

**Child Sexual Abuse Forum
May 8, 2014, Calgary
Honourable Manmeet S. Bhullar, Minister, Human Services**

Hello and thank you for taking the time to be here today and to those who are participating via webcast.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Danielle Aubry and Sheldon Kennedy for their great work putting this forum together, as well as for their ongoing work to support children who have been victims of sexual abuse.

It is my honour to partner with you and many of the organizations that are in attendance here today.

The work you do is important and it is worthwhile.

The sexual exploitation and abuse of children has devastating consequences for many in our province, and we must stand together as a community to stop it.

Victims of this crime need and deserve our support.

That's why we are here today.

I understand there is a video later this morning with stories from survivors of child sexual abuse. I want to thank them for sharing their experiences with us so we can learn.

As part of the Five Point Plan to improve the child intervention system, we are improving our response to child sexual abuse by identifying gaps in services and developing possible solutions.

We have already held a successful roundtable discussion that was focused exclusively on improving the child intervention system.

We have already taken steps to improve information sharing to better support vulnerable children.

We have formed a panel of experts to work with us as we implement the changes that need to be made.

This is the next step in that effort.

Today's forum will help us learn more about child sexual abuse, which is one of the root causes of a need for child intervention.

We are looking at some of the innovative methods and practices that are helping children and their families.

And what we hear today will form the basis of an ongoing response plan to end child sexual abuse.

The action plan will build on what we know works and will help co-ordinate our collective efforts to end child sexual abuse.

So today, I am pleased to announce that under Budget 2014, we are increasing funding to sexual assault centres in our province.

An additional \$700,000 will go towards increasing the great services provided by dedicated staff all across Alberta so they can continue providing the necessary treatment for healing.

That will bring our total commitment to nearly \$3 million dollars annually.

That means that more people can be helped than ever before.

I have also committed an additional \$200,000 to the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services so they can train more people in how to best support victims of abuse.

We also continue our strong partnerships with victim assistance programs, community agencies, and law enforcement because this is a complex issue, and one that needs everyone's participation and dedication.

Child sexual abuse is difficult to talk about so today it's time to bring a light to this issue so that victims can begin to heal.

There is a great diversity of experience and expertise in the room today and I know we will all gain a better understanding of the issue and the work to come by the day's end.

We need to be able to name and understand the issue before we can fully address it.

Thank you again for being here today and for your efforts to support and assist Alberta's most vulnerable children.