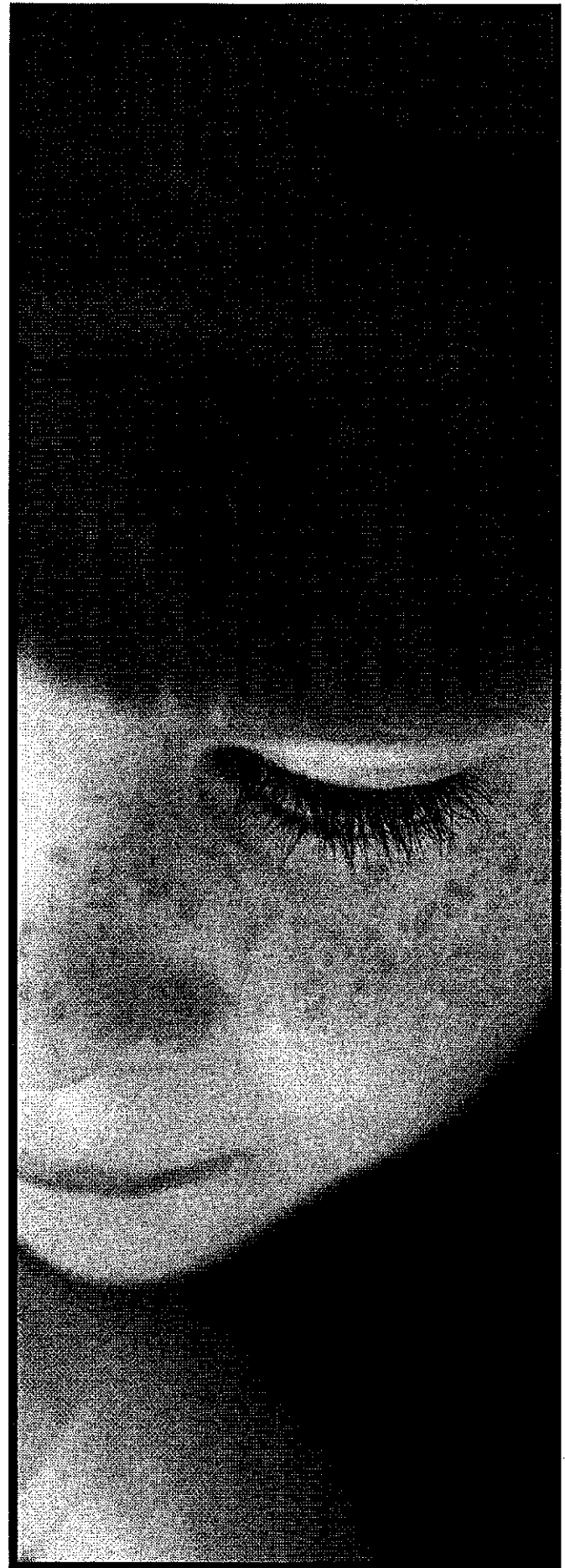


A report of the
**Alberta Association
of Services for Children
and Families (AASCF)**



“The Future is Now!”

Building Strong and
Sustainable Communities
through Strong and Healthy
Social Service Agencies



A report of the

**Alberta Association of Services
for Children and Families**

Released September 2007

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Who Are We?

The **Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families (AASCF)** is a membership association formed in 1967 that represents agencies providing services to children and families in Alberta. Our **mission** is to strengthen member agencies and promote attitudes, practices and conditions that contribute to quality services for vulnerable children and families. The AASCF has **Regional Chapters** throughout Alberta and are in the process of creating additional chapters to meet the changing needs of our members.

Over its history, the AASCF has championed the development of standards for service excellence, influenced social policy and legislation through collaboration with stakeholders, and advocated on behalf of service providers.

The AASCF represents 109 member agencies, who serve approximately 80,000 children and families each year.

Who Are Our Members?

