Aboriginal Children and Early Childhood Caries (ECC)

Early Childhood Caries (ECC) - commonly referred to as tooth decay in primary teeth - is currently reaching epidemic proportions in Aboriginal children in Canada. Research estimates that approximately 70% of Canadian Aboriginal children residing on-reserve experience some level of tooth decay by age 3 and approximately 87% by age 5 (Lawrence et al., 2004). These statistics are alarming and provide evidence of the need for greater awareness about the risks and causes of ECC as well as prevention strategies that can be taken up by caregivers.

Dental caries is an infectious disease in the mouth caused by bacterial by products that dissolve the enamel surface of teeth. There are three main contributing factors to dental caries: a susceptible tooth surface, bacteria in dental plaque and a diet rich in fermentable carbohydrates, particularly sugars (Weir, 2002). Without appropriate prevention and protection strategies, the bacteria may cause severe pain, tooth loss and chronic infection. More seriously, dental caries may affect speech, eating, sleeping, swallowing and even breathing (Weir, 2002). When dental caries occur in children, known as early childhood caries, the damages may impact their oral health for the remainder of their life.

One of the most prominent causes of ECC is providing babies sweetened liquids in their bottle prior to bed or nap time; this is frequently referred to as “baby bottle tooth decay.” Baby bottle tooth decay occurs when babies are given liquids, including milk, juice, and formula, through the bottle over long durations. Bacteria in the mouth use the sugars from the liquid as food and they produce acids which attack the teeth (American Dental Association, 2006). Over time the acids produced by bacteria decay the teeth.

Early childhood caries occurs most prominently in the upper front teeth as they are exposed to the sugars from the liquid the longest. The lower front teeth tend to be protected by the tongue, and therefore are less susceptible. Further, ECC has been found more prevalent in children with asthma as the anti-asthma medications contain sugars (Abi-Nahed et. al, 2006).
Early signs of ECC often go unnoticed or early signs go untreated because of the misconception that “baby teeth” are not permanent and as such do not require as extensive oral health attention as “adult teeth.” Baby teeth are important. Children need strong, healthy teeth to chew food, develop speech and to communicate. Further, baby teeth keep space in the jaw for the adult teeth. If a baby tooth is lost too early, the teeth beside it may drift into the empty space. When it's time for the adult teeth to come in, there may not be enough room, forcing teeth to crowd or grow in crooked (ADA, 2006).

Some early identifiers of tooth decay are as follows:
- Brown spots along the gum-line;
- If a child prefers soft foods, or cries when eating cold, sweet or hard foods; or
- If a child complains of chronic tooth ache or pain.

The following are steps to take to prevent ECC and baby bottle tooth decay (ADA, 2006):
- After each feeding, wipe the baby’s gums with a clean gauze pad;
- Begin brushing your child’s teeth when the first tooth erupts;
- Never allow your child to fall asleep with a bottle containing milk, formula, fruit juice or sweetened liquids;
- Use fluoride toothpaste, with special attention paid to the amount of paste used and that it is not ingested by the child; and
- Start dental visits by the child’s first birthday and visit your dentist regularly.

One of the reasons Aboriginal children are more susceptible to early childhood caries, particularly those living in remote and/or northern communities, is because of the varying levels of fluoride found in the water. Unlike their urban community counterparts, remote and/or northern communities often do not have fluoride supplemented into the drinking water (Weir, 2002). One of the most effective preventative tools against toothy decay is daily fluoride supplementation through use of toothpastes with fluoride.

Early childhood educators and caregivers have a responsibility to be informed of the risks of early childhood caries and prevention strategies that may be taken up so that we may share our knowledge with parents, caregivers and our communities. If you have any questions or concerns regarding early childhood caries please seek your nearest oral health professional.

References
Oral Health Resources and Supports

We have provided some additional resources that can support you in maintaining children’s oral health. We have also provided a chart you may use to track children’s tooth emergence (from Vancouver Coastal Health Authority). If you live outside of the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority jurisdiction, please visit http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/socsec/index.html to be directed to your regional health authority. Alternatively you may contact your local public health office to speak to a registered public health nurse for information and resources regarding children’s dental health.

