

**INDIGENOUS EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE
URBAN, RURAL AND REMOTE REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE
DISCUSSION GUIDE**



Introduction

The Government of Canada believes that all Canadian children deserve a real and fair chance to succeed. It has been demonstrated that early learning and child care directly influences economic, health and social outcomes for individuals and society as well as provides a solid foundation for future success. Adverse early environments create deficits in skills and abilities that drive down productivity and increases social costs. For Indigenous families and children, it is understood that access to affordable, quality, and culturally appropriate early learning and child care is critical.

The Government of Canada made a commitment in Budget 2016 to engage with Indigenous organizations and parents to determine the best approach to delivering high quality early learning and child care for Indigenous children and families. What we hear during this engagement will shape the development of an Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework to guide future federal investments and programming. This distinct Framework is being developed on a separate and parallel track to the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Framework for Early Learning and Child Care to reflect the unique cultures, needs of and priorities of Inuit, Métis and First Nations peoples living on and off reserve, in cities and remote areas, and in the North.

Key principles guiding the development of this framework are:

- ✓ Co-development and partnership
- ✓ Comprehensive and inclusive dialogue
- ✓ Reconciliation (acknowledge the past, act now, look to the future)
- ✓ Responsive and outcome driven
- ✓ Family-centered

These key principles are rooted in the recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP): ELCC for Indigenous children should be grounded in their identity as Indigenous peoples. All Indigenous children, regardless of status or location, should have access to dynamic, culture-based early childhood education

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC): Calls to Action for federal, provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments to work together to develop culturally-appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families.

UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP): Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

What do we mean by early learning and child care?

Early learning can include a range of activities designed to support child development and learning for young children. These activities aim to support language development, emotional and intellectual development, as well as physical development. Early learning activities can take place in the home, in a pre-school or nursery school, or in a child care or day care setting. Early learning and child care (ELCC) can also be alluded to as an aspirational term that means “all full and part-time care and learning services for children from birth to compulsory school age, including centres, preschools and nursery schools, regulated family child care, kindergarten and family resource programs.” Care and education for young children are inseparable. No matter what the name, well-designed ELCC can successfully blend care, learning and support for children and families at one and the same time.

What do we mean by framework?

A framework is a written policy document outlining a shared vision. This Indigenous ELCC Framework will outline an approach for the future of Indigenous ELCC that reflects the unique cultures and needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children across Canada. This Framework will be developed based on input from partners, organizations, communities, and families. This Framework is intended to guide future program approaches and investments, identify priorities, and offer actions for the short, medium and long term.

Why focus on early learning and child care?

Childhood is the basis of everything.

The early years are the most crucial in the long process of a child's physical, psychological and social development. It can be said that this time is when the foundation for wellness, life-long learning, and contribution to society is laid down. The extent to which a solid foundation is built depends upon many intersecting determinants. Research has clearly established numerous positive ways that participation in a high quality early childhood program influences a person's developmental trajectory, not only in later schooling, but in subsequent family formation, mental health, and participation in the economy.

The first six years of a person's life are when the most significant brain growth occurs and this critical development impacts over-all well-being throughout their lifetime. Early childhood is also the best time for children to learn language, as they absorb information faster than in any other stage of life. Finally, the first six years is an important stage of life in terms of culture and identity for Indigenous children; the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples described early childhood as the foundation on which identity, self-worth, intellect and strengths are built.

As children grow, the biological and environmental factors that determine their development become intertwined. When the environment is a secure, positive one, these factors join forces to help maximize children's potential. But when children face enduring obstacles to healthy development, such as poverty, inappropriate care, or violence, environment and biology may route them on a course to emotional, physical and mental health problems. Chronic exposure to maltreatment, poor parenting and other adversity rather than an individual occurrence of maltreatment has been shown to be most damaging to developmental health.

Aboriginal children are a rapidly growing proportion of all children in Canada and recent statistics estimate that 41%-52.1% of them live below the poverty line. Aboriginal children are more likely to suffer poor health than are non-Aboriginal children. Their poor health status is likely to affect their development and life chances. All children in Canada should be able to live the first years of their lives in a healthy environment with a decent standard of living and stimulating learning conditions.

How does the Government of Canada support Indigenous early learning and child care now?

The Government funds a wide range of programs and services to support Indigenous children and families, mainly through the Health portfolio. Some focus on pre-natal and infant/maternal health, while others offer parental/family supports.

Early learning and child care programs have been in place since the 1990's. In 1995, two key programs were launched:

- Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC), administered by the Public Health Agency of Canada;
- Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve (AHSOR), administered by Health Canada
- First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI), administered by Employment and Social Development Canada.

