

A READER FRIENDLY GUIDE TO

THE NATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN

FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD
DEVELOPMENT IN JAMAICA

2008-2023





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This Reader Friendly Guide to the National Strategic Plan (NSP) for Early Childhood Development is a publication of the Early Childhood Commission.

The Commission wishes to thank all the stakeholders who have contributed to the development of the NSP and look forward to your continued support for its successful implementation.

Together we can give Jamaica's children the best start in life!

A publication of the Early Childhood Commission

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ABOUT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMISSION

The Early Childhood Commission (ECC) is an agency of the Ministry of Education. It was established in 2003 by an Act of Parliament to improve the quality of life of our youngest children. The ECC does this by working with a range of stakeholders. This is to ensure that all children under the age of eight years have equal access to high quality early childhood programmes and services.

ECC's Vision

All children having access to high quality early childhood development services enabling the realization of their full potential.

ECC's Mission

An integrated and coordinated delivery of quality early childhood programmes and services which provide equity and access for children zero to eight years within healthy, safe and nurturing environments.

ECC's Quality Policy Statement

The ECC is committed to provide integrated and coordinated delivery of quality early childhood programmes and services within a healthy, safe and nurturing environment consistent with legal and regulatory requirements.

We are committed to continual improvement in meeting or exceeding customer expectations through a highly efficient, motivated and performance-driven team.

WHAT IS EARLY CHILDHOOD?

Early Childhood is the period of growth and development that children go through from the time they are in the womb until they are about eight years old. This is because the unborn child is affected by everything the mother experiences while she is pregnant and this often continues to affect the child's growth and development even after birth. The experiences children have and the care and stimulation



they receive during early childhood lay the foundation for every aspect of their lives in the future; including their health, nutrition, growth, learning thinking and reasoning abilities, as well as their behavior with other children and adults.

WHY SHOULD WE INVEST IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT?

Scientists now know that the quality of life children have during early childhood will affect how well they grow and develop. Research shows that the brain grows the most during these early years. Therefore, children learn best and faster at this time.

Children who get high quality care and stimulation during early



childhood are healthier, get along better with others and do better in pre-school, primary and high school.

When children have a high quality early childhood environment they become educated, productive, well thinking individuals. As a result, the whole society benefits from better educated citizens, a more productive labour force and less crime and violence. Fewer persons will therefore need to depend on social services as more persons would have good jobs and earn better wages.



This can become Jamaica's reality. However, if Jamaica is to reap these benefits, we must invest in early childhood development now. This is why the Early Childhood Commission has developed a national strategic plan for early childhood development in Jamaica.

Our Main Stakeholders

- children
- parents
- early childhood practitioners
- health sector workers
- government ministries and agencies
- non-governmental organizations
- community based and faith based organizations
- local and international development partners

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN (NSP)?

The National Strategic Plan, or NSP is a 5 – year plan, which takes into consideration all areas of early childhood development. Think of the NSP as a roadmap. This roadmap lays out all the roads we must take to reach our goals. It was developed through research, including listening to the ideas and concerns of parents, people who work with children and members of communities. With the completion of NSP (2008-2013) and NSP (2013-2018) the third NSP (2018-2023) has been developed and is being implemented.



WHAT WILL THE NSP DO?

The NSP is designed to meet the needs of Jamaica's parents and children. When the NSP has been fully implemented it will result in us having:

Children who are:	Parents who are:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ clear thinking○ sociable○ healthy○ and ready for life!	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ well informed○ involved in their children's lives○ knowledgeable about their children's needs○ play an active role in their children's development○ and supported in meeting children's developmental needs

The NSP is not a magic wand that will fix everything overnight. Instead, think of it as a process or a journey. As you read you will notice that we have taken what is called **“the life cycle approach”**. This means that we are putting plans in place to meet the needs of our children from when they are in the womb until they are out of the early childhood stage. In the end, this will have a positive effect on the whole society.

The Early Childhood Commission will continue to coordinate the NSP process by working with our partners in government ministries and agencies as well as other organizations.

Government Ministries and Agencies	Other Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ministry of Education and Youth ○ Ministry of Health and Wellness ○ Ministry of Labour and Social Security ○ Ministry of Finance and the Public Service ○ Planning Institute of Jamaica ○ HEART NSTA Trust ○ Private Sector Organization of Jamaica ○ the CHASE Fund ○ JSIF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organizations that provide programmes and services for children ○ Health care workers ○ Operators of early childhood institutions ○ ECI Boards of Management ○ Early Childhood Practitioners ○ Parents ○ Community members ○ Tertiary institutions ○ Jamaica Early Childhood Association

Working with our partners we will implement the following process to improve early childhood development:

PROCESS 1

Effective Parenting Education and support

- Provide parents and caregivers with the support and training they need to effectively raise young children.

