

Starting Early, Starting Strong

Manitoba's Five-Year Plan for
Early Childhood Development



Healthy Child Manitoba
Putting children and families first

Manitoba 

Introduction

Here in Manitoba and around the world, experts agree that a child's future begins to take shape during the early years - when the brain is literally being shaped for the rest of life. We need to do everything we can to make sure we get it right for our children from the very start. Missed opportunities during this time can be compounded over the course of a child's lifetime.

There are many ways we can work together to help children get off to a strong start. In some cases, this involves supporting families to access health care, jobs, employment and training, safe and affordable housing, nutritious foods - all of which play an important role in healthy child development. For others, access to high quality early learning and child care, family resources and parenting programs provide children and their families with that extra bit of support.

Research has shown us that investments in early childhood development (ECD) can make a world of difference for children and their families, and for the economic prosperity of our province. Investments in ECD support healthy, happy children today, who will become tomorrow's leaders, educators, innovators and skilled workforce. Tapping into the potential of every child helps us create a brighter future for all Manitobans.

In 2013, the Manitoba government led a series of public dialogues in communities across the province and invited Manitobans to share their knowledge and vision for ECD. These meetings, along with input from stakeholders, researchers and the Provincial Healthy Child Advisory Committee helped to shape the province's Early Childhood Development Framework, released in 2013. The Framework outlines the science of early brain development, sets out the principles guiding ECD work in Manitoba and identifies the four strategic priority areas that will be the focus of our efforts over the next five years. This plan brings the Framework to life for children and families.

The ECD Framework is available at:
manitoba.ca/healthychild/eod/eod_sessframework.pdf

Working Together and Building Momentum

Manitoba has long been a leader in the area of ECD. In 2000, the creation of Canada's first-ever cabinet committee dedicated to children - the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet - demonstrated the government of Manitoba's ongoing commitment to children and families. For more than a decade, this committee has steered the work of multiple government departments and fostered partnerships with many community-based stakeholders in order to support the best possible futures for Manitoba's children. These partnerships are the key to our success.

Working together, Manitoba has made considerable gains in ECD since 2000, including:

- continually expanding access to affordable, high quality Early Learning and Child Care
- launching the Manitoba Prenatal Benefit, which has helped over 55,000 women to access nutritious food during pregnancy
- establishing Healthy Baby programs in over 100 different sites, supporting thousands of pregnant women, new mothers, their babies and their families each year
- providing tens of thousands of parents of newborn children with the support of a Families First home-visitor, helping to strengthen families and keep them together
- establishing twenty-six Parent Child Coalitions across Manitoba to support grass-roots, community-driven programs for ECD
- reducing the number of women who report drinking during pregnancy with the implementation of a provincial FASD Strategy

MANITOBA'S DIVERSITY

Manitoba's children and families are diverse and their needs vary depending on their geographic location, ethnic and language identity, family structure, and economic security. Census and Manitoba Health data tell us that:

