



## Committee Report

CEYD-25-06

**To:** Chair and Members of the Joint Social Services and Land Ambulance Committee  
**From:** Ashley Vanderlaan, Director of Children’s Early Years  
**Date:** Wednesday, October 08, 2025  
**Subject:** **Update on Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System**

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### Background:

[Ontario’s Action Plan](#) for implementing the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system includes a framework for targeted space creation and funding supports, including start-up grants, general operating, and infrastructure funds.

The CWELCC system aims to ensure that more families have access to high-quality, available, accessible, and affordable child care, while promoting inclusion for children of all abilities and socio-economic backgrounds, with priority given to communities in most need.

As such, the Province introduced a CWELCC directed growth approach and growth targets to Service System Managers, given their role to approve applications for CWELCC funding. The directed growth target for our service delivery area is to have 1,719 new spaces operational by December 31, 2026.

To identify where new CWELCC spaces are most needed, the Children’s Early Years Division (CEYD) uses the [Wellington’s Directed Growth Plan](#), which was developed to comply with the Provincial directed growth approach. This plan is supported by additional data sources, including demographic data to ensure expansion supports access, particularly for families facing systemic barriers while also focusing on communities with low access rates, projected population growth, and high proportions of priority populations, including newcomers and low-income families.

### Update:

With these priorities in place, this update explains how CEYD is working to increase access to licensed full-time centre-based and home-based child care through the CWELCC directed growth approach and growth targets by the end of 2026.

Prior to the implementation of the CWELCC system in 2022, our service delivery area had approximately 2,107 full-time centre-based and 180 licensed home-based child care spaces in operation. Following the introduction of CWELCC and through the [Directed Growth Application](#) process, CEYD invited child care operators to apply for enrollment in the system.

As of September 30, 2025, most of the spaces that existed in 2022 have enrolled in the CWELCC system and all 1,719 new CWELCC spaces to meet the directed growth target have been allocated across Wellington-Guelph. This includes the most recent round of approvals for planned new spaces in Centre Wellington (62 spaces), Guelph/Eramosa (49 spaces), Minto (72 spaces), and Puslinch (52 spaces).

In terms of CWELCC system capacity, 2,437 CWELCC centre-based full-time spaces are currently in operation, with an additional 552 CWELCC centre-based spaces planned to be in service by the end of 2026. If all planned spaces are implemented as scheduled, a total of 2,989 CWELCC centre-based spaces for children under age four will be enrolled in the CWELCC system across Wellington-Guelph by the end of 2026. It is important to note that licensed child care capacity is not fixed. The number of available spaces may fluctuate over time, and these changes should be considered when interpreting space counts.

While all 1,719 new CWELCC space allocations have been assigned in our service delivery area, spaces that are not currently operational and in the planning stage may face challenges that could delay service delivery and affect projected access rates if they are not operational by December 31, 2026. Service System Managers do not control when operators open these spaces; rather, success depends on each operator’s ability to complete construction or renovations, hire staff, and launch programmes on time. CEYD continues to support operators through funding grants and workforce recruitment and retention initiatives.

Below, Table 1 provides a snapshot of current centre-based CWELCC spaces in operation, access rates, and planned CWELCC spaces by municipality, showing how access to child care varies across the service delivery area:

