

The Honourable Manmeet Bhullar
Minister of Human Services
224 Legislature Building
10800 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

August 21, 2014

Dear Minister Bhullar:

You have asked us to “guide action on Human Services’ 5 Point Plan to improve outcomes for children and ensure action on priorities and recommendations for improving the Child Intervention system.”

This letter is our second report to you and includes:

- a report on progress against the 5 Point Plan;
- a report on our work to review and prioritize past recommendations; and,
- recommendations to better assess child intervention system performance and achieve better outcomes.

Progress against 5 Point Plan

Attached to this letter is a chart summarizing progress on recommendations we made in our April 7th letter to you and Human Services’ 5 Point Plan.

Generally speaking, while progress is incremental and sometimes a little slower than we’d like, solid progress is being made in all areas. I’m pleased to report we continue to receive excellent co-operation and support from the department.

Keep a steady hand. Stay focused.

The Government of Alberta is in the midst of political transition. In our first letter we noted that Alberta’s child intervention system has been buffeted by change and external pressures over the last decade. We would strongly caution the government against major structural changes to the Human Services department and the Child Intervention System in this transition period.

Albertans were understandably concerned when media investigation revealed the number of deaths of children in the government’s care and exposed serious investigation, communication and follow-up problems and more.

The Government has begun to make important and necessary improvements to the Child Intervention System. Major structural changes to Human Services or the Child Intervention System now could be counterproductive, slow progress on these critical improvements and risk eroding care for our most vulnerable citizens.

Verification and prioritization of past recommendations

As we mentioned in our first letter, we began our review of past recommendations by looking at recommendations from 2010 using the 2010 Alberta Child Intervention Review Panel as our starting point. We chose this review to begin our analysis because the panel was a comprehensive system review that considered past recommendations in their report and we felt the recommendations captured in this period were representative of the current state of the Child Intervention System.

Our review looked at 96 recommendations from 17 reports. Of these recommendations the department told us four recommendations were not accepted by government, 55 are complete, 12 are ongoing (are systematic in nature and became part of the ongoing work of the department) and 25 are 'in progress' or incomplete.

These recommendations do not include the 36 recommendations (contained in eight reports from four different sources) that have been submitted to the department subsequent to our review beginning. We have not yet examined those.

Verification of completion

At the IOC's request, the Ministry of Human Services has asked the Government of Alberta's Corporate Internal Audit Service to audit the implementation status of the 55 recommendations listed as complete and the 12 listed as 'ongoing.' The audit is scheduled to take place this fall and be complete in January 2015. The ministry has committed to sharing the results of the audit with the IOC, which we will release publicly.

Approach to prioritization of remaining recommendations

We determined that a conventional prioritization exercise (i.e., ranking, sequencing or resourcing work based on urgency or importance) wasn't feasible. This decision was based on a number of considerations:

- Significant work had often already been undertaken, with actions at various stages of implementation.
- The responses to recommendations with similar topics (or themes) are often interconnected, and usually linked to other departmental/divisional priorities that may be independent of the recommendations themselves.
- The recommendations consistently identified important issues, often central to the Child Intervention System's current practice approach or that reflected core principles.
- Many recommendations had similar or equal urgency or importance.

A sub-committee of the IOC reviewed each recommendation along with the associated response, and divided them into two categories:

A	-All key activities have <u>not</u> been fully developed or initiated. -Further priority work is required to support completion.
B	-Most key activities have been developed and initiated. -Further work can be identified and undertaken through the department’s regular, quality assurance and continuous improvement processes.

A summary of the 25 In-Progress Recommendations, with associated responses and priority categorization (A or B) is included in the table *Child Intervention -- High Level Summary of In-Progress Recommendations (2010-2014) with Priority Categories* attached to this letter.

Next steps

The IOC will seek meetings with the recommenders of the 25 In-Progress recommendations (where possible) to test our conclusions and seek feedback from them to determine our final prioritization.

Getting the full benefit of external review

External review and advice can be invaluable in achieving peak system performance, building public trust and ensuring accountability. Today however, Alberta’s Child Intervention System isn’t getting the full benefit of external review because:

- there is routine acceptance of recommendations without always having a thorough understanding of what is being recommended or how those recommendations will be implemented;
- recommendations and the intended outcomes of recommendations are often unclear;
- there is limited planning for implementation upon receiving recommendations;
- there is no specified accountability for delivery of each recommendation; and,
- there is no consistent audit or review of action against recommendations and their intended outcomes.

