



What We Heard

Giving Children the Best Start—The Early Years

Consultations: June – July 2012

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the hundreds of individuals, families, groups, organizations, agencies, and government employees who provided thoughts and ideas throughout the consultation process. This report features excerpts of responses—from the online survey, written submissions, and parent and group dialogues—representing a broad cross-section of groups, organizations, and individuals. The ideas within this report express the views of the participants and may or may not reflect the views of the Province of Nova Scotia.

Introduction

The early years—from before birth to age 6—are the most important in a child’s development. Research suggests that quality early childhood programs and services help children succeed in school and help them live healthier, happier lives.

The province is taking significant steps to support families and children in the early years. For example, the province is

- putting more money in the hands of families through the Nova Scotia Child Benefit, income assistance, and income tax cuts
- helping kids with special needs earlier
- creating hundreds more child-care spaces, making child care more affordable, and increasing support for child-care staff
- tackling childhood obesity

Across the province, thousands of people work hard in more than 200 programs and services dedicated to supporting children and families. About \$100 million is invested by the province annually. And these numbers do not include programs and services delivered by non-profit and other community groups.

Even with these significant commitments, a recent early years study found that Nova Scotia is lagging behind other provinces. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the number of people and programs involved, the study confirms that Nova Scotia needs a more coordinated plan and approach for the early years.

The study also found that one-quarter of the children in Canada—and this statistic is reflected in Nova Scotia—start school with vulnerabilities that make them more likely to fail.

That is not acceptable. Together, we can and must do better.

The province started this work by talking with Nova Scotians. This report reflects what stakeholders and individuals contributed during consultations this summer.

The province also appointed a nine-member advisory council made up of people with the expertise, experience, and passion to identify priorities. These individuals also understand the community services, health, and education systems, and can help identify opportunities for greater coordination.

Health and Wellness, Education, and Community Services staff in the Early Years project office are also reviewing what is working here and elsewhere. Their work will ensure that financial and human resources are matched to the priorities that make the greatest difference in the lives of children and their families.

The multi-year plan, to be presented to government in late fall, will include immediate and longer-term actions. The plan's actions will build on what is working well, close gaps in service, and eliminate programs and services that are duplicated or are not achieving results.

The province is committed to making life better for families. That work begins with our children, giving them the best possible start.

Executive Summary

Background

The early years—from before birth to age 6—are among the most important in a child’s development. Research suggests that quality early childhood services and programs help children succeed in school and help them live healthier, happier lives. Findings from a recent study (The Early Years Study 3) indicate that one in four Canadian children arrives at school with vulnerabilities that make them more likely to fail in school, and this statistic likely holds true for Nova Scotian children. Vulnerabilities can include physical or mental health challenges, behavioural, social, or emotional challenges, learning delays, or other developmental issues.

A project team consisting of staff from the departments of Community Services, Education, and Health and Wellness, with input from a variety of government and multi-sector stakeholders, is leading the development of a policy direction and strategy for the early years. Following the release of Giving Children the Best Start—The Early Years Discussion Paper in May 2012, consultations were conducted with Nova Scotians to obtain feedback on priority areas of action to support the early years. The consultation process included focus/discussion groups with parents (102 participants), consultation sessions (314 participants), cross-governmental discussions (48 participants), written submissions (28 received), and an online survey (500 respondents).

Key Findings

The focus of the consultations was to obtain feedback on potential areas for action related to five themes. The following section provides a brief description of each theme followed by the potential areas for action.

Early Learning

Early learning refers to a wide range of activities that can occur in a variety of settings to expand young children’s physical, emotional, social, and creative development. Children develop their ability to learn through supportive relationships with their families, with other children and adults in their communities, and with all that is around them. Play and experimentation also form a critical part of a child’s early learning.

Nova Scotia has approximately 400 licensed child-care centres, all of which play a valuable role in ensuring that families have access to child care.

Potential Areas for Action

- Build awareness about the importance of the early years among the general public and parents as well as within government, among those who work with children, and within businesses and workplaces.
- Ensure consistency in programs and services in child-care facilities and other early learning programs, including establishing standards and outcomes that are monitored, evaluated, and reported.
- Support access to early learning programs through options such as universal child care, affordable child care, and early learning opportunities.
- Use and build on existing infrastructure, including maintaining and expanding successful programs and models.
- Support parents through programs and education, material resources, and peer support.
- Explore the extension of maternity leave.
- Facilitate collaboration and relationship-building between early childhood educators and educators in the elementary school system.
- Support and value a play-based approach to early learning.
- Support affordable and quality preschool and transition-to-school programs.

Children's Growth and Development

Children rely on others to provide conditions that support their growth and development and their safety. Children are part of families and therefore what impacts the family also impacts the child (e.g. poverty, housing, unemployment, stress, etc.).

The experiences and relationships that children have during their early years (from prenatal development to 6 years of age) have lasting effects that reach far into adulthood: physical and mental health, physical activity, coping, emotional control, habitual ways of responding, behaviour, and self-regulation.

Potential Areas for Action

- Provide comprehensive assessment/screening for growth and development at various ages that is supported by trained providers and standard measurement tools.
- Ensure access to providers, programs, and services for children and families who need additional support.
- Use existing providers to conduct screenings and interventions to support growth, development, and health.
- Support prenatal care through information, services, and programs.
- Support physical activity opportunities for children and families, including linking to/partnering with other strategies that are supporting physical activity.
- Support healthy eating for children and families.
- Support breastfeeding, including educating providers, creating a supportive culture, and promoting policy development.

Support for Families

Children are part of families; issues that impact the family impact the child. For example, low income levels and low literacy rates can challenge the most caring and committed parents in doing and being everything they want for their children. Families with children with special needs are particularly vulnerable.

That's why families are stronger when friends and neighbours reach out—and why community groups and provincial organizations must find new ways to work together to support children and their families.

Our families are also changing. Nova Scotia's families are more culturally diverse than in the past. Programs and services must be delivered in ways that respect this diversity.

Changing family structures, including the ways families balance the responsibilities of work (both paid and within the home) and raising children, are all important considerations. For example, more single dads are parenting, and grandparents are playing an increasingly important role.

Potential Areas for Action

- Ensure a family-centred approach that is holistic, involves families, and recognizes their unique needs and strengths.
- Ensure cultural inclusion, including providing culturally inclusive programs and services; developing supports specifically for diverse populations; building cultural competency among providers; promoting diversity in the workforce; using a gender and diversity lens, navigators, and elders; and providing translation services.
- Recognize and address the unique needs and context of families living in rural communities.
- Provide outreach program and services to help ensure access for those facing more challenging circumstances.
- Address the social determinants of health, including transportation, food security, literacy, affordable housing, education, employment, and family violence.
- Provide financial support and/or subsidies for families to help ensure access to early learning programs and services, including raising the cut-off for subsidies, increasing the amount, and providing more subsidized child-care spaces.
- Support children with special needs and their families, including providing more specialized services, more support in child-care settings (e.g. trained staff and spaces), respite for families, support for advocacy, financial support, and teaching assistants in schools.
- Provide access to developmental screening and support for those most vulnerable by supporting mechanisms such as a triage process and offering services in local communities.

The Workforce

Workforce refers to those individuals who work in programs with a mandate to provide services to young children and their families. This could include early childhood educators, early interventionists, home visitors, and family resource centre staff. This discussion can also include issues related to working parents.

Potential Areas for Action

- Improve the salary and benefits of early childhood educators, including developing a standardized pay scale, standardizing qualifications that are linked to standardized wages, and partnering with interested organizations to develop a long-term strategy to improve wages.
- Build awareness among various stakeholders—parents, the public, and society in general—about the importance and value of the work done by early childhood educators.
- Provide education and training for early childhood educators, including supporting early childhood centres to help build the capacity of their staff; offering professional development days during work hours; promoting shared professional development days with others such as elementary teachers, health providers, etc.; creating a discipline for early childhood education; and increasing support for universities and colleges who teach early childhood educators.
- Develop standards to ensure consistency in education and professional development.

Leadership, System Integration, and Accountability

The early years begin before birth, in the prenatal period, and continue until a child reaches 6 years of age.

Currently across the province, a patchwork of programs and services intended to benefit families with children in the early years is delivered in a wide variety of ways. This fragmented approach leads to variations in quality of programs and services, creates gaps and duplication, dilutes accountability, and limits the opportunity for integration and coordination.

We have strengths to build on. A critical piece is to ensure that programs and services that are working well are sustained and can grow. There is also work to do to ensure that our collective efforts are integrated, support priorities, and lead to the best results for families and children. The province now has a leadership opportunity to develop an early-years policy framework and action plan built on partnerships and integration, with clear accountability for results.

Potential Areas for Action

- Provide effective leadership for the development of an early years strategy, including financial investment, a lead agency for the early years, political will and commitment, community/stakeholder input, a policy framework, and accountability mechanisms.
- Support coordination and collaboration among those working in the early years, including having a single entry point or hub model, building on existing networks and partnerships, facilitating communication and relationship-building between stakeholders working in the early years, facilitating sharing and information data between organizations and providers, and providing navigation services for families.
- Use a community development approach in the development of a policy direction and strategy for the early years.
- Build awareness of existing programs, services, and supports for children and families in the early years, among parents and among those who work with parents and children.

Next Steps

The consultation process provided Nova Scotians with the opportunity to share their views on potential areas of action for the early years. An Advisory Council, formed in May 2012 to advise the Minister of Education and the Better Health Care Ministers on strategic issues related to the early years, working with the Project Team will use the feedback obtained in the consultations together with evidence and best practices to inform the development of a policy direction and strategy for the early years in Nova Scotia. Recommendations will be provided to government in fall 2012.

Vision and Guiding Principles

A Vision for Early Years in Nova Scotia

The vision for early years in Nova Scotia is clear:

Children are healthy, safe, and nurtured in their families and communities.

Guiding Principles

Comprehensive: Programs and services should address the needs of the whole child in the context of their families and communities, recognizing that the child, parent, caregiver, and community all contribute to optimal child development.

Integrated: Programs should be coordinated and integrated—without duplication—encompassing all aspects of the early years, including health, education, and child care.

Accessible: Programs and services must be accessible for people with a diverse range of social, cultural, economic, or geographic circumstances. Families should also be able to easily identify and access programs and services available to them, ideally through a single entry point.

Inclusive and Respectful of Diversity: Every child should have opportunities to play, grow, learn, and develop a sense of belonging within their families, communities, and society. The needs of children and families with diverse values, beliefs, and behaviours must be addressed, including tailored delivery of programs and services to reflect social, cultural, and linguistic considerations.

High Quality: Policies and programs should be based on recent research and best practices for children. Programs, services, and resources should be appropriate to the age and developmental stage of the child.

Accountable: Programs and services must be tied to a vision, policy, and priorities. They also must be evaluated, based on standards, outcomes, or other measures, to ensure accountability for results.

