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Ontario's Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework

2017



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Message from the Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care

As Ontario's first Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care, I have been inspired by the hard work, dedication and commitment of people to make our province a wonderful place for children and families. Every day I meet people who are passionate, informed and eager to move our early years system forward. They share a common goal: to ensure that children thrive in programs that engage their curiosity and nurture their sense of self. They want to see children flourish.

I'm glad to see that so many understand that the early years of a child's life are vital to their development and future success. When children succeed, we all succeed. This is why our government recently announced a historic commitment to help 100,000 more children, from birth to age 4, access licensed child care over the next five years. This major transformation will double capacity for infants, toddlers and preschoolers, and will help more families find high-quality licensed child care spaces to give their children the best possible start in life.

To ensure that this unprecedented investment is responsibly implemented, we wanted to hear from as many families as possible to learn what they want and need from Ontario's early years and child care system. Last fall I began a tour that took me to cities, towns, rural areas and Indigenous communities across Ontario to hear about how we can work together to achieve our vision for our early years system. Using our [discussion paper](#) as a starting point, we held engagement sessions in 20 locations across the province, and held 15 stakeholder meetings. In all, we met with about 2,100 people, and we received over 6,000 responses to our online survey.

Our consultations provided us with a wealth of advice and information. This renewed framework is a collaborative effort authored by the many voices who took the time to share their vision for the early years, including the many children I was lucky enough to meet on my travels.

I am committed to bringing real, positive change to the early years sector, and to make it easier for Ontario families across the province to raise their children in high-quality and responsive environments that are affordable and accessible. We all want more children and families to experience the benefits of our early years system, and this framework is the foundation for a responsible and measured plan for getting us there.

We've made a lot of progress in modernizing Ontario's early years and child care system, but we know there is more work to do. Our government has listened to your thoughts and opinions and we're moving forward to transform the system. As we do this, I am pleased to know that so many of you are willing to help us achieve our vision of a more affordable, accessible and integrated system. Through our partnerships, we are better supporting Ontario families and giving kids a stronger start in life. Together we will succeed.

Our government is working hard to improve and enrich the lives of children and their families. The following framework is built on thousands of conversations, and I hope you will see your passion and wisdom reflected in these pages. It is dedicated to the children and families in Ontario, and reflects the compassion, commitment and vision for the early years that continue to grow throughout our province.

We appreciate your generous input and guidance, and we promise to take your advice to heart as we build a system that works better for Ontario families.

When children succeed, we all succeed.

Chi miigwetch; nia:wen; marsi; merci; thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Indira Naidoo-Harris". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Indira Naidoo-Harris
Minister

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Une publication équivalente est disponible en français sous le titre suivant : *Cadre stratégique renouvelé pour la petite enfance et les services de garde d’enfants de l’Ontario, 2017.*

This publication is available on the Ministry of Education’s website, at www.ontario.ca/edu.

Our Vision for the Early Years and Child Care

All children and families have access to a range of high-quality, inclusive and affordable early years and child care programs and services that are child- and family-centred and contribute to children's learning, development and well-being.





Introduction

“History will judge us by the difference we make in the everyday lives of children.”

– Nelson Mandela

Ontario’s Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework is our province’s plan to transform Ontario’s early years and child care system. This set of initiatives will provide enhancements to create an integrated continuum of learning for children while supporting Ontario’s world-class early years professionals as it gives more children access to early years and child care programs across the system. This includes increasing access to child and family programs as well as our commitment to help 100,000 more children – from birth to age 4 – access licensed care. Our plan sets the foundation for a more responsive and affordable system, and reflects the change that Ontarians told us they need.

In the fall and winter of 2016–17, we held public consultations across the province to learn how to enhance Ontario’s early years¹ and child care system. Our objective was to hear from parents, caregivers, early years and child care professionals, municipalities,² school boards, employers, Indigenous partners, communities and other key stakeholders about the strengths of the system, as well as the challenges they face and how government might address them.

We heard that recent provincial initiatives are having a positive impact on the lives of Ontarians. For example, experts and families told us that [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years](#) has enhanced the quality of early years programs. Ontarians also said that full-day kindergarten (FDK)

is providing children with a stronger start in life while giving parents and caregivers the benefits of a more seamless day. We heard that the Child Care and Early Years Act has strengthened health and safety standards and brought legislation up to date. And we heard that historic provincial investments have helped more children play and learn in affordable, high-quality settings.

Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“The government of Ontario has taken extraordinary, historic steps over the past decade to modernize the Ontario child care system, and improve access to licensed child care and early years programs, through significant new investments in these programs.”

– Recreation partner

Many Ontarians will also benefit from the changes that will be rolled out over the next year. These immediate plans include:

- expanding before- and after-school programming for children aged 6 to 12, where there is sufficient demand;
- integrating Ontario’s child and family programs into a more streamlined and accessible service; and
- committing continued support for early years and child care professionals through a \$2 per hour plus benefits wage enhancement and a \$20 home child care enhancement grant.



We are proud that this work is making high-quality education and care more accessible for children and families. But we know that there's more work to do. During our public engagement, participants identified a number of challenges within Ontario's early years and child care system. These issues fall into four broad areas:

- Child care has become *unaffordable* for many of Ontario's lower and middle class families.
- Too many parents and caregivers struggle to *access* quality child care options.
- It is often hard to recruit and retain qualified early childhood educators, and additional support is needed to improve the *quality* of care.
- The current system is not *responsive* enough to the changing needs of families.

