

No Man Left Behind

How and Why to Include
Fathers in Government-Funded
Parenting Strategies

April, 2016

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In December 2015, Shift submitted a proposed *Action Plan* to the Government of Alberta Family Violence and Homelessness Branch to engage men and boys in preventing violence against women and advancing gender equality. One of the top priorities identified within this plan was the need for new funding and support to increase positive fatherhood involvement as a key prevention strategy for domestic violence. The Palix Foundation provided funding to support further development in this area and, together with three key policy makers from the Government of Alberta (Paulette Rodziewicz, Suzanne Anselmo, Sheryl Fricke), helped to shape this project. Shift would like to thank these policy makers for their support throughout this project. We would also like to thank:

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We would like to dedicate this call for action to Patrick Dillon who was a tireless advocate in supporting fathers in this province.

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KEY MESSAGES

- Research unequivocally shows that fathers play a vital and distinct role in supporting children’s health and development. Positive, involved fathering is associated with:
 - Increased emotional well-being, cognitive competence, problem-solving ability, school achievement, social competence, empathy and reciprocity.
 - Decreased criminal behaviour, violence and aggression, and substance abuse in youth.
 - As adults, children who were raised by warm, consistent and engaged fathers are more likely to be tolerant and understanding and maintain healthy intimate partner relationships free from violence.
 - Positive father involvement contributes to two important societal outcomes: 1) gender equality, and 2) healthy beliefs, attitudes and norms around what it means to be a healthy, non-violent man.
 - Despite a growing recognition of the importance of fathers, international and Canadian studies suggest that a majority of parenting policies and interventions effectively marginalize fathers, focusing almost exclusively on mothers.
 - This gender bias is evident in Alberta. Very few evidence-based fathering programs and supports are available, and references to fathers were noticeably absent in the 29 provincial policy frameworks and business plans that were reviewed for this report.
- Positive father involvement is defined by responsive, consistent and nurturing interactions that are supported by an authoritative parenting style.*
- The Government of Alberta (GOA) can play an important role in helping to redress this gender bias and support fathers across Alberta to be actively and responsibly engaged in the lives of their children by:
 - Developing an internal strategy to further promote father-friendly environments, policies and practices within the GOA.
 - Investing in communities and agencies to increase the quantity and quality of programs and supports for fathers throughout the province, and supporting funded agencies to become more father-friendly.
 - Implementing a social marketing strategy that includes positive and consistent messages about the importance of fathers in child and youth development.
 - Investing in father-focused program evaluation and data collection to inform policy and program development.
 - Developing a non-transferable paternity leave policy that supports up to three months of paternity leave for fathers (or co-parents) after the first year of a child’s life, with higher benefits than those provided under national legislation.
 - Interviews with provincial policy makers indicate readiness for advancing a positive fatherhood strategy in Alberta.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Research clearly shows the importance of positive father involvement to healthy child outcomes, and indicates that fathers play a distinct role in supporting children's social, emotional, cognitive and physical development and well-being. However, despite a growing recognition of the importance of fathers, international and Canadian studies suggest that a majority of parenting policies and interventions “explicitly or implicitly marginalize fathers,”¹ focusing almost exclusively on mothers.² The Government of Alberta (GOA) can play an important role in helping to redress this gender bias by supporting fathers across Alberta to be actively and responsibly engaged in the lives of their children. This report outlines the rationale and strategy for promoting positive father involvement across the prevention continuum, and offers specific recommendations for government action.

The findings and recommendations outlined in this report are based on extensive research conducted by *Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence*. Shift's interest in promoting positive fatherhood emerged as a result of *research* related to engaging healthy, non-violent men and boys in violence prevention activities as an important primary prevention strategy for domestic violence. Fatherhood was identified as a key entry point for this work and as a promising way to prevent violence against both women and children.³ Further investigation confirmed that 1) the benefits of positive father involvement go well beyond violence prevention and 2) little is available in Alberta to support positive father involvement.

Recognizing an opportunity for the GOA to refocus its investments in parenting to ensure a more equitable emphasis on fathers, Shift met with key policy makers from across government to gauge their interest in advancing a fatherhood strategy. With the understanding that broad-based support for a fatherhood strategy clearly existed among policy makers, Shift conducted a number of research projects to support further development, including:

- A review of the literature on positive father involvement
- A review of evidence-based fatherhood programs
- Interviews with 27 policy makers across the GOA
- Interviews with representatives from two organizations in Alberta that implemented father-friendly programs and practices
- A review of assessment tools designed to help human service organizations become more father-friendly
- A review of 21 Alberta policy frameworks/strategies (from 2004-2016) and eight GOA business plans released in November 2015*

This report draws on all of these sources** to highlight the importance of supporting positive fatherhood involvement and outline ways that the GOA can enhance related programming and policy in the Alberta context.

* All of the research associated with this project has been approved by the University of Calgary Research Ethics Board.

** Findings from each of these research projects are summarized in the *Fatherhood Involvement Reference Report* which can be accessed at: <http://preventdomesticviolence.ca/content/research-library>

2.0 Who

A PROFILE OF FATHERS IN ALBERTA

2.1 What Do We Mean by ‘Father’?

As the social construct of ‘family’ continues to expand, our understanding of fatherhood also continues to evolve. Today, ‘father’ is defined more broadly than it was in the past to include a range of males (or people who identify as male) who might function in a caregiver role. In addition to biological fathers, this includes adoptive fathers, foster fathers, stepfathers, father figures, transgender fathers and relatives or friends who serve as father surrogates.⁴ The full range of people who may serve in a fathering role should be considered in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs and policies.

In this report, the term ‘father’ or ‘dad’ includes biological and adoptive parents, stepparents, father figures, and any other males serving a parenting function.

2.2 Today’s Fathers

Most children in Canada live with their fathers. In fact, in 2006, 80% of fathers lived with their children full time, while only 4% had no children in the home.⁵ Fathers are also more involved with daily child care than they were in the past, and the number of stay-at-home dads and lone-parent families headed by men is increasing:⁶

- In 2008, approximately 10% of stay-at-home parents were fathers, compared to 4% in 1976.⁷
- While fathers still spend more time engaged in paid work than mothers, they are taking on more responsibilities in the home. Between 1986 and 2005, fathers increased the amount of time spent on childcare and housework by 18% and 14%, respectively.⁸
- In Canada, the number of male lone-parent families grew by 16.2% from 2006 to 2011. (By comparison, lone-parent families headed by females increased by 6.0% during that time).⁹
- In Alberta, 24% of lone-parent families with children under the age of 25 are headed by males.¹⁰
- Over the years there has been a clear trend away from sole custody by either parent toward joint custody and shared custody.¹¹ In most cases, even when a child lives primarily with the mother, the father continues to be involved in his child’s life, suggesting that shared parenting has become the norm in Canada.¹²

Beyond lone parenting, family structure at large in Canada is also changing, and this diversity must be considered when thinking about policy and programming that promotes fatherhood in Alberta:

- The number of same-sex couples across Canada increased by 42% between 2006 and 2011.¹³ In Alberta, approximately 3% of children aged 24 and under live in a household with male same-sex married or common-law parents.¹⁴
- Within the transgender community, biological mothers may transition genders and take on a new role as fathers in the lives of their children.
- About 1 in 10 children in Canada live in stepfamilies, and a number of these stepfamilies are considered “complex” (i.e., where there are biological children from the current and/or prior relationship(s), resulting in varying and multiple step-sibling relationships).¹⁵ A growing body of work demonstrates the importance of considering complex stepfamily relationships when looking at father involvement.¹⁶
- In 2006, Aboriginal fathers comprised approximately 3% of all men in Canada who lived with dependent children, and were more likely to be a lone father or a father in a common-law relationship than non-Aboriginal fathers. They were also less likely to work full-time and more likely to have a lower median income.¹⁷
- Immigrant fathers comprise approximately 25% of all men in Canada who live with dependent children. Based on 2006 data, immigrant fathers are more likely than non-immigrant fathers to be married, but are less likely to work full-time and more likely to have a lower median income.¹⁸
- Existing data make it difficult to know the precise number of young dads in Canada, but conservative estimates suggest about 5,700 men aged 15-19 were fathers in 2006. Compared to adolescents who were not parents, young dads were less likely to attend school full-time and more likely to work full-time.¹⁹



Why

THE CASE FOR SUPPORTING POSITIVE FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNMENT POLICIES, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES*

3.1 Defining Positive Father Involvement

The term ‘positive father involvement’ is used to describe dads who promote their child’s well-being and security by taking an active role in caring for their child’s social, emotional, cognitive and physical health, and by having a respectful, equitable relationship with the child’s mother or co-parent.

