

Policy Briefing



Prepared for: Interior Health & Ministry of Jobs Economic Development and Innovation, Government of B.C.

Issue: Workforce vacancies in the childcare sector negatively affect the quality of care provided, as well as the overall stability of the sector.

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Purpose: To provide the relevant governing bodies with recommendations for key actions they can take to better support childcare providers in addressing workforce vacancies.

Background

- 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.
- Rural childcare providers face major challenges to operations due to workforce vacancies.
- The current level of vacancies affects the quality of childcare provided, as well as the working conditions of the existing staff. These working conditions affect recruitment and retention.
- 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.

Discussion

- A recent study identified workforce as the second greatest challenge to rural childcare operators in the Kootenay Region, 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.
- The same study identified a lack of qualified staff as the number one barrier to expansion, as well as the number one reason that providers have licensed spots that remain unfilled.
- Over half of all current vacancies in the Kootenays are for on call/casual positions and the lack of casual and part-time employees acts as a barrier to existing staff being able to take vacation and sick days. This exacerbates burnout in the workforce.
- Increased availability of part-time and casual staff would enable childcare providers to fill gaps in service provision including weekends, and before-school.
- Due to low wages in the sector and high cost of living, most staff require stable, full-time hours. Therefore, casual positions are less desirable.

Options

1. Business as usual.
 - The childcare industry will face continued and increasing precarity, with the potential to lose providers from the sector permanently.
 - The quality of childcare will be substandard, as childcare centers are understaffed, and/or staffed by employees experiencing burnout.
 - Licensed childcare spaces will remain unfilled.
 - There is no associated extra cost with this option.
2. Create a centralized service that offers on-call and casual employees available for multiple childcare providers.
 - This eliminates the administrative and financial burden of recruiting and retaining a supply of casual workers.
 - Casual workers can have greater access to hours and wages, incentivizing casual roles. With coordination across centers, staff in the childcare sector can have access to full time hours, while centers can fill casual and part-time shifts.
 - The childcare sector will see improved stability, increased quality of service, and improved working conditions for staff.
 - This will require additional funding and service provision from an external organization or government body.
3. Provide services to facilitate workforce recruitment from outside the region. This includes providing housing supports, as well as supporting potential staff through immigration requirements.
 - This will increase the available pool of employees for childcare providers to hire from.
 - This will increase employment prospects for out-of-region individuals, and consequently attract talent to the region.
 - The childcare sector will see improved stability, increased quality of service, and improved working conditions for staff.
 - This will require additional funding and service provision from an external organization or government body.
 - This doesn't overcome the issue of a high need for on-call and casual employees.

Recommended Action:

This brief recommends Option 2: Create a centralized service that offers on-call and casual employees available for multiple childcare providers.

While this option does entail an extra associated cost, it will provide the most direct benefit to address the problem of vacancies in the childcare sector, primarily through addressing the deficit of casual staff. With a supply of workers on standby, childcare centers would be able to fill staffing gaps with minimal administrative burden. Additionally, these casual staff would have greater access to work than if they were a casual staff for a single center only. However, it is important to note that this is a solution to solve only the most immediate challenges regarding workforce vacancies. It will alleviate some of the most pressing challenges for childcare providers and staff. Broader systemic change is required to truly resolve challenges in the workforce.