This framework identifies how we will address these challenges. We will provide support to Ontario families immediately, while working with our partners on more transformative changes over the longer term. The work we do over the next five years will focus on seven areas:

1. Increasing access to early years and child care programs and services
2. Ensuring a more affordable early years and child care system
3. Establishing an early years workforce strategy
4. Determining a provincial definition of quality in the early years
5. Developing an approach to promoting inclusion in early years and child care settings
6. Creating an outcomes and measurement strategy
7. Increasing public awareness of Ontario's early years and child care system

Ontarians told us that they want this province to be one of the best places for their children to live, learn and grow. We share their goal, and believe this framework will help us achieve our vision. Our plan provides a clear path to a stronger early years and child care system, and builds on the progress we've made together already. It incorporates the vital feedback we received from the thousands of people across Ontario who told us that they need high-quality, accessible and affordable early years and child care options. Together, we are ready to build on our progress and foster growth in Ontario's early years and child care system. Our goal is to help families access the valuable opportunities necessary to give children enriching and rewarding lives.



Why Are the Early Years Important?

"The positive relation between child care quality and virtually every facet of children's development that has been studied is one of the most consistent findings in developmental science."

– The National Academy of Sciences

We all want the very best for children. The early years are formative, and parents understand that the time and care they spend on their children nurtures their health and well-being, both today and throughout their lives. Research shows that positive early years experiences can have a strong impact on a child's life,³ and how important it is for government to recognize this connection and invest in this critical period.



Health, Learning, and Economic Outcomes of Positive Early Years Experiences



Healthy Child Development

- A high-quality early childhood education positively contributes to a child's overall health and well-being
- The positive effects of high-quality early childhood experiences last a lifetime



Learning

- Early learning experiences have a long-lasting impact on a child's language, literacy and mathematics skills
- A high-quality early childhood education has a positive effect on school success



Economic

- For every dollar spent on a child's early years, there is an immediate \$2 return on investment
- Over the life of the child, this dollar investment can grow to return up to \$7

Children are highly attuned to the world around them, and their earliest experiences have lifelong effects:

- Positive experiences create strength, confidence and resiliency in children for life.⁴
- Ongoing negative experiences in their early years can lead to longer-term difficulties, and the need for costly interventions later on in life.⁵

Feedback to our Discussion Paper

"Increasingly the literature and experiences of educators and families demonstrate the importance of affordable, accessible, high-quality services for families across the economic spectrum, for children's well-being and for the economy."

– A parent

The Ontario government supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). The Convention holds that children are human beings with distinct rights, including:

- Protection (e.g., from abuse, exploitation and harmful substances)
- Provision (e.g., for education, health care and an adequate standard of living)
- Participation (e.g., listening to children's views and respecting their evolving capacities)
- Play (e.g., in recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child)
- Specific protections and provisions for vulnerable populations

High-quality early years programs not only play a part in preparing children for the future, they also recognize children as born learners and as citizens with rights who deserve to have beneficial experiences every day in enriching environments. All children are complex thinkers, and as they grow they thrive in responsive and caring relationships that support how learning happens. All children are curious and learn through play, making connections and testing theories as they interact with their world. Nurturing this innate curiosity through high-quality relationships and experiences is key to their health and well-being. A young child's brain is enormously complex. A baby's brain builds up to 1 million neural connections *a second*.⁶ Child development experts recommend that we support children in this critical period by providing them with inclusive, caring environments and meaningful interactions. We must encourage these fast-growing and imaginative minds by fostering exploration, play and inquiry, so that all children have the opportunity to learn, create and engage in critical thinking with others.

Children are competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential. They grow up in families with diverse social, cultural, and linguistic perspectives. Every child should feel that he or she belongs, is a valuable contributor to his or her surroundings, and deserves the opportunity to succeed. When we recognize children as capable and curious, we are more likely to deliver programs and services that value and build on their strengths and abilities.

– How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years

A robust early years system benefits not only children and their immediate families but the community as a whole. Having affordable, high-quality early years options gives parents more employment opportunities, while giving employers access to a more diverse workforce. In addition, accessible and affordable child care options support the economic empowerment of women, who currently drop out of the workforce in disproportionate numbers to care for children. Child care also allows more parents to pursue a diverse range of postsecondary education and training opportunities to support their economic and social goals. This also helps close the wage gap between male and female earners and reduces poverty. These are some of the many reasons why it is so important to provide young children with the best possible start in life. Money spent on early childhood education is not just money well spent – it is an investment for a better future for everyone.

“Many nations and regions now view child care as necessary to strengthen economic prosperity. It encourages high levels of employment by helping families combine work and family responsibilities. Research indicates that where affordable, quality child care is available, women are more likely to work, stay employed and hold better jobs, all of which contribute to narrowing the gender wage gap.”

– Final Report and Recommendations of the Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee (June 2016)





Building on Momentum

“Scientists and philosophers tend to treat knowledge, imagination and love as if they were all very separate parts of human nature. But when it comes to children, all three are deeply entwined. Children learn the truth by imagining all the ways the world could be, and testing those possibilities.”

– Alison Gopnik⁷

Research has guided Ontario’s plan to modernize and transform its early years and child care system. Today’s early years and child care system provides a range of programs and services to meet the diverse needs of families, including: child and family programs, all forms of high-quality child care, full-day kindergarten, before- and after-school care, recreation programs and other care arrangements. Together these support a continuum of learning for children up to age 12, while giving families the convenience and benefits of a well-integrated system. Recognizing the crucial role relationships play in raising a child, the ministry has developed strong partnerships – between school boards, municipalities, Indigenous communities, Francophone partners, child care and early years providers and community members – to better coordinate collective efforts across the province. This collaboration has helped Ontario double the number of licensed child care spaces in schools since 2010, giving more families access to a high-quality, seamless day.

The government has made significant investments in licensed child care in schools and communities across the province. By doubling investments, we have enabled twice as many children to access high-quality care today. With our expansion plan we will help twice as many infants, toddlers and preschoolers access licensed care by 2021. This funding is in addition to the investments the ministry is making for its [Journey Together](#) commitments to expand access to child and family programs on-reserve, and child care and child and family programs off-reserve.

