BC FIRST NATIONS EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Responses to these materials are welcome. See the community feedback questions inside

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INTRODUCTION

The BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Council (FN ECDC) was created in March, 2007, reflecting a collective commitment by a range of stakeholders to discuss the development of a coordinated BC First Nations Early Childhood Development (ECD) Agenda and Action Plan. The FN ECDC is intended to advise and advocate for First Nations ECD, and to cooperate, coordinate and collaborate to improve outcomes for First Nations children. The FN ECDC has been endorsed by BC First Nations leadership.

As one of its first initiatives, the FN ECDC lobbied the Government of BC for funding to support the development of a First Nations-specific ECD Framework. In the spring of 2009, with funding from the BC Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation (MARR), the Council sponsored the development of a background paper and a BC First Nations ECD Framework.

This discussion paper summarizes both of those documents, which were prepared by Margo Greenwood, under the direction of the First Nations Early Childhood Development Council Work Group. Those authors are credited with the work highlighted below.

Part One of this discussion paper describes the context for the development of a First Nations Early Childhood Development (ECD) framework. This context includes a brief description of the background of First Nations ECD in BC, an overview of current realities, as well as the identification of elements of quality ECD programs and services, including a holistic view of ECD for young First Nations children and their families.

Part Two of this paper highlights the BC First Nations ECD Framework that was prepared for the ECDC in order to gather community input.

This summary is intended to provide an overview of the background paper and ECD framework in a format that will facilitate community input regarding an ECD strategy for First Nations in BC.
PART ONE:

*Taking Action for Our Children:*

BACKGROUND

All of the work that has been undertaken to date has been based on the assumption that First Nations peoples are better able to achieve success when they have access to culturally relevant and specific programs and services that recognize their right to self-determination. The three fundamental premises include:

1. Early childhood is one aspect of a holistic view of overall health and well-being.
2. The first six years of a child’s life are crucial for providing the foundation for life-long learning and good health.
3. Early childhood is a time of critical transformation and change.

The early years of children’s lives are times of wonder, development and potential. These years are also a time when we can take action to alleviate or prevent circumstances that might otherwise impact children for the rest of their lives. Early brain development research affirms the significant role of ECD in creating the foundation of children’s academic success and health. For First Nations children, the early years of life also are crucial for building their identity and sense of self, which in later years are often associated with individual and collective well-being. In addition, in First Nations communities, ECD programs and services are critical sites for cultural rejuvenation, language re-vitalization, and community (re)building.

Universal access to a holistic, seamless continuum of high quality ECD programs, services and supports is especially important for First Nations children and families given the continuing realities of poverty and the significant developmental and educational disparities between First Nations and non-First Nations children and families. Although ECD programs, services and supports cannot, by themselves, overcome the impacts of entrenched social and economic adversity, extensive evidence demonstrates that access to high quality ECD interventions can significantly improve the quality of life and developmental outcomes of children —particularly children in difficult socioeconomic circumstances. Early investments in young children and their families can make a significant and long-term impact on children’s academic success, and can reduce the need for more costly interventions later in life.

Quality ECD programs and services are influenced and shaped by nurturing relationships, human interactions, environments, experiences and cultures. To achieve such quality programs, investments in First Nations ECD programs and services are needed from different levels of government. Finally, a strategically coordinated and integrated ECD system would increase the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of programs and service offerings.
WHERE WE HAVE BEEN

Caring for Children

Prior to colonization and the disruption of community social structures, First Nations children were cared for and educated by family and community members according to the cultural and linguistic traditions of each Nation. Teachings were age and gender specific, focused on relationships with the social, natural and spiritual worlds, and included hands-on instruction in traditional skills, according to each child’s evolving capacities and gifts, to allow them to participate in and for the benefit of family and community. Teachings passed down from Elders and those before them serve as a reminder that children are the heart of the family, community and Nation. Further, the care of children was considered a sacred and valued responsibility.

Unfortunately, those values and practices were seriously impacted by the ravages of colonization, the systemic marginalization of First Nations peoples, and the resulting unacceptable socioeconomic position of First Nations peoples in Canada. Of all the colonial policies implemented by the Government of Canada, one of the most devastating for First Nations peoples was the creation and implementation of residential schools. Among the many negative effects of residential schools was the disruption of traditional family kinship ties and traditional child rearing practices.

As a legacy of colonization, today First Nations people, when compared to non-Indigenous Canadians, live with significant cultural, socioeconomic, and health inequities: higher rates of poverty and higher rates of youth suicide; lower levels of incomes and employment; loss of language and cultural traditions; higher rates of school incompletes; higher rates of child apprehensions; lower levels of life expectancy; higher rates of incarceration and interaction with the criminal justice system; and disproportionately high rates of both chronic and infectious diseases (Reading et. al. 2007; Richmond and Ross 2009).

First Nations peoples across Canada live in what some call ‘third world conditions of health’ and what others refer to as the “embodiment of inequality” (Adelson 2005). Indeed, although Canada is ranked among the best places to live in the world, if the United Nations Human Development Index was applied to Indigenous peoples living on-reserve, Canada would rank between 68th to 80th in the world (Bennett, Blackstock and De La Ronde, 2005).

In 2006, nearly one-fourth of all Indigenous people in Canada lived in homes in need of major repairs, and when compared with their non-Indigenous counterparts, Aboriginal peoples were almost four times more likely to live in a crowded dwelling (Statistics Canada 2008). Finally, results of the 2002/2003 First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS), a unique survey because First Nations’ communities implemented the research and the data remains the property of the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO), indicate that First Nations adults in communities (on-reserve) have less education,
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In addition to living with increased rates of health inequities, Indigenous peoples in Canada face specific and significant mental illnesses in greater abundance than their non-Indigenous counterparts (Kirmayer et al 2000). According to the Regional Health Survey, Indigenous people aged 15 and over and living off-reserve are almost twice as likely as their non-Indigenous counterparts to have suffered a major depressive episode in the past 12 months, and a high percentage of youth report feeling sad, blue, or depressed during two or more weeks in the previous year (NAHO 2002/2003).

First Nations children continue to be the fastest growing segment of the Aboriginal population in Canada, although birth rates are slowing (now estimated at 1.5 times the rate for all of Canada). According to the 2001 Census, 35% (213,530) of the First Nations population is between the ages of 0 and 14 years, compared to approximately 19% for all of Canada. Aboriginal peoples account for 4% of the total population, while Aboriginal children account for 9% of the child population. These children live in a variety of settings, including urban, rural, remote, on-reserve and off-reserve communities.

First Nations children also continue to be over-represented in child poverty statistics; research suggests that more than 50% of First Nations children may be growing up in poverty. First Nations children are more likely to be raised in a single parent household, especially if living off-reserve. Aboriginal children are being taken into care in BC at a steadily rising rate. An Aboriginal child today is 9.5 times more likely to be in care than a non-Aboriginal child, and half the children in care in the province today are Aboriginal.

The Relevance of this Legacy for ECD Development

To be effective within the context of this colonial history and current realities, a First Nations ECD Framework must be adequately responsive to the psychological constructs that result from this legacy, including the need to gain the trust of parents and families who were attacked by the very systems that were supposed to support them. Although it is erroneous to catalogue First Nations peoples’ marginalization without concurrent documentation of the strengths, resiliencies, and capacities present in First Nations communities, it would be equally irresponsible to downplay the realities faced by many families. Generally, it is important to understand the role of colonization in determining the health status of First Nations people in BC, while also recognizing that the situation is slowly being addressed by implementing culturally relevant programs and services for First Nations children in their early years.

