

Eastern Ontario Blind - Low Vision Early Intervention Program

The Blind – Low Vision Early Intervention Program is an initiative of the Government of Ontario’s Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Its objective is to give children who are born blind or with low vision the best possible start in life.

Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre coordinates services for Eastern Ontario which includes the city of Ottawa, Renfrew County, and the counties of Prescott-Russell and Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry. Services are provided in partnership with the Ottawa Children’s Treatment Centre.

The program provides education and support for parents so they can encourage the healthy development of their children. Parents learn to help their children develop the skills they need for daily activities at home and in early learning and care settings.

Without special support from an early age, a child who is blind or has low vision may have trouble learning to talk, explore and make friends when he or she begins school. A child who is blind or has low vision is at a significant risk for difficulties in all areas of development, including:

- communication and language
- fine and gross motor skills
- understanding and thought processes
- social skills
- emotional development
- self help

With the right intervention from skilled professionals, parents can learn how to encourage the healthy development of their children, and help them learn the skills they will need to succeed in school.

HOW DOES MY CHILD QUALIFY FOR THE PROGRAM?

When children are diagnosed with blindness or low vision, a referral can be made to the program by a physician, ophthalmologist, optometrist, parent or caregiver by calling 613-688-3979 or 1-866-432-7447. Referrals may also be faxed to 613-820-7427.

WHAT SERVICES DOES THE PROGRAM OFFER?

The Blind - Low Vision program offers three types of services:

Family support:

These services are provided by family support workers who are social workers specially trained in the impact of a visual impairment on child development. The family support worker will help the family understand and cope with the implications of the diagnosis and help them make informed decisions about support services.

Intervention services:

For a child with visual impairment, touch, hearing and the use of remaining or residual vision are critically important for learning and development. Support by trained and knowledgeable professionals in the area of visual impairment is essential to help the child develop these senses to the best of his or her ability. Intervention services are provided by specially trained early childhood vision consultants in the family's home. The consultant teaches parents how to support their child's development in the following areas.

- intentional movement (orientation and mobility)
- development of motor skills (e.g., rolling, reaching, crawling, walking, and use of hands to manipulate and explore objects)
- daily living skills (e.g., eating, dressing, toileting)
- concept development (e.g., object identification, function, and characteristics)
- social and emotional development
- language and communication development
- how to make the most of residual vision
- how to use all the senses to promote development

Consultation services:

When your child enters a child care or early learning centre, Blind - Low Vision Program staff will help the early childhood educators at that centre learn how to best work with and teach your child.

If you have concerns about your child's vision, don't wait. The sooner a problem is identified the sooner your child can have the help he or she needs for the best opportunity for healthy development.

To learn more about developmental milestones of vision -

<http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/earlychildhood/blindnesslowvision/brochure.aspx>