

**AN INTEGRATED
APPROACH TO
EARLY CHILDHOOD
DEVELOPMENT:
A POSITION PAPER**

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Presented by
The First 2000 Days Network
www.2000days.ca

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Foreword

We know that countless individuals, groups, and organizations across Alberta are working hard to give children the opportunities they need to reach their full potential. We also know that many young children in our province continue to struggle despite these efforts. The First 2000 Days Network is one initiative that is working to improve the landscape of Early Childhood Development by leveraging the former for the latter.

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.

The needs around integration that exist within the sector are replicated at the provincial level. As a Network that understands the importance of integration within complex systems, the benefits of increasing quality integration and coordination at the provincial level are clear. Moreover, in working with various actors at the grassroots and organizational level, the Network sees the potential benefits of working within a broader system that is more aligned and could provide a common vision, strategic direction, and an approach to learning that could drive the diverse work that happens locally.

While there are many ways of creating positive change, shifting practice at the provincial level is a huge leverage point. The power that resides in our legislation, ministries, and provincial frameworks cannot be understated, and we must seize these opportunities to positively impact children across Alberta. We deeply believe that **when an integrated approach to ECD is implemented through the coordinating elements described in this paper, we will positively impact early childhood outcomes across Alberta.** This position paper is a reflection of our current understanding of the dynamic, complex and emergent systems that influence early childhood development. 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 province's way of working.

The First 2000 Days Network Community



first2000days
Early Childhood Development Network

Prepared by Janet Eremenko and Felicia Esposito

A Note Regarding Terminology

It is important to clearly define the following terminology *as it applies to this position paper*. As is often the case in complex contexts with many stakeholders, there is an array of definitions and interpretations of key terminologies. The ECD ecosystem is no different. This section is intended to establish definitions for the reader of this report while recognizing that different individuals and organizations may hold various definitions of these key concepts.

These diverse definitions reflect the lack of integration within the sector. An integrated approach to Early Childhood Development would require and support strong mechanisms to establish common definitions and shared understanding of these key terms. Following an adequate period of engagement and consultation with the sector, a focused definition of key concepts to which organizations and initiatives across Alberta could align would greatly serve the sector, public awareness efforts, and evaluation processes.

For the purpose of this report, definitions are as follows:

Early Childhood – Narrowly, early childhood is the period of a child’s life from birth through to the end of their fifth year. More broadly, we also consider the months preceding this period (from conception to birth) and the years following (approximately to age 8) as being included in early childhood, but to a lesser extent. This distinction is necessary as we discuss coordination of policy and programs. For example, prenatal and maternal health, though outside the defined window of early childhood, have tremendous impact on the birth to 5-year period. Similarly, an individual’s ‘early childhood’ (birth to 5) has impact on how children transition to and through the first years of primary school.

Early Childhood Development (ECD) – The stages throughout the early childhood age range stated above whereby a child develops the physiological, social and psychological skills, and neural pathways and patterns that set the course into their later years. It encompasses all developmental areas of childhood, including physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and health-related outcomes, and is not limited to school-readiness or childcare.

Integration – In the context of this report and its focus on the provincial order of government, integration is used to describe the process of creating an inter-ministerial, coordinated approach to all government functions as they relate to ECD. Integration is seen as a means to improve the effectiveness of services while at the same time reducing public costs. In the field of Early Childhood Development, it is related to co-ordinated policy for children through the formation of integrated networks among kindred sectors such as social welfare, school systems, family, employment and health services.

Executive Summary

A person's first five years of life have a tremendous impact on their life course. The importance of this period of growth and extreme sensitivity to both positive and negative experiences is captured in a vast body of current research related to Early Childhood Development (ECD). The evidence is clear: reliable, responsive relationships and safe, supportive environments facilitate positive neurological, psychosocial, and physiological development at this critical time. While programs and services are crucial supports, they are enabled or constrained by broader political, economic, and social contexts. Government policies, programs, and practices specifically can act as powerful leverage points to improve outcomes for Alberta's children.

For this reason, **we are calling on the Government of Alberta to initiate an integrated approach to ECD. We believe that when an integrated approach to ECD is implemented through the coordinating elements herein described, then it can be incorporated across government to improve early childhood outcomes. A child-centered perspective throughout government policies, practice, and programs will provide leadership to shift Albertans' understanding and value of early childhood development, to the benefit of all children.**

This position paper focuses primarily on a set of enabling elements which, when successfully implemented in a complementary fashion, will produce the integrated approach that will result in better outcomes for children – as children – and throughout their adult life. The enabling elements of an integrated approach are:

Legislation: Legislation has a significant impact on the long-term viability of an integrated approach. In Alberta, there are already numerous pieces of legislation that directly or indirectly address child health and well-being, educational outcomes, early learning and childcare, and the child welfare system. An integrated approach would expand the legislation that is identified and considered relevant for alignment with early childhood priorities.

Initial and Ongoing Situational Analysis: In undertaking broad systems change, it is crucial to understand the context. To support an integrated approach, an initial situational analysis should map out the interwoven parts of the current factors that impact ECD. As an ongoing piece of work, this situational analysis lends itself to a process where feedback loops about shifting contexts are consistently evaluated and introduced into the process, leading to a more robust, integrated system as time progresses.

Guiding Principles: Any strategy, management model, or cultural change process needs to be guided by an articulated set of principles and values. They are a statement of values that guide a cultural shift within government to think about and do work through an ECD lens.

Guiding Strategy: A guiding strategy establishes and manages the foundation for the implementation of an integrated approach. It lays out the direction and goals of the integrated approach to ECD, which is completed in consideration of outcomes and objectives identified through other elements suggested in this report.

Management Model: A management model includes a clear governance model, institutional anchor, and adequate funding. Without it, intersectoral coordination exists by name only. A management model is the mechanism through which intersectoral coordination can be evaluated, accountable, and transparent. It is the entity that ensures government is invested long-term, despite potential changes in party leadership and policy priorities, guaranteeing there is consistency in leadership, knowledge, and oversight.

Evaluation: An evaluation framework should outline indicators that are realistically measurable while still providing useful information, which is challenging in complex and unpredictable systems (Preskill & Gopal, 2014; Cabaj, 2018). The approach to evaluation must reflect this complexity and the non-linear relationship between strategy and evaluation.

Public Awareness: There is an opportunity to change how, why, and whether the general public cares about early childhood development. We can work to expand how people connect their own and their families' well-being to the well-being of children in their communities and more broadly, their province. Moreover, there is room to improve the public's overall understanding of early childhood development.

Research & Innovation: A Research and Innovation Strategy would "provide a unified, evidence-informed framework that addresses the gaps in existing knowledge and builds on the strengths of our communities... A shared language and conceptual base are needed to engage stakeholders with diverse expertise at all levels" (Benzies, 2013).

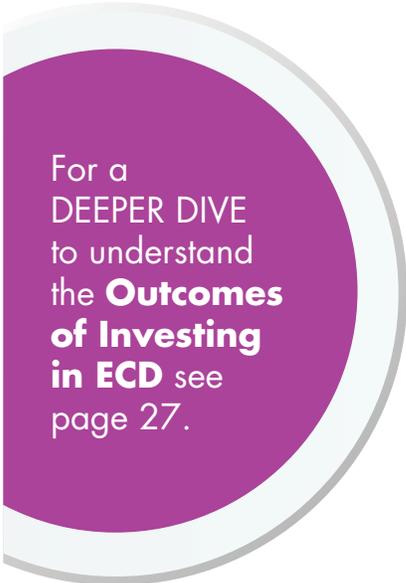
These elements enable an integrated approach to ECD, which can be realized with minimal costs to government and maximum benefits to our youngest Albertans. While all these elements are equally important, they may play different roles in the development, implementation, and sustaining of an integrated approach to ECD. This paper describes each of these elements in detail and leverages experience and expertise from examples across Canada (e.g. Manitoba Healthy Child or Ontario Children's Services) and the world (e.g. Chile, Sweden, Jamaica and New Zealand). These examples demonstrate the possibilities of an integrated approach to ECD and the core function of these enabling elements.

To some readers, an integrated approach to ECD may sound familiar. At government and community levels, many efforts have been made to establish broad, coordinated ECD strategies, including Success by 6, All in for Youth, and Together We Raise Tomorrow. From a legislative perspective, in 2013, the Children First Act was proclaimed into law, promising the establishment of a Children's Charter. While none of these have resulted in a fully integrated approach to ECD, they provide a strong foundation for systemic change. Any of the recommendations in this paper should be implemented in the context of building upon and coalescing around the knowledge of initiatives that have come before it.

Introduction

This position paper focuses on the details related to an integrated approach to Early Childhood Development. It explores our central theory of change: **When an integrated approach to ECD is implemented through the coordinating elements herein described, then it can be incorporated across government to improve early childhood outcomes. A child-centered perspective throughout government policy, practice, and program will provide leadership to shift Albertans' understanding and valuing of early childhood development.**

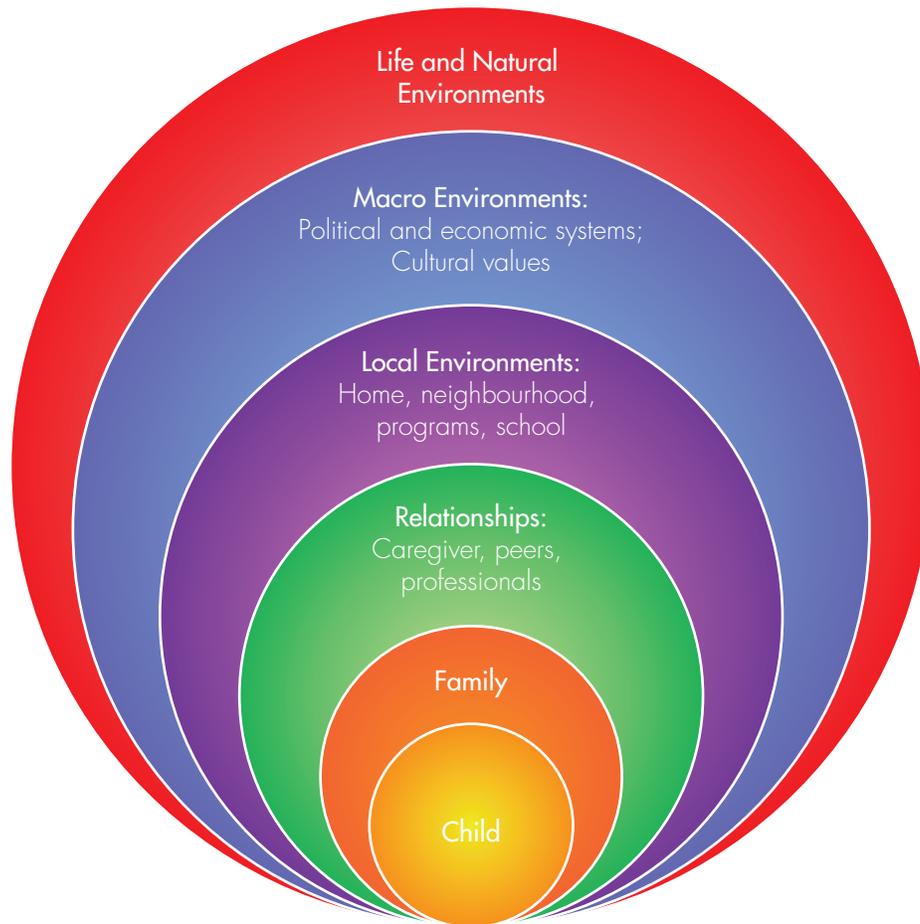
In exploring the key enabling elements of an integrated early childhood system, this report takes a holistic approach to child development. There are countless iterations of ECD models that represent the same essential understanding of how children develop. At the centre of the model is the child, whose neurological, psychosocial, emotional, and physical well-being is central to their growth. The second most proximate influence on a child's life are those individuals with whom there are frequent, responsive, and reliable emotional connections. Science confirms the oft-quoted psychologist Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner, that "Every child needs at least one adult who is irrationally crazy about him or her... That's number one. First, last and always" (Brendtro, 2006: 163). Beyond these immediate relationships, healthy human development is influenced in deeply meaningful ways by relationships to communities (of geography, faith, culture etc.), by the interconnected web of public and private policy, programs, and practice, and by our natural environments.