Many First Nations are in a process of social, economic and political transformation, as well as cultural and linguistic revitalization, in which early learning is recognized as critically important. Aboriginal children also represent a fast-growing child demographic in the province. In terms of the progress being made in ECD program development specifically, it is fortunate that many core traditional practices and teachings continue to exist in First Nations families today, despite the impact of five generations of residential schooling and decades of child welfare apprehensions that followed the closure of the schools (i.e., the “sixties scoop”). Elders, parents and community members consistently advocate for
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ECD programs and services that reflect their beliefs and values, customs, traditions and protocols to ensure that children know who they are and are solidly grounded in their cultures and languages. ¹

In addition, with the signing of the historic New Relationship and Transformative Change Accord (2005) and the Tripartite Agreement on First Nations Health (2007), BC First Nations are rightfully garnering increased governmental and policy attention, including a growing awareness that early childhood is an area that should be adequately recognized, funded and supported at all levels.

But addressing First Nations ECD in BC will not be without challenges. BC is home to 203 First Nations, speaking more than 30 ancestral languages, along with First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Aboriginal peoples from other parts of Canada and the world. The wide ranging and unique circumstances, values and needs of communities are critical challenges for comprehensive ECD action planning.

Policy and Research Factors

In considering ways to address the needs of children, it is important to note that in BC, there has been a clear and compelling commitment to focus on the province’s children and youth – a commitment that was spurred in great part by critical findings documented by Ted Hughes with respect to the challenges facing the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

In 2007, the three Ministries of Children and Family Development, Healthy Living and Sport, and Education partnered in an effort to articulate a vision, pedagogical principles, and key areas of learning for children birth to five years – the years before a child’s entry into school. That Early Learning Framework (2007) was designed to be applicable to all early learning environments, including child care and any other pre-school and early childhood development or child health programs. Building upon the assumption that the early years are integral to the well-being of children and the communities in which they live and contribute, the intended purposes of the Early Learning Framework are as follows.

- Support dialogue and reflection on the critical importance of development and learning of young children.
- Serve as a tool for reflecting on and guiding early learning programs and activities.
- Support discussion with and between families about their children’s early learning.
- Guide professional development activities and investments.
- Serve as a basis for discussion among community partners with respect to the early years.
- Create a shared image of the child that can guide efforts to promote early learning at the local and provincial levels.

¹ Assembly of First Nations, 1995
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While that document is not specific to First Nations children, some Aboriginal communities have expressed interest in developing their own culturally specific early learning framework.

In addition, an Interim First Nations Child and Family Wellness Council (IFNCFWC) was established at the Indigenous Child at the Centre II Forum held on July 21 – 23, 2008 (www.informationbc.ca/child2/Communiques). During this Forum, delegates developed and endorsed the “One Heart, One Mind Statement of Solidarity and Cooperation,” which affirmed a commitment to work together in a Nation-to-Nation and community-driven process to secure the individual and collective survival, dignity and well-being of our children. To advance these matters, the Statement also supported the establishment of an IFNCFWC which has been meeting on a monthly basis since October 2008.

In February and March 2009, the terms of reference for the Interim First Nations Child and Family Wellness Council (IFNCFWC) was adopted by resolution of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and Union of BC Indian Chiefs. The terms of reference may be found at the following website: http://www.informationbc/child2.

On March 30, 2009, the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) and the Minister of Children and Family Development finalized a Protocol which commits the Parties to establish a common vision for child, youth and family wellness in BC, establishes the principles upon which the Parties will continue to work together, and includes a framework to support First Nations communities to exercise jurisdiction and responsibility for their children, youth and families. The IFNCFWC will take the lead on work under the Protocol on behalf of the BCAFN, FNS and UBCIC.

The IFNCFWC will be engaging on a regional basis to obtain direction and feedback from First Nations on the development of this workplan, and encouraging MCFD to work directly on a government-to-government basis with First Nations to implement key actions agreed to in the Protocol.

Canada’s Advisor on Healthy Children and Youth, Dr. Kellie Leitch, also is optimistic about the ability to effect broad social change by intervening in, and working with, children’s early years (Leitch 2007). The early years of a child’s life, according to Leitch, might be best conceptualized as the time for the prevention of ills that might otherwise impact an individual throughout the life spectrum. Leitch observes that all of Canada can be bettered if the early years of a child’s life are optimized, particularly in the areas of injury prevention, reduction of childhood obesity, improvement of mental health services, and understanding environmental factors impacting children’s health. Leitch, in particular, recommends the expansion of Head Start Programs as a way of extending support for the healthy development of Aboriginal children.

Research also supports the value of focusing on ECD. For example, according to Van Labdeghem, Curtis and Abrams (2002):

Recent early brain development research affirms the significant role that early childhood development plays in establishing the critical foundations for children’s academic success, health and general well-being. Early childhood development is largely influenced and shaped by
nurturing relationships, human interaction, environments, experiences and cultures. Children’s physical health, cognition, language, and social and emotional development are critical underpinnings to school readiness.

Low-income children are far more likely than their counterparts to be at-risk for poor developmental outcomes. Fortunately, early investments in young children and their families can make a significant and long-term impact on child well-being and academic success and can reduce the need for more costly interventions.

In addition, the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS) has, consistently and for a long period of time, linked the well-being of First Nations children to the overall well-being of First Nations. Their argument rests on the need for cultural specificity in all aspects of programs touching the lives of Aboriginal children: by extension, cultural health and wellness will reverberate into the children’s families and communities, while the knowledge(s) of the families and communities will simultaneously be passed to the children and generations to come.

According to the BCACCS, curriculum for First Nations ECD must embrace and reflect a holistic approach, language recognition, communications with Elders and, as much as possible, take steps towards teaching Indigenous protocols around food, ways of knowing the world (science, literature, etc.), and sense of self. Cultural connectivity, argues the BCACCS, is of vital importance. These curriculum imperatives also sit within a broader need for Aboriginal ECD education and training. BCACCS identified the following themes: accessibility of training programs; funding and sustainability of the programs; recruitment and retention of learners; culturally relevant curriculum; community capacity; and integration and coordination of training programs.

The argument for cultural specificity was updated by the BCACCS in both 2006 and 2007. In these years, the BCACCS produced both a comprehensive environmental scan and a review of the literature, with several key findings: there is much work to be done in the area of culturally meaningful and specific programs and policies for Aboriginal children and youth; the need for Aboriginal focused programming and policy for children in their early years is of pressing importance; and if Aboriginal specific programs and policies for children (including those in their early years) can be strengthened and supported, there is potential for vast socio-cultural and economic improvements across Aboriginal communities.

Commissioned by the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP), the paper Promoting Equity and Dignity for Aboriginal Children in Canada (Ball 2008) also documents linkages between cultural healing from colonial practices such as residential schooling and Aboriginal ECD. That report finds that development will occur through broad-spectrum partnerships and will require expanded and long-term investments anchored in measurement and data analysis. The report concludes that the expenditures associated with such investments are critical for the long-term well-being of First Nations and Canada as a whole.

Most recently, in a September 2008 day of dialogue, an impressive and multi-disciplinary team of Indigenous women researchers and writers articulated a vision for an Aboriginal Early Years Strategic Plan (Little Drum, 2008). Those researchers agreed that there should be two parallel ECD frameworks to meet the needs of BC’s First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children. The resulting report clearly articulates that such a plan must be rooted in Aboriginal culture and language, healthy families, and a strong sense of community and self-determination. The report drew unarguable linkages between the strength of
First Nations and the wellness of First Nations children. The report, in its summation of community voices and perspectives, asserted that any Aboriginal Early Years Strategic Plan had to:

- foster Aboriginal child and family wellness;
- build capacity within Aboriginal families, communities, and organizations;
- ensure that Aboriginal worldviews, cultures, and languages are integral in all programs and services; and
- ensure all programs and services are culturally safe, accessible and integrated.

