



Region of Waterloo
COMMUNITY SERVICES

Region of Waterloo Children's Services

Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan 2022-2026



2022-2026 Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan

Children's Services, Regional Municipality of Waterloo



Region of Waterloo

COMMUNITY SERVICES

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Acknowledgments

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Region of Waterloo, Children's Services acknowledges the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and Neutral Peoples as the original stewards of the land. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit community members who continue to reside within the boundaries of Waterloo Region. The Region remains committed to working together with Indigenous communities on our path to Truth and Reconciliation.

Disclaimer:

The EYCC Service System Plan incorporates data, feedback and community analysis from a variety of sources. The content in this report went through a detailed review process to ensure it was accurate. However, errors, omissions and mistakes can inevitably happen. If the reader finds an error, please contact chsadmin@regionofwaterloo.ca and future versions of this document will be corrected to reflect accurate information.

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Letter from the Director of Children’s Services

I am pleased to share our new Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan 2022-2026 (“System Plan”). This plan is our road map to creating a high quality, equitable, and responsive Early Years and Child Care (EYCC) system that is accessible and affordable for every family in Waterloo Region. This System Plan is the result of the dedicated collaboration of diverse Waterloo Region stakeholders including parents, EYCC partners, and Region of Waterloo staff. Thank you to all who provided valuable feedback to improve our local system.

While we have made many system improvements since 2016, there is much more that needs to be done. High quality, licensed child care is necessary for the well-being of all children, women’s workforce participation, addressing the impacts of poverty, and to support a robust economy. We know the Early Years and Child Care (EYCC) system is not working for all families - many are unable to access the high-quality, affordable, and responsive child care they need and deserve.

Unprecedented events and societal shifts over the past few years have impacted Waterloo Region’s EYCC sector and informed the 2022-2026 System Plan.

- Since 2017, \$38.2 million in new provincial and federal investments supported significant growth in EYCC programs, including the creation of 1,232 new spaces in not-for-profit child care centres.
- In 2021, the federal government revealed the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan, a \$30 billion investment to expand and provide an average of \$10 per day child care in the next five years.
- In 2020, the legislated temporary closure of child care centres resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of high quality child care to continue essential services. During shutdowns from 2020 to 2022, the Province funded free Emergency Child Care for essential health care and front line workers. Federal and provincial programs were also implemented to stabilize child care.

- As Ontario begins its economic recovery, pandemic impacts continue as sustainability of the EYCC system is at a critical juncture. Concerns related to workforce recruitment, retention issues and increased costs have been accelerated.
- Our community is increasingly aware of the need to address racism, and inequities, particularly towards people who are Black, Indigenous, or racialized. Children’s Services is critically examining policies and practices and will be implementing systemic changes to address biases and barriers. Children’s Services will also be supporting the whole EYCC community to take action to create an inclusive EYCC system.

While the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan is exciting, implementation cannot come at the cost of quality and equity. The plan must come with strategies that address affordability and access issues, system inequities, and the workforce crisis through increased salaries of early childhood educators.

The next five years have potential to bring about transformational change in the local EYCC landscape. To be successful, this change will require advocacy, difficult conversations, hard work, and dedicated collaboration with parents, the EYCC community, and all levels of government. I know our local community is prepared for this challenge and I look forward to working together to create an equitable, high quality, affordable, and responsive EYCC system in Waterloo Region.

Sincerely,



Barbara Cardow, Director, Children’s Services

Message from Regional Council



Regional Council's vision is to work with our partners to build the best community in Canada and beyond. In this community, every resident feels like they belong and has the support they need, not just to meet basic needs, but to thrive, grow, and fully contribute. Every family has access to affordable child care and early learning that nurtures their child's emotional, physical, mental, social, and cultural wellbeing and growth. Every child has the right to experience early years and child care programs where adults are caring and responsive, where they engage in active learning through exploration, play and inquiry, and where their families are valued as active participants and contributors.

As a Council, we take pride in making the right decisions, not just for today, but for future generations. We appreciate the inherent value and worth of every child and the importance of nurturing their brain development today so they can reach their potential in the future. We know that barriers exist; the pandemic presented many challenges and exacerbated inequities in service delivery. It also gave us an opportunity to do better.

Our vision and plan for the future recognizes that not every child has equal access to high quality, inclusive early learning. That is why we made a commitment and are taking actions to make real progress on this. Our transformational system plan, which began in 2021, includes a multi-faceted approach to supporting an equitable child care system through the following investments:

- A mentorship program that provides children with care in their first language and career opportunities for caregivers who are newcomers
- Funding to move towards a more anti-oppressive and anti-racist child care system
- Funding to support outreach that increases access to care for Indigenous, Black, African, Caribbean, racialized and other marginalized communities

You will learn more about these investments in this Early Years and Child Care System Plan. They are just a few of the actions we are taking to build a more equitable future for all in Waterloo Region.

Executive summary

Early Years and Child Care Services System Plan Overview

The Early Years and Child Care (EYCC) Service System Plan is a multi-year plan designed to support the creation of a vibrant, inclusive, and high-quality EYCC system and world-class community for children and families.

As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM), the Region of Waterloo, Children's Services is required to engage in system-wide planning for all licensed EYCC programs serving children birth to 12 years old, to ensure services align with community needs. To develop this System Plan, Children's Services engaged with over 3,000 parents, EYCC organizations, and community partners in Waterloo Region to gather their feedback and ideas to improve the system. In addition to extensive consultation, an environmental scan of community socio-economic trends, analysis of EYCC program level data, and synthesis of relevant policy and early learning research were all completed.

The System Plan is organized according to four pillars that are needed in a strong EYCC system - access, affordability, quality, and equity and responsiveness. These four components are closely interconnected and coordinated action is needed across each pillar in order to create an equitable EYCC system.

The System Plan includes seven strategic priorities supported by twenty-nine actions, developed based on the consultation feedback and environmental scan. In the coming months, an implementation plan and performance measurement framework (including targets) will be developed to guide the implementation of the System Plan.

Access

Key Trends and Gaps

- Only 26% of children between 0 to 4 years old in Waterloo Region have access to a licensed child care space.
- Waitlists for child care are significant, and families report that the application and waitlist process is unclear and lacks transparency.
- Child care spaces are not equitably distributed across Waterloo Region.
- Parents with higher income and born in Canada reported greater access to licensed child care than parents with lower income or born outside of Canada.
- The viability of many EYCC programs has been negatively impacted by the pandemic.
- EarlyON child and family programs served 4,629 unique children ages 0 to 6 years old in Waterloo Region in 2020.
- 21% of Black parents surveyed indicated they did not feel comfortable accessing EYCC programs and services.

Planning Considerations

- At least 3,000 new licensed child care spaces are needed to provide access for 40% of children ages 0 to 4 years.
- Demand for child care will grow with the potential Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan, and new strategies are needed to support equitable access to child care or there is a risk that marginalized families will be further excluded from the system.

- New high-quality licensed child care spaces should be strategically located to increase equity of access to child care.
- To ensure a strong EYCC system, expansion must be balanced with sustaining the existing system.
- Improvements to the child care application and waitlist processes need to be designed with a focus on equity (to ensure the systems do not disadvantage some families), and balancing of family and child care operator needs and preferences.
- Locations of EarlyON mobile programs should be reviewed regularly to ensure they continue to support equitable access to EarlyON.

Affordability

Key Trends and Gaps

- Approximately 50% of families surveyed identified that child care was not affordable, which aligns with research that finds a family would need an after-tax income of at least \$160,000 for licensed child care centre fees for one infant in Waterloo Region to be affordable.
- Child care fees in Waterloo Region increased faster than inflation, by an average of 10% between 2017 and 2020.
- Fees for full-time licensed child care (0 to 4 years) are between \$9,012 to \$23,939 annually per child.
- An average of 2,745 children each month receive child care subsidy, which supports low-income parents (most earning less than \$40,000) to work (69%) and attend school (14%).

Planning Considerations

- Without new ongoing funding, there is limited ability to reduce fees to established affordability thresholds. Significant new investments, such as the announced Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan, are critical to supporting affordability.
- Child care fee subsidy will continue to be essential in supporting equity within the EYCC system after the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan is implemented, given that the majority of families receiving fee subsidy currently pay less than \$10 per day.
- Funding to support significant reductions in child care fees must be indexed to inflation or otherwise increased annually to ensure that affordability is maintained over time.
- To maximize impacts of new affordability investments, the funding approach for implementing system-wide fee reductions should prioritize operating expenses related to quality (e.g., educator compensation) and addressing system and family needs (e.g., serving younger age groups, locations in underserved neighbourhoods). New accountability mechanisms are needed to ensure investments achieve intended goals.



Quality

Key Trends and Gaps

- The cumulative impacts of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic have intensified EYCC workforce challenges including: educator stress and burnout, high educator turnover, labour shortages, difficulty recruiting qualified educators, and educators leaving the sector in greater numbers.
 - The median wage for Registered Early Childhood Educators in licensed child care programs in Waterloo Region is \$21.14 per hour.
 - Two-thirds of parents and just under half of child care operators reported that quality is inconsistent across the EYCC system, which results in some children receiving higher quality care than others.
 - Child care operators and families identified opportunities for the current continuous quality improvement program to improve its impact. The program is currently being redesigned to address feedback.
- Quality benchmarks and supports must address both structural quality (e.g., child care environments) and process quality (e.g., the relationships between children, educators, and families).

Planning Considerations

- It is critical that all investments in new child care spaces, such as through the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan, are tied to meeting quality benchmarks to ensure that child care supports positive outcomes for children.
- The EYCC system is facing unprecedented workforce challenges, and new strategies to recruit and retain staff are necessary to maintain current capacity and create new capacity.
- Workforce strategies must address wages, the most significant root cause of workforce issues, to ensure long-term impacts to recruitment and retention.
- Increased consistency in quality across different programs is needed to ensure that the benefits of child care are experienced equitably.



Equity and Responsiveness

Key Trends and Gaps

- There are significant systemic barriers to fully participating in the EYCC system such as: a lack of culturally responsive EYCC programs, reliance on literacy and technology to access information about and register for EYCC programs, lack of diversity among EYCC staff, and lack of responsive care for some children with special needs.
- Indigenous, Black, and racialized families, families living in lower income, and families with children with special needs face the most significant systemic barriers in the EYCC system and reported lower levels of receiving fair and equitable treatment in the EYCC system when compared to other families.
- There is limited data to quantify and understand systemic issues in access to and experiences of the EYCC system for Indigenous, Black, and racialized, and other marginalized families in Waterloo Region.
- Approximately 1,500 children receive individualized special needs supports each year, but 27% of parents surveyed were not aware these supports exist.
- While 94% of child care operators identified taking significant actions to improve inclusion of children with special needs, they also identify challenges to being fully inclusive such as lack of funding for additional educator support.
- There was a 27% increase in French language child care spaces in Waterloo Region between 2018 and 2020.



Planning Considerations

- An equity lens must be applied to all EYCC system policies and practices to consider and address intended and unintended consequences for Indigenous, Black, and racialized families, and other marginalized families.
- All action to address systemic barriers and inequities must be guided by purposeful engagement with Indigenous, Black, and racialized families, and other marginalized families.
- To make the EYCC system more equitable, action and supports are required at system and program levels, and individual educators also require new professional learning opportunities and supports in the area of equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- Improved data collection is needed to support disaggregation of data to better understand the experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized families and other marginalized families. While data is being collected and analyzed, action can still be taken to improve equity of the EYCC system - the lack of data should not be an additional barrier to improvement.





Strategic priorities for 2022-2026

1

Advocate for new investments

- Advocate for funding to increase affordability of licensed child care (including the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan)
- Advocate for capital and operating funding for new spaces
- Advocate to increase base funding levels and for implementation of a provincial wage scale for EYCC staff
- Advocate to expand the income threshold for child care fee subsidy

2

Address systemic inequities

- Engage with Indigenous, Black, and racialized families and other marginalized families to identify and address systemic barriers
- Work with Indigenous partners to further implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations
- Create and implement a data strategy that supports data disaggregation
- Support new equity and inclusion training and supports for EYCC operators
- Provide grants for child care programs to improve equity and inclusion
- Revise policies and provide funding to support parents with precarious employment to access licensed child care more equitably
- Increase access to child care fee subsidy for Indigenous, Black, and racialized families through providing new supports and funding

3

Grow and sustain the system

- Implement a child care growth strategy
- Support child care sustainability through new priorities and policies
- Support new child care centres and EarlyON programs in schools through key partnerships
- Update the EarlyON needs assessment to ensure continued responsiveness
- Implement a workforce recruitment and retention strategy



4

Evaluate outcomes of investments

- a. Implement a new quality measurement approach
- b. Implement new funding policies that include consistent fee standards and wage benchmarks
- c. Measure outcomes of special needs and capacity building supports and make changes based on results

5

Enhance stakeholder engagement

- a. Develop a framework that outlines an approach to stakeholder engagement
- b. Conduct ongoing engagement with parents
- c. Engage in ongoing collaborative system planning with community partners

6

Support continuous quality improvement

- a. Provide new quality improvement supports (e.g., coaching, training) to child care operators and EarlyON programs
- b. Implement new quality improvement grants for child care operators
- c. Implement a professional learning and development strategy
- d. Lead local knowledge mobilization initiatives

7

Improve service experiences

- a. Make accessing child care more transparent and equitable through OneList and other process changes
- b. Implement technological solutions to improve parent experiences with fee subsidy
- c. Increase awareness of the local early years and child care system through new strategies



Creating a system plan for Waterloo Region

Creating a system plan for Waterloo Region

Introduction

The foundation of a world-class community is a strong investment in the well-being and quality of life for children and families. The Early Years and Child Care (EYCC) Service System Plan (System Plan) is a multi-year plan that will act as our road map for the next five years to guide investment in quality child care and early learning programs. The Province of Ontario under the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 requires the Region of Waterloo, Children's Services as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) to develop a System Plan to guide the planning and management of the EYCC system for children ages 0-12 years old.

The System Plan includes an environmental scan of local socio-economic community trends, an inventory of EYCC programs that highlights any service gaps, a description of community planning processes, and outlines strategic priorities and actions and how they will be achieved. The System Plan is supported by a Data Backgrounder that summarizes key community demographic data. The System Plan is organized around four key components of a strong EYCC system - access, affordability, quality, and equity and responsiveness. These pillars represent the essential inter-connected components of a high quality EYCC system that is inclusive of all children and families. This System Plan has been developed to meet the provincial criteria and ensure there is flexibility in the strategic actions to adapt and respond to new government initiatives (e.g., Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan) and the evolving needs of children and families in Waterloo Region. This System Plan builds upon the actions of the previous System Plan.



System Plan accomplishment highlights 2016-2021

The accomplishments of the EYCC system between 2016 and 2020 provide an important foundation for the 2022-2026 System Plan.



In 2019, the first Indigenous-led Child and Family Centre in Waterloo Region was opened.



2 new EarlyON Child and Family Centres opened in schools between 2016 and 2021 and one moved and expanded its capacity.



\$1.4 million was distributed in grants to 85 child care sites across 2018 and 2019 to support increased quality in licensed child care programs.



217 new licensed home child care caregivers received start-up grants to increase access to high quality licensed home child care for children ages 0-4 years.



The total number of licensed child care spaces (all ages) grew by **2,783** between 2016 and 2020.



Special Needs Resourcing funding was increased by **14%** to support the inclusion of all children 0-12 through new and expanded services.



\$38.2 million in new Provincial and Federal funding between 2017 and 2020 focused on increasing access to and affordability of licensed child care.



4,780 parents participated in two large scale surveys to inform EYCC planning.



Emergency child care was provided for up to **550** children during each child care system closure in 2020 and 2021.



Fee Reduction Pilot reduced fees by **\$10** per day (infants), **\$3** per day (toddlers) and **\$2** per day (preschoolers) in 2018-2019.



\$31 million provided to child care programs to support program sustainability and additional expenses during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021.



133 EYCC programs participated in continuous quality improvement programs in 2020/21.

System Plan development and engagement

To support the development of the 2022-2026 System Plan, families and community stakeholders were invited to provide feedback on their experiences of the EYCC, including what is working well and what they would like improved to better align with community needs. Participants were also asked to reflect on the impacts that COVID-19 has had on their organization or family and what is needed to support ongoing recovery. In addition to extensive community engagement, an environmental scan was completed to highlight community demographics, understand socio-economic trends, and collect program data. Trends, data and findings were used to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement and informed the development of the System Plan and the strategic priorities and actions for 2022-2026.

Who provided feedback?

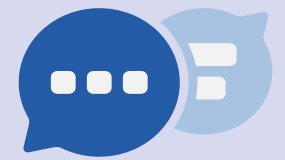
Over **3,000** key stakeholders provided invaluable feedback that shaped the EYCC Service System Plan including:

- Parents and caregivers (including parents who identify as Black, Indigenous, racialized or marginalized)
- Licensed centre-based child care operators, including Francophone operators
- Licensed home child care agencies
- EarlyON Child and Family Centre operators
- Early Childhood Professional Resource Centre
- Conestoga College
- Indigenous organizations
- Publicly funded English and French language school boards
- Special Needs Resourcing agencies

- Internal Region of Waterloo Staff (Children's Services, Public Health)
- Children and Youth Planning Table members such as: public libraries, children's mental health, community centres, child welfare, recreation, counselling agencies and area municipalities.

How did we consult?

- 1** online parent survey completed by **2,908** parents/caregivers
- 2** online surveys with **70** licensed centre child care operators and licensed home child care agencies
- 2** focus groups with Special Needs Resourcing agencies
- 4** focus groups with local publicly funded school boards
- 1** focus group with Conestoga College and Early Childhood Professional Resource Centre
- 2** focus groups with EarlyON providers
- 2** online surveys with members (community stakeholders) of the CYPT (28 respondents)
- 2** community consultations with **85** EYCC community partners
- 7** internal consultation sessions with **35** Region of Waterloo staff



A young child with blonde hair and blue eyes is the central figure. Their face is covered in purple paint, particularly around the eyes, nose, and mouth. They are holding a paintbrush with a red handle and a purple tip. The child is wearing a white tank top with a colorful pattern of yellow and blue shapes. The background is a dark, textured floor. The image is framed by a purple border with diagonal lines.

Planning for children and families

Planning for children and families

Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) role

As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager, the Region of Waterloo is responsible for planning, overseeing, and managing licensed child care and early years programs and services for children aged 0 to 12 years at the local level.



The Service Manager roles include:

- **Funding and Resource Allocation** - Managing local funding and resource allocations that align with system priorities and ensuring accountability for public investment.
- **Capacity Building** - Providing capacity-building support to local early years and child care service providers through professional learning activities in areas such as: pedagogical approaches, leadership, quality, policy development and business practices.
- **Policy Development** - Developing and implementing policies that support provincial and local priorities.
- **Direct Service Delivery** - Directly operate child care fee subsidy program and a Licensed Home Child Care Agency.
- **Quality Improvement** - Developing and monitoring quality approaches to support continuous quality improvement across the EYCC system.
- **Oversight and Accountability** - Providing oversight of early years and child care providers by monitoring and holding agencies accountable for their responsibilities to their service contracts. Being accountable to funders and local partners for use of funds and progress on strategic priorities.
- **System Planning** - Developing a System Plan to address provincial priorities and community needs with local early years and licensed child care providers.

Community planning and engagement

Ongoing collaboration with community partners and organizations is critical to planning for and providing locally responsive early years and child care services. Children's Services supports a broad range of engagement activities and groups including community-wide collaboratives, program specific planning groups, and regular ongoing open consultations with the entire EYCC system. The following groups reflect the diverse experience of early years and child care partners across the Region and provide valuable expertise and insight on system needs, Regional policy, and funding administration.

On-going engagement with funded Early Years and licensed Child Care partners

Children's Services regularly hosts virtual meetings, teleconferences, forums, and webinars with licensed child care operators (home and centre based), publicly funded School Boards, EarlyON Child and Family Centre operators, Special Needs Resourcing agencies, and the Professional Resource Centre to consult, gather feedback, and share information.

Early Years Joint Strategic Planning Group

The Waterloo Region District School Board, the Waterloo Catholic District School Board and Region of Waterloo Children's Services forms the Early Years Joint Strategic Planning group. This group works in partnership to develop and implement plans for the coordination of responsive, high-quality, accessible, and increasingly integrated early years programs and services.



Children and Youth Planning Table (CYPT)

- The CYPT is a community-wide partnership that includes over 800 service providers, researchers, planning bodies, and funders serving children, youth and families in Waterloo Region.
- The Steering Committee, Data, Research and Evaluation team, Communication Advisory Team, Continuous Professional Learning Committee, and the Early Years Steering Group, as well as the CYPT staff work collaboratively to improve child and youth well-being in Waterloo Region.
- The work of the CYPT is currently focused on increasing a sense of belonging for children and youth. This work includes a focus on equity, attachment, relationships and feeling valued, heard and included.

Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) Leadership Team

Children's Services regularly meets with Special Needs Resourcing agencies to manage and monitor special needs services and further develop the collaborative approach to service delivery.

Smart Waterloo Region

Smart Waterloo Region (SWR) is a local cross-sectoral project to leverage data, tech-enabled innovative solutions to help improve the wellbeing of children and youth. Children's Services participates and supports the social inclusion, wellbeing, and belonging work as it relates to improving the lives of children and youth.

Provincial Federal Context - Changing EYCC landscape

For over a decade, the EYCC system has been experiencing large scale transformation. In 2009, the Province began to implement a number of changes to strengthen early years and child care services across Ontario. In 2010, The Ministry of Education took over the responsibility and strategic direction for licensed child care from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. The following key initiatives have impacted the system and continue to be relevant to local system planning for 2022 to 2026:

2009 - With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Years in Ontario

New vision of an integrated system to support children 0 to 12 years of age and their families.

2010-2014 - Full-Day Kindergarten

Implementing full-day kindergarten transformed the licensed child care system as spaces for children aged four and five were repurposed for younger children.

2014 - How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years

A professional learning resource guide about learning through relationships for those working with young children and families. Created to support pedagogy and curriculum/program development in early years programs.

2014 - The Child Care and Early Years Act (CCEYA)

Replaced the Day Nurseries Act and established new rules governing child care in Ontario. The act strengthened health and safety requirements in child care.

2015 - Launch of Provincial Wage Enhancement Grant

Funding to help close the gap between Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) in the public education system and those working in licensed child care settings.

2016 - The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

Ontario's commitment to increase access to Indigenous child care and child and family programs.

2017 - Schools First Child Care Capital Funding

Funds new not-for-profit, capital projects in order to increase access for children 0 to six years of age, through retrofits, renovations or expansion projects.

2017 - Ontario's Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework

The province's seven-point strategy to transform Ontario's early years and child care system within the context of four pillars: affordability, access, quality, and responsiveness.

2017 - Canada-Ontario Early Learning and Child Care Bilateral Agreement

The Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada agreement to increase funding to expand licensed child care services.

2017 - Provincial Child Care Expansion Plan

The Province of Ontario's plan to create additional access to licensed child care for 100,000 more children aged 0-4 years.

2018 - EarlyON Child and Family Centres

Province consolidates four child and family programs and rebrands as EarlyON Child and Family Centres. Service system managers assume responsibility for EarlyONs with enhanced requirements to ensure integration and consistency of services that best meets local needs.

2020 - COVID-19 Pandemic and Emergency Child Care

The province of Ontario ordered all licensed child care centres to close as a result of COVID-19 from March to June 2020. The Ministry of Education fully funded service system managers to open select emergency child care centres for health care and other frontline workers.

2020-2022 - Changes to provincial funding formulas and cost-sharing measures

In 2019, the Ministry of Education announced revisions to the provincial/ municipal cost-share formula to be phased in between 2020 and 2022. Expansion funding was reduced by \$1.5 million in 2020. In 2021, the cost-share for administrative expenses was changed to 50% provincial / 50% municipal (from mostly 100% provincial). In 2022, administrative expenses were capped at 5% from 10%.

2021 - Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan

The federal government announced a transformative plan to build a national quality early years and child care system in partnership with provincial, territorial, and Indigenous partners. This plan includes reducing parent fees for licensed child care to an average of \$10 per day within the next five years. Ontario has not yet signed an agreement with the federal government at the time of publishing and local funding impacts are not yet known.

What are the benefits of a quality early years and child care system?

It is widely recognized that high-quality early years and child care programs have long-lasting and wide-reaching positive benefits on the education, social, and emotional development of children and provide valuable supports to families.¹ However, low quality EYCC programs negatively impact children's development, and the impacts are stronger for children from disadvantaged backgrounds². There are three major benefits to all Waterloo Region residents of a high quality and affordable early years and licensed child care system:

A) Benefits to children and families

- Participation in high-quality early years and child care programs improves children's quality of life and well-being, including positively impacting their cognitive and social development in the short and long term, with the strongest effects for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.³ Children's experiences in the early years strongly influence their brain development and affect their capacity to learn and overall development.⁴
- A high-quality early years and child care system positively contributes to a sense of belonging and improves the well-being of children and families to support them to fully participate and contribute to our local community.

B) Economic benefits

- High-quality, affordable licensed child care is essential for families to maintain employment or pursue post-secondary education and training opportunities
- Accessible and affordable licensed child care boosts labour force participation rates of women,⁵ who often leave the workforce in disproportionate numbers to care for children when unable to find child care that addresses their needs.⁶ More women in the workforce boosts the GDP, increases income from taxes, and helps address income inequality by closing the wage gap between male and female earners.⁷ Since 2005 with the introduction of Quebec's subsidized provincial child care program, the labour force participation of women 15 to 44 years old was 81 per cent, compared to 75 per cent in Ontario.
- Increased household income supports financial independence and decreases the number of families relying on social assistance and other social programs and ultimately reduces poverty rates.

C) Social benefits

- Children attending high-quality inclusive early years and child care programs improve their cognitive ability, increase readiness for learning at school, are less likely to be referred for special education, less likely to drop out of school, and less likely to repeat a grade in later years. Long-term outcomes include increased high school graduation rates and labour performance rates and a reduction of criminal activity and teen pregnancy.⁸
- Children living in low income who also face additional systemic barriers (e.g. Black, Indigenous, racialized, new immigrants and other marginalized families) experience the most improved developmental, social and economic outcomes from participating in high-quality EYCC programs.
- Local data from the Early Development Instrument (EDI) and Early Years Experiences at Kindergarten have shown that participation in high-quality EYCC programs improves children's health and overall wellbeing in Waterloo Region.



The EYCC System in Waterloo Region

The EYCC System in Waterloo Region

Licensed Child Care

- Licensed Child Care is regulated by the Ministry of Education and must adhere to the minimum standards set out in Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014. In Waterloo Region, programs are available for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, kindergarten, and school-age children in centre or home-based care settings.



Centre-Based Care

- Centre-based care is provided by not-for-profit and for-profit operators for children ages 0 to 12 years old in a variety of locations including schools, community centres, workplaces, places of worship, and stand-alone buildings.
- Centres offer full-time or part-time spaces, either full day (e.g., typically between the hours of 7 a.m. and 6 p.m.) or half days, five days per week.



Home-Based Care

- Licensed Home Child Care agencies contract with independent caregivers to provide care for children ages 0 to 12 years old in their private homes.
- Care is available full-time or part-time. Extended days, evenings and weekend care may be available.



Before and After School Programs

- Before and after school programs are available for children ages 4 to 12 years old. These programs are operated directly by publicly funded school boards or licensed child care operators located in schools where there is sufficient parent demand.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres and Indigenous-led Child and Family Centre

- EarlyON Child and Family Centres offer free virtual and in-person programs for children from birth to six years of age and their parents or caring adults. EarlyON Centres are places where families engage in play based learning with their children, learn about child development, access resources and services, and meet other families. Qualified Registered Early Childhood Educators and other professionals are on-site to provide support, advice, information, and helpful resources.

Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) Collaborative

- KidsAbility and KW Habilitation form the SNR Collaborative and provide special needs support to all licensed child care programs in Waterloo Region for children ages 0 to 12. Resource consultants, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and/or behavioural therapists provide these supports so that all children can fully participate in licensed child care.
- The SNR Collaborative provides supports based on a tiered model of service where universal and targeted supports are available to all licensed child care programs.
- In partnership with school boards, transition to school supports are provided for children with special needs who are entering kindergarten from a licensed child care setting

Child care fee subsidy

- Child care fee subsidy provides financial assistance to help parents pay for licensed child care so they can go to work or school. Financial eligibility is based on household income and the cost of child care.

Early Childhood Professional Resource Centre

- The Professional Resource Centre provides Registered Early Childhood Educators and other EYCC staff professional learning and development offerings, educational resources, learning tools, pedagogical supports, and continuous quality improvement supports.

Early years quality

- Region of Waterloo Early Years Analysts, in collaboration with Pedagogists from the Early Childhood Professional Resource Centre at Conestoga College, work together to support and mentor programs and early years professionals on their quality journey. Engaging in a continuous quality improvement approach, they participate with the community in leadership reviews, small group meetings, and reflective practice. They will gather and analyze data to support meaningful professional learning, and provide support for mentoring and coaching.
- The Region's continuous quality improvement program, Early Years Engage helps early years programs take a team approach to ongoing improvement through an annual goal setting and work plan development process.

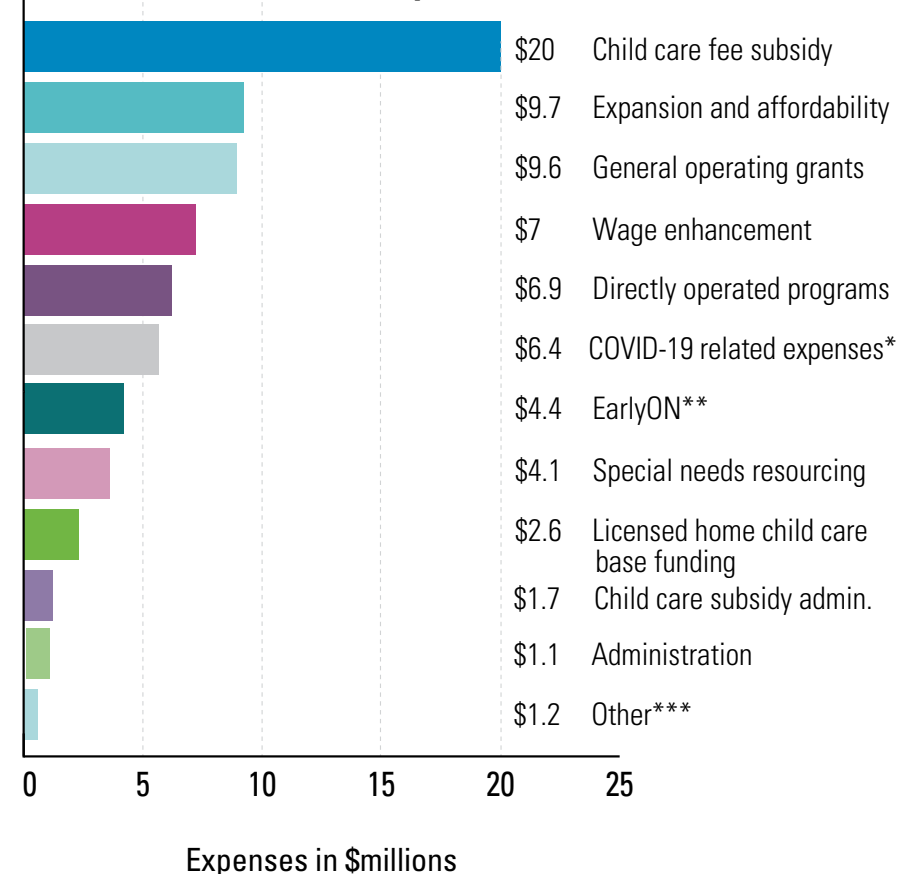
Funding and budget

In 2021, Children's Services total annual projected budget was almost \$75 million. Of that total, approximately \$65 million in funding was provided by the Province of Ontario and about \$8 million was provided by the Region of Waterloo. The Region of Waterloo contributes above the required provincial cost-share amount, thereby increasing the total overall funding available. The other revenue identified is primarily from parent fees for directly operated programs.

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Children's Services Annual Budget	\$75 M	\$72 M	\$69 M	\$75 M
Provincial Contribution	\$64 M	\$61 M	\$58 M	\$65 M
Regional Contribution	\$9 M	\$9 M	\$9 M	\$8 M
Other Revenue	\$2 M	\$2 M	\$2 M	\$2 M



Children's Services Expenditures, 2020 (in \$millions)



* COVID-19 related expenses included: Safe Restart Funding to support programs with expenses associated with meeting new Public Health standards, and COVID-19 related program expenses.

** EarlyON includes Indigenous-led EarlyON.

***Other = Planning, pay equity, capacity building, repairs and maintenance.

What funding changes are expected in the next five years?

Public investment is essential in building a strong EYCC system. It is expected that the next five years will bring significant changes in funding for the early years and child care sector. In April 2021, the Federal government announced a \$30 billion investment over the next five years to support a Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan. The central feature of the plan is to improve affordability of child care through reducing fees in licensed child care - by an average of 50 per cent by 2022, and further to an average of \$10 per day by 2026. At this time, the Province of Ontario has not yet signed an agreement for the funding, so implementation details and impacts to the local early learning and child care system and funding are unknown. Given the substantial investment it is predicted that, once implemented, this funding will impact all aspects of the early years system such as growth of new spaces, child care fee subsidy, and general operating funding approaches.

Additional funding changes beyond those directly related to the Federal investment are anticipated at a Provincial level. In 2019, the Ministry of Education announced revisions to the provincial/municipal cost-share formula that were to be phased in between 2020 and 2022. As part of these changes, funding for expansion was reduced by \$1.5 million in 2020. In 2021, administrative expenses were shifted to a 50/50 per cent provincial/municipal cost-share from mostly 100 per cent provincial funding. The impact to the budget was mitigated through transitional funding of \$1.6 million. Provincial funding for 2022 was announced in late 2021. The final phase of the cost-share changes (moving from 10 per cent to 5 per cent maximum on administrative expenses) will move forward in 2022. However, the impact on the budget in 2022 will again be mitigated through one-time transitional funding of \$2.8 million. If mitigation funding ends in 2023 and maximum administrative expenditures remain at the reduced level, this will create significant funding pressures in the child care system in Waterloo Region, particularly related to system manager functions.

In addition to changes to the cost-share formula, the Ministry of Education also announced in 2019 that they would be revising the entire child care funding formula. Due to the pandemic, this work was paused in 2020 and it is not known if or when this work will resume. Finally, in December 2020, Regional Council made the decision to transition out of direct operation of the five Region of Waterloo Children's Centres to strengthen the Region's service system manager role. This resulted in approximately \$4.3 million annually in provincial funding to be reinvested in the early years and child care system in Waterloo Region (\$1.1M in 2021 and \$4.3M in 2022). Regional Council prioritized using this funding to address identified gaps across the system including: equity and inclusion, continuous quality improvement, and sustainability of the system. Implementation of the funding reprioritization began in late 2021 and will continue into 2022. Reinvestments will be evaluated and long-term approaches will be determined based on these evaluation results and System Plan priorities.





Access

Access

Introduction

Families need access to affordable, high-quality licensed child care so parents can go to work or school. In addition, participation in quality EYCC programs positively impacts children's development and family and child well-being.⁹ Licensed child care includes: centre based care, home base care, and before and after school programs operated by the publicly funded school boards or by licensed child care providers. Unfortunately, despite growth in the EYCC system over the past five years, many families are still unable to access licensed child care or EarlyON programs and services when and where they are needed.

Licensed centre-based child care

Licensed centre-based child care programs are provided by not-for-profits, co-operatives, nursery schools, and for-profit operators in a variety of locations for children ages 0 to 12 years old. Centres offer full-time or part-time spaces for either half or full days of care, five days a week. Typical hours of operation are Monday to Friday between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. and there are currently no weekend and extended evening care hours available. All centre-based care is licensed by the Ministry of Education, must comply with regulations outlined in the Child Care and Early Years Act (CCEYA), 2014 and is inspected annually. Licensing standards address items that affect quality such as staff/child ratios, physical environment, staff qualifications, and children's health and well-being.

"The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) predicts that if enrollment in early childhood education were to increase to 93.5 per cent of all children ages two to five years, an additional 76,500 women would enter the Canadian workforce."¹⁰

Age Category	Ratio of employees to children	Maximum number of children in a group
Infant (0 to 18 months)	3 to 10	10
Toddler (18 to 30 months)	1 to 5	15
Preschool (30 months to 6 years)	1 to 8	24

As of December 31, 2020 there were 5,634 licensed spaces for children 0 to 4 years of age, an increase of 149 spaces (3 per cent) from the same time in 2019.¹¹ In addition, there were 434 licensed JK/SK and school age program spaces for 4 to 12 year old children that are not before and after school spaces. These may be full-day kindergarten alternative programs or summer camps. (Note: This does not include summer camp programs operated by entities that are not licensed early learning and child care programs).

Number of
licensed
centre-based sites
(0 to 4 years)¹²

2018 - 103 sites
2019 - 105 sites
2020 - 106 sites



Number of
licensed
centre-based spaces
(0 to 4 years)¹³

2018 - 5,181 spaces
2019 - 5,485 spaces
2020 - 5,634 spaces



Number of
school-aged spaces
in licensed child care
centres (non before
and after school)¹⁴

2018 - 451 spaces
2019 - 434 spaces
2020 - 434 spaces



Number of **licensed centre-based spaces** in 2020 in Waterloo Region



376

Infant spaces
(0 - 18 months)



1,680

Toddler spaces
(18 - 30 months)



3,578

Preschool spaces
(2.5 - 4 years)

Number of **licensed centre-based operators**

In 2020, there were 63 organizations operating 98 not-for-profit child care sites, 32 for-profit child care sites, and 5 municipally operated child care sites.



5 municipally
operated child care sites



32 for-profit
child care sites



63 organizations



98 not-for-profit
child care sites

Licensed home-based child care

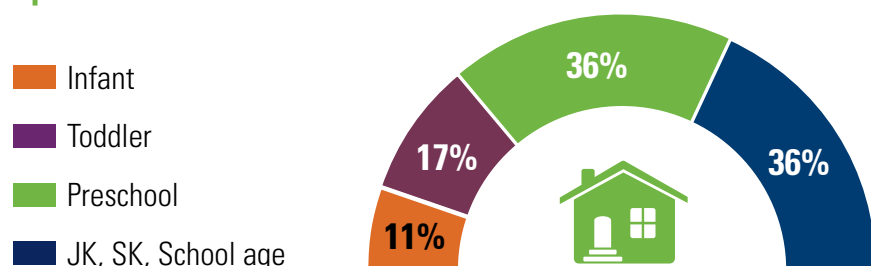
Licensed home-based child care is provided in approved private family homes by caregivers who have a contract with one of four licensed home child care agencies in the Region. Home-based licensed child care is available for children up to 12 years old and can be available seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Licensed home child care provides a unique and rich learning environment for children. Siblings can often be placed together and smaller group sizes allow for more child and caregiver interaction. All home-based care providers must comply with regulations outlined in the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, and are inspected monthly by a home child care consultant. Caregivers are permitted to have no more than six children birth to 12 years old (not including their own children older than four).

Licensed Home Child Care¹⁵	2018	2019	2020
Number of children (0-4) accessing licensed home child care	946	1,002	722
Number of children (5-12) accessing licensed home child care	533	573	406
Total number of children accessing licensed home child care	1,479	1,575	1,128

A recent cost-benefit analysis from the Conference Board of Canada concluded that for every \$1 dollar spent on high quality EYCC programs, there is an economic return between \$1.50 and \$6 in the areas of employment and gross domestic product. This figure grows to double digits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁶

As of December 31, 2020, there were approximately 369 home based caregivers, providing care to 1,128 children in Waterloo Region.

Age distribution of children in the Region's directly operated licensed home child care



Before and after school programs

Before and after school programs (also called extended day programs and/or youth development programs) are offered at schools to support a seamless day for children. These programs are either operated by school boards or by licensed child care providers for children ages 4 to 12 years old. In spring of each year, school boards determine the viability of providing before and after school programs by surveying parents' intentions to register for the upcoming school year.

In 2020, 89 per cent of publicly funded schools offered before and after school programs and 2,995 children accessed school board operated before and after school

care. This represents a 52 per cent reduction in enrollment from previous years and is attributed to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on care needs (e.g., parent stopped working, change of work location/hours, virtual learning, etc.). In addition to the school board operated spaces, licensed child care providers can provide up to 6,009 licensed spaces of before and after school care located in schools. Child care operators have reported significant reductions in enrollment and overall operating capacity of these spaces.

Unlicensed child care

Unlicensed child care is provided in private residences or in children's homes and is not associated with a licensed home child care agency. Unlicensed child care is not monitored by the Ministry of Education and is not required to meet most provincial requirements and standards in areas such as health and safety, food handling, physical space, and provider requirements. The Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 outlines that unlicensed child care providers are not permitted to care for more than five children which includes their own children under four years of age and no more than three children under two years of age. The Ministry of Education may inspect an unlicensed home if they receive a complaint. Research highlights the need to improve the quality of care in the unlicensed child care sector¹⁷ and when there is enough supply of licensed child care spaces there is a decrease in the use of unlicensed child care.

