



Media Release
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Report Calls on Child-Serving Systems to Make Good on Improving Mental Health & Addictions Services

REGINA – Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, Dr. Lisa Broda, releases ***Desperately Waiting***, a research report involving almost 500 participants from across ministry sectors, communities, families and young people that calls on child-serving systems to address decades-old issues in the provision of mental health and addictions services for children.

The goal of this research is to elevate the rights, interests, and well-being of young people in Saskatchewan by gathering and analysing the direct experiences and perspectives of stakeholders in relation to youth mental health and addictions services. This work aligns with the issues we have heard about for years through our advocacy and investigative work - concerns regarding self-harm, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, completed suicides and increasing problematic substance use among young people.

We called this report, *Desperately Waiting*, because children and youth are at a crisis point in trying to access and receive mental health and addictions services. As illustrated in our report, gaps and deficiencies in these services have been known for over two decades, with not only the 2004 Advocate report, *Its Time for a Plan for Children’s Mental Health*, but also more recently with the *Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan (MHAAP)*.

Past recommendations offering roadmaps for change have been met with promises to address these, and while some investments and improvements have been made, our report shows many of the same systemic gaps persist. “This has created a landscape in which available services are focused on reacting to crisis, leaving a significant number of young people in Saskatchewan – who desperately need support – waiting for services until they, too, reach a crisis point,” said Broda.

Our research for this report involved nearly 500 participants, from corner to corner across the province that included children, families, communities, and professionals from across child-serving ministries including the provincial health systems. During these consultations, we asked what works within the mental health and addictions system for children and youth, the barriers and challenges young people face in accessing services and what is needed to improve the system.

The negative impacts on the well-being of children resulting from adverse childhood experiences and inequities regarding the social determinants of health were identified by young people and adults across all sectors and stakeholder groups as being the social drivers undermining the mental health of our children and youth.

“The participants stated that, when children and youth struggle or find themselves in a mental health or addictions-related crisis, the system is plagued with challenges such as availability of service providers and difficulty accessing services,” said Broda.

This report includes 14 cross-government recommendations related to mental health and addictions inpatient and community-based services. Some of these recommendations build upon those made in past reports, while others are new. These include:

- Implementing Youth Advisory Councils within the Ministry of Health and Health Authorities
- Decreasing wait times for mental health and addictions services to meet or exceed public expectations
- Funding and implementing more mental health counsellors and Indigenous Elders/Knowledge Keepers in schools
- Expanding outreach-based mental health and addictions services
- Funding and providing in-home support services to families who require this service to maintain care for their children at home
- Developing “middle-tier” therapeutic residential services for children and youth
- Evaluating and enhancing current detox and addictions treatment models
- Improving transitions from child and youth to adult mental health and addictions services
- Implementing the electronic Mental Health and Addictions Information System
- Moving all child-serving ministries to an integrated service-delivery model to enhance communication and coordination of services and achieve better outcomes for mental health and addictions services
- Developing a province-wide ‘Children’s Strategy’ to mitigate the social and environmental factors that negatively impact the well-being of children and youth

“What concerns me most is knowing that the profound impact of poor mental health and well-being of children and youth can tragically lead to the gravest of outcomes,” said Broda. “Until young people have full and effective access to preventive mental health and addictions services, their well-being will continue to suffer.”

The consequences of the pandemic have only exacerbated mental health and substance use issues for young people and have created obstacles to advancing government efforts to implement previous recommendations, such as the ones made in the 2014 MHAAP.

“We must not be satisfied with the state of mental health and addictions service provision as it is today. After decades of the same issues, we cannot expect outcomes to change without significant investments and for the system to immediately prioritize the well-being of children,” said Broda.

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. She leads a team of professionals who work on behalf of the province’s young people. Our vision is that the rights, well-being, and voices of children and youth are respected, valued, and supported to assist young people to reach their full potential.

- 30 -

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