



Ontario Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan Resource

Ministry of Education

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The province recognizes the critical role Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) play in soliciting and maintaining in-depth knowledge about their community's needs, planning and managing the system, identifying and addressing service gaps, and supporting service coordination.

The *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* requires service system managers to establish a child care and early years programs and service system plan (service system plan) for their service area that addresses matters of provincial interest under the Act.

Provincial Interest

Under the Act, it is a matter of provincial interest to have a system of child care and early years programs and services that,

- (a) is focused on Ontario's children and families;
- (b) promotes the health, safety and well-being of children;
- (c) provides high quality experiences and positive outcomes for children with a provincial framework to guide pedagogy;
- (d) includes knowledgeable, self-reflective and qualified professionals and staff, including members of the College of Early Childhood Educators;
- (e) responds to communities' needs by,
 - i. providing services both for families who receive financial assistance for child care and for families who do not receive such financial assistance,
 - ii. providing a range of service options to support parents who are part of the workforce, such as options that address varied working hours and arrangements, and
 - iii. providing centre-based and home-based options for families in relation to the receipt of licensed child care;
- (f) respects equity, inclusiveness and diversity in communities and the particular qualities of,
 - iv. Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities,
 - v. children with disabilities;
 - vi. Francophone communities, and
 - vii. urban, rural, remote and northern communities;
- (g) provides for strong and sustainable partnerships among the Province, service system managers and others in the community;
- (h) is co-ordinated with other community and human services;
- (i) is flexible and able to adapt to local circumstances;
- (j) supports the social and economic well-being of Ontarians;
- (k) ensures appropriate accountability for public funding;
- (l) supports the transition from child care and early years programs and services to school;
- (m) approaches pedagogy in child care and early years programs and services in a manner that supports the transition referred to in clause (l);
- (n) addresses any other aspect prescribed by the regulations.

Provincial interest as listed above sets out system level goals and allows service system managers to develop their local plans and strategic directions in a way that takes these goals into account. The province recognizes that in addition to these interests, CMSMs and DSSABs have municipal interests in the early years system, which are set locally and pursued within the provincial legislative and regulatory context.

Building on the provincial interest under the Act, the Ontario Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan Resource is intended to provide helpful direction and information to service system managers as they develop and implement the service system plan, in partnership with relevant community partners and families. This resource defines expectations for service system planning in order to ensure that plans assess community need, are reflective of the engagement of all relevant community partners, establish strategic priorities and outcomes, and outline steps for implementation.

Consistent service system plans across the province would provide the province with an opportunity to analyze the impacts of programs and services, identify progress and service gaps, and foster evidence-based decision making that is transparent and supports public confidence.

Key Implementation Dates

Service system plans must be updated at least every five years.

June 30, 2019: All CMSMs and DSSABs are required to have an approved Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan available to the public and the Ministry. New or revised service system plans must be approved by the council of the municipality, or by the members of a district social services administration board and sent to the Ministry by June 30, 2019.

Roles and Responsibilities

Strong partnerships and collaboration between the province, service system managers, school boards, child care and early years providers, Francophone communities, Indigenous partners and other early years partners are essential to the successful development and implementation of the child care and early years service system plan.

Service System Managers

CMSMs and DSSABs are the designated service system managers responsible for planning and managing licensed child care services and early years programs at the local level. These programs and services are managed through a local service planning and management process that reflects current legislation, regulations and policies/directives. Provincial funding is provided to CMSMs and DSSABs that have the flexibility to determine how to allocate child care and early years funding to best meet the needs of children, families and service providers within their community. In addition, CMSMs/DSSABs also invest their own funding in order to better meet the needs of their communities.

Service system managers possess critical knowledge about community needs, maintain close connections with community partners, and are well-positioned to establish strong links between child care and early years programs and other relevant community and municipal services (e.g., public health, libraries, affordable housing, and other social services). As set out in Act service system managers:

- May establish, administer, operate and fund licensed child care and early years programs, including providing assistance to licensees and evaluating and assessing the impact of public funding;
- Deliver and administer local policies respecting the operation of child care and early years programs and services;
- Coordinate the planning and operation of child care and early years programs and consult and cooperate with school boards and other prescribed persons or entities in the development and implementation of the service system plan;
- Coordinate the planning and operation of child care and early years programs with the planning and provision of other human services delivered by the service system manager; and
- Assess the economic viability of child care early years programs and facilitate changes to make programs more viable.

Service planning should be done in the context of the full range of co-ordinated child care and early years services for children and families.

