



# Staff Report to Council - for Information

**Title:** Bruce County Child Care and Early Learning Directed Growth Plan Update

**From:** Tina Metcalfe, Director Human Services

**Date:** November 21, 2024

**Report Number:** HS-2024-043

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## Report Purpose:

This report is for information.

## Report Summary:

This report provides an update on the implementation of the Bruce County Child Care and Early Learning Directed Growth Plan.

## Background/Analysis:

Under the CWELCC system, Ontario committed to support the creation of 86,000 new CWELCC licensed child care spaces by the end of 2026. The directed growth approach supports space creation in underserved communities and parts of the province who have historically low rates of child care access.

In 2023, Bruce County was allocated a notional target of 645 new child care spaces to be realized by the end of 2026.

Shortly after receiving the notional target, staff developed and launched an [Early Learning and Child Care Expansion Toolkit | Bruce County](#) on the Bruce County website. The toolkit provides a step-by-step guide with tools and resources to support expansion projects.

As at the end of Q3 2024, Bruce County has experienced an expansion of 374 new child care spaces. In total, there are 415 approved child care spaces including future year applications.

In alignment with Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework, Bruce County's Directed Growth Plan prioritizes child care expansion projects that:

1. Support child care access for low-income children, vulnerable children, children from diverse communities, children with special needs, Francophone, and Indigenous children.
2. Increase access equity by supporting child care expansion in municipalities with an

access rate lower than the provincial average of 37%.

The chart below provides a comparative summary of child care access rates in Bruce County as of January 2023 (pre-expansion), and currently as a result of the Bruce County Child Care and Early Learning Directed Growth Plan for children aged 0-4.

Saugeen Shores, South Bruce Peninsula, as well as North Bruce Peninsula have all met the targeted CWELCC access rate and are anticipated to retain the number of spaces. Municipalities below the 37% access rate remain a priority for further expansion.

Child care access rates were calculated by dividing the number of available infant, toddler, and preschool child care spaces by the 2021 Census 0-4 population.

Municipality	CWELCC Access Rate Pre-Expansion (2023)	Current CWELCC Access Rate (Q3 2024)
Huron-Kinloss	13%	18%
South Bruce	2%	7%
Kincardine	33%	48%
Arran-Elderslie	16%	33%
Saugeen Shores	50%	66%
Brockton	31%	33%
South Bruce Peninsula	44%	51%
Northern Bruce Peninsula	62%	78%
Combined Access Rate	30%	41%

3. Maintain or improve the proportion of not-for profit licensed child care spaces at 70% or higher. Provincial policy, currently being reviewed, requires that Bruce County maintains or improves the proportion of not-for profit licensed child care spaces at 70% or higher by the end of 2026 (auspice ratio). Currently 62% of Bruce County CWELCC spaces are offered by not-for profit operators and 38% by for-profit operators.

### Implementation Challenges

The ability for child care operators to operate at full licensed capacity is impacted due to qualified staff shortages as well as recruitment and retention challenges. The expansion of child care and early years services in Bruce County requires additional Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE). The expansion of 645 spaces requires between 100-130 additional RECE's in the sector to accommodate child to staff ratios.

### Implementation Opportunities

#### Bruce County Children's Services Continues to Accept Expansion Applications

The application period for licensed child care expansion remains open. Interested

operators are encouraged to visit the Early Learning and Child Care Expansion Toolkit on the Bruce County website ([Early Learning and Child Care Expansion Toolkit](#)). The toolkit provides a step-by-step guide with tools and resources to support expansion projects. New applicants are encouraged to explore steps required to become not-for-profit child care operations due to the required proportion of not-for profit licensed child care spaces. Interested applicants are advised of the need to expand in municipalities not currently at the 37% threshold for access, to support access equity.

### **Start-Up Grants**

Start-up grant funding continues to be available for eligible applicants to support initial costs required to expand or create spaces. Eligible expenses include equipment or leasehold improvements, such as retrofit, renovation or expansion projects. This funding cannot be used for capital costs or school-based expansions. Start-up grant funding is available through the Early Learning and Child Care Expansion Application process. To date, \$872,610 has been flowed to support expansion applicants.

### **Financial/Staffing/Legal/IT Considerations:**

CWELCC start-up grant funding and other child care expansion costs are funded by the Provincial/Federal Governments with no financial impact to the County of Bruce.

### **Interdepartmental Consultation:**

Information Technology Services supported the development the online [Early Learning and Child Care Expansion Toolkit](#).

### **Link to Strategic Goals and Objectives:**

Community and Partnerships - Build a strong and inclusive community

Growth and Innovation - Promote responsible growth

### **Link to Departmental Plan Goals and Objectives, if any:**

The Bruce County Child Care and Early Learning Directed Growth Plan is in alignment with the priorities of access, inclusivity and affordability as identified in the [Bruce County Early Learning and Child Care Service System Plan - 2024 to 2028](#).

### **Report Author:**

Gillian Andrews, Children's Services Manager

### **Departmental Approval:**

Tina Metcalfe, Director of Human Services

**Approved for Submission:**

Christine MacDonald, Chief Administrative Officer