

# **Closing the Gap Between Vision and Reality:**

Strengthening Accountability, Adaptability and  
Continuous Improvement in Alberta's Child  
Intervention System

Final Report of the Alberta Child Intervention Review Panel  
June 30, 2010

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## Preface

Individual Albertans, families and communities share a commitment and a responsibility to safeguard and nurture our children. We are united in this task across culture, profession and place by the profound human ideal that children – all children – should be safe and well. All children are vulnerable, but some children in Alberta are at higher risk of experiencing harm or neglect. These children require more help than most to achieve their potential. Some even require protection to keep them safe. It is in these difficult circumstances that Alberta Children and Youth Services steps in as a safety net for children and families.

This is an enormously difficult job. More often than not, the people receiving child intervention services face challenging social situations. They may experience poverty, racism, neglect, abuse, and poor physical and mental health – many in the context of family breakdown, or without family support. Overcoming these circumstances is possible, but it takes a sophisticated web of supports. Children in the care of the government frequently have greater need for services and support in order to achieve equitable outcomes when compared with other children.

The good news is that every day there are successes: families who are better able to raise their children; children who leave care of the government into stable, happy homes; and young adults who emerge from the care of the government to lead healthy, productive lives. The stark reality, however, is that some children do not realize their potential and in some cases, tragedies occur despite the best of intentions. Albertans expect more for all of their children.

The Alberta Child Intervention Review Panel (Panel) was asked to help strengthen the “system” of child intervention service in Alberta, and in particular find ways to improve its accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement. We were not asked to review the quality of services delivered or to assess outcomes that are realized for children and families who receive intervention services. However, we know there is a strong connection between the performance of individuals who provide services and the conditions in which they work. By focusing “upstream” on improving organization and processes, this Panel was asked to help create conditions where it is possible to deliver better services. In this way, enhanced accountability, adaptability and continual improvement will ultimately improve outcomes for children and families.

To meet our mandate, we have talked with hundreds of people across the province and received input from hundreds more through written submissions and a survey. We have visited First Nations communities; met with youth and families who are currently receiving services; and reached out to experts from Alberta, across Canada and beyond. We have met with officials at every level of the Ministry, with CFSAs, DFNAs and contracted agencies, and with supervisors and case workers who work with children and families every day.

Fundamentally, we found a system made up of people who are deeply committed to protecting and nurturing Alberta's vulnerable children. We also found a system in which substantial changes have occurred over the past decade to design and implement a new system for child intervention services called the Alberta Response Model. The stakeholders that we heard from believe that the vision for the child intervention service in this province is the right one: proactive services that strengthen families and communities, and prevent crises in the lives of children. However, this vision has not yet been realized, especially for Aboriginal children and families.

Our review has identified a number of important opportunities to strengthen the way that services are organized and carried out. Specifically, we learned that Aboriginal peoples – who are vastly overrepresented in the child intervention caseload – have very limited influence over the way that services are planned and delivered; that gaps exist in the systems for assuring quality of services; that a different approach is needed to ensure that future changes will succeed as envisioned; and that the current CFSAs governance model is not effective. Each of these findings addresses the overarching conditions that are the foundation for the one-to-one relationships that are the core of services for children and families. Our recommendations do not speak to these relationships directly, but rather lay the groundwork for better services and better results.

The Panel's objective is not to remake the child intervention service in Alberta. Indeed, quite the opposite is true – building from the current base and providing stability for the dedicated people providing services is very important. The members of our Panel come from outside Alberta's child intervention system, and we have a deep respect for the progress that has occurred in this province. However, a decade into the journey toward the Alberta Response Model, we believe it is time for Alberta to re-think parts of its approach and re-focus some of its efforts to achieve its vision for the future. It is time to address key barriers that are limiting implementation, accountability and quality assurance. It is time to rethink, refocus and rebuild.

This report makes recommendations for improving the way that child intervention works in Alberta. There is great promise for what can be accomplished by families, communities and government working together. Our recommendations align with the current vision for Alberta, build on areas that have been successful, but also offer a different course for achieving the vision. We are filled with a sense of optimism that Alberta's Minister of Children and Youth Services will embrace this report as a call to action, and a framework for bridging the gap between vision and reality.

## Executive Summary

In July of 2009, the Minister of Alberta Children and Youth Services (ACYS) announced the formation of an independent Panel to review the child intervention system in Alberta. The Panel was asked to make recommendations to the Minister about how to continue the evolution and enhancement of child intervention services by building on existing strengths and opportunities in Alberta in three principal areas: accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement. The mandate of the Panel was not to review child intervention services themselves, but rather the “system” by which the Ministry provides these services. More specifically, the Panel was tasked to review the structures and processes that underpin the organization and delivery of child intervention services in Alberta.

Alberta’s child intervention system has seen tremendous change over the last decade, and understanding this process of change has been critical to the Panel’s work. In 2001, the Ministry approved a new approach to child intervention called the **Alberta Response Model**. The Alberta Response Model was intended to improve service for children, youth and families, while also allowing the Ministry to manage rising caseloads and skyrocketing costs in the system. The Panel heard strong support from stakeholders for the vision of proactive, preventative child intervention services established by the Alberta Response Model, but there have been significant challenges in the implementation of this vision. It is the task of the Review Panel to recommend improvements that will allow Alberta to achieve the vision for children and families set out by the Alberta Response Model.

The Panel consulted with many different individuals and organizations in developing an understanding of child intervention in Alberta and of opportunities to improve services for children and families. These consultations allowed the panel to receive input from a broad range of stakeholders through a variety of different means, including:

- Public survey responses;
- Written submissions to the Panel;
- Interviews, focus groups, meetings and other direct consultations with stakeholders;
- Dialogue with youth who have experience with child intervention services;
- Visits in person to First Nations communities;

- A Child Intervention Symposium; and
- A targeted Jurisdictional Review.

**The Panel has developed a total of fourteen recommendations for the Minister**, organized according to areas of areas of focus and summarized below.

Area of Focus	Recommendations
Services for Aboriginal Albertans	1. Establish a senior executive position at the Assistant Deputy Minister level tasked with enhancing the capacity and cultural competency of the child intervention system to serve Aboriginal children and families.
	2. Establish an ongoing, formal, tripartite process to collaboratively address inequity for First Nations people in the child intervention system.
	3. Enhance capacity for Aboriginal-led agencies to provide services for Aboriginal people in off-reserve communities. As capacity is built over time, enable Aboriginal-led agencies to provide a greater range of child intervention services to Aboriginal children and families off-reserve.
	4. Establish an off-reserve Aboriginal service delivery stream to provide child protection, investigations and case management for Aboriginal children and families.
Quality assurance	5. All child intervention services delivered to children and families by government or on behalf of government should be accredited.
	6. Continue to develop and implement a clear, efficient process for escalating and tracking serious incidents within the Ministry, DFNAs, and contracted agencies.
	7. Clarify the role of the Child and Youth Advocate to focus on individual advocacy and not system-level advice.
	8. Establish a provincial Child and Family Service Quality Council with a mandate to systematically assess service quality and report findings publicly.
Capacity to implement change	9. Develop and resource a change strategy that aligns and guides implementation of the various child intervention improvement initiatives.
	10. Develop and implement a human resource strategy that addresses capacity, qualification and competencies at all levels of the system.
	11. Continue the shift towards an outcomes-based performance management system.
	12. Seek a mandate to establish a shared approach and infrastructure to better support vulnerable children and families in Alberta.
Governance	13. Establish a clear line of accountability for local child intervention service under Regional Directors who report to the Provincial Director.
	14. Transition CFSA Boards to become Child and Family Services Advisory Councils focused on providing input to the Ministry on behalf of communities.

## *Services for Aboriginal Albertans*

Aboriginal children make up 64% of the child intervention caseload, a significant overrepresentation that is perhaps the most striking issue across the Alberta system. Services for Aboriginal Albertans, therefore, remained a prominent issue throughout the Panel's review. The findings of the Panel illustrate issues that go beyond Aboriginal overrepresentation and suggest a fundamentally different experience of child intervention for Aboriginal Albertans. The Panel recommends changes that will give Aboriginal people more responsibility and authority over child intervention services for Aboriginal children and families, so that these services are more adaptable to the needs of Aboriginal Albertans.

### **Recommendation #1: Establish a senior executive position at the Assistant Deputy Minister level tasked with enhancing the capacity and cultural competency of the child intervention system to serve Aboriginal children and families.**

The Ministry should create an Assistant Deputy Minister position focused on Aboriginal service issues, whose responsibilities include providing senior leadership in enhancing capacity and cultural competence specific to child intervention for Aboriginal people. It is the belief of the Panel that flexibility to address Aboriginal cultural perspectives should be incorporated at multiple levels, but that dedicating a senior leadership position within the Ministry is a critical component. Accordingly, this recommendation addresses the need for leadership at an executive management level to develop policy, partnerships and capacity in the area of Aboriginal child intervention services.

The case for this position is founded on the strong need for services appropriate to the needs and culture of Aboriginal peoples. In addition, Aboriginal leadership at the senior executive level will be essential to enable and successfully implement the Panel's other recommendations with respect to services for Aboriginal Albertans.

### **Recommendation #2: Establish an ongoing, formal, tripartite process to collaboratively address inequity for First Nations people in the child intervention system.**

The Panel recommends establishment of a standing forum wherein representatives from the federal government, the Government of Alberta and Alberta First Nations collaborate to help

create and ensure equity in child intervention services and outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. It is clear that tripartite collaboration will be required to address some of the complex challenges associated with child intervention services for First Nations Albertans, given the shared responsibility of First Nations, federal and provincial governments for these challenges.

Although the parties themselves should determine the structure and membership of this tripartite process, as well as their agenda and approach, this Panel is prepared to recommend three priority issues as the initial areas of focus:

1. The formal adoption of Jordan's Principle to address service gaps and administrative barriers between provincial and federal jurisdictions.
2. Increasing the capacity of DFNAs to deliver effective child intervention services.
3. Accreditation for First Nations child intervention services (see Quality Assurance, below).

**Recommendation #3: Enhance capacity for Aboriginal-led agencies to provide services for Aboriginal people in off-reserve communities. As capacity is built over time, enable Aboriginal-led agencies to provide a greater range of child intervention services to Aboriginal children and families off-reserve.**

In the spirit of self-determination, the Panel recommends reallocating resources to support Aboriginal-governed agencies to deliver supportive services to Aboriginal children and families in off-reserve communities. This recommendation aims to build community capacity in an incremental fashion for Aboriginal people to support Aboriginal children and families directly. It is important that Aboriginal community agencies are given the authority and flexibility to adapt supportive services in culturally appropriate ways. Equally important, however, is a sustained commitment by the Ministry to supporting Aboriginal agencies to take on more and more of the range of child intervention services. In the future where sufficient capacity exists, agencies should be empowered to deliver child protection, casework and investigation as well as family enhancement services.

**Recommendation #4: Establish an off-reserve Aboriginal service delivery stream to provide child protection, investigations and case management for Aboriginal children and families.**

This recommendation intends that services delivered by the Ministry (including investigation and case management) be organized and managed as distinct Aboriginal services, adapted for the needs of Aboriginal people. The Panel recommends establishing Aboriginal leadership to manage the planning, design and delivery of off-reserve child intervention services currently provided by the mainstream CFSA system. This shift would entail a number of incremental steps, to be actively managed within the Ministry over a period of several years, including:

- Recruiting qualified Aboriginal people to regional management positions with authority over delivery of child intervention services specifically for Aboriginal populations;
- Aligning staff or units serving Aboriginal clientele under Aboriginal managers, and supporting these units to improve their cultural competence;
- Increasing the independence, flexibility and capacity of local offices and staff teams to deliver culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal clients; and
- Transitioning to parallel service streams for investigations, placement, case management and child protection delivered to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and families.

Given that the majority of Aboriginal children in care come into the system off-reserve, regional leadership of child intervention services is a particularly important level at which Aboriginal authority and responsibility should be enhanced. More specifically, this creates the potential for greater flexibility and cultural adaptation of services by placing the planning, design and delivery of child intervention off reserve under Aboriginal leadership and distinguishing it as a different service stream. It is the Panel's belief that this will improve outcomes for Aboriginal children.

### ***Quality Assurance***

The Ministry has made significant investments in quality assurance mechanisms, but a more unified, purposeful approach to optimizing and aligning these efforts is required to move forward.

Key findings of the Panel related to quality assurance include the following:

- The Ministry makes substantial investment in information management and monitoring compliance with system processes.
- External oversight is lacking for child intervention in Alberta.
- There is a notable lack of client input in evaluating service quality, resolving complaints and designing services.
- The process for escalation of serious incidents is evolving to remove its reliance upon personal judgment at many levels.
- Case files are not reviewed in a systematic fashion.
- The system does not appear to have the ability to identify and track emerging trends and issues.

**Recommendation #5: All child intervention services delivered to children and families by government or on behalf of government should be accredited.**

Building upon existing accreditation mechanisms for contracted agencies, the Ministry should broaden accreditation requirements to include all other organizations delivering protection and family enhancement services to children and families. In other words, regional organizations, DFNAs and community agencies delivering services directly to clients should be accredited according to common standards for service quality. Accreditation should be delivered by one or more organizations external to the Ministry. This process is intended to replace some of the existing ACYS quality assurance mechanisms, such as internal file reviews and the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. Moreover, it should replace some of the process-based reporting requirements for frontline staff, enabling them to spend more time directly with clients.

**Recommendation #6: Continue to develop and implement a clear, efficient process for escalating and tracking serious incidents within the Ministry, DFNAs, and contracted agencies.**

ACYS has made considerable progress since the inception of the Panel's review in establishing a more rigorous process by which serious incidents are escalated and senior leaders provided with information and advice to address them. On April 1, 2010, a new Directive for reporting

serious incidents was announced. This recommendation is intended to commend the recent action on the part of the Provincial Director to improve serious incident reporting, and to urge the Ministry to take the next steps to refine and fully implement the process.

**Recommendation #7: Clarify the role of the Child and Youth Advocate to focus on individual advocacy and not system-level advice.**

Alberta's Office of the Child and Youth Advocate should be directed to reaffirm their primary focus on advocacy and support services for individual children. This "individual advocacy" role is distinct from the role of providing advice or oversight regarding service trends and quality for the system as a whole – which should not be a responsibility of the Advocate's office in the future. The role of the Advocate as internal to the Ministry, reporting to the Minister, fulfills these individual advocacy duties most effectively. It is envisioned that an independent Quality Council (see Recommendation #8) should take on systemic advice and quality assurance functions instead of the Advocate – in fact, this recommendation should not be implemented until the system-level advocacy function of the current Advocate's office is supplanted by another mechanism (i.e., the Quality Council).

**Recommendation #8: Establish a provincial Child and Family Service Quality Council with a mandate to systematically assess service quality and report findings publicly.**

The Panel recommends the establishment of a provincial Child and Family Service Quality Council as an arm's-length organization empowered and funded by the Government of Alberta through the Minister of Children and Youth Services to report directly to Albertans on the quality, safety and performance of child welfare services. Membership on the Quality Council will include cross-sectoral expertise (at a minimum including representatives from the health, education and justice sectors), Aboriginal representation, and the Child and Youth Advocate.

The specific mandate of the Quality Council should be broader than child intervention, encompassing at minimum the range of services provided by ACYS, with the goal of:

- Systematically measuring, monitoring and publicly reporting on service quality based on input from children and families in the system;

- Initiating and conducting system reviews that analyze trends, emerging issues, and opportunities to improve services for children and families, including how communities and broader service systems can more effectively support these children and their families;
- Within one year, beginning to evaluate the implementation of changes in support of the Alberta Response Model;
- Ongoing evaluation of major system changes – including recommendations by this Panel; and
- At the request of the Minister, convening and directing experts external to the Ministry to independently investigate and publicly report on matters concerning service outcomes.

The creation of a provincial Quality Council directly strengthens accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement within Alberta’s child intervention system by providing external advice, oversight and increased transparency.

### ***Capacity to implement change***

In Alberta, ideas for how to improve child intervention services are clearly present, and decision makers have demonstrated the will to make big changes with a vision to transform the system in the best interests of children. However, capacity to implement intended changes has been a key issue over the past several years. The result is that despite some positive developments over the past decade, there remain significant challenges to improve the way that child intervention services are organized, planned and delivered in Alberta.

Key findings of the Panel related to capacity for change and implementation include:

- There is strong support for the vision of the Alberta Response Model.
- Change leadership and change management are key areas for improvement.
- There are indications of a closed and defensive culture among child intervention staff, management and executive leaders.
- There are opportunities to improve the capacity of service delivery staff.

- Integration of child intervention with communities and other “systems” is lacking.
- Child intervention in Alberta has begun to shift toward measurement of outcomes, but the approach to performance management based on outcomes is in its infancy.

**Recommendation #9: Develop and resource a change strategy that aligns and guides implementation of the various child intervention improvement initiatives.**

Change management and implementation has been a significant challenge for child intervention in Alberta, highlighting the need for a disciplined approach and supporting infrastructure. The Panel recommends a formal strategy and investment to sustain the focus of the Ministry and its partners on the implementation of a shared vision for child intervention in Alberta that aligns with and builds from that established by the ARM. This means that leaders must be held accountable for developing and achieving change management objectives and timelines as part of formal change management processes. Further, given the scale of changes that have occurred and those that will be required in the future, this approach to change should be iterative and flexible to adapt to a continually shifting environment.

**Recommendation #10: Develop and implement a human resource strategy that addresses capacity, qualification and competencies at all levels of the system.**

Given the complex, demanding nature of child intervention work – from clinical decision making to executive leadership – the system is best served by a highly skilled, well trained and professional workforce. Although the Panel did not assess the capacity or competencies of staff directly, this recommendation to establish a human resource strategy will address a number of observed opportunities to improve the adaptability of the system and the quality of service.

**Recommendation #11: Continue the shift towards an outcomes-based performance management system.**

The performance and quality of child intervention services in Alberta are not assessed according to the results or outcomes of the services provided. There are indications that child intervention is shifting toward outcomes measurement as a part of managing system performance in the future, however. The Panel recommends that the Ministry continue its

work towards a performance management system that balances measurement of outcomes with process compliance – not by adding more measurement requirements, but by focusing more on reporting results and less on documenting process and procedure. A focus on outcomes should – over time – become the primary means by which the system measures performance, gradually replacing current reporting mechanisms focused on reporting and tracking processes.

**Recommendation #12: Seek a mandate to establish a shared approach and infrastructure to better support vulnerable children and families in Alberta.**

The Review Panel’s mandate is limited to the child intervention system within a single Government of Alberta Ministry. However, given the interconnected nature of issues facing children, families and communities – and the need for more work to strengthen families and prevent crises – the Panel feels compelled to make a broader recommendation for greater collaboration to overcome jurisdictional silos, address shared issues and find shared solutions.

In this spirit, the Panel recommends that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services seek a mandate from the Premier to establish a unifying initiative across the Government of Alberta that will better integrate mandates, policy, resources and infrastructure that support children and families. Further, this initiative should adopt a unified approach to engaging and enhancing community infrastructure in this critical work.

### ***Governance***

The following are the key findings of the Panel related to child intervention governance:

- The current child intervention service delivery system under the CFSAs is a “hybrid” of regional and centralized governance. This hybrid model contributes to a lack of clarity in decision-making responsibility and authority for CFSA Boards, CFSA CEOs, the Provincial Director, and Ministry executives.
- Executive accountability for child intervention practice under the Provincial Director of Child Intervention (Provincial Director) is not clear within the current system.

- Community input into the system is currently focused at regional and local levels, and could be strengthened.

The Panel's governance recommendations seek to establish clearer lines of reporting and responsibility for child intervention, while elevating the input and advice of the community about how best to deliver services. The Panel recognizes that ACYS may not be able to implement these recommendations in the near future, and that one or more transitional governance shifts may be required. It remains critical, however, that the Ministry work to resolve the lack of clarity in the governance of child intervention services by implementing either a fully centralized or fully decentralized (regional) governance model. Furthermore, the Panel feels that a centralized model is most appropriate for Alberta. Recognizing the Ministry has a fundamental choice to fully centralize or decentralize, the following recommendations are intended to support a centralized system of governance.

**Recommendation #13: Establish a clear line of accountability for local child intervention service under Regional Directors who report to the Provincial Director.**

The Panel recommends that the current position of CFSA CEO be redefined as Regional Director – responsible for child intervention and reporting to the Provincial Director. In this way, clear and direct lines of reporting and accountability for regional child intervention services will be established. The current dual lines of CFSA accountability make it difficult for CFSA staff to be answerable to the Provincial Director for child intervention practice, which the Provincial Director has a legal responsibility for. This is because child intervention workers and managers are currently answerable to their CFSA CEO, who in turn reports both to the Deputy Minister and the Board; meanwhile, the reporting relationship between CFSA CEOs and the Provincial Director is unclear under the current model.

**Recommendation #14: Transition CFSA Boards to become Child and Family Services Advisory Councils focused on providing input to the Ministry on behalf of communities.**

Given that CFSA Boards are not currently functioning as governance Boards, and recognizing the importance of community input, the Panel recommends that the Ministry shift the emphasis of its community advisory bodies from overseeing regional service delivery to engaging community input. An important part of this change is to streamline and clarify CFSA

governance by redefining CFSA Boards as Advisory Councils responsible for community input and engagement.

This shift clarifies child intervention governance while causing minimal disruption to the current centralized decision making model. Moreover, it addresses the fact that CFSA Boards have too many responsibilities (some of which are outside of their control), while elevating the status of community input within the system.

## 1. A Review of Child Intervention in Alberta

### Mandate

In July of 2009, the Minister of Alberta Children and Youth Services (ACYS) announced the formation of an independent Panel to review the child intervention system in Alberta. The Panel was asked to make recommendations to the Minister about how to continue the evolution and enhancement of child intervention services by building on existing strengths and opportunities in Alberta. The mandate of the Panel was not to review child intervention services themselves, but rather the “system” by which the Ministry provides these services. More specifically, the Panel was tasked to review the structures and processes that underpin the organization and delivery of child intervention services in Alberta.<sup>1</sup>

The Panel was directed to examine three aspects of Alberta’s child intervention system: **accountability**, **adaptability** and **continuous improvement**. Specifically, the following questions were posed to guide and focus the review process:

- **Accountability:** *Are the necessary checks, balances and processes/mechanisms in place to ensure accountability and transparency in the child intervention system?*
- **Adaptability:** *Does the system have the capacity to effectively respond to emerging societal trends, service demands, and evolving workforce and practice issues?*
- **Continuous Improvement:** *Is the system organized and aligned with leading practices and evidence-based research?*



The review process focused on these three areas as a lens to examine child intervention in Alberta at a “systems level”. This “systems level” scope concentrated the Panel’s review on supporting structures and processes that enable child intervention services, including linkages between child intervention and other services and “systems” such as health care, education,

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, the Panel makes reference to the child intervention “system”, which refers to the structures and processes that underpin the organization and delivery of child intervention services in Alberta.

justice and corrections. As a result, **a number of areas were deemed out of scope** for this review, including:

- Detailed investigations into the operations of particular programs, personnel, clients and/or cases;
- Analysis of the quality of services delivered;
- Analysis of the outcomes or effectiveness of services; and
- System capacity and funding levels.

### ***The Review Panel***

Members of the Alberta Child Intervention Review Panel were appointed by the Minister based on their expertise in the field of child welfare and related fields, or their knowledge of Alberta’s social services and government. The Panel is comprised of independent members from outside the child intervention system in Alberta who bring the benefit of different regional, national and international perspectives in this field. The Panel members are as follows:

<b>Panel Member</b>	<b>Organization (Location)</b>
Dorothy Ahlgren	Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police – Crime Prevention Committee (Ottawa, Ontario)
Cal Dallas	Alberta MLA – Red Deer South (Red Deer, Alberta)
Mike DeGagné	Aboriginal Healing Foundation (Ottawa, Ontario)
Peter Dudding (Co-Chair)	Child Welfare League of Canada (Ottawa, Ontario)
Jane Fitzgerald	Children’s Aid Society of London & Middlesex (London/Middlesex, Ontario)
Sandra Harrison	Alberta Mental Health Patient Advocate (Edmonton, Alberta)
Josie Hill	Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre (Winnipeg, Manitoba)
Kenn Richard	Toronto First Nation Child and Family (Toronto, Ontario)
Dr. Gayla Rogers	University of Calgary Faculty of Social Work (Calgary, Alberta)
Dr. Nico Trocmé (Co-Chair)	McGill University / Center of Excellence in Child Welfare (Montreal, Quebec)

## Approach

The Panel conducted their work in four phases:

1. Planning, leading the development of a Project Charter.
2. Current Systems Analysis, including:
  - Developing and releasing an online Public Discussion Guide, which included a survey for Albertans, and then analyzing the feedback received from across the province.
  - Reviewing written submissions requested from the public and from stakeholder groups.
  - Inviting certain stakeholders to meet with the Panel in person, and to provide presentations and/or supplementary documents as appropriate.
  - Conducting interviews, meetings and focus groups with ACYS staff, CFSA child intervention staff and supervisors, DFNA Directors, Aboriginal stakeholders, and external stakeholders (including a meeting with family members involved with child intervention services).
  - Limited meetings in person with children and youth who have received child intervention services.
  - Visiting three First Nations communities in person to meet with DFNA staff, community members, and local government.
3. Leading Practices Examination, including:
  - A two-day Child Intervention Symposium convened in March 2010 that invited input and presentations from external experts to the Panel about solutions from other jurisdictions to similar issues faced in Alberta. This event also engaged Alberta stakeholders in collaboratively exploring the applicability of these leading practices to enhance accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement in Alberta.
  - A high-level jurisdictional comparison was targeted to provide broader context and comparative insight related to specific identified issues in Alberta. This

Jurisdictional Review was intended to help inform and enrich recommendations under consideration by the Panel.

#### 4. Final Report Development

Each of these phases is described in greater detail in the Project Charter (attached as Appendix A) developed as part of the planning phase.

### Child Intervention Services in Alberta

It is important to clarify for the reader what is meant by *child intervention* and the *child intervention “system”* as the focus for this review. In Alberta, the term “child intervention” is used to describe what is known in most other jurisdictions as “child welfare”. Both terms refer to supports and services provided to ensure a child’s safety and well-being. These services focus on supporting families to be healthy and making sure that children grow up in safe and nurturing homes.

Parents and guardians are expected to care for their children, but sometimes they are not willing or able to provide a safe and secure home. If a child or youth has been abused or neglected, or is at risk of being abused, it is the responsibility of the parent or guardian to ensure the safety of the child or youth. If they cannot, Children and Youth Services steps in to provide support and to ensure the safety and well-being of that child – these services are collectively referred to as “child intervention”. The child intervention “system”, as noted above, refers to the structures and processes that underpin the organization and delivery of these services.

There are two main “streams” of services provided by that make up Alberta’s child intervention system: the family enhancement stream and the child protection stream.

**Family Enhancement** refers to cases where a child or youth has experienced abuse or neglect but the child can still be safe in the home if supports are provided to the family. The goal of family enhancement is to support families so that crises are avoided and families can stay together. Family enhancement supports may include conflict resolution, parenting skills, and counseling. Many partners, including extended family and community-based service providers,

can be brought together to help strengthen the family to meet their child's needs. ACYS enables family enhancement services in most cases by providing contract funding to community agencies.

**Child Protection** refers to cases where a child or youth is at high risk of physical, sexual or emotional harm and the family is unwilling or unable to address their problems voluntarily. In some situations, a child must be removed from the home because of ongoing and serious safety concerns. In these situations, the court is usually involved in making the decision to remove a child, and the Government of Alberta takes over parental responsibility for their safety. Child protection services (including investigations, case management, legal orders and permanent placements) are provided directly by Government of Alberta staff, or by Delegated First Nations Agencies on most of Alberta's First Nations reserves.

### ***Child Intervention Service Delivery***

Child protection and family enhancement services are primarily delivered by regional organizations serving specific geographic catchment areas: Child and Family Service Authorities (CFSAs) and Delegated First Nation Agencies (DFNAs). There are 10 CFSAs in the province, 9 of which serve specific geographic areas. The remaining CFSAs (Region 10) serves Métis Albertans affiliated with one of the land-based Métis settlements in the province, wherever they may currently reside. Across the province, CFSAs employ more than 2,100 staff, including 1,600 workers providing direct supports to children, youth and families. CFSAs provide services in addition to child intervention, such as child care and Family Supports for Children with Disabilities.

There is a partnership for services to First Nation people lies with federal, provincial and Band governments. This creates a tripartite structure for child intervention services wherein ACYS has entered into agreements with 18 DFNAs to provide services to First Nation children on 110 of the 126 reserves across the province. Although DFNAs provide child intervention services on behalf of ACYS, their funding comes from the federal government through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). This means that DFNAs are responsible to the Minister of Children and Youth Services for delivering quality intervention services to children, youth and families. However, they are also responsible to INAC for the appropriate use of the funding they receive to provide these services.

Both CFSAs and DFNAs must comply with service delivery standards that are established by Children and Youth Services. Policy, funding and monitoring compliance are functions retained by the Ministry.

Child intervention alone cannot keep children safe, nor can it prevent crisis situations. The child intervention system requires strong partnerships with groups that can help families address serious challenges, such as family violence, addictions, poverty, health and mental health, and others. Supportive services and interventions related to child intervention are provided by contracted agencies within a given community. It is significant to note, however, that these contracted services are only provided to children and families who have open child intervention case files. An assessment of risk and need by ACYS is the first contact with the system and must be completed before services can be provided.

### ***Context: A System in Transformation***

Alberta's child intervention system has seen tremendous change over the last decade, and understanding this process of change has been critical to the Panel's work. In 2001, the Ministry approved a new approach to child intervention called the Alberta Response Model. The Alberta Response Model was intended to improve service for children, youth and families, while also allowing the Ministry to manage rising caseloads and skyrocketing costs in the system. The new model was also motivated by strong public and political pressure for action in the wake of several well-publicized tragedies involving children in the care of the system.

The Alberta Response Model was founded upon five core pillars or principles that have informed the process of transformation since 2001:

- Differential response;
- Community partnerships;
- Permanent placements;
- Increasing parental responsibility; and
- Evaluation of child-centered outcomes.

