

CITY OF VICTORIA

Child Care Needs Assessment Update

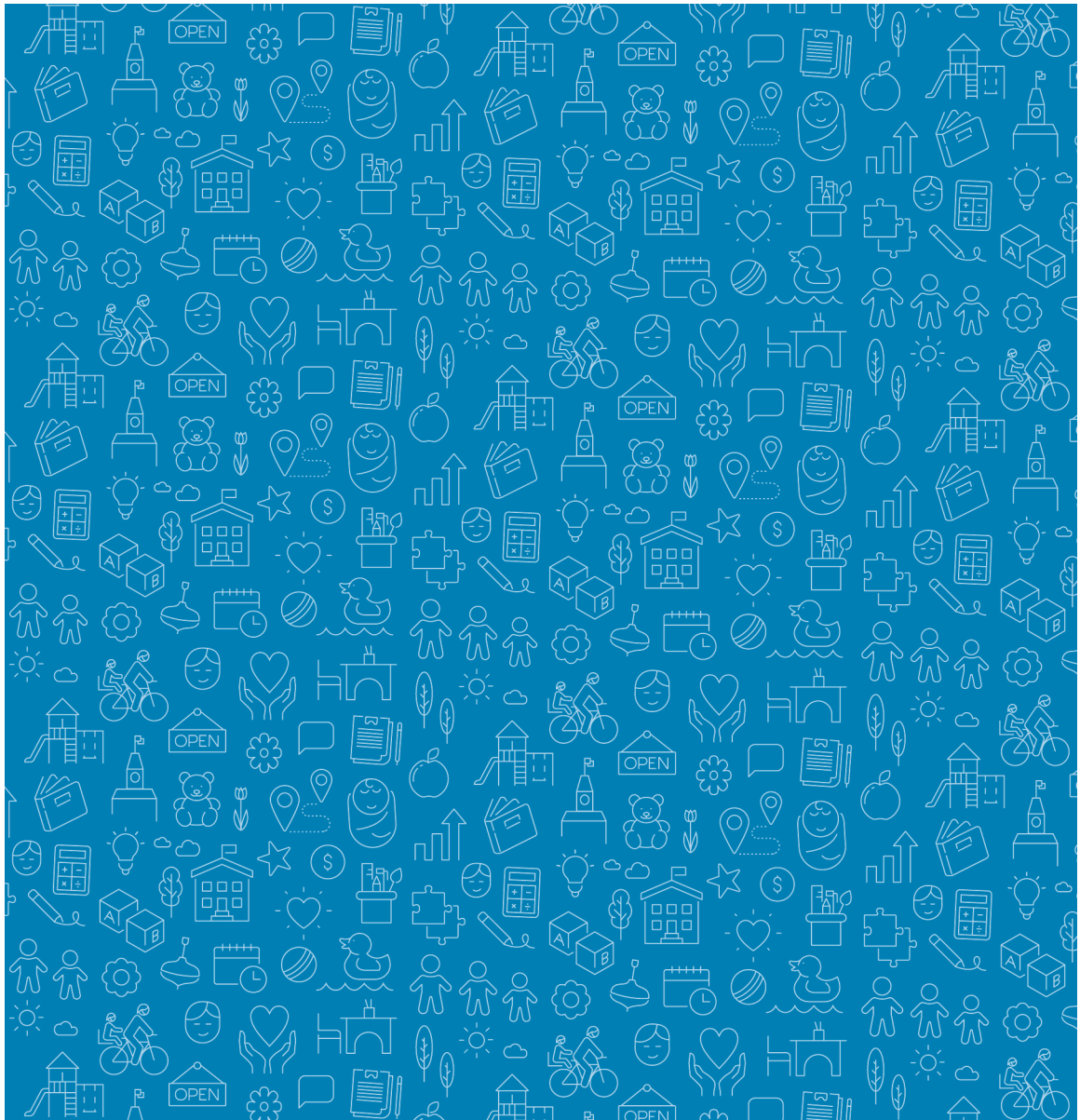


Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Key Findings	3
Recommendations	4
Introduction	6
Methodology	6
Data Limitations and Changes From the Last Update	7
Population.....	9
Understanding activity limitations in Victoria’s children	14
Household and Neighbourhood Considerations.....	17
Child Care Space Inventory	27
Number of Child-Care Spaces in 2024.....	27
Survey Summary.....	32
Space Creation Targets.....	37
Conclusion	40
Recommendations	40
Next Steps.....	42
Appendix	44
Appendix A: Licensed Child-Care Categories in British Columbia	44
Appendix B: 2024 Child-Care Access Rates by Comparison	50
Acknowledgements	51

Executive Summary

This report provides an updated assessment of the licensed child-care landscape in the City of Victoria, building on the 2020 Child Care in Victoria plan and the 2022 Child Care Plan – Update Demographic Data and Projections of Need. This report supports 2021 demographic data from the Canadian Census with 2024 population projections, current Island Health child-care space licensing numbers and insights from a targeted survey of local child-care providers completed in the fall of 2024.

Key Findings

Demographic trends and projections:

- As of 2024, there are an estimated 7,408 children aged 0-12 in Victoria.
- The child population is expected to decline slightly in the short term but will grow over the next 20 years.

Child-care space availability and insights:

- There are 3,453 licensed child-care spaces in Victoria, with the majority (87.2 per cent) in group child-care spaces.
- From 2022 to 2024, the total number of licensed spaces increased by 762, driven primarily by growth in group child care (30 months to school age), school age care on school grounds and group child care (0 to 36 Months).
- Despite the increase in licensed spaces, survey results indicate that less than 50 per cent of providers are operating at full capacity, highlighting barriers such as staffing shortages, funding challenges, licensing ratios, lack of demand and physical space limitations.

Gap analysis and child-care access rates

- With an estimated 7,408 children and 3,453 licensed spaces, the City of Victoria has a total child-care access rate of 46.6 spaces per 100 children in 2024.
- By age range, this analysis suggests an access rate of 31.7 spaces per 100 children for those under three, 127.8 spaces per 100 children aged 36 months to school age (three to four) and 33.4 spaces per 100 children for those aged five to 12.

Child-care space creation

- To meet a target of 50 per cent or 960 licensed child-care spaces for children under three by 2030, Victoria will need approximately 420 new spaces over the next five years.
- To achieve a target of 80 per cent or 3,288 licensed child-care spaces for school-age children by 2030, Victoria will need approximately 1,736 new spaces.
- For children aged three to four years, the current access rate of 127.8 spaces per 100 children indicates the 50 per cent target is met and can be sustained through 2030 and beyond. However, the demand from children of parents who commute to and prefer child care in Victoria is not accounted for in this access rate. Additionally, these figures do not include children who enter child care at two and a half years old or remain in care until five and a half years old. For this reason, the supply of group child-care (30 months to school age) spaces should not be considered complete in the short or long term.

Recommendations

To support efforts to create equitable, attainable and inclusive child care, it is recommended that the City of Victoria pursue the following actions in five key priority areas:

Process

- Enhance tracking and analysis:
 - Continue tracking the creation of new child-care spaces through licensing applications on a year-over-year basis to understand space creation against existing targets.
 - Create a GIS-based inventory of licensed spaces considering family growth, income, equity and diversity analysis, and child-care needs by neighbourhood-enhanced insights.

Policy

- Enable child-care spaces:
 - Improve regulatory tools to facilitate the creation of quality child-care spaces in new developments. Prioritize equitable, affordable and culturally inclusive solutions that respond to diverse needs.

- Community consultation:
 - Engage with diverse communities, including low-income families, single-parent families and families facing housing challenges, to understand varying child-care needs.
- Equity and accessibility:
 - Identify barriers to equitable and accessible child care to support inclusive care models.

Partnerships

- Partner with school districts:
 - Collaborate with local school districts to enhance before- and after-school care on school grounds.

Advocacy

- Encourage inclusive child care:
 - Advocate for funding that enables affordable, culturally inclusive and responsive child care for diverse needs.

Education and Training

- Support training for local Early Childhood Educators (ECEs):
 - Explore partnerships with training organizations and academic institutions focused on infant-toddler certification to increase in infant/toddler child-care spaces (0-36 months). The City could leverage its internal expertise, host training events and facilitate communities of practice to strengthen local ECE capacity.
- Educational materials:
 - Continue developing informational materials to help child-care providers in addressing existing gaps.

This update highlights progress and ongoing gaps in the child-care system, providing a roadmap for the City's continued efforts to better meet the needs of families in Victoria.

Introduction

This report provides an update on demographic information and projections regarding the need for licensed child-care spaces within the City of Victoria. This work builds on the City's 2020 Child Care in Victoria ¹ plan, which offers a comprehensive overview of the provincial context, other City plans and the recommendations currently in place.



Methodology

This assessment involved updating and analyzing child-care data for the City of Victoria and engaging with local child-care operators through a targeted survey. The quantitative data presented in this report is sourced from the following:

- 2021 Census of Population Profile for the City of Victoria
- B.C. Statistics Population Estimates and Projections
- Island Health child-care licensing data
- Greater Victoria Child Care Resource and Referral Centre (CCRR)

¹ *Child Care in Victoria*. City of Victoria Child Care Solutions Working Group, 2020.
<https://www.victoria.ca/media/file/child-care-victoria-report>

Data Limitations and Changes From the Last Update

The data used to compare the current number of children in the community with projected child population estimates has certain limitations.

The most recent count of children in Victoria is derived from the 2021 Statistics Canada Census, which reports child population data in five-year age ranges: zero to five, five to nine and 10-14. While these ranges were used in the previous child-care update to identify space gaps, the broad age categories limit the ability to understand specific needs for each type of child-care licence.

For the 2024 Child Care Plan Update, B.C. Statistics Population Estimates and Projections were used to closely examine projected child population growth in age ranges that better reflect licensing categories and population changes since the last census. For a full explanation of the child-care licensing categories in British Columbia, see Appendix A.

