ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

An Environmental Scan of Outdoor and Land-Based Early Learning in Canada: Evidence, Policy Gaps, and Recommendations for Action

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JULY 2026

How to Cite this Report

Beverlie Dietze, Kelsey Robson, and Melanie Manitowabi. *An Environmental Scan of Outdoor and Land-Based Early Learning in Canada: Evidence, Policy Gaps, and Recommendations for Action.* July 2026. Toronto: Lawson Foundation. Available at https://lawson.ca/OLBEnvScan/

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Executive Summary

This Environmental Scan examines how outdoor and land-based early learning is positioned, supported, or constrained across all 13 provinces and territories in Canada, drawing on a national literature review and analysis of early learning and child care (ELCC) regulations, early learning frameworks, and standards of practice for early childhood educators across jurisdictions, including comparisons with more advanced international jurisdictions. The scan identifies critical gaps, tensions, and opportunities, and concludes with evidence-based recommendations for system alignment, ELCC regulatory reform, early learning framework development, and educator preparation and professional learning.

The scan highlights research that high-quality outdoor and land-based early learning supports children's physical health and motor development, social-emotional competence, ecological awareness, cultural identity, creativity, and resilience. Findings reveal that provincial and territorial early learning frameworks embrace outdoor and land-based teaching and learning, which is valued by Indigenous communities and early childhood educators across the country. Yet outdoor and land-based early learning remains constrained by ELCC regulatory systems not designed for it and by the near absence of related professional standards and competencies. Across the country, outdoor and land-based pedagogy is simultaneously encouraged in principle and unsupported in practice.

The scan identifies a **critical four-way disconnect** at the core of Canada's early learning systems that persists across all 13 provincial and territorial jurisdictions:

1. **Early Learning Frameworks** – Philosophically endorse outdoor and land-based learning as central to quality.
2. **Standards of Practice:** None in any Canadian jurisdiction explicitly identify outdoor or land-based competencies.
3. **Post-Secondary Programs** – Approximately 7% include any outdoor or nature-based module; approximately 4% include mandatory Indigenous studies.
4. **Licensing Regulations** – Prioritize safety compliance over pedagogical competence; no risk-benefit assessment; no outdoor and land-based competency expectations

Six cross-cutting themes, drawn from the jurisdictional analysis, show how the four-way disconnect plays out in practice. These are not isolated problems, but rather six expressions of the same structural gap, which in turn each represent a clear opportunity for action.

- A **framework-regulation gap** demonstrates that provincial and territorial early learning frameworks are consistently more progressive than the ELCC regulations that govern program delivery.

- **Indigenous land-based pedagogy** remains absent from regulations and standards of practice, even as Canada has committed to reconciliation through the TRC Calls to Action and UNDRIP.
- Competencies essential to quality outdoor and land-based practice, including **ecological literacy** and **risk-benefit assessment**, are absent from standards and licensing requirements in every jurisdiction.
- **Children's rights** under UNCRC and UNDRIP are acknowledged in many frameworks but are not evident in the regulatory requirements that govern daily practice.
- There is no **accountability** mechanism requiring the alignment of early learning frameworks, standards of practice and post-secondary preparation, and licensing regulations, which are each developed independently.

The scan moves beyond review and analysis to recommendations, which are organized around **four action pathways**, each identifying the responsible parties for change:

1. **System Alignment** – coordinated, government-led action across all parties
2. **Regulatory Reform** – provincial and territorial governments
3. **Early Learning Framework Development** – governments, framework developers, and Indigenous governments and organizations
4. **Educator Preparation and Professional Learning** (including Standards of Practice) – post-secondary institutions, regulatory bodies, and professional associations

These pathways are not sequential, and progress on all four simultaneously is required to close the four-way disconnect.

As the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) initiative continues to unfold, coherent policy frameworks are required to support all children's opportunities for high-quality outdoor and land-based learning, reflecting lessons from international jurisdictions that have successfully integrated outdoor and land-based early learning into their ELCC systems. This scan offers a practical instrument to support policymakers and all responsible parties in fully enabling outdoor and land-based early childhood education for every child across Canada.

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1 Purpose, Methods, Audience, and How to Use This Document

This Environmental Scan was commissioned by the Lawson Foundation to provide a comprehensive, evidence-informed picture of the research, policy, and professional landscape for outdoor and land-based early learning across Canada. It is intended to support leaders and policymakers in the development of a coherent jurisdictional policy framework to fully enable and promote outdoor and land-based early childhood education, especially in early learning and child care (ELCC) settings.

The scan identifies where the current system supports and where it constrains outdoor and land-based programming in ELCC, and it sets out a clear, evidence-based case for coordinated change across four policy domains: system alignment, regulatory frameworks, early learning frameworks, and educator preparation and professional learning.

The scan is intended as a practical instrument for change, not simply a record of what exists. It moves deliberately from evidence (what the research shows) to analysis (how this is showing up across Canadian systems) to action (what needs to happen, and who is responsible).

Methods

The scan draws on four interlocking areas of inquiry:

- A national literature review synthesizing peer-reviewed research, policy documents, and Indigenous scholarship published primarily from 2019–2026.
- A jurisdictional analysis of ELCC licensing regulations across all 13 provinces and territories.
- A review of early learning frameworks across all 13 jurisdictions.
- An examination of standards of practice for early childhood educators, including national comparisons with Australia, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, and Germany.

The scan identifies critical gaps, tensions, and opportunities, and concludes with evidence-based recommendations for system alignment, ELCC regulatory reform, early learning framework development, and educator preparation and professional learning.

The scan was conducted through a systematic four-phase research process: (1) a targeted literature scan and framework development; (2) document collection across all 13 provinces and territories; (3) analytical coding using ATLAS.ti and AI-assisted cross-jurisdictional comparison; and (4) cross-jurisdictional comparative analysis. Findings from this scan also inform a companion peer-reviewed article that presents the scholarly analysis of the policy landscape for an academic audience.

Target Audience

This scan is written for multiple audiences who each have a distinct role in realizing the vision of accessible, high-quality outdoor and land-based early learning for every child in Canada:

- **Provincial and territorial governments** responsible for licensing regulations, early learning frameworks, and early learning and child care funding agreements
- **Federal partners** engaged in the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care system
- **Indigenous governments, communities, and organizations** who hold jurisdiction over land-based early learning and whose self-determination is central to meaningful reform
- **Post-secondary institutions** that prepare the next generation of early childhood educators
- **Professional bodies and standards organizations** responsible for early childhood education standards of practice
- **Sector advocates, researchers, and funders** seeking to align investment and influence with the highest-leverage points for change

How to Use This Document

The scan is structured to support different entry points depending on your role and interest:

- **For a rapid overview**, the Executive Summary and Section 7 (Cross-Cutting Themes) provide the key findings and their significance.
- **For regulatory decision-makers**, Section 4 (Regulations) and Section 8, Pathway 2 (Recommendations: Regulatory Reform) are the most directly actionable.
- **For curriculum and early learning framework developers**, Section 5 (Early Learning Frameworks) and Section 8, Pathway 3 (Recommendations: Early Learning Framework Development) are the primary reference points.
- **For educator preparation and standards bodies**, Section 6 (Standards of Practice) and Section 8, Pathway 4 (Recommendations: Educator Preparation and Professional Learning) are most relevant.
- **For Indigenous communities and organizations**, Section 3 (Literature Review), Section 4 (Regulations: Tension 3), and the Indigenous-specific pathways throughout Section 8 Recommendations reflect the distinct considerations and obligations most relevant to land-based pedagogy governed by Indigenous peoples.
- **For those working on system-wide coordination**, Section 7 and Section 8, Pathway 1 (Recommendations: System Alignment) speak directly to the accountability mechanisms required for lasting change.

The scan concludes with a set of recommendations organized around four action pathways. Each pathway identifies the responsible parties for action, recognizing that meaningfully advancing outdoor and land-based early learning requires coordinated movement across governments, institutions, and the profession.

2 Introduction

Outdoor and Land-based Early Learning

Outdoor and land-based early learning refers to the breadth of Euro-Western/non-Indigenous outdoor play-based and Indigenous land-based opportunities provided to young children through early childhood education programs. These may take place across the nature continuum, from enclosed outdoor spaces to nearby parks and wild places, to forests, mountains, rivers, and prairies. In Indigenous contexts, land-based pedagogy is inseparable from Indigenous epistemologies, governance structures, and relationships to specific territories: it is a pedagogical approach grounded in Land as a living relation, guided by local Knowledge Keepers/Elders, and linked to cultural continuity and self-determination (McDonald, 2023; Peltier, 2021). Outdoor and land-based opportunities for young children are informed by the professional learning and experience of educators and program staff, standards and regulations which govern programs, and additional policy guidance from governments and professional organizations.

What do we mean by "outdoor and land-based"?

This term “inclusively encompasses the breadth of Euro-Western/non-Indigenous outdoor play–based and Indigenous Land-based approaches to teaching and learning, which may take place in a range of outdoor environments on the Land and across the nature continuum: from enclosed/fenced outdoor spaces, to nearby outdoor spaces and parks, to natural Land such as forests, mountains, and prairies; the scope for quality experiences is extensive. In each context, the Indigenous approaches will centre the local Lands and be guided by local Indigenous Knowledge Keepers to validate the Land teachers of that Indigenous People’s geographic and cultural ancestries (Lawson Foundation, 2024, p. 9).

In this environmental scan, *outdoor and land-based programming* refers to outdoor and land-based experiences incorporated into early learning programs, whereas *Outdoor and Land-based Programs (OLBs)* refer to programs whose primary model of care and education is delivered outdoors in all weather and seasons. OLBs are currently unregulated in Canada.

Why This Matters

The evidence is unambiguous: high-quality outdoor and land-based learning supports physical health and motor development, social-emotional competence, ecological awareness, cultural identity, creativity, and resilience in young children (Bremner, 2026; Dietze & Kim, 2026; Green, 2022; Molyneux et al., 2023). These benefits align directly with Canada’s commitments to environmental literacy and climate action. *Canada’s Toward a National Framework for Environmental Learning* (2025) identifies environmental literacy as foundational in developing the

ecological knowledge, values, and agency that climate action requires. This reinforces the importance of children having access to natural spaces as a way to foster an understanding of the environment, climate change, and conservation of biodiversity.

Outdoor and land-based early learning and child care programs are essential for children to acquire the knowledge and skills of environmental literacy. These benefits are not incidental. They are well-documented, significant, and contingent on well-prepared educators and supportive regulatory environments (Dietze et al., 2025; Bremner, 2026). Yet for many Canadian children, access to outdoor and land-based programming is constrained by the very systems designed to support their development (Bremner, 2026; Green, 2022; Kiviranta et al., 2024). Yet the regulatory environments that govern most licensed child care in Canada were designed with indoor, facility-based programs in mind, and the fence that defines a licensed outdoor space often marks the boundary of what children are permitted to access. Regulatory and licensing barriers force many high-quality outdoor and land-based programs to operate unlicensed and ineligible for public funding. Indigenous communities face Western regulatory frameworks that constrain their ability to develop land-based programs grounded in their own knowledge systems. Students studying early childhood education lack opportunities to learn and practice in outdoor and land-based programs, and educators trained in outdoor facilitation navigate rules that prohibit the very practices research supports (Dietze & Kim, 2026; Dietze et al., 2025).

Indigenous Cultural Relevance and Responsiveness (Scope and Commitments)

This scan is grounded in a distinctions-based understanding that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples hold diverse languages, histories, legal orders, governance structures, and relationships to Land. Throughout, the scan treats Indigenous land-based pedagogy as Indigenous-governed and place-specific (not a generic version of 'outdoor learning'). The intent is to identify how current early learning and child care systems enable or constrain Indigenous self-determination in early learning, while avoiding claims about any specific Nation's protocols, priorities, or practices that can only be articulated by that Nation.

Operationally, cultural relevance and responsiveness in outdoor and land-based contexts requires attention to local authority and protocol; consent, reciprocity, and appropriate compensation for Elders and Knowledge Keepers; Indigenous data sovereignty and community expectations for stewardship of information; cultural safety and anti-racism as core quality requirements; and distinctions-based implementation that avoids pan-Indigenous approaches and reflects regional realities (urban, rural, remote, and Northern).

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system represents a landmark federal commitment to universal, affordable, and high-quality early learning and child care across

Canada. As federal and provincial governments continue to build out this infrastructure, the CWELCC framework operates as an important backdrop to this scan. Because CWELCC funding flows through provincial and territorial licensing agreements, programs that cannot obtain a license under existing regulations are ineligible for federal funding. This means that families using outdoor and land-based programs cannot access the subsidized fee structure available to those in licensed centre-based care. The findings of this scan are therefore relevant not only to provincial and territorial regulatory reform, but to the broader goal of a truly universal system that reflects the diverse needs of Canadian families and ways children learn.

3 Literature Review

The literature review synthesizes scholarship published primarily between 2019 and 2026, including peer-reviewed empirical research, policy documents, competency frameworks, implementation science, and Indigenous scholarship from Canadian and international contexts. Six thematic clusters organize the key findings.

The Developmental Benefits of Outdoor and Land-Based Learning

A substantial and growing body of research documents the developmental benefits of high-quality outdoor and land-based learning for young children. Kiviranta et al. (2024) identified six interrelated dimensions of effective outdoor learning practice: holistic development, well-being, multimodal hands-on learning, nature as a teaching and learning resource, teachers as mediators, and organizational conditions. They concluded that outdoor environments offer unique and irreplaceable learning opportunities that indoor settings cannot replicate.

Academic and Cognitive Outcomes

Outdoor and land-based programming and pedagogies have demonstrated measurable benefits for children's learning and cognitive development. A scoping review of studies involving children from early childhood through primary school found improvements across an array of learning domains including science, reading, writing, and mathematics, alongside gains in self-awareness, motivation, and well-being (Rubat du Mérac et al., 2025). Systematic reviews have found that children exposed to nature demonstrate improvements in attention, memory, and mood (Mann et al., 2022). Higher levels of green time are also associated with favourable psychological outcomes, including a potential buffering effect against the negative impacts of excessive screen time (Oswald et al., 2020).

Early Childhood and Developmental Benefits

The benefits of outdoor and land-based experiences are particularly pronounced in the earliest years. Craig et al. (2024) emphasize that from birth to age eight, children are in a critical period of rapid brain development, and that meaningful contact with nature during the first three years creates conditions for spontaneous learning that shape all future learning, behaviour, and health. Research further demonstrates that natural environments offer diverse and challenging opportunities that support multiple developmental domains, with toddlers engaging in a wide range of gross motor, exploratory, and social activities when given the freedom to interact with varied natural settings (Olsen et al., 2025). White et al. (2023) linked regular nature exposure in early childhood with reduced stress, improved attention, stronger immune function, and greater self-regulation, even from relatively brief interactions with nature.

Frances et al. (2024), examining the Australian context, confirmed near-universal integration of outdoor pedagogy in regulated early childhood education settings under the National Quality Framework, and documented a sharp developmental discontinuity when children transition to primary school settings where equivalent outdoor requirements do not apply. This finding has direct implications for Canadian policy design, where no comparable regulatory framework currently ensures continuity of outdoor and land-based learning across the early years.

Adventurous and Risky Play

Research on adventurous and risky play has become a particularly active area of scholarship relevant to early childhood educators. Sandseter et al. (2023) found associations between adventurous outdoor play and children's emotional regulation, social competence, and physical health. Beaulieu and Beno (2024) argued that healthy childhood development requires outdoor risky play and called for frameworks that support contextually informed risk-benefit judgment rather than blanket hazard elimination. A 2026 scoping review found that risk-taking in nature-based play supports executive function skills, emotional regulation, and problem-solving, and helps children build resilience (Gray et al., 2026). The 2025 Outdoor Play Canada position statement, informed by 18 literature reviews and over 200 global experts, further cautioned that overly structured and heavily supervised environments may contribute to increased anxiety in young children.

> Hazard elimination refers to the removal of perceived physical risks from the outdoor environment, prioritizing the prevention of physical injury above all other considerations.

Land-Based Pedagogies and Indigenous Perspectives

Understanding outdoor and land-based pedagogies in the Canadian context requires engagement with Indigenous perspectives, which offer a foundational framework that extends well beyond the nature-as-resource model common in mainstream Western early childhood education. Indigenous perspectives on land-based learning promote children's well-being through learning with and from traditional teachings, including recognizing human interconnectedness with the natural world and building reciprocal relationships with nature (McGlynn-Stewart et al., 2024). A three-year qualitative study of early years educators introduced to Indigenous land-based pedagogies found that children, supported by their educators, increased their sense of belonging in the world and recognized their responsibility to care for nature (McGlynn-Stewart et al., 2024). Relationships are understood as a core focal point of land-based learning: being on the land not only facilitates relationships between people, community, and all living things, but necessitates them (Bowra et al., 2021). Research shows that Indigenous children benefit especially from culturally responsive, land-based experiences with these approaches making learning more authentic and relevant, fostering engagement and persistence, and fulfilling children's basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Føns, 2025).