There are two aspects to positive father involvement: positive parenting and involved parenting.

1. **Positive Parenting** is associated with qualities related to an authoritative parenting style,²⁰ which include:
 - Supporting the child’s sense of identity and independence within warm and responsive relationships;²¹
 - Having high and consistent expectations about behaviour, maturity and complying with authority;²²
 - Using positive disciplinary methods** rather than corporal punishment (which is associated with serious developmental problems in childhood and beyond).²³

2. **Involved Parenting** includes:

- Interacting with the child in loving and consistent ways;
- Taking an active role in ensuring that the child is safe, and that his or her emotional, social, cognitive, and physical needs are addressed.²⁴

Family conditions that help dads to be great fathers include having a respectful, equitable and non-abusive relationship with the child’s mother (even if the parents don’t live together anymore) and with others who may have a primary caregiving responsibility for their children (e.g., grandparents).²⁵

3.2 Why Positive Father Involvement Is So Important

3.2.1 Positive Father Involvement Results in Better Outcomes for Children and Families

Positive father involvement is important because it results in better outcomes for children, families and communities. (For a summary, see the “Quick Overview” text box below). Numerous cohort studies have demonstrated the “overall protective and positive effect” of positive father involvement on children starting in infancy and extending through childhood

* While this report focuses on the importance of fathers in the lives of children, we are not seeking to make a totalizing or essentialist argument, and recognize the growing research literature that demonstrates the role of lesbian-led families and transgender parents who provide supportive, caring, and nurturing familial environments for their children.

** This term (along with several others) is defined in the glossary at the end of this report.

Early experiences build brains: Nurturing interactions between children and their caregivers, including their fathers, help contribute to healthy brain development. These positive experiences are the bricks that build sturdy brain architecture, which is the basis for all future development.

and adolescence and well into adulthood.²⁶ Positive involved fathering supports children's health and development in the following ways:

- **Emotional Well-being:** The positive effects of engaged, responsible fathering begin in infancy. For example, fathers who care for and engage with their infants and toddlers help to nurture children's secure attachment.²⁷ Such attachment promotes emotional well-being and healthy relationships across the lifespan²⁸ and lays the foundation for strong father-child bonds throughout childhood, adolescence and beyond. Positive father involvement is also associated with higher levels of resilience, problem-solving/adaptive skills, emotional regulation and social competence, and lower levels of anxiety, depression, impulsivity and psychological distress.²⁹ Children of involved fathers are also more likely to develop a positive self-concept and have higher rates of self-esteem, and greater life satisfaction as adults.³⁰
- **Cognitive Well-being:** Children of highly involved fathers are more cognitively competent at six months, and are better problem-solvers as toddlers.^{31,32} By the time they reach school age, they are more likely to perform better in school, have positive attitudes towards school, and have better math and verbal skills. They are also less likely to have attendance issues or behavioural issues leading to suspension or expulsion.³³
- **Social Well-being:** Positive father involvement is associated with "children's overall social competence, social initiative, social maturity and capacity for relatedness with others."³⁴ It also has an impact on peer relations, and is associated with lower levels of aggression and conflict, and higher levels of reciprocity, empathy, generosity and peer acceptance.³⁵ Some research suggests that dads may play a larger role than moms in supporting children's confidence in exploration and interaction with their social and physical environments.³⁶ This is often facilitated through physical play between fathers and children,³⁷ which also has a direct link to children's cognitive capacity and emotional well-being.³⁸ As adults, children of involved fathers are more likely to be tolerant and understanding, adjust well to college, have supportive social networks, have long-term friends with whom they are close, and have more satisfying and successful intimate relationships.³⁹
- **Reduced Behavioural Problems:** In addition to enhancing child well-being and promoting healthy development, father involvement can help to reduce a range of externalizing and internalizing behaviours, including criminal behaviour, violence and aggression, truancy and substance abuse.^{40,41} Boys who have engaged, nurturing fathers are also less likely to use violence against female partners in adulthood⁴² and are more likely to be nurturing and gender-equitable when they become fathers themselves.

Father involvement can also have a positive impact on fathers themselves. Dads who spend more time positively engaging with and caring for their children improve their own well-being⁴³ while increasing their capacity to express emotions and experience empathy.⁴⁴ Certain subpopulations of fathers also experience beneficial impacts. For example, incarcerated fathers who maintain strong family ties during imprisonment have higher rates of post-release success and lower levels of recidivism compared to those who do not.⁴⁵

Moms can also benefit from positive father involvement: a significant body of research shows that involved fathers help to foster greater maternal satisfaction,⁴⁶ and can help to buffer the effects of a less supportive mother (e.g., a mom who is depressed).⁴⁷ Positive relationships between parents also promote a more harmonious home environment, which is another factor contributing to children's positive development.⁴⁸

3.2.2 Positive Father Involvement Contributes to Healthy Masculinity Norms and Gender Equality

In addition to child and family outcomes, positive father involvement can also contribute to two very important societal outcomes: developing healthy masculinity norms and increasing gender equality. By normalizing the role of men in childcare and household tasks, the restrictions of traditional definitions of masculinity are expanded and replaced with a broader vision of men's capacity in family, life and society in general.⁴⁹ Research suggests that involved, responsible fathering can help men to construct models of healthy masculinity for themselves (i.e., models based on nurturing, caring, respect, and equality).⁵⁰

In Nordic countries, where gender equality is high, healthy masculinities are closely associated with men's identities as fathers. This was achieved, in part, through paternal leave policies that were implemented in conjunction with employment policies to support women in the workplace.⁵¹ Involved fathers with positive parenting skills model non-violent, non-traditional masculinities, flexible views about gender roles, and healthy relationship skills at home and in community.⁵² Increased positive father involvement can shift traditional masculinities and gender norms, and may increase gender equality both within families and in society as a whole.⁵³ Clearly the benefits of positive paternal involvement for dads, moms, children, families and society as a whole are substantial.

We use the term “healthy masculinities” to refer to the development of beliefs, attitudes and norms about masculinity that promote gender equality, non-violence and social and emotional competencies.

This involves:

1) expanding traditional notions of masculinity to include a wider range of human qualities and experiences (e.g., nurturing, care-taking, being vulnerable); and 2) challenging aspects of traditionally defined masculinity that reinforce existing power dynamics and limit the potential for gender equality.

Quick Overview of Outcomes Associated with Positive Father Involvement

Child Outcomes

- Increased emotional well-being, including higher levels of secure attachment, resilience, problem-solving/adaptive skills, and emotional regulation
- Lower rates of anxiety, depression, impulsivity and psychological distress
- Higher rates of positive self-concept, self-esteem, and greater life satisfaction as adults
- Increased cognitive competence and problem-solving capacity
- Better school outcomes, including higher academic achievement, greater math and verbal skills, better school attendance, and decreased rates of suspension and expulsion
- Greater social competence and capacity for healthy relationships, including higher levels of reciprocity, empathy, generosity and peer acceptance, and lower levels of aggression and conflict
- More tolerant and understanding as adults; better able to adjust well to college; higher rates of long-term intimate partner relationships that are successful and satisfying; more long-term friends with whom they are close
- Reduced externalizing behaviours including criminal behaviour, violence and aggression, truancy, and substance abuse
- Lower rates of domestic violence as adults

Parent/Family Outcomes

- Increased overall well-being among fathers
- Increased capacity for fathers to express emotion and experience empathy
- Decreased recidivism among fathers who have been incarcerated
- Greater maternal satisfaction in relationship
- Reduced impact of maternal mental health issues on children
- More harmonious home environment
- Gender equitable relationships (e.g., sharing of household tasks, parenting, etc.)

