The BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework
About the BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Council

The First Nations Early Childhood Development Council (FNECDC) was created in March 2007 to advocate for the interests of British Columbia’s First Nations children. It is composed of representatives from First Nations communities, organizations and political leaders responsible for the care, education, health and wellness of First Nations children from birth to six years of age.

The FNECDC has been endorsed by BC First Nations leadership. It is not a new or stand-alone organization, but is a collaborative process of dialogue and action that respects the mandate and expertise that each participating member brings to the table.

The FNECDC’s Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) “acknowledges that Early Childhood Development is critical to the success of First Nations children in all aspects of their lives and serves as the foundation for life-long learning.” The MOU was first signed in March of 2010 by 37 signatories agreeing to work together to improve Early Childhood Development (ECD) opportunities for First Nations children. Membership as of March 2011 exceeds 60 representatives from First Nations communities, governments and organizations across the province. A list of current member can be found in Appendix C.

The FNECDC continually accepts new members. Interested BC First Nations communities, political bodies and social organizations may apply to become FNECDC members by designating an authorized representative and submitting a written request. More information can be found on the FNECDC website at http://fnecdc.ca
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Executive Summary

This is not the first edition of The British Columbia First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework. We first published the document in 2009, in recognition of the urgent need to support First Nations in their efforts to drive their own traditionally and culturally rich systems of ECD.

The first edition identified strategic actions needed by four major stakeholder groups: First Nations communities, First Nations organizations, First Nations leadership and provincial/federal governments. While we continue to include all of these groups, this updated version of the document places the spotlight specifically on First Nations Communities.

Part I of this publication describes the spirit and substance of this Framework as a matter of urgency. It begins by taking a brief look back into the shared history of First Nations and the resulting socioeconomic conditions that affect our children and families.

Part II is The Framework, in its original form. It begins by describing our vision of the future where all First Nations families will have access to high quality identity-based opportunities that will nurture healthy, holistic, and resilient children. Our mission, values and beliefs are grounded in the founding principles of a system that values high quality care and a child-centred approach. Our three major goals are once again stressed with a renewed commitment to all First Nations children and families:

1. Increased availability, accessibility, and participation in ECD programs,
2. Enhanced quality of ECD programs and,
3. Improved integration and collaboration at all levels.

Part III reports on the results of a survey circulated to First Nations communities throughout 2009-2010. These results show widespread consensus on our Framework’s vision, guiding principles and goals, and also point to the significant ECD service-delivery challenges currently facing First Nations communities across British Columbia including: insufficient funding, lack of capacity and a human resource crisis, among other things.

Our intent with this version of our living document is to demonstrate that The Framework’s three goals are realistically attainable and can be accomplished by translating our words into actions. Simple tables make reference to practical exercises that can be undertaken by First Nations community members to improve current realities. The first step toward action is to begin a dialogue. We hope this document will facilitate discussions at Band Council meetings, community engagement sessions, kitchen tables, playgrounds and beyond.
We conclude by outlining some key future steps such as: a commitment to continued community engagement and the development of a British Columbia First Nations ECD Action Plan.

Comments and questions related to the Framework and its goals are very much welcomed on an ongoing basis and will help to guide the FNECDC’s future priorities and actions. Feedback can be submitted through our website at: http://fnecdc.ca
“Our hope is that this framework is used properly and that cultural practices don’t become an add-on rather than what they should be; a foundation.”

Community Survey Respondent
PART I:
Looking Back and Moving Forward

INTRODUCTION

The early years of children’s lives are times of wonder, development and potential. It is a time of critical transformation and change. The early years are also a time when taking appropriate action will alleviate or prevent some circumstances that might otherwise negatively impact children for the rest of their lives.

*The BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework* is the first phase in the development of a province-wide strategic action plan designed to ensure that every First Nations child, family and community in BC has access to high quality, comprehensive, integrated ECD programs and services that are community controlled, sustainable and culturally relevant.

Over the course of more than one year (2009-2010), The Framework was circulated to First Nations families, communities, early childhood educators (ECE), caregivers and service providers across every region of the province. The opinions of community stakeholders were requested in a survey which asked them to review and comment through a questionnaire on the vision, principles and overall content of the document. They were also asked to identify challenges they face in creating and delivering ECD services within their communities. Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered and analyzed throughout 2010 and is now ready to be shared.

In keeping with the FNECDC’s mandate to educate and inform, we are once again publishing the original Framework in its entirety. However, this version, of our living document includes a summary of the survey results and also reflects and builds upon the words, directions and desires of First Nations communities. We hope it will act as a valuable testament to the hard work of all those First Nations communities who continue to fight for the rights of British Columbia’s youngest and most vulnerable children.
**Purpose**

The British Columbia First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework has two main objectives:

1. To serve as a road map, grounded in community knowledge and traditional ways of being, that will guide the actions of First Nations parents, communities, service providers, leadership and governments, as we work together to create a future in which the potential of all our children is fully realized.

2. To be a reference document that will stimulate discussion and debate on the strategies and policies that are needed to develop the comprehensive and seamless First Nations Early Childhood Development system that we so urgently need.

**A Shared History**

Prior to colonization First Nations children were cared for and educated by family and community members according to the spiritual, cultural and linguistic traditions of each Nation. Teachings were age and gender specific; They focused on hands-on instruction in traditional skills according to each child’s evolving capacities and gifts; Elders spoke of children as the heart of the family, the spirit of the community and the future of the Nation. The care of children was considered a sacred and valued responsibility belonging to the community as a whole.

Unfortunately, these values and practices were seriously disrupted by colonization, the expropriation of our traditional land and resources, the creation of residential schools, and the systemic marginalization of First Nations peoples. The resulting destruction of time-honored family kinship ties and traditional child rearing practices has left a legacy of misery and despair for many First Nations families and created significant disparities in life chances between First Nations and non-Aboriginal children.