Table 1: Licensing categories and corresponding age ranges

Age range	Child-care licensing category
0-2	Group child care (0-36 months)
3-4	Licensed preschool
	Group child care (30 months to school age)
5-12	Group child care (school age)
	School age care on school grounds

The key child-care licensing ranges that can be attributed to specific ages are group child care (0-36 months), group child care (30 months-school age), licensed preschool, group child care (school age) and school age care on school grounds (Table 1).

As B.C. Statistics only provides population projections in one-year increments, a three-to-four-year-old range (36 months to school age) is used to estimate the projected population associated with group child care (30 months to school age) and licensed preschool categories. This adjustment eliminates the half-year overlap between the two younger

child-care licensing categories. While this makes the projected populations more accurate by avoiding duplication, it does impact direct comparison to child-care space limits by setting the age range to three to four years old instead of two and a half to four. However, since licensing stipulates that only two out of 25 children in the 30-months to school age category can be under three, the impact on comparisons is expected to be minimal.

The other child care licenses — in-home multi-age child care, multi-age child care, and family child care — cover broader age ranges and account for a smaller share of child care in Victoria. For this reason, they are analyzed separately or within insights regarding the broader child population (0-12 years).

There is also an assumption that children are in child care at four years old and in school at five years old. Kindergarten start times result in some overlap, with four-year-olds sometimes in kindergarten and five-year-olds sometimes in child care. For the purposes of this analysis, these numbers are assumed to balance out.

Overall, population projections provide guidelines for understanding community context but do not represent perfect accuracy. Given the time since the previous census, population projections are the foundation for this report's analysis and findings should be considered approximate for planning or decision-making purposes.

Demographics

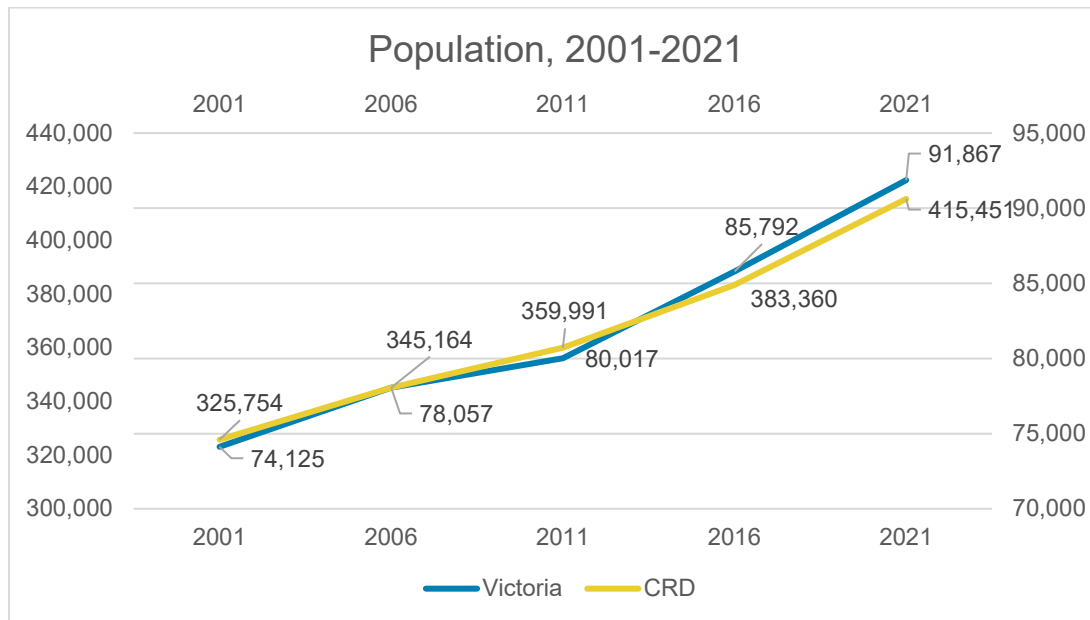
Families in Victoria represent a diverse tapestry of languages, cultures, abilities and backgrounds. This includes low-income, newcomer, Indigenous and gender-diverse families, as well as kids with activity limitations. These varied and intersectional perspectives shape the child-care landscape, making it essential for the City's child-care needs assessment to reflect this diversity and explore the barriers to access faced by specific populations.

Population

Population Growth

Victoria's population grew 24 per cent, from 74,125 in 2001 to 91,867 in 2021². During the same period, the CRD's population increased by 28 per cent.

Figure 1: Population, City of Victoria and CRD, 2001-21



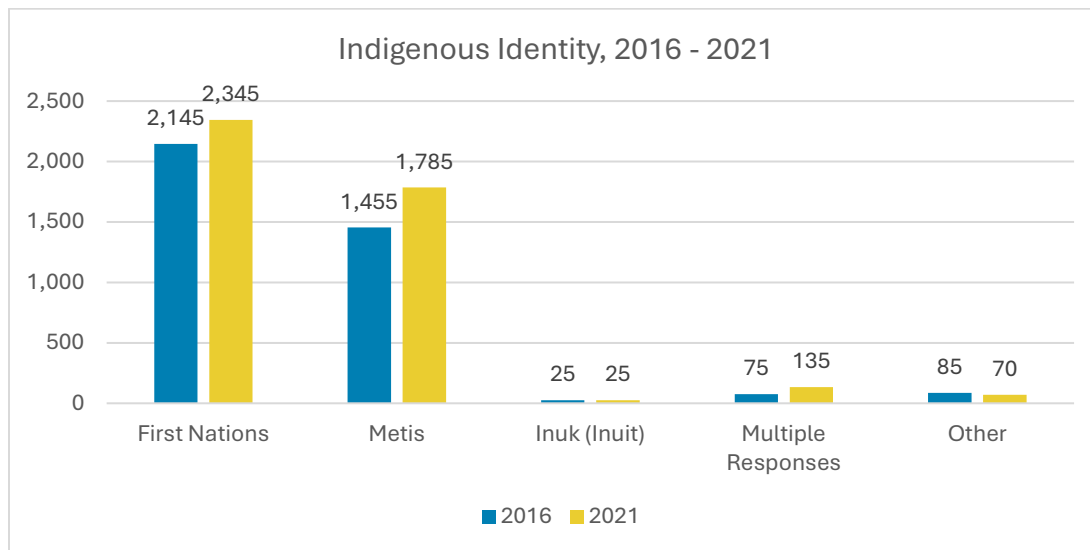
Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population: Census Profile for City of Victoria

² Unless otherwise stated, all data is from the 2021 Statistics Canada Census.

Indigenous Population

The number of individuals with Indigenous identity increased between 2016 and 2021, to a total of 4,360 individuals. This increase was proportional to the overall population of the City of Victoria, with Indigenous persons representing approximately 4.7 per cent of the City's population.

Figure 2: Indigenous identity, City of Victoria, 2016-21



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population: Census Profile for City of Victoria

Child Population by Age

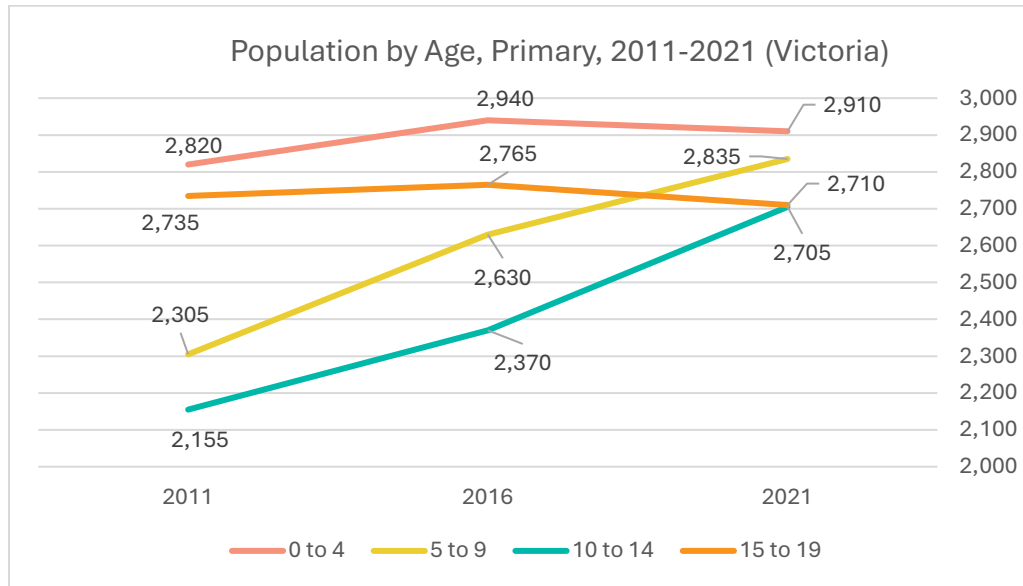


In 2021, the City of Victoria had 11,160 individuals under the age of 19, an increase of 455 individuals or 4.2 per cent, from 2016. The proportion of the population ages 0-14 in the City of Victoria was 9.2 per cent.

- 0-4 years old: 2,910 (26.1 per cent)
- 5 -9 years old: 2,835 (25.4 per cent)
- 10-14 years old: 2,705 (24.2 per cent)
- 15-19 years old: 2,710 (24.3 per cent)

From 2011 to 2021, the 10-14 age group saw the largest increase at 26 per cent. The largest category overall as of 2021 was those aged 0-4, at 2,910. However, this age group experienced a slight decline of one per cent between 2016 and 2021.

