

Standing Committee on Public Accounts
Children's Services 2019-20 Annual Report
Follow up Questions and Responses

Question 1: PA-481 and PA-492

Ms Pancholi

Provide a breakdown of the \$26.5 million budget adjustment by program area...which grants were cut and which discretionary programs were cut as a result of in-year savings in 2019-20?

Response:

- Adjustments were put forward in areas where either a surplus or funding needs were forecast. The total budget reduction of \$26.5 million is broken out as follows:
- In-year budget adjustments of \$18.7 million in the Child Intervention Program was due to:
 - Projected lower Child Protection caseloads;
 - Projected lower cost per case in Foster and Kinship Care; and
 - An increase in Supports for Permanency.
- In-year budget adjustments of \$1.1 million in the Child Care Program was primarily due to:
 - savings from the reallocation of Kin Child Care and Stay-at-home subsidy programs to support increases in the child care subsidy program to benefit more children and families,
 - A projected increase in the Inclusive Child Care program;
 - A reduction in administrative expenses;
 - Increase of \$2 million in Child Care Accreditation.
- In-year total budget reduction/savings of \$6.5 million in the Early Intervention Services for Children and Youth program primarily due to:
 - A projected decrease from the non-renewal of Parent Link Centres and Family Resource Centres, conclusion of Early Childhood Development Coalitions grant reviews and the delay of new initiatives related to non-client facing contracts and grants.
 - A projected increase in Youth in Transition due to increased bursary payments as more applicants met the criteria than expected.
- In-year net reduction in Ministry Support Services mainly due to shared services savings recognized from attrition, hiring restraint, and restraint on discretionary expenses.

Question 2: PA-481

Ms. Pancholi

How much was the ministry anticipating to save as a result of lowering the eligibility age for the Supports and Financial Assistance Agreements (SFAA) program?

Response:

- Total cost savings for age reduction was projected to be \$14 million in 2021-22 for the SFAA program. Estimated savings to government as a whole remain unknown as youth transition to supports more appropriate to their needs in other ministries.

Question 3: PA-482

Ms. Pancholi

Was an analysis or review done of each of their [SFAA recipient] specific circumstances to determine what other government support they would be eligible for? Was any formal review done of each individual young person's file?

Response:

- A comprehensive review of every SFAA recipient's circumstances (22-24 year old) was conducted to ensure they would have a reasonable and successful transition plan.
- Individual case information is personal information and cannot be shared.

Question 4: PA-482

Ms. Pancholi

Was formal consultation done with the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Labour and Immigration, and the Ministry of Advanced Education before the decision was made to lower the eligibility for the SFAA program? Did the Ministry consult with the Child and Youth Advocate in its decision to lower the eligibility age for SFAA?

Response:

- There are always ongoing discussions between Ministries about issues facing young adults and the transitions between Children's Services and programs provided by other Ministries and agencies.
- The Ministry consulted with the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA), Community and Social Services, Indigenous Services Canada and contracted agencies as part of the development process for a strengthened approach to serving young adults.
- Additionally, the Ministry worked in close partnership with both the OCYA and Community and Social Services to ensure each young adult and their unique circumstances would be supported to transition to appropriate adult services to meet their needs, including employment based supports, Income Support or an application for AISH.

Question 5: PA-482 and PA-486

Ms. Pancholi

Any evidence and research done for lowering the age of the eligibility of the SFAA program which resulted in that decision? A cross-jurisdictional analysis is not the same thing as doing a cost-benefit analysis for Alberta young people transitioning out of care to determine whether or not there were short- and long- term cost implications as well as the impact on these young people. Was that analysis done? Was a [Social return on investment and economic impact assessment] done for the SFAA program?

Response:

- The ministry completes research and analysis as part of advice to government; this can include jurisdictional scans, literature reviews, and other analysis.
- This review is considered advice to government on ongoing policy developments.

Question 6: PA-485

Mr. Walker

What struck me was the 90 per cent metric for ensuring success in this [Advancing Futures] program. Comment on how they came to setting that 90 per cent mark?

