
Subject: Licensed Home Child Care

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, September 12, 2023

Recommendations

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

Key Facts

- i. This report provides an overview of licensed home child care and its important role in the provision of child care in Niagara. The licensed home childcare sector is an integral component of the childcare system, with the ability to provide care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to children up to 12 years of age.
- ii. Licensed home child care is funded through parental fees and government investments and is regulated by the Ministry of Education. The provincial regulatory framework for licensed home childcare is intended to ensure the safety of children and provide families confidence of high-quality child care.
- iii. As the licensed home child care regulatory framework is designed to protect children in child care, there are no significant regulatory changes to recommend at this time.
- iv. Changes to administrative processes and managing public misconceptions about licensed home child care can be helpful to support improving the functionality of the sector.

Financial Considerations

Licensed home child care (LHCC) is funded by parental fees and federal and provincial government investments in child care. While there are no direct or specific municipal levy investments into LHCC, the mandatory regional contribution required by Niagara Region as municipal service manager for the early years and child care sector is intended to support the LHCC sector as well.

Analysis

1. Overview of Licensed Home Child Care

LHCC is licensed under the Ministry of Education (MEDU) and must comply with the regulations set out in the *Child Care and Early Years Act (2014)*. As per the legislation, each home child care provider must register with a LHCC agency, which is licensed by MEDU.

Individuals wishing to become home child care providers are considered to be independent contractors/ business operators. Home child care providers can serve a maximum of six children and must count their own children in this allotment if they are younger than four years old. Home child care providers are able to set their own hours by offering flexible care, including full day, before and after school care, extended hours, and overnight care. Home child care providers are required to offer children a number of key care elements including, a variety of toys and equipment, two hours of outdoor play daily, meals and snacks prepared according to Canada's Food Guide etc.

Home child care providers are visited monthly by the licensing agency to monitor safety, quality of care, cleanliness, and compliance. Further, an annual inspection is completed by the Ministry of Education. Contracted home child care providers are compensated based on hours of care provided.

The LHCC sector is an integral component of the child care system, providing care for children up to 12 years of age, with the potential of offering care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to support all working families. As a model that draws on the services provided by local residents, it also allows licensed child care to be offered in remote or low-density communities. Currently, the LHCC sector is further serving as a valuable child care resource due to licensed child care centres operating below full capacity due to the lack of registered early childhood educators.

Currently, Niagara has two LHCC agencies which provide licensing and support to LHCC service providers:

- Wee Watch
 - 41 service providers; serving 197 children
- Niagara Region Licensed Home Child Care
 - 62 service providers; serving 332 children

Since March 2022, there has been consistent growth within the LHCC sector. The sector has grown by 22 new homes, serving 108 children. Appendix 1 provides a breakdown of LHCC providers by each municipality.

2. Licensed Home Child Care Regulatory Framework

The provincial regulatory framework for LHCC is intended to ensure the safety of children and provide families confidence of high-quality child care. The regulatory requirements ensure accountability by allowing agency staff and ministry staff to visit, inspect and support contracted home child care providers as needed.

Home child care providers are required to provide documentation prior to becoming contracted with a licensed agency. Below is a list of some of the required documentation:

- Current first aid and CPR certification (including infant and child CPR)
- Vulnerable sector checks for all residents in the home
- Up to date immunizations
- Updated rabies shots for pets
- Fire inspection of the home
- Home insurance, which states the maximum number of children the home child care provider is insured for.

Vulnerable sector and health requirements are similar to the legislative expectations as licensed child care centres. Additional requirements such as fire inspection, rabies vaccinations, vulnerable sector checks for residents and frequent visitors to the home, are required to ensure the safety of all children.

Quarterly, home child care providers undergo a provincially mandated home safety inspection that focuses on all the safety components of the home, including supervision and visitors, play materials, sleep settings, temperature of the home, procedures for hazardous materials, medical and anaphylactic policies, nutrition policies and emergency preparedness.

Contracted home child providers are required to follow the agencies program statement which aligns with the "*How Does Learning Happen?* Framework" that is utilized across all early years. Home child care providers must also follow provincial guidelines related safety and sleep arrangements.

