

Government of Alberta's Response to Strengthening Foundations: Assessment, Information-Sharing and Collaboration, An Investigative Review

On September 7, 2021, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) released a report titled *Strengthening Foundations: Assessment, Information-Sharing and Collaboration – An Investigative Review*. The purpose of the report is to identify whether services and supports were appropriate, provide public assurance and identify systemic issues that might have been present.

The death of any child is a tragedy. Our thoughts are with those who continue to grieve each of these children and youth. We have carefully reviewed the recommendations with an eye to continuously improving services for vulnerable children and youth in Alberta.

The OCYA's report makes two recommendations directed towards Children's Services (CS) and several other ministries.

CS' response includes information gathered from the following sources:

- a review of existing policies in comparison to issues identified in the report;
- a review of current ministry initiatives, practice and program directions related to issues identified in the report; and
- engagement across divisions, regional service delivery partners and other ministries.

We thank the Office of Child and Youth Advocate for the necessary work they do on behalf of children and youth in our province.



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Recommendation	Ministry Response	Actions Planned or Underway
<p><i>The Ministries of Children's Services, Health, Education, Justice and Solicitor General, and Community and Social Services should review and adjust their quality assurance processes to include both qualitative and quantitative measures that regularly evaluate service delivery within their systems.</i></p> <p><i>Further Comments:</i> <i>The quality assurance measures should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>be based on the organization's principles and be culturally inclusive so evaluation tools and measures are meaningful and appropriate to meet the needs of Alberta's diverse populations;</i> - <i>evaluate the quality of interactions and inform how services are being delivered; and</i> - <i>result in improved decision-making, as well as overall improvement in the lives of young people and their families.</i> 	<p>CS accepts this recommendation and shares the Advocate's desired outcome of achieving improved quality assurance processes.</p>	<p>The Service Delivery Accountability Standards (SDAS) is a suite of measures providing operational quality assurance information to Service Delivery Directors, management, front-line workers and corporate staff. The SDAS measure, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the quality of services provided to children, youth and families. They reflect key areas of the child intervention system, and include the Child Intervention Standards, that complement and align with current policy and legislation expectations.</p> <p>There is a commitment to review the results of Child Intervention Standards on a regular basis and make revisions, as required, as part of the continuous improvement cycle to ensure the standards remain relevant and current initiatives and policy directions are reflected. The standards have been undertaken as a means to evaluate service delivery since 2010, and have evolved over the years. In the future, more focused qualitative reviews will take place to affirm the validity and accuracy of data collected within the Child Intervention Case Information Online system.</p> <p>Special topic-specific reviews measure the implementation of initiatives, service delivery practice and/or outcomes for children and families. Reviews were conducted recently, using both quantitative and qualitative measures, on planning for children in</p>

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<p><i>Each ministry is responsible for reporting its own public accountability activities and outcomes, which should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>be publicly available at regular intervals;</i> - <i>be reported in clear, simple language; and</i> - <i>include thorough input and feedback from service delivery staff and clients who received services.</i> <p>Expected Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Child-serving ministries will have balanced quality assurance processes that evaluate both qualitative and quantitative measures, which will indicate if knowledge, critical thinking, analysis, and intervention used in service delivery for young people is improving.</i> - <i>Child-serving ministries will utilize evaluation results to inform program improvement, staff training, and development strategies so services are being provided to children and families as intended.</i> 		<p>permanent care, caregiver transitions and youth transitioning to independence. Currently, the information is being analyzed and will be used to inform policy and practice improvements.</p> <p>An evaluation of recently implemented practice strategies is in progress. Both quantitative and qualitative data will be gathered for this review. Results from this evaluation will also inform policy and practice improvements, service delivery approaches and training.</p>

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<p><i>The Ministries of Children’s Services, Health, Education, Justice and Solicitor General, and Community and Social Services should collaborate and coordinate with Service Alberta to regularly communicate where to access reference and training materials to those responsible for providing services under the Children First Act. Furthermore, these ministries should offer service providers opportunities for ongoing, interactive, cross-systems training on the act.</i></p> <p><i>Further Comments</i> <i>Communication about the Children First Act should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>be targeted towards service providers who promote well-being, safety and security of children and families;</i> - <i>occur at regular intervals; and</i> - <i>be relayed using various platforms, such as public awareness campaigns, emails, hard copy marketing materials, and so on.</i> 	<p>CS accepts the intent of this recommendation and shares the Advocate’s desire for improved outcomes for children and families.</p> <p>The applicability of the <i>Children First Act</i> (CFA) is limited and does not include service delivery for children and families, which is addressed in other existing legislation (such as the <i>Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act</i>, the <i>Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act</i>, the <i>Health Information Act</i> and the <i>Personal Information Protection Act</i>). However, CS acknowledges that staff and service providers need to be informed and knowledgeable of all legislation pertaining to information sharing.</p>	<p>Information sharing strategies and the CFA are a component in Child Intervention Practitioner (CIP) training, required of all practitioners upon employment.</p> <p>Practitioners access the CFA through the Child Intervention online portal.</p> <p>All CS staff are required to complete training specific to information sharing. This training includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information Sharing - Information Sharing Under the CFA - Information Sharing in Practice <p>The online course for Information Sharing under the CFA is also publicly available.</p> <p>CS collaborates with all relevant stakeholders to ensure information-sharing practices are consistently applied to child intervention service delivery.</p> <p>Representatives from CS, Education, Health, Community and Social Services, Justice and Solicitor General and Service Alberta have met to discuss information sharing efforts of respective ministries.</p>

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<p><i>The training should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>be specific to information-sharing;</i> - <i>provide professionals who deliver services to children and families an understanding of the Children First Act (CFA) and how it fits within their ministry's legislation, policies, procedures and practice frameworks;</i> - <i>provide all participants with resource materials to refer to when applying the CFA;</i> - <i>be ongoing, so service providers' knowledge and resources are current;</i> - <i>address service providers' concerns about what information they are able to share, and when, with cross-ministry partners; and</i> - <i>provide a dispute resolution process that can be accessed by service providers when there is disagreement about information-sharing.</i> 		<p>Service Alberta does not have an active role in communicating with service providers, but does host online training related to the CFA, and publishes additional resources on Information Sharing.</p> <p>To address any gaps in service provider knowledge, CS will embed the CFA as a formal contract standard.</p>

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<p><i>The language in the Children First Act related to “best interests of the child” should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>be clearly defined to help reduce confusion and improve consistency when applying the legislation.</i> <p><i>Each ministry is responsible for reporting its own public accountability activities and outcomes, which should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>be publicly available and updated at regular intervals; and</i> - <i>be reported in clear, simple language.</i> <p>Expected Outcome: <i>Children and families will receive holistic services resulting from cross-ministry information-sharing and collaboration among frontline practitioners, which will improve outcomes for Alberta’s families.</i></p>		