



**EARLY  
CHILDHOOD  
EDUCATION**

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## **FIRST NATIONS EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

### **VISION**

Over the last several years, Ontario First Nations have been working on improving services to support early childhood development. They envision a system whereby children are able to reach their full potential, and where the Nation(s) take on the responsibility to ensure that this happens:

“Throughout the history of First Nations, children have been cared for, nurtured, instructed and encouraged to grow and develop to their full potential. First Nations people view the care and development of the children as one of the most important responsibilities of a Nation, and share the belief that “the children are our future.”<sup>i</sup>

Ontario First Nations have traditionally understood the importance of the early years, and can now call on a growing body of evidence regarding the critical importance of good quality care in the early years.<sup>ii</sup> What the child experiences in the first few years of life will have a significant impact on the learning, behaviour and health of the individual throughout his or her lifetime. The future of the nations is thus directly tied into the quality of First Nations early childhood education and development.

### *Looking to the Past, Working with the Present*

Aboriginal people have historically taken care of early childhood education through an extended family network that saw to the child’s physical, mental, emotional and spiritual development:

Traditional Aboriginal life provided the conditions for a solid childhood foundation. Babies and toddlers spent their first years within the extended family where parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters all shared responsibility for protecting and nurturing them. Traditional Aboriginal child-rearing practices permitted children to exert their will with little interference from adults. In this environment, children were encouraged to develop as thinking, autonomous beings. At the same time, they acquired language and were integrated into the rhythms of daily life in the family and community.<sup>iii</sup>

These traditional practices can serve as principles for developing a system that suits the present. Most Aboriginal parents now work within a modern economy and social structure that necessitates a shift from traditional early childhood education. Parents often engage in adult work and school environments that are removed from children, and extended family members may not be available to participate in the child rearing and daily care. Modern families can therefore benefit greatly from a network of programs and services that can assist with child care, child development and education as well as parent support.

Many First Nations families can also benefit from additional support because of their struggles with poverty, and because of family breakdown, lack of parenting skills and low education levels that are the intergenerational results of residential schooling and other colonial interferences. A contemporary vision of First Nations early childhood education and development needs must take into account that First Nations children are on the whole, a population that is greatly at risk<sup>iv</sup>, and that are therefore in need of superior supports and programs that will guarantee a healthy future for First Nations peoples.

Programs and services can adopt the role of assisting families with early childhood development. These services work with parents, extended families and communities to fulfil a holistic education for Aboriginal children.

It is important to acknowledge, as the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) has, that parents must have choices in terms of the types of services that are available, and the extent to which they use them:

Some parents may reject institutional forms of early childhood education, preferring to work with their own children at home, with support or resources from child care workers or educators. Others, including working parents, may prefer to see a centralized facility where children come together under one roof. Since any intervention at this critical age for cultural transmission will have a profound, long-term impact on the child's life, it is imperative that early childhood strategies be fully under the control of parents, who can make strategic choices about shaping their child's future.<sup>v</sup>

#### *Current Ontario First Nations Framework for the Vision*

Ontario First Nations have always acknowledged early childhood education as an important component of the life long learning process. Over the last few years, they have been working on an integrated vision of early childhood development. In this paper, the vision of an Ontario First Nations early childhood education system will be explored by examining:

1. The values, principles and best practices that have been established and upheld through existing early childhood education and development initiatives in First Nations communities throughout the province; and
2. The provincial and national work that is currently underway related to the integration and coordination of early childhood development programs and services.

Aboriginal early childhood education is currently provided in the home and through the extended family, as well as through community based programs and services. Aboriginal children continue to engage in informal learning activities as they did traditionally by watching older siblings and adults and by participating in family and community events. They may also have access to a range of programs and services, including child/day care centres, Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve, Brighter Futures, the Canada Pre-Natal Nutrition Program, Aboriginal Healthy Babies Healthy Children and the FASD Initiative. Junior and senior kindergarten also fall within the parameters of early childhood development and education, but they have not been included in this analysis as they will be covered in other chapters dealing with the primary school years.

In July 2002, Human Resources Development Canada (now HRSD), Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and Health Canada (HC) were given the mandate to jointly implement a federal Aboriginal Early Childhood Development Strategy. The intent was to return to Cabinet by March 2004 and propose options to implement a coordinated approach to early childhood development programs and services.

Ontario region has participated in this process by developing a “community mapping and environmental scan” of existing First Nations early childhood development programs and needs.<sup>vi</sup> This work was done under the direction of the First Nations Head Start Regional Advisory Committee, which has since broadened its mandate to become the Early Childhood Development Committee. With their preliminary research complete, the ECD Committee is now planning on engaging Ontario First Nations in community-based dialogue about an integrated and coordinated early childhood development strategy. This strategy will provide the tools to develop a unique

early childhood development plan for individual communities or groups of communities. The findings from this province-wide dialogue are expected to be available by the fall of 2004.

***Key Principles of a First Nations Early Childhood Education System***

In reviewing key components that have been identified around early childhood education and development by Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve<sup>vii</sup>, The Assembly of First Nations<sup>viii</sup>, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples<sup>ix</sup> and the Chiefs of Ontario<sup>x</sup> there are some common principles that emerge.

