

Consultation on Bill S-212

An Act respecting a national strategy for
children and youth in Canada

Brief presented by the
Early Childhood Observatory

November 2025

OBSERVATOIRE
des tout-petits



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- In addition to improving the trajectory of preventive services, taking preventive action also means improving living conditions to ensure that every child, without exception, can be born, grow up and flourish in dignity, from conception to adulthood.
- This requires taking a broad view of all public policies that have an impact on early childhood development, paying particular attention to children who suffer from inequality. A national strategy along these lines would help to ensure this.
- The scientific community has identified pertinent indicators for monitoring the development and well-being of young children in Québec. These data allow the Early Childhood Observatory to prepare portraits that provide an overview of these findings.
- Monitoring the evolution of available data helps to evaluate the performance of public policies and programs that have been set up to foster young children's development and well-being.
- The proposed national strategy will have a significant impact if it encourages the involvement of various bodies whose responsibilities affect the well-being and rights of very young children, older children and youth. Their roles could be clarified to ensure they complement those of organizations that are already present and active in the ecosystem.

The Early Childhood Observatory

An organisation that allows us to better understand the reality of young children and the environments in which they are growing up.



Our mission

The mission of the Early Childhood Observatory (*Observatoire des tout-petits*) is to share the current state of knowledge in order to promote informed decision-making on the subject of early childhood in Québec. Our goal is to ensure that every young child has access to conditions that will enable them to develop their full potential, regardless of where they are born or where they are growing up.

How can the Early Childhood Observatory collaborate?

Thanks to data provided by the scientific community, the Early Childhood Observatory can offer a clear, accurate picture of the reality of young children.

The Observatory constantly updates its dashboard to include **the most current data** as well as the most rigorous and insightful **knowledge** on early childhood in Québec, from conception to age 5.

It also prepares and publishes **thematic reports, annual portraits/profiles, surveys and web dossiers** in order to offer an overview of the issues and attempt to answer the following questions:

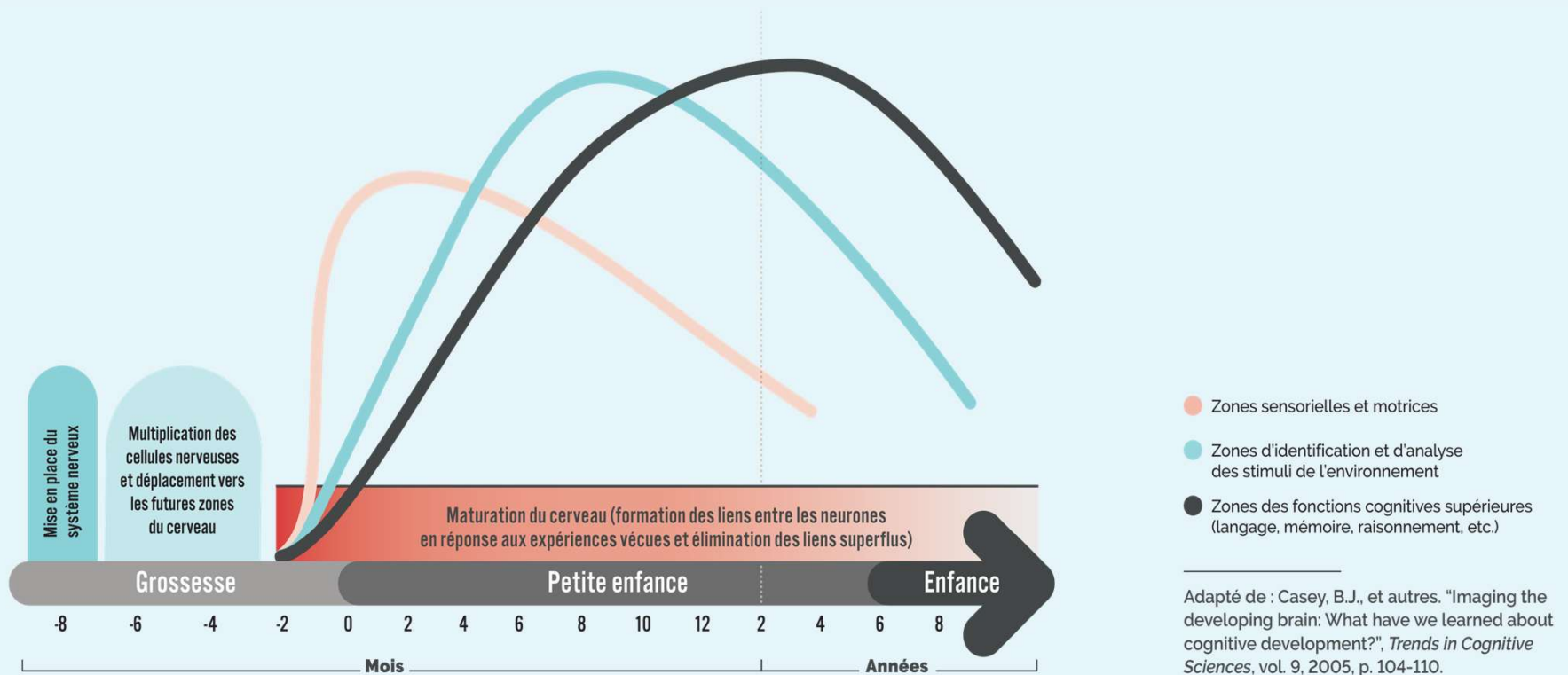
- How are young children faring in Québec?
- What environments are they growing up in?
- What are we doing for young children and their families in Québec?



