

EarlyON Child and Family Centres Business Practices and Funding Guideline

Peel Region EarlyON Service Providers

Released: December 2024

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Section 1: Overview

This guideline provides EarlyON service providers with key information about business practices and funding for EarlyON Child and Family Centres (EarlyON Centres). This includes indoor, outdoor, and online programs, services, and resources.

Section 2: Working with you

We will work with you to fund, plan, and manage the delivery of EarlyON programs by:

- Developing system-wide standards.
- Ensuring equitable access to quality programs.
- Creating and issuing funding streams and opportunities that connect to system priorities.
- Developing and tracking policy and contract compliance.
- Ensuring equitable access to French-language programs.
- Providing authentic and Indigenous-led programs for children and families.
- Identifying, collecting, and analyzing local data sources to inform system planning.
- Monitoring and assessing the delivery of core services.
- Reporting to the Ministry of Education and Regional Council on performance measurement.
- Facilitating connections with you to identify and monitor system-wide trends and pressures.

We will continue to engage you in service system planning and consultation to support the ongoing development and implementation of a high quality and responsive early years and child care system.

Section 3: Service provider eligibility

General eligibility criteria

To deliver EarlyON programs, you must:

1. Be a not-for-profit organization that can enter into a signed service agreement with Peel to deliver EarlyON programs.
2. Follow all requirements imposed by applicable law.
3. Meet contractual requirements related to:
 - a. Delivery of [mandatory core services](#).
 - b. Qualified professionals delivering programming as per the [Staffing Requirements for EarlyON Providers Policy](#).
 - c. Delivery of EarlyON programs at your approved weekly number of program hours.
 - d. Communications guided by the [Visual Identity Guideline](#).
 - e. Financial reporting.
 - f. Adherence to [Regional policies, procedures, and guidelines](#) such as, but not limited to, serious occurrence and change of business requirements.

Section 4: EarlyON Centre service provider obligations

Key goals and objectives

You must design and deliver programs that are high quality, accessible, integrated, and accountable. More specifically, these programs must achieve the following:

- Children have access to play and inquiry-based learning opportunities alongside their parents, guardians, and caregivers. They experience positive development, health, and well-being. This could include play and inquiry-based experiences in the EarlyON program where children birth to six years old engage with older siblings on school closure days, evenings, or weekends.
- Parents, guardians, and caregivers have access to high quality programs that support them in their role as their children's first educators. These programs enhance their well-being and enrich their knowledge about children's early learning and development.
- Parents, guardians, and caregivers have opportunities to strengthen their relationships with their children through play.
- Programs are responsive to community needs and reflect the perspectives of children from birth to six years old and their families. EarlyON centres consider the identified socio-demographic dimensions of families in their local communities and provide welcoming, inclusive, and culturally appropriate programs.
- Children and families have access to French-language programs based on local need.
- Authentic and Indigenous-led programs for children and families, including culturally responsive programming for Indigenous children and families, are available based on local need.
- Parents, guardians, and caregivers receive up-to-date information about community resources, including services that meet their needs beyond the early years.

To ensure children and families have increased access to services that meet their needs, you may need to consider options such as extending or altering hours of operation, using different service delivery models, conducting needs assessments, or applying an outreach and communications strategy.

Ontario's vision and guiding principles¹

EarlyON Centres support children, parents, guardians, and caregivers in learning, growing, and connecting - together.

You must follow the principles below when creating, delivering, and evaluating programs and services:

¹ As adapted from guiding principles in the Ministry of Education's Ontario Child Care and Early Years Funding Guidelines, 2025 (see guidelines saved [here](#))

- **Child and Family Centres:** All programs and services are designed and delivered to meet the unique needs of families and support their learning, development, and well-being.
- **Welcoming:** EarlyON Centres are warm, accessible, and welcoming to all. Environments are designed using an integrated anti-racist, anti-oppressive and equity-based approach which is reflective of diverse cultures, languages, identities, and worldviews. The welcoming environment is also based on the foundational conditions for supporting growth and long-term success (belonging, well-being, engagement, and expression). See more information in [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years \(HDLH\)](#).
- **High quality:** Programs and services are designed to support positive experiences and outcomes and encourage nurturing relationships between children, parents, guardians, and caregivers. Programs and services are also based on the latest evidence and research.
- **Inclusive:** Programs and services are accessible and equitable, reflective of and responsive to the diverse communities they serve. The EarlyON environment is adaptive and flexible. It supports the unique needs of children and families from diverse, racialized, newcomer, and/or 2SLGBTQ+ communities, and across developmental domains, learning styles and abilities. The environment is accessible and inclusive to all.
- **Integrated:** Programs and services are developed, coordinated, and delivered in collaboration with broader community services. This may include 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 Centre programs and services that embrace and build on their strengths, address identified gaps and meet their unique needs on an ongoing basis.

Pedagogical framework for EarlyON centres

Programs should reflect children, parents, guardians, caregivers, and educators as competent, capable, curious, and rich in potential and experience. This includes:

- Environments that engage parents, guardians, and caregivers as co-learners and leaders to shape positive experiences and outcomes for children, families, and the community.
- Use of HDLH to guide the development and delivery of programs, services, and resources.
- Use of the following documents to help strengthen program and service quality:
 - [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years](#)
 - [Think, Feel, Act: Lessons from Research about Young Children](#)
- Continued commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) by engaging in the development of annual action plans and focusing on recommendations as outlined in the EarlyON DEI Summary Report: [Our Intentional Journey of Growth](#).

Mandatory core services

You must deliver EarlyON programs that include all three types of mandatory core services, including:

1. Supporting early learning and development
2. Engaging parents, guardians, and caregivers

3. Making connections for families

You must provide mandatory core services on a consistent basis year-round. Mandatory core services must follow requirements for hours of operation.

