



Region of Waterloo Children's Services

Early Learning and Child Care Service Plan

2016-2020



Region of Waterloo
COMMUNITY SERVICES



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Front Cover Photo - Owl Child Care
 Back Cover Photo - Emmanuel at Brighton Child Care Centre



I ntroduction

Owl Child Care



Introduction

Letter from the Director of Children's Services

I am excited to share our new Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Service Plan with you. This plan is a multi-year plan that will act as our road map for the next four years. As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM), the Region of Waterloo, Children's Services has a mandate and directive from the Province to engage in system wide planning for licensed early learning and child care services.

Our new plan builds upon the work that was listed in our previous ELCC Service Plan 2010-2015. Much has changed in the past five years as we now have full implementation of full day kindergarten, expansion of before and after school programs, capital funding for construction of new child care collocated with new schools and the rollout of a new Provincial wage enhancement program to name a few.

This new plan provides a picture of our current services and challenges in Waterloo Region, which is based on input and feedback from parents, service providers and child care operators. Licensed early learning and child care which occurs in the infant, toddler, preschool and school age years is the first stage in a continuum of lifelong learning opportunities for children. The early years are critical to supporting positive outcomes for children as they grow towards adulthood. Nobel Laureate James Heckman notes: *"Investment in early education for disadvantaged children from birth to age five helps to reduce the achievement gap, reduce the need for special education, increase the likelihood of healthier lifestyles, lower the crime rate, and reduce overall social costs."*

Access to licensed early learning and child care is critical to support healthy outcomes. Continued investment is required to support and build a system of licensed early learning and care that is of high quality, affordable and available to families when they need it. Access to high quality early childhood education also contributes to local economies by creating jobs and supporting employment opportunities for parents. *"Early Learning and Child Care is the most overlooked economic development opportunity... If we are trying to entice businesses and skilled workers, then we must address their child care needs."* (New Westminster, Child Care Needs Assessment.)

There is no doubt that the world of licensed ELCC is in a period of transformative change. A number of Provincial and legislative changes are driving a movement to modernize child care as we have known it. We have done our best to anticipate and predict the impact of what we know, however we are aware that the approaches and strategies identified in this document may need to be modified along the way. We are excited however to continue our journey towards a vibrant, high quality, inclusive service system of early years services and supports. We want to ensure that Waterloo Region is a community where children thrive. We will do this by taking a planned and strategic approach in collaboration with our community partners.

Nancy Dickieson,
Director, Children's Services



Executive Summary

Early Learning and Child Care Service Plan 2016-2020

The Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Service Plan is a multi-year plan that will act as our road map for the next four years. As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM), the Region of Waterloo, Children's Services has a mandate and directive from the Province to engage in system wide planning for licensed ELCC services.

This Service Plan provides a picture of our current services and challenges in Waterloo Region, based on input and feedback from over 1,100 parents, as well as service providers and child care operators, and builds on the work completed as part of the 2010-2015 Service Plan. Since that time, licensed ELCC has changed significantly with the implementation of full-day kindergarten, expansion of before and after school programs, the role out of a new Provincial wage enhancement program, and the implementation of the new *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* (CCEYA).

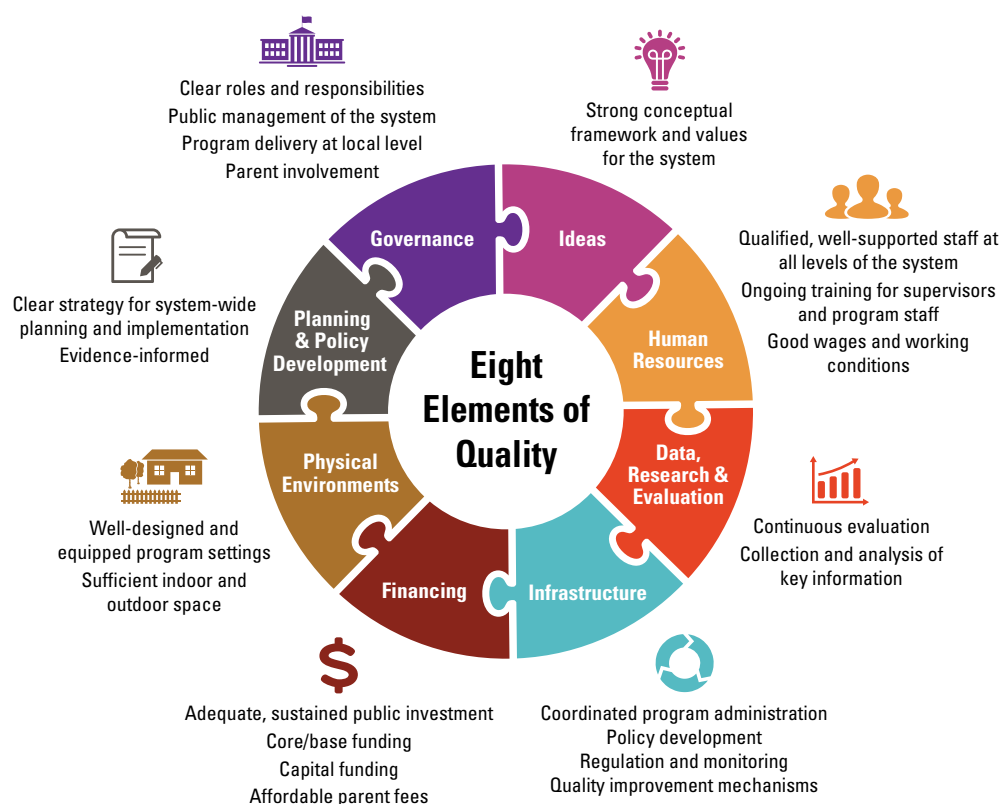
We are excited to continue our journey towards a vibrant, high quality, inclusive ELCC system by taking a planned and strategic approach in collaboration with our community partners. Together, we want to ensure that Waterloo Region is a community where all children thrive.

ELCC Service Plan Framework

A focus on quality ELCC is at the core of the Service Plan. The eight elements of a quality ELCC system are used by Children's Services as a framework to guide system planning. These elements are highly interconnected and all are essential in supporting an ELCC system with high quality ELCC programs.

4 'A' Lens

Children's Services views and understands the ELCC system through a 4 'A' lens of **Availability**, **Affordability**, **Accessibility** and **Accountability**. This lens provides a framework for organizing the Service Plan, including data, feedback and actions. Each section also provides information specific to a key area in the local ELCC system.



(Source: Martha Friendly and Jane Beach, (2005). Elements of a high quality early learning and child care system. Childcare Resource and Research Unit.)



Owl Child Care

Availability

There are several options for quality, licensed ELCC programs in Waterloo Region. While the number of ELCC programs has increased in recent years there are still many children unable to access licensed care due to a lack of available space.

What we heard from families and ELCC partners...

- Location of child care was the most frequently identified influence on child care choices by parents.
- Many parents identified a need for more licensed spaces available in their neighbourhood.
- Parents identified a lack of infant spaces as a major challenge in the region.
- Operators identified cost of infant and toddler care as their second highest viability challenge; this has been constant since 2012.
- Service providers, educators and operators identified a need for more licensed spaces overall.
- Community partners noted a need for more licensed care within close proximity to public transit.

Affordability

High quality licensed early learning and child care comes at a significant financial cost to families. While Child Care Fee Subsidy may reduce the cost barrier for families who meet set income and other eligibility criteria, the high cost of child care remains the number one factor local parents reported they would change about their child care experience.

What we heard from families and ELCC partners...

- Many parents have identified cost as the top factor they would change about their child care experience.
- Local licensed ELCC operators identified wages, operating costs associated with ELCC, and insufficient public funding as the main barriers to reducing parent fees.
- Wages for current staff and parent fees not reflecting the true cost of ELCC were identified as two of the top three viability challenges for licensed ELCC operators.
- Community partners and educators identified affordability of licensed child care as one of the top barriers to accessing licensed ELCC.

“Start looking [for child care] early because there are not enough spaces.” – Advice from a parent

“When you have two kids in daycare it is about as much as a mortgage payment.” – Parent



Accessibility

All children have the right to fully participate in a quality licensed early learning and care child program. Unfortunately, not all children have access to high quality, licensed ELCC for a variety of reasons including cost, availability, cultural barriers and/or special needs.

What we heard from families and ELCC partners...

- The child care system is complex to navigate and requires significant advance planning – start searching early was the most frequent advice that parents offered to someone new to the system.
- Community partners, staff and child care operators identified challenges and inconsistencies with the use of OneList.
- ELCC programs need to be more responsive in meeting the unique and changing needs of children with special needs.
- Educators require more support and training to ensure full participation of children with special needs in ELCC programs.
- The inclusion of children with special needs into child care programs is beneficial for children with special needs, their families and all other children in the program.
- Community partners and educators identified a need to be more accessible to non-English speaking families, newcomers, and First Nations, Inuit and Metis families.

Accountability

Research shows the developmental benefits of high quality ELCC programs. High quality ELCC is linked with short- and long-term positive impacts in areas such as cognitive and emotional development, social competence and positive behaviour. Beyond the benefits for children, there is increasing evidence that high quality ELCC yields economic and social returns both in the short and long term.

What we heard from families and ELCC partners...

- Providing licensed ELCC that is of the highest quality is the top priority for Children's Services and ELCC operators so that children in Waterloo Region thrive and achieve optimal development health.
- Many parents identified the staff or caregiver as one of the most important influences on their child care choices.
- Staff retention was identified as one of the top challenges facing licensed ELCC operators.
- Staff wage was the highest viability challenge facing ELCC operators, followed by cost of providing infant/toddler care, parent fees not true cost, and lack of REECE supply staff.

Actions for 2016-2020

1. Develop a master plan for development of licensed, high quality ELCC in Waterloo Region.
2. Improve access to affordable, high quality, licensed early learning and child care services and experiences for all families.
3. Build capacity to support inclusion of all children in high quality, early learning and child care experiences.
4. Address the service experience for families with early years services.
5. Mobilize a renewed approach to continuous quality improvement for all early years services that is responsive, effective and measurable.



St. Jacobs Daycare

Developing the Early Learning and Child Care Service Plan

The Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Service Plan was developed based on priorities identified by the community. Throughout the spring of 2016, over 1,200 community stakeholders provided their input through a number of opportunities for engagement. The following key community stakeholders provided invaluable feedback that shaped the ELCC Service Plan:

- **Parent and Guardian** input was primarily gathered using *Engage Region of Waterloo*, the Region of Waterloo's online platform for public engagement. Over 1,100 parents were recruited to participate using a wide variety of channels and provided feedback regarding their experiences with ELCC in Waterloo Region.
- **ELCC service providers** gave their feedback regarding current system challenges and priorities at two ELCC forums held during spring 2016. Additionally, ELCC service providers were invited to submit photos highlighting the work of their program – these photos are included throughout the Service Plan. More information about the ELCC forums is available on page 15.
- **Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) Collaborative** provided feedback about barriers to inclusion in licensed ELCC and potential actions to address these barriers. Feedback was gathered through ELCC forums and focus groups with each of the three agencies providing SNR supports. More information about the SNR Collaborative is available on page 15 and page 52.
- **Children's Planning Table (CPT) members** (including service providers, planning bodies and funders) provided feedback regarding barriers for families and potential priorities at a planning session held before the CPT meeting in May. More information about the CPT is available on page 15.
- **School Boards** (Waterloo Region District School Board and Waterloo Catholic District School Board) provided general input through their Designated Early Childhood Education Supervisors at the ELCC forums and informal conversations between senior leadership.
- **Regional Staff (Children's Services)** provided feedback about barriers and priorities through structured activities during meetings, individual interviews and electronically.
- **Regional Staff (Other departments and divisions)** provided feedback through focus groups and interviews about barriers in ELCC for vulnerable populations and challenges with system navigation and discussed opportunities to work together and integrate services to address barriers.

In addition to community engagement, data was collected from Statistics Canada, the Child Care Licensing System (CCLS), the Ministry of Education and a literature review was completed. Together, all of this data and feedback has informed the Service Plan and shaped several key directions for 2016-2020.



The Current Early Learning and Child Care System





Lakeshore Cooperative Nursery School

The Current Early Learning and Child Care System

Eight Elements of a Quality System

The quality of early learning and child care (ELCC) matters. High quality care evolves from a high quality ELCC, and Children’s Services is committed to supporting a high quality system through its work as a Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM).

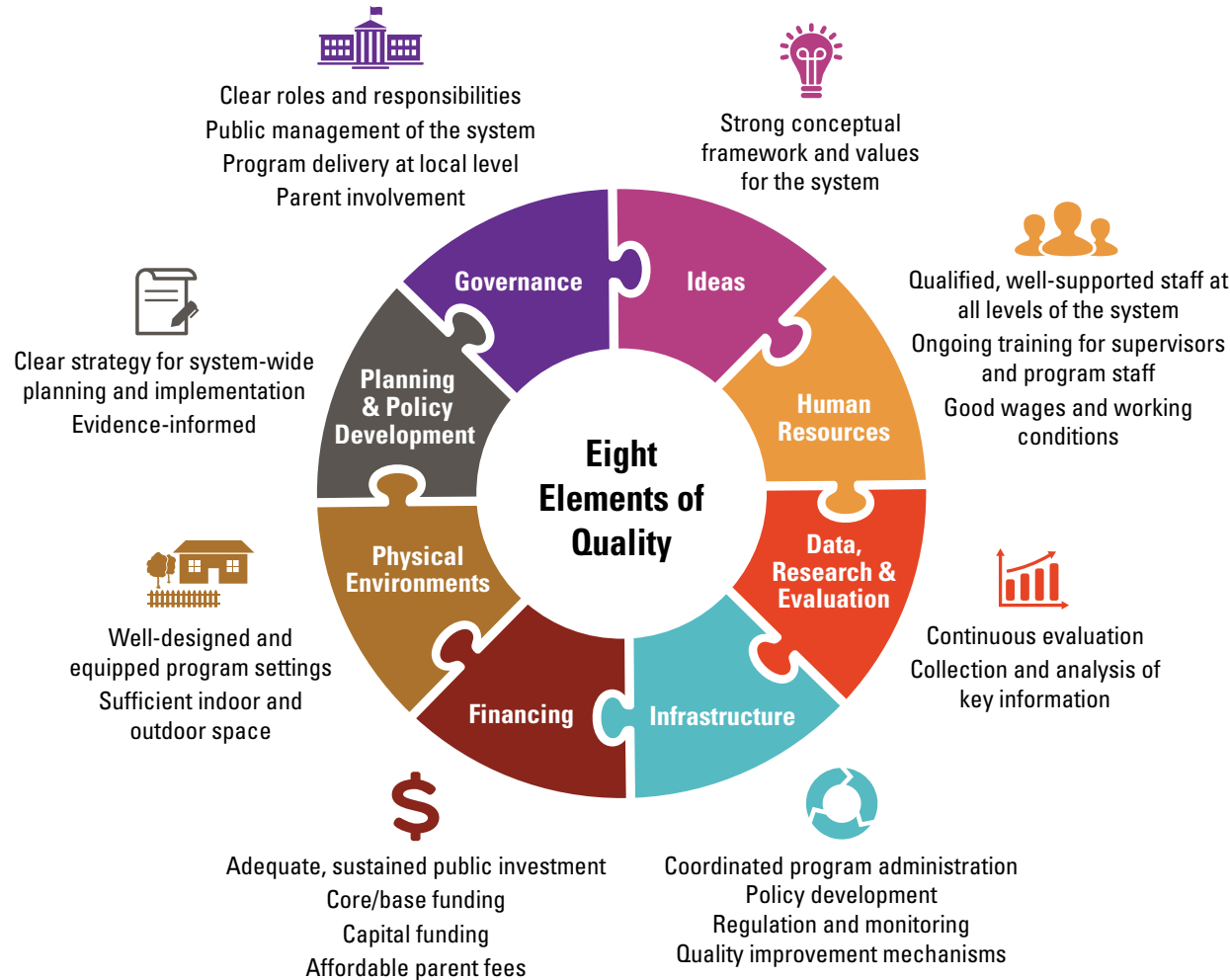
A focus on quality ELCC is at the core of the Service Plan. The eight elements of a quality ELCC system, as identified by Martha Friendly and Jane Beach in *Quality by Design*, are used by Children’s Services as a framework to guide system planning. These elements are highly interconnected and all are essential in supporting an ELCC system with high quality ELCC programs. The local ELCC system, as in the rest of Ontario, is not fully publicly funded. As the CMSM in this context, Children’s Services has oversight at a system’s level, but more limited control at the direct service or program level.

