

Healthy Growth and Development Guideline, 2018

Population and Public Health Division,
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

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1. Preamble

The Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services, and Accountability (Standards) are published by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care under the authority of section 7 of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* (HPPA) to specify the mandatory health programs and services provided by boards of health.^{1,2} The Standards identify the minimum expectations for public health programs and services. Boards of health are accountable for implementing the Standards including the protocols and guidelines that are referenced in the Standards. Guidelines are program and topic-specific documents which provide direction on how boards of health shall approach specific requirement(s) identified within the Standards.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this guideline is to provide direction to boards of health on required approaches in developing and implementing a program of public health interventions to support healthy growth and development in the health unit population.

In doing so, this guideline includes the following components:

- Key public health and content specific frameworks and concepts (see section 4);
- An overview of boards of health roles and responsibilities (see section 5);
- Required approaches (see section 6) for:
 - Using a public health program planning cycle that supports boards of health to develop and implement a program of public health interventions by integrating all guideline components.
 - Topics that boards of health shall consider when making decisions to develop and implement healthy growth and development programs of public health intervention.
- Core definitions to support this guideline (see Glossary).

3. Reference to the Standards

This section identifies the standards and requirements to which this guideline relates.

Healthy Growth and Development

Requirement 2. The board of health shall develop and implement a program of public health interventions using a comprehensive health promotion approach to support healthy growth and development in the health unit population.

- a) The program of public health interventions shall be informed by:
 - i. An assessment of risk and protective factors that influence healthy growth and development.
 - ii. An assessment of existing programs and services within the area of jurisdiction of the board of health to build on community assets and minimize duplication.

- iii. Consultation and collaboration with local stakeholders in the health, education, municipal, non-governmental, social, and other relevant sectors with specific attention to:
 - School boards, principals, educators, parent groups, student leaders, and students;
 - Child care providers and organizations that provide child care services such as Community Hubs and Family Centres;
 - Health care providers and LHINs;
 - Social service providers; and
 - Municipalities.
 - iv. Consideration of the following topics based on an assessment of local needs:
 - Breastfeeding;
 - Growth and development;
 - Healthy pregnancies;
 - Healthy sexuality;
 - Mental health promotion;
 - Oral Health;
 - Preconception health;
 - Pregnancy counselling;
 - Preparation for parenting;
 - Positive parenting; and
 - Visual health.
 - v. Evidence of the effectiveness of the interventions.
- b) The program of public health interventions shall be implemented in accordance with relevant guidelines, including the *Health Equity Guideline, 2018* (or as current); the *Healthy Growth and Development Guideline, 2018* (or as current); and the *Mental Health Promotion Guideline, 2018* (or as current).

School Health

Requirement 3. The board of health shall develop and implement a program of public health interventions using a comprehensive health promotion approach to improve the health of school-aged children and youth.

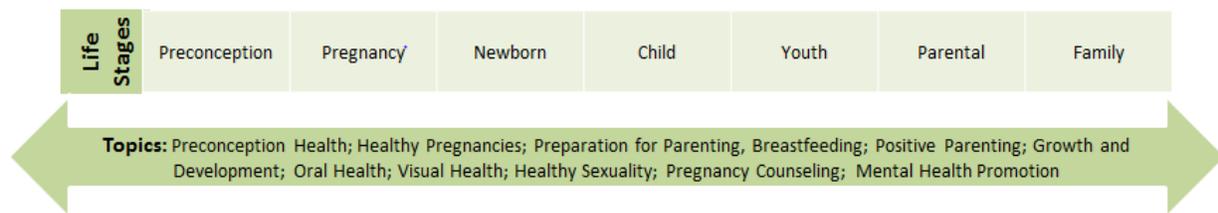
- a) The program of public health interventions shall be informed by:
 - An assessment of the local population, including the identification of priority populations in schools, as well as school communities at risk for increased health inequities and negative health outcomes;
 - Consultation and collaboration with school boards, principals, educators, parent groups, student leaders, and students;
 - A review of other relevant programs and services delivered by the board of health; and
 - Evidence of the effectiveness of the interventions employed.
- b) The program of public health interventions shall be implemented in accordance with relevant guidelines, including the *Chronic Disease Prevention Guideline,*

2018 (or as current); the *Health Equity Guideline, 2018* (or as current); the *Injury Prevention Guideline, 2018* (or as current); the *Healthy Growth and Development Guideline, 2018* (or as current); the *Mental Health Promotion Guideline, 2018* (or as current); the *School Health Guideline, 2018* (or as current); and the *Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction Guideline, 2018* (or as current).

