



# COMMUNICATION UPDATE

<b>TO:</b>	Mayor and Members of Council
<b>DATE:</b>	October 9, 2025
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care – 2025 and 2026 Space and Funding Allocation Update
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City-wide
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Jessica Chase, Director Children's and Community Services Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

The purpose of this communication is to provide Council with an update on the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) space and funding allocations for 2025 – 2026, as well the City's plan to address future considerations for interested child care operators.

## Background

In 2023, the Ministry of Education announced the new community-based child care space allocations and initial operating funding under the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) plan.

The plan aims to ensure more families across Ontario have access to safe, affordable and high-quality child care, with the average cost of child care for eligible children 0 to 6 years old reduced to approximately \$12 per day by March 2026.

On March 31, 2025, the Ministry of Education released an updated memorandum following their child care space recalibration exercise. As a result of this Ministry exercise, Hamilton was identified as one of 27 out of 47 Service System Managers receiving a reduced allocation of Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care spaces. The City of Hamilton's directed growth child care space allocation for 2025 and 2026 was reduced by 289 spaces.

In Hamilton, the demand for child care has continued to outweigh the number of available spaces. Ontario's Ministry of Education set a target access rate (i.e. the number of available licensed child care spaces to compared to the child population) of 37% by 2026 (for children 0 to 6 years old). This is equivalent to one affordable child care space available for every 2.7 children.

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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.

Hamilton's current system-wide access rate using all spaces currently licensed in the system is 35% (CWELCC spaces only is 30%). The expansion of licensed child care remains a priority and has focused on expansion within the areas of the city with the lowest access rates.

Based on the new child care space targets, Hamilton will achieve a system-wide access rate of 37% by the end of 2026. For CWELCC spaces only, the access rate for affordable child care in Hamilton will be 32% by the end of 2026.

The provincial and federal governments continue to negotiate the next stage of the CWELCC agreement. At this point, no child care funding or spaces are available beyond 2026.

### **Infrastructure Funding Update**

In addition to the recalibration exercise, the March 31, 2025, memo announced new Early Learning Child Care Infrastructure funding for Hamilton for 2025. Hamilton received \$1,629,121 to support non-profit licensed child care operators to increase inclusion in child care for under-served communities. The funding complements the Start-Up Grant Program, and supports additional infrastructure costs, including planning and design stage expenditures and the purchase of land or buildings.

As a result of the additional Infrastructure Funding, a total of 54 net new affordable spaces were approved to support child care in Hamilton.

### **Directed Growth Application Process Update**

As a condition of CWELCC participation, the City of Hamilton was required to develop and implement a Directed Growth plan to guide the allocation of new CWELCC spaces through to 2026. The new spaces were designed to enable growth for new child care licensees and expand current child care programs with existing licensees.

The Directed Growth Application process also identifies underserved priority neighbourhoods based on local priorities and the priority populations established by the Province, including children living in low-income families, children from diverse communities, children with special needs, Francophone children and Indigenous children. While city-wide applications were welcome, wards with access rates less than 37% were prioritized to meet Ministry targets.

The City of Hamilton's Child Care Directed Growth Application process has now closed. Hamilton has approved and allocated all remaining community-based child care spaces for 2025 and 2026.

All applications submitted prior to September 30, 2025, have been reviewed and all applicants have been informed of decisions.

Since 2023, the City has approved 23 licensee applications, for a total of 1,046 new, affordable child care spaces.

### **Future Considerations**

Directed Growth applications that scored well and are aligned with the City's access and inclusion priorities – but unfortunately could not be approved due to limited Ministry space allocations – have been placed on a Future Considerations List.

For prospective applicants who have not previously submitted a CWELCC Directed Growth application, the City of Hamilton is now accepting an 'Expression of Interest' form, available online at [www.Hamilton.ca/CWELCC](http://www.Hamilton.ca/CWELCC).

Submitted 'Expression of Interest' forms will not be evaluated, but instead used for information purposes to support City staff in tracking potential child care growth and interest in future participation in CWELCC.

If the Ministry of Education provides additional space allocations for Hamilton in the future, the City will reopen the application process and revisit the applications on the Future Considerations List, as well as through the Expression of Interest form, to explore the continued interest and ability to open a new child care centre.

Evaluation criteria will continue to prioritize wards with lower access rates to child care, reinforcing the City's commitment to support equitable access across Hamilton.

City staff also continue to advocate to the federal and provincial governments for increased child care spaces for families in our community.

The City's website has been updated to reflect the above information at [www.Hamilton.ca/CWELCC](http://www.Hamilton.ca/CWELCC).

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](mailto:Jessica.Chase@hamilton.ca).

### **APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

N/A