

2025 City of Quesnel and North Cariboo Childcare Inventory Update



Summary

The 2025 Childcare Inventory Update provides an overview of licensed childcare spaces in Quesnel and the surrounding North Cariboo region. It compares current capacity to the 2020 Childcare Strategy's 2029 targets and assesses demographic trends affecting childcare demand.

Since the 2020 report, the region's total childcare spaces have slightly decreased. Infant and toddler spaces remain limited at around 10% of the total. Geographic inconsistencies continue, with the rural areas of Cariboo I, Lhtako Dene, and Wells having no licensed providers.

Population trends suggest a decline in child population in the City of Quesnel, while some rural areas have experienced slight growth. 2024 estimates from BC Stats show lower than projected numbers in the under 5 populations, but a higher number for school aged children, suggesting an increased demand for after school care.

Key developments since 2020 include the expansion of BC childcare subsidy programs, the opening of a facility in West Quesnel that has made 10 more spaces available including 8 infant and toddler spaces, and the future opening of a 61-space childcare facility in Carson Elementary School that is currently being constructed. To meet the 2029 targets, the region will need to expand capacity for infants and toddlers and address the shortage of qualified early childhood educators.

Introduction

Access to affordable, licenced childcare is an important factor to supporting families and enabling workforce participation. The Tactical Plan section of the 2023 City of Quesnel Workforce Strategy highlights the importance of updating the communities' childcare inventory. Feedback from the Economic Development Strategy consultation suggests residents are concerned about a lack of childcare availability affecting healthcare worker retention. The report that came from this consultation, Quesnel's 2025-2029 Economic Development Strategy, highlights an initiative of advocating and supporting new childcare services to increase the participation of working families in the labour market.

This update builds on the original 2020 City of Quesnel and North Cariboo Childcare Strategy: Needs Analysis Report, which established targets for 2029. This 2025 update provides a current overview of licenced childcare spaces, assesses changes in child population demographics, and measures progress towards the 2029 targets set in 2020. Comparisons are made between the 2019 baseline and the current 2025 conditions. While this report does not set new targets, it evaluates whether the region is on track to meet the original goals.

Methodology

Data for this report was collected through a combination of online research and direct outreach to childcare providers in the study area. Online sources included Northern Health's care provider listings, the BC Maps "Childcare Map" data, and both BC Stats and Statistics Canada population data. This research produced an updated contact list of registered facilities in the relevant census areas, which include the City of Quesnel, Cariboo A, B, C, and I, and Wells, and Lhtako Dene.

Childcare providers were contacted by phone or email to verify their facility details, program types, and available spaces. Where providers could not be reached, facility information was updated using Northern Health and BC Maps records. Population data is based on the 2016 and 2021 Censuses and BC Stats projections to 2034 using School District 28 boundaries. Statistics Canada and BC Stats use different geographic boundaries to display data; the BC Stats population estimates and projections will vary slightly from the Statistics Canada population data.

City of Quesnel and North Cariboo Child Population Trends

Between 2016 and 2021, the child population in the Quesnel region showed mixed trends. While some age groups grew in the sub-areas, others declined (Figures 5-6). Population projections from BC Statistics data (Figures 1-2) do not have the same geographic boundaries as the Child Population data (Figures 3-6). Projections and estimates in Figures 1-2 are based on school district area (SD28) instead of census agglomeration sub areas.

When compared to the 2020 Childcare Strategy's projections for 2024, the actual estimates indicate that growth in the infant and toddler category (0-2 years old) was slightly lower than expected, with 527 children compared to the projected 588. The under-school age category (3-4 and half of all 5-year-olds) was also lower than projected by 36.5 children. The school age category (6-12 and half of all 5-year-olds) exceeded projections by 46.5 children, indicating an increased demand for after-school care.

BC Statistics projections to 2029 expect 540 infants and toddlers (a 2.46% increase from 2024 estimates), while children under school age and school age are expected to decline. This suggests that while the total child population will see a small decrease, infant and toddler spaces will remain the highest in demand.

