

# **WHERE TO FROM HERE?: BUILDING A FIRST NATIONS EARLY CHILDHOOD STRATEGY**

**A Dialogue Initiative Undertaken by  
The Assembly of First Nations**

**DISCUSSION PAPER**

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## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this document is to provide you, the participant in a dialogue about Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (AECD), both with some background and history on AECD in Canada, including the development of government policies and funding initiatives and to then lead you into a series of questions which we are asking your input on. Once you have read the introduction and background, including two tables that summarize documents exploring the integration of First Nations Early Childhood programs and services and series of potential challenges and constraints associated with a single window approach of AECD, please begin to consider the questions which you will find on the last page of this document. We value your input!

## **1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

*Children are not our possessions, they are gifts to us. This is the belief of our people. Children must be restored to their place, the heart of the community and in doing so restore our communities to a place of power and self-sufficiency (Joint First Nations Inuit Federal Child Care Working Group, 1995, p.9).*

### **Early Childhood Development (ECD) Strategy**

With the announcement of the Early Childhood Development Agreement in 2000 came a commitment of 2.2 billion dollars to support Canadian families and communities in their efforts to ensure the best possible future for their children. Funding for Aboriginal peoples was conspicuously missing. This was followed by a 2002 announcement of \$320 million over the next five years with an ongoing investment of \$65 million per year for a strategy to support the early childhood development of Aboriginal children. This announcement and subsequent strategy was to complement the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Agreement reached by the First Ministers in September, 2000 and is also in keeping with the federal government's commitments made in the January 2001 and September 2002 Speeches from the Throne.

The Early Childhood Development Strategy was intended to identify ways in which programming can more effectively meet the needs of the communities it serves. To guide this strategy the federal government established a number of action groups, one of those groups is the ECD Interdepartmental Working Group. This group is made up of members from Health



Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) as well as the five National Aboriginal Organizations. The three federal ministries represented on this working group have collaboratively undertaken several initiatives including: an environmental scan and survey lead by HRDC, implementation pilot projects lead by INAC and a National Dialogue lead by Health Canada. Concepts of coordination, cooperation, collaboration, integration and consolidation have underscored the federal government's shift in policy and program implementation strategies.

In addition to their own National Dialogue, Health Canada invited the National Aboriginal Organizations to submit proposals for their own process. The objective of the Aboriginal dialogue was to seek information from communities about possibilities and best options for informing how federal government programs can work together to more effectively deliver ECD programming and funding.

Part of the Assembly of First Nations' national dialogue undertaken on December 16, 2003 focused on a 'single window' approach. There were mixed sentiments voiced by the participants underscored by a need for more time to understand and define the approach from a First Nations place as well as the need for clarity around government's definition of a 'single window' approach.

## **Early Learning and Child Care**

At the same time as Early Childhood Development consultations were being undertaken, the federal, provincial, and territorial governments identified early learning and child care as a shared priority as evidenced in the agreed upon shared objectives and principles in the *Multilateral Framework for Early Learning and Child Care* (2003). Under the Multilateral Framework, the Government of Canada is transferring \$1.05 billion over five years, and provincial and territorial governments have begun to make new investments to improve the availability and affordability of quality early learning and child care for children under age 6.

The October 5, 2004 Speech from the Throne confirmed the Government of Canada's commitment to work with provinces and territories on the development of a national vision to guide the development of ELCC, based on the four principles of quality, universally inclusive, accessible and developmental (QUAD). In moving forward, the Government of Canada is



seeking agreement on an approach that focuses on results, builds on best practices, reports to Canadians on progress. As such, stronger accountability is a key element of a new agreement.

At their November 2, 2004 meeting, FPT Ministers responsible for Social Services recognized the critical need to engage First Nations leadership in discussions about ELCC implementation. In cooperation with Health Canada (HC), Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), Social Development Canada (SDC) is leading an engagement strategy on Aboriginal ELCC. Organizations are being asked to consider how the 'QUAD' principles will be contextualized in Aboriginal communities.

Part of our work for this session will be to examine whether or not the QUAD principles are appropriate in First Nations communities and if not how can they be changed or added to. To add to our understanding of what has been done to date on the topic of integration of First Nations early childhood programs and services including a 'single window' approach an overview of First Nations specific documents are offered as further background.