Community-based: Programs, services, and policy will be based on the needs and strengths of communities. This will be a continuous process of adapting and refining our ability to reach our communities. Programs, services, and policy will also build on community leadership, knowledge, and life experiences.

Consultation Process

Overview

Following the release of Giving Children the Best Start—The Early Years: Discussion Paper in May 2012, consultations were conducted with Nova Scotians to obtain feedback on priority areas of action to support the early years. The discussion paper was organized around five main themes:

- early learning
- children’s growth, development, and wellness
- support for families
- the workforce
- leadership, system integration, and accountability

In the discussion paper a brief definition is provided for each theme, current issues are identified, and potential outcomes proposed. During the consultation process the issues and outcomes were validated and gaps identified, and feedback was obtained regarding suggested areas for action to address the issues and achieve the outcomes.

Data Collection

The consultation process used seven data collection methods, which are outlined in Table 1. Details of the location of the sessions and the number of participants at each session are provided in Appendix 1.

Table 1 –Data Collection Methods and Sources

Data Collection Method	Number of Participants	Focus of the Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine focus/discussion groups with parents conducted through Family Resource Centres • Conducted by a consultant 	95 participants (Audio recorded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is working and does not work well to support children and their families in the early years. • Supports needed for children and families in the early years.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eleven cross-governmental discussion groups • Conducted by the project team and consultant 	48 participants (Handwritten notes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validation of the issues identified in the discussion paper and identification of gaps. • Priority areas for action to address the issues and achieve the outcomes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of the key informant interview with African Nova Scotian Affairs, eight focus/discussion groups were held with African Nova Scotian families and community members • Conducted by staff of African Nova Scotian Affairs • Hosted in community churches 	57 participants (Handwritten notes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is working well to support children and their families in the early years. • What does not work well to support children and their families in the early years. • Supports needed for children and families in the early years.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online survey 	500 surveys completed, in both English and French	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is working well to support children and their families in the early years. • What does not work well to support children and their families in the early years. • Supports needed for children and families in the early years.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six stakeholder sessions conducted by a consultant 	314 participants (Handwritten notes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority areas for action to address the issues and achieve the outcomes identified in the discussion paper.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder session evaluations 	165 evaluations completed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority areas for action to address the issues and achieve the outcomes identified in the discussion paper.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written submissions 	28 submissions received	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority areas for action to address the issues and achieve the outcomes identified in the discussion paper.

The consultation process was conducted in June and July 2012, with the online survey open for a total of eight weeks. One stakeholder session and key informant interview were conducted in French. The survey was available in English and French. It consisted of five open-ended questions as well as questions to gather demographics of survey respondents (the survey demographics are provided in Appendix 2).

A variety of methods were used to record the information gathered during the consultations, including:

- handwritten notes taken by the facilitators of the church groups and key informant interviews
- audio recordings of the parent focus/discussion groups, which were then transcribed verbatim
- handwritten notes taken by session participants at the stakeholder sessions
- administration of the online survey via the software Select Survey

Data Analysis

Data analysis was completed by consultants from Research Power Inc., a Nova Scotia-based consulting firm specializing in research and evaluation. Data from all sources (handwritten notes, transcripts, survey responses, evaluation responses, and written submissions) were imported into a qualitative analysis software package NVivo (Version 9). The responses were then coded, i.e. broken into meaningful pieces related to emerging themes and categories. The findings have been synthesized and compiled into this report. Verbatim quotations are presented to illustrate each theme.

The findings are compiled by the five themes in the discussion paper (early learning; children's growth, development, and wellness; support for families; the workforce; leadership, system integration, and accountability). The challenges (or what is not working well in the early years) were analyzed and reviewed to identify any new issues not captured in the discussion paper. The suggested areas of action (the focus of the consultation process) are organized by the outcomes for each theme.

Considerations

- Five hundred responses to the survey were received. Not every respondent answered every question. All surveys that contained a response to at least one of the questions were included in the analysis.

- Quotations from the session where handwritten notes were taken are not as detailed or “rich” as those obtained through the transcripts of the audio recordings or the written submissions.
- Participants could have provided input through multiple methods (e.g. someone could have participated in the stakeholder session, completed a written submission, and completed the online survey).
- Strength of response is provided for the reader through the descriptors “consistent,” “some” and “a few.” As a guideline, the following applies:
 - the term “consistent” = mentioned very frequently
 - the term “some” = mentioned less often, but by more than a third of respondents
 - the term “a few” = mentioned far less often, by less than a third of respondents
- Even though strength of response is provided to give an indication of how often a theme is identified, the information gathered through the consultation process is qualitative data. It provides rich and valuable insights into people’s views and feelings, but is not intended to be generalized or quantified.

Findings

Early Learning

Early learning refers to a wide range of activities that can occur in a variety of settings to expand young children’s physical, emotional, social, and creative development. Children develop their ability to learn through supportive relationships with their families, with other children and adults in their communities, and with all that is around them. Play and experimentation also form a critical part of a child’s early learning.

Nova Scotia has approximately 400 licensed child-care centres, all of which play a valuable role in ensuring that families have access to child care.

Current Issues

Low Understanding and Awareness: Families, and society in general, do not fully understand the importance of the early years and early learning. As well, people are not aware that early learning can occur in a variety of settings— from play at home and outings with family and friends to events organized in the community and regulated child care.

Limited Accessibility to Early Learning: Not all children have access to early learning and play opportunities in a developmentally appropriate group setting prior to starting school.

Inconsistency in Program Quality: The quality of programs for children from birth to age 6 varies widely across the province. Some have standards and expected outcomes; some are evaluated, and others are not.

Transition to School: Many children have difficulty making the transition into school, and if they enter school behind their peers they may not catch up. A contributing factor is the lack of connection between programs for children from birth to age 6 and public schools—for instance, no shared learning outcomes.

The issues were affirmed through the consultation process, with no additional challenges identified.

Outcomes and Potential Actions

Discussion Question: In your opinion, what are the priority areas for action to address the current issues and achieve the outcomes related to early learning?

Outcome: Families and communities have greater awareness and understanding of the importance of the early years and of early learning.

The need to build awareness about the importance of the early years was consistently discussed in the stakeholder sessions but identified less often from the other data sources (a few to some respondents). Respondents discussed the importance of building awareness among the general public and parents as well as within government, among those who work with children (e.g. health-care providers, educators, etc.), and within businesses and workplaces.

Increasing public and provincial awareness of the significance of the Early Years is essential. Accompanying this is the concept of broadening the view of early learning settings and supports. Although the outcomes state “Families and communities have greater awareness ...”, society as a whole needs to also support this concept. Early Learning needs to be on the political agenda, and each department needs to link and work together to support transitions in systems during the early years and across the lifespan. Increasing awareness of the importance of the early years and awareness of supports for families/young children is an important aspect of framework development. With awareness may come increased inquiry into and need/access for services and programs. Awareness and planning for services need to go hand in hand in order to be proactive and match the guiding principles identified earlier in the report. (Written Submission)

Start working towards a cultural shift in our province where the importance of the early years, and the value of young children and the people who work with young children, is valued by society. We wouldn't allow anyone to walk in off the street and teach our children in elementary school but yet we have the collective idea that anyone can provide care for young children—it's just play. (Online Survey)

Outcome: Families in every region have greater access to appropriate high-quality early child development and learning programs.

Consistency

The importance of ensuring consistency in programs and services in child-care facilities as well as with other early learning programs offered was discussed in all of the consultations. Respondents noted the importance of having reasonable standards and outcomes for all types of programs that are monitored, evaluated, and reported on. The importance of ensuring the consistency of programs and services available across the province was also noted (participants discussed the fact that there are fewer programs and services in some rural areas).

... [a] standardized system across service providers (across province, e.g. Early Intervention, Family Resource Centres, ECE programs). (Stakeholder Session Notes)

Really good evaluative models are also needed. We need evaluative tools that are shared and used across programs consistently. When we can prove we have positive outcomes, we demonstrate the value to community and to government. Evaluation of services is missing. [We] need to demonstrate successes. (Key Informant)

A few respondents also noted the importance of consistency in terms of curriculum for early years education.

A curriculum framework must be built, based on quality criteria and an accepted pedagogical approach. (Written Submission)

Universal Child Care

The importance of universal child care was a consistent theme that emerged during the consultations, particularly in the stakeholder sessions and through the written submissions.

... holistic support that allows for equitable access but that addresses historical racism and allows for a level playing field. (Church Group)

Dedicate funds and human resources to an integrated provincial system of early childhood resources, thus allowing equality of opportunity for every NS family. (Online Survey)

We need a comprehensive long-term strategy to build a public early learning and child-care system in our province that is universally accessible (geographically and economically), quality and developmentally appropriate. (Online Survey)

... access to service for all families; recognize that Early Years programs for families are part of a wider discussion about community (and community development). (Stakeholder Session Evaluation)

A few respondents expressed concern for a universal approach to child care at the expense of supporting families with greater need.

[We] appreciate the research but [we have] concerns with the approach of universality—without a targeted approach families will be further marginalized and inequities will rise. (Written Submission)

Affordable Child Care

Even if respondents did not discuss universal access, the importance of affordable child care and the need for more spaces were consistently identified, as well as the importance of access to quality programs and services.

... easier access to day care. I had to place both of my children on waiting lists the day they were born. (Online Survey)

... more licensed family home day care options—expand and strengthen! Link these providers to child-care centres to facilitate children’s transitions as they get older. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

Children Under 18 Months of Age

Some respondents, particularly those in the parent focus/discussion groups, discussed the importance of improving access to child care for children younger than 18 months of age. It was noted that there are few child-care facilities that will take children under 18 months.

... gaps in younger-age day cares; good quality, monitored, home and local community-based. Cost, availability and hours of operation are driving families away from regulated options. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

There are very few if any spots in licensed day cares for children this age and moms and dads only have 12 months mat/parental leave. This means that parents have no or very few options for child care for their child at this time. At a point where both parents and children are having separation anxiety they should be supported with quality child care. Something needs to be done about this: either maternity leave extended to 18 months where there are more spots for children, or more spots for infants need to be available. (Online Survey)

Affordable Early Learning

In addition to child care, respondents consistently discussed the need for more opportunities for affordable early learning and play, particularly for children who are younger.

We believe that better access to high-quality early learning programs is essential to reducing and preventing poverty. Any program that provides children with enriched experiences is valuable, but in terms of the need for better access to affordable programs we would prioritize early learning and child care, because quality child-care programs not only provide children with enriched experiences but also allow parents, especially mothers, to participate in education and skills development programs. (Written Submission)

Flexibility

The importance of flexibility of child-care programs and services (e.g. extended hours of operation, having part-time options available, accessible locations, providing respite services) was a consistent theme identified in the stakeholder sessions and parent focus/discussion groups.