Figure 3: Population by age, City of Victoria, 2011-21



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population: Census Profile for City of Victoria

Projected Child Population

The following data is based on B.C. Statistics Population Estimates and Projections for the City of Victoria. These numbers represent estimates of the child population (0-12 years) before 2024 and projections from 2024 onward. Age ranges of 0-36 months (under three years old), three to four years old, and five to 12 years old have been chosen to align with child-care licensing categories.³

As of 2024, it is projected that there were 7,408 children aged zero to 12 in the City of Victoria. Of these:

- 0-36 months: 1,701 children (23 per cent)
- 3-4 years: 1,064 children (14.4 per cent)
- 5-12 years: 4,643 children (62.7 per cent)

Projections for 2024 indicate a slight decrease in the number of children aged 0-36 months and three to four years compared to 2021 estimates. (Figure 4). This decline may be partially attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw an already falling provincial fertility rate dip to one child per woman in 2023 — the lowest since 2002⁴.

The overall child population is projected to decline over the next 20 years. With the average age of childbearing rising, and more families choosing not to have children, most population growth both in Canada and British Columbia is driven by migration⁵.

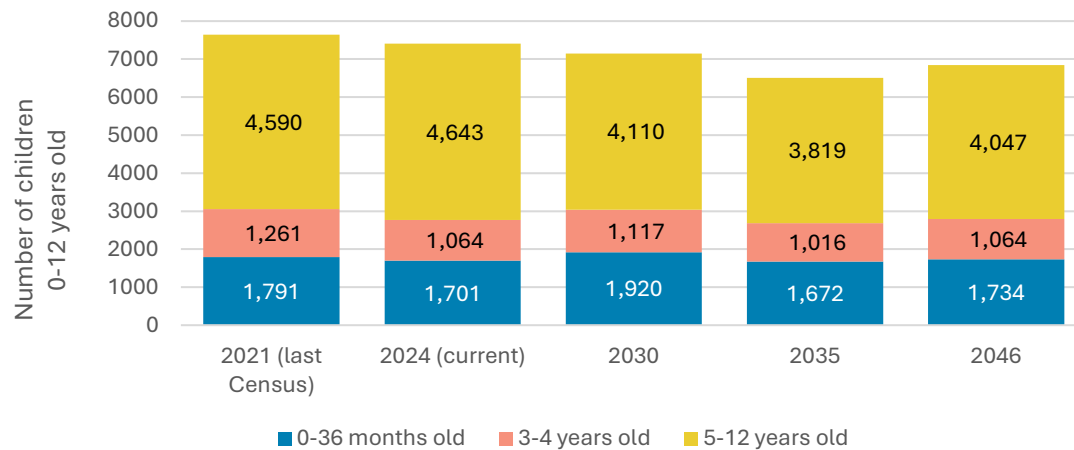
In Victoria, where affordability is a challenge for many young families and the senior population far outnumbers those under 19, the fertility rate is one of the lowest in the country, recorded at 0.95 children per woman in 2020. The upcoming 2026 Census will be critical for understanding these trends more accurately.

³ The B.C. Child Care Licensing Regulation identifies age ranges for child-care licensing as zero to 36 months, 30 months to school age, and school age. In this definition school age begins at five years old.

⁴ *Fertility Indicators, British Columbia, 2023*. Statistics Canada, Government of Canada, 2022.
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-607-x/71-607-x2022003-eng.htm>.

⁵ *Population Growth: Migratory Increase Overtakes Natural Increase*. Statistics Canada, Government of Canada, 2021.
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2014001-eng.htm>.

Figure 4: Estimated and projected child population, City of Victoria, 2021-46



Source: B.C. Population estimates and projections for British Columbia

Understanding activity limitations in Victoria's children

Activity limitations refer to the difficulties or restrictions that individuals experience in performing everyday tasks or participating in typical activities due to physical, cognitive, sensory or mental health conditions. In the context of children in Victoria, activity limitations are categorized into six types:

- Cognitive: Difficulties with learning, understanding or concentrating.
- Physical: Difficulties with movement or coordination.
- Seeing: Vision impairments.
- Hearing: Hearing impairments.
- Mental health-related: Emotional or psychological conditions affecting daily functioning.
- Other long-term conditions: Health issues expected to last six months or more.

Table 1: Children with activity limitations in Victoria

Activity Limitation Reported	0 to 6 years	7 to 14 years	15 to 19 years
Total responses	4,070	4,350	2,725
No difficulties or long-term conditions reported	3,690	3,145	1,560
Seeing (alone or in combination with another limitation)	40	180	235
Hearing (alone or in combination with another limitation)	45	35	35
Physical (alone or in combination with another limitation)	120	75	100
Cognitive (alone or in combination with another limitation)	210	635	580
Mental health-related (alone or in combination with another limitation)	85	735	890
Other: Other health problem or long-term condition that has lasted or is expected to last for six months or more	115	295	230

Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population

In Victoria, 9.3 per cent of those aged zero to six years, 27.7 per cent of those aged seven to 14 years and 42.8 per cent of those aged 15-19 years report one or more of the six activity limitations. This represents a significant portion of the child population.

For the youngest age group, cognitive limitations are the most reported, followed by physical limitations. This highlights the need for child-care facilities to provide additional supports tailored to these activity limitations, as well as accommodations for the smaller percentages of children with seeing, hearing and mental health limitations. The number of children reporting activity limitations due to mental health concerns increases significantly in older age groups and may impact the need for supports within school-aged child care.

Families Who Commute

The City of Victoria is a major regional employment centre, with tens of thousands of workers commuting daily into the downtown core and surrounding neighbourhoods. Because of this, the need for child-care spaces within the city likely extends beyond what is captured through current population estimates. Engagement activities from previous needs assessments indicate that parents prefer child care located near their workplaces.

The GoVictoria Mobility Profile, completed in April 2019, found that more than half (56 per cent) of local jobs are filled by people living outside the city. Nearly 40,000 people commute to Victoria for work, while about 15,000 Victoria residents commute out of the city. This means almost three times as many people come into the city as leave for work each day.

It is important to note that the number of children from surrounding municipalities who rely on child care in Victoria is not reflected in the population figures or the space needs analysis.



Household and Neighbourhood Considerations

Household Families

In 2021, there were 8,875 census family households⁶ with children in the City of Victoria, an increase of 3.4 per cent (310 households) since 2016. Divided by type, there were:

- Couple households with children: 5,650 (increased to 8.8 per cent or 455 households from 2016)
- Single-parent households: 3,225 (decreased 4.3 per cent or 145 households from 2016)

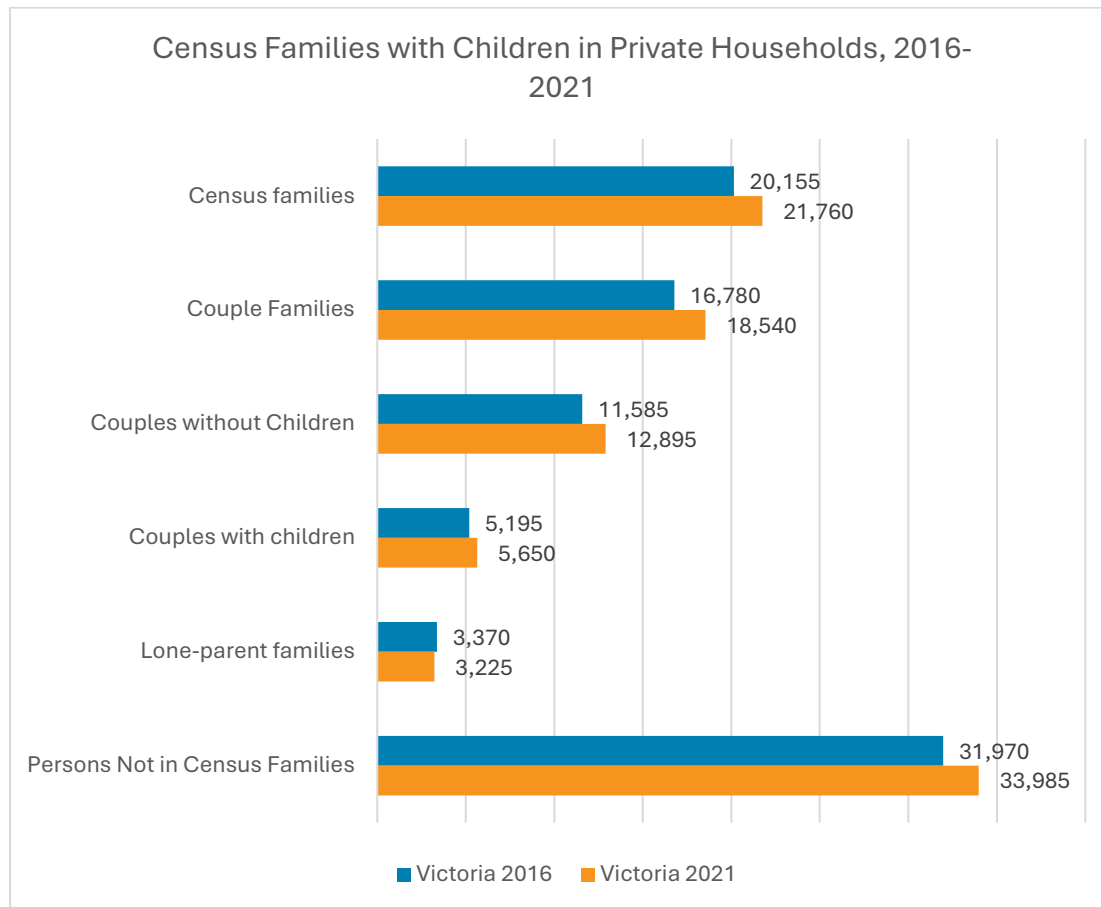
The average number of children in a census family household with children was 1.5 in 2021. The average household size for couples with children was 3.7, while the average family size for lone-parent households was 2.4.

⁶ Statistics Canada defines a census family as:

- A married couple (with or without children from either or both spouses).
- A common-law couple (with or without children from either or both partners).
- A one-parent family, where a single parent (of any marital status) lives with at least one child in the same dwelling.

All members of a census family must live together in the same household.

