



COMMUNICATION UPDATE

TO:	Mayor and Members of Council
DATE:	March 27, 2026
SUBJECT:	Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care – 2026 Space and Funding Allocation Update
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City-wide
SUBMITTED BY:	Jessica Chase Director, Children’s and Community Services Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department
SIGNATURE:	<i>Jessica Chase</i>

PURPOSE

This communication provides Council with an update on the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) space and funding allocations for 2026.

INFORMATION

On October 9, 2025, City staff provided a Council Communication Update to advise that Hamilton had allocated all Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care community-based child care spaces and funding for 2025 and 2026.

In November 2025, the provincial and federal governments negotiated a one-year extension of the Canada-Ontario Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care agreement. The extension secured \$695M in additional funding to maintain the current system through the end of 2026, allowing the provincial and federal governments to work on a longer-term agreement. The Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Infrastructure Fund agreement was also extended until December 2026, securing \$66.8M in federal funding for 2026.

In December 2025, the Ministry of Education required all municipalities to complete a series of Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care reports outlining how space targets had been met.

On March 19, 2026, the Ministry of Education advised that following a second Ministry recalibration exercise, space and funding allocations were revised based on the December 2025 reporting.

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

The City of Hamilton received 333 additional Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care spaces. To support the additional space targets, Hamilton also received a total of \$2,899,359 in additional funding to be allocated as follows: \$2,034,202 for operating dollars, \$23,722 for administration costs, and \$841,435 in Early Learning and Child Care Infrastructure funding. Early Learning and Child Care funding is specific to community-based, centre-based, not-for-profit, licensed spaces and supports additional infrastructure costs, including planning and design stage expenditures and the purchase of land or buildings.

The new spaces and funding are a positive step forward for Hamilton, but timelines remain the same. All Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care space targets and funding must be allocated, with the new spaces fully operational, by the December 31, 2026 Ministry deadline.

By the end of 2026, 1,743 new licensed child care spaces for children ages 0 to 5 years will have been created in Hamilton since 2022.

Next Steps

The priority remains maximizing affordable, accessible, equitable and high-quality child care spaces for families in Hamilton. To meet the December 31, 2026 Ministry deadline, it is critical that spaces and funding are prioritized for eligible centres who are best positioned to being fully open and operational in 2026.

Key considerations as City staff plan for next steps include timeline feasibility, wards with lower access rates to child care, and aligning with the Ministry of Education's auspice ratios (i.e. balancing child care centres operating not-for-profit and for profit).

While there is no additional information about Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care spaces and funding beyond 2026, the City will continue to advocate for additional funding and spaces to support continued growth for families in our community.

The above information will be shared with the City's network of child care operators, those individuals who have completed an 'Expression of Interest' form for future consideration in expansion/growth, and posted on the City's website at www.Hamilton.ca/CWELCC.

Additional information will be shared with Council and the community once plans have been confirmed.

For any questions on the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care plan, please contact Jessica Chase, Director, Children's Services and Community Services Division at Jessica.Chase@hamilton.ca.

REQUIRED RESOURCES

There are no impacts to staffing or any additional municipal funding required as a result of these changes.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

N/A