4. Context

Healthy growth and development refers to a process that encompasses physical, mental, emotional and social well-being. It includes age-appropriate growth and development outcomes, such as motor, language, social, emotional and cognitive skills and abilities.³ Healthy growth and development interventions are intended to help achieve a healthy start in life, including optimal preconception, pregnancy, newborn, child, youth, parental, and family health (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Life Stages and Topics for Consideration for Healthy Growth and Development



Healthy child development is a key determinant of health, with robust evidence linking early life experiences to mental and physical health outcomes throughout the life course.⁴ Because of the critical foundation laid by childhood experiences, investments in early childhood development can strongly influence population health and promote health equity, including impacting school success, economic participation, and social well-being.⁵

Healthy growth and development requires family-centered, community-based, culturally competent, coordinated care and support throughout the life course.⁶

4.1 Key Public Health Frameworks and Concepts

This section outlines key public health frameworks and concepts to inform the development and implementation of a program of public health interventions to support healthy growth and development with an emphasis on social determinants of health, health inequities, and comprehensive health promotion approaches.

4.1.1 The Population Health Promotion Model

This model shows how a population health approach can be implemented through action on the full range of health determinants by means of health promotion strategies. This model centres around three questions:

- “On **WHAT** should we take action?” – Acknowledges action is required across the determinants of health
- “**HOW** should we take action?” - Focuses on the actions in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (below).
- “**WITH WHOM** should we act?” - Affirms that comprehensive action must be taken at multiple levels (e.g. individual, family, community, sector/system; and society) to bring about change.⁷

Figure 2. The Health Cube



Source: Public Health Agency of Canada. *Population health promotion: an integrated model of population health and health promotion*. Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada; 2001. Reproduced with permission.⁸

4.1.2 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion

This framework provides the core strategies for health promotion action when planning, implementing, and evaluating healthy growth and development programs and services including:

- Building healthy public policy
- Creating supportive environments
- Strengthening community action
- Developing personal skills
- Re-orienting health services.⁸

The subsequent Jakarta Declaration reiterated the importance of the core strategies identified in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, and added further emphasis that comprehensive approaches are the most effective; settings offer practical opportunities for implementation of comprehensive strategies, and participation is essential to the empowerment of individuals and communities in order to sustain efforts.⁹

4.1.3 Social-Ecological Model of Health

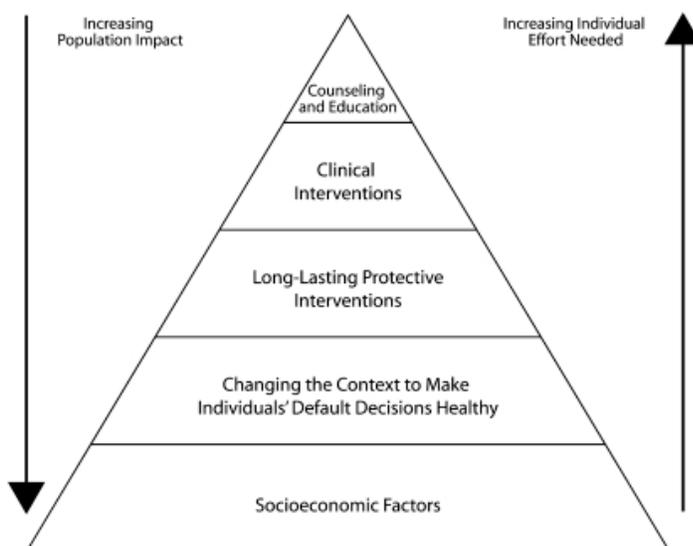
This framework considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors. It highlights the range of factors that put people at risk or protect them, as well as how factors at one level influence factors at another level.¹⁰

4.1.4 Key Public Health Concepts

This section outlines key concepts to inform the development and implementation of a program of public health interventions to support healthy growth and development.

