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**For Information**

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**REPORT TITLE:**      **Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care Update and Expansion Plan**

**FROM:**                Sean Baird, Commissioner of Human Services

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**OBJECTIVE**

To provide information on the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Access and Inclusion Framework, including priority communities for child care expansion in Peel.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- The Province's Access and Inclusion Framework sets a foundation for targeted Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) expansion to improve access to child care for diverse and underserved populations.
  - The Region of Peel, as the Service System Manager for Early Years and Child Care, has been allocated 7,621 new child care spaces (1,111 school-based and 6,510 community-based) to be realized by the end of 2026.
  - Community prioritization for child care expansion in Peel included a review of child care demand as well as community well-being indicators, resulting in 13 priority communities being identified for growth.
  - There are challenges to achieving the goal of child care expansion, including: restricted autonomy for child care providers in expansion, workforce shortages, increasing child care demand and ensuring access for low-income families and children with special needs.
  - These challenges will be mitigated through transparent communication with the sector, continued advocacy to provincial and federal governments, active monitoring of system trends, and changes to child care policy requirements.
  - Staff will continue to work with system partners on the implementation of the expansion plan and report back to Council with updates on progress towards realizing the expansion targets in Peel.
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**DISCUSSION**

**1. Background**

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program aims to provide greater access to affordable and high-quality child care.

In Peel, families with children under the age of six years old in participating CWELCC licensed child care programs have already seen their child care fees reduced by 52.75 per

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cent. Further reductions are planned for September 2024 with a goal of an average of \$10-a-day for child care in Ontario by 2025.

In addition to improving affordability, CWELCC will also increase the number of child care spaces available for families. The province has committed to the creation of approximately 86,000 new licensed child care spaces of which, approximately 53,000 spaces remain to be created by 2026.

In December 2022, the province released the Access and Inclusion Framework, which sets a foundation for targeted CWELCC child care expansion. This Framework focuses on creating affordable child care spaces in communities with populations who need them most to improve access to child care for diverse and underserved populations.

The Provincial expansion targets have been allocated to regions based on five socio-economic factors including:

- Children aged 0-5 in lone-parent families
- Low-income measure
- Households spending greater than 30 per cent of income on shelter costs
- Recent immigrants, and
- Women aged 25-44 not participating in labour force

## 2. CWELCC Targeted Child Care Expansion

As part of the CWELCC child care expansion, the Region of Peel, as the Service System Manager for Early Years and Child Care, has been allocated 7,621 new child care spaces (1,111 school-based and 6,510 community-based) to be realized by the end of 2026 in priority communities identified by the region.

In addition to the socio-economic factors identified by the province, community prioritization for child care expansion in Peel was achieved by reviewing both child care demand and additional well-being indicators included in Peel's Neighborhood Information Tool. This tool includes indicators such as immigration, ethnicity, income, housing costs/conditions, health, employment, education, crime and one parent status.

The prioritization of child care expansion in Peel will include the following thirteen priority communities:

### Priority Communities

- Mississauga Valley
- Mississauga West-Meadowvale
- Brampton Centre
- Mississauga Cooksville
- Mississauga Port Credit
- Mississauga East Credit
- Brampton Bramalea
- Brampton Northwest
- Caledon Southwest
- Mississauga East
- Brampton Southwest
- Caledon Southeast
- Brampton Southeast

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The identification of priority communities is based on available data sources and reflects our current understanding of child care demand and community well-being in Peel - see Appendix I for a map of priority communities for CWELCC child care expansion.

While not all communities in Peel are identified as priority for expansion, families will continue to access affordable child care, as 95% of existing licensed child care sites are currently enrolled in CWELCC. Current analysis indicates that, in the short term, the number of existing licensed child care spaces available in communities not identified as priority for expansion are adequate to meet the current demand. In the future, additional spaces may be needed in these communities, as demand increases as a result of child care becoming more affordable.

As staff work with community partners to determine the feasibility for growth in priority communities, monitor supply and demand of spaces and receive updated census data, additional communities may be considered for expansion in order to best meet the needs of diverse and underserved populations in Peel.