Vancouver Coastal Health
Community Dental Health Program
Vancouver Coastal Health offers a public dental health program that provides preventive education and dental services for families living in the city of Vancouver. This program can help your family prevent tooth decay.

The program provides dental care and advice about dental health for babies (http://www.vch.ca/dentalhealth/child_checkup.htm) and preschool aged children. VCH presently seeing children grade three and under for check-ups in their public health dental clinic. The program works with schools and community groups around Vancouver. For information on the public health dental clinic or upcoming outreach clinics please visit http://www.vch.ca/dentalhealth/contact.htm

BC Nurse Line
24 hours per day Registered Nurse support line is available at (604) 215-4700

BC Healthy Kids Program
The BC Healthy Kids Program helps low income families with the costs of basic dental care for their children. Eligible clients include dependent children under 19 years of age who receive Medical Services Plan (MSP) premium assistance through the Ministry of Health. To view full details and contact information please visit http://www.eia.gov.bc.ca/publicat/bcea/HealthyKids.htm

How do I apply for the BC Healthy Kids Program?
Families who have been approved for MSP premium assistance will be signed up with the Program. Coverage begins at the start of the next month. No additional application form is needed to register. For information on how to apply for MSP, contact the Ministry of Health at: 604 683-7151 or toll free at: 1 800 663-7100. Information is also available from the Health Insurance BC website at: www.HIBC.gov.bc.ca.

What does the BC Healthy Kids Program cover?
Dental – Children are eligible for $700 of basic dental services per year. This coverage includes services such as exams, x-rays, fillings, cleanings and extractions. Your dentist can advise you of other services that may be covered. Emergency dental treatment is also available if the child’s annual limit has been reached. Emergency treatment is only available for the immediate relief of pain. The BC Healthy Kids Program does not cover orthodontic treatment.

How do I access services under the BC Healthy Kids Program?
To use services under the BC Healthy Kids Program you will need to show your child’s BC Care Card to the dental office. Your dental office will confirm coverage with the program contractor before each appointment. Important: Before any services begin, check with your dental/optical provider to see if there will be additional charges to you over what the BC Healthy Kids program will cover.

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How long will my child be covered under the BC Healthy Kids Program?
Children are covered under the BC Healthy Kids Program as long as their parent’s MSP premium assistance is active and continuously in effect. Children may be covered up to and including the month they turn 19. Any changes with your family’s MSP premium assisted medical coverage may affect your child’s coverage with the BC Healthy Kids Program.

Who provides services under the BC Healthy Kids Program?
Before treatment begins, confirm that your dentist provides services under the BC Healthy Kids Program.

For More Information
If you receive MSP premium assistance, contact your dentist directly.
Contact the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance by calling: 1 866 866-0800
Press 4 and then 2.

Announcements

New staff member at BC ACCS
We are pleased to announce Lenora Pritchard is our newest child care advisor!

Lenora is Coast Salish and Tsimshian and a band member of Musqueam First Nation. She is a single mother of her twenty month old daughter Alisa, who survived a very complicated open heart surgery and was on life support. Lenora understands how difficult it can be for parents to have a child who requires extra support.

Lenora graduated from her Basic Early Childhood Education from Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ontario and her Special Needs and Infant/Toddler training from the North West Community College in Terrace, BC. She has been working in Aboriginal child care for the past fifteen years. She has worked for Musqueam, Lake Babine, Snuneymux and Tsweiltuth First Nations. Lenora’s most memorable project was working for Lake Babine Nation where she created a thirty-two seat daycare. This is a project that she is very proud of and she will never forget as she was involved in all aspects of the development of this child care centre. This is when Lenora first became involved with BC Aboriginal Child Care Society. In fact she was their very second member and she was also contracted to facilitate workshops at their annual conferences.

Lenora is a dance member of the Git Hayetsk Dancers in Sm’algyax (Tsimshian language), which means “People of the Cooper Shield.” She belongs to the Killer Whale Clan and she is much honored to learn more about her Tsimshian culture. She feels that it is very important to know who you are and be proud of where you come from. This is what her Great Grandpa Edward Sparrow, one of her greatest influences instilled in her.

