

A CITYWIDE STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN

Calgary's Strategy for Children Aged 0-8

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Presented by
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Territorial Acknowledgement

In the spirit of respect, reciprocity and truth, we honour and acknowledge Moh'kinsstis and the traditional Treaty 7 territory and oral practices of the Blackfoot confederacy: Siksika, Kainai, Piikani as well as the Îyâxe Nakoda and Tsuut'ina nations. We acknowledge that this territory is home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3 within the historical Northwest Métis homeland. Finally, we acknowledge all Nations, indigenous and non, who live, work and play and help us steward this land, honour and celebrate this territory.

Foreword

We know that countless individuals, groups, and organizations across Calgary are working hard to give children the opportunities they need to reach their full potential. We also know that many young children in our city continue to struggle despite these efforts. The First 2000 Days Network is one initiative that is working to improve the lives of children and families by leveraging all of this work.

All of the energy and action that happens at the community and organizational level has to be supported by a **citywide investment in children**.

The First 2000 Days Network acts as a catalyst for linking, aligning, and leveraging efforts in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) system to enable collective action toward improving ECD outcomes. The Network does not provide direct programming or service delivery to families and children. Rather, we focus on inter-organizational capacity and systems change. **We firmly believe that by impacting how the sector works together to reduce duplication, decrease inefficiencies, and guide quality collaboration by driving for continuous quality improvement at the individual, program and service, organizational, and systems levels, we can have a positive impact on child and family outcomes.**

While there are many ways of creating positive change, shifting practice at the city level is an important leverage point. We also recognize that Calgary exists in a provincial context, which is why we continue to advocate for an integrated approach to early childhood development, as articulated in our [position paper](#) (An Integrated Approach to Early Childhood Development, April 2019). Finally, we acknowledge that we exist in a shifting global context. We cannot ignore the impact of climate change, shifting migration patterns, populism, and other world events on our local contexts.

The efforts to align our support for children and families is a reflection of our current understanding of the dynamic, complex and emergent systems that influence children's outcomes. As a Network of people who are guided by a deep care and investment in children's well-being, we hope this is the beginning of a significant change in our city's way of working.

The First 2000 Days Network Community



The Opportunity: A Citywide Strategy for all Children

“The first five years of my life are really, really important. That is when most of my brain is being wired. Scientists say that from the day I’m born millions of neurons are making billions of connections. I’m learning all the time- at every moment of my day.

Everything around me is teaching me, but the most important teacher of all is you. YOU are my interpreter, my guide, my steward, my security and my bridge to understanding the world around me. I need to live in a place where I have the chance to play outside, read, get lots of sleep, and play with other kids. I want to feel safe and deal with all of my feelings, even when I’m sad, angry or scared.

I don’t want you to have to do it all alone. Sometimes kids and adults need extra help, I want you to know where to find it and for you to also feel safe and able to deal with your feelings. I want you to be able to ask for what you need and get help, just like me.

Even though you’re so important to me, I know that there are other important adults in my life. My doctor helps me when I’m sick. I have lots of teachers around me at school and in our neighborhood. They help me do puzzles, rhyming, singing, and reading when you’re not around. I want all other kids to be as lucky as me.” (Excerpted from “I’m Ready: How to make sure every child is thriving by five”, First 2000 Days Network, 2015)

Imagine a city where all kids are supported to reach their fullest potential. We know the early years have a huge impact on the rest of children’s lives. We want to support children from the prenatal period up to age 8. This **citywide strategy for all children** outlines what we need to do to achieve this vision.

Overall, our hope is simple. We want a **citywide strategy that ensures children are valued, healthy and thriving**. With a citywide strategy, Calgary’s children will be able to say:



I have a healthy body, mind, and spirit



My family and community make me feel safe and stable



I am ready to succeed in school and other life settings.

Because children live in families, are supported by professionals, who live, work and play in Calgary, we have a vision for them too.



Families will feel resilient and supported in raising their child, understand the importance of the early years, and know how to access services and supports.



