



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

PHSSC 6-2025

Tuesday, June 10, 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

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1. <u>CALL TO ORDER</u>	
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3. <u>DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY INTEREST</u>	
4. <u>PRESENTATIONS</u>	
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	A presentation will precede the consideration of this item.	
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8. OTHER BUSINESS

9. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 8, 2025 at 1:00 p.m. in the Council Chamber, Regional Headquarters.

10. 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).

Nurse Family Partnership Program

Public Health and Social Services Committee

PHD-C 2-2025

June 10, 2025

Angela Roy, Manager, Nurse-Family Partnership and Repro/Child Health Programs

Nurse-Family Partnership Program

Family and Community Health Division

PHD-C 3-2025

June 10, 2025

Angela Roy, MHS, BScN, RN
Manager Early Years Program

Nurse-Family Partnership Program (NFP)

- Free, voluntary home visiting program designed for first time parents under age 25.
- Evidence-based program with significant return on investments (13:1) over the lifetime of the child.

NFP Goals

- Improve pregnancy outcomes by promoting prenatal health behaviours.
- Improve child health and development by supporting positive parenting practices.
- Enhance economic self-sufficiency of families by helping clients set and achieve goals related to education and employment.

Council's Strategic Priorities 2023-2026

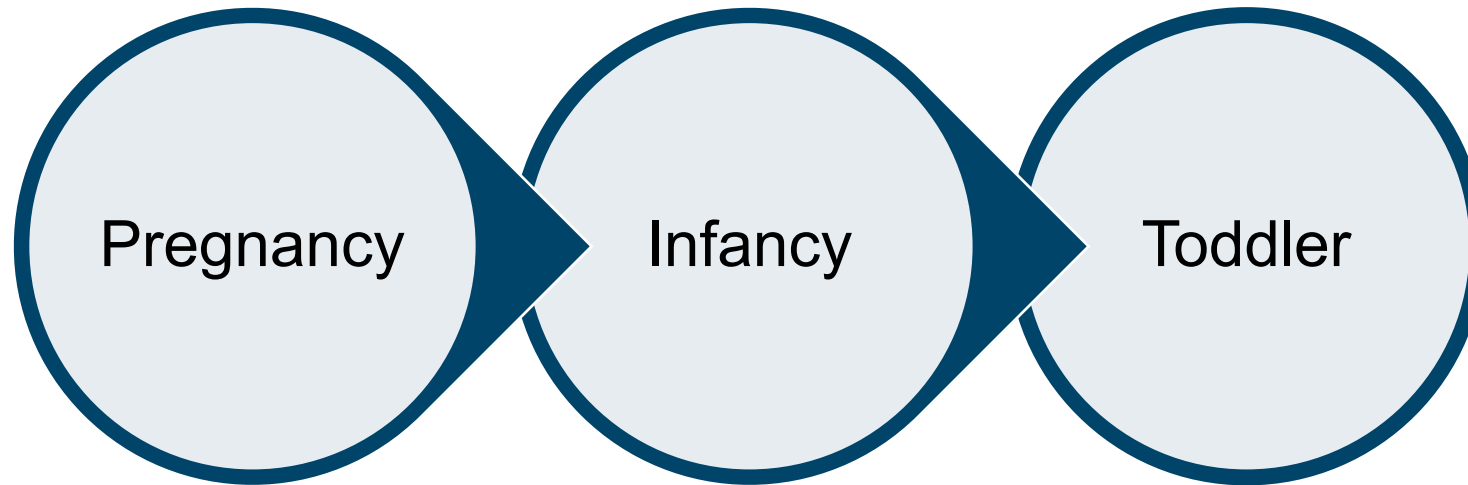
**Effective
Region**

**Green and
Resilient
Region**

**Equitable
Region**

**Prosperous
Region**

NFP Program Structure



Jane's story without NFP Support

Without NFP Support

- Jane (17) was not referred to the program.
- Continued vaping due to stress and lack of support.
- Missed prenatal appointments.
- Felt isolated and anxious during pregnancy.
- Struggled with postpartum anxiety.
- Unsure how to support her daughter's development.
- Did not return to school.

Jane's story with NFP Support

With NFP Support

- Jane (17) was referred to the NFP early in her pregnancy.
- Connected with a Public Health Nurse within a week.
- Received regular visits.
- Learned about prenatal health, healthy relationship and self-care.
- Quit vaping and attended prenatal appointments.
- Received support with breastfeeding, bonding, and managing stress.
- Set goals, returned to school, and found employment in long term care.
- Secured housing and childcare.

Why is NFP essential for young parents?

- Young parents under 25 are still developing key brain functions and sometimes benefit from consistent intensive support.
- The nurse is the key to program success - building a trusted relationship over 2.5 years.
- In Niagara, there were 233 individuals who gave birth in 2024 who met the eligibility criteria for NFP but were not enrolled prenatally.

Program Indicators to date



333 referrals



256 enrolments



6295 hrs with a nurse



210 babies born



84% initiated breastfeeding



90 graduates

Client Quotes

"She just helped me be the best mom that I could be... Like she set me up for success in a way and I know I would be a good mom without her, but I feel like I'm a better mom with the things I have learned from her."

"I went from being very hopeless to very supported."

"I don't think I would be the same parent I am today. I have so many more tools than I would've if I had just done it on my own."

Questions?

If you have any questions, please contact:

- **Angela Roy**, Manager Early Years
 - angela.roy@niagararegion.ca
 - 905-321-0239

Beach Surveillance

Public Health and Social Services Committee

PHD-C 4-2025

June 10, 2025

Brandon Krupa, Environmental Health Manager

Beach Surveillance

Public Health's Role & Future Vision

PHD-C 4-2025

June 10, 2025

Brandon Krupa, Manager, Environmental Health

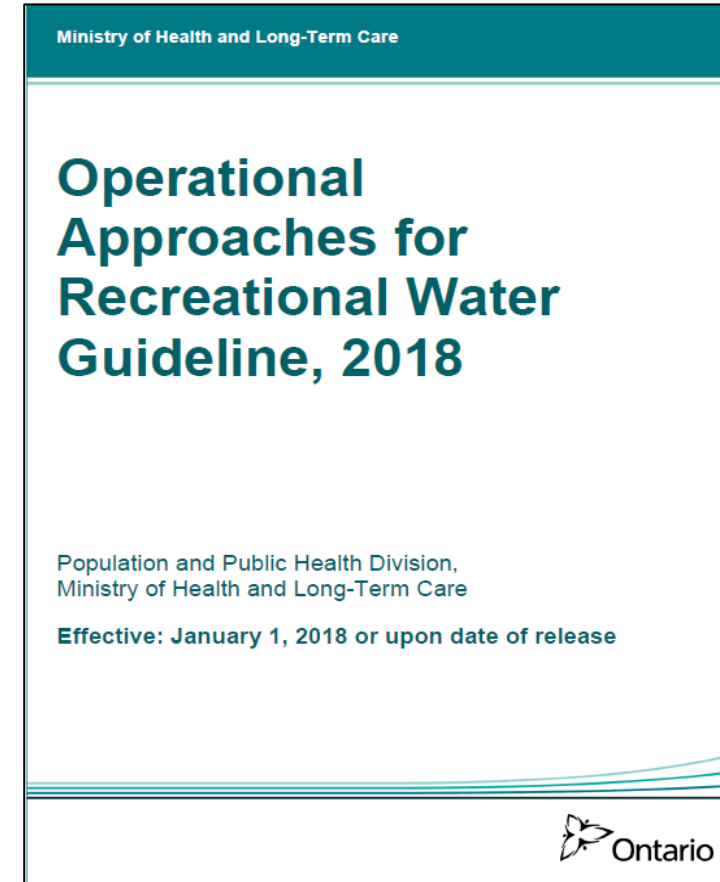
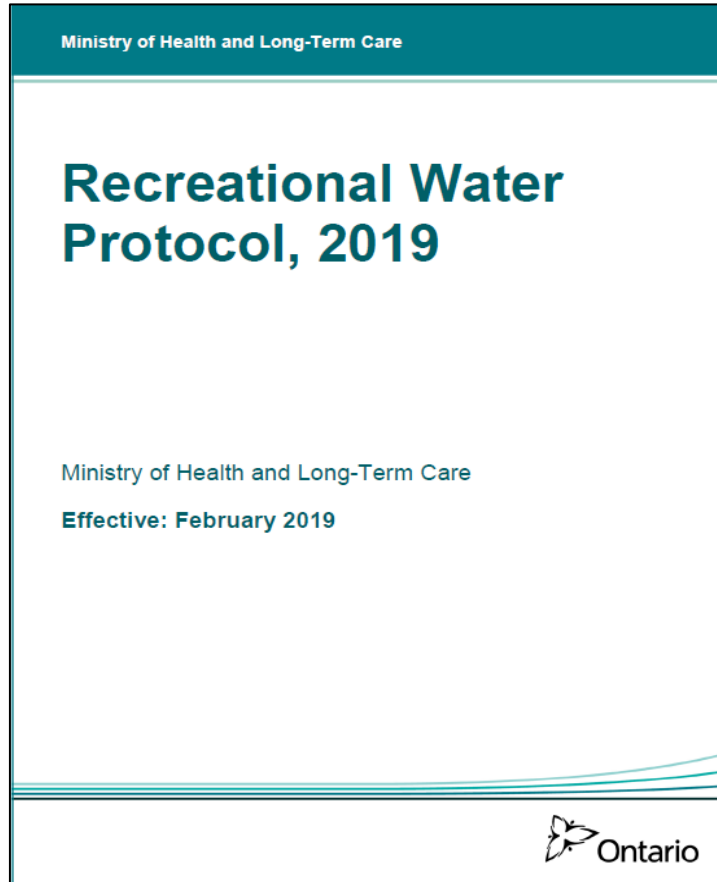
The Public Health Unit's Role

To Reduce the risk of water-borne illness and injury.

1. Conduct annual assessment of public beaches
2. Routine beach surveillance
3. Communicate to the public

Note: Mandates and authorities for PHUs are provided under Ontario's Health Protection and Promotion Act

Recreational Water Guidance



Niagara Beaches

- Public beach criteria
- 19 beaches are inspected and sampled in the region
 - Lake Ontario – 7
 - Lake Erie - 12

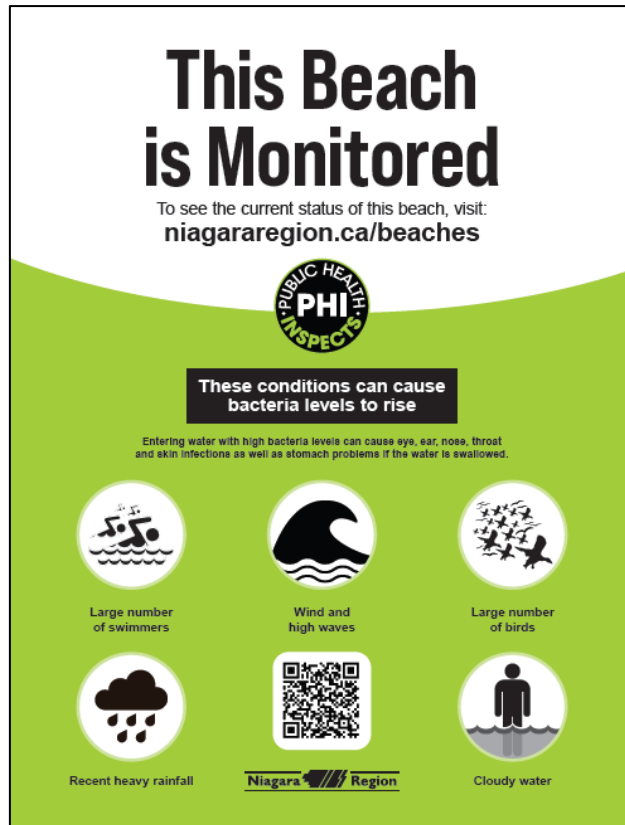
Beach Surveillance

- Beaches are sampled from Victoria Day to Labour Day
- 1/week mandated sampling frequency
 - 13 sampled twice a week
 - 6 sampled once a week
- What are other Public Health Units doing?

Water Sampling Process

- 5 water samples taken per beach
- The water is tested for E. Coli
- E. Coli counts determine if a swimming advisory is posted
- Advisory vs. Closure

Public Messaging and Promotion



- Public awareness and education
- Educate the public on the environmental factors affecting water quality

Beach Water Testing Website

Beach Water Testing in Niagara

Check before swimming

We test the water of beaches in Niagara every year during the summer. Make sure the water is safe before you swim.



Beach water testing results

Beach	Municipality	Water Temperature	Updated
 Bay Beach (Crystal) Open for swimming	Fort Erie		Has not been sampled yet
 Bernard Avenue Beach Open for swimming	Fort Erie		Has not been sampled yet
 Crescent Beach Open for swimming	Fort Erie		Has not been sampled yet

Beach Water Testing Website Traffic

Year	Views	Active Users
2023	134,010	60,734
2024	146,156	75,207
% Increase	↑ 9.07%	↑ 23.82%

How Water Results Get Posted

Day One

- 8 am: Water sample taken
- 11 am: Water sample couriered to lab
- 1 pm: Received at lab for analysis

Day Two

- 11 am: Receive notification of sample results
- 12 pm: Data entered, and website updated

Sampling Challenges

- Delay in updating the website
- Constantly changing water quality
- Accuracy of posting:
 - 2022 – 84.27%
 - 2023 – 74.85%

Continuous Quality Assurance

- Evidence based approach
 - No known diseases of Public Health significance sourced from our beaches
 - Daily testing vs. Twice weekly
- Opportunity to reallocate resources

Predictive Modeling

- What is predictive modeling?
- Partnership with Toronto Metropolitan University
 - 1 of 5 Public Health Units in the country
 - 2025 – Niagara Beach Survey
- Water Quality Application

Benefits of Predictive Modeling



- Improve public safety
- Providing timely information & increase public awareness
- Reduce manual sampling frequency

Questions?

Updated Niagara Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2025-2029)

Public Health and Social Services Committee

COM 22-2025

Tuesday, June 10, 2025

Jessica Thompson, Community Safety and Well-Being Program Manager

Updated Niagara Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2025-2029)

COM 22-2025

June 10, 2025

Sandy Dupuis, Associate Director, Comm Strategic Priorities

Jessica Thompson, Community Safety and Well-Being Program Manager

Community Safety and Well-Being Planning

- Provincially mandated through the Ministry of the Solicitor General (2019)
- Multisectoral and community-driven
- Addresses root causes of complex social issues at the local level
- Goal: Reduce demands on emergency services
- Update required every four years

Council Strategic Priorities

Equitable Region:

- Collaboration
- Safety and well-being
- Focus on those disproportionately impacted by the social determinants of health

Provincial Framework

Social

Development:

Promoting and maintaining safety and well-being

Prevention:

Proactively reducing identified risk

Risk

Intervention:

Mitigating situations of elevated risk

Incident

Response:

Critical and non-critical incident response



CSWB Plan 2021-2025 Achievements

- Five community strategies in progress
- Six Action Tables advancing community initiatives
- \$24 million in community investment
- 5000 community members engaged in local priorities
- Niagara Well-Being Tool launch
- Niagara's Situation Tables expansion
- Building Safer Communities Granting Program Pilot

Community Engagement Overview

- 2000 resident surveys
- Drawing on recent engagement with individuals with lived and living experience
 - Mno Bmaadziwin Indigenous Engagement Report
 - Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy
 - Gun and Gang Prevention Strategy
 - Substance Use Strategy

Community Engagement Survey Highlights

- 8% decrease in respondents' feelings of strong sense of belonging (45% to 37%)
- 81% of respondents feel crime has increased over the past four years
- 28% of respondents feel unsafe / very unsafe in their community

Top Issues

Issue	2025
Addictions/Substance use	62%
Affordable Housing	48%
Homelessness	43%
Mental Health	26%
Crime Prevention	23%
Poverty and Income	22%
Human Trafficking	14%

CSWB New Priority Areas

- Community Engagement
- Guidance from sector leaders
- Analysis of local data and best practices
- Environmental Scan of other municipal plans
- Niagara Region's updated Community Safety and Well-Being Plan will build on the previous plan and focus on four key priorities.

CSWB Plan Update (2025-2029)

Key Drivers of Impact:

- Building Strong Partnerships
- Investing in Communities
- Using Evidence to Guide Decisions
- Driving System-Wide Change

Priority: Mental Health and Addictions

Goal: Improve access to culturally safe, equitable and appropriate mental health and addictions services and support.

- Action Spotlight:
 - Substance Use Strategy
 - HART Hub
 - Alternative Response to 911 Calls Involving Mental Health and Addiction

Priority: Homelessness and Basic Needs

Goal: Improve access to basic needs and appropriate supports for people experiencing barriers.

- Action Spotlight:
 - Supportive Housing Strategy
 - HART Hub

Priority: Gender-Based Violence

Goal: Enhance Niagara's capacity to recognize, prevent, and respond to gender-based violence.

- Action Spotlights:
 - Increase Capacity for Community Agencies to respond to Intimate Partner Violence and Human Trafficking

Priority: Community Safety

Goal: Strengthen early intervention and timely responses to urgent situations through the most suitable service providers.

- Action Spotlights:
 - Youth Crime Prevention Strategy
 - Welcoming Streets Initiative Pilot Program
 - Niagara Situation Tables Expansion

Thank You

Subject: Updated Niagara Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2025-2029)

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, June 10, 2025

Recommendations

1. That the Updated Niagara Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2025-2029) **BE ADOPTED** by Regional Council;
2. That staff **BE DIRECTED** to submit Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2025-2029) to the Ministry of the Solicitor General in accordance with the Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019; and
3. That the achievements related to the actions outlined in the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan **BE REPORTED** annually to Regional Council.

Key Facts

- Pursuant to the Community Safety and Policing Act, the Ministry of the Solicitor General mandated in 2019 that all municipalities develop and adopt a local Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan, with a 2025 legislative amendment requiring updates by July 1, 2025, and every four years thereafter.
- In March 2025, staff initiated community engagement efforts to inform the plan update, which included launching a resident-wide survey, while also drawing on previous engagement activities with individuals with lived expertise, input from sector leaders and local data.
- Through these efforts, four key priorities for community safety and well-being planning were identified: mental health and addictions, homelessness and basic needs, gender-based violence and community safety.
- Community safety and well-being planning is grounded in evidence and has led to significant local outcomes, including the creation of five community strategies, six community action tables, and the investment of \$24 million in grants back into the community.

Financial Considerations

In December 2019, Regional Council approved a temporary full-time position to provide project management support and conduct necessary, fulsome community consultation required to develop Niagara's first CSWB Plan. The Region has a provincially legislated responsibility to coordinate the development, implementation and monitoring of the CSWB Plan, and as such, additional staff resources are required to support the long-term sustainability of the plan and facilitate implementation of actions under each of our priority areas. The Region has relied on temporary external grants to fund three additional staff to achieve the actions of the plan. This funding comes to an end on March 31, 2026.

Analysis

Legislative Requirement for CSWB Plan

In 2021, in accordance with a mandate from the Ministry of the Solicitor General, Niagara Region, in partnership with Niagara Regional Police Services, adopted its first Community Safety and Well-Being Plan. The objective of community safety and well-being planning is to promote a multi-sectoral approach to addressing the root causes of complex social challenges at the local level, with the goal of reducing demand on emergency response services. Informed by the expertise of local leaders across all sectors through the Advisory Committee, Niagara Region's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan remains a living document that can evolve and respond to the ever-changing needs of community.

Community Engagement to Inform Plan Update

In March 2025, a region-wide survey was conducted to assess residents' perceptions of safety and crime, and to identify the key factors influencing their sense of safety and overall well-being. With nearly 2,000 responses collected from across all twelve of Niagara's municipalities, the findings showed that 37% of respondents reported a strong or very strong sense of community belonging. These individuals cited strong social connections and access to local resources and amenities as primary contributors. In contrast, 21% of respondents reported a weak or very weak sense of community belonging, attributing this to limited social connection and inadequate access to local supports. These findings highlight the importance of connection and access to timely resources in residents' overall wellbeing.

As it pertains to feelings of safety, 40% of respondents reported feeling safe or very safe in their community. This was mostly attributed to strong connections with friends,

family, neighbours and those who they interact with regularly. Alternatively, 28% of respondents reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe, citing increased rise in crime, more visible substance use, and increased visible homelessness as the most common reasons. Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan is a partnership across sectors in our community to increase feelings of safety and wellness for all members, including those who are most vulnerable.

For additional information on community engagement results, please see Appendix 1. Niagara's CSWB Plan (2025-2029)

Drawing on findings from the resident survey, recent extensive engagement with individuals with lived and living experience, guidance from sector leaders, and analysis of local data, Niagara Region's updated Community Safety and Well-Being Plan will build on the previous plan and focus on four key priorities. The following section outlines these priorities along with the corresponding goals for each area:

Mental Health and Addiction: Improve access to culturally safe, equitable and appropriate mental health and addictions services and support.

Homelessness and Basic Needs: Improve access to basic needs and appropriate supports for people experiencing barriers.

Gender-Based Violence: Enhance Niagara's capacity to recognize, prevent, and respond to gender-based violence while providing meaningful support to those affected.

Community Safety: Strengthen early intervention and timely responses to urgent situations through the most suitable service providers.

Through the collaborative work of the Community Safety and Well-Being team, alongside Niagara Regional Police Services and community partners, these goals will be pursued through a set of clearly defined actions. These actions have been identified as a result of a coordinated, evidence-informed approach that leverages local expertise and resources to address the identified priorities collaboratively and strategically. Currently, Niagara's plan has nine action items across all four priorities. Staff will continue to engage with community partners and persons with lived expertise to adjust actions as needed to reflect community needs.

Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2021-2025) Achievements

Throughout the past four years, The Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2021-2025) has yielded many successful outcomes working alongside all sectors and 70 community partners. For more information on specific achievements, please see Appendix 2.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not applicable.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan aligns with Council Strategic Priority Two: Equitable Region, by collaborating with community to support the safety and well-being for all residents, including those who have been disproportionately impacted by the social determinants of health.

