

How do educators and perceptions of role and policies influence healthy eating-active living environments for preschool children in child care ^[1]

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Abstract

The number of preschool children (ages 2-5 years) in child care in Canada has been increasing for the last 15 years. The preschool years represent an optimal phase for growth and development, so establishing healthy eating and physical activity behaviours is important. Child care educators have a unique opportunity to influence, promote and support the development of these healthy lifestyle behaviours.

An exploratory focused ethnography case study design was used to understand the perceptions and influence child care educators have regarding their role in promoting healthy eating and physical activity to preschool children in child care centres, including their knowledge of the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth (ANGCY). Three child care centres in the Edmonton, Alberta area were chosen (1 high performing case and 2 reference cases). Data were collected through direct observation of meal and play times, key informant interviews, and researcher recorded field notes. Data analysis was guided by the principles of ethnography through coding, categorizing and identifying common themes. Overall, . Furthermore, results indicated child care educator behaviours and caregiving styles have an important role in shaping the healthy environment and children`s eating behaviours.

These findings address gaps in the literature for establishing the influence and the role child care educators have on creating healthy eating and active living environments for preschool children in child care. These findings also address the need for other means of knowledge translation regarding the ANGCY to optimize awareness and uptake, and indicate new resources and training for child care educators that may be required. Finally, these data will inform Alberta Health Services on further development of healthy lifestyle policy intervention and evaluation within child care centres.

Region: Alberta ^[3]

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