Early childhood education (ECE) programs have been linked to improved childhood intellectual, verbal and cognitive development, higher educational attainment, and better social and health outcomes.¹,² Indigenous specific ECE programs, such as Aboriginal Head Start, have been operating for over a decade. Aboriginal Head Start, other Indigenous ECE programs, and school curriculums have the potential to address the legacy of residential school by providing Indigenous children with culturally grounded education.³ The number of Indigenous-led schools are increasing across the country, yet funding and resources are inadequate.⁴,⁵ Some accounts indicate that First Nations children receive $2,000 less for education compared to non-Indigenous children in Canada.⁵

**Early Childhood Learning**

76% of Indigenous children in Toronto over the age of 2 years have attended an early childhood development or preschool program.

Based on UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) recommendations, Canada is trying to ensure that 50% of 2-4 year old children regularly attend early childhood programs.⁶

Half of children who attended an early childhood program went to a program designed specifically for Indigenous children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous-specific early childhood programs attended by Indigenous children in Toronto:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Head Start Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten at First Nations School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Early Years Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Healthy Babies, Healthy Children Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

68% of Indigenous children in Toronto between 2 and 4 years of age have attended an early childhood development or preschool program.

**School Experiences and Performance**

An inclusive community-driven health survey for Indigenous peoples in Toronto

For the full OHC Toronto report visit: www.welllivinghouse.com
School Experiences and Performance

Child Programs and Services

Indigenous children in Toronto have participated in events, programs, or services at the following places:

- Native Child & Family Services: 36%
- Native Canadian Centre of Toronto: 23%
- Anishnawbe Health Toronto - Queen: 21%
- Council Fire Native Cultural Centre: 19%
- Anishnawbe Health Toronto - Gerrard: 18%
- Native Women’s Resources Centre: 12%
- Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto: 4%
- Anduhaun: 3%
- Gizhaadaawgamlik Daycare: 2%
- Anishnawbe Health Toronto - Vaughan: 1%
- Other*: 4%
- Chose not to answer: 41%

*Includes: Elizabeth Fry Toronto - Family Programming

73% of Indigenous children that attended an early childhood learning program attended the Aboriginal Head Start Program.

80% of Indigenous children in Toronto attended events/programs/services at Native Child & Family Services, Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, and/or Anishnawbe Health Toronto (Queen).

34% of Indigenous adults said that community resources for Indigenous children are inadequate in Toronto.

School Mobility and Performance

42% of Indigenous children in Toronto (5 years+) have attended 3 or more different schools since preschool or kindergarten.

- 22%: 1 school
- 32%: 2 schools
- 16%: 3 schools
- 6%: 4 schools
- 9%: 5 schools
- 11%: 6 or more schools

Of the children that changed schools, the most recent change of schools was due to the following reason:

- Family or child moved: 41%
- Regular progression through the school system: 34%
- Wanted a specific program: 3%
- Not getting along with students, teachers or other staff: 1%
- Other*: 21%

*Includes: Concerns about standards/quality of teaching, New school was located closer to home, Wanted a more culturally appropriate school
School Experiences and Performance

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**Policy Implications**

**Implement TRC Call to Action 12:**

We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families.

**Implement TRC Call to Action 7:**

Implement TRC Call to Action 7: We call upon the federal government to develop with Indigenous groups, a joint strategy to eliminate educational gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

**Additional Recommendations:**

City of Toronto, provincial and federal policy makers work in partnership with urban Indigenous peoples and organizations to:

- Sustain and expand Indigenous specific culturally programming and supports throughout the school system from early childhood education to college and university.
- Develop and implement Indigenous specific programs and services to ensure Indigenous children with learning disabilities have access timely access to comprehensive learning assessments and appropriate school and community supports.
- Develop and implement longitudinal research opportunities to better understand the impacts of mobility, including school changes, on educational experience and performance.

**Definitions**

Indigenous adults: persons 15 years or older self-identifying as Indigenous, such as First Nations, Métis, Inuit or other Indigenous Nations, living or using services in the City of Toronto; Trans/Other: includes Trans, Other and you do not have a category that applies to me; Trans: Transgender, Transsexual, or Gender Queer.

**Sources**

1. UN General Assembly (2007); 2. Smylie et al. (2016); 3. Truth and Reconciliation Canada (2015)

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**Our Health Counts: Community health assessment by the people, for the people**

**For the full OHC Toronto report visit:**

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