Other Pertinent Reports

Not applicable.

Prepared by:

Jessica Thompson
Community Safety and Well-Being
Program Manager
Community Services

Recommended by:

Henri Koning, MHSc
Commissioner
Community Services

Submitted by:

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared in consultation with Sandy Dupuis, Associate Director Community Strategies and Priorities, Megan Henry, Data Analyst Community Safety and Well-Being and was reviewed by John Pickles, Program Financial Specialist and Mario Lagrotteria, Deputy Chief Niagara Regional Police.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Community Safety and Well-Being Resident Survey 2025: Highlights

Appendix 2 - Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2021-2025)
Achievements

Community Safety and Well-Being Community Survey

Background

Niagara Region Community Services, in partnership with Niagara Regional Police Services created and launched a public survey to engage residents in preparation to revise Niagara's current Community Safety and Well-Being Plan. The purpose of the survey was to understand:

- Perceptions of well-being and community safety
- Determine community safety and well-being priorities in our community
- Identify where change is needed

Methods

The CSWB resident survey was launched Wednesday March 5th, 2025 and was open for approximately two and a half weeks before closing on Friday March 21st, 2025. The survey included a variety of quantitative and qualitative questions to understand perceptions of well-being and safety. Participation was voluntary and open to all Niagara residents and people who work in Niagara.

Respondent Information

The overwhelming majority of survey respondents (99) lived in Niagara and was a good representation of residents across the Niagara Region (Table 1). Of those that answered sociodemographic questions, 71% self-identified as women/girls, 18% men/boys, 2% as gender diverse, 10% did not know or preferred not to answer. Most respondents identified as white (78%) and 8% of respondents identified as a racialized population. Approximately 3% of respondents self-identified as Indigenous. There was also an opportunity for respondents to self-identify as part of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community (8%) and if respondents identified as a person with a disability (21%); this may be any physical, mental, learning, communication, seeing, hearing disability or illness and may be permanent or temporary, visible or invisible.

Table 1. 2025 CSWB Survey respondent municipality of residence vs. population distribution

Municipality	2025 CSWB Survey (%)	2021 Census Population (%)
St. Catharines	36%	29%
Niagara Falls	17%	20%
Welland	16%	12%
Fort Erie	5%	7%
Grimsby	3%	6%
Lincoln	3%	5%
Thorold	5%	5%
Port Colborne	5%	4%
Niagara-on-the-Lake	3%	4%
Pelham	4%	4%
West Lincoln	2%	3%
Wainfleet	1%	1%
TOTAL	100%	100%

Data Source: 2025 CSWB Survey, Niagara Region, 2025; 2021 Census, Statistics Canada, 2023.

Key Findings

Well-Being and Belonging

Respondents were asked how they would describe their feelings of belonging to their local community, ranging from very weak to very strong. Overall, 37% of respondents felt strong or very strong sense of community belonging and often cited strong social connections and access to local resources and amenities. In contrast, 21% of respondents reported very weak or weak sense of belonging due primarily to a lack of community and social connections, as well as limited resources and amenities.

Compared to the 2020 CSWB resident survey, there was an 8% decrease in respondents feeling strong or very strong and a 6% increase in very weak or weak feelings of belonging.

Safety and Crime

Respondents were asked how safe they feel in Niagara region ranging from very unsafe to very safe. Respondents who reported feeling safe or very safe, 40%, attributed these feelings of safety to strong social connections with family, friends, neighbours and their overall community. While 28% of respondents said they feel unsafe or very unsafe in their community, the common reasons included a perceived rise in crime, more visible homelessness, and increased substance use in their community. In 2020, 63% of respondents felt very satisfied or satisfied with their personal safety in their community while 28% felt very dissatisfied or dissatisfied.

Top Issues in Niagara

According to community, the top three issues affecting Niagara residents' ability to be safe and well were addictions/substance misuse, affordable housing, and homelessness. Mental health remained a top issue and there was an increase in respondents choosing crime prevention, human trafficking and food security as top issues compared to the 2020 CSWB survey (Table 2).

Table 2. Top issues effecting Niagara's ability to be safe and well, 2020 vs. 2025

Issue	2020 CSWB Survey (%)	2025 CSWB Survey (%)
Addictions / substance misuse	68%	62%
Affordable housing	46%	48%
Homelessness	20%	43%
Mental health	44%	26%
Crime prevention	18%	23%
Poverty and income	28%	22%
Human trafficking	11%	14%
Employment and skills development	13%	9%
Food security	2%	7%
Road safety	7%	6%
Support for older adults who are vulnerable	7%	5%

Data Source: 2025 CSWB Survey, Niagara Region, 2025; 2020 CSWB Survey, Niagara Region, 2020.

These preliminary findings will be followed up by a detailed community engagement report and available online through [Community Safety and Well-Being Plan - Niagara Region, Ontario](https://www.niagararegion.ca/community-safety/plan.aspx) (<https://www.niagararegion.ca/community-safety/plan.aspx>)

Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2021-2025) Achievements

The launch of Niagara's first Community Safety and Well-Being Plan led to significant achievements, including better coordination across sectors. By bringing together 70 community partners from across the region, the plan helped break down silos and support a more coordinated effort to address the root causes of complex social issues. Some notable successes include:

- 1) **Five Community Strategies in Progress:** During 2021-2025, system leaders have come together to work on five community strategies including: Youth Gun and Gang Prevention, Alternate Response to 911 Calls Involving Mental Health and Addiction, Situation Table Expansion, Substance Use and Supportive Housing. Each of these strategies relies on the guidance and collaboration from community leaders and engages individuals with lived expertise to support a more equitable and coordinated approach.
- 2) **\$24 Million in Grants Invested Back into Community:** With the support and collaboration from local partners, the Community Safety and Well-Being Team has been successful in receiving numerous external grants to support community work including Building Safer Communities: Youth Crime Prevention and The HART Hub.
- 3) **5000 Community Members Engaged in Local Priorities:** In addition to the leadership provided by local community partners, 5000 residents including individuals with lived expertise have been engaged in community safety and well-being initiatives through surveys, facilitated interviews, focus groups and involvement in action tables.
- 4) **Launch of the Niagara Well-Being Tool:** The successful launch of the publicly accessible well-being tool has given residents and community partners access to valuable neighbourhood-level data. To date, the tool has engaged 700 users. For more information, please visit [Niagara Well-Being Tool - Niagara Region, Ontario](https://www.niagararegion.ca/community-safety/well-being-tool.aspx) (<https://www.niagararegion.ca/community-safety/well-being-tool.aspx>)

- 5) **Risk Lowered for 113 Individuals Through Niagara's Situation Table**
Expansion: Since expanding to include all 12 of Niagara's municipalities, the Situation Table has supported over 113 Individuals and their families at acutely elevated risk. By intervening before a crisis occurred, the Situation Table has prevented possible apprehensions, arrests, calls to emergency services and hospital visits. To date, 447 Table Representatives have been trained across 51 community agencies.
- 6) **552 Children and Youth At-Risk Supported Through Local Programs:** In collaboration with Public Safety Canada through the Building Safer Communities Fund, Niagara has funded nine local programs to provide crime prevention initiatives for 552 at-risk children, youth, and their families across the region.
- 7) **Model Design for Alternate Response to 911 Calls Involving Mental Health and Addictions:** In March 2024, Community Safety and Well-Being Staff brought forth a motion to Public Health and Social Services Committee to design a model for alternate 911 responses to mental health and addictions calls. This model is currently being built in partnership with CMHA Niagara, Niagara Regional Police and EMS to be brought back to council later this year.
- 8) **Mno Bmaadziwin:** The Indigenous Engagement Report completed in 2021 captures insights shared by Indigenous communities about what it means to live a good and healthy life. Guided by principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion, the Community Safety and Well-Being Team remains committed to ongoing engagement with Indigenous communities to ensure their voices are meaningfully represented in our work. As part of this commitment, a joint roundtable has been established to connect with leaders from local urban Indigenous agencies within the Niagara Region.

To access additional information about Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan and its associated actions, please visit [Community Safety and Well-Being Plan - Niagara Region, Ontario](https://www.niagararegion.ca/community-safety/plan.aspx) (https://www.niagararegion.ca/community-safety/plan.aspx)

Student Immunization Record Review 2024-2025

Public Health and Social Services Committee

PHD 5-2025

June 10, 2025

Leslie Alderman, Vaccine Preventative Diseases

Student Immunization Record Review 2024-2025

PHD 5-2025

June 10, 2025

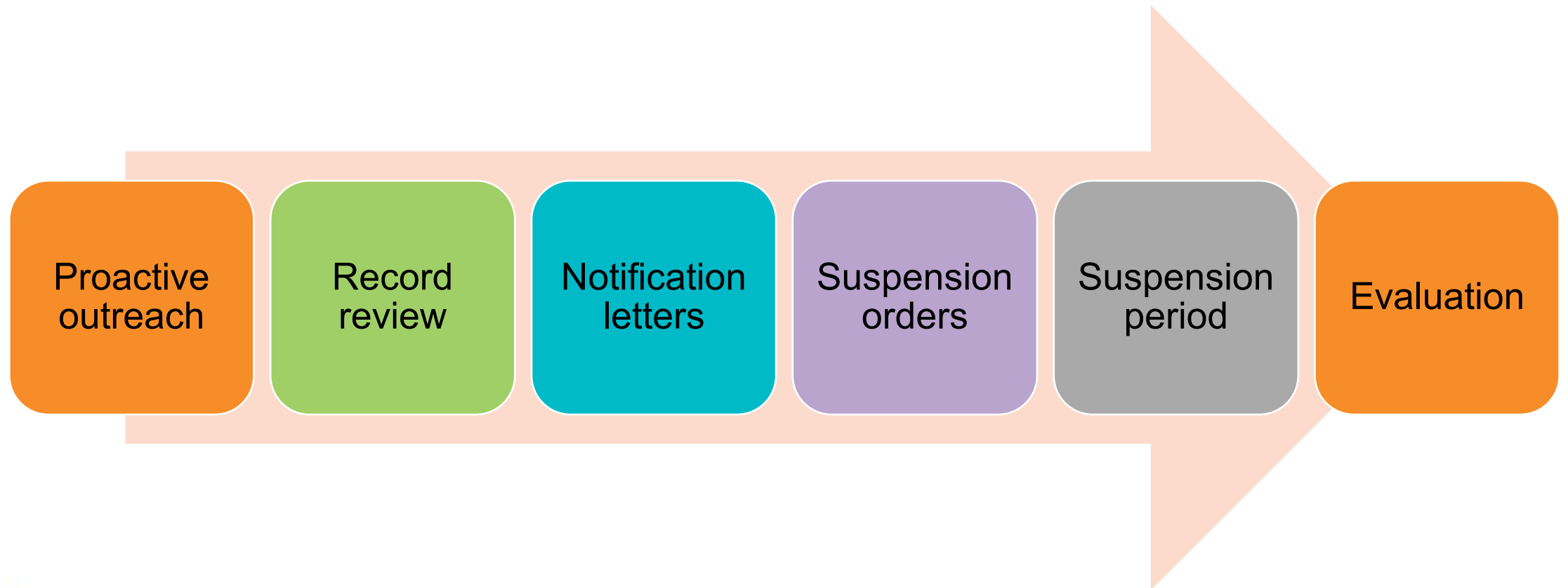
Leslie Alderman, Manager Vaccine Preventable
Diseases Nicole Luciano, Program Specialist

Protecting Children from Harmful Diseases

- The Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA) requires all Ontario students to have up to date records on file to attend school
- Nine vaccine-preventable diseases
- Accurate immunization records help identify those at risk in an outbreak



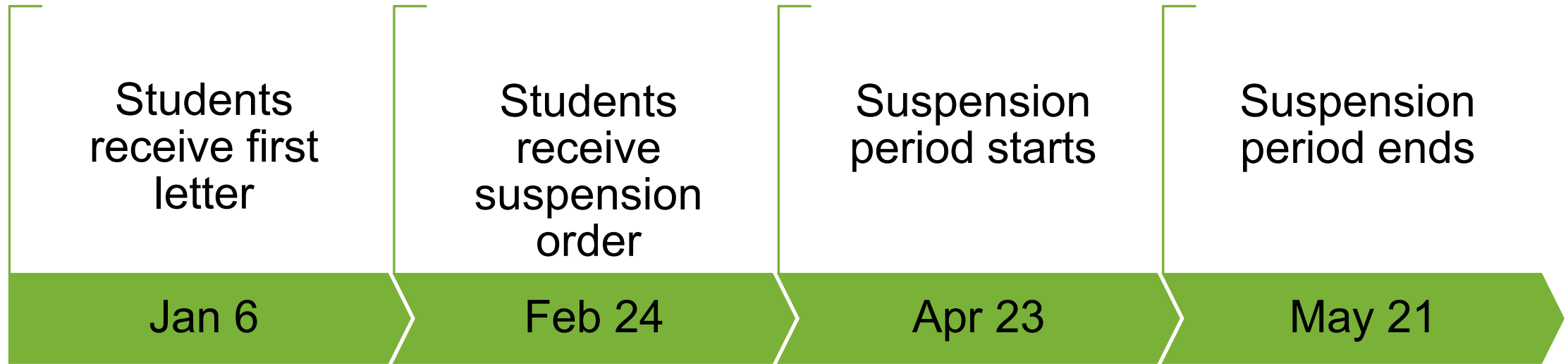
The Record Review Process



It Takes a Community...

- Schools
- Families
- Health care providers
- Community partners
- Internal partners

71,343 Student Records Reviewed



Niagara's immunization compliance for students from age 4 to 17 years increased from 80.4% in January to 93.2% in May

Supporting Families

- Maximize partnership
- Ongoing communications including interpreter services
- Targeted outreach
- Providing guidance to primary care and families

Continuous Quality Improvement



Reduce the number of initial letters distributed to students



Reduce the number of suspension notices issued to students



Decrease the number of student suspensions



Identify and implement proactive opportunities

Evaluation Process

Data collection

Analysis

Develop evidence
informed
recommendations

Prioritize

"Process went well, fast. Good information given by nurse. Nurse validated all vaccines, explained the process and calmed down my child."

"I didn't have enough information before getting the suspension letter."

Questions?

Subject: Student Immunization Record Review 2024-2025

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, June 10, 2025

Recommendations

1. That Report PHD 5-2025 **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the annual student immunization record review process in alignment with the *Immunization of School Pupils Act (1990)* (ISPA).
- The purpose of the *Act* is to enhance the protection of children's health against nine designated vaccine preventable diseases.
- Students attending school in Ontario are required to have an up-to-date immunization record, or a valid exemption, on file with Public Health. Niagara's compliance with the *Act* for children 4 – 17 years of age has increased from 80.4% in January 2025 to 93.2% in May 2025.
- Factors facilitating this year's record review process including maximizing community partnerships, ongoing communications, and targeted outreach. Efforts to improve the annual process for future years are underway.

Financial Considerations

Student immunization record review activities are completed within the existing cost shared budget for the Vaccine Preventable Diseases program (64% Ministry: 36% Niagara Region Levy).

Analysis

Public Health plays an important role in disease and outbreak prevention through vaccination and ensuring appropriate vaccination coverage across the region. Each year, in accordance with the *Immunization of School Pupils Act (1990)*, the Vaccine Preventable Disease program reviews the immunization records on file of all school-aged children. Immunization reminder notices are sent to students and their parents or

guardians if records are incomplete, outlining what is missing and providing a deadline to update and submit the information to Public Health. If the record remains incomplete, an Order for Suspension from Attendance at School (Order for Suspension) is issued, as outlined in the legislation. If updated vaccination information or valid exemption documents are not submitted to Public Health by the deadline indicated on the Order for Suspension, students are subject to suspension from school for up to 20 school days or until the required information is provided.

Minimizing suspensions under the *Act* is a key priority. To support this, Public Health provided communications to School Boards and Principals, families and primary care providers throughout the record review process, sharing information and applicable timelines. An interpreter resource in various languages was included with both the reminder notice and Order for Suspension, together with infographics explaining the process and reporting options. Public Health frequently accessed 911 interpreters in various settings to assist with explaining the process and expectations under the *Act*. Vaccination clinics were held in secondary schools and additional clinics ran over March Break at various locations across the region. Subsequent school-based clinics were also offered with an emphasis on removing barriers for underserved populations and those without access to an Ontario health card or family doctor.

71,343 student records were initially reviewed by staff, with immunization reminder notices sent to 13,719 students at the beginning of January. Many of these students were likely up to date with immunizations but had not yet reported this information to Public Health. As Ontario does not have a provincial immunization registry, students or their guardians are required to directly report immunization records to their local public health agency. Niagara Region has multiple privacy compliant options for record submission to facilitate the process.

At the end of February, 8,727 students remained non-compliant with the legislation and received an Order for Suspension, requesting information be submitted to Public Health by April 22, 2025. The suspension period began on April 23 with 1,831 students continuing to have incomplete records on file and by the end of the first week of suspension this number decreased to 670 students. 93.2% of Niagara students were in compliance with the *Act* as of May 2025. Vaccine coverage rates are antigen or disease specific and range from 88.9 – 93.1% depending on the antigen or disease.

Public Health staff made concerted efforts to work closely with school principals and families to further reduce those suspended from school before the May 21st end of suspension period. Since January 2025, Public Health staff vaccinated 3,169 students,

administered 5,337 doses of vaccine, processed 725 exemptions, and updated more than 13,000 student immunization records from a variety of sources. Staff have also fielded over 14,000 phone calls and supported more than 1,200 in-person visits to the main Public Health office, offering guidance to students and families or receiving updated immunization information.

These efforts complemented the immunization services provided by primary care providers and other community partners. Public Health has formed strong and valuable partnerships with School Boards, Administrators, Principals, Multi-language Resource Coaches, and Settlement Workers in Schools, which were essential to supporting immunization initiatives. The Vaccine Preventable Diseases program worked in close collaboration with the School Health and Outreach teams, the Health Promotion and Foundational Standards Division, and various corporate departments, including the Information and Technology team, the Clerk's Office, Legal, and Customer Service, to ensure a coordinated and effective approach.

The annual record review process faced additional pressures this school year. Some examples include a larger school-aged cohort, changes in provincial polio vaccine requirements resulting in more students being overdue for polio vaccine, and challenges with vaccine supply. Furthermore, the review period was significantly delayed due to the Canada Post strike, leading to challenges in offering the same number and scope of catch-up vaccine clinics.

Staff implemented new strategies to improve the process including making calls to those with no records on file during November/December of 2024, reaching out to families to offer missing vaccine during other public health vaccine campaigns, and booking students into upcoming appointments.

A comprehensive review is currently underway to identify proactive opportunities to address the record review process and improve service as well as operational efficiency. The objectives of this continuous quality improvement (CQI) review include:

- Reducing the number of initial letters distributed to students
- Reducing the number of suspension notices issued to students
- Decreasing the number of student suspensions

Recommendations are anticipated this summer. There is also a provincially funded "Locally Collaborative Driven Project" led by South East Health Unit, in collaboration with Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health, Lambton Public Health and Queen's

University focused on a process evaluation of ISPA programing that will further inform our improvement efforts.

Alternatives Reviewed

As per Section 5 of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* and the Ontario Public Health Standards (2021), the Board of Health is accountable for the provision of disease prevention and is a requirement to receive Ministry of Health funding. Under Requirement 1b) of the Immunization program standard, the Board of Health shall assess, maintain reports, and report on the immunization status of children attending schools in accordance with the *Immunization of School Pupils Act*.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

This report supports the Council Strategic Priorities of Effective and Equitable Region. The comprehensive review of the record review process will strategically improve good governance practices to ensure quality and effective functioning, fiscal responsibility, and resiliency of Public Health program and services. It also aligns with Equitable Region by ensuring services meet the needs of the community in an inclusive, welcoming, and equity-focused way.

Prepared by:

Leslie Alderman
Manager, Vaccine Preventable Disease
Program
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 reviewed by Diane Vanecko, Director of Clinical Services.

Subject: Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy – Transit Benefit Pass

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, June 10, 2025

Recommendations

1. That Report COM 19-2025 **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the expansion of the Transit Benefit Pass approved by the Niagara Transit Commission Board in March 2025 (NTC 7-2025) to include Ontario Works (OW), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and low-income families & individuals as of July 1, 2025.
- This initiative is an action within the 2024–2028 Poverty Reduction Strategy, under the Transportation focus area to “provide concession fare products for people who are living in poverty”.
- The expanded program provides eligibility to OW and ODSP recipients and low-income individuals to purchase a \$50 Monthly Transit Benefit Pass.
- OW and ODSP recipients will present their program statement to Niagara Transit as verification of income testing, thus automatically qualifying them for the monthly Transit Benefit Pass for a 12month period.
- Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities (SAEO) will support the administration of the Transit Benefit Pass for low-income families not in receipt of OW or ODSP utilizing existing assessment technology and income thresholds currently applied to the Niagara Utility Benefit and Low-Income Funeral programs.
- Once deemed eligible, low-income individuals will be provided with a letter to present to Niagara Transit staff directly to allow for the purchase of a reduced rate monthly Transit Benefit Pass for a 12-month period.

Financial Considerations

SAEO will support eligibility assessments for the Transit Benefit Pass for low-income residents not receiving OW or ODSP, within its approved 2025 operating budget.

Analysis

Transit Benefit Pass

In March 2025, Niagara Transit Commission (NTC) approved the expansion of the Transit Benefit Pass to include OW and low-income families and individuals. The current program is available to recipients of ODSP. Niagara residents will be eligible to purchase a Transit Benefit Pass effective July 1, 2025. OW and ODSP recipients and Low-Income residents who qualify financially are responsible for purchasing the pass directly from NTC with their own funds. NTC staff will verify eligibility by reviewing their proof of income and valid identification.

Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy Recommendation

The five-year Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy was launched in 2024. The strategy reflects concerns, opportunities and actions identified by residents during a broad engagement process on how to address poverty in Niagara. A key goal of the NPRS is to align Regional efforts and investments, improve policies, promote best practices, and enhance programs and services to strengthen effectiveness and accountability which ultimately impact poverty reduction efforts across Niagara.

Transportation is one of the Eight Areas of Focus identified in the strategy and indicates that transportation is a significant poverty-related barrier. One of the recommended actions is to “provide concession fare products for people who are living in poverty”.

Program Delivery Partnership

Approximately 14% of Niagara’s population lives in poverty. Of this group, 9% have been income-tested through participation in OW or ODSP. OW and ODSP recipients automatically qualify for the monthly Transit Benefit Pass, as they have already undergone income testing through their respective Provincial programs.

SAEO will support the administration of the Transit Pass by assessing eligibility for the remaining 5% of low-income families. SAEO will leverage existing assessment technology and income thresholds currently applied to the Niagara Utility Benefit and Low-Income Funeral programs. Eligibility is assessed based on the total household net income and family size. The Discretionary Benefits Portal will be expanded to allow for on-line applications and administration of assessments and approvals by SAEO staff.

Communication Plan

The Niagara Transit Commission (NTC) will lead the communication strategy for the Transit Benefit Pass launch, aligning it with the Fare Harmonization date of July 1, 2025. To support uptake of the Transit Benefit Pass, SAEO staff will complement NTC efforts. These coordinated actions aim to enhance access to transportation for individuals living in poverty.

Alternatives Reviewed

This report is initiated by staff to provide Council with an update on progress related an action item within the Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Alternative methods to determine eligibility for the low-income Transit Benefit Pass based on the total household net income and family size could be developed. The collaboration between NTC and SAEO supports low-income residents transit needs by using existing systems and expertise and demonstrates a commitment to innovation, efficiency, and supports equitable transit access.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The Transit Benefit Pass aligns with Council's strategic priority of "Prosperous Region" to promote economic welfare and a healthy business environment in Niagara by investing and enhancing access to transit through a discounted transit fare for individuals living in poverty across Niagara. It aligns to "Equitable Region" to promote affordability with a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens which is an action item under transportation in the NPRS.

Leveraging the expertise and established practices of SAEO supports efficient administration, making it easier for OW, ODSP and low-income residents to purchase the Transit Benefit Pass.

Other Pertinent Reports

NTC 7-2025 Transit Benefit Pass Update

[COTW-C 1-2024 Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=36144)

(<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=36144>
COTW-C 1-2024)

[Poverty Reduction Strategy 2024-2028](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=36145)

(<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=36145>)

[Poverty Reduction Strategy at A Glance](https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/COTW_Mar07_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COTW-C%201-2024%20Poverty%20Reductions%20Strategy%20Placemat%20At%20a%20Glance.pdf)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/COTW_Mar07_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COTW-C%201-2024%20Poverty%20Reductions%20Strategy%20Placemat%20At%20a%20Glance.pdf)

Prepared by:

Lori Watson
Director
Social Assistance &
Employment Opportunities
Community Services

Recommended by:

Henri Koning, MHSc
Commissioner
Community Services

Submitted by:

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared in consultation with Erin Mozina and Marc Todd, Managers, Social Assistance & Employment Opportunities, and John Pickles, Program Financial Specialist, and reviewed by Donna Gibbs, Director, Legal Court Service and Carla Stout, General Manager, Niagara Transit.

Subject: Evaluation of the 2023-2024 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Projects

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, June 10, 2025

Recommendations

1. That Report COM 20-2025 **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide a summary and evaluation of the seven 2023-2024 Niagara Prosperity Initiative (NPI) funded projects emphasizing their role in addressing urgent community needs and improving the wellbeing of vulnerable populations within the region.
- The projects were strategically selected in response to the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, prior to the launch of the Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy, focusing on critical areas of housing, health, and domestic violence.
- Over the two-year funding period, more than 6,040 individuals living in poverty in Niagara directly benefited from these initiatives.

Financial Considerations

NPI's financial investment is reviewed annually by Regional Council as part of the Community Services operating budget. For the 2023-2024 period, a total budget of \$2,800,000 was approved to support seven projects. This allocation aligns with the Region's strategic budget planning and investment priorities, ensuring focused funding toward programs that effectively address poverty reduction in the Niagara region.

Analysis

The selection of the 2023-2024 NPI projects was guided by extensive community engagement sessions and a robust literature review designed to identify the most pressing service gaps affecting individuals living in poverty across Niagara. These efforts ensured that funded projects were responsive to real community needs.

Consultations with internal Niagara Region divisions further aligned the projects with existing poverty reduction initiatives, avoiding duplication and enhancing collaboration.

To monitor progress and evaluate impact, funded agencies provided quarterly reports including detailed activity summaries and financial statements. Additionally, site visits enabled direct observation of project implementation and outcomes.

This comprehensive approach supported informed funding decisions and ongoing evaluation, ensuring that projects delivered measurable benefits in housing, health, and domestic violence support services.

Evaluation of NPI Projects

Over the 2023-2024 period, NPI's targeted funding positively impacted 6,041 individuals living in poverty. The following measurable outcomes demonstrate the impacts in stabilizing housing for chronically homeless individuals, enhancing health supports for people living in poverty, and providing critical advocacy and after-care supports for domestic violence survivors.

Housing

In 2023-2024, NPI funded two key housing projects addressing the needs of Indigenous families and chronically homeless individuals. The Indigenous Wellbeing: Homeward Bound project, delivered by the Niagara Regional Native Centre, provided comprehensive supports including rental subsidies, parenting assistance, transportation access, and help maintaining stable housing. This project distributed 31 rental subsidies and offered 30 instances of rent assistance to Indigenous families, enabling them to sustain secure homes.

The Community Integration Workers project, managed by Gateway Supportive Housing, supported 44 chronically homeless people in maintaining their housing and integrating into their communities. Services focused on addressing physical and mental health issues, addiction challenges, and provided pathways to employment, volunteerism, or education for 10 individuals.

Health

NPI funded three health-focused projects that addressed food security, early childhood development, and income through living wage promotion.

The Pop-Up Markets project managed by United Way, organized 853 food markets across Niagara in neighborhoods identified as having barriers to food access. Over 44,000 affordable food products were distributed in partnership with more than 35 local

farmers, food producers, and suppliers. This program helped residents living in poverty who face difficult choices between essential expenses like housing and food.

The Early Childhood Development project delivered by Port Cares, supported nearly 5,000 family and child attendances at community sites, focusing on children aged 0-6. Targeted toward high-risk and newcomer families, the programming emphasized social and emotional development, including support for children living in temporary housing.

The Living Wage project led by United Way, promoted living wage certification by performing outreach, supporting employers, and coordinating with the Ontario Living Wage Network. It successfully certified 23 new living wage employers in the Niagara Region, promoting sustainable income for workers.

Domestic Violence

NPI funded two critical projects providing after-care supports for women and children transitioning out of shelters, delivered by Birchway and Gillian's Place. These community-based advocacy programs include home visiting and in-community services, which research shows are effective in reducing intimate partner violence and aiding children exposed to traumatic environments.

These projects supported 617 women and children who had fled domestic violence. Services included counselling, life skills training, and assistance in securing permanent housing, employment, or education opportunities. This holistic approach fosters survivors' independence and safety while helping them rebuild their lives.

These projects exemplify effective post-shelter interventions that support survivors' long-term wellbeing and contribute to breaking the cycle of domestic violence within Niagara communities.

Alternatives Reviewed

This report is initiated by staff to provide Council with a summary and evaluation of the 2023-2024 NPI funded projects.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

This report is aligned to Council's strategic priority of "Equitable Region" to ensure that the Region is inclusive, welcoming, and free of discrimination for all citizens, including those living in poverty. NPI investment is one of the mechanisms that the Region uses to address poverty in Niagara. The 2023-2024 projects contributed to reducing

homelessness, improved housing stability for vulnerable populations, provided effective post-shelter interventions to breaking the cycle of domestic violence, and increased the number of living wage employers in Niagara.

Other Pertinent Reports

[COM 28-2022 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Update](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=28331)

(<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=28331>)

[COTW-C 1-2024 Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy](https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/COTW_Mar07_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COTW-C%201-2024%20Niagara%20Poverty%20Reduction%20Strategy.pdf)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/COTW_Mar07_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COTW-C%201-2024%20Niagara%20Poverty%20Reduction%20Strategy.pdf)

[Poverty Reduction Strategy 2024-2028](https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/COTW_Mar07_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COTW-C%201-2024%20Niagara%20Poverty%20Reduction%20Strategy(1).pdf)

([https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/COTW_Mar07_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COTW-C%201-2024%20Niagara%20Poverty%20Reduction%20Strategy\(1\).pdf](https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/COTW_Mar07_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COTW-C%201-2024%20Niagara%20Poverty%20Reduction%20Strategy(1).pdf))

[Poverty Reduction Strategy Placemat](https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/COTW_Mar07_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COTW-C%201-2024%20Poverty%20Reductions%20Strategy%20Placemat%20At%20a%20Glance.pdf)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/COTW_Mar07_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COTW-C%201-2024%20Poverty%20Reductions%20Strategy%20Placemat%20At%20a%20Glance.pdf)

Prepared by:

Marc Todd
Manager
Social Assistance & Employment
Opportunities Community Services

Recommended by:

Henri Koning, MHSc
Commissioner
Community Services

Submitted by:

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared in consultation with Lori Watson, Director, Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities, Lisa Gallant, Poverty Reduction Strategy Advisor, John Pickles, Program Financial Specialist.

Subject: Directly Operated Child Care Value for Money Audit

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, June 10, 2025

Recommendations

1. That the Children's Services Directly Operated Child Care Value-for-Money Audit Report COM 21-2025 **BE RECEIVED** for information; and
2. That Report COM 21-2025 **BE FORWARDED** to the Region's Audit Committee for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the results of the Directly Operated Child Care Value-for-Money Audit.
- The Ministry of Education (MEDU) mandated that a third-party value-for-money audit of municipal directly operated child care programs be completed by June 30, 2025.
- Deloitte LLP (Deloitte) was procured through Niagara Region's Request for Proposal process to complete the audit.
- Deloitte concluded that the Region's directly operated child care centres provide value for money as it relates to the efficient and effective use of federal and provincial funding and the ability to drive affordability, accessibility, quality and responsiveness at the Region's directly operated childcare centres.
- A detailed summary of findings, recommendations, and management responses are available in Appendix 1, and the report is attached as Appendix 2.

Financial Considerations

The cost of the value-for-money audit is fully funded by MEDU and included in Children's Services 2025 Budget. Implementation of the recommendations provided in the value-for-money audit will be managed within the existing Children's Services' budget.

The value-for-money audit found that the sustainability of directly operated centres relied on regional levy contributions from 2021 to 2023. However, the updated CWELCC funding formula in 2025 will allow a larger portion of provincial funding to be

allocated to directly operated child care centres, which will reduce the need for these contributions.

Analysis

Background

In 2024, MEDU mandated a third-party value-for-money audit of municipal directly operated child care programs to be completed by June 30, 2025. The purpose of the value-for-money audit is to determine whether federal and provincial funding is being used efficiently and effectively.

Niagara Region directly operates five child care centres: Branscombe Early Learning and Family Centre, Fort Erie Child Care Centre, Port Colborne Child Care Centre, St. Catharines Child Care Centre and Welland Child Care Centre. Across the five centres 255 children are enrolled for child care.

Deloitte was procured through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process to complete the value-for-money audit. Deloitte conducted its review based on the five criteria policy objectives of the CWELCC program: affordability, accessibility, quality, responsiveness and fiscal sustainability.

Niagara Region Children's Services, as the Consolidated Service System Manager for Early Years and Child Care, is responsible for responding to findings and recommendations made by the auditor.

Key Findings

The audit incorporated qualitative and quantitative analysis across all five pillars. Deloitte concluded that the Region's directly operated child care centres provide value for money as it relates to the efficient and effective use of federal and provincial funding and the ability to drive affordability, accessibility, quality and responsiveness at Region's directly operated childcare centres.

Regarding fiscal sustainability, Deloitte concluded that the Region's directly operated centres relied on regional levy contributions in the years reviewed (2021-2023). The review noted that while directly operated child care centres did require a levy contribution, a large portion of the levy supported expenditure related to labour, which represents about 92 percent of the total costs. Deloitte also noted a correlation between

the funding and the quality of child care at the directly operated centres, particularly related to staffing.

Deloitte identified eleven recommendations to strengthen processes within Niagara Region Directly Operated Child Care Centres as outlined in Appendix 1. Children's Services had initiated implementation of the recommendations in support of improving operational effectiveness and efficiency. A full report of Deloitte's findings are attached as Appendix 2.

Alternatives Reviewed

The value-for-money audit was required by the MEDU and was a mandatory exercise.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The value-for-money audit aligns with the Council's Strategic Priority 1: Effective Region. The implementation of these recommendations will implement continuous improvement and modernized processes to ensure value-for-money in the delivery of services and programs.

Other Pertinent Reports

[COM 17-2025 Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement Update](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=42943)

(<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=42943>)

Prepared by:

Satinder Klair
Director, Children's Services
Community Services

Recommended by:

Henri Koning, MHSc
Commissioner
Community Services

Submitted by:

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.
Chief Administrative Officer

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

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Summary of Recommendations and Management Responses

Appendix 2 - Niagara Region – Children's Services 2024 Value for Money of Region
Operated Child Care

Appendix 1: Summary of Recommendations and Management Responses

Affordability	
Procedure	Procedure 1: Determine the affordability of the rates being charged by the directly operated child care centres
Conclusion	Procedure 1: Niagara has successfully implemented the CWELCC framework by reducing child care fees. In addition to the CWELCC program, the Region offers a child care subsidy to eligible families, further supporting its commitment to making child care more affordable.
Recommendations	No recommendations
Response to Recommendations	No response required

Fiscal Sustainability	
Procedure	Procedure 1: Analysis of financial sustainability of revenues and expenses
Conclusion	There is a need for ongoing support from the Region annually in the form of the General Tax Levy. This funded between \$600,000 and \$999,700 of operations for the years 2021 to 2023. Salaries represent 92% of total expenses.
Recommendations	1. Children's Services creates a separate budget for directly operated centres that identifies funding sources and compare to actuals on an ongoing basis 2. If the Region decides to no longer provide the directly operated centres with General Tax Levy contributions to their operating budgets, at least 12 month notice is required.
Response to Recommendations	Recommendation 1 has been accepted and implemented for 2025. Recommendation 2 noted and accepted

Accessibility	
Procedure	<p>Procedure 1: Analyzing accessible spots.</p> <p>Procedure 2: Assessing location availability and physical accessibility of centres.</p>
Conclusion	<p>Procedure 1: Implementation of policies to enhance the accessibility of child care spaces illustrates commitment to supporting sector. Relatively high proportion of children receiving SNR supports illustrates commitment to accessibility for all.</p> <p>Procedure 2: Three of five directly operated centres are located within a priority neighbourhood, with a fourth adjacent to one. Centres are equipped with features of physical accessibility and families' needs are met through hours and type of care.</p>
Recommendations	<p>Procedure 1:</p> <p>A) Recommend that the directly operated centres incorporate different learning needs into waitlist policy</p> <p>B) Document the practice of accepting children whose services have been terminated at another agency.</p> <p>Procedure 2:</p> <p>A) Continue to monitor and assess the state of the sector to ensure that the needs are being met through appropriate expansion of child care centres.</p>
Response to Recommendations	<p>Recommendations accepted.</p> <p>Children's Services will review the waitlist policy to reflect different learning needs in the policy.</p> <p>Children's Services has started the process of documenting the practice of supporting children terminated by other agencies.</p> <p>As per COM 23-2024, Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care Directed Growth Priority Neighbourhoods Update, Children's Services updated priorities neighbourhoods for expansion and is committed to continuing to update the priority areas based on projected need.</p>

Quality	
Procedure	<p>Procedure 1: Delivery of “How does Learning Happen?”</p> <p>Procedure 2: Staff skills and quality delivery</p>
Conclusion	<p>Procedure 1: Niagara Region has effectively integrated How Does Learning Happen? Pedagogy through the parent handbook, program statement and daily programming provided by staff. Centres are monitored effectively through internal policies and practices and through Ministry inspections. However, better documentation of internal practices and policy updates is recommended</p> <p>Procedure 2: The Region has implemented policies to ensure staff have the required skills and qualifications to deliver high-quality education (i.e. certifications, training, professional development opportunities). It is recommended that training and processes are all thoroughly documented moving forward</p>
Recommendations	<p>Procedure 1:</p> <p>A) Recommended that centres formally document the review of documentation both before and after Ministry inspections to ensure tracking corrective actions and implementation.</p> <p>B) Document all reviews of Record Keeping Policy to ensure proper annual monitoring</p> <p>Procedure 2:</p> <p>A) Identify and document missing processes to support knowledge transfer across centres</p> <p>B) All completed training courses should be tracked formally to ensure accurate recording</p>
Response to Recommendations	<p>Recommendations accepted.</p> <p>Children’s Service will document the practices and process identified in the recommendations.</p>

Responsive	
Procedure	Procedure 1: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion + Truth & Reconciliation.
Conclusion	Procedure 1: Children's Services has integrated DEI principles into daily interactions and programming through food standards and nutrition; individualized support plans and short term specialized support funding and through daily programming.
Recommendations	<p>Procedure 1:</p> <p>A) Create a written policy for variable schedules to ensure clarity and consistency for staff and families</p> <p>B) Create a formal documentation system to track implementation of DEI Action Plan principles</p>
Response to Recommendations	<p>Recommendations accepted.</p> <p>Children's Service will document the practices and process identified in the recommendations</p>

Please Note that this document has been received from an external source. Accessibility efforts have been completed, some pieces throughout could not be revised, therefore if you require assistance, please contact Niagara Region Community Services Administration.



Niagara Region – Children’s Services

2024 Value for Money of Region Operated Child Care|

MAY 15, 2025

We have completed our review based on information provided by The Regional Municipality of Niagara, noting the following:

1. We do not assume any responsibility or liability for losses incurred by the Regional Municipality of Niagara, or any other parties as a result of the circulation, publication, reproduction or use of this report contrary to the provisions of this report.
2. Our work does not constitute an audit or other form of assurance as defined by the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario. Therefore, this work and the resulting report do not represent an auditor's opinion. Additionally, our work cannot assure that all errors, omissions, or irregularities have been identified. Our conclusions are based on reviewing information according to specific criteria in the format of a consulting report.
3. This report should be viewed in its entirety. Considering portions of the report or specific factors separately may lead to a misleading understanding of the process underlying it. Attempting to do so could place undue emphasis on particular factors, calculations, or analyses.
4. This report is based on the information, documents, and explanations provided to us, with our conclusions dependent on the integrity of this information as outlined in our scope of review. We did not verify the accuracy of third-party information, nor did we conduct investigative procedures to independently confirm the accuracy of such information.
5. If any of the information provided was inaccurate or incorrect, or if different information or assumptions are considered, the conclusions may vary, potentially significantly, from those stated in this report. Errors, omissions or irregularities of the materials provided could limit the associated benefits of the recommendations.
6. Management of the Region is solely responsible for any and all activities associated with accepting and implementing the recommendations. The scope of our work did not include any considerations or activities related to implementation.
7. We reserve the right, but will be under no obligation, to review this report, and if we consider it necessary, to revise this report in light of any information which becomes known to us after the date of this report.



Disclaimer

No opinion, counsel, or interpretation is intended in matters that require legal, tax or other appropriate professional advice. It is assumed that such opinion, counsel, or interpretations have been, or will be, obtained outside of the scope of this report.

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PURPOSE

The Ministry of Education 2024 Ontario Child Care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres Service Management and Funding Guideline (2024 Guideline) requires Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) to retain independent advice and to conduct a value-for-money review on their direct delivery of child care services. The Region of Niagara (Region, Niagara) engaged Deloitte LLP (we, us) to perform these services.

The purpose of the value-for-money review was to determine whether federal and provincial funding is being used efficiently and effectively by directly operated centres, and whether the child care services could be more efficiently offered instead by a third-party provider. The report, recommendations and management responses must be posted publicly.

SCOPE

No criteria were set at the direction of the Ministry. Deloitte proposed to review the 2022-2024 operations against the following five criteria aligned with Canada-wide Early Learning and Childcare (CWELCC) policy objectives: **Affordability, Sustainability, Accessibility, Quality, and Responsive**. Prior to the collection of the information to perform the work, the Region agreed to the project plan and criteria.

To support their conclusions, Deloitte reviewed existing Child Care policies, Regional monitoring practices and examples of their use in practice. Deloitte performed analysis when needed to draw conclusions on how the Region has ensured it is exhibiting positive behaviours for each of the five criteria.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

The Region of Niagara's directly operated child care centres appear to achieve the CWELCC policy objectives of Affordability, Accessibility, Quality and Responsiveness.

Findings in the Sustainability objective noted that the Region is providing an annual Regional contribution to the operational costs of the directly operated child care centres to fund investments in Affordability, Accessibility, Quality, and Responsive. The Regional contributions allow the directly operated centres to provide increased programming and services to their system users. Our review concluded that third-party child care providers, including both for-profit and not-for-profit centres, do not have the same access to Regional contributions. Consequently, for-profit and not-for profit providers need to manage within a budget and/or above break-even financial positions, which likely impacts the scope of the service offerings, and the affordability, accessibility, quality, and responsiveness of their services.

Indirectly, Deloitte saw the connection between the investments in Affordability, Accessibility, Quality and Responsive to the ability to demonstrate child care excellence to third-party providers under their Service System Manager role, in each policy objective respectively.

Overall, Deloitte concluded that the Region's directly operated child care centres appear to be a value for money as it relates to the efficient and effective use of federal and provincial funding and the ability to drive affordability, accessibility, quality and responsiveness across both the directly operated and third-party providers.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the conclusions, Deloitte provided the Region with recommendations for improvement. The following pages summarize the observations, findings and recommendations.