To ensure the Child Intervention System gets the full benefit of external reviews, we recommend:

1. The department develop a process to review and discuss proposed recommendations with the recommending body before committing to implement. The purpose of this discussion would be to clarify the intent and feasibility of recommendations which can help ensure that, once accepted, departmental action plans address the identified issues. An approach similar to this is regularly used by Alberta’s Auditor General. For fully independent review bodies such as the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, the department could consider some form of Memorandum of Understanding to outline

how these bodies could work with the department to achieve clear, implementable recommendations.

2. In cases where this type of advance dialogue is not workable, develop a process to discuss the published recommendations with the recommender and develop a clear implementation plan that meets the recommendations' intent. This will require that the Minister allow the department adequate time to consider each review and discuss with the recommending body before responding or accepting the recommendation.
3. Outreach to judges and the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate to establish guidelines for developing recommendations that are clear and precise to support more ready implementation and audit. The SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely) may be a useful model or approach.
4. For each recommendation accepted by government, the department should develop an auditable action plan that has at minimum:
 - a. A clear outcome for each recommendation
 - b. Clearly articulated actions that will be undertaken
 - c. Assigned responsibility for those actions
 - d. Timeline for completion
 - e. Regular review and scheduled audit

Note: defining a clear outcome for each recommendation (a.) is a shared responsibility between the recommender and the department.

How is the Child Intervention System performing?

To put it simply – we don't know. We have no reason to believe Alberta's Child Intervention System is performing poorly, but in the absence of clear and measurable outcome expectations, benchmarking and data to verify performance we can't say with any certainty how we're doing.

There's been some good work in defining outcomes, identifying outcome indicators and collecting supporting data. The outcomes being measured are tied to the National Outcomes Measures (a joint project of provincial ministries responsible for child intervention) but reflect largely what can be measured today (perhaps not everything we need to). Even then, we're still developing the indicators and the indicators we do have aren't benchmarked against our peers or best in class performance, so we can't tell if the data we'll see shows good, bad or average performance (although we will be able to compare against our own performance over time and between regions which is positive). There's also been some nascent and promising work on Outcome Based Service Delivery (OBSD), but OBSD today only covers 14 percent of the Child Intervention System caseload.

We also don't know what happens to children after they leave care. In our view, the ultimate measure of our Child Intervention System should be the success children have as adults. It is

critically important we understand what happens to children when they leave care and become adults so we can adapt our system to give them the greatest chance at success.

In the age of big data and information systems capable of tracking millions of data points, there is no reason why we can't measure the performance of the child intervention system, compare our performance against our peers (and the best in the world) and know whether or not our Child Intervention System sets the children and families involved with it, up for long term success.

Building a performance based, data driven Child Intervention System

To support the assessment of Child Intervention System performance and ongoing performance improvement we're recommending a four point **System Performance Data Strategy**.

The objectives of this strategy are to:

1. Enhance system performance: understand long-term outcomes for children involved in Alberta's child intervention system to inform the evolution of system outcome expectations, practice and legislation;
2. Benchmark Alberta's performance against our peers and international best practices to inform outcome expectations, practice and legislation; and,
3. Improve public confidence: quantify Alberta's performance and share information with publically to build trust and confidence.

This strategy builds on and includes work already in progress and is designed to be conducted simultaneously.

The four points in our proposed System Performance Data Strategy are:

1. *Public reporting of program data and system outcomes*
2. *Benchmarking Alberta's performance*
3. *Review of existing cross-ministerial administrative data on children leaving the Child Intervention System*
4. *Longitudinal study tracking the experiences of current children following their inclusion in the Child Intervention System*

Part 1: Public reporting of program data and system outcomes

Publish Child Intervention System profile data and the 16 Child Intervention System Outcome Indicators. This includes:

- a. Child Intervention statistical profiles

Timeline: July 2014 (Complete).

Data available at <https://osi.alberta.ca/osi-content/Pages/Catalogue.aspx?category=Children and youth>

- b. Interactive online Child Intervention data tool (2008/09 – 2012/13).

Data available at <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/abuse-bullying/cidata/#>

Timeline: July 2014 (Complete)

- c. Child Intervention System outcomes data for 12 established indicators (2008/09 – 2012/13).

Includes measures in four domains: (1) Safety (Recurrence; Maltreatment in Care; Deaths and Serious Injuries); (2) Permanency (Family Preservation, Family Reunification; Adoption & Guardianship; Time in Care; Moves in Care); (3) Well-Being (Well-being); and (4) Family and Community Support (Parental Capacity; Family and Community Engagement; Cultural Connectedness)

Timeline: October 31, 2014.

