

Setting Directions

The directions in the 2010–2014 Toronto Child Care Service Plan articulate an agenda for continuous improvement in program delivery and management. They ensure collaborative work among the various divisions in the City, other orders of government and community partners and focus on the following:

1. Strategic leadership
2. Advancing quality
3. Improving access and equity to services for children
4. Developing an integrated system of services for children and families
5. Transition to early learning

1. Strategic leadership

Children’s Services will continue to provide leadership in planning and managing a comprehensive quality child care system that is delivered at the local level and sensitive to local service pressures and demands. As the demand for child care continues to grow, it has become increasingly important for all government and community partners to work together to create a culture of shared responsibility. This sets the stage for greater strategic investment that focuses on securing the appropriate level of funding required to meet the needs of children and families.

Goal:

- 1.1 To deliver the highest quality of service that balances system accountability and sustainability with local needs and accessibility

Action statements

- strengthen intergovernmental, school board and community partnerships
- work with government partners to secure stable and sustainable base funding to meet system demands and community needs
- encourage all orders of government to dedicate the funding required to maintain/expand current service levels
- strengthen and enhance contract requirements for all service providers receiving funding from the City of Toronto

Goal:

- 1.2 To advance delivery of a fully integrated and seamless system of services for children aged 0 to 12 years and families, by developing and implementing a framework that:
 - focuses on successful outcomes for children and families
 - recognizes resource requirements
 - generates outcomes in locally appropriate ways

Action statements

- continue to build support for implementation of the full vision of the report *With Our Best Future in Mind—Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, a report to the Premier by the Special Advisor on Early Learning, Charles E. Pascal
 - with community and government partners, advance service integration in at-risk communities through pilot projects and other initiatives
 - resolve governance issues in the family support services sector by clearly positioning the City as the lead government in advancing these programs
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Goal:

1.3 To enhance the role of Children’s Services and the child care system in addressing broader City and intergovernmental policy objectives and priorities

Action statement

- continue to work across City divisions and governments to ensure that the needs of families are considered and to advance priorities in poverty reduction, employment creation, recreation and middle years program planning and delivery
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Goal:

1.4 To be recognized among all stakeholders and partners as a leader in service system management

Action statements

- proactively participate in regional, provincial and national initiatives intended to advance services for children and families
 - demonstrate a commitment to innovation in the design and delivery of services, including exploring new strategic partnerships
 - reaffirm and advance the lead role of the municipality in systems planning, expanding application of the Operating Criteria and awareness of the Report Card
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Goal:

1.5 To foster and lead research initiatives that measure, evaluate and improve the quality of child care and children’s services in Toronto

Action statement

- work with academic and education partners to advance research and performance measures that assess the quality of child care programs and other children’s services
- provide access to the Children’s Services database for research purposes

Goal:

1.6 To encourage federal support of family and children's services

Action statements

- communicate the importance of sustainable services for children and families
- encourage reintroduction of a National Child Care Strategy
- communicate the financial requirements of families in accessing sustainable quality child care

2. Advancing quality

Every child benefits from a quality early learning and care experience. Families should expect that licensed child care will deliver a high quality program that allows children opportunities for play, socialization, exploration and developmentally appropriate learning in a safe and nurturing environment.

The Toronto Operating Criteria is a validated tool used to evaluate child care quality and it promotes an integrated approach to planning and management that ensures services to children/families are accessible, inclusive and promote equity in an early learning and care environment. In addition, the Operating Criteria draws on the following key elements that are essential for a high quality child care program:

- program content and development
- health and safety standards of the physical facility
- training, experience and stability of caregivers
- group size (ratio of children to caregivers)
- family involvement in the program
- sound management practices

Children's Services is committed to ensuring that all child care centres and home child care agencies with a service contract for fee subsidy maintain a high level of quality of care by assessing them for standards outlined in the Toronto Operating Criteria and posting the results on the City's website.

