

DRAFT

Children's Services



service plan

2015-2019



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message from the general manager



On behalf of Toronto Children's Services, I am proud to share the new Service Plan for 2015-2019. The Service Plan is an important tool that guides the planning and management of services for children and families in Toronto. With input from many key stakeholders, this Service Plan tells the story of the child and family system in Toronto – how it has changed, where it is now, and where we plan to take it – and lays out concrete actions that advance the well-being of children and families.

In Toronto, we have a rich history of service planning that dates back to our first Council-approved plan in 1992. This practice has benefitted the child and family system in many ways. Each new service plan gives us the opportunity to connect with our partners, review our achievements, respond to change, and set ambitious new goals for the sector. The new *Child Care and Early Years Act* now legislates that all service system managers develop a service plan.

Over the last five years, we accomplished what we had committed to in the last Service Plan, while responding to significant changes in the sector. The child and family system has undergone unprecedented change in terms of the way services are governed, delivered, and monitored. While this is positive, we know it has been challenging for families and service providers to adapt. We have all learned many lessons from this period of change, and will continue to support service providers as our system continues to modernize.

To accompany this Service Plan, Children's Services will develop an annual work plan with specific deliverables, targets, and timelines that move us towards our five-year objectives. These plans will be made available to the public each year.

This Service Plan was developed through broad engagement and consultation with many diverse stakeholders and community partners. I would like to thank the many individuals, families, service providers, community agencies, and City divisions, agencies, boards, and commissions who contributed their time and input. Your valuable ideas and insights helped to create a relevant and dynamic Service Plan that will keep us connected and accountable to the community for the next five years.

Elaine Baxter-Trahair
General Manager

executive summary

The Children's Services Service Plan is a vital document that guides the division in the planning and delivery of services for children and families in Toronto. The division develops a new Service Plan every five years. Each new plan provides the opportunity to assess our accomplishments and challenges over the last five years, take stock of the landscape we're working within, and set ambitious new directions for the next five years. The Service Plan sets a vision for the child and family service system, including early learning and child care, and moves us to action to bring that vision to life.

This Service Plan was built on collaboration. Children's Services worked closely with stakeholders – including families, service providers, and other community partners – to develop a plan that is responsive to their needs and perspectives. Over 3,000 individuals contributed over the course of the service planning process. As a result, this Service Plan is informed by and designed to reflect stakeholder priorities.

The Service Plan has four parts. Parts A, B, and C provide background information and analysis that set the stage for our new strategic directions and actions, which appear in Part D.

Section A: A Toronto for All Children & Families delves into Children's Services' role in building a city that works for all of Toronto's children and families. Investing in services for children and their families contributes to improved health, education, employment, social equality, and poverty reduction outcomes. Children's Services' vision for the service system focuses on meeting the needs of children and families, and of the communities, service providers, and system that support

them. Children's Services has three roles it can leverage to help achieve this vision: service system manager, service provider, and strategic leader.

Section B: The Changing Landscape is an environmental scan of the many influences that are impacting the child and family system in Toronto. The sector has undergone significant change over the last five years, and it is still in flux. These changes are happening at a community level, municipal level, provincial level, and within the broader social context. They present new approaches to support child and family well-being, and provide a new framework for local planning and integrated service delivery. As a champion for children and families, Children's Services must respond to and implement these changes in a way that maintains the stability of the service system, responds to local needs, and reflects Toronto's unique character and diversity.

Section C: The Service Sector provides a snapshot of existing programs and services, with a focus on those programs and services that Children's Services plans, funds, and manages. Service areas include: early learning and care; child care fee subsidies; Aboriginal services; French-language services; special needs services; family support; and quality assurance. Within each of these areas, there are specific planning considerations, including current trends, changes, and challenges. These considerations are directly linked to the Service Plan actions in Part D. Further, we acknowledge that the current service system as it relates to early learning and child care would need to grow significantly through careful planning and long-term investment in order to meet demand in Toronto.