According to these stakeholders, First Nations early childhood education should be:

- ⇒ holistic, serving the child's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs;
- ⇒ providing safe, loving and nurturing care for children;
- ⇒ contributing to the preservation of Aboriginal languages by providing language learning and programming;
- ⇒ providing cultural literacy through culture-based programming and curriculum;
- ⇒ community driven, exercising local jurisdiction and control;
- ⇒ built and maintained with parental and community participation;
- ⇒ supported by adequate fiscal resources;
- ⇒ accessible and affordable;
- ⇒ supported by quality management and human resources; and,
- ⇒ demonstrative of a quality of service, achieved by appropriate child staff ratios, standards, regulation and licensing, training and administration.

***Qualities and outcomes of individuals who successfully pass through the early childhood education system***

In order to describe the qualities and outcomes of individuals who successfully pass through an Aboriginal early childhood education, it would be helpful to refer back to the traditional systems of early childhood education and the qualities that have been valued throughout time. It would be beneficial to ask this question in a formal visioning exercise. Until such time as this question is asked, however, there are some traditional qualities and outcomes that stand out, including having a strong sense of identity and belonging, having a sense of one's interconnected relationship with all of creation, and learning about the adult world through observation and play.

For a contemporary perspective, it is helpful to examine the Aboriginal Head Start program, as it is based on a holistic framework that serves current Aboriginal early childhood development and educational needs. This program was established to assist children aged 0-6 years and their families to have access to the supports that will maximize their potential in terms of early childhood development and school readiness. Information on the approaches and outcomes of Head Start is provided in the next section, but a brief list of indicators of success might include:

- ⇒ strong sense of cultural identity;
- ⇒ sense of place and belonging within a community;
- ⇒ familiarity with Aboriginal language(s) and cultures;
- ⇒ school readiness (socially and academically);
- ⇒ "physically fit": well nourished, knowledgeable and cared for in terms of hygiene, general health and dental health.
- ⇒ benefiting from parents who play an active role in their education and development
- ⇒ having adequate support to deal with developmental challenges and special needs.

### **WHAT CURRENTLY EXISTS**

In Ontario, the current services and programs related to early childhood development and education are as follows:

#### **Child Day Care (provincial)**

Parents in Ontario have a number of options for child care, including bringing caregivers into their own home, taking children to the caregiver's home or placing their children in centre-based care. Centre based care is licensed by the province. Child day care centres operate under the standards and laws set by Ontario's *Day Nurseries Act*, and caregivers must have training and meet the standards set by the Ministry of Child, Family and Community Services. While some home care settings are also regulated, the majority are not.

There are currently fifty-five First Nations child day care centres on reserve in the province of Ontario, serving 3,018 children. Only two First Nations offer regulated home care at this time.

*The Chiefs of Ontario is currently involved in a child care needs assessment exercise that will determine how many children are currently waiting for spaces in regulated care.* It is worth noting, however, that the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care reports that 91% of children under the age of twelve in Ontario can not access a regulated child care space.<sup>xi</sup> The quality of care is immensely important to First Nations people, particularly given the additional supports that are often needed. The Assembly of First Nations has noted that "poor quality child care settings can also create negative effects on a child's development," citing research suggesting that "for vulnerable children or children at risk, a low-quality child care program seems to aggravate their problems."<sup>xii</sup>

#### **Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve (federal)**

The Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve (AHSOR) program has been operating since 1998, following on the urban Aboriginal Head Start programs that have been operating since 1995.

The purpose of Aboriginal Head Start is to provide school readiness and early intervention by engaging Aboriginal parents, guardians and communities to support the developmental needs of children aged 0-6. Program staff work with the children to develop positive self-esteem, encourage their desire for learning and provide opportunities to enhance all aspects of development. The program also aims to reduce negative health affects experienced by Aboriginal children due to high rates of poverty and lack of social supports in many Aboriginal communities.

AHSOR is based on six core components: culture and language; education; health promotion; nutrition; social support and parental and family involvement. AHSOR maintains that "Research indicates that programs such as AHS lead to significant improvement in reading skills, cognitive development, enhanced self esteem, lower school absenteeism and improved health"<sup>xiii</sup>.

First Nations in Ontario submitted a total of sixty-nine proposals in the original call, while only fifteen were accepted. In the fiscal year 2002/2003, fifteen First Nations delivered the AHSOR program across the region at a total of eighteen sites, serving five hundred and seventy three children. At that time, there were sixty-nine children on the waiting list across the province.

The 2002-2003 Annual Progress Report for AHSOR in Ontario demonstrates that the programs have fulfilled the core components in the following manner:

*Culture and Language*

Culture and language have been identified as critically important by AHSOR programs in Ontario. AHSOR programs incorporate language and culture by speaking First Nations languages; developing signs in First Nations languages, promoting drumming and singing, arts and crafts, storytelling, and encouraging children and families to participate in community celebrations and gatherings. Several AHSOR programs incorporate traditional practices and ceremonies into the programs. Some programs have incorporated regular visits with Elders.

*Education*

Most of the AHSOR programs encourage children and families to participate in music, story time, letters and sounds, numbers and math, colours, shapes and patterning, instructional and directional language, concepts development, budgeting and financial planning, literacy and reading, fine and gross motor development, science exploration, computers, speech language, activity centres and problem solving.

*Health Promotion*

The AHSOR offers support and health promotion in the areas of immunization, hygiene, dental practices, and promoting participation in physical activities, healthy lifestyles and eating habits, promoting healthy self-esteem and following the medicine wheel and holistic health practices.