PROCESS 2

Effective Preventive Health Care

- Ensure that a health care system that takes good care of children and works with parents to avoid preventable illness is in place.

PROCESS 3**Early and effective screening, diagnosis and intervention for “at risk” children and households**

- Put good screening systems in place so that children who are at risk for health, behavioural, developmental or learning problems or who live in situations that could harm their development, can be identified early. This is to ensure that families and children receive the help that they need.

PROCESS 4**Safe, Learner Centred, Well- maintained ECI Facilities**

- Ensure that early childhood institutions are safe, well-maintained and nurturing and able to meet the developmental needs of children.

PROCESS 5**Effective curriculum delivery by trained ECD Practitioners**

- Ensure that all early childhood practitioners are trained to help children develop and reach their full potential.

In order to achieve these goals, the right working environment must be in place to ensure the success of the NSP. This means that:

Working Environment Process 1

A coordinated approach to the delivery of ECD services

- all the persons and organizations who work with children or provide programmes and services for them must work together to achieve the targets set.

Working Environment Process 2

Evidence-based decision making

- decisions on how to improve the quality of early childhood development in Jamaica must be made based on timely, clear, current and accurate information.

Working Environment Process 3

Public education

- An effective public education and awareness strategy to ensure that the public, including key stakeholders and partners, are all kept informed about the achievements in the sector and the work that needs to be done.

Working Environment Process 4

Resource mobilization

- As financing constraints have long been found to be a challenge for the ECD sector, resources are identified through alternative funding from donor agencies in order to support ECD activities.

ACTIVITIES TO BE CARRIED OUT UNDER THE NSP

To reach the goals of the NSP, there are a set of planned activities that must be carried out to make the **process** work. Let us look more closely at them.

PROCESS 1: Effective Parenting Education and Support

ACTIVITIES: The activities to be carried out to meet this goal are:

- Ensure that antenatal child health clinics and ECIs provide parenting education and support for parents.
- Develop a directory of high quality parenting support programmes for young children including those offered by health centres, resource centres, early childhood institutions, and non-governmental organizations.
- Inform parents and caregivers about the importance of parenting and early childhood development and how they can get the support they need to help their children grow and develop well.
- Review and update the Parenting Strategy
- Establish Early Childhood Development Community Councils
- Develop the “1st 1000 Days App”
- Strengthen partnerships with our parenting partners to better coordinate the delivery of programmes offered to parents



PROCESS 2: Effective Preventive Health Care

ACTIVITIES: The activities to be carried out to meet this goal are:

- Develop a certification system to ensure that child health clinics provide the highest quality services.
- Develop and put in place a system to provide a wide range of child development and parenting services (“Reach up and Learn”) at health centres.
- Develop and put in place a plan to ensure that the staff at well child clinics is trained and able to provide the new services that are needed.



- Roll out the newly designed Child Health and Development record or “Passport” and sensitize parents, health professionals, and ECIs to support children’s development and track each child’s health and development.
- Develop and put in place an early childhood nutrition policy to ensure that our young children are well nourished.
- Provide parents and caregivers with information on how to help children grow up healthy and avoid common illnesses that can be prevented. This will be done through community workshops, media promotions and other activities.
- Improve the government information system so that accurate records on children’s health, development and behavior can be kept.

PROCESS 3: Early and effective screening, diagnosis and intervention for “at risk” children and households

ACTIVITIES: The activities to be carried out to meet this goal are:

- Develop and put in place a national policy on screening and early identification for children and households that are “at risk”.
- Work with agencies such as the National Parenting Support Commission (NPSC), the PATH Programme, social workers, and health care workers to put a system in place to identify families in high



risk situations and provide support for them.

“At Risk” children are children who have health, behavioural or developmental problems or who live in situations that could prevent them from developing as they should.

Families or households “at risk” are those that are in situations that could prevent young children from developing as they should.

