

COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

Child Care and Early Years Service Plan

2023 - 2027

County of Wellington Child Care and Early Years Service Plan 2023-2027

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Warden Andy Lennox

MESSAGE from the Warden

The Council and staff at the County of Wellington are committed to supporting children and families through planning for child care and early years programmes and services that are of high quality, are equitably available, equitably accessible, and affordable.

I am pleased to present Wellington's Child Care and Early Years Service Plan, 2023 – 2027.

As the designated service system manager for the Wellington service delivery area, the County is responsible for planning and managing child care and early years services that respond to the needs of children and families across the County of Wellington and the City of Guelph. This work is supported through the development of a Child Care and Early Years Service Plan, required under the Child Care and Early Years Act (CCEYA), 2014, and to be updated every five years.

Research shows that the first few years of a child's life lay the foundations for a successful, healthy path to adulthood. A child's early years also have meaningful implications for parents, local communities, the economy, and society as a whole. In later years, participation in high-quality learning environments help to support children and their communities and improve social, health, and academic outcomes.

This Service Plan was developed through extensive community and partner engagement between the County, municipal, and community leaders, and through analysis of local service system data.

Together, this information provides a good understanding of community strengths and opportunities as we advance our system of services that supports children and families through child care and early years programmes in our communities.

Wellington's Child Care and Early Years Service Plan is being presented during a pivotal moment for licensed child care in Ontario. In 2022, the Province of Ontario entered into the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) System which will give families access to more affordable and high-quality licensed child care options, reduce fees for licensed child care to an average of \$10 per day by 2025-2026, increase child care spaces, support the child care workforce, and support inclusive child care. These announcements are positive developments and this Service Plan will guide the important work of the Children's Early Years Division to make these objectives a reality for children and families who reside in the County of Wellington and the City of Guelph.

Sincerely,
Andy Lennox
Warden, County of Wellington

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

The County of Wellington Children's Early Years Division (CEYD) is the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) designated by the Province of Ontario as responsible for planning and managing licensed child care and early years (EarlyON) services for the Wellington service delivery area. As the service system manager, CEYD is required, under Ontario's Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 to establish a local child care and early years service system plan that addresses matters of provincial interest as stated in the Act, in addition to local child care and early years service system interests.

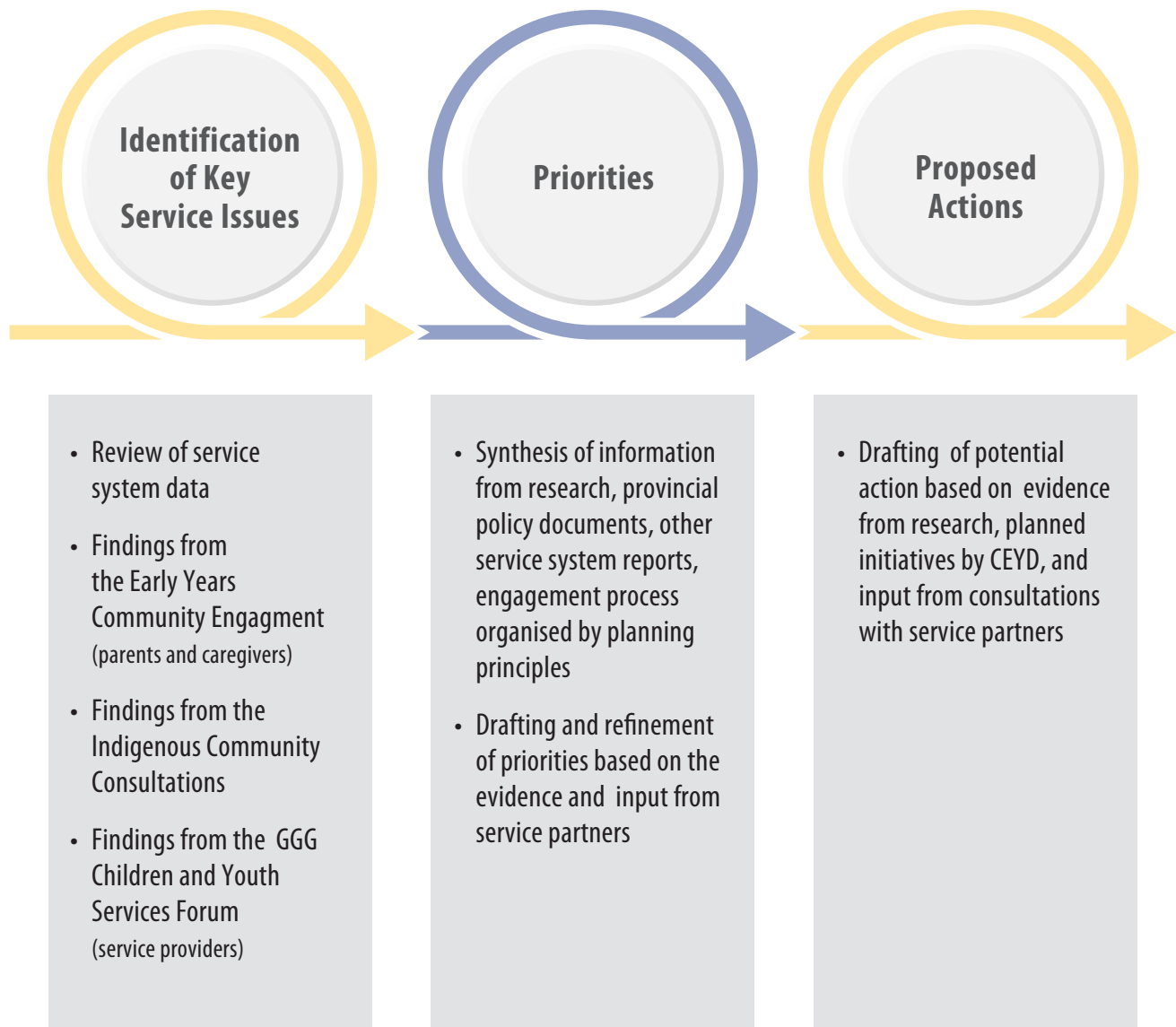
The current child care and early years service system plan identifies 16 priorities that will be the focus of actions by CEYD in collaboration with school boards and other key child care and early years services system partners for the next five years.

The priorities were identified based on analysis of data collected from an environmental scan of Wellington's child care and early years service system, as well as input gathered from extensive engagement with local service partners including school boards, community planning tables, and other service providers; the Indigenous community; the Francophone community as well as parents and caregivers across the service delivery area.

Below is an overview of how we moved from identifying key child care and early years service system issues to developing priorities and drafting potential actions that can be taken. The result is what we believe is a shared Wellington child care and early years action plan.



APPROACH TO PLANNING



The priorities are organized using CEYD's child care and early years planning principles of high quality, equitably available, equitably accessible, affordable, alongside the additional category of leadership and accountability. Our plan for the next five years is both ambitious and timely. It will guide us in effectively leveraging investments and resources to continually advance a system of child care and early learning in the Wellington service delivery area that enhances the development and well-being of all children and their families.

CEYD's Strategic Priorities

2023-2027

High Quality

1 →

Implement a consistent continuous quality assessment and improvement strategy across the child care and early years services system.

2 →

Develop and support implementation of a workforce strategy that improves recruitment and retention of qualified child care and early years professionals.

3 →

Increase access to and participation in professional learning and capacity development opportunities that enhance the child care and early years workforce's knowledge and competencies on topics of current focus, relevance and interest within the service sector, including diversity, inclusive practices and cultural competence.

Continue to increase, optimize and stabilize the capacity for licensed child care and EarlyON services, focusing on fair distribution and licensed child space coverage for infants and school-age children.

Support the development and delivery of French language child care and early years services.

Implement recommendations of the Indigenous Early Years Community Consultations and support the establishment of Indigenous-led child care and early years services.

← 4

← 5

← 6

Equitably Available

Equitably Accessible

7 →

Improve child care and early years service system information, awareness, communication, and service navigation resources to enable parents to make informed decisions about and facilitate access to available services.

8 →

Advocate for additional funding to implement strategies for increasing flexibility of the service system so that programmes can serve families with diverse needs (including hours of operation, part-time options, and non-standard work schedules).

9 →

Improve integration of the child care and early years service system, particularly EarlyON programmes, with other community services.

10 →

Develop and support implementation of service system requirements to reduce barriers to accessing services, eliminate all forms of systemic marginalization and ensure the service system is welcoming and responsive to all families in the service delivery area.

11 →

Implement the new SNR strategy for supporting children with additional support needs that builds on the strength and knowledge of parents and ECEs, and makes effective and efficient use of enhanced supports to allow full and meaningful participation of all children in early learning environments.

CEYD's Strategic Priorities

2023-2027

Continue to pursue strategies for making child care services affordable for families, including advocating for more public funding of the system, and taking advantage of any federal and provincial funding initiatives.

Improve awareness and facilitate parents' access to child care fee subsidy, including simplifying processes for families applying for and receiving child care fee subsidy.

←12

←13

Affordable

**Leadership
and
Accountability**

14→

Develop and implement a framework for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of child care and early years services and programmes that ensures transparency and system accountability, and reinforces service quality.

15→

Explore technological options to reduce administrative burden, improve customer service and access to programmes for service partners and families.

16→

Guide and assist child care and early years service partners through periods of both anticipated and unforeseen changes to the service system.

INTRODUCTION



About the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan

The County of Wellington Children's Early Years Division (CEYD) is the designated Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) responsible for planning and managing licensed child care and early years (EarlyON) services for the Wellington service delivery area.

Under Ontario's Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, CMSMs are required to establish a local service system plan for licensed child care and EarlyON services that addresses matters of provincial interest as stated in the Act, while also addressing local child care and early years service system interests that are pursued in alignment with provincial legislation and policy.

The Importance of High Quality Child Care and Early Years Services

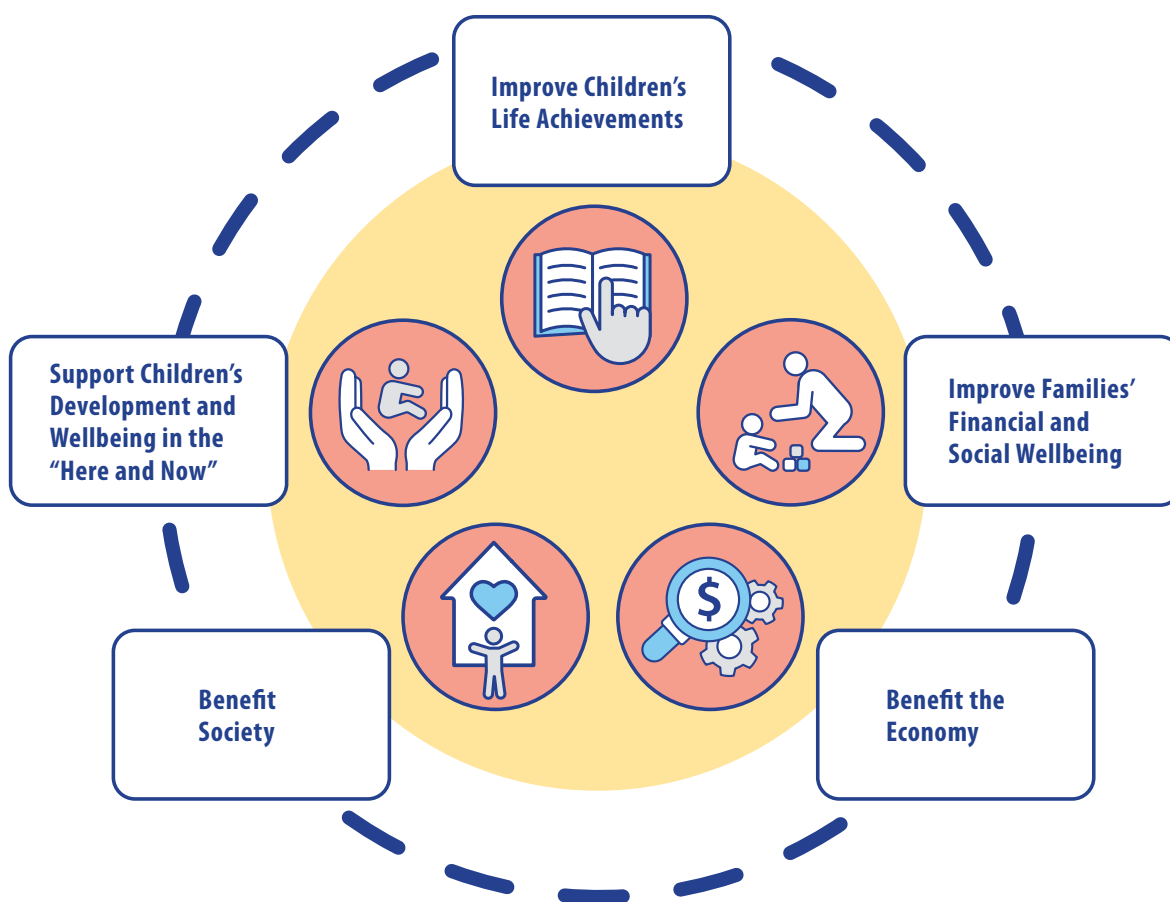
Historically, child care or the non-parental care and supervision of young children, originated to serve two main functions, that is, to support parents' employment and to support children's healthy development among poor working-class families (Vandenbroeck, 2020). There is now a large body of research evidence that shows that high quality, well-organized, affordable child care and early years services that are accessible

and available at adequate levels have wider benefits to children, families, society and to the economy (Ackerman, 2021; Lazzari & Vandenbroeck, 2013; Melhuish, 2014; NESSE, 2009). These benefits include supporting children's development and well-being, improving children's life achievements, improving the financial and social well-being of families, and generating benefits to society and to the economy.

Support Children's Development and Well-being in the "Here and Now"

High quality child care and early years services promote children's balanced development and overall well-being in the "here and now" (Campbell-Barr & Nygard, 2014, p. 349). Studies have shown that when children participate in high quality child care and early years services that offer children opportunities for mutually rewarding interactions with their peers and responsive adults, and provide rich environments that engage their interests, natural curiosity and promote learning through play, this improves

children's cognitive, physical and social development and well-being (Ackerman, 2021; Melhuish et al., 2006; Morabito et al., 2013). In addition, evidence shows that while high quality child care and early years services benefit all children, they are particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds by helping to counter the negative impact of adverse circumstances on development (Melhuish et al., 2015; Vandenbroeck, 2020).



Improve Children's Life Achievements

There is evidence to suggest that children's earliest experiences and learning form the basis of subsequent learning. Access to high quality child care and early years services is considered to provide a solid foundation for children's future educational achievement and social development by enhancing children's capabilities in the important domains of language, cognition, numeracy, emotional regulation, social cooperation and other social abilities, in ways that have a life-long impact (Penn, 2011). Studies have found positive association between better outcomes related to school results, employment status, earnings, and civic engagement in adulthood and children's participation in early childhood education and

care services (Lazzari & Vandenberg, 2013).

The impact of high quality child care and early years services on life-time achievement is more noticeable for children from disadvantaged backgrounds even though the achievement gap between children from high and low socio-economic backgrounds persists into later life and adulthood. This is because closing the achievement gap and ensuring equality of outcomes (based on merit) requires more comprehensive approaches along the child's life-span to address persistent adverse circumstances that can result in inter-generational transmission of disadvantage (Ackerman, 2021; Lazzari & Vandenberg, 2013; Morabito et al., 2013).



Improve Families' Financial and Social Well-being

Availability of high quality, full-time, full-year licensed child care is a strong determinant of parents' level of participation in the labour force, particularly for mothers (OECD, 2011a). Women's participation in employment contributes to family income, which reduces child poverty and improves children's well-being, and it supports gender equality (County of Wellington Child Care Services, 2012).

Data from Statistics Canada show that the Canadian labour market is characterized by an increase in families where both parents work and an increase in women's participation in the labour force, including women with young children. Among families with children under age 16, dual earner couples increased from 33% of families in 1976 to 55% in 2014, and among couples with children under age 16 dual earners with both partners working full time

increased from 24% to 50% of couple families over the same time period (Uppal, 2015). Furthermore, single earner families with father as the sole earner decreased from 51% of families with children under 16 in 1976 to 17% in 2014, demonstrating an increase in labour force participation among women with young children.

Evidence also show that within Canada, the increase in women's participation in the labour force is greater in jurisdictions where child care is more affordable and available, such as Quebec. Statistics Canada data show that between 1976 and 2016 labour force participation among women aged 15 to 44 in Ontario increased from 60% to 75% (Moyser & Milan, 2018). In comparison, Quebec saw a greater and faster increase, from 51% in 1976 to 81% in 2016. The increase was greatest from 1996 and was driven mainly by women whose youngest child in the household was under the age of 3. Labour force participation among women whose youngest child was under 3 in Quebec increased by 19 percentage points between 1996 and 2016 (from 61% to 80%) while in Ontario it increased by only 4 percentage points from 66% to 70% over the same period. It is important to note that in this time, Quebec rolled out their model for universal childcare, providing families with spaces as low as \$8.25/day which significantly increased number of women in the labour force (Petersson et al., 2017).

Provision of affordable, high quality child care that includes spaces for infants (i.e., aged 0-18 months), is key to shortening parental work interruptions and ensuring that parents (mostly

mothers) can return to work in a timely fashion, which helps to maintain their earning capacity (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015). Research findings also indicate that the form of high quality care that best supports mothers' labour force participation has to be formal care that provides continuity and stability of care arrangements, which reduces parental stress and improves parents work performance; offers extended full-time care hours allowing mothers to take on better paying full-time employment positions;

and offers scheduling flexibility even for mothers who work part-time (County of Wellington Child Care Services, 2012; Melhuish, 2015).

Evidence also shows that high quality child care and early years services can be an important source of social supports for all parents, and for parents in vulnerable situations in particular (Vandenbroeck, 2020). Child care and

early years services serve as settings for peer support, where parents share parenting experiences, and the presence of knowledgeable, qualified staff in these settings serve as an essential resource for supporting parents in their role as caregivers (Campbell-Barr & Nygard, 2014; Vandenbroeck, 2020).

Benefit Society

When high quality child care and early years services improve children's life chances they are also considered to benefit society in a number of ways. High quality child care and early years services have been shown to enhance life long-learning, which is now widely considered to be essential for today's



competitive knowledge economy (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2002). Investments in child care and early years services are also considered to protect society against costly remedial action later in life (Penn, 2011). For example, participation in child care and early years services is associated with reduced need for special educational services, costs associated with failed employment, and costs associated with social functioning (Melhuish et al., 2015). Provision of child care and early years services that confer entitlement and are offered in the context of social mix, that is, where there is intimate contact and interaction between children and families of diverse socio-economic backgrounds, is considered to contribute to social cohesion (Lazzari & Vandembroeck, 2013; Vandembroeck, 2020).

Benefit the Economy

Adequate supply of high quality child care and early years services, that include full-time child care spaces, benefit the economy by increasing labour supply as mothers join the workforce; by boosting tax revenues as the child care and early years service sector is a labour intensive industry that generates jobs; and by supporting regional economic growth through its multiplier effects. Child care and early years services bolster and sustain employment in other sectors. It is estimated that every \$1 of public money spent on child care in Ontario results in an economic output of \$2.27 in the broader economy (Fairholm, 2011).

Influences that Shape the Child Care and Early Years Services Planning Context

There are many influences that shape how we plan, manage and deliver child care and early years services as service system managers including at the community, municipal, provincial and national levels.

Community Level Influences

When services are comprehensive, provide seamless experiences and focus on the entire childhood continuum, they are known to improve outcomes for children and families (Corter & Peters, 2011; Melhuish et al., 2006; Pancer et al., 2013). To ensure that child care and early years services are increasingly integrated with other social and health services for children, youth and families, the County of Wellington Children's Early Years Division works closely with local service partners, especially through the local planning tables for children and youth services.

The GGG Planning Table

The Growing Great Generations (GGG) Planning Table was launched in April 2013 and is the integrated planning initiative for children and youth services (birth to 18 years of age) in the Wellington service delivery area. It brings together community health and social service organizations and groups to engage in system-level planning that seeks to strengthen and align services and supports for all children, youth and their families.

Growing Great Generations Vision

All children, youth and their families in the Wellington service delivery area have access to resources, services and supports that promote their optimum social, emotional, intellectual and physical development.



GROWING GREAT[™]
generations

Guided by their vision, the functions of Growing Great Generations are to:

- Integrate planning of services for all children birth to 18 years old by setting broad community' service goals
- Provide a formal way for ensuring that resources are allocated to meet service gaps that address specific needs in the community and align with the community service goals
- Facilitate setting of priorities that allow our community to better respond to any new initiatives relevant to children and youth services

GGG Birth-Six Working Group

Formerly known as the Growing Great Kids Planning Table, the Birth-Six Working Group is the local Best Start Network, created in 2004 when the provincial government mandated municipalities across Ontario to develop local collaborative planning tables for child care and early years services. The provincial directives and focus regarding Best Start Networks have shifted over time, but the Birth-Six Working Group continues in its role as the local Best Start planning table, working towards an integrated child care and early years service system.

In January 2015, the GGG Birth-Six Working Group became a permanent sub-working group of the GGG Planning Table. While broad service system goals for all children are set at the GGG Planning Table, the GGG Birth-Six Working Group retains its focus on child care and early years programmes and services. The GGG Birth-Six Working Group brings together representatives from local organizations that provide services and programmes for children birth to 6 years and their families.

In 2018, GGG Planning Table set three broad community services goals:

- 1 → Service Availability -**
For children, youth and their families to have timely access to high quality, effective services
- 2 → Service Accessibility -**
To make services for children, youth and their families accessible, and easy to understand and navigate regardless of where the family lives or their circumstances
- 3 → Service Connectedness**
For children, youth and families who receive multiple services to experience services in a well-connected manner

These goals represent change that needs to happen in the services for children and youth in order to influence the well-being of children and youth in a positive way.



The GGG Birth-Six Working Group identified three priorities:

- 1 Equitable access to early years services for children birth to 6 years of age and their families
- 2 A website that is relevant for families and service providers
- 3 Smooth transition to school experiences for children, their families and educators

The Birth-Six Working Group has undertaken a number of initiatives to address their priorities. Under priority 1, the Birth-Six Working Group supported the development of the Wellington Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres Preliminary Plan in 2017, which laid out the local plan for creating EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

A new, integrated website was launched in 2017, which addressed priority 2 of the Birth-Six Working Group. The website provides information about services and supports for children birth to 18 years and their families, a resource and training portal for service providers, and information to support the service system. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the website was a valuable tool for providing updates to families about availability of programmes and services and other resources to help families navigating life with young children under mandatory lockdowns. Supporting smooth transitions to school (priority 3) remains part of ongoing work by the Birth-Six Working Group who initiated the Transition to School conference in late 2022 which brought together service providers, school boards, and community organizations to discuss future actions on this priority.

Municipal Level Influences

Municipalities play a very important role in supporting the well-being of children and their families and continue to be a key stakeholder in the child care and early years sector. As the level of government closest to and with the most knowledge of their local communities, municipalities in our area are constantly developing and refining their programmes and services in response to the local needs of children and families. Some of the work of our municipalities impacting young children and their families is highlighted here.



Municipal Programmes and Services for Children

All municipalities across our service delivery area either directly provide or support the provision of a number of recreation and camp programmes for young children. In addition, some municipalities, responding to unmet needs for school-age care in their communities, now deliver authorized recreation and skills building programmes to children 4 to 12 years under provisions of the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014.

Municipal Libraries

Municipal libraries are an important public resource available to young children and families in Wellington County (through the Wellington County Library System) and the City of Guelph (through Guelph Public Library). They support children and their families in a variety of ways, including through both structured and unstructured programming that enhance children's learning experiences and act as settings for socialization for both parents and their children.

Transportation Services

Transportation is often cited as a barrier to accessing services, particularly for families in Wellington County (where there is no public transit system) and those living in low income households. In 2019, the County of Wellington launched RIDE WELL, a publicly funded demand based transit service that is available across Wellington County and also takes customers to and from locations in the City of Guelph. In the City of Guelph where there is a well-established transit system, the City offers subsidized bus fares to young children from 5 years of age up to high school and an affordable bus pass programme for adults, youth and seniors living in low-income households.

High-speed Internet

The current COVID-19 pandemic clearly highlighted how essential it is for families to have access to reliable, high-speed internet connections. Many parts of Southwestern

Ontario, especially rural communities, have very poor internet service. The County of Wellington continues to advocate for and support availability of reliable internet services for underserved communities and rural families through partnerships and initiatives such the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology Inc. (SWIFT) Network.

Provincial Level Influences

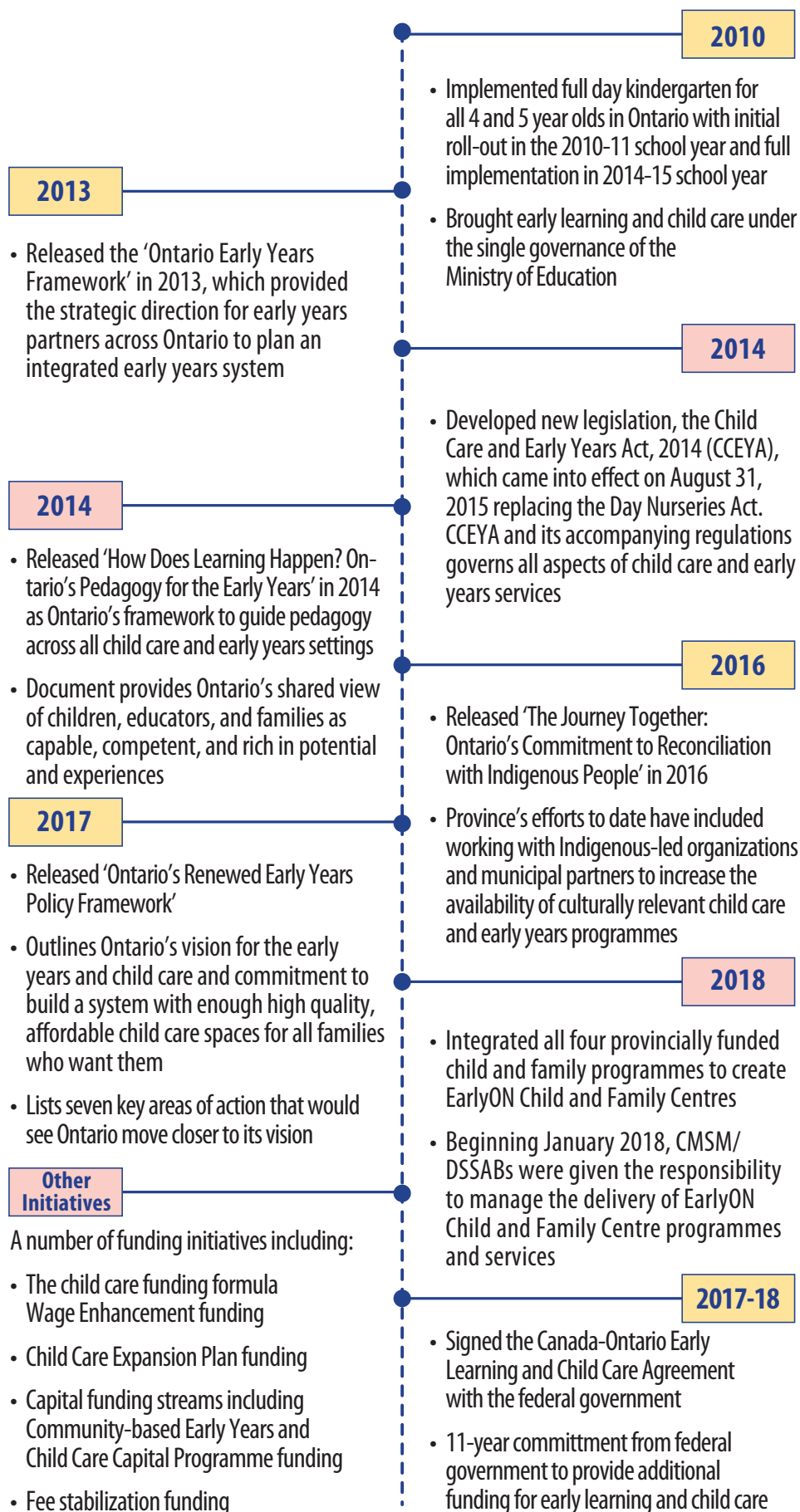
Our role as the service system manager for child care and early years services is governed and directed by policy, legislation and regulations set by the Government of Ontario. CEYD's work ensures that Ontario's vision for the early years and child care, as stated in Ontario's Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework (2017) is realized in our community.

Ontario's Vision for the Early Years and Child Care

All children and families have access to a range of high-quality, inclusive and affordable early years and child care programs and services that are child- and family-centered and contribute to children's learning, development and well-being.

Ontario continues on a journey to modernize and transform its child care and early years services system, which began in 2010 as the province started implementing recommendations from Dr. Charles Pascal's report 'With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario' (Pascal, 2009).

While there have been many changes, some notable actions taken by the Government of Ontario to date are highlighted here:



Federal Level Influences

While responsibilities for child care and early years services in Canada lie with provinces and territories, recent events have shown that when political will exists, the federal government can utilize its spending power to make significant social investments and allow development of systems that give all Canadian children the best start in life and improve the well-being of families and communities (Cameron, 2009). This is exemplified by the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework and the more recent Budget 2021 announcement.

The Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework

In 2017, the federal government released the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework in which the Government of Canada committed to make additional investments in provincial and territorial early learning and child care systems (Government of Canada, 2017). In Budget 2016 and Budget 2017 the federal government proposed investments totaling \$7.5 billion over an 11-year period through annual allocations beginning 2017-18 until 2027-28.

Guided by the principles of high quality; accessible, affordable and flexible; and inclusive, and building on existing investments, the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework sets an objective for provinces and territories to further build early learning and child care systems by addressing local, regional and systems priorities that have an impact on families in greater need. The Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework forms the basis for the Canada-Ontario Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (Government of Canada, 2020), a bilateral agreement in which Ontario committed to implement an action plan addressing the following initiatives:

- Access for children and families to affordable and high quality child care
- Access to no cost high quality early years experiences through EarlyON Child and Family Centres
- High quality training and professional learning opportunities for the early years and child care work force

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario used its allocation for 2020-2021 under the agreement to support short-term measures to minimize the impacts of COVID-19 on Ontario's early learning and child care system.

BUDGET 2021 A Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan

Budget 2021, in which the federal government committed new significant investments in early learning and child care totaling up to \$27.2 billion over five years starting in 2021-22 and about \$9.2 billion ongoing (Government of Canada, 2021), has been heralded as historic and viewed as “representing the most significant federal financial and policy commitment to child care to date” (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2021). The investments include dedicated funding for Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care.

Currently, the bulk of public funding for early years and child care comes from provincial and territorial governments, but the new federal investments announced in Budget 2021 are expected to bring federal funding of Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) on par with that of provincial and territorial governments within the next five years.

Budget 2021 clearly articulates ELCC as “essential social infrastructure” and care work as “the backbone of the economy” (Government of Canada, 2021). The bold, strategic investment in ELCC is meant to spur economic recovery by enabling parents, particularly women, to return to work.

The new investments will support a Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care plan and builds on the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework. With the goal of ensuring that all

families have access to high quality, affordable and flexible ELCC no matter where they live – this plan is, therefore, for a universal child care and early years service system.



The focus of the plan includes bringing fees for regulated child care down by 50% by 2023 and to an average of \$10 per day within five years; supporting provinces and territories to increase the number of new high quality child care spaces primarily through the not-for-profit sector; developing a growing, qualified workforce; and instituting a data-supported strong system for public accountability. On March 28, 2022, Ontario reached a 6-year agreement with the federal government on funding for and the terms of a Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care program (Government of Ontario, 2022).