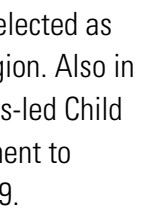
Before and After School Programs ¹⁸	2018	2019	2020
Number of children accessing school-board operated programs	5,141	5,795	2,995
Number of licensed before and after school spaces operated by community agencies. ¹⁹ The actual number of children accessing these spaces was much lower than licensed spaces available.	6,276	6,404	6,009



EarlyON Child and Family Centres

In 2016, the Ministry of Education announced its plan to integrate Ministry funded child and family programs across Ontario under one name, EarlyON Child and Family Centres (name announced in October 2017). The purpose of this transformation was to enhance the quality and consistency of child and family programs

across Ontario. In January 2018, the YMCA of Three Rivers was selected as Lead Agency of EarlyON Child and Family Centres in Waterloo Region. Also in 2018, Anishnabeg Outreach was selected to operate an Indigenous-led Child and Family Centre under the Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. The centre opened in 2019.



Child and Family Centres	2018	2019	2020
Number of EarlyON Child and Family Centre sites in Waterloo Region ²⁰	33	27	25

In 2020, there were twenty-five locations providing EarlyON services, including five EarlyON Centres. However, for much of the year, in-person programming was not available due to the pandemic and virtual services were offered instead. Planning also continues for enhanced EarlyON programs and services for Francophone families.

Families served through **virtual pre-registered events** and **in-person programming** in 2020:

4,629 unique children served ages 0-6 years old

19,174 visits by children ages 0-6 years old

4,005 unique parents served

15,997 visits by parents



Quick Facts

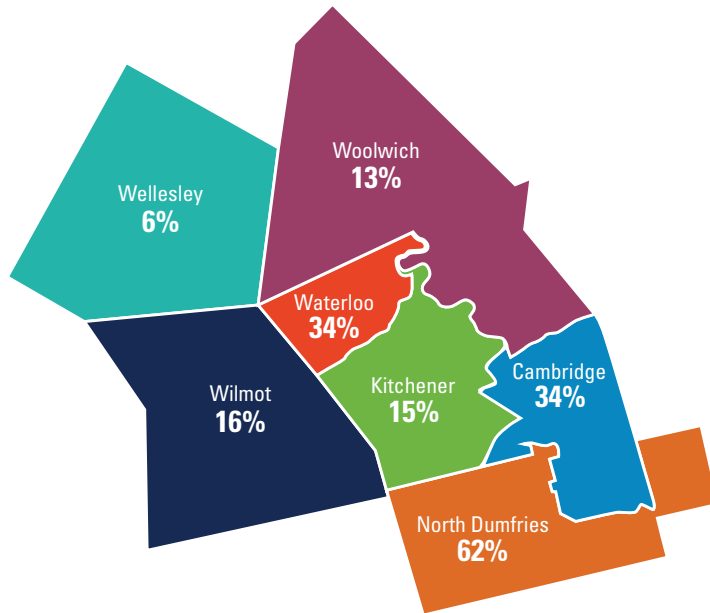
20
EarlyON mobile sites

5
EarlyON centre/school based sites

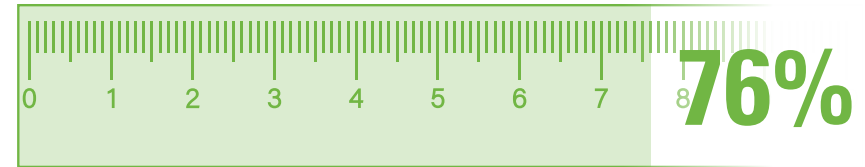
Where is child care available?

Access to licensed child care spaces varies significantly by municipality and neighbourhood across Waterloo Region. About one in four children (26 per cent) between 0 and 4 years old in Waterloo Region have access to a licensed child care space (including both licensed centre and home-based spaces).²¹ There are some neighbourhoods with multiple choices for child care and some neighbourhoods with no options. Almost half of families prefer child care that is located less than 5 km from their home, work, or close to the school older siblings attend. The Province continues to prioritize neighbourhood-based services, including child care located in schools.

Percentage of children (0 to 4 years) with access to a licensed centre-based space by municipality



Recent research has used the term “child care desert” to describe geographic areas where there are at least three children in potential competition for each licensed child care space.²²



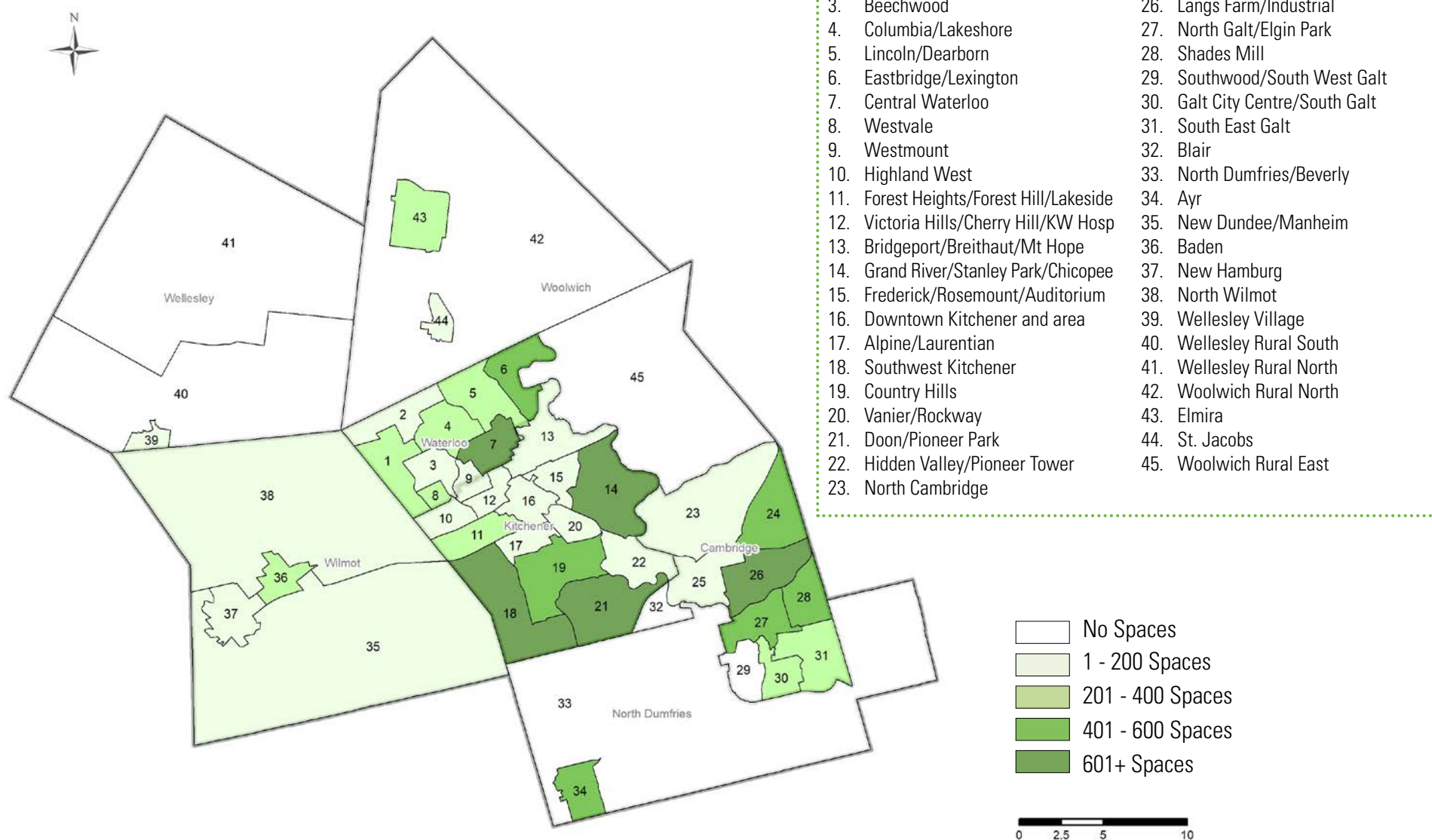
In 2021, 76 per cent of neighbourhoods in Waterloo Region have been identified as “child care deserts” where there is insufficient child care available based on the child population of the neighbourhood.²³

In recent engagement, licensed child care operators and special needs agencies, noted that some of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods (e.g., lower income, lower social cohesion) in the Region have the fewest child care spaces.

“Better flexibility for scheduling in families with parents who do shift work.” - Parent

“More available spaces close to home and/or work: this shouldn’t feel like a lottery” - Parent

Licensed child care spaces by neighbourhood, 2021



2020 Total licensed child care capacity and percentage of children with access, by age group²⁴

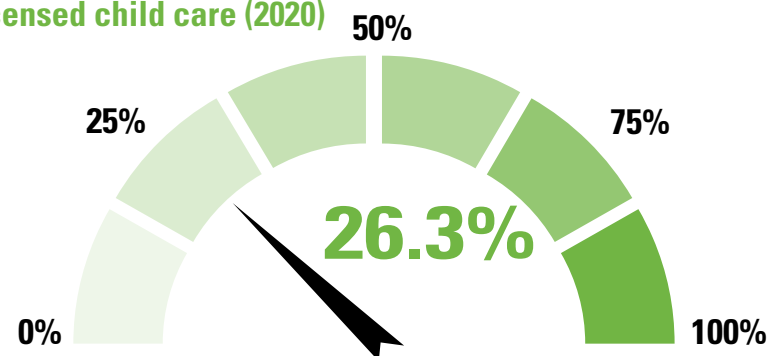
	Infant (0 to 17 months)	Toddler (18 to 30 months)	Preschool (30 to 47 month)	Total 0 to 4 spaces
Licensed centre spaces (Note 1)	376	1,680	3,578	5,634
Licensed home based spaces (estimate) (Note 2)	123	195	404	722
Total Spaces	499	1,875	3,982	6,356
Population	8,935	6,055	9,205	24,195
Percentage of children with access to a space	5.6%	31%	43.3%	26.3%

Note 1: Represents licensed capacity. The licensed capacity is the maximum number of spaces approved by the Ministry of Education and could be higher than the operating capacity (number of spaces at which a child care operator is able/willing to operate).

Note 2: Licensed home child care age break down is based on the Region's directly operated licensed home based child care program data from 2020. This was the only available age data for home child care, and represents an estimate, given that spaces in licensed change change frequently based on the number of caregivers and demand for service.

For **40%** of children ages 0 to 4 years old to have access to licensed child care, an additional **3,232 spaces** would need to be created.

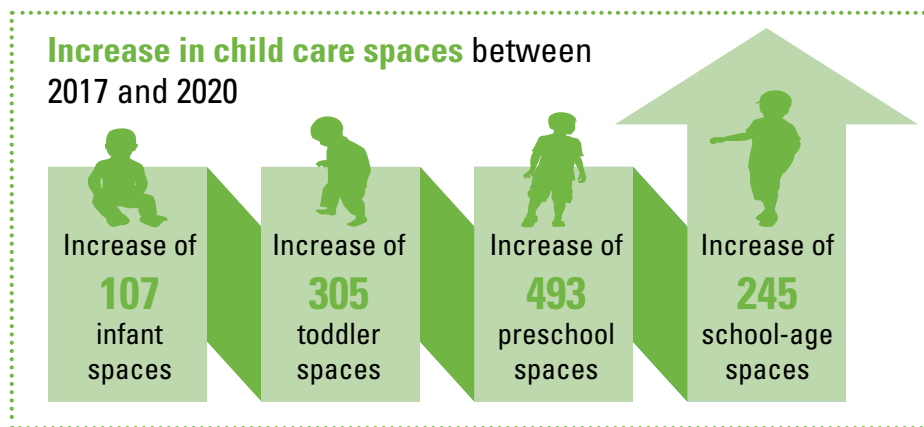
Percentage of children in Waterloo Region with access to licensed child care (2020)



335 (12 per cent) of parents said that they tried to access one or more forms of licensed child care but were unsuccessful. The top reasons included that the program was full, the program did not offer the hours that they needed, and the program did not offer the location that they needed.

There is a total of 6,356 child care spaces for children 0 to 4 years old in Waterloo Region. The current number of spaces can accommodate 26.3 per cent of Waterloo Region children, which is less than the overall access target of 40 per cent. Based on growth projections, by 2026 the 0 to 4 year old child population is anticipated to grow to 26,494, so an additional 4,241 spaces would be needed to meet the 40 per cent access target by the conclusion of this System Plan.

Between 2017 and 2020, there was an increase of 905 licensed child care spaces for children 0 to 4 years old. In the next five years, 280 new child care spaces are planned to be co-located in schools. Government funding for capital costs has been limited primarily to child care built in schools. Research indicates that when there are not enough licensed child care spaces, families are forced to pursue other less desirable options, including unaffordable and/or unlicensed child care. These options can put children at risk. To ensure families have more child care options, significant child care growth and sustainability of existing programs must be supported with new public funding.

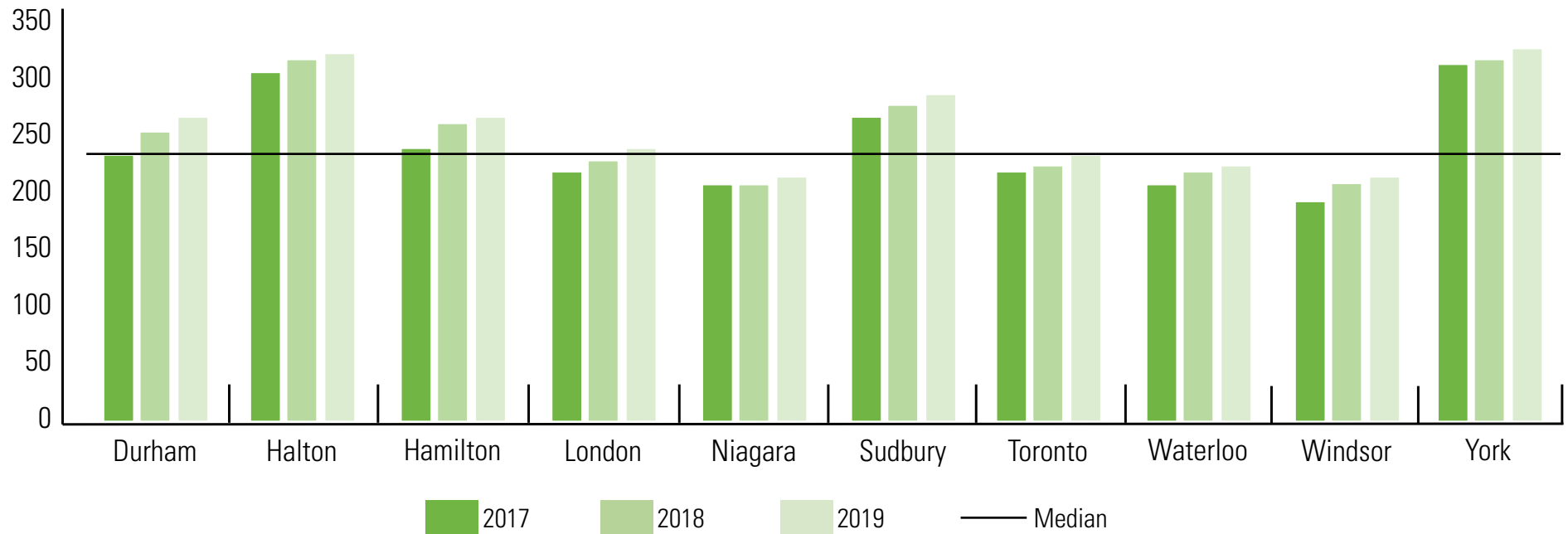


How does Waterloo Region compare to other municipalities?

The Region participates in the Municipal Benchmarking Network Canada (MBN) along with 16 other municipalities. This partnership works together to identify trends in municipal services and support policy and planning across the province. Since 2012, the number of licensed child care spaces per 1,000 children in Waterloo Region has been lower than the provincial median and is currently the third lowest overall of reported municipalities.²⁵

Regulated Child Care Spaces in Municipality per 1,000 Children (12 and Under)

The measure reflects the number of licensed spaces in child care centres and home child care programs.



What would parents change about accessing the EYCC system?

Licensed Child Care

When asked what they would change about the licensed child care system, twenty-eight percent of parents said they would add additional spaces that are more strategically located, such as closer to home, rural and downtown areas, pedestrian friendly areas, and located in elementary schools. In addition, parents noted the need for more infant spaces and space to accommodate siblings at the same location.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres

Thirty per cent of surveyed families indicated they have accessed EarlyON programs in the past two years and were familiar with the programs and services offered. Seventy-five per cent of respondents said the programming met their needs and they would not make any changes to the program. Eighteen per cent of families suggested improvements to EarlyON programs including: expanding hours to accommodate working parents, increasing awareness, and offering more locations that are pedestrian friendly and close to public transit.



“In the past, EarlyON programs I attended were not very accessible by transit which is limiting for families without car access.” - Parent

“More advertisement and promotion, coming from a different province I did not know what EarlyON was or how to access or if it was free and now with the COVID closures I have no idea how to access it or that I could virtually.” - Parent

“Our family has 22-month old twins which means that we require two spaces for child care for the same age group. Limited number of available spaces made accessing child care difficult.” - Parent

“More centre based spots, especially for infants.” - Parent

“There are not enough spots to get all children into the child care system.” - Parent

Other barriers

In addition to lack of spaces available, parents report other barriers to accessing child care. Survey data highlights related to barriers include:

- Seventeen per cent of parents born in Canada reported having more access to child care compared to 8 per cent of parents who were not born in Canada.
- Twenty-three per cent of parents with incomes over \$100,000 indicated they have more access to child care in comparison to 6 per cent of parents with incomes less than \$40,000.
- Seventeen per cent of parents with children with special needs said that they have less access to child care compared to 10 per cent of parents who do not have special needs child(ren).
- Twelve per cent of lone parents expressed they had less access to child care than two parent families.

Licensed child care providers and EYCC community partners also identified similar systemic inequities in the EYCC system.



“For those who don’t speak English or who do not have the technology, accessing the waitlist/list for service is a challenge.” - EYCC provider

“It appears like some opportunities for high quality centres are more accessible to middle or higher income communities based on where they are located. Barriers to transit makes it challenging to get to locations and fees can be a barrier.” - EYCC provider

“I do not believe that every child has equitable access to child care, there are fee barriers, distance barriers, language barriers for children and families.” - EYCC provider

How do families apply for licensed child care?

Families access the licensed EYCC system through OneList Waterloo Region, a web-based, centralized application and waitlist system. All families must create a profile and apply through OneList for child care in Waterloo Region, including centre and home based, and before and after school programs. OneList allows families to research different programs, locate licensed child care in their neighbourhood, and apply for licensed child care or school board operated programs. Parents can also access and learn more about the EYCC system by visiting the Region of Waterloo or Ministry of Education website or by calling any EYCC programs directly. Since 2013, all EYCC operators with a purchase of service agreement with the Region are required to use OneList as their primary application and waiting list.

The number of children waiting for licensed child care has increased significantly since OneList was launched in 2013. In 2015 there were 2,809 children registered with OneList compared to 4,287 children in 2021. This represents an increase of 52.6 per cent.

Quick Facts

4,287 children are currently registered with OneList in 2021²⁶

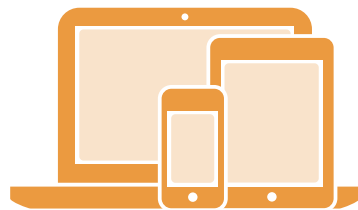
19% (836) have a preferred start date within the next 3 months

37% (1,576) are pre-planning and have a preferred start date of later than 3 months

44% (1,875) are past their preferred start date. They may still be waiting for child care or are staying on the waitlist to keep their licensed child care options open.

"My family is in that middle spot where daycare is too expensive but I make just enough to not have any access to support or subsidies."
- Parent

Click



www.OneListWaterlooRegion.ca

Call



Call any EYCC program directly

Connect



Visit any program in person

"Having a system that is updated monthly, transparent, and tells you where you are on a waitlist and expected time until care is available without having to call/email." - Parent

What improvements can be made to the application and waiting list process?

Navigating the licensed child care system can be confusing and frustrating for parents. Feedback from parents suggest that challenges are less about the registration technology and more how system and program level policies and procedures are inconsistently applied.

Many families identified that they would improve the application and waitlist process through increased transparency of the process including:

- Clear information on how far in advance parents should apply for child care,
- Clarity about the child's position on the waitlist,
- Clear and consistent priority policies across all child care programs so parents can know what to expect, and
- Centralized information about where spaces are available.

“Make it clear that registering on OneList is not enough--you need to contact your preferred placements yourself and schedule tours if you want to be considered.” - Parent

While most child care operators reported that OneList is an effective method of filling child care spaces, operators report that some families experience technology and language barriers with the system. Some operators are concerned that due to long wait lists, parents keep their children on wait lists to keep their options open in

case their circumstances or preferences change. This makes wait list management very time consuming and challenging for child care operators and can make placing a child in need of a placement inefficient .

