



Ontario Association of Young Parent Agencies

serving infants, children and young parents - together

l'Association Ontarienne des Agences pour Jeunes Parents

servir nourrissons, enfants et jeunes parents - ensemble

February 2026 Newsletter

12 min read



Message from Nicole Perryman, Chair, O

*30 Years of Black History Month: Honouring
Brilliance Across Generations — From Nation
Builders to Tomorrow's Visionaries*

Each year, Black History Month offers an opportunity to honour the experiences, achievements, and enduring contributions of Black communities in Canada, while deepening our collective understanding of their impact on our society. This year marks a significant milestone as Canada recognizes 30 years of Black History Month, under the theme unveiled by the Honourable Marc Miller: Honouring Black Brilliance Across Generations — From Nation Builders to Tomorrow's Visionaries.

This moment invites both celebration and reflection. While we uplift the leadership, creativity, and resilience of Black Canadians, we must acknowledge the ongoing realities of anti-Black racism and systemic barriers that continue to affect Black individuals, families, and communities. As we reflect on the past and present, we are reminded of our shared responsibility to advance equity, amplify community voices, and support approaches that foster belonging, dignity, and opportunity.

Black excellence is not limited to celebrated milestones or well-known figures. It lives in the everyday acts of parenting under pressure, advocacy within systems that were not designed for Black families, and the quiet leadership of those who continue to build community despite ongoing inequities. It is found in the strength of young Black parents navigating housing instability, child welfare involvement, financial precarity, health inequities, and disproportionate surveillance within the criminal justice system, often simultaneously.

These realities are shaped by systemic and historical forces rooted in anti-Black racism and colonial legacies that continue to impact Black families across multiple systems. Recognizing

Black excellence therefore requires honesty: an acknowledgment that resilience should never be mistaken for justice, and survival should never replace accountability.

Black History Month is also a call to action.

It urges organizations, service providers, and institutions to move beyond symbolic recognition toward culturally responsive, community-oriented practice. This includes centering Africentric and Indigenous ways of being; approaches grounded in relationality, collective care storytelling, land-based knowledge, intergenerational wisdom, and holistic wellness. When families are supported in ways that honour their cultural identities and lived experiences, outcomes are strengthened, trust is restored, and healing becomes possible.

We also take this moment to celebrate those whose work often goes unseen: the Black staff, community practitioners, peer supporters, allies who show up daily for Black families. We acknowledge their commitment to meeting families where they are, challenging inequities

systems, and creating courageous spaces for healing, reflection, and growth. Their labour, emotional, cultural, and relational, is essential and deserving of recognition.

As we honour 30 years of brilliance, let us recommit ourselves to the work ahead. May we continue to listen deeply, act boldly, and stand in solidarity with Black families, not only in February, but every day. Black history is not only something we remember. It is something we actively shape, together.

Significant Dates

February 2026	Black History Month
February 10-14	NonProfit Appreciation Week
February 16	Family Day
February 25	Pink Shirt Day
February 26	Member Meeting (1-3:30 pm)

Member Updates



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PREVENTING FOOD ALLERGIES IN INFANTS

Research has shifted our understanding of early introduction of common food allergens, and timely guidance for young parents is essential. This webinar provides Young Parent and Infant Agency staff, childcare workers and leaders with clear, evidence-based strategies to support young parents in safely introducing common allergens (e.g. peanuts, egg) to their infants and the importance of keeping it in their diets.

Participants will learn practical steps for early allergen introduction, how to explain the evidence in simple, supportive ways, and how to navigate common challenges—including feeding anxiety and inconsistent guidance. The session emphasizes an equity- and trauma-informed approach to supporting young families, reflecting OAYPA's strategic commitment to strengthening prevention and early intervention across the sector.

Join us to build confidence in supporting young parents and help reduce the risk of food allergies in the infants you work with.

Speakers:

- Dr. Stephanie Erdle, Pediatric Allergist, BC Children's Hospital
- Jennifer Gerds, Executive Director, Food Allergy Canada

When: Wednesday, February 18th, 2026
11:00 - 11:45 AM

Register Here: 

The bottom of the flyer features the Food Allergy Canada logo, a QR code, and various food icons including a bowl of pasta, a fish, a pumpkin, an egg, and strawberries.

