

# Government of Alberta Children's Charter Public Consultation

Focus Group Summary Notes: Canadian Mental Health Association

Facilitated by the Edmonton Social Planning Council

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## THINKING ABOUT AN ALBERTA CHILDREN'S CHARTER

### What principles could be included in a children's charter?

Probe Questions:

a) **What kind of life do we envision for our children?**

"I want a life where children can have access to the basics – food, clothing and shelter. I live in a nice place but equally important as our physical environment is our emotional wellbeing."

"All of my children are on their own, and I certainly wish they have the skills to go out on their own and not need so much support and stuff. I think it is important to clear up my debt, and put something away for them so at least they have something for the future."

"I think of this from a holistic perspective (physical, mental, emotional wellbeing). I want my children to feel a sense of community and in order to feel this they must engage in their community. I want them to have good self-esteem and confidence. And school comes into that. Education for all, a real focus on literacy and tutoring for everybody [is important]."

"I want my children to have hope for their future, be able to give and receive empathy."

"I think all children should feel safe both physically and emotionally and this comes from having access to a caring and support environment."

"Education is so very important and all children should have access to it. I also think there should be good programs that support kids after they finish high-school."

"What is important is that they have a sense of family life. Sense of social support. A safe work environment. A safe living environment."

"I see that rents are going up, it's harder to live, more people are falling into a life of poverty and I worry that my children will have a hard time thriving in an environment where things are tough. It seems that politicians don't really care as they make major budget cuts to programs and services that people need."

"They are doing things all backwards. Do they not realize that the kids that are coming up are our future?"

"I haven't worked for a couple of years.... But 68% of my income has gone to rent. I just hope for the future [generation] that they can bring the rent down. Like \$950 is a lot of money for rent."

Sometimes people have to decide that: If I pay my rent, I am going to have to pay this much for food.... I was in that position with my kids a while back, thank god I got out that situation.”

“Access to affordable housing. [Low-income families] can get that housing... but it’s in a slum area.... You [don’t] have enough money to live. That’s why a lot of people are getting depressed.”

“I have four children that are adults now, but they all had some sort of disability that was not completely taken care of in the school system. I went to a speech [therapy] class [that my child was enrolled in] twice, and was told that I had to assume all the responsibility to fix the problem. As a single parent without any support from my Ex-husband, I found it extremely stressful.”

“What I would like to see in the future is more [access to special] education. My first child had a cleft lip. And, he was put in a school for children who have hearing loss. And, it cost \$3000.... After a year, he was taken out of the school because [I couldn’t afford it] and it was not covered by the government.”

“Classrooms are getting larger, and it’s becoming more difficult for the teachers to manage the classroom.”

“I have a daughter with cerebral palsy, and she is no longer able to get medical [services that she needs]. She [had her services] cut off. They said she should go out to work. There is not enough support and help for people with physical and mental health issues.”

“I want children to have access to opportunities that will lead to success. If we don’t provide the basics and the emotional support, they will be set up to fail.”

“Children are impressionable. They learn from their experiences. If you give them the right experiences, they will thrive.”

“We need better access to mental health assessments at an early age, before they go to school. My daughter suffers from autism. She struggled all through school. She finally tried to graduate from high school for three years, and they just passed right over her. [They did not test her for a learning disability or autism.] And, once they found out, it was too late.”

### **What role does government/communities/individuals& families have in supporting these principles?**

“Government needs to continue to provide financial support to children in need. And I feel they need to provide more financial support.”

“They [should inform] individuals [about these services] for any children that falls outside the *normal* area. That can be tricky. Some people don’t want mental illness diagnosed too early because of stigmatization, or they get misdiagnosed.

“The government should be actively involved in ensuring that housing built for the poor doesn’t become slums. We want people to have permanent places to live, but why should they be subject to housing that is poor quality and in neighborhoods that are run down. All this does is further emphasize the issues of poverty. Poor people shouldn’t have to feel ostracized.”

“The government means well, but they tend to botch it along the way. For the same price, they can build nice [affordable housing units] in a nice neighborhood

“More efforts need to be made to teach kids about life-skills in school.”

“Individuals need to do more to support one another, instead of being rude. Media also plays a role in fostering positive behaviors.”

“Individuals need to be responsible for the upkeep of subsidized housing that they are provided with by the Government (if [tenants] want to stay there, then appreciate it, don’t vandalize it). At the same time the Government needs to do their part to help neighborhoods accept people who are poor or have a mental illness.” (Direct reference to the negative attitudes in Terwilligar Towne)

“Schools should continue to provide lunch programs so that kids don’t go to school hungry and we need to continue to have subsidized affordable housing. Let’s have governments and individuals work as a team.”

“We need to continue to have mixed housing in neighborhoods and let people live their lives without fear that they will be ostracized because they are living in low income.”

“Parents have to support their children. They have to give them guidelines. Chores. Morals. Etiquette.”

“Volunteering most of my life. I know what my children have been doing, but I’ve brought them up right. All of those things combined with the government subsidies would be much more supportive to families. There should be government subsidies, who are willing to work or volunteer their time.”

“Lower income individuals don’t get the funding they need [to put their kids in] sports. Like soccer, baseball, etc. They [can’t buy] any of the equipment. The costs are exorbitant. They have other costs to take care of... food, clothing, and shelter. Once you get through that, you’re done.”

“Families should get together. Have block barbecues [because they build stronger communities], which teach them how to get along.”

“Government needs to ensure we support single people on AISH. There are lots of supports for kids and families but not the same level of support for singles.”

**Given the life we want for our children, how does poverty and poverty reduction factor in?**

“Poverty reduction is more than just an increased income. It’s got a lot to do with raising one’s self esteem.”

“In my mind, with all the successful poverty reduction strategies, it would level the playing field so to speak. It would give them opportunities that would let them stand on their own. It would give them a chance to have a normal life.”

“Programs that help with accessing affordable decent housing and life skills training and support for families would be beneficial so that people can live functional lives.”

“For myself, I was missing several key components and was not able to function. With help, I was able to obtain the missing ingredients... and those were the life skills that were missing.”

“With children, it would level the playing field so to speak. Successful poverty reduction strategies would bridge the gap between where they currently are living in poverty, and where they [can be].”

“Poverty reduction changes everything.”

“Healthy living is tied to poverty, both physically and mentally. By addressing the issue of poverty you can live a productive life.”

“For me, I was raised in poverty. I didn’t have any after school support. I didn’t have anything. If kids don’t have that, it can lead to drugs and gangs... you know. Getting kids out of poverty puts them on a level playing field so they have the ability to do things.”

“Having the ability to participate in recreation programs with my kids through using the leisure access card has been extremely helpful.”

“Reducing poverty has the ability to give people a second chance at life, to allow their kids to live healthy *normal* lives, and become productive citizens that contribute to society.”