- ◆ Aboriginal Family Support Services
- ◆ Accredited Supports to the Community
- ◆ Adoption 2000 Consulting Inc.
- ◆ AETAS Health Care Inc.
- ◆ Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre
- ◆ Alta Care Resources
- ◆ Aspen Family and Community Network
- ◆ Association for Parents of the Handicapped of SE AB
- ◆ Association of Communities Against Abuse
- ◆ Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society
- ◆ Big Brothers Big Sisters Society of Edmonton and Area
- ◆ Blue Devil Wilderness Camps Ltd.
- ◆ Bona Comp. (Ardrrossan Dreamcatcher)
- ◆ Bosco Homes
- ◆ Bow West Community Resource Centre
- ◆ Boyle Street Community Service
- ◆ Boys & Girls Clubs of Alberta
- ◆ Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary
- ◆ Boys' & Girls' Clubs of Edmonton
- ◆ Bredin Institute
- ◆ Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter Association
- ◆ Canadian Accreditation Council
- ◆ Canadian Outcomes Research Institute
- ◆ Can-Care Homes For Youth Inc.
- ◆ CARF Canada
- ◆ Catherine Hedlin
- ◆ Catholic Social Services
- ◆ Cerebral Palsy Association in Alberta
- ◆ Changes
- ◆ Cheyenne Life Style Support Services
- ◆ Child & Adolescent Services Association
- ◆ Child & Youth Care Association of Alberta
- ◆ Child & Youth Care Program (Grant MacEwan)
- ◆ Children First Family Services Association
- ◆ Children's Cottage Society Of Calgary
- ◆ Chimo Youth Retreat Centre
- ◆ Closer to Home Community Services Society
- ◆ Cook Counselling Services Ltd./Connections
- ◆ Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre of Calgary
- ◆ Dickinsfield Amity House
- ◆ E4C
- ◆ Edmonton & Area ABI Adoption Society
- ◆ Elk Island Child & Youth Ranch Inc.
- ◆ Enviro's Wilderness School Association
- ◆ Family Centre Society of Southern Alberta
- ◆ Family Connections
- ◆ Family Ties (1997) Association
- ◆ Family to Family Care Ltd
- ◆ Focus(Vermillion Assoc for Persons with Dis)
- ◆ Grand Cache Transition House Society
- ◆ Grand Prairie Emergency Shelter
- ◆ Healthy Families Healthy Futures (Healthy Families Region11Society)prev name
- ◆ Hedin Consulting Service
- ◆ Heritage Family Services Ltd.
- ◆ High Weald Consulting
- ◆ Hull Child & Family Services
- ◆ Inner City Youth Housing Project
- ◆ Lakeland Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Society
- ◆ Lamoureux Children's Home
- ◆ Lethbridge College
- ◆ Lethbridge Family Services
- ◆ McMan Youth Service, Family & Community Services (Medicine Hat)
- ◆ McMan Youth, Family & Community Services (Edmonton and North)
- ◆ McMan Youth, Family & Community Services Association (Innisfail)
- ◆ McMan Youth, Family & Community Services Association (Calgary)
- ◆ McMan Youth, Family & Community Services Association (Lethbridge)
- ◆ Melina Dayne Psychological Services
- ◆ M tis Child & Family Services Edmonton
- ◆ Morrison Youth Care Inc.
- ◆ Mount Royal College - Child & Youth Care Counsellor Program
- ◆ Mountain Plains Community Services Society of the North
- ◆ Mountain Plains Family Services Society of Edmonton
- ◆ New Horizons Group Home
- ◆ Oak Hill Boys Ranch
- ◆ Opokaa'sin Early Intervention Society
- ◆ PACE
- ◆ Parents As Teachers Society (South Region)
- ◆ Parkland Youth Homes
- ◆ Pathways Family Services
- ◆ Pathways Home
- ◆ Piikani Child & Family Services
- ◆ Prodigy Human Service Consultants Inc.
- ◆ Protegra Inc.
- ◆ Red Deer Family Service of Central Alberta
- ◆ Red Deer Native Friendship Centre
- ◆ Region 3 Family Based Care Society
- ◆ Rocky Native Friendship Centre
- ◆ Safe Haven Child & Youth Services Ltd.
- ◆ Sifton Family & Youth Services
- ◆ Southern Homes Society
- ◆ Spectrum Youth And Family Services Association
- ◆ Spirit Of Our Youth Homes Inc.
- ◆ Terra Association
- ◆ The Catholic Family Services of Calgary
- ◆ The Family Centre of Northern Alta
- ◆ The Hera Society
- ◆ The Salvation Army Children's Village
- ◆ The SPEC Association for Children & Families
- ◆ VALID
- ◆ W.J.S. Alberta
- ◆ Warren Youth Services
- ◆ Wetaskiwin Youth Centre
- ◆ Wood's Homes, Calgary
- ◆ Yellowhead Youth Centre
- ◆ Youth and Volunteer Centre
- ◆ Youth Assessment Centre - Lac La Biche
- ◆ Youth Emergency Shelter Society
- ◆ YWCA of Edmonton
- ◆ YWCA of Lethbridge & District (Ywise Choice)



Report produced by the **Edmonton Social Planning Council.** (www.edmspc.com)

Executive Summary

Strong and Sustainable Communities are Achieved through Strong and Healthy Social Service Agencies

The funded agencies serving Alberta's Vulnerable Children and Families are in a crisis.