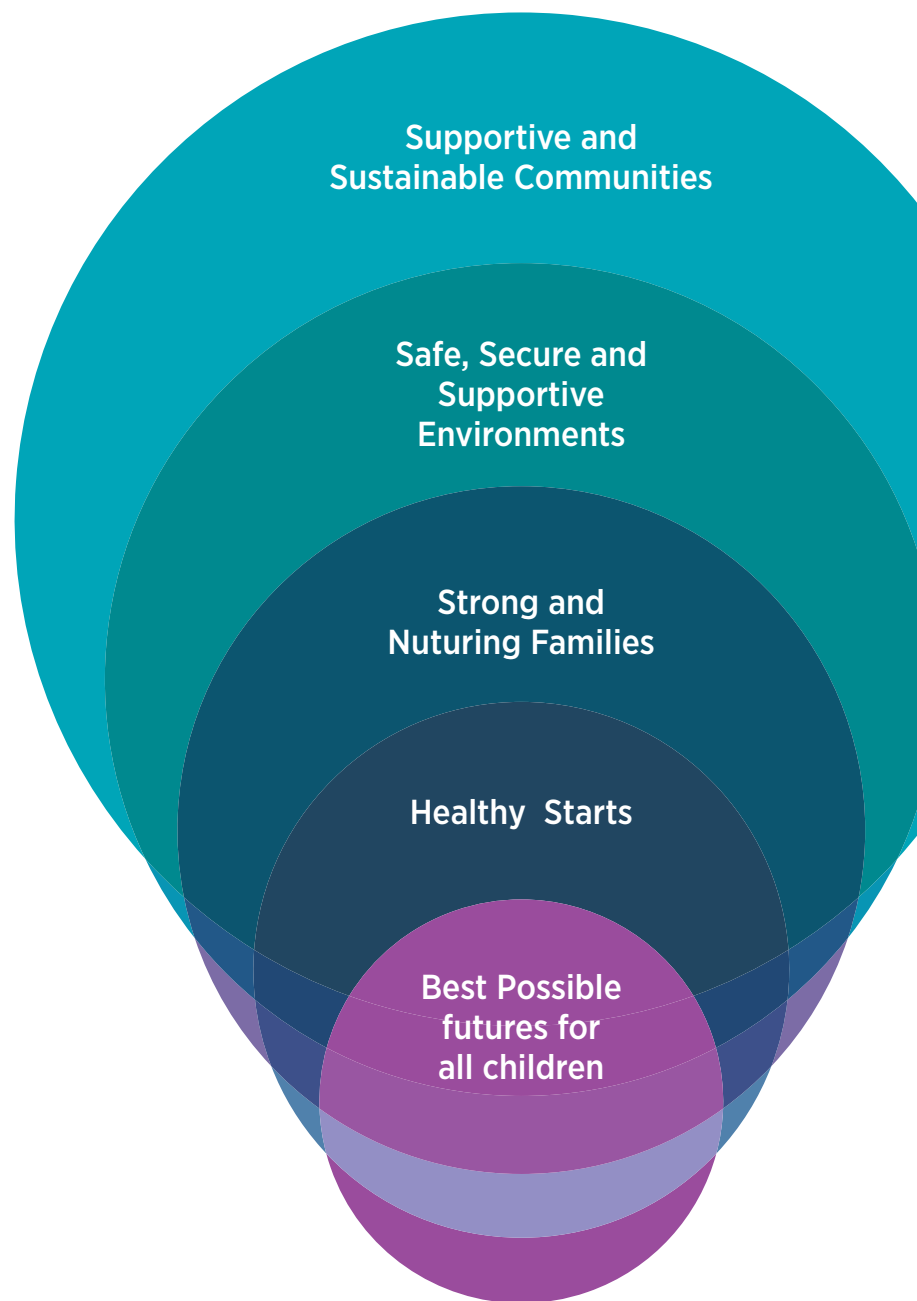
- the province has a higher percentage of children and youth compared to all of Canada. This trend is likely to grow as Manitoba's birth rate continues to rise above the Canadian average. Within Manitoba, there are regional variations of birth rates, with rates generally higher outside of Winnipeg, particularly in the North.*
- Manitoba has a high percentage of Aboriginal families and children, and this diversity is growing. Aboriginal children under six (not including those who live in First Nations communities) represent 19% of all children under six in Manitoba, compared to 5% in Canada.*
- Manitoba has a large Francophone population (3.5% of the population), and over two thirds of children of Francophone parents receive their education in French.*
- immigration continues to be a leading contributor to population growth in Manitoba, having increased by more than 200% between 2000 and 2010. The majority of recent immigrants in Manitoba are from Southeast and Southern Asia, and Eastern Europe.*
- most families in Manitoba have two parents (71%), while approximately 12% of families are headed by a lone parent. Lone-parent families are more likely to face the challenges of lower than average family income or poverty.*
- ECD programs offered throughout Manitoba are inclusive of our diverse population, and have been effective in strengthening parenting skills and improving outcomes for children.*

Strategic Priority

‘Building Blocks’

As we work together with community partners to further our progress in ECD, our five-year plan will chart the course forward. The plan is anchored by four strategic priority building blocks that were established following province-wide dialogues, culminating in the release of the 2013 Early Childhood Development Framework.

1. **Promoting Healthy Starts** — because a healthy start in life literally shapes the early development of a child’s brain and sets the course for their future health, well-being and learning.
2. **Supporting Strong and Nurturing Families** — because positive parenting, secure attachment, attention, love and care are essential for healthy development.
3. **Fostering Safe, Secure & Supportive Environments** — because prolonged anxiety, distress and negative experiences get in the way of proper brain development and limit the potential of children.
4. **Strengthening Communities** — because supportive and sustainable communities are essential for all the other building blocks: promoting healthy starts, supporting strong and nurturing families, and fostering safe, secure, and supportive environments for Manitoba’s children.



Promoting Healthy Starts

Every newborn baby deserves the healthiest possible start to life so that doors don't close for them before they can even talk or walk. Healthy babies start with healthy moms. By promoting moms' healthy lifestyle, proper nutrition, and access to physical and mental health supports, we can help babies get a strong start in life and reduce negative experiences that could impact them for the rest of their lives.

In 2001, the province established the Manitoba Prenatal Benefit for low-income pregnant women across Manitoba, including those in First Nations communities, to help them access nutritious foods during pregnancy. We see the benefits of this program everyday with fewer babies born with low birth weight, fewer preterm births and more breastfeeding among those who receive the benefit. We will continually work to ensure this important program reaches the women who need it the most. Over the next five years our target is to reach 20,000 pregnant women and their babies.

To help pregnant women and families in some of Manitoba's most remote communities to have better access to healthy foods, we will be launching a program to subsidize the cost of milk, fresh fruits and vegetables in ten Northern communities. Along with our community partners, we will continue to promote Manitoba's breastfeeding strategy because we know that breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for new mothers and their babies.

Healthy nutrition is not only important for pregnant women and their babies, it is also critical to the development of young children. We are working to promote practices in child care settings that help to establish life-long healthy eating habits and enhance readiness to learn.

Manitoba's successful Healthy Baby programs, with over 100 sites across the province, are key to helping pregnant mothers get connected to other important services like parenting supports and maternal health care. We will continue to expand and support initiatives that link Manitoba families to primary care, including continued investment in Family Doctor Finder Program, QuickCare Clinics, mobile clinics, as well as hiring additional health professionals and supporting the development of multi-disciplinary *My Health Teams* across the province.

Health care services for Manitoba children in rural and isolated communities will also be improved through the creation of a 24/7 phone line that will connect pediatricians with family physicians in these communities.

"At Healthy Baby I can draw on everybody's experiences. If I'm not sure of something, there's a nurse there, a dietician there... There are other Moms who have already 'been there'. It's really helped me just relax to find out my experience is normal."

Michelle and Maya



We are also committed to strengthening the province's midwifery program so that more women and their babies may benefit from this successful prenatal and postnatal health care model.

Investments to improve and expand maternal care facilities will continue to be a priority. A new state-of-the-art birth centre was opened in 2011 which now offers women a comfortable, home-like setting for giving birth. The centre also provides a range of primary maternity services including prenatal, pregnancy and postpartum care by midwives, as well as counselling services, and health education programs on parenting and newborn care.

While every child develops at a slightly different rate, there are important developmental milestones that help parents, early childhood educators and health providers recognize when a child may have challenges. Early identification of issues, such as speech or language delays, is key to addressing the challenge and minimizing the impact on development. That is why Manitoba will establish a cross-departmental committee to explore the feasibility of implementing a province-wide Early Years Developmental Screening program.

Supporting Strong and Nurturing Families

All children deserve to grow up in strong, supportive families. It is what we all want for our children. All families can benefit from a little bit of extra support from time to time to help them gain the knowledge and confidence they need to make their homes a place where children can grow and thrive. Some families face more hurdles and require greater support. The province is committed to meeting the needs of all families.

