



# **Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework 2023**

## **Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System**

**June 2023**

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# HIGHLIGHT OF CHANGES

## General Language:

- Replaced: "Disabilities" with "special needs"
- Replaced: "targeted growth" with "Directed Growth"
- Replaced: "regions" with "service areas"
- Replaced: "Assess barriers" with "identify barriers"
- Replaced: "System service plan" with "service plan"

## Purpose Section:

- Amended: Updated language surrounding principles of inclusion.
- Added: List of pedagogical documents consulted to provide guidance regarding principles of inclusion.
- Added: Linked this document specifically to the CWELCC agreement.
- Added: Adding the opportunity to make changes to the child care system.

## Access Section:

- Amended: Updated data from DARE regarding space creation, and how many spaces are currently implemented vs planned.
- Amended: Maintenance of the not-for-profit vs for-profit spaces over the course of the agreement.
- Added: A principle of inclusion that we need to meet or exceed the proportion of French language spaces for ages 0-5, proportion to the francophone population of Ontario.
- Amended: Added technical details about service plans (that they are council-approved) and referenced our guidance document on the subject.
- Added: Detailed section about the service system manager service plans.
- Added: Sections about Directed Growth and the allocation of access to French-language child care.
- Added: Socio-demographic variables are not exhaustive, but service system managers may rely on other data in establishing directed growth plans.
- Amended: Added that non-standard child care is tracked through Child Care Operator Survey
- Amended: Allocation model photo updated.

## **Inclusion Section:**

- Added: Added language that Ontarians face multiple barriers to inclusion, which need to be identified and assessed.
- Amended: Removed language regarding LGBTQ+ populations, which isn't in the CWELCC agreement.
- Amended: Shifted accessibility bullets to three, from two, for additional specificity.
- Added: Section to the description of Special Needs Resourcing, that describes more thoroughly what SNR does.
- Removed: Mention of the "transitional year".
- Added: Indigenous and Francophone Child Care paragraphs and descriptions of our activities in the area.
- Updated: mentioned 2023 engagement with SSMs / the consultation on Framework. Updated dates regarding submissions to the Ministry.
- Amended: Table 1 amended for technical accuracy and currency, by each independent team. Start-up grant description updated. SNR description updated to remove specific details and advise licensees to talk to their SSM.

## **Scope of Investments:**

- Added: detail surrounding the Start-up Grant program.
- Added: Significant section on reporting, which provides new details on how reporting must be submitted to the ministry.
- Added: Note that the data reporting indicators proposed are merely to promote discussion with sector partners, and that feedback will be solicited before the final data reporting measures are instituted.

## **Reporting Section:**

- Added: Service system managers requirement to provide data on CWELCC space creation and Directed Growth in accordance with the annual CWELCC Funding Guidelines.
- Added: Reporting indicators, the number of spaces created in priority neighbourhoods and/or for priority populations as identified by service system managers in their Directed Growth plans and the number of net new spaces created for operators who opted-in to CWELCC.
- Added: Information on data reporting indicators, considerations, and ministry engagement with the sector as work progresses on CWELCC data collection and reporting requirements.
- Added: Qualitative reporting refers to licensed child care-related diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives as part of service system managers' service plans and

Directed Growth plans and may include outcomes of engagement with Indigenous partners.

- Added: Ministry may request qualitative reports to monitor the implementation of CWELCC and to inform future initiatives and service providers are encouraged to provide them, where available.

**Conclusion:**

- Amended: CWELCC A&I Framework will be enhanced throughout the agreement.
- Amended: Start-up grant details added.
- Amended: Data reporting and monitoring with the Federal Government removed.

# Introduction

On March 27, 2022, the federal government and Ontario reached a \$13.2 billion agreement on a Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system. The new system will lower child care costs and improve access, quality and inclusion across Ontario's child care and early years sector.

The Access and Inclusion Framework is designed to support Service System Managers (SSMs) with developing and implementing local service plans with an increased focus on access as it relates to inclusion. This new Framework was informed by the feedback and consultations conducted in early 2023 with service system managers, Indigenous partners, Francophone stakeholders, other provincial government ministries and a range of external partners. It is also now more closely linked with the Directed Growth strategy, and the ministry's commitments under the Ontario's CWELCC Action Plan.

Quick Facts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>As of April 2023, the Ontario government has invested over \$2.2 billion in capital projects in education, including 100 new schools, 88 additions and renovations to existing facilities, and nearly 6,500 new licensed child care spaces. In 2022, the Ontario government invested more than \$58 million to create 1,502 more school-based licensed child care spaces for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.</li><li>Ontario's child care system offers a range of options for families with differing needs, including licensed, unlicensed, for-profit, not-for-profit, centre/school-based, and home-based child care.</li><li>As of March 31, 2023, there were 5,545 licensed child care centres offering 472,997 spaces for children ages 0-12. The number of home child care agencies increased by 4.3% from 139 to 145.</li></ul>

Child care is foundational to supporting early childhood development, learning, well-being, and student success. Quality child care experiences provide lifelong benefits to children, and are a key enabler of workforce participation, particularly for women. The Ontario government is committed to providing access to high-quality, affordable child care to as many families as possible. Currently, children are supported by a system of early learning and child care that is offered in a variety of community-based settings and in publicly funded schools to support seamless access and experiences for all Ontario families.

