

Together We Raise Tomorrow.



An Alberta Approach to
Early Childhood Development

2013



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An Alberta Approach to Early Childhood Development

Executive Summary

Together We Raise Tomorrow is a province-wide initiative to support the well-being, safety, security, education and health of all children in Alberta. Over the next year, government and communities will work together to build on the principles of Alberta's Social Policy Framework to create a children's charter, a poverty reduction strategy and move forward with the Alberta Approach to Early Childhood Development. These conversations will bring Albertans together to identify local solutions and supports that will fit the diversity of children and families in the province.

The Government of Alberta has made the strategic decision to focus special attention and effort on early childhood development to help Alberta's children realize their full potential. We know that when children thrive, they are likely to become adults who thrive and this contributes to the collective well-being of the province, now and into the future.

The foundation for strong and healthy children is set in the early years; starting even before they are born. All children need nurturing relationships and safe, supportive environments to grow and learn. Their future health and success in school, work and relationships depends on it. It's the important day-to-day connections and positive interactions between parents, family members and caregivers that help children thrive. However, it takes the whole community, working together, to create the nurturing environments that families need to support their young ones.

We know that child poverty, homelessness, family violence and abuse cause some children to be more vulnerable than others. Supports need to be targeted to fit the unique challenges and diversity of Alberta families so all children can succeed. This means a connected early childhood system of evidence-based prevention, early intervention and protection services in communities that supports the healthy development of all children and responds to the very real risks for those who are vulnerable.

Efforts will focus on:

- A healthy start for children
- Children realizing their full developmental potential when they enter school
- Parents providing nurturing and stable environments for their young children
- Safe, supportive communities for children to learn grow and thrive

Over the next three years, we will work to:

- Improve maternal, infant and child health to support healthy pregnancies, reduce the number of children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, optimize maternal mental health and provide early screening and follow up to support a child's development.
- Provide Alberta parents with access to leading edge early years information and practical tools that help support their child's development.
- Assist families experiencing periods of vulnerability to provide healthy, safe, nurturing experiences for their children and protect children who are not safe.



The foundation for strong and healthy children is set in the early years; starting even before they are born.



As Albertans, we will move forward on a platform of shared purpose, focused leadership, and strong collaborative relationships that are grounded in common outcomes and shared measures of success.

- Create a “made in Alberta” early years approach to provide responsive early learning and care options that help children to reach their developmental potential by the time they enter school.
- Collaborate with communities to develop a cohesive and accessible system of neighbourhood supports where families can get the right supports at the times they need it most.

Success will be achieved when:

- More women experience healthy pregnancies
- More children are realizing their developmental potential in the first years of life
- Alberta parents are more confident in their parenting role and how their child is developing
- Communities are working together to increase access to the right services, at the right time to meet the needs of families.

Early Childhood Development: Moving Forward Together

Most of Alberta’s children are developing as expected, but we know we can do better. In Alberta, approximately 27 per cent of children beginning school are experiencing difficulty in one or more areas of development, including language, thinking and social skills—a rate higher than the Canadian average of 25 per cent.

Alberta’s Approach to Early Childhood Development will build on the foundation established by existing child, youth and family programs. With appropriate parent and community resources, more children will have the chance to grow up strong and healthy, and avoid the need for costly healthcare and social programs throughout their lives. As Albertans, we will move forward on a platform of shared purpose, focused leadership, and strong collaborative relationships that are grounded in common outcomes and shared measures of success.

Early Childhood Development services have been offered by multiple departments with varying funding and policies. As a result, duplications or gaps can exist in community-based programs. This means we have to adopt a different way of working and thinking across government and with communities that integrates services and supports to address the unique circumstances and needs of families. Integrating our approach aims to improve health and development outcomes for Alberta’s children.

Building community networks of high-quality, integrated, and accessible early childhood programs and services will allow parents to access the right services at the right time. These networks will include a connected range of services and supports to:

- provide healthy childhood development opportunities for all children
- assist families with evidence based early childhood development information and positive parenting strategies
- target early intervention services to prevent and respond to adverse childhood experiences
- support vulnerable children to be safe and protected

A Focused Path

Success for all children is possible if government, communities, families and researchers work together to create a cohesive, inclusive and responsive early childhood development system that is accessible to all families. A connected early childhood system of evidence-based prevention, early intervention and protection services in communities will support the healthy development of children and respond to the very real risks for those who are vulnerable. Our goal is to develop innovative solutions to fit the unique challenges and diversity of Alberta families so all children can succeed.