[A] more accessible program is more flexible in location, start/end time and activity type. (Online Survey)

Parents should be able to choose what's best for their children. Whether [programs are] offered for a full day or part day, flexibility and inclusivity are key to successful early learning and child-care programs. (Written Submission)

Existing Infrastructure

The importance of using and building on existing resources was consistently discussed in the consultations. This included adequately funding, maintaining, and expanding the many successful programs and models in Nova Scotia (family resource centres, public health programs, public libraries, recreation centre programs, programs offered through churches, the Four Plus program, Kids First program, SchoolsPlus, early intervention, etc.). Respondents also identified the need to use existing physical infrastructure, such as schools and other community facilities, to support early years programming. The importance of reinstating some programs that have recently been cut due to lack of funding was noted by some. Finally, the importance of continuing to consult with those with knowledge and expertise in the early years was also highlighted by some.

Make sure the money goes where it is needed and will be used to the best advantage. Unfortunately providing families with increased money is not always the answer. The money needs to be put into the existing, successful services and programs so they can expand and be more accessible, as well as to be able to be self-supporting in terms of salaries and programming. (Online Survey)

It would be useful to review what exists in our community (both federally and provincially funded programs) as an Early Years framework is designed, in order to avoid duplication and to review existing services with a lens towards improved coordination, integration, and potential enhancement/efficient use of current resources and programs. (Written Submission)

The Early Years community is ready for further action and welcomes the opportunity to engage in a process that is open and transparent—one that emphasizes the excellent work that is currently happening in our province. While recognizing that improvements and expansions are needed, we have an excellent foundation upon which to build a system that can be showcased on a regional, national, and international level. The time has come where communities can grow their leadership roles as they update and refine what supports work best for families. ... Let's work with those already established partnerships and tables and the innovative projects they have developed in our province. Let's not begin this work again as if the work of the past 18 years does not exist. There are only so many resources available in our province—we owe it to the people to ensure we make the most effective use of these resources. (Written Submission)

Outcome: Families are supported to provide children with enriched experiences in the early years.

Parent Support

The importance of supports for parents was consistently discussed in the church groups, stakeholder sessions, and parent focus/discussion groups, and also in some online surveys, key informant interviews, and written submissions. Respondents discussed the need for and importance of programs and education for parents, material resources, and peer support.

• Parent Programs and Education

Respondents discussed the need for programs for parents to build knowledge, skills, and confidence in parenting children in the early years (child growth and development, parenting skills, advocacy skills, transition to school, healthy eating, etc.). It was also noted that programs should be offered in a variety of formats (face-to-face, online, telephone support, mobile services, etc.) for both mothers and fathers (a few respondents noted that programs for fathers have traditionally been lacking).

... more time with parents to be child's best resource—so educate parent or a relative to be the proper resource ... Give parents confidence in themselves so they can be better parents. (Church Group)

We can better support children and their families by offering accessible programming and support to them. Programming that focuses on physical

activity, literacy, and parent/child programming to encourage quality time with each other ... parenting programming, educating parents by teaching them quality parenting skills. (Online Survey)

Create mentoring programs for new moms. While this would be advantageous for First Nations moms, it would also benefit non-First Nations new moms. This would especially be important for off reserve new moms who may be away from their home communities due to employment or educational opportunities, etc. (Written Submission)

• **Material Resources**

Respondents discussed the importance of the provision of material resources to help enhance parents' knowledge, skills, and confidence.

More education needs to get to new parents about the importance of things such as breastfeeding or reading to the child. Also, although there are procedures in place for doctors to check babies for learning difficulties up to 12 or 18 months, I feel that another area where parents require more education is for ages 1 to 6 years. (Online Survey)

• **Peer Support**

Peer support, including providing opportunities for parents to connect and link to learn from one another and support each other, was highlighted by respondents.

Peer-to-peer support is also very important. It is sometimes easier for people to receive information from a peer rather than from a professional. There are many proven best practices on the effectiveness of peer-to-peer support. (Key Informant)

Parental Leave

Discussed in some of the stakeholder sessions and parent focus/discussion groups and by a few other sources was the need to extend maternity leave to 18 months, given that there are very few child-care spaces for children under 18 months. Some respondents also felt that there was a need to reform maternity/parental leave (e.g. extend it, provide better employment insurance) to enable more parents to stay home with their children.

Outcome: Early childhood programs and schools are prepared to respond to the needs of all children. This is supported by stronger links between schools and other early childhood education programs.

Relationships

The importance of building relationships and facilitating collaboration between early childhood educators and educators in the elementary school system was consistently discussed in the stakeholder sessions and identified in a few key informant interviews, written submissions, and survey responses.

We also agree that the needs of children could be supported through stronger links between schools and other early childhood education programs and that, ideally, children should arrive at school ready to benefit from what school has to offer. (Written Submission)

Early Learning within Schools

A few respondents noted the benefits of, and suggested placing, early learning programs within schools. However, a few others were less supportive of this approach.

Support Early Learning programs accessible to all in school/schools-plus hubs. (Stakeholder Session Evaluation)

I feel that the best option would be for child care to be included in the school system. Older children would benefit from having younger children around. (Online Survey)

ECD integrated into schools needs to be examined closely as schools are not always the best location/place, and in rural areas access is an issue. Build on models that currently work in Nova Scotia [such as] Family Resource Centres. (Written Submission)

Play-based Approach

The importance of valuing a play-based approach to early learning was consistently noted in the stakeholder sessions, in some of the written submissions, and in a few key informant interviews and survey responses. Respondents cautioned against the “schoolification” of early learning, particularly if early learning programs are located within the Department of Education and schools.

We need to make sure we are providing appropriate levels of teaching and play ... positive opportunities for play in the communities and at home.
(Stakeholder Session Notes)

It is critical that the early learning system be guided by research that emphasizes that the curriculum be developmentally appropriate, inclusive and play-based, and taught by early childhood educators. (Written Submission)

Outcome: Children arrive at school ready to benefit from all that school has to offer.

Transition to School

Formalizing the transition process from early learning to the school setting was consistently discussed in the stakeholder sessions, and a few survey respondents indicated that preschool screening should be implemented to ensure children are prepared for school.

Transition-to-school protocols should be strengthened and standardized.
(Stakeholder Session Notes)

The link between Early Years education and primary needs to be strengthened, through education/awareness (curriculum), interventions, support (human, monetary). (Stakeholder Session Evaluation)

Affordable and Quality Preschool

The importance of access to affordable quality preschool/pre-primary programs was identified in some of the stakeholder sessions and in a few of the other sources. Some of these respondents noted the importance of universal preschool programs that provide access for all children.

*I would say allow for preschool to be something that all children have the opportunity to participate in. Please keep it play-based and non-academic.
(Online Survey)*

*... greater opportunities for preschool-age children to have high-quality experiences in an early learning environment, so concepts are developed.
(Written Submission)*

Children's Growth, Development, and Wellness

Children rely on others to provide conditions that support their growth and development and their safety. Children are part of families and therefore what impacts the family also impacts the child (e.g. poverty, housing, unemployment, stress, etc.).

The experiences and relationships that children have during their early years (from prenatal development to 6 years of age) have lasting effects that reach far into adulthood: physical and mental health, physical activity, coping, emotional control, habitual ways of responding, behaviour, and self-regulation.

Current Issues

Lack of Opportunity for Assessment: Opportunities to assess the development of children from birth to age 6 (specifically at 18 and 24 months of age) are currently lacking. This results in missed opportunities to diagnose health or developmental issues at a crucial time.

Lack of Opportunity for Assessment of Stressors on Families: While an increase in home visits and other services present some opportunities to identify stressors on families, these opportunities are limited. This in turn limits the ability for service providers and health professionals to identify appropriate supports for families and children.

Health Issues: Nova Scotia children are facing significant health issues. These include premature births, low birth weight, low breastfeeding rates, smoking during pregnancy, poor nutrition, obesity affecting prenatal care and birth, childhood obesity, and mental health and substance abuse issues.

The issues were affirmed through the consultation process, with no additional challenges identified.

Outcomes and Potential Actions

Discussion Question: In your opinion, what are the priority areas for action to address the current issues and achieve the outcomes related to children’s growth, development, and wellness?

Outcome: Families are supported (with knowledge, skills, and services) in their children’s growth and development, beginning in the prenatal period.

Assessment and Screening

The provision of assessments/screening for growth and development was a consistent theme identified in the stakeholder sessions; it was discussed in some of the written submissions and key informant interviews and in a few online surveys and church groups. Respondents discussed the need for more assessments at an earlier age, the importance of consistency in measurement tools, and the need for trained providers to do the assessments.

The importance of a standardized assessment tool to ensure consistency across providers and the province was consistently highlighted by respondents who discussed developmental screening. Several potential measures were noted to gather additional information.

Implement developmental screening using a standardized assessment measure that includes social and emotional development ... must include adequate funding to deal with assessment results for those identified ... screening cannot be done at only one point in time. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

Evaluation across such a rich and diverse system requires a small number of standardized process and outcome measures that will be used by every program or combination of programs that targets child development. At a minimum, this should include assessment at birth, 18 months, and 5 years. In addition, one should consider measures at 24 and 36 months and use data available in the later years such as provincial academic tests. (Written Submission)

The respondents who discussed assessment and screening consistently highlighted the importance of the need for a comprehensive development screening at 18 to 24 months. Some indicated that another screening should also be completed at approximately 3 years of age. A few respondents highlighted the importance of including dental health and mental health in these early screenings.

Universal screening—what are the priorities and when should they be screened? ... need to be more uniform across province, other provinces are doing this. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

Try to achieve province-wide standard of access to early screening. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

... a comprehensive integrated childhood assessment at an earlier age (18 months), using a determinants of health and collaborative approach to identify families with concerns/issues and make appropriate referral at an early age. (Online Survey)

... importance of screening at an early age for both development and family vulnerabilities. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

Training for providers who conduct screening was discussed by respondents, with both public health providers and family physicians/primary care providers noted as appropriate to provide screening. A few indicated that child-care providers could also support screening/assessments.

... developmental screenings across the province with a variety of health professionals (Occupational Therapists, Health & Development, Early Interventionists, Public Health Services, Family Resource Centres, etc.)—held in the school—ideal location. (Key Informant)

Access to Providers and Services

The need for more providers and/or services was consistently highlighted during the consultations. Specifics mentioned included the need for more preventative programs, public health services such as home visits, nutrition programs and services, mental health services, hearing and speech therapy, addiction services, primary care, occupational health, psychology/counselling services, oral health care, specialty health care such as paediatricians, and early intervention services for those with special needs.

... access to a primary health-care provider (preferably a nurse practitioner). (Online Survey)

... family doctors/nurse practitioners for all—have universal support for all families around parenting—well-baby clinics staffed by a nurse practitioner, family practice nurse, public health nurse, public health Community Home Visitor with liaisons to Mental Health, nutritionist, speech therapy, early intervention, etc. (Online Survey)

... mental health—early intervention (0-6), preschool mental health needs a huge boost and greater recognition/benefits. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

Existing Infrastructure

The importance of using existing providers to conduct screenings and interventions to support growth, development, and health was consistently discussed. Respondents provided examples of providers that could be used more effectively, such as primary care practitioners and teams (e.g. physicians, family practice nurses, and nurse practitioners), public health providers, dental hygienists, other allied health providers, and those who work in early intervention. Some discussed the need to recognize early childhood educators as potential referral sources, and a few noted the importance of using other mechanisms to provide services such as telehealth.