Figure 5: Census families with children in private households, City of Victoria, 2016-21



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of population: Census profile for City of Victoria



Neighbourhood Demographics and Child-Care Needs

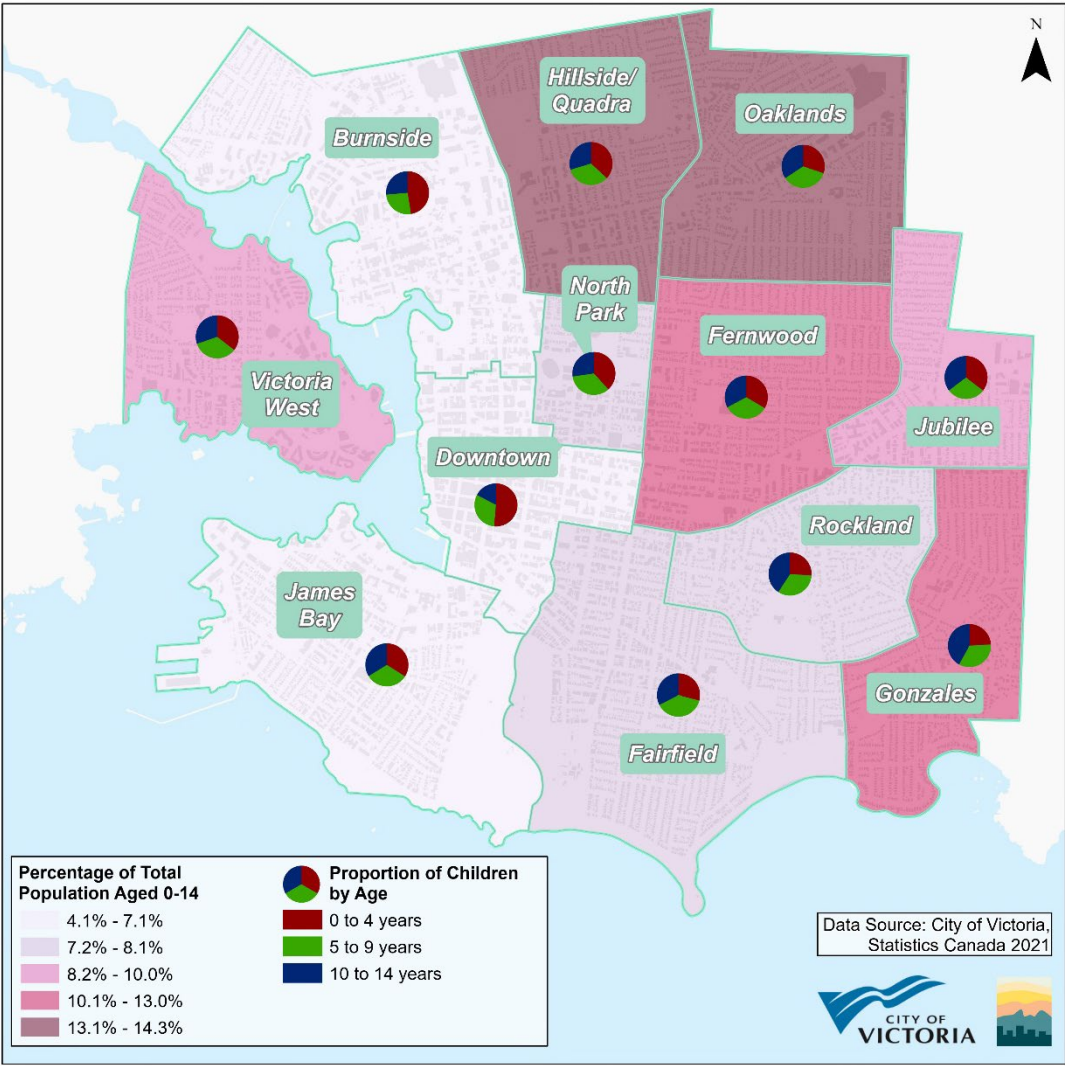
The highest concentrations of children in Victoria are in Oaklands, Hillside Quadra, Fernwood and Gonzales (Figure 6). Downtown and North Park have the lowest concentration of children, yet they show above-average rates of lone-parent families (36 per cent), with North Park at the highest, with 48 per cent.

Single-parent families and racialized children are prominent in several Victoria neighbourhoods, underscoring important equity considerations. Although North Park has a low overall number of families with children (261 or 2.9 per cent of the city's total), it has a higher-than-average share of single-parent families at 41.7 per cent. Fernwood (39.2 per cent) and James Bay (41.7 per cent) have higher-than-average shares of single-parent families, while Oaklands is slightly below the citywide average of 36.4 per cent, at 33 per cent. These differences highlight the importance of considering single-parent households when planning for childcare needs across neighbourhoods.

North Park, Hillside Quadra and Downtown also have higher proportions of racialized children, highlighting the need for child-care solutions that are culturally inclusive and responsive to these populations. The demographic profiles of these neighbourhoods point to the importance of addressing the unique challenges faced by single-parent families, racialized communities and renters.

Looking at the broader child population, Fernwood, James Bay and Oaklands have the highest proportions of families with children. Hillside Quadra is notable for its larger family sizes and significant number of children, while data indicates that Downtown has smaller family sizes and fewer children overall. These patterns emphasize the necessity of tailoring child-care solutions to the unique demographics and socioeconomic realities of each neighbourhood.

Figure 6: Child distribution in Victoria

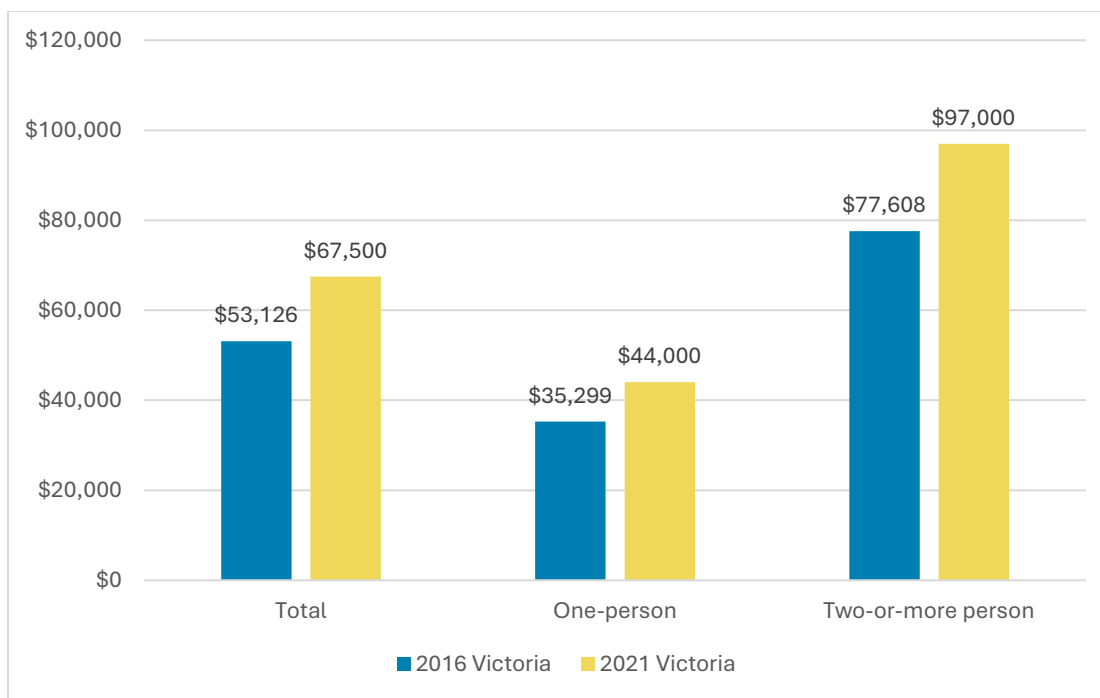


Source: Licker Geospatial for City of Victoria

Household and Family Income

The median total household income in Victoria increased by 27 per cent (\$14,374) between 2016 and 2021 (reflecting the 2015 and 2020 tax years, respectively). This figure is not adjusted for inflation.

Figure 7: Household median total (before tax) income, City of Victoria, 2016-21



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population: Census Profile for City of Victoria

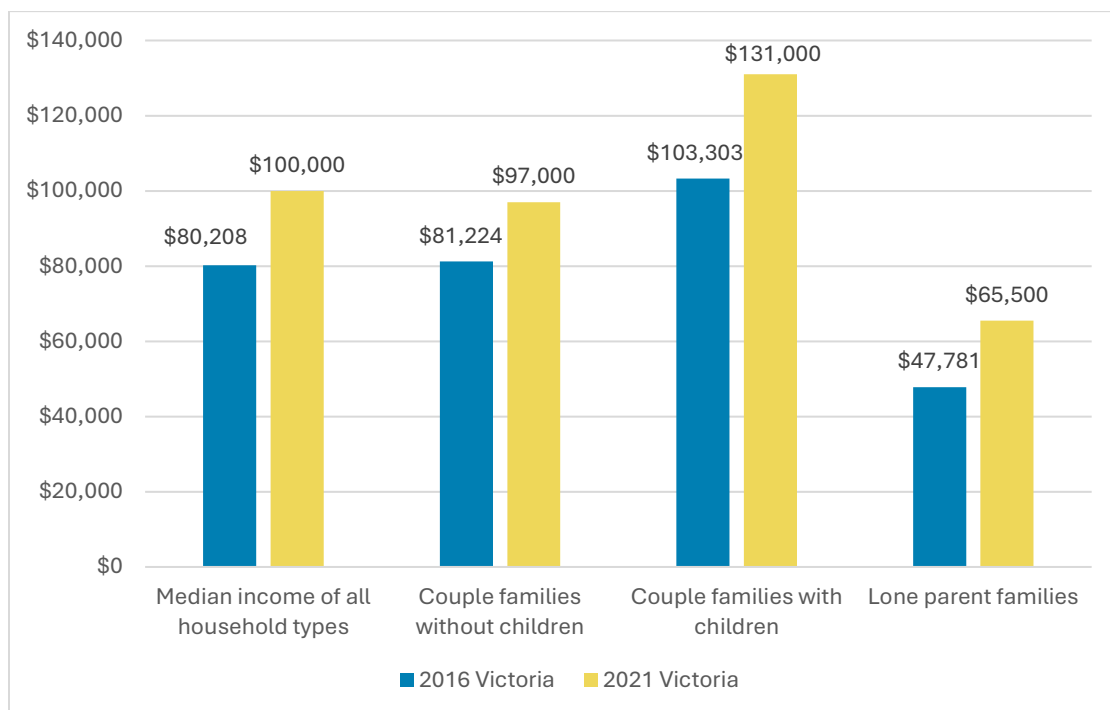
The total income of families in Victoria increased between 2016 and 2021, with the median before-tax income rising by 24.7 per cent (\$19,792). However, income disparities remain evident between family types.