To ensure there is adequate leadership to see the plan through, additional federal investments are designed to strengthen the capacity of the newly created Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care, which is tasked with bringing together all parties to collaborate in designing and implementing a Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care system.

The Wellington Child Care and Early Years Service Delivery Area

Our Region

Within the delivery of social services, the Wellington service delivery area (“Wellington”) is described as a mid-sized delivery area in the southwest region of the province with both rural and urban geographic areas. It consists of the single tier municipality of the City of Guelph and the seven lower tier municipalities of the County of Wellington (Township of Centre Wellington, Town of Erin, Township of Guelph/Eramosa, Town of Minto, Township of Mapleton, Township of Puslinch and the Township of Wellington North).

The total land area of Wellington is 2,660.6 km². The area covered by each municipality varies considerably ranging from 87km² to 535km² (Figure 1).

The seven municipalities in the County of Wellington have relatively larger land areas with a variable land use pattern that is more typical of rural areas. The primary land use is agriculture, but the manufacturing sector also plays a lead role in the economy. Each of the County of Wellington municipalities also has a number of communities, often referred to as population centres, that show land-use patterns more typical of urban areas – they are dominated by service and tertiary industries.

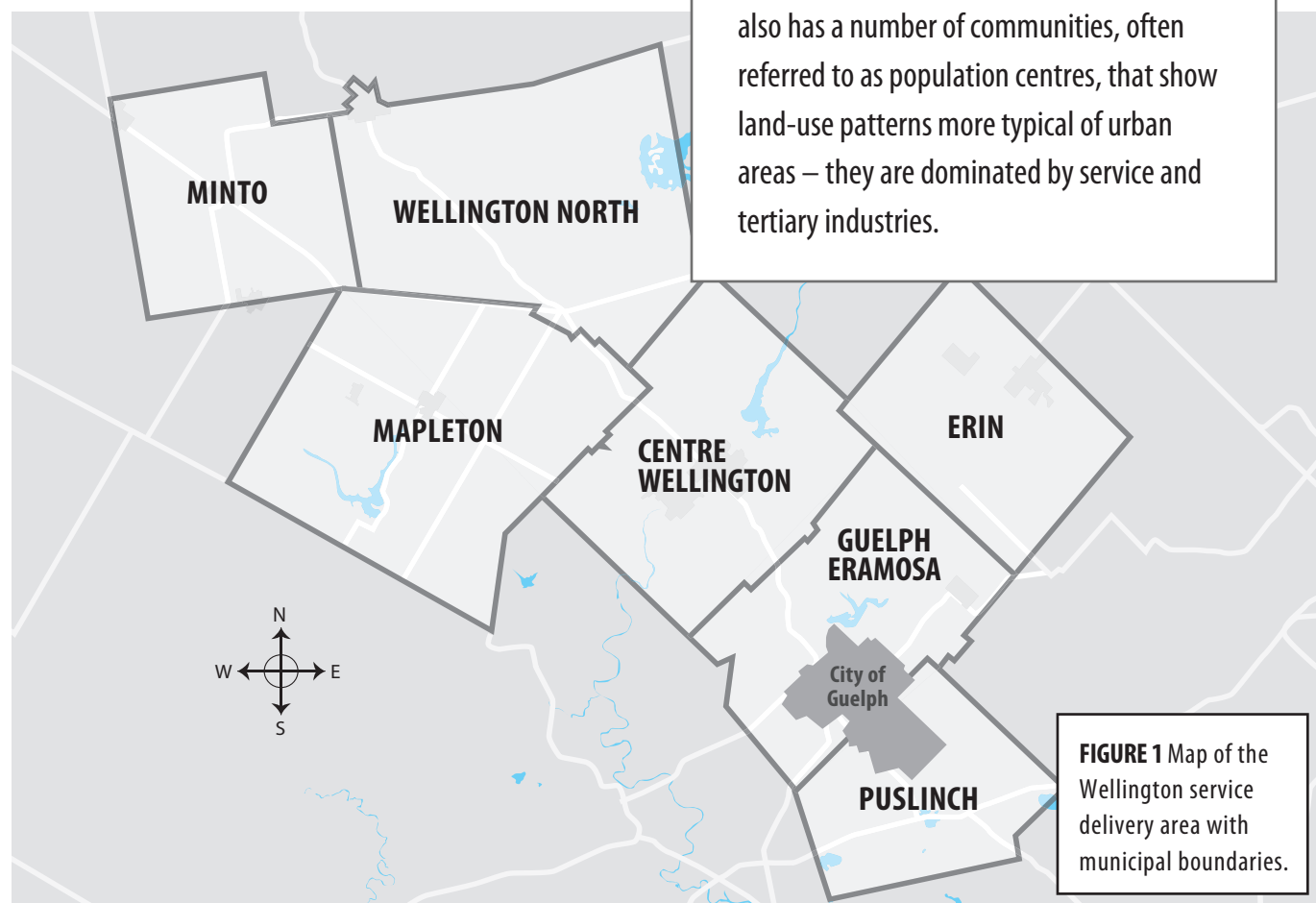


FIGURE 1 Map of the Wellington service delivery area with municipal boundaries.

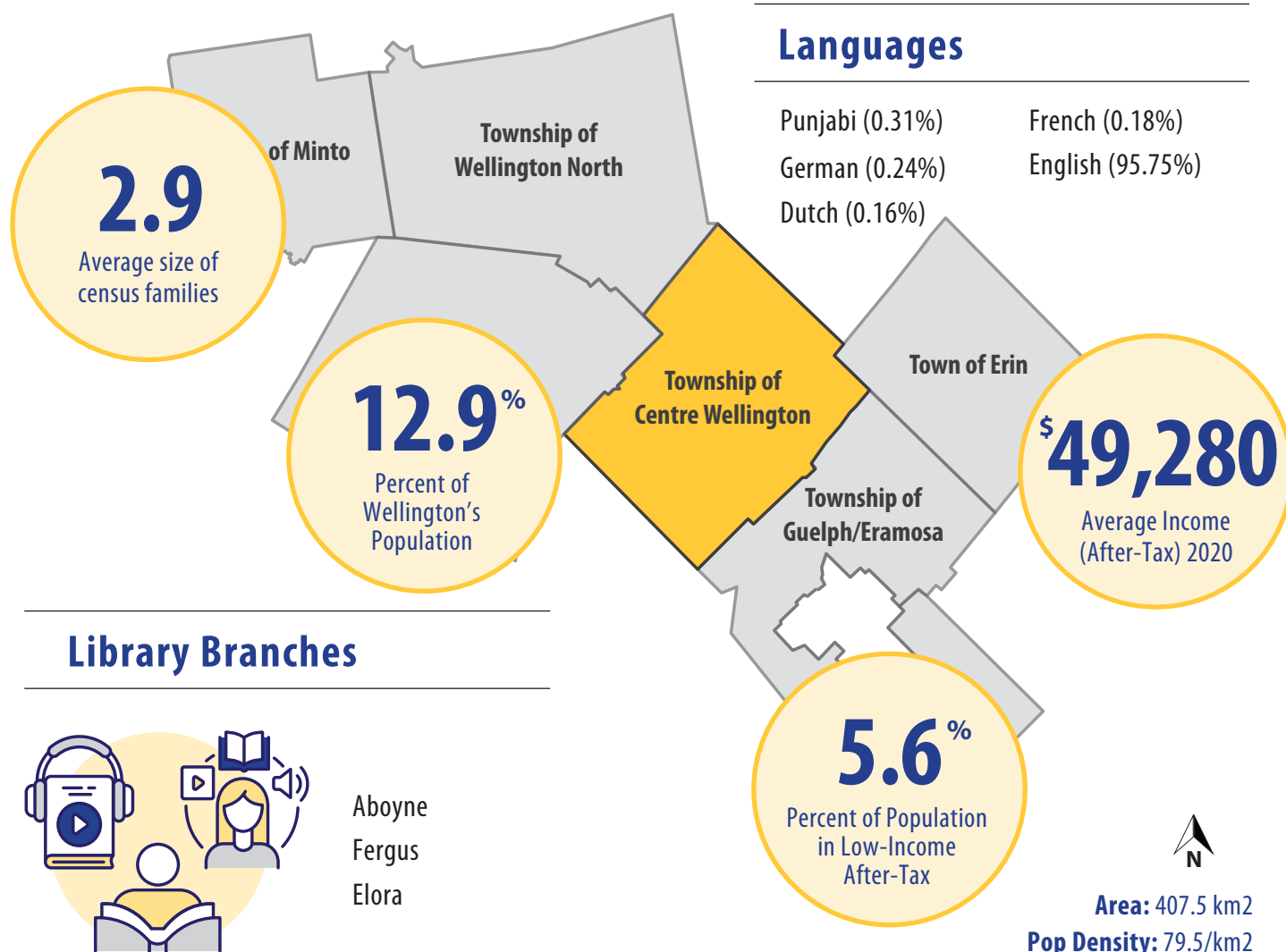
Township of Centre Wellington

The Township of Centre Wellington is home to several population centres such as: Fergus, Belwood, Aboyne, and Elora/Salem.

Fergus is the largest population centre in Centre Wellington. Fergus is home to the Centre Wellington Sportsplex and hosts the Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games.

Elora/Salem is the second largest population centre and is home to the Elora District Community Centre. Elora hosts the Elora Farmers' Market and Riverfest Elora which are popular events that attract community members and tourists.

Aboyne is located between Fergus and Elora/Salem and is home to the Wellington County Museum and Archives, and Wellington Place Child Care and Learning Centre which is directly operated by the County of Wellington.



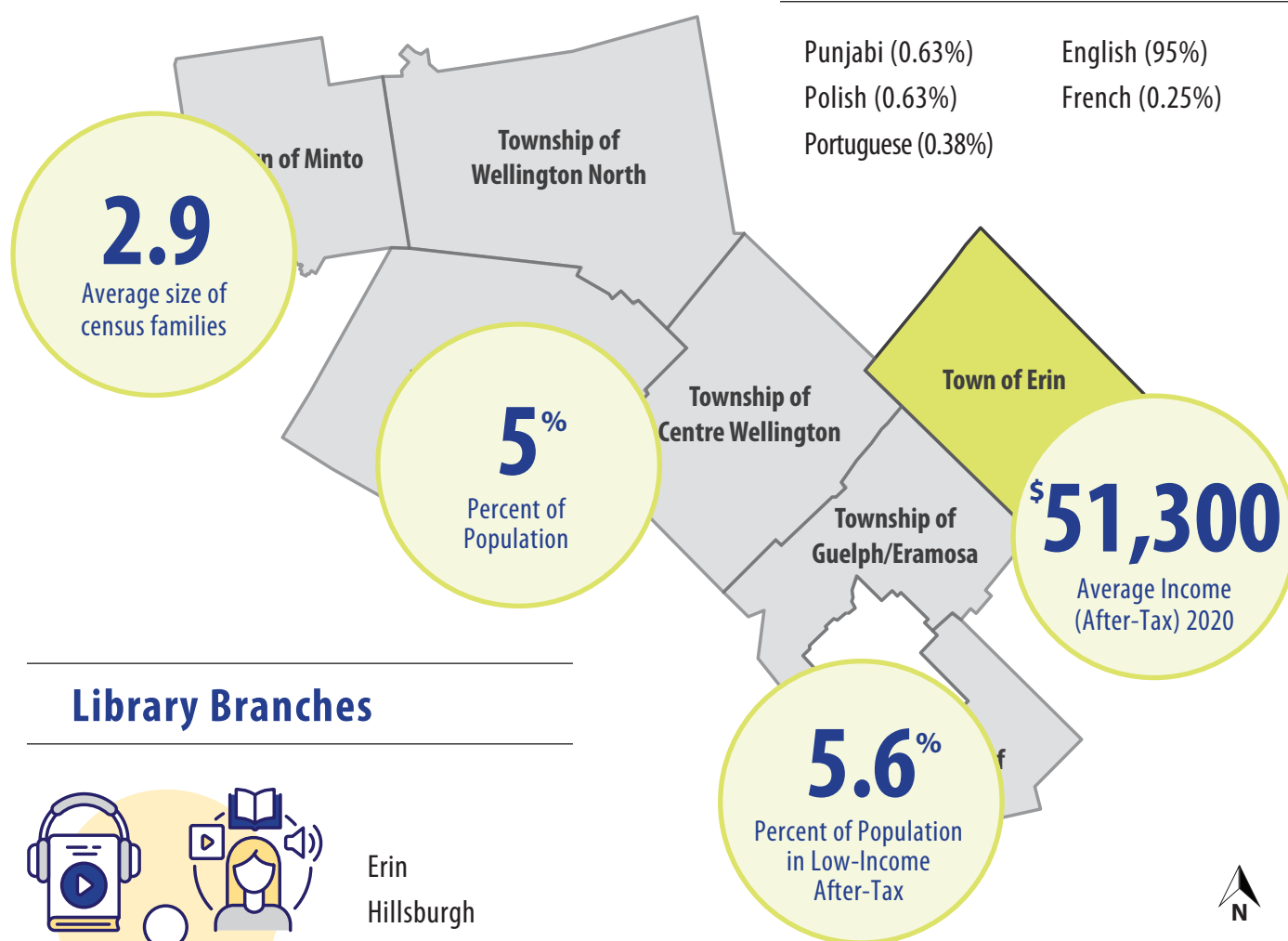
Town of Erin

The Town of Erin is home to several population centres such as: Erin, Hillsburgh, Brisbane, and Ospringe.

The Town of Erin offers many parks and recreation facilities to its residents such as, Erin Community Centre, Hillsburgh Community Centre, and Victoria Park. Additionally, Erin hosts the Erin Farmers' Market and Erin Fall Fair seasonally. Erin is near several large population centres outside of Wellington County, such as Orangeville and Georgetown, where residents also access amenities and services.

Languages

Punjabi (0.63%)	English (95%)
Polish (0.63%)	French (0.25%)
Portuguese (0.38%)	



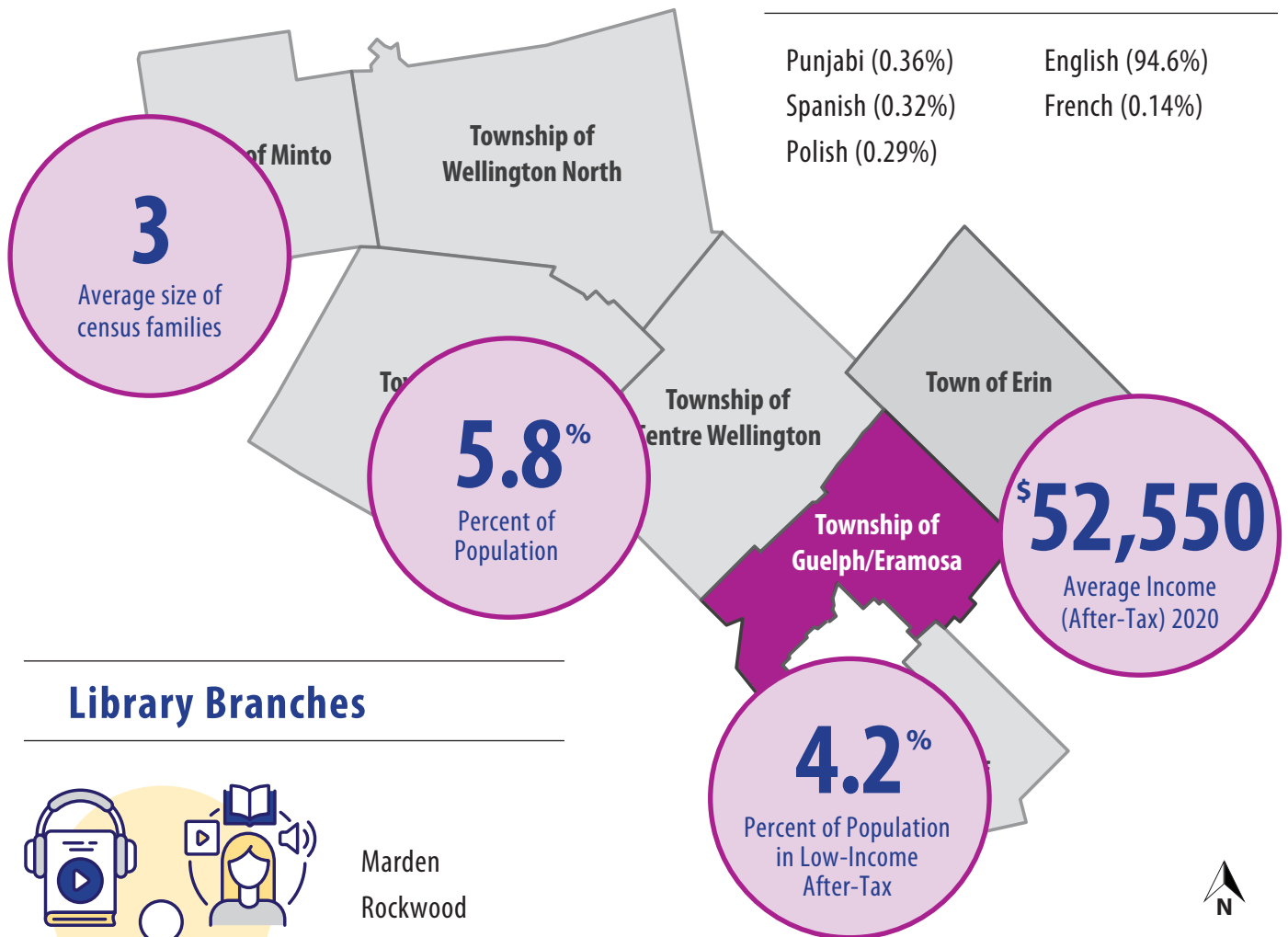
Township of Guelph/Eramosa

The Township of Guelph/Eramosa is home to several population centres such as: Rockwood, Eden Mills, Eramosa, and Marden.

There are many parks and recreation facilities around the township including Marden Park, Eden Mills Memorial Park, Rockmosa Park and Splash Pad, Marden Community Centre, Rockmosa Community Centre, and the Royal Distributing Athletic Performance Centre. Guelph/Eramosa is also home to the Guelph Lake and Rockwood Conservation Areas. Guelph/Eramosa also hosts the Rockwood Farmers' Market and Hillside Festival, which are popular attractions for community members and tourists alike.

Languages

Punjabi (0.36%)	English (94.6%)
Spanish (0.32%)	French (0.14%)
Polish (0.29%)	



Library Branches



Marden
Rockwood



Area: 291.67 km²
Pop Density: 47.5/km²

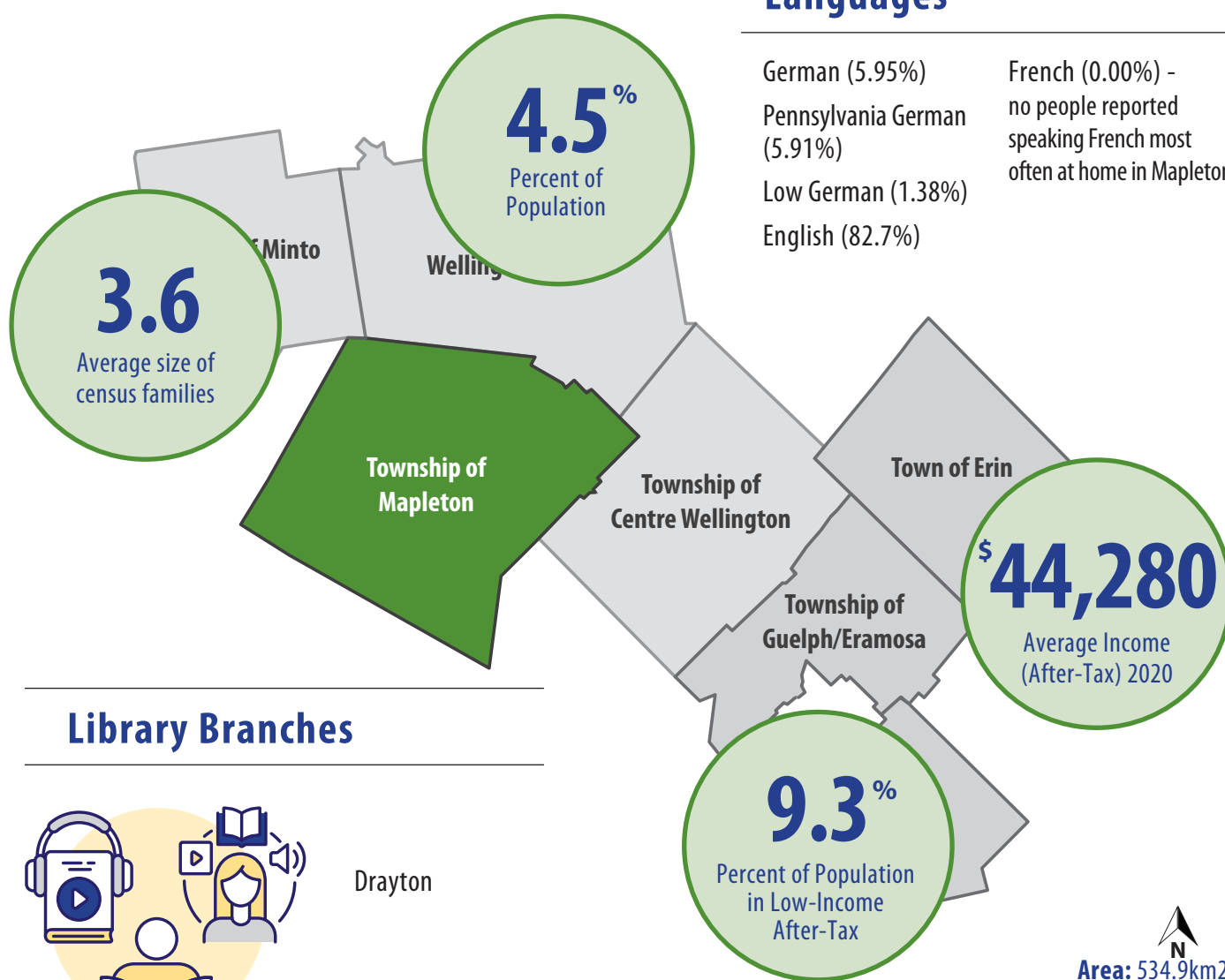
Township of Mapleton

The Township of Mapleton is home to several small population centres such as: Moorefield, Drayton, and Alma.

Drayton is the largest population centre for the Township of Mapleton community and is home to the Drayton Festival Theatre. Seasonally, Mapleton hosts the Mapleton Farmers' Market. Conestoga Lake which is a popular cottage and fishing destination. From the lake, the Conestoga River runs through the township and offers opportunities for kayaking, canoeing and fishing.

Languages

German (5.95%)	French (0.00%) - no people reported speaking French most often at home in Mapleton
Pennsylvania German (5.91%)	
Low German (1.38%)	
English (82.7%)	



Library Branches



Drayton



Area: 534.9km²

Pop Density: 220.2/km²

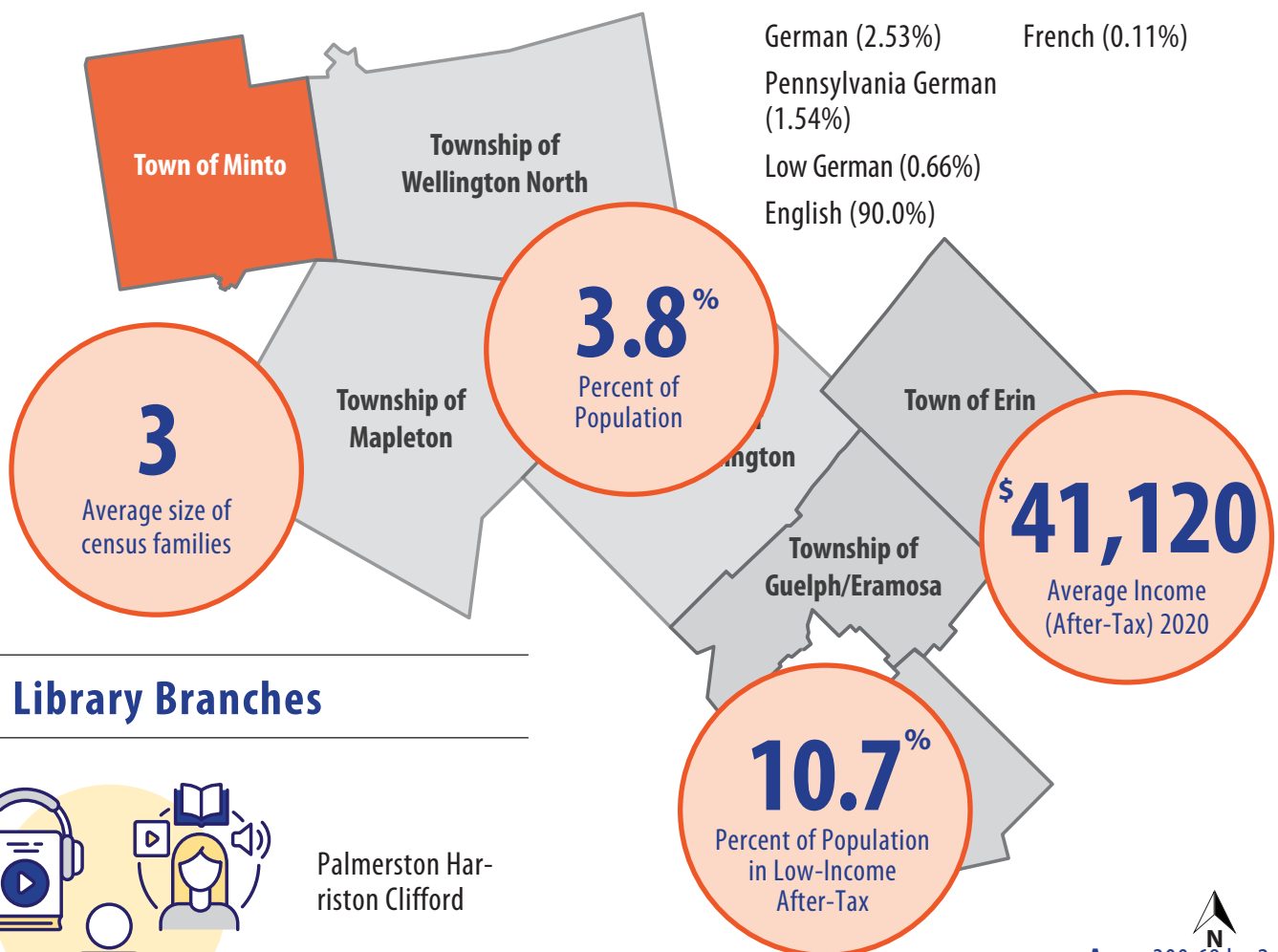
Town of Minto

The Town of Minto is home to several small population centres such as: Palmerston, Harriston, and Clifford.

Palmerston is home to the Palmerston Railway Heritage Museum which hosts the Minto Farmers' Market seasonally. Also in Palmerston are the pool, splash pad, and arena, as well as Lion's Heritage Park. Minto also has the Clifford Cenotaph Park and Pavilion and the Harriston Kinsmen Pool and Playground. Each of Palmerston, Clifford, and Harriston have a community arena for residents and local sports teams. Also located in Palmerston is the Palmerston Child Care and Learning Centre which is directly operated by the County of Wellington.

Languages

German (2.53%) French (0.11%)
Pennsylvania German (1.54%)
Low German (0.66%)
English (90.0%)



Library Branches



Palmerston Har-
riston Clifford

Area: 300.69 km²
Pop Density: 30.3/km²

Township of Puslinch

The Township of Puslinch is home to several small towns/villages such as: Aberfoyle, Arkell, and Morriston.

Puslinch offers a variety of amenities and services to the community. Aberfoyle is home to the Aberfoyle Antique Market and hosts the Aberfoyle Farmers' Market in the summers. Puslinch is also home to a variety of recreation and community facilities such as the Puslinch Community Centre, the Optimist Recreation Centre which has the Outdoor Arena, and Morriston Meadows Park.

Languages

Punjabi (1.57%)	English (92.4%)
Urdu (0.44%)	French (0.13%)
Mandarin (0.38%)	

2.9

Average size of census families

Township of Wellington North

3.3 %

Percent of Population

5.3 %

Percent of Population in Low-Income After-Tax

\$69,000

Average Income (After-Tax) 2020

Library Branches



Puslinch

Township of Puslinch

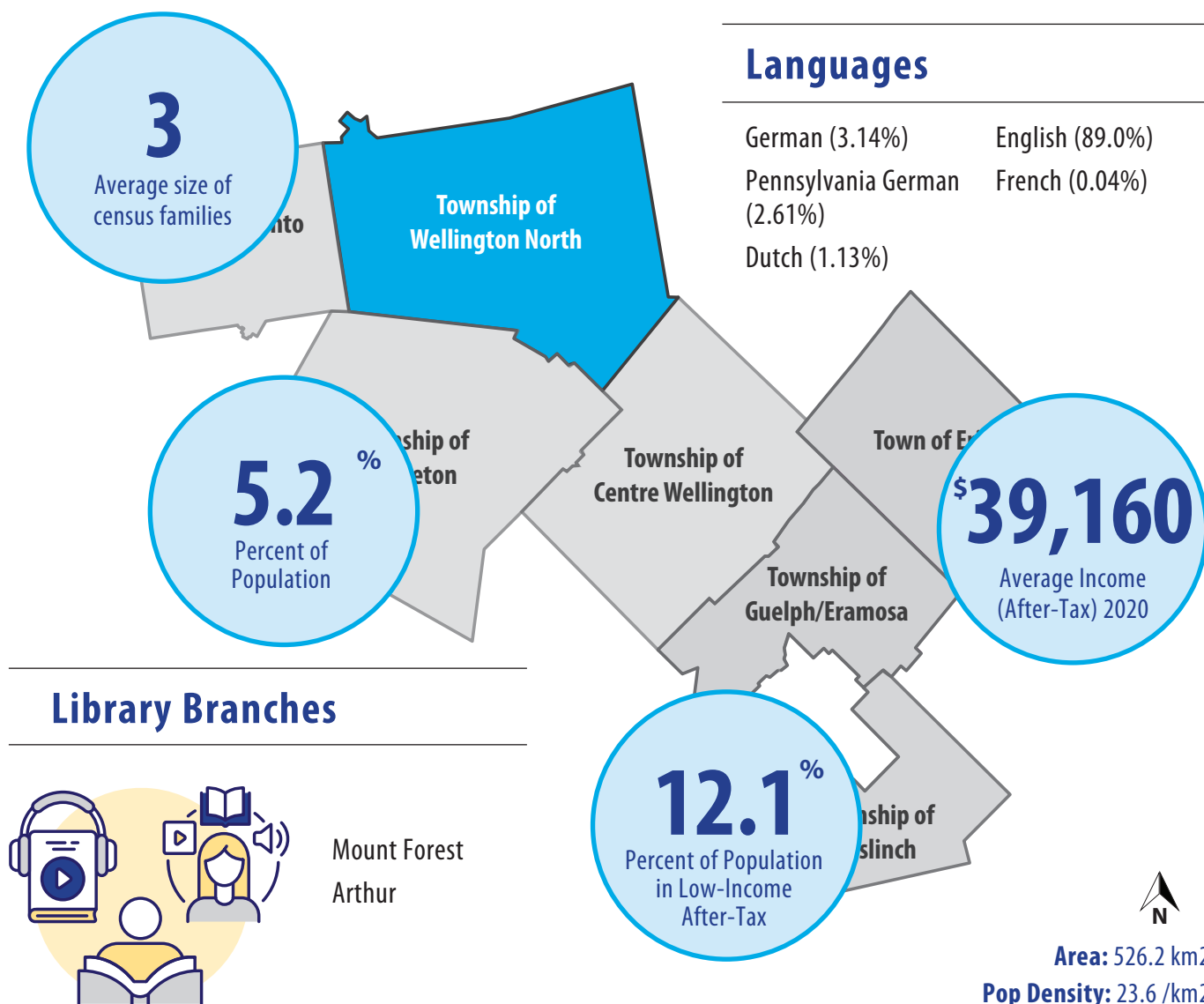


Area: 214.62 km²
Pop Density: 37/km²

Township of Wellington North

The Township of Wellington North is home to several small towns/villages such as: Mount Forest, Arthur, Damascus, Riverstown, Conn, and Kenilworth.

