



PATHS TO PROSPERITY

A FRESH START FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

An Ontario PC Caucus White Paper

December 2012



It's the responsibility of the Premier and government to ensure that we have a growing economy. One that generates good jobs. One where people – with a little hard work – can get ahead. Ensuring economic opportunity is an essential responsibility of government, and only a growing economy gives us the resources necessary to provide core government services.

But we also have a much broader responsibility. It makes the headlines less frequently but it's just as important.

We have a duty and capacity to support our most vulnerable people. It's a duty to give them a hand up when they need it, and to ensure the best quality health care and social services are in place for those who, through no fault of their own, face incredible challenges.

But the current system in Ontario is failing to do that, even though ministry spending is up 50 per cent over the last decade and 12,000 youth in need are on waiting lists for treatment.

It's imperative we find the courage to explore bold, new ideas to help our most vulnerable.

As with all of our *Paths to Prosperity* policy white papers, I asked my PC Caucus to come up with fresh solutions to the problems we face in Ontario today. Where government currently fails, I asked them to consult the experts, the front line workers and those who rely on these services and their families, to be creative and, above all, not to reject any idea that could work.

Some of the best and most current thinking on the delivery of social services for children right now is contained in this discussion paper, *A Fresh Start for Children and Youth*.

Some of the ideas it contains like Social Impact Bonds – a cost-effective way of using the private and non-profit sectors to fund and deliver social programs focused on better outcomes, not bureaucratic process – are ideas that are already being used elsewhere around the globe and will deliver real results.

Ironically, many of those who oppose these types of innovative policies are the same ones who talk about the need for compassion. But their approach – embracing a system that is failing to deliver – is the one that actually robs us of the ability to be compassionate in the first place.

We won't let inaction rob tomorrow's youth of a fair chance and fresh start.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Hudak', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tim Hudak
Leader of the Official Opposition



Jane McKenna

MEMBER OF PROVINCIAL PARLIAMENT,
BURLINGTON

Youth are our future. Whether as parents or policymakers, we have a responsibility to help our children succeed and to give them the tools they need to live the life they deserve. If we don't do our best for the next generation, it speaks volumes about who we are as a government.

Ontario's Ministry of Children and Youth Services is responsible for regulating, funding and monitoring the delivery of services to some of our province's most vulnerable: children and youth in distress. And it is failing – failing children, parents and service workers.

Our system is almost impossible for users to navigate and so fragmented that most see no system at all. Its funding formulas are ineffective. Costs rise steadily with no visible improvement. Success rates can't be reliably measured since there are no defined objectives. Lack of coordination among agencies has created duplication and service gaps, and driven up costs. Worse, demand exceeds supply, meaning long waiting lists for just about everything.

We must do better.

The people of Ontario understand the importance of raising healthy kids. They know a loving, stable home and a sense of belonging helps young people grow up strong and happy. They understand that every child needs to be free from hunger, addiction, violence, neglect and isolation in order to thrive.

Sadly, they also see that the government's response has mostly been lip service. Everybody involved in this system wants leaders to show true leadership. We expect government to do its best when it comes to looking out for our kids. Investing now in quality services for children and their families benefits all Ontarians.

With Tim Hudak's leadership, we will rise to the challenge and create a smart, sustainable system for our children and grandchildren, both now and in the future.

As Children and Youth Services Critic for the Ontario PC Caucus, I would like to thank the many experts and stakeholders who contributed their insight and ideas to this innovative paper. We also want to know what you think about our *Paths to Prosperity* white paper. Please send me your feedback by contacting my office through email at jane.mckenna@pc.ola.org or by phone at **416-325-2627** (Queen's Park).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane McKenna". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ontario PC Critic for Children and Youth Services

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INTRODUCTION

Let’s start at the beginning. A child-centred model of care focuses on the needs of the child above all else. That sounds obvious, but it’s a fact that gets easily lost in bureaucracy. And it has been lost.

We propose to get back to the basics – to respond to the needs of our youngest citizens, to help every child become the best they can be and to protect them from harm. We have a moral obligation to our children and youth to make sure that they get the best possible start, despite what can sometimes be the worst possible circumstances.

A young person who has been abused or neglected at home and placed in the custody of a Children’s Aid Society will be in our collective care until she is re-settled, either with her own family or in a safe and loving adoptive family.