Goal:

2.1 To utilize the Operating Criteria to articulate the City's expectations of quality and evaluate child care programs

Action statements

- complete the validation of the Operating Criteria as an accurate measure of child care quality
- advocate for the use of the Operating Criteria in all child care programs in Toronto beginning with those that receive funding
- participate in the development of a regulatory quality framework for all child care programs and child and family centres

Goal:

2.2 To promote “Early Learning for Every Child Today” (ELECT) as a curriculum framework

Action statements

- establish an advisory group to provide leadership during the implementation of the ELECT curriculum framework
 - oversee the development and implementation of a leadership course for child care operators and home child care agencies on ELECT
 - ensure congruence between ELECT and the Toronto Operating Criteria guidelines
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Goal:

2.3 To develop a Middle Childhood Strategy within the framework that defines and sets direction of a system of high quality out-of-school-time programs for children aged six to 12

Action statements

- develop best practices/standards guide for out of school programming
 - research and develop a quality measure that is applicable to the full range of programs for middle childhood children
 - complete a needs and environmental scan to determine family needs, service distribution on gaps
 - align the Middle Childhood Strategy with the full vision of *With Our Best Future in Mind—Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, a report to the Premier by the Special Advisor on Early Learning, Charles E. Pascal
 - support the development of an expanded model of quality recreation and care to meet the needs of school age children
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Goal:

2.4 To develop universal design guidelines for child care spaces that are developmentally appropriate, safe and accessible physical environments

Action statements

- develop design guidelines for use by child care operators to build new and retrofit existing child care space
- develop costing guidelines for transforming space to support new or changed age groupings

Goal:

- 2.5 To continue to develop and invest in a comprehensive system of support for children with special needs

Action statements

- direct future resources to promote, expand and sustain inclusive environments by achieving service growth that reflects the population of children with special needs
- reconfigure and adjust services for children with special needs as required during the introduction of the Early Learning program
- ensure that capital and operating funding for new programs is contingent on programs being inclusive of children with special needs
- develop a plan to increase the number of special needs resource staff supporting children with special needs in all areas of the city

3. Improving access and equity to services for children

In 1999, Toronto Council adopted the principles of age and geographic equity to ensure equitable access to the limited supply of fee subsidies. These principles will continue to guide the allocation of fee subsidies through the 2010–2014 Toronto Child Care Service Plan. To sustain the system within a changing landscape, fee subsidies will continue to be allocated using the principles of age and geographic equity with a greater emphasis on age equity.

Age Equity: The limited number of subsidy spaces is currently allocated by age group with: 30 per cent to infants and toddlers (0 to 30 months), 45 per cent to preschool (30 months to kindergarten), and 25 per cent to school age (grade 1 and up). These allocations may need to be revisited given Early Learning and fiscal pressures.

Geographic Equity: Each city ward is allocated a share of the limited subsidy spaces based on the proportion of children living in the ward below the low-income cut-off (LICO). However, allocation of subsidy is on a first-come, first-served basis to families who qualify under the income test and is not just restricted to families whose incomes are below LICO.

Goal:

- 3.1 To improve geographic equity at the individual ward level so that each ward is within 10 per cent of equity

Action statements

- develop geographic ward plans so that each ward is within 10 per cent of its equity target by 2014

Goal:

3.2 To continue to support the principles of age equity and ensure equitable access to child care for infants and toddlers

Action statements

- continue to support and manage age and geographic principles through centralized management of the wait list for fee subsidy
 - review home child care rate structure to improve fair and equitable access
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Goal:

3.3 To improve access to service and communication of information for families through the use of technology

Action statements

- continue to enhance the Children’s Services website and online services to support families and the community in accessing information about child care
 - expand opportunities for families to directly interface and access services through online services
 - ensure that the division is well-positioned to support changing business requirements through the implementation of the next phase of the Children’s Services Information System (CSIS 3)
 - align with the City’s e-services strategy and 311
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Goal:

3.4 To expand the Child Care Capital Strategy to include a 10 Year Capital Plan that will identify capital investment needed to improve access to child care across the city. The plan will address:

- new facility requirements
- retrofit requirements
- long-term systems needs
- financial commitment required to implement plan
- age and geographic equity targets

Action statements

- develop a 10-year Capital Plan to improve access to child care as part of the Child Care Capital Strategy

Goal:

3.5 To lead in the infrastructure planning and development of services for children in the City of Toronto through municipally led initiatives and partnership opportunities