Community/Societal Outcomes

- Increased gender equity and equality
- More expansive notions of masculinity (i.e., healthy and non-violent)
- Broader vision of men's capacity in family life and society in general

3.3 Why the Government of Alberta Needs to Do More to Effectively Engage Fathers

Alberta has a strong commitment to children, and recognizes the importance of healthy child development to the well-being of individuals, families and communities. For this reason, the GOA has made considerable investments in parenting programs, services and supports over the past two decades. However, many of those investments target mothers, and fathers are rarely a focus.^{54,55} When interviewed by Shift, Alberta policy makers acknowledged a number of gaps in programs and services for fathers in this province, including:

- Lack of overall funding for fatherhood programs
- Lack of fatherhood programming available across the prevention continuum
- Lack of male staff involved in parenting programs and services
- Lack of training available for staff to understand how to effectively engage and work with fathers
- Lack of fatherhood programming for diverse communities (e.g., Aboriginal, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (GBTQ), newcomers, immigrants)
- Current practices not based on evidence⁵⁶

A recent e-scan of primary prevention programs designed for men in Alberta confirm these findings, as the scan identified very few universal programs in Alberta that specifically target fathers.⁵⁷ The e-scan also noted some other key gaps, including a lack of fatherhood programs in rural areas (communities

north of Edmonton are particularly underserved) and a lack of primary prevention programs for diverse fathers (e.g., the e-scan found that Alberta has no programs specifically targeting Aboriginal fathers**, gender or sexually diverse fathers, fathers with disabilities, or ethnocultural fathers).

Due to entrenched gender biases, the health and parenting capacities of fathers are not generally recognized or supported in current government policies and practices.

A review of 21 policy frameworks developed between 2004-2016 in Alberta identified a similar imbalance.⁵⁸ Only one policy document, *Family Violence Hurts Everyone: A Framework to End Family Violence in Alberta* (2013), has an explicit strategy for engaging and supporting (young) fathers. Moreover, only one policy paper included a definition of parenting that was inclusive of fathers. When asked about the underlying reason for the lack of support for fathers in this province, the majority of policy makers interviewed attributed the gap, in part, to policies, practices and systems that are based on outdated and traditional approaches to gender roles and family structure.⁵⁹

Research suggests that this type of gender bias is common in Canada. Programs, policies and research to support maternal health, well-being and parenting are relatively well established, whereas the fathering role is not as highly valued or understood.⁶⁰ Furthermore, policies or programs that are intended to be inclusive of both fathers and mothers in principle do not support gender equity

** This is about to change: The Family Centre in Lethbridge recently received funding from the Family and Community Safety Grant Program to work in partnership with some of the Aboriginal communities in that area to adapt the Supporting Father Involvement (SFI) program. They are working in collaboration with the Blood Reserve, Kanai Children's Services and Opokaa'sin Early Intervention Society, and plan to begin recruiting fathers and families for the program in Fall 2016.

in practice: “Many organizations that do have ‘family-friendly’ policies and practices actually remain gendered in their expectation that such programs are mostly for mothers.”⁶¹ Canadian fathers are certainly aware of this imbalance: in a large survey of over 2500 Canadian parents, only 27% of fathers agreed strongly with the statement ‘I think Canada values the role of fathers.’ By contrast, 51% agreed strongly that ‘Canada values the role of mothers.’⁶²

This imbalance is not unique to Canada: A recent systematic review of the global literature on parenting interventions confirmed that fathers are “marginal to the bulk of parenting interventions”⁶³ and generally excluded in policies related to parenting in countries throughout the world. “Policies on parenting tend to reflect and perpetuate, implicitly or explicitly, the gender biases that prevail in cultural stereotypes and mainstream parenting practices.”⁶⁴ Fathers are also generally excluded from policy related to early childhood development. The authors of this review point out that this type of gender bias perpetuates stereotypes that limit the roles that both women and men can play in society:

*“In the realm of social welfare policies, conditional cash transfers or other income support programs for low-income families have often excluded men, on the grounds that women devolve more of their income to the household than do men. Recent critiques of income support programs are instructive: to focus exclusively on women may inadvertently contribute to a gender divide, in which women are viewed as caregivers and responsible, while men are seen as inherently derelict in their capacity for family support. Similarly, strong gendering biases in parenting policies tend to reproduce a **mothering** rather than **fathering** cultural model of childrearing: these tilt programmatic interventions toward mothers, rather than toward both fathers and mothers as coparents.”⁶⁵*

Ideally, parenting programs, policies and supports should engage both men and women as co-parents, but first we need to address the gender bias that currently exists. For this reason, Shift is calling for an intermediary focus on fathers.

Ideally, parenting programs, policies and supports should engage both men and women as *co-parents*. However, given the strength of gender biases related to parenting, an intermediary phase that explicitly focuses on fathers is needed. By investing in policies, programs and services that support fathers, the GOA can promote a message about the importance of positive father involvement to healthy child outcomes and help to redress an imbalance that affects us all.



3.4 Why the Time is Right

Over two decades ago, the United Nations declared that “Equal rights, opportunities and access to resources, equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women, and a harmonious partnership between them are critical to their well-being and that of their families as well as to the consolidation of democracy.”⁶⁶ While Canada has been slow in advancing gender equality, the newly elected Liberal government is clearly working to address this. The Federal Mandate Letter for the Minister of Status of Women, for example, outlines a decisive agenda for addressing gender biases in national affairs.⁶⁷ Alberta’s new NDP government is also moving in this direction: the establishment of a Status of Women Ministry in 2015, for example, signals a commitment to gender equity and equality along with a readiness to begin redressing the biases that exist. The Status of Women Business Plan that was released in November 2015 includes a commitment to “develop a program targeted at engaging men and boys.”⁶⁸

Findings from Shift’s interviews with policy makers offer further evidence that the time is right for Alberta to move towards an agenda that addresses gender biases in parenting programs and supports and recognizes the importance of fathers to child, family and community outcomes. Almost all of the 27 policy makers interviewed suggested that the current policies and systems in place within the

GOA are out-dated and based on old, traditional notions of gender roles and definitions of family and do not account for current economic and political realities or current family and workplace structures. Policies that were identified as missing in the Alberta context include: parental leave specific to fathers/co-parents; childcare support in the workplace; and flex-time policies that encourage family time (e.g., encouraging fathers to go to their children’s appointments, school functions, etc.). In addition, the lack of research on paternal attachment was identified as a gap.

Policy makers suggested that these gaps could be addressed by:

- Investing in the development of a focused fatherhood strategy that would increase the number of programs available for fathers throughout the province. Policy makers suggested that this strategy be embedded within a broader parenting strategy, and that the Early Childhood Development portfolio could lead this.
- Developing a social marketing strategy that includes positive and consistent messages about the importance of fathers in child/youth development.
- Promoting the inclusion of fathers in schools and school districts.
- Creating legislation that would encourage workplaces to cultivate father-friendly environments through policies and programming (e.g., paternal leave, family friendly policies, on-site child care programming).

Overall, the participants agreed that the GOA’s investments should prioritize prevention and health promotion activities.⁶⁹

4.0

HOW PROMISING PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING POSITIVE FATHER INVOLVEMENT

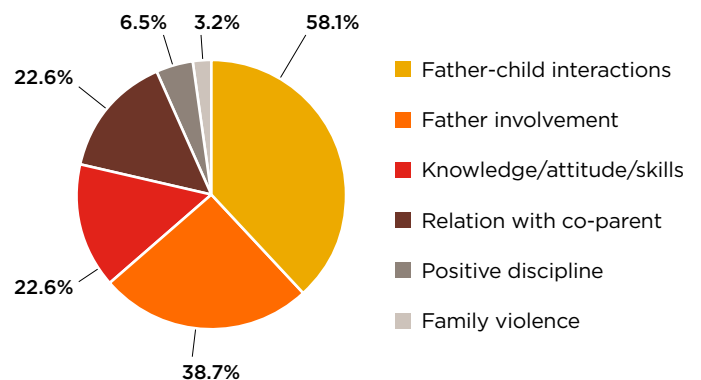
While evidence related to the importance of fathers to child development and well-being is well established, research related to fathering *interventions* is still in its infancy. Most of the parenting interventions that have been studied focus on mothers.^{70,71} Those that *do* include fathers often do not disaggregate the findings by gender, and therefore do not offer any information about the differential impact of the program on fathers versus mothers.⁷² As the authors of a review of best practices in this field conclude, “Fathers are still for the most part invisible ‘others’ in such programming or are assumed to be absent.”⁷³

Despite these limitations, promising practices for engaging fathers are beginning to emerge, including practices related to programs, populations, organizational culture, policy, research and evaluation. Each of these is discussed in the sections that follow.

4.1 Effective Programs

Shift recently conducted an analysis of 36 systematic reviews and meta-analyses that examined 449 positive fatherhood and/or parenting programs. (Appendix B offers a high-level overview of the findings. Please refer to the accompanying *Fatherhood Involvement Reference Report* for further details). Of all of the programs examined, 28 were found to have promising impacts on some aspect of positive fatherhood, including: positive father involvement (58.1% of programs identified); father-child interactions (38.7%); parenting knowledge, attitudes and/or skills (22.6%); relationship with co-parent (22.6%); and positive discipline (6.5%). One of these programs – *Supporting Father Involvement* (SFI) – is currently in use at two sites in Alberta and could be scaled up for greater reach and impact.