- d. Complete development of four outcome measures still under development

Includes: school moves, school performance, health and transition to adulthood.

Finalize methodology and data collection

Timeline: 2015-16

Part 2: Benchmarking Alberta Child Intervention System Outcomes & Service Delivery

Benchmark each of Alberta's Child Intervention System outcome indicators and our service delivery standards against our Canadian peers and international best practices. While we may not be able to always get an 'apples to apples' comparison we will be able to get a sense of what others have achieved to get an indicative sense of our performance and what is possible.

Part 3: Review of existing cross-ministerial administrative data on children leaving the Child Intervention System

Support the Child and Youth Data Lab (CYDL) in completing a retrospective, longitudinal analysis of outcomes, focusing on children/youth moving through and exiting the system, using existing program and Government of Alberta data.

The CYDL links and analyzes administrative data about children and youth using government programs and services offered by the Ministries of Education, Innovation and Advanced Education, Health, Human Services and Justice and Solicitor General.

The CYDL has already collected administrative data from a number of Ministries for the year 2008/2009 and provided a "snapshot" of youth ages 12-17 years in Alberta.

They have begun work on a project called “The Experiences of Albertan Children and Youth (2005/2006 to 2010/2011)” and are using cross-ministry administrative data for a longitudinal study of Albertans age 0-30 over a six year time span (2005/2006 to 2010/2011). The goal is to compare groups of service users to the general Albertan population and to study service use within and across Ministries.

This project can answer several key critical questions:

- How many children and youth who have been involved with Child Intervention are accessing or involved with other child and youth services/programs (such as Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) and youth justice)?
- What types of services/programs are young adults who have been involved with Child Intervention accessing/involved with post-intervention (such as, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH), Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD), Support and Financial Assistance Agreements (SFA), Justice, Income Support)?
- What types of education-related programs are young adults who have been involved with the system accessing post-intervention (such as, Advancing Futures Bursary, Student Loans, Post-Secondary Education, High School upgrading)?
- What types of health-system interaction (frequency/diagnosis) and type of usage (doctor visits, ER care, hospital care, etc.) do children in the CI system experience?
- What influence do CI outcomes have on patterns or trajectories of service use? For example, do adoptions/private guardianships, reunifications, preservations and age outs use government systems differently or have patterns to their service and program use?
- How are the trajectories and patterns of service use different for Aboriginal children and youth? For Aboriginal young adults?

Timeline: The project is set to begin reporting in 2016.

Part 4: Longitudinal study tracking the experiences of current children following their inclusion in the Child Intervention System

Conduct a longitudinal study of children involved in the Child Intervention System based on Alberta Incidence Study (2014). The Alberta Incidence Study (AIS) is a study of children involved in the Child Intervention System with information collected from workers in a representative sample of offices across Alberta.

A longitudinal study would follow children in the 2014 Alberta Incidence Study at regular intervals for three to five years. The objective of this study is to understand the longer-term outcomes for children in the Child Intervention System, and support continuous service improvement efforts.

Timeline: Estimated completion 2018/19

Our upcoming work

The IOC is turning our attention to the next topics in our work plan including staff training, leadership and capacity as well as system governance. We are adjusting our schedule to spend extra time to discuss Aboriginal over-representation in the Child Intervention System through the fall. An updated work plan is attached for your information.

On behalf of the Child Intervention System Implementation Oversight Committee I'm pleased to submit this report to you. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments. We aim to have our next report to you by the end of September.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve.

Kindest regards,



Tim Richter
Chair, Implementation Oversight Committee

On behalf of:

Dr. Lionel Dibden, Pediatrician Medical Director, Child and Adolescent Protection Centre, Stollery Children's Hospital; Chair, Child and Family Services Council for Quality Assurance

Ms. Joni Morrison O'Hara, retired Alberta Child Intervention System leader

Dr. Nico Trocmé, Professor of Social Work, McGill University; Co-chair, 2010 Child Intervention Review Panel

Trevor Daroux, Deputy Chief, Calgary Police Service

The Honourable Lawrie J. Smith, Court of Queen's Bench (retired)

Chief Wilton Littlechild, member and former Chief of the Ermineskin Cree Nation, member of the United Nations Human Rights Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Commissioner for the Indian Residential School Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Ms. Lori Cooper, Chief Delivery Officer, Alberta Human Services (ex officio)

Encl.

5 Point Plan Progress Update

Summary of In-Progress Recommendations (with Priority Categories)

IOC Work Plan