Arthur and Mount Forest offer the most amenities and services to the Wellington North community. Arthur is home to the Arthur & Area Community Centre and the Patriotic Murals which commemorate Arthur as Canada's Most Patriotic Town due to the community's effort to support Canada in WWII. Mount Forest is home to the Mount Forest and District Sports Complex, the Mount Forest Museum and Archives, the Wellington North Farmers' Market, and hosts the Mount Forest Firework Festival each summer. Mount Forest is also home to the Mount Forest Child Care and Learning Centre which is directly operated by the County of Wellington.



City of Guelph

As the largest population centre in Wellington County, the **City of Guelph** offers many recreation opportunities for the community through its various parks, splash pads, wading pools, outdoor pool (at Lyon Park), skateparks, recreation centres, and arenas including the Exhibition Park Arena, Victoria Road Recreation Centre, and the West End Community Centre. Some parks contain additional amenities such as the carousel and miniature train at Riverside Park. The City of Guelph is also home to the Guelph Museums, the Sleeman Centre (a sporting venue), and hosts the Guelph Farmer's Market year-round. Willowdale Child Care and Learning Centre, which is directly operated by the County of Wellington, is also located in the City of Guelph.

Languages

Punjabi (1.11%)	English (83.9%)
Mandarin (0.99%)	French (0.33%)
Vietnamese (0.88%)	

2.9

Average size of census families

8.2%

Percent of Population in Low-Income After-Tax

\$46,080

Average Income (After-Tax) 2020

59.6%

Percent of Population

Library Branches



The City of Guelph has the Guelph Public Library which has six branches throughout the city that offer a variety of resources and programming to the community, and the Bookmobile mobile library which serves a number of schools and child care centres in the Wellington service delivery area.

City of Guelph



Area: 87.22 km²
Pop Density: 1644.1/km²

Population Distribution

TOTAL POPULATION

Based on 2021 Census data, Wellington has a total population of 241,025, much of which is concentrated in Guelph (60%), and Centre Wellington (13%) with the remainder of the population distributed fairly evenly across the remaining Wellington County municipalities (each having between 3% to 6% of the total population; Figure 2).

Percent of Total Population of Wellington County

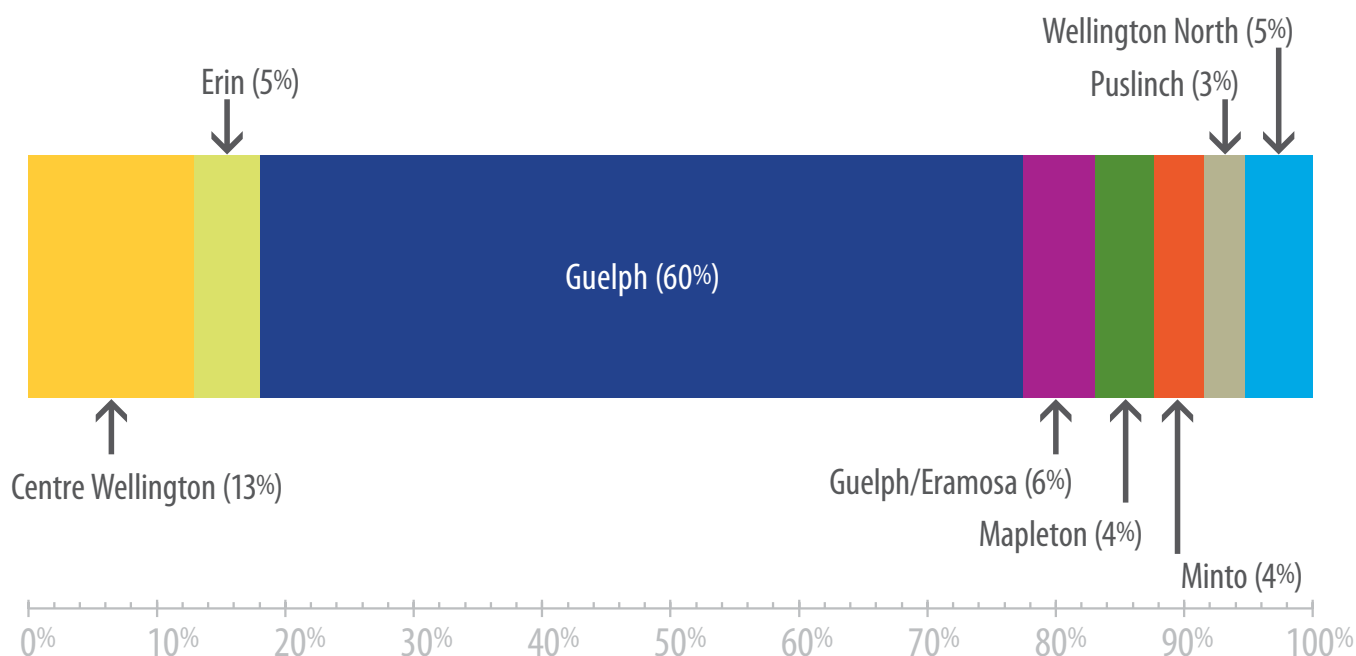


FIGURE 2 Total population distribution across the Wellington service area.

The total population of Wellington increased by 8.2% from 2016 to 2021, an increase greater than that of Ontario, whose population grew by 5.8% over the same period (Figure 3). Wellington's total population increase is a result of population growth in all eight municipalities, particularly Centre Wellington (10.3%), Guelph (9%), Guelph/Eramosa (8.2%), and Puslinch (8.2%), which saw total population increases above 5%. This confirms Wellington County municipalities and Guelph as "Places to Grow",

a designation assigned to the area under Ontario's Places to Grow Act, 2005 (Government of Ontario, 2020).

Growing communities require access to adequate high quality physical and social infrastructure. Just as others are planning for water, roads, transit systems, and schools, Wellington's child care and early years service system plan aspires for adequate access to high quality, affordable child care and early years services for our growing communities.

POPULATION OF CHILDREN BIRTH TO 12 YEARS OF AGE

The child care and early years service system plan focuses on children birth to 12 years of age and their families. Based on the 2021 Census data, Wellington has 35,480 children birth to 12 years of age. This represents 14.7% of the total population of the service area.

Percent of Population Growth Wellington Service Delivery Area (2016-2021)

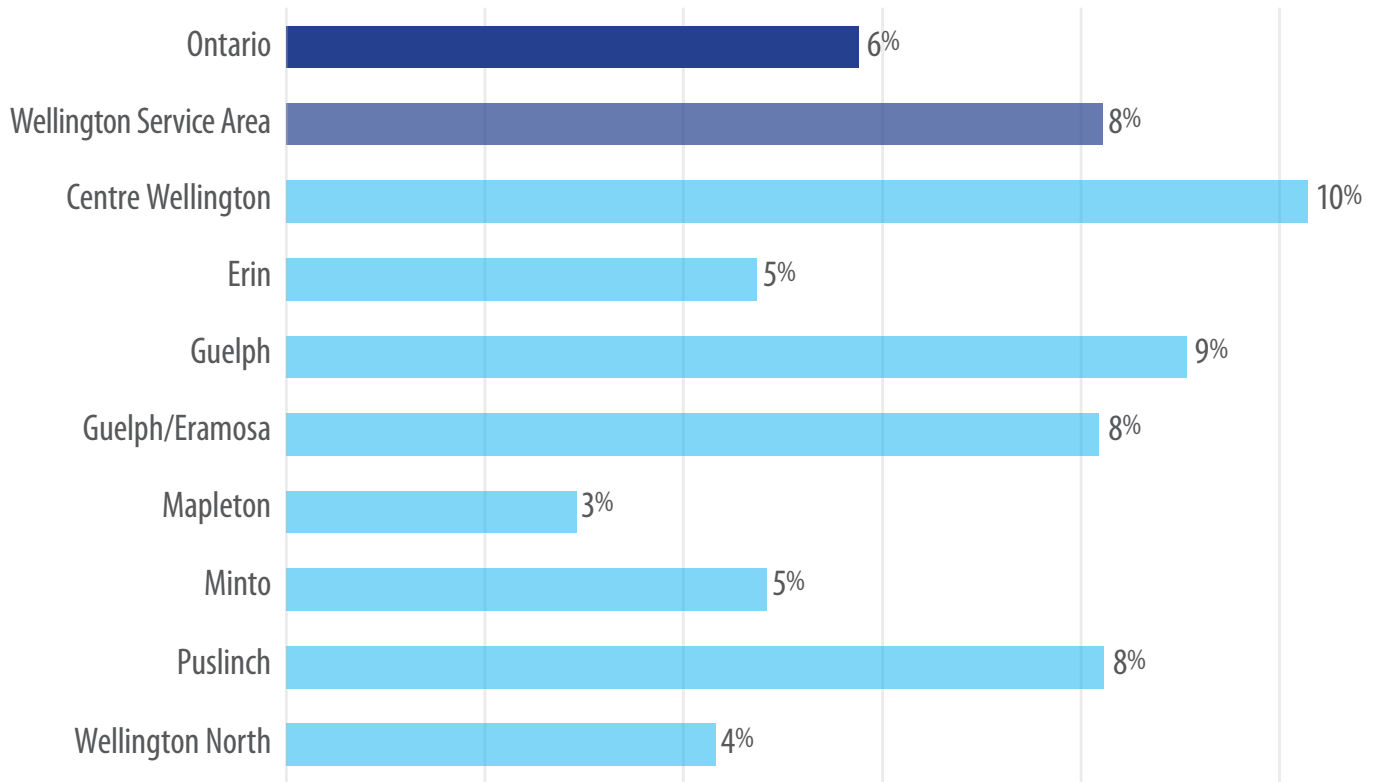


FIGURE 3 Total population growth for the Wellington service delivery area between 2016 and 2021.



Percent of Population of Children Birth to 12 years (2021)

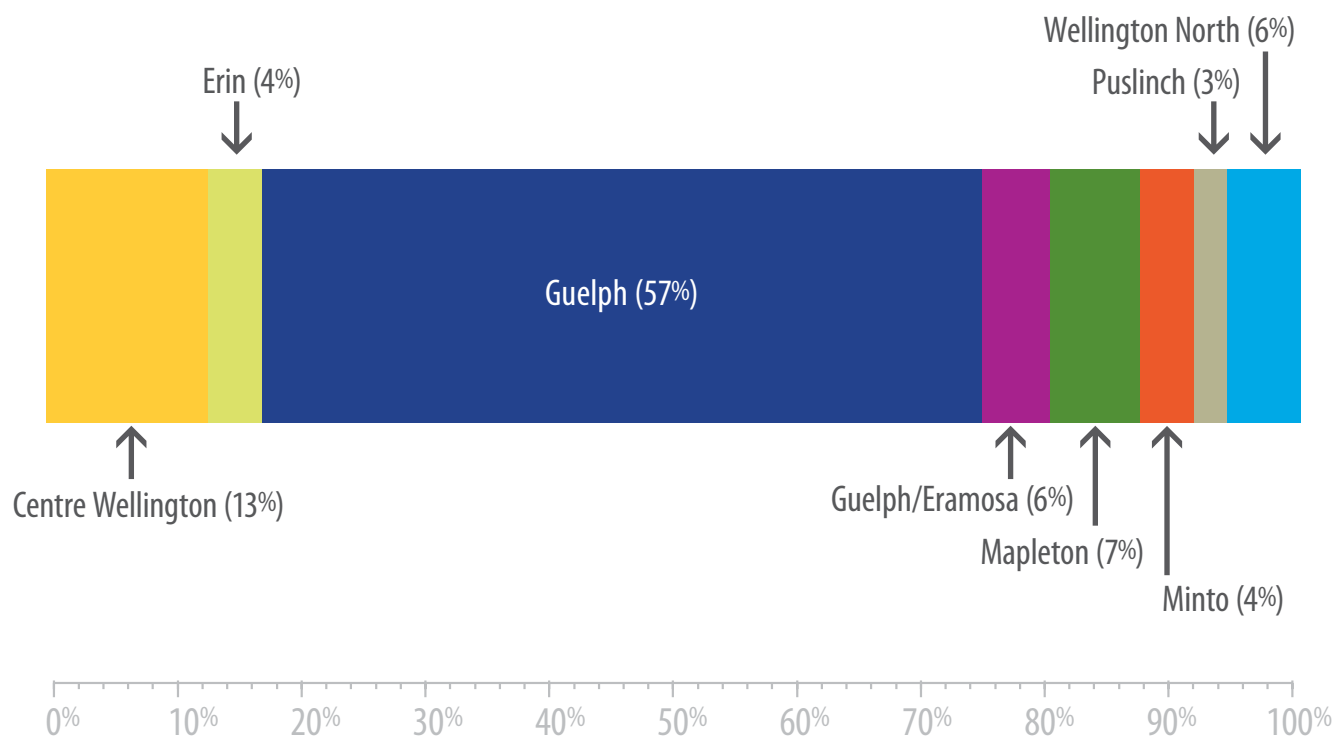


FIGURE 4 Distribution of population of children birth to 12 years of age in Wellington.

The majority of the population of children birth to 12 years of age is concentrated in Guelph (57%) and Centre Wellington (13%). While Mapleton has only 4% of the total population it has a relatively larger share of the population of children birth to 12 years of age, at 7%.

Overall, Wellington's population of children birth to 12 years of age increased by 5% from 33,875 in 2016 (Figure 5).

Percent Population Change of Children Birth to 12 years (2016-2021)

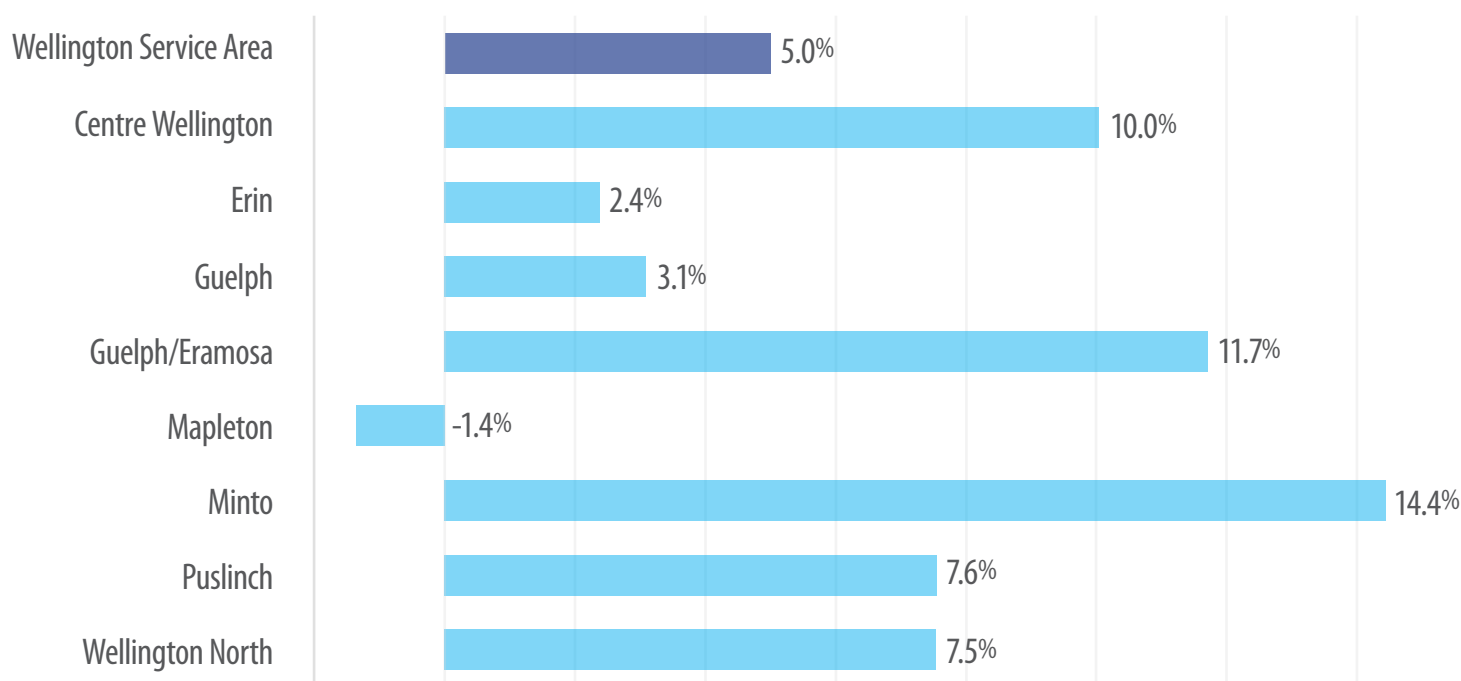


FIGURE 5 Population change of children aged birth to 12 years across the Wellington service delivery area between 2016 and 2021.

While the majority of the municipalities experienced growth, the population of children birth to 12 years of age decreased in Mapleton. Municipalities with the largest population growth were Minto (14%), Guelph/Eramosa (12%), and Centre Wellington (10%).

When planning licensed child care, it is important to consider the birth to 12 age group under two categories - namely children birth up to 4 years who are not yet in school and children 4 to 12 years of age who will be referred to as school-age children in the remainder of this report.

Of the total population of children birth to 12 years of age in Wellington, about 3 in 10 (29%) are children birth up to 4 years while 7 in 10 (71%) are children 4 to 12 years of age.

Children birth to 6 years of age is another important age category as this is the focus of EarlyON Child and Family Centre programmes and services. Of the total population of children aged birth to 12 years of age in Wellington, about 1 in 2 (52%) are children 6 years old or younger.

Diversity in Wellington

Diversity relates to the differences among individuals which are shaped by socially defined characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, ability/disability, immigrant status, religion, etc. These differences matter in as far as they determine a person's position within a social hierarchy (Capitman, 2002), which can impact one's ability to access and fully benefit from available services.

Ontario's Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 outlines matters of provincial interest that have to be addressed through the child care and early years service plan. The Act states that it is a matter of provincial interest "that there be a system of child care and early years programmes and services that respects equity, inclusiveness and diversity in communities and the particular qualities of Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities; children with disabilities; Francophone communities, and urban, rural, remote and northern communities" (sub-paragraph f of subsection 49(1) of CCEYA, 2014).

In order to address this particular provincial interest, it is important that we understand Wellington's diverse population.



Indigenous People in Wellington

Statistics Canada census data is used for municipal, provincial, and federal funding and planning purposes, and captures Indigenous populations via self-reporting (Trovato & Aylsworth, 2018). Indigenous is a collective term for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples who reside on Turtle Island, commonly known as Canada. It is important to note that there may be barriers to self-reporting, particularly to government organizations, due to an ongoing history of colonialization and violence towards Indigenous populations at the hands of the Canadian Government (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015).

As Ontario continues on the pathway to decolonization and reconciliation, one of its goals is to

work with Indigenous communities and municipalities to increase the availability of culturally relevant child care and early years programmes (Government of Ontario, 2016).

As such, it is important for Children's Early Years Division to know more about the Indigenous communities in our service delivery area.

To report on the population of Indigenous people in the Wellington service area, the "Indigenous Ancestry" variable from Census, 2021 is used.

According to the Census 2021 data, there are 710 First Nations (North American Indian) (0.3% of the Wellington service area), 220 Métis (0.1% of the Wellington service area), 15 Inuit (0.01% of the Wellington service area), and 10 people

reporting multiple Indigenous ancestries (less than 0.1% of the Wellington service area). Additionally, 4850 people indicated that they had Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestries (2% of the Wellington service area).

For planning service delivery, it can be helpful to consider the entire population of North American Indian. Overall, in the Wellington service delivery area, 5805 people identified as having Indigenous ancestries. This accounts for 2.4% of the population, below the 3.7% value for Ontario (see Figure 6).

Indigenous People as a Percentage of Total Population (2021)

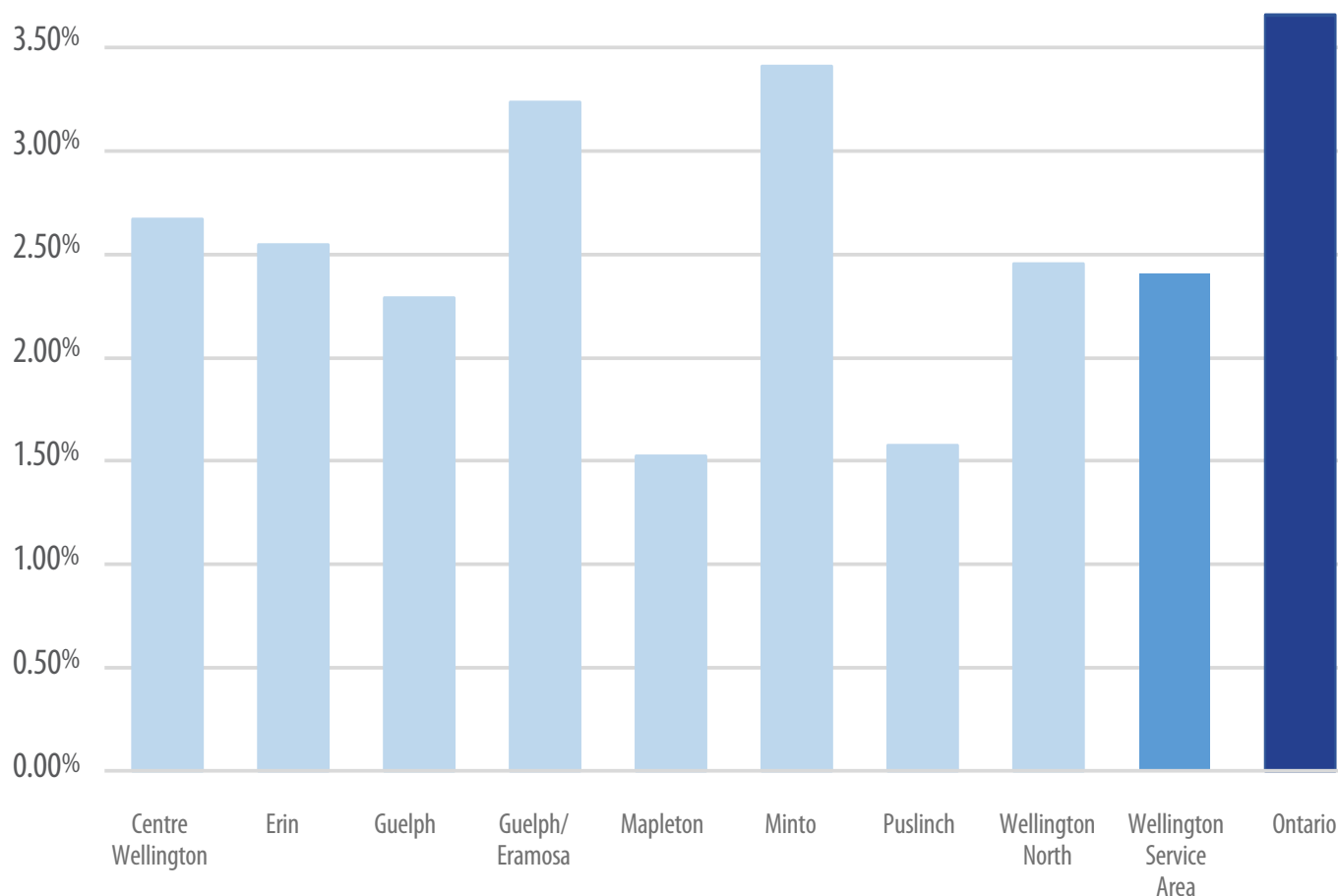


FIGURE 6 Population of Indigenous people as a percentage of the total population in the Wellington service area.

French Language in Wellington

The focus on French-speaking communities highlights the importance of and responsibility related to Francophone linguistic and cultural heritage in the Canadian context. Using 2021 Census data, this section presents data on French-speaking populations in our service delivery area.

According to the 2021 Census data, in the Wellington service area, there are 2740 people who speak French at home. This accounts for 1.1% of the total population of Wellington. The French-speaking community in the Wellington service area is much lower than the proportion of French-speaking people across Ontario (3.1%). As such, Wellington is not a designated French language community. However due to the presence of French public and French Catholic schools in the Wellington service area, which are home to French child care programmes, and a popular French Immersion programme with the Upper Grand District School Board, it is important to work with and understand the needs of our French speaking and Francophone communities.

French-speakers reside throughout the Wellington service delivery area. The proportions of Francophones relative to the total population vary by municipality, ranging from 0.3% of the total population in Wellington North to 1.4% of the total population in Guelph (Figure 7).

Capturing the French-speaking populations using languages spoken at home does not account for those who speak French at work or those individuals for which French is their first official language, or their colonial language, and their preferred language at home is another, non-official language. As such, data on non-official languages is reported in the following section. Furthermore, estimates of Francophone populations based on the Inclusive Definition of Francophone (IDF) will be released over the course of this service planning period and will also be used to support the planning of French early years programming and service delivery.

People Who Speak French at Home as a Proportion of Total Population (2021)

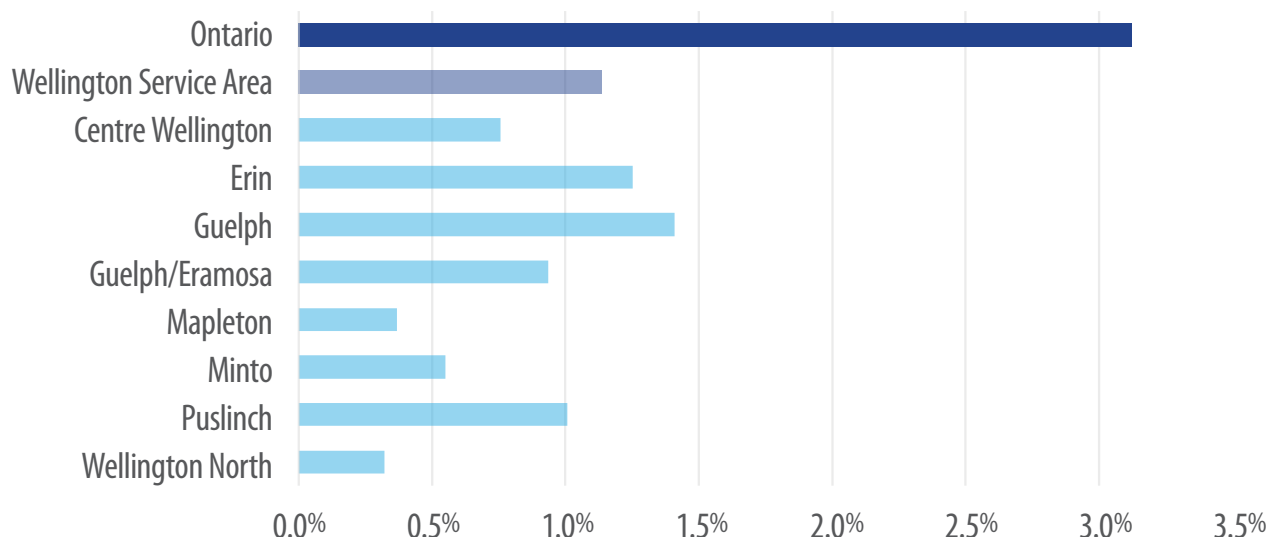


FIGURE 7 Proportion of the total population who are Francophone people by municipality with the Wellington service area and Ontario as comparators.

Cultural Diversity

There are various ways for assessing cultural diversity within a population, including languages spoken at home. Information about languages spoken at home is readily available through Statistics Canada. Understanding the linguistic variation, as well as patterns of immigration and migration within the population of Wellington can provide insights into the level of ethno-cultural diversity in our service delivery area, which help us plan a child care and early years service system that respects equity, inclusiveness, and diversity.

Census data show that English remains the predominant language spoken most often at home across Wellington. Between 82.7% (Mapleton) and 95.7% (Centre Wellington) of the population speak English at home. Additionally, across less than 1 in 100 speak French most often at home. Total population data show that 9.1% of the population of Wellington speak non-official languages at home, which is lower than the 15.6% for the whole of Ontario (Figure 8). The data also show some significant variation across the 8 municipalities.

Proportion of the Total Population Who Speak Non-Official Languages at Home (2021)

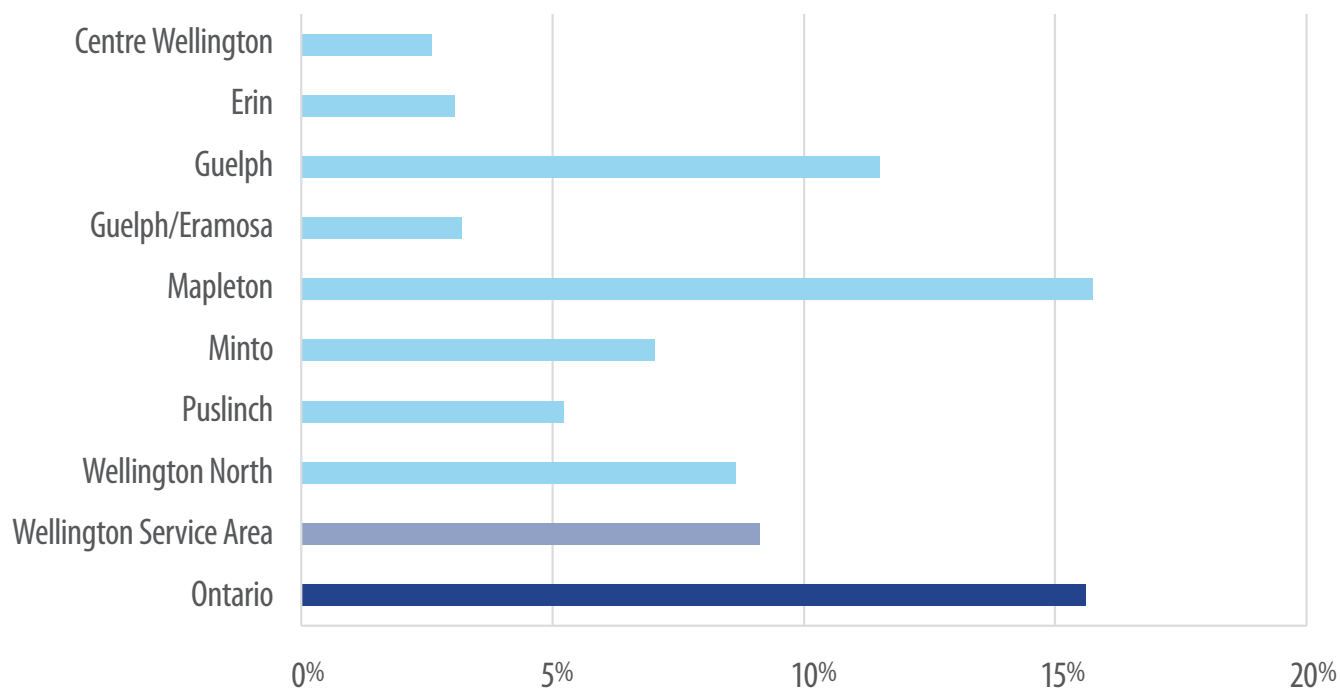


FIGURE 8 Proportion of the total population who speak non-official languages at home, by municipality with Wellington and Ontario as comparators.