## **Vision:**

Ontario's vision for the CWELCC system is that more families in Ontario have access to high-quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive early learning and child care no matter where they live.

## **Goal:**

Under the CWELCC Agreement, Ontario will support the creation of 86,000 new CWELCC licensed child care spaces by the end of 2026, including more than 4,900 CWELCC net new licensed 0-5 child care spaces created since April 2019.

Ontario will focus on creating affordable child care spaces in communities with populations that need them most. This directed growth approach will support space creation in underserved

service areas of the province – parts of the province that have had historically low rates of space availability.

### Method:

The Ministry of Education (the ministry) will continue to work with Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Services Administration Boards (CMSMs and DSSABs), also known as service system managers (SSMs), to develop directed growth plans that support child care access for low-income children, vulnerable children, children from diverse communities, children with special needs, Francophone, and Indigenous children.

In addition to collaborating with SSMs, the ministry will continue to engage with child care and early years sector partners, as well as the federal government, to strengthen the ministry's approach to access and inclusion.

## Ontario's Child Care Vision



**CWELCC System: where more families in Ontario have access to high quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive early learning and child care throughout the province.**

- Child care is foundational to supporting early childhood development, learning, well-being and student success. It is a key enabler of workforce participation, particularly for women, both as parents and providers
- Ontario has developed an Action Plan with **five key pillars to achieve this vision:**



#### Quality

Increase number of RECEs to 60% of workforce & implement wage minimums



#### Inclusion

Ensure affordable spaces and access to child care for priority populations, including low income, vulnerable children, Francophone, Indigenous and other diverse communities



#### Affordability

Reduce parent fees for children aged 0-5 to achieve \$10/day average fees.



#### Access

86,000 new child care spaces created in high need areas by December 2026.



#### Data and Reporting

Support successful implementation through data and reporting

## Purpose of the Access and Inclusion Framework

Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework is intended to support CMSMs and DSSABs with developing and implementing local service plans with an increased focus on access as it relates to inclusion.

Ontario's vision for access and inclusion is that more children (of all abilities and socio-economic backgrounds) can actively and meaningfully participate in child care, and be supported in forming authentic, caring relationships with their peers and educators. These principles and definitions of inclusion are informed by a variety of sources, including Ontario's pedagogy for the early years, *How Does Learning Happen?: Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*, *Think, Feel, Act: Lessons from Research about Young Children*, *the Ontario Child Care*

*and EarlyON Child and Family Centres Service Management and Funding Guideline 2023, and the Child Care Centre Licensing Manual.*

Coupled with the space allocations for directed growth, the Access and Inclusion Framework is designed to meet Ontario's commitment under the CWELCC Action Plan to "support increased access to child care for children of low-income families, vulnerable children, children from diverse communities, children with special needs and Francophone and Indigenous children." In early 2023, CMSMs and DSSABs confirmed their space expansion targets and identified their priority neighbourhoods for space creation under CWELCC.

The ministry will work with CMSMs and DSSABs to gather data, assess barriers to access and inclusion, and support a plan for increased access to affordable licensed child care, which will include the analysis of underserved regions and vulnerable populations.

## **Opportunities and Challenges**

The CWELCC system presents opportunities for the ministry and SSMs to plan for and build an affordable child care system that is inclusive and accessible to all.

### **Opportunities**

The ministry's strong relationships with CMSMs, DSSABs and child care partners provides opportunities to:

- Explore and make sustainable changes to the child care system that will strengthen the government's commitment to access and inclusion.
- Collectively assess the data and limitations related to diversity, equity, and inclusion within the child care system.
- Gather information about the types of data that CMSMs and DSSABs collect and leverage this information to support future policy/program initiatives.
- Engage with organizations working with underserved and vulnerable populations to acquire insights into gaps in data collection related to underserved, vulnerable and diverse communities.

Proposed data collection measures should be streamlined and centralized where possible and minimize administrative burden.

### **Challenges**

To implement a comprehensive service plan, the plan must be informed by the appropriate data. The lack of availability of sufficient data poses several challenges, including:

1. Demographic and socio-economic data related to children in licensed child care settings is limited.
2. Data related to Special Needs Resourcing such as the type of special needs and supports / accommodations required (i.e., cognitive, physical, behavioural, communications) or professional learning and capacity building supports has not been collected.



# Access and Inclusion Principles and Approach

Ontario's Action Plan includes a focus on improved access and inclusion.

## Access

Through the CWELCC Agreement, Ontario is improving access to child care by allocating funding to support the creation of 86,000 new, high-quality, affordable child care spaces. This includes more than 4,900 net new spaces already created since April 2019. These new licensed child care spaces represent a mix of not-for-profit and for-profit settings, community and school-based spaces offered in centres and homes, providing families with choice and flexibility. Under the CWELCC Agreement, Ontario committed to maintaining or improving the proportion of not-for-profit licensed child care spaces for children aged 0 to 5 at 70% or higher by the end of 2026.

