

# SASKATCHEWAN ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH



# 2025

A N N U A L  
R E P O R T



**LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL**

April 2026

The Honourable Todd Goudy  
 Speaker of the Legislative Assembly  
 Legislative Building  
 2405 Legislative Drive  
 Regina, SK. S4S 0B3

Dear Mr. Speaker:

In accordance with section 39 of *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*, it is my duty and privilege to submit to you and members of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan this Annual Report from the Advocate for Children and Youth for the year 2025.

Respectfully,

A blue ink signature of Lisa Broda.

**Lisa Broda, PhD**  
**Advocate for Children and Youth**

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# Message from **the Advocate**



It has been my distinct privilege to serve the young people of Saskatchewan as I entered my second term as the Advocate for Children and Youth in April of 2025. Our office remains dedicated to helping children and youth have their viewpoints and interests heard and meaningfully considered in decisions that affect them. Our work is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which outlines 54 articles protecting the rights of children by setting standards in health care, education, legal, civil, and social services. These rights are critical to the safety, protection, and overall well-being of young people and must be upheld to ensure they live to their full potential.

As an independent office of the Legislature, we are responsible for advocating and monitoring the services and support programs for young people, and ensuring such services achieve the desired outcomes for children and youth. While we strive to work collaboratively with the entities that serve children, in order to preserve our independence, our office does not report to, or through, any government ministry or agency.

Our mandate is to work toward addressing gaps and strengthening the services children and youth

receive. This is difficult and challenging work, and 2025 was no exception. Children face complex issues and, in most situations, there is often no clear path forward.

The intricacy and difficult nature of our casework requires considerable effort to ensure young people who are struggling can navigate access to services, know their rights, have their voices heard in decisions affecting them, and achieve successful and supportive outcomes. Our cases reflect a full spectrum of social, economic, health and well-being, and physical safety issues such as food insecurity, homelessness, family separation and placement challenges, trauma and neglect, family and sexual violence, lack of access to education, difficulties transitioning to adulthood, mental health and substance misuse problems, and, at its worst, suicide or attempts to end life.

What we see in our work is sobering; however, working with a vast array of public bodies allows us to dig deeply into the hardest challenges and issues experienced by children, youth, and their families, and those providing services to this vulnerable population. Thus, our office is uniquely positioned to address these emerging and persistent concerns, track trends, and shed light on critical issues. Unfortunately, our work highlights the sombre side of the impacts children and youth face when they are not afforded services to address even their basic needs.

Sadly, too many children and youth have adverse childhood experiences and are not thriving in caring and supportive environments. We continue to see how children without structured, nurturing, safe, and protective surroundings can easily become disenfranchised and marginalized – leading to worsening mental health and symptoms of mental illness. In Canada, the suicide rate for 15–24-year-olds continues to be the second leading cause of death – which illustrates the worst outcome of poor mental health.

Our top priority is ensuring our work makes a critical and meaningful difference in the lives of the children and youth we serve and advocate on behalf of. Individual and systemic advocacy is the cornerstone of our work and the demand for our advocacy services is continuing to rise, along with complexity and urgency. Young people need our office now more than ever and our work continues to reflect this in our 2025 Annual Report.

We also recognize the difficulties and challenges faced by all

those in working in child welfare in providing quality services to our most vulnerable. In times where significant challenges exist in doing this work, we thank everyone for their dedication and commitment. We also ask government to keep investing in the well-being of children and youth to protect their right to live to their full potential, as these are Saskatchewan's future leaders.

Our office will continue to remain focused, compassionate, inclusive, and adaptable in our approach to the work we do under the authority of our legislated mandate. The success of our work and this office is directly attributed to our

staff and the high-quality services we provide to support the children and youth we serve. I have a deep level of gratitude for their commitment and loyalty to the young people of Saskatchewan.

**LISA BRODA, PHD**  
*Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth*

## Legislated Mandate

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent office of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. Our mandate is defined by *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*.

Our work includes:

### ADVOCACY

on behalf of children and youth receiving services from a provincial ministry, agency of the government, or publicly-funded health entity.

### PUBLIC EDUCATION

to raise awareness of the rights, interests, and well-being of children and youth.

### INVESTIGATIONS

into any matter concerning, or services provided to, children and youth by a provincial ministry, agency of the government, or publicly-funded health entity.

### RESEARCH AND ADVISE

on any matter relating to the rights, interests, and well-being of children and youth.

These functions are all interconnected and lead to the work we do systemically to ensure Saskatchewan children and youth receive the services to which they are entitled.

# Strategic Plan – 2025-2030

The end of 2024 marked the conclusion of the Advocate’s five-year strategic plan. Since this time, and with the Advocate’s reappointment for a second term in April of 2025, our office reviewed and refreshed our priorities with new goals and actions for 2025-2030. Upholding the rights of children, amplifying their voices in decisions that impact

the services provided to them, and supporting young people to live to their full potential are part of our vision and purpose of our strategic plan. We are looking forward to moving ahead with our goals and actions and upholding our legislated mandate for better system outcomes for children and youth in Saskatchewan.

## Priorities

### CHILDREN AND YOUTH VOICE

- Support self-advocacy and guide young people in services and systems
- Include, represent, and advance child and youth perspective
- Advocate for and support opportunities that enhance growth and development

### RECONCILIATION

- Strengthen relationships with First Nations and Metis communities
- Seek and include Elder guidance and cultural knowledge
- Influence systems to act on reconciliation for better outcomes for Indigenous children

