

# Message - From the Chief Medical Officer of Health

In the last 10 years we have learned more about human development than we ever knew before. Science is showing us the strong connection between the early childhood years and life-long health, well-being, learning and behavior. It is teaching us that what happens in a child's early years has a long reach forward.

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**The purpose of this report is to get people talking and engaged about early childhood development.** Why? Because the prosperity of our province depends on our ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation; because any child, no matter his or her circumstances, has the right to opportunities that will ensure their ability to grow, develop and thrive; and because, when we invest wisely in children and families we benefit from the constant renewal of people who contribute through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship.

Our growing understanding about the amazing early years in a child's life provides us with a compelling opportunity to re-think what we do to support healthy childhood development. All governments in Canada, including Alberta, make significant investments in their children; however, traditionally more has been focused on children after they enter the school system than before and our investments are primarily targeted to children deemed to be from high risk families. If we wait to intervene until children are in school or even adults, we miss out on the most promising opportunities to create better outcomes for our children. This means that investing wisely in those first five years of life will yield a wide range of dividends for our collective benefit.

All children, but particularly those in early childhood need a safe, nurturing, and loving environment to reach their full potential. Specifically, our children need healthy bodies, which means access to healthy food, places to

run and jump, and adequate sleep; healthy minds, which means access to settings and people who will develop healthy thinking and nurture healthy emotions and spirits; and, the ability of their families to connect to the best resources that will further nurture and make these healthy bodies and minds grow to reach their full potential.

Simply put, the quality of a child's earliest environment and exposure to appropriate experiences at the right stages of development forms the foundation for the course of their life path. Because of this – whether we are parents, grandparents, families without children, community leaders, business owners, farmers and ranchers, teachers, medical professionals, or government leaders – we all have a stake in getting this right. Even better, we can all make a contribution!

We will do the best we can because we love our children, but we also need champions who value the energy, enthusiasm, wonder and connection to the future our children bring. It is my hope this report will serve as a catalyst to engage Albertans in this important conversation. **Let's ask ourselves: are we doing the best we can to ensure positive futures for our children? It is the most important investment we could make as Albertans.**



André Corriveau, MD, MBA, FRCPC  
Chief Medical Officer of Health

# let's talk

## About the Early Years

[www.health.alberta.ca/about/OCMOH-Reports.html](http://www.health.alberta.ca/about/OCMOH-Reports.html)



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