Following the success of AHSUNC, Health Canada launched the Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve (AHSOR) program in 1999.

*Since 1995, **Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC)** has provided funding to Aboriginal community-based organizations to develop programs that promote the healthy development of Aboriginal preschool children. It supports the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical development of Aboriginal children, while supporting their parents and guardians as their primary teachers. AHSUNC sites typically provide structured half-day preschool experiences for Aboriginal children (3-5 years of age) focused on six program components: Aboriginal culture and language; education and school readiness; health promotion; nutrition; social support; and parental involvement.*

*The **First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI)** supports First Nations and Inuit communities in developing and implementing child care programs designed to address their local and regional needs. The objective of the initiative is to increase the supply of quality child care services in First Nations and Inuit communities. The guiding principle is that FNICCI centres provide quality, affordable and culturally appropriate care for children.*

*The **Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve** Program funds activities that support early intervention strategies to address the learning and developmental needs of young children living in First Nations communities. The goal is to support early child development strategies that are designed and controlled by communities. AHSOR Programming is centered around six components: education; health promotion; culture and language; nutrition; social support; and parental/family involvement.*

Children in the Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve Program gain opportunities to develop self-confidence, a greater desire for learning, and an excellent start in their journey towards becoming successful people. Parents, guardians and other family members are the most important teachers in a child's life. The Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve Program knows this and provides support. It helps parents and other caregivers learn and improve skills that contribute to healthy child development. It also works with families to help strengthen family relationships.

The Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities is intended to reach vulnerable populations of Aboriginal children. There are approximately 47,900 Aboriginal children aged three to five years in Canada (living off-reserve) and the AHSUNC reaches approximately 4,640 children aged zero to six (86% of them are between the ages of three to five) each year.

One of the foremost investments that governments can make to improve the country's social and economic fabric is to provide solid support for children. Research shows that the affordability and quality of child care have an impact on the participation of parents in the labour market and on children's development.

Who do we want to hear from, and what do we want to know?

We want to hear from parents, family members, communities, early childhood educators, youth, Elders, experts and leaders about your vision for early learning and child care for Indigenous children and families so that we can build on what is working today and improve on what is not working.

Your candid views, ideas and insights on how to realize positive change will help shape the development of a National Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework that will reflect a common vision with shared goals (while recognizing cultural differences), desired outcomes and concrete actions that will ensure Indigenous children and families receive the start in life they deserve.

The Government of Canada is committed to working in partnership with Indigenous peoples to co-develop this Framework. Over the next few months, CAP will seek a broad range of voices to:

- Identify strengths, challenges and opportunities through engagement and dialogue
- Discuss communities' needs and priorities
- Validate meaningful principles and goals
- Establish priorities for sustained action in the short, medium and long-term

This initiative will also discuss three federal Indigenous early learning and child care programs – , Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC), Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve (AHSOR), and First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI) – to better understand what is working well and what could be improved. These programs are part of a broader suite of federal education and health programs (such as First Nations kindergarten on-reserve funded by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada). Views on how these programs can better work together to support improved health, education and wellness of Indigenous children and families are also welcomed as part of this engagement

How will your feedback be used?

Your feedback will be used to inform ESDC for the development of an Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework that meets the needs of Indigenous children and families. The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples will roll-up the feedback from six- eight regional community roundtables and submit it ESDC for input into the Indigenous Early Learning Framework. **Meeting notes and reports will be returned to all regions for input and feedback as part of the development process. Please ensure you have provided contact information to meeting organizers so you can be included on all follow-up communications.**

The Government of Canada and Congress of Aboriginal Peoples respects First Nations principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP). Prior to delivering any report to ESDC, CAP will circulate it back to the regional participants for review and feedback.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These discussion questions are intended to help you in providing your feedback, and can be used as a starting point for your own dialogue.

You may want to tailor the questions to respond to your unique circumstances, add your own questions, or remove others.

Theme 1: Early Learning and Child Care Needs - Current Federal Programs – Strengths, Benefits and Areas for Improvement

Specific Needs:

Thinking about existing federal programs, services, and supports (e.g. First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative, Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve, Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities:

1. What is currently working well?
2. What needs to be improved?
3. Is there an early learning and child care program or service that you or your community would like to access but cannot?
 - Describe barriers or challenges that need to be addressed so that improvements can be made, to Federal and/or provincial programs/funding?

General Needs:

1. What should Indigenous children learn or experience in early learning and child care programs?
 - What role should culture play in early learning and child care?
2. What should Indigenous parents and caregivers learn or gain from early learning and child care programs?
3. What does 'quality' in early learning and child care mean to you?

