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Re: A Call to Action on Behalf of Maltreated Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers in Canada

When young children experience adversity, it increases the risk of poor outcomes for them throughout their life. When infants, toddlers and preschoolers become involved with child protection services, many of them have already experienced adversity and many, if not all, have been deeply and negatively affected by it. Today, emerging science is helping us understand just how adversity is embedded into the body and how it ultimately influences brain development, health, education success, and relationships throughout life. The science is also showing us that for this very vulnerable group of children an exponentially greater response in service delivery, policy and practice is essential if we are truly committed to helping them achieve better outcomes.

There is a wealth of important work being done by child protection to improve the lives of children at risk due to maltreatment or neglect, however, the system is fragmented and inconsistent. All those involved in the systems of care and protection need to understand the unique developmental needs of infants - that simply removing a child from an unsafe home is not enough. The science of early development is clear - infancy is the time of greatest vulnerability, and also the time of greatest potential. The child protection system is better placed than any other to effectively intervene in the lives of vulnerable infants in a manner informed by early developmental science to improve outcomes. Child Protection services **MUST** consider and address the social and emotional impacts of early maltreatment as early as possible to mitigate lifelong consequences.

Now is the time for the child protection system to examine and improve policy and approaches to cases involving infants and young children. Infants, toddlers and preschoolers served by child welfare need intervention that is relationship-based, child focused, developmentally appropriate, and trauma informed. Those supporting these children such as birth parents, foster parents, kin, child and family service workers, and others need tools and resources that make it possible to positively influence that child's outcomes.

Infant Mental Health Promotion (IMHP) at the Hospital for Sick Children has developed the enclosed advocacy document entitled ***A Call to Action on Behalf of Maltreated Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers in Canada*** which contains rich evidence-based information about the unique vulnerability of maltreated infants. You will also find important policy recommendations which are informed by strong scientific evidence. We hope this *Call to Action* will be a valuable new tool for you as you advocate on behalf of young children.

It is our hope that you will consider officially and publicly endorsing this document by returning the enclosed signed letter of endorsement, and actively incorporating these key concepts in future planning. It is only through recognition of these key principles that we can collectively bring about the necessary change to prevent mental health difficulties for young children in care and improve outcomes. We very much value the role that child protection agencies, health, education and other systems play in protecting our children's present and their delicately forming futures, and look forward to your support in this initiative.

Thank you for your consideration and everything you do for Canada's little ones,
Sincerely,
[name]

[position]
[Agency]

[Agency Contact Details]