Professionals will know how to support families’ strengths and needs, coordinate with others to serve families holistically and use data to support quality improvement.



Calgary will be a city that commits to and prioritizes children and families, invests in prevention, and has safe, inclusive and inspiring environments for children to learn.

Citywide Strategy Overview

Strategies for Action

- Facilitate access to quality early years resources.
- Connect and coordinate existing early years activity.
- Align strategies to work together.
- Create a shared measurement system, based on a common quality standard.
- Build organizations' capacity to support:
 - parental resilience
 - social connections
 - concrete support in times of need
 - knowledge of child development
 - social and emotional competence of children
- Support mutual learning.
- Support research-based decisions.
- Build public will and advance research and policy that supports early years.

Fundamentals

- High quality relationships
- Sufficient investments
- Enabling policy environments
- Public awareness of the importance of the early years
- Healthy communication channels
- Continuous quality improvement

Core principles

- Whole child and family centered
- A socio-ecological approach
- Foundations in relationship
- Cross-sector collaboration
- Learning focused

Outcomes > collaboration, quality, strong system

The systems that impact children's outcomes are well-coordinated.

- Children are included as a priority in all city-wide strategies.
- The sector shares data, resources, and information to support higher quality services, increase referrals, support quality improvement and avoid duplication.

Children and their families have access to high quality services and supports.

- The sector uses common quality standards to guide its work.
- The sector has the capacity to support:
 - parental resilience
 - social connections
 - concrete support in times of need
 - knowledge of child development
 - social and emotional competence of children

The Citywide Strategy for all Children is supported by policies and data, well-resourced, and a priority for everyone.

- The early years are integrated into and aligned across all government ministries.
- All sectors take responsibility for their role to support families and children.
- Early years activity is sufficiently funded to support these outcomes. This funding is coordinated through funder's alignment.
- Data is collected and shared to enable continuous improvement.
- Policies support healthy families.

Results: Children are valued, healthy and thriving

As a child...

- I have a healthy body, mind, and spirit.
- My family and community make me feel safe and stable.
- I am ready to succeed in school and other life settings.

Our family...

- Feels supported to raise our child to be healthy and resilient.
- Understands the importance of our child's earliest years.
- Can bounce back from challenges.
- Knows how to access to high-quality programs and services that support us.

As a professional...

- I have the knowledge, support and capacity to support family's strengths and needs.
- I coordinate with other services so I can serve families holistically.
- I use data to support planning and quality improvement.

In Calgary...

- We understand the importance of the early years and commit to making children and families a priority.
- We have a coordinated approach to champion the importance of the early years.
- We save money because investing in children is investing in prevention.
- We have safe, inclusive, and inspiring learning environments for children.

References

- A community Backbone Organization's Theory of Change. Centre for Connected Communities.*
- Early Childhood Colorado Framework: A Shared Vision. (2015). Early Childhood Leadership Commission*
- Early Childhood System Performance Assessment Toolkit. (2019). Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy.*
- Hope Starts Here: Detroit's Early Childhood Partnership. (2017)*
- Ways of knowing, being, doing and feeling: a Wholistic early childhood development model. (2017). The Winnipeg Boldness Project.*

How? Our Strategy

The success of the Citywide Strategy for all Children depends on addressing three imperatives that would support a city where all children are valued, healthy and thriving:

Imperative #1: The systems that impact children's outcomes are well-coordinated.

Imperative #2: Children and their families have access to high quality services and supports.

Imperative #3: The Citywide Strategy for all Children is supported by policies and data, well-resourced and a priority for everyone.

Effectively supporting each of these imperatives requires leveraging and building on existing activity in these areas, a clear strategy, and a recognition of the current opportunities and barriers that need to be addressed. These are explored below.

Imperative #1: The systems that impact children's outcomes are well-coordinated.

