



be most obvious during the early years. Study after study has confirmed the fact that the first years of life lay the foundation for future development. It is becoming more apparent that the determinants that effect children's health will ultimately have an impact on their future risk of chronic disease.

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#### IV Recommendations

It is important not only to recognize the link between early child development and chronic disease but to consider ways in which we can address this connection. The Best Start report about the important connection between early childhood and risk factors for adult chronic disease provides suggested recommendations for policy makers, organizations and practitioners who work with young children and families and/or in chronic disease prevention, and provides some key steps that can be taken to lower future risk of chronic disease. These recommendations focus on overall actions that can be implemented by society as a whole and include specific steps that early child development practitioners and organizations can take to promote early child development and chronic disease prevention.

##### Recommendations for practitioners:

- Recognize that every step we take to promote healthy child development is actively reducing chronic disease and contributing to the health of the next generation.
- Understand the importance of and adopt a comprehensive approach to early child development and chronic disease prevention that is grounded in the social determinants of health.
- Take every opportunity possible to actively learn about the links between early child development and chronic disease.
- Seek out best practices that can be modified if necessary and used to enhance positive and healthy conditions during childhood.
- Establish and promote policies in day care settings, schools, and other venues that ensure children are provided with:
  - good quality, safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food
  - daily and safe opportunities for physical activity and recreation, indoors and out
  - protection from the sun, especially during the sun's peak hours
  - a safe nurturing environment that encourages attachment and bonding.
- Encourage parents to:
  - Breastfeed their babies and provide their children with healthy food choices based on Canada's Food Guide.
  - Nurture and bond with their children.
  - Avoid smoking around their children.
  - Protect their children from the sun.
  - Ensure their children have plenty of opportunity to engage in lifestyles which promote physical activity.
  - Recognize that their children are developing lifelong health behaviours now.
  - Understand their role in preventing chronic disease in their children when they are adults.
- Be a positive role model by adopting healthy behaviours both at work and at home such as not smoking, eating healthy foods, getting plenty of physical activity and avoiding the sun.

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#### V Conclusion

The early years are a critical period in human development. Childhood experiences have a profound impact on future wellbeing including risk of chronic disease. It is clear that scientific evidence exists about the link between early child development and chronic disease. Government policy-makers must be engaged, and the time is right to get the word out and take further action in this area.

Linking early child development and chronic disease is even more important as part of a long-term strategy that can offer a dramatic return on our investment in the health of Canadians. Practitioners in the field of early child development and their colleagues working in chronic disease prevention, community and public health have a key role in and responsibility for advocating for and implementing strategies which address the connection between early child development and chronic disease in order to promote the health of our precious generation, the children of today.

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#### VI References

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