



ALBERTA CHILD WELFARE SERVICES INFORMATION SHEET

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Introduction

This CWRP Information sheet provides an overview and description of child welfare and protective services within the province of Alberta, including relevant legislation, structure of services, and recent updates or changes to the child welfare system. This information sheet is a synthesis of publicly available documentation.

Background

The Ministry of Children's Services is responsible for child welfare in Alberta. The [*Child, Youth, and Family Enhancement Act*](#) governs child protection and intervention services, which are provided in five regions, and through 19 delegated First Nations Agencies (Government of Alberta, 2021).

The *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* outlines the key principles, legal mandates, and measures to be taken to respond to reports of child maltreatment and ensure child safety and well-being. The [*Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act*](#), the [*Drug-Endangered Children Act*](#), and the [*Protection Against Family Violence Act*](#) also guide child welfare practice in Alberta, allowing caseworkers and social workers to intervene in a broad range of issues related to harm or risk of harm to children (Government of Alberta, 2021).

According to [statistics](#) published quarterly by the Alberta government 9,889 children and youth were receiving ongoing intervention services as of December 2021. 7,985 of those children and youth receiving intervention services were in out-of-home care (Government of Alberta, 2022).

Child in Need of Protection

Section 2 of the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* lists the circumstances under which a child or youth requires intervention. This includes situations of alleged physical, sexual, or emotional harm, neglect and/or abandonment.

Spectrum of Services

Child protection services are provided by Child Intervention Offices and teams across 7 regions of the province. The child protection and intervention process begins with the intake stage. At intake, reports of alleged abuse/neglect are received and are screened to determine if they meet the criteria outlined in section 2 of the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* (2000) for a child requiring intervention. For screened in reports, a child intervention worker will gather additional information to determine whether the reported allegations require a formal assessment, referred to as a safety assessment. At the safety assessment stage, a child intervention worker will conduct an investigation to determine the safety of the child, which includes meeting with the child(ren) who have been allegedly harmed or placed at risk of harm. This can take up to 40 days. Following the safety assessment, a child protection file will either be (1) closed, if no safety concerns remain, or (2) “open to legal status,” if it is determined that intervention is required to ensure the child’s safety (Government of Alberta, 2022).

Services for open files can be provided through multiple pathways. A Family Enhancement Agreement may be created detailing a plan for keeping the child(ren) safe and steps to be taken to address the concern(s) of abuse/neglect. The Family Enhancement Agreement is a legal document that is agreed upon by both the child intervention worker and the parents/guardians. If a Family Enhancement Agreement cannot be reached, or if the parents/guardians are unable to keep the children safe via the Agreement, a Supervision Order may be required through the family court system. A Supervision Order mandates services to be completed, as well as authorizes child intervention worker to monitor your progress and ensure the safety of your children for a maximum duration of 6 months. Supervision orders are reviewed and can be renewed, varied, or terminated at the time of their expiry. A child may be placed in out-of-home care (Kinship, Foster care, residential care) when it is determined a parent or guardian cannot appropriately care for or keep the child safe. Emergency care may be used for a maximum of 10 days while care arrangements are made. A child under the age of 6 years old may be placed in temporary care of a director of child intervention services for a maximum cumulative duration of 9 months. The maximum cumulative duration for a child 6 years old or over is 18 months. If the concerns are not appropriately addressed by the end of the maximum cumulative duration, the child may be placed in permanent care (*Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*, 2000).

Parenting, family, and clinical services to meet the needs of children and families are provided through referrals from Child Intervention to other public health and social services, and/or private clinical services. Public health and social services include parenting programs and child mental health programs. Child Intervention provides specialized clinical services via contracts with private service providers (Kyte & Wegner-Lohin, 2014; Government of Alberta, 2022)

Indigenous Child Welfare Services

There are 48 First Nations across the province of Alberta. There are 19 agreements in place which delegate Child Intervention Services to First Nations Agencies for 37 of these communities. Delegated First Nations Agencies (DFNAs) have authority to provide Child Intervention services to First Nations children living on-reserve. Children living off-reserve, as well as children living on a reserve that does not have a DFNA are protected by provincial Child Intervention services in their region (Government of Alberta, 2022).

Additional Information

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) of Alberta is an independent office which serves the best interests of children and youth. It is responsible for advocating on behalf of children and youth who are receiving services under the Child Intervention Services or the Youth Justice System. The functioning of the OCYA in Alberta is governed by the [Child and Youth Advocate Act](#) (2011) and addresses a variety of issues that vulnerable children and youth face, including access to services, legal representation in cases of Child Intervention, and investigations of serious injuries or deaths of children or youth within the Child Intervention and Youth Justice systems (OCYA, 2022). The most recent investigative review was published on September 21, 2021 and reviews the deaths of nine children who were either actively involved with Child Intervention Services, or who had such involvement within the two years preceding their deaths. The report makes multiple recommendations for improved Child Intervention Service delivery to ensure children and youth's well-being, commenting on issues related to early childhood adversity, substance use, cultural considerations, family violence, and mental health. Specifically, the OCYA (2021) recommended: (1) the development of a protocol for information sharing to ensure that the Ministry of Children's Services is informed prior to a perpetrator of family violence being released from incarceration; (2) that risk posed to victims of family violence is re-assessed prior to a perpetrator being released from incarceration; and (3) to "strengthen policy and practice supports" related to ensuring appropriate plans are created and implemented for family and cultural connections for First Nations children and youth in the care of the Ministry of Children's Services.

References

- Child and Youth Advocate Act*, S.A. 2011, c. 11.5
- Child, Youth, and Family Enhancement Act*, R.S.A. 2000, c. 12
- Drug-Endangered Children Act*, S.A. 2006, c. D-17
- Government of Alberta. (2022, February 10). *Child Intervention Information and Statistics Summary Child Intervention Information and Statistics – 2021-22 Third Quarter (December) Update*. alberta.ca/child-intervention-statistics.aspx
- Government of Alberta. (2022). *Child Intervention*. <https://www.alberta.ca/child-intervention.aspx>
- Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Alberta. (2021, September 21). *Mandatory reviews into child deaths: October 1, 2020-March 31, 2021*. https://www.ocya.alberta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/MandRev_October2020-March2021.pdf
- Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Alberta. (2022). *What is the OCYA?* <https://www.ocya.alberta.ca/>
- Protection Against Family Violence Act*, R.S.A. 2000 c. P-27
- Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act*, R.S.A. 2000, c. P-30.3