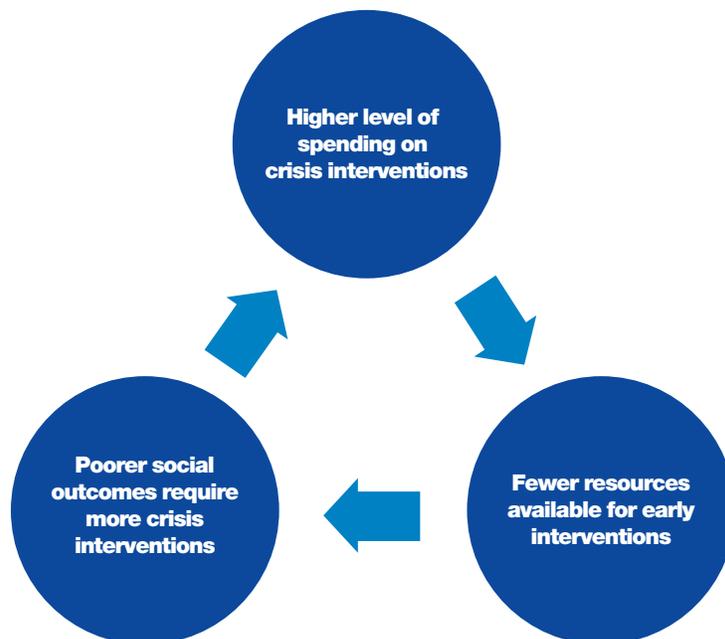
Studies have shown that when Crown wards transition out of care, they don’t do as well as other young adults. They’re less likely to finish high school, pursue post-secondary education or even earn a living wage. They’re more likely to spiral into poverty, homelessness, mental health issues and substance abuse and become entangled in the justice system. As they struggle to reach adulthood, they are often loaded with more

baggage than they can carry.

We should be there for them sooner, providing early intervention and preventative care alongside mental health services, counseling and mentoring. These will help build resilience, instill confidence and nurture the inner strength and life skills that give rise to positive, independent lives. A cookie-cutter approach won’t do the job. Focused, personalized care gives us a much better chance of keeping young people on the right path.

Beyond the ethical reward of this work, value for money will also be dramatically improved because it reduces demand for acute care further down the road. Intensive intervention in later life – whether health, child welfare, youth justice, special education or job training – all come at higher cost to the public purse than proactive measures. More importantly, we will have given these young people the tools to make it on their own. As a society, we owe them that much.

A Cycle of Underinvestment



RENEW ONTARIO'S ADOPTION SYSTEM

It can take several years for a willing couple to adopt an Ontario-born child. With three different systems – private, public and out-of-country – it shouldn't be surprising that parents often choose the one that offers timely adoption and values their commitment to the process.

For parents anxious to start a family, the wait can be a demoralizing ordeal. For a child, five years feels like an eternity. Foster children will tell you that they're in survival mode every minute of every day. These kids yearn for a sense of belonging. They need to be free to be children, not burdened by a sense of loss and insecurity.

Public adoption services are straining under the weight of an antiquated system in which Crown wards wait far too long in temporary and expensive foster care. In 2008, there were only 822 wards adopted in Ontario, a number that represents about half of all adoptions. With approximately 8,500 Ontario children waiting for adoption, and families anxious to adopt, the system needs to be reconfigured so that children can become part of a permanent family as early in their life as possible.

We should make better use of the AdoptOntario website by mandating Children's Aid Societies to use the registry. This central hub for families interested in public adoption will advance the goal of getting more children into loving homes, and do so sooner. Early adoption gives children their best chance of developing

the strong bonds and sense of security that contribute to adult success.

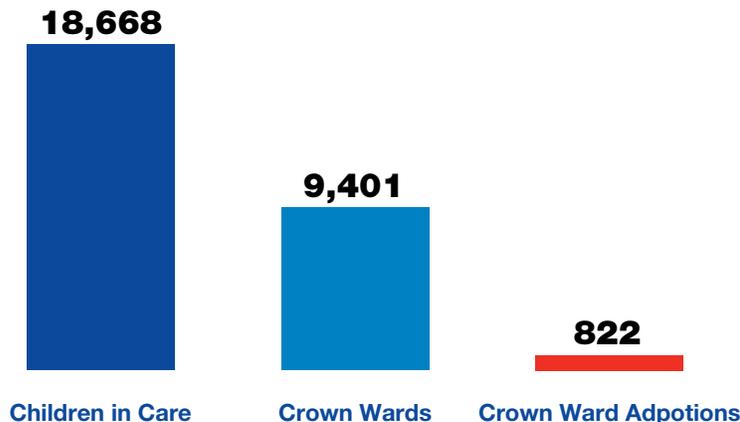
Children in care are those under the care of the Children's Aid system, and are in residential services such as a foster home, group home or a youth justice facility.

Crown wards are those who have been permanently removed from their families and placed under legal guardianship of the province.

Every Crown ward has a permanency plan, but we need to ensure the goal of a forever family is achieved within a reasonable period of time. The longer the kids spend in temporary foster care, the greater the long-term impact. Sixty-eight per cent of homeless kids come from either foster homes, group homes or a youth centre. We would mandate annual reviews for each child, holding the individual Children Aid Society accountable for their progress in securing an appropriate home for every child.