The province recognizes the critical role CMSMs and DSSABs play in gathering and maintaining an in-depth knowledge about their communities' needs, planning and managing the system, identifying and addressing service gaps, and supporting service coordination.

Currently, the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*, requires SSMs to develop and implement a five-year child care and early years programs and services plan (herein referred to as 'service plan') for their service area that addresses matters of provincial interest under the legislation.

Service plans include the following key elements:

- environmental scan results that assess current and future child care and early years service gaps and opportunities.
- a description of the community planning processes used to inform the development of the plan and a commitment to consult, at regular or relevant intervals, through the life of the plan.
- strategic priorities and intended outcomes that are responsive to community needs and align with Ontario's vision for child care and early years and provincial interest.
- a measurable and action-oriented implementation plan that describes how strategic priorities and outcomes will be met; and
- accountability methods including the public posting of service plans and reporting in accordance with the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*.

In addition to the key areas identified, SSMs should also identify any other programs, needs, opportunities and/or challenges that may exist in their communities in their service plans to support the ongoing reporting and planning process.

To ensure improved access to licensed child care, SSMs will build on their existing service plans to identify areas where directed expansion of affordable child care spaces is most needed in their communities.

Ontario has committed to creating 86,000 child care spaces by the end of 2026. As of December 31, 2022, there were 4,900 CWELCC eligible spaces in operation. A further 72,500 spaces were allocated to SSMs in the winter/spring of 2023, while 8,600 remain in a strategic reserve for future space allocation.

Planning for the allocation of these new spaces has been made in support of local plans for expansion of licensed child care spaces, in alignment with the principles described below.

## Principles for Access

The ministry's CWELCC space allocation approach will support child care access as follows:

### 1. Access Equity:

- CMSMs and DSSABs will be allocated CWELCC spaces for children age 0-5 improving access across the province to bring the provincial average access rate to 37% by 2026.

### 2. Directed Growth to support Underserved and Vulnerable Populations:

- The province will allocate to each SSM a target number of CWELCC spaces that will be determined based on a formula that takes into consideration socio-economic indicators to support child care for underserved and vulnerable populations.

### 3. Francophone Spaces:

- Meet or exceed the proportion of French language spaces for ages 0 to 5, proportional to the population of Francophone people in Ontario.

## Approach to Access

In accordance with the [Ontario Child Care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres Service Management and Funding Guideline 2023](#), SSMs are required to develop or revise service system plans to address requirements as set out in the legislation, regulations, and provincial policy. Service system plans must be approved by the council of the municipality, or by the members of a District Social Services Administration Board.

The ministry provided each SSM with growth targets and funding allocations for their service area to develop plans for directed growth in alignment with the principles above. These directed growth plans must identify where affordable child care spaces are required in their communities; how net new affordable child care spaces will be best supported; which populations are most in need; and how they align with ministry target requirements.

Service plans should aim to address questions such as:

- Which geographic areas are facing a lack of access to affordable child care options?
- How will the needs of Black, racialized, Indigenous and Francophone populations be identified and addressed?
- How will the needs of vulnerable groups, including newcomers, low-income families and children with special needs, be identified and addressed?
- How will child care be directed to support labour market participation, including through flexible models of child care to support parents who are shift workers?
- How many spaces are needed and where?
- Should these spaces be centre-based and/or licensed home-based?
- Are additional interventions needed to ensure that new spaces are made available to underserved and vulnerable populations?
- Which data sources or other information (i.e., environmental scans, community and/or Indigenous partner engagements) informed the selection of priority neighbourhoods?

Directed growth plans should be informed by the SSM's service planning data when determining priority neighbourhoods and underserved and vulnerable populations. Information regarding directed growth plans must be publicly communicated as an attachment, appendix to the service plan, or in a format that aligns with the SSM's communication approach regarding service planning priorities.

SSMs must prioritize space creation in the priority neighbourhoods identified in their Directed Growth Plans. However, given that the ministry has allocated additional spaces to support Directed Growth, SSMs may create spaces to increase access for underserved, vulnerable, and diverse populations in areas that fall outside priority neighbourhoods if there are barriers to increased space creation in the priority neighbourhoods identified (e.g., lack of real estate, lack of operators or all operators are at maximum capacity). These spaces must be separately reported to the ministry as set out in the 2023 CWELCC Funding Guidelines.

## **Space Allocation Model**

The ministry has developed a space allocation model to allocate new CWELCC 0-5 child care spaces across service areas in line with the objectives above. This space allocation model incorporates demographics, socio-economic indicators, and existing licensed child care capacity.

## **Access Equity**

Most of the spaces are allocated to help each service area progress towards a target provincial ratio of spaces to children, or access rate, of 37%. This is equivalent to one affordable child care space available for every 2.7 children aged 0-5.<sup>1</sup> Working towards this ratio will significantly decrease the disparities in access to child care across the province.

