



Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies

The voice of child welfare in Ontario

Pre-Budget Consultation

Submission to the Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs

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Executive Summary

The child welfare system in 2016 continued with the transformative work of system-building and being optimally structured so as to respond most effectively to the needs of children, youth and families in Ontario. We are working in five main areas to achieve this, including ensuring that:

- services are based on best practices, promote equity of outcomes and are culturally responsive;
- human resources are of the highest standard of competence and expertise;
- governance mechanisms for societies are functioning effectively;
- quality of services are continuously improved through evidence-informed decision-making;
- the child welfare system is optimally structured to enable effective service delivery.

Many of the initiatives described in this submission are progressing in partnership with government. Additionally, the sector acknowledges new proposed legislation that would raise the age of protection to 18, which is consistent with a long-time sector advocacy position.

There is still much additional work to be done and we request funding to make progress on these areas in the next year. Recommendations are as below.

1. **Increase the overall Child Welfare Funding Envelope.** The child welfare funding envelope has been fixed for six years. With additional demands from government on CASs through Quality Improvement Plans, Performance Indicators as well as the proposed statutory increase in the age of protection, more funding is required to ensure agencies can deliver services sustainably.
2. **Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) Resources.** Costs for implementation and sustainment of this crucial enterprise system have been significantly higher than predicted. Enhanced funding to improve deployment and ongoing sustainment of CPIN in agencies across the province, including fixes to reporting and system customization.
3. **Support for Indigenous CASs.** Government should continue the process of restoring jurisdiction for child welfare in Indigenous communities to Indigenous CASs, provide for child welfare recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report and support Indigenous CASs with the infrastructure and funding to provide culturally appropriate services.
4. **Resources for the Wider Children's Services Sector.** Government needs to robustly support the wider children's services sector including children's mental health, adult mental health, domestic violence and addictions treatment, all of which are essential to keeping children safe in their homes.
5. **Support for Reconfiguration.** Resources are required to support the future implementation of a Shared Services Program for back office functions in child welfare as well as any amalgamations in the sector.

History

The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) is a member organization, representing 44 of the 47 Children's Aid Societies (CASs) in Ontario. OACAS is the "*voice of child welfare in Ontario, dedicated to providing leadership for the achievement of excellence in the protection of children and in the promotion of their well-being within their families and communities.*"

Since 1912, OACAS has demonstrated a history of successful advocacy, member services and public education on behalf of its member agencies, as well as the children and families that are served by CASs in Ontario. The strength of OACAS lies in the commitment and participation of its membership in Ontario.

Mandate

Children's Aid Societies provide mandatory and critical services. They are legislated to perform certain functions under the provisions of Section 15 of the *Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)*¹. The mandate of CASs, as described in this section of the *CFSA*, includes the following functions:

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

This legislation and the supporting regulations, directives and standards prescribe specific and detailed requirements for what services CASs must provide, how they must provide these services, including services to Indigenous children and families and French language services, as well as the timelines in which these mandatory services must be provided.

CASs provide critical and essential services which are a safety net for the most vulnerable members of our society – infants, children and youth who are at risk of or are experiencing physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse, neglect or abandonment. CASs are mandated to intervene if a caregiver cannot adequately care for or provide for a child.

Children's Aid Societies protect and safeguard most children while they remain with their families in the community. This family-based support takes the form of intensive assessments and service plans, contacts with numerous other professionals and service providers, as well as ongoing supervision of the child while he/she remains in the family home. These are complex cases in which child protection concerns have been verified and there are risks of, or actual, abuse and

¹ Child and Family Services Act R.S.O 1990. Part III Section 15

neglect. As such, the work must be performed by skilled, qualified child welfare staff. Serving these children in the context of the home – when it is safe to do so – is consistent with the legislative and regulatory mandate and with the policy direction of government.

Commitment to Children, Youth and Families in Ontario

Many children's aid societies in Ontario have been providing services to children and families for over 100 years. Societies have evolved programs and services to meet the changing needs of their local communities.

This past year, OACAS member societies across the province renewed their commitment to work together and with other community resources to create a child welfare system so as to achieve the best outcomes for all children, youth and families in Ontario.

This commitment means that all children's aid societies are working together provincially to strive to continuously improve outcomes of safety, well-being and permanence for children, youth and families, while being accountable and transparent to Ontarians.

In practice, the improvements that continue to be made ensure children, youth and families in Ontario:

- Are treated with respect and supported with culturally relevant practice;
- Have an equitable chance at a successful outcome;
- Are served by competent, well-trained professionals who are skilled at supporting people to heal and grow through challenging experiences
- Can trust that agencies are accountable for their public resources, transparent about their performance, and willing to make changes to ensure successful outcomes

The sector is engaging in a number of projects provincially, in addition to the work being done locally, in order to help accomplish this goal and reduce fragmentation in the sector. These projects are best summarized in five categories:

1. **Service Delivery.** To ensure that services are culturally responsive and promote equity of outcomes through best practices.
2. **Human Resources.** To ensure high standards for the competence and expertise of management and workers across the province.
3. **Governance.** To ensure governance mechanisms for societies are functioning effectively.
4. **Data Gathering and Analysis.** To ensure quality of services are improved continuously through evidence-informed decision-making.
5. **Operations.** To ensure that the child welfare system is optimally structured to enable effective service delivery.

