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Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) Application Process

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers for Child Care Operators

Halton Region's Directed Growth Plan

1. Why did Halton create a Directed Growth Plan?

The Ministry of Education requires that Service System Managers for child care in Ontario including Halton Region, develop a directed growth plan that identifies where affordable child care spaces are required in communities through to 2026. Halton Region is responsible for implementing this legislated Plan locally, which includes priority neighbourhoods for expansion, and an application, review, and approval process for operators. Halton Region's Directed Growth Plan is guided by the Ministry of Education's Access and Inclusion Framework and aligned with the Ministry of Education's directed growth space allocations.

2. What is a Directed Growth Plan and what purpose does it serve?

[Halton's Directed Growth Plan: An Appendix to the Early Learning and Child Care Service Plan](#) ("the Plan") is a comprehensive plan that focuses on system priorities as identified through consultation with local service providers and community partners. The Region used provincial guidelines, the Provincial Access and Inclusion Framework, and the [2022-2025 Early Learning and Child Care Plan](#) to inform the directed growth plan. Council approved the Region's Directed Growth Plan in October 2024.

The purpose of the Plan is to provide information to operators of licensed child care centres and licensed home child care agencies regarding the CWELCC System for the period of 2024-2026. The Plan includes priorities for enrolment and expansion of affordable child care spaces in CWELCC, and identifies underserved priority neighbourhoods based on local priorities and the priority populations established by the Province including: children living in low income families, children from diverse communities, children with special needs, Francophone children and Indigenous children.

3. What is the Ministry of Education's Access and Inclusion Framework?

The Ministry's Access and Inclusion Framework is a plan to make child care more accessible, affordable, inclusive, and responsive for all families in Ontario. It requires Service System Managers to update their service plans with their Directed Growth Plans for CWELCC spaces. This framework aims to support equitable access to child care for communities most in need such as:

- Low-income families
- Vulnerable communities
- Diverse communities
- Children with special needs

- Francophone families
- Indigenous families
- Families needing more flexible models of care, including evening, weekend, and overnight care

Halton's Directed Growth Plan reflects the Region's commitment to access and inclusion.

CWELCC Application Process

4. Why are these spaces available now?

Halton Region is now accepting applications from licensed child care operators that wish to enroll or expand Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) spaces in 2025 and 2026. Community based spaces e in 2025 are reallocated from existing operators that have exited the system. When an operator opts out of CWELCC, the spaces associated to a centre are reallocated back into the CWELCC system. It remains Halton's priority to ensure that as many families have access to affordable CWELCC spaces as possible. Halton is acting quickly to reallocate these opted out spaces to other operators seeking to enroll or expand CWELCC spaces.

The Ministry of Education has confirmed that the Region can add 347 new community-based spaces in 2026. Applicants will be considered both for spaces reallocated in 2025 and new spaces in 2026.

The Region has a significant number of operators who are interested in applying for enrolment and expansion in CWELCC. Opportunities to enroll into the program are therefore limited. The Directed Growth Plan application is competitive. Expressing interest or applying for CWELCC through the CWELCC Application process, does not guarantee automatic participation and enrolment into the CWELCC System.

5. Why are some operators choosing to opt out of CWELCC?

The Province has recently changed the CWELCC funding model to a cost-based approach. The Province believes this better reflects the true cost of providing child care, moving away from the previous revenue replacement model. Under the new cost-based funding model, operators will receive benchmark funding that is representative of the typical costs of providing high-quality child care in Ontario as determined by the Ministry of Education.

Some child care operators made a business decision to leave the CWELCC system as the new funding model did not work for them. The Region is supporting these operators to transition out of the CWELCC system. Vacated spaces will be reallocated to other Halton child care operators as quickly as possible to minimize the impact to families.

6. How many spaces are available for CWELCC expansion in Halton in 2025?

No new spaces have been allocated by the province in 2025. However, a limited number of community-based spaces will be reallocated from Halton child care operators that have opted out of the CWELCC system to successful applicants of the Directed Growth Plan application process.

The Ministry of Education (EDU) has indicated that it may reallocate CWELCC spaces from Service System Manager areas that have been unable to fill all spaces, into areas (like Halton) that have fully

committed all available spaces and need more to address growing community demand. If Halton is allocated additional spaces as part of this process, we will use the existing application process to allocate additional spaces earmarked.

