

*(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)*  
SPEECH

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ASSOCIATE MINISTER OF SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH  
DISABILITIES

FAMILY TELECONFERENCE

TUESDAY MARCH 11, 2014  
7-8 PM

DEPUTY MINISTER'S BOARDROOM  
12<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR STERLING PLACE  
9940 -106 STREET, EDMONTON

## INTRODUCTION

- Good evening everyone and thank you for joining us today.
- I am Naresh Bhardwaj, Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities.
- I work closely with the Minister of Human Services, the Honourable Manmeet Bhullar.
- Human Services came into being in 2012, bringing together formerly separate ministries that supported people with disabilities, children and families, immigrants, and Albertans struggling with homelessness and unemployment.

- The purpose of this phone conference is to reach out to you, share information, and hear your thoughts and concerns.
- I'm here to talk to you about this year's budget and what it means to you, as well as give you an update on what's going on in Disability Services.
- Your input is very important to me, and we will do more of these in the future.
- Wendy McDonald from AACL is also here with me, and I thank AACL for their support and for helping us connect with you.

### VISION

- I want to begin by talking a little about our government's vision for disability services in Alberta.

- For those of you who were involved in the Social Policy Framework, you will know that the vision that came out of that process was that:
- “Everyone contributes to making our communities inclusive and welcoming. Everyone has opportunities to fulfil their potential and to benefit from our thriving social, economic, and cultural life.”
- Alberta is a thriving, vibrant, and diverse place with a bustling economy.
- There is absolutely no reason why people with disabilities cannot be a part of that and benefit as much as any other Albertan.

- We want to see people with disabilities living inclusive lives, with access to a wide range of employment opportunities.
- We want to work closely with individuals and their families to help them achieve their goals and dreams.
- And we are proceeding with the transformation of disability services to make those things a reality.

### BUDGET

- Now I know many of you are interested in hearing about our budget, so I'll start with the good news.
- We got a \$54 million increase this year over the forecasted amount for 2013/14 for a total budget of \$967 million.

- This budget is for all provincial disability programs, including PDD, FSCD, and FASD.
- That amounts to a 5.9% increase, so we are very happy about that.
- That increase will help us address caseload growth, increases to agency wages, and support the continued transformation of the PDD system.
- The legislature approved the extra spending in 2013/14, and funding has been reinstated to cover last year's reductions.
- We heard you loud and clear when you said that you agreed with our direction, but you needed more time to make the changes.

- We are still committed to moving away from the current patchwork of services to a system that meets the needs of people with disabilities and supports them to be independent, employed, and involved in their community.
- But we gave service providers an additional year to make the shift to the new outcomes-based contract, and I am happy to say that 99% of our service providers have now signed that contract.
- This is a contract that PDD worked collaboratively with service providers to create.
- It holds service providers accountable for the results they achieve, rather than administrative tasks like tracking units, codes, and rates.

- This gives them the flexibility to focus on meeting individuals' goals, rather than tracking hours.
- We have also been able to complete almost all of the SIS assessments, which helps us to have a clearer picture of the range of needs people have across the province.
- Now I know many of you have concerns about SIS. I've been hearing them from families and individuals.
- So what we are going to be doing is holding focus groups to look at what is working and what needs to be improved in how we use the SIS tool.

### Agency Wages

- Getting back to the budget, it also increases the wages for community agencies.

- Our contracted agencies are important partners, and helping them increase their staff wages is a priority for me.
- We are honoring our commitment to provide predictable, ongoing funding for contracted agencies to get and keep staff.
- There is \$69 million in the ministry budget to cover this increase.
- However, we know money isn't the only issue. A qualified workforce is critical to providing quality services.
- That's why we have a committee made up of service providers. It is called the Workforce Alliance, and they are looking at compensation, education and training,

and contracting processes to make sure we have a good long-term plan for the disability services sector.

### Community Access

- This year's budget also provides an increase for community access supports.
- I want to assure you that community access will continue to be there for people who need it.
- I know this is an area that many of you were concerned about when we announced the changes to PDD last year.
- We still want to continue to work on improving the quality of community access programs to ensure individuals are included in their communities.

- And employment will continue to be the option of first choice when it fits individuals' goals and abilities.

### EMPLOYMENT FIRST

- This budget also provides \$3 million to help us implement the Employment First strategy.
- Many people with disabilities are looking to have more opportunities to reach their full potential, and have told us they want to participate in more employment opportunities.
- [Minister may choose to add comments here around youth employment]
- We created an Alberta Employer Advisory Council to bring private sector employers together to discuss how

we can improve employment options for Albertans with disabilities.

- We also want to make sure that as government, we are setting a good example.
- So we are in the process of setting up a second Advisory Council made up of public sector employers, including municipal and provincial government representatives, to determine how we can do a better job of employing people with disabilities.
- We are also looking at setting up a government internship program for people with disabilities.

*Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD)*

- Budget 2014 also includes an increase of \$4 million for the FSCD program.

- This will help us meet a projected increase in the number of families joining the program this year.

### YOUTH TRANSITION

- Another exciting piece of work that I think will interest you is youth to adulthood transition.
- We've heard from many of you that there is a transition gap when young people turn 18.
- Many of you have said that you don't know where to turn to find out about adult services, and the transition from youth services to adult services is difficult and complicated.
- So what we are doing, as of April 1, is moving FSCD so that it is being co-administered with PDD.

- What that means is that both the Family Support for Children with Disabilities program and the Persons with Developmental Disabilities program will fall under the same regional director, and they will be delivered by the same staff.
- The two programs will now be working together to support children, youth, and adults with disabilities throughout their lifetime.
- I want to be clear that FSCD is still there, and PDD is still there. The programs themselves have not changed.
- They will just be together, under one umbrella of services, in order to improve coordination between staff.

### FASD

- I also want to talk about our work on FASD.

- Budget 2014 will expand services, prevention initiatives and housing supports for many of the estimated 36,000 Albertans affected by FASD.
- We have a new prevention initiative called the “Prevention Conversation: A Shared Responsibility” project that launched in early 2014.
- This project placed Prevention Facilitators in communities across Alberta, with the goal of increasing prevention and awareness of FASD for health practitioners and those working in the social services sector.
- New funding in 6 First Nations will help provide direct support to women in their communities.

- We have more funding for innovative projects related to FASD, such as the Lakeland Second Floor Women's Recovery program.

### *BUILDING RURAL CAPACITY*

- The final item I want to mention is my upcoming regional tour.
- I will be travelling around the province to hear about best practices and learn about some of the challenges with providing supports in rural areas.
- Some of the communities I will be visiting are: Fort McMurray, Lloydminster, Vermilion, Slave Lake, Camrose, Wetaskiwin, Jasper, High River, High Level, Peace River, Grimshaw, Brooks, Drumheller, Barrhead, Lethbridge, Lacombe, and Lac La Biche.

## CONCLUSION

- So that's an overview of the budget and some of the work we have planned for this year.
- I want to thank all of you for being engaged.
- I hope to work closely together over the coming year to make our disability services even better.
- If you want more information about the Human Services budget, I encourage you to look at our website:  
[humanservices.alberta.ca/](https://humanservices.alberta.ca/)
- There is a link right at the top of the page to budget information and videos.
- Now I want to give you a chance to speak.

- So now we will turn it over to the phone line for questions.
- I have some department staff here with me to help answer your program-specific questions.
- Thank you.