



Federal and Alberta Government Programs for Early Childhood Development: A Schematic

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1. Introduction

What types of government programs are available to children—or perhaps more appropriately, parents with children—under the age of six in Alberta? This report attempts to answer this question by creating an inventory of federal and Alberta government programs directed at early childhood development (ECD)—with early childhood generally defined as children under 6 years old. The report is intended to be a starting point for future policy research on early childhood programs in Alberta.¹

To improve public policy directed at ECD, the report provides a basic understanding of programs that are currently offered and how they are delivered. It is hoped that the information and schematic that follow provide not just an inventory, but a way of thinking about public policy directed toward young children in Alberta. Although focused on Alberta, the findings are relevant for other jurisdictions as well.

2. Scope

Included in this inventory are government programs that involve ECD-related benefits to families and children (children are defined as anyone under the age of 6 years old). We have not limited ourselves only to those programs that deal specifically with ECD for two reasons:

- Certain programs developed to support parents, children, and families may not have been designed specifically to address ECD, but may have important implications for ECD; and, if we do not know exactly what is out there, we do not know what needs to be done.
- This report only deals with programs and funds delivered and distributed by either the Alberta provincial government or Canada’s federal government. There is another whole world of non-governmental services throughout the province, providing a staggering number of specialized and directed programs which are beyond the scope of this report, but would be a valuable supplement to it.

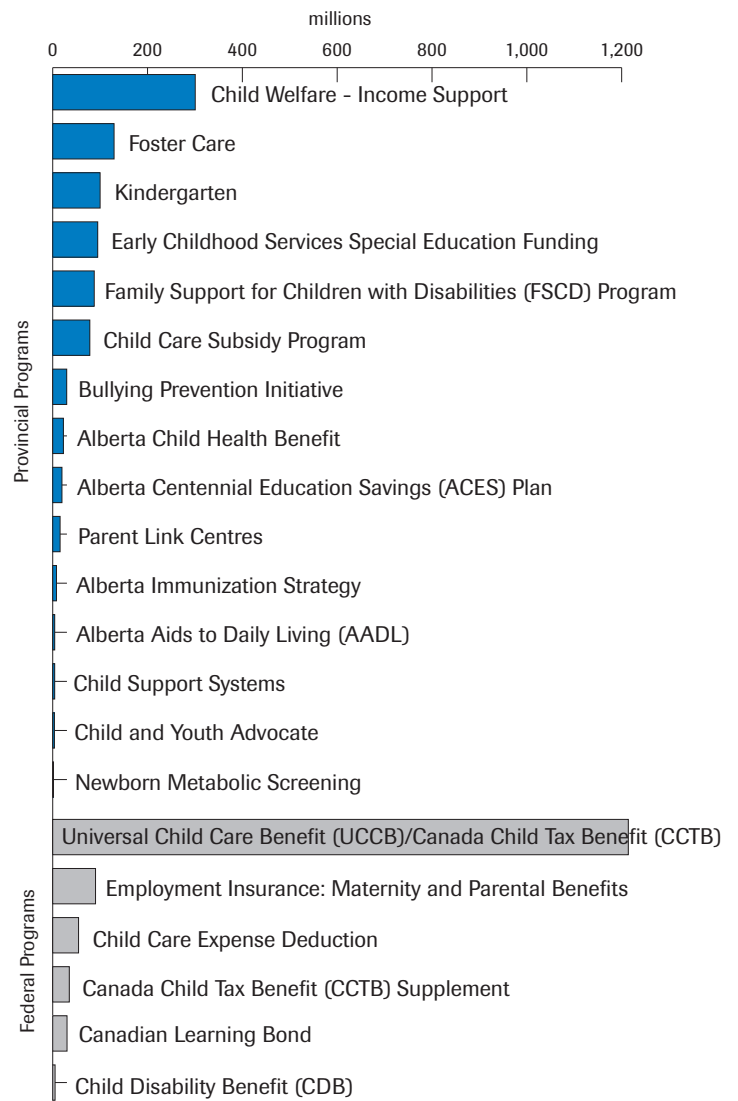
Information on these programs was culled from government websites and documents. The information has been reviewed by government and external ECD experts to better ensure comprehensiveness.

