

Business Plan 2018–21

Children's Services

Accountability Statement

This business plan was prepared under my direction, taking into consideration our government's policy decisions as of March 7, 2018.

original signed by

Danielle Marie Larivee, Minister

Ministry Overview

The ministry consists of the Department of Children's Services. Within the department's budget, funding is provided for a range of programs and services with a focus on and accountability for protecting children through child intervention, foster and kinship care, adoption, child care, early childhood development and transitioning youth from care into adulthood.

A more detailed description of Children's Services and its programs and initiatives can be found at: www.childrensservices.alberta.ca.

Strategic Context

The outcomes and key strategies identified in this business plan are aligned with the strategic direction of the Government of Alberta.

Children's Services helps make life better for thousands of Alberta's children, youth and families. The ministry does this by helping ensure Alberta's children get the services and supports they need to thrive in healthy families and healthy communities.

During the past few decades, Alberta society has changed. The population has seen strong growth. Many new Albertans have come from other areas of the world. As a result, the province is much more culturally and ethnically diverse and the programs and services the ministry helps deliver must reflect that diversity of need.

In response to the increasing diversity of the province, Children's Services is transforming the ways it supports children, youth and families. It is committed to ensuring effective programs and supports are provided when they are needed and where they are needed. However, the ministry cannot achieve this goal through its efforts alone. Success requires strengthened partnerships with Indigenous leaders and communities, the Government of Canada, and other Government of Alberta ministries. In Alberta, the non-profit and voluntary sectors also play a significant role in the delivery of social services to children, youth and families.

Following a year of engagement with families, youth, communities including Indigenous peoples, stakeholders and experts in the system, the all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention delivered its final recommendations to the Minister of Children's Services. The recommendations call for significant changes to Alberta's child intervention system. Children's Services will work alongside Indigenous communities to co-create solutions that meet their needs and implement these recommendations.

Diverse Families

The province has seen increased numbers of single-parent families, blended families and extended families. As a result, Children's Services needs to be flexible in how it meets those needs.

Advancing gender equality is a priority for the Government of Alberta. Gender equality is intrinsically linked to social and economic growth and is vital to the realization of human rights for all. Across government, this commitment has been operationalized by adopting Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) and establishing Centres of Responsibility in each ministry to assess the gender and diversity implications of engagement processes, policies, programs and initiatives.

Women in Alberta continue to have primary responsibility for caring for children and other dependent-family members. The ability of women to participate in the work force is directly affected by the availability of affordable child care. In 2017 there were an estimated 330,816 children under six in the province.

Supporting families with children and providing accessible, high-quality and affordable child care throughout the province is a priority for the ministry. So too are delivering early childhood development and child protection services.

Families and the Economy

The historic collapse in global oil prices has had a significant impact on Albertans. Alberta had the lowest percentage of two-income families in Canada prior to the recession. This was reflected in the high-paying jobs often available in energy-related industries. To be responsive to Alberta families, Children's Services must be aware of the circumstances they are facing.

Children who experience poverty when they are young are more likely to have poorer health outcomes, learning difficulties, academic underachievement, lower literacy rates, a decreased likelihood of completing high school and postsecondary education, increased exposure to violence, and lower incomes as working adults.

Families experiencing poverty are more likely to struggle to provide the supports that children need. Broad policy choices have been made to provide additional supports for families that may be vulnerable to poverty. These include the Alberta Child Benefit, an enhanced Family Employment Tax Credit, increases to the minimum wage, increases to Family and Community Support Services, and additional investments in child care.

Early Childhood Development

Advances in neuroscience have increased our understanding of how early childhood experiences shape the developing brain, impact child development, and affect well-being and success in later life. The developing brain is highly elastic and grows rapidly up to age five. Many aspects of children's environments effect their development, including learning activities in the home and family income and access to economic and social resources.