- Upstream approach: seeking to address the causes of the causes.¹¹
- Proportionate universalism: achieving a blend of universal and targeted interventions in order to reduce inequities among groups.¹²
- Strength-based approach: emphasizing strength and asset based assessment and programming.¹³
- Life course approach: recognizing differences in risks and opportunities across the life course including critical periods, as well as the cumulative effect of exposures within and across stages.¹⁴
- Intersectional approach: acknowledging that change must take place across a spectrum, from individual supports and services to organizational change; recognizing the unique historical, social and political contexts that an individual will experience based on their individual combination of diversity factors such as race, gender, gender identity, ability or status.¹⁵
- Population health impact pyramid (Figure 3): focusing on interventions that address supportive environments and social determinants is likely to have greater population impact versus relying solely on individual-level interventions.¹⁶

Figure 3. Population Health Impact Pyramid



Source: Frieden TR. A framework for public health action: the health impact pyramid. *Am J Public Health*. 2010;100(4):590-5. Reproduced with permission.¹⁶

4.2 Key Content-Specific Frameworks and Concepts

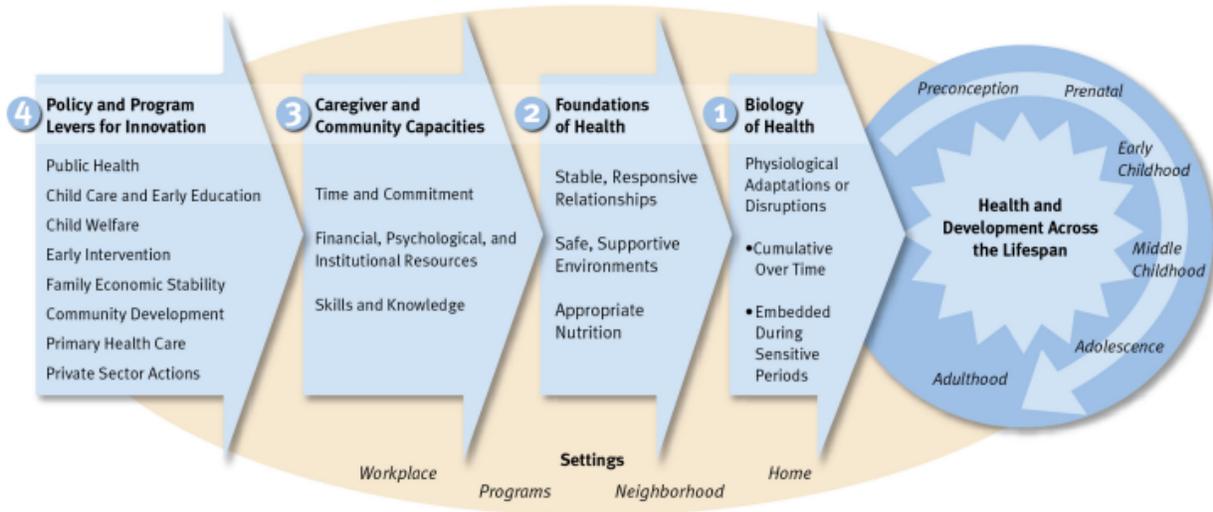
This section provides a summary of key content-specific frameworks and key concepts related to healthy growth and development to inform the development and implementation of a program of public health interventions to support healthy growth and development.

4.2.1 Harvard’s Early Childhood Policies and Programs Framework

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University developed an evidence-based framework addressing the contributors to early child development and which emphasizes the importance of action in a wide range of policy domains.¹⁷

Figure 4. Harvard’s Early Childhood Policies and Programs Framework.

