



## ONTARIO GOVERNMENT PUBLIC TOWN HALL MEETINGS: EARLY YEARS AND CHILD CARE POLICY FRAMEWORK AND EXPANSION

### POINTS TO CONSIDER IN ANSWERING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### ACCESS

##### 1. WHAT DOES ACCESS TO CHILD CARE AND EARLY YEARS PROGRAMS MEAN TO YOU?

Give examples from your own life if you've struggled to access child care. Or provide examples of how you've seen friends, loved ones, or families that you work with experience child care challenges.

Access to child care would mean:

- there are enough spaces for all who want them;
- parents could afford licensed child care spaces with quality programs;
- spaces are available where you need them (convenient, close to public transit, lower-income communities, rural communities) and when you need them (shift and precarious work during evenings, nights and weekends);
- providing supports for the full inclusion of children with special needs in child care centres and enabling child care that respects the racial, cultural and ethnic diversity of our communities;
- having a system that's easy to navigate and user-friendly.

##### 2. IN YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM AND WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST BARRIERS TO PARENTS ACCESSING LICENSED CHILD CARE AND EARLY YEARS PROGRAMS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

One strength of our current system is the dedicated workforce who provide quality services.

There are many serious barriers, which make it difficult to access licensed child care including the long waitlists for licensed child care spaces, the costs that are unaffordable to most parents, the lack of options for shift workers and in rural communities, the lack of available spaces for children with special needs and a child care system that is difficult for parents to navigate.

##### 3. IN YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT CAN BE DONE BY GOVERNMENTS, COMMUNITIES, EMPLOYERS AND PROVIDERS TO INCREASE ACCESS TO LICENSED CHILD CARE AND EARLY YEARS PROGRAMS?

- The provincial government should fund the capital costs to create additional child care spaces
- The provincial government should make child care fees more affordable by providing operational funding to licensed child care centres, introducing a sliding scale for fees and capping maximum parent fees.
- Municipal child care system managers would continue their role in consulting with communities to prioritize new spaces being developed in under-served communities
- A segment of the new spaces created should accommodate parents who work shift work based on community need

## RESPONSIVENESS

1. DO PARENTS HAVE THE EARLY YEARS AND CHILD CARE OPTIONS THEY NEED?
  - No. With licensed spaces for less than a quarter of children, currently too many families do not have the option of quality licensed child care.
  - Families who work non-standard hours, and those living in rural areas often have even fewer options.
  - Indigenous families often do not have the option of culturally safe and appropriate programs.
2. WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM AND OPTIONS AVAILABLE?
  - There are many examples of great early learning and child care programs around the province. We need to emulate what these sites of excellence do well when we expand spaces.
3. WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PROVIDE YOUR FAMILY WITH MORE CHOICE AND FLEXIBILITY?
  - The government should invest capital and operating funds in developing more public and non-profit child care centres so that there are adequate spaces for those that need them.
  - Programs to meet the needs of families working non-standard hours or child care options that work for rural areas are best achieved within a comprehensive child care system because these programs can be very expensive to operate on their own.

## AFFORDABILITY

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### WHAT DOES AN AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE SYSTEM LOOK LIKE TO YOU?

- Parents can afford child care fees; costs do not eat up a significant portion of parents' incomes.
- Parent fees are on a sliding scale and geared to parents' income with the highest income parents paying the most.
- The government funds operating costs of licensed child care centres.

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### WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE SUBSIDY MODEL IN ONTARIO?

- Our current child care funding and subsidy model in Ontario is broken. The median fee for an infant space in Ontario was \$1,152 per month in 2012. A study for the City of Toronto found that licensed child care was unaffordable for 75% of families.
- Even if a family in Ontario qualifies for subsidized child care, they may be placed on a long waitlist and have to pay full fees for a period of time.
- The provincial government should shift to a more sustainable funding model to provide long-term operational funding to child care centres with fees on a sliding scale based on income.

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### WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS GOVERNMENTS, COMMUNITIES, PROVIDERS AND EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO TO MAKE EARLY YEARS PROGRAMS IN ONTARIO MORE AFFORDABLE?

- Affordability will continue to remain an issue until we move from a child care market to a child care system. The government has an opportunity with the creation of 100,000 spaces to begin creating

a system with well-compensated and trained staff, affordable parent fees and enriching learning environments.

- Research shows that child care costs for middle class families are lowest where the provinces have regulated fees and made up the difference through provincial core funding to services. We need the government to prioritize affordable child care to help close the gender wage gap, to support working families and to reduce poverty rates.

## QUALITY

### 1. WHAT DOES A HIGH QUALITY EARLY YEARS OR CHILD CARE PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?

- At the minimum, quality settings provide inviting spaces for children to play and learn together, supported by a consistent staff of well-trained educators.
- Quality should also encompass other important values like inclusion for children with disabilities, cultural safety, and equitable access for all families.

### 2. WHAT ROLE SHOULD THE PROVINCE PLAY IN ENSURING HIGH QUALITY EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE PROGRAMS?

- The Province should focus on *structural* factors that can influence quality – such as better wages and training for staff, and public and non-profit provision.
  - Research shows that the training and consistency of staff have an impact on program quality – low-turnover can be achieved through decent pay and working conditions.
  - Studies show that there is a quality advantage for public/non-profit child care compared to commercial care. The most responsible use of public dollars is to expand child care in the public and non-profit sectors.

### 3. HOW SHOULD WE MEASURE QUALITY IN OUR EARLY YEARS AND CHILD CARE PROGRAMS?

- The Province should engage with child care experts and researchers to develop a robust data and research agenda to monitor quality as programs develop.