

# **Alberta Response Model**

## **Building On Successful Practice and Transforming Outcomes for Children**

### **Introduction**

The type and delivery of services to children and their families changes over time. This constant state of change may be attributed to a number of factors including shifts in policy development, fiscal realities, and increasing need for effective services.

How can we influence this highly dynamic system so that it produces better outcomes for children and yet be fiscally sustainable?

The Alberta Response provides the necessary tools to meet this challenge.

### **Background**

*Our main challenge in this project is to contribute to the well-being of children and families by synthesizing what we know about wellness and maltreatment, and by translating this knowledge into morally sound, technically effective, and enduring social interventions*

*– Promoting Family Wellness and Preventing Child Maltreatment, (ed. I.Prilleltenshy et al)*

In November 2001, Standing Policy Committee approved a set of significant policy changes collectively referred to as “Alberta Response”.

The Ministry of Children’s Services has identified the Alberta Response as a high priority in the 2003-05 Ministry Business Plan.

### **Alberta Response Overview**

The Alberta Response is the implementation of several complex activities that address short term and long term needs of children, youth and families who come into contact with the child welfare system. Simply put, it is “family-centered practice with child-centered outcomes”.

### **Vision, Beliefs, Principles**

Many people may feel more comfortable beginning with a process that articulates vision, beliefs and principles. The following are suggestions to support discussions. These suggestions are based on the Government of Alberta and Ministry of Children’s Services Business Plans and the Alberta Mental Health Board’s Children’s Mental Health Policy Framework approved by Partnering Deputy Ministers Alberta Children and Youth Initiative.

## **Vision**

Alberta Response is congruent with the Government of Alberta's commitment that "Our children will be well cared for, safe, successful at learning and healthy".

## **Beliefs**

Children, youth and families have strengths and potential.

Communities have the commitment and capacity to support children, youth and families.

Individuals, families, community and governments share responsibility and accountability for achieving better outcomes for children and youth who come into contact with child welfare systems.

## **Principles**

***Family-Centered:*** There is a need for programs and services to be designed for children, youth and parents/caregivers to optimize well-being.

***Respect:*** Respect for the potential, dignity, culture, spirituality and diversity of all children, youth and their families shall be demonstrated.

***Well Being***<sup>1</sup>: The well being of children and youth will be positively affected in environments where they are safe, well nourished, stimulated, loved and have opportunities to learn and play.

***Community-based:*** There is a need for programs and services to be available, accessible and reflect community needs and community engagement.

***Collaborative:*** Better outcomes for children and youth will be achieved through efficient and effective collaborative action based on common goals.

***Information:*** Ensure appropriate and timely information on service need, capacities and resources is available and disseminated to all who need it for planning and action.

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<sup>1</sup> Well being is a favorable state of affairs in which the needs of children, youth, families and communities are met. These needs are met by the combined presence of cogent values, satisfactory psychological and material resources, effective policies and successful programs

## **Alberta Response Activities**

Alberta Response activities include:

### **Adapting current case management to a *Differential Response system***

A differential response system involves the provision of early assessment and support services to lower risk children and families who are open to this method.

For those cases where the risk to children is higher or where the family will not address their needs voluntarily, there would be a child protection services investigation to determine whether or not the child needs mandatory protective services.

### **Partner Delivery Systems including Child Welfare, Family and Community Support Services, Early Years and other community-based support systems**

In order for a differential response system to be effective, community-based services and child welfare must work as partners. The community (which includes human services such as social services, health, education, and justice) provides more accessible and natural supports for children and their families.

Families receive more appropriate services in a timely manner through strong community-based networks. In many communities across the province, these partnerships exist and would be enhanced in this new environment.

### **Increasing Permanency Planning**

Children need stable nurturing relationships in permanent homes.

Several policy changes are under consideration to make this happen more readily for children in care. They include enabling front-line staff to involve extended family earlier in planning for a child in need of alternative care, establishing more specific standards of permanency planning and developing a private adoption agency role in the adoption of children who are permanent wards of the government.

### **Reviewing the Child Welfare Act**

A review of the Child Welfare Act will result in an enabling piece of legislation that more strongly supports this new direction. Although the Child Welfare Act Review is a separate process and mandate, there are important linkages to be made.

### **Increased Parental Responsibility**

Parents are the nurturers and providers for their children. We honor parent-child relationships based on commitment by providing services so that parents can better assume their responsibilities.

Although few in number, there are parents whose children receive services and who are able to provide a financial contribution towards those services. There will be an increased expectation that for parents who can contribute to services will do so according to their ability.

## **Evaluation of Child Centered Outcomes**

The Alberta Response will transform the child welfare system and community-based service systems so that desired outcomes will be achieved. Measuring progress towards those outcomes (examples listed in appendix) will track this transformation and suggest ways to improve the type and delivery of services: a continuous cycle of improvement based on evaluation.

## **Alberta Response Objectives**

In general, the Alberta Response objectives are to transform child welfare practice by building on successes and to improve outcomes for children, youth and families who come into contact with child welfare system.

