

Position Paper: Addressing the Childcare crisis for the Well-being of Perinatal Mental Health in Newfoundland and Labrador

Introduction

The Perinatal Mental Health Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador (PMHANL) is an assembly of compassionate and dedicated individuals who transcend boundaries of gender, identity, culture, and institutions. Our unified purpose is to advance the health and wellness of parents, children, and families by focusing on perinatal mental health. With the understanding that the childcare crisis has profound implications for generations to come, we have established the PMHANL to address gaps in programs, services, and support systems. In alignment with our mission, we recognize the urgent and symbiotic relationship between perinatal mental health and the childcare crisis affecting our province. This position paper aligns with the stepped care model and delineates our stance, collaborative community partnership initiatives, and a roadmap for comprehensive solutions.

The Childcare Crisis and Perinatal Mental Health

The childcare crisis in Newfoundland and Labrador is a pressing concern that holds profound implications for the well-being of parents, particularly during the perinatal period. A recent report published by the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, a non-profit research institute based in Toronto, has shed light on the critical shortage of regulated child-care spaces in the province. According to this report, Newfoundland and Labrador currently offers only enough regulated child-care spaces for 14 percent of children under the age of 12, which is half the national average [1]. This deficiency places the province among the lowest in Canada in terms of providing children with access to regulated child-care spaces, ranking third lowest among all provinces and territories. In contrast, the national average stands at 29 percent [1,2].

The provincial Health Accord Report has showcased the link between childcare and social determinants of health for both caregivers and children, and despite the federally funded \$10 per day childcare plan, the currently available subsidized spaces do not meet the child care demands of the province. More provincial investment is needed to ensure it is reaching every family [3].

Adequate childcare is fundamental for birthing individual and parents' well-being during the critical perinatal period. A lack of accessible, affordable, and high-quality childcare options places undue stress on parents, amplifying the risk of perinatal mental health challenges. The emotional toll of balancing work, family responsibilities, and inadequate childcare exacerbates feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression, which can ultimately impact the well-being of families, children and generations to come. The recent Jimmy Pratt Foundation report on Early Learning & Childcare provided a roadmap for the federal and provincial governments to promote the creation of more regulated childcare spaces within months [4].

Position

The Perinatal Mental Health Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador stands in solidarity with parents and families impacted by the childcare crisis. We recognize that the state of childcare infrastructure has profound implications for perinatal mental health, and thus, the alliance supports and advocates for better childcare through the following:

1. Recognition of the link

We recognize that the lack of childcare and the well-being of parents are closely interconnected. Available and accessible childcare is of prime importance to parents, birthing individuals and generations to come. Further, the well-being of parents and the well-being of children are also closely interconnected, with parental well-being being one of the main determining factors for infant and child well-being.

2. Advocacy for comprehensive solutions

PMHANL commits to advocating for comprehensive solutions that address the childcare crisis head-on. We urge government bodies and policymakers to prioritize the development and implementation of childcare policies that ensure accessible, affordable, and high-quality childcare services across the province. We stand in solidarity with the Association of Early Childhood Educators and the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada to pursue child care issues at the federal level and provincial level to promote a broad consensus of support within all regions of Canada, including the national child care act. We support the Childcare Now advocacy group in their call to increase federal funding needed to make regulated child care spaces available for all [5]. More governmental investment in Family Resource Programs and the \$10 per day child care plan are needed.

3. Collaborative Efforts

PMHANL recognizes that addressing the childcare crisis requires collaborative efforts among various sectors, including government agencies, community organizations, and educational institutions. We are committed to fostering partnerships that promote interdisciplinary approaches to finding lasting upstream solutions. We support collaborations with childcare providers, community groups, governmental institutions, and others.

4. Research and Data

As an alliance, we emphasize the importance of research and data collection to underscore the impact of the childcare crisis on perinatal mental health. We encourage studies that highlight the correlation between adequate childcare, reduced stressors, improved perinatal mental health outcomes, and subsequent improved infant and child health outcomes. We continue to collaborate with research institutions and academic partners namely Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador (Perinatal Mental Health Research Exchange group) providing data-driven insights to support our advocacy efforts.

Conclusion

The Perinatal Mental Health Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador is committed to championing the well-being of birthing individuals, parents, children, and families. By recognizing the imperative link between the childcare crisis and perinatal mental health and through strategic community partnership initiatives, we aim to contribute to a healthier, more supportive environment for all. Through these efforts, we envision a future where families in our province thrive, and perinatal mental health is a foundation of overall community well-being.

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References

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