

Re-envisioning an early years system of care towards equity in Canada: A critical, rapid review ^[1]

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Abstract

Background: Many children in high-income countries, including Canada, experience unjust and preventable health inequities as a result of social and structural forces that are beyond their families' immediate environment and control. In this context, early years programs, as a key population health initiative, have the potential to play a critical role in fostering family and child wellbeing. **Methods:** Informed by intersectionality, this rapid literature review captured a broad range of international, transdisciplinary literature in order to identify promising approaches for orienting early years systems of care towards equity in Canada. **Results:** Findings point to the need for a comprehensive, integrated and socially responsive early years system that has top-down political vision, leadership and accountability and bottom-up community-driven tailoring with an explicit focus on health promotion and maternal, family and community wellness using relational approaches. **Conclusions:** Advancing child health equity in wealthy countries requires structural government-level changes that support cross-ministerial and intersectoral alliances. Employing intersectionality in this rapid review promotes contextualized and nuanced understandings of what is needed in order to advance a responsive, comprehensive and quality early years system of equity-oriented care. Further research is needed to prevent child health inequities that are disproportionately experienced by Indigenous and racialized children in wealthy countries such as Canada. Policy and research recommendations that have relevance for high-income countries in diverse global contexts are discussed.

Region: Canada ^[4]

Tags: indigenous early learning and child care ^[5]

programs ^[6]

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