More specifically, Alberta Response will result in:

1. Stronger community-based partnerships and linkages that work together to improve outcomes for children, youth and families
2. Increased utilization rate of effective community-based supports for children, youth and families in “at-risk” circumstances
3. Increased permanent placement in families for children who have Permanent Guardianship Status
4. Decrease in the number of children and youth requiring child protection services and increased child, youth and family well-being
5. Systemic changes to child protection and community-based delivery systems

# **Alberta Response Frequently Asked Questions**

## **What do people mean when they use the term “Alberta Response”?**

“Alberta Response” is a shorthand term that refers to the way in which services are provided to children and families in Alberta who come into contact with child welfare systems.

## **What is different in the Alberta Response from what is happening now?**

Currently, children and families can obtain a wide variety of excellent services but these services could be improved to work together in a way that:

- considers the comprehensive needs of the child and family
- considers the strengths of the family, extended family and community
- coordinates the various services in the way that makes the most sense for the child and family
- provides continuity between what happens in the family before services, during services and after services
- provides needed services that the family seeks out voluntarily without requiring statutory involvement

The Alberta Response will ensure that:

- the comprehensive needs of the child and family are assessed and served
- a child who needs services will receive those services without being in need of protection
- the strengths of the family are recognized and mobilized
- all services to a family will be coordinated and will work together toward common goals
- whichever “door” a family enters first will provide access to all services they need
- services will be provided that make sense in the context of the family and what the family has been doing to meet the child’s need before services and what the family can maintain after services
- families can obtain supports and needed services voluntarily whenever they are willing to do so as long as the child will not be left at risk without statutory services

## **What will be the results of providing children’s services according to the Alberta Response?**

- Families will take more, earlier and better advantage of community-based pre-crisis services.
- Children will receive the right service at the right time.
- Service and child outcomes will improve.
- Fewer children will require statutory child protection services and, those who do, will move through more quickly.

## **What are the implications for Child Welfare delivery?**

- Child Welfare staff will participate on multi-discipline teams where the comprehensive needs of the child and family are assessed and services planned.
- If Child Welfare receives a referral concerning a child who needs services but is not alleged to be at significant risk, the family will be helped to access needed services voluntarily without a child protection file.
- Crisis response teams will respond to family crises with the intent of diffusing the crisis and quickly engaging any needed services without the need for protective services.

- If assessment and/or non-statutory services are provided, the family will be encouraged to provide an information-sharing consent to enable a multi-discipline, coordinated response.
- If a child is alleged to be at significant risk or if another professional reports that the family is unwilling or unable to access needed services voluntarily, a child protection investigation will be completed.
- A risk assessment will be completed on a child when determining the need for protective services, regularly during services and before ending services.
- When assessing the needs of a child, the strengths of the family, extended family and community will be recognized and mobilized. Family and community members will be invited to develop plans to meet a child's needs and to case manage when possible.
- All services, including protection services, to a family will be coordinated and will work together toward common goals.
- The case plan for a child receiving protective services will:
  - clearly link the services to the identified risk factors and assessed needs
  - clearly link the permanency plan to the service outcomes
  - clearly link the decision to close to the risk reduction and service success
  - move the child to permanency as quickly as possible

### **How will the Alberta Response be developed?**

Stronger partnerships that have a child-within-the-family focus will be formed among:

- all Ministries responsible for children's programs
  - various programs that serve children and families
  - regional governance bodies responsibility for children's services
  - local management of the various children's services
  - local service providers who provide the range of children's services
- Alberta Children's Services will support all involved Ministries, programs, regional authorities, management teams and service providers to ensure children and families receive the Alberta Response.
  - Child and Family Services Authorities, Family and Community Support Services and First Nations Delegated Child Welfare Agencies, along with their regional and local partners, will work together to support the Alberta Response.

## Appendix: Alberta Response desired outcomes, outcome measures and service deliverables

Desired Outcomes <sup>2</sup>	Outcomes Measures	Service Deliverables to Achieve Desired Outcomes
Improved Child Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease in recurrence of child maltreatment (rate and incidence)</li> <li>• Decrease in serious injuries/deaths (rate and incidence)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement Differential Response</li> <li>• Assessment of strengths, needs, and risks for children and families</li> <li>• Strengthen relationships between child welfare and community based support services to increase early intervention and prevention activities</li> <li>• Review process for multiple referrals</li> </ul>
Improved Child Well Being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in grade level/graduation</li> <li>• Increase in positive child behaviors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on FCSS service linkages</li> <li>• Enhance Early Childhood Development activities including programs designed to maximize children's potential, parenting supports</li> <li>• Development of specific programs for child who witness family violence</li> <li>• Family group conferencing</li> </ul>
Increased Permanency Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in permanent placements</li> <li>• Increase in temporary placements with family known to the child</li> <li>• Decrease in "moves in care"</li> <li>• Decrease in time to achieve permanent placement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish more specific standards and options for permanency planning</li> <li>• Establish a review process to review cases when permanency planning is at an impasse</li> <li>• Involve private adoption agencies in ward adoptions</li> <li>• Review process for serialized placement</li> </ul>
Increased Family and Community Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease in family moves</li> <li>• Increased positive parenting capacity</li> <li>• Increase in ethno-cultural placement matching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement a Differential Response</li> <li>• Focus FCSS, ECD (Home Visitation and FAS) on children and families-at-risk</li> <li>• Develop family/community coordination models</li> <li>• Increase access to addictions programs</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from "Child Welfare Outcome Indicator Matrix" Trocme, Nutter, MacLaurin and Fallon