



**ALIGN**

Association of  
Community Services

# **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**
  - One pager developed on the benefits of joining ALIGN
    - Can be found on ALIGN website
  - Incentives for members to renew (pricing break), as well as incentives for events and training opportunities.
  - To Do: Letters to be completed and sent to previous ALIGN members outlining the benefits of ALIGN membership.
    - List of previous members compiled and compared to current membership for letter sending

Membership campaign was sent out in mid-March. We reviewed previous members, people who have attended events and current members. We have received a few new members to date. We will have BOD reach out to those that they can influence

All members from last year have been invoiced, FRN and DFNA lists, former members and anyone who has taken training this year that is not a member.

Pauline and I met with an FRN in Edmonton, and they were in a dilemma because they do not have a way to pay for membership. Discussion with Dionne Kennedy regarding this. Still TBD

Total members currently: 78
- **Develop a strategy to bring Family Resource Networks into ALIGN**
  - Looking at current FRN lists to determine which FRNs are ALIGN Members
    - To Do: Letter to be created and sent to FRNs to invite them to ALIGN membership.

- o In Foundations of Caregiver support there have been ongoing conversations for FRNs to become members – [discussed in fall session](#)
- o Encouraging ALIGN membership and support at the Steering Committee
  - Members to encourage members – [Kirby and Nicole attend the steering committee. They will discuss further](#)
- o To Do: Share resources IE. ICUF and Well-Being Projects [-to get on agenda for FRN steering committee](#)
- o To Do: New Fact Sheet to be sent to FRNs  
[All FRN's were sent a letter and an invitation to belong to ALIGN](#)  
[Currently have 31/74](#)

### Expand Communication Practices:

- **Create and communicate key messages**
  - o Benefit Messages Completed
  - o Political Tool-Kit available on ALIGN website
  - o Key Messages for Post-Secondary institutions available on ALIGN website
  - o Updated ALIGN Fact Sheet
  
- **Establish a digital communications strategy**
  - o Social media strategy is in place
  - o On-going Indigenous Connections newsletter and Members Bulletins
  - o To Do: ALIGN Fact Sheet to be added to ALIGN website- completed
  
- **Maintain the website and increase communication mechanisms to members as ALIGN grows**
  - o All ALIGN events link directly to the ALIGN website directing traffic.
  - o Updated the website design & transitioned tech support and domain in February 2022.
  - o This past 7 months ALIGN promoted several special features including 20 Great Ways for Children, Youth and Families to Honor and Celebrate National Indigenous History Month (JUNE) which turned out to be the top post at 3,992 views to date.
  - o Several pages that very popular and are excellent ways of attracting a broader range of viewers including the popular Grants, Careers, and Indigenous Cultural Understanding pages.
  - o The interest and interaction and feedback has been very positive, and viewers appear to be interested in online interactive learning activities.
  - o We did a post 5 Basic Considerations for Creating an Improved Online Experience for People with Low Vision. to share some basic accessibility principles with members.
  - o [Indigenous advent calendar](#)

- o Website is undergoing a redesign- 2023/2024
- o Between April 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023 website had 467,014 clicks, by 59,999 users
- o Top views consistently are grant, bursaries and awards
- **Concentrate on building meaningful and mutually respectful relationships with government**
  - o Developed a collaborative table with Child Intervention Services, ALIGN and CS Discussion Table, TOR completed, Committees created to disseminate information, committee share points completed. 2 meetings in Nov. Dec. – review ANCHOR review, minister letters, transitions/ Dec was to be focused on foster care/ adoption review
    - Recent visit with new minister and DM. Both seem collaborative and wanting to have ongoing meetings
  - o Working with Alberta Council to complete Government Relations Meetings and mixer events- planning under way. 2 sessions for Board and Executive members planned for January.
    - Ongoing advice and support from AC
    - Support for breakfasts
    - Using relationships to have meetings and convey messages
  - o Sit on the FRN Steering Committee- Nicole to sit on steering committee for another year
    - 12 members sit on Steering committee of 22 total
  - o FSCD Provincial Representative Table – ongoing
    - Briefing note completed and request to meet with both Minister and Chief of staff
  - o Provincial Foster Care Table - recreated a collaborative table including AFKA, ALIGN and DFNA's
    - Reviewing terms of reference
  - o Strategy created to engage the provinces DFNAs/IGB – collaborative table, indigenous consultant reaching out, invited to Walking the Children Home summit.
    - Walking the Children Home Together has been helpful, also have a strategy to meet with First Nations as they identify where/what their plans are for legislation. So far, Montana band and MNA

