

Building An Early Childhood Development System Utilizing A Population Health Perspective



A Tool for Reviewing Current Approaches

***Report of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial
Advisory Committee on Population Health and Health Security***

2003

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***Federal/Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee
on Population Health and Health Security***

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I Introduction

This paper was developed by the Child and Adolescent Development Task Group of the Federal/Provincial/ Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health and Health Security (ACPHHS) as part of a series of documents focused upon child development from a population health perspective. The ACPHHS promotes a broad population health approach on which the federal, provincial and territorial governments continue to collaborate towards improved health outcomes for all Canadians. The ACPHHS recognizes the critical importance of early childhood development to the health of our population. Their benchmark document, *Strategies for Population Health: Investing in the Health of Canadians* and the follow-up documents, (first and second) *Report on the Health of Canadians*, both identify healthy childhood development as a crucially important determinant of health over the life span.

Previous paper of the Child and Adolescent Development Task Group include *Building a National Strategy for Healthy Child Development* (March 1998), *Investing in Early Child Development: The Health Sector Contribution* (September 1999), and *The Opportunity of Adolescence: The Health Sector Contribution* (October 2000). *Building an Early Childhood Development System Utilizing a Population Health Perspective* builds on and incorporates aspects of these previous documents. This paper will contribute to the efforts of jurisdictions across Canada to support and enhance the healthy development of children from conception to age six.

What happens during the first months and years of life matters a lot, not because this period of development provides an indelible blueprint for adult well-being, but because it sets either a sturdy or fragile stage for what follows.

(From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Child Development, 2000:5)



Consultations with Canadians on the National Children's Agenda confirmed broad-based support for the goals that children are: 1) physically and emotionally healthy, 2) safe and secure, 3) successful at learning, 4) socially engaged and responsible. Building on the momentum of this shared vision, in September of 2000, the federal, provincial, and territorial governments of Canada reached an historic agreement on early childhood development. In April 2001, the Government of Canada began the transfer of \$2.2 billion over five years to provincial and territorial governments to support investments in early childhood development programs and services. The intent of this Federal/Provincial/Territorial partnership is to ensure that young children fulfill their potential. In support of this common goal, governments will improve and expand early childhood development programs and services over time. Governments will report regularly on their progress

and will continue to build knowledge and disseminate information to parents, communities and service providers to help them to give children the best possible start in life (First Ministers' Meeting Communiqué, 2000).

Although it subscribes to its general principles, Quebec did not participate in the development of this document, since it intends to maintain its exclusive responsibility with regard to social and health matters.

Purpose Of The Paper

This paper is intended to serve three purposes. The first is to inform Health and Social Services Deputy Ministers and other senior decision-makers about the potential benefits of using a population health perspective to build integrated systems of strategies to promote healthy early childhood development. The second is to offer a framework for understanding, consistent with this perspective, for those with the responsibility to design, fund, monitor and or support strategies for early childhood development. The third is to provide a tool that enables jurisdictions (i.e. federal, provincial and territorial governments and Aboriginal governance bodies) and communities to identify the components and characteristics of their current approach to promoting early childhood development, and to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of their existing system. This tool may also be useful for jurisdictions and communities in moving towards a more integrated system of strategies.

Why Use A Population Health Perspective?

Child development is often viewed in terms of “ages and stages”. This perspective is helpful because it focuses upon developmental periods and milestones, and in so doing emphasizes the typical characteristics and optimum outcomes for each stage. But the ages and stages perspective does not provide a very complete “framework for understanding” because it does not address the factors that influence child outcomes, nor the strategies that support healthy early development.

This is where the population health perspective has a number of advantages. With its emphasis on the links between populations, determinants of health and well-being, and outcomes, it provides a framework for both understanding and organizing the factors that influence early childhood development. At the same time, the population health perspective also provides a framework for taking action on issues related to early childhood development. It does this in ways that consider and respond to multiple determinants, and/or require collaboration across multiple sectors.

In a population health approach, the entire range of known (i.e. evidence-based) individual and collective factors and conditions that determine population health status—and the interactions among them— are taken into account in planning action to improve health.

(From Taking Action on Population Health, 1998:1)

The population health perspective offers a unifying framework that is useful for understanding, analyzing, and responding to factors that influence early childhood development.

Why Build A System Of Early Childhood Development Strategies?

