

**Report to
Rapport au:**

**Community and Protective Services Committee
Comité des services communautaires et de protection
17 June 2021 / 17 juin 2021**

**and Council
et au Conseil
23 June 2021 / 23 juin 2021**

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Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE File Number: ACS2021-CSS-GEN-0009

**SUBJECT: COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts, Supports and Planning Considerations
for the Child Care and Early Years Sector and Children's Services
Work Plan Update 2021-2022**

**OBJET: Répercussions de la pandémie COVID-19, mesures de soutien et
considérations de planification pour le Plan de travail mis à jour
2021-2022 du secteur des services de garde d'enfants et de la petite
enfance**

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Community and Protective Services Committee recommend Council:

- 1. Receive this report for information on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the child care and early years sector and the ongoing supports to families, children and service providers.**
- 2. Approve the updated Children’s Services Work Plan 2021-2022 as outlined in this report.**
- 3. Reaffirm the City of Ottawa’s support for building a national child care program and system of early learning and child care services that focuses on increased access, affordability, quality and responsiveness which is essential to the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery by directing staff to actively monitor federal developments and engage in provincial planning discussions as outlined in this report.**

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

Que le Comité des services communautaires et de protection recommande au Conseil:

- 1. Recevoir ce rapport pour obtenir de l’information sur les répercussions de la pandémie de COVID-19 sur le secteur des services de garde d’enfants et de la petite enfance et sur le soutien continu offert aux familles, aux enfants et aux fournisseurs de services.**
- 2. Approuver la mise à jour du Plan de travail 2021-2022 des Services à l’enfance tel qu’il est décrit dans le présent rapport.**
- 3. Réaffirmer l’appui de la Ville d’Ottawa à l’établissement d’un programme national de services de garde d’enfants et d’un système de services d’apprentissage et de garde des jeunes enfants axé sur l’amélioration de l’accès, de l’abordabilité, de la qualité et de l’adaptabilité, ce qui est essentiel à l’intervention et la reprise des activités la COVID-19 en demandant au personnel de surveiller activement les développements fédéraux et de participer aux discussions de planification provinciales décrites dans le présent rapport.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to update Council on the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Ottawa's local child care and early years sector and highlight the ongoing supports to families, children and service providers as requested by Council on December 9, 2020 (City Council Agenda 45, Item 9). Staff received input from the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group and other stakeholders on the information presented in this report. The report further outlines the planning considerations required to assist with the pandemic response and recovery and these considerations have been reflected within the updated 2021-2022 work plan for Council approval.

Assumption and Analysis

As Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM), Children's Services is responsible for the planning and management of licensed child care and early years programs and services for children from 0 to 12 years old in Ottawa. This includes coordinating and planning at the system-level to ensure services are responsive to the needs of families and align with the Province's vision.

In 2019, Council approved the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2019 – 2023 (ACS2019-CSS-GEN-0011) that established ten strategic priorities for the planning and management of licensed child care and early years programs and services for children from 0 to 12 years old. The Service System Plan established a common vision to unite as a city and progressively respond to better meet the needs of children and families in Ottawa. The priorities focused on increasing access, affordability, quality and responsiveness and would build a strong foundation for the future as child care and early years initiatives continue to evolve. The Plan also acts as a road map to make system improvements for the benefits of children and families.

In addition to the Child Care Service System Plan, Council included an action item within the Thriving Communities priority area of the City of Ottawa Strategic Plan 2019-2022, to invest in child care services to improve accessibility, affordability, quality and responsiveness of child care services across all city wards. Children's Services wishes to thank the Mayor and Council for continuing to prioritize child care and early years and for the advocacy to the Province to support the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery of the sector.

The impacts and stress of the pandemic on children, families and service providers have been significant. Some of the issues that have emerged include feelings of

isolation, challenges with mental health and difficulty accessing essential supports, including securing and maintaining employment. Families have also had to make difficult decisions relating to their children's care, especially those who have children with special needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted inequities including the gender gap and barriers women and gender diverse persons experience daily. COVID-19 impacts women and girls disproportionately, with existing gender gaps in access to social services increased and women at a higher risk of isolation, food insecurity, loss of income and gender-based violence. Sex, gender, racialization, income, housing, employment, and other socioeconomic factors represent overlapping and compounding risks for people in the pandemic. At the end of 2020, unemployment remained higher for Indigenous peoples and over half reported that the pandemic was having a "moderate" or "major" impact on their ability to meet essential needs, including food and grocery needs and PPE. There is no doubt that families who face various systemic barriers including Indigenous and racialized communities have been disproportionately affected and there is a need to consider these impacts in response and recovery.

Service providers have demonstrated creativity, dedication and resilience throughout the pandemic and played an essential role in supporting families in the community and work together with Children's Services to collectively tackle pandemic impacts. While some of the strategic priorities defined in the Service System Plan needed to shift and adapt as a result of the pandemic to meet emerging needs and ensure the continued viability and sustainability of the sector, many actions were successfully accomplished, and extensive supports were provided to the sector and to families in 2020. Highlights include Emergency Child Care access for health care and frontline workers, funding, monitoring and supports to ensure access and affordability with a 97% program reopening rate, virtual EarlyON Child and Family services to ensure access to family supports, training and resources on COVID-19 public health operating requirements and workforce mental health and resiliency funding and resources to support quality, and increased engagement and collaboration with sector partners to increase responsiveness.

Children's Services with input from the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group, the broader child care and early years sector and family perspectives obtained through a population survey of Ottawa families, commissioned by the City's Community and Social Services Department, identified six key pandemic themes and related planning considerations to inform the continued pandemic recovery and response:

- Family impacts and need for child care and early years supports

- Disproportionate impacts on women and groups facing systemic barriers
- Emergency response, closing and reopening requirements
- Operational impacts of new health and safety requirements
- Child care worker and early childhood educator workforce pressures
- Financial pressures and threats to sector viability and social infrastructure

The Children's Services' 2021-22 work plan, provided for Council's approval, has been updated to consider these planning considerations in order to support the sector in addressing the impacts and meeting the needs of families through the pandemic response and recovery within available resources. Planning considerations have been used to adapt the Service System Plan activities to respond to local needs while continuing to advance progressive improvements in access, affordability, quality and responsiveness. There are also new opportunities that may impact the work plan, such as the Federal budget and continued negotiations on a National Child Care Strategy. A national program has the potential to make significant positive impacts and address issues that families and service providers face, both historically and those further exacerbated as a result of the pandemic. Children's Services will actively monitor federal developments and engage in provincial planning discussions so that opportunities to support local needs and advance Service System Plan strategic priorities are maximized, and that federal plans are considered in the implementation of the work plan. Building a national program and system of early learning and child care services that focuses on increased access, affordability, quality and responsiveness is vital to the COVID-19 pandemic response and would also benefit families, children, social well-being and economic recovery in Ottawa. It is recommended that Council reaffirm the City of Ottawa's support for building a national program.

The COVID-19 pandemic required Children's Services to shift and adapt to the needs of the sector and the needs of children and families. This was in addition to the regular system management responsibilities, and it is expected that the pandemic recovery and response actions will continue to be needed for the duration of 2021 and well into 2022. This will significantly increase the requirements for both Service Managers and service providers and these considerations need to be acknowledged with additional provincial funding allocations and flexibility in the guidelines. To also ensure the continued viability and sustainability of the sector and to provide enhanced supports for families and service providers, there is a need for continued advocacy for the reversal of the previously announced provincial change on the spending threshold for program delivery / administration funding.

The implementation of this work plan and COVID-19 response and recovery will continue to be supported through the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group, Table Francophone, Indigenous Early Years Circle and Design Team sub-groups (Access, Affordability, Quality and Public Awareness), with increased engagement given the changing pandemic landscape.

Financial Implications

The work plan includes 2021-2022 actions that will drive the priorities of the Service System Plan forward within current resources, or resources that can be reasonably anticipated.

Public Consultation/Input

Extensive engagement and consultation with over 2,000 families, child care and early years providers and other community stakeholders was undertaken to develop the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2019-2023. Further, to outline COVID-19 pandemic impacts, supports and planning considerations for 2021-2022, Children's Services sought knowledge and insights with heightened engagement with the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group, the broader child care and early years sector and valuable family perspectives obtained through a population survey of Ottawa families.

SYNTHÈSE ADMINISTRATIVE

L'objectif de ce rapport consiste à rendre compte, au Conseil municipal, des répercussions importantes de la pandémie de COVID-19 sur le secteur local des services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance d'Ottawa et de souligner les soutiens continus aux familles, aux enfants et aux fournisseurs de services, comme l'a demandé le Conseil le 9 décembre 2020. (Ordre du jour 45 du Conseil municipal, point 9). Le personnel a reçu des commentaires du Groupe consultatif sur la planification du réseau des services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance et d'autres intervenants sur l'information présentée dans le présent rapport. Le rapport décrit en outre les considérations de planification nécessaires pour faciliter l'intervention en cas de pandémie et le rétablissement, et ces considérations ont été reflétées dans le plan de travail mis à jour de 2021-2022 aux fins d'approbation par le Conseil.

Hypothèse et analyse

En tant que gestionnaires des services municipaux regroupés (GSMR), les Services à l'enfance sont responsables de la planification et de la gestion des services de garde

d'enfants agréés et des programmes et des services de la petite enfance pour les enfants de 12 ans et moins à Ottawa. Il s'agit entre autres de coordonner et de planifier les activités dans l'ensemble du système afin de s'assurer que les services répondent aux besoins des familles et cadrent avec la vision du gouvernement provincial.

