
Alberta Child and Youth Well-Being Action Plan





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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is the greatest public health crisis we have faced in more than a generation. It has affected all Albertans' lives, including children and youth. Given those far-reaching impacts, Alberta appointed an expert advisory Child and Youth Well-Being Panel in 2021 to better understand the full scope of the psychological, social, educational, and physical effects on children and youth.

Between May and August 2021, the panel engaged with a wide range of Albertans, including researchers, educators, health care professionals, mental health experts and, most importantly, parents, youth and children. This engagement included two public surveys, 16 roundtable discussions, six telephone town halls, 15 MLA-led roundtable discussions with Albertans across the province, and the consideration of 96 email submissions. The panel also completed a comprehensive review of current research and emerging evidence.

In December 2021, the panel delivered a report to government with 10 recommendations to help support the well-being of children and youth impacted by COVID-19, which can be found at: open.alberta.ca/publications/child-and-youth-well-being-review-final-report. We thank the panel for their excellent work that informed this action plan.

Indigenous and newcomer children, youth and families were also greatly affected by the pandemic and the action plan reflects the commitment of Alberta's government to providing accessible, culturally appropriate services and supports.

We know that to have the most impact, we need to work across government to support children and youth in Alberta.

The actions we are taking will address the panel's recommendations, and strengthen supports and services for children and youth as we look to the future.



Child and Youth Well-Being Panel Recommendations

The panel's report grouped findings into themes: health impacts, social well-being, learning impacts, child and youth development, family well-being, domestic violence, mental health supports, school supports, disproportionate impacts, and technology access.



Advance existing and create new interventions and supports, where necessary, to help children and youth navigate the psychological, social, educational, and physical effects of the pandemic. Ongoing pandemic responses, including future interventions and supports, should factor in the distinct needs of children and youth and seek to minimize psychological, social, educational, and physical impacts on them.



Support existing and implement new province-wide efforts, where necessary, to support food security for children, youth, and their families.



Advance existing and create new supports, where necessary, for those adults who are helping children and youth to navigate adverse experiences during the pandemic.



Review effectiveness and alignment of existing child and youth mental health and well-being programs and services to inform enhanced resource allocation.



Explore and activate ways to better track, measure, and understand the learning impacts of the pandemic, and inform decisions to strengthen school capacity to respond.



Create available, streamlined and universally accessible pathways to connect children, youth, and families with mental health services and supports.



Improve broadband internet service and access to devices to address difficulties related to remote education and virtual mental health supports.



Recognize and enhance the essential role of schools in interdisciplinary wraparound services and supports for mental health and well-being of students.



Accelerate and utilize data collection, collaboration, and innovation to better assess child and youth development and enhance decision-making related to their well-being and resiliency.



Create more opportunities for children and youth to have improved access to cultural, sports, arts, and recreational activities.



Recommendation 1

Advance existing and create new interventions and supports, where necessary, to help children and youth navigate the psychological, social, educational, and physical effects of the pandemic. Ongoing pandemic responses, including future interventions and supports, should factor in the distinct needs of children and youth and seek to minimize psychological, social, educational, and physical impacts on them.

Objective

The following actions will enhance support for children and youth navigating the effects of the pandemic, and ensure their needs are considered separately when planning future mitigation efforts.

Actions

New

- Invest \$110 million in targeted funding over three years, including \$30 million in the 2022-23 school year to support students experiencing academic and mental health challenges, and help students improve their mental health. *(Education)*
- Expand mental health and behavioural supports in schools with the Child and Youth Health Services Initiative to prevent health challenges before they happen, intervene early when challenges arise, and offer access to treatment and recovery supports when needed. This is part of the comprehensive recovery-oriented system of care that Alberta's government is building. *(Health, Mental Health and Addiction)*

Ongoing

- The innovative Civil Society Fund is helping non-profit organizations and the Albertans they serve to deal with pandemic impacts, improving their social recovery, and encouraging their economic participation. *(Community and Social Services)*
- COVID-19 highlighted a need to build resiliency and help children and youth manage their health, mental health and well-being. The physical education and wellness curriculum for kindergarten to Grade 6 will be implemented across the province in September 2022, with a focus on development in these areas. *(Education)*

