

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OMSSA'S Submission Re: Ontario's New Child Care Plan

OMSSA and its members stand ready to work with the Province on the successful implementation of the new child care plan in local communities across Ontario. OMSSA appreciates the opportunity to provide recommendations and consultation on the Province's new child care plan.

OMSSA's positions and recommendations are summarized below, with more details within our full submission dated March 20, 2019:

QUALITY

- Child safety and well-being is the most important and highest priority.
- Sustaining the current licensed child care system and continuing to invest in the expansion of licensed child care is of critical importance.
- Incentives should be provided to encourage unlicensed providers to enter into the licensed system, to ensure oversight that currently does not exist. Reducing barriers to home child care licensing requirements would create new capacity, support quality, enhance oversight and accountability for services rendered by families.
- Coordinated, dedicated efforts are required to ensure new students are trained and that current RECEs are compensated adequately so they remain in the system. OMSSA supports working in partnership with the Province and College of ECEs in the creation of a provincial recruitment and retention strategy to address the shortage of ECEs in Ontario.

AFFORDABILITY

- Maintaining fee subsidies is crucial to addressing affordability in child care.
- The proposed tax rebate will help many families, but should be implemented alongside other tools that support connection to the labour market, such as the child care fee subsidy.
- The regulatory framework guiding child care fee subsidies under Ontario's Child Care Funding Formula has not been updated since 2005. Currently, a family's income must be under the threshold of \$20,000 to qualify to receive the full subsidy. OMSSA would like to work with the Province in considering an increase of the threshold to match the Low-Income Measure After-Tax (LIM-AT), adjusted for family size and indexed to inflation.
- Allocations and capital expansion funds should be maintained, as capacity is needed to address growing demand for licensed child care. A tax rebate will further increase demand and will not be effective unless people have access to affordable quality licensed child care spaces.

- OMSSA and its members encourage the Ministry to work to improve collaboration with school boards to leverage surplus buildings and land for the expansion of early years and child care services across Ontario, while encouraging children's services hubs and before and after school programs in schools.

ACCESS

- Investments should be made to expand high-quality licensed child care spaces across the province, with fees that are affordable to Ontarians. Additional capital expansion funds are needed to increase access and address the growing demand for licensed child care in communities across Ontario.
- Funding flexibility is key to enabling CMSMs and DSSABs to address unique local issues that pose barriers to access.
- OMSSA members appreciate the new dollars received to support EarlyON Centres in Ontario. This funding will benefit all 47 system service managers in Ontario and is welcomed by our membership.
- As a result of the Journey Together initiative, CMSMs and DSSABs, in partnership with Indigenous community organizations, have expanded access to culturally-relevant child care spaces for Indigenous families. Journey Together funding needs to be maintained.
- Sustaining and maintaining special needs resourcing funding to ensure inclusive support services for children with special needs is required. More work is needed to eliminate barriers for families with children with special needs, including further integration of services between schools and child care.

CHOICE

- Studies have shown parents prefer licensed child care when it is available and affordable. There must be adequate access and capacity in the licensed child care system to ensure people have true choice in early years and child care services.
- There is a need for increased public awareness on the impacts of high and low-quality child care (including long-term social and economic impacts) to assist families in making informed choices around licensed or unlicensed child care. OMSSA supports and is willing to assist the Province in creating an education campaign to promote informed decisions and the importance of licensed child care and safety.
- Efforts should be made to bring unlicensed providers into the licensed system, so that choice allows consideration for quality and safety.

- Funding allocations should be grounded in an understanding of unique regional and local needs. Where the need is greatest, special attention should be paid to sustainable child care programs in smaller and rural communities, as well as infant care.
- Choice is not possible without access to quality, affordable early years and child care services across all parts of Ontario.

REDUCING ADMINISTRATIVE & REPORTING BURDENS

- OMSSA applauds the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for their initiative to reduce the reporting burden for municipalities in all areas. OMSSA is also pleased to contribute to work being done in human services integration and social services modernization.
- To reduce administrative and reporting burdens in early years and child care, OMSSA suggests that the Province consider funding simplicity and flexibility, by streamlining child care and early years funding into a single envelope.
- OMSSA members support reducing duplication in data reporting, aligning federal and provincial reporting and ensuring the same data is being requested across programs, with consistent definitions, language, and reporting methods.
- OMSSA and its members encourage the Province to develop an Ontario-wide system for all data reporting across human services programs.
- Streamlined funding and reporting is more efficient, reduces administrative waste, and saves money.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PROVINCE

- Multi-level partnerships (between the Province, Service System Managers, service providers and families) are key to an effective early years and child care system. The system today is strong because of the collaboration that has taken place between the Province, system service managers and providers.
- As key partners in administration, funding and delivery, Service System Managers welcome the opportunity to be engaged and leveraged at all stages of policy design and development as the Province works towards modernizing and improving child care and early years services in Ontario.
- OMSSA and its members are ready and able to work in partnership with the Province to lend our expertise and experience on the province's new child care plan. OMSSA appreciates our strong working relationship with the Province. Together with our members, we look forward to consulting, supporting and implementing the Province's new child care plan for Ontario.