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<sup>1</sup> The access rate of 37% is based on the estimated 2025 population of children age 0-5 and the anticipated total licensed child care spaces in Ontario by the end of 2026 once all of the 86,000 new affordable licensed spaces have been created.

## Directed Growth to Support Underserved and Vulnerable Populations

In addition to the above, a portion of spaces have been allocated to service areas based on five socio-economic factors in order to support access to affordable child care for underserved and vulnerable populations. These Directed Growth spaces are to ensure that service areas with high-needs populations have capacity to provide affordable child care for those who need it most. These spaces should not be interpreted to be the number of spaces required to meet the needs of underserved and vulnerable populations. Ensuring underserved and vulnerable populations have access to affordable child care should be a consideration in planning all new child care spaces allocated to a service area within the flexibility afforded to SSMs in their base CWELCC funding allocations.

### *Socio-economic variables used in the allocation model:*

- *Children ages 0-5 in lone-parent families*
- *Low Income Measure (with children age 0-5)*
- *Households spending >30% of income on shelter costs*
- *Recent immigrants, 2011-2016*
- *Women age 25-44 not participating in labour force*

*Each variable was weighted evenly, and spaces were distributed in proportion to each region's population of each variable.*

Directed Growth spaces have also been allocated to ensure equitable access to French-language child care. The age 0-5 population with knowledge of French for each service area was used to ensure an access rate for these children that is proportional to the Francophone population in each CMSM and DSSAB.

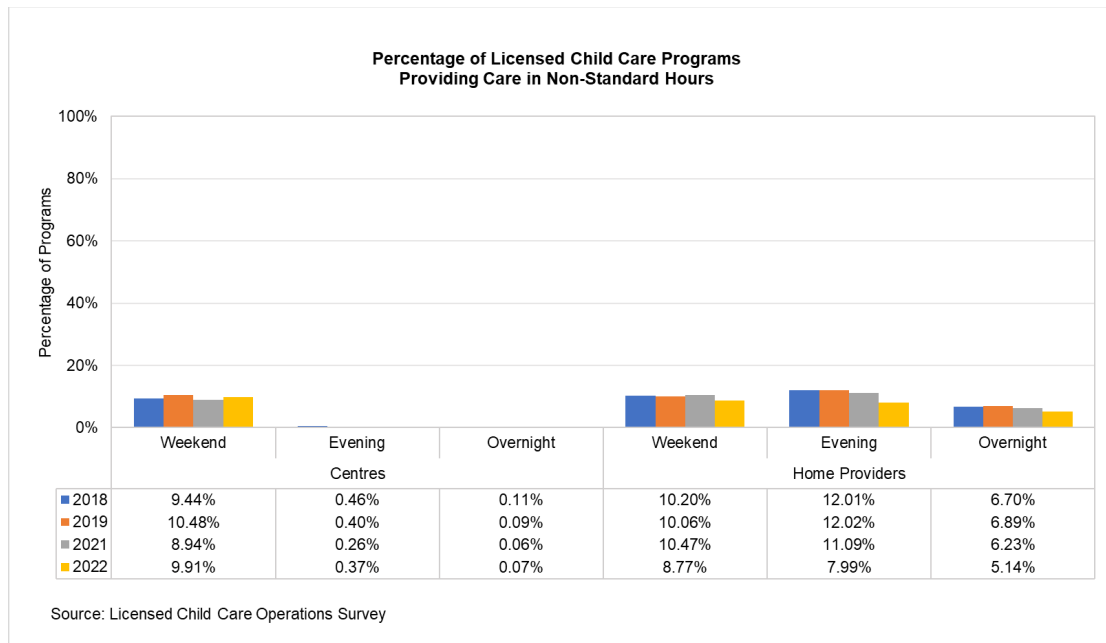
While the ministry has used the above socio-demographic variables for the purpose of space allocations, this should not be considered an exhaustive list. CMSMs and DSSABs may rely on other data sources (i.e., Early Development Instrument data, social risk index, StatsCan statistics and data, local datasets, etc.) in establishing their directed growth plans to support access equity for underserved and vulnerable populations.

## Flexible Child Care

The ministry is working with CMSMs and DSSABs to support parental labour market participation with flexible spaces for those who work non-traditional hours and in non-traditional locations. To support parents who are shift workers, further consideration is needed to funding spaces that will increase the availability of flexible models of care. This includes evening, weekend, and overnight child care.

The ministry collects data on licensed child care programs providing care in non-standard hours (such as evenings, overnight, and weekends) annually through its Child Care Operator Survey:

- Child Care Centres: less than 1% identify offering service in the evenings or overnight; 9%-10% identify offering weekend care.
- Home Child Care: 8-12% identify offering service in the evenings, 5-7% offering services overnight; 9-10% offering services on weekends (see below).