- Youth will also be better served by more mentorship opportunities for those leaving government care, and more widespread grants to youth suicide prevention programs and initiatives. \$2.6 million has been allocated for the new Transition to Adulthood Program. *(Children's Services)*

Existing/ Pandemic Supports

- The review highlighted the importance of consulting with youth on how best to support them. Alberta's government will continue to work with the Minister of Education's Youth Council (MYC) on current and future supports. Upcoming MYC engagement will be specific to mental health and learning loss. *(Education)*
- Additional funding of \$2 million was provided in 2021 to women's emergency shelters to ensure continued safe service delivery for women, children, and youth experiencing family violence during the pandemic. *(Community and Social Services)*
- Consultations during this review highlighted the need to consider children and youth separately when forming pandemic responses. This feedback was crucial, and was used to adapt the pandemic response in fall 2021 to limit the negative impacts of restrictions on children and youth. *(All)*
- Alberta's government made it easier for more families to access critical services throughout the pandemic by strengthening prevention and accountability within the Family and Community Social Services Program. *(Community and Social Services)*



Recommendation 2

Review effectiveness and alignment of existing child and youth mental health and well-being programs and services to inform enhanced resource allocation.

Objective

Gaps need to be closed in existing mental health programming worsened by the pandemic and ensure the most efficient delivery of services for our children and youth.

Actions

New

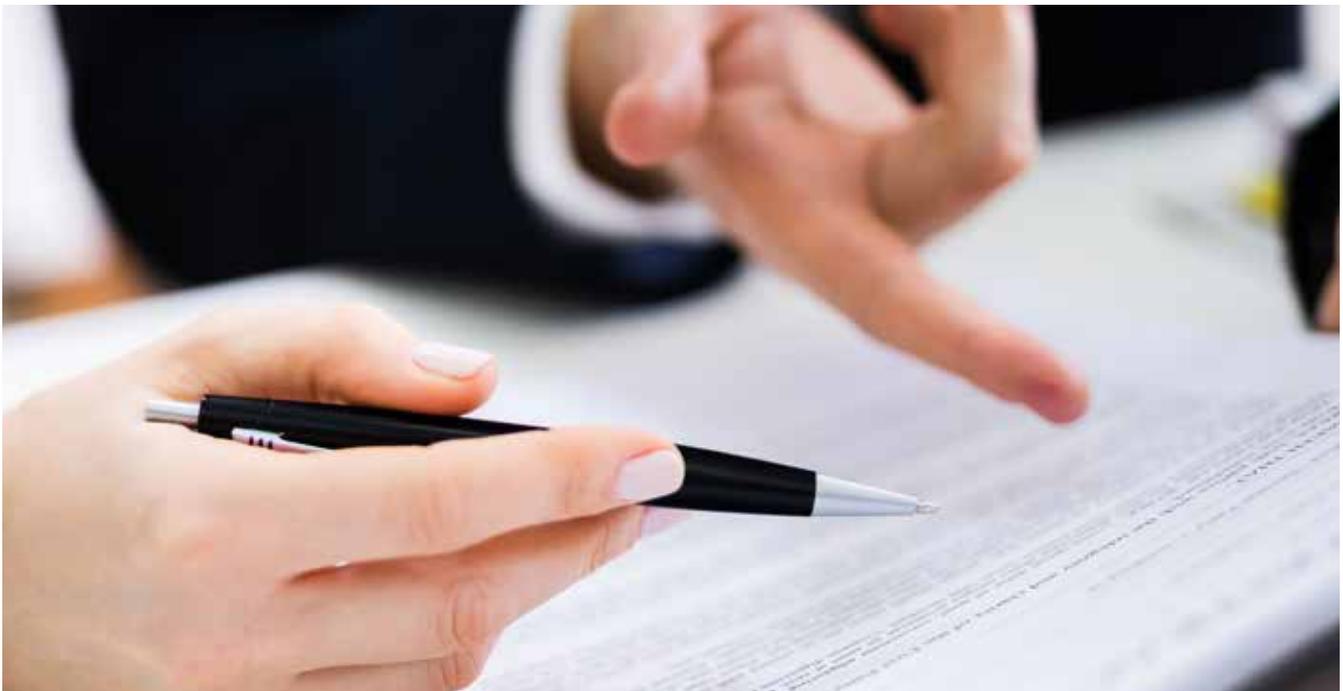
- The review highlighted the need to help children and youth build resiliency and improve their mental wellness. Alberta's government is building a model of care that focuses on improving outcomes to ensure that the lives of children and youth are being improved by services being delivered. *(Mental Health and Addiction)*
 - All existing programs are being reviewed to ensure they meet the goal of helping youth improve their mental wellness and build long-term resilience.