Implementation Gaps and the Role of Educator Preparation

Despite this compelling evidence base, significant implementation gaps persist, with unstructured and challenging outdoor experiences increasingly replaced by highly structured, adult-supervised alternatives (Harper et al., 2025). This shift has occurred alongside rising concerns about children's physical inactivity, mental health challenges, and overreliance on digital devices (Harper et al., 2025; Haidt, 2024). Patchen et al. (2024) note that while outdoor time during the program day can provide equitable access to developmental benefits, within-setting constraints continue to limit its consistent integration. The evidence collectively establishes that the benefits of outdoor and land-based pedagogy are significant, but contingent on educator preparation and pedagogical intentionality. Realizing these benefits fully will require sustained investment in educator training, meaningful engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems, and purposeful programming design. These are priorities that are increasingly urgent for early learning and child care in Canada.

Educator Competency and Professional Preparation

The literature consistently identifies a significant gap between the professional preparation educators currently receive and the competencies required for effective outdoor and land-based practice. Dietze and Cutler (2020) found that approximately 7% of post-secondary ECE programs across all provinces and territories included any outdoor or nature-based module. This figure has not meaningfully improved in subsequent years. The indoor-centric design of ECE diploma and degree curricula treats outdoor content as elective enrichment rather than core professional knowledge (Dietze & Kashin, 2019).

Kelly et al. (2026) documented how inadequate preparation leads educators to transpose indoor instructional habits to outdoor settings rather than engaging with the distinct pedagogical possibilities of natural environments. Their research identified a 'wall of occupational socialization' that newer educators encounter when attempting to implement outdoor approaches in settings where indoor-centric norms are entrenched. Howe et al. (2021) found that educators in established outdoor programs demonstrated markedly more sophisticated risk-benefit reasoning, but also reported encountering more systemic implementation barriers, suggesting that professional expertise heightens awareness of structural constraints while building capacity to navigate them.

Traynor and colleagues (2025) applied Normalisation Process Theory to outdoor learning implementation in Scottish early childhood settings, identifying practitioner capacity such as encompassing confidence, training, and personal interest in outdoor environments, as one of four critical influences, alongside policy endorsement, leadership support, and adequate resourcing. One of their key findings was that policy mandates and organizational support proved insufficient when practitioner preparation was inadequate, just as individual motivation could not compensate for absent resources or unclear policy direction.

Risk, Benefit, and Children's Rights

A distinct strand of the literature examines risk-benefit assessment as both a professional competency and a rights-based obligation (Eagar et al., 2025; Beaulieu & Beno, 2024). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly Article 31, affirming every child's right to play with opportunities for risk, exploration, and environmental engagement, provides the rights-based foundation for this work.

The Natural Start Alliance (2025) proposed benefit-risk assessment as a core professional standard for outdoor educators, recommending its integration as an explicit licensing and curriculum accountability requirement. Washington State's outdoor preschool licensing pilot provided the most detailed North American model, embedding benefit-risk assessment protocols as a central regulatory standard and replacing hazard-elimination language with structured processes supporting healthy risk-taking while maintaining accountability.

Critically, no Canadian jurisdiction has embedded risk-benefit assessment frameworks in licensing requirements, despite the availability of the open-source *Risk Benefit Assessment for Outdoor Play: A Canadian Toolkit* (Gill et al., 2019). This creates a regulatory environment that may actively undermine high-quality outdoor programming by discouraging the adventurous, child-led experiences that research identifies as developmentally essential. Beaulieu and Beno (2024) and Sandseter et al. (2023) emphasize that contemporary regulatory environments across all Canadian provinces and territories are structured around hazard elimination rather than benefit-risk assessment. This creates a regulatory contradiction in which the settings best positioned to deliver children's rights to play with adventure and risk are the most constrained by liability-driven safety requirements.

Indigenous and Land-Based Pedagogy

Protocol & Partnership Principles (for non-Indigenous-led settings)

Land-based learning is not reducible to a set of activities that can be appended to a program without relationship. In non-Indigenous-led settings, culturally responsive practice is typically characterized by engagement with local Nation(s) and protocol; avoidance of pan-Indigenous symbols or generalized teachings; appropriate compensation for Elders and Knowledge Keepers and respect for boundaries around what can be shared; attention to pedagogical documentation practices that may inadvertently appropriate or disclose protected knowledge; and use of rights- and curriculum-based frameworks (e.g., TRC, UNDRIP, IELCC) to strengthen accountability while maintaining Indigenous partners' authority in decision-making.

The literature on Indigenous and land-based pedagogy is distinct in both its epistemological foundations and its political stakes (McDonald, 2023). McDonald (2023) establishes that land-based pedagogy for Indigenous communities is inseparable from Indigenous epistemologies,

governance structures, and relationships to specific territories. It is simultaneously a pedagogical approach, a cultural resurgence practice, and an assertion of sovereignty. Bowra et al. (2021) articulate an Indigenous perspective, arguing that land-based learning cannot be reduced to outdoor activity but must be understood as a relational, reciprocal, and place-specific practice grounded in Indigenous ontologies that position land as a living relative and teacher. Peltier (2021) situates learning in Anishinaabe contexts of Land, family, and community, emphasizing relational curriculum-making and Indigenous Knowledge that comes from the Land.

Scope note: This scan synthesizes published literature and policy frameworks; it does not substitute for Indigenous-led engagement, Nation-specific ethical review, or local validation of program design. Accordingly, culturally grounded land-based early learning is best interpreted in context and under the guidance of Indigenous governments and local Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Lamb (2021) found that only 4.34% of Ontario college ECE programs included mandatory Indigenous Studies courses, and only 8.82% of graduates felt sufficiently prepared to work with Indigenous children or families. Similar patterns exist nationally. This gap is significant in Canada's territories, where Indigenous peoples are the majority and land-based learning is central to cultural survival. Ball (2021) argues that universal developmental norms rooted in Euro-Western worldviews fail to serve Indigenous children and families, calling for culturally relevant, relational approaches to assessment designed with Indigenous families and communities rather than applied to them.

The Indoor-Centric Default: Organizational and Systemic Barriers

Individual educator practice cannot be understood or improved in isolation from the organizational and systemic contexts that enable or constrain it (Lawson Foundation, 2025; Deding & Minnaert, 2024). Kelly et al. (2026) document how the primacy of indoor environments creates an organizational standard that outdoor pedagogy must continually work against, positioning educators who prioritize outdoor practice as operating outside rather than within professional norms. Addressing this requires not only individual professional development but organizational culture change, with leaders actively modeling and resourcing outdoor practice (Kiviranta et al., 2024; OECD, 2025).

Prince and Diggory (2024) revealed how inspection and accountability frameworks shape de facto professional standards. In England, outdoor learning references in Ofsted inspection reports were heavily concentrated in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where access to outdoor environments is a statutory requirement, and were largely absent from primary school inspections where outdoor provision is discretionary. This reinforces the importance of professional standards of practice being embedded within accountability structures to achieve sustainable influence on

practice. Scotland's Care Inspectorate model, which explicitly recognizes and affirms outdoor learning as a quality indicator within its inspection framework for all early learning and child care settings, provides a contrasting international model worthy of adaptation (Care Inspectorate & His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, 2025).

International Evidence: Proven Approaches

Regulatory adaptation to support outdoor and land-based pedagogy is not experimental. It has been successfully implemented in multiple international jurisdictions:

International Precedents

Washington State (USA): Permanent licensing framework for outdoor nature-based early learning and child care with adapted requirements enables programs to operate in forests, parks, and beaches with portable shelters and partnership agreements.

Germany & Denmark: Forest kindergartens formally integrated into public education systems for decades. Adapted requirements recognize outdoor environments as legitimate learning settings while maintaining quality oversight.

Scotland: National outdoor play strategy with coordinated implementation support across policy, professional learning, and practice levels. Care Inspectorate explicitly recognizes outdoor learning as a quality indicator.

Norway: Risk-benefit approaches embedded in early childhood regulation and practice. Educators supported to make contextually informed judgments about appropriate challenge rather than applying blanket restriction.

Australia: Bush kindergarten models integrated within the National Quality Framework, with documented evidence of developmental benefits and implementation feasibility.

Taken together, these precedents demonstrate that regulatory adaptation for outdoor and land-based pedagogy is not only feasible but well-established across diverse jurisdictions, regulatory cultures, and geographic contexts. In each case, jurisdictions moved beyond treating outdoor environments as exceptions to standard licensing requirements and instead developed frameworks that recognize them as legitimate, high-quality learning settings in their own right. The common thread across these models is intentionality: success has depended not on deregulation, but on thoughtful reframing of quality standards, investment in professional preparation, and alignment between policy, inspection, and practice. For Canada, these precedents offer not a single template to replicate, but a body of evidence that principled, context-sensitive regulatory reform is both achievable and developmentally warranted.

4 Early Learning and Child Care Regulations

This section synthesizes the regulatory landscape across all 13 Canadian provinces and territories as it pertains to outdoor and land-based programming. Analysis is organized around five key themes: outdoor space requirements, time requirements, supervision and safety, field trips and beyond-the-fence programming, and Indigenous provisions.

Beyond-the-Fence refers to programming that takes place outside a licensed facility's fenced or defined premises, such as parks, trails, and other natural environments.

Universal Baseline and What Is Missing

All 13 provinces and territories state outdoor play as a requirement, typically specifying minimum daily time (ranging from 1 to 2 hours) and minimum outdoor space allocations. This pan-Canadian baseline reflects recognition that outdoor access is foundational to children's health and development. However, regulations uniformly treat outdoor experiences as a compliance requirement. It appears to be more of a checkbox specifying time and space minimums, rather than as a distinct pedagogical approach requiring intentional facilitation.

What Regulations Emphasize vs. What Is Missing

EMPHASIZED: Prescriptive fencing and enclosure requirements • Canadian Standards Association (CSA) approved surfacing materials (excluding natural terrain) • Equipment height restrictions • Mandatory line-of-sight supervision • Shade and hazard prevention protocols • Daily minimum outdoor time

LARGELY MISSING: Pedagogical framing of outdoor environments as intentional learning contexts • Risk-benefit guidance • Indigenous land-based pedagogy • Clear guidance for outdoor programs and beyond-the-fence programs • Outdoor and land-based pedagogy-based learning definitions • Outdoor and land-Based-specific educator competency expectations

Jurisdictional Overview: Regulations

Provinces and territories are listed in alphabetical order below in Table 1.

TABLE 1 REGULATIONS

Province/Territory	Min. Outdoor Time	Space Req. (per child)	CSA Standards	Field Trip Guidance	Indigenous Provisions
Alberta	Daily (unspecified)	4.5 m² (19m+); 2 m² (infant)	Referenced	Standard field trip rules	Absent
British Columbia	Daily (unspecified)	6.0 m²	Referenced	General excursion rules	Limited – minimal in regulation
Manitoba	Daily	7.0 m²	Referenced	Standard field trip rules	Absent
New Brunswick	Daily, all weather	4.5 m²	Not mentioned	Standard field trip rules	Indigenous curriculum approval option
Newfoundland & Labrador	Daily	7.0 m²	Not mentioned	Standard field trip rules	Indigenous engagement in development
Northwest Territories	Daily	5 m²	Not mentioned	Standard field trip rules	Limited Indigenous pedagogy reference
Nova Scotia	Daily	7.0 m²	Referenced	Standard field trip rules	Limited
Nunavut	Daily	5 m²	CSA if new space	Standard field trip rules	Limited despite Indigenous majority
Ontario	2 hours/day (6+ hr programs)	5.6 m²	CAN/CSA Z614 required	Limited detail	First Nations self-governance provisions
Prince Edward Island	Daily	7.0 m²	Not mentioned	Standard field trip rules	Limited
Quebec	Daily	4.2 m²	CSA required	Standard field trip rules	Absent
Saskatchewan	Not specified	7 m² (min); 9–18 m² (best practice)	New structures CSA required	Detailed excursion protocol	Cultural competence in training
Yukon	Daily	5 m²	CSA required	Standard field trip rules	Limited

These findings reveal a fundamental tension at the heart of Canadian outdoor play regulation. While all jurisdictions formally require outdoor time, the regulatory framework is constructed almost entirely around physical safety and spatial compliance rather than pedagogical intention. Requirements specify where children may play and for how long but are largely silent on how educators could facilitate that play, what learning is expected to occur, and what professional competencies are required to support it.

The result is a regulatory environment that can accommodate outdoor time without meaningfully supporting outdoor learning. Closing the gap between outdoor access as a compliance obligation and outdoor and land-based pedagogies as a recognized professional practice is the central regulatory challenge this proposal seeks to address.

Key Regulatory Tensions

Five fundamental tensions emerge from the cross-jurisdictional regulatory analysis:

Tension 1: Compliance vs. Pedagogy

Current regulations frame outdoor play as a checkbox (daily time requirements, space allocations) rather than as a pedagogical approach with intentionality and learning outcomes. The gap between early learning frameworks that position outdoor environments as rich learning contexts and regulations that treat them as supplementary spaces creates fragmentation and undermines quality. Regulations must explicitly articulate outdoor environments as intentional pedagogical contexts that support distinct forms of learning, not merely spaces for physical activity.

Tension 2: Risk Elimination vs. Risk Management

Regulations emphasize safety through restriction such as fencing, approved surfaces, and line-of-sight supervision, while providing no guidance on supporting children's adventurous and challenging play. This eliminates challenge from children's environments, paradoxically increasing both physical and psychological risk by preventing competence development. No Canadian jurisdiction has embedded risk-benefit assessment frameworks in licensing requirements. A shift from risk elimination to risk-benefit frameworks is required that balances safety with developmental rights.

Tension 3: Universal Standards vs. Cultural Self-Determination

Standardized regulations impose Western assumptions about childhood and appropriate environments, constraining Indigenous communities' ability to develop land-based programs grounded in their own epistemologies and governance structures. Virtually no recognition of Indigenous land-based pedagogy appears in regulations across the country, despite Canada's commitments to reconciliation, UNDRIP, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. Distinct regulatory pathways for Indigenous-governed, land-based programs are urgently needed.

Tension 4: Indoor-Centric Models vs. Outdoor and Land-Based Program Viability

Licensing requirements designed for facility-based early learning and child care create barriers for programs operating primarily outdoors. Outdoor and land-based programs (OLBs) generally refer to programs that operate primarily outdoors and on the land for most of the scheduled day, across

all seasons and weather (Lawson Foundation, 2025). These programs are intentionally uncontained, with learning unfolding through direct relationships with the natural world and the people within that space. Many operate as beyond-the-fence programs, where standard indoor facility requirements simply cannot apply.

The regulatory gap is particularly striking when considered alongside existing practice. Licensed, facility-based programs may take children on field trips outdoors to engage in precisely the kind of land-based activity that defines OLBs, without any additional oversight or regulatory scrutiny. Programs for which outdoor and land-based experiences are not an occasional excursion but the entire programming model are excluded from the licensed system altogether. Because outdoor and land-based programs cannot meet indoor facility requirements, many are forced to operate unlicensed and ineligible for public funding. A differentiated licensing pathway is required to accommodate diverse program models while maintaining quality oversight.

Tension 5: Equity Intentions vs. Access Barriers

While early learning and child care systems aim for universal access, licensing incompatibility prevents OLBs from accessing public funding, limiting participation to higher-income families who can afford private-pay services. This inequity is compounded at the federal level by the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system. Although CWELCC represents a landmark commitment to universal, affordable, high-quality child care with a target of $10-a-day fees for families, its funding flows exclusively through provincial and territorial licensing agreements. Because OLBs cannot obtain a license under existing regulations, they are ineligible for CWELCC funding, meaning families using these programs cannot access the subsidized fee structure available to those in licensed centre-based care. The system designed to make child care affordable for all Canadian families is, in its current form, structurally inaccessible to an entire pedagogy of early learning.

This is further compounded by the fact that many families who choose OLBs do not require full-time child care, yet the current funding and licensing structure is designed around full-time, facility-based attendance models. Families seeking part-time or flexible OLB options find themselves doubly excluded. They are unable to access public subsidies and unable to find programming that fits their needs within the regulated system. This creates a troubling two-tier system where evidence-based, developmentally beneficial outdoor and land-based learning becomes a privilege rather than a universal right.

5 Early Learning Frameworks

Canada's early learning frameworks present a markedly more progressive vision of outdoor and land-based pedagogy than their regulatory counterparts. Across all 13 jurisdictions, frameworks consistently position outdoor environments as rich, intentional learning contexts, yet this progressive vision is rarely reflected in the licensing regulations that govern program delivery. This section summarizes key themes from the frameworks and presents jurisdictional comparisons.

The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework

The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (IELCC, 2018) sets a shared national vision for ELCC that is culturally rooted, led by Indigenous peoples, and is distinctions-based across First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. Co-developed with Indigenous partners after comprehensive national engagement, the IELCC emphasizes Indigenous knowledges, languages, and cultures as the foundation of identity and wellbeing. It affirms children's sacred place and the sacred responsibility to care for them and supports ELCC as a vehicle for language and cultural revitalization, healing, and reconciliation. Outdoor and land-based learning are implicitly central to the IELCC's vision, though not explicitly named in all excerpted sections.

Jurisdictional Early Learning Framework Analysis

Table 2 below summarizes key findings within each provincial and territorial early learning framework with respect to outdoor pedagogy, Indigenous content, and alignment with licensing regulations. Jurisdictions are listed in alphabetical order.