En 2019, le Conseil municipal a approuvé le Plan de système de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance 2019-2023 (ACS2019-CSS-GEN-0011), qui établissait 10 priorités stratégiques pour la planification et la gestion des programmes et des services de garde d'enfants agréés et les programmes et services de la petite enfance pour les enfants de 12 ans et moins. Le Plan de système de services établissait la vision commune de la Ville et était progressivement adapté pour mieux répondre aux besoins des enfants et des familles d'Ottawa. Les priorités consistaient essentiellement à améliorer l'accès, l'abordabilité, la qualité et l'adaptabilité, en plus d'aménager de solides assises pour l'évolution continue des initiatives menées pour la garde des enfants et la petite enfance. Ce plan de système de services sert aussi de feuille de route pour apporter au réseau des améliorations dans l'intérêt des enfants et des familles.

Outre le Plan de système de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance, le Conseil a prévu, dans le cadre du secteur prioritaire des Collectivités prospères du Plan stratégique 2019-2022 de la Ville d'Ottawa, d'investir dans les services de garde d'enfants afin d'améliorer l'accessibilité, l'abordabilité, la qualité et l'adaptabilité des services de garde d'enfants dans tous les quartiers de la ville. Les Services à l'enfance souhaitent remercier le maire et le Conseil municipal pour continuer de prioriser la garde des enfants et les services à la petite enfance et pour exhorter le gouvernement provincial à appuyer l'intervention pendant la pandémie de COVID-19 et la reprise des activités du secteur.

Les répercussions et le stress de cette pandémie sur les enfants, les familles et les fournisseurs de services et les éducateurs sont considérables. Les sentiments d'isolement, les problèmes de santé mentale et la difficulté d'accéder à des soutiens essentiels, notamment en sécurisant et en maintenant les emplois, font partie des problèmes qui se sont fait jour. Les familles ont aussi eu des décisions difficiles à prendre relativement à la garde de leurs enfants, surtout ceux qui ont des enfants qui ont des besoins particuliers. La pandémie de COVID-19 a mis en lumière les inégalités, y compris l'écart entre les sexes et les obstacles auxquels font face quotidiennement les femmes et les personnes de diverses identités de genre. La COVID-19 touche les femmes et les filles de façon disproportionnée, les écarts existants entre les sexes dans l'accès aux services sociaux ayant augmenté et les femmes présentant un risque plus

élevé d'isolement, d'insécurité alimentaire, de perte de revenu et de violence fondée sur le genre. Le sexe, le genre, la racialisation, le revenu, l'emploi et d'autres facteurs socioéconomiques représentent des risques qui se chevauchent et qui s'aggravent pour les personnes touchées par la pandémie. À la fin de 2020, le taux de chômage des autochtones est demeuré plus élevé et plus de la moitié des répondants ont déclaré que la pandémie avait une incidence "modérée" ou "majeure" sur leur capacité de répondre aux besoins essentiels, y compris les besoins en aliments et en épicerie et les besoins en ÉPI. Il n'y a aucun doute que les familles qui doivent surmonter divers problèmes systémiques, ainsi que les communautés racisées, ont été démesurément pénalisées et il s'impose de reconnaître ces répercussions dans l'intervention et la reprise des activités du secteur.

Les fournisseurs de services ont fait preuve d'ingéniosité, de ténacité et de résilience pendant toute la pandémie et ont joué un rôle essentiel dans l'aide à apporter aux familles de la collectivité, en plus de travailler de concert avec les Services à l'enfance pour affronter collectivement les répercussions de la pandémie. S'il a fallu transformer et adapter certaines priorités stratégiques définies dans le Plan de système de services en raison de la pandémie pour répondre aux besoins émergents et assurer la viabilité soutenue et la pérennité du secteur, de nombreuses mesures ont été menées à bien, et une aide considérable a été apportée au secteur et aux familles en 2020. L'accès aux Services de garde d'enfants d'urgence pour les travailleurs de la santé et de première ligne, le financement, la surveillance et l'aide apportée pour assurer l'accès et l'abordabilité pour assurer la réouverture des programmes à un taux de 97 %, les services virtuels des Centres pour l'enfant et la famille ON y va afin d'assurer l'accès aux programmes d'aide offerts aux familles, à la formation et aux ressources sur les exigences opérationnelles de la santé publique pendant la COVID-19 et le financement et les ressources consacrés à la santé mentale et à la résilience de l'effectif pour promouvoir la qualité, de même que l'accroissement de la mobilisation et de la collaboration des partenaires sectoriels pour rehausser l'adaptabilité font partie des faits saillants.

En consultation avec le Groupe consultatif sur la planification du réseau de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance, l'ensemble du secteur de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance et grâce aux points de vue réunis auprès des familles dans un sondage réalisé auprès des ménages d'Ottawa, commandé par la Direction générale des Services sociaux et communautaires de la Ville, les Services à l'enfance ont cerné six grands thèmes pandémiques et les considérations qui entrent en ligne de

compte dans la planification de ces thèmes pour éclairer l'intervention soutenue pendant la pandémie et la reprise continue des activités :

- Les incidences sur les familles et les besoins de soutiens à apporter à la garde des enfants et dans les services à la petite enfance;
- Les répercussions démesurées sur les femmes et les groupes confrontés à des obstacles systémiques;
- Les exigences en lien avec l'intervention d'urgence, de la fermeture et de la réouverture;
- Les répercussions opérationnelles des nouvelles exigences en matière de santé et de sécurité;
- Les pressions sur l'effectif des travailleurs des services à l'enfance et des éducateurs de la petite enfance;
- Les impératifs financiers et les menaces contre la viabilité du secteur et les infrastructures sociales.

Nous avons mis à jour le Plan de travail 2021-2022 des Services à l'enfance, à soumettre à l'approbation du Conseil municipal, pour tenir compte de ces considérations dans la planification afin d'aider le secteur à se pencher sur les répercussions et à répondre aux besoins des familles pendant l'intervention pandémique et la reprise des activités à même les ressources disponibles. Nous nous sommes inspirés des considérations liées à la planification afin d'adapter les activités du Plan de système de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance pour répondre aux besoins locaux en continuant d'apporter peu à peu des améliorations dans les conditions d'accès, l'abordabilité, la qualité et l'adaptabilité des services. Il y a aussi de nouvelles possibilités qui pourraient avoir des incidences sur ce plan de travail, par exemple le budget fédéral et les négociations qui se poursuivent dans le cadre de la Stratégie nationale des services de garde d'enfants. Un programme d'envergure nationale ferait rejaillir d'importants bienfaits et permettrait de résoudre les problèmes que doivent affronter les familles et les fournisseurs de services, à la fois traditionnellement et du point de vue des difficultés qui sont exacerbées par la pandémie. Les Services à l'enfance surveilleront attentivement l'évolution des décisions du gouvernement fédéral et participeront aux discussions sur la planification du gouvernement provincial pour maximiser les possibilités de répondre aux besoins locaux et de promouvoir les priorités stratégiques du Plan de système de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance et pour tenir compte des plans fédéraux dans la mise en œuvre du Plan de travail. Il est essentiel, dans l'intervention menée pendant la pandémie de COVID-19 et dans la reprise des activités, de mettre sur pied un

programme et un réseau d'envergure nationale pour les services d'apprentissage et de garde des jeunes enfants en priorisant l'amélioration de l'accès, de l'abordabilité, de la qualité et de l'adaptabilité, au bénéfice des familles, des enfants, du bien-être social et de la reprise économique à Ottawa. Il est recommandé que le Conseil municipal réaffirme l'aide apportée par la Ville d'Ottawa pour mettre sur pied un programme d'envergure nationale.

La pandémie de COVID-19 a obligé les Services à l'enfance à se transformer et à s'adapter aux besoins du secteur et à ceux des enfants et des familles, en plus de s'acquitter de leurs responsabilités courantes comme la gestion du système. On s'attend à ce qu'il soit nécessaire, pour la durée de 2021 et le début de 2022, de continuer d'intervenir pendant la pandémie et de consacrer des efforts à la reprise des activités. Les exigences auxquelles devront répondre les gestionnaires de services et les fournisseurs de services seront considérablement rehaussées et il sera donc essentiel de tenir compte de ces considérations dans l'attribution des crédits de financement supplémentaire du gouvernement provincial et une souplesse dans l'application des directives. En outre, pour assurer la viabilité soutenue et la pérennité du secteur et pour offrir une meilleure aide aux familles et aux fournisseurs de services, il y a un besoin d'inverser le changement déjà annoncé par le gouvernement provincial pour ce qui est du seuil des dépenses à consacrer au financement de la réalisation et de l'administration des programmes.

La mise en œuvre de ce plan de travail et l'intervention et la reprise des activités pendant la COVID-19 seront soutenus par l'entremise du Groupe consultatif sur la planification du réseau de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance, de la Table francophone, de l'Indigenous Early Years Circle et des équipes de design (Accès, Abordabilité, Qualité et Sensibilisation du public), en tenant des consultations plus nombreuses en raison de l'évolution du paysage pandémique.

Répercussions financières

Le Plan de travail prévoit pour 2021-2022 des mesures qui permettront de respecter les priorités du Plan de système de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance dans le cadre des ressources actuelles ou des ressources que l'on peut vraisemblablement prévoir.

