

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts
Children's Services 2021-22 Annual Report
Follow up Questions and Responses**

Question 1: Ms. Pancholi

Table performance measures around permanency, family preservation or family reunification? Why aren't those pieces indicated in the annual report?

Response:

- These performance measures are available in the quarterly public report posted on Open Alberta.
- [Child intervention information and statistics summary - Open Government \(alberta.ca\)](#)

Question 2: Ms. Pancholi

Were there any emergent actions that were taken as number of deaths increased during the 2021 fiscal year? Did you take any new actions, additional actions? Were there any emergent actions that were taken as you saw those numbers increasing during the 2021 fiscal year? If there were any actions taken or work done with the Child and Youth Advocate or any other ministry, can you table with this committee any work plans or meeting notes that address what additional actions, new actions you are taking directly to support children and youth?

Response:

- From April to December 2021, there were 36 deaths of children, youth, and young adults receiving child intervention services. The Minister of Children's Services directed the ministry to carry out a review of the cases to gain an understanding of the circumstances surrounding these deaths to help identify improvements that could be made to better serve children, youth, and families. The publication reports on the findings of three separate reviews undertaken by the ministry and actions currently being taken by the ministry in light of the findings.
- <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/review-of-deaths-of-children-and-youth-receiving-child-intervention-services-findings-and-actions>

Question 3: Ms. Pancholi

How do you evaluate that children are protected and that their well-being is preserved? How do you feel that you are communicating to Albertans that you are performing your job, that you are doing what you've set out to do and what your objectives are?

Response:

Quality assurance activities that focus on evaluating the safety and well-being of children include:

- Electronic Service Delivery Accountability Standards (ESDAS), which are a suite of 18 electronic measures that provide quality assurance information to Service Delivery Directors (Regional and Delegated First Nation Agency), management, frontline workers, and corporate staff. The ESDAS measures the quality of services that are provided to children, youth, and families and reflect key areas of

the child intervention system that complement and align with current policy and legislation. Examples include evaluating recorded face-to-face contact and overdue intakes and investigations.

- The Electronic Risk Identification and Mitigation Initiative (E-RIMI) is about safeguarding and enhancing the well-being of children and youth; it uses integrated data to identify risk in child intervention. E-RIMI is the introduction of a system for early identification to let case teams know if a child's case plan needs attention. One measure looks at children under the age of six who were in care and returned to parental care. A second measure evaluates the transition to adulthood plan for 16- and 17-year-olds. In each situation, case teams review each flagged case to ensure that planning and supports are working to address any concerns.
- Designated Reviews are internal reviews completed to look into the circumstances of some deaths or serious injuries of children receiving intervention services. Designated Reviews are called when a preliminary review has identified a need to gather further information regarding the incident and suggests that changes may be required to strengthen programs, policy, and practice. The findings and the recommendations arising out of Designated Reviews, which are publicly posted, are intended to prevent or reduce the risk of future deaths and serious injuries to lead to better outcomes for children, youth, and families.

To answer the second question, how do you feel that you are communicating to Albertans that you are performing your job, that you are doing what you've set out to do and what your objectives are?

- When Children's Services becomes involved with a family due to concerns of child abuse or neglect, every effort is made to explain child intervention involvement in a way that the client can understand.
- Ministry staff can provide various fact sheets to the client to support the explanation, they can use translation services if needed, and can invite a cultural broker to assist and support the family whenever needed.
- The goal is to ensure the parent/guardian and children understand what child intervention is, why it is needed, what will happen in the immediate and long term, and when there is an open file, to develop a plan to mitigate the concerns raised about the children as quickly as possible. The parent/guardian and their support network are present and are participants in the development of the plan, and participate in the review of the plan regularly. In this way, each client knows that Children's Services is doing what we have set out to do to mitigate child intervention concerns together and everyone understands the objectives.

Question 4: Ms. Pancholi

Table how the ministry tracks reports of a child in need of intervention made to the ministry in a year.

