



**Ministry of Children's Services' Response to the
Office of the Child and Youth Advocate
2015-2016 Annual Report**

June 2017

Alberta 
Children's Services

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Background

The *Child and Youth Advocate Act* requires the Advocate to report annually to the Legislative Assembly on the work of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA). The ministry is pleased to respond to the OCYA's 2015-16 Annual Report.

Children's Services continues to welcome the Advocate's comments on our shared goal to achieve positive outcomes for Alberta's children, youth, and families and ways to strengthen the child intervention system.

In 2015-16, Children's Services received 18 recommendations from the OCYA pertaining to the child intervention system. The ministry responded to these recommendations using the Children's Services Recommendation Approach, a consistent, rigorous method of addressing recommendations.

Responses to the OCYA reports and recommendations are posted on the ministry's public website. All recommendations are tracked (with immediate actions taken where necessary in the case of a death or serious injury of a child receiving services) and analyzed to determine themes, assess work underway, identify current opportunities and options along with collaborative actions required with partnering ministries and, finally, determine next steps.

Response to Recommendations

The OCYA's 2015-16 Annual Report does not include formal recommendations for Children's Services or the child intervention system; however, the report does provide a year in review outlining the OCYA's activities on behalf of Albertans. The annual report includes an overview of the investigative reviews completed in the fiscal year and notes changes the OCYA made to enhance its investigative review process and support transparency and consistency in its investigative work.

Children's Services recognizes work done by the OCYA staff to improve the clarity of their recommendations. Recommendations that are clear and measurable equip the ministry to take actions to achieve tangible outcomes.

Children's Services supports the OCYA's investigative review processes and other reports (including special reports, service reports and annual reports), by providing data, information, and materials specific to individual children, at the OCYA's request.

As part of the process of reviewing and responding to these reports, the ministry and the OCYA staff meet after a report is released to clarify the intent of the recommendations. This supports the development of actions to address the systemic issues identified by the recommendation. Children's Services appreciates the Advocate and his staff for their collaborative work.

In the 2015-16 fiscal year, the OCYA provided a total of 20 recommendations, 18 specifically addressed to the ministry, for systemic improvements in the areas of placements, child intervention case planning, caregiver capacity to meet the needs of children placed in their care, parental addictions, access to mental health services, medication management, responses to poverty and neglect, the importance of relationships, and suicide risk assessments. The ministry takes each recommendation seriously and reviews it against the intended outcome to develop actions that address the identified issue.

The ongoing work to build connections between the ministry and the OCYA is a mutual endeavour, one which Children's Services values. This collaboration supports systemic change within the child intervention system by providing valuable insight into areas of growth.

In the 2015-16 fiscal year, the OCYA partnered with the ministry and the Centre for Race and Culture to learn about the complex issues facing newcomers to Canada, one of the areas identified in the OCYA's service reports. This partnership is one example of how meaningful collaboration between Children's Services and the OCYA can address systemic issues. In the upcoming year, Children's Services is looking forward to partnering with the OCYA to review supports and services for sexual and gender diverse children and youth in care.

Conclusion

Children's Services will continue to work with the OCYA and other recommending bodies to incorporate evidence-informed leading practice into the child intervention system. Improvements to child intervention service delivery are made through these collective efforts, and in consideration of ongoing research and the viewpoints of experts and those impacted by the child intervention system.

Throughout the year, the ministry has maintained a strong working relationship with the OCYA through regular meetings at management and senior leadership levels and working groups to support the ongoing exchange of information, policy development and revision, program development and design, and data and information sharing.

Children's Services will continue to focus on strengthening practice, tailoring supports and services to meet the needs of children, youth, and their families, and providing creative and accessible training and development for caregivers, front-line service delivery staff, and agency partners that will lead to improved outcomes. We have a shared responsibility with families, communities, and other government ministries to support the safety, security, and well-being of Alberta's children.

We thank the Advocate for his ongoing advocacy for Alberta's children and for supporting them to have a voice to express their views and interests.