Early intervention and prevention is crucial in all health sectors. Oral health is no exception. In order to reduce the number of young patients waiting for treatment at the IWK, we need to offer parents a more comprehensive baby wellness visit. Community clinics, especially in areas that have been identified as most vulnerable, need inter-professional collaboration. (Online Survey)

Make better use of existing resources and expertise that already exist for assessment and intervention (reduce wait times and increase accessibility)—non-siloed and integrated! Have the right skills available at the right time (not always Cadillac-level training required). (Stakeholder Session Notes)

Children often have long waits for specialized services, e.g. speech therapy and mental health. Some children are dealing with trauma. The most severe [cases] should get priority access to help. Violence should be part of the triage and rank at the top. (Key Informant Interview)

Prenatal Care

The importance of and need to support prenatal care through information, services, and programs was consistently discussed in the stakeholder sessions and church groups, and by some of the other sources.

Earliest of interventions needed: a commitment to women and prenatal care/support. (Key Informant)

I think, prenatally, they should [provide] more screening for moms who may have mental illness or addiction, domestic violence issues in the family, [so they may] be able to disclose that in a safe way without having fear. (Parent Focus/Discussion Group)

I truly feel we need to begin the focus on the prenatal period and the mother (primary care provider) to ensure a smooth transition into motherhood. (Online Survey)

A few noted the importance of prenatal care close to home in local communities and access to midwifery services.

... more support for the midwives ... more access/availability for home births, more midwives, more second attendants. (Online Survey)

Outcome: Children thrive and grow up with health-promoting attitudes and behaviour.

Physical Activity

The importance of supporting physical activity opportunities for children and their families was consistently discussed in the stakeholder sessions and parent focus/discussion groups, and in some of the other sources.

Respondents discussed the need for:

- support to develop the built environment (e.g. playgrounds, walking and bike trails, etc.)
- improvements to indoor infrastructure for physical activity such as swimming pools, recreation centres, etc., and access to equipment
- more affordable opportunities to support physical activity in the early years including programs for children in the early years

- subsidies and incentives to facilitate participation in sports and athletics
- incorporating physical activity within early learning programs and schools to build physical literacy skills
- linking the Early Years strategy with other strategies (e.g. THRIVE) and stakeholders (e.g. municipal recreation departments; Physical Activity, Sport and Recreation in the Department of Health and Wellness, etc.)

Designing built and natural environments for healthy communities, including connectivity for walking and wheeling (e.g. cycling, wheelchair), and healthy eating are important considerations. (Written Submission)

ANYTHING as long as it is FREE and easily available. (Key Informant)

Healthy Eating

Healthy Eating was consistently discussed in the stakeholder sessions and discussed in a few of the other sources.

[Provide] nutrition workshops starting with small children, on the importance of healthy food choices (providing tips and suggestions for healthy snacks) and the consequences of an unhealthy diet. (Online Survey)

Policies to address health negating food marketing practices. (Stakeholder Consultations)

Provide nutrition information / education to parents and families. Much of this work is done through First Nations and Inuit Health Branch. There is a Regional Nutritionist on Staff but perhaps there could be opportunities for partnerships. For example, FNIHB had developed a cookbook intended for use by low income First Nations families. The province may find this a valuable resource for on and off reserve First Nations populations. (Written Submission)

Breastfeeding

The importance of and need for more support for breastfeeding was noted in some focus/discussion groups and a few online surveys. A few respondents also discussed the importance of training providers, such as nurses in hospitals and family physicians, so that they can effectively support mothers. A few also discussed the importance of building a supportive culture and policy development to support breastfeeding.

Support for Families

Children are part of families; issues that impact the family impact the child. For example, low income levels and low literacy rates can challenge the most caring and committed parents in doing and being everything they want for their children. Families with children with special needs are particularly vulnerable.

That's why families are stronger when friends and neighbours reach out—and why community groups and provincial organizations must find new ways to work together to support children and their families.

Our families are also changing. Nova Scotia's families are more culturally diverse than in the past. Programs and services must be delivered in ways that respect this diversity.

Changing family structures, including the ways families balance the responsibilities of work (both paid and within the home) and raising children, are all important considerations. For example, more single dads are parenting, and grandparents are playing an increasingly important role.

Current Issues

Low Literacy Rates: Low literacy skills are an issue for many Nova Scotians. Research shows that a parent's education level and literacy skills are a key factor in predicting positive outcomes for children.

Low Income Levels: Low incomes prevent some families from taking advantage of the 12-month maternity leave. As well, child care is too expensive for some families, even with existing financial assistance.

Transportation: In rural Nova Scotia in particular, lack of transportation limits access to early years learning and care programs and services.

Services for Children with Special Needs: Families with children with special needs often are on waiting lists for early intervention programs and diagnostics.

Sustainable, Predictable Funding: Community-based organizations often must apply for funding or have multiple funding sources (including fund-raising, which is unpredictable), challenging them in their long-term planning and certainty in delivering services.

The issues were affirmed through the consultation process, with the following additional challenges identified:

- A few (written submissions and key informant interviews) noted the challenge of family violence and its impact on the early years.
- A few (parent focus/discussion groups and church groups) noted a lack of family support (i.e. support from parents, grandparents, etc.) as challenges to the early years.
- Some parent focus/discussion groups and church groups identified the need for enhanced income assistance and simpler processes.

Outcomes and Potential Actions

Discussion Question: In your opinion, what are the priority areas for action to address the current issues and achieve the outcomes related to support for families?

Outcome: Programs and services are child- and family-centred, based on the unique needs of individual families.

Family-centred

Identified in some stakeholder sessions and key informant interviews and in a few church groups and written submissions was the importance of ensuring a family-centred approach that is holistic and recognizes the unique needs of families and involves families.

We cannot support children in isolation; to support children we must support their entire family ... We need to empower families—build trust, confidence in a culturally competent way ... meet people where they are, provide accessible services ... [We] need to have common understanding of what family-centred means. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

... a holistic approach to the child, including strengthening the parent/guardian who is often the natural advocate for their children/extended family. (Church Group)

... important to recognize that often families are the experts in the issues and the experts in what the solutions are. The solutions need to come from families. (Key Informant)

Culturally Inclusive

The importance of, and the need for, ensuring cultural inclusion was consistently discussed in the church groups, stakeholder sessions, and key informant interviews; in some focus/discussion groups and written submissions; and on a few online surveys.

• Culturally Inclusive Programs and Services

Respondents noted the need to provide programs and services that are culturally sensitive, inclusive, and relevant, and that address the cultural needs of diverse populations.

Provide services and access to services in a respectful, culturally appropriate, and sensitive way. (Key Informant)

How does the system or continuum of care reach out to families of African descent? Are books appropriate? Young black women need to see themselves and their families represented in the materials, if they are to be of support. Packages provided to new parents need to reflect women of African descent (and their families). Seeing themselves in the literature (pictures) makes a significant difference to successfully connecting young women to the programs and services they need. (Key Informant Interview)

• Supports Specific to Diverse Populations

In addition to providing culturally inclusive programs and services, the need to provide programs and services to meet the unique needs of culturally diverse populations and communities was highlighted.

• Cultural Competency Among Providers

Respondents indicated the need to continue to build cultural competence among the various providers working in the early years. Providing education and training related to cultural competency in the systems/institutions educating providers who work in the early years was also highlighted.

If we are going to be champion of Francophone children, [there is a] need for cultural competence training and information. [We] need cultural competency knowledge woven throughout programs and in training institutions. (Key Informant Interview)

Teachers need to be culturally aware and prepared—too often stigma is applied to children from specific communities; systemic racism exists and excludes children from meaningful attachment to programs; systemic racism exists in both the health-care and education systems. (Key Informant Interview)

• Diversity in the Workforce

Ensuring that various cultures are reflected within the workforce who work with children and parents in the early years was discussed by respondents.

Encourage diversity in staffing—different cultural experiences. (Key Informant Interview)

• Gender and Diversity Lens

Some respondents noted the importance of ensuring that the policy framework and strategy is developed through a diversity and gender lens, and that policies support culturally inclusive programs and services.

The plan needs to be looked at from a gender and diversity perspective. There would be benefits in connecting directly with immigrant communities. Cultural relevancy and issues for new Canadians in rural areas may be different from those in urban settings where there may be more supports. More women who are new to Canada are accessing services than ever before, but often they have to come to Halifax. (Key Informant Interview)

... need to think about how the First Nations federal piece fits into the provincial system. We all have an interest in making sure children are well-served. Decide who, logically, is the main point of contact and divert the bulk of responsibilities there. From a provincial/political perspective, this needs to happen. (Key Informant Interview)

• Translation

The importance of ensuring resources are available in languages other than English, particularly French, was noted by some respondents.

For families, more services should be available in French in all Acadian and Francophone regions. The services provided by early intervention coordinators should be better recognized by other health professionals, which will result in a closer working relationship. In addition, early intervention services should be available in French in all Acadian regions. (Stakeholder Session Evaluation)

• Navigators

A few respondents suggested that navigators would help to support diverse populations to navigate the early years systems, programs, and services.

Navigators can help guide families through the system, especially when they are facing a new situation, speaking from their own culture, in a sensitive conversation without being oppressive. (Key Informant Interview)

• Elders

Including elders from communities in supporting culturally sensitive and inclusive programs and services was discussed by a few respondents.

That's why I think about elders too, because they help instill your self-esteem—who you are—and you're proud. Get out there, you know, they need that ... And their stories too ... It's like they can relate you to somebody else they knew once upon a time, and then you don't feel so bad. You're not the only one who's had that problem, and then they can give you ideas on how to fix that. (Focus/Discussion Group)

Rural Context

The importance of recognizing the unique needs and context of families living in rural communities was highlighted in some stakeholder sessions and written submissions, and by a few respondents from the other data sources. Specifically, respondents identified the following:

- the need for more early learning programs and services in rural communities, including child care, and early learning activities
- the need to ensure consistency in early years programs and services across the province (i.e. ensure that supports are not centralized to bigger towns or cities)
- the need to work with local business and community organizations to help ensure that programs and services are accessible

In smaller communities empower/resource local businesses/parents/municipalities/schools to provide services. (Online Survey)

Increase program accessibility for rural families ... Bring programs and services to families/children in their home communities. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

Build infrastructure to build capacity and families will stay in rural communities that support quality child care. Stakeholders include Chamber of Commerce, Regional Development Authorities, municipalities, etc. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

We also need to ensure that families are able to access the services that are available to them. It is great to have a program or service available to them, but if they are not able to get to it due to transportation issues then the program loses its purpose. Home-based services would help with this, or a province-wide public transportation system. In rural communities public transportation is non-existent. (Online Survey)

... trained First Nation community health workers who can do the grassroots work right in the communities (on- and off-reserve). That means gaining community members' confidence, being received right into people's homes, conducting community members' small group discussion/strategy sessions, giving workshops and education sessions, making available Native healing programs, etc. (Online Survey)

Outreach

A few respondents identified the need for outreach programs and services to help ensure access for those facing more challenging circumstances (e.g. lack of access to transportation in rural and urban areas; feeling uncomfortable attending programs offered in health-care settings, schools, etc.).