There are opportunities to improve how organizations, programs and service providers coordinate their activity, share data and resources, and leverage each other's work. When the sector works together more efficiently and effectively, children and families have better outcomes. It is also important to note that *what* the system is coordinated around is important. This is addressed in imperative #2.

There are several citywide strategies that are currently being implemented.¹ It is necessary for children to be considered in each of these strategies.

Our outcomes: We are working towards...

- Children are included as a priority in all city-wide strategies.
- The sector shares data, resources, and information to support higher quality services, increase referrals, support quality improvement and avoid duplication.

What's getting in the way?

1. **Scarcity mindset and competition amongst organizations and agencies:** Organizations and agencies are often competing for the same pool of limited resources, which is a disincentive for collaboration.

¹ These include:

2. **Lack of investment in a coordinating body:** Collaboration requires intentional, strategic support. We need a coordinating body, like the First 2000 Days Network, with the capacity to actively support high-quality sharing, linking, aligning and leveraging.
3. **Barriers to sharing data:** There are legal, practical, technological challenges to sharing data that would support increased coordination and collaboration amongst agencies.
4. **Defining the resources that impact children and families too narrowly:** Families' outcomes are impacted by a myriad of circumstances and factors outside of the traditional early years sector. Supporting collaboration across sectors would be crucial to have a widespread impact on families.

Strategies



Create opportunities for community and organizations to share, link, align and leverage their work.²³

Existing foundation

Short term activity

- Continue current engagements to support sharing, linking, aligning and leveraging.
- Expand its engagement capacity to support robust collaboration.
- Identify new, key stakeholders whose collaborative efforts can serve as levers for change in the sector.
- Explore opportunities and challenges related to data sharing, across the sector.
- Formalize data sharing agreements amongst a cohort of agencies/organizations.

Medium-long term activity

- Continuously scan for emerging opportunities to share, link, align and leverage.
- Maintain engagement capacity to support robust sharing and linking.
- Long-term, expanded investment in alignment around a shared quality standard or with organizations under a common funding umbrella.
- Create an integrated system for data sharing across the sector



Actively represent the needs of children aged 0-8 in citywide strategies

Existing foundation

² To learn more about existing sharing and linking activity, see First 2000 Days Network [“Trends in Sharing and Linking” report](#) (August 2018); and 2018 [PARTNER tool results](#).

³ To learn more about efforts around alignment, see First 2000 Days Network case studies on “Coalitions Collaborating for Impact” and the Strengthening Families capacity building opportunities; and 2018 [PARTNER tool results](#).

Short term activity

- Complete a scan of citywide strategies to assess how children are currently included, potential opportunities, barriers to inclusion.
- Find ways to leverage strategies where children are currently considered.
- Begin engagement with strategies that have not included a focus on children.

Medium-long term activity

- Continuously scan for emerging citywide initiatives.
- Integrate children where there are opportunities for inclusion.



Align the early childhood and K-3 systems

Existing foundation

Short term activity

Medium-long term activity



Invest in a central coordinating entity to lead the *Citywide Strategy for all Children*⁴

Existing foundation

Short term activity

Medium-long term activity

- Identify sustainable, long-term funding for coordinating entity.
- Reflect on strengths and gaps in First 2000 Days Network strategy and implications to shift to a comprehensive citywide strategy, outlined in this document.
- Support the continued strategic evolution of the coordinating entity.

Imperative #2: Children and their families have access to high quality services and supports.

We must support the sector that supports children so that they can provide families with high quality services and supports that improve their outcomes. This does not mean that everyone is doing the same thing. We need diversity in the sector to serve people with different needs. That being said, there are general, research-based principles that the sector can adopt to amplify the quality of its work. The Strengthening Families framework is a robust, research-based framework that outlines the five

⁴ To learn more about the First 2000 Days Network's strategy, see "[First 2000 Days Network Case Study: Establishing the pre-conditions for systems-level change.](#)"

promotive and protective factors that result in population level change for children and families. The Strengthening Families framework is also being used by several organizations and systems in Calgary and Alberta.⁵

In addition to the Strengthening Families framework, which outlines *how* you might interact with children and families, we also know a lot about *what* we can do to support these protective and promotive factors. For example, research shows that reading with children is a significant lever for change, that can also impact a number of protective and promotive factors.

