



National Aboriginal Woman Summit: *Strong Women, Strong Communities*
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Issue Paper: Poverty and Child Welfare

Inuit Perspective:

Inuit Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a major base for a lifelong learning continuum. The Inuit vision of ECD encompasses important values associated with Inuit languages, culture and ways. The purpose of ECD is to strive toward the ultimate goal of 100% health, happy and safe Inuit children and families. This also requires a multi-pronged approach that also addresses matters related to health promotion and prevention aimed at improving Inuit health outcomes.

How is Inuit ECD unique?

- Inuit ECD focuses on health, safety and well being of the whole child
- Inuit families are recognized and are honoured as for the child's first teacher
- Inuit elders provide the foundation and knowledge
- Programs are based upon understanding of Inuit culture, language and ways
- Programs maintain a balance between the use of traditional and contemporary child development knowledge
- Inuit ECD respect Inuit regional diversity and priorities
- Geographic location of Inuit regions provides unique opportunities and challenges.

ECD Linkages to Health Promotion and Prevention (Wellness Strategy):

A Health Promotion and Prevention (Wellness) Strategy is a key investment in Inuit health and is viewed as a means of ensuring that gaps between Inuit health status and that of other Canadians is eliminated. These initiatives must be available for individuals throughout their life span, beginning with prenatal programming and early childhood programming and continuing on into adulthood. These programs are essential tools in beginning to address child welfare and poverty because they respond not only to Inuit health care priorities but to the broader determinants of health that impact Inuit communities. Communities have also identified the need for initiatives related to food security and food availability, parenting, access to midwifery, addictions prevention, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and other public health programs.

What is Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami doing about it?

ITK has been working with Federal, Provincial, and Territorial governments and Inuit organizations to identify the current shortfalls and present needs that will result in decreased child poverty and improvements to child welfare. Further, ITK has signed a work plan with the Minister of Health which identifies a concrete six month action plan that is an initial step in advancing Inuit interests with respect to improving health status in Inuit communities.

With regard to ECD, ITK is working with members of the Inuit ECD Working Group and through this partnership strives to achieve the objectives of the Inuit Early Childhood Strategy. Some of the objectives of the strategy include:

- To develop and produce culturally appropriate resource materials
- To develop a mechanism for a regional exchange of information and resources
- To ensure that Inuit ECD best practices are developed and delivered

Recommendations:

- Inuit ECD faces funding shortages; many ECD workers have no benefits and low pay, there is high staff turnover, major skills gaps and a stressful work environment. A strategy needs to be implemented to work on a retention plan, recruitment of workers, increasing pay with benefits, and a training plan to increase the skills base to enhance quality programs.
- There is a need for Inuit specific programming in ECD that includes curriculum that is appropriate to Inuit languages; this would involve the hiring of Inuit Elders and more learning resources in Inuit languages for use in child care centres.
- There is a need to develop a holistic joint strategy for Inuit children and youth which will focus on wellness. The strategy will be developed between Inuit and the many Federal/Provincial/Territorial departments and agencies that focus on Aboriginal children and youth.
- Acknowledgement, recognition, and commitments to addressing the crucial linkages between non medical determinants of health, such as poverty, addictions, abuse, that affects individual, family and community wellness and suicide prevention (Celebrate Life) initiatives.
- Commitment to increase accessibility to culturally appropriate curriculum for use in child care centres which includes necessary learning resources.