**Today’s Reality**

Many First Nations parents and families continue to be impacted by socioeconomic conditions that affect their capacity to provide for the basic needs of their children and First Nations children continue to be over-represented in child poverty statistics. Those living on-reserve are particularly vulnerable. According to the 2010 Report Card of Campaign 2000, one in four children in First Nations communities now live in poverty. The crisis shows no signs of slowing; Census data now indicates that the current birth rate within Aboriginal families is 1.5 times that of the overall Canadian rate. Yet, many new First Nations families remain unsupported in their efforts to adequately educate and care for their children.

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“First Nations children are among the most vulnerable members of society. In 2008, we noted that over 5% of all children residing on reserves were in care; this was close to eight times the proportion of children residing off reserves.”

_Status Report of the Auditor General of Canada- 2011_
The good news is that a large and growing body of international research shows that access to high quality ECD programs that involve families and communities while focusing on health, education and care, are effective in ensuring that all children get the best possible chance to thrive and succeed.

The bad news is that existing ECD programs and services in British Columbia’s First Nation communities are often fragmented, inaccessible and/or average in quality, reflecting a severe lack of stable funding and a disjointed approach to strategic planning and policy development.

High quality ECD services and programs can provide the key to overcoming many significant inequalities currently facing First Nations families and communities. Some of the building blocks are already in place but much construction lies ahead. By working together, parents, community members, service providers and leaders are more than capable of achieving the goals laid out in The BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework.

A Call to Action

The content of The Framework continuously acknowledges the importance of the early years and the central role children play in their families, communities and Nations. We are calling for collective, transformative action by all those involved and at every level of ECD policy development and service delivery.

What is desperately needed now more than ever, is a shared and sustained commitment to improve the research, planning, funding, and implementation of high quality First Nations ECD programs, services and supports across the province of British Columbia.

The Framework identifies the steps needed to get positive results based on respectful, meaningful collaborations and partnerships amongst four major stakeholder groups: First Nations communities, First Nations organizations, First Nations leadership and Provincial/Federal governments. It is time for all of these groups to begin a dialogue around the spirit and substance of this Framework as a matter of urgency. It is now time to move beyond words on a page. It is time to use actions to fulfill commitments.


“We are glad to see Cultural, Language and Spiritual development included in the vision statement for First Nations ECD.”

Community Survey Respondent
“Early Childhood Development is the neglected child of our social infrastructure. When will it ever change? When will the talk ever lead to real action?”

Community Survey Respondent
PART II:

The BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework

OUR VISION

High quality identity based opportunities will be widely available and accessible to all First Nations children and their families. ECD programs and services will nurture all aspects of the holistic development of a resilient child: emotional, physical, cognitive and spiritual. Children will be culturally connected and spiritually rooted in the traditional language and histories of their families, communities and Nations.

OUR MISSION

To develop a coordinated, holistic early childhood system of programs, services, supports and resources designed to support First Nations children, parents, families, communities and Nations through collaborative and integrated approaches to planning, service delivery, governance and administration.

OUR VALUES AND BELIEFS

- First Nations children are sacred gifts from the Creator.
- Each child is born with gifts.
- Children are the present and future of our families, communities and Nations
- Caring for children is a sacred and shared responsibility.
- Parents and families are recognized as the first teachers and caregivers of their children.
Guiding Principles for Quality First Nations ECD Programs & Services

Quality ECD programs and services for First Nations children and their families are shaped by the nurturing relationships, natural environments, positive experiences, and rich cultures of each Nation. The challenge is to integrate developmentally-appropriate practice with an approach that supports local identity-based holistic programming. These are the founding principles of a ‘quality’ First Nations ECD system:

- **FIRST NATIONS CUSTOMS OF KNOWING AND BEING**
  Relationships, programs, services, supports, practices, infrastructure and governance structures must be imbued and anchored in First Nations knowledge, beliefs and values rooted in a spiritual connection to the land and to all living beings.

- **COMMUNITY-BASED AND DIRECTED**
  The care of children is a sacred and communal responsibility starting with parents and family and extending to community and Nation. ECD programs and services are developed through a community and Nation-driven process and delivered based on the needs of First Nations communities.

- **HOLISTIC, UNIVERSAL, ACCESSIBLE, AND COMPREHENSIVE**
  ECD programs, services and supports must be accessible to every child, whether living off-reserve or on-reserve, in a small isolated community or in a large urban centre. Programs and services need to be comprehensive so that the diverse needs of children and families are met. They must support the development of the whole child including his/her social, emotional, physical, cognitive, cultural, linguistic and spiritual development. A holistic perspective also considers seamless access to other systems, including education, health and social services.

- **INTEGRATION AND COORDINATION**
  ECD legislation, licensing, regulations, standards, policies, and program/service delivery structures must become synchronized in order to ensure an integrated and coordinated ECD system.

- **TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**
  Monitoring, evaluation and reporting on ECD programs, services and supports lead to enhancements in quality. In this way, service providers can be successful in meeting the desired outcomes for First Nations children and their families. Accountability measures also serve to identify gaps, overlaps and deficiencies.

- **SUSTAINABILITY**
  Funding for ECD programs and services must be continuous and consistent over time in order to facilitate parental/family trust, to ensure programs and services are able to recruit and retain qualified staff, and to have enough longevity to make a difference in children’s lives.
Our Goals

1. Increased availability, accessibility, and participation in ECD programs, services and supports by First Nations children and families;

2. Enhanced quality of ECD programs, services and supports; and

3. Improved integration and collaboration at all levels of a First Nations ECD system.

Goal 1: Increased Availability, Accessibility, and Participation in ECD Programs, Services and Supports by Children and Families.

