



Inclusive child care program guide

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Inclusive Child Care Program Overview

Parents and families across Alberta rely on licensed child care programs every day to support the growth and development of their children. Child care programs and educators help children of all abilities build skills that support their growth and overall health.

Access to inclusive child care is important to support families who have children with extra support needs. Inclusive child care environments support parents' participation in the workforce and help children to build positive relationships and participate meaningfully in the program.

The intent of the Inclusive Child Care (ICC) program is to assist child care programs and educators to build their capacity to include children who have extra support needs, increase families' access to inclusive child care, and prevent the exclusion or removal of children from child care programs.

The ICC program provides a range of resources and supports to licensed child care programs that include:

- access to on-site consultation to support quality enhancement of program delivery and/or guidance for individualized strategies,
- training and professional development delivered with coaching supports to promote capacity building of inclusive practices, and
- access to funding for short-term engagement supports and resources to support knowledge and skill development.

Outcome of inclusion

Inclusion in licensed child care allows every child regardless of their abilities, and their family, to benefit from the broad range of experiences and opportunities that participating in licensed child care offers. Inclusive practices are responsive to the needs of all children, promote individual development, and enable meaningful participation with peers, educators and within their community. Inclusive experiences in child care provide children a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and optimizes their developing capabilities.

Entrance criteria

The ICC program is available to licensed child care programs (facility-based programs and family day home programs operating under a licensed agency). Child care programs must demonstrate that they require support to successfully include a child or children with extra support needs in their program.

Child care programs apply directly to the ICC program; a referral is not required.

Legislative Authorities

The Ministry of Children's Services is responsible for the Inclusive Child Care program. The *Early Learning and Child Care Act* and Regulation provides the legislative authority for the Ministry of Children's Services to license child care programs in Alberta. Section 1.2(c)(ii) of the Act requires that all providers of child care programs take into consideration the diversity in the children's abilities in the program.

The *Early Learning and Child Care Act* came into effect on February 1, 2021, and includes new Principles and Matters to be Considered that must be reflected in the operations and daily programming of all licensed child care programs in Alberta. One of the matters to be considered is that the diversity in the abilities of the children in the program is to be respected and valued.

The *Government Organization Act*: Ministerial Grants Regulation. Section 3 of the Act authorizes ministers to make grants to persons or organizations for any purpose related to a program, service or other matter under the administration of the Minister.

Roles and Responsibilities

Children and Family Services

Children and Family Services is responsible for:

- supporting parents in finding and choosing available licensed quality child care options;
- licensing and monitoring child care programs; and
- funding the ICC program

ICC service providers

ICC agencies

ICC agencies are funded to deliver the ICC program by providing short-term, intensive, evidence-based consultation, professional development, and engagement support to child care programs and educators to develop the skills and abilities needed to successfully include children with extra support needs.

ICC agencies have knowledge and expertise in early learning and child care and inclusion of children who have extra support needs. ICC agencies use the evidence-based Pyramid Model ([National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations \(challengingbehavior.org\)](https://www.nationalcenter.org/Pyramid-Model-Innovations)) to provide on-site consultation and training to child care programs and educators to develop inclusive practices that promote children's social and emotional development, and prevent and address challenging behavior. They may also incorporate additional evidence-informed approaches such as trauma-informed practice and the Core Story of Brain Development. ICC agencies are familiar with their community's resources and supports and foster collaborative relationships with stakeholders.

ICC agency roles and responsibilities include:

- receiving applications for inclusive child care supports from child care programs;
- conducting an observation of the child care program to identify appropriate resources and supports;
- developing support agreements with child care programs accessing consultation supports;
- facilitating the delivery of ICC supports and resources;
- ensuring that consultants can access specialized services, such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech and language pathologists;
- allocating engagement funding to child care programs;
- collecting and safeguarding the privacy of any personal information required; and
- providing relevant data to Children and Family Services for outcomes measurement.

On-site consultant

On-site consultants are responsible for assisting child care programs and educators in utilizing the ICC supports to increase the program's capacity to include children who have extra support needs.

Onsite consultants are employees of the ICC agency and are responsible for:

- building positive relationships with child care programs, educators, families and community service providers;
- following evidence-informed practice models in their work with child care programs;
- utilizing expertise to support child care educators to set and complete goals, develop strategies and increase inclusive practices; and
- assisting child care programs and families to navigate services for children with extra support needs and recommending community supports. For example, supporting a family to access supports through the Family Resource Network program.

Child care programs and families

Child care programs and the families they serve are partners in supporting their children with extra support needs and work collaboratively to facilitate children's learning and development in the child care program.

Licensed child care programs

Licensed child care programs are responsible for:

- applying for ICC supports by completing the application form, available for download at <https://www.alberta.ca/child-care-supports-for-inclusion.aspx>;
- ensuring the active participation of program leadership and educators in the ICC program;
- developing and completing goals to build child care program capacity;
- collecting parent or guardian consents where required to share information about a child or family with the ICC agency and/or another service; and
- providing relevant data to ICC agencies for outcomes measurement.