Other environments, including high-quality, vibrant early learning environments such as child care, have also been shown to positively impact children's learning and educational achievement in the long term. The province's expansion of Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Centres is intended to provide those kinds of environments for children. This program is another step toward being able to offer a wide range of Albertans with \$25-a-day high-quality, affordable child care.

Child care licensing officers inspect licensed child care programs to ensure the program meets the *Child Care Licensing Act* and the Child Care Licensing Regulation requirements. Compliance with the Act and Regulation ensures the health, safety and well-being of children in the programs and supports their engagement in high-quality learning environments.

The Government of Alberta believes accessible, affordable quality child care is essential to positive early childhood development, labour force participation of parents, women's equality, social integration and inclusion of newcomers, and poverty reduction – all aspects of social and economic growth, and has moved forward on its commitment to Alberta families. In March 2017, the Government of Alberta announced an investment of \$10 million per year for

three years to develop and implement 22 ELCC Centres, followed by a program evaluation. In June 2017, Alberta signed the Multilateral ELCC Framework with federal, provincial and territorial partners, ensuring a foundation of federal investment in affordable child care across Canada. The province announced expansion of the ELCC Centre pilot for 78 additional sites in December 2017, creating 4,500 additional affordable child care spaces, giving families access to quality childcare at \$25-a-day. Expansion is made possible by the Canada-Alberta Bilateral Agreement for federal investment of approximately \$45 million for each of the three years, under the Multilateral ELCC Framework.

Reconciliation

Albertans are reaching new understandings of the history of residential schools and how the Sixties Scoop directly contributed to lower social outcomes and intergenerational trauma experienced in many Indigenous families and communities today.

Intergenerational trauma exists in many families because survivors have not had an opportunity to address the abuse they experienced. These experiences can be transmitted to later generations. Intergenerational trauma has affected the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples and communities, and led to greater social disparity. Continued marginalization of Indigenous peoples and communities must be addressed to help alleviate the effects of intergenerational trauma.

The challenges faced by some Indigenous peoples and communities have contributed to the disproportionate numbers of Indigenous children in care. In the last five years, the number of Indigenous children in care has declined by 16 per cent. While this is heartening, only dedicated action will reduce this number further.

Indigenous children in care deserve to remain connected to their culture. Children's Services is working to improve these cultural connections and provide children opportunities to practice their beliefs, customs, and ceremonies and remain connected to their communities. An Indigenous cultural lens is being applied to all policy priorities to ensure these needs are met.

Canada and Alberta are redefining, reconciling and working to heal the historical relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action call upon all orders of government to work together to change policies and programs in a concerted effort to repair the harm caused by residential schools and move forward with reconciliation.

Children's Services is working toward reconciliation and achieving better social outcomes for Indigenous children and families. It will achieve this through coordinated and collaborative efforts with Indigenous and government partners in policy, relationship building, and service delivery, to collectively address the root causes of social and economic challenges, working collaboratively with Indigenous partners and across governments.

Outcomes, Key Strategies and Performance Measures

Outcome One: Children Thrive – All children thrive through nurturing relationships and safe, supportive environments

Families of all backgrounds do better in healthy, supportive communities that include quality schools, strong primary health care services, community organizations and government services. The ministry recognizes the importance of providing support to children from their early years through to adulthood to develop competencies and coping skills that affect learning, behaviour and health.

Early childhood development, including child care, is based on evidence that all children need a healthy start, nurturing relationships and safe, supportive environments to grow, learn and thrive. Part of this rests on a connected early childhood system of evidence-based prevention and early intervention services in communities that supports the children's healthy development and responds to risks for the vulnerable. The ministry works with community agencies

to provide parents with quality information, supports and services to strengthen family resiliency. Children’s Services has identified accessible, affordable, quality child care as a top priority.

Key Strategies:

- 1.1 Improve access to quality, affordable child care.
- 1.2 Enhance and promote culturally appropriate, community based early childhood services, parenting resources and supports including Francophone, Indigenous and new Canadian sectors of the population served.