The Alberta Response Model intended a fundamental transformation in how child intervention was to be understood and delivered in Alberta. As such, there have been a series of changes at

all levels of this large and complex system in the intervening years, the most significant of which include:

1. The introduction of the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* in 2004 in an attempt to align child intervention legislation with the Alberta Response Model;
2. A new Casework Practice Model, introduced in 2007 to support differential response and align with the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*; and
3. A collaborative effort between ACYS, the federal government and First Nations communities to provide DFNAs with additional funding for preventative support services.

In conducting this review, the Alberta Response Model was understood to be the broad strategic framework underlying the changes of the last decade. While child intervention in this province has evolved considerably, still more changes are planned and underway to transform child intervention services. It is important to emphasize that the Panel is cognizant of the historical context and the future directions envisioned for the transformation of child intervention services in Alberta. Therefore, although the data collected by the Panel represents to some extent “a snapshot in time”, the analysis of this information is informed by an understanding of the critical context of system change – past, present and future.

## 2. What We Heard

The Panel consulted with many different individuals and organizations in developing an understanding of child intervention in Alberta and opportunities to improve services for children and families. This section briefly summarizes what the Panel heard through each major phase of consultation<sup>2</sup>, including:

- Public survey responses;
- Written submissions to the Panel;
- Interviews, focus groups, meetings and other direct consultations with stakeholders;
- Dialogue with youth who have experience with child intervention services;
- Visits in person to First Nations communities;
- The Child Intervention Symposium; and
- The Panel’s targeted Jurisdictional Review.

### Public Survey Responses

As a part of this review, a survey was administered to the public to gather the views of Albertans on key aspects of Alberta’s child intervention system. The survey was posted along with a Public Discussion Guide containing background information about the Panel, their process, and the child intervention system in Alberta. The vast majority of responses were collected online via the Children and Youth Services website. A total of 1,277 surveys were “started” online, meaning that this many individuals opened the survey. In total, 567 respondents followed the survey through to the end.

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<sup>2</sup> Full accounts of the Panel’s findings from these consultations are attached as Appendices. The Panel also completed an Interim Report that comprehensively documents what was heard from stakeholders and is intended as a supplement to this Final Report.

There are two strong themes that emerged from the written and quantitative input from Albertans who responded to the survey<sup>3</sup>:

1. Respondents believe that the child intervention system requires more capacity to better support children, families and communities.
2. The system is perceived to be relatively closed to input, suggestions and feedback.

## Written Submissions to the Panel

The Panel received a total of 49 submissions. The following key themes relevant to the scope of the review were identified through analysis of the written submissions:

- There is strong support for an increased and sustained commitment to prevention and family enhancement through relationship-based services.
- Written submissions identify a number of capacity challenges for the system.
- Responses emphasize the importance of addressing the disparity and overrepresentation within the system experienced by Aboriginal children and families. A number of respondents question the cultural appropriateness of child intervention practice in serving Aboriginal children and families.
- Respondents highlight the importance of better integrating child intervention with other “systems” and services.
- Respondents perceive the child intervention system to be closed to input and communication.
- Improved training and support for child intervention workers is seen to be important.
- Child intervention practice may fragment participants in the system, pitting their interests against one another and creating challenges for collaboration.

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix C contains a detailed summary of public survey findings.

- Alberta courts do not assign family cases that recur in the legal system to a particular judge for their duration.
- The system is not perceived as able to accommodate the added challenges faced by children and parents with disabilities.
- The system is seen as inconsistent in its approach to concurrent plans, which are required by policy but no longer in legislation.

A number of suggestions for improving the child intervention system were made within the written submissions received, and these were considered by the Panel in developing recommendations.

## **Direct Consultation with Stakeholders**

In March 2010, the Panel completed an Interim Report to synthesize and document major themes and findings identified to date. The majority of these themes and findings reflect “what was heard” by the Panel from interviews, meetings, focus groups and other discussions with stakeholders, both internal and external to the system.

The Panel presented *four overall findings about child intervention in Alberta and a series of systems-level themes*. The overall findings are:

- There is widespread support for the philosophy, principles and vision of the Alberta Response Model.
- The child intervention system in Alberta has experienced significant challenges in implementing the Alberta Response Model.
- Aboriginal children and families continue to be marginalized within the current system.
- Mechanisms for assessing quality and demonstrating accountability within the system require further development.

Related to the four overall findings, the Panel also outlined eleven major themes that emerged from consultation with Alberta stakeholders:

*Change Leadership:* Long-term success in the transformation of child intervention services under the Alberta Response Model requires a sustained commitment to and focus on implementing necessary changes. Effective engagement of child intervention workers to inform implementation approaches, and resources to support implementation are particularly important.

*System Capacity:* The child intervention system appears to be operating near the limits of its capacity. Ultimately, capacity challenges impact the ability of workers to effectively implement core components of the Casework Practice Model.

*Integration with Communities and Other “Systems”:* Integration with communities and other “systems” is essential to the long-term success of the system and to the transformation envisioned by the Alberta Response Model. However, evidence of such integration is scarce.

*Organizational Culture:* Stakeholders have strong impressions of a closed, risk-averse organizational culture within the child intervention system.

*Inclusion of Children and Families:* Children and families feel that they are not adequately heard and included in the current child intervention system.

*Appropriateness of Services for Aboriginal Albertans:* The current system is struggling to adapt to the unique needs of Aboriginal populations when it comes to child intervention services.

*Gaps between CFSAs and DFNAs:* Alberta’s child intervention system has significant gaps and differences between services provided by CFSAs and DFNAs, respectively. Funding issues, complex accountability requirements, and lack of access to organizational supports are reported to be significant barriers faced by DFNAs.

*Challenges in Implementing Differential Response:* A continued systemic focus on child protection appears to have limited the ability of the system to implement differential response.

*Risk Management:* While some notable strengths exist in Alberta, there are also gaps in several critical areas related to processes to support management of risk in the child intervention system. Particular areas of concern include a lack of external oversight, high reliance on personal judgment to assess risk, and limited ability to identify and track emerging trends and issues.

*Quality Improvement:* Significant provincial, regional and case-level data are captured, but there are opportunities to adjust the types of information gathered to increase the emphasis on quality and outcomes.

*Shifting Organizational Relationships:* Recent shifts will likely result in significant changes in the organizational relationships that enable delivery of child intervention services through contracted agencies.

## Discussions with Youth

Panel members spoke with groups of youth with child intervention experience in person on three separate occasions. A total of 17 youth were directly involved in these discussions. The central message heard from these youth can be expressed as follows: *youth live in the system; they want a voice and some ability to influence the course of their care*. More detailed ideas and insights provided to the Panel by youth include the following:

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*"Do not give up on us! We are worth the investment".*

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*- Alberta youth -*

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### A voice for youth

- Youth have a minimal voice within the system, especially when they are younger. Policies to ask youth for their opinions and insights are not implemented.
- Youth are never asked by an independent source how their care is going. Asking youth about their care should be done in a relationship-based, non-judgmental setting, creating a safe, comfortable space.
- Youth are often uncomfortable asking for help in the current system, and when they do they feel they have little influence over decisions made about their lives and their care.
- Youth are often unaware of any authority or rights that they should be able to exercise or access, and so the foster parent carries all the authority in the relationship.

### **Navigating the system**

- There is often little awareness among youth about who they can ask for what types of help. Some youth report receiving no education on their rights or on the availability of the Child and Youth Advocate.
- Social workers and child and youth workers do not always volunteer information, support or services; youth must ask for them (and be aware of them) to receive them.
- There are a number of similar services offered by different organizations, which can be challenging and confusing for youth.
- “Documentation” of a child’s “issues and behaviours” over the years follows them and informs future relationships with staff and the system.

### **“Social workers” [i.e., CFSA caseworkers]**

- Youth need social workers to be responsive, not just to their needs and day-to-day concerns, but for critical issues such as health care needs. Many of the youth that the Panel spoke with expressed a sentiment that their services and care environment did not adapt quickly to their changing needs.
- Some youth feel that their social workers are determined or instructed to avoid regular contact with them due to time constraints.
- Social workers should be evaluated regularly. They should recognize that youth “live in the system, we don’t work in it”.
- Social workers are often inconsistent, uncertain of what they can provide, or forced to “check with their boss” before taking any action.
- Timely, consistent information for social workers is important. Social workers should have a handbook of resources for kids in care. They could also benefit from a manual – written by youth – on how to be a good social worker for a child.
- Some youth feel that they have no ability to switch to another worker if there is a poor relationship or if their needs are not being met.

### **Family connectedness**

- Foster parents need to be given more and more timely information about the youth that they will be caring for. Also, the needs of some youth require that foster parents receive additional training (e.g., related to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder).
- Foster parents may need a greater network of support as well, especially when they are new and dealing with difficult issues from youth.
- Separating siblings causes additional problems and isolation.
- Youth need to be in contact with their families where possible, whatever the budget implications. Keeping families together and reconnecting family members with youth in protection is important.
- Support for parents (e.g., teaching parenting skills and supporting employment) is perceived by some to be positive.

### **Service delivery**

- When social workers and families are engaged and consistently present in a young person's life, success is possible. Trust is a critical element; the youth that the Panel heard from reported a wide range in the quality and consistency of their relationships with caseworkers.
- Youth live in the system. Some feel they treated as though it is their fault that they are in care.
- Often the system is geared to meet basic needs, with little budget or attention devoted to other issues such as safety, isolation, quality of life and violence between youth (e.g., in a foster care setting). Violence in the home, in particular, is an important issue rarely escalated beyond the foster parent unless the consequences have been serious.
- The system "ages out" youth abruptly, yet youth feel they are not adequately supported to gain independence and control over their lives in the years before they turn 18.
- Changing placements is very disruptive. Youth may or may not receive any notice about a change in placement, and they do not have any input into the decision.

- Family enhancement services are not “voluntary”, as the other option is the child protection stream.
- Social workers do not work during the hours in which crises often occur for youth (i.e., late night).

## Visits to First Nations Communities

During the course of the review, DFNA representatives invited the Panel to visit reserve communities in person to better understand the issues relevant to child intervention services for Aboriginal Albertans. As a result of this invitation, it was decided that Panel members would visit one DFNA from each of the three Treaty Areas in the province<sup>4</sup>, with the intention of speaking directly with staff, elders, leaders and members of the community to:

- Discuss issues and challenges relevant to delivering child intervention services on reserve;
- Identify opportunities to improve the child intervention system and services for Aboriginals on and off reserve; and
- Better understand the unique experience of First Nations people in Alberta, and how this history has impacted children, families and child intervention services.

The overall impressions of Panel members were of staff and communities who are tremendously committed to supporting First Nations children and families on and off reserve – the people that the Panel met with were deeply invested in their communities and in working to improve the services that they provide. Panel members were also struck by the breadth of innovation and progress evident in meeting with DFNAs, from the impressive pool of foster homes supported by Kee Tas Kee Now, to the satellite office operated in Calgary by Siksika, and the ties between the DFNA and innovative youth programming in Saddle Lake.

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<sup>4</sup> The Panel visited the following DFNAs: Saddle Lake Wahkohtowin Childcare Society, Siksika Family Services Corporation, and Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council Child and Family Services.

Many of the issues, challenges and concerns heard by the Panel during the visits to First Nations communities echoed findings from previous consultations. There were also several new insights that enhanced the understanding of the Panel members about the current state of child intervention services for Aboriginal Albertans. The findings of the Panel are summarized as follows:

- The Band Designate role has not enhanced meaningful collaboration between DFNAs and CFSAs.
- Several of the First Nations post-secondary organizations and communities are in the process of developing a social work curriculum that incorporates Aboriginal values, history, practices, and instructors (including elders and other community members).
- Political will was a key factor in the establishment of the only off reserve DFNA satellite office.
- There are a variety of perspectives on whether and how DFNAs can collaborate to improve child intervention services.
- First Nations people and communities want to take care of their own, as it is their children who are at stake. DFNA staff feel that their close ties to community members are a strength for their child intervention work, and not a conflict of interest.
- “Repatriation” of Band members taken into care is a significant priority.
- Socioeconomic realities on reserve contribute to the need for child intervention services.
- DFNAs face capacity challenges, both within their Agencies and within reserve communities, which often lack the breadth of supportive services available off reserve.
- Federal and provincial jurisdictional boundaries are a significant operational challenge impacting service access, funding for supportive services, collaboration with CFSAs and the ability of DFNAs to identify and serve Band members off reserve. DFNAs want to be able to serve Band members who are living off reserve, and are frustrated with the barriers to doing so. Connectedness to home communities is seen to an important aspect of Aboriginal wellbeing.
- Panel members observed a tremendous willingness in First Nations communities to engage in dialogue and collaborative problem-solving with the “mainstream system”.

Those consulted, however, feel that there has been little meaningful engagement with Aboriginal stakeholders to date in important policy, practice and design decisions.

- First Nations communities feel that they have little authority or influence within the child intervention system.
- Aboriginal communities have methods of caring for children and families that predate and are often in tension with the child intervention system. The participation of the broader community in rearing children, for instance, is a cultural practice that is difficult to reconcile with the perspective of the current system.
- DFNA staff see supporting children and families on reserve as crucial preventative work, and would like to engage in more family enhancement service delivery.
- DFNA Directors have dual streams of accountability that can be challenging to reconcile – to the Band and to the Ministry.
- It is important that the system incorporate a greater proportion of Aboriginal staff members. A number of barriers were observed to recruiting and retaining Aboriginal staff (e.g., style of recruitment, relevant qualifications, hostile work environments, racism, the absence of Aboriginal managers, etc.).
- The SAFE Home Assessment tool is seen by some (but not all) Aboriginal communities as culturally inappropriate.

## **The Child Intervention Symposium**

The Alberta Child Intervention Symposium (Symposium) was held March 18-19, 2010 in Edmonton. On the basis of important themes from prior consultations, the Symposium was organized around the following three challenges in Alberta's child intervention system:

1. Managing and implementing change;
2. Child intervention services for Aboriginal Albertans; and
3. Transparent oversight and accountability.

Invited delegates represented a range of perspectives, from service providers to government officials. Following presentations from experts in each topic, delegates were asked to discuss and respond to the ideas presented in light of their unique knowledge and perspective. Panel members then had the benefit of receiving feedback that was specific to the views of delegates representing different groups.

The dialogue and discussion by Symposium delegates and expert presenters was tremendously helpful to the Panel in considering recommendations to address each of the three issues identified as subjects for the symposium.<sup>5</sup>

## Jurisdictional Review

A targeted Jurisdictional Review was conducted by the Panel to contrast specific challenges and potential solutions in the Alberta context with the situation in other Canadian provinces. This Jurisdictional Review was intended to inform recommendations in development by:

- Identifying or crystallizing potential options or solutions that could be applied in Alberta;
- Providing a comparative context for identified challenges and recommended solutions in this province; and
- Establishing and communicating a solid rationale for recommended improvements.

This was not a comprehensive review of jurisdictions across Canada, nor was it a review that addressed each recommendation being contemplated by the panel. Instead, the Jurisdictional Review focused on specific areas in which the panel identified the need for additional contextual and comparative information.

The review panel identified four main areas of inquiry for the Jurisdictional Review, outlined in the table below. Within each area of inquiry, several more specific guiding questions were developed to focus the review, and three or more comparator jurisdictions were identified:

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<sup>5</sup> A full description of what the Panel learned during the Symposium can be found in Appendix G.

Jurisdictional Review Lines of Inquiry	Jurisdictions for Comparison
Off-reserve services for Aboriginal children	
<p>How does your jurisdiction provide services for Aboriginal children living off reserve?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are Aboriginal people involved in the governance of off-reserve child welfare services?</li> <li>• Has your jurisdiction formally adopted Jordan’s principle, either in policy and/or in practice?                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This principle states that the government or department of first contact must pay for services needed by an Aboriginal client without delay or disruption, with the understanding that the appropriate source for payment can be determined subsequently.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• British Columbia</li> <li>• Ontario</li> <li>• Manitoba</li> <li>• Nova Scotia</li> <li>• New Brunswick</li> </ul>
Accreditation for child welfare services	
<p>How are child welfare services accredited and/or inspected in your jurisdiction?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are all child welfare services accredited or inspected?</li> <li>• What dimensions of quality are assured through accreditation?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manitoba</li> <li>• Ontario</li> <li>• British Columbia</li> <li>• Québec</li> </ul>
External input into the child welfare system	
<p>How is feedback or input from clients (children and families) gathered and used to improve child welfare services?</p> <p>How does the child welfare system in your jurisdiction regularly receive input from outside the system itself (e.g., from communities, Advocates or independent reports)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ontario</li> <li>• Manitoba</li> <li>• Québec</li> </ul>
Child welfare staff capacity	
<p>What are the minimum educational standards for child welfare practice in your jurisdiction?</p> <p>How does your jurisdiction bridge between formal education and child welfare practice to ensure job readiness of new employees?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nova Scotia</li> <li>• Saskatchewan</li> <li>• Manitoba</li> </ul>

The sections below detail the Panel’s analysis of the results of the Jurisdictional Review. The full Jurisdictional Review report has been submitted to the Ministry.

### ***Off-reserve Services for Aboriginal Children***

Jurisdictional comparison highlights the fact that, for the most part, Aboriginal people living off-reserve are not provided with child welfare services through separate streams of service delivery in the jurisdictions reviewed. The exception is Manitoba, which has evolved distinct service delivery for First Nations people that is not limited to geographic boundaries of reserve communities. In other jurisdictions, approaches vary, from closer ties with on-reserve service delivery (Nova Scotia) to Aboriginal service delivery agencies in specific urban centers (Ontario and B.C.).

Aboriginal people are not heavily involved in the governance of off-reserve child welfare in the jurisdictions that were reviewed, with Manitoba as the principal exception. Further, where Aboriginal people are involved in governance off-reserve, their involvement has been limited in most cases to First Nations people. In Manitoba, although the Boards of the Northern and Southern First Nations Authorities are made up of First Nations people, the Panel heard that there have been challenges with the political nature of representation on these Boards.

One area in which Aboriginal people and communities have governance and influence over child welfare services off-reserve is in the case of funded community agencies. Most of the jurisdictions reviewed highlighted examples of Aboriginal-run agencies providing services in the community for Aboriginal people.

In particular, the urban centers of Vancouver and Toronto are served by well-developed Aboriginal agencies with full delegated authority for child protection and supportive services. These agencies (*Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society* and *Native Child and Family Services of Toronto*) provide relevant and instructive models of how urban Aboriginal organizations can be empowered over time to provide child welfare for urban Aboriginal people. The examples of *Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society* and *Native Child and Family Services of Toronto* provide a number of important considerations for Alberta:

- *Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society* and *Native Child and Family Services of Toronto* both arose because of a need to serve a distinct Aboriginal clientele in an urban setting.
- Supportive services were the initial focus of these agencies. After an infrastructure of support had been developed, they worked incrementally toward full authority for child protection in collaboration with provincial governments. In each case, a joint

commitment toward this goal of full delegated authority and political will within the agency and the government was important.

- Governance of these agencies is not tied to specific First Nations bands or organizations. In this way, the agencies are able to be responsible to the urban Aboriginal community first and foremost, and the political dimensions of representation and governance are simplified.

With respect to Jordan's Principle, the jurisdictional comparison demonstrates the following:

- Three of the five provinces reviewed have not implemented Jordan's Principle in policy or practice.
- New Brunswick formally adopted Jordan's Principle in legislation passed in 2010.
- Manitoba has developed Terms of Reference for the Committee tasked with the implementation of Jordan's principle and is currently working towards implementation. Twice, however, the *Jordan's Principle Implementation Act* was introduced in the provincial Legislature and failed to be passed.
- Jordan's Principle has resonance in multiple provincial jurisdictions.

### ***Accreditation of Child Welfare Services***

The status of accreditation for child welfare services varies considerably from province to province. Nonetheless, the Panel's comparison of inspection and accreditation in four jurisdictions provides a number of useful considerations for accreditation in the Alberta context:

- Accreditation and inspections should be considered in the context of all quality assurance mechanisms for child welfare.
- Accreditation can provide a regular, systematic process to collect input from clients and staff.
- External oversight can be integrated into child welfare systems through an accreditation process.

- Voluntary accreditation results in added administrative and quality assurance tasks for agencies. Although this may well increase service quality, agencies are hard-pressed to participate in rigorous, voluntary accreditation without dedicated resources to offset the required investment.
- Multiple sources for accreditation result in multiple standards and dimensions of quality assessed through accreditation.
- In some jurisdictions, provincial governments invest resources directly into the accreditation and inspection of agencies providing child welfare services to children and families.
- There is no single child welfare accreditation body and no universal standard for what dimensions of quality should be assessed through accreditation. This suggests that the components of accreditation can be tailored to some extent as part of a broader, province-wide quality assurance approach for child welfare.

### ***External Input into the Child Welfare System***

It appears that the voice of children, youth and families in child welfare is limited in a number of Canadian jurisdictions, based on the information available. Although complaint resolution is an area of emphasis in all provinces reviewed, regular mechanisms to obtain client input are far less consistent across jurisdictions. Notably,

- All jurisdictions that were reviewed have a clearly defined complaint resolution process.
- Ontario's quality assurance processes include direct input from children and youth about the quality and appropriateness of their care.
- Québec's case review process involves family members directly if it is determined that a change to the case plan is needed.

With respect to external input, the comparison across several jurisdictions illuminates several clear themes:

- Community members are directly involved in the governance of child welfare service delivery – usually through agencies/Authorities delivering child protection – in each of the jurisdictions reviewed.

- Each of the three jurisdictions has an independent Advocate or similar role, reporting publicly to their respective Legislatures. In each case, this office is responsible for both individual and systemic-level advocacy for children involved with child welfare.
- Mechanisms to encourage regular advice and input into the system by external partners and communities are limited.

### ***Child Welfare Staff Capacity***

Each of the jurisdictions that were reviewed expressed a preference for a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree as the minimum educational standard for workers delivering “clinical” child welfare services. Although exceptions were noted when potential staff with this qualification were not available, it is the express intention of these three provinces to only hire employees with at least a BSW to do child welfare work, unlike Alberta. In fact, in Nova Scotia it is preferred that supervisors and administrators have their Master’s Degree in Social Work (MSW).

Each jurisdiction has mandatory training requirements for new employees. Notably, however, only Nova Scotia requires that this training be completed before an employee has full authority to make clinical decisions. In Manitoba, there are additional requirements for on-the-job training for employees who do not meet the minimum educational and experience qualification standards. Formal job mentoring was not mentioned in any of the jurisdictions as a requirement for new employees with minimum educational qualifications.

The panel observed limited evidence of formal working partnerships between child welfare systems and post-secondary educational institutions. One exception noted was the practice of encouraging (but not requiring) child welfare practicum students in Saskatchewan to take training modules offered to new staff.

### 3. Findings and Recommendations

The Panel has developed a total of fourteen recommendations for the Minister. These recommendations are outlined in the sections that follow, and are organized according to four areas in which the Panel has identified opportunities to improve the child intervention system:

1. Services for Aboriginal Albertans
2. Quality assurance
3. Capacity to implement change
4. Governance

Within each of these sections, the Panel presents the following information for the consideration of the Minister:

- A brief discussion of the implications of these recommendations for accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement in the system;
- A summary of key findings of the Panel;
- Several recommendations, each of which is accompanied by an explanation and supporting rationale.

Where relevant, comparisons to other jurisdictions are also included in the analysis of recommendations.

### 3.1. Services for Aboriginal Albertans

Aboriginal children make up 64% of the child intervention caseload<sup>6</sup>, a significant overrepresentation that is perhaps the most striking issue across the Alberta system. Services for Aboriginal Albertans, therefore, remained a prominent issue throughout the Panel’s review of the system that delivers child intervention services across this province.

Adapting services to address the unique needs of Aboriginal populations requires engaging Aboriginal people in the design and implementation of both policy and practice. Aboriginal leadership and governance are a crucial foundation for the innovation, engagement and ownership required to improve service in collaboration with Aboriginal people and communities. **Accountability** for services delivered to Aboriginal children and families is a particularly important consideration, as the manner in which decisions are made about services for Aboriginal clients both on and off reserve is critical within a system in which the majority of clients are Aboriginal.

Similarly, the **adaptability** of child intervention services and system processes to the unique situations of Aboriginal populations is especially relevant to this review. Recommendations with respect to services for Aboriginal Albertans are intended to create more flexibility and capacity for the system to serve its Aboriginal clients according to their needs and culture. They also seek to address the question of how these services are delivered in Alberta compares with promising approaches in other jurisdictions – in other words, to position the child intervention system in Alberta for **continuous improvement**.

#### ***Key Findings***

The Panel’s review resulted in a number of stark findings about child intervention services for Aboriginal Albertans, including the following:

- Alberta is struggling to adapt to the unique needs of Aboriginal populations when it comes to child intervention services.

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<sup>6</sup> Alberta Children and Youth Services. (2010). “Aboriginal Children in Care”. Internal summary to address information requests from the Review Panel.

- There is a strong sentiment among the Aboriginal stakeholders that the Panel spoke with that the current system does not allow sufficient self-determination; Aboriginal people are not empowered to take care of Aboriginal children.
- There are significant gaps and differences between child intervention services provided by CFSAs and DFNAs, respectively.
- There are significant concerns about the level of cultural competence within CFSAs, as well as the ability of CFSAs to meaningfully engage Aboriginal stakeholders in addressing unique cultural issues.
- Métis Albertans affiliated with land-based Métis Settlements are served by their own CFSAs, a model which represents a pioneering effort in Canada involve Métis people in the governance and delivery of child intervention services.
- It is not clear how the unique needs of Aboriginal populations are being identified and addressed at the level of policy and strategy in a deliberate, systematic fashion.

Each of these findings is discussed below in further detail.

### **Adapting to unique needs**

Alberta Children and Youth Services continues to strive to understand and meet the unique needs of Aboriginal Albertans when it comes to child intervention services. However, Aboriginal stakeholders told the Panel that historical issues of over-representation, marginalization and disparity continue to be the common experience for Aboriginal families and communities. The overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and families is a complex problem, related both to child intervention practice, and also to broader social and economic issues such as poverty, racism and intergenerational trauma. While there have been improvements to addressing the needs of Aboriginal clients through enhanced kinship care, significant barriers and challenges appear to exist for Aboriginal children and families, and for the agencies who serve them. Many of the underlying causes and associated issues, however, lie beyond the scope and capacity of the child intervention services to address.

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*“The biggest change that I would like to see is for the Ministry to understand that they do not understand.”*

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*- Aboriginal stakeholder -*

### **Self determination**

The overwhelming message heard by the Panel from Aboriginal (First Nations, DFNA and Métis) stakeholders was **“we want to take care of our own children”** – and that Aboriginal people and communities have the capacity to do so. Aboriginal governance over child intervention services is limited almost entirely to DFNAs on reserve. There is a strong sentiment among DFNA stakeholders that the current system does not allow them to address at-risk children and families in a manner that is appropriate to their culture and communities – many Aboriginal stakeholders feel that this is a “white system” imposed upon them. This is not about political influence; rather it is about quality and appropriateness of services.

In child intervention, the idea of self-determination speaks most clearly to the imperative need to empower Aboriginal families and communities to shape supports and services according to their unique circumstances. However, a focus on self-determination could also be applied more broadly to all cultures and communities, as the basis for a system that is much more adaptable to the values, language and cultural needs of all Albertans. At present, the Aboriginal population should be the primary focus for empowering self-determination given their overrepresentation in the child intervention caseload – but it is important to recognize that this is not simply an “Aboriginal issue”; the broader systemic concern is the adaptability of services to the needs of children, families and communities.

### **Reported gaps in service**

There appear to be significant gaps and differences between child intervention services provided by CFSAs and DFNAs, respectively. Funding issues, complex accountability requirements, and lack of access to organizational supports are reported to be significant barriers faced by DFNAs. Further, there are distinct barriers and challenges associated with jurisdiction and the intersection of federal funding with provincial operational requirements. Given this combination of factors, the current system is challenged to provide equitable service levels for First Nations Albertans. DFNAs and CFSAs appear to engage in minimal cooperation to ensure adequate and appropriate services for First Nations clients. For example, collaboration between CFSA staff and First Nations Band Designates is minimal, in spite of policy requirements for notification and cooperation.

In part, the intent of delegating authority to DFNAs is precisely to address the need to involve First Nations communities in developing culturally appropriate ways of delivering child

intervention services. In practice, however, DFNAs are stretched by the legislative, procedural, reporting and administrative requirements of delivering these services in the manner required by ACYS. As a result, they feel that there is not enough flexibility in how they are able to offer child intervention in their communities, and that First Nations children and families on reserve continue to be marginalized and under-served compared to levels of service off-reserve.

The Panel was pleased to have the opportunity to visit three First Nations communities and speak with DFNA staff and community members directly. In spite of service gaps between CFSAs and DFNAs, the Panel observed staff and communities who are tremendously committed to supporting First Nations children and families on and off reserve. The people that the Panel met with were deeply invested in their communities and in working to improve the services that they provide. Panel members were also struck by the breadth of innovation and progress evident in meeting with DFNAs, from the impressive pool of foster homes supported by Kee Tas Kee Now, to the satellite office operated in Calgary by Siksika, and the strong connection with innovative youth programming in Saddle Lake. There are a number of promising approaches and considerable progress to be built upon evident in the efforts of DFNAs and First Nations communities to serve First Nations children and families.

### **Cultural competency**

There appear to be opportunities to improve the cultural adaptability of child intervention services in general. At present, however, given that most children in care are Aboriginal, the issue of cultural competence is most prominent in determining how best to adapt service delivery to the cultural perspectives of Aboriginal children, families and communities.

The majority of Aboriginal children come into the care of the government in urban settings that are served by CFSAs.<sup>7</sup> CFSAs generally have specific staff, units or even offices dedicated to Aboriginal clientele, however there is little evidence that policy or practice are culturally sensitive for Aboriginal clients. The Panel heard significant concerns about the level of cultural competence within CFSAs, as well as the ability of CFSAs to meaningfully engage Aboriginal

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, only 16% of those receiving child intervention are receiving services from DFNAs, according to a 2009 ACYS presentation provided to the Review Panel entitled “Achievements & Lessons Learned from Implementation of the Alberta Response Model”.

stakeholders in addressing cultural issues. When combined with findings about DFNA services (see above), this suggests that significant issues exist right across the child intervention system in terms of services for Aboriginal children and families.