Licensed home agencies support home child care providers with many of the requirements, including onboarding, training, review of documentations and ministry compliance.

3. Unlicensed Home Child Care

Unlicensed home child care providers are not inspected by the MEDU and are not required to meet most provincial standards. Unlicensed home child care providers can care for a maximum of five children under the age of 13 years, including a maximum of 3 children under the age of 2 years. Unlicensed home child care providers must allow parental access to the premises, must not operate in more than one location, and must notify parents, in writing, that they are not licensed. Unlicensed home child care providers are not registered or documented. Other than the parent, there is no third-party that is verifying the safety of care provided or the quality of the program offered.

4. Improvements for the LHCC Regulatory Framework

The LHCC regulatory framework is designed to protect children in child care. Reviewing the regulatory framework from the lens of high-quality child care and ensuring the safety and well-being of the children, there are no significant regulatory changes that staff would recommend at this time. There are, however, process changes that may support contracted home child care providers and encourage other individuals to consider operating as a LHCC provider. These include:

i. Administrative Burden

Contracted home child care providers are expected to complete a range of required documentation. Examples of such required documentations include: a daily log that documents children's arrival and departure time, accident or incidents, sleep start and end times, menu changes, outdoor play and outdoor maintenance; visual check reports; etc. LHCC providers are often unable to complete these documentations while caring for children and are required to work after hours for which they are not compensated.

While the administrative burden may be viewed as a challenge, it is considered the responsibility of operating a business. However, there may be opportunities to work with LHCC agencies and MEDU to simplify the documentation that is required.

Niagara Region's Children's Service staff meet with MEDU staff regularly and one of the regular topics on the agenda is supporting the LHCC sector. During these meetings,

municipal partners and the MEDU collectively discuss where improvements can be made. It should also be noted that the MEDU is investigating a potential new technology solution to reduce the administrative burden across the sector. Niagara Region Children's Services staff are actively participating in a provincial-municipal working group to share their experiences and feedback.

ii. Misinformation/ Public Perception

LHCC may be negatively impacted by some misinformation shared via social media. There are many private groups on social networking sites where misinformation is frequently shared, which has been seen to impact the reputation of LHCC and the child care choice of families.

Late in 2022 and into early 2023, Niagara Region Children's Services launched a marketing campaign aimed to inform families of LHCC as an alternative form of licensed child care and attract more LHCC providers. Some of the marketing tactics of the campaign included social media ads, radio ads, and mailouts to selected neighbourhoods where participation in LHCC was historically low.

While it cannot be directly correlated to the marketing campaign, Niagara Region's LHCC Agency has seen an increase of 10 net new home child care providers and 60 net new spaces since October 2022. There has also been an increase in the number of inquires for both home child care providers and families.

Additional marketing opportunities, including a province-wide marketing campaign, may be beneficial in encouraging more families and home child care providers to consider LHCC. Niagara Region's Children's Services team will continue to seek these opportunities for additional marketing.

Alternatives Reviewed

An update on Licensed home child care was requested by the Public Health and Social Services Committee.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The provision of accessible and quality early learning programs and services supports a Prosperous Region.

Prepared by:

Satinder Klair
Director, Children's Services
Community Services

Recommended by:

Adrienne Jugley, MSW, RSW, CHE
Commissioner
Community Services

Submitted by:

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared in consultation with Jacqueline Gates, Early Years and Child Care Specialist and reviewed by Laura Rasmussen, Manager Children's Operations, and Ashley Boyle, Program Supervisor, Children's Services.

Appendix 1 Licensed home child care providers per municipality

Municipality	Wee Watch Providers	Niagara Region Providers
Niagara Falls	10	10
Welland	2	10
Thorold	7	2
Fort Erie	0	2
Port Colborne	0	3
St. Catharines	22	28
Pelham	0	3
Grimsby	0	1
Lincoln	0	1
West Lincoln	0	0
Wainfleet	0	0
Niagara-on-the-Lake	0	1