

Haldimand and Norfolk Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Directed Growth Plan

Published November 2023

Updated August 2025

Haldimand and Norfolk Children's Services

Emergency and Social Services Division



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BACKGROUND

On March 27, 2022, Ontario signed a \$13.2 billion agreement with the federal government for funding of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system. Ontario's vision under this new agreement is that families will have access to high-quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive early learning and child care across the province. To achieve this vision, the Ministry of Education (the ministry) has developed an Action Plan that identifies five (5) key pillars: Affordability, Quality, Access, Inclusion, and Data and Reporting.

Ontario's Child Care Vision



Figure 1: Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework 2023 - CWELCC, June 2023

Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework 2023 - CWELCC (June 2023), identifies the province's goals for access and inclusion under the CWELCC Agreement (**Figure 1**), which are further elaborated on below:

1. Ontario will support the creation of 86,000 new licensed spaces for CWELCC eligible children by the end of 2026, including more than 4,900 net new licensed child care spaces created since April 2019; and,
2. Ontario will focus on creating affordable child care spaces in communities with populations that need them most. This directed growth approach will create spaces in underserved areas of the province that have historically seen low rates of space availability.

Shaped by a variety of sources, including Ontario's pedagogy for the early years, Ontario's vision for access and inclusion is that "more children (of all abilities and socio-economic backgrounds) can actively and meaningfully participate in child care, and be supported in forming authentic, caring relationships with their peers and educators" (*Access and Inclusion Framework 2023 - CWELCC, June 2023*).

Haldimand and Norfolk Children's Services is designated by the province as the service manager for Haldimand County and Norfolk County. Ontario's *Access and Inclusion Framework* supports service managers with the development and implementation of service plans that focus on access as it relates to inclusion. This directed growth plan uses the province's principles of access and inclusion to outline the locations, priorities, and methods by which child care expansion will occur in Haldimand County and Norfolk County.

Under the CWELCC system, funding to support access and inclusion is targeted toward programs and activities for children under six that has an impact on families, including those that may be low-income, Indigenous, and living in underserved and vulnerable communities. For the purpose of this plan, underserved and vulnerable communities are described as low-income children, vulnerable children, children from diverse communities, children with special needs, children requiring enhanced or individual supports, Indigenous children, Black, other racialized children, Francophone children, newcomer families, and children whose caregivers are working non-standard hours. Although Haldimand and Norfolk Children's Services will continue to work with local Francophone partners, increasing access and inclusion for these communities in this region is not a provincial focus.

Principles of Access

Ontario will support the creation of 86,000 new, high quality, affordable licensed child care spaces for CWELCC eligible children by the end of 2026, including more than 4,900 net new licensed child care spaces created since April 2019. To allow families flexibility in their child care choices, these new spaces are a combination of not-for-profit and for-profit settings, community and school-based spaces offered in centres and homes. Through the CWELCC agreement, Ontario has committed to maintaining or improving the province-wide proportion of not-for-profit licensed spaces for children aged 0 to 5 years at 70% or greater by the end of 2026.

The ministry's approach to space allocations considers local plans for expansion of licensed child care spaces, in conjunction with the Principles for Access. The two (2) Principles of Access that apply to Haldimand County and Norfolk County are listed below.

1. Access Equity: The number of CWELCC spaces for children aged 0 to 5 years are allocated for the purpose of improving access across the province to bring the provincial average access rate to 37% by 2026.
2. Directed Growth to Support Underserved and Vulnerable Populations: A target number of CWELCC spaces set by the province and based on a formula that takes into consideration socio-economic indicators to support child care for underserved and vulnerable populations.

Socio-economic factors used in the ministry's space allocation model:

- *Children aged 0-5 in lone-parent families*
- *Low Income Measure (with children aged 0-5)*
- *Households spending >30% of income on shelter costs*
- *Recent immigrants, 2011-2016*
- *Women aged 25-44 not participating in labour force*

The majority of licensed spaces are allocated to meet the principle of Access to Equity, or to meet the provincial target access ratio of spaces to children. By working towards a provincial access rate of 37%, this would mean that there would be one affordable child care space available for every 2.7 children aged 0 to 5 years.¹

To ensure that directed growth supports underserved and vulnerable populations, the ministry has allocated a portion of the spaces based on five (5) socio-economic factors². These spaces are not to be interpreted to meet the needs of the underserved or vulnerable populations, but to ensure that areas with high-needs populations have capacity to provide affordable child care for those who need it most.