In rural areas you would still have mothers at home, [who are] not part of a network of parents ... how do you reach these parents? How do you provide them with information, let them know what services are available? (Key Informant)

Outcome: Families in greatest need have greater access to programs and services.

Social Determinants of Health

The need to address the social determinants of health, particularly transportation issues, was consistently discussed during the stakeholder sessions and church groups, in some of the parent focus/discussion groups, key informant interviews, and written submissions, and by a few of the survey respondents. Other issues identified as impacting the early years and

requiring action included food security, literacy, affordable housing, education, employment, and family violence.

Suggestions provided by respondents include:

This group is especially aware of the impact of POVERTY on these issues. Poverty is one of the key factors that prevent families from providing services to their children. Generally speaking, families will do better for their children when they know how to do better. Unless we change the issues of poverty and access to services, things will not change. We can't generalize issues to the extent that the people who need help the most won't/can't access it. Poverty cannot be glossed over. (Key Informant)

Transportation is a huge issue for young families in rural Nova Scotia. (Online Survey)

Many children who are not school age are not fed well at home either. Many poor families cannot access healthy foods and this impacts child development and a family's ability to provide other opportunities for children. There are stigmas attached to feeding children. We do need to recognize that children who may not be dealing with poverty may also benefit from feeding programs ... Universally available food programs/food security is the answer. (Key Informants)

Literacy supports for parents should be available in different forms: written, video, online, and in person at a basic level. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

For single moms and dads who are sitting home, who can't seem to afford to go to school, they can't find the people to help them; like me—I have no family. I have me, so for me to go back to school or to pick a trade that I want so I can become full-time, I can't do it right now. If I've got to wait six more years, I'm going to be 48 years old. (Focus/Discussion Group)

Recognize the special vulnerability faced by mothers and children affected by family violence; improve attitudes and understanding towards victims of family violence; improve access to mental health care and/or counselling for families; provide consistency for the availability of programs across the province. (Online Survey)

Subsidies and Financial Support

Participants in the church groups, parent focus/discussion groups, and stakeholder consultations consistently discussed the importance of and need for financial support and/or subsidies for families to help ensure access to early learning programs and services, including child care, and extracurricular and sport activities (this was also identified by some of the survey respondents and written submissions, and in a few key informant interviews). A few also discussed the importance of subsidies to support essential items such as milk, diapers, car seats, etc. Subsidies for spaces were also highlighted.

... more support for families in low income brackets, especially those above the poverty line but below the middle class. (Online Survey)

... subsidies for care—with two children in 5-day-a-week care, day care is the most expensive line item on our family's budget, ahead of mortgage and groceries. (Online Survey)

Children and Families with Special Needs

The need to ensure supports for children with special needs and their families was consistently discussed in the stakeholder sessions, by some of the written submissions and survey respondents, and in a few key informant interviews, church groups, and parent focus/discussion groups.

Early childhood assessment/management for developmental issues and mental health risks should be available in day-care centres. Children who need these services often are part of families who have difficulty navigating the usual referral mechanisms. (Online Survey)

Respite is either not available to families or not available long enough for families. Respite provides a break for the parents and the child from each other. Respite allows children to interact with others, supporting their independence and perspective, and [provides a] rest for families. Respite is okay! (Key Informant)

We strongly advocate for the inclusion of children's mental health issues in the early years to be an integral (embedded) part of any Early Years system of care ... ensuring (mandating) adequate extra resources, e.g. trained or specialized staff and spaces for children at risk for mental health disorders in regulated provincial day-care centres. (Written Submission)

Access for the Most Vulnerable

Some respondents discussed the importance of ensuring access to developmental screening and supports for those who are most vulnerable/who are experiencing challenging circumstances/who have special needs, through mechanisms such as a triage process and services being offered in local communities.

Shorten wait-times for diagnosis and evaluation of suspected level delays so that services can be offered in a timely manner. If the window of opportunity in the preschool years is missed because of excessive wait-lists, care is suboptimal. (Online Survey)

The Workforce

Workforce refers to those individuals who work in programs with a mandate to provide services to young children and their families. This could include early childhood educators, early interventionists, home visitors, and family resource centre staff.

This discussion can also include issues related to working parents.

Current Issues

Wages and Working Conditions: The extent of the role and contributions of this workforce to a child's learning and development is not well understood. As a result, wages and benefits remain low, making a career in the early years less attractive for potential workers. Government has provided funding to child-care centres to increase salaries. However, many experienced staff still make only minimum wage or slightly above, despite having completed post-secondary training. Benefits, including paid leave, vacation, and pension opportunities, also vary greatly across the workforce.

Qualifications and Training: A wide range of positions, representing the many types of programs and services, exist across the workforce. Education and training requirements also vary greatly. This limits opportunities for professionals from across the workforce to pursue professional development as a group—to share their expertise and to develop stronger links and a common understanding of how their work is related.

Growing Demand for Child Care: As Nova Scotia’s economy grows, the province will need more qualified early childhood educators and more child-care options for families.

Support for Parents in the Workforce: Child care helps women to obtain higher education and to enter and stay in the workforce. This leads to increased financial independence and, in some cases, helps break the cycle of poverty. Currently in Nova Scotia, access to reliable and developmentally appropriate child care can be difficult for families. Barriers include a limited number of child-care spaces, limited options for parents who work irregular hours or shifts, and the cost of child care, especially for families with more than one child.

The issues were affirmed through the consultation process, with no additional challenges identified.

Outcomes and Potential Actions

Discussion Question: In your opinion, what are the priority areas for action to address the current issues and achieve the outcomes related to the workforce?

Outcome: Society recognizes the people who work in the early years workforce as critical contributors to children’s learning, care, and development.

Salaries and Benefits

The need to improve the salary and benefits of early childhood educators was consistently discussed in the stakeholder sessions, written submissions, and online survey, and in some key informant interviews and focus/discussion groups. Generally, specific strategies and/or actions were not provided; however, a few suggestions were included:

As an early childhood educator, I would say that building up a more stable ECE workforce would be helpful. Because of low pay and high job demands, the sector faces a tremendous amount of staff turnover and a lack of resources. (Online Survey)

Quality child care only comes through quality caregivers. Therefore we need to keep qualified ECEs in the field. Those who love the children and want to work

with them should be able to do so. Make it a profession that they can afford to stay in. Focus needs to be on making the ECE job better with benefits and decent wages, and this would help to keep good staff! (Online Survey)

... fairness and equality in compensation (salaries and benefits) based on qualifications and job descriptions, for professionals providing intervention services and child-care centre staff. (Stakeholder Session Evaluation)

Value of Early Childhood Educators

It was consistently noted in the stakeholder sessions, by some written submissions, and by a few other sources that there is a need to build awareness among various stakeholders including parents, the public, and society in general, about the importance and value of the work done by early childhood educators.

We agree that the role and contributions of this workforce are not well understood and their work is not adequately compensated. Indeed early learning and care workers are amongst the lowest paid in the labour market. Part of this can be attributed to the linking of “care work” with “motherhood” and the mistaken assumption that mother-work is not “real work” because it has been traditionally carried out by mothers without compensation. This ignores the complexity of the work of child care, which not only entails physical care but the transmission of skills, including those related to emotional and social development. With the growing demand for early learning and child-care, these assumptions must change. (Written Submission)

... educating parents and community on the importance of quality early learning programs, so that people are excited and encouraged to seek work in the ECE field, and know they will be making an appropriate wage. (Online Survey)

Outcome: People working in early learning have training, support, and ongoing development to meet their responsibilities.

Early Childhood Educator Training and Education

Participants of the stakeholder sessions and the written submissions consistently discussed the importance of education and training for early childhood educators (this was identified in some church groups and key

informant interviews, and by a few focus/discussion group participants and survey respondents). Specific suggestions included:

Provide increased opportunities for pre-service programs (diploma-degree), in-service ongoing professional development opportunities, and mentorship. This will assist with equitable opportunities across Nova Scotia. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

Cultural competence is critical. Professional Associations (Family Resource Centres and child-care staff) would be helpful as a means of disseminating cultural information in support of young children and their families. (Key Informant)

... shared professional development days (Health, Education, Community Services, child care, Family Resource Centres, Early Intervention). (Stakeholder Session Notes)

Provide education to community health staff [in First Nation communities] re: accessing provincial and district systems and services for children. The province could work to educate the community health staff on the services available to First Nations. There is often confusion where there shouldn't be. There also needs to be more communication between communities, the District Health Authorities, and the province on federal programs and services that are provided on reserve and ones that are not. (Written Submission)

Standards

The importance of standards to ensure consistency in education and professional development and the quality of early learning programs and services was consistently discussed during the stakeholder sessions, and noted in a few other data sources. The importance of a professional association and licensing body was also highlighted by a few.

... needs to be standard pay scale for ECEs, consistency of qualifications. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

... self-regulatory body for child care works (licensed to practice)—not government-run (like doctors, occupational therapists, physiotherapists). (Stakeholder Session Notes)

Outcome: More parents, especially women, are able to find and keep jobs.

Some respondents indicated that the cost and availability of flexible child care is a burden for families and a barrier to entering the workforce. The notion of extended maternity leaves, more and flexible child-care spaces (especially for infants), and additional community supports specifically designed to allow parents to enter the workforce was identified as a key area for focus.

More affordable child care; I personally spend almost an entire paycheque each month for child care! This is a tremendous barrier to anyone who wishes to work, and makes working for minimum wage pointless. (Online Survey)

INCREASE the allowance provided for child care ... basically I work for the first two weeks to pay child care, then I have to pay bills, shop for groceries, and run two vehicles (husband and I both work) out of my next cheque ... getting to be a hopeless situation and I have not discounted the idea of leaving the South Shore to see if better is out there. (Online Survey)

I think affordable child care [is a top priority]. I have four kids ... two are in school, but I would have to pay full-time for two kids, plus after-school care. I'm a stay-at-home mom ... there's no point for me to work for minimum wage. (Focus/Discussion Group)

... But how many people have an eight-to-five or nine-to-five job, and how many people only have to work Monday to Friday? Well, what about weekends if you haven't got family? ... Yeah, and definitely in this community, there's a lot of shift work. (Focus/Discussion Group)

Leadership, System Integration, and Accountability

The early years begin before birth, in the prenatal period, and continue until a child reaches 6 years of age.