Consultation et commentaires du public

Nous avons mené une vaste consultation auprès de plus de 2 000 familles, fournisseurs de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance et d'autres intervenants dans la

collectivité afin de mettre au point le Plan de système de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance 2019-2023. En outre, pour tracer les contours des répercussions pandémiques de la COVID-19, des programmes d'aide et des considérations liées à la planification pour 2021-2022, les Services à l'enfance ont réuni des connaissances et des commentaires et un engagement accru du Groupe consultatif sur la planification du réseau de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance, l'ensemble du Secteur de services de garde d'enfants et de la petite enfance et en réunissant les précieux commentaires des familles pendant un sondage démographique des ménages d'Ottawa.

BACKGROUND

As Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM), Children's Services is responsible for the planning and management of licensed child care and early years programs and services for children from 0 to 12 years old in Ottawa. This includes coordinating and planning at the system-level to ensure services are responsive to the needs of families and align with the Province's vision.

In 2019, Council approved the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2019 – 2023 (ACS2019-CSS-GEN-0011) that established ten strategic priorities for the planning and management of licensed child care and early years programs and services for children from 0 to 12 years old. The Plan established a common vision to unite as a city and progressively respond to better meet the needs of children and families in Ottawa. The priorities focused on increasing access, affordability, quality and responsiveness and would build a strong foundation for the future as child care and early years initiatives continue to evolve. The Plan also acts as a road map to make system improvements for the benefits of children and families.

In addition to the Child Care Service System Plan, Council included an action item within the Thriving Communities priority area of the City of Ottawa Strategic Plan 2019-2022, to invest in child care services to improve accessibility, affordability, quality and responsiveness of child care services across all city wards. Children's Services wishes to thank the Mayor and Council for continuing to prioritize child care and early years and for the advocacy to the Province to support the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery of the sector.

DISCUSSION

This report outlines the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Ottawa's local child care and early years sector and highlights the ongoing supports to families, children and

service providers. The report further outlines the planning considerations required to assist with the pandemic response and recovery and the value of a national program and system of early learning and child care services that focuses on increased access, affordability, quality and responsiveness.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on Ottawa's child care and early years sector requiring ongoing supports for families, children and service providers in order to maintain essential services for the community. While the response and support of the sector during the pandemic continued to move the Service System Plan priorities forward, Children's Services shifted and adapted to support the sector and meet the needs of families through the pandemic response, in addition to regular system management responsibilities. Full details on 2020 supports provided to address pandemic impacts and advance access, affordability, quality and responsiveness priorities are available in Document 2.

Children's Services with input from the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group, the broader child care and early years sector and family perspectives obtained through a population survey of Ottawa parents and guardians, has identified six key themes to outline the pandemic impacts and supports, while also considering the planning considerations to assist with the pandemic recovery and response in 2021-2022. This report outlines the impacts and supports as well as planning considerations for each theme.

The COVID-19 response was supported through the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group, Table Francophone, Indigenous Early Years Circle and Design Team sub-groups (Access, Affordability, Quality and Public Awareness), with increased engagement given the changing pandemic landscape. The Design Teams, facilitated by Children's Services staff, met throughout 2020 to identify and address short-term pandemic priorities based on real-time challenges faced by the sector, in keeping with Service Plan values and objectives. Children's Services wishes to thank the child care and early years sector partners and other stakeholders for the rapid learning, heightened collaboration and productive partnership in support of local families, the sector and our community.

Family Impacts and Needs for Child Care and Early Years Supports

Impacts and Supports

The impacts and stress of the pandemic has had a dramatic impact on families who rely on child care and early years services for care and support and are facing isolation and

mental health challenges and difficult decisions in obtaining support for their children. Many families experienced pandemic impacts on employment and the suspension of training and skills-building programs, and certain groups experienced disproportionate impacts. The City's Community and Social Services Department commissioned a population survey of randomly selected local parents and guardians with children between 0 to 12 years in February 2021 to help understand the impact of the pandemic on the use of child care services locally (referred to as the population survey for the remainder of the report). The local research reflects the broader research (national, provincial) on groups of people that have been disproportionately affected. The population survey found that:

- 39% experienced a job disruption including a job loss, quitting their job, changes to the number of hours they work, or other disturbances due to the pandemic
- Some groups of people faced more job disruptions due to COVID-19 than others. For example, 47% of women experienced job disruptions while only 27% of men surveyed did.
- People with household incomes under \$60,000 compared to those with household incomes of \$60,000 or more were more likely to experience job disruptions (63% vs. 31%)
- People who were not born in Canada faced more job disruptions than people who were born in Canada (49% vs 35%). Finally, 74% of people with disabilities reporting facing job disruptions compared to only 34% of people without disabilities.

Further impacts were realized with schools closed to in-person learning and employers shifted to working from home. With fears of contracting COVID-19 and messages encouraging citizens to stay home wherever possible, some families decided to take a leave from work or juggled work and care on their own. Other essential workers required Emergency Child Care in order to go to work and contribute to the community pandemic response. Families' needs and behaviours were variable as the COVID-19 prevalence in the community increased or decreased and as organizations closed and reopened, impacting employment and training. A June 2020 Statistics Canada study found that 80% of parents with young children 11 years and under were feeling very or extremely concerned about balancing child care, schooling and work.

Despite the dynamic environment, as noted in Document 1, Table 1, overall demand and interest in child care per the Child Care Registry and Waitlist has remained relatively unchanged, confirming how essential these services are for families. However, with the volatility of COVID-19, health and safety-related concerns and closures, risk of

disruption such as requirements to isolate for a period of time with any potential COVID-19 symptoms, changing or uncertain family needs and eligibility for fee subsidy, placements have been impacted. Pandemic impacts on employment and education meant that many clients are no longer eligible for child care fee subsidy, and some are delaying care with pandemic uncertainty and fear of contracting COVID-19. As a result, an approximate 30% decrease in use of child care fee subsidy was evident in Sept 2020, as compared to pre-COVID-19, highlighted in Document 1, Table 2. This further highlights the disproportionate impacts on groups, as families may not be eligible because of changes to their work, school or activity. Similarly, as noted in Document 1, Table 3, licensed not-for-profit centre-based providers are reporting a vacancy rate of approximately 28% across all age groups in Ottawa and all 14 licensed home child care agencies have indicated that they have vacancies in their homes and the capacity to expand to accept new children into care. School board extended day programs are operating at roughly 25-40% of pre-COVID-19 capacity levels and experience closures when schools are closed to in-person learning.

Low enrollment as a result of the pandemic is a top impact and concern for the sector and Children's Services advanced the following continuous improvement activities to promote ease of access for all families:

- New Family User Portal and translation feature on the Child Care Registry and Waitlist to support a simple and user-friendly process and increase understanding of the application process
- Client-centric fee subsidy service delivery approach with mobile supports for appointments, fee subsidy presentations in the community and ability to upload documents online
- Increased placement coordination to significantly reduce the fee subsidy waitlist
- Enhanced immediate acceptance process for families with exceptional circumstance
- Collaborated with the Indigenous Early Years Circle to improve processes and procedures in support of Indigenous families accessing fee subsidies

Planning Considerations

Results of the population survey shed light on families' considerations and needs in making child care decisions. The survey found that many families (41%) had changed their main type of child care during the pandemic, over half of which made changes to their child care because of COVID-19. Concern about contracting COVID-19 was the main reason provided by 36% of parents, followed by the unreliability of child care

because of COVID-19 (e.g. outbreaks, reduced opening hours, shut downs) reported by 31% of parents. No longer accessing child care due to change in employment or working from home was another reason for changing child care arrangements. As noted in Document 1, Table 4, the survey found that there were statistically significant changes to the proportion of people using certain types of care: before and afterschool (-8.5% points), home child care providers (-3% points) and families who reported no child care arrangement (7% points).

Most parents (71%) indicated that certain factors would make them more likely to use a child care centre, home child care or before-and-after school programs. Widespread vaccination for COVID-19 was most cited (44%) followed by no longer working from home (33%). Of those working exclusively from home (51%), the majority (63%) thought they would be working both outside of the home and from home in 12 months time. When parents were asked about the main type of child care they anticipate using in 12 months time for all of their child(ren) 0 - 12 years old, the top three anticipated arrangements were before and after school programs (30%), no child care arrangement (27.3%), care provided by a family member (21%). More details are available in Document 1, Table 5.

There is a need to monitor and address the concerns and needs of families to ensure future access to these essential supports, including the many benefits of the child care and early years services. There is a need for Children's Services to continue to monitor and investigate the changing needs and attitudes of families throughout the pandemic recovery and work with the sector to respond to changes in operating guidance and ensure a safe environment for children and child care workers and early childhood educators. In addition, there is a need to support the sector to adapt and transform to meet the evolving needs of families in the short and longer term.

While children and families are not attending care or services, they are missing out. High-quality child care programs have a positive influence on children's social development, school readiness and academic achievement. These safe environments help children grow in confidence and learn new skills. Access to care makes it easier for parents to work or focus on their education and being part of the workforce increases household incomes and improves socioeconomic status. These services often connect parents with each other and with specialized community-based services if needed. Strong child care and early years programs positively contribute to the social well-being by reducing poverty and gender inequalities and fostering a sense of belonging. Long-term closures and absences can harm the learning, mental health and development of children and children who face the most harm from the loss of in-person learning are

often also those most at risk: children from racialized communities and low-income families.

Families deserve a safe, affordable place to send their children for care and to have confidence in the health and safety practices and benefits of a rich learning environment. There is a need for Children's Services to advocate for the Province to provide more flexibility to programs, such as eligibility to child care fee subsidy given the pandemic impacts on the employment and education environment to support with access to these essential services for those most impacted.