To reach Lenora at BC ACCS please email Lenora@acc-society.bc.ca or telephone 604-913-9128 ext 004.
New Publications

Health Canada First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Food Guide

Health Canada has recently added a supplementary issue of their 2006 revised Canada's Food Guide: Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide: First Nations, Inuit and Métis. This resource is the first-ever Food Guide that is tailored to reflect the traditional foods and traditions of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The guide takes into account the values, traditions and food choices of Aboriginal peoples, including moose stew, char and bannock. Health Canada asserts it is an important step towards achieving significant and long-term improvements in the health of Aboriginal Canadians through healthy eating and physical activity.

To order a copy of Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide: First Nations, Inuit and Métis, please visit: www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide or contact:

Publications
Health Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9

E-Mail: publications@hc-sc.gc.ca
Tel.: 1-866-225-0709
TTY: 1-800-267-1245
Fax: (613) 941-5366

Sub-Group on Indigenous Children and Young People

Building on the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child Day of General Discussion on Indigenous Child Rights and recognizing the work of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues respecting Indigenous child rights, the Sub Group on Indigenous Children and Young People (ISG) was officially formed at a meeting held at Native Child and Family Services in Toronto, Canada on October 24, 2005. The formation of the sub group represents the first international focal point that specifically focuses on the pervasive and persistent rights violations experienced by Indigenous children, young people, their families and communities worldwide.

ISG has new publications available in .pdf format off their website. Below is a list of current publications available at: http://www.isg-ngogroup.org/publications.html


Executive Summary Versions


Athabasca University Gateway Project

Athabasca University has published Producing Results in Prior Learning the final report of a three year study on the importance of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) in recognizing credentials, building on previous post-secondary education and advancing careers for mid-career professionals. The report shows that prior learning assessment and recognition saved participants time as well as tuition and opportunity costs associated with the pursuit of post-secondary education. For a copy of this report please visit http://gateways.athabascau.ca

1 University Drive Athabasca, AB T9S 3A3, (780) 675-6111

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Child Care Human Resources Sector Council Research Project Findings

Child Care Human Resources Sector Council has completed their Career Promotions and Recruitment Strategy Project and has produced an executive summary available on their website at www.ccsc-cssge.ca/english. CCHRSC has also produced a paper “What factors influence wages and benefits in early learning and child care settings?” available online.

Child Care Resource and Research Unit

Child Care Resource and Research unit has produced a new publication Child Care Spaces: Recommendations and a final report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on the Government of Canada's Child Care Spaces Initiative. Please visit the following website for details.

http://action.web.ca/home/crru/rsrсs_crru_full.shtml?x=99247

Visiting Australian Aboriginal Woman

BC ACCS currently has a temporary employee visiting from Australia. Carmen Paulke joins our team as resource librarian for the remainder of her stay in Canada. Please read her bio below.

My name is Carmen Paulke I am a young Australian Aboriginal waringu (woman) and my heritage resides from the Kuku Yalanji people of the Daintree Rainforest in Far North Queensland, Australia.

I acknowledge my people’s systems and beliefs within my life and understand Indigenous issues which stem from personal experiences. I am currently traveling on an around the world trip and have traveled, lived and worked in many countries learning about their cultures. I have always been influenced, inspired and intrigued by many different cultures and also learning about my own.

My Tribal Group is formed of the area between Mossman and Cooktown in North Queensland region. Most of my people live at either Wujal Wujal on the Bloomfield River or at The Gorge on the Mossman River. The Kuku-Yalanji bama (people) are the only tribal rainforest people in Australia who still have their own culture and language.

Kuku Yalanji Aboriginal people were hunters and gatherers, with more than five groups ranging across the terrain as the seasons changed, yielding their sustenance from the rivers, beaches, reefs and seas. Our people have existed as part of nature in the traditional country for ever and have learned to manage and respect the environment and its resources. The Mossman Gorge is one of the most popular visitor spots in the Wet Tropics. The crystal clear water cascading over smooth granite boulders that line the gorge, make this one of the most picturesque section in the Daintree National Park. We are true rainforest people who live in harmony with our environment. We are part of it and it is part of us. Our culture has always involved a deep respect for nature and an intimate knowledge of its cycles.