Children in Care, Crown Wards and Adoptions of Crown Wards in Ontario

As cited in the Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption report, 2009



Source: Raising Expectations: Recommendations of the Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption

In 2009, the Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption, led by the current Canadian Governor General David Johnston, released a report that found the cost of maintaining a Crown ward in foster care is roughly \$32,000 per year. It would cost significantly less to provide a responsive system to help parents through the adoption process and provide modest supports

to adopting families to help manage the extra cost of raising children with histories of abuse and neglect. The expert panel estimated that an annual allowance of \$8,000 to \$15,000 would save taxpayers as much as \$28 million within five years. While the provincial legislature voted unanimously to implement part of these recommendations, there is still much further to go.

PATH 1

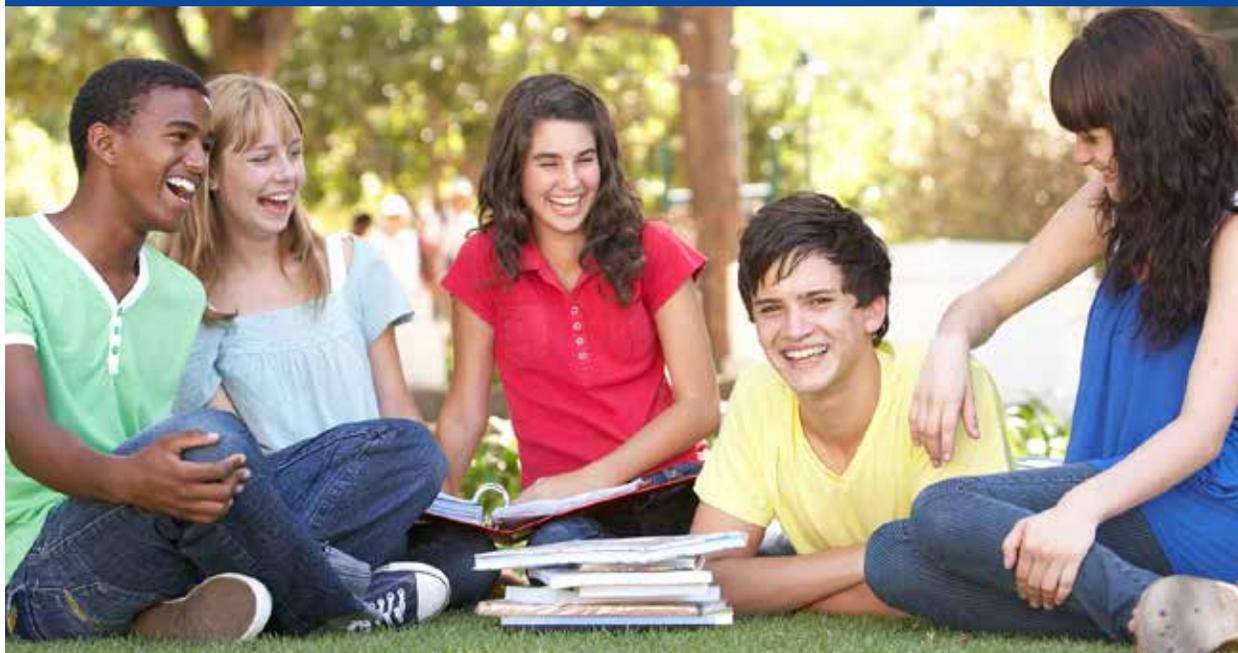
Make better use of the already existing AdoptOntario website by requiring that Children's Aid Societies use the registry. This will ensure that families interested in public adoption have one central place to access all relevant information with the goal of getting more children into loving homes.

PATH 2

Set ambitious targets to increase the number of Crown wards adopted and mandate annual reviews to hold the Children's Aid Societies accountable for each child's progress towards a permanent home.

PATH 3

As recommended by the Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption, provide modest support for parents through the adoption process to help them manage the extra cost of raising children with special needs or histories of abuse or neglect. Given the support would be significantly less than the cost of maintaining a Crown ward in the system, it would not cost the government any money and could even lead to modest savings.



IMPLEMENT PAY-FOR-SUCCESS INITIATIVES

We know that early intervention can have a profoundly positive impact on young lives and reduce the need for more costly interventions in the future. We also know that even core services can fall victim to budget cutbacks. With child welfare budgets stretched thin by existing caseloads, finding funds for early intervention will be challenging in the years ahead.

The emerging concept of social finance is answering that challenge and generating keen interest from non-profits, charities and governments alike. Social finance, which structures a government services contract as a kind of pay-for-performance pact, is currently being explored through pilot projects in the United Kingdom and the United States.