We also provide cost data for programs where available. We provide details on \$2.3 billion in spending on ECD programs

in Alberta. This represents 4.1% of combined federal and provincial spending in Alberta. Alberta spends less than 3% of its budget on ECD programs, while Ottawa spends just under 8% of its budget on ECD programs. By way of comparison, Alberta spends nearly 40% of its operating budget on health care and Ottawa spends 16% of its program spending on benefits to seniors (excluding the Canada Pension Plan).

Figure 1 illustrates the major federal and Alberta ECD spending programs for which we have expenditure estimates. It illustrates that the bulk of spending on programs comes in the form of the federal Universal Child Care Benefit which, at \$1.1 billion, dwarfs all other spending. The large categories of provincial spending are for child welfare, foster care and early childhood education programs, including kindergarten.

Figure 1: Federal and Provincial ECD Programs



Note: In the federal government’s 2007 budget, the UCCB and the CCTB were combined and referred to as “Children’s Benefits.”

¹ Much of the impetus for this work has come from the first (2007) and second (2008) “Building Blocks for a Healthy Future” conferences. Sponsored by the Norlien Foundation and held in Red Deer, Alberta, the conferences brought together experts on ECD.

This report lists what *is* being done. It will be the role of future reports to build on this information and suggest what *should* be done and what *could* be done better.

To preview our conclusions:

- The federal government is primarily involved in delivering financial benefits to parents, whether in the form of direct payments or deductions delivered through the tax code.
- The province of Alberta delivers many of the remedial programs that require more intensive service delivery. This is because ECD falls under provincial jurisdiction.
- We provide details for \$2.3 billion in spending on ECD. Of that, \$2.0 billion goes directly to parents in the form of cash benefits or reimbursement of costs. \$1.4 billion of that \$2.0 billion in cash benefits come from the federal government.
- The federal government has initiated a number of innovative, preventative pilot programs. It is also the primary funder of ECD research.

3. Creating a Schematic

Total federal and provincial government involvement in ECD in Alberta amounts to 79 distinct programs. The existence of such a vast number of programs prevents discussing them all in detail. To make information manageable, we have produced a schematic that summarizes some key features of these programs. Our schematic groups programs according to several key criteria, establishing a broad understanding of the policy environment.

First, we divide programs into three broad categories—1) programs for parents; 2) programs for professionals; and 3) internal government initiatives. Within these categories, 44 programs are delivered to parents and/or children and 32 are directed to professionals. Internal government initiatives include two very broad provincial programs and one general intergovernmental ECD agreement. We do not examine the three internal government programs in the analysis below. A later section briefly addresses some programs delivered by the Calgary Health Region.

We then ask three questions of each of these groupings.

What type of program is it? – Programs directed at parents have been divided into three categories: (a) financial benefits paid to parents; (b) guidelines or awareness campaigns; and (c) services delivered

directly by government to parents. Programs directed at professionals have been categorized into (a) guidelines or awareness campaigns; (b) programs where the government delivers a service; and (c) research.

To whom is the program targeted? – Programs have been divided into (a) universal programs meant to benefit all children; (b) programs targeted at children with special needs; (c) programs targeted at families with low income; and (d) programs with other types of targets (e.g., adoptive or foster children).

What is the targeted point of intervention? – Programs are categorized further according to whether they are (a) preventative; (b) remedial; or (c) mixed. Preventative programs are those targeted to prevent specific childhood development issues or complications. Remedial programs are those that support or assist children and families who face childhood development issues or complications. Mixed programs are those without discrete preventative and remedial components.

Figure 2 provides a visual schematic of ECD programs directed to families according to these three groupings, and Figure 3 provides the same for programs directed at professionals, others, and the Calgary Health Region.