A pregnant woman with dark skin is shown from the waist up, wearing a maroon-colored, sleeveless, form-fitting dress. She is holding her pregnant belly with both hands, one near the top and one near the bottom. She has a ring on her left ring finger and white nail polish. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. A dark green rounded rectangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing white text.

**Why is it important to take
action early in childhood?**

Pregnancy and early childhood are critical periods in human development. What happens before age 5 can have lasting effects that can lead to problems later on.



A significant emotional relationship with a childcare educator

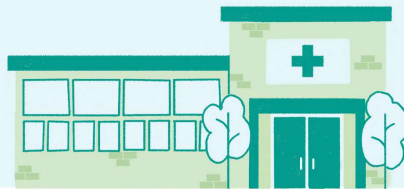


Support from the adults in their life, including parents, educators and professionals

Access to high-quality municipal infrastructure

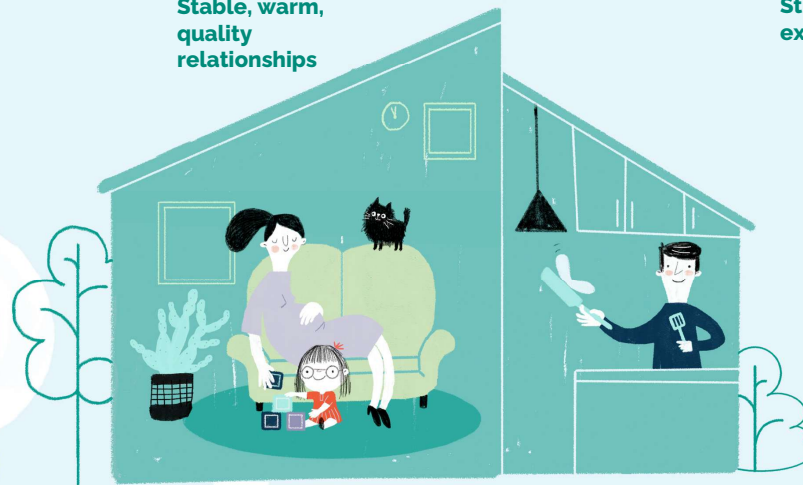


Accessible healthcare and social services



Screening for possible health and wellness issues

Stable, warm, quality relationships



Stimulating experiences

Several factors in a child's life can come together to influence their development—even the way their genes express themselves. Protective factors can foster a child's development.

It is the cumulative effect of risk factors and protective factors that influence children's development, health and well-being.

Examples of risk factors

- > Parent or caregiver insensitive to child's needs
- > Maltreatment or neglect
- > Difficult relationships with peers (friends at daycare or in the neighbourhood)
- > High parental stress
- > Coercive parenting style
- > Chronic conflict between parents or caregivers
- > Social and economic disadvantage
- > Stressful events in the community