Principles of Inclusion

All children are entitled to the same opportunities, regardless of their unique circumstances. Through the CWELCC system, the ministry has introduced initiatives to create inclusive licensed child care environments, where children can participate, play, and learn in meaningful ways, in addition to forming authentic caring relationships. These initiatives support the inclusion of diverse, underserved, and vulnerable populations and communities.

The ministry's Principles for Inclusion take into consideration accessibility, participation and belonging, and equity in licensed child care settings, and are described as:

1. **Accessibility:** Providing a wide range of opportunities across diverse settings and context for learning, play and inquiry in both physical and teaching environments. This involves the following key components:
 - Removing/reducing physical and systematic barriers.
 - Ensuring opportunities are sufficient in terms of intensity and frequency for every individual.
 - Incorporating multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression in learning spaces and programs. Programs need to support all children at the front end.
2. **Participation and Belonging:** Using intentional and instructional intervention approaches to enable children to actively engage in all parts of the day, including learning activities and social interactions, fosters belonging which contributes to developmental and life-long well-being. Strategies, accommodations, modifications, and adaptations to spaces and programs are required to ensure full engagement. This involves the following key considerations:

¹ The access rate of 37% is based on the estimated 2025 population of children age 0-5 and the anticipated total licensed child care spaces in Ontario by the end of 2026 once all of the 86,000 new affordable licensed spaces have been created.

² Each factor was weighted evenly, and spaces were distributed in proportion to each region's population of each variable.

- Values, policies, and practices that support the right of every child and their family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society.
 - Employing engagement approaches that ensure each child and family feels that they belong, are valued, and heard.
 - Ensuring diversity in engagement approaches, spaces, and programs.
3. Equity: Removing barriers to ensure that children have equitable access to early learning opportunities. Supporting children in realizing their capacity as engaged learners that are competent, capable, curious, and rich in potential. This involves the following key considerations:
- Programs, services and supports that take account of the backgrounds and intersecting identities of children and their families.
 - Ensuring any assessment tools are unbiased and designed for use with children from diverse families and communities.
 - Providing differing levels of support for children depending on their individual needs.

The ministry has established the following initiatives to advance inclusion in the licensed child care system: Special Needs Resourcing, Child Care Fee Subsidy, *How Does Learning Happen? (HDLH): Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*, Indigenous and Francophone Child Care, and the Ontario Child Care Tax Credit.

Funding Opportunities

In addition to providing funding to support the creation of high-quality, affordable new spaces in underserved and vulnerable communities and populations, the ministry addresses barriers to access and inclusion through the following initiatives: start-up grants, pedagogical framework, Special Needs Resourcing, child care fee subsidy funding, and workforce funding.

DIRECTED GROWTH PLAN

In early 2023, Haldimand and Norfolk Children's Services submitted to the Ministry of Education (the ministry) a directed growth plan that identified local space expansion targets, priority neighbourhoods, and underserved and vulnerable populations. These targets and priorities were determined using the ministry's guidelines and available service planning data. Throughout the implementation of this directed growth plan, the service manager will continue to gather new data and information to guide the direction of this plan. Haldimand and Norfolk Children's Services will seek out opportunities for expansion, consider local dynamics, assess barriers to access and inclusion, and determine the viability of increasing access to licensed child care in priority neighbourhoods to ensure that high-quality, affordable, and inclusive child care is accessible to those that need it most.

Targets & Priorities

In line with the Principles for Access, growth targets and funding to support expansion have been allocated by the province. Originally, a total of 441 licensed child care spaces for children aged 0 to 5 years were allocated to both counties, consisting of 196 school-based spaces and 245 community-based spaces. In late 2024, the ministry performed a recalibration of space targets using updated data collected from service managers. The results of this exercise, published in March 2025, saw an additional 33 community-based spaces added to Haldimand and Norfolk's space allocation for a combined total of 474 spaces to be created by the end of 2026.

CWELCC Space Targets:
*Haldimand County and Norfolk County have been allocated a combined total of **474** licensed child care spaces for children aged 0 to 5 years old.*

The recalibration was implemented with the intention of providing more achievable targets and moving related operating funding to areas where capacity to grow the CWELCC system is demonstrably more acute across the province. Acknowledging the need for flexibility, the ministry is allowing service managers to shift space targets between settings, i.e., school and community, and age groups as long as the overall space creation targets are met.

Further, auspice targets were adjusted as part of the recalibration. Working towards the provincial target of a 70% or higher proportion of not-for-profit licensed spaces, Haldimand and Norfolk's local target was revised to 100%. As of 2025, all new directed growth spaces created will be not-for-profit for the remainder of the CWELCC agreement.