Rationale for Goal 1: First Nations families must take responsibility for increasing their rates of participation in programs that offer support for their children. However, availability and accessibility of quality ECD programs and services must first be vastly improved in order to ensure that there are no barriers hindering such participation.

In order to support their children, families need access to programs, services and supports that are successful in meeting their diverse needs. Opportunities to engage in activities that focus on traditional culture and language need to be widespread and ongoing.

Increased access to varied opportunities for quality early learning experiences will ensure optimal and equal chances for healthy, holistic childhood development and learning. This, in turn, will foster resiliency in First Nations children and families still struggling with the negative impacts of colonization.

Before actively choosing to involve their children in ECD programs and services, parents need information on why ECD programs and services are important to their child’s development and learning. They need to know what quality ECD looks like. This knowledge will give them the confidence they need to feel good about the choices they make.

Parents need information on how to access quality services that are responsive to their needs. They also need to trust that those programs, services and supports are sustainable so they may continue to participate without fear that these programs and services will be discontinued.

“We need to educate parents as to the value of ECD; That childcare programs serve as a form of education, not just a place for babysitting.”

Community Survey Respondent
Goal 2: Enhanced Quality of ECD Programs, Services and Supports.

Rationale for Goal 2: Children benefit from participation in quality ECD programs and services. Conversely, poor quality ECD actually causes harm to children. A high-quality ECD system helps parents, families, communities and Nations achieve their dreams and aspirations for their children.

Success in the field of ECD is dependent on access to adequate resources and integrated relationships between program components. The cultural, linguistic and developmental content of programs, services and supports must be excellent; The training of local educators and caregivers must be valued; The social, physical and spiritual environment must be central to the process and finally; Policies, standards, regulations and legislation must consider and speak to a First Nations viewpoint.

These components collectively form the foundation for the relationships and interactions between ECD caregivers/service providers and First Nations children and families.

Goal 3: Improved Integration and Collaboration at all Levels of a First Nations ECD System.

Rationale for Goal 3: Quality ECD programs, services and supports focus on the social, physical, mental, intellectual, spiritual, cultural and linguistic well-being of the child. As such, they require links between children and their families and communities, prenatal and parenting programs, and health, education and social services. A strong platform of ECD supports is facilitated by multi-sector, multi-jurisdictional collaborations and partnerships, among First Nations ECD programs and services, organizations, communities, Nations and families.

“The 3 goals of the Framework have obviously been very carefully thought about and cover the needs of First Nations Families very clearly and with great compassion.”

Community Survey Respondent

“The proportion of Aboriginal children in care has increased over most of the last decade from a bad enough 43% in 2001-02 to over 54% in 2009-10. Aboriginal children are about 9% of the whole population of children in BC under the age of 19.”

Strategies for Communities

The action-oriented strategies detailed in the following tables are intended to guide communities in their ongoing efforts to improve the lives of all First Nations children. The Strategic Objectives refer to broad purposes, while the Strategic Actions are the specific measures undertaken to achieve The Framework’s three main goals. It is important to note that, certain strategic actions will need to be implemented before work on others can begin. What is significant across all strategies is that the focus to be maintained is a ‘child at the centre’ philosophy.

Achieving Goal 1:
Increased Availability, Accessibility, and Participation in ECD Programs, Services and Supports by Children and Families.

The Role of First Nations Communities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Objectives</th>
<th>Strategic Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase availability</td>
<td>• Identify gaps in ECD programs, services and supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify strategies for addressing gaps in programs, services and supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop community plans for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve access to services</td>
<td>• Identify child and family needs, barriers and solutions to access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Address barriers including affordability of programs and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase participation</td>
<td>• Raise awareness of benefits of quality ECD programs and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide parents and families with information about ECD and quality programs and services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Achieving Goal 2:**
Enhanced Quality of ECD Programs, Services and Supports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The Role of First Nations Communities:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strategic Objectives</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strategic Actions</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Enhance child development outcomes**   | • Identify the cultural, linguistic and developmental needs of all children  
• Identify and pilot child well-being indicators  
• Provide developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate activities  
• Ensure integration of culture and language in children's activities  
• Implement policy of inclusion for all children | |
| **Improve programs and services**        | • Promote the importance of ECD training  
• Set realistic targets for increasing the number of qualified early childhood educators  
• Identify ECD training and professional development needs  
• Identify specific student supports for potential students  
• Develop ECD Nation/community-specific curriculum  
• Develop recruitment and retention plans for ECD practitioners  
• Identify First Nations specific practice performance measures  
• Prioritize children's safety in all aspects of ECD programs and services | |
| **Increase parent and family support and engagement** | • Identify parent and family needs  
• Provide relevant ECD information to parents and families  
• Encourage involvement of parents and families in planning for their children  
• Involve parents and families in teaching, learning and assessment of their children  
• Offer parent and family learning opportunities  
• Develop culturally, linguistically and developmentally appropriate assessment tools and methodologies  
• Lobby for adequate and equitable funding | |
| **Increase capacity**                    | • Offer training in administration of ECD programs and services  
• Develop community specific ECD policies and guidelines  
• Identify areas of research  
• Develop research agendas in collaboration with communities, negotiate collaborative research partnerships with First Nations communities and researchers based in academic institutions  
• Engage in community based research partnerships with researchers | |
Achieving Goal 3: 
Improved Integration and Collaboration at all Levels of a First Nations ECD System

The Role of First Nations Communities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Objectives</th>
<th>Strategic Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase integration, coordination and collaboration</td>
<td>• Establish relationships with ECD education and training programs to ensure availability and accessibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Establish linkages between ECD programs and services and the formal education system’s K-12 Enhancement Agreements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Align policy and practices between early intervention in ECD and the formal education system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Partner with schools to ensure smooth transitions between ECD setting and school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support implementation of integration, coordination and collaboration</td>
<td>• Identify necessary collaborations and partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Demonstrate and willingness to enter into relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The Role of Stakeholder Groups

Achieving the three overarching goals of the BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework will depend heavily on the ability of all stakeholder groups to work together in fulfilling their proper roles in the ongoing process of providing high quality ECD programs and services for First Nations children across British Columbia.
**First Nations Communities**

Strong webs of community support provide First Nations children with opportunities to thrive and succeed. These webs are woven by the love of family members and the wisdom of Elders. They are maintained by hard-working ECEs, knowledgeable educational professionals, multi-talented program managers, reliable service providers and experienced community administrators. The role of parents in a community cannot be underestimated. They must be proud to be their child’s first and primary teacher. Caring parents who feel supported by their communities have strong voices capable of directing how community ECD services are designed, implemented and evaluated. Their voices need to be heard and their roles within the community need to be extended and supported.