To increase transparency and ensure confidence and access to essential services, especially for those who have been disproportionately impacted, there is a need for Children's Services to work together with partners and stakeholders to develop and locally implement a public information campaign to ensure awareness and understanding of local child care and early years services. A campaign that includes information on the benefits of the licensed sector and the essential nature of services for families has the potential to increase access and address workforce challenges.

Disproportionate Impacts on Women and Groups Facing Systemic Barriers

Impacts and Supports

Women, girls and gender diverse persons face barriers to access adequate, affordable, and suitable services and resources. Indigenous women, older women, racialized women, women with disabilities, and all gender diverse persons face multiple layers of discrimination.

The City's Women and Gender Equity Strategy describes that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the gender gaps and barriers women and gender diverse persons experience daily. COVID-19 impacts women and girls disproportionately, with existing gender gaps in access to social services increased and women at a higher risk of isolation, food insecurity, loss of income and gender-based violence.

Women have also shouldered the added schooling and child care responsibilities brought on by the pandemic. It's reported that 12 times more mothers have left their jobs to care for toddlers or school-aged children than fathers. In Canada, nearly 100,000 women over 20 years of age have exited the labour market entirely, compared to 10,000 for men. While women in general have experienced disproportionate job loss during the pandemic, certain demographic groups of women including mothers, visible minorities, young people, lower income earners and new immigrants have been the

most significantly impacted by job loss and employment gaps. This has underscored the importance of safe, affordable, quality child care to allow women as essential workers to have the opportunity to support their family and contribute to the community.

Women carry an increased double burden of care as they constitute a large majority of frontline workers and health responders who are required to work more and in more high-risk environments during COVID-19. The College of Early Childhood Educators reports that there is a total of 3,663 RECEs who work in Ottawa, with 97 per cent being women, and workers have expressed concern about risks inherent in working on the front-line with young children.

Working closely with the Gender & Race Equity, Inclusion and Indigenous Relations and Social Development Service, Children's Services was named as a focus area in the City's Women and Gender Equity Strategy and identified commitments in 2020 (see Planning Considerations). The Women and Gender Equity Strategy (WGES) was developed to ensure that the City of Ottawa's services, strategies, and plans integrate a women and gender lens and promote women and gender equity.

In addition to sex and gender, racialization, income, housing, employment, and other socioeconomic factors represent overlapping and compounding risks for people in the pandemic. According to a Statistics Canada study, for Indigenous people at the end of 2020, unemployment remained higher compared with non-Indigenous people. 57% of Indigenous people living with a chronic condition or disability surveyed said that their overall health was "much worse" or "somewhat worse" than before the pandemic, and 64% reported that their mental health was "much worse" or "somewhat worse" than before the pandemic. In addition, over half of the respondents reported that the pandemic was having a "moderate" or "major" impact on their ability to meet essential needs, including food and grocery needs (54%) and PPE needs (52%).

The pandemic has also been particularly difficult for children with special needs and their parents. An August 2020 Statistics Canada study found that a greater proportion of parents of children with disabilities compared to parents of children without disabilities, were very or extremely concerned for their children's school year and academic success and mental health. The uncertainty of the pandemic and the associated disruption in routines are challenging for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, who benefit from structure, clear expectations and a variety of supports which were disrupted by COVID-19. Even before the pandemic, research shows that families of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities experienced heightened parenting stress in comparison to parents of children with typical development. The

impacts of closures to schools, child care and professional supports means that parents and guardians of children with special needs have been required to be their child's special education teacher, social skills coach, speech–language pathologist or behavioural/mental health therapist perhaps with little professional support. Recognizing these impacts, Children's Services worked closely with Children's Inclusion Support Services (CISS) to ensure that children with special needs have been supported during COVID-19 and that inclusion is prioritized. CISS maintained its services to the 800+ children they served prior to the closure of child care services. Behaviour consultants supported families on their caseloads with toys, equipment and virtual services.

Planning Considerations

Children's Services, the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group, Indigenous Early Years Circle and Table Francophone are committed to gender and race equity and recognize that applying a gender, race-based and cultural lens is highly aligned with sector values and responsiveness goals in the Service System Plan. Participation in the City's Women and Gender Equity Strategy (WGES) in 2021-2022 is an opportunity to leverage the initiatives and support of the WGES partners and participate in intersectional work between WGES and the Anti-Racism Strategy, to address the disproportionate impacts on women and groups, and to advance goals of the child care and early years sector. Immediate measures are needed to integrate a gender lens into the pandemic recovery, as well as broader initiatives to foster systemic and sustainable change towards women and gender equity.

The need for additional supports in the child care system for children with special needs and their families was highlighted by both parents and guardians and child care providers in the Service Plan. The impact of the pandemic on families with children with special needs has further highlighted the challenges faced by families, the gaps in the system and the need for a social infrastructure that will support families with special needs. There is a need for Children's Services to continue to collaborate with CISS to ensure that children with special needs are supported through disruptions to child care and school, changing operating guidance and care environments and in Emergency Child Care services.

The following actions are needed in 2021-2022 in order to begin to address the disproportionate impacts on women and groups facing systemic barriers:

- Participate as a focus area in the City's Women and Gender Equity Strategy and apply a gender lens to Service System Plan implementation activities

- Participate in the Gender and Race Equity Baseline Study and apply results to data practices
- Develop and review Children's Services content with a lens for intersectional groups of women and gender diverse persons
- Raise awareness and build the capacity of staff and sector partners on equity and inclusion with training, presentations and workshops
- Expand community-based advisory groups to include intersectional groups of women and gender diverse persons
- Continue to work together with the Indigenous Early Years Circle and Table Francophone to support access and sector responsiveness
- Ensure special needs resourcing and supports for families through response and recovery

Emergency Response, Closing and Reopening

Impacts and Supports

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, on March 17, 2020, the Province declared a state of emergency and ordered the closure of all licensed centre-based child care centres and all facilities providing indoor recreational programs, including EarlyON Child and Family Centres. Licensed home child care programs were not required to close and many continued to provide care to children aged 0 to 12 years old. The mandated closure lasted over 12 weeks, leaving families with little support, especially front line and essential workers who continued to work outside the home. Emergency Child Care (ECC) was implemented to support the pandemic response. Further, additional instances of Targeted ECC were planned and implemented in December 2020 and again in April 2021. Supports and resources were also made to reopen with COVID-19 operating requirements. Centralized planning, coordination and collective action was required to face this major challenge.

Emergency Child Care for health care and other essential front-line workers was planned and implemented in March 2020 and again for school-aged children in December 2020. Children's Services planned and implemented the service based on community need and capacity, including developing program components and access for families, providing funding and assessing costs, monitoring and provincial reporting. In consideration of provincial direction, close partnership with Ottawa Public Health (OPH) was required in order to develop approved pandemic plans, screening tools, determine case and outbreak management protocols and develop and deliver child care workers and early childhood educators training on new public health operating guidance

and restrictions. From April 14 to June 28, 2020, 103 children attended ECC at three Municipal Child Care Centres, one not-for-profit community partner with three centre-based locations, plus home child care locations. Lessons learned and training, tools and resources on implementing the COVID-19 operating requirements were used to support community providers in re-opening services.

A second shutdown effective December 26, 2020, included the closure of schools to in-person learning and the closure of before and after school programs and extended day programs. Children's Services planned and implemented targeted ECC for school-aged children from January 4 to 29, 2021. Twenty-three service providers at 63 centre-based locations and 7 licensed home child care agencies each with multiple locations participated. The highest number of children served on a single day through targeted ECC services was 502 children. On April 15, 2021, the Province announced a third closure and Targeted Emergency Child Care for school-aged children. Children's Services planned and implemented the program beginning April 19, 2021. As of May 4, 2021, 27 not-for-profit service providers at 61 centre-based locations and 7 licensed home child care agencies each with multiple locations are participating. As of May 4, the highest number of children served on a single day was 829 children.

Child care was permitted to reopen on June 26, 2020. Preparation for reopening was a substantial exercise at both the system planning and provider level and with the supports provided 97% of programs were able to successfully reopen. New operating guidance requiring intensive training, new protocols, site-based pandemic plans, cohorting involving reorganization of staff and children in programs, screening, daily attendance records, cleaning, restriction to visitors, implementing new drop off and pick-up protocols to facilitate physical distancing, all to ensure the health and safety of children, families and educators. COVID-19 operating guidance was different for each setting, centre-based, home child care, before and after school and EarlyON Child and Family Centres. In addition, there was significant need for guidance, advice and collaboration in order to inform adaptations to programming and ensure quality child care.

Children's Services worked closely with the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group, including the Table Francophone and the Indigenous Early Years Circle, to identify issues and provide supports for a safe reopening. In partnership with OPH, Children's Services supported the provision of training and information sessions to support the sector with implementing operating guidance and took an active role in ensuring guidance and advice met the needs of providers and families.

Investments in support and training at the sector level and commitment and professionalism of providers ensured success in adapting to new operating requirements and allowed services to reopen quickly. The continued ability to adjust to and adhere to changing operational guidance has allowed 0-4 services to continue to be offered in the more recent school closures. Work is on-going, as monitoring and evaluation of the response and determine what additional measures are needed to support families and local service providers to remain open.