Data for municipalities appear to show two patterns. Fewer than 6% of the total population of Centre Wellington, Erin, Guelph/Eramosa and Puslinch speak non-official languages at home suggesting that the majority of the people in these four municipalities speak an official language at home. In contrast, a relatively larger share of the total population speaks non-official languages at home in Mapleton (15.7%), Guelph (11.5%), Wellington North (8.6%), and Minto (7%), suggesting greater ethno-cultural diversity in these municipalities.

To better understand the degree of diversity in each geography, data for the total number of people who speak non-official languages at home were further analyzed to determine which non-official languages were the most prevalent across the Wellington service delivery area (Figure 9).

Non-Official Languages Spoken at Home by Municipality, 2021

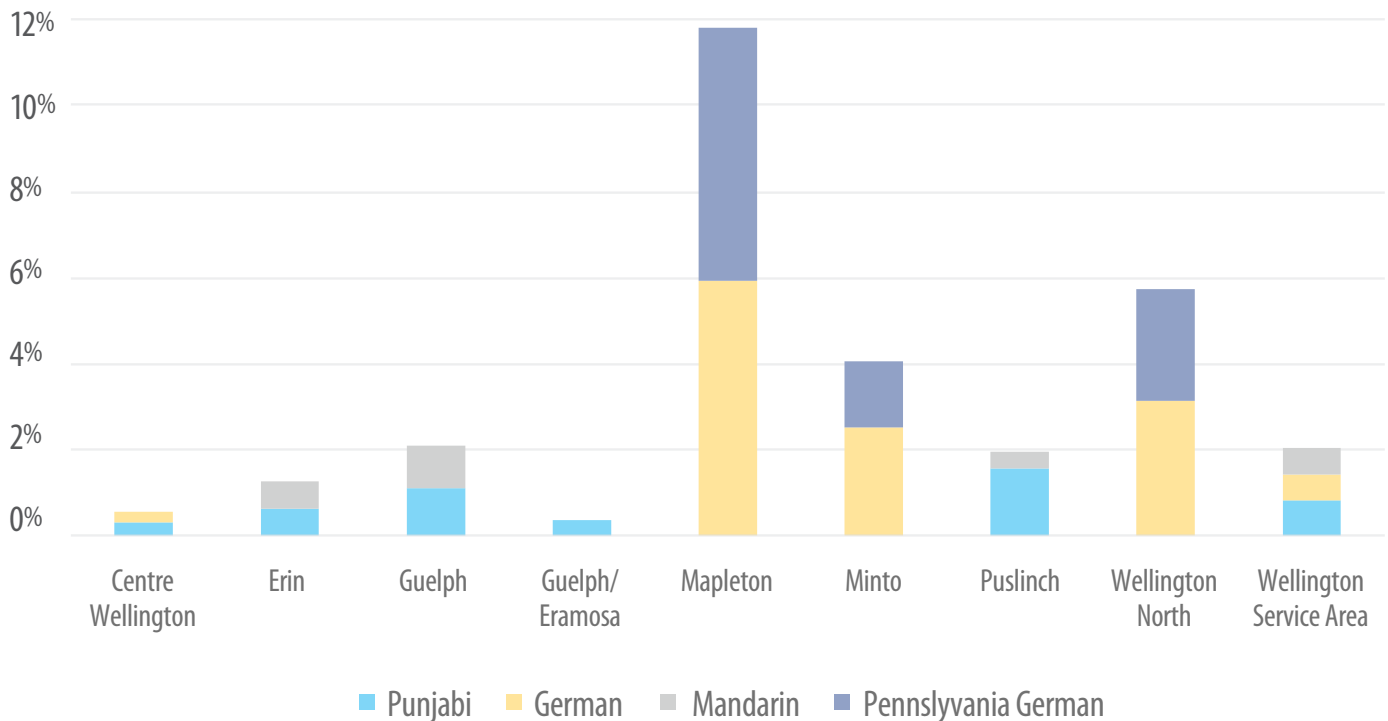


FIGURE 9 Prevalence of non-official languages spoken at home, by municipality with Wellington as a comparator.

The data show that across all municipalities, either Punjabi or Germanic languages are the most common non-official languages spoken. The larger populations of individuals speaking Germanic languages in Mapleton, Minto, and Wellington North may be attributed to higher populations of Low-German Speaking individuals in those municipalities. In particular, many Low-German speaking families from Mexico have immigrated to Wellington County and settled in the Drayton area in Mapleton (Bennett, 2010).

When planning for child care and early years services that respects equity, inclusiveness, and diversity, it can be helpful to understand how many people may be new to the Wellington service delivery area. When considering newcomers, we consider those who have moved to the region from: countries outside of Canada (immigration), other provinces within Canada (interprovincial migration), and from other municipalities with Ontario (interprovincial migration).

Data from Census 2021 indicate that 2.7% of the population in the Wellington service area are recent immigrants who obtained their permanent resident status or landed immigrant status in between 2016 and 2021. This value is slightly lower than the 4.1% for Ontario. Additionally, across

the municipalities in the Wellington service area, there is significant variation (see Figure 10), ranging from 4.1% (Guelph) to 0.3% (Wellington North). Similarly, across the Wellington service area, there are 2665 people (1.1%) who moved to the region from another province. This value is slightly lower than the value seen for Ontario (1.6%).

Proportion of Newcomers to Wellington Service Delivery Area in the Last 5 Years as a Percent of Population (2021)

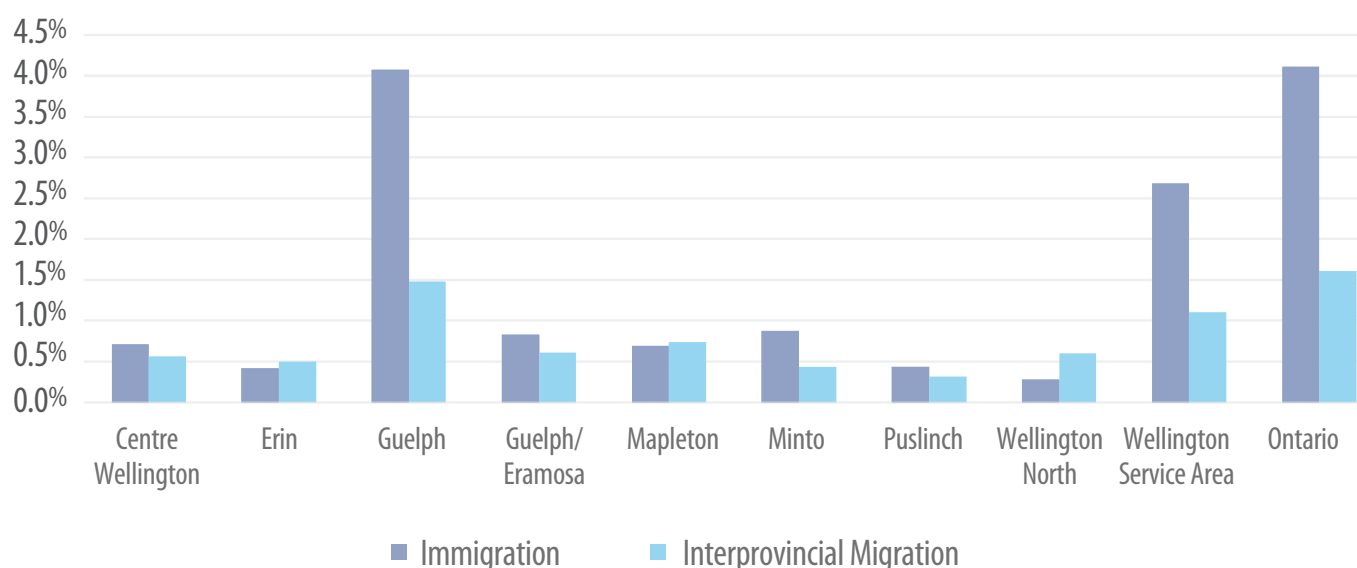


FIGURE 10 Proportion of newcomers from outside Ontario to Wellington service delivery area in the last 5 years (2016-2021) by municipality.

It can also be useful to consider those who moved to Wellington from other municipalities. In the Wellington service delivery area 5.4% of the population is made up of individuals who moved from elsewhere in Ontario in the last year. Across Wellington, there is variation in which municipalities have seen the most interprovincial migration, ranging from 3.5% in Mapleton to 7.7% in Guelph/Eramosa (see Figure 11).

Proportion of Population Migrating from Other Municipalities in Ontario

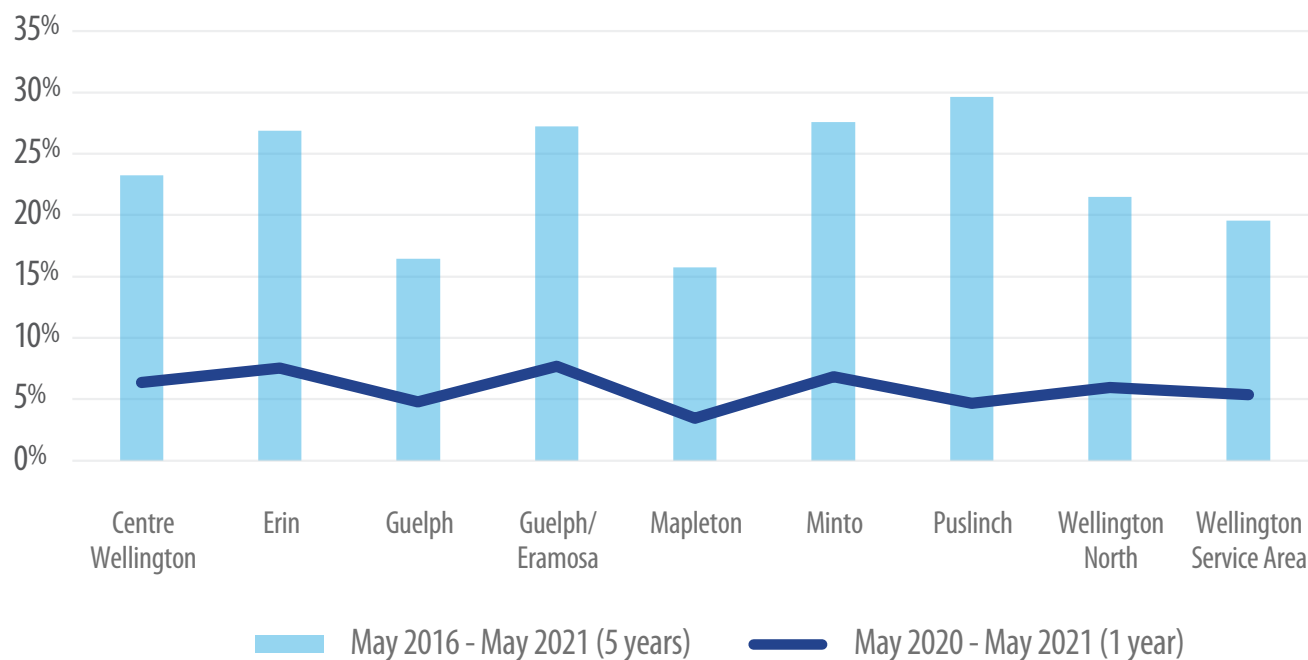


FIGURE 11 Proportion of newcomers to Wellington service delivery area from elsewhere in Ontario in the last 12 months and in the last 5 years by municipality.

Socio-Economic Profile of Wellington

Measures of labour force activity are good indicators of regional economic wellbeing, financial wellbeing of families and ultimately the wellbeing of children. When parents, particularly women, participate in the labour force, it contributes to family income, reduces child poverty, supports economic growth and contributes to tax revenue (County of Wellington Child Care Services, 2012).

Compared to the rest of the province, Wellington performs well on employment and income related variables.

Measures of Employment

Prior to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the unemployment rate (based on 2016 Census data) was relatively low in Wellington (5.3%) compared to the whole of Ontario (7.4%). There was variation in unemployment rate across municipalities, ranging between 2.6% in Mapleton to 6.1% in Guelph.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased the unemployment rate across Ontario, including in the Wellington service delivery area. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the unemployment rate (based on 2021 Census data) for Wellington (9.3%) was slightly lower compared to the whole of Ontario (12.2%). There was significant variation in the unemployment rate across municipalities, ranging from 3.8% in Mapleton to 10.8% in Guelph.

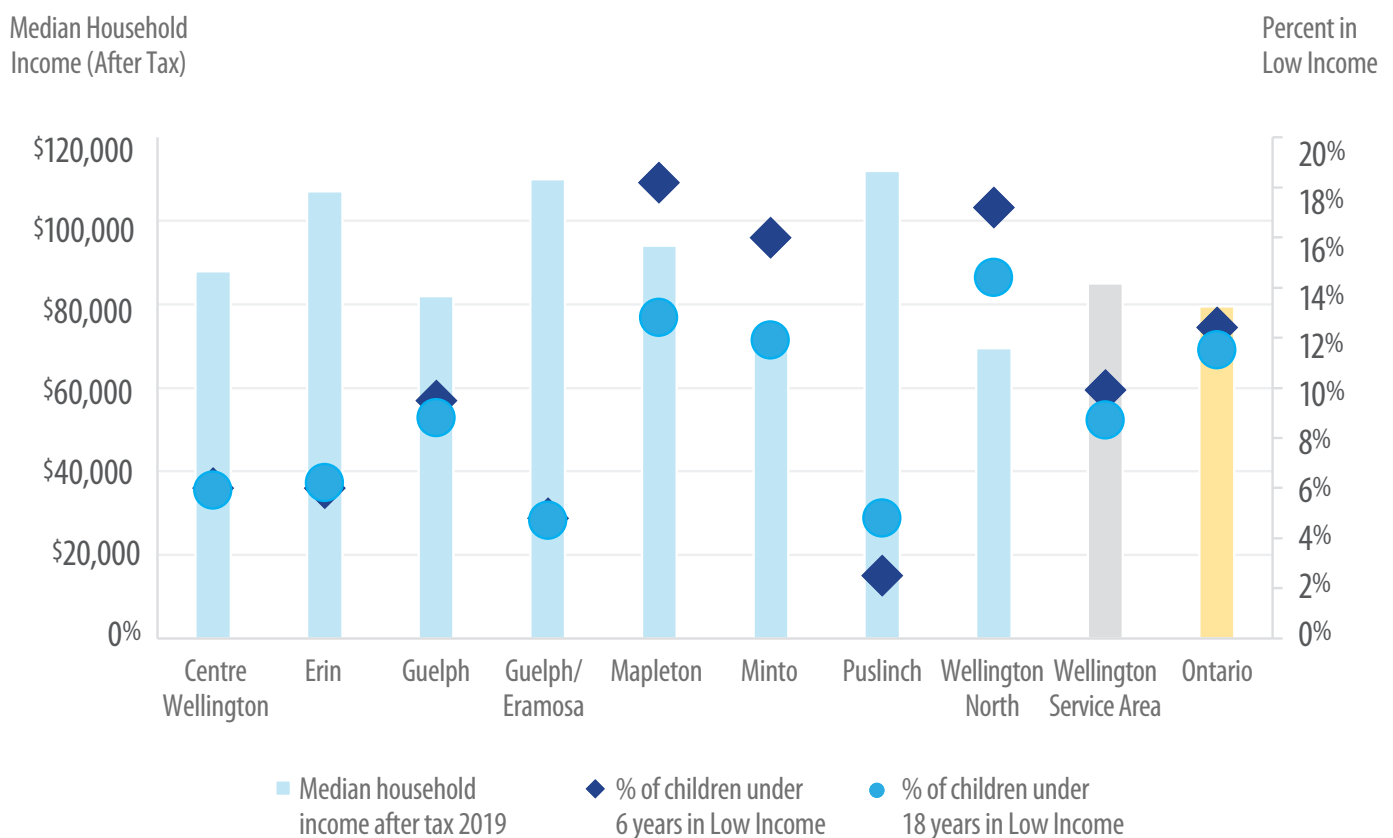


FIGURE 12 Median household income in 2019 (bars) and prevalence of children in low income families based on Low Income-After Tax (diamonds and circles) across Wellington, based on 2021 Census data.

Measures of Household Income and Poverty

Based on 2021 Census data, Wellington has a median household income (after tax) of \$85,000 in 2019, which is higher than that of Ontario of \$79,500 (Figure 12). Except for Minto (\$74,500) and Wellington North (\$69,500), municipalities in Wellington have median household income (after tax) above those of Ontario.

Despite relatively high median incomes across Wellington, data show that there are some children who live in low income households and, therefore, at risk of experiencing poverty (Figure 12). About 10% of children under 6 years and 9% of children under 18 years in Wellington live in low income households. In comparison, approximately 12% of children under 6 years and 12% of children under 18 years in Ontario live in low income households.

Although Wellington is doing better compared to Ontario, there is greater variation across municipalities. The percentage of children under 6 years living in low income household ranges from 2.5% to 18.2%, while that of children under 18 years ranges from 4.8% to 14.4% across Wellington (Figure 12). Mapleton, Wellington North and Minto have the highest child poverty rates in Wellington. Each of these municipalities has more than 15% of children under 6 years and more than 11% of children under 18 years living

in low income households. Puslinch and Guelph/Eramosa have the lowest child poverty rates in Wellington, with 2.5% of children under 6 years in Puslinch and 4.7% of children under 18 years in Guelph/Eramosa living in low income household.

Poverty rates tend to be higher for children under 6 than for children under 18 years in all municipalities. This confirms previous reports indicating that families with children are at higher risk of experiencing poverty when their children are younger and in greater need of care (OECD, 2011b). Cost of care and availability of spaces can contribute to higher poverty rates among families with young children. The cost of child care tends to be higher for younger children which can put a great financial strain on families. In addition, there is very limited availability of child care spaces for the youngest children, particularly infants, which can affect the caregiving parent's ability to work, thus reducing family income.

Children with Vulnerabilities

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) data provide population level estimates of the percentage of children with social and developmental vulnerabilities (presented as the percentage of children vulnerable in one or more domain of development). Figure 13 shows EDI data for Wellington for three cycles: 2012, 2015 and 2018. Data for Ontario is included for comparison.



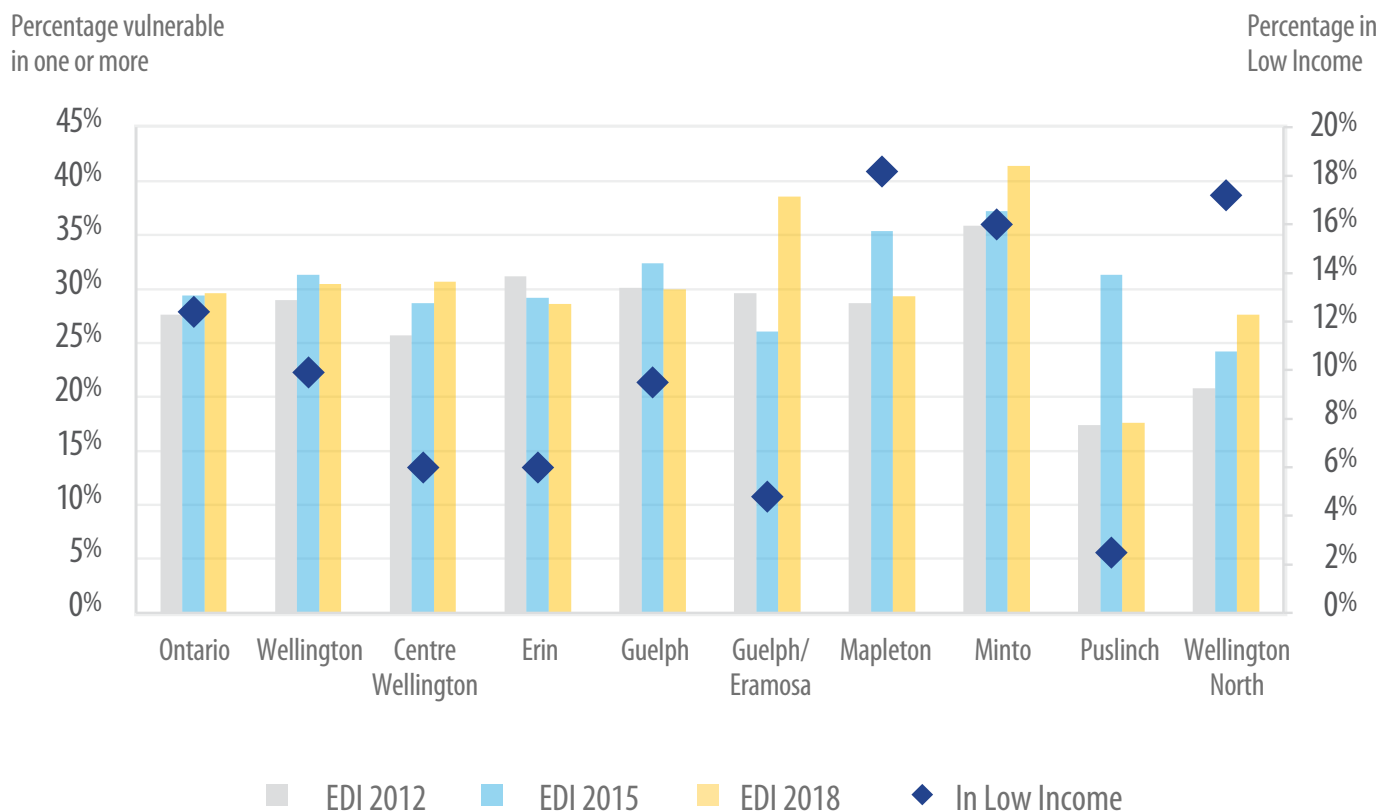


FIGURE 13 EDI results showing the percent of children vulnerable in one or more domain for 2012, 2015 and 2018 and the percent of children under 6 years of age living in low income across Wellington.

From 2012 to 2018 the percentage of children vulnerable in one or more domain in Wellington has remained very close to 30% although there is a slight trend towards an increase in vulnerability. Data for Ontario show a similar trend of increasing vulnerability from 2012 to 2018, although the percentage of children vulnerable in one or more domain has remained slightly below 30%.

The percentage of children vulnerable in one or more domain varies considerably across Wellington municipalities, but three patterns seem to emerge from these data (Figure 13). Centre Wellington, Guelph/Eramosa, Minto and Wellington North appear to show a trend of increasing vulnerability similar to Wellington and Ontario. In Guelph, Mapleton and Puslinch the percentage of children vulnerable in one or more domain appears to be steady from 2012 to 2018 except for a sharp rise in 2015. Erin is the only municipality that shows a decrease in the percentage of children vulnerable in one or more domain from 2012 to 2018.



When EDI results are plotted alongside the percentage of children under 6 years living in low income the data show that even in areas where the percentage of children living in low income is low the percentage of children with vulnerabilities can still be high (Figure 13). This is consistent with evidence showing that “vulnerable children are not limited to low-income families... and the majority of vulnerable children – more than 60% - live in moderate, middle class and affluent families” (Pascal, 2009).

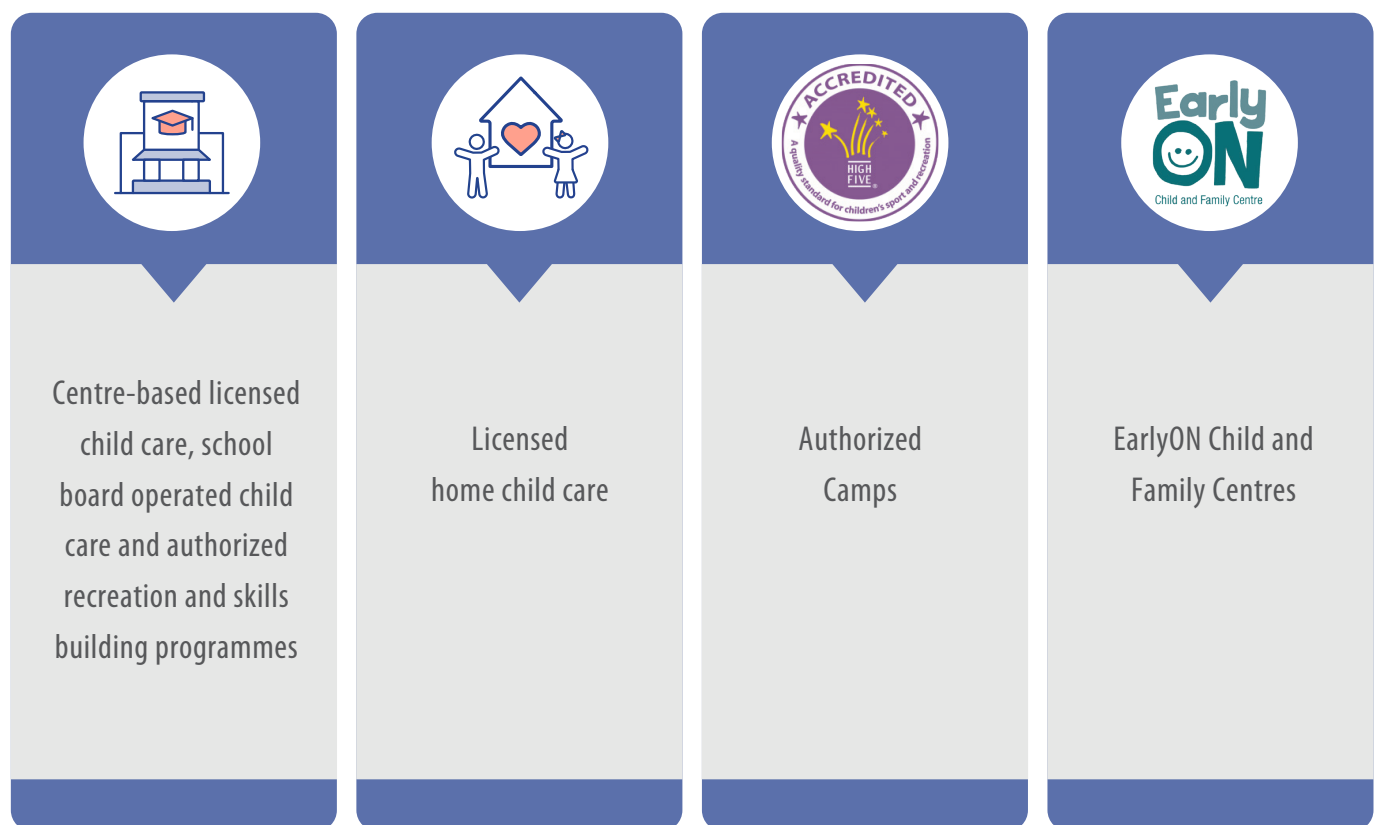
Overall, the data show that in all municipalities within our service delivery area there are children who show some developmental vulnerability. Given the variation in level of vulnerability across municipalities, a nuanced approach to service planning and resource distribution is needed to ensure responsiveness to local needs.

Estimates of social and developmental vulnerabilities among children can be an indicator of the level of potential additional supports required to make programmes and services more accessible and inclusive for all children.

A Snapshot of Child Care and Early Years Services in Wellington

The Continuum of Child Care and Early Years Services

The continuum of child care and early years services that are the focus of our service system plan as defined in CCEYA, 2014 include centre-based licensed child care for children birth up to 4 years, licensed before and after-school programmes for children 4 to 12 years, school board operated child care programmes, licensed home child care, authorized recreation and skill building programmes, “authorized” camps, and EarlyON Child and Family Centres.



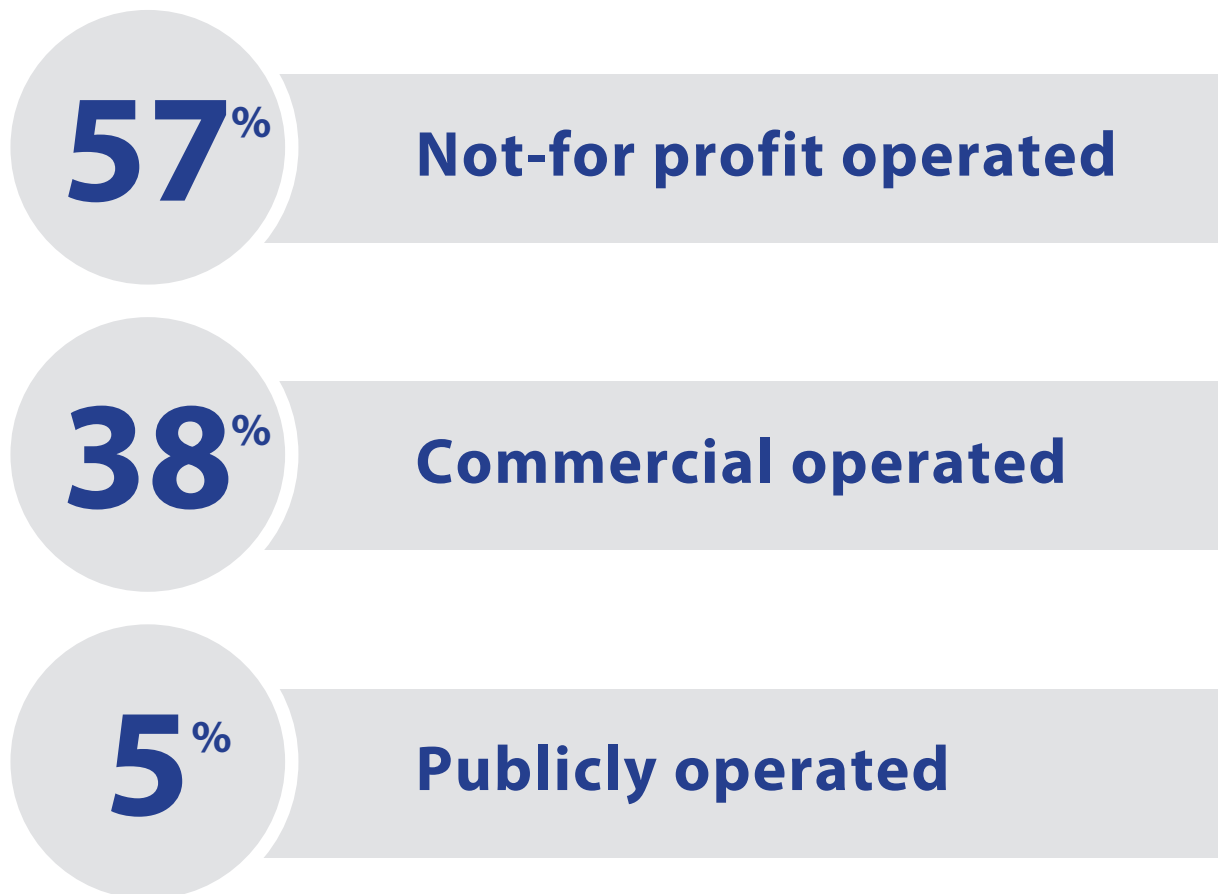
Centre-based Child Care

For the purpose of this report, counts of centre-based child care programmes include centre-based licensed child care for children birth up to 4 years, licensed before and after-school programmes for children 4 to 12 years, school board operated child care programmes, and authorized recreation and skills building programmes.

There are 96 centre-based child care programmes in Wellington serving children birth up to 12 years of age.

Centre-based Child Care Programmes by Auspices

More than half of centre-based child care programmes in Wellington are not-for-profit (57.1%), about 2 in 5 are commercially operated (38.1%) and less than 5% are publicly operated. The publicly operated programmes include one school board operated programme, four centres directly operated by the County of Wellington and two municipally operated authorized recreation and skills-building programmes.



Centre-based Child Care Programmes by Age-group

Of the centre-based child care programmes in Wellington, 40.6% serve children birth up to 4 years of age, while 42.7% provide care to children 4 to 12 years (i.e., school age care).

Additionally, 16.7% of centres provide care to both children birth up to 4 years and school age children.