7. How do child care operators apply to enroll in the CWELCC system?

Halton Region has developed an online, two-stage, application process for licensed child care operators in the Region. Operators not currently enrolled in CWELCC, that are interested in submitting an application, are encouraged to visit halton.ca for more information. Operators can e-mail childcareservices@halton.ca to request an application.

8. When can child care operators apply to enroll in the CWELCC System?

Applications will be accepted, for a limited timeframe. Licensed child care operators, meeting the eligibility criteria as outlined in the Directed Growth Plan, can submit an application no later than 4:00 p.m. on January 31, 2025.

9. If my organization is already enrolled in the CWELCC System and wants to expand or add a new site, does my organization need to apply?

Yes. All child care operators seeking to enroll or expand in the CWELCC System in 2025 and 2026 can submit an application for consideration.

10. If my organization submitted an application during Halton Region's 2023 CWELCC Application process, do I need to re-apply?

Yes. Operators that applied in 2023 and wish to enroll or expand in the CWELCC system in 2025 and/or 2026 must submit a new application following the current application process.

On May 24, 2023 the Ministry of Education provided notification that funding available to Halton Region to support growth of spaces in the CWELCC System had been significantly reduced and Halton Region was unable to proceed with 2023 applications.

11. Can child care operators apply to enroll in the CWELCC System after January 31, 2025?

All applications must be submitted no later than January 31, 2025 at 4:00 p.m. firm to be considered.. If Halton is allocated additional spaces for CWELCC expansion in the future, Halton will use the existing application process to allocate additional spaces.

12. When will child care operators find out if their CWELCC application has been prequalified and/or approved?

The Region will communicate in writing within 60 days, from the submission date of a complete application, if an applicant has been prequalified. Only prequalified applications will proceed to stage two of the application process. The Region will then review prequalified applications and communicate a final decision in writing to child care operators within 45 days of identifying prequalified applicants.

13. Will applications be considered in the chronological order they are received?

No. The Region will implement a fair and transparent process in which all applications are reviewed against

provincial requirements and scored based on the alignment of the proposed project to Halton's application and evaluation considerations. Staff will review applications as quickly as possible.

14. Why is the Region implementing a two-stage application process?

The Directed Growth Plan includes an internal, two-stage application review process to evaluate all applications and determine which child care operators will receive new CWELCC spaces.

Stage one will prequalify child care operators based on established criteria. Successful proposals will proceed to stage two of the application process.

Stage two will prioritize approval of prequalified applications based on alignment with the Ministry's Access and Inclusion Framework and auspice target, and Halton's priorities for expansion, including priority neighbourhoods and in-demand child care age groups. Implementing this approach will streamline the application process for both child care operators and the Region. It will allow a timely decision regarding applications that cannot be prioritized due to an operator's inability to meet eligibility criteria and/or demonstrate organizational readiness.

15. Can new operators who are not yet licensed but are willing to open up spaces within 6 months apply, or is the application open only to existing operators?

Operators must be licensed and operational anywhere in Ontario for at least one year prior to January 1, 2025, if opening spaces in 2025. If opening in 2026, they must be licensed and operational for one year prior to January 1, 2026. Unlicensed child care programs, including unlicensed home child care, authorized recreational programs and school board operated extended day programs are not eligible to participate in the CWELCC System and are not eligible for pre-qualification

16. If we are interested in opening up a child care centre in 2026, should we still apply during this application cycle?

Yes, operators are encouraged to apply and indicate on the application form whether their organization is ready to open spaces within the 2025 or 2026 expansion year.

17. As a centre that has not been operational for a year or more are we still encouraged to apply?

To pre-qualify, applicants must demonstrate readiness to open spaces within the expansion year by answering a series of questions in the application. These measures are in place to support immediate demand for CWELCC space expansion in Halton. A key priority for Halton is helping families access affordable care as quickly as possible.

The Region will be prioritizing enrolment and expansion for operators who are licensed and operational for one year prior to January 1st of the expansion year (e.g., 2025 or 2026), and ready to open the spaces within the expansion year. However, operators can still apply and indicate an estimated date when children will first enroll and receive care.

18. Do I need to submit a Child Care Licensing System (CCLS) request for CWELCC enrollment with my new license application/revision with the Ministry of Education?

Child care operators interested in enrolling or expanding CWELCC spaces in 2025 or 2026 must go through Halton Region's CWELCC Application process first. Operators can proceed with a revision/application with the Ministry but should indicate they are not applying for CWELCC at this time. A revision can be submitted later if the application is approved through the application process.

19. Updated - Do we need to fill out Expression of Interest forms for multiple locations separately? Do we need to submit CWELCC applications for multiple locations?