The efforts being made provincially in each of these categories is described in more detail below.

Service Delivery

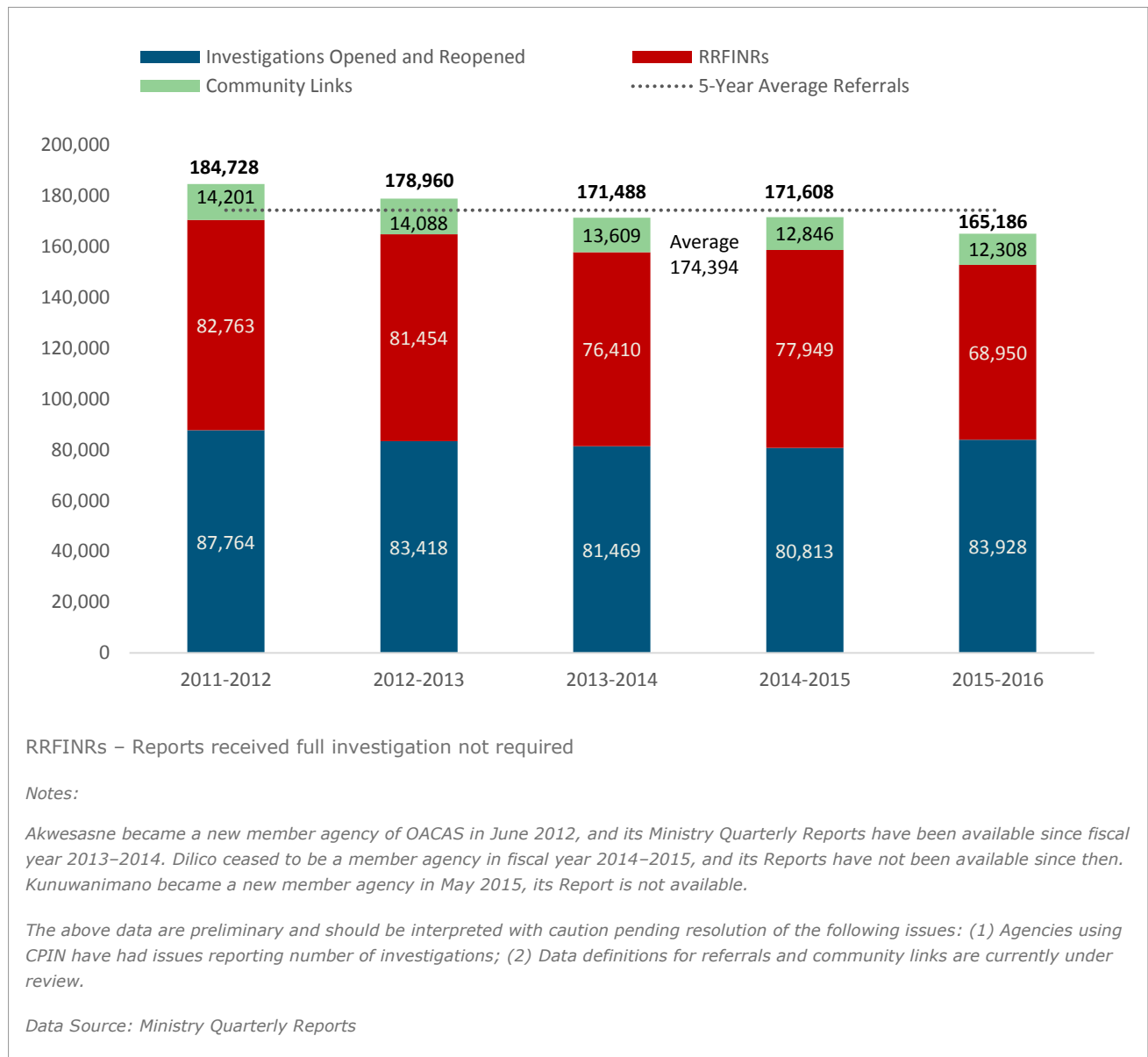
Children's aid societies are mandated to provide many services to children, youth and families in communities in Ontario as described in the section above. Our service related data are shown below. A caveat is required with respect to volume data as agencies that are on CPIN are have been unable to pull accurate, consistent data for many service volume reports due to the limitations of the reporting functionality of the system. These numbers are therefore to be interpreted with caution, as they are preliminary.

Child Welfare Service Trends

Child Protection Services

As shown in Figure 1 below, in 2015-16, agencies received over 165,000 calls, which is slightly less than 2014-15 however the veracity of this number still needs to be verified as per the note above. Of these, almost 84,000 required child protection investigations. Thus, although the estimated number of referrals is less than the previous year more actually required investigation (51% of total referrals requiring investigations as opposed to 47% the previous year).

