
NEWS RELEASE COMMUNIQUÉ

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Ministry of Children and Family Development
Employment and Social Development Canada

Expansion of programs aid Indigenous children under six and their families

PRINCE GEORGE (LHEIDLI T'ENNEH) – Indigenous children under six, and their families, will benefit from a \$30-million expansion of Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) programs that provide culturally based inclusive child care and early learning, family bonding and prevention services.

The expansion was announced by Katrine Conroy, Minister of Children and Family Development, at the Prince George Aboriginal Head Start.

“I’m happy to see that funding from the Canada-British Columbia early learning and child care bilateral agreement will be used to expand great programs across British Columbia, like the Aboriginal Head Start programs, that support the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical growth of Indigenous children in a culturally appropriate manner,” said Jean-Yves Duclos, federal Minister of Families, Children and Social Development. “As a government, we take our relationship with Indigenous peoples very seriously. We need to make sure Indigenous children and their families have every chance to succeed.”

“Aboriginal Head Start provides culturally appropriate child care and parenting programs during a child’s early years, to help families become stronger and more resilient, and keep Indigenous children connected to their culture,” said Conroy. “Our government is committed to the principles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and reducing the number of Indigenous children in care. This investment in Aboriginal Head Start assists us in this important goal by recognizing the right of Indigenous families and communities to care for their children, guided by their culture.”

The Province is investing \$30 million by 2020 through a partnership with the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) and the Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC (AHSABC). The investment will expand AHS programs in the province. The AHSABC will receive \$19.5 million to expand their program, and create new licensed child care spaces that will be free for families. The FNHA will receive \$10.5 million to enhance its existing programs, and create new early-learning seats in First Nations communities.

“We want parents to have more options for culturally inclusive, quality child care that honours their traditions,” said Katrina Chen, Minister of State for Child Care. “These investments support our commitment to make life more affordable for families across the province.”

“This provincial investment to expand the reach of AHS in B.C. will help respond to the demand we are hearing from communities who currently don’t have such resources for the children and families. Through collaboration and community partnerships, we will be able to strengthen community services where they are needed most,” said Joan Gignac, executive director, AHSABC. “This investment will build on the successes and lessons learned by offering what we

now understand AHS to be — which is ‘family wellness’ programs. By investing in our children and their families, we are ultimately strengthening B.C. communities.”

There are 122 on-reserve AHS programs in B.C. that are funded through the FNHA. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) also funds 12 urban/off-reserve AHS programs in B.C., each serving 40 children, aged three to five years. Each AHS program is unique, and is designed to meet the needs of the communities it serves.

“FNHA welcomes these funding enhancements, which will facilitate culturally safe early learning and school readiness,” said Richard Jock, chief operating officer, FNHA. “This investment recognizes parents, caregivers and other family members as the most important teachers in a child’s life, and engages and supports them to be the child’s first teachers, through strengthening family bonds. Building healthy citizens begins in childhood, and this enhancement will support community driven approaches to child development.”

The AHS program uses culturally relevant curriculum and supports to enhance child development and cultural attachment for Indigenous children. The program offers holistic, wraparound prevention supports like parent education. It also offers referrals to early intervention services, such as counselling and speech therapy. AHS also creates opportunities for parents, guardians and family members to play a role in the program.

Quick Facts:

- In February 2018, the Province signed a \$153-million, three-year Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) partnership agreement with the Government of Canada, to enhance and expand programs and services that benefit parents and young children.
- Under the agreement, provincial and territorial governments can use funding for early learning and child care programs and services that reflect their particular local and regional needs.
- The provincial investment in Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) is part of this agreement.
- Under Childcare BC, the Province is investing more than \$1 billion into child care over the next three years, to lay the foundation for a universal child care system that will provide access to affordable, quality child care for anyone in B.C.
- Investments under the ELCC agreement complement the goals of Childcare BC — to improve access to child care by supporting British Columbians who need it most, including young parents, children with special needs and Indigenous communities.
- The ministry, through its Aboriginal Service Innovation – Early Years program, also funds AHS programs in a number of B.C. communities.

Learn More:

For more information about Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve, visit: <http://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/maternal-child-and-family-health/aboriginal-head-start-on-reserve>

For more information about Aboriginal Head Start in urban communities, visit: www.ahsabc.com

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