Over the next three years we will take action to:

- Improve maternal, infant and child health to support healthy pregnancies, reduce the number of children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, optimize maternal mental health and provide early screening and follow up in order to identify challenges and support a child's development.
- Provide parents with access to leading edge early years information and practical tools that support their child's development.
- Assist families experiencing periods of vulnerability to help them keep their children safe and supported.
- Create a "Made in Alberta" early years approach that provides parents with access to responsive early learning and care options.
- Collaborate with communities to develop a cohesive and accessible system of neighbourhood supports that families can access when they need it most.

Success will be achieved when:

- 1. More women experience healthy pregnancies.**
Measure: Improved measures of infant and child health.
- 2. More children are realizing their developmental potential in the first years of life.**
Measure: Reduced per cent of children in Alberta who are reported to be experiencing great difficulty in one or more of the areas of development.
- 3. Alberta parents are more confident in their parenting role and how their child is developing.**
Measure: Increased per cent of parents who report using effective parenting practices to support their child's development.
- 4. Communities are working together to increase access to the right services, at the right time to meet the needs of families.**
Measure: Increased per cent of parents who understand where and how to access ECD information and supports.

Our shared experiences serving children and families across government and communities, current knowledge of the needs of children in Alberta, and emerging scientific evidence have helped us to determine where we need to start and why.





All developing children need a healthy start, nurturing relationships, and safe, supportive environments to grow, learn and thrive.

The Developing Child

The foundation for strong and healthy children is set in early childhood, starting even before they are born. Clear scientific evidence tells us that brain development is influenced by early childhood experiences. Brain development is optimal when children grow up with safe and healthy environments, loving and supportive relationships and opportunities to learn.

Families are the primary teachers, nurturers and protectors for children. A child's positive interaction with a parent is the most powerful way to develop a healthy, happy child. However, if children are exposed to traumatic events and ongoing stress such as witnessing or experiencing family violence, living in poverty, or being subjected to neglect or abuse, brain development may be impaired. Children living in these environments are more likely to face developmental difficulties, poor health and be less prepared for school. This can set a course for challenges and difficulties for children that can last throughout their lifespan.

We recognize that this unfortunate reality is compounded for some Aboriginal, new Canadian and lone parent families. They can encounter barriers to meeting the basic needs of their families. The impact of complex, multigenerational issues faced by many Aboriginal families means a significant over representation of Aboriginal people in health, justice and social services. Language and cultural barriers experienced by families of recent immigrants can increase challenges for their child's learning. Limited resources and competing demands can make it more difficult for lone parent families to reach out for support.

All developing children need a healthy start, nurturing relationships, and safe, supportive environments to grow, learn and thrive. These positive and caring interactions support healthy development and can buffer the impacts of negative experiences and environments. Our children's lifelong health and future successes in school, work and relationships depend on it.

Developing Healthy Brains



Experiences Build Brain Architecture

Early experiences establish either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the learning, health, and behavior that follow.



Serve and Return Interactions

Back-and-forth vocalizing and gestures are fundamental to the wiring of the brain, especially in the earliest years.



Toxic Stress Derails

Unrelenting stress caused by extreme poverty, neglect, or abuse can affect healthy development.

From Harvard University's Centre on the Developing Child

An Alberta Approach to Early Childhood Development

A Healthy Start Means a Healthy Future

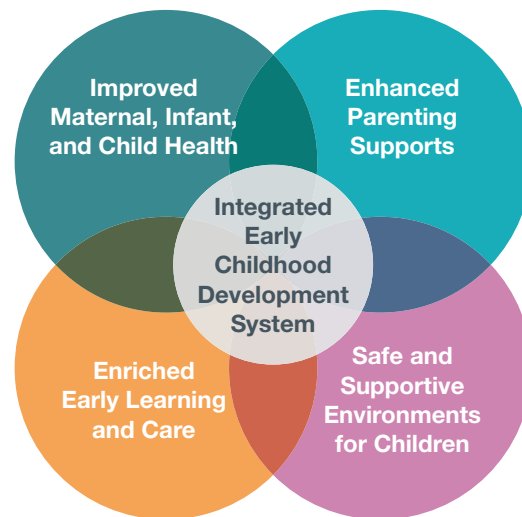
In Alberta, all children have a healthy start, safe and healthy environments, nurturing and supportive relationships and opportunities to learn, creating a foundation for them to fulfill their potential and benefit from our thriving social, economic, and cultural life.