Figure 1: Total Referrals – Five Year Trend



Children in Care

As shown in Figure 2 below, the number of children in the care of CAS has declined by almost 22% since 2011-12, with 20,253 children in care served in 2015-16. Each year, approximately 1/3 of these children are discharged – either to their families, to adoptive or other permanent homes or because they have aged out of care.

Figure 2: Children in Care – Five Year Trend



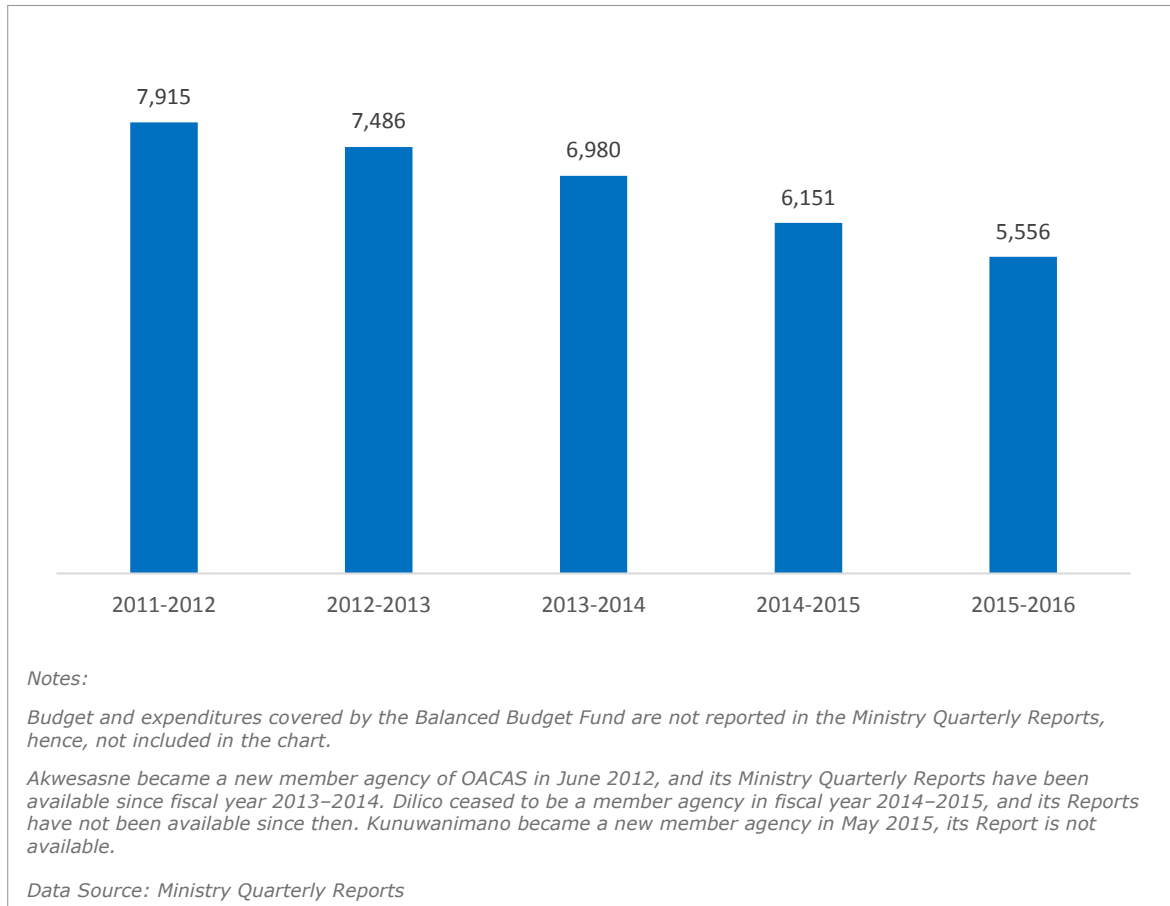
Too often the public looks only at the trends related to “children in care”, assuming that a decline in numbers should signal a reduction in the need for resources. In fact, where this number is declining, it signals that intensive family interventions are working and it is critical to continue to invest in these services in order to avoid, wherever possible, the more intrusive and costly outcome of children in permanent care of a CAS. It is important to acknowledge, however, that sometimes the protection and safeguarding of children also requires admission to care. It is essential that the full spectrum of services be available and adequately resourced to keep children safe.

Crown Wards

The most significant trend is the continued decrease in the number of Crown wards, down from 7,915 to 5,556 in five years – a decrease of close to 30%. This decline is related to at least two major factors:

- The movement to serve more children with their families;
- The priority to find permanent homes through adoption, legal custody, kin arrangements, and customary care for Indigenous children and youth; and

Figure 3: Monthly Average Number of Crown Wards – Five Year Trend



Equity of Outcomes

Preliminary data gathering through Performance Indicators has suggested that there is some variability in outcomes across the province. This is partly due to the way funding is allocated across the province. There is particularly a need for more funding to Indigenous and remote northern agencies. Recommendations from the sector around these issues will be addressed via the funding model review. A brief outline of some of the issues is as below:

Indigenous Agencies

The government and the sector have been moving forward with restoring jurisdiction to more Indigenous agencies. Further support is required to continue this process for agencies that have not yet been mandated. However, even for currently mandated agencies, the funding model does not take into account special considerations for providing culturally appropriate services to Indigenous children and youth. A separate approach for funding and supporting Indigenous agencies is required in the sector.