Outcomes of Fatherhood Programs Included in the Review (n=28)



While increasing the number of evidence-based fathering programs in Alberta would be ideal, the current economic environment might limit the options available for introducing new programming. However, existing programs can be assessed against what is currently known about promising practices for fathering programs, and restructured to support a more father-inclusive approach.

Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2012) identified commonalities among fatherhood programs that have been rigorously evaluated and found to be effective. Many of the practices were ones that are associated with effective programming generally (e.g., provide staff with training and coaching opportunities, deliver services in engaging and interactive ways, replicate the curriculum with fidelity). However, some were specific to fathering programs, including the following*:

- Incorporate teaching methods and materials that are appropriate for fathers and the cultures of the populations served
- Use theoretical approaches that have been effective in influencing parenting behaviours in other contexts
- Employ a variety of teaching methods designed to focus on fathers as individuals, thereby personalizing the information
- Encourage the use of an incentive to fathers and/or their families
- When focused on fathers involved in the criminal justice system, teach both incarcerated and re-entering fathers important skills and give them opportunities to practice using these skills
- When working with teen fathers, include mentoring as a program component and offer a comprehensive array of services⁷⁴

In addition to the promising practices outlined above, a number of other design principles have been identified. These include the following:

- **Target both parents:** A growing body of evidence suggests that engaging both parents, rather than just one, may be more effective.⁷⁵ As the authors of an extensive review of parenting programs point out, “behavioural change within families seems unlikely to be sustained when only one parent, whether the mother or father, is the sole target of a parenting intervention. We need to comprehensively understand the *community of care* provided to children, and the sensitivity of children to a range of caregiving contexts.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, evidence suggests that, in the case of heterosexual couples, mothers have a significant influence on the way that their partner’s role as fathers is shaped; thus involving the mother is key. “It is clear that interventions to enhance fathers’ involvement with their children must focus not only on fathers, but also on their partners as active participants who affect the father’s definition of his role within the family.”⁷⁷
- **Ensure sufficient dosage:** A 2012 review of rigorously evaluated fatherhood programs found that effective programs tended to host 1.5 hour sessions at least once a week for five to ten weeks. Programs that lasted at least two months tended to have the greatest effect, while programs that lasted only a couple of hours had little to no effect. The authors conclude that, “effective programs need to address both consistency of program delivery and adequate dosage to accomplish the intended outcomes.”⁷⁸

* This list is taken from: J. Bronte-Tinkew, M. Burkenhouser, A.R.J. Metz, “Elements of Promising Practices in Fatherhood Programs: Evidence-Based Research Findings on Interventions for Fathers” *Fathering*. Vol.10, no.1, Winter 2012, pp. 20-24.
<http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/courses/csafety/mod2/glossary.htm>

- **Provide individualized and contextualized support:** Relationship-based, individualized support is associated with better outcomes for father-focused programs. This means moving beyond the standardized content to engage fathers as individuals and customize the information to their particular situation.⁷⁹ “Practitioners should be prepared to address the contextual factors as well as parenting skills,” writes John Hoffman, author of *Father Factors: What Social Science Research Tells Us About Fathers and How to Work With Them*. “The most effective and comprehensive efforts to support fathers, whether at the level of policy or local program and practice, must include, or be linked to, concrete efforts to assess and address the systemic barriers and individual challenges facing fathers and potential fathers.”⁸⁰

4.1.1 Recruiting Men for Fatherhood Programs

Research conducted by Shift in 2014 with representatives from organizations that are actively seeking to engage men in programming in Alberta confirm that men can be difficult to recruit.⁸¹ The literature related to supporting father involvement identifies several practices that can help to address this challenge. These include the following:

1. **Start early:** Research suggests that levels of father involvement that are established early on (i.e., when the child is still in utero or in infancy) tend to be sustained.⁸² Therefore, a particular emphasis should be placed on involving men in programs that are associated with pregnancy and infancy.
2. **Develop a compelling “Why” story:** Fathers are more likely to engage with parenting programs and services if they understand the significant ways in which fathers impact child development, independent of mothers. Interventions that develop a compelling ‘why’ story that is specifically targeted to dads are more likely to attract fathers.⁸³

3. **Develop a robust theory of engagement:** Researchers point out that, like other programs, programs intended to engage fathers must be based on very clear, evidence-informed ideas about the beliefs and behaviours of the target audience and an understanding of “why... parents [would] want to spend their time participating in [a given] program.”⁸⁴ Thus, a robust theory of engagement specific to fathers is critical to effective recruitment.
4. **Go where the men are:** One of the ways to engage more fathers is to go where they naturally congregate. Shift’s research suggests that, by taking advantage of places where men regularly congregate and connect (e.g., work, gym, child’s sporting events), it is possible to increase learning opportunities or social support, recognizing that these social exchanges are chances to establish a community network that utilizes word-of-mouth referrals⁸⁵ and peer supports.
5. **Enlist the help of moms:** Numerous studies have shown that mothers can sometimes be a barrier to father involvement, and often play a ‘gatekeeping’ role that limits the ways that fathers can engage in their children’s lives. Mothers are also an important *influence* on fathers, and can play a key role in encouraging them to participate in programs. Therefore, “providing information to mothers to pass on to fathers may be an effective way of recruiting fathers in programs and services.”⁸⁶

4.1.2 Implementation

Policy makers, researchers and organizations are paying more and more attention to the art and science of effective implementation. Whereas in the past, evidence-based programs were often considered ‘plug and play,’ we now understand far more about the infrastructure and resources required to address the research-to-practice gap, and the activities required to ensure that programs are able to be implemented and scaled with fidelity in real world settings.⁸⁷ We also have a much better sense of how long it takes to achieve full implementation. Research suggests that two to four years are required to reach the stage where client outcomes can be measured, and that implementation is a recursive process with six functional stages of implementation: exploration, installation, initial implementation, full implementation, innovation, and sustainability.⁸⁸ The stages are not linear as each appears to impact the others in complex ways. Successful implementation entails specific developmental activities within the following components: staff selection; pre-service and in-service training; ongoing coaching and consultation; staff evaluation; decision support data systems; facilitative administrative support; and systems interventions.⁸⁹

At this time, Alberta has only one evidence-based program for fathers in the province (SFI), and implementation of that program has been limited to a few organizations. If Alberta is to introduce new programs or enhance existing ones, and try to scale those programs, we will need to draw on lessons from the field of implementation science to understand the types of supports required at each phase of development.

4.2 Diverse Populations

While the research related to supporting father involvement amongst diverse populations is still in its infancy, some promising practices are emerging around the following groups: vulnerable and at-risk fathers, adolescent/young fathers, new fathers, Aboriginal fathers, GBTQ fathers, and fathers who are recent immigrants.

4.2.1 Vulnerable and At-Risk Fathers

Vulnerable fathers include fathers “whose context is less supportive – for example, fathers who do not live with their children, who have strained relationships with the mother or who are experiencing economic stress.”⁹⁰ This group can also include fathers who pose a potential risk to their families due to addictions, mental health issues, criminal behaviour, violence, etc. As one author points out, this is a critical population to reach because “ignoring vulnerable fathers, in effect, means ignoring both their potential benefits as parents and the potential risks they may pose to mothers and children.”⁹¹ Vulnerable fathers require a range of supports at multiple levels to help address the contextual factors that limit the ways in which they can engage positively with their children. Thus, in addition to

parenting and child development programming, they often need supports designed to help address the life challenges they are facing, including supports related to employment, education and partner relationships.⁹² In fact, research suggests that addressing these types of barriers and challenges may be more important than providing parenting information and support, and parenting programs may be ineffective without them.⁹³

Fathers who perpetrate violence are a sub-group of fathers who require specialized supports. Unfortunately, as one author points out, “it is still early days for parenting interventions for men who batter,”⁹⁴ and Shift’s review of evidence-based fathering programs did not find any programs for this group that met our criteria. (Fatherhood programs were only included if they showed an impact on the target outcome[s], as compared to a comparison or control group). However, one Canadian program shows great promise. *Caring Dads: Helping Fathers Value Their Children* is a 17-week program designed to promote child well-being by working with fathers on their skills, behaviours and knowledge. The program also includes contact with the child’s mother and coordinated case management for children. A pre-post evaluation with 98 fathers in Ontario found that men who participated reported less hostility and verbal anger, improved parenting (less laxness, hostility and over-reactive parenting) and improved co-parenting (communication and respect) following the program. The effects on over-reactive parenting and co-parenting respect were medium in size, and indicated that 36-43% of men who initially scored in the clinical range on these variables recovered by the end of the intervention.⁹⁵ The *Caring Dads* program is currently offered in Alberta by the PACE Centre in Grande Prairie.

