Ministry of Education

Ontario Child Care and Early Years Funding Guidelines

for Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Services Administration Boards

Chapter 6: EarlyON Guideline

JULY 2026

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PART 1: EARLYON CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES

1.A. OVERVIEW

EarlyON Child and Family Centres (EarlyON) offer high-quality, free drop-in and pre-registered programs for children 0 to 6 and their families. They provide welcoming environments where children, families and caregivers can learn, grow and connect together. EarlyON programs and services are offered through a variety of service delivery methods to meet the unique needs of families in their communities, including mobile, virtual and outdoor programs as well as phone services.

EarlyON programs are supported by:

- A legislative framework that recognizes the role of Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs);
- Investments in EarlyON Child and Family Centres;
- Early Years Accommodations in Schools: Reference Guide (2018)
- The *Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023*; and
- A provincial pedagogy for the early years to guide service providers and educators: *How Does Learning Happen, Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* (HDLH).

CMSMs/DSSABs are responsible for the local management of EarlyON Child and Family Centres as part of their responsibility for the service system management of child care and other human services.

1.B. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

It is expected that CMSMs/DSSABs, school boards and local service providers will be guided by the following principles when developing, delivering, and evaluating EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs and services:

Child & Family Centres:	All programs and services are designed and delivered to meet the unique needs of parents/guardians, caregivers and young children to support their learning, development and well-being.

Welcoming:	EarlyON Child and Family Centres provide a warm and welcoming environment based on the foundational conditions for supporting growth and long-term success (belonging, well-being, engagement and expression). See below for more information on HLDH.
High Quality:	Programs and services are designed to support positive experiences and outcomes and foster nurturing relationships between children, parents/guardians and caregivers, and are based on the latest evidence and research.
Inclusive:	Programs and services are accessible and responsive to children, parents/guardians and caregivers with varying abilities and cultural, language, socio-economic, sexual orientation and religious backgrounds.
Integrated:	Programs and services are developed, coordinated, and delivered in a cohesive manner in collaboration with broader community services, school boards, early years partners, primary care providers, parents/guardians, and caregivers.
Community Led:	Communities, educators, parents/guardians, and caregivers are engaged in designing EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs and services that embrace and build on their strengths, address identified gaps and meet their unique needs on an ongoing basis.

1.C OBJECTIVES

EarlyON Child and Family Centres must be designed and delivered to achieve the following key goals and objectives:

- Children have access to play and inquiry-based learning opportunities alongside their parents/guardians and caregivers and experience positive developmental health and well-being. This could include play and inquiry-based experiences in the EarlyON program where children 0 to 6 years engage with older siblings on school closure days, evenings or weekends.

- Parents/guardians and caregivers have access to high-quality services that support them in their role as their children's first educators, enhance their well-being, and enrich their knowledge about early learning and development.
- Parents/guardians and caregivers have opportunities to strengthen their relationships with their children through play.
- Services and supports are responsive to community needs. Francophone children and families have access to French-language programs and gain enhanced knowledge about language and identity acquisition.
- Indigenous children and families have access to culturally responsive programs and services.
- Parents/guardians and caregivers are provided with timely, relevant and up to date information about community and specialized services.

1.D PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR EARLYON CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES

EarlyON programs must reflect the view of children, parents/guardians, caregivers and educators as competent, capable, curious and rich in potential and experience. Guided by *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* (HDLH), EarlyON Child and Family Centres provide an environment that engages parents/guardians and caregivers as co-learners and leaders in influencing positive experiences and outcomes for children, families and the community.

CMSMs/DSSABs, local service providers and school boards offering EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs and services are required to apply the principles in HDLH to guide the development and delivery of programs. HDLH supports the adoption of cohesive pedagogical approaches across early years settings, based on the four foundations for learning: belonging, well-being, engagement and expression. The following documents are available to help strengthen program quality in early years settings including EarlyON Child and Family Centres:

- *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*
- *Think, Feel Act: Lessons from Research about Young Children*

1.E BRANDING AND DIGITAL TOOL

Branding

EarlyON branding and signage builds on efforts to increase public awareness of EarlyON Child and Family Centres. CMSMs/DSSABs and EarlyON agencies have the ability to produce these products locally and can produce EarlyON signage (including promotional materials) for their communities by utilizing EarlyON funding to cover the costs.

EarlyON signage must be produced in alignment with the ministry's Visual Identity Guideline. Brand assets (such as logos) and templates are available for download through the Dropbox website.

CMSMs/DSSABs are required to submit mock-ups of customized signage to the ministry for approval, prior to production and may contact the ministry at EarlyON@ontario.ca for assistance with EarlyON branding and signage.

