



Hamilton's Early Years  
Community Plan  
**2023 ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN**



# 1

# INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

This environmental scan report provides a description of Hamilton's children and families including key demographic, socio-economic, community health and early child development statistics and trends, based on available data sources. It also provides a current snapshot of Hamilton's Early Years System including centre-based, home-based, and co-operative licensed child care, EarlyON Child and Family Centres, Special Needs Resourcing and Mental Health services and resources, that are available in Hamilton, etc.

The purpose of the environmental scan is to ensure that local system and service planning and decisions, including updates to Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan, are informed by demographic changes and community trends as well as system trends and gaps in order to ensure an Early Years System that is relevant and responsive to the needs of Hamilton's children and their families.

Together with Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan 2023 Update, this document is meant to provide a snapshot of Hamilton's children and families and its Early Years System.

The environmental scan data contained and referenced within this report is also an important resource for local community service providers and partners who utilize demographic and community trend data for their own program planning processes.

This report draws from several data sources including but not limited to the following:

- [Statistics Canada's Census 2021](#) and [2016](#). The 2021 data reported are primarily at the City of Hamilton (Census Division) level. Non-standard Census data at the Census Tract level are still pending release from Statistics Canada. Census Tract level data is required to describe the social and demographic characteristics of Hamilton's neighbourhoods. At the time of publication, the City of Hamilton's [Ward Profiles](#) are the best available source of neighbourhood-level demographic data. 2021 Census data at the ward and Census Tract levels will be shared with the community following its release by Statistics Canada.
- Early Development Instrument (2018)
- Ontario Parent Survey (Third Wave), Hamilton findings (2022)
- City of Hamilton's Children's and Community Services Division's Early Years system data

# DEMOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN THE CITY OF HAMILTON

## KEY POPULATION AND GROWTH TRENDS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

### Hamilton's Population is Growing

The City of Hamilton's population was 569,355 in 2021.

Between 2016 and 2021, the population of Hamilton grew by 32,435 individuals for a population growth of 6.0%, surpassing the provincial average of 5.8%<sup>1</sup>.

Hamilton's population is predicted to grow to approximately 809,660 individuals by 2046<sup>2</sup>. This represents a population growth of approximately 38% over the next 25 years. This is in line with population growth projections for Ontario (38%).

### Hamilton's Child Population Continues to Grow

In 2021, Hamilton had 91,240 children aged 0 to 14 years of age. Table 1 provides a break down by age group for 2016 and 2021.

Between 2016 and 2021, Hamilton's child population growth varied across the city. Parts of Glanbrook, Upper Stoney Creek, and Flamborough East experienced relatively large gains in the number of children 0 to 6 years of age compared to other areas of the city (identified in Figure 1) between 2016 and 2021.

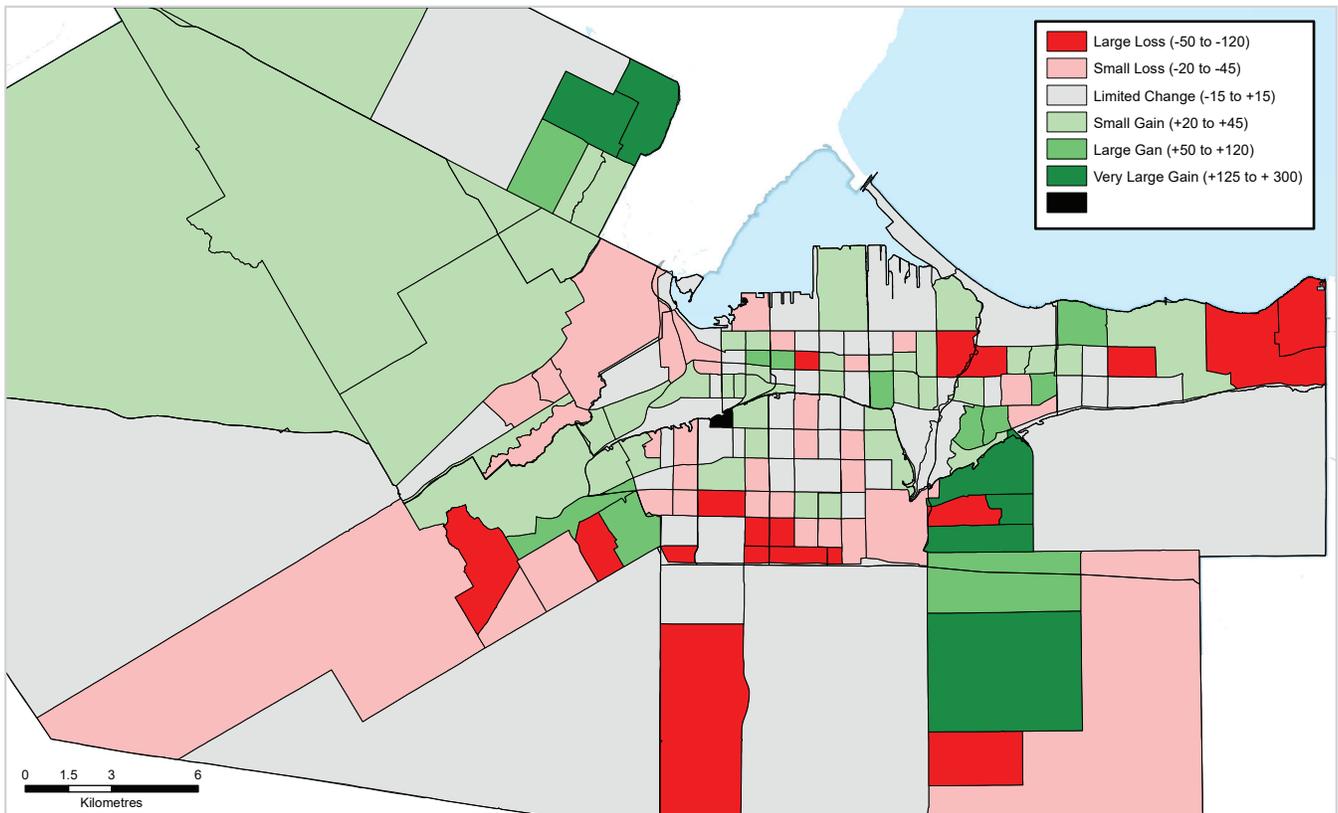
**Table 1: Child Population by Age Group, City of Hamilton 2016 and 2021**

Age Group (years)	2016	2021
0-4	28,275	29,100
5-9	29,355	30,695
10-14	29,485	31,445
<b>TOTAL 0-14</b>	<b>87,115</b>	<b>91,240</b>

Source: Statistics Canada Census data, 2016 and 2021 accessed through the City of Hamilton's [City Dashboard](#).

- 1 Source: Data is derived from custom tabulations of Statistic Canada's Census obtained by the City of Hamilton as a consortium member of the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet) Community Data Program.
- 2 Ontario Ministry of Finance. [Ontario Population Projections Update, 2021-2046](#). Updated Summer 2022.

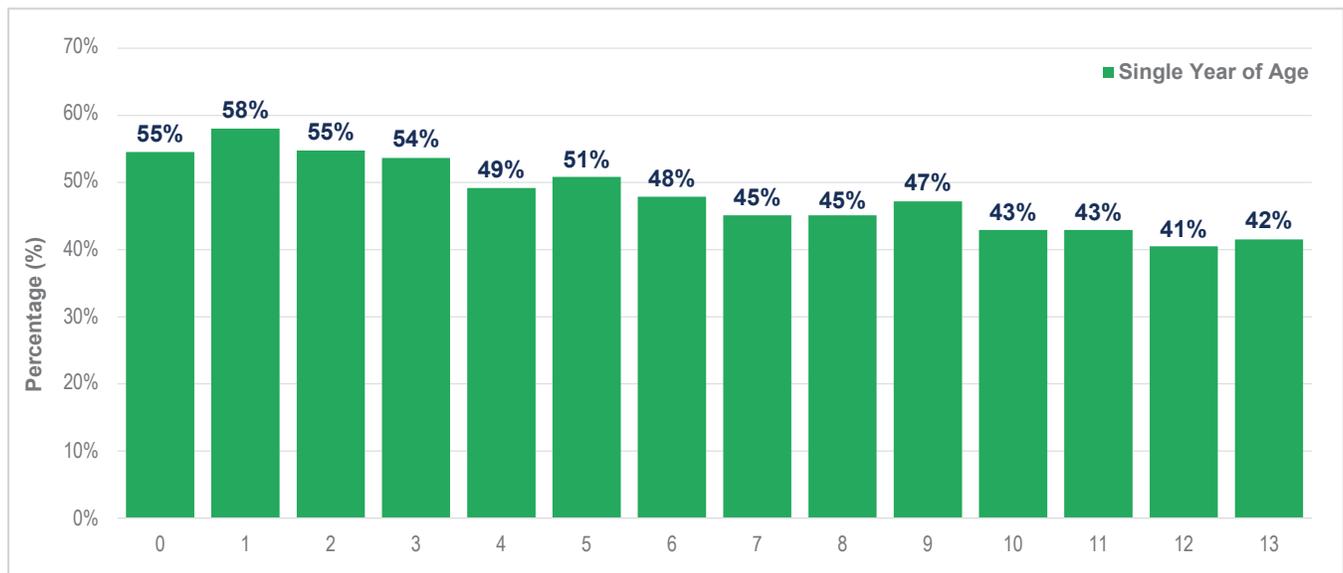
**Figure 1: Gain/Loss Counts of Children Aged 0 to 6 Years from 2016 to 2021 by Census Tract, City of Hamilton**



Source: Statistics Canada. Census 2016 and 2021. Obtained through City of Hamilton, Children’s and Community Services Division.