We also distinguish between programs delivered by the federal and provincial governments. The Canadian constitution gives responsibility for ECD to provincial governments. Historically, however, the federal government has used the tax system and its spending power to deliver programs to families with young children.

We also distinguish programs by whether they are (a) government-funded; (b) government-delivered; or (c) a mix. Government-funded programs are those programs which provide funding for non-governmental program delivery. In these cases, the government does little more than give money to non-governmental organizations that meet the requirements for government assistance. The government's role is to set guidelines, determine who meets the guidelines, and send them money. Government-delivered programs are funded, administrated, and delivered directly to families and individuals by a government department. These may be programs in which parents and children can participate or simply programs that transfer funds or tax cuts directly to these families. Mixed programs are those in which the government partners with non-governmental agencies to deliver a program. These programs often involve cases wherein project guidelines and materials are developed by governments and then delivered by community organizations, caregivers, or health care professionals.

DEVELOPING THE SCHEMATIC

In the schematic, we list programs delivered by the federal and provincial governments for Early Childhood Development and categorize them as noted in the main text. We will use four programs as examples to show how to categorize various programs.

The Universal Child Care Benefit

The Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) is a series of programs directed at families with children. It includes a \$100 per month payment to parents for each child under the age of 6 and the Canadian Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) that directs cash payments to parents with children under 16 based on family income. Ottawa spends \$11.2 billion nationally on UCCB programs, with roughly \$1.1 billion finding its way into Alberta.

A majority of the funding for this program is directed at all families (the CCTB is targeted based on income). The UCCB delivers cash benefits directly to parents. We have classified it as a remedial program as there is no specific childhood development issue or complication that the programs are attempting to prevent. The federal government delivers the UCCB through the tax system, or direct to parents in the case of the \$100 per month, using information from the tax system.

Alberta Immunization Strategy

The Alberta Immunization Strategy (AIS) is a 10-year, \$9.5 million provincial program launched in 2007 with the intent to decrease the occurrences of vaccine-preventable diseases in Alberta. The two main components of this program include \$8 million to be contributed to vaccine delivery and \$1.5 to be focused upon professional education. Vaccinations to be delivered to children at a series of landmarks between 2 months and 16 years of age will combat diseases including chickenpox, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, haemophilus influenza type B, hepatitis B, human papillomavirus, influenza, measles, mumps, rubella, and meningococcal and pneumococcal diseases.

This immunization program is a service directed at all children, who will be immunized for all the diseases mentioned above according to a specific timetable. Alberta Health and Wellness states that the AIS is delivered by the province in order to stem of the tide of vaccine-preventable diseases, causing it to be classified as a preventative program.

Canada's Physical Activity Guides for Children and Youth

Canada's Physical Activity Guides for Children and Youth are two separate guides intended to address the observation by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute that the country's children and youth are not active enough to promote healthy growth and development. The guides were first launched by Health Canada and the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology in 1998 after being developed and tested by a community of experts and children.

With the cooperation of various partners, including a number of NGOs, health boards, and educational organizations, the federal government has promoted these guidelines in an effort to encourage healthy lifestyles among Canadian children, preventing health issues in adulthood. Because the federal government not only developed these guidelines, but have also had a hand in delivering them, it was determined that Canada's Physical Activity Guides for Children and Youth may be considered to have a mixed delivery.

Healthy Weights Social Marketing Campaign

The province of Alberta's Healthy Weights Social Marketing Campaign is a \$2 million program intended to fund professionals and communities who wish to promote the importance of healthy eating. This campaign mixed a series of approaches in order to prevent outbreaks of childhood obesity, including funding to professionals, schools and community organizations, the development of dietary guidelines for parents and children, and the creation of a marketing campaign intended to promote and encourage healthy diets.

