



Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services
York Region's 2024 to 2027 Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan

1. Recommendation

1. Council approve the 2024 to 2027 Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan (Attachment 1).

2. Purpose

This report seeks Council approval of Attachment 1, the 2024 to 2027 Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan (the 2024 to 2027 Plan). The 2024 to 2027 Plan sets priorities that will guide the work of the Region and other organizations supporting children aged 0 to 12 years in York Region. It also reviews accomplishments of the 2020 to 2023 Plan.

Key Points:

- The Region is a Service System Manager under the provincial Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, and required to have a Council approved service plan in place for its service area
- A research and engagement process informed the 2024 to 2027 Plan. It was developed through consultation with school boards, child care operators, community leadership tables, local cities and towns, regional staff across departments and community agencies serving children, including mental health
- The 2024 to 2027 Plan's priority areas and actions will build a more accessible and inclusive child care and early years system, one where all children are able to benefit from high quality services supporting healthy child development and families' overall well-being
- By continuing to build on the vision and priorities established in the [2020 to 2023 Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan](#) (2020 to 2023 Plan) the 2024 to 2027 Plan will:
 - Help provide consistent direction to the delivery of children's services

- Ensure the Region collaborates with service providers to maintain and expand the child care and early years sector so all children feel a sense of belonging and are able to fully participate in programming
- Support the Region and Service Providers in adapting to changes required as part of implementation of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system, the national child care system for children age 0 to 6 years (often referred to as \$10/day child care)
- Staff will report on accomplishments of the 2024 to 2027 Plan as part of the 2028 to 2031 Plan that will be presented to Council for consideration in 2028

3. Background

York Region plans, oversees and manages child care and early years services in our communities

York Region is one of 47 Service System Managers mandated by the province to plan, oversee and manage child care and early years services for children aged 0 to 12 years. Child care and early years programming falls under the direction of the Ministry of Education as part of the broader education portfolio. The overarching Provincial goal for child care and early years services is to support Ontario's families and children with a system of responsive, high quality, accessible, integrated services that are sustainable and contribute to healthy child development and to the growth of the economy.

As part of implementation of the CWELCC system, the province developed Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework, 2023 (Attachment 2) which identifies marginalized populations (low income, children with special needs, Francophone, Indigenous, Black, and other racialized children and newcomers) to be prioritized for child care spaces, and principles of inclusion to be embedded into all programming and service system plans. The province requires Service System Managers to update plans every five years. The Region's Plan is updated with each new term of Council and anchored by [York Region's 2024 to 2027 Strategic Plan](#) under Healthy Communities area of focus. Accomplishments on the 2024 to 2027 Plan will be presented for Council consideration in 2028.

In 2023, approximately 73,000 children and their families benefited from programs and services provided by or contracted through the Region

Services are delivered through a network of not-for-profit, private agencies and other partners, such as school boards and local hospitals. In addition to the Region's role in managing funding, program eligibility and service planning, the Region delivers programs for children with special needs.

Programs administered by the Region included the following:

- [Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care system](#): In November 2022, 90% of child care operators, totalling 552 child care centres opted into the new system, creating over 33,000 CWELCC funded spaces across the Region

- [Child Care Fee Subsidy program](#): 8,233 children living in low-income households received Child Care Fee Subsidy to attend licensed child care so their parents could go to work or attend school
- [Infant and Child Development Services](#): For 2,725 children with special needs, who do not attend licensed child care
- [Inclusion Support Services](#): Supported 2,003 children with special needs to attend licensed child care
- [EarlyON Child and Family Centres](#): 13,078 children benefited from access to Early Childhood Educators to support their learning and development
- [Community Programs](#): 1,949 children living in low income households received a subsidy to participate in recreation, swimming and camp programs provided by Local Municipalities and community agencies
- Community Housing After School Programs: 216 children and youth developed life skills and confidence through after school programs in four York Region community housing buildings.

In addition, the Region provides indirect supports which benefit about 24,000 children each year. This includes providing funding to licensed child care centres for:

- Wage enhancements to attract and retain quality Registered Early Childhood Educators
- Specialized equipment and repairs and maintenance funding, to create welcoming, safe environments for children
- General operating costs to support licensed child care operators to ensure access and affordability for families

More information on Children’s Services is available in Appendix A.