The UK has pioneered an innovative social capital model, the first of its kind in the world, using Social Impact Bonds to finance social programs. Instead of developing a new government-funded program to improve the reintegration of prisoners into society, the Peterborough Prison pilot project relies on non-profit organizations to run the program. Investors provided \$8 million in funding for the non-profits through their purchase of bonds. The program aims to reduce relapse by providing help finding housing and improving education of prisoners during and after incarceration. The more successful the program, the higher the rate

of return on the bonds, which will be paid out of the money saved by government in prison costs.

Bond investors provide capital that pays for the up-front services of the non-profit service provider. Non-profits must hit set benchmarks in order for backers to recoup their investment.

The UK pilot has attracted favourable interest from jurisdictions like the European Union, Australia and the United States, where Michigan, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Virginia and New York are all at various stages of exploring Social Impact Bonds. There is growing momentum around these bonds, which encourage innovation in service delivery and offer incentives for the development of progressive, preventative policy.

New York is actively moving forward on what they refer to as “pay-for-success bonds” in a showcase project

“ ***The government should use pilot projects to assess the usefulness of Social Impact Bonds, which help reduce fiscal pressures on government.*** ”

Source: Drummond Report, page 41

financed by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. The idea is for private investors to sponsor services for at-risk children over a period of years. If the youngsters achieve the goals outlined in the bond, such as getting into college, the government repays the investors capital.

Massachusetts will be the first place in the United States to test the innovative financing model with \$50 million in bonds for two projects: one to house the chronically homeless and another to help youth coming out of the juvenile justice system.

Although these initiatives are still fairly new, the fundamentals – robust data analytics and evidence-driven policy – are familiar. Any program financed this way has to be focused on delivering clear, definable outcomes. Much like ethical investing, many investors want to have a transformational impact in the lives of vulnerable groups, and Social Impact Bonds fill that role. There is an ongoing need for social programs that government is hard-pressed to meet, and the charitable donation sector is flagging in the wake of the recession.

Most importantly, funding for Social Impact Bonds would be both sustainable and scalable. Success breeds success. Non-profits would have the reassurance that – if they achieve social returns – they can go back to the capital markets and raise money again.

There are various areas that are best suited to funding by Social Impact Bonds – chronic homelessness is considered to be a natural fit and increasing kindergarten readiness

among low-income children is another potential program area. In the field of adolescent intensive intervention, programs could be targeted to young people with complex needs and their families, and aimed at reducing family breakdown and consequent entry into care.

Social Impact Bonds have the potential to deepen our understanding about how we are actually improving people’s lives. They provide us a valuable opportunity to engage Ontario’s generous charitable sector in changing the lives of children at risk. We can all work together to ensure that the essential services that government provides are producing their intended outcomes by taking a look at these innovative new initiatives.

The Social Impact Bond model works in a three-step process.

1. Investors provide capital to scale-up a proven social program over 3-5 years to meet specific goals.
 2. Social benefits of the program are linked to positive economic results (e.g. decreased health care costs, lower crime rates, increased employment).
 3. Government pays back investors’ principal and return if specific goals are met.
- Source: Government of Alberta.*

PATH 4

Allow Ontarians to invest in the future success of their community and youth through Social Impact Bonds. The government should use a “pay-for-success” model that only pays out if goals are reached, reducing the burden on taxpayers while improving results for our youth. Children win, investors win and the government wins.

RESTORE FOCUS AND AUTHORITY

According to the current government, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services was created in 2003 to work with other ministries and agencies to place a priority on services specifically for children and youth. But, the vast majority of its funding is transferred to service providers. As a result, the ministry merely adds another layer of bureaucracy.

There's plenty of evidence to show that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services is not performing adequately. It is not in a position to restructure and revitalize the service delivery system or even coordinate an extremely fragmented service network. With the system being so difficult to navigate, the perception is that there is no system at all.

Budget allocations and funding formulas are ineffective, resulting in perverse consequences, financial chaos and ongoing difficulties at the Children's Aid Societies. There is no measurement of success or failure since there are no clear objectives to be achieved. Tracking is limited. There is no consistency of programming across the province. Families have become accustomed to long waiting lists. On and on it goes.

There is, in fact, no one responsible for service coordination. And what's even more problematic is the lack of focus on prevention and early identification of potential problems or challenges. The result has been a perception on the part of service providers and families alike of a Ministry that has never fully understood its mandate or been able to deliver on it.

A better approach would be to combine related programs within core line ministries that directly deliver services to the people of Ontario. Instead of separating children's mental health into a stand-alone government ministry, these mental health services should be provided by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, where programs will receive the appropriate priority and have a budget based on need. Under this approach, the Ministry of Health could establish a children's mental health division.

