

Briefing Note



Prepared for: Ministry of Education and Child Care, Government of British Columbia

Issue: Workforce challenges in the childcare sector go beyond the number of workers and wage rates and threaten the business viability of childcare providers.

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Purpose: To highlight the workforce challenges faced by childcare providers in rural communities, acknowledging a complex web of issues that extend beyond compensation and the number of workers.

Background:

- Rural childcare providers face major challenges to operations due to workforce recruitment and retention issues.
- A recent Kootenay regional survey identified workforce as the second greatest challenge to childcare operators, after insufficient funds to cover expenses.
- Recruitment is a challenge for over 70% of childcare providers surveyed and retention is a challenge for over 50% of childcare providers surveyed.
- While issues related to compensation do play a role in creating challenges in recruitment and retention, compensation is not the only issue nor is it the only solution.
- Staff are the cornerstone of quality childcare services, and addressing issues in the workforce is an integral part of providing a quality service to families in B.C.

Discussion:

- As B.C. experiences a rapidly rising cost of living, childcare providers struggle to increase wages to match inflation, even with wage enhancements. As a result, workers are not necessarily better off.
- Financial constraints prevent childcare providers from being able to provide incentives such as a pension, benefits, or paid planning time. This issue is exaggerated in smaller centres.
- Challenges securing affordable and suitable housing makes it difficult to attract staff and makes it difficult for existing staff to remain in the sector while living in rural regions and small communities.
- Insufficient wages make it difficult to attract new and appropriately qualified employees to the sector.

- The stressful conditions within understaffed childcare centres act as a negative feedback loop for recruitment and retention. As childcare centres cannot attract or retain staff, the conditions of an under resourced centre only worsen.
- Staffing challenges lead to an environment where children with challenging behaviours do not receive the support they need, leading to more challenging working conditions for existing staff.
- While childcare providers require casual and part-time staff to fill in staffing gaps such as sick days and vacation, the compensation and instability of hours makes it difficult to fill these positions.
- While there is potential to attract international applicants, this comes with its own complexities related to the administrative pathways, as well as potentially limited newcomer services in rural places.
- Uncertainties and a lack of clarity in pay top ups and wage subsidies add to increased precarity of the sector. Some providers do not qualify for wage subsidies due to stipulations in eligibility.

Conclusion & Next Steps:

The childcare sector's existing workforce issues make it challenging for providers to offer a quality service, while also remaining a viable business in the long term. These issues are complex and numerous, but also interrelated. Solutions must therefore take a holistic approach, that can increase childcare businesses' ability to recruit and retain staff.