*Nutrition*

AHSOR programs work with nutrition in a variety of ways: by incorporating traditional foods, following the Canada Food Guide, offering cooking classes, nutrition workshops, and encouraging children to participate in the selection and cooking of healthy foods. All of the programs provide healthy lunches and/or snacks to children.

*Social Support*

AHSOR programs promote positive social skills and interaction by encouraging children to respect themselves and others, share with others, play fair, have good manners, play with kindness, play with consideration, learn through play, take turns, practice independence, work on listening skills, and reinforce the development of a positive attitude. AHSOR programs also participate in community events, and develop linkages with community partners. Parents receive social support through means such as having access to community resource information, being referred to other community services and attending parental social gatherings and other events.

*Parent and Family Involvement*

Parental involvement with AHSOR is achieved through parent advisory committees, encouraging families to participate in field trips, special events, and celebrations, involvement in curriculum development, following healthy lifestyle choices, participating in daily activities of the AHSOR program and participating in information and education workshops for parents.

**Junior and Senior Kindergarten** (federal)

Many First Nations have a junior and/or senior kindergarten component to their school. INAC maintains data on the number of kindergarten students enrolled in these schools. In the year 2001/2002, 71 First Nations had kindergarten programs, of which 66 were junior and senior kindergarten combined.

**Brighter Futures** (federal)

The Brighter Futures program was introduced by Health Canada in 1993 with a mandate to support community based activities to foster the well being of First Nations children. Child development, healthy babies, mental health, injury abuse, solvent abuse treatment and parenting skills are some of the activities supported by the program.

This program is provided to communities according to a per-capita formula, and does not require proposals. A total of 119 First Nations in Ontario are currently funded under Brighter Futures, making it the most widespread early childhood development initiative on reserve in Ontario.

**The Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP)** (federal)

The Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, sponsored by Health Canada, began in 1994 with the goal to help improve birth outcomes through nutrition and support to high-risk pregnant women. There is a First Nations and Inuit component of the program. The objectives of the program have been revised over the course of the program, and are now as follows:

1. To improve the adequacy of the diet of prenatal and breastfeeding First Nations and Inuit women;
2. To increase access to nutrition information, services and resources to eligible First Nations and Inuit women;
3. To increase breastfeeding support, initiative and duration;
4. To increase knowledge and skill-building opportunities for those involved in this program; and
5. To increase the number of infants fed age-appropriate foods in the first 12 months.

**Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder Program (FASD)** (federal)

The First Nations and Inuit FASD Program is a Health Canada program that has been operating since 2000. The program goals are to prevent FASD births and increase knowledge, skills and quality of life of FASD affected children, parents and families. The program funds activities that help:

1. Those possibly at risk of having a baby with FASD.
2. Parents/care-givers or families of children with FASD.
3. Identify, assess and diagnose children with FASD.
4. Provide FASD education and training.

The initiative has a health promotion and awareness component to it providing for educational workshops and forums, education in the schools, and educational and advertising material in a variety of media. The education component includes efforts to train professionals and community members to provide sensitive services and effective techniques in dealing with children who are alcohol affected, and identifying diagnostic tools and intervention supports.

**Aboriginal Healthy Babies Healthy Children** (provincial)

The Aboriginal Healthy Babies Healthy Children is a prevention and early intervention program for Aboriginal families with children aged 0-6. It began in the fall of 2000 and is administered by the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy. The goal is to assist Aboriginal families in providing the best opportunities for healthy development of children through education, family

home visiting, and coordinating/facilitating access to appropriate services. A/HBHC home visitors offer guidance and assistance to new parents, sharing their knowledge about nutrition, growth, child development, health and well-being. The program also allows for home visitors and nurses to monitor and promote healthy pregnancies and to provide expectant parents with the knowledge they will need when the baby arrives. Many of the programs offer prenatal classes, parenting classes, breastfeeding supports, and social events that allow new parents to build their knowledge while developing a community of support. The programs also link families to other community services and supports for new parents. All of the provincial territorial organizations in Ontario employ A/HBHC workers.

### **Early Years Challenge Fund (provincial)**

Ontario's Early Years Challenge Fund provides seed money for early childhood development proposals with a strong sustainability plan and parent involvement. Early years centres are located across Ontario. There are none on reserve, but they have provided training and funding to two First Nations and renovations and operating funding to one northern First Nation.

### **BEST PRACTICES**

There are some general principles and key components that are evident throughout all of the early childhood development programs, and that distinguish these First Nations programs from mainstream programs. The following offer some examples of how these principles have been put into practice.

#### **1. Community driven, demonstrating parental and community involvement.**

[National First Nations child care] study participants view the child care centre as an integral part of the community where the whole community can work together for the good of the children and everyone, including children, Elders, parents, caregivers, and community members can learn.<sup>xiv</sup>

Effective First Nations early childhood education and development programs are grounded in community and parent participation. Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve incorporates parental and community involvement through parent advisory committees as well as parent participation in program activities as described in the previous section. First Nations child care centres have also identified that it is important to have educators that are from their own community.<sup>xv</sup> Many of the early childhood development programs, such as Aboriginal Healthy Babies/Healthy Children, the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, the FASD programs and Brighter Futures work with both parents and children. Parental education, health promotion and prevention are important components of these programs.