All child care operators seeking to enroll or expand in the CWELCC System must submit one Expression of Interest form. If your organization intends to enroll or expand across multiple sites, please send an e-mail to childcareservices@halton.ca to receive a multi-site application form.

20. Is there any funding available to expand a site currently enrolled in CWELCC or to start up a new child care centre in Halton?

If your application for CWELCC is approved, you will receive additional information regarding eligibility and applications for start-up grants at the time of approval.

21. Is my organization eligible for legacy top-up funding for new spaces created in 2025 or 2026?

According to the Ministry of Education's 2025 CWELCC Guidelines, new spaces created after August 14, 2024 are ineligible for legacy top-up funding. Operators who enroll spaces in 2025 or 2026 are eligible for a benchmark allocation and a growth top-up for the new spaces.

22. How does the funding work and how much funding is given per child or teacher or premises?

We encourage operators to learn more about the Ministry of Education's Cost-Based funding approach to obtain an understanding of how funding is allocated for CWELCC. Please review the linked [Webinar](#) for further information. For an allocation estimate please refer to the [Ministry of Education's Funding Estimator Tool](#).

CWELCC Application Prioritization Criteria

23. What eligibility criteria must child care operators meet in order to participate in the CWELCC System?

To participate in CWELCC, interested operators will be required to meet the following criteria:

- Be a licensed child care centre or home child care agency serving CWELCC eligible children
- Maintain their license in good standing in accordance with the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (CCEYA) and must not be in contravention of the CCEYA and its regulations;
- Demonstrate and maintain financial viability to the satisfaction of Halton Region;
- Implement fee reductions in accordance with Ontario Regulation 137/15 under the CCEYA, which will include, effective January 1, 2025, a new \$22 cap on daily fees, and implement any subsequent reductions which are mandated; and
- Maintain existing licensed spaces for CWELCC eligible children.

In addition, providers must demonstrate that the operation of the child care centre or home child care agency is aligned with the Ministry of Education's Access and Inclusion Framework. This includes increasing access to licensed spaces for children living in low-income families, children from diverse communities, children with special needs, Francophone children and Indigenous children.

24. What criteria will be reviewed as part of stage one of the CWELCC Application review process?

Stage one will prequalify applicants using the following criteria:

- **Financial and Operational Viability:** Operators will be required to demonstrate financial and operational viability to be eligible for consideration. This will include identification of viability concerns and a review of their overall financial position, if required. The operator must also have been licensed and operational for one year to demonstrate operational viability.
- **Readiness to create spaces:** Operators will be required to demonstrate readiness to open new CWELCC spaces quickly. New spaces must be operationalized within the funding year to be given consideration.
- **Willingness to enter into an Agreement with the Region:** Operators will be required to affirm their willingness to enter into a Child Care Service Management Agreement (CCSMA) for CWELCC with Halton Region and accept all requirements of potential funding.

25. How would financial and operational viability be assessed if new operators are invited to apply?

New operators are expected to provide any relevant information and documents required to assess financial viability, as may be determined by Halton Region at its sole discretion. Operators must also demonstrate operational viability by responding to a series of qualitative questions.

26. Will existing applicants who are already enrolled in CWELCC be prioritized?

Halton Region will be identifying pre-qualified applicants and prioritize enrolment and expansion for operators who demonstrate operational and financial viability, readiness to create spaces, and a willingness to enter into a Child Care Services Management Agreement with the Region.

Existing operators are not prioritized or given preference for CWELCC funding. All interested applicants who believe they meet eligibility criteria are encouraged to apply.

27. I bought a pre-existing child care centre in Halton. They have been operational for years now. Under new ownership, does this meet the requirement of “being operational for 1 year before January 1, 2025”?

If the newly acquired centre has been licensed and operational for at least one year prior to January 1, 2025 (to open in 2025) or January 1, 2026 (to open in 2026), this meets the pre-qualification criteria. This requirement is tied to the child care centre/business and not the owner. Interested child care operators are encouraged to complete the CWELCC application. Halton Region will review an operator's financial and operational viability based on the information provided. The Region will request additional information if needed to make a determination.

28. Can operators enroll into the CWELCC system with a Wage Enhancement Grant (WEG)-only agreement?

Operators must be willing to enter into a Child Care Service Management Agreement (CCSMA) for CWELCC with Halton Region in order to proceed to Stage Two of the application process.