Planning considerations



- At least 3,000 new licensed child care spaces are needed to provide access for 40% of children ages 0 to 4 years.
- Demand for child care will grow with the potential Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan, and new strategies are needed to support equitable access to child care or there is a risk that marginalized families will be further excluded from the system.
- New high-quality licensed child care spaces should be strategically located to increase equity of access to child care.
- To ensure a strong EYCC system, expansion must be balanced with sustaining the existing system.
- Improvements to the child care application and waitlist processes need to be designed with a focus on equity (to ensure the systems do not disadvantage some families), and balancing of family and child care operator needs and preferences.
- Locations of EarlyON mobile programs should be reviewed regularly to ensure they continue to support equitable access to EarlyON.

“Many places have priority spots for specific employers (of parents). This means that some programs cater to specific groups (like university or tech company employed parents), which tends towards a socioeconomic bias.” - Parent



A child wearing a pink hat with a unicorn horn and a green patterned shirt sits on a blue tarp outdoors. Various educational toys and materials are scattered around, including abacuses, a book, and markers.

Affordability

Affordability

Introduction

High quality licensed child care comes at a substantial financial cost to families. To help pay for licensed child care, the child care fee subsidy program offers financial support to decrease some or all costs for families who meet specific eligibility criteria. However, for families who are ineligible for subsidy, the high cost of care remains the number one factor that creates a barrier to accessing child care and that parents would change about their experience in licensed child care.

Licensed child care fees

There is a wide range of daily parent fees for licensed child care. Parent fees are set by licensed child care operators based on their operating budget. Rates are impacted by: educator compensation and benefits, the age of the child, facility costs (e.g., rent, mortgage, utilities), furnishings and equipment, overhead/administration costs, food, demand for service, and auspice (e.g., for-profit, not-for-profit). The largest cost in licensed child care is the educator salary and benefits. The compensation and benefits of educators is strongly linked to higher retention rates. The most expensive care is for infants, due to the higher staff to children ratios, equipment costs, and other requirements related to the physical environment.

Between 2017 and 2020 the national inflation rate increased by 6.54 per cent while the average cost of child care in Waterloo Region increased by 9.97 per cent (difference of 3.43 per cent).²⁷ The increases to parent fees are exceeding the rate of inflation and making it increasingly unaffordable for families.



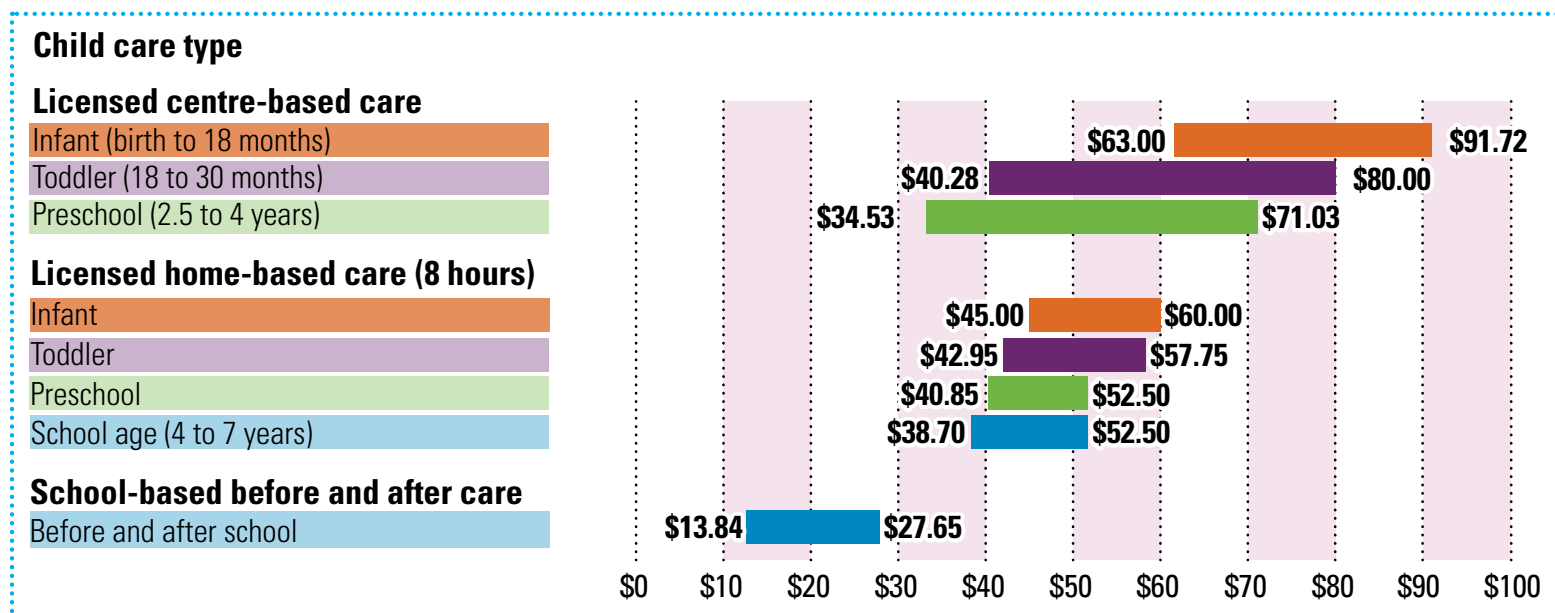
Comparing licensed centre-based child care average rates, 2017-2020

Age Group	2017	2018 ²⁸	2019 ²⁸	2020	% Change from 2017-2020
Infant	\$67.56	\$61.74	\$65.49	\$74.29	10%(\$6.73)
Toddler	\$49.77	\$49.15	\$52.23	\$55.78	12% (\$6.01)
Preschool	\$44.17	\$43.73	\$46.68	\$47.63	7.8%(\$3.46)

Annual full time cost to attend licensed child care, 2020

Age Group	2020
Infant	\$16,443 to \$23,939
Toddler	\$10,513 to \$20,880
Preschool	\$9,012 to \$18,539
School age (before and after school only, does not include summer care) ¹²	\$2,685 to \$5,364

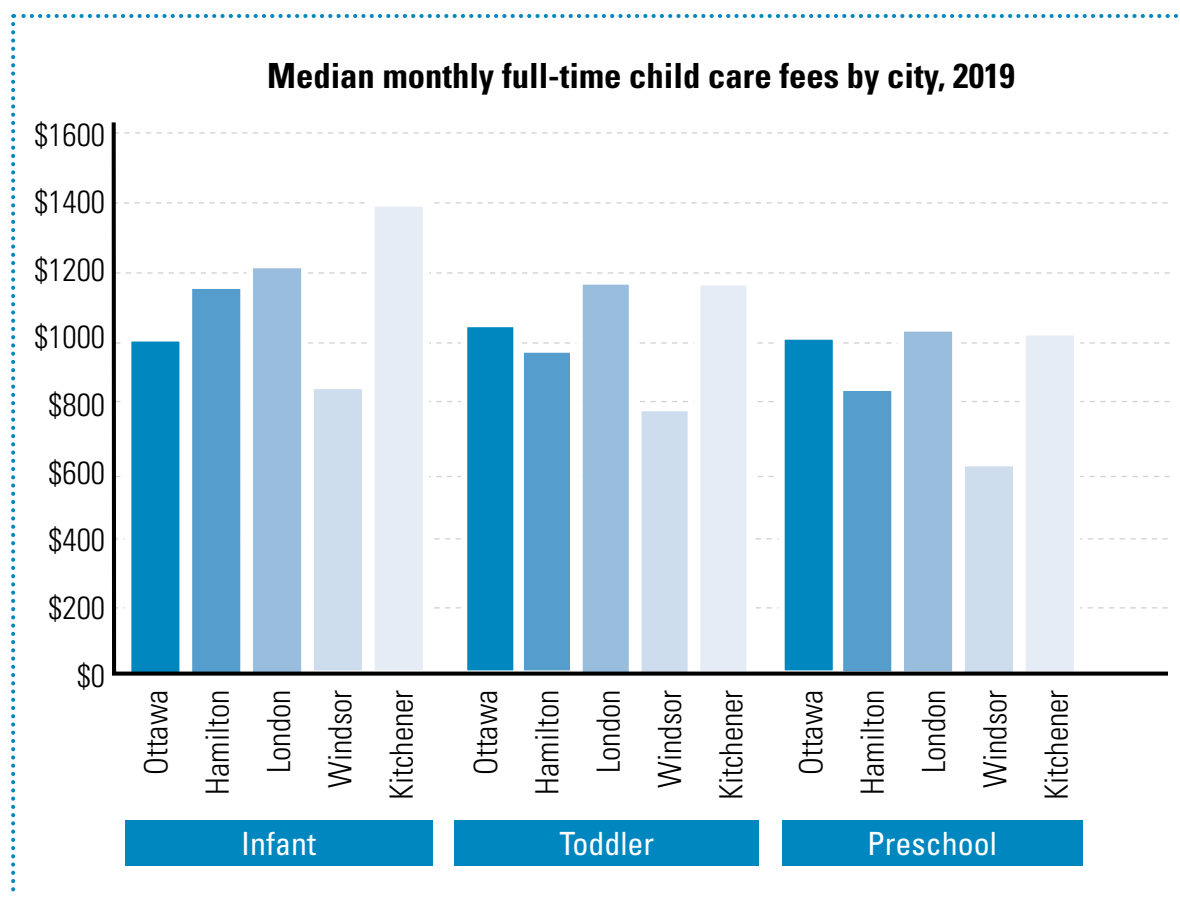
Range of parent fees for full day care, per day 2020



"The cost of child care is a factor in our decision to have only one child. While we can afford one child care fee, we could not reasonably afford to have two kids in daycare." - Parent

How do Waterloo Region fees compare to other municipalities?

A survey completed by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in 2019²⁹ shows how child care rates in the City of Kitchener compare to similar sized cities in Ontario, as shown in the graph below. The City of Kitchener has the highest infant fees as well as the second highest toddler and preschool fees in comparison to the other four cities. Data from the rest of Waterloo Region was not collected as part of this survey, but local fee analysis reveals there are no significant differences between Kitchener and the rest of Waterloo Region in terms of fees.



Is licensed child care affordable for families?

Affordability is a significant barrier to families accessing licensed child care. To manage the high cost of licensed child care, parents identified that they have left the workforce or reduced their hours of work, used unlicensed child care, and have had fewer children.

In 2021, **47%** of parents said that licensed child care was not affordable.

Licensed child care is considered unaffordable for surveyed parents of all income levels, including those with a household income of \$100,000 or more. In *Affordable for All: Making Licensed Child Care Affordable in Ontario*, economist Dr. Gordon Cleveland indicates that for child care to be considered affordable it must cost less than 10 per cent of a family's after-tax income and is completely unaffordable if it costs more than 20 per cent of the after-tax family income. This would mean that a Waterloo Region family would need an after-tax income of at least \$160,000 to find centre-based infant child care for one infant affordable. However, in 2016, Waterloo Region's median family income before tax was \$117,324.³⁰



A family will spend up to **\$120,000** on child care expenses for one child between ages 1 and 12, based on 2020 rates with no inflation (Note 1).



Note 1: This calculation is based on full-time licensed child care costs in Waterloo Region from ages 1 to 4 and before and after school and summer care costs for ages 4 to 12.



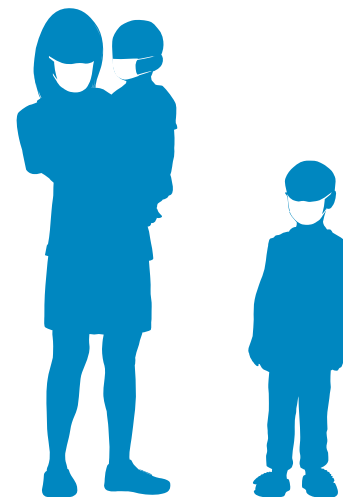
Surveyed parents reported the following impacts of child care costs on their household finances:

- **43%** indicated they are unable to save money
- **36%** stated they are unable to afford luxuries such as vacations
- **27%** said it increases family debt
- **26%** are unable to make larger purchases (such as a car or house)
- **24%** indicated that they are unable to place their child(ren) in other activities

“Child care costs mean I would lose money to go to work (have to pay more than I would make in income).” - Parent

For many decades EYCC operators and educators, experts in the sector, and families have advocated for a national child care system that would meet families’ needs and improve the affordability, availability, and accessibility of child care across Canada. In April 2021, the

government of Canada announced \$30 billion in new investment over the next five years to support the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care strategy. This national child care plan would significantly reduce child care fees to an average of \$10 dollars a day. As of January 2022, Ontario has not yet signed a bi-lateral agreement with the federal government. A national early learning and child care program has the potential to make significant impacts and provide new investment into the EYCC system that is needed to support recovery from the pandemic and Canada’s economic renewal.



Studies show that universal child care contributes to higher levels of employment (particularly for women), higher levels of education, and more equitable health and wellbeing across the community. In addition, children who regularly participate in EYCC programs have higher graduation rates, are ready for learning, and develop strong social skills.³¹

“The cost! It shouldn’t have to cost a fortune to send my child to a quality and safe place for care.” - Parent

A robust system of accessible, high-quality, affordable, inclusive child care services would remove many systemic barriers impacting the access to child care and inclusion of underserved communities, low-income and visible minorities, young people, new immigrants, people with disabilities, and those who are precariously employed.

What is child care fee subsidy?

Child care fee subsidy is available to provide financial assistance to eligible families to help pay for licensed child care costs for children up to age 12. Child care fee subsidy is available to families who meet financial eligibility criteria (which are set by the Province) and who require child care for one of the following reasons:

- Parent is employed or going to school,
- Child has special or social needs, or
- Parent has an illness/disability.

“My family is in that middle spot where daycare is too expensive but I make just enough to not have any access to support or subsidies.” - Parent

In Waterloo Region, parents in receipt of fee subsidy can apply to any licensed program with a Purchase of Service Agreement with the Region and have either the full or partial amount of their child care costs covered. Fee subsidy is available for licensed centre programs, licensed home based child care programs, before and after school programs (through School Boards and licensed child care programs), and approved summer camps. As of September 30, 2021 all but five local licensed EYCC Operators had active Purchase of Service Agreements.

Families currently receiving fee subsidy also indicated that without fee subsidy they would not be able to afford licensed child care, would look for cheaper child care options, or consider having family, friends, or a neighbour provide care.

In 2021, \$20 million dollars of the Region’s early years and child care budget is being dedicated to the child care fee subsidy and there is no waiting list to access the program.

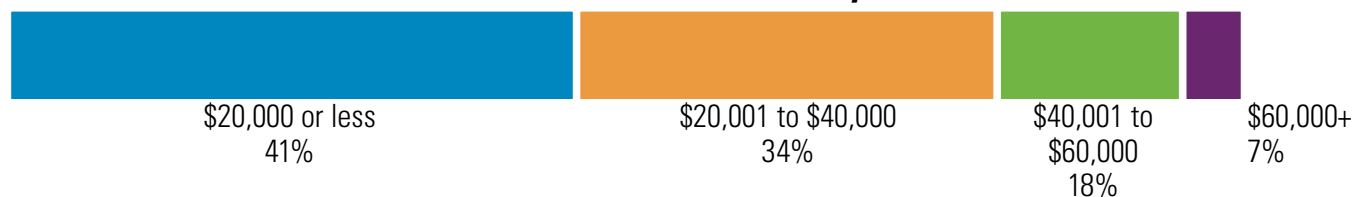
“The cost of child care is a factor in our decision to have only child. While we can afford one child care fee, we could not reasonably afford to have two kids in daycare.” - Parent

Child care fee subsidy	2017	2018	2019	2020
Average number of children receiving child care subsidy per month	2,836	2,970	3,300	2,745
Per cent of families receiving subsidy that are lone-parent families	78%	76%	72%	71%
Per cent of families receiving subsidy with an income of less than \$20,000	48%	46%	45%	41%

In 2020, the EYCC system was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as the Province mandated child care centres to close for at least 25 per cent of the year. Many child care programs had reduced capacity when they re-opened and experienced a temporary decrease in the demand for their program because of the pandemic. Between 2019 and 2020 there was a 16.8 per cent reduction in average number of children per month in receipt of subsidy. In 2022 it is anticipated the demand for child care fee subsidy will return to pre-pandemic levels.

“Higher income families have access to higher quality nursery schools and child care.” - Parent

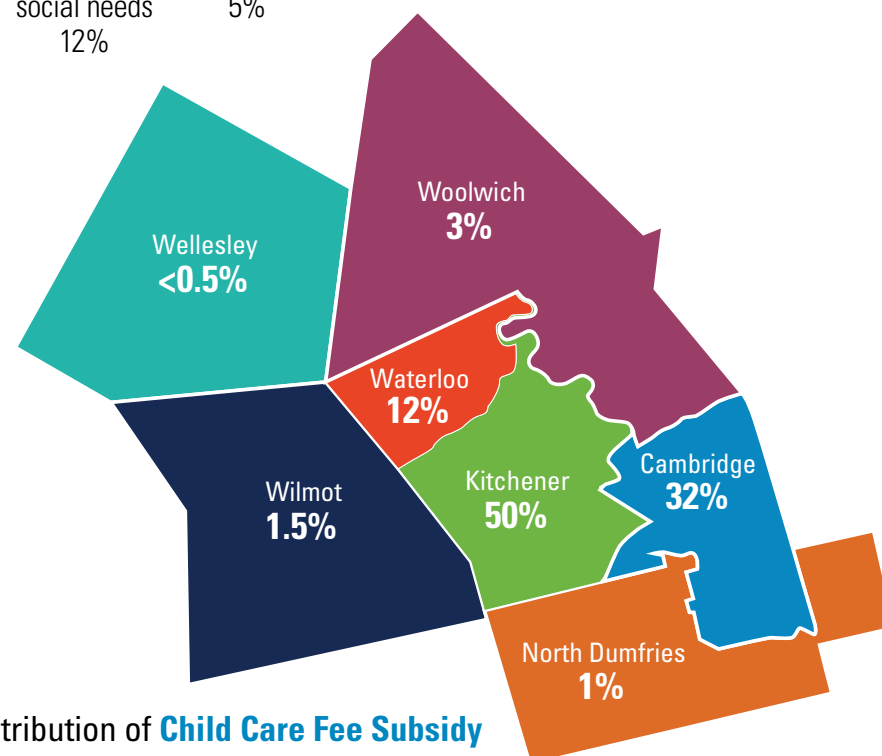
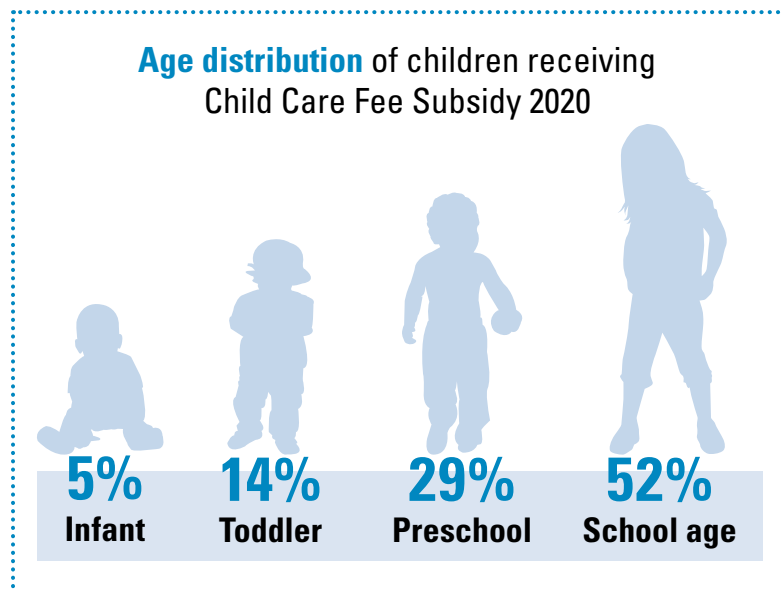
Income distribution of families on the Child Care Fee Subsidy caseload 2020



Reasons families receiving subsidy are using child care 2020



Age distribution of children receiving Child Care Fee Subsidy 2020



Distribution of **Child Care Fee Subsidy** by municipality in 2020



2020 Quick Facts

An average of **2,745** children receive child care subsidy per month

71% of families accessing subsidy are lone-parents

41% of families that received subsidy have a net income of **\$20,000** or less

How can fee subsidy be improved?

There is a need for greater promotion of the resources available to families to support access to EYCC system. Seventeen per cent of surveyed parents indicated that they were not aware of child care fee subsidy and based on their reported household income, they may be eligible for financial assistance. Community partners also identified that many families are unaware of resources, especially new immigrants. They also suggested intentional outreach in low-income neighbourhoods and with organizations serving Indigenous, Black, and other racialized and marginalized families, to increase awareness of available resources.

