

# Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan

2016- 2020



A roadmap for a brighter path for  
children and families

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# Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan

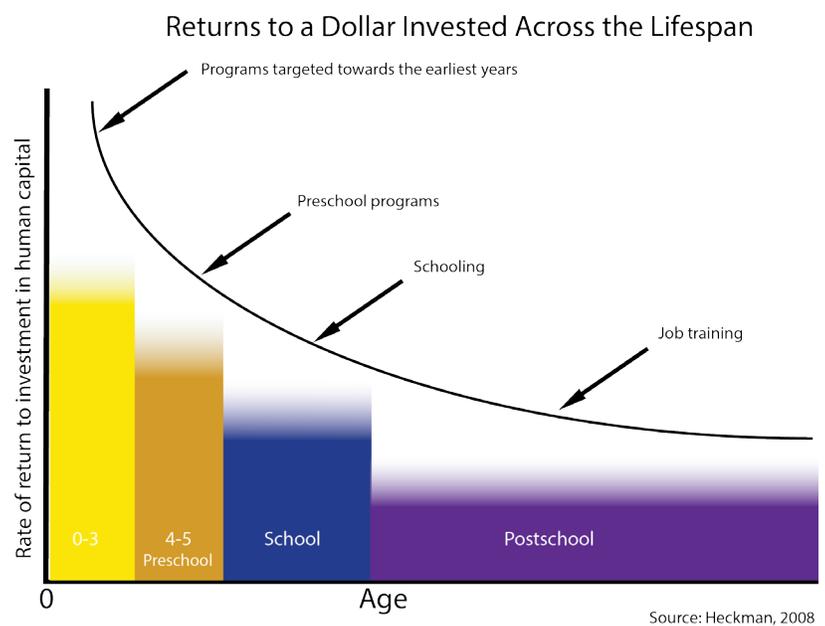
The Government of Saskatchewan's vision for our province is to be the best place in Canada to raise children. To support this vision, we have developed *Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan* to help all children be safe, healthy and develop to their full potential in strong families and supportive communities.

Supporting Saskatchewan's children during their early years is a long-term priority for our government. This plan sets out goals and actions to improve early years programs and supports over the next five years. We will start by improving existing programs, re-focusing resources and eliminating gaps in services so young children and their families receive the right supports at the right time. Over time, we will invest in programs and supports that help meet the goals outlined in this plan and provide lasting benefit to Saskatchewan children and families.

## Supporting Saskatchewan children through their early years

Making sure all children get a good start in life leads to a better quality of life for Saskatchewan people. It reduces the risk of poverty and improves school readiness, health and wellness. It also reduces employment and education gaps for First Nations and Métis people and improves graduation rates and lifelong success for all citizens. It is estimated that one dollar invested in a high quality early years program can result in a return of \$4 to \$9 over the lifespan of the child<sup>1</sup>.

Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan will help meet the challenges of our province's growth and create a better quality of life for Saskatchewan people by supporting 264,000 residents (25 per cent of our population) including 133,000 young children<sup>2</sup>.



1. Center on the Developing Child (2009). *Five Numbers to Remember About Early Childhood Development* (Brief). Retrieved from [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu).
2. Taxfiler (T1FF) Family Data, Table F-15: Census family units and children by age of children, 2013 and Taxfiler (T1FF) - Neighbourhood Income and Demographics, Table N-3: Taxfilers and dependents by single year of age, 2013.

Our government is committed to improving early years programs and services and will collaborate with school divisions, health regions, regional social services, First Nations and Métis organizations, libraries, community-based organizations, federal and municipal governments, families and communities to implement the plan over the next five years.

# What happens in the early years matters for a child's entire life

Each stage of a child's early years, from the prenatal stage to age eight, has the potential to define his or her future. When social, physical, emotional and academic development is nurtured, children have the opportunity to reach their potential. When their development isn't nurtured, children are at risk of lower literacy and numeracy, higher incidences of involvement with the justice system and reduced economic participation throughout life.