Service system managers will be required to develop a new Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan or revise an existing service system plan to address new requirements as set out in the legislation, regulations, and provincial policy. New or revised service system plans must be approved by the council of the municipality, or by the members of a district social services administration board and sent to the Ministry by June 30, 2019.

School Boards

With the implementation of full-day kindergarten in publicly funded schools as well as recent provincial capital investments for new and retrofit child care spaces in schools, school boards are playing an even greater role in integrating and coordinating child care and early years programs and providing an environment where services can be co-located and integrated for the purpose of reducing transitions and building stronger connections for children and families.

Under the Act, service system managers are required to consult and cooperate with school boards, and others prescribed by regulation, in the development and implementation of child care and early years service system plans.

Within the duty to assess demand and provide before and after school programming, local services system managers and school boards must work together to engage community partners, including Indigenous and Francophone partners, when determining community service needs in the broader context of the service system plan.

Province of Ontario

As set out in the S.53 of the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*, the province is responsible for:

- Developing and promoting an overview of the system of child care and early years programs and services and aspirational goals for the system;
- Supporting the provision of child care and early years programs and services across the province;
- Promoting health, safety, and well-being of children;
- Coordinating efforts with other ministries in relation to programs and services that support the learning, development, health and well-being of children;
- Encouraging high quality experiences that support children's learning, development, health and well-being; and
- Administering the licensing framework set out in the Act as well as enforcing the Act.

The Ministry is committed to supporting service system managers as they plan, develop, and implement their service system plan. The province provides a number of different supports to help with planning such as funding for data analysis and planning, qualifications upgrade, capacity building as an eligible expense for child care and early years, wage enhancement, and funding for programs and subsidy.

SECTION 2: KEY ELEMENTS OF SERVICE SYSTEM PLANS

Service system plans should include the following key elements:

- Environmental scan results that assess current and future child care and early years service gaps and opportunities;
- A description of the community planning processes that was used to inform the development of the plan and a commitment to consult, at regular or relevant intervals, through the life of the plan;
- Strategic priorities and intended outcomes that are responsive to community needs and align with Ontario's vision for child care and early years and provincial interest;
- A measureable and action-oriented implementation plan that describes how strategic priorities and outcomes will be met; and
- Accountability methods including the public posting of plans and reporting in accordance with the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*.

In addition to the key areas identified, service system managers should also identify any other programs, needs, opportunities and/or challenges that may exist in their communities in their service system plan to support the ongoing reporting and planning process.

Environmental Scan

It is important that all service system managers conduct an environmental scan to ensure that local service planning decisions are informed by an in-depth understanding of community demographics, current services, service gaps and/or duplication, and short and long term opportunities to address community needs. It is important to make an inventory of all relevant early years programs including licensed child care, before and after school programs for children ages 4-12, authorized recreation and skill building programs and Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres as part of this scan.

Service system managers are expected to consider information related to:

- Location, number and language (English, French or non-official) of families with children ages 0-12;
- Number and location of children and/or families that self-identify as First Nation, Métis, Inuit, and or Indigenous;
- Existing programs serving children 0-12, and parents/caregivers including information on program offerings, general locations or proximity to services, utilization, as well as current and future demand for services;
- French language early years services;
- Special needs services or children in need of extra supports;
- Available or potential program space within local schools or community buildings;
- Socio-economic data that may identify children and families with any social or developmental vulnerabilities and their approximate location;
- Any other information that may be relevant to local service planning for child care and early years programs (e.g., Early Development Instrument (EDI), employment data, child/family risk factors).

To support this process and to inform service planning, service system managers are encouraged to refer to early years programs and associated data, Statistics Canada, and the EDI scores. Service system managers may also wish to draw upon their own internal and community-based data sources.

Service system managers are encouraged to build on any existing tools or processes that may already be in place (such as internal and community-based data sources), and to regularly engage and communicate with community partners throughout the environmental scan and planning process. Regional Child Care Advisors are also available to support service system managers throughout the environmental scan process.

Early Years and Child Care Community Planning Processes

It is expected that service system managers actively engage with a wide range of local community partners while conducting their environmental scans and engaging with early years planning processes. Service system managers are expected to involve member of lower tier municipalities and other departments within their own CMSM/DSSAB in addition to the following organizations:

- Licensed home child care agencies and centre-based providers;
- English and French district school boards, including Directors of Education and Early Years Leads;
- Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centre service providers;
- Indigenous partners including local First Nations;
- Francophone organizations and networks;
- Children, families and caregivers;
- Authorized recreation providers;
- Local public health units;
- Employee groups (Ex. Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Offices, Real Estate Wardens);
- Employer organizations;
- Specialized community service agencies; and
- Other relevant community, post-secondary and training, or government organizations, ministries and departments.