The case for quality early learning and child care is strong - research has repeatedly shown that “experiences early in life can have a lasting impact on later learning, behaviour, and health.”ⁱ

High quality early learning and child care is linked with short- and long-term positive impacts in areas such as cognitive and emotional development, social competence and positive behaviour. Conversely, low quality care can have damaging impacts on these areas.ⁱⁱ



The figure below outlines the eight key elements of a quality ELCC system. These elements and the corresponding supporting research underlie and inform all of the planning work and priorities identified in the Service Plan.



Jacob Hespeler Child Care

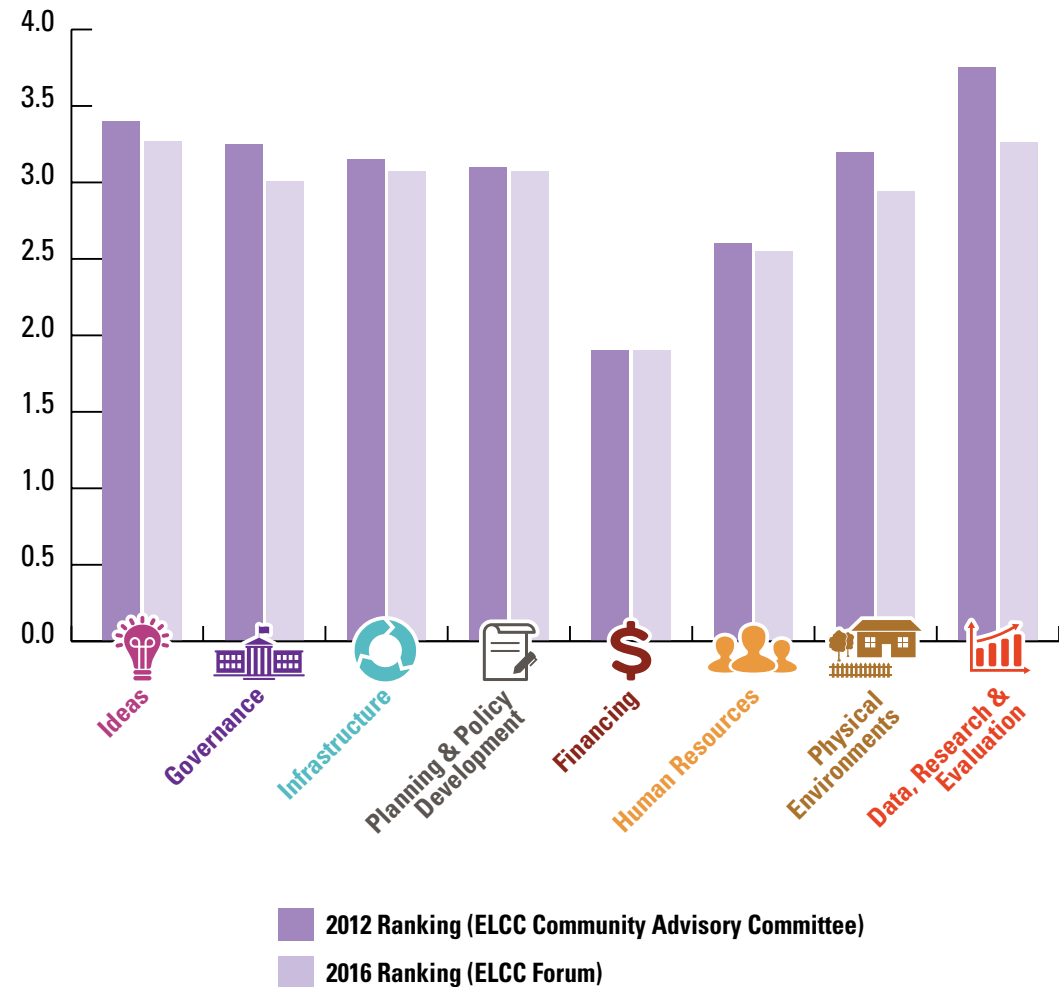
(Source: Martha Friendly and Jane Beach, (2005). Elements of a high quality early learning and child care system. Childcare Resource and Research Unit.)

The ELCC community provided ratings of progress on the eight elements of quality from 1 (not at all achieved) to 5 (completely achieved) in both 2012 and 2016. As the figure to the right shows, the system continues to have significant room to grow and improve in all elements. Financing and Human Resources were identified as the areas furthest from being achieved and Ideas and Data, Research and Evaluation being closer to achieved.



Lakeshore Cooperative Nursery School

ELCC Community Rating of Progress on the Eight Elements of Quality





4 'A' Lens

While the eight elements of a quality system are at the core of the Region of Waterloo's approach to ELCC planning, the 4 'A' lens, described below, represents the lens through which Children's Services views and understands the ELCC system, including changes to the system over time. This lens provides a framework for organizing the Service Plan, including data, feedback and actions.

Organizing the Service Plan by the 4 As

All sections answer and/or identify areas for local knowledge development related to the following questions:

- What challenges exist for families and the system in this area?
- What are the important planning considerations in this area?
- What actions/priorities could address existing challenges?
- What impact does this have on children?

Each section also provides information specific to a key area in the local ELCC system:

Availability

What types of licensed ELCC spaces exist in Waterloo Region? Where are they located? How many spaces are there?

Affordability

How much does licensed ELCC cost? How affordable is it to families? Who receives child care fee subsidy?

Accessibility

How do families access ELCC programs? What supports exist in ELCC for children with special needs? Is ELCC accessible to all families?

Accountability

What are the indicators of a quality ELCC program? Do families understand what makes a quality ELCC program? What resources exist to support quality across the ELCC system?

Local Context - Region of Waterloo Children's Services

Vision:

Waterloo Region is a community where all children thrive.

Mission:

- We **SERVE** our community by providing responsive, inclusive programs for children and families
- We **ENGAGE** with families and our community partners to provide high quality services.
- We **INSPIRE** by supporting and creating innovative early learning environments where all children belong.

Regional Values

At the Region of Waterloo we are committed to:

- **Service** - We provide excellent public service and strive to understand and meet the needs of all those we serve.
- **Integrity** - We practice high standards of ethical behaviour and conduct ourselves with an openness and transparency that inspires trust.
- **Respect** - We create an environment where people are included, valued and treated with dignity.
- **Innovation** - We foster an environment of leadership, excellence and creativity.
- **Collaboration** - We build internal and external relationships to achieve common goals and resolve differences.

Consolidated Municipal Service Manager

Children's Services is a division of the Community Services Department at the Region of Waterloo. Children's Services is the provincially designated CMSM. As the CMSM, Children's Services has the responsibility for service and system management for licensed ELCC services for children from birth to 12 years of age. This is done in consultation with community partners and organizations.





Community Planning

Children’s Services continuously gathers feedback from community partners to inform system planning. There are three key planning groups and their working groups that are the main sources of regular ELCC planning input.

| Group | Members | Description |
|---|--|---|
| Early Learning & Child Care Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Licensed ELCC program owners/operators, supervisors, assistant supervisors, and ELCC programs’ board members Ministry of Education Local Boards of Education | The ELCC community meets formally at least four times each year at ELCC Forums. Feedback is gathered at each forum about emerging issues and priorities. Additional input is sought, as needed, between meetings using surveys or focus groups and informal meetings. |
| Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) Collaborative | Three member agencies providing inclusion support services in licensed ELCC with the Region of Waterloo (Family and Children’s Services Waterloo Region, KidsAbility, and KW Habilitation). | The SNR Leadership Team meets five times a year, working groups meet on a more regular basis on project specific tasks. |
| Children’s Planning Table (CPT) | Organizations (including service providers, planning bodies and funders) providing support services to children (pre-birth to 18 years of age). | The CPT is an integrated planning table for children’s services from pre-birth to 18 years of age in Waterloo Region. The whole CPT meets up to six times each year. Working groups also meet regularly. |



Conestoga College Doon Child Development Centre



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Ontario Vision for the Early Years

Ontario's children and families are well supported by a system of responsive, high-quality, accessible and increasingly integrated early years programs and services that contribute to healthy child development today and a stronger future tomorrow.

Provincial Context

Since 2007, the Province has been actively working to strengthen the Ontario ELCC system through a number of actions. In 2010, licensed ELCC transitioned to be a responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MEDU). The Ontario Early Years Policy Framework was released in 2013, providing strategic direction to the ELCC system. The following are key initiatives of the Province (based on the Policy Framework and other strategic planning) that are the most relevant for planning during 2016-2020:

1. Modernization of Child Care – The Province committed to modernization of child care. The *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* (CCEYA) came into effect on August 31, 2015. The legislation replaced the outdated Day Nurseries Act, and applies to licensed child care and some types of unlicensed child care. Phase 1 of the legislation focused on licensing standards and clarity, enforcement and children with special needs. The Province is currently implementing Phase 2 regulations over 2016/17 that focuses on (among other things) service system management and funding, licensing standards, clarity and fees, terms of licence (tiered licensing), before and after school programs for children ages 6-12. It is anticipated that additional regulatory changes will be implemented in 2017 and beyond.

Implications for Planning: Changes to the legislation will continue to impact the role of Children's Services as a CMSM and will have practical implications for all key stakeholders in the local ELCC system. During the transition period over the coming years, Children's Services will be required to strategically plan how to put the necessary supports in place to keep the local licensed ELCC system stable.

2. How Does Learning Happen? – How Does Learning Happen? (HDLH) is Ontario's pedagogy for early year's programs. Released in 2014, all licensed ELCC programs are required to apply HDLH in their learning environments. HDLH is built on an understanding of children as competent, curious, capable of complex thinking, and rich in potential and is organized around four foundational conditions for children to grow and flourish: belonging, well-being, engagement and expression (HDLH, 2014).

Implications for Planning: Children's Services will continue to play a role in supporting capacity in understanding and implementing HDLH within the local ELCC system.



3. Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres (OEYCFC) – In early 2016, MEDU announced changes to existing family support programs. All existing family support programs funded through MEDU will be combined into one service model – Ontario Early Years Child & Family Centres. As the CMSM, the Region of Waterloo will lead a community planning process in 2017 to define the model and approach for implementation in 2018.

Implications for Planning: Significant local community planning and consultation will be required to determine a local plan for implementing the Province’s vision for the OEYCFC.

4. Special Needs & Mental Health Strategies – The Special Needs and Mental Health Strategies will connect children to services as early as possible and improve the service experience of families by identifying children sooner, coordinating service planning and making supports and service delivery seamless. Families will access services in different ways and the role of the service delivery agencies will change as these new strategies are implemented.

Implications for Planning: In the CMSM role, Children’s Services has the responsibility of coordinating local SNR services in licensed child care settings. These new strategies will continue to impact this planning work.

5. Integration with education and use of schools – The Province continues to integrate child care, early learning and education as part of the Ministry of Education. Building off the focus of integration and with a priority of creating a seamless ELCC system for families that minimizes transition, the Province is invested in using schools as hubs for ELCC and the broader community. The **Schools-First Child Care Capital Retrofit Policy and Capital Funding for New Construction of Child Care** provides funding for retrofitting existing schools and/or purpose building new schools to include child care facilities for children under 3.8 years. In May 2016, the Ministry announced additional funding to support the **development of OEYCFCs and other community hub space in schools.**ⁱⁱⁱ This new development responds to recommendations in the document *Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan*, released by the Premier’s Special Advisor on Community Hubs in 2015.

Implications for Planning: With the evolution of integration between ELCC and education, the ELCC system will continue to enhance planning practices with local school boards. The ELCC system, led by Children’s Services, will work closely with school boards to strategically plan for funding of child care spaces and OEYCFCs in schools, both existing and new.



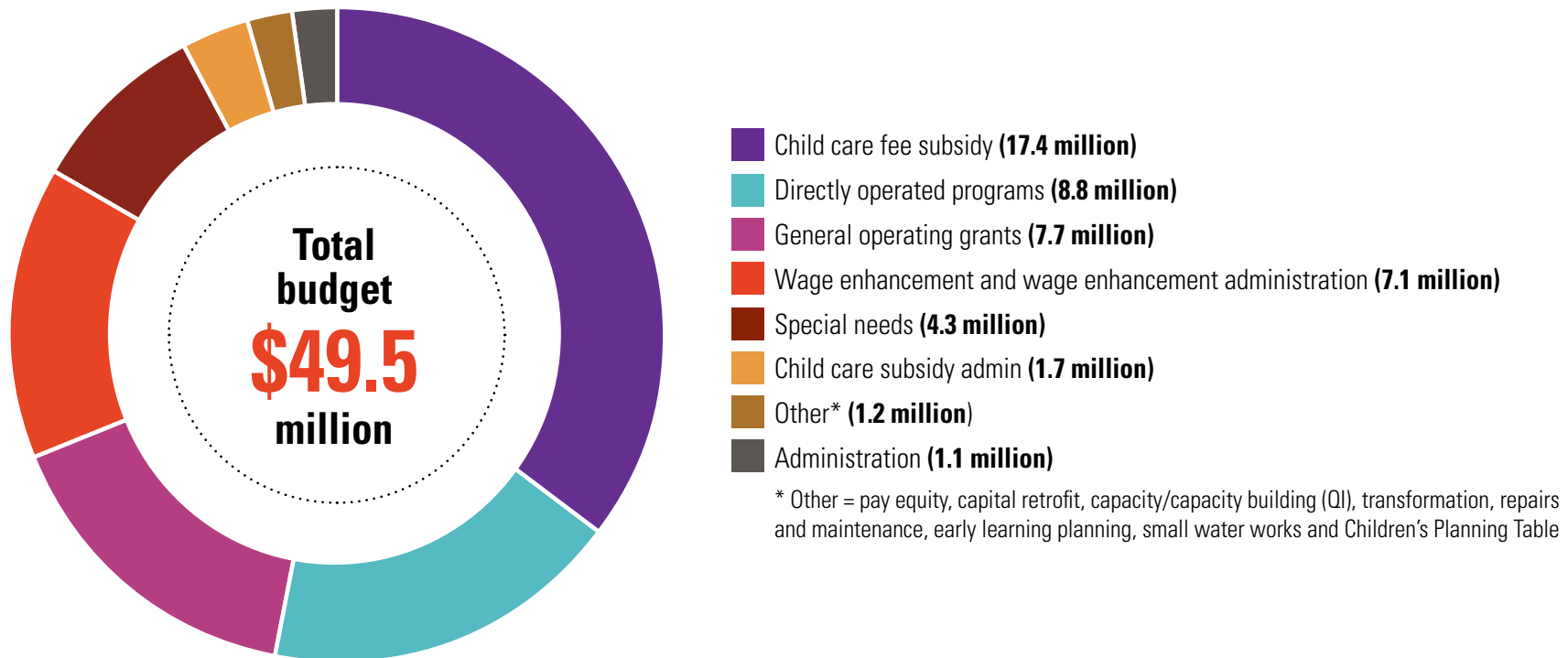
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Funding & Budget

The Region of Waterloo, Children’s Services Division total annual budget is \$49.5 million for 2016 (projected). The majority of this funding is dedicated to supporting the ELCC system.

Where does the funding coming from?

The Children’s Services 2016 budget totals \$49,510,457 million. Of that total approximately \$42M is funding provided by the Province and almost \$8M is provided by the Region of Waterloo. The Region of Waterloo contributes approximately \$2.5M above and beyond what they are required, signalling a commitment to sustaining current levels of services for fee subsidy, special needs resourcing and directly operated services.





