

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

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Recommendations

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

Key Facts

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

Financial Considerations

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

Analysis

Background

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

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

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

Service System Plan

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

Alternatives Reviewed

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

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

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

Prepared by:

Satinder, Klair
Director, Children's Services
Community Services

Recommended by:

Henri Koning
Commissioner
Community Services

Submitted by:

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.

Chief Administrative Officer

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

Appendices

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