A Framework for Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Policies and Programs to Strengthen Lifelong Health



Source: Center on the Developing Child. *The foundations of lifelong health are built in early childhood* [Internet]. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University; 2010 [cited 2018 Jan 18]. Reproduced with permission.¹⁷

4.2.2 Key Content-Specific Concepts

Key concepts when applying these frameworks to practice include:

- **Developmental Assets:** a framework for positive youth development that includes 40 research-based internal and external strengths, supports, and non-cognitive skills that help children and youth to grow into healthy, caring and responsible adults¹⁸

- **Person-and-Family-Centred Care:** a holistic approach to the provision of care and services that encompasses not only the health of the individual but also their family, culture, and community.¹⁹

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The Standards accommodate variability across the province and require boards of health to apply the Foundational Standards in assessing the needs of their local population and to implement programs of public health interventions that promote healthy growth and development in the health unit population. A flexible approach accommodates greater variability where there is an opportunity to plan programs to decrease health inequities and address the needs of priority populations. Boards of health shall consider all topics listed in the Standards, but can focus public health programs and services on those topics that address identified gaps and will have the greatest impact on improving the health of the local population. Boards of health shall be guided by the principles of Need; Impact; Capacity; and Partnership, Collaboration, and Engagement.

5.1 Program Standards, Protocols and Guidelines

The Healthy Growth and Development Standard requires boards of health to develop and implement a program of public health interventions using a comprehensive health promotion approach to support healthy growth and development in the health unit population. The program of public health interventions shall be informed by:

- An assessment of the risk and protective factors that influence healthy growth and development;
- An assessment of existing programs and services within the area of jurisdiction of the board of health to build on community assets and minimize duplication;
- Consultation and collaboration with local stakeholders in the health, education, municipal, non-governmental, social and other relevant sectors with specific attention to:
 - School boards, principals, educators, parent groups, student leaders, and students.
 - Child care providers and organizations that provide child care services, such as Community Hubs and Family Centres;
 - Health care providers and Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs);
 - Social service providers; and
 - Municipalities.
- Consideration of the following topics based on an assessment of local needs:
 - Breastfeeding;
 - Growth and development;
 - Healthy pregnancies;
 - Healthy sexuality;
 - Mental health promotion;
 - Oral health;

- Preconception health;
- Pregnancy counseling;
- Preparation for parenting;
- Positive parenting; and
- Visual health.
- Evidence of the effectiveness of the interventions employed.

Healthy growth and development is also impacted by other Program Standards including but not limited to:

- Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being Standard;
- Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control Standard;
- School Health Standard; and
- Substance Use and Injury Prevention Standard.¹

There are linkages to healthy growth and development in other guidelines and protocols, including:

- *Child Visual Health and Vision Screening Protocol, 2018* (or as current);
- *Chronic Disease Prevention Guideline, 2018* (or as current);
- *Healthy Babies Healthy Children Protocol, 2018* (or as current);
- *Injury Prevention Guideline, 2018* (or as current);
- *Mental Health Promotion Guideline, 2018* (or as current);
- *Oral Health Protocol, 2018* (or as current);
- *School Health Guideline, 2018* (or as current);
- *Sexual Health and Sexually Transmitted/Blood-Borne Infections Prevention and Control Protocol, 2018* (or as current); and
- *Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction Guideline, 2018* (or as current).

5.2 Foundational Standards

The Foundational Standards inform all areas of board of health planning and programming as they underlie a comprehensive public health approach. There are three Foundational Standards that have implications for the Healthy Growth and Development Standard.

- Population Health Assessment Standard
 - Public health practice responds effectively to current and evolving conditions, and contributes to the public's health and well-being with programs and services that are informed by the population's health status, including social determinants of health and health inequities.
- Health Equity Standard
 - Public health practice results in decreased health inequities such that everyone has equal opportunities for optimal health and can attain their full health potential without disadvantage due to social position or other socially determined circumstances.

- Effective Public Health Practice Standard
 - Public health practice is transparent, responsive to current and emerging evidence, and emphasizes continuous quality improvement.¹