Service system managers are expected to regularly solicit feedback from these organizations throughout the planning and implementation process to ensure plans are responsive to community needs, existing service capacity, and individual community goals and priorities. Service system managers are also expected to share recommendations and decisions with organizations to ensure that they are implemented throughout the community.

Service system managers are encouraged to utilize a variety of methods to engage with the representatives listed above when developing their service plan (e.g. existing consultation and engagement practices, deputation to committees that report to council, existing community planning tables, individual discussions, focus groups, and surveys). Service system managers are expected to ensure a transparent and inclusive engagement process and develop a pattern for engagement that can adapt to local needs. This approach ensures transparency and inclusivity and also leverages relationships and experiences the service system manager would have with community partners and stakeholders.

Planning in collaboration with service providers and the community will support:

- Enhanced service accessibility for all children and families, particularly isolated, newcomer, and low-income families;
- Active engagement with Francophone, Indigenous and culturally appropriate partners in the planning, management and delivery of responsive programs and services;
- Support for local decision making to enrich programs, facilitate smooth transitions and enhance integration between child care and early years services, schools and specialized community services; and
- Regular collection and insights from parents, caregivers and children to inform local programs and services.

Service System Plan Outcomes

Ontario's vision for the early years sees all children and families having access to a range of high-quality, inclusive and affordable early years and child care programs and service that are child and family centred and contribute to children's learning, development and well-being. The impact of this transformation will ultimately be measured by the enhanced healthy development of children within the community and throughout the province. The four key components of a strong early years system – accessibility, responsiveness, affordability and quality form the basis for ongoing monitoring and assessment of the early years transformation.

The service system plan should support the design and improvement of an early years service system based on the needs, strengths, priorities, and desired outcomes of the community. An important aspect of this plan will be monitoring and measuring the impact of programs and services and making adjustments as needed to realize this vision for their community.

Service system plans are expected to identify the intended outcomes associated with each of the four components of Ontario's vision, which reflect the results of the environmental scan and community engagement. This establishes common provincial outcomes that align with the provincial interest, while offering communities the flexibility to define metrics that reflect the needs and priorities of their specific community. The province recognizes that in some cases these outcomes depend on the willingness and ability of independent organizations and that community partnerships are important in order to meet these outcomes.

Each outcome included within a CMSM/DSSAB's service system plan should be accompanied by measurement indicators that will be used to assess and demonstrate the impact of their early years programs and services.

There are number of different ways that communities may collect outcome-based information related to the four components of Ontario's vision. Examples include but are not limited to the following:

Accessible

- Community programs and service providers are increasingly aware of families' needs for child care and early years services within the community.
- Programs address service gaps throughout the community to provide high-impact child care and early years services that can be easily accessed by children and families.
- Municipal by-laws are addressed and examined in cases where they may limit access to early years and child care services.
- Programming is provided for children with special needs and/or other vulnerable communities, is culturally responsive to the needs of newcomer communities, is delivered by First Nation, Métis, Inuit, urban Indigenous, Francophone partners and other populations within the community.

Responsive

- Programs and services reflect diverse needs of children and families in the community, and provide families with more choice and flexibility for their child care options.
- Programs and services reflect cultural and/or linguistic diversity, geographical spread and address demand or gaps in programs and services.

Affordable

- Community service providers enhance engagement and collaboration with broader community service providers, school boards, early years partners, primary care providers, parents and caregivers.
- Early years partners collaborate to improve affordability of child care and early years services in the community; policies support families in need through fee subsidies.

High-Quality

- Programs and services align with health and safety requirements set out in the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*.
- Programming and pedagogy is consistent with *How Does Learning Happen? (HDLH?): Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*, and reflects the view of children as competent, capable, curious and rich in potential.
- Programs and services are staffed by a highly skilled workforce such as registered early childhood educators or other certified professionals.
- Community providers provide capacity building opportunities to engage child care and early years staff in ongoing professional learning and development needs.