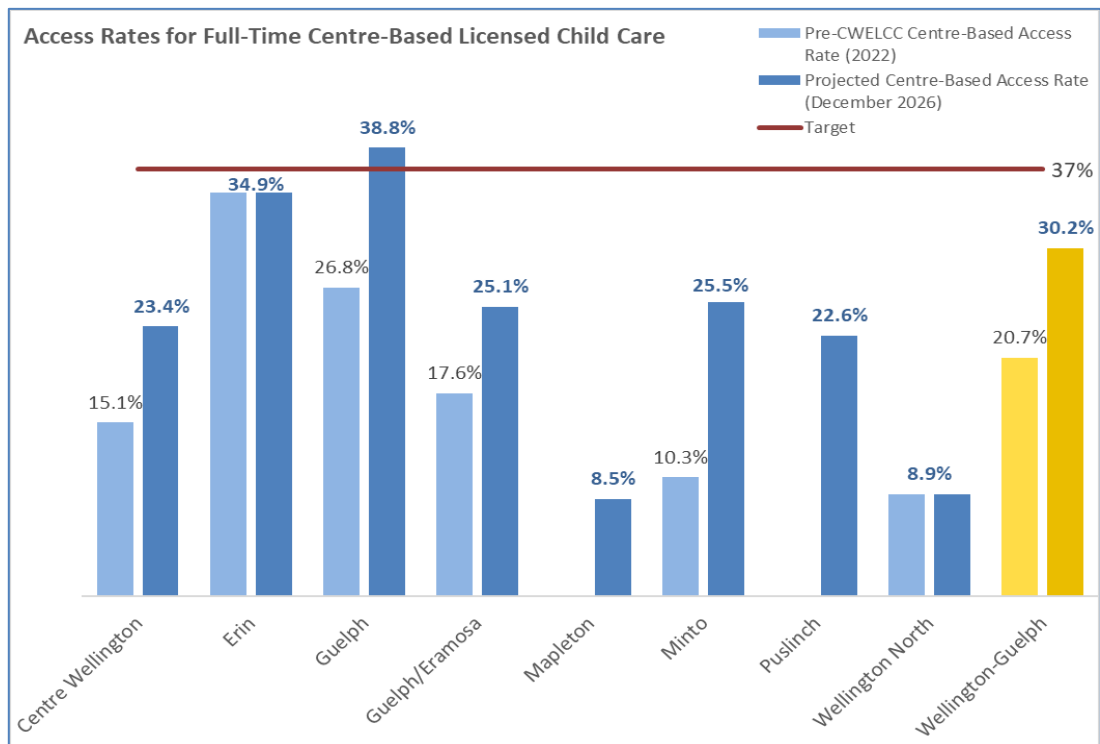
**Table 1.**

Municipality	Centre-Based Spaces in Operation		Planned CWELCC Centre-Based Spaces by December 31, 2026
	CWELCC Spaces in Operation	Current Overall Access Rate	
Centre Wellington	196	15.1%	108
Erin	145	34.9%	0
Guelph	1,914	35.9%	207
Guelph/Eramosa	75	21.0%	49
Mapleton	0	–	64
Minto	49	10.3%	72
Puslinch	0	–	52
Wellington North	58	8.9%	0
<b>Wellington-Guelph (total)</b>	<b>2,437</b>	<b>26.1%</b>	<b>552</b>

*Data Source: Children’s Early Years Division. (2025). Wellington County Service Data, as of September 30, 2025.*  
*Data Note: The current access rates include both CWELCC enrolled and non-CWELCC enrolled centre-based child care spaces. The planned CWELCC spaces include those approved through applications but are not yet operational.*

To assess centre-based child care access, it is important to compare local access rates to Ontario’s target of 37%, or 37 spaces per 100 children under age four, set in 2023 through the [Ministry of Education’s Access and Inclusion Framework](#). Below, Graph 1 shows progress made both before and during CWELCC implementation, and highlights where access gaps still remain for centre-based spaces. While Guelph is on track to exceed the 37% access target by December 31, 2026, all seven lower tier municipalities in Wellington County remain below the 37% access target for centre-based spaces:

**Graph 1.**

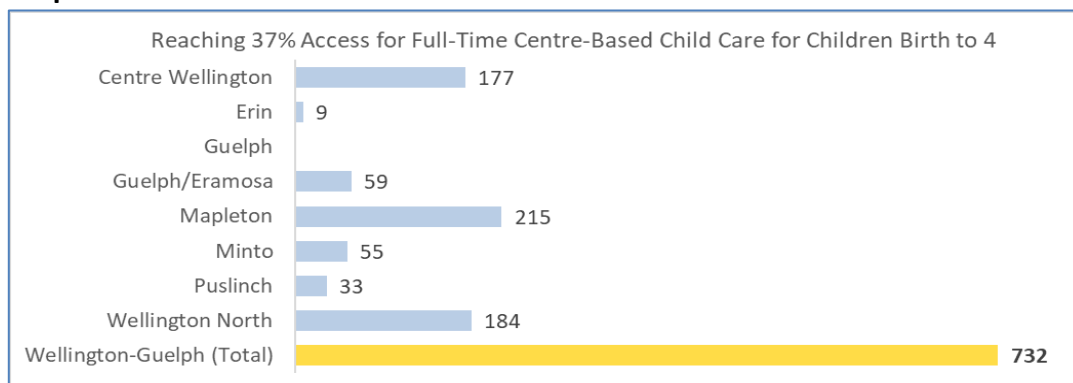


**Data Source:** Children’s Early Years Division. (2025). Wellington County Service Data, as of September 30, 2025.

**Data Note:** data includes full-time centre-based child care for children birth up to age four and includes CWELCC and non-CWELCC spaces. Projected access rates consider both spaces in operation and planned spaces.

While Graph 1 shows progress toward meeting the 37% access target for centre-based spaces, Graph 2 below identifies the estimated number of additional centre-based child care spaces needed in each lower tier municipality in Wellington County relative to this target, which applies only to centre-based, not licensed home-based spaces. In total, there is a shortfall of 732 centre-based spaces needed to meet the target.

