



ALIGN Strategic Directions 2022-2027

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ALIGN Association of Community Services Mission:

One voice, so children, families, and communities thrive.

Values:

- Excellence
- Respect and Kindness
- Collective Voice in Action
- Ethical Accountability
- Courage
- Commitment
- Integrity
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Beliefs:

- We believe that children and families are experts in their own lives. They should have services available to them based on the best knowledge, practices, and wisdom, provided from a strength-based, family and child centered approach.
- We believe that it is our collective responsibility to advocate for the most vulnerable in our society to ensure all children, young people, and families live in safe, secure, healthy, stable, and nurturing environments.
- We believe in the importance of having a healthy, safe, competent, effective, and skilled workforce to ensure children, young people and families have the support they need and deserve.
- We believe in upholding equity and inclusion, and in respecting the diversity and dignity of all people.
- We believe it is our collective responsibility to address systemic and institutional racism.
- We believe in a sector-wide commitment to Truth and Reconciliation and that Indigenous families affected by colonialism and residential school trauma take the time and resources needed to heal and to move forward.
- We believe in a collective response to advocate for systematic change for children and families.

Objects:

- To serve as a community of agencies respecting the diverse needs of Alberta's children, youth, individuals, and families.
- To act as a collective voice advocating for the rights, causes, and issues that directly affect our members and Alberta's children, youth, individuals, and families.
- To support excellence in service delivery through shared diverse knowledge, wisdom, and evolving practice.
- To influence and collaborate with the government in the development of legislation, policy, and procedures.

ALIGN Strategic Directions: 2022-2027

Throughout a series of discussions facilitated by AndersonDraper Consulting Inc, collaboration, and reflection, the board, and staff of ALIGN identified six strategic directions to focus on over the next five years. In a pre-survey, participants identified that the strategic directions from the 2017 – 2022 document were solid after a review and discussion can continue to inform the board's work, with the focus to shift to revised directions and updated strategies. Participants also noted gains had been made on the directions from the previous time frame, yet work remains to be done.

ALIGN is well-positioned to work collaboratively to achieve their vision and mission, with a strong board, made up of some long-term members and some newer ones. An important consideration during this time frame is the succession planning of the board and staff. It is also important to note that this plan was developed during a pandemic, as such fostering wellness and considerations post-pandemic are timely strategies.

Strategies and tasks were identified within each strategic direction and are presented in the section that follows.

Direction #1: Develop and implement organizational sustainability strategies

Direction #2: Promote excellence in professional development and research in Alberta

Direction #3: Develop an ALIGN Indigenous strategy/cultural understanding

Direction #4 Promote anti-racist practice and address systemic and institutional racism

Direction #5: Develop a workforce strategy for healthy, sustainable, competent service providers

Direction #6: Advocate and demonstrate leadership to enhance child, youth, and family well-being in Alberta

Direction 1: Develop and Implement Organizational Sustainability Strategies

This direction requires energy and time to focus on as well as placing an emphasis on cultivating relationships with member organizations and identifying potential new ones that are key to organizational success. A focus will be on examining membership with an aim to increase diversity in part through the member survey conducted in 2021 and member meetings and by creating key messages to communicate to members. Tasks will include meaningfully connecting with underrepresented groups and encouraging them to join (e.g., Family Resource Networks). Another aspect of this strategic direction is diversifying ALIGN's funding base by staying open to and responding to new opportunities. Supporting the work of chapters and sharing information is a key part of this direction.

Strategies and Tasks:

Diversify Membership:

- Examine ALIGN's membership to identify who is represented or not
- Develop a strategy to bring Family Resource Networks into ALIGN

Expand Communication Practices:

- Create and communicate key messages
- Establish a digital communications strategy
- Concentrate on building meaningful and mutually respectful relationships with the government
- Maintain the website and increase communication mechanisms to members as ALIGN grows

Focus on Succession Planning:

- Create a succession plan for the role of Executive Director
- Identify how to recruit and capture the skills of staff needed to support the ALIGN Board and the future Executive Director

Explore Funding Opportunities:

- Build a financial sustainability strategy
- Explore fundraising as an alternate revenue stream
- Identify and apply to grants outside the province

Support the Work of Chapters:

- Enhance flow of information between ALIGN and chapter groups (see direction six for additional strategies and tasks specific to chapters)

Direction 2: Promote Excellence in Professional Development and Research in Alberta

This strategy relies on relationship building, emphasizes mental wellness, has an Indigenous focus, as well as being intentional about addressing racism. It also considers occupational health and safety (OHS), recognizes the need to address the aftereffects of the pandemic all the while remaining collaborative and focusing on relationship building.

Strategies and Tasks:

Continue with Board Development Activities:

- Focus on board development, through building connections and strengthening relationships
- Identify key stakeholders for board member positions (e.g., universities, professional groups, and associations)

Foster Wellness:

- Promote and support the mental wellness of the board members, members, and people ALIGN serves

Develop and Support Professional Development:

- Continue to invest in leadership development (e.g., ALIGN bursaries)
- Review what professional development exists in these areas, identify potential partnerships and, where needed, develop professional development or share and support development opportunities that are focused on:
 - mental wellness
 - Indigenous research
 - development of protocols
 - equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and addressing racism
 - OH&S
 - increase cultural understanding for newcomers and refugees
- Conduct professional development with ministry staff/child welfare staff

Consider Supports Needed Post-pandemic:

- Develop a strategy to address the effects of the pandemic supporting member agencies, their staff to mitigate and minimize the impact of job burnout

Direction 3: Develop an ALIGN Indigenous Strategy/Cultural Understanding

ALIGN has a role to play in supporting organizations to understand and develop their own Indigenous and cultural strategies and enhance understanding, both at the staff/front-line and organizational level.