25%

of licensed
programmes for
children birth
up to 4 years are
located in schools

Child Care Programmes Located in Schools

Ontario's longstanding "schools first" approach, prioritizes schools as the preferred location for child care and early years programmes (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018a). Locating child care centres in schools is supported by research, which shows that locating the continuum of early childhood education and care services in schools provides for greater continuity for children and families, reduces parental hassles and facilitate children's transition into full day learning (Corter & Pelletier, 2010).

About 1 in 4 programmes that offer care for children birth up to 4 years are located in schools. In contrast, a larger share (closer to 9 in 10) of child care programmes that offer care for children 4 to 12 years are located in schools.

Although the majority of existing child care programmes for school age children are located in schools, service system data show that

almost a third of elementary schools in Wellington (30%) do not have a co-located child care or authorized recreation programme. Findings of a community engagement project that was conducted by CEYD in 2018 show that the majority of parents with school age children who were surveyed indicated that they would use before and after school care if it is located at their child's school.



86%

of child care
programmes for
children 4 to 12
years are located
in schools



Distribution of Centre-based Child Care Programmes for Children Birth up to 4 years

Of the 52 centre-based licensed child care programmes for children birth up to 4 years of age, the majority (78.2%) provide full-time full-year child care and the remaining 21.8% are nursery schools that offer only part-time care.

Having both full-time and part-time care options enables our system to be flexible and responsive to varying family needs. However, for planning purposes, we prioritize full-time full year child care for children birth up to 4 years because evidence shows that high quality full-time, full-year licensed child care has a measured positive impact on children's continued development, sustains effective parental engagement in the workforce or in education opportunities and can support economic development (County of Wellington Child Care Services, 2012; Melhuish, 2015).

Figures 14 and 15 show the location of centre-based licensed child care programmes relative to the population distribution for children birth up to 4 years across the Wellington County municipalities (Figure 14) and Guelph (Figure 15). Please note, Guelph is plotted separately to ensure clarity of maps.

There is evidence of inequitable distribution of child care programmes relative to the population of children birth up to 4 years both in Wellington County municipalities and in Guelph. For the Wellington County municipalities (Figure 14), the majority of child care programmes (both full-time full year and nursery schools) are located in population centres.

However, the data also show areas with relatively large population of children birth up to 4 years that do not have child care programmes, such as parts of Mapleton and Wellington North.

Similarly, while a substantial share of child care centres for children birth up to 4 years are located in Guelph, there are parts of Guelph with very high concentration of children birth up to 4 years (especially the north, northeast and south end) that have very few or no child care centres.

This inequitable distribution of child care programmes could be driven by financial viability considerations. Given the market-based nature of child care, child care operators are likely to locate programmes in more desirable neighbourhoods. There is evidence that without intentional planning child care programmes can become concentrated in some neighbourhoods leaving other areas with no options (Akbari & McCuaig, 2017).

The inequitable distribution of child care programmes could also reflect a limited ability by child care operators to respond to population growth by increasing the supply of child care. As the service system manager, our planning responsibilities include supporting the system to respond to changing community needs, such as population growth, and ensuring equitable distribution of child care programmes in order to improve access for families.

It is important to note that while identifying the location of child care centres shows the distribution of programmes relative to where families live, it does not provide a full picture of capacity (i.e., space availability in relation to the population of children). It is, therefore, very possible that even in areas with child care centres, the centres may not have enough spaces relative to the population of children in that area who need those spaces. The distribution of child care spaces across the service delivery area is presented in a later section.



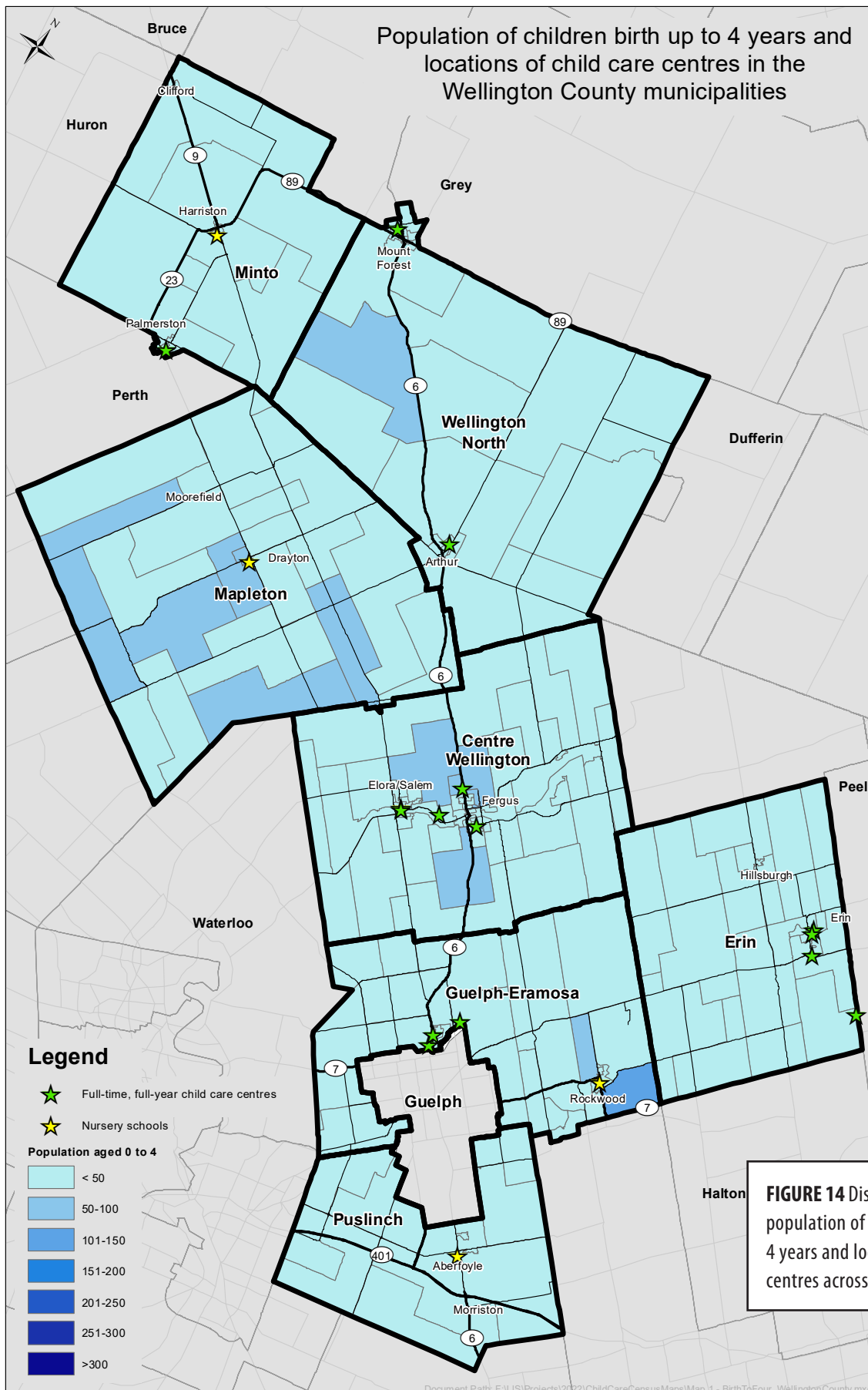


FIGURE 14 Distribution of population of children birth up to 4 years and location of child care centres across Wellington.

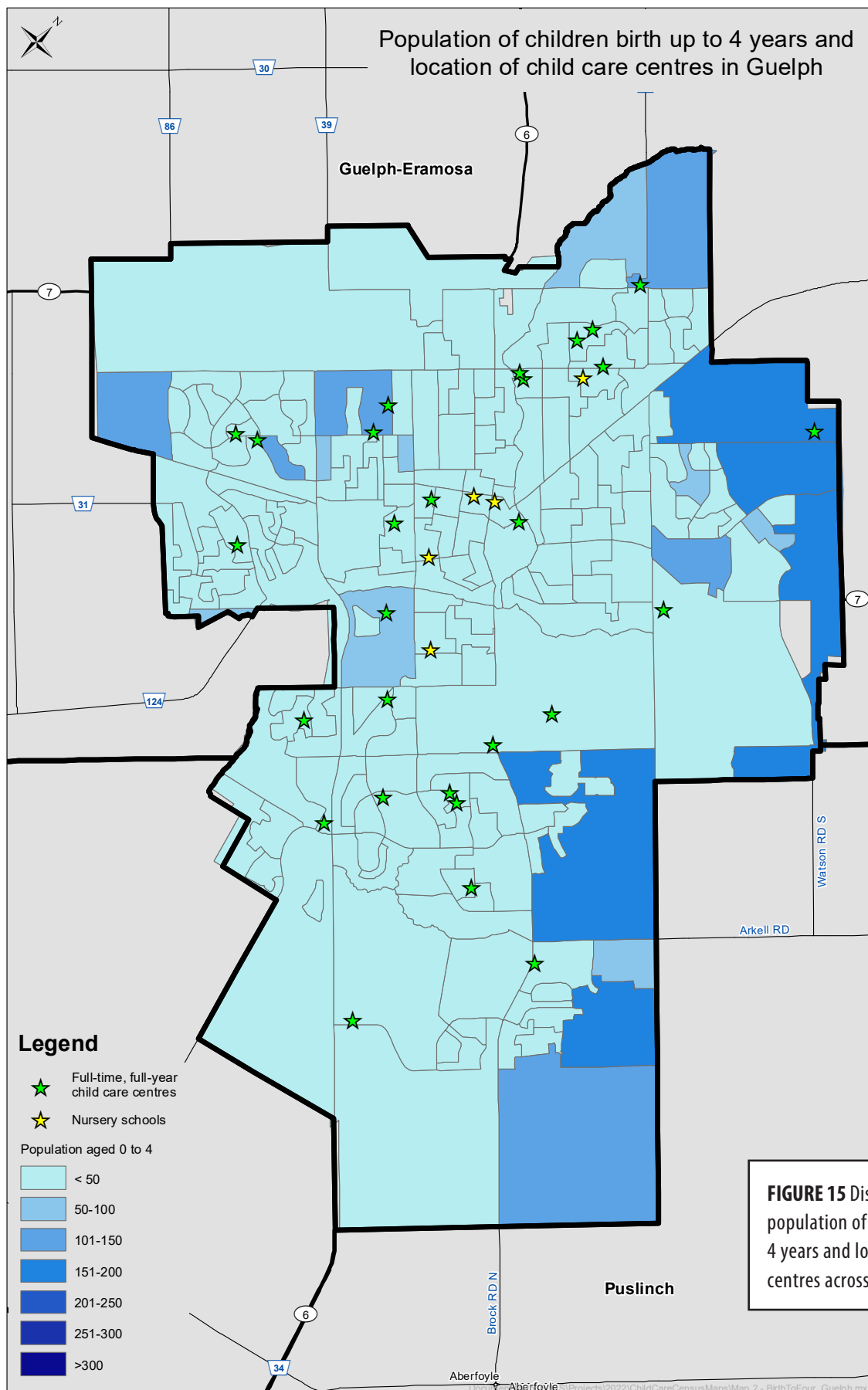


FIGURE 15 Distribution of population of children birth up to 4 years and location of child care centres across Guelph.

Distribution of Centre-based Child Care Programmes for Children 4 to 12 Years

In addition to licensed child care and school board operated child care, CCEYA, 2014 recognizes authorized recreation and skills building programmes as a regulated care option for school age children. While licensed child care and school board operated programmes can provide care both before and after school, authorized recreation and skills building programmes can only offer care once a day for no more than three hours (either before school or after school).

For the purpose of this report, counts of centre-based child care programmes for children 4 to 12 years include licensed before and after-school programmes, school board operated child care programmes. Counts of authorized recreation programmes are presented separately.

Of the 57 school age care programmes in Wellington, the majority (77.2%) are licensed before and after-school programmes, about 22.8% are authorized recreation and skills building programmes.

Of the 57 school age care programmes in Wellington, the majority (77.2%) are licensed before and after-school programmes, about 22.8% are authorized recreation and skills building programmes.

Figures 16 and 17 show the location of centre-based child care programmes relative to the population distribution of children 4 to 12 years of age across the Wellington County municipalities (Figure 16) and Guelph (Figure 17). Please note, Guelph is plotted separately to ensure clarity of maps.

There is evidence of inequitable distribution of school age care programmes relative to the population of children 4 to 12 years in both Wellington County municipalities and Guelph.

For the Wellington County municipalities (Figure 16), the majority of child care programmes are located in population centres. However, there are some population centres that do not have school age child care programmes including Elora in Centre Wellington, Hillsburgh in Erin, Clifford in Minto, Morriston in Puslinch, and Mount Forest in Wellington North. Furthermore, none of the population centres in Mapleton have school age care programmes.

While a substantial share of child care centres for children 4 to 12 years of age are located in Guelph, there are parts of Guelph with very high concentrations of children 4 to 12 years

(such as the north, northeast, west and south end) that have very few or no child care centres.

Given that the majority of all school age child care programmes are located in schools, it is likely that the distribution pattern follows the distribution of schools. However, as noted earlier, not all schools have child care programmes.

Furthermore, identifying the location of child care centres only shows the distribution of programmes relative to where families live, and does not provide a full picture of capacity (i.e., space availability in relation to the population of children). It is, therefore, possible that even in areas with school age child care programmes, the programmes may not have enough spaces relative to the population of children in that area who need spaces. The distribution of child care spaces across the service delivery area is presented in the next section.

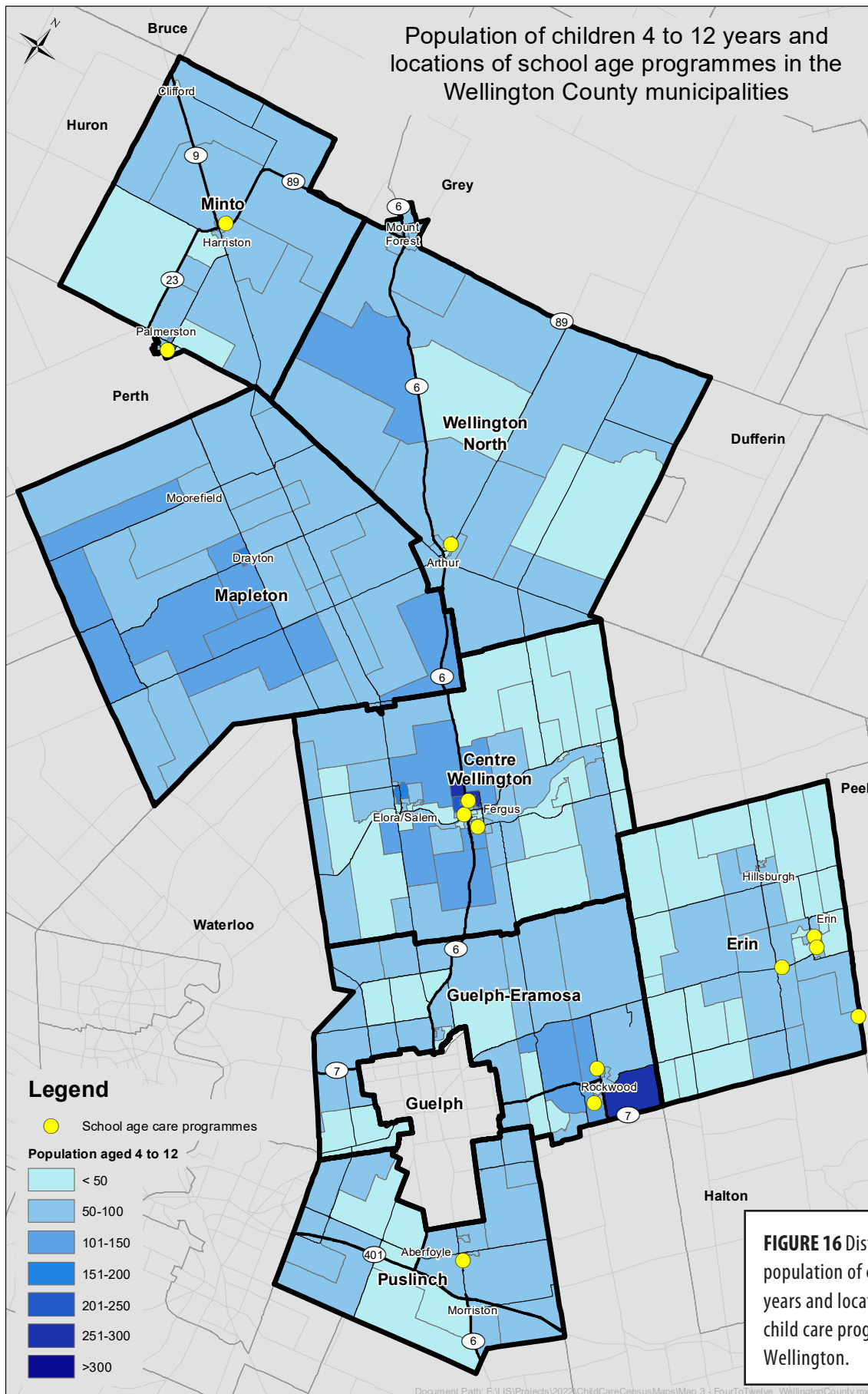
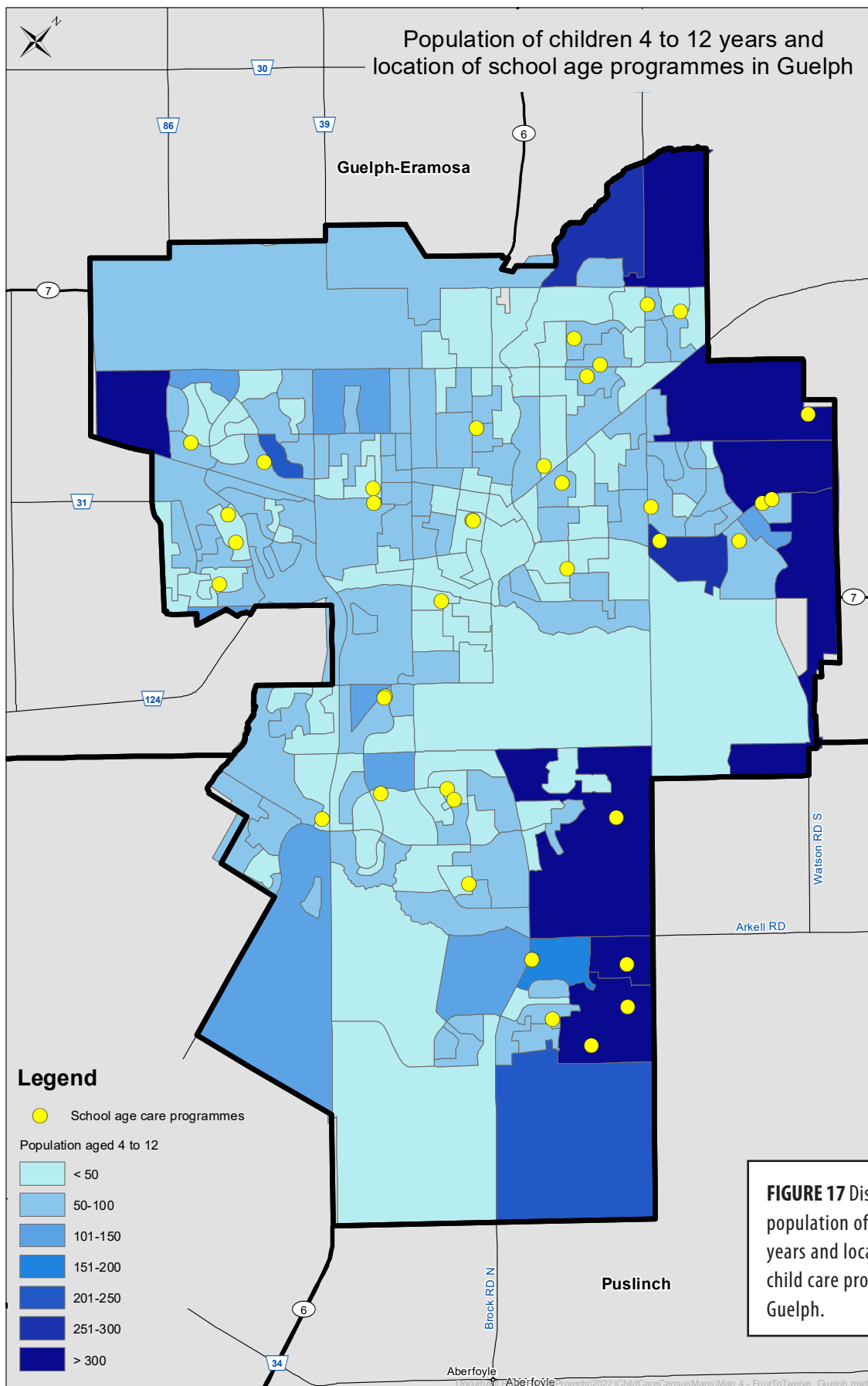


FIGURE 16 Distribution of population of children 4 to 12 years and location of school-age child care programme across Wellington.



Child Care Space Availability and Expansion of the Child Care System

For child care, availability is defined by the number of child care spaces provided in relation to the total population of children within the boundaries of the planning unit. For children birth up to 4 years only full-time full-year spaces are considered for planning purposes.

Wellington has made significant strides in increasing licensed child care space availability (Figure 18), but as the data show, licensed child care capacity is still low for children birth up to 4 years (Figure 19). Furthermore, despite increases in licensed child care spaces for all age groups from 2018 to 2022, the number of infant spaces is low (see Figure 20). Additionally, though there have been increases to school age spaces (Figure 21), the capacity for school age children is also low (Figure 22).



10,200

Total population
of children birth
up to 4 years in
Wellington

Child Care Space Availability for Children Birth up to 4 Years

As of September 1, 2022, Wellington had full-time, full-year centre-based licensed child care spaces for 22% of the total population of children birth up to 4 years in the service delivery area.



22%

Available full-time
full years licensed
child care spaces

Expansion of Centre-based Licensed Child Care Children Birth up to 4 years, 2018-2022

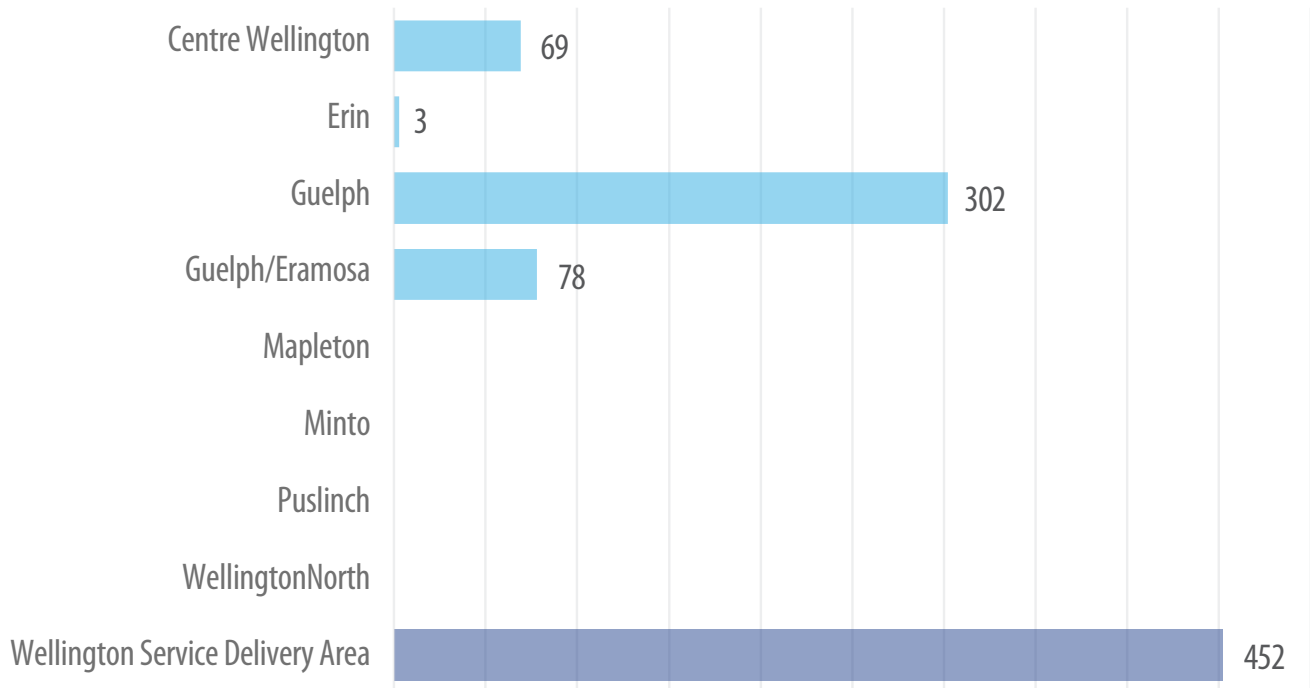


FIGURE 18 Expansion of the number of licensed child care spaces for children birth up to 4 years from 2018 to 2022

Child Care Space Availability for Birth to Age 4 (2018 - 2022)

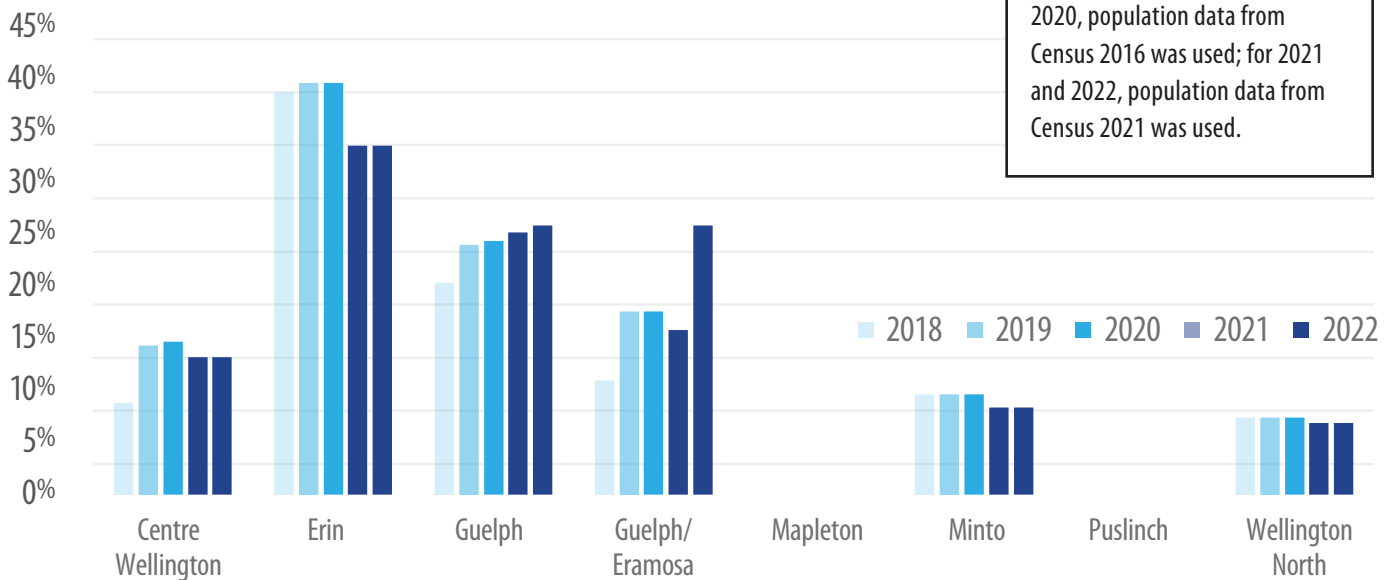


FIGURE 19 Full-time, full-years licensed child care space availability for children birth up to 4 years by municipality from 2018 through 2022. Note: for 2018, 2019 and 2020, population data from Census 2016 was used; for 2021 and 2022, population data from Census 2021 was used.

Despite the increase in licensed child care spaces between 2018 and 2022, the Wellington service delivery area qualifies as a child care desert (Figure 19). A child care desert is defined as a geographic zone (usually postal code) with a child care space availability of less than 33% (i.e., there are more than 3 children for 1 space) (Macdonald, 2018).

The 2022 full-time, full year licensed child care space availability data show that all of the municipalities in Wellington are child care deserts, with the exception of Erin, which has enough full-time, full year licensed child care spaces for 35% of the population of children birth up to 4 years.

In Guelph/Eramosa, there was an increase in child care space availability in 2022 due to the addition of a new child care centre in Rockwood. There was no change in full-time, full year licensed child care space availability in Mapleton, Minto, Puslinch and Wellington North over the five-year period.

Our service system data additionally shows that licensed child care spaces for infants are even more scarce (see Figure 20). Based on research evidence, availability of infant spaces allows mothers to rejoin the workforce earlier, which helps to maintain their earning capacity (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015).

Number of Full-Time, Full-Year Spaces for Children Birth up to Age 4 by Age Group

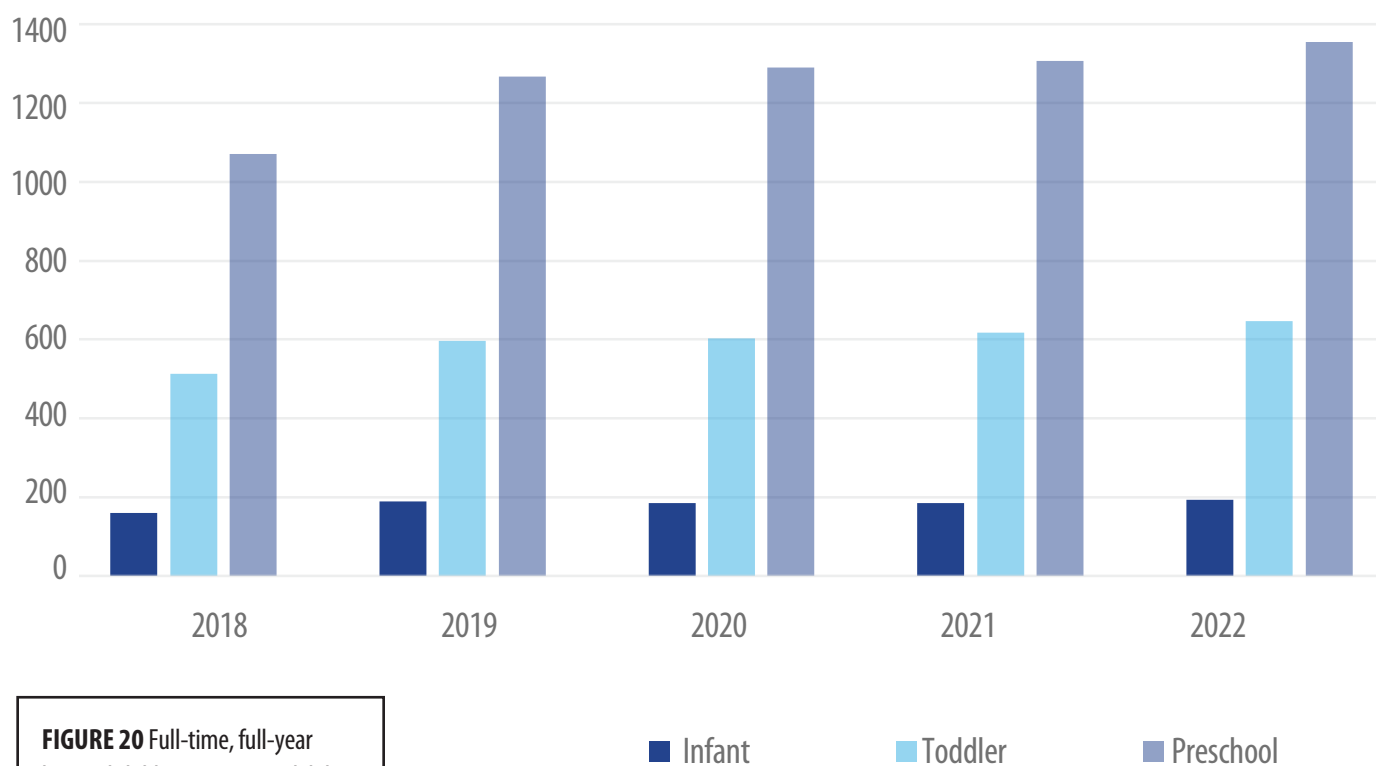


FIGURE 20 Full-time, full-year licensed child care space availability for children birth up to 4 years by age group for 2018 through 2022



25,280

Total population
of children 4 to
12 years of age
in Wellington

Child Care Space Availability for Children 4 to 12 Years of Age

When counting child care space availability for children 4 to 12 years of age, we consider spaces in licensed before and after school programmes, and in school board operated programmes. Authorized recreation and programmes are considered separately.