- Ensure that trained specialists are available at health facilities and in communities to provide services for children who have developmental and behavioural problems that need special attention.
- Ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, or HIV/ AIDS have equal access to high quality programmes and services and are treated as well as other children.
- Inform parents, caregivers and the general public about child development issues so they can identify children who are at risk early and improve their quality of life.
- Develop the Jamaica School Readiness Assessment (JSRA).
- Develop the Ages and Stages Questionnaire - Jamaica (ASQ-J).
- Institute the Family Support Screening Tool (FSS) which is designed to assess and refer households “at risk”.

PROCESS 4: Safe, Learner Centred, Well- maintained ECI Facilities

Activities: The activities to be carried out to meet this goal are:

- Inspect ECIs regularly to ensure they maintain high standards.
- Ensure that Development Officers work with ECIs to help them meet the required standard.
- Establish government of Jamaica Brain Builder Centres that provide children with early stimulation, nutrition and social protection that will facilitate optimal development at no cost to parents.
- Increase the number of ECIs who have a permit to operate and a certification of registration, by supporting them to meet regulatory requirements.



PROCESS 5: Effective curriculum delivery by trained ECD Practitioners

Activities: The activities to be carried out to meet this goal are:

- provide all ECIs with an approved early childhood curriculum.
- Ensure that Development Officers work with early childhood practitioners to help them understand the curriculum and teach the children better.
- Put systems in place to ensure fairness in how ECIs get financial support.
- Put systems in place to ensure that all EC practitioners are trained, licensed and continuously upgrade their skills.
- Ensure that each ECI has at least one diploma or degree trained teacher.
- Support the improvement in teacher quality through capacity building programmes.
- Facilitating ongoing In-service training.
- Strengthen the utilisation of teacher assessment tools.
- Revise the Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum (JECC).
- Strengthen partnerships with teacher training institutes to improve teacher quality.
- Increase the number of trained teachers in the ECD sector.



WHAT WE NEED TO MAKE SURE THE ACTIVITIES ARE CARRIED OUT

It is important that all agencies that provide programmes and services work together. In this way we will be able to put the right framework in place so that we are able to carry out all the activities set out above. This framework is called the working environment. The working environment has four processes. They are explained below:

Working Environment Process 1: A coordinated approach to the delivery of ECD Services

To make sure that all the different agencies for early childhood development work in harmony to achieve their goal. To do this we must:

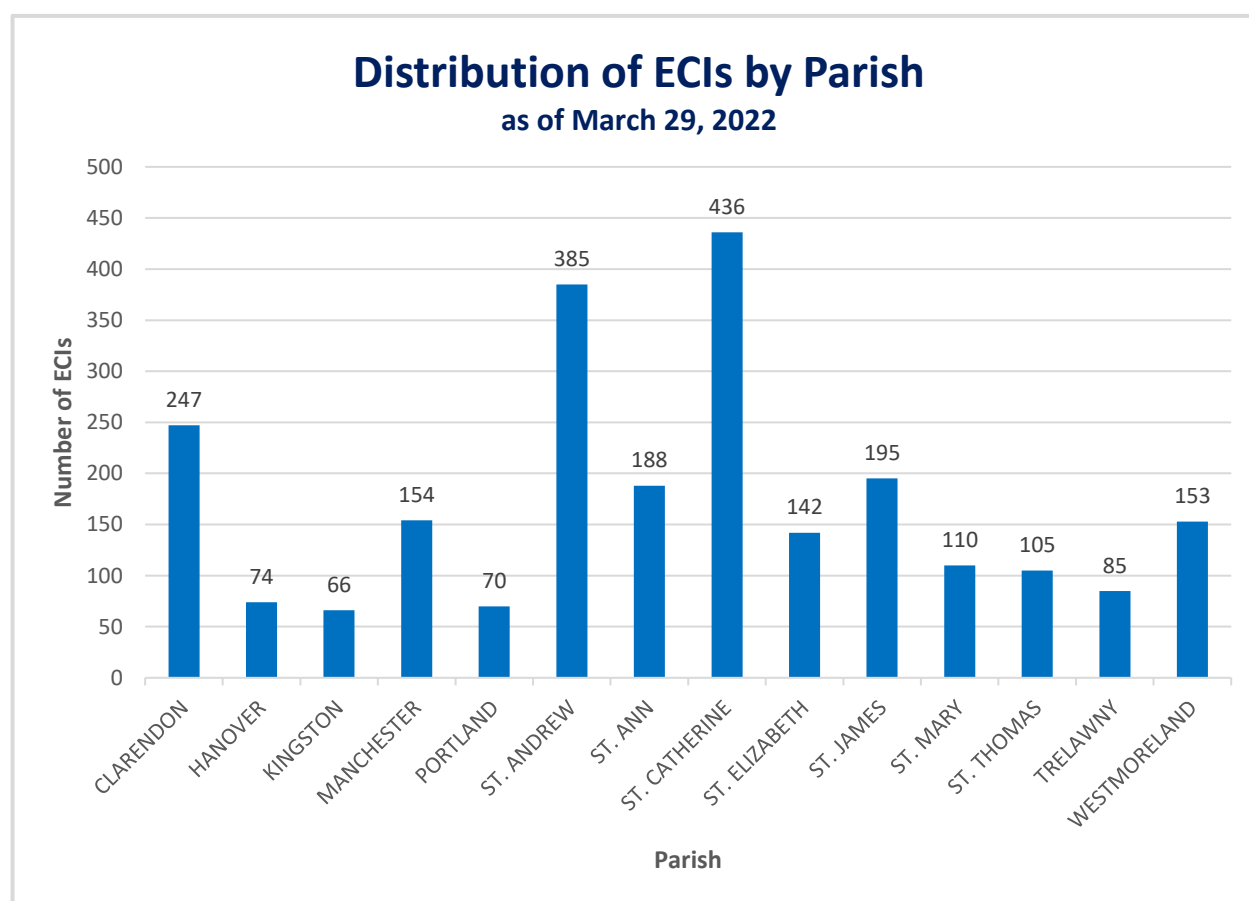
- Put laws in place to govern the early childhood sector.
- Have Government ministries and agencies work together to plan and budget for the early childhood sector.
- Put systems in place to make sure that the resources of the sector are managed well.
- Put systems in place to ensure that there are good management structures for ECIs.
- Encourage persons to serve on ECI Boards.
- Work with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other community organizations to provide improved services to young children and their families.
- Rally the entire country to provide more support and resources for the ECD sector.