New Child Care and Early Years Digital Tool

As referenced in Chapter 1, Division 2, the ministry is introducing a new provincial child care and early years digital tool where parents/guardians and caregivers can easily access information on EarlyON programs and services.

It is important that CMSMs/DSSABs and EarlyON service providers make timely updates to reflect the current status of site locations and programs to ensure parents/guardians and caregivers have access to the most up to date information through the child care and early years digital tool.

CMSMs/DSSABs are to include requirements to use the child care and early years digital tool and to keep information up to date in their Service Agreements with all EarlyON service providers.

CMSMs/DSSABs and EarlyON service providers can contact the ministry at ITModernization@ontario.ca for assistance with the child care and early years digital tool.

PART 2: EARLYON FUNDING APPROACH

2.A ALLOCATIONS AND EXPENSES

CMSMs/DSSABs have flexibility to spend EarlyON allocations on any of the expense/program categories to meet the provincial requirements to deliver mandatory core services and customized community connections for EarlyON Child and Family Centres. Please note there is a maximum expenditure requirement for Administration, and a minimum expenditure requirement for Child Care and Early Years Planning and Data Analysis Services.

Additional details regarding all the expense categories are outlined in Part 5 of this guideline chapter.

For EFIS financial and service data reporting requirements, please refer to Chapter 7: EFIS Reporting Requirements for more information.

2.B MUNICIPAL CONTRIBUTIONS

EarlyON Child and Family Centres are funded through contributions made by the Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada. CMSMs/DSSABs are encouraged to maintain or consider making municipal contributions to enhance programs and services and support integration with other human and early years programs and services, where appropriate. Any municipal contributions made by CMSMs/DSSABs must be reported to the ministry through financial reporting.

PART 3: FRAMEWORK FOR EARLYON CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES

3.A MANDATORY CORE SERVICES

To achieve the intended goals and outcomes of EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs, the ministry has identified a suite of mandatory core services that must be available to children and families across the province. CMSMs/DSSABs are required to plan and oversee the local delivery of these core services related to:

- Supporting early learning and development,
- Engaging parents/guardians and caregivers, and
- Making connections for families.

CMSMs/DSSABs can choose to directly operate EarlyON Child and Family Centres or enter into a Service Agreement with publicly funded school boards or non-profit local service providers. All CMSMs/DSSABs, EarlyON service providers and EarlyON Child and Family Centre sites must use the new, provincial child care and early years digital tool for all functions related to EarlyON program delivery and service management once the EarlyON module of the new child care and early years digital tool is implemented in each CMSM's/DSSAB's respective region. CMSMs/DSSABs are to include requirements to use the new digital tool and to keep information up to date in their Service Agreements with all EarlyON service providers.

CMSMs/DSSABs must prioritize EarlyON Child and Family Centre funding to ensure the provision of consistent, high-quality core services at no fee to participants.

Supporting Early Learning and Development

EarlyON Child and Family Centres must offer drop-in programs and other programs and services that promote responsive adult-child relationships, encourage children's exploration, play and inquiry, based on the pedagogy in HDLH.

Early learning and development programs are most effective when the context for learning is foregrounded in relationships and focused on supporting the development of strategies, dispositions, and skills for lifelong learning through play and inquiry.

Engaging Parents/Guardians and Caregivers

EarlyON Child and Family Centres must actively work to engage with parents/guardians and caregivers. This includes:

- Inviting conversations and information sharing about their children’s interests, child development, parenting, nutrition, play and inquiry-based learning, and other topics that support their relationship with their children.
- Providing targeted outreach opportunities that are responsive to community needs.
- Collaborating with other support programs to enhance parent/guardian and caregiver well-being, enrich adult-child relationships, and to support parents/guardians and caregivers in their role(s).
- Providing information, support, and resources to assist parents/guardians and caregivers with the child care and early years digital tool.

As noted above, parent/guardian and caregiver engagement may take place in a variety of formats depending on the needs of individuals within the community. Engagement may include group discussions, informal one-on-one engagement, printed and electronic resources or other engagement opportunities as appropriate.

Making Connections for Families

EarlyON Child and Family Centres must continuously look for opportunities to facilitate stronger relationships within their local community and assist parents/guardians and caregivers in accessing services and supports that respond to a family’s unique needs. This includes:

- Ensuring EarlyON staff have relationships with community partners and an in-depth knowledge of community resources to allow for seamless transitions for families who may benefit from access to specialized or other services.
- Responding to a parent/guardian and caregiver concern about their child’s development through conversations and observations. In some cases, staff may direct parents/guardians and caregivers to seek additional supports from primary care or other regulated health professionals.

- Sharing information and facilitating connections with specialized community services (such as children's rehabilitation services; gender-based violence support for families), coordinated service planning, public health, education, child care, and child welfare, as appropriate.
- Early Identification and connecting parents/guardians and caregivers to specialized services and resources (such as Smart Start Hubs).
- Providing information about programs and services available for the whole family beyond the early years.