**First Nations Leadership**

Tribal and Band Councils, Chiefs, and traditional governments have a major role to play as champions, advocates and role models. Leaders committed to young children make it their goal to become better informed about the key issues around ECD. They know informed decisions are sound decisions. Good leaders show they care by making children a priority in all community planning efforts. They engage and listen to parents, ECEs, and service providers. They work collaboratively and purposefully to ensure all children in their community are receiving the services, supports and resources they need.

**Provincial/Regional Organizations and Councils**

The role of organizations such as the BC Assembly of First Nations, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and, the First Nations Summit, is to act as knowledge brokers, policy advisors and advocates. Councils such as the First Nations Child and Family Wellness Council and the First Nations Early Childhood Development Council also have a responsibility to create the conditions necessary for improved collaboration. True success in First Nations ECD depends upon all of these groups acting as a unified and strong voice committed to transformative change. They must fulfill their role as facilitators in lobbying for research, public policy development and equitable and sustained funding for Early Childhood programs and services.

**Provincial and Federal Governments**

A number of provincial ministries and federal departments are involved in the delivery of First Nations Early Childhood Development programs and services in British Columbia. These government stakeholders act as funders, policy-makers and regulators, making them authorities, rather than partners. Achieving the goals set out in *The BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework* depends heavily upon these governing bodies making a shift to increase their role as collaborators, supporters and advocates for positive change. When governments are genuinely interested in the well being of their citizens they are transparent in their actions. They value and support research projects that drive policy. They honour their commitments to international conventions and charters. Good governments take steps to streamline funding so that contributions to ECD programs and services are equitable and sustained.
An Ongoing Process

The implementation of goals and strategies included in *The British Columbia First Nations ECD Framework* depends heavily on a model of continuous systemic research, planning, support, consultation, monitoring and reporting. This method works well when collaboration occurs at all levels.
The importance of community consultation at all stages of the development of a quality First Nations driven ECD system, from research and planning, to implementation and evaluation, cannot be understated.

**Research and Planning**

The long-term goal of realizing a “made in BC” First Nations specific system of ECD programs, services and supports depends on robust research and thoughtful planning. Input from academic experts combined with that of grass-roots workers from across the province is continuously needed.

**Leadership Support**

First Nations leadership is currently engaged through the FNECDC in advising, advocating and collaborating on strategies detailed in *The BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework*. Political resolutions from organizations such as the BC Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs allow leadership to be held accountable for improving outcomes for First Nations children.

**Community Consultation**

Consultation on *The British Columbia First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework* is ongoing. First Nations communities are currently engaged through membership on the FNECDC. Furthermore, future engagement sessions will allow stakeholders the opportunity to discuss how *The Framework* fits within their vision and for children. Participants will also confirm key themes, priorities and actions for moving forward.

**Implementation and Monitoring**

The FNECDC continuously supports a province-wide focus for implementing The BC First Nations ECD Framework. Identifying and confirming potential progress indicators, benchmarks and timelines will be necessary in or to monitor and track progress on the key components. An important aspect of FNECDC oversight will include regular reporting to First Nations communities and leadership.

**Reporting**

Direction and advice from First Nations communities and leadership are continuously incorporated into new documents published by the FNECDC. Reporting on successes seen and challenges to overcome is an important aspect of the work of the FNECDC. This communication involves regular updates to First Nations communities and leadership as well as briefing notes and public policy recommendations sent to organizations and governments.

“I believe that as time goes by it would be best to share what we know.”

Community Survey Respondent
“This Framework needs to be made known to many so the voices behind it can be heard and responded to by those in Leadership roles.”

Community Survey Respondent
PART III:
A Report from First Nations Communities

THE 2009-2010 COMMUNITY SURVEY

At the core of The Framework is the belief that all First Nations children, families and communities are able to achieve the best possible outcomes when equitable access to high quality ECD programs and services are made affordable and available. We were left with these questions:

- Are the varied needs of our First Nations families currently being met?
- How are we best able to pinpoint obstacles?
- Can limited resources be targeted to provide effective supports?
- What role should FNECDC play in supporting communities?

Recognizing the value of engaging community members and service providers in providing answers to these, and other, important questions, the FNECDC prepared and circulated a survey to First Nations leaders, ECD service providers, community members and families across B.C. throughout 2009-2010.
Objectives
The main goals of the survey were to use the data gathered to identify what is working well but also to help pinpoint challenges in ECD service delivery within First Nations communities in B.C. Achieving these goals has allowed the FNECDC to address priority areas with targeted funding and action-oriented solutions. Moreover, the survey results have helped to guide the advocacy efforts of the FNECDC in improving the First Nations ECD system.