Response:

- The 90 per cent target rate was set in 2016. At that time, the program was looking to increase the completion rate for students from 82 per cent.
- There are many factors that influence a student's ability to complete their program of study. The Advancing Futures program offers a transitional support program that includes social, emotional, and funding supports specifically for young people formerly in care, to more effectively help students overcome barriers to completion. The Social Return on Investment that the program completed in 2019 validated that consistent interaction with students directly has an impact on student success.
- A contact standard rate of 90 per cent helps to increase the completion rate of students and ensures that funding invested in program participants yields positive outcomes.

Question 7: PA-487

Ms. Pancholi

Can you provide information about what percentages of assessments and visits were done virtually and what percentages were being done in-person?

Response:

- Prior to March 2020, nearly all assessments and visits were conducted in-person, however these results started to change when service delivery was altered in response to COVID. Then about 18 per cent of visits were done virtually, with the remaining in person.
- Shifts in service delivery to virtual visits and assessments would be more clearly reflected in reviewing 2020-21 results.

Question 8: PA-487

Ms. Pancholi

Intakes dropped because kids were not in places where trusted adults could see them. Did you get many reports of that nature [differences from the referrals coming forward]?

Response:

- Compared to the previous year, March 2020 results show a five per cent decrease in referrals from Education sources and a five per cent increase in referrals from Justice, such as the police.

Question 9: PA-490 and PA-491

Ms. Pancholi

I was asking whether the Ministry tracks child care fees by municipality or region or keeps track or, basically, the cost of child care across the province?

Response:

- Children's Services tracks average licensed child care fees by program type and by region

Question 10: PA-492

Ms. Pancholi

Can you provide a list on what specific activities occurred in 2019-20 on [nine short-term actions in A Stronger, Safer Tomorrow report]?...Table any ongoing work related to the long-term action items in the Ministerial Panel and Child Intervention (MPCI)?

Response:

- The all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention (MPCI) was formed to support families and children by improving the child death review process and strengthening Alberta's child intervention system.
- Children's Services continues to shift the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in child intervention through policies and practices to prioritize children being connected to their culture, their families, and their communities. In 2019-20, the 26 recommendations from the all-party committee continued to drive policy and practice improvements and continued to be operationalized within the department as part of regular business.
- The enactment of Canada's An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Metis child, youth and families (Federal Act), has shifted the landscape for child and family services in Alberta. Some of the focus has shifted to partnerships with Indigenous communities as they determine the pace at which they want to assume delivery of some aspects of child and family services. The minimum standards for delivery of child and family services within the Federal Act are consistent with amendments made in February 2019 to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act in response to the all-party recommendations.
- All but one of the recommendations have either been fully completed or are in progress as part of ongoing operations: eleven have been fully completed; 8 are in progress; 6 are ongoing and 1 recommendation on a longitudinal study of children in care has not been started.

Question 11: PA-493

Ms. Renaud

On page 28 of the annual report the Ministry references \$12.1 million investment into Inclusive Child Care. Could you table information on the outcomes? What are measures for success? How many spots are available? How much was spent on training of staff? Are all the spots in accredited child care and early learning - if not clarify?

Response:

- Inclusive Child Care (ICC) supports include training for child care staff, consultation on programming for inclusion, resource and referral information, or in some cases, funding for additional staff.
- In 2019-20, all Children's Services regions provided support for children with disabilities as needed and there was not a limited number of 'spots' available for these children. A total of \$9.77 million was allocated across the province. As there was variation in how each region delivered the ICC program, outcomes are provided by region.
 - In Calgary, Central and Northwest regions, the approach taken was to build program and staff capacity through consultation supports, such as coaching and strategies to build staff skill implementing best practices for including children with diagnosed needs. This allowed 160

child care programs to increase their skill in supporting children with unique needs in this and future years

- In Edmonton, North Central, Northeast, and South regions, the approach taken was to enhance staff supports (an additional staff above the staff to child ratio in a child care room) to allow staff to meet the needs of children with special needs. In total, 1,014 children were supported in these regions.
- Additionally, the ministry provided \$2.3M to Getting Ready for Inclusion Today (GRIT) to support the inclusion of children with diverse needs through the Access, Support and Participation (ASaP) program.
- Participation in accreditation was not a requirement for accessing Inclusive Child Care supports.

