



THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF NIAGARA
PUBLIC HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
AGENDA

PHSSC 4-2025

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

1:00 p.m.

Council Chamber - In Person and Electronic Meeting

Niagara Region Headquarters, Campbell West

1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way, Thorold, ON

To view live stream meeting proceedings visit: niagararegion.ca/government/council

	Pages
1. <u>CALL TO ORDER</u>	
2. <u>LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT STATEMENT</u>	
3. <u>DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY INTEREST</u>	
4. <u>PRESENTATIONS</u>	
4.1 <u>Programs to Support Psychological Wellness at Niagara EMS</u> Karen Lutz, Deputy Chief, Operations, Niagara EMS and Mayram Traub, Psychological Wellness Facilitator	3 - 15
5. <u>DELEGATIONS</u>	
5.1 <u>Operation - Leave the Streets Behind</u>	
5.1.1 Kenneth Smalko, Royal Canadian Legion Branch 17 Thorold	16 - 17

6. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 6.1 COM 11-2025 18 - 64
Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan 2025-2030

A presentation will precede the consideration of this item.

- 6.2 PHD 3-2025 65 - 86
Public Health 2025 Annual Service Plan and Budget Submission

A presentation will precede the consideration of this item.

7. CONSENT ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

- 7.1 COM-C 6-2025 87 - 93
Thorold Motion

- 7.2 COM 13-2025 94 - 100
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- 7.3 PHD 4-2025 101 - 104
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- 7.4 PHD-C 1-2025 105 - 106
Programs to Support Psychological Wellness at Niagara EMS

8. OTHER BUSINESS

9. CLOSED SESSION

- 9.1 Confidential COM 12-2025
A Matter of Labour Relations/Employee Negotiations and Personal Matters about Identifiable Individuals Pursuant to Sections 239(2)(d)(b) of the Municipal Act, 2001: Special Needs Program Update

A presentation will precede the consideration of this item.

To be distributed.

10. BUSINESS ARISING FROM CLOSED SESSION ITEMS

11. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 6, 2025, at 1:00 p.m. in the Council Chamber, Regional Headquarters.

12. ADJOURNMENT

If you require any accommodations for a disability in order to attend or participate in meetings or events, please contact the Accessibility Advisor at 905-980-6000 ext. 3252 (office), 289-929-8376 (cellphone) or accessibility@niagararegion.ca (email).

Programs to Support Psychological Wellness at Niagara EMS

Public Health and Social Services Committee

PHD-C 1-2025

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Karen Lutz, Deputy Chief, Operations, Niagara EMS

Mayram Traub, Psychological Wellness Facilitator

Programs to Support Psychological Wellness at Niagara EMS

PHSSC April 8, 2025

Objectives

- To proactively highlight to PHSSC three innovative programs at Niagara EMS to support the Psychological Wellness of staff and the ways they are used.
- To demonstrate the linkage between these programs and researched evidence surrounding mental stress injuries and first responders.
- To report on the impact of these programs to date.

Presumptive Legislation in Bill 163

- 2016 - Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act
- A first responder, diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, is presumed to have been injured on the job without the need to prove a causal link between PTSD and a workplace event.

First Responder Work Related Stressors

- Operational workload
- Physical risks – lifting, workplace violence
- Psychological stress from traumatic events
- Lack of time to recuperate between calls
- Evidence demonstrates that organizational support during these stressors may mitigate these stressors that precipitate mental stress injuries.

Proactive and Innovative Programming

- Decompression Time and Mental Stress Leave Days - to address Psychological Stress from traumatic events and to allow time to recuperate between calls
- High Acuity Incident Heat Map – to actively monitor any physical and psychological traumatic events
- Time on Task Report – to address Operational Workload

Decompression Time and Mental Stress Leave Days

- Following a difficult call or specific incident that elicits an acute stress reaction a period of decompression time may be provided to the staff member
- Employees are offered mental health supports
- If required, up to two additional Mental Stress Leave Days may be requested

High Acuity Incident Heat Map

- Is a quick visual view for Superintendents of the frequency of exposures to high stress calls
- Developed by analyzing our own data and WSIB reports for the types of calls linked to mental stress injuries
- Superintendents can quickly look to see if any of their staff have had an increase in frequency of exposures and proactively check in.

Time on Task Report

- This is a real time report that monitors the workload of all our staff
- High workloads are highlighted by colours – red, yellow and green
- Superintendents can use this data to move crews with high workloads to areas where call volumes are less to decrease the workload and potential exposure to high acuity stressful calls

Others Mental Health Supports in Place

- Peer Support
- Chaplain
- Family information night for new frontline Paramedics and System Status Controllers (SSCs)
- Coach Medic/SSC Mentorship program for new recruits
- Provincial Resource Guide
- Operational Hotwash Process by Superintendents
- EFAP (Employee Family Assistance Program)

Results of Programs to Date

- Reduction of 56% of WSIB Claims or cost avoidance of \$435,110.00 since 2022
- 26% reduction of Lost Time days in 2024 compared to 2023
- Allows our Superintendents to proactively monitor the psychological health of our staff, perform check-ins and offer an array of supports if required
- Programming recognized nationally and internationally

Next Steps

- Continue to actively encourage and support our Superintendents to complete check ins with staff
- Implement more seamless processes for Return to Work after Mental Stress Injuries
- Build a program to support staff preparing to retire using evidenced based research
- Increased resources for Peer Support including Leadership Peer Support

Questions?

From: [PF-Mailbox-01](#)
Subject: FW: Online Form - Request to Speak at a Standing Committee or Regional Council
Date: March 18, 2025 5:38:36 PM

From: Niagara Region Website
Sent: Tuesday, 18 March 2025 17:38:30 (UTC-05:00) Eastern Time (US & Canada)
To: Clerks
Subject: Online Form - Request to Speak at a Standing Committee or Regional Council

Request to Speak at a Standing Committee or Regional Council

To reply, copy the email address from below and put into 'To'. (if resident entered their email address)

Name
KENNETH A SMALKO

Address
[REDACTED]

City
THOROLD

Postal
[REDACTED]

Phone
[REDACTED]

Email
[REDACTED]

Organization
Royal Canadian Legion BR 17 Thorold

standing committee
Public Health and Social Services Committee

Presentation Topic

Operation Leave the Streets Behind

Presentation includes slides

No

Previously presented topic

No

Presentation Details

Working with Region over the last 4 years the Royal Canadian Legion in the Niagara Region has had great success with the Operation Leave the Streets Behind . We have housed and provided assistance to countless Veterans. There was some initial growing pains as we at the RCL did not understand the benefits the Region brought to the table. Also the Region did not understand the vast resources the RCL has access to. We started with weekly Microsoft team meetings to bi-weekly meetings. Approximately 2 years ago all meeting ceased. The RCL in Niagara has been left out of the process. We are looking to remind the Niagara Region of the unlimited resources the RCL has to help not only the Veterans on the street but all Veterans. Our goal is to reset this, so we assist all of our Veterans, so that none of the men and women who have put the uniform on for this country fall thru the cracks and they get all of the benefits they have earned. We need to be included in this process again. As we have stated in the past. As long as our government is sending or men and women in uniform from the best place on this planet to the worst places the Royal Canadian Legion will be there to assist them. I would like to speak at the Public Health Meeting on April 8th, 2025 @ 1p.m

Video Consent

Yes

Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan 2025- 2030

Public Health and Social Services Committee
COM 11-2025
April 8, 2025

Satinder Klair, Director of Children's Services

Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan 2025-2030

What is a Service System Plan?

- Provincially mandated requirement
- Data and community informed multi-year plan
- Guides investment in high quality programs and services
- Sets priorities to achieve the best outcomes for children and families

Service Plan Development Cycle



Service Plan Engagement

- Feedback solicited from:
 - 2,612 Parents and Caregivers
 - 563 Licenced Child Care Staff and Operators
 - 31 Licenced Home Child Care Providers
 - 45 Early ON staff
 - 102 Childrens Services Staff (including directly operated child care sites)
 - Niagara Region Women's Advisory Committee
 - Niagara Region Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee

Service System Plan Pillars

1. Customer-Centered
2. High-Quality
3. Accessible and Responsive
4. Affordable and Growth Focused
5. Community-Driven

Pillar 1: Customer Centered

Goal: Awareness of programs and services offered

Objectives

- Access to program information
- Opportunities for engagement and feedback

Pillar 2: High Quality

Goal: Programs and services are high quality and support healthy child development

Objectives

- Clear expectations and shared definition of quality
- Timely access to information
- Attracts and retains qualified educators

Pillar 3: Accessible & Responsive

Goal: Responsive to the needs of families and children in Niagara

Objectives

- Programs and services meet family's needs
- Delivered with a Diversity Equity and Inclusion focus

Pillar 4: Affordable & Growth Focused

Goal: Programs are affordable for families and support economic growth

Objectives

- Improve access to subsidized programming
- Continue CWELCC expansion
- Support ongoing collaborative partnerships

Pillar 5: Community-Driven

Goal: Work towards integrated service delivery

Objectives

- Collaborate with internal and external partners
- Strengthen relationships with Indigenous & Francophone partners

Council Strategic Priorities

Effective Region

Remaining an employer of choice by transforming service delivery in a way that is innovative, collaborative and fiscally-responsible.

Green and Resilient Region

Focusing on reducing our collective carbon footprint and preparing to adapt to climate change impacts by ensuring current and future infrastructure is resilient.

Equitable Region

Providing opportunities for a safe and inclusive Niagara by listening and responding to our current community needs and planning for future growth.

Prosperous Region

Advocating with senior governments for future growth and enhancing Niagara's transportation network to help support a diverse economy by creating a Region where new and existing businesses can thrive and grow locally, nationally and internationally.

Thank you

Subject: Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan 2025-2030

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Recommendations

1. That the Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan be **APPROVED**.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan 2025-2030 as per provincial requirements.
- The Early Years Service System Plan (“Service System Plan”) is provincially mandated under the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*.
- The Service System Plan is a comprehensive multi-year plan that will act as the road map for the next five years to guide investment in high quality early years and child-care programs and services.
- The development of the Service System Plan followed an extensive and in-depth analysis of community-level demographic and service data and community engagement. It captures the voices of parents and families, child-care centres, licenced home child-care providers and other staff across the sector.
- The Service System Plan is built on five pillars: Customer Centred, High Quality, Accessible and Responsive, Affordable and Growth Focused, and Community-Driven.
- Each pillar is comprised of a goal, objective and activities which will direct the work under each pillar of the Service System Plan. An implementation plan on activities and evaluation will be developed following approval of the plan.

Financial Considerations

The Service System Plan is mandated and primarily funded through provincial funding that is included in Children’s Services overall gross operating budget of \$198 million.

Analysis

Background

Niagara Region Children's Services is the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for the Early Years and Child Care Sector. The development of the Service System plan is legislated under the *Early Years and Child Care Act, 2014*. Regional Council's approval of the Service System Plan is required per provincial requirements.

The Service System Plan is a comprehensive multi-year plan that will act as a road map for the next five years to guide investment in early years and child-care programs and services. The Service System Plan sets priorities to achieve the best outcomes for Niagara children and families.

The Service System Plan has been developed based on engagement and input from over 3,300 individuals and community partners, including parents and families, child-care operators, staff from the sector, Niagara Region Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, Niagara Region Women's Advisory Committee and, more importantly, children themselves.

Service System Plan

The Service System Plan provides a road map to create a more balanced, inclusive and customer driven system, leading to improved outcomes for children, families and the community.

The Service System Plan will be guided by five pillars, each with corresponding goals, objectives and activities. The five pillars and goals are:

1. Customer Centered: Families and children in Niagara are aware of the programs and services offered.
2. High Quality: Early years and the child-care sector are supported to provide programs and services that are high quality, supporting healthy child development.
3. Accessible and Responsive: Programs and services are responsive to the needs of families and children in Niagara and ensure all can access programming where they feel welcome, included, and supported.
4. Affordable and Growth Focused: The system programs are affordable for families and can meet economic growth and demand to support parents' and caregivers' workforce participation.

5. Community Driven: Niagara Region leverages relationships with community partners to work towards integrated service delivery.

A copy of the Service System Plan is attached as Appendix 1 to this report and provides details on each of the pillars, including objectives and activities.

Conclusion

Niagara region is growing, welcoming diverse families to call our twelve municipalities home. As we grow, it is important that the early years and child-care sector evolves in a way that meets the changing needs of children and families. This Service System Plan will continue to strengthen the Region's role as the Service System Manager by creating a structure to guide the early years and child-care sector while maintaining flexibility to adapt to change.

A robust implementation plan that outlines the key performance indicators and expected outcomes will be developed. Progress against the goals will be tracked and measured over the next five years and reported regularly to the Public Health and Social Services Committee.

Alternatives Reviewed

The development of the Service System Plan is a legislative and mandatory requirement.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The Service System Plan aligns with the Council's strategic priorities of an equitable region and a prosperous region as the Service System Plan will support inclusive and welcoming early years and child care programming, and help to attract and retain businesses and create jobs by providing accessible, high-quality early years and child care.

Prepared by:

Satinder, Klair
Director, Children's Services
Community Services

Recommended by:

Henri Koning
Commissioner
Community Services

Submitted by:

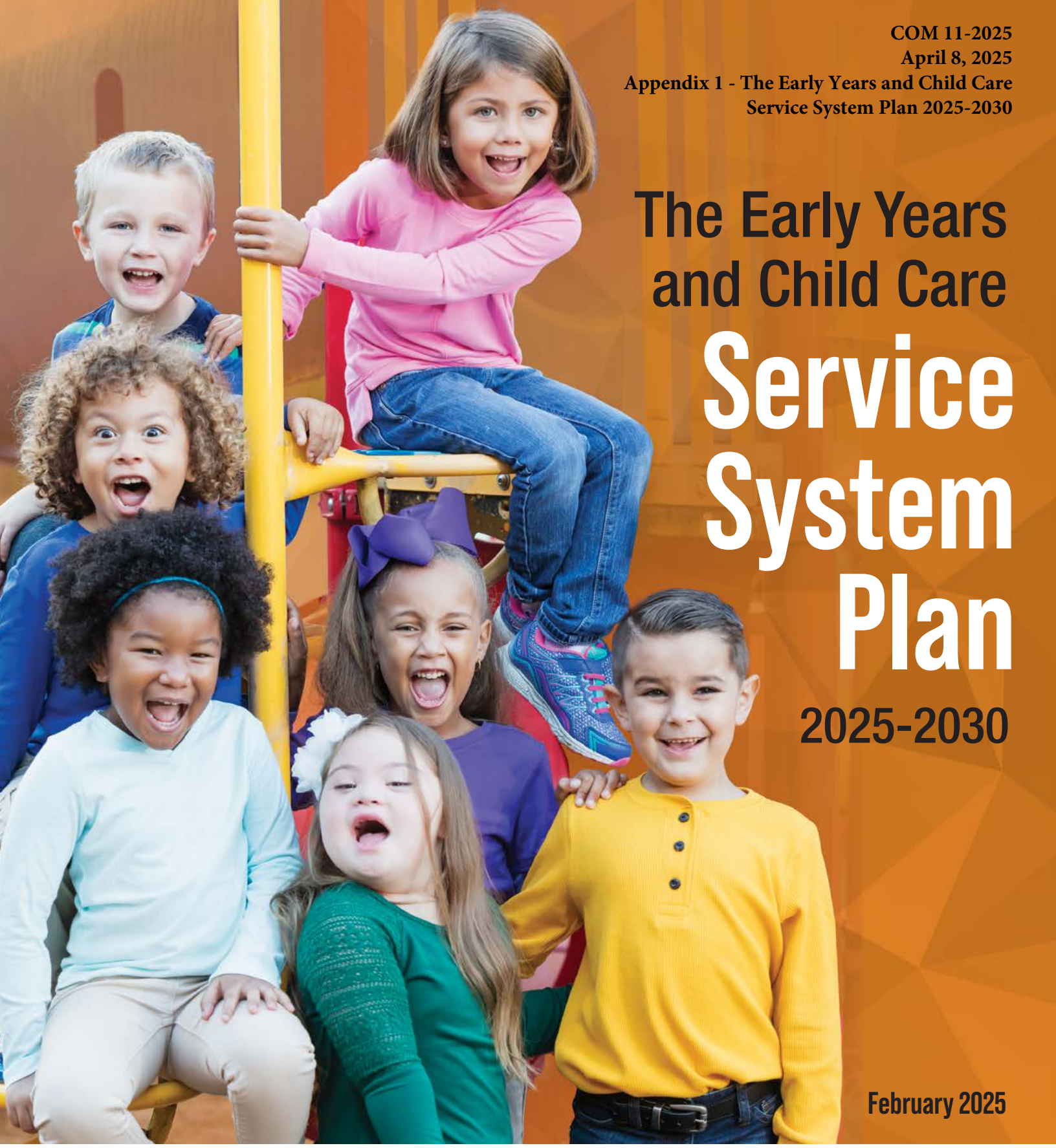
Ron Tripp, P.Eng.

Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared in consultation with Pamela Hamilton, Senior Program Financial Specialist, and reviewed by Donovan, D'Amboise, Manager Program Financial Specialist.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan 2025- 2030



The Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan

2025-2030

February 2025

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Land Acknowledgement

Niagara Region is situated on treaty land. This land is steeped in the rich history of the First Nations such as the Hatiwendaronk, the Haudenosaunee, and the Anishinaabe, including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. There are many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit from across Turtle Island that live and work in Niagara today. The Regional Municipality of Niagara stands with all Indigenous peoples, past and present, in promoting the wise stewardship of the lands on which we live.

The Regional Municipality of Niagara is committed to equity and respect for all by ensuring Indigenous voices are heard and included in our plans and programs. In addition, we are committed to eradicating anti-Indigenous racism and discrimination within the early years and child care sector in Niagara.

Message from the Regional Chair

On behalf of Niagara Regional Council, I am pleased to offer my support for Niagara Region's Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan, which will be instrumental in guiding Niagara's early years and child care sector for the next five years.