Informed by their local service planning process, CMSMs/DSSABs have the flexibility to determine how these services are delivered, the design and development of programs to meet core services, and who will deliver EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs and services.

3.B SERVICE DELIVERY METHODS

CMSMs/DSSABs have the flexibility to offer EarlyON programs and services through a variety of service delivery methods. CMSMs/DSSABs are required to establish mandatory centres and are expected to leverage other service delivery options to meet the unique needs of families in their service areas. This may include providing outdoor, mobile, phone, or virtual programs and services. The ministry strongly encourages providing families with multiple avenues to access EarlyON programs.

EarlyON programs and services are intended to be community-based (including schools, community buildings/spaces, and common areas within residential areas and natural outdoor spaces) and must never be offered within individual homes.

Schools-Based Approach

Schools provide an environment where services can be co-located and integrated for seamless access by families within neighbourhoods. Co-location provides many benefits for families, including reducing transitions, building stronger connections between children, families, and early years/school professionals, and supporting a continuum of learning through a consistent approach to early years pedagogy.

The ministry encourages the use of a schools-based approach in alignment with other child care and early years initiatives, where possible. This includes locating EarlyON Child and Family Centres within schools. Details can be found in the Early Years Accommodations in Schools: Reference Guide.

Mandatory Centres

Mandatory Centres are physical program sites where children, parents/guardians and caregivers can participate in-person. Centres may be located within schools or community buildings or may be stand-alone sites. CMSMs/DSSABs must offer centre-based core services year-round and at least five days per week, including either Saturday or Sunday. This requirement may be met by offering the core services in different centres on different days of the week.

CMSMs/DSSABs may choose to have several centres within their service areas, operating at different times and on different days of the week. CMSMs/DSSABs may also consider offering evening services to expand access. However, this is not mandatory and should be based on identified community needs.

Optional Service Delivery Methods

Mobile Services

CMSMs/DSSABs can offer programs and services outside of centres to further integrate EarlyON Centres with broader community services and to enhance service access (for example, mobile programs for residents living in high-density areas, weekly programs in libraries in rural communities). Mobile programs often involve "set-up and take-down" and operate in a shared space.

Mobile services may have regular or irregular days, times, and locations of operation. CMSMs/DSSABs and service providers must establish an appropriate mechanism to communicate information about these services and their locations, dates and times of operations.

CMSMs/DSSABs may also consider coordinating transportation options to increase program accessibility where necessary and feasible.

Outdoor Programs

As stated in HDLH, children thrive in programs where they can engage in vigorous physical play in natural outdoor spaces and playgrounds that present manageable levels of challenge. While these environments need to be safe, it is also important to provide children with opportunities for a reasonable degree of risk taking. CMSMs/DSSABs are encouraged to offer EarlyON programs in natural outdoor settings, such as a community park, and discuss the benefits of outdoor play with parents/guardians and caregivers.

Outdoor programs may have regular or irregular days, times, and locations of operation. CMSMs/DSSABs and service providers must establish an appropriate mechanism to communicate information about these programs and their locations, dates and times of operations, including cancellations/rescheduling due to inclement weather.

Virtual Programs, Services and Resources

Virtual EarlyON programs have become a key service delivery option for families accessing early years supports. CMSMs/DSSABs are encouraged to continue providing virtual programs, services, resources, and information to support the diverse needs of families.

CMSMs/DSSABs are encouraged to work with service providers to ensure that best practices are being followed when hosting a virtual program. The list below provides helpful tips for securing a virtual session and ways to exercise caution when facilitating these sessions. Please note that this list is not exhaustive and may not apply to all online platforms.

Tips include:

- Offer pre-registration for virtual programs;
- If applicable in the application, turn on pre-meeting setting features (for example, view and admit participants, remove participants, turn on virtual waiting room);
- Disable user-controlled features (such as chat box, file share, screen sharing);
- Provide a password for each meeting session; and,
- Limit the re-use of access codes.

Local Phone Lines

Information about EarlyON Centres' programs and services, including about child development, parenting supports and play and inquiry-based learning, can be embedded in existing community phone-based information services (such as 211 or 311).

3.C CUSTOMIZED COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Community Partnerships to Support Core Service Delivery

The ministry recognizes the importance of integrating EarlyON Child and Family Centres within the broader context of local community services (such as child care, public health, employment and training programs, recreation programs, public libraries, schools, and specialized services), to meet its core service requirements. Joint community-based planning supports greater integration resulting in easier access and better client experiences.

Leveraging Partnerships to Create Customized Community Connections

For EarlyON Child and Family Centres to be effective, supports for parents/guardians and caregivers related to early learning and development must be developed with an understanding of the unique characteristics, needs and priorities of the community that is being served.