Hamilton is one of several areas in Ontario that is projected to see its population of children aged 0 to 14 years grow by over 35% over the next 25 years (from 2021 to 2046) (Figure 2).<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 2: Projected Population Growth in Children Aged 0-14 by Census Division, 2021 to 2046**



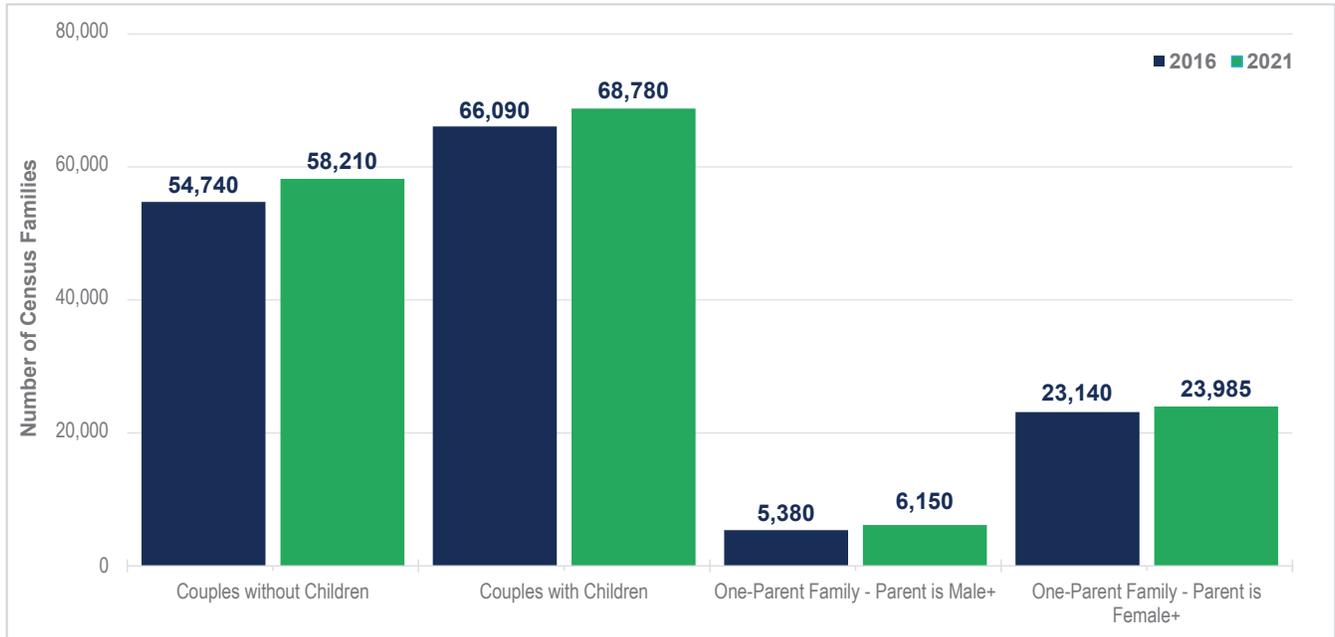
Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance. Ontario Population Projections Update, 2021-2046.

3 Ontario Ministry of Finance. [Ontario Population Projections Update, 2021-2046](#). Updated Summer 2022.

## Families

In 2021, there were 98,915 families with children in Hamilton up from 94,610 in 2016 (Figure 3). Of these, 30.5% of families with children (30,135 families) were one-parent families (Figure 3).

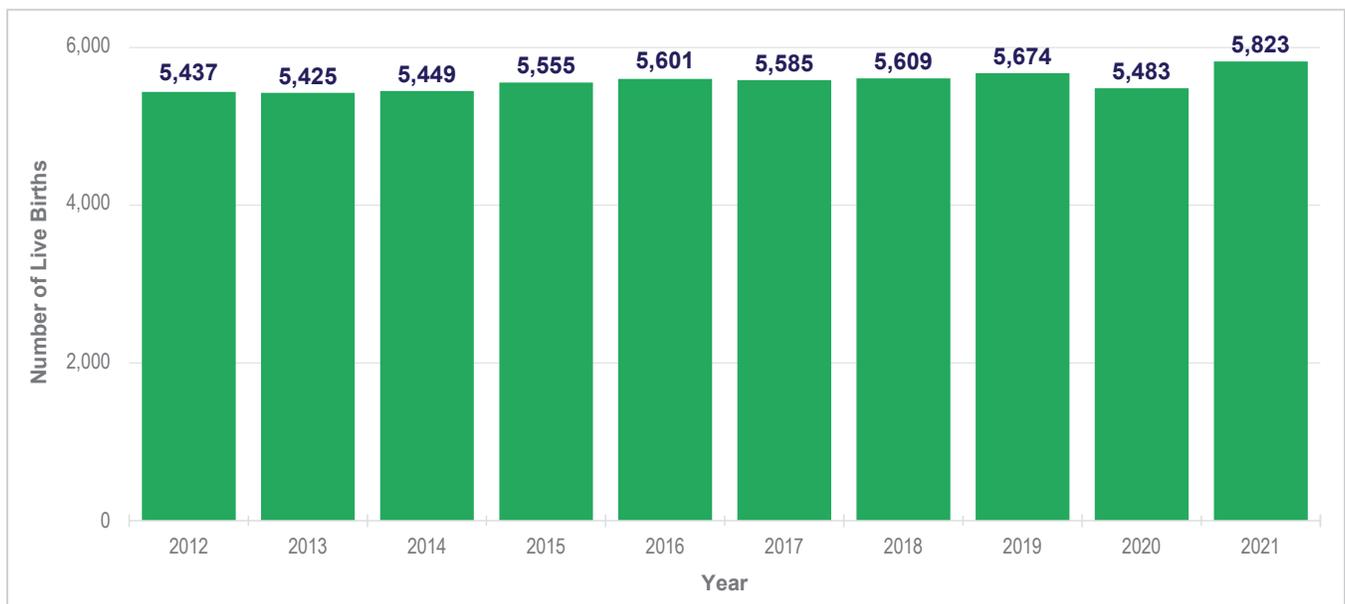
**Figure 3: Number of Census Families by Census Family Type, Hamilton 2016 and 2021**



Source: Statistics Canada Census data, 2016 and 2021 accessed through the City of Hamilton's [City Dashboard](#).

The number of live births in Hamilton has seen a recent increase reaching a 10 year high of 5,823 live births in 2021 (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Number of Live Births by Year, Hamilton 2012 to 2021**



Source: Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Snapshots: Reproductive health Snapshot: crude birth rate, 2020 [Internet]. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; c2022. Accessed through the City of Hamilton's [City Dashboard](#).

# DIVERSITY - KEY LANGUAGE, IMMIGRATION AND VISIBLE MINORITY TRENDS IN HAMILTON

## Hamilton Residents Speak Different Languages



**92%** of people living in Hamilton spoke **English** only



**6%** (or 32,630) spoke both **English and French**



**0.1%** (or 410) spoke **French Only**



**2%** (or 10,435) spoke **neither** English nor French in 2021

- In 2021, the top 5 non-official languages spoken in Hamilton were:
  1. Arabic
  2. Italian
  3. Spanish
  4. Chinese languages
  5. Portuguese
- There were notable increases in the proportions of people reporting Arabic, Spanish, Punjabi and Tagalog as their first language in Hamilton between 2016 and 2021. There were notable declines for Italian, Chinese languages, Portuguese, Polish, Serbian and German. These trends in local language diversity stem from recent immigration patterns.<sup>4</sup>

## Hamilton's Population is Increasingly Diverse



- In 2021, **28.2%** (or 158,185) of Hamilton residents were born outside of Canada compared to **25.9%** (or 136,590) in 2016.



- In 2021, Hamilton was home to **20,145** recent immigrants<sup>5</sup> and **12,640** non-permanent residents.



- **25.1%** (or approximately 141,000) of Hamilton's population identified as belonging to a visible minority in 2021 compared to **19.0%** (or approximately 100,100) in 2016.

4 Workforce Planning Hamilton. (2022). Linguistic Profile of Hamilton, Ontario. [2021 Census of Population Infographics](#).

5 Recent immigrant refers to a person who obtained a landed immigrant or permanent resident status up to five years prior to a given census year.

# EMPLOYMENT, INCOME AND HOUSING STATUS IN HAMILTON

## Unemployment in Hamilton

Hamilton's unemployment rate (2-year moving average) has seen a recent uptick from a low of 5.1% in 2018-2019 to 7.9% in 2020-2021 (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Unemployment Rate (2-year moving average), Hamilton 2006/2007 to 2020/2021



Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey (LFS) accessed through the City of Hamilton's [City Dashboard](#).

## Income

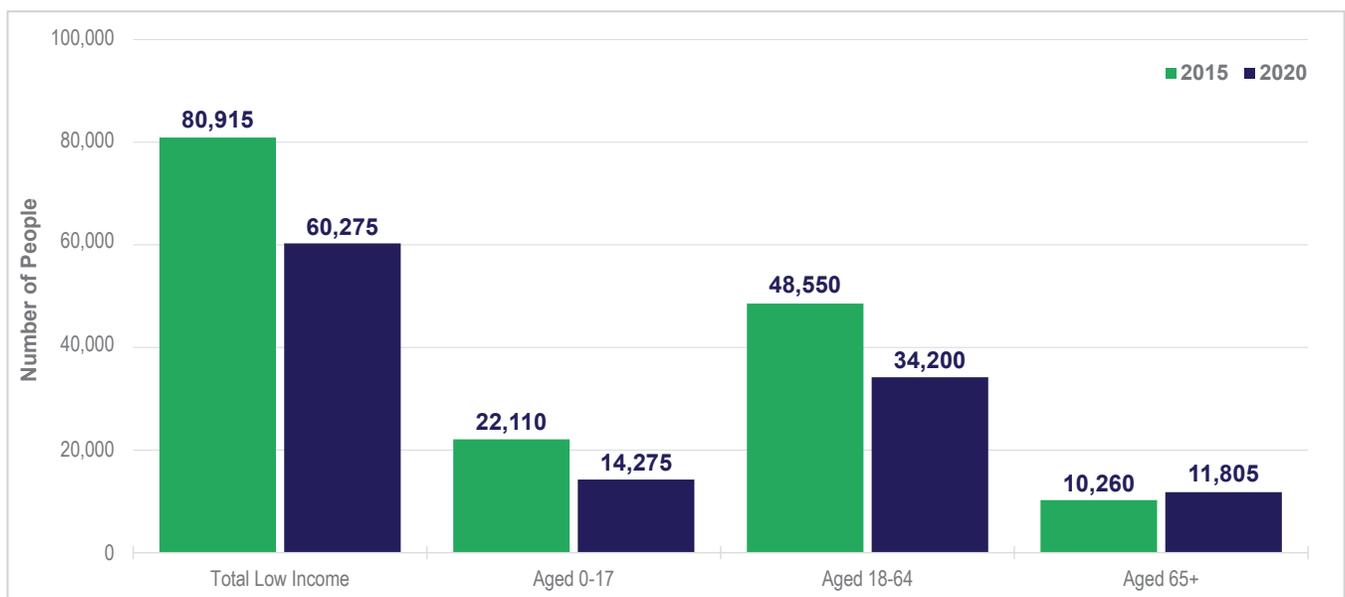
The average household income in Hamilton was \$108,700 in 2020 up from \$87,775 in 2015.

Eleven percent (or 60,275) individuals living in Hamilton reported low-income status in 2020 down from 15% (or 80,915) in 2015.

In 2020, approximately 14,275 children aged 0-17 years were living with low income (Figure 6).

