



Fact Sheet

Early Childhood Development

Background

February 2004

In September 2000, Premier Klein and all First Ministers (except the Premier of Quebec) signed a Communiqué on Early Childhood Development. The Communiqué described their vision of early childhood development as an investment in the future of Canada. It also reflects a long-term commitment by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments to improve and expand the supports available to young children and their families. As part of their commitment, the federal government expanded its support to provinces and to enhance their already significant contributions to early childhood development.

Under the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative, a cross-ministry Early Childhood Development Strategy was developed in Alberta, to support Alberta's commitment to the Communiqué and the children and families of Alberta.

Vision and Goals

Supporting the vision of early childhood development is an investment in the future of this province, Alberta's Early Childhood Development Strategy has three goals:

- to provide a range of health, social and learning programs and services for children, from preconception to age six, their parents and families;
- to ensure that children get the best start in life; and
- to build on the existing foundation of services and programs.

Key Investment Areas

There are four key areas of investment in Alberta's Early Childhood Development Strategy:

1. Services to Expectant Parents, New Parents and Infants:

Through the Young Family Wellness Initiative, regional health authorities are provided with funding to enhance their public health services based on the priorities of the region. Examples of strategies include:

- prenatal to birth period: prenatal education; early postnatal follow-up; post-partum depression screening
- infancy and early childhood: breast feeding support; enhanced well-child screening, assessment and referral; parenting support and education in areas such as nutrition, safety, child development, etc.; enhancement of specialized services and supports for infants and children with developmental delays and their families; and injury prevention initiatives.

2. Parenting Supports and Parenting Skills Programs:

Investments in key areas 2 and 3 have been made through regional child and family services authorities in conjunction with their community partners including as core partners Family and Community Support Services, regional health authorities, and school authorities to meet the needs of children and families in their communities.

The ACYI is a collaborative partnership of government ministries working together on issues affecting children and youth. Partners include Children's Services, Learning, Health and Wellness (including AADAC and the Alberta Mental Health Board), Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Solicitor General, Human Resources and Employment, Community Development and Justice and Attorney General.

Positive parenting is one of the strongest contributors to health child development, decreasing the chances of developmental delays and learning and behaviour problems.

Investments include family resource centres, parent support programs such as Moms and Tots groups, development/access to parenting information, home visiting programs for children and families in at-risk circumstances, parent/child literacy programs, programs/supports for parents raising infants and toddlers with disabilities, and culturally appropriate parenting supports.

3. Quality Programming in Childcare Settings, Pre-school Programs, and Other Settings:

This key area contributes to a child's readiness for school by providing stimulating, positive interactions and language development, which increases children's chances of being successful at school.

Investments focus on enhanced quality programming in childcare settings, pre-school programs and other settings including licensed day care, contracted family day homes, and family childcare.

4. Community Capacity-Building to Effectively Plan with Government and Non-Government Partners:

This key area aims to improve the capacity of local partners, parents and communities to plan and provide quality services to support children and families. Through partnerships with other government ministries/boards/agencies and community-based organizations a number of investments have been made in provincial initiatives including:

- exploration into a provincial screening and tracking system for children age 0 - 6 to determine a child's developmental status in relation to developmental milestones
- expanded Parenting After Separation Programs
- supports to young children in shelters who have witnessed family violence
- Alberta Child Care Accreditation Program
- expanded Family and Community Support Services programs for young children and families

Outcomes

The Early Childhood Development Initiative supports the following ACYI outcomes:

- Children are born healthy.
- Parents play the primary role in supporting and nurturing children and are provided with resources to meet the needs of their children.
- Children are ready to learn when they start school.

Partners

Alberta Children's Services
Alberta Health and Wellness
Alberta Learning

Alberta Mental Health Board
AADAC
Alberta Justice and Attorney General

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