

# Child Care

Enhancing supports for human services

## Policy opportunity and solutions


The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program is improving affordability for Peel families. The Province can ensure the unique challenges and local needs in Peel are met by:

- Supporting and funding a strategy to address the Early Childhood Educator (ECE) workforce crisis.
- Providing fair, predictable, flexible funding to Service System Managers to support the administration of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Expansion Plan program.
- Providing adequate capital funding to support child care expansion to improve access to affordable license child care.

## Background

The CWELCC is a transformative all levels of government initiative, which, when fully implemented, will provide much-needed affordability for families in Peel, where parents pay some of the highest child care fees in the country. Funding received from the Ministry of Education toward the expansion of the CWELCC program supports fee reduction, workforce compensation, administration and start-up funding as new child care spaces are opened.

The program is also expected to act as a catalyst for increased labour force participation, which in turn, supports shared goals in Peel and communities across Ontario to drive economic expansion. Each dollar invested in early years and child care returns \$3 to \$10 in terms of savings and benefits that are both immediate and long-lasting.



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The progress of CWELCC implementation has been encouraging. However, the goal of achieving \$10/day child care by 2025 is at risk unless adequate conditions, such as a suitable workforce of qualified ECEs, sufficient funding that takes local needs for child care into consideration are in place, which will require ongoing support from the Province.

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## Workforce strategy

In Peel's fast-growing communities, demand for affordable child care continues to outstrip supply. To address this challenge, the Province should develop and implement a comprehensive, long-term recruitment and retention strategy for ECEs. Without sufficient qualified staff, there will be waitlists and a lack of access to licensed child care, despite the millions in funding that have been invested.

In the absence of a province-wide approach, Peel Region launched an innovative program aimed at increasing the number of available staff resources by offering fully and partially funded ECE diploma spaces to qualified applicants. This is part of a comprehensive plan to address the workforce shortage. However, as this was funded through a one-time provincial grant, long-term support from the Province is critical for the continuation of the program beyond 2023 to ensure there is a sufficient supply of qualified ECEs.

Expansion of the post-secondary Child Development Practitioner Apprenticeship Program and financial subsidies should also be considered by the Province to support additional avenues to increase the number of ECEs.

## Fair and flexible funding

While the final details of the 2024 CWELCC funding formula have not yet been shared, the Province should continue working with Service System Managers on the new funding formula to ensure it considers local cost differences (including child care fees, lease costs, wages) and key demographic statistics (e.g., Low-Income Measure) to ensure fair access to affordable child care across Ontario.



Further, to address the unique needs of Peel communities, the Province should reinstate flexibility for local Service System Managers to use provincial funding to support families living in poverty. Families earning less than \$50,000 a year still cannot afford \$10/day child care, and families with children ages 6 to 12, who do not qualify for the CWELCC program, will need ongoing financial support to afford licensed child care. This is not a request for additional funding but simply a return to the flexibility Service System Managers had previously. Also, as the system grows, so will the number of children with special needs accessing child care and funding is needed to ensure these children have fair and equitable access to affordable child care.

### Capital funding

Provincial support received through the Start-up Grant and CWELCC funding from the Province is greatly appreciated. This funding will ensure communities identified in Peel as having greater need for quality, affordable child care will continue to be prioritized, while supporting first-time start up costs and minor renovations to create more net new spaces.

However, not-for-profit providers do not have access to private financing to support expansion and are governed by boards, which require assurances that organizational viability can be maintained under the new funding approach before exploring expansion opportunities. Provision of capital funding will support non-profit expansion in Peel to maintain the existing 60/40 not-for-profit and for-profit space ratio, while increasing access to affordable child care for families.

Peel Region is committed to continued collaboration with the provincial government toward our shared goal of building and supporting an Early Years and Child Care system that is responsive to current and future needs of children and families in Peel.

