
Subject: Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care Directed Growth Priority Neighbourhoods Update

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, September 10, 2024

Recommendations

1. That an update on the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Program Directed Growth priority neighbourhoods **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- In May 2023, the Ministry of Education (MEDU) confirmed Niagara Region's allocation of 4,067 new child care spaces for the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) Directed Growth Program between 2022 and 2026.
- The MEDU required Niagara Region to identify priority neighbourhoods for the CWELCC Directed Growth plan. These neighbourhoods were identified based on the best available demographic and service utilization data and staff committed to update the priority neighbourhoods as new data became available.
- The CWELCC priority neighbourhoods for directed growth were updated based on updated Statistics Canada data, updated Planning Neighbourhoods, and current child care demand, resulting in 15 priority neighbourhoods.
- The directed growth spaces for 2025 and 2026 will be considered in accordance with the updated neighbourhoods and provincial priorities of low-income families, vulnerable and diverse communities, children with special needs, Francophone families, Indigenous families and families requiring flexible care.
- The updated priority neighbourhoods will be shared with the early years and child care sector in the fall.

Financial Considerations

The CWELCC Directed Growth program is fully funded by the province with no requirements of additional levy contribution.

For 2024, Niagara Region received \$4.1 million in Direct Growth fee reduction and workforce compensation funding to support new CWELCC childcare spaces. This funding supports new CWELCC spaces in achieving reduced childcare fees and improved workforce compensation.

An additional \$9.9 million was provided in 2024 to support with the start-up costs associated with the Directed Growth spaces. This funding supports approved providers with the costs of establishing new CWELCC spaces, including purchasing of play-based materials.

Analysis

CWELCC Expansion Progress

As noted in COM 19-2023, *Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care Expansion Plan Update*, the CWELCC program aims to provide greater access to affordable and high-quality child care. In June 2023, the province released its updated Access and Inclusion Framework, which sets a foundation for targeted CWELCC child care expansion. The intention of the Framework is to support increased access to child care in priority communities for low-income families, vulnerable and diverse communities, children with special needs, Francophone and Indigenous families and families needing flexible models of care. A key requirement of the provincial expansion plan was to identify priority neighbourhoods that met the requirements of the provincial Access and Inclusion Plan.

In 2023, Niagara Region Children's Services identified 12 priority neighbourhoods in accordance with MEDU requirements using the best available data at that time. Niagara Region Children's Services has approved 2,450 CWELCC Directed Growth spaces from 2022 through 2024, representing approximately 60% of Niagara's total growth spaces until 2026.

In June of 2024, Niagara Region Children's Services paused on approving further applications for new child care spaces to ensure that the allocation of child care spaces aligns with the most current data and community needs. This realignment of priority neighbourhoods allows for a more strategic approach, leading to better targeted support for areas that have seen significant shifts in population or socioeconomic conditions.

Updated Priorities Neighbourhoods

The CWELCC Directed Growth priority neighbourhoods utilized the 2016 census data and aligned with the Public Health Priority Neighbourhoods tool that was developed around 2011. The priority neighbourhoods at the time also considered additional measures as per MEDU requirements and included: current child care demand, Niagara's Official Plan and growth areas, low-income families, and child care deserts (more than 3 children for 1 child care space available).

The updated priority neighborhoods use the additional measures and updated data from 2021 census data, 2024 Early Development Instrument (EDI) scores, data related to visual minorities, lone parent families, and families spending more than 30% of their income on shelter/housing costs. Based on these factors, the following 15 priority neighbourhoods were identified for CWELCC Directed Growth:

Municipality	Neighbourhood
Grimsby	Grimsby Beach
Lincoln	Beamsville
Niagara Falls	Stamford
	Beaverdams
	Westlane
	Drummond/Victoria
Pelham	Fonthill
Port Colborne	Humberstone/Stonebridge
St. Catharines	St. Catharines Downtown/Haig Area
	Facer/Cushman
Thorold	Thorold Proper
Welland	Woodlawn/Seaway
	South Pelham/Chippawa Park Area
	Eastdale/Cordage

The updated 2021 census data and redrawn neighbourhoods are reflective of demographic changes, evolving community needs, and better alignment with MEDU requirements. Niagara Region Children’s Services will continue to consider any possible impact of the region’s economic prosperity or employment impacts as it reviews the need for additional child care spaces. Expansion in communities not defined as priority

neighbourhoods will continue through any spaces that become available because of the closure of existing CWELCC enrolled spaces. Families in these neighbourhoods will also continue to benefit from existing CWELCC spaces in their communities.

The updated CWELCC Directed Growth priority neighbourhoods and the updated Directed Growth application will be shared with the early years and child care sector in the fall of 2024 for space expansion in 2025 and 2026.

Alternatives Reviewed

If CWELCC Directed Growth priority neighbourhoods are not considered using the latest data, child care spaces could be directed towards areas where they will not have the greatest impact on improving access and inclusion for underserved communities.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Allocating CWELCC Directed Growth spaces in accordance with priority neighbourhoods that are developed on the latest available data and information aligns with Council's strategic priority of an **Effective Region** by ensuring child care spaces are delivered in an fiscally responsible and sustainable manner (Objective 1.3) to support Niagara families and child care demand within the region.

The CWELCC Directed Growth Plan is also closely tied to Council's Strategic Priority of a **Prosperous Region** by ensuring that Niagara Region's Children's Services continues to advocate with senior governments (Objective 4.4) to ensure space allocation from the province is reflective of the child care demand in Niagara.

Other Pertinent Reports

- [COM10-2024 Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Program Update](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=6ab0ab65-97e2-45bd-9799-ab6933092264&Agenda=Merged&lang=English&Item=16&Tab=attachments)
(<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=6ab0ab65-97e2-45bd-9799-ab6933092264&Agenda=Merged&lang=English&Item=16&Tab=attachments>)
- [COM 19- 2023 Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care Expansion Plan](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=ac6d9802-6432-47fb-adbc-f94c19f649c8&Agenda=Merged&lang=English&Item=18&Tab=attachments)
(<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=ac6d9802-6432-47fb-adbc-f94c19f649c8&Agenda=Merged&lang=English&Item=18&Tab=attachments>)

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