Parents and guardians

Parents and guardians of children with disabilities and those who require extra supports to be included in child care programs:

- communicate with the child care program about their child's extra support needs;
- connect the child care program with other services that may already be supporting the child, such as Family Supports for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) through the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services, or Early Childhood Services through the Ministry of Education, only if requested, and with written consent;
- provide informed consent to receive consultation support through the ICC program when required; and
- remain as involved as possible in any individualized support plans related to their child's development and care.

Intake process

Applying for supports

Child care programs

Child care programs apply for supports using the ICC program application available for download at <https://www.alberta.ca/child-care-supports-for-inclusion.aspx>.

A child care program that is already receiving ICC supports in a specific room and would like support in another room should contact the ICC agency before making an additional application. The ICC agency will advise if a new application is required.

ICC agencies

Upon receipt of an application form, the ICC agency contacts the child care program to arrange for an onsite observation and interview to determine the supports that would meet the child care program's needs. ICC supports will not be provided without an on-site observation and interview.

The ICC agency will schedule the onsite observation and interview for a time when the child care program leadership is present and relevant program educators can be available outside of the child-to-staff ratio if needed. During the observation, the ICC agency will observe the specific child care room and consider the inclusiveness of the environment, the practices of the educators and how the children interact in the setting.

Following the observation, the ICC agency will interview both child care program educators and leadership to help identify gaps and/or supports not noted during the observation.

Once the onsite observation and interview is completed, the ICC agency arranges for a follow-up meeting with the child care program to discuss ICC supports.

Determining supports

The ICC agency will identify the resources and supports that will be the most valuable for the child care program.

The ICC agency may determine that individualized strategies are required to support the inclusion of a child who has a disability or extra support needs. In this situation the ICC agency may request that the child care program have the child's parent or guardian complete a Consent to Share Information form to provide information about how the child is supported by other organizations or participate in any individualized support plans related to their child's development and care.

Support agreement

The ICC agency prepares a support agreement that includes the range of activities and supports to be provided to the child care program, including the timeline and intensity of supports required.

The agreement outlines the specific ICC supports that the ICC agency will be providing to the child care program. Each type of support includes a description, the purpose, the program's goals, the educators or leadership who will be involved, and the consultant. ICC supports will not be provided without this agreement in place.

The support agreement may be in effect for up to six months.

The support agreement specifies the child care program's responsibilities regarding educator and leadership participation, and engagement.

After the support agreement has been created, the ICC agency follows up with the child care program leadership to discuss and sign the agreement. The ICC agency ensures that child care program leadership is aware of their participation requirements and the supports the child care program will be receiving.

Once the agreement has been signed, the ICC consultant initiates delivery of supports with the child care program.

Supports provided

Onsite consultation

Consultation is an integral part of the ICC program and essential for increasing the capacity of child care programs to provide inclusive practices for children who require extra support. Consultants are provided by the ICC agencies and have knowledge and skills in early childhood and inclusive practices, drawing from evidence-based approaches, including the Pyramid Model, trauma-informed care, and others. These agencies have been selected and funded by Children and Family Services.

The consultant's role is to assist the child care program in utilizing the ICC supports to increase the program's capacity to include children with extra support needs. Consultants may include a child's parents or guardian in their work, as well as other programs that may be providing support to a specific child.

The consultant follows the following framework in providing supports to the program and the family:

Building relationships

Once a support agreement with the child care program is in place, the consultant schedules an onsite visit. The focus of the initial onsite consultation visit is to build a relationship with the child care program and discuss the consultation process. After the initial onsite consultation visit, the consultant visits the child care program frequently over the next six to eight weeks to move through the steps necessary to develop a plan for the program.

Gathering information

The consultant gathers information to determine specific program or educator development needs. The consultant has access to a selection of evidence-based tools to assess the child care program environment, staff interactions with children or recommend the completion of a developmental screening with an individual child to determine whether an extra support need is connected to a specific area of development.

Setting goals

After gathering information, the consultant and educator develop specific goals to address the needs identified. These goals should be concrete, measurable and describe a positive action or outcome.

The goals may involve:

- Making environmental modifications, such as changing the room layout, reducing the number of stimulating items, or adding sound absorbers.
- Adjusting the program delivery, such as altering the daily routine or adding visual schedules.
- Educator practice changes, such as providing supportive transitions or using planning and documentation to support children's learning and development.
- Individualized strategies, such as guiding a child through a problem-solving process or modifying a group activity to enable all children's participation with the group.

Selecting strategies

The consultant and educator determine the actions, resources and supports required to complete each goal and develop a plan. Considerations during the action plan development include the priority level of each goal, the complexity of the goals, the knowledge or training required, the resources required, the length of time to complete the goal, and how they will know when the goal has been met.

The consultant uses their knowledge and experience to guide the identification of strategies and supports to achieve the educator's goals. This may include deciding which goals can be implemented quickly or have a broader impact. Or, a consultant may guide an educator through strategies that support a child with a diagnosed need that staff have not previously encountered.

