

Developing a Quality Standards Framework for Licensed Residential Services in Ontario

Discussion Guide

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
September 2019

CONTEXT:

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (the ministry) is leading the reform of licensed residential services and is committed to improving the experiences and outcomes for children, young persons and families in Ontario. Enhancing the quality of care children and young persons receive is at the heart of this reform. Part II of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017* (CYFSA; “the Act”) establishes the rights of all children and young persons receiving services under the CYFSA, as well as the additional rights of children in residential care. This includes the right to be physically safe and supported to be healthy, to feel and be heard, and to have the right placement and services at the right time, including culturally appropriate services. As part of this reform, the ministry is seeking to increase the capacity of residential licensees to provide, or support the provision, of high-quality residential care. This includes their staff and caregivers, placing agencies and adult allies. High-quality residential care is defined as meeting the individualized needs of all children and young persons who receive licensed residential services under the Act.

We are sharing this draft quality standards framework (standards framework) with you because we want your input before it is finalized and publicly released. A meaningful standards framework must include the perspectives of those who are directly impacted by it to support broad community ownership. Our intent is to have an inclusive process for developing a standards framework for licensed residential services in Ontario that addresses the perspectives of Ontarians, community leaders, service delivery partners, other government ministries, families and caregivers, and most importantly, children and young persons with lived experience.

This purpose of this accompanying discussion guide is to provide additional context, and key questions for you to consider when providing feedback on the standards framework.

All feedback received on the draft standards framework will be reviewed by the ministry and incorporated as appropriate. We encourage you to review and discuss this standards framework within your organization or your networks, including with youth, families and caregivers, and to provide your feedback collectively or individually.

The standards framework provides an overview of what high-quality care looks like across all sectors and settings that make up licensed residential services for children and young persons in Ontario under the authority of the Act. It is intended to help build a common understanding of our goals as we work together to strengthen licensed residential services in Ontario to better meet the needs of children, young persons and families. It is important to note that residential *care* is distinct from residential *treatment*. Residential care is the basic service provided across all licensed residential settings and all sectors, for example, providing a home to, and meeting the daily needs of, children and young persons. Residential treatment is the specialized service provided to children and young persons with specific needs in residential settings, for example, psychotherapy and Applied Behavior Analysis. Residential care must be subject to distinct quality standards from the standards of practice for residential treatment. Delivering high-quality residential care is the foundation to creating an environment that supports optimal development and facilitates residential treatment. Of note, developing standards for high-quality residential treatment is outside the scope of this standards framework.

There are current requirements for residential licensees and placing agencies in the Act and regulations that contribute to achieving high-quality residential care. The quality standards build on these requirements to further support residential service providers as they care for children and young persons. The requirements in the Act and regulations, and quality standards are connected and intended to be used together to help achieve high-quality residential care.

The ministry has heard through multiple reports that children and young persons do not consistently experience high-quality residential care. For example, on September 25, 2018, the Office of the Chief Coroner released *Safe with Intervention: The Report of the Expert Panel on the Deaths of Children and Youth in Residential Placements*. The expert panel reviewed the recent deaths of 12 children and young persons who were in the care of a children's aid society and living in residential settings to determine whether these tragedies were a trend and/or systemic problem. The 12 children and young persons all experienced mental health concerns and addictions. Eight of the children and young persons identified as Indigenous from First Nations communities in North Western Ontario, one identified as Black, and many identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Two-Spirited, Queer. None of the 12 deaths were determined to be caused by "natural" circumstances. This report contained five recommendations, including that the ministry immediately enhance the quality and availability of residential placements for young people in residential care, and specifically establish quality standards for all residential services in Ontario.

INTENT:

The draft quality standards outline what it means to provide high-quality residential care to children and young persons in licensed residential settings. The intent of the quality standards is to improve the day-to-day experience of children and young persons in residential care and to promote positive outcomes. The standards framework will be used in licensing reviews as a discussion tool with residential licensees to help build their understanding and capacity to provide high-quality residential care. The standards framework will also be used by other ministry staff in their discussions with residential licensees or placing agencies. It may also be used by placing agencies in their placement and oversight discussions with residential service providers ahead of making any placement decisions and on a continuous basis, including with those providers who are unlicensed.