As the Region continues to grow, welcoming new businesses and families, and as the early years and child care sector continues to evolve with federal and provincial policies, it is imperative that we have a Service System Plan that can support our flourishing region and changing family needs.

The Service System Plan has been heavily informed by in-depth community consultations with parents and families, staff working in the sector and community partners, all of whom provided valuable input that will help us build a strong direction for the future. This Plan will help us deliver inclusive, accessible and affordable early years and child care programming leading to improved outcomes for children, families and the community.

The goals we have set for ourselves through this plan are ambitious. Achieving them will require strong collaboration and shared commitment from all parties, and I look forward to seeing what we can collectively accomplish for the good of Niagara's families and communities.



Jim Bradley, Chair
Niagara Region



Letter from the Director

I am pleased to introduce Niagara Region's Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan for 2025–2030 ("Service System Plan"). Under the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*, Service System Managers are required to develop a Service System Plan that sets a five-year strategic direction. This plan aligns with Niagara Region's current priorities, reinforcing our commitment to building a thriving community by growing better, together. It reflects our dedication to fostering a connected, inclusive, and flourishing Niagara.

The Service System Plan is a comprehensive multi-year roadmap that guides investments in high-quality early years and child care programs and services. It establishes key priorities to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and families in Niagara. It also reaffirms our commitment to strengthening a high-quality, affordable, responsive, and accessible early years and child care sector.

This plan was informed by extensive community engagement, with input from over 3,300 individuals, including parents and families, child care operators, staff from the sector, EarlyON, and Niagara Region, and, most importantly, children. Collaboration and research enabled us to create a relevant and impactful plan.

Achieving the plan's goals will require ongoing collaboration and coordination across sectors and levels of government. A shared commitment to these priorities will ensure meaningful progress for children and families in our region.

I extend my sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed their insights and feedback during the engagement process—your input has been invaluable in shaping this plan. I would also like to acknowledge the dedicated staff who diligently developed this plan based on the collected community engagement data.

As we look ahead to the next five years, I am excited to continue working together to create positive change. Growing better, together means fostering collective action to achieve our shared vision and keeping Niagara's children and families at the heart of our efforts.



Satinder Klair, Director Children's Services
Niagara Region



Background

Our Role as a Service System Manager

Niagara Region is one of 47 Service System Managers mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education to plan, oversee and manage child care and early years programming for children aged 0 to 12 years in Niagara.

As the service system manager for the early years and child care sector, Niagara Region provides oversight to the early years and child care system in Niagara, while also directly operating programs and services for families and children. Niagara Region oversees and delivers programs and services across 12 local area municipalities that make up Niagara Region: Fort Erie, Grimsby, Lincoln, Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Port Colborne, St. Catharines, Thorold, Wainfleet, Welland and West Lincoln.

Under the *Early Years and Child Care Act, 2014*, Niagara Region's Children's Services plays an integral role in planning, funding, administering, and operating early years and licensed child care services in Niagara. Under this act we are mandated to complete a Service System Plan every 5 years. This Service System Plan is a 5 year plan from 2025-2030.



As the Service System Manager, Niagara Region's responsibilities include:

Management of provincial **funding and resources** to support children and families.

Supporting **local policies** for the operation of child care and early years programming.

Monitoring quality across the early years and child care system.

Professional development and **capacity building** for staff working in the early years and child care sector.

Implementation of **Canada-wide early learning and child care** program and targeted child care expansion.

Being **accountable** to the Ministry of Education and families for the early years and child care system and funding.

Direct service delivery, including direct operation of five child care centres and one licensed home child care agency, and delivering child care fee subsidy to families.

Evidence informed **system planning** to address the needs of Niagara residents and Provincial priorities.

Early Years and Child Care Systems in Niagara Region

Centre Based Child Care

Centre based care is provided for children aged 0-12 years by not-for-profit and for-profit operators in a variety of locations, including schools, community hubs and stand-alone buildings. As of Dec. 31, 2024, there are 193 contracted centres operating 13,750 licensed spaces in Niagara region.

Home Based Child Care

Licensed home child care agencies contracted with independent providers to care for children aged 0-12 years in their private home. Extended days, evenings and weekend care may be available at the discretion of the provider. As of Dec. 31, 2024, there are three agencies offering 856 spaces across 141 homes.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres

EarlyON Child and Family Centres (EarlyONs) offer free virtual and in-person programming for children aged 0-6 years and their parents or caregivers. EarlyONs are places where families engage in play-based learning, access resources and support and meet other children and families. As of Dec. 31, 2024, there are 21 physical EarlyON locations and one virtual EarlyON centre in Niagara.

Special Needs Resourcing

Special Needs Resourcing can be accessed through licensed child care or EarlyON locations. Educators are supported by resource or behaviour consultants so children can fully participate in programming. Transition to school supports are also provided for children entering kindergarten.



Child Care Fee Subsidy

Fee subsidy provides financial assistance to help families pay for licensed child care so they can attend school or go to work. Subsidy is based on both household income and the cost of child care.

Professional Development and Learning

Niagara Region contracts with the Early Childhood Community Development Centre to deliver professional learning to Niagara Early Childhood Educators to support them in their learning and professional development.

Quality Programming in Early Years and Child Care

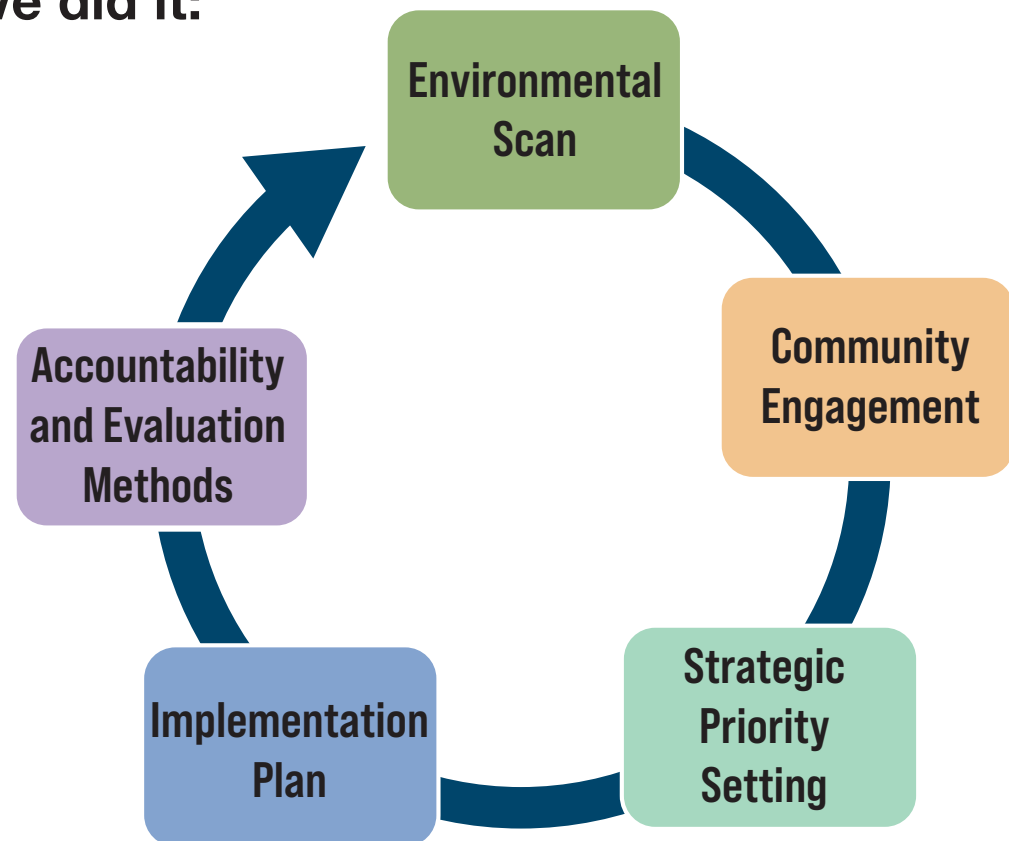
Quality is a key pillar in delivering service to families and children in Niagara. To maintain quality care all licensed child care centres and licensed home child care providers are trained in Quality Child Care Niagara.

Process Overview

Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan Process

The Early Years and Child Care Service System Plan (Service System Plan) is a mandated, comprehensive multi-year plan that will act as our road map for the next five years to guide investment in high quality early years and child care programs and services. The Service System Plan allows us to set priorities that will aim to achieve the best outcomes for Niagara children and families. Niagara Region's Children's Services has followed a comprehensive process, including an in-depth analysis of community-level demographic and service data and community engagement, to inform the development of this plan. Following the release of this report, an Implementation and Evaluation Plan will be developed.

How we did it:



1. Jurisdictional Review

- We reviewed Service System plans of seven comparators to understand their goals and objectives, as well as the structure of their plans

2. Environmental Scan

- We pulled data from multiple databases to gather the most up to date data on children's services programs
- In addition, we leveraged the 2021 Canadian census data to understand the current landscape in Niagara

3. Community Engagement

- To inform our community engagement we reviewed 15 other Consolidated Municipal Service Management Service System Plan engagement strategies
- Focus groups: conducted 12 groups with Registered Early Childhood Education and fee subsidy staff, community partners serving children and child care operators and providers
- Community engagement: administered an online survey promoted through social media, EarlyONs and child care centres and programs where we gathered 2,600 responses
- Staff Sector Survey: distributed an online survey to the sector where we gathered approximately 500 responses

Develop Broad Recommendations

- Completed a thematic analysis on data collected from the jurisdictional review, environmental scan and community engagement to identify trends and themes in line with Ministry of Education pillars
- Utilized analysis to create high-level recommendations

Data Validation With Partners

- Hosted two open house sessions after data was analyzed to ensure recommendations were aligned with other programs and services

Develop Goals, Objectives and Activities

- Following data validation with partners, goals, objectives and activities were drafted for each recommendation
- Implementation planning will build upon this framework to include indicators and metrics to allow us to track our progress



Early Years and Child Care in Canada

COVID-19

Educators and providers across Niagara worked together to ensure early learning and child care services continued to operate safely throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Niagara Region worked together with the Province of Ontario, Niagara Region Public Health and local child care providers to ensure essential workers had access to high-quality child care during province-wide school and child care closures. Our EarlyON Centres continued to provide programming for families using virtual and online modalities.

The Covid-19 pandemic strengthened child care’s role as an essential service that allows parents and caregivers to work and contribute to our economy. Together, we will continue to advocate for the role that high-quality, accessible child care plays in economic growth and recovery.

As we move towards a post-pandemic early years and child care system, we continue to face impacts to workforce stability, recruitment and retention. Recovery of the early learning and child care sector is an important part of the Service System Plan.

Truth and Reconciliation

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada published its final report detailing the experiences and impacts of the residential school system in Canada, creating a historical record of its legacy and consequences. The Calls to Action are directed at individuals, organizations and all levels of government to make concrete changes in society.

In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report and Calls to Action, Niagara Region published a series of reports to guide our work with First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities, including *Mno Bmaadziwin: Living the Good and Healthy Life and Creating our Way Forward*. An Indigenous ReconciliAction Plan is currently being developed.

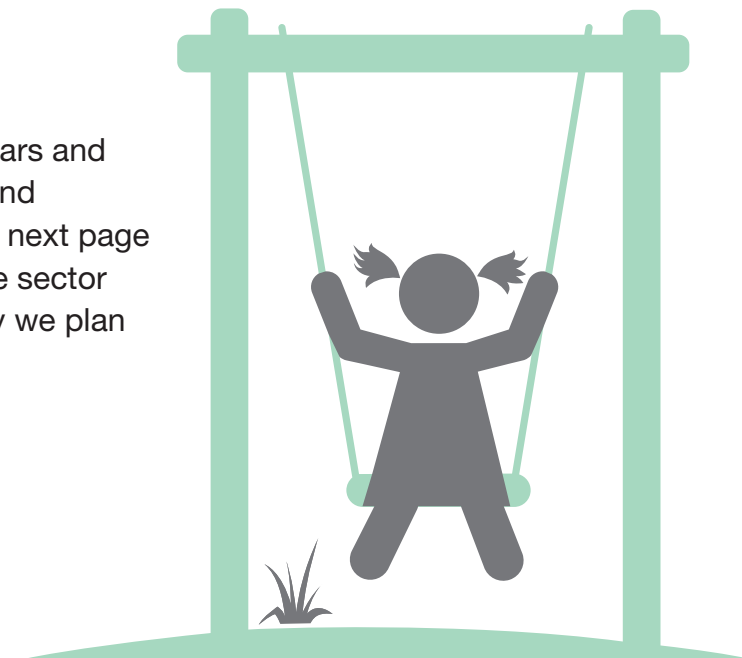
Niagara Region Children’s Services has a longstanding relationship with Indigenous agencies through the delivery of services intended to support the Indigenous peoples and standing in partnership with Indigenous partners on the implementation of Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action. Niagara Region Children’s Services currently supports two Indigenous led EarlyON Centres. And in partnership with Niagara College, Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre and Six Nations Polytechnic, proudly supports the Indigenous-led Registered Early Childhood Educators Program.

Niagara Region is committed to meaningful, authentic engagement with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities to ensure access to culturally safe services and programs delivered by the Region. To learn more about Niagara’s Indigenous Engagement, please visit the Niagara Region [Indigenous Engagement](#) website.

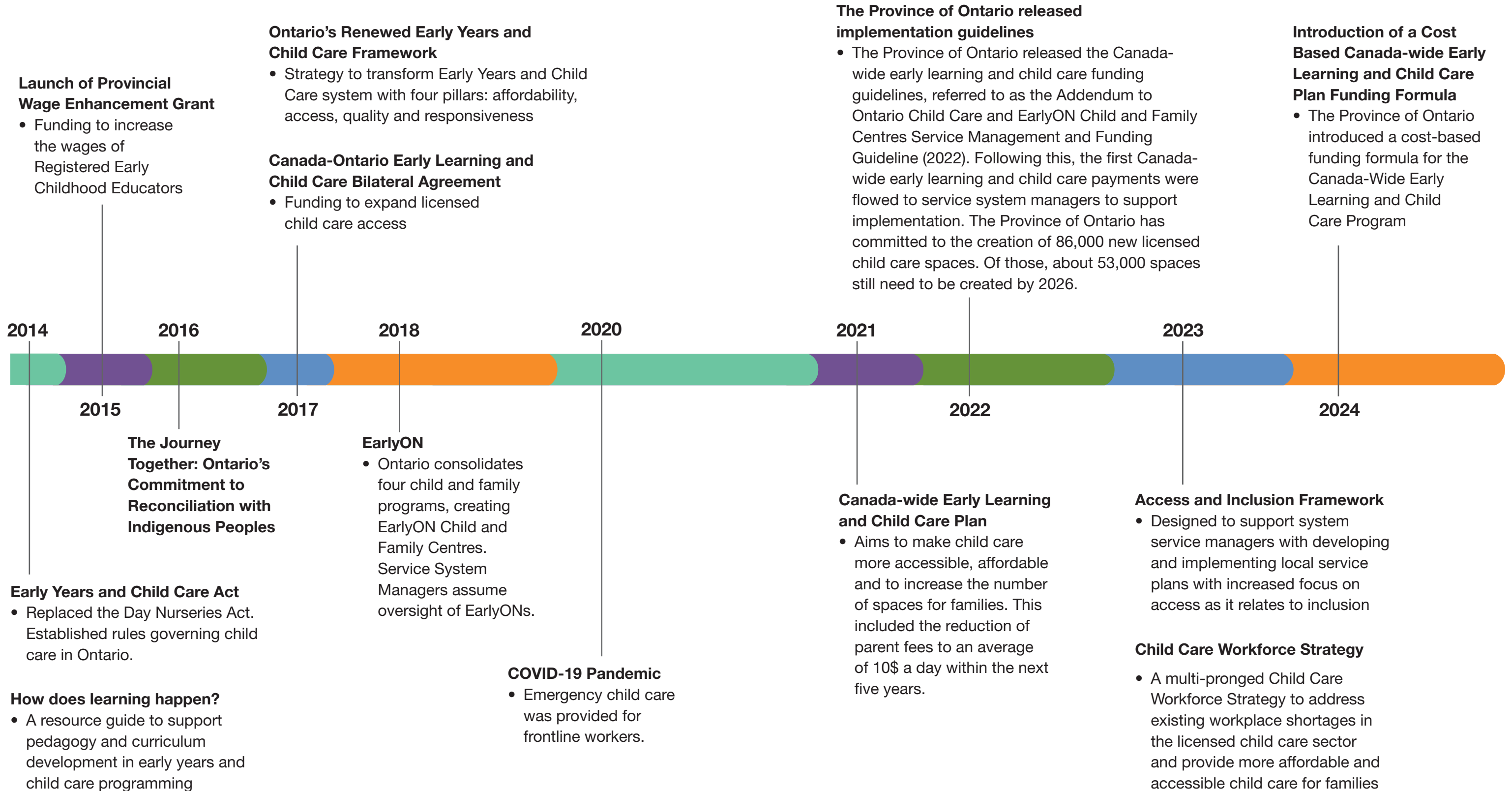
Niagara’s Service System Plan will build upon this work to ensure our system meets the needs of Indigenous parents, families and children.

Provincial and Federal Context

Over the course of the last 10 years, the early years and child care system has been experiencing rapid and large-scale transformation. The road map on the next page provides an overview of the major milestones the sector has experienced that continue to impact the way we plan and execute our work.



Road Map of Last 10 Years



Niagara-at-a-Glance

Niagara Region Current State

Niagara Region is a growing municipality, consisting of twelve local area municipalities, comprising urban and rural communities. As Niagara’s population grows, the region is becoming increasingly diverse, leading to changing needs of the children and families who call Niagara home. As a Service System Manager, Niagara Region must monitor community trends and demographic changes to ensure that the programs and services delivered continue to meet the needs of the community. This section illustrates data trends in Niagara that will influence the planning and delivery of programs and services.