To support a continuum of learning across child care and early years settings, the government released *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*. This pedagogy focuses on the importance of learning through relationships in our work with young children and families. To support those who help children learn and grow, the government provided early years and child care professionals working in licensed child care settings with wage enhancements to reflect the value they bring to Ontario each day by teaching and caring for its youngest citizens.

With this renewed framework we are investing in the future of Ontario's children. We know how important the early years are in forming a solid foundation for a child's entire life, and their long-term success as they progress through school. Through this early years and child care transformation, we are reinforcing a full continuum of learning where children are engaged in high-quality programs today so that they can become productive citizens tomorrow. Ontario already has strong early years, child care and education systems, and we are committed to making them even better. We are coordinating our collective efforts to address issues related to affordability, access and training to be more responsive to the needs of families. This is why we are dedicated to the success and well-being of each and every child and student, so that they can reach their full potential.



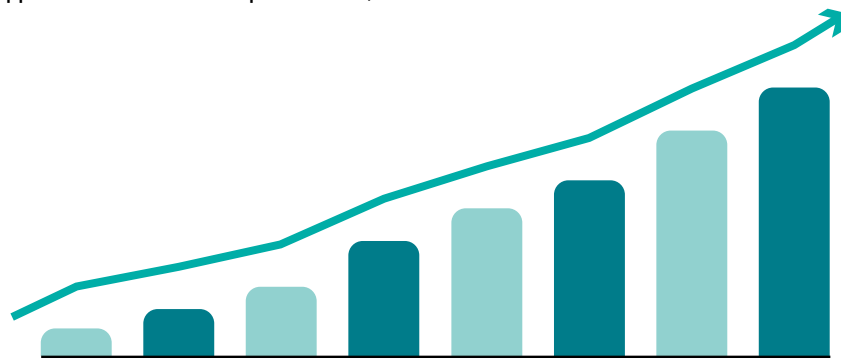
Mitzie Hunter
Minister of Education

Ontario's Increased Investments in Licensed Child Care

In 2017, the ministry is providing **\$1.37 billion** to 47 municipalities, including wage enhancement and child care expansion plan funding.

This investment will increase the number of child care spaces in Ontario. As of 2015–16, the number of licensed child care spaces in Ontario has grown to nearly 390,000 – an increase of more than **108 per cent** since 2003–04.

This investment supports child care operating costs, including: operating funding, fee subsidies, supports for children with special needs, and administration.



We know that families and children benefit from programs that help them to strengthen adult-child relationships, support parents/caregivers in their roles, offer play- and inquiry-based learning and connect families with specialized community supports. This is why Ontario currently invests in child and family programs in communities across the province. To provide more consistent and responsive programs and services to families, Ontario is currently transforming all existing child and family programs into one program model.⁸ High-quality services will now be provided through local Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres. These centres will be managed by local municipalities, who are knowledgeable about the needs of their communities, so that families can have access to programs better suited to their needs. Through our close partnerships with municipalities, school boards and early years partners, we expect these new centres will be transformed beginning in 2018.

Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“In the past few years, Ontario has gained a high level of respect for its visionary work in early education. The changes have been profound, and thoughtfully introduced. The views that guide the work are articulated clearly, and express great respect for children, families, and educators. We now have a solid foundation upon which to build a more coherent system.”

– Academic partners

Ontario now has a stronger early years system thanks to provincial investments and the coordinated efforts of our partners across this province. At the same time, we know it’s not easy for all families to find the early years and child care option that meets their needs. This is why we reached out across the province to hear from Ontario families about what they think and feel about our current early years system.





What We Heard: Ontario's Vision for the Early Years and Child Care

Feedback to our Discussion Paper

"If the first six years of life are so critical to human development and success, as the research so clearly tells us, then we need to make the transformation of early education and care a priority."

– Survey respondent

We have been energized and inspired by the passion and dedication that people across the province have for making Ontario a wonderful place for children to grow. Everywhere we visited people came out to say they wanted more: more opportunities to access high-quality early years programs in their communities, more responsive hours of care that meet the demands of modern life, more child and family programs to help families learn, grow and connect together. This local engagement gave us tremendous insight into how the current system is meeting the needs of Ontario families and the areas where there is need for improvement.

Feedback to our Discussion Paper

"The framework pillars of access, responsiveness, affordability and quality provide an excellent foundation on which to build a child care system."

– Early years partner

We engaged with families around four important themes: affordability, access, quality and responsiveness. These pillars were chosen based on extensive feedback from our partners, and were further reinforced through our engagement:

Affordability	Access	Quality	Responsiveness
<p>Ensuring that early years programs and services, including licensed child care, are within affordable reach for families</p> <p><i>“An affordable early years system would ensure that every parent has access without having to sacrifice their other basic needs and where every caregiver is empowered to enter the workforce if they choose.”</i> – Early years partner</p>	<p>Increasing access to early years programs to give families more opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood programs and services</p> <p><i>“An accessible system is one that can accommodate all children for whom there is a desire for them to participate.”</i> – Municipal partner</p>	<p>Enabling safe and reliable programs built on positive, responsive relationships, engaging environments, and meaningful experiences for children and families, delivered by educated and well-supported staff</p> <p><i>“High-quality early years and child care programs involve the establishment of positive and responsive relationships between children, families and educators and are environments where children are valued as individuals and as active and competent contributors with their own unique interests and points of view.”</i> – Early childhood educator candidates</p>	<p>Providing a range of early years and child care programs that are inclusive and culturally appropriate, located in schools, communities, workplaces and home settings so that parents – including parents who work irregular hours – can choose the options that work best for their family</p> <p><i>“We understand responsiveness in Ontario’s early years and child care system to mean that there is a natural flexibility in the system so that it can easily change to meet families’ ever-changing needs.”</i> – Child care partner</p>

Our engagement and continuing partnerships have strengthened Ontario’s early years and child care system. To help us reach even higher, the ministry is introducing a seven-point strategy designed to give families both immediate relief and greater support in the long run, while making it easier for more children to access high-quality early years and child care experiences.