Caring Dads: Helping Fathers Value Their Children is a 17-week program for fathers who have perpetrated domestic violence. The program is designed to promote child well-being by working with fathers on their skills, behaviours and knowledge. Coordinated case management is built into the program, as is contact with the child’s mother. While the evaluation of the program is limited, Caring Dads seems to be associated with decreased rates of hostility and verbal anger and improved parenting. The Caring Dads program is currently offered by the PACE Centre in Grande Prairie, and could be extended to other jurisdictions across Alberta.

4.2.2 Adolescent/Young Fathers

Young dads often experience a number of challenges related to income and relationships. Therefore, the principles associated with vulnerable fathers usually apply to adolescent fathers as well: “There is evidence to suggest that providing teen fathers with parenting information alone is insufficient to positively impact the lives of teen fathers and their families....As teen fathers often exist in more challenging circumstances and have limited resources, programs that expand the variety of resources available tend to have more positive effects.”⁹⁶ In addition to these supports, effective teen fatherhood programs often include mentoring as a program component.⁹⁷ One program that has evidence of effectiveness is Florsheim and colleagues’ *Young Parenthood Program (YPP)*. The program is now being funded by the GOA’s Ministry of Human Services and adapted for young dads at the Louise Dean School in Calgary through Catholic Family Service. An evaluation of the program (called *Families Moving Forward*) is currently being conducted. If successful, *Families Moving Forward* could be scaled across Alberta.

4.2.3 New Fathers

The Program Review conducted by Shift identified several promising programs that focus on helping new fathers learn to interact in positive ways with their infant. These interventions were all relatively brief and not very resource-intensive, rendering them a cost-effective way to support positive father involvement. For example, one hour-long intervention involved teaching fathers baby massage and bath techniques. Despite the brevity of the intervention, fathers were observed to be more engaged with their infant than the control group eight weeks after the session. Fathers who participated in the intervention also reported giving their infant more baths and massages than a control group who received no intervention.

The Home-Visiting Program for First-Time Fathers (which was developed in Alberta) could be incorporated in hospital settings throughout the province and/or delivered through public health.

Another intervention – the *Home-Visiting Program for First-Time Fathers* – was implemented and evaluated in Alberta. The intervention involves providing home visits (lasting approximately one hour) at five and six months of age.⁹⁸ During the home visit, an interaction between the father and infant was taped, and this tape was then reviewed by the father and the Home Visitor, in order to help the father improve their sensitivity and response to the child. Fathers also received a copy of the tape to keep, as well as several handouts. Three months following the home visit, fathers who received the intervention showed improvement on observed father-child interaction (particularly in sensitivity to cues and fostering cognitive growth) compared to a control group of fathers who only received the pamphlet. Thus, it appears that programming for new fathers can be leveraged by policy makers and practitioners with minimal resources.

4.2.4 Aboriginal Fathers

Aboriginal fathers are an important population because a significant proportion of Aboriginal men grew up in residential schools or institutionalized care, and many have not had the experience of being parented. “In Canada’s first-ever study of Indigenous fathers,” Hoffman writes, “86% of the 90 participants referred in some way to ‘disrupted intergenerational transmission of fathering’ due primarily to the negative influence of residential schools and similar ‘colonial interventions,’ which caused huge disruptions in Aboriginal families when these men were growing

up. As a result, some fathers in this study acknowledged that when their first child was born they were not ready to assume responsibility for children. Not surprisingly, about half of the subjects reported little or no contact with their first-born children. Some said participation in treatment programs for substance abuse or anger management helped prepare them to take on a positively involved role with subsequent children, in some cases years after they first became parents.”⁹⁹ Despite the overwhelming need, this population is not being served effectively due to a lack of programs for Aboriginal fathers in Alberta (although it is encouraging that SFI is now being adapted for some Aboriginal communities in Alberta).¹⁰⁰ Thus, funding, research and evaluation should be directed to learning how to better serve this population of fathers.

With recent funding from the Ministry of Human Services, the Lethbridge Family Centre is working in collaboration with the Blood Reserve, Kanai Children’s Services and Opokaa’sin Early Intervention Society to adapt SFI for Aboriginal fathers in and around Lethbridge. They have hired an Aboriginal case manager and two Aboriginal program staff (male/female), and will be adapting the activities to ensure that they are culturally relevant and appropriate.

4.2.5 Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Fathers

Promising practices related to programs for gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (GBTQ) fathers is another key gap in the research. Whereas in the past, gay men often fathered within the context of heterosexual marriage, over the past two decades “more gay fathering is taking place in the context of open non-heterosexual identity, including gay men in heterosexual marriages who ‘come out’ and same sex male couples or single men who become parents after coming out.”¹⁰¹ However, while some organizations are eager to reflect this shift in their programming, they have little research or evidence to draw on.

A Canadian study suggests that LGBTQ fathers potentially face a number of challenges, including:

- Isolation and invisibility associated with parenting in a culture that emphasizes heteronormative family structures
- A “sense of hopelessness amongst formerly straight fathers about gaining access to their children through the court system”¹⁰²
- Disruptions to the father-child relationship after coming out
- Homophobia, which can impact parent-child relationships and access, as well as paternal health and well-being¹⁰³

Further development, funding and research is required to ensure that we are meeting the needs of LGBTQ fathers in Alberta. This is especially important for transgender fathers who may experience transphobia within their own families and from agencies designed to provide parental supports. This is a field of research which needs urgent attention.

4.2.6 Immigrant Fathers

Immigrant fathers have differing needs depending on their particular 'social location'.* Thus, a one-size-fits-all approach to immigrant fathers is not appropriate, and programs must be customized accordingly. This requires the development of cultural sensitivity on the part of program designers and staff. Cultural sensitivity implies "not only an understanding of a group's unique values, beliefs, and customs, but an appreciation of these differences as well. Rather than judging a group by a particular standard, cultural sensitivity acknowledges different ways of being and acting. Differences are not automatically seen as deficits. In parenting programs, this may be reflected in an acceptance of non-traditional childrearing practices or unique family constellations."¹⁰⁴ Gorman and Baiter identify three types of culturally sensitive parenting programs:

1. **Translated programs** (i.e., the original program is translated into another language)
2. **Culturally adapted programs** (i.e., the program is designed to incorporate the culture of the target population)
3. **Culturally specific programs** (i.e., the program is designed to incorporate the culture of the target population *and* to facilitate successful parenting within that culture).¹⁰⁵

Most of the research in this area focuses on translation or cultural adaptation,¹⁰⁶ and highlights the importance of the following principles in program design**:

- Sensitivity to the degree of influence of specific cultural family risk and protective factors
- Level of acculturation, identity, and lifestyle preferences
- Differential family member acculturation leading to family conflict
- Family migration and relocation history
- Levels of trauma, loss and possible post-traumatic stress disorder related to war experiences or relocation
- Family work and financial stressors
- Language preferences and impediments due to English as a second language, and level of literacy in native language¹⁰⁷

These general principles must then be understood within the specific needs and location of the target population.

4.3 Organizational Culture

As the Norwood case study illustrates (see *Becoming Father-Friendly: Language Matters* below), organizations that are designed for "families" or "parents" often mistakenly assume that they are father-friendly. However, programs, services and environments that are designed for families often unconsciously perpetuate the gender bias described above and consequently engage a predominantly female population. Given the deeply gendered beliefs, norms and attitudes related to parenting in our culture, organizations need to be intentional and explicit in ensuring that fathers are included.

* Social location refers to the groups people belong to because of their place or position in history and society. All people have a social location that is defined by their gender, race, social class, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic location. Each group membership confers a certain set of social roles and rules, power, and privilege (or lack of), which heavily influence our identity and how we see the world. <http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/courses/csafety/mod2/glossary.htm>

** The following list is taken from: K. L. Kumpfer, R. Alvarado, P. Smith, and N. Bellamy, "Cultural sensitivity and adaptation in family-based prevention interventions," *Prevention Science* 3, no. 3 (September 2002): 243.