Note: *The 'Framework-Regulation Alignment' column reflects the degree of alignment or divergence. 'Large divergence' means the framework is significantly more progressive than the regulations as in British Columbia, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, reflecting the strength of their Early Learning Frameworks rather than a weakness.*

TABLE 2 EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORKS

Province/Territory	Framework	Outdoor Pedagogy Emphasis	Indigenous Content	Framework-Regulation Alignment
Alberta	FLIGHT	Strong – purposeful outdoor environments, risk-taking, seasonal engagement	Absent	Moderate divergence
British Columbia	BC Early Learning Framework	Strong – land as teacher, living inquiry, pedagogical narration	Very strong – First Peoples Principles of Learning, UNDRIP, reconciliation	Weak – large divergence
Manitoba	Early Returns	Moderate – outdoor connection to nature, daily play	Absent	Moderate divergence
New Brunswick	NB Curriculum Framework	Strong – daily outdoor in all weather, healthy risk-taking, wild places	Limited – cited; Minister may approve Indigenous curriculum	Moderate divergence
Newfoundland & Labrador	Navigating the Early Years	Moderate – seasonal outdoor experiences, physical development	Limited – Indigenous engagement in development process	Moderate divergence
Northwest Territories	NWT Early Learning Framework	Strong – land-based, inseparable from identity, risky play	Very strong – Indigenous worldviews foundational, 11 official languages	Large divergence
Nova Scotia	Capable, Confident and Curious	Moderate – outdoor play as part of whole child development	Limited	Moderate divergence
Nunavut	Nunavut ELCC Framework	Strong – land-based, cultural grounding	Strong – Indigenous culture central	Large divergence
Ontario	How Does Learning Happen?	Moderate – inquiry, play, exploration indoors and outdoors	Limited	Moderate divergence
Prince Edward Island	PEI Early Learning Framework	Moderate – outdoor access and nature connection	Limited	Moderate divergence
Quebec	Accueillir la petite enfance	Moderate – daily outdoor access emphasized	Absent	Moderate divergence
Saskatchewan	Play and Exploration	Moderate – outdoor yards as extensions of indoor learning, well-being	Moderate – cultural competence, Natural Curiosity resource	Partial alignment
Yukon	Yukon Framework	Moderate – outdoor and nature connection	Partial	Moderate divergence

National Policy Contradiction: Frameworks Affirm What Regulations Exclude

Analysis of early learning frameworks across all 13 Canadian provinces and territories reveals a consistent and striking pattern: every jurisdiction acknowledges outdoor pedagogy in its early learning framework, yet no jurisdiction has updated its licensing regulations to match. This gap exists from coast to coast to coast.

The ambition of Canada's early learning frameworks is not in question. British Columbia's framework explicitly embeds the First Peoples Principles of Learning and UNDRIP; the Northwest Territories framework grounds its entire approach in Indigenous worldviews across eleven official languages; Nunavut places Indigenous culture and land-based experience at the centre of its vision for children. Alberta and New Brunswick demonstrate strong commitments to outdoor pedagogy, including healthy risk-taking and all-weather learning. These frameworks represent genuine policy leadership.

It is precisely the jurisdictions that have most meaningfully honoured Indigenous knowledge and outdoor pedagogy in their curriculum documents that show the largest framework-regulation divergence. This divergence should be read as a measure of how far ahead their frameworks are, not how poorly their systems perform. British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut have done the most to affirm Indigenous ways of knowing at the framework level; their regulations simply have not yet caught up. The policy direction is clear. The regulatory infrastructure has not followed.

No jurisdiction achieves strong alignment between framework and regulation. Saskatchewan comes closest with partial alignment; all others show moderate to large divergence. Closing this gap requires bringing licensing regulations into coherence with commitments already made.

The Framework-Regulation Gap

The most consistent finding across the jurisdictional analysis is the gap between progressive frameworks and compliance-oriented licensing regulations. This gap is widest in the territories, particularly in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, where frameworks are explicitly land-based and ground outdoor learning in Indigenous epistemologies and cultural survival, but regulations apply standard southern compliance models with little acknowledgment of these distinct contexts.

British Columbia presents the starkest contrast: its Early Learning Framework codes extremely high for Indigenous pedagogies (55 instances) and land-based learning (31 instances), while its Community Care and Assisted Living Act Regulation contains virtually no reference to either. Alberta's FLIGHT framework frames outdoor environments as sites of meaning-making and inquiry while its regulation defines them as controlled, enclosed, and maintained spaces. This divergence, which appears repeated across every jurisdiction, reflects a structural issue in which Indigenous and land-based pedagogies are central to curriculum vision but absent from regulatory infrastructure.

6 Standards of Practice for Early Childhood Educators

Standards of Practice are meant to define the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and professional behaviours required to practice competently within a profession (Office of the Superintendent of Professional Governance, British Columbia, 2023; NAEYC, 2019). They serve as a shared reference point for educator preparation, professional certification, program quality assurance, regulatory oversight, and ongoing professional development. This section examines how Standards of Practice across Canada address, or more specifically fail to address, outdoor and land-based pedagogy.

What is a Standard of Practice?

A Standard of Practice is a formally established set of expectations that defines the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and professional behaviours required to practice competently within a given profession or field. Standards of Practice serve as a shared reference point for educator preparation, professional certification, program quality assurance, regulatory oversight, and ongoing professional development. Standards of Practice focus on the professional practitioner: what they know, what they can do, and how they approach their work ethically and reflectively. In early childhood education, Standards of Practice typically articulate competencies across domains such as child development, curriculum, relationships, and professional conduct. For outdoor and land-based early learning, they would additionally encompass ecological literacy, Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing, risk-benefit assessment, and land-based pedagogical competence – areas that are currently absent from existing ECE standards across all Canadian jurisdictions.

Existing Standards of Practice Across Canada

Standards of Practice for early childhood educators are limited across Canada. Those that exist do not acknowledge outdoor and land-based pedagogy. Some jurisdictions have formal, enforced standards through regulatory colleges or registries (Ontario, British Columbia) or government (Nova Scotia); others rely on professional associations; most have no formal standards at all. Table 3 below summarizes the status of Standards of Practice and their treatment of outdoor/land-based pedagogy. Jurisdictions are listed in alphabetical order.

TABLE 3 STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

Jurisdiction	Standards Body	Standards Format	Outdoor Pedagogical Content	Indigenous Content
Alberta	AECEA / Government	Professional Standards	Absent	Absent
British Columbia	ECEBC / ECE Registry	Professional Standards & Code of Ethics	Absent as defined competency	Limited
Manitoba	MCCA / Government	Guidelines	Absent	Absent
New Brunswick	Government / Quality Framework	Guidelines & Quality Framework	Limited	Limited
Newfoundland & Labrador	AECE-NL	Association guidelines	Absent	Limited
Northwest Territories	Government	None formally	Absent	Limited
Nova Scotia	Government	Standards of Practice	Absent	Limited
Nunavut	Government	None formally	Absent	Limited
Ontario	College of ECE	Code of Ethics & Standards	Absent	Absent
Prince Edward Island	PEI Regulatory Body	Association guidelines	Absent	Absent
Quebec	No regulatory college	Association guidelines only	Absent	Absent
Saskatchewan	SECA / Government	Guidelines	Absent	Limited
Yukon	Government	None formally	Absent	Limited

The table surveys early childhood education standards across all 13 Canadian provinces and territories, examining the standards body responsible, the format of standards used, and the inclusion of two key content areas: outdoor pedagogical content and Indigenous content.

Standards Bodies & Formats

Regulatory approaches vary considerably. Some jurisdictions have professional regulatory bodies (e.g., Ontario's College of ECE, BC's ECE Registry), while others rely on government departments or associations. The formats range from formal *Standards of Practice* and *Codes of Ethics* (BC, Ontario, Nova Scotia) to looser *Guidelines* (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick) or no formal standards at all (Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Yukon).

Outdoor and Land-based Content

Outdoor and land-based content is almost entirely absent across all 13 jurisdictions. British Columbia is the sole partial exception, where it appears as a limited competency area rather than a defined standard.

Indigenous Content

Indigenous content fares only slightly better. While absent in five jurisdictions (Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, PEI, Quebec), it is described as "limited" in the remaining eight – suggesting some minimal acknowledgment, but no jurisdiction has embedded it as a robust or formal competency.

Key Learning

Across Canada, ECE professional standards show a systemic gap in both outdoor/land-based and Indigenous content, with no jurisdiction fully addressing either area. This points to a significant opportunity for national and regional reform in ECE competency frameworks.

Eight Core Competency Domains

Based on the review of Canadian and international research, eight core competency domains emerge as foundational to safe, ethical, and pedagogically rigorous outdoor and land-based practice. These domains are deeply interconnected; expert practice involves integrating them simultaneously in response to children, context, environment, and community. Table 4 outlines eight Competency Domains that describe what educators are expected to demonstrate in each area of outdoor and land-based teaching and learning.

TABLE 4 COMPETENCY DOMAINS

#	Competency Domain	What Educators Demonstrate
1	Child Development & Pedagogical Knowledge	Deep understanding of child development, play-based and inquiry-driven learning, applied in outdoor contexts where traditional classroom indicators may not apply.
2	Ecological & Environmental Literacy	Foundational knowledge of local ecosystems, seasonal patterns, flora and fauna, and environmental stewardship – enabling authentic inquiry, safety awareness, and climate education.
3	Indigenous Perspectives & Ways of Knowing	Understanding of Indigenous land-based pedagogies, local Indigenous histories and territories, TRC obligations, treaty education, and respectful community engagement with Elders and Knowledge Keepers.
4	Cultural Humility & Relational Practice	Culturally responsive practice grounded in humility, ethical engagement, and respect for diverse community contexts – recognizing that relationships with land and nature are culturally shaped.
5	Health, Safety & Risk-Benefit Competence	Informed risk-benefit assessment that preserves opportunities for challenge and growth. Includes emergency preparedness, first aid, weather literacy, and environmental hazard awareness.
6	Reflective, Ethical & Professional Practice	Critical reflection on practice, ethical decision-making in dynamic environments, pedagogical documentation, and commitment to ongoing professional learning and collaboration.
7	Outdoor & Land-Based Pedagogical Competence	Ability to design, implement, and reflect on learning experiences using land, seasonal change, and natural materials as active pedagogical tools – across diverse ecosystems, weather conditions, and cultural contexts.
8	Children's Rights, Voice & Participatory Practice	Upholding children's rights to participate in decisions affecting them, co-constructing curriculum alongside children, supporting autonomy and agency, and treating children as capable knowledge-holders.

Overall, the table presents a holistic framework for educators working in outdoor and land-based learning environments, with a strong emphasis on ecological knowledge, Indigenous perspectives, cultural sensitivity, and child agency.

Competency Coverage by Jurisdiction

Table 5 summarizes recognition of selected competency domains across post-secondary programs (P), early learning frameworks (F), and licensing regulations (R). Coverage scale: Absent = no recognition | Limited = minimal | Partial = some content, not required | Present = formally required. Jurisdictions are listed in alphabetical order (AB, BC, MB, NB, NL, NT, NS, NU, ON, PEI, QC, SK, YT).

TABLE 5 COMPETENCY COVERAGE

Domain	AB	BC	MB	NB	NL	NT	NS	NU	ON	PEI	QC	SK	YT
Ecological Literacy (F)	L	L	L	L	L	P	L	P	L	L	L	L	P
Ecological Literacy (R)	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Indigenous Knowing (P)	L	L	L	A	L	P	L	P	A	A	A	L	P
Indigenous Knowing (F)	L	P	L	L	L	P	L	P	L	L	A	L	P
Risk-Benefit (R)	L	L	L	A	A	A	L	A	L	L	L	L	A
OLB Competence (P)	L	L	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
OLB Competence (R)	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A

The competency coverage table above reveals a striking and consistent pattern across all 13 Canadian provinces and territories. Ecological literacy is partially present in early learning frameworks in the territories (Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Yukon) and largely limited or absent elsewhere and is entirely absent as a requirement in licensing regulations across every jurisdiction. Indigenous knowing shows slightly stronger recognition in frameworks, particularly in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon, but remains absent or limited in post-secondary programs in most jurisdictions. Risk-benefit assessment receives limited recognition in regulations across most provinces but is wholly absent in Alberta, Newfoundland & Labrador, Nunavut, and Yukon. Most critically, outdoor and land-based pedagogical competence is absent from licensing regulations in every single jurisdiction, and is present only at a limited level in Alberta, British Columbia and New Brunswick post-secondary programs. Taken together, the table confirms that the competencies most essential to quality outdoor and land-based practice have not been systematically embedded in any of the three policy instruments – regulations, frameworks, or standards – in any Canadian jurisdiction.

Reconciliation as a Professional Obligation

The integration of Indigenous knowledge and land-based learning is not an optional enhancement to outdoor and land-based programming. It is a professional and ethical obligation. Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, UNDRIP, and the IELCC Framework all provide rights-based grounding for this work.

Educators in outdoor and land-based programming are often learning and playing within Indigenous homelands and/or on Lands that are subject to Treaty and other Indigenous–Crown relationships. These places have histories, responsibilities, and protocols that predate colonial structures. Understanding whose Lands we are on, following local protocols, and building reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities can shift how educators approach Land: from a resource to be used, to a teacher to learn from and a relation to care for. As McDonald (2023) emphasizes, Indigenous land-based pedagogy is inseparable from Indigenous epistemologies, governance, and relationships to specific territories, resulting in positioning educator preparation in this area as a matter of professional competency and ethical responsibility.

7 Cross-Cutting Themes

The Critical Four-Way Disconnect

Across all 13 Canadian jurisdictions, the same structural disconnect persists: early learning frameworks philosophically endorse outdoor and land-based learning; post-secondary programs inadequately prepare educators for these contexts; licensing regulations prioritize safety compliance over pedagogical competence; and where Standards of Practice exist, none explicitly identify outdoor or land-based competencies. This four-way disconnect has serious consequences for children's access to quality outdoor learning, for educator professional identity, and for Canada's obligations under the TRC Calls to Action, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and UNDRIP. The scholarly dimensions of this disconnect are examined in a companion article currently in preparation by the authors that situates these findings within the broader academic literature on standards of practice, educator competency, and outdoor and land-based policy reform.

The Critical Four-Way Disconnect

1. Early Learning Frameworks: Philosophically endorse outdoor and land-based learning as central to quality.

2. Standards of Practice: None in any Canadian jurisdiction explicitly identify outdoor or land-based competencies.

3. Post-Secondary Programs: Only ~7% include any outdoor/nature-based module; ~4% include mandatory Indigenous Studies.

4. Licensing Regulations: Prioritize safety compliance; no risk-benefit assessment; no OLB-specific competency expectations.

The following **six cross-cutting themes** bring the four-way disconnect to life through concrete evidence drawn from Canadian regulations, early learning frameworks, and standards of practice. Each one represents both a current gap and a clear opportunity for action. Together, they set the stage for the recommendations that follow.

1. The Framework-Regulation Gap: Provincial and territorial early learning frameworks are consistently more progressive than licensing regulations. This gap is widest in the territories, where frameworks are explicitly land-based but regulations apply standard southern compliance models.

2. Indigenous Land-Based Pedagogy: Indigenous land-based pedagogy is absent from regulations and standards of practice across the country, despite Canada's TRC Calls to Action and UNDRIP commitments – a gap that is most acute in the territories where Indigenous peoples are the majority.

3. Ecological Literacy: Ecological literacy is absent as a defined educator competency across all 13 jurisdictions. This is a striking gap given Canada's extraordinary ecological diversity and its commitment, through *Canada's Toward a National Framework for Environmental Learning* (2025), to building the ecological knowledge and agency that climate action requires.

4. Risk-Benefit Assessment: No jurisdiction has embedded risk-benefit assessment frameworks in licensing requirements, potentially creating regulatory environments that actively undermine high-quality outdoor programming.

5. Children's Rights: Children's rights under UNCRC and UNDRIP are acknowledged in many frameworks but are not evident in the regulatory requirements that govern daily practice.

6. Accountability: Across all 13 jurisdictions, there is no accountability mechanism that requires any of the four components – early learning frameworks, licensing regulations, standards of practice, or post-secondary preparation – to align with one another. Early learning frameworks can endorse outdoor and land-based learning without any obligation on regulators to follow. Post-secondary programs can graduate educators without outdoor and land-based competencies without consequence. There is no obligation for provinces, territories, or associations to establish standards of practice. Until accountability mechanisms are built across all four components simultaneously – through inspection frameworks that assess outdoor and land-based practice, post-secondary requirements to include OLB competencies, and standards of practice with regulatory force – the four-way disconnect will persist regardless of how progressive individual early learning frameworks become.

8 Recommendations

The cross-cutting themes above establish the "So What" – how the four-way disconnect is playing out across Canadian systems. This section moves to the "Now What." Recommendations are organized into four action pathways, each with a clear audience for action: System Alignment, Regulatory Reform, Early Learning Framework Development, and Educator Preparation and Professional Learning (including Standards of Practice). These pathways are not sequential; progress on all four simultaneously is required.

Pathway 1: System Alignment

Responsible parties: Provincial and territorial governments; Indigenous governments; licensing bodies; post-secondary institutions; professional associations; sector researchers and funders.