There are a number of answers to the question *why build a system of early childhood development strategies?* To begin with, because the time is right. The First Ministers recently made a significant commitment to provide resources for early childhood development with a focus on key areas for action and jurisdictional reporting to their publics on investments and indicators of child well being. Health care systems are evolving and discussions are underway across the country (e.g. Kirby¹, Romanow² reports) about what the core components of a health system should be, and how they should be managed. Across Canada, health, family and social services ministries are exploring ways to better support all families, including at-risk families, to be more successful in meeting their child's and family's needs. This supportive environment provides a key opportunity for jurisdictions to create more intentional and integrated approaches for early childhood development.

“Strategy” is used in this paper as a generic term to refer to a wide range of approaches to promoting and supporting the health and well-being of young children and their families including legislation, standards, programs, services, income transfers and public education.

(From *Service System Management*, 2000)

Also, because the current system of strategies is increasingly fragmented. Growing appreciation of the influence of the early years on both an individual child's potential for health, learning and relationships, and on the subsequent long term health of the population has led governments to increase their investments in getting children off to a good start in life. As a result of these increased investments, there is a wider array of strategies to support early childhood development. These strategies are often provided by different levels of government, and sometimes by different departments within a level of government, and a diverse range of community-based service providers. The end result can be a myriad of quite specific programs that are not well linked nor well coordinated.

1 The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Sciences and Technology, October 2002. *The Health of Canadians – The Federal Role – Final Report*.

2 Commission on the Future of Health Canada. November 2002. *Building on Values: The Future of Health Care in Canada – Final Report*.

Another reason for developing a system of strategies for early childhood development is because young children and their families need it. Families often require a unique mix of strategies to help their children develop along a healthy pathway. However, they are not likely to receive that mix if there is no system of strategies; that is, if the strategies do not exist, are not locally available, are not accessible, or are not coordinated.

Last but not least, we need to develop a system of strategies because it is the most effective use of resources. This is because not only do many families require a mix of strategies, but some strategies only have a meaningful and long-lasting effect when provided in combination with others. Nutritional counseling strategies, for example, may only have benefits if they are combined with strategies to ensure that the family has a safe place to live, sufficient income, and adequate means of obtaining healthy food. These diverse strategies are often provided by various government and community-based programs. To receive maximum benefit on investments in early

childhood development, there needs to be a shared understanding of the nature and magnitude of the strategies being used by different levels of government and different government departments, and these strategies need to be comprehensive, coordinated, and linked, as far as possible.



II Framework for Understanding

In order to build a system of strategies to promote early childhood development, decision-makers need to make informed choices about which strategies to include. They need to know something about early childhood development and the factors that influence it. In other words, they need a “framework for understanding.” This section highlights the components of such a framework by looking at some of the important characteristics of early childhood development, of population health, and of systems. It also suggests a number of organizing principles that are useful in developing a system of strategies for early childhood development from a population health perspective.

Understanding Early Childhood Development

Until quite recently, it was believed that development of the human brain was pretty much completed at birth; that an individual was by and large the product of their genetic endowment from their parents. As recent studies point out, this is no longer the accepted view.

The Early Years Study and other reports have identified key points on early childhood development that are important to note in developing a system of strategies to get children off to a good start in life:

- ▶ Early brain development is interactive, rapid and dramatic
- ▶ During critical periods, particular parts of the brain need positive stimulation to develop properly
- ▶ The quality of early sensory stimulation influences the brain’s ability to think and regulate bodily functions
- ▶ Negative experiences in the early years have long-lasting effects that can be difficult to overcome later
- ▶ Good nutrition and nurturing support optimal early brain and physical development and later learning and behaviour
- ▶ There are initiatives that can improve early childhood development

It is clear that the early years from conception to age six have the most important influence of any time in the life cycle on brain development and subsequent learning, behaviour and health. The effects of early experience, particularly during the first three years, on the wiring and sculpting of the brain’s billions of neurons, last a lifetime.

(From Early Years Study: Final Report, 1999:52)

Some implications of these key points of early childhood development for a system of strategies are:

- ▶ That the early years represent an extremely rapid period of human development
- ▶ That there are critical or sensitive periods in early development where there are opportunities for gains or losses
- ▶ That multiple influences can affect development, even prior to conception (e.g. maternal nutrition, alcohol use)
- ▶ That optimum development requires attention to the multiplicity of factors that influence healthy growth and development

Scientists have now discovered that a tremendous amount of brain development occurs between conception and age one. Human development is not a matter of nature versus nurture, but rather the interplay of nature and nurture together.

