

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)
SPEECH

HONOURABLE DAVE HANCOCK
MINISTER
ALBERTA HUMAN SERVICES

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF
THE GIRL PANEL
DISCUSSION

OCTOBER 11
8 AM

GOVERNMENT HOUSE
12845 - 102 AVENUE NW
EDMONTON, AB

INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Sandra, for the kind introduction, and for your efforts here today as moderator.

You are a passionate advocate for the rights of girls and I am so pleased you could be involved today.

I also want to extend my thanks to you for taking on the mandate of Associate Minister of Family and Community Support Services.

It's a very big and very important task.

For those of you who may not know, she will be leading the provincial government's response on bullying, family violence and sexual assault and exploitation.

These are areas that require special attention and focus and Premier Redford knows how important it is that we address these issues.

That's why she created this mandate and I know that Minister Jansen will be a powerful advocate for it and for real and lasting change.

And thank you as well to our wonderful group of panellists.

I'm honoured to be here with all of you to celebrate International Day of the Girl.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on this important day.

This day promotes equal treatment and opportunities for girls around the world.

It also reminds us about the particular challenges that girls face, and the need to take action.

Today we not only recognize the contributions and achievements of girls and women in Alberta, we also have to ask ourselves:

What do we need to do to improve the opportunities and the quality of life for girls?

Because when girls are supported and equally valued in society, we all benefit.

As we have seen in that short video clip, when one generation of girls succeeds they lay the groundwork for the success of the next generation of girls that will follow them.

When girls start school, they are more likely than boys to do well in reading, writing and forming friendships.

Yet, for many girls, this advantage is overshadowed by two serious problems - high rates of sexual assault and a sharp decline in mental health during adolescence.

Aboriginal girls in Canada are especially at risk.

They experience alarmingly high levels of depression, suicide, addiction, early and unwanted pregnancies, HIV infection and poverty.

This is unacceptable in a province as rich in diversity and economic opportunity as Alberta.

The Alberta government, under the leadership of Premier Alison Redford, is working on a number of initiatives that will support girls throughout their lives.

This year, we are focused on improving outcomes for all children by creating a Children's Charter to guide decision making within government and in communities.

The Charter will establish the principles, priorities and roles and responsibilities specifically for Alberta children.

It will promote a longer-term discussion about supports for children and families, breaking down barriers and helping to create positive outcomes for children.

The charter is just one of the ways we are working together to support children and youth in Alberta.

It is part of a broader engagement called Together We Raise Tomorrow.

We are inviting groups like this one here today, and individuals who are online, to talk about a range of supports.

We are looking at poverty and the best ways to reduce it.

We are looking at supports and services for very young children.

We want to know how those services could be better delivered and integrated.

These items, when grouped together, will give us a great picture of how we as a government can support you as a community.

It will be the start of real, lasting and very positive change.

Because I think you will agree with me, that change is needed.

Girls need to be supported throughout their formative years and live in safe and caring communities where they can reach their full potential.

This will foster in them powerful voices for change and create leaders of tomorrow.

Improving the lives of girls also requires the support and engagement of boys.

We can't have one without the other.

What we know for sure is that children and youth in healthy environments with opportunities to succeed have a much greater chance of becoming responsible, caring and contributing members of society.

Our government's goal is to build an Alberta where everyone lives in dignity.

Together, the work of government and concerned and passionate women and girls like you will make our province a place where everyone is valued.

And where everyone has equal opportunities, and the encouragement to succeed.

I thank all of you here today for coming to engage in meaningful discussion on how we can take action to improve the lives of girls in our province.

Thank you.