



Summary of the Evaluation of the Early Learning and Child Care Innovation Program, 2026



About the Program

The Early Learning and Child Care Innovation Program supports innovative practices that strengthen the changing nature of early learning and childcare. It is a contributions program that funds projects aimed at exploring, testing and developing new ideas to foster innovative practices in ELCC services across Canada. Starting in 2018, the Government of Canada is investing \$100 million over 10 years to enable innovative practices in early learning and childcare.



Key findings

- The Innovation Program was designed to support a limited number of projects to test and identify innovative approaches. These projects were aligned with the persistent and evolving challenges facing the ELCC sector. While projects generated insights, they were not expected to directly address the full breadth and complexity of these challenges.
- Canada's ELCC ecosystem is complex and evolving, with provinces and territories playing a predominant role. In the context of the Innovation Program, it remains unclear, based on the information available, the extent to which ESDC strategically leverages existing networks to support the identification, sharing and uptake of best practices in support of its national objectives for replication and scale.
- A high volume of applications and external delays, including as a result of the pandemic, impacted the Innovation Program's ability to allocate funding to launch projects in a timely manner.
- There is an uneven capacity among funding recipients to systematically inform and report on the effectiveness, scalability, and adaptability of their innovative approaches. Nonetheless, the available evidence provides lessons learned and insights into the challenges organizations face when developing innovative practices in an ELCC context.
- Funded projects demonstrated a commitment to addressing equity considerations in their design and outputs. While it was not possible to assess the outcomes, available evidence shows that organizations integrated strategies to promote cultural diversity, respect and inclusion, and language accessibility, to target vulnerable children and families with unique child care needs.
- While some projects have begun sharing results, structured mechanisms for dissemination were planned, but not yet implemented at the time of the evaluation.

The full Evaluation of the Early Learning and Child Care Innovation Program, 2026 is available at:
[Evaluation of the Early Learning and Child Care Innovation Program, 2026 - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/early-learning-child-care-innovation-program/evaluation-2026.html)





Lessons Learned

1. Adapting programming to create inclusive and culturally responsive child care environments contributes to improving child and family outcomes, while professional development and peer support contribute to building educator confidence and capacity.
2. Clear methodological approaches, well-defined performance measurement frameworks, and articulated pathways for innovation are essential for innovation programs.



Observations

1. Funding recipients' capacity to measure and assess innovative approaches influences their ability to generate project level evidence. Ensuring that funding recipients have capacity in this area could better support the development and learning associated with innovation.
2. Consolidating lessons learned across projects and supporting dissemination of results through appropriate networks or forums could support the broader uptake of innovative practices over time.

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