## **2. AN OVERVIEW OF WORKS FOCUSING ON THE INTEGRATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES**

This section of the paper focuses on the work that has already been undertaken to explore and articulate the integration of early childhood development (ECD) programs and services in First Nations communities. It is designed to provide us with further information about integration, a single window approach, principles and considerations for implementation including potential benefits, challenges and barriers.

### **Over- Arching Principles For Consideration In The Development of an ECD Single Window Approach:**

1. First Nations child care programs are an integral part of self-government and self-sufficiency (Greenwood & De Leeuw, 2004);
2. Any development of ECD policy and implementation of that policy that impacts current program delivery will require appropriate, substantive consultation that fulfills First Nation



standards with regard to representation, inclusion of community members, and opportunity for all First Nations to participate (Greenwood & De Leeuw, 2004);

3. Federal, provincial, and territorial governments must take the input and policy recommendations of First Nations into serious consideration, even if the research and data collection are cursory because of short time frames, and because the long term research providing hard data on Aboriginal issues has been notoriously lacking (Noonan & Associates, 2002);
4. In some provinces and territories First Nations are not willing to collaborate on provincial/territorial and federal programs and services. This position is a challenge in overcoming greater understanding of varying government roles and how they could complement one another. Instead, there is fundamental mistrust and suspension of First Nations starting down this path of relations (Noonan & Associates, 2002);
5. Program development and implementation must be built upon, and reflect in implementation, the values and beliefs of First Nations peoples and must also be developed, controlled by, and be reflective of First Nations communities (Greenwood & De Leeuw, 2004);
6. First Nations cultures and values will define child care curricula and evaluation, and accountability criteria (Greenwood & De Leeuw, 2004);
7. Flexibility is needed in order to honour and preserve diversity between First Nations communities and a broad range of community needs and processes (Greenwood & De Leeuw, 2004);
8. Three levels of government – First Nations, provincial, and federal governments, where appropriate, will collaboratively develop policies reporting practices, and data management systems (Greenwood & De Leeuw, 2004);
9. There is a need for sustained and adequate resources inclusive of capital development, administrative support, and program implementation (Greenwood & De Leeuw, 2004);  
and



10. Above all, integration of services must enhance not diminish existing programs and be truly effective in creating effective infrastructures and processes for communication, administration, and evaluation (Greenwood & De Leeuw, 2004).



## Documents Exploring the Integration of First Nations Early Childhood Programs and Services

	Jurisdiction	Funding	Accountability
McDonald (2001) <i>Early Childhood Development and First Nations Children</i>	Licensing and monitoring under First Nations' jurisdiction	Long-term, stable, fair & equitably distributed Funding must be flexible to meet diverse needs of First Nation communities. Resources needed for children with special needs, Resources needed for proper facilities, including maintenance and operation.	
Anne Noonan and Associates (2002) <i>Policy Considerations for the Proposed Integration of Children's Services for First Nations</i>	Licensing and monitoring under First Nations' jurisdiction	Recognize that First Nations communities have limited fund raising capacity to support funding gaps. Long-term, stable, fair & equitably distributed Flexible and meet diverse needs of First Nations communities. Resources needed for proper facilities and for children with special needs.	Framework different than mainstream- must acknowledge what First Nation communities consider success.
Morgan and McGettigan (1999) <i>Integration of Services: From Concept to Reality</i>	Self-governance is essential, including the structures and ability to develop, implement, and enforce policy and laws and to delegate, link and transfer with other governments. Process is required for resolving conflicts between laws of different jurisdictions. Each service provider will need to be able to develop and implement standards for building codes, employees, etc.	Funding mechanism required for capital costs and operational costs.	Each service provider needs accountability system to a political body. Each program will require a process for evaluating the effectiveness of programs meeting their goals.
Greenwood and de Leeuw (2004) <i>A Report of the Assembly of First Nations Early Childhood Development National Discussion</i>	Integration cannot be used to devolve the responsibility the federal government has towards First Nations, particularly with regard to early childhood development.	Change in service delivery is accompanied by increased cost and resource stress: consequently, funding is needed for training and capacity building. Flexible funding regimes and strategies to better support community needs, including ability to carry over yearly funding. Increased funding for children with special needs.	Evaluation criteria should focus on success rather than failure. Reporting forms are continually changing. There should be common reporting templates for all the federal ECD programs. Changing reporting requirements need to be done in the best interest of community, not solely for the benefit of government and bureaucracy. There is a need for reciprocal reporting and transparency.
James (2003) cited in <i>BC First Nations Children: Our Families, Our Communities, Our Future</i>			