Our Community

Emmanuel at Brighton Child Care Centre





Jacob Hespeler Child Care

Our Community

Waterloo Region is a dynamic and growing community. Our population has changed over time by our vibrant industries and has been influenced by the people who have moved here from other regions of the world. The needs for child care are shifting and the factors influencing the decisions parents make about child care for their families are changing. This section provides an overview of our community. This will provide an understanding of the impact and implications our community has on our Service Plan over the next five years.

Population and Birth Rates

The Region of Waterloo is one of the fastest growing regions in Ontario. In 2011, the Region had a total population of 507,096.^{iv} It is estimated that in 2016, the population of Waterloo Region will reach 560,000.^v The Provincial program, Places to Grow has identified Waterloo Region as an area to plan for growth and development and forecasts a rise in population up to 729,000 by 2031.^{vi} Between 2006 and 2011, a large portion of our growth took place in the townships with the greatest growth occurring in Woolwich Township. Overall, Waterloo Region had a total population growth of 6.1% from 2006.

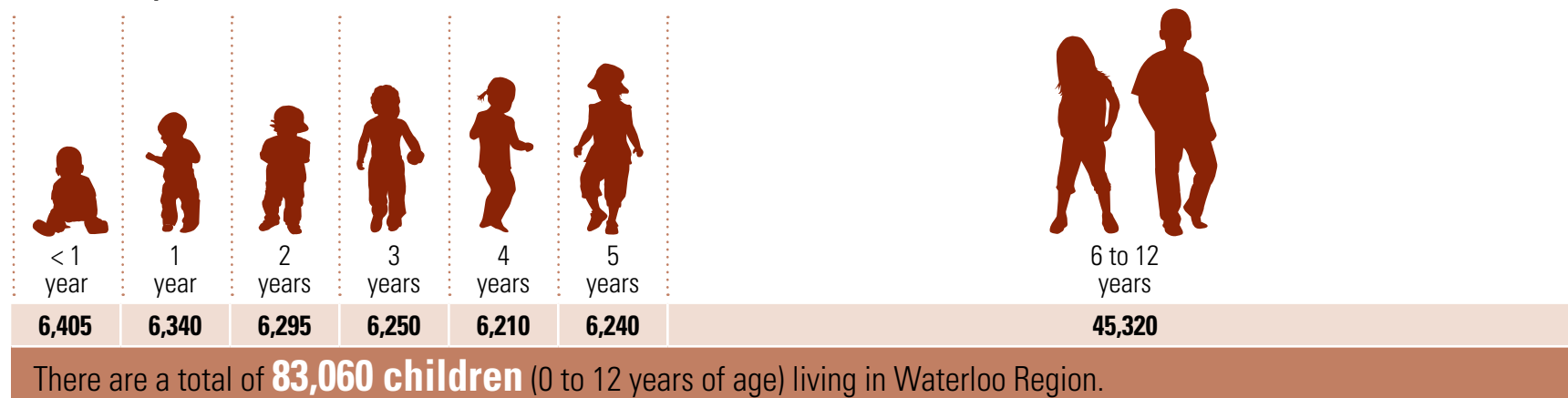
Population and Population Growth in Waterloo Region, 2011^{vii}

| | Cambridge | Kitchener | North Dumfries | Waterloo | Wellesley | Wilmot | Woolwich | Total |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------------|----------|-----------|--------|----------|----------------|
| 2011 Population | 126,748 | 219,153 | 9,334 | 98,780 | 10,713 | 19,223 | 23,145 | 507,096 |
| Population Growth | 5.3 | 7.1 | 3.0 | 1.3 | 9.4 | 12.4 | 17.7 | 6.1 |

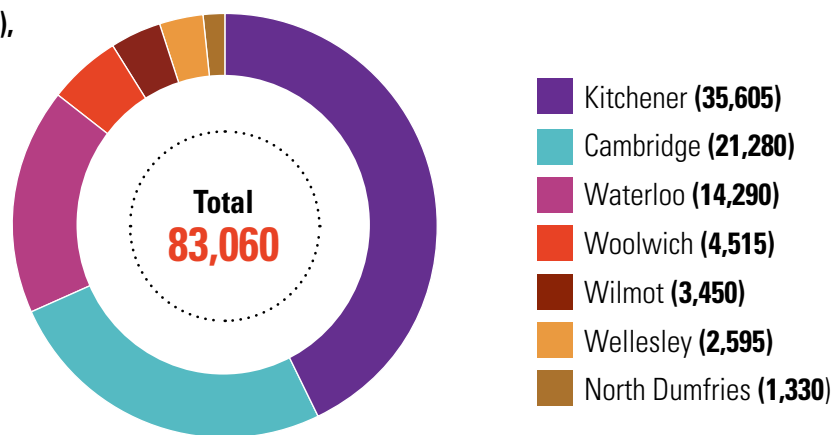
While the Region continues to plan a number of future population changes, we are looking to continue to manage growth of children and families, as Waterloo Region already has a significant number of children under the age of 12 years of age. It was projected that in 2016 children would account for 83,060 residents in our community. The large majority of families live in

the three urban centres, there are many families living in rural towns and villages across the Region. The rural townships are undergoing significant population growth and have a unique demographic make-up when compared to Kitchener, Cambridge and Waterloo.

2016 Child Population, 0-12 Breakdown^{viii}



2016 Child Population (0-12), by Municipality^{ix}





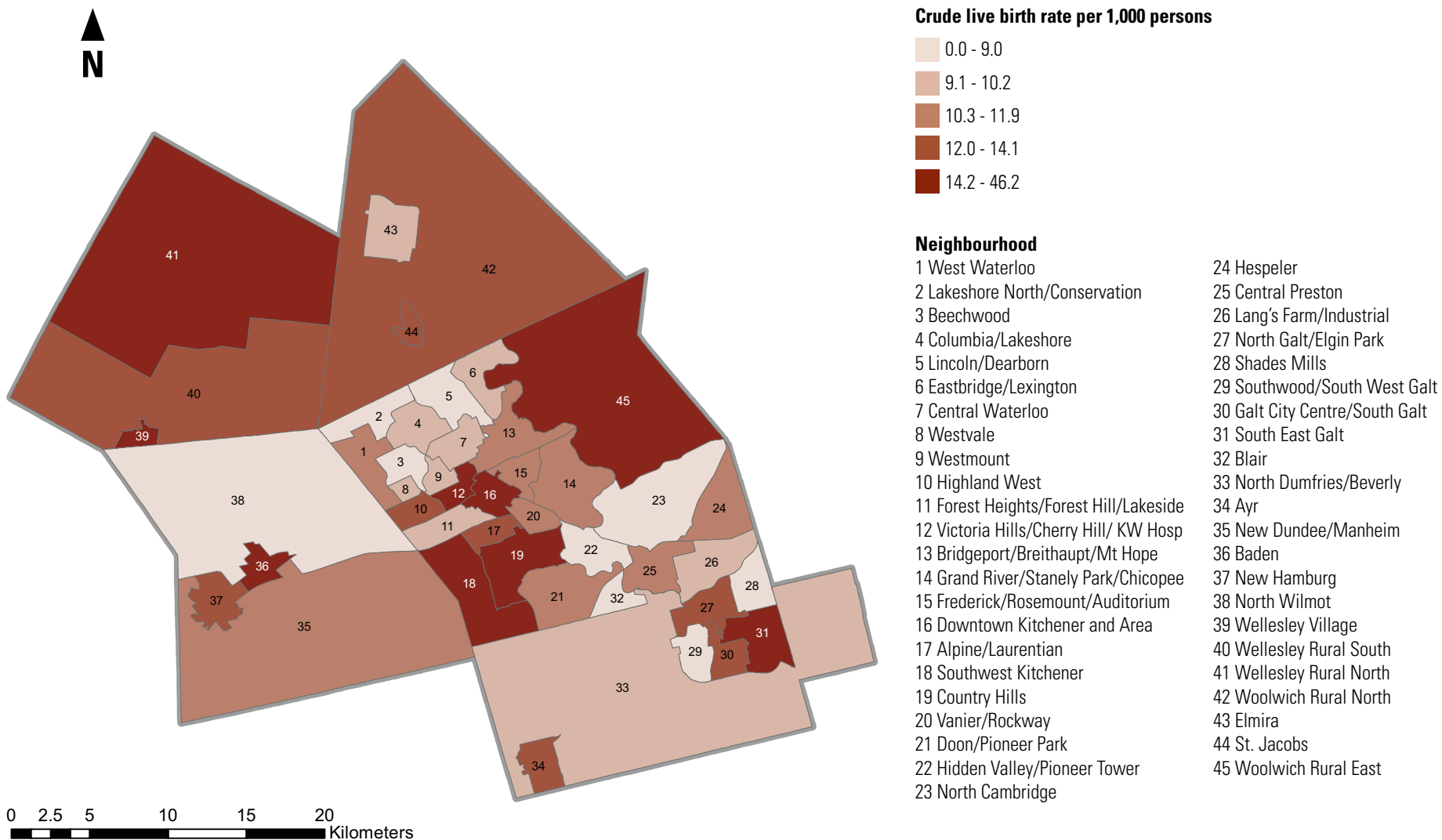
St. Jacobs Daycare

Waterloo Region has an average birth rate of 11.2 per 1,000 population. In comparison to the Province of Ontario, Waterloo Region had a slightly higher birth rate in 2014.

Live Births and Crude Birth Rates, 2011, 2013, 2014^x

| | Actual live births | | | Crude birth rate per 1,000 people | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|---------|---------|-----------------------------------|------|------|
| | 2011 | 2013 | 2014 | 2011 | 2013 | 2014 |
| Cambridge | 1,347 | 1,433 | 1,487 | 10.3 | 10.7 | 11.1 |
| Kitchener | 2,643 | 2,708 | 2,744 | 11.7 | 11.7 | 11.9 |
| North Dumfries | 91 | 95 | 70 | 9.5 | 9.7 | 7.2 |
| Waterloo | 942 | 904 | 923 | 9.2 | 8.7 | 8.9 |
| Wellesley | 125 | 119 | 117 | 11.3 | 10.6 | 10.4 |
| Wilmot | 176 | 217 | 221 | 8.9 | 10.7 | 10.9 |
| Woolwich | 275 | 306 | 305 | 11.5 | 12.5 | 12.5 |
| Waterloo Region | 5,599 | 5,860 | 5,976 | 10.7 | 11.0 | 11.2 |
| Ontario | NA | 139,244 | 128,998 | NA | 10.3 | 9.5 |

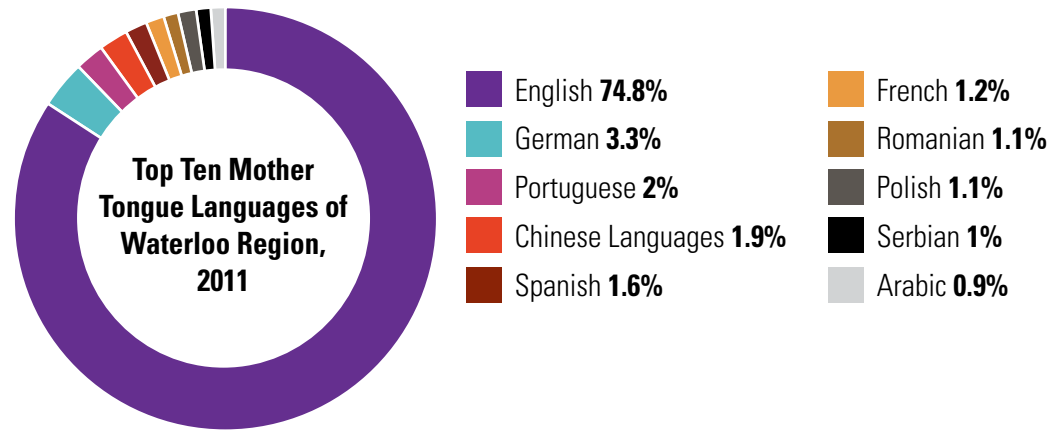
Crude Live Birth Rates by Neighbourhood, Waterloo Region 2014



Source: BORN Information System (2014), Extracted: September 1, 2015. Census (2011), Statistics Canada, Extracted: May 4, 2015.

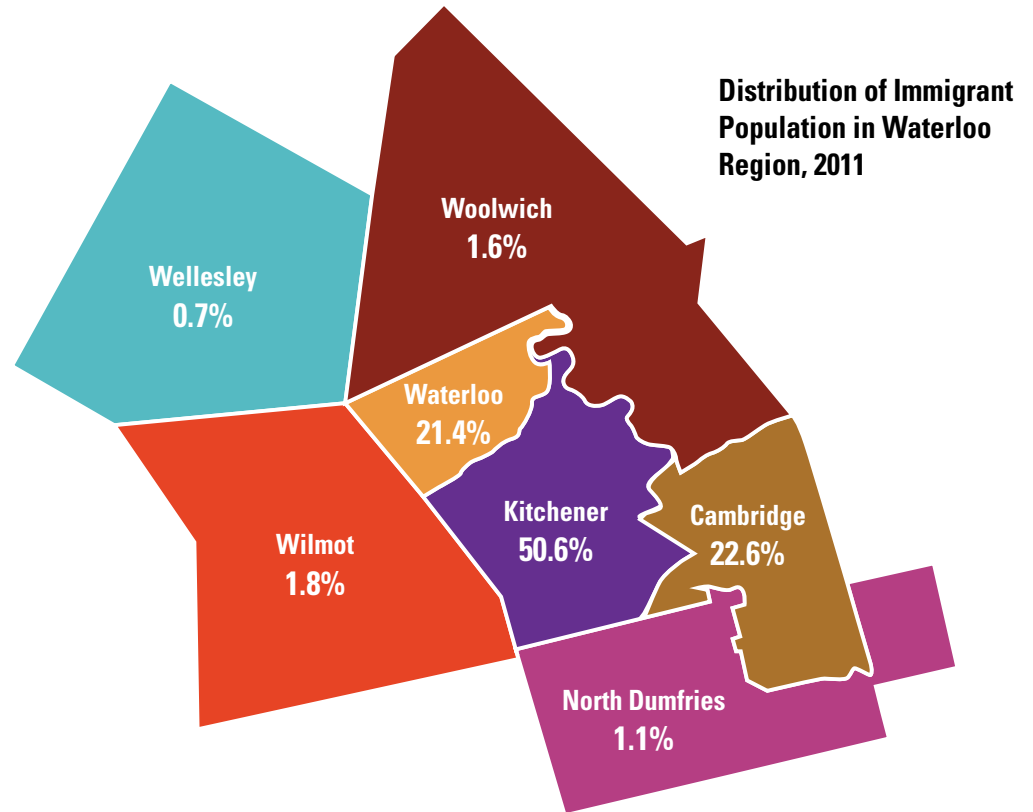
Language

Residents of Waterloo Region speak many different languages. While most people can speak English (96.8%) the number of people who can speak languages other than English and French is increasing.^{xi} In 2011, more than 25% of residents reported a language other than English or French as their mother tongue.^{xii}



Immigration

Waterloo Region has the seventh highest proportion of immigrants^{xiii} in Ontario and eleventh in Canada. In 2011, more than 22% of the Waterloo Region residents were born outside of Canada. Immigrants are of mixed descent and of those who landed in Canada between January 1, 2006 and May 10, 2011, 9.5% were from India, 9% from China and 5.5% from the United States.^{xiv} In 2011, there were 111,495 immigrants living in the Region. In recent years, origins of newcomers have changed. 2011 marked the first time that the number of Europeans migrating to the Region making up less than half of the Region's total immigrant population. Instead, Asia and the Middle East were the most common place of birth.^{xv} In 2015, the Federal Government made a commitment to welcome 25,000 Syrian newcomers to Canada. As of March 28, 2016 the Waterloo Region Syrian Refugee Resettlement Committee reported that 1,187 Syrian refugees have settled in the area, of which 1,039 settled in Kitchener. Many of the government sponsored families are families of 7 or more.





