



*Prepared by:*

*Youth in Transition Working Committee*

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# Youth in Transition Policy Framework

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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During the 1990s and 2000, the Alberta Government began several new initiatives focused specifically on youth. Some of these included the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative, Youth Employment Strategy, Youth Forums and the Aboriginal Youth Forum. Many of these initiatives shared a common vision to ensure youth are able to contribute to and take full advantage of social and economic opportunities. The personal and career goals of youth are encouraged through the building of their skills, knowledge, and abilities to share and contribute towards Alberta's ongoing prosperity and quality of life. As a result of these youth initiatives a need was identified for a policy framework to guide and provide consistency in the development of government policies, strategies, funding allocations as well as outcomes for all of Alberta youth.

The Youth in Transition Policy Framework provides the direction and parameters for policy and program development for youth in transition, aged 13 to 24. The framework takes into consideration the diverse needs of youth in transition, as well as those of their parents, families, caregivers and communities.

The vision of the Youth in Transition Policy Framework is that youth are working towards enhancing their ability and capability to be healthy, happy, active, involved and independent. The policy direction lays the foundation for the planning and implementation of policies for a continuum of programs, services, and resources for youth. The guiding principles support this overall vision, direction and implementation of youth policies and programs.

The purpose of the framework is to (1) identify policy goals and strategic outcomes which will guide program development for youth; (2) provide consistency and support to ministries in their development of policies, programs, and strategies; and (3) encourage capacity building for youth and others. It is proposed that the Youth in Transition Policy Framework will form the basis of current and future discussions, decisions, and plans for policy and legislation, funding allocations, and priority services needed for youth in transition to adulthood.

# **Youth In Transition Policy Framework**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In the 1990's and 2000 the Government of Alberta began several new initiatives which focused on youth. The Alberta Children and Youth Initiative, Safe and Caring Schools, Youth Forums and the Aboriginal Youth Forum are a few examples and others are listed in Appendix 1. A Youth Secretariat was established to bring focused attention to issues related to youth. The Youth Employment Strategy was introduced to ensure youth are able to contribute to and take full advantage of the social and economic opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It was recognized that Alberta's ongoing prosperity and quality of life depends on the development of youth's ability to share their skills, knowledge, energy and enthusiasm. As a result of these initiatives and strategies a need was identified for a youth in transition policy framework. This framework was designed to guide and provide consistency in the development of government policies, strategies, funding allocations as well as outcomes for all Alberta youth. The framework reflects the needs and voices of youth in transition, parents, caregivers, families, communities and government.

## **II. PURPOSE OF YOUTH IN TRANSITION POLICY FRAMEWORK**

The purpose of this policy framework is to provide a rationale and philosophy to guide policy and program development for youth in transition to adulthood.

This policy framework:

- identifies policy goals and strategic outcomes that guide program development for youth;
- provides consistency in policy development for youth across government and supports individual ministries in their policy and program planning, strategic development and accountability; and
- encourages capacity building and the development of resiliency for youth, parents, caregivers, families and community to support youth in transition to adulthood.

## **III. YOUTH IN TRANSITION**

The majority of youth in Alberta are successfully managing the challenges of transition to adulthood. They have supportive family and friends, are in school or working and are able to maximize opportunities to move toward healthy adulthood.

There is a smaller proportion of youth that do not have all the necessary supports, skills or developmental abilities to manage the transition toward healthy adulthood. Those youth are more likely to be receiving, or in need of, some type of support.

In general practices, there is not a standard definition of “youth” or “adolescent”. The definition is usually driven by particular pieces of legislation which focus on specific actions or services for youth (i.e., *School Act, Child Welfare Act, Young Offenders Act*). The legal definition of adulthood (age 18 in Alberta) has led to the creation of boundaries in the determination of eligibility for either youth or adult services. These boundaries have at times prohibited the provision of a required service due to the age of the recipient.