Currently across the province, a patchwork of programs and services intended to benefit families with children in the early years is delivered in a wide variety of ways. This fragmented approach leads to variations in quality of programs and services, creates gaps and duplication, dilutes accountability, and limits the opportunity for integration and co-ordination.

We have strengths to build on. A critical piece is to ensure programs and services that are working well are sustained and can grow. There is also work to do to ensure that our collective efforts are integrated, support priorities, and lead to the best results for families and children. The province now has a leadership opportunity to develop an early years policy framework and action plan built on partnerships and integration, with clear accountability for results.

Current Issues

Integration: No single program or department holds the responsibility for children. This results in a multitude of issues such as:

- fragmented management and delivery of programs and services (in “silos”)
- the lack of a common framework to establish measures of quality, inclusiveness, affordability, and developmentally appropriate programs and services
- limited ability to share information and data, which in turn creates barriers to effective communications within government and with and among partners
- a lack of an integrated continuum of supports and services for children and families, including children with special needs
- poor linkages with other levels of governments, such as municipalities and school boards
- difficulty for families to find and access the right support at the right time, based on their needs

Stakeholder Involvement: Stakeholders (e.g. businesses and community groups) want to be involved in policy, program planning, and delivery of early childhood programs but are not aware of clear and meaningful opportunities to do so.

Accountability: Nova Scotia does not have a common policy direction or strategy to guide program development and service delivery for the early years. Accordingly, program standards and guidelines, as well as monitoring and evaluation, are often program-specific. They do not build upon each other in ways that could lead to a sense of shared responsibility or a potential for greater benefit collectively than what can be achieved through individual and isolated efforts.

The issues were affirmed through the consultation process, with no additional challenges identified.

Outcomes and Potential Actions

Discussion Question: In your opinion, what are the priority areas for action to address the current issues and achieve the outcomes related to leadership, system integration, and accountability?

Outcomes: Partnerships—within government and with partners—improve communication, planning, integration, evaluation, and shared accountability for early years programs and services.

Leadership

The importance of effective leadership to support the development and implementation of an early years policy direction and strategy was consistently discussed in the stakeholder sessions and on the written submissions, and discussed in some of the key informant interviews. The key themes included the importance of financial investment, a lead agency, political will and commitment, community/stakeholder input and representation, policy, and accountability mechanisms.

• Financial Investment

The importance of and need for investment of financial resources to support the development of an integrated system for the early years was the most common theme of the consultation process.

Spend more money on early childhood education. Put more money into child-care centres, staff wages, programs, early screenings, and parent subsidies. (Online Survey)

A paradigm shift in health spending away from downstream, preventable disease towards prevention and health promotion (encompassing increased investments in addressing the social determinants of health, which ultimately drive a substantial portion of Nova Scotia's current nation-leading poor outcomes). (Online Survey)

View all levels of funding in Education (early learning, public school, post-secondary) as an investment in children and youth on a continuum of support. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

The importance of investing in existing early years programs and services that have proven to be effective was also highlighted—both to strengthen and to sustain the good work underway.

Increasing screening without increasing the resources for following up on positive screens could prove a frustrating experience for all involved. Second-level assessment strategies and resources along with additional intervention resources need to be part of the plan from the beginning. (Written Submission)

... sustainable predictable funding for programs—positive strong programs need to be sustained. (Key Informant)

A few respondents discussed the need for and importance of a publicly funded early years system, similar to education and health.

A universal access philosophy would respect the community's or individual family's right to identify their needs, and a core funding model for public or community-based and community-governed programs and services with additional financial support options for families as required, would promote sustainability, accountability, and quality. (Written Submission)

• **Lead Agency**

The respondents who discussed the importance of leadership highlighted the importance of establishing a new department or ministry to lead the development of a policy framework and support effective system integration. Some indicated that incorporating the work within an existing department

would not give it sufficient profile and attention. Although a few indicated that the work could be led by a designated unit or branch within the Department of Education, there was a fear that the play-based philosophy could be lost. In addition to the departments of Education, Health and Wellness, and Community Services, respondents noted the importance of including other departments such as Justice.

... need for a children's champion/single department to be responsible for service for 0–6. (Stakeholder Session Evaluation)

... better coordination of services, as presently the departments of Health, Education, and Community Services all offer services to young children and their families. There is some overlap of services and also gaps. I think that families of young children would be best served through a separate government department or perhaps through a designated branch of services for young children under either Health or Education. (Online Survey)

Provide one-stop shopping for families. Have a vision of what we want to achieve and develop a road map to get there. Embed child-care services in Education or its own ministry. (Online Survey)

We do not need new programs but a novel way to integrate them into a common home, or a new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development with an appropriately expanded mandate would be most suitable but only with entrenched integration, not simply with other departments. The uniqueness of the early years demands that related programs and services be integrated into a system and be led by a provincial government department. There is considerable support to integrate this system alongside the public education system. There are also concerns that its unique mandate will be lost if it is just considered an add-on to the school system. The department should emphasize in its title and structure that the Early Years requires a unique mandate. In New Brunswick, it is called the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. In Quebec, the ELCC (Early Learning and Child Care) is situated under the Ministry for Families and Seniors. It is critical that the early learning system be guided by research that emphasizes that the curriculum be developmentally appropriate, inclusive and play-based, and taught by early childhood educators. (Written Submission)

A few respondents indicated that an ombudsperson would help to champion the early years work within government and help to ensure that early years remains a priority in the long term.

I feel we need a children's issues ombudsman. Every decision made by government should be vetted by this office. If it is good for children, chances are it is good for everyone else. (Written Submission)

Although the need for a lead agency was consistently discussed, a few respondents indicated that a lead agency was not required to support more effective integration.

... should integrate without being a department by itself; we have professionals in place; cut admin paperwork; we need to be accountable. (Key Informant)

• **Political Will and Commitment**

In discussing leadership some respondents highlighted the importance of political will and commitment. Some noted that it is well known what needs to be done to support the early years and the benefit of doing so—it is now up to government to support the change process.

Government currently has the research, the data, everything it needs to make the changes to meet the needs of the Early Years; when politicians decide it is a true priority then things will change. (Stakeholder Session Evaluation)

Strong commitment from government! Not afraid to rock the boat—willing to change. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

• **Stakeholder and Community Participation**

The importance of involving community members, including parents as well as stakeholders who have been working to support the early years (e.g. providers, community-based organizations, universities, not-for-profit organizations, etc.) was noted. A few respondents expressed concern about what they felt was lack of representation of parents/families and community on the Advisory Council.

Create participatory infrastructure to involve parents, child-care workers, and community advocates in the ongoing governance of ELCC. We can learn from

models in other jurisdictions, where elected boards allow communities to be actively involved in decision-making. (Written Submission)

• **Policy Framework**

The importance of a policy or conceptual framework was highlighted by some, and a few noted that a family policy lens/philosophy should be used to guide the work and ensure that it remains true to the guiding principles. The importance of legislation based on clearly defined public social policy was also highlighted. It was noted that a vision, values, and clearly articulated policy framework are key to the development of an early years system.

... a clearly stated conceptual framework, which includes system-level goals and philosophy. (Written Submission)

... workplace policies that support parents in meeting their child's needs. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

Early learning and care must be stated to be a significant and valued policy, and not merely an add-on to existing policy. For example, if ECD became an add-on to the current School Board system, whose mandate does not otherwise change, the risk is that its focus and perhaps direction would be lost within the larger mandate of educating children from primary through post-secondary education. The specialized expertise of Early Childhood Educators (ECE) may also be underutilized unless explicitly defined in a new mandate. (Written Submission)

• **Accountability, including Monitoring and Evaluation**

Respondents who discussed leadership consistently identified the importance of identifying and implementing accountability mechanisms for an early years strategy and system. The need for governance with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, the establishment of clear goals, indicators, and benchmarks, and a system to monitor outcomes were discussed by respondents.

Identify outcomes, establish benchmarks, measure and report. This information should be in the public domain to support evidence-based decision making ... transparency is important. (Online Survey)

In order to "monitor progress" and "focus on results" (page 2, Discussion Paper), data must be collected regularly according to acceptable practices. Systems

should be in place for longitudinal as well as “snapshot” analysis, including comparative studies, to see if policies are meeting intended outcomes. (Written Submission)

Some respondents noted that much work has been done provincially, nationally, and internationally, and this research and evidence should be used to inform decision making related to the development of the policy framework and integrated system for the early years.

Looking at the early years systems implemented across Canada can provide some guidance on how to move forward. (Online Survey)

... design framework based on evidence but specific to our communities/reflective of need. (Stakeholder Session Evaluation)

Coordination and Integration

The importance of and need for more effective coordination and collaboration among those working in the early years was consistently discussed in the stakeholder sessions, key informant interviews, and written submissions, by a few online survey respondents, and in a few focus/discussion groups and church groups. Respondents discussed the importance of the following:

- **Single Entry Point or Hub Model**

Respondents who highlighted the need for coordination and linking of programs and services to help create an integrated system consistently discussed the need for a single entry point and/or “hub,” where multiple programs and services are provided in an accessible community location.

I have to agree with the discussion paper in that services should be intertwined in order to integrate assistance ... could get everything they require in one place, rather than seeking separate professionals for prenatal care, speech therapy, behavioural therapy, transition to school programs, etc. (Online Survey)

Services need to be integrated in the communities where people live ... Community-based “one-stop shopping”, all under one roof (immediate/quick response, continuity of care, providers to support and learn from each other and the community). (Stakeholder Session Notes)

• Existing Partnerships and Strategies

Respondents noted that working with and building on existing networks and partnership infrastructure and capacity would help to develop an integrated system for the early years (e.g. linking the early years work to existing strategies such as THRIVE, the anti-poverty strategy, the mental health strategy, etc.).

Partner with existing organizations within communities—Family Resource Centres, non-profits, schools—and use that framework to get ideas and programs out or drum up participation. (Online Survey)

Partnerships with community organizations, to keep collaboratively engaged on specifics of regional needs and the care and sensitivity required for policy execution, are paramount. (Written Submission)

First Nations need to be included at the table ... consolidated effort to bring public and band schools together (resources, meetings, etc.). This should include all child care, early years projects. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

Link to the provincial Mental Health Strategic Plan that supports early identification (18 months +); this is critical to catch needs and respond quickly. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

• Build Partnerships

Building partnerships with individuals and organizations working in the early years, particularly with community groups and organizations, municipalities, schools, and local businesses, was also consistently highlighted.

Weaving the social fabric around Nova Scotians from the prenatal period onwards will depend on local partnership among individuals representing public health, mental health, early intervention, speech and language, family medicine, pediatrics, projects such as Roots of Empathy, public school educators, early childhood educators, and others from sectors that have important but indirect contributions to child well-being. (Written Submission)

• Communication and Relationships

Some respondents identified the need to implement strategies to improve communication between stakeholders working in the early years and to build relationships among these individuals and organizations (e.g. facilitate a

better understanding of roles and responsibilities, ensure consistent messaging, build trust, etc.).