Food Allergy Canada

OAYPA is proud to be partnering with Food Allergy Canada on an upcoming webinar focused on food allergies and supporting young parents and their children. As part of this collaboration, we are sharing this timely and informative article to build awareness and practical understanding.

We invite you to read the feature below and promote the webinar below to your program teams: [What You Need to Know About Preventing Food Allergies in Infants](#)

When: Wednesday, February 18th, 2026, 11:00-11:45AM

Starting solids is a big milestone, and when foods are introduced, matter in the prevention of food allergies. Here are 5 key takeaways for young parents taken from Food Allergy Canada's resource [Eat Early, Eat Often](#) which offers practical guidance on the early introduction of allergens.

Introduce allergenic foods early to help stop food allergy from developing: The Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology and the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) recommend that common food allergens are fed to babies at around 6 months of age. If there is a high risk of developing food allergy, introduction can start earlier than 6 months once developmentally ready, but not before 4 months. High-risk babies have eczema or pre-existing food allergy, or a parent/sibling with eczema, food allergy, asthma, or hay fever.

1. The most common causes of food allergies in babies are cow's milk, egg, peanut, tree nuts, sesame, wheat, soy, and fish.
2. Once introduced, it's very important to keep the food in the diet by continuing to feed it at least once a week: Giving it just once only sometimes could increase the chance of an allergy developing.
3. Feeding allergenic foods for the first time in most babies is safe.
4. Feed the baby allergenic foods for the first time at home.
5. Feed the baby one food at a time to see how they respond.

It is important to note that CPS recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. For breastfed babies, avoid occasionally giving cow's milk formula, as it can increase the risk of cow's milk allergy. This includes supplementing with cow's milk formula in the first few days of life. If it has been introduced, Canadian allergists recommend continuing to give it daily to prevent milk allergy from developing while maintaining daily breastfeeding.

These simple, practical steps fit into everyday feeding routines and help reduce anxiety around introducing new foods. Young Parent Agencies can play a vital role by sharing this guidance, normalizing early allergen introduction, and reinforcing that parents are not alone navigating infant feeding. Clear, supportive information helps families make informed choices and sets the foundation for healthier beginnings. Download and share [Eat Early Eat Often](#) for practical guidance on how to start early introduction of food, including tips, red flags, and signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction in babies. Visit foodallergycanada.ca/earlyintro for this resource and others including webinars, videos from a Registered Dietitian, and more!



Member Spotlight: Columbus House Pembroke

OAYPA is proud to recognize member agency Columbus House Pembroke which was recently featured by United Way East Ontario (check out the article and video [here](#)) for its expanded programming supporting youth experiencing homelessness and complex mental health challenges in Renfrew County. The feature highlights how partnership funding enabled Columbus House to strengthen staffing, add counselling supports, and deepen collaboration with local systems to better meet the needs of youth in crisis. Centred on prevention, stability, and dignity, this work reflects the critical role community-based agencies play in helping young people move out of survival mode and toward long-term housing and well-being.

Congratulations to Columbus House Pembroke for this well-deserved recognition and for exemplifying the impact of OAYPA members across the province.

Study offers evidence that racial bias is at play in overrepresentation of Black youth in Canadian child welfare systems

Analysis of national data reveals Black children are more likely to be placed out-of-home than white children, including when case characteristics are otherwise similar



Evidence, Equity, and Child Welfare: Reflections from New Canadian Research

Recent research from McGill University, published on January 12, 2026, offers important evidence that racial bias—specifically anti-Black racism—contributes to the overrepresentation of Black youth in Canadian child welfare systems. For organizations working with children, youth, and families, this research invites critical reflection on how systems intended to protect can also produce harm. The study examined national child welfare data and found that Black children are not only investigated at higher rates than their white counterparts but are also significantly more likely to be placed out-of-home, even when their cases are otherwise similar.

Key Findings from the Study

Using data from the Canadian Incident Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (2019), researchers found that:

- Black children are investigated by child welfare authorities at more than twice the rate of white children.
- When cases were matched for similar clinical and economic factors, Black children were placed out-of-home at twice the rate of white children.
- These disparities cannot be explained by poverty or socioeconomic hardship alone, pointing to racial bias within the system.
- Black children were more likely to be reported as having experienced physical abuse, despite no significant differences in actual physical harm, raising concerns about biased perceptions of Black parenting.
- Child welfare involvement itself can be invasive and may be a source of trauma rather than protection.