Section D: Strategic Directions & Actions for the Next Five Years sets the agenda for the next five years. It maps out concrete and deliverable actions that reflect the stakeholder priorities, changing landscape, and planning considerations we have described in Parts A, B, and C of the Plan. These actions are organized under five new strategic directions, which move the system towards our vision of an accessible, inclusive, seamless, and resilient system. The new strategic directions are:

Direction 1: Access to high quality child care

Access to child care means that it is available, affordable, and of high quality. Actions under this direction describe the ways in which Children’s Services will work with our partners and leverage opportunities to increase the number of child care spaces and fee subsidies in Toronto. Actions also include the way we plan to advance the quality of child care across the system.

Direction 2: Inclusive support for all families

Families are vulnerable when they face significant barriers to accessing services, or when existing services do not meet their needs. Factors that contribute to vulnerability may include: poverty; structural inequalities; discrimination; limited social support; service affordability; and geographic location. Actions under this direction include targeted strategies to make services more accessible and responsive to the unique needs of Toronto’s diverse families. System-level actions also describe the ways in which Children’s Services will help to alleviate poverty and build a city that is more inclusive and equitable for all families.

Direction 3: Engagement, partnership and communication

The child and family system is founded on strong community partnerships. Communicating with and engaging our partners in the planning process helps Children’s Services to stay attuned and respond to the diverse needs of children, families, and service providers. Actions under this direction focus on strengthening relationships with school boards and other community partners. Actions also outline initiatives to improve customer service and communication, emphasizing how information will be shared with and gathered from stakeholders.

Direction 4: Systems change

The child and family system is undergoing significant change. Children’s Services will advance the modernization of the child and family system by implementing Provincial legislation and City Council direction in a way that works for Toronto. Actions under this direction include the new child care funding model which will improve the way Children’s Services provides funding and other supports to service providers. Other actions focus on consolidating and integrating the planning of services, including middle childhood programs, child and family centres, and other early years programs.

Direction 5: Leadership

Children’s Services will champion the needs of children and families in Toronto. Actions under this direction outline the work we will do with all orders of government to grow and strengthen the child and family system, and improve the well-being of children and families. Actions also describe Children’s Services’ work to advance the sector through innovative research and policy initiatives, support for the RECE workforce, and the promotion of the Assessment for Quality Improvement to other jurisdictions.

stakeholder-driven service planning

This Service Plan is driven by community priorities.

The child and family system is made up of a diverse group of stakeholders – the children and families who use services, the organizations that provide those services, and the decision makers and community partners who plan them. We know that to build a cohesive and effective system, we need to work together.

Children's Services undertook a series of dynamic initiatives to engage stakeholders in the Service Planning process. From the outset, we ensured that their priorities would shape every aspect of the Service Plan. We targeted stakeholders who represented the diversity of families and partners in the service system, and designed engagement opportunities for each unique group. In some cases, this meant partnering with a local organization (i.e. settlement services, community centres, Aboriginal agencies, etc.). Engagement methods included: focus groups; online surveys; telephone surveys; interviews; arts-based activities; games; and others. Over 3,000 individuals participated, including:

- Children
- Families
- Aboriginal families & service providers
- Newcomer families
- LGBTQ-led families & families of trans or gender independent children
- Advocacy & women's organizations
- Academics & local experts
- The Toronto Child and Family Network
- Child care service providers
- French-language service providers
- Family Support practitioners
- Toronto Children's Services staff
- City Divisions, agencies, boards, & commissions
- School boards

Through candid conversation, we gained a deeper understanding of different stakeholders' unique experiences and perspectives. At the same time, we affirmed our shared goals and priorities for how to advance the well-being of children and families in Toronto. We heard about what's working within the existing system, as well as the barriers, challenges, and vulnerabilities faced by different stakeholders.

Ultimately, these conversations produced a collective vision for an inclusive, collaborative, accessible, and resilient child and family system. Children's Services combined this powerful community vision with robust research and data analysis to develop a comprehensive Service Plan that will carry us forward for the next five years.

To read the full report on our stakeholder engagement process, visit: toronto.ca/children/serviceplan.





