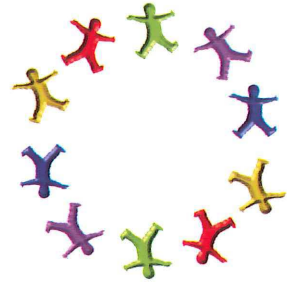


# a national children's agenda



## developing a shared vision

N.W.T.  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
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# A Message from the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Council on Social Policy Renewal

Children are our country's strength today, and in the future. Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments have recognized this and are working in a unique collaboration to support the well-being of children. This work has already achieved results. The National Child Benefit was implemented on July 1, 1998, and Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments plan to build on this cooperative approach to addressing child poverty. More recently, the February 1999 Social Union framework agreement signals an era of more effective cooperation among governments on social issues, including children.

Collaborative government initiatives such as the National Child Benefit can make significant differences in children's lives, but they are not enough on their own. We need a vision. A vision that can help all parts of our society to focus on children's needs. A vision that can move each of us in a common direction as we play our own individual roles.

At the First Ministers' Conference in December 1997, Canada's Prime Minister, provincial Premiers\* and Territorial Leaders reaffirmed their commitment to new cooperative approaches to address children's needs through a National Children's Agenda. Responsibility for this important work was given to the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Council on Social Policy Renewal.

\* Quebec agrees with the objectives of the National Children's Agenda. However, the Government of Quebec has decided not to participate in its development because it wishes to assume full control over programs aimed at families and children within its territory. Furthermore, Quebec has not signed the Social Union Framework Agreement. Consequently, any references to joint federal-provincial-territorial positions in this text do not include Quebec.

The Council, established by first ministers in 1996 to coordinate the renewal of Canada's social programs with support from the Health, Education, Social Services and Justice sectors, has taken the first steps toward the development of a National Children's Agenda. We have reviewed key findings and policy directions developed by governments and non-governmental organizations and have received input from five national Aboriginal organizations. There is considerable common ground, and this is reflected in the ideas we are sharing with you in this document. While new resources may be needed in some cases, this paper is not intended to begin a process of priority setting for new government spending. We believe we can make progress by developing a shared vision and by building on the important work that is already occurring across the country. Through sharing best practices and by beginning to align resources to this vision, we hope to improve the lives of Canadian children.

We recognize that governments cannot move forward with a National Children's Agenda by themselves. This document is an invitation to communities, businesses, organizations, governments and individual Canadians to think about children. We ask you to read it, to discuss it, and to work with us to develop a shared vision of what we want for our children.

## Federal-Provincial-Territorial Council of Ministers on Social Policy Renewal

The Honourable Bernhard H. Wiens, M.L.A.  
Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs  
Government of Saskatchewan

The Honourable Pierre Pettigrew, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Human Resources Development  
Government of Canada

The Honourable Allan Rock, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Health  
Government of Canada

The Honourable Dianne Cunningham, M.P.P.  
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs  
with Responsibility for Women's Issues  
Government of Ontario

The Honourable Francene J. Cosman, M.L.A.  
Minister of Community Services  
Government of Nova Scotia

The Honourable Bernard Thériault, M.L.A.  
Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs  
Government of New Brunswick

The Honourable Bonnie Mitchellson, M.L.A.  
Minister of Family Services  
Government of Manitoba

The Honourable Andrew Petter, M.L.A.  
Minister of Intergovernmental Relations  
Government of British Columbia

The Honourable Mildred A. Dover, M.L.A.  
Minister of Health and Social Services  
Government of Prince Edward Island

The Honourable Lyle Oberg, Dr., M.L.A.  
Minister of Family and Social Services  
Government of Alberta

The Honourable Joan Mary Aylward, M.H.A.  
Minister of Health and Community Services  
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

The Honourable Floyd Roland, M.L.A.  
Minister of Health and Social Services  
Government of the Northwest Territories

The Honourable David Sloan, M.L.A.  
Minister of Health and Social Services  
Government of Yukon

The Honourable Edward Picco, M.L.A.  
Minister of Health and Social Services  
Government of Nunavut

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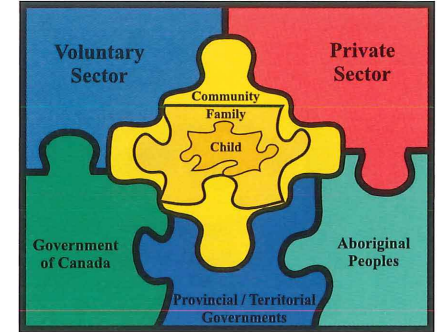
# PREFACE:

This is a document about children. Our own children. Our grandchildren. Our nieces and nephews. Our neighbours' sons and daughters. It is an invitation for each of us to think about all of Canada's children. What hopes do we have for them? What opportunities do young Canadians up to the age of 18 need today, and in the future? How can we contribute to creating these opportunities?

Many Canadians have already begun to consider and discuss these questions. In families, neighbourhoods, communities, businesses, organizations and governments, people are working together to put children front and centre. They are creating circles of responsibility around children, families and their communities that can inspire new solutions across the country.

Together we can do more. We are invited to imagine a society that values children for who they are, and that provides opportunities for every child to achieve his or her full potential.

This document proposes a common vision for children. It suggests goals to set for ourselves, and offers directions to help us achieve them. It also describes, in their own voice, the perspectives of the five Aboriginal organizations involved in the social renewal process. By considering these elements, we can help build a National Children's Agenda.



*our future  
our children*

# SECTION I:



## A National Agenda for Children

Every day, a thousand children are born in Canada. Making sure they grow up healthy, happy, successful and safe is a key responsibility for parents, communities and society as a whole.

An increasing number of Canadians believe we can do more for children, and Canada's governments agree.

### Facts About Children

- there are approximately 7 million children under the age of 18 in Canada today
- this age group represents 24% of the total population.
- between 1991 and 1996, the number of immigrant children grew by 26%
- approximately 82% of children in Ontario and British Columbia live in urban settings

## Why focus on children?

### Canadians want children to be a priority.

Canadians have shown themselves to be a caring society and, when asked, they include better support and nurturing for children among their top priorities for national action (Southam News-Compas, 1998).

Professionals, communities and organizations working on behalf of children – including Campaign 2000, the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD), the Canadian School Boards Association and the Canadian Nurses Association – are also calling for a better, countrywide approach to children's well-being.

### Children are our strength today, and in the future.

Children are everyone's responsibility, and everyone's future. Canadians want a society where all children grow up to be responsible, productive, healthy and caring – a society where no child gets left behind.



Such a society can thrive economically, socially and culturally, focussing its resources on preventing social and economic problems. We can begin building that stronger society by working to give all Canadian children the best possible start in life.

### Why is it important to join forces now?

#### We have new knowledge about how early childhood shapes a lifetime.

Recent human development research confirms how important the first 5 years of life can be for children's lifelong abilities, health and well-being. This is a crucial time for brain development, a time when the structure of children's brains ("malleability") is strongly influenced by the world around them. These formative years are also crucial in shaping gender roles.

The quality of care children receive in their early years directly affects the way they think and learn, and has a lasting impact on their future abilities. Unhealthy physical, emotional and social environments during early childhood can have lifelong consequences. In fact, children who have been well cared for have brains that are physically different from those of children who have experienced less favourable conditions in their early years.

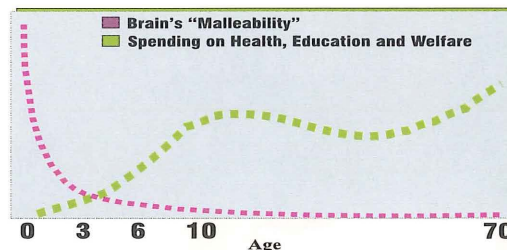
#### We need to reach children before problems occur.

Even with the new knowledge that we have about the opportunities provided by early childhood, Canadians still focus considerable resources on fixing problems after they occur. We certainly cannot ignore the importance of services addressing children's needs later in life. However, as much as possible, we need to promote the ongoing well-being of children from the start of their lives.

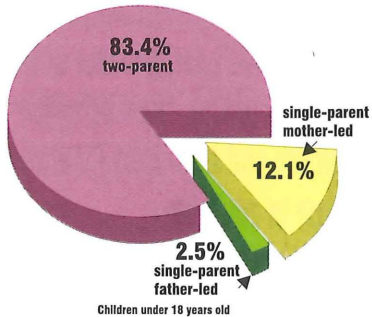
There is substantial evidence that the quality of early childhood experiences has long-term effects on an individual's performance in the education system, their behaviour in adult life and their risks for chronic disease in adult life.