During the earliest years of life, a child's brain is developing the foundation upon which all further learning is built. Infants naturally invite adults to engage in interactions through crying, babbling, facial expressions and gestures. When adults respond back with the same vocalizing and gestures, they are playing a vital role in the development of the brain. There are only 2,000 days between when a baby is born and when they begin Kindergarten. By engaging children in conversations, reading to them, responding to their needs in sensitive ways and providing opportunities to explore the world around them, parents, caregivers and early childhood education professionals lay the groundwork children need for positive health, behaviour, learning and relationships through their life.



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by Canada in 1991, underlines that all children have rights – a right to be protected, to health and nutrition, to communicate, to be heard, to have access to leisure, play, culture, and art, to contribute, and to learn. Children have the right to respectful environments including respect for First Nations and Métis ways of knowing, cultural traditions of newcomers to Canada and inclusion of children who are unique learners or experiencing disability.

# Listening to Saskatchewan people

Our Early Years Plan is a made-in-Saskatchewan approach. The thoughts, challenges, and ideas expressed through citizen-informed recommendations through the Saskatchewan Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan, and the Saskatchewan Disability Strategy all informed the path that we have chosen. We've also heard about how we can better serve the children and families of our province through our everyday work with parents and community organizations.

In Fall 2014, Legislative Secretary Russ Marchuk heard from parents and early childhood education professionals around the province about early learning in Saskatchewan. From them, he learned about opportunities to improve early learning in our province and challenges that we need to overcome to provide all children with quality early learning experiences. These opportunities and challenges have helped shape Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan.



## *Did you know?*

Since 2008, there has been a 23 per cent increase in the number of children aged four and younger in Saskatchewan.

According to the 2006 census, approximately 30 per cent of these children aged zero to four are First Nations and Métis.

For every increase of 100 children in the province, 44 are new Canadians. Almost 10,000 immigrant children aged one to nine arrived in Saskatchewan from 2008 to 2014.

The greatest overall numbers of children who are not fully ready for school are found in the middle of the socioeconomic status range.

According to the Ministry of Education's Early Years Evaluation, 59 per cent of Saskatchewan children going into Kindergarten arrive at school fully ready to learn. The Ministry of Education's Education Sector Strategic Plan has set a goal that by 2020, 90 per cent of students exiting Kindergarten will be ready for learning in primary grades and that by 2018, 80 per cent of Grade 3 students will read at or above grade level.

# Building a strong Saskatchewan by supporting early years

Supporting Saskatchewan children and their families through the early years contributes to the Government of Saskatchewan's work on the Saskatchewan Poverty Reduction Strategy, Saskatchewan's Disability Strategy, and the Mental Health and Addictions Plan.

## Through the early years plan we will:

- focus on healthy childhood development including prenatal and early childhood support for mothers and children,
- improve parent choice and access to high quality early learning and child care opportunities,
- support families in their role as parents and caregivers, and
- align programs and services at the provincial and community levels.

## The five pillars of Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan

1. Healthy Beginnings
2. Early Learning
3. Child Care
4. Strong Families, Healthy Children
5. Community Planning and Alignment



In 2015-16, the Government of Saskatchewan invested more than \$31.5 million\* in healthy beginnings by supporting:

Children's Therapy Services

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Targeted FASD Prevention Programs

Services for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Enhanced Preventative Dental Services Program

Maternal Wellness

Midwifery

Child Health Clinics

Early Childhood Immunization

Postnatal visiting services

Pediatric and subspecialty pediatric medical services

KidsFirst

Early Childhood Intervention Program (ECIP)

\* Does not include costs for programming supportive of the early years embedded in regional health authority base funding.

# Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan

## At-A-Glance

Healthy Beginnings	Early Learning	Child Care	Strong Families, Healthy Children	Community Planning and Alignment
<b>GOALS</b>				
Children and families benefit from a strengthened focus on the first three years of life.	Children benefit from high quality early learning environments, developmentally appropriate practices and engaging, supportive relationships.	Children benefit from high quality environments in child care while their parents work or go to school.	Families benefit from supports that help them to be stable, nurturing and to raise healthy children.	Children and families benefit from programs and services that are coordinated, integrated and aligned.
<b>WITHIN FIVE YEARS, WE EXPECT TO:</b>				
<p>Strengthen prenatal supports to help at-risk women and teens have healthy pregnancies</p> <p>Make it easier for new mothers to find support for their mental health</p> <p>Realign home visiting programs for vulnerable families with children up to age three</p>	<p>Increase the availability of early learning spaces including Prekindergarten programs when able</p> <p>Work with First Nations and Métis organizations to improve the reflection of culture in early learning programs</p> <p>Encourage all early learning programs to use best practices in their approach to helping children learn</p> <p>Educate parents about how to choose quality early learning programs for their child</p> <p>Enhance post-secondary and professional learning opportunities for early learning professionals</p>	<p>Establish child care centres in all new school builds in the province as appropriate, starting with the nine joint-use schools scheduled to open in 2017</p> <p>Enhance child care and Before &amp; After School care</p> <p>Simplify the child care subsidy process for parents</p> <p>Improve supports for children who are unique learners or experiencing disability</p> <p>Help children transition successfully from home-based or early learning settings into school</p> <p>Support child care centres to recruit and retain staff</p>	<p>Work with existing family resource centres to support alignment and provision of quality services for families</p> <p>Work with First Nations and Métis organizations and communities to support culturally appropriate parenting programs</p> <p>Help young children and families who have experienced family violence by providing programs, counseling and improved trauma response training for staff</p> <p>Prioritize social housing for families with children aged zero to eight</p> <p>Provide support for programs that support children's health and promote 60 minutes of activity every day</p> <p>Support literacy programs for families</p>	<p>Align home visiting programs to ensure they serve families better, beginning with a pilot project in the North</p> <p>Provide families with information about the importance of the early years, including how they can support their child's development at home and the services available to support them</p> <p>Support smoother transitions and improve access to services for vulnerable children</p> <p>Plan programs and services to meet the needs of children and families</p> <p>Work with the Federal Government and First Nations to ensure equitable early years supports for children living on reserve</p>

# Healthy Beginnings

**Goal:** Children and families benefit from a strengthened focus on the first three years of life.

## We will start by:

- Making it easier for new mothers to find support for their mental health.

## Within five years, we expect to:

### Enhance Prenatal Supports

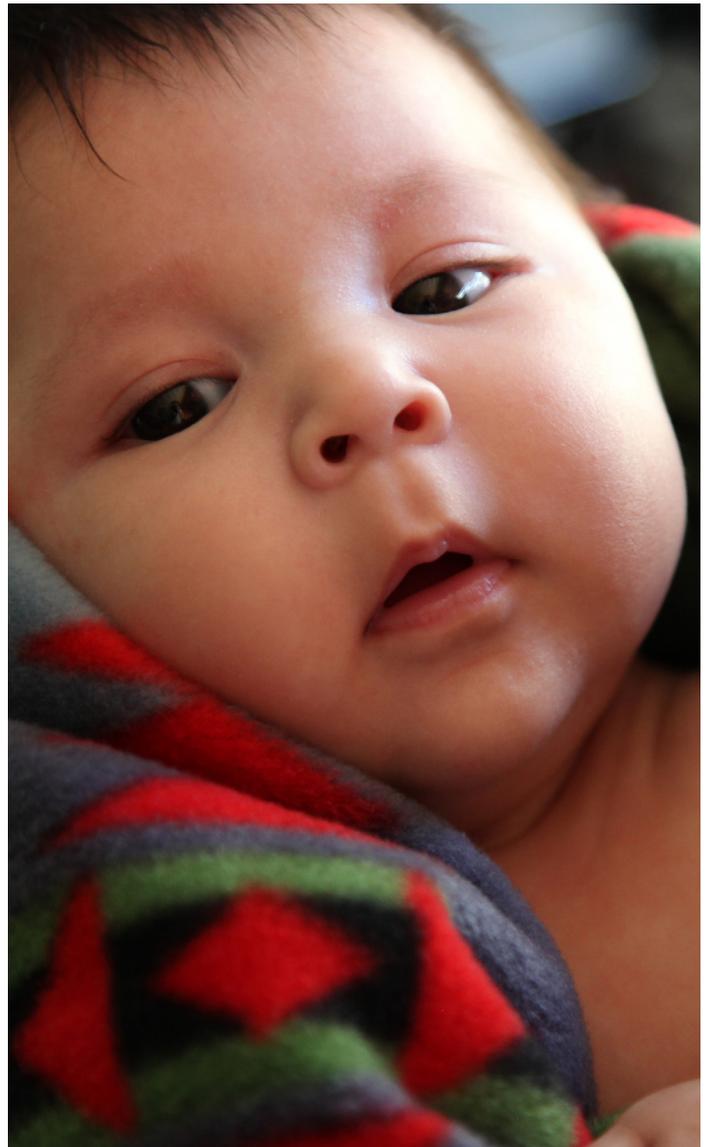
- Support the identification of prenatal women with potential risk factors and help them benefit from health services.
- Look for ways to help more parents, especially first time and teen parents, benefit from prenatal classes.
- Look for ways to expand community programs that help at-risk women and teens be healthy during their pregnancy, with a focus on culturally appropriate services.
- Strengthen community programs that work with at-risk women and teens to support prenatal health and healthy pregnancies.