(From Early Years Study: Final Report, 1999:26)

SHHH! Brain Development in Progress



By age 3 years, a young child's brain is apt to be more than TWICE AS ACTIVE as that of his or her PEDIATRICIAN

Sources: Gopnik et al. (1999); Shore (1997).

Understanding Population Health

A population health approach focuses upon the inter-related conditions and factors that influence the health and well-being of populations, and then uses what is learned to develop and implement policies and actions that will improve the health and well-being of those populations (Advisory Committee On Population Health, 1999). The approach attempts to improve outcomes, in part, by addressing inequalities in the health conditions and health status of populations at different stages in life and over the life course.

On its own, studying and reporting on the health status of children...is not a population health approach. However, applying an evidence-based, collaborative process for intervening on multiple determinants (e.g. income, environmental factors) to address the health status issues being studied is a population health approach, and even more so if linked to action and evaluation.

(From Taking Action on Population Health, 1998:2)

One of the tenets of the population health approach is that factors outside the health care system significantly affect health status. These factors, or “determinants of health”, include income, social status, social support networks, education, employment and working conditions, physical environments, social environments, biology and genetic endowment, personal health practices and coping skills, healthy child development, health services, gender and culture (Health Canada, 1998).

The population health perspective is useful as part of the framework for understanding early childhood development for a variety of reasons. As the Health Canada document *Taking Action On Population Health* points out, the population health perspective provides a conceptual framework for thinking about the multiplicity of factors that affect childhood development, and allows for an assessment of their relative importance. It also provides a framework for taking action in ways that consider and respond to multiple determinants. In addition, the paper emphasizes strategies that are focused upon communities, society, or systems in order to have an impact on groups or populations. And it encourages collaboration between sectors (such as health, education, housing, finance, social services, and environment) as well as between levels of government, since no one sector nor level of government has access to all the factors that influence child development (Health Canada, 1998).

Key elements of a population health approach:

- ▶ Focus on the health of populations
- ▶ Address the determinants and their interactions
- ▶ Base decisions on evidence
- ▶ Increase “upstream” investments
- ▶ Apply multiple strategies
- ▶ Collaborate across sectors and levels
- ▶ Employ mechanisms for public involvement

(From: Taking Action on Population Health, 1998)

Understanding Systems

Building a system of strategies for early childhood development is extremely challenging. This is because a true *system* has three essential characteristics. First, the parts should be interrelated to the extent that they regularly interact. Second, the parts should be interdependent in the sense that a change to one part of the system will have an impact on other parts. And third, the parts should make up a unified whole; that is, they should constitute a discernible, integrated, and complete entity.

Given these three criteria, there is some question as to whether what many call a system is indeed a true *system*. This is particularly the case with regards to service systems, which are rarely intentional systems in the sense that they were designed as interrelated, interdependent, unified wholes. As has been pointed out, more often than not, they are eclectic arrays of agencies that reflect historical funding patterns based upon needs identified by various constituencies at different points in time. As a result, service systems are made up of agencies of varying sizes with distinct mandates, catchment areas, target populations, age restrictions, types of service, approaches, lengths of service, and so on. (From *System Service Management*, 2000)

The challenge of building a system of strategies for early childhood development becomes even greater when strategies beyond programs and services are included, along with strategies funded or provided by different levels of government. To build such a system requires the development of a set of strategies that are intentionally complementary, mutually reinforcing, and reasonably comprehensive.

Understanding The Framework

In order to design a conceptual framework for a system of strategies for early childhood development, it is necessary to identify the characteristics of that system that are to be used as dimensions of the framework. The characteristics that appear most relevant to developing such a system from a population health perspective are: stage of development, type of strategy, focus of strategy, and determinants of health.

System, n. a regularly interacting and interdependent group of items forming a unified whole (Webster's Dictionary)

Stage Of Development

A fundamental organizing principle for any system of strategies for early childhood development is to organize strategies by the child's "stage of development." The needs of children and their families change as the child passes through the various stages of development. As a result, strategies which support early childhood development need to be appropriate to their particular stage i.e. different strategies will be appropriate at different stages. Often, however, the same general strategy will be appropriate at most or all stages of development, with some aspect of the strategy changing according to the stage. For example, parent education strategies are useful at all stages of a child's development, although the content will change as the child ages.