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, loss in employment wages were offset by government transfers from COVID-19 income support programs (e.g. Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)). Household after-tax income increased for families with children and households with low income due to government transfers from COVID-19 relief programs for these groups. This subsequently resulted in decreases in low-income rates, particularly amongst families and children in 2020.

Figure 6: Number of People Reporting Low Income Status by Age Group, City of Hamilton 2015 and 2020



Source: Statistics Canada Census data, 2016 and 2021 accessed through the City of Hamilton's [City Dashboard](#).

In March 2023, approximately 10,260 families and 18,860 beneficiaries<sup>6</sup> in Hamilton were supported by Ontario Works for basic food and shelter needs<sup>7</sup>. See Figure 7 for caseload trend between 2015 and 2023.

**Figure 7: Number of Families on the Ontario Works Caseload, City of Hamilton, 2015-2022**



Source: Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) social assistance Operations Performance Reports. Accessed through the City of Hamilton’s [City Dashboard](#)

## Housing Affordability

People in households that spend 30% or more of total household income on shelter expenses are defined as having a “housing affordability” problem. People who lack access to acceptable housing are more likely than those with adequate housing to experience physical and mental health problems.<sup>8</sup>

In Hamilton, 23% of households reported spending 30% or more of their total annual household income on shelter in 2021 down from 26% in 2016. Despite this, the rise in inflation increased the price of local housing from 2015 to 2022, effectively decreasing the value of the dollar and worsening the affordability of housing for households with moderate and low income.<sup>9</sup>

Housing affordability is more of an issue for renters compared to owners. Specifically, 38% of tenant households reported spending 30% or more on their annual household income on shelter in 2021 compared to 16% of owner households.

To learn more about Hamilton’s population visit the following City of Hamilton webpages:

[hamilton.ca/citydashboard](https://hamilton.ca/citydashboard)

[hamilton.ca/wardprofile](https://hamilton.ca/wardprofile)

[hamilton.ca/opendata](https://hamilton.ca/opendata)

6 The number of individuals (including dependent children) supported by Ontario Works.  
 7 Source: Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) social assistance Operations Performance Reports accessed via City of Hamilton Dashboard.  
 8 Butler-Jones D. The Chief Public Health Officer’s Report on the State of Public Health in Canada, 2008.  
 9 SHS Consulting and the City of Hamilton. [The City of Hamilton Housing Needs Assessment](#). December 12, 2022.

# HEALTH & WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN & FAMILIES IN HAMILTON

## Early Child Development

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a tool that is widely used around the world to monitor the state of early childhood development. The EDI questionnaire is completed by senior kindergarten teachers measuring children's ability to meet age-appropriate developmental expectations in five key domains:

- Language and Cognitive Development
- Emotional Maturity
- Social Competence
- Communication Skills and General Knowledge
- Physical Health and Well-being

The EDI is used to: help identify strengths and needs of children within the community, contribute to the planning of early childhood investment, and inform policy and program development decisions.

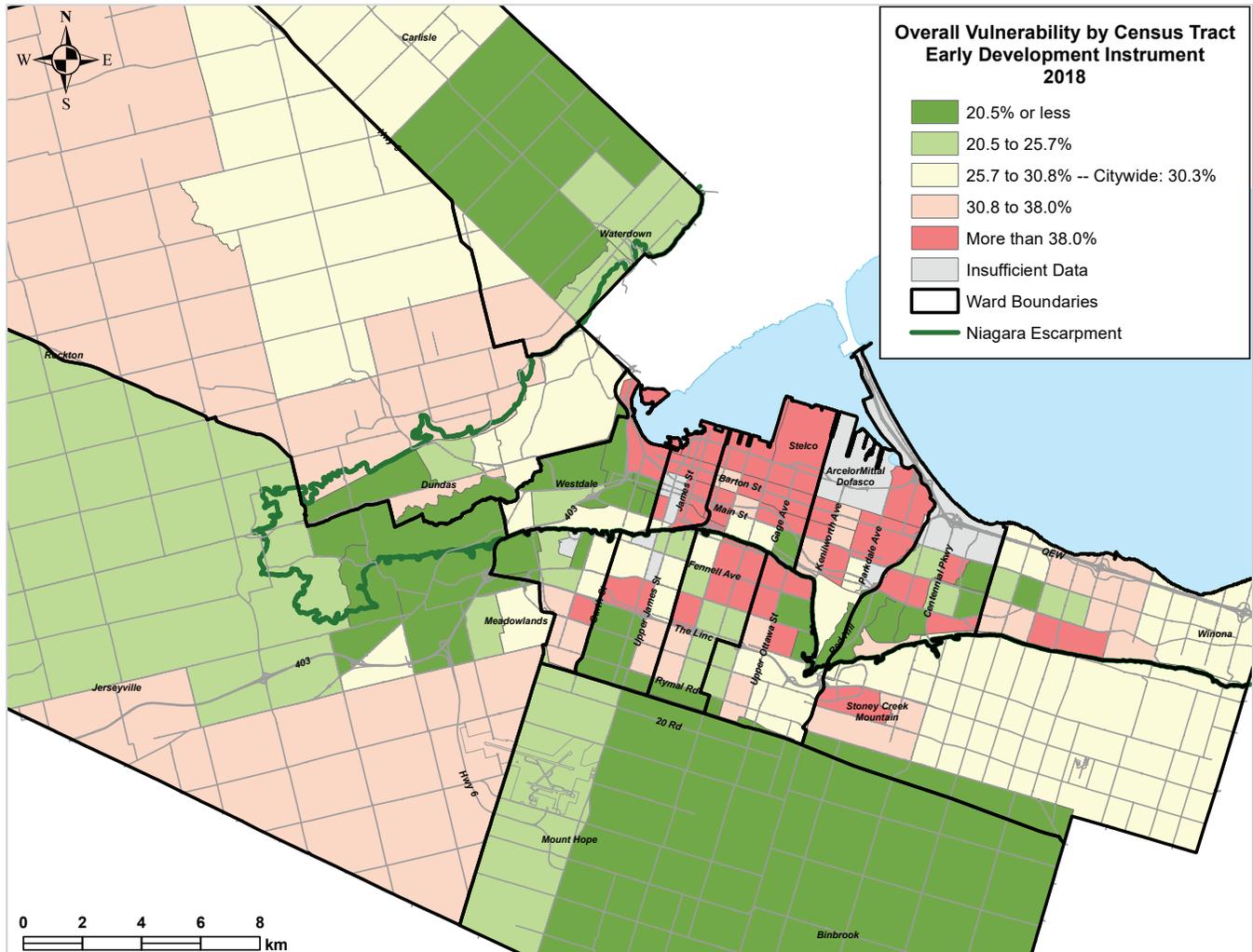
EDI vulnerability describes the children who score below a standard score in any domain. Higher vulnerability indicates a greater percentage of children are struggling. In general terms, an increase in vulnerability is negative and a decrease in vulnerability is positive. The vulnerability rate has been shown to be a strong predictor of future school success.

The most recent data from EDI was gathered in 2018 in Hamilton. The EDI was implemented in Hamilton schools representing 4,972 children in senior kindergarten.

## EDI 2018 Highlights

- Almost 1 in 3 (30.3%) children in kindergarten in Hamilton were vulnerable in one or more areas of their development in 2018. This is a small decrease (an improvement) from 30.7% in 2015.
- Children in Hamilton scored slightly more vulnerable than the provincial average (30.3% vs 29.6%) in 2018.
- Vulnerability rates varied greatly (from 16% to 52%) across Hamilton's neighbourhoods in 2018.
- EDI vulnerability was highest (over 38%) in several lower city neighbourhoods (within Wards 2, 3 and 4 primarily) but also in pockets of Hamilton Mountain (north of the Lincoln M. Alexander Parkway). Refer to Figure 8.

Figure 8: Overall Vulnerability on Early Development Instrument (EDI) by Census Tract, Hamilton 2018



Source: EDI 2018 obtained through City of Hamilton, Children’s and Community Services Division.

EDI data broken down by domain and Census Tract provides a sense of how and where children in Hamilton are most vulnerable as of 2018 (Figure 8).

For example:



Vulnerability is **highest** in **Physical Health and Well-being (17.0%)** and is an issue across many Hamilton neighbourhoods.



Vulnerability is also **high** in the **Emotional Maturity (12.3%)** especially in lower city wards.



Vulnerability is **lowest** in the **Language and Cognitive Development (8.2%)** except amongst children in Ward 2 (downtown).

### Physical Health and Well-being Vulnerability in the EDI

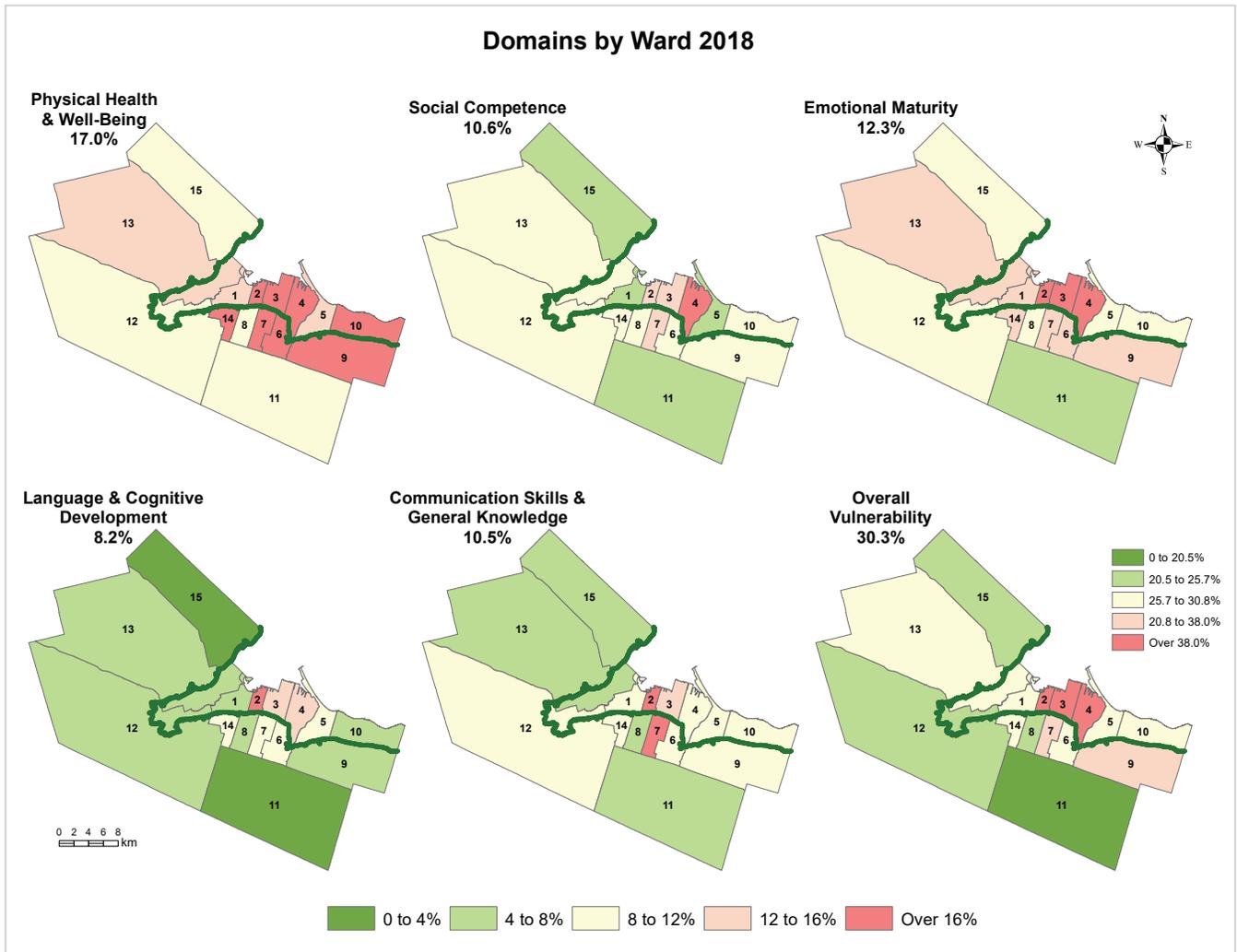
This domain measures children’s gross and fine motor skills, physical independence, and readiness for the school day. Children with vulnerability in this area can experience several challenges during their day of learning including being dressed inappropriately, frequently late, hungry or tired. They may also experience challenges in tasks that require developed fine and gross motor skills.