For a
DEEPER DIVE
to understand
the **Outcomes
of Investing
in ECD** see
page 27.

It is foundational to understand that investing in ECD contributes to several significant outcomes including: a healthier population, improved educational outcomes, improved national and international standing, economic benefits, and a contribution to Canada's commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

First 2000 Days Network Model of Child Development



This image was developed by drawing on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Child Development, the Early Childhood Colorado Framework, and the Magnolia Place Initiative's Theory of Change.

In exploring integration, the principles used to generate considerations around enabling elements include:

Universality: Being inclusive of children of all socio-economic status and cultural backgrounds.

Human-centred design: Taking the perspective of the user of the system to shape the approach to designing that system.

Collaboration: Drawing on the depth and breadth of the knowledge and expertise that exists within the field and community of people who care deeply about early childhood development.

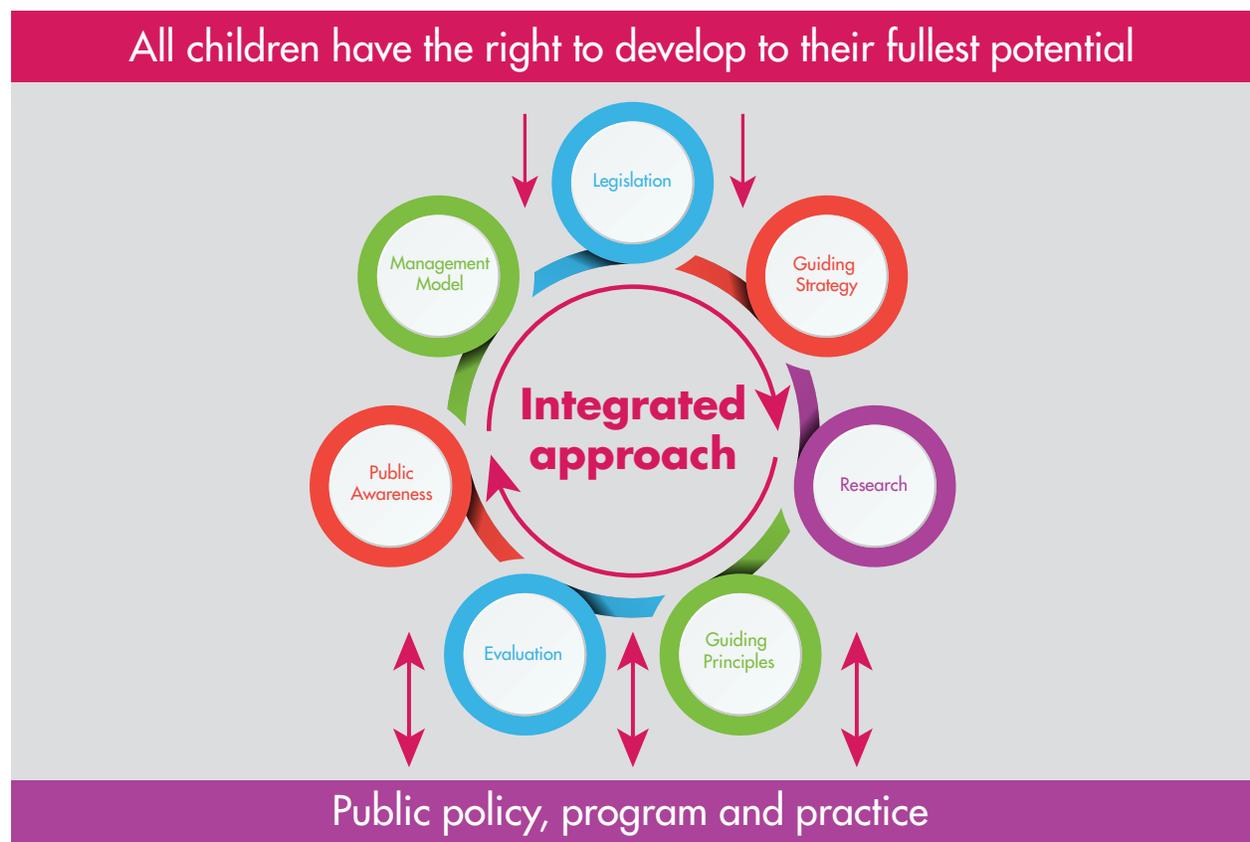
For a DEEPER DIVE
see the "ECD models"
section on page 39.

The Enabling Elements of an Integrated Approach

Implementing an integrated approach to ECD through the enabling elements herein described can facilitate the inclusion of an ECD lens across all government branches, thereby improving early childhood outcomes. A child-centered perspective throughout government policy, practice, and program will provide leadership to shift Albertans' understanding and value of early childhood development.

In studying examples of integrated approaches to ECD in Canadian jurisdictions and around the world, there are clear trends in how these approaches are created, implemented, and sustained. These trends inform the elements the Government of Alberta should consider in developing its integrated approach to ECD. Committing long-term, adequate investment of resources and political capital in the elements mentioned here will generate lasting benefits for Alberta's children and families.

Should one or more of these elements be adopted separately, they are strong enough to stand on their own. However, they are related to and strengthen each other, thereby contributing to better outcomes for Alberta's children. The elements are not hierarchical or prioritized in any way. In the fullest definition of systems and complexity, each of the elements are inter-related and mutually reinforcing and should be completed with the highest attention to complementarity.



1. Legislation

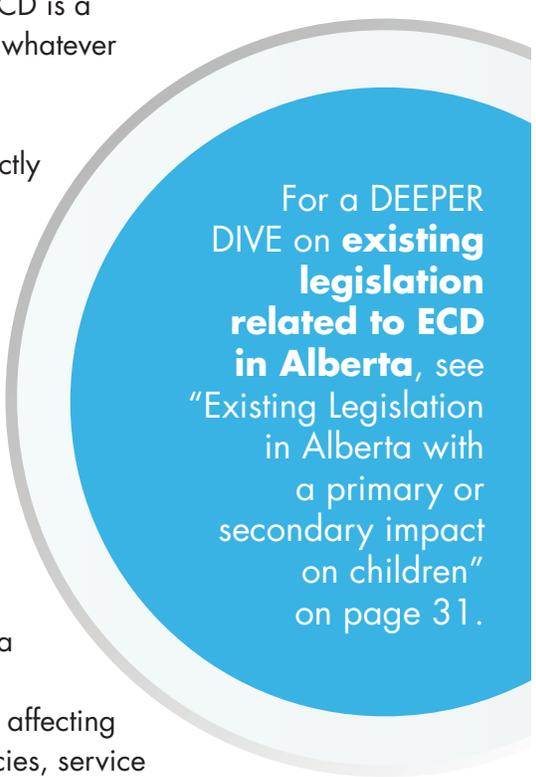
The legal framework for an integrated approach to ECD might precede or follow other enabling elements, depending on the broader political, sectoral, and societal context. Regardless of timing, legislation has a significant impact on the long-term viability of an integrated approach. A government might include all the pieces of an integrated approach, but if it is not enshrined in legislation, its sustainability and longevity is vulnerable to changes in leadership and investment priorities. Above all, legislation must be adequately robust to withstand a fluctuating economic forecast, political ideologies, and differing priority areas. ECD is a long-term investment with outcomes that may not materialize for decades. Therefore, a strategy and its goals risk being shelved if they do not align with changing governments. The challenge for policy-makers is to create legislation with enough detail and “tooth” to withstand changes in government and remain relevant and useable over time. This legislation would clarify that ECD is a unilateral concern for all Albertans, regardless of partisanship and whatever other shifting priorities may come about.

There are already numerous pieces of Albertan legislation that directly or indirectly address child health and well-being, educational outcomes, early learning and childcare, and the child welfare system. In 2013, Bill 25: *The Children First Act* was passed. This was a significant step taken by the Government to enshrine a set of principles and future strategic action items related to ECD. It included extensive amendments of other Acts that have the greatest and most direct impact on children. Most note-worthy in the Children First Act is the requirement that a Children’s Charter, along with associated and specific principles, be established “to ensure government policy puts children first.”

Section 2(1) of *The Children First Act*: “The Minister shall establish a Children’s Charter to guide the Government of Alberta and its departments in the development of policies, programs and services affecting children and to guide collaboration among departments and agencies, service providers and Albertans.” (2013)

Laws that pertain to “child-serving” ministries are directly impacted by the *Children First Act*. In an inclusive, integrated approach, this type of legislation would include departments and laws serving children both directly and indirectly. An integrated approach would expand the types of legislation to identify and consider for alignment with early childhood priorities, such as the Maintenance Enforcement Act, Mental Health Act, or the Family Law Act.

Moreover, despite this promising piece of legislation, implementing an integrated approach to ECD remains elusive. This approach to legislating a “children’s lens,” which the Children’s Charter appears to include, is challenged by a lack of associated regulations and recommendations



For a DEEPER DIVE on **existing legislation related to ECD in Alberta**, see “Existing Legislation in Alberta with a primary or secondary impact on children” on page 31.

that would define the implementation of the *Children First Act*. In contrast, legislation in other jurisdictions is far more detailed and robust enough to stand alone in the absence of other legislation. For example, some jurisdictions' legislation explicitly include overarching principles, management models, fiscal frameworks, and accountability/reporting structures to support their implementation.¹ A similar structure supporting full integration could support Alberta's commitment to establishing a Children's Charter and broader integration. Overall, the *Children First Act* carries tremendous potential to initiate a government-wide, integrated approach to children's rights, health, and well-being.

To consider:

- What is the status of the creation of a provincial Children's Charter²?
- How is the spirit of the *Children First Act* being adopted/adhered to?
- Are there associated *Children First Act* regulations?
- Could legislation establish a single definition of key concepts?

2. Initial and Ongoing Situational Analysis

In undertaking broad systems change, it is crucial to understand the context. To support an integrated approach, an initial situational analysis needs to go beyond a conventional environmental scan. Rather, it should map out the interwoven parts (and their relationships to each other) of the current factors that impact ECD. A situational analysis, or "mapping" initiative, can provide a holistic picture of current programs, processes, policies, actors, and flows of information. This analysis will identify synergies and collaborative potential across government departments, policy makers, and community agencies.