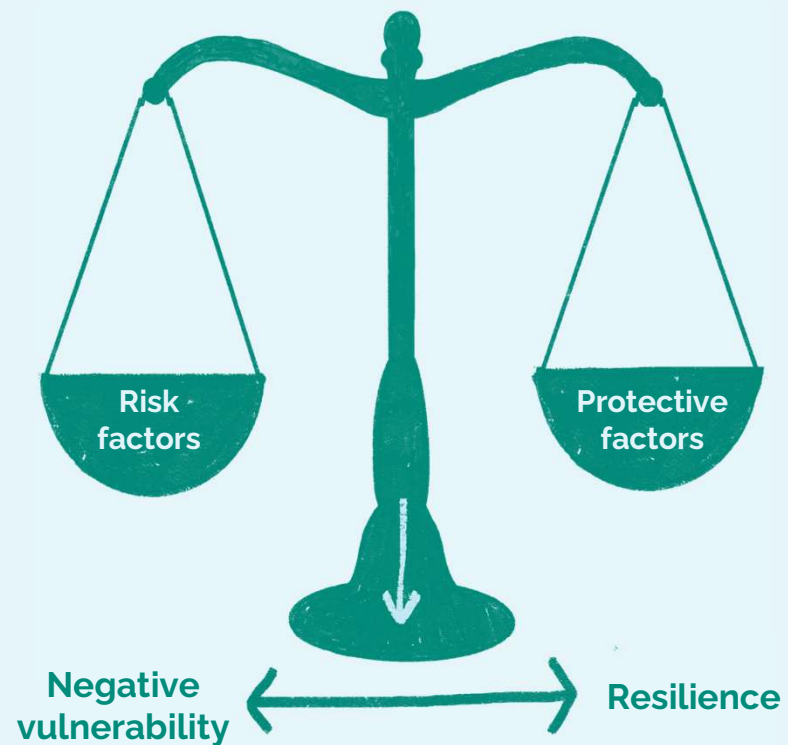


Figure adapted from Halfon (2007)

It is for these reasons that the WHO* and the OECD** recommend a global approach to early childhood

The **most effective** actions are those that integrate direct interventions with the child with broader interventions that have an impact on **all the environments** in which they are growing up.***



* World Health Organization

** Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

*** Early Childhood Observatory, *What is Québec Doing to Support Young Children and Their Families? Review of Public Policies – 2021*. Montréal, Québec

A combination of cohesive policies based on a current, integrated vision has the best chance of fostering healthy childhood development.



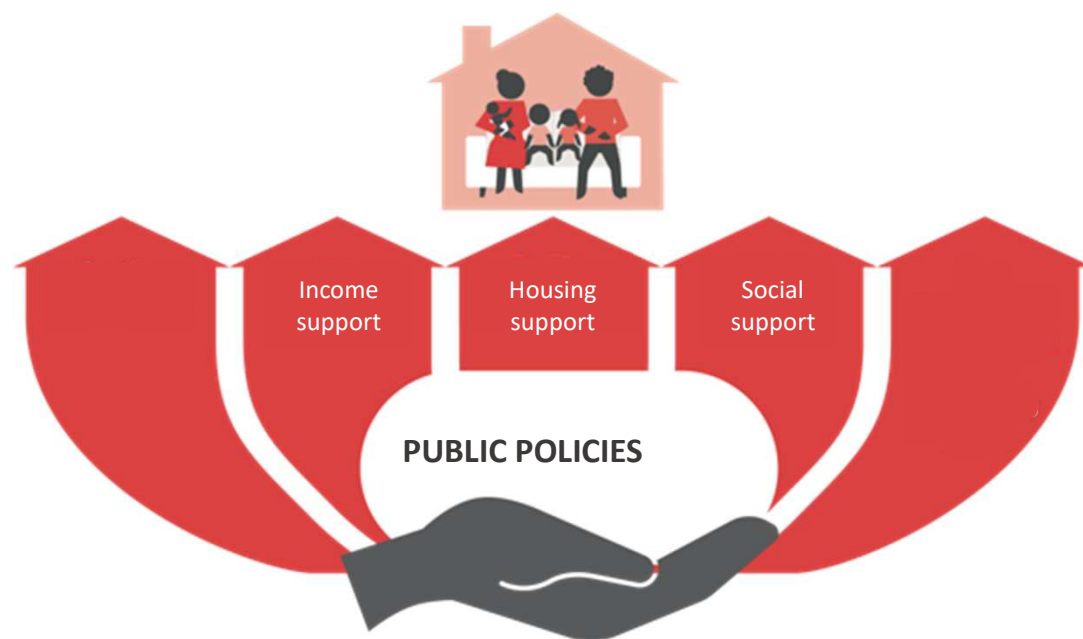


**A specific focus within a
broad perspective**

Monitoring all policies

In terms of prevention, individual public policies cannot have **an effective and sustainable impact** on their own.