Our outcomes: We are working towards...

- The sector uses common quality standards to guide its work.
- The sector has the capacity to support:
 - parental resilience
 - social connections
 - concrete support in times of need
 - knowledge of early childhood development
 - social and emotional competence of children

What's getting in the way?

1. **No common quality standards:** The sector does not have a broad, common definition of 'quality'.
2. **Insufficient pool of high-quality providers:** Many early childhood providers lack training and expertise in early childhood. This problem is continually reinforced by the ongoing undervaluation of professions related to early childhood, where people are underpaid and undervalued. This creates challenges for both recruitment and retention.
3. **Lack of investment in capacity building for organizations and professionals**

Strategies



Make sure professionals know how to:

- **Support parents' resilience**
- **Build social connections in their communities**
- **Provide families with concrete support in times of need**
- **Empower families with knowledge of early childhood development**
- **Actively build children's social and emotional health**

Existing foundation

Short term activity

- Provide direct learning opportunities to professionals who want to build their capacity in these areas.
- Highlight reading as a strategy to support these different areas

⁵ At the time of this report, xxx are using in part of fully the Strengthening Families framework.

Medium-long term activity

- Support the role of families in children’s development



Make sure professionals can use data to support continuous improvement in their practice. Whenever possible, this data should be collected according to shared quality standards.

*Note these efforts would align with efforts to create an integrated system for data sharing across the sector.

Existing foundation

Short term activity

Medium-long term activity

- Explore the benefits and challenges associated with developing a shared measurement system (including technological, current funding practices, existing data collection practices, legal and privacy concerns).
- Link with existing data hubs
- Invest in developing a system that responds to what was learned in the short term.



Support higher standards for training requirements and compensation for people who serve children.

Existing foundation

Short term activity

Medium-long term activity

- Identify and coordinate existing advocacy efforts.

Imperative #3: The *Citywide Strategy for All Children* is supported by policies and data, well-resourced, and a priority for everyone.

While there is a lot that we can do by implementing a citywide strategy, everything we do exists within a broader context. It is essential that the broader systems enable, rather than constrain, our work. For example, children have to be a priority for all sectors (not just those directly related to children’s outcomes); our work with children has to be funded sufficiently and sustainably; policies need to be in place to support families; and data needs to be collected and shared to support continuous improvement.

Without these larger structures in place, we will be limited in what we can achieve.

Our outcomes: We are working towards...

- The early years are integrated into and aligned across all government ministries.
- All sectors take responsibility for their role to support families and children.
- Early years activity is sufficiently funded to support these outcomes. This funding is coordinated through funder’s alignment.
- Data is collected and shared to enable continuous improvement.
- Policies support healthy families.

What’s getting in the way?

- 1. General lack of understanding of the importance of the early years**
- 2. Lack of data on children and family’s outcomes:** There is insufficient access to citywide data about children and family outcomes making it challenging to know and track how families are doing, over time.
- 3. A disintegrated approach to early childhood development:** At the provincial and municipal levels, there is no integrated approach to early childhood development.
- 4. No provincial-led strategy or focus on the early years:** There is no provincial-led strategy or focus on the early years, creating system-wide barriers to making changes at the local level. This is a reflection of a lack of political will to support the early years as a priority.
- 5. Disjointed funding environment:** The local and provincial funding environments are not aligned, creating system-wide barriers to making changes at the organizational level.

Strategies



Increase public awareness of the importance of investing in children aged 0-8.

- Existing foundation
- Short term activity
- Medium-long term activity

- Develop a baseline understanding of public attitudes towards ECD. This may be completed through a survey and through direct community engagement.
- Identify key opportunities to disseminate messaging.
- Develop material and campaigns that target what the public values and/or does not understand about the early years.
- Train individuals who interact with parents to use effective messaging about the importance of the early years.