Supporting early learning and development

- Offer programs that build responsive adult-child relationships, encourage children's exploration, and promote play and inquiry. Programs are based on the pedagogy in HDLH to support skills for life-long learning.

Engaging parents, guardians, and caregivers

- Actively work to engage with parents, guardians, and caregivers.
- Invite conversations and information sharing about children's interests, child development, parenting, culture, nutrition, play and inquiry-based learning, and other topics that support their relationship with their child(ren).
- Provide focused outreach opportunities that are responsive to community needs. This includes connecting with parents, guardians, and caregivers who could benefit from EarlyON programs and services but are not currently using programs and services for various reasons.
- Work with other support programs to enhance parent, guardian, and caregiver well-being, enrich adult-child relationships, and support parents, guardians, and caregivers in their role(s).

Parent, guardian, and caregiver engagement may take place in various formats depending on the needs of individuals within the community. Engagement may include group discussions, informal one-to-one engagement, printed and electronic resources or other engagement options.

Making connections for families

- Build strong relationships with community partners and in-depth knowledge of resources to allow for seamless transitions (warm hand-offs) for families who may benefit from access to other services.
- Respond to a parent or caregiver's concern about their child's development through conversations and observations. In some cases, staff may direct parents, guardians, and caregivers to seek added supports from regulated health professionals.
- Share information and promote connections with other community services such as licensed child care, income and social supports, settlement services and public health.
- Support early identification and connect parents, guardians, and caregivers to specialized services and resources, including:
 - [Smart Start Hubs](#).
 - The [Early Years Check-In](#) developmental screening tool or other free screening tools to assess child development.
 - The [Play & Learn](#) website for suggested activities to support child development.
 - Providing opportunities for EarlyON Resource Consultants to interact with staff and families as part of the Child Development Supports program.

- Provide information about programs and services available for the whole family beyond the early years.

Note: Child care advertising must relate only to a centre or home-based child care licensed by the Ministry of Education.

Customized programs

In addition to mandatory core services, EarlyON providers deliver customized programs that address the needs and priorities of their local community. These programs are co-developed or delivered with the support of community partners.

Customized programs must:

- Address the needs of an individual community and/or underrepresented groups within that community.
- Address an identified gap in service.
- Promote positive outcomes for families with children from birth to six years old.

Any programs within the scope of mandatory core services are not eligible to be a customized program. These programs must also not be related to special needs resourcing (other than peer-support groups).

Inclusiveness

Parents/guardians/caregivers and children can attend programs unless it violates the Ontario Building Code maximum occupancy or risks staff, families, and children's health and safety.²

Programs are intended to meet the needs of parents, guardians, and caregivers and their children from birth to six years old. You may need to accommodate families and caregivers who attend programs with siblings older than six years. You can connect families to services with activities suitable for children and youth beyond the early years. You should use your professional judgement when assessing these cases.

Diversity, equity and inclusion

In Peel Region, we are committed to working with you to enhance DEI in your programs, policies, and practices. This includes ensuring our EarlyON services are safe, welcoming, and inclusive spaces for all families, and that they reflect the needs of a growing and diverse community.

Part of the DEI progress to date has included implementing the EarlyON Child and Family Centres Workforce Survey, introducing socio-demographic questions in OCCMS, enhancing DEI in the Continuous Quality Improvement tool, and developing annual DEI action plans that identify

² This includes any person who violates Peel Region's EarlyON Participant Code of Conduct.

strategies to increase DEI competences, practices, and representation in EarlyON centres across Peel.

[Our Intentional Journey of Growth: Enhancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Peel's EarlyON System](#) provides an overview of our DEI journey to date in EarlyON, including recommendations for both Peel Region and EarlyON providers moving forward.

You can access more information on the results of the EarlyON workforce survey by visiting Peel's [Funding Support and Resources webpage](#).

Child development supports

Child Development Supports (CDS) is a partnership between EarlyON service providers, Peel Region and the CDS administrator, EveryMind Mental Health Services (EveryMind). The model focuses on three streams of services:

- Program support to increase access to high-quality child development information and strategies, build capacity for both EarlyON teams and families to support early identification of child developmental concerns and connection to community programs and services that may support their child's development. Program support includes coaching and modelling strategies, informal recommendations and resources, program development and consultations to support inclusive and diverse environments, information sessions and workshops.
- Brief consultations, a structured opportunity for families to consult with an EarlyON Resource Consultant (ERC) regarding concerns about their child's development. These are offered online or in-person to meet the needs of the family. They may result in one or more referral recommendations.
- Peel Infant Parent Program (PIPP), an infant mental health and EarlyON program delivered at select EarlyON locations. PIPP helps parents, guardians, and caregivers of children from birth to 36 months old to understand their child's needs, behaviour, and development. The goal of PIPP is to help families develop healthier relationships. PIPP includes two components, where eligible families attend an in-centre program and are also supported by a child and family clinician who provides confidential online or in-home sessions.

You must provide ERCs access to EarlyON settings and allow ERCs to interact freely with participants and/staff. You must also:

- Plan monthly programs with your designated ERC.
- Provide EarlyON families with information on CDS and PIPP.
- Communicate any upcoming program closures or changes in hours to your designated ERC.
- Schedule consultations between parents, guardians, and caregivers and ERCs if required.
- Use the LookSee Checklist™ with families.
- Implement ERC recommendation(s) and any changes or updates to the CDS program.
- Promote CDS services including the ERC schedule and information at all EarlyON settings (indoor, outdoor, and online).