For the purpose of this framework, youth will be defined as individuals aged 13 to 24 years. This is intended to provide lower and upper limits during which a youth may need any number of services. This definition is not intended to require changes to mandates that currently exist for youth services ministries/agencies.

A variety of challenges are faced by youth in Alberta as they move through adolescence and progress into young adulthood.

- Youth are being helped and supported by their families longer. More than 30% of young adults between 18 - 25 years are still living at home.
- Youth with a history of abuse, family breakdowns, child welfare involvement, addictions, conflict with the law, physical or mental health concerns or developmental disabilities face greater difficulties.
- Aboriginal youth must cope with the demanding task of finding their way in systems that may not meet their cultural and spiritual needs.
- Immigrant youth have unique needs as they transition into a new country while still maintaining their own beliefs and cultural traditions. The number of immigrant youth in our province continues to rise.
- Transition to adult services is of particular concern for youth with special needs and disabilities and their families. Many current services do not provide a seamless or a smooth continuum of services to meet their unique needs.

For a detailed profile of youth see Appendix 2

## IV. VISION

**Our youth are healthy, happy, active, involved and independent.**

The Youth in Transition Vision is based on the following assumptions:

- Youth will participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of youth programs and policies.
- Youth are valued as having a role to play as individuals and with peers, friends, family, community and society.

- Youth are diverse individuals and have diverse views about what they need in life.
- Youth need access to a variety of programs, services and opportunities to successfully transition to adulthood.

The overall goal is to strive for youth to have well-rounded lives and access to a continuum of supportive opportunities.

This vision for the Youth in Transition Policy Framework is derived from the Government of Alberta's broad vision that sees "a vibrant and prosperous province where Albertans enjoy a superior quality of life and are confident about the future for themselves and their children." It is also complementary to the goal of the Alberta's Children and Youth Services Initiative that "children and youth are well cared for, safe, successful at learning and healthy."

## **V. GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The guiding principles provide direction for policy development and implementation. They reflect the voice of youth, families, caregivers, government and stakeholders heard in numerous consultations throughout the province.

- Value and Respect – Youth are valued, respected, listened to, and given the support to make decisions impacting their lives and unique characteristics.
- Youth Focused – The needs of a youth are addressed within the context of their transition to adulthood.
- Significant Relationships – Positive relationships between youth, their families and other significant individuals will be supported.
- Aboriginal Culture – The culture and traditions of aboriginal youth are respected.
- Culturally Sensitive – Supports and services are offered in an environment where the values, traditions, languages and cultures of all people are acknowledged, recognized and respected.
- Celebration and Recognition – Supports and services recognize, build upon and celebrate the strengths and potential for independence of youth.
- Youth Approachable Communities – Youth are portrayed positively and are welcomed, encouraged and supported to actively participate in all aspects of the community.
- Youth Involvement – Youth are active participants in developing, implementing, evaluating and maintaining programs and policies.

- Comprehensive – Supports and services are holistic, co-ordinated, consistent, flexible and accessible.
- Sustainability – Supports and services recognize that responses to the needs of youth require a long-term approach.
- Community Capacity – Existing community-based support systems will be identified and, when feasible to do so, enhanced and/or developed.
- Accountability – Supports and services are effective and demonstrate positive outcomes for youth.
- Collaboration – Working together results in the best outcomes for youth and the most effective use of resources.
- Diversity – Supports and services are responsive to and respectful of the diverse needs of youth.

## **VI. POLICY DIRECTION**

The Youth in Transition Policy Framework provides parameters for the development of programs, services, and resources for youth. Policy goals are stated below. Specific recommendations for policy development and implementation are provided in Appendix 3.

