

RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS AND KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION



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Improving the health and well-being of families with children and youth living with complex needs

What you need to know:

Inclusion is not a full reality for many children and youth living with complex needs (CCNs) and barriers to inclusion are often intensified among Indigenous and newcomer families with children with CCNs. Providing quality services to families with children with CCNs creates more opportunities for their full inclusion into their communities and to improve their health and well-being.

What is this research about?

This literature review highlights smart practice recommendations from scholarly and grey literature related to children and youth living with complex needs (CCNs) to improve the health and well-being of children and their families. CCNs generally refers to children and youth living with either a physical or developmental disability, a medical condition or illness.

This research supported an evidence-based analysis and decision-making process for the Children's Health Foundation of Vancouver Island's impact area *Children and youth living with complex needs (0 to 24 years old)*.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers gathered, synthesized and presented the relevant research, gaps and smart practices identified in the literature.

The researcher searched Google and Google Scholar, and several databases including CINAL, PsychInfo, and University of Victoria (UVic) Summons to gather academic and grey literature sources from the past 15 years. Sources were mainly set in and written from a Canadian context, but included international sources (USA and AUS) when relevant.



UVic researchers reviewed literature to support an evidence-based decision-making process for the Foundation's impact area "Children and youth living with complex needs" (Photo credit: Greg Wolford from [Pixabay](#)).



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What did the researchers find?

The researchers found the following trends in the literature:

- **Complexity** - CCNs spans across many sectors and disciplines, with different language and labels, diagnoses, populations, and locations
- **Barriers to access of services** - which include ideological, institutional, and interpersonal factors
- **Equity** - barriers particularly for Indigenous and migrant families
- **Relationships and inclusion** - which are linked to positive health outcomes
- **Integrative and collaborative service delivery** - approach is widely recommended for an integrative, holistic and collaborative service model
- **Family Centred Care (FCC)** - approach is widely recommended for when working with families

The smart practices identified in the literature for addressing barriers to accessing CCNs services include:

1. FCC approach encourages more family participation in health care planning
2. Adopt a social determinants of health (SDH) perspective
3. Adopt a Strength Based Practice (SBP)
4. Address equity issues that supports Indigenous research on community health
5. Increase and improve integrative and collaborative service delivery by facilitating trusting relationships.

Suggestions for future research include:

- Family-centred service
- Multidisciplinary and inter-professional programs
- Connections between parent well-being and child development with CCN
- How background factors, such as culture and environment together with stressors and supports, impact the families' experiences with services, as well as differences in their adaptation to raising a child with CCNs

How can you use this research?

This research will help practitioners, policymakers and other stakeholders develop policies, programs and resources to support quality services to families with CCNs, as well as create more inclusive opportunities. The smart practices identified in the literature review can be used as a guide for both practice and policy development towards solutions for the barriers and equity issues in CCNs services.

About the researchers

Amira Abdel-Malek is a UVic graduate student supervised by Dr. Kimberly Speers. The researchers conducted this research as part of a partnership facilitated by [Research Partnerships and Knowledge Mobilization](#) between the [Children's Health Foundation of Vancouver Island](#) and UVic.

Keywords

Families/children/youth; complex (care) needs/disabilities/special needs; accessibilities/barriers to services/programs; Canada/BC; Indigenous/First Nations/Aboriginal; migrant/immigrant

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