#### Focus on Succession Planning:

- **Create a succession plan for the role of Executive Director**
  - o Identify how to recruit and capture the skills for staff needed to support the ALIGN Board, and be very focused on the needs to ALIGN and the board, so that they are useful and sustainable positions
    - Updated Executive Director job description and executive committee planning



## Explore Funding Opportunities:

- **Build a financial sustainability strategy**
  - **Explore fundraising as an alternate revenue stream**
  - To Do: Investigate website Sponsors with a sponsor letter and create a sponsored journal.
  - To Do: Engage with CSAE for fundraising ideas and other fundraising bodies- Strategy to be built.
    - Golf tournament
    - Numerous grant applications
  
- **Identify and apply to grants**
  - Heritage grant- Walking the Children Home Together - denied
  - Civil Society Grant- OHS (\$300,000 pending) - denied
  - City of Edmonton- ICUF dissemination (operationalization) (\$38,000 denied)
  - CIP Grant- Workforce recovery (\$56,500)- pending revising to WTCHT support- Sept 15
  - MIIG 25,000- digitizing ICUF (\$25, 000) - received
  - Leadership/ workforce recovery (\$500,000 pending) – request sent to DM and Minister- no word
  - Walking the Children Home transition project request (672,750.00)- request sent to DM and Minister- small part of OHS safety grant from CS
  - To Do: CIP Occupation- OHS
  - To Do: Continue to look for Federal Grant opportunities for Anti-Racism.
  - To Do: Look at foundations offering grants and apply
    - Applied to Gord Downie and Air Canada for support to WTCHT 3/4

## 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)**
  - Staff to attend Chapter Meetings – staff are attending but we have to balance attendance with costs
  - Support Chapters as they request – facilitate conversations regarding ICUF, political toolkit
- Chapter chairs to meet on ad hoc bases – Chapter chairs to develop Terms of reference

## 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**
  - Leadership development strategies and board specific training – BOD have participated in the development of a learning series on leadership with Dr. Schultz
  - Discuss engagement in workforce recovery strategies – discussion and BOD mtg
- **Identify key stakeholders for board member positions (e.g., universities, professional groups, and associations)**
  - People with lived experience should be on our working committees as much as possible. We have had young people input on ICUF and have asked a young person to sit on the Wellbeing advisory committee
  - Added academics and CYCAA to BOD

Foster Wellness:

- **Promote and support the mental wellness of the board members, members, and the families they serve**
  - TiPi Teaching
  - Connections Newsletter
  - Communications gatherings have evolved into Workforce Recovery Gatherings
  - Cultural/Neurological Education - People need to realize where your organization and you are and will be a key component in facilitating the ICUF.
  - Leadership and workforce resiliency – focus groups to develop a leadership cohort series

Develop and Support Professional Development:

- **Continue to invest in leadership development (e.g., ALIGN bursaries)**
  - Apply for Leadership Bursary (next Minister) – requested – discussed with DM Aug. 2023
  - 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
- Mentoring
- Kinship
- equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and addressing racism- **in development**
- OH&S- **summit October 2023/ contracted specialist for gap analysis of HSA**
- Conduct professional development with ministry staff/child welfare staff
- increase cultural understanding for newcomers and refugees
- Continue to develop the ALIGN Conference- **January 2023**
  - Conference to cover all our strategies
  - This year will be a hybrid online conference to allow for accessibility- **2024 will be in person**
  - Financial boost to ALIGN
- **Identify Research Projects**
  - Canadian Consortium of Child and Youth Trauma
  - Beyond Neglect advisory committee
  - Cultural Brokers: Agents for Health and Wellness Equity for Newcomers, Along the Full Continuum of Settlement, Integration, and Social Inclusion.
  - To Do: Indigenous research: Evaluate our ability to work in parallel world views
    - **Hosting research series throughout the year. To date 3xgroup care – Anglin and Gharabaghi**