You must review and follow the Referral Process document when booking a brief consultation and a capacity building or program consultation with an ERC. You can access the Referral Process

document by visiting Peel's [Funding Support and Resources webpage](#) and selecting "Child Development Supports Referral Process".

Indigenous-led program (Journey Together)

Journey Together brings Indigenous-led cultural activities and awareness to children aged birth to six years and families. The program is designed to:

- Increase access to Indigenous-led programs and raise awareness of Indigenous culture for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and families.
- Create a feeling of inclusivity to support improved outcomes for children.
- Increase EarlyON staff knowledge of Indigenous culture.

The program is delivered by Indigenous RECE staff employed by [The Indigenous Network \(TIN\)](#) at various EarlyON Centres. You must provide the RECEs access to EarlyON settings, plan monthly programs together, provide and promote the Journey Together program with EarlyON families, actively participate in Journey Together programs in your EarlyON setting. You must also use and make visible knowledge gained of Indigenous culture in your programs and services in ways that are respectful of our roles as settlers, if applicable.

Capacity building

Capacity building supports professional learning and development opportunities that grow the ability of EarlyON professionals to provide high quality programs and services for families at EarlyON settings and supports staff in continuous learning towards their own professional development.

Child Development Resource Connection Peel (CDRCP), the Capacity Building Administrator, will distribute a professional learning opportunities booklet for the early years sector throughout the year.

You must make staff aware of training opportunities, provide staff with adequate time away from work to attend training and ensure there is an equitable opportunity for staff to attend professional learning opportunities designed for Peel's EarlyON sector and additional training available through [CDRCP](#).

EarlyON Program Managers must be available to authentically participate in Professional Learning Working Group meetings, as required. This includes taking part in decision-making, creating safe spaces for multiple voices and viewpoints to be expressed, and providing timely information to inform the professional learning plan for EarlyON staff.

Nutrition

As part of the mandated core service of *Engaging Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers*, you must provide information for enhancing food and nutrition knowledge through resources and valid sources.

EarlyON staff can access the "Food and Nutrition Resources" document on Peel's [Funding Supports and Resources webpage](#) as a reference while delivering programs and services.

To support mandatory core services that are responsive to local needs, EarlyON funding can support light meals or snacks for EarlyON program participants. EarlyON providers should use the trusted resources below to guide the provision of healthy snacks:

- Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services' [Student Nutrition Program, Nutrition Guidelines 2020](#)
- Canada's Food Guide: food-guide.canada.ca/en/
- Additional information on food premises: We also recommend that EarlyON providers follow the below guidance when considering the provision of snacks:
- Healthy snacks should be nut free - and sensitive to known allergies in the environment.
- Healthy snacks should be culturally appropriate: An individual's ethnic, cultural and/or religious background has an impact on their food choices and eating practices. You must try to reflect the diversity of the Peel community, while also meeting guidelines.
- Consider food items with little to no added salt, sugars, or saturated fat.
- Serve water or milk instead of juices with high sugar.

Mental health supports

In 2025, we are providing funding under the Mental Health Supports fund for EarlyON providers to use for programming that focuses on the mental health and well-being of families and children that attend EarlyON centres in Peel. This may include customized programs focused on mental health supports, or additional core service hours to meet increased community demand and support mental health of families.

This funding is for use in 2025 only. The Mental Health Supports fund will end after 2025.

OCCMS technology (booking technology)

Ontario Child Care Management System (OCCMS) is a cloud-based tool with custom-built features for data management. You must accurately enter program into OCCMS including program name, description, date and time, and program attendance.

OCCMS adheres to all applicable privacy legislation and will only store data needed to operate EarlyON programs and fulfill regional and provincial reporting requirements. You can access OCCMS information in the OCCMS Manual available on Peel Region's [Funding Supports and Resources webpage](#).

To support up-to-date, and accurate information for families, you must:

- Enter monthly calendar into OCCMS by the 20th calendar day or next business day of each month for the upcoming month. You should ensure accuracy of calendar details such as any program closure dates and statutory holidays.
- When possible, include the platform that you are using to provide online programs such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams or WebEx.
- Include programs and services that take place in partnership with our EarlyON partners from EveryMind, who provide EarlyON CDS, and TIN who provide the Journey Together Program.

- If you are asking to add a new program in OCCMS, email earlyon@peelregion.ca with the new program name, program description (maximum 500 characters), age group, and EarlyON sites before the 10th day of the month.
 - If the new program is a customized program, please indicate this in your request.
 - Before sending a request, you must ensure the program is not already listed in OCCMS. You can find a list of approved OCCMS program names in Appendix A of this guideline. Maintaining consistency in your program times and program names helps families reliably include EarlyON programs in their daily and weekly routines.

When needed, you should support and help participants to enter information into and use the booking software. You must also enter program attendance within two weeks after the previous program month has ended. Note that the collection of socio-demographic data through the booking software continues to be optional, and strongly encouraged. Peel Region has developed and shared a Frequently Asked Questions document to support staff when communicating with families about the collection of socio-demographic data. Please refer to this document for further information. If you are unable to locate this document, you can request a copy by emailing EarlyON@peelregion.ca.

Information and referral services

Information and Referral Services ([InfoPeel](#)) is a system-wide approach to provide consistent information for families, professionals and community partners about the location and schedules of EarlyON programs. CDRCP is the system administrator for InfoPeel.

To support easier access for families to all EarlyON programs and locations in Peel, staff should:

- Know how to access and navigate the InfoPeel website.
- Promote InfoPeel to families in programs, outreach activities and communications.
- Assist families in accessing and navigating the InfoPeel website.