	2024 Projection (from 2019)	2024 Estimate	2024 Comparison projection vs estimate	
Age Group	# of children	# of children	# difference	% difference
Infant and toddler (0-2 yrs)	588	527	-61	-10.37%
Under school age (3-4 year olds and half of all 5 year olds)	545	508.5	-36.5	-6.69%
School age (6- 12 years olds and half of all 5 year olds)	1856	1902.5	46.5	2.50%
Total 0-12 year olds	2989	2938	-51	-1.70%

Figure 1: 2024 SD28 Population Projection vs Estimate, BC Stats

	2029 Projection			2034 Projection		
Age Group	# of children	# of change 2024- 2029	% change 2024- 2029	# of children	# of change 2029- 2034	% change 2029- 2034
Infant and toddler (0-2 yrs)	540	13	2.46%	531	-9	-1.66%
Under school age (3-4 year olds and half of all 5 year olds)	463	-45.5	-8.94%	493.5	30.5	6.58%
School age (6-12 years olds and half of all 5-year- olds)	1587	-315.5	-16.58%	1551.5	-35.5	-2.23%
Total 0-12 year olds	2590	-348	-11.84%	2576	-14	-0.54%

Figure 2: SD28 Population Projection 2029, 2034, BC Stats

City of Quesnel and North Cariboo Population Profile

	City of Quesnel		Cariboo A And Lhtako Dene (Quesnel 1)		Cariboo B	
Age Group	Number of Children	Percentage	# of Children	Percentage	# of Children	Percentage
0-2 yr	245	19.14%	175	18.71%	75	15.31%
3-5 yr	300	23.44%	205	21.93%	90	18.37%
6-12 yr	735	57.42%	555	59.36	325	66.32%
Total	1280	100%	935	100%	490	100%

Figure 3: Child population by specific age combinations related to childcare, Quesnel Census Geographies (part 1), 2021 Statistics Canada Census.

	Cariboo C and Wells		Cariboo I and Nazko		Agglomeration	
Age Group	Number of Children	Percentage	Number of Children	Percentage	Number of Children	Percentage
0-2 yr	30	16.21%	25	13.88%	550	17.97%
3-5 yr	50	27.02%	35	19.44%	675	22.06%
6-12 yr	105	56.76%	120	66.66%	1835	59.97%
Total	185	100%	180	100%	3060	100%

Figure 4: Child population by specific age combinations related to childcare, Quesnel Census Geographies (part 2), 2021 Statistics Canada Census.

	City of Quesnel		Cariboo A and Lhtako Dene (Quesnel 1)		Cariboo B	
Age Group	# Change in Number of Children, 2016-2021	% Change in Number of Children, 2016-2021	# Change in Number of Children, 2016-2021	% Change in Number of Children, 2016-2021	# Change in Number of Children, 2016-2021	% Change in Number of Children, 2016-2021
0-2 yr	-65	-20.96%	20	12.90%	-20	-21.05%
3-5 yr	-20	-6.25%	0	0%	-15	-14.28%
6-12 yr	-95	-11.44%	10	1.83%	30	10.16
Total	-180	-12.33%	165	3.31%	-5	-1.01%

Figure 5: Child population change, by specific age combinations related to childcare, Quesnel Census Geographies (part 1), 2016- 2021 Statistics Canada Censuses

Age Group	Cariboo C and Wells		Cariboo I and Nazko		Agglomeration	
	# Change in Number of Children, 2016-2021	% Change in Number of Children, 2016-2021	# Change in Number of Children, 2016-2021	% Change in Number of Children, 2016-2021	# Change in Number of Children, 2016-2021	% Change in Number of Children, 2016-2021
0-2 yr	-5	-14.28%	-10	-28.57%	-75	-12%
3-5 yr	5	11.11%	0	0%	-30	-4.25%
6-12 yr	-20	-16%	5	4.34%	-65	-3.42%
Total	-20	-9.75%	180	2.85%	-170	-5.26%

Figure 6: Child population by change, specific age combinations related to childcare, Quesnel Census Geographies (part 2), 2016-2021 Statistics Canada Censuses.

Survey

The information on available spaces in this report came from childcare providers and BC government data. Parents were not interviewed. A total of 35 childcare providers were contacted for this update while 5 were unreachable. The details for these facilities were updated using Northern Health and BC Maps records.