Northern Agencies

CASs in the north report that the cost of delivering services to a family and their children is greater than might be the case in more densely populated centres in the south. Significant per case costs relating to travel – which could be hundreds of kilometers at a time, can involve transportation by air, ground or water, and take many hours to travel – put a significant strain on staff time and availability. Further, many northern and remote areas are not well supported by other social services, and as such CASs need to work harder to either serve these families or find an appropriate referral service. Finally, recruitment and retention of staff continues to be a challenge for northern agencies. A 2015 survey of Human Resource Managers found that agencies in the North and North East Zones experienced turnover rates of 16.7% and 13.7%, respectively. This is much higher than the provincial average of 8.3% and highlights additional costs associated with recruitment, training and retention with which northern agencies struggle.

The new funding model was intended to address these 'Remoteness' elements, however it does not provide sufficient weight to the actual costs of delivering services in the north. The sector looks forward to engaging with the government in the review of the current Child Welfare Funding Model to better address the challenges in northern agencies, which ultimately can hinder efforts of equity of outcomes across the province. The proposed engagement through the funding model review as well as other avenues to support northern agencies is welcomed for the province.

Culturally responsive services

The most recent Ontario Incidence Study revealed an overrepresentation of two main groups in the sector: Indigenous and African Canadian children and youth.

Indigenous Communities

The Ministry and sector have been in the process of restoring jurisdiction for child welfare services to Indigenous agencies for a few years now. Additional support is required not only to restore jurisdiction for agencies that are mandated in the coming years, but also to provide an appropriate amount of capital to ensure these agencies have the facilities with which to effectively deliver services.

It is extremely important to understand the cultural factors associated with the Indigenous population. The needs of these communities are different – structural disadvantages such as lack of access to locally based social services poverty, health and mental health services, addictions, and homelessness are all contributing factors to higher levels of intrusion and more extensive services. Much of this is the result of intergenerational trauma experienced in Indigenous communities due to the actions of child welfare.

Work done based on the 2013 Ontario Incidence Study found²:

- Indigenous children being more than 130% more likely to be investigated than a White child;
- Cases involving Indigenous children and youth being 15% more likely to be substantiated than White children;
- Indigenous children and youth being 40% more likely to be transferred to ongoing services;
- Indigenous children and youth being 168% more likely to be placed in out of home care during the investigation.

Culturally appropriate programs are required, as well as the resources to support them, to better address the needs of Indigenous children and families across the province. CASs appreciate the funding model review specifically considering a separate approach to fund Indigenous agencies and recommend that beyond just child welfare, funding is put towards addressing the risk factors, poor outcomes and lack of services in many First Nations communities. Additionally, as is indicated in the *Support Required* section, resources to address the Truth and Reconciliation report, as it relates to child welfare in Ontario, are required.

² Child Maltreatment-Related Service Decisions by Ethno-Racial Categories in Ontario in 2013

African Canadian Communities

A similar picture of over-representation and the need to provide culturally responsive services for African Canadian communities also exists.

From the same study³:

- Black children are 40% more likely to be investigated compared to White children
- Black cases are 18% more likely to be substantiated
- Black children and youth are 8% more likely to be transferred to ongoing services
- Black children and youth are 13% more likely to be placed in out of home care during the investigation

The One Vision One Voice project was led by a Steering Committee representing the African Canadian community across Ontario. This project sought to understand and make recommendations on how the system can better serve African Canadian families and address the statistics of over-representation shown above. CASs acknowledge the support from government to create the two-volume Practice Framework created for member agencies and look forward to continuing to partner on the second phase of the project, which will focus on implementing the Framework's recommendations.

Best practices for Improved Outcomes

The sector continues to build on best practices and ensure that these are evidence-informed in order to improve the quality of services for children and youth.

Some of the work that the sector continues to drive includes:

- To ensure that we have consistent, sector-wide implementation of recommendations from inquests across the province, notably Jeffrey Baldwin and Katelynn Sampson recommendations
- To improve adoption services by improving practice for prospective adoptive parents, promoting collaboration and transparency in adoption and increasing opportunities for children and youth in Ontario to achieve permanency
- To assess service models for their potential to improve outcomes for children, youth and families
- To ensure due diligence for all children and families impacted by Motherisk hair testing, and to identify trends and themes with respect to the role of hair testing in child welfare decisions

The sector continues to look forward to working with government to achieve better services across the sector through these initiatives.

³ Child Maltreatment-Related Service Decisions by Ethno-Racial Categories in Ontario in 2013

Human Resources

Continuously raising the bar for the human resources in the child welfare sector is critical to ensuring that our children and youth are safe and are receiving the services they need from children's aid societies.

This past year, 5,672 workers from all 47 agencies completed online e-learning for the new Child Protection Standards and Eligibility Spectrum documents and their application. Continued improvement of training for workers is being institutionalized via the revamped Child Welfare Professional curriculum for new workers. In addition, a new Authorization process which involves an assessment of learning for new workers has been established for implementation in 2017. This new process critically ensures that all new workers have a minimum level of training prior to independently being able to independently conduct investigations, apprehend children in need of protection and make a child protection application to a child welfare court. The resource implications for some agencies are large, and the government needs to support agencies to enable CASs to implement the process successfully.

Additionally, the sector has worked on and developed several tools for to support consistent approach to worker safety in the province. The workers in our sector need to feel safe in order to be able to deliver high quality services to children, youth and families and the successful implementation of all recommendations from the worker safety report will enable them to do so.

The sector acknowledges the government's continued partnership in ensuring that our workers are effectively trained, prepared and protected so that they continue to have the confidence by all Ontarians that they will help deliver the best outcomes for children, youth and families.

Governance

The boards of children's aid societies are critical in ensuring a sustainable and accountable sector. CAS Board members are all volunteers that use their time and talents to ensure societies are effectively delivering the mandate described above.

The sector continues to partner with government to provide Boards and Executive Directors of all 47 Children's Aid Societies with the tools they need to lead in their accountability role, utilize best practices and continuously learn. We introduced a Standardized Board Monitoring Framework and Tool to monitor Compliance, Risk, Performance, CEO Accountability and Board Accountability. Additionally, the sector has developed a library that houses resources of interest and importance to governing boards to provide effective governance to our sector.

Data Gathering and Analysis

CASs are promoting a culture of continuous quality improvement through quality data analysis focused on outcomes and taking action on the findings.

The sector continues to compile and report on the five publicly reported Performance Indicators as measures of safety, permanency, and well-being of children and youth. The collection of data helps identify areas where we are doing well and others where we can improve. It also enables us to share best practices across the sector, and act in areas where we do need to improve. This data, along with other indicators, is important in helping us to continuously improve how CASs engage with children, youth and families.

Additionally, agencies are completing quarterly Quality Improvement Plans for government. These plans are being used to identify areas where we are doing well and where we can improve in terms of compliance with Standards and other regulatory requirements. We will continue to use this data to identify areas of investment in the sector to aid with the continued improvement of quality services and outcomes for children, youth and families in Ontario.

Operations

Currently the child welfare system is structured with each agency providing services to its local community, leading to 47 agencies with multiple information systems and some minimal centralized functions.

The purpose of the Operations related projects is to ensure the best system structure and sector use of resources to achieve better and more equitable outcomes for children, youth and families.

We have mentioned the current challenges faced by Indigenous and remote Northern agencies. We appreciate the opportunity to provide insight and recommendations to the Ministry through the funding model review process.

The sector also acknowledges the work done by the Ministry thus far to support the implementation of a single information system – the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) – by 2020. This will represent an evolution in ensuring child protection across the province and we look forward to partnering to roll this system out, in a sustainable way, across the province.

CASs also continuing to work towards assessing and designing a Shared Service Program for functions in the sector that can be further centralized. We look forward to partnering with government to make this a reality for the child welfare sector in Ontario.

Finally, CASs continue to assess amalgamations that make sense for the sector. However, as identified in the *Support Required* section, resources to support any planned reconfiguration of the sector are necessary.

Bill 89: Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act, 2016

As the sector has been moving forward, in many cases in partnership with government, on the many projects discussed above, the sector would also like to acknowledge the work of government in the proposed new legislation that introduces several amendments and regulation-making authority in the key areas of:

1. Protection and Prevention
2. Quality Improvement
3. Accountability and Oversight
4. Support for First Nations, Métis and Inuit People

The sector is actively engaging in the review process of the proposed legislation and is pleased to see some resonance on some key long-standing advocacy positions as below.

Raising the Age of Protection To 18

We have long-since highlighted the need to provide protection services to youth beyond 16, similar to some of our provincial peers. This was predicated largely on the Ontario was out of step with the UN Convention on the Right of the Child. We acknowledge the movement made on this front and look forward to working with government on implementation. There will, of course, be resource implications for this and we are highlighting this point again in the *Support Required* section below.

Personal Liability Coverage for Board Governors

We have mentioned the importance of our Governors in providing for a sector that is accountable. We have long-since asked that board members, who are volunteers bringing a diverse group of skill sets, be indemnified against personal liability so as to better support the work that they do in the province. This proposed legislation is a good step toward strengthening this governance function in the sector.

Further Support Required

There has been a lot of work over the past year, and really, the past few years in the sector in order to modernize service delivery to children, youth and families as well as reduce fragmentation. Much of this work has been in partnership with government as noted above and is the reason we are making strides toward a shared vision of a highly effective children services system.

There continues to be more work to be done. Below are some of the areas that require further resources and partnership to make sure that the sector can continue to sustainably provide services to Ontarians in the years ahead.

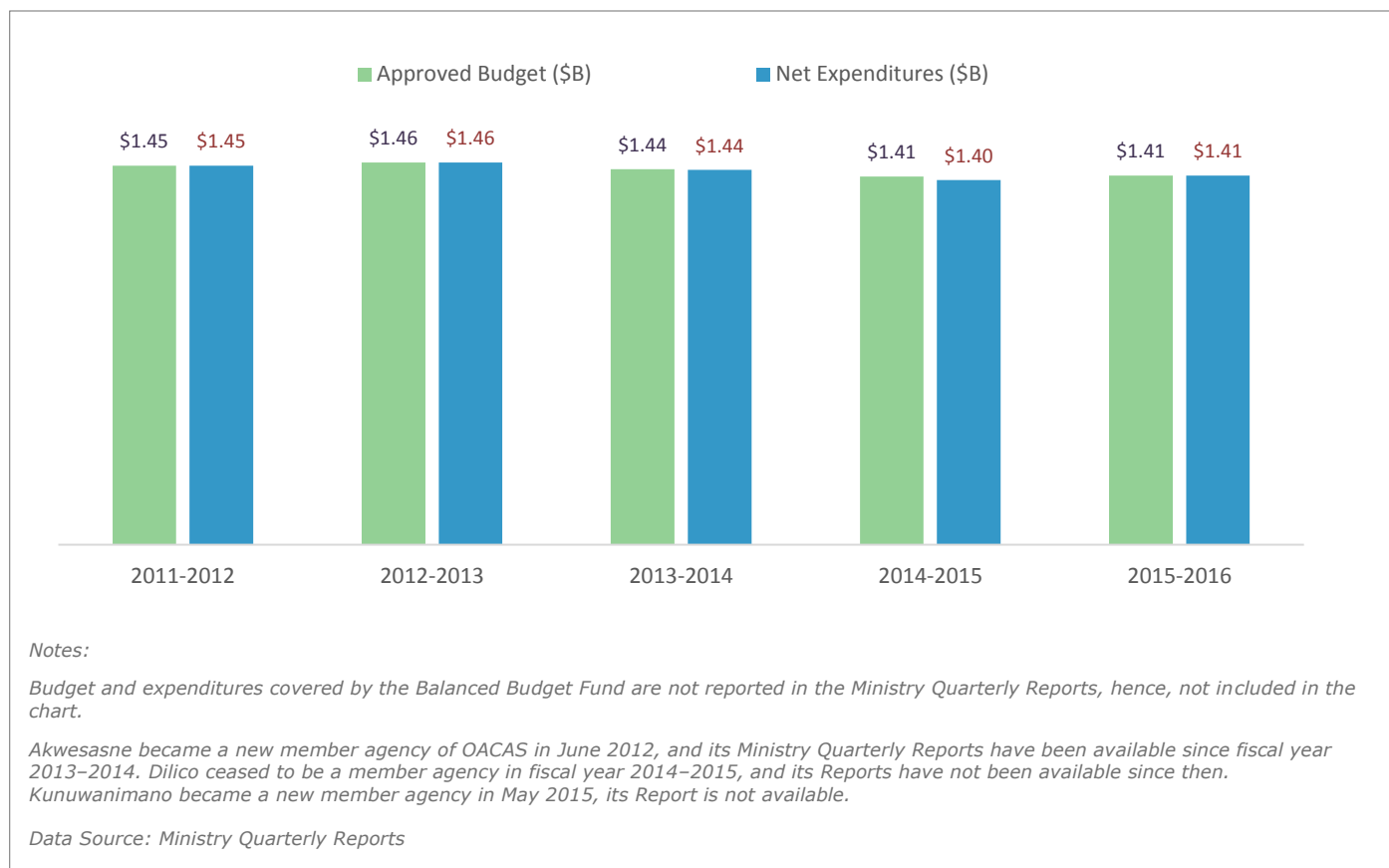
Funding Envelope

For the past six years the child welfare funding envelope has been flat-lined and the sector has worked closely with government and other partners to reform and modernize the system. See Figure 4 for budget allocations and expenditures for the sector.

CASs are now in their fourth year of working with the new funding model. Alongside flat or diminishing allocations for many individual CASs, the sector has also committed resources to activities that are enhancing accountability, transparency and service across the sector. These include: the implementation and sustainment of the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN), reporting of Performance Indicators, Quality Improvement Plans, and the assessment of a Shared Service Program. This puts additional pressure on CAS budgets outside of providing services and CPIN and Quality Improvement Plans especially are causing concerns around the sustainability of workloads for workers across the province.

CASs are fully aware of the provincial funding landscape and continue to do their best to keep children safe from abuse and neglect and manage within their approved budgets. This becomes increasingly difficult to do with no growth and additional pressures.

Figure 4: Funding Envelope and Expenditures – Five Year Trend



Age of Protection

As noted above, the government has introduced proposed legislation that would provide services for youth through the age of 18. It is critical that the funding envelope be expanded by an appropriate amount to support these youth. We know that older youth can have complex needs and this may require a larger contribution to the envelope than what we have seen for some of the existing children and youth serviced by children’s aid societies.

Recommendation

The government must provide an appropriate level of funding to adequately support provision of services under the current mandate of CASs. Additional funding is also required to support expansion of the mandate to a new group of youth ages 16 and 17, ones which typically require a more complex set of services from the CAS.

CPIN Deployment and Sustainment

The Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) is an information system that will replace the variety of IT systems used by CASs. The need for a province-wide information system for all Children's Aid Societies (CASs) has been repeatedly identified through inquests and various provincial reports over the past two decades. CPIN is the response to this need, and is being developed and deployed by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) in collaboration with the child welfare sector and supported by OACAS. The system has been rolled out currently in 15 CASs, which represents almost 38% of FTEs in the sector. All remaining agencies will be phased in by 2019-2020.

There are three areas where support for CPIN for CASs to transition to CPIN is critical. These are:

- Deployment (implementation) of the CPIN System to agencies across the province;
- Ongoing sustainment costs related to CPIN;
- Ongoing remediation to ensure the system responds to the needs of the sector, including enabling CPIN agencies to meet reporting requirements of Quarterly Reports, Quality Improvement Plans and Performance Indicators.

Deployment

There are significant resources – both financial and HR – required for an agency to be ready for CPIN deployment. Examples of requirements from agencies that have gone live with CPIN include:

- Testing prior to and immediately after go-live on CPIN;
- Training costs before going live on CPIN, both for service and finance;
- Costs for decommissioning legacy systems;
- Change management support; and,
- Support on data migration and validation.

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services provides \$220,000 per agency for deployment and covers the cost for work associated with data migration, regardless of agency size. However, CASs have spent as much as \$4.5M on deployment. Current levels of Ministry investment in deployment are not sufficient. CASs on CPIN have had to use resources from their core operating budgets and Balanced Budget Funds in order to fully support deployment of CPIN. CASs that have not been able to build up their Balanced Budget Funds and are struggling with their current allocation, and would not be able to absorb the costs of CPIN implementation.

Recommendation

There needs to be enhanced funding to support the true cost of CPIN deployment across the sector.

Sustainment

Similarly, agencies that have already implemented CPIN have needed to dedicate resources to the sustainment of CPIN. Examples of requirements for sustainment include:

- Specialized staffing for reporting, service and finance;
- Extended timing to complete business processes in CPIN means employing a higher staff complement than service volumes would warrant; and,
- Ongoing training for staff on CPIN.

The Ministry provides no funding to support sustainment of CPIN. This is fully funded out of core operating budgets and Balanced Budget Funds. This is unsustainable and again would be difficult for CASs that have not been able to accumulate money in a Balanced Budget Fund to absorb.

From a provincial standpoint, there are some key elements that need to be in place to support sustainment. These are:

1. Sector capacity building around analytics and specialized reporting;
2. A provincial training program for new workers and retraining for existing workers;
3. Harmonization of business processes across the province to align with each other and the CPIN application and structure; and,
4. Change management resources to support agencies moving to CPIN.

Recommendation

There needs to be enhanced funding to support the true cost of CPIN sustainment for agencies across the sector. This would support not only the additional resources required within agencies, but also support a provincial CPIN sustainment strategy including elements of training, standardization of business processes, reporting and change management.

Ongoing MCYS Support

In addition, more support is needed at the Ministry to help support sustainment. Currently many agencies are utilizing workarounds in order to be able to use the CPIN system. Fixes are required in order to enhance the system such as, improvements to the search and reporting functionality for the purposes of analytics, legal and other areas of the system. A strong need for provincial business harmonization is also required to ensure CASs are using the system as intended and designed. Change requests, defect remediation and enhancements to the system need to be identified, processed and implemented in a timely manner.

Recommendation

There need to be more resources at the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to support with fixes and customization of the system to meet the needs of the child welfare sector. Resolution of issues with the system will help with greater user satisfaction and reduce the need for inefficient workarounds.

Indigenous Child Well-Being Agencies

In addition to the funding model inadequately providing for Indigenous CASs, there are also other Indigenous specific concerns that need to be addressed. These include:

1. Restoring Jurisdiction; and,
2. Truth and Reconciliation support.

Restore Jurisdiction

Indigenous children are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system in Ontario. While Indigenous/FNMI children represent only 3% of population of Ontario, they make up over 21% of children in care⁴. However, there are still only nine mandated Indigenous CASs and the majority of Indigenous children served by CASs continue to be served by non-Indigenous agencies.

Indigenous CASs are best positioned to deliver culturally appropriate services to Indigenous communities. This is highlighted in Part X of the Child and Family Services Act⁵, which has recognized the Indigenous authority to make child welfare decisions since 1984. However, more than thirty years later, these provisions have still not be realized due to the lack of human and financial resources that have been invested.

Recommendation:

Funding needs to be in place to support restoring child welfare jurisdiction across the province. Pre-mandated Indigenous agencies need to have full authority and jurisdiction to deliver services to the Indigenous communities they serve. Additionally, new funding and resources are required to support CASs throughout the transfer of the child protection jurisdiction. This would be to support Indigenous agencies receiving jurisdiction and CASs transferring cases. Resources for restoring jurisdiction should be equivalent to what was provided during CAS amalgamations to support this significant change-management initiative.

Infrastructure Support

Over the past 10 – 25 years, the child welfare field has evolved as a result of sequential reviews, reforms and transformations of the sector. With each generation of change, government expectations have become more precise, as has the expectation that child welfare agencies operate in as businesses accountable for public funds. This evolution has been supported by the inclusion of professionals who have helped manage child welfare – including but not limited to qualified accountants, quality assurance experts, legal counsel, human resource professionals, communications experts, and business managers. As resources have been constrained, some of these professional roles may have been scaled back, re-defined and/or shared across agencies. In some cases the expert advice continues in-house, or is purchased or provided on a pro-bono

⁴ The Structure of Indigenous Child Welfare in Canada

⁵ Child and Family Services Act, 1990

basis. However, it is recognized that the management of a modern and accountable agency demands the support of this type of infrastructure. Indigenous CASs have not had the benefit of the time to develop resources to build such infrastructure. For many communities there are no opportunities for shared resources nor are there pro-bono services available.

Recommendations

The government must support newly established Indigenous child welfare agencies via specific infrastructure investments in order to succeed, to meet government expectations and to be a leading resource in their communities.

Truth and Reconciliation Support

Ontario's child welfare sector welcomed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report as a historic milestone in reconciliation between communities. These recommendations serve as guidance as the sector continues to seek the right path to the best outcomes for Indigenous children, youth and families we work with.

The work of the Commission named child welfare as an actor that needs to change. The Commission directly relates the overrepresentation of youth in child welfare today to the "intractable legacies of residential schools".⁶

There are specifically five Calls to Action that the government needs to address in order to help with reconciliation in the child welfare sector in Ontario.

Call to Action 1:

Funding is required to address Call to Action 1 and reduce the number of Indigenous children in state care by:

- Monitoring and assessing neglect investigations;
- Providing adequate resources to child welfare programs to keep families together where safe to do so and keep children in culturally appropriate environments regardless of where they reside;
- Developing training programs to educate social workers about history and impacts of residential schools and potential for Indigenous communities to provide solutions to family healing; and,
- Training for child welfare decision makers to consider the impact of the residential school experience on children and their caregivers.

Call to Action 2

Support is required to support Call to Action 2 by ensuring appropriate research and data collection in order to be able to publish annual reports on the number of Indigenous children in

⁶ Honoring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future – Summary Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

care compared to non-Indigenous children, the reasons for apprehension and the total spending on preventive and care services, in addition to the effectiveness of various interventions.

Call to Action 3

There is a need to support Call to Action 3, which includes:

- Full implementation of Jordan’s principle which requires the first government department contacted to cover the cost, to be repaid by the responsible department later.

Call to Action 4

Call to Action 4 involves the work to enact Indigenous child-welfare legislation that establishes national standards for Indigenous child apprehension and includes principles that affirm the right of Indigenous governments to establish and maintain their own child-welfare agencies, and that courts take the residential school legacy into account in their decision making.

Call to Action 5

There government should address Call to Action 5 by allocating resources to develop culturally appropriate parenting programs for Indigenous families.

Recommendation:

The government should provide funding in order to develop these important programs, services and legislation in order to support the reconciliation effort within the Ontario child welfare sector

Resources for the Wider Children’s and Family Services Community

Child Welfare is one part of the equation for ensuring the health and safety of Ontario’s children. In fact, in 97% of investigations⁷ where it is determined a family requires support, the children remain in the home. Often, services such as children’s mental health, adult mental health and addictions treatment and domestic violence prevention are essential for CASs to keep children safe in their homes.

A specific trend that is worrisome for children’s services is the increased abuse of opioids in the province. A report published late in 2016 from the Chief Coroner’s Office shows that 13 people die of opioid-related toxicity every week in the province.⁸ In fact, the same report shows that opioid toxicity deaths increased 33% from 2010 to 2015, and deaths from fentanyl nearly doubled over this same period. This is an alarming trend and if it continues, would have an impact the number of children requiring care from children’s aid societies. It is important that the

⁷ 2013 Ontario Incidence Study on Reported Child Abuse and Neglect

⁸ Small-town Ontario fears a fentanyl overdose wave. Ottawa Citizen. November 16, 2016.

government address what is currently a problem from becoming an epidemic and understands the link to the need for child protection services.

Recommendation

The government support the broader children's services sector, including children's and adult mental health, addictions treatment and domestic violence as community links in helping CASs successfully provide services to children, youth and families.

Reconfiguration

The sector has completed some preliminary work around the prospect of amalgamations. This work and the power afforded to the Minister features prominently in the new proposed legislation as well. The framework for amalgamations, to ensure alignment with other providers of children's services and to best support communities needs to be well-planned.

There are currently 47 CASs in Ontario. The number of CASs has been reduced, with 16 agencies merging via 7 amalgamations since 2012. As the sector continues to find the most efficient means of operating, more amalgamations may be on the horizon, however there will be significant costs associated with planning and implementation of further amalgamations that should not be funded through CAS operating budgets.

Recommendation

The government needs to provide CASs appropriate resources in order to be able to support further and more complex amalgamations in the future.