Conditions for Success



Strategic Priorities



What You Can Do to Get Involved

- Visit earlychildhood.alberta.ca to post your ideas and information on the web.
- Tell your friends on Facebook about what we're up to—set up a link from your Facebook page to our website.
- Champion Early Childhood Development on social media: if you're on Twitter, tweet your followers Early Childhood Development updates.
- Lead a discussion about the Alberta Approach to Early Childhood Development in your community.
- Join or start an early childhood development network in your community.
- Respond to the discussion questions and invite others to get involved.

Appendix 1: The First Steps

Taking Action to Build an Integrated Early Childhood Development System

Setting the Foundation:

- Establish shared governance to guide and enable the development of an integrated Early Childhood Development system.
- Develop a community engagement strategy, including a strategic communication plan, to actively engage communities in the planning, design and implementation of an integrated Early Childhood Development system.
- Develop an outcomes based measurement and measures of success framework across the strategic priorities for action to facilitate shared leadership and accountability for results across ministries and with communities.
- Develop a research and innovation strategy with researchers, leading experts, government departments and community leaders to: promote innovation; inform policy, program and practice; and maximize Early Childhood Development outcomes.

Moving Strategic Priorities to Action

Improved Maternal, Infant and Child Health

What Albertans will see: Increased access to services and supports for families to improve maternal, infant and child health, including maternal mental health and pre-school screening and follow-up services.

Outcome: A healthy start for children.

Deliverables:

- Improved access to maternal, infant and child health services to support healthy pregnancies, healthy birth weights, increased breastfeeding rates and reduce the number of children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.
- Increased access to early childhood screening and follow up services.

Milestones:

- 2013:** Develop strategies to support maternal infant health, infant and preschool screening and follow-up, and enhance social-emotional development screening in Parent Link Centres; develop targeted prevention strategies for pregnant at risk women to address mental health and addiction issues.
- 2014:** Develop policies that address gaps and enhance benefits for women before and after giving birth as well as promote breastfeeding. Begin implementing targeted prevention strategies and newborn hearing screening.

Enhanced Parenting Resources

What Albertans will see: Parents are provided with access to leading edge early years information and practical tools that help support their child’s development.

Outcome: Parents providing nurturing and stable environments for their young children.

Deliverables:

- Provide Alberta parents with access to leading edge early years information and practical tools that help support their child’s development.
- Assist families experiencing periods of vulnerability; including poverty, homelessness, family violence or abuse to reduce their barriers to providing healthy, safe, nurturing experiences for their children and protect children who are not safe.

Milestones:

- 2013:** Support distribution of comprehensive parenting resources that provide parents with the most recent information on child development and positive parenting strategies including targeted approaches that support at risk families.
- 2014:** Develop a multi-channel approach to dissemination of information and continue implementing enhanced parenting supports.

Enriched Early Learning Environments

What Albertans will see: A “Made in Alberta” early years approach that provides parents with well-aligned, integrated, and accessible early learning environments to help lay the foundation for their child’s future success before they enter school.

Outcome: Children realizing their full developmental potential when they enter school.

Deliverables:

- Parents have access to evidence-based early years programming and a range of quality early learning environments that are responsive to the needs of families and helps them support their child’s development.
- Caregivers and early childhood educators have a common approach to early years programming that includes the quality early learning and play experiences children need to grow, learn and thrive.

Milestones:

- 2013:** Engage researchers, stakeholders and community partners in the development of a draft early learning framework that supports a “Made in Alberta” integrated approach to service delivery.
- 2014:** Consult with Albertans on key elements of the framework and pilot innovative curriculum and integrated service delivery approaches.

Safe and Supportive Environments for Children

What Albertans will see: A cohesive, inclusive and responsive system of neighbourhood supports that families can access to support the healthy development of their children.

Outcome: Safe, supportive communities where children learn, grow, and thrive.

Deliverables:

- Information regarding leading edge early childhood development science, as well as provincial and community data on how children are developing, are available to communities to help them create safe, supportive and nurturing environments where children can reach their developmental potential.
- Initiatives are aligned with other community collaborations to ensure a cohesive approach to create and support accessible systems of neighbourhood supports for children.
- A cohesive and accessible system of neighbourhood supports with a range of integrated services is available to families in community hubs to get the right supports to families at the right times to support the safe and healthy development of their children.

Milestones:

- 2013:** Engage community partners in creating an integrated early childhood development system in Alberta to improve maternal and child health, enrich early learning and care options, support parents and create safe and supportive communities.
- 2014:** Initiate a process with community partners to develop integrated service delivery hubs, including demonstration projects, to build on and align with current programs and services to create a more integrated early years approach.

