

Backgrounder to crisis in children's services

Funding shortfalls

- 49 of Ontario's 53 Children's Aid Societies (CASs) face a total budget shortfall of \$67 million this year. CASs face shortfalls of up to 30 per cent of their costs. Agencies in northern Ontario and those serving First Nations and Aboriginal communities have received some of the largest cutbacks.
- 10 agencies that provide government-mandated child welfare and protection services also provide other services including child and youth mental health services and child development services.
- 37 CASs have requested a Ministerial Review of their funding. Agencies anticipate finding out whether they will receive more funding in December.
- York Region Children's Aid Society is short \$7.3 million or 16.2 per cent of its budget. On Nov. 10, the agency issued 60 days notice of layoff to 18 employees. If the agency does not receive additional funding, the employees will be laid off as of Jan. 15, 2010.
- Chatham-Kent Children's Services is short \$1.6 million or 7 per cent of its budget. The agency will be unable to meet its payroll past March 12, 2010.
- Payukotayno: James and Hudson Bay Family Service is short \$1.9 million or 14.6 per cent of its budget. The agency will cease to have sufficient funds to continue operations on Dec. 14. Letters of layoff have been given to all front-line and management staff, approximately 120 staff.
- Kenora Patricia Child and Family Services will run out of funds in December. A neighbouring agency, Tikinagan Child and Family Services, informed Kenora Patricia on Nov. 11 that as of Nov. 1, it could no longer pay \$600,000 monthly for a number of children placed in Kenora Patricia's residential care. The children will remain for the time being. 16 layoff notices will be issued to Kenora Patricia staff on Nov. 18, and if the agency does not receive additional funding, Kenora Patricia will have cash flow issues the third week of December and more layoffs notices will be issued.
- Child and youth mental health agencies provide services to many of the same vulnerable children as CASs. Agencies have received only an 8 per cent increase to their core budgets since 1992.
- Child and youth mental health agencies struggle to deliver quality services with fewer dollars to an ever-increasing number of children and youth in need.

Mandate and need

- Under the Child and Family Services Act, CASs have a unique mandate to protect children, investigate allegations of child abuse and neglect, and provide guidance, care, prevention and adoption services.
- OACAS member agencies provided care to 27,152 children and 42,811 families in 2008.
- The child welfare system has experienced two major legislative reforms: *Child Welfare Reform* in 2000 which expanded the definition of 'child in need of protection' and *Child Welfare Transformation* in 2006 which emphasized providing safe, stable, family-centred options for children by keeping children safe with biological and kin families, and finding adoptive families when necessary.
- *Child Welfare Transformation* requires CASs to increase the time staff members spend with families and community partners to develop plans which balance family with safety.
- The government's funding model of CASs does not reflect the actual hours it takes staff to manage caseloads and abide by statutory requirements. The funding model also does not reflect, in some instances, the real cost of treatment for high-needs children.
- Regarding children's mental health services, 25,341 children in Ontario completed the Brief Child and Family Phone Interview in 2008, the intake process for child and youth mental health agencies. 45 per cent of those children were still waiting for service on December 31, 2008.
- A first-ever policy framework for child and youth mental health, *A Shared Responsibility*, was released in November, 2006. The framework called for a flexible continuum of timely and appropriate services resulting from the co-ordination of all government ministries and community agencies responsible for the healthy development of children. The government has provided no additional funding to make this vision a reality.
- Research shows that almost one out of five Ontario children and youth has a diagnosable mental health disorder that causes moderate to severe impairment, and two-thirds of those children have more than one disorder.
- According to the Ontario Child Health Study, five out of every six children who need specialized help for mental health problems are not getting any. And those who seek help face an average wait time of five and a half months.
- Child and youth mental health providers have experienced up to a 50 per cent increase in referrals for service during the recession.
- It is now well-documented that 70 per cent of mental health problems first appear before the age of 20 – for some conditions the average age of onset is as low as 12 – and that prognosis for recovery is best when treatment is provided early.

National Child Day

- In 1993, the federal government enacted legislation to designate November 20 of each year as National Child Day in order to promote awareness of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on November 20, 1989.
- Canada ratified the *Convention* in 1991.
- The *Convention* spells out the basic human rights children under 18 everywhere have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.