Methodology
The survey was limited to 13 questions: 6 questions were included in order to gather community-specific information on ECD service-delivery, 5 questions spoke directly to the content of *The Framework*, while 2 questions invited feedback about the role of the First Nations Early Childhood Development Council. (See Appendix B for a complete list of survey questions). The majority of the survey responses were submitted using an on-line survey tool. Hard copies of the survey were also circulated at ECD conferences and meetings throughout 2009-2010. Since internet connectivity in some remote communities remained a challenge, telephone interviews were also conducted. 56 responses from a total of 203 First Nations communities were gathered and analyzed. While the actual response rate was lower than expected, the data captured from 56 communities provides a clear picture of the services and supports that are functioning effectively, as well as the challenges that are common across all regions of the province.

Key Findings
Survey results show widespread agreement that the role of the FNECDC should include: advocacy, communications, planning and research. 94% of respondents also agreed that the vision statement presented in the first version of *The Framework* fits with their community’s own vision for children.

More importantly, the findings confirm what we know to be true: Current programs and services supporting First Nations children in British Columbia fail to adequately meet the needs of families and communities. Qualitative and quantitative data gathered clearly indicates a host of priority areas deserving of immediate attention. In particular, low levels of funding combined with challenges in staffing/human resources have created nothing short of a crisis in First Nations ECD service provision in British Columbia.

“When measuring public expenditure on early childhood programs, Canada ranked the lowest of 14 developed countries.”

Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education & Care. A 2006 OECD Report
Community-Identified Challenges

One key survey question produced some telling responses: “What challenges does your community face in creating or delivering ECD services? Please choose all that apply.”

Funding Levels

The most pressing concern of all is that sustained, adequate and secure funding for First Nations ECD programs and services in BC is severely lacking. 82% of respondents felt that current funding allocations are insufficient to meet the growing needs of First Nations families.

Funding Proposal Process

In addition to shortages of funding, 66% of survey respondents reported challenges in navigating funding/proposal processes. Funding processes are, more often than not, proposal driven. This means First Nations communities are forced to compete against each other for scarce resources. Furthermore, navigating the proposal process for funding can be overwhelming for those communities with limited capacity.

Human Resources

A First Nations ECD human resource strategy is badly needed in the province of B.C. 61% of survey respondents reported that the training, recruitment and retention of a qualified workforce are major challenges for First Nations ECD
service providers. There is a clear need to raise the profile and salaries of qualified ECEs in order to attract and retain those who may otherwise be drawn to other career opportunities. Greater numbers of First Nations staff who are deeply rooted in the local language and culture are also desperately needed across the entire province.

**Fragmented Services**

More than half (58%) of survey respondents believe that the current system of ECD and care for First Nations children and families is lacking in consistency and coordination. To access services, families are often forced to switch from program to program or from one service-provider to another. Links between services are unclear or broken and there are often wide disparities in the training and child care philosophies of staff.

**Government Policies**

The survey responses indicate that the creation and implementation of government policies related to ECD is done with little considerations of the impacts on traditional First Nations ways of knowing and being. First Nations ECD centres continue to be subject to culturally inappropriate regulations; 51% of communities identified this as a challenge that they face in delivery of services. Widespread dissatisfaction was also expressed with European-biased government forms, process and requirements for early childcare centre licensing. An additional concern was that training for ECEs is, more often than not, derived from non-Indigenous systems of knowledge and practice.

**Information Sharing**

36% of respondents expressed their concern about the need to gather and share more information specific to the needs of First Nations children and their families. Culturally appropriate ways of gathering, organizing and disseminating information related to First Nations ECD service delivery will help to identify gaps and create strategies to fill them. Furthermore, a data base to manage information and to support planning is currently lacking.

**Local Support**

26% of survey respondents suggested that local support for ECD services was lacking within their community. They said that many locally elected First Nations leaders are neglecting to make children a priority. As a result, parents and service-providers do not feel adequately supported. Voices capable of directing how community ECD services are designed and implemented are being ignored. These voices need to be heard by elected leaders and advocacy efforts need to be extended.
Moving Toward Solutions

The Survey asked respondents to list priority areas for action on ECD programs and services that are specific to their local communities. This graphic represents the results. The bigger the bubble, the higher the percentage of respondents who acknowledged the area as a pressing priority.
Funding

The single most popular response from all survey data gathered was the need for adequate and consistent funding for First Nations ECD programs and services. In additions to shortages of funding, many respondents were also concerned about the capacity challenges involved in navigating complicated funding processes such as grant writing and requests for proposals. There must also be increased transparency in government program funding. Equitable, adequate and sustainable resources must be available not only to support existing services but also the planning of new services, their implementation and the evaluation of ongoing services.

Early Childhood Development Workers

There is a need to raise the profile of qualified First Nations staff working within ECD programs and services. Steps must be taken to attract and retain those who may otherwise be drawn to other careers where salaries and benefits are greater. ECEs must be recognized as professionals, not merely as babysitters. The FNECDC is currently addressing this issue and plans on publishing a strategy paper on training, recruitment and retention of ECEs in the spring of 2012.

Language and Culture

A major theme running through all survey responses was the need to infuse more local languages and traditional cultural practices to create strong foundations for First Nations ECD programs, services and supports. The responsibility for providing quality childcare involves support for material and human resources that include traditional teachings, First Nations beliefs and a connection to Elders.

Special Needs

Survey participants agreed that ECD programs and services accepting children who require additional supports are severely lacking. Those that do exist are rarely culturally and linguistically appropriate for First Nations children. First Nations families caring for children with special needs face numerous challenges in accessing Early Intervention Therapy: speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, professional counseling services, and respite care among other things. The limited number of programs and services that are available need to function in a more coordinated way. Preparation of an inventory report that maps currently available Early Intervention Therapy programs, services and resources is the first step in addressing gaps in service delivery for the future.
Rural and Remote Communities

Our survey respondents reported that additional ECD programs and services are badly needed to meet the growing demands of BC’s First Nations children and families. This need was seen as particularly pressing for those people in rural and remote regions of British Columbia where there may be no service provision at all. Transportation in several communities was reportedly difficult but funding to increase the number of localized programs and services in small communities was of greater concern to some.