"Before receiving the subsidy I was going to move to be closer to family to help with care. I am grateful". - Parent

Income eligibility threshold amounts for child care fee subsidy have not been increased by the Province since 2005. This has led to fewer middle income households being eligible for child care fee subsidy. These households then spend a high proportion of their income on child care.

"If not for the subsidy, all of my pay cheque would go toward child care, I would be losing money by working." - Parent



How does affordability impact children?

- Though cost is not an indicator of quality, typically lower cost options are provided in unlicensed home based environments where there is no oversight to monitor and support child development.
- Parents experience stress associated with the financial burden of paying for child care. Stress can impact a parent's mental health and wellbeing which can impact their interactions with their child.
- The significant cost of licensed child care means that families disposable income is reduced and children are unable to access other recreational opportunities.



Planning considerations



- Without new ongoing funding, there is limited ability to reduce fees to established affordability thresholds. Significant new investments, such as the announced Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan, are critical to supporting affordability.
- Child care fee subsidy will continue to be essential in supporting equity within the EYCC system after the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan is implemented, given that the majority of families receiving fee subsidy currently pay less than \$10 per day.
- Funding to support significant reductions in child care fees must be indexed to inflation or otherwise increased annually to ensure that affordability is maintained over time.
- To maximize impacts of new affordability investments, the funding approach for implementing system-wide fee reductions should prioritize operating expenses related to quality (e.g., educator compensation) and addressing system and family needs (e.g., serving younger age groups, locations in underserved neighbourhoods). New accountability mechanisms are needed to ensure investments achieve intended goals.





Quality

Improving quality in the early years and child care system

Introduction

High quality EYCC plays an important role in healthy child development and improving quality of life. Over the past decade, research has consistently linked the positive impacts that high quality EYCC programs have on children's cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development.³² Conversely, low quality early learning and child care can cause harm and negatively impact children.³³ Research shows that approximately 15 per cent of Canadian children in school need costly special education supports. Two years of quality EYCC lowers special education placement in school by 40 per cent to 60 per cent for children with cognitive risk and 10 per cent to 30 per cent for children with social or behavioural risk.³⁴ High quality EYCC also supports families to work or go to school, which contributes to the local the economy, promotes lifelong well-being and increases social equity.³⁵

"The importance of quality for child development, wellbeing and happiness cannot be overstated. [Quality early childhood education and care] can have significant economic and social benefits through its effects on child development. Conversely, poor quality ECEC fails to meet the human rights test of 'in the best interests of the child' and, indeed, may even be harmful."³⁶ - Child Care in Canada by 2020: A Vision and a Way Forward.



What makes high quality EYCC programs?

The Ministry of Education created How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years to strengthen EYCC program quality.³⁷ This professional learning resource is intended to inspire and support educators in the delivery of high quality EYCC programs. How Does Learning Happen? sets out a shared understanding of children, families, and educators, which values and builds on their strengths and abilities. Children and parents are viewed as competent, capable, curious, and rich in potential and their diverse social, cultural, and linguistic perspectives are valued. Educators are co-learners and reflective professionals who are rich in experience. Critical reflection, learning, and growth are foundational to high quality EYCC programs.

There are many elements that create quality EYCC programs. In addition to meeting and maintaining provincial standards set out in the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, high quality EYCC programs have process and structural quality elements. Structural quality provides a foundation and is linked to process quality.

Structural quality includes:

- Purposefully designed child-centred indoor and outdoor environments that are intentionally designed with open-ended materials.
- Small group sizes for children and high educator to child ratios.
- Well trained Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE) .
- Good working conditions for educators, resulting in low turnover.
- Educators regularly engage in continuous professional learning, reflective practice and collaborative inquiry to expand their knowledge and skills and support continuous quality improvement.



Process quality includes:

- Cultivating authentic, caring relationships and connections to create a sense of belonging between children, educators, and families.
- Engaging children in active, creative, and meaningful exploration, play, and inquiry.
- Nurturing children's emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development in a holistic manner.
- Fostering children's communication and expression.
- Welcoming families and providing opportunities for meaningful participation.
- Recognizing and responding to diversity, inclusion, and equity.
- Educators are co-learners, learning with and from children.
- Children's learning and thinking is made visible.



How do parents and operators define quality?

In recent engagement, both parents and operators agreed that the most important element of quality in child care is a warm and positive relationship between the educator and child. Good communication and inclusive programs were the second and third most important elements of quality. Parents and operators also identified the following components that support quality:

- Low educator turnover,
- Fair educator compensation,
- Educators who are RECEs,
- A program philosophy/curriculum that supports child development,
- Low number of children per room, and
- Safe activities and equipment.

However, 63 per cent of parents did not know about the continuous quality improvement program Early Years Engage that supports EYCC to improve the quality of their program. Further promotion of the quality improvement work of the EYCC system is needed to strengthen parents' awareness and understanding.

Is quality consistent across the EYCC system?

As the system manager, Children's Services is responsible to ensure that all local early years and child care services and service providers meet a high standard of quality and safety. When high quality is consistent across the system, children accessing these programs receive the high quality experience they deserve. Unfortunately, that is not the case in Waterloo Region. Just under half of child care operators and two-thirds of parents reported that quality is inconsistent across the EYCC system. In addition, staff from community agencies that spend time in licensed child care centres note that there is a wide range of quality in Waterloo Region. Operators and parents also identified key areas where the consistency of quality can be improved including:

- Increasing educator wages and improving working conditions,
- Reducing the frequent turnover of educators,
- Lowering child to educator ratios,
- Creating a common definition of quality with clear guidelines,
- Supporting programs to deepen their understanding of How Does Learning Happen? and apply the learnings,
- Increasing accountability of all child care operators in Waterloo Region to participate in quality improvement activities and to demonstrate increased quality indicators,
- Increasing selection and assortment of healthy nutritious food,
- Improving communication between parents and educators, and
- Increasing the amount of outdoor time and variety of open-ended play materials.

The inconsistency of quality across EYCC programs highlights the need to enhance and deepen quality improvement work so that children and families have access to high quality programs, regardless of where they attend.

How are RECE wages connected with a high-quality EYCC system?

The training, knowledge, and competencies of Registered Early Childhood Educators are distinct and unique from other professions. The ECE Act defines the practice of early childhood education as the planning and delivery of inclusive play-based learning and care programs for children in order to promote the well-being and holistic development of children, and includes: delivery of programs to children 12 years or younger, assessment of the programs and of the progress of children in them, and communication with parents or persons with legal custody of children in programs to improve the development of the children such other services or activities as may be prescribed by the regulations.³⁸

A qualified, stable, and well-compensated workforce, supported through continuous professional learning, and good working conditions is the foundation of high quality EYCC programs. The EYCC sector is facing a workforce crisis with all programs reporting significant difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified staff. Licensed child care settings in particular have the lowest retention rate of any EYCC employment setting.³⁹

"I think the staff work very hard and have an extremely important job. I wish they were paid more." - Parent

In 2020, the salary for RECEs in Waterloo Region ranged from \$14.00 per hour to \$38.43 per hour, with a median wage of \$21.14. The wages identified in the table below do not include the Provincial Child Care Wage Enhancement. Wage Enhancement (including the Home Child Care Enhancement Grant) is a provincial program started in 2015, which provides up to an additional \$2 per hour plus benefits for eligible child care program staff working in licensed centre-based child care and up to \$20 per day for home child care caregivers. The purpose of this program is to reduce the gap between RECEs working for the Boards of Education and those working in licensed child care and to support recruitment and retention of child care professionals. This median salary increase did not keep pace with the rate of inflation over the same time period. Research shows that low or insufficient wages in EYCC leads to higher staff turnover, fewer RECEs attracted to work in the field, inconsistency for children, and overall lower quality of care.⁴⁰

2020 Hourly Wages for all Licensed Child Care Centre Staff

Position	Lowest	Highest	Median
RECE	\$14.00	\$38.43	\$21.14
Supervisor	\$16.00	\$54.95	\$30.00
Non-RECE program staff	\$14.00	\$36.63	\$17.00
Cook	\$14.50	\$31.29	\$18.48

Between 2018 and 2020 the median salary in Waterloo Region for an RECE increased by **68 cents** an hour.



How are auspice and the quality of child care connected?

The majority of licensed child care centres in Waterloo Region are not-for-profit organizations. Research has indicated that public and not-for-profit child care centres are of higher quality than for-profit centres.⁴¹ The factors that impact quality are fair wages, access to professional learning, higher educator retention, and good working conditions. Research has shown that in order to make a profit, for-profit organizations are more likely to pay lower wages, hire less qualified and educated staff, and decrease staffing costs wherever possible which results in poorer working conditions thereby causing higher educator turnover.⁴²

“Our community has many wonderful non-profit child care centers and quality is pretty consistent across those. There are a few for profit centers and I believe the quality in those centers to be lower.” - Parent



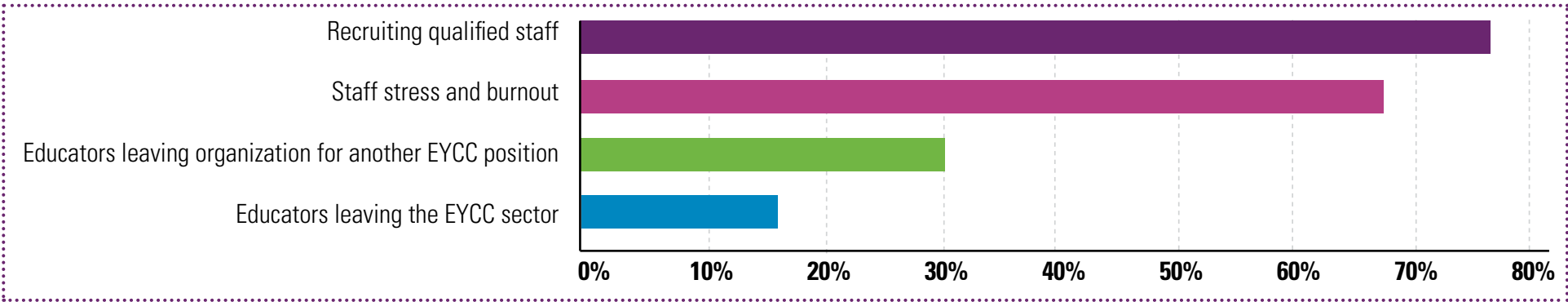
“If we can provide professional pay and decent work for educators we’ll have lower turnover rates and higher quality. It’s also easier to attract new ECEs when you have a stable, supported team in place.” - Operator

How has COVID-19 impacted the workforce?

The EYCC workforce has always experienced challenges, primarily due to low compensation and working conditions. However, the cumulative impacts of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic have intensified the workforce challenges. Operators report additional challenges in the workforce such as: educator stress and burnout, high educator turnover, labour shortages, difficulty recruiting qualified staff, new RECE graduates not interested in working in licensed

child care, and educators leaving the sector in greater numbers. The EYCC system was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and is still responding to rapid and continuous health and safety policy and procedure changes on top of their regular work of maintaining a nurturing and developmentally appropriate and safe environment for children. Many programs in Waterloo Region and across the province continue to have reduced capacity due to staff shortages and have limited capacity to provide time for staff planning or professional learning.

Waterloo Region EYCC Operator most commonly identified workforce issues



How can workforce issues be improved?

“Staff turnover, poorly paid staff means lots of staff turn-over and lack of consistency for children.” - Parent

Research has shown that educators with higher pay and higher qualifications are more likely to interact with children in a stimulating and nurturing way.⁴³

To address the issues of low wages and staff retention, other provinces in Canada

have implemented a competitive wage grid benchmarked against other comparable positions. Some other ideas that child care operators and community partners had to address workforce challenges include:

- Increase funding provided for wages and benefits,
- Increase funding to support mental health and wellness,
- Develop a strategy to increase awareness of EYCC career opportunities,
- Enhance access to opportunities to upgrade skills and professional learning, and
- Develop a strategy to improve professional recognition of Early Childhood Educators in Waterloo Region.

When operators were asked if participation in Early Years Engage improves the quality of their program, 49% agreed, 39% were neutral, 10% disagreed, while 2% were unsure.



What resources exist to support quality across the EYCC system?

As the CMSM, Children’s Services plays a significant role in supporting capacity building and quality improvement for the EYCC system. All EYCC operators with a Purchase of Service Agreement with the Region of Waterloo are required to participate in Early Years Engage. Early Years Engage is the Region’s continuous quality improvement program that works with EYCC partners to continuously improve early years and child care in Waterloo Region.



Moving forward, Children’s Services will be enhancing Early Years Engage and continuous quality improvement supports in the following areas:

- Implementing a new quality measurement approach to allow the Region, as System Manager, to increase accountability for continuous quality improvement and measurable quality outcomes.
- Increasing quality improvement and capacity building supports (e.g., coaching, training) for the EYCC community, offered by the PRC through Conestoga College.
- Providing grants for community child care operators to support their quality-improvement priorities.

Focused work to improve the equity and responsiveness of the EYCC system and programs is closely linked with continuous quality improvement, and an equity lens will be used in the development and evaluation of supports.



The Early Childhood Professional Resource Centre (PRC) at Conestoga College is a resource to improve quality and is designed to meet the diverse needs of the EYCC system through the provision of professional learning opportunities and pedagogical supports. Early years professionals have access to continuous professional learning activities (including workshops and networking opportunities), educational resources, self-assessment and learning tools, pedagogical support, and a lending library of toys and equipment. In addition, early years professionals have access to work stations, office equipment and meeting space.

Continuous professional learning is an integral component of quality. Surveyed operators shared the different ways that their organizations support educators' professional learning including: supporting full or partial costs to attend training, offering internal learning opportunities, and offering paid time off to attend professional development. When operators were asked about what top three professional learning opportunities would support their staff do their job better, they indicated the following:

- 45% supporting children's self-regulation
- 29% understanding how to provide culturally-relevant programming
- 29% providing developmentally appropriate (research-based) programming

Planning considerations



- It is critical that all investments in new child care spaces, such as through the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan, are tied to meeting quality benchmarks to ensure that child care supports positive outcomes for children.
- The EYCC system is facing unprecedented workforce challenges, and new strategies to recruit and retain staff are necessary to maintain current capacity and create new capacity.
- Workforce strategies must address wages, the most significant root cause of workforce issues, to ensure long-term impacts to recruitment and retention.
- Increased consistency in quality across different programs is needed to ensure that the benefits of child care are experienced equitably.
- Quality benchmarks and supports must address both structural quality (e.g., child care environments) and process quality (e.g., the relationships between children, educators, and families).



Equity and responsiveness

Increasing the responsiveness of the early years and child care system

Introduction

EYCC programs and services play a vital role in supporting equity, inclusion, and diversity in the early years and in the broader community. However, existing policies, programs and structures in the EYCC system may unintentionally disadvantage certain children and families, including Indigenous, Black and racialized families, LGBTQ2+ and families living in lower income, families with a child with special needs, and French language minorities. The EYCC system must critically reflect on how programs and services are provided and work towards removing systemic barriers and obstacles that impact a child's ability to fully participate and benefit from high-quality EYCC programs and services.

What does an equitable EYCC system look like?

The College of Early Childhood Educators Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice identifies equity as “a state in which personal and social circumstances are not obstacles to being included and supported to achieve equal educational outcomes and well-being among all children. An early years’ environment that is equitable recognizes, values, and builds on the diversity of each child and family.”

In an equitable EYCC system:

- Systemic barriers are identified and removed.
- All children and families can fully participate in high quality, affordable child care in their preferred location.
- All children and families are viewed as capable, competent, curious, and rich in potential.
- Families’ diverse social, cultural, and linguistic perspectives are valued and reflected in programming.
- Supports are provided to families who face barriers to accessing the EYCC system.



What are the systemic barriers to accessing the EYCC system?

Research has shown that not all families have the same access to EYCC programs and that systemic barriers exist particularly for Indigenous, Black and racialized families, families living in lower income, families with children with special needs, and families with parents who identify as LGBTQ2+. Through engagement with families, EYCC providers, and community partners a number of systemic barriers that affect a family's ability to fully participate and benefit from high-quality early learning programs and services were identified, including:

- A lack of culturally responsive EYCC programs including Indigenous-led programming
- Unequal distribution of EYCC programs across neighbourhoods and municipalities
- A lack of diversity among EYCC staff
- Few programs offering services and supports in languages other than English, including for registration and waitlist processes
- Lack of accessible EYCC programs for children and parents with physical disabilities
- Reliance on technology to access information about EYCC programs and register for programs
- Limited EYCC program hours, particularly for centre-based programs
- Literacy requirements related to child care waitlists and application processes
- Lack of awareness of existing EYCC programs and supports, including child care fee subsidy
- Lack of responsive care for some children with special needs

How do parents experience equity in EYCC system?

Through the 2021 parent survey, parents shared their unique experiences of equity, diversity, and inclusion in the EYCC system and suggestions for improvement. The majority of surveyed parents (80 per cent) believed that they received fair and equal treatment regardless of their ability, race, ethnicity, economic status, sexual orientation, gender, religious beliefs, and language at EYCC programs. However, only 65 per cent of parents reported that differences in ability, family structure, cultural practices and religious beliefs were valued, celebrated, and welcomed in the EYCC system.

It is important to note that these experiences are not universal, particularly for families who are Indigenous, Black and racialized. Only 61 per cent of Black parents believed that they received fair and equal treatment in EYCC settings and 21 per cent of Black parents indicated they did not feel comfortable accessing EYCC programs and services compared to only nine per cent of white parents. Parents also identified that EYCC program staff did not reflect enough diversity in gender identity, race, culture, sexual orientation, language or ability. Unfortunately, further data disaggregation for Indigenous and other racialized families was not possible due to low response rates for these groups.

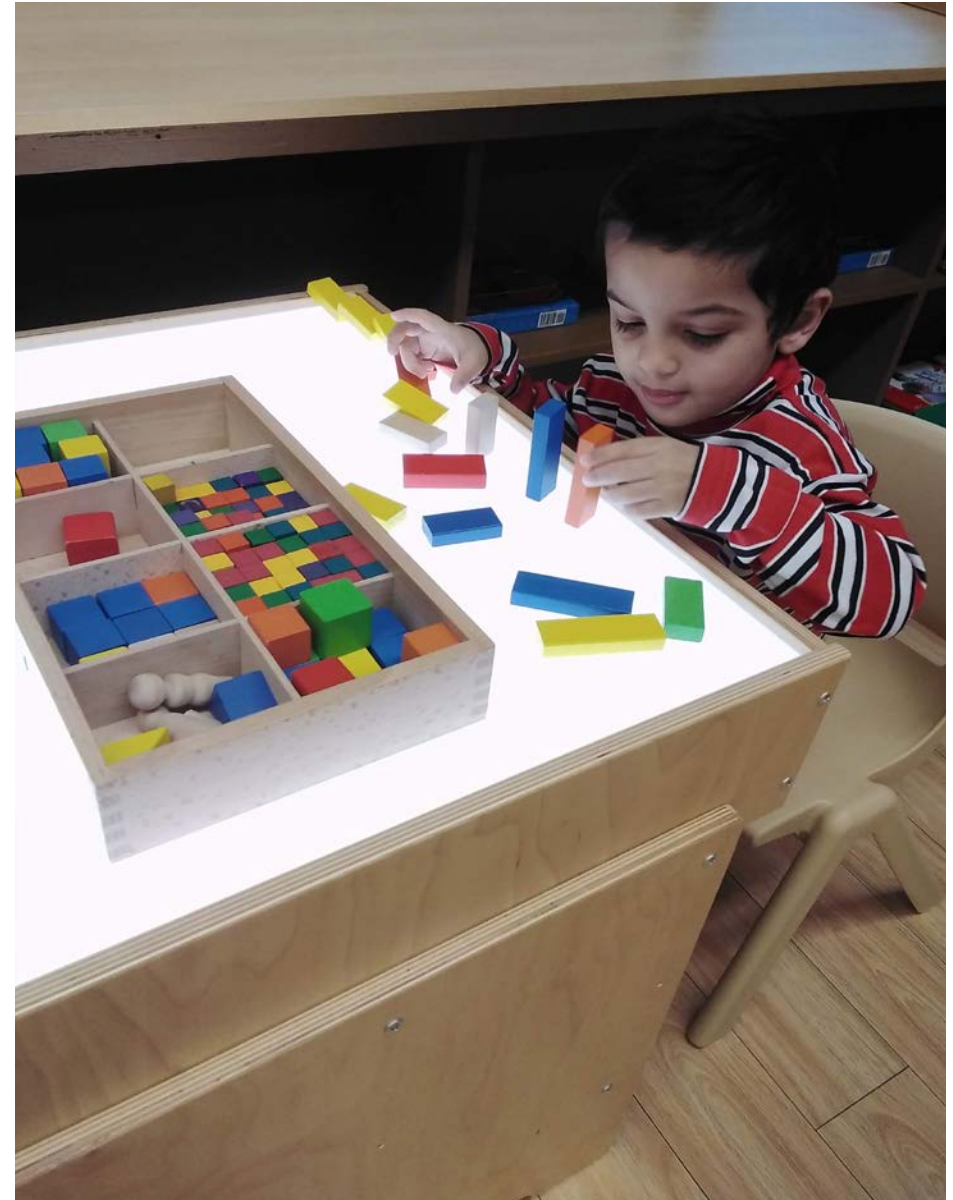
“There is no attempt from child care providers to get to know our culture or celebrate our new year or even simply talk about our background/ culture with other kids.” - Parent



Parents living with lower income were also less likely to feel like they had received fair and equitable treatment in the EYCC system and were less comfortable accessing EYCC programs and services compared to families with higher incomes. Parents also commented on equity issues with the quality of care, and discrepancies between families with lower incomes being unable to access higher quality centres and care options in the region. Families living with lower incomes also identified more challenges securing a child care space, including working non-standard hours or having precarious employment.