Theme 2: Successes and Promising Practices

1. How will we know if an Indigenous early learning and child care program is successful?
 - Are there meaningful ways to measure success for Indigenous children?
2. Can you describe some successes and promising practices in Indigenous early learning and child care in your community? Suggestions on how can we build on these successes?

Theme 3: Planning for the Future of Early Learning and Child Care

In an ideal world 10 years from now:

1. What does early learning and child care programs look like for Indigenous children?
2. What roles are played by Indigenous communities, the federal government and other partners?
3. What are your hopes, dreams and vision for Indigenous children and families?
4. If you had more funding from a community perspective for early learning and child care, what would you do with it?
5. Additional comments, thoughts, feedback:

How do I share my views with the CAP?

If are not able to attend a Regional Roundtable and you wish to respond to any of these questions or have any additional thoughts on Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care, responses can be emailed to VGluska@abo-peoples.org or you can send us your thoughts by mail to:

Virginia Gluska
Congress of Aboriginal People
867 St-Laurent Blvd. Ottawa, ON, K1K 3B1

About you...

If you choose to provide it, the following information about yourself or your organization would be appreciated. Providing this information is optional. If you want to stay informed as we collaborate on the Framework, please provide your contact information.

- 1) Name
- 2) Organization Name:
- 3) Address:
- 4) Are you representing yourself, or an organization?
- 5) Community represented:
- 6) Phone:
- 7) Email:
- 8) How did you gather the information to answer these questions (e.g. individual feedback, consulted colleagues, board meeting, community meeting, workshop, etc.)?
- 9) If you would like to provide any additional background on your organization, or your personal experience, please feel free to forward more information.

GLOSSARY/DEFINITIONS – KEY TERMS

To help you in providing your feedback, we have included some definitions of key terms and discussion questions.

Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve (AHSOR) – Health Canada’s AHSOR supports early child development strategies that are designed and controlled by First Nations communities. AHSOR Programming is centered around six components: education; health promotion; culture and language; nutrition; social support; and parental/family involvement.

Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) – Public Health Agency’s AHSUNC funds Indigenous community-based organizations to develop programs that promote the healthy development of Indigenous preschool children. AHSUNC programming is centered on six program components: Indigenous culture and language; education and school readiness; health promotion; nutrition; social support; and parental involvement.

Affordable – takes into account parents’ and caregivers’ ability to pay for services.

Culturally appropriate/culturally relevant - describes programming that reflects and supports strong, positive Indigenous identities that are rooted in the traditional knowledge, cultures, and languages of the participants.

Child care – Child care is the caring for a child or children, usually from birth to age twelve or thirteen, by a day-care center, babysitter or other provider. Child care enables parents and caregivers to work, participate in training, or go to school. Many child care programs include elements of *early learning*.

Early childhood development – refers to the growth of a person from pre-conception to the age of six. It describes the development of the whole child, and includes physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language development.

Early learning – Early learning programs are programs for young children (usually from birth to age five or six) designed to support child development (e.g., social, emotional, intellectual, speech and language, physical development) and learning. Programs are generally based on a curriculum and delivered in locations such as child care centres, nursery schools, and preschools or in the home.

First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI) – Employment and Social Development Canada’s FNICCI supports First Nations and Inuit communities in developing and implementing child care programs designed to address their local and regional needs.

Flexible - refers to initiatives that promote early childhood development and support parents and caregivers to participate in employment, training, or school, such as increased ELCC spaces, extended hours, and flexible hours of operation.

Holistic – can refer to programs, services, or approaches that promote Indigenous culture, language and tradition; that recognize the importance of life-long learning; and/or recognize the interconnection between learning and societal, economic and environmental well-being.

Inclusive – responsive to the needs of children with differing abilities and differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Indigenous people - Defined in the *Constitution Act, 1982* to include all Indigenous people of Canada – First Nations (Status and Non-Status), Métis and Inuit people.

Kindergarten – can also be included under *early learning*, but is generally part of the formal school system. In some provinces and territories, kindergarten is offered to children aged 4 (sometimes called junior kindergarten) and aged 5 (sometimes called senior kindergarten).

Quality – Can refer to enhancements to training, child/caregiver ratios and group size, wages and benefits, recruitment and retention, physical environment, health and safety, and learning environment.

Special needs – requiring additional resources beyond those normally required to support healthy development. This could include children who require additional resources because of exceptional gifts or talents, physical, sensory, cognitive and/or learning challenges, mental health issues, as well as problems due to social, cultural, linguistic or family factors.