- Dr. Fraser Mustard, Canadian Institute for Advanced Research

**The mismatch between opportunity and investment**



### Families are diverse



Statistics Canada - Census Data 1996

### As society changes, we need to change how we respond to children.

As our society and economy evolve, many traditional ways for helping children may no longer be adequate. Changes in family structure, the economy and workplaces are putting new pressures on families and children. As well, historical barriers and rapid changes in First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities are profoundly influencing Aboriginal children.

Barriers exist that limit opportunities for children from ethnic communities and children with special needs. Increases in poverty rates in single-parent families, child abuse, crime and environmental hazards also pose serious risks for children. As we learn more about factors that make children vulnerable, we must apply that knowledge to improving children's chances of success in life.

### Facts about Aboriginal Children

- Almost 32% of Aboriginal children under the age of 15 live in a single-parent family
- 35% of Aboriginal peoples are under the age of 15 compared with only 20% of the overall population
- the ratio of Aboriginal children under the age of 5 to women of childbearing age is 70% higher than the ratio for the non-Aboriginal population

"Asthma is one of the leading causes of school absenteeism (25%) and of infant hospitalization. Canada has documented an increase in childhood asthma over the last two decades."

- *The Progress of Canada's Children*, (CCSD, 1997)





**We have convincing information about the impacts of poverty.**

Research shows that poverty compounds the challenges and stresses that all families face, and has a powerful impact on children. Poverty increases health risks. It can impair the ability of families and communities to nurture children. It can lower children's achievements in school. At the same time, research also suggests that good parenting and quality preschool, school and community education programs can reduce these effects. With initiatives like the National Child Benefit, governments and communities are working together to support low-income families. But we can do more.



We can work together and gain inspiration from work being done across Canada. Most of Canada's provincial and territorial governments have begun to develop more comprehensive approaches to serve children and families. Parents, communities and organizations working on behalf of children are seeking opportunities to share their efforts and experience. Across the country, new efforts are being made in response to the knowledge we now have about the importance of healthy child development. A National Children's Agenda can help to unite these initiatives, promote them and inspire new solutions. (Appendix a provides examples of innovative initiatives from across Canada.)



## SECTION II:

### Developing a Shared Vision for Children

#### How can Canadians develop a shared vision for children?

- We can start by talking about the aspirations we have for children and what we know today about their growth and development.
- We can work toward a common set of goals and priorities that we believe will improve children's futures.
- Each of us can consider what we can do for the children in our families and how we can support parents in our communities and in the workplace.
- Finally, we can decide how to gather and share information about children's well-being, and how to measure our progress in putting children first.

The next few pages outline a possible vision, values and goals for a National Children's Agenda. Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments recognize that this document is not an end in itself, but an important step forward in building a consensus on what we want for children.



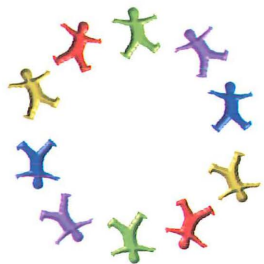
## **Vision:**

### **What do we want for our children?**

Canadians want their country to be one where all children thrive in an atmosphere of love, care and understanding, valued as individuals in childhood and given opportunities to reach their full potential as adults.

Respected and protected from harm, children will grow up to respect and protect the rights of others. Valued, nurtured and loved, they will grow up able to contribute to a society that appreciates diversity, supports the less able and shares its resources.

Given the opportunity to develop their physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual capacities to their fullest, children will become tomorrow's successful and enthusiastic parents, caregivers, workers and citizens.





"She just, it's like a flower. She just opened up...she started to find out who she was."

- parent commenting on her child as a result of participation in a playgroup

## Values:

### What do we believe about our children?

We respect the voices of all children, and recognize their inherent worth. Children should be valued for who they are now, as well as for who they will become. Their voices must be respected and their unique cultural identities protected and preserved. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* tells us that all Canadians, including children, possess certain rights and protections under the law. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child sets international standards for children's human rights. Both documents specifically address issues related to Aboriginal rights and gender. All children have the right to safeguards and assistance in the preservation of these rights and freedoms.

### We believe in protecting children's best interests.

Because of children's inherent dependence and vulnerability, protecting their interests is a basic social responsibility. Decisions and choices that affect children need to promote their best interests within their individual families and communities.

### We believe we can support children by supporting parents and families.

Children grow up best within families that are able to provide security, nurturing, respect and love. Families are primarily responsible for the well-being of children, yet all Canadians can play a role in helping families to thrive. Parents and families need support from individuals, communities, businesses, organizations and governments.



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**We understand the value of working together.**

Educators, caregivers, coaches and other mentors make powerful contributions to children's growth and well-being. Asking everyone to think about children, including Canadians who may face barriers to involvement, is essential to fostering cooperation.

**We believe in reflecting the diversity of our country.**

Canadians recognize the many different realities for children in Canada. These realities reflect factors such as children's cultural backgrounds, gender, race, and level of mental and physical ability. Our goals should reflect the richness and diversity of Canadian culture and the unique needs of each child. They should be achieved in partnership with our communities.

**We honour Canada's Aboriginal traditions.**

Aboriginal peoples have a special place in Canadian society. Aboriginal children gain strength from the traditions and values of their cultures. They represent the spirit of these cultures and their hope for a strong future. The efforts that Aboriginal peoples are making to rebuild vibrant communities in which their children can thrive must be recognized and supported. Additionally, the role that parents, elders and extended families play in nurturing Aboriginal children must be respected.



Across Canada, Aboriginal communities are developing initiatives to support their children. In 1981, the Meadow Lake Tribal Council in Saskatchewan successfully combined child care, parent and child education, healing, wellness and economic development into a holistic approach that draws on the community's own resources, experiences and values. From this success, the Council went on to establish its own First Nation Child and Family Service Agency in 1993.



## Goals:

### What do we hope to achieve?

Four goals for a National Children's Agenda have been set out for discussion. They reflect the emerging common ground among those interested in child development. They are directed by both the proposed vision for Canada's children and the values this vision embodies. They are focussed on four measurable areas: health; safety and security; success at learning; and social engagement and responsibility. We can track our progress in achieving these goals by measuring and reporting on key indicators of child well-being and influences on children's lives.

### As a nation, we aspire to have children who are:

*1. Healthy physically and emotionally*  
Children who are as physically, emotionally and spiritually healthy as they can be, with strong self-esteem, coping skills and enthusiasm.

### *2. Safe and secure*

Children whose basic needs are met, including food, shelter, clothing and transportation. Children who are protected from victimization, including abuse, neglect, discrimination, exploitation and dangerous environments, and who are given support by caring adults.

### *3. Successful at learning*

Children should have opportunities to reach their potential for physical and social development, language skills, literacy, numeracy and general knowledge. Children who are ready for learning throughout their lives so they can develop the skills, knowledge and competencies they need for successful transition to adulthood.

### *4. Socially engaged and responsible*

Children who can form stable attachments to nurturing adults when they are young, and are able to develop strong, supportive relationships within and outside their families. Children who value the cultural heritage and diversity of others, and who develop an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of belonging to a wider society. Children who respect themselves and others, and understand the personal and social consequences of their choices.

## SECTION III:

### Building a National Children's Agenda

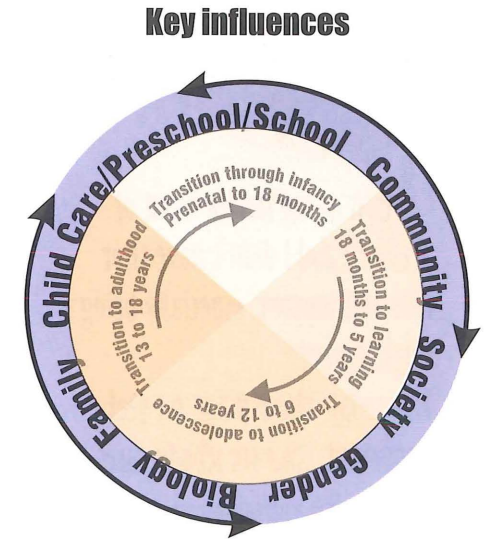
How can Canada achieve the vision and goals that we will set together for a National Children's Agenda? By understanding what children need when they are growing up. By agreeing on what we can do to meet those needs. By tracking progress to ensure that we are making a difference. And by working together.

#### What do children need?

Knowledge about children has increased dramatically in recent years, alongside our understanding of general health and well-being. Today, we know more about the conditions that promote healthy child development, including how the many environments that children interact with, such as family, school and community, shape their development. We also know more about the stages of childhood.

Earlier in this paper, the critical importance of focussing our resources on early childhood development was highlighted. Research suggests that there are windows of opportunity throughout childhood for influencing a child's future development and for helping to overcome earlier disadvantages.

The diagram to the right illustrates the interaction between key environments and those "windows of opportunity." (Appendix b has more information about developmental stages and environmental influences that can affect childhood development.)



# 10



"...most of my family is out of province and I didn't have that love and support, especially being a single parent.