Factors to Drive our Success

As we move forward with the Alberta Approach to Early Childhood Development the enablers noted below and the linkages to other priorities will be critical to our success.

Enablers

The enablers are those factors that will support our ability to work collaboratively and be accountable for results.

- Research and innovation
- Integrated Policy
- Governance (i.e. cross ministry, community engagement)
- Targeted and aligned resources
- Accountability for results (performance management)
- Workforce planning
- Information sharing and data collection systems

Linkages with Social Policy Framework and other Family and Community Priorities

We must also be aware of, and link to other key strategies.

- Plan to End Child Poverty
- Primary Health Care (i.e. Family Care Clinics)
- Inspiring Education
- Addictions and Mental Health Strategy
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder 10 year Strategic Plan
- A Framework to End Family Violence in Alberta
- Healthy Relationships Initiative
- Information Sharing Strategy
- Youth Homelessness Strategy
- Aboriginal and Urban Aboriginal Strategies

Community Engagement

Phased Community Engagement Approach

The Alberta Approach to Early Childhood Development is one of the social policy transformation initiatives. Focused conversations will be held online and with communities to help inform the design and implementation of an integrated early years approach, i.e. Enriched Early Learning and Care, Improved Maternal and Child Health, Supporting Parents, Safe and Supportive Community Environments.

We will engage with families, service providers, researchers, and other community partners, such as Early Childhood Coalitions, ParentLink Centres, Family Care Clinics, schools, municipal programs, and early learning and child care providers, including multicultural and Aboriginal perspectives.



Appendix 2: Why Does Early Childhood Development Matter?

The Science: A Compelling Case for Change

Leading brain and child development research has guided our decision to integrate the four strategic priorities into an integrated system of early childhood development supports.

Approximately 27% of Alberta's kindergarten children are experiencing developmental difficulties.

- The Early Development Instrument (EDI) measures development in five year old children in regards to their social competence, physical health and well-being, language and thinking skills, emotional maturity or communication skills, and general knowledge. In Alberta, EDI results show that up to 27% of kindergarten children are experiencing developmental difficulties and thus not meeting developmental milestones in one or more of the developmental areas.
- EDI results reflect a number of factors contributing to child development, including the health condition of mothers and babies before, during, and after child birth (e.g., low birth weight, maternal depression, and premature birth), social and economic factors that impact supports parents need (e.g., poverty), and the health and safety of physical environments (e.g., positive early learning and care environments.)
- Evidence shows a connection between EDI results and children's achievement in later grades, high school completion, and post-secondary attendance.

Improving early childhood development is a good investment.

- Research shows that intervening earlier rather than later increases the positive impact on brain development and life course outcomes. Economic analyses suggest that a dollar invested in early childhood is 3 times more cost effective than one invested in school age children and 8 times more cost effective than one invested in adult education.
- By targeting causes of developmental difficulties, we improve life course outcomes and reduce the number of children experiencing developmental difficulties. We also secure significant savings in healthcare, education, justice and social services.

New brain science research provides evidence that shows what happens in early childhood has impact throughout the life span.

- The brain structure supporting social, emotional and mental development is developed in early childhood; capacity to develop these foundations decreases over time.
- Early experiences have a powerful influence on brain architecture. Early experiences interact with a child's genes and can change the child's developmental path.
- Early experiences set the path for future health, learning and behaviour. Disrupted early development can impact the functioning of the brain and immune systems including;
 - > **Health:** Heart disease, obesity, auto-immune disorders, some forms of cancer, mental health, Type II Diabetes and blood pressure
 - > **Learning:** Literacy, academic achievement, math abilities and cognitive abilities (IQ)
 - > **Behaviour:** Anti-social behaviours, substance abuse, violence, alcohol abuse and smoking

- Brain research also demonstrates that strong relationships, healthy environments and rich learning experiences support healthy brain development which can prevent developmental difficulties as well as buffer children against the impacts of negative experiences and environments.
- Science tells us that meeting the developmental needs of young children is as much about building a strong foundation for lifelong physical and mental health as it is about enhancing readiness to succeed in school.

We will use this evidence and other emerging sources to guide the development of the Alberta Approach to Early Childhood Development to integrate across the four strategic areas for action: improving maternal, infant and child health; enhancing parenting supports; enriching early learning and care; and developing safe and supportive environments for children.