## Documents Exploring the Integration of First Nations Early Childhood Programs and Services (cont'd)

	Research	Administration	Training	Implementation
McDonald (2001) <i>Early Childhood Development and First Nations Children</i>			First Nation & Culturally specific training	
Anne Noonan and Associates (2002) <i>Policy Considerations for the Proposed Integration of Children's Services for First Nations</i>	Research must be done under the ownership, control, and access of First Nations. Fill research gaps for: - First Nation perspective of successful programming and funding. - identifying cause for actual problems or confusion in accountability criteria.	Consistency with greater flexibility More funding needed for administrative needs.	First Nation & Culturally specific training	Existing agreements must be honored. Programming must be First Nations and community driven. Traditional components must be integrated through Elder participation. New policy cannot ignore issues of First Nations member who live off-reserve.
Morgan and McGettigan (1999) <i>Integration of Services: From Concept to Reality</i>	Each service provider will be required to conduct research and develop new culturally-appropriate programs. First Nations need to have access to information and data. First Nations need to have input into the design of information collection initiatives.	Administrative support needed for program areas.	On-going mechanisms needed to ensure service providers can hire skilled people from among the First Nations' citizens.	Each service provider needs ability to contract with funder, employees, etc.
Greenwood and de Leeuw (2004) <i>A Report of the Assembly of First Nations Early Childhood Development National Discussion</i>	There is a need to establish baseline statistics and demographic information: this must not be a top down endeavor but rather should be designed, implemented, and ultimately owned by First Nations communities.	Increased communication clarity between and among programs and governments.	Support and funding to build administrative capacity at the community level, including training and educations.	Integration must ensure equal access to programs, and in order for integration to occur, money and resources must be allocated to local communities at the local level. Community and parent involvement in all levels of discussion regarding any facet of First Nations and early childhood development. Betterment of communications between and within governments and ministries and strengthen communication between government and First Nations.
James (2003) cited in <i>BC First Nations Children: Our Families, Our Communities, Our Future</i>				Holistic service delivery that reflects an Aboriginal philosophy and way of life. Successful partnerships are built upon the following factors: 1) a history of collaboration, 2) recognition of need, 3) responsibility for the problem and the solution, 4) scarcity of resources, 5) competition for clients, 6) complex problems, 7) failure of existing efforts to address the issue, and 8) viewing collaboration as important and compelling.



## Constraints and Challenges:

Challenges include:

1. disparity in services and gaps in services for children in the 0-3 age group,
2. funding and reporting issues and the privileging of government and bureaucratic needs over First Nations and community needs,
3. information and communication inconsistencies and contradictions, and
4. lack of fundamental acknowledgment concerning the importance of early childhood development and its associated staff, programs, and conceptualizations (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2004).

Issues and Constraints Potentially Generated by the Integration of Services include:

1. building programming into an integrated pot of resources may require higher levels of competition in a relatively non-competitive population;
2. the existing competition between tribal Councils and First Nations may be exacerbated if the lines of communication between funding agencies and programs are altered;
3. focused research must be able to demonstrate that a centralized funding process will clear backlogs, resolve funding confusion, and secure better First Nation management;
4. implementation at the community level deserves priority consideration, and integration should not mean less money because of less “management” at the top of the funding pyramid; and
5. new or revised integration strategies have to be carefully planned and implemented in stages corresponding to phasing out or conversion of existing programs (Noonan & Associates, 2002).

Potential Benefits of Leaving Funding Agreements and Management for Child Services as they Presently Stand include:

1. preservation of existing childcare services as stand alone programming will in turn insure that children’s needs do not get lost either fiscally or physically;
2. reporting data requirements must be agreeable to Canada and First Nations and create a common reporting model, establish a clear process to effectively ensure



- stability and certainty, and confirm a formal process to regularly review any “mutually” accepted funding protocol; and
3. Change in programs creates confusion and often resources for retaining and realignment are not available – if there is no change then there is no confusion and need for retaining and realignment (Noonan & Associates, 2002).