Similarly, parents of children with special needs were less likely to report that they had received fair and equal treatment and were less comfortable accessing EYCC programs and services compared to parents without a child with special needs. These parents reported having less access to child care compared to other families and some parents noted challenges finding an EYCC program that would accept their child or that was able to meet their child's needs.

Children's Services will be conducting further intentional engagement with Indigenous and racialized families, collecting new data and conducting further data disaggregation to better understand the experiences of Indigenous, Black, racialized, and other marginalized families in the EYCC system.



"It's understandable it's a female dominant role, however, I don't know of any BIPOC RECE at my centre. As a person of colour, it can be challenging when your ethnicity is not visible." - Parent

"The child care centre staffing does not reflect the diversity of the children and families utilizing the system." - Parent

How can Children's Services support equity in the EYCC system?

The current EYCC system in Waterloo Region is not equitable for all children and families. As the CMSM, Children's Services has the responsibility to work

"We are not completely confident that all newcomer families are being served well." - EYCC provider

with EYCC stakeholders and parents to identify existing systemic barriers and remove them. Through the development of the System Plan, a number of actions to improve equity in the EYCC system have been identified, including:

- Purposeful engagement with Indigenous, Black and racialized families, and other marginalized families to identify systemic barriers.
- Increasing access to the EYCC system for Indigenous, Black and racialized families by removing systemic barriers and providing new supports to families to assist with access.
- Providing supports to address challenges with recruiting and hiring qualified staff that are reflective of diverse populations.
- Supporting the creation and delivery of professional learning opportunities that address equity, anti-racism, inclusion and diversity across the EYCC system.
- Providing supports to child care programs to identify and remove barriers and create culturally responsive programs that recognize that children learn in ways that are connected to their diverse social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

"The child care centre staffing does not reflect the diversity of the children and families utilizing the system"
- EYCC provider



What resources are available to support children with special needs?

The inclusion of children with special needs into the EYCC system is central to supporting healthy child development, active participation, and cultivating feelings of belonging. Child care supervisors and educators play important roles in supporting children with special needs, particularly in creating a culture of inclusion and learning environments where all children are included and able to fully participate. Research shows that all children benefit from inclusive child care, as it promotes respect and provides families supportive environments that value diversity.⁴⁴

The Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) Collaborative provides support to licensed child care programs across Waterloo Region for children up to 12 years of age at no cost to families. The SNR Collaborative strives to ensure that all children, regardless of their abilities, are supported to thrive in quality, inclusive early years environments.



All children benefit from being in inclusive environments where they are able to participate and collaborate in meaningful ways and form authentic, caring relationships. - How Does Learning Happen?

KW Habilitation and KidsAbility are funded by Children's Services to provide services through resource consultants, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, as well as behaviour therapists. The services provided may be focused on one child, the whole classroom and/or home environment to promote inclusion including:

- Capacity building and training for staff
- Individual assessments and plans to support child development (e.g., speech and language, occupational therapy, and physiotherapy)
- Information and support to families
- Additional staffing for child care programs
- Transition supports to children who are entering kindergarten.



In 2020, 950 children received SNR services, and a total of 18,085 hours of enhanced classroom supports were provided. The actual number of children served in 2020 was significantly reduced from previous years due to the mandated closure of child care centres, fewer spaces being available when the system re-opened and lower demand for care. In addition, throughout most of 2020, due to COVID-19, Special Needs Resourcing agencies provided mostly virtual supports to child care programs and families.

Special Needs Resourcing (SNR)	2018	2019	2020
Number of children in child care receiving SNR services	1,215	1,537	950
Number of additional staffing hours to provide supports	41,780	44,763	18,085

What are the challenges for children with special needs and their families?

Parents who identified having children with special needs articulated a number of challenges with the EYCC system including: lack of support navigating the system, shortage of responsive, safe, and quality spaces for their children, as well as the capacity of some educators to handle their children's behavioral, social, and emotional needs. Parents of children with special needs also reported that not being able to access the EYCC system contributed to exclusion from social opportunities with other children and sometimes having to leave the workforce to care for their child.

"Having a special needs child with Autism Spectrum Disorder makes me wary of using certain types of care. I was very uncomfortable putting him in a centre with class sizes of 24 kids because I felt he would get lost in the crowd, so I avoided those centres." - Parent

All licensed EYCC programs have access to the services provided by the SNR Collaborative. Ninety-four per cent of operators identified taking some significant actions to improve inclusion of children with special needs. Some examples of actions are: providing inclusive environments, enrolling all children with special needs, fostering a sense of belonging, and investing in professional learning related to inclusion. Operators also identified a number of challenges to being fully inclusive of children with special needs including a lack of funding for additional educator support, educator burnout, difficulty in being responsive to increasingly complex needs, administrative process burdens to access supports, and wait times for some services.

27%
of surveyed parents
were unaware of the
availability of special
needs supports.



When operators were asked what additional supports would allow their organization to be more responsive to children with special needs, they identified the following solutions: more enhanced staffing for children with complex needs, more tools and resources available for educators, educator coaching during and outside of program hours, and more experienced RECEs.

What EYCC programs exist for Francophone children?

Availability of culturally responsive programming is a priority in Waterloo Region. For the Francophone community, having access to French language early learning services is key to preserving culture, language, belonging, and increasing attendance in French-language schools. In 2020, there were 221 spaces in French language centre-based child care. This represents an increase of 47 spaces since 2018. Twenty-four new French language spaces are expected by 2022 as well as the creation of an EarlyON mobile site located in a French-language school.

27% increase in French language spaces in Waterloo Region from 2018 to 2020.



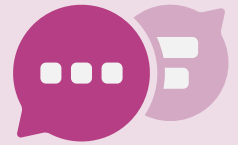
French language child care providers are challenged to recruit and retain enough French speaking qualified educators in their programs. In 2020, the College of Early Childhood Educators indicated that 1,706 RECE members identified as being

Francophone in Ontario. This is not enough RECEs to provide all geographic areas in Ontario adequate access to qualified French speaking educators. Children's Services is committed to working with Francophone partners to meet the needs of this community.

Number of French language centre-based child care spaces



89 surveyed parents identified as being Francophone and have accessed one of the **221 French language child care spaces** in Waterloo Region.



What EYCC programs exist to support Indigenous children?

Children's Services is committed to reconciliation and listening to the Indigenous peoples in Waterloo Region about what early learning and child care services are needed to meet their needs. In 2017, Healing of the Seven Generations completed a needs assessment to expand access to culturally relevant child care and child and family programs. A proposal was submitted to the provincial government and funding was approved to support the creation of an Indigenous-led Child and Family Centre. In 2019, Anishnabeg Outreach opened the first Indigenous-led Child and Family Centre in Waterloo Region. In 2020, all programming was provided virtually for most of the year. "Spirit bundles" containing food, information, clothing, diapers, etc., were created for the unique circumstances of families in need who access the services of Anishnabeg Outreach.

Indigenous partners identified significant barriers to operating Indigenous-led EYCC services. Barriers include lack of affordable space and the recruitment and retention of RECEs who are Indigenous. In 2020, the College of Early Childhood Educators indicated that 591 RECE members identified as being Indigenous in Ontario. This is not enough RECEs to provide all geographic areas in Ontario adequate access to qualified Indigenous educators.

Children's Services is committed to working with Indigenous partners and increasing their access to culturally responsive EYCC programs. EYCC operators identified the need for more professional learning about the unique rights and needs of Indigenous children and their families and how they can be better supported.

Planning considerations



- An equity lens must be applied to all EYCC system policies and practices to consider and address intended and unintended consequences for Indigenous, Black, and racialized families, and other marginalized families.
- All action to address systemic barriers and inequities must be guided by purposeful engagement with Indigenous, Black, and racialized families, and other marginalized families.
- To make the EYCC system more equitable, action and supports are required at system and program levels, and individual educators also require new professional learning opportunities and supports in the area of equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- Improved data collection is needed to support disaggregation of data to better understand the experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized families and other marginalized families. While data is being collected and analyzed, action can still be taken to improve equity of the EYCC system – the lack of data should not be an additional barrier to improvement.



Strategic priorities and actions for 2022-2026

Strategic Priorities and Actions for 2022-2026

Introduction

A strong child care system balances affordability, accessibility, quality, and equity and responsiveness. These four components are closely interconnected - without strategic attention to each component, the full benefits of EYCC investments to children, families and the broader community will not be realized.

The System Plan includes seven strategic priorities supported by 29 actions. They were developed to strategically strengthen all components of the EYCC system (affordability, accessibility, quality, and equity and responsiveness) based on feedback from parents, EYCC operators and community partners, and findings from the environmental scan. The development of priorities was also guided by the Region of Waterloo’s Strategic Imperatives, especially equity and partnerships. In combination, the strategic priorities and actions in the System Plan will create a more balanced and inclusive EYCC system that improves outcomes for children, families and the community.

An implementation plan will be created for each strategic priority and Children’s Services will regularly bring updates to the EYCC system and/or Regional Council to monitor the progress. In addition to the implementation plans, Children’s Services will develop a performance measurement framework to track the progress and impact of the System Plan actions and identify improvement opportunities over the next five years. A mid-point update will be provided to the community regarding the process achieved on System Plan priorities and actions.

This System Plan is intended to be dynamic and adaptable. The needs of the community are changing quickly and new directions from the provincial and federal governments are expected. The System Plan will allow Children’s Services to respond to changes and ensure that continued attention is given to all four components of a strong EYCC system. Over the next five years, the strategic priorities will act as a road map to support Waterloo Region to become a world-class community where all children have access to affordable, responsive, high quality early years and child care services.



1 Advocate for new investments

- a. Advocate for significant new provincial and federal investments in child care affordability. Monitor the progress of a federal Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan and implement any national initiative related to child care.
- b. Work with Provincial and Federal governments to secure additional capital and operating funding to support new child care spaces and expanded EarlyON and Indigenous-led services.
- c. Advocate for increased base funding and the implementation of a provincial wage scale to support professional pay for early years and child care workers.

Why is this important?

- Base ongoing Provincial child care funding levels decreased by a total of \$4.2 million between 2020 and 2022.
- Current funding levels are not adequate to meet the needs of the existing child care system. For example, there is insufficient ongoing funding to provide operating funding to all eligible child care programs in Waterloo Region. Currently, there are 11 programs with approximately 800 licensed spaces not in receipt of operating funding due to insufficient funding.
- To implement substantial changes to the EYCC system in areas such as affordability, growth in the number of spaces, and increased wages for EYCC staff, there must be increased, long-term investment by both provincial and federal governments.



2 Address systemic inequities

- a. Engage with Indigenous, Black and racialized families, and other marginalized families to identify systemic barriers in early years and child care. Address systemic barriers through implementing new and/or revised policies and strategies, supported by ongoing engagement with key stakeholders.
- b. Work with Indigenous community partners to further implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations in early years and child care settings.
- c. Create and implement a data strategy in collaboration with community partners that allows for data disaggregation to enhance the CMSM capacity to better understand the experiences of Indigenous, Black and racialized families, and other marginalized families in the early years and child care system.
- d. Support the development and delivery of new equity and inclusion capacity building supports for early years and child care operators including anti-racism, and the critical examination of the early years pedagogy from an equity, diversity and inclusion lens.
- e. Provide grants for child care organizations to undertake their own initiatives to improve equity and inclusion and address system barriers.
- f. Revise local policy and provide funding to support parents with precarious employment to access licensed child care more equitably.

- Parents, EYCC providers, and community partners identified a number of systemic barriers that prevent Indigenous, Black and racialized families, and other marginalized families from fully participating in high-quality early years and child care programs and services.
- Participation in high quality child care and early years experiences supports children's well-being and development and also increases women's participation in the labour force. When families face significant barriers to accessing the EYCC system, they do not experience these benefits, which leads to further marginalization.
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action identifies many concrete changes within the education system (including EYCC) that are necessary to support Indigenous children and families and advance reconciliation.
- As the CMSM, Children's Services is responsible for leading collaborative work with families and system partners to identify existing systemic barriers in the EYCC system and remove them.
- There are currently limited options to disaggregate data in areas such as child care waitlists and enrollment and child care fee subsidy. Disaggregated data can highlight differences in EYCC experiences for Indigenous, Black and racialized families and other marginalized families so that changes can be made.
- Child care operators and other early years partners identified strong interest in improving equity and inclusion in their programs, but also identified that additional funding to support material purchases and training was needed to enhance the work in this area.

3 Grow and sustain the system

- a. Implement a child care growth strategy identifying priorities for new child care development (home and centre based) to address inequities in access to child care.
- b. Identify short- and long-term priorities to ensure child care program (home and centre based) sustainability. Implement an approach to support sustainability priorities, including relevant funding policies.
- c. Continue to work in partnership with local school boards, Ministry of Education, and other stakeholders to build new child care centres and EarlyON co-located in schools.
- d. Update the EarlyON needs assessment to determine where EarlyON services are most needed and ensure services are responsive to community needs.
- e. Implement a workforce recruitment and retention strategy to sustain the current workforce, grow the number of qualified educators, and attract and support the development of a diverse workforce.

Why is this important?

- Seventy-six percent of neighbourhoods in Waterloo Region are child care deserts and many EYCC programs have long waitlists. If a Federal affordability strategy (e.g., \$10/day child care) is implemented, demand for child care spaces for children ages 0-4 years is expected to rise significantly, and thousands more spaces would be needed.
- Geographic access to child care is inequitable across Waterloo Region. Strategic priorities for growth are needed to ensure that marginalized families have access to high quality, licensed child care.
- COVID-19 has negatively affected the sustainability of EYCC programs through new and increased workforce challenges (e.g., difficulty recruiting and retaining staff), increased expenses to meet public health standards, and decreased enrollment. New short- and long-term supports are needed to ensure sustainability of EYCC programs.
- EarlyON programs have shifted significantly between 2020 and 2021, as a direct result of pandemic service limitations. More information about families' needs and preferences is needed to support continued responsive EarlyON programming.
- Research consistently shows that highly trained, professional, and engaged staff are the cornerstone of high quality EYCC programs. Ongoing challenges related to EYCC staff recruitment and retention have been amplified by the pandemic, and programs identify that staffing issues are now a significant concern for their program. New approaches are needed to address this critical issue.



4 Evaluate outcomes of investments

- a. Implement a new quality measurement approach to strengthen accountability for continuous quality improvement.
- b. Implement new fee subsidy, Licensed Home Child Care Base Funding, and Operating Funding policies that include consistent child care fee standards and wage benchmarks for early years and child care professionals.
- c. Measure outcomes and evaluate effectiveness of special needs and capacity building supports. Based on the results, implement changes to supports.

Why is this important?

- The Ministry of Education establishes and monitors basic health and safety and quality standards; however, further quality measures are needed to address the inconsistencies in quality that are reported by parents, child care operators, and community stakeholders. The existing quality improvement approach requires strengthening to include data measures and a clear accountability framework. New quality improvement supports will also be added (see Strategic Priority 6).
- Local child care funding policies were last significantly reviewed in 2015. Given new investments and potential shifts in provincial and federal funding, changes are needed to ensure consistency across programs and to measure outcomes of funding investments.
- Special Needs Resourcing services were revised starting in 2019 and have been impacted by service restrictions related to the pandemic. An evaluation of current services and approaches is needed to ensure that services continue to respond to the needs of children, families and programs.



5 Enhance stakeholder engagement

- a. Develop a Children's Services Engagement Framework that outlines a consistent, inclusive, transparent approach to community and stakeholder engagement.
- b. Conduct ongoing engagement with a broad representation of parents through a range of strategies, including forums, social media, advisory groups, Engage Waterloo Region, and other platforms.
- c. Engage in ongoing collaborative system planning with community partners, including organizations that support Indigenous, Black and racialized families, local school boards, and the Children and Youth Planning Table.

Why is this important?

- Ongoing engagement with parents, EYCC providers, and new and existing community partners is critical in informing system planning, including implementation. An equity and inclusion lens will be applied to all engagement approaches.
- Historically, Indigenous, Black and other racialized and marginalized families have been underrepresented in Children's Services engagement efforts. New strategies and approaches to support collaboration with diverse families are required to address EYCC system barriers and inequities.



6 Support continuous quality improvement

- a. Work with early years and child care partners, including the Professional Resource Centre at Conestoga College, to provide new quality improvement supports (e.g., coaching, training, pedagogical support) for community child care operators and EarlyON Child and Family Centres.
- b. Implement new quality improvement grants for community child care operators to support their quality improvement priorities such as purchasing high quality classroom materials, making small facility upgrades, and supporting educator professional development.
- c. Implement a professional learning and development strategy to support early childhood educators to maintain and further develop their knowledge and skills, based on relevant research and identified training needs.
- d. Lead local knowledge mobilization initiatives and support evidenced-informed decision making among early years and child care service providers. Build capacity, awareness and understanding of early years research, including the Early Development Instrument (EDI), among community partners.

Why is this important?

- The quality of child care programs significantly impacts child wellbeing and development. Parents, child care operators, and community stakeholders report variable quality of child care programs across Waterloo Region. To strengthen child care quality, new supports for child care operators are needed along with new accountability measures (see Action 4a).
- Child care operators identified that they have limited funding in their existing budgets to support quality improvement activities for staff and purchases to improve the quality of the physical child care environment.
- Research has demonstrated that ongoing training and professional development of child care educators supports high quality child care programs. Approaches to professional development vary significantly across EYCC programs in Waterloo Region, and a new strategy will support improved consistency in opportunities for educators.
- With significant shifts to the EYCC system anticipated over the next five years, building on existing evidence and research will be critical to the effectiveness of new strategies to support positive child and family outcomes.



7 Improve service experiences

- a. Make accessing child care more transparent and equitable and improve the service experience for families through changes to OneList and associated registration policies and processes.
- b. Implement technological solutions to improve parents' experiences accessing child care fee subsidy, including launching a new Parent Portal and electronic document submission.
- c. Increase public awareness of the local early years and child care system through a variety of strategies including new partnerships with community stakeholders that support families (e.g., offering services in the community, promoting EarlyON, SNR and OneList, etc.).

Why is this important?

- Families and community stakeholders consistently report that the child care system is difficult to navigate and that access is inequitable. For example, child care spaces are secured by parents using high-level technology and literacy skills and anticipating child care needs far in advance.
- Lack of awareness of EYCC system services and resources (including EarlyON programs) is a significant barrier to accessing EYCC services and programs for many families. Traditional methods of marketing have not been effective in reaching all families, particularly Indigenous, Black, and racialized families and other marginalized families, and new strategies that are based on an equity lens are needed.





Appendix 1: Data Backgrounder

Demographic profile of children and families in Waterloo Region

Children's Services is responsible for monitoring community trends and demographic changes to inform planning for a system that is relevant and responsive to the community. This demographic profile highlights key population trends, social-economic-environmental data, relevant community trends, EYCC program information, and the analysis of the most recent Early Development Instrument (EDI) results. All data included represents the most recent data that is available in our community and is primarily based on the 2016 Canadian Census, unless otherwise indicated.

COVID-19 has had major impacts on programs and services in Waterloo Region. Many EYCC organizations are reporting significant changes due to program closures, service reductions, and changes to how data is collected due to the pandemic. Understanding our community and how it is changing is critical to understanding the potential demand for EYCC programs and services and where they should be available. The data and analysis throughout this profile represent some of the information used to inform the strategic priorities and actions in the System Plan.

