



Current Workforce Challenges and Escalating Costs in Contracted Community Services Sector

ALIGN Association of Community Services

Government Briefing

Background:

ALIGN is a network of child and family service agencies, all committed to improving the quality of life for Alberta's most vulnerable children and families.

ALIGN Association of Community Services is a membership-based, non-profit organization supported by over 120 members throughout the province. Approximately 80% of the contracts government arranges with early intervention, family resource networks, child intervention and disability services each year are with ALIGN's member agencies. Our members employ 10,000-15,000 staff and provide services to over 200,000 vulnerable children and families each year.

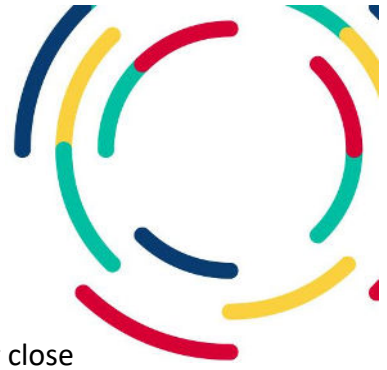
The agencies in the child wellbeing system are struggling, and while the people who work in the sector offer meaning, purpose and have a sense of belonging, they are being driven out due to the inability to have a living wage for some, and certainly not a comparable professional wage to those working for the province.

Issue:

Since 2014, contract community group care service providers have received no increases in funding for staff wages. Nor has funding addressed increases in administrative costs due to inflation over the last 8 years. This is unsustainable for service providers.

Foster and kinship caregivers have not had an increase in more than 3 years and there is no clear plan for re-negotiating in the near future.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all Albertans, and highlighted vulnerabilities in our communities. Existing inequities and challenges, such as low income or precarious work, mental health concerns, and isolation, have worsened for both front line workers and those that they serve.



Sustainability has reached a tipping point. People are having to go into deficit, or close programs or agencies. They simply cannot afford to continue doing business. Agencies have no control over the rising costs and no longer have reserves to manage.

Significant challenges right now:

- Chronically underpaid workforce (no increases in group care since 2014) inflation over this time is 24%.
- Severe fatigue by pandemic demands –
 - This leads to a staffing crisis at the frontline. Managers and executives are burnt out adapting, adjusting, and leading through a pandemic crisis. Staff report significant mental health challenges, and turnover rates are significant. Foster and kinship families absorbed the costs throughout the pandemic in areas of food, child care, and time off due to the needs of isolation.
- Shortfalls in funding
 - The expiration of federal subsidies, decrease in provincial support, drops in donor support, decreased ability to fundraise. Some agencies have foundations that cover shortfalls but those are eroding.
- 30-year peak in inflation
 - escalating cost of living, administration, indirect service costs like insurance, utilities, workers compensation. These are hard costs that service providers are unable to absorb given the cost cannot be passed on to those we serve.

This is an unsustainable state for service providers, and an unmaintainable situation for vulnerable Albertans who rely on these services. Maintaining quality supports with funding shortfalls and workforce struggles is impossible. Children and staff are at risk.

An immediate response is required. We need to stabilize the workforce, pay for hard costs and then figure out how to maintain or meet the needs moving forward.

Requested Actions:

- An immediate 24% investment for all contracts
- Immediate investment to foster/kinship parents of \$200.00 per child in their home before the end of the year to offset the costs of utilities, food and the pandemic.
- A commitment to equitable wages and cost of living increase in 2023 budget