

# 16-year-old Dillon: An Investigative Review

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Government of Alberta's response to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Report

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# BACKGROUND

On November 2, 2017, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) released a report entitled *16-Year-Old Dillon: An Investigative Review*. The report reviews the life and circumstances of a youth who was receiving child intervention services at the time of his injury.

As described in the OCYA's report, Dillon was 16 years old when he was seriously injured. Dillon is resourceful and enjoys being involved in cultural activities. Dillon also has cognitive impairments and diagnoses related to conduct disorders. At the time of his injury, he was the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order.

The OCYA's report makes two recommendations: one for the ministries of Children's Services, Health, Education, and Community and Social Services regarding information-sharing and service coordination for young people with complex needs, and one for the Ministry of Children's Services regarding building long-term networks for young people.

The Government of Alberta's response includes information gathered from the following sources:

- A review of existing policies in comparison to issues identified in the report;
- A review of current initiatives, practice and program directions related to issues identified in the report; and
- Engagement with all ministry partners, including other divisions, regional service delivery partners and other ministries.

The Government of Alberta welcomes the OCYA's recommendations and thanks the Advocate and his office for their ongoing commitment to improving outcomes for vulnerable children, youth and families.

# RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendation #1:

The Ministries of Children's Services, Health, Education, and Community and Social Services should establish or strengthen policies and protocols so information is shared and used to coordinate service plans for young people with complex needs.

**Ministry response:** The Ministries of Children's Services, Health, Education, and Community and Social Services accept the recommendation.

The Government of Alberta is working to ensure that government and service delivery partners can share information to make the best decisions for Albertans' health, safety, and education.

A number of initiatives are underway that will improve information sharing and coordination across ministries, including Alberta's Information Sharing Strategy and implementation of the Valuing Mental Health report. The Strategy supports improved information sharing practices through governance that builds accountability into service delivery models, policy, training, information management and processes to ensure the information management practices are consistent. Implementation of the Valuing Mental Health reports includes training providers to better interpret legislation and use existing tools to address perceived information-sharing barriers.

Other processes are also being specifically designed or strengthened to meet the needs of young people with complex needs:

- The Supports for Adults with Complex Service Needs: Cross Ministry Policy Framework is being expanded to include youth aged 16 and 17 with complex needs.
- Children's Services and Community and Social Services are collaboratively developing a Child Intervention and Disabilities protocol that will support assessment, planning and intervention methods to assist children, youth and parents with cognitive challenges. This protocol has been drafted and is currently being reviewed by key stakeholders. It will help staff work across programs in an integrated manner to support children, youth, parents and caregivers with disabilities.
- Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD), administered by Alberta Education, is a partnership among school authorities, Alberta Health Services, Community and Social Services, Children's Services, Health, interested First Nations and other community stakeholders. These partners work together across 17 regions to share and co-ordinate available resources, build their capacity, and plan for sustainable solutions in meeting the needs of children, youth and their families. RCSD regions provide a variety of supports and services when additional resources are needed to meet the mental, physical,

- emotional and social needs of children and youth including those with complex needs.
- Children's Services has initiated a committee comprising Alberta Health Services, and mental health and Children's Services professionals to review shared challenges and potential collaborative solutions for youth dealing with complex mental health and/or addictions issues. The committee is focused on finding solutions to systemic challenges faced by youth with complex mental health and/or addictions and their families.

## Recommendation #2:

Child Intervention Services should improve casework strategies that strengthen relationships and engagement to natural supports, with a focus on building long term networks for young people.

**Ministry response: The Ministry of Children's Services accepts the recommendation.**

Children's Services is implementing the Lifelong Connections practice strategy to assist front-line staff in case planning with children and youth. The practice strategy contains tools to support strong and enduring long-term relationships for young people, and highlights the importance of developing and sustaining family, community and cultural considerations. With collaborative planning and critical thinking components, Lifelong Connections will help staff to engage networks and maintain connections throughout the lives of children and youth.

Children's Services is also implementing Family Finding, a tool that helps staff locate nurturing and sustaining relationships for all children and youth involved with intervention services. Family Finding also provides strategies to engage and build family and community networks for children and youth. Front-line service delivery staff (both Delegated First Nations Agency and regional staff) and contracted agency staff across Alberta are being trained in this model.

# CONCLUSION

The Government of Alberta thanks the Advocate for his review and recommendations. While it is saddening that this young man suffered serious injuries during a difficult time in his life, we are encouraged to know that Dillon recovered from this incident and is supported by his family and community.

Children and youth with complex needs often come to the attention of multiple service providers. That's why the Government of Alberta is committed to strengthening supports for children, youth and families with complex needs. Children's Services, Health, Education, Community and Social Services, and other ministries are all working to improve information sharing, strengthen service delivery collaboration and better support children, youth and families across Alberta. Children's Services is also working to support staff in helping children, youth and families receiving child intervention services build meaningful and lasting relationships with their family, community and culture.

The Government of Alberta accepts these recommendations and is already working to improve services and supports to better meet the needs of vulnerable Albertans.