A child care study involving Ontario First Nations key informants recommends that communities must lead the development and governance of early childhood education as well :

Government programs intended for First Nations peoples should consider:

- 1.) including communities directly in the development of their program;
- 2.) incorporating time lines that would allow communities opportunity to consult with their members in determining and defining their specific child care program; and
- 3.) including flexible opportunities for communities to define and develop administration and governance structures.<sup>xvi</sup>



## **2. Incorporate language and culture.**

Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve and most child care centres incorporate daily language activities as well as ongoing culture-based programming, as described in the previous section. In the 2002 national study on First Nations child care, Arliss Skye, supervisor of the child care centre at Six Nations of the Grand River demonstrated how even the physical environment of a First Nations child care centre must reflect the culture:

“The physical environment of child care centres should include materials that allow children to manipulate or develop their motor skills. Materials that reflect nature and our traditions, such as dolls, turtle rattles, songs, traditional clothing, dream catchers, pottery and utensil, will increase children’s knowledge and expose them to their culture and heritage<sup>xvii</sup>”.

In 2004, the Ontario Chiefs in Assembly adopted an Ontario First Nations Language Strategy Report which recommended that all present and future early learning programs for First Nations children be required to have language immersion or language mentoring as a core component.

## **3. Attending to the holistic (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual) needs of the child**

The early childhood education and development programs in existence strive to meet the holistic needs of Aboriginal children. Spiritual needs may be attended to by culture based programming that engages children and their parents in traditional teachings and practices that can enhance a spiritual sensibility. AHSOR and child care centres attend to the mental needs of children through school readiness curriculum and activities, such as those described in the previous section. Parents also have many learning opportunities related to their child’s needs. Physical needs are attended to through careful attention to age appropriate physical development for children, and to access to health care and monitoring for pregnant or nursing women and children. Parents and children often bond to early childhood development workers, and find emotional support through both peers and staff.

## **4. Ensuring a quality service**

High quality childcare is sensitive, responsive, personal, developmentally appropriate, culturally appropriate and not custodial. High quality child care is also characterized by small group sizes, well trained staff, adequate health, safety and physical environment precautions, high adult to child ratios and stable consistent caregiving.<sup>xviii</sup>

First Nations community members have identified that a high quality of service in child care settings is of primary importance. Many First Nations wish to take on their own regulatory authority, and those advocating the development of First Nations standards are in agreement that any new standards should exceed the standards and training currently offered, primarily by including a cultural component. The Assembly of First Nations *National Overview of First Nations Child Care in Canada* indicates that quality child care includes standards, regulations, licensing and accountability as well as training and the preservation of language and culture.<sup>xix</sup>

With the exception of Aboriginal Head Start, all of the early child development and education programs described here have a mainstream counterpart. The extent to which First Nations members are accessing these services is unknown.

## **WHAT DO FIRST NATIONS NEED TO REALIZE THEIR VISION**

There are many excellent First Nations delivered early childhood development programs at present. What is lacking overall is the ability to fully serve all of the families that would like to access these services, as is evident, for example, in the waiting lists for First Nations child care and in the demand for more Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve programs.

Some of the general gaps that have been identified are as follows:

The early childhood education and development programs that currently exist would benefit from a more *coordinated and integrated* approach to service delivery. (See more on this under “impediments”, below).

There is a need for *comprehensive service delivery*, which would include child care services that would address the needs of children age 0-12. This would also address the needs for infant care, respite care, seasonal and part-time needs.<sup>xx</sup>

*Northern communities* are not receiving service to the same extent of as southern communities. The Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program is available in ninety-one First Nations’ communities; forty-two of the forty-three communities who do not access the program are in the north. The majority of communities without a kindergarten program (forty-seven out of sixty-two) are northern communities. Seventy-one of the eighty Ontario First Nations not accessing the First Nations/Inuit Child Care Initiative are in the north. And of the eighty-two Ontario First Nations without day care, seventy-three are in the north.<sup>xxi</sup>

First Nations child care centres are limited in their ability to serve *children with special needs*, as identified in the national First Nations child care study:

Fiscal, human and environmental resources already stretched to the limit for delivering basic child care services become ever more stretched when attempting to deliver services in communities where the number of children with fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) or fetal alcohol effect (FAE) is high, or where the levels of unemployment and dependence on social assistance has reached epidemic levels. In many cases children with special needs simply do not get service because the cost associated with this type of specialized care is too prohibitive for many First Nations child care administrations.<sup>xxii</sup>

Some AHSOR programs have identified the need to have special needs teachers within each program to work individually with special needs children. The most recent Ontario AHSOR progress report (2002/2003) indicates that 10% of the children enrolled in the program have special needs. The Ontario Indian Social Services Council has noted that it is difficult to access professional services in a timely manner, and that funding for these services is inadequate.<sup>xxiii</sup>

There is a need for *research specific to First Nations early childhood development* to support the development of programs, services and strategies to support the distinct needs of First Nations children. The Ontario community mapping exercise reports “this... exercise has raised a concern that research done thus far around early childhood development is not reflective of Indigenous reality in terms of healthy child development within Indigenous communities, languages, cultural beliefs and values.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

Following on this, there is a need for first Nations to *define early childhood development* for themselves.

Gaps that are particular to child day care centres and AHSOR are as follows:

### **Child/Day Care Centres**

The 1995 Ontario Indian Social Services Council Child Care Consultation<sup>xxv</sup> report identifies a number of key areas of concern for First Nations day cares in the province:

#### *Programming issues:*

- need human resources and curriculum development for culture-based programming
- need to look at issue of serving nutritional food
- need resource centres for parents, locally and regionally
- need coordination for transportation

#### *Training Issues:*

- community members need access to culture-based, ongoing training that is accessible
- cross-cultural training is needed for MCFCS area office staff as well as non-Native staff in First Nations day cares.