Question 12: PA-494

Ms. Pancholi

As a result of changes that were made to subsidy, how many parents in the middle class lost their subsidy as a result of the changes and how much money they lost per parent subsidy?

Response:

- There were no changes made to the subsidy program in 2019-20.

Question 13: PA-494

Ms. Pancholi

With the change to the Alberta Child and Family Benefit, how many parents lost the child benefit in the upper end of the range and how much money did they lose?

Response:

- The consolidation of the former Alberta Child Benefit and the Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit (AFETC) into one program – the Alberta Child and Family Benefit (ACFB) - came into effect in July 2020 to ensure that those who needed the most support received it.
 - Approximately 65,000 to 75,000 low-income families who are earning less than \$25,000 would receive more benefits, in particular those who rely on Income Support or Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH).
 - Prior to consolidation, families with four or more children earning more than \$90,000 were still eligible to receive benefits under AFETC; though a family earning more than \$61,000 would not receive a large amount (\$4 to \$144 a month).

Question 14: PA-494

Ms. Pancholi

Can the ministry advise us as to the status of the Inclusive child care policy? As well as provide a detailed breakdown of the \$12.1 million?

Response:

- See answer to question 11.

Question 15: PA-495

Ms. Pancholi

What does the ministry know about how many on children on subsidy might have also been eligible for PUF and how many would have lost PUF for their kindergarten year or RSCD funding? Does the ministry work with those ministries to realize how many parents would have lost those supports? Does the inclusive child care policy and plan take into account that there are roughly about 3,500 children currently waiting for FSCD, family support for disabilities, funding?

Response:

- The child care subsidy program does not collect information about other supports or funding (through FSCD, PUF or other government programs) that applicants receive as this information is not required for eligibility or to determine their subsidy rate.

Question 16: PA-495

Ms. Pancholi

With respect to the \$25 per day child care program, beyond the evaluation that was done in that year, can the ministry table the detailed responses from the child care programs that led to that evaluation report that were in year 2 of the \$25-per-day program?

Response:

- In accordance with FOIP legislation, detailed responses from child care programs cannot be provided.

Question 17: PA-495

Mr. Guthrie

Regarding the child care subsidy program, what criteria is evaluated to determine whether a partial or full subsidy is given, and are there any additional requirements other than family earnings less than \$50,000 a year to receive this subsidy?

Response:

- In 2019-20, eligibility for the subsidy program and benefit amounts were based on a complicated formula that took into consideration:
 - total family income (line 15000 of the income tax return),
 - family structure (single or dual parent),
 - number of dependents under 18,
 - number of children attending child care,
 - type of child care program used (whether it was a daycare, out-of-school care program, family day home or group family child care), and
 - total hours of care needed.
- Families earning less than \$50,000 with children attending full time hours were eligible for the maximum subsidy amount.
- Additional criteria included:
 - applicants must be an Alberta resident;
 - the subsidy applicant or child is a Canadian citizen/permanent resident;

- the subsidy applicant is working, attending school, looking for work or they or their child have a special need.
- Families making over \$50,000 could still be eligible for a partial subsidy, based on the other criteria (number of children, type of child care, etc.).
- As of August 1, 2020, the subsidy program has a simpler formula and provides a higher monthly subsidy to eligible families.

Question 18: PA-495

Mr. Walker

Can the department outline what groundwork was done by the ministry in 2019-20 for the [Child Care Licensing Act] review with the intent to reduce red tape?

Response:

- In 2019-20, planning began for the child care legislation review.
- In fall of 2019, an analysis was completed of child care legislation (including associated processes and forms) with a focus on assessing all barriers and steps required to access and provide child care in Alberta.
 - This RTR review identified a number of potential policy shifts to reduce unnecessary red tape that were realized in 2020-21. In addition, government committed to receiving more information from stakeholders to inform and validate these shifts, which occurred as part of the formal legislative review in 2020-21.