated with greater satisfaction in the provided care (FNIGC, 2018). Furthermore, Indigenous families who assigned a greater importance to traditional learnings for their children were more likely to use informal childcare involving a family relative (FNIGC, 2018). In this context, licensed childcare has a role to play in supporting resiliency and these findings potentially support the integration of traditional, culturally-relevant teachings into childcare.

Further research into this topic may include exploring methods for childcare centres to be more financially and culturally accessible to Indigenous families. Work moving forward in this direction should be Indigenous-led, involving community members and done in collaboration with organizations such as the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC).

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# APPENDIX

The following is a copy of the interview guide for this project.

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## SECTION 1. DEMOGRAPHICS

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**Question 1a.** What kinds of programs are you offering currently? Have your program offerings changed due to COVID?

- Under 18 months
- 18-36 months
- 30 months – school age (Full-day)
- 30 months – school age (Pre-school)

**Question 1b.** At what capacity are these programs operating at? How does this differ from normal operations? (Capacity = number of children attending and staff working per program)

**Question 2a.** Understanding the demographics of families served. Do you serve the following families?

- Families receiving affordable childcare benefit
- Indigenous families
- New immigrant and refugee families
- Single-parent families
- Families of colour and minorities

*Follow-up question: Are you serving any other types of families that might be disproportionately impacted by COVID?*

**Question 2b.** What specific challenges are you experiencing, or do you anticipate in serving vulnerable or disproportionately affected families?

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## SECTION 2. CHILDCARE OPERATIONS AND RE-OPENING

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**Question 3.** Was the childcare centre ever closed? (If closed, does this childcare centre have plans to re-open?)

**Question 4.** How was the decision to remain open/close/re-open made? Who was involved in the decision-making and what sources were consulted?

**Question 5a.** How is your childcare space secured? (i.e. rent, lease, private)

**Question 5b.** Describe your childcare facility operations:

- Co-located with another organization
- Embedded within the same building
- Completely stand alone
- Shared space with another organization

**Question 5c.** Has the COVID-19 pandemic caused any challenges on the facility space? (i.e. challenges in securing the space, relationship with landlord...etc.)

# APPENDIX

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## SECTION 3: FINANCIAL SITUATION AND SUPPORT ACCESSED

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**Question 6.** What kinds of support has the childcare centre used/benefitted from?

- Temporary Emergency Funding (TEF)
- ECE wage enhancement (ECE-WE)
- Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative (CCFRI)
- Affordable Child Care Benefit (ACCB)
- Temporary Inclusion Support Fund
- Childcare Guidelines for staying safe while operating
- Other

*Follow-up question: Aside from federal and provincial financial support, what other funding have you received, if any?*

**Question 7.** What financial supports (available to childcare operators) were you NOT aware of?

**Question 8.** What kind of support (financial or non-financial) would you need to re-open?

**Question 9.** What kind of support (financial or non-financial) would you need to continue operations?

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## SECTION 4. CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

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**Question 10.** In the case where childcare centres have to be closed again due to COVID, what are some concerns that you have?

**Question 11a.** What operational challenges were you facing before the pandemic? What operational challenges are you facing during the pandemic?

**Question 11b.** How has the pandemic impacted the childcare sector as a whole?

**Question 12.** Using the scale below, where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 7 means “strongly agree”, how would you rank the following statements?

Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Slightly Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
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**Statement 1.** “I am concerned about the childcare centre not being able to continue operation in the long term.”  
(Long term in this case is 6 months after re-opening)

**Statement 2.** “I am concerned that re-opening may put my staff and the participating children at a greater health risk.”

**Statement 3.** “I am concerned about the lack of staffing and difficulty of recruiting staff.”

**Question 13.** What measures for resilience or collaborations that have occurred because of COVID will you be applying moving forward?