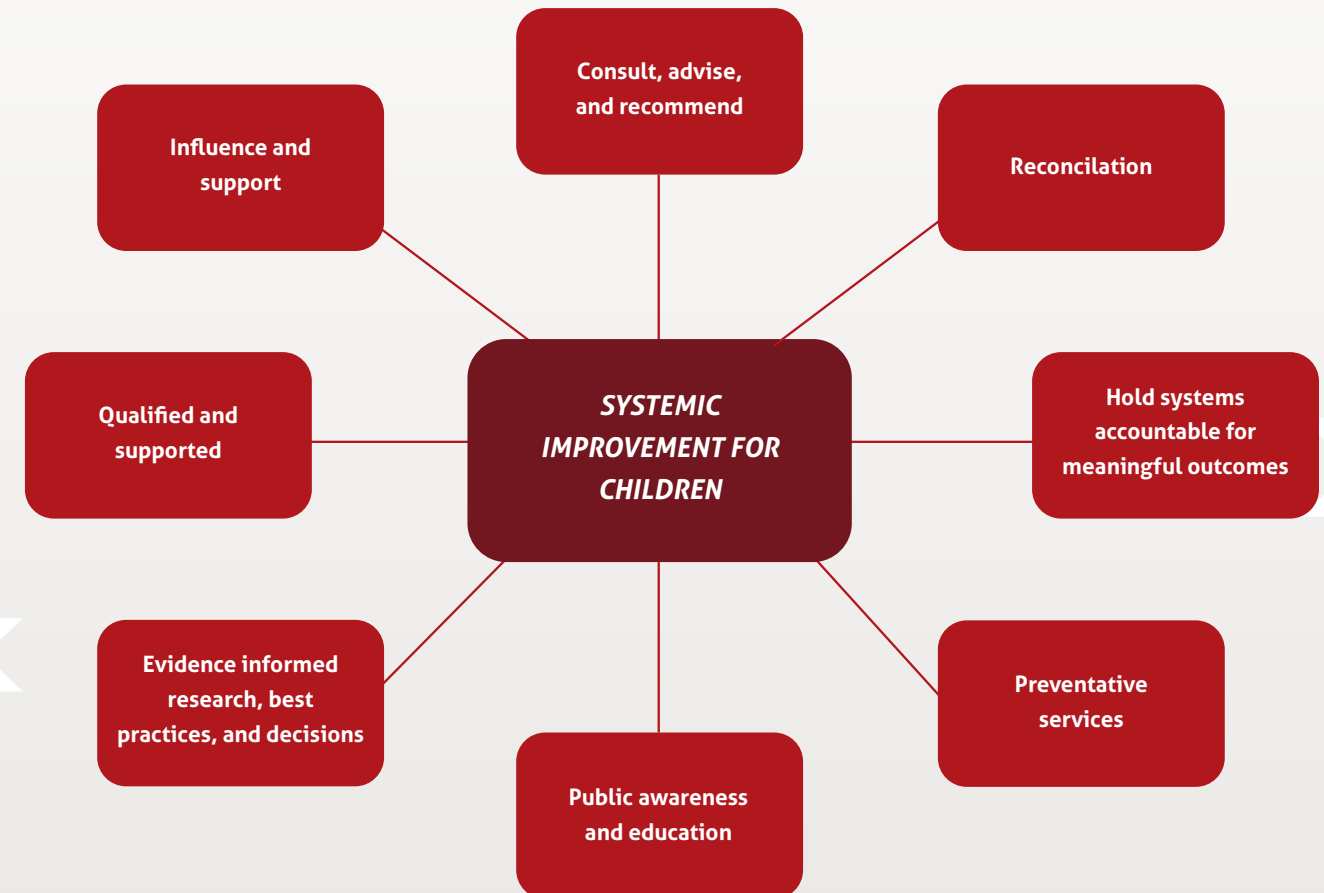
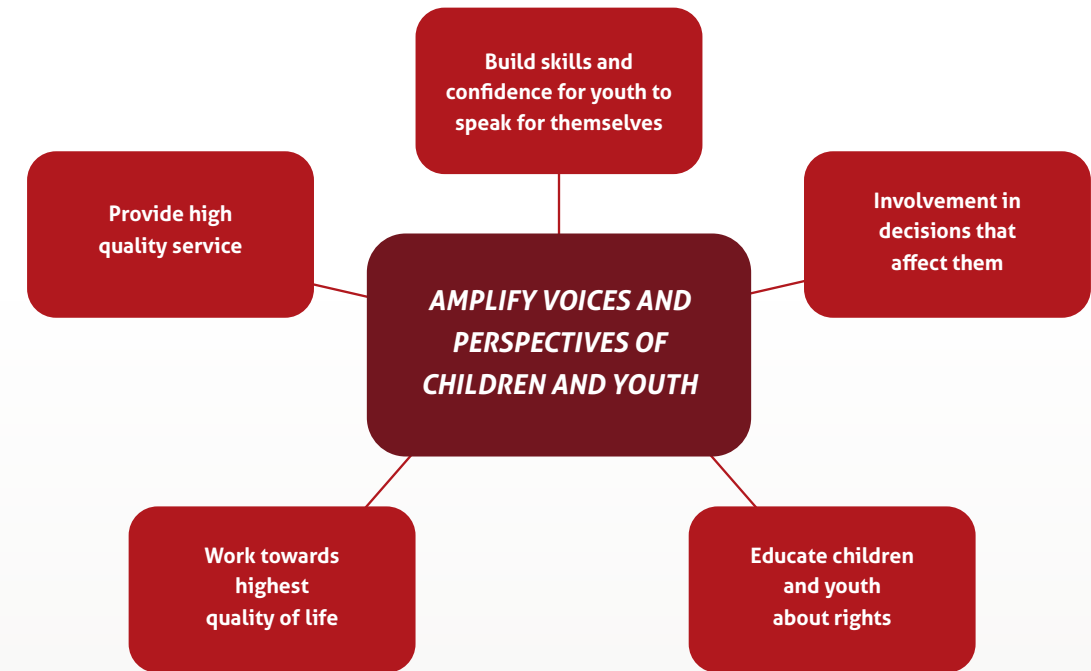
### PREVENTION

- Research and advance evidence informed prevention models and best practices in service delivery

### PUBLIC AWARENESS

- Engage with young people, families, communities, and systems to raise awareness of our services
- Educate young people and others about children’s rights and current issues

## STRATEGIC PLAN - COMPONENTS OF PURPOSE AND OUTCOMES



# Reconciliation and Ongoing Elder Guidance

Reconciliation and elder guidance remain a priority. Elders provide invaluable wisdom and guidance that emphasize the importance of culturally appropriate services related to Indigenous ways of knowing to support children and families. Our office has been fortunate to continue to benefit from the guidance of Elders and we are extremely grateful for their expertise, time, and commitment to the work of our office.

Our office also continues to prioritize reconciliation through following and embedding the principles of the Touchstones of Hope in our work by promoting

relationship building, truth telling, respecting culture and language, and self-determination. We also work to incorporate the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice, articles under the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, and an *Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth, and families* within our work and within our consultations on legislation and policy, in addition to our recommendations arising from our investigations.



Elder Teachings - National Indigenous Peoples Day - Flying Dust First Nation – June 2025



# Youth Advisory Council

Our Youth Advisory Council (Council) consists of seven extraordinary youth providing representation from across the province. In 2025, the Council continued to assist our office in identifying issues facing the youth in their communities and the youth of this province. Their concerns set discussion themes for the year. The Council shared their perspectives and knowledge on topics such as vaping, bullying, and education. Much of their assessment in these areas led back to their top issue of concern – mental health and addictions.

Most recently, the Council has been focusing on youth mental health by reflecting upon our *Desperately Waiting* report. The Advocate met with the Council to review the recommendations of the report and to get their input on the recommendations and progress. This work will continue into 2026.

In May, members of the Council contributed to a submission to the United Nations working group on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They offered insight on the rights to early childhood education, free pre-primary education, and free secondary education. We were excited to have their voices quoted in the final report.

Recruitment of Council members continues to be a priority for our office. Youth with a desire to use their voice can contact our office to learn more about joining.



## Youth Advisory Council

Youth have the right to express their views about all things that affect them and to have their opinions and perspectives be taken seriously by decision-makers!

We are looking for new members for our Youth Advisory Council. We are recruiting youth between the ages of 14 and 19.

### What the Advocate for Children and Youth does:

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent office of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. 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. We do this through advocacy, investigations, public education, research and making recommendations to government and other agencies.