Program information

When establishing an EarlyON program, you must consider the name and description of the program to ensure it is appropriate. Peel Region has the right to change the name and/or description of any program if it determines these to be inconsistent with the values, vision and promise of the EarlyON brand.

You must not charge any fees for families to participate in EarlyON programs and services. Any communications to families or community members related to fundraising for your agency must not imply that donations are required to support the delivery of EarlyON services.

Posted hours of operation and monthly program calendar(s) for programs should be printed and posted in a clear and accessible public space. Clearly identify where interruptions to programming and program closures exist, such as unexpected closures due to weather or facility changes, lunch hour closures or closures to allow for a later program, and when programs are closed for statutory holidays or training. EarlyON programs located in schools must identify interruptions to programming or program closures due to strike action.

Use appropriate ways to communicate to parents, guardians, and caregivers about programs and services being offered for all service delivery methods (indoor, outdoor, and online). This includes information about program and service locations, dates, times, and cancellations or rescheduling.

You must communicate changes to operation hours promptly by posting them in the next month's program calendar. Where possible, also post hours of operation and program calendars online and in a mobile-friendly format.

You must inform the public through your website and social media channels of closures due to bad weather that affect the full day or morning programs by 8:00 a.m.; closures that affect afternoon and evening programs must be posted by 12:00 p.m. All in-person locations are closed when the Peel District School Board (PDSB) closes its schools. Mobile locations in Caledon are closed when the PDSB cancels school bussing.

EarlyON centres located in schools may be affected by closures due to strike action. In these instances, we will communicate updates from district school boards as soon as possible. You must inform the public of any anticipated closures through your website and social media channels, as well as notify the public of any alternate programming (such as outdoor or online programs) that you will deliver during the strike action period. You must also confirm your short- and long-term plans, as well as any staffing or financial impacts, with us. If required, we will work with you to plan an approach for returning to in-person delivery of programs and services.

Public announcements

Public announcements regarding EarlyON Centres are the responsibility of Peel Region as the service system manager. Inform us if the media contacts you for comment about programs, services, and resources. When creating announcements and media responses, we will work with you where appropriate.

The Ministry of Education hosts the EarlyON Child and Family Centre website, where parents, guardians, and caregivers can easily access information on site locations. You must update us and seek approval for any changes to sites by sending a Request/Notification of Change to EarlyON Centres Business Form to earlyon@peelregion.ca. You can access this form by visiting Peel's [Funding Support and Resources webpage](#) and selecting "Change to EarlyON Centre's Business Form".

Peel partnership handbook

EarlyON Centres located in schools are encouraged to use the [Peel Partnership Handbook for School-Based Early Years and Child Care Partners in Peel](#) to complement existing formal agreements.

The Peel Partnership Handbook supports collaborative and positive working relationships among school staff, early years and child care providers, and other community programs. This helps for a seamless transition between the school day, early years and child care programs, and learning and care programs for families with children 12 years and younger.

Wi-Fi access at school-based locations

In partnership with each school board, free Wi-Fi access for EarlyON staff is available at school-based locations. Log-in details and scope of use differ between school boards. These details are communicated to those registered for Wi-Fi access at each participating location.

Your log-in usernames and passwords are confidential and must not be shared with families. Wi-Fi access must only be used for EarlyON-related activities such as data collection and referrals. You should also be mindful of your usage and how many devices are being used at the same time to consider bandwidth limits.

In situations where you cannot connect to the Wi-Fi network or experience other technical difficulties, contact the school principal or board IT staff for technical support.

For all other questions, such as changing or adding an individual for access to Wi-Fi or requesting access to Wi-Fi at another school-based location, please contact earlyon@peelregion.ca.

Supervision and monitoring

You must always supervise EarlyON program participants. This may include children, families, service providers, or community members.

You may offer child minding services to support parent, guardian, or caregiver participation in EarlyON programs or services. You must monitor all participants, and the parent or caregiver must remain on site.

Accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities

You must comply with requirements set out in the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 \(AODA\)](#). This includes ensuring that all staff are trained on the following:

- How to interact and communicate with persons with disabilities, including those who use assistive devices or require the assistance of a guide animal or support person.
- How to use equipment that is available to support the provision of programs or services for persons with disabilities.
- How to support persons with disabilities who have difficulty accessing programs or services.
- Policies, practices, and procedures related to the provision of services to persons with disabilities.

Upon request, you must provide evidence of your AODA training policy and records of those who have attended the training. If a training model is not in place, you must ensure each staff completes the following online training module, found at aoda.ca/free-online-training/.

Lease obligations

For every EarlyON centre, you must do the following:

- Enter into a lease agreement with the property owner for space to deliver programs and services and adhere to the agreement.
- Consult with us on the terms of the lease and provide a copy of the agreement, seeking approval prior to signing.
- Notify us of any issues that may arise as they relate to the lease.

Lease costs are included in the EarlyON budget. We are available to assist in lease agreement negotiations, if required.

Section 5: Peel Region obligations and rights

Payments

We provide funding to you to deliver programs and services as set out in [section 4](#) of this guideline. Funding is provided monthly in accordance with payment schedules as set out in GovGrants.

We will deduct any funds that were not used for eligible expenses, including any unspent spends, which must be returned to Peel.

We have the right to withhold any payments if not satisfied that you are meeting the requirements as set out in these guidelines and the 2025 EarlyON Centres Services Funding Agreement.

You must submit, in writing, any changes to budgets that would affect the funding amount we have provided. These changes must be pre-approved.