1. Vulnerable Alberta children and families are increasingly at risk of not receiving the services they need.

Child and family service agencies funded by the Ministry of Children's services (hereby referred to as "funded agencies") are increasingly unable to attract and retain qualified employees due to the low compensation they are able to offer relative to other sectors. The overall skill level and qualifications of staff and applicants is declining. Agencies are being forced to divert resources to recruitment and training. Staff are overloaded and service quality is declining. Agencies are unable to plan for their own growth and sustainability.

This crisis is the result of the historical insufficient funding for staff compensation, which is compounded by sporadic and targeted increases. When funding increases are given, they tend to be specifically enveloped by program and profession. This has resulted in significant disparities both between and within social service sectors, professions, regions and agencies.

It is becoming more difficult to provide a safe and functional working environment for staff and clients. Agencies are having to take capacity out of the system as the staff-to-client ratios fall below a level where programs can be run safely and effectively for both clients and staff.

The Bottom Line: Sustainable and predictable funding for wages and benefits is required to recruit and retain qualified staff to run essential programs and services.

2. The strength and sustainability of Alberta communities and the capacity of our Social Infrastructure is being compromised.

Broad under funding and inconsistent allocation of core operational budgets continue to erode the social infrastructure. Our operational cost increases have not kept pace with rising costs over the last ten years. This has been further exacerbated by the strength of our current economic environment.

As contracted Government of Alberta essential service providers, our capacity to meet increasing demand is diminishing. This is having an adverse effect on the strength and sustainability of Alberta communities.

The Bottom Line: Sustainable and predictable support for the bricks and mortar is required for strong Social Infrastructure.

Current Realities

Since the major cuts to social programs in the 1990s, the Government of Alberta has contracted many agencies across the Province to deliver services ranging from childcare to family violence prevention. However, the funding models adopted for social services have not evolved in response to the changes taking place given Alberta's strong economic growth. Higher operating costs and increasingly complex social issues from a transient population influx has created an exponential increase in demand for social services.

The Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families (AASCF) represents 109 agencies that provide a wide range of services to vulnerable children and families across the Province. Recent surveys show that staff working in funded agencies have lagged behind their professional peers financially for many years.

The Bottom Line: Above all, this is an economic issue. An appropriate investment today will create economic efficiencies in the long run.

Research has shown that one dollar invested can yield up to a 7 dollar return in avoided costs, such as police, justice, addiction and treatment costs, as well as increased productivity, employment, and contributions to the community. (Schweinhart, *et al.*, 2005)

Initiatives Undertaken by the Ministry of Children's Services

The Ministry of Children's Services has taken a number of important steps to alleviate aspects of the human resources crisis:

- \$18-million increase in salaries, and \$2-million increase in operating costs, in the last two years (a historical perspective will be provided for discussion at our meeting)
- \$2-million training bursary for leadership development
- Support for a training needs assessment
- Support an audit of the sector's administrative efficiency
- Strengthen and collaborate with AASCF to address challenges encountered by the child and family services sector

The administrative audit sponsored by the Ministry of Children's Services found that the system was run effectively and efficiently. Despite heavy competition for funding between agencies, funded agencies regularly share resources and knowledge, collaborate on issues, and refer clients with specific needs to other agencies better able to meet their needs.

Despite all these positive developments, the crisis in the sector continues. AASCF urges the Government, through the Ministry of Children's Services, to take the following actions to alleviate the current crisis and ensure the long-term viability of funded agencies responsible for the provision of essential services for vulnerable children and families.

Initiatives Undertaken by Funded Agencies

Fundraising. As the gap between actual and funded costs widens, funded agencies have increased their fundraising efforts to cover the shortfall. Growing donor exhaustion means that fundraising for essential services, in particular on staff and operations, is not well received, and agencies are spending large amounts of resources otherwise allocated to direct service, quality improvement and program development.