6. Required Approaches

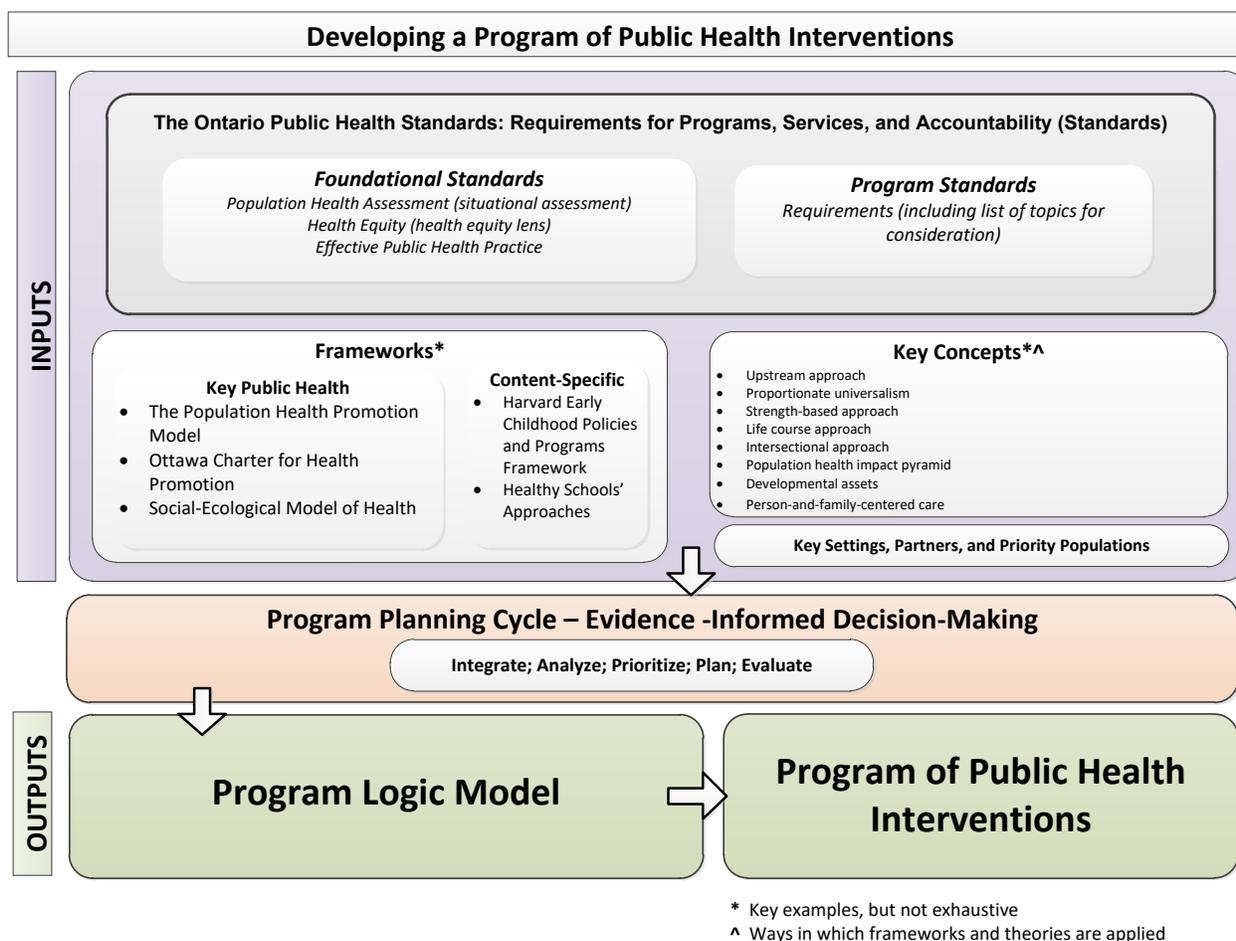
This section outlines required approaches that boards of health shall use when developing and implementing a program of public health interventions to support healthy growth and development in the health unit population.

6.1 Public Health Program Planning Cycle

Boards of health shall use a public health program planning cycle to support evidence-informed decision-making related to the development and implementation of a program of public health interventions to support healthy growth and development in the health unit population (Figure 6). This shall include consideration of:

- The preceding key public health and content-specific frameworks and related concepts (see section 4);
- Requirements outlined in the Healthy Growth and Development Standard and related program standards(see section 5.1);
- Requirements outlined in the Foundational Standards (see section 5.2);
- Key settings, partners and priority populations, which may vary by healthy growth and development topic and local context; and Key healthy growth and development topics, based on an assessment of local need (see section 6.2).