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

AFFORDABILITY

The analysis of the rates charged by the Region's directly operated centres demonstrated a commitment to affordability. The centres have effectively followed the CWELCC fee reduction guidelines, implementing the required percentage reductions in fees for the 2022, 2023, and 2024 years. This has resulted in significant reductions in child care costs for families, enhancing accessibility to high-quality early learning and child care, in alignment with the objectives of the CWELCC program. Overall, the directly operated child care centres have successfully met the expectations of affordability.

Recommendations: Deloitte had no recommendations related to affordability.

FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY

The analysis of the financial sustainability of revenues and expenses for the directly operated centres revealed a need for ongoing contribution from the Region. Despite efforts to manage costs effectively, the centres have required a Regional contribution to balance their expenses in the years reviewed 2021-2023, with the required contribution increasing from \$766,100 in 2021 to \$999,650 in 2022, before decreasing to \$600,800 in 2023. Salaries at the directly operated centres represent approximately 92% of total expenses and operating costs, which have been increasing consistently from 2021-2023.

The Region should evaluate its ongoing commitment to providing Regional contributions to ensure the continued delivery of high-quality child care services. Overall, the financial sustainability of the directly operated centres relies on these contributions, alongside effective cost management.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that Children's Services create a separate budget that identifies funding sources for the directly operated centres and compares actuals on an ongoing basis.
- It is recommended that if the Region of Niagara decides to no longer provide the directly operated centres with contributions to their operating budgets, the Region should provide the centres with sufficient notice to allow them to adjust operations.

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (cont'd)

ACCESSIBILITY

The Region promotes accessibility through a waitlist policy, though it does not prioritize children with special needs or formally reserve spots for those terminated from other centres. In addition, the Region has implemented policies for reviewing and monitoring regulated procedures, as well as an Individualized Support Plan (ISP) policy to improve access to support services. Three of the five directly operated centres are located in priority neighbourhoods, with a fourth within a five-kilometre radius. All centres are physically accessible, featuring ramps, elevators, and automatic doors to further enhance accessibility.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that the Region integrate considerations for prioritizing individuals with diverse care or learning needs into the waitlist policy. This would enhance transparency for parents and caregivers, while also improving access to child care services for those with additional needs.
- It is recommended that the practice of accepting children whose services have been terminated at other centres be formalized in a clear policy to ensure consistency and accountability in operations.
- It is recommended that Children's Services continue to monitor and assess the state of the child care sector to ensure that needs are being met through appropriate expansion of child care centres.

QUALITY

Delivery of How Does Learning Happen:

The Region has successfully integrated the four foundations of the *How Does Learning Happen?* pedagogy into the daily operations of the directly operated centres. The Parent Handbook and Program Statement outline the values and approaches followed, and staff actively incorporate these principles into the programming and activities, supported by policies that promote high-quality care. Although these policies lead to higher operating costs, they enhance the quality of care provided in the directly operated centres, reflecting the additional investment needed to sustain these standards. The application of these foundations was also observed during the site visits to the centres, offering valuable insight into the staff's dedication to upholding the four principles of belonging, well-being, expression, and engagement.

The centres are monitored both externally by the Ministry of Education and internally by the Region through various policies and practices in place to maintain high-quality care, although some internal procedures are not formally documented.

The Region has effectively integrated the four foundations into the daily activities and interactions within its directly operated centres. Deloitte has observed and the Region has demonstrated that these foundations are consistently incorporated across the centres, their classrooms, activities, and resources.

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (cont'd)

QUALITY (cont'd)

Staff Skills and Quality Delivery:

The Region has established policies to ensure that staff possess the necessary skills and qualifications to deliver high-quality education and care. Ongoing professional development is supported through training modules, dedicated learning days, and mentorship programs offered throughout the year, and the Region also supports staff pursuing further education. As a result, more than 50% of staff have remained with the directly operated centres for over five years, contributing valuable experience, insight, and institutional knowledge to daily practices and programming. To mitigate the risk of knowledge loss, it is recommended that any undocumented processes be formally recorded.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that the Region formally document the review of the centres' documentation both before and after Ministry inspections to identify and address any missing information or required changes. This will ensure consistency in tracking corrective actions and implementation.
- It is recommended that annual reviews of the Record Keeping Policy be documented to ensure effective monitoring and compliance, given its importance for Ministry inspections.
- It is recommended that Children's Services identify and document any missing processes to support more effective knowledge transfer between staff throughout the directly operated centres.
- It is recommended that all staff training be formally documented and tracked by course to ensure accurate monitoring of qualifications and professional development.

RESPONSIVE

Children's Services has demonstrated a strong commitment to fostering a high-quality learning environment that integrates principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, and Truth and Reconciliation into daily programming and interactions at the directly operated centres. This commitment is supported by a range of policies and practices—including the DEI Action Plan, the Food Standards and Nutrition Policy, and the ISP policies—which collectively aim to ensure that all children have access to the resources and supports they need to thrive, and that staff receive appropriate training to effectively meet these needs. Additional practices implemented by Children's Services—such as the provision of emergency child care during the COVID-19 pandemic and the establishment of mentoring relationships between directly operated centres and other child care providers—have positioned the directly operated centres as a benchmark within the sector. These initiatives reflect the Region's broader commitment to fostering inclusive, diverse, and equitable child care environments by supporting collaboration and ensuring continuity of care during times of need.

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (cont'd) ***RESPONSIVE (cont'd)***

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that the Region develop a formal policy regarding variable schedules to ensure consistent implementation and support across directly operated centres, while also providing greater clarity for both staff and families.
- It is recommended that a formal documentation system be implemented to monitor the application of DEI Action Plan principles, ensuring consistent and effective integration across the directly operated centres.



OVERVIEW

Deloitte LLP and affiliated entities

Purpose

On November 30, 2023, the Ministry of Education (Ministry) released the 2024 Ontario Child Care and EarlyON Child and Family Centre Service Management and Funding Guidelines (Guidelines). The guidelines introduced a requirement for a third-party value-for-money review of municipal directed operated child care programs. The purpose of the value-for-money review is to determine whether federal and provincial funding is being used efficiently and effectively by directly operated centres, and whether the child care services could be more efficiently offered by a third-party provider. The Region of Niagara (Region, Niagara) directly operates five child care centres that have been listed below.

1. Branscombe Early Learning and Family Centre
2. Fort Erie Child Care Centre
3. Port Colborne Child Care Centre
4. St. Catharines Child Care Centre
5. Welland Child Care Centre

The Region has engaged Deloitte to conduct a review of the operations of the directly operated child care centres in relation to the Ministry's and Region's mandates to identify findings and recommendations as outlined in the Guidelines. Deloitte (we, us) focused on Niagara Region's directly delivered child care centres to provide an in-depth look at how Niagara supports families and promotes the well-being of children in the community. The criteria and scope of the review have been established by Deloitte and agreed upon with the Region.

The Region of Niagara Children's Services (CS) plays two key roles within child care; one as the Service System Manager for the Early Years and Child Care Sector and the other as an operator of the five directly operated child care centres. This report focuses on the Region's role as an operator of the five child care centres and therefore, the Region has been evaluated on the criteria specifically to this role. As the Region is uniquely positioned to service in both of these roles, where applicable, the knowledge as the Service System Manager may be leveraged in recommendations as this knowledge is vital to assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the activities of the directly operated centres.

Sources of Funding

The five child care centres are funded through a combination of federal and provincial funding, along with parent fee revenue. The centres receive funding from these sources along with a regional contribution to further support its ongoing operations of the directly operated centres. As this report assesses the years 2021-2024, it is acknowledged that the review period predates recent changes to the funding formula, and that the implementation of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) agreement and provincial funding guidelines are continuously evolving.

Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (CWELCC)

On March 28, 2022, Ontario secured a \$13.2 billion agreement with the federal government to fund the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care system (CWELCC) system. This program aims to improve early learning and child care through a phased approach, focusing on five pillars:

- Improved affordability
- Improved access
- Sustaining high-quality services
- Inclusion
- Enhanced data and reporting

The CWELCC Agreement's funding supports the enhancement of Ontario's early learning and child care system by increasing quality, accessibility, affordability, and inclusivity (*Per the 2024 Service Management and Funding guideline, Pg. 11*).

Criteria and Scope

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (CWELCC) outlines five main areas in which the program is aiming to achieve improvement. These five pillars will serve as the primary criteria and scope throughout the value-for-money report. We have categorized the five pillars outlined in the CWELCC agreement as either effective or efficient criteria.

EFFICIENCY

1. Affordability
2. Fiscal Sustainability

EFFECTIVENESS

3. Accessibility
4. Quality
5. Responsive

Overview of the Report

This report will highlight and focus on each criteria in scope; affordability, fiscal sustainability, access, quality, and responsiveness. Each criteria will contain two main sections:

1. What does the criteria mean to the Ministry, how does that tie to the criteria that have been set, and how that impacts the procedures conducted
2. Documentation and demonstration of how the Region measures against the VFM criteria through a set of procedures.

The procedures differ for each criteria; however, this structured approach aims to provide a comprehensive and clear evaluation of the criteria, facilitating a better understanding of how it is demonstrated by the Region and any potential enhancements.



AFFORDABILITY

What does Affordability mean to the Ministry of Education?

Per the Ministry of Education's Service Management and Funding Guidelines, Pg. 27-28, 37-38, affordability focuses on making child care services financially accessible to all families ensuring that cost is not a barrier to accessing high-quality care. This is achieved through funding provided to support fee subsidies to make child care more accessible to low-income families, providing access to subsidized child care across jurisdictions, and ensuring recipients of Ontario Works and other social assistance are automatically eligible for child care fee subsidies. The following factors are outlined by the Ministry as it relates to ensuring cost is not a barrier:

- Fee Subsidies
- Cost-Sharing and Financial Flexibility
- Cross-Jurisdictional Access
- Special Provisions for Vulnerable Populations

The CWELCC system has also been implemented across the directly operated centres to further improve the affordability and accessibility of child care programs in the Region.

Procedures

The following procedures and steps were performed to assess affordability:

Procedure 1: Determine the affordability of the rates being charged by the directly operated child care centres

- Obtain a breakdown of the rates from 2022 to 2025 that the directly operated child care centres are charging families.
- Compare the rates being charged to the respective decreases of expected CWELCC funding.

Procedure 1: Determine the affordability of the rates being charged by the directly operated child care centres.

The Region of Niagara's directly operated child care centres are enrolled in the CWELCC program, a federal initiative that launched on April 1, 2022. The program aims to make high-quality early learning and child care more affordable and accessible to families across Canada by reducing child care fees over several years through a phased approach, with a target of achieving an average cost of \$10 per day by 2026. These subsidies are intended to support children enrolled in a licensed child care program who are under the age of six, or may be over the age of six where their birthdays are early in the year or who are six years of age and attending before and after school care. The table below provides an overview of the child care rates for the programs at the directly operated centres from 2022 until 2025, demonstrating the impact of CWELCC on reducing fees for families. The table is divided into the time periods in which the child care fees were reduced:

Program	Rates			
	Base Rate pre-CWELCC (March 27, 2022)	Base Rate less 25% (effective April 1, 2022)	Base Rate effective January 1, 2023	Base Rate effective January 1, 2025
Infant Full Day	\$52.93	\$39.70	\$25.01	\$22.00
Infant Half Day	\$26.47	\$19.85	\$12.51	\$12.51
Infant less than 3 hours	\$15.00	\$12.00	\$12.00	\$12.00
Toddler Full Day	\$45.00	\$33.75	\$21.26	\$21.26
Toddler Half Day	\$22.50	\$16.88	\$12.00	\$12.00
Toddler less than 3 hours	\$15.00	\$12.00	\$12.00	\$12.00
Preschool Full Day	\$45.00	\$33.75	\$21.26	\$21.26
Preschool Half Day	\$22.50	\$16.88	\$12.00	\$12.00
Preschool less than 3 hours	\$15.00	\$12.00	\$12.00	\$12.00
JK/SK Full Day	\$40.43	\$30.32	\$19.10	\$19.10
JK/SK Half Day	\$23.00	\$17.25	\$12.00	\$12.00
JK/SK Before School	\$10.00	\$10.00	\$10.00	\$10.00
JK/SK After School	\$13.00	\$12.00	\$12.00	\$12.00
JK/SK Before and After	\$23.00	\$17.25	\$12.00	\$12.00

*April 1, 2022 is reflective of a 25% CWELCC reduction. January 1, 2023 is reflective of a 52.75% CWELCC reduction. January 1, 2025 is reflective of the reduction to \$22 per day or the maintenance of fees if already below \$22 per day.

As indicated in the table above, fees were reduced by 25% on April 1, 2022, and by January 1, 2023, fees had reduced by a total of 52.75%, demonstrating compliance with the reduction targets outlined in the phased approach. It should be noted that a daily rate floor of \$12 prevents the centres from reducing fees below this threshold, which explains why some programs did not make a full 25% reduction in April 2022 or continue with further reductions. As of January 1, 2025, programs enrolled in CWELCC were required to reduce fees to \$22 per day, and programs with fees already below this amount were required to maintain those rates. In addition to the CWELCC program, the Region offers child care subsidies to eligible families that need additional assistance with the cost of child care, explained in more detail on the next page.

Procedure 1: Determine the affordability of the rates being charged by the directly operated child care centres (cont'd).

Child Care Subsidy

The child care subsidy is designed to provide financial assistance to eligible families to help cover the cost of a space in a child care program and is available in addition to the CWELCC reduction. The subsidy can be received as a full subsidy, which covers the entire cost of a child care space, or as a partial subsidy, which covers a portion of the cost, the amount of which is based on the family's household income level. In 2023, 33 children at the directly operated centres received a fee subsidy, representing approximately 13% of the total average enrollment for the year. In 2024, 23 children or 9% of the total average enrollment for the year received fee subsidy. The Region outlines a three-step eligibility process to qualify for the subsidy which is followed throughout the sector/Region whether the centre is directly operated or not.

Conclusion - Procedure 1: Determine the affordability of the rates being charged by the directly operated child care centres

The Region of Niagara has successfully implemented the policies established by the federal and provincial governments to provide affordable child care under the CWELCC framework. It has effectively met CWELCC requirements by reducing child care fees in accordance with the guidelines, achieving an initial 25% reduction in 2022, an overall reduction of 52.75% by 2023, and a reduction to \$22 per day as of January 1, 2025. In addition to the CWELCC program, the Region offers a child care subsidy to eligible families, further supporting its commitment to making child care more affordable.



FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY

What does Sustainability mean to the Ministry of Education?

Sustainability involves ensuring the long-term viability and effectiveness of child care and early years programs. This includes maintaining financial health, supporting high-quality services, and adapting to changing needs and conditions. Per the 2024 Management and Funding Guidelines, pg. 27-30, sustainability involves:

- **Financial Health:** Ensuring that child care programs are financially stable through effective budgeting, cost management, and diverse funding sources. This includes the strategic use of provincial and municipal funds, parent fees, and other revenue streams to maintain operations and support growth.

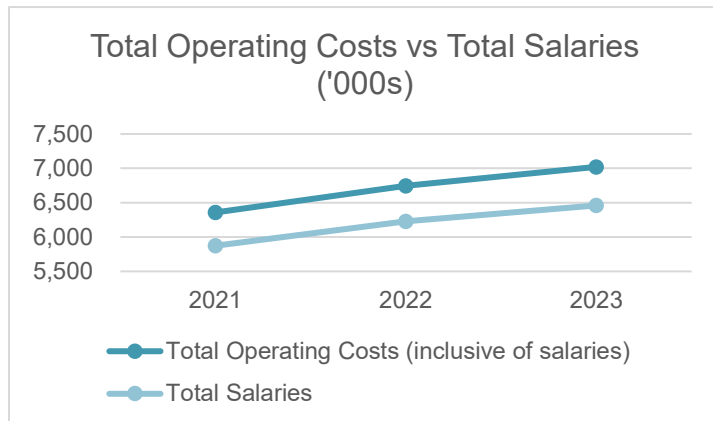
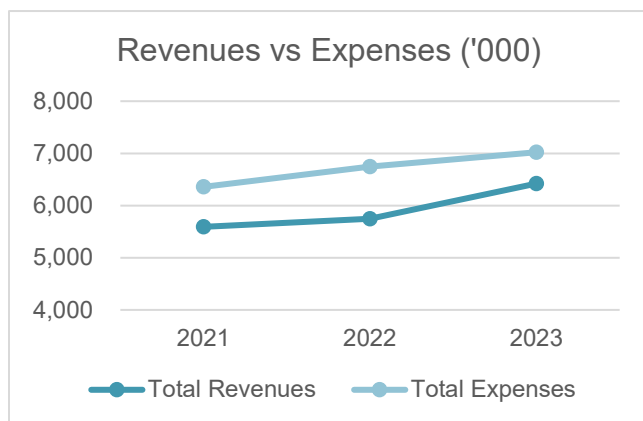
Procedures

Procedure 1: Analysis of financial sustainability of revenues and expenses

- Compared total revenues and expenses from 2021 to 2023
- Compared total operating costs to total salaries from 2021 to 2023
- Analyzed the total cost per child per day based on operating costs for the 2021, 2022, and 2023 years
- Analyzed the total funding received from third party compared to parent fees and operating costs
- Analyzed fee subsidy trends since the introduction of the CWELCC program

Procedure 1: Analysis of financial sustainability of revenues and expenses.

We received and reviewed the financial data for the directly operated centres for the 2021 - 2023 years and analyzed the following trends:



Based on the financial data, the directly operated centres require a Regional contribution in order to balance their total expenses over their total revenues. The regional contribution over the past three years has been \$766,100 in 2021, \$999,650 in 2022, and \$600,800 in 2023.

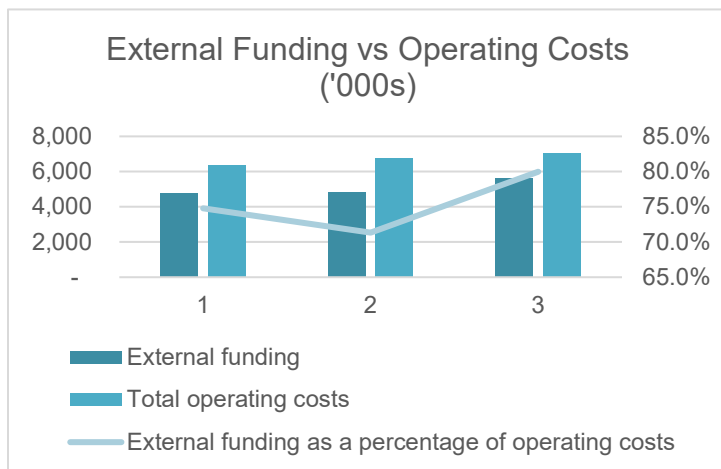
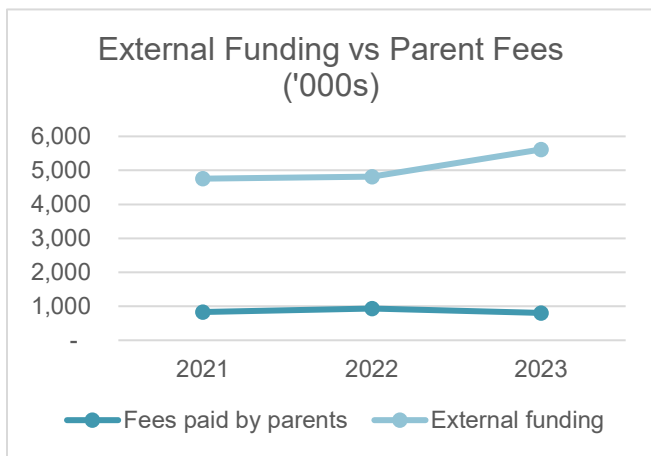
The Region has the discretion and authority to allocate federal and provincial funding to non-directly operated child care centres. Therefore, the Regional contribution can fluctuate from year to year depending on how the funding is allocated to the non-directly operated child care centres. Further for the years analyzed, this expenditure allowed the Region to leverage additional provincial funding that supported the sector as a whole.

The Region undertakes a regular comprehensive review of the overall budget and actuals of the entire child care sector which is inclusive of both directly and non-directly operated child care centres. This allows the Region to ensure the appropriate funding is provided to all centres with the priority being that the non- directly operated centres receive the funding first. It would be beneficial for the Region to identify specific funding sources for directly operated centres and for non-directly operated centres as this will allow for a clearer picture on the overall Regional contribution.

Revenues have increased over the years by 3% in 2022 and 12% in 2023 due to additional federal and provincial funding being provided. As noted above, salaries are the largest expense for the directly operated centres which make up approximately 92% of total expenses and operating costs. From 2021 to 2023, salaries have increased by 6% in 2022 and 4% in 2023. Both salaries and total operating expenses have been increasing at consistent levels from 2021-2023.

Procedure 1: Analysis of financial sustainability of revenues and expenses (cont'd).

Over the years, fees paid by parents have been decreasing due to the CWELCC fee reduction funding received from the Province. Additionally, child care centres have been able to utilize various other funding grants. External funding increased by 1% in 2022 and 17% in 2023. However, this increase does not necessarily align with the CWELCC reductions of 25% and 52.75%, as the Region has discretion over how funding is allocated among all child care centres within the Region. This discretion is reflected in the second graph, where external funding as a percentage of operating costs decreased in 2022 compared to 2021. As of 2023, 80% of the operating costs are covered by the funding provided by the Province.



As demonstrated above, operating costs have increased year over year; however, as highlighted in the Accessibility section, average enrollment has decreased over the years. The decrease in enrollment is mainly due to more full-time care instead of part-time care/variable schedules. Even with these changes, the daily cost per child has remained relatively stable with a 7% increase from 2022 to 2023.