Parental Involvement

Empowering and educating First Nations parents about the value of ECD programs and services is extremely important. Parents must be proud to be their child’s first and primary teacher. As such, they must feel supported and involved in a variety of ways. Survey respondents insisted that they must be included in the consultation, development, planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of ECD programming. Additionally, support for parents must be tailored to meet individual family needs. Classes on positive culturally relevant parenting practices should be offered on days and times that are convenient for parents. Survey responses strongly indicated that communities must be environments that support families. Children must be valued, accepted and included in all community environments and events.

Relationships and Partnerships

Survey respondents agreed that there is a significant need to enhance relationships and partnerships between early childcare programs and other relevant systems such as public education, healthcare and child welfare. First Nations ECD stakeholder groups cannot be expected to affect positive change all on their own; rather, they must be part of a holistic, interconnected structure that actively seeks to enhance early childcare for all. Cooperation and communication is critical to the success of any program serving First Nations children and their families.

“We need to engage our Leaders, our Chiefs and Councils, to raise the profile of our qualified Early Childhood Educators. We need to value the work they do.”

Community Survey Respondent
Accountability and Transparency

Some survey participants suggested that more regular monitoring, evaluation and reporting on ECD programs and services by governments and First Nations themselves will lead to quality ECD programs. Sufficient funding is needed to support First Nations in ensuring successful accountability and transparency measures are being implemented. This type of funding support will result in vital and urgent identification of gaps, overlaps and deficiencies across the province. It is only once these issues are identified with accuracy, that priorities for actions can begin to guide future discussions on policy and funding.

Governance and Jurisdiction

First Nations in BC have the right to the autonomous governance of ECD programs and services serving their children and families. In practice, however, the authority does not currently rest with First Nations, but is dispersed among federal and provincial ministries and agencies. What is needed is a transfer of authority and responsibility for ECD from provincial and federal governments to First Nations themselves.

“We need to be engaging families to be involved with their children in consistent and enriching ways.”

Community Survey Respondent

Conclusion & Next Steps

Research affirms the significant role of ECD in creating the foundation of children’s academic success and health. For First Nations children, the early years of life are also crucial for building identity and a strong sense of self, both of which in later years are associated with individual and collective wellness. In First Nations communities, ECD programs and services are critical sites for cultural rejuvenation, language re-vitalization, and community (re)building.

The problem is that existing ECD programs and services in BC First Nation communities are more often than not, fragmented, inaccessible and/or average in quality, reflecting a severe lack of stable funding and a disjointed approach to planning and policy development.
What is desperately needed now more than ever, is a shared dialogue around the spirit and substance of this Framework. First Nations communities need to be supported in their efforts to work in partnership with local and regional agencies, provincial organizations and all levels of governments to realize an integrated continuum of high quality widely accessibly ECD programs, services and supports for every First Nations child. We look forward to a future in which words are transformed into actions that will benefit all of British Columbia’s First Nations children, families and communities.

In the coming months the FNECDC will continue to honour First Nations voices by engaging communities in identifying priorities within The Framework that are deserving of more immediate attention. On this foundation, the FNECDC intends to construct a detailed British Columbia First Nations ECD Action Plan.

The Framework and the Action Plan will be unified in their comprehensive approach. Together they will act as a strategic plan designed to ensure that every First Nations child, family and community in British Columbia has access to high quality, comprehensive, integrated ECD programs and services that are community controlled and culturally relevant.

To assist us in our efforts and to improve future versions of The BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework, we welcome all feedback from every segment of our communities. This can be submitted through our website at http://fnecdc.ca
“European guidelines and requirements for childcare centre licensing need to be dissolved. We need our own.”

Community Survey Respondent
APPENDIX A

Strategic Actions for Stakeholder Groups: First Nations Leadership, Provincial Organizations and Governments

While pro-active community stakeholders are a necessary piece, they do not complete the entire puzzle. The implementation of goals and strategies included in The British Columbia First Nations ECD Framework depends heavily on a model of continuous collaboration at all levels to ensure success.
## Strategies and Actions for Goal 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is Responsible</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Increase availability</td>
<td>2. Improve access to services</td>
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<td>3. Increase participation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>First Nations Communities</strong></td>
<td>Identify gaps in ECD programs, services and supports</td>
<td>Identify child and family needs, barriers and solutions to access</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Raise awareness of benefits of quality ECD programs and services</td>
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<td>Identify strategies for addressing gaps in programs, services and supports</td>
<td>Address barriers including affordability of programs and services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Provide parents and families with information about ECD and quality programs and services</td>
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<td>Develop community plans for children</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>First Nations Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Lobby for equitable ECD programs, services and supports for First Nations children</td>
<td>Focus on small, rural, remote and underserved areas</td>
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<td>Champion quality ECD for children and families</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Provincial and Regional Organizations and Agencies</strong></td>
<td>Advocate for equity of programs services and support on-reserve, especially in underserved and remote areas</td>
<td>Conduct research to provide information for ongoing policy development that will address barriers to access and participation</td>
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<td>Develop communication strategy for promoting the importance of ECD</td>
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<td>Advocate for equitable funding</td>
<td>Address access to subsidies</td>
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<td>Conduct research on encouraging ECD participation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Governments</strong></td>
<td>Ensure equity of ECD programs, services and supports available to First Nations children and families</td>
<td>Collaborate with First Nations to address access barriers</td>
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<td>Continue to promote the importance of ECD and children’s development</td>
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<td>Provide equitable funding to First Nations to promote access to quality, affordable ECD programs and services</td>
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## Strategies and Actions for Goal 2

