

Inventory & Space Needs Update

The 2021 Smithers Child Care Plan included an inventory of licensed child care programs and space needs. This section updates this information using 2021 Census population data and licensing information obtained from Northern Health Community Care Licensing.

Licensed Programs & Spaces

In the Town of Smithers there are 14 licensed child care programs provided by 12 licensed child care providers for a total of 286 spaces. Of all licensed child care providers, six (6) are non-profit and six (6) are for-profit. Table 1, below, shows the distribution of licensed child care programs and spaces in the Town of Smithers in 2020 and 2023.

Table 1. Licensed Child Care Programs & Spaces in Smithers

Facility Type	Child Care License Type	Number of Programs		Number of Spaces	
		2020	2023	2020	2023
Centre-based	Group (Under 36 months)	1	1	36	20
	Group (30 months to school-age)	3	3	102	104
	Multi-Age	1	1	8	8
	Preschool	4	5	76	75
	Group (School Age)	2	2	53	49
Home-based	Family	3	2	21	14
	Multi-Age	0	2	0	16
TOTAL		14	16	296	286

The number of licensed child care providers **increased** from nine (9) to 12 providers between 2020-2023. There was one family child care business that closed and three (3) new providers, including two home-based businesses and one preschool. The total number of licensed child care spaces **decreased** by 3% or 10 spaces between 2021-2023.

Figure 1. Licensed Child Care Spaces in Smithers in 2020 and 2023

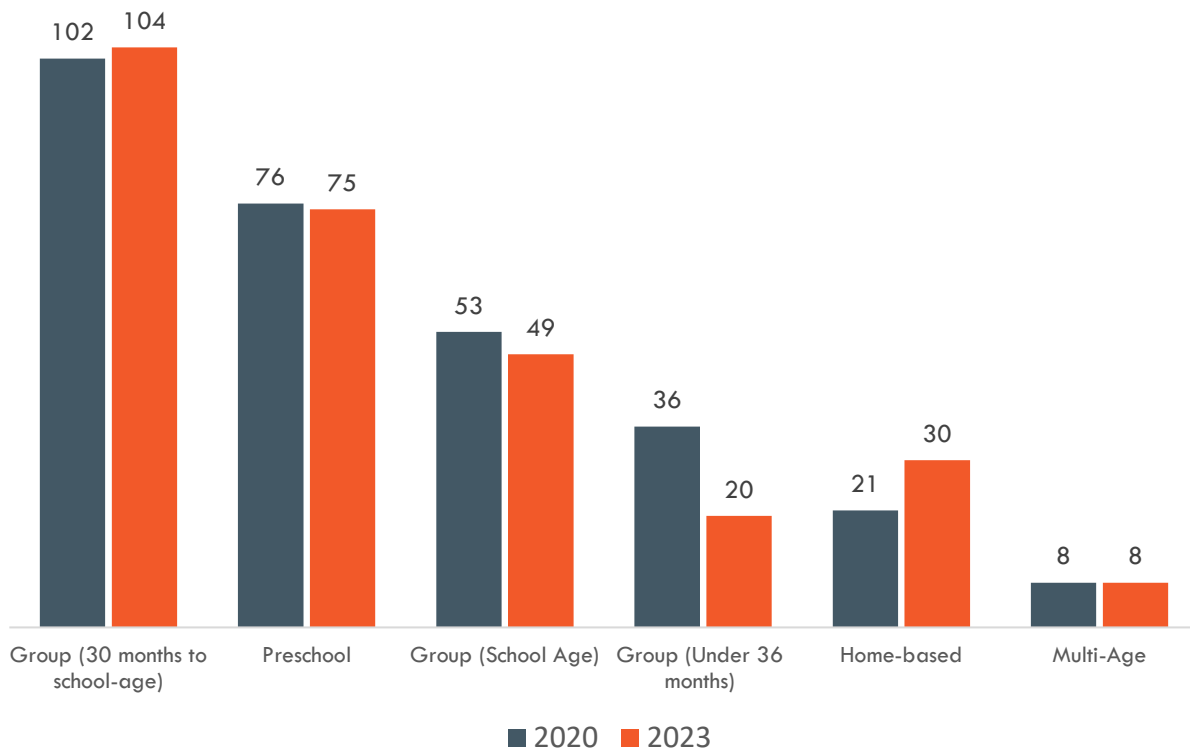


Figure 1, above, illustrates the changes in spaces between 2020 and 2023. Key findings include:

- Group (30 months to school age), preschool, multi-age, and group (school age) spaces remained stable between 2020 – 2023.
- Infant / toddler spaces (Group – Under 36 months), **decreased** by 16 spaces, accounting for the largest loss of spaces.
- The largest growth of child care spaces was in home-based child care (family and family multi-age), which saw an **increase** of 9 spaces from 21 spaces in 2020 to 30 spaces in 2023.