### **The Métis CFSA**

Métis Settlement communities are served by one of the 10 CFSA, which is tasked to provide culturally appropriate services for settlement-affiliated Métis children involved with child intervention across the geographic catchment areas of other CFSA. The designation of a CFSA to serve land-based Métis settlements was the first arrangement of its kind in Canada. This arrangement has benefits for settlement-affiliated Métis, because the CFSA receives Government of Alberta infrastructure support and appears to have been able to partner effectively with other CFSA to provide Métis resources where there is need. Métis community members serve on the CFSA Board and help to direct the priorities of the CFSA. On the other hand, by tying the mandate of this CFSA to land-based settlements and only to those Métis who are settlement-affiliated, the vast majority of self-identified Métis in Alberta are excluded. At present, only 1 in every 8 self-identified Métis is affiliated with a specific settlement.<sup>8</sup>

### **Aboriginal policy and strategy**

It is not clear to the Panel how at the level of policy and strategy the unique needs of various Aboriginal populations are being identified and addressed in a deliberate, systematic fashion by the Ministry. In particular, the Panel noted few strategies to better serve urban and other off-reserve Aboriginal populations. The recent shift to enable kinship care stands out as a notable exception to this finding.

Jordan's Principle is a notable concept with resonance in policy and governance discussions across the country. Jordan's Principle states that the government or department of first contact must provide for services needed by an Aboriginal client without delay or disruption, with the understanding that the appropriate source for payment can be determined subsequently. While a number of provinces have pledged to adopt Jordan's Principle, no

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<sup>8</sup> Métis Nation of Alberta. January 15, 2010 meeting with the Review Panel.

federal, provincial or territorial government has yet to fully implement it. A number of First Nations leaders across Canada have pledged full support for the adoption and implementation of Jordan's Principle.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Recommendations***

The Panel feels strongly that to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and to reverse the trajectory of increasing overrepresentation, there is a need to change the fundamental approach of this system to working with Aboriginal stakeholders. The recommendations that follow build upon the assertion heard again and again from Aboriginal stakeholders that Aboriginal people should be able to take care of their own children. The Panel's recommendations are intended to incorporate greater responsibility and authority for Aboriginal people at multiple levels of the child intervention system. These changes envision an incremental, deliberate increase over time in the capacity of the system to empower and involve Aboriginal people in taking care of Aboriginal children.

Together, the recommendations outlined in this section comprise a unified vision for the future of on-reserve and off-reserve child intervention services for Aboriginal Albertans. In particular, increased Aboriginal governance and authority for off-reserve services have strong implications for the organization of the system. For additional details related to the implications of these recommendations for governance and accountability relationships, see the Governance section, below.

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<sup>9</sup> First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada. (2009). *Jordan's Principle*. May 2009 Brochure available online at [http://www.fncfcs.com/docs/JordansPrinciple\\_Brochure\\_May2009.pdf](http://www.fncfcs.com/docs/JordansPrinciple_Brochure_May2009.pdf). Accessed May, 2010.

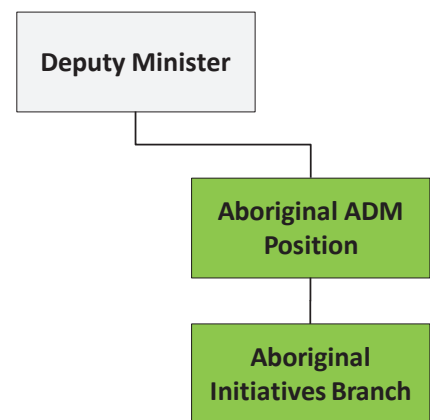
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### Recommendation 1:

Establish a senior executive position at the Assistant Deputy Minister level tasked with enhancing the capacity and cultural competency of the child intervention system to serve Aboriginal children and families.

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**The Ministry should create an Assistant Deputy Minister position focused on Aboriginal service issues, whose responsibilities include providing senior leadership in enhancing capacity and cultural competence specific to child intervention for Aboriginal people.** More specifically, this Assistant Deputy Minister position would be an Aboriginal person responsible for increasing Aboriginal self-determination in child intervention, as well as the cultural competency of staff and services.



It is the Panel's intention that this new position be instrumental in the implementation of Recommendations 2, 3, and 4, including playing an active role in change management. The Assistant Deputy Minister position should include the following objectives (although there may be others as well, depending on the role of this Aboriginal leadership position in the broader context of the Ministry as a whole):

- Partner with Aboriginal stakeholders to develop and adapt child intervention policy and practice according to the unique perspectives of Aboriginal children and families (for example, some stakeholders suggested that there should be an Aboriginal Casework Practice Model in parallel to the current Casework Practice Model);
- Strengthen the cultural competence of regional staff delivering child intervention services for Aboriginal people, as well as their capacity to adapt services to the needs and perspective of their Aboriginal clientele (see Recommendation #4);
- Lead the development of increased community capacity for Aboriginal-run agencies to provide child intervention services off reserve (see Recommendation #3);

- Provide leadership to tripartite efforts to address child intervention issues for First Nations children and families (see Recommendation #2);
- Establish and enhance strategic and operational partnerships between on-reserve and off-reserve service delivery streams;
- Provide increased opportunities for off-reserve Aboriginal people and agencies to provide input and advice to the system, and to participate in continuous improvement efforts; and
- Manage the Aboriginal Initiatives Branch, and increase their capacity to facilitate two-way communication and partnerships between DFNAs and ACYS.

### ***Rationale***

It is the belief of the Panel that flexibility to address Aboriginal cultural perspectives should be incorporated at multiple levels, but that dedicating a senior leadership position within the Ministry is a critical component. Accordingly, this recommendation addresses the need for leadership at an executive management level to develop policy, partnerships and capacity in the area of Aboriginal child intervention services. The need for this position is founded on the strong need for services appropriate to the needs and culture of Aboriginal peoples. Successful implementation of this new leadership position should have a clear impact on both accountability and adaptability of services for urban Aboriginal populations.

In addition, Aboriginal leadership at the senior executive level will be essential to enable and successfully implement the Panel's other recommendations that specifically address child intervention for Aboriginal Albertans (#2, #3 and #4).

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## **Recommendation 2:**

Establish an ongoing, formal, tripartite process to collaboratively address inequity for First Nations people in the child intervention system.

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**The Panel recommends establishment of a standing forum wherein representatives from the federal government, the Government of Alberta and Alberta First Nations collaborate to help create and ensure equity in child intervention services and outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations.** This is a shared responsibility that requires shared solutions; each group must approach the process in the spirit of partnership and with a willingness to formalize commitment for change if progress is to be made. Although the Panel’s mandate extends only to child intervention as delivered through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, it is evident that a tripartite approach is required to address child intervention for First Nations children and families.

It is not yet clear what the structure and membership of this tripartite process should be; indeed it is incumbent on these three stakeholder groups to create the conditions for success. The Panel does recommend, however, that the process should include the following:

- Leaders from all three groups who are empowered to make decisions and changes through this collaborative venue on behalf of their respective organizations;
- Investment of resources to support the process on an ongoing basis; and
- Commitment of all three parties to a shared mandate to be developed together.

Although the parties themselves should determine their agenda and approach, this Panel is prepared to recommend three priority issues as the initial areas of focus for the process:

1. The formal adoption of **Jordan’s Principle** to address service gaps and administrative barriers between provincial and federal jurisdictions.

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*Jordan’s Principle states that the government or department of first contact must provide for services needed by an Aboriginal client without delay or disruption, with the understanding that the appropriate source for payment can be determined subsequently.*

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2. Increasing the capacity of DFNAs to deliver effective child intervention services. This task would involve tackling issues such as:
  - Investing in organizational and resource capacity of DFNAs (in areas such as information technology, human resources, training and transportation);
  - Providing more funding and support for the role of Band Designate to increase collaboration between on- and off-reserve services;
  - Coordinating the transition of services when people move on and off reserve;
  - Identifying and building on promising practices, services and approaches by DFNAs across the province; and
  - Creating opportunities to increase efficiency through sharing resources, knowledge, services and/or governance between DFNAs.
3. Accreditation for First Nations child intervention services (see Quality Assurance, below).

### ***Rationale***

Given the inequity observed by the Panel in the experiences of First Nations peoples compared to other clients in the child intervention system, it is vitally important to address the challenges faced by DFNAs in supporting First Nations children and families. The capacity challenges, jurisdictional issues and relative isolation experienced by DFNAs impact the potential of these Aboriginal-led agencies to deliver culturally appropriate services to support their clientele.

It is clear that tripartite collaboration will be required to address some of the complex challenges associated with child intervention services for First Nations Albertans, given the shared responsibility of First Nations, federal and provincial governments for these challenges. The issues, problems, and potential for solutions are shared between all three groups. Solutions must therefore be developed through meaningful partnership between all three groups. Moreover, the challenges faced by the partners are not simple, and will require the benefit of time and ongoing collaboration to address. To ensure that this process will result in solutions and real change for First Nations children and families, it is necessary to formalize the venue for tripartite collaboration, and provide ongoing resources in support of the joint process.

Establishing Jordan's Principle as the initial foundation for this tripartite work is an important first step for a number of reasons:

- It addresses the capacity and jurisdictional issues at the heart of system challenges in serving First Nations children and families.
- Jordan's Principle has strong resonance and relevance across Canada, and is being adopted in some other Canadian jurisdictions and in other service sectors.
- Jordan's Principle has tremendous potential as a concept that can be built upon to tackle and surmount jurisdictional issues between child intervention and other services for children and families. The core concept of providing needed service irrespective of administrative barriers is a powerful one that can be broadened considerably beyond the issue of addressing costs for child intervention services delivered to First Nations clients.

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*The Panel's jurisdictional comparison suggests that, although Jordan's Principle has resonance in multiple provincial jurisdictions, uptake and progress in implementing it varies. For instance, New Brunswick formally adopted Jordan's Principle in legislation passed in 2010, yet legislation to do so in Manitoba was twice defeated in 2008. Ontario, Nova Scotia and British Columbia have not yet adopted Jordan's Principle.*

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### **Recommendation 3:**

Enhance capacity for Aboriginal-led agencies to provide services for Aboriginal people in off-reserve communities. As capacity is built over time, enable Aboriginal-led agencies to provide a greater range of child intervention services to Aboriginal children and families off-reserve.

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In the spirit of self-determination, **the Panel recommends reallocating resources to support Aboriginal-governed agencies to deliver supportive services to Aboriginal children and families in off-reserve communities.** This recommendation aims to build community capacity in an incremental fashion for Aboriginal people to support Aboriginal children and families directly. It is important that Aboriginal community agencies are given the authority and flexibility to adapt supportive services in culturally appropriate ways. Equally important,

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however, is a **sustained commitment by the Ministry to supporting Aboriginal agencies to take on more and more of the range of child intervention services. In the future where sufficient capacity exists, agencies should be empowered to deliver child protection, casework and investigation as well as family enhancement services.**

This goal cannot be achieved overnight; indeed, the Aboriginal organizations in Toronto and Vancouver that deliver child protection provide a compelling example of the need for years of capacity-building to establish a functional set of supportive services and community partnerships necessary to be successful. Also compelling, however, is the strength of these urban Aboriginal organizations in engaging Aboriginal communities and adapting services to cultural needs. The Ministry, therefore, should adopt a disciplined approach to actively managing and supporting the process of community capacity-building.

In implementing this recommendation, existing agencies may be built upon or new ones created; Aboriginal community members will be best-positioned to design services as needed. However, urban communities – Edmonton and Calgary in particular – should be the initial focus of capacity-building efforts, given the volume of Aboriginal children and families living in Alberta’s cities.

These Aboriginal agencies should be governed by Aboriginal representatives from the community with a mandate to act collectively, and not as advocates for the interests of individual First Nations or agencies. Indeed, the governance of these agencies should retain

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*Vancouver and Toronto are served by well-developed Aboriginal agencies with full delegated authority for child protection and supportive services. These agencies (Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society and Native Child and Family Services of Toronto) provide relevant and instructive models of how urban Aboriginal organizations can be empowered over time to provide child welfare for urban Aboriginal people.*

- *Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society and Native Child and Family Services of Toronto both arose because of a need to serve a distinct Aboriginal clientele in an urban setting.*
  - *Supportive services were the initial focus of these agencies. After an infrastructure of support had been developed, they worked incrementally toward full authority for child protection in collaboration with provincial governments. In each case, a joint commitment toward this goal of full delegated authority and political will within the agency and the government was important.*
  - *Governance of these agencies is not tied to specific First Nations bands or organizations. In this way, the agencies are able to be responsible to the urban Aboriginal community first and foremost, and the political dimensions of representation and governance are simplified.*
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formal independence from individual DFNAs, agencies or First Nations Bands, although it is recognized that close partnerships with on-reserve service providers will be required. More specifically, the Panel recommends that clear, formal working relationships and protocols be established between off-reserve Aboriginal agencies and their key partners, including ACYS, First Nations Bands, DFNAs, and both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community agencies as required.

The Panel does not wish to dictate the specific stages of development, required partnerships or optimal service model for the Aboriginal agencies. In the spirit of Aboriginal self-determination and Aboriginal responsibility for Aboriginal children, it should be Aboriginal stakeholders who drive planning and design, working closely with Ministry partners. In this way, the Ministry will empower Aboriginal people to create and implement more culturally appropriate support services for children and families.

### **Rationale**

Recognizing the importance of self-determination and genuine partnerships with Aboriginal stakeholders, the growing off-reserve Aboriginal population should be empowered to design, deliver and govern accredited (see Recommendation #5), community-based child intervention services. Major urban centers (Edmonton and Calgary) are a particularly important area of focus for these efforts given the significant and growing populations of urban Aboriginal people living there.

This recommendation will position the system to better serve the urban Aboriginal population through active collaboration, sharing of responsibility, and Aboriginal empowerment. A strategic and rigorous process for ACYS to manage and enable these changes over time is vitally important to long-term success, especially given the multi-year horizon of the recommendation.

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*The Aboriginal population in Canada is growing fast, and becoming increasingly urbanized. According to the 2010 Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (conducted by Environics):*

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*Half of Aboriginal peoples in Canada now live in urban centers, a proportion that has been increasing at the expense of rural and on-reserve populations.*

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*In 2006, Edmonton was home to over 52,000 Aboriginal people (an Aboriginal population second only to Winnipeg in size), an increase of 27% since 2001. Calgary, with more than 26,000 Aboriginal residents, experienced a similar increase of 26% for this population during this period*

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#### **Recommendation 4:**

Establish an off-reserve Aboriginal service delivery stream to provide child protection, investigations and case management for Aboriginal children and families.

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This recommendation intends that services delivered by the Ministry (including investigation and case management) be organized and managed as distinct Aboriginal services, adapted for the needs of Aboriginal people. **The Panel recommends establishing Aboriginal leadership to manage the planning, design and delivery of off-reserve child intervention services currently provided by the mainstream CFSAs system.**

The Panel understands that fully implementing this recommendation will be a long-term process. Similar to Recommendation #3, which would build community capacity for Aboriginal delivery of child intervention services, the shift proposed here is a building of Aboriginal capacity throughout the system in a parallel fashion.

To be clear, **this recommendation is not simply about expanding the existing units, teams or staff resources devoted explicitly to service for Aboriginal people in CFSAs.** Distinct regional service delivery streams should entail:

- Separate management within regions, who are given the authority to adapt services and practice as appropriate to meet the needs of Aboriginal children and families;
- An emphasis on including Aboriginal people in staff and management positions, and a corresponding focus on enhancing the cultural understanding and competency of all staff serving Aboriginal people in particular; and
- Reallocating resources (including staff) under Aboriginal management to focus on improving outcomes and adapting services for Aboriginal people.

This shift would entail a number of incremental steps, to be actively managed within the Ministry over a period of several years, including:

- Recruiting qualified Aboriginal people to regional management positions with authority over delivery of child intervention services specifically for Aboriginal populations;

- Aligning staff or units serving Aboriginal clientele under Aboriginal managers, and supporting these units to improve their cultural competence;
- Increasing the independence, flexibility and capacity of local offices and staff teams to deliver culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal clients; and
- Transitioning to parallel service streams for investigations, placement, case management and child protection delivered to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and families.

It is important to note that this recommendation does not replace the need for Métis management of child intervention services for Métis children and families. In fact, the incremental approach to building Aboriginal cultural competence and capacity should include an explicit emphasis on services for Métis Albertans under Métis leadership – and should explore expanding the current scope of Métis services to include those Métis who are not directly affiliated with a land-based settlement.

### **Rationale**

Establishing regional leadership and service delivery specific to Aboriginal child intervention is consistent with the Panel’s position that there is a need to enhance the adaptability of the system to Aboriginal culture(s). Given that the majority of Aboriginal children in care come into the system off-reserve, regional leadership of child intervention services is a particularly important level at which Aboriginal authority and responsibility should be enhanced. More specifically, this creates the potential for greater flexibility and cultural adaptation of services by placing the planning, design and delivery of child intervention off reserve under Aboriginal leadership and distinguishing it as a different service stream. It is the Panel’s belief that this will improve outcomes for Aboriginal children.

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*Jurisdictional comparison revealed only one province in which Aboriginal people living off-reserve are provided with child welfare services through separate streams of service delivery. This exception is Manitoba, which has evolved Authorities to provide services off-reserve for First Nations people. In other jurisdictions, approaches vary; for instance Ontario and British Columbia have empowered Aboriginal service delivery agencies to deliver the full range of child welfare services in specific urban centers.*

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The importance of adaptability and services that are appropriate to the needs of unique cultural groups cannot be overstated. Systemic bias exists at multiple points within child welfare systems, as Terry Cross of the National Indian Child Welfare Association illustrated at the Symposium that was a part of the Panel's review process. Further, he suggested that a lack of understanding underpins much of this bias. Reciprocal learning is required to address systemic biases and improve the experience of Aboriginal children and families with the child intervention system. The Panel believes that enhanced Aboriginal leadership will help facilitate and incent this learning, and thereby impact direct service delivery. An Aboriginal perspective is required to design and adapt services such that systemic biases are reduced. In addition, Aboriginal leadership of service delivery staff will enable flexibility and greater understanding of Aboriginal cultural perspectives.

The approach outlined above to enhancing services for Métis Albertans builds on the current model of the Métis CFSA, while recognizing the importance of adapting services to the cultural perspectives of Métis peoples across the province.

## 3.2. Quality Assurance

Delivery of child intervention services is complex work. Clients often face enormous challenges, services are provided by professionals in multiple organizations and settings, clear direction can be hard to find, and the consequences of failure can be dire for children and families. In this environment, having effective systems of quality assurance is of paramount importance. When designed and implemented well, quality assurance mechanisms generate information that helps to ensure and demonstrate **accountability**, provides flexibility for professionals to **adapt** their practices to specific circumstances, and elicits lessons learned that support **continuous improvement**. ACYS has made significant investments in quality assurance mechanisms, but a more unified, purposeful approach to optimizing and aligning these efforts is required to move forward.

### *Key Findings*

Key findings of the Panel related to quality assurance include the following:

- The Ministry makes substantial investment in information management and monitoring compliance with system processes.
- External oversight is lacking for child intervention in Alberta.
- There is a notable lack of client input in evaluating service quality, resolving complaints and designing services.
- The process for escalation of serious incidents is evolving to remove its reliance upon personal judgment at many levels.
- Case files are not reviewed in a systematic fashion.
- The system does not appear to have the ability to identify and track emerging trends and issues.

Each of these findings is discussed below in further detail.

### **Information management**

Panel members were struck by the availability of significant case-level data within Alberta – this is a definite strength of this province’s system in the opinion of the Panel. It is notable that quality assurance in the system is heavily focused on process compliance, although efforts are underway to increase reporting on outputs and outcomes. For example, reasonably comprehensive systems are in place to track the timely completion of case-level processes, from assessments and placements to completion of specific forms by child intervention workers. Practice standards are monitored thoroughly using this type of process-based information, especially since the introduction of new reporting forms under the Casework Practice Model. These newer forms have increased the rigor and standardization of assessments in particular, in an attempt to ensure that all important information about a case is captured. Outcomes measurement, by contrast, is in its early stages in the Alberta system.

It is also significant that the availability and reliability of data collected by CFSA are perceived to be markedly different from the DFNA context, in which infrastructure and capacity challenges impact information gathering, reporting and analysis – DFNAs suggest that they do not have the technical infrastructure, expertise or organizational capacity to collect comparable data.

### **External oversight**

Quality assurance is approached as an internal process, with very few mechanisms for external oversight. The Child and Youth Advocate (Advocate), for instance, reports to the Ministry in Alberta. Administrative reviews of case-level incidents are also conducted internally, lacking transparency and external oversight. In addition, Special Case Reviews to review serious incidents are called at the discretion of the Minister – although the death of a child in care almost always results in a Special Case Review – and there is no requirement to make the results public. Appeals of case decisions are also handled internally, and the oversight role of the Appeal Panel has been impacted by recent (2009) legislative amendments.

Community agencies delivering child intervention services are required to be accredited by external accreditation organizations, but neither CFSA nor DFNA are subject to this requirement. Instead, CFSA and DFNA quality assurance mechanisms tend to be internal and based on reporting and compliance. External oversight of the system, therefore, appears to be

minimal, with exceptions in the areas of community agency accreditation and fatalities of children in care.

### **Client input**

It is striking that Alberta lacks systematic mechanisms to ensure that the voices, suggestions and issues of children and families who receive child intervention services are heard. The Panel has noted that:

- There is no regular, systematic mechanism for asking children or families about the quality and appropriateness of their care and other services received.
- Youth report that they are often uncomfortable asking for help in the current system, given that they are not asked about their care by an independent source.
- There is no evaluation of outcomes from perspectives of children and families.

### **Escalation of serious incidents**

During the course of this review, the process for escalating serious incidents up through the Ministry changed to become much more rigorous as a result of an April 1, 2010 Directive from the Provincial Director, accompanied by new tools for use by CFSAs and DFNAs. The impact of these recent changes is not clear to the Panel at this time, but it appears that they are an encouraging first step toward more rigor and clarity in this critical area. It is also worthy of note, however, that the Panel is unaware of any implementation or change management efforts to support and refine the new process.

When a serious incident occurs involving a child in care, the Director may recommend that the Minister calls a Special Case Review, which is an intensive, collaborative investigation into the details of the incident. Prior to the April 2010 Directive however, in order for a given incident to come to the attention of the Director, staff at many levels of the system relied upon personal judgment about the seriousness of the situation to make decisions about escalating and incident (except when a child had died while in care). At the case level, neither agency nor CFSAs were previously aware of consistent criteria for determining whether an incident is serious enough to warrant more senior-level attention. Once a caseworker escalated an issue, it could proceed up through the hierarchy of the CFSAs organization, albeit not in a standardized

fashion. Within the Ministry itself, an administrative review and non-standardized judgments by staff would determine if and when an incident was brought to the attention of the Director.

The new process instituted on April 1, 2010 more clearly defines the requirements for notification when a limited range of serious or critical incidents occur, including specifications for a few kinds of incidents that have to be escalated, as well as timelines and steps for notifying senior management within the Ministry. These changes are seen by the Panel to be positive, although there may be room to expand the categories established in the Directive to include a wider range of incidents.

Reporting of incidents within DFNAs occurs through a different process, both prior to the new Directive and presently. Prior to April 1, the Panel understands that (ACYS) First Nations Liaison Units acted as a go-between with DFNAs and supported them to inform and notify the Director of serious incidents. Under the new Directive, reporting is clarified and incidents are escalated to the Director, with no mention of First Nations Liaison Units. However, it is notable that DFNA incidents are required to be escalated to far fewer of the senior Ministry executives than those that take place in CFSAs, and it is not clear why this would be the case. It is further unclear if the support provided to DFNAs in the past in preparing case information for the Ministry will continue, and what status this support might have within the new escalation process.

### **Case file reviews**

ACYS reviews case files in each of the regions to ensure compliance with service standards and processes. There is no process, however, to ensure that every file is reviewed, nor to target these reviews around particular issues or trends. To be clear, the issue here is not that every file should be reviewed, but rather that it is unclear how the current file review process ensures quality assurance in a systematic fashion.

### **Identification of system trends**

Existing monitoring mechanisms do not appear to track patterns in particular types of incidents or issues emerging from multiple cases at the community, regional or provincial level. Consequently, there do not seem to be processes for the system to identify and adjust to emerging trends among clients. For example, if there were dramatic increases in the use of

physical restraints in agency settings, the child intervention system is not positioned to identify these shifts.

A partial exception is the Advocate's office, which has played a limited role in highlighting issues across the system through the Advocate's annual report. However, this office has no systematic mechanism to identify and track emerging issues, and the Advocate is dependent on Ministry resources for access to relevant data.

### ***Recommendations***

The quality assurance mechanisms within the current child intervention system have evolved over time, rather than in a planned way using an overarching strategy or model. As such, there are opportunities to build upon current processes to enable a more accountable, transparent and systematic approach to quality assurance. The Panel recommends that systematic accreditation, together with an external Quality Council, should supplant a number of the fragmented mechanisms currently in operation. Further, the process for escalating serious incidents should continue to evolve, and the Child and Youth Advocate's quality assurance role should be modified.

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#### **Recommendation 5:**

All child intervention services delivered to children and families by government or on behalf of government should be accredited.

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**Building upon existing accreditation mechanisms for contracted agencies, the Ministry should broaden accreditation requirements to include all other organizations delivering protection and family enhancement services to children and families.** In other words, regional organizations, DFNAs and community agencies delivering services directly to clients should be accredited according to common standards for service quality. This process is intended to replace some of the existing ACYS quality assurance mechanisms, such as internal file reviews and the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. Indeed, it is vitally important that

accreditation requirements are not additive, but rather replace other quality assurance mechanisms and establish transparent standards of quality.

Accreditation is intended to enhance external oversight and transparency for quality assurance of child intervention services. The Panel is not in a position to prescribe the appropriate process for accreditation in Alberta, but suggests that any accreditation process should include at a minimum:

- A regular, predictable schedule;
- Inspections or site visits by qualified external or arms-length inspectors;
- Case file reviews;
- Assessment of client experience;
- Meaningful feedback to service delivery organizations at both the case level and the agency or organizational level;
- Recommendations for improvement;
- A process to hold agencies and organizations accountable for recommended improvements; and
- A focus on outcomes, as opposed to process and procedure.

It is important to ensure that the accreditation and inspection process is appropriate to the services being provided and to the agencies or organizations providing them. In the case of DFNAs, for instance, establishing accreditation mechanisms may involve a phased approach that engages First Nations communities to incorporate and address the unique cultural and organizational capacity issues on reserves.

Accreditation should be delivered by one or more organizations external to the Ministry. Nationally, there are three principal accrediting bodies in this field that could be engaged to support accreditation in Alberta:

- The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities;
- The Canadian Accreditation Council of Human Services; and
- The Council on Accreditation.

### ***Rationale***

This recommendation enables a more comprehensive, systematic process to promote service quality in all parts of the system where child intervention services are provided – by community agencies, DFNAs and government staff alike. This will enhance accountability and may also strengthen public confidence in the system by establishing a transparent way of ensuring quality for all services. Moreover, it should replace some of the process-based reporting requirements for frontline staff, enabling them to spend more time directly with clients. Finally, building an accreditation process is an opportunity to establish quality assurance mechanisms that are focused on outcomes for children and families (see Recommendation #11).

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### **Recommendation 6:**

Continue to develop and implement a clear, efficient process for escalating and tracking serious incidents within the Ministry, DFNAs, and contracted agencies.

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ACYS has made considerable progress since the inception of the Panel's review in establishing a more rigorous process by which serious incidents are escalated and senior leaders provided with information and advice to address them. Building upon this positive momentum, the Panel recommends that ACYS and the Provincial Director continue to refine and evolve this process by:

- Collaborating with child intervention staff, supervisors, management and executives to ensure the process and supporting tools are comprehensive, clear, robust and as practical as possible. In particular, there may be other types of incidents that are not included in the Directive and for which additional clarity is required.
- Addressing the discrepancies between CFSA and DFNA processes for escalation and reporting.
- Ensuring that the policy and practice of community agencies and external partners support and align with this ACYS process.

- Framing the process in terms of improved quality of services. In particular, removing the emphasis within the Directive on public or media attention as a driver for good practice in escalating incidents is recommended.
- Ensuring that information regarding serious incidents is gathered, tracked and analyzed in a fashion that allows ACYS to identify trends and opportunities to improve service delivery. For instance, the recommended Quality Council (see Recommendation #8, below) could play a strong role in identifying system trends related to serious incidents.

### ***Rationale***

The April 1, 2010 Directive for reporting serious incidents is essentially brand new. Although it is definitely a significant step in the right direction, it is not yet clear how well it is understood by child intervention staff, supervisors and community agency staff, any of whom may observe a serious incident. It is further unclear if the categories of incidents for escalation are fully understood and easily applicable, and if the information and advice provided to senior executives and to the Provincial Director will be sufficient under the new Directive. This recommendation is intended to commend the recent action on the part of the Provincial Director to improve serious incident reporting, and to urge the Ministry to take the next step to refine and fully implement the process.

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### **Recommendation 7:**

Clarify the role of the Child and Youth Advocate to focus on individual advocacy and not system-level advice.

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Alberta's Office of the Child and Youth Advocate should be directed to reaffirm their primary focus on advocacy and support services for individual children. This "individual advocacy" role is distinct from the role of providing advice or oversight regarding service trends and quality for the system as a whole – which should not be a responsibility of the Advocate's office in the future. The role of the Advocate as internal to the Ministry, reporting to the Minister, fulfills these individual advocacy duties most effectively. It is envisioned that an independent Quality

Council (see recommendation #8) should take on systemic advice and quality assurance functions instead of the Advocate.<sup>10</sup> In fact, it is important to emphasize that this recommendation should not be implemented until the system-level advocacy function of the current Advocate's office is supplanted by another mechanism (i.e., the Quality Council).