The service system plan is also expected to include outcomes for the following priorities and services:

- 1) Child Care and Early Years Programs (including licensed child care, before and after school programs for children ages 4-12, authorized recreation and skill building programs and Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres)
- 2) Renewed Child Care and Early Years Policy Framework and Expansion Plan
- 3) French Language Services
- 4) Special Needs Resourcing and Services
- 5) Indigenous Programs and Services

Child Care and Early Years Programs

Service system managers will be expected to work closely with their communities and families to identify their strategic priorities related to local child care and early years programs and services. This collaboration includes identifying opportunities to improve the access, quality, integration and responsiveness of licensed child care, before and after school programs for children 4-12, Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres, authorized recreational and skill building programs and other relevant early years programs and services.

When developing outcomes and local indicators to integrate into the service system plan, it may be helpful to refer to the following resource documents:

- 1) Ontario's Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework
- 2) Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centre Guidelines
- 3) Before-and-After School Programs Kindergarten - Grade 6 Policies and Guidelines for School Boards
- 4) Authorized Recreation and Skill Building Programs – A Resource for Service System Managers
- 5) Ontario Child Care and Child and Family Program Service Management and Funding Guideline
- 6) How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years

Under section 62 (1) of the Act, service system managers may provide advice to the ministry regarding the issuance of a child care licence if, in its opinion, the licence would authorize the provision of child care in the service area that is inconsistent with its child care and early years service system plan. This is an ongoing/existing process that the Ministry will be fully implementing this fall, beginning in September 2017.

In recognition of the essential role that service system managers play in licensed child care, the CCEYA provides that service system managers have the option to provide advice that will be considered during the licensing process. Service system managers can choose whether to provide this advice.

This advice, if provided, would not be part of the service system plan that is posted and submitted to the ministry.

French Language Services

Service system managers must consult with local Francophone communities and are required to provide French-language services as determined through local service planning and engagement with community partners, parents and caregivers. Service system managers located in areas designated under the French Language Services Act (FLSA) are required to provide French-language early years programs and services in accordance with their legislated responsibilities and the specific requirements outlined in their service agreement.

Indigenous Programs and Services

Service system managers are expected to work closely with Indigenous partners to help ensure that Indigenous children and families have access to quality child care and early years programs that meet their unique cultural and linguistic needs. Working together will support local program and service planning, integration across local early years and other human services, and prioritization of community needs in order to support the implementation of new and expanded programs committed to in [The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples](#).

Service system plans should include information on how service system managers are ensuring:

- Access to quality early years programs that respond to local needs and priorities as identified by Indigenous partners and supporting parent choice and flexibility in program options;
- Enhanced Indigenous control of service design and delivery; and
- Support for the capacity of Indigenous service providers to operate early years programs.

Implementation Plan

Under section 52(2) of the Act service system managers, school boards, and other entities prescribed by regulation, must cooperate with each other for the purpose of implementing the plan. Therefore, it is expected that service system managers will engage community members and service providers throughout the implementation of the service system plan.

The implementation plan section of the service system resource document should outline what steps will be taken to meet strategic priorities and outcomes throughout the lifespan of the individual plan. These steps should be financially and operationally feasible, measurable, innovative and align with the strategic priorities identified through the environmental scan process.

Within the service system plan, the implementation plan should clearly outline:

- 1) *Strategic Priorities and Outcomes*: specific objectives and measurement indicators that relate to identified community priorities and provincial outcomes.
- 2) *Actions*: how community priorities and outcomes will be achieved through a consultative and transparent process. Actions should consider the time period the plan applies to (i.e. a 3 year plan or a 5 year plan).
- 3) *Timelines*: estimated timelines for achieving the identified priorities and outcomes.
- 4) *Additional Context*: supplemental information that may contribute to the implementation of the service system plan.

The implementation plan is intended to focus on what actions will be taken throughout the life of the plan to meet the priorities and outcomes. It is not intended to be definitive and the Ministry recognizes the implementation plan will need to be flexible and account for a shift in timelines or priorities. The implementation plan is an action plan that provides an overview of how progress will be achieved over a given time period. Service system managers can voluntarily submit updates to the ministry regarding their implementation plan or the service system plan more broadly as changes or updates arise throughout the lifespan of their service system plan. These updates are not mandatory or expected, however it does provide the ministry with valuable information regarding service system planning, provincial outcomes, and local priorities.

Public Posting

The Act sets out that service system plans must be approved by the council of the municipality, or by the members of a District Social Services Administration Board. Following the approval of service system plans, the Ministry expects the service system manager to send a copy of the approved service system plan to the Ministry through the elib@ontario.ca account and to their regional Child Care Advisor within 60 days of it being approved. Service system managers are also expected to post a copy of the approved plan on their public website within 60 days of it being approved.