SCOPE:

The draft standards framework is designed to help individuals and agencies that provide or support residential care to children and young persons in licensed settings. This includes individuals and agencies in the child welfare, youth justice, child and youth mental health and/or complex special needs sectors. This document intends to foster a shared understanding of what it means to provide high-quality residential care and to promote the sharing of leading and innovative practices.

This standards framework provides guidance on the many aspects of high-quality care that are necessary to support vulnerable children and young persons in residential care. Understanding high-quality residential care in a fulsome and holistic way makes it possible to identify opportunities and challenges related to achieving and exceeding these quality standards.

The primary audiences for this standards framework are:

Residential licensees – individuals or organizations that are licensed to provide residential care and are responsible for the care provided in their licensed settings.

Staff and caregivers – individuals providing residential care and services directly to children and young persons and those who interact most with them daily, including foster parents, frontline workers and their supervisors.

Placing agencies – individuals or organizations that make placement decisions for children and young persons and have oversight over the placements while they are living there, such as children’s aid societies, youth justice placement coordinators and child and youth mental health agencies.

Adult allies – adults in the child or young person’s life that have an active interest in supporting and partnering with the child or young person and can help ensure that children and young persons are receiving the care that they need.

The ministry also recognizes the important role it plays in supporting the primary audiences of this standards framework to provide high-quality residential care. As previously noted, we all have a responsibility to strive towards achieving the highest quality of care possible for children and young persons.

DEVELOPMENT:

The content of this standards framework was developed according to the quality of care domains identified by youth with lived experience in residential care in their report [Envisioning Better Care for Youth: Our Input to the Blueprint](#). The domains refer to the everyday experiences of children and young persons while in a residential setting, except for the Homes and Ongoing Support domain, which includes elements that take place outside of the residential setting and within the broader provincial service system (e.g., placement decisions).

The structure of the draft standards framework was developed using [Health Quality Ontario’s Quality Standards Process and Methods Guide](#). This guide outlines the process of developing quality standards and indicators and provides helpful suggestions to maximize implementation efforts.

The Ontario Ministry of Education’s [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years](#) policy framework document, as well as quality standards from other jurisdictions, including [Minimum Standards for Children’s Homes](#) from Northern Ireland and [Better Care, Better Services](#) from Western Australia, were also used to develop the content of this framework.

QUALITY STANDARDS:

Twelve draft quality standards have been developed to guide the practice of all licensed residential service providers in Ontario and are further explained and described in the draft standards framework. The 12 quality standards are:

1. **Informed Placement Decisions** – Children and young persons are placed in licensed residential settings based on an assessment of their needs and aligned to the placement’s demonstrated capacity to meet those needs.

2. **Individualized Care** – Children and young persons receive individualized care while receiving residential services that helps to meet their unique needs, encompassing all aspects of their lives and well-being, and promote their social, community and recreational engagement.
3. **Children and Young Persons’ Rights and Complaints** – Children and young persons are supported and empowered to understand, exercise and receive the benefit of their rights, including raising concerns about their care and having these concerns responded to in a timely manner.
4. **Children and Young Persons’ Voice** – Children and young persons in residential care are continuously engaged to participate and have an active voice in the planning and decision-making that impacts their lives.
5. **Safe, Inclusive and Accessible Environments** – Children and young persons feel that the licensed residential setting where they reside is safe, inclusive, and accessible.
6. **Identity** – Children and young persons in residential care are able and encouraged to identify and embrace the many dimensions of their identity, including their creed and culture, and the care provided to them adheres to their identity.
7. **Positive Relationships** – Children and young persons in residential care are supported to develop and maintain positive relationships with others and themselves.
8. **Staff and Caregivers** – Children and young persons are cared for by staff and caregivers who have appropriate educational qualifications, skills, training and experience to adequately support them and meet their needs.
9. **Health and Well-Being** – Children and young persons live in an environment where their physical, emotional and mental health and wellbeing is promoted and where they are able to access the appropriate services to meet their overall health needs.
10. **Educational Achievement** – A child or young person’s right to receive an education is facilitated by the residential licensee. The education of children and young persons is actively promoted as valuable and considered an important part of their preparation for leaving residential care and moving into adulthood.
11. **Access to Electronic Communication** – Children and young persons have developmentally and age-appropriate access to means of electronic communication, including electronic devices with internet access, in accordance with their needs.
12. **Supported Transitions** – Children and young persons receive care that helps prepare and support them in transitions, including placement changes, to independence and adulthood, and to adult services. Unplanned transitions are avoided to the extent possible.