Political Context

In June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper offered a statement of apology – a formal recognition of the colonization of Canada’s First Peoples. In that apology he stated the importance of:

Forging a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.

In addition, as mentioned above, the New Relationship between the Province of British Columbia, the Government of Canada, and the First Nations Leadership Council, as acknowledged in the Transformative Change Accord (2005), is also a backdrop for further ECD development. The Accord is an agreement that recognizes the need to strengthen relationships on a government-to-government basis, and affirms the parties’ commitment to three goals:

1) close the gaps between First Nation and other British Columbians in the areas of education, health, housing an economic opportunities ...;  
2) reconcile Aboriginal rights and title with those of the Crown; and  
3) establish a new relationship based on mutual respect and recognition.

These commitments represent an important component of the context for attaining greater control over ECD programs and services. Control over programs and services offers an avenue to address the coordination and integration of programs and services, as well as addressing on-the-ground challenges and divisions that often result from limited resources and the subsequent competition that occurs for resources between ministries, agencies, groups and organizations.

Successes, Challenges, Barriers and Gaps in Existing ECD Programs and Services

The First Nations ECD Background Paper (Greenwood, 2009) contains a chart of Federally and Provincially Funded ECD Programs, Services and Supports Available to First Nations Children and Families in British Columbia as of May 2009. In addition, the paper includes a brief written overview of such programs.
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In spite of those existing programs, services and initiatives, however, there is a continued need for additional programs and services, along with program structural change. While these apparent gaps are program specific, a number of broad considerations must be taken into account when contemplating a First Nations ECD system. These include the following:

**Additional Programs, Services and Supports:** Program gaps may simply mean that there is a need for additional programs and services and/or may mean that there is a need to revise current programs and services. There also is almost universal agreement that additional ECD programs and services are needed to meet the existing demands of First Nations children and families.

**Special Needs:** Programs, services and supports targeted to children requiring additional supports (or special needs) are critical. Very few programs exist for First Nations children with special needs, and those programs that do exist are not necessarily culturally or linguistically relevant. The programs and services also need to function in a coordinated way.

**Culture, Language and Quality:** Cultural and linguistic relevance has particular importance for all programs, services and supports targeted to First Nations children and their families, and feeds into the ‘quality’ of programs, services and supports. Ensuring cultural and linguistic relevance requires engagement with First Nations Elders, parents, families and community members as the holders of First Nations specific knowledge and ways of being.

**Early Childhood Education Teacher Training:** Culture and language are, for the most part, not included in ECD training for ECE teachers wishing to work with First Nations children. This gap is significant, given the centrality of children to First Nations and the necessity of them knowing who they are relative to the collective. Their identity ensures continuity of the culture and their Nation. Also related to ECE teacher training is the need for communities to develop and implement appropriate recruitment and retention strategies. Children, parents and families interact with multiple systems, including the ECD system, and it is within this system that children grow, develop and learn. Often early childhood training is derived from non-Indigenous systems of knowledge with practices and information that differ from the potential caregiver’s experience and reality. These non-Indigenous practices and knowledge also often differ from the children’s realities.

**Social Determinants:** Children, parents/guardians and families are impacted by conditions in their environment that affect their capacity to meet basic needs. One such condition is poverty. These conditions have a direct impact on people’s lives.

Other determinants that directly impact the lives of children and their families include: social supports, family violence, income, employment, and behaviours such as smoking and alcohol consumption.
**Relationships and Partnerships:** There is a significant need to establish and enhance relationships and partnerships with other systems, such as the education system, the health system, and the child welfare system. An effective First Nations ECD system does not exist on its own; rather, it is part of a holistic framework of relationships with other systems, such as its connection to the formal education system through the interface of kindergarten and early childhood programs. These relationships are critical for the successful implementation of any system serving First Nations children and their families.

**Relevant Research:** Much has been written about the need for more research and evidence-based information specific to First Nations children. ECD is no exception. There are very few studies specific to First Nations children, and even less data on their health and well-being, including developmental outcomes.

**Program Accountability and Transparency:** Monitoring, evaluation and reporting on ECD lead to quality ECD programs and services and ensure that they are successfully meeting the desired outcomes for children and their families. Adequate resources are required to ensure successful accountability and transparency measures. Accountability measures also serve to identify gaps, overlaps and deficiencies.

**Governance:** First Nations in BC have the right to the autonomous governance of ECD and education programs and services serving children and their families. Currently, however, these programs and services are not under the authority and responsibility of First Nations, but are dispersed amongst federal and provincial ministries and agencies. The vast majority of programs and services comply with provincial legislation, which is directly linked to funding. Authority and responsibility must be moved from provincial and federal governments to First Nations.

**Funding:** In addition to a recognized shortage of funding to adequately support current ECD programs and services – let alone a comprehensive slate of services – there is also a need for increased transparency in government program funding. Equitable, adequate and sustainable resources must be available to support First Nations-driven program and service development and implementation.

**Quality:** Parents may struggle to find reliable child care services. Some parents end up choosing multiple early childhood care and education arrangements of uneven quality to meet family needs.
WHERE WE ARE GOING

This section presents some key considerations in realizing a First Nations ECD system of programs, services and supports.

1. Elements of Quality ECD Programs and Services

Quality ECD programs and services serving First Nations children and their families are influenced and shaped by nurturing relationships, human interactions, environments, experiences, and cultures. In the First Nations context, this means integrating developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) with a socio-cultural approach that supports holistic, culturally, linguistically and developmentally appropriate programming. In this approach, emphasis is placed on children’s cultural, linguistic and spiritual development, which is learned through being socialized into their cultural community.

As such, ECD programs and service must be rooted in First Nations knowledge(s), values and beliefs - one of the most fundamental of these being the spiritual connection to the land, and the connection to all things and beings. These connections are expressed in First Nations languages and geographic and ecologically distinct cultures – each with its own worldviews, philosophies, beliefs, values, traditions, customs, protocols, practices, hopes and dreams. This holistic, sacred and relational view of the world highlights the centrality and importance of spirituality and relationships, and in this instance, the relationships between children and their families and their caregivers. This foundation of First Nations knowledge is the platform upon which rests a ‘quality’ First Nations early childhood development system.

The importance of high quality, culturally and linguistically relevant ECD programming is fundamental to First Nations children’s healthy development. In addition, investments in ECD for BC First Nations programs and services are made by different levels of government and these investments need to be sufficient and guaranteed over a long period of time to inspire the confidence of families and to ensure their effectiveness. A strategically coordinated and integrated system of ECD would increase the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of programs, services and supports.

2. Seeing ECD Holistically

First Nations share a belief that all living things have gifts, and that it is through the sharing of our gifts that survival, balance and harmony in life are achieved. First Nations values related to sharing, caring, generosity, love, respect and honour provide an ideal platform from which to build a holistic ECD system designed to serve First Nations children and their families.

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2 For a fuller discussion of quality see Appendix B the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society’s Quality Statement on Aboriginal Child Care and the companion document to this Framework, A Background Paper for the BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework.
A holistic perspective also allows for a social determinants approach to ECD, which emphasizes overall health and well-being. The term “social determinants” refers to the social conditions in which people live their daily lives -- where they work, live, learn, play and love. At times, these social determinants, of which ECD is one, are collectively referred to as the ‘context’ in which we find ourselves. This holistic, contextual view of our health and well-being offers us a way to address the social, economic and historical inequities that exist for First Nations peoples, and to address the care and education of children.