Response:

- We track total number of calls: those referred to intake and of those the number referred to investigation. Over 80 per cent of all calls do not result in an investigation. Referrals that do not have legislative grounds for CS involvement are not recorded in the electronic information system.

- If it is determined that the information was provided maliciously, is unfounded, or does not provide reasonable and probable grounds to believe that the child or youth is in need of intervention, caseworkers are to document their analysis supporting the decision according to worksite practice.
- If it is determined that a child is in need of intervention under the legislation, a file opens and is entered into the electronic information system. In 2018-19, approximately 1,144 or 56 per cent of the young adults who had an active Support and Financial Assistance Agreement were Indigenous.

Question 5: Ms. Pancholi

On page 19 of the annual report it references the \$10.3 million in federal funding for space creation that was given out in March 2021. The deputy has already, you know, indicated how many spaces were created, 1,076. Can the deputy clarify how many of those spaces were actually enrolled by the end of the 2021 fiscal year? Similarly, with the 112 overnight spaces we know that they were created in that fiscal year, but were they actually enrolled by the end of the fiscal year?

Response:

At the end of 2021-22, out of the 1,076 spaces that were created:

- 677 of the 964 day-use spaces were enrolled full-time
- 18 of the 112 overnight use spaces were enrolled full-time

Question 6: Ms. Pancholi

And, again, by the end of the 2021 fiscal year all of those programs that were unlicensed when they received the funding: if you could confirm that they were all licensed and operational by the end of the fiscal year. Of the unlicensed programs that received the funding, were all of those spaces licensed and operational by the end of the fiscal year?

Response:

- No, some programs experienced delays with construction and opening due to COVID-related issues. Of the 18 programs (comprising 491 spaces) that were unlicensed at the time of grant signing, eight programs (comprising 203 spaces) were open and operational by March 31, 2022. In 2018-19, 1,058 (40 per cent) of Children's Services staff had completed the Indigenous Learning Initiative training offered by the Public Service Commission, including exemptions, also fulfilling ICUF's introductory Foundations Pathway.

Question 7: Ms. Pancholi

For that space creation grant, which was mentioned on page 19 of the annual report, did any of that funding go to programs that were not licensed at the time of receiving the grant?

Response:

- Yes, funding was awarded to 18 programs that were not licensed at the time of grant signing.

Question 8: Ms. Pancholi

And how much of that \$10.3 million space creation grants went to unlicensed programs?

Response:

- Of the \$10.3 million provided for space creation grants in 2021-22, \$4.4 million was provided to programs that were not licensed at the time of grant signing.

Question 9: Ms. Pancholi

Go back to the original action plan in the Stronger, Safer Tomorrow plan and evaluate whether or not you actually completed those actions. How many recommendations of the MPCJ were completed and have been implemented?

Response:

In March 2018, the all-party panel delivered 26 recommendations in *Walking as One: Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention's Final Recommendations to the Minister of Children's Services*.

- As of March 31, 2022, of the 26 recommendations, 23 had been completed and three were in progress. Those three included:
 - Improve transition supports for youth in care to adulthood, including post-secondary opportunities that will help them succeed in life. This would expand upon supports already in place.
 - Ensure policies and practices for family assessment, case planning and child placement are culturally relevant to families and serve to strengthen connection to families, kinship and community. Where changes are required, policies and practices must be framed to reflect an Indigenous worldview; and include opportunities for children to learn language and cultural practices.
 - The Government of Alberta will collaborate with Indigenous peoples and communities on Indigenous-led, collaborative research in alignment with First Nation Principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession by Indigenous communities. This research will include evaluating and informing child intervention policies and practices. Research funders will be encouraged to offer grants to prioritized projects in support of this recommendation.
- <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/bb927d32-61da-4014-82b2-1746ac26e88f/resource/8e03a767-f579-4014-a9ab-4a4373f1b89e/download/mpci-recommendations-to-minister-of-childrens-services.pdf>

Question 10: Ms. Pancholi

How many Indigenous children were actually in kinship homes as opposed to foster homes? The number of children in Kinship homes?

