

# Background for *Advancing Early Childhood Education Outdoors Now*

*This brief provides key information and links to further readings*

- The BC Ministry of Health's **COVID-19** [Public Health Guidance for Child Care Settings](#) recommends to “have children outside often” as an environmental measure to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 among children and adults (p. 4). COVID-19 [cases are rising](#) in British Columbia at this time.
- **Early Childhood Education** and Child Care are sometimes [used interchangeably](#) along with other terms, such as early learning and preschool. We use the term Early Childhood Education (ECE) inclusively, to refer to diverse programs for young children.
- [BC Licensing Regulations](#) define **Child Care** as a category of programs including preschools and group child care, so the term will be used in relation to this legislation. Our focus in *Advancing Early Childhood Education Outdoors Now* is on outdoor programs **for preschool-aged children** (30 months to school-age).
- Under the [British Columbia Community Care and Assisted Living Act](#), a **Community Care Facility** requires a premise for licensed child care programs, a premise is defined as a “building or structure”. Certain [licensing regulations](#) address program safety and hygiene in relation the facility and its equipment. The legislation **limits the ability to license outdoor or nature-based programs** without buildings.
- Programs for children under five years old are generally not publicly funded in British Columbia. There is a critical [shortage of child care spaces in BC](#) and the government is [committed to addressing these issues](#) through a plan toward universal child care.
- There are early childhood education **outdoor programs operating in BC** already, including programs that are unable to be licensed under current legislation. With legislative changes, these outdoor programs could benefit from government oversight and the [affordable child care benefit](#) and [child care operating funding](#) supports that are only available to licensed programs.
- Washington State is one example of a government that has recently permitted the **licensing of outdoor and nature-based child care** programs for preschool-aged children **without indoor facilities**, by establishing an [Outdoor Preschool Pilot \(OPP\) program](#). The [Outdoor Preschool Pilot Standards](#) emphasize **educator qualifications, benefit-risk assessments** and **risk management plans**. While preschools in BC are limited to four hours per day, participation in the OPP allows licensed pilot programs to run **longer than four hours**.

- British Columbia released an updated [Early Learning Framework](#) to guide Early Childhood Education in 2019. This document emphasises the importance **of learning through play and inquiry** and “connection and reconnection to land, culture, community, and place” (p. 21). These pedagogies flourish outdoors.
- The [vast majority of British Columbia](#) is on the **unceded traditional territories** of many diverse First Nations. This means “First Nations people never ceded or legally signed away their lands to the Crown or to Canada”. The new BC [Early Learning Framework](#) highlights the role of educators in responding to the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action](#) and “**educating others about Indigenous peoples’ experiences** of systemic marginalization and forced assimilation, and how we all have an obligation of redress for the damage done, and being done, to Indigenous communities” (p. 104). Educators are also expected to “extend **Indigenous perspectives** throughout the entire learning journey” (p. 40). These **responsibilities** are important to keep in focus as we imagine the future of Early Childhood Education Outdoors in British Columbia.

***With this brief, we hope to provide a point of departure for learning from speakers, asking questions and working together to imagine pathways forward.***

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**About the *ECEO Now Working Group*:** We are a passionate and collaborative group of educators, researchers, practitioners, and administrators seeking to ignite rich and informed discussions on the topic of Early Childhood Education Outdoors.

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