

Working Together for Our Children and Youth

The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies' 2019 Pre-Budget Submission

Date: **February 8, 2019**

Email Submission: **submissions@ontario.ca**



Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies

Working Together for Our Children and Youth

The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies' 2019 Pre-Budget Submission

Children's Aid Societies (CASs) have the exclusive mandate to protect children and youth in Ontario. There are 38 Children's Aid Societies and 11 Indigenous Child Well-being Agencies across Ontario who handle over 168,000 calls from concerned Ontarians, conduct 83,000 child protection investigations, and provide service to over 43,000 families. In 97% of investigations conducted by CASs, children are supported to remain in their own homes while they and their families receive services from CASs and other community services. The families that CASs work with are often vulnerable in many areas of their lives. CASs work closely with health and social services partners to keep children and youth safe and to help families who face significant challenges to thrive in their communities.

The child welfare sector is modernizing and streamlining how it delivers services while maximizing the return on the \$1.5 billion public investment. Innovation and change require allocation of dedicated resources and sometimes upfront investment to realize sustainable change and cost benefit in the long-term.

To that end, we ask that the Government protect its investments in child welfare and continue to fund ongoing service and infrastructure projects that are modernizing the system, so we can:

1. Sustain and amplify the investments in service improvement through a child-centred service approach that is focussed on creating consistent outcomes
2. Align and coordinate with our social service and community partners, improving service to the public
3. Change the outcomes for Indigenous children and youth by supporting capacity for Indigenous child Well-being Agencies to care for their own
4. Create the business processes needed to work as a unified system, enhancing efficiency and the safety of children and youth



Child-Centred Approach focused on Creating Consistent Outcomes

The Government of Ontario passed new child welfare legislation in 2017 (Child, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA)), with long-awaited updates that put the child at the centre of decision-making and added services to 16- and 17-year-olds to the mandate of CASs. The new legislation sets the groundwork for service-related projects focused on delivering culturally appropriate service to children and youth involved with the system. These initiatives are crucial to deliver child protection services that allow for the best possible service outcomes for all our children and youth. However, some of these initiatives represent significant change management and resource allocations for the sector.

Diane, who had previously been abused by her parents, was kicked out of her home by her mother at 17 years old. She moved in with her 17-year-old friend, Felicia, and her 27-year-old boyfriend, Kirk. Details of the situation raised concerns of human trafficking for a CAS worker who had been involved with Diane's family. The caseworker was able to provide Diane with a VYSA to connect her with community youth and women's services, shelters, and housing to help her escape her situation, and supported her in building skills and independence. At a later point, Kirk was arrested on charges of assault and sexual assault, and Felicia contacted the same caseworker for help and support. Both of these young women were able to access supports through VYSAs made possible through the new legislation which extends CAS support to 16- and 17-year-olds.

The OACAS recommends that the Government maintain its investments and commitments to:

- Monitor and fully fund services to 16- and 17-year-olds, as required by the CYFSA
- Enhance privacy protection for individuals involved with CASs through investing in the implementation of the CYFSA Part X, which is set to come into force in 2020
- Improve outcomes for Black and African-Canadian children, youth, and families involved with the child welfare system through building on the One Vision One Voice project
- Implement a cross-sectoral approach to improving outcomes for children and youth requiring placements out of their homes, recognizing that many intersecting service systems have a responsibility to the safety and well-being of young people in this province

Investments in these key areas align well with recommendations contained in the *Managing Transformations* report to government, particularly in the areas of citizen-centered programs, enhanced efficiency, effectiveness and improved outcomes of services to Ontarians.

Change Outcomes for Indigenous Children and Youth

CASs have been actively working with the province's 11 Indigenous Child Well-being Agencies to restore jurisdiction of child protection for Indigenous children and youth to Indigenous communities. CASs have been investing significant time and resources to ensure cases involving Indigenous children and youth can be transferred safely to Indigenous Child Well-being Agencies. While this process is underway, both the mainstream and Indigenous agencies must be financially supported to ensure the continuity of care. Continued support for Indigenous Child Well-being Agencies for infrastructure and operational capacity is crucial to ensure success during this period of transition and through the long-term.

The OACAS recommends that during the transition, the Government recognize the need for additional funding within the child welfare envelope to:

- Provide for one-time start-up and infrastructure costs for newly designated Indigenous Child Well-being Agencies
- Ensure CASs can continue to support Indigenous agencies through the transfer of Indigenous child and youth protection cases
- Support Indigenous Child Well-being Agencies to solidify their long-term sustainability
- Develop accessible social services and infrastructure for Indigenous communities to reduce the cost and social impact of sending children and youth long distances to access services

Upfront investment in Indigenous agencies to care for their children close to home will ultimately realize savings from the operating funds that are currently being used to place children far from their homes. Additionally, it will support enhanced outcomes of Indigenous families in alignment with the key social determinants of health that are crucial in the health and well-being of the child, family, community, and Nations.