Type Of Strategy

An essential organizing principle for a system of strategies for early childhood development is to organize by "type of strategy." Governments—and to some extent communities—have a variety of options available to them to help promote healthy childhood development. The most common of these options, or strategies, include: rules and regulations (e.g. legislation, policy, standards); programs and services; income transfers; and public education. Each of these strategies has different characteristics, advantages or disadvantages, and cost implications. In many instances alternative strategies can be used in an effort to achieve similar ends. For example, jurisdictions can use regulatory strategies (e.g. product standards, car-seat restraint legislation), program strategies (e.g. injury prevention programs), or public education strategies (e.g. the importance of using bicycle helmets) to try to reduce the number of head injuries in young children.

All early childhood development systems already use a variety of types of strategies. One of the benefits of identifying a jurisdiction's or community's system of strategies for promoting early childhood development is that it facilitates a discussion of the benefits of different strategies.

Focus Of Strategy (Social Ecology)

Children are raised by families, but they grow up in neighbourhoods and communities. For this reason the strategies which support child development need to focus upon more than just the child and their parents. Strategies can be focused upon any one of a number of intended beneficiaries including the child, parent(s)/caregiver(s), family, neighbourhood, community, or society as a whole.

In many instances alternative strategies may be used to focus upon different beneficiaries or different determinants in an effort to achieve similar ends. For example, regulations regarding the fortification of certain foods, pre and postnatal nutrition programs for new mothers, income support programs for families, and public awareness campaigns regarding the benefits of breast-feeding all contribute to healthy infant nutrition.

The most successful early childhood development systems will include strategies focused upon a variety of intended beneficiaries.

Determinants Of Health

Just as it is necessary to have strategies that focus upon different individuals and groups, it is also necessary to have strategies that focus upon the different factors that influence child development and well-being. These factors can act more or less independently (e.g. genetic endowment) or in combinations (e.g. education and income levels). Since many of these factors represent living conditions, it is sometimes possible to improve development and well-being by focusing upon improving their living conditions. As a result, any early childhood development system needs to include strategies that focus upon strengthening the living conditions that young children require to thrive.

III The Tool for Reviewing Current Approaches

Jurisdictions everywhere are struggling to be more systemic in their approach to supporting early childhood development and family life. Often, however, various factors make systemic approaches difficult to achieve. Competing priorities, budget realities, bureaucratic structure, time pressures, complexity of the issues, communication challenges, organizational cultures, political habits and sometimes simple expediency, all conspire against more systemic planning and implementation of strategies for early childhood development.

This tool was developed as a resource for those interested in promoting, developing, or strengthening a systemic approach to supporting early childhood development. The tool provides jurisdictions, Aboriginal governance structures, and communities with a series of steps that they can use to identify their current mix of strategies for early childhood development. Having identified these strategies, jurisdictions and communities may wish to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the mix of strategies, and/or the opportunity to change or add to it.

There is no perfect system of strategies. Each jurisdiction and community will have a set of strategies that reflects its history, circumstances, resources, and priorities. The intent of the tool is to enable jurisdictions and communities to become more aware of the complete mix of strategies provided by different levels and branches of government and/or others, so that they have a comprehensive overview of current strategies. This awareness can then be used as a basis for future decision-making.

The tool consists of a series of steps organized around two themes: the components or parts of the system of strategies, and the characteristics of that system:

- ▶ Steps 1 through 4 are intended to assist jurisdictions and communities to identify the complete array of strategies used in their approach;
- ▶ Steps 5 through 9 are intended to assist them in assessing the extent to which that approach has the characteristics of a system.

Identification Of System Components

Each early childhood development approach will have its own unique mix of components. The following four steps are intended to help jurisdictions and communities identify their own particular mix. The first step is to identify the strategies currently used in a particular jurisdiction or community, organized by type of strategy, the stage of development to which it applies, and the contributor of the strategy. Steps 2 - 4 then look at these components through a number of “lenses” requiring the reorganization of the components by focus of strategy, determinant of health, and Early Childhood Development (ECD) Communiqué area for action.