In 2016, couple families earned 116.2 per cent more than lone-parent families and 27.2 per cent more than couples without children. In 2021, couple families with children had incomes double (100 per cent more) that of lone-parent families and 35 per cent higher than couples without children.

Although lone-parent households saw the highest increase in median income, with a growth rate of 37.1 per cent, these households still have the lowest median income. Lone-parent families also face a disproportionate financial burden when it comes to child-care costs, as they are both the primary caregivers and sole income earners.

It is important to note that many households reflected in the 2021 census may have received federal pandemic relief programs, including the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), GST top-ups and increases to the Canada Child Benefit. These supports impacted household incomes and some of the increases in 2020 may have been temporary.

Figure 8: Family median total (before tax) income, City of Victoria, 2016-21



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population: Census Profile for City of Victoria

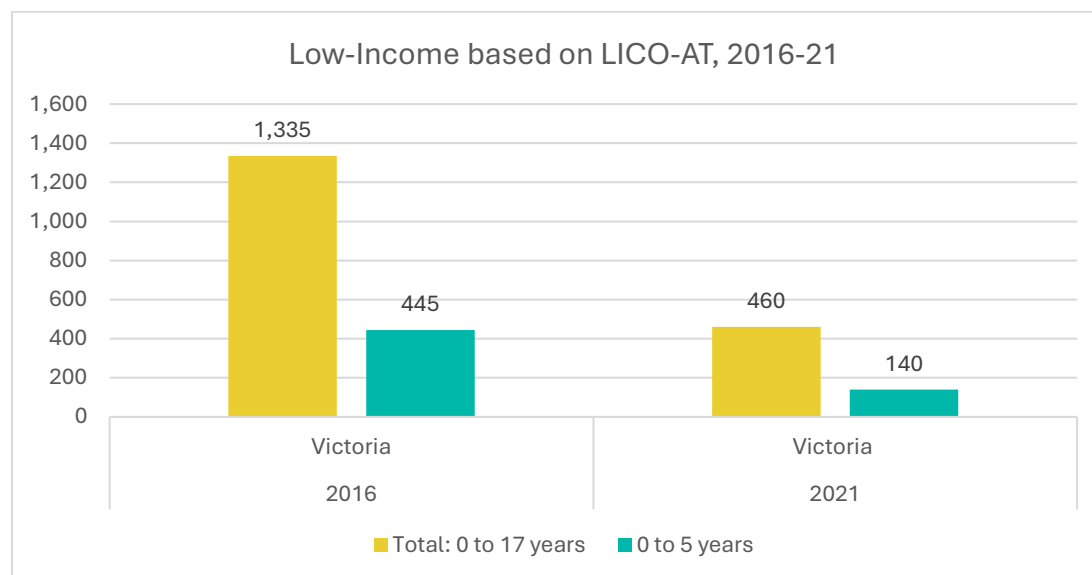
Low Income Based on Low-Income Measure After Tax (LICO-AT)

The prevalence of low income based on the Low-Income Measure After Tax (LICO-AT) in the City of Victoria decreased between 2016 and 2021. In 2016, the overall prevalence was 14 per cent, with 14.4 per cent of children aged zero to 17 living in low-income households. By 2021, the rate for the same age group fell to 4.6 per cent, representing a decrease of 875 children living in low-income households.

The number of children aged zero to five in low-income households also declined, with 305 fewer children in that category.

It is important to note that federal pandemic relief programs likely contributed to the significant decline in the number of households with children identified as low-income in the 2021 census.

Figure 9: Low-income children (0-17 years), City of Victoria, 2016-21



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population: Census Profile for City of Victoria

Households Spending More Than 30 Per Cent of Income on Shelter

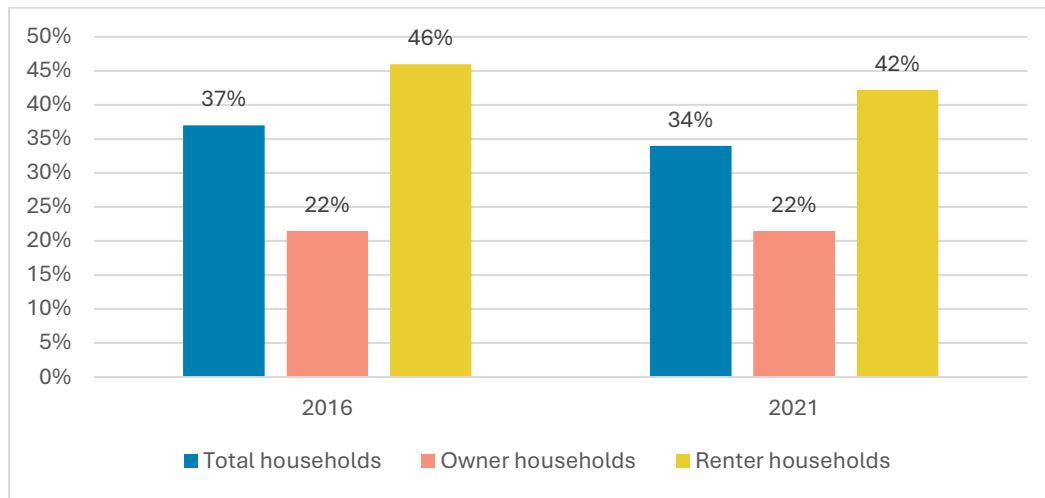
The number of households in the City of Victoria spending 30 per cent or more of their income on shelter decreased between 2016 and 2021, from 37 per cent to 34 per cent. The proportion of owners spending 30 per cent or more remained steady, at 22 per cent, while the proportion of renters declined slightly from 46 to 42 per cent.

Across Canada, fewer households lived in unaffordable housing in 2021 despite rising shelter costs. COVID-19 relief programs provided financial support to many households, helping them weather rising housing costs and other financial challenges. According to the 2020 Canadian Income Survey, government transfers cushioned the significant losses in market income many Canadians experienced during the pandemic-related economic shutdowns. More households reported it was “easy” or “very easy” to meet their financial needs in 2021 — 5.8 million or 39 per cent compared to 5.4 million households, or 37 per cent, in 2018.⁷

Income distribution and homeownership trends show that couple families in Victoria have significantly higher homeownership rates than lone-parent families. Homeownership is an important factor in child-care planning, as it indicates housing security. Renter families with children are at greater risk of displacement and may need to move more frequently disrupting child-care arrangements and limiting access to preferred options.

⁷ *Housing Challenges Remain for Vulnerable Populations in 2021*. Statistics Canada, 2022.
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220721/dq220721b-eng.htm>

Figure 10: Households spending 30 per cent or more on shelter costs, City of Victoria, 2016–21



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population: Census Profile for City of Victoria

Demographics Conclusion

While household incomes in Victoria increased in 2021, this trend should be interpreted with caution, as it may be partly attributable to temporary COVID-19 government relief programs that have ended. Although the income gap between lone-parent families and couple families with children has narrowed, lone-parent families continue to have the lowest median incomes. Despite experiencing the highest proportional income growth, lone-parent families still face significant financial challenges, particularly in affording stable housing and child care.

While the prevalence and total number of low-income households have declined, short-term government support during the pandemic may have contributed to this decrease. With the end of these supports, financial pressures on families, especially those with children, may intensify, highlighting the ongoing need for affordable, stable child-care options in Victoria.



Child Care Space Inventory

Number of Child-Care Spaces in 2024

According to Island Health child-care licensing data, there were 3,453 licensed child-care spaces in the City of Victoria as of September 2024. Group child-care spaces were the most common option, totaling 3,010 spaces (87.2 per cent), which included:

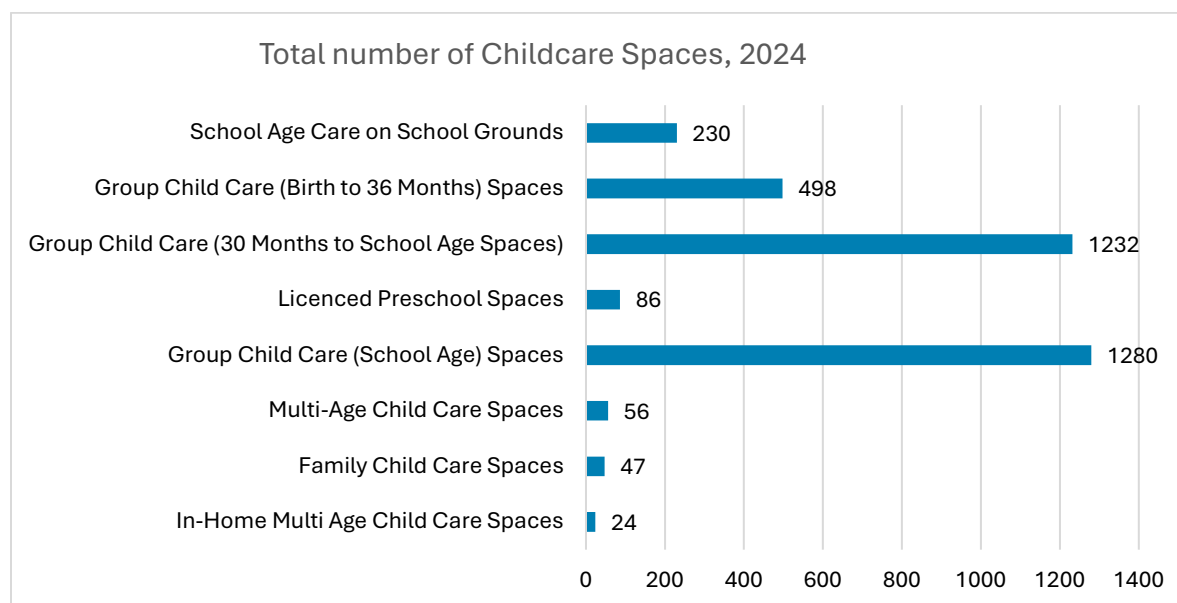
- Group school age: 1,280 spaces (37 per cent)
- Group child care (30 months to school age): 1,232 spaces (36 per cent)
- Group child care (0–36 months): 498 spaces (14 per cent)