The evidence presented in this scan points to a single, urgent conclusion: piecemeal reform will not close the four-way disconnect. Amending regulations without reforming post-secondary preparation, updating early learning frameworks without revising standards of practice, or developing professional competencies without aligning licensing accountability will each, in isolation, leave the structural problem intact. What is required is a coordinated, government-led, community-participatory reform of all four components simultaneously – early learning frameworks, licensing regulations, standards of practice, and post-secondary preparation – designed from the outset to move together.

- Establish a government-led Outdoor and Land-based Early Learning Reform Table that includes Indigenous communities, educators, families, licensing bodies, post-secondary institutions, and researchers as co-designers for system-wide change for outdoor and land-based programming.
- Align licensing regulations with early learning frameworks; resolve the structural contradiction between progressive framework language and compliance-oriented regulation.
- Use regulatory reform as the legislative vehicle to mandate alignment across funding and subsidy structures, professional preparation standards, and quality assessment frameworks, ensuring that all components advance simultaneously.
- Centre Indigenous self-determination throughout implementation, ensuring Indigenous-led land-based programs have distinct, Nation-led pathways developed in partnership rather than being absorbed into existing Euro-Western regulatory structures.
- Build in knowledge mobilization from the start by embedding community feedback loops, practitioner-led documentation, and cross-jurisdictional learning exchanges throughout the reform process.
- Develop public-facing accountability mechanisms that track progress across all four components, with transparent reporting to governments, communities, and families.

Pathway 2: Regulatory Reform

Responsible parties: Provincial and territorial governments

Access to high-quality, outdoor and land-based learning across a variety of environments and landscapes is a universal equity issue. Every child in Canada, regardless of family income, geographic location, or ability, deserves meaningful engagement with outdoor and land-based programming. Regulatory reform in multiple domains is required to enable equitable access to high-quality learning experiences for all children.

2.a. Risk, Challenge, and Children's Rights

Canada's regulatory frameworks are built around blanket hazard elimination, an approach the evidence consistently identifies as developmentally counterproductive. Children denied adventurous and risky play miss critical opportunities for resilience, self-regulation, and physical competence. Yet no Canadian jurisdiction has embedded risk-benefit assessment in licensing requirements, despite available Canadian toolkits and clear obligations under UNCRC Article 31. Reform must shift the foundational logic from hazard elimination to risk-benefit assessment.

- Adopt risk-benefit assessment frameworks in licensing regulations; replace blanket hazard elimination models with structured processes supporting healthy risk-taking.
- Revise restrictive fencing, surfacing, and equipment requirements that prevent authentic outdoor and land-based learning.
- Explicitly permit risky play (climbing, tool use, rough play, graduated independence) as developmentally beneficial.
- Shift supervision from mandatory line-of-sight to risk-assessed approaches supporting child agency.
- Integrate children's rights (UNCRC Article 31; UNDRIP) as a foundational principle in licensing frameworks.

2.b Indigenous Self-Determination and Land-Based Pedagogy

Indigenous land-based pedagogy is a distinct, sovereign practice inseparable from Indigenous epistemologies, governance, and relationships to specific territories. Current regulations impose Western facility-based standards that constrain Indigenous communities' ability to develop land-based programs on their own terms. Canada's commitments under the TRC Calls to Action, UNDRIP, and the IELCC Framework are not aspirational. These are obligations.

- Enable Indigenous governance of land-based early learning through distinctions-based pathways (First Nations, Inuit, Métis) that recognize Indigenous jurisdiction, local legal orders, and Nation-to-Nation relationships.

- Recognize Elders' and Knowledge Keepers' roles as educators and leaders in outdoor and land-based programs; ensure policies address protocol, consent, and compensation, and remove credential requirements that unintentionally exclude community-authorized educators.
- Co-develop regulatory approaches that are distinctions-based and regionally responsive and embed cultural safety as a quality requirement (including anti-racism, language revitalization supports, and community-defined indicators of quality).
- Provide sustained, flexible resources for Indigenous-led program development (transportation, equipment, staffing, time on the Land), including dedicated funding for relationship-building and ongoing community guidance.
- Clarify terminology and accountability: reserve 'Indigenous land-based' for Indigenous-led or Indigenous-governed programming; for non-Indigenous-led programs, set expectations for partnership, protocol, and cultural safety when learning on the Land.

2.c. Facility-based ELCC programs: Within and Beyond the Fence

Existing regulations constrain outdoor and land-based learning without providing sufficient oversight for beyond-the-fence programming in facility-based programs. Small outdoor spaces with a reliance on fixed playground equipment and insufficient natural materials and loose parts constrain outdoor and risky play. A licensed facility-based program may take children to a forest or local park with no additional considerations to support outdoor and land-based programming.

- Adapt facility and material requirements with greater flexibility for outdoor and land-based programming; streamline approval processes.
- Consider community assets in the licensing process as a way to expand the range of outdoor environments available to programs
- Create OLB-specific guidance for programs operating regularly in natural environments beyond licensed premises; distinguish regular outdoor and land-based programming from occasional field trips.
- Require continuous professional learning for program staff focused on outdoor and land-based knowledge and competencies.

2.d. Distinct Regulatory Category for Outdoor and Land-based Programs (OLBs)

Outdoor and land-based programs are ineligible for public funding and cannot obtain licenses under current child care legislation. This exclusion means that a form of learning with well-documented benefits for children's development and wellbeing remains entirely outside the publicly funded system. Until outdoor and land-based programs can access licensing and public funding on equal terms with conventional child care, a foundational barrier exists.

- Create differentiated licensing pathways for OLBs – drawing on models from Washington State, Germany, and Denmark.

- Ensure licensing reforms explicitly enable public funding for OLBs, ensuring programming is accessible across income levels.
- Ensure funding supports programs in providing gear so that children's access to OLBs is not determined by a family's ability to equip them for outdoor conditions.
- Enable partnerships with municipalities, conservation authorities, and land managers through template agreements addressing liability, access, and use expectations.
- Support diverse geographic contexts – urban, rural, remote, Northern – and require accessibility for children with diverse abilities.

Pathway 3: Early Learning Framework Development

Responsible parties: Provincial and territorial governments; early learning framework developers; Indigenous governments and organizations

Canada's early learning frameworks already affirm outdoor and land-based learning more strongly than licensing regulations. The task is to consolidate and extend that leadership to ensure frameworks explicitly name outdoor and land-based learning as a distinct pedagogical approach and reflect Indigenous land-based epistemologies under Nation-level guidance.

- Update frameworks in all jurisdictions to explicitly name outdoor and land-based learning as a distinct pedagogical approach, not simply a component of general outdoor play.
- Establish formal mechanisms requiring regulations to align with framework commitments; resolve the structural gap between progressive framework language and compliance-oriented licensing.
- Embed Indigenous land-based learning in frameworks through Nation-to-Nation co-development processes, ensuring cultural specificity and Indigenous authority rather than pan-Indigenous generalization.
- Integrate the eight core competency domains into framework guidance so that ecological literacy, risk-benefit assessment, and land-based approaches are positioned as expected elements of program quality, not optional enhancements.

Pathway 4: Educator Preparation and Professional Learning (including Standards of Practice)

Responsible parties: Post-secondary institutions; provincial and territorial ECE regulatory bodies and professional associations; provincial/territorial governments

Regulatory reform will require educators to have the knowledge and skills to bring outdoor and land-based learning to life. This scan found that ecological literacy is absent from provincial and territorial programming documents and that no jurisdiction has embedded outdoor or land-based competence as a licensing requirement. Educator preparation must be treated as a central pillar that is built deliberately, funded adequately, and held to the same standard of accountability as the regulatory changes that accompany it.

- Develop Standards of Practice for outdoor and land-based ECE through a collaborative and regionally responsive process.
- Integrate the eight core competency domains into post-secondary ECE program standards across all jurisdictions as core curriculum.
- Provide accessible professional learning for practicing educators; train regulatory staff to support outdoor and land-based approaches, including risk-benefit assessment processes.
- Embed outdoor and land-based learning as an explicit quality indicator in accountability frameworks.

9 Conclusion

This Environmental Scan set out to map the outdoor and land-based early learning landscape in Canada. What has been missing is a clear, coordinated picture of exactly where the system stands and what needs to happen simultaneously across all four components. This scan provides that picture.

Findings illustrate that a four-way disconnect among licensing regulations, early learning frameworks, standards of practice, and post-secondary preparation is real. The cross-cutting themes show precisely how the disconnect is playing out – from the absence of standards of practice, ecological literacy, and Indigenous land-based pedagogy, to the constraint of the adventurous play children need. These are not isolated problems. They are expressions of the same structural gap.

The four action pathways identified translate this evidence into a concrete agenda: system alignment, regulatory reform, early learning framework development, and educator preparation and professional learning are not separate projects. Rather, they are four levers that work best when pulled together. International models from Washington State, Germany, Denmark, Scotland and Australia show this is achievable. Indigenous scholarship provides the ethical grounding. The CWELCC moment provides the policy opening. Canada has everything it needs to close the four-way disconnect and every reason to move now. With collective approaches, system reform can be accomplished for the benefit of all young children in Canada.

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Appendix A: Jurisdictional Regulatory Summary

The following provides expanded details on outdoor and land-based regulatory provisions for each province and territory, organized by the eight categories used in the jurisdictional scan: (1) Regulations & Supervision, (2) Outdoor Space Requirements, (3) Time Requirements, (4) Safety, (5) Field Trips/Excursions, (6) Pedagogical Framing, (7) Indigenous Connections, and (8) Indigenous Ways of Knowing. Entries are listed in alphabetical order.

Alberta – Early Learning and Child Care Regulation

- Outdoor play space must be securely enclosed. 4.5 m² per child (19 months+); 2 m² per infant. No time requirements specified.
- Regulation language is directive and compliance-based; no pedagogical framing, land-based, or Indigenous content.

British Columbia – Community Care and Assisted Living Act Regulation

- Outdoor space must be provided; mandatory supervision and fencing. Regulation is heavily weighted toward operational and procedural concerns with minimal reference to pedagogical intent.
- Indigenous pedagogies referenced minimally (2 instances coded) despite BC ELF's extremely strong Indigenous content (55 instances).

Manitoba – Community Child Care Standards Act | Child Care Regulation (M.R. 62/86)

- Minimum 7 m² per child; must accommodate the greater of 50% of licensed spaces or 55 m²; space must be located within 350 m of the centre for full-time programs; fenced and at least 50% grass, sand, or similar surface. CSA standards apply to playground equipment and surfacing. No specific daily outdoor time mandated in regulation.
- Regulation language is primarily compliance-based; play-based programming referenced in best practices guidance but not embedded in regulatory requirements.
- No Indigenous content in the regulation itself.

New Brunswick – Early Childhood Services Act | Licensing Regulation (NB Reg 2018-11)

- 4.5 m² per child; must safely accommodate 50% of children; must be immediately adjacent or within reasonable walking distance. Outdoor play required for at least one hour in each four-hour block of time when the majority of children are in attendance – one of the most explicit outdoor time mandates in Canada.
- Daily activities must be purposely planned, documented, and responsive to capabilities, needs, and interests of each child; must include time and space for free choice of play and exploration, and indoor and outdoor physical activity. Program statements must identify the curriculum framework used.
- Operators may apply for approval to use an Indigenous culture-based curriculum framework; Indigenous content available as an approved alternative curriculum pathway but not integrated as a core regulatory requirement.

Newfoundland and Labrador – Child Care Act | Child Care Regulations (NLR 39/17)

- 7 m² per child – among the highest outdoor space requirements in Canada. Regulations address outdoor time requirements; quality of child care delivery emphasized in 2017 regulatory update. Annual inspections by licensing officials required.
- No Indigenous content identified in the regulation; despite significant Indigenous populations in Labrador, neither land-based pedagogy nor Indigenous relational framing is present in regulatory requirements.

Northwest Territories – ELCA Regulations 098-2024

- Standard outdoor space and supervision requirements; some reference to Indigenous pedagogies (3 instances) but not integrated as core requirements.
- Stark divergence from Northwest Territories ELF, which demonstrates one of the strongest national commitments to land-based pedagogy (cultural content coded 70 instances; Indigenous pedagogies 45 instances).

Nova Scotia – Early Learning and Child Care Act | Early Learning and Child Care Regulations

- Minimum 7 m² per child; separate infant outdoor play space required at minimum 7 m² per infant; fenced at minimum 1.2 m high for infants. Programs must provide a developmentally appropriate period of outdoor activity except in extreme weather; no specific daily minimum hours prescribed.

- Indigenous content growing strongly at the curriculum and professional development level but not yet embedded in the regulation itself.

Nunavut – Early Learning and Child Care Act

- Regulations apply standard compliance model with minimal recognition of Nunavut's predominantly Indigenous context.
- Framework is explicitly land-based and culturally grounded, but this is not reflected in regulatory requirements – representing the largest framework-regulation gap in the country.

Ontario – Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 | Regulation 137/15

- Minimum 5.6 m² per child outdoor space; 2 hours daily for programs 6+ hours; CSA CAN/CSA Z614 required for structures and surfacing.
- Program statements must include approaches fostering children's exploration, play, and inquiry, including outdoors. Licensees must implement these approaches in practice.
- First Nations explicitly permitted to authorize child care on their territory; some regulatory sections do not apply to programs on First Nation reserves.

Prince Edward Island – Early Learning and Child Care Act | Early Learning and Child Care Act Regulations

- 7 m² per child – among the highest outdoor space requirements in Canada. No specific daily outdoor time minimum prescribed in the regulation.
- Play-based curriculum framework Relationships, Environments, Experiences adopted in 2012; mandatory for Early Years Centres.
- Child, Youth and Family Services Regulations (2024) explicitly recognize Indigenous governing bodies and emphasize culturally sensitive approaches; Indigenous recognition limited to governance and access rather than pedagogical content in the early learning regulation.

Quebec – Educational Childcare Act | Educational Childcare Regulation (S-4.1.1, r. 2)

- Outdoor area must be accessible and safe; CAN/CSA Z614 standard required for playground equipment and surfacing. No specific daily outdoor time minimum prescribed.
- Curriculum framework Accueillir la petite enfance available for all CPEs and garderies; supports exploratory and play-based learning but is provided only in French, limiting accessibility for Indigenous communities. Framework is not compulsory in unrecognized home child care.
- No land-based or Indigenous epistemological content in the curriculum framework.

Saskatchewan – Child Care Regulations, 2015

- 7 m² per licensed child (minimum); 9–18 m² recommended. Neighbourhood walks and excursions governed by detailed ratio and supervision protocols.
- Continuing education requirements include building cultural competence with a focus on Indigenous culture.
- Recommends Natural Curiosity (2nd Ed.) – Considering Indigenous Perspectives in Children's Environmental Inquiry as a practitioner resource.

Yukon – Child Care Act | Child Care Centre Program Regulation (YOIC 1995/087)

- Minimum 5 m² per child using the outdoor space at one time; space may be on premises or off; fencing at least 1.2 m high required unless a public playground; suitably surfaced and drained. Daily schedule must include time to play outdoors every day except in inclement weather.
- Meals must meet Canada Food Guide and Native Food Guide – one of the only explicit regulatory references to an Indigenous-specific resource in Canadian child care regulation.
- The Early Years program supports Indigenous parents and caregivers at the community level. Land-based and Indigenous pedagogical content is not reflected in the child care regulation itself.

Appendix B: Early Learning Framework Comparison by Theme

This appendix provides a thematic comparison of early learning frameworks across all 13 provinces and territories, focusing on three themes central to this scan: (1) outdoor pedagogy language and positioning, (2) Indigenous content and land-based learning, and (3) risk and challenge in play.

Theme 1: Outdoor Pedagogy Positioning

British Columbia's Early Learning Framework and the Northwest Territories Early Learning Framework represent the strongest national examples of outdoor environments positioned as pedagogically rich and relational. Both explicitly connect outdoor learning to Indigenous worldviews and land-based knowledge. At the other end of the spectrum, several frameworks (Manitoba, Newfoundland & Labrador, PEI) treat outdoor play primarily as developmental and physical, with limited pedagogical framing.

Theme 2: Indigenous Content and Land-Based Learning

The Northwest Territories Framework is exceptional nationally, with Land capitalized to encompass Indigenous peoples, cultures, languages, knowledge systems, and communities. It states explicitly that 'Children spend time on the Land and learn from multiple teachers and community members that are Indigenous to the Land.' BC's framework embeds First Peoples Principles of Learning and includes practice prompts asking educators: 'What are the local Indigenous stories of the land?' and 'How can I connect or reconnect to local Indigenous communities?'

Most provincial frameworks reference Indigenous content to varying degrees in their development processes, but few embed Indigenous perspectives as a foundational pedagogical principle rather than an add-on. Quebec's framework contains no Indigenous content in excerpted sections.

Theme 3: Risk and Challenge in Play

The Northwest Territories framework provides the most explicit treatment of risky play, stating: 'Risky play is often associated with activities in the outdoors – dynamic and changing conditions provide more opportunities' and listing specific types: great heights, high speeds, using tools, rough and tumble, interacting with potentially harmful elements, risk of getting lost. Alberta's FLIGHT and New Brunswick's framework both reference healthy risk-taking. Most other frameworks do not explicitly address risk in play.

