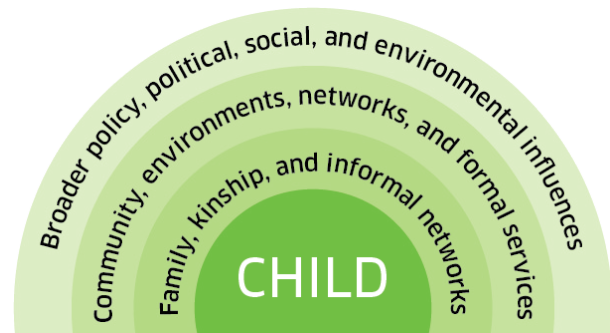




Findings From an Environmental Scan of Early Childhood Mental Health Programs

Infant and early childhood mental health, sometimes referred to as social and emotional development, is the developing capacity of the child from birth to five years to form close and secure adult and peer relationships; experience, manage, and express a full range of emotions; and explore the environment and learn – all in the context of family, community, and culture.*



Early childhood mental health (ECMH) was a new priority area for the Mental Health Commission of Canada to explore between 2019-2021. A key part was the completion of a national environmental scan on ECMH programs across Canada.

The scan had two main goals:

1. To take stock of the nature, quality, and availability of ECMH programs and their related research and evaluations.
2. To learn about gaps in services and any ongoing challenges and opportunities to improve their availability.

* Cohen, J., Oser, C., & Quiqley, K. (2012). Making it happen: Overcoming barriers to providing infant-early childhood mental health. Zero to Three. <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/511-making-it-happenovercoming-barriers-to-providing-infant-early-childhood-mental-health>

What's in the Scan

Based on the determined methodology, the following programs were found and reviewed:

243 Programs

64 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis

8 2SLGBTQ+

6 Linguistic minorities

5 Immigrant, refugee, ethnocultural, and racialized groups

13 Research

10 Evaluation

9 Grey Literature

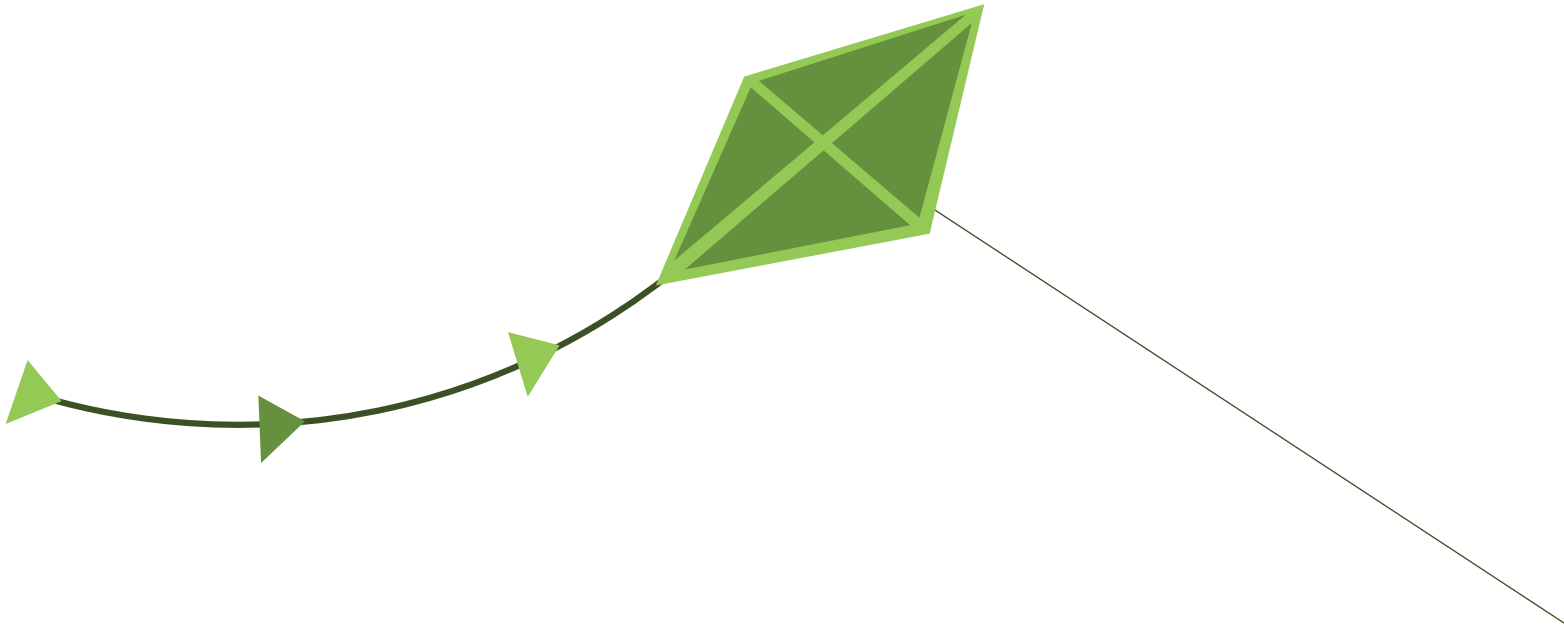
In total, the scan found **243** programs, **188** reports and **35** economic reports.