### **Single Window Approach to Integration of First Nations Early Childhood Development Programs and Services**

In the Assembly of First Nations’ Integration of Early Childhood Development programs and services discussion held December 16, 2003 participants were asked to explore the concept of a single window approach to the integration of early childhood development programs and services. Some participants noted that a single window might allow for a more streamlined process, something most agreed would be of benefit to communities. Others suggested a single window approach would ensure less bureaucracy and an enhancement of programs that currently exist, hoping that as a consequence a more concerted focus on child development would arise, ultimately allowing for more resources to be used for children. One participant observed that “it would be helpful – it would eliminate some of the “little bit here” and a “little bit there” approach that is currently in place in relation to the services and programs we currently utilize.” (Greenwood & De Leeuw, 2004)

In contrast to the supportive sentiments voiced by some participants, others voiced hesitancy and skepticism in reference to a single window or integrated approach. Some participants noted that striving for integration, when so many pieces were missing at the present time, was not an effective strategy for success. There was wide concern regarding the background and impetus for a single window approach, including the concern that the change was being orchestrated not in the best interest of First Nations but rather with the fiscal interest of government in mind. Many cautions were raised concerning feelings that government often developed initiatives not with the interests of First Nations as the guiding principle but rather with administrative and fiscal constraints in mind. One participant, in a summative fashion, observed that:

A single window approach would not be helpful if during all the program shifting, we were faced with fewer contributions than we currently receive, or if the amount of accountability reflects the



“window” department’s inadequacies. It would also not be helpful if such funds were allocated with excessive guidelines that would impede service delivery to the community. Strategies based on a national level with a paint brush approach have always and will continue to be ineffective. Any strategy needs to be designed and implemented at a community level. (Greenwood & De Leeuw, 2004)

The following dialogue questions seek to build upon the work that has already been completed in the area of integration of early childhood development programs and services while at the same time melding the early learning and care initiative into a broader First Nations early childhood strategy. That being said, the task before us is to articulate ways in which we as First Nations across Canada view and want to implement the coordination and integration of early childhood programs and services for our children. In doing so we want to ensure that there is adequate quality early childhood programs and services and that those programs and services are built upon First Nations’ values and cultural principles. We must make sure that quality early childhood programs and services are in place for our children and families now and in the future. With the emphases that current governments are placing on early childhood we have a unique opportunity to create and implement a vision for First Nations children and families.

### **3. BUILDING A FIRST NATIONS EARLY CHILDHOOD STRATEGY**

The following questions are meant to guide you through the focus group session during which time you will have an opportunity to discuss and share your thoughts and realities with regard to early childhood programs and services for First Nations children in Canada. This is a time to discuss possibilities knowing that there is no singular way or strategy for coordinating the delivery of First Nations early childhood programs and services. Many ways must come together in order to honour the diversity of our nations, our communities, our families, and perhaps most importantly, our children.

#### **Vision for Children**

1. What is your vision for a continuum of quality early childhood programs and services for the children of your community?
2. What would you identify as the key ideas or principles underlying First Nations quality programs and services for children and families?



3. Consider the following elements of quality:

**Quality:** evidence based, high quality practices relating to programs for children, training and supports for early childhood educations and child care providers and provincial/territorial regulations and monitoring

**Universally inclusive:** open to all children, without discrimination

**Accessible:** available and affordable for those who choose to use it

**Developmental:** focused on enhancing early childhood learning opportunities and the developmental component of ELCC programs and services

Would they be appropriate for First Nations communities? Why? Why not?

Would you change them? If so how?

Are there other principles that should be included?

### Successful Models

4. Is their effective coordination or integration of programs and services in your community that others should know about?

### Integration of Programs and Services

5. How could the federal government support the delivery of early childhood development programs and services in First Nations communities in a more effective and efficient way?
6. Would a “single window” approach where community programs and services are delivered in a coordinated approach be helpful?

If yes, why would it be helpful? What would a “single window” approach look like at for programs and services at the community level when implemented?

How would they be administered?

How would they be managed?

How would they be funded?

How would the programs and services be implemented for the children?

If no, why would it not be helpful?

7. What supports, capacity development would be needed to implement a “single window” approach to early childhood program and service delivery in your community?
8. If a “single window” approach were implemented for First Nations early childhood programs and services what role would regional or national First Nations bodies play?  
What authority or responsibility would they have?
9. If a “single window “ approach were to be implemented for early childhood programs and services in our communities (and regionally) what would be the next steps? How would you prioritize these steps?