Appendix C: Standards of Practice by Jurisdiction

The following provides expanded detail on how Standards of Practice for early childhood educators in each province and territory address outdoor and land-based (OLB) pedagogy. For each jurisdiction, entries identify the standards body, the format and status of existing standards, and what those standards do or do not include with respect to OLB and Indigenous content. Across all 13 jurisdictions, the finding is consistent: outdoor and land-based competencies are absent or, at best, limited. No jurisdiction explicitly identifies OLB practice as a defined professional competency. Jurisdictions are listed in alphabetical order.

Alberta

Standards Body: Alberta Early Childhood Educator Association (AECEA) and Government. Format: Professional Standards. OLB Content: Absent. Indigenous Content: Absent.

Alberta's AECEA make no reference to outdoor or land-based practice, ecological literacy, or Indigenous knowledge systems. This is notable given that Alberta's FLIGHT framework does reference healthy risk-taking and outdoor learning. The complete absence of both OLB and Indigenous content in the standards means that educators working in outdoor programs or with Indigenous children have no professional benchmark against which to understand or demonstrate their specialized competencies.

British Columbia

Standards Body: Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC) and the ECE Registry. Format: Professional Standards and Code of Ethics. OLB Content: Absent as a defined competency. Indigenous Content: Limited.

BC's Professional Standards and Code of Ethics are written for generalist ECE practice and make no explicit reference to outdoor environments, ecological literacy, land-based pedagogy, or risk-benefit assessment. This represents one of the most striking disconnects in the country: BC's Early Learning Framework is among the strongest nationally for outdoor and Indigenous content – yet none of this is reflected in the professional standards that govern ECE practice in the province.

Manitoba

Standards Body: Manitoba Child Care Association (MCCA) and Government. Format: Guidelines. OLB Content: Absent. Indigenous Content: Absent.

Manitoba's guidelines contain no reference to outdoor or land-based practice and no Indigenous content. Both absences are complete. The guidelines reflect a generalist, indoor-centric conception of ECE practice that does not acknowledge the specialized knowledge and skills

required for outdoor programming or culturally responsive practice with Indigenous children and families.

New Brunswick

Standards Body: Government / Quality Framework. Format: Guidelines. OLB Content: Limited. Indigenous Content: Limited.

New Brunswick has OLB content embedded into their Quality Framework. There is a focus on weather conditions and includes some acknowledgment of Indigenous curriculum development.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Standards Body: Association of Early Childhood Educators Newfoundland and Labrador (AECE-NL). Format: Association guidelines. OLB Content: Absent. Indigenous Content: Limited.

AECE-NL's association guidelines make no reference to outdoor or land-based competencies. Indigenous content is limited. The guidelines carry no regulatory force, and their generalist framing does not reflect the specialized knowledge base required for educators working in outdoor or land-based programs.

Northwest Territories

Standards Body: Government. Format: No formal standards. OLB Content: Absent. Indigenous Content: Limited.

The Northwest Territories has no formal Standards of Practice for ECEs, representing the most acute standards gap in the country when considered alongside its framework. The Northwest Territories Early Learning Framework is the strongest nationally for land-based and Indigenous content, yet this exceptional framework vision is matched by neither regulatory requirements nor professional standards.

Nova Scotia

Standards Body: Government. Format: Formal Standards of Practice. OLB Content: Absent. Indigenous Content: Limited.

Nova Scotia is one of the few provinces with government-issued formal Standards of Practice – a stronger infrastructure than jurisdictions relying solely on association guidelines. However, OLB content is entirely absent and Indigenous content is limited.

Nunavut

Standards Body: Government. Format: No formal standards. OLB Content: Absent. Indigenous Content: Limited.

Nunavut represents a significant standards gap in Canada. The territory has no formal Standards of Practice for ECEs; its population is predominantly Inuit; its Early Learning Framework is

explicitly land-based and culturally grounded. The gap between framework vision and professional infrastructure requires opportunities for further development.

Ontario

Standards Body: College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE). Format: Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. OLB Content: Absent. Indigenous Content: Absent.

Ontario has the most formalized professional regulatory infrastructure for ECEs in Canada – the College of Early Childhood Educators is the only self-regulatory college for the profession in the country – yet its Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice make no explicit reference to outdoor environments, ecological literacy, land-based pedagogy, risk-benefit assessment, or Indigenous knowledge systems. This is arguably the most consequential absence nationally.

Prince Edward Island

Standards Body: PEI Regulatory Body. Format: Association guidelines. OLB Content: Absent. Indigenous Content: Absent.

PEI's association guidelines contain no OLB or Indigenous content. Both are entirely absent. PEI is identified elsewhere in this scan as a jurisdiction with both significant need and significant opportunity for focused standards development, given its small size and the potential for meaningful reform.

Quebec

Standards Body: No regulatory college. Format: Association guidelines only. OLB Content: Absent. Indigenous Content: Absent.

Quebec has no regulatory college for ECEs and relies on association guidelines alone, which carry no regulatory force. Neither OLB content nor Indigenous content appears in these guidelines. Quebec's framework also contains no Indigenous content in its excerpted sections – the only provincial or territorial framework with this absence.

Saskatchewan

Standards Body: Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association (SECA) and Government. Format: Guidelines. OLB Content: Absent. Indigenous Content: Limited.

Saskatchewan's guidelines do not identify outdoor or land-based competencies. Indigenous content is limited. This is a meaningful gap given that Saskatchewan's child care regulations do reference building cultural competence with a focus on Indigenous culture and recommend Natural Curiosity (2nd Ed.) as a practitioner resource – a stronger regulatory foundation than most provinces.

Yukon

Standards Body: Government. Format: No formal standards. OLB Content: Absent. Indigenous Content: Limited.

Yukon has no formal Standards of Practice for ECEs. This absence is particularly significant given Yukon's geography and the centrality of outdoor and land-based environments to children's daily lives in the territory. Yukon is identified in this scan as one of the jurisdictions with both the greatest need and the greatest opportunity for pilot standards development.

Appendix D: Provincial and Territorial Summaries

This appendix provides a jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction summary for all 13 Canadian provinces and territories, organized alphabetically. For each jurisdiction, four areas are addressed:

- **Regulations** – what childcare licensing regulations specify about outdoor environments, land-based practice, safety, and Indigenous provisions.
- **Early Learning Framework** – what the early learning framework says about outdoor pedagogy and Indigenous content, with an analysis of framework-regulation alignment.
- **Standards of Practice** – what the ECE professional standards body requires, with a focus on OLB and Indigenous competencies.
- **Risky Play, Risk-Benefit, Educator Training & Supervision** – what each jurisdiction's documents say specifically about risky play, risk-benefit assessment, educator preparation for outdoor and land-based teaching and learning, and outdoor supervision requirements.

Post-Secondary Preparation – while not mapped jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction, the absence of outdoor and land-based benchmarks in post-secondary programs is noted as a compounding gap throughout.

Relevant website links are provided for each jurisdiction's regulations, frameworks, and professional associations.

Alberta (AB)

REGULATIONS	EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK	STANDARDS OF PRACTICE
Early Learning and Child Care Regulation	FLIGHT: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework	AECEA / Government – Professional Standards

Regulations

Outdoor & Land-Based Provisions

- Outdoor play space must be securely enclosed; 4.5 m2 per child (19 months+); 2 m2 per infant.
- No outdoor time requirements are specified.
- Language is directive and compliance-based ('must ensure,' 'must be enclosed').
- No pedagogical framing, land-based learning, or Indigenous content.
- Coding: outdoor space requirements (5), supervision (2), safety (2); no coding for pedagogy or land-based learning.

Safety Standards

Outdoor space must be securely enclosed. CSA or equivalent standards referenced.

Early Learning Framework

Outdoor Pedagogy

- Opportunities for play and playfulness with others in purposefully designed outdoor and indoor environments.
- Spending time outdoors, planting gardens, and creating imaginary worlds in nature through play.
- Appreciate the uniqueness of the seasons and changes in weather and daylight.
- Developing a stewardship of nature... on the ground, in the water, and through the air.
- Supported in exploring natural and wild spaces... ensure access, celebrate the joy of being outdoors... focus all their senses.
- Risk-taking referenced. Encourages risk-taking endeavours in the uneven outdoor space. Risk-taking positioned positively as part of learning
- Outdoor play that exercises the muscles, lungs, heart, and mind – running, jumping, digging, swinging, rolling.
- Children participate in decisions about when and how transitions between indoor/outdoor occur.

Indigenous Content

No specific Indigenous content noted in the source excerpts.

Framework & Regulatory Analysis

FLIGHT demonstrates strong emphasis on pedagogical framing (23 coded instances), children's rights (11), nature (5), land-based (4), and risky play (6). The framework positions outdoor environments as sites of meaning-making, inquiry, and relationship with land. However, this progressive vision is not matched by regulatory language, which is directive, compliance-based, and contains no pedagogical framing or Indigenous content – a clear framework-regulation divide.

Standards of Practice

OLB & Indigenous Content at a Glance

OLB Content: Absent

Indigenous Content: Absent

- Alberta's professional standards make no reference to outdoor or land-based practice, ecological literacy, or Indigenous knowledge systems.
- The complete absence of both OLB and Indigenous content means educators working in outdoor and land-based programs or with Indigenous children have no professional benchmark for their specialized competencies.
- This is notable given that Alberta's FLIGHT framework explicitly references healthy risk-taking and outdoor environments as sites of meaning-making and inquiry.

Risky Play, Risk-Benefit, Educator Training & Supervision

Summary at a Glance

Risky Play (Framework): Present – risky play referenced (6 coded instances); risk-taking framed positively

Risk-Benefit (Regulation): Absent – regulation focuses on hazard elimination and enclosed spaces; no risk-benefit framework

Educator Training for OLB: Absent – no OLB-specific training or professional development requirements in regulation or standards

Outdoor Supervision: Standard compliance-based supervision; no OLB-specific or excursion-differentiated requirements

Risky Play & Risk-Benefit Assessment

- FLIGHT references risky play in 6 coded instances – one of the stronger framework references nationally.
- Encourages risk-taking endeavours in the uneven outdoor space. Risk-taking positioned positively as part of learning.
- Risk-taking listed alongside exploration and inquiry as developmental goals in outdoor environments.
- However, no risk-benefit assessment framework exists in regulation; the Early Learning and Child Care Regulation focuses on hazard elimination ('must be enclosed,' 'must ensure') with no guidance for educators on supporting healthy risk-taking.
- Alberta demonstrates a clear divide: the framework frames risk as learning, while regulation frames outdoor space as a controlled, compliance-based environment.

Educator Training & Professional Preparation for OLB

- No OLB-specific training or professional development requirements exist in Alberta's Early Learning and Child Care Regulation or in AECEA's Professional Standards.
- Alberta is consistent with the national pattern: approximately 7% of Canadian post-secondary ECE programs include any outdoor or nature-based module (Dietze & Cutler, 2020), and Alberta's programs are not exceptions.
- FLIGHT's vision of outdoor environments as sites of meaning-making, inquiry, and relationship with land is not supported by any corresponding educator competency requirement.
- No post-secondary or continuing education requirement for ecological literacy, outdoor pedagogy, or Indigenous land-based knowledge exists.

Outdoor Supervision Requirements

- Regulation requires standard line-of-sight supervision for outdoor spaces; outdoor play space must be securely enclosed.
- Supervision coding: 2 instances – general compliance-based requirements only.
- No differentiated supervision guidance for excursions, beyond-the-fence programming, or outdoor-primary programs.
- Standard field trip rules apply; no detailed excursion protocol specific to land-based or nature-based settings.

Key Links & Resources

Association of Early Childhood Education of Alberta: https://aecea.ca/

Early Learning and Child Care Regulation: https://open.alberta.ca/publications/2008_143

FLIGHT: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework: https://www.flightframework.ca/

British Columbia (BC)

REGULATIONS	EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK	STANDARDS OF PRACTICE
Community Care and Assisted Living Act – Child Care Licensing Regulation	BC's Early Learning Framework	ECEBC / ECE Registry – Professional Standards & Code of Ethics

Regulations

Outdoor & Land-Based Provisions

- Outdoor space must be provided; mandatory supervision and fencing required.
- Regulation is heavily weighted toward operational and procedural concerns: 'must ensure,' 'must provide,' 'must be supervised.'
- Coding: outdoor space requirements (5), outdoor supervision (4), safety (6), field trips (4).
- Some references to inclusion (6) and cultural considerations (3); land-based learning entirely absent.
- Indigenous pedagogies appear minimally (2 instances) despite BC's framework having 55 coded instances – one of the largest framework-regulation gaps in Canada.

Safety Standards

Fencing and supervision required. CSA mentioned as a recommendation.

Early Learning Framework

Outdoor Pedagogy

- Pedagogy takes place outdoors and indoors and both are inherently valuable.
- Children develop a sense of place when they connect with their outdoor environment... Indigenous peoples have been the knowledge keepers of these places.
- Practice prompt: How do children contribute to determining the routines and schedules of outdoor time?
- Arrangement of objects outdoors can 'invite interaction... collaborative learning... invite children to explore and express their identities and cultures.'
- High coding for Indigenous pedagogies (55) and land-based learning (31) – strongest nationally.

Indigenous Content

- Developed with BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, First Nations Education Steering Committee, and Metis Nation BC.
- First Peoples Principles of Learning embedded 'to transform education and early learning to reflect Indigenous perspectives, knowledges, values, and understandings.'

- Practice prompts: What are the local Indigenous stories of the land? How can I connect or reconnect to local Indigenous communities?
- Indigenous peoples have been the knowledge keepers of these places... Indigenous languages are some of the voices of these places.
- Anchored by UNDRIP and TRC Calls to Action; educators' role in reconciliation emphasized.

Framework & Regulatory Analysis

BC's Early Learning Framework positions OLB as a relational and land-based pedagogical orientation, with the highest national coding for Indigenous pedagogies (55) and land-based learning (31). Land is framed as teacher, place, and territory. The contrast with regulation is particularly stark: the framework conceptualizes outdoor environments as land-based and culturally situated, while the regulation defines them as bounded, supervised, risk-managed spaces. This illustrates a pronounced structural misalignment.

Standards of Practice

OLB & Indigenous Content at a Glance

OLB Content: Absent as a defined competency

Indigenous Content: Limited

- BC's Professional Standards and Code of Ethics are written for generalist ECE practice with no explicit reference to outdoor environments, ecological literacy, land-based pedagogy, or risk-benefit assessment.
- This is one of the most striking disconnects nationally: BC's Early Learning Framework is among the strongest for outdoor and Indigenous content that position land as a teacher and embeds First Peoples Principles of Learning, yet this is not reflected in professional standards.
- Indigenous content in the standards is limited and does not operationalize the reconciliation commitments evident in the early learning framework.

Risky Play, Risk-Benefit, Educator Training & Supervision

Summary at a Glance

Risky Play (Framework): Implicit – outdoor environments framed as spaces for exploration and inquiry; risky play not explicitly named

Risk-Benefit (Regulation): Absent – regulation focuses on supervision and fencing; no risk-benefit language

Educator Training for OLB: Absent – no OLB or risk-benefit competency requirements in

regulation or Professional Standards

Outdoor Supervision: Detailed – supervision coding (4 instances); field trips and excursions separately addressed (4 instances)

Risky Play & Risk-Benefit Assessment

- BC's Early Learning Framework does not explicitly name 'risky play' but positions outdoor environments as contexts for exploration, inquiry, and child-led learning. This framing is consistent with risk-benefit thinking.
- The framework emphasizes children as capable meaning-makers' and educators as 'co-learners. This disposition supports contextually informed judgment rather than blanket risk prevention.
- No risk-benefit assessment framework appears in the Community Care and Assisted Living Act – Child Care Licensing Regulation. Safety coding (6 instances) focuses on supervision and hazard control.
- The regulation's framing has terms such as must be supervised, must ensure. These reflect a hazard-elimination rather than risk-benefit orientation, in direct tension with the framework's pedagogical vision.

Educator Training & Professional Preparation for OLB

- No OLB-specific educator training or competency requirements appear in BC's licensing regulation or in ECEBC's Professional Standards and Code of Ethics.
- Despite BC's Early Learning Framework being the strongest nationally for Indigenous and land-based content, no requirement exists for educators to demonstrate competence in outdoor and land-based pedagogy, ecological literacy, or Indigenous ways of knowing.
- ECEBC's Professional Standards are written for generalist ECE practice; outdoor and land-based practice remains professionally invisible.
- No continuing education requirements for outdoor or land-based pedagogy exist in the regulation.

Outdoor Supervision Requirements

- BC's regulation has relatively detailed supervision provisions compared to most jurisdictions – supervision coded 4 instances, field trips and excursions 4 instances.
- Mandatory supervision and fencing required for all outdoor spaces.
- Excursions are addressed with general rules but no specific protocols for outdoor, nature-based or beyond-the-fence programming.
- No differentiated supervision guidance for outdoor-primary programs, nature or land-based settings – all programs are governed by the same indoor-centric model.

