

# SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

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## Building an Affordable, Accessible, Responsive, Inclusive and High Quality Early Learning and Child Care System

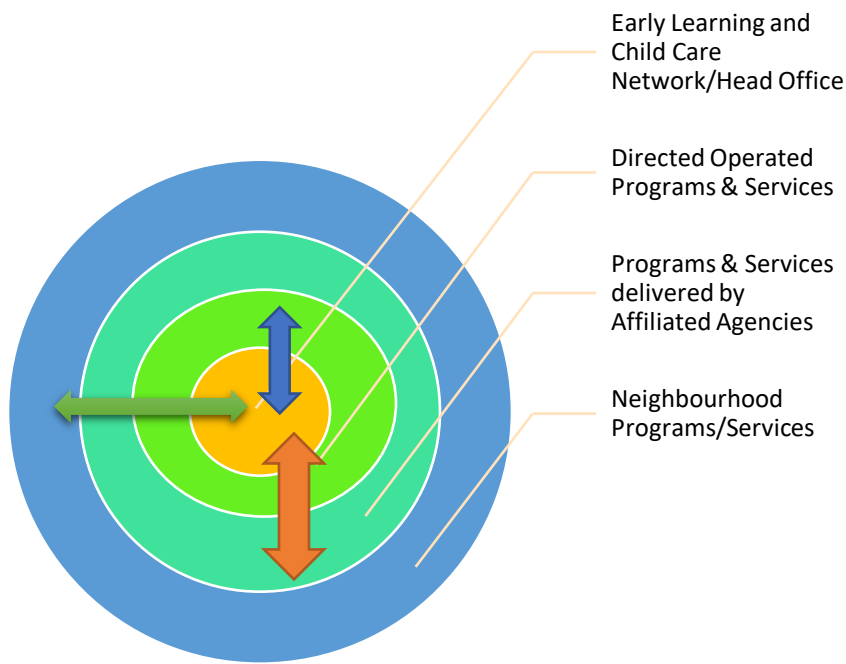
### EARLY LEARNING AND CARE NETWORKS

#### A PROPOSED MODEL

Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN) are neighbourhood, community-based hubs where children and families come together to a) participate in a wide range of affordable programs, services and supports including licensed child care and/or b) to be connected to specialized services through systems navigators or brokers attached to the Centre. Families and service providers are actively engaged in a collaborative planning process that ensures that each Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN) is a true reflection of the community in which it is located. Services and programs may be directly operated by the Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN) or operated by an affiliated not-for-profit agency through a memorandum of understanding with the Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN). From the perspective of the child and family, the provision of services is seamless.

<sup>1</sup> This brief document proposes a conceptual framework for Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN).