Performance Measure	Last Actual 2016-17	Target 2018-19	Target 2019-20	Target 2020-21
1.a Percentage increase in the number of licensed and approved child care spaces ¹	6.6%	4%	4%	4%

Note:

¹ The increase in licensed and approved child care spaces data includes spaces in ELCC centres. Spaces are expected to increase in ELCC centres from approximately 1,300 spaces to an estimated additional 4,500 spaces as the ELCCs expand up to an additional 78 sites. The proportion of spaces in ELCCs in relation to all spaces can be reported. As of November 2017 for example, 1,076 (or 0.88 per cent) of the total 122,480 licensed and approved child care spaces in Alberta are located in the 18 (currently open) of the 22 ELCC Centres. However, it is noted investment in ELCC centres is finite over a period of three years. As the number of ELCC centres stabilizes at approximately 100 sites, the number of spaces in ELCCs will stay relatively constant at around 5,800, whereas other regulated spaces will continue to grow across the province.

Linking Performance Measures to Outcomes:

1.a This measures increases in regulated child care spaces and demonstrates how well Children’s Services is ensuring the accessibility of quality and affordable child care spaces in Alberta.

Performance Indicator	Actual 2013	Actual 2014	Actual 2015	Actual 2016	Actual 2017
1.a Licensed and Approved Child Care Spaces/Enrollment (on March 31st of each fiscal year)					
• Spaces	96,073	99,538	105,310	109,482	116,714
• Enrolment	79,858	83,212	86,280	88,929	93,132
• Per cent enrolled	83.1%	83.6%	81.9%	81.2%	79.8%

Outcome Two: Resilient Families and Communities: Through greater collaboration, supports and services to families and communities are strengthened to support nurturing environments that enhance the development, well-being and resiliency of children and youth

All children, regardless of race, deserve access to supportive environments to help them flourish. Addressing inequality and closing the gap in social outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and families requires thinking differently and having real, community-driven conversations. Responses to issues need to be undertaken in collaboration with communities to develop community-led and culturally grounded actions.

Through collaboration and greater dialogue, the ministry will move towards more open and meaningful relationships for the benefit of all Alberta families, and will strive to create a society where Indigenous people can fully participate in the economic, social and cultural life of this province.

Adolescence is another critical period of development. Youth need access to supportive relationships and environments throughout their teenage years in order to build resiliency and develop the skills needed to successfully transition into adulthood. Access may include resiliency focused youth programs that address identity, positive engagement

with youth, transitional planning, mentoring, mental health supports, accessible accommodations and supports for homeless youth, educational attainment and employment.

Transition into adulthood can be challenging, particularly for youth transitioning out of care. Children’s Services recognizes a youth’s potential by providing them with the resources and supports needed to reach their goals and overcome challenges. To this end, Children’s Services provides opportunities for all youth transitioning out of care to achieve success.

Key Strategies:

- 2.1 Collaborate with Indigenous communities, leaders and partners to strengthen relationships and develop strategies to support Indigenous children, youth and families.
- 2.2 Together with Indigenous leaders, implement the intent of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth & Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action.
- 2.3 Formally support Jordan’s Principle¹ to meet the needs of First Nations children.
- 2.4 Support the successful transitioning for youth out of care into adulthood.
- 2.5 Improve mentoring opportunities for children and youth who have experienced trauma, including youth in care and Indigenous youth, focusing on career exploration, pre-employment skills and life skills.
- 2.6 Develop and implement strategies to increase wellbeing and resiliency of children and families, including developing a Suicide Prevention Plan with community-driven, Indigenous approaches to address youth suicide.