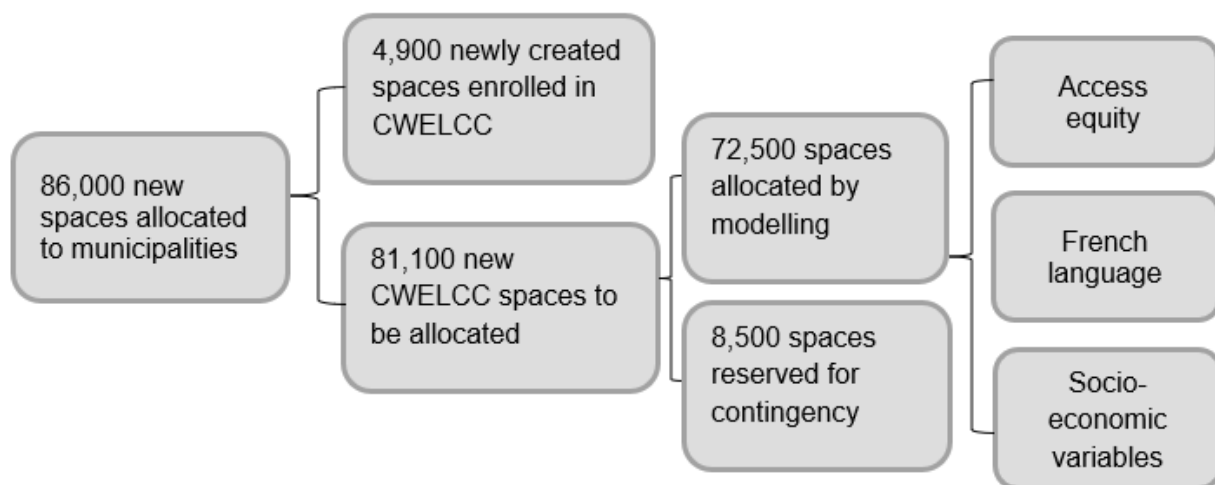


## Implementation Considerations

The space allocation model also supports successful implementation through the following contingencies:

- A portion of the new spaces to be created are set aside to address potential space pressures in the planning discussions with CMSMs and DSSABs. This may include space allocations to reflect the needs of specific underserved and vulnerable populations, and fast growing CMSMs and DSSABs.
- Space allocations will consider the ministry's current and ongoing commitments to school-based child care spaces.

## Overview of Space Allocation Model



## Inclusion

The ministry acknowledges that every Ontarian has their own unique circumstances and that multiple factors that can act as barriers will need to be identified and assessed in the creation of an inclusive system of early child education. The CWELCC system presents an opportunity for Ontario to introduce initiatives that support the needs of diverse and underserved and vulnerable populations, including low-income, Francophone, Indigenous, Black, other racialized and newcomer communities, as well as children with special needs. It aims to support children to have access to inclusive environments where they can participate, play, and learn in meaningful ways, and form authentic caring relationships.

This vision is supported by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which both highlight how all children, including those with special needs, are entitled to the same opportunities – for example to health care, nutrition, education, social inclusion, and protection.<sup>2</sup>

## Principles for Inclusion

Local service plans developed by CMSMs and DSSABs should consider the principles of accessibility, participation and belonging, and equity. Adopting inclusive practices is vital for ensuring that children, despite their background or who they are, have an equal opportunity to succeed.

### 1. Accessibility

Providing a wide range of opportunities for learning, play, and inquiry in physical and teaching environments across diverse settings and context is essential.

Key components of accessibility involve:

- Removing/reducing physical and systemic barriers (e.g., transportation, space and socioeconomic, cultural, language).
- Ensuring opportunities are sufficient in terms of intensity and frequency for every individual.<sup>3</sup>
- Incorporating multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression in learning spaces and programs (i.e., Universal Design, Universal Design for Learning). Rather than modifying/adapting the physical and learning/instructional environments after the fact, programs need to be ready to support all children at the front end.<sup>4</sup>

### 2. Participation and Belonging

This principle involves the intentional and instructional intervention approaches that enable children to actively engage in all parts of the day, including play and learning activities and social interactions.

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<sup>2</sup> How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years (Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Barton, E. E., & Smith, B. J. (2014). Fact sheet on preschool inclusion. Pyramid Plus: The Colorado Center for Social Emotional Competence and Inclusion. Denver, CO. Practice, 17(1), 1-13.

<sup>4</sup> Strain, P., Schwartz, I., Barton, E.E. (2011). Providing Interventions for Young Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders: What We Still Need to Accomplish. Journal of Early Intervention, 33, 321-332.

Participation fosters a sense of belonging which contributes to developmental and lifelong well-being. Belonging refers to a sense of connectedness to others, an individual's experiences of being valued, of forming relationships with others and making contributions as part of a group, a community, the natural world.

Participation requires strategies, accommodations, modifications and adaptations to spaces and programs so that children can fully engage with each other and their environment.

Key considerations of participation and belonging include:

- Values, policies, and practices that support the right of every child and their family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society.
- Employing engagement approaches that ensures each child and family feels that they belong, are valued, and heard.
- Ensuring diversity in engagement approaches, spaces, and programs (i.e., staff share similar backgrounds and lived experience and interactions with children and families are maximized through multiple mediums and languages).

