

INFANT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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INFANT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FACT SHEET

PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN

What Are We?

Within the continuum of services and supports for young Canadian children and their families, there are specialized programs that focus on infants and children who have a developmental delay or who are at risk for delayed development for established, biological and/or psychosocial reasons.

Infant Development Programs in BC provide a range of family-centred prevention and early intervention services and supports for such families and infants. The first Infant Development Program in British Columbia was established in 1972 and there are now 52 programs in the province funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. At the provincial level, there is a Provincial Steering Committee, a Provincial Advisor and Regional Advisors available to support staff and communities in delivering high quality services. Primarily, the programs serve children from birth to three years of age, while a few serve children up to the age of five. Programs are administered by a variety of community agencies. They have evolved to meet the needs of each community and to complement the mix of services available.

Who Are the Children and Families We Serve?

Infant Development Programs are designed to serve infants who are at risk for developmental delay and also their families. Infants can fall within one or more of the following risk factor categories:

- Established risk – Infants who have diagnosed medical disorders. An established range of developmental disabilities may be associated with these disorders, which include genetic and chromosomal syndromes; neurological disorders; congenital malformations of the nervous system; sequellae of infections of the nervous system; metabolic disorders and others
- Biological risk – Infants who have a history of prenatal, perinatal, neonatal and/or early developmental events that may have affected the central nervous system and may result in developmental difficulties for the child. Biological complications may include: birth asphyxia or trauma; prematurity; physically disabling conditions; increased genetic risk for disability; apparent global developmental delays

- Psychosocial risk – Infants who have a statistically increased probability of delayed development because of individual susceptibilities that are aggravated by environments in which there may be inadequate response to the infant’s physical, developmental and/or social-emotional needs. Parental inexperience/developmental delays or mental health problems, attachment difficulties, non-organic failure to thrive and child neglect or abuse are included in this category

Programs do not require that a child have a diagnosis for families to access our services. Referrals are made by parents, physicians, public health nurses and other community professionals in a position to assess developmental concerns in young children.

What Do We Do?

We provide an integrated approach to infant development and family-centred intervention that is parent-led and responsive to parent strengths, competencies and priorities.

The family is the major decision-maker in a child’s life, and the active involvement of the family throughout our involvement is essential to a satisfactory and meaningful outcome.

Through a transdisciplinary approach and in collaboration with other service providers, we aim to provide the highest level of opportunity for the optimal development of the child and family unit. Support is provided within the child’s natural environment where the infant development consultant serves many functions.

Services provided are tailored to child and family need and may include:

- Home visits
- Informal and formal child assessment and family needs assessment, using a variety of tools
- Support to enhance parenting skills and increased understanding of child development
- Sharing information on typical and atypical child growth and development
- Intervention to promote positive parent-infant interactions and support for the relationship
- Planning interventions to promote secure infant attachment
- Early intervention in all developmental domains (gross and fine motor, social and emotional, language and cognitive)
- Assistance to families in connecting with other families for parent to parent support
- Assistance to families in accessing more specialized services and information about additional community resources and supports
- Assistance to parents in obtaining information about their child’s condition or diagnosis

- Support to the family when a diagnosis of developmental delay or medical condition exists
- Acting as service co-ordinator or supporting a family member or other professional in this role
- Advocacy for and with families in their relationships with health, social and community services
- Provision of parent-child group programs or support to families in accessing community programs
- Community-wide planning with other service providers to prevent duplication or fragmentation of service and to identify gaps in service
- Public education to promote the benefits of early identification, intervention for children and families at risk

Within a family-centred philosophy, the infant development consultant supports families in the identification of their needs, resources and service requirements. The family's involvement and participation is a recognized key factor in the achievement of successful outcomes. Collaboration across individual professionals and agencies is also key to ensure that family life is strengthened rather than stressed by intervention.

We serve over 5,000 children each year throughout the province of BC, primarily through home visits on a monthly or bi-weekly basis. Frequency of service is established according to family and child needs, and is crucially dependent on the resources available to each program and other community supports available to the family.

Staff Training and Expertise

Our infant development consultants are skilled in providing an effective home-based intervention service. They benefit from continuous staff development opportunities locally, regionally and provincially. A Certificate and Diploma Program in Infant Development are offered through the University of British Columbia (UBC). IDP consultants have training in one or more of the following disciplines: child development; psychology; social work; physiotherapy; occupational therapy; child and youth care; nursing, education; early childhood education; developmental services or other related disciplines.

Infant development consultants bring a unique set of skills and abilities to work with high-risk infants and their families who are at risk as a result of poverty, parental unemployment, parental mental health issues or other conditions that may make it more difficult for parents to meet the child's developmental need. Their expertise covers knowledge of typical and atypical child development; observational skills; the ability to assess child and family strengths and needs; appreciation of issues related to family dynamics and child-rearing; training with respect to supporting those who experience grief and loss; and advocacy skills.

A family-centred service is promoted to encourage positive parent-child interactions and to promote the infant's optimal developmental progress. The relationship of secure attachment to

developmental accomplishment is promoted by the active encouragement of parents to recognize their infant's cues and to respond in ways that foster a sense of security and play.

What Are the Outcomes of Early Intervention?

What happens to children in the first years of life will play a large role in the path they will follow as adults. Recent research in the neurosciences provided powerful evidence for the influence of the early years on the children's base for competence and coping skills. These influences may affect learning, behaviour and health throughout their whole life.

Infant Development Programs are effective in promoting positive outcomes for the children and families who are nurtured through the children's early years.

To contact the IDP in your community, call your public health nurse.

This fact sheet is based on work done by the Ontario Association for Infant Development