### ***Rationale***

The Advocate is well-positioned and well-established as a resource for advocacy, complaint resolution and legal support for individual children in care. In fact, in 2008 an Alberta review of the role of the Advocate noted the advantages of the reporting relationship within the Ministry (as opposed to reporting directly to the legislature) in allowing the Advocate to efficiently obtain information and support for individual cases. This office is not well-positioned, however, to track and provide advice on system trends, emerging issues, or broader issues shared with partners outside child intervention. Further, the internal ACYS reporting relationship limits the ability of the Advocate to provide independent oversight or advice.

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### **Recommendation 8:**

Establish a provincial Child and Family Service Quality Council with a mandate to systematically assess service quality and report findings publicly.

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**The Panel recommends the establishment of a provincial Child and Family Service Quality Council as an arm's-length organization empowered and funded by the Government of Alberta through the Minister of Children and Youth Services to report directly to Albertans on the quality, safety and performance of child welfare services.**

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<sup>10</sup> The Panel reviewed information about the Advocate and similar roles across Canada as documented in the following report:

Alberta Children and Youth Services. (2009). *Review of Child and Youth Advocacy in Alberta*. Alberta Child and Youth Advocacy Review Committee.

The specific mandate of the Quality Council should be broader than child intervention, encompassing at minimum the range of services provided by ACYS. Specifically, the mandate should include:

- Systematically measuring, monitoring and publicly reporting on service quality based on input from children and families in the system;
- Initiating and conducting system reviews that analyze trends, emerging issues, and opportunities to improve services for children and families, including how communities and broader service systems can more effectively support these children and their families;
- Within one year, beginning to evaluate the implementation of changes in support of the Alberta Response Model;
- Ongoing evaluation of major system changes – including recommendations by this Panel; and
- At the request of the Minister, convening and directing experts external to the Ministry to independently investigate and publicly report on matters concerning service outcomes.

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*The Quality Council concept is loosely based on the Health Quality Council of Alberta, whose mandate is to promote patient safety and health service quality on a province-wide basis.*

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Membership on the Quality Council will include cross-sectoral expertise (at a minimum including representatives from the health, education and justice sectors), Aboriginal representation, and the Child and Youth Advocate. It will also be necessary for the Ministry to determine what the optimal relationship should be between this Quality Council and the Alberta Center for Child, Family and Community Research, which is heavily involved in data management for children and youth in this province in partnership with ACYS.

This Quality Council should replace the existing Social Care Facilities Review Committee, and should assume the “systemic advocacy” functions currently undertaken by the Advocate. In this manner, the Advocate’s office can focus more strongly on its core role of “individual advocacy”.

Serious incidents occur in every complex system, and are usually caused by a combination of factors, including human error and system failures. People in the system have an obligation to improve – to be genuinely open to and responsive to input and criticism, and to take actions

that decrease the likelihood of serious incidents occurring in the future. Unfortunately, in the case of child intervention, the results of serious incidents are often tragic and there is a strong desire to hold someone responsible, and so the focus on learning and improvement is secondary. Fundamentally important to the work of the Quality Council is an emphasis on understanding “systemic factors” that contribute to serious incidents, as opposed to assigning blame.

### ***Rationale***

The creation of a provincial Quality Council directly strengthens accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement within Alberta’s child intervention system by providing external advice, oversight and increased transparency. Accountability will be enhanced by having an organization whose primary purpose is to engage children and families who receive child intervention services, and to publicly report on what has been learned. This transparency may also promote greater public confidence and a better public understanding of child intervention.

Adaptability is promoted through input and advice from an objective, arms-length organization of experts with a specific mandate to identify ways that children and families can be more effectively served, regardless of where (i.e., through what system) they receive the service. Finally, investigation and public reporting of events with poor service outcomes and system trends will stimulate improvements in child intervention practice on an ongoing basis.

### 3.3. Capacity to Implement Change

Change is hard. Implementing changes that result in improvement is even more difficult in complex systems, where so much is beyond the immediate control of decision makers. Managing change requires specialized skills and processes that differ from those associated with operational leadership in a stable environment.

For change to succeed, several ingredients must fall into place including good *ideas*; *will* to change; and strong *execution* of plans. In Alberta, ideas for how to improve child intervention services are clearly present, and decision makers have demonstrated the will to make big changes in line with a vision to transform the system in the best interests of children. However, capacity to implement intended changes has been a key issue over the past several years. The result is that despite some positive developments over the past decade, there remain significant challenges to improve the way that child intervention services are organized, planned and delivered in Alberta.

This issue of change is fundamentally tied to each of the Review Panel's three key areas of inquiry. Panel members have sought to understand:

- Who is **accountable** for changes in support of Alberta's vision?
- How much flexibility is there in the system to allow people and processes to **adapt**?
- How is the system positioned to support **continuous improvement** as child intervention transforms?

#### ***Key Findings***

Key findings of the Panel related to implementation capacity include:

- There is strong support for the vision of the Alberta Response Model.
- Change leadership and change management are key areas for improvement.
- There are indications of a closed and defensive culture among child intervention staff, management and executive leaders.
- There are opportunities to improve the capacity of service delivery staff.

- Integration of child intervention with communities and other “systems” is lacking.
- Child intervention in Alberta has begun to shift toward measurement of outcomes, but the approach to performance management based on outcomes is in its infancy.

Each of these findings is discussed below in further detail.

### **Support for the Alberta Response Model**

Almost universally, the Panel heard strong support for the direction envisioned by the Alberta Response Model. In particular, there is support for the vision of a system that is more proactive and able to prevent crises by strengthening families and building strong ties to the community. Differential response is also perceived to be a positive foundation of child intervention practice to help achieve the vision of a more integrated and preventative system.

### **Change leadership**

At the time the Alberta Response Model was approved, there appears to have been a strong initial focus on implementation of the model. However, in the absence of a coordinated change management strategy that would effectively engage staff and partners in implementing the changes, the model has not been fully implemented as envisioned. Moreover, there are strong indications that the system has lost focus on the Alberta Response Model as its vision for the future. In fact, many stakeholders believe that the Alberta Response Model has been replaced by subsequent changes (e.g., the Casework Practice Model), and is no longer relevant.

Notably, change has been rapid and constant in the years since the Alberta Response Model was introduced. “Change fatigue” appears to be a significant issue, specifically among direct delivery staff and supervisors, who report feeling overwhelmed by the continuous changes to their day-to-day work. In part, the negativity and fatigue associated with the changes in the system are related to the perception among child intervention workers and supervisors that there has not been sufficient investment by ACYS to support the changes. They note that adapting to new processes takes significant time and resources over and above what is required to fulfill everyday responsibilities.

There is also a strong perception among child intervention workers and supervisors that changes within the system are implemented without adequate feedback and refinement based

on practical implications in the field. In particular, new tools for assessment and reporting (i.e., the Ongoing Case Assessment Review, Detailed Assessment Record and Safety Phase Assessment Record) were often cited as examples of changes that were implemented in the absence of understanding how they would impact caseworkers. The Ongoing Case Assessment Review form, in particular, was frequently singled out as a largely unnecessary and redundant tool that does not add value to casework practice. There was also a strong negative sentiment expressed to the Panel about the lack of appropriate consultation in conceptualizing and implementing change.

### **Organizational culture**

Organizational culture is critical to the performance and adaptability of individuals and groups in all professions. In the absence of a positive and constructive culture, the best plans can prove impossible to implement. Although the Panel’s work did not include a formal assessment of organizational culture, several strong impressions emerged that suggest a defensive, risk-averse culture, including:

- Caseworkers and investigators report a marked tendency reported to err on the side of caution by apprehending a child rather than supporting them within a family setting while the family is facing challenges. Of course, Ministry staff should not be expected to risk the safety of children, but it seems that the ability of the system to reduce the need for protective services by strengthening families is limited if decision making at this level is overly conservative – or if sufficient supports are lacking that would be necessary to prevent taking a child into care.
- The performance management systems of the Ministry are primarily concerned with demonstration of compliance with established casework processes and procedures. Related to this emphasis on process reporting is a perception that service delivery staff spend a substantial proportion of their time on paperwork that is seen to “protect” the Ministry rather than improving the lives of clients.

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*“[T]op down elaboration of rigid work methodologies is a daily reminder to caseworkers that someone who doesn’t do casework thinks they know better how it should be done...the casework relationship is the intervention.”*  
*[emphasis in original]*

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- Written submission -

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- When serious incidents occur, there appears to be a high reliance on internal investigative processes, with limited transparency of process and reporting of results.<sup>11</sup> This contributes to the perception of a Ministry that is averse to exposing weaknesses, admitting mistakes, or learning from negative occurrences – in particular due to the political sensitivity of adverse events experienced by children in care.
- Case-level decisions are perceived as closed to input from community partners, stakeholders outside the Ministry, parents, families and children themselves.

### **Staff capacity**

Although the Panel did not conduct a formal assessment of staff capacity, there are indications that regional staff are stretched in their ability to deliver services and conduct casework as envisioned and required. Ultimately, capacity challenges impact the ability of workers to adapt and to effectively implement core components of the Casework Practice Model, especially when working with children, youth and families who have complex needs. Several important findings of the Panel relate directly to the capacity of the system, including:

- Competition exists for limited funds in tough economic times. For instance, only 4% of CFSA spending is devoted to family enhancement, compared with 80% for core legislated protection services.<sup>12</sup> It is difficult to adapt the system when such a large proportion of scarce financial resources must be allocated to reactive rather than preventative service.
- The administrative and paperwork demands under the Casework Practice Model have increased significantly, making each case more time consuming. At the same time, child intervention workers report increased complexity of cases in recent years, both due to the magnitude of client needs and the changes in assessment practice under the Casework Practice Model. More complex cases require more time, and therefore the workload per case has reportedly increased.

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<sup>11</sup> Formal, public inquiries into fatalities of children in care and Special Case Reviews stand out as notable exceptions to this observed tendency to internalize investigation.

<sup>12</sup> These figures were provided by ACYS to the Review Panel in October of 2009 as background information for the review.

- A substantial number of caseworkers are relatively inexperienced, yet they carry tremendous responsibility and must make difficult decisions about complex family situations. This is a particular concern when serving Aboriginal families, as a deep understanding of culture and history is often necessary to understand situations and to respond appropriately.
- The capability of staff to perform this difficult work with children and families is a vital issue. There are opportunities to improve levels of qualification, training and job-readiness of new staff, in particular.
- Investigators and caseworkers in Alberta are not required to have completed a Bachelor's Degree in social work. In fact, these staff are not required to have any formal social work education at all. The Panel observed minimal formal linkages between ACYS and educational institutions with social work programs, including First Nations colleges.

### **Integration with other “systems”**

The Alberta Response Model acknowledges the simple truth that child intervention systems cannot function in isolation. In fact, the success of differential response and family enhancement are inextricably linked with the quality and effectiveness of partnerships, as a range of supports and interventions are required to proactively strengthen families.

There has been some progress in this area, including participation in cross-Ministry work, such as the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative, the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Cross-Ministry Committee, and Alberta's Safe Communities Initiative. However, on balance the child intervention system appears to be struggling to transform its relationship with the community and with other government systems to one of active partnership and collaboration. Cross-Ministry bodies have not yet achieved strong integration of services at the community level.

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*“The more Alberta’s child intervention system allows the community to become involved the more equipped the communities will be in dealing with the constant pressures society is putting on our children and families.”*

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*- Written submission -*

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### **Shift toward outcomes measurement**

The Panel observed a trend in child intervention in Alberta toward the measurement of outcomes, recognizing the critical importance of being able to better achieve and demonstrate results for children being served. Alberta has played a strong leadership role in the cross-jurisdictional development of outcomes for child welfare services (i.e., the National Child Welfare Outcomes Indicator Matrix). Within this province, however, the shift to measuring outcomes is just beginning. A preliminary initiative in this area, named Outcomes Based Service Delivery, has taken steps to change the way in which certain “Lead Agencies” identified in each CFSA region are funded. It appears to be the intention of the Ministry to align outcomes with more flexible funding arrangements under this model in the future, but the full scope of the Outcomes Based Service Delivery initiative is still being developed.

### ***Recommendations***

Recommendations in this section seek to increase the ability of the child intervention system to **adapt** and make changes for the better. More specifically, they attempt to position the system to take a more deliberate approach to service improvement on an ongoing basis – one that will enable design and managed implementation of future changes to achieve better results. Further, the suggested changes attempt to improve the capacity of the child intervention system – and the Alberta government – to provide children and families with seamless services of the highest quality.

The cornerstone of a system that continuously adapts and improves is a culture where openness to learning and development are strongly emphasized and encouraged at all levels. The Panel believes that leaders in Alberta’s child intervention system should strive to build a culture where:

- Learning and improvement are a continual focus at every level;
- Improvement efforts include direction and input from external stakeholders, clients, and staff at all levels of the system; and
- People in the system are held accountable, but also feel that they will not be punished for making mistakes that are due to factors outside of their control. Learning from mistakes is emphasized over blame.

A culture of learning and improvement is essential to demonstrating **accountability** and having effective systems for **continuous improvement**. It is vital to meaningfully involve those people throughout the system who will be affected by a proposed change in its design, implementation and evaluation. This is the way that staff, stakeholders and clients become engaged and “buy into” changes. More importantly, it is how systems can ensure that they are making changes in the right ways in the first place.

The Alberta Response Model includes evaluation of child-centered outcomes as one of its pillars, and this is a principle that can be built upon to adapt and improve child intervention services in the years to come. A fundamental culture shift is required to open the system to input, feedback and research, and also to criticism. Such a culture shift begins with a commitment from leaders at every level to be transparent about successes and failures, to embrace adverse events as learning opportunities, and to systematically build improvement work into the way that child intervention services are planned and delivered. A number of the changes recommended throughout this report by the Panel are consistent with this kind of culture change.

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### **Recommendation 9:**

Develop and resource a change strategy that aligns and guides implementation of the various child intervention improvement initiatives.

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Change management and implementation has been a significant challenge for child intervention in Alberta, highlighting the need for a disciplined approach and supporting infrastructure. **The Panel recommends a formal strategy and ongoing investment to sustain the focus of the Ministry and its partners on the implementation of a shared vision for child intervention in Alberta that aligns with and builds from that established by the ARM.** This means that leaders must be held accountable for developing and achieving change management objectives and timelines as part of formal change management processes.

Given the scale of changes that have occurred and those that will be required in the future, this approach to change should be iterative and flexible to adapt to a continually shifting environment. We submit that a successful strategy will have the following characteristics:

- Revisiting, re-invigorating and consistently communicating the vision for the future of the system under the Alberta Response Model, and how this vision relates to changes underway;
- Assignment of executive leadership to a “program of change” that is clearly separated (but aligned with) day-to-day operational responsibilities;
- Dedication of human resources with project management capability to coordinate the development and execution of the strategy;
- Development of demonstrable milestones and objectives with timelines and clear accountability for completion;
- Alignment of priorities across the Ministry (e.g., incorporating change objectives into ACYS business planning);
- An approach to Ministry resource allocation that includes funding of new priorities that replace rather than add to other, lower priorities;
- Allocation of resources to support change management activities on an ongoing basis;
- Putting mechanisms in place to accommodate input by clients and service delivery staff in refining changes in policy or practice;
- Empowering leaders at all levels of the system to determine priorities for change that can be implemented at their level; and
- Ongoing communications regarding planned and active system changes, including public reporting on progress, successes and challenges.

Change priorities and issues will evolve as the system itself continues its evolution. However, there currently are several key implementation issues that should serve as initial areas of focus:

- The smooth implementation of new information infrastructure; specifically, the replacement of the Child and Youth Information Module system with Intervention Services Information System;

- The utility, efficiency and workload demands of the assessment, reporting and case management tools associated with the Casework Practice Model;
- Continuing the shift toward a performance management system that balances measurement of outcomes with process compliance; and
- Careful planning and evaluation, as well as clear communication, related to the new Outcomes Based Service Delivery funding model for regional “Lead Agencies” – including its impacts and implications in the areas of casework, contract management, outcomes measurement and the relationship between the Ministry and the contracted agency sector.

### ***Rationale***

Since its inception, the Alberta Response Model has required and continues to demand complex changes in the organization and delivery of child intervention services. The system does not have a broad strategy for the implementation of the Alberta Response Model, and there is no dedicated plan or process to guide and adapt system changes according to the overall vision. Further, change leadership at all levels of the system appears to have been fragmented, lacking strong alignment with a common understanding of where the system is headed, and why.

The child intervention system has struggled to transform itself, working to develop new ways of doing business while at the same time staying focused on delivering high-quality services for a challenging clientele. The size and complexity of the system, together with the magnitude of changes it has envisioned, make it critically important to sustain and renew focus on the vision for success. This requires investing in change management, and recognizing that complex changes are iterative.

Iterative change requires consistent input from those staff and clients in the system that are affected by changes. The process recommended by the Review Panel positions the system to adapt and improve on an ongoing basis. This includes but is not limited to formal evaluations at a single point in time. The byproducts of this type of change management include greater engagement, buy-in and ownership with respect to the changes among those most affected. The four implementation issues listed above represent an excellent opportunity to focus

proactive, collaborative change management efforts around important processes that are “front-of-mind” at present.

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**Recommendation 10:**

Develop and implement a human resource strategy that addresses capacity, qualification and competencies at all levels of the system.

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The Panel recommends that ACYS take a more deliberate approach to human resource planning and management that will increase professionalization at all levels and enhance the ability of staff to deliver child intervention services as envisioned within the Alberta Response Model.

The human resource strategy should:

- Work to establish a Bachelor of Social Work degree as a minimum educational requirement for child intervention investigators, caseworkers and supervisors working directly with children and families. It is recognized that this requirement must be introduced in a measured fashion that respects the experience and competencies of the current workforce (i.e., structure implementation over a period of years). It must also be accompanied by increased capacity among post-secondary education institutions to facilitate educational and training opportunities that are specific to child intervention, and are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal populations.
- Build upon the platform of a BSW degree as minimum requirement for “clinical” investigation, casework and supervisory positions to develop training, mentorship and partnerships with educational institutions that will enhance job readiness of new child intervention staff.
- Support the ongoing work of Aboriginal stakeholders, First Nations colleges and the University of Calgary to incorporate a deeper understanding of Aboriginal peoples into curriculum for social work students.
- Define appropriate competency requirements for key staff positions, including direct service delivery, supervisory and executive leadership positions. Aboriginal cultural competency is a particularly important requirement to be addressed at all levels.

- Include an approach to recruitment and retention that increases the numbers of qualified Aboriginal staff at all levels of the system.
- Enhance the cultural competence of staff and their capacity to engage in a constructive way with Aboriginal peoples.
- Hire executive leaders and managers with skills and responsibilities to manage change and build system capacity – and integrate these expectations into the roles of current leaders.
- Define and enable ongoing training and development requirements for service delivery staff and supervisors in the system.
- Integrate more sophisticated workload assessment and management systems by building on the workload assessment tool currently in development for child intervention workers – but also by reevaluating the workload model to accommodate more face-to-face time with clients.

### ***Rationale***

Given the complex, demanding nature of child intervention work – from clinical decision making to executive leadership – the system is best served by a highly skilled, well trained and professional workforce. Moreover, the professionalism and capability of staff at all levels has a direct impact on adaptability to changes, which will continue to play a prominent role across the system in the years to come.

Although the Panel did not assess the capacity or competencies of staff directly, this recommendation to establish a human resource strategy as outlined above will address a number of observed opportunities to improve the adaptability of the system and the quality of service:

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*Each of the jurisdictions that were reviewed expressed a preference for a Bachelor of Social Work degree as the minimum educational standard for workers delivering “clinical” child welfare services.*

*The panel observed limited evidence of formal working partnerships between child welfare systems and post-secondary educational institutions.*

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- Increasing the ability of staff to work constructively with Aboriginal clients and communities is extremely important in a system with a majority of clients who are Aboriginal.
- Improving the qualifications, competencies and job-readiness of child intervention workers is a priority, given the challenging nature of this work and its importance in the lives of vulnerable children. Increasing the professionalism of the child intervention workforce is a key opportunity for improvement.
- Workload assessment and workforce planning are important, especially in the area of increasing Aboriginal staffing, but it is important not to lose focus on what workers are being asked to do and how. Relationship-based service is the core of good child intervention, and the system must continually strive to improve the quantity and quality of face-to-face social work practice.

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### **Recommendation 11:**

Continue the shift towards an outcomes-based performance management system.

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The performance and quality of child intervention services in Alberta are not assessed according to the results or outcomes of the services provided. There are indications that child intervention is shifting toward outcomes measurement as a part of managing system performance in the future, however. Alberta has been a national leader in helping to create the National Child Welfare Outcomes Indicator Matrix, but outcomes are not yet part of performance management in this province.

An outcomes-based performance management system has the following characteristics:

- Common outcomes for child intervention services measured across the province;
- Regular measurement and public reporting of outcomes achieved;
- Celebration of successes for organizations that deliver excellent services and achieve good outcomes;

- Incentives for service delivery organizations to implement practices that are known to be associated with good outcomes;
- Mandated improvement processes for organizations who consistently fail to implement good practices and as a result achieve poor outcomes; and
- Flexibility for service providers to adapt services so as to improve outcomes.

The Panel recommends that the Ministry continue its work towards a performance management system that balances measurement of outcomes with process compliance – not by adding more measurement requirements, but by focusing more on reporting results and less on documenting process and procedure. In working to this end, the following are critically important:

- Identify and communicate a set of system outcomes that can be applied broadly across organizations delivering services in Alberta’s child intervention system.
- Reserve an emphasis on process compliance for areas where there is significant risk to the safety and wellbeing of children. An example would be the process for managing serious events (including “near-misses” that do not result in harm): there should be absolutely no doubt about what information is escalated to the Provincial Director, how this occurs, at what levels decisions are made, how the Minister is informed of the situation and how it is being rectified.
- Enable an outcomes-based performance management system with streamlined information systems. The intent to implement ISIS appears to be a positive move in this direction.
- Incorporate a focus on common outcomes into accreditation and other external oversight processes.

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*The United Kingdom’s Every Child Matters initiative includes a transparent performance measurement system based on shared outcomes across the system. This transparency has permitted the development of a common, public dialogue about child welfare that has moved beyond simply reacting to negative incidents and reduced political pressure to react to tragedies.*

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*The U.K. model identifies two key questions on which all assessments of organizations and agencies providing services to children are based:  
(1) How well are the children served?  
(2) What capacity do organizations/agencies have to improve?*

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*- Dr. Wendy Thompson,  
McGill University -*

- Assess and evaluate ongoing efforts to incorporate a greater focus on outcomes in the system in order to ensure that reporting requirements, measures and incentives are practical, appropriate, and applicable in improving results for children and families.
- Performance management should reinforce a culture of learning and improvement. One way of accomplishing this is to incorporate the concept of “earned autonomy” into the system, whereby high performing organizations who demonstrate positive outcomes are rewarded with less rigorous oversight and higher profile of their successes. Alternately, lower performing organizations are provided with enhanced support to improve their processes and performance. Once performance improves, however, efforts to monitor and measure process compliance should reduce.

### ***Rationale***

Measuring and demonstrating results is fundamentally important to adapting services, improving the system, and holding people accountable for making a positive difference in the lives of children and families. Outcomes are extremely difficult to measure in a child intervention context, but the need to determine if, why and how much clients’ lives are impacted by services remains an imperative goal and an imposing challenge – in Alberta and across the country. It is essential that Alberta sustain a measured approach to shifting from measuring and managing indirect indicators to demonstrating outcomes, and working to better them. A focus on outcomes should – over time – become the primary means by which the system measures performance, gradually replacing current reporting mechanisms focused on reporting and tracking processes.

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**Recommendation 12:**

Seek a mandate to establish a shared approach and infrastructure to better support vulnerable children and families in Alberta.

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The Review Panel’s mandate is limited to the child intervention system within a single Government of Alberta Ministry. However, given the interconnected nature of issues facing children, families and communities – and the need for more work to strengthen families and prevent crises – the Panel feels compelled to make a broader recommendation for greater collaboration to overcome jurisdictional silos, address shared issues and find shared solutions. Although the organizations and people who compose Alberta’s child intervention system are fundamentally important, they cannot succeed in isolation. Embracing the notion of shared responsibility is at the core of effective partnerships that are so essential to supporting children and families.

In this spirit, the Panel recommends that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services seek a mandate from the Premier to establish a unifying initiative across the Government of Alberta that will better integrate mandates, policy, resources and infrastructure that support children and families. Further, this initiative should adopt a unified approach to engaging and enhancing community infrastructure in this critical work.

This collaboration should seek to take a different form than the cross-Ministry work currently underway in this province. There is a need to unify at multiple levels: bringing together mandate, planning, policy and organization within government – but also at the local and community levels where service delivery staff and agencies need to work better together.

A shared mandate should: address policy gaps that currently exist related to provision of supports for vulnerable Albertans; identify shared outcomes for children and families that apply across government; develop mechanisms that align mandates, performance measures and resource commitments across government; and establish a common approach to engaging communities in building and implementing solutions.

Key issues that should be addressed in the context of this initiative include:

- Early childhood development;

- Education
- Mental health, substance use and addictions;
- Secure treatment environments;
- The transition to adulthood;
- Entanglement with criminal justice, corrections and legal systems;
- Cultural and language barriers;
- Homelessness; and
- Life skills and employment training.

### ***Rationale***

Essentially, the Panel is recommending that ACYS elevate the interconnected nature of challenges facing children, families and communities, and champion government collaboration to address them. This recommendation is consistent with the system changes recommended above to enhance integration of services, openness to learning and external input, as well as to help build the partnerships and broad collaboration that will be required to succeed in becoming more proactive in supporting children and families.

The Alberta Response Model envisions more proactive and preventative services for children and families that prevent the kinds of crises that result in family breakdown and children in care. Addressing the root causes of the complex challenges encountered by this system requires a broader mandate than child intervention, however, as the causes and the issues themselves are considerably broader in scope. Parents, families, communities, service provider organizations, and governments have a shared interest in and shared responsibility for safeguarding and supporting children and families. A greater degree of integration among and between government and community resources is required to shape the kind of holistic system of support that can address root causes and erode the need for child protection services. The child intervention system has limited potential to prevent or to heal family breakdown in isolation.

Underpinning this recommendation to establish shared responsibility for children and families is Jordan's Principle. This principle asserts that needed services should be provided to children

irrespective of who has primary responsibility or who will cover the cost – administration must not come before service. We submit that this concept provides an excellent foundation for an initiative intended to provide needed supports irrespective of the mandate, administrative or cost implications – not only between jurisdictions, but also between agencies, departments and government Ministries.

### 3.4. Governance

By definition, intervention in families for the sake of children involves the need to decide what kind of home environment and what kinds of services are in the best interests of a child. These choices occur on a day-to-day basis for individual cases. However, there are also broader strategic decisions that affect what services are available, how they are designed and organized, and what systems of checks and balances are in place to ensure quality of services provided. Given the systems-level mandate of this Panel, it is these broader governance<sup>13</sup> issues that are the focus of recommendations about who should decide what is best for children in the system.

Improving the governance of the child intervention system must consider two key tenets:

1. Responsibility and accountability for a child’s safety and wellbeing must be clear to ensure that decisions are made in the child’s best interest; and
2. The best interests of children in the system cannot be determined or acted upon without the involvement of the communities in which they live and other stakeholders who deliver services.

In practical terms, the overlap between these governance issues begs the question: given the direct accountability of the Ministry, how much influence should the community have over how services are designed, organized and delivered? The reality is that both Ministry accountability and community influence are necessary to have a system that is both **accountable** and **adaptable**. The challenge is to ensure the system of governance enables both.

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<sup>13</sup> This report adopts the working definition for governance from the *Institute on Governance*: “Governance determines who has power, who makes decisions, how other players make their voice heard and how account is rendered.” Full citation for this definition is included in Appendix I – References.

## **Key Findings**

The following are the key findings of the Panel related to child intervention governance:

- The current child intervention service delivery system under the CFSA is a “hybrid” of regional and centralized governance.
- Executive accountability for child intervention practice under the provincial Director of Child Intervention (Provincial Director) is not clear within the current system.
- Community input into the system is currently focused at regional and local levels.

Each of these findings is discussed below in further detail.

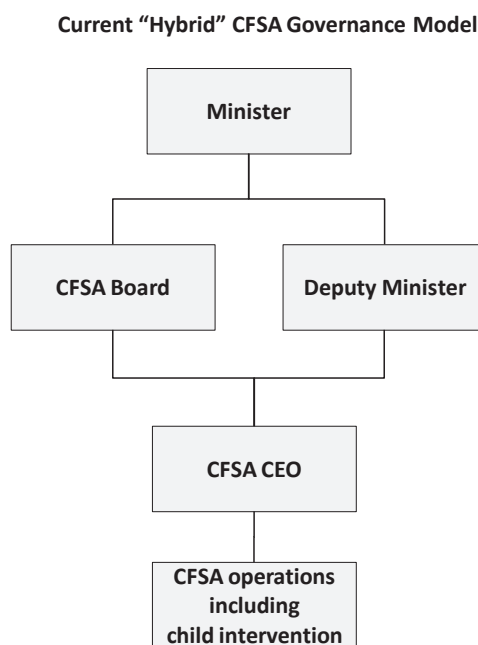
### **“Hybrid” governance model**

The current child intervention service delivery system under the CFSA is a “hybrid” of regional and centralized governance. CFSA Boards are neither true governing bodies nor groups that are focused primarily on community engagement. There is some confusion regarding the scope of Boards’ authority and their optimal role in the current system. Specifically, it is not clear the extent to which Boards can independently make policy, spending and operational decisions within their regions, which decisions must be made in consultation with the Ministry, and which decisions are made by the Ministry.

Similarly, regional CFSA CEOs report both to a Board of community members and to the Deputy Minister of ACYS.

This dual reporting results in an overlap of governance interests between CFSA Boards and the Ministry. In practice, however, the model is much more strongly centralized than it appears as the Ministry retains control over policy, standards, regulation, funding and operational priorities.