The people there made me feel important...like somebody cares."

- participant in a parent support group

### How can Canadians best respond?

Research and experience suggest six interrelated areas where cooperative effort can have positive effects on children. Consideration of these areas and others that may emerge through discussion of a National Children's Agenda can provide opportunities to rally Canadians and make a meaningful difference in the lives of children.

#### *1. Supporting parents and strengthening families*

Parents and families play the primary role in children's lives, and a nurturing, supportive family is the best foundation for good child development. Support for parents and families is essential to improve circumstances for children. It requires the cooperative effort of many partners, including employers, communities, voluntary organizations and governments. For example, employers could create supportive workplaces that help parents meet their responsibilities to their children.

#### *2. Enhancing early childhood development*

New research on early childhood development confirms what many Canadians already know: strong relationships and stimulating, loving care in children's early years establish the best foundation for their growth and development. Efforts to enhance conditions that promote healthy development and reduce risks during early childhood – up to the age of 6 – can support a strong foundation for children in their later years. They could be a special focus of a National Children's Agenda.

" In 1994-1995, 32.4% of children aged 0-11 (1.5 million children) were in some form of non-parental child care while their parents worked or studied. Of the children who were not in child care, 39.6% - 1 million children - had been in child care at some point in the past."

- *Growing Up in Canada*, National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996



### *3. Improving economic security for families*

Poverty and economic insecurity affect parents' abilities to meet their children's needs. For most families with children, especially those led by single mothers, sustained employment is the key to a secure family income. A strong economy that fosters opportunity, particularly for young families, is the best way to improve the economic well-being of families and reduce child poverty.

Even during periods of strength in our economy, many families continue to need additional financial support for raising their children. The new National Child Benefit system is helping parents make the transition from welfare to work, and is assisting low-income earners to stay in the work force. Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments will continue their efforts to support low-income families.

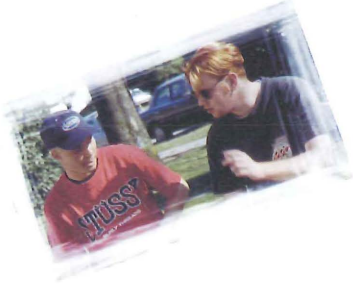
### *4. Providing early and continuous learning experiences*

Canadians have begun to recognize the need to focus on children as "learners" and the importance of strengthening children's formal and informal learning environments. Learning begins in infancy with the stimulation provided by parents and other caregivers. As children mature and develop relationships outside their families, teachers and others who interact with them foster learning among children of diverse backgrounds and abilities. With the right combination of support, challenge and opportunities provided by parents, educators and the community, children can master the concepts, knowledge and skills they need for success throughout their lives.



"Talk with us, not to us."

- YouthNet member, Ottawa



"I'd wish the violence would stop.  
There's so much violence in this  
world."

- youth participant in *Kids Talk and Videotape*  
Health Canada

# 13

## 5. Fostering strong adolescent development

In order for adolescents to participate meaningfully in society, they need opportunities to develop empathy, tolerance, respect for people of different genders and ethnic backgrounds, a sense of fair play and justice, hope, understanding and self-confidence. They also need the skills and knowledge to find a place in the labour force.

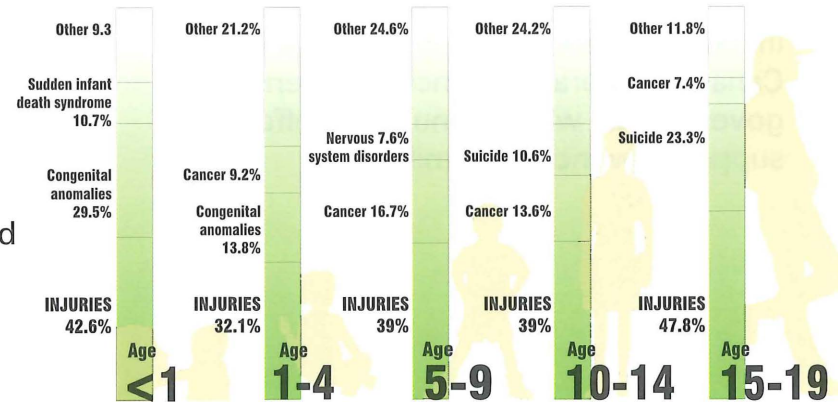
All adolescents face a degree of risk, but some are at greater risk because of their socio-economic status, gender, family situation, mental health, behavioural problems or peer pressure.

A National Children's Agenda provides an opportunity to focus on finding better ways to support young people as they move into the world of work and parenting, helping them to contribute to their communities and develop new skills and their sense of citizenship. Care should be taken to provide fair opportunities for both girls and boys, and for low-income youth and adolescents who demonstrate high-risk behaviour.

## 6. Creating supportive, safe and violence-free communities

For optimal development, children need secure homes, violence-free family environments and protection from victimization. They also need healthy communities, including safe neighbourhoods, play spaces and clean environments. Parents, municipalities, manufacturers, police officers, social workers and legislators must share responsibility for making communities safer for children and youth.

**Leading causes of death  
for all Canadian children  
at different ages, 1995**



A number of initiatives, including the work of the Canadian Crime Prevention Council, have recognized that communities are the best places to identify problems that families face, and the best places to work toward solutions. Strong and healthy communities give children and their parents a greater sense of belonging and are more likely to foster community involvement.

### **How will we know if we're making a difference?**

#### *By tracking our children's progress*

Businesses, organizations and governments regularly report on our country's economic well-being. The progress of Canada's children is just as important. We need better information about children's well-being and development in order to do our best. We need to know if we're finding the best windows of opportunity to help children, and whether we are using them to their fullest. We need to track the progress of both girls and boys.





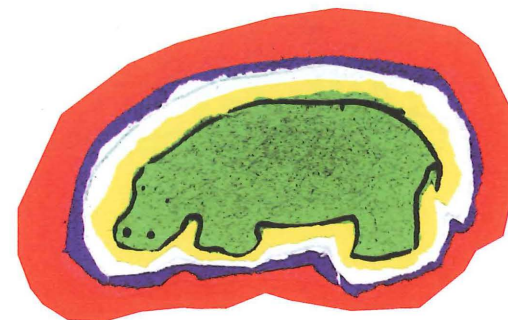
That is why, as a fundamental building block of a National Children's Agenda, Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments propose to develop and report on key indicators of child well-being. These indicators could be developed in collaboration with researchers, policy and decision makers, professionals, Aboriginal peoples, communities, businesses and individual Canadians.

Reporting on mutually agreed indicators of child well-being would complement the work already under way by organizations, communities and governments.

*By sharing effective practices*

A National Children's Agenda can focus more attention on gathering and sharing information about work that is improving children's well-being. It can direct more attention to the results that programs are achieving for children. We can also build a "learning focus" into all of our initiatives, and promote the importance of ongoing research into child development and other child-related research, to help us improve the well-being of children well into the future.

A separate supplementary discussion paper is available that outlines approaches to measuring child well-being and monitoring children's progress.



## How do we begin?

To move forward with a National Children's Agenda, the federal, provincial and territorial governments are seeking feedback on the vision, values, goals and proposed areas for action.

Are the six suggested areas for cooperative effort the right ones? What are their implications, and how do we respond to them in order to achieve our goals? How can we best support the imagination and commitment of those who influence children every day: families, communities, businesses, voluntary organizations and governments?

## We need to build on the good work already in progress.

We need to make links among initiatives that are providing new insights into the well-being of children – such as those described in Appendix a.

## We need to change.

Instead of focussing mainly on problems after they have occurred, we need to focus more attention on programs that prevent them and promote good development throughout childhood.



In 1993, a group of Montreal residents gathered to mobilize the resources needed to promote the well-being of 0-3 year olds in the city's poorest neighbourhoods. With support from volunteers and Montreal businesses, the program has inspired the development of local medical, nutritional and parenting resources for young children.

A recent Canadian study, *The Benefits and Costs of Good Child Care*, by University of Toronto economists Gordon Cleveland and Michael Krashinsky, determined that for every dollar invested in high quality early childhood education, there is a two dollar dividend that benefits society in addition to the child and his/her family.

**"Our concept is not only to look at one aspect of child welfare, but to integrate the whole community in the overall development of children."**

- Coldwater Indian Band, *Liberating Our Children, Liberating Our Nation*

**"Keep Your Promises."**

- what youth want from adults, by a youth participant in *Kids Talk and Videotape*, Health Canada

### **We need a holistic approach.**

Children's lives cannot be fragmented – so we need all sectors of society to work together to address their needs.

### **How do we work together?**

Governments recognize that a National Children's Agenda can work only if it reaches beyond governments and inspires every Canadian to help put children front and centre. We propose a vision that can draw each of us toward a stronger appreciation for children in all their diversity. Canadians understand their own communities and their own partners best. So we invite you to join us in hope, and in a special promise to make room for all children in the centre of Canadian society.