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is Responsible</th>
<th>1. Enhance child development outcomes</th>
<th>2. Improve programs &amp; services</th>
<th>3. Increase parent &amp; family support and engagement</th>
<th>4. Increase capacity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Nations Communities</strong></td>
<td>Identify the cultural, linguistic and developmental needs of all children</td>
<td>Promote the importance of ECD training</td>
<td>Identify parent and family needs</td>
<td>Offer training in administration of ECD programs and services</td>
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<td>Identify and pilot child well-being indicators</td>
<td>Set realistic targets for increasing the number of qualified early childhood educators</td>
<td>Provide relevant ECD information to parents and families</td>
<td>Develop community specific ECD policies and guidelines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate activities</td>
<td>Identify ECD training and professional development needs</td>
<td>Encourage involvement of parents and families in planning for their children</td>
<td>Identify areas of research</td>
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<td>Ensure integration of culture and language in children's activities</td>
<td>Identify specific student supports for potential students</td>
<td>Involve parents and families in teaching, learning and assessment of their children</td>
<td>Develop research agendas in collaboration with communities, negotiate collaborative research partnerships with First Nations communities and researchers based in academic institutions</td>
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<td>Implement policy of inclusion for all children</td>
<td>Develop ECD Nation/community-specific curriculum</td>
<td>Offer parent and family learning opportunities</td>
<td>Engage in community based research partnerships with researchers</td>
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### Strategies and Actions for Goal 2

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<th>Who is Responsible (Continue)</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Enhance child development outcomes</td>
<td>Develop recruitment and retention plans for ECD practitioners</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Develop culturally, linguistically and developmentally appropriate assessment tools and methodologies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Improve programs &amp; services</td>
<td>Identify First Nations specific practice performance measures</td>
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<td>3. Increase parent &amp; family support and engagement</td>
<td>Prioritize children’s safety in all aspects of ECD programs and services</td>
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<td>4. Increase capacity</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Nations Communities</td>
<td>Supporting ECD</td>
<td>Support and champion ECD</td>
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<td>Lobby for ECD First Nations specific education and training</td>
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<td>Lobby for adequate and equitable funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Nations Leadership</td>
<td>Support and champion ECD</td>
<td>Facilitate relevant appropriate research focused on First Nations children’s development</td>
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<td>Explore and identify pros and cons of ECD training delivery options</td>
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<td>Develop a framework for parent support and development that links to ECD</td>
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<td>Provide writing and consultation supports to communities for the development of specific curriculum training resources such as language and culture specific materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provincial and Regional</td>
<td>Facilitate relevant appropriate research focused</td>
<td>Work with communities to ensure student supports, (such as: child care and academic counselling) are available to potential students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizations and Agencies</td>
<td>on First Nations children’s development</td>
<td>Support communities in developing culturally appropriate parenting programs and like supports</td>
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<td>Identify and coordinate opportunities for ECD practitioners to participate in professional development (that is, pre and in-service) opportunities including administrative development</td>
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<td>Who is Responsible (Continue)</td>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>Actions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Provincial and Regional Organizations and Agencies</strong></td>
<td>1. Enhance child development outcomes</td>
<td>Collaborate with communities to develop recruitment and retention plans for ECD practitioners and staff</td>
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<td>Coordinate opportunities for training in technology for students, practitioners, and children</td>
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<td>Conduct research on indicators of quality</td>
<td>Advocate for adequate funding for capital and infrastructure needs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Advocate for equitable and adequate funding to ensure quality ECD programs and services</td>
<td>Develop community policy development guidelines</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Facilitate community based research partnerships with post-secondary institutions and researchers</td>
<td>Engage in research relevant to communities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Governments</strong></td>
<td>Prioritize children’s ECD programs and services</td>
<td>Examine current ECD funding strategies and mechanisms and regulatory schemas</td>
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<td>Support the inclusion of parents and families direct involvement in ECD programs and services</td>
<td>Support local capacity development activities</td>
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<td>Share information with First Nations communities</td>
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### Strategies and Actions for Goal 3

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<th>Who is Responsible</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Enabling Strategies</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Actions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1. Increase integration, coordination and collaboration</strong></td>
<td>Establish relationships with ECD education and training programs to ensure availability and accessibility</td>
<td>Identify necessary collaborations and partnerships</td>
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<td>Establish linkages between ECD programs and services and the formal education system’s K-12 Enhancement Agreements</td>
<td>Demonstrate and willingness to enter into relationships</td>
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<td>Align policy and practices between early intervention in ECD and the formal education system</td>
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<td>Partner with schools to ensure smooth transitions between ECD setting and school</td>
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<td><strong>Who is Responsible</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Enabling Strategies</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>First Nations Communities</strong></td>
<td>Establish relationships between health and social services, post-secondary education, K-12 education system, and between and amongst ECD Programs and services</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>First Nations Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Facilitate relationships between First Nations communities and community colleges, universities and other training institutions</td>
<td>Review current ECD program policies and funding strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provincial and Regional Organizations and Agencies</strong></td>
<td>Facilitate relationships between First Nations communities and community colleges, universities and other training institutions</td>
<td>Review current standards, regulations and legislation governing ECD</td>
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<td>Advocate for the inclusion of First Nations cultural and linguistic content into ECD programs and course curricula</td>
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<td>Share information between and amongst ECD programs, organizations and agencies</td>
<td>Identify elements of a holistic and coordinated system of ECD programs and services</td>
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<td>Who is Responsible (Continue)</td>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>Enabling Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Provincial and Regional Organizations and Agencies</strong></td>
<td>Increase integration, coordination and collaboration</td>
<td>Support implementation of integration, coordination and collaboration</td>
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<td>Engage and collaborate with the First Nations, to create a conceptual model of coordinated ECD programs and services</td>
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<td>Engage and collaborate with the First Nations, to develop an operational plan to develop and administer quality programs and services</td>
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<td>Create an accountability Framework for monitoring the ECD system</td>
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<td><strong>Governments</strong></td>
<td>Partner with First Nations communities in advocating for the importance of quality ECD for children and families</td>
<td>Partner with First Nations to review ECD standards, regulations and legislation</td>
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<td>Share information about current ECD system across jurisdictions and ministries</td>
<td>Partner with First Nations to review current ECD program policies and funding strategies</td>
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</table>
“...By embracing the traditions of our people, our ancestor’s sacred number four, and the symbolism of the tree of life, this provides the tools for parents/caregivers and families to support and strengthen the early development of our children. A holistic educational experience that incorporates traditional teaching and values will prepare our children not only throughout their educational experience, but it will support them throughout life.”