Working Environment Process 2:

Evidence-based decision making

Timely, clear, current appropriate, evidence-based information to support ECD

- Put in place an upgraded computerized system to collect, store and manage important information about young children and their families.
- Keep track of the status of Jamaica's young children's development through surveys and assessments. This is important as it will help us to know if the NSP is working.



Working Environment Process 3:

Public Education

Strengthen the use of social media platforms to reach out to the public and tell them about the importance of young children's development.

- Facilitate sensitisation sessions that will be held during ECC Community Initiatives.
- Spread the word about the "1st 1000 Days App", explain how to download and use it.

Working Environment Process 4:

Resource Mobilization

Identify alternative sources of funding for the ECD sector.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE PLAN AFTER 5 YEARS

This is what the Plan will achieve after five years.

1. Early childhood parenting education and support services will be of a high quality.
2. Health centres will offer high quality services that aim to keep children well. They will also screen children and households to find those that are having problems and get help for them.
3. There will be a trained person called a “child development therapist” to help children with special needs.
4. More EC practitioners will be trained to help children with special needs.
5. More ECIs will meet the required standards.
6. ECIs will have trained EC practitioners.
7. The state of the young Jamaican child’s development will be checked and reported on to the public.
8. The public will be more aware of the importance of early childhood care, education and development.
9. More partnerships will be facilitated to support the ECD sector.

HOW WILL WE KNOW IF THE PLAN IS WORKING?

Remember the road map? As we travel along on our journey, we will check every few months to see if we are going in the right direction. These checks are what we call monitoring and evaluation. It allows us to keep an eye on

the plan to see if we are meeting our goals. Through monitoring and evaluation, we will also be able to see how the NSP has helped our children, their families, teachers and communities. We will also be able to see the impact on our country's development.

WHAT IS THE COST OF ALL THIS?

Based on the Resource Mobilization Strategy \$14B-\$21B will be needed to sufficiently support the ECD sector. Currently, the Ministry of Education and Youth allocates \$4.5B to early childhood education which is roughly 5% of the overall budget of the education ministry. In views expressed in the World Bank/UNICEF Public Expenditure Review Report of 2021, \$3.7B could be reallocated from the Tertiary Education budget to the ECD budget to improve learning outcomes for young children. The report also states that Jamaica's tertiary education funding is 'very high' when compared to that of other countries. Additionally, global evidence suggests that investment in early childhood education is among the most effective interventions in the development of low income students.

WHO IS GOING TO MAKE THIS PLAN WORK?