Response:

- In 2021-22, on average each month, there were 2,215 Indigenous children and youth placed in a kinship placement.
- In 2021-22, 37 per cent of Indigenous children were placed in foster care and 33 per cent of Indigenous children were placed in kinship care.

Placement Distribution for Indigenous and All Children receiving CI				
	2021-22			
	Indigenous		Total CI	
	#	%	#	%
At Home	1,409	21%	2,602	26%
Caregiver	4,792	71%	6,659	66%
<i>Foster Care</i>	2,527	37%	3,277	33%
<i>Kinship Care</i>	2,215	33%	3,210	32%
Facilities	582	9%	822	8%
Total Placements	6,783		10,083	

Question 11: Mr. Panda

Thank you for supporting private-sector child care operators. What did Children's Services do to ensure all parents had access to affordable child care when and where they need it? Specifically, some parents need it in nontypical times, like leaving the kid overnight. How are you ensuring those parents are supported?

Response:

- In 2021-22, Children's Services supported access to flexible, affordable child care through investments targeted to communities with limited to no access to child care and areas of high demand, including to support families who need flexible child care outside of traditional working hours. Using funding from the 2020-21 Bilateral Early Learning and Child Care Agreement with the federal government, Children's Services invested \$10.3 million to provide 44 grants to create 1,076 licensed child care spaces, including 112 for overnight care to meet the unique and diverse needs of Albertans that work non-traditional hours.
- Additionally, as part of our commitment to helping families access affordable, quality child care, Children's Services worked to reduce parent fees by providing affordability grants directly to child care providers so they can lower fees for all parents regardless of income level, and by raising the income threshold for child care subsidy up to \$179,999. This includes fee reductions for part-time, extended hours, and overnight child care.

Question 12: Ms. Pancholi

Page 35 of the annual report indicates that 2,844 regulatory requirements were reduced in the '21 fiscal year. Can the ministry please table with this committee a detailed breakdown of all 2,844 regulatory requirements that were reduced as well as the original number of 10,079 regulatory requirements that were identified in the business plan of 2021? A detailed breakdown of both of those, please, for the committee.

Response:

- Children’s Services looked at the Regulatory Count Tracking Database to narrow results to the end of fiscal 2021-22 but found it is not possible to narrow the results. Red Tape Reduction (RTR) reporting is based on a calendar year (January to December) and not the fiscal year (April to March). To satisfy this request, a comprehensive inventory of Children’s Services RTR Count to date has been provided that includes all the regulatory requirements that formed the baseline count of 10,079. Setting a baseline count of regulatory requirements is an important step to better understand the regulatory burden on Albertans and families and reduce red tape. The document captures the baseline count as of May 2019 for statutes, regulations, policies, and forms. It also shows the current count after any number of updates and/or net changes to any regulatory instruments due to repeal/or amendment to statutes/regulation and changes to policy, guidelines/standards, and forms.
- Treasury Board and Finance (TBF) direction was for each department to count the regulatory requirements in all their regulatory instruments: statutes, regulations, policies, and forms. To achieve this commitment, departments support public reporting by:
 - Counting – maintaining a count of the number of regulatory requirements imposed by all statutes, regulations, policies, and forms for which they are responsible (their count); and
 - Reporting – updating the Regulatory Count Tracking Database, managed by the RTR Division, to ensure it contains an accurate representation of their count, at any given time.
- As of December 1, 2022, Children’s Services has achieved 33.8 per cent and surpassed the target reduction in its regulatory requirement baseline count established as of May 1, 2019; 0.8 per cent greater than the TBF target of 33 per cent by March 2023. Children’s Services’ current regulatory requirements count is 6,669, which is down 3,410 from the baseline.

Question 13: Ms. Pancholi

Can you please table for this committee a breakdown of the number of child apprehensions by region and DFNA that were done in 2021?

Response:

- In 2021-22, there were 1,594 apprehensions of children and youth in the province, of which 82 per cent were for children/youth receiving services from a Region.

