

## Check Against Delivery

### **Children's Mental Health Improvements Media Conference February 2, 2014 – Calgary, Alberta Honourable Manmeet S. Bhullar**

Good afternoon everyone. Thank you George, for that kind introduction.

On behalf of Premier Redford and my government colleagues, I'm honoured to be here today.

I am pleased that my friend and colleague Fred Horne – Minister of Health has also joined us.

Our ministries work very closely on a number of important initiatives, including the Early Childhood Development Strategy that supports young families.

What an amazing campus this is! Hull Services symbolizes the true meaning of opening the door to people when they need it most – which is extremely important to me.

I commend you for your commitment to providing families with support to overcome challenges for over 50 years.

You and your organization have made a significant contribution to the well-being of our young people – and I know the support you provide to young people will only get better as we go forward together.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Chief Mental Health Officer from Alberta Health Services – Dr. Michael Trew – for taking time out of his busy schedule to join us today.

As well Norm Brownell. Norm is the President of the Alberta Foster Parent Association and Katherine Jones – who is the Executive Director, is also here with us.

We also have a couple of the Regional Child and Family Services Directors with us.

Jon Reeves from the Calgary and Area and David Tunney from the Central Child and Family Services Region.

Since my appointment to Human Services, I have committed to open discussion and effective change when and where it is needed to improve supports for vulnerable Albertans.

I am very passionate about this work.

I know there are things we can do to improve our province's system of supports for children and families.

Albertans need to know that we are taking concrete action and making real change to protect and nurture Alberta's most vulnerable children and youth.

Witnessing first-hand the challenges that can bring children and families to the attention of child intervention services is heartbreaking.

Reaching out to a family, and helping them with their struggles early on, can help parents get back on track so they can keep their children with them.

Government cannot do this alone. We need to work with our important community partners if we truly want to improve on the programs and services available to help address issues our children and youth face.

Mental health is a contributing root cause that brings children and families to the attention of child intervention services.

Children and youth who have been abused and or neglected are often very affected by the trauma they have endured.

We need to do a better job of addressing the mental health concerns of children and youth who are receiving intervention services.

This includes supporting those who have experienced trauma, like the children and families who were affected by the floods here in southern Alberta last summer.

During the Child Intervention Roundtable – if you watched the webcast and listened to Premier Redford speak – you would have witnessed her passion for the subject.

I share that same passion!

So today – I'm pleased – along with Minister Horne – to announce a new investment of \$5 million that will support the expansion of mental health supports for children, youth and families receiving child intervention services.

Youth receiving intervention services are more likely to have all types of mental health conditions – compared to youth who are not involved with the intervention system.

If we really want to have healthy families and communities, we need to start with our young people.

Starting with the young people that come to the attention of the Child Intervention system.

At some point, these individuals will no longer be involved with the system – and will need a solid base to function as an adult – and make their own contribution to society.

This investment would not have been possible without the full cooperation of Alberta Health.

Our new investment will:

- introduce three best practice sites in Calgary, Edmonton and Red Deer to provide increased mental health services to children and youth;
- provide children and youth in care who have experienced physical abuse, sexual abuse and/or neglect with better access to mental health specialists;
- provide child intervention staff with instant access to expert clinical/medical consultation that will help them better understand available psychiatric treatment plans and appropriate medications;
- provide crisis mental health supports for high-needs children and offer effective strategies to help foster parents and other caregivers better manage these children; and
- develop a cross-ministry mental health action plan that will enhance and sustain a high-level of supports for children involved with child intervention and expand the reach to support all children and families with mental health needs in Alberta.

To start with, we're enhancing how we assess mental health needs and provide short-term intervention services for children who have mental health concerns.

We will do this by offering children up to eight therapy sessions.

If more intensive services are required, we'll connect the child with the supports they need.

We're also increasing the ability of our staff and service delivery partners to recognize early indicators of problems, by providing Mental Health First Aid training to child intervention workers, contracted service providers, foster parents and other caregivers.

In addition, we're providing crisis mental health support to improve the ability of foster parents and other caregivers who are caring for high-needs children and youth.

It's vital that foster parents and other caregivers have the proper training and support they need to help them through those difficult times.

These dedicated men and women do an amazing job and many times these valued caregivers are caring for a child or youth that has multiple issues, including depression and other forms of mental health issues.

We're also providing more supports to staff and caregivers, including making mental health specialists available to staff for clinical medical consultations.

This should give them a better understanding of mental health treatment plans - know how to sustain them – including the appropriate use of medication.

In addition, we're implementing three best practice sites that will provide increased mental health services to children and youth.

Here in Calgary – at Hull Services – which is one of the three sites – they will build capacity in parents to give them the ability to provide care for their child with mental health needs.

This will help reduce the need for residential care.

In Red Deer – the Parkland Youth Homes Society will develop and provide a program for children and youth who are being discharged from an acute care hospital setting and not ready to return to a community setting.

Their programming will also aim to prevent a child or youth from needing to go to a hospital to get help.

And in Edmonton at the Yellowhead Youth Centre, they will provide longer-term mental health supports and services for children with complex needs and help them transition to the community.

Results and learning from the work of these three sites will be used to enhance mental health support and services for children, youth and families who are involved with child intervention services across the province.

Today's announcement builds on announcements I've made over the past two weeks:

- expanding of our network of Parent Link Centres and enhancing training for home visitation practitioners so they can better screen for family violence;
- increasing early screening of children with emotional and/or social difficulties at early childhood development programs, such as Parent Link Centres;
- helping parents access programs through mental health/behavioural specialists at Parent Link Centres; and
- accelerating improvements to Alberta's child intervention system through our five point plan.

We had a very successful two-day child intervention roundtable last week – one part of our plan.

I look forward to the draft report that will cover many of the topics discussed:

- changes to the publication ban;
- posting recommendations on-line;
- creating an open data portal;
- revising the Fatality Inquiry process; and
- changes to legislation where necessary.

How we achieve actions from the final report will be up to the implementation team.

Keeping families healthy, safe and whole – and eliminating the need for intervention – is ultimately the goal.

This mental health investment is a critical piece as we challenge the root causes that can bring children, youth and families to the attention of the Child Intervention System.

Working with my government colleagues to develop a comprehensive action plan is a good start.

Thank you.

I'd now like to invite Minister Horne to come forward and say a few words.