### **Implementation Challenges and Mitigation Strategies**

CWELCC child care expansion presents an opportunity to build an inclusive, accessible, and affordable child care system, however there are challenges to realizing this goal, including:

#### **a) Restricted Access to CWELCC Expansion**

Provincial policy now restricts CWELCC expansion to priority communities. The Region of Peel as Service System Manager is responsible for determining where expansion occurs. This approach will restrict the autonomy of child care providers, who would like to participate in CWELCC, by limiting their decision-making regarding expansion which may impact their viability.

To support child care providers, staff will ensure full and transparent communication of the priority communities for expansion, as well as the application process to ensure providers have the necessary information to inform their business decisions related to growth.

#### **Registered Early Childhood Educators Workforce Shortages**

CWELCC expansion in Peel Region will not be possible if Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) workforce pressures are not addressed. As noted in the March 24, 2022, report from the Commissioner of Human Services, titled "Addressing the Child Care Workforce Shortage" (Resolution 2022-178), attracting and retaining RECEs is a serious issue that may lead to waitlists for child care in Peel. As the workforce recovers to pre-pandemic levels, staffing in priority communities will need to increase significantly to support the realization of expansion targets by 2026.

As noted in the July 7, 2022 report from the Commissioner of Human Services, titled "Advocacy to Address Challenges Facing Early Years and Child Care" (Resolution No. 2022-615) staff will support advocacy activities to advance priorities to address the Early Childhood Educator Workforce crisis with the federal and provincial governments, where appropriate.

Staff will also continue to work with community partners to implement workforce

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strategies including active partnerships with local Greater Toronto Area colleges to create fast track RECE programs to increase the number of qualified staff to fill the labour market gap. In addition, the workforce strategy will include targeted initiatives to support workforce growth in priority communities.

### **b) Provincial Expansion Targets Do Not Reflect Anticipated Child Care Demand**

While the expansion target of 7,621 new child care spaces in Peel will help to support increased access in priority communities, this target does not reflect the child care demand in Peel.

Staff anticipate that as CWELCC improves affordability for families, the demand for child care will increase. Peel's child care demand model and research<sup>1 2</sup> highlighting utilization rates in jurisdictions with universal child care, currently suggests that an additional 14,200 spaces, over and above the 7,621 allocated by the province, will be required in Peel. Staff will monitor system trends and update local demand models as new updated census data, while continuing to advocate to the province to increase child care expansion targets in response to evolving local needs.

### **c) Access for Low Income Families and Children with Special Needs**

To realize the Provincial goal of building an affordable child care system that is inclusive and accessible, all new child care providers who wish to participate in CWELCC will be required to accept families in receipt of child care subsidy and children with special needs.

The Region will work with child care providers who are currently participating in CWELCC and do not meet this requirement to support them to transition to these new requirements by December 31, 2023.

## **Next Steps**

Staff will finalize and release the Region's expansion policy and priority communities to the child care sector and will post the 2023 CWELCC expansion policy and application process on the Region's website.

Staff will also begin engagement of the child care sector and community partners to identify feasible opportunities for child care expansion to achieve established targets. The province has indicated that funding allocations to support expansion will be shared with Service System Managers in the spring 2023. An update on this allocation for Peel will be shared with Regional Council once received.

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1. <https://childcarepolicy.net/how-big-will-the-expansion-of-child-care-services-need-to-be-in-ontario/>

2. <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/cd/bgrd/backgroundfile-102626.pdf>

## Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care Update and Expansion Plan

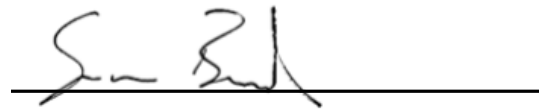
### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications from this report. CWELCC child care expansion will be 100 per cent funded by the Province/Federal Governments with no financial impact to the Region of Peel.

### APPENDICES

Appendix I - Priority Communities for CWELCC Child Care Expansion

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean Baird", is written over a horizontal line.

Sean Baird, Commissioner of Human Services

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