SUMMARY OF SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

Numbers at a glance

We received feedback through an online survey, meetings and town hall sessions.

6,044	1,190	895	45
Number of people who submitted feedback through our online survey	Number of people who attended targeted sessions, employer roundtables and interviews	Number of people who participated in public town hall sessions	Number of stakeholder organizations who submitted written feedback

In-person sessions

We hosted conversations with a variety of people across Ontario, including:

- ✓ 15 engagement sessions with people in the sector, including child care providers and educators, Francophone and Indigenous partners
- ✓ 25 one-on-one interviews with employers, followed by a roundtable discussion
- ✓ 20 engagement sessions with parents, caregivers, early years and child care providers, employers, municipalities, school boards, experts and members of the public

Engagement locations

We visited the following locations across the province:

- ✓ Thunder Bay
- ✓ Moosonee
- ✓ Moose Factory
- ✓ Toronto
- ✓ Brampton
- ✓ Milton
- ✓ Peterborough
- ✓ Scarborough
- ✓ Kitchener/Waterloo
- ✓ Ottawa
- ✓ Kingston
- ✓ London
- ✓ Windsor
- ✓ Wellington
- ✓ York South-Weston
- ✓ Niagara
- ✓ Grey-Bruce
- ✓ Durham
- ✓ Sudbury
- ✓ York

SUMMARY OF SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

What we heard

Some common themes emerged through our engagement:

On affordability

- The high cost of child care and a need for fee subsidies can be barriers to accessing licensed child care.
- While needs vary across regions, issues related to the affordability of licensed child care are consistent, with urban centres experiencing the highest child care costs in Canada.
- There is a desire for the province to examine how child care is delivered in other jurisdictions and, where possible, to find ways to adapt best practices.

On access

- Families face challenges accessing licensed child care due to high cost and lack of space, and these challenges are more pronounced when looking for infant and toddler spaces.
- Parents are not always aware of all early years and child care programs available in their community (e.g., licensed home-based or centre-based child care, child and family programs).
- Parents need easier access to early years and child care information, such as where spaces are available.
- In Indigenous communities, child care should be part of a holistic approach to supporting children and families.

On quality

- Participants identified the need for consistency in how quality is defined, as well as for provincial measures for assessing quality.
- There is a need to better support Ontario's valued early childhood educators through professional development, wage enhancements and other workplace opportunities.
- Participants agreed that high-quality early years and child care programs support children's learning, development and well-being, and improve chances for success in school and in life.

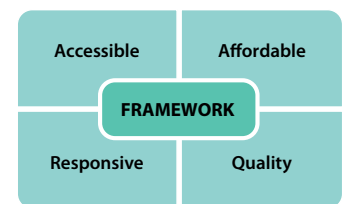
On responsiveness

- Participants suggested that programs need to have more flexible hours (including weekend and evening care) to better support parents who work non-traditional hours.
- Locations of child care and early years programs were identified as barriers, along with a lack of transportation options for families in rural communities.
- The need to increase supports for children with special needs was identified.
- There is a desire for more culturally responsive early years options, especially for Francophone, Indigenous and multi-ethnic programming.



Seven Key Areas of Action

1. Increasing access to early years and child care programs and services



Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“Access to high-quality child care is an issue that impacts our entire society.”

– Survey respondent

Early years and child care programs and services are beneficial for children and families, however not everyone can easily access them. Currently, only approximately 20 per cent of children in Ontario are in licensed child care, but we know that demand for high-quality child care is higher.

What We Heard

Through our engagement we heard that Ontarians want government to increase access to licensed child care and early years programs. In cities, child care costs are too high for many families to access. In northern and rural communities, child care centres are often too far away. In First Nations communities there are too few licensed child care spaces, which would support parents in accessing education and employment. And too many families everywhere face difficulties finding high-quality infant care. We heard that government should work harder to ensure that child care is available for the varied needs of families, particularly those with children under the

age of 4, and in a variety of settings: school-based, community-based and home-based. We also heard how important it is for older children to have better access to before- and after-school programming and for families to have better access to child and family programs.

Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“Access means from the time a child is born until they are 12, families have neighbourhood access to child and family programs, infant and toddler child care and before- and after-school child care in their neighbourhoods, and children attending schools should have a seamless day.”

– School board partner

What We’re Doing

Expansion Plan

To provide support, the government is making it easier for more families to access licensed child care in both centres and homes through our expansion plan. This investment will double capacity for children aged 4 and under. We will introduce a three-pronged strategy to help achieve our goals, using (1) school-based, (2) community-based, and (3) licensed home-based child care expansion to help enhance access, as families need more licensed child care spaces in cities, in rural communities and throughout Northern Ontario.

We will also work with our First Nation and federal partners to ensure that more children and families can benefit from our expansion plan by enhancing access to licensed child care in First Nation communities on reserve. And as part of the [Journey Together](#) initiative, we will help expand access to child and family programs on reserve, and increase the number of licensed child care spaces and culturally relevant programs for First Nation, Métis and Inuit families off reserve.

To make child care even more accessible, the government will strengthen the licensed home child care sector by providing targeted base funding through municipalities and First Nations.

Innovation Fund

Throughout our engagement we heard many innovative ideas on how to increase access. We are committed to making these ideas work. That’s why Ontario is launching a fund to support innovative solutions to increase access and encourage licensed child care growth in unique and inventive ways.

