



Hamilton

# COMMUNICATION UPDATE

<b>TO:</b>	Mayor and Members City Council
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	December 19, 2024
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care – 2025 and 2026 Directed Growth Application (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Brenda Bax, Acting Director, Children’s and Community Services Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	<i>BBax</i>

The purpose of this communication update is to advise Council on the status and approach of the division’s 2025 and 2026 Directed Growth Application process to create new affordable child care spaces under the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care plan.

The province and the City of Hamilton are entering the fourth year of implementing the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care plan. The goal of the plan is to ensure more families across Ontario have access to safe, affordable and high-quality child care. The plan will be phased in by March 2026, with the average cost of child care for eligible children 0 to 6 years old, reduced to approximately \$12 per day. Ontario’s Ministry of Education has also set a target access rate (the ratio of available child care spaces to children) of 37% by 2026 for this age group. This is equivalent to one affordable child care space available for every 2.7 children. Hamilton’s access rate is currently at 34% and once all spaces are open in 2026, Hamilton’s access rate will increase to 38% exceeding the Ministry benchmark.

## 2024

In 2024, staff prioritized community-based expansion in Wards 6,11, 5 and 2. Wards 7 and 4, identified priority wards in 2023 were also considered due to low access rates. Ward prioritization was determined based on both access rates and socio-economic indicators.

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OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

**SUBJECT: Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care – 2025 and 2026 Directed Growth Application (City Wide) - Page 2 of 3**

The division has now completed the 2024 directed growth application process, allocating all 265 community-based spaces. These new spaces are expected to open and become operational in the coming weeks.

**2025**

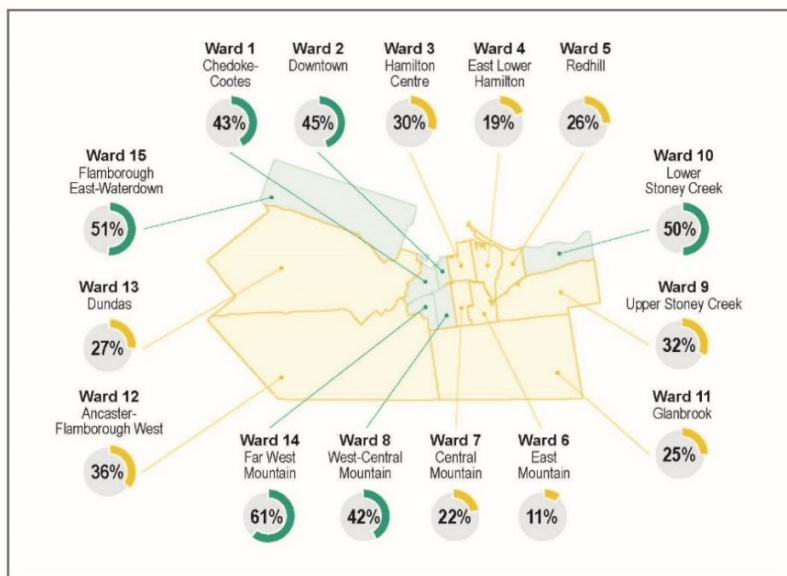
On January 7, 2025, the division will launch 2025 and 2026 city-wide Directed Growth Applications, prioritizing all wards with access rates less than 37%. Recognizing that opening a new child care centre can take time due to factors like location and facility type, the division will be accepting applications for 2025 and 2026 simultaneously. This approach aims to ensure new spaces open earlier in the year they are approved, offering families more options sooner. The Ministry of Education has allocated a total of 641 community-based spaces for 2025 and 2026.

The City’s community-based space allocations for 2025 and 2026 are as follows:

<b>Ministry of Education City of Hamilton space allocation</b>			
<b>Allocation</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2026</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Total spaces</b>	388	302	690
<b>School-based</b>	49	0	49
<b>Community-based</b>	339	302	<b>641</b>

The map below highlights the priority order of wards based on socio-economic indicators and access rates. Although all wards may receive new child care spaces over the next two years, the division will prioritize those with access rates below 37%.

City of Hamilton 2024 Child Care Access Rates (%) by Ward



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**SUBJECT: Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care – 2025 and 2026 Directed Growth Application (City Wide) - Page 3 of 3**

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Under the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care plan, all new child care spaces are allocated through the Directed Growth Application process. Applications are evaluated using the City of Hamilton's Access and Inclusion Framework, access rates, and auspice ratios.

After completing the 2024 application process, staff conducted a debrief to identify ways to improve the process, with a focus on enhancing the customer experience.

The following changes have been made for 2025:

- **Open application intake process:** Application will open on the City's website, remaining open until all community-based spaces under the agreement are allocated.
- **Improved documentation:** Applicants must provide additional supporting documents to expedite the creation of spaces.
- **Flexible approach:** Adopting a more responsive process to streamline evaluations and accommodate applicants more effectively.

Applications will be evaluated on a first-come, first-served basis. Applicants will be notified of their evaluation date and can expect a response within 4-6 weeks of that date. Staff remain confident in the evaluation criteria used over the past two years to guide approval decisions.

The division is also prioritizing system capacity by supporting new spaces and centres that require building permits, renovations, retrofits, fire safety inspections and child care licensing approvals.

To further refine the process, staff are completing the second phase of community engagement in 2024. Insights from this engagement will help shape the evaluation of directed growth applications in 2025.

Should you require further information on the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care, please contact Brenda Bax, Acting Director, Children's Services and Community Services Division at 905-973-4463 or via email at [Brenda.Bax@hamilton.ca](mailto:Brenda.Bax@hamilton.ca).