

ALIGN Calgary Chapter Submission to the Child Intervention Review Panel

The ALIGN Association of Community Services is a unified community of agencies that represent the diverse needs of Alberta's children and families and advocates for the causes and issues that directly affect our member agencies and the people we serve.

The Calgary Chapter of ALIGN currently includes 40 member organizations serving children and families in Calgary and surrounding communities. On behalf of the ALIGN Calgary Chapter, we would like to share with the Panel feedback that was received from our member agencies related to the current Child Intervention system. Agencies were asked to give feedback in the spring of 2017 and this information was collated and summarized into 5 separate submissions. The themes that emerged include:

1. Working Relationships and Collaboration
2. The Practice of Child Intervention Work
3. Funding Community Agency Services: a Sector in Crisis
4. Responding to the Needs of Indigenous Families
5. Ensuring Quality Services for Vulnerable Children and Youth

We thank you for reviewing this submission and taking the information into consideration as you formulate recommendations to improve our Child Intervention system.

Hazel Bergen and Bjorn Johansson,
Co-Chairs of the Calgary Chapter of ALIGN

Submission #3 - Funding Community Agency Services: A Sector in Crisis

Introduction

Many community Agencies are contracted by Children's Services to provide critical services to vulnerable children, youth, and families. These are professional, specialized services working with complex children and families. These services are offered by community agencies who operate as "businesses" that must sustain themselves amidst the real costs in their operating environment. The Community Agency sector – which is highly efficient in its costs model and its committed staff, Boards, and volunteers – requires and deserves the support of the Government of Alberta in its crucial role of helping to ensure the safety and well being of children.

Sustainability

Community Agencies are depended on to provide high quality services on a sustainable basis. In order to do this, they must be able to adequately cover operating expenses to maintain a stable infrastructure for the services they provide, including such costs as administration, IT, HR, facilities, travel, utilities, and insurance, as well as service delivery support costs such as evaluation & outcome monitoring and training. All of these parts of our organizations need to be supported to provide quality professional services to increasingly complex vulnerable children, youth and families.

True Costs

Like all services, we face the challenges of escalating costs. Agency services have not been provided with operating cost increases in their contract budgets for many years – meanwhile, these costs have all increased significantly. The result is that essential services have become more and more dependent on Agency resource development to subsidize contracted mandated services to children, youth, and families. Even in the area of basic needs such as food budgets, Agencies are struggling and must rely on donations and community resources.

The lack of true cost funding is creating a critical state in terms of agency sustainability. Long standing contract base funding levels, with no opportunity to revise these levels in terms of true costs, has severely hampered our ability to meet the needs of very vulnerable and at-risk children.

The Wage Gap for Qualified Staff

The need for wage increases is critical. To recruit and retain the qualified professionals required to work with increasingly complex children, youth and young adults, agencies must be able to address staffing increases in both wages and the ratios of positions to fulfill our mandates. Compensation data collected over the last few years indicates a wage disparity with the public sector of 20%.

The answer to these challenges faced by community agencies who are a critical part of the Child Intervention system will not only strengthen the case management system, but will also significantly support its partner agency sector.

Recommendations

1. That funding levels be reviewed immediately to ensure the sustainability of Agency operating costs using a true cost basis.
2. That staffing costs be reviewed and adjusted to support the recruitment and retention of qualified professional staff.
3. That staffing levels be reviewed and adjusted to ensure both quality services and safety for staff and persons served.
4. That support functions (e.g. outcome reporting, training) be reviewed and supported to recognize the requirements of the funder and the needs of the organizations in term of quality improvement and professional development.
5. That the range of professional Clinical Support services (e.g. Child Therapy, Family Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Trauma supports, etc.) be reviewed and supported to meet the need

presented by the increasing complexity of the children, youth and families we serve as well as the requirements of the funder (GOA).

6. Cost increases need to be indexed to keep pace with economic changes on an ongoing basis, to account for annual inflation, and, in the area of wages, narrow the gap between the agency sector and the public sector.
7. There appears to be a significant disparity funding levels across different areas of the province, and between public and agency sector funding levels (e.g. group homes and residential care versus government and agency foster care). These need to be reviewed and adjusted to be more equitable and to meet the real costs of delivering quality services across the Province to complex clients who require an increased intensity of care and an increasing range of services.
8. Agencies share a desire for the best outcomes for our persons served. Based on our expertise, knowledge regarding the people we serve, and our creativity, we recommend a funding model that is more flexible and reflects these capacities, focusing on outcomes and the means to achieve them efficiently as independent entities.