

July | 2014

Premature Birth in Canada: An Environmental Scan  
Recommendations for the Canadian Premature Babies  
Foundation – Fondation pour Bébés Prématurés  
Canadiens

Prepared for:  
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# Summary and Recommendations

## Summary of Report Findings

Premature birth in Canada is a growing issue, with rates of premature birth on the rise across the country, and particularly among Aboriginal populations. Babies born prematurely have both immediate health and supportive care needs, and may also experience long-term impacts such as increased risk of developmental or physical challenges. The economic burden of prematurity in Canada is significant, at \$587.1 million.<sup>1</sup>

The government of Canada has joined global efforts to address the issue of maternal and child health at the international level. Around the world, a number of different groups are working to raise awareness about premature birth and advocate for change. In Canada, the Canadian Premature Babies Foundation-Fondation pour Bébés Prématurés Canadiens (CPBF-FBPC) is the national organization for premature babies. In order to support their work going forward, CPBF-FBPC has commissioned this environmental scan on the issue of premature birth. The environmental scan included a review of the grey and academic literature and focus groups and interviews with key informants from across the country.

While the environmental scan identified areas where care for premature babies and their families is working well (such as the provision of high quality clinical care; progress in implementing family-centred care; and an increasing emphasis on research and quality improvement activities national and at the local level), gaps or challenges and areas where care could be improved were also identified. The greatest areas of need included addressing issues related to consistency and continuity of care; improving provision of family-centred care, including appropriate supports that will facilitate family participation in care (e.g., on-site accommodations, parent and health care provider education); increasing supports for families, particularly supports that will address families' emotional needs, the financial

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<sup>1</sup> K. M. Johnston et al., "The Economic Burden of Prematurity in Canada," *BMC Pediatr* 14(2014).

burden of an extended hospital stay, and the period immediately following discharge home; improving planning for and family supports when a baby is transferred to another facility; and increasing access to long-term follow-up and care for all premature babies.

Based on the findings from the environmental scan, ten recommendations have been developed that span the continuum of care for premature babies and their families. These recommendations, if implemented, can help to increase awareness of premature birth in Canada and improve the care and support received by families who experience a preterm birth.

- 1.1 It is recommended that provincial governments and other health authorities identify and implement initiatives that have been shown to reduce or prevent premature birth. This includes interventions at the level of primary prevention as well as secondary and tertiary prevention.
- 1.2 It is recommended that stakeholders in the area of premature birth work together to increase awareness of premature birth among the general public.
- 2.1 It is recommended that hospitals continue their efforts to improve clinical care. Priority areas include reducing barriers to developmental care and improving the consistency and continuity of care across facilities and between health care providers.
- 2.2 It is recommended that hospitals work to reduce barriers to family-centred care through initiatives that address physical barriers (e.g., lack of place for family to stay at the hospital while the baby is there) and improve staff support (e.g., staff education and training on empowering parents to provide care, inclusion of the family perspective in staff orientation/training, etc.). Hospitals should also examine their policies and approaches to ensure that care is as family-centred as possible.
- 2.3 It is recommended that Canadian standards or guidelines for family-centred care be developed and implemented to help ensure consistency in the approach across facilities.
- 3.1 It is recommended that hospitals review their discharge planning policies and processes to ensure that families are sufficiently prepared to go home (or to another facility) and

that adequate planning for discharge is conducted well in advance of the time of discharge. Families should be actively involved in the discharge planning process.

- 3.2 It is not likely possible to completely eliminate the need for emergency transfers of premature babies to other facilities. However, it is recommended that hospitals make every effort to alleviate the stress associated with an emergency transfer by discussing the possibility with families in advance, and obtaining the family's preference for the transfer location.
- 3.3 It is recommended that governments and hospitals explore extending long-term follow-up care and support to include more premature babies (i.e., the moderate and late preterm babies), and to cover a longer period of time, into the preschool years at a minimum.
- 4.1 It is recommended that governments work with hospitals to support expanding the supports available to families with premature babies. These could include physical supports such as accommodations, financial supports such as extended parental leave, and social and emotional supports such as peer support or access to counselling services. Families that are particularly vulnerable would benefit from additional supports.
- 4.2 It is recommended that hospitals and research institutions enhance support for research and quality improvement. This could include additional research funding, financial and staff support for quality improvement activities, and continued support for the Canadian Neonatal and Neonatal Follow-up Networks.

## **Recommendations for CPBF-FBPC**

The Canadian Premature Babies Foundation-Fondation pour Bébés Prématurés Canadiens (CPBF-FBPC) works to prevent preterm birth through education and research; to support the best standards of care for premature babies; to give premature babies and their families a voice across Canada; and to increase awareness of premature birth. The purpose of this environmental scan has been to gain a better understanding of the landscape in Canada around premature birth, including identification of gaps and best practices that could help

to address those gaps. In addition to the recommendations included in the final Environmental Scan report, recommendations for CPBF-FBPC on making the best use of the information from the environmental scan are also outlined here.

This environmental scan has examined premature birth across the continuum, addressing a broad range of different aspects and issues. In order to make strategic use of the information, it would be helpful to further refine the focus, identifying priority areas for change on which communication and outreach efforts can be focused. CPBF-FBPC can then develop an appropriate communication and outreach strategy that will identify desired outcomes, key messages, and stakeholders to be targeted. Throughout this process it will be critical to engage those with related expertise to help determine priorities and next steps. The engagement of key stakeholders as partners and champions can also help to support the work as it moves forward.

1. It is recommended that CPBF-FBPC decide on priority areas of change on which to focus their advocacy, awareness and outreach efforts.
2. It is recommended that CPBF-FBPC engage key stakeholders in the process of identifying priority areas and acting as change champions.
3. It is recommended that CPBF-FBPC develop a comprehensive communication and outreach strategy, focusing on the priority areas that will help to build buy-in and support. The strategy should identify communication goals and priorities, stakeholders to be targeted, key messages and talking points, and the communication strategies will be used.