



# kids first.

Building Alberta's Capacity to Support Children  
— A Strategic Framework for Change —



Alberta is leading the country in changing how children receive support and care. In the process, Alberta Children's Services is undergoing a fundamental transformation in order to put the well being of the child at risk as the central purpose of all that it does.

This change is part of a broader picture of how Alberta can "Put Children First." The principles and strategies outlined in this framework involve all sectors of our society – parents, extended families, communities, businesses, service agencies and government. The change is simple but far-reaching. Families, extended families and communities have the primary responsibility for caring for their children. Government provides the leadership and the enabling frameworks to support this responsibility. *All* partners share a focus on ensuring Alberta's children are safe, healthy and able to learn.

From initiatives that invite the private sector to support community-based programs for children, to better integration of services for families, we can all contribute to ensuring our province's children have a chance at a healthy and productive life.

The transformation to **child-focused outcomes** is new and necessary. The national experience with child welfare demands a basic rethinking. Historically, children's services across North America, enabled by statutory authority, have emphasized custody and care issues. There is a strong case to be made that this approach – right across the country – is failing to meet the needs of too many children. As it undertakes this transformation, Alberta Children's Services crucial role as a protector of vulnerable children will remain – but it will focus more clearly on meeting the developmental needs of each child and mobilizing all possible resources within the family, community and broader society to support the well being of children.

Alberta's position as a leader in this reform is the result of three years consultation and effort, including initiatives such as the Task Force on Children at Risk, the ministry's Children's and Youth Forums, reviews of other jurisdictions and input from national and international leaders in the children's services. Alberta has also led the way by developing a cross-ministry approach to services for children. This approach is unique in Canada and the collaboration of a number of Alberta ministries is already well underway on key initiatives.

The basic nature of this change is reinforced in the concept of a "Children's Filter" proposed by Alberta pediatrician, Dr. Lionel Didben. He suggests the core filters for all policy and program decisions should be:

1. *How does this decision affect children?*
2. *Is this decision in the best interests of children?*

As the following diagram shows, Alberta Children's Services is refocusing to ensure that the best interests of children are at the heart of all we do. Our beliefs, strategic directions, strategies, policies and organizational model are adapting to reflect the Kids First concept.

This fundamental change will influence services for children in every way. It will determine priorities, policies and plans. It will impact structure, roles and responsibilities. It will shape Alberta's new child welfare legislation and it will influence the ways in which people and partner organizations work together. The links to community support agencies must be strong and government ministries must work seamlessly – integrating their policies and programs more efficiently and effectively.

Healthy, self-reliant citizens are the greatest **Alberta Advantage**, and Alberta Children's Services is focused on ensuring all children – especially those at risk – have a fair chance to meet their own potential.



## Building Blocks of Change

1. Build capacity for families and communities to support their children.
2. Use the "Children's Filter" to review and develop policies and decisions.
3. Make prevention/early intervention (pre-natal to six years) a top priority with all partners:
  - Greatest long-term impact.
  - Children become self-reliant adults.
  - Supports sustainability.
4. Develop strategic alliances and partnerships—from the grassroots to the boardroom.
5. Engage corporate partners in a purposeful way.
6. Give voice to youth.
7. Develop an outcome-focused culture among partners.
8. Build skills and competencies across the system.
9. Commit to quality and accountability.

## Alberta's Vision – Kids First



### Purpose:

Developing and protecting the potential of each child.



### Beliefs:

#### ***About Alberta's Children...***

- Every child has the right to the support they need to reach their personal potential. Children are entitled to safety, health and the ability to learn no matter who provides their care.

#### ***About Responsibility...***

- The well being of children is, first and foremost, the responsibility of parents – but it is also a shared responsibility of the child's extended family and community, together with support agencies and others who care.

#### ***About Prevention and Intervention...***

- The risks and barriers to a child's safety and development should be identified early and prevented or overcome wherever possible. When intervention is necessary, it should focus on what's best for the child's developmental needs and goals. These interventions should be effective and tailored to the situation, circumstances and capacity of the child's family and community.