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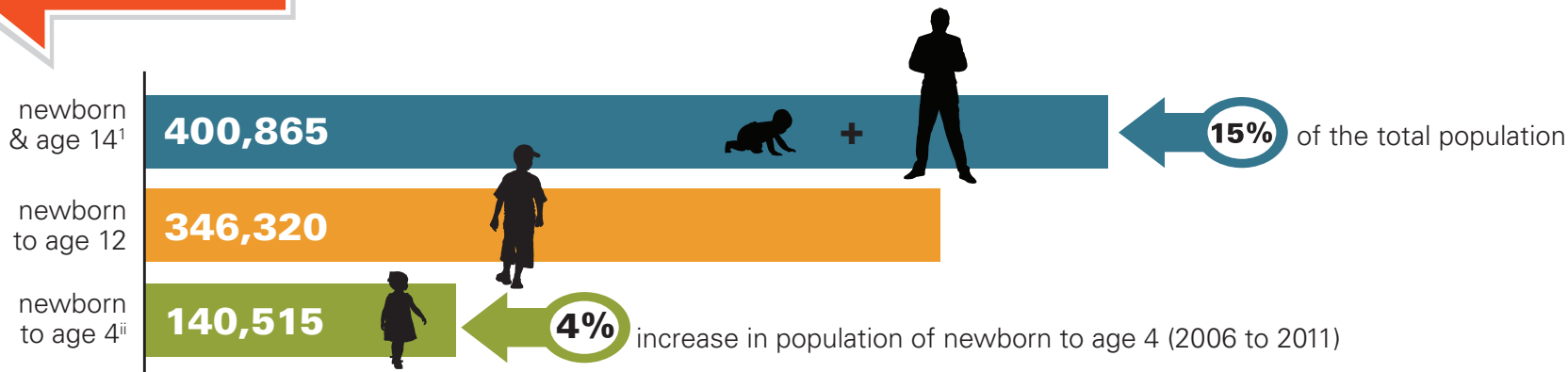
A Toronto for all Children and Families

Investing in children and families is critical to building a vibrant city. This section describes the child and family system, and Children's Services' role in making Toronto a city that works for all children and their families.

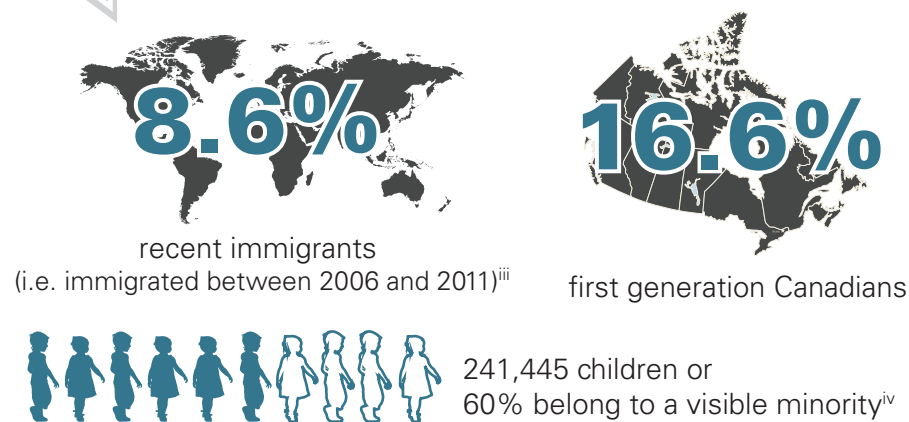
toronto's children and families

Toronto's children and families are diverse. Services planned and delivered to them must capture their different experiences and needs.