At its core, a holistic perspective of ECD focuses on children, their parents/guardians, and their families. First and foremost are the interactions that occur between children and their parents/guardians within their families. The parents/guardians and families, including extended family, are closest to the children and have the most influence on their growth and development, learning and care.

A holistic perspective of ECD also considers other systems, including education, health and social services. This approach supports seamless access to all programs and services necessary to ensure that each child and family achieves its full potential.

Government policies, regulations and resourcing must support such a holistic perspective.

3. A Look to the Future

Over the past decade, several specific strategic plans, policy papers and service delivery frameworks addressing early childhood programming have been brought forward by researchers, advocates and service providers. While not all focus on First Nations children, they provide structures and attributes worth considering in the development of a BC First Nations ECD Framework.

Common to most of those documents were calls to coordinate and integrate services, to create legislative and policy change, to ultimately become self-determining, to view early childhood programs and services as holistic and within a continuum of supports, to consider cultural specificity and connectivity, and to achieve overall health and well-being.

Drawing from those findings, as well as building upon all of the contextual issues, research, and considerations cited above, the following BC First Nations Early Years Framework is presented for feedback from First Nations representatives in BC.
PART 2

Community Feedback
Taking Action for Our Children:

A BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework
Summary

Your feedback is requested by Spring 2010.
See the Community Feedback Questions in Appendix A.

Taking Action for Our Children: A BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework is the first phase in the development of a strategic plan designed to ensure that every First Nations child, family and community in BC has access to high quality, comprehensive, integrated early childhood development (ECD) programs and services that are community controlled, sustainable and culturally relevant.

The purpose of this plan is to start a process that will fundamentally change the current reality of poverty, ill-health and despair of so many of our families, into one in which there is an intensive, seamless ECD system that can give real hope for a better future where every child’s potential is realized. We are convinced that high quality ECD services and programs can provide the key to accomplishing this goal. We believe that we have some of the building blocks already in place and that by working together we can achieve these goals. We now ask that our communities and governments begin a dialogue around the spirit and substance of this plan as a matter of urgency.

We need community and stakeholder feedback to ensure that we can all move forward together for the sake of our children.

ECD programs are generally intended to give all young children a strong start in life that will ensure that they can fulfill their potential as healthy, thoughtful and caring human beings. The programs also include a focus on the combined health, education and care of the young child, as well as the supports the child’s family needs. A growing body of research has also shown that when these programs are of high quality they are effective in countering the effects of discrimination and poverty, and have a positive effect on a person’s whole life.

However, existing ECD programs and services in BC First Nation communities tend to be fragmented and vary in quality, reflecting the lack of funding and a cohesive and planned approach to policy-making. The Framework provided here is intended to be the basis for the development of a comprehensive ECD system that is responsive to First Nations children and families. It identifies the
first steps needed to get positive results based on respectful, meaningful collaborations and partnerships amongst First Nations programs, organizations, communities and governments.

The Framework reflects and builds on the words, directions and desires of First Nations parents, families, service providers, communities and organizations, as communicated in a number of forums over the past decade. It is meant to respect those words by using them as a foundation for the Framework. It acknowledges the importance of the early years and the central role children play in their families, communities and Nations. From this Framework comes a call for collective transformative actions at all levels of ECD policy development and service delivery. The emphasis placed on “quality” programs, services and supports in this Framework document cannot be overstated. Nor can the importance of relationships.

It will take First Nations communities working in partnership with local and regional agencies, provincial organizations and governments to realize an integrated continuum of ECD programs, services and supports in which “no First Nations child is left behind”.

1.0 Introduction & Purpose

The overarching goal of *Taking Action Now for Our Children: A BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework* is to improve the lives of all BC First Nations children by supporting their healthy growth, education and development in the early years. Building upon a decade of discussions, meetings and research with BC First Nations communities, the Framework is intended to serve as a road map that will provide guidance and advice to First Nations communities, leadership and governments about the kinds of strategies and actions that are needed to develop a comprehensive, holistic system of early childhood development (ECD)\(^3\) programs, services and supports focused on the needs of children, from birth to school age, and their families. At the core of this framework is the belief that our children, families and communities have the right to the best possible outcomes, as a result of equitable access to available resources, and that they know best what those outcomes should be.

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\(^3\) In this Framework document ECD is used as an inclusive term and has an educational, social, health and cultural context and includes child care, preschool programs and, emphasizing education health and well-being of the family such as, prenatal and pregnancy support, special needs, early intervention and child welfare services.
and how to use resources to achieve them. This Framework promotes strategies and actions for ensuring access and enhancing ECD services, and advocates for policy changes that will enable First Nations control of these programs and services for their citizens. It is likewise meant to support local decision-making and planning and may serve as a tool for communities, leadership and governments to track and measure progress over the next five to ten years.

While we want to see early progress on improving outcomes for our children, we recognize that transformation is a longer-term process and that the scope of the work that must be done to achieve the vision identified in the Framework means that it might be most realistic to plan our activities and goals in five-year periods. Each 5-year plan will reflect the progress we have achieved over the previous five-year period and will provide opportunities to adjust the strategy according to any changes in our children’s developmental environments.

**Building on Community Knowledge**

We know anecdotally that the existing ECD programs and services in our communities are very effective, but they are not accessible to all, are fragmented, uneven in quality, insufficiently funded, and sometimes not adequately supported by the community. Evaluations of the overall effectiveness of an ECD program seem rare and so the opportunity for improvement and reflection and accountability to the community may be lacking.
2.0 Developing the Framework

VISION – Healthy, culturally strong children

Optimal, culturally relevant opportunities for First Nations children that nurture social, emotional, physical, cognitive and cultural, linguistic and spiritual development within their families, communities and Nations.

Mission

To develop a coordinated, holistic early childhood system of programs, services, supports and resources designed to support children, parents, families, communities and Nations through collaborative and integrated approaches to planning, service delivery, governance and administration.

Values and Beliefs

- First Nations children are sacred gifts from the Creator.
- Each child is born with gifts.
- Children are the present and future of our families, communities and Nations
- Caring for children is a sacred and shared responsibility.
- Parents and families are recognized as the first teachers and caregivers of their children.
Guiding Principles for Quality First Nation Early Childhood Programs & Services

- **First Nations ways of knowing and being** - Relationships, programs, services, supports, practices, infrastructure and governance structures must be imbued and anchored in First Nations knowledge(s).

- **Community-based and directed** - The care of children is a sacred and communal responsibility starting with parents and family and extending to community and Nation. ECD programs and services are developed through a community and Nation-driven process and delivered based on the needs of First Nations communities.

- **Holistic, universal, accessible, and comprehensive** - ECD programs, services and supports should be accessible to every child, whether living off-reserve or on-reserve, in a small isolated community or in a large urban centre, and should support the development of the whole child including his/her social, emotional, physical, cognitive, cultural, linguistic and spiritual development. Programs and services should be comprehensive so that the diverse needs of children and families can be met.

- **Integration and coordination** - ECD legislation, regulations, standards, policies, and program and service delivery structures that are synchronized and aligned result in an integrated and coordinated ECD system.

- **Transparent and accountable** - Monitoring, evaluation and reporting on ECD programs, services and supports leads to quality offerings, and ensure that they are successfully meeting the desired outcomes for children and their families. Accountability measures also serve to identify gaps, overlaps and deficiencies.

