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## Investments in early childhood guided by new early development data

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**YELLOWKNIFE (September 17, 2014)** – New data released today by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) confirms that actions the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) is undertaking to support the healthy development of children in the NWT are focused on areas of greatest need. The information was collected over three years using the Early Development Instrument (EDI), a standardized method of measuring readiness to learn that is used across Canada and in several other countries.

“The Early Development Instrument is the first reliable measure we’ve had to see how prepared our young children are for school,” said Minister of Education, Culture and Employment Jackson Lafferty. “The information we’ve gathered over the past three years will help us focus and target our early childhood development investments in areas where they will have the greatest impact and gives us a baseline we can use to measure our success.”

The EDI measures five areas of early development: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development and communications skills and general knowledge. Baseline data gathered over three years indicates that many NWT children are vulnerable in one or more areas:

- 38% of five-year-old children in the NWT are vulnerable in one area of their development, as compared to 25% in the rest of Canada. This is as high as 53% in small communities.
- 23% of five-year-old children are vulnerable in at least two areas of their development, as compared to 12% in the rest of Canada.
- 12% of NWT children are at risk in the area of physical development related to nutrition, sleep and general well-being; more than triple the national average.
- 8.5% of NWT children have been identified with multiple challenges, as compared to the Canadian average of 3.8%.

The EDI results emphasize the need for targeted investment in the NWT’s children and support work the GNWT has already outlined in its *Right from the Start: Early Childhood Development Framework and Action Plan*. This ten-year strategy will guide GNWT action on early childhood development and addresses the need for enhanced early learning opportunities and new programs and services.

“We need to recognize that we didn’t get to this point overnight,” said Minister Lafferty. “There are decades of cultural and social practices that have affected our kids and it will take time to reverse that. The EDI clearly demonstrates that the NWT’s children need better supports and rich early learning opportunities for healthy growth and development. Our government has already started making the changes all our children and their families need and, with *Right from the Start*, have the plan we need to ensure long-term success.”

Actions already taken by the GNWT in support of early childhood development include introducing free, optional, developmentally appropriate and play-based Junior Kindergarten, new scholarships for students taking early childhood diploma or degree programs, wage subsidies and professional development opportunities for early childhood workers and licensing changes that give day home operators more flexibility in working with two and three-year-old children. Upcoming actions include providing baby bags for new parents and important parenting information loaded on electronic tablets.

[Backgrounder – Early Development Instrument](#)

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**Media inquiries:**

**Jacqueline McKinnon**

Manager, Public Affairs and Communications

Education, Culture and Employment

Tel: (867) 920-6222

Email: [Jacqueline\\_mckinnon@gov.nt.ca](mailto:Jacqueline_mckinnon@gov.nt.ca)

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