

Budget 2015

Hi all,

Yesterday AASCF was invited to meet with the Minister after the budget announcements for a bit more of a detailed discussion about Ministry of Human Service (MHS). Here is what I learned.

Overall this budget is part of a ten year plan for the Government to do 3 things:

1. Strengthen its fiscal foundation
2. Build a legacy
3. Secure the future

All while moving away from being dependent on the Oil and Gas industry. This budget still has a 7 Billion dollar deficit. They are taking a 'calm approach' to decreasing the debt and ensuring we have future savings.

There is a link that all budget information can be seen: alberta.ca/budget.cfm.

For the Ministry of Human Services the budget in total is \$100 Million. It is broken down this way:

- 25% (\$1.1B) to Support to person with disabilities;
- 23% (\$972m) Assured Income for the severely handicapped (AISH);
- 18% (\$750m) employment and income supports;
- 17% (\$ 697m) child intervention; 7% (\$207m) child care;
- 4% (\$163m) homeless and outreach supports;
- 2%(\$91m) Early intervention services for children and youth;
- 2%(\$76m) Family and Community Support Services;
- 1%(\$22M) Family and Community Safety;
- 1%(\$30m) Public Guardian and Trustee Services;
- <1% (\$14m) common service access; and
- 1% (\$ 38m) ministry support services.

This is an overall increase of 1.8% in the budget for MHS. The increase is mostly focused on maintaining front line services; keeping Michener Centre open and increases to PDD and AISH to cover current deficits and projected caseload increases.

\$1.1Billion was added to PDD/AISH/FSCD services - \$66 million for PDD and FSCD and 31.5 Million for AISH and a significant increase for FSCD.

The Minister is focused on regional delivery alignment and ensuring that Albertans can get what they need when they need it. She is also putting the Family and Community Engagement Councils on hold. She wants to have discussions with the community on how to tap into existing community activities and groups.

A few weeks ago we were having discussion with the Ministry and they were worried that all areas were going to have to cover for the deficits in PDD and AISH. It is a relief that there was added funds in this area. This is a bit of a relief for everyone else as the Ministry has to balance from within regardless of

service area. In my opinion, with discussion with my counterparts in other associations, this is not a full coverage of the debt but is close. Therefore the thing to watch is for caseload growth and where the money needs to come from. Increased funds to FSCD is a welcome addition. There does seem to be an understanding of the caseload growth and the need to look after and plan for the vulnerable folks with disabilities.

Overall in Child Intervention there was a bit of a reduction. The Minister stated that this was because of the decreasing numbers of children in care. There has been an overall 3.8% reduction in service. There has been a significant reduction of children in care and therefore a perceived decrease need for foster care. This worries me a bit because that does not mean that the funds are being reinvested in the community where the families are staying. AASCF will be meeting with the ADM for this area in the near future to get clarity on how funds will be spent, and what the plans are moving forward.

Child Care received increase. This is to keep up with the Child Care subsidy and wage top ups.

FCSS remains the same as it has been for years.

Homeless and Outreach Supports which includes the Women's shelters essential stayed the same.

Early intervention services for children and youth saw a decrease in funding. While the Minister discusses this as a priority area for her there was some decrease and little explanation.

Family and Community Safety also saw a decrease. One area of interest here was the Family and Community Safety Program. Many people have sent in proposals to receive funds from this grant program that was announced 2 years ago. This fund has been decreased from \$20,000.00 to \$4,761 million. The Minister explained that the funds will be allocated soon and will be based on the applications that they have but will be significantly reduce amounts from initial thought.

The final thing that was discussed was wages. There will be no increase in wages to contracted services. The minister was clear that they feel they have given 94% of the obligation but that there will be no increase this year. She seemed to think this was close to closing the gap. It was clearly stated that this was nowhere near closing the gap but was the wage allocation the government had promised a few years ago. This is an area we will continue to work on through the Workforce Alliance and other advocacy activities.

Overall this budget was focused on vulnerable people and did support in some areas. Given the fiscal challenges I think we can pretty much say this was a flat line budget for MHS. While there were increase those cover deficient areas that are already there. In the coming weeks we will learn what some of this really means.

Also to note is that the budget has to be debated in the House. The House has been adjourned until April 13th. So really this budget may not be approved and accepted until early May.

There is also the possibility of an election being called. If that is the case then there will be a new budget after that is completed.

It is really important to keep the pressure on MLA's. There are many new/ or will be many new ones in the future and you need to make sure they understand the needs of vulnerable Albertans from your perspective. Last week we went out the political toolkit as an aid for you to visit, write and see your

elected officials. There are some key messages in there that are meant to help you have those conversations.

The Workforce Alliance continues to work as a joint government and community committee that gives advice to the Ministry on issues of workforce. WE sit at that table and continue to advocate strongly for a healthy viable human services contracted workforce.

ANVSI is also a multi-ministry and community committee that works to strengthen the not-for profit sector influence with government.

Never forget that we are all working in a political system. We need to be vigilant and clear about what the vulnerable people we work with need in this province. So please visit your MLA's, go to community activities, and get your boards members to be active.

I will update people if and when I get more information.

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to email RBarraclough@aascf.com or call 780.233.5459

Sincerely

Rhonda Barraclough

Executive Director, AASCF