### **Policy Goals**

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| Goal #1 | The Government of Alberta identifies youth in transition as a priority.  |
| Goal #2 | Programs, services and resources are targeted effectively for youth in transition.   |
| Goal #3 | Government policies and programs for youth recognize and support 'families' in the broadest sense, as fundamental to the stability of youth in transition. |
| Goal #4 | Communities have the capacity to effectively provide and sustain youth programs, services and resources.   |

The Youth in Transition Policy Framework has been designed to achieve three key strategic outcomes.

- Youth acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities to live happy, healthy, fulfilling lives and contribute positively to society.
- Youth are safe, supported and connected to caring peers and adults.
- Youth are involved in and have access to a wide range of flexible services that meet their diverse and unique needs.

## **VII. FUTURE DIRECTION FOR THE YOUTH IN TRANSITION POLICY FRAMEWORK**

It is proposed that the Youth in Transition Policy Framework, as well as other relevant frameworks, will inform current and future discussions, decisions and plans for policy, legislation, funding allocations and priority services for youth. Alberta's youth will be considered one of the priorities for government ministries and will be involved in determining the future direction of goals and business plans. Youth, stakeholders, along with Alberta government ministries will not only inform critical decisions in policy, legislation, programs and services for youth, but will also be involved in the accountability and reporting process.

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# A POLICY FRAMEWORK: YOUTH IN TRANSITION

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## List of Appendices

**Appendix 1: Historical Context**

**Appendix 2: Profile of Youth**

**Appendix 3: Policy Direction: Goals and Recommended Action**



## Appendix 1: Historical Context

There have been several provincial initiatives that have focused on children and youth:

- The Redesign of Children's Services consultation process took place in Alberta in the mid 1990's.
- Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation developed the Future Leaders Program for Aboriginal youth in 1995, and the program has continued to grow every year since.
- The Safe and Caring Schools initiative, led by Alberta Learning in collaboration with other ministries, associations, universities and stakeholders develops resources, provides training and conducts conferences for school communities and stakeholders.
- In November 1998, the Alberta Children and Youth Services Initiative (ACYI) provided a clear vision, expected outcomes and a plan that supports the healthy development of Alberta's children and youth. The ACYI goals are to ensure Alberta's children and youth will be well cared for, safe, successful at learning and healthy. Key initiatives included:
  - Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Initiative
  - Student Health Initiative
  - Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Initiative
  - Children's Mental Health Initiative
- Child and Family Services Authorities were established in 1999.
- The Ministry of Children's Services was established in 1999.
- In the spring of 1999, the Premier announced the formation of a Youth Secretariat to be housed in the Ministry of Children's Services.
- The Task Force for Children at Risk was formed by the Premier in June 1999.
- In October 1999, First Circle – Uniting for Children Forum was held.
- During 2000, Alberta Community Development, Volunteer Services Branch conducted a series of youth leadership forums in various Alberta communities.

- The Government of Alberta Aboriginal Policy Framework adopted “involvement of youth” as a key principle.
- An Alberta Youth Employment Strategy was introduced by a partnership between Human Resources and Employment and Alberta Learning.
- Seven “Your Choice, Your Voice” youth forums were held across Alberta in 2000.
- A National Aboriginal Youth Strategy is currently being developed by federal and provincial ministries in conjunction with Aboriginal organizations.
- Youth justice committees have been established in 89 communities throughout the province.
- A youth stream for funding has been put in place for the Community Crime Prevention Grant Fund.
- A provincial children’s mental health framework and implementation plan is being developed through the Alberta Children’s Initiative process.
- Many reports and inventories outlining services to children and youth are available, such as those compiled by the Children’s Advocate, Alberta Mental Health Board, Alberta Solicitor General, Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, Alberta Teachers’ Association, Family and Community Support Services Association, and Child and Family Services Authorities. These inventories have served as the foundation for building the Youth in Transition Policy Framework.