Population Demographics

Niagara’s population continues to grow at a faster rate than the Province of Ontario and is projected to be 694,000 people living in Niagara by the year 2051. The population of Niagara Region grew by 6.7% from 446,888 to 477,941 between 2016 and 2021, higher than the provincial change of 5.8%.

Geography	Population 2016	Population 2021	Percentage Change
Ontario	13,448,494	14,223,942	5.8%
Niagara Region	446,888	477,941	6.7%

Since the last census cycle in 2021, Niagara Region’s population has grown by 9.9% to 525,352 in 2023.

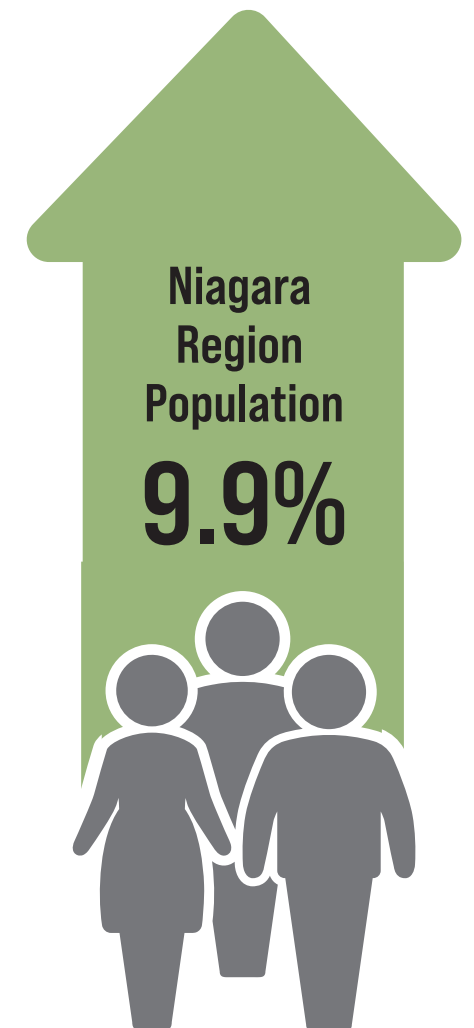
The three municipalities with the greatest population growth between 2016 and 2021 were Niagara-on-the-Lake (9.0%), Port Colborne (9.4%) and Thorold (26.7%).

Niagara is seeing an increase in housing starts each year, with 2,671 in 2021, 2,771 in 2022 and 2,810 in 2023. This growth in population and housing illustrates the need for agile early years and child care programs and services to continue to meet the growing needs in Niagara.

Niagara’s population is slightly older than the Province of Ontario, with an average age of 44.4 years compared to 41.8 years.

The 0-9 age range makes up 9.6% of Niagara’s population, which is slightly lower than the province (10.2%).

The data in this report is from the 2021 census which was the most up to date information available at the time of writing this report.



Diversity in Niagara

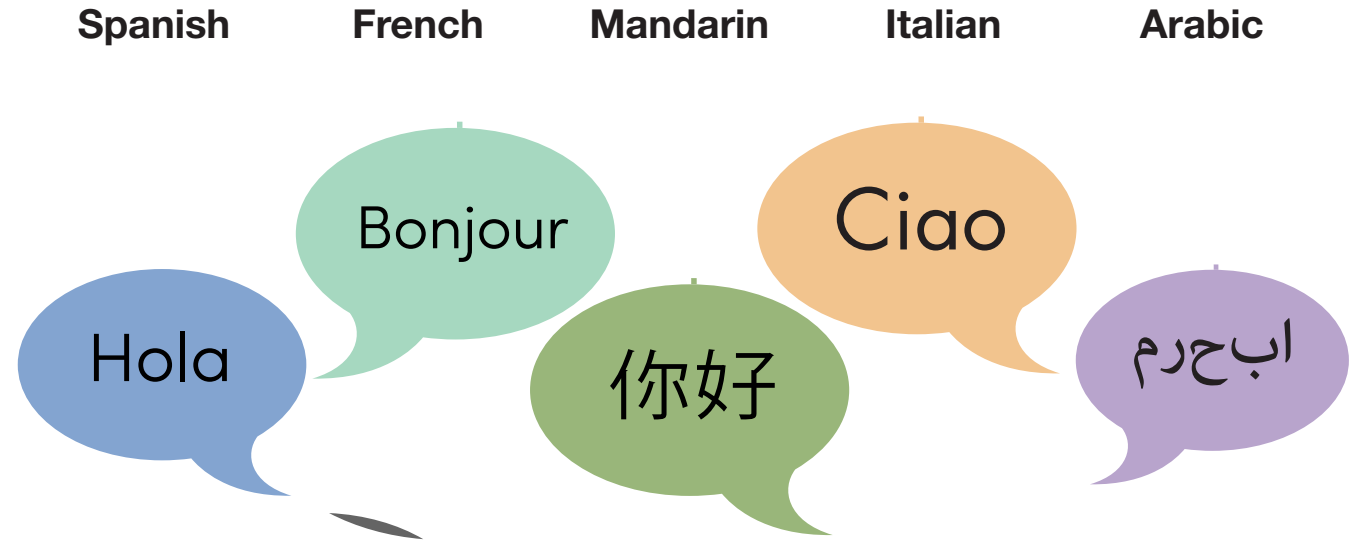
Niagara Region is becoming increasingly diverse. It is important for the early years and child care sector to adapt programs and services to meet the needs of diverse children and families.

Niagara is home to 83,005 Immigrants to Canada and 8,390 non-permanent residents, with these two groups representing 19.5% of Niagara’s population.

A total of 8,725 Niagara residents immigrated to Canada between 2016 and 2021.

In Niagara, 13.3% of residents identify as a visible minority, compared to 8.9% in 2016, which is an increase of 4.4%. Niagara Falls (20.9%), Thorold (18.5%) and St. Catharines (16.5%) have the highest proportion of residents who identify as a visible minority.

In Niagara, 6.94% of residents speak a language other than English most often at home. The five most commonly spoken languages other than English are:



About 3.0% of Niagara residents identify as Indigenous. Port Colborne (5.4%), Fort Erie (5.0%) and Welland (4.3%) have the highest proportion of residents who identify as Indigenous. However, Indigenous Peoples are underrepresented in the Census due to the absence of several Indian reserves and Indian settlements in the 2021 Census of Population. Furthermore, Indigenous Peoples are less likely to participate in Census due to lack of trust of the Canadian government, migration between geographical locations and unclear definitions of different Indigenous identity groups within the Census.



Socioeconomic Status Indicators

The median household income in Niagara is \$71,000, which is lower than the provincial median of \$79,500.

In Niagara, 3,653 (13.7%) children under six are living in low income based on the low-income measure after tax. This proportion is highest in St. Catharines (17.2%), Welland (16.5%) and Thorold (15.8%).

In Niagara, 17.67% of families are one-parent households.

The early years and child care sector plays an important role in ensuring programs and services are accessible by all children and families regardless of income.



Employment and Education

Access to licensed child care is an important driver of the economy, allowing for more women to participate in the workforce.

Niagara’s unemployment rate (15.5%) is higher than the Province (12.2%), the unemployment rate for women in Niagara (16.9%) is higher than the rate for men (14.2%).

Niagara’s participation rate (58.5%) is lower than the province (62.8%), the participation rate for women in Niagara (54.8%) is lower than the rate for men (62.5%).

In Niagara, 15.4% of residents over 15 have no certificate, diploma or degree; 31.9% of resident’s highest level of education is a high school diploma and 52.7% have completed a post-secondary diploma or degree.

At the same time, Niagara is experiencing consistent economic growth and investment with approximately 35 industrial business expansions or openings announced between 2022 and 2025. Niagara will welcome over 2,300 new job openings alone as a result of these new investments.

The early years and child care system is a major contributor to Niagara region’s success in economic prosperity. Early years and child care programming contributes robustly to meeting workforce demands to support economic development and opportunities for local residents to gain and maintain meaningful employment. Niagara Region's 10 Year Economic Development Strategy and Niagara’s Talent, Attraction and Retention Strategy, and the Service System Plan collectively will help guide the ongoing collaboration to strategically align child care and economic development initiatives.

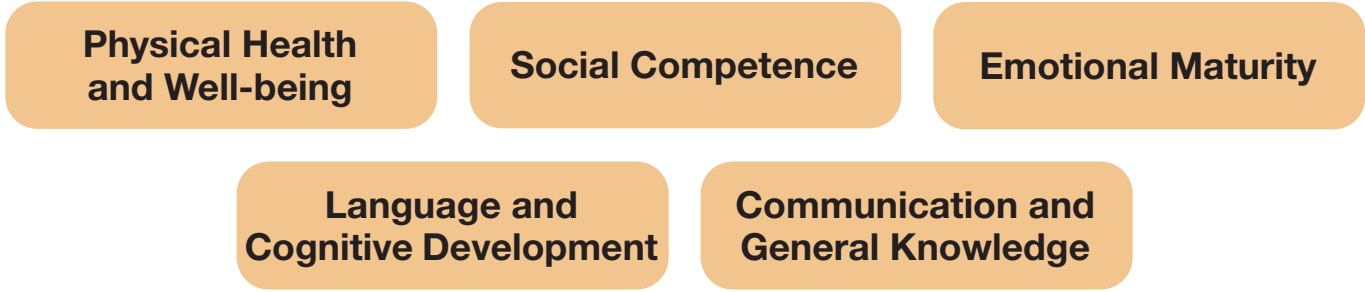


With new companies looking to call Niagara home and existing companies looking to expand, licensed child care is critical to boost labour force mobility to support economic growth in the region.

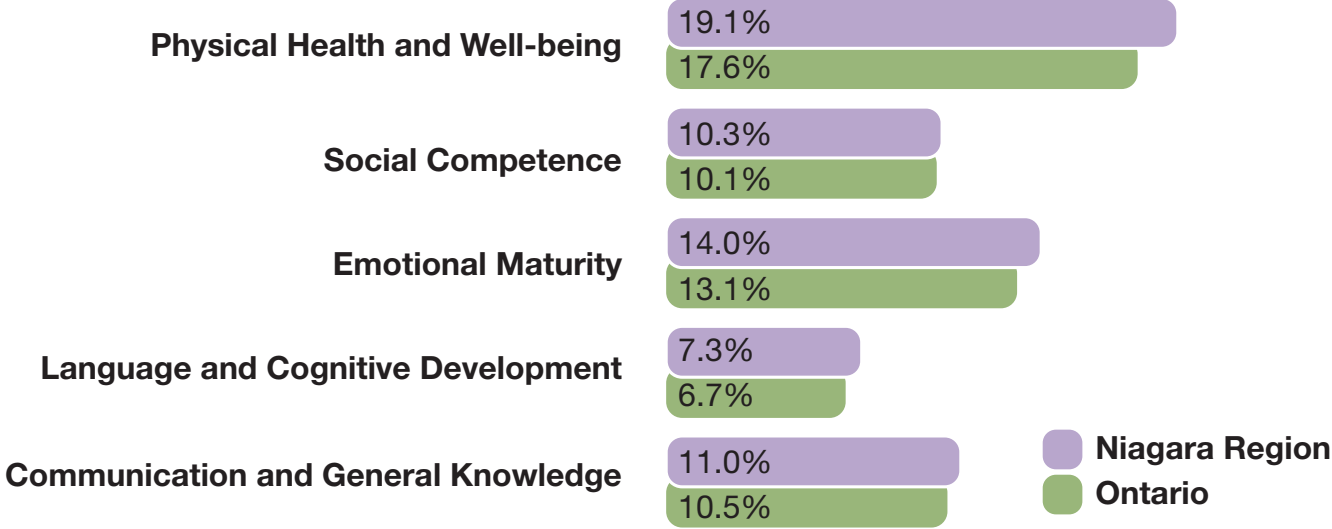
Early Development Instrument Data

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is administered by teachers in publicly funded schools. The EDI targets senior kindergarten students and is a questionnaire of 103 questions that the teacher assesses on behalf of their students. The EDI is mandated by the Ministry of Education and is conducted every three years in schools across Niagara region and the Province of Ontario.

The goal of the EDI is to get a snapshot to see how children are progressing and developing. The EDI measures vulnerability in five domains:



The following results are vulnerability rates for the latest cycle of EDI (Cycle 6, 2022 - 2023)



The latest EDI results indicate that we are aligned with the Provincial Vulnerability Rates. EDI provides us with a population level data point to see how our youngest learners in Niagara are progressing. The EDI data supports our commitment to evidence-informed decision making and allows us to strategically plan programs and services. EDI is used in collaborative work with other departments at Niagara Region like Public Health and the Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Children's Services Current State

EarlyON Centres

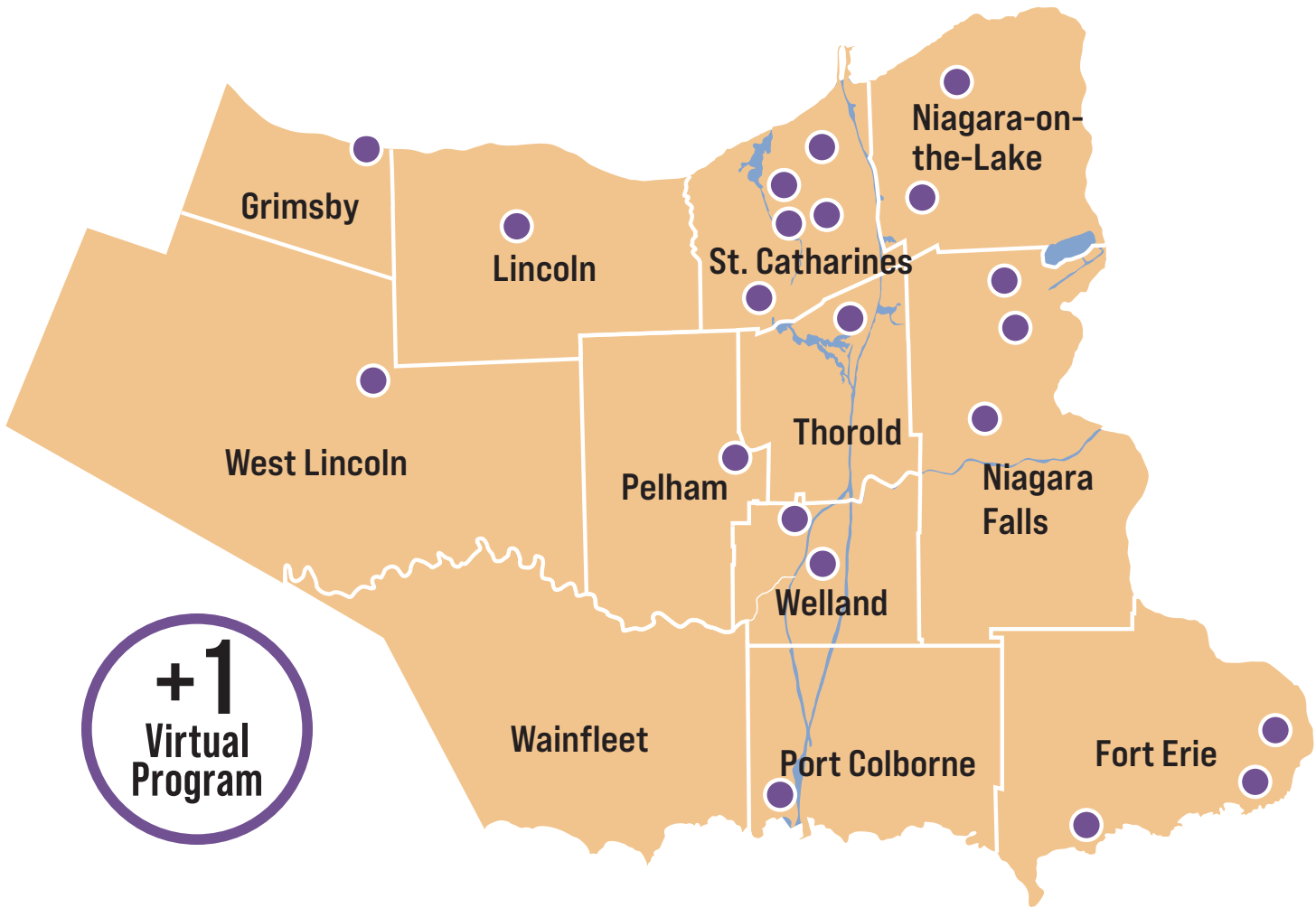
EarlyONs are community hubs where parents can come to play with their children and access a variety of programs for no cost. Families may come to EarlyONs for:

- Increased socialization with other children and families
- New toys, faces and environments
- Support with resources for special needs and developmental concerns or questions
- Structured programming offerings
- School readiness skills

Across Niagara, EarlyON programming is accessible in ten of our local area municipalities.

Indigenous programming is embedded through our two Indigenous EarlyON programs - Tshikeksa' EarlyON delivered by Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre and Odrohyagweh EarlyON delivered by Niagara Regional Native Centre. Our Indigenous-led EarlyON programs are focused on meeting the needs of the diverse off-reserve Indigenous population living in Niagara region by integrating Indigenous perspectives throughout the EarlyON curriculum.

While the Indigenous EarlyONs are open to all, they focus on offering Indigenous and culturally specific programming with a responsive pedagogy. Offering programming through these methods helps to bridge connections for Indigenous and non-Indigenous families to connect.