### What the Youth Advisory Council does:

- Provides input, advice, and feedback on initiatives, projects or other work of the Advocate for Children and Youth.
- Allows youth to use their voices and lived experiences to inform and elevate advocacy around respecting the rights and well-being of children and youth in Saskatchewan.

### What to expect:

- Expect to meet about every other month (virtually and/or in person).
- Honorariums are paid for every meeting attended.
- A term on the Youth Advisory Council lasts two years.

If you are interested in joining the Youth Advisory Council or have any questions,

contact:  
Jen or Virginia at:  
Phone: 1-888-322-7221  
Email: [contact@saskadvocate.ca](mailto:contact@saskadvocate.ca)

To learn more about our office, please visit our website at: [www.saskadvocate.ca](http://www.saskadvocate.ca)



# Public Awareness and Education



Public consultation and outreach ensure children, young people, families, and all our stakeholders are aware of and continue to connect with our office.

Our office maintained its province-wide presence in 2025 by hosting almost 500 engagements throughout the year. These included presentations to ministries, agencies, conferences, workshops, attending community and Indigenous-led events, and distributing child-rights focused material.

This outreach is always positively received, and it inevitably leads to calls for even greater public connection and an increase in calls for service and assistance. While we value and appreciate every opportunity to engage in the community, and to assist those in need, this contributes to the increase in issues that are raised with our office.

During 2025, we also conducted 90 'Speak for Yourself' self-advocacy workshops which reached nearly 1700

children and youth – providing information about our office, rights, and how to advocate for themselves. Since the inception of this workshop in April 2022, we have connected with over 7500 young people across the province.



Speak For Yourself Workshop – Ranch Erhlo – March 2025



Speak For Yourself Workshop – Leask Community School – October 2025

# Communities Reached in 2025



# Conferences, Events, and Other Engagements



Ranch Ehrlo Winter Festival – Corman Park – March 2025



Out Saskatoon Open House – June 2025



Teddy Bear Picnic – North Battleford - May 2025



Random Acts of Kindness Event – Biggar - June 2025



Ranch Ehrlo 3 Mile Run – Buckland – July 2025



Fireworks Festival – Saskatoon – August 2025



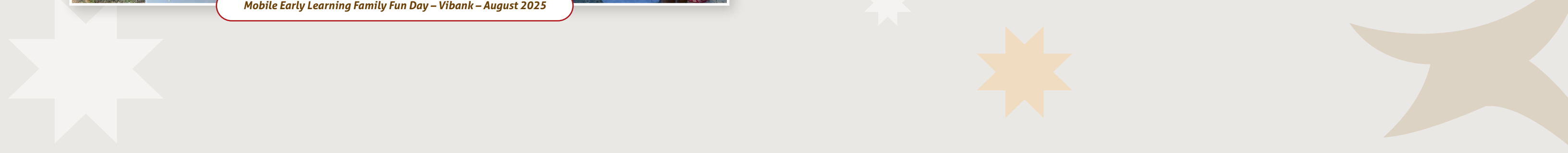
Mobile Early Learning Family Fun Day – White City – August 2025



Mobile Early Learning Family Fun Day – Vibank – August 2025



Montreal Lake Child Family Services Summer Camp – Candle Lake – August 2025





Ranch Ehrlo Powwow and Carnival – Pilot Butte – August 2025



Family Resource Centre Anniversary and Grand Opening – Kamsack – September 2025



Health Fair – Pelican Narrows – October 2025



White Buffalo Transition Home Grand Opening – Muskoday First Nation – August 2025



Regina Public Schools Post-Grad Career Fair – October 2025

## National Child Day

In 2025, our office celebrated National Child Day by attending various events across the province. The Advocate also released a media statement to highlight the current challenges with Jordan's Principle. Dr. Broda called on Canada to end the discrimination and address the systemic barriers that are preventing Indigenous children from receiving the services and supports to which they are entitled.



# Intake and Regional Advocacy

Advocacy is one of the primary functions we use to resolve individual and systemic issues impacting Saskatchewan children and youth. We do this through various approaches to advocacy and through promoting the rights of young people. Achieving resolution is getting progressively more challenging, given the complexities and inadequate services and support available. When a young person's rights are not fully respected or implemented, they will face barriers in reaching their fullest potential. Our office is concerned that services across the province do not adequately meet the needs of children and youth and, as a result, young people are struggling more than ever.

Our office receives between 1800-2000 files per year with an average of 75% related to calls for advocacy to assist young people in getting services. We closely monitor the landscape of issues coming to our attention and reported the escalated level of our concerns in our 2023 and 2024 Annual Reports. In 2025, the Advocate observed another marked increase in the complexity and severity of the issues children, youth, and their families are experiencing.

We noted a dramatic rise (over 660 more issues since 2024 alone and, in the past two years, an increase of nearly 1300 issues) indicative of the persistent and deeply entrenched struggles children and young people face.

The issues children experience is primarily due to adverse childhood experiences, the lack of access to service provisions, or because a child needed additional resources. We continually receive reports from stakeholders and young people who experience food insecurity, are unhoused, have mental health or substance misuse issues, intergenerational trauma, suicide ideation and attempts, or have completed suicide. We frequently receive calls from families

reporting the lack of financial means to provide basic necessities and adequate accommodation for their children. Our staff routinely address issues pertaining to accommodations that do not have proper utilities or are creating health concerns.

Issues with case management and case planning continue to be the most common theme reported to our office in 2025 (see charts on page 19). These issues are typically identified when a child-serving ministry or agency's plans do not adequately address the risk factors or needs of a child, or do not fully respect the young person's rights.

Throughout 2025, we continued to hear about human resource shortages within the child-serving ministries, Indigenous child welfare agencies, school divisions, health entities, and community-based organizations. It is our assessment that, in many cases where case management and case planning are the primary concerns, there is an element pertaining to staffing shortages. We again noted a significant increase in callers reporting they had been unable to contact their assigned worker or requesting our assistance to obtain a new worker. Although we understand steps are being taken by these entities to address these gaps, the Advocate remains troubled about the serious impacts this is having on Saskatchewan children and youth. Common impacts include (but are not limited to):

- delays in safety assessments;
- delays in receiving support and services;
- lengthy wait times; and,
- delays in children being afforded family connections.

Not only are stakeholders such as parents, caregivers, family members, youth, and other professionals reporting the impacts to our office, ministry staff have also reported the challenges they experience in their day-to-day operations and the significant impacts on service provision to children. These include, but are not limited to:

- inability to meet the demands of the position;
- inability to comply with policy and legislation;
- inability to meet the increasing needs of children, youth, and their families; and,
- burnout and high turnover.

In addition, the number of issues surrounding educational planning more than doubled from 2024 to 2025. A common theme pertains to students being excluded from their classrooms in some capacity – many cases involved students experiencing reduced hours at the school, whereas some were being excluded from school on a full-time basis.