EarlyON Funding Framework

In 2024, we updated EarlyON funding allocations to align with the following principles:

- **Equity:** Acknowledging sector feedback, we have prioritized wage equity amongst EarlyON positions and have allocated funding to providers based on our new 2024 wage benchmarks.
- **Sustainability:** Parts of the EarlyON funding allocation are now calculated through funding formulas to ensure financial sustainability and to assist with future budgeting.
- **Flexibility:** We recognize that EarlyON providers are unique in their service delivery models and have factored in flexibility within the funding lines and reasonable thresholds to ensure quality programs are maintained.

In 2025, we will use this funding framework as a base and will optimize funding available to meet your operational needs.

You can find more information on the Technical Framework for EarlyON funding in Appendix B.

Guideline changes

We will notify you of any changes to these guidelines and provide 30 days of advance notice. However, if a change is needed within a shorter period, we may provide advance notice that is less than the 30-day standard.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

We are committed to enhancing DEI at EarlyON centres across Peel to ensure that EarlyON programs are safe, welcoming, and inclusive spaces for all families and that they reflect the needs of a growing and diverse community.

This includes working with you to implement recommendations as set out in the [EarlyON DEI public report](#) and in your DEI action plans.

Section 6: Service delivery model

The following service delivery model promotes meaningful engagement of families attending programs and facilitates mandatory core service delivery:

- A minimum of 25 program hours each week in urban communities and 20 program hours each week in rural communities.
- Access to EarlyON in-person programs within a five-minute drive in urban communities and a 15-minute walk in densely populated communities. In-person EarlyON programs can include indoor and/or outdoor programs.
- Increased access to programs in rural communities.
- Access to online EarlyON programs.

We use a schools-based approach, where possible, when planning for the locations of EarlyON Centres. This approach provides opportunities for more early years and child care services to be co-located and integrated. A schools-based approach results in fewer transitions for children, early years and school professionals to build stronger connections between children and families, and a more consistent approach to early learning. This approach aligns with guidance in the [Early Years Accommodations in Schools: Reference Guide](#).

The EarlyON staffing model ensures the effective delivery of core services and establishes key benchmarks for the system. These include:

- A base ratio of one Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) and one Family Support staff to 30 participants for each centre.
- A base ratio of one RECE and one Family Support staff to 45 participants for each mobile program.
- A minimum of two staff for each centre and mobile program.
- Dedicated community outreach hours for service providers to engage with the community, particularly families who are not familiar with, or do not attend, EarlyON programs.

We co-created the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) approach with you to provide clear and consistent expectations and measures for EarlyON programs. Through the CQI process, we will

continue to work with you to ensure that child and family perspectives, along with the foundations of HDLH are reflected in programs. The CQI process will continue to support EarlyON teams in delivering high quality programs and services to ensure positive outcomes for families that take part in EarlyON programs, services, and resources.

You must discuss, set, and monitor service level targets for your programs with us and must meet or exceed the targets that we agreed to. If required, you may discuss strategies with us to support you in meeting these targets.

Mandatory and optional delivery methods

EarlyON programs are mainly delivered through mandatory centre-based and mobile service delivery methods. You can also use optional service delivery methods such as outdoor and online programs. We will use local data and feedback from families to ensure that programs are offered in ways that meet all families' needs. The following information describes each service delivery method.

Mandatory delivery methods

Centres

- Any physical program location where children, parents, guardians, and caregivers attend child and family programs in person.
- Located in permanent standalone locations or within schools or community buildings.
- Offer core services at one or more locations year-round, five days each week, including a Saturday or Sunday.
- Need minimal set-up and take-down.
- Offer optional evening programs where it meets a community need.
- At least one centre in each review area will offer programming on a weekend (either Saturday or Sunday).
- Follow the centre staffing model as described in the [Staffing Requirements for EarlyON Providers Policy](#).

Mobiles

- Offer programs outside of centres to further include EarlyON Centres in broader community services.
- Enhance program access, largely in high-density areas, rural areas, and communities with target groups.
- Usually need set up and take-down.
- Usually operate in a shared space.
- Mobile programs typically operate for six or fewer hours per week.
- Follow the mobile staffing model as described in the Staffing Requirements for EarlyON Providers Policy.
- You can apply for a mobile program staffing exemption using the EarlyON Centre's Staffing Exemption Application. Access this form by visiting Peel's [Funding Support and Resources webpage](#) and selecting "EarlyON Centre's Staffing Exemption Application".

Optional service delivery methods

Outdoor programs

- We encourage you to offer programs at a natural outdoor setting such as a community park nearby an EarlyON location or in your assigned EarlyON review area.
- We encourage staff to discuss the benefits of outdoor play with parents, guardians, and caregivers.
- Need set up and take-down.
- Operate in a shared space.
- Operate at one or more locations year-round, seasonally, or offer time-stated sessions.
- Follow the mobile staffing model as described in the [Staffing Requirements for EarlyON Providers Policy](#).

Online programs

- Offer programs using web-based video conferencing services such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or WebEx.
- Enhance program access beyond in-person offerings.
- Refer to [Virtual Services Guideline](#).

Section 7: Policies, procedures, and guidelines

EarlyON Centre provider protocols and policies

At minimum, you must have in place the following policies and make all organizational policies available to us if we ask:

- a) Vulnerable sector checks.
- b) First aid.
- c) Emergency plans.
- d) Sanitation and maintenance.
- e) Anaphylaxis.
- f) Workplace health and safety relating to staff.
- g) Complaints and resolution processes, including methods to immediately let us know of all serious complaints that are escalated to the organization's Executive Director level as per your organization's complaints process.

Any policies that you develop must align with the requirements set out in this EarlyON guideline.

Peel Region policies and protocols

We provide the following EarlyON policies and protocols, which you must follow:

- a) Change of Business Requirements of EarlyON Providers Policy.
- b) Serious Occurrence Requirements of EarlyON Providers Policy.
- c) Staffing Requirements for EarlyON Providers Policy.