The 2024 to 2027 Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan builds on the work of the previous plan

In [November 2019](#), Council approved the 2020 to 2023 Plan which was the first plan the Region prepared under requirements of the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*. The 2020 to 2023 Plan established a vision and five Priority Areas, developed through consultation with a broad range of stakeholders. Objectives and key actions in the 2020 to 2023 Plan were intended to be flexible and responsive to anticipated provincial changes. The 2020 to 2023 Plan helped the Region guide the child care and early years service system through provincial program changes, the COVID-19 pandemic and the development and implementation of the CWELCC system.

2020 to 2023 Plan achieved tangible outcomes

There has been a lot to celebrate in the child care and early years sector over the last several years. Locally, there is a stronger network of services available to support children with disabilities. The Region is now working more actively with all our partners and system capacity has increased. There

is great potential to increase access to the service system and create a community where children and their families can participate fully and achieve their full potential.

The 2020 to 2023 Plan focused on delivery of high quality, accessible, and integrated services that are sustainable, contribute to healthy child development and to the growth of the economy.

Key accomplishments of the last four years are in Table 1, with a complete list in Attachment 1.

Table 1
2020 to 2023 Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan Priorities Areas and Outcomes Achieved

Priority Area	Examples of Tangible Outcomes
1. Decisions based on data	Updated 64 Early Years Community Profiles to support service planning. Early Year Community Profiles are an interactive online resource designed to support program, service and policy planning for young children and their families at the neighbourhood level
2. A system that works together to plan services	Opened 6 emergency child care centres providing care to over 130 children of essential health care and other frontline workers during the initial province-wide closure in March 2020
3. Parents, caregivers and professionals have the knowledge and capacity to support child development	EarlyON Child and Family Programs provided virtual programming for children and parents, and connected families with staff who provided answers to parents' questions about their children's development through 4,076 parenting consultations in 2020
4. A responsive system that reflects the needs of children, families and the community	Neonatal Follow-Up clinics provided in partnership with Mackenzie Health, Oak Valley Health and Southlake Regional Health Centre shifted to a virtual service delivery model during the pandemic to continue to provide essential screening for babies at risk of developmental delay. 694 children were monitored in 2020
5. Children are included and have access to services	Launched Resources for Inclusion Support for Early Learning Settings program in 2022, to make early learning and child care settings more inclusive by providing staff training, resources and funding to access additional classroom support when needed. These services benefit all children in the child care classroom; 425 child care classrooms received this additional funding in 2023

4. Analysis

Parents, caregivers, service providers, local municipal and region staff and other partners were consulted to develop the 2024 to 2027 Plan

The 2024 to 2027 Plan was developed through extensive consultations with parents, community partners, and community leadership tables such as the Human Services Planning Board, Newcomer Inclusion Table, York Region Accessibility and Advisory Committee and Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group. The engagement process identified community needs and priorities, areas where efficiencies can be realized and additional partnership opportunities. A summary of this feedback is found in Attachment 1.

During consultations, internal and external partners agreed work remains to achieve the original five priorities set out in the 2020 to 2023 Plan, and these priorities should be carried forward.

The 2024 to 2027 Plan builds on the existing priorities established in the 2020 to 2023 Plan through an extensive consultation process which helped identify what is working well within our system and where opportunities exist to improve outcomes for children and families.

The 2024 to 2027 Plan will support enhanced collaboration among the partners and contributors across the child care and early years system in York Region

The 2024 to 2027 Plan carries forward the vision from the 2020 to 2023 Plan to work with partners and collaborators to support children's learning and development and families' overall well-being through:

- Accessible, affordable, responsive, high-quality services that are welcoming to all York Region children and families
- Planning decisions focused on outcomes, evidence-based and financially sustainable

Having a shared vision, priorities and actions is critical to providing consistency to programs and services within the service system.

Forty deliverables are identified to realize the vision and priorities of the 2024 to 2027 Plan

Attachment 1 lists 40 deliverables that will support implementing the vision and priorities of the 2024 to 2027 plan. A sample of deliverables and performance measures for each Priority Area are listed in Table 2.