... building connections and trust across various sectors and departments so practitioners and upper management value each other's perspective. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

[There were] major communication gaps between aboriginal programs and "mainstream" programs. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

• Information Sharing

The need to support more effective sharing of information and data between organizations and providers to better support the early years was noted. Some respondents indicated that strategies to address issues related to confidentiality (that preclude effective information sharing) are needed.

... integrated/collaborative process for sharing information. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

[Address] confidentiality and information-sharing across departments. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

• Share Resources

A few respondents highlighted the importance of shared funding from the lead departments for the early years strategy to facilitate more effective collaboration and integration.

Funding needs to come from multiple departments [to ensure] buy-in. (Stakeholder Session Notes)

• Navigation

Some respondents discussed the need to provide services to help families navigate the myriad of programs and services they may need to access to support their child/children in the early years.

There are poor linkages between programs and services for families to easily navigate; early childhood navigators in each community would support families. (Key Informant Interview)

Have [a] person/coordinator/navigator functioning as link in 0–school age for school readiness (e.g. link with SchoolsPlus program for support issues such as transportation, access to programs ...). (Stakeholder Session Notes)

Community Development

The importance of a community development approach in the development of a policy framework and strategy for the early years was consistently discussed in the church groups, in some of the stakeholder sessions, written submissions, and key informant interviews, and in a few focus/discussion groups and online surveys. Respondents discussed the importance of providing programs and services where parents and children feel comfortable, recognizing the strengths of parents, children, and communities, and building on and supporting these assets/capacities. The importance of using participatory approaches that involve parents and communities in program and policy development and ensuring that services meet the unique contexts of local communities was also highlighted.

Build community capacity to support families. (Online Survey)

The province needs to: determine how existing community resources can be organized to serve as a strong foundation for new Early Childhood Learning and Care investments; produce blueprints for a comprehensive, integrated system of quality early childhood learning and care services; facilitate a community consensus on the best delivery models; inform policymakers about effective community-based models; demonstrate that different communities—each with a different resource base and with different funding and policy frameworks—can develop unique, responsive service delivery options that at the same time meet overarching criteria for quality, accessibility, and accountability. (Online Survey)

Outcome: Families are aware of supports available to them, and can access the programs and services they need, when and where they need them.

Respondents in the stakeholder sessions, church groups, parent focus/discussion groups, and key informant interviews consistently noted the need to build awareness of existing programs, services, and supports for parents and children in the early years—both among parents and among those who work with parents and children (e.g. health-care providers, child-

care providers, etc.). It was noted that more advertising is needed about early learning programs (e.g. play groups, recreation programs, library programs, etc.), day cares, early intervention services, and health-care services. Suggested ideas to help build awareness of programs and services included compiling an inventory and making this publicly available, distributing information to parents when they have a baby or through health-care providers, and using navigators to help build awareness of what is available (particularly for those who have greater needs or are facing more challenging circumstances).

Information needs to be available on where affordable or free/safe environments for child care are located. (Church Group)

People are unaware of resources available. Even people who work with children are unaware of other supports. There needs to be a government body who organizes registration so people can find them. (Online survey)

... an easier way to get information ... if you're one of these people who says "I need to find a private day care," it's hard to get that information to find out ... maybe if communities have a central website or something that you could plug into and get all that information ... (Focus/Discussion Group)

Next Steps

The consultation process provided Nova Scotians with the opportunity to share their views on priorities for the early years. An Advisory Council was formed in May 2012 to advise the Minister of Education and the Better Health Care Ministers on strategic issues related to the early years work (Appendix 3 provides a list of members). The Early Years Project Team will use the information obtained through the consultation process and compiled in this report, together with evidence and best practices (from Nova Scotia and other national and international jurisdictions) to inform the development of a policy direction and strategy for the early years in Nova Scotia. The Early Years Project Office expects to present an action plan to government this fall.

As was noted during the consultation process, Nova Scotia has a wealth of knowledge and expertise to draw from to ensure that the policy direction and strategy are based on evidence and meet the unique context of Nova Scotian communities. The Early Years Project Team will continue to work with key stakeholders in the area of early years in Nova Scotia as they move forward with the development and implementation of the early years policy direction and action plan.

Appendix 1: Data Sources

Written Submissions

Organization	Number of Contributing Authors
Annapolis County Family Resource Centre	1
Annapolis Valley Regional Library, Bridgetown, Nova Scotia	1
Atlantic Network for Early Human Development	4
Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chief Secretariat, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia	1
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Nova Scotia Office, Halifax, Nova Scotia	1
Colchester East Hants Health Authority, Public Health Services	Not provided
Community Coalition to End Poverty in Nova Scotia, Halifax, Nova Scotia	1
Concerned Citizen	1
Concerned Citizen (by e-mail), location unknown	1
Concerned Citizen (by e-mail), Sydney, Nova Scotia	1
Concerned Citizen (by e-mail), Toronto, Ontario	1
CUPE Nova Scotia	3
Department of Health and Wellness—Physical Activity, Sport and Recreation	Not provided
École acadienne de Pomquet	1
École acadienne de Truro	1
Halifax Public Libraries, Halifax, Nova Scotia	1
Institute for Human Services, Truro, Nova Scotia	1
IWK Health Centre, Department of Pediatrics	6
IWK Health Centre, Mental Health Program	4
Joint Submission by Family Resource Centres and Associations in Nova Scotia	9
Le Centre provincial de ressources préscolaires, la Fédération des parents acadiens de la Nouvelle-Écosse et l'Université Sainte Anne	3
Little People's Place Child Care Centre, Shelburne, Nova Scotia	1
Memory Lane Family Place	Not provided
Non Profit Directors Association, Nova Scotia	2
NSCC Cumberland Campus, Amherst, Nova Scotia	18
NSCC Kingstec Campus, Kentville, Nova Scotia	1
The Early Childhood Interventionists Association of Nova Scotia (ECIANS)	1
YWCA Halifax	1
TOTAL Submissions = 28	

Focus Groups

Organization	Location	No. of Participants
Bayers Westwood Family Centre	Halifax	11
Cape Breton Family Place Resource Centre	Sydney	10
East Preston Family Health Resource Centre	East Preston	13
Kids First Class à Kids First Association	Antigonish	10
Maggie's Place Family Resource Centre	Amherst	12
Membertou Head Start	Membertou	9
Millbrook First Nation	Millbrook	7
Parents' Place Yarmouth Family Place Resource Centre	Yarmouth	12*
South Shore Family Resource Association	Bridgewater	11
TOTAL	N/A	95

* Includes two parents from same family

African Nova Scotian Affairs Discussion Groups

Organization	Location	No. of Participants
Beechville United Baptist Church	Beechville	8
Black Cultural Centre	Dartmouth	7
Cornwallis Street Baptist Church	Halifax	8
Glace Bay	Glace Bay	5
Menelik Hall	Sydney	5
Second United Baptist Church	New Glasgow	8
Victoria Road Baptist Church	Halifax	10
Windsor Plains United Baptist Church	Windsor	6
TOTAL	N/A	57

Cross Governmental Discussion

Organization	No. of Participants
African Nova Scotian Affairs	6
Department of Justice	4
Department of Labour and Advanced Education	2
Disabled Persons Commission	5
Health Directors from First Nations Communities à First Nations Inuit Health	7
Office of Aboriginal Affairs	7
Office of Acadian Affairs	4
Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)	3
Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations	2
Status of Women	10
YMCA Immigrant Services Program	4
TOTAL	54

Stakeholder Consultations

Location	Date	No. of Participants	No. of Evaluations
Annapolis Basin Conference Centre, Cornwallis	June 19, 2012	41	33
Francophone Consultation (teleconference)	June 20, 2012	36	12
Glengarry Best Western, Truro	June 13, 2012	64	37
Membertou Trade & Convention Centre, Sydney	June 11, 2012	36	28
NSCC Waterfront Campus, Dartmouth	June 7, 2012	48	27
NSCC Waterfront Campus, Dartmouth	June 21, 2012	89	28
TOTAL	N/A	314	165

Online Survey (N=500)

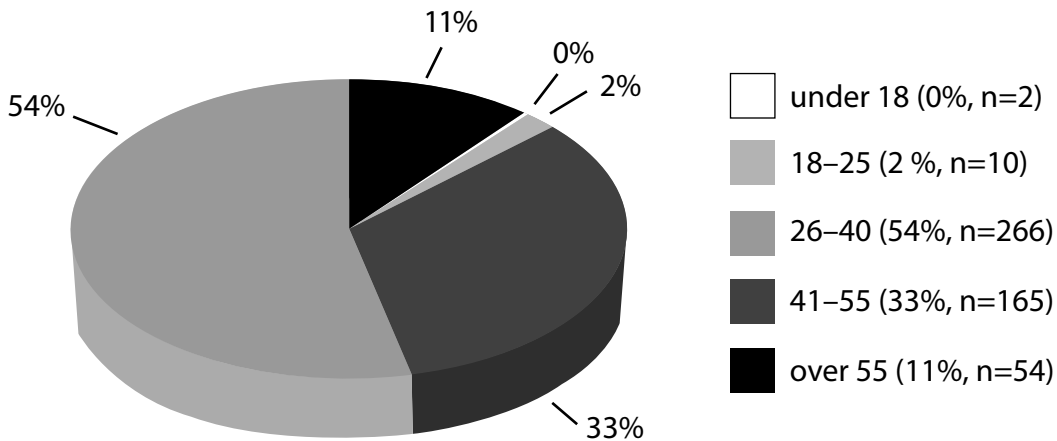
Question	No. of Responses
What works well in Nova Scotia to support children and their families in the early years?	460
What does not work well in Nova Scotia to support children and their families in the early years?	464
How can we better support Nova Scotia's children and their families in the early years?	466
If you had to select one thing that could be done to better support Nova Scotia's children and their families in the early years, what would that be?	466
Is there anything else you would like to share?	271

Appendix 2

Online Survey Respondent Demographics

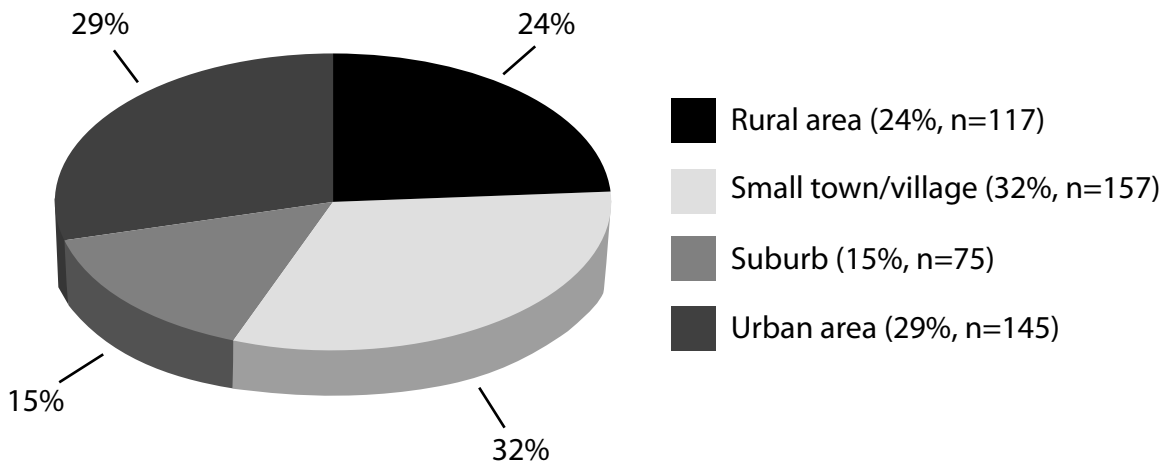
The majority (54%, n=266) of respondents to the online survey were between the ages of 26 and 40, with one-third (33%, n=165) between the ages of 41 and 55.