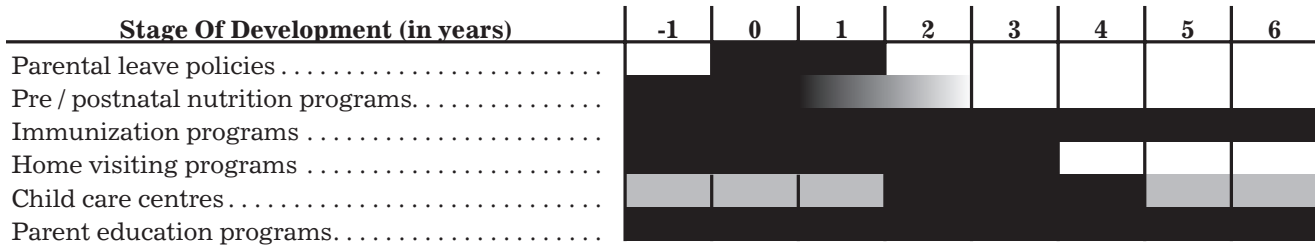
Step 1: *Identify Components By Type Of Strategy And Stage Of Development*

The starting point in obtaining a comprehensive overview of any particular early childhood development approach is to identify all the strategies that are currently in use by a jurisdiction or community. Since the complete ECD system will include a complex—and not always obvious—mix of different strategies, one useful way to approach the task is to use a framework similar to that described in Figure 1. This framework organizes a number of typical components by the type of strategy (rules and regulations, programs and services, income transfers, and public education) and by the stage of development to which they apply. Another useful variable to include, where possible, is the contributor (e.g. provider or funder) of the strategy, since it encourages the identification of strategies outside one’s own sector or level of government.

It is important to note that while this step will provide information about the mix of strategies, it does not address the availability, accessibility or efficacy of any of the strategies. It is not uncommon for strategies to have limitations or gaps in availability. Examples include: specific services may be more available in urban versus rural parts of the jurisdiction; demand may exceed capacity, resulting in waiting lists; strategies may be primarily focused on priority age groups even though all age groups would benefit; or strategies are in place but the resources are modest, limiting the potential of the strategy to reach the target population as fully as possible.

Worksheet 1 in the Appendix is intended to assist those who are interested in completing this step in a systematic way. The list of policies, programs and services under each type of strategy is not exhaustive. In using the worksheet, it is necessary to identify and add the other policies, services and programs that are relevant for consideration. Completing this step will enable jurisdictions and communities to answer the question “What is the complete mix of strategies being used as part of our current approach to supporting early childhood development?”

**Figure 1
Illustration Of Strategies By Type & Stage Of Development**



Other suggested strategies for your consideration

Rules & Regulations

- Family responsibility workplace policies
- Product safety standards
- Labeling regulations
- Environmental regulations and by-laws
- Building standards and codes
- Child protection legislation
- Child care licensing standards
- Social assistance legislation

Programs & Services

- Comprehensive family planning programs
- Screening programs for genetic conditions
- Birthing centres
- Health services
- Early development centres
- Family resource programs
- Services for children & families with special needs
- Community capacity building programs
- Pre-school education
- Recreation programs

Income Transfers

- Canada Child Tax Benefit
- National Child Benefit
- Prenatal benefits
- Maternal & Parental Leave Benefits
- Child care subsidies/deductions
- Rental housing supplements
- Funding related to special needs children
- National Homelessness Initiative

Public Education

- Health education programs
- Prevention programs (e.g. FAS, family violence)
- Safety promotion programs

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Step 2: Identify Components By Focus Of Strategy

Completing Step 1 will result in the identification of the components in any given ECD system. For some, that may be sufficient. Others, however, may want to obtain further insights into the strengths and weaknesses of their current ECD system by viewing the components through a variety of “lenses” which require the reorganizing of the components, much like a kaleidoscope reveals different patterns by rearranging the same pieces of glass.

Step 2 offers a way of viewing the components that provides insight into the intended focus of the ECD strategy. Figure 2 rearranges the examples contained in Figure 1 by whether the strategy is focused upon the child, the parent or caregiver, the family, the community, or the general public / society at large. By mapping the strategies in this way it becomes evident where the emphasis in the system lies with regards to focus. Figure 2, for example, illustrates that this particular mix of strategies focuses considerably more on the child, parent/caregiver, and family than it does on the community. Whether this is the right emphasis is up to each jurisdiction or community to decide. This step is intended to assist in better understanding the emphasis of their current mix of strategies.

Worksheet 2 in the Appendix provides a framework for jurisdictions or communities to assess the extent to which they have strategies that are focused upon the child, parents or caregivers, the family, the community, and the general public or society at large. By completing this step, jurisdictions and communities will be able to answer the question “To what extent does the mix of strategies focus upon the child, the parent/caregiver, the family, the community, society?”