Licensed child care programs continue to operate within Monday – Friday working hours. There are no overnight care programs, occasional care, drop-in programs, or programs open on statutory holidays.

Three schools are co-located with licensed child care programs. These are St. Joseph’s Elementary School (preschool & after school program), Bulkley Valley Christian School (preschool), and Walnut Park Elementary School (preschool, 30 month – school age, after school program). There continues to be no Young Parent Program or Aboriginal Head Start program in Smithers.

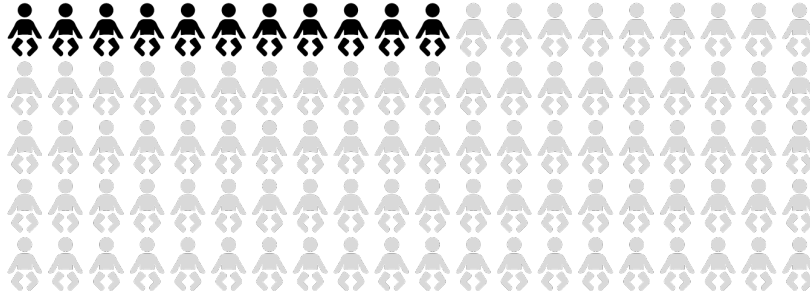
Child Care Coverage Rate

Table 2 shows the number of child care spaces per 100 children, known as the coverage rate. It includes current licensed group child care spaces that provide full-time child care to specific age groups with 2016 and 2021 census data.

Table 2. Smithers Licensed Child Care Coverage Rate

Type of Child Care	Child Care Spaces		Child	Population	Child Care Coverage Rate	
	2020	2023	2016 Census	2021 Census	2016	2021
Infant / Toddler Dedicated Spaces (Group - Under 36 months)	36	20	175	190	21%	11%
3-5 Year Dedicated Spaces (Group - 30 Months to School Age)	102	104	185	195	55%	53%
School Age Spaces (After School Care)	53	49	470	450	11%	11%
All Care Types¹	296	286	830	835	36%	34%

The child care coverage rate for children 0-12 years of age is 34% in Smithers, a slight decrease from the 2021 rate of 36%. Notably, the largest decrease in child care coverage has been in dedicated infant / toddler space, which dropped from 21% to 11%.



In 2023, Smithers has 11 spaces for every 100 children (0-36 months of age)

Child Care Space Needs

The Smithers Child Care Plan outlined a space target of 46 additional spaces to incrementally increase the child care coverage rate to from 36% to 38% using projected 0-12-year population growth obtained from BC Stats.

Table 3, below, provides an updated projected needs using 2021 census data and a coverage rate of 38% from the Child Care Plan. In addition, the Province of BC’s coverage target of 59% is provided to align with universal child care coverage targets.

Table 3. Child Care Space Needs

¹ Includes family, multi-age & preschool child care spaces

0 to 12 Year 2021 Census Population	Existing Licensed Spaces	Spaces Needed for 38% Coverage	Gap (38%)	Spaces Needed for 59% Coverage	Gap (59%)
835	286	317	+31	493	+207

Child Care Gaps

The 2021 Child Care Plan revealed a range of child care needs in Smithers, reflecting a demand for additional licensed child care spaces across of range of ages and child care types. Child care gaps from the 2021 plan included:

- 1. Infant / toddler spaces** - While there is a need for more child care spaces and program types in Smithers, there is a notable shortage of infant & toddler spaces.
- 2. Flexible & extended hour care options** - There are no licensed care options for those requiring care beyond traditional working hours, including before school care options & drop-in.
- 3. Family hubs** - With most child care facilities located as a stand-alone use, there is a lack of child care being co-located in “family hubs” with uses that serve families (i.e., schools, civic, recreation, family service organizations).
- 4. Space creation barriers** - Suitability and availability of child care spaces, lack of affordable purchase / lease prices, and staffing challenges are key barriers to space creation.
- 5. Affordability** - Affordability of child care is a key challenge, both for fees and within the overall context of the higher cost of living in Smithers. Accessing affordability benefits and child care information is a challenge.
- 6. Care & supports for vulnerable families** - Child care options for vulnerable families are limited, notably indigenous-led child care, no Young Parent Program, supports for children with extra support needs and care offered in conjunction with “wrap-around” services (i.e., meals, family services, transportation) in safe & trusted environments.

With the 2023 inventory and space needs update, the 2021 findings remain, with increasing pressure on infant / toddler (0-36 month) spaces. There has likely been progress to improve affordability of child care fees for parents with the introduction of the provincial Affordable Child Care Benefit program.