This will include facilitating non-traditional and seasonal hours for families who need more care options around the clock, as well as further encouraging growth in the non-profit sector.

Expanding Before- and After-School Programs

Following the success of full-day kindergarten in better integrating learning and care under one roof, the government is expanding before- and after-school care for students from Kindergarten through to Grade 6 in all publicly funded schools where there is sufficient demand. This will give families additional options at local schools while providing more children greater access to a seamless, high-quality day.

For 2018 and Beyond

Over the longer term, Ontario will continue to evaluate the implementation of its expansion plan to ensure that its new licensed child care spaces are accessible to children and families. We will also increase access to child and family programs as we integrate our four existing programs into one consistent, enhanced provincial model to best meet local family and community need.

ACTION ITEMS

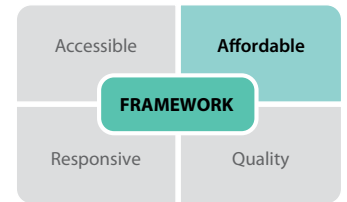
- ✓ Help 100,000 more children aged 4 and under access licensed child care over the next five years
- ✓ Strengthen the licensed home child care sector by providing base funding to give families more options for high-quality care
- ✓ Work to increase licensed child care spaces in Indigenous communities
- ✓ Launch an innovation fund to provide unique and inventive solutions to increasing access to licensed child care
- ✓ Expand before- and after-school care for Kindergarten to Grade 6 to improve access to seamless programming
- ✓ Integrate Ontario's existing child and family programs into a single suite of services to better serve children and families



What this means for children and families

Families will find it easier to access high-quality early years programs and licensed child care spaces in homes, schools and communities.

2. Ensuring a more affordable early years and child care system



Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“If we know that early investment in child development and learning yields positive long-term outcomes, then the government of Ontario should take the lead in supporting families in creating more quality, accessible and affordable spaces.”

– Survey respondent

Access and affordability are linked. Across the province the cost of licensed child care has become a barrier to access. Infant care is particularly expensive, preventing many families from even trying to find licensed care, which we know can impact access to workforce and education opportunities.

What We Heard

We know that licensed child care costs are simply too high for many Ontario families. For women and single parents in particular, the lack of affordable child care often prevents them from finding meaningful employment or education opportunities.

Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“Attention to child care and early learning makes good economic sense for Ontario. These systems support local economies and help families and communities thrive by making full-time work possible for families. Especially in northern and rural communities, child care systems and early years programming help attract and retain the skilled workforce needed to grow local economies.”

– Municipal partner

What We're Doing

Immediate Action

In order to help 100,000 more children access licensed child care spaces, we must ensure that these spaces are affordable. To move forward, in 2017–18, the \$200 million investment announced in the 2017 Budget will support access to licensed child care for 24,000 more children aged 4 and under.

For 2018 and Beyond

The government will look to improve our current funding approach, with a special focus on ensuring that more families can afford quality, licensed child care across the province. We will also work with families and experts in the coming months to deliver a child care affordability strategy that will identify further measures that could lower costs and support parents.

ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Invest immediately so that more infants, toddlers and preschoolers can have affordable access to high-quality licensed child care throughout the province
- ✓ Increase funding for fee subsidies to help families who need them
- ✓ Improve the current funding approach with a focus on improving affordability and access to fee subsidies

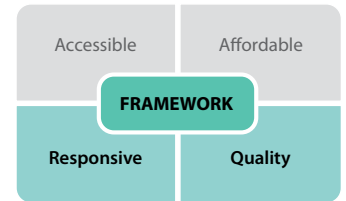


What this means for children and families

Child care will be more affordable for families.



3. Establishing an early years workforce strategy



Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“For quality practice to be sustained and positive outcomes for child development realized, those who care for and educate the youngest across our province must keep abreast of changes and have the structures and supports in place so they can meaningfully engage in professional development that will support them to effectively manage the increasingly complex demands of their practice.”

– Educator partners

Children deserve the highest-quality educators. Educators are competent and capable, curious and rich in experience. They are knowledgeable, caring, reflective and resourceful professionals. We know that it takes special talent to listen, respond, nurture and learn with children, so that’s why we support the professionalization of early childhood educators. We introduced the Early Childhood Educators Act in 2007, helping to establish Canada’s first regulatory college for early childhood educators. Since then we’ve also introduced wage enhancement to better compensate early childhood educators and early years professionals for their work, and increased funding to our Early Childhood Educator Qualifications Upgrade Program.

Educators in Ontario’s early years settings:

- cultivate authentic, caring relationships and connections to create a sense of belonging among and between children, adults, and the world around them;
- nurture children’s healthy development and support their growing sense of self;
- provide environments and experiences to engage children in active, creative, and meaningful exploration, play, and inquiry;
- foster communication and expression in all forms.

– How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years

What We Heard

Although early years and child care professionals appreciate the progress the government has made, there is more to do. The government's wage enhancement for staff has helped, but many in the sector are worried that this funding is only temporary. Many centres experience difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified early years and child care professionals to provide programming that is culturally responsive and meets the needs of all children. There is also a great need for ongoing professional learning opportunities. Helping 100,000 more children access licensed child care and transforming Ontario's child and family programs is only possible with a robust and world-class workforce.

Feedback to our Discussion Paper

"We believe the Government of Ontario must address the pressing workforce issues in any strategic framework going forward. Although early childhood educators shape the future of children, they still lack sufficient recognition for their invaluable contribution."

– Recreation partner

What We're Doing

Immediate Action

A workforce strategy will be launched using expert advice to develop recommendations to support a longer-term plan for growing the profession of early childhood educators and addressing the multiple complex issues facing the sector.