### Emotional Maturity Vulnerability in the EDI

Children who are identified as vulnerable on the Emotional Maturity domain experience several challenges related to emotional regulation. They may be more likely to have problems managing aggressive behaviour or be inattentive and impulsive.

Source: Human Early Learning Partnership. (2022). [Vulnerability on the EDI: Fact Sheet](#). University of British Columbia.

Figure 9: Percentage of Children Vulnerable on One or More (1+) Early Development Instrument (EDI) Domains by Neighbourhood, Hamilton 2018



Source: EDI 2018 obtained through City of Hamilton, Children’s and Community Services Division.

To learn more about the health and development of children in Hamilton visit the City of Hamilton’s [Child and Youth Health Atlas](#).

## Highlights from Ontario Parent Survey (Hamilton-specific results)

The Ontario Parent Survey (OPS)<sup>10</sup> aims to help understand how families and children have been affected by the lockdown due to COVID-19, and what services families and caregivers may need. Findings from the OPS Third Wave (2022) indicates COVID-19 has negatively impacted both parents' mental health and financial security as well as negatively impacted children's mental health, behaviours and well-being.

### Impacts on Financial Stability



- **30%** (a third) of parents reported a loss of income
- **22%** (a quarter) of families reported 'moderate to major' impact on their ability to meet financial obligations and essential needs
- **68%** of parents reported an increase in time caregiving for young children/school-aged children

### Mental Health Impacts



- **71%** of parents reported significant depressive symptoms
- **40%** of parents reported needing help for mental health but did not seek help
- **12%** reported that their child needed help for mental health but did not seek help
- **39%** sought professional care for their child's mental health
- **31%** of caregivers indicated that COVID-19 had 'a lot' to 'a great deal' of negative impact on their children's mental and emotional health

### Parents Reported Moderate to High Levels of Concern About the Impact of COVID-19 on...



- **61%** managing screen time at home
- **62%** learning and education
- **51%** maintaining household routines, organization and meals
- **51%** balancing work while looking after children

### Additional Concerns Included:



- **44%** managing their children's anxiety and stress
- **43%** amount of child's physical activity
- **31%** managing their child's behaviour

### Top Three Events or Changes to Daily Life That Were Most Negative for Children Included:

**75%**  
not seeing their friends

**51%**  
not going to school  
in person

**45%**  
having to stay home

10 Offord Centre for Child Studies. (2023) Ontario Parent Survey: Findings and Results from the Third Wave (Hamilton). McMaster University.

# 4

# HAMILTON'S EARLY YEARS SYSTEM

The City of Hamilton's Early Years System aims to make Hamilton the best place to raise a child and the best place to be a child.

This involves ensuring that Hamilton families have access to high-quality, affordable, flexible and inclusive child care, early years programs and the availability of services for children and their families, prenatal and beyond. Accessing and experiencing early learning environments that encourage exploration, engagement, a sense of belonging, well-being and expression are essential to a child's physical, social, intellectual and emotional development. Having child care and early years programs and services available is also essential to parents and caregivers. It provides the opportunity and flexibility for them to find and maintain employment, pursue an education, improve their parenting capacity, meet and connect with other individuals and families in their communities, and build a better life for their families.

Hamilton has a variety of early years services and programs designed to meet the diverse needs of Hamilton's children and families. This section provides a high-level overview of Hamilton's Early Years System including snapshots of licensed centre-based care, licensed home-based child care, and EarlyON Child and Family Centres. Hamilton's wide range of Early Years System support services and resources are also described including Special Needs Resourcing, Child Care Fee Subsidy Program, wage grants, Infant and Early Years Mental Health System Support Committee, and Hamilton's Early Years Quality Program.

## Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) System

In March 2022, Ontario reached a \$13.2 billion agreement with the federal government on funding for and the terms of the CWELCC system. The new system will lower child care costs and improve access, quality and inclusion across Ontario's child care and early years sector.

Licensed child care operators were required to opt in or opt out of the CWELCC system by November 1, 2022. In Hamilton, 96% (215) of eligible child care operators (including both licensed centre-based and home-based child care operators) have opted in. New child care operators who wish to participate in the CWELCC program in 2023, will need to align with Ontario's Ministry of Education's direct growth approach, which seeks to create affordable childcare spaces in communities with populations who need them most.

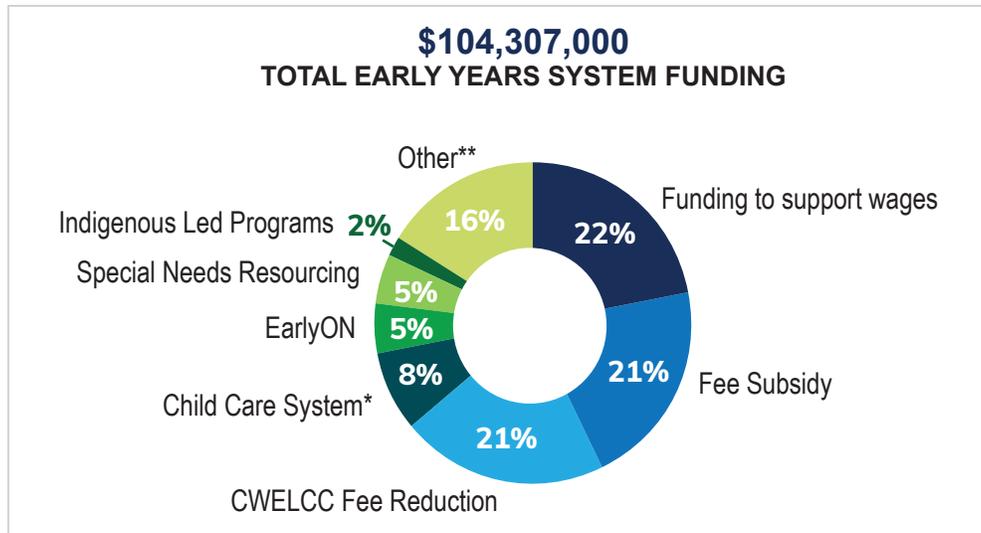
## Early Years Funding and Budget

In 2022, Hamilton's Early Years System had a total operating budget of \$104.3 M. The majority of the budget is allocated towards:

- Funding to support child care wages (**\$23.4M**)
- Child care fee subsidy (**\$21.7M**)
- Child care fee reduction through CWELCC (**\$21.4M**)

See Figure 10 for distribution of Early Years System funding by category.

Figure 10: Early Years System Funding for Hamilton, 2022



\* Child Care System: system priorities, health and safety, capital and transformation.

\*\* Other: admin, resource centres and capacity and emergency supports

Source: City of Hamilton Children’s and Community Services Division (2022).

## ACCESS TO THE EARLY YEARS SYSTEM

Families need access to affordable, high-quality licensed child care so parents and caregivers can work or continue their education. Participation in quality early years programs (such as, those offered at EarlyON Child and Family Centres) have also had a positive impact on child development and well-being, and family well-being.<sup>11</sup>

## Licensed Centre-Based Child Care by the Numbers (March 2023)



**223** licensed child care centres  
**20,725** spaces for children 0-12.



This includes:

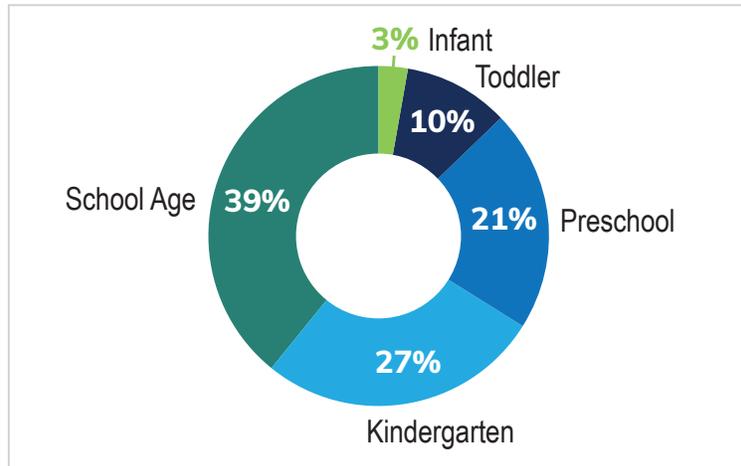
- **3** licensed French language licensed child care centres<sup>12</sup> serving **280 child care spaces** (infant to school-age)
- **1** Indigenous-led child care centre<sup>13</sup> serving **73 spaces** (infant to preschool)
- **59%** (131 centres) of licensed child care centres are located within a school (but not necessarily operated by a school board)
- **7,049** spaces (a third of all spaces) in Hamilton are for younger children (infants, toddlers and preschoolers) (Refer to Figure 11)

11 OECD (2018). [Early Learning Matters](#)

12 Hamilton’s three French language child care centres are: La Garderie Le Petit Navire, Le Ballon Rouge De Hamilton, and Pavillon de la Jeunesse avant et après l’école.

13 Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg is a multi-service, Indigenous non-profit that provides services and supports to all people across the life cycle.

