



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

August 19, 2013

Investment in Aboriginal Early Childhood Development Needed

Doctors are demonstrating their ethical duty to patients by working towards a society in which everyone has an opportunity to lead a healthy life. Last winter, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) and MacLean's magazine hosted a series of town hall meetings, including one at the Winnipeg Art Gallery specifically focused on issues of Aboriginal Health. The purpose of the dialogue is to understand what can be done to address the unfair circumstances that lead some people to be sicker than others. Earlier this month, the CMA released a report on the town hall proceedings, which includes a focus on the disproportionately negative health status of Aboriginal peoples due to systemic racism.

Participants identified four main social determinants across Canada as critical for good health: income, housing, nutrition and food security, and early childhood development. The CMA town hall report finds that effective early childhood development offers the best opportunity to reduce income disparities and improve the social determinants of health.

Effective early childhood development programs can mitigate the impacts of growing up in poverty. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are often behind their more affluent peers in terms of readiness for school, a key factor for school achievement and later life success. In Manitoba, this is measured by the Early Development Instrument, which finds that nearly two out of four Aboriginal children

arrive NOT ready for grade one. This despite the best efforts of parents of Indigenous children, who have the same hopes and dreams of their children as all parents, however they face incredible challenges to providing opportunities for education.

The most tragic statistic given by the Children's Advocate Manitoba in 2009 is 87% Aboriginal children were taken into the child welfare system.

As a panelist I brought the message that there is need for governments to have targeted programming in childhood development in order to reach the urban Aboriginal families and their children. Providing universal programming will only reach very few Aboriginal families. All North End Winnipeg programs and services do outreach to the families in order to provide them with programming. Government programming does not do this.

I explained to the audience about our campaign called "Aboriginal Children Count: A Campaign for Social Justice in Early Childhood Development." As a part of this campaign we are doing community based research called "Kiskinwahamkwakewin" which is a Cree word describing the task of education or instructing. The research is with 100 North End families who live in about six neighbourhoods and we are asking them only three questions: what values

there is an alternative.

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they were raised with, what values do they pass on to their children and what kind of programs would they like to see for their children. This research will be gathered and completed this year and put into a framework based on the Tipi teachings which then the families will own.

So why have a campaign such as this? We did the research and found that in 2012 nearly 9,000 Aboriginal babies to age four will be living in the City of Winnipeg. There are currently five Head Start program in the North End of Winnipeg, which can only take in 200 Aboriginal children. Currently there is a long waiting list. We talked with the federal government representatives and learned that there will be no more centers developed.

What is needed, and our campaign recommends, is that at least 22 more Aboriginal Tots and Family programs for babies up to age four be built. There is a need for five more Healthy Baby programs which will do outreach to Aboriginal families and their babies. This will ensure the participation of families by relating to their own people from the community. Any Aboriginal parenting program developed has to be owned by the Aboriginal people and must be infused with the cultural values with the help of our traditional Elders. It must include the effects of colonization, the sixties scoop and the residential schools. These are only a few examples.

What can you do to help this campaign? Contact early childhood funders to ask for change and the great need to increase the current and future funding of Aboriginal early childhood development programming. Support current Aboriginal early years programming in the North End and the inner city to make them stronger and sustainable.

The physicians at the CMA recognize the value of early childhood development. One of the recommendations from the town hall report is that all levels of government make early childhood development and

parental supports a priority. We need to keep reminding governments of their obligations to Aboriginal children and all children.

*Kathy Mallet as Co-Director of the
Community Education Development
Association (CEDA)*

Links

View CEDA's website www.cedawpg.org to learn about the campaign and view the Aboriginal Children Count info.

CMA townhall report

http://www.cma.ca/multimedia/CMA/Content/Images/Inside_cma/Advocacy/HCT/What-makes-us-sick_en.pdf

View the Winnipeg townhall

<http://www.cpac.ca/eng/programs/conversation-macleans/episodes/cma-town-hall-winnipeg>

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