### **What's Next**

Governments will be sitting down with key partners to encourage dialogue about the vision, values, goals and areas for action proposed for the National Children's Agenda. The purpose of the dialogue is to develop a strong vision for children. At the end of the dialogue process, governments will incorporate the views of Canadians into a vision document and report back so that the vision can guide all of our efforts to improve the lives of Canada's children.

All Canadians are welcome to provide governments with their views on the National Children's Agenda. There are several ways to send in your comments. You can contact us in writing at:

***National Children's Agenda, 280 Albert Street, 10th Floor, Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 5G8***

Written comments can also be submitted through the National Children's Agenda Web site at ***[www.children-enfants.org](http://www.children-enfants.org)***

Your views can also be provided by calling ***1-800-361-6392***. The operators at this number can also give you information on public dialogue opportunities related to the National Children's Agenda in your province or territory.

## SECTION IV:

### **An Aboriginal Perspective on the National Children's Agenda**

On behalf of the federal, provincial and territorial governments, the Council would like to thank the five national Aboriginal organizations that have already generously provided input on the National Children's Agenda. It is with great pleasure that we include in this section an Aboriginal Perspective on children's issues, written in their own voice.

#### **ABORIGINAL PEOPLES OF CANADA**

The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are recognized and affirmed in s.35 (1) of the Constitution Act, 1982. For the purposes of that Act, "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit and Metis peoples of Canada. The reality of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is complex since it involves recognition of the multiple realities of Aboriginal peoples: First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. The more than 600 First Nations have much in common, but they are different from one another, and very different from the Inuit whose culture was shaped by the northern environment. Different again are the Métis people who blended Aboriginal and European traditions into a new culture.



#### **ABORIGINAL PEOPLES PARTICIPATION IN THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S AGENDA**

Aboriginal peoples are being asked to participate with other Canadians in the development of a shared vision, values and goals for the National Children's Agenda. There are compelling reasons for Aboriginal people to participate as more than half of the Aboriginal population is made up of children, a trend counter to Canadian demographics. The five national Aboriginal organizations are committed to the National Children's Agenda and an ongoing mechanism for ensuring the inclusion of an Aboriginal Perspective in its development.



## OUR CHILDREN ARE AT RISK



Unfortunately, Aboriginal people often experience ill health, run-down and overcrowded housing, polluted water, inadequate schools, poverty and family breakdown at rates found more often in developing countries than in Canada. Today, Aboriginal children face far greater risk than most non-Aboriginal children since among many things they are:

- Twice as likely to be born prematurely, underweight, or die within their first year of life;
- Three or four times more likely to suffer Sudden Infant Death Syndrome;
- Fifteen to thirty-eight times more likely to suffer from the effects of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome;
- Three times more likely to be physically disabled;
- Six times more likely to die by injury, poisoning or violence; and,
- Five times more likely to take their own life.

Aboriginal children are more likely to live in poverty since half of all Aboriginal families live in poverty with one in four being a single parent family often headed by a teenager.

We now know that it is important to obtain precise information on the socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal children in Canada today. While it is recognized that Aboriginal children are in greater risk than most non-Aboriginal children, the nature, extent and degree of the differences have never been precisely measured or documented.

A study is currently being undertaken to enable Aboriginal groups to develop a socio-economic profile of Aboriginal children in Canada and to identify and measure the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children on key socio-economic variables.





## **HOW WILL WE WORK TOGETHER?**

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples envisioned a new partnership where a sincere commitment among peoples to live together in peace, harmony and mutual support would exist. The National Children's Agenda represents an opportunity to establish this new partnership based on recognition, respect, sharing and responsibility.

The national Aboriginal organizations are pleased to be engaged in the National Children's Agenda since Aboriginal children represent the spirit of our peoples and our hope for a stronger future. Through consultations with our various constituencies, the basic questions and recommendations of the National Children's Agenda will be addressed.

As participants in the development of the National Children's Agenda, Aboriginal peoples can open the eyes of Canadians. Ironically, traditional Aboriginal child care approaches are increasingly seen as being in harmony with emerging and developmental research which shows that self-esteem is dependent upon fostering children in a spirit of belonging, mastery, autonomy and generosity.

Aboriginal people firmly believe that children represent the primary means through which cultures can preserve their traditions, heritage and languages. In this sense children are considered the hope of the future.

**Assembly of First Nations**  
**Metis National Council**  
**Native Women's Association of Canada**  
**Congress of Aboriginal Peoples**  
**Inuit Tapirisat of Canada**



# 20

# Appendix a



## Initiatives from across Canada

Governments across Canada\* have introduced a number of innovative initiatives to help Canadian children have the best possible opportunity to develop to their full potential. These initiatives reflect some of the ideas put forward in this paper. They recognize the importance of early childhood development, illustrate integrated approaches and structures, and link governments, non-governmental agencies and communities in common purpose, enhancing the well-being of children. The initiatives described below are models of government activities that can serve as building blocks for continued action in support of children and their families.

\*Quebec agrees with the objectives of the National Children's Agenda. However, the Government of Quebec has decided not to participate in its development because it wishes to assume full control over programs aimed at families and children within its territory. Furthermore, Quebec has not signed the Social Union Framework Agreement. Consequently, any references to joint federal-provincial-territorial positions in this text do not include Quebec.

## Yukon

Yukon is always seeking ways to better serve the needs of children in addition to maintaining its long-standing programs in child health and social services. The following are two of a number of new initiatives:

- In January 1998, a *Children's Drug and Optical Program* was introduced to reduce the cost of prescription drug and optical requirements for children in low- to moderate-income families. This is part of the reinvestment of social assistance savings to meet the objectives of the National Child Benefit.
- The *Children's Dental Program* provides health promotion, dental care prevention and basic dental restorative work to Yukon children from Kindergarten through Grade 8. Preschoolers may receive examination and oral health services. The preschool program will be expanded to target children at risk of developing baby bottle tooth decay. Early identification and intervention (application of duraflor to strengthen teeth and prevent tooth decay) is expected to contribute to the health of children, improve participation and success in school, and reduce health care system costs.

## Northwest Territories

The Northwest Territories' *Healthy Children* initiative is an interdepartmental, multidimensional, long-term strategy for investing in the health and well-being of children and their families. The initiative is constructed on a framework which recognizes that children's developmental and learning opportunities are directly linked to the well-being of their parents, families and communities. Begun in 1997, the initiative has provided financial resources and other supports to over 140 community-based programs throughout the Northwest Territories.

*Healthy Children* is founded on a vision – “healthy children born to healthy parents, growing up in strong and supportive families in caring communities” – and is supported by a set of guiding principles that include community ownership, cultural recognition, inter-agency collaboration and holistic approaches to programs and services.

The focal points for the initiative include prenatal activities to ensure healthy babies, programs for young people who are preparing to raise a family, supports to parents to foster strong families, and actions to help create healthy and caring communities. Included within the initiative is a new college certificate program designed for students who wish to work with “at-risk” children and families.

Sample programs within this initiative include:

- A family support program created by the Baker Lake Hospice Society that includes family visits, prenatal nutrition and the *Nobody's Perfect* parenting program.
- An in-home family support worker program created by the Inuvik Family Counselling Centre to support high-risk families and provide early intervention assistance for children at risk.





## British Columbia

British Columbia has focussed its efforts on children through two groundbreaking initiatives.

First, British Columbia has created a new ministry specifically dedicated to children and families. The holistic approach of BC's Ministry for Children and Families is embodied in a number of innovative strategies.

- Through its Aboriginal strategy, the Ministry for Children and Families is working with Aboriginal communities to strengthen their capacity and authority to serve their own members.
- *Building Blocks*, the Ministry's prevention and early intervention strategy, includes projects that enhance learning opportunities for parents and children in child care settings, provide support and mentoring to new parents, and develop community-based strategies to prevent Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.
- The Ministry's addictions strategy recognizes the needs of children, and has resulted in the creation of the country's first residential treatment centre with a licensed child care facility – moms with addictions can continue to live with their children while receiving treatment.

- The Ministry's youth strategy includes the provision of safe housing, treatment for addictions, and other innovative supports to help kids get off the street.

British Columbia has also led the way in combatting child poverty through two of its *BC Benefits* programs – *BC Family Bonus* and *BC Healthy Kids*. Parents can best provide for their children by obtaining work to increase their income. But this can lead to a significant reduction in government benefits. With *BC Benefits*, parents continue to receive income support and health benefits for their children based on their level of income – whether they receive social assistance or not. Removing this barrier between welfare and work has resulted in 31,000 fewer children being on welfare in British Columbia.



## Alberta

The *Alberta Children's Initiative* provides a clear vision, expected outcomes and a policy framework that supports the healthy development of Alberta's children. Its goals are that Alberta's children will be well cared for, safe, successful at learning and healthy.