The second largest category of child-care spaces was school-age care on school grounds, with 230 spaces, followed by:

- Licensed preschool: 86 spaces
- Multi-age child care: 56 spaces
- Family child care: 47 spaces
- In-home multi-age child care: 24 spaces

(See Appendix A for licensing definitions of each category)

Figure 11: Total number of child-care spaces, City of Victoria, September 2024



Source: Island Health child care licensing data for City of Victoria, September 2024

Changes in Child-Care Capacity, 2022 to 2024

Between 2022 and 2024, the number of licensed child-care spaces in the City of Victoria increased by 762, rising from 2,691 spaces in 2022 to 3,453 spaces in September 2024.

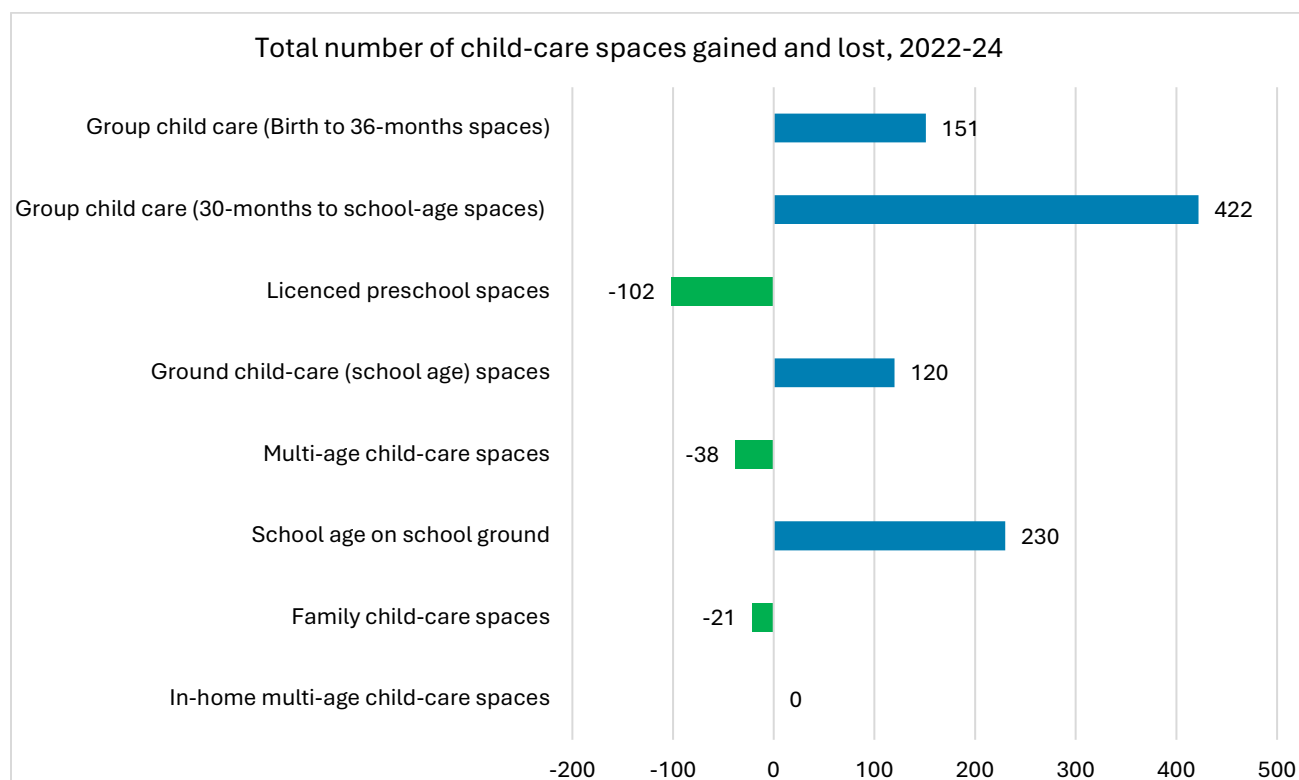
The most considerable growth was seen in the following categories:

- Group child care (30 months to school age): increased by 422 spaces
- School age care on school grounds: increased by 230 spaces
- Group child care (0–36 months): increased by 151 spaces
- Group child care (school age): increased by 120 spaces

While these categories experienced growth, other types of licensed spaces saw declines:

- Licensed preschool: decreased by 102 spaces
- In-home multi-age child care: decreased by 38 spaces
- Family child care: decreased by 21 spaces

Figure 12: Changes in child-care space capacity, City of Victoria, 2022-24



Source: Island Health child-care licensing data for City of Victoria, September 2024

Child-Care Provider Survey

During the engagement process for the original Child Care Plan in 2020, both the Child Care Working Group and interviews with child-care providers indicated that the reported child-care space capacity might not reflect actual availability. To better understand the gap between the maximum licenced spaces and the actual number of spaces offered, a child-care provider survey was included in the 2024 update of the Child Care Plan.

In October 2024, this survey was distributed to child-care providers in Greater Victoria through the Victoria Child Care Resource and Referral Program. A total of 46 providers responded, 23 of whom identified as operating one or more locations in Victoria, with the remainder serving the broader area. There were 74 child-care providers listed through this program in the City of Victoria, and the survey achieved a response rate of 31.1 per cent for

local providers, along with 23 additional respondents serving the broader region. These results represent the total population of child-care providers in the City of Victoria.

Capacity Limitations

Child-care providers were asked to report both their total licensed child-care spaces and the number of spaces they actively offer. The 45 providers who answered this question reported being licensed for a total of 4,308 child-care spaces across the three group child-care licensing ranges. Of this total, the actual number of spaces reported available was 4,061, indicating that up to 247 licensed spaces are currently not being offered due to capacity limitations among this sample of providers in Greater Victoria.

Additionally, only 19 providers (42.2 per cent) reported operating at full capacity, while 26 (57.8 per cent) indicated they were offering fewer spaces than they are licensed for, suggesting significant capacity challenges. Notably, five respondents stated that they currently offer only one less space than they are licensed for. This is often done to keep a space available for emergency referrals, drop-ins or younger siblings transitioning into child care. Even with these considerations, 21 providers (46.7 per cent) are still operating below full capacity.

When asked about the factors affecting space availability, respondents highlighted several barriers, including:

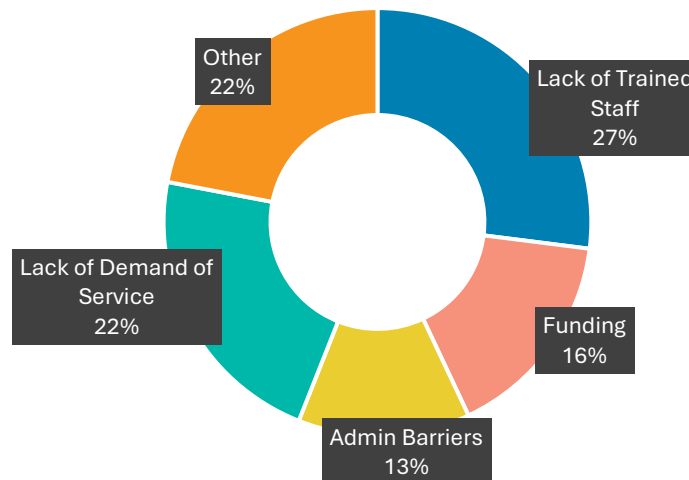
- Lack of trained staff
- Lack of demand for services
- Funding and administrative barriers (Figure 13)
- Staff-to-child ratios: The cost of hiring additional staff to meet ratios for infants and toddlers (0–36 months) was cited as a significant barrier, along with difficulties in hiring support staff for children with special needs.

Child-to-staff ratios also make it challenging to fill all available spaces, as age-specific requirements mean that shifts in enrollment in one age group can impact overall capacity. Providers must balance staffing across multiple age groups to remain compliant.

While these findings reflect the broader Greater Victoria area, they provide valuable insights into the regional context and current challenges faced by child-care operators.

Further investigation into common practices for space reservation could deepen the understanding of capacity limitations.