A robust situational analysis can create a launching pad for effective, integrated work that fills existing gaps and injects new perspectives, programs, and synergies into existing challenges and opportunities in the system. This analysis can be structured in many different ways. One example is using the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis method. This method includes steps such as identifying 'internal

A key part of understanding the context of the early childhood development sector includes understanding the different ways that an average Albertan interacts with the sector.

¹ For examples of legislation that enshrines an integrated approach to ECD see: *The Healthy Child Manitoba Act* (2007) that includes adherence to the Healthy Child Manitoba Strategy and the role of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet; South Africa's *Children's Act* (2005); Jamaica's two pieces of legislation; *The Early Childhood Act* (2005) that "provides a comprehensive framework for all aspects of ECD" and *The Early Childhood Commission Act* (2003) establishing the Early Childhood Commission (the national management model with specific functions and oversight responsibility for ECD). Additionally, *The Early Childhood Education Act* in the United States relates to children before they enter Kindergarten and led to the creation of the nation-wide Head Start program, amongst many others, as well as the State of Colorado's House Bill 13-1117, *Concerning alignment of child development programs, and, in connection therewith, making and reducing an appropriation, reaffirms principles of ECD, the need for intersectoral interventions and the management model of oversight; the Early Childhood Leadership Commission*.

² Worth noting is the organization Children First Canada, which has undertaken the drafting of a national Children's Charter. The draft charter may be seen here (<https://www.childrenfirstcanada.com/canadian-childrens-charter>) for reference. Currently the inclusion of early childhood development in the charter is not yet confirmed and is being considered.

strengths and weaknesses’ and ‘external opportunities and threats’. This approach to a situational analysis could feed into the strategic planning for an integrated approach. Regardless of method, a situational analysis that supports an integrated approach would include existing programs, policies, and approaches to evaluation (including indicators collected across the system).

For a DEEPER DIVE on an **average experience for Albertans** with young children, see page 32.

Further analysis would serve to identify and incorporate existing integration, learnings from previous integration plans, and management models. As an ongoing piece of work, this situational analysis lends itself to a process where feedback loops about shifting contexts are consistently evaluated and introduced into the process, leading to a more vigorously integrated system. An example of a situational analysis is NIPECD, the National Integration Plan for Early Childhood Development, in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 2015). NIPECD was created when South Africa began analyzing their early childhood system and included a review of the integration plan and a diagnostic analysis of the current situation. These became the launching point for its overall integration plan and strategy.

To consider:

- What is the current breadth and depth of ECD integration and practice within all ministerial portfolios?
- Is there a central registry for all data collected through government departments?
- Do we know all the public programs, services and policies in place to advance ECD in Alberta?

BENEFITS OF AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Smooth transitions – Strengthening the system that supports ECD would support crucial transitions before and after the birth to 5-year period. Returns on investment can diminish if we don’t pay attention to the years that precede and follow the birth to 6-year period (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2017). Therefore, countries are increasingly directing their policy attention to facilitate smooth transitions, specifically, though not exclusively, through stronger collaboration between ELCC and primary school. For example, alignment of curriculum frameworks at both levels is taking place in Austria, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Norway, Slovenia, Wales (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2017). Alberta has made valuable progress in this area as well, with the introduction of an ELCC Curriculum Framework.

Reduced Duplication – An integrated approach can reduce duplication of efforts across sectors and maximize scarce financial, human and material resources (Naudeau et al.,

2011). Conversely, a lack of intentional inter-sectoral and inter-institutional coordination can result in duplication and low-quality interventions (Umayahara, 2004).

Potential for economic efficiencies – Though there are costs involved in the process of integration, integration (and policy coordination, to a lesser extent) can produce multiple efficiencies; allowing for economies of scale, limiting uncertainty and sharing risk (Stead and Meijers, 2009). An integrated approach can also create synergies in delivery and technical components of interventions, as well as the promotion of innovation in policy development and implementation (Stead and de Jong, 2006 as cited in Stead and Meijers, 2009)

3. Guiding Principles

Any strategy, management model, or cultural change process needs to be guided by an articulated set of principles and values. These guiding principles may be one of the first steps in setting the ground for an integrated system. They are a statement of values that guide a cultural shift, within government, to think about and do their work through an ECD lens. Globally, integrated ECD systems have guiding principles that leads ECD investment and integration within government and community processes. In the context of building an integrated approach to ECD, common guiding principles include:

1. Universality

Ensure that access to healthy, supportive, nurturing environments is universally available for all children by including the elimination of barriers related to socio-economic status, disabilities, family circumstances, cultural backgrounds or geographic location (ECMap, 2014).

2. Innovation

Openness to different views, new perspectives and the capacity to push against convention to achieve progress

3. Fiscal responsibility

Obligation to respect government's fiscal responsibilities as well as ensuring that programs are affordable for families

4. Accountability

Framework with evidence-based results and measurements

5. Cooperation/Collaboration

Culture of cooperation within government and between governments and community

6. Adaptability

Flexibility to change and adapt in a timely way

7. Human centered design

Understanding that there is a person at the end of every path; an approach with their perspective

Healthy guiding principles do not shy away from addressing community needs and encouraging new ways of thinking. Moreover, these principles are broad enough to apply to any area affected by ECD, and to support the ability to attain goals set out by the Guiding Strategy. This includes leaving space for community expertise and assets to contribute to an integrated system in a way that makes sense for them.

One example of success in this endeavour is Healthy Child Manitoba, which adopted ten guiding principles in their *Starting Early, Starting Strong* strategy in November of 2013. The guiding principles and values were created in collaboration with their community partners, stakeholders, and Provincial Healthy Child Advisory Committee, along with input from their broader community. Some of the guiding principles of Healthy Child Manitoba include being 'Community-based', 'Evidence-based', 'Integrated, Coordinated and Comprehensive' and 'Fiscally Sound' (Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, Manitoba Government, 2013).

4. Guiding Strategy

"Most inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms establish a workplan at the very initial stage, in order to define the common vision and objectives, strategies, tasks and responsible sectors or persons." UNESCO, 2004

A guiding strategy establishes and manages the foundation for the implementation of an integrated approach. It lays out the direction and goals of the integrated approach to ECD, which is completed in consideration of outcomes and objectives identified through other elements suggested in this report. A guiding strategy needs to leave space for flexibility and adaptability so it can guide processes that will

GUIDING STRATEGIES should include and respect rich indigenous traditions, ways of knowing and community-based philosophies.

All of Alberta's children benefit when an Indigenous worldview is integrated into guiding strategies. Indigenous view of childrearing values and respects the child's autonomy, where "Aboriginal children are openly recognized and respected as persons and are thus encouraged to make their own decisions about how they wish to explore their environment" (Muir and Bohr, 2014 as cited in Taylor, 2017).

Where Indigenous children are concerned, the systematic review of all policies, practices, programs and services is required on an ongoing basis to address the inequities that exist in Alberta. In its universality (i.e., for all Alberta children), an integrated approach must explicitly recognize the need and to "make the space" for culturally appropriate service provision. Moreover, Call-to-Action #12 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls upon "... the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families." (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015). Further, because an integrated approach is whole-of-government, a guiding strategy must approach the deep over-representation of Indigenous children in care. There are powerful, challenging learnings held in the truths of Canada's centuries-long residential school system and the Sixties Scoop. With meaningful and sustained engagement with First Nations, Metis and Inuit People, Alberta may choose to create a separate, Indigenous approach to ECD, such as British Columbia's *BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework*.

change over time and maximize efficient and effectiveness in the long term. Guiding strategies lay out a way of operating, understanding, and designing policy, which change alongside shifting relationships, governments, and cultural climates. They are foundational to a shift in culture where ingrain a child-centred perspective in the discussions and decision making at all government levels is a natural progression to the formation of policies and programs.

While there are many components to a guiding strategy, a few key components include: identification of strategic alignment (within the government, between differing orders of government, and between government and community), an accountability framework with an ECD-centred focus, guiding principles, fiscal responsibility, and an outcomes framework.

To consider:

- Is there a smaller scale model of integration within government already taking place that may be used as a starting point for overall integration of ministries?

5. Management model

Establishing management models for the leadership and guidance of an integrated approach can be a challenging enabling element to create and sustain. In the absence of a clearly defined management model which includes a clear governance model, institutional anchor, and adequate funding, intersectoral coordination exists by name only. A management model is the mechanism through which intersectoral coordination can be evaluated, accountable, and transparent. It is the entity that ensures government is invested long-term, despite potential changes in Government and policy priorities, guaranteeing there is consistency in leadership, knowledge, and oversight. This section will discuss similarities amongst several management models in North America and other countries, and considerations for creating a management model that might be successful in Alberta's context.

The management model is an opportunity to clearly define and coordinate leadership for an integrated approach to ECD. In the literature regarding the subject, 'management model' may be used synonymously with 'coordination mechanism', 'governance model', 'institutional anchor' or, in a collective impact approach, a 'backbone'. Used in a general sense, 'governance' refers to the locus of where authority lies, the process of decision making, how decisions are implemented, and the nature of accountabilities between stakeholders (Muttart, 2012). Regardless of name, these factors all have the potential to establish clearly identifiable leadership, non-partisan commitment to a strategy and its principles and objectives, and a level of ownership and sustainability.³

³ For examples of management models to support an integrated approach to ECD see Healthy Child Manitoba, South Africa's two-tiered committee, Jamaica, Chile, and the state of Colorado

The first similarity amongst many of the management models investigated is the presence of a cabinet-level committee to facilitate intersectoral coordination at the highest level. Most jurisdictions with a stated plan for an integrated approach to ECD have a ministerial-level committee; however, implicit or explicit leadership of the committee is often permanently held by a child-serving ministry or a ministry of education (OECD, 2017). To place a significant amount of this responsibility in Education or Social Welfare/Human Services is in contradiction to the spirit in which an integrated approach is established. Since the aim is to embed ECD across the “whole-of-government”, it is advantageous to share the responsibility for oversight and leadership across ministries, thereby challenging traditional practices of a narrow approach to ECD.⁴

Many jurisdictions with an integrated approach to ECD and an associated management model have enshrined that management model in legislation, further protecting it from changes in government and policy agenda. In the case of Jamaica, diversity in membership of their management model (opposition party members, governor-general-appointed chairpersons, and non-state actors) was their protection against changes in government and political agendas (World Bank, 2013). Some examples of legislation establish the commitment to a committee without further detail. Others are far more specific, outlining legislating membership and nomination, accountability and reporting mechanisms, and in a few cases, funding commitments (OECD, 2017).

Certain examples of management models include secondary levels of oversight that are not held at the political level, such as an ECD taskforce with community members, parent representatives, and government administration. A third-party organization at arm’s-length to government is also a viable component to the management model, such as an independent ECD agency that can facilitate coordination.⁵ Alberta’s Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is an example of an independent office of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. An ECD Commission, committee, or council, complementary to a cabinet committee, could serve as a community-led, executive-serving, intersectoral coordination mechanism with the power to make funding decisions. The aforementioned final report of the ECDMap project recommended, amongst other promising suggestions to *“Establish a permanent provincial secretariat of Human Early Learning and Development (HELD) with a cross-departmental mandate and budget to set out and implement strategies that enhance the collective impact of government activity on early childhood development.”* (ECMAP, 2014)

Regardless of the type of anchor, it’s important that it be adequately resourced in terms of financial endowment, political capital, and human resources. Funding must be sufficient to support effective oversight of implementation, accountability of government to the strategy, leadership, monitoring, measurement and evaluation, and policy coordination (Vargas-Baron, 2005).

