

Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) System Priority Areas for Directed Growth 2023-2026

Introduction

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) System has an ambitious goal to add an additional 53,000 licensed child care spaces in Ontario between the years 2023 and 2026. This goal is directly related to Ontario's target to increase the access rate to licensed child care for children age 0-5 to 37% by 2026. This equates to one affordable child care space for every 2.7 children aged 0-5 in Ontario.

The Ministry of Education has provided the City of Stratford, as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County, with a CWELCC space allocation target, which requires the City of Stratford to determine priority areas for the creation of new licensed child care spaces to be enrolled into the CWELCC System.

CWELCC Space Allocation for City of Stratford

The CWELCC space allocation for the City of Stratford, shown in Table 1, is 461 spaces for children age 0-5 from 2023 to 2026, with 100% of those spaces designated to be operated by not-for-profit child care organizations. 137 of those will be spaces located in schools and 324 of those spaces will be community-based.

Within the allocation, the City of Stratford has projected that up to 150 spaces will be realized through its home child care locations. The City of Stratford will be the lead agency responsible for planning for, and delivering, licensed home child care through its directly operated licensed home child care agency as it has the enhanced resources internally to ensure the project is delivered at a high service level standard. An additional 235 spaces have been committed to previously approved licensed child care expansions. This leaves the opportunity for at least 76 licensed centre-based child care spaces to be realized to meet the provincial target.

Table 1: Ministry of Education targets for Stratford (March 31, 2025 memo):

| | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 | Total |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| School-based | 49 | 88 | 0 | 137 |
| Community-based | 0 | 120 | 204 | 324 |
| Total | 49 | 208 | 204 | 461 |

Current Licensed Child Care Access Rates and Population

Supporting access to full-time licensed child care for children age 0-4, prior to school entry, is recognized as critical to supporting workforce participation. The current licensed child care access rates for these children in the City of Stratford, Town of St. Marys, Municipality of North Perth, Municipality of West Perth, Township of Perth East, and the Township of Perth South are shown in Table 2. Ontario has set a target of 37% access to licensed child care spaces for children age 0-5, which also includes the kindergarten age children, by the year 2026.

As shown in Table 2, currently no municipality has reached that target. Many gaps remain, as the total access rate across Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County is currently just 15%.

The lowest access rate is found in Perth South, however St. Marys is found within its geography and has the highest access rate in the area, at 28.9%.

Perth East has the next lowest recorded access rate of 1.6%, followed by North Perth at 12.5%, Stratford at 21.1%, West Perth at 25.2%, and finally St. Marys at 28.9%. Overall, the age category with the lowest access rate is infants at 5%.

Table 2: Licensed Child Care Access Rates (2025)

| Municipality | Infant | Toddler | Preschool | Total 0-4 |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| North Perth | 5.6% | 12.2% | 16.9% | 12.5% |
| Perth East | 0.0% | 0.0% | 3.2% | 1.6% |
| Perth South | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| St. Marys | 11.4% | 46.2% | 31.5% | 28.9% |
| Stratford | 4.4% | 25.6% | 29.3% | 21.1% |
| West Perth | 12.3% | 22.7% | 33.4% | 25.2% |
| Total | 5.0% | 17.1% | 20.2% | 15.0% |

Note: Table 2 does not include the Kindergarten age group, which is included in Ontario's target access rate as children of this age are often also served through other licensed child care age groupings.

The population of children age 0-5 in Perth County is shown in Table 3. The municipality with the largest population of children age 0-5 is Stratford with 1,855, followed by North Perth with 1,415, Perth East with 1,160, West Perth with 680, St. Marys with 680, and Perth South with 245. Although Stratford has the highest total number of children, it has the second lowest proportion of children when compared to

the total population at 5.6%. The highest proportions of children age 0-5 are found in Perth East at 9.2%, and North Perth at 9.1%.

Table 3: Population of Children in Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County

| Geography | Total Population | Total Children Age 0-5 | % Age 0-5 of Total Population |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Stratford | 33,235 | 1,855 | 5.6% |
| Perth South | 3,775 | 245 | 6.5% |
| St. Marys | 7,385 | 365 | 4.9% |
| West Perth | 9,035 | 680 | 7.5% |
| Perth East | 12,595 | 1,160 | 9.2% |
| North Perth | 15,540 | 1,415 | 9.1% |
| Total | 81,565 | 5,735 | 7.0% |

Priority Areas

Through its Access and Inclusion Framework, the Ministry of Education has identified that new community-based child care spaces to be enrolled in the CWELCC System must be located in areas that best support the needs of families. Children's Services has determined priority areas for Stratford, St. Marys, and Perth County based upon the data presented in this report on current access rates and the population of children age 0-5.

Four municipalities have been designated as priority areas for the directed growth of CWELCC spaces: North Perth, Perth East, Perth South, and Stratford. Each of these municipalities have access rates for children age 0-4 lower than 25% and have access rates for infants lower than 6%. In addition, Stratford, North Perth, and Perth East account for 77% of the total population of children age 0-5.

Although these municipalities have been selected as priority areas, St. Marys and West Perth may still experience growth of licensed child care spaces under CWELCC to advance towards Ontario's target of an access rate of 37%, and to support the needs of children and families in those communities.