Figure 2: A Schematic of Federal and Provincial ECD Programs for Parents and Children in Alberta

Type	Universal/Targeted	Purpose	Program Name	Issue	Level of Government	Government Role	Cost (\$000s) ¹		
Financial Benefits Paid to Parents (27)	Universal Programs (7)	Preventative (2)	1	Alberta Centennial Education Savings (ACES) Plan	Education – Post-Secondary	Provincial	Deliver	19,500	
			2	Stay-at-Home Parents Support	Child Care	Provincial	Fund	Included in #19	
		Remedial (25)	3	Employment Insurance: Maternity and Parental Benefits	Healthy Pregnancy, Birth, and Infancy	Federal	Deliver	90,300	
			4	Child Care Expense Deduction	Early Childhood Development, Learning and Child Care	Federal	Fund	54,500	
			5	Canada Pension Plan Children’s Benefits	Pension	Federal	Deliver	TBD	
			6	Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB)	Parenting and Family Support	Federal	Deliver	Included in #7	
			7	Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB)/Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB)	Parenting and Family Support	Federal	Deliver	1,121,400 ²	
	Other (4)		8	Kinship Care	Child Welfare	Provincial	Deliver	Included in #9	
			9	Foster Care	Child Welfare	Provincial	Deliver	129,436	
			10	Foster-To-Adopt Program	Child Welfare	Provincial	Deliver	Included in #9	
			11	Alberta Child and Youth Support Program	Financial Support	Provincial	Deliver	TBD	
	Targeted Programs (20)		Special Needs (5)	12	Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) Program – Family Support Services	Children with Disabilities	Provincial	Mixed	Included in #41
				13	Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) Program – Child Focused Services	Children with Disabilities	Provincial	Fund	Included in #41
			Low income (11)	14	Early Childhood Services Special Education Funding	Special Education	Provincial	Fund	94,930
				15	Inclusive Child Care Program	Child Care	Provincial	Fund	Included in #19
				16	Child Disability Benefit (CDB)	Special Needs	Federal	Deliver	5,000
				17	Child Support Systems	Child Support	Provincial	Deliver	4,177
				18	Alberta Child Health Benefit	Health Care	Provincial	Fund	22,528 ³
				19	Child Care Subsidy Program	Child Care	Provincial	Fund	78,281
				20	Kin Child Care Funding Program	Child Care	Provincial	Fund	Included in #19
				21	Supports for Permanency	Child Welfare	Provincial	Deliver	TBD
				22	Extended Hours Child Care	Child Care	Provincial	Fund	Included in #19
		23		Income Support	Child Welfare	Provincial	Deliver	300,673	
		24		Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit	Tax	Provincial	Deliver	TBD	
		25		Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) Supplement	Early Childhood Development, Learning and Child Care	Federal	Deliver	34,955	
		26		Canadian Learning Bond	Education	Federal	Deliver	30,200	
		27		Employment Insurance Family Supplement	Employment Insurance	Federal	Deliver	TBD	
Guidelines or Awareness Campaigns (5)	Universal Programs (4)	Preventative (2)	28	Bad Guy Patrol	Internet Safety	Provincial	Deliver	TBD	
			29	Bullying Prevention Initiative	Bullying	Provincial	Deliver	29,533 ⁴	
			30	Consumer Product Safety Activities – Is Your Child Safe? Booklet	Parenting and Family Supports	Federal	Mixed	4	
			31	Keep Kids Safe Car Time 1-2-3-4	Parenting and Family Supports	Federal	Deliver	5	
	Targeted Program (1)	Preventative & Remedial	32	FASD Strategic Plan, including seven FASD Networks and FASD Demonstration Projects	Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder	Provincial	Deliver	TBD	
Services Delivered Directly by Governments to Parents (12)	Universal Programs (6)	Preventative (2)	33	Alberta Immunization Strategy	Immunization	Provincial	Deliver	9,500 ⁵	
			34	Newborn Metabolic Screening	Health Care	Provincial	Deliver	1,670 ⁶	
		Remedial (2)	35	Kindergarten	Early Childhood Education	Provincial	Deliver	100,000	
			36	Child and Youth Advocate	Legal Issues	Provincial	Deliver	3,583	
		Preventative & Remedial (2)	37	Children’s Mental Health Initiative	Mental Health	Provincial	Mixed	TBD	
			38	Parent Link Centres	Family/Parent Resources	Provincial	Deliver	15,613 ⁷	
	Targeted Programs (6)	Other (2)	Remedial (5)	39	Early Childhood Services (ECS) Funding for Early Learners: ESL / Francisation	Early Childhood Education	Provincial	Fund	Included in #14
				40	Maintenance Enforcement Program	Child Support	Provincial	Deliver	TBD
		Special Needs (3)		41	Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) Program – General	Children with Disabilities	Provincial	Mixed	87,647
				42	Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) Program – Information and Referral Support	Children with Disabilities	Provincial	Deliver	Included in #41
				43	Alberta Aids to Daily Living (AADL)	Health Care	Provincial	Deliver	4,213
		Low Income		Preventative (1)	44	Nobody’s Perfect	Parenting and Family Supports	Federal	Deliver