Child care space availability for school-age children in Wellington is even lower than that for children birth up to 4 years. As of September 1, 2022 there were enough child care spaces for only 10.1% of the total population of children 4 to 12 years of age in Wellington.

Between 2018 and 2022, Wellington experienced a small net increase in child care space availability for school-aged children (Figure 21). Child care space availability data by municipality show that



10.1%

Available school-
age child care
spaces

this was a result of increases and losses in licensed school-age spaces. Centre Wellington and Erin saw an increase in licensed school-age child care space availability, while Guelph, Guelph/Eramosa and Puslinch saw a reduction. The remaining municipalities experienced no change in licensed school-age child care space availability over the five-year period.

Number of Full-Time, Full-Year Spaces for Children Birth up to Age 4 by Age Group

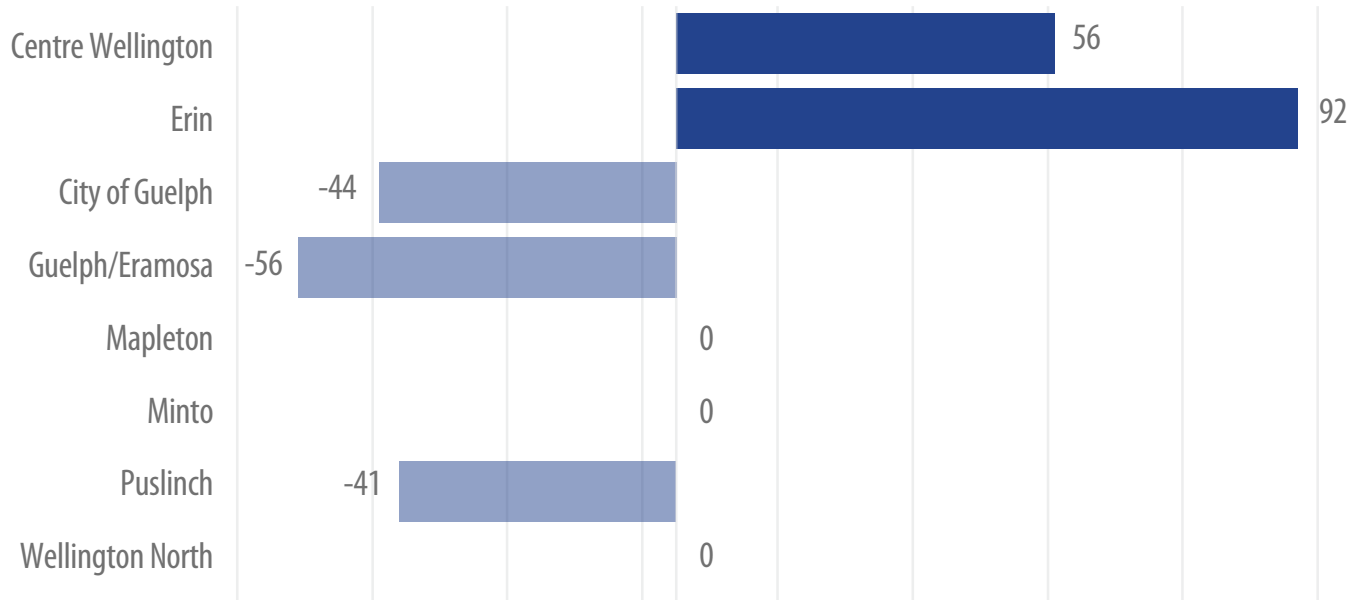


FIGURE 21 Change in the number of licensed child care spaces for children aged 4 up to 12 years by municipality from 2018 to 2022

Child Care Space Availability for Children Age 4 to 12 years (2018-2022)

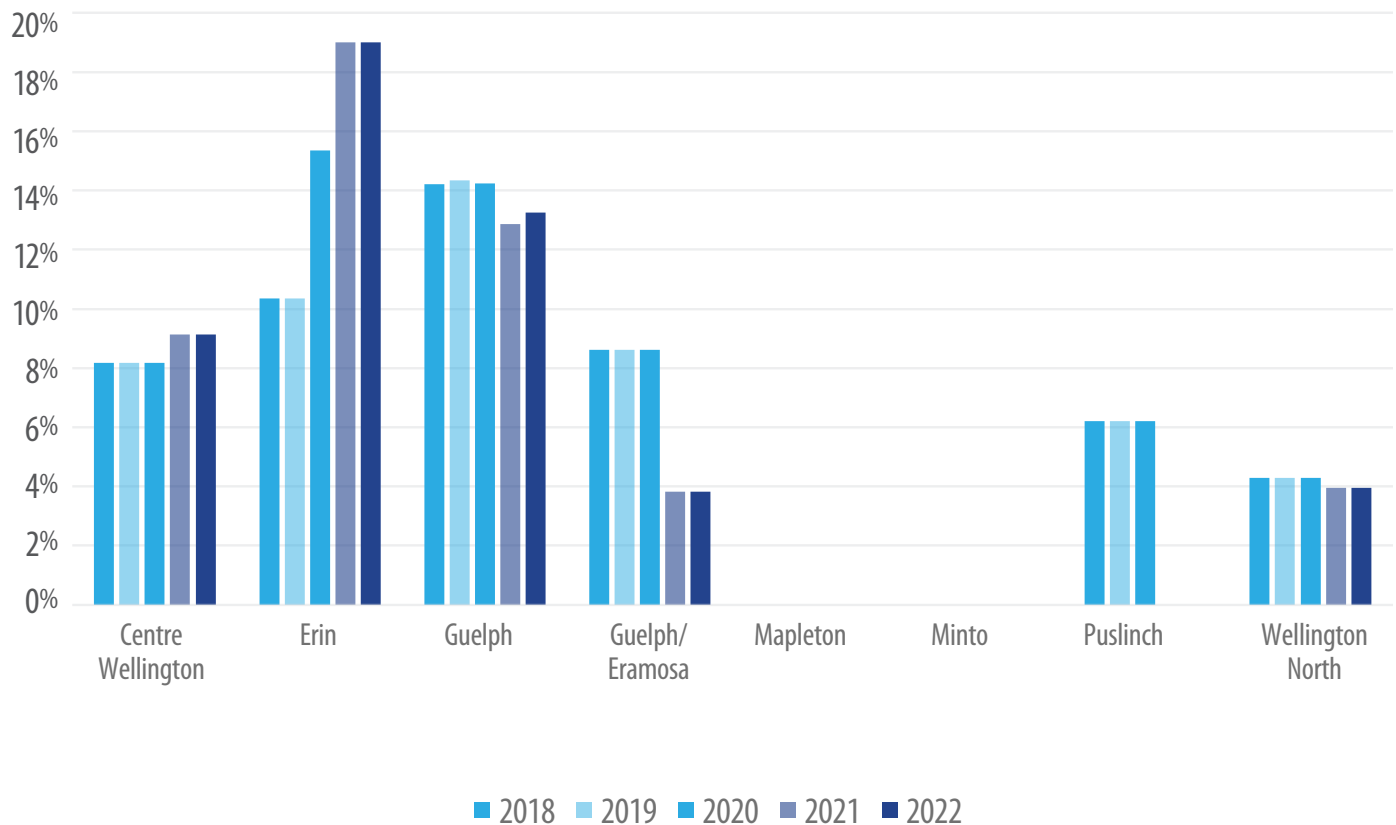


FIGURE 22 Licensed space availability for children aged 4 to 12 years by municipality for 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022. Note: for 2018, 2019 and 2020, population data from Census 2016 was used; for 2021 and 2022, population data from Census 2021 was used.

The increase in school age spaces in Centre Wellington and Erin can be attributed to the addition of several new programmes between 2019 and 2021. The notable decrease in school age space availability in Guelph, Guelph/Eramosa, Puslinch, and Wellington North was due to many before and after school programmes changing to authorized recreation programmes. Similarly, in Minto and Mapleton where there are no licensed school spaces, there are authorized recreations programmes that provide care to the community. The availability of authorized recreation spaces is presented in Figure 23.

Number of Authorized Recreation Spaces in 2022

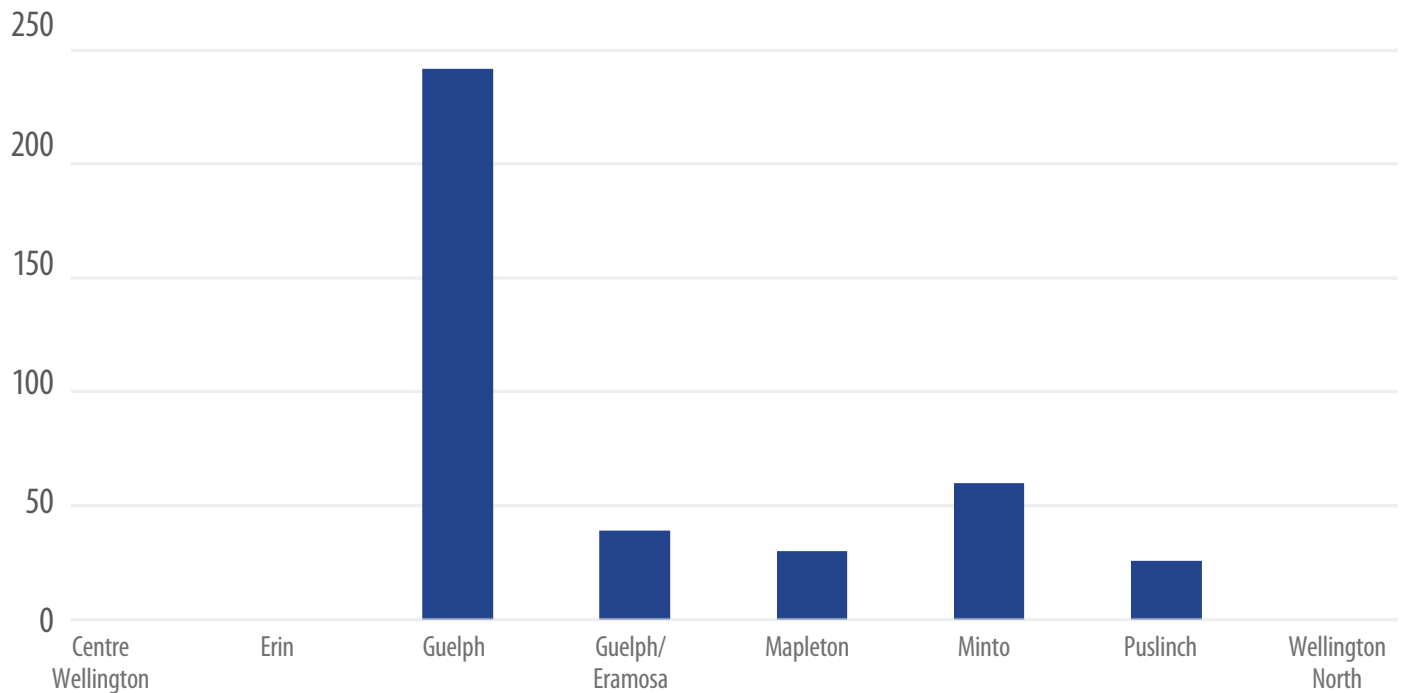


FIGURE 23 Authorized Recreation space availability for children aged 4 to 12 years by municipality in 2022.

Licensed Home Child Care

Licensed home child care is a very important part of the child care and early years system. Wellington has one Home Child Care Agency licensed for 87 home child care providers. For the purposes of this document any reference to home child care providers means providers contracted with the Home Child Care Agency; they are part of the licensed child care system.

Recruitment and/or retention of home child care providers is a long standing concern in the sector (Doherty et al., 2001) and remains a challenge in Wellington. As of December 31, 2019, just prior to the disruptions caused by

the COVID-19 pandemic, the Wellington Home Child Care Agency was operating at just under 50% of its licensing capacity with 42 home child care providers contracted with the Agency.

The distribution of home child care providers by municipality is shown in Figure 24. Guelph/Eramosa, Mapleton and Puslinch have no home child care providers contracted with the Wellington Home Child Care Agency and are not shown on the graph.

Number of Licensed Home Child Care Providers Contracted by the Home Child Care Agency (2019)

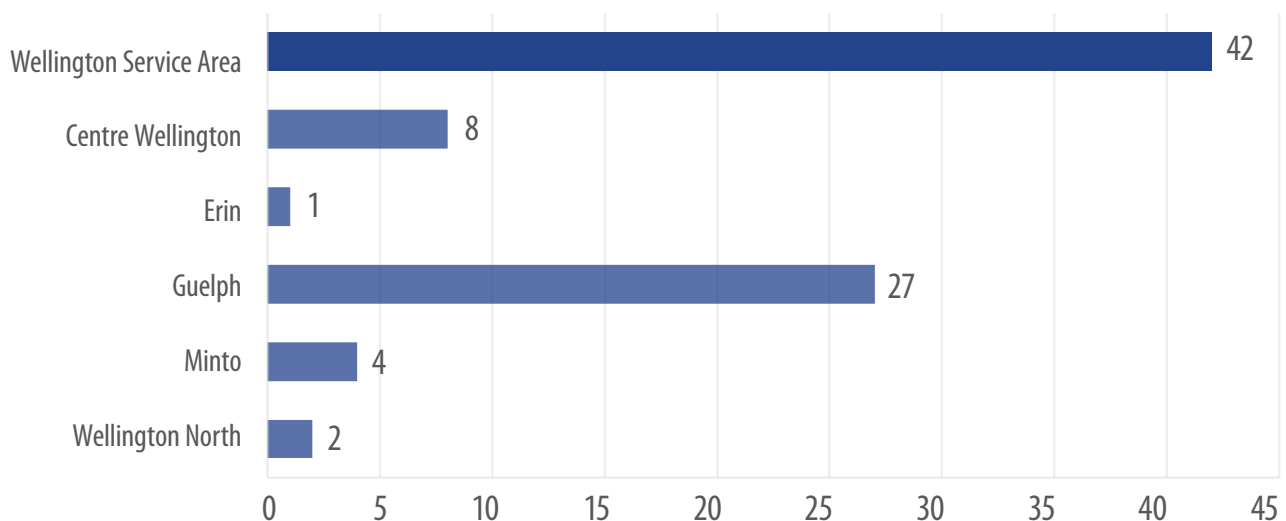


FIGURE 24 Distribution of home child care providers contracted with the Wellington Home Child Care Agency in 2019

Home child care providers provide care for children birth to 12 years of age. As of December 31, 2019 a total of 179 children were cared for by home child care providers contracted with the Wellington Home Child Care Agency. The majority (57.5%) were children birth up to 4 years of age and 42.5% were school age children.

Authorized Camp Programmes

Care that is provided to children 4 years of age or older through a programme that operates for no more than 13 weeks in a calendar year on days where instruction is not typically provided for pupils in schools (i.e., on professional development (PD) days, school breaks and over the summer), and is operated by a recognized organization, is considered as a “camp” (CCEYA, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020). In addition, camps have to meet certain requirements, including requirements for health and safety as set by service system managers. For the purposes of this document, these programmes will be referred to as “authorized camps”.



Authorized camps are an important part of the regulated child care and early years continuum and most importantly they allow children and families to access supports such as child care fee subsidies and Special Needs Resourcing.

In Wellington, authorized camp programmes, in addition to meeting minimum health and safety requirements, are required to maintain a minimum expectation for quality as determined by the Operating Criteria process.

Currently there is only one organization, the YMCA, delivering authorized camp programmes in Wellington.

It is important to note that, for the most part, authorized camps complement licensed child care programmes, which are able to operate year-round (i.e., on instructional and non-instructional days). However, the reality is that the majority of licensed and school board operated child care programmes that offer before and after school care do not operate on days when instruction is not typically provided (i.e.,

on PD days, school breaks and over the summer). This means that given the very limited number of authorized camp options within our service delivery area, parents are forced to use other camp options that have limited or no oversight and do not allow parents to access public supports including child care fee subsidy and Special Needs Resourcing supports.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres

EarlyON Child and Family Centres (“EarlyONs”) are child and family support programmes and services for children birth up to 6 years and their parents and caregivers. They were created by the consolidation of the former Better Beginnings, Better Futures programmes; Child Care Resource Centres; Ontario Early Years Centres; and Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, with the aim of having “an increasingly integrated, cohesive system of services and supports for children ages 0-6 and their parents and caregivers” (Government of Canada, 2020).

The County of Wellington, as the service system manager for child care and early years services, assumed responsibility for the planning and management of EarlyONs on January 1, 2018. EarlyON programmes and services in Wellington are delivered by three community agencies: Community Resource Centre of North and Centre Wellington, Guelph Community Health Centre, and Shelldale Family Gateway.

Wellington’s EarlyON programmes and services are delivered using three approaches: centres, satellites and mobile services. The three approaches represent differences in service delivery setting and in levels of programming intensity of mandatory core services. Detailed definitions for centre, satellite and mobile services are provided in Appendix A.

In developing the local EarlyON service system, CEYD adopted a strategy that supports increased access to EarlyONs by making services more consistent, equitably distributed across the service delivery area and closer to where families live.

Our approach prioritizes stable physical sites, i.e., centres and satellites because these stable sites

provide the best opportunity for ensuring service consistency and improved access. Parents have better access when services are delivered consistently – meaning stable venues, predictable hours, programming of higher frequency, a comprehensive menu of mandatory core services, and stable staff (that has time to establish relationships with families). Both local (Corter & Peters, 2011; Pancer et al., 2013) and international studies (Melhuish et al., 2006; Mel-

huish et al., 2010) have demonstrated the effectiveness of child and family support programmes that are offered in stable physical sites.

Access is also improved when programmes and services are located close to where families live. Given the size of our geography and population distribution throughout parts of the service area, it is inevitable that not all families will be close to an EarlyON centre or a satellite. EarlyON mobile services are a delivery option that allow programming to reach families closer to where they live.

The County of Wellington, as the service system manager for child care and early years services, assumed responsibility for the planning and management of EarlyONs on January 1, 2018.

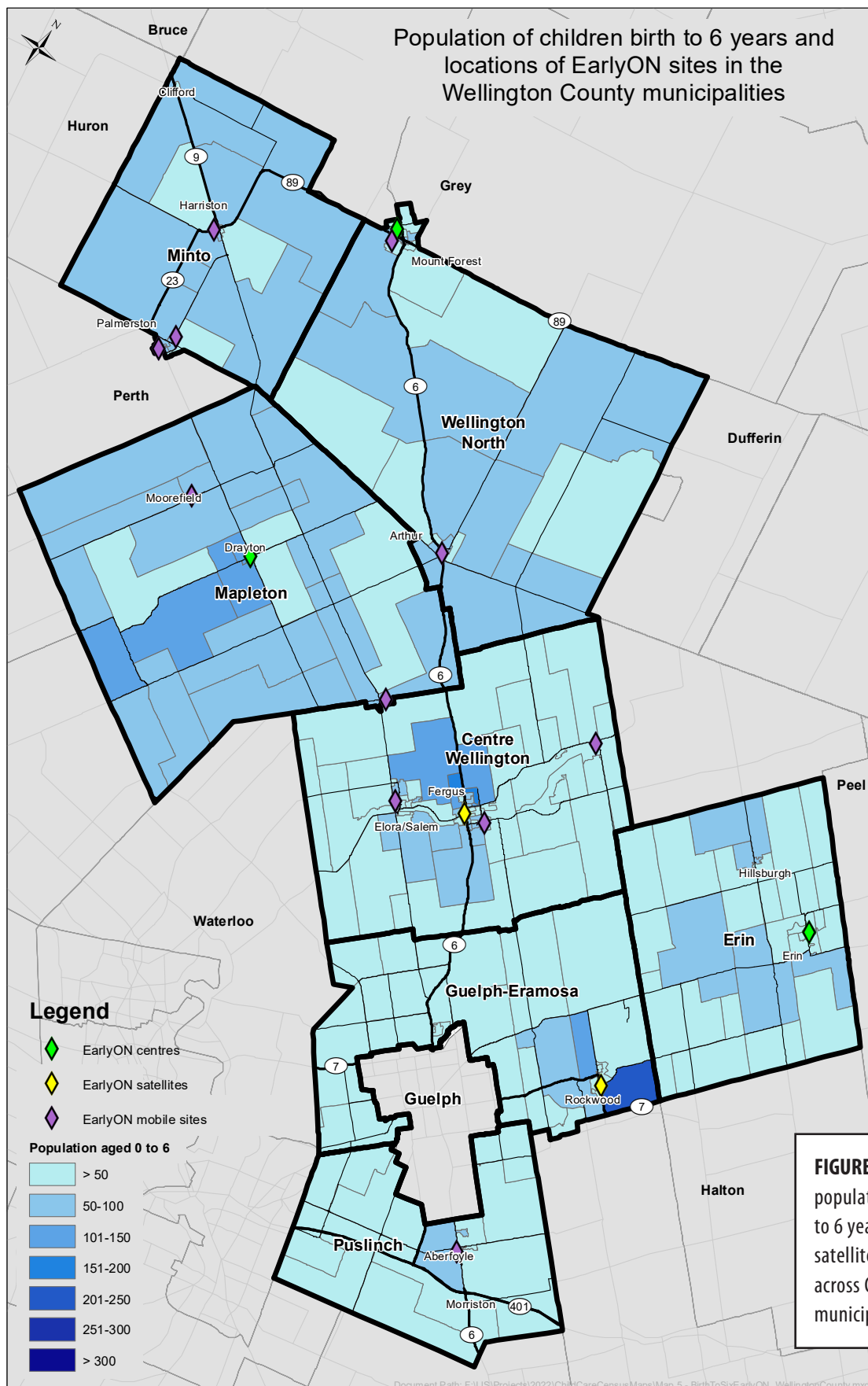
Distribution of EarlyON Sites

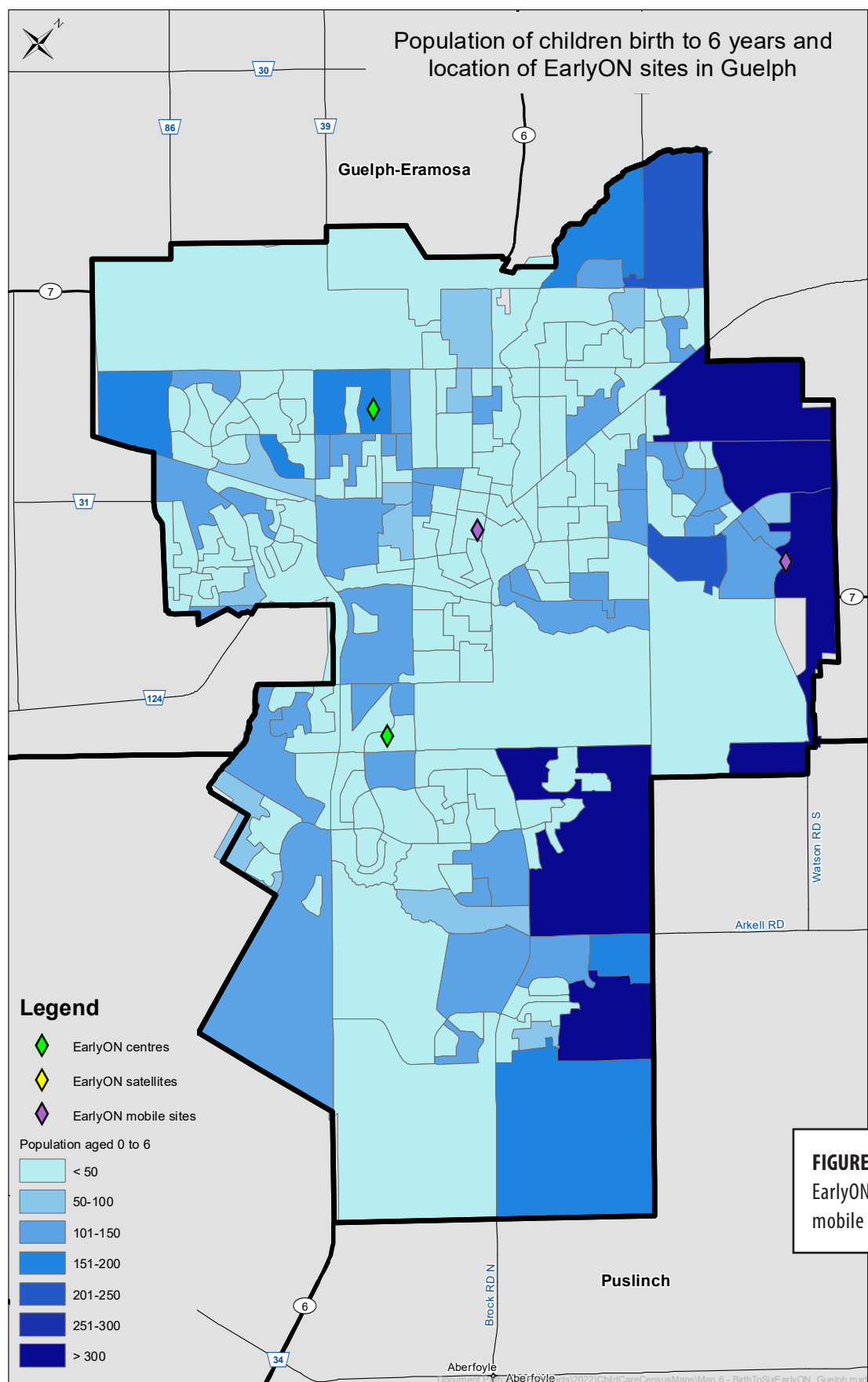
Figures 25 and 26 show the distribution of EarlyON service sites relative to the population distribution of children birth to 6 years of age across the Wellington County municipalities (Figure 25) and Guelph (Figure 26). Please note, Guelph is plotted separately to ensure clarity of maps.

There are 20 EarlyON service sites in Wellington and each of the municipalities in our service delivery area have at least one site (Figures 25 and 26). When the service system manager took over responsibility for EarlyONs in 2018, only two municipalities had EarlyON centres, that is, Guelph (with two centres) and Wellington North (with one centre). Currently, seven of the eight municipalities (Centre Wellington, Erin, Guelph, Guelph/Eramosa, Mapleton, Minto, and Wellington North) have at least one centre or satellite. In Puslinch EarlyON services are delivered solely via mobile services.



Our target for the service delivery area is for each municipality to have at least one centre and to use mobile services, not as the primary model for EarlyON service delivery, but rather for outreach and to improve access where physical sites are located too far from the community.





Indigenous Early Years and Child Care Services

To guide the vision for an early learning and child care vision that supports Indigenous communities, the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework outlines the principles, goals, and strategic actions that would build, support, and sustain an Indigenous child care and early years system (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018). The framework emphasizes that different ways of knowing are held by the distinct Indigenous communities. Further, the framework outlines the importance of tailoring an Indigenous child care and early learning system to the cultural nuances found within Indigenous communities and provides distinct priorities and strategic actions for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

A review of existing programmes and services offered in Wellington indicate that there are no child care and early year's services that meet the unique needs of Indigenous children and families in the service delivery area.

There have been local efforts to introduce early years programming aimed at Indigenous families, but with limited success. A 2012 Sharing Circle Report that was commissioned by the GGG Birth-Six Working Group to better understand experiences and needs of the local Indigenous community stressed the need to establish relationships with local Indigenous organizations, Indigenous staff and the Indigenous community in order to improve programme uptake (Sherman, 2012).

As part of a comprehensive Early Years Community Engagement Project undertaken to help inform the child care and early years service system plan, the County of Wellington partnered with the Indigenous Healing and Wellness Program Wellington-Waterloo in 2019 and hired a consultant, INDsight Consulting, to conduct an Indigenous community consultation on child care and early years programmes and services.

Findings from the 2019 Indigenous Early Years Community Consultation are consistent with those of the 2012 Aboriginal Sharing Circle Report. The 2019 Indigenous Early Years Community Consultation Report also recommends that for child care and early years services to meet the unique needs of Indigenous children and families they have to be based on Indigenous values and goals; be informed by Indigenous world-views and ways of being; be Indigenous-led within an Indigenous organization; and be supported by stable, sustainable and adequate funding.

Recommendations from the 2019 Indigenous Early Years Community Consultation Report will guide how the County of Wellington works with the local Indigenous community to develop programmes and services that meet their unique needs.

French-Language Early Years and Child Care Services

Due to its small Francophone population, the Wellington service delivery area is not located in an area designated under the French Language Services Act . However, the County of Wellington is committed to work with the local Francophone community and address their child care and early years programme and service needs.

There are two French-language child care operators who provide licensed child care programmes to children birth to up 4 years and to school age children. Both operators are located in Francophone elementary schools in Guelph.

Currently, there are no French language EarlyON programmes in Wellington although data from our community engagement work show that interest exists among members of the Franco-phone community as well as the general public.



The Child Care and Early Years Workforce

The child care and early years workforce is diverse. Key to programme operations include supervisors, early childhood education programme staff, home child care advisors, and cooks in licensed centres for children birth up to 4 years.

Given the important role that early childhood education programme staff, particularly Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE), have in programme quality, understanding the proportion of RECEs in the workforce helps us track how well we are doing towards staffing for quality. Currently, there is very limited consistent tracking of child care and early years workforce data in our area, but the information at hand shows that the sector continues to experience a shortage of RECEs.

Data on the distribution of RECEs across child care settings are currently not available, but conversations with programme operators suggest a greater shortage of qualified staff in school-age programmes.

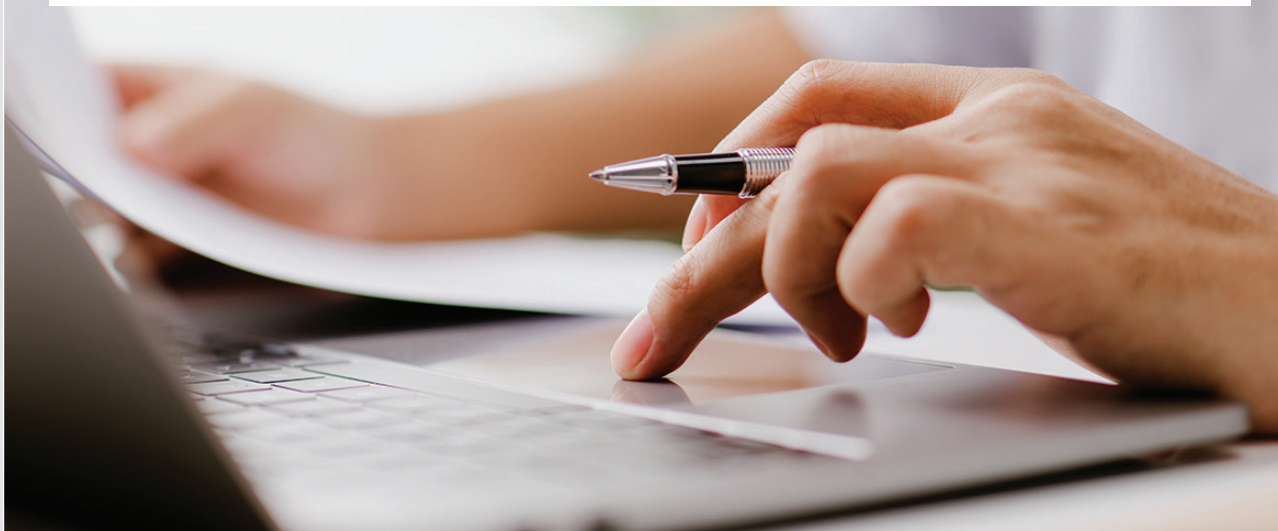
In Wellington, home child care advisors (that is, the home child care agency staff who help to supervise and provide pedagogical and other professional supports to home child care providers) are all RECEs – meaning they are in good standing with the College of Early Childhood Educators and participate in ongoing professional learning to enhance their own knowledge and skills.