The Panel heard that this dual reporting relationship, in addition to creating the potential for conflict between Board and Ministry priorities, has resulted in uncertainty and frustration among Board members about the limits to operational authority of Boards. Indeed, there are



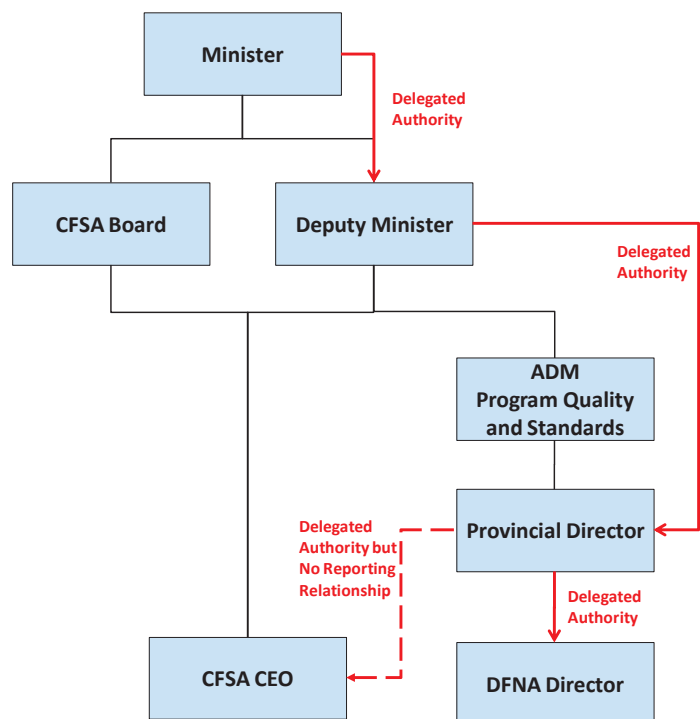
legislative provisions in the *Child and Family Services Authorities Act* whereby the Minister may give direction to the Board and to the Authority, thus limiting regional autonomy.

### Executive accountability for child intervention practice

The legislated responsibilities of the Provincial Director are clear.<sup>14</sup> Operationally, however, the chain of responsibility for child intervention practice and service under the Provincial Director is far less clear within the current system. Regional child intervention staff report up through the regional bureaucracy to the CEOs of their respective CFSAs, who in turn report to the Deputy Minister. The accountability relationship between the Provincial Director, who carries legislated delegation authority for child intervention, and the CFSAs is unclear. This is because although the CEOs derive their delegated authority from the Provincial Director, it appears that there is no corresponding reporting relationship.

The Provincial Director is thus placed in a position of responsibility for case-level outcomes that s/he does not have authority over; the Provincial Director is not currently positioned to provide executive leadership, policy direction or administrative management of regional practice. A significant risk arises that, since it is not clear to what extent regional organizations and executives should be responsible for case-level decisions, the Provincial Director will be required to act as final decision maker in each case where there is doubt – in other words, a large number of decisions may get pushed upward

Current Model: Accountability and Delegated Authority for Child Intervention



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<sup>14</sup>It is important to note that the Review Panel did not receive a formal legal opinion regarding Alberta’s current legislation or the legal implications of recommendations in this report.

from the regions to a single individual. Ideally, a delegation model should be in place where the Provincial Director is able to define and hold regional executives accountable for a given scope of decision making authority.

By contrast, executive responsibility and delegation of legislated child intervention authority are clearer in the DFNA system, wherein DFNA Directors carry authority delegated by the Provincial Director and are accountable to the Provincial Director for child intervention service in their respective jurisdictions.<sup>15</sup> The Panel heard, however, that although official lines of accountability were clearer for DFNAs, the actual working relationships between DFNAs and the Ministry are not very close, and that communications between the two are generally facilitated through ACYS First Nations Liaison Units, operating under the Aboriginal Initiatives Branch.

### **Community Input**

At present, Alberta's communities have input into the child intervention system through two primary mechanisms:

1. CFSAs Boards whose mandate includes, among a multitude of other duties, engaging community members to help shape regional delivery of child and family services, including child intervention.
2. Contracted service delivery agencies that provide supportive services for children and families at the community level. These non-profit agencies are governed by members of the community, and are contracted by CFSAs and DFNAs to serve children and families directly.

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<sup>15</sup> Alberta Children and Youth Services. (2010). *Delegation Model and Process*. Internal document (Draft).

### ***Recommendations***

In Alberta, there is a fundamental lack of clarity in the governance of child intervention services:

- The CFSA service delivery system is overseen by a “hybrid” of regional and centralized governance – CFSAs are not fully autonomous regional organizations, but neither are they directed entirely by the provincial Ministry.
- Accountability for child intervention practice under the Provincial Director is unclear.

The Panel believes strongly that resolving the lack of clarity in the governance of child intervention services should be a very important priority for the Ministry. Although many potential models exist, they fundamentally fall into one of two categories: (1) centralized, or (2) decentralized. **Child intervention services in Alberta must be accountable centrally or regionally; the existing hybrid of both prevents clear accountability, and therefore is not seen to be a sustainable option.**

Recognizing the fundamental choice that exists, the Panel believes centralized governance to be a better solution than fully regional service delivery for the child intervention in Alberta. This option was deemed the optimal solution for the governance challenges in this province for the following reasons:

- CFSA Boards are not positioned or supported to act as autonomous governance Boards (i.e., to have full decision-making authority over how services are organized and delivered within their region, within the limits defined by legislation, regulation, directional policy, budget, and quality assurance standards), which would be required under a true regional governance model. The Panel is concerned that granting CFSAs a high degree of autonomy from the Ministry may not be palatable or practical within the current Alberta context.
- The Panel has concerns about the capacity of Boards to fulfill their full range of responsibilities. Transitioning to a fully regionalized model will require substantial effort and a much stronger emphasis on defining core competencies of Board members, more rigor in recruiting Board members with such competencies, and stronger evaluation of the performance of Boards.

- It is the opinion of this Panel that regionalization would entail significant management, human resource and labour relations challenges stemming from the fact that regional staff are presently Government of Alberta employees. Full regionalization could be hindered by dual accountability for staff, who are employed by ACYS but also accountable to the Boards of their regional organizations. Transitioning to a fully regionalized model (where regional organizations are operationally independent from the Ministry) could require resolving this situation of dual accountability, which would likely have significant human resource and cost implications for the Ministry.
- A centralized option would require far less disruption of the organization and relationships that enable service delivery, and thus the impact on day-to-day service delivery is believed to be less in governance were fully centralized than if it became fully regionalized.

The two recommendations below represent the Panel’s preferred option for resolving the tension of hybrid governance – that is, clarifying central accountability and enhancing the role of community input and advice. The Panel recognizes, however, that the Ministry must carefully consider the legal and human resource of these recommendations and based on this further analysis:

1. ACYS may decide to fully regionalize child intervention service delivery instead of pursuing full centralization; or
2. ACYS may not be able to implement a fully centralized model as recommended in the immediate future, and that one or more transitional governance shifts may be required.

Therefore, a number of critical considerations are presented following the recommendations in this section that speak to these two contingencies. In other words, in the event that the Ministry does not implement a fully centralized governance model as recommended, there are still certain significant issues that must be addressed, whether the system moves to full regionalization or remains a “hybrid” of the two. Ultimately, it remains vital that the Ministry work to implement either a fully centralized or fully decentralized governance model.

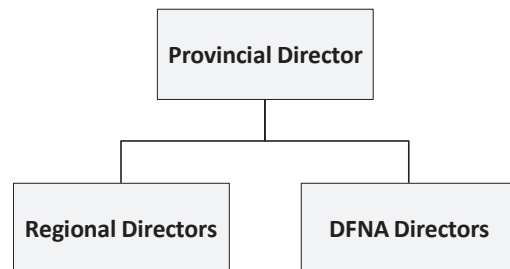
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**Recommendation 13:**

Establish a clear line of accountability for local child intervention service under Regional Directors who report to the Provincial Director.

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Changes to CFSA governance are required to resolve the lack of clarity in accountability for regional child intervention delivery through the CFSA structure. **The Panel recommends that the current position of CFSA CEO be redefined as Regional Director – responsible for child intervention and reporting to the Provincial Director.** In this way, clear and direct lines of reporting and accountability for regional child intervention services will be established.



The Panel is not in a position to specify whether these Regional Directors should retain responsibility for other portfolios of the current CFSA CEOs (i.e., Family Support for Children with Disabilities and child care); the key shift recommended here is that these positions should report to the Provincial Director. Similarly, the Panel does not recommend changing the number of regional service delivery organizations. Finally, the Panel is not in a position to prescribe an optimal reporting relationship between the Provincial Director and ACYS executives at the ADM and DM levels, given that the Panel was mandated only to examine child intervention, and not the full range of Ministry operations.

It is important to recognize that this reform of the CEO role as Regional Director does not mean that the position would be specified in legislation. Like their DFNA counterparts, Regional Directors would receive delegation of the powers and duties of the Provincial Director but not legal designation. The Provincial Director, therefore, remains the legal guardian of children involved in child protection services.<sup>16</sup>

This recommendation includes a Métis Director to manage child intervention services for Métis children and families. Although their purview would not strictly be regional, the Panel does

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<sup>16</sup> Alberta Children and Youth Services. (2010). "Delegation Model and Process". Internal document (Draft).

recommend sustaining support for child intervention services with an explicit Métis focus. The value that the Métis CFSA has added to the system in terms of enhanced coordination with Métis communities, cultural competence and culturally appropriate placements for Métis children should continue to be supported within this model.

It is also important to emphasize that this shift in regional governance should be implemented in a deliberate fashion as a part of a strategy that carefully considers a number of factors before changes are made, including:

- The appropriate reporting relationships between Regional Directors and ACYS executives;
- Scope and responsibilities of the Regional Director and Provincial Director roles;
- Issues of integration, accountability and reporting for the other two statutory Directors in the Ministry (responsible for Family Support for Children with Disabilities and Child Care, respectively); and
- Transition and change management considerations in order to move to the new governance model.

### ***Rationale***

The Panel's governance recommendations for the CFSA system present the opportunity to clarify accountability for the management and delivery of child intervention service under the executive leadership of the Provincial Director. The current dual lines of CFSA accountability make it difficult for CFSA staff or executives to be answerable to the Provincial Director for child intervention practice, for which the Provincial Director has a legal responsibility. This is because child intervention workers and managers are currently answerable to their CFSA CEO, who in turn reports both to the Deputy Minister and the Board.

The reporting relationship between CFSA CEOs and the Provincial Director is unclear under the current model. Serious incidents are escalated directly from CEOs to the Provincial Director, but there does not appear to be any other direct reporting or accountability between these offices. By removing the confusion around the dual reporting relationships of CFSA CEOs, however (see Recommendation #14), the Ministry has an opportunity to streamline and enhance accountability for regional child intervention practice to the Provincial Director. In this

way, delegated authority and accountability will become better aligned between Regional Directors and the Provincial Director. Moreover, leadership for child intervention practice and responsibility for service outcomes would be aligned under a single executive role.

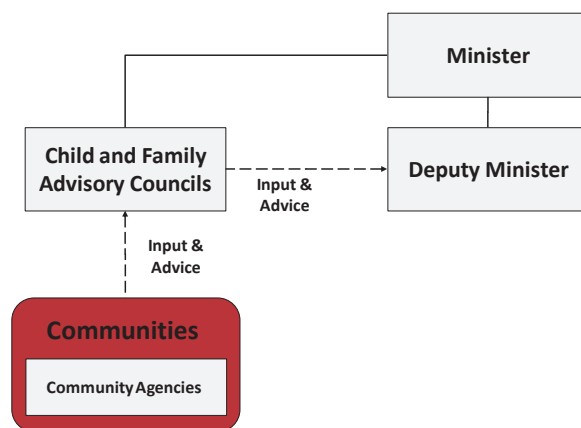
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### Recommendation 14:

Transition CFSA Boards to become Child and Family Services Advisory Councils focused on providing input to the Ministry on behalf of communities.

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Given that CFSA Boards are not currently functioning as governance Boards and recognizing the importance of community input, **the Panel recommends that the Ministry shift the emphasis of its community advisory bodies from overseeing regional service delivery to engaging community input.** Child and Family Services Advisory Councils should have a clear and focused mandate to:



- Engage community stakeholders across Alberta to solicit input regarding child and family service needs, gaps, and opportunities;
- Provide advice about child and family services to the Deputy Minister of ACYS based on the input and perspective of the community;
- Serve as a venue for two-way communication and information sharing between the Ministry and the community;
- Identify and highlight successful local programs and practices; and
- Identify and promote opportunities to integrate and align services at the community level.

An important part of this change is to streamline and clarify CFSA governance by redefining CFSA Boards as Advisory Councils responsible for community input and engagement. This

change entails not only an administrative shift, but also a legislative one, as the CFSA's and their Boards operate under the *Child and Family Services Authorities Act*. Day-to-day service, however, should be minimally impacted – services will still be delivered regionally, with central direction and authority as before. What will change is the unclear dual accountability of CFSA organizations to community Boards as well as the Ministry.

To aid the Ministry in implementing this recommendation, the Panel believes the following considerations are important:

- The number of Advisory Councils should be considered to ensure community input is optimized. While it may be attractive to begin this transition by retaining the current number and configuration as represented by CFSA Boards, the Ministry should consider whether this is the most appropriate model and potentially adjust the number, locations and/or membership over time.
- Competencies of Advisory Council members may be different from those of governing Boards. The Panel endorses a competency-based approach to selecting Advisory Council members and recognizes that this may result in some change in members from the current CFSA Boards.
- It is particularly important for Aboriginal community views to be included in Advisory Councils. The Panel believes that at least one Aboriginal Child and Family Services Advisory Council should be established immediately.
- As a transitional step towards resolving the current “hybrid model” of governance, the Panel would suggest that the Ministry develop an Accountability Framework to strengthen and clarify decision-making authorities and responsibilities. This should be seen as an interim solution, with the understanding that the model itself should be changed as soon as practicable.

### ***Rationale***

Redefining CFSA Boards and enhancing community input through Advisory Councils was determined to be an appropriate resolution to the child intervention governance issues within the CFSA system. There are a number of reasons that the Panel supports this course of action, including:

- Redefining CFSA Boards clarifies child intervention governance while causing minimal disruption to the current centralized decision making model.
- CFSA Boards have many responsibilities, some of which are outside of their control.
- Engagement with the community is an important source of external input and advice for the child intervention system, and a role that should be elevated. Child and Family Advisory Councils can add tremendous value by enabling closer communication and partnerships with communities.
- Replacing the advice of CFSA Boards would not eliminate local input to the system, as these Boards are not the sole community voice available to child intervention decision makers at present.

Each of these reasons is discussed in further detail below.

### **Clarifying child intervention governance**

The Panel consistently heard from stakeholders that CFSA Boards have limited financial, strategic and operational authority within the current system. In practice, almost all meaningful decision making authority is retained by the Ministry. For example, CFSA Boards report having very limited influence on how funding is directed within their regions, because the pool of discretionary spending over which they have the most influence is seen to be vulnerable to the fiscal demands of core legislated services – over which they have little influence. The Panel believes that redefining the Boards will clarify the existing, largely centralized decision making structure with minimal disruption to service delivery for children and families. Existing dual reporting relationships for CFSA CEOs would be resolved, as well, and the accountability of CEOs to the Ministry would be streamlined and clarified.

### **CFSA Board responsibilities**

The responsibilities for CFSA Boards are many and diverse, ranging from financial oversight and monitoring operations to strategy and community engagement.<sup>17</sup> Not only is it difficult to recruit and support an effective group of Board members to fulfill all of these responsibilities, but it is clear that a number of these duties that cannot be fulfilled effectively by the Board given Ministry control over many decisions. In particular, the Panel heard that Boards lack autonomy to make budget and funding decisions independent of the Ministry, and that most policy and direction is also controlled centrally.

### **Elevating engagement with the community**

Child and Family Advisory Councils are proposed as a means to elevate the status of community input within the system. The Panel recommends that these Advisory Councils include Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Councils so as to ensure that Aboriginal communities have a strong voice in the system. This representation is important because the majority of the child intervention caseload is Aboriginal, meaning that communication about community and service issues for Aboriginal children and families should be prominent and regular.

Currently, community engagement and input are one of the many responsibilities of CFSA Board members. Outside of the efforts of these individuals, there are very few formal mechanisms for the Ministry and CFSAs to gather and incorporate community input and advice for child intervention policy, practice, or service delivery. The Panel believes that this external input is a vital resource for continuous improvement of the system. Recognizing the importance of this input, the Advisory Councils should report to the Deputy Minister. The Deputy Minister, as the leader of Ministry operations, is ideally placed to incorporate the community voices reported by these Councils into the child intervention system across the province. It was judged impractical to have the Councils provide advice directly to the Minister, both because of the demands of multiple Councils upon the Minister's time, and because this would further remove their operational advice from operational decision makers.

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<sup>17</sup> Boards preside over a broad range of CFSA responsibilities, which are established by the CFSA Act (see Appendix). Building upon that legislation, a 2006 Memorandum of Understanding between the ACYS Minister and CFSAs specifies an extensive range of responsibilities for CFSA Boards (see Appendix H). These have since been further clarified within the Board Member Manual.

As a formal mechanism for ongoing engagement with communities, Advisory Councils present a number of opportunities for continuous improvement:

- Input and advice about how best to provide child intervention services that will meet local needs;
- Identification of opportunities for partnerships to better integrate child intervention practice with community resources and services;
- Providing a voice for Aboriginal communities in particular, whose members are overrepresented within the child intervention caseload;
- Two-way communication that will increase knowledge and understanding of child intervention services; and
- Providing a broad perspective on the needs of children and families that may enable better integration of ACYS services with other providers in communities.

### **Retaining local input**

Alberta will continue to engage contracted community agencies in delivering supportive services for children and families across the province. These agencies are community-run, and as such will retain the current level of community leadership for local services. In addition, leaders of regional service delivery (i.e., current CFSA CEOs) have had and will continue to have the responsibility to engage their communities in determining how best to support children and families. The mechanisms implemented regionally for community engagement should continue to be determined at the regional level.

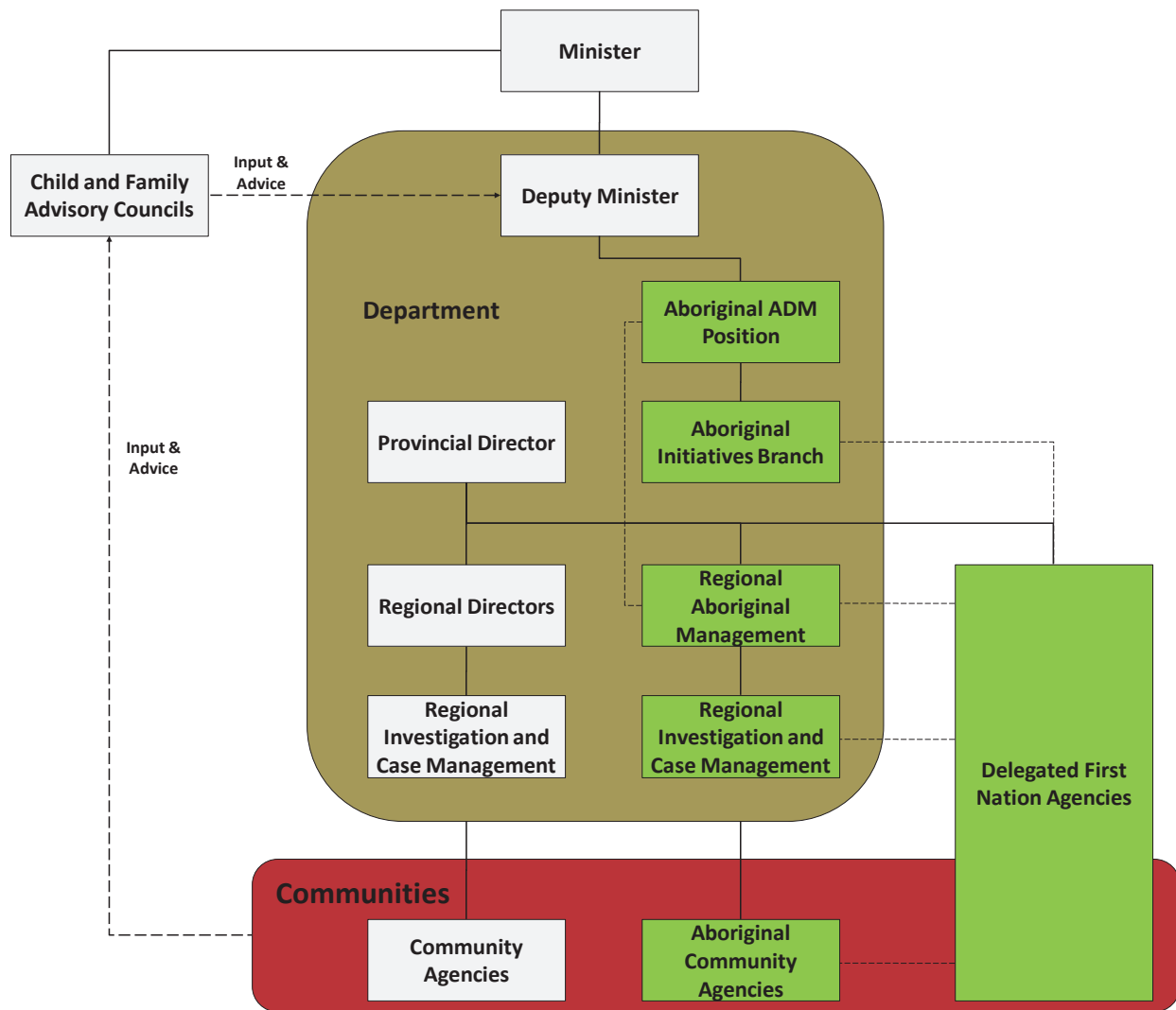
### ***Summary: Clarified Governance for Child Intervention Services***

The recommendations in this section clarify governance of child intervention services in Alberta. In particular, they eliminate current ambiguity related to the roles of CFSA Boards and CEOs, while clarifying the accountability to the Provincial Director for regional delivery of child intervention services.

The following diagram summarizes the proposed changes, and also incorporates governance changes recommended above in the section entitled Services for Aboriginal Albertans

(Recommendations #1 through #4). It bears repeating, however, that **these changes are intended to be incremental, complimentary and managed carefully and actively over time.**

### Recommended Governance for Child Intervention



## **Appendix A    Review Panel Project Charter**

### **Introduction**

On July 23, 2009, the Minister of Alberta Children and Youth Services (ACYS) announced the formation of an independent Panel to review the child intervention system in Alberta. More specifically, the Panel is tasked to review the structures and processes that underpin the organization and delivery of child intervention services in Alberta, with a particular emphasis on accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement. This review demonstrates a commitment to strengthening the supports that improve the lives of many of the province's most vulnerable children and youth. Under the leadership of nationally recognized child intervention specialists, the Review Panel will recommend changes that continue the evolution and improvement of the ACYS systems that safeguard children in Alberta.

The Minister has appointed co-Chairs and members of the Panel after receiving input, suggestions and advice from experts internal and external to the Ministry. The Review Panel will convene in the fall of 2009 and embark on a process of independent review that will result in a series of recommendations to be delivered to the Minister in the spring of 2010.

The present document is intended as:

- A common foundation of information about the Panel and the review process;
- A roadmap for how the review will be accomplished; and
- A “living document” that evolves as further planning is conducted and additional information becomes available.

## Panel Membership

The following members have been appointed to the Review Panel by the Minister.

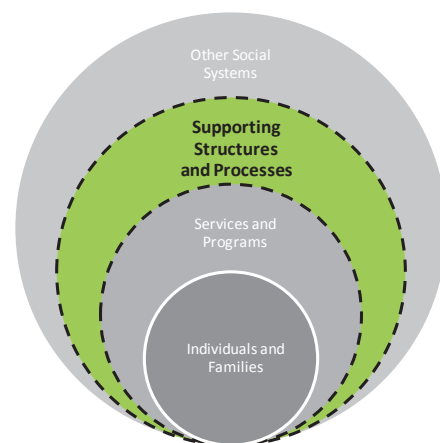
**Figure 1:** *External Review Panel Members*

Panel Member	Organization (Location)
Dorothy Ahlgren	Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police – Crime Prevention Committee (Ottawa, Ontario)
Cal Dallas	Alberta MLA – Red Deer South (Red Deer, Alberta)
Mike DeGagné	Aboriginal Healing Foundation (Ottawa, Ontario)
Peter Dudding (Co-Chair)	Child Welfare League of Canada (Ottawa, Ontario)
Jane Fitzgerald	Children’s Aid Society of London & Middlesex (London/Middlesex, Ontario)
Sandra Harrison	Alberta Mental Health Patient Advocate (Edmonton, Alberta)
Josie Hill	Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre (Winnipeg, Manitoba)
Kenn Richard	Toronto First Nation Child and Family (Toronto, Ontario)
Dr. Gayla Rogers	University of Calgary Faculty of Social Work (Calgary, Alberta)
Dr. Nico Trocmé (Co-Chair)	McGill University / Center of Excellence in Child Welfare (Montreal, Quebec)

## Scope

The external Review Panel will examine three dimensions of Alberta’s child intervention system: **accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement**. By exploring these three areas, **the Panel will assess the structures and processes that underpin the delivery of child intervention services in the province**, including linkages between child intervention and other “systems” such as justice, health care and education. The Panel’s report will make recommendations for **how to continue the evolution and enhancement of child intervention services by building on existing strengths and opportunities in Alberta**. While the Panel’s work will include an examination of systems for delivery of services, the review will not independently assess outcomes of Alberta’s approaches to child intervention.

The graphic to the right indicates that the review will focus at a “systems level”, concentrating on supporting structures and processes. As a result, detailed investigations into the operations of particular programs, personnel, clients and/or cases within the system are out of scope. However, where the Panel receives information that would suggest future study is warranted into a particular aspect of the child intervention system, it will include recommendations to that effect.



The following core questions will guide the review process in the three areas of focus:

- **Accountability** – *Are the necessary checks, balances and processes/mechanisms in place to ensure accountability and transparency in the child intervention system?* Aspects of the system that will be examined include:
  - Existing quality assurance mechanisms, including relationships with stakeholders who have an oversight role in the child intervention system
  - Methodology for information gathering, management and distribution
  - Monitoring for compliance of standards
  - Clarity of procedures particular to catastrophic events
  - Nature and quality of public reporting
  - Jurisdictional issues
  - Scope and limits of the authority of key stakeholders, including delegation of responsibilities
- **Adaptability** – *Does the system have the capacity to effectively respond to emerging societal trends, service demands, and evolving workforce and practice issues?* The Panel will consult with Albertans to identify key trends/demands/issues and will examine systems and processes for responding to priorities. Major trends/demands/issues are expected to include:
  - The changing economic climate in the province
  - Trends in migration within the province as well as inter-provincially
  - Poverty and a lack of affordable housing
  - Impact of gangs, drugs, and sexual exploitation on family and community health
  - Recruitment and retention of a quality labour force, including caregivers

- Youth in care engaging in aggressive/violent behaviours in the community
- Challenges associated with the increase in immigrant populations
- Challenges associated with significant urban Aboriginal growth
- Challenges associated with the significant number of Alberta children in care, per capita
- **Continuous Improvement** – *Is the system organized and aligned with leading practices and evidence-based research?* The Panel will examine research, and consult with experts and other jurisdictions to consider:
  - How the system stays connected to best practice and research;
  - Evidence of on-going attempts at service and system improvement, with particular emphasis on Aboriginal children and families
  - The commitment to provide alternatives to children coming into care

## Methodology

A review of Alberta's child intervention system is a complex task that requires a thoughtful, well-designed methodology. The framework outlined in this section will allow the Panel to:

1. Define initial areas of inquiry
2. Understand the current Alberta child intervention system, with particular emphasis on:
  - a. Determining what major organizational and service delivery systems are in place
  - b. Identifying strengths and weaknesses of current systems in terms of accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement
  - c. Focusing the Panel's work in particular areas of concern
3. Identify leading practices (from existing research, expert opinion and review of other jurisdictions) that Alberta may wish to consider; and
4. Conduct analysis and make recommendations to improve Alberta's child intervention system.

### *Areas of inquiry*

As noted above, the review will analyze the child intervention system through the lens of three areas of inquiry: accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement. Several organizational components that underpin child intervention services will be analyzed according to their impact on accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement of child intervention services in Alberta. Components include:

- **Structure:** system organization, partnerships and community engagement
- **Human resources:** including leadership, training and culture
- **Service delivery processes:** including screening and assessment, service planning, and significant event investigations
- **Information management:** including collection, analysis, utilization and communication of data
- **Planning and reporting:** including identification of priorities, linkage between reporting and planning
- **Governance:** practices related to direction and oversight of the child intervention system

**Figure 2:** *Alberta Child Intervention System Review – Areas of Inquiry*

***Understanding the current Alberta child intervention system***



The Panel will establish a thorough understanding of the current state and recent history of the child intervention system in Alberta, using the three principal areas of inquiry to focus their efforts. It will be the task of the Panel to determine the following:

- What systems have been developed to facilitate accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement of child intervention services across Alberta?
- How are these systems currently functioning with respect to accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement?
- In what areas should the remainder of the Panel’s work focus?

Beginning from this basic approach to understanding current state and recent developments, the Panel will conduct a review of Alberta’s system that focuses on the following key questions.