⁴ See the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/OntarioEarlyYear.pdf>. Sweden, New Zealand, Norway and Slovenia have also mandated Education as the institutional anchor [leader] for an integrated approach (OECD, 2017)

⁵ A Mexican case study examines three very different mechanisms that have had as one of their purposes to foster co-ordination of policies and programmes benefiting young children. The first mechanism is a National Commission charged with evaluating and monitoring programmes for children, linked to goals set at the World Summit for Children (1990). The second mechanism is a co-ordinating and technical committee of an inter-sectoral programme of health, education and nutrition, which began in earnest in 1997, directed to communities and families living below the poverty line. The third example is a less formal and on-going inter-sectoral and inter-institutional effort to define indicators of well-being for children under six years of age, which began in early 2001. (UNESCO, 2004)

To consider:

- Does Alberta have the political will to put a system in place? If so, is the institutional leadership in place?
- Has Alberta created a shared vision for ECD?
- Can you name a publicly recognizable example of inter-ministerial coordination related to ECD?

6. Evaluation

“[It is necessary] to understand the exact mechanisms by which early skills and behaviours can eventually translate into lasting long-term benefits for the children and economy. The ECE [ECD] community needs to know which skills and program designs lead to the most positive outcomes for children later in life.” (Alexander et al., 2017)

The enabling elements of an integrated approach to ECD are deeply aligned, complementary, and reinforcing. Where the Research and Innovation Strategy establishes a research agenda and how it informs policy, program, and practice, evaluation develops the framework for determining how the enabling elements are working in tandem to contribute positively or negatively to ECD outcomes and improved quality standards of program and practice. All systems should be able to support adaptive learning, guide strategy, provide the foundation for quality improvement and monitor compliance with established standards: these are the functions of an evaluation framework (Neuman & Devercelli, 2013).⁶

An evaluation framework should outline indicators that are realistically measurable while still providing useful information, which is challenging in complex and unpredictable systems (Preskill and Gopal, 2014; Cabaj, 2018). The approach to evaluation must reflect this complexity and the non-linear relationship between strategy and evaluation. Moreover, while there are many potential sources of data, it is important to remember to engage and ask parents and families with young children what would have the greatest impact on their lives and the well-being of their child.

The coordinating elements are presented here with no need for prioritization in execution or importance, except the evaluation framework, which leads all other action. An evaluation framework should follow the creation of the comprehensive strategy since an evaluation framework will include clearly stated objectives, which in turn reflect the goals of the strategy. In

⁶ Chile's national, integrated approach to ECD has a robust Monitoring and Evaluation framework, establishing a biopsychosocial development support assessment tool and associated baseline data with an accompanying qualitative evaluation of the implementation of such a tool. Their approach includes participatory evaluation, population-level data, programmatic outcomes, an implementation survey, and qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the initiative's municipal network, i.e. accountability of partners in implementation.

addition to assessing program impact and quality, the evaluation framework might also give attention to the quality of coordination and integration of systemic actors. The quality of work and experiences of the user relies, in part, on the quality of collaboration and communication between service providers and government branches. It may also include assessment of the optimization and harmonization of the **research → policy → evaluation → adaptation feedback loop** and the effectiveness of the management model, including reporting mechanisms, departmental accountability, and resourcing.

BENEFITS OF AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Shared information systems - Cost efficiencies could be achieved from establishing shared information systems to collect both survey and administrative data (Neuman and Devercelli, 2013)

Shared goals and alignment - At the community level, an integrated approach to *ECD* reflects and promotes integration, by providing clear, measurable goals at the government level (as stated in the guiding strategy). At the ministerial level, an ECD policy framework can help harmonize the goals and strategies of various departments and institutions horizontally. It can engage new ministries that have not traditionally been engaged in ECD (e.g., Justice and Solicitor General, Status of Women).

Establishing common definitions (e.g., age coverage), agendas, principles and foundational understandings regarding ECD facilitates coordination across the system, supports the navigation of bureaucracies, and increases accessibility for Albertans.

“A coherent strategy can help coordinate efforts across sectors to ensure that all children received the full scope of services they need and that all service providers know and follow regulations and norms.” UNESCO, 2004

In addition, what is measured and how it is measured should align with the legislation, regulations, and frameworks of other orders of government. For example, the Canadian government has signed a Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care with the provinces and territories, providing a set of indicators by which they will publicly report the status of programs and allocation of dollars spent. Though this is focused exclusively on ELCC rather than an integrated approach to the early years, the bilateral agreement between the Government of Alberta and Government of Canada should be a contributing document in the selection of measures and indicators.⁷

⁷ The bilateral agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta took effect April 1, 2017 and will remain in effect until March 31, 2020. Funding funnelled through this agreement supported the expansion of Alberta's \$25/day ELCC Centre program.

To consider:

- Are child health, well-being, and education data currently available and being considered systematically?
- Is there general agreement on child outcome metrics? Other metrics?
- Are there capacity constraints to be addressed for gathering reliable data in a timely way?

7. Public Awareness⁸

'It takes a village to raise a child' is a common saying. Our 'village' includes all the people and systems that support and impact young children throughout their early years. In this context, there is an opportunity to change how, why, and whether the general public cares about early childhood development. We can work to expand how people connect their and their families' well-being to the well-being of children in their communities and, more broadly, their province. An educated public, which values and has a greater understanding of the importance of the focus on ECD in every aspect of government and community, will encourage support for an integrated approach. Moreover, adopting an integrated approach demonstrates government collaboration, cooperation, and investment, and displays for the public and taxpayer a tangible, effective, and efficient method for creating policies and programs linked to ECD. An integrated approach would also lead to fiscal and social efficiencies in the delivery and creation of programs with child-centred perspectives. Generally, a public that understands, values, and supports the long-term investment in ECD would be a positive reinforcement for an integrated approach.

BENEFITS OF AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Leadership in publicly 'setting the course' - Our governments play an important role in declaring our priorities as a society. An integrated approach "...can raise the visibility of a nation's vision and goals for young children, clarify the respective responsibilities of different actors and agencies, and provide critical guidance for public and private investments [and build capacity in community and strengthen Public/private relationships]" (Naudeau et al, 2011).

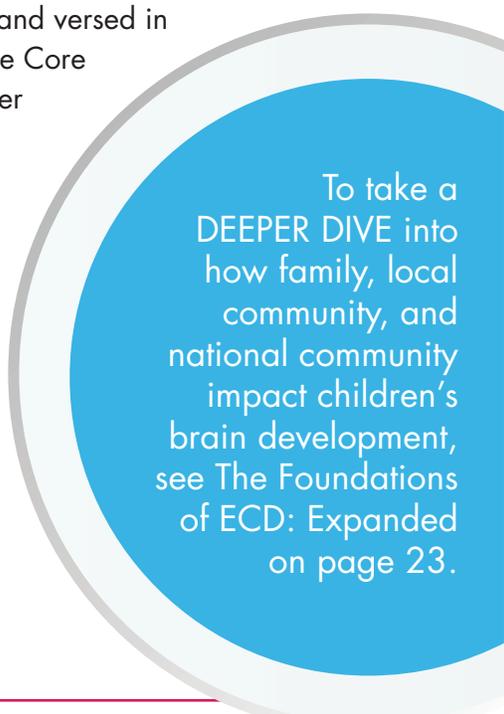
Demonstration of evidence-based practice - Scientific findings from around the world, including our own province, tells us to consider the whole child in their whole environment. If science has solidly confirmed that we can't silo aspects or stages of a child's development, we cannot silo the policies and programs that serve them. Just as a child's learning and development is not limited to one relationship or a period of their day, children's development cannot be adequately addressed through interventions via any single sector (Naudeau et al, 2011).

⁸ For perspective on the Alberta public's perception of ECD and ELCC, see The Muttart Foundation's *in the Best Interests of Children and Families: A Synthesis of Regional Discussions* (2011); *Toward a Provincial Framework for Early and Care in Alberta: A Record of Participant Discussions* (2013) and the Alberta Centre for Child, Family & Community Research publication "What Albertans Know About Child Development: A Comparison of the Provincial Benchmark Surveys 2007 and 2013" (2014). These can be found at <https://www.muttart.org/report/?type=ece>

To add, according to the *What Alberta Adults Know About Child Development: A Benchmark Survey* (2007), a study conducted by PolicyWise for Children & Families, only 45% of surveyed adults across Alberta understand children’s physical and cognitive developmental milestones. More poignantly, only 7% of surveyed adults across Alberta understand the emotional and social developmental milestones (Rikhy & Tough, 2007).⁹ It is clear there is much room for improvement.

There is a strong research-base around the foundations of early childhood development.

Generally, it would be strategic for the ‘village’ to be more educated and versed in early childhood development. Information outlined in resources like the Core Brain Story (currently being shared in ways that facilitate and empower adult comprehension) could support parents and caregivers to understand their child’s development, help generate conversations with professionals in the field, and develop a mutual understanding and language around what is needed to support healthy early childhood development. Supporting anyone who interacts with children to have better tools to in turn support children by increasing the patience and understanding of their developmental stage has the potential to change their outlook on what it means to care for a child. For example, understanding the function “Serve and Return” has the potential to change interactions between a child and a parent or caregiver, stimulating and opening the neural pathways in the brain that only a few decades ago were not yet understood.



To take a DEEPER DIVE into how family, local community, and national community impact children’s brain development, see *The Foundations of ECD: Expanded* on page 23.

“Parents’ understanding of child development may influence their expectations and interactions with children” PolicyWise For Children and Families, *What Alberta Adults Know About Child Development: A Benchmark Survey* (2007; Presenter: Dr. Suzanne Tough)

An example of this type of shift in public awareness comes from Sweden, where ECD is integrated broadly into their policy, program, and overall understanding of themselves as a society. Starting in the 1970s, the country started introducing child care policies that eventually led to educating the public on ECD, and ingrained the idea that everyone in a community is involved in the development of a child. Today in Sweden it is natural to think of supporting ECD in policy and program formation. It has become a part of the cultural fabric that ECD is everyone’s responsibility (Gunnarson, Korpi and Nordenstam, 1999).

⁹ Adults included in the survey specifically interacted with children under the age of 14. For more survey results go to the video link (<https://policywise.com/video-library/what-alberta-adults-know-about-child-development-a-benchmark-survey/>) to Dr. Suzanne Tough’s presentation

8. Research and Innovation¹⁰

When Alberta began its work to establish a made-in-Alberta strategy for ECD (the Social Policy Framework finalized in 2013), a Research and Innovation Strategy was created to enable achievement in its strategic priorities. A Research and Innovation Strategy “provide[s] a unified, evidence-informed framework that addresses the gaps in existing knowledge and builds on the strengths of our communities. ... A shared language and conceptual base are needed to engage stakeholders with diverse expertise at all levels.” (Benzies, 2013).

