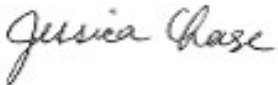




CITY OF HAMILTON
HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENT
Children's and Community Services Division

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	October 19, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Early Years Community Plan 2023 Update (HSC23063) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Rachelle Ihekwoaba (905) 546-2424 Ext. 5909 Shawna Scale (905) 546-2424 Ext. 3724
SUBMITTED BY:	Jessica Chase Director Children's and Community Services Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan 2023, attached as Appendix "A" to report HSC23063, be approved, and
- (b) That staff be authorized to implement Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan 2023 Update

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan 2016-2020 is a foundational document that remains relevant today to support coordinated, systems-wide action and transformational change in our local early years system. As part of our requirements as a Consolidated Municipal System Manager for early years services, Hamilton is required to update its early years plan every five years and obtain approval from Council.

Significant progress has been made on the original priorities outlined within Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan 2016-2020. A list of achievements show advancement in a number of key areas, including equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging and systems stabilization and sustainability during, and coming out of, the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The Hamilton Early Years Community Plan 2023 Update was developed based on engagement with the local early years community and system partners. The plan provides an overview of the priorities and action areas required to support transformative systems change and ensure responsiveness to both community and system needs. These changes require dedication, commitment and coordinated focus from Hamilton’s early years community, systems partners, combined with City of Hamilton leadership.

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial:

The City is the Consolidated Service System Manager for Child Care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres across Hamilton. The below chart shows the 2023 approved budget for childcare and early years:

Funding Source	2023 Approved Budget
Ministry of Education provincial funding	\$161,798,759
Net levy municipal contribution	\$ 8,597,408
Total	\$170,396,167

Hamilton’s Early Years Community Plan 2023 Update will be implemented through this existing budget as well in collaboration with many community partners offering early years related services and supports across Hamilton. There are no additional net levy impacts at this time.

Staffing: N/A

Legal: N/A

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Hamilton Early Years Community Plan 2023 Update report continues to build on the foundational plan established in 2016. The strategic priorities outlined in the original Hamilton Early Years Community Plan 2016-2020¹ have remained relevant over time. In response to a continuously changing landscape and shifts in community demographics and needs, annual emphasis has been placed on the most salient priorities and emerging opportunities. As outlined in Hamilton’s Early Years Community Plan 2023 Update, we continue to focus on advancing transformative, system-wide change and impact that will allow us to make Hamilton “the best place to raise a child and age successfully”.

¹ Hamilton Early Years Community Plan 2016-2020: <https://www.hamilton.ca/sites/default/files/2022-08/earlyyears-services-community-plan-2016-2020.pdf>

The purpose of this update is to highlight where the system will focus its collective efforts in the coming years. While there is some uncertainty in the environment (for example, the system is currently anticipating the release of a new Ontario funding model for the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care system), the Hamilton Early Years Community Plan provides a roadmap to collectively respond as a system. Our intention moving forward is to strengthen our ability to be flexible and responsive to meet the needs of Hamilton's children, families and caregivers, and early years community.

The following is a high-level summary of work undertaken since the last 2019 Early Years Community Plan progress update. While not an exhaustive list, it highlights progress and impact made in key areas in response to local needs and opportunities:

- 2019: Building Strong Foundations (first two years into plan)
 - o Established and refined a new organizing structure to support systems change which embedded a focus on equity and engagement, and focused attention on early years workforce stabilization and infant and early years mental health, based on identified community need
- 2020: Systems Stabilization and Sustainability (COVID-19 pandemic)
 - o Worked collaboratively with early years community operators and Public Health to ensure that the local child care system could operate safely and remain viable, accessible and responsive to the unique situations and needs of its children, families and caregivers.
 - o Pivoted to outdoor and virtual programming in EarlyON Child and Family Centres to allow for continued offering of, and expanded options for, services to children, families, and caregivers at 35 locations across Hamilton.
- 2021: Addressing Early Years Workforce Challenges (pandemic recovery)
 - o Implemented policies and procedures to support safe and successful reopening of early years programs and services and reduce any service disruptions for families and caregivers.
 - o Developed a Workforce Strategy to respond to critical staffing challenges experienced post-pandemic
 - o Provided grants and mentorship opportunities to 227 early years staff and 95 Early Childhood Education students to address recruitment and retention challenges
- 2022 and 2023: Adopting and Advancing a System-Wide Approach to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging
 - o Advanced foundational work to embed equity across the early years system which included finalizing an Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Action Planning Framework and hiring a dedicated staff to advance this work.