The *Alberta Children's Initiative* also provides essential information that guides regional planning of local health, education and social services for children and families. It breaks down program boundaries and builds up integrated service delivery for children at the community level. Ministers of Family and Social Services, Health, Education, Justice and Community Development, along with the Minister Without Portfolio Responsible for Children's Services, are working together to support the initiative and its implementation. All partners are accountable for the successful achievement of agreed-upon goals.



Progress made toward positive outcomes for children will be measured and reported annually.

The *Alberta Children Involved in Prostitution Initiative* presents the first piece of legislation in Canada that addresses child prostitution directly. It acknowledges that children involved in prostitution are victims of sexual abuse and require protection. Programs and services are available to help children end their involvement in the sex trade and legal penalties are in place for persons who sell and buy children for sex.

Alberta also provides education and prevention programs aimed at the reduction of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects in partnership with Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Education and prevention programs have proved to be more effective than legislation in reducing this disability, which is 100% preventable.

In addition, *Alberta's Student Health Initiative* and *Alberta's Child Health Benefit* provide benefits, programs and services to advance childhood well-being.





## Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan's *Action Plan for Children* is a major interdepartmental initiative. It is a cooperative undertaking by eight government agencies. A commitment to integrated planning and coordination has been integral to its success. The *Action Plan* promotes an emphasis on issues affecting children, youth and families in the province. Since its implementation in 1994, Saskatchewan's *Action Plan for Children* has involved hundreds of Saskatchewan communities and organizations.

The *Action Plan* has provided a policy framework and multi-year strategy through which many new or enhanced services for children and families have been developed. Framed in terms that are clear and simple, the policy framework includes a common vision and shared beliefs, principles and goals. Government departments and communities can use it as a common basis for action and respond effectively to the needs of children by working together. Since its inception, the *Action Plan* has also published a number of reports that help to maintain community support and enhance public accountability.

Two of the many examples of integrated services profiled in *Action Plan* reports are:

- West Flats Citizens Group in Prince Albert – located in a community school, this program provides preventative education and support services for families, along with service coordination; and
- Weyburn Family Place – a community-based centre providing prevention programs to support positive family life. Included are a resource library for parents, parenting education programs, family support programs and an indoor playground for young children.



## Manitoba

Manitoba's Children and Youth Secretariat has the mandate to coordinate services and facilitate joint working arrangements among government, non-governmental organizations, agencies, community and private sector interest groups on issues relating to the healthy development and well-being of children. Through the *ChildrenFirst* policy, the Secretariat is implementing a five-prong program: reducing abuse and neglect; increasing readiness to learn; reducing poverty; building community capacity; and eliminating Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Three new initiatives are:

- *BabyFirst*, targeted at prenatal to three-year-old children, is modelled after the successful Hawaii *Healthy Start* program which boasts a 90% reduction in child abuse. Every child born in Manitoba will be assessed for neglect or abuse "at-risk" factors. Families that choose to be involved will be supported by a home visitor.
- *Early Start*, targeted at children aged between two and five, is patterned after an internationally recognized best practice, the Perry Preschool model. In cooperation with the child care system, *Early Start* combines home visiting and quality child care programming aimed at increasing school readiness. Thirty-eight sites are operational employing 21 home visitors.
- *Women and Infant Nutrition (WIN) Program*, administered by Family Services, is for lower-income pregnant women and parents with children less than one year old. WIN is designed to improve nutritional knowledge and the general health of children. WIN provides parents with access to community-based nutritional programming and an enhanced nutrition supplement, giving families on provincial income assistance increased access to nutritious foods during critical developmental stages.





## Ontario

Ontario is committed to ensuring the best possible outcomes for children and their families. The province has already taken many important steps consistent with the vision and themes of the National Children's Agenda:

- Most recently, the government commissioned the *Early Years Study*, co-chaired by Dr. Fraser Mustard and The Honourable Margaret McCain. This study is examining the best ways to prepare all of Ontario's young children for scholastic, career and social success.
- To help children at risk, Ontario has increased funding to *Healthy Babies, Healthy Children*, which screens all newborns, identifies those at high risk and ensures they receive appropriate services. Other early intervention programs include *Better Beginnings, Better Futures, Ontario Breakfast for Learning* and *Preschool Speech and Language*.
- The *Ontario Child Care Supplement for Working Families* will help 350,000 lower-income children and families. The new *Learning, Earning and Parenting Program* will provide child care subsidies and other supports to help young parents on welfare finish school and reduce their dependency on social assistance. Additional child care assistance will also be provided for participants in *Ontario Works*, to give greater flexibility and choices for parents.
- To help keep children safe, Ontario is undertaking a step-by-step reform of the child welfare system. This year, in addition to introducing a new risk assessment system, additional funding was provided to Children's Aid Societies (CAS) to increase the number of child protection staff, provide better training for front-line workers and revitalize foster care. Over the next years, up to \$170 million will be provided to CAS for up to 760 additional staff.
- Ontario recognizes that a coordinated approach is required to better meet children's needs. Through efforts such as the Making Services Work for People community planning process, the appointment of a Minister Responsible for Children, the establishment of a Children's Secretariat and the creation of an Office of Integrated Services for Children, Ontario has signalled its continued commitment to children.



## Nova Scotia

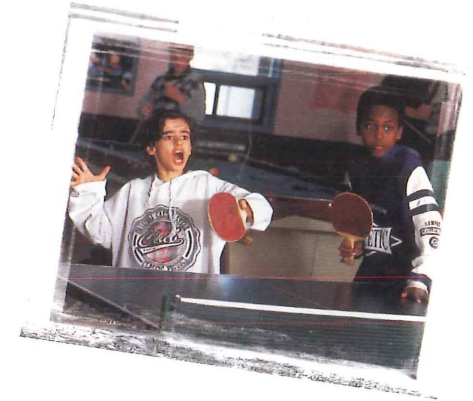
The Government of Nova Scotia is committed to working with community groups and parents to enhance programs to support Nova Scotia families and children.

The Children and Youth Action Committee (CAYAC), a joint effort of the Department of Community Services, Education and Culture, Health, Justice and the Youth Secretariat, serves as a focal point for the coordination of cross-jurisdictional issues. Several key initiatives have been undertaken, including:

- The *Eastern Region Project*, which has established four community-based Youth Health Centres.
- *Early Identification and Intervention Services*, which is developing services for children under the age of six who require extra supports.

In addition, Nova Scotia offers a range of support programs for families and children through the National Child Benefit reinvestment program. These include:

- The *Nova Scotia Child Benefit*, which offers income support to low-income families.
- The *Healthy Child Development Initiatives*. These support prevention programs such as parent education services, early intervention programs to serve pre-school children with special needs, additional centre-based child care spaces, and family child care options in rural Nova Scotia.





## New Brunswick

The *Early Childhood Initiatives* (ECI) were introduced in 1994 for “priority” preschool children and their families, which includes children from the prenatal stage to five years whose healthy development is at risk.

- These services are designed to help parents give their children the best start in life, so they may grow strong and healthy in healthy families and communities, and enter school better prepared to achieve their potential.
- This cluster of seven health and social services includes prenatal and postnatal screening, as well as nursing and nutrition interventions, preschool health clinics at 3.5 years of age, home-based early intervention services, integrated day care services, social work prevention services and home economics services. These services are coordinated through a single entry point, via the regional Public Health nurse.
- ECI provides the opportunity to support parents and strengthen families province-wide, enhance early childhood development, and give children early and continuous learning experiences.

*Parenting Days* are a service provided by the Department of Health and Community Services, in partnership with communities.

- Acting on their own initiative, communities partner with service clubs, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to develop events which support and value the contribution of parents to society. Government acts as a catalyst by providing in-kind support (such as access to staff and resources) for promotion of the events. Events are free of charge to the public.
- *Parenting Days* support parents and strengthen families at the community level, have the potential to enhance early childhood development, and provide early and continuous learning experiences for children and youth whose parents attend the workshops.



## Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island firmly believes in the value of multisectoral collaboration in developing public policy, and in working with government and community partners to develop programs and strategies for the province. In this spirit, the recent Speech from the Throne announced that Prince Edward Island will provide leadership for the development of a multi-year *Healthy Child Development Strategy* for the province. Building on the vision, values and goals of the National Children's Agenda, an Interdepartmental Committee on Healthy Child Development has begun to network with other public service and community partners to plan and coordinate a province-wide consultation on healthy child development.

- The strategy will build on key lessons from research on brain development by encouraging secure relationships, minimizing known risks, building on critical periods for learning, and supporting early intervention. The strategy is intended to be multisectoral and focussed on outcomes for children. It will include an evaluation component and be resourced through federal, provincial, community and private sector partnerships.