CMSMs/DSSABs may identify a specific priority or need in a given neighborhood, community or service area. In such cases, CMSMs/DSSABs may wish to leverage and further develop the partnerships that EarlyON Child and Family Centres have with different community services to develop specific strategies or targeted approaches to support this identified priority.

For example, in a community that has many newcomers to Canada, an EarlyON Child and Family Centre may wish to work more closely with settlement services to coordinate services for such families. This may include hosting a series of information sessions that relate to newcomers at the EarlyON Child and Family Centre (such as housing, employment, education) or using the EarlyON Child and Family Centre as a hub to access other programs (such as language classes).

Customized community connections should only be considered once the EarlyON Child and Family Centre core service expectations are being met on a regular and consistent basis.

Child Minding

EarlyON Child and Family Centres may offer child minding services during parent/guardian and caregiver programs or to allow parents/guardians and caregivers to access other community services (such as postpartum depression support programs, employment and training services), provided that parents/guardians and caregivers remain onsite in accordance with requirements under the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* (CCEYA).

Respite Child Care

Respite child care is intended to support parents/guardians who require emergency short- term or occasional care for their children. CMSMs/DSSABs have the option of working with service providers to offer respite child care, as a customized community connection, in EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

CMSMs/DSSABs funding respite care using their EarlyON allocations determine which locations would offer this service. CMSMs/DSSABs should work with EarlyON centres to determine the prioritization of respite child care for families in their communities.

If provincial EarlyON funding is insufficient to cover all expenses related to respite child care, CMSMs/DSSABs may work with EarlyON centres to establish fees for respite care or find alternative funding sources to help cover the costs of delivering this service. Where a fee is charged, respite child care must be offered as a not-for-profit, full-cost-recovery program.

Respite child care should only be considered once the EarlyON Centre core service expectations are being met on a regular and consistent basis in a community.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres that provide respite child care must comply with legislative and regulatory requirements for unlicensed child care included in the CCEYA:

- Providing care for no more than 5 children at any one time (section 6 (3) 2 of the CCEYA);
- The group of children must not include more than three children who are younger than two years old (section 6 (3) 2 of CCEYA)*;*
- Child care can only be provided at one premises per corporation (section 7 of the CCYEA);

- EarlyON Centres must disclose to parents/guardians that they are unlicensed and retain a record of that disclosure (section 12 of the CCEYA);
- Providing receipts for payment, when requested (section 15 of the CCEYA);
- Parents/guardians must not be prevented from accessing their children or the premises where child care is provided (with limited exceptions listed in section 10 (1) and 10 (2) of the CCEYA); and
- Providers must not have been convicted of an offence identified in section 9 of the CCEYA or have had their authority to practice restricted by the College of Early Childhood Educators, the Ontario College of Teachers or the College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (section 9 of the CCEYA).

In addition, EarlyON providers must disclose to parents/guardians and caregivers that children may be on the premises with parents/guardians and caregivers who have not submitted a Vulnerable Sector Check.

Under section 30 (1) of the CCEYA, the ministry has the authority to enter and inspect a premise where it suspects on reasonable grounds that child care is provided.

CMSMs/DSSABs are responsible for ensuring that up-to-date records of the name and addresses of EarlyON locations providing respite child care are reported to the ministry. Updates should be sent to EarlyON@ontario.ca.

3.D REGISTERED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR (RECE) STAFF REQUIREMENT

Programs in EarlyON Child and Family Centres should be designed to foster positive outcomes and support nurturing relationships for children, parents/guardians and caregivers based on the latest evidence and research. RECEs play a critical role in delivering early years programs and have specialized knowledge and expertise related to child development as well as play and inquiry-based learning that is essential to delivering high-quality early years programs and services, such as drop-in programs in EarlyON Centres.

CMSMs/DSSABs are required to ensure that mandatory core services related to supporting early learning and development at every EarlyON Child and Family Centre are overseen by an RECE in good standing with the College of Early Childhood Educators. The ministry recommends RECE qualifications for all staff delivering services related to early learning and development.

Aligned with the other mandatory core services, CMSMs/DSSABs have the flexibility to determine if additional staff with specialized skill sets may be responsive to community needs. It is expected that staff will engage in continuous professional learning opportunities to keep informed of the latest research on adult education, child development, play and inquiry-based pedagogy, and other relevant topics.

RECE Staffing Considerations

EarlyON Child and Family Centres must employ at least one RECE at every centre. In recognition of the current RECE shortage, CMSMs/DSSABs have the discretion to approve an employee who is not a RECE in place of an RECE where an EarlyON Child and Family Centre has tried but is unable to recruit at least one RECE to oversee mandatory core services related to supporting early learning and development. This provision does not apply to persons that:

- Have been members of the College of Early Childhood Educators in the past, but have resigned or had their membership suspended, cancelled or revoked, or who have let their membership lapse.
- Have satisfied the educational requirements to be registered as members of the College of Early Childhood Educators but have not become members.