EarlyON Centres were also closed as of March 17, 2020, including all in-person drop-in playgroups and workshops. Following a short re-opening period in September, Centres were closed again during subsequent stay-at-home orders in December 2020 and April 2021. Despite not being able to offer direct in-person services, EarlyON Centres have been engaging with young children and families using innovative ways to provide family support, such as virtual playgroup programming and workshops available online through YouTube, Zoom, EarlyON Google pages and dedicated pages on Pinterest. In addition, Family and Baby Wellness checks were completed by phone, including reaching families that welcomed newborn babies and 1 on 1 phone support with a Registered Early Childhood Educator to access early years and family resources, such as information on family issues, family stress reduction and referral to other wrap-around services. Children's Services produced EarlyON Fact Sheets to promote access to virtual programs and services. These were distributed to the Human Needs Task Force, the child care and early years sector, and published on Ottawa.ca in order to increase access to these important supports for families.

Planning Considerations

Ensuring access to child care for essential workers during closure periods so that health and frontline workers can support the pandemic response needs to be a top priority. Reserve capacity and resources are needed to appropriately meet future needs. Implementation of Emergency Child Care requires significant effort, planning and coordination by Children's Services and providers and is critical in supporting families of essential workers and Ottawa's response to the pandemic. In addition, there is a need to ensure early years child and family supports continue to be available, in formats flexible to meet the needs of families as operating guidance and restrictions evolve.

Addressing evolving pressures and needs of the sector continues to be important to ensure access to essential supports for families through recovery. Ongoing support to ensure services remain open and are supported through closure periods is critical. Pandemic operating requirements continue to evolve and new issues for providers and

families emerge, requiring training, tools and resources. Funding supports targeted to meet local needs are also needed to address closures and ensure access to these essential services for families into the future. Further details on priority sector needs, such as funding and support adapting to operational health and safety guidance to ensure a safe environment and prevent closures are highlighted in sections below.

Financial Pressures and Threats to Viability

Impacts and Supports

Service providers and educators demonstrated patience and resilience throughout this pandemic and continue to have an essential role in supporting families in our community. The pandemic also highlighted the importance of strengthening the social infrastructure of our community and the need for an ongoing response to changing demands for services to ensure the continued viability and sustainability of the sector. Child care and early years supports have never been more recognized as essential to children, families, our community well-being and the economy.

Service providers have had to respond to unexpected temporary closures, a new funding landscape and increased operating costs, while trying to maintain affordable child care for families. Children's Services is committed to responding to the changing demands of the sector by identifying funding gaps and prioritizing provincial advocacy as we recover from the financial pressures brought on by the pandemic.

Mandated closures due to COVID-19 have presented new financial challenges for service providers, including greater financial uncertainty and loss of income. Providers have experienced extended provincial lockdowns and temporary program closures due to COVID outbreaks, both of which have had important financial consequences. They have had to contend with a new and complex provincial funding framework while responding to the evolving needs of the community.

In order to support financial viability and sustainability of the sector during the mandated closure and reopening periods, the Ministry developed a new funding approach which leveraged federal programs available as part of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan and aligned with the timing of these supports.

The implementation of this new funding framework resulted in an increased administrative burden for both agencies and Children's Services. Upwards of 250 funding applications were consolidated, validated, analyzed and submitted for provincial approval in order to support the sector. Payments were advanced to offer interim

financial support while funding applications were being processed and approved. This required a significant effort to reconcile payments with the approved provincial funding supports.

While the objective of the new provincial funding framework was to support financial sustainability, these changes to funding created greater financial uncertainty. The matter was further compounded by the delay in provincial confirmation of 2020 funding, received on February 3, 2021. Despite these challenges, and thanks to the additional Federal and Provincial funding supports, the sector remained viable with 97% of child care service providers in Ottawa having reopened and offering care to families in our community.

Children's Services has worked alongside the Ministry of Education to secure the necessary funding to support the sector through this uniquely challenging year. An additional \$46 million dollars was requested and approved from the Province for Sustainability and Re-opening funding to support the child care and early years sector during the different phases of the pandemic. This support includes:

- Regular 2020 General Operating Funding - For the periods of January 1 to March 16, 2020 and September 1 to December 31, 2020, which were pro-rated to reflect 55% of their annual funding amount.
- Sustainability Funding - For the service provider's closure period beginning March 17, 2020 for a total of \$20 million dollars.
- Re-opening Funding – From the service provider's reopening date to August 31, 2020 for a total of \$26 million dollars.
- Safe Restart Funding - For the period of September 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021 for a total of \$13.4 million dollars.
- Reinvestment Funding - For the period of January to March 2021, for a total of \$5 million dollars.

Children's Services recognized the important financial consequences of mandated closures due to COVID and advocated to the Ministry for additional funding. As a result of this advocacy, it was announced that across the Province, \$66M was being reinvested in 2021 for the period of January to March 2021. Ottawa's allocation was \$5M to further support increased costs of operating child care and EarlyON child and family centres during the pandemic. Children's Services consulted with the Child Care

and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group to determine a fair and equitable allocation method.

Planning Considerations

Children's Services consulted with individual service providers to review their funding, pressures and planning for 2021. With confirmation of 2020 funding, including additional provincial supports for pandemic impacts, 57% of centre-based not-for-profit agencies identified their financial situation for the 2020 calendar year as "good", 41% as "fair", 1% as "poor" and 1% did not respond. By providing much-needed funding, 97% of not-for-profit providers have remained financially viable, however pressures will continue as a result of continued pandemic impacts.

The financial position of not-for-profit agencies is highly variable as they operate with limited reserves. In an effort to support service providers in budgeting and planning for business continuity, there is a need for ongoing communication and engagement about funding needs and supports. Consultation with the sector, including the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group and Affordability Design Team is needed in order to seek guidance and advice on meeting local needs for funding supports.

The child care and early years sector remains viable and access to families intact only because of additional funding provided to support the gaps for providers during closures, reopening and supports for additional costs incurred due to the pandemic operating requirements. Significant efforts are needed to reconcile various funding periods and envelopes, provincial and federal for both Children's Services and providers. There is a need for support to the sector to understand the rapidly changing funding landscape and individualized information to inform budgeting at the service provider level. This will significantly increase the requirements for both Service Managers and service providers and these considerations need to be acknowledged with additional Provincial funding allocations and flexibility in the guidelines.

The pandemic has also highlighted the gaps in the social infrastructure of the community and the need for resources to respond to changing needs and demands for services. To ensure the continued viability and sustainability of the sector and to provide affordable supports for families, Children's Services needs to continue to prioritize provincial advocacy to ensure local needs for funding are met and to prioritize consultation and use of funding allocations to meet local needs and advance Service System Plan goals through recovery. Further advocacy to reverse the previously announced Provincial change on the spending threshold for program delivery / administration funding is needed, to ensure resources are available to allocate funding to meet local needs.

Operational Impacts of New Health and Safety Requirements

Impacts and Supports

With health and safety a major concern and top priority for both service providers and families during the pandemic, Children's Services has prioritized support for the sector to ensure a safe environment for both children and child care workers and early childhood educators.

Since the reopening of child care and early years sector and throughout the pandemic response to-date, there have been considerable new and changing requirements for operating child care and early years programs. Requirements are frequently changing and are unique and distinct for each setting: centre-based child care, home child care, before and after school care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres. Through the various waves of the pandemic and changing provincial and local levels of risk, pandemic plans, screening protocols, ratios and cohorting and subsequent reorganization of child care workers and early childhood educators and children in programs, outbreak management for confirmed or suspected cases, and program best practices continue to change.

As operating requirements change, there is a significant need for sector support, collaboration and local guidance in order to interpret and adapt protocols and programs and provide training and resources to ensure quality services and a safe environment for all.

In partnership with OPH, Children's Services has invested significant time and resources in the development of local operating guidance, assisted the sector with pandemic planning, training and communications. Information sessions, training and tools and resources have been produced to support provincial and local operating guidance. In addition, OPH with support of Children's Services, and input from sector partners, developed and maintained a dedicated "evergreen" website offering the latest information/resources for both providers and families [Supporting Child Care and Early Years During COVID-19](#).

Given the importance of context-specific public health guidance and advice to the sector, Children's Services established a partnership and new collaborating structures with OPH. Regular meetings between leadership and staff occur and OPH provides a representative at the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group meetings to ensure that two-way dialogue with sector representatives occurs. Working together with OPH as a key city partner has been invaluable in the sector response to

the pandemic. Children's Services continues to provide the child care sector lens so that any local decisions and guidance are well-informed by the context, needs and realities of both providers and families. In addition, Children's Services supports the sector by monitoring questions and issues to support the resolution of any issues or gaps identified.

Planning Considerations

Supporting service providers to operate in adherence to highly technical changing local and provincial guidance continues to be important. Understanding and applying the operating requirements have proven to make a positive difference – resulting in decreased risk, fewer closures and fewer financial impacts for both providers and families. In turn, efforts to ensure safe environments, increases family confidence in the service and reduces stress for child care workers and early childhood educators. With the rapid changes in the landscape, there is continued need for centralized and coordinated supports and high-quality tools and resources.

There is a need for Children's Services to continue the positive and productive working relationship with OPH to support the sector as the pandemic impacts continue to evolve. With vaccination now available for child care workers and early childhood educators, and feedback from families on the importance of vaccination in decisions to return to care, there is a need for Children's Services to support vaccination efforts and work with the sector to establish common sector values, policy implications and monitoring impacts.

