



How communities can support healthy early childhood development

Communities help to create the environments that children need to thrive and succeed. Studies show that children tend to do better in strong, supportive communities. Community resources can offset the impact of poverty and other risk factors on early development. Communities are key players in the Early Child Development (ECD) Mapping Initiative, which will enable Albertans to better understand and support the development of young children.



How do communities influence early childhood development?

A child's early experiences (from birth to age five) shape the structure of the rapidly developing brain. The quality of early experiences is influenced by the environments in which children are raised. Children who have access to nurturing, stimulating and safe environments during their early years have fewer developmental difficulties and experience better health, learning, relationships and well-being.

How do communities fit into the ECD Mapping Initiative?

- Research information will be presented at the community level. This information includes Early Development Instrument or EDI results collected in kindergartens and information about socio-economic and community factors that may affect development.
- Communities will be actively involved in gathering information about their resources and providing valuable feedback and input.

How are communities defined?

There are many ways to define a community. For the purposes of the ECD Mapping Initiative, a community is:

- an urban or rural geographical area,
- where people live, work, play and raise their families, and
- where people identify with all or parts of the local geography, landmarks, institutions and social groups, including parks, schools, sports teams, places of worship and community centres.

How can communities engage with the ECD Mapping Initiative?

Communities are encouraged to form early childhood development (ECD) coalitions that represent their diversity. Coalitions work with the Early Child Development Mapping Project (ECMap) community development coordinator assigned to their geographic area or zone to:

- map community boundaries,
- identify community resources,
- circulate and discuss the ECD research information that is gathered for their community, and
- plan responses that will benefit young children and families in their communities.



How are community boundaries established?

Community boundaries are identified by ECD coalitions with the assistance of ECMap community development coordinators. Boundaries are adjusted to match postal code areas and boundary areas used by Statistics Canada. This makes it possible to interpret and map local early child development results, socio-economic information and community resources.

What are community resources?

Every community has resources that support families and children. Community resources can include

programs, facilities, services, characteristics and landmarks and informal support systems. They may range from parks to libraries, daycare centres, preschool programs, skating rinks, parent support groups, play groups, recreational facilities and church groups. Communities will indicate which resources they consider to be valuable assets in raising their young children.

How will the ECD Mapping Initiative help communities?

Maps and reports will be produced for communities throughout Alberta. This information will help communities to:

- understand how their children are developing,

- compare their children's development with other communities in Alberta and across Canada,
- identify their strengths and gaps in supporting child development,
- respond effectively to local needs, and
- apply for Community Response Seed Grants from Alberta Education to assist them in community mobilization.

How can I get involved?

Please contact your local ECMap community development coordinator.

For further information, please go to www.ecdmapping.alberta.ca

**Mapping a bright future
for Alberta's young children**