Volunteerism. This sector has always relied on the goodwill of volunteers to help address the resource shortfall from Board Governance to direct service. This sector is currently experiencing difficulty finding enough volunteers to meet the increasing demand, due to lack of volunteers and an increasing concern for the liabilities intrinsic to the sector.

What Needs to be Done Now

- 1. Approve an immediate 20% increase to the funded agencies providing services to children and families in Alberta: 80% of which is designated to staff salaries and benefits, and 20% to core operating costs.**

Salaries and Benefits. This proposed contribution would make an immediate difference in attending to current risks, and make the sector more attractive to existing staff and new recruits.

Core Operational Costs. Despite inflation increasing 30 per cent over the past decade, the proposed increase would immediately help to strengthen the Social Infrastructure, ease the financial pressures, and allow agencies to focus their attention on program delivery.

- 2. Continue working with AASCF on identifying issues and their solutions.**

What Needs to be Done in the Future

- 1. Annually index funding for salaries and operational costs to the weekly average wage and inflation indices, respectively, to ensure the initial 20% increase holds its value.**

Annually indexing salaries to Alberta's weekly average wage – as the Alberta Government has done for the minimum wage – will help to ensure that the social services sector remains competitive in the job market. Annually indexing the core operational budgets to the Consumer Price Index will help to ensure that funded agencies can cover core operational cost increases without having to divert resources to seek additional funding.

- 2. Develop a long-term, cross-ministerial strategy to implement an integrated, comprehensive and equitable approach to fund staff positions in Alberta's nonprofit, human services sector. This includes the creation of a position evaluation, classification and compensation system.**

Present government initiatives, such as the Alberta Nonprofit Voluntary Sector Initiative (ANVSI), may help in the development of these strategies.

- 3. Continue partnership with the AASCF to attend to the needs of children and families.**

Backgrounder



Sustainable and predictable funding for wages and benefits is required to recruit and retain qualified staff to run essential social services.

The greatest concern for funded agencies is their current inability to attract and retain enough qualified staff. Based on the AASCF survey results, funded agencies had a six-month turnover rate of 20 per cent in 2006. Funded agencies also reported nearly 800 job vacancies and a declining number of applicants. The sector has become a "training ground," and applicants tend to have less education and experience than required. Funded agencies are often forced to settle for less in order to fill their vacant positions.