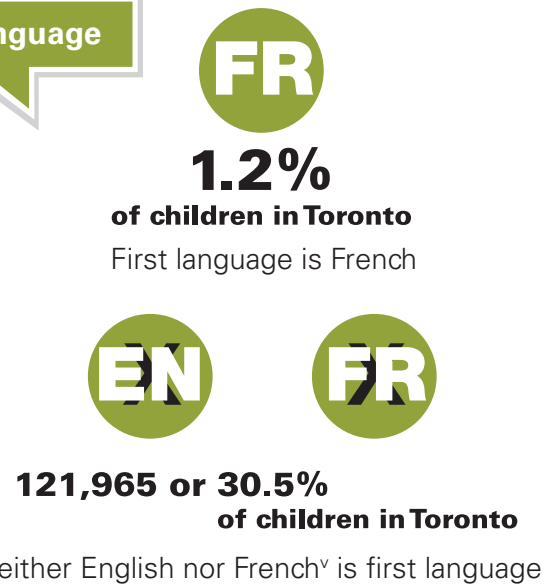
Children In Toronto



Children Newborn To 14



Language



¹ While Children's Services serves children from newborn to age 12, Census Canada reports data for newborn to 14. We use this data where necessary to make comparisons with other jurisdictions, and where the assumption can be reasonably made that the data is similar for newborn to age 12.

Family - Households



25%

of Toronto's children live below the low income measure²



22%

of children in Toronto live in lone-parent households
55% of them live below the low income measure^{vii}

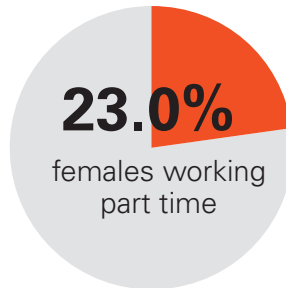
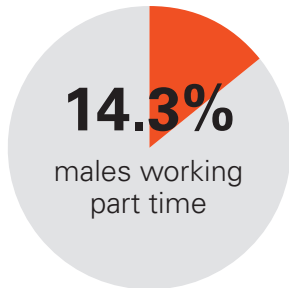
Employment



Canadian unemployment rate



Toronto unemployment rate



Family - Median Income

Ontario: **\$101,715**

vs

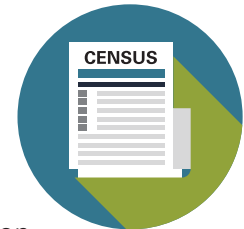
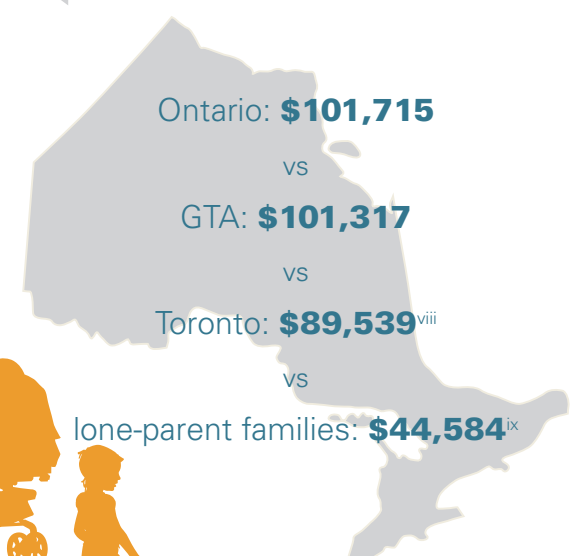
GTA: **\$101,317**