- The strategy will build on current initiatives and programs, including the Family Literacy Initiative, the Premier's Action Council on Family Violence, Early Childhood Education services, Autism Services, the Community Action Program for Children network of family resource centres, and community and employment development strategies. The province has adopted a policy framework to encourage interdepartmental collaboration and partnership in the development of policies, programs and services for young children and their families.





### **Newfoundland and Labrador**

Announced in August 1998, *People, Partners and Prosperity: A Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador* is a framework for social action which identifies the government's major social strategies and sets its long-term social goals.

The first of its kind in Canada, the *Strategic Social Plan* also includes a social audit component to document and measure progress which will indicate what is working, why, how and for whom. The plan recognizes that social policy is bigger than government and puts forward strategic directions for developments, including building on community and regional strengths, integrating social and economic development, and investing in people.

In keeping with the plan, the province has introduced two new pieces of legislation to strengthen supports for children, youth and their families. *The Child Care Services Act* and *Child, Youth, and Family Services Act* represent a significant shift in the legislative framework that forms the basis for intervention programs and services. It includes an emphasis on prevention, and early intervention and involvement of children, youth, families and communities in the planning, development and delivery of services.

Actions highlighted in the plan are intended to be broad initiatives aimed at achieving strategic goals and objectives. Government is building on initiatives that use an intersectoral approach, such as the Model for Coordination of Services to Children and Youth and the Provincial Strategy Against Violence.

Under its National Child Benefit Provincial Reinvestment Plan, Newfoundland and Labrador is reinvesting \$10.15 million annually in new programs and services. The initiatives that are being introduced by the province include:

- additional child care subsidies, the introduction of licensed family home child care and licensed infant child care;
- additional family resource centre sites to provide a range of supportive and early intervention services to children 0 to 6 years of age and their families.
- the development of coordinated, regional community youth networks to support 12- to 18-year-old youth; and
- increases to the child care expense, deduction and the extension of drug card benefits for families where parents are making the transition from social assistance to work.

## Government of Canada

The Government of Canada has introduced a number of initiatives aimed at improving the life experiences of children, particularly early childhood development. The examples below focus on three important areas: supporting parents (including improving the support system for low-income families with children); strengthening communities; and building our research capacity.

Canada's income support system for families with children includes the *Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB)*, which provides payments to 80% of Canadian families with children. As a result of increases in recent budgets, the total value of the CCTB will be close to \$7 billion by the year 2000.

Federal Child Support Guidelines, introduced in 1997, made child support orders fairer, more predictable and more consistent. Within a national approach, the federal government will continue to work with the provincial and territorial governments to implement new legislation.

A number of federal programs for Aboriginal children and families have a strong focus on early childhood development, culture, supporting parents and community partnerships, including the *Aboriginal Head Start program*, *First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative*, First Nations Child and Family Services and First Nations education programs.

The *Community Action Program for Children (CAPC)* recognizes that communities are best positioned to identify the needs of their children and have the capacity to draw responses together. Every week, nearly 29,000 children and 27,000 parents and caregivers visit the nearly 400 CAPC projects in over 300 urban, rural and remote communities.





Investing in children and youth is a major priority of Phase II of the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention. The strategy supports communities in the development of innovative, sustainable ways to prevent crime and victimization and build a safer society, including the provision of necessary supports and resources for children and their families.

The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) is increasing our understanding of the key determinants of healthy child development. The NLSCY monitors the development of a representative sample of Canadian children and is building a research base of information on what matters for children.

### **Joint Federal/Provincial/Territorial Initiative**

The National Child Benefit (NCB) is an innovative and progressive new partnership between Canadian governments. Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services have designed the NCB initiative, an investment in the well-being of Canada's children. The primary goals of the NCB are to improve benefits and services available to low-income families with children, and to help parents move from welfare to work and stay employed.

The Government of Canada began with an initial investment in the NCB of \$850 million in July 1998, which low-income families receive as a supplement to the Canada Child Tax Benefit. As of the year 2000, the Canadian government will be investing a total of \$1.7 billion per year in the NCB. This provides a higher basic level of income support for children, whether their parents are in the labour market or receiving social assistance. In turn, provinces and territories have adjusted the support they provide to children through social assistance and invested in new and enhanced benefits and services to meet the objectives of the NCB.

# Appendix b

## 1. Developmental stages and environmental influences

Knowledge about child development has increased dramatically in recent years. Today, we know more about how children pass through physical and mental stages as they grow. Research also suggests that there are “windows of opportunity,” critical periods when we can be most effective in helping children to develop on the right track – or to get them back on track.

### *Prenatal to eighteen months – transition through infancy*

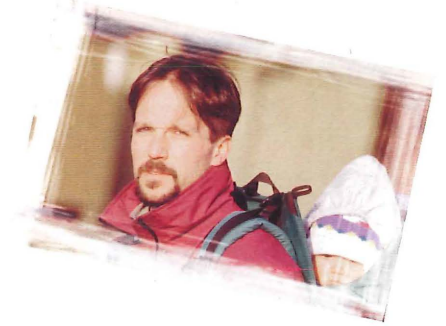
In this period, the “basic sculpting” of the child’s brain takes place, and children are both most dependent on, and vulnerable to, their caregivers. Connections are made among brain cells that establish how a growing child experiences his or her environment. Basic emotional attachment to an adult develops. Infants learn to recognize the human face and its emotional communication. They also learn the emotional role of touch. As brain pathways develop, a child's early experiences with language, colour and music make more complex cognitive, emotional and behavioural abilities possible.

There are pre-birth factors that can permanently influence a child's development. For example, good maternal health and nutrition have positive effects, while tobacco, alcohol and substance use during pregnancy can have serious negative effects. Good maternal health is best achieved through the support pregnant women receive from their partners, employers, family members and others.

### *Eighteen months to age five – transition to school*

This is a time when children's interactions with their environments expand. It is a time of rapid cognitive, behavioural, emotional and social development. Children at this stage need a broad range of stimuli, from physical play to intellectual challenges, and a balance in these activities. Children begin to learn social behaviour and how to anticipate consequences for their actions and choices. During this time, children also learn behaviours that are “expected” of them because of their sex.

Ongoing loving, nurturing and positive attention from adults during this period can help to develop children's confidence and curiosity. There is growing literature about how activities such as reading with children and interactive playing can develop their “readiness to learn.”





At this stage, variations in readiness to learn among children with differing levels of financial security and early learning opportunities have been found to emerge. It is believed that these differences can be reduced with stimulating, quality care.

#### *Ages six to twelve – transition to adolescence*

While early childhood establishes the base for children's development, the period between ages six to twelve builds on these early years, and continues the intense learning and social development of childhood. As they are challenged by increasingly difficult choices, children develop and consolidate a widening range of physical, emotional, cognitive and social skills and capacities. They become more independent, and individuals and environments beyond their homes and families play more important roles in their lives. This developmental stage is important in shaping gender identity.

Research has shown that repeated negative experiences during this stage can affect developmental results. Good adult guidance is important for helping children to understand consequences and develop maturity during this stage.

As in the preschool years, there are continuing opportunities to help children develop “on track” and to assist disadvantaged children to achieve levels comparable to their more advantaged peers.

#### *Ages thirteen to eighteen – transition to adulthood*

Children begin to establish an independent life course and to make decisions that can have lifelong consequences during their adolescence. At the same time, they experience the physical and emotional changes associated with puberty. Differences between boys and girls in the confidence with which they approach their studies, in their levels of participation in sports, in how they express frustration and in the kinds of decisions they make about their lives are accentuated. As teens grow, they strive for more independence from their families, experimenting with new ideas, experiences and responsibilities.

Their peers become increasingly influential; however, they still need strong support from parents, other adults, schools and communities. Negative gender images, peer pressure and the desire to test limits can lead to risk-taking behaviours that can have serious consequences.



Caring and stable relationships between teens and adults in the home, school and larger community have been linked in adolescents to higher self-esteem, less depression, greater involvement in school and community activities, and better school performance.

## **2. Environmental influences**

Children are shaped by the world around them, and many environments affect their development at all stages during their growth. As we have just indicated, there are periods during which the effects of environmental influences are heightened, such as during children's earliest years, when their minds and bodies and social behaviours are developing.

Understanding the impacts of environmental influences can help us make choices that build more supportive environments for children and enhance their development.

### *Biological inheritance*

Children inherit a particular set of characteristics that mediate the influence of their environments. Their particular genetic inheritance includes both protective and risk factors that can influence their mental and physical health. Problems that may be present at birth can be alleviated and sometimes overcome through environmental factors.