- Working across ministries, Alberta's government is expanding access to prevention and early intervention supports for youth, including youth mental health hubs, phone and virtual supports, and access to mental health supports in schools. *(Education, Mental Health and Addiction)*

Ongoing

- Alberta's government will continue to build a comprehensive recovery-oriented system of care that focuses on supporting children and youth with prevention and early intervention supports to improve long-term outcomes. *(Health, Mental Health and Addictions)*
- Alberta's government is enhancing the Alberta 211 system to make mental health support more accessible to all Albertans including youth. *(Mental Health and Addiction)*
- Alberta's government has also partnered with the Kids Help Phone to build capacity and provide more access to virtual supports specific to children and youth. *(Mental Health and Addiction)*

Text INFO to 211, chat with professionals at ab.211.ca, or call 2-1-1.





Recommendation 3

Create available, streamlined, and universally accessible pathways to connect children, youth, and families with mental health services and supports.

Objective

Service gaps identified by children, youth and parents during the review will be filled to ensure all Albertans have access to high-quality and affordable mental health services.



To find mental health supports near you, visit <https://recoveryaccessalberta.ca/>

Actions

New

- Expand mental health and behavioural supports in schools with the Child and Youth Health Services Initiative to prevent health challenges before they happen, intervene early when challenges arise, and offer access to treatment and recovery supports when needed. This is part of the comprehensive recovery-oriented system of care that Alberta's government is building. (*Health, Mental Health and Addiction*)
- A cross-government approach is being undertaken to build better mental health services for children and youth.
 - A significant focus is being put on ensuring that programs are not isolated across ministries, and that services are easily accessible for children, youth, and their families.
 - This will include youth mental health hubs, e-mental health, digital hubs, and Family Resource Networks.

Ongoing

- Pandemic closures of services resulted in a loss of culturally appropriate health services for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth across the province. Continued funding for the Indigenous Wellness Core will increase access to these services for FNMI youth. (*Community and Social Services*)
- Children and youth with disabilities were disproportionately impacted by pandemic closures, and many experienced increased difficulty accessing services. Family Resource Centres are able to provide tools, information, and resources to children, youth, families, and adults with disabilities across the province. (*Community and Social Services*)
- Rural and remote families identified difficulty accessing supports through the pandemic. We are expanding funding for Family Resource Networks to address this gap. (*Children's Services*)
- Alberta's government also expanded online and phone addiction and mental health recovery supports, including Kids Help Phone, the Mental Health Helpline, and the Addiction Helpline. (*Health*)



Recommendation 4

Recognize and enhance the essential role of schools in interdisciplinary wraparound services and supports for mental health and well-being of students.

Objective

Reaffirm and improve the ability of schools as an important avenue to provide essential mental health and well-being supports for Alberta children.