**Graph 2.**



**Data Source:** Children’s Early Years Division. (2025). Wellington County Service Data, as of September 30, 2025.

**Date Note:** Calculations to determine remaining spaces include CWELCC and non-CWELCC spaces.

Home-based child care plays an important role in the growth of the CWELCC system. In addition to expanding centre-based child care, CEYD is also working to increase access to flexible care options by enrolling licensed home child care providers into the CWELCC system. Home-based child care can offer adaptable solutions, helping ensure families in underserved areas have access to licensed, affordable

child care. This growth approach complements centre-based expansion and supports inclusive service delivery across the service delivery area.

CEYD allocates CWELCC spaces to two licensed home child care agencies: one operated through the County of Wellington’s Directly Operated Programmes, and the other by the not-for-profit agency Wee Watch. These agencies provide administrative oversight and support to individual providers, ensuring quality and compliance within the licensed system. They are responsible for distributing the CWELCC spaces allocated by CEYD to individual home-based child care providers.

Below, Table 2 presents the existing availability of licensed CWELCC home-based spaces and planned CWELCC home-based spaces for Wellington-Guelph. When planning for home child care, it is difficult to predict where prospective providers will reside; however, both local licensed home child care agencies are working to promote growth in the rural municipalities to supplement the availability of centre-based care.

**Table 2.**

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Existing CWELCC Home Child Care Spaces</b>	<b>Planned CWELCC Home Child Care Spaces</b>
Centre Wellington	72	–
Erin	18	–
Guelph	396	–
Guelph/Eramosa	12	–
Mapleton	0	–
Minto	6	–
Puslinch	0	–
Wellington North	18	–
<b>Wellington-Guelph (total)</b>	<b>522</b>	<b>198</b>
<i>Data Source: Children’s Early Years Division. (2025). Wellington County Home Child Care Data, as of June 30, 2025.</i>		
<i>Data Note: Planned home child care spaces include approved directed growth applications for licensed home child care agencies.</i>		

**Conclusion**

As of September 30, 2025, CEYD has allocated CWELCC funding to support 2,437 full-time centre-based spaces and 522 licensed home-based spaces currently in operation. In 2025, the Province provided a total of \$73 million in CWELCC funding to support the operation of 2,959 centre-based and licensed home-based active spaces. An additional 552 centre-based spaces and 198 licensed home-based spaces are planned to be operational by the end of 2026. The County of Wellington’s funding allocation for 2026 has not yet been confirmed by the Province.

Overall, by December 2026, CEYD projects a total of 3,709 CWELCC spaces will be in operation for children under age four, including both full-time centre-based and licensed home-based spaces. This meets the directed growth target of 1,719 new spaces. When combining all CWELCC spaces (centre-based and licensed home-based), the access rate across Wellington-Guelph is projected at 36%, one percentage point below the 37% target access rate for centre-based spaces.

When looking specifically at centre-based care, Guelph is the only municipality in the service delivery

area projected to meet the 37% Provincial access target. The average access rate for centre-based child care across the service delivery area is 26.1%. To meet the Provincial access target, an additional 732 unfunded centre-based child care spaces are needed beyond those created through the CWELCC system. Under the current directed growth target, there is no flexibility to fund this shortfall, and any new licensed child care spaces created in Wellington-Guelph will not be eligible for CWELCC funding under the current funding model.

Despite limitations in funding flexibility to address the remaining centre-based space shortfall, the CWELCC system has made progress in delivering affordability benefits for families accessing CWELCC enrolled spaces. As of January 1, 2024, fees have been reduced to \$22.00 per day per child. For example, full-time infant care costs have dropped from approximately \$1,374.78 per month in 2021 to \$484.00 per month in 2025, saving families up to \$10,689.36 annually per infant. No updates have been received from the Province regarding further reductions to parent fees beyond this amount. It is important to note a gap that has been created as a result the CWELCC system, in that families can only be offered fee subsidies if they obtain a spot in a CWELCC-enrolled space (centre-based and home-based). This is problematic for low income and/or high risk families given the waitlists for CWELCC enrolled centres have dramatically increased.

Looking ahead, there is a clear need to explore options for continued growth and investment in child care beyond 2026. Future directed growth planning should consider ways to support rural municipalities, expand access through both centre-based and home child care, and reduce barriers for non-profit operators. Addressing these needs will be essential to achieving equitable access to licensed child care across Wellington-Guelph. Sustained and expanded investment from senior levels of government will be critical to closing these gaps and ensuring that all families benefit from affordable, high-quality child care.

### **Strategic Action Plan:**

This report relates to the following objectives and priorities in the County's Strategic Action Plan:

- Doing what the County does best – Providing Critical Daily Services for your residents

### **Recommendation:**

That the Joint Social Services and Land Ambulance Committee recommend to County Council to receive the report, Update on Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System, for information.

Respectfully submitted,



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Director of Children's Early Years

In consultation with/approved by:

Luisa Artuso, Social Services Administrator  
Scott Wilson, Chief Administrative Officer