vs

Toronto: **\$89,539**^{viii}

vs

lone-parent families: **\$44,584**^{ix}



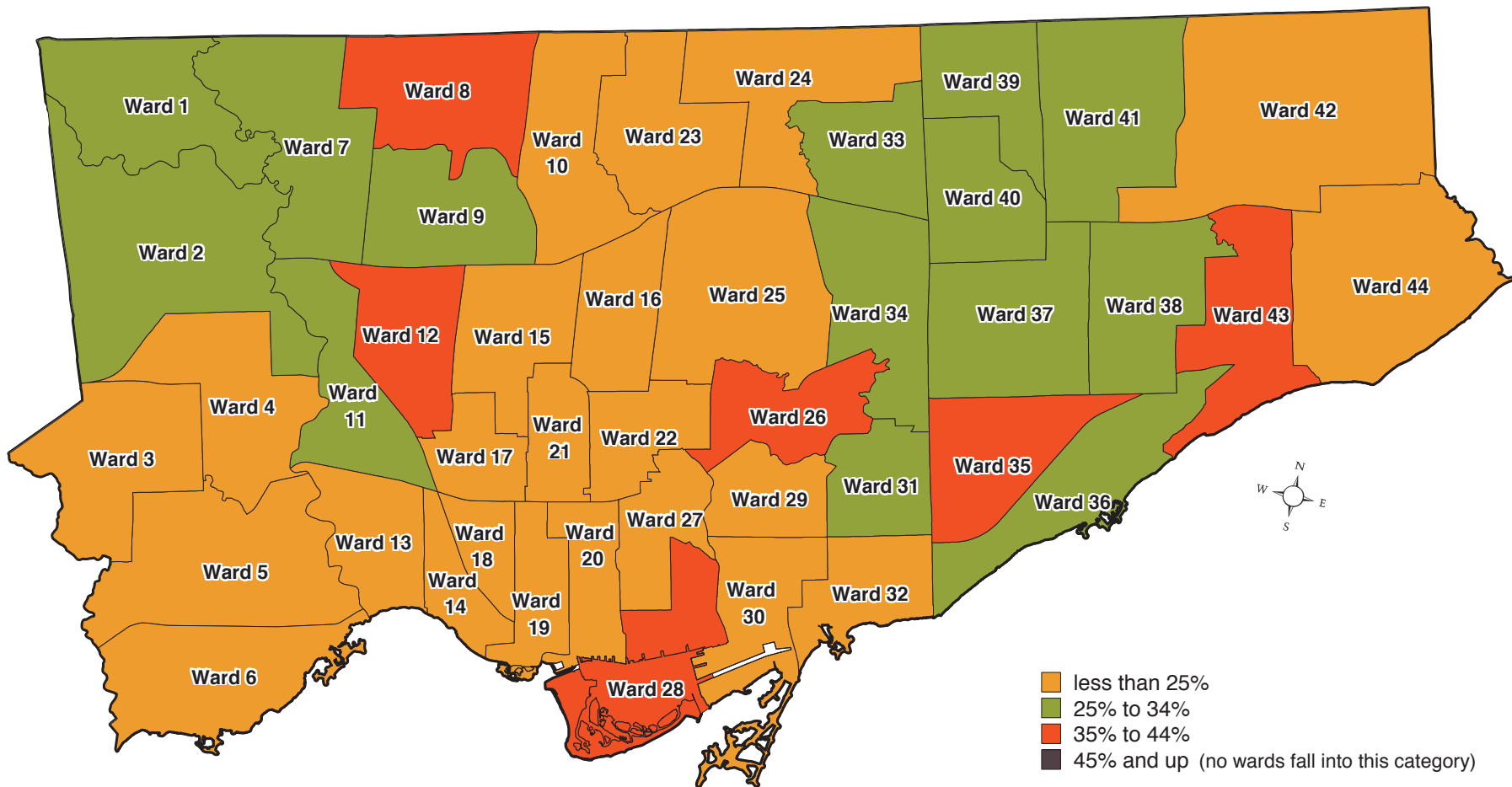
Census data under represents Aboriginal population

it is estimated that there are between **35,000** and **70,000** Aboriginal people in Toronto. (Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Metis, Cree, Mi'kmaq, Inuit and more.^{vi})

² The low income measure (LIM) after tax is a fixed percentage (50%) of median household income, adjusted to account for household needs.