As the study's lead author, Dr. Alicia Boatswain-Kyte, notes, these findings challenge common assumptions about why disparities exist and highlight how heightened scrutiny and disproportionate system involvement shape the experiences of Black children and families.

Why this Matters for OAYPA

This research aligns closely with OAYPA's commitment to anti-racism and anti-oppression. Anti-Black racism is a systemic issue, embedded in policies, practices, and decision-making processes. This research reinforces the importance of:

- Continuously examining how bias, power, and surveillance operate within child welfare and related systems.
- Using least-intrusive, culturally responsive approaches that respect family autonomy and dignity.
- Grounding our work in evidence, reflection, and accountability to better support equitable outcomes for children and families.

Read the full McGill University article here:

<https://www.mcgill.ca/newsroom/channels/news/study-offers-evidence-racial-bias-play-overrepresentation-black-youth-canadian-child-welfare-systems-370209>



Ontario Intensive Treatment Pathway Conference Resources

The [Ontario Intensive Treatment Pathway \(OITP\)](#), held its first-ever symposium in Ottawa, marking a significant milestone in transforming intensive mental health treatment for children and youth across the province. OITP represents an unprecedented model that will transfer the intensive treatment system in Ontario and improve access for children and youth up to the age of 17, with the most significant mental health needs, with an initial focus on live-in treatment delivered through a provincially guided, regionally delivered approach. Access the PowerPoint presentations from the conference [here](#).

SickKids Consultation Sessions Reminder

All are welcome to the SickKids monthly Consultation Sessions: Bring Your Team! Any questions? Contact Bev (bmackillop@abionacentre.ca)

Monthly 2nd Wednesday (1:00 - 2:30PM) [Click here to join these sessions.](#)

Dates: 11-Feb-26, 11-Mar-26, 8-Apr-26, 13-May-26, 10-Jun-26

Monthly 4th Wednesday (9:00 – 10:30 AM) [Click here to join these sessions.](#)

Dates: 25-Feb-26, 25-Mar-26, 22-Apr-26, 27-May-26, 24-Jun-26

All Are Welcome to the SickKids Bimonthly Consultation Sessions: Bring Your Team!

SickKids Telemental Health Consultation Sessions, facilitated by Dr. Dafni Sadler and Gillian Thompson are available to all OAYPA agency staff for 2025-2026. These OAYPA-specific consultations are an opportunity to connect with colleagues across the province, fostering a community of practice and offering essential guidance for our daily work. Through dynamic discussions with SickKids and case study presentations by agency staff, we will collectively learn and grow from one another's experiences.

These sessions run twice a month. Feel free to attend as many sessions as you wish.

[Click on the link below to join the conversation!](#)

Frequency: Monthly 2nd Wednesday (1:00 - 2:30PM)
Dates: 10-Sep-25, 8-Oct-25, 12-Nov-25, 10-Dec-25, 14-Jan-26, 11-Feb-26, 11-Mar-26, 8-Apr-26, 13-May-26, 10-Jun-26

Get Involved!

Are you an allied healthcare practitioner working with infants, young children, and their families? Your frontline experience can provide essential insight into the supports, gaps, and opportunities within Canada's infant and early mental health systems.

Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion (IEMHP) wants to better understand the realities you face and identify the resources, supports, and system-level changes that would strengthen your ability to serve children and caregivers effectively.

Your input will directly inform efforts to build more responsive, equitable, and coordinated services for young children and their families across the country. We invite you to complete a brief survey that will help guide the development of future training, tools, and systems-improvements across sectors. The survey takes only a few minutes to complete.



ASQ Data Study Queen's University/ IEMHP SickKids – CanDDIS

The aim of Canadian Database of Development, Infancy to 5 (CanDDIS) is to evaluate how pre-school children are developing using developmental screening tools called the Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQs). Scores from the ASQs will be collected from community-based agencies and child welfare agencies. The goal is to learn about community health and program policy. We want to learn about this because Canada currently does not have a system for understanding how children under 6-years old are developing. There are several community agencies taking part in this project from across Canada.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the updated Memorandum of Understanding. If you wish more information, please contact Dr. Karys Peterson-Katz (karys.peterson-katz@sickkids.ca).

Ministry Updates

Ministry of Education

In order to better support families, Ontario is amending a regulation under the Child Care and Early Years Act so that Canadian Disability Benefit payments will not be considered income when determining eligibility for childcare fee subsidies.