Implementing this ECD Research and Innovation Strategy would be highly complementary and aligned with other enabling elements of an integrated approach to ECD; supporting the objectives, informing policy, program, and practice, and establishing best principles and best practice (where contextual similarities allowed).¹¹ It could also build upon and align the effective and valuable work already taking place in Alberta.

A Research and Innovation Strategy should be established early in the process. While Situational Analysis, Research and Innovation, and Evaluation are identified as stand-alone enabling elements in this report, they might also be incorporated into a single continuum of work. A Research and Innovation Strategy is intended to provide strategic direction to investment priorities in Alberta leading to knowledge mobilization and knowledge transfer, while also sharing the benefits of the research across Canada and around the world. In tandem with the Evaluation element, a Research and Innovation Strategy can bridge science and evidence with policy, program, and practice.

To consider:¹²

- What are the key elements that lead to improved child health and developmental outcomes in early childhood programs?
- How can gains be sustained over time, and how does one program build on another?
- How does Alberta’s political, economic and social context affect ECD policy, programs, and services?

¹⁰ Other examples of collaborative, public-private-academic research strategies for Early Childhood Development include the Human Early Learning Partnership at the University of British Columbia, where developmental outcomes are monitored over place and time to identify factors in enhancing outcomes for children. Nationally, see the Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development at www.sk-c-eed.ca and a report recently published by Sheri Torjman: National Child Data Strategy: Results of a feasibility study. For more information follow <https://lawson.ca/private-national-child-data-strategy-results-feasibility-study/>.

¹¹ In systems of complexity, where context and environment have a significant impact on outcomes, emphasizing best principles rather than best practice can allow for contextual and regional variations. See Preskill and Gopal’s Evaluating Complexity (2014)

¹² Inspired by the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council “From Neurons to Neighborhoods: An Update: Workshop Summary”: Policy Implications of a Research Agenda

Alberta-based examples of inter-ministerial initiatives

There are several examples of inter-ministerial initiatives within Alberta. This list provides examples that demonstrate the viability and strengths of an integrated approach.

Creating Connections: Addiction and Mental Health Strategy

Created in 2011, Alberta's Addiction and Mental Health Strategy is founded on an integrated addiction and mental health service model that places clients/patients, family, and community at the centre. The strategy establishes guiding principles and identifies "enablers" that include research and evaluation, policy direction, and funding and compensation frameworks. Strategic alignment is identified and interestingly, in the context of this paper, one of the five strategic directions of *Creating Connections* is to "Foster the Development of Healthy Children, Youth and Families." Seventeen Government of Alberta Ministries with complementary and supportive mandates were invited to participate in the development of the strategy. Visit <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/9ab4e813-6731-4f6c-b517-57637ad440c3/resource/bebad5b6-5e87-4627-bef4-9589790a0aad/download/54546662011creatingconnectionsAlbertasaddictionmentalhealthstrategy.pdf> for more information on Alberta's Mental Health and Addiction Strategy.

Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD)

RCSD is an initiative led by Alberta Education, in partnership with the ministries of Health, Children's Services and Community and Social Services. Administered at the regional level, RCSD facilitates the cooperation between multiple service providers to better meet the diverse needs of children with special needs. As early as 2.5 years of age (the point at which a child is eligible to receive special funding through Alberta Education) they can become a part of the RCSD network where specialists (speech therapists, occupational therapists etc.) can collaborate to understand and meet the complex needs of children and their families. For an example of RCSD in action, visit the Calgary region RCSD website at <http://www.calgaryandarearcsd.ca/>

Beaverbrook Wellness Centre, Spruce Grove

This project is an example of integration at the community level, where it has the most direct impact on the lives of users; every day, children and their families walk through the doors to utilize services. Collaboration between developers, the local School Division, municipal government, and the Government of Alberta has been captured under one roof, where a co-

created facility provides child care, K-9 schooling, a Parent Link Centre, after-school care and recreation facilities for Spruce Grove residents. For more information about this family-oriented hub model of service delivery, visit <https://beaverbrook.ca/the-new-beaverbrookwellness-centre/>

EDI Program

The Early Development Instrument Collection, Analysis, and Community Mobilization Program, is the initiative that follow the completion of the Early Childhood Mapping Project pilot program. The EDI Program is complemented by the creation of Early Childhood Coalitions of Alberta, local bodies responsible for supporting communities in understanding how young children are doing throughout the province. The EDI program is a partnership between the ministries of Health, Education, and Community Social Services (soon to be replaced by Children's Services). Health is responsible for data analysis, matching, mapping, and reporting. Community and Social Services provides Coalition grant funding and supports community mobilization related to EDI results. Education collects EDI data through the School Authorities. For more information visit <http://ecdcoalitions.org/>

Health is responsible for data analysis matching, mapping and reporting.

Community and Social Services provides Coalition grant funding and supports community mobilization related EDI results.



Education collects EDI data through the School Authorities

Conclusion

Implementing an integrated approach structured by these enabling elements will be a monumental step towards systemic change that improves outcomes for all of Alberta's children. Creating a strong legislative foundation and management model would provide the structures required for robust and sustainable integration. A guiding strategy based on guiding principles and ongoing assessments of the situation would enable the development of specific goals and directions for the integrated approach. A clear approach to evaluation, research, and innovation would ground the approach in learning. The leadership that this approach provides has the potential to reflect and strengthen Albertans' awareness and value of early childhood development.

When investments in ECD respect and reflect scientific evidence about how children grow and learn, there is a tremendous opportunity to support a healthier population, improved educational outcomes, and economic benefits. To add, investment in ECD reflects our values as Canadians who have committed to the United National Convention on the Rights of the child, giving our children the opportunity to do their best in Alberta, Canada, and the world.

Alberta has the expertise to create a robust and integrated early childhood development system. In developing this integrated approach, the province has the opportunity to draw from a context of the explorations and initiatives that are currently in place and those that have come before. The benefits of investing in an integrated approach will far outweigh the cost. An integrated approach will provide every child in Alberta with the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential, in turn benefitting healthier and stronger families and communities, and all of us.

The Foundations of ECD: Expanded

This section provides additional details of some of the key research areas related to early childhood development. This section is not intended to be comprehensive. However, some of these themes were touched on briefly in the main body of the report and so are expanded upon here.

Children's brain development (0-5 years old)

The body of research describing children's brain development in early childhood is growing exponentially. Organizations such as the Centre for Child Development at Harvard University and, closer-to-home, the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative, PolicyWise, and many Albertan academic institutions are at the forefront of activating and contributing to this research. Public knowledge of this research is slowly increasing as well, through initiatives such as the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative's development of The Core Brain Story.¹³ As more research reaches the public domain and becomes readily available, the ability to educate parents, teachers, health practitioners, politicians, and the wider public in this brain story becomes much stronger. Furthermore, it's considered a greater matter of importance for all those who encounter children, regardless of whether that contact is a central aspect of their daily responsibilities, to be educated in these ideas. Facilitating this learning supports an Alberta-based collective understanding of neurological functioning and capacity in early childhood.

While it is not the purpose of this document to educate on the actual stages of early childhood development, there are several sources that may be accessed by readers of this paper to delve further into this research. At the beginning of this document a suggested reading list can offer further insight.

The evidence is clear that the human development and skill sets seen in adults are a learned process; "wired" into the brain at a very early age and setting the foundation for that child to learn, assess, evaluate, and react to many life situations. This period of early childhood development should be made a matter of high importance not only to parents and caregivers of children in their early years, but to policy makers, health care practitioners, teachers, and all those who encounter children of that age group.

Fundamentally, a child's brain begins to build in-utero. While wiring and foundation-building begin there, they do not end there. The construction of these initial in-utero 'blueprints' happen once a baby is born, through interaction with parents and caregivers, most critically in the first 5

¹³ Alberta Family Wellness Initiative has presented the core story of brain development in an accessible and visually engaging format for public audiences. The AFWI, in consultation with North America's most prominent experts, support and apply leading research about early brain development and its connection to adult health. The videos and other supporting information can be seen at: www.brainstory.org/. The AFWI also offers the Brain Story certification, a free online course for anyone to who wants to learn more about the science of brain development. For more information on the Brain Story Certification visit www.albertafamilywellness.org/what-we-know/the-brain-story

years of life (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010a). This is the time when those paths connect and the building blocks and foundations of a child's brain architecture form. The genes that carry the blueprints for these capabilities may be there, but it's the environment in which young children live that will help shape the use of, or inability to use, the blueprint exists, and bring it to its fullest potential.¹⁴

Healthy ECD occurs in surroundings of nurturing and responsive relationships, safe and supportive environments, and those with access to health and quality care services. These positive experiences and factors can protect against vulnerabilities and stress.

Ecological models of Early Childhood Development

There are many different approaches to depicting ecological models of early childhood development. However, there is significant overlap in the broad categories that are used to illustrate the influences on children's development. These include:

Child

The child as the centre of the influencing circles emphasizes the viewpoint that the focus is on the child and their development.

Family (This often includes parents and extended family)

Further evidence and research has also led to understanding the importance of family resilience in early childhood development. While family resilience can be a complicated definition, in its simplest form it is reliant upon the factors around individual health (emotional, educational skills, and physical) and community health (engagement with larger community, access to quality resources, care and schools).

"Family resiliency is the ability of a family to respond positively to an adverse situation and emerge from the situation feeling strengthened" (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2007: 8)

The emotional and social support for a child in their early years primarily comes from their families and their caregivers. Giving this family unit the tools for resiliency by extension supports children in their early years to develop in healthy environments, as well as teaches them resiliency in any number of situations they might encounter during this time. While there are several community-based programs in Alberta to support the family unit, these may operate in isolation

¹⁴ Dr. Jack Shonkoff, from the Centre on Child Development at Harvard University, has been at the forefront of this complex neurobiological research and efforts in making it accessible to the public. In his paper with Harvard colleagues, Paper 10 - Early Experiences Can Alter Gene Expression and Affect Long-Term Development and Paper 11 - Building the Brain's "Air Traffic Control" System, the researchers delve into the wiring of the brain and the effects of environment on the development of the young brain. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/building-the-brains-air-traffic-control-system-how-early-experiences-shape-the-development-of-executive-function/>

from other initiatives. Increased collaboration and information-sharing between organizations and initiatives could greatly improve both the quality and frequency of programs being offered. Many programs run as silos of resources (both people and financial), in which restructuring to a collaborative approach would simultaneously benefit the families and the programs themselves to bring forth further programming.

“Preventative interventions that help families develop strong protective factors were more cost effective than aid for families already in crisis” (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2007: 33)

Local Community

InBrief, The Foundations of Lifelong Health, published by the Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University, is a summary of findings from scientific publications from the Centre itself. This summary tells of three important areas where community impacts a child’s development. First is time and commitment, which includes “how communities assign and accept responsibility of monitoring child health and development outcomes”; second is financial, psychological, and institutional resources, which include “the availability of community services and organizations that promote children’s healthy development and supportive structures, such as parks, child care facilities, schools and after-school programs”; and third, skills and knowledge, meaning “caregivers’ education, training, interactions with child-related professionals, and personal experiences” (Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010b: 1).