To help families with the questions and anxieties that can come along with parenting, Manitoba continues to invest in family resource centres, parent child coalitions, parenting resources and programs like the successful Healthy Baby program, Families First home visiting program, Triple P Positive Parenting program, and the Empowered to Change initiative.

In the coming year, we will invest in new resources to support families day-to-day by offering helpful tips for raising healthy, confident children and providing up-to-date information on the programs and services that are available throughout the province. This will include:

- Launching a broad range of new parenting resources, with information ranging from pregnancy through to young adulthood;

"I started taking a Triple P parenting program. It was really worthwhile. I just generally wanted to be a better parent. I've never found a program quite like this. Everybody is equal. It's like a family here. I've recommended it to a lot of people already."

Alice and Brannagh and Aibhlinn



- Updating our online resources to make them more practical and easy to use;
- Developing a new range of culturally appropriate parenting resource materials for Aboriginal parents and communities in consultation with local Aboriginal organizations and the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health; and
- Enhancing and expanding the Manitoba Parent Line, a provincial toll-free support line for parents.

With the launch of this new campaign, we will reach out to more Manitoba families with valuable parenting resources and are setting a goal of increasing calls to the Manitoba Parent Line and visits to the Manitoba Parent Zone website by 25% over the next two years.

Families with children who require additional supports often face added challenges. To provide these families with much-needed additional supports, Manitoba will continue to invest in therapeutic and medical supports such as the Children's Therapy Initiative and Children's disAbility services. In Spring 2016, Manitoba will open the doors to the new Specialized Services for Children and Youth - a new state-of-the-art hub of services and resources for children with additional support needs and their families.

Over the past few years much has been learned through the implementation of pilot projects like the Partners in Inner-city Integrated Prenatal Care program and Towards Flourishing, a postnatal mental health promotion program. The province will work with partners to draw on and apply the lessons learned from these programs. This will include creative forms of outreach to connect women at high risk with early, consistent prenatal care and working to sustain aspects of Towards Flourishing Strategy within our Families First program to better promote positive mental health with new mothers and families.



Manitoba will also continue to strengthen standards in early learning programming through a new play-based framework that reflects international best practice for those organizations who deliver programming in the community.

Fostering Safe, Secure & Supportive Environments

To grow and thrive, children need to spend their time in safe and supportive environments in their homes, in child care centres, in schools and in the community. Yet not all families have the same opportunities to provide their children with these positive early life environments. There is much we can do so that all children have the fairest chance to reach their full potential.

We know that when parents have access to safe, affordable housing, healthy food and good jobs, their children are more likely to be healthy, happy and successful. In Manitoba we are committed to reducing the number of people living on a low income. Using the Statistics Canada Market Basket Measure, in 2012, there were 144,000 Manitobans living in low income, including 44,000 children. Through the All Aboard Strategy, we will continue our efforts to reduce poverty and its negative effects on children and families.

In the past year, Manitoba has taken additional steps, including:

- launching Rent Assist, a new portable benefit for social assistance recipients and other low-income Manitobans that will follow people into jobs to help promote transitions to employment
- introducing the Manitoba Works! Co-operative Work Experience Program to provide essential skills training and work experience to over 270 people who face barriers to employment
- increasing the supply of social and affordable housing
- establishing the Northern Healthy Food Initiative to support access to healthy food in northern Manitoba

In partnership with Manidoo Gi Miini Gonaan centre, the province has piloted the internationally recognized Abecedarian program in the Lord Selkirk Park community in Winnipeg. This enriched, culturally-based early learning and child care program and family resource centre serves the children and families in the Lord Selkirk Park community. Early evaluation results of this pilot program show positive outcomes for children. We will extract the lessons learned in innovative programs such as these so they can be amplified for the benefit of children, parents, early child care providers, and community organizations. A partnership with Red River College is underway to adapt best practice programming content into multi-media parenting resources that can be easily accessed by all parents and caregivers.

"We came from Uganda and three of our children came to child care at Manidoo. I started volunteering and now work here as a child care assistant. The kids get to know other children in the neighbourhood, they feel at home here and learn about the community. I recommend the program a lot."