Advocate for an integrated approach to early childhood development at the ministerial level

Existing foundation

Short term activity

Medium-long term activity

- Identify and coordinate existing advocacy efforts.
- Develop a better understanding of the opportunities and barrier to integration at the system level. This may include a survey of and direct engagement with individuals working at the systems level.
- Respond to survey findings to support integration at the ministerial level



Work with funders to align funding requirements and support transparency

Existing foundation

Short term activity

Medium-long term activity

- Convene funders who invest in children to assess opportunities and barriers to alignment.
- Develop relationships between and amongst ECD funders.
- Convene opportunities for funded agencies/organizations to share challenges and opportunities around current funding practices with funders.
- Support response to opportunities and challenges identified by funders and funded agencies/organizations.

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How would we know?

Our direct outcomes	Measurement description	Existing resources	Effort to measure ⁶
The systems that impact children's outcomes are well-coordinated.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The early years included as a priority in all city-wide strategies. 	Assesses the extent to which the early years are meaningfully integrated in other citywide strategies. Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty reduction strategy Resilience strategy Regional collaborative service delivery 	None available.	Low
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sector shares data, resources, and information to support higher quality services, increase referrals, support quality improvement and avoid duplication. 	Assesses the extent to which the sector is coordinated, aligned and the results of this collaboration.	First 2000 Days Network PARTNER tool results. The approach can be leveraged; however, the results are limited to a small number of professionals and the First 2000 Days Network work, specifically.	Medium
Children and their families have access to high quality services and supports.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sector uses common quality standards to guide its work. 	Assesses the sector's use of quality standards to guide its work. Assesses the extent to which these standards are aligned.	None available.	High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sector has the capacity to support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> parental resilience social connections concrete support in times of need knowledge of early childhood development social and emotional competence of children 	Assesses whether the programs and services in the sector support the five protective factors, as described by the Strengthening Families framework.	The Strengthening Families framework provides all of the material required to assess this outcome. This is already being implemented with a subset of organizations in Calgary.	Medium
The <i>Citywide Strategy for Children</i> is supported by policies and data, well-resourced, and a priority for everyone.			

⁶ Low= There are existing tools or data available or these would be easy to develop; Medium= There are tools or data available (but not both); High= There are no existing tools or data available OR there are tools available but there are significant barriers to data collection.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The early years are integrated into and aligned across all government ministries. 	Assesses the extent to which the early years meaningfully integrated across government ministries.	The First 2000 Days Network paper outlines the starting requirements for an integrated approach to ECD at the ministerial level.	Medium-High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All sectors take responsibility for their role to support families and children. Early years activity is sufficiently funded to support these outcomes. This funding is coordinated through funder's alignment. 	<p>Assesses engagement with and support of leaders in the sector and from other sectors in the community.</p> <p>Assesses the match between existing funding and needs in the early years sector.</p> <p>Assesses the extent to which funder's are aligned.</p>	None available	Low-Medium
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data is collected and shared to enable continuous improvement. 	Assesses whether data is shared across the system	None available	High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies support healthy families. 	Assesses whether there are policies in place that support families directly and enable all of the above.	None available	Medium

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How would we know?