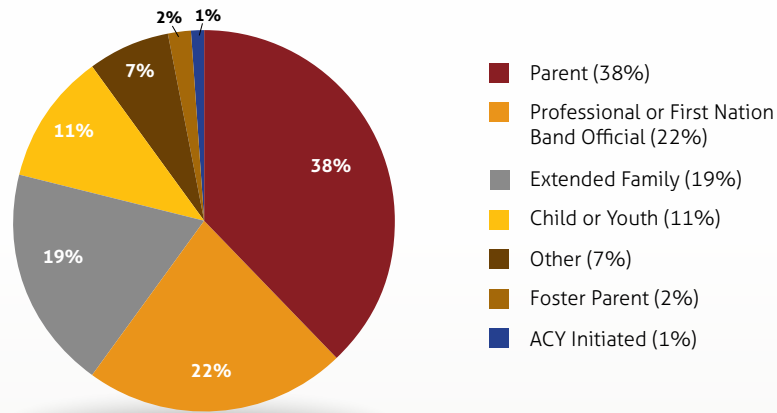
As stated earlier, the struggles young people face has increased in complexity. We understand schools are seeing the same concerns and, at times, find it difficult to manage these complexities within the resources available. We are encouraged by the

additional resources as outlined in the teachers 2023-2026 Provincial Collective Bargaining Agreement and anticipate this will provide increased support in the classrooms across the province. Allowing all students to receive assistance they require will support them to live to their fullest potential in the academic system. Our office is monitoring this situation closely and will continue to do so throughout 2026.

Although we are concerned about the inadequacy of services and support available to all Saskatchewan children and youth, our office recognizes the hard work and compassionate service being provided to children and youth in most instances. From parents and caregivers to various professionals, most are doing everything they can to try to meet the needs of young people with the resources that are available.



WHO CONTACTED THE ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN 2025\*



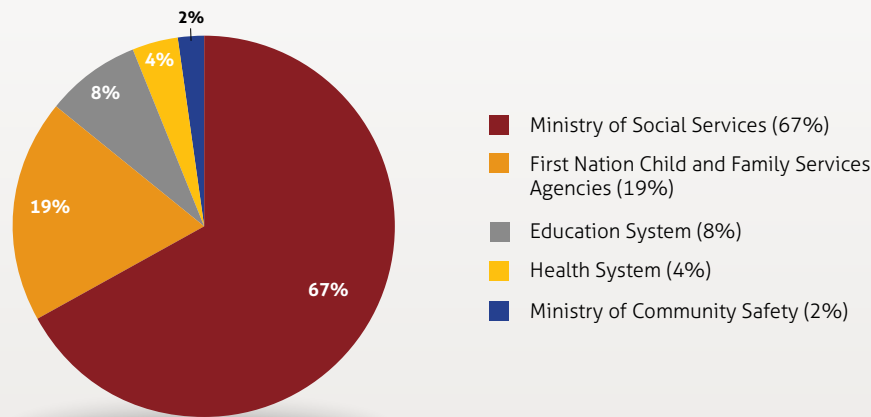
\* Advocacy files only.

Parent includes parents, stepparents, non-custodial parents, legal guardians, caregivers, alternate caregivers, and persons of sufficient interest.

Other includes interested third parties such as babysitters, neighbours, or anonymous callers.

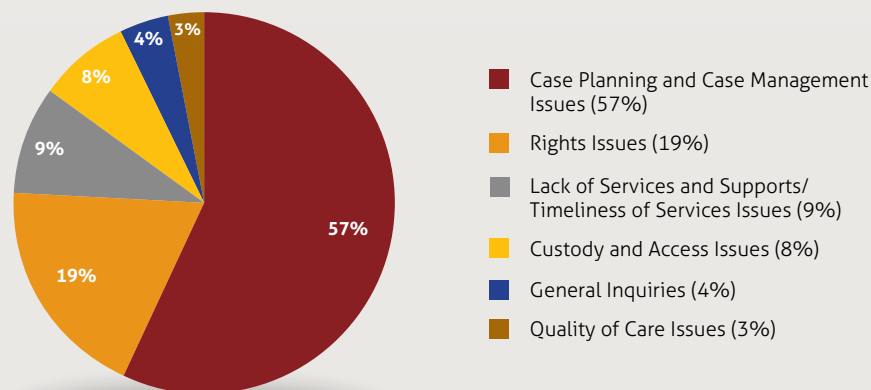
ACY Initiated is when our office initiates advocacy after becoming aware of a situation through means such as the media.

MINISTRIES OR AGENCIES THE ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH RECEIVED CALLS ABOUT IN 2025\*



\* Advocacy files for ministries and agencies within our jurisdiction.

MOST COMMON ISSUES FOR THE ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN 2025\*



\*General Inquiries represents issues that require a referral to another resource or agency.

Custody and Access Issues are beyond the mandate of our office. They also require referral to other resources or agencies.

# Investigations and Systemic Advocacy

Another core aspect of our work is investigations and systemic advocacy. Our work in this area involves conducting individual, aggregate, and systemic reviews of provincial public services to children and youth, leading research on matters relating to the rights, interests and well-being of young people, and consulting on provincial policy and legislation from a child-rights lens.

Information compiled from our investigations is themed together with our advocacy casework and often highlights broader, system-based issues and concerns. Through this work, the Advocate provides advice and makes evidence-based recommendations to the provincial government and publicly-funded health entities to enhance service provision to children. Our office monitors progress made on the implementation of these recommendations. Collectively, the aim of these activities is to identify and resolve systemic barriers to ensure children are provided with the services to which they are entitled, and to work collaboratively with child-serving systems toward broad changes in policy, practice, and legislation that will benefit many young people now and in the future.

## INDIVIDUAL, AGGREGATE, AND SYSTEMIC REVIEWS

Individual and/or aggregate investigations primarily focus on services to children who have been seriously injured or have died while in receipt (or recent receipt) of child welfare or correctional services, as we are notified of these incidents directly by the ministries involved. However, under *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*, our office has a broad mandate to investigate any matter that comes to the Advocate's attention related to provincially mandated services to young people. Therefore, our reviews also assess services to

children and youth within health, education, and other systems. This process positions our office to provide an overarching view of patterns impacting child well-being, identify gaps in service, determine whether systems are working together in the best interests of children, and make recommendations on what could be done to support child-serving systems to meet their needs.

In 2025, our office was notified of 42 injuries and 30 deaths of children and youth by the Ministry of Social Services, Child and Family Programs and the Ministry of Community Safety (formerly the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety). One additional investigation involving services to a child within the education and health systems was initiated by the Advocate. While assessment or investigation of several of these files is ongoing, over the course of 2025, our investigations team assessed and closed 93 files arising from injury and death notifications received from 2021 to 2025, either individually or through an aggregate approach. In undertaking these reviews, we make comments and, at times, recommendations to the ministries involved. We highlight opportunities to strengthen service provision, and speak to broader themes and patterns within case practice, policy, and legislation that inform our systemic work.

Much of our systemic work in 2025 focused on advancing previous recommendations and systemic projects introduced in our 2024 Annual Report.

## MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY SAFETY

Through our reviews of notifications received by the Ministry of Community Safety, we noted that, in most cases, services and planning for youth were appropriate. While we noted overall compliance with policy, in some instances, risk assessments and case plans were completed outside of policy

timelines. As noted in our 2024 Annual Report, these circumstances continued to mainly result from difficulty in locating the young person. We also continue to note, as reflected in the notifications received year over year, that young people involved in the corrections system are particularly vulnerable to risk of suicide.