Work as a Unified System

Child Protection Information Network

The Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) was first launched by the Ontario Government in 2014 as an enterprise system to modernize the way child welfare agencies do business. In 2019, all 38 non-Indigenous Children's Aid Societies will be using CPIN, ensuring timely access to case information for child protection workers across the province that enables them to make critical safety decisions for children and youth. A significant investment is still required to address identified technical deficiencies. A compromised system will put the safety of these children and youth at risk. The Government's continued support for this system is crucial to the safety of Ontario's children and youth – to be clear, there is no alternative.

The OACAS recommends continued Government investment in CPIN to:

- Build on the significant investments already made to develop and deploy this system
- Provide critical updates and required fixes that ensure its continued functionality
- Support development of consistent business processes across the province
- Ensure information can continue to be shared securely and efficiently between child protection agencies

The ongoing investment in CPIN supports the recommendations of Ernst & Young for government to invest in digital and data, improve access to accurate and timely data related to service delivery, and evidence informed decision making.

The Shared Services Program

The child welfare sector has been investigating ways it can pool resources to establish consistent business standards and realize cost-savings through a Shared Services Program (SSP). The SSP has identified 13 business streams to help the sector streamline itself and work more efficiently. Although the SSP has already made significant achievements through the implementation of some of its business streams, there are ongoing projects to find where further savings might be realized for the sector.

The OACAS recommends the Government continues its investments in the SSP to:

- Complete the sector's back-office feasibility study, and act upon the findings of the study
- Further develop other SSP business streams to realize efficiencies and improve service

Further, this request aligns well with recommendations the government has received related to creating back-office efficiencies. Early results indicate the potential for significant cost benefits as well as more consistent and effective service delivery to citizens of Ontario.

Since the procurement service launch in April 2018, projected cumulative savings are approximately \$880,000 over the life of the contracts. Savings have been realized through the purchase of IT, telephone and cellular services and equipment, smoke detectors, actuarial services, postage meters, snow removal, consulting services, and motor vehicles. It is expected that the sector will find more savings through continued and expanded group purchasing as the program matures.

Coordinate with our Health, Social Services, and Community Partners

Many service systems work with the core populations served by child welfare: 89% of children who receive CAS service live in families that are struggling to meet their basic needs; 53% of families live in socio-economic hardship, and 46% receive services because of adult mental health issues including addictions. Some Indigenous children and youth in Ontario must travel up to 2,000 km to access vital mental health services. Well-funded, accessible social services can collectively address social determinants of health and prevent families from requiring CAS services and improve outcomes for the people affected.

The OACAS recommends that the Government maintains funding to health and social services in Ontario to:

- Ensure the children youth and families we serve can access social services close to home without undue long wait times
- Improve access to consistent health, social, mental health and addiction services to improve outcomes
- Develop accessible social services and infrastructure for Indigenous communities to reduce the cost and social impact of sending children and youth long distances to access services
- Establish a cross-sectoral provincial table for the purposes of planning, policy advice, and development of common outcome measures

The child welfare sector is currently on a transformative path with many ongoing initiatives to help improve efficiency in the system, while also delivering services that drive consistent outcomes for the children youth and families we serve.

The child welfare sector is committed to working with government on key transformative initiatives, including reviewing and clarifying the scope of services to be delivered by child welfare agencies, working collaboratively with other community service partners, as well as reviewing and defining the optimal structure of the child welfare system. These types of changes require up-front investments for sustainable long-term change. In the meantime, service delivery must continue relative to the exclusive child protection mandate held by Children's Aid Societies and Indigenous Well-being Agencies. As we are on a parallel journey to maintain good service standards while we innovate and streamline our infrastructure, OACAS recommends that the Government maintains its current child welfare funding envelope at \$1.5 billion and continues to support the important infrastructure and service projects that are helping to move the sector forward, in partnership with government.

Every October, OACAS and CASs, in partnership with boards of education, schools, and EarlyOn and child care centres across the province participate in Ontario Dress Purple Day. The campaign raises awareness about every child and youth's right to safety and well-being. Classroom resources to support the campaign are developed for the OACAS by Boost Child & Youth Advocacy Centre and Windsor CAS. It is a prime example of how working with community partners benefits all children and youth in Ontario.

The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) is a collective of 48 Children's Aid Societies and Indigenous Child Well-being Agencies that guides transformative change in the child welfare sector; advocates in the interests of the child welfare system and the children, youth, and families we serve; and works to strengthen the system by delivering provincial programs.

oacas.org



Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies