



EARLY YEARS FRAMEWORK

MINISTRY OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT



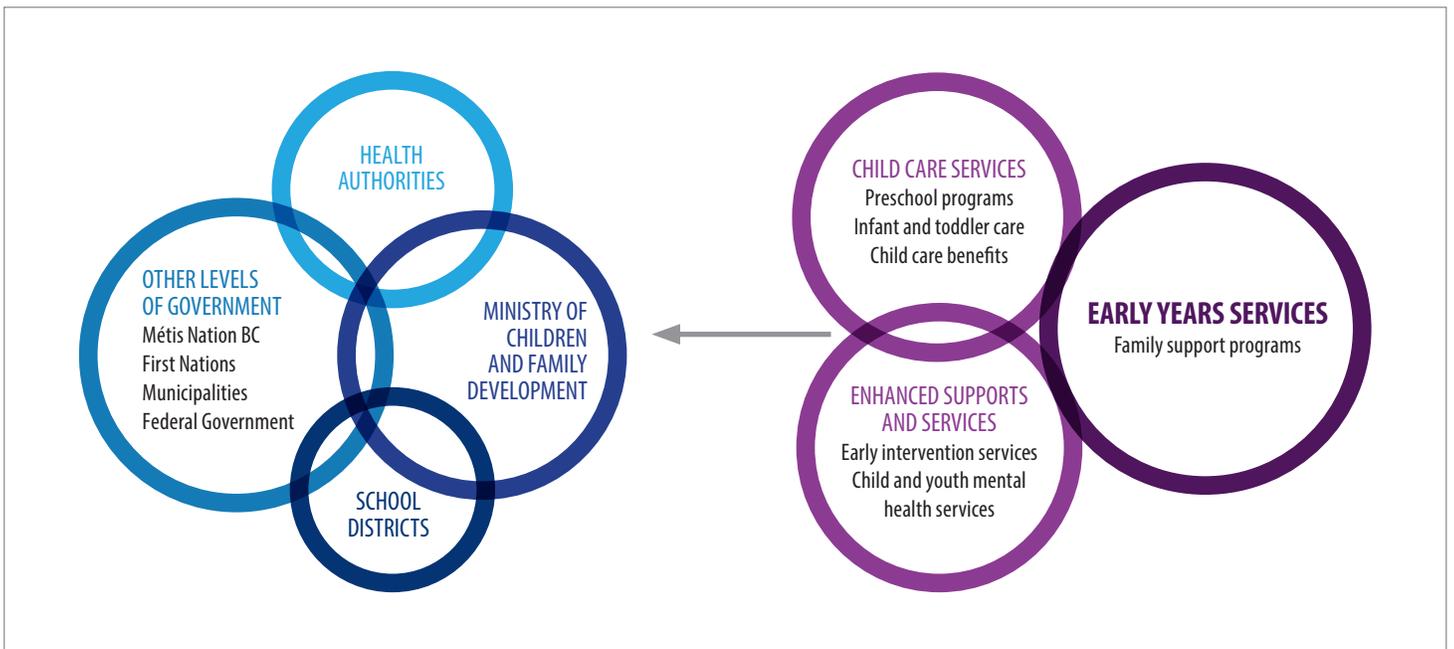
PURPOSE

The purpose of the Early Years Service Framework is to define the services the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) funds within the early years service area.

The system of early years services in BC is significant. Over \$200 million is spent each year in early years supports and services through provincial and federal organizations, in addition to the significant investments made in child care and specialized supports. Most government organizations have clear mandates that define what early years services they deliver. For example, health authorities provide child health support, immunizations, vision and audiology screening, and perinatal health supports such as breastfeeding education. MCFD also benefits from defining an overarching policy direction to guide its early years services.

MCFD funds a range of ‘universal’ and enhanced early years supports. Enhanced services have distinct criteria for eligibility, while ‘universal’ services tend to have undefined criteria, and overlapping mandates and intended outcomes. MCFD invests in three key areas in the early years period: child care, enhanced or eligibility-based services (for children and youth with mental health concerns or special needs), and a third less-defined category sometimes referred to as Early Childhood Development or Family Support, which will be referred to as “early years services” from here on.

The first two key areas, child care and enhanced or eligibility-based services, have clear criteria and outcomes. For example, to access child and youth special needs supports, a person requires assessments and must meet eligibility criteria. Moreover, investments and intended outcomes for child care services are well defined in B.C.’s child care plan. The third area, early years services, lacks eligibility criteria, making it more difficult to define.



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EARLY YEARS TOUCH POINTS

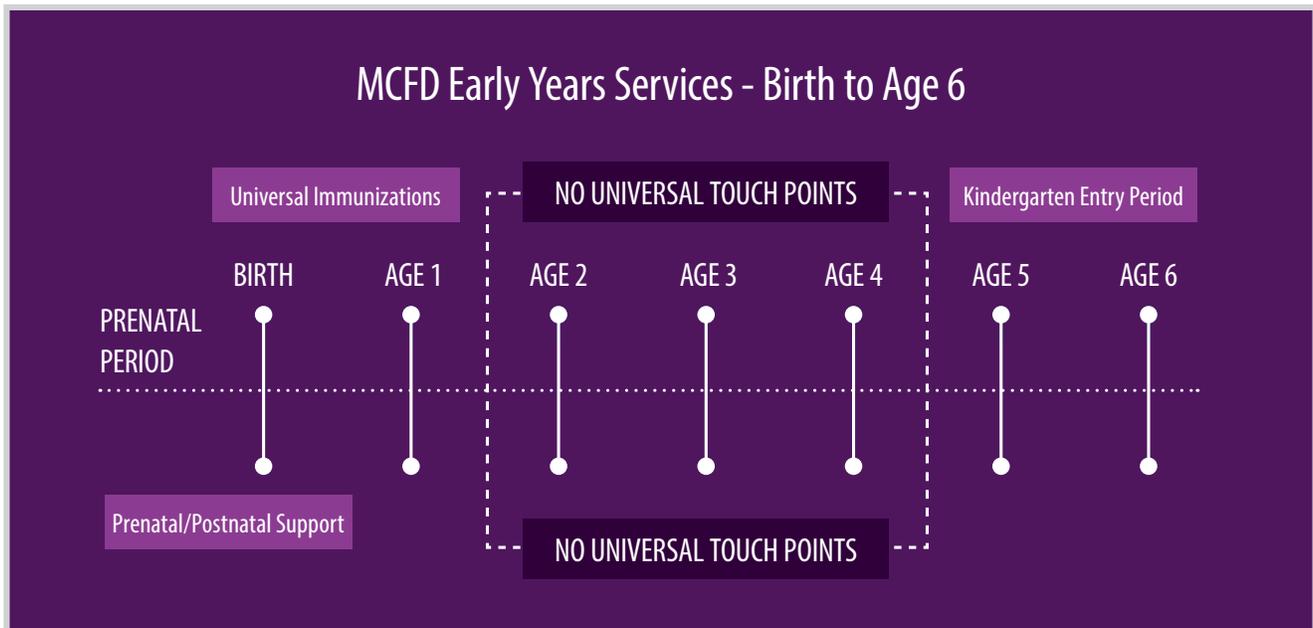
The early years is a period of many transitions. Families have many needs in this period. Government and service organizations seek to meet these needs through an array of services, each with their own service delivery structures (e.g. health authorities, school districts, and service organizations). ‘Touch-points’ are when families engage and interact with these services.

Communities may also have unique informal settings, programs, or systems that provide a ‘social richness’ by building relationships and social networks.

Many families lack consistent touch-points with formal systems of supports and services between a child’s 18-month immunization and their school transition. During this period, many families lack connections, supports, and networking opportunities.

Early years services can and should develop or leverage touch-points with formal systems, as well as build up less formal opportunities within community settings to create and enhance opportunities for families to continuously engage and access the supports and services they need during their child’s first six years of life.

There is no universal touch-point for children and families between 18-months and school entry.



JOURNEY THROUGH THE EARLY YEARS

For many families, the journey through the early years is smooth and positive; they travel through the various community-based early years programs and transition to kindergarten effortlessly. There are an equal number of families who speak about the journey as overwhelming, confusing, and challenging. With over 1000 unique programs and services for young children and their families offered in BC today, many parents struggle to navigate and access this large system of services.

BC has a diverse demographic makeup that further affects the uniqueness of these family pathways. For example, the province has a significant rural/remote population, is home to the second largest population of Indigenous peoples in Canada, and has an ever-increasing number of immigrant, newcomer, and refugee families. These contextual factors shape families' journeys through the early years.

In recent decades, families in B.C. have undergone tremendous change that has resulted in a great diversity of family forms and relationships. In the vast majority of two-parent families, both parents now work. The proportion of lone parent families is also growing. Concurrent to these shifting dynamics, is the reality that parental social isolation is becoming a significant concern.

Becoming a parent is a significant life event. The change in routine, fragmented services and loss of time to socialize can mean that many parents feel lonely. Social isolation poses significant risks to parents. Health risks associated with social isolation have been compared in magnitude to the well-known dangers of smoking cigarettes and obesity. Parents' loneliness has also been shown to have negative effects on children, impacting their social competence, motivation to learn, and academic skills. If a child is raised in a socially isolated family, the risk of the child becoming chronically lonely increases.

