



July 22, 2009

Panel established to help build stronger child intervention system

Edmonton... A review panel led by child intervention specialists from across the country will study Alberta's child intervention system, bring forward leading practices, and suggest ways the system may be strengthened to support at-risk children, youth and families.

"Continuous improvement has always been an important part of our child intervention system," said Children and Youth Services Minister Janis Tarchuk. "While we believe that our child intervention system is strong, the children and families we serve deserve to benefit from the knowledge and experience of leaders in the child intervention field."

The nature of child intervention supports and services has continued to transform over the years in Alberta. The rate and effects of population growth and shifting demographics in the province, combined with societal changes such as gang activity, addictions, human trafficking, and use of the Internet by predators as a tool for child sexual exploitation, make it necessary to confirm that the child intervention system in the province is keeping pace and responding effectively.

"In the last eight years, we have introduced new public policy, enacted new legislation around child intervention, and are currently implementing a new model to manage casework practice," said Tarchuk. "Reviewing the effectiveness of these enhancements is the natural next step in the evolution of the child intervention system in Alberta."

The review panel will be co-chaired by child intervention specialists Dr. Nico Trocmé, Philip Fisher Chair in Social Work at McGill University and Scientific Director of the Canadian Centre of Excellence in Child Welfare and Peter Dudding, Executive Director of the Child Welfare League of Canada. The co-chairs will make recommendations to the Minister on additional panel members, expected to include individuals with backgrounds in Aboriginal child and family services, child and adolescent mental health, and the youth justice system.

The panel will examine the following questions:

- Are the necessary checks, balances and processes in place to ensure accountability and transparency in the child intervention system?
- Does the system have the capacity to effectively respond to emerging societal trends, service demands, and evolving workforce and practice issues?
- Is the system organized and aligned with leading practices and evidence-based research?

Cal Dallas, MLA for Red Deer-South, will work with the panel to ensure collaboration and co-ordination with Safe Communities and other government initiatives that support and serve vulnerable and at-risk children and youth.

Opportunities for input from partners and stakeholders in the child intervention system and from the public will be provided during the review process. The review panel's report with recommendations is expected to be submitted to the Minister in spring 2010.

"The driving force behind establishing the panel is making a strong system stronger, but recent tragedies involving children and youth in the system also make it prudent to ensure our system is rooted in a solid foundation," said Tarchuk. "By receiving an objective assessment and acting on opportunities to strengthen our system, people in our province will gain an increased understanding of how the child intervention system works and be confident that we are doing the right things for at-risk children, youth, and families in Alberta."

The review also follows through on a commitment made by western Canadian provincial ministers responsible for social services to share best practices in child intervention, particularly in the area of supports and services to Aboriginal children, youth, and families. Tarchuk plans to share the results of this review with her western ministerial colleagues.

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Backgrounders: Panel terms of reference and co-chair biographies

Media inquiries may be directed to:

Trevor Coulombe, Communications, Children and Youth Services
780-427-4801

To call toll free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

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Review panel terms of reference

Background

Alberta's child welfare system has evolved significantly since 2001, when government approved implementation of the Alberta Response Model (ARM). ARM is a child intervention differential response system, aimed at addressing short- and long-term needs of children, youth and families who come into contact with the system. It is family-centred practice with child-centred outcomes.

In 2001, a review of the *Child Welfare Act* was announced, as it was clear that the act did not enable full implementation of ARM. In 2004, the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* was proclaimed.

To fully realize the intent of the new legislation, a change in casework practice was required. This change, to provide effective and responsive interventions that could be measured, and to ensure consistent practices that support improved outcomes for children, youth and families, led to the implementation of the Casework Practice Model in 2008. The Casework Practice Model involves a stronger focus on intake and assessment of children, youth and families at the initial contact stage, to ensure services planned are as effective as possible.

The most recent systemic change has been the shift to an increased focus on improved outcomes for children, youth and families receiving intervention supports and services.

At this time, it is important to validate that the right model for child intervention supports is in place, and to hear from child intervention specialists on how to make the system stronger. This review also follows through on a commitment made by western Canadian ministers responsible for social services to share best practices and advance continuous improvement in their jurisdictions.