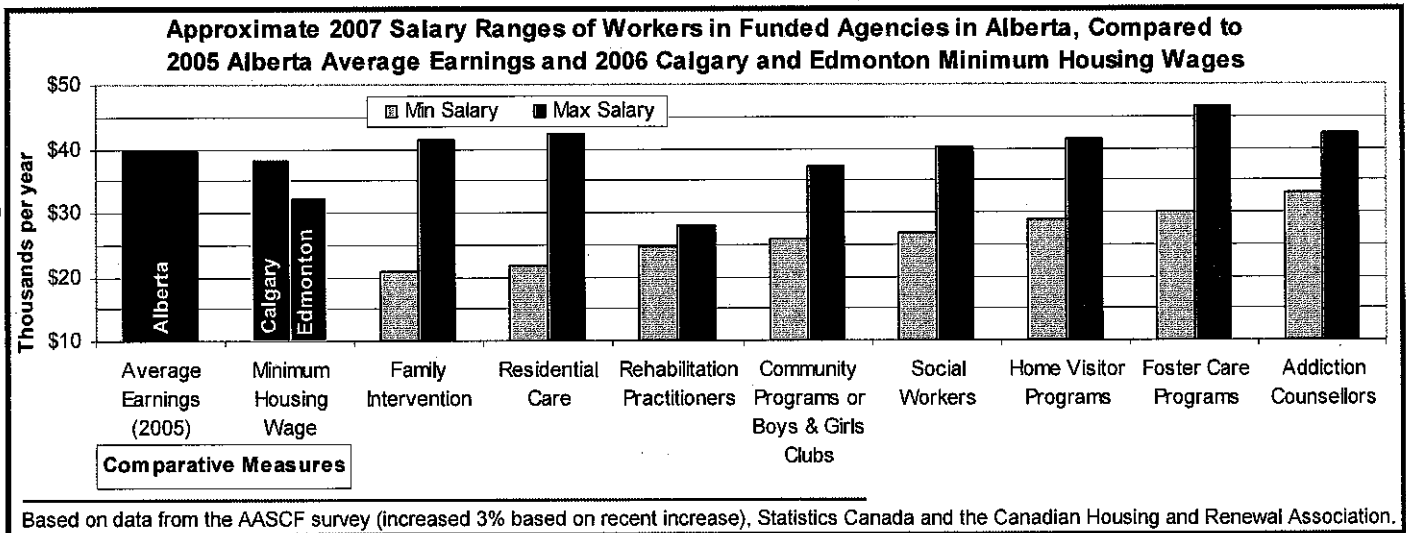
Salaries and Benefits

Inadequate compensation was the most common reason given by funded agency staff for leaving their jobs. The salaries and benefits offered by funded agencies have long been lower than similar positions in other sectors, such as health, education and social services, and are becoming increasingly unattractive in the current competitive job market.

"Current compensation levels are such that folks do not apply. Two recent provincial and national job postings got a total of three responses - two of which were qualified. Once compensation was clarified, candidates respectfully declined."
(AASCF survey respondent)

Few funded agency staff earn salaries near the Alberta average, and those who earn the lowest salaries fall well below the Alberta median. Many earn less than a minimum housing wage, spending more than 30 per cent of their gross income on shelter. The AASCF survey found that 29 per cent of staff worked more than one job to make ends meet.

"[Some staff can't] pay their rent, [use] the food bank and work at two or more jobs... [They] cannot afford to [work in this field]."
(AASCF survey respondent)



The recent 3 per cent salary increase given by the Ministry of Children's Services did not adequately match the increases in average weekly earnings, which rose 5 per cent from 2005 to 2006. As a result, the already significant salary gap between funded agency staff and their professional counterparts in the government, hospital, education and for-profit sectors is widening. Currently, funded agency staff earn up to 50 per cent less than the Alberta average earnings in 2005, depending upon their position.

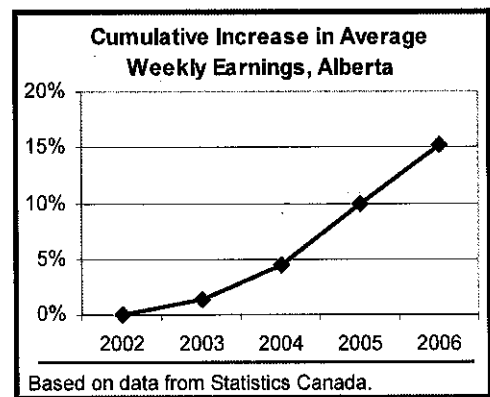
Approximate 2007 Salary Range of Funded Agencies in Alberta, Compared to Alberta Average and Median Earnings from 2001 to 2005

Alberta Earnings		
	Average	Median
2001	\$32,104	\$24,413
2002	\$33,200	\$25,154
2003	\$35,346	\$26,171
2004	\$37,011	\$28,395
2005	\$39,600	\$30,000

(Based on data from Statistics Canada)

Funded Agency Salaries (2007) *	
Reported Salary Range	
Minimum	\$20,600
Maximum	\$46,350
Average of Reported Ranges	
Minimum	\$25,521
Maximum	\$38,682

* This table reflects the salary data presented in the bar graph above.



The distribution of additional funding for wage increases is inconsistent across the sector. This has resulted in significant disparities between and within programs, agencies, professions, and regions. It is common, for example, for front-line workers in a contracted program to receive wage increases, while program supervisors, administrative/support staff and frontline workers in similar programs on a fee-for-service basis do not. The sporadic funding increases have forced many funded agencies to cut administrative staff, and hire more part-time and contract positions that offer poor benefits and job security. These positions are less attractive to staff and recruits.

“We have had to cut the coordinator and admin positions supporting the services ... [This] means less supervision of front line staff and [less] support to families.”

“We are relying on one-year project funding to maintain full-time employees, so new staff is on contract, without any [job] security...” (AASCF survey respondents)

Working Conditions

The high staff turnover in funded agencies has created significant workload increases for the remaining staff. The deteriorated working conditions make it harder for staff to work safely and effectively, reducing the likelihood of achieving positive client outcomes that make work in the social services sector rewarding. The longer that staff work under these high stress conditions, the more likely they are to burn out, and need an extended leave and/or seek alternative career paths.

“Kids will react to [staff] leaving them and feel as if they are not valued. This usually manifests itself through violence [and] acting out... which requires more time and attention.”

“[The] increased workload and need to cover off on open shifts in residential programs is resulting in higher rates of stress and burnout.”