Child Care Worker and Early Childhood Educators: A Workforce Under Pressure

Impacts and Supports

An experienced and stable workforce, supported through ongoing training, good wages and working conditions is critical to ensuring quality child care and early years services. Pre-pandemic, challenges to the workforce, such as retention and recruitment, salaries and benefits and professional development were identified in the Service System Plan. In particular, a shortage of supply staff and part-time and split shift work arrangements were noted. Recruitment of qualified child care workers and early childhood educators was also identified as an issue, even more acute for the Francophone and Indigenous sectors given additional requirements related to language and cultural background. Professional burnout in providing care to young children was also identified as an issue.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, child care and early years workforce pressures have been exacerbated. Operating requirements are complex and necessitate additional child care workers and early childhood educators and limit child care workers and early childhood educator's movement between programs in a cohort model, making it difficult for staff cover-off or casual supports for programs. While cohorting is important to reduce any potential COVID-19 transmission, it places pressure on the already limited qualified workforce. In addition, as possible or confirmed cases are identified and child care workers and early childhood educators are required to isolate from the workplace (e.g. a case in the child care centre) or family reasons (e.g. a family member with symptoms), there are no staff available to replace. Variable sick leave pay means there are further personal financial impacts to early childhood educators with symptoms or those required to isolate, many of whom are women who are paid low wages. This workforce challenge in turn, affects families as lack of child care workers and early childhood educators contributes to increased program closures or limited operations reducing reliable access to these essential supports.

Burnout and stress have also increased as educators work to support families during this time of stress. The unknown and uncertainty of COVID-19, adjusting to changing protocols and fear of contracting COVID-19 given the nature of child care and the need to be in close proximity with young children who do not wear masks or understand physical distancing continue to be top of mind. Throughout the pandemic, child care workers and early childhood educators have consistently reported for work every day, demonstrated considerable flexibility and adapted to the newest health and safety protocols, and greeted young children and families with warmth, professionalism and grace. It is with much respect that this sector is valued as essential to our community. Mental health and resiliency of the workforce and supporting child care workers and early childhood educators in this time of stress and uncertainty was a top priority for the sector and Children's Services. To support the sector, Children's Services partnered with OPH to produce and promote a Thank You Campaign including a letter and video to acknowledge the tremendous efforts of child care workers and early childhood educators and provide mental health information and resources.

In response, Children's Services, through provincial programs such as Safe Restart and Reinvestment Funding, provided funding support for additional staffing, PPE and other costs to ensure the safety of child care workers and early childhood educators throughout the pandemic. Child care workers were not identified for pandemic pay as essential workers on the front lines of COVID.

Further, Children's Services supported workforce training on operating guidance and information sessions to ensure the workforce obtained up-to-date guidance to work safely and feel confident in the work environment. More details on support to ensure a safe environment for the workforce are provided in the section on Operational Impacts.

To support the workforce, Children's Services allocated targeted special purpose capacity building funding to service providers in order to support child care workers and early childhood educators' development and supports in the area of mental health and resiliency. To further support, together with the Quality Design Team, a tailored mental health training and resource list was prepared and distributed to the sector, including resources for Francophone and Indigenous populations.

Planning Considerations

Looking ahead into 2021-2022, there is a need to prioritize the immediate threats to the child care and early years workforce and ensure the health and safety of the workforce with changes and the evolution of operating guidance. There is a need to keep the workforce safe, confident and engaged in the setting to retain and support existing child care workers and early childhood educators. Efforts are needed to ensure the latest public health guidance is understood and followed, in order to promote the safety of staff and also ensure that families continue to have access to these essential supports, with limited disruptions.

Supporting the continued mental health and resiliency of the workforce is also needed through recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the work environment and added stress to an already demanding setting. Efforts are needed to ensure a healthy work environment, with supports for mental health and resiliency, in order to ensure child care workers and early childhood educators are able to be there to provide essential supports to families. There is a need for targeted support for mental health and resiliency to be prioritized again for 2021-2022. Recognition and increased awareness of the essential role that child care workers and early childhood educators play in our community is also needed. Acknowledgement and value of this essential work is an important value for the sector and its workforce.

In addition, there is a need for Children's Services to leverage workforce initiatives at the regional and provincial level to address current issues, which can evolve into the broader workforce strategy described in the Service System Plan. There is a need to identify and coordinate capacity building and professional development opportunities for child care and early years professionals in Ottawa and work with partners on promotion of Early Childhood Education Qualifications Upgrade program.

Children's Services Workplan 2021-2022

Children's Services' 2021-22 work plan has been updated to reflect that pandemic recovery and response actions that will continue to be needed for the duration of 2021 and well into 2022. Planning considerations have been used to adapt the Service System Plan activities to respond to local needs while continuing to advance progressive improvements in access, affordability, quality and responsiveness, within available resources.

While there is continued variability and pandemic uncertainty that may impact priorities, the updated work plan will address short and medium-term needs for response and recovery and ensures capacity to respond to further emergency needs, such as delivering Emergency Child Care as needed, as well as responding to new opportunities that may impact the work plan, such as the Federal budget and continued negotiations on a National Child Care Strategy.

The implementation of this work plan and COVID-19 response and recovery will continue to be supported through the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group and Design Team sub-groups. This approach is the foundation to implementing the Service System Plan priorities, by completing the work through a consultative and transparent process in collaboration with sector partners. Continuing to meet the challenge of the pandemic requires significant advocacy and partnerships. Children's Services is an active participant in the Children's Services Network with the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association and advocacy to the Ministry of Education continues in order to ensure local needs are considered. Local collaboration with stakeholders such as the Human Needs Task Force, Employment and Social Services, Ottawa Public Health, and By-Law were critical in the response.

Full details on the 2021-2022 work plan to advance access, affordability, quality and responsiveness Service System Plan priorities are available in Document 3 and highlights are provided below.

Access

Respond to need for emergency child care during closures and support the sector to remain open to support families by continuing to monitor enrollment. Ensuring access to the sector by adapting to family impacts and needs for child care and early years and support any sector transformation needed. Implement Wait List and Fee Subsidy program enhancements to ensure flexibility to help more families meet their evolving needs. Participate in a public information campaign to build confidence and ensure

awareness of local child care and early years services for all families, highlighting the benefits of early childhood education and the essential nature of services for families.

Affordability

Advance affordability of the sector and respond to financial pressures and threats to sector viability by prioritizing timely provision of any federal and provincial funding to help keep rates affordable and relieve pandemic pressures. Identify gaps and investments needed in social infrastructure to ensure community providers are able to respond to changing demands for their services and strengthen the sector through resilient recovery. Engage with the sector to allocate funding to meet local needs and ensure funding information is accessible. Actively monitoring federal and developments and engage in provincial planning discussions and ensure readiness for a potential national child care plan which is vital to the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery.

Quality

Ensure quality in child care and early years programs by supporting the sector to address changing operational requirements and workforce pressures exacerbated by the pandemic, such as: providing sector training, information, web resources and tools to support safe delivery of quality services and programming with changing pandemic operating requirements, providing workforce vaccination and health and safety supports to ensure a healthy, stable child care and early years workforce and continuing to support mental health and resiliency of the workforce through targeted capacity building funding.

To address workforce pressures, work with the Quality Design Team and the Eastern Region Capacity Building Network to identify and develop/coordinate capacity building and professional development opportunities for child care and early years professionals in Ottawa and working with Ministry of Education and Eastern Ontario municipal partners on promotion of Early Childhood Education Qualifications Upgrade program.

Responsiveness

Improve system responsiveness to address disproportionate pandemic impacts on women and groups facing systemic barriers. Collaborate with CISS to ensure that children with special needs are supported through disruptions. Participate as a focus area in the City's Women and Gender Equity Strategy and implement commitments such as reviewing public content with a lens for intersectional groups of women and

gender diverse persons, raising awareness and building the capacity of staff and sector partners with training on equity and inclusion workshops and expanding community-based advisory groups to include intersectional groups of women and gender diverse persons.

Key Outcomes

Making a determined effort to incorporate the planning considerations for each of the six key pandemic themes in the updated Children's Services work plan will support families and providers to navigate the continued pandemic response and recovery. Responding to family impacts and changing needs, addressing disproportionate impacts on women and groups, responding to the emergency needs, supporting the sector with operational impacts of changing health and safety requirements, acting on immediate workforce pressures and addressing financial pressures and threats to sector viability and social infrastructure will support children and families and sustain the child care and early years sector through the pandemic recovery. Addressing the themes with deliberate actions designed to preserve the sector, will ensure future access and a reliable system ready for active participation in a national program.

Program Delivery/Administrative Threshold

The City of Ottawa's provincial allocation for 2021 has remained mostly unchanged from the previous years non-COVID-19 related allocation. The Province provided \$2.6M in one-time funding in 2021 to delay their recently announced changes, including a changed threshold for program delivery / administration funding.

As shown in this report, the pandemic related responsibilities of the Services System Manager have drastically increased, which is in addition to the regular system management under provincial legislation and guidelines. It is anticipated that the pandemic response and recovery actions will continue to be needed for the duration of 2021 and well into 2022. This will significantly increase the requirements for both service system managers and service providers. There is a need for these considerations to be reflected in the provincial allocations and guidelines and enhanced supports and flexibility for providers and families to ensure the system is not further impacted. There is also a need for continued advocacy for the reversal of the previously announced provincial change on the spending threshold for program delivery / administration funding.