Amina and Prosper



Over the next five years, we will develop early childhood hubs, drawing on lessons from the Manidoo centre, to better meet the needs of Manitoba's most vulnerable children. These hubs will centralize ECD services so they are easily accessible to the families and children who need them the most. The hubs will feature licensed child care, parenting and family supports, outreach and engagement capacity, as well as cultural programming and other services that are tailored to meet the community's local needs. Plans are underway to develop the first hubs in the Lord Selkirk Park community and in the new IRCOM (Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba) site in Winnipeg.

We will also expand successful outreach and engagement practices that support hard-to-reach parents, caregivers and children, and we will continue to explore and pilot new integrated service delivery models to better meet the needs of Manitoba's families.

Manitoba remains committed to continuing to ensure culturally respectful and supportive services for Aboriginal and newcomer families. We will continue to support traditional Aboriginal parenting programs, and service organizations for newcomer families and local family resource centres.

We know that licensed early learning and child care is an important support for many children and their families. Over the past decade and a half, Manitoba has consistently invested in early learning and child care, and together with partners we have accomplished a lot. But there is still more work to do. Over the next five years, Manitoba is committed to continuing to grow the early learning and child care system so that more children have access to this valuable opportunity for early learning.

This will include:

- adding 5,000 new and newly funded spaces
- investing \$25 million to build and expand centres in schools - where parents have told us centres make the most sense - while also continuing to support the construction and expansion of centers in other community settings
- creating child care spaces in all newly built and renovated schools, as well as introducing legislation to protect child care space in schools
- increasing supports for home-based child care
- supporting higher wages for early childhood educators through regular operating grant increases to centers, as well as increasing opportunities for training and professional development

Manitoba's vision for the future of early learning and child care is one where together with partners, the province can expand the number of spaces so that child care is universally accessible for all families who need it, while also remaining affordable for Manitobans. To move this ambitious vision forward, the province has established a new Commission on early learning and child care to look at the future of child care in Manitoba.

Schools are central to community life and are increasingly connecting with parents long before their children begin kindergarten. Through the Early Childhood Development Initiative, \$21 million has been provided to Manitoba's school divisions to support quality preschool programming in schools. We will continue to promote these early connections between schools and families by providing school divisions with funding to support quality pre-school programming in schools. The Commission will also be asked to look at how to create closer ties between early learning and child care centres and schools.

We will also continue our work to foster healthy communities for ECD by looking for ways to increase education opportunities, recreation programming, neighbourhood safety and housing improvements.

All children deserve to have access to early learning, sport and recreation. Through responsive and respectful outreach initiatives with vulnerable families, we will help children and their families make connections to free or low-cost programming offered by community organizations.

We will continue to work to make Manitoba communities healthy and vibrant through the Community Places Program by offering planning services and capital grants to community facilities. The successful Neighbourhoods Alive! initiative will continue to support many community-led neighbourhood revitalization efforts, improving capacity for local community development.

ALLAboard

All Aboard, Manitoba's Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy is a concerted government-wide effort to co-ordinate multidisciplinary programming across government and target those with the greatest need. Evidence shows that we are on the right track -- since the strategy was set in place (2009), there has been stability or progress on 16 out of 21 indicators of prosperity and inclusion, including:

- *more high school graduation – 8.0%*
- *fewer households in core housing need - 8.8%*
- *higher minimum wages – 22.9%*
- *more available child care – 5.5%*
- *fewer teen births – 15.2%*



Strengthening Communities

It takes a village to raise a child. We know this is true. It is equally true that it takes commitment, knowledge and attention to raise the village. The well-being of young children is a shared responsibility and a shared benefit. Manitoba is committed to supporting sustainable and strong communities through investments in community capacity building and training, partnership development, public education, and knowledge sharing.

We believe that local communities know how best to meet the needs of their families. The province remains committed to empowering Manitoba communities and helping them build capacity. To date, twenty-six Parent Child Coalitions have been established across the province, strengthening community engagement and encouraging community-led action to meet the needs of their local children and families.