#### *Staffing Issues*

- need trained, qualified staff from the communities; First Nations should determine who is qualified to work in their day care
- staff wages are lower than municipalities; low salaries create high turnover
- lack of funding for replacement staff prevents workers from taking time out for training or sick days
- staff child ratios are too high
- appropriate standards for supervisors are needed.

#### *Licensing Requirement Issues:*

- need for more clarity re what is required for a license
- First Nations often lack adequate infrastructure to meet the standards
- few First Nations have training or capacity to provide licensed home care

#### *Client Issues*

- special needs children are not served due to lack of resources
- more school aged programs are needed along with flexible standards

#### *Funding Issues*

- supervisors are expected to be administrators without proper supports and on top of also working in the classroom
- there are no capital funds for first nations day cares (see below)

#### *Professional Development Issues*

- need for a Native child care association

### **Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve**

First Nations in Ontario recognize the value of AHSOR and have questioned why there are only fifteen programs in the province, when the need for such a program is so widespread. They recommend the expansion of AHSOR in Ontario to support projects in as many First Nations communities as possible.

Among the existing AHSOR programs, the key challenges, issues of concern and needs include the following:

- transportation difficulties
- lack of physical space
- limited space in the program
- lack of capital dollars

- limited program hours
- lack of full-time language instructors
- requirement for special needs teachers and resources
- requirement for support groups
- lack of training and information
- requirement for additional programs and services (music, theatre and dance)
- program enhancement through linkages, training, professional development, curriculum development and resources
- early identification of developmental delays
- home based programs
- community and parent involvement
- onerous reporting requirements
- linkages with other AHSOR programs

AHSOR programs that are located in remote communities have identified problems that are specific to them, including a lack of skilled workers, housing and child development stresses, lack of employment, lack of recreational facilities, lack of transportation, lack of professional development and training opportunities, and that some communities are only accessible by air transportation.

In addition to the gaps identified above, some of the overriding impediments to service include:

### **1. Lack of coordination of service**

“Early childhood programs are variously defined as child care to support parental employment; as mental health or prevention initiatives to enhance the life chances of children at risk; and as cultural programs to reinforce cultural identity and educational programs to foster intellectual achievement. We consider these distinctions irrational. Aboriginal parents and educators consistently press for holistic programs that address the physical, intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual development of children”.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has identified a need for coordinated, holistic service delivery in the area of early childhood development and education. They point out that “the lack of co-ordination between programs and the maze of regulations governing them constitute an impediment to rational planning and equitable access to services at the community level.”<sup>xxvii</sup>

The Ontario First Nations Community Mapping and Environmental Scan of Early Childhood Development notes that there are inconsistencies in the data maintained by federal and provincial programs. They also point out that there is no central place to locate information about the various federal and provincial programs.<sup>xxviii</sup>

First Nations in Ontario have identified a need for coordinating areas of responsibility between all levels of government (federal, provincial and First Nations), noting that they need to have input into national processes that impact on regional implementation.

### **2. Need for consistent reporting, monitoring and evaluation**

Ontario First Nations have also called for more consistent monitoring and reporting requirements for early childhood development programs. Evaluations need to be consistent, First Nations driven and built with front-line input.

First Nations staff at the community and regional levels are hampered by overloaded work schedules which leave little time for reflecting, planning or strategizing around improving the current system of early childhood development.<sup>xxix</sup>

### **3. Jurisdictional issues**

These issues are discussed below, in the section dealing with the roles and obligations of various governments.

### **4. Lack of capital and operation and maintenance funding**

See below in section on costing.

### **5. Culture-based training and curriculum**

Many communities are not able to employ their members as early childhood educators because they have not had access to training. First Nations people need to have training that is accessible and culturally relevant. The Assembly of First Nations has identified that “First Nation specific training must be developed and delivered to ensure there are sufficient child care providers who are able to meet the needs of First Nations children and their parents.” They add, “Culture specific curricula is also required.”<sup>xxx</sup> (The Anishinabek Education Institute has been cited as a successful model of ECE training delivered directly to First Nations communities via distance education.)

## **COSTS**

In 2003-2004, First Nations early childhood development funding in Ontario totaled approximately \$57 million. The bulk of this was spent on licensed child day care and Brighter Futures projects.

Current spending levels for all the programs are listed below. Costing formulas have only been provided for the two key early childhood education delivery mechanisms: child day cares and Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve. A community by community costing exercise would be necessary to determine the overall needs of early childhood education and development.

### **Child Day Care (provincial)**

Funding levels for the 52 day care centres that were in existence in 2003 totaled \$15.2 million. This averaged out to roughly \$292,300 per First Nation, with the actuals varying from \$15,000 at Kasabonika to \$1,243,343 at Six Nations. These costs reflect service to 3,018 children.

Funding for First Nations day care in Ontario has been cost-shared by the province since the implementation of the 1965 Indian Welfare Agreement. Further funds have been made available through the 2000 HRSD First Nations/Inuit Child Care Initiative. This Initiative provides \$4.4 million annually through the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreements. It has supported the enhancement and enrichment of existing day cares. The Ontario Chiefs allocated 1.2 million of the HRSD funds to capital expenses to support the creation of five new day cares, with the capacity to serve a maximum of twenty-four children each.

Ontario First Nations have costed day care expansion at \$6,000 per space. This figure does not include capital expenses, for which there is a great need.