Map of Niagara region showing the locations of the EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

EarlyON Visits in 2023:

- 16,841** Unique children served
- 80,632** Children visits
- 13,926** Unique parents and caregivers served
- 65,227** Parent and caregiver visits

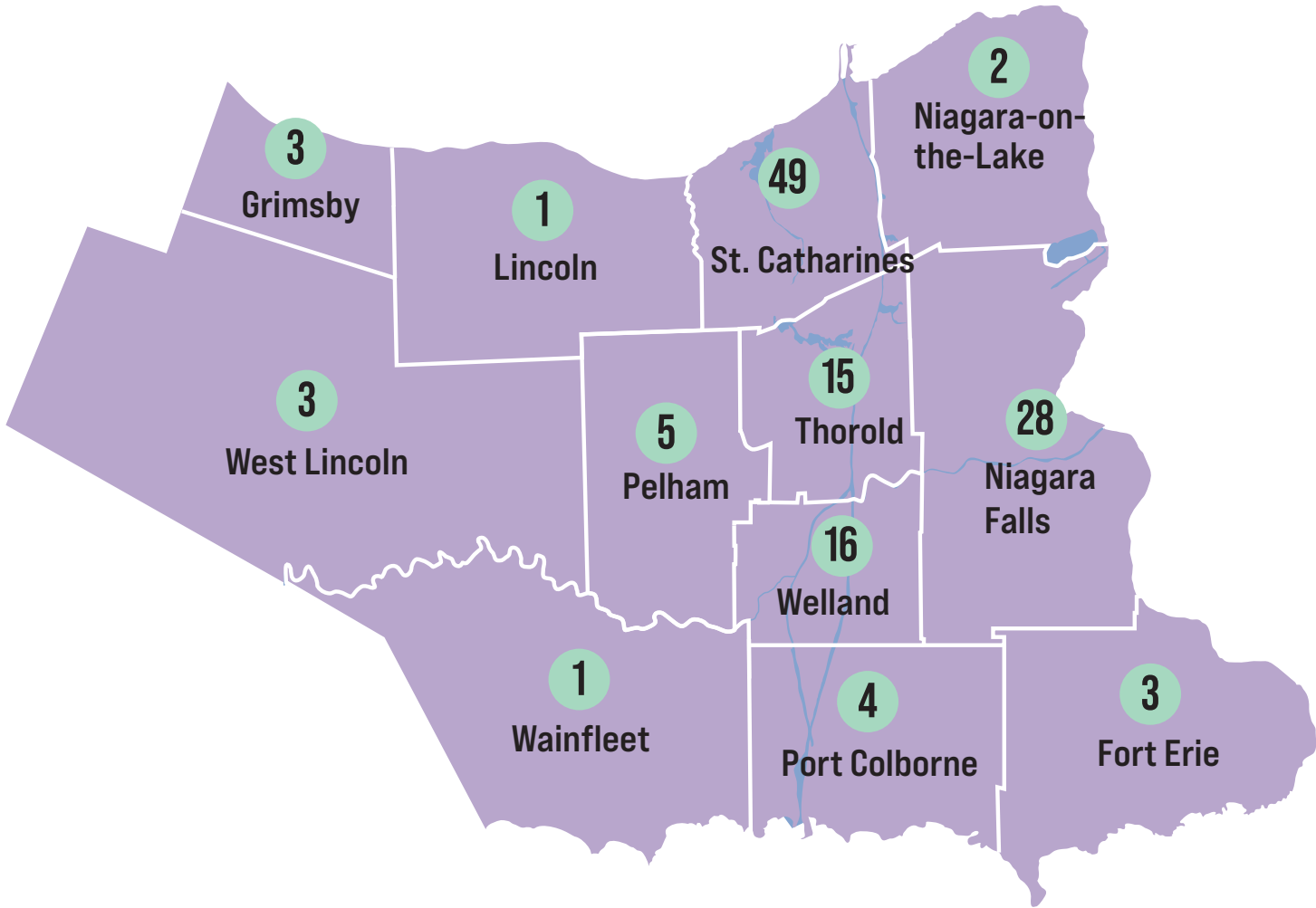


Licensed Home Child Care

Niagara Region and Wee Watch are the contracted agencies to deliver licensed home child care in Niagara. In 2024, Children’s Learning Garden signed a contract with Niagara Region to become the third licensed home child care provider and are expected to begin operation in late 2024.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Average daily enrollment	243	269	262	247	523	519
No. of contracted homes	92	89	99	91	120	141

Licensed home child care plays a vital role in supporting families across Niagara. With the current workforce challenges in the early years and child care sector, licensed home child care providers create capacity in the sector and allow for more families to have access to child care. Licensed home child care providers are located within the neighbourhoods that families live and work, improving accessibility to care for families who do not have access to a motor vehicle.



Map of Niagara Region showing number of licensed home child care spaces.

Number of licensed home child cares in each of the local area municipalities	
Fort Erie	4
Grimsby	4
Lincoln	1
Niagara Falls	29
Niagara-On-The-Lake	2
Pelham	5
Port Colborne	5
St Catharines	53
Thorold	19
Wainfleet	1
Welland	14
West Lincoln	4
TOTAL	141

Fee Subsidy

The fee subsidy program helps support eligible parents with financial assistance with child care costs. Fee subsidy is available for licensed child care centres, licensed home child care and licensed camp programs. Fee subsidy supports can range from the full to partial costs of child care being covered. The subsidy received by a family is based on their income, fees charged by providers, and thresholds established by the province.



Total number of children annually served by fee subsidy

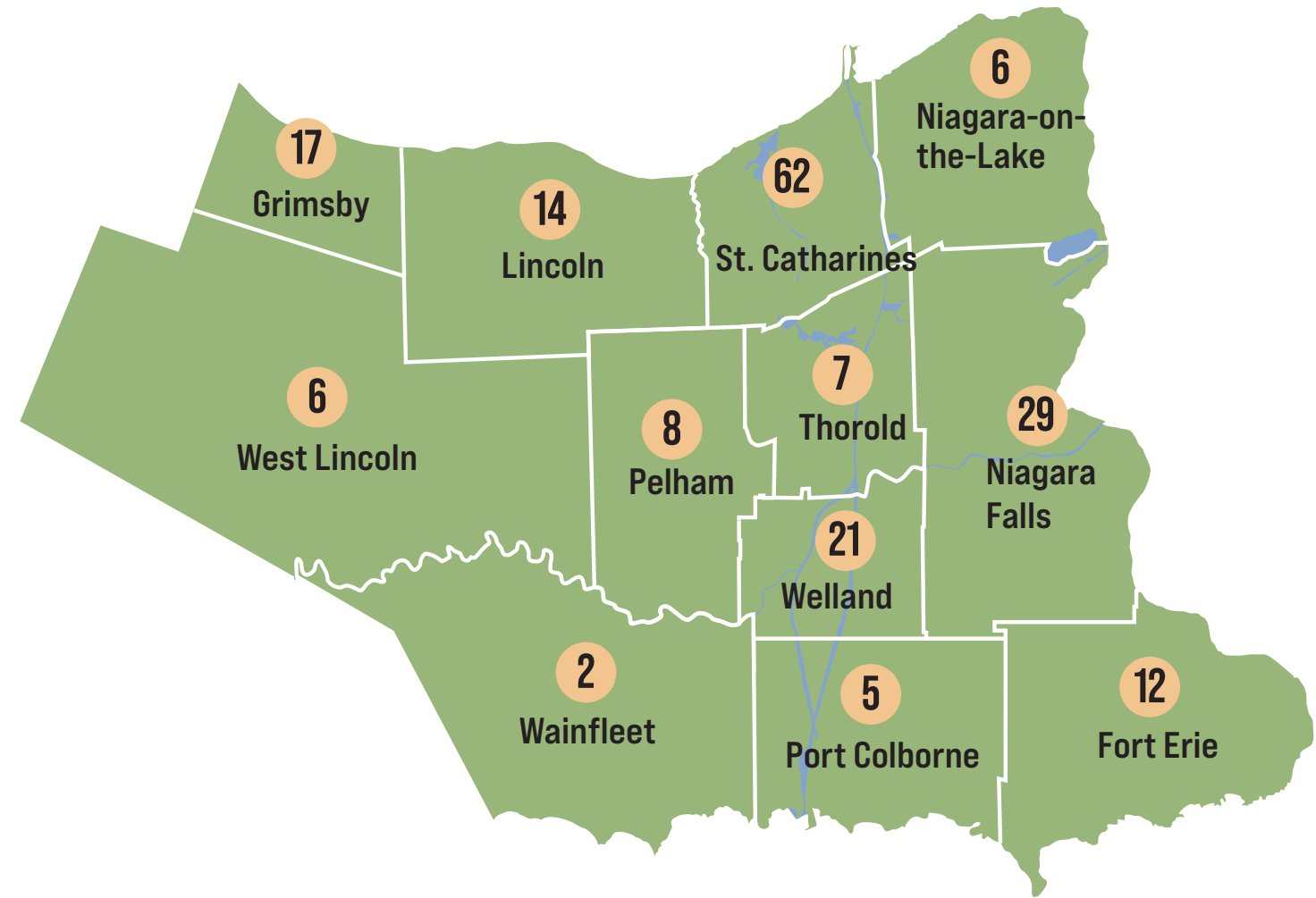
2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
4,334	3,396	2,787	2,837	2,587

Below is the number of children who have the entire cost of their care covered by fee subsidy. These are families making less than \$20,000 a year.

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
2,013	1,431	958	824	780

The introduction of Canada-wide early learning and child care has made child care more affordable for more families, which has impacted the number of families accessing fee subsidy. Canada-wide early learning and child care has also further contributed to a higher demand for licensed child care.

As we continue to support Canada-wide early learning and child care expansion and directed growth of licensed child care spaces, we will be modernizing our fee subsidy program to keep up with the changing needs. Providing a fee subsidy program and access to licensed child care is integral to supporting the most vulnerable families in Niagara.



Map of Niagara Region showing number of licensed child care centres.

Licensed Child Care Centres

At the end of 2024, Niagara region had approximately 13,750 licenced child care centre spaces and 846 licenced home child care spaces, for a total of 14,596 spaces. Niagara has experienced tremendous growth in licensed child care spaces in the last five years, with licensed child care spaces increasing by 2,211.

Number of Canada-wide early learning and child care enrolled centres	
Fort Erie	12
Grimsby	17
Lincoln	14
Niagara Falls	29
Niagara-On-The-Lake	6
Pelham	8
Port Colborne	5
St Catharines	62
Thorold	7
Wainfleet	2
Welland	21
West Lincoln	6
TOTAL	189

Number of Child Care Service Providers

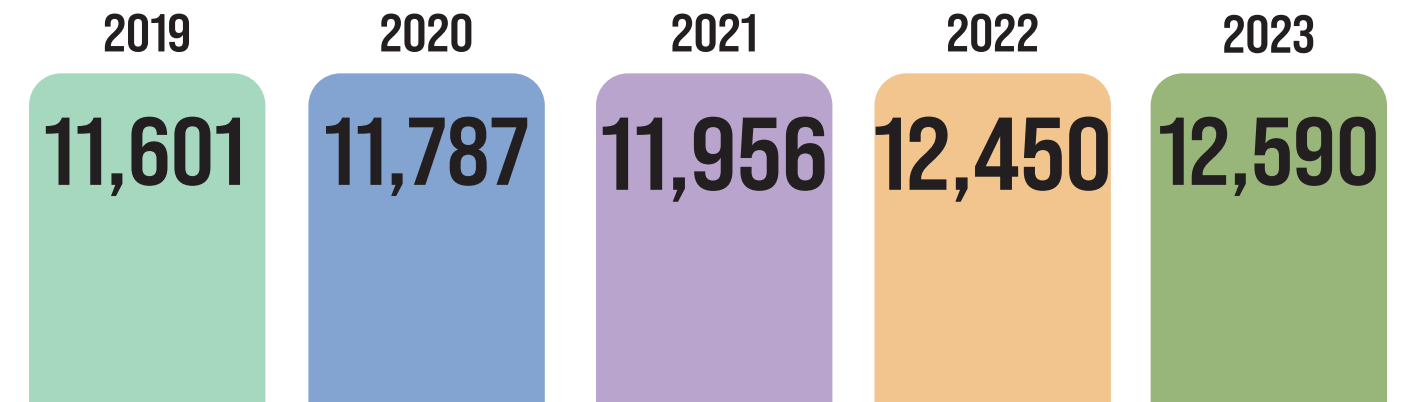
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
No. of service providers	58	60	62	64	61	71
No. of service providers contracted with Niagara Region	51	53	55	58	55	67
Total no. of child care service providers	173	174	173	174	178	179

Number of Licensed Spaces

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
No. of infant spaces	264	298	318	348	358
No. of toddler spaces	1,199	1,289	1,219	1,323	1,401
No. of preschool spaces	2,873	2,927	2,932	3,168	3,284
No. of JK/SK school aged spaces	2,923	2,942	3,007	3,026	3,021
No. of school aged spaces	4,571	4,531	4,682	4,699	4,624
Total no. of licensed spaces	11,830	11,987	12,158	12,564	12,688

A very small proportion, less than one percent, of licensed spaces in Niagara do not hold a contract with Niagara Region. This means that they are government-regulated and inspected by the Ministry of Education but they are not contracted with Niagara Region to receive Ministry funding or supports. These sites do not report any data to Niagara Region, therefore there is no known information on financial viability or operating capacity. They cannot serve families with fee subsidy or receive any federal or provincial funding provided for the sector.

Licensed spaces contracted with Niagara Region



Licensed spaces not contracted with Niagara Region



Providers in Niagara region offer both French language and Indigenous child care spaces allowing families to have diverse options that meet their specific language and culture needs.

French Language Spaces

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Infant-preschool spaces in school	368	414	415	415	415
JK/SK and school aged spaces in schools	668	659	644	644	644
Total french language spaces in schools	1,036	1,073	1,092	1,089	1,145
School age spaces in community space	0	0	0	30	30
Infant-preschool spaces in community	10	10	33	86	86
Total no. french language spaces	10	10	1,059	30	30

Indigenous Led Spaces

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
No. of Indigenous led infant to preschool spaces	101	157	157	157	157
No. of Indigenous led JK/SK and school aged spaces	80	67	67	67	67

Licensed child care is in high demand for families across Niagara. With the implementation of Canada-wide early learning and child care we are aiming to increase spaces and capacity to allow enrollment in child care centres to be more accessible for parents and families.

Ongoing workforce challenges continue to impact the operating capacity of the child care sector, with child care centres operating below their licensed capacity. As of September 2024, Niagara Region's child care sector was operating at approximately 64% of licensed capacity, with before and after school programs operating at approximately 49% and Canada-wide early learning and child care programs operating at 71%.

Niagara Region has been working with community partners to explore and implement innovative, creative local solutions, such as a supply staff registry, to support with workforce challenges. This work will continue under the guidance of this service system plan. According to the Knowing Our Numbers Report, staff wages are among the top reasons cited by staff looking to vacate the Early Years and Child Care field.

The Provincial Workforce Strategy, released in late 2023, seeks to increase the compensation of Registered Early Childhood Educators on an annual basis to a minimum of \$28 per hour by 2026.



Child Care Registration

OneHSN is the online registration system that allows parents to search and apply for all licensed child care programs for children from birth to age 12, including licensed home child care. Niagara Child Care Registry allows a parent to apply for up to 10 centres at once and prioritize up to five centres.

Number of total registration applications

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Infant	778	858	754	1,459	1,905
Toddler	629	867	932	1,897	2,682
Preschool	587	947	992	1,890	2,397
JK/SK and school aged	1,052	1,755	1,983	3,602	3,504
Total no. of registration applications	3,046	4,427	4,661	8,848	10,488

Leveraging OneHSN to support the registration of families and children to enroll in child care spaces allows us to be responsive to the demand for child care while providing a seamless customer service experience for families in their registration.

Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care System

In 2023, Niagara Region was allocated 4,067 licensed child care spaces by the Province that must be created by 2026 as part of Canada-wide early learning and child care targeted growth plan.

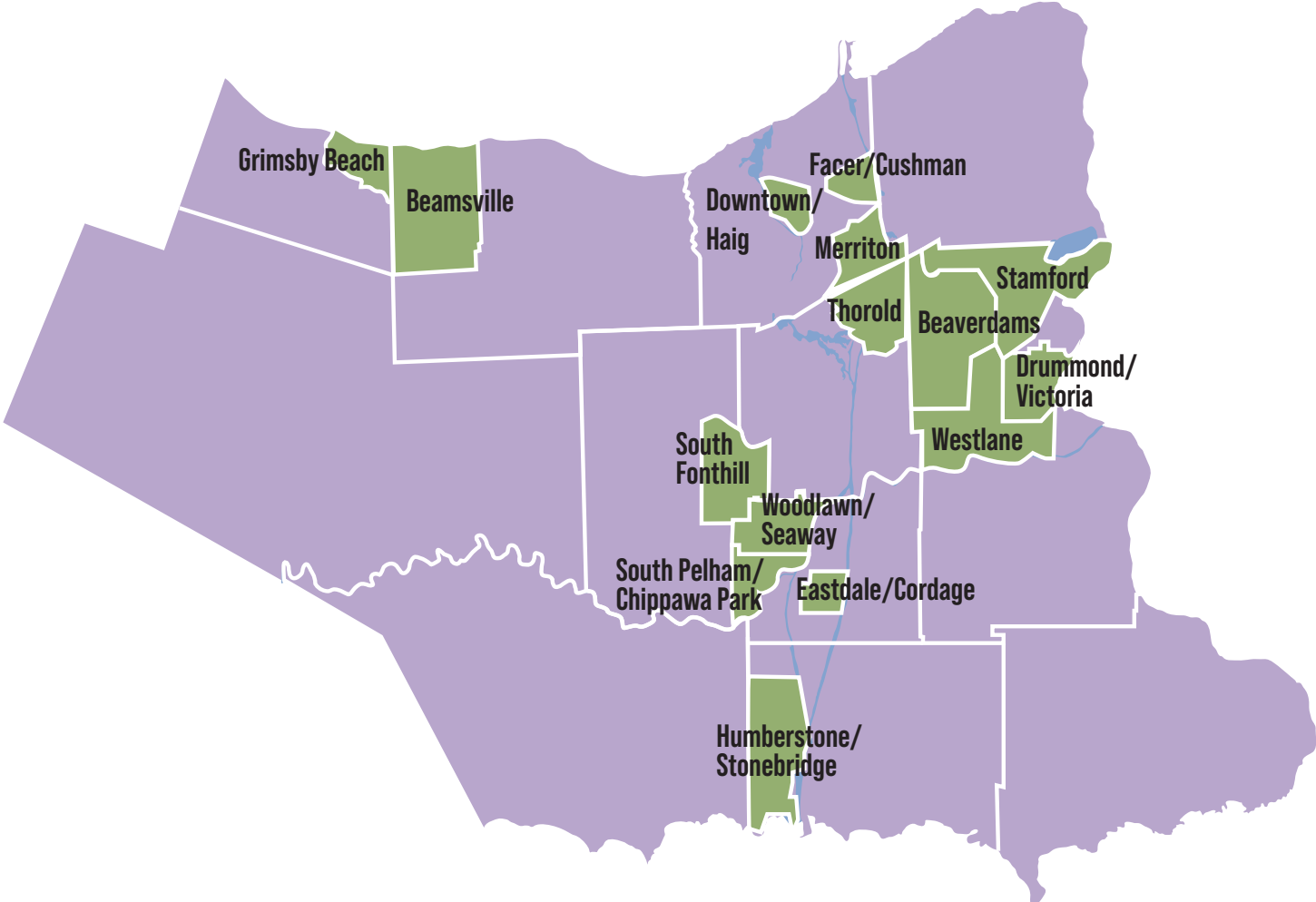
As per provincial direction, the new licensed child care expansion spaces will target specific communities to support the families who need them most.

