

Early Intervention Therapies: Ensuring every child with special needs has timely access

The challenge:

Children with special needs rely on Child Development Centres for Early Intervention Therapies that enable them to participate in activities many families take for granted.

Speech language therapy helps develop the ability to communicate, *physiotherapy* improves mobility and coordination, and *occupational therapy* enables these children to manage daily living activities that come naturally to able-bodied children.

MCFD funds these therapies for children from birth to age five. There are critical developmental stages where children benefit most from therapy, but because of inadequate funding there are long waits for treatment. This means many children don't receive therapy at the optimal stage, and in some cases "age out" of the program before receiving therapy.

By the end of 2016, after 10 years with no increased funding for early intervention therapy, there were hundreds of children on wait lists at CDCs around the province. A 2017/18 funding increase has allowed CDCs to begin addressing these wait lists, but CDCs report that early intervention therapies still have the longest wait times of all the services they deliver. And no funding lift was allocated for these services in Budget 2019.

This problem has also been recognized by the BC Association of Child Development and Intervention, Speech and Hearing BC, and the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

Ongoing work:

MCFD is currently undertaking a review of how services for Children and Youth with Special Needs (CYSN) are being delivered. HSA is encouraged by this effort and supports the work of the ministry to ensure services are meeting the needs of children and families.

We continue to advocate that the critical services provided by Child Development Centres need increased funding to reduce wait times.

Our ask:

Increase funding for MCFD's *Early Intervention Therapy* program so that Child Development Centres (CDCs) can ensure timely access to critical services, including speech/language therapy, occupational therapy, and physiotherapy.

Early Years Mental Health Services: Addressing the critical gap in mental health care in BC

The challenge:

The foundation for sound mental health is built in the earliest years of life, when a child develops capacities for learning and relating to others. Anxiety, depression, hyperactivity and aggression in the pre-school years can have a significant negative effect on social and psychological development. In very young children, these mental health issues often manifest as severe problems with eating, sleeping, toileting or speaking, as well as tantrums, biting, throwing toys and hitting other children.

These types of mental health issues in the early years are on the rise, and are often linked to the struggles that a child's parents are having with such things as mental illness, substance use, poverty and the after effects of trauma. Such cases require support from behaviour specialists, mental health clinicians and family support workers.

Mental health services are most effective when provided early, and when integrated with other services provided to children with special needs, such as the multidisciplinary, team-based care that CDCs provide. CDCs are an important avenue for providing the full range of mental health supports required by children and their families.

Ongoing work:

The establishment of the Foundry model in BC is an important step forward in serving youth, aged 12 to 24 years old, with mental health issues in BC, and we applaud the government for this work. Now is the time to expand mental health services into the early years programming to meet the demonstrated need of young children (1-5) and their families.

Budget 2019 committed an additional \$74 million to mental health initiatives. As the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction builds out mental health programming, we strongly advocate that sustained, and enhanced, funding go to the Child Development Centres to provide those services in the communities they serve.

Our ask:

Provide ongoing, appropriate funding to ensure that children and families in BC can access publicly funded Early Years Mental Health Services at their local Child Development Centre.

Child Development Centres are non-profit, community-governed organizations that are recognized leaders in delivering services to children and youth – and are well-positioned as existing community-based organizations to be the foundational providers of *Early Years Mental Health Services* as part of full continuum of integrated and responsive mental health services for children and youth.