

Deaf childhoods and inclusive early childhood education and care ^[1]

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Excerpt from Introduction

On April 22, 2021, the Canadian Government released a budget that puts forward funding for a national \$10 per day childcare plan. This is a significant accomplishment for childcare advocates who have been fighting for a universal system for years. It is significant to remark that advocates have long called for the system to be inclusive and accessible. The government outlined these principles in the 2017 Multilateral Early Learning and Childcare Framework, stating that childcare should be high-quality; accessible, affordable and flexible; and inclusive (Government of Canada, 2017). The budget outlines funding that has very few provisions to ensure these principles are enacted. In this budget, the only reference to accessibility in childcare is funding to improve physical accessibility in up to 400 childcare centres. In Ontario alone, there are more than 5,565 centres (Government of Ontario, 2020). Physical accessibility does not account for the many other aspects of access that are lacking in childcare in Canada. In this brief, we consider access and quality from the standpoint of deaf and hard of hearing children and their families. The IECSS project focuses on disability in childhood. However, 21 participants identified that their children are deaf or hard of hearing (for some, it is temporary). In addition, almost all participants across our larger sample of 136 families have interacted with systems of infant hearing screening.

This brief draws on the experience of IECSS participants, who have been interviewed between 1 and 6 times over the course of the longitudinal study. It is critical to recognize that when deaf and hard of hearing children do not have access to a language they understand, they can experience barriers to communication with caregivers and to inclusion (Kushalnagar et al., 2020). These barriers are tied to language deprivation, or the persistent lack of access to a natural language in early childhood, which impacts cognitive development (Hall et al., 2018; Spellun & Kushalnagar, 2018). Young deaf children's adverse childhood communication experiences related to ongoing exclusion from family communication directly contribute to gaps in social and academic development and to psychological distress (Kushalnagar et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2017). In contrast, when young deaf children and their families have access to national sign languages, such as American Sign Language (ASL), Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ), and Indigenous sign languages, children have age-appropriate language development and healthy development across all domains (Caselli et al., 2021; Wilkinson & Morford, 2020).

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: special needs ^[4]

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