

Towards Universally Accessible Child Care: Ontario's Five-Year Action Plan

"Thank you for being a part of our important work to create a renewed *plan for the future of child care in Ontario*. This renewed framework is a bold step forward. It contains a ground-breaking set of initiatives that will help us continue to transform the early years and child care system in the province and make high-quality experiences possible for even more children and families. I am excited to hear from you as we continue this conversation. Together, we can give our children the best possible start in life and build a better future for Ontario."

– Indira Naidoo-Harris, Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care

Introduction to the Framework

Ontario is committed to building a system with enough affordable child care spaces for all families who want them. The Renewed Early Years & Child Care Policy Framework lays out a clear plan to take bold steps towards that goal. Within the next five years, we expect to double the current capacity of licensed child care for children aged 0-4 in the province. Our intention is that expansion will focus on the public and not-for-profit sectors. This carefully planned approach steadily increases the number of children accessing high-quality child care while delivering transformative change.

Some highlights of our renewed framework include:

- **Affordability Strategy**
- **Workforce Strategy**
- **Special Needs Strategy**
- **Innovation Fund**
- **A One-stop Online Hub**
- **Commitments to Enhance Inclusion and Quality**

This innovative framework is our blue print to strengthen Ontario's child care system in partnership with those who use and shape it.

Seven Key Areas of Action

Ontario's Renewed Early Years & Child Care Policy Framework includes seven areas of action that overlap and reinforce one another.

1. Action Area: Increasing access to early years and child care programs and services

- ✓ **Immediate steps to build capacity:** As part of the province's 2017 Budget, we announced \$200 million to support access to licensed child care for 24,000 children up to age four. This important step immediately builds additional capacity in the child care system.

✓ **Mixed Growth Expansion Plan**

By making significant investments in operating and capital funding, we will provide 100,000 more children aged 0-4 with access to high-quality licensed child care over the next five years. Our Expansion Plan prioritizes Ontario's not-for-profit child care sector. Municipalities will focus on developing this important sector and will demonstrate the rationale when unable to do so.

We are also focusing on building up capacity in various settings, including:

- **School-based child care:** We will expand and enhance child care in schools.
- **Community-based child care:** We will work with our municipal partners to create new spaces in the community to provide parents with additional options to access high-quality child care.
- **Licensed home-based child care:** We will strengthen Ontario's licensed home child care sector through base funding, beginning in 2018, and additional support.
- **Indigenous child care:** We will also increase access to culturally relevant child and family programs and licensed child care in Indigenous communities, building on our *Journey Together* commitments.

✓ **Innovation Fund**

We will create an Innovation Fund that supports growth in the not-for-profit sector and helps fund different child care models. For example, this important new resource could be used to provide care options to families in under-served communities or to parents who work irregular hours. It could also help to fund pilot projects, lab schools that model pedagogical leadership, and/or create an organization to encourage growth and development of the not-for-profit sector. Beginning in 2018, this applications-based program will enable experts and providers to address pressing issues in our child care system.

2. Action Area: Ensuring a more affordable early years and child care system

- ✓ **Immediate relief for parents:** We are making important investments in Ontario's child care system to provide immediate support to parents. As part of the province's 2017 Budget, we are investing \$200 million to create new spaces and make child care more affordable.
- ✓ **Affordability Strategy:** We are immediately launching an Affordability Strategy, led by an external expert, to identify how the government can make Ontario's child care system fairer and more affordable. The objective of the strategy is to identify and implement a new funding model to bring down costs for families.

3. Action Area: Establishing an early years workforce strategy

- ✓ **Workforce Strategy:** We know that we need to make big changes to better support our world-class Early Childhood Educators (ECE). That is why we are launching a Workforce Strategy that will be guided by external experts. It will provide the government with clear policy direction on issues that require attention, including:
 - Compensation
 - Hiring and retention
 - Professional development
 - Education and training

The external experts will report back with clear, actionable and transformative changes to better support our world-class ECEs.

- ✓ **Two provincially funded professional learning events per year:** We know the importance of continuous professional learning for ECEs. Beginning this year, the province will fund two professional learning and leadership events per year for ECEs and early years staff.
- ✓ **ECE Qualifications Upgrade Program:** We will also continue to help professionals upgrade their qualifications through the ECE Qualifications Upgrade Program.

- ✓ **Wage Enhancement Grant:** We are maintaining the wage enhancement grant, while exploring methods for improving the program.

4. Action Area: Determining a provincial definition of quality in the early years

- ✓ **Definition of Quality:** Our objective is to embed quality into every aspect of Ontario's early years and child care system. We will align our approach to quality with *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* and ensure that it includes a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion. It will also tie into the work we are doing to support the workforce, accessibility and affordability. Our objective is to work collaboratively to define, create and measure meaningful environments for children, families and early childhood professionals.

5. Action Area: Developing an approach to promoting inclusion in early years and childcare settings

- ✓ **Special Needs Strategy:** The government will develop a renewed approach to address inclusion in early years and child care settings in 2018. Our objective is to ensure that diversity, cultural sensitivity and supports for children with special needs are built into everything we do in the early years and child care system. This approach will align with other initiatives supporting healthy child development in the early years, including Ontario's *Special Needs Strategy*, *Moving on Mental Health*, the *Ontario Indigenous Children Strategy* and others. In the immediate term, the Ministry of Education will continue to collaborate with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services on Ontario's Special Needs Strategy and the new Ontario Autism Program.

6. Creating an outcomes and measurement Strategy

- ✓ **Outcomes and Measurement Strategy:** We are establishing a five-year Outcomes and Measurement Strategy to help track progress, measure quality, and identify and respond to trends in Ontario's child care system. The strategy will include:
 - An outcomes framework with targets and timelines
 - A data management approach
 - A research plan

We will also develop and release an annual data report, beginning September 2017.

7. Increasing public awareness of Ontario's early years and child care system

- ✓ **Improving Public Awareness:** We will increase public awareness of the range of early years and child care programs and services that are available to families.
- ✓ **One-stop Online Hub:** We are creating a one-stop online hub for Ontario's early years system, giving parents a central location to access information, services and tools.
- ✓ **New Visual Identity:** We are creating a new visual identity for Ontario's child and family programs by January 2018, as part of the integration of four existing child and family programs.

Ontario's Renewed Early Years & Child Care Policy Framework will help make licensed child care more affordable and more accessible for families, and is part of Ontario's plan to create jobs, grow the economy and help people in their everyday lives. The framework's seven-point plan will transform its early years and child care system to ensure all children are given the best possible start in life, and have the opportunity for future success.

edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/eyccframework.html