BECOMING FATHER-FRIENDLY: LANGUAGE MATTERS

REFLECTIONS FROM NORWOOD CHILD AND FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE (EDMONTON, ALBERTA)

Several years ago, the Norwood Child and Family Resource Centre was funded by the Norlien Foundation (now Palix) and the GOA to implement *Supporting Father Involvement* (SFI), an evidence-based parenting program that was developed in the United States. As part of this initiative, Norwood undertook a father-friendly assessment of their organization – and the results were very surprising. “We always saw ourselves as a family centre, and that included fathers, right?” says Norwood’s Executive Director Bev Parks. “So we thought ‘Well, we’re already doing this.’...What’s interesting is [the assessment] really opened our eyes to how not friendly we were! And so it was more than just, you know, having a mechanic’s magazine in the lobby or having a picture of a dad on the wall. It was really about talking to our staff and looking at our programs. And looking at how we promoted our programs. By talking to dads, we learned that when you say ‘parents,’ sometimes they don’t feel that includes them – they often take ‘parent’ or ‘family’ to mean ‘mom.’” Changing their language throughout the organization was just the beginning. Annually, Norwood uses the *Pruett’s Father Engagement and Father Assessment Tool* to monitor changes and identify other areas that require further development, including staff hiring (they hired more men), program scheduling, promotional materials, agency policies, facility (physical environment), communication and interactions with all clients. They also review all program offerings on an annual basis to ensure they are inclusive of fathers. Parks concedes that it is a long process – one that is ongoing. But they are already seeing an increase in the number of men involved in their programming and have seen enormous changes in terms of hiring more men, staff attitudes, and more inclusive approaches to service delivery.

Before developing father-inclusive programming, then, organizations may first need to do the important work of creating a father-friendly climate. This is especially true for those settings where fathers have not been a primary area of staff focus and/or where staff beliefs/philosophies of care are not aligned with father-inclusive approaches. This process requires committed leadership and considerable time. (Please see the case study, *Becoming Father-Friendly: A Five Year Process*, below).

There are a number of tools designed to help organizations assess their policies, practices, attitudes, staffing models and program offerings with the goal of becoming more father-friendly. For example, the *Supporting Father Involvement* program,

which has been implemented by three organizations in Alberta, offers a training manual designed to help agencies become more father-friendly. The manual helps organizations to shift towards more father-friendly policies and practices, prepare for challenges with enrollment and recruitment, address co-parenting issues, and encourage a focus on long-term sustainability and systemic change.¹⁰⁸

Shift's review of six father-friendly organizational assessment tools* found that:

1. **Policies and procedures** should be assessed to ensure that they support equitable service provision (i.e., serving both mothers and fathers); recognize the specific needs and contributions of fathers; and support fathers working within the organization (e.g., with paternal leave and leave to care for a sick child).
2. **Services and supports** should promote healthy co-parenting while recognizing differences between males/fathers and females/mothers; provide curricula/experiences that appeal to both men and women; explicitly include and engage dads; be offered on weekends and evenings; challenge cultural norms around traditional forms of masculinity; give men permission to be vulnerable and expressive; and educate mothers about the importance of father involvement.¹⁰⁹ (Studies have shown that mothers often serve as gatekeepers, limiting the involvement of fathers: “when mothers are less supportive of fathers’ involvement in child care, fathers are less likely to be involved”¹¹⁰).
3. **Staffing models** should be assessed to ensure that there are males on staff who are helping to deliver parent programming (given that the social sector is predominantly staffed by females).
4. **Staff training** should include training related to the importance of fathers and how to engage them; performance appraisals should include the ability to work with fathers.
5. **Physical environments** should be welcoming to fathers (e.g., images of men are present, resources are available for fathers, neutral tones are used for the decor).
6. **Language and communication** should not be biased towards the mothers. This includes developing policies related to communicating with both parents, regardless of the living arrangement (with the possible exception of cases where domestic violence is present); ensuring that staff are explicitly communicating the importance of fathers to both moms and dads; advertising specifically to “dads” rather than “parents” (research suggests that fathers interpret the word ‘parent’ to mean ‘mom’ in the context of programs and service offerings¹¹¹); and using photos of men with their children in advertising.
7. **Evaluation strategies** should be assessed to ensure that they include outcomes and indicators specific to fathers, and that they are disaggregating program data by parent role.

In addition to promoting the need for father-friendly environments within the agencies it funds, the Province will need to apply these criteria internally to ensure that the GOA is a father-friendly workplace.

* Please see the accompanying *Fatherhood Involvement Reference Report* for details.

BECOMING FATHER-FRIENDLY: A FIVE YEAR PROCESS

REFLECTIONS FROM CATHOLIC FAMILY SERVICE (CALGARY, ALBERTA)

In 2013, Shift partnered with Catholic Family Service (CFS) to adapt an evidence-based program for teen dads (Young Parenthood Program) for implementation in Louise Dean, a school for pregnant and parenting teens. Programs and services for dads was a gap that CFS had wanted to address for a number of years, but they had struggled to gain traction in this area. The partnership with Shift offered an opportunity to implement a program with a proven track record, adapt it for the Alberta context, and evaluate its effectiveness. The process was not as easy as simply implementing a program, however. The Louise Dean school has focused on mothers for over 45 years. Making the change to serving dads required a huge cultural and organizational shift – one that took committed leadership, an effective assessment tool, well-designed change management processes, and several years to achieve. But CFS didn't stop there. They realized that while they were a family-serving organization, some of their services (particularly counselling) were mostly drawing women. "Although our intention was to be open to men, boys and fathers," says CEO Patricia Jones, "many weren't coming..." With this realization, the organization as a whole underwent a father-friendly assessment and change management process. This involved engaging board members and staff, enlisting supervisors as change agents, integrating the approach into their strategic plan, and addressing personal and organizational barriers to more effectively engage men. The process has taken several years, and Jones estimates that it will likely be a five-year process in total. It hasn't been easy. "It's a much more bumpy ride than we anticipated," says Jones. But the benefits are profound. "Once that awareness happens," she says, "you cannot go back. Once we realized that there are fathers that we were treating as optional, fathers who are human beings with hearts and minds, fathers that love their kids, and once you see the research that says that kids do better and fathers do better and mental health increases and domestic violence decreases, and that it really is the long term prevention answer for our community, you cannot go back."

4.4 Policy Initiatives

Greater father involvement, healthy masculinity norms and increased gender equality can be achieved through deliberate policy initiatives that support fatherhood. Nordic countries provide a good case example of ways in which father-friendly policies can be used to enhance positive father involvement and increase gender equality.¹¹² In Sweden, for example, father-friendly legislation and more equitable gender norms evolved in tandem over the past 40 years.¹¹³ Sweden's fatherhood and accompanying policies have, in fact, dramatically increased father involvement, particularly in early

childhood. Moreover, the country ranks highly in the United Nations' assessment of gender equality.¹¹⁴ In fact, in Sweden today, "[t]o qualify for hegemonic masculinity, it is no longer enough to be rational, goal-means oriented, career-oriented, and disciplined. Today, men must also show their readiness to engage in child care, their child orientation, and their willingness to live up to the ideal of gender equality."¹¹⁵ Researchers suggest that the general political vision that developed and continues to this day is that both male and female emancipation can be achieved through active fatherhood.¹¹⁶

Many countries have followed the Nordic example and introduced paternity leave, with very positive results: “Research shows that fathers do take advantage of dedicated (non-transferable) paternity leave, and that generous parental leaves lead to increased father time investment in their children and involvement with their children generally.”¹¹⁷ In Quebec, where fathers are entitled to up to five weeks of paternity leave in the first year of a child’s life and the benefits are higher than those provided under national legislation, more than 50% of fathers take paternity leave.¹¹⁸

Paternity leave on its own is not sufficient; other policy levers must be used in tandem. These might include: publicly-funded child care, opportunities to have more flexibility in the scheduling of work hours, gender-wage parity, and work cultures that support fathers’ efforts to give priority to their involvement with their children.¹¹⁹ Sweden’s paid parental leave insurance (introduced in 1974) is reinforced by other legislation designed to promote gender equity, including legislation focused on sexual harassment, workplace equality, wage parity, and parenthood and employment.¹²⁰

4.5 Research, Evaluation and Surveillance Data

As discussed earlier, one of the key impediments to implementing best practices and evidence-based programming for fathers is the relative dearth of quality research, evaluation and surveillance data in this field. Most of the research related to parenting interventions focuses on maternal support and outcomes. If we are

to support positive father involvement in Alberta, we need to begin investing in research and evaluation that specifically measures father engagement and outcomes related to this engagement.¹²¹ Furthermore, evaluations of programs that target both mothers and fathers should employ a gender-based analysis so that the differential impact on fathers and mothers can be better understood. In addition to including programs specific for fathers and disaggregating data from parenting programs, some authors point to the need for longer-term outcome data that assesses program impact on the following:

- Parenting quality
- Co-parenting quality
- Family functioning
- Parental stress/depression
- Level of father involvement
- Capacity for anger management and emotional regulation
- Child outcomes in relation to health, education, psycho-social development and maltreatment¹²²

Lastly, it is apparent that we need epidemiological data that more deeply assess the ‘process’ of fatherhood in Alberta. This includes demographic data that offer a more accurate sense of the number of men in Alberta who play a fathering role (e.g., biological fathers, step-fathers, adoptive fathers, men in father-like caregiving roles, etc.), and the representation of those men across different social locations (e.g., same-sex fathers, Aboriginal fathers, young fathers). Fathering data (e.g., residency status; engagement; father-child interactions) would also be beneficial to more responsive planning of policies and programs.



