



BC Aboriginal
Child Care Society

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THE NATIONAL FIRST NATIONS AND INDIGENOUS EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE FRAMEWORKS DEVELOPMENT: 2016-2018

1. First Nations (AFN & FNLC) Mandates for Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC)

In July of 2016, the Assembly of First Nations created a joint First Nations-Federal Government ELCC Working Group and mandated a regional First Nations engagement process to “oversee a 4-6 month community engagement process that would identify and confirm the key principles, priorities and actions of a First Nations ELCC framework along with an action plan that takes into account regional priorities, needs and circumstances”¹

In the Fall of 2016, the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and Union of BC Indian Chiefs mandated BCACCS to be the “the lead agency to coordinate a province-wide First Nation engagement process on Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC)”²

2. First Nations ELCC Regional Engagement in BC

Between December 2016 – February 2017, with input from: partners, First Nations leadership and other stakeholders, BCACCS developed a regional ELCC engagement plan to engage as comprehensively as possible—with limited resources and a short time frame.

From March through August of 2017, regional First Nations ELCC engagements were undertaken in order to gather the “advice and direction from Chiefs, community leaders and key stakeholders regarding the values, principles and priorities to be included in the proposed national Indigenous ELCC framework from a BC perspective.”³

BCACCS engaged First Nations communities, First Nations early childhood educators and early childhood education administrators, First Nations regional leadership (in partnership with the First Nations Health Council), First Nations institutional partners and stakeholders, First Nations communities with no ELCC services, and First Nations cultural leadership (at the 2017 First Nations Elders gathering). In all, First Nations ELCC engagement was developed and documented from twelve institutional partners and over six hundred individuals representing well over one hundred and fifty First Nations communities.

¹ Assembly of First Nations Resolution #39-2016

² BC Assembly of First Nations Resolution #12-2016, First Nations Summit Resolution 1016.03, Union of BC Indian Chiefs Resolution 2016-48

³ BC Assembly of First Nations Resolution #12-2016, First Nations Summit Resolution 1016.03, Union of BC Indian Chiefs Resolution 2016-48

The *First Nations Early Learning and Child Care Regional First Nations Engagement* “rollup” report was validated with participants in September, 2017 and submitted, along with other regional reports, to the National ELCC working group of the Assembly of First Nations.

Key priorities for change that emerged from the BC regional First Nations ELCC engagement include:

- **Land, language, culture and identity** are crucial in Indigenous ELCC
- **Children, family and extended families supports** respect First Nations social systems
- Indigenous **Governance and jurisdiction** cannot be sidestepped, and is what ‘works’ in Indigenous contexts
- **Funding** for First Nations ELCC must be greatly increased, existing programs enhanced and funding decisions be made subject to First Nations governance
- **Quality** must be supported in Indigenous ELCC through Indigenous-developed and led initiatives in education, professional development, research and community development
- **Capacity** development supports are essential both to realize community and nation self-determination in this area of social policy but also to connect it to other areas, in its contributions to comprehensive and legitimate holistic Indigenous leadership in social policy

BCACCS was subsequently mandated by the BC Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs to develop First Nations ELCC engagement “through approval and implementation processes such that it will be a basis for First Nations and their communities to exercise their authority to determine the systems and structures, as well as the programs and services, that provide ELCC supports to them—in ways they develop and control, by way of capacities provided and developed for the purpose”—including by way of “ongoing engagement.”⁴

3. National First Nations and Indigenous ELCC Framework Development and Approval

With representatives from all regions of the Assembly of First Nations and officials from five federal ministries, through the fall of 2017, BCACCS contributed to the development and drafting of both First Nations and Indigenous ELCC frameworks. Based on regional Indigenous ELCC engagements, these frameworks provide for policy transformation for ELCC structural and systems change subject to Indigenous leadership and increasing self-determination over short, medium and long terms. Their foremost authorities are inherent Indigenous rights and title, First Nations treaty rights and, thereafter, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,⁵ the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,

⁴ BC Assembly of First Nations Resolution 14-2017, First Nations Summit Resolution 1017.03, Union of BC Indian Chiefs Resolution #2017-39.

⁵ The articles of the Declaration support a mandate for First Nations control, direction and governance of First Nations early learning and child care (ELCC) within an Indigenous right to strengthen and maintain distinct social and cultural institutions (Article. 2(a); 5; 14; 20; 23) which is an integral part of Indigenous cultural revitalization (Article. 13.1) and a part of Indigenous educational systems, for which there exists a right of Indigenous establishment and control (Article 14).

the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in addition to ongoing First Nations-led ELCC engagement.⁶

The First Nations ELCC framework is the First Nations component of the National Indigenous ELCC framework. It established the following key **guiding principles** (each with attendant goals) for National First Nations ELCC policy development and transformation:

1. Indigenous knowledges, languages and cultures
2. First Nations governance
3. Quality programs and services
4. Inclusive, accessible and flexible
5. Transparent and accountable
6. Collaborations and partnerships
7. Capacity development⁷

To concretely specify and support First Nations ELCC policy and governance development, establish and support its regional leadership, and chart a common way forward in First Nations leadership of ELCC policy development, the National First Nations ELCC Framework then outlines six areas of **strategic action**, specified over short medium and long terms, by which to realize its goals and in asserting its principles. First Nations ELCC framework areas of strategic action:

1. Governance and ELCC Service Delivery
2. Quality Programs and Services
3. Funding Approaches and Allocations
4. Linkages and Partnerships
5. Reciprocal Accountability, Research and Evaluation
6. Capacity Development

On December 7, 2017, the Chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations endorsed the initial draft of the First Nations ELCC framework and supported its continuing co-development and implementation, along with the continuation of the ELCC Working Group of the AFN.⁸ From regional First Nations ELCC engagement and the subsequent First Nations ELCC Framework draft, the Chiefs also resolved support for the full funding of First Nations ELCC capacity development “separate from ELCC program funding.”

The federal cabinet is due to consider the IELCC framework for approval in early 2018, for implementation beginning April 2018.

⁶ Per Assembly of First Nations National ELCC Working Group Terms of Reference

⁷ Draft National First Nations Early Learning and Child Care Framework, 2017.

⁸ Assembly of First Nations Special Chiefs Assembly Resolution #23-2017.

4. National First Nations and Indigenous ELCC Framework Regional Implementation

As the ELCC frameworks support the exercise of First Nations ELCC governance by First Nations rights and title holders, its implementation is largely a regional matter. Mandated by the BC Assembly of First Nations, Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the First Nations Summit, led by communities and with key regional partners, BCACCS is charged to ensure that Indigenous ELCC framework implementation process(es) are both pathways to quality programs and services for First Nations families and, more broadly, to First Nations self-determination.⁹ In these objectives, the development of First Nations governance in ELCC is subject to a right to autonomy¹⁰ as well as to government obligations to provide financial and technical support.¹¹

Along with continuing national First Nations ELCC working group framework implementation planning¹² and ongoing community-based First Nations ELCC engagement, regional partnership development is ongoing in anticipation of National ELCC frameworks' implementation.

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⁹ UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 3.

¹⁰ UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 4.

¹¹ UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 39.

¹² As mandated by Assembly of First Nations Special Chiefs Assembly Resolution #23-2017.