Data for EarlyON programmes is more readily available and is consistent with information from the child care sector. About 84% (21 out of 25) of EarlyON programme staff in Wellington are RECEs.

Children's Early Years Division's Service System Management Roles

As the service system manager for child care and early years services, CEYD performs a number of functions to ensure the system is planned and managed in a way that addresses provincial goals and local needs.

CEYD is the only agency of the early childhood service continuum that is mandated to serve the whole Wellington service delivery area. Comprising six teams, CEYD staff members include early childhood professionals, RECEs, and professionals with expertise in planning and research. This section highlights the work of the different CEYD teams.



Child Care Administration

The Child Care Administration team is responsible for managing and delivering the General Operating Grant (GOG), Wage Enhancement Grant (WEG), and other grants to licensed child care programmes; and for managing and delivering funding according to the municipal contracts that the CEYD holds with community organizations.

The activities of the Child Care Administration team include monitoring quality using the Operating Criteria process, our programme evaluation tool that helps us to distribute public funding in a fair way that prioritizes high quality practices, in all programmes that have or wish to have a Purchase of Service Agreement (POS). Our GOG strategy prioritizes licensed child care programmes for children birth up to 4 years and programmes with GOG Purchase of Service Agreement automatically have a contract for Fee Subsidy.

Licensed child care programmes for children birth up to 4 years not interested in a GOG Purchase of Service Agreement and all school-age care programmes (i.e., licensed child care, school board operated, authorized recreation and skills building programmes, authorized camps) are eligible to apply for a Fee Subsidy-only POS with the County of Wellington. Programmes that fail to meet the minimum quality expectations lose their eligibility to receive the GOG and Fee Subsidy funding from CEYD.

Highlights of key initiatives undertaken by the Child Care Administration team

- Implemented the GOG funding strategy, a strategy that was developed to prioritize high quality, stabilization of full-time, full year licensed child care spaces for children birth to up 4 years and replaced the historical Wage Subsidy (2015-2016)
- Developed guidelines and quality assessment tools to support operation of authorized recreation and skills building programmes and help alleviate shortage of care spaces for school age children (2017-2019)
- Developed guidelines, application, and reporting processes for additional funding including Wage Enhancement Grant, Fee Stabilization Grant and Fixed Overhead Costs (since 2015)
- Supported the child care community through the COVID-19 pandemic including administering the Federal Safe Restart funding (since 2020)
- Supported the child care community through the COVID-19 pandemic by including Pandemic Support Funding (funded through WGOG) to fund additional costs associated with COVID-19. Funding was only provided to Operators with a Wellington General Operating Grant Agreement. This included developing a survey which Operators reported to the County based on actual costs, following up with approval letters and issuing payments. This was offered to Operators from January 2021-March 2022
- Supported the child care community with an ongoing supply of Rapid Antigen Tests (monthly). This started in January 2022 and is expected to continue for the foreseeable future
- Supported the work of developing and implementing the materials (e.g., applications, reporting templates, legal agreements), policies, and procedures for the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care system to support Wellington's child care community and provide lower fees to families enrolled in participating child care programmes (2022)

Child Care Fee Subsidy

The Child Care Fee Subsidy team administers the child care fee subsidy programme that helps eligible families to pay for child care. Responsibilities include determining eligibility based on family income as well as a family's need for care, and working with child care programmes to review information of families in receipt of child care fee subsidy to ensure fee subsidy payments are made for services provided.

The Child Care Fee Subsidy team additionally provides a family support role to child care fee subsidy clients by connecting them to other supports and services within the social services department of the County of Wellington and other community organizations as needed.



Highlights of key initiatives undertaken by the Child Care Subsidy team

- Co-location of the Child Care Subsidy team with Housing and Ontario Works, the other Social Service Divisions of the County of Wellington, as part of a broader human services integration initiative (since 2017)
- Policy change making parents who work varied schedules eligible to receive subsidized full-time child care, improving access to child care for parents who have unstable work schedules (2017)
- Began providing interpreter services for child care subsidy appointments for parents who need it, and also for accessing the entire child care continuum
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Child Care Fee Subsidy team ceased in person processes and began to conduct eligibility and annual review appointments virtually, supported by electronic document submissions, which helped to remove time and transport barriers for families while reducing application processing time
- Due to impacts to the system related to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2019 data is reported here, which showed:
 - 668 children received child care fee subsidy and of these 16.5% had identified special needs
 - Three most frequently cited reasons for seeking child care subsidy among applicants were “working full time” (53%), “child/family need referral” (15%), and “attending school” (13%)
 - Guelph had the largest share of children in receipt of fee subsidy (80%) followed by Centre Wellington (7.9%)
 - The number of children in receipt of fee subsidy was considerably lower in the other municipalities, particularly in Mapleton which accounted for only 0.1% of the total share of children in receipt of fee subsidy in 2019
- Swiftly developed and implemented Emergency Child Care in 2020, January 2021, April to June 2021, and January 2022 in partnership with licensed community child care programmes to provide child care for frontline workers during COVID-19
- Developed and implemented an electronic process for families to more easily make payments towards money owed to the County due to a Subsidy Overpayment
- Manually calculated refund amounts and reduced parent fees so that families in receipt of Subsidy can benefit from CWELCC at the same time as other full fee families attending the same programme

Early Years Operations

The Early Years Operations team was created in 2020 and is responsible for the management and general oversight of the EarlyON Child and Family Centres, the provincially funded family support programme for parents/caregiver and children birth to 6 years of age.

As of 2021, the Early Years Operations team took over responsibility for the newly remodeled Special Needs Resourcing strategy that supports child care and early years programmes to ensure the design and delivery of programmes that are inclusive of the diverse needs of all children. This includes managing service contracts with community organizations under the Special Needs Resourcing funding.

Highlights of key initiatives that now fall under the Early Years Operations team

- Assumed responsibility for EarlyON Child and Family Centres and developed operational guidelines, service descriptions and a programme statement for programming and service delivery that is consistent, of high quality, aligns with Ontario's vision for early years and How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years (since 2018)
- Engaged a third party, OPTIMUS/SBR to conduct an in-depth review of the County of Wellington's Inclusion Support Services model for delivering Special Needs Resourcing funding and provide recommendations (2019).
- Expansion of EarlyON sites, including creation of new centres in Erin (2019) and Mapleton (2020)
- Began implementing the new Special Needs Resourcing model for Enhanced Support System (2021)
- Helping the early learning community understand the Enhanced Support System services that are available to support their programmes (since 2021)
- Continued to expand our EarlyON programmes by adding a site in Rockwood and more programming offered downtown Guelph (2022)

Capacity Building

The Capacity Building team of CEYD was created in 2018 to oversee responsibilities for provincial capacity building funding. With a focus on the child care and early years workforce, capacity building funding is intended to support professional learning and development opportunities that build the capacity of licensees, supervisors, programme staff/caregivers, home visitors, home child care

providers and non-profit volunteer board members to support the provision of high quality programmes for children ages birth to 12, and that align with the views and approaches outlined in How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years.

The team's activities include providing inclusive and collaborative support that enhances reflective practice and to strengthen the pedagogy of community based children's early years programmes through on-site

coaching, mentorship, resources and planned professional learning, and maintains all virtual learning tools and resources. In 2020, the County of Wellington acquired Reaching IN... Reaching OUT (RIRO) and Bounce Back and Thrive (BBT), resilience skills training programmes for staff and parents, respectively. The Capacity Building team oversees all aspects of the implementation of these programmes, including training content review, updating and dissemination, training of all RIRO and BBT trainers and maintenance of website resources.

Highlights of key initiatives undertaken by the Capacity Building team

- Implemented Side-by-Side Mentorship, a mentorship model in which qualified staff from the Capacity Building team work alongside educators in programmes to engage in reflective practice on observations and responses to everyday lived experiences with children
- Formed the Capacity Building Community Advisory Group to provide advice on all professional learning and training that the team provides to the early learning and care community
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, developed and supported implementation of Caring Well for Our Community During a Pandemic – a training plan to support the early learning and care community during the re-opening phase of the pandemic, which focused on three commitments:
 - Access to reopening resources for child care operators and educators;
 - Supporting self-care and team support through professional learning and access to resources; and
 - Thinking together about pedagogical practices during a pandemic
- Between 2018 to 2021, 244 capacity building opportunities were offered of which about 6% were RIRO trainings, 29% were networking events and about 65% were other professional learning opportunities on topics including pedagogy, child development, health and wellness, community building, professionalism and first aid (Figure 27)
 - A number of capacity building offerings, including 3 RIRO trainings, that were planned for 2020 were cancelled due to the pandemic

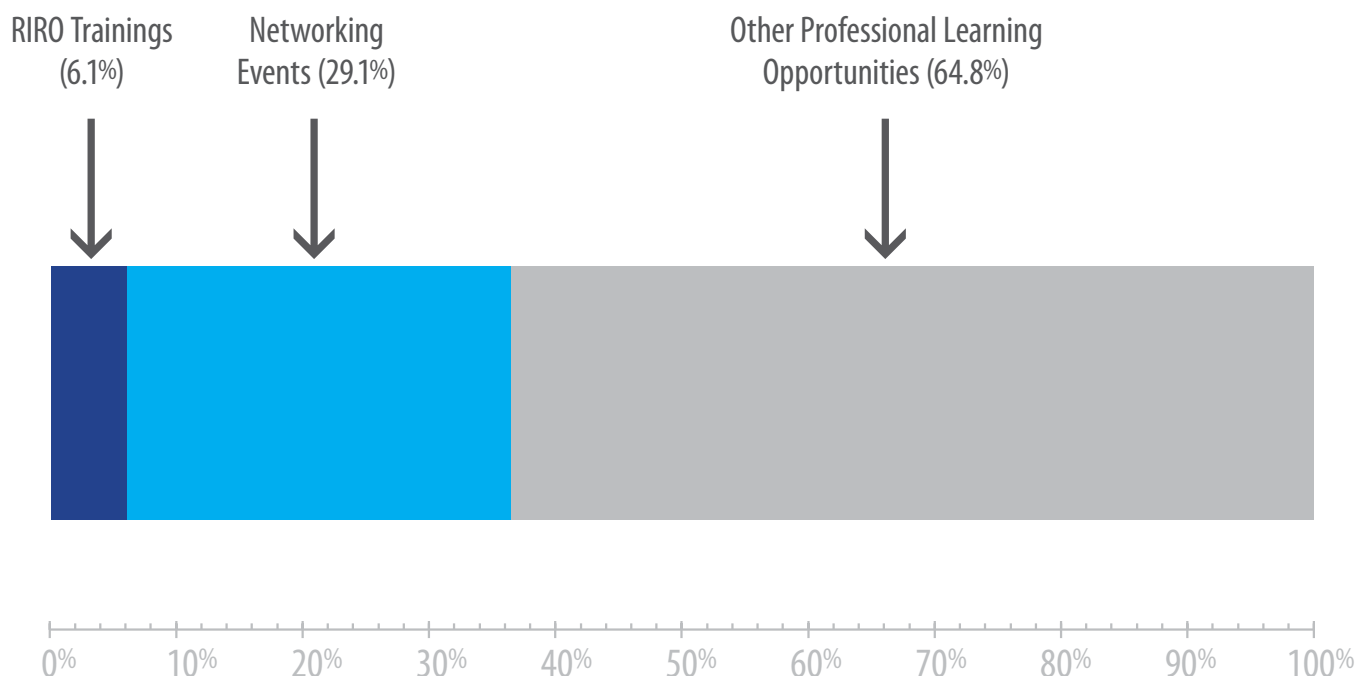


FIGURE 27 Number of RIRO trainings, networking events and other professional learning opportunities as a percentage of total capacity building opportunities offered from 2018-2021

Planning

The work of the Planning team serves to support the whole service system as well as the work of other CEYD teams. The Planning team is responsible for providing planning and ongoing monitoring support to the child care and early years service system, ensuring that the “design and improvement of the service system is based on the needs, strengths, priorities, and desired outcomes of the community” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017).

In addition, through coordination support for the GGG Planning Table and the GGG Birth-Six Working Group, the team provides important staff resources needed to facilitate on-going collaboration and integrated planning of services for children and youth up to age 18 among children’s services partners.

Highlights of key initiatives undertaken by the Planning team

- Worked with Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) on the Inclusive Early Childhood Service System (IECSS) research project - a longitudinal study that explores the experiences of families with young children experiencing developmental concerns and disabilities from the parents' perspective that functioned as part of our Special Needs Resourcing system review (since 2014)
- Supported the development and implementation of the initial Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres Preliminary Planning that supported establishment of the Wellington EarlyON Child and Family Centres (2017-2018)
- Collaborated with service partners to conduct the 2017 Children and Youth Services Forum, which informed development of the 2018-2023 Growing Great Generations Community Plan (2018)
- Worked with community organizations that deliver EarlyON programmes and services to develop and implement a reporting system for EarlyON Child and Family Centres (2018-2019)
- Undertook an extensive early years community engagement project as part of ongoing needs assessment to inform development of the child care and early years service plan (2018-2019)
- Continued and completed the County of Wellington child care and early years service plan (2018-2022)
- Provided support for the Inclusion Support Services review project (2019)
- Facilitated updating of the GGG Birth-Six Working Group 2015-2020 Community Plan (2020)
- Assisted with the development of policies and procedures to support the implementation of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care system (2022)

Directly Operated Programmes

The CCEYA, 2014 has provisions that allow service system managers to directly operate child care and early years programmes. The County of Wellington has taken the decision to directly operate child care programmes only when there is a unique opportunity or a unique need. CEYD's Directly Operated Programmes team operates four licensed child care programmes for children birth up to 4 years and the Wellington Home Child Care Agency, which contracts home child care providers across the service delivery area.

In addition to addressing service needs and opportunities in the community, directly operating child care programmes benefits the local child care sector in a number of ways, including the following:

Highlights of key initiatives undertaken by the Directly Operated Programmes team

- Opened the Palmerston Child Care and Learning Centre in 2018 which expanded licensed child care spaces in Minto from 13 to 49 spaces, including much needed spaces for infants (10 spaces) and toddlers (15 spaces)
- Opened a new child care centre in 2019 in Aboyne, Wellington Place, which provides 64 spaces, including 10 infant spaces and 30 toddler spaces
- Opened and operated Emergency Child Care for designated frontline workers in 2020 out of 3 directly operated programmes during the COVID-19 Provincial State of Emergency
- Adapted, adjusted and developed new policies and processes in response to the ongoing changes to public health guidelines and Ministry legislation to continue operations during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Improved billing efficiencies by establishing a pre-authorized payment system for automatic bank withdrawals as well as creating ability for families to pay online via credit card
- Transition to digital, centralized waitlist now being managed by the Children's Early Years Clerk (2022)



Planning Process for Child Care and Early Years Services

In developing the child care and early years service system plan, CEYD as the service system manager is expected to utilize planning processes that engage a wide range of local community partners. In particular, service system managers are required to consult and cooperate with school boards, and others prescribed by regulation in the development and implementation of the service system plan (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017).

The current service system plan is informed by an extensive engagement process with our local service partners including school boards, community planning tables, and other service providers; the Indigenous community; the Francophone community as well as parents and caregivers across the Wellington service delivery area.

Engagement with Service Partners

CEYD has a longstanding tradition of ongoing collaboration with service partners to plan for child care and early years services. Engagement with service partners is primarily through the GGG Planning Table and the GGG Birth-Six Working Group.

The following two service partner engagement activities informed the development of the service system plan:

The GGG Children and Youth Services Forum

1

In May 2017, the GGG Planning Table held a forum with frontline staff who work directly with children, youth and their families in the Wellington service delivery area

2

Staff participated in facilitated discussions where they identified what was working well, service limitations, and suggestions on what can be done to address these limitations

3

56 people attended representing 30 organizations including school boards, local municipalities and community agencies

Consultations with Child Care and Early Years Services Partners

- In June 2021, CEYD conducted consultations with child care and early years partners to gather input on draft service plan priorities and potential actions
- The consultations involved facilitated discussions guided by priority-focused questions designed specifically for each group
- The following groups of child care and early years service partners were consulted:
 - The GGG Birth-Six Working Group (all four school boards in our area are represented at this table)
 - Operators of licensed full-time, full-year child care for children birth up to 4 years
 - Operators of licensed nursery schools
 - Operators of licensed school age care (before and after school care)
 - Operators of authorized recreation and skills building programmes
 - Licensed home child care providers
 - Operators of EarlyON Child and Family Centres
 - The Capacity Building Advisory Group



Engagement with Parents and Caregivers

In 2018, the County of Wellington Children's Early Years Division conducted a two-part early years community engagement project to solicit input from parents and caregivers across Wellington so that their voices and experiences could be reflected in the service system plan.

The first part of the community engagement project was conducted between May – November 2018. It used a combination of online surveys and in person community conversation to ask parents and caregivers about their perspectives on and experiences with child care and EarlyON services. For this part, surveys and community conversations were conducted in both English and French, ensuring that the voice of the Francophone community was heard. A final report of the findings was released in 2019.

The second part of the early years community engagement project was the Indigenous Early Years Community Consultation project. CEYD partnered with the Indigenous Healing and Wellness Program Wellington-Waterloo in 2019 and hired a consultant, INDsight Consulting, to consult with the local Indigenous community on child care and early years programmes and services.

The aim of the consultation was to learn from the Indigenous community about approaches that

would support the development and delivery of child care and early years programmes and services that meet the unique cultural and linguistic needs of Indigenous children and families in Wellington. It was important to hire an Indigenous consultant to ensure the consultation would use research methods that are specific to and respectful of Indigenous protocol. The project began in May 2019 and a report with findings and recommendations was submitted to CEYD in November 2019.



Analysis of Findings

This section synthesizes evidence gathered from the engagement process, the environmental scan (i.e., snapshots of demographic and service system data for Wellington), and from research literature to provide an overview of the state of child care and early years services in Wellington. The information is organized around the five principles used by CEYD to make decisions in child care and early years service system management. The principles are that child care and early years services are:

- High quality
- Equitably available
- Equitably accessible
- Affordable (where there are costs)
- Leadership and Accountability to list of principles

High Quality Services

According to the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework high quality programmes are attuned to children's development; respect diversity, equity and inclusion; and are staffed by knowledgeable professionals (Government of Ontario, 2013).

Research has shown that staff are the key to quality in child care and early years settings (Urban et al., 2011). High levels of staff qualifications, staff participation in ongoing professional development and favorable working conditions including competitive staff wages and benefits, and availability of supports have been shown to contribute to high quality programme settings (Goelman et al., 2000; Slot, 2018).

Quality in child care and early years settings is a complex concept to define and measure (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008; Urban et al., 2011). However, at minimum the view of high quality services is that programmes are held to high standards of quality that are supported by evidence, and take into consideration the contextual, value-based, and dynamic nature of quality (OECD, 2015).

Key findings on service quality

Our engagement activities with both parents and caregivers and service providers provided important insights related to quality of child care and early years services in our area.

When parents were asked about what was not working well with their child care arrangements they identified high staff turnover and high child to staff ratios, lack of quality and meaningful programming and a lack of experienced staff. When asked to describe their ideal child care scenario, parents indicated the following:

- High quality programming in all care settings that suit children's development and interests, including play-based programming in early learning settings and meaningful programming in school age care settings
- Staff who are qualified and compensated fairly
- Consistent, reliable, and compassionate staff who are able to communicate well and build trusting relations with parents
- Child care settings with low child to staff ratios
- Care environments that are safe, clean, nurturing, provide healthy meals, and have additional supports available for children who need them

When asked what would improve participation and experiences in EarlyON services in Wellington, parents and caregivers indicated the following:

- Knowledgeable and consistently trained staff
- Programming content that is varied, interesting and meaningful to parents and children
- Spacious, safe and clean programming environment

Because quality in child care and early years settings is strongly tied to higher levels of staff qualifications (Goelman et al., 2000; Urban et al., 2011), in Ontario, it has long been recognized that child care and early years programmes must be staffed by registered early childhood educators (RECEs) (Pascal, 2009). Service providers identified a shortage of qualified staff and high staff turnover as issues facing the local child care and early years sector. Furthermore, providers identified a critical shortage of suitably qualified staff for school age programmes, that is, staff able to support the increasingly self-directed programming needs of older children.

What this means is that a sizeable proportion of our child care and early years workforce has low qualifications. Researchers stress the need for ongoing professional learning for all staff, but more so for staff

with inadequate pre-service training. It has been noted that ongoing professional learning can compensate for inadequate pre-service training, provided it is long-term and sustained (Vandenbroeck, 2020).

Reasons given by service providers for the shortages of qualified staff and poor staff retention include low wages and unfavorable working conditions, which make it difficult to hire and retain RECEs. Data from Ontario continues to show that the early childhood education and care work is undervalued, and the workforce faces poor wages, a lack of benefits and other supports known to aid in the recruitment and retention of qualified staff (Doherty et al., 2000; R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd, 2017).

The tension between demand for a highly qualified workforce that can deliver quality programming and the challenging working conditions may also explain the current low numbers of home child care providers in our area (Vandenbroeck & Bauters, 2017).

CEYD is committed to supporting programmes as they strive for improvements in quality. Wellington's General Operating Grant is a strategy to "fund for quality" that incentivizes child care operators to pay their staff better wages. Currently, of the 46 birth up to 4 years child care programmes that are eligible for the General Operating Grant funding, 74% have a POS for the General Operating Grant.

In addition, CEYD uses an Operating Criteria process to monitor quality in licensed child care settings, which has also been adapted for application in authorized recreation and skills building programmes and authorized

camps. In addition to other benefits such as improved accountability of public investments, there is evidence that on-going quality monitoring of child care and early years settings can create incentives for improved performance, and can help identify underperforming settings for remedial action (OECD, 2015). As part of Wellington's commitment to improving quality, the CEYD Operating Criteria assessment tool is continually being updated to reflect new research on providing high-quality care. Currently, there are no Operating Criteria for Home Child Care and EarlyONs, and service providers indicated the need for continuous quality assessment in all child care and early years settings.

Wellington will address challenges currently faced by the local child care and early years sector while building on progress made to date to ensure child care and early years services are of high quality, by focusing on these areas:

- Implementing consistent continuous quality monitoring across all child care and early years settings
- Developing and supporting a workforce strategy that supports recruitment and retention of qualified child care and early years professionals
- Increasing access to and participation in relevant and meaningful ongoing professional learning and capacity development opportunities for the child care and early years workforce

Equitably Available Services

Research has shown that for child care and early years services and programmes to have the educational, social, and economic benefits to children, families and society, the supply of services has to be sufficient to meet the needs of all those who need them (Vandenbroeck, 2020). In addition, recent findings from economic research show that high quality child care options have to be located geographically near to families and include adequate infant spaces, to improve overall utilization, and promote women's participation in the labour force (Alexander et al., 2017; Malik et al., 2016).

The principle that services are equitably available means that child care and early years services are planned for delivery in relation to the whole population of children being served in the geographic area. Applying the principle of equity in relation to available services also helps to ensure that services are distributed fairly across the service area and within planning units so that they are not clustered in some areas and not available at all in others.

Key findings on service availability

When parents were asked about what was not working well with their child care arrangements, they identified a lack of child care spaces, particularly a lack of infant spaces and spaces for school age children. When asked to describe their ideal child care scenario, parents indicated the following in relation to service availability:

- Enough high quality full time, licensed (centre-based and home child care) spaces that include enough spaces for infants and flexible care options for parents who need them.
- Enough before and after school care spaces, ideally located at the school, that include care options during professional development days, school breaks and flexible options for parents who need them.
- Adequate licensed child care options for Francophone families, including care on professional development days

When asked what would improve participation and experiences in EarlyON services in Wellington, parents and caregivers indicated the following in relationship to service availability:

- Convenient and accessible programme location (close to home/in the community)
- French language EarlyON programming that is comprehensive and family focused
- Culturally relevant Indigenous-led programmes delivered under an Indigenous organization (based on recommendations in the Indigenous Early Years Community Consultations Report, 2019)

Findings from the 2018 Early Years Community Engagement project show that there is interest in Indigenous EarlyON programmes among members of the general public, especially those interested to learn more about Indigenous history and culture. In addition, there is interest in EarlyON French language programmes among members of the Francophone community as well as the general public, especially those interested in French immersion school for their children.

Feedback from service providers concurred with findings from engagement with parents and families and with local service system data. Service providers noted that some services were located far from where families live and that service levels were inadequate relative to demand, characterized by, for example, child care waitlists. Child care waitlists are inevitable in our service delivery area given that the service system data confirm Wellington as a child care desert (Macdonald, 2018).

Service providers also indicated that services are not distributed fairly with rural parts of the service delivery area tending to be underserved. Indeed, child care data show that while Mapleton has a sizeable population of young children, it has the highest level of unmet child care need. For us, need for child care is a population-level variable. This means the number

of available licensed child care spaces (full-time, full year child care spaces for children birth up to 4 and licensed/regulated child care spaces for children 4 to 12 years of age) in relation to the total population of children represents “met need”. Areas with no spaces are areas of highest “unmet need”. There are currently no licensed child care spaces in Mapleton for both children birth up to 4 years and for school age children.

CEYD continues to partner with the province, local school boards and service providers to create more centre-based licensed child care spaces and more recently with municipalities to create authorized recreation and skills building programmes and authorized camps (using provisions in CCEYA, 2014 and its regulations) and address the sizeable shortage in school age care. Currently, Minto operates authorized recreation and skills building programmes, Wellington North operates authorized camps and Mapleton has expressed interest to operate authorized recreation and skills building programmes.

Licensed home child care is a very important part of the child care continuum and yet findings from our engagement with parents and caregivers show that it is the least used form of care in the service area. The service data also show that our home child care agency is operating at less than 50% of its



licensed capacity indicating potential room for child care space growth through regulated home child care providers, provided the current challenges to recruiting and retaining home child care providers are addressed (Vandenbroeck & Bauters, 2017).

Some progress has been made to improve availability of EarlyON services in Wellington and all municipalities have at least one EarlyON site. Working towards a target of having at least one centre per municipality, half of our municipalities now have at least an EarlyON centre, and EarlyON mobile services have helped to bring services closer to where families live.

While municipal boundaries remain our primary planning units of focus, we also recognize the need to take a nuanced approach in our planning decisions in order to be respon-

sive to internal demographic shifts, especially population growth. For example, for both child care and EarlyON services, decisions regarding child care space expansion and new EarlyON sites will include considerations of areas undergoing significant residential housing development (as a proxy for population growth in those areas), such as the north-end, south-end and west-end areas of Guelph, as well as some population centres in the County (such as Fergus in Centre Wellington, Rockwood in Guelph/Eramosa, and Clifford in Minto).

The lack of child care and early years programmes that meet the cultural needs of Indigenous children and families and the lack of EarlyON programmes for Francophone families is consistent with our own service data and was also echoed by service providers.

Our strategy for addressing challenges related to child care and early years service availability, will include a focus in the following areas:

- Continuing to improve availability and capacity of licensed child care (including infant spaces and spaces for school age children) and EarlyON services
- Supporting the development and delivery of Francophone child care and EarlyON programmes
- Implementing the recommendations of the Indigenous Early Years Community Consultations report and supporting the establishment of Indigenous-led child care and early years services



Equitably Accessible Services

The principle that services are equitably accessible means that all children and families, regardless of their circumstances (such as, socio-economic status, gender, disability, location, ethnicity, etc.) are able to participate in child care and early years services and programmes. It also means that families should expect the same range of programmes to be offered consistently across the service area.

Accessible early years services are described in the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework as programmes that are easy for families to access; the transitions between programs and services are seamless; and are culturally responsive and adaptable to local community needs (Government of Ontario, 2013).

Key findings on service accessibility

When parents were asked what was not working well with their current child care arrangements they identified a lack of flexible and reliable care options; unstable and patch-worked care arrangements; and inconvenient hours of operation and care locations. Their ideal child care scenario included the following:

- One care setting where children of different ages, from infants to 12 years, are cared for, ideally located at the local school for minimal drop-off and pick-up points
- Child care locations that are convenient for parents, ideally close to home, work place or at the local school
- Hours of operation that accommodate parents' schedule, including non-standard work hours

When asked what would improve participation and experiences in EarlyON services in Wellington, parents and caregivers indicated the following in relationship to service accessibility:

- Better advertisement and communication of EarlyON programme information
- Programme schedules that are convenient and accommodate parents' and children's needs (and for the whole family)
- More programme slots for popular programmes and high demand times

Input gathered from service providers and service system data substantiated feedback received from parents regarding service accessibility.

Service providers identified a number of barriers that limit service accessibility including the poor knowledge/awareness of what services are available among service providers and families; a lack of resources within the community to help families understand and navigate services; a lack of public transportation services in parts of the service area; a lack of flexible scheduling options to meet varying family schedules.

Poor knowledge and awareness of services can limit access for families even when services are available. In addition, when services are organized to ensure greater continuity for children and families, to reduce parental hassles, to facilitate children's transitions, and to promote participation by families from diverse backgrounds then access is optimized (Corter & Pelletier, 2010; Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). To this end, Wellington continues to work closely with the local school boards, under Ontario's schools first approach, to pursue capital funding applications that support location of child care and early years programmes in schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018a).

In addition to service frequencies that are not adequate, especially in rural parts of the service area, service providers indicated that the range and mix of programme offerings for some services are not equitable across the service area, and across children's age ranges, interests and continuum of needs. The goals of EarlyON Child and Family Centres include ensuring that

parents have consistent service experiences regardless of where they live. To this end, our EarlyONs have been developing programmes and services so that they offer consistent experiences for parents and children, including developing core service descriptions, defining minimum programme levels and hours of operations for centres, satellites and mobile services and creating a consistent staffing model, particularly for the play-based learning component of the core services.

Demographic data show that our service area

is becoming increasingly diverse and service providers identified a lack of effective translation supports as a barrier limiting access for some families. Other challenges noted include inadequate policies, practices and qualified staff to support the inclusion of children with disabilities, and other systematically marginalized service users. In addition, the

need for service delivery approaches that are non-stigmatizing for users was also identified.

For children with special needs or in need of additional supports, service providers identified eligibility restrictions, referral criteria and complicated intake systems as making entry into services difficult. In addition, service providers noted that families of children with additional support needs often experience disruptions and poor service continuity due to geographic and age eligibility restrictions. For some families with more complex needs, service providers suggested a coordinator role to assist families navigating multiple services and make follow-ups as needed.



Findings from the IECSS project confirmed the challenges experienced by children with additional support needs and their families in their interaction with the service system, including onerous, but often unnecessary diagnostic dependent eligibility criteria, difficulties navigating multiple services, and unrealistic expectations placed on families to do the coordinating work so that services work for their child (Frankel et al., 2019; IECSS, 2015; Underwood et al., 2019). In 2019 the CEYD engaged a consultant to review the local Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) strategy. The review provided recommendations that were used, alongside findings from the IECSS project, to remodel the local SNR. Implementation of the remodeled SNR strategy will be part of this service plan.

