

# The Best Policy Mix for Children: A Pathway to Citizenship

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# Based on Ongoing CPRN Research

- **The “Best Policy Mix for Canada’s Children”**
  - 10 research reports about policies for preschool children and their families (1997-1999)
  - Housing affordability as a children’s issue (2000-01)
  - Public policies for school-aged children (2000-01)
  - Two policy paradigms affecting families (2000-01)
  - Public policies for children with disabilities (2001)
- **Citizenship and Governance Issues**
  - *Mapping Social Cohesion* (1998)
  - Citizenship research -- conceptual papers, youth and citizenship, recreation and citizenship (1999-2001)
  - *Social Cohesion Nexus* -- Web site and list-serve (2000-01)
  - Governance of policies for children with disabilities (2001)



# Objectives of this Presentation

- Introduce the idea that policies mediate the relationships that comprise citizenship
- Explain what a “best policy mix” for children means
- Describe the “societal nest” and the “three enabling conditions” that foster positive child outcomes
- Provide a list of questions by which we can assess our effectiveness in supporting children and families



# What is Citizenship?

- “Citizenship” has three analytic dimensions:
  - ***Rights and responsibilities***
  - ***Access***, and
  - ***Feelings of belonging*** (i.e., identity)
- “Full citizenship” means *actively seeking to engage* in different areas of life -- to exercise all three dimensions of citizenship
- Healthy, active citizenship fosters social and economic development -- now and for future generations



# Families and Citizenship

- Successful engagement requires:
  - **Equality** of opportunity, of rights, and before the law
  - **Equity** in treatment, and recognition of difference, and
  - **Attachment** to country and to community
- For parents, opportunities to exercise *full citizenship* are affected by the policy mix available to support children and families

# Citizenship is Mediated by Policy

- Citizenship is a *dynamic relationship* between individuals and the state, and among individuals
- Because it is dynamic, citizenship is different for:
  - Citizens of the past
  - Citizens of the present
  - Citizens in becoming (youth), and
  - Citizens of the future (children)
- Relationships between individuals and institutions -- in the public, private and non-profit sectors -- are mediated by a range of policies

# What is the “Best Policy Mix” for Children?

- A “best policy mix” for children creates the environment needed to achieve positive child outcomes
- It provides a foundation for citizenship for children, and the capacity to experience *full citizenship* for parents
- It requires:
  - A strong “societal nest”
  - Three “enabling conditions” and
  - “Access, equity, and belonging” for the entire family

# We All Contribute to Children's Development

- Children are “nested” in multiple environments:
  - The child within the family
  - The family within the larger community of neighbourhoods and workplaces
  - Communities with geographic and political boundaries, which are also the *social nests* in which children and families are nurtured
  - Public institutions, which provide community infrastructure (e.g., schools, recreation facilities)
  - Governments, which provide resources and policies to allow all parts of the “nest” to function well



# The Societal Nest



# What is the State of the Societal Nest?

- New employment patterns, restructured families and changing approaches to policy have all affected the capacity of parents to meet the needs of their children
- Parents need employers and communities to *support* family life
- Families need governments to *invest* in children and parents, and to *support* the efforts of communities and employers with a mix of public policies
- Their combined efforts produce the “enabling conditions” that foster healthy child development



# What Do We Mean by “Child Outcomes”?

- Child outcomes refer to measures of physical, emotional and behavioural achievements or failures, relative to an age-specific peer group
- Many factors have a strong statistical association with specific child outcomes:
  - Family income
  - Family composition
  - Parenting practices
  - Neighbourhood characteristics
- These and other inputs combine to create the *three enabling conditions* that lead to improved child outcomes



# What are the “Three Enabling Conditions”?

- The *three enabling conditions* that foster positive child outcomes are:
  - Adequate income
  - Effective parenting, and
  - Supportive community environments
- To consciously support children, ask:  
*Which of the three enabling conditions are we supporting with the work we are doing?*



# 1. Adequate Income

- *Adequate income*, preferably earned income, can be assured by:
  - Recognizing the costs of raising children
  - Significantly reducing the cost of child care for employed parents, and
  - Providing additional income support to parents with low earned incomes, social assistance payments or maintenance payments