Early childhood educators and other early years professionals are integral to our vision of a high-quality early years and child care system. This is why we're committed to supporting ongoing compensation through wage enhancement and the home child care enhancement grant.

Professional Development

We will support ongoing professional learning opportunities for educators to maintain and further develop their knowledge and skills, including two provincially funded professional learning and leadership events a year for child care and early years staff. We will also work to find ways to allow early childhood educators to have release time so that they can further develop their expertise.

The ministry will work to strengthen high-quality and culturally relevant programming in early years settings. This will include a resource document on *aménagement linguistique* for the early years, which will help to promote French language and Francophone culture in Ontario.

“In minority communities, early childhood is particularly important, on both an individual and a community level. For young children, this is a key time in terms of learning the French language, building identity and developing a sense of belonging to the community.”

– Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages

Helping Early Years Professionals Upgrade Their Qualifications

To help attract and retain more early childhood educators, Ontario will continue to help people upgrade qualifications through the Early Childhood Educator Qualifications Upgrade Program. This program helps support individuals working in the early years sector to obtain an early childhood educator diploma and become eligible to apply for membership with the College of Early Childhood Educators.

For 2018 and Beyond

The government will move forward with a workforce strategy to develop ways to further support early years professionals in areas such as compensation, hiring, retention and professional development so that more Ontario families can have access to high-quality educators to meet their diverse needs.

Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“We can’t build a high-quality early years and child care system without a high-quality early childhood workforce. Affordable spaces without quality care and education experiences for children are not what parents, children, staff or the government ultimately want.”

– Educator partners

ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Develop a workforce strategy to support recruitment and retention of early years and child care professionals
- ✓ Confirm ongoing support for wage enhancement while exploring methods for improving the program
- ✓ Provide ongoing support for professional development including two provincially funded events per year

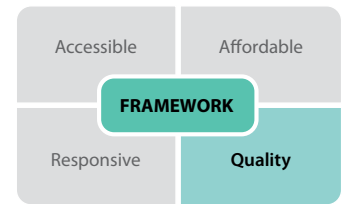


What this means for children and families

Families will continue to benefit from high-quality child care and early years programming delivered by engaged and knowledgeable educators.



4. Determining a provincial definition of quality in the early years



Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“High-quality early years and child care programs are reflected through smiling children who are confidently exploring safe, beautiful, well-equipped indoor and outdoor environments and co-learning with positive, responsive and active educators.”

– Municipal partner

High-quality early childhood settings are linked with immediate- and long-term positive outcomes for children. Studies show that children who attend high-quality early childhood programs and experience warm, supportive relationships are happier, less anxious and more motivated to learn than children who do not.⁹ To help strengthen quality and consistency across the early years sector, the government created *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years*. This pedagogy has helped guide early years educators in planning and providing environments and experiences that support children’s learning, development, health and well-being.

What We Heard

Families know that children benefit from high-quality settings. Although there is more awareness of the importance of quality in early years and child care settings, stakeholders and families are calling on government to advance further on improving quality. A shared understanding of how high-quality experiences are necessary for children’s health and happiness would strengthen all early years programs. It would ensure consistency in diverse settings while still allowing for flexible approaches to creating the kinds of environments and experiences that are meaningful for children.

Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“Quality needs to be synonymous with inclusive practice. Ample research demonstrates that meaningful inclusive services have the characteristics that make services high-quality for all children.”

– Academic partners

What We're Doing

Immediate Action

The government will engage with early years partners to develop a provincial definition of quality that builds on our shared views of the child, the family and the educator. We will have focused discussions about quality with early years program leaders, Indigenous and Francophone partners, service system managers, experts and members of the academic community, and we will learn from educators, parents and children about what matters most about quality.

For 2018 and Beyond

We know that the quality of care is important to families. This is why we will work collaboratively to provide a definition of quality in early years and child care. We will ensure that our approach to quality is connected and aligned with our other strategies, and that it includes a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion. We will also ensure that our mechanisms for supporting and assessing quality include nurturing positive relationships, creating engaging and culturally appropriate environments and experiences, and documenting children's exploration and learning. To better support a continuum of learning, the Ministry of Education intends to create strong linkages between quality in early childhood settings and approaches to quality used in school settings for children aged 6 to 12.

ACTION ITEMS

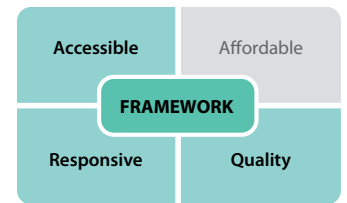
- ✓ Engage with early years partners to co-develop a definition of program quality by 2019
- ✓ Research and develop a mechanism for measuring program quality as part of our outcomes and measurement strategy



What this means for children and families

Children and families will continue to benefit from a consistent approach to quality across early years settings that supports a continuum of learning.

5. Developing an approach to promoting inclusion in early years and child care settings



Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“Across the province the need for increased funding for special needs resourcing is essential. In order for all children to access affordable, high-quality licensed child care programs it is essential that the need for more funding be recognized for those programs which provide supports to children with exceptionalities.”

– Survey respondent

All children are unique and grow and learn in different ways. Early years programs develop policies, practices and environments that respect and support inclusion, meaningful participation in everyday activities and a sense of belonging for all children. When children with special needs have access to early years programs that offer appropriate support, it can lead to rich and fulfilling childhoods while also preparing them for meaningful participation in society. The ministry currently provides funding for special needs resourcing to municipalities and First Nations to support the inclusion of children with special needs in licensed child care programs.

Every child has a sense of *belonging* when he or she is connected to others and contributes to their world.

Every child is developing a sense of self, health, and *well-being*.

Every child is an active and *engaged* learner who explores the world with body, mind, and senses.