Community expands into the area of influencing child-serving professionals, such as teachers, early childhood educators, and healthcare workers, but also includes other parents and those professionals who engage with children but are not considered “child-serving”, such as the local grocery store operator or local librarian. A child is surrounded by a community which influences their development at different touch points in their early years. Part of the community function, both formally and informally, is to provide a safe and supportive environment for children. Formally, community influences include community initiatives and programs that already support ECD. These programs can be partnerships formed between government and community organizations or between community organizations, creating local ECD programs and initiatives. Examples in Alberta include Parent Link Centres, Community Health Centres, Public Libraries and the Early Childhood Intervention Program through Alberta Health.

Informal community influences also play a key part in influencing a child’s development. Those include interactions with other children and their families, or caring neighbours and adults within the community they live in. There are opportunities for positive interactions with close family and friends at playdates and gatherings, or during the basic errands of grocery shopping at the market or store. These interactions can be at regular intervals, i.e. a weekly playdate, or sporadic, such as talking to a neighbour on the sidewalk.

National Community

Government's most obvious influence on a child's development is through the legislation, policies, programs, and practices it implements and adopts. These administrative levers have a wide-reaching consequence not only on the early years, but into adult years. Examples include public health care systems, parental leave legislation, child benefits and the policy and procedures concerning ELCC rules and regulations. Parental leave affects the duration and the structure for one parent staying home and caring for a child; health care systems ensure regular monitoring a child's physical and mental well-being; and ELCC regulations establish safe, high-quality environments for children and ELCC service providers and educators.

These responsibilities can carry over to the private sector. Employers that offer family-friendly employment policies demonstrate a belief in the value of ECD and are responsive to the priorities of employees with children. Creating environments of workplace flexibility and child care arrangements, along with providing quality programs for employees to balance work and their family, foster a supportive and resilient community surrounding the child.

*Again, as stated in *InBrief, The Foundations of Lifelong Health*, "...public and private sector policies and programs can strengthen the foundations of health by enhancing the capacities of caregivers and communities." (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010b)*

Outcomes of Investing in ECD

There is a strong case for investing in early childhood development, across many different factors of concern.

Healthier Population

Investment in ECD leads to a physically and mentally healthier population. Studies show that children who grow up in safe, caring, developmentally-rich environments are more likely to be physically and mentally healthy throughout their lives, become good parents, develop strong, positive social relationships, and have better coping and problem-solving skills. Children with healthy experiences in early childhood are less likely to suffer from chronic diseases such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure, with similar impacts on mental well-being, demonstrating a lower likelihood of mental illness such as depression and addiction (ECMap [Fact sheet], 2013).

At the core of healthy brain development in early childhood is the prevention and mitigation of toxic stress. Toxic stress occurs when no supportive caregivers are present to “buffer” a child’s response to repeated negative experiences such as neglect, abuse, and chaotic environments (Alberta Family Wellness Initiative, 2018). Prolonged exposure to toxic stress through interpersonal experiences and environmental influences can result in physiological adaptations or disruptions affecting life-long learning, behaviour, and physical and mental health. This can create biological memories in the body that carry through to adulthood (Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010b). Building a community of support for a child at a young age can reduce the potential for negative experiences to elicit a toxic stress response.

“Positive experiences and healthy environments, for the most part, contribute to life-long health, learning and well-being. Negative experiences and “toxic” physical and social environments can disrupt development and put a child on a more difficult life path. The costs of these disruptions are borne, not only by the child and her family, but ultimately by all of us.” Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, 2011)

“Toxic stress caused by significant adversity can produce physiological disruptions that undermine the development of the body’s stress response systems and affect the architecture of the developing brain, the cardiovascular system, the immune system, and metabolic regulatory controls. These physiological disruptions can persist far into adulthood and lead to lifelong impairments to both physical and mental health.”

– InBrief, The Foundations of Lifelong Health, by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

Improved Educational Outcomes

There is a substantial amount of data collected in Alberta related to evaluating educational scores, results, and school readiness. While the purpose of ECD is not only to improve educational outcomes, an abundant data set provides a valuable discussion point concerning investment in ECD and the associated improvements in educational attainment.

A 2012 TD Economics Special Report on early childhood education¹⁵ cites “studies show that children who enter kindergarten with a higher skill set generally experience fewer grade repetitions, on time graduation, lower dropout rates and higher post-secondary attendance than those that enter with vulnerabilities.” (Alexander & Ignjatovic, 2012). Upon entering the education system, children’s physical, social, emotional and intellectual health, is strongly associated with success in the early grades and moderately associated with success in later grades. The Conference Board of Canada’s *Ready for Life* report also cites several studies showing improved and sustained educational outcomes for children who had 1 to 2 years more of early childhood education exposure, prior to entering the school system. An increase of early childhood education (ECE) spaces for children under the age of 5, have resulted in higher math scores for children aged 15 and translated to an increase in future wages (Alexander et al., 2017).

The study that most recently and accurately captures school preparedness for Alberta’s youngest children is the Early Child Development Mapping Project (ECMap), which has transitioned to the EDI Program.¹⁶ ECMap was part of the Government of Alberta’s Early Childhood Development Mapping Initiative, jointly facilitated by the Ministries of Education, Health, and Human Services. The project was led by the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth and Families (CUP), based in the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta.

The full results of the ECMap pilot program were published in a series of final reports in 2014.¹⁷ According to the 2014 results, 1 in 2 Kindergarten-aged children are experiencing difficulty or great difficulty in at least one area of development; the greatest areas of difficulty were communication skills and general knowledge. The regional differences in ECMap results require regional creation and implementation of solutions. The Government of Alberta has demonstrated its support of these place-based responses with the creation and continued funding of Early Childhood Coalitions. Further, the creation of the EDI program shows the commitment of the Government to ECD. The recommendations of the final report remain highly relevant and complementary to an integrated approach to ECD.

The 2014 results clearly show that nearly one third of Alberta’s youngest children are struggling with one or more of the five areas of development outlined in the ECMap Summary report before

¹⁵ The TD Economics Special Report uses the term “early childhood education”, however most organizations and Government of Alberta branches use Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) to define the formal learning opportunities for children before they enter primary school.

¹⁶ The Early Child Development Mapping Project was a 5-year pilot program which reached completion in 2014. It has now shifted to a fully implemented program with continued coordination across Health, Education, and what is now Children’s Services (formerly Human Services). Data collection is scheduled to occur every two years. The EDI program, the first since the end of the pilot, was the third round of data collection.

¹⁷ For the series of reports, 1) Final Report, 2) Special Needs Report, 3) Community Profiles, and 4) Wisdom of Coalitions Report, visit <http://www.ecmap.ca/>

they begin school. It needs to be noted, that once a child begins school, focus shifts to academic development and the “soft” skills (social competence, communication skills, and emotional maturity) are not given as strong a focus. This runs counterintuitively to the evidence (including the number of papers authored by Dr. Jack Shonkoff and his colleagues at the Centre for the Developing Child at Harvard University, as well as Conference Board of Canada’s report *Ready for Life* and *The Brain Story* by Alberta Family Wellness Initiative) demonstrating that these soft skills are a bridge to success later in life. The overarching conclusion is that investment in ECD leads to more healthy, well-balanced, socially-adjusted children, and this carries on to adulthood.

“In many ways, coming to school with a solid base of these foundational executive function skills is more important than whether children know their letters and numbers.” (Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2011)

“Measuring “beyond school readiness” means that we consider the whole child in the context of her broader environment and that we measure her life readiness. It points to the importance of collecting data about the child’s earliest environments, before birth and even before pregnancy. The more we know about these very, very early experiences and the experiences after that, the better prepared we will be to identify, and hopefully mitigate, risks for healthy childhood development – if not life-long development.” (Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, 2011)

Improved National and International Standing

The Conference Board of Canada 2017 report *Ready for Life* studied ECD and ECE¹⁸ and their potential impacts on the Canadian economy. This report included comparisons between Canada and other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries on investment in ECE before the ages of 5. *Ready for Life* shows that Canada is above average in providing ECD programs to children aged 5 and over and that enrollment in Kindergarten is high. However, in per capita investment in ECE and the measurable results of ECE programs, Canada falls short of many of its peer countries. The Conference Board of Canada report concluded that if Canada were to bring the enrolment rate in ECE for children aged 2 to 4 to the OECD average, it would allow 134,000 more children to access ECE. Furthermore, moving to the OECD optimal level would result in almost 400,000 more children attending ECE programming (Alexander et al., 2017)

¹⁸ As in the TD Economics Special Report, the Conference Board of Canada report uses the term “early childhood development”. When not referencing an existing report, this paper uses the term “early learning and child care” or ELCC to align with current provincial and national terminology

Fulfilling commitment to a Rights-based approach

Canada is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states simply that every child has rights and these rights are broad and affect their development into adulthood. The rights of the child are much more comprehensive than through formal education alone; children have a right to live and learn in an environment rich with positive influences, safety and security - in all settings including educational, community and home. These are the conditions that align with what we know about the fundamentals of ECD, and which will foster and develop a child's holistic well-being for success throughout life. With the research pointing to this development starting at birth or even before then, these rights also begin at birth, so that every baby born has a right to quality learning to enable the best possible start to life.

Economic Benefits

There is an abundance of research related to the economic benefits of improving access to quality, affordable Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC), though the economic benefits of an integrated approach to ECD are not as frequently researched.¹⁹ One would predict that given the disparate contextual conditions affecting systems-level initiatives, there would be significant variation in the calculation of benefits from one jurisdiction to another. In our estimate, economic benefits from an integrated approach could be generated from early intervention and improved health outcomes, reduced overlap of service provision, greater administrative efficiency (i.e., shared information and evaluation systems) and improved policy, program and service coordination.

Improving access to quality ELCC is likely to be included in any comprehensive approach to ECD, and there is no shortage of study in this public policy domain. The earning and employment opportunities of parents, especially women, increase almost immediately and correspondingly with access to child care (Fortin, 2017). In the case of subsidizing these

ELCC services and/or wages, families have a greater share of dollars to spend on other goods and services when there isn't such a significant amount of their monthly income allocated to child care. Additionally, with an adequate system of children's services that are accessible to all, children are more likely to have higher earnings later in life, lower risks of engagement with the criminal justice system, and reduced need for remedial education (Karoly, Kilburn and Cannon, 2005).

“... the bulk of the evidence suggests that efforts to expand children's participation in a variety of high-quality ECE programs will result in positive long-term impacts on the economy with the potential to lower inequality.”
(Alexander et al., 2017)

¹⁹ Some of these include the work of Professor James Heckman, Nobel Memorial Prize winner in economics and an expert in the economics of human development www.heckmanequation.org and the publications of Pierre Fortin studying the impacts of \$7/day child care in the province of Quebec. See, for example “What have been the effects of Quebec's universal childcare system on women's economic security” at <http://www.ourcommons.ca/content/Committee/421/FEWO/Brief/BR8806290/br-external/FortinPierre.e.pdf>

There remains tremendous variation in cost-benefit analyses for funding ELCC because of the wide range of variables that are selectively included in these studies. Some examples in the United States claim a cost-benefit ratio of \$1 to as much as \$17. Canadian studies of similar analyses are not nearly as high, but remain significant. Recent publications from Quebecois economist Pierre Fortin claim that for every \$1 invested in ELCC by the Quebec government, \$1.05 is recouped (Monsebraaten, 2011). According to the literature review contained in the Conference Board of Canada report, there is a clear positive benefit from investment in ELCC, with the ratio ranging from 1.6 to 2.5 (Alexander et al., 2017).