## Appendix 2: Profile of Youth

A snapshot of youth in Alberta reveals:

- In 1996, children under 15 comprised 23% of Alberta's population, a slightly higher proportion than the national percentage of 21%. The proportion of Aboriginal children under 15 is quite high, 37% compared to non-Aboriginal children 20%. This proportion of Aboriginal children is likely even higher, since 7 Aboriginal reserves and settlements were not included in the census.
- Despite marked improvements in the economy, the number of youth living below the income cut-off is very high by historic standards. Poverty rates among Alberta children under 18 have risen since 1980. In 1996, 13% of Alberta children lived in a low-income situation.
- Prenatal alcohol exposure is considered one cause of preventable birth defects and developmental disability in children.
- While the exact number of children affected by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) in Alberta is unknown, it is estimated that 1,200 children in the care of child welfare suffered from this problem in 1999. As FAS affected youth in transition into adulthood, they may experience significant personal problems as societal expectations increase and the affected youth are increasingly unable to meet these demands.
- Suicide among children aged 10 to 14 is twice as high in Alberta compared to the rest of Canada.
- Approximately 7% of children aged 9 to 13 have a mental disorder, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, emotional disturbances, neurotic disorders, psychoses, autism and developmental delay.
- The percentage of Alberta youth taking part in risky behaviour is increasing. In 1999, 33% of Alberta youth aged 15 to 24 smoked tobacco. Although alcohol consumption among teens and children has dropped since 1990, there is a considerable increase in the proportion of school-age youth using hashish or marijuana. In Alberta, 55% of youth are reported to have tried alcohol at least once, while 16% used cannabis.
- Youth who engage in one risky behaviour are more likely to engage in others.
- A 1995 survey showed that 69% of Alberta youth engage in some gambling activity and 23% are considered at risk or problem gamblers.
- The transition from school to work has become much more gradual. The majority of Alberta youth stay in the educational system for a considerable length of time. Enrollment in full-time post-secondary studies is increasing in Alberta. Between 1992 and 1998, this increase was 5 percent, the second largest among all provinces.

- Results of the Labour Force Survey show that 68% of Canadian teenagers and youth in their twenties had a job in 1998, while 40% of the teenagers attending school were employed.

### Aboriginal Youth

- Educational levels among Aboriginal youth lag behind those of other Canadians by wide margins in both rural and urban areas. More than two-thirds of Aboriginal youth do not graduate from high school.
- From 1989 to 1993, the mortality rate among Aboriginal youth was about 3.6 times higher than that of other Canadian youth.
- The incidence of disability among Aboriginal youth is about 1.7 times higher than for non-Aboriginal youth.
- Suicide deaths account for nearly one-third of all deaths among Aboriginal youth. This rate is five times that of other Canadian youth for Aboriginal males and eight times the rate for females.
- The rate of gambling is over twice as high among Aboriginal youth than other Canadian youth, with 89% of Aboriginal youth engaging in a gambling activity, 49% are considered to be at risk or problem gamblers.

### Youth in Child Protection

- Child protection caseloads are rising. In December 2000, 14,555 children were in receipt of protective services. This represents an increase in the caseload of 11.9% from December 1999. The increase in the caseload has continued to grow and there is no indication that this growth will slow or stop. Caseload growth is consistent across all age groups.
- Approximately 350 youth aged 18 and 19 receive child welfare services through a Care and Maintenance Agreement. Care and Maintenance Agreements are available to some youth who are involved with child protective services prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Youth involved with child protective services are at high risk for an unfortunate profile of hurtful behaviour, substance abuse, suicidal behaviour, developmental disabilities, unsuccessful transition to further education, over-representation in the criminal justice system and over-representation among children involved in prostitution.
- For children in the care of child welfare, the transition to adulthood is often abrupt, with a sudden loss of adult support. These youth, who already face multiple barriers, are expected to achieve at the age of 18 what most other youth of that age do not – working towards independence.