Our ultimate results	Measurement description	Existing resources	Effort to measure
As a child...			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have a healthy body, mind, and spirit. 	Assesses children's physical, mental, social, and emotional health.	Data collected by Alberta health	Medium
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My family and community make me feel safe and stable. 	Assesses whether the child's environment supports their healthy development	All our Families study data Data collected using ACEs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am ready to succeed in school and other life settings. 	Assesses whether children are developing appropriately by the time they enter Kindergarten.	EYE collected (at the individual level). Past EDI collection can provide a baseline but is not sustainably funded.	
Our family...			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feels supported to raise our child to be healthy and resilient. 	Assesses how supported families feel in terms of their: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> parental resilience social connections concrete support in times of need knowledge of early childhood development social and emotional competence of children 	The Strengthening Families framework provides all of the material required to assess this outcome. This is already being implemented with a subset of organizations.	Medium
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands the importance of our child's earliest years 	Assesses the presence of public outreach activities and the extent they are effectively influencing public understanding of the importance of early childhood.	Data from the Palix Foundation about the core brain story. Baseline available from Benchmark survey about parents' understanding of ECD.	Medium
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can bounce back from challenges. 	Assesses family's resilience	Parental resilience tool developed by CSSP. No existing data collection or baseline.	Low-Medium
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knows how to access to high-quality programs and services that support us. 	Assesses accessibility and quality of existing programs and services.	Individual programs might have data available.	Medium
As a professional...			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have the knowledge, support and capacity to support family's strengths and needs. 	System's support of professional development and organizational capacity to improve services	Tools, such as those developed by CSSP can be used for data collection. Individual programs might have data available. This is not publicly available.	High

	System's ability to understand a family's strengths and needs		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I coordinate with other services so I can serve families holistically. 	System's ability to help connect families to the services and supports they need	First 2000 Days Network social network analysis. This data set is limited to a small subsector of the ECD sector.	High
	System's service providers level of working together, when needed to meet a family's needs	No comprehensive baseline available.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I use data to support planning and quality improvement. 	System's level of using data to improve outcomes for families and system functioning	Individual programs might have data available. This is not publicly available.	High
In Calgary...			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We understand the importance of Early Childhood and commit to making children and families a priority. 	Assesses the presence of public outreach activities and the extent they are effectively influencing public understanding of the importance of early childhood.	Data from the Palix Foundation. Baseline data available from Benchmark survey.	Medium
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have a coordinated approach to champion the importance of early childhood. 	Assesses the effectiveness of a citywide early childhood strategy	Baseline data partially available via the First 2000 Days Network PARTNER results	Medium-High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We save money because investing in kids is investing in prevention. 	Indicators of impact on outcomes that ECD impact, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High school graduation rates Poverty levels Rates of addiction 	Data likely exists on the broader outcomes. However, tracking the impact of investments in children would require longitudinal data collection.	High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have safe, inclusive, and inspiring learning environments for children. 	Assesses whether all families have access to safe, inclusive, and inspiring learning environments built for children	YYC Plays supports citywide opportunities for children to play. They might have data that supports their work?	Medium-High

Conclusion

What would Calgary look like if we made sure that all children were healthy, lived in safe and stable environments and were ready to succeed? What would we need to do to make sure their families felt supported, understood the importance of these early years, were resilient, and could access the programs and services they needed? How could we make sure that professionals could work with others to support families holistically, and had access to the data and information that they need to inform their work?

A citywide strategy to supporting children aged 0-8 is a necessary ingredient to work towards this vision. If we made these investments, **Calgary would be a city that was a proud champion for children**. This is a tremendous opportunity to act in accordance with the scientific evidence about how children grow and learn.



We can have a healthier population and improve educational outcomes.



We can save money because investing in kids is investing in prevention.



We live up to our values as Canadians who have committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child, giving our children the opportunity to do their best in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and the world.

The benefits of investing in citywide strategy will far outweigh the cost. It would provide every child in Calgary with the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential, in turn benefitting healthier and stronger families, communities, and all of us.

Deeper Dive

Use the information from the position paper (however, does this have to be updated to 0-8 data).

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References and Resources

That the above strategy does not currently embed an explicit indigenous framework reflects the fact that consultations are current and continuing. We will build on the work that has already come before in resources such as “Well-being and resiliency: the miyo resource kâ-nâkatohkêhk miyo-ohpikinawâwasowin” and by strengthening relationships with indigenous consultants in ways that respect and honour traditional knowledge, and lived and learned experiences.

Well-being and resiliency: the miyo resource kâ-nâkatohkêhk miyo-ohpikinawâwasowin. (2019). Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/9781460143384#detailed>

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