Key Links & Resources

Early Childhood Educators BC: https://www.ecebc.ca/

Community Care and Assisted Living Act – Child Care Licensing Regulation: https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/crbc/crbc/332_2007

BC's Early Learning Framework: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning/teach/early-learning-framework

Manitoba (MB)

REGULATIONS	EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK	STANDARDS OF PRACTICE
Child Care Regulation, Man Reg 62/86	Early Returns: Manitoba's ELCC Curriculum Framework	MCCA / Government – Guidelines

Regulations

Outdoor & Land-Based Provisions

- Daily outdoor play required.
- Emphasis on safety, materials, and daily outdoor access is consistent with operational compliance model.
- Community Child Care Standards Act governs operational standards alongside the Child Care Regulation.

Safety Standards

Safe environments and daily outdoor access referenced. No mention of CSA standards.

Early Learning Framework

Outdoor Pedagogy

- Environments that support exploration and interaction both indoors and outdoors.
- Outdoor surroundings should connect and engage children with nature.
- Infants: Even the youngest infants need time to play outdoors and to spend time connecting with nature... include grass, sand, plants, trees.
- Provide outdoor active play every day... create separate outdoor play space so infants can safely and independently explore.
- How do we arrange our indoor and outdoor space and materials? Why?

Indigenous Content

No specific Indigenous content noted in the source excerpts.

Framework & Regulatory Analysis

Early Returns emphasizes exploration, interaction, and connection to nature, with moderate coding for outdoor engagement and pedagogy. Manitoba reflects alignment in outdoor access but not in pedagogical depth. Outdoor learning is framed as supportive rather than central. No land-based or Indigenous content at either the framework or standards level.

Standards of Practice

OLB & Indigenous Content at a Glance

OLB Content: Absent

Indigenous Content: Absent

- Manitoba's guidelines contain no reference to outdoor or land-based practice and no Indigenous content.
- The guidelines reflect a generalist, indoor-centric conception of ECE practice that does not acknowledge the specialized knowledge required for outdoor programming.
- Culturally responsive competencies needed to serve Indigenous children and families are entirely absent.

Risky Play, Risk-Benefit, Educator Training & Supervision

Summary at a Glance

Risky Play (Framework): Absent – no risky play or risk-benefit language in framework

Risk-Benefit (Regulation): Absent – standard safety and compliance language only

Educator Training for OLB: Absent – no OLB training requirements in regulation or guidelines

Outdoor Supervision: Standard – general safety and supervision requirements; no excursion-specific protocols noted

Risky Play & Risk-Benefit Assessment

- Early Returns does not reference risky play, risk-benefit assessment, or challenge-based outdoor learning.
- Outdoor environments are framed as supportive, safe spaces for exploration and connection to nature – not as contexts for adventurous or challenging play.
- The Child Care Regulation and Community Child Care Standards Act contain no risk-benefit language; safety coding reflects standard hazard-prevention orientation.
- Manitoba is consistent with the national pattern: no Canadian licensing regulation has embedded a risk-benefit assessment framework.

Educator Training & Professional Preparation for OLB

- MCCA's guidelines and government standards contain no requirement for OLB-specific training, ecological literacy, or outdoor pedagogical competence.

- No continuing education requirement for outdoor or Indigenous land-based pedagogy exists in Manitoba's regulation.
- Manitoba is consistent with the national picture in which approximately 7% of Canadian post-secondary ECE programs include any outdoor programming, with no jurisdiction requiring OLB competence as a licensing condition.

Outdoor Supervision Requirements

- The Child Care Regulation requires standard daily outdoor play with safety and supervision requirements.
- No excursion-specific or beyond-the-fence supervision protocols are identified in the excerpted content.
- General outdoor supervision follows standard compliance model.

Key Links & Resources

Manitoba Child Care Association: https://mccahouse.org/

Child Care Regulation, Man Reg 62/86: https://canlii.ca/t/56lcx

Early Returns: Manitoba's ELCC Curriculum Framework: https://www.gov.mb.ca/education/childcare/resources/pubs/early_returns.pdf

New Brunswick (NB)

REGULATIONS	EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK	STANDARDS OF PRACTICE
Early Childhood Services Act – Early Learning & Childcare Regulation	NB Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care	Government / Quality Framework – Guidelines

Regulations

Outdoor & Land-Based Provisions

- Outdoor play required daily and in all weather conditions.
- Outdoor space requirements, maintenance, safety, and supervision emphasized.
- The Minister may approve use of a curriculum based on Indigenous culture for designated facilities – this could support land-based learning approaches.
- Language: 'must ensure,' 'shall provide,' 'must maintain.'

Safety Standards

Outdoor environments framed as licensed spaces requiring upkeep and hazard control. Some reference to health and safety requirements for outdoor play structures. No CSA Z614 named.

Early Learning Framework

Outdoor Pedagogy

- Be outdoors daily, in a range of weather conditions.
- Educators provide outdoor time and access to the natural world and wild places, and share in the joy at being outside.
- Quality outdoor environments in home and centre-based care.
- Healthy risk-taking, and quality outdoor play.
- What materials are rotated through outdoor areas, and what activities are available in the outdoors?
- Increased valuing of outdoor play and being in the outdoors.

Indigenous Content

- Mentions Indigenous languages of the region (Maliseet/Passamaquoddy) in citations.
- The Minister may approve use of a curriculum based on Indigenous culture for designated facilities, which could support land-based learning and Indigenous knowledge.
- Indigenous content appears in citations and examples rather than explicit program-level guidance in the excerpted content.

Framework & Regulatory Analysis

The NB Curriculum Framework shows strong emphasis on pedagogical framing, children's rights, culture, and nature. Land-based and risky play concepts are present, though less extensively than BC or NWT. The framework positions outdoor environments as contexts for inquiry and participation. Regulation emphasizes compliance and operational standards, with both documents referencing outdoor play but not integrating land-based or Indigenous content strongly enough to constitute intentional OLB pedagogy.

Standards of Practice

OLB & Indigenous Content at a Glance

OLB Content: Limited – the only jurisdiction in Canada with any OLB presence in professional guidelines

Indigenous Content: Limited

- New Brunswick has OLB content, even though limited as presented in its Quality Framework guidelines.
- The curriculum framework has an emphasis on outdoor learning in all weather conditions and options for Indigenous curriculum.
- While distinguishing NB from all other jurisdictions, OLB competencies are touched upon but not defined, required, or embedded as core professional expectations.
- Indigenous content is similarly limited rather than substantive.

Risky Play, Risk-Benefit, Educator Training & Supervision

Summary at a Glance

Risky Play (Framework): Present – healthy risk-taking' explicitly referenced; one of few frameworks to name this.

Risk-Benefit (Regulation): Absent – regulation focuses on maintenance, safety, and supervision; no risk-benefit framework

Educator Training for OLB: Limited – no OLB training requirements; guidelines have limited OLB content (only jurisdiction with any)

Outdoor Supervision: Compliance-based – supervision and maintenance emphasized; outdoor space requirements and hazard control

Risky Play & Risk-Benefit Assessment

- New Brunswick's Curriculum Framework explicitly references 'healthy risk-taking, and quality outdoor play' – placing NB among only a handful of jurisdictions to name this concept directly.
- The framework positions outdoor environments as contexts for inquiry, participation, and challenge – language consistent with a risk-benefit orientation.
- However, the Early Childhood Services Act and Regulation contain no risk-benefit assessment framework. Supervision, maintenance, safety, and hazard control dominate regulatory language.
- NB is the only jurisdiction where limited OLB content appears in professional guidelines. It does not extend to a risk-benefit assessment competency.

Educator Training & Professional Preparation for OLB

- New Brunswick's professional guidelines have limited OLB content. This is the only jurisdiction nationally with any OLB presence, but this falls far short of defined competency requirements.
- No specific OLB training, ecological literacy, or outdoor pedagogical competency requirement exists in NB's licensing regulation or quality framework.
- The framework's emphasis on daily outdoor play in all weather conditions is not supported by educator preparation requirements.

Outdoor Supervision Requirements

- The Early Childhood Services Act and Regulation codes highlight supervision and maintenance language, such as 'must ensure,' 'shall provide,' 'must maintain.'
- Outdoor environments are framed as licensed spaces requiring upkeep and hazard control.
- Standard field trip and excursion rules apply; no specialized supervision protocols for nature-based settings.
- The gap between the framework's call for outdoor play in all weather conditions and the regulation's hazard-control framing creates a practical tension for educators.

Key Links & Resources

Day Care Facilities Act / Government: https://www2.gnb.ca/

Early Childhood Services Act – Early Learning & Childcare Regulation: https://www2.gnb.ca/

NB Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care:
https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/ed/pdf/ELCC/ECHDPE/nb-curriculum-framework.pdf

Newfoundland & Labrador (NL)

REGULATIONS	EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK	STANDARDS OF PRACTICE
Child Care Act & Child Care Regulations	Navigating the Early Years: An Early Childhood Learning Framework	AECE-NL – Association Guidelines

Regulations

Outdoor & Land-Based Provisions

- Daily outdoor play required.
- Emphasis on daily outdoor play, active movement, and safety.
- Strong coding in physical and developmental categories.
- Child Care Policy and Standards Manual and Regulation 39/17 govern operational requirements.

Safety Standards

Physical development and safety emphasized. No specific safety standard references.

Early Learning Framework

Outdoor Pedagogy

- Take me outside regularly during every season... I learn so much about my world by going outdoors.
- Provide me with daily opportunities for indoor and outdoor play... freedom to play outdoors and to explore nature at my own pace.
- When setting up my indoor and outdoor play spaces... balance free play and structured play.
- Physical skills include running longer distances, climbing steep hills, making mud pies, building snow structures.
- Focus on natural materials and physical development through outdoor play.

Indigenous Content

Framework development acknowledged Indigenous Affairs participants, indicating Indigenous engagement in development. Excerpted content does not include specific program directives on Indigenous ways of knowing.

Framework & Regulatory Analysis

Navigating the Early Years emphasizes frequent outdoor experiences across seasons, with coding highlighting nature, exploration, and physical development. Both the framework and regulations promote outdoor access, but OLB is framed primarily as developmental and physical rather than pedagogically intentional or land-based. Indigenous engagement in the development process is noted, but not reflected in specific program directives.

Standards of Practice

OLB & Indigenous Content at a Glance

OLB Content: Absent

Indigenous Content: Limited

- AECE-NL's association guidelines make no reference to outdoor or land-based competencies.
- The guidelines carry no regulatory force, and their generalist framing does not reflect the specialized knowledge required for outdoor programs.
- Indigenous content is limited; culturally responsive competencies for serving Indigenous children and families in NL's diverse communities are not addressed.

Risky Play, Risk-Benefit, Educator Training & Supervision

Summary at a Glance

Risky Play (Framework): Absent – no risky play or risk-benefit language; outdoor framed as physical development

Risk-Benefit (Regulation): Absent – standard safety and compliance language only

Educator Training for OLB: Absent – no OLB training requirements in regulation or association guidelines

Outdoor Supervision: Standard – daily outdoor play required; general safety and supervision; no excursion-specific protocols noted

Risky Play & Risk-Benefit Assessment

- Navigating the Early Years does not reference risky play or risk-benefit assessment. Outdoor learning is framed primarily through physical development such as climbing, running, building snow structures.
- The framework emphasizes freedom to play outdoors and to explore nature at my own pace. This language is consistent with child agency, but without explicit risk-benefit framing.
- Neither the Child Care Act nor Child Care Regulations contain risk-benefit language; safety coding reflects standard physical development and hazard-prevention orientation.
- NL is consistent with the national finding that no Canadian jurisdiction has embedded a risk-benefit assessment framework in licensing requirements.

Educator Training & Professional Preparation for OLB

- AECE-NL's association guidelines make no reference to outdoor or land-based competencies and carry no regulatory force.
- No OLB-specific training, ecological literacy, or outdoor pedagogical competency requirement exists in NL's Child Care Act, regulations, or professional guidelines.
- Indigenous engagement in the development of the framework is noted but not translated into educator preparation requirements.

Outdoor Supervision Requirements

- Daily outdoor play is required: Child Care Policy and Standards Manual and Regulation 39/17 govern operational requirements including safety and supervision.
- Supervision follows standard compliance model; no excursion-specific or beyond-the-fence supervision protocols identified.
- Strong coding in physical and developmental categories reflects a developmental rather than pedagogical framing of outdoor supervision.

Key Links & Resources

Association of Early Childhood Educators of NL: https://www.aecenl.ca/

Child Care Act & Child Care Regulations:
https://www.assembly.nl.ca/Legislation/sr/statutes/c11-01.htm

Navigating the Early Years: An Early Childhood Learning Framework:
https://www.gov.nl.ca/education/files/Early-Learning-Framework.pdf

Northwest Territories (NWT)

REGULATIONS	EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK	STANDARDS OF PRACTICE
Early Learning and Childcare Act & ELCA Regulations 098-2024	The Northwest Territories Early Learning Framework	Government – No Formal Standards

Regulations

Outdoor & Land-Based Provisions

- Standard outdoor space and supervision requirements.
- Coding concentrated in safety (4), outdoor space requirements (3), and supervision (2).
- Some references to Indigenous pedagogies (3 instances) but not structurally embedded.
- Regulatory language focuses on licensed program requirements, safety compliance, and a centre-based model.
- Stark divergence from NWT ELF, which demonstrates the strongest national commitment to land-based pedagogy.

Safety Standards

Safety and supervision focused. No CSA standards mentioned.

Early Learning Framework

Outdoor Pedagogy

- It is impossible to separate the learning that occurs within indoor and outdoor environments. All parts are equally important – all activities that occur indoors can also occur outdoors.
- Risky play is often associated with activities in the outdoors... dynamic and changing conditions provide more opportunities. Types: great heights, high speeds, using tools, rough and tumble, interacting with potentially harmful elements, risk of getting lost.
- Consistent visits to the same outdoor location help children form a connection to specific places.
- The outdoors is ideal... freedom and space to test their limits, explore boundaries, and learn to manage challenges and risks.
- Opportunities to access and use an outdoor space throughout all seasons... significance historically and spiritually.
- Educators reframe perceived risk as an opportunity for situational evaluation and personal development.

Indigenous Content

- Land is capitalized to encompass Indigenous peoples, cultures, languages, knowledge systems, and communities'; these have evolved together in 'strong, inseparable connections.
- The NWT is the homeland of Dene, Metis, Inuvialuit, and Nehiyawak; early learning must be grounded in Indigenous worldviews, cultures, languages, and knowledge systems.'
- Children spend time on the Land and learn from multiple teachers and community members that are Indigenous to the Land.
- Emphasizes 11 official languages (9 Indigenous); language comes from Land; educators model use of Indigenous languages.
- Decolonize: dismantle colonial structures; support healing and revitalization of Indigenous identities, knowledge, culture, and practices.
- Practice prompts: What are meaningful ways for children to begin understanding historical and current approaches to colonialism? and 'What local Indigenous stories of the Land...?

Framework & Regulatory Analysis

The NWT Early Learning Framework demonstrates the strongest national commitment to land-based pedagogy, with extremely high coding for cultural content (70), Indigenous pedagogies (45), and land-based learning (14). Land is positioned as inseparable from identity, language, and knowledge systems. The regulation, however, remains institutionally structured and minimally adaptive to land-based contexts. This is one of the most pronounced misalignments in the country, underscoring the urgency of closing the gap between regulatory systems and Indigenous self-determination.

Standards of Practice

OLB & Indigenous Content at a Glance

OLB Content: Absent – no formal Standards of Practice exist

Indigenous Content: Limited – no formal Standards of Practice exist

- The NWT has no formal Standards of Practice for ECEs. This has the most acute standards gap nationally when considered alongside its early learning framework.
- The NWT Early Learning Framework is the strongest nationally for land-based and Indigenous content, yet this exceptional vision is matched by neither regulatory requirements nor professional standards.
- Educators in the NWT have no professional benchmark that reflects the land-based, culturally grounded practice that the framework envisions and that NWT communities expect and deserve.

Risky Play, Risk-Benefit, Educator Training & Supervision

Summary at a Glance

Risky Play (Framework): Strongest nationally – risky play explicitly defined with 6 categories; reframing risk as opportunity

Risk-Benefit (Regulation): Absent – regulation focuses on safety compliance; no risk-benefit framework despite framework vision

Educator Training for OLB: Absent – no formal Standards of Practice exist; no OLB training requirements in regulation

Outdoor Supervision: Standard compliance model – safety (4), outdoor space (3), supervision (2); no land-based differentiation

Risky Play & Risk-Benefit Assessment

- The NWT Early Learning Framework provides the most explicit and detailed treatment of risky play of any jurisdiction in Canada.
- Risky play is often associated with activities in the outdoors... dynamic and changing conditions provide more opportunities. The framework lists six specific types: great heights, high speeds, using tools, rough and tumble, interacting with potentially harmful elements, and risk of getting lost.
- The outdoors is ideal... freedom and space to test their limits, explore boundaries, and learn to manage challenges and risks.
- Educators are explicitly directed to reframe perceived risk as an opportunity for situational evaluation and personal development. This is the clearest articulation of a risk-benefit orientation in any Canadian framework.
- Opportunities to engage in outdoor free play and risky play have declined. Safety measures have sought to prevent all play-related injuries. The framework directly critiques over-restriction.
- Despite this exceptional framework language, the ELCA Regulations 098-2024 contain no risk-benefit assessment framework. Regulatory coding concentrates on safety (4), outdoor space requirements (3), and supervision (2) – standard compliance language that does not support the framework's vision.
- This is the most acute risk-benefit gap in the country. The framework most clearly articulates the case for risk-benefit assessment, but it is matched by no regulatory mechanism.