You must also follow Peel Region guidance as outlined in the Early Years and Child Care Service Provider Handbook, including the accountability framework, inter-agency dispute resolution policy, and requirements related to audited financial statements and right to enter, audit and consultation. The handbook is available on Peel's [Funding Support and Resources webpage](#).

Change of business requirements of EarlyON providers policy

You must follow the Change of Business Requirements of EarlyON Providers Policy if you propose changes to the centre's business operations (including days or hours of operation, or the transfer of program hours between existing sites to meet demand).

Complete the Request for a Change to EarlyON Provider's Business form and receive approval where applicable before making changes.

You can access the Change of Business form and policy by visiting Peel's [Funding Support and Resources webpage](#).

Serious occurrence requirements of EarlyON providers policy

You must follow the Serious Occurrence Requirements of EarlyON Providers Policy when a serious occurrence happens. You must review the Serious Occurrence Protocol with new staff at the time of hire and with ongoing staff annually.

All staff must have access to the protocol and the Serious Occurrence Report (SOR) form.

All resources related to serious occurrence reporting, including the serious occurrence policy, SOR form, protocol, and reporting process document, can be found on Peel's [Funding Supports and Resources webpage](#).

You must report any serious occurrences within 24 hours using the SOR form.

Staffing requirements for EarlyON providers policy

You must follow the Staffing Requirements for EarlyON Providers Policy for planning and delivery related to all EarlyON Centre staffing. The policy includes information linked to staff qualifications, mobile programs staffing requirement exemption, RECE exemption, legacy provision, qualifications upgrade program, the staffing requirement, and role profiles for EarlyON staffing positions.

If you experience challenges recruiting staff, you may ask for an exemption:

- From the EarlyON mobile services staffing requirement.
- To hire staff with alternate qualifications to meet local community needs.
- From the RECE requirement.

You can ask for an exemption by completing and sending us the EarlyON Centre's Staffing Exemption Application for approval.

You can access the staffing requirements policy and staffing exemption form on Peel's [Funding Support and Resources webpage](#).

Duty to report

Everyone, including members of the public and professionals who work closely with children, by law, must report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. Anyone with reasonable grounds to suspect that a child may need protection must report it to a Children's Aid Society.

You can find more information on the duty to report, what happens when a report is made, and how to recognize signs of abuse and neglect at the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, [Children's Aid website](#).

Peel Region guidelines

We have developed the following guidelines for consistent operations:

- a) Community Engagement and Outreach Guideline.
- b) Continuous Quality Improvement Guideline.
- c) Service Provider Selection Guideline.
- d) Stabilization Funding Guideline.
- e) Virtual Services Guideline.
- f) Visual Identity Guideline.

Community engagement and outreach guideline

This framework guides the outreach function using a two-fold approach of program-based and community-based contexts within a partnership and shared resources model. This model builds awareness of EarlyON programs across Peel.

You must follow the community engagement and outreach guideline, including implementation, documentation, and participation.

Staff doing the outreach function must attend periodic meetings for focused conversations about community engagement and strategic planning for outreach efforts and progress.

Continuous quality improvement guideline

A CQI approach was co-created with you to provide a common understanding of quality, define key elements of quality programming, establish quality standards, and provide indicators that demonstrate what the standards look like in practice. This approach allows for clear and consistent expectations on how to assess quality in EarlyON programs. It provides a process to identify successes and areas for growth, as well as instructions on how to create improvement plans.

You must follow the actions for each CQI cycle that includes the following:

- Attend CQI information sessions, discussions and collaboration meetings coordinated by us.
- Provide resources and materials that reflect the value of the CQI process and outcomes.
- Create brave spaces for multiple viewpoints and voices.
- Complete and submit the CQI workbook using the guideline to direct the process of reflection, evaluation, and planning for each centre-based, mobile, outdoor, and online program.
- Monitor and document the progress of quality improvement plans to reach your CQI goals.
- Report your assessment, goals, quality improvement plans and status to us.

Service provider selection guideline

An EarlyON service provider is chosen based on an application process using Peel's procurement practices. Eligibility to apply is based on the number of hours offered at a site and its location.

Site selection

We consult with you to use a site selection framework for new EarlyON centres. This framework ensures that the selection of new sites reflects the growing and diverse nature of the region, addresses system inequities, and is responsive to the individual needs of all areas, including those that are well-established, rural, and in newly developed communities.

Stabilization funding guideline

Stabilization funding is a one-time grant opportunity that may be available through an application or allocation process. Based on available funds, this funding could support new site setup expenses, customized programming, and other system wide enhancements.

Virtual Services Guideline

Virtual services use web-based and telephone platforms to deliver services, maintain relationships, and support families. You can post or facilitate activities and resources appropriate to children aged birth to six years that support development and resources that support parents', guardians' and caregivers' needs and connect them to the community's services.

The Virtual Services Guideline sets out standards that you must use when delivering virtual services. If approved by the region, you can provide virtual services up to seven days each week, including Saturday or Sunday.

Any approved hours for live online programming must include the time online before and after a program, and hours to support staff planning time. Your focus should be on the delivery of 30-minute programs where possible, but you may offer some 45-minute or 60-minute programs where more time is required. You can decide how much planning time you assign to each of your live online programs within the total allocated staffing hours for online programming.

Virtual support and engagement, which includes 1:1 support and web-based engagement is supported through the existing staffing and funding model. You can find more details in the virtual services guideline.

The Virtual Services Guideline is available on Peel's [Funding Supports and Resources](#) webpage.