## 2. Effective Parenting

- *Effective parenting* can be supported through:
  - Improved paid and unpaid parental leaves
  - Flexible employment hours and schedules
  - Improved access to health and developmental programs, as well as to community resource centres, and
  - Enhanced availability of developmental child care and preschool programs for both employed and stay-at-home parents

### 3. Supportive Communities

- *Supportive community environments* can be provided to children by:
  - Ensuring access to reliable health, social and recreational services, and to a quality education
  - Providing integrated delivery of these services
  - Creating “child friendly” and “family-centred” spaces and systems, and
  - Collaborating within and across sectors to promote better outcomes for *all* children

# The Enabling Conditions Empower Parents

- Efforts to create the three enabling conditions are largely directed to parents
- Measures to create and sustain one or more of the enabling conditions empower parents to do the best they can to:
  - Support their children’s optimal development in the here and now, and
  - Create a pattern of successful participation in society -- for themselves and for their children -- both now and in the future

# Children in the Here and Now

- Since 1989, Canada has been signatory to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, through which children are entitled to:
  - **Provisions rights** -- to goods, services and resources
  - **Protection rights** -- from neglect, abuse, exploitation and discrimination, and
  - **Participation rights** -- giving children appropriate information to enable them to make decisions about and contribute to the circumstances of their everyday lives
- Those responsible for children -- and, as members of the societal nest, we are *all* responsible for children -- must ensure that the “best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration”



# Patterns of Healthy Development in the Nest

- ***In Families*** -- where the initial development of children's unique talents is supported and nurtured by parents
- ***In Non-parental Care Settings*** -- where toddlers and preschoolers learn to play and share with others, and begin to acquire skills that set the tone for learning in school and throughout life
- ***In Schools*** -- where children build on early strengths, expand their capabilities, learn independently and in groups, and enjoy informal and organized play
- ***Through Organized Recreation*** -- where children can improve their physical and psychosocial health, and practice cooperation, team work, and leadership
- ***Through Voluntarism*** -- where, as young people's identities develop, they begin to contribute to their communities



# Children as the Citizens of Tomorrow

- Today's children will become the next generation's societal nest
- Their healthy development *now* will enable them to achieve their potential as children and enjoy their childhood for what it is
- It will enable them as *adults* to support robust productivity as labour force participants in a knowledge-based economy
- They will also form families of their own and, like their parents today, will need to balance work and family life
- And like their parents today, they -- and society -- will benefit from the policies that support the work-family balance as they:
  - Determine how much time they can commit to civic life
  - Participate in neighbourhood projects and programs, and
  - Contribute to a high quality community life



# The Importance of Citizenship

- There may be broad social consequences -- in the short and long term -- arising from decisions made by public, private and voluntary organizations about the distribution of resources that support children
- Decisions made by all these actors in the societal nest contribute to the “policy mix” available to support children and their families
- Acting in the “best interests of children” raises issues of:
  - **Access** to resources, as well as to opportunities for children and parents to fully engage in society
  - **Equity** in treatment and recognition of difference, and
  - **Belonging** to national and local communities



## What's “Best” for Children is Good for *All* of Us

- We each play many roles in the societal nest and, in these different roles, we can ask:
  - *In what ways are we fostering the three enabling conditions that lead to improved outcomes for children -- adequate income, effective parenting, and supportive community environments?*
  - *Is there a “best mix of policies” in our community that empowers parents to do the best they can for their children?*
  - *Are we supporting integrated service delivery that makes it easy for children and parents to access the resources they need at different times in the life cycle?*
  - *Do our communities promote equity for **all** children and **all** parents? Do our actions create a sense of belonging for all?*



# The Best Policy Mix for Children

- Involves policy actors at all levels of the societal nest -- and requires coordination
- Fosters the three enabling conditions that lead to positive child outcomes
- Serves multiple purposes -- and more than one enabling condition -- using a variety or “mix” of policy instruments
- Focuses on creating positive outcomes for children
- Recognizes that “full citizenship for parents” is an essential outcome of the best policy mix for children -- and creates a virtuous circle of social development

# Our Research Continues

For additional information:

- CPRN Web site: <http://www.cprn.org>
- Family Network E-Mail: [family@cprn.org](mailto:family@cprn.org)

Most CPRN research can be downloaded from our Web site.

We invite you to join our free news services (see our Web site):

- *e-network*
- *The Social Cohesion Nexus*