Table 2
2024 to 2027 Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan Priorities Areas, Deliverables and Performance Measures

Priority Area	Deliverables	Performance Measures
1. Service Providers have the data they need to provide quality programming	Ensure community partners have consistent access to demographic and census data to inform their program planning	% increase of partners using data tools to inform decision making
2. Partners coordinate effectively across the service system to support the needs of children and families	Actively engage with other levels of government and neighbouring Service System Managers to implement staff recruitment and retention strategies	% new staff hired for CWELCC-funded classrooms
3. Parents, caregivers and professionals have the knowledge and capacity to support child development	Deliver capacity building activities for professionals that reflect community needs and increase access for priority populations	% Centres participating in capacity building activities related to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility
4. A responsive system that reflects the needs of children, families and the community	Develop an access and inclusion implementation plan for licensed child care operators	% CWELCC applications scoring high for existing access and inclusion practices
5. Children are included and have access to services	Ensure inclusion is part of all service planning to support children of all abilities	# / % of children with special needs who are able to maintain quality child care placements

Deliverables are broad enough to provide direction while maintaining flexibility to change how services are delivered in collaboration with community partners to meet goals.

The 2024 to 2027 Plan supports the Healthy Communities Area of Focus

The 2024 to 2027 Plan aligns with the 2023 to 2027 Strategic Plan – Healthy Communities Area of Focus. Access to inclusive children’s services protects and promotes the well-being of children and their families. High quality early learning and child care programs have positive impacts on child development, and decrease future reliance on social services for children, while improving sustained engagement in the economy for parents and caregivers.

The priorities of the 2024 to 2027 Plan will also support improvements in children’s mental health, post-pandemic, through access to high quality child care, recreation and community programs and improved mental health pathways that are easy for families to navigate. To understand the impacts of isolation from the pandemic restrictions on children and youth, The Hospital for Sick Children surveyed 1,000 parents of children and youth aged 2 to 18 years old and nearly 350 youth between 10 and 18 years old from April to June of 2020. The research, published February 2021, found 70.2% of school-aged children (6-18 years old) reported deterioration in at least one domain; depression, anxiety, irritability, attention span, hyperactivity, and obsessions/compulsions. Greater stress from social isolation was strongly associated with mental health deterioration.

5. Financial Considerations

Total gross expenditures in the approved 2024 operating budget for Children’s Services are \$408.1 million. \$382.5 million (94%) is funded by the province, \$24.2 million (6%) is funded by tax levy and \$1 million funded by Oak Valley Health and Children’s Treatment Network. A breakdown of the total budget is in Table 3.

Table 3
2024 Children’s Services Budget

Program	Total Budget
Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC)	\$236M
Child Care (i.e. Child Care Fee Subsidy)	\$149M
EarlyON Child and Family Centres	\$11M
Infant and Child Development	\$7M
Regional Initiatives*	\$4M
Third Party Programs**	\$1M
Total	\$408M

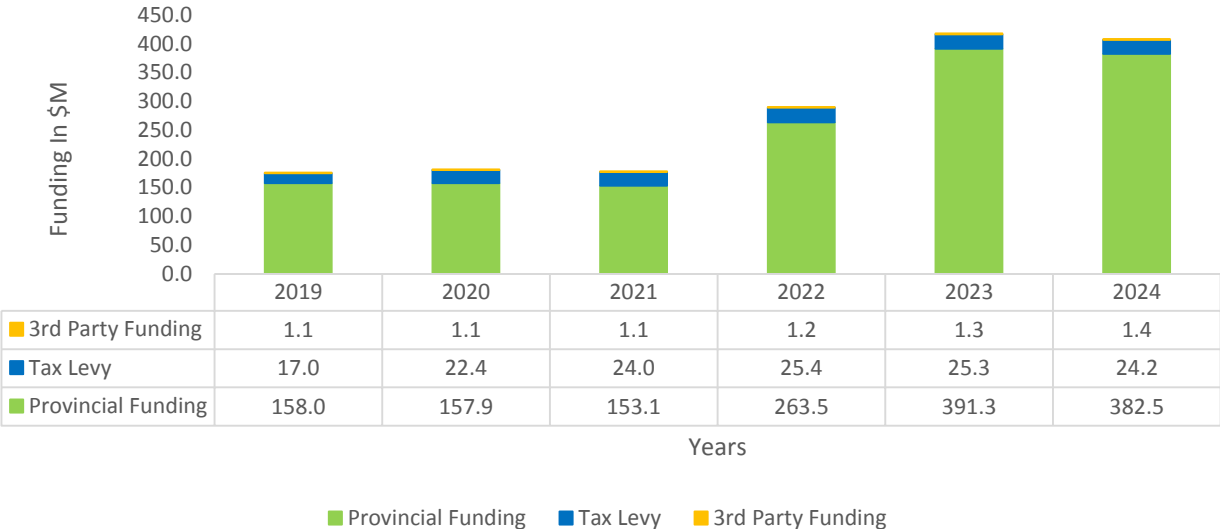
* Regional Initiatives include subsidies to families to participate in recreation programs, e.g. local municipal recreation programs or summer day camp and youth overnight camps.