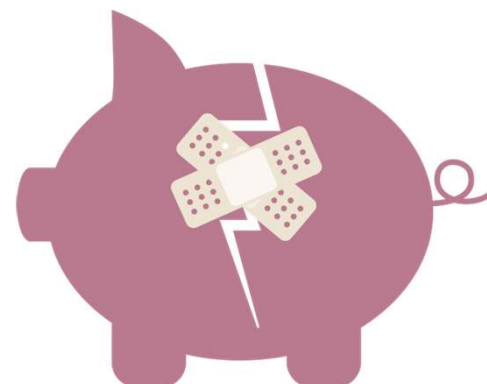
It is by taking into account all of the policies that have an impact on young children's development (in the areas of health and social services, family income, educational childcare and education, for example) that **institutional action will be the most effective.**



Paying particular attention to vulnerable children

Young children living in low-income families, young Indigenous children, children who need special support, children of immigrants and those of other ethno-cultural backgrounds are **particularly affected by inequalities** that compromise their development.

For example, in 2019, **47%** of First Nations children and **25%** of Inuit children **were living in poverty** in Canada, while the child poverty rate for all Canadian children was 17.6%.



Early Childhood Observatory, *What is Québec Doing to Support Young Children and Their Families? Review of Public Policies – 2021*. Montréal, Québec

BEEDIE, Natasha, David MACDONALD and Daniel WILSON. *Towards Justice: Tackling Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada*, [Online], Upstream, 2019, 26 p. https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Upstream_report_final_English_June-24-2019.pdf?_gl=1*1iqwmvm*_ga*MjEyMDk0MjQxLjE3NjA5OTM4NzE.*_ga_YMHSE2PZ5Y*czE3NjA5OTM4NzAkbzEkZzEkdDE3NjA5OTM5MzAkajYwJGwwJGgw

A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a light blue sweater, kissing a baby on the cheek. The baby is wearing a teal sweater and holding a blue toy block. They are outdoors in a grassy field with trees in the background. A red semi-circular overlay is on the left side of the image.

Complementarity of actors and evaluation of programs and measures

The significance of working together

Improving young children's living conditions requires **collaboration** among the various **levels of government** and the involvement of **actors other than** political decision-makers, such as employers, community organizations and non-profit organizations.

In order to make the best use of these organizations' **in-depth understanding of the issues** that affect the families they already support, it is important to adequately fund community organizations and **to work closely and collaboratively** with them—documented strategies* for more effectively reaching children in the most vulnerable families.



* Early Childhood Observatory, *What is Québec Doing to Support Young Children and Their Families? Review of Public Policies – 2021*. Montréal, Québec

The importance of evaluating public policies

To date, few studies have evaluated the effects of political policies on early childhood development, even though evaluation would make it possible to **identify** the most effective policies and **optimize** their implementation, in light of the most recent advances in **experiential and scientific knowledge**.

If they are to be able to effectively guide government actions, all actors involved must have ongoing access to **high-quality data** in order to adjust their interventions within **appropriate timeframes** and evaluate **their effectiveness**.

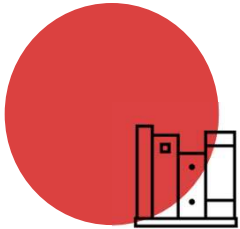
For example, the **streaming data model** *Population Data BC* facilitates access to administrative and multi-sector data in order to better guide early childhood interventions and fully measure their outcomes.



The importance of children's citizen participation: some inspiring examples

- Every year in **Fortierville**, Québec, children are invited to speak at municipal council meetings and to talk about their needs and what they would like to see happen in their community. Further to children's requests, berries were planted in the community garden and a skateboard park project was developed.
- To include children's visions in the development of the the City of Montréal's 2050 Land Use and Mobility Plan, **the organization Concertation Montréal** launched the consultation "Tell me about your city!" in July 2022. This initiative consisted of a series of participatory activities for children between the ages of 4 and 12 that were held in city parks and early childhood centres.
- The Montréal borough of **Villeray-Saint-Michel-Parc-Extension** introduced a public consultation process that includes children's voices on developing and reorganizing the borough's parks and green spaces. As part of this process, children aged 3 to 8 took part in consultations on the renovation of a neighbourhood wading pool.





Additional reading

Portraits published by the Early Childhood Observatory

[Portrait - 2024](#) What environments are Québec's youngest children growing up in?

[Review of Public Policies - 2021](#) What is Québec doing to support young children and their families?

Reports published by the Early Childhood Observatory

[How can we contribute to developing the full potential of children who need special support?](#)

[Screens and young children – Fact sheets](#)

[What can we do to foster children's development before they start school?](#)

Data from the Early Childhood Observatory

<https://tout-petits.org/donnees> (In French only)

Reference framework for children's rights-based indicators (a Canadian initiative)

<https://www.unb.ca/globalchild/>

<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-71594-5>

The Early Childhood
Observatory is ready to fully
cooperate in any future efforts
to define and implement a
national strategy for children's
health and well-being.

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