1-All figures for 2005-2006 only, unless otherwise noted; 2-In the federal government’s 2007 budget plan, the UCCB and the CCTB were calculated together as “Children’s Benefits.”; 3-Figure from 2006-2007 fiscal year; 4-Supported by Family Violence initiatives; 5-Total funding; 6-Starting 2007; 7-Budgeted under Parenting Resources Initiative

Figure 3: A Schematic of Federal and Provincial ECD Programs for Professionals, Other and Health Regions in Alberta

Professionals									
Type	Universal/Targeted		Purpose	Program Name		Issue	Level of Gov't	Gov't Role	Cost (\$000s) ¹
Guidelines and Awareness Campaigns (11)	Universal Programs (11)		Preventative (11)	1	Child and Youth Nutrition Guidelines	Health Care	Provincial	Deliver	500 ²
				2	Healthy Weights Social Marketing Campaign	Health Care	Provincial	Mixed	2,000 ³
				3	Family-Centred Maternity and Newborn Care National Guidelines	Healthy Pregnancy, Birth, and Infancy	Federal	Deliver	151
				4	Folic Acid Awareness Campaign (part of Healthy Pregnancy Strategy)	Healthy Pregnancy, Birth, and Infancy	Federal	Deliver	69 ⁴
				5	Healthy Pregnancy Social Marketing Campaign (Healthy Pregnancy Strategy)	Healthy Pregnancy, Birth, and Infancy	Federal	Deliver	2
				6	National Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Social Marketing Campaign (Healthy Pregnancy Strategy)	Healthy Pregnancy, Birth, and Infancy	Federal	Deliver	36 ⁴
				7	Postpartum Parent Support Program	Healthy Pregnancy, Birth, and Infancy	Federal	Mixed	0
				8	Reducing the Risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome	Healthy Pregnancy, Birth, and Infancy	Federal	Mixed	2
				9	Consumer Product Safety Activities – Consumer Product Safety Industry and Professional Guides	Parenting and Family Supports	Federal	Mixed	3 ⁴
				10	Canada's Physical Activity Guides for Children and Youth	Parenting and Family Supports	Federal	Mixed	21
				11	Family Violence Initiative – National Clearinghouse on Family Violence	Research and Information	Federal	Deliver	73
Government Services (9)	Universal Programs (8)	Preventative (6)	12	Allergy & Anaphylaxis Informational Response (AAIR)	Childhood Allergies	Provincial	Fund	TBD	
			13	Family Literacy Programs	Education	Provincial	Fund	TBD	
			14	Regional Health Promotion Co-ordinators for Healthy Weights	Health Care	Provincial	Fund	2,700 ⁴	
			15	Young Family Wellness Initiative	Health and Wellness	Provincial	Fund	TBD	
			16	Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program	Healthy Pregnancy, Birth, and Infancy	Federal	Fund	3,070	
			17	National Literacy Secretariat – Family Literacy Projects	Parenting and Family Supports	Federal	Fund	342	
		Preventative and Remedial (2)	18	Community Action Program for Children(CAPC)/Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) National Projects Fund	Parenting and Family Supports	Federal	Fund	119	
			19	National Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Initiative	Healthy Pregnancy, Birth, and Infancy	Federal	Mixed	120	
		Targeted	Low Income	Preventative (1)	20	Community Action Program for Children (CAPC)	Parenting and Family Supports	Federal	Fund
Research (12)	Universal Programs (10)	Preventative (11)	21	Pre-school Developmental Screening	Health Care	Provincial	Fund	3,000 ⁴	
			22	CIHR – Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health (IHDCYH)	Research	Federal	Fund	4,900	
			23	Children's Health and the Environment	Research	Federal	Deliver	26	
			24	Understanding the Early Years (UEY) Initiative	Research	Federal	Deliver	238	
			25	Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network	Research	Federal	Mixed	104	
			26	Canadian Childhood Cancer Surveillance and Control Program	Research	Federal	Mixed	12	
			27	Canadian Perinatal Surveillance System	Research	Federal	Mixed	190	
			28	Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being – Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development	Research	Federal	Deliver	67	
			29	Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being – Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare	Research	Federal	Mixed	37	
			30	Child Maltreatment Surveillance Activity	Research	Federal	Fund	36	
	Targeted (2)	Special Needs	Remedial (1)	31	Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being – Centre of Excellence for Children and Adolescents with Special Needs	Research	Federal	Deliver	32
	Low Income	32		Social Development Partnerships Program – Children and Families	Research	Federal	Fund	554	
Other									
Universal/Targeted		Purpose	Program Name		Issue	Level of Government			
Universal Programs (3)		Remedial (1)	35	The September 2000 Federal-Provincial-Territorial Early Childhood Development (ECD) Agreement	Childhood Development	Intergovernmental			
			36	Alberta Children and Youth Initiative	Children and Youth	Provincial			
			37	Children and Youth with Special and Complex Needs Policy Framework	Special Needs	Provincial			
Calgary Health Region (CHR)									
Type	Universal/Targeted		Purpose	Program Name		Issue	Level of Gov't	Government Role	
Guidelines and Awareness Campaigns (3)	Universal Programs (3)		Preventative (3)	40	Young Family Wellness Initiative – Three Cheers for the Early Years	Wellness	CHR	Region Deliver	
				41	Childbirth and Parenting Education	Healthy Pregnancy, Birth, and Infancy	CHR	Region Deliver	
				42	Healthy Babies	Healthy Pregnancy, Birth, and Infancy	CHR	Region Deliver	
Service Delivery (2)	Universal Program (1)		Preventative (2)	43	Newborn Jaundice Screening Program	Healthy Pregnancy, Birth, and Infancy	CHR	Region Deliver	
	Targeted	Low Income		44	Best Beginning Program	Healthy Pregnancy, Birth, and Infancy	CHR	Region Deliver	