**Figure 2
Illustration Of Strategies By Type & Focus Of Strategy**

	Type of Strategy			
	Rules & Regulations	Programs & Services	Income Transfers	Public Education
Focus	<hr/>			
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product safety standards • Labeling regulations • Environmental regulations and by-laws 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health education programs • Safety promotion programs
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building standards & codes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community capacity building 		
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family responsibility workplace policies • Social assistance legislation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early child development centres • Family resource programs • Services for families with special needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada Child Tax Benefit • National Child Benefit • Prenatal benefits • Child care subsidies/ deductions • Rental housing supplements • National Homelessness Initiative 	
Parent / Caregiver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental leave policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive family planning • Genetic screening • Pre- & post-natal nutrition • Home visiting • Health services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maternal & Parental Leave Benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent education programs • Prevention programs
Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child protection legislation • Child care licensing standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birthing centres • Immunization programs • Health services • Child care • Services for children with special needs • Pre-school education • Recreation programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding related to special needs children 	

Step 3: *Identify Components By Determinant Of Health*

Step 3 allows jurisdictions and communities to assess their mix of ECD strategies in relation to the determinants of health. Figure 3 rearranges the examples contained in Figure 1 by the following determinants of health:

- › Healthy Child Development*
- › Biology and genetic endowment
- › Culture
- › Education
- › Employment and working conditions
- › Gender
- › Health services
- › Income and social status
- › Personal health practices and coping skills
- › Physical environments
- › Social environments
- › Social support networks

Although there may be some debate about where a particular strategy fits in this framework, the value of rearranging the examples in this way is that it reveals patterns in the mix of strategies contained in any particular early childhood development system. Figure 3, for example, illustrates that this particular mix of strategies emphasizes some determinants more than others, and that there are relatively few strategies identified for some determinants (e.g. education, social environments, and social support networks) and no strategies identified for others (e.g. culture, gender). Again, whether this is the right emphasis is up to each jurisdiction or community to decide. This step will provide a better understanding of the current emphasis.

Worksheet 3 in the Appendix provides a framework for organizing the components of the system of strategies for early childhood development in relation to the determinants of health. Completing this step will allow jurisdictions and communities to answer the question “What does the mix of strategies look like from a population health perspective?”

* Healthy Child Development, as one of the determinants of health, is not separated out in this discussion of the tool for reviewing current approaches.

This paper is predicated on an understanding of healthy child development as the link to others, and the multiplicity of factors that affect healthy child development in the population health context.

Figure 3
Illustration Of Strategies By Type & Determinant

Determinant	Type of Strategy			
	Rules & Regulations	Programs & Services	Income Transfers	Public Education
Biology & Genetic Endowment		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genetic screening • Family planning • Pre- & post-natal nutrition • Immunization programs 		
Culture				
Education		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early child development centres • Pre-school education 		
Employment & Working Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental leave policies • Family responsibility workplace policies 			
Gender				
Health & Social Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child protection legislation • Child care licensing standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early child development centres • Family resource programs • Child care • Health services • Recreation programs 		
Income & Social Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social assistance legislation 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada Child Tax Benefit • National Child Benefit • Prenatal benefits • Maternal/Parental Leave Benefits • Child care subsidies • Rental housing supplements • Special needs funding • National Homelessness Initiative 	
Personal Practices & Coping Skills				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health education & safety programs • Parent education • Prevention programs
Physical Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental regulations & by-laws • Product safety standards • Labeling regulations • Building standards 			
Social Environments		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community capacity building 		
Social Support Networks		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home visiting 		

Step 4: *Identify Components By ECD Communiqué (2000) Areas For Action*

Provinces and territories have agreed to invest in, and report on, four areas for action under the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Early Child Development Communiqué (2000). These four areas of action are:

- › Promote healthy pregnancy, infancy, and birth
- › Improve parenting and family supports
- › Strengthen early childhood development, learning and care
- › Strengthen community supports

Since these four areas of action are an important focus for jurisdictions, they have been included in the tool for reviewing current approaches. Step 4 enables jurisdictions and communities to view their mix of ECD strategies through the lens of the four “areas for action” under the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Early Child Development Communiqué (2000). By rearranging the strategies contained in Figure 1 in this way, Figure 4 illustrates the emphasis in relation to each of the four areas of action. In this particular mix, there are relatively more strategies addressing the first three areas of action than the fourth (community supports). A similar exercise could be done for the four ECD goals (physical and emotional health, safety and security, social engagement, success at learning), or for other types of outcomes. By completing this exercise, decision-makers, when making decisions about where to invest, will consider which strategies are most apt to lead to desired outcomes.