#### What it looks like:

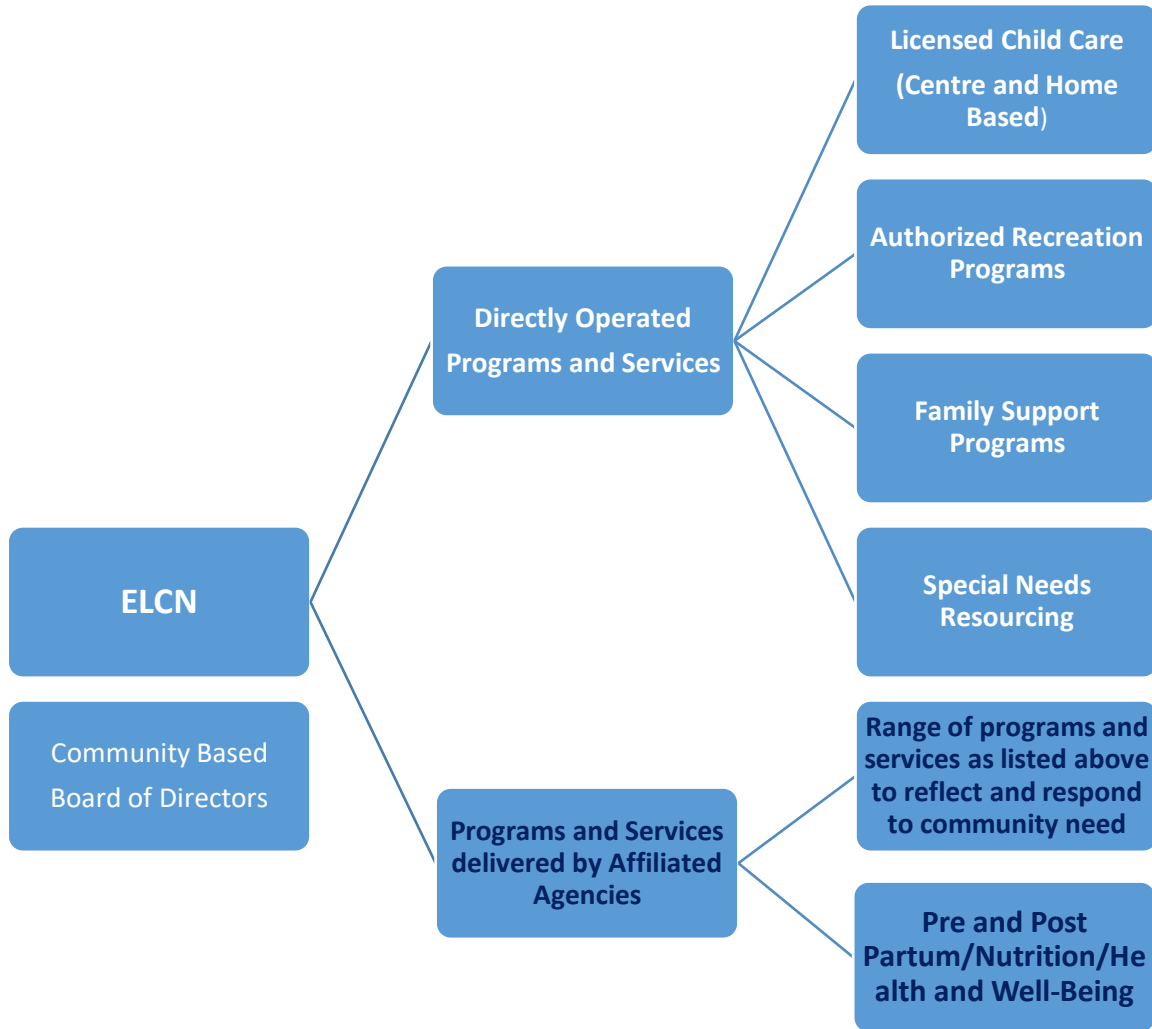


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- 1) What Services are provided by and/or through an Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN)?
- a. Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN) are destination points for parents and caregivers that provide access to core services as well as programs and services that are specific to the identified needs of the community in which they operate.
  - b. Each Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN) will be responsible for ensuring the provision of the following 8 CORE services:
    - i. Licensed child care
    - ii. Licensed Before and after school programs for kindergarten and grade 1 children
    - iii. Regulated recreation programs for school age children (Grade 2 through 6)
    - iv. Holiday and summer programming for school age children
    - v. Family Support and Engagement
    - vi. Access to specialized services
    - vii. Special Needs resourcing
    - viii. Public Health programs including but not limited to:
      1. Pre and Post Natal (18-month well-baby etc.)
      2. Nutrition
      3. Immunization
      4. Parenting
    - ix. Local service coordination and planning
  - c. Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN) will serve as a resource for community-based child care programs in the catchment area (See below, Section 4).
  - d. Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN) will be linked to a family of schools.
  - e. Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN) will work with their community partners and the service system manager to identify and address other services and programs needs in the catchment area. Needs may be addressed directly by the ELCN or through memorandums of understanding between the ELCN and other community or specialized agencies.
  - f. Programs and services will be directly provided by the lead agency or through protocols and memorandums of understanding with agencies providing specialized services.
  - g. Accessibility will be achieved through the use of virtual services, satellite locations and a main site for each defined neighbourhood/community.



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## 2) How will it be determined which agency/organization becomes the lead agency?

### Principles:

- a. The process will be guided by a Provincial Framework. Underpinning the Provincial Framework will be a commitment to quality program and service delivery that incorporates a high level of parent engagement.
- b. The Framework will include a mechanism that ensures that the process is open and transparent and equitable for all participants in the process.
- c. The process will be inclusive. A wide range of community-based stakeholders will be actively involved in the decision-making process. Opportunities for parents and interested community members to participate must be built in to the process. A consensus building model increases the likelihood of both 'buy-in' to the process and on-going collaboration between agencies and organizations. It will be the responsibility of each community to determine the most effective way of moving forward within the context of a provincially determined framework.

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- d. CMSNs/DSSABs, as service system managers, will play the lead role in ensuring that all appropriate stakeholders are at each planning table.
- e. The process must build on existing community strengths and capacity. The identified Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN) lead agency must demonstrate that they have the infrastructure capacity to:
  - i. Demonstrate good governance policies and practice
  - ii. Demonstrate the ability to effectively manage complex finances
  - iii. Demonstrate outstanding human resource management
  - iv. Have a proven record of working cooperatively and collaboratively with a diverse range of agencies and organizations and institution
- f. The process will be transparent and facilitate a community-by-community determination of which not-for-profit agency/organization is best positioned to serve as the lead agency for the Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN).
  - i. Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN) may emerge from a coming together of a range of services under the auspice of an existing not-for-profit or public entity that will serve as the lead agency developing and delivering early years programs and services. It is also possible that stakeholders may decide that the needs of children and families can be more effectively met by pooling existing resources and creating a new organization.<sup>1</sup>
  - ii. In some communities an existing agency may already be delivering most, if not all, of the programs and services that the community deems necessary for an Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN). In this instance, re-branding may be necessary.