The Advocate and staff met with the Deputy Minister of Community Safety and other officials in 2025 to discuss these findings and other issues of shared concern. The Advocate was encouraged to learn of Ministry initiatives aimed at enhancing its understanding of systemic issues revealed through its internal child injury and death review process. We also noted the Ministry's enhancement to policies aimed at connecting with hard-to-reach or disengaged youth. The Ministry acknowledged the difficulties its staff face in accessing support and appropriate placements in the community for some youth, specifically for those with mental health needs. Our office highlighted potential resources and noted our continuing advocacy for the full implementation of our recommendations made in our 2022 special report on the child and youth mental health and addictions system, entitled *Desperately Waiting*.

We encourage all ministries to continue to work together towards full implementation of all recommendations made in that report.

## MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES, CHILD AND FAMILY PROGRAMS

### Case Practice and Capacity Within Child Welfare Services

Our individual and aggregate investigative reviews of notifications received from the Ministry of Social Services, Child and Family Programs also revealed instances of effective case practice. However, as raised last year, the Advocate remains concerned about issues related to case practice in child welfare. The analysis of our advocacy cases combined with findings from our aggregate reviews points to similar concerns as noted in our 2024 Annual Report. Overall, caseworkers in both provincial child welfare offices and First Nations

Child and Family Services Agencies continue to face systemic barriers impacting their capacity to adhere to policy requirements. These include, but are not limited to, completing timely and/or thorough investigations, meeting contact standards, developing comprehensive case plans, and keeping up with documentation.

Throughout 2025, the Advocate raised these issues through closure letters on individual and aggregate reviews and met with the Deputy Minister of Social Services and other officials, in addition to the Executive Directors of First Nations Agencies, to discuss these overarching themes. While our office learned of several promising initiatives to increase capacity within child welfare services across the province, concerns remain.

While the Advocate is encouraged by these efforts, the persistence of these foundational issues led to our office formalizing – and expanding – a systemic investigation into case practice and policy compliance within both the Ministry of Social Services, Child and Family Programs service delivery areas and First Nation Child and Family Services Agencies. The scope of our investigation will focus on the impact of the Ministry of Social Service's oversight and quality assurance processes in supporting service delivery improvements and best outcomes in service provision for children. Continuing this investigation is a priority for the coming year.

### Private Placements

The Ministry of Social Services supports families to make a private arrangement with another caregiver, if required, as an alternative to a child being placed in the care of the Minister. Through advocacy calls and Ministry reviews of

injuries and deaths over time, our office noted a pattern of concerns related to private arrangements impacting the well-being of children. Some of these concerns included lack of appropriate assessment of caregivers, the child's right to maintain family connections not being upheld (when safe to do so), children being returned by private caregivers to unsafe conditions, and inconsistent or insufficient support to private caregivers from the Ministry.

In early 2025, we encouraged the Ministry to conduct a review of private arrangement policy and practice. The Ministry later advised this work was underway and, to contribute to this process, we outlined the issues that had come to our attention. The Advocate also made a formal recommendation that the Ministry strengthen its private arrangement placement policy to ensure the rights of children to safety, development, special protection, and assistance are upheld. We further identified potential opportunities for enhancements to policy and practice for the Ministry's consideration. The Advocate is encouraged that the Ministry has accepted this recommendation and will be monitoring the Ministry's progress on this initiative.

### Youth at Risk of Suicide and Sexual Assault

Our investigations team also completed our aggregate analysis of the 188 notifications received from the Ministry of Social Services regarding suicide attempts and sexual assaults experienced by youth in care during 2022-2023.<sup>1</sup> We are currently finalizing this work and the Advocate hopes to share our findings and recommendations with the Ministry in 2026.

Related to this, our office has had ongoing engagement with the Ministry regarding updates to its Serious Occurrence Reporting and Review Policy. This policy determines which injuries and deaths will trigger the Ministry's internal quality assurance reviews and notification to our office. Findings from our aggregate review

<sup>1</sup> These injuries were categorized under the Ministry's Serious Occurrence Reporting and Review Policy as "medium impact." Accordingly, they did not meet the Ministry's criteria for its in-depth quality assurance review, or notification to our office. The Advocate requested our office be made aware of these incidents in the years 2022 and 2023. See our office's Annual Reviews for those years for additional detail.

<sup>2</sup> Two of these were tentative recommendations. Their closure was formalized in early 2026; however, the Advocate's consultation with the Ministry of Social Services and the subsequent changes to policy occurred in 2025.

of suicide attempts and sexual assaults informed the consultative feedback we provided back to the Ministry. As a result, we advocated for the Ministry to expand its policy definitions to capture more instances of sexual assault within the cases reviewed by its quality assurance team. These reviews offer an important opportunity for the Ministry to better understand circumstances that can lead to or contribute to sexual assault and, therefore, better understand what role the Ministry can play in prevention.

## RECOMMENDATION MONITORING

In 2025, our office continued to monitor recommendations made in previous reports concerning mental health and addictions services to young people, bullying and the use of physical restraints in schools, group home oversight, and the Ministry of Social Services, Child and Family Programs Person of Sufficient Interest program. The Advocate is pleased that ministries, for the most part, have been working collaboratively with our office and are making progress in the implementation of those recommendations.

The Ministry of Social Services, Child and Family Programs fully implemented three of the Advocate's recommendations<sup>2</sup> related to strengthening safeguards for medically vulnerable children in care. The Advocate appreciates the openness of the Ministry to engage in consultation on these policy changes. Further, while our office formalized closure in early 2026, the Ministry of Social Services fully implemented a fourth recommendation related to the evaluation of a harm-reduction program for meeting the needs of high-risk youth in care with a view to expanding similar programs across the province.

## MINISTRY OF EDUCATION – REGISTERED INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

We continued to engage with the Ministry of Education throughout 2025 on its progress toward implementation of recommendations made in our special report, *Making the Grade: Moving Forward in Independent Education*, aimed at improving oversight of services to students in registered independent schools.

Our office sought clarification from the Ministry as to its rationale for not accepting or not fully implementing a number of recommendations. While the perspectives and position of our office and the Ministry differ in several areas, the Advocate appreciates the willingness of the Ministry to engage in discussion and to further consider the evidence and findings leading to our recommendations.

As indicated in our 2024 Annual Report, the Ministry only accepted, or accepted 'in concept', 26 of the 36 recommendations made. While it is not ideal that not all recommendations were accepted, the Advocate is encouraged that, based on enhancements to documentation and oversight practices, our office was able to close seven recommendations arising from this report as 'Accepted/Satisfied'.<sup>3</sup> Ministry action in this regard will better ensure:

- consistent recording of discussions with and recommendations made by Ministry Superintendents to independent school administrators (Recommendation 3);
- students and families are aware of whom to contact with any concerns regarding a registered independent school (Recommendation 10);
- consistent documentation of student well-being during Ministry visits to a school (Recommendation 11);
- confirmation of the Professional A teacher to student ratio at each supervision visit (Recommendation 14);
- collection of updated course outlines for all grades in the seven required areas of study

(Recommendation 19);

- improved Ministry processes of collection, entry, storage, and tracking of data on learning outputs (Recommendation 25); and,
- that only appropriate student medical and personal information is collected for required purposes (Recommendation 33).