1-All figures for 2005-2006 only, unless otherwise noted; 2-Figure from 2006-2007 fiscal year; 3-Starting 2007; 4-Total funding

4. Programs for Parents

A majority of programs (27 of 44) targeted at parents come in the form of financial benefits paid to parents. And while we do not have complete expenditure data for all programs, these financial benefits also represent a majority of total government expenditures on ECD. Among the largest programs are the federal Canada Child Tax Benefit that is targeted to families based on income and the Universal Child Care Benefit that pays \$100 per month to families for each child under the age of 6. These two programs combined—called the Universal Child Care Benefit—pay out upward of \$1.1 billion in Alberta.² At the provincial level, there are cash payments directed to foster parents, families supporting children with disabilities, and childcare, in addition to basic income support. A majority of these cash payments are targeted in some fashion, with the largest portion (11 of 27) targeted on the basis of income.

The vast majority of financial benefit programs (25 of 27) are remedial in nature—in short, payments are provided to parents based on some sort of demonstrated pre-existing need or qualification. Both the federal and provincial governments provide Albertans with these targeted programs. For instance, families who support children with special needs are eligible for the Child Disability Benefit (CDB) from the federal government, as well as the Inclusive Child Care program from the government of Alberta. Similarly, low income families may be eligible for the federal Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) Supplement in addition to the provincial Child Care Subsidy program.

