

Early Years and Child Care Annual Report 2020^[1]

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Excerpts from Introduction:

We know the integral role that the early years and child care system plays in supporting families and giving every child the best possible start in life. That is why the provincial government is committed to building a high quality, inclusive, and affordable early years and child care system.

To enable a better understanding of the early years and child care system, this report provides an annual snapshot and year-over-year trends of Ontario's early years and child care sector. In addition, the report supports the provincial government's commitment under the Canada-Ontario Early Learning and Child Care Agreement to publish its progress.

Most of the data presented in this report was collected between March 2019 and March 2020. In early 2020, COVID-19 arrived in Canada, affecting the lives of all Ontarians. It has created significant health and economic hardship for families. It has also had a major economic impact on the child care sector.

While the majority of the data in this report is current up to March 31, 2020, the numbers presented reflect the period immediately prior to the emergency closure of child care centres in the province that resulted from the initial outbreak of COVID-19. Due to concerns from the licensed child care sector about the impact of the outbreak on child care services and the temporary emergency closure, the Ministry of Education did not conduct the annual survey of licensed child care centres and home child care agencies in 2020. Consequently, some sections of the report present data from 2019, as that is the most recent data available.

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, Ontario's early years and child care system continued to grow. In the year ending March 31, 2020:

The number of licensed child care centres increased by almost 1% to 5,565 centres, of which more than 3,000 centres were located in publicly funded schools.

The number of licensed child care spaces grew by 16,206 spaces to 462,802 spaces, representing an increase of 4%. All age groups have seen an increase in spaces: a 4% increase for infants, toddlers, Kindergarten, and school age children; a 3% increase for preschool children; and an increase from 418 to 692 spaces for the "family age group".¹

A total of 131 home child care agencies were in operation, with 8,296 approved homes affiliated with these agencies.

More than 2,000 individuals were approved to receive grants to support them in obtaining an early childhood education diploma.

In response to the initial wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the provincial government took swift action to support families and the child care system during this unprecedented and challenging time by:

- ordering the temporary closure of all child care centres and indoor recreational facilities, including EarlyON Child and Family Centres, to help stop the spread of COVID-19
- continuing to fund child care providers and EarlyON Child and Family Centres to help them remain financially sustainable
- establishing emergency child care to support health care and other frontline workers free of charge during the closure period by opening 160 emergency child care centres and 44 homes, serving an average of approximately 3,000 children
- providing virtual support services and other supports to families during the closure period through the EarlyON centres
- prohibiting child care providers from charging child care fees to parents when care was not being provided during the closure, up to August 31, 2020
- helping parents pay for the extra costs associated with school and child care closures during the COVID-19 outbreak with the Support for Families program, in which parents received a one-time payment of \$200 per child up to 12 years of age, and \$250 for those with special needs up to 21 years of age
- supporting child care centres in reopening once strict health and safety measures had been met, based on guidance documents developed in partnership with provincial health and labour ministries as well as federal, municipal, and child care sector partners
- providing medical masks and face shields to early years and child care programs to support a healthy and safe reopening
- supporting the child care sector financially as it transitions to reopening and serving families.

As of September 30, 2020, 5,158 licensed child care centres and 131 licensed home child care agencies have reopened following the emergency closures resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak. This represents 93% of the 5,565 child care centres and 131 home child care agencies that were licensed as of March 31, 2020.

In 2019-20, the Ministry of Education also continued meeting with stakeholders to understand the strengths and opportunities in the legislative framework laid out in the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (CCEYA). The CCEYA came into effect on August 31, 2015. It was designed to strengthen compliance, health, and safety in child care settings across the province. As laid out in the CCEYA, the Ministry of Education was required to conduct a review of the legislation within five years of its coming into effect.

The review included a consultation with parents and with early years and child care stakeholders. The ministry held 20 stakeholder sessions and received 45 submissions. We also launched two public surveys (one for parents and one for sector partners) that received more than 15,000 responses. The information received through this consultation will support the review of the CCEYA and help us improve the system to better meet the needs of families and child care providers.

Early years and child care programming provides critical support for children's learning and development, and for enabling parents to return to work. A stable and accessible child care system will be crucial for Ontario's recovery following the COVID-19 outbreak.

In 2020-21, the provincial government will continue to support families and the early years and child care system by:

- investing more than \$2 billion in early years and child care funding, including approximately \$375 million for the Ontario Child Care Tax Credit
- engaging with our sector partners on how to ensure the health and safety of families and the viability of our critical early years and child care programs, as we continue to plan for the period following the COVID-19 outbreak
- providing child care and EarlyON programs with funding through the Safe Restart Agreement with the federal government
- supporting families in need of fee subsidies and providing funding to municipalities for this purpose
- creating up to 30,000 child care spaces in schools over five years – including up to 10,000 spaces in new schools
- allocating \$208 million to municipalities to support wage enhancements for eligible child care professionals
- reducing red tape and administrative burden for the early years and child care sector.

While the child care landscape has shifted since March 2020 and the data may not accurately reflect the real impact that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have on the provision of services, this report provides important information about overall trends in the licensed child care system.

The ministry is supporting the reopening of child care by putting the health and safety of children and families first and ensuring the sustainability of this vital sector. We remain steadfast in building a flexible, high quality system that is accessible, affordable, and inclusive.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: data ^[4]

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