### Focus on Early Interventions in the First Year of Life

- Improve collection of newborn data at birth and connect families to additional supports as needed.
- Provide expectant or adoptive parents with a maternity package.

### We will give vulnerable families continuous support

- Realign home visiting programs for vulnerable families with children up to age three and make sure more children go on to benefit from programs like Prekindergarten as they become eligible.



In 2015-16, the Government of Saskatchewan invested more than \$30.4 million\* in early learning by supporting:

Early Entrance

Prekindergarten

English as an Additional Language assessment and support

First Nations and Métis Education Achievement Fund

\* Does not include costs supportive of the early years embedded in school division funding.

# Early Learning

**Goal:** Children benefit from high quality early learning environments, developmentally appropriate practices and engaging, supportive relationships.

We will start by:

- Improving targeting of Prekindergarten programs for vulnerable children.
- Educating parents about how to choose quality early learning programs for their child.
- Supporting play-based, developmentally appropriate approaches across the sector

Within five years, we expect to:

**Increase availability of early learning opportunities**

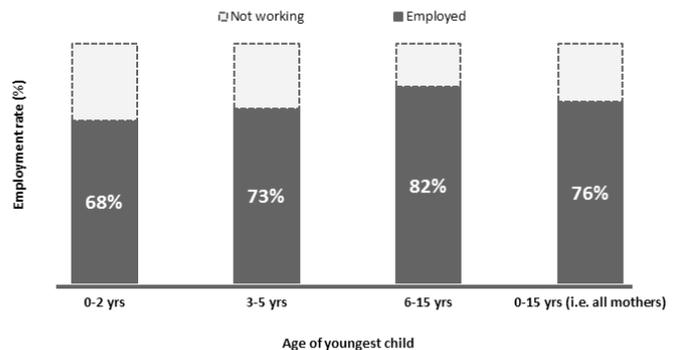
- Improve access to early learning spaces for four-year-olds including community-based preschool and child care centres.
- Enhance Prekindergarten programs for vulnerable three- and four-year-olds when able.

**Develop culturally appropriate early learning programs**

- Establish agreements that make it easier to develop early learning programs jointly with interested First Nations and Métis communities and organizations.
- Support early learning environments to be more culturally inclusive.

Early learning refers to programs for groups of children up to eight years old where care and learning occur at the same time. Research has shown that children who attend a high quality early learning program are more likely to be ready for school than other children.

Employment rates among mothers with children aged 0-15 yrs, Saskatchewan, 2014



Statistics Canada (CANSIM) Table 2820211 - Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by family type and family age composition, annually



In 2015-16, the Government of Saskatchewan invested more than \$67.8 million in child care programs and subsidies.

### Enhance quality across the early learning sector

- Encourage all early learning programs to use a play-based approach to learning.
- Support the quality of early learning environments by expanding the use of quality rating tools.
- Enhance opportunities for post-secondary training and learning for professionals who work with young children.

# Child Care

**Goal:** Children benefit from high quality environments in child care while their parents work or go to school.

### We will start by:

- Making it easier for parents to find local child care and early learning programs.
- Establishing child care centres in nine joint-use schools and make them part of the school community.

### Within five years, we expect to:

#### Support parent knowledge and choice, including enhancing licensed child care

- Enhance child care.
- Enhance Before & After School care.
- Simplify the child care subsidy process for parents.