Figure 11: Percent of Licensed Centre-Based Child Care Spaces by Age Group in Hamilton, March 2023



Source: City of Hamilton Children’s and Community Services Division (2022).

### Licensed Home-Based Child Care by the Numbers (March 2023)

- **3** home child care agencies<sup>14</sup>
- **134** licensed home-based child care operators
- Approximately **804** licensed home-based child care spaces<sup>15</sup>

### Child Care Access Trends

- **11%** increase (1,975 spaces) in the number of licensed centre-based child care spaces in Hamilton from December 2019 to March 2023 (Refer to Table 2)
- **Infant and toddler age groups** saw the largest increases in the number of licensed centre-based child care spaces between 2019 and 2023 (Refer to Figure 12)

Table 2: Number of Licensed Centre-Based Child Care Spaces by Age Group in Hamilton, December 2019 vs March 2023

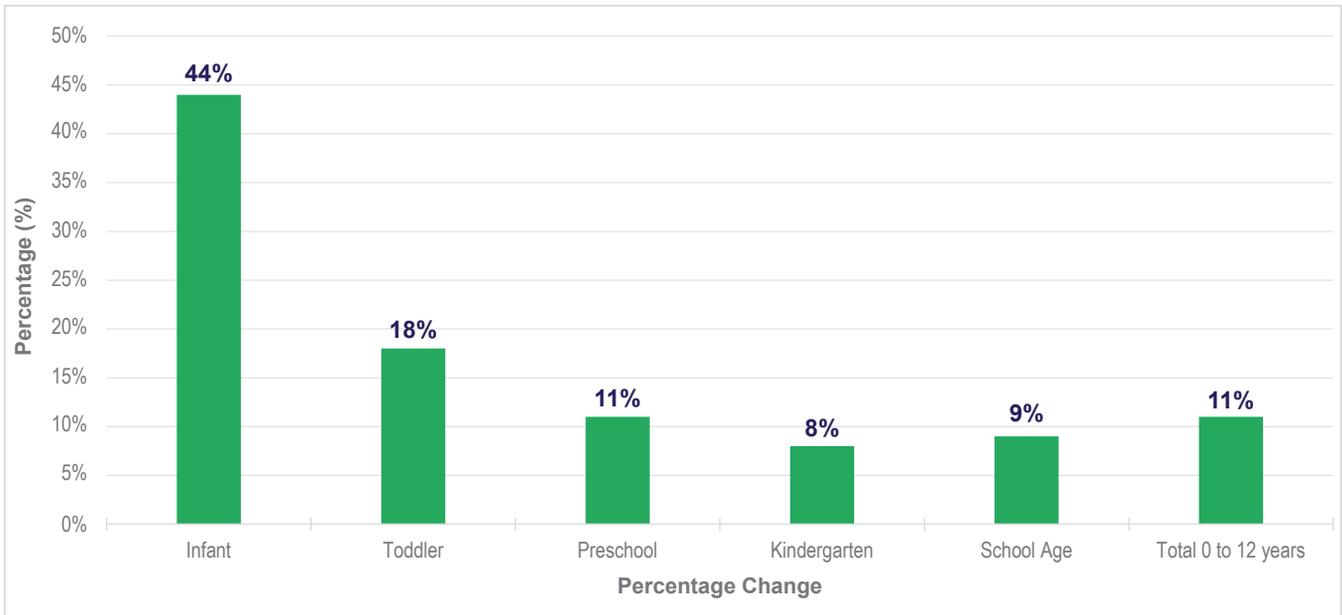
Child Care Age Group	Number of child care spaces in Hamilton	
	December 2019	March 2023
Infant (0-18 months)	379	546
Toddler (18-30 months)	1,782	2,094
Preschool (30 months to 4 years)	3,990	4,409
Kindergarten (4-5 years)	5,155	5,547
School Age (6-12 years)	7,444	8,129
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18,750</b>	<b>20,725</b>

Source: City of Hamilton Children’s and Community Services Division (2022).

<sup>14</sup> Today’s Family, Wee Watch Galbraith and Wee Watch Golfwood

<sup>15</sup> This is an estimated number based on potential availability given each licensed-home child care operator can provide care for up to 6 children. Actual numbers will differ based on how many children any given operator is currently providing care to.

**Figure 12: Percentage Change in the Number of Licensed Centre-Based Child Care Spaces by Age Group in Hamilton, December 2019 vs March 2023**



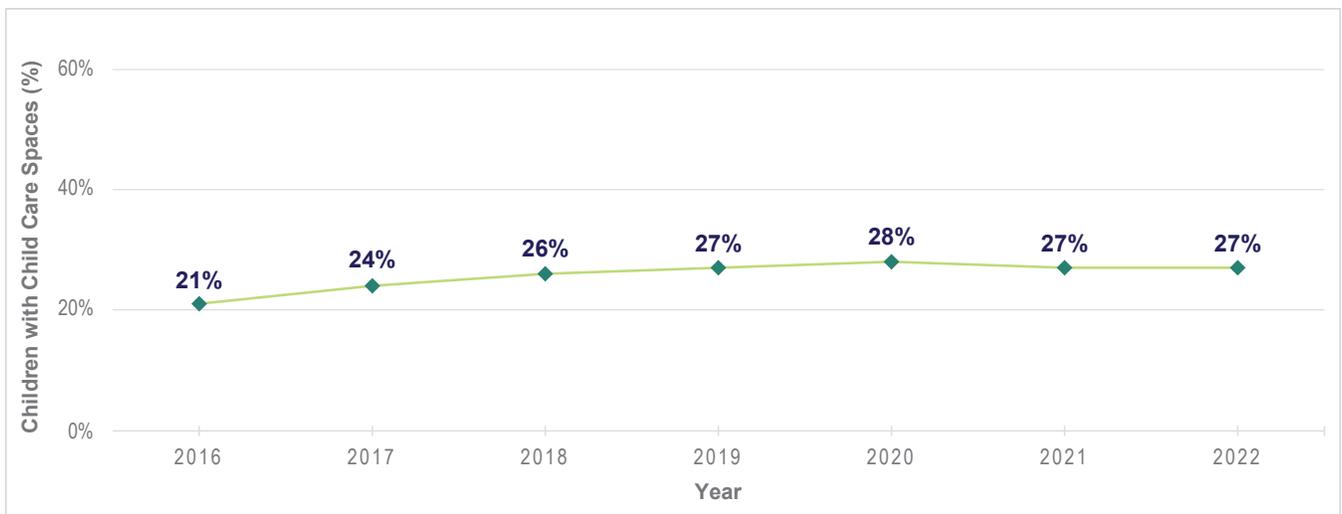
Source: City of Hamilton Children’s and Community Services Division (2022).

### Child Care Expansion for Children 0 to 5 years Through an Access and Inclusion Framework

Under Ontario’s Access and Inclusion Framework 2022 (Ministry of Education) funding for spaces will be allocated to help each region progress towards a target provincial ratio of spaces to children, or access rate, of 37%. This is equivalent to there being one affordable child care space available for every 2.7 children aged 0-5 years. As of March 2023, the local access rate for infant, toddler and preschool age groups was 31%.

Hamilton monitors child care access for children aged 0-12 years. In 2022, Hamilton had enough licensed child care spaces for 27% of the child population up from 21% in 2016 (Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Children (age 0-12 years) with a Child Care Space, Hamilton 2016 to 2022**



Source: Statistics Canada (Census 2016 and 2021 population counts) and Ontario Municipal Child Care Management System (OCCMS) (child care spaces) accessed through the City of Hamilton’s [City Dashboard](#).

Child care spaces are not equitably distributed across the City of Hamilton. Access to licensed child care spaces varies significantly by age group and City ward. For example, licensed child care capacity is lowest for infants and highest for pre-school aged children (Refer to Table 3). Few wards across the City of Hamilton are meeting the provincial child care access target of 37%. This is especially the case in parts of the lower city (Wards 3 and 4), central and east Mountain (Wards 6 and 7) and to some extent in Glanbrook (Ward 11) (Refer to Table 3).

**Table 3: Licensed Child Care Capacity<sup>16</sup> by Child Care Age Group<sup>17</sup> and City Ward, City of Hamilton, February 2023**

Ward	Infant Access Rate (%)	Toddler Access Rate (%)	Pre-school Access Rate (%)
Ward 1	13	59	65
Ward 2	13	50	84
Ward 3	4	31	37
Ward 4	3	17	33
Ward 5	7	30	42
Ward 6	0	9	18
Ward 7	1	21	34
Ward 8	0	47	72
Ward 9	9	52	70
Ward 10	11	52	53
Ward 11	4	17	32
Ward 12	6	36	58
Ward 13	0	39	45
Ward 14	15	67	102
Ward 15	15	59	80

Source: City of Hamilton Children’s & Community Services Division.

Ontario’s vision for the CWELCC system is that more families in Ontario have access to high-quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive early learning and child care no matter where they live. A focus will be given to creating affordable child care spaces in communities with populations who need them most. This targeted growth approach will support space creation in regions of the province that have had historically low rates of space availability.

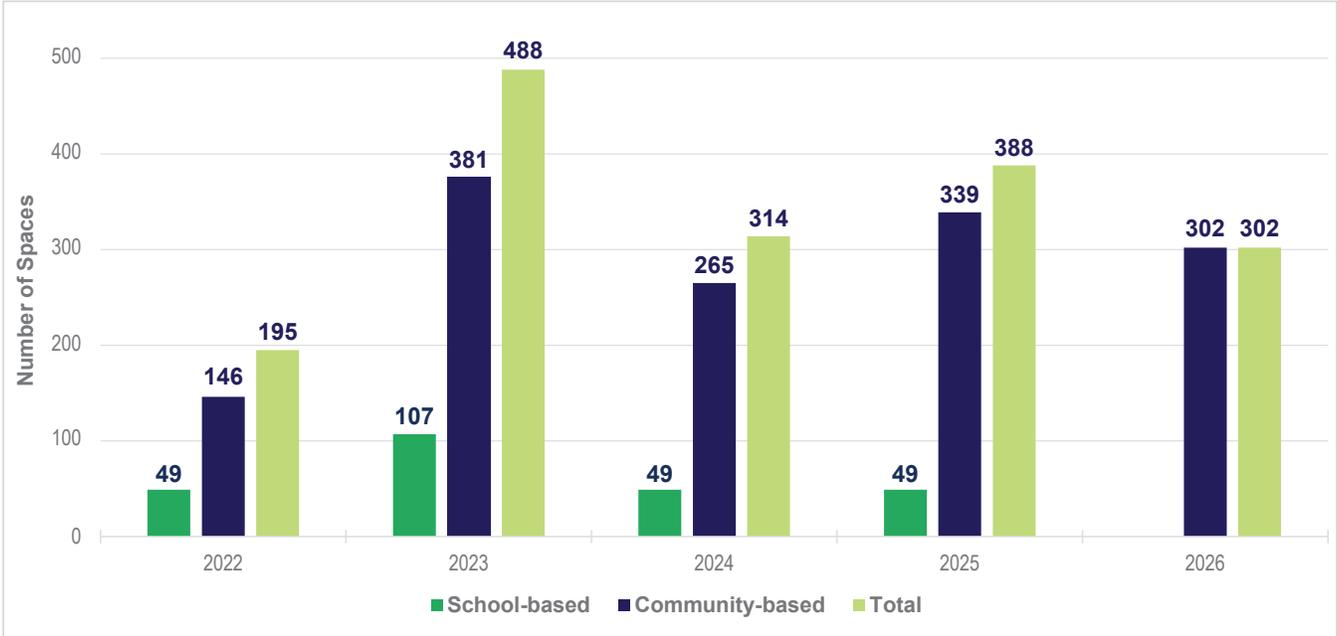
16 The access rate percentage is defined by the total number of licensed child care spaces divided by the population.