Existing Legislation in Alberta with a primary or secondary impact on children

Please note, some of this legislation was amended by Bill 25: Children First Act:

- Protection Against Family Violence Act
- Maintenance Enforcement Act
- Family Law Act
- Drug Endangered Children Act
- Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act
- Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act
- Alberta's Promise Act
- Child and Youth Advocate Act
- Education Act
- Fatality Inquiries Act
- Mental Health Act
- School Act
- Vital Statistics Act
- Child Care Licensing Act

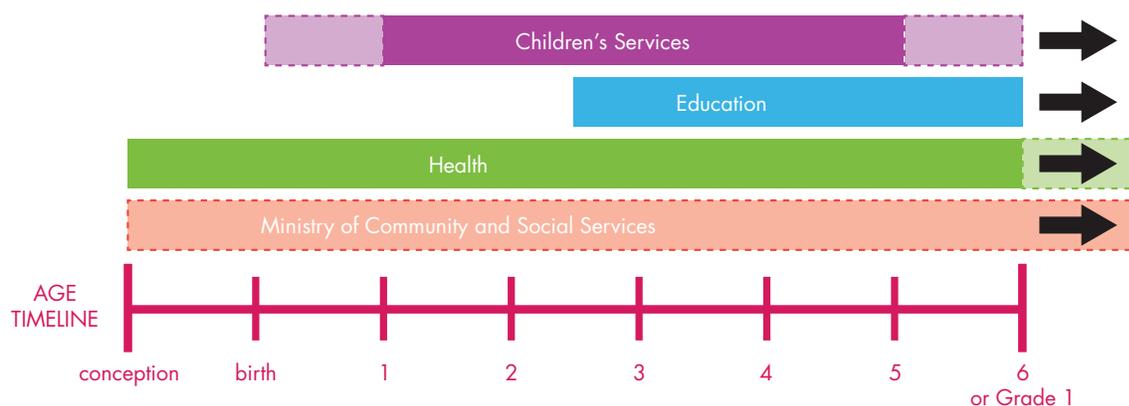
An average experience for Albertans with young children

The web of services, programs, and policies that serve parents of young children and young children themselves is reflective of the complexity of the whole system, as well as of the myriad of stakeholders, organizations, service providers, and public administration with a stake in Early Childhood Development. The target audience for this report is provincial, but certainly, the complexity grows immensely when we consider multiple orders of government that hold their own pieces of the puzzle. It is precisely this complexity of overlapping systems that drives this call for an integrated approach to ECD. An integrated approach could, in part, serve to provide clarity and eliminate redundancies between service providers, just as it would ease navigation for parents and improve outcomes for children.²⁰

The following is meant to capture key government-led programs and services available to Albertan families; however it is understood that services, availability, and accessibility are not the same across the province. In some areas of public service, rural communities do not have the same access to programs and specialization that urban centres have.

“Parents with young children are served by many, many public systems. Some of these include public health and health care, education and early learning, provincial services for children and youth, municipal services for families and communities, and community recreation services. Despite a shared interest in families, most of these systems work independently of each other.” (Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, 2011)

Ministerial Interaction



²⁰ The purpose of the 3-year Early Years Continuum Project was “to learn how to create and sustain a comprehensive continuum of community supports for families with young children (prenatal to school entry). The initiative was achieved with support from Success by 6 and funding from Alberta Education. For more information and project materials, visit <http://www.successby6edmonton.info/earlyyears>

Prenatal: Conception to Birth (Ministry of Health²¹)

Basic medical care is available to all Albertans, but it is not always easily accessible (Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, 2011). Prenatal services related to healthy pregnancies and the appropriate development of the fetus are provided as a part of our universal health care system. Prenatal Education programs are made available to expecting parents to help them understand and prepare for pregnancy, labour, birth, and early parenthood. Pregnant individuals in Alberta have access to prenatal screening and diagnosis, regular assessments for their well-being and that of their unborn babies, and treatment if necessary. The *Healthy Parents, Healthy Children* resource is provided to all pregnant individuals across Alberta in hard copy format, and is also a rich, thorough resource accessible online.

Increased research concerning Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and the importance of good nutrition for gestational parents and their babies has informed policy and practice concerning public awareness and health promotion (for example; growing knowledge base that alcohol can damage a growing fetus) and community services (for example; the delivery of nutritious food hampers for low-income, expecting parents). Travel may be required to access services, particularly those that require specialized care or testing, and many pregnant individuals in Alberta do not get prenatal care as early as they want it, and a small number receive no care at all (Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, 2011).

The Government of Alberta created a framework to end family violence in Alberta, emphasizing the impact of family violence on children and communities. Evidence shows that violence from an intimate partner increases against pregnant individuals, and some partners might experience physical violence for the first time during pregnancy. Violence during pregnancy can lead to pre-term labour and delivery, decreased blood flow to the uterus and fetus, low birth weight and in rare circumstances, fetal death. Those who experience violence during pregnancy are also at continued or increased risk of experiencing violence once the baby is born. Sadly, the science is conclusive.

“Beginning in utero and continuing throughout the first years of life, there are periods when the developing brain is exceptionally sensitive to the positive or negative effects of this immediate environment. A positive environment with adequate nutrition that is free of contaminants and filled with social interactions with caring, attentive caregivers prepares the architecture of the developing brain to function optimally. Conversely, an early environment with poor nutrition that contains harmful toxins, or is deprived of appropriate sensory, social, or emotional stimulation results in weak brain circuitry.”

(Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, 2011)

²¹ Families with very young children appear to engage with the Ministry of Health more than other ministries, assuming additional needs are not identified such as low-income status or child intervention. Alberta Health Services' *Healthy Children and Families Strategic Action Plan* is situated within *Healthy Living, Population, Public and Aboriginal Health (PPAH)* and contains three teams targeting the preconception to 18 years of age population: Reproductive Health (RH), Early Childhood (EC), and Healthy Children and Youth (HCY). Within the 2015-2018 Action Plan, priority areas include Early Childhood Development and Child and Youth Mental Health. See the Action Plan at <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/hp/hcf/ifhp-hcf-strategic-action-plan.pdf>

If a child is a victim of abuse of any kind, or witnesses abuse of any kind, as a young child or in utero, they may carry that stress for the rest of their lives, which can manifest in disease and early death (ACEs Study). A safe and supportive environment, and its impact on a young child, matters even before they take their first breath.

Infancy: 0 to 1 (Ministry of Health)

The *Healthy Parents, Healthy Children* resource provided to expectant parents continues its relevance after the birth of their baby; providing parenting resources, guides to brain development, feeding baby, good sleep practices and immunization information. Well Child Services, or well baby visits, are voluntarily booked by the parent to meet with a public health nurse for routine vaccinations (2, 4, 6, and 12 months), for health education and promotion, health assessment and screening to identify health concerns, and for information and referral to community services, and community partnerships.

Following the regular immunization schedule brings families through the doors of a public health clinic with some regularity to allow for discussions related to the health of the baby and the family overall. However, it has been stated in past public engagement that following the immediate perinatal period, it is possible for young children to spend the next three or four years of their life having had no interaction with government service or programming. Parent Link Centres are accessible to all parents, providing a hub-like space to access supports and services.

Operated by the Ministry of Children's Services, Parent Link Centres exist in both rural and urban communities across the province and have been a valuable service for parenting and play programs for children of all ages. Parent Link Centres were visited by approximately 56,000 Alberta children and youth and almost 44,000 parents and caregivers in 2015-2016.

The first 12 months of a child's life can be an emotionally intense period of change in the home. Fortunately, stigma concerning post-partum depression has been reduced and families are encouraged to discuss this with one another and seek outside supports. A parent struggling with depression may be insufficiently responsive to a young child during that sensitive early period when the foundations of attachment relationships are developing (Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2011). To be sure, it is not exclusively the responsibility of gestational parents to remain well (or achieve wellness during the post-partum period), but the resources are increasingly available to seek assistance, while recommendations for self-care are highlighted in those resources (*Healthy Parents, Healthy Children*, for example), hopefully increasing health outcomes as a result. Early Childhood and Perinatal Mental Health services are available at several health facilities across the province providing consultation and therapeutic interventions for infants, young children, and their families.

“Particularly, with respect to early child development, each developmental stage should be viewed as crucial in and of itself, as well as in relation to subsequent development stages and life experiences.”

AHS HCF Strategic Action Plan

Toddlers: 12 months to 3 years

(Ministry of Health + Ministry Children's Services)

Once a standard year-long parental leave is complete, many families begin the transition to out-of-home Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC), whether it be at a day care centre or family day home. This time spent away from home and a primary caregiver is a sensitive period of transition for the child and her parents. The child's environment of relationships is about to grow significantly larger, to include other children and care providers. A child may spend 40 hours or more per week in this environment where she can thrive if the environment is a stimulating and responsive one with highly trained, early childhood educators and care providers.

Waitlists can be lengthy, and Albertan centres are still permitted to charge a waitlist fee. Assuming multiple spaces are available, parents have the choice of a facility-based day care program, an approved family day home, or approved group family day home if a second care provider is included. The Government of Alberta refers to family day homes that have not sought approval and who care for 6 children or less as Private Babysitters. Licensing (a requirement of all day care centres and group family day homes) and accreditation (standard of quality) are within the mandate of the Ministry of Children's Services and delivered by regional Child and Family Service departments. Oversight of approved family day homes falls to private Approved Day Home Agencies, contracted by Children's Services. Accreditation²² as a standard for quality follows the recently launched *Play, participation and possibilities: An early learning and child care curriculum framework for Alberta*.

“[Play, participation and possibilities] frames curriculum meaning making that highlights the relationships and curriculum decisions shaping responsive practices in early learning and child care communities. It is a guide for early childhood educators to use in their everyday work with young children and their families in Alberta... An early learning and child care curriculum framework is different than a traditional curriculum.” Early Learning Framework, 2014

To reduce the cost of child care, subsidies have been made available to licensed day care centres and approved family day home agencies seeking accreditation, as well as child care subsidies for families that are provided directly to the child care provider. Two-parent families earning less than \$50,000 per year before-tax, and lone-parent families earning less than \$25,000 per year qualify for a reduction in child care rates if they are accessing a licensed child care program.^{23,24}

²² Accreditation follows the Standards of Excellence. It is a measurement of quality child care. In addition it is a measurement of 4 outcomes: Children, Families, Staff and Community outcomes. Currently the Accreditation Standards of Excellence recognizes all pedagogies or curriculums, including the ELCC framework.

²³ For maximum subsidy amounts, visit <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/child-care-subsidy-rates.pdf>

²⁴ In addition to Child Care Subsidy, the Ministry of Children's Services also provides financial supports for Kin Child Care Funding Program, Extended Hours Child Care Subsidy, and Stay-at-home Parents Support. For more information, see: <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/financial-support/15679.html>

Furthermore, Alberta has also introduced a \$25/day daycare program available to non-profit child care providers across the province. In January 2018, the program shifted from funding 22 ELCC centres to 100. And subsidizing the cost of child care is a necessity. According to *Time Out: Child Care Fees in Canada 2017*, median child care fees for toddlers in Edmonton and Calgary were \$891 and \$1,050, respectively (Friendly and Macdonald, 2017). Paying full-time child care rivals the average rent for a two-bedroom unit.²⁵

Beyond the core daytime hours spent in an ELCC program²⁶, children will visit the public health nurse for routine immunization at 18 months, and not again until between 4 and 6 years of age. Barring the need for additional interventions before the age of 2.5 years, programs and services for early childhood development are still largely under the umbrella of Alberta Health Services, and largely in response to observable concerns and symptoms. For example, the Early Childhood Intervention Program works with families concerned with their child's development and/or children at risk of developmental delays.