Three recommendations have been closed as 'Partially Accepted/Partially Satisfied' as, while not meeting the full spirit and intent of the recommendation, the Ministry has committed to taking steps to:

- encourage participation of unfunded registered independent schools in provincially mandated assessments in reading, writing, and math (Recommendation 26);
- include disaggregated data on learning output of independent schools in its Annual Reports (Recommendation 27); and,
- accept 'in concept' that the ambiguous wording of restrictive enrollment provisions in *The Registered Independent School Regulations* is not to be applied more broadly than intended (Recommendation 29).

The Advocate is further encouraged that the Ministry has committed to making amendments to The Registered Independent Schools Policy and Procedures Manual related to reducing conflicts of interest, strengthening policy language to match regulatory requirements, and ensuring students are informed of physical and mental health care services available through the Saskatchewan Health Authority, when needed (Recommendations 2, 17, 20, and 36). The Ministry anticipates these changes to be finalized in the spring of 2026. We have also requested additional information to assist in assessing progress on several other recommendations (13, 18, 23, 28, and 31). Once these policy changes are implemented and/or we receive the requested information, our office can assess those recommendations for closure.

Further, the Advocate is pleased that, through

collaborative discussion, the Ministry has now indicated a willingness to further consider three recommendations related to amending regulations and policy to ensure respect for students' rights to privacy and ability to access their own records (Recommendations 5, 6, and 7). We look forward to further discussion with the Ministry in this regard.

Despite some progress, the Ministry has declined and/or failed to take any tangible action on 14 recommendations made in *Making the Grade*. Accordingly, the Advocate has now closed these recommendations as 'Not Accepted/Not Satisfied' (Recommendations 1, 4, 8, 9, 12, 15, 16, 21, 22, 24, 30, 32, 34, and 35). We will continue to monitor these issues through our regular advocacy processes and may re-open these recommendations at any time.

## CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCATES

On behalf of Saskatchewan children, our office continued to lead national work with other provincial advocates and federal bodies to further the interests and rights of young people. As current President of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA), the Advocate continued to engage on and advocate for progress towards a National Child and Youth Strategy. Senator Rosemary Moodie's framework bill on this strategy was re-introduced in

the current session of parliament, re-numbered as Bill S-212. The Advocate was invited to appear as a panel witness before the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology in November 2025, and had the opportunity to speak to both the importance of the bill and opportunities for it to be strengthened.

Additionally, in December 2025, the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights released its final report and recommendations arising from its study on Aging Out of Care, titled [Nothing to Celebrate: The Crisis of Youth Aging Out of Care](#). In her dual role as the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth and President of the CCCYA, the Advocate appeared as a witness and made a written submission to this study in 2024. Our office and the CCCYA were pleased to see that our interventions are referenced in the report and contribute to the recommendations.

This work is key in advancing important outcomes that can address the issues children and youth face across Canada, and that of course includes Saskatchewan.

With respect to the meeting of the Forum of Ministers on Human Rights discussed in our 2024 Annual Report, our understanding is that meeting is now scheduled for 2026. The Advocate and the CCCYA look forward to participating in this forum.

<sup>3</sup>These recommendation closures were formalized in early 2026.

# Systemic Investigation

## Exposure to Toxic Illicit Drugs



### The Impact on Children Under Five

#### SASKATCHEWAN'S DRUG CRISIS

In recent years, the negative impacts associated with illicit drug use have significantly escalated across the country, including Saskatchewan. Tragically, with the increasing toxicity of the illicit drug supply, our province has experienced an increase in deaths due to fentanyl and methamphetamines, in particular. The Saskatchewan Coroners Service (the Coroner) has reported that, in the general population, deaths due to fentanyl have markedly increased from nine in 2016 to 303 in 2023. Deaths due, at least in part, to methamphetamines increased from 22 in 2016 to 287 in 2023.<sup>4,5</sup>

#### PURPOSE AND SCOPE

While taking note of the above context, our office also observed an emerging pattern in death and injury notifications received in recent years of very young children with fentanyl and methamphetamine in their system. These are children who – by comparison to youth or adults – did not take drugs intentionally, but were exposed in environments where toxic, illicit drug use<sup>8</sup> was occurring.


**DRUG ALERT**


**Date Issued:** August 28, 2025

**Community/Region:** Saskatoon area

**Situation:** Saskatoon Fire Department have responded to 84 suspected overdoses since Aug 17. Dangerous drugs in the area. Many cases have required multiple doses of naloxone. Prairie Harm Reduction have detected Carfentanyl in one test on Aug 20 which may have been linked to increases in overdoses and multiple reported fatalities in the community.


**Description of drug:** green/blue crystals in one sample

**Sold as:** Unknown

**May contain:** Carfentanyl, fentanyl


**RISK:** High risk of lethal overdose.

**Date Alert Expires:** September 4, 2025



Use of illegally acquired drugs poses health risks, including overdose and death. Some risks can be reduced, but not eliminated, by:

1. Getting a Take Home Naloxone Kit. Call HealthLine 811 to find locations.
2. Calling the National Overdose Response Service at 1-888-688-NORS (6677) if you are alone.
3. The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act protects individuals who seek emergency help during an overdose or who witness an overdose.
4. Finding where to access drug checking supplies and/or services through [www.saskatchewan.ca/overdose](http://www.saskatchewan.ca/overdose).
5. Sharing this alert.
6. Signing up for Sask Drug Alert: Scan QR code or text **JOIN** to **1-833-35-B-SAFE** (352-7233)



**Provincial drug alerts regarding overdose incidents and deaths, public health notifications warning of toxic drug supplies,<sup>6</sup> and federal wastewater studies,<sup>7</sup> are sounding the alarm for Saskatchewan communities.**

#### INCREASING DRUG TOXICITY

“Fentanyl is commonly found in the toxic illegal drug supply and is the main driver of overdose-related harms and deaths in Canada. You can’t see, taste or smell fentanyl, and a few grains can be enough to kill you.”

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/opioids/overdose-crisis-toxic-illegal-drug-supply.html>

**Methamphetamine** is a stimulant which can cause agitation, tachycardia, elevated blood pressure, seizures, and increased temperature. According to a study in the United States, this drug has increased in potency 130% since 2007.

Meays B. M, Simpson JL, Ramos AK, Bevins RA, Carlo G, Grant KM. Children exposed to methamphetamine in settings where the drug is being used. *Child Youth Serv Rev.* 2019;104, Article 104393. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chldyouth.2019.104393>

These incidents are extremely troubling on their own. However, notifications to our office represent only a small subset of harm experienced by children across Saskatchewan. Given the large per capita use of illicit drugs in this province<sup>9</sup> and the increasing toxicity of the substances being used, the Advocate is concerned that the likelihood of children exposed to these lethal substances could increase as well.