Consider Supports Needed Post-pandemic:

- **Develop a strategy to address the effects of the pandemic supporting member agencies, and their staff to mitigate and minimize the impact of job burnout**
  - Transition from COVID Communication Meetings to Workforce Recovery Meetings
  - Touch base with post-secondary institutions around practicum students and prepare them for the field. (More trauma-informed training) – **session at McEwan March 2023**
  - Wage discrepancies – **discussed with Minister**
  - Data collection and dissemination
  - Work force recovery plan
    - **Ongoing discussion; struggle to get funding**

- Did discuss with new Minister. He seems to be concerned with staff MH

## 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**
  - November 4, 2022- Walking the Children Home Together 1-day Summit
    - Invited Chief and Council
    - Explore relationship building with the Chief and Council moving forward
    - Second summit being planned for Spring 2023- successful
    - 3<sup>rd</sup> Summit planned for Nov 2024 and then 4<sup>th</sup> in May 2024 on the land

Understand and Address the Impacts 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**
  - Ongoing Caregiver Provincial Collaborative Table meetings with DFNAs
  - Ongoing discussion re: learning from Louis Bull transitions
  - Articulating parallel world views
  - ALIGN initiating early conversation with IGB prior to their transitions to foster clarity and understanding of agency role and responsibility
  - Goal of WTCHT.
  - Meeting with First Nations and MNA to discuss agency's role with child welfare and planning forward for child welfare legislation
- **To Do: Issue a statement from ALIGN in support of the Act - regarding the relationship between the sector and the newly developed legislations of the individual IGB's (Board activity)**

## Nurture Stronger Indigenous Understanding

- **Develop strategies to advance reconciliation**
  - Open and close meetings with prayer/land acknowledgment
  - All strategies to have a written and oral understanding- **oral introduction to the wellbeing report as example/ talking circles/ indigenous youth participation**
  - Ensure protocol is offered
    - **ICUF fee for service x3 sessions. Have been very good and now developing a “train the trainer” model for Nov 2023**
  
- **Learn and better understand the trauma responses and the effects of residential school and colonialism**
  - Offering Training- Cultural Solutions 101
  - Releasing ICUF -**developing a support plan to operationalize it.**
  - Well-Being Project – ensure trauma from the residential school system is addressed as part of wellbeing documents
  - Increasing Elder interaction and building cultural capacity via engaging outside of our circle and following protocol.

## 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 because 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:

- **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
      - Workforce recovery and leadership development will include anti-racism – **in preliminary discussion and design of a cohort learning series**
    - Provide opportunities for discussion among agencies

- Foster Care and Group Care workforce recovery meetings-ongoing
  - Create psychological safety for the ALIGN board and member agencies to discuss- cohorts
  - 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:**
  - Engaged young people in our well-being definitions - invited
  - Work with Multicultural health brokers – foundations training
  - Indigenous caregivers/workers/ and supporters are part of the planning and development of all projects-ongoing
- **Explore and provide opportunities to learn from others – cohort training**
- **Encourage learning from those who do not hold ‘power’ positions within organizations to distribute the burden of leadership – Summit/ ICUF/community of practice - OHS**

#### 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**
  - Specific effort to relate ICUF to current events like Residential school, pope’s visit
  - Understanding and using parallel world view in all ALIGN engagements moving forward
  - Projects will have an Anti-Racist focus
  - Consider tools and resources for adopting and diversifying world views other than the Euro-Canadian view
  - Conference provides variety of understanding
- **Provide resources on psychological well-being to create comfort and safety**
  - Leading with kindness
  - OH&S Advisory Committee to look at psychological well-being in the workplace.
  - Create psychological wellness scale
  - Work from a trauma-informed perspective and understand the brain science, human development, and indigenous understanding.
  - Always looking for speakers to acknowledge the struggle and regulate the sector and move it forward

- **Share policies and organizational practices including competencies**
  - Always looking for speakers to acknowledge the struggle and regulate the sector and move it forward
  - Acknowledge colonialism and systematic racism and move towards a goal of inclusion and well-being.