(AASCF survey respondents)

Funding and staff shortages have also limited the ability of funded agencies to offer training and career advancement opportunities that are commonly available to staff in other sectors. The leadership development bursary from the Ministry is a good start. However, additional funding is required to address other staff development needs in the sector.

Current Realities: Lack of Sustainable Funding for Salaries and Benefits

Vulnerable Children and Families: Unmet Needs

Vulnerable children and families are not receiving the quality of support they need. Some services are at risk of being cut off. Constant staff turnover makes it difficult to develop the stable, trusting client-staff relationships very much needed by the vulnerable children and families. Added instability not only hinders their progress, but can make things worse.

“Clients will suffer the most. The quality of supports will go down... [and] we may need to cut spaces or close programs.”

“When [agencies] have no options but to hire someone with only minimal suitability, it places [everyone] at risk. [It won't] be long before we start to read about the negative impacts...”

(AASCF survey respondents)

Funded Agencies: Reduced Capacity

As a result of constant staff turnover – compounded by the inability to find adequate replacements – funded agencies are losing the skills, knowledge and experience that allow them to consistently deliver high-quality services and respond to changing community needs.

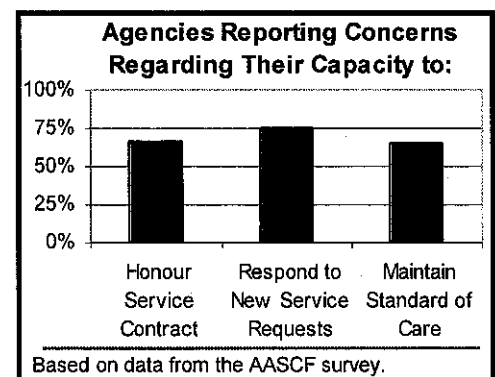
“We are losing the depth of staff capabilities... Recent diploma grads are becoming senior staff in less than 6 months due to turnover instead of capability.” (AASCF survey respondent)

High leadership turnover has also made it difficult for funded agencies to plan for organizational sustainability.

Government: Poor Return on Investments

The Government of Alberta is effectively undermining its own investments by under funding agencies. Agencies are much less able to meet their contractual obligations when they are forced to divert their resources to short-term survival. Consequently, the Government will end up paying more for income and housing supports, justice, health care and other services.

“Time and resources [are being] spent on [recruiting and training] new staff, instead of... direct service to children and families.” (AASCF survey respondent)



Sustainable and predictable support for the bricks and mortar is required for strong Social Infrastructure.

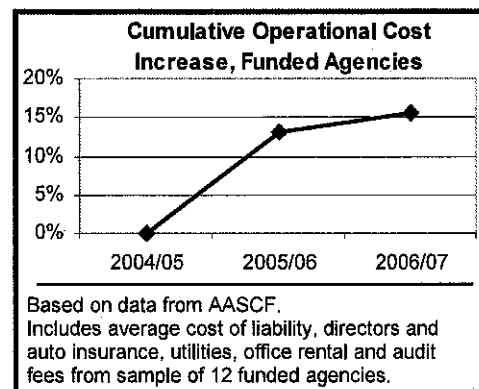
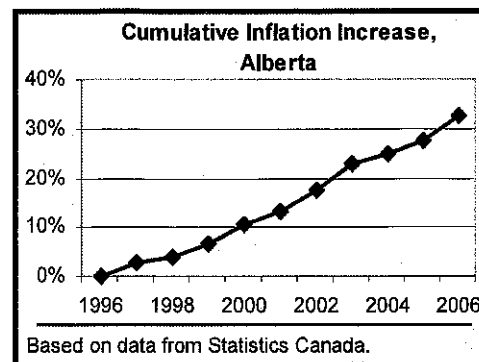
As Alberta's economy grows and prospers, inflation has increased and the cost of running the funded agencies has followed suit. Despite the constant reality of rising costs, operational budgets for funded agencies has not kept pace for over ten years.

A sample of 12 funded agencies reported their core operational costs have increased an average of 16 per cent since 2004/05 - approximately 7 percent higher than inflation over the same period of time. The same sample of funded agencies reported core operational funding increases from the Ministry of Children's Services ranged from 0.3 to 42.8 per cent for the same period. For all but three agencies, the additional funding was not sufficient to cover their ongoing cost increases.