Actions

New

- Alberta's government is expanding mental health and behavioural supports in schools with the Child and Youth Health Services Initiative so that every child and youth has access to supports. *(Health)*
- Targeted funding of \$110 million over three years will enable schools to support students experiencing academic challenges, and create school environments supporting student well-being and positive mental health. *(Education)*

Ongoing

- The Specialized Learning Support grant funds student wellness programs in schools which allows for psychological and social-emotional supports, access to mental health workers, and other wellness supports as needed. *(Education)*
- Children and youth with disabilities were disproportionately impacted by school closures, including those with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Funded by Education, the WRaP 2.0: FASD Coaching Partnership Project works to enhance the capacity of teachers and schools to meet the educational needs of children and students with FASD. *(Education, Community and Social Services)*
- Budget 2022 included \$48 million toward student wellness programs. *(Education)*
- In many cases, family violence went underreported during the pandemic as a result of school closures. We are working across government to complete the Family Violence Death Review Committee's recommendations. *(Community and Social Services)*
 - These include improved access to mental health supports for children and youth experiencing family violence.





Recommendation 5

Create more opportunities for children and youth to have improved access to cultural, sports, arts, and recreational activities.

Objective

All children and youth in Alberta will have the ability to return to pre-pandemic cultural, sport, art, and recreational activities while also creating new opportunities for play.

Actions

New

- The “Return to Play” program is a partnership between the government and KidSport Alberta. More funding will subsidize opportunities for children and youth in financial need, and reactivate community-level sport, physical activity, and recreation for children and youth, including those with disabilities. *(Culture)*
- Beginning April 1, 2022, Alberta’s government will match Sport, Physical Activity, and Recreation Fund Program donations. *(Culture)*
 - Up to \$350,000 in matching funds are being made available to support sport, physical activity and recreation in the province.

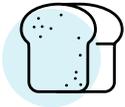


Ongoing

Through the Playground grant, every new or modernized K-7 school will get a new playground. This guarantees every child has access to a safe place to play. *(Education)*

Pandemic Supports

- Through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Alberta’s government continued to provide funding for creative arts to schools that shifted online interactions between children and youth and artists during the pandemic. *(Culture)*



Recommendation 6

Support existing and implement new province-wide efforts where necessary to support food security for children, youth, and their families.

Objective

Improve food security for children and youth in Alberta, both in the long-term and future crisis situations such as pandemics and natural disasters.

Actions

New

- The Ministry of Education is exploring research partnerships to investigate ways to improve school nutrition in Alberta. *(Education)*
- The Ministry of Education will issue a call for proposals from non-profit organizations to collaborate with schools to pilot innovative ways to support vulnerable youth and reduce operating costs and the administrative burden on schools, while ensuring students receive healthy, balanced meals. *(Education)*

Ongoing

- Continue to provide significant funding to school authorities for their local school nutrition programs: \$17 million for the program in the 2022-23 school year. This funding provides a daily nutritious meal to more than 40,000 students in a school year. *(Education)*
- The recently updated Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) program and regulations allow flexibility for local FCSS programs to provide vulnerable Albertans with direct assistance like food provision during extraordinary times of crisis. *(Community and Social Services)*
- Develop a framework to strengthen food insecurity prevention supports. *(Community and Social Services)*

Pandemic Supports

- One-time funding of about \$6 million was provided to support food banks and community organizations in food supply efforts during the pandemic. *(Community and Social Services)*





Recommendation 7

Advance existing and create new supports, where necessary, for those adults who are helping children and youth to navigate adverse experiences during the pandemic.

Objective

Through the review, parents and experts gave feedback that the ability of the child to navigate pandemic-related stress was often directly related to the response of their parents. Many parents expressed feeling unsure of their own ability to access supports, or where to access supports for their children. By strengthening supports for parents, teachers, and other adults working with children and youth, we can ensure children are able to receive the support they need from those who care for them.

Actions

New

- Increase funding to the Canadian Mental Health Association. This will increase the drop-in support groups for parents of children and youth with mental health and addiction issues. *(Health)*
- Early childhood educators will receive more training on mental health needs in children from birth to age six. *(Children's Services)*
- Alberta's kindergarten to Grade 6 curriculum is being renewed, which will provide opportunities for students to learn about well-being including mental health, physical activity, nutrition, positive body image, consent and healthy relationships. *(Education)*
 - This will also empower teachers to properly support children and youth addressing these issues.