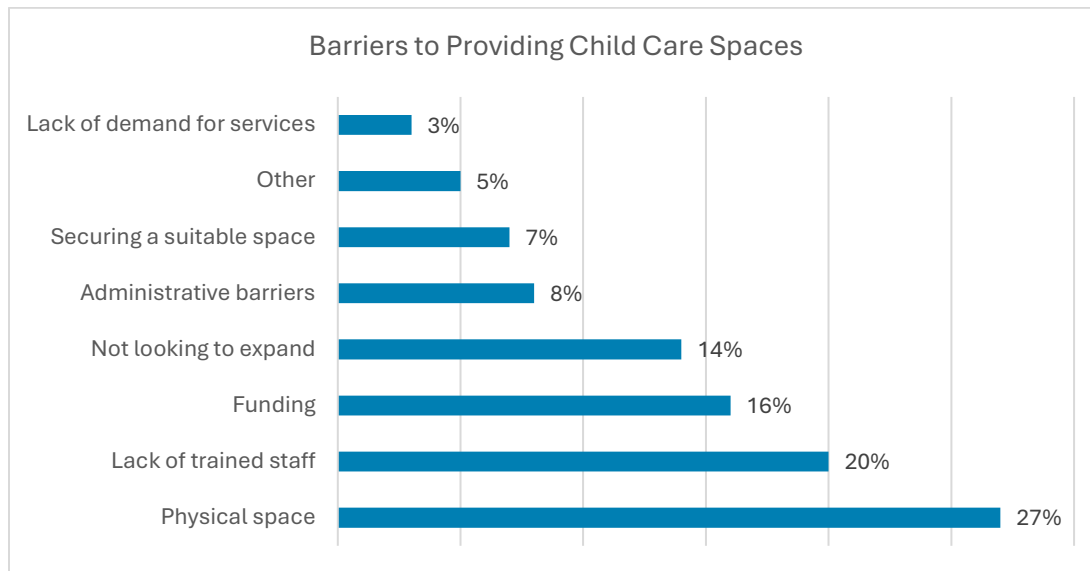
Figure 13: Limitations of child-care spaces



Several respondents noted an oversupply of child-care spaces in the preschool (30 months to school age) category, reducing demand for this type of care in Victoria.

Providers were also asked about the barriers they face in expanding child-care spaces in existing or new facilities (Figure 14). While 14 per cent of respondents indicated they are not looking to expand, those who did identify barriers cited the following challenges: lack of physical space, shortage of trained staff, insufficient funding, administrative barriers and difficulty securing suitable space for new facilities.

Figure 14: Barriers to providing more child-care spaces



Survey Summary

Child-care providers identified several key factors affecting child-care space availability in Victoria that may not be fully captured by licensing data. Survey results indicate a desire for more resources to increase the number of trained and qualified early childhood educators and support staff.

Three respondents (6.5 per cent) noted an oversupply of preschool spaces, while another four respondents (8.7 per cent) highlighted specific needs for after-school care and infant/toddler spaces (0–36 months).

Low wages and a shortage of suitable staff were cited as barriers to expansion, particularly for the zero to 36-months licence, which requires a ratio of one staff for every four infants.

Waitlists may also be unreliable, as parents often register on multiple lists to secure a space as quickly as possible, making it difficult to gauge actual demand.

Three respondents (6.5 per cent) also expressed a need for more accessible child-care options for children with special needs or activity limitations. This feedback was provided voluntarily, suggesting that a future survey could benefit from a deeper exploration of child-

care needs for children with disabilities in Victoria. Engaging parents directly could also provide greater insights.

Child-Care Spaces Gap, 2024

In 2024, there were an estimated 7,408 children aged zero to 12 in the City of Victoria and 3,453 licensed child-care spaces. This represents a nine per cent improvement since 2019, when the gap between spaces and children was 4,431. However, the actual gap is likely larger than reported, given the unknown number of families from surrounding municipalities seeking child care in Victoria, as well as the number of child-care providers unable to operate at full capacity. Survey findings highlighted contributing factors, including staffing shortages, staff ratio limitations and other factors revealed in the survey.

Gap Analysis

The updated child-care spaces gap analysis is based on comparisons between B.C. Statistics Population Estimates and Projections for the City of Victoria and the child-care space inventory provided by Island Health in September of 2024. The community profile reflects Victoria’s projected child population and demographic details, while the inventory data represents the known number of licensed child-care spaces, broken down by type.

Current Child-Care Access Rate

The current child-care access rate — number of spaces per 100 children — is determined using B.C. Statistics child population projection data and the number of licensed child-care spaces for each age category in 2024. Group child-care licensing and age categories were grouped as follows:

- Zero to 36 months (under three years old)
- 36 months to school age (three to four years old)
- School age care (five to 12 years old)

School age care on school grounds (230 spaces) was included in the school age category, and licensed preschool (86 spaces) was added to the 36 months to school age category to better align with the associated age range. Multi-age, in-home multi-age and family child-care spaces were evenly split among the three age categories.

In 2024, the City of Victoria had a child-care access rate of 46.6 spaces per 100 children, up from 38.2 spaces per 100 children in 2022. As noted in the Child Care Space Inventory, the largest increase in licensed spaces came from the group child-care (30 months to school age) category, which added 422 new spaces, followed by school-age care on school grounds, which grew by 230 spaces.

Because each licensing category and its associated age group have unique features and needs, it is important to consider the access rate for each category rather than the overall rate for the zero to 12 age range. The current child-care access rates for each age range in the City of Victoria are summarized in Table 3.

Table 2: Current child-care access rates ⁸

	Projected Child Population (2024)	Number of Spaces (2024)	Access Rate (Spaces per 100 Children)	Percentage
0–36 months (under 3)	1,701	540	31.7	31.7%
36 months to school age (3-4 years old)	1,064	1,360	127.8	127.8%
School age (5-12 years old)	4,643	1,552	33.4	33.4%
Total (0-12 years old)	7,408	3,453	46.6	46.6%

While the total access rate of 46.6 per cent across all licensing categories is above the provincial average of 21 per cent, a breakdown by category shows uneven distribution:

- Infants under three years: 31.7 per cent
- School-age children: 33.4 per cent ⁹

⁸ The following assumptions were made to calculate the child-care spaces gap. Given these assumptions, the gaps represent rough estimates and should not be considered exact.

- All children require child care, which may not be true for families with a stay-at-home caregiver.
- Statistics Canada census data for the population did not include a breakdown by age. Therefore, recorded population age breakdowns do not align with the age criteria, which mean that number of spaces cannot be accurately allocated across age groups except by using B.C. Statistics population estimates and projections.
- Ages zero to two are covered by group child care (0 to 36 months) spaces.
- Ages three to four are covered by group child care (30 months to school age) spaces and licensed preschool spaces. This means the population projections for this category do not represent children between the ages of two-and-a-half to three years old who may be present in group child care (30 months to school age) or licensed preschool.
- Ages five to 12 are covered by the remaining child-care space types. These spaces include multi-age child-care spaces, which could be allocated to other age groups. However, the average allocation is not known.

⁹ 2023 Survey of Licensed Child Care Spaces in Metro Vancouver. Metro Vancouver Regional Planning, 2023. <https://metrovancover.org/services/regional-planning/Documents/survey-of-licensed-child-care-spaces-in-metro-vancouver-2023.pdf>

These lower access rates indicate the need for more spaces in these licence types to meet current and future targets. This uneven distribution is consistent with provincial and regional trends (Appendix B).

Space Creation Targets

A Note on Targets

Best practices from comparable jurisdictions were reviewed to establish space creation targets based on child-care coverage. Notably, in 2002, all European Union member states committed to space coverage for 90 per cent of children from age three to school age and 33 per cent of children under three, a benchmark known as the Barcelona Targets.

One of the primary goals of these targets is to “remove disincentives to female labour force participation.”¹⁰ In December 2022, a European Union Council approved a recommendation to update the Barcelona Targets for 2030, raising the desired access rate for infants (0-36 months) to 45 per cent and increasing the child-care and preschool target from 90 to 96 per cent.¹¹

City of Victoria Targets

In comparison, the City of Victoria has set significant but lower access rates:

- 50 per cent for non-school-age children (zero to five years old), including infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children
- 80 per cent for school-age children

While these targets do not reach the Barcelona Target levels, they reflect local conditions and represent above-average access compared with provincial levels. Victoria’s role as a regional employment hub creates additional demand pressures, which may necessitate adjustments to these targets over time.

¹⁰ *Child Care Deserts in Canada*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2018.
<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2018/06/Child%20Care%20Deserts.pdf>

¹¹ *Council Recommendation of 8 December 2022 on Early Childhood Education and Care: The Barcelona Targets for 2030*. Official Website of the European Union, 2022.
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022H1220%2801%29>.

Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6 summarize the average annual space creation targets for the City of Victoria across three age categories on a five-year horizon:

- Zero to 36 months
- 36 months to school age
- School age to 12 years old

Space Creation Targets: Zero to 36 months (under three years old)

To meet a target of 50 per cent, or 960 licensed child-care spaces for children under three by 2030, the City of Victoria will need approximately 420 new spaces over the next five years in addition, to the 540 spaces we currently have.

Table 3: City of Victoria space creation targets: zero to 36 months (three years old)

Year	Total children	Total spaces needed to maintain current access rate of 31.7 (or 31.7 % coverage)	Total spaces needed to maintain access rate of 50 (or 50 % coverage)
2024	1,701	540 (2024 baseline)	851
2030	1,920	609	960

Space Creation Targets: 36 Months to School Age (three to four years old)

For children aged three to four, the current access rate of 127.8 per cent indicates that the target of 50 per cent is met and can be sustained to 2030 and beyond. However, as Victoria serves as a regional employment hub, with more than half of the local jobs filled by commuters, many parents working in the city prefer to seek child care in Victoria. The demand for commuter families is not reflected in the current access rate.

Additionally, the current rate does not account for children who enter child care at two-and-a-half years old or remain in care until five-and-a-half years old. For this reason, the supply of group child-care (30 months to school age) spaces in Victoria should not be considered complete in the short or long term.

Table 4: City of Victoria space creation targets: ages 36 months to school age (three to four years old)

Year	Total children	Total spaces needed to maintain current access rate of 127.8 (or 127.8 % coverage)	Total spaces needed to maintain access rate of 50 (or 50 % coverage)
2024	1,064	1,360 (2024 baseline)	532
2030	1,117	1,428	559

Space Creation Targets: School Age (five to 12 years old)

Despite a projected decrease in the population of school-age children over the next five years, the City of Victoria will need approximately 1,736 new licensed child-care spaces above the 1,552 identified as of 2024 to meet a target of 80 per cent coverage, or 3,288 spaces, for school-age children by 2030.