Early childhood support, such as blindness, low vision and infant hearing, should fall under the Ministry of Health as well.

A children's services division within the Ministry of Community and Social Services should be responsible for services like child protection, adoption, foster care, children's treatment centres, residential homes, autism and physical and developmental disability services, as well as the Ontario Child Benefit and the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Pre-school speech and language, child and baby nutrition programs and Ontario Early Years Centres should be assigned to the Ministry of Education in a new pre-school division. And youth justice programs should be folded into the mandate of the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services or the Attorney General as appropriate.

To ensure a reliable transition and to firmly establish new child-centred policies governing community-based services, cabinet ministers from the Ministries of Health, Education and Community and Social Services should meet regularly to measure and report on progress towards an outcomes-based system. Quality will be improved because child-centred programs will be delivered holistically. We'll get rid of the silos and work together towards a shared goal.

The ministers should be tasked with implementing an integrated systems approach that accomplishes several key goals:

- To make better use of the private sector and not-for-profits to provide competitive services;
- To design policy and funding frameworks and system-wide standards, tools and infrastructure; and,
- To build consistency and equity of service across Ontario.

PATH 5

There is plenty of evidence to show that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services is not performing adequately and is not in a position to restructure and revitalize the service delivery system. It should be dissolved and its core functions reassigned to other existing portfolios with appropriate expertise. Ministers with overlapping responsibility for children and youth should meet regularly to measure performance and evidence-based outcomes.

While today's children are born with their feet planted firmly in the twenty-first century, the agencies tasked with protecting them are still anchored in the twentieth.

Child protection in Ontario is provided through a community-based system that evolved out of historical Children's Aid Societies. Those organizations were developed a century ago to protect children from harm. Today they are expected to broker a broad spectrum of services to support the well-being of children while still meeting their protective mandate.

The evolution of Ontario's Children's Aid Societies into a case-coordination agency for local services has had a negative impact on their ability to fulfill their core mandate. Without clear direction from government, Children's Aid Societies simply can't run front-line care effectively and act as primary service coordinators. Child protection should be integrated with other core services for children and youth.

We think Ontario should have a streamlined, modernized system. One solution is to focus on integrating and digitizing existing local services and working with local providers in training local assessment and intake staff. To accomplish this goal, the government must mandate the Children's Aid Societies to create a triage process – assessments that allow individuals to be streamed

into appropriate and effective programs – and an online catalogue of core local or regional services. Ideally, community services would also be clustered under one roof. Local coordination would vastly improve access to the entire suite of services, including mental health, children's aid, training and education supports, youth justice, autism services, rehabilitation and respite care.

Our child-centred model also envisions a unique user ID for every child, with robust privacy protections, so his or her history of care is accessible to service providers across the province. This would enrich quality of care and prevent duplication and runaround. For example, when children and youth move, they won't have to begin the assessment process over again.

Effective coordination relies on dedicated case tracking and well-defined outcome metrics. High school graduation would be a crucial measurement of success in this context, but we wouldn't stop there.

We intend to place children in safe, permanent homes with an adoptive family or their own relatives. From that foundation, they can grow up to be healthy, productive adults. Progress of children in the system should be monitored with a particular emphasis on transition to adulthood.

PATH 6

Lack of communication between ministries and service providers makes it difficult for parents to navigate the system and has become a common source of frustration. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should place greater emphasis on service integration and case coordination in order to make the system more efficient and user-friendly. A unique user ID for every child, with robust privacy protections, will ensure case histories are accessible and children's progress is trackable and not duplicated.

PROMOTE FAIRNESS IN THE FUNDING OF CHILDREN’S AID SOCIETIES

Though they have made notable strides over the years, Ontario’s Children’s Aid Societies are also shackled to a funding model that hasn’t kept pace with current thinking.

The province’s 46 Children’s Aid Societies are not designed to provide an integrated provincial system of child welfare services. The largest has 800 staff; the smallest has only 30. The result is uneven levels of specialization and varied outcomes across the province, with some Children’s Aid Societies sorely lacking in expertise and management capacity.

The government’s current funding model is widely seen as flawed. It’s not only overly complicated, but it rewards volume increases rather than results, and has made it more difficult for the Children’s Aid Societies to adapt to budget constraints. Experts agree that funding must be based on the population served, weighted by local cost drivers and historic patterns of usage.

A “duty-to-cooperate” model has been adopted in the United Kingdom. This places an expectation on all agencies to invest and improve children’s outcomes, and rewards these actions with financial and performance incentives.

This model includes a “relative needs formula” that reflects the demographic, geographic and social characteristics of each area. Local poverty rates, unemployment levels and past usage would all be factored in. The formula is designed to reflect the

relative needs of individual local authorities in providing services. It’s founded on a basic amount per capita with additional allocations to reflect local circumstances.