The benefits of moving towards systems and practices that include peer-support, and where culture is central to wellbeing, are well documented in Indigenous communities.

The benefits of moving towards systems and practices that include peer-support, and where culture is central to wellbeing, are well documented in Indigenous communities. Indigenous mentoring has traditionally been embedded in cultural practice in which the entire society contributes to the raising and teaching of their children; yet today, many of the social and cultural systems and networks that once guided Indigenous peoples are no longer as central to community life.

Not only are families feeling socially isolated and unaware of the supports and services that exist to help them, often times it is difficult to identify and access specialized supports and services, such as early intervention therapies.

There is demonstrated need to improve the supports and services for families during the early years period, including making them more consistently available, clearer in what they provide, and more welcoming to families of different experiences and levels of vulnerability. There is also a need to create clearer pathways from these programs and services to enhanced supports and services that address vulnerabilities a child or family might face, such as Infant and Youth Mental Health supports and Children & Youth with Special Needs services.



FRAMEWORK, GOALS AND PRINCIPLES

This service framework outlines the policy direction for all early years services supported by MCFD to ensure families have the supports and services that they need when they need them.

Overall, MCFD early years services are intended to achieve the following goals:

- » Support the well-being of children and families;
- » Serve as a barrier-free access point, particularly for families facing acute or chronic vulnerability; and
- » Provide clear pathways to enhanced supports and services including Infant Mental Health, Children & Youth with Special Needs, etc.

In the short term, these objectives enhance protective factors and support intended outcomes such as improved cultural connectedness, maternal child attachment, parent efficacy and reduced immediate vulnerability.

In the long term, these objectives help achieve social and economic benefits through enhanced family preservation and maximized developmental outcomes for children.

In addition to the overarching goals, in outlining key principles and services that will guide spending across MCFD, this framework will:

- » Provide clarity to service providers, families, and funders regarding the early years services funded by MCFD:
- » Ensure direct services and supports are prioritized for funding;
- » Allow for improved referrals between early years services and enhanced supports ;
- » Support evidence-informed investments; and
- » Provide clarity of MCFD mandate to support collaboration with other vested partners in the early years landscape (e.g. health authorities).

MCFD'S EARLY YEARS SERVICES

Providing Family Navigation

Services focus on connecting families in need to services that can be of assistance. This is not simply an information service. The provider has a deeper understanding of common family needs and vulnerabilities and helps make effective direct connections. This service is key in ensuring referrals between universal and enhanced supports are made. Services may take the form of: One-to-one-in-person discussion; Telephone communication; E-mail or text message communication; Case management.

Supporting Families

Services focus on addressing the expected or unexpected challenges that a family may face (particularly families with enhanced vulnerability). Services include: Provision of language specific information and support; Parenting education; Provision of food and equipment (e.g. car seat, clothing, housing information); Unstructured, safe place to access professionals informally.

Providing Non-Child Care Early Learning

Services specifically focus on child development in one or more of the following areas: physical, social, emotional, language and communication, cognitive, and spiritual. Services include: Physical and creative play; Exploration and risk taking; Learning about social responsibility and empathy towards others; Literacy and communication.

Promoting Community Belonging

Services provide opportunities for parents to share experiences, expertise, guidance and emotional supports with other parents, with the intent of reducing social isolation and promoting community belonging. Services may take the form of: One-to-one peer mentoring; Group meetings and gatherings focused on connecting families; Phone, e-mail, in person informal opportunities to meet/ share conversations, Parent support groups.

Supporting Indigenous Culture, Language Revitalization, and Cultural Competency

Services connect families to their Indigenous culture and language, with the intent of reducing cultural isolation and supporting cultural connectedness and community wellness. Education to non-indigenous organizations to build cultural competencies with staff, children and families. Services may take the form of language/ cultural programs, community gatherings or informed cultural competency training.

OUR VISION

Children and families have the supports and services that they need when they need them. MCFD early years services are intended to achieve the following goals

- 1 Support the well-being of children and families
- 2 Serve as barrier-free access point, particularly for families facing acute or chronic vulnerabilities
- 3 Provide clear pathways to enhanced supports and services including Infant Mental Health, Children & Youth With Special Needs

In the short term, these goals enhance protective factors and intended outcomes such as improved cultural connectedness, enhanced parent child attachment, enhanced parent efficacy, and reduced immediate vulnerability.

In the long term, these service goals help achieve social and economic benefits through enhanced family preservation and maximized developmental outcomes for children. These goals also address social determinants of health leading to improved equity across populations.



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GOV.BC.CA/EARLYYEARS**