2021-22 Total Count	Regions	DFNAs	Province
All Apprehensions	1,307	287	1,594

Question 14: Ms. Pancholi

Page 42 of the annual report indicates that spending on child intervention was \$16.6 million less in 2021 because of staff vacancies. What was the staff vacancy rate at the beginning of the 2021 fiscal year and at the end of the fiscal year for

the ministry? Please table that as well as a breakdown of vacancy rates for each region and DFNA.

Response:

- At April 1, 2021, there was a 14.88 per cent vacancy rate (484) and as of March 31, 2022, there was a 20.82 per cent vacancy rate (696).
- The Government of Alberta is not privy to Delegated First Nations Agencies (DFNA) vacancy rates in the 19 DFNAs.

Question 15: Ms. Pancholi

Also, can you please table with this committee what evaluation metrics were put into place to determine what impact the \$19.3 million in the early childhood educator recovery and retention grant had on the workforce, what evaluation metrics, and how it is reflected that those dollars actually improved educator retention and recovery?

Response:

- Retention rates improved to 12 per cent between September 2021 and March 2022, after the funds were allocated. Prior to the funds being allocated, retention rates were approximately 9 per cent.

Question 16: Ms. Pancholi

Page 20 of the annual report references, and the deputy has repeatedly referenced, the 19,756 certified educators in March 2022. Can you confirm that all of those 19,756 were working and receiving wage top-up as of March 2022, and can you break those down by level 1, level 2, and level 3?

Response:

- The 2021-22 Children's Services Annual Report states that there were 19,756 certified early childhood educators (ECEs) working in licensed child care programs.
- As this information comes from the monthly claims for wage top-ups that programs submit, all ECEs included in the table below worked and received wage top-up in March 2022. The table provides a breakdown of this group by certification level.

Certified Early Childhood Educators Working in Licensed Child Care Programs in Alberta, by Level, March 2022

<i>Certification Level</i>	<i>Number</i>
Level 1 Early Childhood Educator	8,323
Level 2 Early Childhood Educator	3,114
Level 3 Early Childhood Educator	8,319
Total	19,756

Question 17: Mr. Hunter

Our top priority is the safety and well-being of the children and youth in government care, so I'm glad to see that the ministry started a prompt investigation into every death or serious injury of a child, youth, or young adult who had received services. Can you expand on those steps as it's very important to make sure that those steps are clear?

Response:

Children's Services Internal Child Death and Serious Incident (ICDSIR) Process outlines prompt timelines for service delivery and the Office of the Statutory Director for immediate responses, notifications, and analysis.

- This includes teleconferences within two business days to discuss the event, answer questions regarding the details of the incident, safety planning for the family, and supports provided. A summary and analysis of the child intervention involvement is completed within 45 business days.
- Depending on the circumstances, a Designated Review may be called to focus on what happened and where programs, policy, and practice need to be strengthened.

Question 18: Mr. Turton

Outline the steps the province is doing to protect children in light of the number of children that have passed away while in the province's care?

Response:

- We are committed to continuously improving our system to support the safety and well-being of children receiving child intervention services. All deaths and serious injuries of children receiving intervention services are reported to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate.
- Children's Services investigates every death of a child or youth receiving intervention services and any individual that has died within two years of receiving intervention services. The death of any child or youth is subject to the ICDSIR process, which seeks to understand and learn from the event in order to prevent similar events from happening in the future.
- If further examination is needed, Children's Services conducts a child intervention designated review to provide new findings and recommendations that can improve the system.
- Actions related to the recommendations from Designated Reviews are monitored by the ministry.
- In response to a higher-than-average number of deaths in 2021, then-Minister Schulz directed the ministry to carry out a thorough review of the cases to gain an understanding of the increase. As a result, in April 2022, the report *Review of Deaths of Children and Youth Receiving Child Intervention Services: Findings and Actions* was issued.
- In response to the findings, Children's Services identified recent actions taken that will help improve services for children, including:
 - implementing a recovery-oriented system of care in Alberta;
 - creating new, and enhancing current, out-of-home placement options with additional funding and supports for youth with additional complex needs;