This type of modified, population-based approach to funding local services would help with service delivery of an equivalent quality across very different regions in Ontario.

PATH 7

The current funding formula is drastically flawed. It threatens quality care because it’s based on the number of children in the system and is a disincentive to moving the child out into a more permanent and promising situation. Revise the funding model for Children’s Aid Societies to reward performance and allow them to deliver greater value for money.

A Four-Tiered Strategy for Sustainable Child Welfare

A modernized child welfare system providing integrated child-focused services fully aligned with the broader network of children’s services to improve outcomes for children and youth.

▲ ▲ ▲ ▲
Advance broader integration of services for vulnerable children and families.

- ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲
- 1) Reconfigure the organization of CAS structures and service delivery.**
 - 2) Change the approach to funding child welfare.**
 - 3) Implement a new approach to accountability and system management.**
 - 4) Strengthen and improve service delivery.**

Source: Interim Report of the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare

DEFINE, MEASURE AND REWARD SUCCESS

Better information helps government make better decisions. Heightened accountability boosts public trust. Despite those incentives, accountability is often an afterthought. It can also be subjective: accountable for what, exactly?

Accountability for program success or failure should move away from performance and compliance to a new, clearly articulated framework of child-centred outcomes in order to ensure all service providers are working towards shared goals.

System-wide goals for youth should include a range of objectives, from improved access to services and employment opportunities to better educational and mental health outcomes.

Accountability requires clear objectives and a monitoring system. The British model makes use of inspections. Inspectors examine the strengths and weaknesses of a particular service, as well as the ability of services to produce expected outcomes. This provides a snapshot of the organization's performance.

Next, the inspector develops an analysis of the organization's prospects for improvement. A simple three-star rating is used and results are on public record. Accountability is then tied to consequences

based on the notion of earned autonomy. Government intervention occurs in inverse proportion to risk. For example, a star rating of zero would result in closer scrutiny and support, while a three-star rating would be an opportunity for the service provider to promote best practices more widely and reduce the frequency of inspections.

Inspections and star ratings may seem nostalgic in the digital age. But once goals and measurement criteria are established, assessments are best conducted by real people, in real time. An inspection and rating system would inject an element of healthy competition into the system, support continuous improvement and provide a way of recognizing and rewarding excellence.

Accountability is at the heart of any successful enterprise. It answers the question, "Are we doing a good job?" It's also important in attracting and retaining the highly skilled workers needed to achieve the best results.

PATH 8

Measure program achievement based on the success of the child, not simply the number of children in care. Adopt an accountability framework tied to program outcomes rather than inputs and reward exceptional performance. Accountability would be tied to consequences and determined by an inspection and rating system. This would encourage healthy competition in the system and provide a way to recognize excellence.

CLOSE THE GAPS IN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

It's hard to accept that suicide is the second leading cause of death, after car accidents, among youth aged 10 to 24. Universities are struggling to cope with long waiting lists for counseling while fast-tracking suicide prevention programs.

Mental illness, including depression and anxiety, affects 20 per cent of teenagers before age 18. That's around half a million young Ontarians wrestling with these issues everyday.

Given these stakes, it's even harder to accept that mental health services are every bit as fragmented and difficult to access as other services for children and youth. Ontario PC Deputy Leader Christine Elliott will be releasing a *Paths to Prosperity* white paper on health care in the new year, and it will include more on this topic. For now, here is a brief comment on

pressed to access mental health services for her child.

Mental health issues often emerge in adolescence and intensify in early adulthood. Early intervention and treatment is desperately needed. Left untreated, serious, mostly chronic disorders will have substantial impact on a young person's development and ability to cope with daily life.

These facts are well-established, but don't seem to register. Mental health issues are growing exponentially, and yet there are not enough services to meet existing

Stakeholders and experts say that in Ontario there is really no such thing as a mental health 'system.' It has been referred to by Dr. Stan Kucher, co-author of a 2010 Report for the Mental Health Commission of Canada, as 'a non-system of non-care' - fragmented and difficult to access at best.

accessibility and how the system measures up to our benchmark of early intervention and prevention.

demand. Only one in five children are even being treated. They deserve better, and we need to do more.

Mental health services are scattered across several ministries and are provided by hundreds of community agencies in various care settings with a wide variation in standard and accessibility. Waiting lists are long and application procedures obscure. Even a parent used to navigating the bureaucratic maze would be hard-

Frontline providers of services to children and youth should be trained in identifying mental health issues and early intervention. Teachers, child care workers, youth justice workers, sports coaches and young people themselves should all be educated about mental illness and be able to recognize the symptoms.