Consequently, the Advocate launched a systemic investigation to better understand how many children in Saskatchewan are seriously impacted by exposure to toxic, illicit drugs, which drugs are most harmful, and whether the systems designed to protect children are adequately responding to the evolving nature of the illicit drug supply. The scope of our investigation also includes an examination of the way in which these types of injuries are tracked and analyzed by child-

serving systems. All systems must work collectively to explore opportunities to get ahead of this issue before more children are hurt.

While our full investigation has not yet concluded, the Advocate has a mandate to report on matters of public interest. In this case, the Advocate wanted to draw the public’s attention to the risks posed to very young children by the increasingly toxic, illicit drugs present in our communities, such as fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine. There is a need for enhanced public awareness that the presence of these drugs in the same environment as children – whether or not caregivers are currently under the influence – is putting them at risk of physical harm.

<sup>4</sup> Saskatchewan Coroners Service. Drug Toxicity Deaths – Saskatchewan, 2016 to present. (Retrieved from: <https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/90505> & <https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/128069>)

<sup>5</sup> Available statistics for the years 2024 to 2025 currently reflect lower numbers of fatalities due to these drugs; however, not all investigations by the Coroner are complete.

<sup>6</sup> Government of Canada. (2024). Canada’s overdose crisis and the toxic illegal drug supply. (Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/opioids/overdose-crisis-toxic-illegal-drug-supply.html>)

<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada. (2023). Stimulants in the wastewater of Canadian cities: provisional results, January 2022 to May 2023. (Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/231101/dq231101b-eng.htm>)

<sup>8</sup> Many substances, whether over-the-counter, prescribed, or illicit, can be toxic if present in high enough dosages. Additionally, some substances that may be legitimately prescribed to treat medical conditions (i.e. such as fentanyl), are also made, sold, and used illicitly. In this systemic investigation, we utilize the term “toxic, illicit drugs” to refer specifically to substances in the latter category that have increased in toxicity and/or the likelihood to cause harm to children upon exposure.

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada. (2023). Stimulants in the wastewater of Canadian cities: provisional results, January 2022 to May 2023. (Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/231101/dq231101b-eng.htm>; Statistics Canada. (2025). Levels of Drugs in the Wastewater of Canadian Cities. (Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-607-x/71-607-x2024021-eng.htm>)

## METHODOLOGY

To determine the number of children impacted across the province, we reviewed available information between 2019 and 2025<sup>10</sup> from the Saskatchewan Coroners Service, the Ministry of Health, the Saskatchewan Health Authority, and the Ministry of Social Services regarding children under five years of age who had passed away or sought medical treatment after exposure to illicit drugs.<sup>11</sup> This work remains ongoing, as not all information for 2025 is currently available.

We then reviewed the child protection response, where applicable, in cases where children had passed away, and engaged with the health system to explore how data related to injuries is recorded, tracked, and used to enhance public awareness and prevention efforts. We also spoke with ministry and health authority officials and reviewed relevant policies. These discussions will continue in 2026.

### WHY UNDER AGE 5?

*Children under age five are particularly vulnerable and at a higher risk to unintentional exposure due to their increased contact with contaminated household surfaces (i.e. through crawling and hand-to-mouth behaviour), and their inability to protect themselves in environments where substance use is occurring.*

## PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF IMPACT ON CHILDREN UNDER FIVE

### Child Deaths Following Exposure to Toxic, Illicit Drugs

Available information indicates that, from 2019 to 2025, 13 children under age five died with toxic, illicit drugs in their system at the time of their death. In three of these cases, drug exposure either directly caused or contributed to the child's death.

Of those three, two children died of exposure to methamphetamine, and one to fentanyl.

Of the remaining 10 children, three children died by other accident or illness, and seven died by undetermined causes. In these cases, the extent to which the drug was contributory could not be definitively determined by the Coroners Service. However, in several of these instances, it was noted that drug exposure may have exacerbated other stressors to the child's body, such as trauma or respiratory issues, experienced at the time of their passing. Overall, methamphetamine was the illicit substance most commonly found in the systems of children who had died.

### Child Injuries Due to Exposure to Toxic, Illicit Drugs

The Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Health Authority do not track the type of drug exposure as specifically as the Coroner. Therefore, it was more challenging to determine the specific substance leading to a child's injury. Within these limits, our office was able to confirm at least 29 instances from 2019 to 2025 in which children were treated in hospital for toxic, illicit drug exposure, but survived. Of these exposures, eight were to methamphetamine, 14 were to fentanyl, and nine were to cocaine.<sup>12</sup>

Compared to the child death data, fentanyl exposures were more prevalent in hospital visits than methamphetamine. However, methamphetamine toxicity has only been tracked by the health system on its own since 2022. Therefore, exposures to this substance may be underrepresented in earlier years.

In every death and injury examined, it was not known how the exposure occurred. Depending on the substance, the child may have been exposed through ingestion, environmental exposure in contaminated homes, inhalation, or via breast milk. It is, therefore, important to protect children from being in environments where use of these substances is present.

The Advocate also emphasizes the above figures do not reflect the total number of children in Saskatchewan exposed to these substances – rather only those who passed away or suffered significant physical harm.

Children often live in sibling and extended family groups, meaning that many more children than represented here have been put at risk of this type of exposure.

Furthermore, while our investigation has focused on illicit drug exposure (including fentanyl), our research found that children are also at significant risk of harm from medication more commonly prescribed for a therapeutic purpose. Data from the health system indicates high rates of hospital treatment in children under age five for exposure to benzodiazepines (i.e. sedatives like Xanax, Valium, and Ativan), antiepileptic and sedative-hypnotic drugs, and hydromorphone, which can also be drugs of abuse. Prevention activities related to these substances will differ, as there may be legitimate, medical reasons for these prescription drugs to be present in a home that includes children. For this reason, the focus of our work currently has remained on fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine.

*Article 33 states that "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances [...]", clearly framing drug exposure as a violation of children's rights.*

### DRUG EXPOSURES BY TYPE OF DRUG

TYPE OF DRUG EXPOSURE	DEATHS	HOSPITAL VISITS
Fentanyl	1	14
Methamphetamine	10	8
Cocaine	2	9
Total children:	42	(2 children were exposed to both methamphetamine and cocaine)

### EXPOSURES TO FENTANYL, METHAMPHETAMINE, AND/OR COCAINE BY AGE

AGE	DEATHS	HOSPITAL VISITS
0-11 Months	9	7
1 Year	3	8
2 Years	-	9
3 Years	-	3
4 Years	1	2

*These children resided across Saskatchewan, in both urban and rural communities. Accordingly, this is an issue impacting children province-wide.*

## CHILDREN'S RIGHTS MATTER – THE DUTY TO REPORT

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) outlines the obligations to uphold all rights of children and youth, particularly, when it comes to the right of children to be protected and safe. This includes the right to be safe from harm caused by toxic, illicit drugs.<sup>13</sup> The Ministry of Social Services, including its delegated First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies, is the provincial entity duty-bound to protect children at risk of harm.<sup>14</sup> Children also have a right to be cared for by their family and are not to be removed, unless it is in their best interest.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Not all Coroner investigations for this period are concluded. Additionally, data from the Ministry of Health and Saskatchewan Health Authority is not complete in many regions.