	2022	2023
Total operating costs	\$6,745,415	\$7,021,742
Average total enrollment	271	264
Days open per year	248	248
Daily cost per child	\$100.20	\$107.30

Conclusion - Procedure 1: Analysis of financial sustainability of revenues and expenses

The analysis conducted outlines a need for financial support from the Region as the centres have required a Regional contribution to balance budgets in the years reviewed of 2021-2023. The required contributions have been between \$600,000 and \$999,700 during this period. The contribution has fluctuated throughout the years as it is dependent on how the Region allocates the federal and provincial funding that is provided between the non-directly operated centres and the directly operated centres. Salaries represent approximately 92% of the total expenses, in which the percentage has remained stable year over year with an increase in operating costs of 6% in 2022 and 4% in 2023.

For the years reviewed, the financial sustainability of the directly operated child care centres was contingent on Regional levy, and part of this expenditure allowed the Region to leverage additional provincial funding for the sector. With the change in the funding formula, the Region must assess its continued commitment to using Regional contributions to support the sustainability of directly operated child care centres.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

As the Region conducts the financial analysis on the child care sector in totality and strategically leverages funding opportunities, it is challenging to truly understand the Regional contribution that is required for the directly operated childcare centres themselves. Therefore, it is recommended that Children's Services create a budget that identifies funding sources for the directly operated centres and compares actuals on an ongoing basis.

Given the ongoing changes to the funding formula, the Region should consider what is the Regional contribution required to operate directly operated child care centres. In addition, if the Region of Niagara decides to no longer provide the directly operated centres with contributions to their operating budgets, the Region should provide the directly operated centres with sufficient notice (i.e., at least 12 months) to allow the centres to adjust operations.



ACCESSIBILITY

What does Accessibility mean to the Ministry of Education?

Per the Ministry of Education's Service Management and Funding Guidelines, Pg. 12, 37-42, accessibility involves ensuring that child care services are inclusive, physically accessible, culturally responsive, and easily reachable by families, particularly those in need of subsidized care and those with special needs. Accessibility involves several key aspects:

- Facilitating Access to Subsidized Child Care – *See Affordability Section*
- Inclusion of French Language Services: For CMSMs and DSSABs serving areas designated under the French Language Services Act (FLSA), specific requirements must be met to ensure the provision of French-language child care, EarlyON Child and Family Centres, and supports for children with special needs. This is to ensure that French-speaking communities have access to high-quality services in their language.
- Cultural Responsiveness – *see Responsiveness Section*
- Accessibility of Child Care Centres: Child care centres are expected to ensure all children, including those with special needs, can fully participate in programs. This involves creating physical environments that are inclusive and adaptable to the needs of all children.

Procedures

The following procedures and steps were performed to assess access:

Procedure 1: Analyzing accessible spots

- a. Review the policies in place to ensure accessibility.
- b. Examine the practices implemented by Niagara to ensure their services are accessible to all children.
- c. While maintaining confidentiality, evaluate the number and percentage of accessible child care spots available by month over a 12 month-period that align to what the Region deems as accessible.

Procedure 2: Assessing location availability and physical accessibility of centres.

- a. Evaluate whether the child care centre locations are easily accessible for the population they are intended to serve along with being physically accessible.

Procedure 1: Analyzing accessible spots

a. Review the policies in place to ensure accessibility.

Registration/Waiting Lists Policy

Starting January 1, 2017, Ontario Regulation 137/15 section 75.1 (2) mandates that *“Every licensee that establishes or maintains a waiting list described in subsection 1 shall develop written policies and procedures that, (a) explain how the licensee determines the order in which children on the waiting list are offered admission; and (b) provide that the waiting list will be made available in a manner that maintains the privacy and confidentiality of the children listed on it, but that allows the position of a child on the list to be ascertained by the affected persons or families.”*

The directly operated child care centres have established a waitlist policy, which is outlined in both the Parent Handbook and the Registration/Waiting Lists policy. The policy specifies that no centre will charge a fee or collect a deposit for placement on the waitlist, and includes the following procedures for families that would like to register for child care:

- Submit an online application to the Niagara Child Care Registry
- Need to provide information about their family on the application form
- Place their child on up to 10 lists (child care programs)
- Not be charged a fee to be placed on the registry/waitlist
- For assistance with the website, contact OneHSN Support at 1-888-722-1540 or support at Support@OneHSN.com
- The Supervisor or designate will contact the family when a child care space becomes available at a Regional child care centre that the parent has selected
- Families will be offered admission from the registry/waitlist based on space available of the required age group and date of request. Consideration for child care placement is given first to existing families who are requesting to place a sibling, families that are transferring from within the Regional Child Care Centre and then new families from Niagara Child Care Registry
- Employees of the Regional Child Care Centres may be offered admission from the registry/waitlist based on space available of the required age group
- Information will only be accessed by the centre supervisor or designate and is password protected to ensure that the child's information remains confidential. Families may contact the Regional child care centre directly to inquire about their position on the waitlist for admission. The waitlist policy will be included in the parent handbook and the complete policy will be provided to a family if specifically requested

According to discussions with Children's Services, the waitlist operates on a first-come, first-served basis, with priority given to families with children currently enrolled at the centre and those transferring from another directly operated centre. Although it is not a requirement by the Ministry, there is no formal prioritization for children with special needs or reserved spots for emergent situations. However, the centres have made accommodations in special or unique circumstances. For example, a child with a high level of needs was originally on the waitlist but was then admitted to the Branscombe centre once capacity permitted. The child requires the use of medical equipment, and staff at the centre were trained to use the necessary equipment and manuals were created alongside the child's medical plan for staff to follow.

Procedure 1: Analyzing accessible spots

a. *Review the policies in place to ensure accessibility (cont'd).*

Registration/Waiting Lists Policy (cont'd)

In addition, per Children's Services, when a child is terminated from another child care centre and requires an emergency spot, the directly operated centres will provide care if they have the available capacity at that time, as maintaining spots for emergent situations is not currently enforced as a formal policy.

Implementation, Reviewing and Monitoring of Regulated Policies

The Region has established a policy requiring that the directly operated centres ensure the implementation of all policies, procedures, and individualized plans mandated by the Regulation. Additionally, the policy specifies that all policies, procedures, and individualized plans must be reviewed with employees prior to the commencement of employment, and again whenever any changes are made. A record of each review, including the date and the signature of the individual who conducted or participated in the review, must be maintained, and records of compliance or contraventions must be securely stored for a minimum of three years from the date of creation.

Individualized Support Plans and Inclusive Programming Policy

The Region has developed a policy requiring the development of an Individualized Support Plan (ISP) for children with special needs, as well as the implementation of all necessary steps to support them to the fullest extent possible. Children with special needs are defined as those whose cognitive, physical, social, emotional, communicative, or developmental needs necessitate additional support. The policy specifies that the supervisors of each child care program are responsible for the development of an ISP for each child with exceptionalities upon enrollment, in consultation with the child's parent, the child, and any regulated health professional that could help inform the plan. The policy also outlines the required components of each ISP and the procedures to follow if the child is referred to a Resource Consultant or Behaviour Consultant. The plans are reflective of the *How Does Learning Happen?* framework and must be updated regularly.

Procedure 1: Analyzing accessible spots

a. *Review the policies in place to ensure accessibility (cont'd).*

Procedure 1a: Conclusion

The Region has effectively implemented the objectives of establishing and maintaining a waitlist policy in accordance with section 75.1 of Ontario Regulation 137/15. While the waitlist policy outlines when consideration for placement in a child care program is given to others first, there is no specific prioritization for children with special needs or emergent spots left open for children whose services have been terminated by other child care centres. The Region has also established a policy around the implementation, review and monitoring of regulated policies to ensure that the directly operated centres and the staff are informed about the policies and any changes that have been made. The ISP policy also outlines the requirements for children who require ISPs and the process for their development.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

By having policies that prioritize those with different learning needs, it enhances the value of the directly operated centres within the community and increases the transparency to parents/caretakers on how the policies are being applied. Therefore, we recommend that the directly operated centres incorporate such considerations into their waitlist policy to demonstrate that they are a priority.

Although the directly operated centres have a practice of accepting children whose services have been terminated at other child care centres when capacity permits, this practice is not formally documented in a clear policy. Without such documentation, there is a risk that the practice may not be consistently applied or monitored consistently. Documenting the practice in a clear policy would ensure clarity, accountability, and consistency in operations.

Procedure 1: Analyzing accessible spots

b. Examine the practices implemented by Niagara to ensure their services are accessible to all children.

Tracking of Terminations within the Sector

During discussions with Children’s Services, it was noted that there has been an increase in the number of terminations at non-directly operated centres, where a child’s care is discontinued due to the extent of their needs. In 2024, Children’s Services began formally tracking instances of child care terminations across the sector. Although Children’s Services has only recently begun tracking the number of terminations, ongoing monitoring will allow the Region to gain valuable insight into trends or patterns within the sector regarding the reasons for discontinuing care. This tracking can also help Children’s Services identify potential gaps in support and determine where directly operated centres may be able to accommodate children whose care has been terminated. Children’s Services has provided the number of children whose services were terminated from non-directly operated centres and for whom care was provided across all five sites in 2022, 2023, and 2024, as detailed below.


Number of Terminated Children Accepted at Directly Operated Centres						
Year	Branscombe	Fort Erie	Port Colborne	St. Catharines	Welland	Total
2022	2	0	2	2	0	6
2023	2	0	0	3	1	6
2024	1	0	0	1	2	4

Registration/Waiting Lists Policy

The waitlists are regularly monitored by the Program Assistant, who sends notifications to families requesting confirmation of their continued need for child care and their desire to remain on the waitlist. If no response is received from a family by a specified date, they are then removed from the waitlist.

Implementation, Reviewing and Monitoring of Regulated Policies

This policy specifies that supervisors are responsible for ensuring compliance with the expectations outlined in each policy or plan through daily observations of operations and discussions with staff. Additionally, the policy includes a "Monitoring of Regulated Policies" form, provided below, which is completed by supervisors or Lead RECEs. This form is used to document compliance or non-compliance with the listed policies, either in response to a serious occurrence or as part of routine monitoring throughout the year. The Region aims to ensure that each listed policy is documented by the end of the year.

NiagaraRegion

REGIONALLY OPERATED CHILD CARE CENTRE

MONITORING OF REGULATED POLICIES

(Playground, Anaphylactic, Sanitary, Sleep Supervision, Serious Occurrence, Medication, Supervision of Volunteers & Students, Program Statement, Staff Training, CRC Vulnerable Sector Check, Fire Safety/Evacuation, Process of Monitoring Compliance & Contraventions)

The following policy, _____, has been observed where compliance or contraventions have been documented for the year 20____.

Date	Observation	Signature

Procedure 1: Analyzing accessible spots

- b. *Examine the practices implemented by Niagara to ensure their services are accessible to all children (cont'd).*

Snacks and Lunch

The Region provides children at the directly operated centres with lunch, scheduled morning and afternoon snacks, along with two additional snacks throughout the day. The Region ensures that the dietary needs of children are met through meals prepared by qualified dietary staff on-site at the child care centre. Diverse menus are developed in alignment with *Canada's Food Guide*, *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide-First Nations, Inuit and Metis*, and *Nutrition for Healthy Term Infants*. Weekly menus are posted for parents and guardians, and special dietary requirements are accommodated as needed. While children are not required to have these snacks, educators allow them the autonomy to choose whether and what they wish to eat. Furthermore, each centre is equipped with fruit bowls and child-safe knives in every classroom, enabling children to independently cut their own fruit at any point during the day if they are still hungry. This reflects Children's Services' commitment to providing all children enrolled in the directly operated centres with reliable access to nutritious food each day, thereby eliminating barriers to food accessibility.

Individualized Support Plans and Inclusive Programming Policy

Children's Services utilizes an electronic system in which the ISP is signed off on by centre staff once it has been developed. Additionally, the educators work with Resource Consultants (RCs) and when ISPs require modifications, they must be signed off by the educators and the RC. The updated plans are subsequently reviewed during staff meetings and posted in the classrooms. This process facilitates communication and ensures that all staff involved in the care of children have easy access to the most current and relevant information, thereby supporting the delivery of up-to-date care.

Inclusion of French Language Services

In accordance with the Ontario French Language Services Act, the communities of Welland and Port Colborne within the Region are designated as French-speaking, and as such, additional documentation can be printed in the French language if requested. This practice enhances accessibility by ensuring that French-speaking children and families have access to high-quality child care.

Procedure 1b: Conclusion

Children's Services has established measures to ensure that services are accessible to all children at the directly operated centres. They have recently begun tracking community terminations within the sector, and in conjunction with their efforts to provide care to children who have been terminated when capacity permits, this approach ensures that children receive the care they require. Regulated policies are monitored throughout the year to ensure compliance, and the directly operated centres also provide lunch and four snacks daily, ensuring children receive adequate meals and have access to nutritious options.

Procedure 1: Analyzing accessible spots

- c. While maintaining confidentiality, evaluate the number and percentage of accessible child care spots available by month over a 12 month-period that align to what the Region deems as accessible.

As there is no prioritization for children with special needs, all available spots in the directly operated child care centres are accessible to any child, regardless of their needs. Children's Services has provided monthly data for the 2022, 2023, and 2024 school years, outlining the number of children at each centre and the number of children on Special Needs Resources (SNR) caseload at each centre each year. The number of children on SNR caseload is provided by the Resource Consultants who work with the children at the centres where an ISP has been developed and implemented. The tables below present an analysis of the proportion of spots occupied by children on SNR caseload as a percentage of the total spots occupied at each centre during the 2022, 2023, and 2024 school years:

2022	Branscombe	Fort Erie	Port Colborne	St. Catharines	Welland	Avg. Total
Average children per year	47.08	34.36	71.01	88.31	30.69	271.45
Children on SNR caseload per year	12.00	14.00	4.00	15.00	9.00	54.00
Percentage of spots occupied by children with accessibility needs	25%	40%	6%	17%	29%	20%

2023	Branscombe	Fort Erie	Port Colborne	St. Catharines	Welland	Avg. Total
Average children per year	44.69	37.07	65.04	85.00	32.08	263.88
Children on SNR caseload per year	13.00	17.00	1.00	12.00	3.00	46.00
Percentage of spots occupied by children with accessibility	29%	46%	2%	14%	9%	17%

2024	Branscombe	Fort Erie	Port Colborne	St. Catharines	Welland	Avg. Total
Average children per year	45.42	41.75	62.47	85.58	29.17	264.39
Children on SNR caseload per year	12.00	11.00	2.00	7.00	2.00	34.00
Percentage of spots occupied by children with accessibility	26%	26%	3%	8%	7%	13%

Procedure 1: Analyzing accessible spots

- c. *While maintaining confidentiality, evaluate the number and percentage of accessible child care spots available by month over a 12 month-period that align to what the Region deems as accessible (cont'd).*

On average, the proportion of spots occupied by children on SNR caseload relative to average total enrollment has steadily declined, decreasing from 20% in 2022 to 17% in 2023, and further to 13% in 2024. Welland experienced the most significant changes, while Branscombe and Fort Erie reported the highest percentage of children on SNR caseload. Average enrollment has decreased over the past three years, primarily due to the introduction of the CWELCC program, which has led more families to opt for full-day or full-week child care instead of part-time. This shift has reduced the availability of variable schedules and thus the number of children attending the centres. Additionally, age group allocations have necessitated the repurposing of rooms. For example, if an additional toddler room is needed, then the room would be repurposed and thus enrollment levels would decrease as only 15 spaces are allowed in a toddler classroom compared to 24 in preschool

A comparison of the proportion of children on SNR caseload at directly operated centres versus those across the sector shows a significantly higher percentage at the directly operated centres. As noted on the previous page, in 2022, 2023, and 2024, 20%, 17%, and 13% of children at the directly operated centres were on SNR caseload, respectively, compared to 5.2%, 4.7%, and 4.5% within the sector during the same years. This variance demonstrates the ability of the directly operated centres to support a greater number of children requiring support for accessible needs, thereby enhancing access to inclusive, high-quality programming for children with diverse developmental needs.

Procedure 1c: Conclusion

The directly operated centres have experienced relatively high proportions of spots occupied by children on SNR caseload, although these numbers have been consistently decreasing over the last three years. Despite the decreasing average enrollment over the last three years, the Region has maintained a relatively high number of children on SNR caseload (over 10% each year), demonstrating their ability to accommodate those with identified accessible needs.

Conclusion - Procedure 1: Analyzing Accessible Spots

The Region's implementation of policies to enhance the accessibility of child care spaces, coupled with their tracking of terminations to identify service gaps, underscores their commitment to providing comprehensive support within the sector. The relatively high proportion of children on SNR caseloads further demonstrates the Region's dedication to addressing and supporting the learning needs of children with accessibility requirements. It is recommended that the Region includes considerations for prioritizing individuals with diverse learning needs on the waitlist and to formally establish a policy regarding the acceptance of children who have been previously terminated from other child care centres, where capacity permits.

Procedure 2: Assessing location availability and physical accessibility of centres

- a. *Evaluate whether the child care centre locations are easily accessible for the population they are intended to serve along with being physically accessible.*

The Region has designated 15 priority neighbourhoods for targeted child care growth under the CWELCC system, aimed at supporting families who have the greatest need for access to child care spaces. These priority neighbourhoods are determined using four datasets: child care deserts in the neighbourhood, the number of children on waitlists for child care, growth areas within the neighbourhood, and the locations of child care centres. A list of the priority neighbourhoods, along with the directly operated child care centre within each area, is provided below.

Priority Neighbourhood	Directly Operated Centre
Stamford	Branscombe Early Learning and Family Centre
Drummond/Victoria	N/A
Merritton	N/A
Thorold Proper	N/A
St. Catharines Downtown/Haig Area	St. Catharines Child Care Centre
Beaverdams	N/A
Eastdale/Cordage	N/A
Beamsville	N/A
Grimsby Beach	N/A
South Pelham/Chippawa Park Area	N/A
Woodlawn/Seaway	N/A
Facer/Cushman	N/A
Fonthill	N/A
Humberstone/Stonebridge	Port Colborne Child Care Centre
Westlane	N/A

As indicated above, three of the Region's five directly operated centres, or 60%, are located within a priority neighbourhood, with a fourth, Fort Erie, situated within a five-kilometre radius of a priority neighbourhood, demonstrating a high level of accessibility to the directly operated centres from the priority neighbourhoods.

Procedure 2: Assessing location availability and physical accessibility of centres

- a. *Evaluate whether the child care centre locations are easily accessible for the population they are intended to serve along with being physically accessible (cont'd).*

As the CMSM, the Region is responsible for analyzing and assessing areas of need for expansion and directing child care growth within the sector, in alignment with space expansion targets. Children's Services, in its role as CMSM, receives applications from child care operators seeking expansion and must determine the most appropriate locations for this growth. Decisions regarding expansion take into account economic growth within the Region and require operators to demonstrate how they will address child care demand. The Region's primary focus is to explore expansion opportunities within the community before considering the expansion of directly operated sites, as the Region aims to maintain its current footprint unless directed otherwise by Council.

Hours of Operation

The Region's five directly operated child care centres operate Monday to Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., providing 10.5 hours of care per day. These hours are generally consistent with those offered by other child care centres across the Region. This level of availability supports accessibility by accommodating a range of family schedules, particularly for working parents who require full-day care to align with standard work hours.

Physical Accessibility of Centres

In addition to being situated in accessible locations, all five of the Region's directly operated child care centres are also required to meet physical accessibility standards. This may include features such as ramps, elevators, and automatic doors on site to ensure that children, families, and staff can safely and comfortably access the centres.

Conclusion - Procedure 2: Assessing location availability

Three of the five directly operated centres are currently located within priority neighbourhoods, with a fourth centre situated within a five-kilometre radius of a priority neighbourhood, ensuring a higher level of accessibility to the Region's child care facilities. Furthermore, the centres are equipped with features such as ramps, elevators, and automatic doors to ensure full physical accessibility for all individuals. While there are child care centres in the sector that offer extended hours, the directly operated centres meet the needs of the families currently enrolled, with adjustments or exceptions made as necessary. In its role as a CMSM, the Region holds a responsibility for directing the expansion of child care centres within the sector.

RECOMMENDATION:

Given the significant number of priority neighbourhoods in the Region, Children's Services, as part of their role of oversight and service provider, should continue to monitor and assess the state of the sector to ensure that the needs are being met through appropriate expansion of child care centres.



QUALITY

What does Quality mean to the Ministry of Education?

Quality is connected to the Ministry of Education's commitment to ensuring that child care and family services meet high standards that support positive outcomes for children and their families. Per the 2024 Management and Funding Guidelines, pg. 110-111, 115-116, quality is characterized by:

- **Consistent and High-Quality:** services should consistently meet high standards to effectively support the needs of children and families.
- **Engaging and Responsive:** services must engage parents and caregiver and be responsive to the varied needs of families, including those from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.
- **Integration with Community Services:** programs should work in collaboration with the broader community services to provide comprehensive support.

Procedures

The following procedures and steps were performed to assess quality:

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How does Learning Happen?”

- a. Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region at the child care centres to support quality.
- b. Obtain an understanding of how the policy is monitored by the Region to ensure execution and existence and evaluate the quality control measures in place to ensure adherence to these principles.
- c. Observe and document practical examples of the four foundations (belonging, well-being, expression, and engagement) in the day-to-day activities and interactions of educators and children.

Procedure 2: Staff skills and quality delivery

- a. Review if staff have necessary skills and qualifications.
- b. Examine staff turnover rates to assess stability and continuity along with staffing levels and ratios to provide high quality care.
- c. Evaluating whether staff have access to ongoing professional development and learning opportunities to enhance their skills.

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- a. Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region at the centres to support high-quality.

The *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* (CCEYA) is an Ontario legislation that establishes the regulatory framework for child care and early years services, ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of children in licensed child care settings. The CCEYA outlines specific requirements for child care educators related to licensing standards, programming and pedagogy, and health, safety, and physical environment standards. These regulations help create a strong foundation for child care services, ensuring that children receive high-quality early learning experiences that support their development and well-being. While the CCEYA serves as the policy document for the Region, the Region develops the Parent Handbook and Program Statement to implement the principles outlined in the CCEYA.