** Third Party Programs refers to funding provided to York Region to deliver programs on behalf of other organizations such as the Childrens Treatment Network and Oak Valley Health.

2024 Provincial Funding had not been confirmed at the time the 2024 Regional budget was tabled for Council approval or this report to Council. Once full funding is confirmed, budgets will be adjusted through the Treasurer’s delegated authority ([2024 to 2026 Regional Budget report on Dec 21, 2024](#)), with no impact to tax levy.

At this time, staff do not anticipate actions in the 2024 to 2027 Plan will result in additional tax levy pressures beyond the approved 2024 budget and 2025 and 2026 outlook budgets. Figure 1 below identifies the Children’s Services Budget and funding sources for 2019 to 2024.

Figure 1
Children’s Services Budget – Funding Sources 2019 to 2024



In 2019 the province funded 90% of the total Children’s Services budget, falling to 86% by 2021. This was mainly due to small year over year reductions in total provincial funding coupled with larger tax levy cost share requirements from the province.

In 2020, actual expenditures were impacted by the temporary closure of Child Care centres due to pandemic, resulting in lower than budgeted funding from the province. The introduction of the CWELCC program in 2022 resulted in lower than budgeted expenditures, with 90% of operators opting into the program versus funding provided for 100% of eligible operators.

In 2022 and 2023 annual provincial funding increased significantly due to introduction of the CWELCC program.

The province will announce a new funding formula in 2024 to streamline funding streams

The province has indicated a new funding formula will be announced and implemented in Fall 2024. Funding changes beyond 2024 are currently not known and will be addressed through the budget process as required. Actions set out in the 2024 to 2027 Plan may be scaled in response to provincial funding and service decisions.

6. Local Impact

York Region supports and invests in children and their families in all local municipalities to receive cost-effective, equitable, quality service regardless of where they live in the Region. Local municipalities were engaged in developing of the recommended Plan and will benefit from its implementation.

7. Conclusion

The 2024 to 2027 Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan builds on the vision and priorities of the 2020 to 2023 Plan and outlines actions to inspire a more accessible, inclusive and integrated child care and early years service system over the next four years for children aged 0 to 12 years and their families. Promoting children’s learning and development, supporting parents and caregivers to understand their child’s needs and helping participate in the workforce supports a strong economy and healthy, vibrant communities.

For more information on this report, please contact Kevin Pal, General Manager, Social Services at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 72150. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.



Recommended by:

Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health Services



Approved for Submission:

Erin Mahoney
Chief Administrative Officer

March 22, 2024
#15941608

Appendix A – York Region’s Children’s Services Program Descriptions
Attachment 1 – Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan #16070358
Attachment 2 – Ontario’s Access and Inclusion Framework, 2023 #16027463