"Contracts are put into place and the budget remains the same for many years with little regard to the increase in operation costs, cost of living, benefits [or other] incentives for staff..."
(AASCF survey respondent)

Funded agencies typically receive the bulk of their funding through Government contracts. However, the stability of contracts is eroding as they become increasingly short-term and project-oriented, and more frequently subject to re-tendering.

This move towards short-term funding and accountability, has led to more specifically enveloped operating budgets. Spending tends to be restricted to direct program costs and front-line staff, with limited flexibility to cover core operating costs and administrative staff.



Agency Operational Costs and Shortfalls

The focus on project funding has resulted in the chronic under-funding of agencies' core operations. Many funded agencies have to either cut their costs or rely on fundraising to compensate for growing funding gaps. However, fundraising campaigns cost resources and are typically not a significant source of revenue for small organizations.

"Although the province is in an economic boom, little to no increases in funding has come to [funded] agencies... We still have to fundraise just as much, if not more, to support our programs and give staff minimal [wage] increases."
(AASCF survey respondent)

The growing reality is that many funded agencies are not able to make up the difference, and must operate on deficits.

Core Operational Costs

Core operational costs make up the smallest proportion of agencies' expenses, but they are essential goods and services whose costs are beyond the control of funded agencies. They include:

- **Occupancy Costs** (rent, lease, utilities, etc.)
Rental rates for office space are increasing. This is a barrier for many agencies, who are often located in smaller, aging facilities that do not meet their needs, or compromise client security and confidentiality.
- **Facility Maintenance** (IT, office repairs, etc.)
Agencies often cannot afford to hire designated IT or maintenance staff. Repairs may be put off until extra funds become available, even if they are essential to client and staff health and safety.
- **Finance Expenses** (bank charges, accounting, Audit fees)
- **Board and Management Expenses** (liability insurance for directors and board members)
- **Other Administrative Costs** (records maintenance, central office costs – including postage, office supplies, reporting requirements, etc.)
Despite the increases in accountability through project evaluation and reporting, funded agencies are rarely offered additional support to complete them. This is especially a major issue for agencies with multiple funders.

The Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (CCVO) found that mid-sized non-profit organizations in Calgary had an average core operational cost shortfall of 61 percent, and that 80 per cent of programs were under funded for core costs, in 2005. (Eakin, et al., 2006)

Direct Program Costs

Direct program costs are the second largest group of operational expenses. They include products or services directly related to delivering programs, such as equipment and supplies, travel, training, volunteer expenses, etc.

The Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (CCVO) found that mid-sized non-profit agencies in Calgary had an average 20 per cent shortfall in direct program costs in 2005. (Eakin, *et al.*, 2006)

Current Realities: Lack of Sustainable Funding for the Bricks and Mortar

Vulnerable Children and Families: Reduced Capacity

The health, safety and confidentiality of vulnerable children and families, as well as the quality of services they receive, are being compromised by the inadequate and under-maintained facilities in which funded agencies often operate. Inadequate core funding also limits clients' access to services.

Funded Agencies: Reduced Capacity

Inadequate and restrictive operational budgets, compounded by the unpredictability of funding increases, limits the ability of funded agencies to meet rising demand for service and respond to changing community needs. Staff resources that should be devoted to program delivery and sustainability are being diverted to short-term survival. The inadequacy of work equipment and tools, physical program space and delayed maintenance puts the health and safety of clients and staff at risk.

This may reduce the capacity of agencies so severely that they must begin to turn away vulnerable children and families.

In addition, competition between agencies for funding is reducing the potential for beneficial cross-sector partnerships. The pressure to achieve the lowest contract bid also contributes to under-funding, increased staff workloads and high stress levels.

"[Short-term funding models have created] a competitive and adversarial environment amongst agencies, rather than a resourceful, collaborative one... [It sends] a clear message that if agencies want to be in the game, they better keep their costs low."

"[Funding inconsistency] interrupts service provision to clients'... it creates [uncertainty] in this industry, resulting in skilled and dedicated staff leaving."

(AASCF survey respondents)

Government: Poor Return on Investment

As with salaries and benefits, under-funding core operations reduces the ability of social service agencies to meet their contractual obligations to the Ministry. This results in a poor return on the Government's investment, and will lead to increased costs in the long-term, particularly in the health care and justice systems.

"Programs will close, more and more staff will be assaulted, and this sector will suffer. Fewer beds will be available and fewer people will be prepared to work in this sector. What are we saying? THE FUTURE IS NOW!"

(AASCF survey respondent)

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