Programs supporting priority populations

The scan found **64** programs that supported First Nations, Inuit, & Métis, **8** programs that supported 2SLGBTQ+, **6** that supported linguistic minorities, and **5** supported immigrant, refugee, ethnocultural, and racialized groups.

Programs with publicly available direct research/evaluation

Of the **32** programs with direct, publicly available research reports; **13** were research studies, **10** were evaluations and **9** were grey literature reports.



Key Findings

- There is strong evidence showing the importance and impact of early life experiences on mental health and well-being later in life.
- The dedication of those working in ECMH is clear.
- Finding publicly available information about ECMH programs and services is challenging for parents, caregivers, and health-care professionals. While many programs clearly explain their services, the following overall trends were observed:
 - Websites and descriptions are often vague and make information difficult to find.
 - Programs often refer more broadly to “children and youth” rather than specify age ranges.
 - With multiple terms being used to describe ECMH (e.g., socio-emotional development, child wellness, parenting programs), finding the right program is made more difficult.
 - Programs are often unclear if they focus on priority populations (e.g., First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, 2SLGBTQ+, immigrant, refugee, ethnocultural, and racialized populations, linguistic minorities).
 - Program assessments are often unavailable to the public, and information about how they adhere to their programs and models is often missing or unknown.
- Programs that support First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children and their families offer valuable lessons about the focus on family, community, environment, and spirit.
- More work is needed to build a common understanding of ECMH and to reduce barriers to the creation of policies and programs, the use of knowledge, and communication to parents and the general public.



Recommended Actions From the Scan

- ✓ Improve the communications of ECMH programs to give parents and caregivers better access to services when they need or want them.
 - Encourage policy makers and program developers to separate early years in program information, annual reports, and other core documents.
 - Integrate more systems navigators into the ECMH sector that are linked to patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs).*
 - Work with organizations, parents, and caregivers to optimize how ECMH programs are communicated and promoted, ensuring diversity and inclusivity in the services, supports, and materials offered.
- ✓ Help service providers become more aware of their capacity to discuss ECMH programs and refer parents and caregivers to them.
- ✓ Explore the feasibility of establishing a national ECMH strategy to streamline programs, research, evaluation, economic analysis, and reporting across Canada.
 - Develop common core indicators and outcome and population performance measures, including a unified approach to data collection.
 - Create common core indicators and proxies to measure the economic impacts of programs.
 - Explore what service organizations need to build their capacity for evaluation, research, and economic analyses.
- ✓ Work with governments, organizations, service providers, parents, and caregivers to identify national ECMH research gaps and how to address them.
- ✓ Advocate for continued investment in preventing mental illness and promoting mental health across the lifespan, with a specific emphasis on the early years.

** PROMs are measurement tools for which patients provide information on the aspects of their health status relevant to their quality of life, including symptoms, functionality, and physical, mental, and social health.



To learn more, visit the MHCC's [Early Childhood Mental Health page](#).



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