Educator Training & Professional Preparation for OLB

- The NWT has no formal Standards of Practice for ECEs. There is no professional benchmark against which outdoor, land-based, or risk-benefit competencies could be assessed or required.

- No OLB-specific training, ecological literacy, or outdoor pedagogical competency requirement exists in the ELCA Regulations.
- The NWT Early Learning Framework envisions educators who are deeply grounded in Indigenous worldviews, land-based knowledge systems, and reconciliation. Despite this, there is no educator preparation requirement supports this vision.
- This represents the largest gap between framework aspiration and professional infrastructure in Canada.

Outdoor Supervision Requirements

- ELCA Regulations 098-2024 contain standard supervision requirements – coding at 2 instances – with a primarily centre-based operational model.
- No differentiated supervision guidance exists for land-based programs, outdoor-primary settings, or beyond-the-fence programming.
- The regulation's centre-based supervisory framework is structurally incompatible with the land-based, community-embedded learning the NWT framework envisions.
- Field trip and excursion provisions follow standard protocols; no specialized provisions for travel on the Land with Elders or community-based land-based learning.

Key Links & Resources

NWT Early Childhood Association: https://nwteca.ca/

Early Learning and Childcare Act & ELCA Regulations 098-2024:
https://www.canlii.org/en/nt/laws/regu/nwt-reg-098-2024/latest/nwt-reg-098-2024.html

The Northwest Territories Early Learning Framework:
https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/nwt_elf_en_0.pdf

Nova Scotia (NS)

REGULATIONS	EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK	STANDARDS OF PRACTICE
Early Learning and Child Care Act & Regulations	Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework	Government – Formal Standards of Practice

Regulations

Outdoor & Land-Based Provisions

- Daily outdoor play required.
- Regulations emphasize safe environments, supervision, and daily outdoor access.
- Outdoor environments framed primarily in terms of health, safety, and physical activity.
- Some reference to compliance with minister-established health and safety requirements for outdoor play structures.

Safety Standards

Health and safety requirements for outdoor play structures referenced. No CSA Z614 named.

Early Learning Framework

Outdoor Pedagogy

- Intentionally design play-based outdoor and indoor early learning environments.
- Outdoor learning spaces, in all seasons, are critical environments... invite open-ended interactions, spontaneity, risk-taking, exploration, discovery, and connection with nature.
- Outdoor play is an integral factor in supporting the well-being of children every day... risky play... building confidence, independence, and resilience.
- Create welcoming, safe indoor and outdoor early learning environments where children freely explore, take risks, fail, and be successful.
- Outdoor play cultivates responsibility... respect all living and non-living things within Wskitqamu (Mother Earth).
- Outdoor learning spaces include plants, trees, edible gardens, sand, rocks, mud, water.
- Framework cites research on loose parts (PLEY Project randomized controlled trial).

Indigenous Content

- The Mi'kmaq share a foundational connection with the land, honouring Wskitqamu (Mother Earth) through Respect, Relationship, Responsibility, Reciprocity (Netukulimk).
- Programs designed so Mi'kmaw/Indigenous children and families feel included and empowered as essential decision makers.

- Educators must learn about Canada's shared history with Indigenous Peoples. TRC emphasis on residential schools and trans-generational trauma.
- Mi'kmaq... original people of Nova Scotia... have a defined understanding of plants, animals, and watersheds.
- Resources include Mi'kmaw Ways of Being and Knowing (Elder Jane Meader); UNDRIP; Land as teacher (UNESCO).

Framework & Regulatory Analysis

Nova Scotia's Capable, Confident, and Curious framework emphasizes relational and ecological dimensions of OLB, with strong coding for pedagogical framing, cultural references, and connections to nature and responsibility. Outdoor learning is situated within Mi'kmaq worldviews, emphasizing reciprocity and relational accountability. The regulations take a more procedural orientation, framing outdoor play as functional and supervisory – a depth gap where pedagogical meaning is not supported by regulatory structures.

Standards of Practice

OLB & Indigenous Content at a Glance

OLB Content: Absent

Indigenous Content: Limited

- Nova Scotia is one of the few provinces with government-issued formal Standards of Practice. This is a stronger infrastructure than jurisdictions relying solely on association guidelines.
- Despite this formal standing, OLB content is entirely absent and Indigenous content is limited.
- The existence of formal standards that omit outdoor and land-based competencies underscores that even where standards exist, the profession's specialized outdoor knowledge base is not recognized.

Risky Play, Risk-Benefit, Educator Training & Supervision

Summary at a Glance

Risky Play (Framework): Present – risky play explicitly named; builds confidence, independence, resilience; all-season outdoor learning

Risk-Benefit (Regulation): Absent – regulations emphasize safe environments and supervision; no risk-benefit framework

Educator Training for OLB: Absent from regulation; government Standards of Practice exist but contain no OLB-specific competencies

Outdoor Supervision: Standard – safe environments and daily supervision emphasized; health and safety requirements for outdoor structures

Risky Play & Risk-Benefit Assessment

- Outdoor play is an integral factor in supporting the well-being of children every day... risky play... building confidence, independence, and resilience. This is one of the more direct framework statements on risky play nationally.
- Outdoor learning spaces, in all seasons, are critical environments. This invites open-ended interactions, spontaneity, risk-taking, exploration, discovery, and connection with nature.
- Recognize the value of risky play in building confidence, independence, and resilience. This is an explicit educator directive.
- Create welcoming, safe indoor and outdoor early learning environments where children freely explore, take risks, fail, and be successful. This balances safety with the value of failure and risk.
- Despite this framework language, NS's Early Learning and Child Care Regulations frame outdoor environments primarily in terms of health, safety, and physical activity. However, there does not appear to have a risk-benefit assessment mechanism.
- NS has government-issued formal Standards of Practice, yet these contain no OLB or risk-benefit competency. This demonstrates that even with formal standards infrastructure does not automatically address specialized outdoor practice.

Educator Training & Professional Preparation for OLB

- Nova Scotia is one of the few provinces with government-issued formal Standards of Practice for ECEs, but these standards do not contain any OLB competency, no ecological literacy requirement, and no outdoor pedagogical preparation expectation.
- No OLB-specific training or continuing education requirement exists in the Early Learning and Child Care Regulations.
- The framework's Mi'kmaq-informed vision of outdoor learning as relational, reciprocal, and land-based is not supported by any educator preparation requirement in either the standards or regulations.

Outdoor Supervision Requirements

- Early Learning and Child Care Regulations emphasize safe environments, supervision, and daily outdoor access. This is a standard compliance model.
- Some reference to minister-established health and safety requirements for outdoor play structures.
- No differentiated supervision guidance for outdoor-primary programs, nature-based settings, or beyond-the-fence excursions.

- Standard field trip rules apply; no specialized provisions for land-based or Mi'kmaq-guided outdoor learning.

Key Links & Resources

Early Learning and Child Care Act:
https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/early%20learning%20and%20child%20care.pdf

Early Learning and Child Care Act & Regulations:
https://www.ednet.ns.ca/earlyyears/acts_regs_standards.shtml

Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework:
https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/nsel_curriculum_framework_en.pdf

Nunavut (NU)

REGULATIONS	EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK	STANDARDS OF PRACTICE
Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Act	Nunavut Early Learning and Childcare Framework	Government – No Formal Standards

Regulations

Outdoor & Land-Based Provisions

- Regulatory infrastructure is developing, primarily addressing licensing, safety, and operational standards.
- Land-based and culturally grounded dimensions present in the framework are not yet reflected in regulatory language.
- Standard compliance model with minimal recognition of Nunavut's predominantly Indigenous context.

Safety Standards

General safety and operational standards. No CSA or formal safety certifications referenced.

Early Learning Framework

Outdoor Pedagogy

- Opportunities should be indoors, outdoors, and on the land.
- Play indoors, outdoors, and on the land.
- Indoor and outdoor spaces as well as on the land.
- Land-based learning explicitly positioned as a core context for children's development and cultural grounding.

Indigenous Content

- References and aligns with the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (2018) and UNDRIP.
- Affirms Indigenous rights, languages, and culturally grounded ELCC as foundational.
- Framework is explicitly land-based and culturally grounded, centred on Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit knowledge systems.

Framework & Regulatory Analysis

Nunavut's Framework aligns with the IELCC and UNDRIP, positioning learning as occurring indoors, outdoors, and on the land, and affirming Indigenous rights and culturally grounded ELCC as foundational. However, regulatory infrastructure is still developing, and the land-based and culturally grounded dimensions present in the framework are not yet reflected in regulatory language.

Standards of Practice

OLB & Indigenous Content at a Glance

OLB Content: Absent – no formal Standards of Practice exist

Indigenous Content: Limited – no formal Standards of Practice exist

- Nunavut represents the most critical standards gap in Canada. There are no formal standards of practice for ECEs, a predominantly Inuit population, and an explicitly land-based and culturally grounded framework.
- No professional benchmark exists that reflects Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit knowledge systems and land-based pedagogies central to Nunavut's vision for children's learning.
- The gap between the framework vision and professional infrastructure is the largest in the country. The consequences for Inuit children's cultural rights, language revitalization, and identity development are significant.

Risky Play, Risk-Benefit, Educator Training & Supervision

Summary at a Glance

Risky Play (Framework): Implicit – land-based learning and on-the-land play inherently involve challenge; not explicitly named

Risk-Benefit (Regulation): Absent – regulatory infrastructure developing; no risk-benefit framework

Educator Training for OLB: Absent – no formal Standards of Practice; no OLB training requirements

Outdoor Supervision: Developing – regulatory infrastructure primarily addresses licensing and operational standards

Risky Play & Risk-Benefit Assessment

- Nunavut's Early Learning and Childcare Framework does not explicitly name risky play or risk-benefit assessment, but positions learning as occurring 'on the land' – an inherently dynamic, seasonally variable, and challenge-rich environment.
- The framework's alignment with Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit knowledge systems implicitly encompasses land-based challenge, seasonal competence, and environmental engagement that far exceed the scope of conventional playground-based risk management.
- No risk-benefit assessment framework exists in Nunavut's developing regulatory structure; current provisions focus on licensing, safety, and operational standards.

- The absence of a risk-benefit framework in a territory where children's land-based competence is central to cultural survival represents a profound regulatory gap.

Educator Training & Professional Preparation for OLB

- Nunavut has no formal Standards of Practice for ECEs – there is no professional benchmark for any competency, including outdoor, land-based, or Inuit-knowledge-based practice.
- No OLB-specific training, ecological literacy, or Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit knowledge requirement exists in Nunavut's developing regulatory infrastructure.
- This is the most critical training gap in Canada: in a territory where the population is predominantly Inuit and land-based learning is central to cultural survival; educators have no professional preparation requirement that reflects this reality.

Outdoor Supervision Requirements

- Nunavut's regulatory infrastructure is developing; current provisions primarily address licensing, safety, and operational standards.
- No differentiated supervision guidance exists for on-the-land programming, community-based learning with Elders, or outdoor-primary settings.
- The developing regulatory context provides an opportunity to build supervision frameworks that are grounded in Inuit ways of knowing and appropriate to Nunavut's land-based context from the outset.

Key Links & Resources

Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Act: https://www.gov.nu.ca/en/education-and-schools/nunavuts-new-early-learning-and-child-care-act

Nunavut Early Learning and Childcare Framework: https://www.gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/documents/2023-12/Nunavut%20Early%20Learning%20and%20Childcare%20Framework_EN.pdf

Ontario (ON)

REGULATIONS	EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK	STANDARDS OF PRACTICE
Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 | Regulation 137/15	How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years	College of Early Childhood Educators – Code of Ethics & Standards of Practice

Regulations

Outdoor & Land-Based Provisions

- Minimum 5.6 m2 per child outdoor space; 2 hours daily for programs 6+ hours.
- CAN/CSA Z614 required for playground structures and surfacing.
- Program statements must include approaches fostering children's exploration, play, and inquiry, including outdoors. Licensees must implement these approaches in practice.
- First Nations explicitly permitted to authorize childcare on their territory; some regulatory sections do not apply to programs on First Nation reserves.
- Coding: outdoor space requirements (9), supervision (4), safety (3), time (3); minimal pedagogical framing.

Safety Standards

CAN/CSA Z614 required for playground structures and surfacing.

Early Learning Framework

Outdoor Pedagogy

- Children thrive in indoor and outdoor spaces that invite them to investigate with open-ended materials.
- Natural outdoor spaces and playgrounds that present manageable levels of challenge... provide a reasonable degree of risk-taking.
- Creating safe and stimulating outdoor spaces for intentional active play... individualized and adapted.
- Outdoor playgrounds as places for discovery and learning... natural surfaces... pathways... garden areas... open-ended materials.
- Activities in outdoor spaces improve physical health and emotional well-being, self-regulation, creative problem solving, communication.
- Put more emphasis on outdoor exploration and play that engage the body, mind, and senses?

Indigenous Content

No specific Indigenous content noted in the source excerpts.

Framework & Regulatory Analysis

How Does Learning Happen? shows coding for cultural (10), nature (7), pedagogical framing (7), and inclusive approaches (6), with references to land-based learning (3) and Indigenous pedagogies (2). Outdoor environments are framed as spaces for well-being, inquiry, and holistic development. Regulation 137/15 emphasizes structured, supervised outdoor time. This is a clear policy misalignment. Ontario is one of few jurisdictions to name CSA Z614 in its regulations.

Standards of Practice

OLB & Indigenous Content at a Glance

OLB Content: Absent

Indigenous Content: Absent

- Ontario has the most formalized professional regulatory infrastructure for ECEs in Canada – the College of Early Childhood Educators is the only self-regulatory college for the profession in the country.
- The Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice makes no explicit reference to outdoor environments, ecological literacy, land-based pedagogy, risk-benefit assessment, or Indigenous knowledge systems.
- This is the most consequential absence nationally: the CECE's standards set a de facto national benchmark, and their silence on OLB competencies signals that outdoor and land-based practice remains professionally invisible even within the strongest ECE regulatory framework in Canada.

Risky Play, Risk-Benefit, Educator Training & Supervision

Summary at a Glance

Risky Play (Framework): Present – manageable challenge and reasonable degree of risk-taking referenced; balanced framing

Risk-Benefit (Regulation): Absent – CSA Z614 compliance required; regulation focuses on structured space and supervised time

Educator Training for OLB: Absent from regulation; CECE Standards contain no OLB competency despite being Canada's only self-regulatory college for ECEs

Outdoor Supervision: Most detailed nationally – outdoor space (9), supervision (4), time (3), field trips (moderate detail); CSA Z614 required

Risky Play & Risk-Benefit Assessment

- Natural outdoor spaces and playgrounds that present manageable levels of challenge... while these environments need to be safe, it is also important to provide opportunities for a reasonable degree of risk-taking. Ontario's framework takes a balanced position.
- Outdoor playgrounds as places for discovery and learning... more natural outdoor playgrounds... natural surfaces... open-ended materials.
- Regulation 137/15 requires CAN/CSA Z614 compliance for playground structures and surfacing is required, which reflects an engineering-safety rather than risk-benefit orientation.
- Ontario's regulatory framework is the most detailed nationally for outdoor space and time requirements (coding: outdoor space 9, supervision 4, time 3), but this detail is compliance-focused rather than pedagogy-focused.
- No risk-benefit assessment framework exists in Ontario's regulation; the CECE's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, even though this is Canada's most formalized ECE professional standards, contain no risk-benefit or OLB competency.

Educator Training & Professional Preparation for OLB

- Ontario's College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) is the only self-regulatory college for ECEs in Canada, yet its Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice contain no OLB competency, no ecological literacy requirement, and no outdoor pedagogical preparation expectation.
- The CECE's standards set a de facto national benchmark, and their silence on OLB and risk-benefit competencies signals that outdoor and land-based practice remains professionally invisible.
- Lamb (2021) found that only 4.34% of Ontario college ECE programs included mandatory Indigenous Studies courses, and only 8.82% of graduates felt sufficiently prepared to work with Indigenous children or families.
- No continuing education requirement for outdoor pedagogy, ecological literacy, or land-based practice exists in Ontario's Child Care and Early Years Act or Regulation 137/15.
- Program statements must include approaches fostering children's exploration, play, and inquiry outdoors, and licensees must implement them in practice. However, there are no educator competency standard supports this requirement.

Outdoor Supervision Requirements

- Ontario has the most detailed outdoor regulatory framework in Canada: minimum 5.6 m2 per child, 2 hours daily for 6+ hour programs, CAN/CSA Z614 required for structures and surfacing.
- Supervision coding: 4 instances – standard line-of-sight requirements for all outdoor spaces.
- Field trip provisions have moderate detail – more than most jurisdictions but still reflecting a general compliance model.

- First Nations are explicitly permitted to authorize childcare on their territory; some regulatory sections do not apply to programs on First Nation reserves – a partial recognition of Indigenous self-determination in supervision and program governance.
- No differentiated supervision guidance for outdoor-primary programs, forest schools, or nature-based settings beyond the standard licensed model.

