

Executive Summary

The 2010-2014 Toronto Child Care Service Plan is the City's fourth service plan since 1993. This plan was developed anticipating significant change and transition for the child care system in Toronto in the coming years. In fact, completion of this plan was delayed while waiting for the release 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 and the subsequent announcement on early learning from the Province of Ontario.

Though this is a time of transition and transformation for the child care system, this child care service plan has been developed to “stand the test of time” and lead Toronto Children's Services for the next five years. It is a tool for guiding the funding and the management of Toronto's child care system. The plan proposes ways in which service can be delivered in a rational, accountable and equitable manner that maximizes the use of the resources available to the system.

This report is organized into three sections:

1. Toronto's Child Care System
2. Pressures on the Child Care System
3. Setting Directions

Within these sections is information on the services and programs available in the current child care system, the pressures and challenges impacting the system and the five year goals for the division with the corresponding actions to achieve the identified goals.

This service plan has been developed within the framework of the City's Children's Strategy. It adheres to the following eight principles as approved by Toronto City Council at its session on December 1, 2, 3, 2008 with a subsequent amendment in May 2010 adding the words “including children with special needs” to principle e:

- a. Service access based on age and geographic equity
- b. Publicly planned and accountable service outcomes
- c. Service options consistent with informed parental choice
- d. First-come, first-served admission to subsidized care
- e. Recognition that child care services provide developmentally appropriate beneficial care for children, including those with special needs, as well as important family and community support
- f. Recognition that services for children and families should be planned and delivered in an integrated way that promotes seamless service transitions
- g. Agreement that expansion of the child care system take place through public and/or not-for-profit delivery
- h. Commitment to advancing quality and directing resources to the improvement of quality for children's services in Toronto.

In addition to moving forward, this plan builds on the progress achieved during 2005-2009. Some of the notable achievements are:

- Advancements in the use, availability and validation of the City's Operating Criteria including the launch of Criteria results on the City of Toronto website
- Expanded and integrated early learning and care through Best Start expansion of child care in schools. This has resulted in an additional 3,400 licensed child care spaces for children aged 0 to six, developed in accordance with the service plan principles and directions
- Launch of the After-School Recreation Care (ARC) program in 2006 in partnership with Parks, Forestry and Recreation which has expanded to 27 sites and has received a Public Sector Quality Award
- Improved level of compliance with first-come first-served and equity of access policies through the development of a centralized application process for fee subsidy
- Introduction of a centralized intake process to support children with special needs and their families. Developed with community partners, CITY KIDS provides a single point of access, coordinated intake and service delivery. The number of children being supported each year has grown from 3,200 children in 2005 to 4,390 in 2009.
- Established partnership agreements for several capital initiatives aligned with City priorities, including Native Child and Family Services and Crescent Town
- Increased access to online services through the implementation of the CSIS on the Web and the completion of the attendance module

Highlights of some the broad issues and pressures facing the child care system

- **Loss of provincial Best Start funding and federal Early Learning and Child Care Funding**
This has significantly impacted the ability of the City to increase the number of licensed child care spaces.
- **Depletion of the Child Care Expansion Reserve Fund**
The City is currently using funds from the Child Care Expansion Reserve to maintain existing service levels.
- **Early learning implementation**
The child care system is in a time of transition and transformation while the phased-in implementation of early learning occurs.
- **Increased demand for child care subsidy**
Changes to eligibility rules under income testing resulted in growing wait lists for child care subsidy.
- **Increased demand for special needs resources**
- **Governance of the family support sector**
City of Toronto believes and advocates that the authority for planning and funding of Ontario Early Years Centres should be transferred to the municipality as a part of its child care system management role.

- **Improving access and equity**
Communities with inadequate licensed child care services continue to face insufficient access to both licensed care and fee subsidy.

Directions

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

Goals from the 2010-2014 Child Care Service Plan

1. Strategic Leadership–Goals

- 1.1 To deliver the highest quality of service that balances system accountability and sustainability with local needs and accessibility
- 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
- 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
- 1.4 To be recognized among all stakeholders and partners as a leader in service system management
- 1.5 To foster and lead research initiatives with the educational community intended to measure, evaluate and improve the quality of child care and children’s services in Toronto
- 1.6 To encourage federal support of family and children’s services

2. Advancing Quality–Goals

- 2.1 To utilize the Operating Criteria to evaluate and articulate the City’s expectations of quality
- 2.2 To promote Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) as a curriculum framework
- 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
- 2.4 To establish Children’s Services as a lead in the infrastructure planning and development of services for children in the City of Toronto through municipally led initiatives and partnership opportunities

- 2.5 To develop universal design guidelines for child care spaces that are developmentally appropriate, safe and accessible physical environments
- 2.6 To continue to develop and invest in a comprehensive system of support for children with special needs

3. Improving Access and Equity to services for children—Goals

- 3.1 To improve geographic equity at the individual ward level so that each ward is within 10 per cent of equity
- 3.2 To continue to support the principles of age equity and ensure equitable access to child care for infants and toddlers
- 3.4 To improve access to service and communication of information for families through the use of technology
- 3.5 To ensure that a capital program for building new child care sites meets provincial standards for accessibility

4. Developing an Integrated System of Services—Goals

- 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
- 4.2 To align the Middle Childhood Strategy with early learning

5. Transition to Early Learning—Goals

- 5.1 To support full implementation of the early learning system 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
- 5.2 To develop strategies to maintain service sustainability and system stability during and following the transition to early learning
- 5.3 To engage in transitional planning processes that are transparent to families and the child care service system
- 5.4 To provide leadership in the implementation of an integrated early learning system for children 0 to 12 years of age and their families

Current service information including equity levels, enrolment and program locations is available on our website at www.toronto.ca/children or contact 416-392-8297.