toronto's children and families

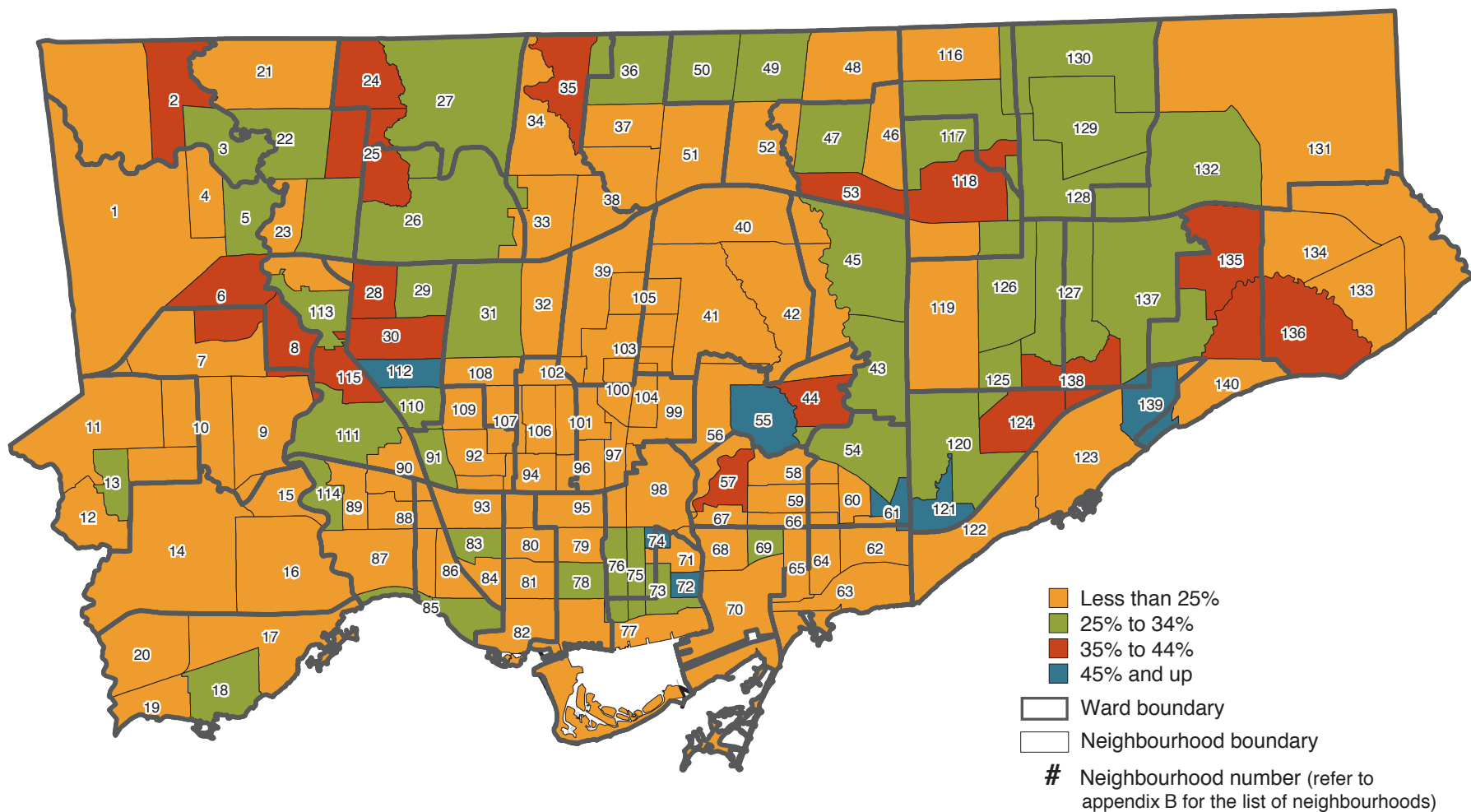
Proportion of low-income children in each ward



On average, 25% of Toronto's children 12 and under are living in low-income families. Low-income is based on the Statistics Canada low income measure (after-tax).

Source: 2011 National Household Survey

Proportion of low-income children in each neighbourhood



benefits of investing in children and families

Supporting children and families is critical to effective city building. Evidence shows that investing in services for children and families helps to achieve many social, developmental, and economic goals. As a champion for children, Children's Services connects the unique needs of families to broader city-building and system-building objectives.

Benefits to children:

An effective child and family system means that children have positive childhood experiences now, and develop into healthy youth and adults in the future. High-quality programs engage children in meaningful learning, and support their cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development.^{xiii} Programs that are accessible, equitable, and inclusive help to combat inequality from the earliest years of life, and build resiliency as children transition into youths.