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

To help ensure housing assistance is directed to those most in need, Ontario is making its annual adjustment to Household Income Limits and High Needs Income Limits under the Housing Services Act. This adjustment reflects the latest data from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and is used by local Service Managers to assess eligibility for housing supports like rent-geared-to-income assistance.



Ministry of Health

Ontario is strengthening health services for expectant families: expanding the scope of practice of midwives and Indigenous midwives and making changes to the provincial newborn and prenatal screening programs. An amendment to O. Reg 45/21 under the Laboratory and Specimen Collection Centre Licensing Act will:

Add 29 tests to the list of tests that midwives and Indigenous midwives may order

- Allow midwives and Indigenous midwives to perform first Point of Care Tests
- Add a new test (X-ALD) to the newborn screening program



- Add three new tests (Fetal Blood Group Genotyping, Fe RHD and first trimester preeclampsia biomarker) under prenatal screening program



Fundraising & Grants

Charity Village

Charity Village offers a thorough list of Canadian corporate funders and private foundations that are crucial for grant seekers. These list a treasure trove of information, including details on various funding programs:

Corporate Funders: [Explore the list.](#)

Private Foundations: [Explore the list.](#)

Build a successful corporate fundraising program with this [eLearning course.](#)

Corporate fundraising can be a gamechanger for organizations, but it's tough to know where to start. The good news is that it's easier to build momentum once you know the fundamentals. This course provides the practical tools needed to help you build stronger partners and bring in corporate support with confidence, including;

- An overview of corporate funding options and partnership opportunities
- Practical steps to plan outreach, build a prospect list, and steward support
- Plus, more!

Professional Development



Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion



Last Call for ASQ/DSP Training

The next free ASQ/DSP training cohort for OAYPA staff is starting in February and it's not too late to register. Please send staff name, ro email and session selections to Tamar Meyer.

Orientation Session 1	Tuesday, February 3, 2026	11:30am - 12:00pm EST	11:30am - 12:00pm ES
Orientation Session 2	Thursday, February 5, 2026	1:00pm - 1:30pm EST	1:00pm - 1:30pm EST
ASQ Session 1	Wednesday, February 11, 2026	10:00am - 12:00pm EST	1:00pm - 3:00pm EST
ASQ Session 2	Thursday, February 12, 2026	10:00am - 12:00pm EST	10:00am - 12:00pm EST
DSP Session 1	Tuesday, February 17, 2026	1:00pm - 3:00pm EST	1:00pm - 3:00pm EST
DSP Session 2	Wednesday, February 18, 2026	10:00am - 12:00pm EST	10:00am - 12:00pm EST
Implementation Session 1	Tuesday, February 24, 2026	10:30am - 12:00pm EST	10:30am - 12:00pm EST
Implementation Session 2	Thursday, February 26, 2026	1:00pm - 2:30pm EST	1:00pm - 2:30pm EST



Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion

Upcoming Webinars

- [Black History Month; Exploring Black Leadership - Panel](#)

February 5, 2026, 1:00 – 2:00 PM

- [Disrupting Microaggressions in the Workplace](#)

February 10, 2026, 1:00 – 2:00 PM

The [CCDI Diversity Calendar](#) is the perfect tool to help HR professionals, DEIA specialists, and advocates for inclusivity foster a more inc and respectful workplace, as you recognize and honour the diverse beliefs and observances important to members of your agency.

Please also find [CCDI Glossary of DEIA Terms \(October 2024\).pdf](#) available on the OAYPA Resource Hub!



Hanan Centre continues provides free literacy training for those working with children under 5. Please see the information below.

[Submit application](#) for the Spark Communication™ workshop

[Submit application](#) for the Hanen 4 "I"s to Socialize™ workshop



National Center on
Substance Abuse
and Child Welfare

Webinar: [Strengthening Father Engagement to Improve Child and Family Outcomes](#)

Feb 4, 2026 02:00 PM

Strong families remain a cornerstone of a healthy society and, fathers play a crucial role—especially in the areas of child safety, stability, well-being. Children with involved fathers experience stronger developmental foundations and lower risks for poor outcomes, such as academic challenges, justice system involvement, substance use, and infant mortality. However, fathers with substance use disorders (SUD) who are also involved with child welfare often experience organizational practices and procedures designed for mothers. This webinar:

- Explores the importance of engaging fathers
- Offers attendees practical strategies to overcome common barriers to engagement in child welfare, SUD treatment, and court services
- Demonstrates how these efforts strengthen family support systems and lead to improved outcomes—such as increased reunification, reduced risk of future maltreatment allegations, and shorter stays in foster care

The session will provide strategies to fully integrate fathers into services while increasing safety factors for children and families affected by substance use and child welfare involvement.