Strategies and Tasks:

Work to Collectively Address the Overrepresentation of the Western World View in the Child Welfare System

- Strengthen our understanding of ways to support the recommendations around Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action for the sector

Understand and Address the Impacts of the Act respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, youth, and families (the Act; formally Bill C-92)

- Help people understand the impacts of the Act and provide support to members
- Issue a statement from ALIGN in support of the Act
- [statement from Rhonda] Relationship between the sector and the newly developed indigenous governing bodies

Nurture Stronger Indigenous Understanding

- Develop strategies to advance reconciliation
- Learn and better understand the trauma responses and the effects of residential school and colonialism

Direction 4: Promote Anti-Racist Practice and Address Systemic and Institutional Racism

This direction relies on a commitment to understanding and addressing systemic and institutional racism, while supporting diversity and representation in ALIGN's work. It addresses the outcomes of reducing the number of Indigenous children in care as a function of racism and ensuring systems do not put any children into care as a result of racism. The direction looks at ways to provide equitable access to services that are available to all families, that families are respected, and children are reunited with their culture and communities, as well as diversifying the world views and representation in ALIGN and member agency staff.

Strategies and Tasks:

Work from an Anti-racist Practice to Address Racist Practices and Systemic and Institutional Racism:

- Explore the experiences of people with lived experiences to better understand systemic racism
- Make a statement about anti-racism in child welfare practices that affect children and families

Create Space for Learning and Sharing:

- Bring leadership together to learn and share
- Provide opportunities for discussion amongst agencies
- Create psychological safety for the ALIGN board and member agencies to discuss
- Provide meaningful engagement opportunities in board governance for people of colour – consider creating a subcommittee to inform the board

Be Led by People with Lived Experience:

- Explore and provide opportunities to learn from others
- Encourage learning from those who do not hold 'power' positions within organizations to distribute the burden of leadership

Provide Tools and Resources:

- Collate and share tools and resources on anti-racist practices and ways to address systemic and institutional racism for member agencies
- Provide resources on psychological safety
- Consider tools and resources for adopting and diversifying world views other than the Euro-Canadian view
- Share policies and organizational practices including competencies

Directions 5: Develop a Workforce Strategy for Safe, Healthy, Sustainable, Competent Service Providers

ALIGN identified the desire to make this sector a “workplace of choice” by concentrating on enhancing recruitment and retention, with a specific focus on diversity and equity as well as highlighting a greater understanding of intergenerational issues within the staffing complement. The importance of working collaboratively with post-secondary institutions, with boards, executives, and staff of member organizations was noted as important. A focus on the pandemic, existing within and recovering from it was identified, as well as recognizing the need to capture learnings and strengthen the sector to be prepared to respond to future health, economic and political challenges. This direction also includes a focus on occupational health and safety, wellbeing, and post-pandemic resiliency.

Strategies and Tasks:

Highlight Actions for Pandemic Resiliency and Recovery:

- Work with member organizations to ensure resources are available for safe, secure, and healthy workplaces to do with staffing, the facility and infrastructure
- Capture lessons learned to assist organizations in being prepared in the event of other population health-related challenges

Engage Stakeholders in Meaningful Collaboration to Strengthen Partnerships:

- Collaborate with post-secondary institutions to make member organizations the “workplaces of choice”
- Concentrate on attraction, recruitment, and retention strategies considering diversity and equity

Increase Cultural Understanding Specific to an Equitable and Diverse Workforce:

- Define what cultural safety means in the workforce

Emphasize Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Supports:

- Develop and foster strong safety partnerships within the sector (i.e., WCB) to enhance professional development through training and capacity building
- Create an OHS plan, support member organizations with undertaking hazard assessments

Consider Intergenerational Issues Impact on Staffing:

- Examine intergenerational issues when it comes to staffing complements
- Develop training or capacity building to support topical discussions amongst different ages and staffing groups

Direction 6: Advocate and Demonstrate Leadership to Enhance Child, Youth and Family Well-Being in Alberta

There was a desire by ALIGN to enhance its advocacy skills with aim to strengthen the work of the sector. Engaging with chapters, Indigenous Governing Bodies and Delegated First Nation Agencies, as well as reviewing its own leadership and governance practices are focuses of the strategies and tasks under this direction. Succession planning, for both the board and staff, as well as a review of ALIGN's governance structure and adjusting as needed to advance its advocacy will serve to support this direction.

Strategies and Tasks:

Advocate to Strengthen Sector:

- Consider a role focused specifically on advocacy when reflecting on succession planning in ALIGN's board and staff
- Improve our understanding of the government in power and what works in terms of lobbying
- Enhance the sector's negotiating skills through skills building
- Promote the need for equitable funding (address wage discrepancy) to meeting legislative and implementation of practice frameworks

Engage with Chapters:

- Consult with chapters to understand local priorities
- Facilitate connections between chapters
- Understand rural and urban needs/issues
- Assist chapters by providing support when preparing for meetings with Children's Services

Consider ALIGN's potential role working with Indigenous Governing Bodies and Delegated First Nation Agencies:

- Communicate ALIGN's mission (increasingly important with the Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families)
- Connect with nations to determine where they are at in the transformation process
- Support relationship building
- Remind Children's Services that Euro-Canadian perspectives are over-represented

Review Leadership and Governance:

- Consider what is happening in governance specifically in the not-for-profit sector
- Bring organization member boards together for co-learning
- Think about how governance can be a conduit for advocacy