## Youth with Disabilities

- The Handicapped Children's Services program is a program that provides support and services to families who have a child (0-18 years) with a disability.
- Currently, the Handicapped Children's Services program serves approximately 9,350 children. Of those 9,350 children, about 29% of the caseload have a developmental disability; 12% have a physical disability; 5% have sensory disabilities; 38% have acute/chronic health problems; and about 16% of the Handicapped Children's Services caseload have mental health problems. The continued development of system capacities to provide accurate and timely diagnosis of disabilities (e.g. FAS) will cause these numbers to increase over the next several years.
- Of the 9,350 children and youth receiving services through Handicapped Children's Services the distribution across ages is :

0-5 years	=	1735
6-10 years	=	3106
11-15 years	=	2947
16-18 years	=	1562

- Transition planning is of particular concern for disabled youth. Often these youth find themselves outside the service mandate of many current adult services such as Persons with Developmental Disabilities, Alberta Mental Health, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped, etc. Families often express frustration and concerns during transition planning for their child.
- Although youth with disabilities have common factors that impact all youth during transition to adulthood, some key issues that are of significant concern for persons with disabilities include:
  1. Economic status, education, training, and employment.
  2. Communication that is inclusive and effective (i.e. alternative formats – translators, TTD, Braille).
  3. Safety and protection from victimization (including environmental safety and preventable injury consideration).
  4. Maintaining good health and well being.
  5. Accessibility and appropriate accommodations.
  6. System Discrimination (development of policies and programs which affect them).
  7. Indirect Discrimination (treating all people as if they were the same may produce inequitable outcomes and creates barriers for some groups).

8. The need for life long supports that change with life phases and individual circumstances (e.g., being a parent with a developmental disability; respite for family members/caregivers; planning for guardianship and care beyond life expectancy of mom/dad/caregiver).

### Youth Crime

- Youth crime in Alberta has decreased steadily since 1991 with the exception of 1999/2000 when it increased slightly. This has reflected national trends.
- On average there are 381 young offenders in custody, of which the average stay for sentenced offenders is 75 days.
- The average age for male and female offenders in custody is 16.
- Approximately 1 in 5 youth court cases involve violent crime and approximately half of the violent crimes are minor assaults. Youth are the most likely group to be victims of violent crime.
- There are approximately 3,500 youth on probation each month.
- Youth complete approximately 90,000 hours of community service work and 3,000 hours of personal service work per year.

## Appendix 3: Policy Direction: Goals and Recommended Actions

POLICY GOALS	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
<p>1. The Government of Alberta identifies youth in transition as a priority.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Incorporate Youth in Transition into the Government of Alberta Business Plan.</li> <li>b) Each Partnering Ministry of the Alberta Children and Youth Services Initiative (ACYI) incorporates Youth in Transition into their business plans.</li> <li>c) Add to the annual Status Report on Children and Youth outcomes and achievements related to Youth in Transition.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Programs, services, and resources are targeted effectively for youth in transition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) On an ongoing basis, determine the needs of Youth in Transition.</li> <li>b) Determine appropriate and targeted programs, services, and resources in response to the needs of Youth in Transition.</li> <li>c) Develop a comprehensive integrated approach to services.</li> </ul>
<p>3. Government policies and programs for youth recognize and support “families” in the broadest sense, as fundamental to the stability for youth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Ensure that supports and programs are available for youth and their families.</li> <li>b) Utilize environmental scans including information on family units, societal impacts on families, and satisfaction of youth and their families with government programs.</li> <li>c) Government policies and programs demonstrate respect for and understanding of the diversity of youth and their family life and family needs.</li> <li>d) Partnerships including youth, parents, families and caregivers are involved in planning and implementation of programs and services for youth in transition.</li> <li>e) Assess resource needs of youth, parents, caregivers and families as part of service or program gap analysis.</li> </ul>
<p>4. Community has the capacity to effectively provide and sustain youth programs, services and resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Increase community awareness as to why communities should invest in youth.</li> <li>b) Involve communities, including youth, in identifying problems, issues and solutions for youth.</li> </ul>