In determining whether to grant approval for a non-RECE employee, the CMSM/DSSAB should consider the proposed candidates' experience and expertise including previous experience in child and family programs or membership in another relevant regulated profession (such as social work or nursing).

It is expected that these non-RECE staff would also engage in continuous professional learning opportunities to keep informed of the latest research on adult education, child development, play and inquiry-based pedagogy, and other relevant topics.

CMSMs/DSSABs must review the conditions for these approvals for non-RECE staff on an annual basis to monitor compliance with this requirement, identify challenges and develop strategies to support service providers in meeting the RECE staffing expectations. This may include transition planning, ensuring capacity to deliver core services related to early learning and development, and human resource approaches (such as recruitment and staffing strategies, qualifications upgrading).

CMSMs/DSSABs and EarlyON service providers must use the new, provincial child care and early years digital tool to complete this process once the new digital tool is available in their respective regions.

CMSMs/DSSABs must document the reasons for granting approvals for non-RECE staff and will be required to report the number of service providers and number of staff that have been approved an exemption through financial reporting.

Legacy Provision

CMSMs/DSSABs may also grant an exemption from the RECE requirement for EarlyON Child and Family Centres employing a staff person to oversee mandatory core services who is not a RECE but who has at least 10 years of experience working in a child and family program setting as of January 1, 2019. This provision is intended to support the retention of long- tenured child and family program staff in their positions, including the rehiring of staff who have recently left their position, but where that position has not yet been filled.

In order to qualify under this legacy provision, a staff person must have been employed for a total of 10 or more years, as of January 1, 2019, in one or more of the following child and family programs:

- Ontario Early Years Centres
- Parenting and Family Literacy Centres
- Child Care Resource Centres
- Better Beginnings, Better Futures.

This provision does not apply to persons that:

- Have been members of the College of Early Childhood Educators in the past, but have resigned or had their membership suspended, cancelled or revoked, or who have let their membership lapse.
- Have satisfied the educational requirements to be registered as members of the College of Early Childhood Educators but have not become members.

In addition, this provision does not apply to new hiring for positions that will oversee the delivery of mandatory core services related to supporting early learning and development. For any new hiring for such positions, EarlyON Child and Family Centres are required to recruit a RECE. Where they are unable to do so, the CMSM/DSSAB may grant approval for staff as described above.

CMSMs/DSSABs will be required to report the number of service providers and number of staff that have been provided an exemption or qualify under the legacy provision through financial reporting.

3.E ADDITIONAL EARLYON CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRE REQUIREMENTS

CMSMs/DSSABs must ensure that appropriate policies and procedures are in place to ensure that EarlyON Centre programs and services are delivered in a way that promotes the health, safety and well-being of children and families being served. This includes ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for service providers regarding:

- Vulnerable Sector Checks
- First Aid
- Emergency Plans
- Sanitation and maintenance
- Workplace health and safety relating to staff
- Complaints and resolutions processes
- Reporting serious incidents to the CMSM/DSSAB (using the child care and early years digital tool, once it is available) and processes for determining the appropriate response is required.

Where an incident has occurred that may result in media attention, CMSMs/DSSABs are required to report this to the ministry at EarlyON@ontario.ca until the new child care and early years digital tool is made available in their region, at which point CMSMs/DSSABs are to use the new digital tool for this purpose.

Duty to Report

Under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*, everyone, including members of the public and professionals who work closely with children, is required by law to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. Anyone with reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection must report it to a children's aid society.

More information on the duty to report, what happens when a report is made and how to recognize signs of abuse and neglect can be found here.

PART 4: EARLYON CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES – SUPPORTING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The following details programs, services and networks that support the delivery of EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs in communities across Ontario.

4.A RÉSEAUX INTERAGIR (formerly REGIONAL FRENCH LANGUAGE NETWORKS)

French Language school boards and early years and child care service providers offering services in French are members of Réseaux Interagir that:

- Network with other Francophone organizations/professionals sharing resources and policies;
- Collaborate on French professional learning; and
- Collaborate with other organizations offering services in French so that providers can make connections for families towards services in French.

The intent of these groups is to:

- Strengthen partnerships between French language service providers, school boards and CMSMs/DSSABs to support the provision of high-quality early years and child care French-language services across the province;
- Identify emerging and established promising practices related to the delivery of early years and child care French-language services in minority and majority language settings; and
- Identify service gaps and work within local early years and child care community planning processes to address them through innovative solutions.