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### 3) How will Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN) transform and integrate services?

- a. From the perspective of the child and family, integration happens when they are able to access services they need from one point of contact without having to reiterate their story. It is incumbent on each community to identify an Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN) that has the capacity and infrastructure necessary to support this high level of integration.
- b. The Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN) lead agency will serve as a broker and system navigator connecting children and families to services. It will also serve to connect and integrate services through a variety of mechanisms including protocols and purchase of service agreements. Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN) lead agencies will be expected to take a lead role at local planning tables.
- c. An “Integration Assessment” tool will be utilized in each community to support the Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN) to develop and implement a continuous

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<sup>1</sup> This is a pretty risky statement. It has the advantage of reinforcing the message that this should be a community-based process and that the participants engaged in the process will have to live with the outcome of the decision that is arrived at through a consensus building process. What do you think?

improvement model with respect to full integrating service provision within the community.

#### 4) How will Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN) relate to licensed child care?

- a. The lead agency/organization will directly operate not-for-profit licensed child care centres at the head office and at other locations throughout the neighbourhood. Locations would include but not be limited to: schools, recreation centres, workplaces, synagogues/churches/mosques, and in homes through licensed home child care.
- b. Existing stand-alone child care centres may continue to operated independently with their own governance structure. To support seamless access for children and their families, independent centres will enter into a memorandum of understanding which will clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN) to:
  - i. Manage a centralized waiting list
  - ii. Facilitate access to a shared benefit package
  - iii. Provide administrative and budgeting support.
  - iv. Provide professional development opportunities to build and strengthen quality and the delivery of seamless programming.
  - v. Serve as a resource and leader for the development and implementation of best practice policies and practices.
  - vi. Enter into agreements to deliver additional support services at community-based child care centres.
- c. Existing community-based centres may also choose to merge or amalgamate with the local Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN) lead agency.
- d. All expansion of the licensed child care system will be under the auspice of a not-for-profit community – based Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN). The lead agency will directly operate expansion sites.
- e. Parental choice will be an important principle with respect to the provision of high-quality early learning and care. Community-based child care centres will continue to provide licensed childcare, collaborating with the Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN) within their communities to facilitate parent and child access to the wide range of programs and services to be provided through the Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN).

#### 5) How will Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN) relate to their community?

- a. Provincial regulations identify CMSMs/DSSABs as the system managers and assign responsibility for the development of a community-based planning strategy to the CMSMs/DSSABs.
- b. Parents and community members are supported and encouraged to play an active role in the planning and development of services provided at and through the local Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN).

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- c. Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN) lead agencies will be not-for-profit and governed by a volunteer Board of Directors.
- d. Each Early Learning and Care Network (ELCN) will have a Parent Advisory Council to ensure that there is a forum for parents to have direct input into the planning for programs and services.

### 6) How will Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN) be governed, funded and held accountable?

- a. Accountability will be measured against a service plan that includes an agreed upon number of service units and outcome measurements.
- b. Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN) will be required to use evidence-based practice and to establish/follow an acceptable evaluation strategy.
- c. Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN) will be governed by boards of directors that include service users and community representatives with diverse professional and ethno-cultural backgrounds.
- d. CMSMs/DSSABs will receive funding from the federal and provincial governments for the planning and management of a comprehensive child care and early years service system which will include a province-wide network of Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN).
- e. Lead agencies will enter into purchase of service agreements with CMSMs/DSSABs to receive base/core funding<sup>2</sup> for the programs identified as being core services. This will include base funding for licensed child care and regulated before and after school programming
- f. The lead agency will leverage resources and supports from existing specialized services to enhance the programs and services available to parents and their children.

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### **Conclusion**

In vibrant communities, the responsibility of meeting the diverse needs of children and their families is shared. The education system, municipal services (libraries, public health, parks and recreation) and the community based not-for-profit sector (licensed child care, Ontario EarlyON Centres, Children's Mental Health) may have different mandates but they have a shared responsibility to collaborate as equals to provide healthy functioning environments for children and their families. Early Learning and Care Networks (ELCN) will provide access to multiple opportunities for children and families within the context of a community driven plan for early years programs and services.

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<sup>2</sup> QELN has a position and a paper outlining CORE or BASE funding principles. We should probably dust it off and update it!