The Regionally Operated Child Care Centres follow the *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years*, which is centered around the following four foundations for learning that have been outlined on page 23 of the document:

FOUNDATIONS	GOALS FOR CHILDREN	EXPECTATIONS FOR PROGRAMS
Belonging	Every child has a sense of belonging when he or she is connected to others and contributes to their world.	Early childhood programs cultivate authentic, caring relationships and connections to create a sense of belonging among and between children, adults, and the world around them.
Well-Being	Every child is developing a sense of self, health, and well-being.	Early childhood programs nurture children’s healthy development and support their growing sense of self.
Engagement	Every child is an active and engaged learner who explores the world with body, mind, and senses.	Early childhood programs provide environments and experiences to engage children in active, creative, and meaningful exploration, play, and inquiry.
Expression	Every child is a capable communicator who expresses himself or herself in many ways.	Early childhood programs foster communication and expression in all forms.

Parent Handbook

The Parent Handbook offers essential information regarding the Regionally Operated Child Care Centres, including details about the agency's role, licensing, staffing requirements, training, and other day-to-day matters for parents. The Handbook also outlines the agency's values and approach, which align with the four foundations of the pedagogy, as well as the Program Statement. A separate, more detailed Program Statement document is also available on the Region’s website, providing a comprehensive explanation of how the pedagogy is incorporated, which is further elaborated on the following page of this report.

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- a. Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region at the centres to support high-quality (cont'd).

Program Statement

In accordance with Ministry requirements, the Regionally Operated Child Care Centres have developed and implemented a Program Statement that outlines the program’s beliefs, values, and best practices, guided by the *How Does Learning Happen?* Pedagogy. The Statement is revised annually, reflecting the goals achieved and identified each year. Pages one and two of the Program Statement, which details how the four foundations of the pedagogy are supported within the Regionally Operated Child Care Centres, have been included in the Appendix.

In addition to detailing how the directly operated centres support the four foundations, pages two to eight of the Program Statement describe how the Region has integrated the pedagogy into its approaches. The 11 approaches have been aligned with the four foundational pillars they most closely represent, as outlined below.

Belonging	Well-Being	Engagement	Expression
Approaches to support positive and responsive interactions among the children, parents, guardians, childcare providers and staff	Approaches to promote health, safety, nutrition, and well-being of the children	Approaches to incorporate indoor, and outdoor play as well as active play, rest, and quiet time into the day	Approaches to encourage the children to interact and communicate in a positive way and support their ability to self-regulate
Approaches to foster the engagement of and ongoing communication with parents about their children and the program	Approaches to provide child- initiated and adult-supported experiences	Approaches to foster the children’s exploration, play and inquiry	Approaches to document and review the impact of the strategies on the children and their families set out in clauses A to J
Approaches to involve local community partners and allow those partners to support the children	Approaches to plan for and create positive learning environments and experiences in which each child’s learning and development will be supported	Approaches to support staff or others who interact with the children in relation to professional learning	

The four foundations have been effectively incorporated into both the approaches outlined in the Program Statement and the daily activities, reflecting the directly operated centres' commitment to delivering high-quality care and education. This is also evident in the licensing summaries completed by the Ministry, a sample of which were reviewed by Deloitte, which highlight how the four foundations are embedded within the centres.

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- a. *Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region at the centres to support high-quality (cont'd).*

Record Keeping Policy

The Region's Record Keeping Policy has been implemented to ensure that current records are always available for inspection by the Ministry Program Advisor and that records are retained for the required duration in accordance with the Corporate Record Retention Policy. The policy also specifies the structure of each client's file, which is organized into six sections containing various documents, as outlined below:

1. Enrollment/Health information that is ongoing (i.e., ISPs, special dietary forms, etc.)
2. Enrollment/Health information that seldom changes (i.e., immunizations, enrollment form, etc.)
3. Financial Information (most recent on top) (i.e., full fee agreements, subsidy forms)
4. Permission Forms (i.e., parental release, consent to release information, etc.)
5. Miscellaneous Information (i.e., case notes (must always remain on top), parent work schedules, correspondence from/to parents)
6. Accident Reports

This policy allows the Region to organize and maintain client files for efficient access during Ministry inspections. Furthermore, improved record-keeping can lead to potentially fewer inspection findings by ensuring that essential documentation is properly stored.

Reflective Pedagogical Programming Policy

The Region has established a policy requiring Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) to provide programs and environments that promote the well-being, belonging, engagement, and expression of children, while ensuring meaningful participation for each child. Furthermore, the policy specifies that children's learning will be documented through pedagogical documentation, which involves observing and recording children's activities. The policy outlines procedures for RECEs to follow, including the use of tools and resources from Quality Child Care Niagara (QCCN), a research-based program that provides training and resources to support educators in delivering high-quality programming for children. Additionally, RECEs are responsible for ensuring the completion of Reflective Program Plans (developed weekly based on a set of criteria) and Reflective Program Observations/Actual Happenings. While these activities and the dedicated planning and documentation time allocated to staff significantly enhance the quality of care at the directly operated centres, they also contribute to increased operating costs, reflecting the additional investment required to maintain a higher standard of quality.

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- a. Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region at the centres to support high-quality (cont'd).

The policy also specifies that RECEs are required to maintain a reflective journal on their computers, updating it weekly, which can be done during the designated documentation time provided. As outlined in the policy, these journal reflections will serve as a starting point for discussions during one-on-one meetings, and while educators are not required to share the actual journal entries, they should be prepared to explain how they were completed. These journals may also be shared during Ministry inspections as a means of demonstrating compliance with reflective practices. The policy further outlines the pedagogical documentation process, specifying the various types of documentation that can be created, as well as the documentation that should be maintained within the classroom. This includes the *How Does Learning Happen?* binder, which contains program plans and group documentation, the classroom portfolios, and each child's individual portfolio. The Reflective Program Plan documents the children's current interests and learning opportunities each week. This document must be filled out weekly and has been provided by the Region, included below:

Niagara Region

Week of: _____ Reflective Program Plan Group: _____

Dramatic and Pretend Play	Outdoor Experiences	Blocks and Construction
Artistic and Creative Development	Children's Interests/Big Ideas/Schemas	Motor Development
Communication, Language and Literacy	Exploration and Discovery	Science, Math, Knowledge of the World

Invitations or Provocation must be set up each day. Material should be added to extend provocations throughout the week.

Program Statement Implementation and Monitoring Policy

The Region has established a policy to monitor the implementation of the Program Statement for directly operated centres. The objective of this policy is to ensure that staff are well-acquainted with the Program Statement and understand the expectations for its implementation and monitoring. It ensures that the approaches outlined in the Program Statement are effectively carried out by the child care centres and provides procedures for staff to follow with respect to both implementation and monitoring.

For instance, the policy specifies that, in implementing the Program Statement, staff must ensure that daily practices, relationships, and the environment are guided by the four foundations of *How Does Learning Happen?*. To achieve this, educators are expected to enhance their pedagogical practices through the following methods:

- Thinking about the *why* of their practice
- Understanding how their actions have an impact on children and their families
- Documentation as a means of gathering evidence of compliance with the program statement's approaches
- Reflecting on practice and collaborative inquiry as a means of reflecting on and discussing documentation and engaging in ongoing professional learning and development to implement the program statement's approaches

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- a. Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region at the centres to support high-quality (cont'd).*

The policy also outlines the procedures to be followed to ensure the monitoring of the Program Statement:

- Supervisors will monitor adherence to the approaches outlined in the program statement and identify any engagement in prohibited practices through observations, as well as reports from colleagues, parents, and community partners
- It is expected that all aspect of the program statement will be observed on an ongoing basis
- Supervisors will provide coaching and guidance for staff members to engage in ongoing reflective practice and collaborative inquiry
- Ongoing performance improvement will occur through peer mentoring, direct review of policies and procedures, and/or training
- Failure to comply with the program statement may result in:
 - A note to file
 - A letter of coaching and counselling
 - A letter of discipline or up to and including termination

The policy must be reviewed by all staff prior to the start of employment and annually thereafter, as well as whenever changes are made to the policy or procedures. Written documentation, including the date, name, and signature, will be maintained.

Implementation, Reviewing and Monitoring of Regulated Policies

As detailed in Procedure 1a) of Accessibility, the Region has a policy that mandates directly operated centres to ensure the implementation of any Regulation-required policies, procedures, or individualized plans. The policy stipulates that all employees must review these policies, procedures, and plans prior to the commencement of their employment, as well as whenever changes are made. Requiring staff to regularly review policies and ensure their implementation promotes a higher level of compliance, resulting in more consistent and effective service delivery and ensuring that educational and care standards are met and upheld.

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- a. *Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region at the centres to support high-quality (cont'd).*

Procedure 1a: Conclusion

The Region has implemented policies that support high-quality delivery of care and learning at the directly operated centres. The Parent Handbook offers essential information regarding the Regionally Operated Child Care Centres, including details about the agency's role, licensing, staffing requirements, training, and other day-to-day matters for parents. The Handbook also outlines a summary of the Program Statement, as well as the agency's values and approach, which align with the four foundations of the pedagogy. A separate, more detailed Program Statement document is also available on the Region’s website, providing a comprehensive explanation of how the pedagogy is incorporated. The Region has also established a Record Keeping Policy to ensure that client files and other documents are retained for the required duration and remain accessible at all times for Ministry Program Advisors. Additionally, a Reflective Pedagogical Programming policy has been established, outlining the pedagogical documentation requirements for RECEs in alignment with the *How Does Learning Happen?* framework.

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- b. Obtain an understanding of how the policy is monitored by the Region to ensure execution and existence and evaluate the quality control measures in place to ensure adherence to these principles.

External Ministry Inspections

The Ministry of Education is responsible for administering and enforcing the CCEYA through the issuance of child care licenses and yearly inspections. Program advisors conduct annual inspections of child care centres to ensure licensing requirements are met, renew licenses, and provide support to licensees in maintaining compliance and improving program quality. During inspections, advisors collect information through the observation of program activities and staff, the review of documentation such as policies and records, and interviews with licensees and staff. Ministry staff also investigate complaints from the public regarding licensed child care and follow up on serious occurrences. Outlined below are the results of the inspections that have taken place at the Region of Niagara’s directly operated child care centres for the years 2022, 2023, and 2024.

	Inspections	Non-Compliances
2023		8
2024		6
Total		29 Non-Compliances

A further analysis of the non-compliances shows that most of the identified risk levels are concentrated at the higher end, with eight classified as critical, 13 as high, six as moderate, and two as low, with the number of non-compliances decreasing over the last three years. A summary of the risk levels of the non-compliances has been included in the table below.

	Low	Moderate	High	Critical
2022	1	3	5	6
2023	1	1	5	1
2024	0	2	3	1

Per the Ministry’s website, low non-compliances are not likely to pose a threat to the health, safety, and well-being of a child, although the possibility exists. Moderate non-compliances may pose an indirect threat to a child that could or has resulted in harm to the health, safety and well-being of a child. High non-compliances are those that pose a direct threat to a child that could or has resulted in serious harm to the child’s health, safety, and well-being, and could require professional intervention such as medical treatment. Critical non-compliances pose a direct threat to the child that could or has resulted in death.

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- b. Obtain an understanding of how the policy is monitored by the Region to ensure execution and existence and evaluate the quality control measures in place to ensure adherence to these principles (cont'd).*

External Ministry Inspections (cont'd)

While the directly operated centres do not have a formal process in place, they take proactive measures leading up to a Ministry inspection. Supervisors and Lead RECEs complete various daily checklists to ensure continuous compliance with all Ministry requirements. The Region employs a Program Assistant who reviews and audits the centres' files and assists with the administrative requirements of the program. The Program Assistant also identifies any gaps, such as missing information. Once gaps are identified, supervisors or RECE leads ensure that the necessary items are addressed. Additionally, previous inspection reports are reviewed to serve as a reminder of past non-compliances, to verify that they were addressed in a timely manner, and to ensure that corrective actions remain in place. Child care Supervisors refer to the Ministry's Child Care Licensing Checklist throughout the year, with particular emphasis in the months leading up to an anticipated inspection. After the inspections, the Ministry's inspection summary is reviewed during supervisor meetings to determine whether any changes are required across all five sites or if the adjustments are specific to individual centres. As highlighted on the previous page, the number of non-compliances have been decreasing over the years.

Implementation, Reviewing and Monitoring of Regulated Policies

As outlined in Procedure 1b) of Access, supervisors conduct daily observations and discussions with staff to monitor the execution and compliance with the policy. Additionally, supervisors or lead RECEs complete a monitoring form to document instances of compliance or non-compliance with the relevant policies, either as part of routine monitoring or in response to serious occurrences.

Program Statement Implementation and Monitoring Policy

The Region's Program Statement Implementation and Monitoring Policy has been established to ensure the effective implementation of the directly operated centres' Program Statement. According to discussions with the Region, this policy is reviewed and signed off annually by all staff, as required by the Implementation, Reviewing, and Monitoring of Regulated Policies policy.

Reflective Pedagogical Programming Policy

Similar to the Program Statement Implementation and Monitoring Policy, the Reflective Pedagogical Programming Policy is reviewed with new staff, and staff are required to sign off on it annually to demonstrate their understanding of and commitment to the policy.

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- b. Obtain an understanding of how the policy is monitored by the Region to ensure execution and existence and evaluate the quality control measures in place to ensure adherence to these principles (cont'd).*

Record Keeping Policy

As previously stated, the Region’s Record Keeping Policy ensures that current records required for Ministry inspections are available and that client files are appropriately structured. Although this policy is not included in the annual sign-off that takes place for policies, it is reviewed by supervisors and lead RECEs, as well as by all new staff members. These supervisor and lead RECE reviews are not documented unless updates are made to the policy, at which point sign-offs are required. Given the critical importance of this policy in ensuring the availability of necessary records during a Ministry inspection, any reviews of the policy should be documented to facilitate proper monitoring.

Planning and Documentation Time

The Region allocates paid documentation time to educators at the directly operated centres for program planning and the preparation of children's documentation, with the objective of producing one piece of documentation per child each month. This dedicated time enables educators to create documents for distribution to families, resulting in the production of higher-quality documentation. The Region has established a Pedagogical Documentation Process that outlines the steps to be followed by RECEs, program assistants, lead RECEs, and supervisors in the creation of documentation. Additionally, the process specifies that monthly tracking reports of the documentation must be submitted to supervisors and Lead RECEs on the 15th and 25th of each month. The Region also maintains a pedagogical documentation tracker, which records the number of documents created each month, along with the staff responsible for creating them. Additionally, the tracker monitors each child at the centres and the number of documentation pieces they receive on a monthly basis. Supervisors will also conduct follow-up support meetings with the RECEs if the following expectations are not met:

- RECE did not complete/submit the required documentation in the month
- RECE team did not complete/submit one piece of documentation for each child once per month
- RECE requires technical support
- Documentation content does not appear to be complete
- Documentation is inauthentic to the child

The date and purpose of the follow-up meetings are recorded on a "Pedagogical Documentation Follow- Up Support Meeting" form, which includes goals for the RECE to work towards, along with tips to support their success. The form is then signed and dated by the supervisor.

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- b. Obtain an understanding of how the policy is monitored by the Region to ensure execution and existence and evaluate the quality control measures in place to ensure adherence to these principles (cont'd).*

Procedure 1b: Conclusion

The directly operated centres are subject to external monitoring through Ministry inspections, while internal monitoring is conducted through annual policy reviews and sign-offs, or as necessary, when policies are updated. While there is no formally documented process in place, the files of the directly operated centres are reviewed prior to Ministry inspections to address any missing information. After the inspections are completed, the summaries are reviewed in supervisor meetings to identify any necessary changes. Educators are also allocated planning and documentation time, enabling them to produce high-quality documentation and fulfill the objectives outlined in the Reflective Pedagogical Programming Policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

While the directly operated centres have established practices before and after Ministry inspections, these practices are not formally documented. It is recommended that the centres internally document any non-compliances identified during inspections, and once rectified, supervisors should sign off to confirm the corrective actions have been completed.

Sign-offs on the Record Keeping Policy are only required when updates or changes are made; otherwise, staff reviews of the policy are not documented. Considering the significance of this policy in ensuring that the necessary records are available for Ministry inspections, we recommend that all reviews of the policy be documented to ensure proper monitoring on a yearly basis.

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- c. *Observe and document practical examples of the four foundations (belonging, well-being, expression, and engagement) in the day-to-day activities and interactions.*

Deloitte visited four of the directly operated child care centres – St. Catharines, Fort Erie, Port Colborne, and Branscombe – and observed the integration of the *How Does Learning Happen?* framework into the day-to-day activities and interactions in several ways, discussed in greater detail below.

Natural Playgrounds

The directly operated child care centres collaborated with Bienenstock, a company specializing in natural playgrounds, that were installed at the centres in which Deloitte observed during site visits. The playgrounds feature hills for climbing, sandboxes, tires, water troughs, mud kitchens, gardens, logs, and play structures made from fallen trees. The integration of natural elements is a central focus for the directly operated centres, as they emphasize incorporating these elements into daily activities and the overall environment for children, including within the classroom, recognizing their contribution to the children's development.

Fruit Bowls

As outlined in Procedure 1b) of Access, the directly operated centres maintain a fruit bowl in each classroom, providing children with the opportunity to have a piece of fruit throughout the day. Additionally, child-safe knives are provided to enable children to independently cut their fruit, fostering their sense of autonomy and independence.

Cozy Corner

Deloitte observed the presence of a “Cozy Corner” in the classrooms at each centre, which consisted of a tent or a box in the corner of the classroom, furnished with blankets and pillows. The space accommodates only one child at a time and provides a space for children to go to if they need time away from others.

Neutral Space

Each centre features a neutral space furnished with chairs and books, which is frequently used by families. This space contributes to a sense of belonging for families, as it provides them with a place to sit with their children before drop-off or after pick-up or socialize with other families.

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- c. *Observe and document practical examples of the four foundations (belonging, well-being, expression, and engagement) in the day-to-day activities and interactions (cont'd).*

Children's Services has provided pictures from the centres to showcase this integration, which have been included below.

Belonging



Well-Being



Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

c. *Observe and document practical examples of the four foundations (belonging, well-being, expression, and engagement) in the day-to-day activities and interactions (cont'd).*

Expression



Engagement



Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- c. *Observe and document practical examples of the four foundations (belonging, well-being, expression, and engagement) in the day-to-day activities and interactions (cont'd).*

Procedure 1c: Conclusion

The directly operated centres have effectively integrated the four foundations of the pedagogy into daily activities, interactions, and the curriculum. This integration was evident in the photos provided by Children’s Services and was further observed by Deloitte during the site visits.

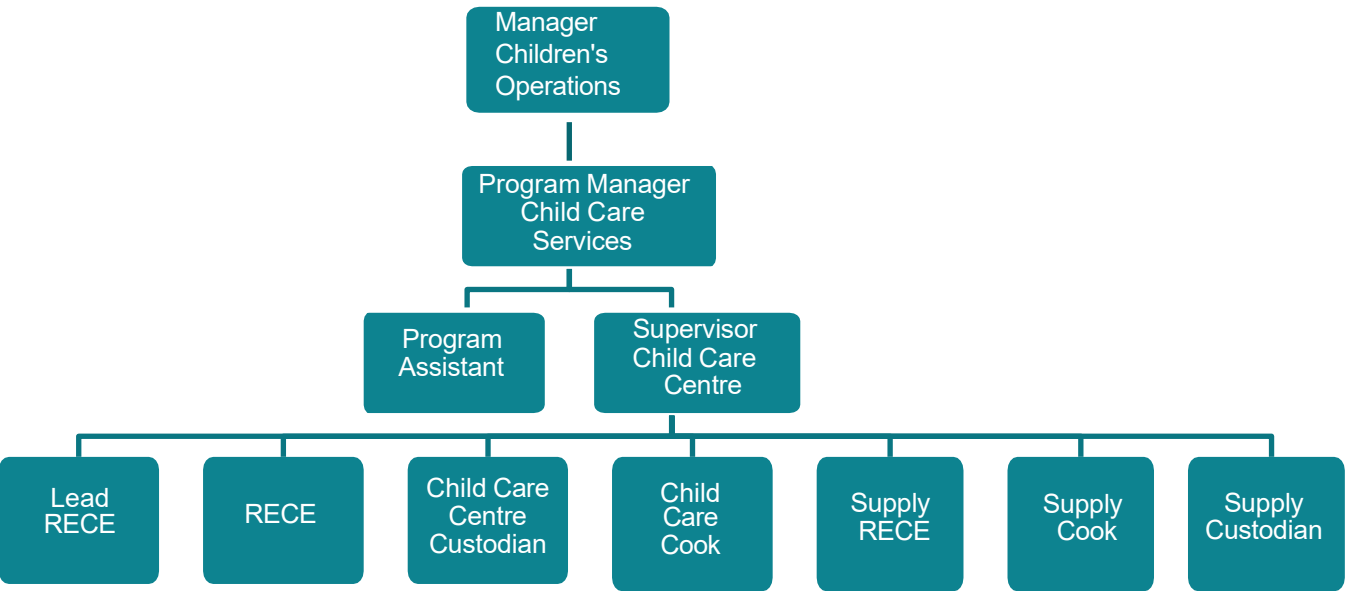
Conclusion - Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

Children’s Services has effectively integrated the four foundations of the *How Does Learning Happen?* pedagogy into the daily activities and interactions of the directly operated centres in various ways. The Parent Handbook and Program Statement outline the values and approaches followed at the centres, which align with the four foundations, and policies have been established to promote high quality. During the site visits, Deloitte observed staff incorporating these foundations into daily programming and activities, as well as throughout other areas of the centres. The centres are monitored through both external Ministry inspections and internal policies and practices designed to ensure effective implementation. However, some established internal practices are not formally documented, and annual sign-offs on the Record Keeping Policy are not required. It is recommended that identified non- compliances be documented and signed off upon resolution to demonstrate monitoring and completion of corrective actions. Additionally, it is advised that the Record Keeping Policy be signed off on annually to ensure full compliance.