Both the provincial and federal governments publish guidelines or invest in awareness campaigns directed at parents. Most of these programs (4 of 5) are universal in nature.

About a quarter of the programs (12 of 44) delivered to families involve delivering some sort of service by government to families. These include immunization programs, legal supports, maintenance enforcement programs and Alberta's Parent Link Program. These are programs where the level of government involvement is the highest—where the government goes beyond information or providing cash supports and actually delivers programs. These programs have developed over a long period of time, in response to the issues and needs of the day. They deal with a wide range of special needs and are delivered by a number of different government departments. In 1998, the provincial government created the Alberta Youth and Child Initiative (AYCI) with the intent of coordinating such programs across a range of ministries, including Alberta Children and Youth Services, Alberta Education, Alberta Health and Wellness, Alberta Advanced

² As a rough approximation, we have attributed federal government program expenditures in Alberta in proportion to Alberta's share of the national population.

Education and Technology, Alberta Aboriginal Relations, Alberta Employment and Immigration, Alberta Justice and Attorney General, Alberta Seniors and Community Supports, Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security, Alberta Alcohol & Drug Abuse Commission, and Alberta Mental Health Board. Under the umbrella of the AYCI, the provincial government “encourages communities to develop innovative approaches and solutions to meet the needs of Alberta's children and youth.”³

Half of the programs (6 of 12) where the government delivers a service to parents are delivered to all families (examples include immunization and kindergarten) and half are targeted in some fashion. Targets include children with disabilities and children for whom English is a second language. A majority of government-delivered services are provided by the provincial government, not the federal government. This is the result of the fact that provincial governments have primary responsibility for most social programs in Canada. A majority (7 of 12) of these government-delivered programs are remedial rather than preventative.

5. Programs for Professionals

One third of programs for professionals (11 of 32) are guidelines or awareness campaigns meant to educate or work with professionals to encourage healthy, safe habits. The ultimate beneficiaries of these campaigns and guidelines are intended to be families, but the substance of these programs are aimed at professionals working in the ECD field.

There are also a number of programs where the government is involved in service delivery for professionals. Many of these programs are demonstration or pilot projects with the government involved in design. Typically, the final delivery of these programs is the responsibility of NGOs as in the case of the federal government's “Healthy Pregnancy Social Marketing Campaign” and the province of Alberta's “Child and Youth Nutrition Guidelines.” Again, the ultimate beneficiaries of these programs are families, but the focus of these programs is ECD professionals who work to develop demonstration or pilot projects. It is notable that the federal government plays a much more prominent role here—suggesting that many of these programs are intended to ensure consistency across provinces.

Just over a third of programs (12 of 32) directed at professionals are research programs funded or conducted by government. Most research programs are conducted by the federal government, with federal government's Public

³ Government of Alberta. “Government of Alberta: Alberta Child and Youth Initiative.” <http://child.alberta.ca/home/501.cfm>.

Health Agency performing much of the research. Two agencies outside of formal federal departments—the Canadian Institutes for Health Research and Networks of Centres of Excellence—also do research on ECD. In Alberta, there is the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research. It is not clear how research on ECD is coordinated between the federal and provincial government, or even across the various funding agencies.

Nearly all programs directed at professionals are categorized as preventative. Guidelines and awareness campaigns such as provincial Child and Youth Nutrition Guidelines and the Postpartum Parent Support Program as well as research funding for such programs as the Understanding the Early Years (UEY) Initiative and the Centres of Excellence for Children’s Well-Being may be categorized here. It is notable that the “service delivery” programs here are also preventative and, as noted, are being led by the federal government. This suggests the possibility that national initiatives by the federal government are frequently more aimed at preventative measures. As the federal government does not have “primary” responsibility for ECD, they have the freedom to think more about preventative programs.

6. The Calgary Health Region

Prior to the amalgamation of Alberta’s nine regional health authorities under a single province-wide health board, the health regions delivered a diverse set of ECD programs.

