

Briefing Note

Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)

Set-up

- DCD is a chronic motor skill disorder seen in children and youth, which significantly affects activities of daily living, school performance, and leisure activities
- Children with DCD struggle to learn basic motor tasks, such as doing up zippers and buttons, throwing and catching a ball, printing at school, and learning to swim
- DCD affects ~40,000 children in British Columbia, yet most children do not receive a diagnosis, therapy, or support. This number equates to 1-2 children in every classroom
- If left untreated, children with DCD are likely to experience behaviour problems in school and display low academic performance, poor self-esteem, mental health problems, and lower quality of life
- Parents who seek help with their younger children report experiencing delays and difficulties in getting a DCD diagnosis which may contribute to higher family stress levels

Need for change

- Although DCD is a chronic lifelong condition, the good news is that a little treatment can go a long way
- Occupational therapy is effective in helping children with DCD to learn motor skills, to increase their function in daily life, and to improve mental health to allow them to participate and be successful alongside their peers
- ...but intervention for DCD is not yet standard of care
- Best practices in DCD treatment lead to measurable improvements in adaptive functioning (e.g., greater independence with self-care activities, improved written output at school, acquisition of motor skills to enable participation in play and leisure activities), which can have a positive effect on the child's self-esteem and mental health
- Finding a pathway to earlier diagnoses and interventions for children at risk of DCD may change the developmental trajectory for these children and positively contribute to family functioning and overall well-being

The Solution

- Ensure DCD becomes a recognized chronic health condition diagnosis under Ministry of Education "D" designation so that children with DCD can receive the support they need at school
- Facilitate partnership between physicians and occupational therapists
- Ensure funding is available for diagnosis and treatment so that children with DCD can experience success, and the negative developmental trajectory associated with this disorder can be prevented.
- Improve access to school-based occupational therapists (OTs) so children can receive the timely treatment they need, such as the successful classroom-based Partnering for Change Model
- Funding to enable OTs to provide evidence-based intervention as standard of care (currently only those families with access to private funds can afford these treatments)
- Funding for early identification and intervention

Conclusion

- This challenge can be met: excellent examples of targeted funding in British Columbia for children with disabilities already exist (e.g., Autism Funding Program, At Home Program)
- Working together, pediatricians, physicians and occupational therapists can ensure timely diagnosis
- We hope to count on your support in addressing this important issue, as it will increase BC's children's ability to participate and to be successful in life
- These efforts will lead to a positive effect on children's self-esteem and mental health
- Best practices in DCD treatment by OTs can help the children of British Columbia lead a better life

The facts

- There are 691,390 children in BC¹
- DCD affects ~ 40,000 children in British Columbia, but they are under-recognized, under-diagnosed and under-treated
- Occupational therapists (OTs) play a major role in health services delivery, working with children to enable function in activities of daily living, school performance, and leisure activities
- According to the Report of the Expert Panel prepared for the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences, people with chronic health conditions should have access to a system of care throughout their life span no matter where they live, supported by self-management to ensure optimal care, and improved outcomes (CAHS, 2010). Occupational therapists are experts in enabling self-management.
- Occupational therapists have developed an effective treatment approach to support children with DCD to achieve functional motor goals. This approach is called CO-OP² (Cognitive Orientation to Occupational Performance) and is one of the most effective treatments for these children.³ Unfortunately, this treatment is not yet standard of care.

1 Census Profile, 2016 Census - British Columbia and Canada Available from: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=PR&Code1=59&Geo2=&Code2=&Data=Count&SearchText=British%20Columbia&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&GeoLevel=PR&GeoCode=59>

2 Polatajko HJ, Mandich AD, Miller LT, Macnab JJ. Cognitive orientation to daily occupational performance (CO-OP) part II the evidence. *Physical & Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics*. 2001 Jan 1;20(2-3):83-106.

3 Blank R, Smits-Engelsman B, Polatajko H, Wilson P. European Academy for Childhood Disability (EACD): recommendations on the definition, diagnosis, and intervention of developmental coordination disorder (long version). *Dev Med Child Neurol*. 2012;54:54-93