CCSMAs require operators to execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Region for inclusion. This MOU defines operator requirements related to children with special needs, enables the provision of fee subsidy, and requires participation in Regional quality initiatives.

A CCSMA supports access to CWELCC for all families in Halton and provides additional supports to operators to support high quality, inclusive care.

29. What criteria will be reviewed as part of stage two of the CWELCC application review process?

In stage two, Halton Region will review prequalified applications and prioritize them for CWELCC expansion based on the following criteria:

- **Location in or near a Priority Neighbourhood:** Prequalified centre-based operators will be prioritized if the location of spaces created are within or near a priority neighbourhood. Prequalified licensed home child care agencies will be strongly encouraged to open homes in priority neighbourhoods.
- **Access and Inclusion:** Operators will be required to complete a mandatory questionnaire to affirm their child care centre or home child care agency operates in a manner consistent with the Ministry of Education's Access and Inclusion Framework. Responses will be scored by a Regional interdisciplinary committee. Operators with an access and inclusion score above 50% will be prioritized.
- **Child Care Age Groups:** Operators will be prioritized if they expand licensed spaces for infant, toddler, preschool, family age and before and after kindergarten aged children. These child care spaces are in highest demand in Halton. Full day kindergarten expansion will not be prioritized as full day kindergarten is accessible through the public school system. Before and after school spaces as part of new public school builds and renovations will be prioritized to support consistency for families and support the funding of all CWELCC eligible spaces at approved school-based sites.
- **Auspice Target:** Halton Region will prioritize operators if their spaces will support the Region in maintaining or increasing its auspice target of not-for-profit to for-profit spaces. Halton Region must maintain an auspice target of 55% not-for-profit spaces / 45% for-profit spaces as the CWELCC system grows.

30. Are spaces open to all not-for-profit and commercial child care operators?

Yes, both not-for-profit and for-profit operators will be able to apply. To support commitments made under the CWELCC Agreement, the Ministry of Education has set an auspice target for space expansion. This means Halton must maintain or improve the existing ratio of non-profit to for-profit spaces for children 0-5 years. A ratio of 55% not-for-profit spaces has been defined by the Ministry of Education as Halton Region's auspice target.

As per Ministry of Education CWELCC Guidelines, all Licensed Home Child Care (LHCC) spaces are considered not-for-profit for the purposes of auspice ratio determination. Although Halton's ability to expand for-profit spaces may be limited by the Ministry of Education's auspice target, both for-profit and not-for-profit operators will be encouraged to apply for CWELCC expansion, when spaces become available.

31. Once applications are approved, how soon will funding be provided to approved operators?

Further information regarding funding allocation will be provided at the time of approval. The timing of when funding will be provided will depend on many factors such as whether the operator is already in an agreement with the Region, requires any amendments to their agreement, and when the spaces will become licensed and operational. Each approved operator's situation may be unique, and the Region would be working closely with approved operators regarding timing for funding allocations.

32. Will there be retroactive funding available for families?

Starting January 1, 2025, child care base fees for programs enrolled in the CWELCC system are capped at \$22 per day. There will be no retroactive funding available for families for fees paid before the operators' enrollment date into CWELCC.

33. If a child care operator applies to enroll in the CWELCC System, can they change their mind later?

Yes. A child care operator may withdraw their CWELCC application at any time.

Priority Neighbourhoods

34. How were priority neighbourhoods developed?

The Ministry of Education's Access and Inclusion Framework requires Service System Managers responsible for child care in Ontario, including Halton Region, to develop priority neighbourhoods. The Ministry requires new CWELCC spaces be prioritized in these neighbourhoods. The Region recognizes that many areas of Halton have equity, diversity and inclusion needs. As such, a consultative, data driven, and equity focused approach was used to determine the Region's priority neighbourhoods. Consultations with over 50 stakeholders from across all four Local Municipalities in Halton were held. Participants included:

- Child care operators via the Regional child care advisory groups, including for-profit, not-for-profit, and licensed home child care operators;
- Halton District School Board and Halton Catholic District School Board;
- The Our Kids Network Research Table; and,
- The Community Safety and Well-Being Data and Decision Support Group.

