

Healthy Child Development

The impact of a child's early years on his or her potential to grow and learn and become a happy, healthy adult is only beginning to be understood.

Challenge

Because of the importance of the early years, policies and programs need to be developed to educate health professionals and support parents in their desire to give children the best start in life.

CICH action and impact

CICH has taken a key role in ensuring such supports are in place. The Institute's voice was one of the first to translate this new research on healthy child development into community-based programs directed at parents and health care professionals. For example, *The First Years Last Forever* is a resource to educate parents about the importance of the early years. The guide provides examples of how parents can support their child's cognitive, emotional and physical development. Almost 3.5 million copies of *The First Years Last Forever* have been distributed to parents, health professionals and employers.

Targeting professionals, the *Nourish, Nurture and Neurodevelopment Resource Kit* synthesizes recent brain development research that revealed "windows of opportunity" for learning in infants and young children. Over 9,500 kits have been distributed to early childhood practitioners, health units and resource centers, helping them understand how this research can guide daily practice and programs, and providing evidence-based best-practice resource materials.

In collaboration with a range of organizations, including Health Canada, CICH has developed and disseminated numerous parenting support programs. *The Next Steps – Caring for Your Preemie at Home* helps parents with the challenge of caring for premature infants, who have developmental risk factors that full-term babies do not. The Institute is a national coordinator of Health Canada's *Nobody's Perfect* program, which helps parents with young children, especially those families that are geographically, socially or economically isolated, improve their parenting skills and increase their knowledge of child development.

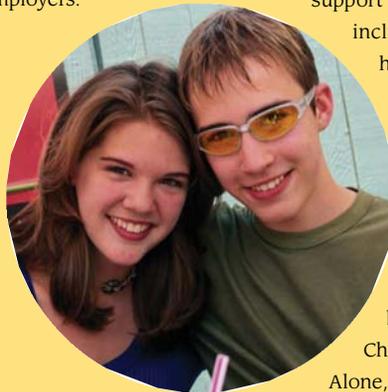
Most recently, CICH launched *e-Parenting Network*, an interactive web TV parenting series accessed through the Internet. The initiative provides a credible, timely, one-stop child health resource for parents, grandparents, guardians and caregivers. Participants can watch programs/webcasts, read and download valuable information, and e-mail questions to be answered by experts in: climate change; safety in the home, the car and the neighbourhood; nutrition for infants, toddlers and school-age children; and effective parenting strategies.

Challenge

Today's world can be profoundly stressful for children. Consider the following statistics: almost one fifth of school-age children have at least one mental health problem, and teen suicide rates increased approximately 300 per cent between 1961 and 1994. One in four girls and one in eight boys is sexually abused before the age of 18. Sexually abused children suffer greatly from the betrayal of trust, and are often at a greater risk of drug and alcohol abuse, suicide attempts, eating disorders, running away, prostitution and becoming sexual abusers as adults. In 1998, 42 per cent of grade 6 boys and 35 per cent of grade 6 girls reported being bullied at school during at least one term. Adolescents are confronted with sexual choices that can seem overwhelming – and rising rates of teen pregnancy show the need for early intervention.

CICH action and impact

As a strong voice for good mental as well as physical health, CICH continues to advocate for a national mental health strategy and support an expansion of the National Children's Agenda to include programs and services that address mental health issues for children six to 12 years old.



The Institute has also developed a number of programs to meet head-on the challenge of supporting our children's mental health. For example, the Institute identified loneliness and disconnection from family and schools as a concern for children, and has addressed the issue by tracking related trends in *The Health of Canada's Children: A CICH Profile* and developing *Still Home Alone*, a report that articulates the issue of unsupervised children and includes recommendations to help them cope. To understand the different stresses associated with growing up female, CICH conducted a literature review and analysis of *The Canadian Girl-Child*. This multi-disciplinary initiative discusses the key determinants of health and well-being of girls and young women in Canada.

CICH's *Safe & Happy Personal Safety Kit* featuring Max the Safety Cat helps teachers and caregivers talk about sexual abuse with children. The kit has been distributed to more than 6,000 daycare centres, as well as numerous parents, community groups and professionals. The Institute also distributes *Child Sexual Abuse Prevention: A Resource Kit*, created as a community development tool to help build community capacity to address the difficult issue of abuse.

CICH was also a partner in the *Pro-Action, Postponement, Preparation/Support* project, which reports on current work being done nationally and internationally in consultation with pregnant and parenting teens to provide a framework for action to reduce the rate of teen pregnancy in Canada.