- Education will issue a Call for Proposals in 2022 for Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) to lead pilots with school jurisdictions to test innovative solutions for delivering the School Nutrition Program (SNP) more effectively.
 - This will allow government to cast a wide net to identify interested NPOs willing and able to collaborate with school jurisdictions and help drive innovation.

Ongoing

- Respect in School is a prevention-training tool, developed for and available to all school staff in Alberta. *(Education)*
- Improve online resources for teachers and school staff to better support the mental health and well-being of students. *(Education)*





Recommendation 8

Explore and activate ways to better track, measure, and understand the learning impacts of the pandemic and inform decisions to strengthen school capacity to respond.

Objective

Strengthen and build the ability to reverse pandemic learning loss and provide support to young students to directly address these gaps.

Actions

New

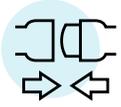
- Implement learning assessments, screening tools and interventions for grades 1-3 in language and math to help assess progress in the critical early years, so we can catch struggling learners early. *(Education)*

- Build a new Data Strategy, which will ensure the government can harness the full potential of its data to better serve Albertans and meet their needs. *(Service Alberta, Education)*
 - This will allow for better learning data collection and early flagging of challenges and opportunities.

Ongoing

- Alberta Education is providing support for targeted literacy and numeracy programming for students in grades 1-3 who have fallen behind during the pandemic by committing an additional \$45 million in the 2021-22 school year. School authorities will report on student gains in literacy and numeracy achievements in June 2022. *(Education)*
- Service Alberta allocated \$4.5 million to initiate implementation of the new Data Strategy: the Government of Alberta's vision of realizing the full potential of Alberta's data for the benefit of Albertans, while respecting privacy. *(Service Alberta)*





Recommendation 9

Improve broadband internet service and access to devices to address difficulties related to remote education and virtual mental health supports.

Objective

Feedback from many rural and remote children, youth and parents indicated they were inadequately connected to supports, or even online schooling, as a result of poor internet access. The Alberta Broadband Strategy will close this gap and ensure all Albertans, regardless of location, can access high-speed internet.

Actions

New

- In March 2022, Alberta's government announced the Alberta Broadband Strategy, an investment of \$390 million over four years to improve rural broadband services in rural, remote and Indigenous communities across the province.
 - Alberta secured a matching dollar-for-dollar investment from the Government of Canada, making a combined public investment of \$780 million for broadband improvements.
- The Alberta Broadband Strategy presents a funded plan to reach universal connectivity by the end of fiscal year 2026-2027. (*Service Alberta*)
- Service Alberta will continue to advocate for federal telecommunications policy reform to better utilize wireless spectrum in rural areas. (*Service Alberta*)





Recommendation 10

Accelerate and utilize data collection, collaboration, and innovation to better assess child and youth development and enhance decision-making related to their well-being and resiliency.

Objective

Child and youth development and decision-making will be informed by the best available data by improving Alberta's Government collection efforts.

Actions

New

- Initiatives are underway to improve monitoring of outcomes in all programs.
 - Improved data collection will support outcomes monitoring to ensure every support or service offered by Alberta's government is improving the lives of children and youth. *(Health, Service Alberta)*

- Creating a new cross-ministry dashboard to assist all government departments to make better informed, data-driven decisions, and to ensure that government programs and services are delivering the best possible outcomes. *(All)*
- The government's Data Strategy will focus on creating a policy environment and a data framework that will enable more data-driven innovations, modernize and strengthen privacy protections, enable better-informed and more timely decision making, and improve the delivery of government services. *(Service Alberta)*

Ongoing

- Conducting an ongoing evaluation of the province-wide Family Resource Network. This evaluation will identify improvements, and will examine how the Network can best meet the needs of children, youth, and families. *(Children's Services)*

What is a data dashboard? A data dashboard is an information management tool used to track, analyze, and display key performance indicators, metrics, and data points.



Alberta 