Building on progress made to date to improve service accessibility, Wellington will focus on the following areas:

- Improving child care and early years service system information, awareness, communication, and service navigation resources.
- Advocating for additional funding to implement strategies for increasing flexibility of the service system.
- Improving integration of the child care and early years service system with other community services.
- Developing and supporting implementation of service system requirements to reduce barriers to accessing services, and eliminate all forms of systemic marginalization.
- Implementing the new SNR strategy for supporting children with additional support needs.

Affordable Services

The principle that services are affordable means that the majority are offered at no cost and, where there is a fee for families to pay there are public mechanisms in place for all families to be able to access programmes regardless of their income status.

Wellington EarlyON Child and Family Centres are fully funded by the province, meaning they are offered at no cost to families. This also includes services delivered by other agencies in EarlyONs.

The current child care system is largely reliant on parent fees. Until there are sufficient public investments so that fees are no longer charged for child care spaces (like Full Day Kindergarten), affordability, regardless of the amount, will continue to be an important consideration in child care system planning (County of Wellington, 2015). This means that even with the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, which has an objective for \$10/day child care on average, there will be some families for whom child care affordability will be a concern (Government of Canada, 2021).

Key findings on affordable services

When parents were asked what was not working well with their current child care arrangements they identified cost of care that is not affordable and a lack of knowledge about child care fee subsidy. Their ideal child care scenario is one where child care is affordable – meaning affordable rates and enough subsidized spaces, or care offered at no cost to parents.

Input from service providers echoed the findings from engagement with parents regarding affordability of fee based services, especially for low incomes families, but also for higher income earners who may just be above fee subsidy eligibility or for whom the fee subsidy rate is still not adequate to offset the cost of service.

Substantiating that lack of knowledge about child care fee subsidy may be a barrier to access for some families, about 30% of respondents to the child care survey across Wellington indicated they did not know about child care fee subsidy. A lack of knowledge about fee subsidy was highest in Mapleton where half of the respondents indicated that they did not know about child care fee subsidy. The survey data agree with our service data showing that in 2019 utilization of child care fee subsidies was lowest in Mapleton accounting for only 0.1% of all children in receipt of child care fee subsidies in Wellington. This is not surprising given that Mapleton is the only municipality with no (zero) licensed child care space availability for both children birth up to 4 years (full-time care) and for school age children. A lack of licensed child care spaces may, therefore, act as a barrier for Mapleton families to access child care fee subsidy.

Child care fee subsidies are a fair, income-determined, public service available for families who qualify and want to use licensed child care, extended day kindergarten programmes and school-age care provisions, including authorized recreation and skills building programmes and authorized camps.

Our service system data show that more than 86% of the licensed child care programmes, home child care programmes, authorized recreation programmes, and authorized camps in our service delivery area have a contract for fee subsidy funding with the County of Wellington (i.e., they have a GOG and/or Fee Subsidy Purchase of Service Agreement). This means that the strong majority of regulated programmes in Wellington continue to be available for use by families who receive child care fee subsidies to assist them in covering the cost of child care. However, to ensure fairness in access to fee subsidy, there is need to improve the number and distribution of licensed child care spaces so that they are more equitably available.

CEYD data for 2019 show that the majority of parents (60%) accessing child care fee subsidies were working full-time and attending school, while 15% had a child experiencing a disability and special needs or a child at risk of disability and special needs. Families of children who are experiencing disabilities and special needs or are at risk of experiencing disabilities and special needs (because of developmental or environmental factors) are able to access fee subsidy supports provided they have a financial need.

Our strategy for addressing challenges related to child care and early years service affordability will complement our other strategies regarding service quality, availability and access and will focus on the following areas:

- Continuing to pursue strategies for making child care services affordable for families, including advocating for more public funding of the system
 - Improving awareness about child care fee subsidies and facilitating parents' access to child care fee subsidy
-

Leadership and Accountability

Leadership and Accountability was identified as an important category to be considered alongside our planning principles when making decisions about the child care and early years' service system. This recognizes CEYD's leadership responsibilities, providing guidance and steering the service system through changes in policy, the social environment or other unpredictable societal and global disruptions such as those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this consideration recognizes our commitment to continue to be accountable in our role as the service system manager as well as to support the overall accountability of the service system.

Key findings on leadership and accountability

During the engagement process with service providers, a number of areas were identified requiring leadership to strengthen the service system and make it more responsive to the changing needs of children and families.

Some of these areas include:

- Use of strategies and programmes that have high or known effectiveness to address service needs
- Addressing technology-related limitations to enable effective communication between service providers and service users
- Supporting better understanding and communication among service providers about how their services link in order to better support families
- Proper soliciting of and use of feedback from families, appropriate research and knowledge to inform service planning
- Addressing limitations related to sharing of client information across service agencies

CEYD will build on structures and processes already in place to enhance leadership and overall accountability of the service system.

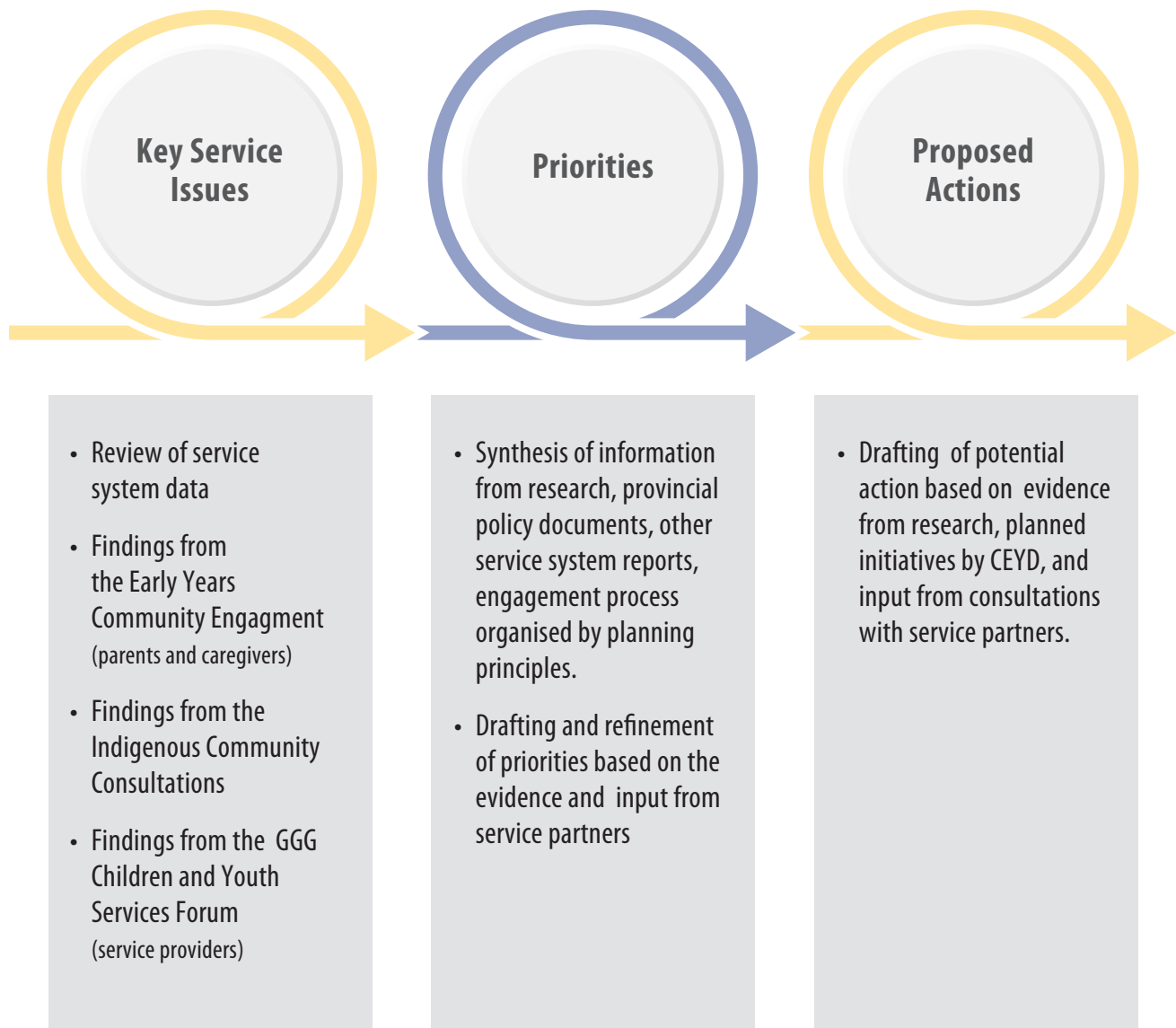
Areas of focus during the lifetime of this service plan include:

- Developing and implementing a framework for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of child care and early years services and programmes
- Exploring technological options to reduce administrative burden, improve customer service and access to programmes
- Guiding and assisting child care and early years service partners through periods of both anticipated and unforeseen changes to the service system



CEYD's Strategic Priorities and Proposed Actions for 2023-2027

Below is an overview of how we moved from identifying key service issues for the child care and early years sector in Wellington, to identifying priorities for the service plan, and to developing potential actions that can be taken to address the priorities. Our process followed extensive engagement with service partners and families, and it was collaborative. The result is a shared child care and early years action plan.



Wellington's shared action plan for child care and early years consists of 16 priorities each with a number of proposed actions. The priorities and proposed actions are organized using our planning principles of high quality, equitably available, equitably accessible, and affordable child care and early years services, alongside the additional category of leadership and accountability.

CEYD's Strategic Priorities

2023-2027

High Quality

Priorities

1



Implement a consistent continuous quality assessment and improvement strategy across the child care and early years services system.

Proposed Actions

- Pilot the revised quality monitoring tool (Operating Criteria) for centre-based care (licensed child care and authorized recreation) and refine it for community-wide application
- Develop and implement a quality monitoring tool (Operating Criteria) for Home Child Care and for EarlyON programmes
- Promote networking, peer-learning and reflection among child care and early learning professionals on what high quality programming looks like in their respective practice settings
- Work with EarlyON providers, and other community partners to identify and implement strategies/practices and offer resources that strengthen staff's capacity to deliver the family support and service navigation functions of EarlyON programmes
- Provide strategies, resources and other supports to strengthen Home Child Care Providers' capacity to offer high quality programming in a mixed-age group setting

Priorities

2 →

Develop and support implementation of a workforce strategy that improves recruitment and retention of qualified child care and early years professionals.

Proposed Actions

- Continue to use provisions within the funding model to advocate for better working conditions for child care and early years staff, including better wages and benefit packages to close the gap with ECEs working in the school system
- Work with service partners, including providers and training colleges, to launch a campaign to promote and elevate the status of ECEs
- Work with providers to develop and implement a consistent and supportive onboarding strategy for new ECEs graduates and other new hires with limited experience
- Work with service partners to create and promote a common readily accessible community job posting portal as the go-to site for child care and early years job postings for the service area (e.g. GGG jobs posting webpage)
- Support collaboration among child care and early years service operators, school boards and other partners to establish a shared portal/supply list for staff working on a casual or part-time basis and foster stable, predictable work conditions
- Advocate for and support stronger collaborative relationships between school boards and third part operators of school-age care to enable better and timely responses to child care needs and resource sharing (including adequate space for school-age care programming) and foster overall integration of school-age care within the schools
- Support purposeful collaboration among school-age care operators, school boards, and other partners to develop a school-age care workforce strategy that addresses staff qualifications and pre-service training

High Quality

Priorities



Develop and support implementation of a workforce strategy that improves recruitment and retention of qualified child care and early years professionals.

Proposed Actions

- Implement a rigorous Home Child Care Provider recruitment and screening process that attracts knowledgeable and competent potential providers while removing onerous administrative expectations and requirements on provider.
- Engage experienced Home Child Care Providers to help promote and advertise the benefits of licensed home child care to entice potential providers
- Work with Home Child Care Providers to explore or advocate for a back-up/fill-in provider model that allows providers to have cover for emergencies, sick-days and/or vacation without disrupting care for families

Priorities

3 →

Increase access to and participation in professional learning and capacity development opportunities that enhance the child care and early years workforce's knowledge and competences on topics of current focus, relevance and interest within the service sector, including diversity, inclusive practices and cultural competence.

Proposed Actions

- Develop and implement a new process for supporting Home Child Care providers to engage in meaningful and skill enhancing professional learning
- Work with participating service partners to implement the in-programme professional learning strategy for child care and early years programmes
- Expand the scope and capacity of the Capacity Building's team onsite programme consultation and mentorship model to deliver both pedagogical and Enhanced Support Service focused professional learning
- Launch and oversee the Early Years Professional Resource Centre virtual hub
- Continue to engage with early years and child care service partners, research and other resources on an ongoing basis to assess pedagogical, policy and social trends, identify topics of relevance and interest to the sector and make available a balanced mix of professional learning offerings with options specific to different practice settings, tailored to different levels of staff and addressing matters of pedagogical, policy and public/societal interest

High Quality

Priorities

3 →

Increase access to and participation in professional learning and capacity development opportunities that enhance the child care and early years workforce's knowledge and competences on topics of current focus, relevance and interest within the service sector, including diversity, inclusive practices and cultural competence.

Proposed Actions

- Make available professional learning offerings using a balanced mix of formats that are exciting, engage participants' curiosity and interests, and meet the varied access needs of staff and providers (e.g. series and one-off sessions; in-person and virtual sessions; live and recorded sessions; and externally facilitated and peer-led learning.)
- Provide meaningful participation incentives including swag, participation certificates, and food
- Identify and address any participation barriers, such as registration cost and release time, and translation of content (esp. into French) and transportation/IT equipment costs
- Implement practices that showcase local knowledge and empower programme leaders and staff to champion quality initiatives within their organizations and to take ownership of their own professional learning (e.g. programme tours; supporting supervisors to train their own staff, facilitate peer learning, help link professional learning to quality, etc.)

Priorities



Continue to increase, optimize and stabilize the capacity for licensed child care and EarlyON services, focusing on fair distribution and licensed child space coverage for infants and school-age children.

Proposed Actions

- Continue to pursue capital build funding and other opportunities to develop child care centres that offer infant spaces, and purpose-built/permanent EarlyON centre locations prioritizing municipalities that currently do not have centres or have higher levels of unmet need
- Implement strategies to grow and stabilize home child care
- Partner with municipalities, school boards and other community partners to develop and implement a local school-age care strategy that addresses issues including space availability, location of care, hours of operation, staff shortage and staff qualifications
- Support the development of strong partnership between child care operators and local training colleges to address child care and early years staff shortages
- Facilitate collaboration between service providers, local municipalities, school boards, and neighbourhood groups to secure spaces to deliver EarlyON programmes
- Continue to support online EarlyON programme and service delivery options

Priorities



Support the development and delivery of French language child care and early years services.

Proposed Actions

- Support partnerships with Francophone school boards, parent councils, community groups and child care programmes to identify, develop and provide resources and other supports for Francophone families or others interested in French language services
- Provide French language options for meetings, networking opportunities and resources, etc. to facilitate participation of Francophone service partners

Priorities



Implement recommendations of the Indigenous Early Years Community Consultations and support the establishment of Indigenous-led child care and early years services.

Proposed Actions

- Build, nurture and sustain relationships with the local Indigenous community that foster ongoing engagement and service development
- Partner with the local Indigenous community to work towards implementing recommendations in the Indigenous Early Years Community Consultations
- Establish collaborative partnerships with the local Indigenous community and engage Indigenous agencies, advisory committees, and Indigenous-led structures within school boards and other service organizations to support the development of resources that enable the authentic and respectful teaching of and learning about Indigenous history, knowledge and culture in child care and early years settings

Priorities



Improve child care and early years service system information, awareness, communication, and service navigation resources to enable parents to make informed decisions about and facilitate access to available services.

Proposed Actions

- Continue to update and improve online information resources and service navigation tools
- Optimize and promote the GGG website as the go-to place for service system information
- Support creation of an EarlyON website to serve as an accessible, simple, easy to understand and up-to-date service information repository dedicated to families
- Support strong collaboration and supportive information sharing practices among child care programmes, EarlyON programmes, schools, and other community services to better assist parents navigating the system
- Facilitate creation of a child care and early years service providers network in the County
- Develop a range of child care and early years information resources for strategic distribution in formats, languages and at places where parents with young children can easily access, e.g. hospital discharge packages, EarlyON centres, and other avenues

Priorities

8 →

Advocate for additional funding to implement strategies for increasing flexibility of the service system so that programmes can serve families with diverse needs (including hours of operation, part-time options, and non-standard work schedules.)

Proposed Actions

- Advocate for adequate funding to support financial viability of operators interested in improving service flexibility, including extended hours
- Work with school boards to address transportation needs of school-age children in Home Child Care.

Priorities



Improve integration of the child care and early years service system, particularly EarlyON programmes, with other community services.

Proposed Actions

- Support stronger collaborative partnerships between schools and child care operators to ensure smooth transitions for children and foster overall integration of care within the school system
- Work with EarlyON providers to develop and launch a promotional and awareness raising campaign of EarlyONs to other community service providers and families
- Work with EarlyON providers to establish strong professional relationships with child care programmes, schools and other community service partners and increase collaboration among the early years continuum partners within EarlyON centres (including regular professional team meetings, information sharing, and networking activities, etc).

Priorities

10 →

Develop and support implementation of service system requirements to reduce barriers to accessing services, eliminate all forms of systemic marginalization and ensure the service system is welcoming and responsive to all families in the service delivery area.

Proposed Actions

- Work with partners to develop and implement a strategy for providing interpretation supports that help parents with language barriers navigate the child care services continuum (including for child care registration, orientation, discussions about a child's development, etc.)
- Collaborate with service partners to conduct ongoing assessment of barriers to accessing services and other societal issues related to systematic marginalization and social inclusion, and develop strategies to address them
- Collaborate with child care and early years programmes and other service partners to implement robust anti-oppression and anti-racism education, training and awareness raising across the service delivery area
- Support EarlyON programmes to implement and strengthen outreach practices that build strong trusting relationships with local families, including offering interpretation services, and responsive programming, regular check-in with families, and communicating in respectful, friendly language
- Support EarlyON programmes to strengthen or build strong connections with various local organizations that serve and support families at risk of marginalization and exclusion
- Collaborate with service partners to identify and provide appropriate educational resources and to create environments where staff teams reflect on and talk openly about systemic racism, oppression, bias, exclusion, etc. and how they manifest as part of their reflective practice

Priorities

11➔

Implement the new SNR strategy for supporting children with additional support needs that builds on the strength and knowledge of parents and ECEs, and makes effective and efficient use of enhanced supports to allow full and meaningful participation of all children in early learning environments.

Proposed Actions

- Continue to support and monitor remodeling and implementation of the SNR's Enhanced Support Service strategy
- Work closely with child care and EarlyON directors, supervisors and other service partners in the roll-out of the new SNR strategy, focusing on education (i.e., provision of clear
- reliable information about the goals of the new strategy and how it operates, tailored to staff levels), continuous engagement and ongoing communication
- Support child care and EarlyONs programmes to take leadership for inclusion in their programmes

Priorities

12➔

Continue to pursue strategies for making child care services affordable for families, including advocating for more public funding of the system, and taking advantage of any federal and provincial funding initiatives.

Proposed Actions

- Continue to administer and to develop guidelines, application and reporting processes for additional government funding for child care and early years operations as it becomes available
- Partner with child care operators, school boards, local municipalities and other partners to advocate for adequate public funding that ensures affordable, high quality programming in all child care settings, including school-age care

Priorities

13➔

Improve awareness and facilitate parents' access to child care fee subsidy, including simplifying processes for families applying for and receiving child care fee subsidy.

Proposed Actions

- Identify and adopt child care fee subsidy intake and review processes that reduce barriers and improve access for families
- Continue to improve flexibility of eligibility criteria for child care fee subsidy to make it easier for families to utilize licensed child care
- Continue to work with school boards, child care programmes, EarlyONs and other service partners to provide information about child care fee subsidy in readily accessible and destigmatizing fashion (e.g. include fee subsidy information in child care registration packages, early years services packages for parents with babies, operators and school board information pamphlets or webpages, immigrant welcome packages and family supports resource pages of other service partners)

Priorities

14→

Develop and implement a framework for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of child care and early years services and programmes that ensures transparency and system accountability, and reinforces service quality.

Proposed Actions

- Undertake a review of the General Operating Grant funding formula to ensure the strategy meets current budget needs and continues to support and enhance the County's priority of funding for quality
- Continue to work with EarlyON operators to provide consistent service experiences for parents and caregivers supported by clearly defined deliverables that are monitored annually
- Strengthen evidence-based planning and decision making practices for the child care and early years service system
- Promote and encourage participation in ongoing quality improvement initiatives including adoption of Operating Criteria by all operators in the service delivery area
- Work with all service partners to collect periodic feedback on the service system from families, service providers and other stakeholders
- Establish periodic reporting and information sharing sessions, including annual reports, service forums, conferences etc.

Priorities

15➔

Explore technological options to reduce administrative burden, improve customer service and access to programmes for service partners and families.

Proposed Actions

- Launch and administer the new Learning Management System to facilitate access to professional learning for child care and early years staff, and streamline data reporting for child care and early years programme operators with service contracts
- Adopt and optimize virtual and online processes that offer efficient service delivery options for frontline operations including child care fee subsidy (intake and review processes) and directly operated child care programmes (registration, family orientation, etc.)
- Launch and administer the RIRO/BBT training and certification programmes
- Work with service providers to ensure technological options are accessible, effective and efficient
- Explore web-based parents/caregiver registration and sign-in options for EarlyON programmes and services
- Continue to support and provide virtual programming and services as an option

Priorities

16➔

Guide and assist child care and early years service partners through periods of both anticipated and unforeseen changes to the service system.

Proposed Actions

- Leverage lessons learned from the pandemic experience and continue to provide timely information and updates to service partners using a variety of communication channels and to use technology as a way to reduce barriers to accessing information, and participate in meetings
- Maintain open, two-way communication with service providers about service system changes and offer information that is timely, clear and helps staff to tie change to overall service system goals (i.e., see continuity)
- Offer professional networking opportunities during times of change where staff can discuss topics important to them and share experiences
- Tailor communication so that information reaches all the people who need to be part of the change process
- Partner with Home Child Care Providers to raise awareness of the unique value of high quality Home Child Care

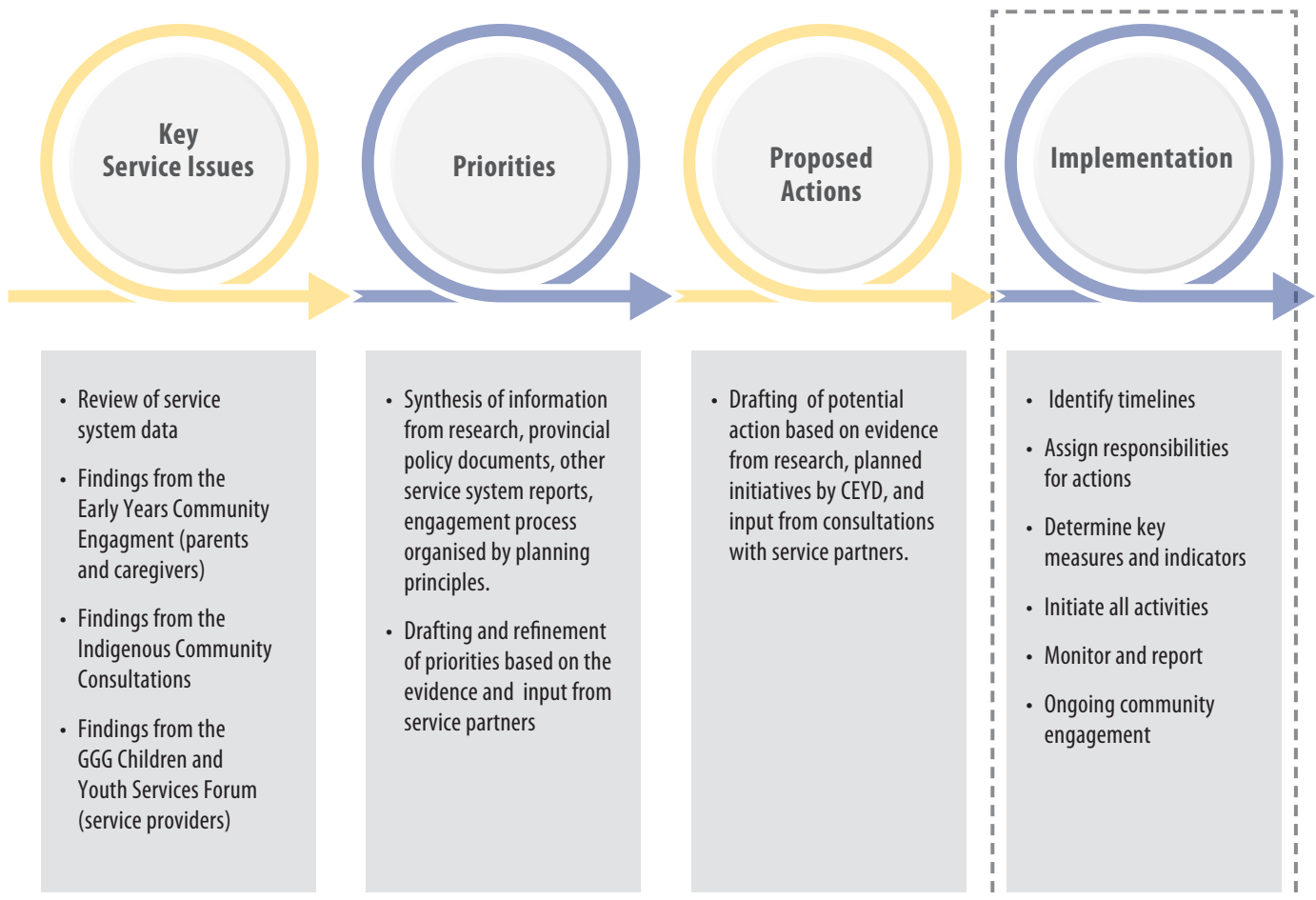
Moving Forward

In this service plan, we have identified priorities based on available evidence regarding the state of our services system, and developed proposed actions that can be taken in order to address the priorities. For the next five years, we will focus on implementing the service plan, which will also include monitoring and reporting on our progress, and on-going community engagement with service partners and families.

Implementation

Implementation of the service plan will occur over its lifetime, 2023-2027, and will involve all actions and activities taken to address the priorities identified, beginning with the development of a detailed implementation plan. Our implementation plan will identify timelines, responsibilities for actions, and key measures and indicators against which progress on each of the priorities will be monitored.

Consistent with our approach to developing the service plan, we will engage our service system partners to develop our implementation plan, which will be completed in 2023. The plan will emphasize partnerships and collaboration with service partners including school boards, child care providers, EarlyON providers, and all our partners at the GGG Planning Table and GGG Birth-Six Working Group to address the priorities.



Given that there are many influences on our service system environment, we recognize the need to ensure that both our service plan and implementation plan remain flexible. This will

allow the child care and early years service system to respond in a timely fashion to changes impacting the system as they come.

Monitoring and Reporting

Monitoring progress on actions taken to implement our service plan, by tracking data for performance measures and indicators identified for each principle, is part of our accountability strategy. The accountability strategy also includes reports that will be shared annually with the child care and early years service partners, the broader children and youth services community, and parents and caregivers within our service area. Annual reports will be posted on the publicly accessible CEYD website.

Our planning principles serve as the desired service system outcomes or the change we would like to see in order to improve our service system and positively impact outcomes for children and families. The advantage of using our planning principles as our desired service outcomes is that they are evidence based, meaning research has shown that high performing service systems are those where services are of high quality, are available, are accessible and affordable (OECD, 2006; Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014; White & Friendly, 2012). The principles, therefore, provide us with stable goal posts,

allowing us to make necessary adjustments to the service system that move us closer to the goal posts.

Furthermore, our principles are consistent with the themes of quality, access, responsiveness, and affordability identified in Ontario's Renewed Early Years Policy Framework; and the

principles of high quality, accessible, affordable and flexible, and inclusive identified in the federal government's Multilateral Framework, which forms the basis of the Canada-Ontario Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. For the past few years, Ontario has been reporting its progress on both of its themes and the Multilateral Framework principles in their annual child care and early

years reports using key outcome measures and performance indicators that are widely used in child care and early years research studies (Government of Ontario, 2017b, 2018a, 2020). This provides us with a credible starting resource for developing a performance measurement framework for monitoring progress on our own principles and priorities.





ONGOING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Engagement with system partners, as well as parents and caregivers will not only occur at the end of the lifetime of the service plan, but rather will be an ongoing process. This approach allows us to remain flexible and be responsive to both anticipated and unanticipated changes that impact the child care and early years service system environment, including changes in local community needs, provincial policy, and in the broader societal environment. Information gathered through ongoing community engagement alongside ongoing monitoring data, will allow us to periodically update our service plan as needed.

NOTES

¹ In published literature child care and early years services are often referred to as early childhood education and care services (ECEC), early learning and child care or by the collective term early years services. The term “child care and early years services” is used throughout this document to be consistent with provincial documents.

² According to Statistics Canada, “Indigenous ancestry refers to whether a person has ancestry associated with the Indigenous peoples of Canada, that is, First Nations (North American Indian), Métis, and/or Inuit. Aboriginal peoples (referred to here as Indigenous peoples) of Canada are defined in the Constitution Act, 1982, Section 35 (2) as including the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.”

³ According to Statistics Canada, “‘Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestries’ includes persons who have First Nations (North American Indian) Métis and/or Inuit ancestry as well as non-Indigenous ancestry.”

⁴ To estimate French-speaking populations in the Wellington service area, the variables Language Spoken Most Often at Home (French) and Other Language Spoken Regularly at Home (French) from the Census Profile 2021 data were added together.

⁵ The Inclusive Definition of Francophone (IDF) variable estimates the number of persons whose mother tongue is French; plus, those people whose mother tongue is neither French nor English (allophones), but who speak French. The IDF is considered to reflect the evolution and diversity of Ontario’s Francophone communities (Government of Ontario, 2009). IDF data for the 2021 Census is not available at this time.

⁶ The EDI assesses children’s developmental health when they enter school by looking at five key areas or domains of child development: physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive development; and communication skills and general knowledge.

⁷ See Wellington Advertiser (2022, June 23). New child care centre opens in Rockwood. Wellington Advertiser. Retrieved from: <https://www.wellingtonadvertiser.com/new-child-care-centre-opens-in-rockwood/>

⁸ Areas are designated under the French Languages Services Act have at least 5,000 Francophones and Francophones make up at least 10% of the area population. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/government-services-french>

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Definitions for centre, satellite and mobile services in relation to EarlyON Services

A CENTRE

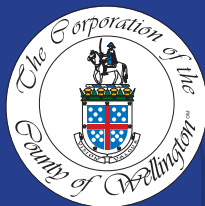
A physical site with space fully committed to EarlyON programming. A centre is open a minimum of 30 hours per week which is spread over 6 days including one weekend day and one evening. The site offers programming for the complete suite of mandatory core services of which at least 75% is drop-in play and inquiry-based programming. Centre opening hours and programming schedule (i.e., days and time slots) are consistent, and operates 12 months/year.

A SATELLITE

A physical site with space that is used for EarlyON programming (the space is multi-use and not fully committed to EarlyON services). A satellite is open for EarlyON programming a minimum of 3 days per week. The site offers a selection of the mandatory core services which includes at least 2 drop-in play and inquiry-based programmes per week. Satellite programming schedule (days and time slots) is consistent, and operates 12 months per year (may offer 9-10 months onsite with summer programming offsite).

MOBILE SERVICE

Any site used for EarlyON programming that offers programming at least once a week, and only offers drop-in play and inquiry-based programming. Mobile service programming schedule (days and time slots) is consistent, and the site may operate less than 12 months per year (a minimum of 3 months per year).



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ALTERNATE FORMATS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST.

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