Every child is a capable communicator who *expresses* himself or herself in many ways.

– *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*

What We Heard

Parents face challenges finding reliable services for children with special needs. We also heard that children's transitions during the day between school and child care need to be coordinated and consistent. Families and stakeholders agree that increased supports for children with special needs are required across the province.

Feedback to our Discussion Paper

"True inclusion is not simply having children with special needs in attendance. It is the active involvement of all the children to ensure they have equal opportunities for participation and positive outcomes. And true inclusion is a component of quality in child care for all."

– Recreation partner

What We're Doing

Immediate Action

The Ministry of Education will continue to work with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services on Ontario's Special Needs Strategy and the new Ontario Autism Program to improve access to timely and effective services so that children with special needs are supported in participating fully at home and in the community. We will also engage with delivery partners to maximize the use of current resources that provide services to children and families.

For 2018 and Beyond

The Ontario government will continue to develop an approach to supporting special needs in early years and child care settings that promotes inclusion for all children. We intend to work with a broad set of stakeholders to better serve children with special needs. The government will release a renewed approach to supporting inclusion in early years and child care settings in 2018. This approach will align with other government initiatives supporting healthy child development in the early years, including Ontario's Special Needs Strategy, Moving on Mental Health, the Ontario Indigenous Children Strategy and others.

ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Undertake a comprehensive review of current approaches to supporting all children in early years settings
- ✓ Engage with stakeholders to develop a renewed approach to supporting children with special needs in the early years

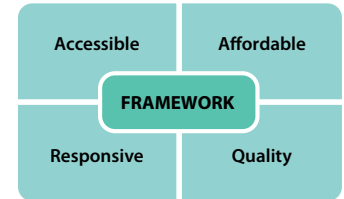


What this means for children and families

Families will find it easier to navigate services and receive support for all children, including those with special needs.



6. Creating an outcomes and measurement strategy



Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“The province should engage with child care experts and researchers to develop a robust data and research agenda to monitor quality as the system develops.”

– Early years partner

We want our investments in the early years system to be responsible, informed and effective. Having a strategic approach to outcomes and measurement will allow the government to ensure that the system gives children high-quality early years experiences while remaining affordable and accessible for families.

Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“In order to measure the quality of early years and child care programs we believe that it is imperative that the suggestions of the children, parents, community and educators be sought when determining the criteria for quality child care programming in Ontario.”

– Early childhood educator candidates

What We Heard

In order to monitor the effectiveness of its early years system, Ontario should create an outcomes and measurement strategy to make sure the system is providing high-quality care that is affordable, accessible and responsive. This strategy should take into consideration the quality of relationships with children and families, and other qualitative evidence (such as pedagogical documentation), to align with *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years*.

What We're Doing

Immediate Action

In order to increase public awareness, accountability and transparency, the government will develop and release an annual report that provides data on defined measures of progress on the actions identified in this framework. This report will give Ontarians access to key information that will help promote a better understanding of the province's approach to the early years and child care.

For 2018 and beyond

The government will develop a five-year strategic approach to monitor and measure our progress in enhancing Ontario's early years and child care system. This will consist of a three-pronged outcomes and measurement strategy, including (1) an outcomes framework to ensure that the system is accountable to children and families, while providing good value for money; (2) a data management approach to better support evidence-based decision making; and (3) a research plan to help ensure that we're using the latest findings to inform the implementation of our renewed framework. These evidence-based approaches will allow us to accurately monitor and evaluate how the system is responding to the needs of families as we move forward.

ACTION ITEMS

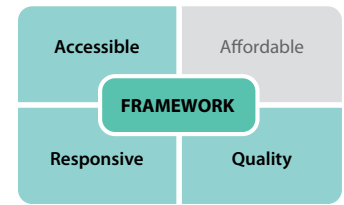
- ✓ Develop and release an annual data report beginning in the fall of 2017
- ✓ Develop a five-year outcomes and measurement strategy to best measure system effectiveness, including:
 - An outcomes framework
 - A data management approach, and
 - A research plan



What this means for children and families

Families will have increased confidence in how Ontario's early years system is working as government decisions become more transparent and evidence-based.

7. Increasing public awareness of Ontario’s early years and child care system



Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“The government should undertake an ongoing public awareness campaign on the benefits of quality child care and early years programs, including information about quality indicators for parents searching for care.”

– Survey respondent

A big part of access is awareness. We know that providing parents and families with information about Ontario’s early years system is an important first step in helping them make well-informed decisions that best meet the needs of their families.

What We Heard

There is currently little awareness of the range of early years programs and services that the government provides, including that Ontario’s child and family programs are provided to families with no charge. The government could do more to inform parents, caregivers, communities and partners about the wide range of options that are available to them, and how high-quality early years interactions are important for well-being and healthy child development. The government should also inform parents about the benefits of play-based learning, and consider opportunities to highlight Ontario’s early years and child care system through an ad campaign.

Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“Work to change the conversation around child care. It is as important a public service as public education, yet it is still talked about in niche terms and as if it’s a women’s issue. It’s a family issue, it’s an economic issue.”

– Survey respondent

What We're Doing

Immediate Action

We want every family and caregiver to know the full range of options currently available to them in their communities. That's why we're developing a public awareness campaign to help parents understand our recent investments in the early years system, and the many different programs and services available to families. High-quality early years experiences are so important for children's learning, development and well-being. Families are stronger when they have access to services that allow parents and caregivers to work, pursue higher education and training and engage in their communities. As a result of this public awareness campaign, families will have more information about the full suite of early years options available to them and will be better able to engage with providers and early childhood educators to ensure the best experiences for their children and themselves.

For 2018 and Beyond

Starting in 2018, the government will release an updated website, including a one-stop hub for parents to easily access information, resources and tools connecting them to a comprehensive range of government early years programs.