<sup>11</sup> Infant deaths known to be the result of prenatal drug exposure (i.e. those who were never discharged from hospital between birth and death) were excluded from our review.

<sup>12</sup> Two of the poisonings were polydrug exposure, both methamphetamine and cocaine.

<sup>13</sup> UNCRC: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

<sup>14</sup> As per *The Child and Family Services Act*

<sup>15</sup> UNCRC Article 9

The legislation governing the mandate of the Ministry of Social Services is clear that its work must be done in the least intrusive manner to the family. When a child is found in need of protection, the government must attempt to keep the child with their family by offering services and support to parents to alleviate the identified concerns.<sup>16</sup>

Involvement with child protection services, particularly in the context of addictions – which are complex and require significant effort to address – can facilitate and support positive changes in families.

*Under Article 19 of the UNCR, children have the right to be protected from all forms of injury, neglect, or negligent treatment, and governments have an obligation to ensure adequate processes exist for the prevention, identification, reporting, referral, investigation, and follow-up related to potential harms.*

Under section 12 of *The Child and Family Services Act*, **every person in Saskatchewan has a duty to report** concerns of child abuse or neglect to a child protection worker or peace officer. Our research has found at least 42 instances of harm to children under five years old caused by, or involving exposure to, fentanyl, methamphetamine, and/or cocaine. These harms are not a result of children intentionally ingesting these drugs. These injuries and fatalities occur simply because these drugs are present in the children's environment and they are too young to protect themselves. As a result, the duty to report includes reporting instances where children are being exposed to these substances, regardless of whether there is a safe and sober caregiver.

Our office has concluded that mandatory reporting is not happening in all cases.

***"The Advocate urges all individuals within child-serving systems, emergency responders, and the wider community to remain vigilant and ensure reports are made when toxic, illicit drug use is occurring near children."***

It is imperative that the Ministry of Social Services – the system responsible for the protection of children – is made aware of these circumstances, so that it has an opportunity to offer appropriate support to families and caregivers to mitigate risk and prevent further harm.

However, the Advocate acknowledges that protecting children from the harms caused by increasingly toxic, illicit drugs does not fall just to the child protection system. The health and education systems, emergency responders, and the public also play a crucial role in prevention and intervention, as well as in ensuring adequate resources and support are available for families who need them.

## ONGOING SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY

### Child Protection Response

Of the 13 child deaths examined, all but one family was involved with the child protection system at some point prior to the death. Our review of these services found many instances of positive case practice and planning, where families were supported within the Ministry's capacity. However, we also noted several potential gaps related to the weight given to the risk specifically posed by fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine exposure in comparison to other drugs or alcohol, delayed or incomplete investigations impacting the provision of ongoing support services, and safety planning that did not adequately address environmental risks to young children caused by these substances.

We have raised these issues with the Ministry of Social Services, Child and Family Programs and the Advocate is encouraged that the Ministry has been open to exploring opportunities to strengthen service provision in this regard. Our office continues to work

with the Ministry in this area and may follow up with formal findings and recommendations.

### Data Tracking

Currently, ministries collect and share information regarding drug exposures in young children differently, which could create challenges to coordinating prevention strategies. For instance, the Coroners Service reports on accidental death due to toxicity from opioids (in general), fentanyl, and benzodiazepines in the age ranges of 0–9 and 10–19. Other drugs, such as methamphetamine and hydromorphone, do not have age ranges specified in public reporting. Substance harm surveillance reporting by the health system utilizes the wider age range of 0–19 years. Furthermore, the Ministry of Social Services does not track the number of child protection reports made specific to drug use around children – regardless of age – and, as such, cannot share data or insights in this regard.

Tracking, analyzing, and reporting on data specific to this vulnerable age group would allow for targeted and evidence-based prevention measures to be employed. Prevention activities differ significantly depending on whether the individual is an older youth intentionally using drugs, or a young child exposed to substances being used by others in their environment. To this end, our office plans to engage child-serving ministries in further discussions on how data gaps can be addressed and how information-sharing in the interest of prevention could be enhanced.

## NEXT STEPS

The prevalence and toxicity of illicit drug use is evolving. Our investigation has established that children under the age of five are being exposed to toxic, illicit drugs, leading to significant physical injury, or even death. The vulnerability of this age group is exacerbated by the child's inability to recognize risk or communicate with trusted adults when drug use occurs in their environment.

Our work is ongoing as not all information for 2025 is available and we continue to review relevant policies and practices with the entities involved. Many questions remain as we continue our review of this critical issue. Going forward, the Advocate is encouraged that child protection and health systems are open to considering opportunities to prevent the current crisis within our province from further impacting our children.

As Saskatchewan communities struggle with the challenges and, in many cases, tragedies resulting from the presence of increasingly toxic, illicit drugs, it is critical that the impact of mere exposure of young children to drugs such as fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine be recognized, and that everyone takes responsibility for ensuring their safety.



<sup>16</sup> *The Child and Family Services Act* - Purpose pg. 5, and Duty to Offer Family Services pg. 11

# Moving Ahead in 2026

Our work in 2025 highlights that children, youth, and families continue to face significant social and economic hardships that are leading to deeply complex issues and a lack of, and/or barrier to, services required to assist in meeting their basic needs. Quality services and intervention programs are more critical than ever as children and youth desperately need these for their safety, protection, and well-being.

While we acknowledge the challenge government faces with the current economic landscape, it is even more critical to invest in services for families and children today, and for the future. Child poverty is at an all-time high in Saskatchewan and we must

address it. Children have a right to an adequate standard of living, appropriate housing, and adequate nutrition – without this, it can impact a child's capacity to learn in school, their mental health, and their overall well-being; hindering their right to thrive and live to their full potential.

Our work in 2026 will continue to focus on the advocacy arm of our mandate to address the complex issues young people face every day. We will continue to focus on monitoring our recommendations and working with all entities toward implementation. Our systemic work will focus on key services within the child welfare system, health, and education.



# Budget

NON-STATUTORY EXPENDITURES	2024-25 BUDGET	2025-26 BUDGET
Personal Services	\$2,122,000	\$2,319,000
Contractual Services	\$500,705	\$449,770
Advertising, Printing and Publishing	\$53,540	\$42,040
Travel and Business	\$104,265	\$86,680
Supplies and Services	\$8,850	\$6,343
Capital Assets	\$12,640	\$95,167
Budgetary Total	\$2,802,000	\$2,999,000

STATUTORY EXPENDITURES	2024-25 BUDGET	2025-26 BUDGET
Personal Services	\$239,000	\$262,000
Statutory Total	\$239,000	\$262,000

TOTAL	2024-25 BUDGET	2025-26 BUDGET
	\$3,041,000	\$3,261,000

# Advocate For Children and Youth Staff

(on December 31, 2025)

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