5.0

What

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

5.1 Develop a Whole Government Approach to Supporting Positive Fatherhood

- a) Develop an internal strategy for the provincial government to become father-friendly by:
- Creating a collective strategy across Government, with specific actions for each Ministry and department to become father-friendly
 - Implementing the strategy with performance measures and an accountability system
 - Ensuring that all future policy documents and performance indicators within business plans are inclusive of fathers
- b) Together with communities and agencies, increase the number of programs and supports for fathers throughout the province by:
- Developing and disseminating a toolkit and training for all funded agencies to become more father-friendly
 - Funding organizational change processes for agencies to become father-friendly
 - Disseminating information on evidence-informed programs to all funded agencies
 - Supporting scaling of evidence-informed fatherhood programs across the prevention continuum
 - Developing funding agreements with parenting agencies/organizations that include reporting guidelines that would support positive father involvement (e.g., specifying the need to conduct an annual organizational assessment, offer workplace training, develop inclusive environments, etc.)
 - Implementing a social marketing strategy that includes positive and consistent messages about the importance of fathers in child/youth development

5.2 Invest in Data Collection to Support Father-Friendly Policy and Program Development

- a) Conduct a review of all father-related epidemiological data in Alberta (i.e., demographic and social data) to:
- Identify gaps
 - Develop a profile of fatherhood in this province
 - Inform future decision-making and policy development
- b) Assess and revise reporting guidelines for funded agencies to ensure that programs and services are collecting data on fathers and are using the information to support continuous improvement
- c) Invest in the evaluation of fatherhood programs, and stipulate that all government-funded parenting programs be evaluated in ways that include a gender-based analysis

5.3 Create a Non-transferable Parental Leave for Fathers

- a) Drawing on the examples of both Sweden and Quebec, explore developing a non-transferable paternity leave policy that supports up to three months of paternity leave for fathers (or co-parents) after the first year of a child's life, with higher benefits than those provided under national legislation



Glossary

GLOSSARY

Authoritative parenting style is when “parents balance encouragement of independence and sense of identity within warm and responsive relationships with high expectations about behaviour and maturity and compliance with their authority.”¹²³

Cognitive development “refers to the process of growth and change in intellectual/mental abilities such as thinking, reasoning and understanding.”¹²⁴

Corporal punishment is defined as “the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury, for purposes of correction or control of the child’s behaviour.”¹²⁵

Evidence-based programs are well-defined programs that have demonstrated their efficacy through rigorous, peer-reviewed randomized controlled trial(s) or quasi-experimental design(s). These programs are also often endorsed by government agencies and well-respected research organizations.¹²⁶ These programs are not only well-defined and effective, but may have also shown long-term benefits and been successfully replicated across a range of populations and contexts.¹²⁷

Evidence-informed programs are programs which are based on a body of research evidence, but do not yet meet the criteria to be considered evidence-based. Preliminary evidence of effectiveness is available through formative work and/or uncontrolled trials.

Healthy masculinities refers to the development of beliefs, attitudes and norms about masculinity that promote gender equality, non-violence and social and emotional competencies. This involves: 1) expanding traditional notions of masculinity to include a wider range of human qualities and experiences (e.g., nurturing, care-taking, being vulnerable); and 2) challenging aspects of traditionally defined masculinity that reinforce existing power dynamics and limit the potential for gender equality.

Hegemonic masculinity refers to “those traits that various cultures ascribe to ‘real men’ and which not only set out such ‘real men’ from women and all other men, but also justify all men to generally be in a position of domination over women. ... [H]egemonic masculinity is a representation of society’s ideal of how male behaviour should be. In reality, its function is to legitimate the social ascendancy of men over women in all aspects of life... In addition, hegemonic masculinity also emphasises superiority of ‘manly’ men over the ‘not-so-manly’ men. This social ascendancy is often portrayed through religious practices, the mass media, business and even through government policies and practices. Hegemonic masculinity is not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense. Only a minority of men

might enact it. But it is certainly normative in that it embodies the currently most honoured way of being a man, it requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it and it ideologically legitimates the global subordination of women to men.”¹²⁸

Lone-parent families are families with only one parent, male or female, and with at least one child.¹²⁹

Positive discipline is “based on children’s rights to healthy development, protection from violence and participation in their learning. [...] ‘Positive discipline’ is non-violent and respectful of the child as a learner. It is an *approach to teaching* that helps children succeed, gives them information, and supports their growth. [...] It is built on 4 principles of effective parenting focusing on identifying long-term goals, providing warmth and structure, understanding how children think and feel, and problem-solving.”¹³⁰

Positive father involvement is used to describe dads who promote their child’s well-being and security by taking an active role in caring for their child’s social, emotional, cognitive and physical health and having a respectful, equitable relationship with the child’s mother, even if the parents don’t live together anymore. Positive father involvement is defined by responsive, consistent and nurturing interactions that are supported by an authoritative parenting style.

Primary prevention explicitly focuses on action before the condition of concern develops. In the area of family violence, it means reducing the number of new instances of violence by intervening before any violence has occurred.¹³¹ Interventions can be delivered to the whole population or to particular groups that are at high risk of using or experiencing violence in the future.

Promising practice is a practice with preliminary evidence of effectiveness in small-scale studies (i.e., pilot or preliminary data).

Secure attachment “involves the mental representation of others as available and trustworthy, and the mental representation of the self as worthy of love and care.”¹³²

Appendix A:

Snapshot of Fatherhood Programs with Evidence of Effectiveness

Program Name (Authors)	Sample Size		Target Audience	Target Child Age	Follow-up Period	Outcomes**					
	% Fathers	% White				Positive discipline	Father involvement	Father-child interactions	Parenting knowledge/attitudes/skills	Relationship with co-parent	Family violence
	A. Promising Programs for At-Risk Fathers (n=11)										
1. Prenatal Education Program for Unwed Adolescent Fathers (Westney et al., 1988), QED ^b	28		Unwed adolescent fathers (ages 15-18)	Prenatal	Post-test		✓		✓	✓	
	100										
	0										
2. Minnesota Early Learning Design (MELD) co-parenting and childbirth program (Fagan, 2008), QED	330		Young fathers-to-be (ages 14-25)	Prenatal	3 month		✓		✓	✓	
	50										
	7.9										
3. Head Start-based Father Involvement Intervention (Fagan & Iglesias, 1999), QED	96		Low-income fathers	Pre-school	Post-test		✓				
	100										
	5.2										
4. Fathers and Sons Program (Caldwell et al., 2010), QED	287		Non-resident, African-American biological fathers	8-12 years	Post-test		✓	✓	✓		
	100										
	0										
5. Young Parenthood Program (Florsheim et al., 2012), RCT	210		Pregnant adolescents and their partners	Prenatal	18 month		✓	✓	✓	✓	
	50										
	42.5 ^a										
6. Young Dads Parenting Program (Mazza, 2002), RCT	60		Urban African-American adolescent first-time fathers (16-18 years)	Infants	Post-test			✓	✓		
	100										
	0										
7. Hawaii Healthy Start Program (HSP) (Duggan et al., 2004), RCT	1286		Families at-risk for child abuse	0-3 years	Post-test		✓				
	50										
	6.4 ^a										
8. Early Head Start (EHS) (Roggman et al., 2004), RCT	74		Low-income families	0-3 years	Post-test			✓			
	100										
	97										
9. Supporting Father Involvement (Cowan et al., 2009), RCT	371		Low-income families	0-7 years	11 month		✓				
	50										
	27										
10. The Creating Healthy Relationships Program (CHRP) (Bradley et al., 2011), RCT	230		Low-income, situationally violent, hetero-sexual couples	0-12 years	Post-test		✓			✓	
	50										
	79										