Procedure 2: Staff skills and quality delivery

a. Review if staff have necessary skills and qualifications.

The Region has established the following organizational structure for its five directly operated child care centres, with each centre comprising a supervisor, Lead RECE, RECEs, custodians, and cooks.



According to discussions with Children’s Services, all educators hired are RECEs. Although it is not a mandatory requirement for all educators to hold RECE certification, having a higher proportion of RECEs contributes to an enhanced level of quality care and education. The following policies and practices have been identified that ensure that staff have the necessary skills and qualifications.

College of Early Childhood Educators

The Region has implemented a policy to ensure that all RECEs comply with the legislation, standards, and requirements established by the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE). The policy stipulates that all RECEs must adhere to the Early Childhood Educators Act, the CECE Code of Ethics, and the Standards of Practice, and that they must maintain membership in good standing with the CECE. Additionally, RECEs are required to renew their membership annually, with the policy outlining the CECE’s renewal requirements that must be followed. For all RECE’s that have passed their probationary period, the Region covers the cost of the annual registration fees.

Parent Handbook

The Parent Handbook specifies the requirements and training that staff at the directly operated centres must meet, including holding a minimum two-year diploma in Early Childhood Education from a recognized institution and ensuring that all educators are registered with the RECE. Additional requirements include Criminal Reference Checks every five years and the completion of an Annual Declaration to confirm staff suitability for working with children. The Handbook further specifies that all staff must participate in training relevant to their roles, and that all RECEs take part in the QCCN.

Procedure 2: Staff skills and quality delivery

a. *Review if staff have necessary skills and qualifications (cont'd).*

Staff Training and Development Policy

Children's Services has implemented a Staff Training and Development policy that all employees are required to review prior to beginning their employment. The policy outlines specific requirements and recommended practices for various roles, including dietary staff, child care custodians, and RECEs. It also specifies that Children's Services will provide staff with resources and information regarding training sessions to enhance and improve their knowledge and skills in early childhood education and other related areas of professional early learning development. Additionally, the policy mandates that RECEs participate in the CECE's Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) Program. This program, which is mandatory for all CECE members, is designed to help RECEs reflect on, plan, and document their professional growth in a meaningful way. The policy further requires that all RECEs, supervisors, and Children's Services staff complete annual training with a certified First Aid and CPR Instructor, as well as the *Allergy Aware* online e-module training on the use of an EpiPen. RECEs and supervisors must also maintain valid Standard First Aid and Infant Child CPR (C) certifications. To further support professional development, the policy encourages staff to attend relevant training sessions and conferences within the community, and for courses related to current or potential job responsibilities, the Region may offer tuition reimbursement.

Procedure 2a: Conclusion

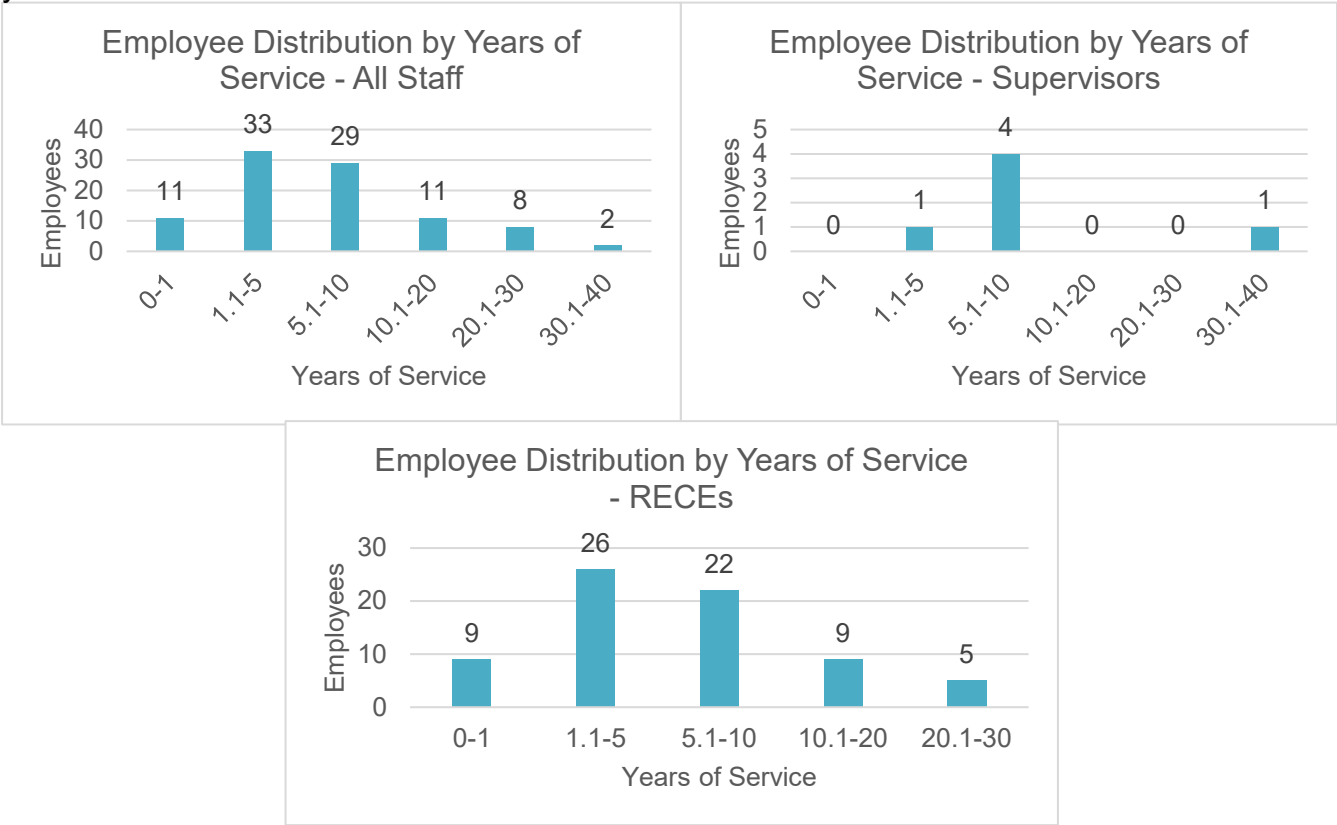
The Region has implemented policies that ensure directly operated staff possess the necessary skills and qualifications to deliver high-quality education and care. The CECE policy ensures that RECEs at the centres hold the appropriate certifications and memberships to teach, with these requirements also detailed in the Parent Handbook. Additionally, the Staff Training and Development policy outlines the specific requirements and recommendations for various roles within the directly operated centres.

Procedure 2: Staff skills and quality delivery

b. Examine staff turnover rates to assess stability and continuity along with staffing levels and ratios to provide high quality care.

The directly operated centres employ a total of 93 staff members, with an average tenure of 7.4 years, suggesting a relatively stable workforce; however, the standard deviation of 7.5 years does indicate a considerable variation in the length of employees' tenure. This variability reflects a mix of long-term employees and newer staff, with 47% of employees having been with the centres for between zero and five years. The minimum tenure of under one year, representing a new hire in February 2025, highlights the presence of recent additions to the workforce, while the maximum tenure of 37.7 years indicates that some employees have been with the centres for many years. The median tenure is 5.4 years, and the 75th percentile of 9.7 years signifies that 25% of the staff have been with the centres for more than 9.7 years.

The graphs below illustrate the distribution of employees at the directly operated centres based on their years of service, categorized into the following ranges: 0-1 years, 1.1-5 years, 5.1-10 years, 10.1-20 years, 20.1-30 years, and 30.1-40 years. Overall, the number of employees decreases as tenure increases, with 47% of the centres' employees having tenures of five years or less, while 23% have tenures ranging from 10 to 40 years. The Region employs five supervisors, 60% of whom have been with the centres for between 5.1 and 10 years, indicating a relatively high level of tenure within these roles. Additionally, of the 71 RECEs, 51% have been with the centres for more than five years, with the majority having a tenure between 5.1 and 10 years.



Procedure 2: Staff skills and quality delivery

- b. *Examine staff turnover rates to assess stability and continuity along with staffing levels and ratios to provide high quality care (cont'd).*

Of the 93 staff members at the directly operated centres, 23% have tenures of 10 years or more, and 30% have been with the centres for between 5.1 and 10 years. In a sector frequently characterized by high turnover, the Region's strong staff retention demonstrates its ability to foster a stable and dedicated workforce, reflecting its sustained commitment to quality. This commitment is further evidenced by higher employee wages – rendering the Region ineligible for certain funding opportunities from the Ministry, such as the Wage Enhancement Grant, which is available to non-directly operated centres offering lower wage levels. The majority of the centres' supervisors have tenures between 5.1 and 10 years. While it is uncommon to have supervisors with less than 10 years of experience, this trend is attributed to less tenured staff demonstrating both interest and capability in advancing through leadership roles to become supervisors. Per discussion with Children's Services, several processes are currently documented, with continued ongoing efforts to capture additional processes, to ensure clear guidance and instruction as it relates to knowledge transfer within the directly operated centres. Examples of processes which are currently documented within Children's Services' system have been included in Appendix B.

To support new supervisors, Children's Services offers comprehensive training sessions and shadow days to prepare them for their roles and facilitate learning from experienced supervisors. Additionally, new supervisors may be paired with a current supervisor for guidance, along with the Program Manager providing substantial support to ensure they are well-supported throughout the process. There is also flexibility in moving between centres, enabling supervisors to visit different sites to offer support and ensure that administrative requirements are met. For knowledge sharing, a shared site with a folder accessible to all supervisors allows them to upload documents for others to review or utilize, such as recent Ministry recommendations, public health notices, and helpful tips. Furthermore, a folder titled "Leadership Manual" contains how-to guides, operating procedures, and information on backfill positions.

Procedure 2b: Conclusion

80% of the Region's educators have been with the directly operated centres for 10 years or less, while 20% have tenures ranging from 10.1 to 30 years. These long-tenured staff contribute valuable experience and a deep understanding of the *How Does Learning Happen?* framework, which enables them to foster a welcoming and inclusive learning environment for young children. To address potential knowledge loss at the supervisor level, Children's Services has implemented several knowledge transfer and sharing processes. This is particularly important given the relatively shorter tenure of the current workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

While Children's Services has some processes documented, it is vital for them to determine what processes are missing and therefore not currently documented. It is recommended that Children's Services conducts an inventory of all activities conducted by their staff and compare to the current documented processes. In addition, Children's Services should meet with both Supervisors and RECE's to determine if there are any missing processes in which they believe would be beneficial to have officially documented. This will further enhance the knowledge transfer between staff throughout the centres.

Procedure 2: Staff skills and quality delivery

- c. *Evaluating whether staff have access to ongoing professional development and learning opportunities to enhance their skills.*

Staff Trainings

Children's Services has several levels of training that the directly operated staff participate in. A list of some of the courses that have been completed over the last few years, separated by category, has been included in Appendix C. It is important to note that while the site-specific trainings listed may vary between centres, it is likely that all centres have completed the same courses, with exceptions for trainings related to medically fragile children. However, the tracking of these trainings are not currently complete as the courses completed are not always properly documented or recorded.

Children's Services provides various professional development opportunities for staff, including a corporate mentorship program, where staff members seeking professional growth can select a mentor to work with, as well as an informal mentorship program that pairs staff with champions at other sites. The Region also supports staff pursuing further education by offering a tuition reimbursement of up to \$1,200 per calendar year. Staff are also supported in attending any workshops or information sessions hosted by the ECCDC, with Children's Services covering the cost of the workshop.

Professional Learning Day (RECEs)

A professional learning day is organized by the Region in its capacity as the CMSM, offering child care programs the option to participate in a system-wide professional learning day for RECEs. The Region's directly operated centres have participated in each session held, and while participation is not mandatory, it is strongly encouraged. Children's Services takes attendance on these professional learning days to ensure the participation of all staff. Flyers from previous learning days have been included below.



Licensed Child Care Administrators: Please share this communiqué with your staff team so they may access the link below.

With an ongoing commitment to support retention and recruitment of Registered Early Childhood Educators and child care staff, Niagara Region Children's Services is excited to be working in partnership with the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC) to host the first system-wide Early Years and Child Care Professional Learning Day on **Friday June 23, 2023**.

These last two years have been extremely challenging for all those working in the early years and child care sector. This Professional Learning Day is focused on inspiring and encouraging staff by highlighting the importance of self-care and well-being, and its importance and impacts to their work, and offering engaging reflection opportunities.

The conference registration portal will be available for viewing on **May 8, 2023**. To view the page, we invite you to [click here](#). Registration is open from **May 15-31, 2023**.



Niagara Region

9:00 to 10:00 am - Welcome and Keynote Presentation

Discovering our Unconscious Biases with Natalie Royer, Saroy Group

This webinar will support educators in reflecting on their own practices and the mindset that informs their practice regarding biases. Through interactive activities and discussion, we will see that we all have implicit biases, and the webinar will provide a way to start self-reflection.



Natalie Royer is a belonging consultant, speaker and coach at Saroy Group Inc. She holds an M.A. from Toronto Metropolitan University and holds a Certificate in Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace from York University and has completed a coaching and mentoring program at the Schulich School of Business. She leverages her compassion, insight, and humanistic approach to facilitate impactful training sessions, workshops, coaching and keynotes on cultivating spaces of belonging. Natalie believes storytelling is a powerful tool to create spaces that promote both empathy and inclusivity when working with children, families and community at large.

10:00 to 10:15 am - Morning Break

hosted by ECCDC



Save the Date! "Let's Dive Deeper into Wellness"

December 11, 2024 - 8:30am-4:30pm
Niagara Falls Convention Centre
6815 Stanley Avenue, Niagara Falls

Educators working in relationship with children, their families and caregivers, have a critical role supporting the development of mental health and well-being. On December 11th we'll come together to dive deeper into the definition of mental health and its core concepts and enhance our knowledge of mental health as state of wellness that can be fostered through relationships and pedagogical practice.

Where Science Meets Practice

Dr. Jean Clinton

Lorrie McGee Baird, RECE

RECE

Deep Dive Learning for facilitators and educators:

Keynote segments by Dr. Jean Clinton and Lorrie McGee Baird move through the science of social-emotional development to exploring core concepts of mental health and well-being. Through deep discussion and hands on experiences, participants will make connections between the core concepts for mental health, and the daily practice and pedagogical approach of educators in EarlyON and licensed childcare settings.

Event Registration Information to follow

In Partnership with ECCDC

Procedure 2: Staff skills and quality delivery

- c. Evaluating whether staff have access to ongoing professional development and learning opportunities to enhance their skills (cont'd).*

Procedure 2c: Conclusion

Children's Services offers directly operated staff opportunities for professional development to advance their learning and education, thereby enhancing their skills. This is achieved through various training programs, the professional learning day for RECEs, mentorship opportunities, and financial support for education or workshops. Although the list of trainings completed by the directly operated centres is extensive, the courses are not well tracked, leading to instances where completed courses may not be properly documented.

RECOMMENDATION:

Although the directly operated centres participate in various training modules, these are not consistently tracked. Inaccurate tracking of courses can result in gaps in verifying professional development. It is recommended that all completed training courses be formally documented and tracked to ensure accurate recording of staff training.

Conclusion – Procedure 2: Staff skills and quality delivery

Children's Services has established effective policies to ensure that directly operated staff are qualified and possess the necessary skills to deliver high-quality care and education. Staff development is supported through a range of training modules, professional learning days, and additional professional development opportunities, such as mentorship programs and financial assistance for further education. It is recommended that the tracking and documentation of staff training be formally recorded to ensure accurate monitoring. In addition, Children's Services should conduct a review of current documented processes conducted by staff and assess which processes are missing to make sure that documentation occurs to ensure proper and complete knowledge transfer guidance.



RESPONSIVE

What does Responsive mean to the Ministry of Education?

Per the Ministry of Education's Service Management and Funding Guidelines, responsive programs reflect local context, offer families flexibility and choice in child care options, and embrace cultural diversity. Per Pg. 58 of the guidelines, inclusivity ensures that child care and early years programs are accessible, equitable, and welcoming to all children and families, regardless of their background, abilities, or socio-economic status.

Procedures

The following procedures and steps were performed to assess responsiveness:

Procedure 1: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion + Truth & Reconciliation

- a. Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region to the centres around diversity, equity, and inclusion and Truth and Reconciliation.
- b. Obtain an understanding of how the policy is monitored by the Region to ensure execution and existence and evaluate the quality control measures in place to ensure adherence to these principles.
- c. Observe and document practical examples of how diversity, equity, and inclusion and Truth and Reconciliation principles are integrated and practiced in day-to-day activities and interactions.

Procedure 1: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion + Truth and Reconciliation

- a. *Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region to the centers around diversity, equity, and inclusion and Truth and Reconciliation.*

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan 2023-2027

The Region has developed a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan (DEI Action Plan) to be implemented from 2023 to 2027, with the goal of enhancing equity and inclusivity while reducing discrimination, as the Region's diversity continues to grow. In support of the research for the Action Plan, 12 dimensions of diversity were identified and utilized to determine the communities included in the focus groups and survey outreach activities. These dimensions encompass Indigenous peoples, ethnocultural groups, new immigrants, people with disabilities, older adults, people with low income, youth, gender, faith, people experiencing homelessness, francophone communities, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals. The Plan outlines a vision, mission, and scope, supported by six guiding principles that form the foundation of the initiative, along with six focus areas, as detailed below.

1. Inclusive workplace culture, leadership, and accountability
2. Increased understanding through education
3. Diverse workforce reflective of Niagara community
4. Programs and services meet the needs of everyone
5. Addressing discrimination
6. Inclusive communication

Each focus area includes both internal and external goals, along with corresponding internal and external actions designed to achieve them. The Region will be issuing reports annually addressing the Plan's progress, along with conducting a mid-term review that will be released in 2025.

Indigenous Action Plan

The Region is in the process of developing an Indigenous Action Plan, which is expected to be finalized by the end of 2025. Similar to the DEI Action Plan, this initiative will apply across the Region, with the work within Children's Services aligning with several of its priorities and objectives. For instance, the planning and implementation of programs and services will prioritize inclusivity and respect for Indigenous peoples.

Variable Schedules

While many child care providers in the Region offer only full-time, five-day care, the directly operated centres have implemented flexible scheduling to accommodate families who require part-time care or care on specific days. This flexibility is particularly important given the centres' proximity to the border, as many parents work across the border in the tourist or health industry, and may require care on varying days or hours. Although the variable schedules that the directly operated centres aim to provide are not mandated by policy, it has been a long-standing practice. To support this, the centres may over-enroll by one or two children based on the scheduling needs and allocate spaces accordingly. Supervisors maintain a tracking spreadsheet that records all children's schedules, allowing educators to identify where variable schedules can be accommodated within the full-time students. Since the centres are not staffed to licensed capacity, if a variable schedule results in one or two additional children in the classroom, a supply staff member is brought in to ensure child care ratios are maintained.

Procedure 1: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion + Truth and Reconciliation

- a. *Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region to the centers around diversity, equity, and inclusion and Truth and Reconciliation (cont'd).*

Parent Handbook and Program Statement

The Parent Handbook and Program Statement both highlight the responsive approach to child care employed by the directly operated centres. The "Our Values and Approach" section of the Handbook highlights that the most effective educators adopt a responsive approach by engaging in activities such as participating in play with the children and cultivating positive relationships with both the children and their families. The Program Statement encourages RECEs to develop responsive learning environments and foster responsive interactions among children, parents, and staff. This can be achieved by designing programming that reflects the children's interests and by fostering individualized connections with both the children and their families.

Food Standards and Nutrition Policy

The Region has implemented a policy regarding food and nutrition that outlines the procedures staff must follow during mealtimes, food preparation, and the food standards that must be adhered to. The policy stipulates that menus should be planned in accordance with Health Canada guidelines to promote healthy eating and must be posted for families to view. Additionally, a list of children's allergies and restrictions must be displayed in cooking and serving areas. The policy also outlines the structure for meal and snack times, which includes having one staff member seated at the table with the children, encouraging children to self-serve, and promoting self-cleanup after meals.

This policy promotes equity, diversity, and inclusion by addressing the varied dietary needs of children. It recognizes and accommodates food restrictions arising from religious or cultural practices, as well as allergies, thereby fostering an inclusive environment that respects and supports diverse backgrounds.

Individualized Support Plans and Inclusive Programming Policy

As previously discussed in Procedure 1a) of Accessibility, the Region has a policy mandating the development of an ISP for children with special needs, as well as the implementation of all necessary measures to support them to the fullest extent possible. This policy ensures that programming and environment are inclusive to the needs of all children, in alignment with the *How Does Learning Happen?* framework.

Short Term Specialized Support Funding Policy

The Region has established a policy to provide an additional non-ratio child care program educator for a limited period to child care centres where permanent educators require additional support. This educator will assist in ensuring the implementation of recommendations made by RCs or Behaviour Consultants (BCs) for children with special needs, specifically in situations where in-ratio educators are unable to sufficiently support the inclusion of a child with special needs in the program.

Procedure 1: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion + Truth and Reconciliation

- a. Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region to the centers around diversity, equity, and inclusion and Truth and Reconciliation (cont'd).*

Procedure 1a: Conclusion

The Region has implemented policies and practices focused on incorporating equity, diversity, and inclusion within the directly operated child care centres.

- The DEI Action Plan outlines the Region's strategy to promote equity and inclusivity, while the Region's responsive approach to child care is also addressed in both the Parent Handbook and the Program Statement.
- The Food Standards and Nutrition policy promotes an inclusive and diverse environment by taking into account every child's dietary needs, and the provision of variable schedules for families highlights the Region's responsiveness to the needs of the community.
- The Individualized Support Plans and Inclusive Programming and the Short Term Specialized Support Funding policies reflect equity, diversity, and inclusion by ensuring that children with exceptionalities receive individualized support and accommodations through the development of an ISP.