There are 12 priority neighbourhoods for child care growth in Niagara for children five years of age and under:

- Grimsby:** Grimsby Beach
- Lincoln:** Beamsville
- Niagara Falls:** Beaverdams, Drummond/Victoria, Stamford, Westlane
- St. Catharines:** Downtown/Haig area, Facer/Cushman, Merritton
- Thorold:** Thorold Proper
- Pelham:** South Fonthill
- Port Colborne:** Humberstone/Stonebridge
- Welland:** Eastdale/Cordage, South Pelham/Chippawa Park area , Woodlawn/Seaway

Multi-year space creation targets

As we continue to expand child care spaces across Niagara region, we are employing a strategic approach to ensure we are reaching our most vulnerable populations. Prioritizing neighbourhoods using data points such as the Early Development Instrument, Low Income Measure, child care deserts and aligning with our public health priority neighbourhoods allows us to designate spaces where there is the most demand.



Map of Niagara Region showing 12 priority neighbourhoods for child care growth for children five years of age and under.

Type of child care spaces

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Totals
School-based spaces	98	0	186	49	49	382
Community-based spaces	259	591	1,267	549	1,019	3,685
Total no. of child care spaces	357	591	1,453	598	1,068	4,067

Special Needs Resourcing

Niagara Region administers the Special Needs Resourcing program through our own direct operations and by contracting partner agencies to provide resource consultant and behaviour consultant support to centres in providing care to children with special or differing needs. The number of children requiring special needs resourcing supports is increasing over time in Niagara.



	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Children served in the Special Needs Resourcing program	413	346	400	691	983	1,021

With our growing population and navigating the post-pandemic landscape we have seen an increasing need for special needs supports. Providing high quality, responsive, affordable and accessible care to all children in Niagara that is inclusive of their unique needs is of top priority.

The data in this report is subject to change as new centres, homes and child enrollment fluctuates. Data was collected at a point in time.

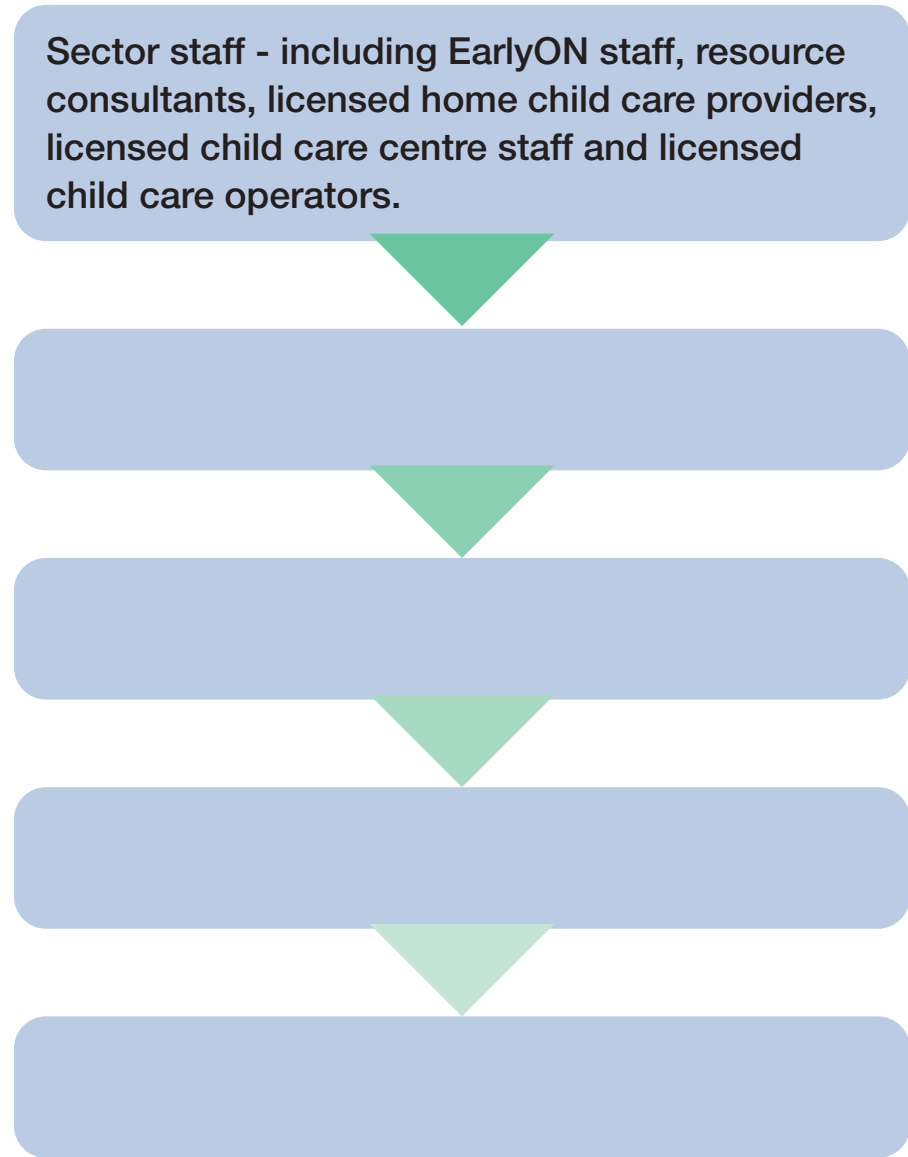


What We Heard

Community Engagement Plan

This Service System Plan has been developed based on a collaboration with community partners to ensure it serves the needs of Niagara children, families and community partners.

Some of the partners that have informed the plan include:

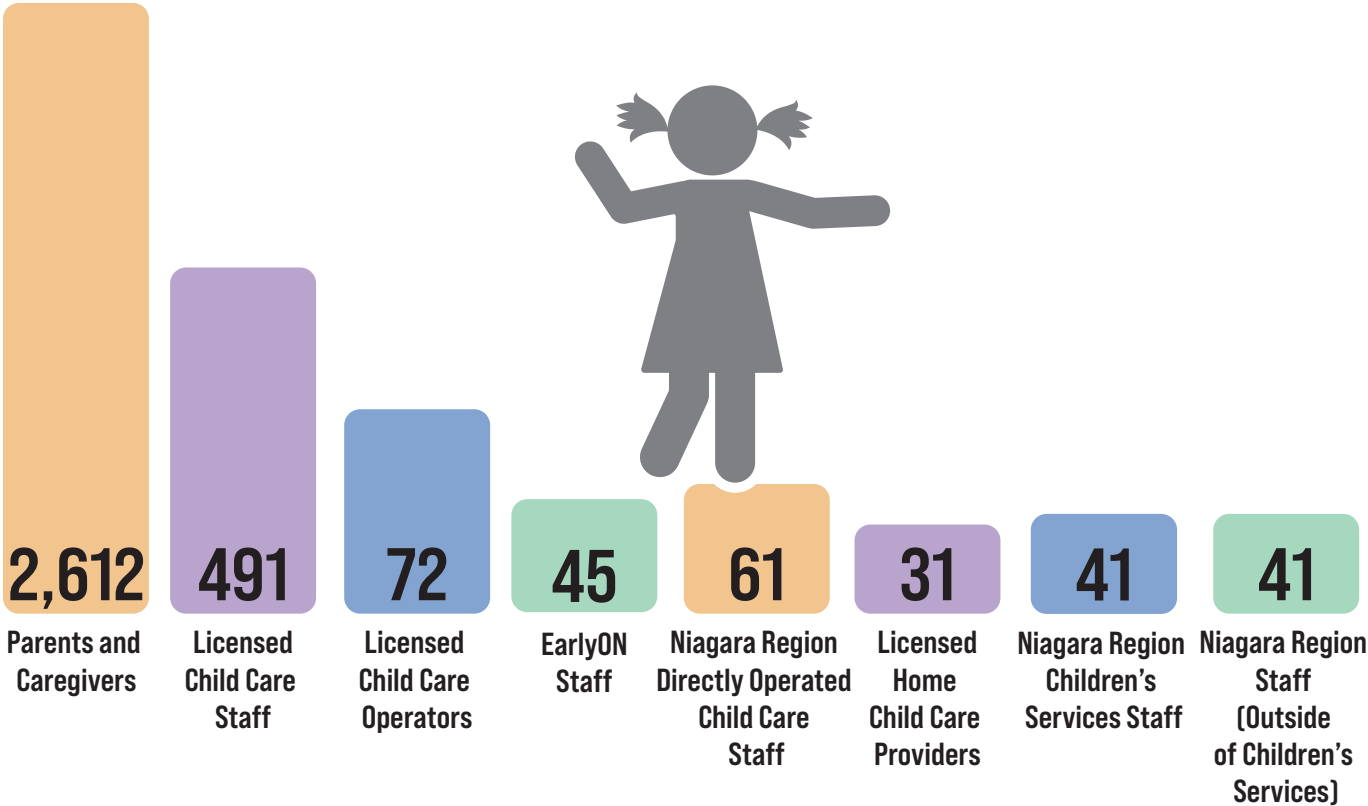


Engagement Methods

A comprehensive community engagement strategy was utilized to reach the Niagara community. Community engagement for all target audiences aimed to capture and understand their experiences within the four ministry pillars: accessibility, affordability, quality and responsiveness.

Who did we hear from?

- 2,612 Parents and Caregivers
- 491 Licensed Child Care Staff
- 72 Licensed Child Care Operators
- 45 EarlyON Staff
- 61 Niagara Region Directly Operated Child Care Staff
- 31 Licensed Home Child Care Providers
- 41 Niagara Region Children's Services Staff
- 41 Niagara Region Staff (outside of Children's Services)



Parents, Caregivers and Families

Parents, caregivers and families were invited to complete an online survey aimed at understanding their experiences with the early years and child care sector.



Demographic Insights:

- 93%** of respondents were parents or guardians
- Number of children**
 - 60%** of respondents had children aged 0-3,
 - 42%** had children 4-6,
 - 28%** had children 7-9 years old and
 - 20%** had children 10-12 years old
- Languages spoken**
 - 96%** of respondents listed their preferred language as English with Spanish being reported as the second preferred language
- Place of birth**
 - 83%** of respondents were born in Canada and
 - 17%** were not
 - 33%** arrived in the last 5 years,
 - 23%** arrived in the last 10 years and
 - 44%** arrived before 2014
- Self identity**
 - 79%** of respondents identified as Caucasian of those not born in Canada, and
 - 5%** identified as Latino/Latina,
 - 4%** as Black
 - 4%** of respondents identified as Indigenous and
 - 4%** identified as Francophone
- Family structure**
 - 82%** of families identified their family structure as a couple family and
 - 12%** as a single parent family
- Family income**
 - 52%** of respondents identified as working full time, with
 - 13%** on maternity leave,
 - 12%** working part time and
 - 11%** as stay at home parents

“My provider is amazing. She teaches other cultures and different foods. My child loves to go!”

Licensed Child Care Highlights:

- Approximately 45% of survey respondents had a child enrolled in a licensed child care centre and 94% of those enrolled are satisfied with their centre
- **Parents value:**
 - A clean and well-maintained facility
 - Wide variety of play-based learning activities
 - Children being happy to attend care
 - Welcoming and friendly staff
 - Outdoor programming and play
- **Parents feel licensed child care program:**
 - Hours meet their family's needs, are accessible and available in their geographic area
 - Affordable with the Canada-wide early learning and child care implementation
 - Assist access to developmental supports



I'm overall happy with the care both our children received from our child care centre. From the caring staff to the balanced meals to the developmental and progress updates including pictures. Financially it was a strain when both girls were there at the same time so the 50% decrease to the daily cost has been a huge help because we're a two-income family and don't qualify for any subsidy. I have recommended the centre to many of our friends.



Licensed Home Child Care:

- 8% of respondents have children in licensed home child care with 90% of those enrolled satisfied with their care
- **Parents value:**
 - A clean and well-maintained home
 - Wide variety of play-based learning activities
 - Children being happy to attend care
 - Regular communication from their provider
 - Outdoor programming and play
 - Canada-wide early learning and child care plan

EarlyON:

- 37% of respondents attend EarlyON programming and 92% of those that attend EarlyON are satisfied with the programming
- **Parents feel our EarlyON programs:**
 - Hours meet family's needs
 - Are conveniently located and accessible
 - Make them feel welcomed and supported
 - Support developmental needs



I've seen a very positive change in my child's social development and skills since we've started attending EarlyOn. I'm grateful there's a free program that allows my child to socialize with others which was one of my bigger concerns before we started attending.



Sector Staff (Children's and Other)



Licensed Home Child Care Providers:

- Have a unique set of needs because they offer care in their places of residence and do not have the same infrastructure as a centre
- **Feel supported by Niagara Region and value:**
 - Providing strong emotional supports
 - Providing safe environments for children and families
 - Being able to offer culturally competent care

Niagara Region Children's Services Staff:

- Consistently promote free EarlyON programs to their families, operators and staff
- Value quality staff and professional development
- Strive to be inclusive and equitable in providing service to families

Niagara Region Staff:

- Staff outside of Children's Services were offered the opportunity to review a draft of the Service System Plan and provide feedback about connections to their work
- Staff validated the draft goals and objectives and offered insights to facilitate connection to work done across Niagara region
- Their feedback was integrated into the final version of the Service System Plan

“Child care is necessary for access to larger labour pool talent, as seen in the economic development talent attraction and retention strategy.”

Licensed Centre-based Child Care Staff and Operators:

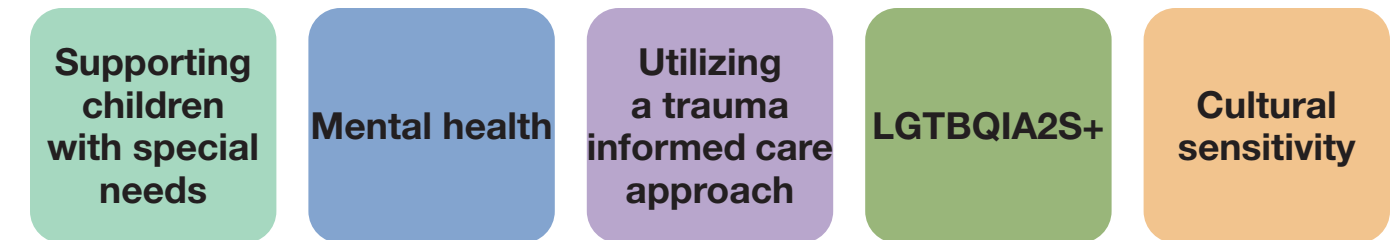
- Feel Canada-wide early learning and child care and fee subsidy strongly support parents and families in Niagara region
- Feel Niagara Region centres offer diverse programming to support the changing landscape of parents and families in Niagara
- Are consistently working towards professional learning goals, leveraging quality professional development options

EarlyON Staff:

- Feel that because EarlyON is free it is accessible and convenient for parents and families
- Feel that there are a wide variety of locations across the Niagara region
- Feel they offer a welcoming environment for vulnerable populations
- Feel they have dedicated and knowledgeable staff who are highly engaged with families
- Feel they have a comprehensive understanding of other programs to refer families to

Staff engagement included an additional component to capture their professional development needs, including diversity, equity and inclusion supports.