Implementing the plan

Once a plan is developed, the consultant visits the child care program at least weekly during the initial implementation of the plan. The visit frequency will decrease to bi-weekly or monthly once educators begin to demonstrate competency and confidence with new practices. The consultant will follow up in person, virtually or by phone for a period of two to three months after the support plan is completed.

Evaluation

Once an educator has completed their plan and met their goals, the consultant will meet with the educator and child care program leadership to discuss the outcomes and any remaining areas of need. The consultant may again use an evidence-based tool to examine the child care program environment or educator interactions with children to help determine whether there are any further needs to be addressed. If further actions are required, a new plan is created using the previously described process.

If the educator has met their goals and is satisfied with the completion of the plan, the consultant may provide follow up contact for the duration of the support agreement, or the child care program may choose to end the agreement.

Additional consultation supports

Individualized supports

The ICC agency maintains access to specialized services, such as occupational therapists, physical therapists, or speech and language therapists as a resource to assist educators with strategies to support children's individual needs when other support services are not involved. These specialized services do not work directly with a child; rather are intended to support an educator's inclusive practices.

When a child with a disability is receiving support from specialized services through another program, the consultant may choose to engage that service for assistance to preserve the continuity of supports.

Referral and navigation of supports

The ICC agency and consultants use their knowledge of the community's service providers and support programs to assist child care programs and their families through navigation and referral.

The consultant may assist a child care program to support a family to access services for their child, including assessments for diagnosis and referrals to other supportive programs. Child care programs may also look to the consultant for help to navigate the complex system of services for children with extra support needs and their families.

Engagement funding

Funding to address the cost of an extra staff may be provided to allow the primary educators to focus on learning new skills, participate in consultation sessions, implement new strategies, etc. Funding is intended to be short-term (maximum of 3 months) and is based on the Support Agreement in place for consultative services.

Engagement funding may be provided for:

- **Staff engagement:** the primary educators are engaged in learning how to meet the unique needs of all children and support them to engage in program activities and peer relationships. All children in the program learn how to empathize and include children with extra support needs. The additional staff in the room allows the permanent primary educator the time and flexibility to increase their knowledge and skills of inclusive practice (e.g. preparation of support materials, collaborative meetings, out of ratio debrief time with coach, etc.)
- **Child engagement:** in circumstances where a child in the program has a medical diagnosis, has a significant need identified, and is engaged in the FSCD application process to fund an aide in daycare. This support is intended to be short term limited support while the FSCD assessment is underway. All funding agreements will be reviewed every three months.
- **Child care program engagement:** in some circumstances it may be helpful for all of the program's educators to participate in a professional learning opportunity together to ensure a consistent approach.

ICC Resource bank

An online resource bank is maintained to support educators as they develop inclusive practices. The resource bank includes tools and tip sheets, online training, and professional development opportunities available across the province. Webinars and communities of practice can be accessed through this site.

The resource bank supports all child care programs across the province regardless of their involvement in the ICC program. Resources have been amalgamated from the ICC agencies and are reflective of the expertise these agencies bring to inclusive practices in child care programs.

Professional development

Professional development is available for educators who work directly with children who have extra support needs. Access to professional development may be arranged through the ICC agency or through the online resource bank. A consultant may follow up the professional development with coaching and/or reflection strategies so that new learning is integrated into practice.

Grant funding for professional development is available through the Alberta Child Care Grant Funding Program. Information about this grant can be found at www.alberta.ca/alberta-child-care-grant-funding-program.aspx.

Changes to supports

Child expulsion

The goal of the ICC program is to assist child care programs and educators to build their capacity to include children who have extra support needs, increase families' access to inclusive child care, and prevent the exclusion or removal of children from child care programs. Child care programs that are receiving ICC support and are considering expelling a child because of his or her extra support needs, are requested to contact the ICC agency prior to any action. The ICC agency and consultant can work with the child care program and the child's family to determine whether resources could be provided to prevent the expulsion and/or identify other supports. If resources are not enough to prevent the expulsion, the ICC agency must report this to the ministry.

Dispute resolution

Should a child care program have a concern which cannot be resolved by the consultant, the child care program should report the concern to the ICC agency Program Manager, who must respond to the program within a reasonable amount of time.

If the matter is still unresolved to the satisfaction of the program, the child care program may address the concern in writing to the ICC agency Executive Director who in turn will be responsible for responding to the child care program in a reasonable amount of time.

The ICC agency will notify the ministry when a dispute leads to the removal of ICC supports.

Review and closure

The ICC agency will complete a second observation in the child care program after a 3-month period to determine the program's readiness to receive less intensive supports. The ICC agency will use this observation to determine if the program has successfully achieved their goals, and if additional supports may be required. If the ICC agency and child care program decide that further supports are required to meet the child care program's goals, supports will continue with an identified timeline of no more than 3 months.

Once educators have increased their capacity for inclusive practices, the consultant follows up for a period of time in person, virtually or by phone to ensure generalization of inclusive practices. Once the consultant and the child care program agree that the program's goals have been achieved, a final observation is completed and services are closed.

Child care programs may apply for ICC supports in the future to provide services for other rooms and educators.