Community Survey Respondent
APPENDIX B

Questions Included in the 2009-2010 B.C. First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework Survey
1. What is your community’s vision for children?

2. Does the vision statement presented in this Framework ‘fit’ with your community’s vision for children?

“Optimal, culturally relevant opportunities for First Nations children that nurture social, emotional, physical, cognitive and cultural, linguistic and spiritual development within their families, communities and Nations.”

3. What is the same or different about your community’s vision than the vision presented in this framework?

4. Do the following goals reflect your community’s hopes and dreams for your children?

   A. Increased availability, accessibility, and participation in ECD programs, services and supports by First Nations children and families;

   B. Enhanced quality of ECD programs, services and supports;

   C. Increased integration and collaboration at all levels of a First Nations ECD system.

5. Would you make changes or additions to the Goals presented in this Framework?

6. What would you need to have in place in order to realize the goals of this Framework?

7. What ECD programs, services and/or supports are working well in your community?

8. What challenges does your community face in creating or delivering ECD services? Please choose all that apply.

   - Communication/info sharing
   - Support from local First Nations community
   - Fragmentation of services
   - Human resources/staffing
   - Funding levels
   - Funding process/proposal processes
   - Government Policies

   What is the main challenge?
9. What are the priority areas for action on ECD?

10. Do you think that the First Nations ECD Council should stand on its own as collaboration between Education, Health, Child Care, and other sectors/organizations, or would it fit better nested within one of these areas?

11. Do the ideas contained in the Quality statement (page 38) 'fit' with your views and experience?

“We, the Original Peoples of this land, know the Creator put us here. The Creator gave us laws that govern our relationships to live in harmony with nature and mankind. The Laws of the Creator defined our rights and responsibilities. The Creator gave us our spiritual beliefs, our languages, our culture, and a place on Mother Earth which provided us with all our needs. We have maintained our Freedom, our Languages, and our Traditions from time immemorial. We continue to exercise the rights and fulfill the responsibilities and obligations given to us by the Creator for the land upon which we were placed. The Creator has given us the right to govern ourselves and the right to self-determination. The rights and responsibilities given to us by the Creator cannot be altered or taken away by any other Nation.”

12. What role (or roles) can the First Nations ECD Council play in supporting your community?

13. Have we missed anything? Other comments?

“Some of our leaders might not realize how important cultural relevance is but community members do. Bringing home tradition is essential for the children.”

Community Survey Respondent
“In 2008 we audited INAC’s program for child and family services on reserves. INAC had not defined key policy requirements related to culturally appropriate child and family services.”

Status Report of the Auditor General of Canada- 2011
APPENDIX C

Signatories to the First Nations ECD Council Memorandum of Understanding as of Sept. 2011
First Nations Leadership

BC Assembly of First Nations
First Nation Summit
Union of BC Indian Chiefs

Communities

Aiyansh Village Government
Kzawada’enuxw First Nation
Gingolx Village Government
Gitanyow First Nation
Gitsegukla Indian Band
Gitwangak Band Council
Haida First Nation
Haisla First Nation
Hesquiat First Nation
Huu-ay-aht First Nation
Kamloops Indian Band
Kiospiox Band Council
Tobacco Plain

Ktunaxa First Nation
Kwakiutl First Nation
Kwantlen First Nation
Lake Babine Nation
Laxgalts’ap First Nation
Lhtako Dene Nation
Lower Kootenay First Nation
Lyackson First Nation
Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nations
Na’azdli Band
Quw’utson Tribes
Saulteau First Nations
Seabird Island Band
Skwxwu7mesh Nation
Sliammon First Nation
Snuneymuxw First Nation
Songhees First Nation
Soowahlie First Nation
St. Mary’s Indian Band
Stz’uminus First Nations
Sumas First Nation
T’Souke Nation
Tahltan Indian Band
Tseshaat First Nation
Organizations

Aboriginal Early Development Consultant
BC Aboriginal Child Care society
Carrier Sekani Family Services
First Nations Education Steering Committee
First Nations School Association
Native Brotherhood of BC
North East Native Advancing Society
Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council
Yaqaan Nukiy Headstart

“Our vision is that the children in our communities are happy, healthy and safe. That they have a strong sense of pride in their identity and are provided with opportunity to participate in their tradition and culture; That each child is valued for their strengths and challenges. That all parents feel supported and are recognized as their children’s first teacher.”

Community Survey Respondent
The First Nations Early Childhood Development Council (FNECDC) was created in March 2007 to advocate for the interests of British Columbia’s First Nations children. It is composed of representatives from First Nations communities, organizations and political leaders responsible for the care, education, health and wellness of First Nations children from birth to six years of age.

This is not the first edition of *The British Columbia First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework*. It was first published in 2009, in recognition of the urgent need to support First Nations in their efforts to drive their own traditionally and culturally rich systems of Early Childhood Development (ECD).

The first edition identified strategic actions needed by four major stakeholder groups: First Nations communities, First Nations organizations, First Nations leadership and provincial/federal governments. This updated version of the document places the spotlight specifically on First Nations Communities.

Comments and questions related to the Framework and its goals are very much welcomed on an ongoing basis and will help to guide the FNECDC’s future priorities and actions. Feedback can be submitted through our website at: http://fnecdc.ca