Sector staff value professional learning opportunities, and identified the following as their top five learning and development needs:



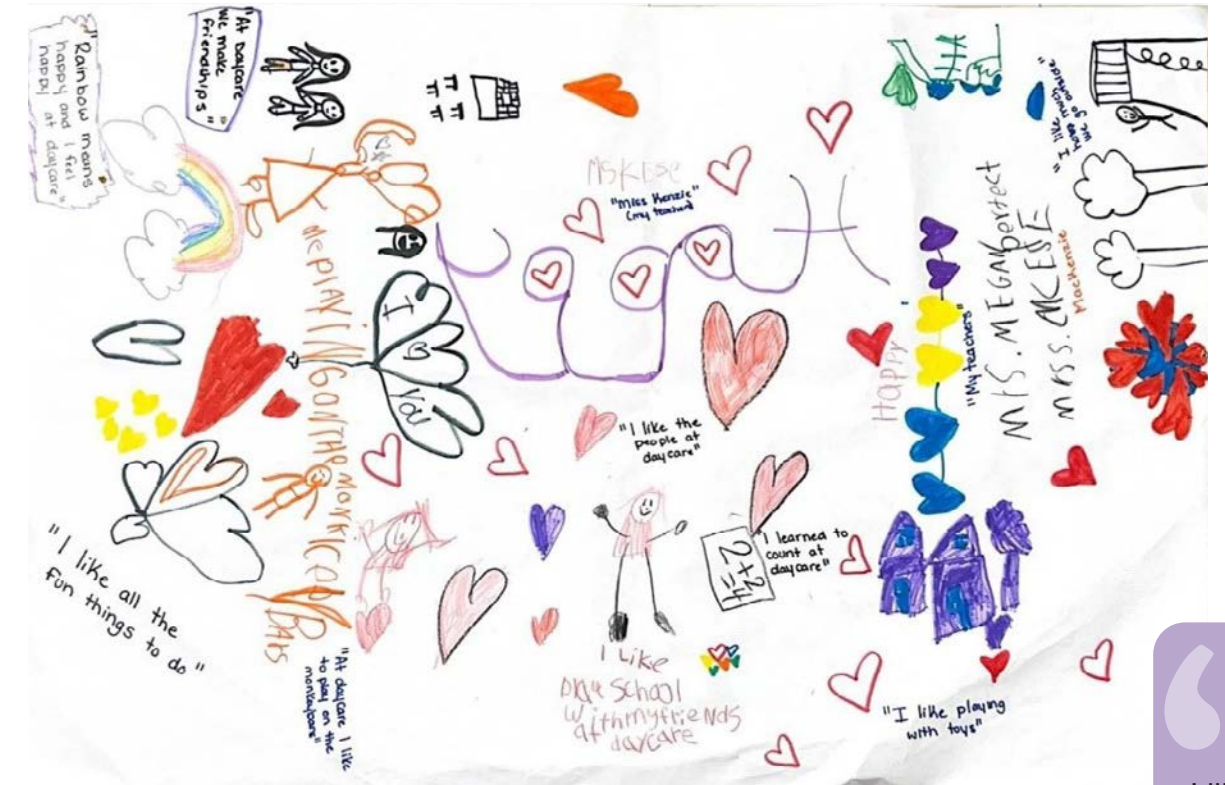
“Expand untraditional partnerships, like partnering with long-term care homes and agencies that serve seniors to connect children and seniors.”

Voice of the Child

Children are at the heart of all we do in the early years and child care sector, and their voices are an important component of the service system planning process. Early childhood educators working in Niagara Region directly operated child care centres worked with children to allow them to express their experiences attending the child care program. Children were supported by front-line staff in a method that was best suited for their age and ability.

At St. Catharines Child Care Centre, children in the preschool program were engaged through conversation and observation.

Children were observed exploring the outdoor environment where they have learned so much from managing risks, testing limits while building relationships with peers and nature.



“ Daycare has lots of love. ”

“ I like daycare because I can climb and jump on the tires. ”

“ Rainbow means happy and I feel happy at daycare. ”



Collages created by children attending Port Colborne Child Care Centre.

“ I like daycare because I can balance. ”



“ I like daycare because I am taller on the tire. ”

“ I like how much we learn outside. ”



“ Daycare is like a community. ”



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Considerations

Niagara Region remains committed to ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion are considered in all that we do. Both the Niagara Region Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee and the Niagara Region Women’s Advisory Committee were engaged for input. Each of these committees includes representation from Niagara Regional Council and community members. Diversity, equity and inclusion considerations are reflected throughout the goals, objectives and activities of the Service System Plan.

Strategic Pillars, Goals, Objectives and Activities

Pillars

A strong early years and child care sector is rooted in accessibility, affordability, quality and responsiveness. Based on what we learned through both research and extensive engagement, the Region is proposing five pillars to guide the work of the sector moving forward.

<p>Customer-Centered</p>	<p>High-Quality</p>	<p>Accessible and Responsive</p>	<p>Affordable and Growth Focused</p>	<p>Community-Driven</p>
<p>Goal: Families and children in Niagara are aware of the programs and services offered.</p>	<p>Goal: Early years and child care sector is supported in providing programs and services that are high quality, supporting healthy child development.</p>	<p>Goal: Programs and services are responsive to the needs of families and children in Niagara and ensure all can access programming where they feel welcome, included and supported.</p>	<p>Goal: The system programs are affordable for families and can meet economic growth and demand to support parents’ and caregivers’ workforce participation.</p>	<p>Goal: Niagara Region leverages our relationships with community partners to work towards integrated service delivery.</p>

Goals, Objectives and Activities

The Service System Plan includes five pillars, each with corresponding goals, objectives and activities. This Service System Plan gives a road map to create a more balanced, inclusive and customer-driven system, leading to improved outcomes for children, families and the community.

Key performance indicators to measure each objective will be developed as part of a robust implementation plan that will include indicators and expected outcomes. Some examples of the same key performance measures are included as samples.



Customer-Centered

GOAL: Families and children in Niagara are aware of the programs and services offered.

Objective: Families are aware of where and how to access information about the programs and services offered for children in Niagara.

- Activities:**
1. Develop a comprehensive communication plan that focuses on both targeted and general multi-modal promotion of Early Years and Child Care programs and services.
 2. Improve the website experience for families.

- Sample Indicators:**
- Number of outreach events attended by Children’s Services
 - Number of informational resources distributed
 - Number of visits to webpage
 - Number of social media campaigns delivered

Objective: Families and children have opportunities to provide feedback to inform programs and services.

- Activities:**
1. Implementation of a customer service strategy that meets the needs of all customers in the early years and child care sector.
 2. Prioritize regular engagement with parents and families to elicit feedback.

- Sample Indicators:**
- Number of families engaged with annually
 - Number of opportunities for families to provide feedback to Children’s Services



High-Quality

GOAL: Early years and child care sector is supported in providing programs and services that are high quality, supporting healthy child development.

Objective: The early years and child care sector has clear expectations and a shared definition of high-quality programs and services.

- Activities:**
1. Align Niagara Region’s role in quality with the provincial vision (currently under development).
 2. Niagara Region directly operated child care centres will enhance the support they provide the sector through mentorship, modelling of best practices and resource sharing.

- Sample Indicators:**
- Creation of a shared definition of quality across the system with a corresponding framework

Objective: Niagara Region is committed to supporting early years and child care service providers with timely access to the information they need to help them make informed decisions that reflect local community need

- Activities:**
1. Engage with sector to understand their information needs
 2. Tailor delivery of information to sector to meet their needs

- Sample Indicators:**
- Percentage of providers satisfied with the information available to them
 - Available dashboard for sector with relevant statistics and data

Objective: Niagara Region supports the early years and child care sector in attracting and retaining qualified educators and child care workers.

- Activities:**
1. Continue to advocate for the sector workforce, including wages and benefits.
 2. Strengthen partnerships with local post-secondary institutions and operators to promote the Registered Early Childhood Educator program and associated pathways to prospective students.
 3. Align professional development offerings to meet sector feedback and needs.
 4. Support consistent and standardized onboarding practices across the early years and child care sector.
 5. Advocate for bridge program for internationally trained Registered Early Childhood Educators to practice in Canada.

- Sample Indicators:**
- Number of Registered Early Childhood Educators and Assistants recruited to work in Niagara
 - Number of Registered Early Childhood Educators and Assistants remaining employed in Niagara after one, three and five years
 - Number of Niagara sector attendees at locally offered professional development sessions
 - Number of successful graduates from offered pathways and bridge programs



Accessible and Responsive

GOAL: Programs and services are responsive to the needs of families and children in Niagara and ensure all can access programming where they feel welcome, included and supported.

Objective: Programs and services are delivered where, when and how families need them.

- Activites:**
1. Ensure offered hours of EarlyON programming meet the needs of parents and families (for example, evening and weekend hours)
 2. Centre-based and licensed home child care expansion is targeted where there is identified need, in line with our priority neighbourhoods and expansion plan
 3. Explore flexible models of licensed child care to support parents with varying shift schedules, including part-time, evening and weekend care
 4. Modernize service delivery across the sector to meet diverse family needs
 5. Advocate for increased expansion of spaces in priority age groups

- Sample Indicators:**
- Number of new licensed child care spaces in priority neighbourhoods
 - Number of EarlyON locations offering expanded programming hours
 - Number of licensed child care providers who offer part-time, evening and weekend care

Objective: Programs and services are delivered with a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion to reflect the needs of the changing landscape in Niagara.

- Activites:**
1. Support the implementation of Niagara’s Diversity Equity and Inclusion Action Plan by working to support early years and child care programs and services to be safe spaces for all people regardless of identity and diversity.
 2. Ensure families and children with special needs have access regardless of their abilities.

- Sample Indicators:**
- Number of diversity, equity and inclusion considerations embedded in programs
 - Percentage of sector staff trained in diversity, equity and inclusion



Affordable and Growth Focused

GOAL: The system programs are affordable for families and can meet economic growth and demand to support parents' and caregivers' workforce participation.

Objective: Improve access to subsidized Early Years and Child Care programming.

- Activities:**
1. Increase promotion of child care fee subsidy program
 2. Increase promotion of EarlyON as a no cost program for families
 3. Advocate for increased base funding and new investments to support child care and EarlyON expansion.
 4. Ensure eligible subsidy families can continue to access spaces in the system.

- Sample Indicators:**
- Number of children supported by fee subsidy
 - Number of unique attendees at EarlyON programming
 - Percentage of fee subsidy licensed child care spaces across the sector

Objective: Facilitate the continued expansion of child care in Niagara, in line with the goals and objectives of Canada-wide early learning and child care

- Activities:**
1. Continue implementation of Canada-wide early learning and child care and targeted growth plan to improve access to affordable child care spaces in line with provincial direction.

- Sample Indicators:**
- Number of annual expansion licensed child care spaces
 - Number of operators enrolled in Canada-wide early learning and child care plan
 - Number of contracted licensed home child care providers

Objective: Build collaborative relationships with local area municipalities, local businesses and public sector organizations to encourage the addition of child care spaces as a driver for employee retention to support Niagara region's economic prosperity.

- Activities:**
1. Continue to increase net new child care spaces on an annual basis to meet the demand required to support Niagara's workforce and economy in support of Niagara's Talent, Attraction and Retention strategy.
 2. Continue to support women's workforce participation by increasing access to affordable child care.

- Sample Indicators:**
- Number of advocacy efforts targeted at women's workforce participation and child care
 - Number of new businesses/employers with child care provided on site or in proximity



Community-Driven

GOAL: Niagara Region leverages our relationships with community partners to work towards integrated service delivery.

Objective: Continue to collaborate with internal and external partners who serve children and families.

- Activites:**
1. Strengthen partnership with public health to align programming to support families' well-being.
 2. Engage with primary care physicians, obstetrician-gynecologists and midwives to explore sharing child care registration information before or at birth.
 3. Continue partnership with local school boards to promote the early years and child care sector as a profession.
 4. Continue to facilitate opportunities for on-going connection and collaboration amongst community partners.
 5. Foster relationships with community agencies who serve newcomers, marginalized populations and children and families with diverse needs to reach families.

- Sample Indicators:**
- Number of agencies engaged with on an annual basis
 - Creation of a public health and Children's Services engagement strategy
 - Number of annual meetings with local school boards
 - Number of community partners who serve newcomers and marginalized peoples to aid in recruitment and retention

Objective: Continue to strengthen relationship with Indigenous and Francophone partners

- Activites:**
1. Support Indigenous and Francophone agencies to provide tailored programming for the communities they serve.
 2. Engage Indigenous and Francophone partners in the planning of programs and services delivered by Niagara Region

- Sample Indicators:**
- Number of Indigenous and/or Francophone initiatives delivered by Indigenous and Francophone agencies
 - Number of programs co-created by Indigenous/Francophone agencies and non-Indigenous and Francophone partners
 - Number of francophone designated centres and spaces in expansion

Annual Updates

We are committed to providing regular updates on our progress towards the goals, objectives and activities outlined within this plan. The Region will share an implementation and evaluation plan, which will be regularly monitored. A review of activities completed each year, along with progress towards key performance indicators will be shared with interested and affected parties on an annual basis.



Conclusion

Niagara region is growing, welcoming diverse families to call our twelve municipalities home. As we grow, it is important that the early years and child care sector evolves in a way that meets the changing needs of children and families. Investing in the early years is the first step towards building a brighter future in Niagara.

Access to child care helps parents participate in the workforce, strengthening and increasing equity in Niagara's economy. Access to high-quality early years programs and services is most beneficial to the children who participate, laying the foundation for cognitive, language and social skills that will carry them into adulthood.

This Service System Plan will continue to strengthen the Region's role as the Service System Manager, creating structure to manage the early years and child care sector while maintaining flexibility to adapt to change. Niagara Region is committed to continuing to deliver programs and services that are accessible, affordable, high-quality and responsive that benefit all families and children.





Niagara  Region

Niagara Region Children's Services
1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way
P.O. Box 1042, Thorold, ON ON L2V 4T7

905-980-6000 or 1-800-263-7215
niagararegion.ca

February 2025

Annual Service Plan and Budget Submission 2025

Public Health and Social Services committee
PHD 3-2025
April 8, 2025

Sabrina Piluso, Director
Health Promotion and Foundational Standards

Public Health Annual Service Plan and Budget Submission 2025

April 8, 2025

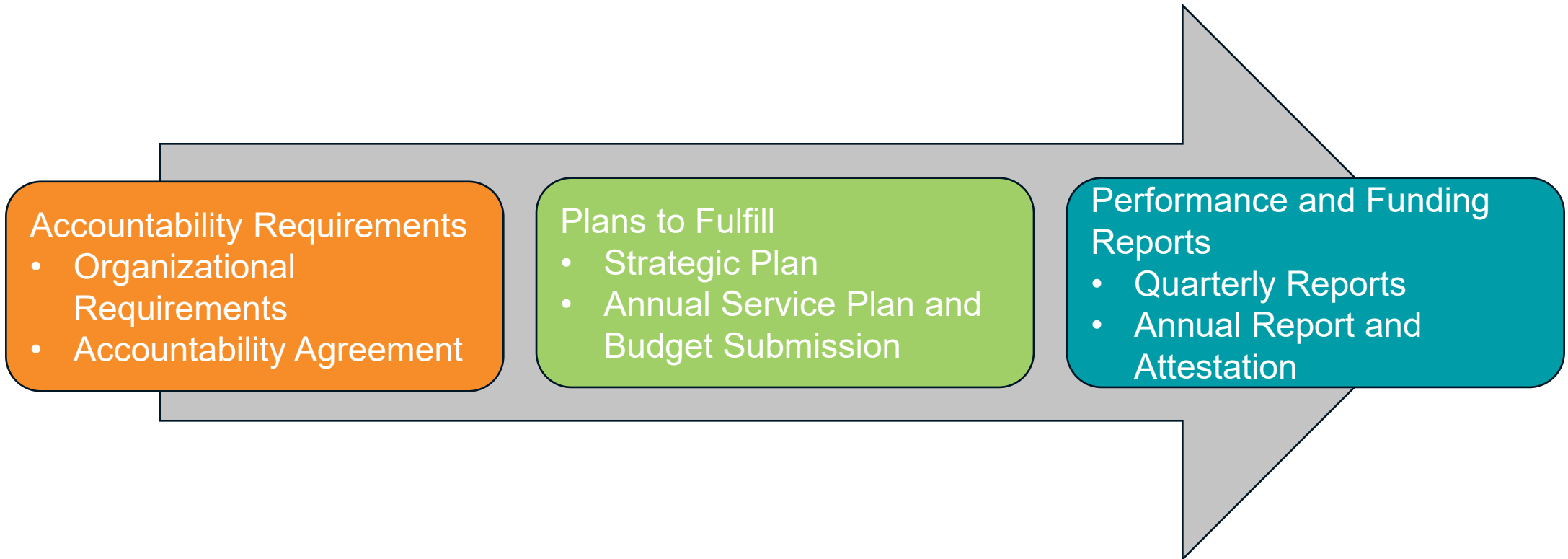
Sabrina Piluso, Director Health Promotion & Foundational Standards

Brian Yeo, Manager Dental Health Program

Purpose

- To seek Board of Health approval of the Public Health 2025 Annual Service Plan and Budget Submission
- Requirement under the Ontario Public Health Standards to receive Ministry of Health funding

Accountability Framework



Annual Service Plan 2025

- Components of the template
 - Community assessment
 - Program plans
 - Budget submission for each program
 - One-time funding requests
 - Board of Health membership, apportionment of costs, certification
- Due on or before March 31, 2025

2025 ASP and Budget Submission

Description	Ministry Funding %	Gross Budget Expenditure	ASP Funding Requests	Levy Funding
Total 2025 ASP Mandatory	64%	\$39,226,653	\$24,998,308	\$14,228,345
Total 2025 OSDCP	100%	2,789,300	2,789,300	0
Total 2025 ASP One-Time Requests	100%	342,640	342,640	0
Overall ASP Total	0%	\$42,358,593	\$28,130,248	\$14,228,345

One-Time Funding Requests

Request	Description	Amount
Public Health Inspector (PHI) Practicum Program	Two PHI practicum students for 14-weeks.	\$ 24,000
Capital	One single and three double New Purpose-Built Immunization Product Refrigerators	\$ 89,680
Capital	New Purpose-Built Vaccine Room Expansion	\$228,960
Total 2025 ASP One-Time Requests	No description required	\$342,640

