

Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres A Public Plan



The Right Time for Transformation

It is an exciting time for Ontario's child care and early years system as we continue our ambitious plan to modernize our programs and services. Our transformative work has already resulted in full-day kindergarten, the new *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*, a new funding formula for child care, and *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*. With this ground-breaking work underway, we remain committed to transforming Ontario's child and family programs. This transformation will help us integrate early years programs and services in Ontario.

We know how important the early years are in forming a solid foundation for a child's entire life. And we know families, communities and the province all benefit from programs and services that promote early learning and development, support parents and caregivers, and provide referrals to specialized services. That is why the government has invested more than \$97 million per year in child and family programs.

Ontario's Child and Family Programs: A Changing Landscape

Every year, thousands of families benefit from these programs in communities across Ontario. The province currently funds four programs for the early years:

- Ontario Early Years Centres
- Parenting and Family Literacy Centres
- Child Care Resource Centres
- Better Beginnings Better Futures.

Research and conversations with parents and educators show these programs are essential because they help children and families to learn, grow and connect – together.

Research also shows many children and families have not participated in these programs for a variety of reasons. Populations in various cities continue to shift, families have moved into new neighbourhoods and there are increasing demands on families. There has also been a surge in new research on early childhood development. Therefore, it is important that child and family programs are equipped to respond to these changing realities.

From Conversation to Transformation

To begin the conversation, Ontario released the *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework* in 2013 to set out a clear vision for Ontario's early years programs and services. The vision is to ensure Ontario's children and families are well supported by a system of responsive, high-quality, accessible and increasingly integrated early years programs and services – a system that contributes to healthy child development today and a stronger future tomorrow.

In line with this vision, the framework highlighted the government's goal to integrate existing child and family programs and establish a common mandate, identity and governance structure. This is in line with recommendations from the report: "*With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario.*"

Since that time, the government has spoken to families, educators, municipalities, and other key stakeholders across the province, to determine the best way to realize this ambitious goal. Our action plan is based on this valuable input, and builds on the successes we have already had in transforming the early years in Ontario. It also describes how we will deliver on this commitment together.

Why Change is Important

Awareness & Access

Despite the benefits of child and family programs to early childhood development and family well-being, we have heard that many parents are not aware of the services available in their communities. The existing system, made up of programs with different names and mandates, can be difficult for parents and caregivers to navigate and access.

Location & Changing Demographics

Location can also be a barrier to access. Families have moved into new communities, and some neighbourhoods have few available services to meet the demand. In other places, several separately managed programs may exist on the same block. In some cases, these programs may not be integrated into local service planning leading to an uneven distribution of services. As such, in some communities, the current system is not as responsive as it could be in supporting Ontario's diverse population of children and families.

Varying Services

Child and family programs and services can vary greatly from one site to another. While some differences are expected to meet the needs in specific communities, parents and caregivers would benefit from a common set of core services regardless of where they live in the province. These core services can be based on what evidence has shown to have the greatest, positive impact on children and families.

The Vision and Objective

Our goal is to establish a provincial approach for integrating and transforming child and family programs for parents, caregivers and young children (ages 0-6). All existing child and family programs funded by the Ministry of Education will be combined into one program model, and services will be provided through local Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres (OEYCFCs). Relevant information will also be available online.

Our goal is to enhance the quality and consistency of child and family programs across Ontario to ensure that:

- All expecting parents, parents, caregivers and home child care providers have access to high quality services that support them in their role;
- All children have access to inclusive, play and inquiry-based learning opportunities to improve their developmental health and well-being;
- All parents, caregivers and home child care providers have a better understanding of early learning and development, find it easy to access support, and are provided with an accessible, non-stigmatized place to seek help; and
- Local services collaborate in an integrated way to meet the needs of children and families and actively engage parents and caregivers to increase participation.

The Plan for Transformation & Integration

The *Transforming Ontario's Early Years Child and Family Programs* action plan will transform and integrate the existing system of child and family programs by:

Establishing provincial service guidelines

These guidelines will support an integrated, efficient and responsive system of child and family programs across the province. They will describe the provincial vision, guiding principles, core services, expected outcomes, and the role of the province, municipalities and other key organizations. They will also name *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* as the guiding pedagogical framework to support the development of local OEYCFC programs.

Enhancing the role of Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs)

CMSMs/DSSABs already play a leading role in local early years service planning, possess knowledge about community needs, and are well-positioned to work with local partners and families to determine appropriate program delivery approaches. Some municipalities also already have responsibility for some child and family programs.

CMSMs/DSSABs will be required to manage the delivery of a suite of core OEYCFC services and will have the flexibility to determine how these core services are delivered and by whom, through local service planning. Planning and engagement between CMSMs/DSSABs, school boards and other community partners in the planning of OEYCFC services and sites will be essential to supporting the development and delivery of programs that are responsive to the needs of the community.

First Nations that receive funding from the Ministry of Education will continue to manage their own programs in coordination with their own local programs and services.

Creating a new funding framework

The government is committed to maintaining its current investment in child and family programs and will develop a new transparent and responsive funding approach to redistribute funding to CMSMs/DSSABs by 2018.

Developing an outcome measurement and accountability strategy

This strategy will identify how to measure the impact of OEYCFCs, and find ways to use this information to promote the broader developmental health and well-being of children and families across Ontario.

Launching a common branding strategy and public awareness campaign

This strategy will raise awareness of OEYCFCs. We want parents and caregivers to easily recognize and identify OEYCFCs, and know what early years programs and services are available. We also want to provide easy access to the latest information about child development and the importance of positive relationships.

Timing & Implementation

The complete transformation and integration of OEYCFCs will take time and thoughtful, local planning with a number of different partners. It will build on the important work that is already taking place in many communities and expand it to meet the needs of all children and families.

It will be essential to have meaningful engagement and joint planning and coordination between CMSMs/DSSABs, school boards including Early Years Leads, child and family program agencies, community planning tables, local public health, First Nations, urban Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit organizations, parents and caregivers in the planning of OEYCFC services and sites in their communities.

We want all voices to be heard throughout this process as the province moves towards an integrated, accessible system of child and family programs in Ontario. We anticipate that OEYCFCs will be embedded into local service system planning by 2018.

We look forward to working with our early years partners as we move forward with the next stage of our plan to transform Ontario's child care and early years system. We firmly believe that all children deserve a brighter future and the opportunity to succeed – and all children deserve the best possible start in life.

For more information about how Ontario is transforming its Early Years Child and Family Programs, please contact the Ministry of Education at EDU-EYD@ontario.ca.

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/FamilyPrograms.html>