The Chiefs of Ontario are presently conducting a needs assessment on First Nations child care. Their survey will determine capital needs as well as space requirements. The assessment is

expected to be complete by July 2004, and will outline more specific and up to date cost projections.

**Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve (federal)**

In 2002/2003, FNIHB (Health Canada) provided approximately \$4.7 million to the fifteen AHSOR programs in Ontario. This makes for an average of \$312,000 per site. The program expects an expansion in 2004/2005, and Ontario First Nations anticipate an increase of \$2.5 million.

In the original call for proposals, sixty-nine First Nations applied for a program, representing ninety First Nations. Only fifteen were funded. This indicates a huge gap in terms of need. First Nations Head Start is one of the least available early childhood development programs on reserve in Ontario. This is unfortunate as its mandate directly addresses early childhood development.

AHSOR has not used a formula for Ontario projects. The funding was proposal driven and funds were allocated based on the budgets within the proposals. AHSOR could only fund fifteen projects based on the proposal budgets. AHSOR is currently establishing funding policies for the current expansion.

**Brighter Futures (federal)**

A total of 128 First Nations in Ontario received \$7.8 million in 2002/2003. Brighter Futures operates under a mainly per-capita formula, but does require proposals. One concern with being formula driven rather than needs-based is that this can hamper funding access for communities with higher need and less human resources to do proposal development. Ontario First Nations point out that funding should be needs based, rather than proposal driven.

Approximately 33 First Nations receive funding under transfer agreements.

**Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) (federal)**

There are currently 92 CPNP projects serving 125 First Nations in Ontario, receiving a total of \$1.4 million. This funding level averages out to only \$11,200 per community, which does not even cover a part time position.

The allocation formula for CPNP considers the number of women of childbearing age in each community and their degree of isolation.

**FASD Program (federal)**

\$1.9 million has been allocated for Ontario for the fiscal year of 2004/2005. First Nations must apply under the call for proposals. Community asset mapping is the priority in this fiscal year.

**National Child Benefit Reinvestment Fund (federal)**

Ontario First Nations were allocated \$8 million for the 2001/2002 fiscal year. In the 2002/2003 fiscal year, \$8.1 million was allocated for applications for NCB programs servicing 1,523 families, including 3,097 children under the age of 18.

**Aboriginal Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Development (FASD) & Aboriginal Child Nutrition Programs (provincial)**

Twenty-two Aboriginal projects receive \$4.35 million annually. Projects are run through Aboriginal Health Access Centres, PTOs, tribal health authorities, independent First Nations and other Aboriginal health service providers. A total of \$20 million has been allocated over a five year period, to run from 2001/2002 to 2005/2006.

**Aboriginal Healthy Babies Healthy Children** (provincial)

The total A/HBHC allocation for the province was \$6.7 million starting in 2000 and moving to \$7.4 million in 2004/05, minus 10% for the remoteness factor. The 10% is divided equally among 57.5 remote communities (identified per agreed upon criteria). The remaining 90% of the Total Program Allocation is divided equally among On Reserve (45%) and Off Reserve (45%) signatories. The total On Reserve share (45%) is divided equally (50%) to establish: (i) a "base" allocation that is shared equally by 134 First Nations; and (ii) a per capita allocation based on INAC August 2000 data as confirmed by the PTOs in 2000.

**Early Years** (provincial)

The total funding for Aboriginal on and off reserve over a three year period was \$5.4 million. Twenty nine First Nations received \$3.8 million of this funding. There is no new funding in the 2004/2005 fiscal year.

**RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO COST****1. Need for capital as well as operation and maintenance funding**

Capital funds for on reserve day care in Ontario has long been identified as a need. First Nations have not been able to access capital dollars under the 1965 Indian Welfare Agreement since 1975. Many of the First Nations day cares in Ontario were built prior to 1975, and are becoming a concern in terms of health and safety. In general, Ontario First Nations have reported their concern at having to adhere to provincial standards for child care centres, but have not been adequately funded to meet these standards.

The needs are currently being identified through surveys that have gone out to First Nations across Ontario. Ontario First Nations' chiefs stipulate that the federal government must recognize its fiduciary responsibility to First Nations children, and fully invest in the needs that are identified in the survey.

**2. Need for long term and or ongoing funding**

Early childhood programs for Aboriginal people are funded predominantly as special projects of limited duration... Stop-and-start program support is wasteful of resources and community effort and demoralizing to Aboriginal people. It is also difficult to acquire or construct appropriate facilities without secure funding.<sup>xxxii</sup>

It is difficult to build a holistic and comprehensive system for First Nations early childhood development when so much of the work is project or program based, with timeframes from one to three or five years. This does not allow for long term planning or consistent results.

**3. Need for funding that reflects regional need**

First Nations in Ontario question why they only received seven percent of the federal First Nations/Inuit Child Care Initiative funding when they represent seventeen percent of the on-reserve population under six years of age. First Nations in Ontario note that they have been successfully using funding formulas that factor in population levels, remoteness and other variables. They prefer an equitable, formula-based approach to regional funding.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

#### 4. Need to address wage inequities

First Nations child care workers have low wages, and some report being the lowest paid workers in their community. There is no equity with municipal day care workers. The province does provide some redress through pay equity, but these arrangements are negotiated individually, and no information is available regarding the extent to which this process is helping First Nations day care workers to address wage inequities. Professional development and travel budgets are often depleted to augment staff salaries.