Example

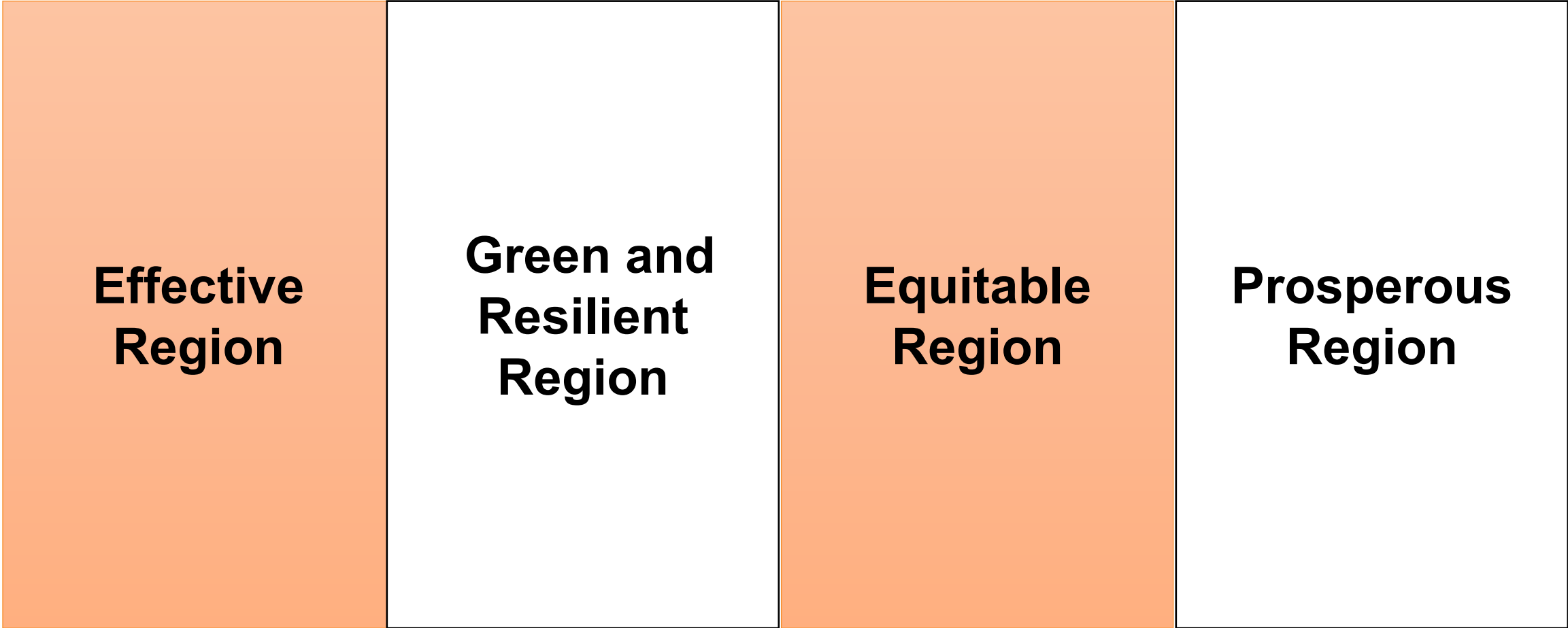
Oral Health



Oral Health Assessment and Surveillance: Program Description

- To improve oral health status for youth under 18 years of age
- Success measured through assessing proportion of school students in a school year screened for one or more decayed, missing, or filled teeth
- Target population: students in kindergarten to grade 12

Council's Strategic Priorities



Community Needs and Priorities

- 34.5% of school students screened with one or more decayed, missing, or filled teeth (DMF)
- Overall rates of DMF increasing
- Overall Child Urgent Case is 3.1%
 - 3.7% in kindergarten
 - 4.5% in grade 2
- Targeted screening and interventions based on prior years screening

Key Partners



INTERNAL
PROGRAMS



SCHOOL BOARDS



VARIOUS PRIVATE
SCHOOLS

Programs and Interventions

Oral Health Assessment and Surveillance

- Dental School-Based Screening (screening)

Healthy Smiles Ontario Program

- Post Notification to Dental Screening (case management)
- Preventive Dental Clinics (case management)

Oral Health Assessment and Surveillance: Interventions

- Conduct school screening in kindergarten, senior kindergarten, grades 2, 4, and 7 at all schools
- All grades screened at priority schools
- Optional screening offered to all secondary school students
- Identify emergent dental conditions and assess eligibility for Healthy Smiles Ontario

Oral Health Assessment and Surveillance: Program Objectives

By end of June 2026:

- Proportion of students declining dental screening in identified grades will be 5.5%

Recommendation

- That the Board of Health **APPROVE** the Public Health 2025 Annual Service Plan and Budget Submission to the Ministry of Health for a total gross budget of \$42,358,593, inclusive of three (3) one-time funding requests totalling \$342,640.

Subject: Public Health 2025 Annual Service Plan and Budget Submission

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Recommendations

1. That the Board of Health (BOH) **APPROVE** the Public Health 2025 Annual Service Plan and Budget Submission (ASP) to the Ministry of Health for a total gross budget of \$42,358,593 inclusive of three (3) one-time funding requests totalling \$342,640.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to seek the Niagara Region's BOH (Regional Council) approval for the Public Health 2025 ASP and Budget Submission to the Ministry of Health. The submission includes the BOH-approved 2025 operating budget for Public Health, and three (3) one-time funding requests.
- The 2025 ASP articulates Public Health's plan to meet the Ministry's requirements under the Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services, and Accountability (June 2021) which communicate the Ministry's requirements and establishes an accountability relationship between BOH and Ministry.
- The submission was due to the Ministry before or on March 31, 2025. A draft version was submitted to the Ministry by the deadline and a signed version will be submitted once approved by the BOH.
- The 2025 ASP provides an opportunity to apply for up to five additional one-time grants that would enable capital asset renewal and support Public Health Inspector practicum students.

Financial Considerations

The Ministry of Health provides cost shared funding to Niagara Region's BOH and has instituted the ASP process as a major accountability mechanism towards provisioning of funding for mandatory and related public health programs and services. The budget figures included in the ASP is the formal request by the BOH to the Ministry for the provincial funding accounted for within the Regional Municipality of Niagara's 2025 Levy Operating Budget that was approved by the BOH on December 12, 2024.

The Public Health budget is largely cost shared between the Ministry and the Regional Municipality of Niagara, with the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) being the only 100% provincially funded program with base funding. The Ministry’s planned allocation for mandatory programs in 2025 is \$24,998,308, representing a one percent growth in base funding over 2024. The provincial cost share ratio for mandatory programs is set at a maximum of 75% of the BOH’s gross operating budget; however, the actual cost share ratio for Niagara is 64%.

The 2025 Public Health request to the Ministry is based on gross budget expenditures of \$42,358,593 broken into three streams: mandatory cost shared programs, OSDCP 100% provincial funded, and one-time 100% provincial funded requests, as summarized in Table 1 below. The BOH has previously approved \$14,228,345 in levy funding for Public Health mandatory programs.

The 2025 Public Health operating budget was prepared and approved without consideration of tariff-related impacts, which could not be anticipated at the time. Any impacts resulting from the ongoing economic uncertainty due to tariffs will be brought back to the BOH through future corporate updates.

Table 1: Summary of 2025 ASP and Budget Submission

Description	Ministry Funding %	Gross Budget Expenditure (Note 1)	ASP Funding Requests	Levy Funding
Total 2025 ASP Mandatory	64%	\$39,226,653	\$24,998,308	\$14,228,345
Total 2025 ASP OSDCP	100%	2,789,300	2,789,300	N/A
Total 2025 ASP One-Time Requests (Table 2)	100%	342,640	342,640	N/A
Overall ASP Total		\$42,358,593	\$28,130,248	\$14,228,345

Note 1 – The funding agreement with the Ministry of Health for Mandatory Programs includes indirect support costs but excludes indirect capital costs from the funding

formula. As a result, these figures differ from those in the Niagara Region's consolidated budget, which includes indirect capital costs.

The three additional one-time requests are outlined in Table 2 below. These requests are included in the ASP but were not included in the 2025 operating budget as it is uncertain which, if any, will be approved by the province. Should the Ministry approve any or all of the one-time funding requests, a budget adjustment will be processed to reflect these items in the 2025 operating budget.

Table 2: One-time Funding Requests (100% Ministry funded)

Request	Description	Amount
Public Health Inspector (PHI) Practicum Program	Two PHI practicum students for 14-weeks to address seasonal workload and support recruitment efforts.	\$24,000
Capital	One single and three double new purpose-built immunization product refrigerators. One has reached end of life and three needed to store more publicly funded vaccine due to larger packaging.	\$89,680
Capital	With the increased number of new purpose-built immunization product refrigerators, a room expansion of the existing room is required.	\$228,960
Total 2025 ASP One-time Requests	N/A	\$342,640

Analysis

The Ministry of Health's [Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services, and Accountability \(June 2021\)](https://files.ontario.ca/moh-ontario-public-health-standards-en-2021.pdf) (https://files.ontario.ca/moh-ontario-public-health-standards-en-2021.pdf) is created under Section 7 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act to specify mandatory public health programs and services provided by the BOH. The Public Health Accountability Framework articulates the requirements of the BOH to be accountable and transparent for the implementation of The Standards. The accountability framework is supported by three areas of documentation:

1. Accountability documents set out organizational requirements across four domains and the Ministry-Board of Health accountability agreement that establishes the key operational and funding requirements.
2. Planning documents which outline what the BOH will deliver under The Standards in the format of the BOH strategic plan and the ASP submission; and
3. Reporting documents that demonstrate performance against The Standards and the ASP. This includes quarterly reporting and an annual report and attestation.

The ASP describes the programs and services being delivered by the BOH, demonstrating alignment with Niagara priorities and accountability for planning and the use of funds to address The Standards. The ASP template includes the following:

- Community assessment – high level description of the health needs, priority populations, and challenges and risks faced by Niagara residents to inform program planning and service delivery decisions,
- Program plans – description of programs and services that will be delivered under the foundational standard and the nine program standards, including interventions and key partners for delivery,
- Budget submission for each program,
- One-time funding requests; and
- BOH membership, apportionment of costs, and certification of the ASP.

A comprehensive planning process was undertaken to refocus the programs centred around health outcomes and clearly define program goals, objectives, activities, and measurable indicators, all aligned to evidence.

The ASP has not been included as an appendix with this report. BOH members may review the document in full by contacting the Medical Officer of Health.

Alternatives Reviewed

Submitting the ASP is a requirement to receive Ministry of Health funding as outlined in The Standards. The alternative to not submitting the ASP would be loss of provincial funding which would impose an untenable burden on the Regional levy.

The Regional Municipality of Niagara is not required to submit additional one-time funding requests. A total of three (3) one-time funding requests totalling \$342,640, have been included in consultation with our corporate partners. These requests are not

mandatory, nor guaranteed, however, Niagara Region aims to maximize revenue to bring greater benefit to Niagara residents and to stabilize levy costs.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The ASP is based on Niagara Region Public Health’s operational planning that aligns with Council’s 2023-2026 Strategic Priorities Effective Region by delivering services in a way that is collaborative, fiscally responsible, and aligned with a skilled workforce. It also aligns with Equitable Region by ensuring services meet the needs of the community in an inclusive, welcoming, and equity-focused way.

Other Pertinent Reports

[Public Health 2024 Annual Service Plan and Budget Submission](#)

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[Public Health 2023 Annual Service Plan and Budget Submission](#)

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[Public Health 2022 Annual Service Plan and Budget Submission](#)

<https://www.google.com/url?client=internal-element-cse&cx=005774670460367375179:knxndu-yx3mm&q=https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx%3FDocumentId%3D22554&sa=U&ved=2ahUKEwig7JLqyP-LAXVmM1kFHcGdEngQFnoECAQQAQ&usg=AOvVaw3ivDvMYXi8enY-hEk8NVIG>

Prepared by:

Diane Vanecko
Director, Clinical Services and Chief
Nursing Officer
Public Health and Emergency Services

Recommended by:

Azim Kasmani, MD, MSc, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health and
Commissioner
Public Health and Emergency Services

Submitted by:

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared in consultation with Donovan D'Amboise, Manager, Program Financial Support and Paula Ollier, Senior Program Financial Specialist.

Memorandum

COM-C 6-2025

Subject: Thorold Motion

Date: Tuesday, April 8, 2025

To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

From: Dr. Azim Kasmani, Commissioner and MOH Public Health and
Emergency Services, Henri Koning, Commissioner, Community Services

Further to the attached Motion by the City of Thorold received by the Regional Clerk on February 27, 2025 and in particular to item number 4 which states “That Staff **BE DIRECTED** to request the following from the Regional Municipality of Niagara:

- a) Increased delivery of preventative drug education in our community;
- b) Creation of an Indigenous homeless and housing action plan;
- c) A staff report on the subject of the Indigenous Mobile Crisis Unit; and
- d) Hosting of a public summit for mental health, homelessness and addiction.”

We respond as follows:

The motion highlights four important areas of focus. Public Health and Community Services have done a lot of work over the past few years in line with these priority areas and now have existing systems, processes, programs and communication processes in place to ensure that the four areas of focus highlighted are effectively addressed. Many of these systems and processes include collaboration with a host of community partners, including individuals with lived experience to ensure the ongoing work is inclusive and responsive to changing community needs.

- a) Increased delivery of preventative drug education in our community;

Niagara Region is currently developing a multi-year Substance Use Strategy that aligns with and builds on previous work by the Overdose Prevention and Education Network of Niagara (OPENN) and falls under the Mental Health and Addiction focus of the Community Safety and Well-Being plan. Prevention is a key pillar of the strategy, with a strong focus on preventative drug education, increased supports to families and early intervention. The strategy engages a wide range of community partners, including individuals with lived and living experience, ensuring that our efforts are community-driven and data-informed, and will be brought to Council for approval.

Public Health's substance use, schools, outreach, mental health, and tobacco teams, in collaboration with partners, continue to support the community with health promotion campaigns, resources, professional development, and skill-building programs aimed at preventing, delaying, or reducing substance use and related harms. Additionally, staff continue to consult and advocate for substance use-related policies in collaboration with community networks, ensuring a collective impact on substance use prevention.

b) Creation of an Indigenous homeless and housing action plan;

Niagara's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan includes actions to address Indigenous housing and homelessness. The Indigenous specific action items in the Region's plan have been provided by the Niagara Indigenous Community Advisory Board (NICAB), which includes representatives from local Indigenous organizations. In addition to supporting the creation of the action plan, NICAB monitors progress and provides comments annually on actions made to address Indigenous housing and homelessness in Niagara. NICAB is also involved in Niagara's Point in Time Counts, including the most recent count in October 2024. NICAB is the lead on analyzing data from the count on Indigenous homelessness and providing recommendations to address Indigenous homelessness based on their analysis.

c) A staff report on the subject of the Indigenous Mobile Crisis Unit;

One of the key actions of the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2021-2024) is the design of an alternate response model to 911 calls involving mental health and addictions. This is a result of a report brought to Public Health and Social Service Committee in March 2024. The report requested that Canadian Mental Health Association, Niagara Branch, along with the partners they deem appropriate, be requested to make a presentation to Public Health and Social Services Committee about an alternative crisis-response model. The 911 Alternate Response working group is currently in the model development phase, as service providers assess organizational readiness and existing resources to support an alternate model. The model may include a mobile civilian response team. One guiding principle the group agreed upon is that the service has equitable, culturally safe and accessible services for all. The working group is actively exploring opportunities for Indigenous specific supports within the model. Once the model is confirmed, a presentation will be brought forward to committee with further details.

d) Hosting of a public summit for mental health, homelessness and addiction;

Community input into homelessness services is provided through a range of opportunities. The Community Advisory Board (CAB) includes a range of participants

including elected officials, homeless serving agencies, housing, lived experts, Indigenous representatives and health including mental health. In addition, at the most recent CAB meeting in March, there was agreement to expand the membership to expand representation to include an additional Indigenous representative, the Community Officer team of Niagara Regional Police, and addictions treatment agency. Homeless Services engages working groups related to different Homeless Services such as shelters, outreach, diversion, prevention, and lived expertise. These working groups include representatives from funded partners and organizations and groups beyond the homelessness serving system as appropriate. The lived expert advisory is consulted on all policy matters and regularly informs the decisions and work of the homeless division.

Niagara Region's Community Safety and Well Being (CSWB) plan is informed from extensive community engagement and multi-sector collaboration. The multi-sector advisory committee that guides the CSWB plan has representation from various sectors including police, mental health and addictions, education, community and social services, child and youth sector, and many others. This plan has identified key priorities in homelessness and housing and mental health and addictions to support community safety and well-being. To identify priorities, significant public consultation is conducted with residents, community providers, and persons with lived and living experience. To address these priorities, the CSWB plan aligns with the work of the Mental Health and Addiction Working group, a sub-group of the Niagara Ontario Health team. This group is committed to improving patient/client and family/caregiver outcomes and experiences by ensuring integrated, streamlined and coordinated access to appropriate mental health and addictions services. Work is underway to move key mental health and addiction initiatives forward in Niagara. Additionally, the CSWB team, in collaboration with Public Health, is in the process of developing a broad substance use strategy to improve the safety and well-being of Niagara residents by preventing, delaying, or reducing substance use related harms. This strategy will be launched sometime in Q2 2025.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Azim Kasmani, MD, MSc, FRCPC
Commissioner and MOH Public Health and Emergency Services

Henri Koning, MHSc
Commissioner, Community Services

Appendix 1 City of Thorold Motion



COM C-6-2025
April 8, 2025
Appendix 1

Thorold

OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
Nicholas Debono, City Clerk
3540 Schmon Parkway, P.O. Box 1044
Thorold, ON L2V 4A7

February 27, 2025

SENT ELECTRONICALLY

To All Concerned Organizations

Re: 14.6 Actions to Address Mental Health, Addiction and Homelessness – City of Thorold Council Resolution

Please be advised that the Council of the Corporation of the City of Thorold, at its meeting held on February 25, 2025, considered the aforementioned topic and the following resolution was passed:

The Corporation of the City of Thorold enacts as follows:

1. That Council for the City of Thorold **CONDEMNNS** the discrimination of people living with mental illness, people who are unhoused, homeless and/or people living with addiction;
2. That Staff **BE DIRECTED** to prepare and make publicly available a collection of resources for the assistance of addition and mental health support and treatment;
3. That Staff **BE DIRECTED** to contact the Canadian Mental Health Association to express interest in hosting a safe beds program in the City of Thorold;
4. That Staff **BE DIRECTED** to request the following from the Regional Municipality of Niagara:
 - a) Increased delivery of preventative drug education in our community;
 - b) Creation of an Indigenous homeless and housing action plan;
 - c) A staff report on the subject of the Indigenous Mobile Crisis Unit; and
 - d) Hosting of a public summit for mental health, homelessness and addiction.
5. That Staff **BE DIRECTED** to request from the Province of Ontario, access to alternative revenue streams other than property taxes, for the purpose of addressing social housing funding requirements; and
6. That this resolution **BE CIRCULATED** to the following, with a request for support and call to action:

- a) all Niagara region school boards, all Niagara region municipalities, all Niagara region Members of Provincial Parliament, all Niagara region Members of Parliament, the Federal Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, the Federal Minister of Indigenous Services, the Federal Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, the Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ontario Minister of Indigenous Affairs, Ontario Solicitor General, and Ontario Minister of Health; and
- b) the Canadian Mental Health Association, Brock University, Niagara College, Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre, Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, Niagara Regional Native Centre, Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board, Niagara Aboriginal Health Centre, Niagara Chapter of Native Women, and Niagara Region Métis Council.