Table 5: City of Victoria space creation targets: school age (five to 12 years old)

Year	Total children	Total spaces needed to maintain current access rate 33.4 (or 33.4 % coverage)	Total spaces needed to maintain access rate of 80 (or 80 % coverage)
2024	4,643	1,552 (2024 baseline)	3,714
2030	4,110	1,373	3,288

Conclusion

Findings from the demographic update, provider survey, gaps analysis and space creation targets reveal an imbalance in available licensed child-care spaces for children of different ages in the City of Victoria. The gap is particularly evident for children under three and school-age children.

For children under three, smaller staff-to-child ratios and limited availability of infant/toddler certified early childhood educators have been identified by providers and the Ministry of Education and Child Care as key factors.

For school-age children, the large age range of five to 12 years old creates a higher demand for spaces. The introduction of the new provincial licensing category, school age care on school grounds, aims to address this gap. Uptake of this category in Victoria is growing, supporting demand for before- and after-school care located conveniently on school grounds.

Recommendations

To support efforts to create equitable, attainable and inclusive child care, it is recommended that the City of Victoria pursue the following actions in five key priority areas:

Process

- Enhance tracking and analysis:
 - Continue tracking the creation of new child-care spaces through licensing applications on a year-over-year basis to understand space creation against existing targets.
 - Create a GIS-based inventory of licensed spaces considering family growth, income, equity and diversity analysis, and child-care needs by neighbourhood enhanced insights.

Policy

- Enable child-care spaces:
 - Improve regulatory tools to facilitate the creation of quality child-care spaces in new developments. Prioritize equitable, affordable and culturally inclusive solutions that respond to diverse needs.

- Community consultation:
 - Engage with diverse communities, including low-income families, single-parent families and families facing housing challenges, to understand varying child-care needs.
- Equity and accessibility:
 - Identify barriers to equitable and accessible child care to support inclusive care models.

Partnerships

- Partner with school districts:
 - Collaborate with local school districts to enhance before- and after-school care on school grounds.

Advocacy

- Encourage inclusive child care:
 - Advocate for funding that enables affordable, culturally inclusive and responsive child care for diverse needs.

Education and Training

- Support training for local early childhood educators (ECEs):
 - Explore partnerships with training organizations and academic institutions focused on infant-toddler certification to increase infant/toddler child-care spaces (0-36 months). The City could leverage its internal expertise, host training events and facilitate communities of practice to strengthen local ECE capacity.
- Educational materials:
 - Continue developing informational materials to help child-care providers address existing gaps.

This update highlights progress and ongoing gaps in the child-care system, providing a roadmap for the City's continued efforts to meet the needs of families in Victoria better.

Next Steps

To ensure that future child-care planning in the City of Victoria is effective and inclusive, the City should engage with families and child-care providers and review the latest data to better understand current needs and potential barriers to expanding child-care access.

Future child-care inventories for the City of Victoria may benefit from engaging families to understand how child care is experienced across demographic markers and neighbourhoods. This would help identify opportunities to make child care more inclusive. Additional engagement with providers and their staff may also help clarify the existing barriers to operating at full capacity.

Upon the release of the 2026 Census, the methodology used in this analysis should be updated with real child population numbers rather than projections. This would improve accuracy and better inform space creation for underserved age groups. Further insight into the number of commuters from other municipalities who access child care in Victoria would also enhance understanding of the demand and the accuracy of access rates.

Space creation relies on provincial support and funding, including the New Spaces Fund, a program launched by the Province of British Columbia in 2018. Aligning child-care development with eligibility for the New Spaces Fund will help the City of Victoria create high-quality, affordable, accessible and inclusive child care for families.



Appendix

Appendix A: Licensed Child-Care Categories in British Columbia¹²

License Type	License Requirements
Group child care (under 36 months)	<p>Ages: Birth to 36 months</p> <p>Maximum group size: 12 children</p> <p>Child-to-staff ratio:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One to four children: one infant toddler educator• Five to eight children: one Infant toddler educator and one early childhood educator• Nine to 12 children: One infant toddler educator, one early childhood educator and one early childhood educator assistant <p>Staff qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Infant Toddler Educator certificate• Early Childhood Educator certificate• Early Childhood Educator Assistant certificate <p>Setting: A community-based facility or centre</p>
Group child care (30 months to school age)	<p>Ages: 30 months to school age (kindergarten)</p> <p>Maximum group size: 25 children</p> <p>Child-to-staff ratio:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One to eight children: one early childhood educator

¹² *Understand the Different Types of Child Care in B.C. Province of British Columbia, 2024.*
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/caring-for-young-children/family-information/licensed-unlicensed-child-care>.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine to 16 children: one early childhood educator and one early childhood educator assistant • 17 to 25 children: one early childhood educator and two early childhood educator assistants <p>Staff qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Educator certificate • Early Childhood Educator Assistant certificate <p>Setting: A community-based facility or centre</p>
Preschool (30 months to school age)	<p>Ages: Two-and-a-half years (30 months) to school age (kindergarten)</p> <p>Timeframe: Typically operates during the school year from one to four hours a day</p> <p>Maximum group size: 20 children</p> <p>Child-to-staff ratio:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One to ten children: one early childhood educator • 11 to 20 children: one early childhood educator and one early childhood educator assistant <p>Staff qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Educator certificate • Early Childhood Educator Assistant certificate <p>Setting: A community-based facility or centre</p>
Group child care – school age	<p>Ages: School age (kindergarten and up)</p> <p>Maximum group size: 24 children from kindergarten or grade one or 30 children from grade two and older with no kindergarten or grade one child present.</p> <p>Child-to-staff ratio:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one responsible adult for each 12 children from kindergarten and grade one

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> one responsible adult for each 15 children from grade two and older <p>Staff qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible adults must be 19 years of age or older and able to provide care and mature guidance to children. Must also have 20 hours of child-care-related training, relevant work experience, a valid first aid certificate and a clear criminal record check. <p>Setting: A community-based facility or centre</p>
School-age care on school grounds	<p>Ages: School age (kindergarten and up)</p> <p>Maximum group size: 24 children from kindergarten or grade one or 30 children from grade two and older with no kindergarten or grade one child present.</p> <p>Child-to-staff ratio:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One responsible adult for each 12 children from kindergarten and grade one One responsible adult for each 15 children from grade two and older <p>Staff qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible adults must be 19 or older and able to provide care and mature guidance to children. Must also have 20 hours of child-care-related training, relevant work experience, a valid first aid certificate and a clear criminal record check. <p>Setting: School grounds*</p> <p>*School-age care on school grounds is a new licensing category created in 2021 to enable more before-and-after-school care on school grounds. It is eligible for Child Care B.C.'s New Spaces Fund under a separate stream from the other child-care licenses and is connected to new legislation to the School Act, which</p>

	allows school boards to directly provide licensed child care, rather than needing a licensed provider on site.
Family licensed child care	<p>Ages: Birth to 12 years old</p> <p>Maximum group size: seven children</p> <p>Child-to-staff ratio:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One responsible adult (who is also the licensee) for seven children <p>Staff qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be 19 or older and able to provide care and mature guidance to children. Must also have 20 hours of child-care-related training, relevant work experience, a valid first aid certificate and a clear criminal record check. <p>Setting: In the child-care provider's personal residence</p>
Multi-age child care	<p>Ages: Birth to 12 years old</p> <p>Maximum group size: eight children</p> <p>Child-to-staff ratio:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One early childhood educator for eight children <p>Staff qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Childhood Educator certificate <p>Setting: A community-based facility or centre</p>
In-home multi-age child care	<p>Ages: Birth to 12 years old</p> <p>Maximum group size: eight children</p> <p>Child-to-staff ratio:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One early childhood educator (who is also the licensee) for eight children <p>Staff qualifications:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Educator certificate <p>Setting: In the child-care provider's personal residence</p>
Occasional child care	<p>This is drop-in child care that can be for a maximum of eight hours a day and no more than 40 hours per calendar month.</p> <p>Ages: 18 months old and up</p> <p>Maximum group size: 16 children (if children under 36 months are present) or 20 children (if no children under 36 months are present)</p> <p>Child-to-staff ratio:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One responsible adult for every four children (if children under 36 months are present) • One responsible adult for every eight children (if no children under 36 months are present) <p>Staff qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be 19 years of age or older and able to provide care and mature guidance to children. • Must also have 20 hours of child-care-related training, relevant work experience, a valid first aid certificate and a clear criminal record check. <p>Setting: A community-based facility or centre</p>
Recreational child care	<p>Ages: School age (kindergarten and up)</p> <p>Maximum group size: No maximum, if usable floor area of a space used for activity is sufficient to ensure the health and safety of children participating in the activity.</p> <p>Staff-to-child ratio:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One responsible adult for each 12 children from kindergarten and grade one • One responsible adult for each 15 children from grade two and older <p>Staff qualifications:</p>

-
- Responsible adults must be 19 years of age or older and able to provide care and mature guidance to children.
 - Must also have 20 hours of child-care-related training, relevant work experience, a valid first aid certificate and a clear criminal record check.

Setting: Indoor facilities other than a single-family house or outdoor settings such as public parks.

Appendix B: 2024 Child-Care Access Rates by Comparison¹³

Table 6: 2024 Child-care access rates by comparison

Jurisdiction	Infant and toddler care	Daycare	School age
British Columbia	23%	57%	10%
Vancouver Island	25%	69%	14%
School District 61	29%	85%	21%
City of Victoria	32%	128%	33%

¹³ British Columbia, Vancouver Island and SD61 access rates were provided by the Ministry of Education and Child Care and align to slightly different age ranges (0-3, 3-5, 6-12). For this reason, comparisons are tentative.

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