These policies offer all children the necessary resources to thrive, regardless of their individual needs or challenges. However, while the variable schedules are a long-standing practice, they have not been formalized through a written policy.

RECOMMENDATION:

Although it has been a long-standing practice, the absence of a formal policy regarding variable schedules may result in challenges in ensuring consistent implementation and support across centres. It is recommended that a formal written policy be developed to document the practice of implementing variable schedules, including guidelines for over enrollment. This will ensure consistency and provide clarity for both staff and families.

Procedure 1: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion + Truth and Reconciliation

- b. Obtain an understanding of how the policy is monitored by the Region to ensure execution and existence and evaluate the quality control measures in place to ensure adherence to these principles.*

Parent Surveys

The Region distributes an annual survey to parents at all directly operated centres, compiles the responses, and documents the completion rate. The survey includes questions regarding families' perceptions of being welcomed at the centre, their sense of being informed about their child's activities and well-being, their satisfaction with communication from staff, the health of the meals and snacks provided, the frequency of receiving documentation about their child's learning and progress, and their overall satisfaction with the program. The use of parent surveys enables the centres to gain insight into their operations from the families' perspective, identifying areas for improvement and providing the opportunity to enhance their practices.

DEI Action Plan

While the Region's DEI Action Plan applies to the Region as a whole, the directly operated centres implement the Plan in several ways. As discussed with Children's Services, module training is conducted across the corporation, with all directly operated staff required to participate. Staff also have the option to engage in additional training offered by the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC), a partner organization, and the directly operated centres incorporate resources from the ECCDC into their provocation kits. The centres integrate DEI-focused questions into their interview processes and maintain equitable hiring practices, ensuring staff diversity, which is reflected in the programming offered. DEI practices are also embedded in each center's programming, including through the food provided and the religious celebrations that children learn about and participate in within the classroom. The monitoring of these practices is part of the daily responsibilities of the lead RECEs, who regularly review pedagogical documentation and continuously observe in the classrooms. Supervisors and lead RECEs are responsible for reviewing program plans to ensure the integration of these practices into the programming, and the Program Manager conducts monthly site visits and tours the environment to ensure that expectations are being met. While the Program Manager maintains personal case notes during these visits, there is no formal documentation or checklist in place to record them.

Food Standards and Nutrition Policy

In addition to the required annual sign off, the policy lists out procedures to be taken by staff in the execution of this policy and some ways in which it will be monitored. For example, water flushing is a mandatory opening procedure that a designated staff member will perform, and this is recorded on a flushing form that each centre has. Additionally, grocery orders prepared by the dietary staff must be approved by supervisors before being sent out to suppliers or being purchased at the store. All cooks and supervisors at the directly operated centres are required to maintain up-to-date training in safe food handling through the Public Health Department, with documentation of this training kept in their personnel file.

Procedure 1: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion + Truth and Reconciliation

- b. *Obtain an understanding of how the policy is monitored by the Region to ensure execution and existence and evaluate the quality control measures in place to ensure adherence to these principles (cont'd).*

Emergency Child Care

The directly operated centres played a leadership role during the pandemic, supporting the community by being the first to offer emergency child care at four of the five centres. During this period, the centres developed and adapted policies and forms for use by other centres, and organized information sessions both independently and in collaboration with public health, setting the benchmark and establishing the standard for child care during that time.

Mentoring Relationship

A collaborative relationship has been established between the directly operated centres and community providers in the sector. This partnership began several years ago, and has continued to strengthen, with the most recent mentorship connection formed in late 2024 with a community partner. The directly operated centres have played a leading role in mentoring programs, particularly during the pandemic. This initiative involves the sharing of policies and templates and allows other operators to visit the directly operated sites with their quality personnel to receive guidance and support tailored to quality and administrative improvements. In the previous year, the Region had a similar program in which operators would visit the directly operated centres to observe their operations, routines, provocations, and staff engagement with the intention of implementing these practices within their own centres.

Procedure 1b: Conclusion

As outlined in Procedure 1a), the directly operated centres have implemented policies and practices that focus on incorporating equity, diversity, and inclusion within the centres, which are monitored in a variety of ways. The directly operated centres collect annual parent feedback to improve their programs and implement DEI principles through staff training, resources, and inclusive hiring practices. Lead RECEs and supervisors conduct daily monitoring, the Program Manager conducts monthly site visits, and educators ensure programming and culturally relevant meals align with DEI principles, adhering to the Food Standards and Nutrition policy signed off annually. The Region is in the process of developing an Indigenous Action Plan, with initiatives within Children's Services expected to align closely with several of its key priorities.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that a formal documentation system should be established to track the implementation of DEI Action Plan principles, whether it is during the lead RECE's daily reviews and/or the Program Manager's monthly site visits.

Procedure 1: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion + Truth and Reconciliation

c. *Observe and document practical examples of how diversity, equity, and inclusion and Truth and Reconciliation principles are integrated and practiced in day-to-day activities and interactions.*

ADeloitte observed the integration of equity, diversity, inclusion, and Truth and Reconciliation practices into both the children's daily activities and the overall operations of the centres. The common areas at each centre feature displays that reflect what the children are learning about in class or focus on current cultural events, such as Chinese New Year. The centres integrate the diverse backgrounds and religions of the children into their daily programming, with activities, books, toys, and crafts that reflect these values. Visual representations of responsive practices within the centres have been provided by the Region and included below.



Procedure 1: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion + Truth and Reconciliation Appendix 2

- c. *Observe and document practical examples of how diversity, equity, and inclusion and Truth and Reconciliation principles are integrated and practiced in day-to-day activities and interactions (cont'd).*

During the tour of the centres, Deloitte also observed the on-site cooks preparing fresh and nutritious meals and snacks for the children daily. These meals incorporate a variety of ethnicities and cultures, while also being mindful of cultural dietary restrictions by offering alternatives such as halal chicken and beef. Additionally, the centres ensure that the food requirements for each individual child are clearly displayed in the kitchen, on the meal cart, and in each classroom to accommodate children with allergies or food sensitivities.

Procedure 1c: Conclusion

The Region has effectively incorporated diversity, equity, inclusion, and Truth and Reconciliation practices into the daily activities and interactions at the directly operated centres, as observed by Deloitte during the site visits and evidenced by the centres themselves.

Conclusion - Procedure 1: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion + Truth and Reconciliation

Children's Services has integrated equity, diversity, inclusion, and Truth and Reconciliation principles into daily interactions and programming at directly operated centres. The DEI Action Plan and Parent Handbook detail the Region's strategy for promoting equity and inclusivity in child care. Policies like Food Standards and Nutrition, Individualized Support Plans, and Short Term Specialized Support Funding prioritize individual needs. Deloitte observed staff applying these principles during site visits. It is recommended to formalize variable scheduling into a written policy and incorporate formal documentation to track the Action Plan's implementation.



APPENDICES

Appendix A

Pages one and two of the Program Statement have been included below which capture how the directly operated child care centres support the four foundations of the pedagogy.

The Four Foundations of Learning and Development	How Niagara Region Licensed Child Care Supports the Four Foundations
Belonging	<p>We provide an environment that supports the diverse needs of all children and families in the Niagara region. We strive to be accepting of all exceptionalities and we adjust our environment to meet the needs of each unique child.</p> <p>To support inclusion, we consider each child's capabilities rather than focusing solely on their needs.</p> <p>We value and support the families we serve and recognize them as partners in their children's learning as we believe they are the child's first Educators. Our Educators are true professionals who build relationships with children and their families and connect with organizations within their community recognizing that "it takes a village to raise a child".</p> <p>Materials, photographs, posted material and resources reflect diversity in race, family composition, abilities etc.</p>
Well-Being	<p>Niagara Region Licensed Educators promote mindfulness throughout the day. Children are given opportunity to finish tasks and practice new skills. The moments spent caring for individual, physical needs are viewed as an opportunity to empower the children to be independent, to gain self-confidence and to be supported through the process with much or as little support as they need.</p>
Engagement	<p>engagement and value within the program and with others.</p>
Expression	<p>Educators encourage children's self-expression through their play, art mediums, music and movement, the use of open-ended questions and by providing time for children to reflect, hypothesize and share their responses.</p>

Appendix B

Some examples of processes that are currently documented in Children's Services' system have been included below.

Category	Documented Process
Attendance (Staff)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kronos Staff Encoding (Attendance) • Kronos Sick New & Sick Continued Encoding (Attendance) • Kronos How to Check Probationary Hours
Attendance (Children)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OCCMS – Directions for Printing OCCMS Summary Reports • OCCMS – Full Fee User Manual • OCCMS – Instructions to Remove a Client
OneHSN Protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To Access OneHSN • Child Status Update • Offering a Vacant Space
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EIR – Employee Incident Reports • Staff Reimbursement SOP • How To Book A Supply
Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Care Outbreak Process • To Access Ped Doc Supervisor Checklist • Child Care Centre Closure Communication List
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outstanding Balance and Non-Sufficient Funds (NSF) Procedures • Setting up a Family And Children Services FACS People Soft Number • Requisition and Receiving User Guide
Ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Care Licensing System (CCLS) Guide for Applicant Licensees • When to Upload Public Inspections (CCLS) • View Non-Compliance Score and List in CCLS
Computer and Tech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructions for Comp Printing and Email (iPad) • Steps for Documentation #1-4 (Ped Doc)

Appendix C

The following is a list of some of the courses that have been completed by Children's Services staff over the last few years, separated by category.

Training Category	Completed Training
Corporate Mandatory Training Modules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phishing Micro Learning • Indicators of a Phish Game • Malware Microlearning • Social Engineering • DEI Learning Course • Metis Heritage Presentation • Indigenous Training
Supervisors and Leads Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Health IPAC session • Excel Training • Supervisors Network ECCDC • Leaders Edge Course
Supply Specific Staff Meeting Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medically fragile child: review of the Individual Specialized Plan and Individual Medical Plans for a new child in consultation of the parents • Diabetes Video at School Training Session • Safe Back Lifting • Medically fragile child: Training with parent, dietician, training video and manual
Child Care Centre Site Specific Training	<p>Port Colborne</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medically fragile child: review of the Individual Specialized Plan and Individual Medical Plans for a new child in consultation of the parents • Diabetes Video at School Training • ECCDC presentation/loose parts • ECCDC Network meetings <p>Branscombe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective play-based policy reflection • Epi-Pen Training • "I didn't mean to ruin your day" (Jan 24, 2023) • Challenging Behaviour Training Session #1 • Challenging Behaviour Training Session #2 "Nothing I do works" • Challenging Behaviour Training Session #3 "Where is the fairy dust"

Appendix C (cont'd)

Training Category	Completed Training
Child Care Centre Site Specific Training	<p>St. Catharines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slip Trip and Fall Training • Loose Parts Training • Reflective play-based policy reflection <p>Welland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trevor Ward Safety Talk Workplace Injury • Pathstone Presentation Special Needs and Behaviors • Public Health Epi-Pen Training • Gossip Vs Venting Video <p>Fort Erie</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe back lifting • ECCDC Network meetings
Direct Operations Child Care Centre Team Trainings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College of ECE CPL • College of ECE Sexual Abuse Prevention Abuse Review Training • Coping & Resilience in the Workplace • Behaviour Awareness and Self Regulations (Pathstones) • Safe Arrival Information Session
Directly Operated Child Care Centre Annual Trainings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Aid/CPR • Duty to Report Training • Epi-Pen (Allergy Aware & CPR) • Anaphylaxis (Allergy Aware) • WHIMIS
Leadership Team Trainings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership Event • Attendance Support Program – Introduction for Leaders • Employee Incident Training • Workplace Mental Health
New Hire Onboarding Trainings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility Training • Respectful Workplace Conduct • RECE - Diabetics training videos • RECE - Specialized training video - Medically Fragile Child • Shadow Days: RECEs, Dietary, Custodian, Program Assistant • QCCN Reflective Training

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Memorandum

COM-C 14-2025

Subject: Seniors Services Long Term Care Homes Volunteer Update

Date: June 10, 2025

To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

From: Paolo Varias, Director, Seniors Services

Seniors Services is deeply grateful for and places great value on, the meaningful contributions made by volunteers across the Region's seven long-term care (LTC) homes. These volunteers; members of the public, community groups, and students, enhance the lives of residents through their time, talents, and compassion.

Volunteers support a wide variety of programs, including mealtime assistance, friendly visiting, pet visits, and recreational programming such as cards and games, bingo, special meals, and entertainment. They also contribute through pastoral care and church services, and by engaging residents in other enriching activities. Beyond programming, volunteers provide palliative care support, operate cafés and tuck shops, enhance outdoor spaces and gardens, assist in hair salons, and help coordinate fundraising events. Their presence and dedication bring comfort, companionship, and joy to residents, and we are sincerely appreciative of their ongoing support.

Like many long-term care homes across the province, Niagara Region's LTC homes continue to face challenges related to volunteerism, particularly in the recruitment and retention of volunteers. While the volunteer pool has gradually declined over time, most significantly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts to rebuild and revitalize this essential network are actively underway.

Despite these challenges, 2024 saw continued volunteer engagement across our homes. A total of 849 individuals contributed their time and energy, including 151 registered volunteers and 698 students through high school, college, and university placements. Collectively, they contributed an impressive 92,033 hours of support to our programs and services.

Seniors Services is committed to strengthening our volunteer base. Targeted recruitment efforts are focused on engaging family members, students, local service clubs and organizations, and residents of the broader community. We continue to

promote volunteer opportunities through multiple channels, including social media, newsletters, outreach to community partners, word-of-mouth referrals, special events, and formal presentations.

Traditionally, many of our volunteers begin their journey as family members or friends of residents, who, after experiencing the impact of LTC firsthand, choose to give back. Others are students seeking valuable hands-on experience or individuals who simply want to contribute to their community in a meaningful way. We welcome all new volunteers and deeply value the lived experiences, perspectives, and unique skills they bring. As a division, we recognize that volunteers play a vital role in supporting residents who call our LTC homes “home”.

In celebration of National Volunteer Week 2025 (April 27–May 3), we embraced this year’s theme: “Volunteers Make Waves.” This theme captured the power and impact of both individual and collective volunteer efforts. Just like a wave, every act of volunteering, large or small, builds momentum, inspires others, and contributes to a greater movement of positive change. To honour this important week, each of our LTC homes hosted Volunteer Appreciation Events to recognize the remarkable dedication, compassion, and commitment of our volunteers. These celebrations provided us with an opportunity to personally thank each volunteer for the difference they make in the lives of our residents and in the heart of our communities.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Paolo Varias, RN, GNC, MSc, MMgt/IMHL
Director, Seniors Services

This memorandum was created in collaboration with Kristin Mechelse, Volunteer Services Program Manager

Memorandum

PHD-C 3-2025

Subject: Nurse Family Partnership Program

Date: June 10, 2025

To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

From: Angela Roy, Manager, Nurse-Family Partnership and Repro/Child Health Programs

The Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program is an evidence-based, nurse-led home visiting initiative designed to support young, first-time parents, beginning early in pregnancy, and lasting until the child turns two years of age. The program aims to improve prenatal health, child development, and economic self-sufficiency among vulnerable families.

In Niagara Region, NFP was launched in 2018 and is delivered through Public Health and Emergency Services as part of a cost-shared funding model. Since its implementation, the program has had a measurable impact on supporting positive health outcomes for both the parent and their child, while addressing key determinants of health through intensive, long-term nurse-client relationships.

This critical stage of life presents a unique window of opportunity to positively influence maternal and child health, parenting confidence, and long-term family well-being. Program indicators reflect the impact of this work and how it contributes to healthier, more resilient families and communities across Niagara, mirroring broader research that shows a significant return on investment for early childhood interventions.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Angela Roy, MHS BScN, RN
Manager, Nurse-Family Partnership and Repro/Child Health Programs

Memorandum

PHD-C 4-2025

Subject: Beach Surveillance

Date: June 10, 2025

To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

From: Brandon Krupa, Environmental Health Manager

Public Health plays an important role in monitoring and maintaining the safety of local beaches in alignment with the guidelines set by the Ministry of Health. The Environmental Health division is responsible for water quality monitoring, issuing swim advisories, and addressing potential public health risks, including bacterial contamination and other health hazards.

Public Health routinely collects water samples from beaches along Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. These samples are analyzed and the results are used to update the beach monitoring website, which is used to provide information to the public. A comprehensive health promotion strategy is used to inform the public about potential risks when swimming at the beach, including educational resources to help individuals make informed decisions about whether it is safe to enter the water.

The division continually evaluates the current beach sampling process, addressing challenges and exploring innovative approaches to enhance the effectiveness of the beach sampling program. The use of predictive modelling is currently being explored.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Brandon Krupa
Environmental Health Manager

Memorandum

PHD-C 5-2025

Subject: Lead Agency Transfer: Infant and Child Development Services to Niagara Children's Centre

Date: June 10, 2025

To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

From: Pamela Dilts, Director of Family and Community Health Division

This memo is to inform you of the successful transfer of the lead agency responsibilities of the Infant and Child Development Services (ICDS) program from Public Health to the Niagara Children's Centre as of April 1, 2025.

ICDS is an early intervention program funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS), that supports families with children at risk for delays in growth and development, connecting them to community supports and services.

The program is outside of the Province's Ontario Public Health Standards and until now, Niagara Region was one of the few public health units in Ontario to administer this program, with most others being operated by community agencies.

The Niagara Children's Centre has a long history of providing expert service and support in child development and is the Provincial Smart Start Hub for Niagara families, which is the entry point to access services for growth and development needs. This transfer now connects families to the Centre earlier and streamlines assessments and referrals.

In August 2024, staff provided a report to council (PHD 4-2024) and received approval to transition the program to the Niagara Children's Centre. MCCSS provided final approval in December 2024, and from January 2025 to March 31, 2025, Public Health worked closely with Niagara Children's Centre to warm transfer 81 clients, ensuring they continue to receive continuous care through their service journey. The process was carefully managed to ensure a seamless handover of responsibilities, and we are confident that the Niagara Children's Centre will provide expert, continuous and consistent care to Niagara families as the lead agency moving forward.

Communications about the lead agency change and new referral process have been shared with community partners. Public Health staff will continue to work with the

Niagara Children's Centre to ensure families are linked to appropriate public health programs and services.

Transfer of lead agency status for this program supports Council Strategic Priorities, contributing to Effective Region objectives 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3, by ensuring value-for-money in Regional services and programs, exploring and implementing opportunities to improve service delivery outcomes, and delivering fiscally responsible and sustainable core services.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Pamela Dilts, RN, BScN, MHS
Director, Family and Community Health Division

Memorandum

PHD-C 6-2025

Subject: International Agricultural Workers Housing Inspection Cost Recovery Fee

Date: June 10, 2025

To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

From: Colin Horne, Manager, Environmental Health

Starting January 1, 2026, Niagara Region Public Health (NRPH) will begin charging a fee for International Agriculture Worker (IAW) housing inspections.

Federal regulations require licensed inspections of IAW accommodations to ensure safety and suitability for the workers; however, this not a Provincial requirement so Public Health does not receive funding from the province for this program.

Currently, IAW housing inspections are conducted without a fee, but the number of IAW housing units and the demand for inspections has grown significantly over the past few years. Between 2016 and 2024, IAW housing units increased from approximately 450 to 570. This growth reflects broader regional trends, including economic development, agricultural expansion, and increased tourism. As a result, the current model of offering IAW accommodation inspections at no cost is no longer sustainable.

To maintain the quality of service and to remain fiscally responsible, Public Health will implement the below cost-recovery fee for IAW inspections as of January 1, 2026:

Inspection Fee: \$250 per unit

Re-inspection Fee: \$125 per unit

These fees are based on staff time and the number of inspections required. Furthermore, with this new model, Public Health will be able to improve customer service, shorten wait times, reduce the need for re-inspections, and use technology to enhance service delivery. A jurisdictional scan indicated that most other Public Health Units within Ontario already charge a fee for IAW housing inspections.

To ensure a smooth transition, IAW housing owners/operators have been proactively notified of the fee via hardcopy letter. The Regional website has been updated and

Public Health will continue to issue email reminders leading up to the January 2026 implementation. Feedback to date has been neutral and understanding.

The agriculture sector is important to Niagara's economy, and International Agriculture Workers (IAWs) are essential to this work. NRPH remains committed to ensuring safe, appropriate housing for IAWs.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Colin Horne
Manager, Environmental Health

Memorandum

PHD-C 7-2025

Subject: Public Health and Emergency Services Department Objectives

Date: June 10, 2025

To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

From: Dr. Azim Kasmani, Medical Officer of Health and Commissioner

Public Health and Emergency Services has developed five objectives that will guide the Department's work over the 2025 and 2026 period. These departmental objectives align with Regional Council's strategic priorities and objectives.

Appendix 1 outlines the five Department objectives and shows how they ladder up to "Growing Better Together: Council Strategic Priorities 2023-2026."

Setting these aligned objectives provides Public Health and Emergency Services direction and clarity for planning, priority setting and decision-making. From a Regional perspective, they will ensure the collective impact of the Department's work is focused, measurable, meaningful, and aligned.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Dr. Azim Kasmani, MD, MSc, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health and Commissioner

Appendices

Appendix 1 Public Health and Emergency Services 2025-2026 Objectives

Effective Region

Council Objective

Implement continuous improvement and modernized processes to ensure value-for-money in Regional services and programs

1

Use evidence to drive planning and decision-making



2

Improve reporting and communication of department successes



3

Evaluate programs/ services regularly and consistently to improve program quality and population outcomes



Council Objectives

Explore and implement opportunities to improve service delivery outcomes through shared services

Deliver fiscally responsible and sustainable core services

4

Ensure that staff are engaged in their work and understand how it contributes to council and department objectives



Council Objective

Invest and support a skilled and aligned workforce at Niagara Region

5

Apply a health equity lens to program/ service planning and delivery



Equitable Region

Council Objective

Ensure the region is inclusive, welcoming and free of discrimination