#### Develop innovative partnerships with schools

- Establish child care centres in all new school builds in the province as appropriate, starting with the nine joint-use schools scheduled to open in 2017.
- Look at ways to innovate in school-based child care centres and make these centres part of the school community.
- Help children transition successfully from home-based or early learning settings into school.

#### Strengthen the child care sector

- Support child care centres to recruit and retain staff.
- Renew the funding model for child care including improving support for children who are unique learners or experiencing disability.
- Explore ways to reflect the early years plan in the province's child care legislation.



In 2015-16, the Government of Saskatchewan invested more than \$11.7 million in families and children by supporting:

Parent Mentoring Program

Family Support Services

Crisis & After Hours Respite & Children's Service Centre Crisis Nursery Respite Programs

Intensive In-Home Supports

Supported Independent Family Living

Baby Steps-Infant Child Care & Young Parent Program

Services to Teen Parents

Parenting after Separation/Divorce

Trauma-Informed Practice

Family Literacy Hubs

Child Nutrition and Development Program

Anti-bullying initiatives, including: Kids Help Phone, Digital Citizenship, Caring & Respectful Schools renewal, Media Smarts

Children Exposed to Violence



In 2015-16, the Government of Saskatchewan invested more than \$1.85 million on community planning and alignment by supporting:

Cognitive Disabilities Diagnostic Teams

*KidsFirst* North

Regional *KidsFirst* Community Developers

# Strong Families, Healthy Children

**Goal:** Families benefit from supports that help them to be stable, nurturing and to raise healthy children.

We will start by:

- Working with existing family resource centres in the province to support alignment and provision of quality services for families.

Within five years, we expect to:

Support parenting knowledge and skills

- Help more parents benefit from parent education programs.
- Support school divisions to offer locally developed courses that teach high school students about parenting.
- Work with First Nations and Métis organizations and communities to support culturally appropriate parenting programs.

Since 2007, the number of licensed child care spaces available in the province has increased by 53 per cent, mostly in child care centres. We will continue to invest in child care so more children and families have access to this resource. Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan will ensure that families who do not use licensed child care also have safe and quality child care options available.

### Support Family Resource Centres and supports for all families

- Support Family Resource Centres by using a best practice provincial model that incorporates parent education, early learning, family supports and information and referrals.
- Support literacy programs for families.

### Support children to be healthy and active

- Support preventive dental care for young children through existing regional programs to reduce childhood tooth decay.
- Support health promotion initiatives aimed at encouraging healthy food environments.
- Provide support for programs that support children's health and promote 60 minutes of activity every day.

### Enhance specialized supports for children and families

- Help young children and families who have experienced family violence by providing programs and counseling and improving trauma response training for staff.
- Strengthen services for families at risk of involvement with child protection.
- Prioritize social housing for families with children aged zero to eight.
- Ensure the new *Child and Family Services Act* enhances the ability to offer preventative services to children at risk of abuse or neglect.
- Look for ways to better support children who are unique learners or experiencing disability.



According to data collected by the province's Early Years Evaluation, 59 per cent of Saskatchewan children are fully ready for school (Fall 2015-16).

# Community Planning and Alignment

**Goal:** Children and families benefit from programs and services that are coordinated, integrated and aligned.

We will start by:

- Connecting vulnerable families with better aligned community-based home visiting programs sooner.

Within five years, we expect to:

**Enhance public awareness of the importance of the early years**

- Provide information to families about the importance of the early years and services available to them.
- Help parents with concerns about their child's development and find additional support as needed.
- Help more families know about the services, support and resources available in their community and understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle to their child's development.

**Work with Northern communities to develop a new approach**

- Provide early years services in ways that best meet the needs of families in the North.

**Build an integrated early years system**

- Ensure government ministries work together on early childhood initiatives.
- Support smoother transitions and improve access to services for vulnerable children.
- Work with the Federal Government and First Nations to ensure equitable early years supports for children living on reserve.
- Develop ways to share information between service providers in family-centred ways while respecting privacy concerns.

**Make informed decisions**

- Plan programs and services to meet the needs of children and families based on data and research.
- Develop a research and innovation plan to build Saskatchewan-based knowledge about the early years.



## SASKATCHEWAN'S EARLY YEARS PLAN

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Government  
of  
Saskatchewan