Wanted: better access to therapy services for special needs kids in rural BC

What you need to know:
In rural BC, long wait times and therapist recruitment challenges limit access to therapy services for children with special needs. Using remote communications like webcams, encouraging collaboration between therapists, and specialised therapist education programs are suggested to improve access to EIT services in BC rural communities.

What is this research about?
In British Columbia (BC), the Early Intervention Therapy (EIT) program delivers physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech-language therapy and family support services to children with special needs from birth to school entry. In rural BC, long wait times and challenges recruiting therapists limit access to EIT.

The BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and the BC Association for Child Development and Intervention want to improve access to EIT for children with special needs in rural areas.

What did the researcher do?
This project involved researching ways to improve access to EIT in rural BC. The researchers reviewed writing on the subject and conducted interviews using these questions:

- What is most effective in improving access to EIT services in difficult to serve areas?
- How are others improving access to EIT in rural areas?

What did the researcher find?
The research findings highlight therapists collaboratively assessing clients as among the most effective ways to help more children. This approach also helps new

Prompt EIT services are crucial to maximising the development of children with developmental disorders.
therapists be effective in their jobs. The findings support using video and audio devices to give therapy remotely. It was also found that increased access to employment training programs for therapists can improve access to EIT services in rural areas. Particularly, programs specializing on practicing therapy rurally.

How can you use this research?

This research will be vital for anyone providing services for children with special needs in rural areas, from policymakers to therapists. This research began to support EIT services in remote and rural BC; however, the findings can be tailored to other remote and rural communities outside of BC. In the project report, the researchers included helpful case studies on how each approach is used successfully in EIT services. Further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of EIT strategies in rural BC and to look at approaches appropriate for rural Indigenous communities.

About the researchers

University of Victoria (UVic) student Katie Whyte conducted this research as part of the Graduate Studies 505 interdisciplinary research internship course.

Drs. Gord Miller and Wayne Mitic of the UVic School of Child and Youth Care both supervised the research project.

Facilitated by UVic’s Research Partnerships and Knowledge Mobilization unit, this project is a partnership between BC’s MCFD, BCADI, and UVic.

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Keywords

Early intervention therapy services; early child development; physiotherapy; occupational therapy; speech-language pathology; speech-language therapy; therapeutic intervention; family support services; developmental delay; disability; children with special needs; remote communities; rural communities

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