- **Sustainability** - Sustainability means that funding for ECD programs and services should be continuous and consistent over time in order to facilitate parental/family trust, ensure programs and services are able to recruit and retain qualified staff, and have enough longevity to make a difference in children’s lives.
3.0 Goals

There are three overarching goals in this Framework, with interconnecting linked strategies and actions for achieving these goals. However, the strategies and actions cannot all happen at once and some will need to be implemented first before work on others can begin.

The three goals that will lead to improved outcomes for all BC First Nations children are:

1. Increased availability, accessibility, and participation in ECD programs, services and supports by First Nations children and families;

2. Enhanced quality of ECD programs, services and supports; and

3. Increased integration and collaboration at all levels of a First Nations ECD system.

Strategies and actions for achieving these goals are set out in the following paragraphs and tables. Strategies refer to the broad areas in which specific actions or activities are undertaken to achieve the strategy and ultimately the overarching goal.
### Goal 1

**INCREASED AVAILABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY AND PARTICIPATION IN ECD PROGRAMS, SERVICES AND SUPPORTS BY CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**Result:** All First Nations children have access to quality ECD programs, services and supports.

### Strategies and Actions for Goal 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO IS THE LEAD</th>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
<th>ACTIONS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Nations Communities (leaders, administrators, program managers, ECD practitioners, educators, service providers)</td>
<td>1. Increase availability Identify gaps in ECD programs, services and supports</td>
<td>Raise awareness of benefits of quality ECD programs and services</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Improve access to services Identify strategies for addressing gaps in programs, services and supports</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Increase participation Address barriers including affordability of programs and services</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide parents and families with information about ECD and quality programs and services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Develop community plans for children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Nations Leadership Role: lobbyists, advocates, champions</td>
<td>Lobby for equitable ECD programs, services and supports for First Nations children</td>
<td>Focus on small, rural, remote and underserved areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial and Regional Organizations and Agencies &amp; First Nations ECDC Role: implementers, advocates, knowledge brokers, facilitators, policy advisors, reporters, collaborators, partners</td>
<td>Advocate for equity of programs services and support on-reserve, especially in underserved and remote areas</td>
<td>Conduct research to provide information for ongoing policy development that will address barriers to access and participation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advocate for equitable funding</td>
<td>Address access to subsidies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governments Role: funders, supporters, policymakers, regulators</td>
<td>Ensure equity of ECD programs, services and supports available to First Nations children and families</td>
<td>Collaborate with First Nations to address access barriers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide equitable funding to First Nations to promote access to quality, affordable ECD programs and services</td>
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</table>
**Rationale for Goal 1:** We need to increase availability, accessibility and participation of our children and families in quality ECD programs and services so that children have optimal opportunities for development and learning by participating in quality ECD programs and services, and so that children, parents and families have access to programs, services and supports that meet their needs (including training, education, employment supports, culture and language aspirations). Quality ECD is especially important for children and families with disadvantaged backgrounds who may not have opportunities for quality early learning experiences.

Parents and families must actively choose to involve their children in ECD programs and services, and they need information that will give them confidence that they are making good choices. They need information on *why* ECD programs and services are important to their child’s development and learning, and to know what quality ECD looks like. Parents need information on how to access quality services and whether or not the programs and services are responsive to their needs. Parents and families also need to know: first, that programs, services and supports are available; and second, that those programs, services and supports are sustainable so they may continue to participate without fear that they will be discontinued.
## Goal 2
### ENHANCED QUALITY OF ECD PROGRAMS, SERVICES AND SUPPORTS.

**Result:** High quality, culturally relevant ECD programs, services and supports

### Strategies and Actions for Goal 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO IS THE LEAD</th>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
<th>ACTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Nations Communities</strong> (leaders, administrators, program managers, ECD practitioners, service providers, parents and families, Elders)</td>
<td>1. Enhance child development outcomes</td>
<td>Identify the cultural, linguistic and developmental needs of all children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Improve programs and services</td>
<td>Identify and pilot child well-being indicators</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Increase parent and family support and engagement</td>
<td>Provide developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate activities</td>
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<td>4. Increase capacity</td>
<td>Ensure integration of culture and language in children’s activities</td>
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<td>Implement policy of inclusion for all children</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>First Nations Leadership</strong> (Role: lobbyists, advocates, champions)</td>
<td>Support and champion ECD</td>
<td>Lobby for ECD First Nations specific education and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial and Regional Organizations and Agencies &amp; First Nations ECDC</td>
<td>Facilitate relevant appropriate research focused on First Nations children’s development</td>
<td>Explore and identify pros and cons of ECD training delivery options</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Work with communities to ensure student supports, (such as: child care and academic counseling) are available to potential students</td>
<td>Support communities in developing culturally appropriate parenting programs and like supports</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collaborate with communities to develop recruitment and retention plans for ECD practitioners and staff</td>
<td>Coordinate opportunities for training in technology for students, practitioners, and children</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conduct research on indicators of quality</td>
<td>Advocate for adequate funding for capital and infrastructure needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advocate for equitable and adequate funding to ensure quality ECD programs and services</td>
<td>Develop community policy development guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitate community based research partnerships with post-secondary institutions and researchers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engage in research relevant to communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governments</td>
<td>Prioritize children’s ECD programs and services</td>
<td>Examine current ECD funding strategies and mechanisms and regulatory schemas</td>
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</table>

**Rationale for Goal 2:** Children benefit from participation in quality ECD programs and services: poor quality ECD actually causes harm to children. A high quality ECD system helps parents, families, communities and Nations achieve their dreams and aspirations for their children. A system of quality ECD programs and services is the result of access to adequate resources and integrated relationships between several program components including the cultural, linguistic and developmental content of programs, services and supports, the training of educators and caregivers, the social, physical and
spiritual environment, and external policies, standards, regulations and legislation. All of these components of quality collectively form the foundation for the relationships and interactions between ECD caregivers/service providers, children and parents/families that ensure the child’s holistic learning and development. More discussion on quality and its constituent parts may be found in Appendix B of this document.
## Goal 3