Graph 1: Age Group (N=497)



The majority (53%, n=262) were from rural Nova Scotia (including rural areas and small towns or villages), with 47% (n=232) from an urban or suburban area.

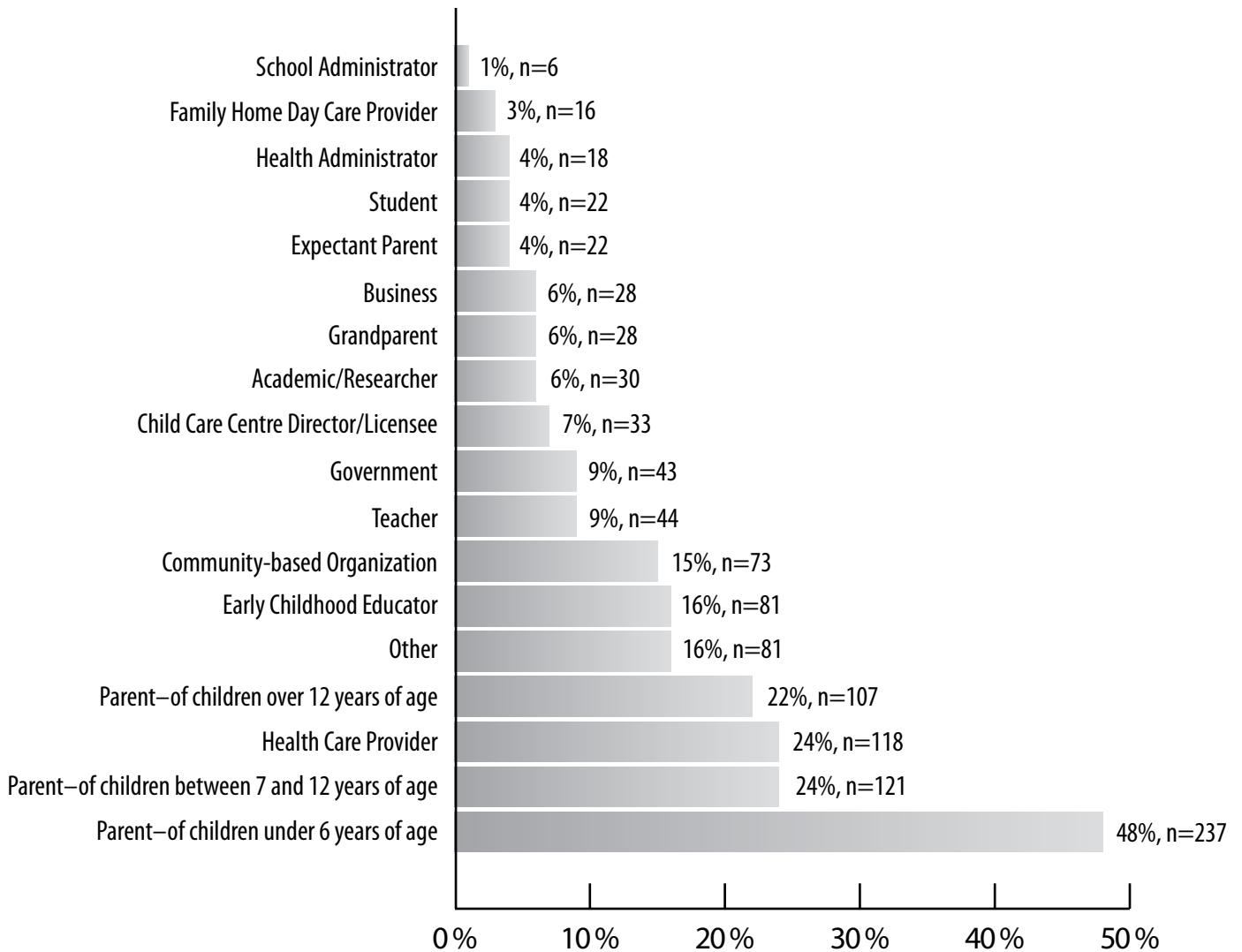
Graph 2: Home Setting (N=494)



Ninety-one percent (n=447) of respondents were female, and 9% (n=46) were male.

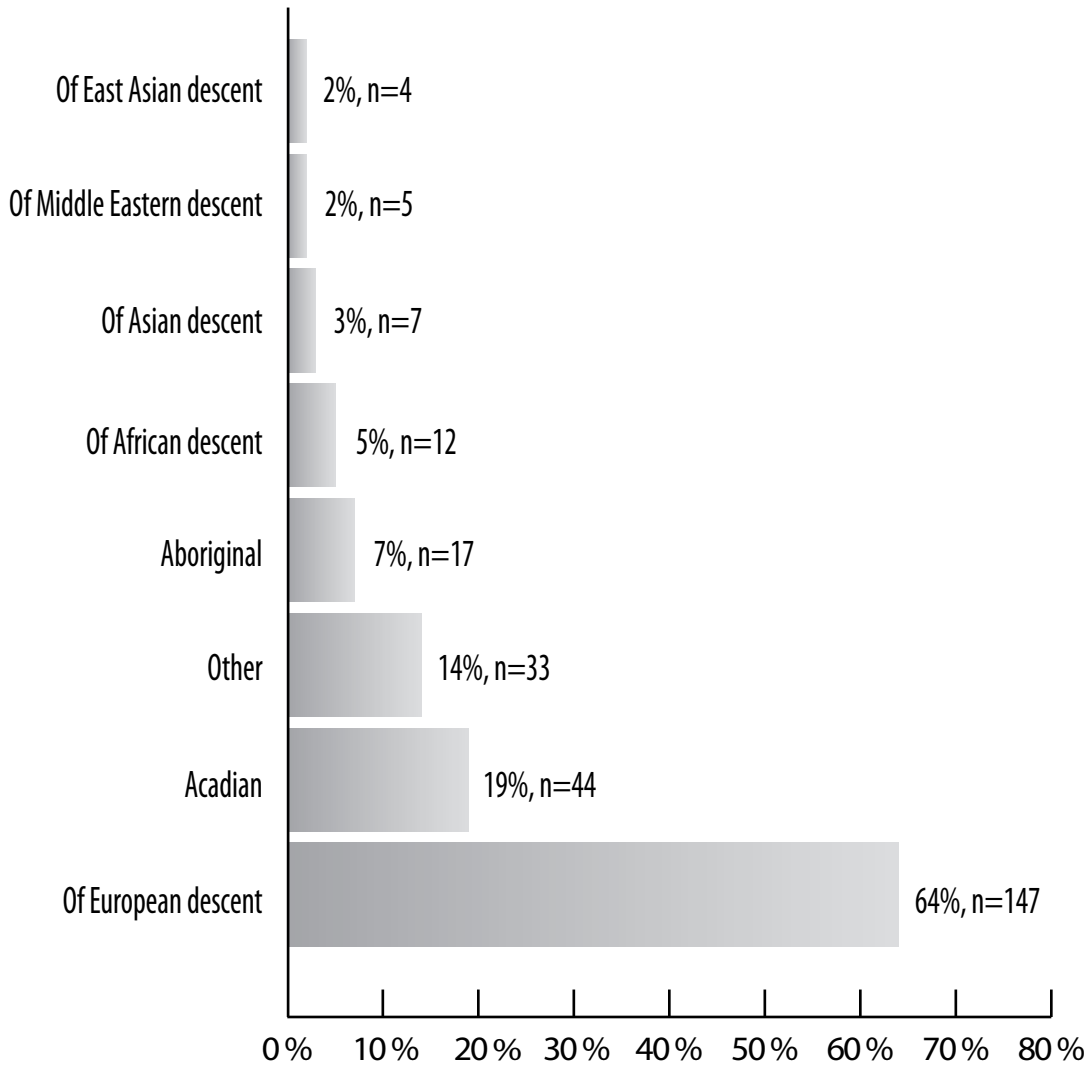
Respondents self-selected groups (note that respondents could select more than one response), indicating that 48% (n=237) were parents of children in the early years, 28% (n=136) were employed in the health-care sector, 26% (n=130) were employed in the early years sector, 10% (n=50) were employed in the P-12 education sector, and 15% (n=73) were involved with community-based organizations. Note that 16% (n=81) also selected “other,” which may include those who wished to provide further detail to their selected groups, or who wished to distinguish themselves from the groups listed.

Graph 3: Self-selected Group (N=495)



Respondents indicated (note that respondents could select more than one response) that 64% (n=147) were of European descent, followed by 19% (n=44) who indicated they were Acadian. Fourteen percent (n=33) indicated Other, which as above may include those who wished to provide further detail to their selection, or who wished to distinguish themselves from the selections listed.

Graph 4: Descent (N=231)



Appendix 3

Advisory Council

- Anne McGuire (co-chair), president and CEO of the IWK Health Centre, champion for early years
- Dr. Mary Lyon (co-chair), Department of Youth Study, Mount Saint Vincent University; research interests include early childhood education, integration of children with special needs, and issues related to rural and remote service delivery systems
- Darrell Samson, superintendent, Conseil scolaire acadien provincial
- Dr. Elizabeth Munroe, academic researcher, St. Francis Xavier University; research interests include school improvement, instructional leadership, early childhood and elementary education; currently works with First Nations communities
- Dr. Gaynor Watson-Creed, Medical Officer of Health, Capital District Health Authority
- Martha MacDonald, economist, Saint Mary's University; research interests include gender and the economy, social security policy, and restructuring in Atlantic Canada
- Dr. Andrew Lynk, pediatrician, Medical Officer of Health, Cape Breton District Health Authority
- Ted Muggah, retired public school administrator with extensive experience in special education and early intervention, Annapolis Valley
- Cyril Reid, former high-school educator, current Chair of N.S. Council of Chairs for Community Child Welfare Boards, and VP of the Nova Scotia Council for the Family, Amherst

