

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early Childhood Development (ECD) Literature Review

(Factors that influence early childhood development, home visitation and community-based collaborative programs, as well as the features of those programs or interventions that promote health equity)

August 13, 2014

Prepared for the Trail Area Health and Environment Committee (THEC)

By Michele Wiens
Human Early Learning Partnership
School of Population and Public Health, Faculty of Medicine
University of British Columbia
2206 East Mall, Vancouver, BC
V6T 1Z3

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Early Childhood Development (ECD) Literature Review

In 2013, the Trail Area Health and Environment Committee (THEC) contracted the Human Early Learning Partnership at UBC to undertake a scoping review of the literature related to early childhood development. The THEC wanted to ascertain whether more could be done at a family or community level to help improve early childhood development (ECD) and young children's health outcomes in the population and thereby create resilience or protection, or offset in some way the potential negative impacts from their exposure to low levels of lead.

The review identifies and describes evidence-based information about the factors that influence early childhood development, the benefits and effectiveness of in-home visitation and community-based collaborative programs, as well as the features of those programs or interventions that promote health equity. Results are presented with respect to: (i) evidence-based papers on healthy child development, home visiting, and community-based collaboration, and (ii) programs, themselves, featuring home visiting and community-based collaboration. There is no formal assessment of the quality of the literature but the review includes key publications for the topics covered and the majority of articles are systematic reviews.

With respect to **factors that influence ECD**, a bank of literature exists outlining significant ECD factors and providing strong evidence supporting a number of practices and programs. The review highlights ECD influences in eight categories: *health and safety; education; material well-being, equity; family and peer relationships; participation; subjective well-being; behaviours and risks; and environment.*

With respect to **home visitation programs** and their role in ECD, evidence is reported by nine domains in which programs aim to improve outcomes: *general; child development and school readiness; child health; maternal health; positive parenting practices; reductions in child maltreatment; reductions in juvenile delinquency, family violence, and crime; low income, disadvantaged mothers, families; and teen moms, at-risk moms.*

There are a number of home visitation interventions available for which there is strong or reasonable evidence of effectiveness. Generally, programs that are most effective are provided by professionals or well-trained para-professionals; are tailored to local social and cultural conditions; have a comprehensive, intensive, rigorous approach (with a theoretical framework) that can be sustained over time with fidelity; include more frequent visitation (for at-risk families); and demonstrate effective collaboration between program staff, parents, and the community.

With respect to **community-based, collaborative interventions** and their role in ECD, the literature provides support for the development of collaborative partnerships. Multi-strategy approaches, especially those that incorporate community development, coalition building and multi-sectoral collaboration, appear to be more effective than single strategies. There is some evidence that local partnerships delivering environmental interventions result in health gain.

With respect to **features of interventions that may promote health equity or protect against increased inequities**, the common elements of programs that promote aspects of health equity appear to be collaboration, sustained funding, and leadership. There is evidence that program models that build relationships across family, school, and the community can improve outcomes for low income and

socially or culturally marginalized families. Another important feature is for programs to employ a health equity and social determinants of health approach, e.g., focusing on poverty reduction, early environment initiatives, neighbourhood factors, and coordination across sectors.

In addition to compiling the literature on interventions, the review serves to consolidate intervention resources, of which the online searchable portals (repositories) of interventions may be particularly useful to ECD staff involved in program and service development.

To use this document further, the bibliography will serve as an excellent resource for obtaining detail on ECD factors and interventions. As funders and groups plan collaborative ECD initiatives, this document, along with the electronic portals identified, will be an important reference tool to pinpoint relevant models of evidence-based programs, best practices, and “promising practices” for which evidence is growing.