Program Name (Authors)	Sample Size	Target Audience	Target Child Age	Follow-up Period	Outcomes**					
	% Fathers				Positive discipline	Father involvement	Father-child interactions	Parenting knowledge/attitudes/skills	Relationship with co-parent	Family violence
	% White									
11. <i>Supporting Healthy Marriage</i> (Lundquist et al., 2014), RCT	6298	Low-income, married parents	0-17 years	18 month					✓	✓
	50									
	21									
B. Promising Programs for First-Time Fathers (n=8)										
1. <i>Growing as a Couple and Family</i> (Bryan, 2000), QED	266	Couples expecting their first baby	Prenatal	10.5 months (range: 6-24 months)			✓	✓		
	50									
	96									
2. <i>Bringing Baby Home Workshop</i> (Shapiro & Gottman, 2005), RCT	76	Expectant and new parents	Prenatal/ Newborn	9-12 months		✓	✓	✓	✓	
	50									
	78.0 ^a									
3. <i>Parenting Transition Group</i> (Doherty et al., 2006), RCT	330	First-time parents	Prenatal/ Newborn/ Infant	12 month		✓	✓	✓		
	50									
	81.0 ^a									
4. <i>Family Foundations</i> (Feinberg & Kan, 2008), RCT	338	Heterosexual couples expecting first child	Prenatal/ Newborn/ Infant	Post-test		✓	✓	✓	✓	
	50									
	90.5 ^a									
5. <i>Brazelton Neonatal Behavioural Assessment Training</i> (Myers, 1982), RCT	84	Married couples who just had their first baby	Newborn	4 weeks		✓	✓	✓		
	50									
	81.0 ^a									
6. <i>Neonatal Behavioural Assessment Scale Demonstration</i> (Beal, 1989), RCT	44	First time fathers	Newborn	8 weeks			✓			
	100									
	Mostly white									
7. <i>Baby Massage and Burleigh Relaxation Bath</i> (Scholz & Samuels, 1992), RCT	64	First-time families	Infants	8 weeks		✓	✓			
	50									
	Australian sample									
8. <i>Home Visiting for First-time Fathers</i> (Magill-Evans et al., 2007), RCT ^b	162	First-time biological fathers	Infants	3 month		✓	✓			
	100									
	83.3 ^a									
C. Promising Programs for incarcerated Fathers (n=2)										
1. <i>Filial Therapy Training</i> (Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998), RCT ^b	32	Incarcerated fathers	3-7 years	Post-test			✓	✓		
	100									
	52									
2. <i>Parent-Education Program for Inmates</i> (Harrison, 1997), RCT ^b	30	Incarcerated fathers	8-17 years	Post-test				✓		
	100									
	n/a									

Program Name (Authors)	Sample Size	Target Audience	Target Child Age	Follow-up Period	Outcomes**					
	% Fathers				Positive discipline	Father involvement	Father-child interactions	Parenting knowledge/attitudes/skills	Relationship with co-parent	Family violence
	% White									
D. Promising Programs for Fathers of Children Experiencing Behavioural Difficulties (n=3)										
1. <i>Triple P: Enhanced (Level 5), Standard (Level 4) and Self-Directed (Level 4)</i> (Sanders et al., 2000), RCT	305 families	Parents of children with behaviour problems	3 years	Post-test	✓		✓	✓		
	74									
	Mostly Caucasian									
2. <i>The Incredible Years 2.1 Individually Administered Videotape Modeling Training</i> (Webster-Stratton, 1992), RCT	162	Families with young conduct-problem children	3-8 years	Post-test			✓			
	38.3 ^a									
	n/a									
2.2 <i>Group Discussion Videotape Modeling Training</i> (Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1997), RCT	166	Families with young conduct-problem children	4-7 years	2 month			✓		✓	
	42.8 ^a									
	92.9 ^a									
3. <i>COACHES</i> (Fabiano et al., 2012), RCT	55	Fathers of children with ADHD	6-12 years	Post-test			✓			
	100									
	85.6 ^a									
E. Promising Universal Programs for Fathers (n=4)										
1. <i>Parenting Support and Education Program for Fathers^b: 1.1 Parent Education/ Play Group Program</i> (McBride, 1990), QED ^b	30	Fathers of pre-school age children	2-3 years	Post-test			✓	✓	✓	
	100									
	80									
1.2 <i>Parent Education/ Support Program^b</i> (McBride, 1991a), QED	60	Fathers of pre-school age children	2-5 years	Post-test			✓	✓	✓	
	100									
	n/a									
1.3 <i>Parent Education/Play Group Program</i> (McBride, 1991b), QED ^b	54	Fathers of pre-school age children	1-4 years	Post-test			✓	✓	✓	
	100									
	78									
2. <i>The Parent Education Program</i> (Levant & Doyle, 1983), QED ^b	22	Married fathers with a school-age child	6-12 years	Post-test			✓	✓	✓	
	100									
	100									
3. <i>Father-Infant Massage Therapy</i> (Cullen et al., 2000), RCT ^b	22	Fathers of infants	Infants	Post-test			✓	✓	✓	
	100									
	68									
4. <i>Triple-P Positive Parenting Program</i> (Hahlweg et al., 2010), RCT	280 families	Parents of pre-school age children	3-6 years	24 month	✓					
	44.1 ^a									
	German sample									

* Please refer to the technical report, “Snapshot of positive fatherhood programs with evidence of effectiveness” for full tables, table footnotes and references.

** A checkmark indicates a significant finding for treatment group fathers (as compared to control/comparison group fathers) at the last follow-up occasion.

^a Hand-calculated.

^b Program name not given by article, so created for this table by the authors.

Overall limitations:

- We provide a snapshot of programs with evidence of effectiveness
- Due to the scope and purpose of the search, it was not designed to be systematic, and we acknowledge that our method means programs were likely missed by our review, especially those programs that were more recently evaluated
- Our findings should be used to indicate that there are a number of programs with evidence of effectiveness that can be built on when planning interventions for fathers in Alberta
- Additional research looking in more detail at programs for each of our identified target populations is needed

Appendix B: GOA Policies, Strategies, and Frameworks Reviewed

1. Creating Connections: Alberta's Addiction and Mental Health Strategy, Government of Alberta & Alberta Health Services, 2016
2. Alberta's Strategic Approach to Wellness, Government of Alberta, 2014
3. Aboriginal Mental Health: A Framework for Alberta, Alberta Health Services, 2006
4. Creating Connections: Alberta's Addiction and Mental Health Strategy, Government of Alberta & Alberta Health Services, 2011
5. FASD 10-year Strategic Plan, Government of Alberta, 2008
6. Becoming the Best: Alberta's 5-Year Health Action Plan- 2010-2015, Government of Alberta & Alberta Health Services, 2010
7. Alberta's Plan for Promoting Healthy Relationships and Preventing Bullying, Government of Alberta, 2014
8. Positive Futures- Optimizing Mental Health for Alberta's Children & Youth, Government of Alberta, 2006
9. Together We Raise Tomorrow, Government of Alberta, 2013
10. Family Violence Hurts Everyone: A Framework to End Family Violence in Alberta, Government of Alberta, 2013
11. Poverty Reduction Strategy, Government of Alberta, 2013
12. Alberta's Social Policy Framework, Government of Alberta, 2013
13. Mental Health Capacity Building Projects in Alberta, Government of Alberta, 2014
14. Aboriginal Engagement & Strategy, Alberta Human Services, 2015
15. Empowered People. Successful Families. Supportive Communities, Human Services Strategic Roadmap, 2015
16. A Network of Resource Centres Serving Parents, Caregivers and Children in Alberta, Alberta Children's Services, 2004
17. Prevention and Early Intervention Framework for Children, Youth and Families, Government of Alberta, 2012
18. Child Intervention Practice Framework, Government of Alberta, 2015
19. Guidelines for Home Visitation Programs, Alberta Children's Services, 2004
20. Two Strategies to Protect Alberta - PAXPlus, Child Development Collaborative for Alberta, ND
21. Implementation Evaluation of the Enhanced Prevention Focused Approach in Alberta for the First Nations Child and Family Services Program, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2010

Appendix C: GOA Business Plans Reviewed

1. Aboriginal Relations 2015-18
2. Advanced Education, 2015-18
3. Education 2015-18
4. Health 2015-18
5. Human Services 2015-18
6. Justice and Solicitor General 2015-18
7. Seniors 2015-18
8. Status of Women 2015-18

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