We are also committing to release a new visual identity for Ontario's child and family programs to better promote our consistent approach to these high-quality services that help support families and expecting parents.

ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Increase public awareness of the range of early years and child care programs and services that are available to families
- ✓ Create a one-stop online hub for Ontario's early years system, giving parents easy access to comprehensive information
- ✓ Provide a new visual identity for Ontario's child and family programs by January 2018, as part of the integration of its existing programs



What this means for children and families

Families will have easily accessible information about the full range of early years and child care programs and services that are available to them.



Building for the Future: Next Steps

“Children are not our possessions; they are gifts to us. This is the belief of our people.”

– Joint First Nations/Inuit Federal Child Care Working Group¹⁰

Together we’ve already made great advances in improving the lives of families across Ontario. The work we’ve done is having a positive impact every day on the lives of parents, caregivers and children. Our efforts are making a huge difference.

There is a wonderful and passionate energy in this province to keep improving the lives of its young children. We are truly inspired by your dedication. We couldn’t have developed this framework without the input of Ontarians all across this province. Our close partnerships have made Ontario a leader in the early years, and we will continue to work closely together to reach our renewed commitments. As we move forward with our immediate- and longer-term strategies, we are committed to working with our partners to leverage the existing research, and using experts to determine a made-in-Ontario approach that will work best for all families in this province.

The government of Ontario is particularly pleased that the 2017 Federal Budget committed to support more early years options across Canada, including a portion for child care programs for Indigenous children living on and off reserve. We are excited to be working with our federal partners to create new opportunities for families. It is our hope that governments, communities, employers and providers – all of us – can continue working closely together for a better today and a brighter tomorrow for all.

We are committed to delivering on each of our goals. To stay engaged with the ministry as we embark on this historic journey together, please visit Ontario.ca/morechildcare for further updates. Our agenda is ambitious, but the children and families of Ontario deserve nothing less from us. They are ready for us to take action today.

Feedback to our Discussion Paper

“We don’t see this as the beginning of the conversation; we see the conversation as ongoing.”

– Early childhood educator candidates





Notes

1. “Early years” refers to programs and services for children or parents that are specified or meet the description set out in the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014. Early years programs and services involve or relate to the learning, development, health and well-being of children, are funded wholly or partly by the ministry and are not child care or extended day programs.
2. In this document, the term “municipalities” is intended to include all 47 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Services Administration Boards that are the local service system managers for child care, and are responsible for managing the child care service system.
3. For healthy development outcomes, refer to Arthur J. Reynolds, Judy A. Temple, Suh-Ruu Ou, Irma A. Arteaga, and Barry A. B. White, “School-Based Early Childhood Education and Age-28 Well-Being: Effects by Timing, Dosage, and Subgroups”, *Science* 333, no. 6040 (2011): 360–64, retrieved from <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/333/6040/360>; and Craig Alexander and Dina Ignjatovic, “Early Childhood Education Has Widespread and Long Lasting Benefits” (TD Economics Special Report, November 27, 2012), retrieved from http://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/di1112_EarlyChildhoodEducation.pdf. For learning outcomes, refer to W. Steven Barnett, “Long-Term Cognitive and Academic Effects of Early Childhood Education of Children in Poverty”, *Preventive Medicine* 27 no. 2 (1992): 204–07. For economic outcomes, refer to Centre for Spatial Economics, *Early Learning and Care Impact Analysis* (Milton: Author, 2010); and James J. Heckman, “The Case for Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children”, in *Big Ideas for Children: Investing in Our Nation’s Future*, ed. First Focus (Washington, DC: First Focus, 2008), 49–58.
4. Harvard Center on the Developing Child, “The Science of Resilience” (InBrief) (2015), accessed May 5, 2017, <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-the-science-of-resilience/>.
5. Harvard Center on the Developing Child, “The Impact of Early Adversity on Children’s Development” (InBrief) (2007), accessed May 5, 2017, <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-the-impact-of-early-adversity-on-childrens-development/>.
6. Harvard Center on the Developing Child, “Five Numbers to Remember about Early Childhood Development” (Brief) (2009), accessed May 5, 2017, <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/five-numbers-to-remember-about-early-childhood-development/>.
7. Alison Gopnik, *The Philosophical Baby* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).
8. To learn more about this plan, visit <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/plan.html>.
9. Stuart Shanker, *Calm, Alert and Learning: Classroom Strategies for Self-Regulation* (Toronto: Pearson Education Canada, 2013).
10. Joint First Nations/Inuit Federal Child Care Working Group, *Considerations and Recommendations for the First Nations/Inuit Child Care Program and Funding Framework: Technical Report* (Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada, 1995).

Seven Key Areas of Action

1. Increasing access to early years and child care programs and services

What this means for children and families

Families will find it easier to access high-quality early years programs and licensed child care spaces in homes, schools and communities.

2. Ensuring a more affordable early years and child care system

What this means for children and families

Child care will be more affordable for families.

3. Establishing an early years workforce strategy

What this means for children and families

Families will continue to benefit from high-quality child care and early years programming delivered by engaged and knowledgeable educators.

4. Determining a provincial definition of quality in the early years

What this means for children and families

Children and families will continue to benefit from a consistent approach to quality across early years settings that supports a continuum of learning.

5. Developing an approach to promoting inclusion in early years and child care settings

What this means for children and families

Families will find it easier to navigate services and receive support for all children, including those with special needs.

6. Creating an outcomes and measurement strategy

What this means for children and families

Families will have increased confidence in how Ontario's early years system is working as government decisions become more transparent and evidence-based.

7. Increasing public awareness of Ontario's early years and child care system

What this means for children and families

Families will have easily accessible information about the full range of early years and child care programs and services that are available to them.



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