Thank you,



Nicholas Debono
City Clerk, City of Thorold

- cc. Niagara region School Boards
 - District School Board of Niagara
 - Niagara Catholic District School Board
 - Conseil scolaire catholique MonAvenir
 - Conseil Scolaire Viamonde
- Niagara region Municipalities
 - Niagara Falls
 - Port Colborne
 - St Catharines
 - Welland
 - Grimsby
 - Lincoln
 - Niagara-on-the-Lake
 - Pelham
 - Wainfleet
 - West Lincoln
 - Fort Erie
- Niagara region Members of Provincial Parliament
 - Sam Oosterhoff
 - Jennifer Stevens
 - Wayne Gates



- Jeff Burch

Niagara region Members of Parliament

- Dean Allison
- Chris Bittle
- Tony Baldinelli
- Vance Badawey

Federal Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada – Honourable Gary Anandasangaree

Federal Minister of Indigenous Services – Honourable Patty Hajdu

Federal Minister of Mental Health and Addictions – Honourable Ya'ara Saks

Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing – Honourable Paul Calandra

Ontario Minister of Indigenous Affairs – Honourable Greg Rickford

Ontario Solicitor General – Honourable Michael S. Kerzner

Ontario Minister of Health – Honourable Sylvia Jones

Canadian Mental Health Association

Brock University

Niagara College

Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre

Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres

Niagara Regional Native Centre

Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board

Niagara Aboriginal Health Centre

Niagara Chapter of Native Women

Niagara Region Métis Council

Steven Soos, Member of the Public



Subject: Building Safer Communities Grant Program Update

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Recommendations

1. That the Building Safer Communities Grant Program update for year one **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide a year one progress update of the Building Safer Communities Grant Program.
- Niagara Region staff developed the multi-year Youth Gun and Gang Prevention Strategy 2023-2026, in consultation with the community, based on best practices and local youth crime data. Niagara Region allocated federal funding to nine community agencies through the Building Safer Communities Grant Program.
- The nine funded agencies served 576 at-risk youth in the first year of the program through programs targeting ten areas of focus.

Financial Considerations

The Federal Building Safer Communities Grant Program provides designated funding to municipalities and Indigenous communities to develop and deliver community-based gun and gang prevention and intervention programming for youth. Niagara Region Community Services has allocated these federal funds to nine local community partners through the Building Safer Communities Grant Program. Through this pilot project grant recipients receive funding for up to two years, ending in December 2025. All funds related to this grant have been provided by Public Safety Canada pursuant to a contribution agreement with Niagara Region. In total, \$2,250,000 has been allocated over two years to support these community initiatives ending December 31, 2025.

Analysis

Background

Reducing youth involvement in crime through the Building Safer Communities Grant Program is a key action in Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan. Through initial community engagement for the creation of the Youth Gun and Gang Prevention Strategy, youth at-risk identified a number of key factors in health, happiness and safety including the need for close interpersonal connections, desire to live in good health, participate in meaningful activities, access safe spaces and adequately meet their basic needs such as housing, income and food. Through a successful granting process, the Building Safer Communities Grant Program awarded nine community agencies funding to run initiatives for youth at-risk of gun and gang involvement for a two-year period (Jan. 2024 to Dec 2025).

In 2024, the nine youth funded agencies reported collaborating with 64 unique community partners to support youth at-risk and their families. With more than 576 total youth at-risk served collectively, the following highlights the significant impact of these programs across all ten areas of focus during the first year of funding.

Focus 1: Programs which prevent youth homelessness

Two youth funded agencies have implemented programs that provide support and build life-skills for youth at-risk of experiencing homelessness. These programs help individuals develop the skills to secure housing and provide wraparound support to ensure youth remain housed.

The Raft has provided support to 34 youth at-risk and their families in the first year through their Family and Natural Supports program, with 80% of participants remaining housed and out of shelter to date. Additionally, 69% of youth who have completed the program remain in high school, have completed high school, or are employed.

Family and Children's Services Niagara, through their Navigating Adulthood program are providing life skills training, supports and mentorship to youth at-risk preparing to transition out of care. After completing the program, 72% of participating youth report they feel well equipped to live safely and independently.

Focus Two: Programs which support the early identification and treatment of mental health concerns for children and youth

Early identification of mental health concerns through equitable access to appropriate treatment and support is important in preventing criminality and victimization among youth with mental illness.

Quest Community Health Centre provides specialized therapy services directly to youth with assistance from their Youth Outreach Worker. Over the first year, the Youth Outreach Worker referred 133 unique individuals to their Youth Therapist who was able to support 96 of these youth with mental health and addictions concerns.

Focus Three: Programs which provide opportunities for mentoring and connection to positive peers or caring adults

Social connections through mentoring can provide guidance, support, and improve self-esteem for youth at-risk. This ultimately leads to a decreased likelihood of criminal involvement and victimization by supporting higher levels of educational attainment and increasing their ability to find meaningful, rewarding work.

The Transitional Youth Program (TYP) through Family and Children's Services Niagara supported 38 youth in the Navigating Adulthood program and had approximately 50 attendants at each of the Home for the Holidays events. By prioritizing mentorship and building connections, youth at-risk have received emotional support from Transitional Youth Workers, engaged in social-recreational activities, and experienced positive behaviour modelling from group facilitators.

Focus Four: Programs which develop youth conflict resolution skills and/or enable alternative dispute resolution

Strong conflict resolution skills are protective factors for improved mental health, reduced risk of substance use, and involvement in violence and criminality.

The primary goal of the Stop Now And Plan (SNAP®) program is to help children stop and think before they act keeping them in school and out of trouble. Run by Contact Niagara with support from the Child Development Institute, the program supports youth aged 6 to 11, and their parents/caregivers in learning skills that build effective emotional regulation, self-control and problem-solving skills. In the first year, 68 children and their families were identified and supported with direct services and additional referrals, including SNAP® programming, to increase conflict resolution skills.

and reduce the likelihood of future criminal justice involvement. Facilitators within the Niagara Resource Service for Youth's (RAFT) Family and Natural Support program are also supporting youth participants by teaching them conflict resolution skills that enable them to manage relationships and remain housed. All 34-youth participating in this program attend Caring Adult Circle meetings, where they are provided opportunities to communicate with the adults in their life, address conflict and establish foundations for life-long support and healthy relationships.

Focus Five: Programs which increase emotional regulation skills or the social-emotional competency for children and their parents

Children and youth who struggle with emotional regulation and/or antisocial/delinquency behaviours are more likely to struggle with mental health, substance use and acts of aggression/violence as adults.

During the first year of funding, the Stop Now And Plan (SNAP®) program being implemented by Contact Niagara, has received referrals for 56 children who are experiencing serious behavioural challenges at home, in school or in the community. Participants who have completed the program, children and parents/caregiver programming, have reported involvement in fewer physical altercations, better ability to self-regulate and increased ability to stay calm in situations where they previously would not have. Parents have reported fewer calls from school administration and an increase in their children's positive social connections with teachers and peers.

Focus Six: Programs which increase positive attachment to school and improve access to post-secondary education

School attachment and commitment serve as significant protective factors against violence and forms of criminality.

The John Howard Society works directly with the District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) to support youth at-risk and their families through Strengthening Families for the Future for Schools. In the first year, 46 families were supported weekly with targeted group programming, structured meaningful conversation and family meals that take place within the school setting. Participants have reported increased connections between families, better coping mechanisms, increased positive communication and decreased behavioural issues at school.

Focus Seven: Programs which connect Indigenous youth and their families with traditional healing and cultural activities

A positive connection to culture, traditions and customs can create a sense of belonging, purpose and self-worth.

Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board (NPAAMB) focuses on skills, while also providing youth the opportunity to participate in traditional rites of passages, ceremonies, and knowledge exchanges. Through their Ceremony 2 Employment (C2E) program, NPAAMB is creating pathways to life and employability skills that create career opportunities, re-engagement with education, and reduce gang involvement. In its first year, 28 youth participated in the C2E program. NPAAMB has maintained a 95% attendance rate with 100% of participants successfully completing the program.

Focus Eight: Programs which provide substance use / addiction treatment for youth

Early substance use is among the top risk factors for one's involvement in the criminal justice system across their life course.

Community Addictions Services of Niagara (CASON) together with DSBN has implemented a summer day treatment program for students with addictions. This service fills the gap during summer months when school-based substance use support or counselling is not available. During the first year of programming, CASON provided programming to 12 unique youth, many of which elected to continue into the second session due to the positive impact of the program.

Focus Nine: Programs which intervene in or prevent youth involvement in human trafficking

Providing youth with the knowledge and skills to combat risk factors associated with human trafficking will decrease their likelihood of victimization.

Crime Stoppers of Niagara is working with community partners to strategically display signage around Niagara to raise awareness among vulnerable groups about the risks of human trafficking. They are also running a social media campaign in partnership with Niagara Regional Police Services that in the first year has produced more than 103,000 views and reached nearly 40,000 individuals, with 61.6% of viewers having identified as women.

Focus Ten: Programs which support Black and racialized youth with a positive sense of community belonging

Creating welcoming spaces free from discrimination or hate, is critical to ensuring Black and racialized youth are safe and have opportunities to thrive.

During the first year of programming, Future Black Female collaborated with more than 17 community partners to deliver empowering workshops, provide mentorship opportunities, and increase access to mental health for Black youth in Niagara. Having 55 unique youth participants in the Empower Youth Program in their first year, Future Black Female continues to offer unique opportunities for Black youth to build connections, establish a sense of belonging, celebrate culture, and build resiliency.

Year two of these programs are currently underway, with an end date of December 31, 2025.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not applicable.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

With a focus on youth-at-risk, the Building Safer Communities Grant Program is aligned to Council's strategic priority of ensuring an "Equitable Region" by listening and responding to community needs and planning for future growth.

Other Pertinent Reports

Confidential COM 30-2023 – Building Safer Communities Fund & Grant Program Pilot

[BSC Grant Recipients - Memo CWCD 2024-30.pdf](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Council%20Weekly%20Correspondence%20Distribution_Mar08_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/BSC%20Grant%20Recipients%20-%20Memo%20CWCD%202024-30.pdf)

[COM 14-2024 - An Evaluation of the use of Granting for the Building Safer Communities Grant Program Pilot](https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_May07_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COM%2014-2024%20An%20Evaluation%20of%20the%20use%20of%20Granting%20for%20the%20Building%20Safer%20Communities%20Grant%20Program%20Pilot.pdf)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_May07_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COM%2014-2024%20An%20Evaluation%20of%20the%20use%20of%20Granting%20for%20the%20Building%20Safer%20Communities%20Grant%20Program%20Pilot.pdf)

Prepared by:

Sarah Glenney
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Recommended by:

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Commissioner
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Submitted by:

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared in consultation with Caitlin Boon, Community Safety and Well-Being Student and Jessica Thompson, Community Safety and Well-Being Program Manager and reviewed by Sandy Dupuis, Associate Director Community Strategies and Priorities and John Pickles, Program Financial Specialist.

Subject: Niagara Emergency Management Program Annual Report

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Recommendations

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide Regional Council with an overview of the Emergency Management Program's activities in 2024.
- The program has successfully met all compliance requirements under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (EMCPA).
- The Emergency Management Program continues to develop annual strategies and work plans with the oversight of the Emergency Management Program Committee.
- Activities in 2024 included emergency management training, emergency preparedness, hazard and incident response, expanding the Community Emergency Response Team, an emergency exercise and public education.
- The Region's Municipal Emergency Control Group (MECG) has been formally appointed by Council, as required by the EMCPA compliance guide.

Financial Considerations

There are no additional financial implications. All programming has been delivered within the approved budget.

Analysis

In 2024, Niagara Region's Emergency Management Program made significant enhancements in preparedness and resilience through several key initiatives. A comprehensive review of these activities demonstrates a well-coordinated effort to strengthen the Region's ability to respond to emergencies, collaborate with partners, and ensure community safety. Below is a detailed examination of the key components of Niagara Region's Emergency Management Program:

Emergency Management Program Committee

The Niagara Region Emergency Management Program Committee played a key role in shaping the Region's 2024 emergency management strategy through two meetings. Topics discussed included: program updates, emergency notification systems, solar eclipse planning, and hazard assessments. These discussions helped ensure alignment on preparedness goals among Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) members.

Training

Training was a priority in 2024, with EOC staff completing mandatory annual training and over 100 Regional and municipal employees participating in various emergency management training programs including IMS 100, IMS 200, BEM, and Scribe training. This training ensured that emergency management personnel were well prepared to handle emergency situations effectively.

Solar Eclipse Emergency Preparedness

The solar eclipse on April 8, 2024, was a major event requiring extensive planning and response. The Region developed a hazard-specific Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA) and a comprehensive emergency plan tailored to the event. This involved more than 100 internal and external meetings, ensuring that all relevant partners were involved. The activation of the EOC from April 7-9 ensured real time situational awareness and coordination. Over 500,000 thousand visitors to Niagara safely observed the eclipse, demonstrating the effectiveness of the Region's preparedness efforts.

Hazards and Emergency Incidents

In 2024, the Region responded to 26 incidents, including several severe weather events like thunderstorms, floods, cold alerts and notably four tornadoes that caused damage but no injuries. The program coordinated timely communication and response efforts amongst the 12 local area municipalities, including activating warming centers and providing free transit rides during extreme weather.

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

CERT expanded to 150 volunteers, including 10 specializing in communications. A key upcoming initiative is the integration of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS), which will enhance situational awareness and response efficiency. This advancement

will further strengthen Niagara's leadership in volunteer-based emergency response and preparedness.

Emergency Exercise

A full-scale exercise tested preparedness for the solar eclipse, involving the Regional EOC staff, CERT volunteers, and the Civil Air Search and Rescue Association (CASARA). The exercise validated response plans, enhanced operational readiness, and demonstrated the region's ability to manage large-scale events.

Public Education

In 2024, the program participated in 29 community events, with 82 CERT volunteers sharing preparedness messages. 30,000 solar eclipse glasses were distributed, along with eye safety information to protect the public from eye damage during the eclipse.

Alternatives Reviewed

The Niagara Region's Emergency Management Program continuously evaluates service delivery methods to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. The current strategic direction has demonstrated success in strengthening emergency response capabilities, enhancing community resilience, and ensuring a coordinated approach to emergency management. As a result, no alternative approaches were deemed necessary at this time.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The Regional Emergency Management Program plays a vital role in advancing Niagara Region's strategic priorities of being an effective Region and a Green and Resilient Region. Through robust coordination with local area municipalities, the program enhances emergency preparedness, response capabilities, and operational efficiency, directly supporting the objective on Effective Region. The program's proactive management of climate-related hazards, including severe weather events and cold alerts, reinforces the region's resilience and sustainability, aligning with the Green and Resilient Region priority. This comprehensive approach ensures that the Region is well equipped to handle future challenges while safeguarding public safety and promoting environmental sustainability.

Other Pertinent Reports

None

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This report was prepared in consultation with the Program Specialist, Project coordinator and reviewed by EMS Chief Richard Ferron

Memorandum

PHD-C 1-2025

Subject: Programs to Support Psychological Wellness at Niagara EMS

Date: April 8, 2025

To: PHSSC

From: Karen Lutz, Deputy Chief, Operations, Niagara EMS

In 2016, Ontario introduced Bill 163 in response to increasing evidence linking Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) diagnoses in first responders to workplace stressors. The legislation required employers of first responders to develop and implement PTSD prevention plans. Niagara EMS responded to this directive and has since built upon this foundational plan, creating innovative programs designed to proactively support the psychological health of frontline staff.

Key Programs:

1. Decompression Time and Mental Stress Leave Days:

These initiatives allow frontline staff to take additional recovery time after traumatic events, ensuring they are not immediately moving on to the next call without sufficient mental recovery. This program aims to mitigate the psychological toll of traumatic events, ensuring staff have the necessary time to decompress.

2. High Acuity Incident Heat Maps:

High acuity incident heat maps provide real-time data on the frequency of high-stress incidents faced by EMS personnel. This allows Superintendents to identify which staff members may have been affected by particularly traumatic calls, enabling them to proactively check in and offer mental health support.

3. Time on Task Reports:

These reports provide a real-time snapshot of the workload of each staff member. Superintendents can use this data to assess and redistribute workloads, ensuring paramedics are not overburdened and are working in areas with lower call volumes when possible.

These innovative programs have been recognized both nationally and internationally for their forward-thinking approach to mental health in first responders. Since 2019, these programs have helped to reduce workers' compensation claims by 56%, avoiding and estimated \$435,110 in costs. As well, in 2024, there was a 26% reduction in lost time days compared to 2023, showcasing the success of these preventative measures.

Niagara EMS is continuously improving its psychological wellness programming, with several new initiatives currently under development. The goal is to further reduce the impact of mental stress injuries and continue supporting the mental health of frontline staff.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Karen Lutz
Deputy Chief, Operations, Niagara EMS