### 3. Equity

Making sure everyone has what they need to succeed by removing barriers that disadvantage some groups over others, is a fundamental principle. Children should have equitable access to early learning opportunities that support them in realizing their capacity as engaged learners that are competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential.

Key considerations of equity include:

- Programs, services and supports that take account of the backgrounds and intersecting identities of children and their families.
- Ensuring any assessment tools are unbiased and designed for use with children from diverse families and communities.
- Providing differing levels of support for children depending on their individual needs.

## Approach to Inclusion

Ontario has been working to advance inclusion through the following initiatives:

- **Special Needs Resourcing:** In Ontario, Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) provides support for the inclusion of children with special needs with their peers in child care and early years settings. Supports through SNR enable all children to participate in licensed child care programs with their peers. Adaptive equipment, class-wide strategies and staff development related expenses are supported through SNR funding to reduce barriers for children with special needs.

Funding is provided to CMSMs, DSSABs and First Nation communities for SNR expenses to support the inclusion of children with special needs at no additional costs to parents. CMSMs and DSSABs are required to spend at least 4.1% of total child care funding allocation on SNR. As the child care system expands, there will be a need to ensure that children with special needs can be supported as required in the new spaces.

- **Fee Subsidy:** Fee subsidy is an essential support for many parents that helps to balance the demands of career and family and enables parents and caregivers to participate in the workforce or pursue education or training. Ontario's child care fee subsidy provides \$880 million in direct support annually for low-income families to access child care. The amount a subsidized family pays for child care is determined through the income test. Other factors include the parents' employment/education activities and/or the special needs of the child, as well availability of subsidy funds within the budget of the CMSM or DSSAB, and space availability.

With CWELCC the ministry has ensured that a comparable fee reduction is applied to families currently in receipt of child care fee subsidy to support equity within Ontario's child care system.

- ***How Does Learning Happen? (HDLH): Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years:*** In Ontario, structural quality (i.e., ratios of adults to children, staff qualifications, health and safety requirements) is supported through provincial licensing standards and program quality is guided by *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years (2014)*.

HDLH sets out values, goals and approaches to guide program development. Together with the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* regulations, HDLH helps to ensure children experience positive, responsive relationships and engaging programs and environments that support learning, development, and well-being. HDLH is mandated under the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* for educators and administrators to support pedagogy and program approaches which aligns with the Kindergarten Program and is informed by early brain development research.

- **Indigenous and Francophone Child Care:** The ministry provides funding for professional learning opportunities (also known as Equity-based Communities of Practice) for Indigenous and Francophone early years professionals to support the implementation of HDLH. These professional learning opportunities are intended to enhance culturally relevant programs and the delivery of high-quality child care and early years programs, which will help promote Francophone and Indigenous culture in Ontario.
- **Ontario Child Care Tax Credit:** The Ontario Child Care Tax Credit remains in effect to support parents with the cost of child care and help them re-enter the workforce. This program continues to provide an estimated 300,000 families each year with up to 75 per cent of their eligible expenses, including for licensed and unlicensed child care in centres, home based care, camps, and other settings.

#### Research Demonstrates:

- High quality inclusive settings benefit all children – with and without special needs.
- Social outcomes are critical and a key indicator that an inclusive program is successful.
- Collaboration is critical to the success of inclusive programs.



To support the needs of diverse communities and populations, SSMs will continue to collaborate with service providers and the community to gather data to identify the barriers focused on:

- enhanced service accessibility for children and families, particularly isolated, newcomer, and low-income families;
- active engagement with those populations who are Francophone, Indigenous, Black, racialized, newcomer, persons with disabilities, or from low-income households to dismantle barriers in the planning, management and delivery of responsive programs and services;
- support for local decision making to enrich programs, facilitate smooth transitions and enhance integration between child care and early years services, schools and specialized community services; and
- regular collection of feedback from parents, caregivers and children to inform local programs and services.

In early 2023, the province engaged with SSMs, other provincial government ministries, and a broad range of external partners on the framework for inclusion. This framework will be used by SSMs to guide the development and implementation of local service plans.

Soon thereafter, in spring 2023, SSMs submitted access and inclusion plans to ensure a broad range of communities and populations have access to high-quality, affordable and inclusive child care. These plans were used to inform the provincial allocation of new child care spaces across the province to support directed growth.

The plans required the inclusion of specific access and inclusion targets, which will be implemented by the province and SSM based on provincial direction and local context and priorities. Examples of specific local priorities include an identified need for more Indigenous child care spaces in a community, more licensed child care spaces in a specific area where there is a high newcomer population, and others. At a minimum, the targets set out in each SSM's plan must reflect the demographics of their service area and ensure that sufficient licensed child care spaces are available for priority groups. These negotiated space creation targets will be used to inform reporting to the federal government.

## Addressing Barriers to Access and Inclusion

Recognizing that inclusion is a shared responsibility, the ministry is building from its current initiatives to ensure that the above noted principles are embedded in the provision of child care.

In addition to providing funding to support the creation of new affordable child care spaces in targeted service areas and for underserved and vulnerable communities and populations, Ontario has several other initiatives that provide opportunities to address barriers to access and inclusion: start-up grants, pedagogical framework, Special Needs Resourcing, fee subsidy funding, and workforce (see Table 1 below).