For more information regarding Réseaux Interagir, please contact the ministry: https://efis.fma.csc.gov.on.ca/faab/Contact_Us.htm.

4.B PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR THE FRANCOPHONE AND INDIGENOUS SECTORS

Through the Canada-Ontario Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, the ministry is investing $1.5M to support professional learning opportunities for Francophone and Indigenous early years professionals. These opportunities are designed to better meet their needs through more targeted, differentiated cultural and regional approaches.

Funds aim to enhance culturally relevant programs and the delivery of high-quality child care and early years programs, in alignment with *How Does Learning Happen?*, which will help promote Francophone and Indigenous cultures in Ontario and also create linkages to or develop professional learning resources that are responsive to the needs of the sector.

PART 5: EARLYON CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES – ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

5.A OPERATING: MANDATORY CORE SERVICES AND CUSTOMIZED COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS EXPENSE

Purpose

To support the costs of operating a system of EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

Most EarlyON funding should fall under this expense category and prioritize the delivery of EarlyON Child and Family Centres and their programs to ensure that funds are focused on serving the needs of children and their families.

Priorities

CMSMs/DSSABs will use the following principles to inform EarlyON Centre operating funding priorities while balancing local needs:

- Stabilize and transform programs so that they are inclusive and responsive to local needs;
- Increase access and consistency of programs and services;
- Align with the Schools-Based approach and supporting the implementation of the Early Years Capital Program;
- Support programs that serve Indigenous and Francophone children; and
- Co-locate with other early years or community programs.

CMSMs/DSSABs may choose to offer not-for-profit full-cost-recovery programs that meet an identified need in their service area (such as infant massage session offered by specialized professionals). These services should only be considered once the EarlyON Child and Family Centre core service expectations are being met on a regular and consistent basis.

Eligibility

Funding may be provided to non-profit service providers, publicly funded school boards or municipalities who offer EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs and services and meet the requirements set out in this guideline.

CMSMs/DSSABs must prioritize funding to deliver mandatory core services that are responsive to local needs. Funding may be used for ongoing costs, including:

- Funding to support salary and benefit expenditures for staff to deliver core services.
- Hiring or acquiring the services of a special needs resource consultant to support the delivery of core services to children with special needs and their families/caregivers, specifically making connections for families to specialized services (such as screening, early intervention, resources and supports).
- Lease and occupancy costs, rental fees for mobile services and other operating costs such as utilities (including closed-end leases of a vehicle to support the delivery of programs where funding does not support transfer of ownership or purchase of a vehicle during or at the end of the lease).
- Service provider administration costs.
- Light meals or snacks for program participants.
- IT costs to support the delivery of virtual programs (such as annual web-based account fees; additional costs related to security features for web-based programs).
- IT costs to support the ongoing use of the new child care and early years digital tool (such as minor hardware purchases), once it is available in their region.
- Branding and marketing costs, such as signage and promotional materials.
- Transportation services to support outreach and participation in programs (including costs for public transit, gas, and general auto repair and maintenance).

- Resources for families and caregivers related to early learning and development (such as materials for inquiry-based play), additional community services and supports, or information to support parents/guardians and caregivers in their role.

- Supplies to support the delivery and daily operation of programs as well as maintenance costs related to the general upkeep, safety, and maintenance of EarlyON Child and Family Centre facilities.

- Operating costs for service providers that are involved in transformation activities or require business transformation supports, such as integrating, sun-setting, establishing or relocating centres (such as legal fees or costs for lease termination, moving, business planning, recruitment and onboarding of new staff, or staffing transitions).

For clarity, funding cannot be used to support direct specialized services. This includes programs and services offered by regulated health professionals working within their scope of practice (for example, occupational therapy, audiology and speech language pathology, physiotherapy). This includes early intervention and screening programs and services that are funded by other ministries or other orders of government. Service providers may direct parents/guardians and caregivers to:

- The Early Years Check-In developmental screening tool or other free screening tools to assess their child's developmental status;

- The Play & Learn website for suggested activities to support children's development;

- Speak with early years professionals, Resource Consultants or healthcare providers about their concerns; or

- Visit a SmartStart Hub at a Children's Treatment Centre.

Additionally, the following expenses are not eligible:

- Bonuses (including retiring bonuses), gifts and honoraria paid to staff, unless they are provided as a retroactive wage increase that will be maintained the following year or an Indigenous elder honoraria.

- Financing costs including principal and interest payments related to capital loans, mortgage financing, or operating loans;

- Property taxes;
- Fees paid on behalf of staff for membership in professional organizations such as the College of Early Childhood Educators.

Reporting Requirements

CMSMs/DSSABs are required to report the following expenditures:

- Total core service delivery and customized community connections funding allocated to service providers (including virtual programs); and
- Total core service delivery and customized community connections expenditures on salaries and benefits, lease and utilities, and other.