Improved Maternal, Infant and Child Health

With a strong focus on maternal, infant and child health before, during and after pregnancy, children have a better chance of getting the good start they need.

We know that healthy mothers are more likely to give birth to healthy babies. Some babies start life at a distinct disadvantage, and some may never catch up. Babies born prematurely or born with a low birth-weight spend more time in hospital at birth, and have a higher risk of developing health and social problems throughout life. Maternal, infant, and child health can be influenced by family income, health behaviors, education, mental health and physical environments. Without proper supports in place for families, consequences will likely involve high costs for the individual, the family, as well as society.

How Do We Know?

A strong body of research supports the need for adequate, accessible health care for expectant mothers, new mothers, and young children and for parents to have access to information on child and brain development.

- Improving maternal, infant and child health can reduce the number of children experiencing developmental difficulties. In Alberta, 17% of women smoke while pregnant. These women are 2.5 times more likely to have a low birth weight baby. Each year, an estimated 450 babies are born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). These preventable developmental difficulties result in costs to government and society. For example, each child with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder costs government and society about \$1,800,000 over their lifetime. Low birth weight and FASD babies are at higher risk for growth and developmental difficulties. Pregnant women, who practice healthy behaviours, like not smoking or drinking alcohol, have healthier children.
- Good medical care and mental health screening and follow-up can catch and provide early treatment for the 20% of women who experience postpartum depression. Post-partum depression disrupts the early mother-child relationship and children born to these moms are 70% more likely to experience developmental difficulties if left untreated.
- About 150 babies each year are born with significant hearing loss. While the number is small, if left undetected and untreated at birth, these children can experience significantly impaired delayed speech and language development, impacting their future well-being.

Enhanced Parenting Supports

It is largely the day-to-day relationships and positive interactions between parents, family members and caregivers that help children reach developmental milestones.

We know parents are a child's most important nurturers and teachers. Many are not aware or able to take advantage of the latest evidence and information regarding child development and how to best support their child. From the first hours and weeks of life, there are small and seemingly inconsequential interactions between parents and young children that are recognized as critical to a child's development. Simple things like eye contact, touching, talking, singing and reading together can have a profound effect on a child's social, behavior and language development. All parents in Alberta need information on the developing brain and the many skills, abilities and developmental milestones that children reach—or are expected to reach—during the first five years of life.

In addition, strategies that help parents who are experiencing challenges or times of vulnerability are critical for reducing barriers to optimal child development opportunities. Parents will thus be better able to support their children to be safe, strong and resilient.

How Do We Know?

- Capacities for learning are built on good nutrition, quality care and a responsive, loving environment during infancy. An infant who is frequently spoken to by parents are likely to learn almost 300 more words by age 2 than their peers who were rarely spoken to as infants.
- Parents or other caring individuals who read to young children more than once a day have a substantial positive impact on children's listening skills, vocabulary and language skills, as well as imagination and creativity. Children aged 2 to 3 who are read to more than once a day do substantially better in kindergarten at the age of 4 and 5 than youngsters who are read to less than once a day.
- Genes and experiences interact to determine an individual's vulnerability to early adversity. Environmental factors appear to be at least if not more powerful than genetic predispositions in their impact on the odds of having chronic health problems later in life. Neuroscience clearly shows that on-going toxic stress, such as child abuse, neglect, poverty, maternal depression, substance abuse or family violence can damage the developing brain. Research has found that toxic stress experiences often co-occur; each additional stress increases the potential for damage to the developing brain.
- Seventy per cent of children experience one or more Adverse Childhood Events such as neglect, abuse, domestic violence, parental mental illness or separation and divorce. Children who experience neglectful and/or abusive early environments have an increased risk for poor health in adulthood. For example, the risk for cardiovascular disease for adults who experienced adverse environments in early childhood in comparison to those who had not is 7:1. The risk for mental health problems such as depression is 10:1.
- Young children, particularly those under three years old, are the most vulnerable to violence by a parent. In 2009, of all children who experienced violence, about 81% of this age group were assaulted by their parent. Children this age are uniquely sensitive to toxic stress, such as experiencing violence, and their future health and development can be disrupted as a result. Furthermore, spousal abuse victims were more likely than other victims to be first victimized as a child, with 48 per cent of spousal victims reporting they were physically assaulted before the age of 15.