First Nation, Inuit and Métis

The Region of Waterloo is committed to the ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) peoples of Waterloo Region. Moving forward with the provinces commitment of reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples, the Region is working with local partners to close gaps and remove barriers for children. To do this, we will continue to develop and nurture relationships with local Aboriginal organizations and work to improve outcomes for children and families in our community.

As the fastest growing population in Canada, 42% of FNMI peoples are under the age of 24.^{xvi} It is estimated that 6,825 individuals identified as FNMI lived in Waterloo Region in 2011.^{xvii} The population is younger than that of Waterloo Region overall, with 23.8% of the population under the age of 15 (compared to 18.3% in Waterloo Region^{xviii}) and a FNMI median age of 28.9 years old (compared to 37.7% in Waterloo Region^{xix}). Family composition is different for FNMI too, with fewer FNMI people married and instead more families are choosing to live in common-law or single families.^{xx}

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was organized by the parties to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. The Commission was part of a holistic and comprehensive response to the charges of abuse and other ill effects for First Nations children that resulted from the Indian residential school legacy. The Commission was officially established on June 2, 2008, and was completed in December 2015. The Commission issued 94 “Calls to Action” to “redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation”.^{xxi} Many of the

Calls to Action refer directly to children and services for children, including actions related to child welfare, culturally appropriate curricula, and community-based program delivery.

In June 2016, the Ontario government moved forward on a plan by working with partners to take action by:

- Understanding the legacy of residential schools
- Closing gaps and removing barriers
- Creating a culturally relevant and responsive justice system
- Supporting indigenous culture
- Reconciling relationships with indigenous peoples.

Ontario plans to help increase the number of off-reserve licensed child care spaces and culturally relevant programming for children and families. Programs will be delivered by urban Aboriginal organizations working with the Children’s Services division of Region of Waterloo. This approach aligns with Ontario’s initiative to transform and integrate child and family programs through Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres.



St. Jacobs Daycare



Thank You

Region of Waterloo Children’s Services thanks the Haudenosaunee, Anishnabe and Neutral peoples who allow us to do this good work on their traditional land.

Education

Waterloo Region boasts two universities and one community college. Almost 80% of residents have at least a high school diploma and over 52% of the Waterloo Region population over the age of 15 have a post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree.^{xxii} The completion rates of a post-secondary education are comparable between men and women.

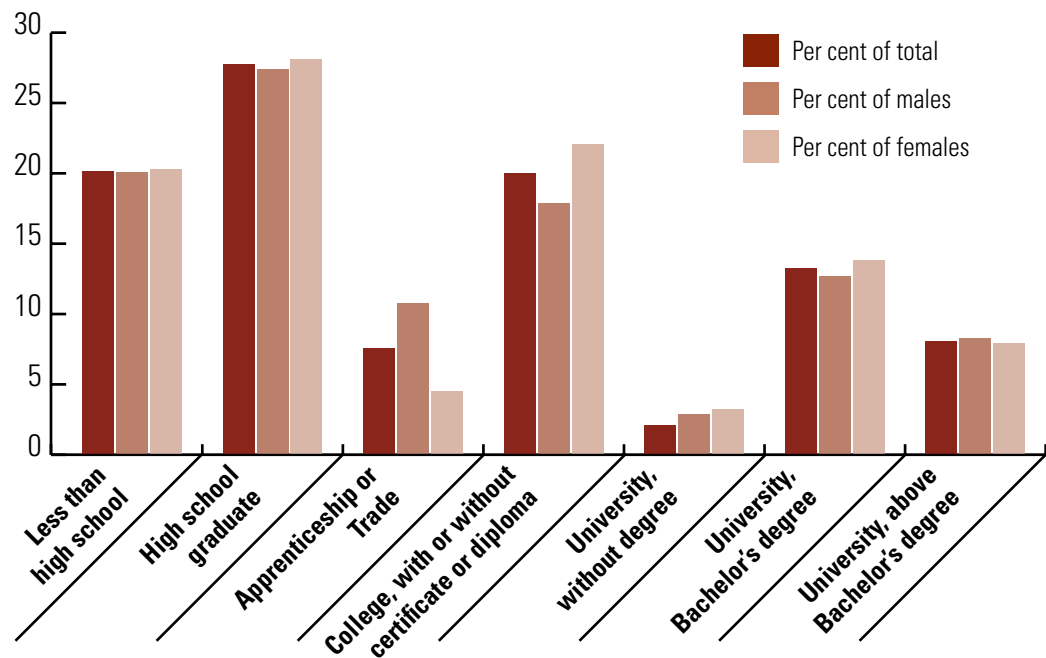
Family Income

In 2011, there were 87,890 families with children. 78% of which were couples with children and 22% were lone-parent families. On average, couples with children had a family income of \$119,113 and lone-parent families had a family income of \$56,897.

Employment

For many years now, Waterloo Region has had a strong labour force. The Cambridge-Kitchener-Waterloo census metropolitan area had an unemployment rate^{xxiii} of 6.0% in March 2016, remaining relatively unchanged since March 2015. Approximately 80% of the labour force is working full-time (more than 30 hours per week) with the remaining 20% working part-time. In 2011, the manufacturing industry continued to represent the largest employment sector in the Region, with over 51,000 jobs, accounting for 18.6% of the employment population). Other significant industry contributions were done so by retail trade (11.3%), health care and social assistance (8.9%), educational services (8.3%), and professional, scientific and technical services (6.3%).^{xxiv}

Highest Education Level, 2011



Family Income Waterloo Region, 2011

| Family characteristic | Number in Waterloo Region | Average family income |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Families without children | 48,215 | \$89,335 |
| Families with children | 87,890 | |
| Couples with children | 68,715 | \$119,113 |
| Lone-parent families | 19,175 | \$56,897 |

Unemployment Rates, Waterloo Region and Ontario, 2014-2016

| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|
| Waterloo Region | 6.4 | 6.4 | 5.9 |
| Ontario | 7.3 | 6.9 | 6.8 |

Potential Growth

The Region of Waterloo is investing in a rapid transit system as a plan to manage future growth projected for the Region. The rapid transit system – ION - will connect the three cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo. ION will move people more efficiently in and around the Region, limit urban sprawl and protect farmland through preservation of the environment. Opportunities for development and/or redevelopment along the transit corridor are expected to attract residential growth within the core of the three cities, including plans for increasing child care and services for children and families as these areas become denser.





Jacob Hespeler Child Care

Implications for Planning

Partnerships with the community to plan for and deliver services that are responsive, inclusive and timely for children and families is important when planning for services that are specific to local needs. For example, programs may respond to changing economic and occupational realities by providing more flexible programming and longer hours of operation to accommodate the needs of parents. The new transit system will change where families live and work and how people move across the Region. Current and new ELCC programs and services will be expected to consider their location in proximity to the transit system as we plan for future programs. Monitoring demographic changes over time allows us to manage growth and improve our understanding of how these changes influence what services families access. As the CMSM, the Region is working towards an ELCC system that is accessible to all children in the Region, regardless of language, culture, identity or income levels. The continuing implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action will impact children and families who participate in child and family programs by creating more wholistic and culturally sensitive services. With all this in mind, a well planned approach and practices in the ELCC system can better meet the needs of children and their families.



Aavailability





St. Jacobs Daycare

Availability

Introduction

There are many options for quality, licensed early learning and child care (ELCC) programs in Waterloo Region. While the number of ELCC programs has increased in recent years there are still many children unable to access licensed care.

Licensed child care is available for infants, toddlers, preschoolers and school-aged children in Waterloo Region. Child care centres operate in a variety of locations including stand alone buildings, workplaces, community centres, schools and places of worship. Licensed child care centres are licensed by the Ministry of Education. Licensed home child care is provided by approved caregivers in their homes under contract with a home child care agency that is licensed by the Ministry. Caregivers can provide care for up to five children in their home. Many schools offer before-and-after-school programs for school age children that are

operated directly and regulated by the school boards. There are also licensed community operators who provide before-and-after-school care for children up to 12 years of age.

Unlicensed child care can include informal care by relatives or friends, and care within or outside the family home by caregivers such as babysitters and nannies. Caregivers who look after five children or less, and who are unrelated, do not have to be licensed. Unlicensed caregivers are not required to meet provincial health and safety standards and are not inspected by a licensed Home Child Care agency. The Ministry of Education may inspect an unlicensed home if they receive a complaint.

“Licensed centres give you peace of mind, and when your child gets to school they’ll be ahead. They also have hours that work for professionals who commute, and summer care options so you don’t wind up scrambling to fill the gap.” – Parent



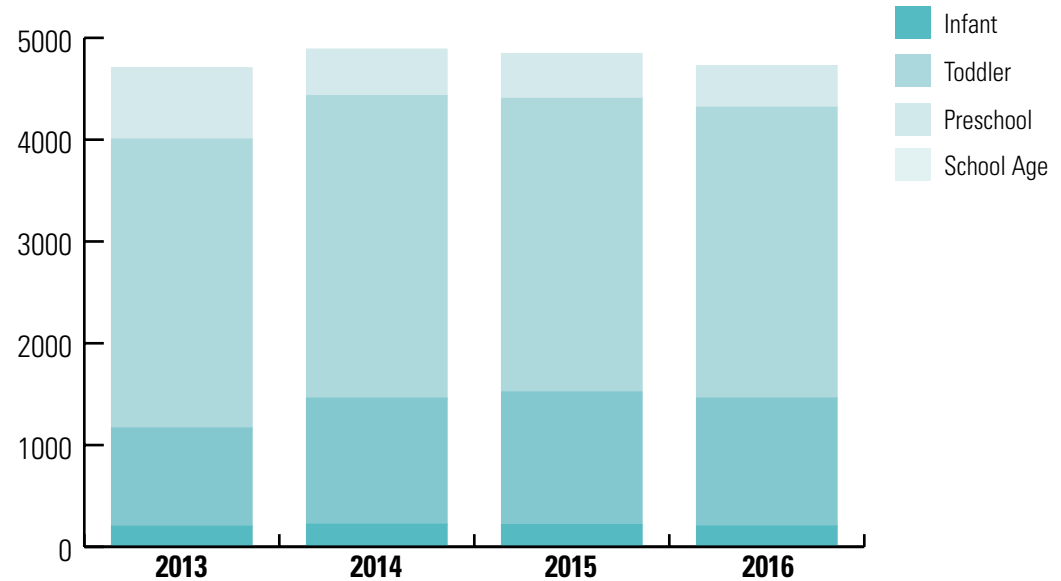
Centre-Based Early Learning and Child Care

As of April 30, 2016 there were 133 licensed child care centres in Waterloo Region, a figure ranging between 129 and 137 since 2013. There was a capacity of 4,727 licensed spaces for infant, toddler, preschool and school age children in 2016.

The majority of licensed child care spaces in the system are centre-based spaces. In a recent survey hosted on the *Engage Region of Waterloo* platform, more than 1,100 parents responded to questions about child care in Waterloo Region. Parents indicated that there are a variety of factors that influence choice. When selecting centre-based care parents did so because of greater reliability of hours, quality of programming, activities and educators. However, parents reported that more licensed centre-based spaces are needed as families are forced to stay on waitlists for many months, often ending up with child care that was not their initial preference.

The lack of centre-based spaces is a significant challenge for families. In a follow up survey completed by parents, 32% said that increasing the number of licensed spaces in centres would be the first action they would take to improve child care in Waterloo Region. In all three cities and four townships in the Region there is a shortage of licensed child care centre spaces, especially for infants.

Number of Licenced Centre Spaces 2013 - 2016



Number of licensed ELCC centres

- 129 2013
- 137 2014
- 135 2015
- 133 2016



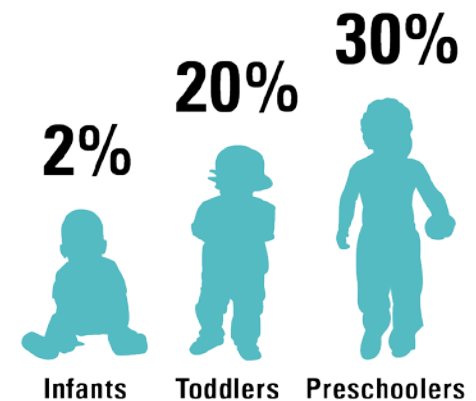
Number of ELCC centre-based spaces

- 203 infant spaces
- 1,258 toddler spaces
- 2,856 preschool spaces

Number of children in Waterloo Region

- 9,505 infants (0 to 17 months)
- 6,280 toddlers (18 to 29 months)
- 9,305 preschoolers (30 to 48 months)

Percentage of children with access to a centre-based ELCC space





Lakeshore Cooperative Nursery School



47%

of families said they'd like more licensed spaces available when asked what they would change about their child care experience in Waterloo Region.

"Sign up early for infant spots as there is a huge shortage in the region."

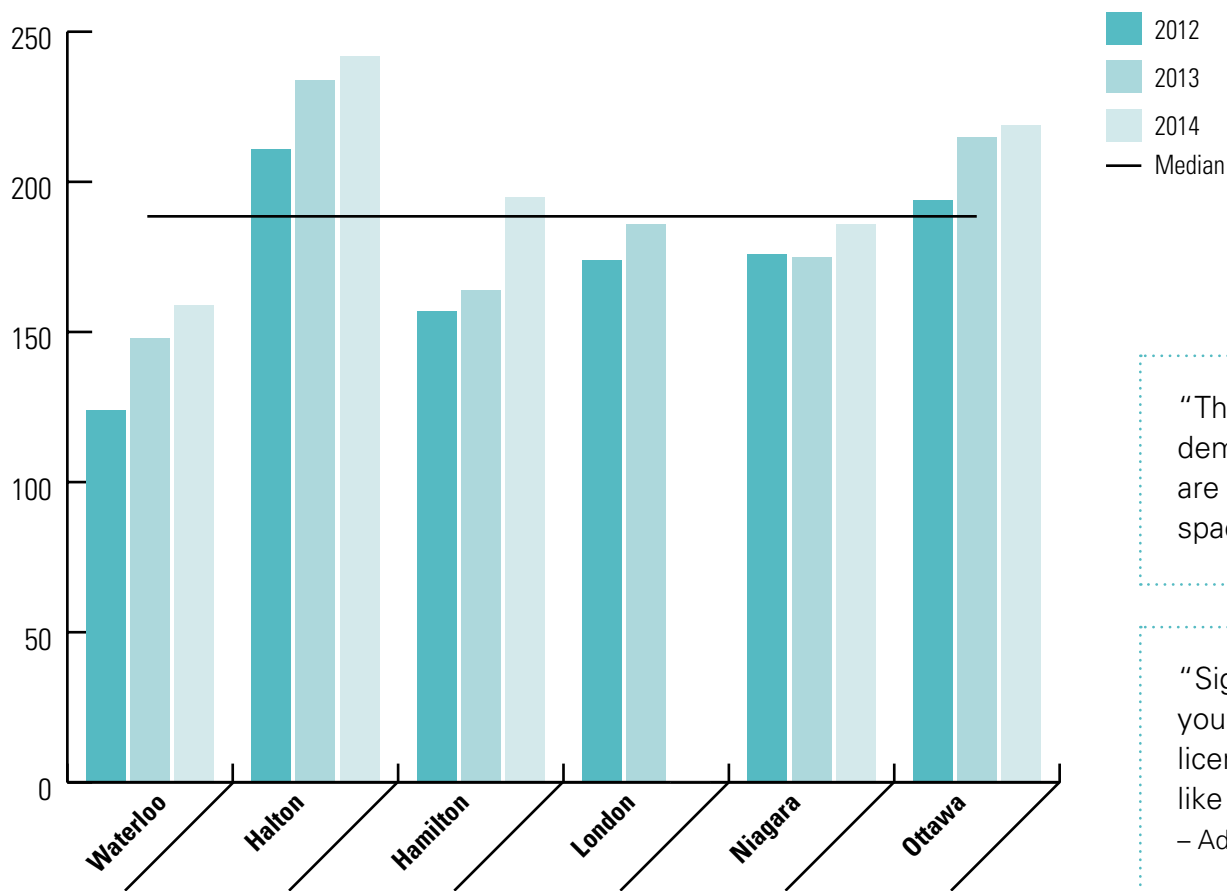
– Advice from a parent

"Increases to the number of infant child care spaces specifically is essential, as this reduces the anxiety that parents feel as they search and wait for a childcare spot. In addition, parents may have no other choice but to place their infant/child in a sub-optimal childcare arrangement (or one that does not meet the needs of the family), at an age when the child is most vulnerable." – Parent

"I was off on mat leave for 15 months and on a list for 20 months and still had to take extra time off work, ask my mom and my husband and my mother in law to cover the time between my start date back at work and the time before my child was accepted into my LAST ranked childcare centre. He is 17 months now and just next week getting into the "infant" program at our preferred location. HORRIBLE! Finding infant care should not be this hard, and we did our due diligence!" – Parent

As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for the ELCC system in Waterloo Region, Children’s Services collects and maintains data on the ELCC system through the Municipal Benchmarking Network Canada (MBNC), formerly Ontario Municipal Benchmarking Initiative. Sixteen partner municipalities collect and compare data on municipal services annually and analyze the results to see how they measure up. Data is used to identify trends and inform policy and planning across the province. Since 2012, Waterloo Region has seen an increase in the number of licensed spaces available. However, the number of licensed child care spaces per 1,000 children in Waterloo Region is considerably lower in comparison to other Ontario municipalities.