Today, the Kuku Yalanji people number approximately 1,000 and make up almost 10% of the Douglas shire population. Their base is at the township of Mossman, where they operate from the reserve Mossman Gorge. On a more recent note, On April 11, 2007 Kuku Yalanji people were granted Native Title- Thirteen years after they lodged their native title claim, the eastern Kuku Yalanji people have been recognized as the traditional owners of their land. Fifteen Indigenous land use agreements have been reached. A quarter of a million hectares of mostly world heritage rainforest between Mossman and Cooktown, including large tracts of the Daintree, have been handed back to traditional owners under a historic agreement with the Beattie Government.
Upcoming Events

**National Child Care Conference: Set Sail for Quality on an Ocean of Caring**
**June 15 -17, 2007 in Halifax, NS**

Join early learning practitioners, researchers, licensers, consultants and trainers at this national conference in Halifax. Speakers and workshops will explore new and innovative means and approaches to enrich the quality of your ELCC programs. This is an opportunity to expand the dialogue on quality and to celebrate and learn from each other. Info

**Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network 6th Annual Conference**
**July 9 - 11, 2007 in Calgary, AB**

Exciting pre-conference seminars focusing on education and early childhood development are scheduled, as well as informative symposia on family and Aboriginal literacy. Register before April 21st to receive an early bird discount on your registration fee. Please send any questions to anc2007@cllrnet.ca for more details visit http://www.cllrnet.ca/index.php?fa=Conference2007.home

**2007 Summer Institute for Early Childhood Education, UBC Campus**
**July 9-13, 2007 in Vancouver, BC**

UBC Institute for ECE is offering a special summer course entitled Frameworks for Creating Generative Learning, July 9-13, 2007 8:30am to 3:30pm daily. To apply for admission please contact the Teacher Education Office at (604) 822-5242 or email teacher.ed@ubc.ca To request a non-credit application please contact Joanne.chilton@ubc.ca For further information please visit the website www.eplt.educ.ubc.ca/di/courses.htm

**Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) Provincial Conference**
**May 31 - June 02, 2007 in Kingston, ON.**

For their 5th year, the AECEO will be presenting a southern and northern provincial conference in Ontario. AECEO provincial conferences draw a wide range of delegates from front line staff to directors and policy makers within the Early Learning and Child Care community. They offer an opportunity for professionals and organizations to showcase their program, research findings and expertise to colleagues both provincially and nationally. Deadline for submission is November 24, 2006. For more information, visit www.cfc-efc.ca/aeceo.

**International Conference on Physical Activity and Obesity in Children**
**June 24 – June 27, 2007 in Toronto, ON.**

This intensive, content-rich, four-day program is the perfect opportunity for any professional involved in promoting children’s physical activity to access the latest leading edge science related to childhood obesity. You will have the opportunity to hear and interact with the world’s leading experts in the field of childhood obesity research. Spaces are limited. For more information or to register, please visit https://event-wizard.com/secured/ewv3.01/forms/welcome.asp?Ecode=ICPAOCJUN242707&ClientId=cfiri&Lang=English

**Early Childhood Educators of BC Conference: Honouring Childhood**
**May 25 – 26, 2007 in Richmond, BC**

ECEBC 36th annual conference, Honouring Childhood, will feature keynote speakers Dr. Alan Pence and Carol Matthews. Conference will be held at Best Western Richmond Hotel and Convention Centre. For registration and program information please visit http://www.ecebc.ca/events/index.html

**Manitoba Institute of Child Health Forum: Oral Health and the Aboriginal Child**
**June 7-8, 2007 in Winnipeg, MB**

Manitoba Institute of Child Health is holding a forum entitled Oral Health and the Aboriginal Child. The focus of this workshop is the oral health of young Aboriginal Canadians. Information can be found at the following website: http://www.mich.ca/pages/dental%20symposium.asp
Caring for our Children is published by the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society. It is distributed to ACCS members, on and off reserve child care centres, Head Start programs, Bands and Tribal Councils in BC and individuals interested in early childhood education and care from a First Nations perspective.

Readers are invited to reprint articles provided proper credit is given. We welcome the submission of articles, book reviews, artwork, photos, letters and poetry.

Suite 708
100 Park Royal
West Vancouver, BC
V7T 1A2

Phone: 604-913-9128
Fax: 604-913-9129

www.acc-society.bc.ca