Key Links & Resources

Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario: https://www.aeceo.ca/

Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 | Regulation 137/15:
https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/14c11

How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years:
https://files.ontario.ca/edu-how-does-learning-happen-en-2021-03-23.pdf

Prince Edward Island (PEI)

REGULATIONS	EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK	STANDARDS OF PRACTICE
Early Learning and Child Care Act Regulations	Early Learning Framework: Relationships, Environments, Experiences	PEI Regulatory Body – Association Guidelines

Regulations

Outdoor & Land-Based Provisions

- Outdoor access and environmental quality addressed.
- Regulations emphasize outdoor access with limited pedagogical language.
- Some reference to minister-established health and safety requirements for outdoor play structures.

Safety Standards

Health and safety requirements for outdoor play structures referenced.

Early Learning Framework

Outdoor Pedagogy

- A natural playground area provides a wealth of sizes and shapes, colours and smells, textures and sounds.
- Natural outdoor environments allow children to witness the progression of seasonal changes... understand the concepts of weather.
- Develop independence in dressing themselves for outdoor play... Allow enough time without adult intervention.
- Include sufficient time, especially outdoor excursions, without being hurried.
- Provide opportunities to care for their environment, both indoor and outdoor... Utilize natural materials... Design outdoor garden areas.
- Children poke and prod, turn leaves over, move twigs, follow an insect – sensory, hands-on engagement.
- Children collect pine cones, shells, leaves from the outdoor environment' and organize them in baskets.

Indigenous Content

No specific Indigenous content noted in the source excerpts.

Framework & Regulatory Analysis

The PEI framework emphasizes sensory exploration, natural materials, and seasonal engagement. These areas are aligned with nature and exploration. PEI supports nature-based environments but lacks explicit articulation of OLB pedagogy or professional competencies, reinforcing outdoor engagement as sensory and exploratory rather than pedagogically formalized. Both OLB and Indigenous content are absent from the standards.

Standards of Practice

OLB & Indigenous Content at a Glance

OLB Content: Absent

Indigenous Content: Absent

- PEI's association guidelines contain no OLB or Indigenous content. Both are entirely absent.
- PEI is identified as a jurisdiction with both significant need and significant opportunity for focused standards development, given its small size and potential for meaningful reform.
- The complete absence of both content areas establishes the baseline from which standards development would need to begin.

Risky Play, Risk-Benefit, Educator Training & Supervision

Summary at a Glance

Risky Play (Framework): Absent – sensory and exploratory framing; no risky play or risk-benefit language

Risk-Benefit (Regulation): Absent – health and safety requirements referenced; no risk-benefit framework

Educator Training for OLB: Absent – no OLB training requirements in regulation or association guidelines

Outdoor Supervision: Standard – outdoor access and environmental quality addressed; health and safety requirements for outdoor structures

Risky Play & Risk-Benefit Assessment

- The PEI Early Learning Framework does not reference risky play or risk-benefit assessment. Outdoor learning is framed through sensory exploration, natural materials, and seasonal engagement.
- Children are encouraged to poke and prod, turn leaves over, move twigs, follow an insect – hands-on, child-led engagement, but without explicit challenge or risk framing.

- Include sufficient time, especially outdoor excursions, without being hurried. Child-paced learning is valued, but not framed in risk-benefit terms.
- The Early Learning and Child Care Act Regulations reference minister-established health and safety requirements for outdoor play structures – a compliance rather than risk-benefit orientation.
- PEI is consistent with the national pattern: no risk-benefit assessment framework exists in any Canadian jurisdiction's licensing regulations.

Educator Training & Professional Preparation for OLB

- PEI's Regulatory Body holds association guidelines but do not contain OLB or Indigenous content.
- No OLB-specific training, ecological literacy, or outdoor pedagogical competency requirement exists in PEI's regulations or guidelines.

Outdoor Supervision Requirements

- The Early Learning and Child Care Act Regulations address outdoor access and environmental quality with standard supervision requirements.
- Some reference to minister-established health and safety requirements for outdoor play structures.
- No excursion-specific or beyond-the-fence supervision protocols identified.
- 'Include sufficient time, especially outdoor excursions, without being hurried' – the framework acknowledges excursions but the regulation provides no specialized supervision guidance for them.

Key Links & Resources

Early Childhood Development Association of PEI: https://ecdaofpei.ca/

Early Learning and Child Care Act Regulations:
https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/legislation/e.01g-early_learning_and_child_care_act_regulations.pdf

Early Learning Framework: Relationships, Environments, Experiences:
https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/publications/eecd_eyfrwrk_full.pdf

Quebec (QC)

REGULATIONS	EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK	STANDARDS OF PRACTICE
Educational Childcare Act	Programme educatif du Quebec	No Regulatory College – Association Guidelines Only

Regulations

Outdoor & Land-Based Provisions

- Structured outdoor time and compliance emphasized.
- Strong operational focus on daily outdoor access.
- Educational Childcare Act and Regulation govern outdoor time and programme requirements.

Safety Standards

Daily access to quality outdoor play structures and age-appropriate materials referenced. No CSA standards named.

Early Learning Framework

Outdoor Pedagogy

- Two periods of between 45 and 60 minutes of free play every day... daily access to a range of quality outdoor play structures and materials that are age appropriate.
- The schoolyard and the outdoor environment are all places where children can develop their motor, social, and cognitive skills.
- Outdoor environments... natural environments provide high-intensity motor experiences... where the environment is conducive to risk-taking, children develop self-protective behaviours.
- Undertake challenges, in outdoor play areas, in their own way.

Indigenous Content

No specific Indigenous content noted in the source excerpts. Quebec is the only jurisdiction nationally with no Indigenous content in its early learning framework.

Framework & Regulatory Analysis

The Programme educatif du Quebec emphasizes daily outdoor play and developmental outcomes, with coding reflecting physical, social, and cognitive domains. Both the framework and regulation demonstrate strong structural support for outdoor access, but OLB is not integrated as pedagogy. Quebec is unique nationally for having no Indigenous content at either the framework or standards level.

Standards of Practice

OLB & Indigenous Content at a Glance

OLB Content: Absent

Indigenous Content: Absent

- Quebec has no regulatory college for ECEs and relies on association guidelines alone, which carry no regulatory force.
- Neither OLB content nor Indigenous content appears in these guidelines.
- Quebec's early learning framework does not contain any Indigenous content. This is only provincial or territorial framework in Canada with this absence.

Risky Play, Risk-Benefit, Educator Training & Supervision

Summary at a Glance

Risky Play (Framework): Present – risk-conducive environments referenced; children develop self-protective behaviours through outdoor challenge

Risk-Benefit (Regulation): Absent – structured outdoor time and compliance emphasized; no risk-benefit framework

Educator Training for OLB: Absent – no regulatory college; no OLB training requirements in association guidelines

Outdoor Supervision: Structured – two daily outdoor periods mandated; emphasis on age-appropriate materials and structured access

Risky Play & Risk-Benefit Assessment

- Outdoor environments... natural environments provide high-intensity motor experiences... where the environment is conducive to risk-taking, children develop self-protective behaviours. Quebec's framework links outdoor challenge to the development of self-regulation and safety judgment.
- Undertake challenges, in outdoor play areas, in their own way. Child-led challenge is supported.
- This is one of the few frameworks to explicitly connect outdoor challenge to developmental outcomes (self-protective behaviours), though it does not use 'risky play' language or articulate a risk-benefit assessment framework.
- The Educational Childcare Act and Regulation emphasize structured outdoor time and compliance. Daily access to a range of quality outdoor play structures is highlighted.

- No risk-benefit assessment framework exists in Quebec's regulation; Quebec is consistent with the national pattern.

Educator Training & Professional Preparation for OLB

- Quebec has no regulatory college for ECEs; association guidelines carry no regulatory force and contain no OLB or Indigenous content.
- No OLB-specific training, ecological literacy, or outdoor pedagogical competency requirement exists in Quebec's regulation or guidelines.
- Quebec is unique nationally in having no Indigenous content at either the framework or standards level – making it the least integrated jurisdiction for both OLB and Indigenous pedagogy.

Outdoor Supervision Requirements

- The Programme educatif du Québec mandates two daily periods of 45-60 minutes of free play with daily access to outdoor play structures – one of the more prescriptive time requirements nationally.
- Daily access to a range of quality outdoor play structures and materials that are age-appropriate. There is an emphasis on structured, age-appropriate provision.
- Children must remember the steps required to put on their outdoor clothing. Supervision of transitions is addressed at a routine level.
- No differentiated supervision guidance for natural environments, excursions, or beyond-the-fence programming.

Key Links & Resources

Quebec Association for Preschool Professional Development: https://qappd.com/

Educational Childcare Act: https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/fr/document/lc/S-4.1.1?langCont=en

Programme educatif du Quebec: https://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/PFEQ/Prescolaire_4ans_en.pdf

Saskatchewan (SK)

REGULATIONS	EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK	STANDARDS OF PRACTICE
Child Care Regulations	Play and Exploration Early Learning Program Guide	SECA / Government – Guidelines

Regulations

Outdoor & Land-Based Provisions

- 7 m2 per licensed child (minimum); 9-18 m2 recommended.
- Neighbourhood walks and excursions governed by detailed ratio and supervision protocols.
- Continuing education requirements include building cultural competence with a focus on Indigenous culture.
- Recommends Natural Curiosity (2nd Ed.) – Considering Indigenous Perspectives in Children's Environmental Inquiry as a practitioner resource.
- Emphasis on outdoor space, safety, and supervision.

Safety Standards

Operational safety and supervision requirements.

Early Learning Framework

Outdoor Pedagogy

- Outdoor play is not a break... The children reminded me of their curiosity... determination...
- Outdoor space with open areas for tricycles, digging, running, and jumping.
- Collections of natural materials from the outdoors.
- Outdoor environments: Prepare obstacle courses that change frequently... Ensure that children have time outdoors daily.
- Outdoor structures with ropes, wheels, and pulleys... musical instruments for outdoor play (pipes, bells, chimes).
- Support children's development in outdoor environments... cultivate outdoor explorations... create extraordinary outdoor places.
- How will the indoor and outdoor spaces be used to encourage exploration and learning?

Indigenous Content

Recommends Natural Curiosity (2nd Ed.) – Considering Indigenous Perspectives in Children's Environmental Inquiry as a resource supporting educators to build a stronger basic awareness of Indigenous perspectives and their importance to environmental education.

Framework & Regulatory Analysis

Play and Exploration supports outdoor learning through environmental inquiry, natural materials, and curiosity, with coding for nature and pedagogical framing. References to Indigenous pedagogies and land-based learning remain limited. Saskatchewan reflects partial alignment but lacking explicit articulation of OLB pedagogy or professional competencies.

Standards of Practice

OLB & Indigenous Content at a Glance

OLB Content: Absent

Indigenous Content: Limited

- Saskatchewan's guidelines do not identify outdoor or land-based competencies.
- Indigenous content is limited. This is a significant gap given that the Child Care Regulations reference building cultural competence with an Indigenous focus.
- Regulations recommend Natural Curiosity (2nd Ed.) as a practitioner resource, a stronger regulatory foundation than most provinces that is not yet matched by professional standards.

Risky Play, Risk-Benefit, Educator Training & Supervision

Summary at a Glance

Risky Play (Framework): Absent – exploratory framing; no risky play or risk-benefit language in excerpted content

Risk-Benefit (Regulation): Absent – safety and supervision focused; no risk-benefit framework

Educator Training for OLB: Strongest nationally – regulation requires cultural competence training with Indigenous focus; Natural Curiosity recommended

Outdoor Supervision: Most detailed excursion protocols nationally – detailed ratio and supervision requirements for neighbourhood walks and excursions

Risky Play & Risk-Benefit Assessment

- Play and Exploration does not explicitly reference risky play or risk-benefit assessment. Outdoor environments are framed through exploration, curiosity, and natural materials.
- Outdoor play is not a break... the children reminded me of their curiosity... determination – outdoor play positioned as serious learning, but without a challenge or risk framing.
- No risk-benefit assessment framework exists in Saskatchewan's Child Care Regulations; safety and supervision coding reflect standard compliance orientation.

- Saskatchewan is consistent with the national finding that no Canadian licensing regulation has embedded a risk-benefit assessment framework.

Educator Training & Professional Preparation for OLB

- Saskatchewan has the strongest regulatory training provision nationally for cultural competence: continuing education requirements in the Child Care Regulations explicitly include building cultural competence with a focus on Indigenous culture.
- The regulations recommend Natural Curiosity (2nd Ed.) – Considering Indigenous Perspectives in Children's Environmental Inquiry as a practitioner resource – the only jurisdiction to name a specific OLB-adjacent resource in regulation.
- This represents a stronger regulatory foundation than any other province, though it falls short of a defined OLB competency standard and is not matched by equivalent professional standards through SECA.
- No specific outdoor pedagogy, ecological literacy, or risk-benefit training requirement exists beyond the cultural competence provision.

Outdoor Supervision Requirements

- Saskatchewan has the most detailed excursion and beyond-the-fence supervision protocols of any jurisdiction nationally.
- Neighbourhood walks and excursions are governed by detailed ratio and supervision protocols. This is a more developed regulatory framework for off-site outdoor programming than most Canadian jurisdictions.
- Minimum outdoor space: 7 m2 per licensed child; 9-18 m2 recommended – one of the more generous space standards nationally.
- These detailed excursion provisions represent the closest thing in any Canadian regulation to guidance for nature-based or outdoor-primary programming, though they remain operationally rather than pedagogically framed.

Key Links & Resources

Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association: https://seca-sk.org/

Child Care Regulations: https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/73483

Play and Exploration Early Learning Program Guide:
https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/74066

Yukon (YT)

REGULATIONS	EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK	STANDARDS OF PRACTICE
Child Care Act and Regulations	BC Early Learning Framework Government of Canada's Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework	Government – No Formal Standards

Regulations

Outdoor & Land-Based Provisions

- Child Care Act and Regulations address operational requirements including outdoor space, safety, and supervision.
- Regulatory Guidelines for Child Care Programs provide additional operational direction.

Safety Standards

Operational safety and supervision requirements.

Early Learning Framework

Outdoor Pedagogy

No dedicated early learning framework was available for Yukon at the time of this analysis. OLB content could not be assessed at the framework level.

Indigenous Content

No specific Indigenous content noted in the available source material.

Framework & Regulatory Analysis

Without a published early learning framework, the extent to which OLB is conceptually articulated in Yukon remains unclear. The lack of both formal standards and an early learning framework represent a significant gap in a territory where outdoor and land-based learning is central to daily life and Indigenous cultural continuity.

Standards of Practice

OLB & Indigenous Content at a Glance

OLB Content: Absent – no formal Standards of Practice exist

Indigenous Content: Limited – no formal Standards of Practice exist

- Yukon has no formal Standards of Practice for ECEs.

- This absence is particularly significant given Yukon's geography and the centrality of outdoor and land-based environments to children's daily lives in the territory.
- Yukon First Nations communities are not served by professional standards that reflect or support land-based, culturally grounded practice.
- Yukon is identified as one of the jurisdictions with both the greatest need and the greatest opportunity for pilot standards development.

Risky Play, Risk-Benefit, Educator Training & Supervision

Summary at a Glance

Risky Play (Framework): Unable to assess – no dedicated early learning framework available

Risk-Benefit (Regulation): Absent – operational safety and supervision requirements only

Educator Training for OLB: Absent – no formal Standards of Practice; no OLB training requirements

Outdoor Supervision: Standard operational model – Child Care Act addresses outdoor space, safety, and supervision

Risky Play & Risk-Benefit Assessment

- No dedicated early learning framework was available for Yukon at the time of this analysis; risky play and risk-benefit content could not be assessed at the framework level.
- Yukon's Child Care Act and Regulations address operational requirements including outdoor space, safety, and supervision. It reflects a standard compliance model with no risk-benefit language.
- Yukon is consistent with the national pattern: no Canadian jurisdiction has embedded a risk-benefit assessment framework in licensing requirements.
- The absence of an early learning framework means there is no jurisdictional vision articulating the value of outdoor challenge or risk-benefit thinking for Yukon children.

Educator Training & Professional Preparation for OLB

- Yukon has no formal standards of practice for ECEs.
- No OLB-specific training, ecological literacy, or outdoor pedagogical competency requirement exists in Yukon's Child Care Act or Regulatory Guidelines for Child Care Programs.
- Yukon First Nations communities, whose children's development is deeply connected to outdoor and land-based environments are not served by the lack of professional standard.
- Yukon is identified as a priority jurisdiction for pilot standards development given both the urgency of the gap and the potential for meaningful reform in a smaller jurisdiction.

Outdoor Supervision Requirements

- The Child Care Act and Regulations address outdoor space, safety, and supervision through standard operational requirements.
- Regulatory Guidelines for Child Care Programs provide additional operational direction.
- No differentiated supervision guidance exists for land-based programs, outdoor-primary settings, or beyond-the-fence programming.

Key Links & Resources

Early Childhood Educators of Yukon Territory: https://www.eceyukon.com/

Child Care Act and Regulations: https://yukon.ca/en/regulatory-guidelines-child-care-and-family-day-home-programs

Government of B.C.'s Early Learning Framework

Government of Canada's Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework