

For Immediate Release
October 14, 2009

Ontario's most vulnerable children to be affected by government cut-backs

Children's Aid Societies receive less funding to provide services to children

TORONTO – Ontario's most vulnerable children and families, served by their local Children's Aid Societies (CASs), will experience the impact of funding cuts this fiscal year, unless the government honours its commitment to fund mandated services.

Under the *Child and Family Services Act*, Ontario's Children's Aid Societies have a unique mandate to protect children; investigate allegations of child abuse and neglect; provide guidance, care, prevention and adoption services.

Forty-nine CASs face overall funding shortfalls of \$67 million, greatly affecting their capacity to deliver the services required by legislation. In addition to historic shortfalls not fully covered by the province, child protection services are receiving \$23 million less than last year but are expected to deliver the same level of mandated service. CASs have a statutory obligation to protect children and cannot waitlist or ration services when the government does not fulfill its statutory obligations.

CASs face shortfalls of up to 30% of costs. The agencies most severely affected include:

- York Region Children's Aid Society \$7.3 million (16.2%)
- Children's Aid Society of Simcoe County \$5.2 million (13%)
- London-Middlesex Children's Aid Society \$3.9 million (6%)
- Durham Children's Aid Society \$3.9 million (5.2%)
- Tikinagan Children & Family Services \$3.9 million (9.2%)
- Payukotayno James & Hudson Bay Family Services \$3.7 million (30.4%)
- Niagara Family and Children's Services \$2.9 million (7.3%)
- Dilico Anishinabek Family Care \$2.7 million (10%)
- Algoma Children's Aid Society \$2.6 million (11.5%)
- Family & Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County \$2.1 million (10%)
- Native Child and Family Services of Toronto \$1.5 million (9.5%)

Agencies in northern Ontario have received some of the largest cutbacks and are facing a collective shortfall of \$16.9 million. Three agencies serving First Nations and Aboriginal communities in the north (Tikinagan, Dilico and Payukotano) face shortfalls of 9 to 30% of their budget. These agencies work with the most high-risk, challenged communities in Ontario and are being forced to limit services due to funding cut-backs.

In all areas of the province, agencies are contemplating cuts to core services including abuse prevention programs; programs to strengthen families; counselling services for families in crisis; court-ordered visits to children in foster and residential care; and collaborative programs with community partners to help families before they are in crisis.

Without sufficient funding, government is forcing CASs to break the rules for child abuse investigation and protection. For example, CASs will have difficulty responding to high-risk child abuse allegations within the mandated timelines; CASs will not be able to meet minimum mandatory standards of seeing

children every month; case workers will be assessing the safety and well-being of children less frequently; children will not be able to visit their biological families as often since CASs will not be able to afford costs of court-ordered access visits.

“The government has said there is no more money for child welfare but services to protect children from abuse are not optional or subject to arbitrary reductions,” said Jeanette Lewis, Executive Director of the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS). “According to the *Child and Family Services Act*, CASs must deliver child protection services, on behalf of the Government of Ontario, to vulnerable children and their families. Many agencies have gone into debt to pay for investigations, residential care, support and counselling for children. Boards should not have to use credit to deliver the government’s services.”

This year, many child welfare agencies have experienced increased child protection caseloads as families struggle with the current economic crisis, high levels of unemployment and increased reliance on Ontario Works. Child welfare agencies are required to provide services to children in need 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Some agencies report that by November they will not have the funds necessary to provide services to investigate abuse and neglect to children. Other agencies will run out of money in January 2010.

“The government has made a choice to put vulnerable children at risk during a recession. People are losing jobs, and this means families are losing their homes and parents in high stress situations are unable to provide for their children, yet child protection services are cut,” said Lewis.

The issue here is two-fold; there is insufficient funding for child protection services, and the complex funding model, used by the government to fund CASs, does not work equally across all parts of the province.

“The funding cut-backs threaten to destabilize the improvements we have made to child protection services and better outcomes for children and families we have achieved over the last few years,” said Lewis. “Boards of Directors and management are put in the position of having to compromise service to meet budget requirements. As the voice of child welfare, OACAS takes the position that the safety of children is not negotiable.”

For more information, visit www.oacas.org.

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Pour diffusion immédiate

14 octobre 2009

Les enfants les plus vulnérables de l'Ontario seront affectés par les compressions budgétaires du gouvernement

Les Sociétés de l'aide à l'enfance reçoivent dorénavant moins de financement pour les services aux enfants.

TORONTO – À moins que le gouvernement ne renouvelle son engagement à financer les services offerts aux enfants, tout porte à croire que les enfants les plus vulnérables de l'Ontario ainsi que les familles recevant des services de leur Société de l'aide à l'enfance (SAE) subiront l'impact de lourdes compressions financières.

En vertu de la *Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille*, les Sociétés de l'aide à l'enfance de l'Ontario disposent d'un mandat unique pour protéger les enfants; enquêter sur les allégations de maltraitance et de négligence et offrir des conseils, des soins, des services de prévention et d'adoption.

Quarante-neuf SAE souffrent actuellement d'une pénurie de financement totalisant 67 millions \$, ce qui affecte considérablement leur capacité à fournir les services requis par la législation. En plus d'une insuffisance historique de financement, les services de protection des enfants reçoivent 23 millions de moins que l'an dernier, alors qu'ils doivent maintenir le même niveau de services. Les SAE ont une obligation légale de protéger les enfants et ne peuvent pas les inscrire sur une liste d'attente ou rationner leurs services lorsque le gouvernement ne remplit pas ses obligations statutaires.

Les SAE font face à une pénurie qui va jusqu'à 30% de leurs subventions. Les agences les plus durement touchées sont:

- Société de l'aide à l'enfance de la région de York / 7,3 millions \$ (16,2%)
- Société de l'aide à l'enfance de Simcoe County / 5,2 millions \$ (13%)
- Société de l'aide à l'enfance de Loudon-Middlesex / 3,9 millions \$ (6%)
- Société de l'aide à l'enfance de Durham / 3,9 millions \$ (5,2%)
- Services aux enfants et à la famille de Tikinagan / 3,9 millions \$ (9,2%)
- Services à la famille de Payukotayno, Baies James et d'Hudson / 3,7 millions \$ (30,4%)
- Services à l'enfance et à la famille de Niagara / 2,9 millions \$ (7,3%)
- Soins à la famille Dilico Anishinabek / 2,7 millions \$ (10%)
- Société de l'aide à l'enfance de Algoma / 2,6 millions \$ (11,5%)
- Services à l'enfance et à la famille de Guelph et Wellington County / 2,1 millions \$ (10%)
- Native Child and Family Services of Toronto / 1,5 million \$ (9,5%)

Les agences du nord de l'Ontario subissent certaines des plus importantes réductions et sont confrontées à un déficit collectif de 16,9 millions de dollars. Trois organismes desservant les Premières nations et les communautés autochtones du nord (Tikinagan, Dilico et Payukotano)

souffrent d'une pénurie budgétaire variant entre 9% et 30%. Ces organismes travaillent avec les communautés les plus à risque et les plus vulnérables, et se voient forcés de limiter leurs services.

Dans toutes les régions de la province, les organismes envisagent des réductions de services de base dans les programmes de prévention de la violence, les programmes visant à renforcer les familles, les services de thérapie pour les familles en crise, les visites aux enfants en famille d'accueil et en soin résidentiel ordonnées par le tribunal, et les programmes de collaborations avec des partenaires communautaires pour les familles avant qu'elles ne se retrouvent en situation de crise.

Sans un financement suffisant, le gouvernement contraint les SAE à déroger des règles en ce qui a trait à la protection des enfants et aux enquêtes sur la maltraitance. Les SAE auront du mal à répondre aux allégations d'abus graves contre les enfants dans les délais prescrits; les SAE ne seront pas en mesure de répondre aux normes minimales obligatoires voulant qu'elles rencontrent les enfants tous les mois; les intervenants ne pourront pas évaluer la sécurité et le bien-être des enfants aussi fréquemment, et les enfants ne seront pas en mesure de visiter leur famille biologique, puisque les SAE ne pourront pas payer les frais de visite ordonnées par le tribunal.

«Le gouvernement affirme qu'il n'y a plus d'argent pour le bien-être des enfants, mais les services de protection pour les enfants victimes de violence ne doivent pas être considérés comme facultatifs ou soumis à des réductions arbitraires», a déclaré Jeannette Lewis, directrice exécutive de l'Association ontarienne des Sociétés de l'aide à l'enfance. «Selon le *Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille* et au nom du gouvernement de l'Ontario, les SAE doivent fournir des services de protection de l'enfance aux enfants vulnérables ainsi qu'à leur famille. De nombreux organismes se sont endettés pour payer les soins résidentiels, de soutien et de thérapie pour les enfants. Les conseils ne devraient pas avoir à utiliser le crédit pour pouvoir offrir des services gouvernementaux.»

Cette année, alors que les familles sont aux prises avec la crise économique, que les niveaux de chômage sont élevés et que le recours à *Ontario au travail* est accru, de nombreuses agences de protection de l'enfance ont enregistré une hausse du nombre de cas de protection. Les organismes de protection de l'enfance sont tenus de fournir des services aux enfants dans le besoin 24 heures par jour, 365 jours par année.

Certains organismes rapportent qu'à partir du mois de novembre, ils n'auront pas les fonds nécessaires pour fournir des services d'enquête sur la maltraitance faite aux enfants. D'autres agences se retrouveront sans le sou en janvier 2010.

«Le gouvernement a fait le choix de mettre les enfants vulnérables en situation de risque au cours de la récession. Les gens perdent leur emploi, ce qui signifie que les familles perdent leur maison et que les parents doivent gérer un niveau de stress élevé et deviennent incapables de subvenir aux besoins de leurs enfants. Et pourtant, les services de protection de l'enfance sont coupés», déplore Lewis.

La problématique est double: il y a insuffisance de fonds pour les services de protection de l'enfance, et le modèle de financement complexe utilisé par les SAE ne fonctionne pas de

manière égale dans toutes les régions de la province.

«Les coupures menacent de nuire aux améliorations que nous avons apportés aux services de protection de l'enfance de même qu'à nos accomplissements des dernières années», affirme Lewis. «Les conseils d'administration et de gestion doivent prendre des décisions difficiles afin de satisfaire les besoins budgétaires. Puisqu'elle doit parler au nom des enfants, l'AOSAE prend position en affirmant que la sécurité des jeunes n'est pas négociable.»

Pour plus d'information, visitez le www.oacas.org

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OU Contactez votre SAE locale.
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STATUTORY OBLIGATIONS

Children's Aid Societies are legislated to perform certain functions under the provisions of Section 15 of the *Child and Family Services Act* (CFSA). The mandate of Children's Aid Societies as described in this section of the CFSA includes the following

- to investigate allegations that children are in need of protection;
- to protect children;
- to provide guidance for protecting children and for the prevention of circumstances requiring the protection of children; and
- to provide care for children assigned to its care under this Act;
- provide adoption services.

While the investigative functions are well known, many people, including government have little understanding of the role that CASs play in “prevention of circumstances requiring the protection of children.” This is a statutory function, and is crucial to help keep families together.

Ontario's Children's Aid societies are the only agencies that have a statutory responsibility to protect children from harm, abuse and neglect and, unlike other sectors, cannot reduce or stop service, turn children away or maintain waiting lists for protection services when funding is insufficient. Agencies must fulfill their statutory obligation and respond when a child or family is in need or in crisis. The reality of child welfare is that needs of a community change and can be unpredictable, affecting if and what type of service a child might require from a CAS.

FUNDING SHORTFALLS

In an unprecedented move, this year 37 CASs have requested a Ministerial Review of their funding.

Some of the agencies most severely affected include:

- York Region Children's Aid Society \$7.3 million (16.2%)
- Children's Aid Society of Simcoe County \$5.2 million (13%)
- London-Middlesex Children's Aid Society \$3.9 million (6%)
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SYSTEM GROWTH AND BETTER OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

The child welfare system has experienced two major sets of changes over the past 12 years. As a result, and with the support of government, better outcomes for children are being realized.

The government is now expressing concern about increased costs over the last decade. In fact the growth in the system was anticipated and planned. The investments in child welfare have increased

substantially due to two major reforms **spearheaded by government**: The Child Welfare Reform (1997-2000) and the Child Welfare Transformation (2006 and ongoing). Both reforms required more investments into the system for improved safety and better outcomes for children.

The **Child Welfare Reform** changed and expanded the definition of “child in need of protection”, which increased the number of children brought into care. Under new legislation, more children at risk were now “in need of protection” by the CAS. The legislation was changed to including:

- Addition of chronic neglect to the definition of a child in need of protection
- Emotional abuse considered as a child protection concern
- Children at risk of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect
- Increased requirements for public and professional reporting of child abuse and neglect; and sanctions for not reporting
- Introduction of standardized eligibility and risk assessment tools in all CASs

As a result of these changes, it was anticipated that the number of children and families served would increase. The changes were proclaimed in 2000, and it was known that it would take the field a few years to implement them – including hiring new staff to take on new functions and serve all eligible cases.

Since 2006, a second reform, better known as the **Child Welfare Transformation**, was implemented by the government. This plan was about providing safe, stable, family-centered options for children by keeping children safe with biological and kin families, and finding adoptive families when necessary. The model requires CASs to increase the time staff members spend with families and community partners to develop plans which balance “family” with safety. Some of the changes are:

- a shift from intrusive investigative approaches to balancing risk with supporting families, which is a much more labor intensive service
- much more time spent searching for kin who may be interested in helping to care for the child
- mandatory use of alternate dispute resolution prior to using court processes
- a need for a higher number of qualified and skilled staff who can work with complex families
- a large increase in mandatory service and administrative requirements, policies, directives, regulations and standards related to services including over 200 reporting requirements, involving more casework and paperwork

Ontario is now beginning to experience the anticipated outcomes of this new agenda. Since 2004/05:

- admissions of children into CASs care have decreased by 18%
- the number of children in the care of CASs has decreased by 5%
- adoptions have increased by 29%

It is important to note that some of the positive directions to keep the children “out of care” are not reflected in the volume statistics used by the government, hence the caseload numbers are under-reported and CASs are not fully funded to do this work.

ACCOUNTABILITY & EFFICIENCY

Ontario’s Children’s Aid Societies are accountable and efficient.

In addition to the reviews conducted by the Ministry, many other mechanisms are in place to supervise the work done by agencies, including, but not limited to, the Ministry's accountability structure (system, agency and case reviews), the Family Court system, the Child and Family Services Review Board, the Office of Ontario's Auditor General, the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, and the Office of the Coroner.

The Ministry of Children's Services own *Child Welfare Program Evaluation, Nov. 2003* states that "there is no jurisdiction in North America that is more cost-effective than Ontario".