To give a flavour of the types of programs delivered by the health regions, we have included a short list of programs delivered by the Calgary Health Region that focus on pre-natal and post-natal care (see Figure 3). There are five programs, three of which are guidelines or information campaigns and two are screening programs. All of these programs are preventative in nature.

7. Concluding Thoughts

The schematic and the discussion above point to four broad conclusions about ECD programs delivered by the provincial and federal governments in Alberta:

- The federal government is primarily involved in delivering financial benefits to parents, whether in the form of direct payments or deductions delivered through the tax code.
- The province of Alberta delivers many of the remedial programs that require more intensive service delivery. This is because ECD falls under provincial jurisdiction.
- We provide details for \$2.3 billion in spending on ECD. Of that, \$2.0 billion goes directly to parents in the form of cash benefits or reimbursement of costs. \$1.4 billion of that \$2.0 billion in cash benefits come from the federal government.
- The federal government has initiated a number of innovative, preventative pilot programs. It is also the primary funder of ECD research.

Some Initial Thoughts for Future Research

If one were to describe the policy framework for federal and provincial ECD programs in Alberta it might look something like the following:

Programs that are directed toward all children and families are generally delivered as cash payments to families using the tax system. This would include the federal Universal Child Care Benefit, the Child Care expense deduction as well as the provincial Alberta Family Employment tax credit. Few universal programs are delivered completely by government—immunization programs are one exception.

Remedial programs targeted at children where the identification of need is fairly straightforward—in cases such as disability or low income, or foster parenthood—are generally delivered via cash payments directly to parents based on some sort of qualifying criteria. Most of these programs are delivered by the province.

Programs for high needs individuals are delivered by the province with more intensive government involvement in design and delivery of these programs. These programs are much more intrusive and require much more rigorous screening mechanisms.

An obvious question for future research is whether this policy framework—which suggests a much more coordinated ECD system than in reality exists—makes sense. If it does, there is a need to do a much more serious analysis of current programs using the framework as a guide—including a better sense of what the gaps are in our existing policy menu. If it does not make sense, what framework makes more sense and how might government programs be altered to fit a new framework? An interesting research project would be to look at the origin of the many programs that exist to answer the question of

whether what we have today is merely the result of ad hoc, crisis management policy development or whether there is a driving policy framework that has produced what we have today.

Another question would be: How can we improve screening? Other provinces (such as British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario) make much more universal use of the Early Development Index to screen for “children at risk.” If ECD programs are to do a better job of helping children at risk, then clearly screening mechanisms for who is at risk become a critical component for program design.

On the research side, it is clear that there are many sources of funding and areas where ECD research is being done. An obvious question is whether more coordination of this research is needed, and if so, how to best accomplish that. The recently created Canadian Partnership Against Cancer provides an interesting example of a quasi-independent (from government) agency that is attempting to better coordinate and disseminate cancer research. Might such an agency work for ECD?

A related question is whether our policy framework adequately represents the best scientific evidence on early childhood development. Do our programs today reflect the myths of yesterday or the scientific facts of today?

It is hoped that the schematic developed here will provide a basis on which future policy research can proceed in ECD. It is a cliché to say that “our kids are our future,” but this is a cliché (like most) whose resonance is equal to the truth that it contains. Then, for the sake of the future, we ought to do a much better job of understanding, and driving, our policy agenda to ensure our kids have the best possible future. ■

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In 1970, the One Prairie Province Conference was held in Lethbridge, Alberta. Sponsored by the University of Lethbridge and the Lethbridge Herald, the conference received considerable attention from concerned citizens and community leaders. The consensus at the time was that research on the West (including BC and the Canadian North) should be expanded by a new organization. To fill this need, the Canada West Foundation was created under letters patent on December 31, 1970. Since that time, the Canada West Foundation has established itself as one of Canada's premier research institutes. Non-partisan, accessible research and active citizen engagement are hallmarks of the Foundation's past, present and future endeavours. These efforts are rooted in the belief that a strong West makes for a strong Canada.

More information can be found at www.cwf.ca.

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