5.B PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND CAPACITY BUILDING EXPENSE

Purpose

To support professional learning and development opportunities that builds the capacity of staff and non-profit volunteer board members to provide high-quality, inclusive EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs and services.

Priorities

Capacity building funding must be prioritized by CMSMs/DSSABs to be locally responsive to children and families in communities and for service providers that:

- Require support in improving quality or aligning programming with HDLH;
- Have limited access to professional learning;
- Have limited capacity in business administration; or
- Serve Francophone or Indigenous children and families.

CMSMs/DSSABs should prioritize funding to support professional learning opportunities where their existing capacity does not meet service-area demand.

CMSMs/DSSABs may wish to build on or complement existing capacity building initiatives in their communities to implement professional learning strategies for EarlyON program staff and supervisors as outlined in Chapter 3: Local Priorities Guideline.

Eligibility

Funding may be provided to EarlyON Child and Family Centres to engage in professional learning and development. Funding may also be provided to non-profit organizations or post- secondary institutions to develop or deliver early years professional learning and development for EarlyON staff.

Funding may support:

- Program-related professional learning opportunities related to:
    - Implementing and practicing pedagogical approaches described in HDLH; or
    - Reflective practice and collaborative inquiry.
- Professional learning and development opportunities for EarlyON staff related to core service delivery and well-being of children and families, such as:
    - healthy child development;
    - pre- and post-natal care;
    - adult and parent/guardian education;
    - diversity and inclusion;
    - community development and outreach; or
    - cultural competency.
- Capacity building of EarlyON staff to ensure core services support the inclusion of children with special needs and their families (such as through the support of an SNR consultant).
- Establishing communities of practices to support EarlyON staff.
- EarlyON business administration (such as program management, human resources, budgeting, leadership, policy development).

Note: While capacity building funding is intended to support EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs, partnerships with other community organizations and initiatives are encouraged to promote inter-professional learning opportunities.

Reporting

Please refer to Chapter 7: EFIS Reporting Requirements for more information.

5.C ADMINISTRATION EXPENSES

Purpose

To support administrative costs incurred by CMSMs/DSSABs for the local management of EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

Eligibility

CMSMs/DSSABs may use up to 10% of their total EarlyON allocation for administration costs that represent actual expenses incurred for program administration and may not be expressed solely in terms of a percentage of program expenditures.

CMSMs/DSSABs have the flexibility to use EarlyON administration funding to support child care general administration expenditures. This flexibility is available where EarlyON administration funding has not been fully utilized for EarlyON expenditures (that is, EarlyON, including for administration or EarlyON program services).

Eligible expenses include:

- Payment of gross salaries and wages, vacation pay, sick pay, compassionate pay, overtime and statutory holiday pay for staff involved in managing the EarlyON Child and Family Centre system and support staff.
    - This may include total gross salary and wage payments to all full-time, part-time, temporary, relief and staff on paid leave of absence. Total salaries equal gross pay, including overtime, paid vacation, paid sick leave, and statutory holidays. The employer's share of employee benefits can be included when calculating benefit costs.
- Employer contributions to pensions (including CPP), employment insurance, workers' compensation (WSIB insurance), employee benefit plans, and other legal requirements of the employer.
- Purchased professional services that are not client related, including those for which the CMSM/DSSAB itself does not employ staff (such as fees for administrative or corporate legal work, audit or bookkeeping fees).

- Reasonable costs to a maximum of fair market value for accommodation required for the management of the EarlyON system and related administration. Fair market value for purchased accommodation is defined as the probable estimated dollar price of the property if that property were exposed for sale in the open market by a willing seller, and allowing a reasonable time for a willing buyer. A fair market value estimate must be accompanied by an indication of the exposure time linked to the value estimate. Exposure time is the estimated length of time the property would have been for sale on the open market before a hypothetical purchase at market value. Exposure time precedes the effective date of the value estimate and is based upon past market trends as they affect the type of real property under consideration. This definition of fair market value must also be applied to rented accommodations, whereby the estimated dollar amount is a rental price, and the willing parties are the owner and the tenant. In the case of owned buildings, the eligible annual cost will be based on fair market value of rent or imputed rent.

- Reimbursement of staff costs for travel required to carry out the management of the delivery and administration of EarlyON Child and Family Centres. Travel costs in Ontario that are associated with attendance at meetings relevant to EarlyON Child and Family Centre service delivery. CMSMs/DSSABs are to refer to the Ontario Public Service Travel Directive.

- Staff development and educational opportunities which assist in the management and administration of the EarlyON system, including travel, accommodation and costs associated with educational conferences or seminars within Ontario or Quebec.