Federal Budget Announcement and Plans for a National Child Care Plan

On April 19, 2021, the Federal Government announced \$30 billion in new investment over the next 5 years, and \$8.3 billion ongoing for Early Learning and Child Care and Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care starting in 2021-22 to move towards a universal child care system. This announcement closely aligns with the Service System Plan priorities and could influence plans over the next 5 years. More information will be needed to assess the impacts to the work plan. The key messages announced include:

- \$27.2 billion over five years, starting in 2021-22 will bring the federal government to a 50/50 share of child care costs with provincial and territorial governments, as part of initial 5-year agreements.
- Future objectives and distribution of funding, starting in year six, would be determined based on an understanding of need and progress achieved as part of this initial plan. The federal funding would allow for:
 - 50 per cent reduction in average fees for regulated early learning and child care in all provinces outside of Quebec, to be delivered before or by the end of 2022.
 - An average of \$10 a day by 2025-26 for all regulated child care spaces in Canada.
 - Ongoing annual growth in quality affordable child care spaces across the country, building on the approximately 40,000 new spaces already created through previous federal investments.
 - Meaningful progress in improving and expanding before- and after-school care in order to provide more flexibility for working families.

The pandemic response to-date relied on consensus, cooperation and significant financial support from the federal and provincial governments. There is a need for intergovernmental partnerships to continue, be strengthened and realigned.

A national program has the potential to make significant positive impacts and address issues that families and service providers face, both historically and those further exacerbated as a result of the pandemic, including:

Benefits to Children: High-quality programs, that provide an educational focus by trained early childhood educators, have a positive influence on children's social development, school readiness and academic achievement. This gives children the best possible start in life.

Benefits to Families: Access to high-quality child care makes it easier for parents to work or focus on education. A national program that is affordable and flexible is important to families facing barriers, such as sole support parents and low-income earners. Being part of the workforce in turn increases household income and improves socioeconomic status. The stability of a national program also has the ability to reduce parental stress, which benefits their mental health and in turn benefits their children, work performance, and standard of living.

Increase in the Labour Force Participation of Women: Potential for a positive economic impact through a resulting boost in the labour participation of women. While women in general have experienced disproportionate job loss during the pandemic, certain demographic groups of women including mothers, visible minorities, young people, lower income earners and new immigrants have been the most significantly impacted by job loss and employment gaps. A national program would also assist the sector with several challenges they currently face with its workforce especially around retention, recruitment and salary and benefits with over 90% making \$27 an hour or less and almost 50% making between \$15 and \$20 per hour.

Social Benefits: Strong child care programs can positively contribute to the social well-being of Ottawa by reducing inequalities and fostering a sense of belonging. Families facing barriers can be better supported. Inclusive programs can also facilitate the integration of children with special needs. A national program would allow families to participate in the social and economic life of Ottawa, which in turn enhances the well-being of the entire community.

Support Covid-19 Recovery: The COVID-19 pandemic has left many families without essential child care and early years supports. Parents with young children are feeling very or extremely concerned about balancing child care, schooling and work. Women have also shouldered the added schooling and child care responsibilities brought on by the pandemic. A national childcare program is essential to the COVID-19 recovery for both parents and our economy.

Economic Benefits: A national program has the potential to provide employment opportunities for thousands of individuals, mostly women. A strong and responsive child care system has the potential to allow more local parents to participate in the workforce and help to attract and retain a skilled workforce to the city, further stimulating the local economy. A national program and the benefits that come from it would also create additional income that provide tax revenue for Governments and reduce the demand for other government support programs.

Children's Services will actively monitor federal developments and engage in provincial planning discussions so that opportunities to support local needs and advance Service System Plan strategic priorities are maximized, and that federal plans are considered in the implementation of the work plan.

Staff recommend Council reaffirm the City of Ottawa's support for building a national program and system of early learning and child care services that focuses on increased access, affordability, quality and responsiveness. A robust system is essential for families especially women and those disproportionately impacted and vitally important to Ottawa's economic renewal.

RURAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no rural implications to this report.

CONSULTATION

Extensive engagement and consultation with over 2,000 families, child care and early years providers and other community stakeholders was undertaken to develop the Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan 2019-2023. Further, to outline COVID-19 pandemic impacts, supports and planning considerations for 2021-2022, Children's Services sought knowledge and insights with heightened engagement with the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group, the broader child care and early years sector and valuable family perspectives obtained through a population survey of Ottawa families.

COMMENTS BY THE WARD COUNCILLOR(S)

This is a City-wide report.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE(S) COMMENTS

No Advisory Committees were consulted in the development of this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no legal impediment to receiving the information contained in this report in accordance with recommendation no. 1. There are no legal impediments to the implementation of the report recommendations.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are risk implications. These risks have been identified and explained in the report and are being managed and mitigated by the appropriate staff.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with the report recommendations.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

The City is committed to meeting its obligations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005. In the area of children's services, this includes but is not limited to, training, customer service and accessible facilities.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

This report aligns with the Thriving Communities priority of the City of Ottawa Strategic Plan 2019-2022.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Document 1 – Select Data Tables

Document 2 – Children's Services 2020 Accomplishments

Document 3 – Children's Services 2021-2022 Workplan

DISPOSITION

Children's Services staff will continue to work collaboratively with the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group and our community partners to implement the actions identified with the 2021-2021 workplan as approved by Council. In addition, the staff will continue to support advocacy efforts with respect to the development of a national child care program and system of early learning and child care services.

DOCUMENT 1: Select Data Tables

The Child Care Registry and Waitlist (CCRAW) is an online tool that first provides families with information and helps them find, explore, and connect with licensed child care service providers. Table 1 provides a comparison of the number of children registered for licensed child care on the CCRAW pre-COVID (February 2020) and during COVID (March 2021).

Table 1: Child Care Registry and Waitlist (CCRAW) By The Numbers

	# of Children	
	February 2020	March 2021
Registered children	8,837	9,753
Francophone families	4,253	4,507
Indigenous families	297	284
Children with special needs	765	798
Space required within the next 3 months	810	867
Preferred start date of 3 months or more	2,966	2,778
Preferred start date in the past [Many have secured care elsewhere and choose to remain registered]	5,061	6,108

Active fee subsidy placements represent the total number of full or partial child care fee subsidy placements that took place for each age group on a monthly basis.

Table 2: Active Fee Subsidy Placements

Age Group	February (2020)	September (2020)	December (2020)	February (2021)
Infants	537	263	278	327
Toddlers	1,191	796	774	746
Preschool	2,333	1,286	1,505	1,728
JK/SK	1,501	1,325	1,006	1,006
School Age	2,762	2,057	1,667	1,635
Total	8,324	5,727	5,230	5,442

Preliminary data from a sample of not-for-profit licensed centres shows the number of: licensed spaces, operational child care spaces that a provider is able/willing to operate, vacant child care spaces that a provider has available to accept new children into care, and a vacancy rate based on the number of operational spaces.

Table 3: Not-for-profit Licensed Centre-based Capacity – Sample of Providers (n=73) - April 2021

Age group	Licensed centre spaces (Note 2)	Operational spaces (Note 3)	Vacant spaces (Note 4)	Vacancy rate (Note 5)
Infants	380	304	85	28.0%
Toddlers	1,863	1,475	325	22.0%
Preschool	4,140	3,385	560	16.5%
JK/SK (before and after school) (Note 1)	4,084	1,608	641	39.9%
School-Aged (before and after school) (Note 1)	7,794	2,838	1,077	37.9%
Total	18,261	9,610	2,688	28%

Note 1 - This does not include school based Extended Day Programs.

Note 2 – Represents provider reported licensed capacity. The licensed capacity is the maximum number of spaces approved by the Ministry of Education and may include director approval for an alternate arrangement.

Note 3 - Operational spaces refer to the number of spaces at which a service provider is able/willing to operate. Significant differences are more common in the Kindergarten and School Age programs.

Note 4 - Vacant spaces refer to the number of child care spaces a provider has vacant/available to accept new children into care.

Note 5 - Vacancy rate refers to the percentage of the spaces that are vacant/available based on the operational spaces.

A comparison of families' main types of child care pre-COVID to during COVID for families with children 0 to 12 years old.

Table 4: Main type of child care for families/caregivers of children 0 to 12 years old

Type of provider	Before Covid-19 (%)	During Covid-19 (%)	Difference (percentage points)
Before/after school	14.1	5.6	-8.5
Care provided by family or nanny	14.3	14.6	0.3
Child care centre	7.2	11.7	4.5
Home child care	13.6	10.6	-3
No arrangement	37	44.3	7.3
Other	13.9	13.2	-0.7

The main types of child care that families of children 0 to 12 years old anticipate they will use in the next 12 months.

Table 5: Anticipated main type of child care in the next 12 months

Type of Care	Percent (%) (Note 1)
Care provided by family member	21.0
Care provided in home by nanny or babysitter	9.9
Home child care	14.1
Preschool/nursery school	11.1
Child care centre	16.3
Before/after school	30.5
No arrangement	27.3
Other	5.3

Note 1: Percentages do not add up to 100% as survey respondents were asked to answer the main type of child care they anticipate using for each of their children.