[Visual Identity Guideline](#)

You must ensure that all communications align with the EarlyON Visual Identity Guideline. The guideline outlines how to use the EarlyON Child and Family Centres brand consistently. It supports the brand values, vision, and promise. It provides information on using the EarlyON logo individually and in partnership with service provider, regional and provincial logos, brand assets and applications.

Section 8: Eligible and ineligible expenses

Eligible expenses

We use the annual EarlyON budget process as a joint planning tool to provide an overview of budgeted cost information and operations within an organization.

You must use your EarlyON base funding to support the operating costs of EarlyON Centres to deliver mandatory core services and deliver programming that is responsive to community need and focused on serving children and their families.

A description of eligible expenses follows.

Salaries and benefits

Salary and benefit expenses that are entirely (100%) EarlyON staff to deliver core services, including Facilitators, RECEs, Family Support, Community Outreach, Program Manager/ Supervisor. Agencies are funded based on the agreed benchmark for each staff position.

Leasing, rental and taxes, maintenance and insurance (TMI)

Occupancy costs including lease or property rentals, rentals for mobile programs, and utilities including hydro, gas, waste management, water, TMI.

Staff travel expenses

Staff travel costs to support outreach and participation in programs, including charges for public transit, mileage, and parking fees.

Program transportation costs

Maintenance, repairs and/or insurance of EarlyON vehicles, if applicable, such as oil changes, gas, general repairs, wiper fluid, or tires.

Program related supplies and resources

Commercial grade supplies, books, toys, and materials that support inquiry-based play such as art material, blocks, musical instruments, or sensory material. Resources, services, and information to help parents, guardians, and caregivers in their role.

- Please refer to the service provider handbook for guidance on the sale of items purchased with Peel Region funding.
- Note: The purchase of staff clothing, if required, must be reasonable and cost-efficient. This could include limiting purchases to t-shirts for program staff to wear while working in the centre, to ensure staff are easily identifiable.

Repairs and maintenance expenses

Supplies to support the delivery and daily operation of programs such as hygiene supplies and cleaning products. Maintenance costs related to the general upkeep, safety, and maintenance of centres.

Professional development and training

Costs related to professional learning and development opportunities to build the capacity of EarlyON staff.

Note: Any meal expenditures for staff must be related to an EarlyON program event or activity. Expenditures should be reasonable and capped at \$25 per person. Within staff meal purchases, alcohol is not an eligible expense.

Transformation activities

Operating costs that are involved in transformation activities and require business transformation supports such as integrating, closing, establishing, or relocating centres. Costs can include legal fees, lease termination, moving, business planning, recruitment, onboarding new staff, and staffing transitions.

Important: Transformation costs are application based. Refer to: [Change of Business Requirements of EarlyON Providers Policy](#) for further information.

Audit costs

Costs associated with Peel Region reporting requirements. These requirements support accountability for funding used for the purpose intended.

Program administration costs

Administrative costs in which 100% of the time is spent supporting EarlyON Centres and programming. This includes:

- **Staffing:** Payment of staff salaries and wages such as an IT support person, which is solely for EarlyON.
- **Benefits:** Employer contributions for pension, EI (Employment Insurance), workers compensation, employee benefit plans.
- **Technology:** Computer hardware, supplies and maintenance, general office software and updates, IT costs to support the delivery of online programs (such as annual web-based account fees; additional costs related to security features for web-based programs).
- **General office expenses:** Telephone, internet, office supplies and equipment, printing, photocopier services, insurance, maintenance, advertising and marketing, branding and marketing costs for EarlyON signage and promotional materials, newsletters, and security.
 - Note that the purchase, development, and distribution of physical promotional materials is limited to pens, pencils, pencil crayons, bubbles, reusable lightweight tote bags (such as grocery bags) and sidewalk chalk only.

Allocated central administration costs (ACA)

Administrative costs that are related to a head office, a shared service or product that provides support to more than one funded program including the EarlyON Centres. This could include bank charges, collection and bad debt costs, or records management.

A maximum of 10% of total EarlyON funding provided by Peel Region can be allocated to cover these costs. These costs should be assigned to the EarlyON budget based on created criteria, such as portion of time that HR spends working on matters related to the EarlyON Program.

Similarly, for costs such as internet, telephone, technology, office space., these should also be allocated based on established criteria. Examples include the volume of use for phone calls and square footage for office space or any other verified consistently used costing approach.

The costing criteria are often created by your agency's finance team, who may work with external auditors to support consistency in reporting over time.

Other

- **Nutrition:** Light meals or snacks for program participants. This includes snacks for participants of the Peel Infant Parent Program (PIPP) or food costs associated with the delivery of customized programs, as approved in your Customized Program Fund application. You will find guidelines on the provision of healthy snacks for PIPP on Peel's

[Funding Supports and Resources webpage](#). You must provide information for food and nutrition knowledge through resources from valid sources.

- **Pay Equity:** This is based on an agreement with agency that receives funding under the pay equity union settlement.

Ineligible expenses

EarlyON funding may not be used for the following expenses.

Note: This is not a complete list. Any expenses not listed in the allowed expenses section are non-admissible without our express permission. For questions, email: earlyon@peelregion.ca.

Direct specialized services

Services offered by regulated health professionals working within their scope of practice such as occupational therapy, audiology and speech and language pathology, physiotherapy. Early intervention and screening services that are funded by other ministries and levels of government.

Program administrative costs

This includes lease costs, program-related supplies and resources, and administrative costs where less than 100% of time is spent supporting EarlyON Centres and programming such as payment of staff salaries and wages.

Staff bonuses, gifts, and honoraria

Retiring bonuses, gifts and honoraria paid to staff, except when they are provided as a retroactive wage increase that will be maintained the following year.

