

Since 1995, Health Canada's Aboriginal Head Start Program has provided early intervention and school readiness for Aboriginal children and families in urban and Northern communities. In 1998, a major expansion of the Program to communities on reserves was undertaken. The Program aims to foster the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical growth of the child as well as a desire for lifelong learning. The Program supports parents/guardians as the prime teachers and caregivers of children, and ensures their participation in the planning, development, operation and evaluation of the Program. There are currently more than 100 Aboriginal Head Start project sites across Canada.

The Nobody's Perfect program, developed in the early 1990s, is a national parent support and education program for parents of children from birth to age five. Nobody's Perfect is a culturally sensitive program designed to meet the needs of parents who are young, single, low-income, who may have limited education, or who are geographically or socially isolated. The program gives parents access to accurate up-to-date information on parenting and provides a supportive group network. The parent materials have been translated and printed in French and many other languages, including Spanish, for use with Canada's immigrant and refugee populations.

Health Canada is currently deploying a First Nations Health Information System to communities that will support program planning, delivery and evaluation, and contribute to the surveillance and overall assessment of health at the community, regional and national level. The First Nations Health Information System will provide the evidence required for effective policy and program planning and evaluation. More than 50 percent of First Nations communities now have the system in their health centres. In addition, Health Canada works with First Nations communities to implement telehealth as a means of reducing geographic barriers to accessing health services, medical specialists and education/professional support.

In July 1999, Health Canada and CMEC released an in-depth status report on HIV/AIDS prevention programs in Canadian education and public health systems. CMEC believes that schools must be part of a continuing, community-wide response to HIV/AIDS by teaching students about the risks, helping them to make responsible choices, and ensuring that young Canadians benefit from a safe and supportive environment.

Health Canada — through the Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS — provided funding for this first ever study. A group of researchers from across Canada catalogued and described the activities of education and public health systems at all levels, from policy makers to teachers to public health practitioners, to prevent HIV/AIDS and to support sexual health education. The Report based on this study will inform educators and health officials about the status of their efforts to prevent HIV/AIDS. CMEC and Health Canada will continue to work to support the provinces and territories in responding to the report by meeting with education and health ministry officials to discuss the results; hosting workshops to provide study results to community and professional organizations across Canada concerned with HIV/AIDS, sexuality, and youth health; working with provinces and territories to enhance curriculums and integrate HIV/AIDS and sexuality into more subjects and grade levels; developing new or better ways to support teachers and parents; and undertaking a follow-up to the 1989 Canada Youth and AIDS Study, which reported on the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours of teens and young adults around sexuality and HIV/AIDS.