Action statements

- support growth in the child care system through public and not-for-profit delivery
- identify capital requirements for child care across the City
- allocate capital dollars according to service plan directives
- implement a Capital Strategy that promotes collaborative approaches to enhance investments
- develop criteria to be used in determining when a new child care program should be delivered by the public or not-for-profit sector
- identify opportunities for capital investment and expansion to support equity principles through revitalization initiatives and partnerships with other City divisions, agencies, boards and commissions, school boards and other community partners.
- target capital funding in accordance with the Capital Strategy to support age equity principles and improve access for infants and toddlers

Goal:

3.6 To ensure that a capital program for building new child care sites meets provincial standards for accessibility

Action statements

- ensure that the guidelines for capital development address the need to remove barriers to physical accessibility for children and families
- develop principles for capital development that support legislative requirements for a safe and healthy workplace

4. Developing an integrated system of services for children and families

Children's Services continues to demonstrate leadership by championing strategies to enhance linkages between existing planning bodies, networks and service planning initiatives. No one division, service or strategy can alone address the needs of children and families in Toronto. Focusing on innovation and partnerships between governments and service providers will create an environment to support the development of a comprehensive system of services for children and families at the neighbourhood level. The City and various community partners have been working together for many years. The Neighbourhood Action Teams and Partnerships and the Best Start Network are examples of Children's Services' commitment to building on collaborative integrated approaches.

Goal:

- 4.1 To promote collaborative practices and partnerships to support the alignment of our service planning activities with other service planning initiatives to move towards an integrated system of services

Action statements

- encourage and advance partnerships with school boards, Public Health, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, and Toronto Community Housing to support integrated planning and collaboration for services
- continue to support collaboration of City-managed services through the Children's Services Integrated Management Committee
- partner with school boards to develop strategies to support the ongoing needs of families for extended care for the full year for children aged four to 12 years
- continue to highlight services to families and children at a neighbourhood level through Neighbourhood Action Teams and Neighbourhood Action Partnerships
- develop opportunities built on research and findings from the First Duty model
- identify opportunities and resources needed for Municipal Child Care Services to continue to take the lead in providing integrated services
- develop principles to guide and support the development of child and family centres including the selection of demonstration sites to be early leaders

Goal:

4.2 To align the Middle Childhood Strategy with Early Learning

Action statements

- develop an implementation plan within the context of Early Learning
- secure funding for After-School Recreation Care programs to ensure stability of programs beyond 2011 for children six to 12 years
- align the Middle Childhood Strategy with the service plan to ensure greater collaboration and coordination for local service planning and delivery
- develop the Middle Childhood Strategy as outlined in the Middle Childhood Strategy Framework passed by Toronto City Council August 2009

5. Transition to Early Learning

Children's Services is working with the Province and boards of education to implement Early Learning and transition to an integrated early learning system. The effectiveness of the transition is contingent upon sufficient resources and tools to support new funding models, address service levels, ensure high quality of services and establish an integrated service system that is seamless and accessible to families and their children aged 0 to 12 years.

Goal:

5.1 To support full implementation of the Early Learning Program articulated in *With Our Best Future in Mind—Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, a report to the Premier by the Special Advisor on Early Learning, Charles E. Pascal

Action statements

- through an intergovernmental strategy, request that the Province confirm its vision for an early learning system and reaffirm the role of Children's Services as service system manager
- seek opportunities where there is existing municipal interest to operationalize the recommendations in the report
- with municipal partners, develop a multi-year strategy for seamless service access and integration of municipal and community services
- provide models that demonstrate how the full vision in the Pascal report can be applied throughout the service system

Goal:

5.2 To develop strategies to maintain service sustainability and system stability during and following the transition to early learning

Action statements

- provide a transition plan to the Province that requests sufficient resources, tools, operational and capital funding to effectively implement early learning
 - apply the service planning principles to determine where to strategically invest resources
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Goal:

5.3 To engage in transitional planning processes that are transparent to families and the child care service system

Action statements

- work with community groups and networks as a forum to discuss planning for an early learning system
- analyze the impact of gradual implementation of early learning on the child care system and develop mechanisms to mitigate any unintended consequences resulting from implementation