Number of Regulated Child Care Spaces per 1,000 Children (12 and under)



Jacob Hespeler Child Care

“The Region seems to have a huge demand for spaces and the waitlists are long. I would like to see more spaces in centres.” – Parent

“Sign up for spaces as soon as you know you’re pregnant because licensed care - particularly for infants is like winning the lottery.”
– Advice from a parent



Waterloo Co-operative Preschool



Home-Based Early Learning and Child Care

In Waterloo Region there are four licensed home child care agencies with a combined licensed capacity of 620 home child care providers. As of April 30, 2016, there were 433 licensed home child care providers providing care to approximately 1,300 children across the Region. If all four agencies were operating at full capacity there could be licensed space available for approximately 1,700 children.

While the majority of spaces available in the Region are centre and school based care, there are many children in licensed home child care around the Region. Licensed home child care is a great option for parents with irregular work schedules, as many home child care providers are available for care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It could also be valuable for families requiring infant care, given the lack of centre-based space for infants. It was noted by parents and service providers that the need for more flexible hours is required and will continue to be a barrier for parents looking for child care.



Before and After School Early Learning and Child Care

Before-and-after-school programs operated by the school boards were introduced in 2011. Since then, the number of schools offering this care has increased significantly. In the 2015/2016 school year, 90% of the schools in Waterloo Region were offering before-and-after school programs for children in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 2. There are fewer schools offering programs for children in Grades 3 to 6. Each spring, the school boards test the viability of the before-and-after school programs by surveying parents intent to register before committing to operating the program the upcoming school year. There were roughly 3,200 children registered for school board operated programs for the 2015-2016 school year. Before-and-after-school programs operated by licensed ELCC programs had a licensed capacity of 3,418 spaces as of April 30, 2016. There are still schools without before-and-after school programs. In these cases, families must find alternative arrangements, sometimes outside of the licensed system.

“Don’t discount home daycares, some are extremely well run.” – Advice to new parents

Before and After School ELCC Programs

| | 2013-2014 | 2014-2015 | 2015-2016 |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Per cent of schools offering before and after school program | 57% | 84% | 90% |
| Number of schools with before and after school programs | 63 | 87 | 95 |
| Number of children in school board operated before and after school programs | 1,646 | 2,142 | 3,212 |
| Number of community operated before and after school programs | 21 | 31 | 31 |
| Number of community operated youth development programs (WRDSB only) | 35 | 53 | 53 |
| Number of spaces in community operated before and after school programs (including youth development programs) | 3,681 | 4,163 | 4,370 |

From the parent survey, families reported that the lack of before-and-after school care for their children is a challenge, especially for those with multiple children, but when available these programs are considered to be convenient, reliable and of high quality.

As of September 2016, more than 90% of schools in Waterloo Region are offering before and after school programs.



“If you’re considering using the before/after school program make sure it is available at your school for your child(s) ages(s). Our school only does care for up to grade two and doesn’t provide another program for bigger kids. My youngest is grade one my oldest is grade three. I have to drop them off in two different places in the morning.”
 – Advice from a parent



Emmanuel at Brighton Child Care Centre

Where is child care available across the community?

Location of child care was the most important factor that influenced child care arrangements for families who responded to the parent survey. Families prefer child care that is located close to their home or close to the school their child attends.



66%

of parents indicated that location of child care was the most important factor that influenced their child care arrangement.



71%

of parents surveyed said having child care close to home was very important to them.



50%

of parents prefer to travel 5km or less for child care.

The number of ELCC centre-based spaces and home child care providers varies considerably between neighbourhoods. There are some neighbourhoods with multiple ELCC centres and homes, providing child care to many children. On the other hand, some families have to travel more than 10km to access licensed child care for their children. The province continues to prioritize neighbourhood-based services, including child care, through the implementation of before-and-after school programs and Community Hubs.

“I like home child care because it has limits for amount of children you can have which gives the opportunity for more one on one.” – Parent

Licensed Child Care Centre Spaces, by Neighbourhood



- No Spaces
- 1 - 45 Spaces
- 46 - 96 Spaces
- 97 - 165 Spaces
- 166 - 383 Spaces

Neighbourhood

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1 West Waterloo | 24 Hespeler |
| 2 Lakeshore North/Conservation | 25 Central Preston |
| 3 Beechwood | 26 Lang's Farm/Industrial |
| 4 Columbia/Lakeshore | 27 North Galt/Elgin Park |
| 5 Lincoln/Dearborn | 28 Shades Mills |
| 6 Eastbridge/Lexington | 29 Southwood/South West Galt |
| 7 Central Waterloo | 30 Galt City Centre/South Galt |
| 8 Westvale | 31 South East Galt |
| 9 Westmount | 32 Blair |
| 10 Highland West | 33 North Dumfries/Beverly |
| 11 Forest Heights/Forest Hill/Lakeside | 34 Ayr |
| 12 Victoria Hills/Cherry Hill/ KW Hosp | 35 New Dundee/Manheim |
| 13 Bridgeport/Breithaupt/Mt Hope | 36 Baden |
| 14 Grand River/Stanely Park/Chicopee | 37 New Hamburg |
| 15 Frederick/Rosemount/Auditorium | 38 North Wilmot |
| 16 Downtown Kitchener and Area | 39 Wellesley Village |
| 17 Alpine/Laurentian | 40 Wellesley Rural South |
| 18 Southwest Kitchener | 41 Wellesley Rural North |
| 19 Country Hills | 42 Woolwich Rural North |
| 20 Vanier/Rockway | 43 Elmira |
| 21 Doon/Pioneer Park | 44 St. Jacobs |
| 22 Hidden Valley/Pioneer Tower | 45 Woolwich Rural East |
| 23 North Cambridge | |

Home Child Care Providers Licensed by an Agency, by Neighbourhood



- No Homes
- 1 - 3 Homes
- 4 - 10 Homes
- 11 - 17 Homes
- 18 - 29 Homes

Neighbourhood

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1 West Waterloo | 24 Hespeler |
| 2 Lakeshore North/Conservation | 25 Central Preston |
| 3 Beechwood | 26 Lang's Farm/Industrial |
| 4 Columbia/Lakeshore | 27 North Galt/Elgin Park |
| 5 Lincoln/Dearborn | 28 Shades Mills |
| 6 Eastbridge/Lexington | 29 Southwood/South West Galt |
| 7 Central Waterloo | 30 Galt City Centre/South Galt |
| 8 Westvale | 31 South East Galt |
| 9 Westmount | 32 Blair |
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| 17 Alpine/Laurentian | 40 Wellesley Rural South |
| 18 Southwest Kitchener | 41 Wellesley Rural North |
| 19 Country Hills | 42 Woolwich Rural North |
| 20 Vanier/Rockway | 43 Elmira |
| 21 Doon/Pioneer Park | 44 St. Jacobs |
| 22 Hidden Valley/Pioneer Tower | 45 Woolwich Rural East |
| 23 North Cambridge | |

Families would like to see more licensed child care spaces in the Region, particularly in the neighbourhood in which they live. Many families highlighted the challenges related to being on a long waitlist for child care and being unable to find a space at their preferred program due to limited numbers of child care spaces compared to number of families in their neighbourhood.

Licensed child care operators noted that it is important to have more licensed spaces available in neighbourhoods where demand is high in order to support families, increase access for all children and decrease the time families spend on child care waitlists. It was noted by licensed child care operators and special needs agencies that some of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods (e.g. lower income, low social cohesion) in the Region are most likely to be underserved and children living in these neighbourhoods would benefit the most from expanded availability of high quality, licensed child care.

“Start looking early because there are not enough spaces.”

– Advice from a parent



Owl Child Care



Region of Waterloo Home Child Care

How does availability impact children?

- More available child care spaces directly supports more equitable access to quality, licensed ELCC programs for all children.
- Children may be in a lower quality child care arrangement based on location – low quality care can be linked with reduced developmental outcomes for children.
- Lack of available child care, particularly infant care, creates a barrier for parents in the workforce or can force parents out of the workforce altogether.
- More licensed child care spaces in the community would decrease the time families spend on the waitlist before being placed in child care.
- Increased number of licenced child care spaces would decrease the number of children in unlicensed or unregulated child care.

Implications for planning

Families continue to be impacted by a lack of licensed child care space in Waterloo Region. The limited access to licensed child care which causes many families to reconsider how and when they will re-enter the workforce. Availability impacts families' child care decisions and is one of the most significant factors in accessing licensed child care. Given the limited capacity of the Region's licensed child care system, a significant number of unlicensed child care options exist. Unlicensed care is not regulated and is not required to meet provincial or municipal standards.

Planning in the Region encourages, when possible, all newly built centres to include space for infants and toddlers in their programs. A review of funding policies based on costs associated with providing care for younger age groupings may be required to ensure that programs are viable for licensed operators, while staying within a fee range that is reasonable for families.

Access to a child care space varies between neighbourhoods. Some parts of the Region have better access than others. Future planning will examine availability of child care thoroughly to ensure that underserved neighbourhoods are given priority when new licensed programs are considered.



Emmanuel at Brighton Child Care Centre

Affordability





Lakeshore Cooperative Nursery School

Affordability

Introduction

High quality licensed early learning and child care (ELCC) comes at a significant financial cost to families. While Child Care Fee Subsidy may reduce the cost barrier for families who meet set income and other eligibility criteria, the high cost of child care remains the number one factor local parents reported they would change about their child care experience.

How much does licensed ELCC cost?

There are a wide range of daily parent fees for licensed child care. Parent fees are set by child care operators based on their operating budget. For licensed centre-based care, the age of the child influences the cost of the care, given that care for younger children requires additional staffing. In addition for centre-based care, factors such as staffing costs (e.g., wages, benefits), facility costs (e.g., rent, mortgage, utilities), demand for service, furnishings and equipment, organizational overhead, food, and auspice (e.g., for-profit, not-for-profit) also influence the parent fees set by the operator.

While some factors influencing fees are associated with higher quality care (e.g., staff wages), other factors are not correlated with quality and therefore higher parent fees are not necessarily associated with higher quality licensed child care. This may be an area of misperception for parents.

*Data Notes: Calculation is based on 2016 rates for Centre-based licensed care for ages 1-4 and before and after school-based care and 8 weeks of full-day HCC for ages 4-12.

“Every child deserves quality child care and parents should have a choice without cutting corners because they simply cannot afford fees.” – Parent

“Budget early as child care costs are very expensive in the Region.” – Advice from a Parent



65%

of parents surveyed identified cost as a top factor they would change about their child care experience.



Local licensed ELCC operators identified wages, operating costs associated with ELCC, and insufficient public funding as the main barriers to reducing parent fees.



At 2016 rates with no inflation, the cost for one child to attend full-time licensed child care from ages 1 to 12 would be between \$71,664 and \$110,320.*

Child care type

Licensed centre-based care

Infant (birth to 18 months)

Toddler (18 to 30 months)

Preschooler (2.5 to 5 years)

Licensed home-based care (8 hours)

Infant

Toddler

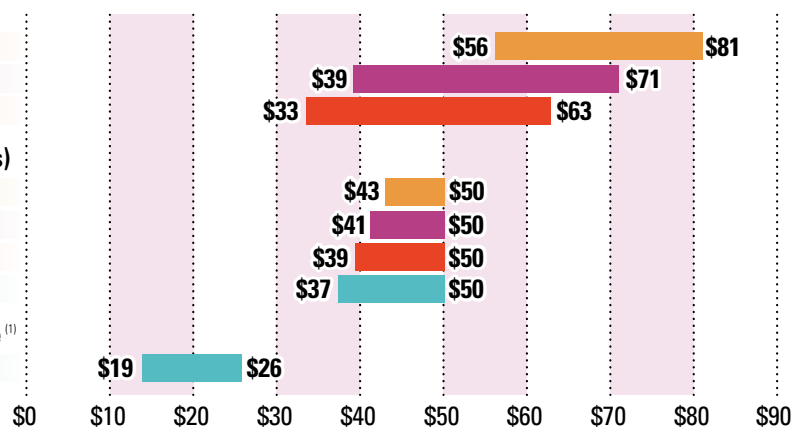
Preschooler

School age (4 to 7 years)

School-based before and after care⁽¹⁾

Before and after school

Parent fees for full day care, per day

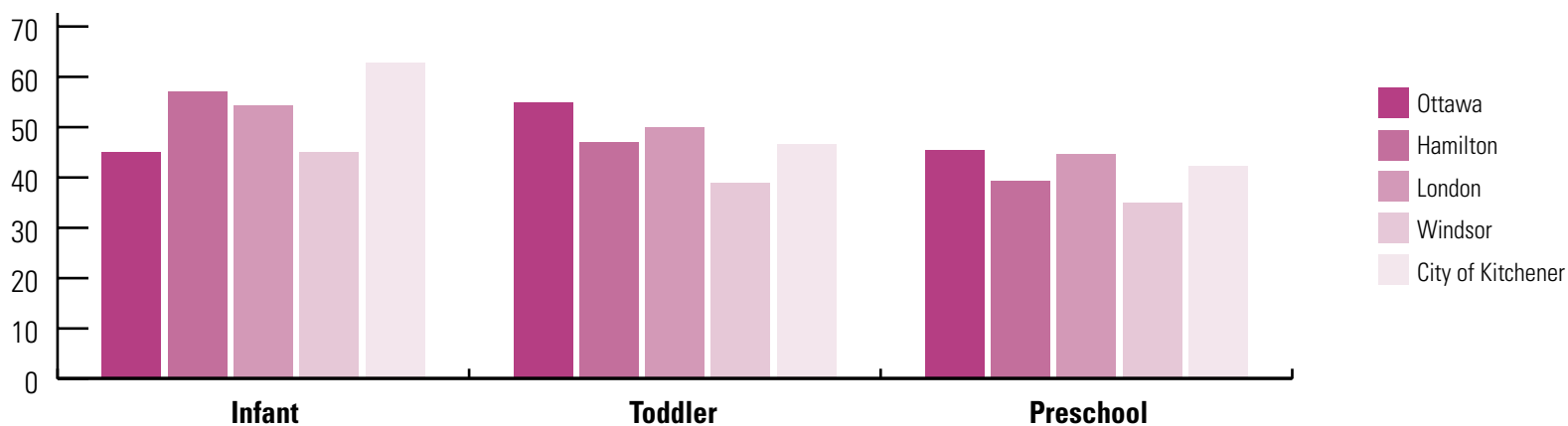


⁽¹⁾ Before and after school care for children 4-12 years, does not include programs operating in French and French Catholic Schools

“[Child care] is just extremely expensive. I used subsidy to help with fees the first year. Later on, both of my children were in child care together for 5 months, I paid over \$12,000 for child care during those 5 months. Overall, It will end up costing me over \$62,000 from the time my first child started in the infant room, till my 2nd child finishes in the preschool room (span of 6 & 1/2 years).” – Parent

A recent survey completed by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives shows how child care rates in the City of Kitchener compare to similar sized cities in Ontario, as shown in the graph below.^{xxv}

Median Daily Child Care Fees in Ontario Cities, 2015



Is licensed child care affordable for families?