**INCREASED INTEGRATION AND COLLABORATION AT ALL LEVELS OF A FIRST NATIONS ECD SYSTEM**

Result: Integrated and collaborative ECD programs and services

**Strategies and Actions for Goal 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO IS THE LEAD</th>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
<th>ENABLING STRATEGIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Nations Communities</strong> (leaders, administrators, program managers, ECD practitioners, service providers)</td>
<td>Increase integration, coordination and collaboration</td>
<td>Support implementation of integration, coordination and collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role: developers, implementers, advocates</td>
<td>Establish relationships with ECD education and training programs to ensure availability and accessibility</td>
<td>Identify necessary collaborations and partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establish linkages between ECD programs and services and the formal education system’s K-12 Enhancement Agreements</td>
<td>Demonstrate and willingness to enter into relationships</td>
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<td>Align policy and practices between early intervention in ECD and the formal education system</td>
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<td>Partner with schools to ensure smooth transitions between ECD setting and school</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Nations Leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role: lobbyists, advocates, champions</td>
<td>Facilitate relationships between health and social services, post-secondary education, K-12 education system, and between and amongst ECD Programs and services)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provincial and Regional Organizations and Agencies &amp; First Nations ECDC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role: implementers, advocates, knowledge brokers, facilitators, policy advisors, reporters, collaborators, partners</td>
<td>Facilitate relationships between First Nations communities and community colleges, universities and other training institutions</td>
<td>Review current ECD program policies and funding strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advocate for the inclusion of First Nations cultural and linguistic content into ECD programs and course curricula</td>
<td>Review current standards, regulations and legislation governing ECD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Share information between and amongst ECD programs, organizations and agencies</td>
<td>Identify elements of a holistic and coordinated system of ECD programs and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engage and collaborate with the First Nations to create a conceptual model of coordinated ECD programs and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engage and collaborate with the First Nations, to develop a operational plan to develop and administer quality programs and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engage and collaborate with the First Nations, to develop a operational plan to develop and administer quality programs and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Create an accountability Framework for monitoring the ECD system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Governments</strong></td>
<td>Partner with First Nations communities in advocating for the importance of quality ECD for children and families</td>
<td>Partner with First Nations to review ECD standards, regulations and legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role: funders, supporters, policy makers, regulators</td>
<td>Share information about current ECD system across jurisdictions and ministries</td>
<td>Partner with First Nations to review current ECD program policies and funding strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Rationale for Goal 3:** Quality ECD programs, services and supports focus on the overall well-being of the child – socially, physically, mentally, intellectually, spiritually, culturally and linguistically – and they are holistic in nature. As such, they require links between children and their families and communities, prenatal and parenting programs, and health, education and social services. A strong platform of ECD supports is facilitated by multi-sectoral, multi-jurisdictional collaborations and partnerships, including between and amongst First Nations ECD programs and services, organizations, communities, Nations and families.
## 4.0 Challenges & Opportunities

The development and implementation of any plan of action is not without its underlying assumptions, challenges and external factors that may impact its implementation. The following chart identifies some of these elements, as well as some of the related opportunities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ASSUMPTIONS</strong></th>
<th><strong>ISSUES &amp; CONSTRAINTS</strong></th>
<th><strong>OPPORTUNITIES</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. New and adequate funding will be in place and stable for at least ten years</td>
<td>1. Inadequate funding to meet current needs</td>
<td>1. Adequate and equitable funding levels will be identified and negotiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Leadership, local communities and staff will take an active role in this</td>
<td>2. Lack of access and inequitable access</td>
<td>2. Needs of underserved communities will be identified and advocacy for equitable treatment and funding carried out by ECDC and Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework</td>
<td>3. Existing programs and services serve only a minority of children in communities with access to funding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rural and remote communities will have access both physically and virtually</td>
<td>4. Numerous gaps in the service delivery system</td>
<td>3. Program and services will reflect community values and needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Developed curricula will fit the needs of children, families and communities and be relevant to a broad base of disciplines</td>
<td>5. Extremely limited services for children with additional and diverse needs for supports, i.e., special needs, early intervention and specialized services</td>
<td>4. Communities have greater autonomy and control over ECD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Elders, language speakers and other knowledge keepers will be willing to share their knowledge of their language and cultural traditions for the purpose of informing ECD curriculum and instructional methods and materials</td>
<td>6. Differences in mandates, confidentiality, accountability, priorities, and responsibilities between partners within and outside of a site</td>
<td>5. Streamlining of ECD programs and services, reduction in inefficiencies and paperwork can be expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Project staff and staffing levels will remain consistent</td>
<td>7. Lack of a common “language” or frame of understanding</td>
<td>6. The additional supports required for children with special needs and early intervention services will be identified and secured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. A training and recruitment strategy will be in place</td>
<td>8. Geographical, and cultural differences</td>
<td>7. New collaboration at all levels of ECD planning and delivery can be created</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The ECDC will be funded to provide consistent support to communities</td>
<td>9. Patchwork of ECD programs, services and supports serving First Nations children and their families are not culturally appropriate</td>
<td>8. Gaps and overlaps will be clearly defined and steps taken to address these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Lack of First Nations control, authority and jurisdiction</td>
<td>9. Through the Framework a clearly defined and supported set of expectations, roles and responsibilities among First Nations program managers, sponsors, ECDCI, partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Continuing economic downturn with implications for government spending, provincially and nationally</td>
<td>10. An accountability and reporting framework for ECD will build on and strengthen existing structures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.0 Process & Next Steps

There are a number of steps to be undertaken in the development, completion and implementation of a BC First Nations ECD Framework. Some of those steps have been taken, while others remain to be implemented following dialogue with BC First Nations leaders, communities, families, programs and service providers.

Step 1: Leadership Support – Ongoing

Key organizations in early childhood development come together in 2007, with the support of political resolutions from organizations such as the BC Assembly of First Nations and First Nations Summit, to advise, advocate and collaborate on a province-wide plan to improve outcomes for First Nations children from birth to age 6 years.

Step 2: Research, Planning and Development – In Progress

The FN ECDC engages a consultant in the spring of 2009 to prepare a research paper and a draft ECD Discussion Paper based on previous discussions with BC First Nations. From the outset, the FN ECDC realized the importance of seeking affirmation and input from leadership, community and service providers on how best to move forward on the Framework, and the long-term goal
of realizing a “made in BC” First Nations specific system of ECD programs, services and supports.

**Step 3: Community Engagement and Consultation – In Progress**

Community and regional engagement sessions are scheduled to take place in fall and winter 2009, to present the ECD Framework and seek community input and advice. In these sessions, stakeholders will have an opportunity to discuss the Framework and how it fits within their vision and priorities for children. Community participants will also confirm key themes, priorities and actions for moving forward in the next five years.

**Step 4: Reporting Out and Action Planning – To be completed**

Direction and advice from the community engagement process will be incorporated into the Framework document for ratification by BC First Nations leadership. A detailed action plan for achieving the Framework will also be prepared to ensure successful implementation and collaboration at all levels within First Nations ECD.

**Step 5: Implementation and Monitoring – To be established**

The FN ECDC will provide and support a BC-wide focus for implementing the Framework at all levels. An important aspect of Council oversight will include regular reporting to community and leadership.
Appendix A
Community Feedback Questions
Taking Action for Our Children:
A BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework

Feedback Requested by
Spring 2010
There is a link on the website of the First Nations Education Steering Committee (http://www.fnesc.ca/ecd/ecd.php) to an online version of the questionnaire.

The First Nations ECD Council is seeking ideas or questions about the draft Framework and we invite responses to the questions provided on the following pages.

First Nations parents, families, communities, early childhood educators, caregivers, service providers, researchers, scholars and leadership are asked to review and provide feedback on the contents of the Framework to ensure that it meets the needs of BC First Nations children, parents, families, communities and Nations.

The responses will assist the First Nations ECD Council to finalize the Framework and related documents prior to the release of the Framework to First Nations leadership and the federal and provincial governments.

Please e-mail or mail your responses, questions and ideas to:

Tyrone McNeil, President
First Nations Education Steering Committee, & Coordinator for First Nation Early Childhood Development Council
113 – 100 Park Royal South, West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2
tyrone@fnesc.ca www.fnesc.ca

Your timely responses to the following questions by Spring 2010 are appreciated as they will help the First Nations ECD Council complete the final revisions to this Framework.

You are welcome to attach additional pages.

Thank you!
Vision, Mission, Values and Principles (see page 20...)

1. What is your community’s vision for children?

2. Does the vision presented in this Framework ‘fit’ with your community’s vision for children?

3. What is the same or different?

Goals (see page 22...)

1. Do these goals reflect your community’s hopes and dreams for your children?

2. What changes or additions, if any, would you make to the goals presented in this Framework?
3. What would you need to have in place in order to realize the goals of this Framework?

Outcomes, Strategies and Actions
1. What ECD programs, services and/or supports are working well in your community?