Table 1 below indicates the recalibrated space targets by year. The changes from the original allocation are noted in brackets.

| Growth Targets | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 | TOTAL |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|------------------|
| TOTAL Spaces | 98 | 69 | 100 | 139 | 68 | 474 (+33) |
| School-based | 98 | 0 | 0 | 98 | 0 | 196 |
| Community-based | 0 | 69 | 100 (+15) | 41 (-32) | 68 (+50) | 278 (+33) |

Table 1: Child care space growth targets, 2022 to 2026, updated March 2025

The ministry's allocation of new child care spaces to support directed growth takes into consideration Haldimand and Norfolk Children's Services local plans for inclusion. To support the inclusion of diverse, underserved, and vulnerable populations, the service manager has identified six (6) priority neighbourhoods for space creation, which include: Delhi, Waterford, Simcoe, Caledonia, Dunnville, and the rural areas of both Haldimand County and Norfolk County.

To ensure access to high-quality and affordable child care, new spaces for children aged 0 to 5 years in Haldimand County and Norfolk County will need to focus on increasing licensed capacity for diverse, underserved and vulnerable populations in these priority neighbourhoods. This directed growth plan will focus on creating new spaces that address the needs of low-income families, children with disabilities and/or needing enhanced or individual supports, Indigenous families, and other racialized children.

New space creation will focus on addressing the needs of:

- *Low-income families*
- *Children with disabilities*
- *Children needing enhanced or individual supports*
- *Indigenous families*
- *Other racialized children*

Child Care Landscape

In the early stages of the CWELCC system implementation, Haldimand County and Norfolk County had twenty (20) licensed child care providers who operated child care programs at fifty (50) different licensed child care sites. Of these, fourteen (14) providers and forty-two (42) different licensed sites were enrolled in the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care system; this included nine (9) licensed home child care locations. Licensed child care providers were located in Simcoe (4), Caledonia (3), Waterford (1), and Hagersville (1). Centre-based licensed child care site locations are illustrated in **Figure 2**.

Of all licensed spaces that were enrolled in CWELCC in 2023, 90.8% (n=1243) were operated by not-for-profit licensed child care providers. The number and percentage of CWELCC eligible spaces by auspice is shown in **Table 2**.

| Auspice | Total # of 0-5 Child Care Spaces | # of 0-5 Child Care Spaces Enrolled in CWELCC | % of 0-5 Child Care Spaces Enrolled in CWELCC |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Not-for-Profit | 1342 | 1243 | 92.6 |
| <i>Centre-based Sites</i> | 1288 | 1189 | 92.3 |
| <i>LHCC Sites</i> | 54 | 54 | 100.0 |
| Profit | 317 | 126 | 39.7 |
| TOTALS | 1659 | 1369 | 82.5 |

Table 2: Number of 0-5 child care spaces by auspice (Child Care Licensing System, October 2023)

Approximately 1 in every 5 children (18.8%) aged 0 to 5 years had access to a child care space that has reduced fees through CWELCC funding. **Table 3** illustrates the number of child care spaces and the access rate for each licensed age group in Haldimand and Norfolk.

90.8% of all licensed child care spaces enrolled in CWELCC are operated by not-for-profit child care providers.

Approximately 1 in every 5 children aged 0 to 5 years has access to a CWELCC enrolled child care space.

| Age Category | Population | Total # of Sites Offering Program | Total # of Child Care Spaces | Total Access Rate (%) | # of Sites Offering Program & Enrolled in CWELCC | # of Child Care Spaces Enrolled in CWELCC | Access Rate to CWELCC Space (%) |
|------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|--|---|---------------------------------|
| Infant (0-18 mths) | 1655 | 11 | 103 | 6.2 | 9 | 87 | 5.3 |
| Toddler (18 mths-30 mths) | 1165 | 17 | 243 | 20.9 | 13 | 195 | 16.7 |
| Preschool (30 mths-44 mths) | 1464 | 20 | 501 | 34.2 | 14 | 358 | 24.5 |
| Kindergarten (44 mths-5 yrs) | 2986 | 29 | 728 | 26.1 | 26 | 660 | 23.8 |
| Family Age Grouping | -- | 2 | 30 | -- | 1 | 15 | -- |
| All Centre-based Sites | -- | 41 | 1605 | -- | 33 | 1315 | -- |
| LHCC Sites | -- | 9 | 54 | -- | 9 | 54 | -- |
| TOTALS | 7270 | 50 | 1659 | 22.8 | 42 | 1369 | 18.8 |