17 Child care age groups are: Infant = 0 to 18 months; Toddlers = 18 to 30 months; and Preschool = 30 months to 6 years.

The purpose of Ontario’s Access and Inclusion Framework is to support Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs), like the City of Hamilton, with developing and implementing local service system plans with an increased focus on access as it relates to inclusion. This includes a focus on supporting child care access for low-income children, vulnerable children, children from diverse communities, children with special needs, Francophone and Indigenous children.

Under CWELCC, the City of Hamilton has been allocated 1,687 new child care spaces between 2022 and 2026 consisting of a total 254 new school-based spaces and 1,433 new community-based spaces (Refer to Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Target Number of New Licensed Centre-Based Child Care Spaces Under the CWELCC System for the City of Hamilton, 2022 to 2026**



Source: City of Hamilton Children’s and Community Services Division (2022).

Hamilton’s child care expansion, in keeping with the Ministry of Education’s Access and Inclusion Framework, will focus on children with special needs, families with low income, those who are most vulnerable, children from diverse communities, Francophone children, and Indigenous children. Early analysis has demonstrated a need to prioritize child care expansion in four city wards. In 2023, Hamilton child care expansion will focus on:

- **Ward 6:** East Mountain
- **Ward 7:** Central Mountain
- **Ward 3:** Hamilton Centre
- **Ward 4:** East Lower Hamilton

It is important to note all wards in Hamilton have their own set of needs with respect to early learning and child care. A deeper review of neighbourhood context and capacity as well as a phased approach to child care expansion will help to ensure each ward’s unique circumstances are taken into account during the implementation of CWELCC.

## EarlyON Child and Family Centres

EarlyON Child and Family Centres offer free, high-quality programs for children from prenatal to 6 years old and their families where they can learn, grow and connect, together. At EarlyON Centres, families can learn and play with their child(ren), meet people and get advice from early childhood educators and other professionals.

### EARLYON CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES BY THE NUMBERS (2023)

- **8** agencies offering programs at **35** locations across the City of Hamilton (refer to Appendix A for a complete list of locations). This includes Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg offering an early learning environment that follows Indigenous teachings and knowledge as well as Centre de santé communautaire – Hamilton/Niagara offering French language programming and supports.
- Ward 3 (Hamilton Centre) and Ward 4 (East Lower Hamilton) have the most sites while many suburban wards (such as, Wards 9, 10, 11, 12 and 14) have one location. For a map of all EarlyON Centre locations, refer to Appendix A.
- **6,926** unique parents and/or caregivers and **9,062** unique children (ages 0 to 6 years) visited Hamilton EarlyON programs for a total of **70,175** parent and **92,808** child visits between May 2022 and April 2023.<sup>18</sup>
- EarlyON participation rate<sup>19</sup> across the City of Hamilton is **20.5%** (May 2022 to April 2023).
- Participation rates have **recovered** from a low of **3.5%** during March 2020 to April 2022<sup>20</sup> and are higher than the pre-pandemic participation rate of 12.1%.
- Over the past year, EarlyON participation rates were above the city average (**20.5%**) across several wards including:
  - Upper Stoney Creek - Ward 9 (**31%**)
  - Hamilton Centre - Ward 3 (**25%**)
  - East Hamilton - Ward 4 (**25%**)
  - Chedoke-Cootes area - Ward 1 (**24%**)
  - Flamborough East - Ward 15 (**24%**)
- EarlyON participation rates were well below the city average (**20.5%**) across several wards including:
  - Ancaster - Ward 12 (**13%**)
  - Hamilton Mountain West - Ward 14 (**14%**)
  - Glanbrook - Ward 11 (**15%**)

18 EarlyON visits counts include multiple visits on the same day, e.g., visiting multiple locations and/or different programs on the same day.

19 The EarlyON participation rate is determined by the number of unique children 0 to 6 years of age that attended an EOCFC in the time period, and identifying the census tract location of their home address; divided by the number of all population children (0 to 6) within each respective census tract provided by Statistics Canada, 2016 Census.

20 This was a period of COVID-19 related closures of in person EarlyON CFC locations.

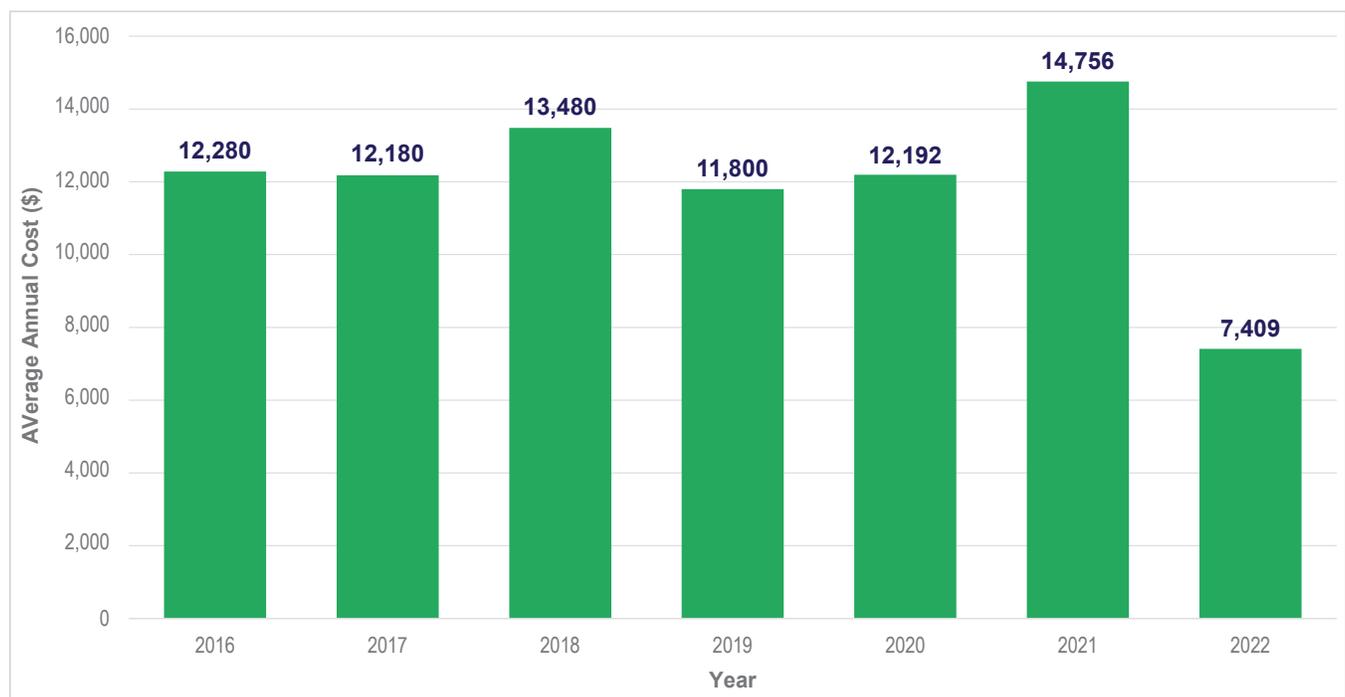
- **1000+** Hamilton families shared feedback about their experiences visiting EarlyON Child and Family Centres in 2023:
  - **80-90%** agreed they had positive experiences visiting an EarlyON Centre
  - **80%** agreed that the [KeyON registration/sign in](#) was easy to use at the EarlyON Centre
  - Families indicated a preference for in-person, flexible programming hours (i.e., morning, afternoon and weekends) while also reporting a preference for online programming, especially during evening hours

## AFFORDABILITY OF THE EARLY YEARS SYSTEM

### Child Care Costs

Quality licensed child care often comes at a significant financial cost to families. The average yearly child care costs for children ages 0 to 6 years in Hamilton increased by 20% from 2016 to 2021. Costs then dropped by 52.75% between 2021 and 2022 (Figure 15) due to funding from the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) System provided to child care operators in 2022 to reduce the costs of child care for eligible families. Refer to Figure 15 for further details regarding fee reductions.

**Figure 15: Average Annual Child Care Cost (all age groups), Hamilton from 2016 to 2022**



Source: City of Hamilton Children's and Community Services Division (2022).

Table 4: Average Daily Child Care Rates per Full Time, Full Day by Child Care Age Group, Hamilton 2022

Child Care Age Group	Pre-CWELCC Rate	Post-CWELCC Rate
Infant (0 to 18 months)	70.80	33.39
Toddler (18 to 30 months)	56.98	26.89
Preschool (30 months to 6 years)	49.59	23.41
<b>Average (0 to 6 years)</b>	<b>59.12</b>	<b>27.90</b>

Source: City of Hamilton Children’s & Community Services Division

### Fee Reduction for Families

The Child Care Affordability Grant began as a pilot project in July 2018 and continued through to December 2022. Approximately 4,200 children in Hamilton benefitted. This fee reduction program was made available to all families regardless of income levels. The plan provided a \$10 per day reduction in child care costs, for parents of children up to four years of age who did not qualify for subsidized spots in licensed child-care facilities. Due to the implementation of Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC), this grant was discontinued in 2023.

**CWELCC estimated annual savings per child (for eligible families)**

**\$3,600** (2022)

**\$9,100** (2023)



### Fee Subsidy

The City of Hamilton provides financial assistance towards the cost of child care through a fee subsidy program. Eligibility is determined through an income test.

