

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

June 21, 2007

THE CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH PLAN – A PROMISING START TO MEETING AN URGENT NEED

Introduction

Research suggests that 15% of children and youth (about one in seven) have a mental disorder serious enough to cause them and their families significant distress. In 2003, the Ministry of Children and Family Development released its five-year plan to improve the mental health outcomes of children and youth in British Columbia. The plan focuses on four areas:

- more timely and effective treatment and support services;
- programs to reduce the risk of, and prevent and mitigate the effects of, mental disorders;
- new efforts to improve the capacities of families and communities to prevent or overcome the harmful impact of mental disorders; and
- better systems to coordinate services, monitor outcomes, and ensure public accountability for policies and programs.

Purpose of our audit

We conducted this audit to assess the adequacy of the work done by the ministry to develop and implement the plan. To do this, we asked four questions:

- Is the ministry's plan for improving the mental health outcomes of children and youth adequate?
- Is the ministry choosing appropriate key initiatives to implement the plan?
- Is the ministry adequately implementing its key initiatives?
- Is the ministry providing adequate accountability information about the plan's implementation?

We did not look at the achievement of planned outcomes as the plan is still being implemented.

What we concluded

We concluded that the Child and Youth Mental Health Plan of the Ministry of Children and Family Development is an adequate plan for improving the mental health outcomes of children and youth, and that the ministry is satisfactorily managing the plan's implementation. But, there is still some room for improvement as the plan enters the final year of implementation.

Our key findings and recommendations

The Child and Youth Mental Health Plan is an adequate plan for improving the mental health outcomes of children and youth

Because our interviews with clinical staff suggested there may be an inconsistent approach to delivering services to patients having a "dual diagnosis" we recommend that the ministry:

- ensure that clinical staff clearly understands the ministry's policy on treating patients with both a mental disorder and a developmental or learning disorder to ensure a consistent approach across the province.

Many stakeholders are concerned that the ministry's current reorganization could undermine the plan's accomplishments

As the ministry finalizes its organizational changes, we recommend that it:

- ensure that adequate accountability mechanisms continue to exist between the ministry's regional operations and the provincial office so that plan objectives remain a priority, at least during the final year of implementation;
- ensure that there continues to be strong ministry leadership for child and youth mental health services;
- address stakeholder concerns about the reorganization; and
- begin formulating new strategies that will build on the accomplishments achieved under the province's first Child and Youth Mental Health Plan.

The ministry is adequately ensuring that its key initiatives are consistent with the plan goals and appropriately supported

Because many groups, especially physicians, have a key role in the mental health system and the relationships are complex, we recommend that the ministry:

- develop a clear strategy to bring about meaningful inter-sectoral collaboration, particularly with physicians.

The ministry is adequately planning and monitoring initiative implementation, but improvements can be made

To improve implementation of the initiatives, we recommend that the ministry:

- ensure that all clinicians receive core, evidence-based practices training, that clinical supervisors consistently review staff application of the concepts, and that evidence-based practice parameters be integrated into services;
- develop school-based FRIENDS champions in under-represented regions, develop strategies to mitigate key risks and establish mechanisms to monitor penetration of the program throughout the province; and
- take steps to increase staff acceptance of the Brief Child and Family Phone Interview clinical intake screening tool.

The ministry has not provided adequate accountability information about the plan's implementation

To improve accountability for the Child and Youth Mental Health Plan, we recommend that the ministry:

- report to the Legislative Assembly and the public on the plan's implementation progress; and
- develop an approved accountability framework capable of evaluating the plan's impact on patient outcomes.

For more information, please contact:

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