## **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, 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, well-being, 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**
  - OH&S Advisory Committee
- **To Do: Capture lessons learned to assist organizations in being prepared in the event of other population health-related challenges**
  - Summit 2023

Engage Stakeholders in Meaningful Collaboration to Strengthen Partnerships:

- Collaborate with post-secondary institutions to make member organizations the “workplaces of choice” **and strengthening students for the workforce. - invitation to discussion for May 2023**
  - Develop an academic community of practice- sharing common concerns ie students, policy development, staffing etc.
- **Concentrate on attraction, recruitment, and retention strategies considering diversity and equity**

- Workforce Recovery Strategy
- Consider HR strategies
- Survey frontline to gather data on workforce needs

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)**
  - OHS Advisory Committee
  - Partnership with continuing care to determine if they are a good fit.
  - Determine a need for an ALIGN staff contractor role in Occupational Health and Safety
  - Apply for funding for OH&S support
    - Received CS grant focused on OHS safety.
    - Contracted with safety specialist to do a gap analysis to determine need for HAS
    - Asked WCB to reclassify codes
    - Planning a Leadership summit – Oct. 2023
    - Updating CSSSI
    - Developing a learning management system to offer training ( being updated)
- **Enhance professional development through trainings and capacity building**
  - Workforce recovery strategy
- **Create an OHS plan, support member organizations with undertaking hazard assessments**

Consider Intergenerational Issues Impact on Staffing:

- **Examine concerns when it comes to hiring**
  - Examine intergenerational issues when it comes to staffing complements
    - To Do: Examine needs of the workforce
  - Develop training or capacity building to support topical discussions amongst different ages and staffing groups
    - Re-opened training space

## **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**
  - Continue to engage with Alberta Council and active government relations committee- ongoing
- **Improve our understanding of the government in power and what works in terms of lobbying**
  - Board engagement sessions
  - Minister briefing
  - Meet with new Ministers and DM/Chief of Staff – fall 2023
- **Enhance the sector's negotiating skills through skills building**
- **Promote the need for equitable funding (address wage discrepancy) to meet legislative and implementation of practice frameworks**
  - This is a key message in our political advocacy toolkit

### **Engage with Chapters:**

- **Consult with chapters to understand local priorities**
  - Endeavour to always have staff present at chapter meetings to provide updates and information sharing
    - Chapters were pivotal in supporting the candidate breakfasts across the province
- **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 in 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)**
  - Meeting with First Nations and MNA
  - Meeting with Executive Director – CID Tim Gillis and ADM Cynthia Dunnigan and negotiator Karen Young
  
- **Connect with nations to determine where they are at in the transformation process**
  - Invite First Nations to *Walking the Children Home Together 1-Day Summit*
    - At spring session, we had approx. 12 nations attend.
    - Nov session focuses in on Nations speaking about their wishes, needs and desires moving forward
  
- **Support relationship building**
  - Launching of ICUF
  - **Develop a facilitation and dissemination strategy for agencies and IGB**
    - Met with Montana Band

Review Leadership and Governance:

- **Consider what is happening in governance specifically in the not-for-profit sector**
  - Attended the non-profit summit
  
- **Bring organization member boards together for co-learning**
  
- **Think about how governance can be a conduit for advocacy**
  - ALIGN participate in the not-for profit sector
  - Consider a joint board between AFKA and ALIGN
  - Consider asking agency support to help develop strategies.