



Management Response to the Value-for-Money Audit of the County of Wellington’s Directly Operated Child Care Centres

March 2025

Background

In its 2024 Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Guidelines, the Ministry of Education required CMSMs/DSSABs who directly operate child care centres to retain independent advice (for example, third-party services) and conduct a Value-for-Money audit on their direct delivery of child care services. CMSMs/DSSABs are responsible for responding to finds and recommendations made by the auditor, including whether the recommendations will be implemented.

The County of Wellington directly operates 4 licensed child care and learning centres, located in the County of Wellington and City of Guelph, and the Beam Group was engaged to conduct the Value-for-Money audit of its centres. The audit was conducted between September 2024 and February 2025 and resulted in 5 Key Opportunities, or Recommendations.

Recommendations and Management Response

Recommendation 1: Increasing spaces

Management Response: Agree Disagree

County of Wellington Comments/Action Plan:

- The Wellington-Guelph service delivery area remains underserved by licensed child care. For children from birth to age 4, both the Township of Mapleton and the Township of Puslinch have no full-time licensed child care spaces. The Township of Centre Wellington, which is expected to experience a 68.2% increase in population from 2021 to 2041, has a low access rate of 15.1% for its current population.
- The County will continue its approaches to the directed growth of licensed child care, including supporting community-based child care operators through CWELCC Start-Up Grants where available and eligible, and through joint capital submissions with local school boards to the Ministry of Education’s Capital Priorities Programme where there is opportunity for such proposals. It will also continue to advocate for additional funding through provincial tables and networks.
- Expansion of directly operated child care programmes may be considered where opportunities for new community-based delivery participation are exhausted, an unmet need exists, and when capital and operational funding to support the programme is available.

Recommendation 2: Equity of access for underserved and vulnerable children, including families in receipt of fee subsidies

Management Response: Agree Disagree

County of Wellington Comments/Action Plan:

- Access to licensed child care programmes, including the County's directly operated programmes, by families in receipt of fee subsidies has declined since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of the CWELCC System, which has greatly increased the demand for licensed child care.
- In 2025, the County will implement a new policy that will retain 10% of spaces at its directly operated centres for families in receipt of fee subsidy and/or families deemed high-risk by Family and Children's Services. In the event that an available space cannot be utilized by a family of receipt in fee subsidy or deemed high-risk, it will be made available to a non-subsidized family to avoid long-term vacancies.

Recommendation 3: Extended hours to support families that are more vulnerable and/or working "non-standard" hours

Management Response: Agree Disagree

County of Wellington Comments/Action Plan:

- The County's directly operated child care centres currently operate from 6:30 am to 6:00 pm. Additional staffing and costs required to extend hours to evenings and weekends has been deemed to not be a feasible option.
- The County will continue to support extended hours through its licensed home child care agency, Wellington Home Child Care.

Recommendation 4: Quality Assessment Tool for continuous improvement

Management Response: Agree Disagree

County of Wellington Comments/Action Plan:

- The County updated its Quality Assessment Tool in 2025, as part of its capacity building system that aims to increase quality levels of the child care system. Participation in this quality programme is optional for community-based child care programmes. All County directly operated child care and early learning centres are mandated to participate. As at March 2025, 89 community-based licensed child care and authorized recreational programmes have voluntarily participated in the Quality Assessment Tool.
- Quality Assessment results are used to identify professional learning needs in the community and to provide targeted supports, as well as best practices that will support

a system of high-quality early learning and child care programmes. These professional learning opportunities will be delivered and supported through the Children's Early Years Division's Early Years Professional Resource Centre.

Recommendation 5: Integration with other supports by strengthening connections to other human services through coordination and information sharing.

Management Response: Agree Disagree

County of Wellington Comments/Action Plan:

- The County has recently created 3 Social Services Help Centres staffed by Social Services Navigator positions. These new positions aim to provide information and supports to residents and promote integrated access to Children's Early Years, Ontario Works, and Housing Services programmes. These information and support services are available in person or by phone, or virtually. Staff at the directly operated child care centres will be trained to make connections to Social Services Navigators for families in order to improve access to supports.
- Growing Great Generations, the child and youth planning table for Wellington-Guelph, has established a System Navigation working group. This work will identify partners who can support the navigation of services and connect community members with services and programmes. It will provide information, resources and training for professionals and the community on navigating services, prioritizing frontline staff. This will be shared with organizations across Wellington-Guelph supporting children, youth, and families, including the Social Services Department.