There exist countless non-profit and community organizations seeking to address particular needs and interests of families with young children, such as experiencing acute scarcity like homelessness or family violence, and other more general supports and services to provide forums for play or simply meeting one's neighbours. Parenting programs and supports continue to be available through Parent Link Centres and private providers. Children's Services provides tools such as *Talk Box*, a toolkit to share ideas about how to create language-rich environments. Recreation facilities, both public and private, indoor and outdoor, become more frequently accessed as children become more active and curious about their surroundings, some of which are fee-based.

Preschool: 3 to 4 years (Ministries of Health + Children's Services + Education)

At the preschool age, a child may continue in a day care program, at a slightly lower median monthly rate, or may be entering a curriculum-based program for the first time. Preschool programs are licensed to provide care for less than four hours per child, per day, and are targeted for children between the ages of 3 and 4.5. The funding model for preschools varies from ELCC programs for younger children; Alberta Education can provide funding to for-profit, non-profit and public licensed preschool programs. As a result, fees for preschool can be significantly less than those at a licensed day care centre or approved family day home, however it cannot be provided full-day. Many families are unable to adjust to these lower hours of care, and therefore continue to utilize full-day care or shuttle the child between preschool and a second arrangement for care. Licensing of preschools is overseen by Children's Services, though curriculum and funding is determined by Alberta Education.

²⁵ Average Rent by Bedroom Type (October 2017) Comprehensive Rental Market Survey Tables: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Retrieved March 23, 2018 from https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/hoficlincl/homain/stda/stda_007.cfm

²⁶ The clear majority of programs are day-time, banking hours, a significant impediment for many families who work non-traditional hours or shift work

At the age of 2.8 years, a child may connect with Alberta Education's Early Childhood Services, or ECS, for the first time. Though ECS includes Kindergarten programming and is largely targeted for children in the year prior to entering Grade 1, ECS funding is available as early as 2.8 years for identified children with severe disabilities/delays. This funding, known as Program Unit Funding, is available through local school boards and/or private ECS providers. For children with mild or moderate delays, who are gifted and talented or are English Language-Learners ("ELL") funding and programming is available from 3.8 years of age. For those families who do require additional developmental and learning supports for their child, the Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD) initiative was created. RCSD works across Alberta Children's Services, Education and Health to coordinate a care plan for children including Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy and Counselling. This attempt at collaborating across ministries on behalf of families is worth further exploration. For the first time since its inception, an ECD (pre-Grade 1) component has been included.

"Fostering the development of healthy children, youth and families can help support good mental health in the first place. It means responding appropriately to shore up the foundation for people when they need it by buffering exposure to toxic stress."

Creating Connections:
Alberta's Addiction and
Mental Health Strategy

At every stage of early childhood, children are learning to process the world around them, often through the responsiveness and reactions of those closest to them. As their child's speech develops and curiosity for the world continues to grow, parents are learning that the serve and return they practiced early on continues, as children mimic what they see. If parents can demonstrate self-regulation, respectful relationships, and healthy behaviours, a child is more likely to develop the same skills. Children continue to thrive in environments with lots of play, conversation, and engagement.

If the environment is not as safe and supportive as it could be, or if parents have reached their functional thresholds without meeting the needs of their child, the impacts of chronic stress are beginning to accumulate and may already be manifesting at this age. The Early Childhood Mapping Project, or ECMap Project, identified approximately 25% of Alberta's children, when evaluated mid-way through Kindergarten, were experiencing difficulty or great difficulty in the early developmental areas of Emotional Maturity and Social Competence (ECMap, 2014).

Kindergarten – 5-year-olds (Ministry of Education)

If a child will turn 5 years of age before March 1 of the year in which he is due to be enrolled, he may enter Kindergarten. Put another way, a child may enter Kindergarten if he is 4 years 6 months or older at the start of the school year. As of 2018, this date will be modified to the end of December, thereby pushing children born in January and February to the following year, increasing the age of entry to 4 years 8 months. Evidence shows that such a change, however

small, is conducive with developmental stages and milestones. However, for some families it means another year of struggling to find and pay for adequate child care arrangements.

“The purpose of the [ECMap] initiative, led by the Ministry of Education, was to study children’s developmental progress by the end of the formative first five years and to learn more about the environmental factors that may be influencing their development.” ECMap Final Report

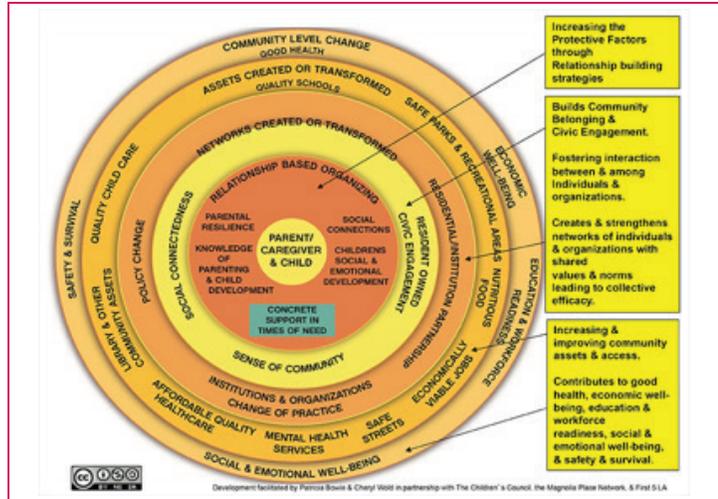
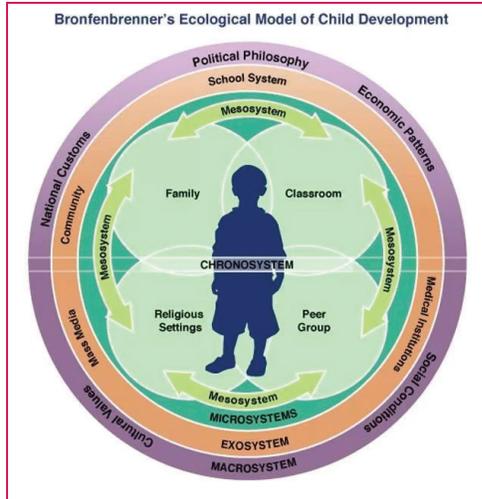
As any caregiver with older children can attest, child care requirements are not completely resolved once a child enters Kindergarten. The clear majority of Kindergarten programs across Alberta are half-day, meaning that families must organize care and supervision for their child before- and/or after-school. Private day care programs have seized upon this need for half-day care to complement half-day Kindergarten, with some even providing transportation services to and from the child’s school. In 2014, 97% of eligible children were enrolled in Kindergarten, however the program is not mandatory (ECEC in Canada 2014). Kindergarten still falls under the Early Childhood Services banner, which could facilitate stronger alignment with ECD and the Early Learning Framework, rather than a K to 12 curriculum that might fall under the banner of Alberta Education.

“Establish a permanent provincial secretariat of Human Early Learning and Development (HELD) with a cross-departmental mandate and budget to set out and implement strategies that enhance the collective impact of government activity on early childhood development.” Policy Recommendation #6, Final Report of the ECMap Project

“The focus on early childhood services and supports is diluted by the multiple and often conflicting acts, regulations, portfolios, funding strategies, levels of governance and service/program guidelines. Even the definition of the word ‘child’, so fundamental to an effective governance framework, differs across departments of government.” (Final Report of the ECMap Project)

ECD Models

There are many models that illustrate the environments that impact a child's development. This selection of images influenced the model that is presented in this report.



From Designing the Futures, Georgetown University
<https://futures.georgetown.edu/chronosystem/>

Early Childhood Colorado Framework

A SHARED VISION

For more information visit earlychildhoodframework.org
 ADOPTED JULY 2008 | UPDATED JULY 2015

Core Principles

The Early Childhood Colorado Framework is based on and guided by these principles:

- Whole child and family centered
- Prenatal through age eight
- Strength based
- Culturally relevant and responsive
- Outcomes focused
- Informed by evidence based and promising practices
- Cross-sector collaboration

Strategies for Action

- Connect and Empower Families
- Build Community Capacity
- Implement Quality Standards
- Make Data Informed Decisions
- Develop and Retain the Workforce
- Support Consumer Affordability
- Advance Sustainable Business Practices
- Encourage Public Private Approaches
- Pursue Continuous Quality Improvement
- Ensure Coordinated Services
- Promote and Share Knowledge

Fundamentals

- Strong Partnerships
- Sufficient Investments
- Sound Policy
- Robust Public Engagement
- Shared Accountability
- Effective Leadership
- Relevant Education Opportunities

Outcomes ► access, quality and equity

Family Support & Education **Health & Well-Being** **Learning & Development**

ACCESS

- Family engagement and leadership opportunities exist within programs, schools and communities
- Services and supports promote the well-being and resiliency of parents and caregivers
- Family friendly policies and practices exist in the workplace

QUALITY

- Comprehensive health coverage and services are consistently utilized by pregnant women and children
- Integrated and preventive maternal and child physical, behavioral and oral health services are available
- All settings promote mental health and well-being through early identification, consultation and treatment
- Education, coaching and ongoing training exist for caregivers, teachers and other professionals
- Learning experiences and environments are high quality, developmentally appropriate and affordable

EQUITY

- Family knowledge and capacity support children's healthy development and learning
- Families advocate for high quality comprehensive services and supports that lead to future success
- All health care providers, including mental health, deliver coordinated, family focused care
- Settings and practices promote strong relationships, social and emotional development, appropriate nutrition and physical activity
- Formal and informal care environments and education practices reach the highest levels of quality
- Adults understand and support children's learning and development, including social and emotional
- All settings provide effective transitions across and within programs, schools and systems

RESULTS

- CHILD:** Young children reach their developmental potential and are ready to succeed in school and in life
- ENVIRONMENTS:** Environments that impact children are safe, stable and supportive
- RELATIONSHIPS:** Adults are knowledgeable, responsive and interact effectively with and on behalf of children
- COLORADO:** Localities and the state attain economic and social benefits by prioritizing children and families

all children are valued, healthy and thriving

The diagram shows a child at the center, surrounded by concentric circles representing different stages of life: **CHILD**, **RELATIONSHIPS** (caregiver, teacher, other professional), **ENVIRONMENTS** (home, neighborhood, program, school), **COLORADO** (local and state systems), **PRENATAL**, **NEWBORNS**, **INFANTS**, **TODDLERS**, **PRESCHOOLERS**, **WIDER PARTNERS**, **1ST GRADERS**, **2ND GRADERS**, **3RD GRADERS**.

From Early Childhood Colorado Framework
<http://earlychildhoodframework.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ECLC-framework-poster-071715.pdf>

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