### **ROLES AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL AND FIRST NATIONS GOVERNMENTS**

Current child care, education and development services for pre-school children are linked to a number of areas, including education, health, social services and employment and training. For this reason, First Nations early childhood education and development fall within the purview of both federal and provincial authorities. The existing array of programs come from Health Canada (FNIHB), INAC and HRSD federally as well as from the provincial Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. First Nations administer these early childhood education and development services within the criteria, regulations and legislation that correspond to each program.

First Nations child care centres in Ontario must be licensed and must follow the regulations defined in the province's *Day Nurseries Act*. All of the Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve programs in Ontario are provincially licensed, with the exception of the Nishtum Kikinoamatowin Aboriginal Headstart, which follows a community based specific AHSOR standard, and where all children are accompanied by their parents. The Deer Lake First Nations Ga Wiianiniiganiitamagoyak Children Centre also follows a community based specific AHSOR standard in addition to being provincially licensed.

The question of who is responsible for service to First Nations pre-school children has been subject of much debate over the years, with the federal and provincial governments each arguing that the other has a responsibility to provide services to children on reserve. The provinces and territories generally have jurisdiction over child day cares, yet the federal government has fiduciary responsibility for First Nations.

The federal government has not recognized First Nations early childhood education (child care) as their responsibility, as in the case of all other levels of First Nations education. First Nations have put forth the argument that the federal government should assume responsibility for child care services because it has a constitutional and legal responsibility for First Nations children:

The federal government has failed to take a lead role in ensuring that services for children in First Nations communities are accessible, affordable and culturally relevant. Moreover, by refusing to accept constitutional and legal responsibility for First Nations children, the federal government has perpetuated the long standing jurisdictional dispute between federal and provincial governments over who is responsible for First Nations children.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

First Nations see child care as an Aboriginal right, and argue that the ability to exercise law making authority in this area is an inherent right:

These First Nations argue that they have made laws related to the care of children for years, and the ability to continue to make these laws are protected as an Aboriginal right



in section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. This argument raises the issue of whether government (federal and provincial) has extinguished the Aboriginal right to make child care laws because of laws passed pursuant to the widely accepted constitutional division of powers, where the provincial governments are empowered to make laws<sup>xxxiv</sup>

At this point, however, First Nations child care remains under the legislative authority of the provinces, while other early childhood development programs are limited to program and project based funding.

Child care on reserve has been limited because there has been no recognition of federal responsibility. Ontario is unique among provinces in that Ontario First Nations have had access to child care funding through the 1965 Indian Welfare Agreement. Through this cost-sharing agreement, the province has been able to extend certain social services (including child day care) to Indians on reserve, and to get reimbursed by the federal government for the bulk of the costs.

Unfortunately, the current system enables the province and the federal government to shirk responsibility related to early childhood development and education. The 2001 First Nations national study on child care recommended that:

“A national First Nations child care agenda be established that clearly identifies the federal government has exercised the constitutional authority and responsibility bestowed on it and thereby eliminating the federal/provincial dispute over who is responsible for First Nations child care.”<sup>xxxv</sup>

A national agenda would ensure that First Nations early child education and development would be adequately resourced, and that First Nations could assume full authority and control over service delivery of First Nations child care. This could include assuming legislative authority over child care services, as follows:

The scope of First Nations authority in child care is viewed as all encompassing, including licensing, monitoring, programming, accreditation of caregivers, establishing appropriate caregiver/child ratios, setting facility standards, and overall standards for the care of children.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

With regard to creating a relationship between all parties to ensure success in First Nations early childhood education, there is a need for a coordinated and consistent approach to providing services. Within the child care arena alone, there are numerous administrative and jurisdictional processes to follow:

Current federal programs lack coordination and consistent approaches to quality services for First Nations children. Programs designed for First Nations children are housed in different ministry offices... each maintain distinct objectives, and have completely separate and unique funding formulas and application processes. As a result First Nation communities developing child care services are faced with numerous bureaucracies.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

The work that is currently underway with the Early Childhood Development Regional Advisory Committee will allow First Nations in Ontario to define the type of coordinated and integrated system that they would like to see in the future. The Committee is now conducting a round of discussions with First Nations in the province with the following intent:

1. To give First Nations the opportunity to define early childhood development options for federal early childhood development programming.
2. To focus on ways of better coordinating early childhood development programs within First Nations communities and between federal departments.

3. To encourage First Nations to identify early childhood development strengths and resources to build on in further shaping of early childhood development programming.

This work will provide a step towards addressing the problems that arise from having a fragmented system of services for early childhood development. The question of jurisdiction will be an inevitable part of this discussion, and these efforts will hopefully move First Nations in Ontario further ahead towards a coordinated and comprehensive early childhood education and development system.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following preliminary recommendations have evolved from the discussion outlined in this paper:

1. **[That] First Nations in Ontario press for a national child care agenda that will substantiate the federal responsibility for the education of First Nations children.**

The proposed national child care agenda for First Nations children would ensure that all First Nations families in Ontario have access to child care that is adequately resourced and operating under First Nations authority.

2. **[That] First Nations in Ontario advocate for a full range of early childhood education and development programs that respond to the needs identified by communities.**

Early childhood development in a First Nations context involves more than a single program or model. First Nations in Ontario have identified that they require a range of programs that address the learning and developmental needs of children aged 0-6. These programs include supports, learning opportunities and resources for parents and communities as well.