PATH 9

The total lifetime cost of caring for one person with untreated mental illness has been estimated at \$1.5 million. Make early identification and intervention of young peoples' mental health issues a top priority by ensuring that appropriate training is provided to frontline child-care workers and make mental health literacy a core competency for all children and youth professionals.

IMPROVE SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Parents of severely disabled children are told the only way to get their kids the 24/7 care they need is to turn them over to a Children’s Aid Society. An exhausted mother, out of money and options to care for her severely autistic teenage son at home, is told to drop him off at a homeless shelter. In another case, a house fire claims the life of an 18-year-old girl diagnosed with both mental illness and an intellectual disability. She was living in a group home but asked to leave to make space for another person, and was in an unsupervised rented house with a group of her peers when she died.

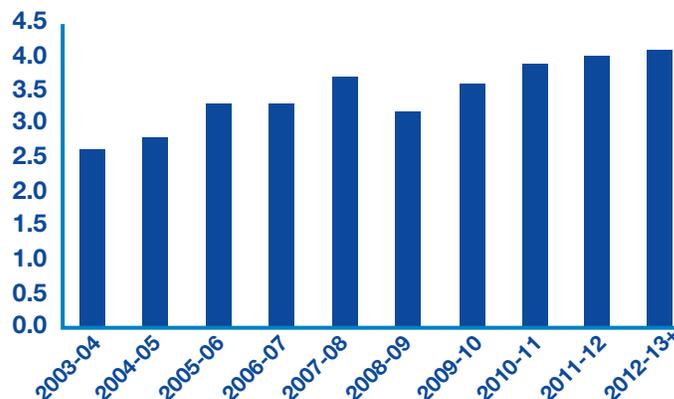
These are all real cases drawn from the headlines in recent years, and they are the people the system should be designed to help.

Despite significant spending increases, Ontario has an unprecedented deficit of care for young Ontarians with intellectual and physical disabilities. Some 65,000 kids have special needs and approximately 60 per cent of those have problems with a developmental function or autism. The province’s waiting list for treatment contains a staggering 12,000 names, and the number of Ontarians with autism spectrum conditions continues to rise across all groups in society. In Toronto, 100 people have been on the waiting list for 20 years. Enough is enough.

As they grow older, parents who have shouldered the responsibility for their adult children with disabilities

“ Despite significant spending increases, Ontario has an unprecedented deficit of care for young Ontarians with intellectual and physical disabilities. ”

**Ministry of Children and Youth Services
Total Expenditures (\$ billions)**



Source: Various Ontario Budget documents and the Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review – 2012. * Current Outlook.

find it more difficult to care for them. Those parents need to know that society, through the programs of the Ontario government, will properly care for their kids who are incapable of living without supports.

Our first priority would be ensuring that parents needing respite care or a live-in placement for their child are able to access that service easily and directly. Currently, parents are forced to surrender their child with special needs to a Children's Aid Society to access live-in services. These are devoted and loving parents who are no longer able to cope with the financial and emotional demands of caring for their child at home. We will ensure they are supported through this difficult transition.

We see no evidence to suggest that the Community Care Access Centre has the expertise to broker these services. There is enough pediatric expertise in school boards and children's treatment centers, but we must do a far better job coordinating services to children with multiple special needs.

Ontario families need to know where to find the services they require. We would create a portal where all services could be accessed and we would develop a comprehensive developmental services strategy for those with a dual diagnosis of mental illness and intellectual disability.

We must also lay strong foundations on which youth can build success. Work and training opportunities, social and recreational opportunities, meaningful day programs in life skills and affordable housing are all needed. Without these supports, the transition from childhood to adulthood can be turbulent.

We can do better without spending a dollar more. Increased spending by the current government in this area has had no impact on outcomes because high costs are driven by inefficient system design and excessive bureaucracy.

All young Ontarians need help to achieve independence, but vulnerable youth need more than most. Access to group homes and job training programs is critical if we are to help them live fulfilling lives and reach their fullest potential. Yet special needs children and youth have had to contend with an out-of-date system that frustrates attempts at access. It is in urgent need of program delivery improvements, improved integration, coordination and equality of access across the province.

PATH 10

Make every effort to keep children with their loving parents. Create a mechanism to ensure that parents can easily access live-in placement or respite care for special-needs kids without having to give their children up as Crown wards.

PATH 11

Create a single online reference tool that lists all services, programs and professional care available for disabled children and youth and their families, and publicize it. The tool can be integrated into a wide variety of information hubs, such as libraries, doctors' offices and offices of Members of Provincial Parliament.

CONCLUSION

Most parents are familiar with sleepless hours spent worrying about their children: are they healthy and happy? Are they doing well in school? Have I done enough to prepare them for the world in which they'll grow up?