**Table 1: Initiatives to Address Barriers to Access and Inclusion**

Start-up grants	Pedagogical Framework	Special Needs Resourcing (SNR)	Fee Subsidy Funding	Workforce
Provide start-up grants to support the creation of	Make changes to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure Indigenous</li> </ul>	CMSMs and DSSABs are required to spend a minimum of 4.1 per	Maintain fee subsidies to support families,	Continue equity-based Communities of

<p>new spaces in locations and for populations most in need.</p> <p>Start-up grants will support directed growth by enabling space creation in neighbourhoods that have had historically lower rates of space availability that may not be accommodated through natural growth.</p> <p>Start-up grants will be used to offset the initial costs required to expand or support the creation of spaces in these regions, such as equipment and leasehold improvements.</p>	<p>practices that foster children's' learning are prominent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• raise awareness of systemic barriers for racialized children and families</li> <li>• address educator bias, attitudes and beliefs that impact children's sense of belonging and competence</li> <li>• support CWELCC commitments related to equity, inclusion and quality</li> </ul>	<p>cent of their child care allocation on SNR.</p> <p>Special needs services and supports in licensed child care and early years settings continue to evolve over time to meet the diverse and changing needs of children, their families, and communities.</p> <p>Licensees enrolled in CWELCC are encouraged to work with their CMSM/DSSAB to develop a plan to increase access for children with special needs to the licensee's child care programs.</p>	<p>including those with children ages 0 to 5, for whom lower fees under the CWELCC system continue to be unaffordable.</p>	<p>Practice funding for existing professional learning strategies for Francophone and First Nation, Métis, Inuit and Indigenous communities to meet the growing professional learning needs related to mental health, cultural diversity, mentorship and networking.</p>
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## Scope of Investments

CWELCC system funding is targeted toward licensed programs and activities for children under age six that has an impact on families, including those that may be low-income, Indigenous, and living in underserved and vulnerable communities, including Black and racialized families; families of children with special needs and children needing enhanced or individual supports; and those with caregivers who are working non-standard hours and Francophone families with limited or no access to programs in their language.

### Start-Up Grants

Ontario has announced that in 2022-23 it is investing \$213 million in start-up grants to support the creation of new spaces in locations and for underserved and vulnerable populations most in need, and to enable new space creation in service areas that may not be accommodated through natural market growth. In alignment with the start-up grant funding guidelines SSMs will provide start-up grants to eligible licensees to support space creation in service areas with high need populations including vulnerable children, children from diverse populations including Black and racialized families, children with special needs, and Indigenous and Francophone communities.

# Framework Accountability

In Ontario, CMSMs and DSSABs are designated under the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*, as SSMS responsible for planning, managing and coordinating child care within their service areas.

The *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*, requires CMSMs and DSSABs to develop and update their child care and early years service plan every five years. The ministry publishes the [Ontario Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan Resource](#) which outlines the requirement for CMSMs/DSSABs to conduct an environmental scan, strength/gaps analysis and the identification of action items to improve access to child care and early years programs for children and families.

The review of access and inclusion plans, which SSMS submitted in early 2023, enables the province to monitor and assess whether a broad range of communities and populations have access to high-quality, affordable, and inclusive child care.

Ontario will continue to engage with SSMS and other sector partners to gather data and to identify barriers to access for children of diverse populations and children with special needs to implement strategies that support these children to access licensed child care.

## Reporting

Ontario's Action Plan commits to enhancing existing data collection activities to support reporting to the federal government on key indicators associated with the CWELCC system. Ontario has laid out specific measures and indicators under the CWELCC system in its Action Plan for each of the key priority areas and will publish its results in the province's Early Years and Child Care Annual Report beginning in 2023.

SSMS must provide data on CWELCC space creation and Directed Growth. Reporting must be completed in accordance with the annual CWELCC Funding Guidelines (section 1.5). In 2023, the mid-year report must be submitted to the ministry by September 30<sup>th</sup> (for January 1- June 30, 2023) and final report for the calendar year by January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024 (data for 2023 calendar year). Indicators related to access and inclusion include:

- Total number of spaces created in priority neighbourhoods and/or for priority populations as identified by CMSMs/DSSABs in their Directed Growth plans broken down by age groups of child, auspice and type of setting.
- Total number of net new spaces created for licensees who enrolled in CWELCC in 2023 broken down by age groups of child, auspice and type of setting.
- Total number of net new spaces supported with start-up grants during the fiscal year, broken down by age groups of child, auspice and type of setting.
- Percentage of for-profit and not-for-profit spaces enrolled in CWELCC (please note that for the purposes of CWELCC reporting, all licensed home child care spaces are considered not-for-profit).

CMSMs/DSSABs will be required to report to the ministry on the following data for licensee participation in CWELCC:

- Total number of licensees submitting an application to participate in CWELCC.
- Total number of licensees that have signed a new CWELCC service agreement with the CMSM/DSSAB, including auspice
- List of licensees whose applications have been declined, and the rationale for denying enrolment in CWELCC.