Figure 6: Developing a program of public health interventions



6.2 Topics for Consideration

Boards of health shall consider the following topics when developing and implementing a program of public health interventions to support healthy growth and development based on an assessment of local need.

- **Breastfeeding**

Breastfeeding is the optimal source of nutrition to support healthy growth and cognitive development of infants.²⁰ Breastfeeding gives a healthy start to life, and provides short-and long-term health and neurodevelopmental benefits for the baby.^{21,22} Mothers who breastfeed experience a delayed return of menses, which may help in child spacing.²³ Breastfeeding is also associated with a decreased risk for type 2 diabetes and certain breast and ovarian cancers.^{23,24} Breastfeeding initiation rates have increased over time, but the rates for exclusive breastfeeding and breastfeeding duration are still low.²⁵

- **Growth and Development**

Healthy growth and development refers to a process that encompasses physical, mental, emotional and social well-being. Healthy child development is a key determinant of health, with robust evidence linking early life experiences to mental and physical health outcomes throughout the life course.⁴ There is evidence of a health gradient in childhood development with socioeconomic factors clearly linked to healthy growth and development outcomes.²⁶ Interventions to ensure that all children have a healthy start in life can support physical, emotional, and mental health, including school success and economic participation.⁵

- **Healthy Pregnancies**

Healthy pregnancies are essential to ensure the health of both the mother and child. Risk factors, such as alcohol intake, smoking, and poor nutrition in pregnancy, can lead to negative outcomes in the physical growth and cognitive development of the child.²⁷ In addition to prenatal care, interventions to improve modifiable risk and protective factors can better the health of the mother and child, families, and society overall.²⁸⁻³¹

- **Healthy Sexuality**

Sexual health is a vital component of an individual's physical and emotional health and well-being. Healthy sexuality involves acquiring the knowledge, skills and behaviour to enable good sexual health throughout life. It also includes the provision of information and services to prevent and manage sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancy (e.g., contraception, pregnancy counselling*), sexual dysfunction and violence. Sexually transmitted infections such as chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis have been rising since 2000.³²

- **Mental Health Promotion**

Mental health promotion is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals and communities to increase control over their lives and improve their mental health. By working to increase self-esteem, coping skills, social connectedness and well-being, mental health promotion empowers people and communities to interact with their environments in ways that enhance emotional and spiritual strength. Evidence shows that initiatives that focus on giving “every child the best possible start” will yield the greatest impacts.³³ Adverse childhood experiences, such as poor attachment to parents, child abuse, family conflict, and neglect, have been clearly linked to risk for mental illness and addiction later in life. Promoting mental and physical health holistically and simultaneously is essential to efforts to reduce health inequities and improve and protect the health and well-being of the population.

- **Oral Health**

* Pregnancy counselling is listed as one of the required topics for consideration in the Healthy Growth and Development Standard.

Tooth decay, though largely preventable, remains the most common chronic illness among children.³⁴ Dental problems can result in eating and sleep disruption, which in turn is associated with underweight, poor performance in school, and failure to thrive.^{35,36} Poor oral health is also detrimental for social outcomes such as low self-esteem, as well as longer-term impacts on employability.^{37,38}

- **Preconception Health**

Preconception, whether before a first or a subsequent pregnancy, is an opportune period to improve the health of women to prevent adverse maternal and infant outcomes. Risk factors that may occur during the preconception period include chronic conditions (e.g., obesity, hypertension, diabetes) and high-risk behaviours (e.g., alcohol intake, smoking, substance use).^{39,40} These are associated with adverse outcomes such as low birth weight, birth defects or other complications, and infant mortality.^{39,40} Approximately 40% of pregnancies being unplanned, preconception care aims to promote the health of women of reproductive age before conception and thereby improve pregnancy-related outcomes.⁴¹

- **Preparation for Parenting**

Preparation for parenting is a significant stage that influences parents/caregivers as they transition from being partners to parents. Preparation for parenting may include a range of activities such as gathering supplies needed for the baby, information related to infant care, feeding and immunizations, pregnancy and parental leave/benefits etc. These have significant impact on the parent-infant relationship, infant development as well as the relationship between partners/caregivers.^{42,43}