**Figure 3:** Review Questions to Understand the Current System

Areas of Inquiry		
Accountability	Adaptability	Continuous Improvement
What are the accountability relationships in Alberta’s system and what processes are in place to ensure transparency and accountability?	What practices are used in Alberta’s system to promote and enable adaptability?	How does Alberta’s system promote continuous improvement?
<p><b>Structure:</b> How is Alberta’s child intervention system currently structured and how has it changed over time?</p> <p><b>Human resources:</b> How are human resources in Alberta’s child intervention system configured (e.g. numbers of staff and other human resources, qualifications, training and re-certification systems, etc.)?</p> <p><b>Service delivery processes:</b> What are the key processes for delivering services in Alberta’s child intervention system?</p> <p><b>Information management:</b> How is information collected and used to support accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement?</p> <p><b>Planning and reporting:</b> How does planning and performance reporting occur in Alberta’s child intervention system?</p> <p><b>Governance:</b> Who is responsible for providing direction and oversight over Alberta’s child intervention system and how does this occur?</p>		

Key sources of information for the current system review include:

- Document review
- Invited stakeholder discussions with the Panel
- Written submissions to the Panel
- Key interviews and consultations
- Public discussion guide

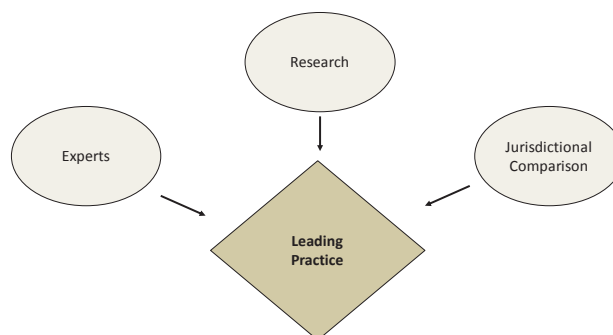
The Panel's review will need to explore all the relevant components of the system. Given recent work in the province to develop the Alberta Response Model (ARM), the five core elements of the ARM will be considered and supplemented where necessary to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the child intervention system in Alberta. Particular attention will be paid to understanding the context of connections, partnerships and relationships that are crucial to facilitating effective service delivery. The core elements of the ARM are as follows:

- **Differential response** including intake/screening, investigation, family enhancement, child protection, etc.
- **Community partnerships** including partner organizations, referrals, funding arrangements, etc.
- **Permanent placements** including foster care, permanency options, guardianship, adoption, etc.
- **Increasing parental responsibility** including engagement of families in planning and decision-making, increasing parental involvement in and responsibility for safety and well-being of children, etc.
- **Evaluation of child-centered outcomes** including caseload data, outcomes, evaluation processes, information gathering, etc.

A key outcome of the Panel's work to understand the current child intervention system will be to focus the remainder of the review process in areas of particular concern or priority. For example, if it is determined that systems for continuous improvement are a current strength of the system, the remainder of the review will likely focus more on developing recommendations to improve systems that impact accountability and adaptability.

### ***Leading Practices in Child Intervention***

For the Panel to effectively review Alberta’s child intervention system, it will be important to also identify leading child intervention practices in other jurisdictions. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including expert input from Panel members, reviews of existing research and identification of emerging and established practices outside of Alberta. Essentially, the Panel will explore leading practice for two purposes:



1. To identify leading practices that are applicable to improving the systems that underpin child intervention service delivery; and
2. To provide context and a broader perspective to the review of the Alberta system by examining the organization of child intervention in other jurisdictions.

Similar to the analysis of the current Alberta system, this exploration of leading practices will be guided by a series of key questions.

**Figure 4:** *Leading Practice Review Questions*

Areas of Inquiry		
Accountability	Adaptability	Continuous Improvement
How can child intervention systems ensure transparency and accountability?	How can child intervention systems be most effective in enabling adaptability?	How can child intervention systems effectively enable continuous improvement?
<p><b>Structure:</b> Are there structural innovations from comparator jurisdictions that have been demonstrated to enhance accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement?</p> <p><b>Human resources:</b> Are there significant human resource trends or practices that other jurisdictions are using to improve accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement?</p> <p><b>Service delivery processes:</b> Are there service delivery processes in other jurisdictions that Alberta is not currently implementing or implementing effectively?</p> <p><b>Information management:</b> How is information used effectively to support accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement among comparator jurisdictions?</p> <p><b>Planning and reporting:</b> Are there planning and performance reporting practices from comparator jurisdictions that have been demonstrated to enhance accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement?</p>		

Areas of Inquiry		
Accountability	Adaptability	Continuous Improvement
<b>Governance:</b> Are there governance practices from comparator jurisdictions that Alberta is not currently utilizing? If so, why?		

Key sources of information for the leading practices review include:

- Review of research
- Expert input (symposium)
- Jurisdictional comparison

***Analysis and recommendations***

Once the Review Panel has established a solid understanding of both the current state and leading practices that can be applied within the context of Alberta’s child intervention system, it will be possible to conduct an informed and meaningful analysis of the strengths of the system and opportunities for further improvement. Essentially, the Panel will be assessing how the organizational and service delivery processes within the Alberta system can be improved by understanding current issues and tensions in the context of leading practices that have shown success elsewhere. This process may require supplemental interviews, consultation, and/or presentations to enhance the Panel’s understanding of specific areas of the system. The table below summarizes the key questions that will guide this analysis.

**Figure 5: Key Questions to Guide Analysis**

Areas of Inquiry		
Accountability	Adaptability	Continuous Improvement
How can the Alberta child intervention system be improved by implementing leading practices in ensuring accountability?	How can the Alberta child intervention system be improved by implementing leading practices in enabling adaptability?	How can the Alberta child intervention system be improved by implementing leading practices in promoting continuous improvement?

Areas of Inquiry		
Accountability	Adaptability	Continuous Improvement
<p><b>Structure:</b> Are there structural changes that Alberta should consider to enhance accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement?</p> <p><b>Human resources:</b> What changes should Alberta consider in terms of developing and managing human resources within the child intervention system in order to improve accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement?</p> <p><b>Service delivery processes:</b> How should core service delivery processes be improved to optimize accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement?</p> <p><b>Information management:</b> Are there improvements in information management that Alberta should consider to optimize accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement?</p> <p><b>Planning and reporting:</b> What changes should Alberta consider to its planning and performance reporting systems to enhance accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement?</p> <p><b>Governance:</b> Are there governance changes that Alberta should consider to enhance accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement?</p>		

In addition to information obtained during the current state and leading practice reviews, the Panel may consider supplemental interviews, discussions, presentations and/or consultations with key stakeholders as required.

### Stakeholder Engagement

The review of Alberta’s child intervention system will require a carefully considered strategy to engage a diverse array of stakeholders at multiple levels. This section outlines the methods envisioned to engage stakeholders in the review process, with the understanding that it is not yet possible to envision the full scope of supplemental engagement activities that may be required. These methods are summarized in the following table.

**Figure 6:** Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

Stakeholder Group	Engagement Venue
General public	Online discussion guide and written submissions
Child intervention experts	Symposium, invited discussions, supplemental consultations

Stakeholder Group	Engagement Venue
Internal ACYS stakeholders	Symposium, invited discussions, key interviews and focus groups, supplemental consultations, written submissions
External agency and community stakeholders and partners	
Other jurisdictions	Symposium
Families and children involved in the system	Online discussion guide, invited presentations (e.g., the Youth Secretariat)
Aboriginal stakeholders	Representation during invited discussions and focus groups with Panel; written submissions; supplemental discussions with selected elders

### ***Online Discussion Guide***

It is critically important to invite public input into the review, especially in light of recent media attention on aspects of the child intervention system. A public discussion guide will be developed with the following objectives:

- Clearly communicate the scope and purpose of the review, as well as the composition of the Panel itself.
- Invite public input to the Review Panel in a structured format that allows Albertans to communicate their experiences with the system, highlight successes and suggest improvements. Input will be sought in areas of focus that align with those identified in the Terms of Reference for the review.
- Provide some basic information on Alberta’s child intervention system that will serve to educate the public on a system that is not well understood.

The public discussion guide will be posted online by ACYS and advertised within local media, inviting thoughtful written submissions and survey responses to the Panel.

### ***Consultation with Partners in Child Intervention***

The Review Panel will host a two-day session in November 2009 at which time a number of invited stakeholders will engage in dialogue with the Panel. The purpose of these sessions will

be to help Panel members develop a deep and broad understanding of organizational and service delivery processes within the Alberta system that underpin adaptability, accountability and continuous improvement of child intervention services. More specifically, the sessions will allow the Panel to identify key issues, tensions and challenges within Alberta's system. This will be a significant input to the review process, as these identified issues may be directly linked with the selection and incorporation of leading practices into the review.

Stakeholders will be invited to address focused questions from the Panel in several ways:

- Stakeholders will make presentations in person to the Panel that will inform and assist their understanding of how the system functions.
- Following each presentation, Panel members will engage in a dialogue with the stakeholder group in order to add depth to their understanding and address specific questions they may have.
- After the session, stakeholders will have the option of providing a Discussion Brief of up to 10 pages, based on questions that arise during the Panel discussion.

In addition to dialogue during the two-day session, a number of stakeholders will be invited to participate in subsequent smaller-scale discussions (interviews and/or focus groups) with Panel members as a means of deepening, broadening and supplementing the insights from the session. Particular effort will be undertaken to ensure that representatives from Aboriginal service providers are included in these discussions. Several First Nation and Métis elders from across the province will also be asked to provide their views in discussions with Panel members.

A wider selection of stakeholders will be invited to make written submissions to the Panel to provide insights in specific areas of the current system. These submissions would be focused around specific questions, similar to the Discussion Briefs associated with the two-day session.

Finally, it is anticipated that the high profile of the review process will engender a number of unsolicited written submissions, which will be reviewed and considered by the Panel as appropriate.

### *Child Intervention Symposium*

In March 2010, a symposium will be convened to solicit input from experts regarding leading practices in organizational processes and systems for child intervention. The symposium will build on the key issues, challenges and tensions identified within the Alberta system. The event will be structured to allow the Review Panel members to hear input and suggestions from leading experts and stakeholders, while also allowing for discussion, sharing of ideas and engagement of a broader audience.

Specifically, these Alberta-specific concerns will inform the research and selection process that determines which leading practices will be explored at the symposium. The focus of the symposium will be defined by the extent to which leading practices from other jurisdictions are appropriate and applicable to improving the Alberta system.

The following details of the symposium have been proposed:

- A 2-day event with approximately 100 participants (in person), to be hosted in Edmonton by the Review Panel and the ACCFCR.
- The Minister will speak to open the symposium, if at all possible.
- Symposium participants may include:
  - Child intervention experts (academics, researchers, policy-makers and recognized subject matter experts).
  - Agency and community stakeholders.
  - Experts from other jurisdictions, including the four Western provinces and the USA.
  - Internal (ACYS) stakeholders.
- Participants will be provided with background information in advance of the event to establish a common understanding of the review and the issues and questions to be explored, based on the current state of the system in Alberta.
- Up to four sessions of approximately a half-day each will be conducted, with each session focused on a single leading practice question/topic. The half-day sessions will each include:
  - A brief presentation of the identified issue(s) and context within Alberta system that informed the selection of the leading practice(s) to be explored.

- A presentation by an expert focused on leading practices from other jurisdictions that may be applicable to specific issues and concerns identified within the Alberta context.
- Facilitated breakout discussions among stakeholders in which they will respond to the presentations, explore the issue in greater depth, and suggest improvements in light of their understanding of Alberta’s child intervention system. Stakeholders will be grouped based on their unique perspectives (e.g., case workers, rural representatives, Aboriginal communities, Alberta youth, etc.). These groups will provide advice on the extent to which leading practices and insights from external jurisdictions may constructively be applied to improving Alberta’s system.
- Presentations of the highlights of breakout discussions.
- Panel co-Chairs will close the symposium by reflecting back some of the key insights heard by the Panel over the course of the event.

### ***Supplemental Consultation***

It is envisioned that several additional methods will be implemented to more fully engage stakeholders throughout the review process, including:

- Key interviews with stakeholders working within the child intervention system in Alberta, especially ACYS staff. These interviews will assist in deepening the Panel’s understanding of particular aspects of the child intervention system in Alberta.
- Consultation with experts in other jurisdictions to gain insight on particular leading practices and their applicability to the Alberta context.
- Supplemental consultations as required subsequent to the March 2010 symposium. These consultations would provide the Panel with additional knowledge, insight and clarification about how particular aspects of the child intervention system could be impacted by applying specific leading practices.

## Communication Strategy

The Panel’s communication strategy identifies major stakeholder groups and communication objectives, key messages, activities, and protocols for Panel members.

### *Stakeholders and Communication Objectives*

Several key stakeholders have been identified as it relates to communications for the Panel’s review. For each stakeholder, one or more general communication objectives may apply, as outlined below:

- **Awareness:** knowledge that the review is underway
- **Understanding:** regarding the objectives, scope, and general process that is being used by the Panel
- **Input:** provision of knowledge in one or more areas of the review
- **Support:** active endorsement among constituents regarding the importance and value of the review

Figure 7 summarizes the communication objectives for several key stakeholders affected by the review.

**Figure 7:** *Alberta Child Intervention Review Communication Objectives*

Stakeholder Group	Communication Objectives			
	Awareness	Understanding	Input	Support
General public	X			
Children and youth in care	X		X	
Foster parents, kinship caregivers and group care providers	X	X	X	
Aboriginal stakeholders	X	X	X	X
CFSA and DFNA leadership	X	X	X	X
Contracted service providers	X	X	X	X

Stakeholder Group	Communication Objectives			
	Awareness	Understanding	Input	Support
Partner ministries	X	X	X	
Government MLAs	X			
Media	X			X
ACYS	X	X	X	X

### *Key Messages*

The following key messages have been developed to guide the Panel’s communication activities:

- This review is an important opportunity to improve Alberta’s system for planning and delivering child intervention services for many of the province’s most vulnerable children and youth.
- While the review is grounded in an ongoing desire to improve the system, recent tragedies underscore the importance of continuing to strengthen accountability, adaptability and improvement processes within the child intervention system.
- The Panel members were selected based on their knowledge and experience of child intervention and related fields. The Panel includes members from across Canada who bring considerable expertise and objectivity to the review.
- The review will highlight strengths and suggest areas where the system may be improved. The Review Panel will recommend changes that continue the evolution and improvement of the ACYS systems that safeguard children in Alberta.
- The review will focus at a “systems level”, meaning that detailed investigations into the operations of particular programs, personnel, clients and/or cases are out of scope.
- The Panel will examine the following core questions:
  - Are the necessary checks, balances and processes in place to ensure accountability and transparency in the child intervention system?
  - Does the system have the capacity to effectively respond to emerging societal trends, service demands, and evolving workforce and practice issues?

- Is the system organized and aligned with leading practices and evidence-based research?
- The Panel is committed to providing meaningful opportunities for input. Interested Albertans are invited to review the discussion guide and comment online or by mail. Details of the review and how to participate can be found at [www.child.alberta.ca/cisreview](http://www.child.alberta.ca/cisreview).
- The Panel recognizes that Aboriginal Albertans have a unique history and relationship with the child intervention system. Accordingly, Aboriginal stakeholders will have specific opportunities to provide input.
- The Review Panel will examine the current child intervention system in our province, identify leading practices from other jurisdictions and suggest ways that Alberta’s child intervention system may be strengthened to support at-risk children, youth and families.

### ***Communication Tools and Activities***

Figure 8 below outlines major activities, timing and responsibilities for implementing the communications strategy.

**Figure 8:** *Communication Activities, Timing and Responsibilities*

Communication Activity	Timing	Responsibilities
Develop website to post online discussion guide and provide updates	September 2009	ACYS
Letter distributed to key stakeholders inviting participation in November 2-3 meetings	Week of October 6, 2009	Co-Chairs
Soft release of online discussion guide, potentially including press release from ACYS and editorial from Co-Chairs in major Alberta newspapers	Week of October 21, 2009	Shared between ACYS and Co-Chairs
Provide media with opportunity to interview Co-Chairs	Week of October 28, 2009	Shared between ACYS and Co-Chairs

Communication Activity	Timing	Responsibilities
Letter distributed to key stakeholders indicating opportunity to provide input through discussion guide and, in some cases, to schedule time for interview	Week of October 21, 2009	Co-Chairs
Two-day meeting for dialogue between Panel and key stakeholders	November 2-3, 2009	Panel
Opportunity for television media to interview Co-Chairs	November 2-3, 2009	Co-Chairs
Selected interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders	November 2009 – January 2010	Panel
Leading practices symposium	March 2010	Shared between ACYS, Co-Chairs and ACCFCR
Release of Panel’s report and related media activities TBD	Post-May 2010	TBD

### ***Panel Protocol for Managing Communications***

The following protocol will be used by Panel members to ensure consistent and coordinated communications related to the review:

- All media requests to comment on the review should be deferred to the Co-Chairs. When requests are received, an e-mail outlining the basic nature of the request should be sent to both Co-Chairs. The Co-Chairs will coordinate with ACYS and *sumera* to ensure a rapid response.
- If Panel members are contacted by stakeholders, including members of the public, the Co-Chairs and *sumera* should be notified. A log of such requests will be maintained by *sumera*, and any Albertan who expresses interest in the review will be notified when the online discussion guide is released.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

Given the complex nature of this review process, it is important to establish a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all contributing members. The following table

outlines the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the participants in the review process in detail.

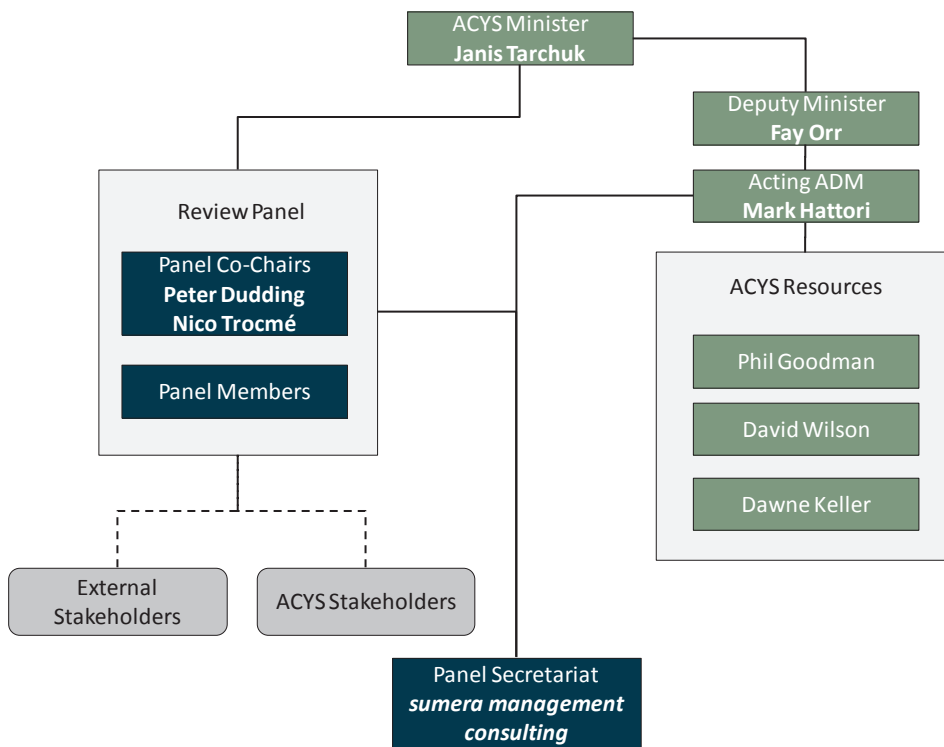
**Figure 9: Child Intervention Review Roles, Responsibilities and Accountabilities**

Participant	Role	Responsibilities	Accountable To
Minister	Direction, oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish Panel</li> <li>Appoint co-Chairs and members</li> <li>Provide initial direction to the review, oversight and final approval of deliverables</li> </ul>	Albertans
Deputy Minister	Direction, oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direction and oversight on behalf of the Minister throughout the review process</li> </ul>	Minister
Review Panel co-Chairs	Lead and conduct the review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide leadership to the Panel</li> <li>Plan and conduct child intervention review</li> <li>Make recommendations to the Minister on behalf of the Panel</li> <li>Fulfill detailed responsibilities as outlined in the Review Panel Terms of Reference (see Appendix A)</li> </ul>	Minister
Review Panel members	Conduct review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fully participate in the child intervention review</li> <li>Develop recommendations to improve Alberta's child intervention system</li> <li>Fulfill detailed responsibilities as outlined in the Review Panel Terms of Reference (see Appendix A)</li> </ul>	Minister
Acting ADM, Program Quality and Standards (Mark Hattori)	ACYS liaison to the Panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Act as liaison and point of contact between the Review Panel and the Ministry</li> <li>Facilitate information requests and support the review process as requested by the Panel</li> </ul>	Deputy Minister
ACYS Information Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Phil Goodman</li> <li>David Wilson</li> <li>Dawne Keller</li> </ul>	Respond to information requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respond to information requests made by the Panel to the Ministry</li> </ul>	Deputy Minister Acting Assistant Deputy Minister (Mark Hattori)

Participant	Role	Responsibilities	Accountable To
Stakeholders (including ACYS internal stakeholders)	Input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute information, advice, expertise and experiences to aid and enhance the review</li> </ul>	N/A
<i>sumera management consulting</i>	Secretariat to the Panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support review logistics, deliverables, and consultation as requested by the Panel</li> </ul>	Acting Assistant Deputy Minister (Mark Hattori) Panel co-Chairs

The following diagram further illustrates the structure of the review process. Solid lines indicate a direct reporting relationship, and dashed lines indicate an advisory relationship.

**Figure 10: Child Intervention Review Project Team Structure**

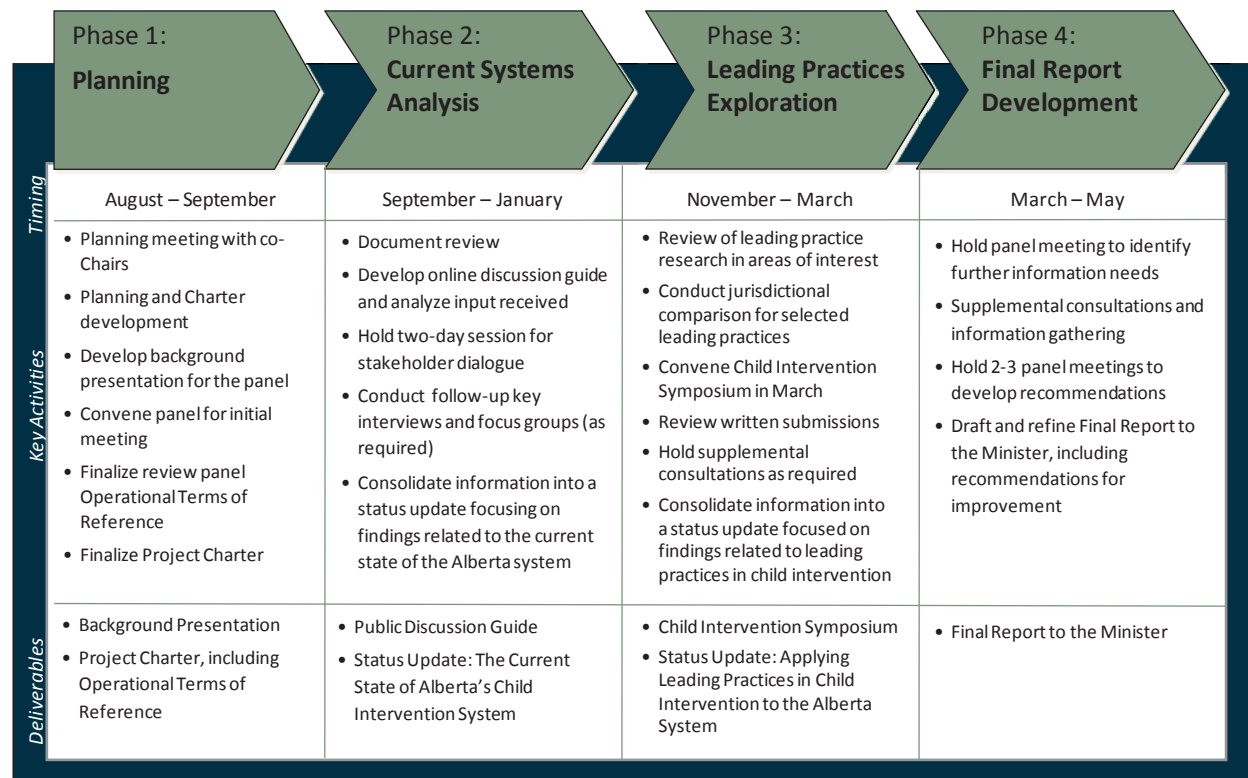


## Work Plan

The following section outlines a detailed work plan to enable the Review Panel to complete a thorough review of Alberta's child intervention system and make recommendations for improvement to the Minister in the spring of 2010. This work plan, which is summarized in the figure below, represents the implementation of the review methodology outlined above. The plan is presented with the understanding that additional refinements are necessary to finalize the work steps envisioned. In total, the workload envisioned for Panel members is as follows:

- One full-day planning meeting in Edmonton in September.
- A two-day session in November focused on the current state of the Alberta child intervention system.
- Participation in small-scale, targeted stakeholder engagements in November and December as required to augment understanding of the current system in Alberta.
- Participation in the two-day Child Intervention Symposium in March.
- A half-day meeting by teleconference following the symposium in March to define preliminary recommendations and supplemental information needs.
- Teleconferences to refine and finalize deliverables (Status Update #1 and #2, and Final Report).
- Two full-day sessions in April/May focused on recommendation development. (note: it may be necessary to have one more meeting in May by teleconference to refine and finalize recommendations)
- Review of interim deliverables, background information and submissions to the Panel as required.

**Figure 11: Child Intervention Review Work Plan**



### Phase 1: Planning

August – September 2009

The first phase of work involves preparing and positioning the Review Panel for success. Considerable planning and preparation will be required to enable a methodical, productive process of review. To that end, Panel co-Chairs will meet on August 31 with key ACYS personnel and *sumera* to develop and enhance the present Project Charter, including the Operational Terms of Reference for the Panel. Subsequent to this meeting, further refinement and planning will be conducted remotely, using teleconferences and electronic correspondence as required. This work will include development of communications and stakeholder engagement strategies, as well as a risk assessment to frame the review process as a whole.

Simultaneous to this Project Charter development, the co-Chairs will be collaborating with ACYS and *sumera* resources to prepare a background presentation in anticipation of the first full meeting of the Review Panel, to be held in Edmonton on September 25<sup>th</sup>. The rationale for this backgrounder is that in order for the Review Panel to be most effective, they should begin with a shared understanding of the scope their task, grounded in key contextual information relevant to the child intervention system in Alberta. Therefore, when the Panel is convened in late September, members will share the same basic understanding of the Alberta context (including the history and recent developments in child intervention), and will also have an opportunity to review the Project Charter in advance and contribute to its further development during the face-to-face meeting. This meeting will focus on developing agreement on the Panel's role, Terms of Reference, and approach to the review process, with the draft Project Charter as a foundation for discussion.

**Phase 1 Deliverables:**

- Background Report for the Panel
- Project Charter, including Operational Terms of Reference for the Review Panel

***Phase 2: Current Systems Analysis***

*September – January 2009*

The second phase of work will focus on developing a thorough understanding of the current state of systems that underpin the organization and delivery of child intervention services in Alberta, guided by the stakeholder engagement approach and the methodology outlined above. Key information gathering activities during this phase will include:

- Finalizing, releasing and promoting the online Public Discussion Guide, and then analyzing the input received.
- Reviewing available documentation and data from ACYS and child intervention stakeholders.
- Inviting stakeholders to participate in discussions with the Panel at a two-day session (November 2 – 3). This process will also request written input in the form of Discussion Briefs.

- Conducting interviews and focus groups with key ACYS and external stakeholders to deepen and supplement understanding of particular aspects of the system.
- Reviewing written submissions requested from the public and from stakeholder groups.

In preparation for the two-day session in November, invitations will be issued to stakeholders to participate through discussions in person and written submissions, as described above. In advance of the event, *sumera* will work with ACYS resources and stakeholders to collect and synthesize as much background information as possible about the current state and recent history of the Alberta system, especially as it pertains to the invited stakeholder groups and the questions posed to these stakeholders by the Panel. This information is intended to prepare and inform Panel members as much as possible, so as to allow them to pursue questions and discussion in greater depth.

Considerable current state information will be collected throughout this phase through the variety of activities undertaken by the Panel and its support personnel. The result of this process will be not only a robust understanding of child intervention in Alberta as it pertains to the three areas of inquiry, but also the identification of a number of significant issues, challenges and tensions within the Alberta system. These specific issues will then inform the leading practices phase, as outlined below.

The Panel will consolidate these inputs and issues into a status update focused on findings related to the current state of child intervention in Alberta, which will serve three purposes:

1. Documenting the variety of inputs to the review process;
2. Providing Panel members with consistent documentation of current state findings against which analysis and insights based on leading practices can later be applied; and
3. Documenting the key issues, challenges and tensions identified in the Alberta system.

**Phase 2 Deliverables:**

- Public Discussion Guide
- Status Update: The Current State of Alberta’s Child Intervention System

### ***Phase 3: Leading Practices Exploration***

*November – March 2010*

Based on the Panel's understanding of the key issues to be addressed within the Alberta system, the third phase of work will begin by collecting and reviewing information on leading practices in other jurisdictions that are relevant to these Alberta concerns. This exploration of leading practices will entail two simultaneous streams:

1. Conducting a high-level jurisdictional comparison to provide broader context and comparative insight to the Panel's understanding of the system in Alberta.
2. Identifying and exploring specific models and research demonstrating effective practice in other jurisdictions related to the identified issues specific to the Alberta context.

It is expected that research, reports, models and jurisdictional comparisons will be suggested throughout the review process by Panel members, stakeholders, ACYS and other experts. In addition, Panel members and other experts will likely suggest relevant models and practices following consultations in 2009 that identify issues specific to Alberta.

Parallel to this process, preparations will be underway by November 2009 to convene a two-day Child Intervention Symposium in March 2010. The purpose of this event, as outlined in detail above, will be to: (1) invite input and presentations to the Panel that inform the members on leading practices in systems related to the organization and delivery of child intervention services, and (2) allow the Panel and stakeholders to explore the applicability of these leading practices in terms of accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement in Alberta. Following the symposium, it is expected that a number of written submissions will be made to the Panel, both by participants in the symposium wishing to offer further information, and by those stakeholders who were not invited to participate in the event in person.

By the end of March, this phase of work will culminate in a status update that provides considerable input and insight about the applicability of leading practices in other jurisdictions to the issues and challenges faced by the Alberta system.

#### **Phase 3 Deliverables:**

- Child Intervention Symposium
- Status Update: Applying Leading Practices in Child Intervention to the Alberta System

### ***Phase 4: Final Report Development***

*March – May 2010*

By March, Panel members will have acquired considerable insight into how the organizational processes that underpin child intervention in Alberta can be strengthened by applying insight and leading practices from other jurisdictions. Therefore, the members will be well-positioned at that point to begin the process of analysis and recommendations development. The first step in this process will be to convene Panel members by teleconference in March to facilitate preliminary discussion about recommendations for improving Alberta's system. During this meeting it will also be important to identify supplemental information and/or consultations required by the Panel to develop robust recommendations for the Minister (if necessary).