- Aboriginal people are over represented in health, justice and social services. The percentage of Aboriginal children and youth in care rose from 22% in 1986 to 67% in 2012, yet Aboriginal children only account for 9% of the child population in Alberta. 63% of Aboriginal inmates experienced foster or group homes during childhood, compared to 36% of non-Aboriginal inmates. The impact of complex issues such as colonization, racism, poverty and intergenerational trauma are root causes for many current issues that Aboriginal families face. Symptoms of the impact of these issues include addictions, mental health issues, family breakdown, chronic poverty, violence and despair.
- Alberta is the third most diverse province in Canada with 16% of the population having been born in another country. With an average age of 27, immigrants are also more likely to have young families. Many immigrant families face issues that can negatively impact child development, including pre-immigration trauma (such as living in a refugee camp) and living in poverty (1/3 of immigrant children live in poverty in Canada), which is also associated with post-partum depression in up to 40% of mothers. The challenges can be compounded by poor family and social supports, difficulty accessing services due to lack of awareness of services, language and cultural barriers.
- Research confirms that a number of parenting programs produce significant and durable positive changes by increasing positive family relationships, reducing child behaviour problems and reducing child maltreatment rates. Research also shows that giving parents child and brain development information and timely supports and interventions reduces the number of children experiencing negative impacts, reduces family stress, and buffers the impact of toxic stress if it does occur.

Enriched Early Learning and Care

In order to help support their child’s optimal development, parents need to feel confident that their children are being cared for in safe, nurturing settings that include quality early learning and play.

Alberta has experienced a significant amount of change in the last 20 years. There has been substantial migration into our province, a tremendous shift in family structure and workforce participation, and changes in roles and relationships between families and their communities. This new reality for our families requires a “Made in Alberta” approach for supporting early childhood development. Parents need access to a range of aligned and responsive early learning and care environments, including options for kindergarten. Positive caregiver interactions in early childhood settings, both at home and in the community, foster social competence, reduce behaviour problems and enhance thinking and reasoning by the time children reach school age.

How Do We Know?

- 70% of Alberta parents with children under six worked outside of their home in 2010. We know that between 2012 and 2016, the Alberta population of children less than four years old is projected to increase by 6%. As the number of working parents grows, it is important to support families to optimize healthy child development by providing aligned, stable and stimulating early learning and child care programs.

- A strong body of research suggests that children’s developmental trajectories are affected by the quality and continuity of their experiences in child care. Improving early learning and child care workforce training and programming can provide tangible improvements in the early learning that children experience.
- Caregiver attributes and interactions in child care settings influence the development of important capabilities in children, including fostering social competence, reducing behaviour problems and enhancing thinking and reasoning by the time children reach school age.

Safe and Supportive Environments for Children

The best early childhood development takes place in environments that focus on the wellbeing of the child. Children have the best possible start in life when family units are strong and are able to find support in their communities.

There are a growing number of community supports for young children and their families. The Alberta Approach to Early Childhood development will work to bring a network of high quality and accessible early childhood programs and services together so families can get the right services at the right time.

A range of integrated services offered in safe, welcoming and inclusive community environments is necessary to provide healthy childhood development for all children, including public awareness, education and positive parenting programs. Targeted early intervention and child protection services prevent and respond to adverse childhood experiences, address issues associated with poor health, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, bullying or abuse, and ensure vulnerable children are safe and protected.

How Do We Know?

- Families need supportive environments in order to be able to meet children’s development needs. Studies show that multiple spheres of influence positively affect a child’s development. Spheres of influence include caregivers outside the family, the neighbourhood environment, resources in the community, cultural and religious affiliations, and the attitudes, policies and resources provided by wider society. These spheres of influence interconnect to shape both the child’s and the family’s environment.
- Integrated service delivery models implemented in Canada have resulted in short-term positive outcomes for children and parents. In Prince Edward Island, the Smart Start Program evaluation found more families were served how they wanted to be as well as had access to a broader range of more flexible and affordable services. Parent satisfaction improved, and preliminary results showed improved school readiness for children who regularly attended the program.
- Evaluations of other integrated service delivery models (such as Sure Start in Great Britain, Communities for Children in Australia, and Toronto’s First Duty) found that children in neighbourhoods with integrated children’s services showed better social development, more positive social behaviour and greater independence and self-regulation compared with children living in similar areas without integrated services. More families knew about services and found them more accessible. Families also attended programs more often and participated in a broader range of activities. There was a reduction in the number of agencies families needed to approach and fewer families fell through the cracks. In addition, parents reported greater satisfaction with services, less family stress, reduced social isolation, more confidence in their parenting and improved communication with staff.

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