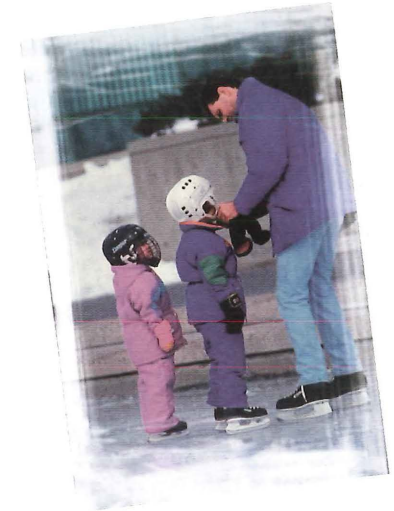
### *Family*

Research has shown that every child needs a secure attachment to at least one nurturing adult, with consistent support and affection early in life. Parents are the primary support for children, and we now have empirical evidence (National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth) that their parenting skills strongly influence children's developmental outcomes. Both mothers and fathers have a critical role; extended family members can also have a crucial influence.

Families require sufficient resources and environmental supports to provide adequately for their children. Parents' workplace environments have a great, if indirect, influence on children's lives. Secure income and flexible, family-sensitive workplace policies contribute to better family environments for children.

### *Child care and school*

At some point in time, all families use some form of supplemental child care. Children who have experienced good care, whether at home, or through formal or informal child care arrangements, have greater social competency, higher levels of language development and play, and fewer behavioural problems in elementary school than those who have experienced lower quality care.





"You read these articles about these great men...whom you are supposed to admire, and they are notable because they worked all their lives for 20 years, 16 hours a day, and I just wonder what happened to their children all that time?"

- a participant in the Fathers of Pointe-Calumet program

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Quality preschool experiences provide varied, stimulating opportunities for interaction and play, and prepare children for school.

Schools play a large role in children's learning, and in their social and emotional development. They help to develop children's cognitive skills and provide opportunities for increasingly complex social relationships. For many children, school is the first opportunity to demonstrate their independence, self-confidence and self-determination.

#### *Physical and community environments*

The physical surroundings that children inhabit can greatly affect their health and well-being. Both natural and built environments such as housing, road systems, parks and recreational areas can present protective and risk factors for children.

In some Canadian communities, children are exposed to pollutants that can adversely affect their health. In other communities, traffic patterns or lack of safe places to play and learn put children at risk. Nurturing communities need to be violence-free, easy to move around in, and provide appealing places to play.

Communities also provide children and families with social supports in the form of belonging, stability and continuity, as well as a context where shared values and expectations are developed. Children meet other children and adults who help them to develop trust, independence and initiative. Communities provide the basic infrastructure for family life: employment, child care, and formal and informal services in health, education, social services, housing, recreation and other areas. Like families, communities vary in their resources and vitality, but all can be friendly to children, particularly when services are accessible and integrated.

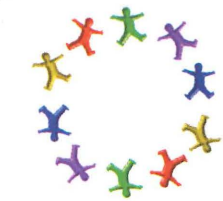
#### *Society*

The values and norms of society, including gender roles, have varying influences on the health and well-being of children. Societal values help determine governments' social, health and economic policies.

Public policies define the social expectations, rights and responsibilities that determine the resources available to children as they grow.

# a national children's agenda

## developing a shared vision



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Children are Canada's strength, today and in the future. That's why federal, provincial and territorial governments are committed to working with you, your neighbours and your community to create a National Children's Agenda.

We need to work toward a shared vision of what we want for our children. We need common concepts of our priorities for children and our collective responsibilities toward our youngest citizens. Most of all, we need to find a way to put our vision and values into words, and our words into action.

The publication, *A National Children's Agenda - Developing a Shared Vision*, is an invitation to think about children. We are invited to imagine a society that values children for who they are, and that provides opportunities for every child to achieve his or her full potential. We encourage you to reflect on the vision summarized in this brochure and to share your thoughts with us.

### VISION What do we want for our children?

Canadians want their country to be one where all children thrive in an atmosphere of love, care and understanding, are valued as individuals in childhood and are given opportunities to reach their full potential as adults.

Children who are respected and protected from harm will grow up to respect and protect the rights of others. Valued, nurtured and loved, they will grow up able to contribute to a society that appreciates diversity, supports the less able and shares its resources.

Given the opportunity to develop their physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual capacities to their fullest, children will become tomorrow's successful and enthusiastic parents, caregivers, workers and citizens.



### VALUES What do we believe about our children?

• We respect the voices of all children and recognize their inherent worth: we value children for who they are now, as much as who they will become.

• We believe in protecting children's best interests: we believe that protecting the interests of children is a basic social responsibility.

• We believe we can support children by supporting parents and families: we believe that children grow up best within families that are able to provide security, nurturing, respect and love.

• We understand the value of working together: we believe that educators, coaches, caregivers and other mentors make powerful contributions to children's growth and well-being.

• We believe in reflecting the diversity of our country: we believe that our goals should reflect the richness and diversity of Canadian culture and the unique needs of each child.

• We honour Canada's Aboriginal traditions: we recognize and respect the special importance of parents, elders and extended families in nurturing Aboriginal children.



### GOALS What do we hope to achieve?

#### Good Health

Children should be as physically, emotionally and spiritually healthy as they can be, with strong self-esteem, coping skills and enthusiasm.

#### Safety and Security

Children's basic needs for food, shelter, clothing and transportation must be met. Children must be protected from abuse, neglect, discrimination, exploitation and danger.

#### Success at Learning

Children should have opportunities to reach their potential for good physical and social development, language skills, literacy, numeracy and general knowledge. They should be ready to learn throughout their lives, so that they can develop the skills, knowledge and coping skills they need for a successful transition to adulthood.

#### Social Engagement and Responsibility

Young children should be helped to form stable attachments to nurturing adults, including supportive relationships within and outside their families. They should be taught to respect themselves and others, and to value the cultural heritage and diversity of others. They should be encouraged to develop an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of belonging to a wider society, to understand the personal and social consequences of their choices.



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Given the opportunity to develop their physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual capacities to their fullest, children will become tomorrow's successful and enthusiastic parents, caregivers, workers and citizens.



## VALUES What do we believe about our children?

- We respect the voices of all children and recognize their inherent worth: we value children for who they are now, as much as who they will become.
- We believe in protecting children's best interests: we believe that protecting the interests of children is a basic social responsibility.
- We believe we can support children by supporting parents and families: we believe that children grow up best within families that are able to provide security, nurturing, respect and love.
- We understand the value of working together: we believe that educators, coaches, caregivers and other mentors make powerful contributions to children's growth and well-being.
- We believe in reflecting the diversity of our country: we believe that our goals should reflect the richness and diversity of Canadian culture and the unique needs of each child.
- We honour Canada's Aboriginal traditions: we recognize and respect the special importance of parents, elders and extended families in nurturing Aboriginal children.



## GOALS What do we hope to achieve?

### Good Health

Children should be as physically, emotionally and spiritually healthy as they can be, with strong self-esteem, coping skills and enthusiasm.

### Safety and Security

Children's basic needs for food, shelter, clothing and transportation must be met. Children must be protected from abuse, neglect, discrimination, exploitation and danger.

### Success at Learning

Children should have opportunities to reach their potential for good physical and social development, language skills, literacy, numeracy and general knowledge. They should be ready to learn throughout their lives, so that they can develop the skills, knowledge and coping skills they need for a successful transition to adulthood.

### Social Engagement and Responsibility

Young children should be helped to form stable attachments to nurturing adults, including strong, supportive relationships within and outside their families. They should be taught to respect themselves and others, and to value the cultural heritage and diversity of others. They should be encouraged to develop an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of belonging to a wider society, and to understand the personal and social consequences of their choices.

## What can we do to meet our goals?

1. Support the role of parents and strengthen families, because they play the primary role in children's lives.
2. Enhance early childhood development because the first few years are important for children's lifelong abilities, health and well-being.
3. Improve economic security for families to help maximize child well-being.
4. Provide early and continuous learning experiences, so that children become lifelong learners.
5. Foster strong adolescent development by giving youth opportunities, skills and a sense of belonging.
6. Create supportive, safe and violence-free communities where children can thrive.

## How will we measure success?

We need better information about children's development and well-being in order to do our best for them. Communities, Aboriginal peoples, researchers, individual Canadians and governments can work together to find ways to track the progress of all girls and boys, and to use this knowledge as a beacon to guide our efforts.

We also want to find better ways of sharing information on successful initiatives, to make sure we're really putting our knowledge to work. A National Children's Agenda will allow us to improve the lives of Canada's children, today and in the future.

## What's Next

Governments\* will be sitting down with key partners to encourage dialogue about the vision, values, goals and areas for action proposed for the National Children's Agenda. The purpose of the dialogue is to develop a strong vision for children by building common ground on what we as Canadians want for our children. At the end of the dialogue process, governments will incorpo-



rate the views of Canadians into a vision document and report back so that the vision can guide all of our efforts to improve the lives of Canada's children.