- Computer hardware, general office software, network access charges, operating costs, general operating system enhancements, general office software updates, computer supplies and maintenance.

Costs associated with the following items may be required to support the management of the EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs and services:

- Telephone, internet, fax (may include rentals, regular charges, long distance)

- Postage and courier

- Office supplies (may include stationery, forms, maps, books, periodicals)

- Printing (may include production, translation, printing, and other costs)

- Photocopier rental and services
- Insurance payments (fidelity, fire, public liability, theft, other), including bonding and liability insurance for staff
- Office equipment and maintenance
- Building maintenance (may include janitorial, cleaning, and minor repairs)
- Bank transaction charges
- Collection and bad debt costs (may include court fees, credit bureau)
- Advertising and marketing (job postings, newsletters)
- Research, consultation, and professional services
- Moving and relocation
- Security
- Records Management
- Minor miscellaneous expenses

For clarity, expenses that do not directly support the management of the EarlyON Child and Family Centre system are not eligible, including:

- Interest expenses incurred on capital or operating loans
- Professional organization fees paid on behalf of staff for membership in professional organizations
- Property tax
- Fundraising expenses
- Donations to charitable institutions or organizations
- Bonuses, gifts and honoraria
- Financing costs
- Reserve Funds
- Development or purchase of quality assurance tools.

Any eligible expenditure exceeding the Administration Maximum Allowable Expenditure (10% of the total EarlyON Child and Family Centre allocation) must be funded with municipal contributions, or the ministry will recover the overspent funds.

Reporting Requirements

Please refer to Chapter 7: EFIS Reporting Requirements for more information.

5.D EARLY YEARS PLANNING AND DATA ANALYSIS SERVICES EXPENSE

Service System Planning

CMSMs/DSSABs are the designated service system managers responsible for planning and managing licensed child care services and early years programs at the local level.

CMSMs/DSSABs must develop service plans reflective of provincial interests set out in the CCEYA.

Service planning should be done in the context of the full range of coordinated early years and care services for children and families. This planning includes engaging and consulting with children and families, service providers, school boards, and community agencies in order to deliver and implement a Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan. CMSMs/DSSABs should also use the data available from the new child care and early years digital tool to help inform service planning, once it is available in their region.

CMSMs/DSSABs are required to develop or revise service system plans to address requirements as set out in the legislation, regulations, and provincial policy. Service system plans must be approved by the council of the municipality or by the members of a DSSAB. Service plans, including plans for directed growth under CWELCC, should be posted in an area easily accessible to the public.

Additionally, *Ontario's Access and Inclusion Framework, 2023,* may be referenced to support CMSMs/DSSABs in developing and implementing local service plans with an increased focus on access and inclusion. System planning should support access to services for lower-income families, vulnerable children, children from racialized communities, children with special needs, Francophone, Black and Indigenous children.

The ministry is continuing to provide dedicated funding to support meaningful community planning processes that inform service system planning decisions.

Purpose

To support CMSMs/DSSABs in service system planning and data analysis activities.

- Ensure child care and early years services are responsive to the needs of children and their families.
- Ensure that local early years programs and services are reflective of relevant, current research and evidence.
- Lead local knowledge mobilization and act as a resource in the community related to early years research and data, including the Early Development Instrument (EDI) and related community measures.
- The Ministry expects CMSM/DSSABs will use data available from the new child care and early years digital tool to support their data analysis activities, once it is available in their region.

Priorities

- Ensure the active engagement of Indigenous and Francophone partners in the planning, management and delivery of responsive programs and services.
- Facilitating smooth transitions and seamless care for children and families.
- Solicit advice and support local coordination and planning to enhance integration between early years services, schools, and specialized community services.
- Increasing access to address unmet demand for child care and early years services.

Minimum Expenditure Requirement

CMSMs/DSSABs are required to spend a minimum amount of their total EarlyON Child and Family Centre allocation on Child Care and Early Years Planning and Data Analysis Services, recognizing the importance of evidence-informed decision making.

This minimum expenditure amount is set out in the budget schedule for EarlyON Child and Family Centres. Where a CMSM/DSSAB does not meet the minimum spending requirement, the ministry will recover unspent funds.

Eligibility

Funding may be used to:

- Regularly engage in discussions to collect insights from community partners, parents/guardians and caregivers, and children to inform local programs and services.
- Support local planning groups in coordination and planning activities, raise awareness, and share information and research.
- Ensure collection and retention of key local historical data on early years and, where appropriate, incorporate these data into early years planning.
- Employ staff to support policy development for local child care and early years service system plans.
- Build capacity, awareness and understanding of early years research among community partners and promote use of research and evaluation findings in evidence- informed decision-making.

Reporting Requirements

Please refer to Chapter 7: EFIS Reporting Requirements for more information.