Affordability is a significant barrier to licensed child care for families. 38% of parents surveyed identified cost of child care as one of the most important factors that influenced their child care arrangements. Parent feedback indicated that some families chose unlicensed child care primarily due to the reduced costs. Parents may also adjust their work schedules to reduce child care costs.

A recent study of the parental contributions to child care and post-secondary in Canada showed that parents with children completing an undergraduate degree are asked to contribute significantly less financially than parents with children in child care. These parents also have a much longer period of time in which to plan and save for their child's non-compulsory education and are likely to be better remunerated than parents of children 0-4 years of age. If these expected contributions were based on ability to plan and pay, one would likely assume that the parental contributions would be reversed and that parents of children in post-secondary would be asked to contribute more than parents of children in child care.^{xxvi}

"...Who do you pay, child care or hydro? Or rent? Or groceries? It's an awful feeling having to choose which bill is more important and for your children to suffer because of it..." – Parent

"Every child deserves quality child care and parents should have choice without cutting corners because they simply cannot afford fees." – Parent

"When you have two kids in daycare it is about as much as a mortgage payment. Then I worry once my kids are in school I still have to pay for before and after care or change my work schedule. When you have more than one child you shouldn't have to decide to quit your job or not cause daycare costs more than you make. It is a very stressful time financially when you have two children in daycare." – Parent

"I ended up going with private, non-licensed daycare....I also considered Centre based daycare, as they have the most flexible hours and don't take vacation; however the monthly cost for an infant was almost double, which is completely unreasonable." – Parent

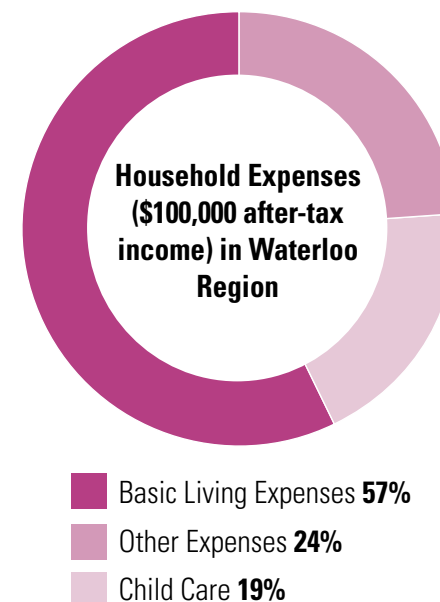
"For our first child, one parent reduced hours to avoid increased [child care costs]. After our second child, one parent stayed home as the net pay after child care costs were too low to be worth it." – Parent

"Look for a private home daycare to help control costs..." – Advice from a parent

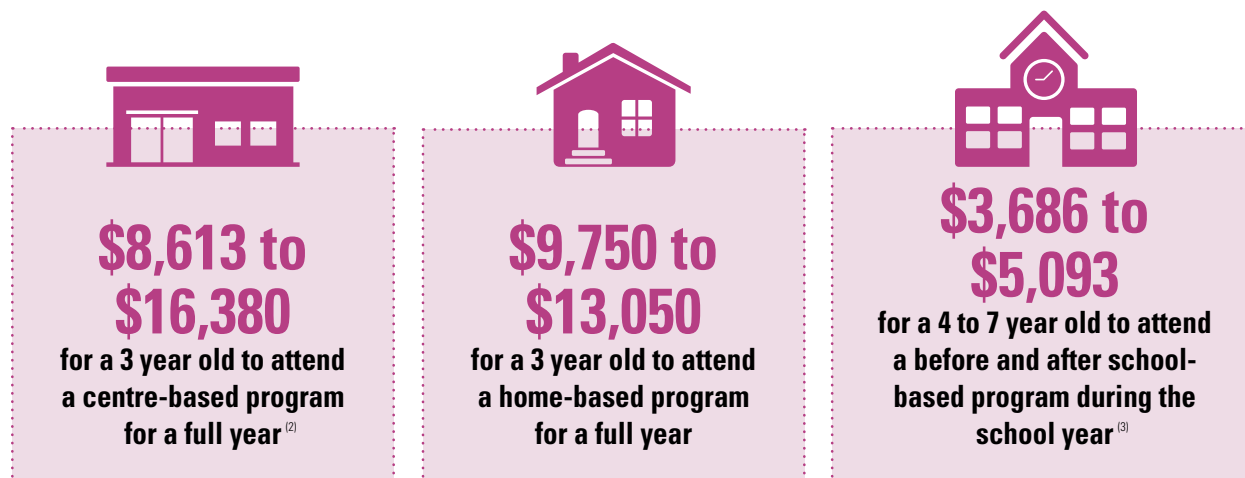
Families who are eligible for Child Care Fee Subsidy (see below) and those whose incomes fall into the highest income brackets are financially able to access licensed care. Families in middle income brackets may experience the affordability barrier to child care most significantly. For example, a two parent family with a net annual income of \$100,000 must dedicate approximately 20% of their income to child care costs. This leaves little income remaining for savings, debt-repayment, home repairs or renovations, recreation and holidays.

For many years ELCC operators and educators, experts in the field and families have advocated for a national child care system that would meet families' needs and

improve the affordability, availability and accessibility of child care across Canada. Studies show, this would contribute to higher levels of employment (particularly for women), higher levels of education, and more equitable health and well-being. Child care is major component of the federal Liberal platform to strengthen the middle class. The Liberal government stated, "We will develop a child care framework that meets the needs of Canadian families, wherever they live... We will meet with provinces, territories, and Indigenous communities to begin work on a new National Early Learning and Child Care Framework, to deliver affordable, high-quality, flexible, and fully inclusive child care for Canadian families." ^{xxvii}



Cost to attend licensed care on a full-time basis



"We could not afford to keep our son in daycare while under 18 months so my mother-in-law watched him daily until he was 18 months so it was cheaper to put him in daycare full time. We also have one location closer to our house but it was too expensive and chose a different daycare facility." – Parent

⁽²⁾ Full year based on 261 paid days (365 days less 104 weekend days) given that most licensed programs charge for holidays.

⁽³⁾ School year based on 194 school days (no non-instructional days included)



Centre Éducatif Village d'Élisabeth

Who receives Child Care Fee Subsidy?

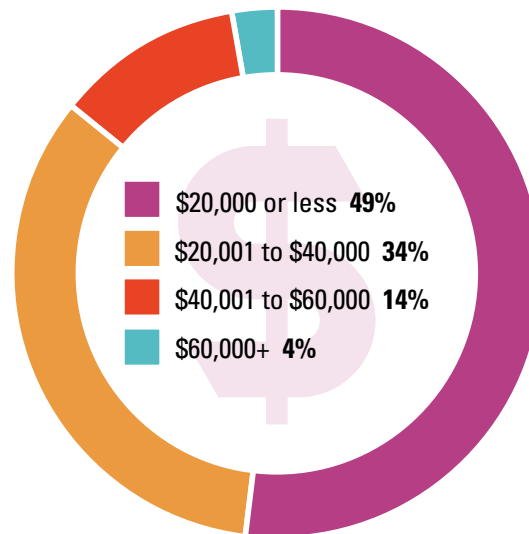
Child Care Fee Subsidy is available to provide financial assistance to eligible families to help pay for licensed child care costs. Fee Subsidy is available for licensed child care centres, licensed home child care programs, before-and-after school programs (through School Boards and licensed child care programs), and approved summer camps. In Waterloo Region, Fee Subsidy can be applied to any licensed program with a Purchase of Service Agreement with the Region. As of April 30, 2016 all but three local licensed ELCC Operators had active Agreements. Families who are eligible for Fee

Subsidy can choose their preferred licensed child care option provided the program has space.

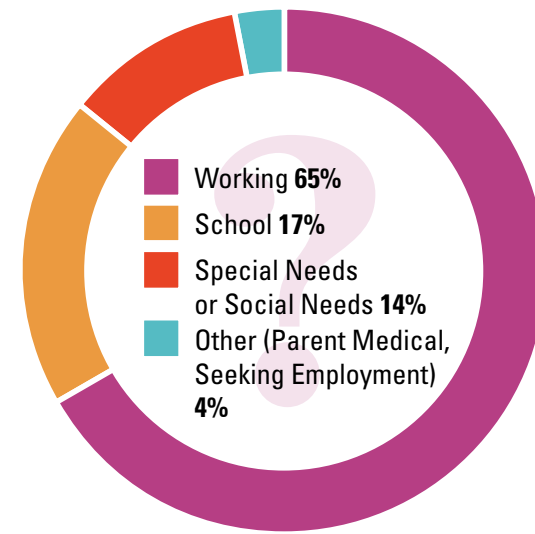
Child Care Fee Subsidy is available to families who meet financial eligibility criteria (which are set by the Province) and who require child care for one of the following reasons:

- Employment, enrolled in school/training
- Child has special or social needs
- Parent has medical needs

Income Distribution of Families on the Child Care Fee Subsidy Caseload, 2015



Reasons Families Receiving Subsidy are Using Child Care, 2015



“[Cost of child care] doesn’t impact my child care arrangement and/or employment as much as it impacts our ability to provide other experiences for our children...Because child care is so expensive we have little left over each month to be able to take our child to other programs.” – Parent

Distribution of the Child Care Subsidy Caseload by Municipality in 2015

City of Kitchener 56%

City of Cambridge 30%

City of Waterloo 11%

Township of Wilmot 2%

Township of Woolwich 1%

Township of North Dumfries 0.5%

Township of Wellesley 0.5%

2015 QUICK FACTS

An average of **2,942 children** (4% of children in the Region) receive Child Care Fee Subsidy per month.

78% of families who receive Child Care Fee Subsidy are single-parent families and **22%** are two-parent families.

Most families (49%) that receive subsidy have a net income of **\$20,000 or less.**



Owl Child Care

“Basically, until our son is out of child care we won’t be putting any other money into the local economy because we won’t be able to purchase anything such as dinners out, renovations, etc.” – Parent

How does affordability impact children?

- More affordable care supports increased access to quality licensed ELCC programs which is directly linked with improved developmental outcomes for children.
- Though cost is not an indicator of quality, typically lower cost options are provided in the unregulated sector where there is no oversight to monitor and support child development.
- Parents adjust work arrangements to reduce child care needs.
- The significant cost of child care reduces a family's disposable income for other expenses or activities that benefit children and the family.
- Parents experience stress associated with the financial burden of child care. This stress can impact their interactions with their children.
- The social and economic impacts of affordable child care reach beyond the child and their family. In Quebec the introduction of universal child care led to a 12% increase in employment rate for women with children under the age of six, and fewer families receiving social assistance.
- Research shows that the cheapest cost for child care and high quality early learning experiences seldom are related.

Implications for planning

The cost of child care clearly impacts families' decisions about child care and is one of the most significant barriers to accessing licensed child care. It is clear that as child care costs increase and eligibility criteria for Child Care Fee Subsidy remains unchanged, families who are eligible for subsidy and families whose income is sufficient to pay for the costs are able to access licensed child care. It is the middle income families who will have the most difficulty in accessing licensed child care.

Given the variability in parent fees and the reasons for the variability, it is unlikely that there is an effective one-size-fits-all approach to reducing or stabilizing parent fees that would promote the quality of ELCC programs. In any fee-related policy decision, consideration is required of operating cost factors such as those costs most associated with quality (e.g., staff wages), costs associated with demand (e.g., location, age) and auspice (non-profit and for-profit).

Throughout recent years, there has been adequate child care fee subsidy funding available to meet local demand. Any policy or system change such as increased awareness of subsidy for middle income households, or increased number of operators with fee subsidy agreements could have a significant impact on the availability of fee subsidy. Additionally, broader community trends such as unemployment and low income must be closely monitored to project possible impacts to fee subsidy demand. If funding remains fixed and subsidy demand or rates increase, a fee subsidy waitlist will be required in the future. Policies and priorities for fee subsidy funding should be continuously evaluated and updated in anticipation of future needs.



Accessibility

Emmanuel at Brighton Child Care Centre





Emmanuel at Brighton Child Care Centre

Accessibility

Introduction

All children have the right to fully participate in a quality licensed early learning and care child (ELCC) program. “High quality ELCC programs have three key components- they are accessible to all children and their families; designed and carried out with consideration for the unique needs for each child; and, they include ongoing evaluation of programs to ensure full participation”.^{xxviii} Unfortunately, not all children have access to high quality licensed ELCC for a variety of reasons including cost, availability, cultural barriers and/or special needs.

How do families access the licensed ELCC system?

In Waterloo Region, families can access the licensed ELCC system through OneList Waterloo Region. OneList is a web-enabled, centralized application system and waitlist site for all regulated ELCC across the Region. OneList allows families to research different programs, locate licensed child care in their neighbourhood, and apply for licensed child care or school board operated programs. OneList also connects families to child care fee subsidy and special needs resourcing supports.

| | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <p>Click</p> | <p>Call</p> | <p>Connect</p> |
| | | |
| <p>www.OneListWaterlooRegion.ca</p> | <p>Call any ELCC program directly</p> | <p>Visit any program in person</p> |

“You have to pursue your own options. Just because you have registered on OneList does not mean you will be contacted or receive a spot.” – Parent



OneList Waterloo Region Statistics

555

Average number of new applications per month

2,809

New children registered with OneList in 2015

234

Average number of new children per month

In addition to OneList Waterloo Region, parents can access and learn more about the system by visiting the Ministry of Education’s website, calling any of the ELCC programs directly or visiting programs in person. As of April 2016, all ELCC operators with a service agreement with the Region of Waterloo are required to use OneList as their primary means for registering children into their programs and are required to direct families to OneList when inquiring about the ELCC system.

Navigating the ELCC system can be overwhelming and confusing for families. One of the challenges parents have related to accessing the licensed child care system relates to OneList. Many parents surveyed shared their frustration with the registration/waitlist process for child care. Primarily, families are frustrated with the time it takes to secure a space; some indicated they were on OneList for 15 months before securing a

spot for their child. This directly relates to the need for more licensed spaces in the Region. There were others who shared their frustration with the inconsistent practices between ELCC programs waitlist management as parents found inconsistencies between processes when applying to multiple programs (e.g. priority to siblings, priority to employees of partner companies, communication with families). The inconsistent practices lead to uncertainty and distrust of the system.

Licensed operators, community partners and parents have shared that accessing the system can be particularly difficult for families who are new to the Region, do not have access to a computer, whose primary language is not English, and whose child has special needs.

“Usability of OneList is very poor and process is incredibly frustrating.” – Parent



Kinsmen Children's Centre



The main piece of advice families offered to new parents looking for child care was to start early.

15%
of parents surveyed indicated an easier registration process would improve their child care experience.



Region of Waterloo Home Child Care

What resources are available to children with special needs?