All Canadians are welcome to provide governments with their views on the National Children's Agenda. There are several ways to send in your comments. You can contact us in writing at: **National Children's Agenda, 280 Albert Street, 10th Floor, Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 5G8.**

Written comments can also be submitted through the National Children's Agenda Web site at [www.children-enfants.org](http://www.children-enfants.org)

Your views can also be provided by calling **1-800-361-6392**. The operators at this number can also give you information on public dialogue opportunities related to the National Children's Agenda in your province and territory.

\* Quebec agrees with the objectives of the National Children's Agenda. However, the Government of Quebec has decided not to participate in its development because it wishes to assume full control over programs aimed at families and children within its territory. Furthermore, Quebec has not signed the Social Union framework agreement. Consequently, any references to joint federal-provincial-territorial positions in this text do not include Quebec.

## VISION Que voulons-nous pour nos enfants?

Les Canadiens et les Canadiennes veulent un pays où tous les enfants vivent dans un climat d'amour, d'attention, de compréhension, un pays qui les valorise comme personnes durant l'enfance et qui leur offre la possibilité de se réaliser pleinement comme adultes.

Les enfants qui sont respectés et qui sont protégés du danger deviendront des adultes respectueux des autres et de leurs droits. Valorisés, choyés et aimés, ils seront plus tard capables de contribuer à une société qui apprécie la diversité, protège les plus vulnérables et prône le partage.

S'ils ont la possibilité de réaliser pleinement leurs capacités physiques, intellectuelles, affectives, sociales et spirituelles, les enfants deviendront des adultes accomplis et assumeront pleinement leurs rôles de parents, de soignants, de travailleurs et de citoyens.



## VALEURS Que croyons-nous au sujet de nos enfants?

Nous respectons la voix de nos enfants et reconnaissons leur valeur intrinsèque : nous respectons les enfants pour ce qu'ils sont maintenant et pour ce qu'ils deviendront.

- Nous croyons qu'il faut défendre les intérêts primordiaux des enfants : nous croyons que la défense des intérêts des enfants constitue une responsabilité sociale fondamentale.

- Nous croyons que le soutien aux enfants passe par le soutien aux familles : nous croyons que les enfants s'épanouissent davantage s'ils grandissent dans des familles qui peuvent leur offrir sécurité, attention, respect et amour.

- Nous comprenons à quel point il est important de travailler ensemble : nous croyons que les éducateurs, les soignants, les conseillers et les autres guides contribuent de façon appréciable à l'épanouissement et au bien-être des enfants.

- Nous croyons qu'il faut refléter la diversité de notre pays : nous croyons que nos objectifs doivent refléter la richesse et la diversité de la culture canadienne ainsi que les besoins particuliers de chaque enfant.

- Nous respectons les traditions autochtones : nous reconnaissons et respectons l'importance des parents, des anciens et de la famille élargie dans l'éducation des enfants autochtones.



## OBJECTIFS Qu'est-ce que nous espérons accomplir?

### Objectif de santé

Nous voulons des enfants qui jouissent d'une santé physique, affective et spirituelle optimale, qui ont une solide estime de soi, de bonnes facultés d'adaptation et de l'enthousiasme.

### Objectif de sécurité et de protection

Nous voulons des enfants dont les besoins fondamentaux en matière d'alimentation, de logement, d'habillement et de transport sont satisfaits; des enfants que l'on protège contre la violence, la négligence, la discrimination, l'exploitation et le danger.

### Objectif d'apprentissage réussi

Nous voulons des enfants à qui l'on offre l'occasion de s'épanouir pleinement sur les plans physique et social, d'apprendre à s'exprimer, à lire, écrire et compter, ainsi que d'acquérir de bonnes connaissances générales; des enfants qui sont prêts à apprendre toute leur vie afin d'acquérir les habiletés, les connaissances et les capacités d'adaptation nécessaires pour réussir leur passage à la vie adulte.

### Objectifs d'engagement social et de responsabilité

Nous voulons des enfants que l'on aide dès leur jeune âge à forger des liens affectifs solides avec des adultes qui les aiment, y compris des relations fortes et positives dans leur famille et à l'extérieur; des enfants à qui l'on montre à se respecter, à respecter les autres et à valoriser le patrimoine culturel et la diversité des autres; des enfants que l'on encourage à comprendre les droits et les responsabilités qu'impose l'appartenance à une société élargie, ainsi que les conséquences personnelles et sociales de leurs choix.

## Que pouvons-nous faire pour atteindre nos objectifs?

1. Appuyer le rôle des parents et renforcer la famille parce qu'ils jouent un rôle de premier plan dans la vie des enfants.
2. Améliorer le développement dans la petite enfance parce qu'il est important que les enfants acquièrent, pendant leurs premières années, les capacités, la santé et le bien-être dont ils jouiront toute leur vie.
3. Améliorer la sécurité économique des familles pour aider à optimiser le bien-être des enfants.
4. Offrir des expériences d'apprentissage précoces et continues de façon à ce que les enfants puissent apprendre tout au long de leur vie.
5. Promouvoir l'épanouissement des adolescents en leur donnant la possibilité d'acquérir des compétences et un sentiment d'appartenance.
6. Créer des collectivités propices, sûres et exemptes de violence où les enfants peuvent s'épanouir.

## Comment évaluerons-nous nos résultats?

Il nous faut de meilleurs renseignements sur le développement et le bien-être des enfants afin d'être en mesure de faire mieux. Les collectivités, les peuples autochtones, les chercheurs, les individus et les gouvernements peuvent se concerter pour trouver des façons d'évaluer les progrès de tous les garçons et filles et se servir de cette connaissance pour guider les efforts.

Les gouvernements du Canada se sont fixé quatre grands objectifs qu'ils espèrent atteindre pour le bien de nos enfants. Nous nous engageons à mesurer le succès des filles et des garçons dans chacun de ces domaines. Nous voulons aussi trouver de meilleurs modes de partage d'information sur les initiatives fructueuses de façon à nous assurer de tirer vraiment parti de nos connaissances. Le Plan d'action national pour les enfants nous permettra d'améliorer les conditions de vie des enfants au Canada, aujourd'hui et dans l'avenir.



## Prochaine étape

Les gouvernements rencontreront leurs partenaires afin de susciter un dialogue sur la vision, les valeurs, les objectifs et les domaines d'intervention proposés dans le Plan d'action national. Ce dialogue permettra de consolider notre vision de l'enfance. À la fin du processus de dialogue, les gouvernements intégreront les points de vue des Canadiens et des Canadiennes en un document qu'ils rendront public afin que nous nous en inspirions pour améliorer les conditions de vie des enfants du Canada.

Tous les Canadiens et Canadiennes sont invités à transmettre aux gouvernements leurs commentaires sur le Plan d'action national pour les enfants. Vous pouvez nous transmettre vos commentaires de diverses façons. Vous pouvez nous écrire à **Plan d'action national pour les enfants, 280, rue Albert, 10<sup>e</sup> étage, Ottawa (Ontario) K1P 5G8**

Il est aussi possible d'utiliser le site Web du Plan d'action national pour les enfants à [www.children-enfants.org](http://www.children-enfants.org)

Vous pouvez aussi téléphoner au **1-800-361-6392** pour donner votre point de vue. Le téléphoniste pourra aussi vous renseigner sur le déroulement du processus de dialogue dans votre province ou territoire.

Le Québec est d'accord avec les objectifs généraux du Plan d'action national pour les enfants. Cependant, le gouvernement du Québec a décidé de ne pas participer à cette initiative, parce qu'il souhaite assumer le plein contrôle sur les programmes destinés aux familles et aux enfants sur son territoire. De plus, le Québec n'a pas signé l'accord-cadre sur l'union sociale. En conséquence, toute référence à des positions conjointes fédérales-provinciales-territoriales dans ce document n'inclut pas le Québec.

# Plan d'action national pour les enfants

## Élaboration d'une vision commune



Les enfants sont la force actuelle et future de notre pays. C'est pourquoi les gouvernements fédéral, provinciaux et territoriaux se sont engagés à travailler en collaboration avec vous, vos voisins et votre collectivité à la création d'un Plan d'action national pour les enfants.

Ce que nous voulons pour nos enfants doit faire l'objet d'une vision commune. Nos priorités à l'égard de nos enfants et nos responsabilités collectives envers nos jeunes concitoyens doivent faire l'objet de concepts communs. Il nous faut surtout trouver des mots pour exprimer notre vision et nos valeurs, et traduire ces mots en action.

La publication *Plan d'action national pour les enfants – Élaboration d'une vision commune* se veut une invitation à réfléchir au sort de nos enfants. Nous sommes conviés à imaginer une société qui apprécie les enfants pour eux-mêmes et qui permet à chaque enfant de se sentir à sa place et d'atteindre son plein épanouissement. Veuillez porter attention à la vision résumée ici et nous faire part de vos impressions.



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