Note: Honoraria for Indigenous elders is an eligible expense for EarlyON funding.

Debt costs

Debt costs including principal and interest payments related to capital loans, mortgage financing, and interest expenses incurred on operating loans.

Property taxes

Municipal taxes levies.

Non-arm's length transactions not transacted at fair market value

A transaction that takes place at non-arm's length is between two individuals who are related by blood, marriage, common-law partnership, or adoption. When this happens, the transaction would require extra documents to ensure it has taken place at fair market value.

Professional organization fees

Fees paid as a condition of employment including vulnerable sector and criminal reference checks.

Fees paid on behalf of staff for membership in professional organizations such as membership fees for the College of Early Childhood Educators.

Costs supported through other Peel Region funding streams

Costs that are supported using other funding programs or grants available through Peel Region including the Community Investment Program, unless otherwise authorized by us.

Reserve funds

Operating or general reserve funds or other savings.

Section 9: Reporting requirements

Key performance indicators

You must collect and submit Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for indoor, outdoor, and online programs to us as listed in GovGrants and any reporting templates we provide.

Reporting submission timelines

We will provide a current year reporting calendar with submission due dates related to all EarlyON funding. This includes reports on year-to-date spending and projections to year-end.

Section 10: Contact information

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Questions can be directed to earlyon@peelregion.ca

Appendix A: Approved OCCMS Program Names

Note: Approved Customized Program names are exempted.

- Adventures in Math and Science
- Art and Sensory Exploration
- Babies on the Move
- Baby Gym
- Baby Playtime
- Bedtime Songs and Stories
- Community Garden
- Conte et Chansons
- Conte et Chansons (en ligne)
- Create and Explore
- Creative Kids
- Drop-In
- EarlyON Cooks
- Exploring the Community (Outdoor)
- Exploring the Outdoors (Outdoor)
- Family Fun with Games
- Family Playtime
- Family Time
- Family Time (2SLGBTQ+)
- Family Time (French Immersion)
- Family Time (Intergenerational)
- Family Time (Language Name)
- Family Time (Language Name) (Outdoor)
- Family Time (Outdoor)
- Growing Bodies, Healthy Minds
- Heure de famille
- I Spy Show and Share
- Infant and Toddler Time
- Infant Massage
- Infant Mother Goose
- Infant Mother Goose (Outdoor)
- Infant Sing & Sign
- Infant Songs and Stories
- Jeu Libre
- Journey Together
- Jump! Hop! Run! (Physical Literacy)
- Kids in the Kitchen
- Learn With Me
- Librarian Visit
- Make the Connection
- Math is Everywhere
- Mother Goose (Language Name)
- Music and Movement
- Music and Movement (Outdoor)
- Nature Connections (Outdoor)
- Open Door
- Play and Learn
- Play in the Park (Outdoor)
- Playtime with Dad
- Preschool STEAM
- Preschool Time
- Preschool Time (American Sign Language)
- Read and Play
- Ready Set Learn
- School Here I Come
- Sharing and Learning (Punjabi)
- Show and Share
- Snacks, Stories & Songs
- Songs and Stories (Language Name)
- Special Event
- Story Stretchers
- Story Time
- Stroller Walk (Outdoor)
- Sweet Signs
- Toddler Mother Goose
- Toddler Music and Movement
- Toddler Playtime
- Toddler Songs and Stories
- Water Play

Appendix B: 2025 EarlyON Technical Funding Framework

Salaries and benefits

Peel allocation. Calculated as Peel Region benchmarks with a 2.5% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) in 2025, per allotted Full-time Equivalents (FTEs). A maximum of 10% may be moved out of this funding line to support other expenditures. There is unlimited flexibility when moving funds into Salaries and Benefits.

Allocated central administration (ACA)

Formula based. ACA is 10% of the sum of the following funding categories: Salaries & Benefits, Lease, Permits & TMI, Staff Travel, Program Transportation, Program Related Supplies and Resources, Repairs & Maintenance, Professional Development and Training, Audit & Insurance, Mental Health, and Customized Programs. Expenditures may not exceed the calculated 10%.

Leasing/rental and TMI

Funded at full value as per provider's entry in the 2025 EarlyON Budget Submission Template. There is no flexibility in this category, i.e., funds cannot be moved out into another line, unless pre-approved by Peel. If there is underspending in *Leasing/rental and TMI*, funds will be recovered by Peel Region.

Staff travel

Formula based. \$0.50 per total annual staffing hours.

Program transportation

As required; based on historical expenditure.

Program related supplies and resources

Formula based. \$4.25 per total annual staffing hours.

Repairs and maintenance

Formula based. \$1.60 per total square feet.

Professional development and training

Formula based. \$500 per allotted FTE.

Program administration

Formula based. Program Administration is 4% of the sum of the following categories: Salaries & Benefits, Lease, Permits & TMI, Staff Travel, Program Transportation, Program Supplies, Repairs & Maintenance, and Professional Development. Total Program Administration expenditures may not exceed the calculated 4%.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres Business Practices and Funding Guideline 2025

Audit and insurance

Peel Region funds 100% of Audit and insurance expenditures. It is funded at full value as per provider's entry in 2025 EarlyON Budget Submission Template. There is no flexibility in this category, i.e., funds cannot be moved out into another line, unless pre-approved by Peel. Peel Region will recover any underspending in Audit & Insurance.

Additional 2025 funding

Mental health supports

Formula based. (Hourly cost x weekly hours) + base allocation.

One-time DEI training

Formula based. (Number of staff x hourly cost) x training hours.

Customized program funding (CPF)

Application based and is funded as per Peel Region approval of CPF plans.