Once the requested supplemental information is provided to the Panel, members will be convened for two full-day facilitated sessions in April to develop and refine the final recommendations of the review. A final report will be drafted and refined, with comments, suggestions and further input from Panel members to be solicited remotely. Panel members and co-Chairs will review, refine and approve the report and the recommendations therein to be delivered to the Minister in late May. Communication and dissemination of the contents of the report will then proceed at the discretion of the Minister.

#### **Phase 4 Deliverables:**

- Final Report to the Minister

### **Risk Management**

There are several distinct risks facing the review of Alberta's child intervention system. The following figure identifies several major risks and proposes mitigation strategies that have been incorporated into the methodology and work plan for the review.

**Figure 12:** *Child Intervention Review – Risks and Mitigation Strategies*

Risk	Mitigation Strategies
There is a need to balance the need for a meaningful review with timely results.	<b>Scope definition:</b> Particular attention has been paid to defining the scope of the review. Specifically, the Panel has determined that their assessment will focus on organizational structures and processes as they relate to accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement of Alberta’s child intervention system. The review is not designed to independently evaluate outcomes of services for children, youth and families in Alberta.
The Panel may not be perceived as having sufficient independence to complete its work in a manner that is unbiased.	<b>Panel membership and structure:</b> The Panel members have been selected in part based on their reputations as professionals with significant experience examining systems in complex and politically challenging environments. The Panel is directly accountable to the Minister of Children and Youth Services and has no representation from the Department to ensure independence. While there is one Alberta MLA on the Panel, this perspective is balanced with others who are experts in various aspects of child intervention, both within and outside of Alberta.
	<b>Profile:</b> The co-Chairs of the Panel will be accessible to the media and public as representatives of the Panel. They will present themselves as professionals selected in part for their ability to provide an objective and independent assessment of Alberta’s system.
	<b>Transparent process:</b> The review process will include several opportunities for the public and for stakeholders in Alberta’s child intervention system to access the Panel. This type of transparent process will reinforce the Panel’s objectivity and independence.
It is politically important for the Minister to see signs of progress throughout the review and to be able to report on this progress if deemed necessary.	<b>Interim deliverables:</b> The Panel’s approach includes several interim deliverables that will be informed by contributions from the public and stakeholders in Alberta’s child intervention system. The deliverables support a stepwise progression from understanding Alberta’s current system, to identifying leading practices, and developing recommendations for improving Alberta’s system based on the Panel’s assessment.
To be accepted in Alberta, the process must include meaningful engagement of system stakeholders.	<b>Flexible process that adapts to stakeholder input:</b> The Panel’s process includes several opportunities for dialogue and for members of the public and others to provide written submissions. The process has also been specifically designed to allow flexibility for the Panel to respond to issues that are raised by stakeholders in Alberta’s child intervention system.
The Minister has committed to involve her colleagues across Western Canada in identification and sharing of leading practices.	<b>Process compares Alberta to other jurisdictions:</b> The Panel’s process provides opportunities for Western Canadian jurisdictions to become involved, both in terms of participation in the symposium and potential selection as comparator jurisdictions for the review.

Risk	Mitigation Strategies
<p>During the course of the review, an incident may occur that puts pressure on the Panel to change the focus of the review.</p>	<p><b>Flexible process combined with open communication:</b> The Panel’s plan is designed to uncover current and emerging strengths and issues with the organizational structures and processes that underpin child intervention services. The process is flexible in the sense that specific findings and recommendations will emerge over the full course of the review. Several opportunities will be provided for stakeholders to provide input to the Panel. In the event that an incident occurs, this will be considered as one input among many.</p>
<p>Some stakeholders may not understand the boundaries of this review versus others that are underway or recently completed.</p>	<p><b>Clearly defined scope:</b> The Panel is spending considerable effort at the front end of the review to understand what additional reviews are underway or have been recently completed, and to define a distinct scope for this review. Remaining at a “systems level” and focusing on “accountability, adaptability and continuous improvement” are both ways to define the scope of this review in a way that is unique. The scope of the review will be clearly communicated to stakeholders and discussion questions will be designed to remain consistent with the scope.</p>

## Appendix B Stakeholder Consultation Approach

The Panel employed a diverse array of stakeholder consultation methods in order to achieve the breadth and depth of perspective required to complete their mandate. These methods included:

- A public survey accompanied by an online Discussion Guide;
- An invitation to the public to provide written submissions;
- Meetings in person with Panel members;
- Interviews;
- Focus groups;
- Visits to First Nations Communities;
- A Symposium; and
- A Jurisdictional Review.

For each of these stakeholder consultations, participants were provided information about the Panel's mandate and areas of inquiry in advance, as well as a set of discussion questions tailored specifically to the unique perspective of each stakeholder group. Interviews and meetings in person were conducted in a semi-structured fashion, using these questions to guide the conversation.

The table below summarizes which stakeholders were consulted, and by what methods, during the course of the Panel's review (the survey and written submissions are not included, as these venues were open to all stakeholders). It is important to note that in some cases stakeholders were invited to speak with the panel and were unable or unwilling to do so, and that these stakeholders do not appear in the summary table.

**Table: Stakeholder Consultations**

Organization	Participants	Consultation Type
<b>Youth who have experience with child intervention services</b>		
N/A	17 youth ages 11-18	In person (see Appendix F)
<b>Families who have experience with child intervention services</b>		
N/A	12 participants: Included parents, foster parents, kinship caregivers, adoptive parents and other family members	In person
<b>Alberta Children and Youth Services</b>		
ACYS	Alberta Child and Youth Advocate	In person, interview
ACYS	Acting Director, Child Intervention	Presentation, interview
ACYS	Deputy Minister	Symposium
ACYS	Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Program Quality and Standards	Interview; Symposium
ACYS	Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Strategies and Supports	Interview; Symposium
ACYS	Assistant Deputy Minister, Support Services Division	Symposium
CFSAs	CFSAs CEOs (all)	In person; Symposium
CFSAs	Child intervention supervisors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 by focus group</li> <li>• 7 Symposium delegates</li> </ul>	Focus groups (2); Symposium
CFSAs	Child intervention staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14 in person</li> <li>• 8 by videoconference</li> <li>• 4 Symposium delegates</li> </ul>	Focus groups (2 in person and 2 by videoconference); Symposium
Assembly of Co-Chairs (CFSAs)	2 CFSAs Board Co-Chairs	Interview
ACYS	Director, Systems Analysis	Interviews (2); Symposium
ACYS	Manager, Adoption and Permanency Services	Interview
ACYS	Manager, Standards and Monitoring	Interview; Symposium
ACYS	Executive Lead, Outcomes Based Services	Interview; Symposium
ACYS	Senior Manager, Legal Representation for Children and Youth Services	Interview

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Organization	Participants	Consultation Type
ACYS	Acting Executive Director, Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying	Symposium
ACYS	Executive Director, Legal Services	Symposium
ACYS	Executive Director, Human Resource Management	Symposium
ACYS	Director, Support Services	Symposium
ACYS	Senior Manager, Research and Innovation	Symposium
ACYS	Senior Manager, MSS Division	Symposium
Formerly ACYS (now McDermott Consulting)	John McDermott	Interview
Formerly ACYS (now Alberta Family Wellness Initiative, Norlien Foundation)	Paula Tyler	Interview
<b>Aboriginal stakeholders</b>		
N/A	Aboriginal Elders	In person, visits to First Nations communities
DFNAs	Directors and staff from DFNAs <sup>18</sup>	In person (2), Symposium,
	DFNA Directors, Board members, staff	Visits to First Nations communities
First Nations Communities	Board members, Elders, Community members (including former youth in care)	Visits to First Nations communities
Métis Nation of Alberta Association	Minister of Children, youth and FASD	In person
	Manager of Children's Services	In person; Symposium
	Manager, Justice	Symposium
Alberta Native Friendship Centers Association	Manager	In person
Native Counseling Services of Alberta	Manager	Symposium
Poundmakers Lodge	Executive Director	Symposium

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<sup>18</sup> Not all of the 18 DFNAs were able to meet with the panel. Representatives from the majority of the DFNAs across the province attended one or more of the consultations, however.

## Alberta Child Intervention Review Panel: Final Report

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Organization	Participants	Consultation Type
Bent Arrow Traditional Healing	Senior Manager for children's services programs	In person
	Director	Symposium
<b>Partners of child intervention services</b>		
Alberta Foster Parent Association	President; Executive Director	In person
Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (Local 006)	Chair, Council Member	In person
Social Care Facilities Review Committee	Vice Chair	In person
Alberta Health Services	Directors of Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Edmonton and Calgary)	Interviews (separate); Symposium (Edmonton Director)
Alberta Health and Wellness	Executive Director, Community Health	Interview; Symposium
	Manager, Special Population	Symposium
Edmonton Police Service	4 Officers housed with the Zebra Centre	Interview
Calgary Police Service	Deputy Chief and a Staff Sergeant from the Child Abuse Unit	Interview
RCMP	Officer in charge of Edmonton Area	Letter in lieu of interview
RCMP	2 Officers	Interview
Correctional Services (Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security)	Executive Director, Young Offender Branch	Interview; Symposium
	Director, Partnerships and Community Justice	Interview; Symposium
Family Law (Alberta Justice and Attorney General)	Executive Director, Departmental Legal Services Delivery	Interview; Symposium
	Directors of the Edmonton and Calgary Family Law Offices;	Interview
Legal Aid Alberta	lawyers from the Family Law Office in Calgary( One was a Symposium delegate)	In person; Symposium
Youth Criminal Defence Office	Associate Senior Lawyer	In person
Alberta Court of Appeal	The Honourable Madame Justice Paperny	Interview
Child Welfare Lawyers Association	2 Lawyers	Interview
Office of the Auditor General	Assistant Auditor General	Interview
University of Calgary Faculty of	Professor	Interview

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Organization	Participants	Consultation Type
Social Work	Associate Professor Emeritus	Interview; Symposium
College of Alberta School Superintendents	President	Interview
Alberta College of Social Workers	Professional Affairs Coordinator	Interview
Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research	President and CEO	Interview
Alberta Council of Women's Shelters	Manager	Interview
<b>Community agencies</b>		
Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families	President; Executive Director	In person; Symposium
The Family Centre	CEO	Symposium
The Zebra Centre	Executive Director	Interview
Child and Adolescent Services Association	CEO; 3 mental health professionals	Interview
Catholic Social Services	CEO	In person
	COO, Children, Family and Community	Symposium
	2 Staff from Immigration and Settlement Services	Interview
Wood's Homes	CEO; Director, Programs and Research	Interview; Symposium
	Director	In person
Hull Child and Family Services	Executive Director	In person; Symposium
Family Ties Association	Executive Director	In person
Opokaa'sin's Early Intervention Society	Executive Director	In person
Parkland Youth Homes	Manager	In person
Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers	Manager, Settlement and Integration	Interview
Homeward Trust	Executive Director	Interview
Calgary Homelessness Foundation	President & CEO	Interview

## Alberta Child Intervention Review Panel: Final Report

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Organization	Participants	Consultation Type
Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op	3 Staff	Interview
Young Women's Christian Association	Manager (Calgary facility)	Interview
Mountain Plains Community Services Society	Executive Director	In person
Elk Island Child and Youth Ranch	Director	In person
Oak Hill Foundation	Executive Director	Symposium
<b>Other Canadian jurisdictions</b>		
Government of Nova Scotia	Executive Director, Family and Community Supports	Symposium
	Director , Family and Community Healing, Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services	Symposium; Jurisdictional Review
	Child Welfare Specialist, Department of Community Services	Symposium; Jurisdictional Review
Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services	Assistant Deputy Minister	Symposium
Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services	Executive Director, Program and Service Design	Symposium
Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services	Executive Director, Child and Family Services Division	Jurisdictional Review
British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development	Chief Operating Officer	Symposium
British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development	Senior Director, Research Evaluation and Accreditation	Jurisdictional Review
Faculty of Social Work, University of Regina	Professor Emeritus	Jurisdictional Review
Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies	Director, Education	Jurisdictional Review
Government of Manitoba, Family Services and Consumer Affairs	Executive Director, Child Protection Branch	Jurisdictional Review

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Organization	Participants	Consultation Type
<b>Federal government</b>		
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada	Child Welfare Lead	Interview; Jurisdictional review
	3 Staff from the Alberta region	Interview
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada	Director (Alberta)	Symposium
<b>External experts</b>		
Canadian Institutes of Health Research	Dr. Malcolm King	Interview
University of Calgary Faculty of Social Work	Dr. Jean LaFrance	Interview
N/A	Ken Chapman, A lawyer who looked in depth at the Justice Coté decision	Interview
McGill University	Dr. Wendy Thomson - Professor and Director, School of Social Work, McGill University, and Commissioner to the Ontario Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare	Symposium
National Indian Child Welfare Association	Terry Cross	Symposium
Open Minds	Monica Oss	Symposium

## Appendix C Public Survey Findings

The table below summarizes the major findings for each of the substantive (i.e., non-demographic) questions included in the survey. Major findings are defined as the most common qualitative themes and/or quantitative responses for each question. These findings are drawn from the complete report of survey results that was provided to the Panel and to the Ministry.

### Major Survey Findings (Excluding demographic questions)

Survey Question	Major Finding
1. What do you think are the most serious issues or challenges currently facing Alberta’s child intervention system? For example, are there economic, social, or demographic issues that the Panel should consider?	The biggest perceived challenges to the child intervention system are the social issues that many families face and the system’s lack of capacity to address those problems. Respondents identified some of these socials issues as poverty, addiction, mental health, abuse, domestic violence, and a lack of social programs and transportation.
2. Do you have suggestions for how the system could be more flexible to better meet the needs of at-risk children, youth and families? If so, please describe.	Respondents felt that more family enhancement supports were necessary to improve the adaptability of the system to families’ needs.
3. Have you ever given input or made suggestions about how child intervention services to at-risk children, youth and families could be improved? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If Yes, have you seen changes to services as a result of your input or suggestions? Please explain.	The strongest sentiment from respondents was that their input and suggestions had not led to any satisfactory changes in their services.
4. Do you feel the necessary checks and balances are in place to ensure accountability within Alberta’s child intervention system? Please explain, including any experience you may have.	Some or all of the necessary checks and balances are in place, but there is a lack of adequate resources to support these measures. Some of the resources that respondents identified as lacking were funding, direct service delivery staff with capacity for implementing checks and balances, and supports for direct service delivery staff.

Survey Question	Major Finding
<p>5. After services were initially provided, to what extent would you agree that someone followed up with you to ensure the services were working for you?</p> <p><i>* Question for individuals who have received child intervention services in the last two years</i></p>	<p>Very few services recipients reported that someone followed up with them after services were provided.</p>
<p>6. Was your input considered and did the follow up you received make a difference in meeting your needs? Please explain.</p> <p><i>* Question for individuals who have received child intervention services in the last two years</i></p>	<p>Most respondents who had received intervention services felt that their input had not been considered.</p>
<p>7. To what extent would you agree that the services provided met your needs (or the needs of your child and/or family)?</p> <p><i>* Question for individuals who have received child intervention services in the last two years</i></p>	<p>The majority of respondents who had received intervention services did not feel that their needs had been met.</p>
<p>8. To what extent would you agree that you have been asked about your satisfaction with services or how services can be improved?</p> <p><i>* Question for individuals who have received child intervention services in the last two years</i></p>	<p>Very few people who have received intervention services feel they were asked about their satisfaction or their suggestions for improvement.</p>
<p>9. Do you have any additional suggestions about how the services provided to your child and/or family could be improved?</p> <p><i>* Question for individuals who have received child intervention services in the last two years</i></p>	<p>Services could be improved by focusing on relationship building with clients and families as a critical component of service delivery.</p>
<p>10. Please provide additional suggestions you may have for how child intervention in Alberta could be improved.</p>	<p>Overall, suggestions speak to the system’s need to increase capacity. There was significant variation among stakeholders in terms of priorities for improvement, but overall the strong message is that additional capacity in various areas of the system is needed to improve child intervention in Alberta.</p>

## Appendix D Principles of the Alberta Response Model

The following five principles underpinned the development of the ARM:

- **Differential response** – Early, detailed assessments allow workers to better understand children’s and families’ needs and connect them to services in either the child protection or family enhancement (FE) stream of services. A differential response approach aims to proactively use FE services in the community to strengthen families and prevent the need for protective interventions.
- **Community partnerships** – The child intervention system needs strong partnerships with groups that can help families address serious challenges, such as safe and secure housing, family violence, substance abuse and addictions, poverty, and physical and mental health, among others.
- **Permanent placements** – An emphasis on permanency recognizes that children and youth need stable, caring relationships in permanent homes to help them reach their full potential. Part of the motivation for this focus was the well-known problems faced by children who experience multiple placements and lack of attachments with family or alternative families. In addition, permanent placements were seen to be an important focus to ensure that children could effectively transition out of the system.
- **Increasing parental responsibility** – The ARM intends to keep parents and families involved in their child’s life even when that child is in the care of the government or others. The model intends that parents and families will be engaged in planning and decision-making, as well as taking some financial responsibility for their child’s well being while the child is in care.
- **Evaluation of child-centered outcomes** – It is important to ensure that the system focuses on and leads to better outcomes for children and families. This requires not only measuring outcomes, but also evaluation and making changes to improve outcomes based on evaluation findings.

## Appendix E Visits to DFNAs

### What We Heard in First Nations Communities

#### *Context*

The Alberta Child Intervention Review Panel has been engaged in consultations with a wide range of stakeholders as they work to recommend improvements for the child intervention system in Alberta to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. During the course of these consultations, First Nations stakeholders from Delegated First Nations Agencies (DFNAs) travelled on two occasions to Edmonton in order to meet with panel members in person. At the latter of these meetings, DFNA representatives invited the panel to visit reserve communities in person to better understand the issues relevant to child intervention services for Aboriginal Albertans.

As a result of this invitation, it was decided that panel members would visit one DFNA from each of the three Treaty Areas in the province, with the intention of speaking directly with staff, elders, leaders and members of the community to:

- Discuss issues and challenges relevant to delivering child intervention services on reserve;
- Identify opportunities to improve the child intervention system and services for Aboriginals on and off reserve; and
- Better understand the unique experience of First Nations people in Alberta, and how this history has impacted children, families, communities and child intervention services.

Having conducted these visits in April, the overall impressions of panel members were of staff and communities who are tremendously committed to supporting First Nations children and families on and off reserve – the people that the panel met with were deeply invested in their communities and in working to improve the services that they provide. Panel members were also struck by the breadth of innovation and progress evident in meeting with DFNAs, from the impressive pool of foster homes supported by Kee Tas Kee Now (KTC), to the satellite office operated in Calgary by Siksika, and the ties between the DFNA and innovative youth programming in Saddle Lake.

The panel feels honoured to have been invited to hear the stories, ideas, experiences and insights in these communities, and humbled by the openness and wisdom encountered.

### ***Consultation Details***

Each visit included one panel co-Chair, one additional panel member and one *sumera* resource (to observe and record). Recognizing the diversity among First Nations communities in Alberta, it was decided that the visits should include:

- One DFNA from each of the three Treaty Areas; and
- A mixture of small, medium and large DFNA organizations with different government agreements:
  - A smaller agency, serving 3 remote reserves (KTC)
  - A mid-size agency with bi-lateral agreements (Saddle Lake)
  - A large agency with a tripartite agreement and both on and off-reserve offices (Siksika).

The panel members were pleased with the opportunity to experience a variety of DFNA organizations and First Nation communities – although it is important to note their impression that the DFNAs selected were among the most successful and promising across the province.

The table below outlines some of the key details of these visits.

**Figure 1: Details of Review Panel Visits to DFNAs**

DFNA	Saddle Lake Wahkohtowin Childcare Society	Siksika Family Services Corporation	Kee Tas Kee Now (KTC) Tribal Council Child and Family Services
First Nations Served	Saddle Lake	Siksika	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whitefish Lake</li> <li>• Loon River</li> <li>• Woodland Cree</li> </ul>
Treaty Area	Treaty 6	Treaty 7	Treaty 8
DFNA Director	Valerie Wood	Clifford Many Heads	Erica Jagodzinsky
Number of Staff (FTE)	25	41	16
Date of Visit	April 13	April 21	April 22
Review Panel Members	Peter Dudding Mike DeGagne	Peter Dudding Kenn Richard	Peter Dudding Josie Hill
Meeting Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DFNA Director</li> <li>• DFNA Staff</li> <li>• Community members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DFNA Director</li> <li>• DFNA Board members</li> <li>• DFNA Staff</li> <li>• Elders</li> <li>• Community members (including former youth in care)</li> <li>• FNLU staff member</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DFNA Director</li> <li>• DFNA Board members</li> <li>• DFNA Staff</li> <li>• Board members</li> <li>• FNLU staff member</li> </ul>

### ***Findings***

Many of the issues, challenges and concerns heard by the panel during the visits to First Nations communities echoed findings from previous consultations. There were several new insights, however, that enhanced the understanding of the panel members about the current state of child intervention services for Aboriginal Albertans. These new findings are as follows:

**The Band Designate role has not enhanced meaningful collaboration between DFNAs and CFSAs.**

- CFSAs are required to consult with a First Nation via its Band Designate when one of its members is taken into care. This consultation/notification is intended to foster collaboration with the Band in determining appropriate courses of action for the child and their family.
- The Designate position is not funded, and so it is additive to the other duties of the person who steps into the role. Travel and other costs associated with collaboration with CFSAs are not reimbursed, which limits the effectiveness of the role.
- In practice, CFSAs do not engage in meaningful consultation with the Band. “Consultation” is often accomplished by a phone call (or a phone message) and no further involvement by the DFNA or Designate is requested. DFNAs perceive that notification is seen as burdensome by CFSAs staff, and not as the foundation for genuine collaboration.
- Some First Nations stakeholders suggested that the position of the Designate should be expanded and supported to play a much more active role in planning support services for First Nations children and families off reserve, and also as a bridge for clients back to the reserve community.

**First Nations communities are developing Aboriginal curriculum for social work education.**

- Several of the First Nations post-secondary organizations are in the process of developing social work curriculum that incorporates Aboriginal values, history, practices, and instructors (including elders and other community members).
- This work is being conducted by First Nations post-secondary institutions that are affiliated with both the University of Calgary Faculty of Social Work and the First Nations Adult & Higher Education Consortium. The specialized BSW degree programs are intended to be formally recognized by “mainstream” educational institutions through partnerships with the University of Calgary – but the “Aboriginal BSW” program has not yet been implemented.

**Political will was a key factor in the establishment of the only off reserve DFNA satellite office.**

- When asked how it was that Siksika was able to establish a satellite office to provide services off reserve, political will (by the Band and the ACYS Minister) at that point in time was identified as a crucial enabler.
- There are employment union implications to DFNAs taking on caseloads off reserve – i.e., CFSA staff would be replaced or supplanted.

**There are a variety of perspectives on whether and how DFNAs can collaborate to improve child intervention services.**

- DFNAs disagree about whether there is need or potential to collaborate in the area of child intervention.
- Some DFNA stakeholders suggest that combining resources and influence could benefit DFNA services. There is some support for the idea of collaboration within Treaty Areas, for instance.
- Panel members also heard, however, that some First Nations would prefer not to collaborate with others within and outside their particular Treaty Area. Some stakeholders did not agree that there was a need for DFNAs and/or First Nations to work together directly in order to improve child intervention outcomes.

***Common Themes***

During the course of these meetings, panel members heard support for a number of the ideas and issues raised and recorded during previous consultations. A number of these themes were found to be common among the different communities visited by panel members, and thus merit recognition as considerations of particular importance for the panel as they work to formulate recommendations. These themes are outlined as follows:

- First Nations people and communities want to take care of their own, as it is their children who are at stake. DFNA staff feel that their close ties to community members

are a strength for their child intervention work, and not a conflict of interest.

“Repatriation” of Band members taken into care is a significant priority.

- Socioeconomic realities on reserve contribute to the need for child intervention services. A lack of housing, for instance, impacts not only apprehension rates but also the availability of “appropriate” foster and kinship homes.
- DFNAs face capacity challenges, both within their Agencies and within reserve communities, which often lack the breadth of supportive services available off reserve.
- There is a concern about the ability to comply with new provincial initiatives such as the ISIS data system.
- The DFNA work force composition is community based, experienced and highly committed.
- Federal and provincial jurisdictional boundaries are a significant operational challenge impacting service access, funding for supportive services, collaboration with CFSAs and the ability of DFNAs to identify and serve Band members off reserve. DFNAs want to be able to serve Band members who are living off reserve, and are frustrated with the barriers to doing so. Connectedness to home communities is seen to an important aspect of Aboriginal wellbeing.
- Panel members observed a tremendous willingness in First Nations communities to engage in dialogue and collaborative problem-solving with the “mainstream system”. Those consulted, however, feel that there has been little meaningful engagement with Aboriginal stakeholders to date in important policy, practice and design decisions. They perceive a reluctance or fear on the part of the “mainstream” to collaborate with Aboriginal communities, and numerous examples were cited of “consultations” during which solutions were developed in advance of Aboriginal input.
- First Nations communities feel that they have little or no authority or influence within the child intervention system. A significant example is that regular meetings between DFNA Directors and CFSAs CEOs have been discontinued due to lack of commitment.
- Aboriginal communities have methods of caring for children and families that predate and are often in tension with the child intervention system. The participation of the broader community in rearing children, for instance, is a cultural practice that is difficult to reconcile with the perspective of the current system.

- DFNA staff see supporting children and families on reserve as crucial preventative work, and would like to engage in more family enhancement service delivery.
- DFNA Directors have dual streams of accountability that can be challenging to reconcile – to the Band and to the Ministry.
- It is too early to assess the impact of the new federal prevention funding on the ability of the DFNA's to implement the family enhancement component of the provincial legislation.
- It is seen to be important that the system incorporate a greater proportion of Aboriginal staff members. A number of barriers were observed to recruiting and retaining Aboriginal staff (e.g., style of recruitment, relevant qualifications, hostile work environments, racism, the absence of Aboriginal managers, etc.).
- The SAFE Home Assessment tool is seen by some (but not all) Aboriginal communities as culturally inappropriate. At least one DFNA has refused to implement this tool.

## Appendix F What We Heard from Youth in Care

Panel members spoke with groups of youth with child intervention experience in person on three separate occasions (one in November, and two in March). A total of 17 youth were directly involved in these discussions. The following table outlines details of these consultations.

**Figure 1:** *Details of Review Panel Consultations with Youth*

Date	November	March 17	March 18
Location	Sterling Place, Edmonton	The Radisson Hotel, Edmonton	The Family Centre, Edmonton
Youth Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 representatives of a group of 15 Edmonton youth convened by ACYS</li> </ul> The 15 youth were from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Advancing Futures Bursary Program</li> <li>The Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area youth in care mentoring program</li> </ul>	5 Calgary Youth from the Alberta Youth in Care and Custody Network <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ages 11 – 17</li> <li>In care</li> </ul>	10 Edmonton youth in care from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Family Centre</li> <li>An Edmonton youth shelter</li> <li>Transitional Supported Independent Living program operated by McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association</li> </ul>

### *Lines of Inquiry*

The organizations and individuals responsible for recruiting youth in each case were provided these questions in advance, and asked to speak with youth beforehand about the purpose of the session and the types of questions that would be asked. The meetings were informal, and only semi-structured. Questions from the November session were refined and expanded for the consultations held in March.

## November

In November, the Panel met with representatives of a larger group of youth convened by the Ministry. The process for engaging these stakeholders had several steps, in line with the Youth Engagement process developed by Youth Strategies:

- Youth Strategies identifies and approaches youth to participate.
- Questions for the youth are provided to Youth Strategies, who structure a youth-friendly engagement discussion around them.
- The youth are convened on a Saturday to discuss the issue. Based on their discussion, a summary presentation is prepared with several of the youth.
- A few representatives of the larger group deliver a presentation to the panel November 2<sup>nd</sup> in the evening based on the views of the larger group. Dinner is provided for the youth and the panel members in advance, and questions and discussion will follow the presentation.

Questions asked:

1. In your experience, how much influence do youth and their families have over what services they receive, and how those services are provided? Have you and your family been involved enough in decisions that affect these services?
2. In your experience, is it clear who in the system is responsible for making sure your safety is assured and your needs are met? Have the people responsible for your wellbeing lived up to this responsibility?
3. Are there issues facing youth and families that the child intervention system is not well-equipped to handle?
4. Youth and families face different issues and challenges over time. In your experience, have the people and the services in the system been flexible enough to adapt to changes in the lives of youth and their families?

## March

On March 17 and 18, the Panel met directly with a number of youth in care. The questions asked included:

1. Is there anyone who regularly asks you how things are going for you in care? If so, do you feel that you are listened to, and that your input is used to make things better?
2. Is it clear to you who in the system is responsible for making sure that you're safe and your needs are met? Have the people responsible for your wellbeing lived up to their responsibility?
3. In your experience, who can you talk to when things aren't going well? How have you tried to address problems with your placement or your care?
4. How much influence do you feel that you have over decisions that affect you? Have you and your family been involved enough in making these decisions? How much control do you have over what services or supports are provided?
5. When things in your life change and your needs are different than before, are the people and services in the system flexible enough to change with you?
6. Do you have any other ideas for how the system could be improved?

### ***What We Heard***

The central message heard from these youth can be expressed as follows: *youth live in the system; they want a voice and some ability to influence the course of their care*. The following are more detailed themes, ideas and experiences heard by the Panel during its three consultations with youth who have experience with child intervention services.

#### **A voice for youth**

- Youth have a minimal voice within the system, especially when they are younger. Policies to ask youth for their opinions and insights are not implemented.
- Youth are never asked by an independent source how their care is going. Asking youth about their care should be done in a relationship-based, non-judgmental setting, creating a safe, comfortable space.
- Youth are often uncomfortable asking for help in the current system, and when they do they feel they have little influence over decisions made about their lives and their care.

- Youth are often unaware of any authority or rights that they should be able to exercise or access, and so the foster parent carries all the authority in the relationship.