Scope of the Review

The review panel will examine the following questions:

- Are the necessary checks, balances and processes in place to ensure accountability and transparency in the child intervention system?
- Does the system have the capacity to effectively respond to emerging societal trends, service demands, and evolving workforce and practice issues?
- Is the system organized and aligned with leading practices and evidence-based research?

Key Deliverables

- The co-chairs will present a report and recommendations to the Minister that focus on continuous improvement, identify current strengths, and suggest areas that could be strengthened.

Accountability

- The Minister will appoint the co-chairs and panel members.
- The co-chairs are accountable to the Minister.

Membership

- Co-Chair: Nico Trocmé, Philip Fisher Chair in Social Work, McGill University and Scientific Director of the Centre of Excellence in Child Welfare.
- Co-Chair: Peter Dudding, Executive Director, Child Welfare League of Canada.
- Member: Cal Dallas, MLA for Red Deer-South.
- Additional members will be named at a later date, based on recommendations of the co-chairs.

Public Input

Opportunities for public input may include:

- Establishing a website and inviting the public to respond to discussion guide questions posted online.
- Inviting formal, written submissions from key partners and stakeholders in the child intervention system.
- Hosting a symposium to gather input from delegates, facilitated by the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research.

Deliverable Timeframe

- A report and recommendations will be provided to the Minister of Children and Youth Services in spring 2010. The report findings will be released publicly.

Confidentiality

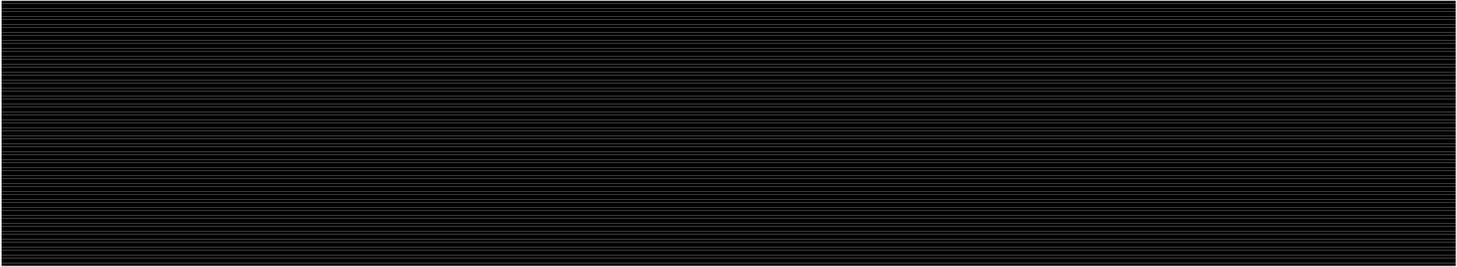
- The *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* apply to all information and records collected, created, maintained or stored for this review.

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Review panel co-chairs

Nico Trocmé, MSW, Ph.D.

- *Philip Fisher Chair in Social Work at McGill University*
- *Scientific Director of the Canadian Centre of Excellence in Child Welfare*

Nico Trocmé is considered among the leading researchers in the field of child welfare in Canada. He was principal investigator for a national incidence study about reported child abuse and neglect. He also directed the development of a framework for tracking child welfare service outcomes, which is currently being implemented by governments across the country.

Dr. Trocmé served as a research advisor for a child welfare service transformation program in Ontario. He has spent the last five years developing a national network of researchers and policy makers to promote and support evidence-based child welfare policy.

He has presented expert evidence at several coroner inquests and provides evaluation and service planning consultation to a number of child welfare organizations in Canada.

He is currently focusing on developing an interdisciplinary community-researcher partnership to conduct and disseminate research for effective programs and policies for vulnerable children, youth, and families.

Peter Dudding, MM, MSW, RSW

- *Executive Director, Child Welfare League of Canada*

Peter Dudding has three decades of senior management experience in the fields of child welfare, public health and international development.

Dudding's career includes service as the associate director of the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa, executive director of the Children's Aid Society of Lanark County, and social services director for the Government of Yukon. He currently serves as the co-director of the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare and co-chairs the national steering committee for the Canadian Incidence Study on Reported Child Abuse and Neglect.

His work includes conducting applied research, establishing best practice models, policy and program development, evaluating outcomes, advocacy, knowledge building, and promoting child and youth rights.

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