Reports are to be submitted to the ministry at [tpa.edu.EarlyLearning@ontario.ca](mailto:tpa.edu.EarlyLearning@ontario.ca)

The data reporting indicators proposed below are intended to promote discussion with sector partners. Feedback from partners, as well as privacy and technical implications and required administrative efforts will be considered when formulating the data that will be collected to fulfill reporting obligations under the CWELCC Agreement. The ministry will engage with the sector as work progresses on CWELCC data collection and reporting requirements, including indicators related to access and inclusion.

Specific measures and indicators to be reported in the SSM's Directed Growth plan could encompass, but would not be limited to, the following:

1. Total number of current licensed child care spaces for priority groups, through statistical methods where possible, segmented by:
  - age group of child (i.e., under age 6 and 6-12)
  - type of setting
2. Total number of inclusive licensed child care spaces created/converted for the aforementioned priority groups, through statistical methods where possible, segmented by:
  - age group of child (under age 6 and 6-12)
  - type of setting
3. Number of children receiving fee subsidies segmented by:
  - age group of child (under age 6 and 6-12)
  - children that receive partial subsidies
  - children that receive full subsidies
4. Number and proportion of children under age six and 6-12 years in flexible licensed early learning and child care arrangements and number and proportion of centres/providers that provide flexible arrangements (i.e., non-traditional arrangements such as flexible/irregular hours, weekend and emergency services); and geographic distribution of spaces
5. Number of children under age six and 6-12 years with special needs and children needing enhanced or individual supports that are in licensed child care spaces
6. Number or proportion of child care sites that provide services adapted to the needs of children with special needs and children needing enhanced or individual supports.
7. Annual funding and percentage of total provincial child care allocation spent on Special Needs Resourcing
8. Number of licensed child care spaces for children under the age of six that offer French-language and bilingual programs

The targets set out in each SSM's Directed Growth plan must reflect the demographics of their service area and ensure that licensed child care spaces are available for priority groups such as:

- children living in low-income families
- children with special needs and children needing enhanced or individual supports
- Indigenous children, Black and other racialized children
- children of newcomers to Canada and official language minorities.

## **Qualitative Reporting**

SSMs may provide additional qualitative reports on licensed child care-related diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives as part of their service plans and Directed Growth plans. Qualitative reports may include, but would not be limited to:

- outcomes of engagement with Indigenous partners
- how systemic barriers to access to licensed child care are currently being addressed (e.g., implementation of recommendations, data collection for evidence informed strategy/policy creation, progress reports)
- diversity and equity initiatives/projects undertaken and their impacts and outcomes.

Qualitative reporting may also explore areas within these following reflective questions specific to licensed child care:

- What are your access and inclusion initiatives currently underway?
- What are the specific considerations for different priority groups?
- What are your other equity and inclusion priorities that have yet to be developed?
- What strategies have worked well when identifying gaps and opportunities to inform your service plan?
- How can the ministry best support CMSMs and DSSABs to develop and implement an inclusion plan?

The ministry may request qualitative reports as described above in order to monitor the implementation of CWELCC and to inform future initiatives related to child care access and inclusion. SSMs are encouraged to proactively share these reports with the ministry, if available.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of the CWELCC system is to make high-quality child care in Ontario affordable, accessible, and inclusive. The province is committed to a child care system that is accessible for all children and will develop a plan that also supports access to affordable child care for underserved and vulnerable children and children from diverse populations, including, but not limited to, children living in low income families, children with special needs and those needing enhanced or individual supports, Indigenous children, Black and other racialized children, children of newcomers to Canada, and official language minorities.

The purpose of Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework 2023 is to support CMSMs and DSSABs with developing and implementing local service plans with an increased focus on access and inclusion. The ministry will continue to explore enhancements to the CWELCC Access and Inclusion Framework throughout the duration of the CWELCC Agreement.

In spring/ summer of 2023, CMSMs and DSSABs will incorporate Directed Growth plans within their existing five-year service plans to ensure a broad range of communities and populations

have access to high-quality, affordable, and inclusive child care. As it expands its child care system, the ministry is working with SSMs and a range of other partners, to ensure equitable funding approaches based on community need.

Ontario is also providing start-up grants to support the creation of new spaces in targeted service areas and underserved and vulnerable communities and populations. Start-up grants will assist licensed child care centre operators to purchase equipment or renovate spaces, and licensed home child care agencies to purchase equipment for providers, in support of licensing requirements.

Where possible, Ontario will report the annual public expenditures on child care programs dedicated to children from diverse and/or underserved and vulnerable families. The province will also work with the federal government on monitoring quality and access and inclusion goals with statistical data. Ontario will continue its work with partners to gather data and conduct identification of barriers to access.

The ministry will continue to consider the sector's feedback on longer term policy and data collection initiatives as part of ongoing CWELCC policy and program development. As such, the Access and Inclusion Framework will continue to evolve as consultations continue and additional data and reporting become available throughout the implementation of CWELCC.