DOCUMENT 2: Children’s Services 2020 Accomplishments

10 Service Plan Strategic Priorities	2020 Accomplishments/ Actions to address pandemic impacts and advance System Plan priorities
Access: We will improve access to high-quality licensed child care and early years services.	
1. Increase and optimize capacity and flexibility, with priority for underserved communities, younger children and part-time care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched the Access Design Team, a subgroup of the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group • Access Design Team members provided input on process/communication for prioritization of child care spaces upon re-opening, part-time care, flexible care • Created a centralized registry site for families and launched Emergency Child Care for children 0 – 12 years in April 2020 to support access to care for front-line and essential workers, at no cost to families • Launched the Vacancy Manager tool for increased awareness of sector capacity and to support system planning • Supported 12 ongoing municipal and provincially funded Capital Projects due to be completed by 2021, an increase of 414 child care spaces
2. Increase information, awareness, and transparency of the child care and early years system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicated through ongoing sector letters with updates, Q&A documents and memos to keep sector informed • Created EarlyON Fact Sheets for families to support access to virtual EarlyON programs and services • Consulted our partners and provided a coordinated response to the Ministry of Education regarding the proposed regulatory changes to the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (CCEYA) • Hosted an information session specifically for Home Child Care providers to provide additional funding and service information

<p>3. Increase supports for families applying for and receiving fee subsidy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Family User portal on the Child Care Registry and Waitlist to support a simple and user-friendly process for families • New translation feature on the Child Care Registry and Waitlist allowing families to select their language of choice to increase understanding of the application process • Delivered child care fee subsidy presentations in the community to increase awareness and knowledge to further support families with their applications • Client-centric fee subsidy service delivery approach with mobile supports for appointments, document review and ability to upload documents online. • Extensive effort with placement coordination in an effort to significantly reduce / eliminate the fee subsidy waitlist. • Reviewed the immediate acceptance process for fee subsidy families with exceptional circumstances • Collaborated with the Indigenous Early Years Circle on reviewing processes and procedures to support Indigenous families accessing fee subsidies
<p>Affordability: We will increase affordability of child care services.</p>	
<p>4. Define affordability and establish consistent child care rates to increase affordability for families based on available funding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided federal and provincial funding to support 97% of child care centres to reopen, keep child care rates affordable and support providers with the additional costs and pressures associated to staffing, PPE and program vacancies • Consulted with the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group to implement local decisions and maximize the available funding for service providers • Provided a recorded funding presentation, which included an overview of all 2020 funding and Federal supports available to the sector

<p>5. Adjust the funding framework to achieve our vision and strategic goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched the Affordability Design Team to increase consultation • Launched two surveys to better understand and respond to the sector's financial needs during the closure and reopening periods • Consulted with the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group to maximize Safe Restart Funding for child care and EarlyON service providers • Conducted 93 virtual funding summary meetings with child care service providers and 25 virtual funding summary meetings with EarlyON service providers to identify and sector themes
<p>Quality: We will increase quality of child care and early years services.</p>	
<p>6. Define quality and establish consistent sector values to better support families and service providers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched the Quality Design Team to increase consultation and transparency with the sector • Quality Design Team membership provided valuable feedback to support the coordination of information and operating guidance from Ottawa Public Health, which led to the creation of an OPH Supporting Child Care and Early Years specific webpage
<p>7. Develop and implement a workforce strategy to increase and support professionals in the child care and early years system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritized the mental health and resiliency of the sector by providing targeted funding supports that help child care and early years professionals and front-line service providers have access to essential resources • With the Quality Design Team members, created and distributed a Mental Health Resource list to support Anglophone, Francophone and Indigenous partners to have access to professional development opportunities and mental health supports for educators and front-line staff • Established a collaborative working group with Ottawa Public Health colleagues to provide consistent messages and updated operating guidance information to the sector

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With Ottawa Public Health, co-hosted two Sector Information Sessions, in English and French and an evening conversation session for service providers with Dr. Vera Etches • With Ottawa Public Health, produced and disseminated a letter and video to thank Child Care Workers and Early Childhood Educators for their contributions in supporting local families and information on mental health and well-being resources • Hosted two information sessions, in English and French, specifically for EarlyON Service Providers regarding updated operational guidance
<p>Responsiveness: We will increase responsiveness of child care and early years services.</p>	
<p>8. Develop and implement a strategy to increase access and support children with special needs and their families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to work closely with Children's Inclusion Support Services (CISS) to ensure that children with special needs are supported during COVID-19 and that inclusion is prioritized • CISS maintained services to the 800+ children they served prior to the closure of child care services. Behaviour consultants supported families on their caseloads with toys, equipment and virtual services
<p>9. Engage all families and service providers of diverse backgrounds in the progressive improvements of child care and early years programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched the Public Awareness Design Team to increase consultation and transparency with the sector • Public Awareness Design Teams members provided valuable feedback to improve access to information by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improving the content on the Children's Services page on Ottawa.ca ○ Providing feedback to Ottawa Public Health regarding the safe return to work /wearing masks campaign ○ Providing feedback regarding a potential child care and early years awareness campaign ○ Providing feedback on the different communication approaches to increase

	<p>access to child care and early years information to families and sector partners</p>
<p>10. Enhance data analytics and measurement strategy to facilitate evidence-based planning and decision making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted ongoing Child Care and Early Years System Advisory Group surveys to better understand sector pressures during COVID and support the response • Progress on development of a Child Care Index to monitor system performance, including development and benchmarking of variables, to support evidence-based system planning and decision-making

DOCUMENT 3: Children’s Services 2021 – 2022 Workplan

10 Service Plan Strategic Priorities	2021-2022 Actions
Access: We will improve access to high-quality licensed child care and early years services.	
1. Increase and optimize capacity and flexibility, with priority for underserved communities, younger children and part-time care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and implement emergency child care services across the city, including flexible options, to ensure access for health care and frontline workers during school and program closures (wave 2, wave 3, potential future waves) • Monitor and investigate families’ changing needs for care and support the sector to adapt and transform as needed • Monitor and track sector operating capacity and vacancies to identify issues and trends to ensure equitable access, and system planning to ensure viability of the sector • Evaluate options and create a plan for capital funding to create additional spaces for groups disproportionately impacted by the pandemic
2. Increase information, awareness, and transparency of the child care and early years system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement CCRAW enhancements, including enhanced family information and navigation supports using the new Family Portal to make it easier for all families to access and navigate the system • Develop a public awareness initiative, together with municipal partners in the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association, and adapt and implement locally to ensure awareness and understanding of local child care and early years services, including the benefits of early childhood education and the essential nature of services for families
3. Increase supports for families applying for and receiving fee subsidy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve communication tools and mobile supports for families with a new application video, information video, workshop, update to the Parent Resource Guide and improvements to Ottawa.ca to meet the needs of all families • Leverage a mobile workforce with case workers and subsidy assistants working

	<p>offsite at local agencies to support families with applications and increase relationships with external stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for provincial changes to the Fee Subsidy program to meet the changing needs of families through pandemic response and recovery
<p>Affordability: We will increase affordability of child care services.</p>	
<p>4. Define affordability and establish consistent child care rates to increase affordability for families based on available funding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize timely provision of federal and provincial funding (including new pandemic funding supports) to help keep child care rates affordable and support providers with the pressures such as PPE, enhanced cleaning, staffing, minor capital, vacancies to respond to changes in operating guidance and requirements • Identify gaps and investments needed in social infrastructure to ensure community providers are able to respond to changing demands for their services and strengthen the sector through resilient recovery and rebuilding • Actively monitor federal developments, engage in provincial planning discussions and ensure readiness for a potential national child care program and system of early learning and child care service
<p>5. Adjust the funding framework to achieve our vision and strategic goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with the Child Care and Early Years System Planning Advisory Group and Affordability Design Team to determine top priorities and allocation of funds/funding formulas through the pandemic response and recovery to meet local needs and the strategic goals • Deliver periodic reviews with providers to provide agency funding overviews and identify needs and sector trends and risks to inform financial viability and funding strategies

Quality: We will increase quality of child care and early years services.	
6. Define quality and establish consistent sector values to better support families and service providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In partnership with Ottawa Public Health, provide sector training, information, web resources (Supporting Child Care and Early Years during COVID-19 website) and tools to support safe delivery of quality services and programming with changing pandemic operating guidance in centre-based, home, before and after school and EarlyON Child and Family Centre settings
7. Develop and implement a workforce strategy to increase and support professionals in the child care and early years system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide workforce vaccination and health and safety supports to ensure a healthy, stable child care and early years workforce • Continue to support mental health and resiliency of the workforce through targeted capacity building funding • Work in collaboration with the Quality Design Team and the Eastern Region Capacity Building Network to identify and develop/coordinate capacity building and professional development opportunities for child care and early years professionals in Ottawa • Work with Ministry of Education and Eastern Ontario municipal partners on promotion of Early Childhood Education Qualifications Upgrade program
Responsiveness: We will increase responsiveness of child care and early years services.	
8. Develop and implement a strategy to increase access and support children with special needs and their families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with CISS to ensure that children with special needs are supported through disruptions to child care and school, changing operating guidance and care environments and in Emergency Child Care services
9. Engage all families and service providers of diverse backgrounds in the progressive improvements of child care and early years programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate as a focus area in the City's Women and Gender Equity Strategy and apply a gender lens to Service System Plan implementation activities • Develop and review Children's Services content with a lens for intersectional groups of

	<p>women and gender diverse persons (e.g. web content, family and provider information)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness and build the capacity of staff and sector partners on equity and inclusion with training, presentations and workshops • Expand community-based advisory groups to include intersectional groups of women and gender diverse persons
<p>10. Enhance data analytics and measurement strategy to facilitate evidence-based planning and decision making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In partnership with the City’s Social Policy and Research Analytics team, commission a population survey of families and caregivers, to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on the use of child care services • Participate in the City’s Gender, Race and Equity Baseline study and integrate a gender, race and equity lens to Children’s Services data • Finalize the Child Care Index, to measure and track system performance across the four priority areas (Access, Affordability, Quality and Responsiveness) and support evidence-based system planning and funding decisions