Worksheet 4 in the Appendix provides a framework for organizing the components of the system of strategies in relation to the four F/P/T ECD Communiqué (2000) “areas of action.” Completing this step will enable jurisdictions and communities to answer the question “To what extent does the current mix of strategies promote healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy; improve parenting and family supports; strengthen early childhood development, learning and care; and strengthen community supports?”

**Figure 4
Illustration Of Strategies By Type & Area For Action**

Area For Action	Type of Strategy			
	Rules & Regulations	Programs & Services	Income Transfers	Public Education
Health Pregnancy, Birth and Infancy		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive family planning • Genetic screening • Pre- and post-natal nutrition • Birthing centres • Health services • Immunization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prenatal benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health education programs
Parenting and Family Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental leave policies • Family responsibility workplace policies • Social assistance legislation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home visiting programs • Family resource programs • Services for families with special needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada Child Tax Benefit • National Child Benefit • Maternal/Parental Leave Benefits • Rental housing supplements • National Homelessness Initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent education programs
Early Development, Learning and Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product safety standards • Labeling regulations • Child protection legislation • Child care licensing standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child care • Early child development centres • Services for children with special needs • Pre-school education • Recreation programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child care subsidies/ deductions • Funding related to special needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety promotion programs • Prevention programs
Community Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental regulations & by-laws • Building standards & codes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community capacity building 		

How Do The Strategies Work Together To Make A System?

Just as each early childhood development system will have its own unique mix of components, so too it will have its own way of promoting and supporting systemic approaches. Therefore, in addition to providing different lenses to increase insight into the mix of strategies used (steps 1-4), the tool for reviewing approaches also provides a series of questions that are intended to increase understanding of the extent to which an approach has the characteristics of a system (steps 5-9).

Step 5: *Assess The Extent To Which Decisions Are Based On Information*

Ideally, decisions related to the design, implementation and management of an early childhood development system would be guided by good information both on the *status* of young people (that is, how they are doing) and on the *conditions* in which they are growing up. Jurisdictions and communities can begin to assess the extent to which decisions are based on information by addressing the following questions:

- 5a. What are the approaches / information sources for determining the **health status** of young children, including the general, at risk, and special needs populations?
- 5b. What are the approaches / information sources for determining the **health conditions** affecting young children, including the general, at risk, and special needs populations?
- 5c. What are the approaches / information sources for determining **best practices**?
- 5d. How has all this information been used to **inform decisions** to-date, and how will it be used to inform decisions in the future?

Step 6: Assess The Extent To Which The System Is Responsive

An effective early childhood development system needs to be responsive to those that it is intended to benefit. This is particularly the case with regard to the program and service components of the system. Families with young children, especially those with parents in the paid workforce, have limited time available to participate in early years activities. As a result, these activities need to be accessible in terms of the times and locations they are offered, and they need to reflect the circumstances of the community they serve (e.g. rural child care programs). The following questions are intended to help jurisdictions and communities assess the extent to which their ECD system is responsive to their particular circumstances.

6a. To what extent are the strategies for ECD available in **multiple settings** such as:

- Workplace
- Community/neighbourhood
- Child care settings and schools
- Hospitals
- Community health clinics
- Shopping malls

6b. To what extent are the following characteristics of a **responsive and integrated** ECD system present in your jurisdiction or community:

- Easily accessible
- Tailored to local community (e.g. program design involves consumers and community leaders)
- Involves linkages and partnerships

6c. What are the approaches to **assessing the extent** to which your jurisdiction or community satisfies the above characteristics of a responsive ECD system?



Step 7: Assess The Extent To Which The System Is Integrated

One of the greatest challenges with any ECD system is keeping the components reasonably integrated. This needs to happen in at least two ways. The contributors to the early childhood development system (often levels and branches of government) need to be aware of one another's current strategies and future directions. This awareness allows them to plan and design their contributions in ways that strengthen the overall system of strategies. Operationally the components of the system, particularly programs and services, need to be integrated so that those involved are aware of the other parts of the ECD system, can assist families in making use of the various strategies, and—where required—can work cooperatively together. The following questions may help to assess the extent to which an ECD system is integrated.