***About Aboriginal Children...***

- Relationships with aboriginal people must acknowledge and support the unique concerns and cultural and traditional needs of First Nation's children.

***About Staff Commitment...***

- Every person and every interaction can impact a child for better or worse.
- Those who work in the field of children's services are skilled and dedicated people who make a positive difference in the lives of the children.

***About the Need for Change...***

- This transformation is vital to the well being of vulnerable children in Alberta and must be pursued by all partners with diligence and determination.

***About Changing Systems...***

- Fundamental change within systems is complex. It takes a shared sense of purpose, committed partners and consistent reinforcement in order to succeed.



**Focus:**

Working together with families and communities, we will focus on outcomes for children.



**Six Strategic Directions:**

**1. Child Centred Outcomes**

- Child welfare practices, policies and programs that support each child to achieve their own potential.
- Assessment and case planning focused on the individual child's developmental milestones.
- Children and families involved in plans and decisions.
- Young people who have been in the child welfare system receive support to make the crucial transition to become independent adults when they turn 18.

## 2. Family Centred Services

Community/Family Engagement

- The strengths of the family, extended family and community are key considerations in case management plans and practices.
- Services are provided in ways that make the most sense given the circumstances of the child and family.
- Families can seek assistance without statutory involvement by Children's Services.
- Whichever "door" a family enters first will enable access to all the supports and services they need.
- There is a continuity of coordinated services and support to the family – before, during and after services are provided.
- Children and families assessed at high risk will continue to access mandatory child protective services just as they do today, but in a more cooperative manner.

## 3. Respect for Diversity

- Children and families will be treated with respect for their potential, dignity, culture, spirituality and diversity.

## 4. Building Community Capacity and Partnerships

Community/Family

Public/Private Partners

Cross-Ministry

- A child's well being is a responsibility shared by all: parents, communities, government, service agencies, the private sector.
- Building the capacity of families and communities to support and protect children is essential.
- A network of community partners and strategic alliances will work collaboratively to build and support this capacity, and deliver the services, and supports children need.
- Cross ministry efforts will work seamlessly, with shared goals and integrated plans.

## 5. Ensuring Quality and Accountability

1. Being accountable is the personal responsibility of everyone involved in providing services and support to children at risk – parents, child welfare staff and public and private sector partners. Each person in this network is responsible for ensuring that their decisions, actions, plans and communications acknowledge the impacts on, and benefits to, the child.
2. This personal accountability, supported by organizational standards and performance measures, will ensure quality, consistency and substantive change.
3. Everyone involved with children and families must always ask:
  - *How can my decision/action/practice affect this child?*
  - *What will this mean for this child 10 years from now?*
  - *Can I be a better partner in the network of providers by sharing information, coordinating efforts and understanding others?*
  - *How have I demonstrated my own responsibility and accountability?*

## 6. Enabling Transformation

- The process of transforming Alberta's approach to child welfare will require changes in culture, relationships, structures and priorities. Transformation is exciting and rewarding. The organization must continually ask itself:
  - *Do our culture, beliefs, language, mind-set, and every-day practices support transformation?*
  - *Is the organization structured appropriately for transformation?*
  - *How are we ensuring coherence with the goals of transformation across our organization – and with all of our partners?*
  - *Do our staff understand, accept and champion our purpose and focus? Are they prepared to participate and be accountable?*
  - *Do we have the infrastructure and technology to ensure an efficient and effective transformation?*



## Key Alberta Children's Services Initiatives to Support Change

### **Alberta Response Model:**

- Assessment planning and support geared to child's needs and circumstance.

### **Child Welfare Act Review:**

- Legislation to enable transition to Kids First concept.

### **Quality Assurance Framework:**

- Standards are set and met.

### **Strategic Partner Networks:**

- Build community capacity.
- Private/public sector.
- Accountability "built-in".

### **Central Intake:**

- Exploring the concept of an integrated, "one-window" system.



## The Building Blocks Of Change