- **Positive Parenting**

Positive parenting promotes healthy attachment with the parent and child, as well as child management strategies to promote positive behaviours in children. Positive and consistent parenting has been associated with successful child development and fewer behaviour problems.^{44,45} Positive parenting can improve a child's development trajectory despite other risks, whereas inconsistent parenting and poor parenting have negative effects.^{46,47} Children subject to harsh, inconsistent discipline practices are more likely to develop behaviour problems.⁴⁷ Interventions to promote positive parenting may not only improve child behaviour but general child health outcomes.⁴⁸⁻⁵¹

- **Visual Health**

Visual health is critically important to mobility, independence, social engagement, physical health, and educational and employment outcomes.⁵² Uncorrected vision impairment is associated with higher rates of injuries, depression, and some chronic diseases, and can significantly affect a child's growth and development by limiting social, physical and educational participation.⁵² Six out of ten children experiencing reading difficulties have uncorrected or undetected vision problems and almost 25% of school-age children have vision problems.⁵³

Glossary

Comprehensive health promotion approach combines multiple strategies and addresses the full range of health determinants to enable people to increase control over, and to improve, their physical, mental and social well-being.

Developmental Assets is a framework for positive youth development that includes 40 research-based building blocks of healthy development that help children and youth to grow into healthy, caring and responsible adults.¹⁸ Research has shown that the more developmental assets young people acquire, the less likely they are to engage in high risk behaviours and the more likely they are to do well in school, be civically engaged and value diversity.¹⁸

Early childhood development refers to the physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development of a child from the preconception stage up to age six.⁵⁴ This period encompasses the most rapid development in a human life. Research has found that early childhood experiences have a decisive impact on the architecture of the developing brain and therefore lay a critical foundation for later life health, well-being, cognitive capacity and social behaviour.¹⁷

Health promotion is defined by the World Health Organization as “the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health. It moves beyond a focus on individual behaviour towards a wide range of social and environmental interventions”.⁵⁵ Health promotion strategies include: 1 - build healthy public policy; 2- create supportive environments; 3- strengthen community action; 4- develop personal skills; and 5- re-orient health services. It involves the population as a whole in the context of their everyday lives rather than focusing on people at risk for specific diseases and is directed toward action on the determinants or causes of health.⁵⁶

Life stages refer to developmental phases through which individuals pass over the course of their lives, including preconception, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age, each with unique biological, psychological, and social characteristics.⁵⁷ Sub-phases within these stages are also often identified. Transitions between life stages can be accompanied by unique developmental needs, challenges and risks. This guideline focuses on preconception, pregnancy, newborn, child, and youth life stages, including the influence of parents and families on achieving a healthy start in life.

Population health is the health of the population, measured by health status indicators. Population health is influenced by physical, biological, behavioural, social, cultural, economic, and other factors. The term is also used to refer to the prevailing health level of the population, or a specified subset of the population, or the level to which the population aspires. Population health describes the state of health, and public health is the range of practices, procedures, methods, institutions, and disciplines required to achieve it.⁵⁸ The term also is used to describe the academic disciplines involved in studies of determinants and dynamics of health status of the population.

Program of public health interventions includes the suite of programs, services, and other interventions undertaken by a board of health to fulfill the requirements and contribute to achieving the goals and program outcomes outlined in the Standards.

Protective factors are individual or environmental characteristics, conditions, or behaviors that reduce the effects of stressful life events. These factors also increase an individual's ability to avoid risks, and promote social and emotional competence to thrive in all aspects of life.⁵⁹

Risk factors are any attributes, characteristics or exposures of an individual that increase the likelihood of developing an unfavourable outcome.⁶⁰

Social determinants of health are the interrelated social, political and economic factors that create the conditions in which people live, learn, work and play. The intersection of the social determinants of health causes these conditions to shift and change over time and across the life span, impacting the health of individuals, groups and communities in different ways.⁶¹

Well-being refers to “the presence of the highest possible quality of life in its full breadth of expression focused on but not necessarily exclusive to: good living standards, robust health, a sustainable environment, vital communities, an educated populace, balanced time use, high levels of democratic participation, and access to and participation in leisure and culture.”⁶²

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