

Policy Briefing



Prepared for: Business Support Organizations

Issue: Childcare providers face significant barriers in accessing business support programs and services.

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Purpose: To provide recommendations to business support organizations, so they are better able to support childcare providers.

Background:

- Childcare providers play a crucial role in BC communities yet face many significant challenges. While business support organizations and programming exist to address some of these challenges, current options for accessing business support fail to meet the needs and circumstances of childcare providers.

Discussion:

- Childcare providers face several challenges in accessing business support services:
 - First - not all childcare business needs have corresponding support programs. According to a recent study, the key areas where childcare providers require support, in order of importance include: financial support, mentorship support, workforce support, and professional development support.
 - Second – not all programs are available equally across the differing types of childcare organizations, with some programs supporting non-profits and others supporting for profits, creating a confusing landscape of supports. There are inconsistencies in service based upon organization type. For-profit providers report difficulty accessing supports, while home-based providers report experiencing excess scrutiny and negative experiences from support providers.
 - Third – the accessibility of programs poses a barrier. Many business support programs operate during hours which coincide with the operational hours of childcare services. As a result, providers are often unable to access support services, as they do not have the staff to cover absences. The process of searching for and applying for support can be confusing and time consuming, adding further strain to already stretched providers. Many lack the time and resources to effectively navigate these systems.
 - Fourth – current business supports are not sector-specific to childcare. Current support organizations lack the sector knowledge to be able to support childcare providers in addressing their biggest challenges. A lack of familiarity with the regulations and nuances of the sector is a major barrier to providing practical support.

Options

1. *Business as usual.*

- Childcare providers are unable to access the supports they require, and the many issues that they face will continue to be unaddressed
- This may lead to poor quality childcare services for families in BC, and precarity in business outcomes for existing childcare providers.
- No extra financial cost to business support organizations
- 2. Reform service delivery to better suit the needs of childcare providers**
 - Shift from passive outreach to proactive engagement strategies to build relationships and trust with providers.
 - Offer in-person support sessions with one-on-one assistance
 - Schedule programs outside of regular working hours, including evenings and weekends.
 - Increase affordability of accessing these business supports, by making services free-to-access and offering subsidies for attending support sessions.
 - Ensure support service providers have an in-depth, up-to-date understanding of the current childcare landscape.
 - There is an associated financial cost to business support organizations, in order to implement these recommendations.
- 3. Address current practices and eligibility requirements that create inequities between service providers.**
 - Develop more inclusive eligibility requirements that ensure all childcare providers, regardless of structure, can access support.
 - Provide clearer guidance on which organizations can access which supports
 - Provide training to the staff of business support organizations, to ensure the correction of any negative biases towards varying types of childcare providers
 - Expanding eligibility may be difficult to implement for business support organizations with their own funding and eligibility requirements
 - There is a cost associated with providing training to correct negative biases of staff
- 4. Create a mentorship program**
 - Establish peer-to-peer mentorship opportunities, which allow providers to connect with experienced individuals who understand their challenges and can provide practical advice based in lived experience
 - This may add an associated financial cost to business support organizations, if coordinating this program.
 - This program may add an additional burden on childcare providers, and therefore would likely require a subsidy for participation.

Recommended Action:

This brief recommends Option 2: Reform service delivery to better suit the needs of childcare providers.

While this option does entail extra associated costs, it will provide the most direct and immediate solution to address the current challenges that childcare providers face in accessing business support services. Through minor modifications in how business support organizations offer their services, great strides can be made in how accessible these services are to childcare providers. Business support organizations will be more successful in fulfilling their mandate to support this sector, while childcare providers will be able to provide high quality childcare services, supported by stability and ease in their business operations.