In addition to information on available spaces, some providers shared feedback. One operator of multiple facilities emphasized that staffing shortages are the main challenge rather than space availability. Recruiting and retaining early childhood educators is an important factor to meeting the 2029 childcare targets. Most of the facilities are sufficiently staffed, but many could increase their capacity with more licensed care providers.

Childcare Inventory and Progress Towards Targets

As of 2025, there are 451 licensed childcare spaces across the study area as shown in Figure 7. This is a small decrease from the 2020 inventory, and the distribution of spaces remains uneven. The City of Quesnel contains a majority of available spaces with 297, while Cariboo A follows with 129. Cariboo B and C have minimal capacity, and Cariboo I, Lhtako Dene, and Wells have no licensed childcare providers at all.

Infant and toddler group care spaces (birth to 36 months) remain the most limited, with only 46 spaces across the region. This is about 10% of the total inventory. This is consistent with the findings from the 2020 Inventory that identified this age group as the highest-need category. Group care for children aged 30 months to school age accounts for 158 spaces, while there are 125 school-age group care spaces. Multi-age and family childcare options contribute to a smaller number of childcare spaces.

Overall capacity has slightly increased (Figure 8), and there has been growth in infant and toddler spaces. This does not close the identified gap, only making a positive impact. Rural and remote communities still have a small share of childcare facilities based on their populations. Many people who live in these areas work in the City of Quesnel district, so the concentration of childcare facilities within city boundaries may not be a significant barrier for accessibility.

Against the 2020 strategy's 2029 targets, progress has been mixed. To meet provincial averages, the target was 86 more spaces by 2024 and a further 55 spaces by 2029. While Quesnel did not meet the 2024 target, and is not on track to meet the 2029 targets, population growth has been slightly less than expected (Figure 1).

Type	City of Quesnel	Cariboo A	Cariboo B	Cariboo C	Cariboo I	Lhtako Dene	Wells	Total
Group (birth to 36 months)	22	24	0	0	0	0	0	46
Group (30 months to school age)	108	42	8	0	0	0	0	158
Licensed preschool spaces	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	20
Group (school age)	67	48	10	0	0	0	0	125
Multi-age childcare	24	8	0	0	0	0	0	32
Family childcare	56	7	0	7	0	0	0	70
In home multi-age care	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
Total	313	129	18	7	0	0	0	467

Figure 7: Quesnel and North Cariboo Childcare Inventory Update 2025

Type	City of Quesnel	Cariboo A	Cariboo B	Cariboo C	Cariboo I	Lhtako Dene	Wells	Total
Group (birth to 36 months)	6	4	0	0	0	0	0	10
Group (30 months to school age)	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	15
Licensed preschool spaces	-39	-0	0	0	0	0	0	-39
Group (school age)	23	30	-5	0	0	0	-12	36
Multi-age childcare	-8	8	0	0	0	0	-8	-8
Family childcare	-34	0	0	7	0	0	0	-27
In home multi-age care	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
Total	-21	42	-5	7	0	0	-20	3

Figure 8: Change in Child Care Spaces 2020-2025

Action Plan Progress

Several steps have been taken since 2020 to expand childcare capacity. The City of Quesnel constructed a new facility in West Quesnel with the support of the BC Government New Spaces Fund, allowing for the forty-seven spaces to be maintained and ten additional spots. Eight of these new spaces are for birth to 36-month ages that have a high demand. An increase in provincial support allows more access to affordable childcare options, this includes the \$10-a-day program and the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative. This does not increase spaces, but increased accessibility to childcare. School District 28 has committed to incorporating childcare spaces into new school buildings. Quesnel Jr. School opened in 2022 creating 56 spaces, and Carson Elementary is expected to open in 2026 with 61 childcare spaces. Specific mention of community childcare needs will be considered as part of the current update of the Official Community Plan, as recommended in the 2020 Action Plan.

Conclusion

The Quesnel and North Cariboo region has made progress toward the 2029 childcare targets set in 2020, but gaps remain in infant and toddler age groups. Population projections indicate that while overall child numbers will remain steady, meeting the 2029 targets will require additional licenced spaces, especially for infants and toddlers, and an increase of educated caretakers.