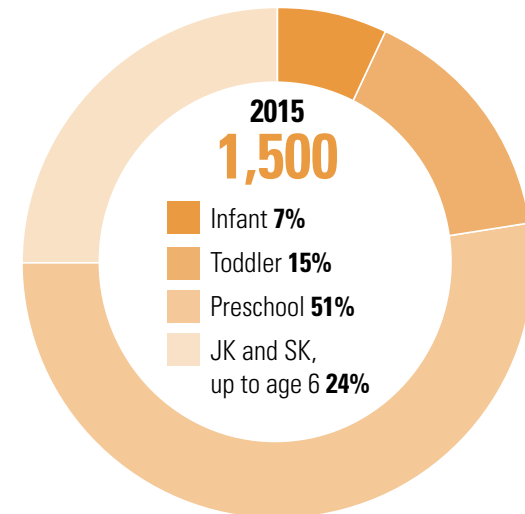
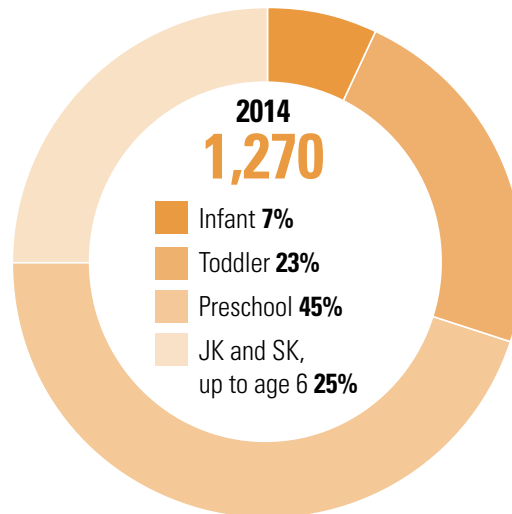
The inclusion of children with social or special needs into child care programs is important as it supports healthy child development and positive self-esteem, facilitates the development of positive social skills, and supports families of children with special needs. Research shows that all children benefit from inclusive child care, as it promotes respect and celebration of diversity.^{xxix}

Many children across the Region require extra support to meet their individual needs. Three community agencies, KW Habilitation, KidsAbility and Family and Children’s Services are funded by the Region of Waterloo to provide supports for children with special needs seeking or attending any licensed child care

program in the Region. These three agencies, along with the Region of Waterloo Children’s Services Division, form the Waterloo Region’s Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) Collaborative. The SNR Collaborative works together to support licensed child care programs in identifying and meeting the diverse needs of all children and their families. All children, regardless of their abilities, are supported to safely participate in quality inclusive services. Since 2003, the SNR Collaborative has served children up to 6 years of age with a developmental concern. In 2015, approximately 1,500 children and 135 licensed ELCC settings received inclusion supports.

“My son has significant special needs. The staff have gone out of their way to accommodate him and have never complained about the extra support.” – Parent

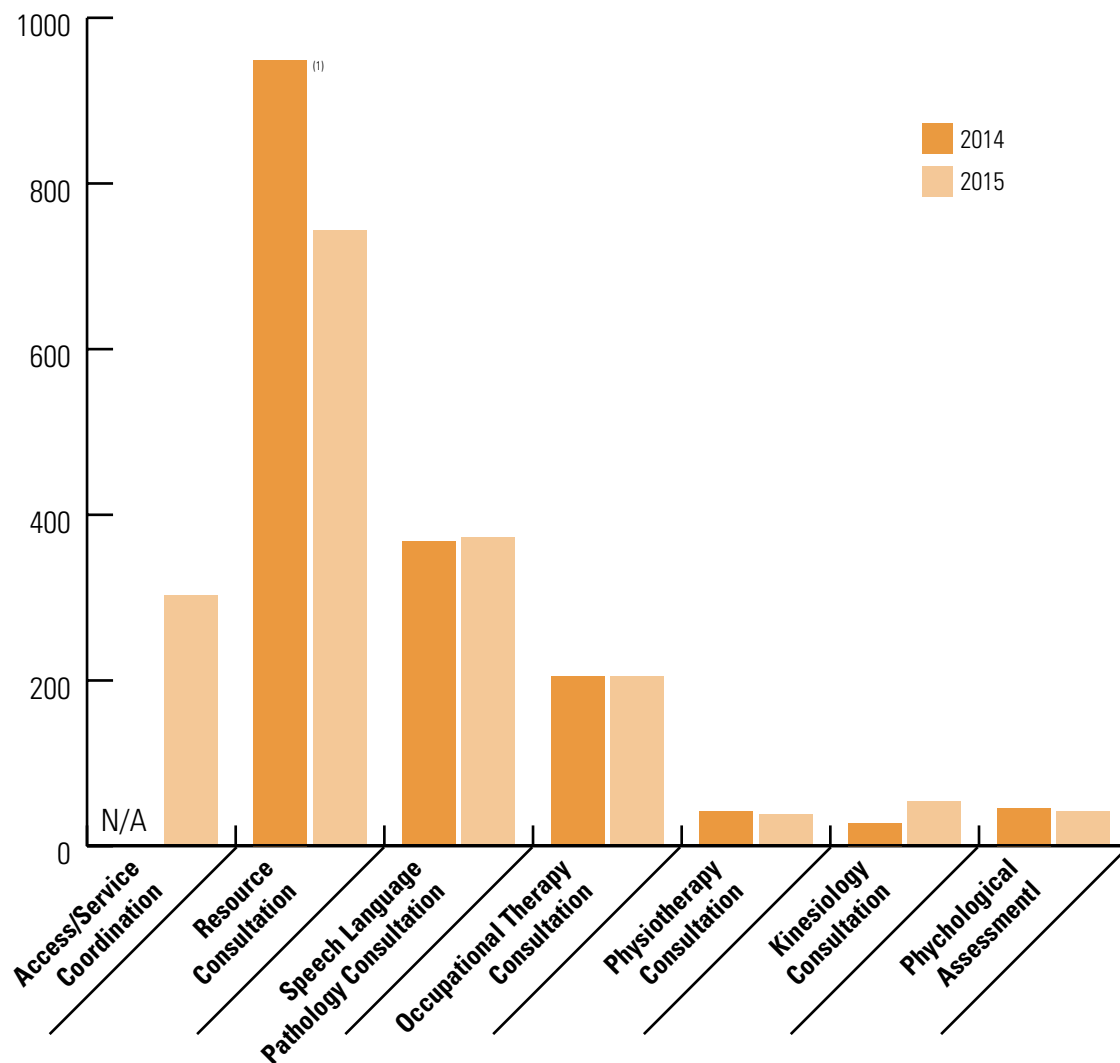
Age Distribution of Children who Received SNR Services



There are barriers and challenges for children with special needs, as well as for educators providing ELCC to children with special needs. Families identified the lack of program options and lack of space as a significant challenge for their children with special needs. It was noted that some families are able to find child care, but their children are not able to attend the program for the full day due to shortages in educators available to provide support. SNR agency staff echoed this concern on behalf of families, noting the stress it causes for parents as many are forced to find alternative child care or adjust their employment. Statistics show that more than two thirds of families of children with special needs will resort to one parent leaving the labour force in order to provide care in the home.^{xxx}

While many ELCC programs support as many children with special needs as possible, there are challenges related to resources and capacity that limit their ability to do so. All ELCC programs with a service agreement with the Region of Waterloo have access to the services provided by the SNR Collaborative. SNR agency staff highlighted some of the challenges ELCC operators and educators have in ensuring inclusive programming for all children. In particular, it was noted that educators and caregivers require more training in relation to inclusion and supporting children with special needs.

Special Needs Supports Delivered in 2014 and 2015



⁽¹⁾Includes access/service coordination



Lakeshore Cooperative Nursery School

42,434

Total hours of enhanced classroom support in 2015

1,588

Total number of volunteer hours supporting children in 2015

1,106

Number of RECEs and parents who participated in training sessions

63

Number of training sessions for RECEs and parents in 2015

Inclusion supports for children up to 12 years

Educators, caregivers, community partners and families have identified a need for inclusion supports for children over the age of 6 years in licensed child care. In 2015, the Ministry of Education expanded the age mandate for special needs resources in their service agreements with Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM's) to include children up to the age of 12 years. At that time, given significant service pressures in the under 6 population, it was not possible to expand the age mandate without additional funding. In order to better project how service expansion to this age grouping might impact services, funding and resource staff began planning to develop a new

approach to deliver service for children up to the age of 12 years. With some modest increase in funding, the SNR Collaborative will support licensed child care classrooms with children up to 12 years of age to enhance inclusion and support full participation in licensed child care. As part of this approach it will be imperative that service providers work together across systems to ensure smooth transitions for children. The model must be based on building capacity of the licensed ELCC program to include all children and where possible, the model should build upon and leverage existing supports, equipment and resources for the child to reduce duplication.

“Children are all treated well, with respect and kindness.” – Parent on their experience in a ELCC Centre

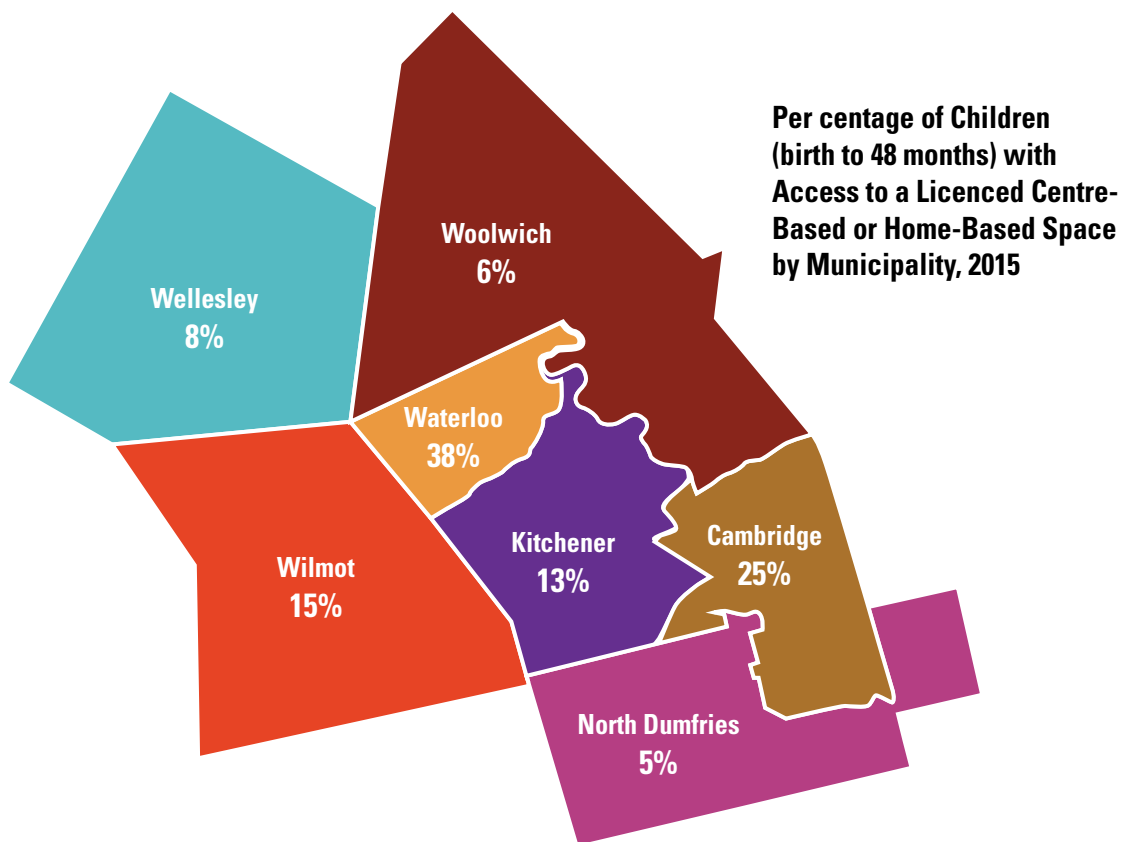
“Better accessibility to quality care for special needs.” – Parent

“I wish they were able to accommodate my child’s special needs.” – Parent of a child age 10

How accessible is licensed child care for families?

There are a number of barriers that exist for families when searching and accessing child care for their children. The accessibility of the ELCC system is dependent on several factors, including:

- Availability** – Families in Waterloo Region experience variability in the number of spaces available by municipality and limited spaces available for infants and toddlers. Intake for child care is greatly variable and not based on an annual cycle like a school year; parents are seeking child care at all times of the year. ELCC operators are licensed based on a set operating capacity; once they have reached that number of children they cannot enrol any further children unless another child leaves the program.
- Affordability** – The high cost of licensed ELCC is one of the top reasons parents do not access the licensed ELCC system. Families who are eligible for child care subsidy and those whose income is sufficient to pay for the costs are able to access child care. Those whose income falls within the middle experience this barrier the most significantly. For example, a two parent family with a net income ranging up to \$100,000 must dedicate approximately 20% of their income to child care costs. With annual child care costs ranging close to \$28,000 for two children, it is clear that many families are forced to make some difficult decisions.
- Accessibility** – Due to location, hours of operation, ages of children in attendance or special needs of the child licensed ELCC centres may not be accessible to all families. For families with transportation limitations or living in areas of the community which does not have a licensed ELCC program there are little to no options.
- Awareness** – Parents are not aware of where to look and how to truly assess child care options. There is limited awareness of the difference between the regulated and unregulated child care sector. Because parents are not sure of where to start they often rely on referral and word of mouth from one parent or family member to another.



How does accessibility impact children?

- Access to high quality, licensed ELCC for all children has links to improved developmental outcomes for children.
- Accessing and navigating the ELCC system is stressful for families, particularly families who are new to the Region, where English is not their primary language, or those who do not have access to a computer.
- Often children living in vulnerable neighbourhoods or children with the greatest need do not have access to high quality, licensed child care.
- The inclusion of children with special needs into child care programs is beneficial for children with special needs, their families and all other children in the program.
- Programs that are accessible and inclusive support equality from the earliest years of life and build resiliency as children transition into their school years and beyond.

Implications for planning

The accessibility of child care is dependent on a variety of factors including affordability and availability. Any policy decisions related to these factors must consider the impact on accessibility of child care for all families.

Given the growth and diversity of our community, new opportunities and challenges exist in creating and sustaining an accessible ELCC system for all families.

In Waterloo Region, families experience different levels of access to child care depending on: where they live in our community; child and family characteristics including special needs, child behaviour; parents' employment; and, the capacity of ELCC programs.

Funding for special needs services has remained fairly consistent over the last several years while the number of children requiring care has continued to increase. Any policy or system change could have a significant impact on the accessibility of ELCC programs and the inclusion for children with special needs. Policies and priorities for special needs funding should be continuously evaluated and updated in anticipation of future needs.

The implementation of the Provincial Special Needs Strategy and the Mental Health Strategy will require monitoring and review to ensure local services are aligned with provincial requirements. As these strategies are implemented, they may redefine the role of the SNR Collaborative and the way in which families access support. As the CMSM, Children's Services will support the SNR agencies through these changes to ultimately improve the experience of children with special needs and their families.



Accountability



Accountability

Introduction

Research shows the developmental benefits of high quality child care and early learning (ELCC) programs. High quality ELCC is linked with short- and long-term positive impacts in areas such as cognitive and emotional development, social competence and positive behaviour. Beyond the benefits for children, there is increasing evidence that high quality, ELCC yields economic and social returns both in the short and long term. The Quality Early Learning Network (2012) lists the following benefits:

- Helping keep families out of poverty;
- Supporting women’s workforce participation, education and training;
- Building strong local economies;
- Mitigating the shift towards increased income disparity;
- Investing in our future knowledge base and competitive capacity by supporting children’s physical, social, emotional and intellectual well-being in the early years;
- Building our future labour force as working population ages.

Ensuring quality ELCC programs is a responsibility shared across the system – there is a role for the Province, the College of Early Childhood Educators, the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) ELCC programs and operators, and parents.

What makes a quality ELCC program?

There are many factors that go into determining the quality of child care, the most important of which are the educators and caregivers. High quality child care programs have the following characteristics:

- High adult to child ratios
- Stable, consistent caregiving (i.e. low turnover)
- Small group sizes for children
- Educators who are well trained in early childhood education
- Adequate health, safety and physical environment precautions
- Adequate wages and good working conditions
- Purposely designed and well equipped spaces for children

Research shows that there are three key factors in the promotion of high quality child care- 1) regulation, 2) auspice (program governance), and 3) funding.

1. Legislative standards, monitoring and enforcement such as the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* and quality initiative programs are related to quality. Better regulations leads to better adult to child ratios, lower staff turnover, higher wages, and more positive interactions between staff and children.

2. Research has shown that not-for-profit child care programs typically have higher ratios, better trained staff, higher wages and better working conditions.
3. Consistent, stable funding is related to better ratios, higher levels of training, better health and safety provisions and quality of the educator and child interactions.