35. What factors were considered to determine the priority level of neighbourhoods in Halton (i.e. High, Medium, Low)?

The Region identified priority neighbourhoods for targeted CWELCC expansion by analyzing four factors:

- **Need for access to child care** – reviewing current access rates relative to the provincial target of 37% and projecting a shortfall of spaces in each neighbourhood if no new spaces are added;
- **Need for affordability** – analyzing the ratio between CWELCC spaces and the number of children living in low income households;

- **Incidence of priority populations** – analyzing:
 - The distribution of Indigenous and Francophone populations,
 - Comparing marginalization using the Ontario Marginalization Index for Households and Dwellings and Racialized and Newcomer populations,
 - Public health indicators, including newborns flagged as “with-risk” in the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program and the existence of Public Health Neighbourhood groups, and
 - Inclusion data, including child care centres with children participating in inclusion programming and the incidence of children participating in the Infant and Child Developmental Services program; and
- **Expected growth in Halton Region** – analyzing population projections and using local planning data to project child population growth.

All four factors were weighted equally (25%) to identify the priority levels for each Halton neighbourhood.

36. I have recently expressed interest in joining the CWELCC program, but I am not sure which priority area this address falls in.

Halton has created a CWELCC Directed Growth Application Map which profiles all 30 Halton neighbourhoods with their level of priority. Child care operators are encouraged to review the map on Halton.ca when developing their applications for CWELCC enrollment or expansion.

37. Can you provide some more clarity on how to read and understand the directed growth application map?

Halton Region’s priority neighbourhoods map can be access through Halton.ca. The map shows a profile of all 30 Halton neighbourhoods colour coded by level of priority.

To access the larger view please click on the square icon on the top right corner. You will be directed to a larger view of the map where you can access a list of neighbourhoods by level of priority. Using the magnifying glass icon located on the top menu, you will be able to insert your site address or postal code. Once your location is found, you can click on the address on the map and identify which priority neighbourhood the site is located in.

38. What if my child care centre isn’t located in an area classified as a priority neighbourhood? Does this mean that I am ineligible to apply for CWELCC expansion?

The Ministry of Education’s Access and Inclusion Framework requires Service System Managers responsible for child care in Ontario, including Halton Region, to develop priority neighbourhoods. The Ministry requires new CWELCC spaces be prioritized in these neighbourhoods. It is important to note that the Region has some discretion to expand CWELCC into other neighbourhoods as local circumstances require. Priority neighbourhoods are only part of the overall scoring process.

Application Form

39. In Section 3, Question 3 we are asked to describe efforts our organization is making to ensure we support Priority Populations. Does that question refer to proximity to Priority Neighbourhoods or is it broader?

Section 3 of the CWELCC Application form applies to Child Care Centres already enrolled in CWELCC in Halton Region. Question 3 requires organizations to describe how the proposed expansion will support priority populations. This includes not only the proximity of the centre to priority areas, but also any efforts your organization is implementing to support priority populations.

40. Our centre offers different options for parents. How do we report different base fees in the application form?

Section 6 of the application form is applicable to child care centres or home child care agencies not enrolled in CWELCC in Halton. On Table 7 please enter your current base fees for each program offered, as they appear on your parent handbook. Please use the categories provided (i.e. full time, part time). If another type of program not listed is offered, please report these in line 30 and 31.

For any additional details about your programming or age groups served, please use the box provided next to Table 7.

Note that base fee refers to any fee or part of a fee that is charged in respect of a child for child care, including anything a licensee is required to provide under the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (CCEYA), or anything a licensee requires the parent to purchase from the licensee, but does not include a non-base fee.

Starting January 1, 2025, child care base fees for programs enrolled in the CWELCC system are capped at \$22 per day.

41. As a centre that is new to CWELCC, when completing the application form would we indicate our current fees, or would we indicate the \$22 a day fee?

Section 6 of the application form is applicable to child care centres or home child care agencies not enrolled in CWELCC in Halton. Please complete the table that applies to your organization with the base fees you currently charge for each program.

Please note that starting January 1, 2025, child care base fees for programs enrolled in the CWELCC system are capped at \$22 per day.

Advocacy for Expansion

42. How is Halton Region advocating for additional spaces to support CWELCC expansion?

Halton Regional Council and staff have vigorously advocated to the province for additional CWELCC funding and spaces so that more Halton families can be supported. On June 19, 2024, Regional Council unanimously approved a Notice of Motion calling on the Ministry of Education to provide more funding for new spaces in Halton.

Resources for Parents

43. Where can families find more information about accessing affordable child care in Halton?

A comprehensive list of Halton child care operators participating in the CWELCC program can be accessed at Halton.ca under Approved Child Care Providers.

Fee subsidies for child care are available to eligible families living in Halton Region. To determine if you are eligible for child care subsidy please fill out the [Child Care Subsidy form](#) or call 311.