York Region’s Children’s Services Program Descriptions

Program	Purpose	Description
Child Care Services		
<p>Funding for Child Care Operators</p>	<p>York Region offers funding to child care operators through a Child Care Services Agreement.</p>	<p>Child care operators who enter into an agreement with York Region can receive funding from multiple funding streams</p> <p><u>General Operating Grant</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides funding to increase staff wages beyond minimum wage, and general operating expenses such as rent and food expenses. <p><u>Child Care Fee Subsidy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program benefits parents with low-income who would otherwise be unable to afford licensed child care. <p><u>Resources for Inclusion Support in Early Learning Settings (RISE)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows licensed child care operators to hire additional staff to support all children in the program, including children with exceptional needs. <p><u>Special Purpose Funding</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special Purpose funding provides financial support for child care operators to address additional requirements from the Ministry, provide training, and purchase supplies. Enhance the toys and equipment in classrooms. <p><u>Subsidy for Staff Salaries</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff salary grants allow child care operators to increase staff salaries to attract and retain staff
<p>Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care</p>	<p>National program to increase access and affordability of licensed child care for children aged zero to six years of age</p>	<p>Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care is a federally funded program, through an agreement with the province and administered by the Region. The program will reduce parent fees to \$10/day by 2025.</p> <p>Child care operators had to opt-in to the program by November 2022; 90% of licensed operators had opted-in to the program by the deadline.</p>

Ontario Child Care Management System (OCCMS)	OCCMS supports the administration of provincial funding. York Region manages OCCMS on behalf of the Ministry of Education through an annual service contract.	OCCMS enables Service Managers and child care centres to manage their child care funding. The Region supports the development and testing of new features and assists Service System Managers across the Province with testing and training staff on OCCMS.
Capacity Building	Coordinated professional development for Early Learning and Child Care staff, supervisors, and operators to build the overall capacity and quality of the Early Learning and Child Care System.	Sessions focus on developing five core competencies: Professional Alignment, Health, Safety and Well-being, Child Development, Equity and Inclusion, and Business Practices. Sessions are provided largely by external third-party experts, but also through internal partnerships such as with Public Health.
EarlyON and Children’s Community Programs		
EarlyON Child and Family Centres	EarlyON Child and Family Centres offer free support services and programs to parents, caregivers, and their children from birth to six years old in Ontario.	EarlyON programs delivered through permanent centres and mobile sites (such as local libraries, schools, community centres and parks) and are operated by four agencies. EarlyON programs are high-quality, inclusive, welcoming places where qualified Early Childhood Professionals help families and caregivers support their child(ren)’s development and well-being.
Recreation Subsidies	York Region offers subsidies for recreation programs, day camps and youth overnight camps.	Recreation programs and day camp subsidies provide children from families with low income the ability to take part in leisure activities. Available subsidies are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Positive Leisure Activities for Youth (PLAY)</u> Subsidies for seasonal municipal recreation programs for children age 4-18 and their single parents. • <u>Summer day camp funding</u> Subsidies for municipal summer day camp for children age 4-12 • <u>Youth overnight camp funding</u> Subsidies for approved overnight camps for youth age 12-17.
Inclusion Support Services – Children with Special Needs		
Inclusion Support Services (ISS)	Inclusion Support Services supports children with special needs from birth to age 13 who attend licensed child care in York Region and require support to fully participate in programs.	Inclusion Support Services provides support to individual children through collaborative consultation visits with educators and support for families’ service coordination needs, as required.
Infant and Child Development Services – Children with Special Needs		

Infant and Child Development Services (ICDS)	Infant Child and Development Services supports families with children from birth to six years of age (or school entry) who have been diagnosed with or are at risk of having a developmental delay.	Infant and Child Development Services provides early intervention to children to support their development and help them participate in daily routines within their home environment.
Neonatal Follow-Up Program	Coordinated through Infant and Child Development Services, the program provides neonatal services for infants and children at higher risk of developmental delay due to prematurity or birth complications.	Neo-Natal Follow-Up Program offered in partnership with all three Regional hospitals. Goal is to monitor development of infants and children with a multi-disciplinary team, identify potential delays and provide interventions early to support the child's healthy development.
Therapy Services	Therapy services support the development of children (from birth to age six) who require occupational therapy and physiotherapy.	Early Interventionists in either Inclusion Support Services or Infant and Child Development Services are the primary service providers who can make referrals to and then work collaboratively with the occupational therapist or physiotherapist, as needed.