Attendees will

- Recognize the importance of: 1) including fathers in child welfare and treatment case planning, and 2) promoting father-child relationships
- Learn effective strategies to engage fathers in treatment and services
- Identify ways to promote father engagement within child welfare, SUD treatment, and court systems



Perinatal Programming of Mental Disorders at McMaster University

Feb 26, 2026, 6:30 PM EST

This [webinar](#) is designed for health care providers supporting perinatal populations. This session will explore the prevalence and impact of Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADs), introduce evidence-based screening using the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) and highlight a 9-week group Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) program tailored for perinatal clients. Explore referral pathways and community supports in York Region, while gaining practical tools to provide trauma-informed, culturally responsive care. Featuring expert insights from Dr. Ryan Van Lieshout (Perinatal Psychiatrist Women's Health Concerns Clinic, St Josephs Healthcare Hamilton), Valerie D'Amico (RN, BScN, MN (Manager, Healthy Growth and Development, York Region Public Health, York Region) and Dr. Joanne Fernandes (Associate

Medical Officer of Health, York Region Public Health, York Region), and lived experience perspectives, this webinar supports your role in advancing maternal mental health through a stepped care approach.



Workplace Safety and Prevention Services Ontario - Free eCourses

Whether you're an employer, supervisor, worker, or safety professional in Ontario, workplace safety is everyone's responsibility. From now until March 31, 2026, Workplace Safety and Prevention Services Ontario (WSPS) is offering select virtual courses completely free to help build a safer, more compliant work environment – without added costs. There is no limit to the number of courses per participant, and a promotional code is required.

Please note that all eCourses must be completed by April 30, 2026. For more information, click [here](#).



SafeGuards is a partnership of provincial associations dedicated to providing culturally informed training on trauma-informed practice, trauma assessment and treatment and related effects of trauma. OAYPA is an Association Member of SafeGuards. OAYPA agencies receive a member's rate, which is 12-23% off on SafeGuards training fees. Save an additional 20% off with group registration of 4 or more participants. Download the group registration form [here](#). For more information and to browse their list of courses, see below/click [here](#).

The following courses may be of interest to you.

- [Painting Rainbows: Engaging the RAINBOW Model to Support 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth](#)

February 3 & 4, 2026, 12:30 – 4:00 PM

- [Using Trauma-Informed Principles in Supporting Intergenerational Trauma in First Nation Communities](#) February 10 & 11, 2026, 1:00 – 4:00 PM
- [Surviving and Thriving: Supporting Caregivers](#) February 12 & 13, 2026, 1:00 – 3:00 PM
- [1 of 2: Trauma Informed Supervision](#) February 23, 2026, 1:00 – 4:00 PM
- [2 of 2: Trauma Informed Supervision](#) February 25, 2026, 1:00 – 4:00 PM
- [Self-Compassion in the Workplace; Caring for Ourselves While Caring for Others](#) March 3, 2026, 1:00 – 4:00 PM ,
- [Trauma Informed Care; Supporting Individuals with Developmental Disabilities](#) March 5, 2026, 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM & March 6, 2026, 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
- [Therapeutic Journaling: An Evidence-Based Intervention](#) March 9, 2026, 12:30 – 4:00 PM
- [Using the STAIR Model and Critical Race Theory when Working with Black Youth and Families](#) March 10 & 11, 2026, 1:00 – 4:00 PM
- [Compassionate Leadership; Fostering Self-Care and Well-Being in Staff Teams and Organizations](#) March 12, 2026, 1:00 – 4:00 PM
- [Indigenous Perspectives on the Mental Health of Children and Youth](#) March 30 & 31, 2026, 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Follow us on social media!

LinkedIn: [Ontario Association of Young Parent Agencies \(OAYPA\)](#)

Instagram: [@OAYPA](#)

Facebook: [Ontario Association of Young Parent Agencies](#)

X: [@TheOntarioAsso1](#)