Performance Measures	Last Actual 2016-17	Target 2018-19	Target 2019-20	Target 2020-21
2.a Percentage of Advancing Futures Bursary youth who completed their educational studies	85%	87%	88%	89%
2.b Percentage of Jordan’s Principle ¹ requests assessed within 48 hours or less	n/a ²	100%	100%	100%

Notes:

- ¹ Jordan’s Principle is a child-first principle meant to prevent First Nations children from being denied essential public services or experiencing delays in receiving them. Source: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/first-nations-inuit-health/jordans-principle.html>
- ² The 48-hour target was put in place in June 2017 and is not applicable for 2016-17.

Linking Performance Measures to Outcomes:

- 2.a Demonstrates how well Children’s Services is addressing the needs of youth transitioning out of government care into post-secondary and enabling them to reach their full potential through participation in advanced education.
- 2.b Demonstrates Children’s Services’ adherence to a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal Compliance Order to ensure that initial evaluations and determinations of Jordan’s Principle requests be made within a 48-hour turnaround time.

Performance Measures under Development:

A performance measure to illustrate the number of youth in care matched with a mentor is under development. Red Deer, Calgary and Edmonton are the pilot cities for the mentoring program.

A performance measure to illustrate the growing number of Children’s Services staff being trained under the Indigenous Cultural Understanding Framework to enhance their work with Indigenous children, youth and families is under development.

Outcome Three: Children are Safe and Supported: Children and youth in need of child intervention achieve safety and well-being

Every child deserves to grow up in a home where they are safe and nurtured. The ministry supports healthy families by offering targeted services and community-based supports so children can safely remain at home. The ministry intervenes to protect children and youth when necessary, seeking to provide them with a safe and nurturing environment free from abuse and neglect and one that encourages the development of lifelong relationships. The ministry collaborates with parents and extended family to maintain familial, cultural and community connections and pursue reunification of families. The ministry continues to build on preventive approaches and implementation of reforms in the child intervention system, focusing on keeping families together, addressing the conditions that bring children into care and promoting collaborative solutions to support child safety and well-being.

Key Strategies:

- 3.1 Continue to improve child intervention practice through the implementation of the Child Intervention Practice Framework and the Signs of Safety practice approach.
- 3.2 Implement the Prevention and Early Intervention Framework to prevent child maltreatment and increase mental wellness.
- 3.3 Support children in care to develop long-term, nurturing relationships.
- 3.4 Enhance child intervention policies and practices to provide culturally appropriate and diverse supports and services for children, youth, and families.

Performance Measures	Last Actual 2016-17	Target 2018-19	Target 2019-20	Target 2020-21
3.a Percentage of Indigenous children and youth who did not return for additional services within 12 months ¹	84%	85%	86%	87%
3.b Percentage of non-Indigenous children and youth who did not return for additional services within 12 months ¹	90%	91%	91%	92%
3.c Percentage of in-care Indigenous children who are placed in family-based care ²	85%	87%	88%	89%
3.d Percentage of in-care non-indigenous children who are placed in family-based care ²	83%	85%	86%	87%

Notes:

- ¹ Includes children and youth who are in care and not in care.
- ² Family-based placements include: Parental Care, Kinship Care, Foster Care and Permanency Placements.

Linking Performance Measures to Outcomes:

- 3.a Demonstrates the number of Indigenous children and youth with a new child intervention file who did not have a file closure in the previous 12 months and demonstrates how well the ministry is doing to provide permanent and stable living situations for children who received intervention services.
- 3.b Demonstrates the number of non-Indigenous children and youth with a new child intervention file who did not have a file closure in the previous 12 months and demonstrates how well the ministry is doing to provide permanent and stable living situations for children who received intervention services.
- 3.c Demonstrates how the individual needs of vulnerable children may be met by placing them in culturally appropriate situations in collaboration with Indigenous communities in order to achieve shared social outcomes.
- 3.d Demonstrates how the individual needs of vulnerable children may be met by placing them in culturally appropriate situations in collaboration with non-Indigenous communities in order to achieve shared social outcomes.