A. Key population and growth trends of children and families

Overall population growth exceeded provincial and national rates

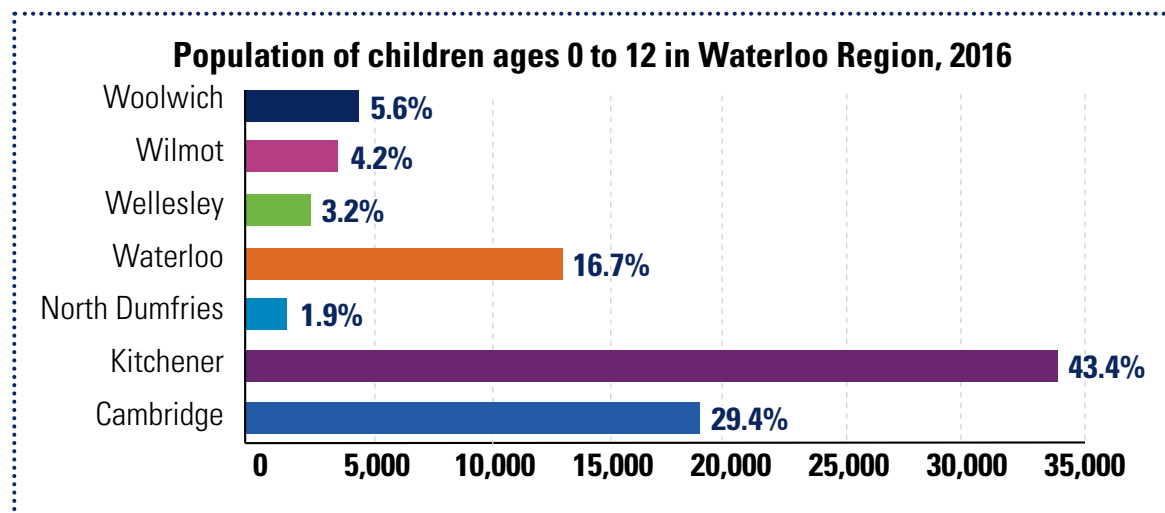
- Waterloo Region is a dynamic and growing community that is composed of three urban cities: Cambridge, Kitchener, and Waterloo and four rural townships: North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot, and Woolwich.
- In 2016, the Region had the 10th highest populous Census Metropolitan Area in Canada and the fourth largest in Ontario with a population of 535,154.⁴⁵
- Between 2011 and 2016, the population of Waterloo Region grew by 28,058 individuals for a population growth of 5.5 per cent. This growth rate surpassed provincial (4.6 per cent) and national (5 per cent) growth. The townships of North Dumfries and Woolwich experienced the largest increase in population growth across Waterloo Region.

2016 Total population in Waterloo Region⁴⁶

	Cambridge	Kitchener	North Dumfries	Waterloo	Wellesley	Wilmot	Woolwich	Total
2016 Population	129,920	233,222	10,215	104,986	11,260	20,545	25,006	535,154
Population Growth	2.5%	6.4%	9.4%	6.3%	5.1%	6.9%	8.0%	5.5%

The child population in Waterloo Region continues to grow

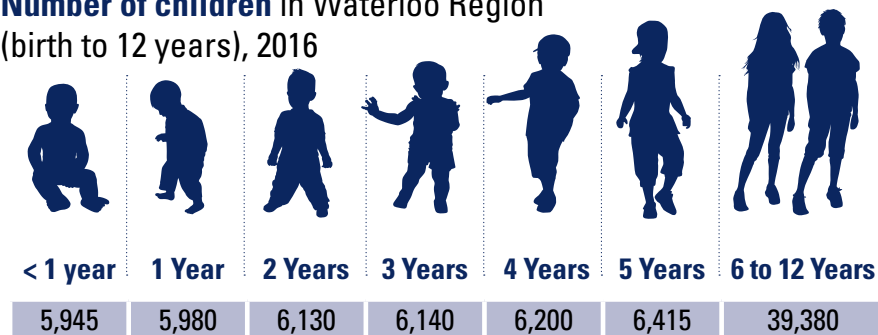
- In 2016, there were 76,190 children ages 0 to 12 years old representing 14.2 per cent of the total population in Waterloo Region.
- From 2011 to 2016, the Waterloo Region 0 to 12 years old child population grew by 3.2 per cent. Although the overall child population grew, for the first time since 2001, there was decrease of 550 (1.8 per cent) children ages 0 to 4 years.

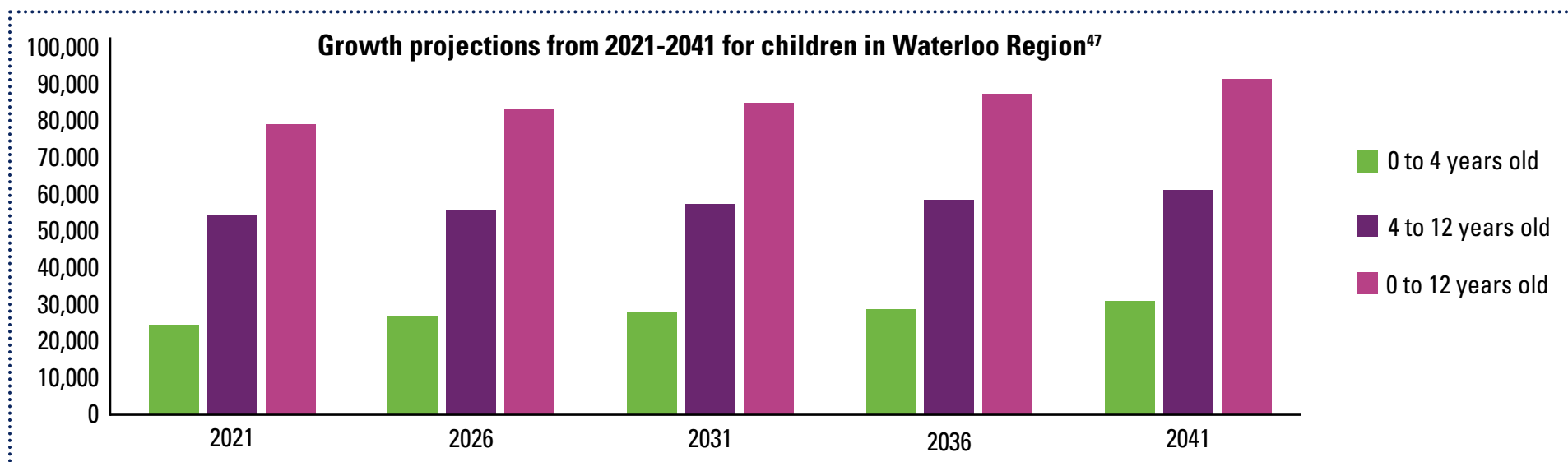


Waterloo Region's child population is projected to increase

- Waterloo Region's child population (0 to 12 years) is projected to increase by 16 per cent or 12,716 children over the next 20 years. Comparatively, Ontario's child population is projected to gradually decrease. Using the 2016 Census and a municipal model for projections, it is projected that in 2021 children account for 78,951 residents in Waterloo Region.

Number of children in Waterloo Region (birth to 12 years), 2016



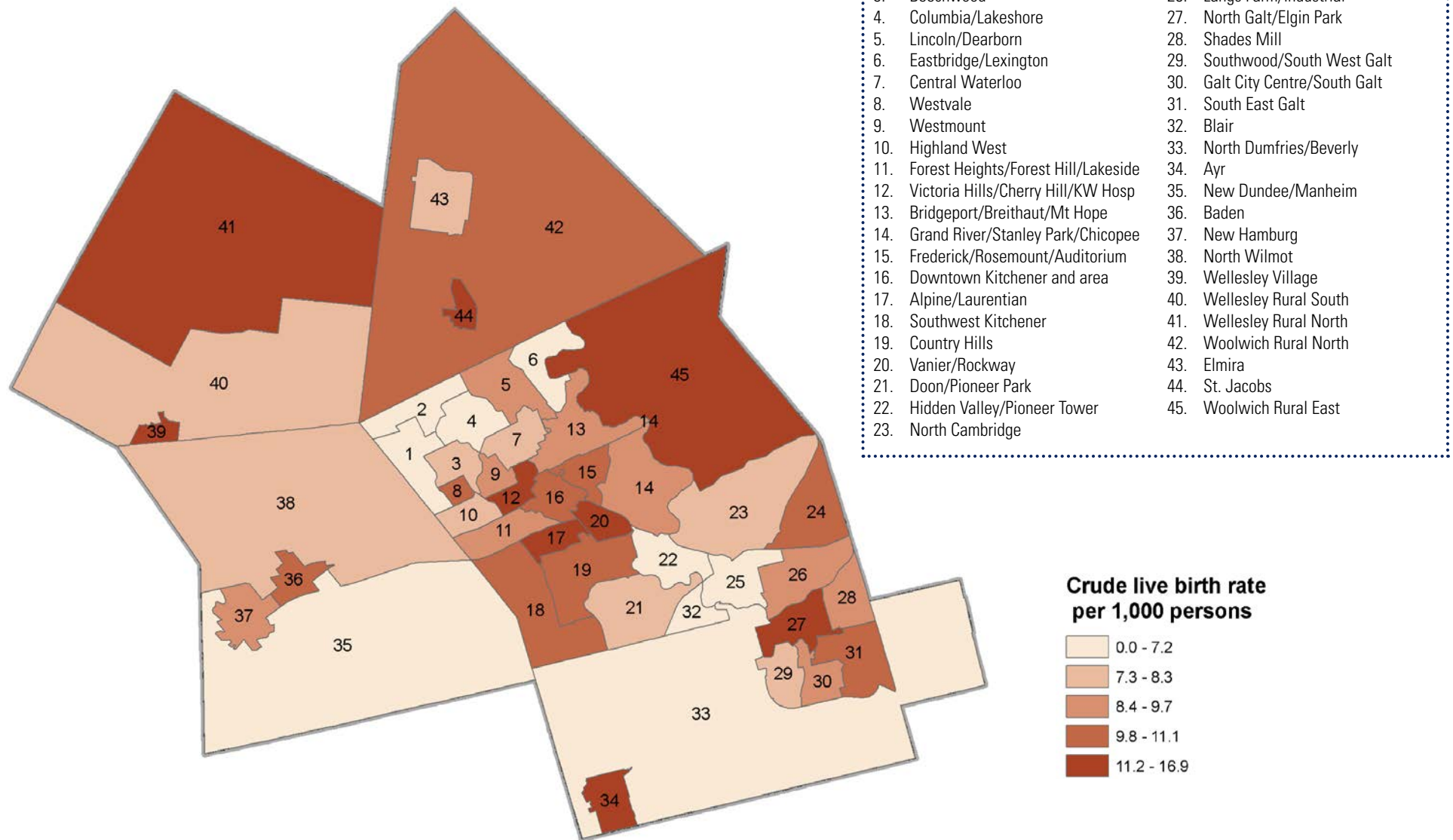


Birth rates in Waterloo Region remain steady⁴⁸

- In 2020, there were 6,077 live births in Waterloo Region, for a birth rate of 9.2 per 1,000 population. Waterloo Region's birth rates since 2017 are slightly higher than Ontario overall. Across Waterloo Region area municipalities, birth rates ranged from 6.9 per 1,000 in North Dumfries to 11.2 per 1,000 in Wellesley.

	Actual live births				Birth rate per 1,000 people			
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2017	2018	2019	2020
Cambridge	1,413	1,394	1,342	1,316	10.4	10.2	9.7	9.3
Kitchener	2,788	2,743	2,632	2,636	11.2	10.7	10.0	9.8
North Dumfries	74	69	98	80	6.9	6.3	8.7	6.9
Waterloo	942	955	880	841	8.4	8.2	7.4	6.8
Wellesley	138	129	131	134	11.7	10.8	11.0	11.2
Wilmot	204	196	195	189	9.5	9.0	9.0	8.7
Woolwich	273	276	264	266	10.5	10.4	9.9	9.8
Waterloo Region	6,116	6,187	6,050	6,077	10.8	10.7	10.2	10.0
Ontario	140,009	138,397	139,529	136,015	10.0	9.7	9.6	9.2

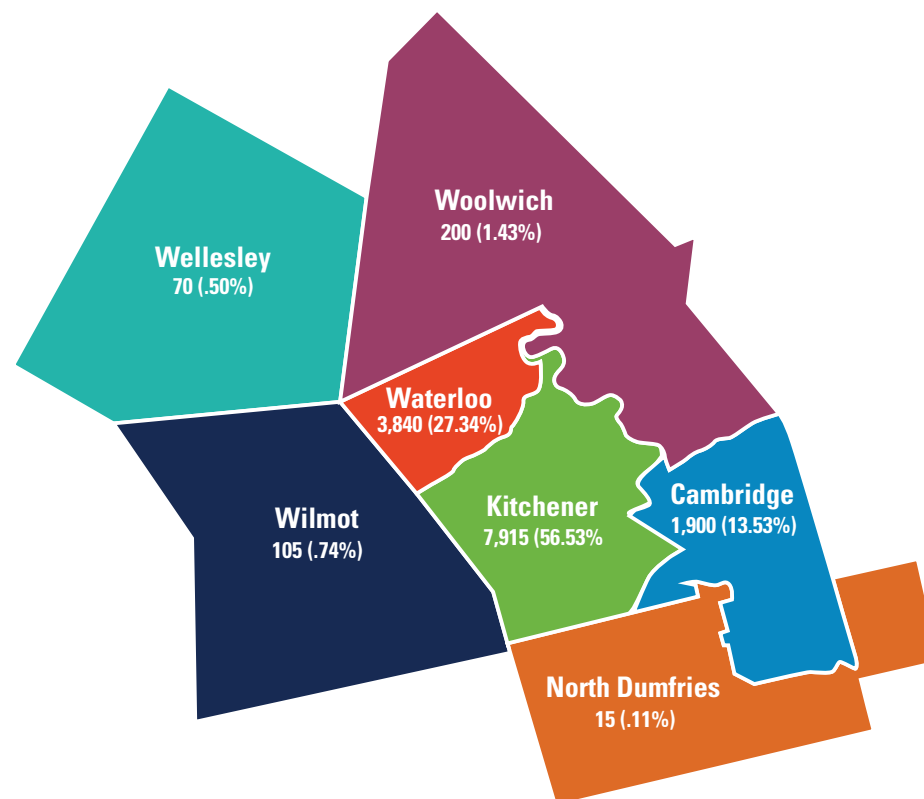
Crude live birth rate by municipality, Waterloo Region, 2020



More immigrants are settling in Waterloo Region

- In 2016, there were 119,335 immigrants living in Waterloo Region and about 7 per cent of children were born outside of Canada. Compared to other Regional municipalities in Ontario, Waterloo Region had the 8th highest proportion of immigrants.⁵⁰
- Between 2011 and 2016, 14,045 new immigrants arrived in Waterloo Region. India, China, Syria, and Iraq were the top four most commonly reported countries of origin. The majority of recent immigrant settled in the three cities, but growing numbers also lived in the rural townships.
- Since 2015, the federal government has increased national immigration targets each year. Between 2017 and Q3 2021, permanent resident admissions in Waterloo Region grew annually with at least 20,310 arrivals in the Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge CMA.
- Over time, the proportion of European immigrants in the Region has decreased, and while the percentage of Waterloo Region immigrants from Asia and Africa has grown, contributing to an increasingly diverse population.
- Immigration is a main source of population growth in Waterloo Region and recently surpassed natural increase. In 2017/2018, 32 per cent of population growth was due to immigration and projections show this will increase. Together with intra-provincial migration this was the highest source.
- Statistics Canada projects that in 2036 up to 58 per cent of Canada's immigrant population could be from Asia while European immigrants will account for only around 15-18 per cent, down from over 30 per cent in 2011. Together first and second generation immigrants could represent nearly one in two people in Canada.

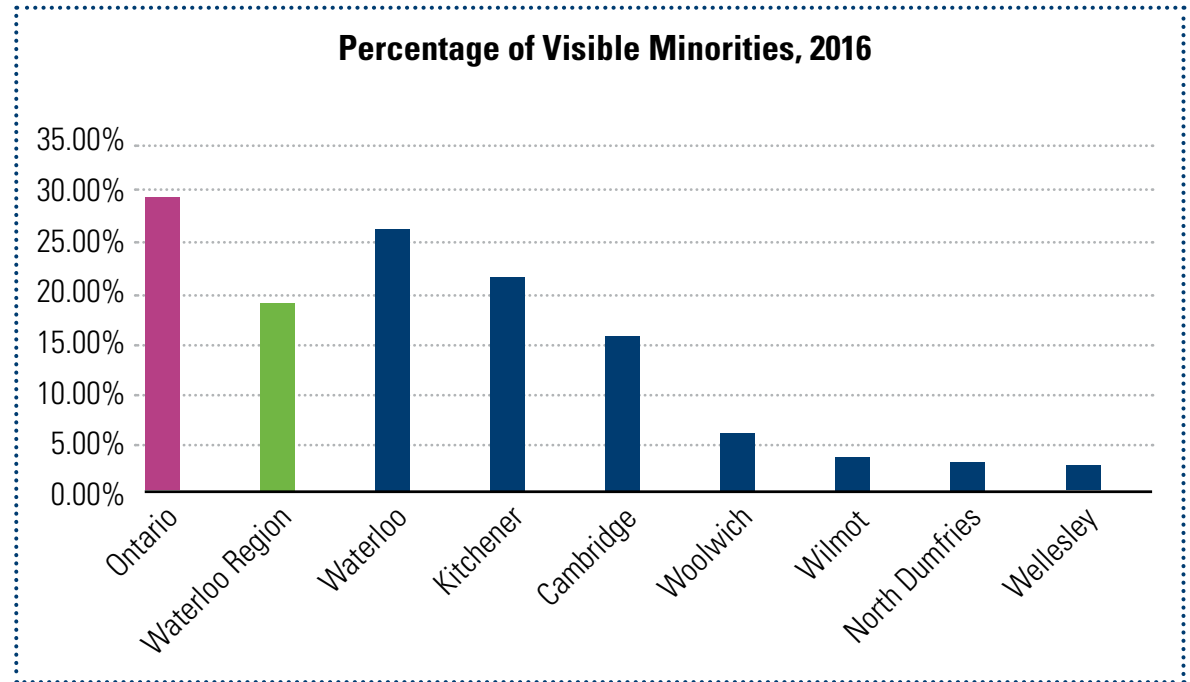
New immigrants between 2011 to 2016 according to municipality



Total number of new immigrants in Waterloo Region (2011-2016) - 14,045

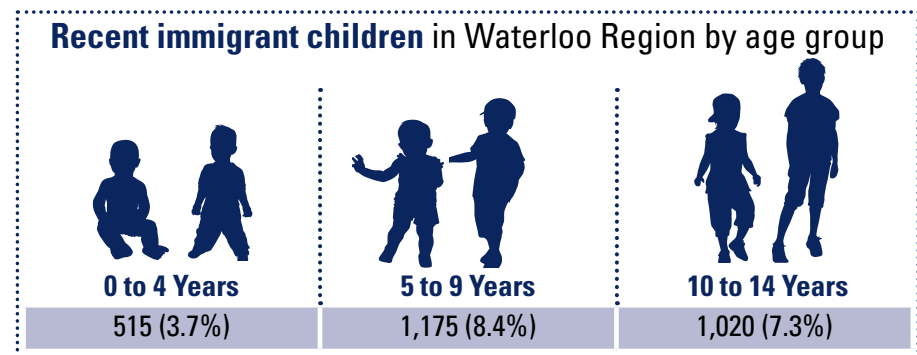
Percentage of visible minority residents is lower in Waterloo Region than Ontario

- The three cities have a higher percentage of visible minority residents compared to the four townships. Waterloo and Kitchener have a higher percentage of visible minority residents in comparison to the entire Region.



Recent immigrant children

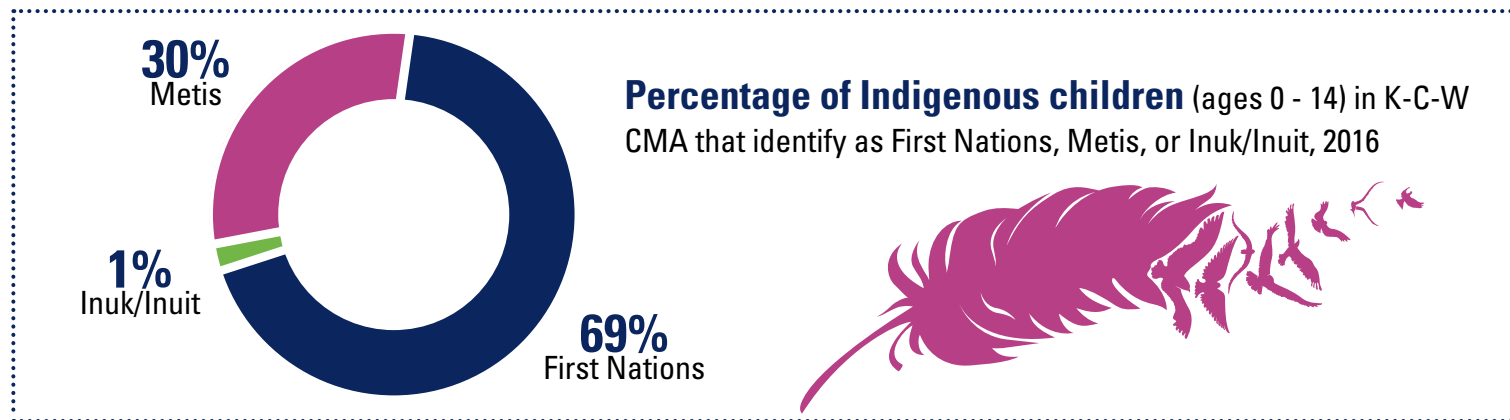
- The highest number of recent immigrant children are those between 5 to 9 years followed by 10 to 14 years and children 0 to 4 years.