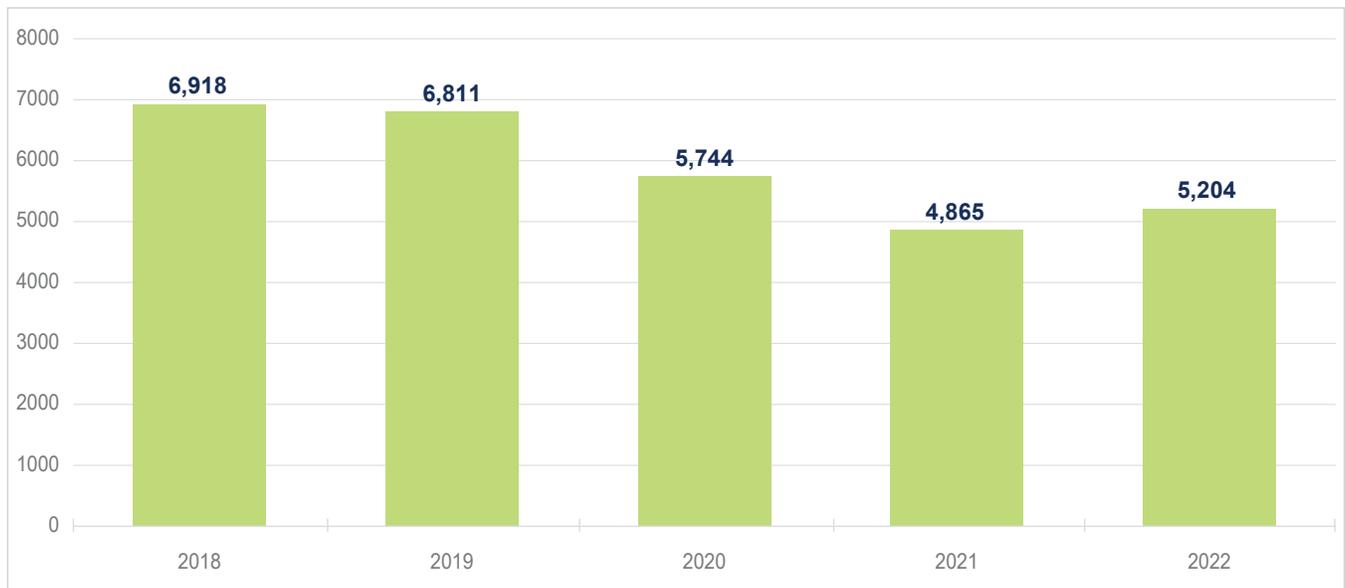
- The fee subsidy budget supports an average of 4,200 children monthly in Hamilton in 2022.
- Approximately 80.2% of both lone parent and/or two parent families receiving fee subsidy were from income brackets of \$40,000 or less<sup>21</sup>

The City of Hamilton will continue to provide the child care fee subsidy program. While it is good news for Hamilton families that licensed child care costs are reducing because of CWELCC funding, the fee subsidy program will continue to ensure families have equitable access to licensed child care.

Figure 16 depicts the number of children receiving child care fee subsidy in Hamilton over the past five years.

<sup>21</sup> City of Hamilton Children’s & Community Services Division

**Figure 16: Number of Children Receiving Child Care Fee Subsidy, Hamilton 2018 to 2022**



Source: City of Hamilton Children’s and Community Services Division (2022).

The child care fee subsidy waitlist has seen dramatic changes over the past 10 years. In 2013, the waitlist peaked at just over 2,100 families. Since then, the waitlist has seen a steady decline with significant drops in 2013, 2015 and 2019 due a range of factors including increased fee subsidy funding and an updated waitlist management process. Hamilton has not had a Child Care Fee Subsidy Waitlist since 2019, this may be due in part to the ongoing recovery of the Early Years System and a gradual return to pre-pandemic capacity.

## **QUALITY OF THE EARLY YEARS SYSTEM**

High-quality early years services and programs substantially influence children’s development and well-being. Evidence shows that high-quality early learning and child care programs support development and positively impact children.<sup>22</sup>

### **Hamilton Early Years Quality Program**

The Hamilton Early Years Quality Program (HEYQP) cultivates high-quality, responsive and accountable relationships with the early years community at all levels of an organization for the benefit of children, educators and families. Quality directly impacts the services provided to families and children in the Early Years System and community. Participation in HEYQP is a fundamental foundation for all early learning and licensed child care operators that have funding agreements with the City of Hamilton. Hamilton’s early learning and child care community embraces, nurtures and commits to building meaningful, authentic opportunities for educators, families, children and communities for diverse, high-quality, inclusive learning, growth through continuous improvement.

22 OECD. (2018). [Early Learning Matters](#).

## HEYQP HIGHLIGHTS



### 2022 HEYQP Supports

- **73** City and Affiliated Services for Children and Youth quality visits were completed with licensed child care operators.
- **182** professional learning opportunities were offered including workshops, podcasts, Infant and Early Years Mental Health Symposium, etc.
- **10,300+** participated in professional learning opportunities.
- **45+** professionals participating in Side by Side mentorship.



### 2022 HEYQP Accomplishments

- **360+** early years program sites participated in HEYQP.
- **3%** of system sites experienced intensive quality monitoring to support change. This has significantly decreased from 23% in 2017 and 21% in 2018, which reflects the quality improvements that have occurred across the Early Years System.
- **99%** positive change was observed for those who experienced intensive monitoring for continuous improvement.

Source: City of Hamilton Children's & Community Services Division.

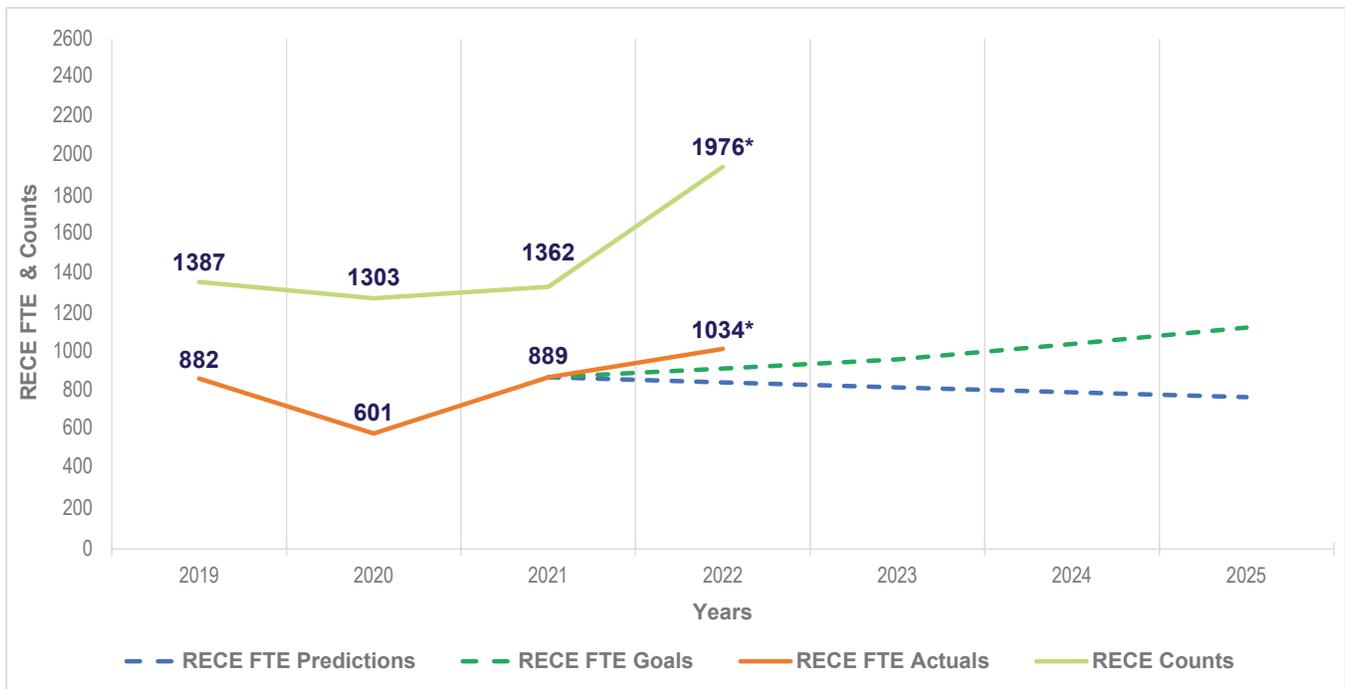
## Early Years Workforce

A qualified, stable and well-compensated early years workforce is the foundation of high-quality early years services and programs. Historically, the Early Years System has experienced workforce challenges due to low compensation and working conditions. Across the province, the early years sector continues to experience recruitment and retention challenges especially the recruitment and retention of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs). Furthermore, the cumulative impacts of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic have intensified these workforce challenges.

During the COVID-19 pandemic (2019 to 2021), Hamilton experienced a decline in the number of RECEs (Refer to green line in Figure 17) and RECE full-time equivalent (FTE) actuals (Refer to orange line in Figure 17). At the height of the pandemic, RECE counts dropped to 1,303 and RECE FTE actuals dipped to 601 in 2020 (Refer to Figure 17).

The local RECE workforce has started to rebound coming out of the pandemic. Specifically, the number of RECEs increased to 1,976 and RECE FTE actuals increased to 1,034 in 2022. This translates to a 45% increase in the number of RECEs and 6.3% increase in RECE FTE actuals in Hamilton from 2021 to 2022.

**Figure 17: RECE Counts and RECE Full time equivalent Actuals from 2019 to 2022, Hamilton**



Source: Hamilton Workforce Funding Project (2023). City of Hamilton Children’s and Community Services Division.

\* Note: counts for 2022 were estimated based on Business Support counts at time of request and confirmation pending.

Unfortunately, similar to other municipalities, Hamilton licensed child care operators continue to report an insufficient number and diversity of early learning and child professionals to meet operational capacity in 2022/2023.

Hamilton’s Early Years HR Workforce Strategy will continue to expand and strengthen its mentorship program to support students towards employment transitions as well as work with early years operators to determine what makes a “good fit” when hiring a new professional.

## Workforce Compensation

A high-quality Early Years System requires a comprehensive human resources workforce strategy, including fair compensation for RECEs.

- Currently, RECEs that work in the early years and child care sector earn an average of \$22.45/hour in Hamilton, compared to RECEs that work for the school boards which make an average of \$27/hour

Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) workforce compensation funding will be used to increase hourly wages of RECEs working in licensed child care. In 2022, the Ontario’s Ministry of Education established an \$18/hour wage floor for RECEs and a \$20/hour wage floor for supervisors. Going forward, RECEs and supervisors will receive a \$1 per hour wage increase each year from 2023 to 2026, up to a maximum of \$25/hour.

Wage grants, including the Wage Enhancement and Fee Stabilization funding, support the salaries of staff working in licensed centre based child care settings and licensed home child care providers.