2. What is the main challenge for your community in creating or delivering ECD services?

3. Please tell us what you see as priority areas for action on ECD?
4. Do you think that the First Nations ECDC should stand on its own as collaboration between education, health, child care, and other sectors/organizations, or would it fit better nested within one of these areas?

5. Do the ideas contained in the “quality” statement ‘fit’ with your views and experience?

6. What role can the First Nations ECDC play in supporting your community? Such as: advocacy; research; technical support; planning; communications, etc.)

7. Have we missed anything?

Thank you for sharing your ideas! Please use additional pages if necessary.
About you...
If you would like to provide the following information about yourself or your organization that would be appreciated. It is not required.

Individual name:
Organization name:
Address:
Are you representing yourself or your organization?

Does your work or your organization’s work include any of the following?
- [ ] Early Childhood Education
- [ ] Aboriginal Headstart
- [ ] Member of the Early Childhood Development Council

First Nation represented (if any):
Contact phone:
Contact email:
How did you gather information to answer these questions? (individual feedback, consulted colleagues, board meeting, workshop....)

If you would like to provide any additional background about your organization or your personal experience with ECD work, please feel free to attach more information.

Thank you!
Appendix B
BC Aboriginal Child Care Society Statement on Quality Child Care

PREAMBLE

For Aboriginal parents, extended families, and communities, caring for children is a sacred responsibility. The Creator has given Aboriginal peoples the right and responsibility to initiate, design, and control programs and services for our children. We accept these rights and responsibilities to care for and educate our children according to the Laws of the Creator.

The elements of quality child care described below rest on these beliefs:

*We, the Original Peoples of this land, know the Creator put us here.* The Creator gave us laws that govern our relationships to live in harmony with nature and mankind. *The Laws of the Creator defined our rights and responsibilities.* The Creator gave us our spiritual beliefs, our languages, our culture, and a place on Mother Earth which provided us with all our needs. We have maintained our Freedom, our Languages, and our Traditions from time immemorial. We continue to exercise the rights and fulfill the responsibilities and obligations given to us by the Creator for the land upon which we were placed. *The Creator has given us the right to govern ourselves and the right to self-determination.* The rights and responsibilities given to us by the Creator cannot be altered or taken away by any other Nation.

Our child care programs reflect the Laws of the Creator, our traditions, beliefs, and values. From those foundations, we have derived these elements of quality:

---

4 BC ACCS is a non-profit, provincial organization that exists to support and develop First Nations/Aboriginal early childhood development and child care resources and services that are high quality, holistic, and are based on children’s culture, language and history. The statement on quality was developed in 2005 by BC ACCS and has been informed by ECD practitioners and other community stakeholders.
**ABORIGINAL WORLD VIEW**

**Principle:**

Quality Aboriginal child care programs reflect a shared world view and child care personnel pass our values on to our children.

**Discussion:**

British Columbia’s Aboriginal peoples share, in varying degrees, a distinctive world view that is reflected in our ways of caring for and educating our children. Elements of our shared world view include: appreciation for the sacredness of life; awareness of the continuity of life and our connections to past and future generations; love for our families; respect for nature; a commitment to positive relationships and equality; and the pursuit of spiritual well-being.

**RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Principle:**

Quality Aboriginal child care programs teach children how to respectfully use and care for the earth’s gifts.

**Discussion:**

At the heart of Aboriginal cultures is a close, respectful relationship with the earth and its inhabitants. Caring for the land, air, and water, respect for nature, and knowledge of the environment are essential characteristics of our cultures.

**COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

**Principle:**

Quality Aboriginal child care programs teach children a non-competitive approach to life. Child care personnel model cooperation, respect, consideration for others, and sharing.

**Discussion:**

Aboriginal cultures are based on relationships of mutual support. Community members cooperate and help one another. Individuals support one another for the benefit of the community as a whole. Teamwork, mutual assistance, and sharing are valued.
ELDER INVOLVEMENT

Principle:

Quality Aboriginal child care programs teach children to respect our Elders. Quality Aboriginal child care programs ask for guidance from Elders. The views of Elders are invited and heard and valued and acted upon. Elders are an essential part of the curriculum.

Discussion:

A defining feature of Aboriginal cultures is the special respect given to Elders. We look to our Elders for guidance and we include them in important decision-making. We ask our Elders to help us learn the traditional teachings of our cultures. Elders play valuable roles in our communities and we turn to them for their knowledge and wisdom.

HOLISTIC VIEW OF DEVELOPMENT

Principle:

Quality Aboriginal child care programs support the development of culturally appropriate, holistically-based curricula and assessment instruments.

Discussion:

The Aboriginal perspective on children’s growth and development is holistic and it includes the spiritual domain. Children’s physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual health and well-being overlap and are intertwined. Each child’s growth and development reflects his or her uniqueness. Patterns of development are inseparable from the cultures in which children are raised.

ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES

Principle:

Quality Aboriginal child care programs endeavour to ensure that children’s rights to enjoy and become literate in their languages are honoured to the extent possible.

Where it is possible, Aboriginal languages are used for everyday communication in child care programs. Where that is not possible, children are taught Aboriginal languages to the extent possible. Child care programs serving Aboriginal children from different cultures teach respect for all languages and cultures.

Discussion:

Aboriginal languages are key elements of our identities and heritage. The continuation and revival of Aboriginal languages are urgent priorities. Child care programs have a critical role to play in preventing further loss of Aboriginal languages.
**RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES**

**Principle:**

Quality Aboriginal child care programs build positive, respectful relationships with children’s families and work in partnership with them. Quality Aboriginal child care programs help families care for their children.

**Discussion:**

Children’s families are their primary care providers and educators. Family members are welcomed and involved in child care programs as volunteers, visitors, and on governance bodies. Families are well-informed regarding their children’s progress. Opportunities are provided for family members to learn more about children and ways of supporting their health and well-being. The form of the education reflects community priorities and preferences. It may involve home visits, outreach programs, parenting workshops or courses, discussion groups, mentoring programs, or other options selected by local families.

**PREPARATION FOR FUTURE RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Principle:**

Quality Aboriginal child care programs prepare children to eventually assume a wide range of responsibilities as members of thriving self-governing communities. Quality Aboriginal child care programs build children’s confidence and self-esteem and communicate the expectation that they will make positive contributions to community life.

**Discussion:**

Aboriginal communities in British Columbia are becoming increasingly self-governing. As the children in our child care programs today grow up, they will fill important roles in governance, administration, service delivery, and business enterprises in their communities. Young children must be prepared for academic success and encouraged to set goals and achieve their ambitions.

**INCLUSION**

**Principle:**

Quality Aboriginal child care programs are inclusive. Children with exceptional talents and abilities are encouraged to develop their gifts. Children who need extra support, modified environments, and individualized programs have their requirements met.
**Discussion:**

Each child is a treasured gift from the Creator. Each child has his or her own individual temperament, talents, learning style, intelligence, interests, challenges, abilities, and prior experiences. Each child’s growth and development and learning path is unique. All children have a right to individually appropriate care that meets their needs, develops their gifts, and helps them reach their full potential.

**MULTI-AGE GROUPING**

**Principle:**

Quality Aboriginal child care programs recognize the advantages of multi-age grouping.

**Discussion:**

The segregation of children on the basis of age is contrary to Aboriginal cultural values and traditions. Multi-age groups more closely resemble life in an extended family. Multi-age child care allows strong attachments between educators and young children to continue from infancy through to school-age. In multi-age programs, younger children are helped by and learn from older children. Exceptional children can be more easily included in multi-age groups since the learning environments are designed for children with a wide range of abilities. With appropriate staff preparation and adult-child ratios, multi-age grouping is a safe delivery option.