C. Indigenous populations in Waterloo Region

The Indigenous population in Waterloo Region is increasing

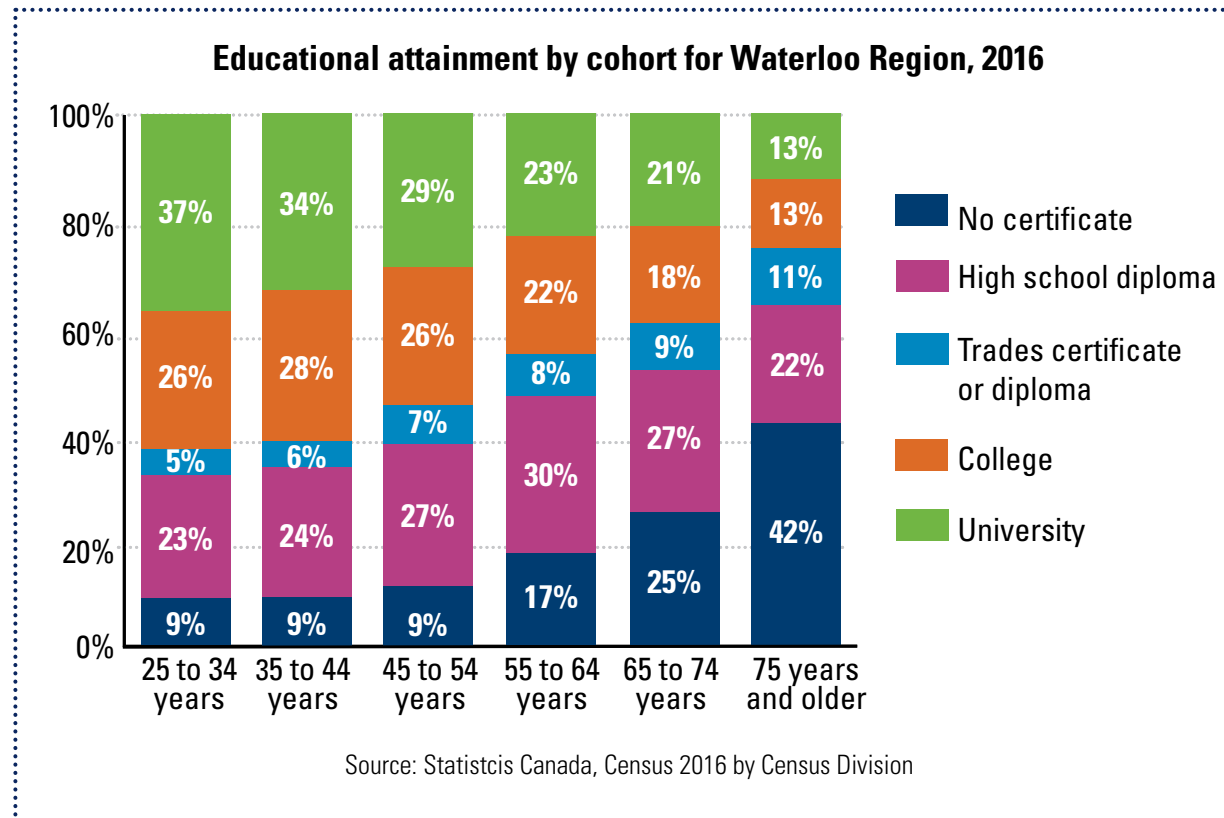
- Between 2006 and 2016, the number of Indigenous residents in Waterloo Region increased by 87 per cent from 4,810 in 2006 to 8,980 a decade later. According to Statistics Canada, this high growth rate was partly the result of natural growth, including both longer life expectancies, high birth rates, as well as an increase in the number of people who self-identified as Indigenous. This change is the result of individuals answering Indigenous identity Census questions differently over time.
- Almost a third of the Indigenous population was under 20 years of age in Waterloo Region, compared to a quarter for the overall provincial population.
- In Waterloo Region, the majority of Indigenous individuals identified as First Nations (61.5 per cent), followed by Métis (31.5 per cent). The remaining proportion identified as Inuk, as having multiple Indigenous identities, or with an Indigenous identity not included in the Census.
- Approximately 1,945 (2.5 per cent) of children ages 0 to 14 years who live in the Region identify as Indigenous.



D. Education and employment rates in Waterloo Region

Educational attainment of Waterloo Region residents is increasing

- Waterloo Region is home to two universities and a community college. In 2016, 54 per cent of Waterloo Region residents aged 25 to 64 years had completed college or university, compared to 49 per cent 10 years prior.
- Between 2006 and 2016, the number of residents without a high school diploma has decreased, while the number with post-secondary qualifications has increased by 37 per cent.



Waterloo Region had a lower unemployment rate than Ontario

- The unemployment rate for Waterloo Region was 6.3 per cent, in contrast to 7.4 per cent in Ontario in 2016.⁵¹
- As a result of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, in Waterloo Region, the unemployment rate reached a high of 12.6 per cent and improved by the end of 2020 to 8.4 per cent.⁵² A total of 16,500 jobs were lost in 2020 (5.1 per cent). The COVID-19 pandemic did not have the same impact on everyone. For example, women, youth, and part-time workers were the most impacted by employment loss.⁵³
- With regard to economic recovery, the Conference Board of Canada is projecting Waterloo Region to experience steady job growth throughout 2021.⁵⁴

E. Household income and poverty trends in Waterloo Region

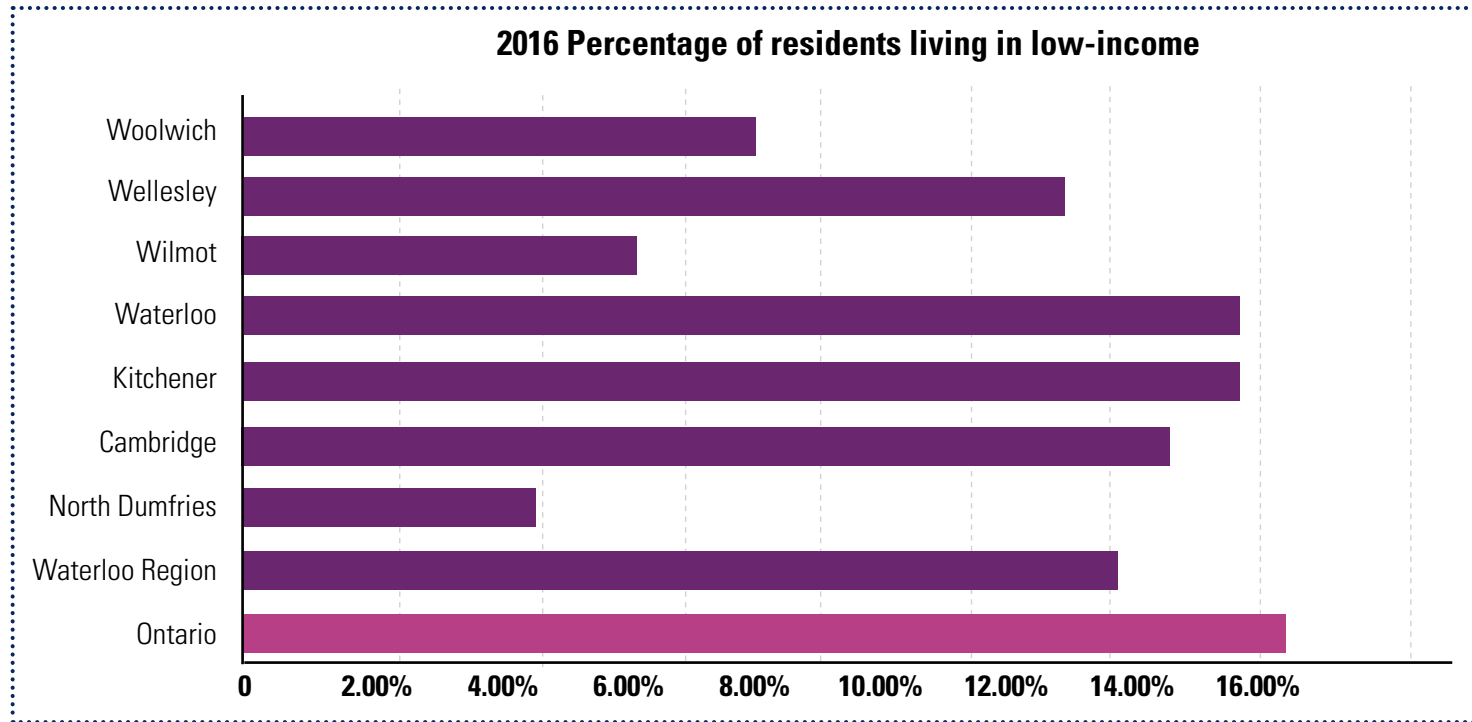
Median household incomes vary in Waterloo Region

- Couples with children had a median family income of \$117,324 and lone-parent families had a median family income of \$54,070. Between 2005 and 2015, the median household income of couples with children increased by over \$10,000, more than that of any other family type over this ten-year period.
- Waterloo Region lone-parent families continued to have the lowest median income out of all family types, and the increase to their median income was less than any other family type.

The youngest children are more likely to live in low income

- Children under five years old were more likely to live in low-income compared to other age cohorts.
- Within Waterloo Region, 17 per cent of children below five years old were living in low-income. This is similar to provincial and national trends of 20 per cent and 18 per cent respectively. Low-income rates amongst young children are high partially because new mothers are more likely to be unemployed or to have significantly reduced earnings during their children's early years.
- Fourteen percent of Ontario residents live in low income compared to 12 per cent (64,015) of Waterloo Region residents. Kitchener and Waterloo had the highest percentage of residents living in low-income, while North Dumfries and Wilmot had the lowest.





Number of families receiving income supports remains consistent

- The Region is a service delivery partner for Ontario Works (OW). The intent of the OW program is to help people in temporary financial need find sustainable employment and achieve self-reliance through the provision of effective, integrated employment services and financial assistance.
- In 2020, there were 3,429 families with children in receipt of Ontario Works in Waterloo Region and this caseload has remained fairly stable in the past five years.
- The highest proportion of cases with children are those with children five years and younger followed by six to 12 years old.

Racialized individuals are disproportionately affected by poverty

- Racialized individuals in Waterloo Region are more than twice as likely to live in poverty compared to non-racialized residents (23 per cent vs 10 per cent).⁵⁵
- In 2016, for every dollar that non-racialized Waterloo Region residents earned, racialized individuals earned 63 cents in median total income.⁵⁶ Racialized women's income levels are lower.
- In Waterloo Region in 2016, racialized females aged 15 years and older earned a median total income of \$20,447 compared to \$31,840 for non-racialized females. Racialized males earned a median total income of \$29,317 and non-racialized males reported a median total income of \$46,301.⁵⁷

In 2019-2020 in Waterloo Region, children ages 0 to 12 years old represented 25 per cent⁵⁸ of all foodbank users.

Food insecurity affects Waterloo Region residents

- Food insecurity is defined as a disruption of food intake or feeding patterns because of a lack of money or other resources. This affects a family's health and well-being. Food insecurity in children is linked with poor outcomes related to quality of life, overall development, and lower academic performance at school,⁵⁹ which can lead to long lasting impacts on income and economic status later in life.⁶⁰
- In 2019, food insecurity affected almost 10 per cent of households in Waterloo Region.⁶¹

- In 2019-2020 in Waterloo Region, children ages 0 to 12 years old represented 25 per cent⁶² of all foodbank users and 600 children living with chronic hunger received food support from Food4Kids.⁶³



Families continue to experience homelessness in Waterloo Region

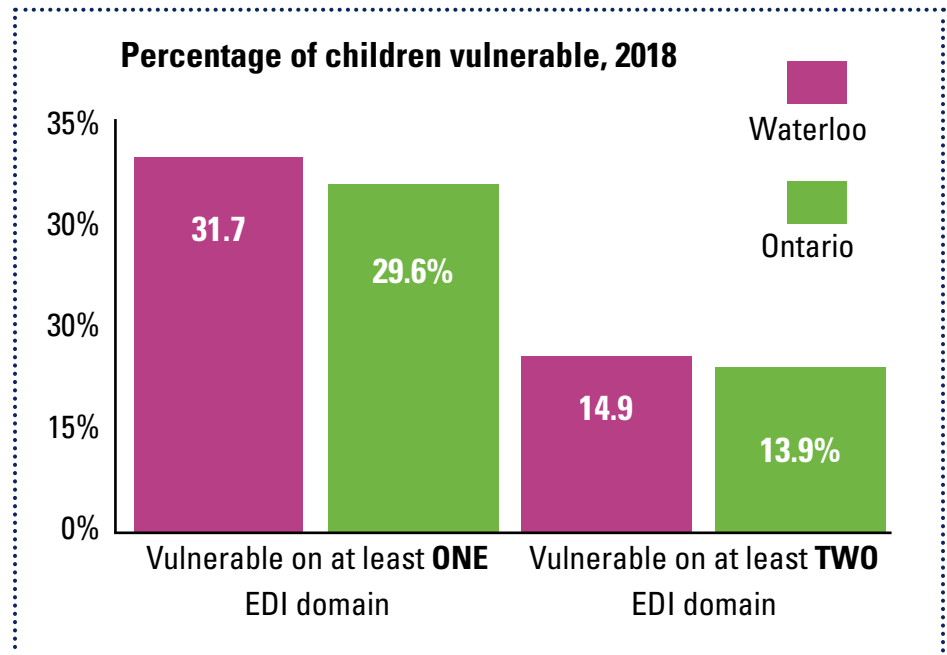
- In Waterloo Region, the Families in Transition (FIT) program provides support to families with dependents under 25 years of age because they are experiencing homelessness or might be at risk of homelessness within 7 days.⁶⁴
- In 2020, 328 families were assessed as being at immediate risk of homelessness and accessed support through the FIT program.
 - 302 families were diverted from shelters and provided housing stability supports.
 - 26 families accessed emergency shelter supports.

F. Key Early Development Instrument (EDI) results

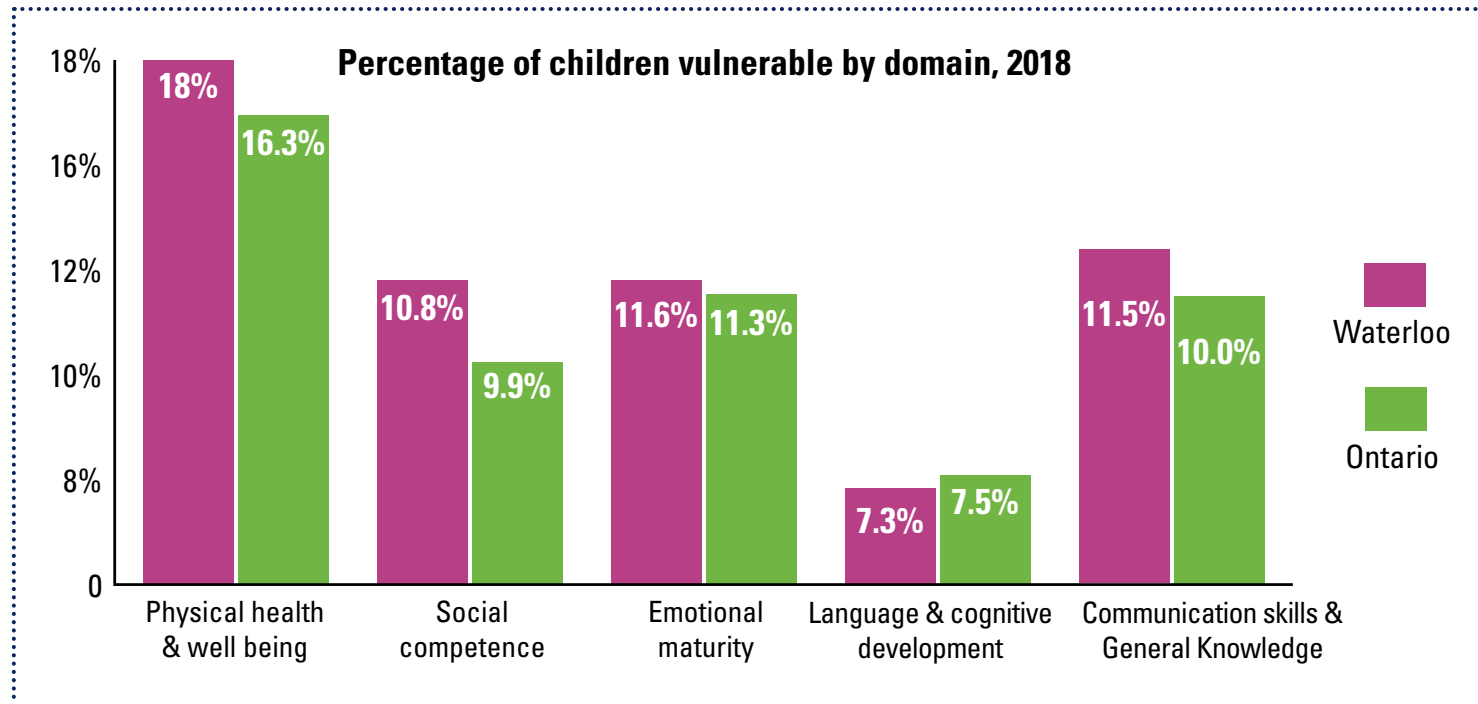
- The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a community-based population measure of children's developmental health and well-being assessed at school entry (senior kindergarten).
 The EDI measures collective developmental health and early learning at the neighbourhood level in five areas: 1) Physical Health and Well-Being, 2) Social Competence, 3) Emotional Maturity, 4) Language and Cognitive Development, and 5) Communication Skills and General Knowledge.
- The EDI results provides important program and service planning information about the neighbourhood vulnerabilities and where additional supports would be beneficial. The most recent EDI data collection was for 2017/2018 school year with a new cycle planned for 2022/2023.

In 2018, 1 in 3 children in kindergarten in Waterloo Region was vulnerable in at least one area of their development.

- The EDI describes children as vulnerable who score below the 10th percentile cut-off of the Ontario baseline population. Higher vulnerability indicates a greater percentage of child are struggling.
- Waterloo Region's children are scoring as slightly more vulnerable than the provincial average in most domains with the exception of language and cognitive development.



- The most significant difference is in the Physical Health and Well-being category where Waterloo Region children are scoring 1.7 per cent more vulnerable than Provincial average. Of the children being identified as vulnerable 20.8 per cent are boys and 15.1 per cent are girls.
- Children who are vulnerable in this area of development may be sometimes tired, hungry or have low energy levels. They also may have average or poor fine and gross motor skills or have below average overall physical development. Physical health and development in the early years sets the foundation for health in later childhood and into adulthood. Poor physical development can increase the likelihood of chronic disease, and can impact mental health and learning outcomes.



Planning Considerations



As the CMSM, Children's Services is working towards an EYCC system that removes systemic barriers so all children and families in Waterloo Region can fully participate and access high quality early years and child care programs. It is important to monitor and understand Waterloo Region's population and socio-economic trends to ensure that service planning is informed by changing community demographics. Understanding population trends supports the creation of a system that is affordable, accessible, high quality, equitable and responsive in order to improve all children and families' quality of life. Some of the important community demographics that have implications for planning include:

- The child population is projected to continue to grow, which means it will be important to plan for an increase in demand for child care spaces across Waterloo Region.
- Waterloo Region is home to diverse children and families, including Indigenous, Black and racialized families who face systemic barriers to accessing early years and child care programs. It is vital that planning for EYCC programs and services considers the diverse needs of children and families, including cultural and linguistic diversity.
- There is an increase in the Indigenous population in Waterloo Region. Children's Services will need to work closely with Indigenous partners to help ensure that Indigenous children and families have access to quality child care and early years programs that meet their unique cultural and linguistic needs.
- EDI results indicate that Waterloo Region's children are scoring as slightly more vulnerable than the provincial average in most domains with the exception of language and cognitive development. These EDI results, along with the number of children living in low-income and experiencing food insecurity highlights the importance of increasing access to licensed child care spaces for vulnerable children to positively impact their development.



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