Table 3: Access to 0-5 child care spaces by age category (Census of the Population, 2021; Child Care Licensing System, October 2023)

The province has allocated 474 child care spaces for Haldimand County and Norfolk County for the purpose of meeting the provincial target of 37% by 2026. Accounting for a 2% growth rate in the 0 to 5 child population and assuming that no additional spaces are added to Haldimand and Norfolk's licensed child care system, the accessibility rate will be approximately 24.9% (**Table 4**). This would mean that approximately 1 in every 4 children will have access to a child care space that is reduced by CWELCC funding by 2026.

| | Projected Population (2% growth rate) | Projected # of Child Care Spaces Enrolled in CWELCC | Projected Access Rate to CWELCC Space (%) |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| TOTAL | 7415 | 1843 | 24.9 |

Table 4: Projected access to 0-5 child care spaces in 2026

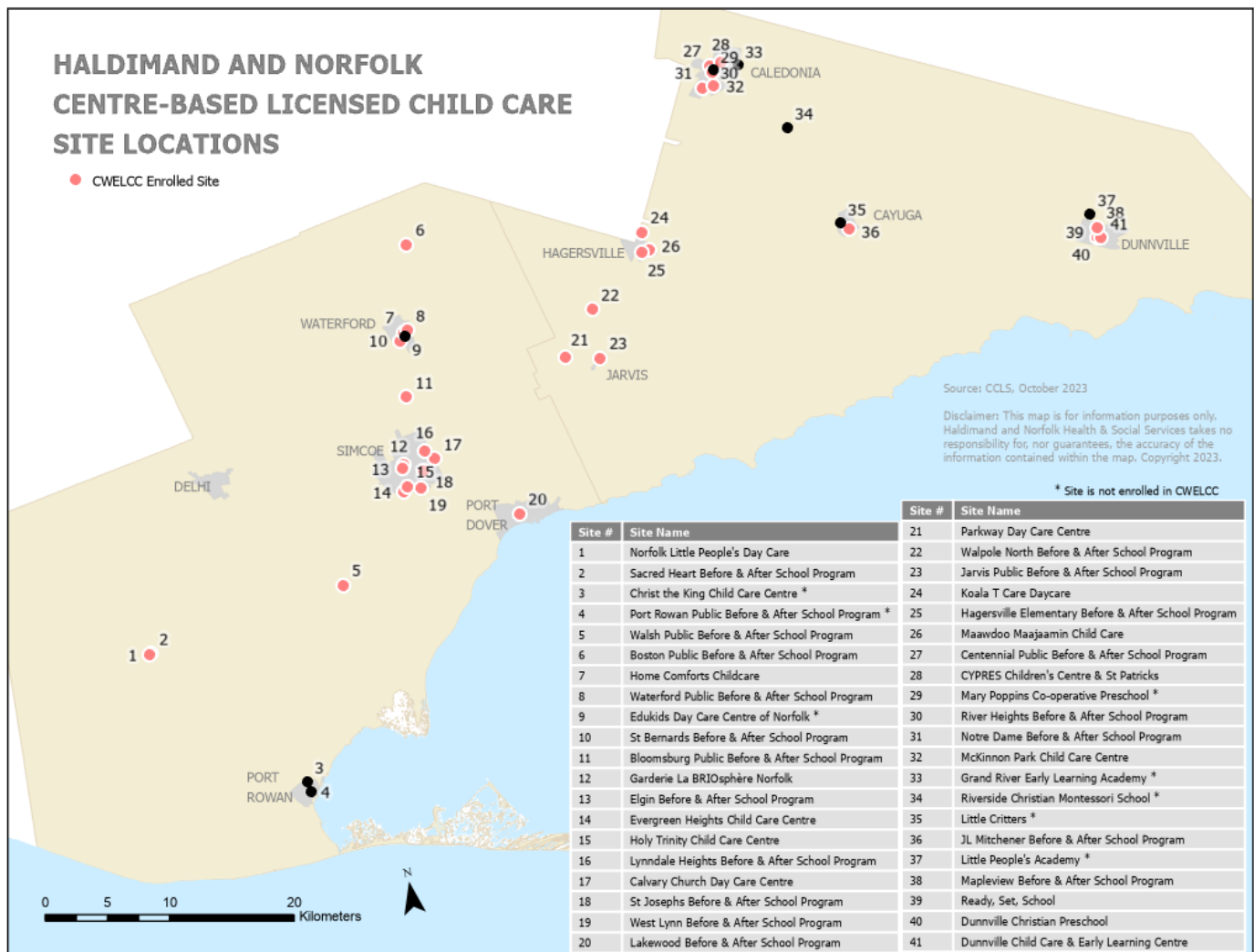


Figure 2: Distribution of licensed centre-based child care sites by CWELCC enrolment (Child Care Licensing System, October 2023)

Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting

Current targets and priorities identified in this directed growth plan were determined using service planning data available to the service manager. **Table 5** identifies the data sources and indicators used to support the current plan.

| Data Source | Priority Neighbourhood Indicator |
|---|--|
| Early Development Instrument | Vulnerable children |
| Census of the Population, Statistics Canada | Child population, Low-income families, Indigenous families, Families speaking a non-official language, French speaking families, One parent families |
| Licensing Capacity Report | Access rate to child care |
| Haldimand and Norfolk Child Care Registry & Wait List | Need for child care spaces |

Table 5: Data sources and indicators used to determine growth targets and priority neighbourhoods

As new data becomes available, the service manager will assess and update the targets and priorities for directed growth in Haldimand and Norfolk. This will be an ongoing process throughout the duration of the CWELCC agreement. Priority neighbourhoods and space allocation targets will be continually assessed to consider opportunities to address:

- Geographic areas that are facing a lack of access to affordable child care options.
- Needs of Black, racialized, Indigenous populations.
- Needs of vulnerable groups, including newcomers, low-income families and children with special needs.
- Labour market participation, including through flexible models of child care to support parents who are shift workers.
- Additional interventions needed to ensure that new spaces are made available to underserved and vulnerable populations.
- Barriers to access and inclusion.
- Unavailable and incomplete data.

Furthermore, the service manager will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the directed growth plan to inform future initiatives related to child care access and inclusion by reporting on the following:

- Total number of spaces created in priority neighbourhoods and/or for priority populations as identified by this plan and broken down by age groups of child, auspice and type of setting.
- Total number of net new spaces created for licensees who enrolled in CWELCC in 2023 broken down by age groups of child, auspice and type of setting.
- Total number of net new spaces supported with start-up grants during the fiscal year, broken down by age groups of child, auspice and type of setting.
- Percentage of for-profit and not-for-profit spaces enrolled in CWELCC.

In addition to conducting environmental scans, the service manager will regularly engage with community partners and stakeholders to inform the direction of this plan. This will include exploring opportunities for workforce recruitment and retention strategies.

Addressing Barriers to Access and Inclusion

Although, the creation of licensed spaces will be prioritized within the neighbourhoods identified in this plan, barriers may exist (e.g. lack of real estate, lack of operators or all operators are at a maximum capacity). In such a case, Haldimand and Norfolk Children's Services will explore opportunities to create spaces to increase access for underserved, vulnerable, and diverse populations in areas that fall outside of these priority neighbourhoods.

Flexible child care supports parental labour market participation, and therefore, flexible spaces for those working non-traditional hours and in non-traditional locations will be considered when allocating funding for CWELCC eligible spaces.

To support the needs of diverse populations, the service manager will continue to identify barriers to access and inclusion by gathering data and new information that focuses on:

- Enhanced service accessibility for children and families, particularly isolated, newcomer, and low-income families.
- Active engagement with those populations who are Indigenous, Black, racialized, newcomer, persons with disabilities, or from low-income households to dismantle barriers in the planning, management and delivery of responsive programs and services.
- Support for local decision making to enrich programs, facilitate smooth transitions and enhance integration between child care and early years services, schools and specialized community services.
- Regular collection of feedback from parents, caregivers, and children to inform local programs and services.

CWELCC Applications and Start-up Grants

Existing and potential licensed child care providers expressing interest in expanding the licensed child care system in Haldimand and Norfolk will be considered based on the province's principles of access and inclusion, as well as provincial and local criteria. Net new affordable child care spaces will be supported through available funding opportunities.

Funding to support access and inclusion is targeted towards programs and activities for children under six that has an impact on families, including those that may be low-income, Indigenous, and living in underserved and vulnerable communities.

Start-up grants are available to support the creation of new spaces in locations for underserved and vulnerable populations and in areas that may not be accommodated through natural market growth. These grants will assist licensed child care centre operators to purchase equipment or renovate spaces, and licensed home child care agencies to purchase equipment for providers in support of licensing requirements. Haldimand and Norfolk Children's Services will refer to the most recent version of the *Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Guidelines* and any updates, amendments, addendums, and memos thereto for guidance on the administration and implementation of start-up grants locally.

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