3. **First Nations pursue early childhood education and development funding that is long term, reflective of need, and based in the federal fiduciary responsibility to First Nations children.**

Early childhood development and education programs must respond to the needs identified by communities, and be long term to ensure consistent service delivery. The needs of the Ontario Region First Nation population must be recognized, as should those of northern communities. Communities have also identified populations of special needs children who are not being served because of insufficient funding. New budgets must take into account the wage inequities that have been identified by early childhood educators.

4. **[That] First Nations in Ontario support the research of the Early Childhood Development Regional Advisory Committee towards developing integrated and coordinated early childhood development and education on reserve.**

The Early Childhood Development Regional Advisory Committee is now engaged in a community mapping exercise with First Nations across Ontario to establish how to better integrate and coordinate early childhood development programming on reserve. This exercise will

allow for making unique plans at the individual community level or among groups of communities.

**5. First Nations in Ontario complete needs assessments for child care on reserve and begin work on costing exercises and needs identification for all programs through the early childhood development community mapping exercises.**

First Nations in Ontario need more information on needs and costing for an integrated and comprehensive early childhood education and development system. First Nations must also be adequately resourced to conduct ongoing needs assessments as well as evaluations that are community driven.

**6. First Nations in Ontario be given the resources to develop language and culture based curriculum and training in the area of early childhood education and development.**

There is a great need for language and culture-based curriculum development and training for early childhood educators, and for culture-based materials for the early years.

**7. First Nations in Ontario be provided the resources to sponsor further research to define early childhood development in an Ontario First Nations context.**

In order to plan and develop early childhood education programs, First Nations people need research that is reflective of Indigenous realities and cultures. There is very little of this type of research currently available, and even less that speaks to the realities of First Nations children and communities in Ontario.

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<sup>i</sup> *Ontario First Nations Early Childhood Development on Reserve, Facilitator's Guide*. Brantford: Chiefs of Ontario, 2004.

<sup>ii</sup> Dr. Rose-Alma J. McDonald, *Early Childhood Development and First Nations Children*, Ottawa, Ont.: Assembly of First Nations Social Development Secretariat, 2001; Margo Greenwood and Sarah Deleeuw, *A Report to the Assembly of First Nations Early Childhood Development National Discussion*, Ottawa, Ont.: Assembly of First Nations, 2003; Chiefs of Ontario, *Ontario First Nations Early Childhood Development: Literature Review and Analysis*. Toronto, Ont.: Chiefs of Ontario, 2003.

<sup>iii</sup> *ibid.*, p. 447-448.

<sup>iv</sup> Macdonald, 2001.

<sup>v</sup> *ibid.*, p. 451.

<sup>vi</sup> Chiefs of Ontario, *Ontario First Nations Early Childhood Development Community Mapping and Environmental Scan*. Toronto, Ont.: Chiefs of Ontario, 2003.

<sup>vii</sup> <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnihb-dgspni/fnihb/cp/ahsor/>

<sup>viii</sup> McDonald/AFN Social Development Secretariat, 2001; Assembly of First Nations, *Report of the National Inquiry into First Nations Child Care*, Ottawa, Ont.: Assembly of First Nations, 1989; Margo Greenwood and Perry Shawana, *Whispered Gently Through Time: First Nations Quality Child Care: A National Study*. Ottawa, Ont.: Health Canada, 2001.

<sup>ix</sup> RCAP, *ibid.*

<sup>x</sup> Chiefs of Ontario, *Ontario First Nations early Childhood Development Community Mapping and Environmental Scan*, Toronto, Ont.: Chiefs of Ontario, 2003.

<sup>xi</sup> [www.chilcareontario.org](http://www.chilcareontario.org)

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- <sup>xii</sup> McDonald, 2001.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Health Canada. *Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve, 2000-2001 Annual Report*. Ottawa: Health Canada, 2003: p. 3.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Greenwood and Shawana, p. 99
- <sup>xv</sup> *ibid.* , p.101.
- <sup>xvi</sup> *ibid.*, p. 97.
- <sup>xvii</sup> *ibid.*, p. 83.
- <sup>xviii</sup> McDonald, p. 6.
- <sup>xix</sup> Assembly of First Nations, *National Overview of First Nations Child Care in Canada*. Ottawa, Ont.: Assembly of First Nations, 1995.
- <sup>xx</sup> Assembly of First Nations, *Report of the National Inquiry Into First Nations Child Care*. Ottawa, Ont.: Assembly of First Nations, 1989.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Chiefs of Ontario, *Ontario First Nations Early Childhood Development Community Mapping and Environmental Scan*, p. 32-33.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Greenwood and Shawana, p. 105.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Ontario Indian Social Services Council, *First Nations in Ontario: Child Care Consultation, Summary and Recommendations*. Toronto, Ont.: Chiefs of Ontario, 1995
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Chiefs of Ontario, *Ontario First Nations Early Childhood Development Community Mapping and Environmental Scan*, p. 38.
- <sup>xxv</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>xxvi</sup> RCAP, p. 452.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Chiefs of Ontario, *Ontario First Nations Early Childhood Development Community Mapping and Environmental Scan*, p. 35
- <sup>xxix</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>xxx</sup> McDonald, p. 35.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> *ibid.* p. 453.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Chiefs of Ontario, *Ontario First Nations Early Childhood Development Community Mapping and Environmental Scan*, p. 39.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Greenwood and Shawana, p. 113.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> *ibid.* 114.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> *ibid.* 121
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> *ibid.* 115
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> *ibid.* 106