

## Prenatal Education in Ontario

# Concerns and Needs of Prenatal Educators



In 2014, Best Start Resource Centre undertook a needs assessment to learn more about the needs of prenatal educators in Ontario. There were 340 respondents from across the province including public health nurses, childbirth educators, community health nurses, midwives, doulas, home visitors and health promoters etc. This fact sheet provides an overview of the supports prenatal educators indicated they need to do their jobs effectively.

## Trends and Challenges in Prenatal Education Delivery

New trends among expectant families identified by prenatal educators included:

- Interest in resources and information on topics such as father involvement, midwifery, comfort during natural birth, and mental health
- Desire for evidence-based information
- Increase in the use of social media
- Decrease in prenatal class attendance
- Increase in parents who do not speak English



Prenatal educators felt that expectant families face the following challenges in regards to participation in prenatal education/information:

- Lack of transportation
- Cost
- Lack of time
- Low value placed on prenatal education
- Mixed messages received about topics such as alcohol consumption
- Fewer referrals by health care providers
- The influence of the media

Additional concerns identified by prenatal educators included:

- Prenatal education is very general and does not always reflect individual life experiences
- Many women feel that labour and birth is something to be afraid of
- People who need information do not always receive it
- Prenatal educators' ability to reach vulnerable populations (such as those with low incomes, etc.)
- Prenatal educators' ability to keep up to date with new information

## The Development of New Supports to Strengthen Prenatal Education Services

Prenatal educators identified a number of areas where they felt they required support, including:

1. Reaching a larger number of future parents
2. Reaching future parents earlier in pregnancy
3. Receiving additional training
4. Making classes more interactive
5. Engaging fathers and partners



Prenatal educators indicated that a number of resources would be useful when working with future parents, including:

1. Prenatal videos with Canadian content
2. Interactive activities, for use in face-to-face sessions
3. Prenatal apps, to offer future parents information that is relevant to their stage of pregnancy
4. Comprehensive handouts for future parents available at low or no cost
5. Free workbooks that could be downloaded or printed and used by future parents
6. Consistent, evidence-based key messages for prenatal education in Ontario

## Meeting the Needs of Providers

Prenatal educators, individually and collectively, have the obligation to continue to look at ways to address the barriers to prenatal education, define and meet their learning and resource needs, and to address specific challenges such as reaching and meeting the needs of specific populations, meeting the demand for prenatal education, reaching women early in their pregnancies, and developing engaging approaches to prenatal education. Communities of practice, training events and other knowledge translation mechanisms offer opportunities to learn, share and network, to meet these and other needs. There is also keen interest in working collectively towards consistent, evidence-based prenatal education key messages for Ontario, in order to improve the quality and consistency of prenatal education.

## Reference

Best Start Resource Centre. (2014). *Prenatal Educator Needs Assessment*.

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