

Advancing Outdoor and Land-based Outdoor Early Childhood Education in Canada - Come Join Us!

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Thank you to the CCOP's Sub-committee on licensing outdoor and land-based programs for writing this post.

Going outdoors with young children is beneficial. Indigenous people have learned on the land for many generations. Many outdoor early childhood programs have been modelled after Scandinavian and Northern European programs where children spend the majority of the day outside. In the last 15 years outdoor and land-based early childhood programs have expanded across Canada.

Appreciating what outdoor programs can offer their children in terms of physical, mental, social, and emotional benefits, parents are keen to enroll their children. However, outdoor based programs in Canada are not licensed as early learning and child care programs, meaning they do not fall under the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care program, which commits to reducing childcare costs to \$10/day for families. The result is that such programs cost between \$50-70/day for families and are therefore cost prohibitive for many. While there is a push to have outdoor programs included in licensing, there is also the recognition that conventional indoor indicators and standards do not easily translate to outdoor contexts, and that outdoor programs require unique educator training and safety protocols. Thus, it is argued that what is needed is the creation of a distinct licensing category for outdoor and land-based ECE programs in each province and territory.

The National Panel on Licensing Outdoor and Land-Based Early Childhood Education is taking a broad view of how we might best move forward towards creating appropriate licensing categories. Members of the panel met at the *Breath of Fresh Air Summit* in

late September 2025 and heard the frustration people are experiencing with establishing outdoor programs across Canada. While each province/territory experiences different landscapes, weather and histories and each situation would call for different solutions and approaches, everyone we heard from shared a common desire to establish appropriate licensing criteria for outdoor programs.

While there is nationwide interest in this issue and the government of Newfoundland and Labrador explored feasibility over 2021-2023, no province or territory currently has taken the necessary steps to licensing outdoor programs.

Our subcommittee on regulating outdoor and land-based programs, with representatives from the Yukon, British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland & Labrador, and Ontario is sharing information and collecting data from across Canada on this very issue. In each of our provinces/territories, we are meeting with licensing officers, talking with politicians and government policymakers and hearing from outdoor educators.

We are gathering a narrative of work happening across Canada in the hopes of finding leverage points to move our efforts forward. While we can see that there has been some progress and information has been shared, we would like to know what is happening elsewhere across Canada.

We would be interested in hearing your story of working with local ELCC licensing officers to realize your dream of daily extended time outdoors with a group of children.

What is happening in your municipality or province/territory? What are your success stories/obstacles?

Share your stories with us: info@outdoorplaycanada.ca