- 7a. What are the mechanisms used to **link** the various contributors to the early childhood development system (e.g. levels of government, branches within government)?
- 7b. What are the mechanisms used to **promote** the integration of the components of the ECD system (i.e. rules and regulations, income transfers, public education, and programs and services) at the operational level?
- 7c. What are the approaches used to **assess** the extent to which your jurisdiction or community satisfies the characteristics of an integrated ECD system?

Step 8: *Assess The Extent Of Intersectoral Action*

Since so many of the factors that influence early childhood development lie outside of the health sector, it is essential that any ECD system involve a high degree of intersectoral action. For such collaborations to be effective, there needs to be a shared vision among partners, sufficient skills and resources, and a clear plan of action. The extent of inter sectoral action can be assessed, in part, by addressing the following questions.

- 8a. What are your jurisdiction's or community's **shared objectives** for early childhood development?
- 8b. Who are the informal and formal **partners** in pursuing these objectives?
- 8c. What are the **contributions** of each partner in early childhood development?
- 8d. What are the strategies or mechanisms for supporting the ongoing **collaboration** among partners?
- 8e. How is **leadership and accountability** shared among partners?

Step 9: *Assess The Extent Of Accountability For Outcomes*

The whole point of an early childhood development system is to improve outcomes for young children. These outcomes, however, are measured in different ways, by different people, for different reasons. It is important to know, therefore, who is accountable for the monitoring of which outcomes. The following questions reflect some of the current accountability requirements.

- 9a. What are the accountability mechanisms for **assessing the outcomes** for children, families, and communities?
- 9b. What are the accountability mechanisms with regards to the four action areas in the Federal/Provincial/Territorial ECD agreement? What process is your jurisdiction using to **report to its public** on ECD?
- 9c. What percentage of your jurisdiction's overall budget for early childhood development is **allocated to evaluation**?

IV Concluding Comments

Supports to early childhood development have been introduced over a period of time, by different levels of government and others, and usually with a fairly specific focus. The result is that many jurisdictions now find themselves with a complex array of strategies intended to benefit young children and their families, but with little rationale for the parts and an incomplete understanding of the whole.

With the shared commitment of governments, communities, service providers, advocates, and researchers to achieve optimal outcomes for children in the early years, there is an opportunity to reconsider past approaches to supporting early childhood development. This paper describes how a population health approach can be applied to build a more integrated system of strategies which promote early childhood development.

The paper offers a framework for understanding, consistent with that perspective, for the benefit of those with the responsibility to design, fund, monitor and/or support strategies for early childhood development. It also provides a tool that enables governments and communities to assess the components and characteristics of their current approach to promoting early childhood development, as they move towards a more integrated system of strategies.



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Appendix A

Worksheets

Worksheet 1

Components By Type Of Strategy, Stage Of Development & Source

- ▶ Using the framework provided below identify the types of strategies included in your jurisdiction's/community's system of strategies for each stage of child development
- ▶ Using type-face, colour-coding or some other technique, indicate whether the source(s) of each of the strategies is Federal, Provincial / Territorial; or other

Stage Of Development (in years)							
-1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Strategy

Rules & Regulations

Programs & Services

Income Transfers

Public Education

Worksheet 2

Components By Type And Focus Of Strategy

- ▶ Using the framework provided below identify the focus for each strategy included in your jurisdiction's/community's system of strategies

Type of Strategy			
Rules & Regulations	Programs & Services	Income Transfers	Public Education

Focus

Society

Community

Family

Parent/Caregiver

Child

Worksheet 3

Components By Type Of Strategy And Determinant

- Using the framework provided below identify the determinant of health addressed by each strategy included in your jurisdiction's/community's system of strategies

Type of Strategy			
Rules & Regulations	Programs & Services	Income Transfers	Public Education

Determinant

Biology & Genetic Endowment

Culture

Education

Employment & Working Conditions

Gender

Health Services

Income & Social Status

Personal Practices & Coping Skills

Physical Environments

Social Environments

Social Support Networks

Worksheet 4

Components By Type Of Strategy & Area For Action

- ▶ Using the framework provided below identify the F/P/T Early Child Development Communiqué (2000) “area for action” addressed by each strategy included in your jurisdiction’s/community’s system of strategies

Type of Strategy			
Rules & Regulations	Programs & Services	Income Transfers	Public Education

Area For Action

Healthy
Pregnancy, Birth
& Infancy

Parenting &
Family Supports

Early
Development,
Learning & Care

Community
Supports