Benefits to families:

Families need support to raise children. Local and meaningful programs help families build social support networks, provide them with tools and resources on child and family well-being, and help connect them to other services they might need.^{xiv} Accessible child care makes it possible for parents and caregivers to work or to focus on education or training. For newcomers, child care is often the first social institution families access, and an important gateway to securing employment and accessing other services.^{xvi}

Economic benefits:

An effective child and family system is vital to economic growth and sustainability. Affordable child care is central to the recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce. Further, the child care sector itself is proven to stimulate the local economy through job creation. Overall, child care and other child and family services demonstrate high returns on public investment, by reducing long-term dependence on social assistance and by improving health and education outcomes.^{xvii}

Social benefits:

When we advance the well-being of children and families, we provide them with tools and opportunities to fully participate in social and public life. We reduce systemic inequities by supporting families who face more complex challenges, and promoting the inclusion of diverse communities in Toronto. Child care is widely known to be a key pillar in poverty reduction,^{xviii} and is internationally recognized as a human right for women and children. It contributes to gender equality by increasing women's participation in the workforce^{xix} and in public life.



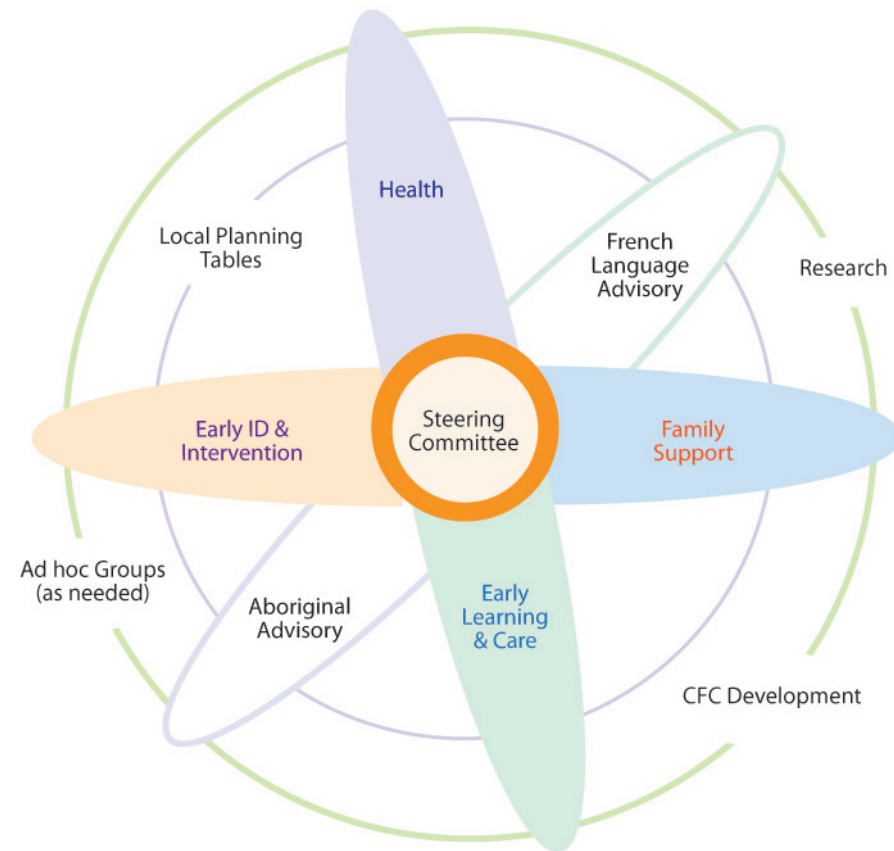
Children and families are an integral part of a healthy, vibrant, and equitable Toronto. This Service Plan continues the journey towards a cohesive system of services that are accessible, affordable, inclusive, seamless, and resilient. We strive to build a city in which:

- **All children** have access to a continuum of services and programs that support their individual needs;
- **Families** know where to find meaningful and affordable supports and services, and have a say in how these services are planned, regardless of their social, economic or cultural background;
- **Communities** are invested in promoting the well-being of their children and families and are connected to the networks and expertise they need to do so;
- **Service providers** are equipped with the tools they need to provide high-quality services, including innovative learning opportunities and meaningful partnership;
- **The system** is nimble, responsive, integrated, and accountable.

the child and family service system

The building of a child and family system is a complex undertaking. Children and families in Toronto access a combination of programs and services, delivered by many organizations. An effective child and family system is more than individual programs and services located in a defined geographic area. It is a coordinated and comprehensive network of services and supports that meet the overall health and developmental needs of children and their families. Developing this system requires explicit effort in bringing together key partners from government, school boards, and community organizations.

In 2012, Children's Services came together with our partners to establish the Toronto Child and Family Network³ as the mechanism to build a child and family system that would most effectively benefit Toronto's children and families. The network, representing over 200 organizations, consists of six substantive committees brought together through the leadership of the Steering Committee – Early Learning & Care, Early Identification & Intervention, Family Support, Health, Aboriginal Advisory, and French Language Advisory. Each of these committees includes representation from a range of different services and supports for children and their families. Within each committee, there is work to be done to integrate and build partnerships across these different services. At the same time, the committees also work collaboratively to promote positive outcomes for children and families. This diagram depicts the interconnected parts that comprise the child and family system.



³ See Appendix A for a full description of the Toronto Child and Family Network

As a champion for Toronto's children and families, Children's Services has three roles:

Service System Manager

Provincial legislation, City Council, and local stakeholders have endorsed Children's Services' role as the "service system manager," designated to manage the planning and delivery of child care and early years programs in Toronto. We work with school boards, other human services, and community partners, to organize a coordinated system of services that provide families with access to the services and supports that they need. Within the system, we specifically manage, plan, and fund the following: child care; fee subsidies; special needs resources; family resource programs; and summer camp programs. We work with our partners to promote and improve quality in programs through assessment, training, and research. We engage in community capacity building, administer local policies, and facilitate change to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and their families.

Service Provider

Children's Services supports families with the cost of child care by administering the child care fee subsidy program to assist Toronto families with the cost of child care. We also directly operate both centre- and home-based child care through Toronto Early Learning & Child Care Services (TELCCS). In addition, Children's Services is one of 18 agencies delivering special needs support to licensed child care providers. We work with other City divisions to coordinate services and improve the family experience. Publicly-delivered services are vital because they fill gaps in the service system, reach families who face complex challenges, and demonstrate high standards of quality.

Strategic Leader

Children's Services works with other City divisions and community partners to build a city that works for all children and families. We advance the well-being of children and families by improving positive outcomes in their development, education, health, financial security, culture, and rights. We foster the development of dynamic and inclusive communities where children and families thrive. We pursue sound research, evidence-based practices, and policy development to ensure that decisions are made based on the best information available. We engage the public and provide them with important information on child and family well-being. Finally, we ensure that decision makers are aware of issues and matters that impact children and families.

Children's Services mission

Toronto Children's Services promotes access to high quality early learning, child care and supports for families through a well planned and managed system.

Children's Services vision

All families in Toronto benefit from a range of services that promote healthy child development and family well-being.

guiding principles

Children's Services is guided by eight principles⁴ to build a system that is:

- a. Centred on children and families, so that they can make informed choices about services
- b. Planned and delivered in an integrated way, so that as children develop, they experience seamless transitions across a continuum of services
- c. High quality, through constantly advancing organizational and pedagogical best practices
- d. Inclusive of children with special needs, as well as vulnerable and marginalized communities
- e. Equitably delivered across the city and available to children of all ages, based on the practices of age and geographic equity
- f. Fair, so that fee subsidies for child care are provided on a first-come, first-served basis
- g. Accountable, through public planning and measured outcomes
- h. Focused on expansion through public and non-profit service delivery



⁴ principles are updated and consistent with previous principles approved by Toronto City Council on Dec 1, 2, and 3, 2008, and amended in May 2010.