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- Implemented an affordability grant pilot project for families accessing before and after school care which reduced the cost to \$15/day for before and after school programs
- Implemented the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Program locally which resulted in an estimated annual savings per child for eligible families of \$3600 in 2022 and \$9100 in 2023.
- Launched the Infant and Early Years Mental Health Care Pathway for children 0-3.8 years old to help streamline the referral process and facilitate access to the right level of care for families with concerns about their child's development.
- Launching Hamilton's Child and Youth Network to provide strategic advice and collectively respond to changes in the broader human services sector that will impact and contribute to the goals of Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan and Youth Strategy

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

The legislation that governs the provision of childcare and early years in Ontario is the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*, and the *Education Act*, and the *Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007*.

Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan Update aligns with the above legislation and requires approval from Council. Once approved, the Plan must be available to the public and shared with the Ministry of Education.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

To ensure that Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan remains relevant and responsive, City staff consulted with the early years community and system partners.

On April 25 and 26, 2023, the City of Hamilton's Children's and Community Services Division hosted three community engagement sessions to assist with the update of its Early Yearly Community Plan. A total of 217 community partners attended these sessions focused on 'Mobilizing Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging in Hamilton's Early Years System'. Participants included a variety of home, centre-based and co-op child care operators, EarlyON providers, City representatives and other early years system partners representing health, social services, child development, and family support.

The consultation sessions focused on providing an overview of a draft Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Policy and sharing Hamilton's Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Access and Inclusion Framework. Participants were invited to provide their input during facilitated discussions to share feedback and identify gaps, challenges

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and opportunities to inform the next iteration of Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan 2023 Update.

Participants identified the need for intentional and aligned strategies at the Individual, Community and Systems Level to enable meaningful and transformative change.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

The following strategic insights, identified through the community engagement process, will inform the priorities and work of the system, moving forward:

- Focus on inclusion and belonging
- Shifting mindsets
- Balancing consistency and flexibility
- Implementation supports

The first phase of work will invest in champions, establishing mechanisms to build capacity at multiple levels across the system, and enabling the exchange of knowledge/promising practices.

Based on input and identified needs shared by the early years community and system partners, Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan 2023 Update includes a focus on the following priorities:

- A continued system-wide focus on **equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging and access and inclusion** to ensure the early years system is reflective of the children and families it serves, with mechanisms in place to successfully implement, measure progress and monitor activities.
- Focused action to support Hamilton's **early years workforce** to continue to grow, attract, retain, and enhance a high quality, diverse local early years workforce to sustain the system.
- Ensuring child care **accessibility, affordability, and expansion** through the implementation of the national child care plan in Hamilton.
- A systems approach towards children in their '**middle years**' (ages 7-14) to improve coordination across sectors for children and their families and support successful, seamless transitions from birth to young adulthood.
- Enhancements to support **system-wide coordination and partnership** by working to coordinate and collaborate to ensure a seamless service experience for Hamilton's children and families.

In collaboration with Hamilton's early years community and systems partners, the Children's and Community Services Division looks forward to advancing the priorities

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and work identified within Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan 2023 Update, and requests that Council approve and authorize staff to implement work related to this plan.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

N/A

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix A: The Hamilton Early Years Community Plan Update (2023 and beyond)

Appendix B: The Hamilton Early Years Community Plan Update 2023 Environmental Scan