Ontario's leaders should be just as concerned about whether we are really giving our all for the betterment of all our children, and providing them with the best chance at a full life.

The choices we make about young Ontarians in the areas of social services, health and education have enormous and lasting impacts upon the future of the province itself. Children embody our hope for a brighter tomorrow. When we fail them we undermine our own dreams for a better world.

The truest measure of a civilized society is the way it cares for its most vulnerable citizens. We have to do more than ask children and young adults in need to take a number and get in line. This makes them feel as if they're nothing more than an abstract case file and is both an insult to their dignity and an indictment of an outdated way of thinking.

We can do better without spending a dollar more. Increased spending by the current government in this area has had no impact on outcomes because high costs are driven by inefficient system design and excessive bureaucracy.

We can reduce the bureaucratic layers and barriers between ministries and open the way for a more child-centred system offering a higher quality of care. Technology can be better used to enrich treatment and enhance individuals' experience within the sector. Improved communication and coordination between ministries and service providers will elevate program performance and make the system more compassionate and user-friendly.

We must strive to identify mental illness as early as possible and make mental health literacy common to all children and youth professionals. We will work harder to keep children with their parents. Failing that, we must do more to place children with forever families. We will give these children the tools they need to chart independent lives.

Throughout, we will benchmark for vastly improved outcomes, measuring the merit of programs by the success of the child, not simply the number of children

in care. We should set ambitious targets to increase the number of Crown wards adopted, holding the Children's Aid Societies accountable for each child's progress towards a permanent home and rewarding exceptional performance where appropriate.

We should investigate the transformative potential of social capital, but also acknowledge that real progress often comes from seeing clearly, thinking creatively and asking critical questions rather than believing that funding alone is a solution.

We welcome frank discussion about the choices government must make as it moves ahead. But words alone will not answer this sector's serious shortcomings. It is not enough to see the flaw; it is important to apply a remedy. Action is everything, and the time for meaningful change is now.

PATHS TO PROSPERITY

A FRESH START FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

PATH 1

Make better use of the already existing AdoptOntario website by requiring that Children's Aid Societies use the registry. This will ensure that families interested in public adoption have one central place to access all relevant information with the goal of getting more children into loving homes.

PATH 2

Set ambitious targets to increase the number of Crown wards adopted and mandate annual reviews to hold the Children's Aid Societies accountable for each child's progress towards a permanent home.

PATH 3

As recommended by the Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption, provide modest support for parents through the adoption process to help them manage the extra cost of raising children with special needs or histories of abuse or neglect. Given the support would be significantly less than the cost of maintaining a Crown ward in the system, it would not cost the government any money and could even lead to modest savings.

PATH 4

Allow Ontarians to invest in the future success of their community and youth through Social Impact Bonds. The government should use a "pay-for-success" model that only pays out if goals are reached, reducing the burden on taxpayers while improving results for our youth. Children win, investors win and the government wins.

PATH 5

There is plenty of evidence to show that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services is not performing adequately and is not in a position to restructure and revitalize the service delivery system. It should be dissolved and its core functions reassigned to other existing portfolios with appropriate expertise. Ministers with overlapping responsibility for children and youth should meet regularly to measure performance and evidence-based outcomes.

PATH 6

Lack of communication between ministries and service providers makes it difficult for parents to navigate the system and has become a common source of frustration. The Ministry of Community and Social Services should place greater emphasis on service integration and case coordination in order to make the system more efficient and user-friendly. A unique user ID for every child, with robust privacy protections, will ensure case histories are accessible and children's progress is trackable and not duplicated.

PATH 7

The current funding formula is drastically flawed. It threatens quality care because it's based on the number of children in the system and is a disincentive to moving the child out into a more permanent and promising situation. Revise the funding model for Children's Aid Societies to reward performance and allow them to deliver greater value for money.

PATH 8

Measure program achievement based on the success of the child, not simply the number of children in care. Adopt an accountability framework tied to program outcomes rather than inputs and reward exceptional performance. Accountability would be tied to consequences and determined by an inspection and rating system. This would encourage healthy competition in the system and provide a way to recognize excellence.

PATH 9

The total lifetime cost of caring for one person with untreated mental illness has been estimated at \$1.5 million. Make early identification and intervention of young peoples' mental health issues a top priority by ensuring that appropriate training is provided to frontline child-care workers and make mental health literacy a core competency for all children and youth professionals.

PATH 10

Make every effort to keep children with their loving parents. Create a mechanism to ensure that parents can easily access live-in placement or respite care for special-needs kids without having to give their children up as Crown wards.

PATH 11

Create a single online reference tool that lists all services, programs and professional care available for disabled children and youth and their families, and publicize it. The tool can be integrated into a wide variety of information hubs, such as libraries, doctors' offices and offices of Members of Provincial Parliament.

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