**RESPECT AND RECOGNITION FOR CHILD CARE PERSONNEL**

**Principle:**

Quality Aboriginal child care programs are exemplary employers, providing all personnel and volunteers with training, support, respect, and recognition for the important work they do.

**Discussion:**

Aboriginal communities have always valued the work done by people who care for and educate children. All personnel in child care facilities, including managers, early childhood educators, child care assistants, cultural and language personnel, support staff, and volunteers require training in order to do their jobs well. Employers show employees and volunteers their work is respected and valued by providing appropriate wages, good working conditions, opportunities for career advancement, access to professional development, and comfortable work spaces and off-duty areas.
**RESEARCH**

**Principle:**

Quality Aboriginal child care programs conduct and participate in research to answer their own questions and increase their understanding of issues that are important to them and to their communities.

**Discussion:**

Research is a means of building knowledge. Early childhood educators act as research practitioners and contribute to the development of a constantly growing body of knowledge focusing on Aboriginal child care. This body of research is used to support the ongoing pursuit of excellence. Aboriginal led research, based on Aboriginal cultural values, contributes to policy development and informs practice. It builds on existing indigenous knowledge and is relevant to the community. Aboriginal research is conducted according to the highest ethical standards.

**DELIVERY MODELS**

**Principle:**

The descriptions of quality Aboriginal child care are applicable in all settings in which children receive care and education.

**Discussion:**

Aboriginal children receive high quality care and education in a variety of settings including child care centres, part-time preschools, adult and tot drop-in programs, Head Start programs, family day care homes, programs based in community centres and parks, before-school and after-school programs for school-aged children, respite facilities that provide overnight and longer-term child care, and child-minding programs.

**COLLABORATION AND NETWORK BUILDING**

**Principle:**

Quality Aboriginal child care programs provide their personnel with opportunities to establish and maintain connections with other Aboriginal child care providers.

**Discussion:**

Child care personnel benefit from belonging to networks of mutual support with other members of their profession. Aboriginal child care providers want to help one another, share their knowledge, and work together to enhance Aboriginal child care services. Personnel require release time and support to attend
meetings and conferences and participate in initiatives that build links between programs. Technologies can be used to enable geographically separated child care personnel to collaborate and stay connected with one another.

**Accountability**

**Principle:**

Quality Aboriginal child care services are governed by and accountable to Aboriginal parents and communities.

**Discussion:**

Aboriginal peoples have the cultural knowledge, commitment to their children’s well-being, and awareness of local priorities that is essential to insure good governance of child care programs.

**Local Authority**

**Principle:**

Quality Aboriginal child care programs comply with the regulations developed by Aboriginal child care administrative bodies.

**Discussion:**

Regulations for the operation of Aboriginal child care facilities are the responsibility of Aboriginal administrative bodies. High standards are set to insure children’s health and safety. Group sizes and adult to child ratios meet or exceed those recommended by the CCCF. Standards for the licensing of facilities and the credentialing of child care personnel are developed and administered by Aboriginal peoples.
Appendix C
Members of the First Nations ECD Council

The following organizations have had one or more representatives on the Council:

- Aboriginal Child Care Society
- Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC
- BC Aboriginal Child Care Society
- BC Assembly of First Nations
- Carrier Sekani Family Services
- Central Interior Partners in Aboriginal Human Resource Development
- Chemainus First Nation
- Coast Salish Employment and Training Society
- First Nations Education Steering Committee
- First Nations Health Council
- First Nations Public Service
- First Nations Schools Association
- First Nations Summit
- First Peoples Heritage, Language & Culture Council
- Kamloops Indian Band
- Kwakiutl Band
- N.E. Native Advancing Society
- Native Brotherhood of BC
- Sauteau First Nation
- Seabird Island Band
- Skeena Native Development Society
- Sliammon First Nation
- Squamish Nation
REFERENCES


## GOALS:

- Increase availability, accessibility and participation
- Enhance quality
- Promote relationships
- Enabling strategies

## STRATEGIES:

**Increase availability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Nations Communities (leaders, ECD practitioners, program managers)</th>
<th>Increase ECD program and service gaps</th>
<th>Identify child and family needs and barriers to access</th>
<th>Improve access to services</th>
<th>Increase participation</th>
<th>Enhance child development outcomes</th>
<th>Improve programs and services</th>
<th>Increase parent and family support and engagement</th>
<th>Increase capacity</th>
<th>Increase integration, coordination and collaboration</th>
<th>Identify necessary collaborations and partnerships</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role:</strong> developers, implementers, advocates</td>
<td>Identify strategies for addressing gaps in programs and services</td>
<td>Address barriers and solutions to access</td>
<td>Provide culturally, linguistically and developmentally appropriate activities</td>
<td>Identify culturally, linguistically and developmentally appropriate activities</td>
<td>Set realistic targets for increasing the number of qualified early childhood educators</td>
<td>Encourage involvement of parents and families in planning for their children</td>
<td>Identify areas of research</td>
<td>Align policy and practices between early intervention in ECD and the formal education system</td>
<td>Partner with schools to ensure smooth transitions between ECD setting and school</td>
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<td><strong>Implement policy of inclusion for all children</strong></td>
<td>Develop ECD community-specific curriculum</td>
<td>Develop culturally, linguistically and developmentally appropriate teaching and assessment tools and methods</td>
<td>Engage in community based research partnerships with researchers</td>
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<td><strong>Implement policy of inclusion for all children</strong></td>
<td>Develop recruitment and retention plans for ECD practitioners</td>
<td>Offer parent and family learning opportunities</td>
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<td><strong>Identify First Nations specific practice performance measures</strong></td>
<td>Develop self review processes and evaluation strategies</td>
<td>Prioritize children’s safety in all aspects of ECD programs and services</td>
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## MAPPING OUR JOURNEY

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<td>Improve access to services</td>
<td>Increase participation</td>
<td>Improve programs and services</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Nations leadership</td>
<td>Role: lobbyists, advocates, champions</td>
<td>Lobby for equitable ECD programs and services for First Nations children</td>
<td>Focus on small, rural, remote and underserved areas</td>
<td>Champion quality ECD for children and families</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provincial and Regional Organizations and Agencies</td>
<td>Role: implementers, advocates, knowledge brokers, facilitators, policy advisors, reporters, collaborators, partners</td>
<td>Advocate for equity of programs and services on reserve especially in underserved and remote areas</td>
<td>Conduct research to provide information for ongoing policy development to address barriers to access and participation</td>
<td>Develop communication strategy for promoting the importance of ECD</td>
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<td>Advocate for equitable funding</td>
<td>Address access to subsidies</td>
<td>Conduct research on encouraging ECD participation</td>
<td>Work with communities to ensure student supports, (such as: child care and academic counseling) are available to potential students</td>
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<td>Governments</td>
<td>Ensure equity of ECD programs and services available on reserve</td>
<td>Continue to promote the importance of ECD and children's development</td>
<td>Support capacity development activities in First Nations communities</td>
<td>Partner with First Nations to review ECD standards, regulations and legislation</td>
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<td>Collaborate with First Nations to address subsidy policies</td>
<td>Examine current ECD funding strategies and mechanisms and regulatory schemas</td>
<td>Share information with First Nations communities</td>
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<td>Provide equitable funding to First Nations to promote access to quality, affordable ECD programs</td>
<td>Support the inclusion of parents and families direct involvement in ECD programs and services</td>
<td>Share information about current ECD system across jurisdictions and ministries</td>
<td>Partner with First Nations to review current ECD program policies and funding strategies</td>
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