Performance Indicators	Actual 2013	Actual 2014	Actual 2015	Actual 2016	Actual 2017
3a Children receiving Child Intervention services as a percentage of the child population in Alberta:					
• Percentage	2.0%	1.8%	1.6%	1.7%	1.7%
• Number of children receiving Child Intervention service ¹	17,277	15,636	14,834	15,564	15,624
• Children in Alberta ²	872,956	890,209	906,245	923,042	935,861
3.b Percentage of Indigenous children in foster/kinship care who are placed with Indigenous families	39%	39%	39%	40%	43%

Notes:

¹ Data on the number of children receiving child intervention services has been updated from the 2017-20 Business Plan as information is from a live database that is constantly updated as information is received.

² Data on the child population in Alberta is taken from Statistics Canada Table 051-0001 Estimates of Population, by age group and sex.

Risks to Achieving Outcomes

Risks that could influence or impact the ministry’s ability to achieve its outcomes include:

Integration and Collaboration: The success of shifting the delivery system to a more person-centred and sustainable one depends on the continued integration of efforts with key partners and stakeholders outside the ministry. Meaningful engagement and ongoing collaboration to further strengthen relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and the service providers and communities is required. A lack of collaboration between system organizations to clearly define roles, responsibilities and accountabilities may result in children and youth not receiving all of the services needed.

System Capacity: The crisis nature of many programs and services may direct resources toward addressing immediate service needs rather than prevention and early intervention. The most effective way to address current and long-term issues is to turn investments and focus to front-end prevention initiatives, as well as introduce transformative initiatives that could address systemic problems.

Information Technology Infrastructure: The benefits of person-centred, integrated service delivery will be realized most effectively with investment in, and co-ordination of, underlying information technology infrastructure within and across ministries. Without an adequate information technology infrastructure, providing timely assistance will be hindered, or worse, those requiring assistance may not receive the help they need.

STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS

(thousands of dollars)	Comparable			2018-19 Estimate	2019-20 Target	2020-21 Target
	2016-17 Actual	2017-18 Budget	2017-18 Forecast			
REVENUE						
Services to First Nations Reserves	39,066	30,543	30,543	45,678	45,678	45,678
Other Federal Transfers	30,019	24,430	70,030	70,982	70,982	71,520
Other Revenue	14,085	1,971	1,971	13,982	13,997	14,011
Internal Government Transfers	-	8,342	7,250	6,591	2,401	-
Ministry Total	83,170	65,286	109,794	137,233	133,058	131,209
Inter-Ministry Consolidations	-	(8,342)	(7,250)	(16,717)	(12,527)	(10,126)
Consolidated Total	83,170	56,944	102,544	120,516	120,531	121,083
EXPENSE						
Ministry Support Services	15,401	17,939	17,939	17,699	17,699	17,699
Child Intervention	770,827	765,826	812,726	826,184	846,629	863,201
Child Care	310,968	321,076	371,251	392,749	406,269	420,069
Early Intervention Services for Children and Youth	96,322	102,570	102,470	107,682	108,682	108,182
Services Provided to Other Ministries	-	-	-	10,126	10,126	10,126
Alberta Child Benefit	105,977	174,000	170,000	175,000	179,000	182,000
Ministry Total	1,299,495	1,381,411	1,474,386	1,529,440	1,568,405	1,601,277
Inter-Ministry Consolidations	(8,886)	(10,800)	(10,800)	(20,926)	(20,926)	(20,926)
Consolidated Total	1,290,609	1,370,611	1,463,586	1,508,514	1,547,479	1,580,351
Net Operating Result	(1,207,439)	(1,313,667)	(1,361,042)	(1,387,998)	(1,426,948)	(1,459,268)
CAPITAL INVESTMENT						
Child Intervention	1,494	9,881	8,789	6,591	2,401	-
Ministry Total	1,494	9,881	8,789	6,591	2,401	-
Inter-Ministry Consolidations	-	(8,342)	(7,250)	(6,591)	(2,401)	-
Consolidated Total	1,494	1,539	1,539	-	-	-