Key Questions:

As you review the draft quality standards framework, please consider these questions to guide the feedback you provide:

1. Are there any revisions to the language or the way the content is framed that you would suggest to better capture the intent of the quality standards framework?
2. Is there content and/or themes that are confusing or missing from the quality standards framework?
3. Are there any other evidence examples that you think should be included? What else is important to be in place to achieve the quality standard?
4. You are invited to provide brief examples of high-quality practice that are occurring across licensed residential settings in Ontario related to the quality standards (there are placeholders at the end of each quality standard within the draft framework).

IMPLEMENTATION:

The draft standards framework is an important step to enhance the quality of care provided in licensed residential settings in Ontario. The ministry intends to develop regulations based on the content of this standards framework to hold residential licensees and placing agencies legally accountable for the quality of care they provide to children and young persons.

Achieving and maintaining high-quality care is an ongoing process. We want this standards framework to guide decisions around the care provided to children and young persons in licensed residential settings. The standards framework will be the start of a dialogue between individuals, agencies, First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, and community organizations to ensure that children and young persons are receiving high-quality residential care. In addition, the standards framework will help to create a common foundation for government and its partners to evaluate, measure and report progress in achieving the desired outcomes for children and young persons.

Key Questions:

1. What do you anticipate will be the key potential impacts, challenges and/or benefits for children and young persons when the quality standards framework is in place?
2. What do you anticipate will be the key potential impacts, challenges and/or benefits for you or your organization when the quality standards framework is in place?
3. Pages 44 and 45 in the draft quality standards framework outline implementation supports the ministry intends to provide to the licensed residential services sector. Please comment on whether you would find these supports to be useful. Are there other implementation supports you would recommend?
4. What tools or additional materials would be helpful in supporting implementation of the framework with adult allies?

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS:

The ministry welcomes your feedback on the draft standards framework. All feedback received on the standards framework will be reviewed by the ministry and incorporated as appropriate. Please email qualitystandardsframework@ontario.ca to share any feedback, comments and/or questions that you may have about the standards framework by **Friday, October 18, 2019**. A consolidated copy of all the discussion questions above has been created for your ease of response (see Appendix A below).

Appendix A: Discussion Questions

The ministry welcomes your feedback on the draft standards framework. All feedback received on the standards framework will be reviewed by the ministry and incorporated as appropriate. Please email qualitystandardsframework@ontario.ca to share any feedback, comments and/or questions by **Friday, October 18, 2019**.

As you review the quality standards framework, please consider these questions to guide the feedback you provide to the ministry:

1. Are there any revisions to the language or the way the content is framed that you would suggest to better capture the intent of the quality standards framework?
2. Is there content and/or themes that are confusing or missing from the quality standards framework?
3. Are there any other evidence examples that you think should be included? What else is important to be in place to achieve the quality standards?
4. We invite you to provide brief examples of high-quality practice that are occurring across licensed residential settings in Ontario related to the quality standards (please see the placeholders at the end of each quality standard within the draft framework).
5. What do you anticipate will be the key potential impacts, challenges and/or benefits for children and young persons when the quality standards framework is in place?
6. What do you anticipate will be the key potential impacts, challenges and/or benefits for you or your organization when the quality standards framework is in place?
7. Pages 44 and 45 in the draft quality standards framework outline implementation supports the ministry intends to provide to the licensed residential services sector. Please comment on whether you would find these supports to be useful. Are there other implementation supports you would recommend?
8. What tools or additional materials would be helpful in supporting implementation of the framework with adult allies?