The quality of an ELCC program and the quality of the caregivers are important for families in the selection of child care. Much of the advice parents provided in the survey to new parents related to quality of ELCC programming and staff.–



49%

of parents identified the staff or caregiver as one of the most important influences on their child care choices

“Go with someone you trust. My licensed daycare is over the top with professionalism and I have little to worry about in the day because they are so good at their jobs...” - Parent

Wages for Registered Early Childhood Educators

ELCC is a very labour intensive service and the amount paid to Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) has a significant impact on the quality of both individual programs and the overall ELCC system. Typically 80-90% of all operating costs relate to staffing. In Waterloo Region there is a great deal of variability between the wages paid to staff who work in ELCC settings, the range in 2015 varied from \$11.00 per hour up to \$35.00 per hour for RECEs. Again, it is important to note that the wages paid to RECE significantly influence retention and quality of the overall ELCC system.

The wages identified in the table below do not include Provincial Child Care Wage Enhancement. Wage Enhancement (including the Home Child Care Enhancement Grant) is a provincial program started in 2015, which provides up to an additional \$2 per hour plus benefits for eligible child care program staff working in licensed child care (including centres and home child care). The purpose of this program is to reduce the gap between RECEs working for the Boards of Education and those working in licensed child care and to support recruitment and retention of child care professionals. It is anticipated that the Province will provide an additional dollar in 2017 and that they will commit to this program. In Waterloo Region in 2015, 911 full time equivalents of licensed child care centre program staff received wage enhancement funding totalling \$1.6 million dollars. An additional \$728 thousand was distributed to 425 home child care providers through the Home Child Care Enhancement Grant.


Research shows that low or insufficient wages in ELCC leads to higher staff turnover, fewer RECEs attracted to work in the field, inconsistency for children and overall lower quality care.

The majority of licensed child care centres in Waterloo Region are non-profit organizations. There are 22 for-profit child care sites in Waterloo Region. Research has indicated that public and non-profit child care centres are of higher quality than for-profit centres. This does not mean that all for-profit centres are poor quality and all non-profit are high quality, but that auspice plays a role in determining whether program quality will be higher or lower through its impact on factors such as wages, staff training, turnover, working conditions, etc. Research has shown that in order to make a profit, for-profit organizations are more likely to pay lower wages and have poorer working conditions that, in turn, cause higher staff turnover. These organizations also hire less-well-trained educators than non-profit or public child care centres.^{xxxi}


Hourly Wage for Licensed Child Care Centre Staff

| Position | Lowest Salary | Highest Salary |
|------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| RECE | \$11 | \$35 |
| Director | \$15 | \$47 |
| Supervisor | \$13 | \$51 |
| Non-RECE program staff | \$11 | \$25 |
| Cook | \$11 | \$29 |

“When touring centres really pay attention to how the caregivers interact with the children, and think if it matches your values and priorities for your child and family.” – Advice from a Parent



Suitable wages =
Fair working conditions
+ Higher retention =
HIGH QUALITY CARE



Insufficient wages =
Higher staff turnover
+ Fewer Registered Early Childhood Educators attracted to work in the field
= Inconsistency for children =
LOWER QUALITY CARE

Do families understand what makes a quality ELCC program?

The ELCC system is complex; parents and guardians are not always aware of where to look and how to truly assess child care options. There is limited awareness of the difference between the regulated and unregulated child care sector. Because parents are not sure of where to start they often rely on referrals and advice from one parent or family member to another. It was highlighted by ELCC operators that many families may not understand the benefits of licensed ELCC for children in relation to their physical, social, emotional, cognitive development. While noted by both parents and operators, a licensed program does not equate to a program of high quality.

Research has shown that parents as consumers of child care may be unaware of the basic elements of quality. ELCC operators and Children’s Services staff identified a need to support families in the understanding of the licensed child care system, the signs of a quality program and how to select an ELCC program that best meets the needs of their family. Research has shown that children in home environments that may place them at environmental risk are more likely to be placed in poorer quality child care. Generally, parents who have higher levels of education, have stable employment and have positive social networks are likely to use better quality child care.

“After the decision to have children - choosing a child care space is the next biggest decision you’ll have to make. Your child will be spending time in this space during the most important development years of their lives. Choose a child care space based on what is best for the child (not necessarily what is cheapest or most convenient). Clean, natural light, live plants, outside space, with trained professionals, and most importantly with a child focused play based approach will provide the foundation for your child to build upon. Everything from attachment, trust, math, creativity, problem solving, resiliency, teamwork - all of these essential skills begin in the years before five and all will develop organically in safe, play based child care centres.” – Advice from a parent

“Importance of the quality of child care and the caregivers approach/ interactions with your child.” – Parent

“Trust your instincts when it comes to care providers. Don’t compromise based on cost, make sure it’s quality and a good fit with a caregiver who is qualified.” – Parent

“Although space and appearance like safety and cleanliness are important, quality providers whom have interest and desire to not only care for your child, but also to provide them with experiences and learning are so valuable to development.” – Parent

“The person that you choose to care for your child is a big decision and should not be taken lightly.” – Parent

What resources exist to support quality across the ELCC system?

For the past 12 years the ELCC community has participated in Raising the Bar (RTB) on Quality, a community-based peer accredited set of quality standards. The goal of Raising the Bar is to ensure that licensed early learning and child care programs (child care centres, home child care agencies, special needs resourcing agencies) in Waterloo Region are engaged in an ongoing process that actively supports healthy child development in settings that are safe, clean and focused on high quality. RTB has been a valuable and highly successful program since 2004. Given the significant changes in the ELCC system, including the implementation of the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*, it was decided that 2016 would be the final year for RTB in Waterloo Region. A new approach to quality assurance is currently being developed and is expected to be implemented in 2017. The new approach will be system-wide to support the evolution of high quality licensed ELCC programs and services for children and their families.

As the CMSM, Children’s Services plays a significant role in building capacity and accountability measures for the ELCC system. Children’s Services strives to support ELCC operators and educators to increase quality across the sector. Children’s Services developed a new funding model in partnership with the community to provide base operating funding and incentive grants. The purpose of the incentive grants is to encourage all ELCC operators to work towards and maintain high quality operating standards. Criteria are linked to evidence-based standards and practices that promote quality in ELCC settings, such as employing skilled

staff and paying a living wage. In addition, Children’s Services distributes approximately \$1 million to support minor capital, repairs and maintenance, and transformational change.

With the implementation of full day kindergarten and the requirements of the CCEYA, Children’s Services has supported operators and educators to mitigate the challenges associated with such significant change. For example, in order to meet the new requirements of the CCEYA, the Region provided one-time funding for \$60,000 to increase First Aid training sessions for community ELCC program staff and caregivers with a licensed Home Child Care agency.

The Early Childhood Professional Resource Centre (PRC) at Conestoga College



provides support to ELCC operators, educators and caregivers. As of April 2016, all ELCC programs with a service contract with the Region of Waterloo are required to participate as a member of the PRC. Members of the PRC have access to continuous professional learning activities, educational resources and curriculum enhancements, toys, and equipment to support early learning and child care in the classroom, workshops and networking opportunities. In addition, members have access to work stations, office equipment and staff support.



Conestoga College Doon Campus Child Development Centre



Staff retention and quality of educators were identified as top challenges facing licensed ELCC operators.

“Licensing doesn’t guarantee quality care.” – Parent



St. Jacobs Daycare

How does accountability impact children?

- High quality child care is linked with short- and long-term positive impacts in areas such as cognitive and emotional development, social competence and positive behaviour.
- Poor quality ELCC is shown to have negative effects on children, particularly for children without positive, supportive home environment.
- Low or insufficient wages for educators, and/or poorly qualified educators, lead to an overall lower quality care for children.
- Lack of understanding of the licensed ELCC system leads families to making uninformed decisions related to child care for their children.

Implications for planning

There is a role for the Province, the College of Early Childhood Educators, the CMSM, ELCC programs and operators, and parents in ensuring a high quality ELCC system. In Waterloo Region, the new quality assurance approach will provide the framework for quality and outline the roles and responsibilities for all partners. The new approach will take a system level approach to support and enhance levels of quality. Evaluative measures will be put in place to monitor progress and support the work. It will also be important to ensure that the licensed child care system in Waterloo Region is aligned with the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* and meets the needs of our community.

The Provincial Child Care Wage Enhancement is a fairly new program and the local impact of wage enhancement is relatively unknown. It would be beneficial to monitor the impact of wage enhancement on the staff turnover rates and salary levels of RECEs.

There is great variability in the quality levels, types and cost of child care provided in the unregulated sector. Regulated or licensed ELCC Programs operate under legislative authority of the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* and are required to maintain consistent standards in the programs offered to children. A key direction from the Province to all CMSMs is to encourage families to access and utilize the licensed ELCC sector. Research would indicate that it is important for healthy outcomes for children that their early years' experiences must be of high quality, enriching and child centred.



Actions for 2016-2020



Actions for 2016-2020

1

Develop a master plan for development of licensed, high quality ELCC in Waterloo Region.

How does this priority address stakeholder feedback?

- Location of child care was the most frequently identified influence on child care choices by parents (66%). In a follow-up survey, 90% of parents identified having child care close to home as important or very important, with the majority wanting child care within 5 km of home.
- A need for more licensed spaces was identified by 47% of parents, service providers, educators and operators.
- Parents identified a lack of infant spaces as a major challenge in the Region.
- Operators identified cost of infant and toddler care as their second highest viability challenge; this has stayed constant since 2012.
- Community partners noted a need for more licensed care within close proximity to public transit.

Planning considerations

- Operators identified a lack of funding for expansion costs (including facility and land expenses) as a barrier in creating more licensed spaces.
- The 2016 Census data will support the identification of high demand locations.
- Potential changes to Federal policies regarding maternity and parental leave will require monitoring.
- Community changes such as transit, growth in urban centres and rural population growth will require ongoing monitoring.
- There continue to be emerging needs of parents including non-traditional child care hours and flexible schedules.

Strategies

- 1.1 Work in partnership with local school boards to identify areas of need and utilize the Provincial Schools First Capital Program to build new ELCC centres collocated with new schools.
- 1.2 Work with the Provincial and Federal governments to seek additional funding for growth of new child care spaces.
- 1.3 Incorporate planning for child care spaces into the Regional Master Plan for growth and development to design a neighbourhood-based approach to planning, with key public and private sector partners.
- 1.4 Enhance the CMSM capacity to track, monitor and evaluate services demands to support community planning.



2

Improve access to affordable, high quality, licensed early learning and child care services and experiences for all families.

How does this priority address stakeholder feedback?

- 65% of parents surveyed identified cost as a top factor they would change about their child care experience.
- Even families with a suitable, stable income still have challenges paying for child care.
- Operators identified system financing as the element of system quality furthest from being achieved.
- Wages for current staff and parent fees not reflecting the true cost of ELCC were identified as two of the top three viability challenges for licensed ELCC Operators.
- Community partners and educators identified affordability of licensed child care as one of the top barriers to accessing licensed ELCC.

Planning considerations

- Consider provincial funding opportunities such as the Schools-First Child Care Capital Retrofit Policy and Capital Funding for New Construction of Child Care.
- Policies related to operating cost most associated with quality (e.g., staff wages) and costs associated with demand (e.g., location, age) and auspice (non-profit and for-profit) must be reviewed.
- Policies and priorities for fee subsidy funding should be continuously evaluated and updated in anticipation of future needs.

Strategies

- 2.1 Work with community partners to develop strategies that will alleviate the cost of ELCC to make it more affordable for families.
- 2.2 Work with Ontario Municipal Social Services Association and the Province to expand the income threshold for child care fee subsidy to increase access for families with limited income.
- 2.3 Continue to monitor the progress of a federal National Early Learning and Child Care Framework and work to support any national initiative related to child care and child well-being.



Build capacity to support inclusion of all children in high quality, early learning and child care experiences.

How does this priority address stakeholder feedback?

- All stakeholders identified the need for ELCC programs to be more responsive in meeting the unique and changing needs of children with special needs.
- ELCC operators and SNR staff indicated that educators require more support and training to ensure full participation of children with special needs in ELCC programs.
- The inclusion of children with special needs into child care programs is beneficial for children with special needs, their families and all other children in the program.
- Community partners and educators identified a need to be more accessible to non-English speaking families, newcomers and First Nations, Inuit and Metis families.

Planning considerations

- In any policy decisions related to affordability, availability and accountability must consider the impact on accessibility of child care for all families.
- The 2016 Census data will support the identification changes and challenges (i.e. culture, language, income) by neighbourhood.
- The implementation of the Special Needs Strategy and the provincial mental health strategy will require monitoring and review to ensure local services are aligned with provincial requirements. As these strategies are implemented, they will redefine the role of the SNR Collaborative and the way in which families access support. As the CMSM, Children's Services will support the SNR agencies through these changes to ultimately improve the experience of children with special needs and their families.
- The ELCC system and RECEs require support and capacity building to understand the benefits and provide the necessary supports for all children, regardless of need, to be included in high quality, licensed child care.

Strategies

- 3.1 Work with local First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners to create culturally relevant child care experiences and services.
- 3.2 Build upon community expertise, best practice and professional development to reshape approaches to wholistic and strength based views of children, families and professionals.
- 3.3 Expand on opportunities to increase knowledge, understanding and approaches to support the many diverse needs of our community.
- 3.4 Monitor and evaluate the efficacy of current approaches and take action to change if needed.



4

Address the service experience for families within early years services.

How does this priority address stakeholder feedback?

- Parents repeatedly indicated that the child care system is complex to navigate and requires significant advance planning – start searching early was the most frequent advice that parents offered to someone new to the system.
- Community partners, staff and child care operators identified challenges and inconsistencies with the use of OneList (for parents and operators).
- Community partners, staff and child care operators identified the need for new parent education strategies about the entire ELCC system including how to navigate the system, the different types of child care options and understanding quality child care.
- More information must to be provided to parents. As one parent stated “We know that things are expensive but I never had a clue on how expensive childcare really was. Pamphlets included in the package you get from the hospital or from your doctor would go a long way.”

Planning considerations

- As our primary user, the priorities and challenges families experience must be the focus in all planning and policy making for the ELCC system.
- The ELCC system in Waterloo Region is built on community partnerships, engaging partners in the planning is required to respond to the diverse needs of children, families, and service providers.
- Improvements to navigating the ELCC system must be made through a lens of customer service, to improve the service for families.

Strategies

- 4.1 Work with community partners, parents and private and public sector to develop a communication and marketing strategy to improve access to early years services.
- 4.2 Build upon the current success of OneList Waterloo Region to develop enhancements, decrease confusion and improve the service experience for families.
- 4.3 Work with school boards, other early years service providers to create a more seamless experience for families as they transition between services.

5

Mobilize a renewed approach to continuous quality improvement for all early years services that is responsive, effective and measurable.

How does this priority address stakeholder feedback?

- Providing licensed child care that is of the highest quality is the top priority for Children’s Services and ELCC operators so that children in Waterloo Region thrive and achieve optimal developmental health.
- 49% of parents identified the staff or caregiver as one of the most important influences on their child care choices.
- Staff retention was identified as top challenges facing licensed ELCC operators.
- Staff wage was the highest viability challenge facing ELCC operators, followed by cost of providing infant/toddler care, parent fees not true cost, and lack of RECE supply staff.

Planning considerations

- The assurance of quality in the ELCC system is a shared responsibility between many including the Province, the College of Early Childhood Educators, the CMSM and ELCC operators and staff.
- The impact of the new quality initiative program will be significant on Children’s Services as the CMSM as well as the ELCC operators and educators.
- Early childhood education is not valued by the public.
- There is a gap in knowledge across the sector related to the working conditions (wages, benefits, capacity building) of RECEs and other ELCC staff and the quality of the care children receive.
- The Provincial Child Care Wage Enhancement is a fairly new program and the local impact of wage enhancement is relatively unknown. It would be beneficial to monitor the impact of wage enhancement on the quality of both individual programs and the overall ELCC system.

Strategies

- 5.1 Implement a new approach to continuous quality improvement with clearly stated outcomes and measures for all related early years programs.
- 5.2 Implement community wide standards of practice relating to wages, working conditions and approaches to pedagogy.



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