### **Navigating the system**

- There is often little awareness among youth about who they can ask for what types of help. Some youth report receiving no education on their rights or on the availability of the Child and Youth Advocate.
- Social workers and child and youth workers do not always volunteer information, support or services; youth must ask for them (and be aware of them) to receive them.
- There are a number of similar services offered by different organizations, which can be challenging and confusing for youth.
- “Documentation” of a child’s “issues and behaviours” over the years follows them and informs future relationships with staff and the system.

### **“Social workers” [i.e., CFSA caseworkers]**

- Youth need social workers to be responsive, not just to their needs and day-to-day concerns, but for critical issues such as health care needs. Many of the youth that the Panel spoke with expressed a sentiment that their services and care environment did not adapt quickly to their changing needs.
- Some youth feel that their social workers are determined or instructed to avoid regular contact with them due to time constraints.
- Social workers should be evaluated regularly. They should recognize that youth “live in the system, we don’t work in it”.
- Social workers are often inconsistent, uncertain of what they can provide, or forced to “check with their boss” before taking any action.

- Timely, consistent information for social workers is important. Social workers should have a handbook of resources for kids in care. They could also benefit from a manual – written by youth – on how to be a good social worker for a child.
- Some youth feel that they have no ability to switch to another worker if there is a poor relationship or if their needs are not being met.

### **Family connectedness**

- Foster parents need to be given more and more timely information about the youth that they will be caring for. Also, the needs of some youth require that foster parents receive additional training (e.g., related to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder).
- Foster parents may need a greater network of support as well, especially when they are new and dealing with difficult issues from youth.
- Separating siblings causes additional problems and isolation.
- Youth need to be in contact with their families where possible, whatever the budget implications. Keeping families together and reconnecting family members with youth in protection is important.
- Support for parents (e.g., teaching parenting skills and supporting employment) is perceived by some to be positive.

### **Service delivery**

- When social workers and families are engaged and consistently present in a young person's life, success is possible. Trust is a critical element; the youth that the Panel heard from reported a wide range in the quality and consistency of their relationships with caseworkers.
- Youth live in the system. Some feel they treated as though it is their fault that they are in care.

- Often the system is geared to meet basic needs, with little budget or attention devoted to other issues such as safety, isolation, quality of life and violence between youth (e.g., in a foster care setting). Violence in the home, in particular, is an important issue rarely escalated beyond the foster parent unless the consequences have been serious.
- The system “ages out” youth abruptly, yet youth feel they are not adequately supported to gain independence and control over their lives in the years before they turn 18.
- Changing placements is very disruptive. Youth may or may not receive any notice about a change in placement, and they do not have any input into the decision.
- Family enhancement services are not “voluntary”, as the other option is the child protection stream.
- Social workers do not work during the hours in which crises occur for youth (i.e., late night).

## Appendix G Child Intervention Symposium

The Alberta Child Intervention Symposium (Symposium) was held March 18-19, 2010 in Edmonton. The Symposium was an important part of the Alberta Child Intervention Review Panel's (Panel) work to recommend how child intervention services can be better organized and delivered in Alberta.

On the basis of important themes from prior consultations, the Symposium was organized around the following three challenges in Alberta's child intervention system:

1. Managing and implementing change;
2. Child intervention services for Aboriginal Albertans; and
3. Transparent oversight and accountability.

Invited delegates represented a range of perspectives, from service providers to government representatives. Following presentations from experts in each topic, delegates were asked to discuss and respond to the ideas presented in light of their unique knowledge and perspective. Panel members then had the benefit of receiving feedback that was specific to the views of delegates representing different groups.

This document is a summary of what the Panel learned based on information from speakers and delegates during the Symposium. It is organized into three sections, each of which addresses one of the topics of discussion. For each topic the following is summarized:

- A brief introduction of the challenge being discussed and how it applies to child intervention in Alberta;
- Highlights from the presentation(s) that were particularly relevant in Alberta; and
- What the panel learned based on speaker presentations and dialogue among delegates.

## Topic 1: Managing and Implementing Change

### *The Challenge*

Since 2001, government and service providers have been working to implement the Alberta Response Model (ARM), an approach to child intervention that is broadly supported by stakeholders within and external to the system itself. Although new legislation and new casework practices are now in place, the system has encountered challenges in achieving a genuine shift in the way clients are served in practice. In particular, it does not seem that the child intervention system has fully realized the vision of integrated, proactive support for families to prevent protection crises from occurring. The first issue for discussion was how implementation can be improved to move Alberta closer to the vision of the ARM.

### *Presentation Highlights*

**Presenter:** Monica Oss, Chief Executive Officer, Open Minds

Monica Oss identified four key elements in enhancing child welfare system performance. For each of these elements, a number of key considerations were identified.

**1. Enhance the measurement of performance to support the system’s vision, objectives and stakeholders.**

- “What gets measured is what gets done”. Performance measurement design has a strong impact on where workers in the system focus their energy. Performance data should be designed to keep all stakeholders focused on the same clear objectives.
- Transparency in performance measures creates a foundation for continuous improvement at all levels.
- A “bottom-up” approach is crucial in determining performance measures and outcomes. Not only will performance measures more accurately reflect the realities

of day-to-day operations, but stakeholders are more likely to “buy in” to performance measures if they’ve been involved in their development.

- It should be clearly communicated to stakeholders that performance management results will be used to enable best practices, and not for punitive purposes.
- To make the system more flexible and better able to meet the needs of different stakeholders groups, identify processes that are essential and must be “prescribed” versus those that can be adapted locally. For the latter, focus on outcomes as opposed to process compliance.
- Performance measures should be respectful and responsive to the needs of those with cultural differences.

**2. Align and realign stakeholder incentives to support system vision and objectives.**

- Just as performance measurement should be focused on outcomes, incentives should be provided for achieving positive outcomes and for following best or prescribed practice.
- Design of performance measures and incentives should include the input of families and other consumers and stakeholders.
- All performance measurement and incentive structure information should be comprehensible, transparent, and readily measurable to allow for regular realignment.
- An incremental approach should be taken to system implementation.
- Monica provided numerous examples of performance based contracting and discussed their implications.

**3. Enhance system operations with ongoing process optimization.**

- Enhancing the effectiveness of services requires the integration of three axes of the system: services, information and funding.
- To create a complete vision, link process improvement initiatives to system performance data. Process mapping is one tool that can aid in understanding how the system functions and what information is available. Process mapping as a basis

for quality improvement requires the engagement of all participants in the process to build a common understanding.

- The engagement of consumers and frontline staff is critical to process optimization.
- Carefully select tools that are appropriate to the process and to the desired improvement.

**4. Sustain the system model through deliberate, effective change management. The following steps are important to system evolution:**

- i. Establish a sense of urgency.
- ii. Create a guiding coalition.
- iii. Develop a change vision with tangible strategies and tactics.
- iv. Communicate the change vision clearly.
- v. Empower broad based action by eliminating barriers and providing resources.
- vi. Integrate cultural competence into organizational change process.
- vii. Generate short terms “wins” by celebrating progress.
- viii. Consolidate gains to produce more change.
- ix. Anchor new approaches in the organizational culture.

### ***What we Learned***

The feedback from stakeholders indicates that although there is strong support for the direction of the ARM, processes of change and performance measurement within the system are not optimally designed to achieve this vision.

Delegates responded to the presentation on performance measurement and enhancement by emphasizing the following aspects of improving system performance in Alberta:

- A greater focus on outcome measurement, as opposed to compliance with processes and procedures;
- A more deliberate approach to implementing changes in support of the ARM, including clear communication of the vision for change;

- The engagement of stakeholders – direct delivery staff in particular – in designing performance measurements and improving system processes; and
- The importance of a culturally appropriate approach to change and to performance measurement for Delegated First Nation Agencies (DFNAs).

As the system implements performance measurement processes (such as Outcome Based Service Delivery), there are several considerations from Monica Oss that seem particularly relevant in light of the dialogue among delegates:

1. Performance measurement should be focused on outcomes. This approach to performance measurement should include two elements in particular:
  - Transparency. Performance measures, their associated incentives and their purpose should be clearly outlined to stakeholders to foster understanding and commitment.
  - A “bottom-up” approach that establishes stakeholder input as the basis for performance measurement design.
2. It is important to be mindful of how stakeholder incentives are organized in the system, especially in the context of Outcome Based Service Delivery (i.e., incentives should be tied to client results, not simply reduced costs).
3. People within the system should have a clear understanding of processes as a means to enable quality improvement. Process mapping is one tool that could assist with process improvement, but whatever tool is selected it is critical that stakeholders at multiple levels are actively involved.

## **Topic 2: Child Intervention Services for Aboriginal Albertans**

### ***The Challenge***

There continue to be significant challenges and disparity in how Aboriginals are served – both on and off reserves – resulting in a different experience for Aboriginal children and families. Meanwhile, the majority of children in care are Aboriginal (64% of the child intervention caseload), and this proportion is projected to increase. Problems with child intervention services for Aboriginals have important historical, economic and social dimensions, but it is

clear nonetheless that the system continues to experience a dramatic overrepresentation of this population in care. The panel invited presenters to explore how other jurisdictions have improved system capacity to meet the needs of Aboriginal clients, and how in doing so they have addressed related issues of governance, jurisdiction, culturally appropriate practice and infrastructure.

**Presenter:** Terry Cross, Executive Director, National Indian Child Welfare Association

### *Presentation Highlights*

Terry Cross discussed two main reasons for the overrepresentation of American Indian children in care in the United States that are highly relevant in the Alberta context:

1. **Disproportionate Need.** Disparity in well being feeds disproportionality in child welfare. Children who experience greater socioeconomic challenges are more likely to be overrepresented in child welfare. Mr. Cross showed that 35% of American Indian children live in poverty in the U.S. compared to 17% of children overall. In part, he linked the overrepresentation of American Indians within the child welfare system to greater need experienced by these children and their families.
2. **Bias in child welfare decision making.** The presentation explored how bias at different decision points within child welfare systems results in consistent overrepresentation. In particular, Terry noted two decision points at which bias is strongly evident in the American system: substantiated reports of maltreatment and placement of children within the system. For example, twice as many cases of reported maltreatment are substantiated for American Indian children compared with Caucasian children. Similarly, for every 100 reports, 8 Caucasian children are placed within the system, compared with 25 American Indian children. There is a need to understand and research how bias is influencing decisions and how to address it.

Terry Cross also spoke about the potential for “deep dialogue” to engage constructively with Aboriginal stakeholders.

**Presenters:** George Savoury and Debbie Boyd-Crowther, Government of Nova Scotia

In Nova Scotia, child welfare services are provided to Aboriginals by Mi’kmaq Family and Children’s Services (MFCS), a fully delegated agency providing protection and enhancement services. Any Mi’kmaq child in Nova Scotia who is removed from their home comes into the care of MFCS. MFCS also provides extensive supports to children and families in their homes as part of their focus on prevention.

MFCS is a relevant example of Aboriginal-run child welfare service delivery in a Canadian jurisdiction. The speakers identified the following as key components of their culturally sensitive model of service delivery:

1. MFCS is a single delegated Aboriginal agency mandated to serve all Aboriginals in Nova Scotia, whether on or off reserve. Jurisdictionally, therefore, the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service agencies overlap.
2. MFCS is governed by a tripartite agreement between the province, the Mi’kmaq people and INAC, but is run by First Nations people under the Government of Nova Scotia. MFCS is not separate, but rather *distinct* from the government system.
3. MFCS uses a family based approach with child centered outcomes.
4. MFCS infuses First Nations values in to their practice.
5. Service delivery staff Nova Scotia’s system are required to have completed a Bachelor’s degree in Social Work as a minimum standard of employment.
6. MFCS places a strong emphasis on accountability to the client and the community.
7. MFCS follows Jordan’s principle. Children are cared for first and then costs and logistics are dealt with once the needs of the child have been met.

### *What we Learned*

Aboriginal children are significantly overrepresented in the child intervention system, in Alberta and in jurisdictions across North America. The presentations on this topic by experts from the United States and Nova Scotia offered a number of insights that are relevant to the efforts to better serve Aboriginal populations in Alberta:

- Disparity in need and supportive resources can drive overrepresentation. This is a significant issue in the Alberta context as well, as the Panel has heard that First Nations communities across the province face resource and funding challenges combined with high levels of need. Addressing resource and capacity issues has been accomplished with some success in Nova Scotia through joint efforts between First Nations, INAC and the provincial government. In Alberta, the situation is more complex due to the plurality of First Nations voices and interests, but nevertheless resource and capacity challenges are shared issues to be addressed jointly by Alberta Children and Youth Services (ACYS), Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and the DFNAs.
- MFCS provides an example of how giving some control and governance responsibility to Aboriginal peoples has enabled greater flexibility in the system to adapt to unique cultural needs.
- It is important to recognize the causes of the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in care, which include not only socioeconomic factors (e.g., racism, intergenerational trauma, poverty and addiction) but also likely bias within the child intervention system at key decision points. Both presentations spoke to the need for workers to be able to differentiate between social disadvantage and abuse. Greater awareness within the system regarding cultural competence may lead to fewer apprehensions of Aboriginal children.
- Both presentations emphasized the importance of collaboration and dialogue with Aboriginal stakeholders as the root of joint efforts to better serve and support Aboriginal families.

Symposium participants were able to articulate a number of common considerations related to improving services for Aboriginal Albertans:

- Delegates told the Panel that CFSAs do not always have the proper training and resources to provide culturally competent care. There are opportunities to improve cultural competency of the system by involving Aboriginal people in the development of processes and services that better meet the needs of Aboriginal children and their families. The Panel also heard that proper training and resources to address Aboriginal needs could be provided to every service provider regardless of their Agency or location.
- Communication and language were identified as significant issues for services to Aboriginals. It was apparent from the presentations and from the breakout discussions that the child intervention system needs to communicate more clearly with Aboriginal stakeholders, and to be aware of the impact of language used within the system. Lack of clarity can lead to misunderstandings and can generate unnecessary tension. The example that arose most frequently through the course of the Symposium was the use of the term “permanent placement” in the ARM. To those working within the system, “permanent placement” means trying to return children to their homes whenever possible, or to find them stable homes. To Aboriginal people, the concept of permanency is a cause for fear, evoking the history of apprehensions and residential schools in Aboriginal communities – permanence in this context is seen to be a negative thing.
- A focus on prevention is perceived to be important in reducing the representation of Aboriginal children in care. It is important to recognize and work to address socioeconomic disparities and to support Aboriginal families in keeping children in their homes.
- A greater degree of flexibility in the system would allow services to adapt to the needs of Aboriginals. The panel also heard that a critical underpinning of this flexibility should be increased understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders, rooted in a spirit of enhanced collaboration and dialogue. A focus on accountability for outcomes instead of processes would help enable adaptability as well. Increasing flexibility requires meaningful engagement of Aboriginal stakeholders in process development and decision making to ensure the system meets their needs and can adapt to different cultural norms.

Delegates also responded to the presentations with a robust discussion of issues and opportunities for improvement specific to DFNAs, including:

- Breaking down jurisdictional barriers to better provide consistent services across the province. Tripartite leaders need to work together to address jurisdictional challenges.
- Capacity issues within First Nations communities should be addressed collaboratively by DFNAs, ACYS and INAC. In this way, disparity of resources and capacity between DFNAs and CFSAs can be addressed such that service delivery on an off reserve can achieve equitable outcomes.
- Relationships between CFSAs and DFNAs should be enhanced to allow for better collaboration and access to services across federal/provincial jurisdictional boundaries.

### **Topic 3: Transparent Oversight and Accountability**

#### ***The Issue***

While Alberta has numerous processes for managing and monitoring service delivery, such as file reviews, a single centralized information system and casework reporting tools, there are gaps that impact the ability of the system to ensure quality and effectiveness. Monitoring and improvement mechanisms are strongly focused on process compliance and outputs, with less capacity to assess effectiveness, quality or outcomes of service delivery. A focus has recently emerged in Alberta on outcomes measurement, although it is not yet clear how this will align with existing accountability and incentive structures.

Alberta's system could benefit from improved mechanisms for accountability, especially ones that incorporate objective external input, direct engagement of clients in monitoring and improving practice, and transparent public reporting of findings from investigations into serious events and "near misses". This topic invited participants to explore how accountability mechanisms have been implemented in other jurisdictions to enhance system quality assurance, and how Alberta's system might learn and benefit from successes elsewhere.

### ***Presentation Highlights***

**Presenter:** Wendy Thompson, Professor and Director, School of Social Work, McGill University

Dr. Thompson’s presentation drew upon her experience in the United Kingdom (UK) as the Prime Minister’s Chief Adviser on Public Service Reform and her involvement in the development of an accountability model for children’s services in the UK. Public services in the UK have been a major public and political issue, and major shifts within their child welfare system were driven to significant extent by the political sensitivity of a series of tragic events. While the approach has varied greatly over the years, in recent years the focus has been on achieving the outcomes established within the *Every Child Matters* model, and on integrating outcome-based performance assessments across the whole of children’s services.

The role of government in the UK child welfare system has shifted from one in which government monitors delivery and manages indicators across the system to a more “hands-off” role as funder and enabler. In other words, the main focus of government has shifted to building agency capacity through support, funding, and aligning incentives.

A critical component of the shift in government’s child welfare role was a transparent performance measurement system based on outcomes that has been implemented across the system. This transparency and external input permitted the development of a common, public dialogue about child welfare that moved beyond simply reacting to negative incidents and reduced political pressure to react to tragedies.

The U.K. model identifies two key questions on which all assessments of organizations and agencies providing services to children are based:

1. How well are the children served?
2. What capacity do organizations/agencies have to improve?

For each question a simple rating scale was developed, with common criteria to allow for accurate and consistent ratings. System incentives are managed at the agency level based on their respective rating. When organizations are found to provide good services and to be positioned for improvement, they are rewarded with more power and flexibility in the use of

their resources, fewer reporting and inspection requirements, and the opportunity to be showcased as models of best practices. Organizations found to demonstrate poor performance without strong potential to improve are subject to closer government scrutiny and controls, and possibly even the replacement of management or the appointment by government of a Trustee over the organization. The purpose of using autonomy as an incentive in this model is to reward or penalize agencies without negatively impacting their ability to provide services (i.e., without simply cutting funding).

Dr. Thomson identified the following factors as critical to the success of the significant system changes in the UK:

- **Transparent, relevant data.** The performance information allows agencies to compare themselves to one another and allows the public to research their local services. The data is adjusted to each region's baseline so as to allow for accurate comparison.
- **Explicit system design.** The system design includes a clear understanding of who is responsible for what. The role of the system is not to provide services but to enable agencies to provide services through funding, policy and performance metrics.
- **Political will.** Political will is needed to tackle resistance both from within the system and from outside it.
- **A child-centered focus.**
- **Strong allies.** Alliances were built with strong government partners, notably the Ministry of Education.
- **Customer engagement strategy.** There must be strong evidence that there is a customer engagement strategy in place. In the UK, for instance, there is a Committee of Children in Care who serve as an advisory to the Secretariat. Public scrutiny and reporting has been an important part of the system's evolution.
- **Cultural competency.** Services and accountability measures must be culturally competent. One way the UK manages this is through monitoring the proportion of workers ethnicities' relative to the ethnicities of those they serve.

### *What we Learned*

Dr. Thompson illustrated how the approach to accountability and quality assurance dramatically changed in the U.K. child welfare system. Although the U.K. system and its

political context are very different from Alberta's, there are nonetheless a number of key lessons from their experience of system transformation that are relevant to the changes underway in this province, including:

- The success factors identified as crucial to the change in the U.K., which may also be valuable considerations in the Alberta context:
  - Transparent, relevant data;
  - Explicit system design;
  - Political will;
  - A child-centered focus;
  - Strong allies within government;
  - A customer engagement strategy; and
  - Cultural competency.
- The U.K. experience demonstrates the importance of clarifying the role of government and communicating its roles clearly throughout the system.
- A focus on outcomes that emphasizes the importance of service quality and capacity to improve over processes. This outcomes focus is relevant context as Alberta moves toward Outcomes Based Service Delivery (OBSD). Also relevant is the alignment of consistent, outcomes-based data with system incentives as an example of how outcomes can be integrated into systematic quality assurance mechanisms.
- The importance of client input, transparency and external oversight in rebuilding public confidence in the U.K. system. Although the Alberta and U.K. political environments are very different, there are distinct similarities in the public, political nature of tragic events. It is significant to note the role of transparency, external oversight and client input in increasing public confidence and reducing political pressure to react to tragedies with system changes.

Responding to the transformation of the U.K. system, delegates identified a number of key issues explored during the presentation that were also significant within the Alberta context. In particular, delegates suggested that accountability within the Alberta system could be strengthened in several ways:

- Opening the system to external input, oversight and/or advocacy functions. Although there was some disagreement about the merits of a fully transparent quality assurance system like the one in the U.K., delegates nonetheless recognized the importance of greater external involvement in the system.
- Client input was seen to be an important component of quality improvement efforts.
- The outcomes focus evident in the U.K. system resonated with delegates, who further stressed the importance of stakeholder involvement in development of performance management mechanisms.

Clarifying roles and responsibilities throughout the system was seen to be valuable, especially with respect to accountabilities at every level. There are opportunities to adjust current roles and responsibilities to better align with accountability expectations.

## Appendix H CFSA Board Governance

The following excerpts informed the Panel's recommendation in the area of CFSA Board governance.

### ***Excerpt from the Child and Family Services Authorities Act:***

- 9 (1) Subject to this Act, the regulations and any directions given under this Act, an Authority is responsible for the provision on the Minister's behalf of child and family services in its region, including the following:
- (a) promoting the safety, security, well-being and integrity of children, families and other members of the community;
  - (b) planning and managing the provision of child and family services;
  - (c) determining priorities in the provision of child and family services and allocating resources accordingly;
  - (d) assessing on an ongoing basis the social and other related needs of the region;
  - (e) ensuring reasonable access to quality child and family services;
  - (f) ensuring that policies and standards established pursuant to section 8 are followed;
  - (g) monitoring and assessing the provision of child and family services;
  - (h) working with other Authorities, the Government and other public and private bodies to co-ordinate the provision of child and family services.
- (2) In carrying out its responsibilities under subsection (1), an Authority must involve
- (a) children, families and other members of the community who receive or who benefit from child and family services, and
  - (b) other interested members of the community.

***Excerpt from the 2006 Memorandum of Understanding between the ACYS Minister and CFSAs***

7.3 Board's Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the Board to direct and oversee the management of the business and affairs of the CFSA.

The Board is responsible for the following:

- (a) setting the strategic direction for the CFSA, ensuring the direction is complementary to the Ministry's strategic direction and providing strategic input into the Ministry's Business Plan;
- (b) ensuring that regional policies are in alignment with the Core Governance Policies;
- (c) monitoring the activities of the CFSA to ensure its mandate is being fulfilled, and that it is in compliance with all relevant government policies and all legal and regulatory requirements;
- (d) exercising independent judgment in overseeing the operations within the directions given under the Act, this MOU and the three-year business plans developed by the Ministry and the Authority;
- (e) understanding its responsibilities and evaluating objectively, on a regular basis, the Board's effectiveness in fulfilling those responsibilities;
- (f) assessing candidates for the position of CEO and developing and monitoring performance expectations for the CEO that meet both Board and Department requirements, in collaboration with the Deputy Minister;
- (g) establishing executive limitations for the CEO;
- (h) establishing terms of reference of any Board committees;
- (i) developing and approving strategies for the governance of the CFSA, including the development of the Board and the recruitment and orientation of new Board members;
- (j) providing a connection between the community and the Ministry; and
- (k) understanding the significant risks to which the CFSA is exposed, and obtaining assurance, on a regular basis, that the CFSA has appropriate and effective risk management process and policy.

***Excerpt from the Alberta Child and Family Service Authority Board Member Manual***

**ROLE OF THE BOARD**

It is the responsibility of the Board to direct and oversee the management of the business and affairs of the CFSA.

As an Agent of the Crown, the CFSA is an integral part of the Ministry of Children’s Services.

The Board of the CFSA is appointed by the Minister and is accountable to the Minister for the execution of all of its governance functions. As such, the Board must be fully informed in order to report to the Minister on activities within the CFSA.

The key responsibilities of the Board are as follows.

**I. Direction Setting**

1. Set the strategic direction for the CFSA, ensuring the direction is complementary to the Ministry’s strategic direction and providing strategic input into the Ministry’s Business Plan.
2. Develop and approve strategies for the governance of the CFSA, including the development of the Board and the recruitment and orientation of new Board members.
3. Ensure that periodic assessment of trends, events, and social and related needs in a region occur.
4. Evaluate the results and information from these assessments and direct them into appropriate planning forums.
5. Provide input into the development of the Ministry’s strategic and Business Plan development and ensure Ministry direction and priorities are incorporated into the CFSA Business Plan.
6. Inform the development, of and recommendation of the CFSA Business Plan, including appropriate risk management strategies, to respond to regional priorities and needs within the fiscal targets set, and for approval by the Minister.
7. Review and monitor the CFSA Operational Plan for progress and its alignment with the CFSA Business Plan.

**II. Monitoring and Assessment**

1. Monitor the activities of the CFSA to ensure its mandate is being fulfilled, and that it is in compliance with all relevant government policies and all legal and regulatory requirements.
2. Have an understanding of the significant risks to which the CFSA is exposed, and obtain assurance, on a regular basis, that the CFSA has an appropriate and effective risk management process and policy.
3. Monitor the CFSA implementation of the Ministry policies and programs and CFSA business and operational plans for achievement of outcomes, and ensure plans for corrective action are in place where required.
4. Ensure risk management processes are in place to keep the Board informed of issues, incidents and trends impacting the operation of the Authority.
5. Review and approve the CFSA Annual Report for submission to the Minister.

### III. Policy Advice and Implementation

1. Ensure that regional policies are in alignment with the Core Governance Policies.
2. Ensure strategies are in place to coordinate the work of the Authority with the programs, policies and work of the government, other authorities, and other public and private bodies in order to achieve the efficient provision of child and family services and to avoid duplication of effort and expense.
3. Identify potential opportunities, policy, program or service issues or gaps requiring attention by the Authority, Department, Ministry or beyond, as it relates to advancing the vision, mission and goals of the Ministry.

### IV. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Recruitment, Selection and Appraisal

1. An Authority is to have a Chief Executive Officer, who is to be appointed by the Minister on the Board's recommendation. The process is detailed in Governance Policy C-3.
2. Establish executive limitations for the CEO.
3. Assess candidates for the position of CEO and develop/monitor performance expectations for the CEO that meet both Board and Department requirements, in collaboration with the Deputy Minister.
4. Delegate management authority, and identify key responsibilities through Core Governance Policies, in compliance with provincial legislation and policies.

5. Respect the privilege of the CEO to carry out executive action, and support the CEOs actions that are exercised within the authority delegated to the CEO and in accordance with Ministry directives and the CFSA business and operational plans.

#### V. Board Development

1. Understand its responsibilities and evaluate objectively, on a regular basis, the Board's effectiveness in fulfilling those responsibilities.
2. Establish processes to share best practices relative to governance. This includes dialogue within and among CFSA Boards.
3. Implement a comprehensive orientation program for new Board members and ongoing development for all Board members.
4. Complete an annual assessment of the Board and individual Board members. Board evaluations are conducted to achieve three purposes: increase accountability, improve performance and support the Board appointment process. There are two levels of assessment. The overall Board's performance is evaluated against the Core Governance Policies and Board accomplishments and results in a development plan for the entire Board. There are also assessments of individual Co-Chairs and Board members with the focus on "growth" and on responsibilities of individuals to manage their own learning and development plans. The procedures for both levels of assessment are contained in a guide for CFSA Board assessment.
5. Develop and implement regional Core Governance Policies to guide Board decision-making and actions of the CEO. This includes the review and update of Core Governance Policies that supplement Core Governance Policies to guide Board decisions and the actions of the CEO.

#### VI. Fiscal Responsibility

1. Exercise independent judgment in overseeing the operations within the directions given under the Act, the MOU and the three-year business plans developed by the Ministry and the Authority;
2. Approve the annual budget produced by the CEO, ensuring that it is in line with the Business Plan goals and priorities and within resources allocated directly to the Authority by the Ministry.
3. Monitor financial information at least quarterly to ensure that resources are being allocated to achieve desired results, and that internal financial controls are effective, and conditions for funding are being respected.

4. Approve the reallocation of resources within budgets to address changes in service demand projections.
5. Approve the allocation of new funds provided by the Minister where the Minister has invited authorities to participate in initiatives.
6. Receive audit reports (internal and external) and ensure that issues in the reports are addressed.

#### VII. Accountability to the Minister

1. Review and approve the CFSA Annual Report for submission to the Minister for consideration.
2. Establish processes to ensure compliance with legislation, regulations, provincial standards and policies and Ministerial directives.
3. Fulfill accountability requirements outlined in the Accountability Framework and Memorandum of Understanding between the Minister of Children's Services and the Authority.
4. Fulfill the role of an advocate to the Minister for issues affecting children, youth and families.
5. Ensure that the Authority is meeting the needs of children, youth and families within the mandate and resources of the Authority.

#### VIII. Responsibility to the Community

1. Provide a connection between the community and the Ministry.
2. Ensure strategies are in place to involve children, families and other members of the community in furthering the vision, mission and goals of the Ministry of Children's Services and to inform them on Ministry and CFSA plans and priorities.
3. Publish the annual report for the Authority.
4. Ensure that capacity building within families in the community is a priority for the Authority.
5. Develop strategic alliances and/or partnerships at the governance level to support the CFSA Business Plan.

#### IX. Recruitment of Board Members and Co-Chairs

1. Recruitment of board members may occur as part of a province-wide board recruitment, or on an ad hoc basis as vacancies occur. All recruitment activities must follow the recruitment procedures outlined in Appendix 6.

2. A regional interview Panel is comprised of a minimum of three members, including the two Co-Chairs or their designate and a human resources representative selected by the department. Additional members on the interview Panel are only permitted by mutual agreement between the regional Co-Chairs and Governance Services.

3. The Board may make recommendations to the Minister regarding the appointment of new members and Co-Chairs through the recommendations made by the regional interview Panel.

## Appendix I      References

The Panel reviewed a large number of documents supplied by the Ministry, stakeholders and external experts, as well as documents acquired through research during the course of the review. This section does not attempt to capture the full range of documents that proved important to the Panel in addressing its mandate; instead, only those documents specifically referenced within this report are cited.

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