- improving kinship care;
- improving access to mental health and addiction services; and
- implementing new programming that better supports young adults in achieving independence.
- In addition, Children’s Services committed to six further actions that will:
 - better help practitioners to identify risk;
 - address safety concerns in contracted agencies;
 - improve safety planning;
 - support practitioners in decision-making by improving casework supervision competencies and skills;
 - ensure mental health and addiction services along the continuum are available in a timely manner; and
 - ensure that kinship homes are properly assessed.

Question 19: Ms. Pancholi

Was there a strategy to space creation and what capacity building did you support?

Response:

- In 2021-22, our strategy to space creation focused on providing access to high-quality child care to help get parents back to work. Additionally, we worked to ensure that we are not investing in areas of the province that have sufficient or excess capacity and focused on creating additional spaces for working parents in rural areas and growing communities.
- The \$10.3 million we provided in 2021-22 to support child care space creation in the province was targeted to communities with limited to no access to child care and areas of high demand, including to support families who need flexible child care outside of traditional working hours.

Question 20: Mr. Yaseen

I was pleased to read on page 26 that Children’s Services provided in 2021-22 \$1.3 million to keep support mentoring opportunities for children and youth that allowed for enhancements to it to be implemented the following year. Do you find that the program can meet the demands for mentors for youth?

Response:

- We provided \$1.3 million through the Community Partnerships Youth Grants and the Youth in Care Mentoring Program for the provision of mentoring supports. The funded community agencies continue to focus efforts on recruiting volunteer mentors, which has been a challenge since the Covid-19 pandemic. To ensure all youth receive supports when they need them, the program meet the needs of young people by supplementing one-to-one mentoring with group mentoring opportunities.
- At the end of March 2022, we provided \$2.6 million in new funding for targeted mentoring supports for youth transitioning to adulthood from government care. Part of the additional funding is allocated to developing a robust provincial volunteer recruitment strategy that will increase the number of mentors for all

children and youth, including youth in and from care. This includes engagement with the corporate sector to enlist their employees in participating in mentoring relationships.

Question 21: Ms. Pancholi

In 2021 fiscal year 49 children and young people died while receiving services, and if we include those who had received services within the last two years as the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate reports, it's actually 76. During that 2021 fiscal year were there any discussions about emergency hiring additional staff, front-line staff, to support children and youth? Were there any emergency funds that were considered to be delivered to contracted service agencies that work directly with children and youth?

Were there urgent meetings held with the Child and Youth Advocate? What was the ministry doing as those numbers were alarmingly increasing during the 2021 fiscal year?

Response:

- From April to December 2021, there were 36 deaths of children, youth and young adults receiving child intervention services. The Minister of Children's Services directed the ministry to carry out a review of the cases to gain an understanding of the circumstances surrounding these deaths, to help identify improvements that could be made to better serve children, youth, and families. The publication reports on the findings of three separate reviews undertaken by the ministry and actions currently being taken by the ministry in light of the findings.
- <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/review-of-deaths-of-children-and-youth-receiving-child-intervention-services-findings-and-actions>

Question 22: Ms. Pancholi

Thank you. Does the ministry do any sort of follow-up to ensure that those children who receive a dedicated support person through FSCD are actually receiving it in a timely way? The reason I ask, of course, is that FSCD requires an assessment to be done before a child can access those supports. FSCD does not have a very good history right now in terms of its program administration and delivery. So I'm wondering: how is Children's Services ensuring that these children in child care settings have the inclusive supports they need?

Response:

- In 2021-22, the ministry implemented a new provincial Inclusive Child Care Program to provide consistent and equitable services to licensed child care programs and family day home agencies across the province and the children and families they serve.
- The Inclusive Child Care program assists child care programs and educators to build their capacity and confidence to include children who have extra support needs, increase families' access to inclusive child care, and prevent the exclusion or removal of children from child care programs.