Evidence-based decision making is integral to our efforts – we want to make decisions based on what we know works. Organizations such as the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) and the Children’s Hospital Research Institute of Manitoba (CHRIM) are extremely valuable partners in helping us determine what is working and what is needed. It is also important that this information reaches communities because it can help them identify what is working locally and better understand their strengths and needs. We will continue to strengthen community knowledge and capacity by sharing local Early Development Instrument (EDI) data, Families First birth screen data and community-level asset data.

In Manitoba, we are fortunate to have the active interest and involvement of the business community, who have championed the importance of investing in the early years, for both its positive effects in the lives of children and families as well as in community and economic development for all. The Winnipeg

"I can't think of an investment that would provide a greater return than one at the stage of a child's life in which their life-long capacity, both intellectual and emotional, is so defined. The employer community must recognize that by supporting early childhood development, they are in fact supporting their future workforce."

Dave Angus, President and CEO, the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce

Boldness Project, in particular, has generated interest in the business community. Supported by private and public sectors, this project has been working with the Point Douglas community to identify opportunities to transform the outcomes of young children, bringing together the wisdom and experience of the community, the best that science has to offer, and most of all, the strengths and commitment of families.

In the coming years, we will continue to identify new and unique opportunities to expand the circle of support for ECD, including building on the interest and support of the business community. We will also partner with our universities and colleges to embed new and emerging knowledge into relevant faculties and challenge academic leaders to grow our research capacity in ECD.

A STORY OF SUCCESS: PARENT CHILD COALITIONS

Parent Child Coalitions bring together the local strengths and resources within a community, through partnerships with a variety of programs and sectors. Coalitions promote and support community-based programs and activities for children and families, with a priority focus on early childhood. There are 26 coalitions located throughout the province. For more information about this community development initiative, visit www.manitoba.ca/healthychild/parentchild

For over twelve years, Parent Child Coalitions have had many successes building strong communities and supporting children, parents and families. Here's one Coalition's story:

The Parent Child Coalition that serves the Winnipeg community of St. James-Assiniboia is built on strong partnerships between the St. James-Assiniboia School Division, the child care community, and other community programs and sectors. The result of these partnerships has been the successful development and growth of several parent child centres throughout this community. These centres, operated by the coalition, are based in community centres and schools through in-kind space-sharing arrangements. These centres have had tremendous success in connecting families to the community, providing children with spaces to play, and supporting parents through positive parenting education resources. One parent, Charlene Knutt, says "I started coming to the parent child centre when my youngest was a few months old. Originally, I came to give my two year old an outing and a chance to play with other kids, but I got so much more than that - activities for the kids, the chance to connect with other parents... I would absolutely recommend it for all parents". The key to the success of this Parent Child Coalition, says Deidre Sagert, an early childhood specialist with the school division, is the partnership between our schools and the community.

On the Right Course

Over the past decade and a half, Manitoba has made much progress in ECD. We are seeing healthier pregnancies and better outcomes for babies born in our province. Parent-child relationships are stronger in the early years and families are better connected to their neighbourhoods. More children have access to early learning opportunities across Manitoba. More children are better prepared for success in early literacy and numeracy when they start school. We know this because we have committed to measuring the impact of investments.

These successes are the result of Manitoba's unique Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, and the many partnerships the province has made with parents and families, service organizations, community leaders, Aboriginal communities, business owners, economic developers, child advocates, and ECD researchers. These partnerships are integral to our five-year plan for ECD and our common goal of ensuring the best start for Manitoba's children.

Evaluations of our ECD work tell us that we are on the right course. We will continue to build on these successes and measure our progress as we move forward over the next five years.

"My experience at Healthy Baby has been good. At the program they answer my questions and I learned a lot of different things. It makes my life a little easier. I would definitely recommend it."

Gordon and Silas





For more information:

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ALLAboard:

Manitoba's Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy

For more information, visit manitoba.ca/allaboard