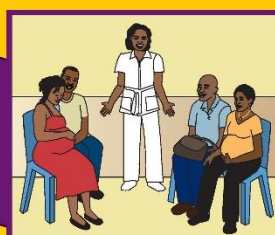
The Early Childhood Commission cannot make the plan work by itself but is responsible for bringing together all the different groups that contribute to early childhood development and work with them to make the plan successful.



As you can see, we all have to play a part in making the NSP work. Remember that it benefits all of us when our children are given the opportunity to reach their full potential.

So, let us all work together to give our children the best start in life!





ANTENATAL CLINIC

- PROCESS 1** Parenting Support
→ Referral Services eg. Home Visiting
- PROCESS 2** Preventive Health Care
→ Referral Services eg. Specialist Antenatal Care
- PROCESS 3** Family & Child Risk Screening
→ Referral Services eg. Path Programme



National Strategic Plan (NSP) for THE JAMAICAN CHILD

0 - 8 YEARS

CHILD HEALTH CLINIC VISITS



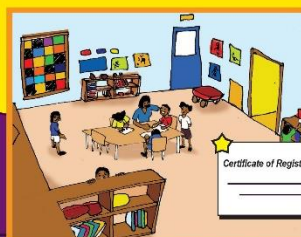
BIRTH

- PROCESS 1** Parenting Support
→ Referral Services eg. Home Visiting
- PROCESS 2** Preventive Health Care
→ Referral Services eg. Specialist Health Care
- PROCESS 3** Family & Child Risk Screening
Referral Services eg. Path Programme, Child Intervention Services



CHILD HEALTH CLINIC

- PROCESS 1** Parenting Support
→ Referral Services eg. Home Visiting
- PROCESS 2** Preventive Health Care
→ Referral Services eg. Specialist Health Care
- PROCESS 3** Family & Child Risk Screening
→ Referral Services eg. Path Programme, Child Intervention Services



ENTRY TO EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTIONS

- PROCESS 1** Parenting Support
- PROCESS 3** Child Risk Screening
→ Referral Services eg. Child Intervention Services
- PROCESS 4** High Quality ECIs
- PROCESS 5** Trained EC Teachers



4 - 5 YEARS
SCHOOL
READINESS
EVALUATION



6 YEARS
TRANSITION TO PRIMARY SCHOOL

NSP Facts You Should Know

What is Early Childhood?

Early childhood is the period of growth and development that children go through from the time they are in the womb until they are about eight years old.

Why is Early Childhood Important?

The experiences children have and the care and stimulation they receive during early childhood lay the foundation for every aspect of their lives. Children who get high quality care and stimulation during early childhood are healthier, get along better with others, learn faster and do better in school. Therefore they will grow up to be educated, well-thinking, productive members of society.

What is the National Strategic Plan (NSP)?

The NSP is a 5-year plan aimed at improving early childhood programmes and services for young children.

How will the NSP Work

NSP takes what is called the "life cycle approach" and is designed to meet the needs of our children from they are in the womb until they are out of the early childhood stage. The Early Childhood Commission and its partners in other ministries and agencies will work together to improve early childhood development through the following processes:

- Process 1:** Effective Parenting Education and Support
Provide parents and caregivers with the support and training they need to effectively raise young children
- Process 2:** Effective Preventive Health Care
Ensure that a health care system that takes good care of children and works with parents to avoid preventable illnesses is in place
- Process 3:** Early and Effective Screening, Diagnosis and Intervention for "At Risk" Children and Households
Put good screening systems in place so that children who are at risk for health, behavioural, developmental or learning problems or who live in situations that could harm their development can be identified early to ensure that families and children receive the help that they need
- Process 4:** Safe, Learner Centred, Well-maintained Early Childhood Facilities
Ensure that early childhood institutions (ECIs) are safe, well-maintained and nurturing and able to meet the developmental needs of children
- Process 5:** Effective Curriculum Delivery by Trained EC Practitioners
Ensure that all early childhood practitioners are trained to help children develop and reach their full potential.

In order to achieve these goals, the right working environment must be in place to ensure the success of the NSP. This means that:

- Working Environment Process 1:** All the persons and organizations who work with children or provide programmes and services for them must work together to achieve the targets set
- Working Environment Process 2:** Decisions on how to improve the quality of early childhood development in Jamaica must be made based on timely, clear, current, and accurate information.
- Working Environment Process 3:** Public education
- Working Environment Process 4:** Resource mobilization

We all have a part to play in making the NSP work.
So, let us all work together to give our children the best start in life!