- In 2022, 1,723 child care staff received the Wage Enhancement Grant (WEG)
- Two thirds of recipients (66%) work in non-profit licensed child care centres and the remaining third work in for-profit licensed child care centres

## Attracting and Retaining RECEs

Responses from a recent survey of RECE professionals attending a local professional learning event\* indicated the top factors in attracting and retaining a high-quality and diverse workforce, including:



\* It's Your Day! Embracing the Early Years Virtual Professional Learning Day. April 22, 2022.

## EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND BELONGING

Early years services and programs play a critical role in supporting equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging in the early years and within the overall community. Hamilton's Early Years System has set a goal of strengthening equity, diversity and inclusion in order to bring to life the vision that all children, families and members of the workforce experience a real, lived sense of belonging in the Early Years System.

### Special Needs Resourcing Program

The City of Hamilton is committed to delivering inclusive services where children with varying abilities are experiencing diverse, meaningful ways to participate and learn. Community partners work together with early learning and child care professionals to ensure families and children have access to and experience diverse, inclusive learning environments.<sup>23</sup> Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) funding supports the Early Years System with resources, equipment, supplies, professional development, such as Shelley Moore, Tools for Life (TFL) for Early Years, and evidence-based pedagogical and inclusion practices to plan, inform and deliver high-quality, inclusive services for families with children who have varying abilities. Evidence demonstrates that diverse, inclusive learning environments where children experience a sense of belonging, provide developmentally beneficial learning, growth and belonging for all children.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> In Hamilton, the City works with community agencies for early learning and child care to provide early learning opportunities for children and their families. Agencies include: Affiliated Services for Children & Youth / Early Words; Community Living Hamilton; and Ron Joyce Children's Health Centre

<sup>24</sup> Underwood, K. (2013). Everyone is Welcome: Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care. [Think, Feel, Act.](#)

## Special Needs Resourcing by the Numbers (2022)

- Each month, an average of **656** children ages 0 to 6 years and an average of **115** children ages 6 to 12 years receive special needs supports.
- **1,237** unique<sup>25</sup> children (0 to 12 years) received special needs supports in 2022
- **331** licensed child care programs were supported through the Special Needs Resourcing Program<sup>26</sup>
- The system had **54** Resource Consultants, and Inclusion Facilitators
- Addition of a new Francophone Resource Consultant
- **200+** early years professionals attended Let's Talk Moore about Inclusion event
- Most educators in 2019/2020 were trained in TFL and more resources will be available in 2023/2024
- In 2022, the City of Hamilton spent **\$5.48M** to support the inclusion of 1,237 children in 331 licensed child care programs

## Special Needs Resourcing Trends

The number of children served through Hamilton's Special Needs Resourcing (SNR) program dipped during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the mandated closure of child care centres and fewer spaces being available when the system re-opened. In 2022, the number of children supported through the SNR program began to return to pre-pandemic levels (Refer to Table 5).

The number of licensed child care programs supported through the SNR program sits at a five-year high of 331. This is despite a decrease in the number of Resource Consultants / Inclusion Facilitators available in the system (Refer to Table 5).

**Table 5: Special Needs Resourcing Trends, Hamilton from 2018 to 2022**

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Monthly number of children served (0-6)	659	825	347	523	656
Monthly number of children served (6-12)	140	138	59	115	115
Number of unique children served	1,299	1,452	1,051	1,370	1,237
Number of licensed child care programs supported	293	303	289	288	331
Number of Resource Consultants / Inclusion Facilitators available to support children and child care programs	61	61	56	53	54
Full time equivalents (FTE) Resource Consultants/ Inclusion Facilitators available to support children and child care providers	50.82	53.46	48.98	48.40	48.40

Source: City of Hamilton Children's and Community Services Division (2022).

<sup>25</sup> Each child is only counted once per year.

<sup>26</sup> This number represents duplicates due to the integrated special needs resourcing delivery model with one or more partners providing supports to the system.

## Early Years Mental Health System and Services

Through its [Infant and Early Years Mental Health \(IEYMH\) System Support Committee](#)<sup>27</sup>, the City of Hamilton aims to facilitate an evidence-based, integrated and coordinated approach to cross-sector planning for infant and early years mental health services in Hamilton. This committee's work focuses on:

- Building awareness of infant and early years mental health in the community
- Increasing professional capacity and opportunities for continuous learning
- Identifying and developing appropriate care referral pathways and wait list strategies for children ages 0-6 and their families
- Improving coordination of services and support across the City of Hamilton
- In Fall of 2022, an informal environmental scan<sup>28</sup> was completed by the Infant and Early Years Mental Health System Support Committee members regarding emerging system trends and capacity identified anecdotal reports of:
  - Increased number of referrals received across member agencies
  - Increasingly acute, multi-layered and complex mental health cases encountered among children and youth, post-COVID
  - Human resources shortages, which impact services and community supports
  - Increased need to support families while waiting for assessment or entry to services.
  - Needed support to ensure children get the right level of care, at the right time

## Newcomer Mental Health Needs

Children and families recently arriving to Canada, especially those who arrive as refugees, experience a range of stressors that place them at risk of poor mental health. A recent Hamilton study<sup>29</sup> out of the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University examined newcomer mental health needs, barriers to care, and opportunities for improving mental health supports.

### Key study findings include:

- Only **2 out of 11** parents who reported their child experienced mental health difficulties since arriving in Canada sought out help
- **85%** of parents said they knew nothing about child and youth mental health services in Hamilton
- The **family unit** is seen as the **primary source of help** for children's mental health difficulties. *"The home is the foundation."*

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27 For a complete list of Committee membership see: [Infant and Early Years Mental Health System Support](#)

28 City of Hamilton CCSD. IEYMH System Summary. January to March 2023.

29 Sims, A. (2023). Thriving Together: Service provider and family perspectives on newcomer child and youth mental health and access to care. Offord Centre for Child Studies. McMaster University)

The study identified a range of intersecting barriers to care including:

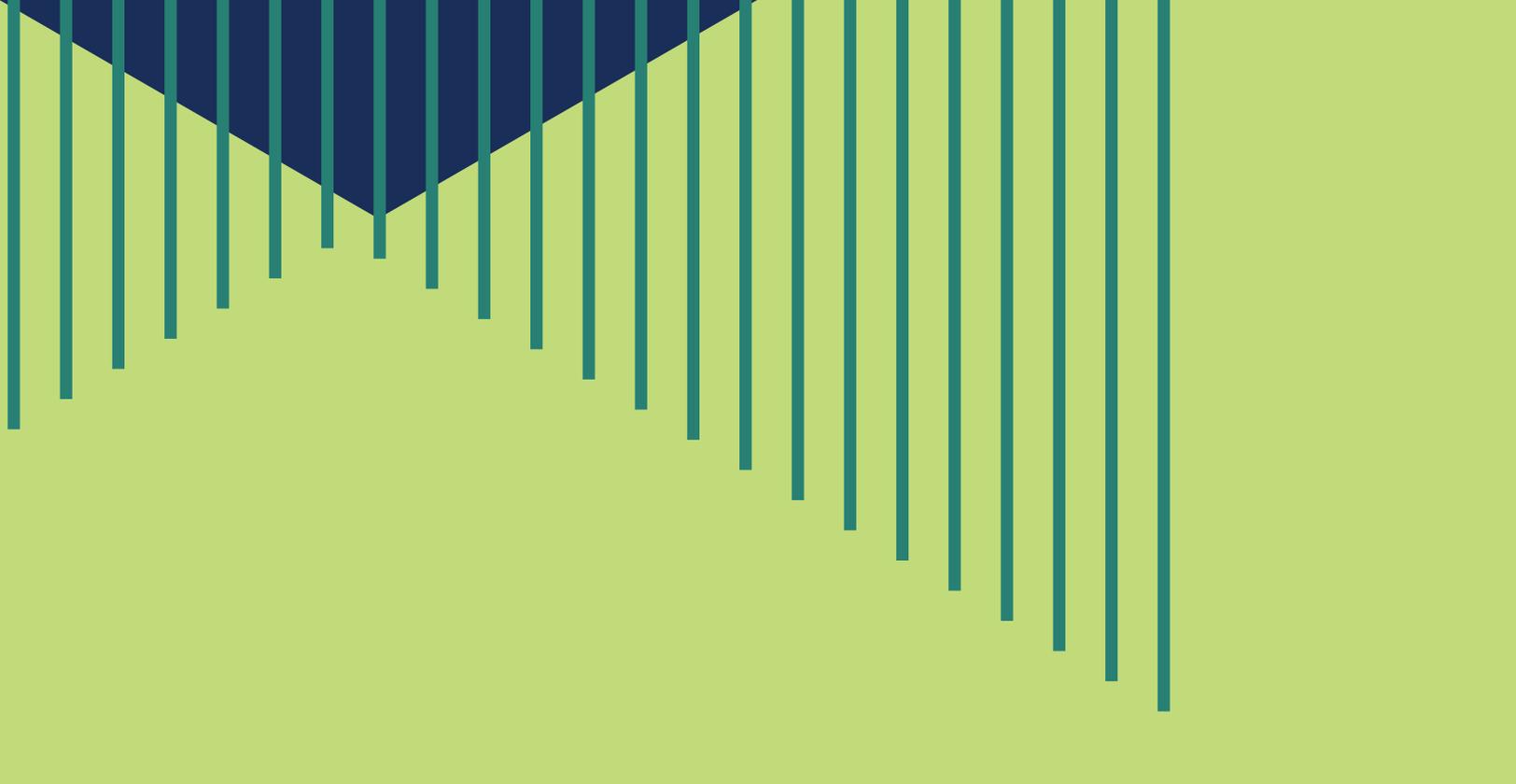
- Structural or systemic barriers such as, complex and difficult to navigate systems and the lack of prevention and early identification
- Provider-level barriers such as, lack of representation and gaps in providers' cultural, language, and mental health knowledge and competencies
- Individual and family-level barriers such as, limited mental health literacy and knowledge of available supports as well as a seeking help only when child or family is in crisis

The study lays out seven recommendations<sup>30</sup> for improving mental health supports for newcomer children and families. The following three recommendations are instructive for Hamilton's Early Years System:

- **Newcomer Engagement:** Amplify and listen to newcomer voices at all stages of policy and program design and implementation
- **Cultural Responsiveness:** Understand how culture and migration experiences shape mental health and work with newcomer families to develop culturally responsive interventions
- **Workforce Diversity and Development:** Hire and support a more racially and culturally diverse workforce that better reflects newcomer communities

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30 To learn more see: <http://cyrrc.org/2022/03/4j>



# APPENDIX A





Hamilton