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## Archived - September 2016 Mandate letter: Children and Youth Services

Premier's instructions to the Minister on priorities.



September 23, 2016

The Honourable Michael Coteau  
Minister of Children and Youth Services  
56 Wellesley Street West, 14<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, Ontario  
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Dear Minister Coteau:

Welcome to your role as Minister of Children and Youth Services. As we mark the mid-point of our mandate, we have a strong and new Cabinet, and are poised to redouble our efforts to deliver on our top priority — creating jobs and growth. Guided by our balanced plan to build Ontario up for everyone, we will continue to work together to deliver real benefits and more inclusive growth that will help people in their everyday lives.

We embark on this important part of our mandate knowing that our four-part economic plan is working — we are making the largest investment in public infrastructure in Ontario's history, making postsecondary education more affordable and accessible, leading the transition to a low-carbon economy and the fight against climate change, and building retirement security for workers.

Building on our ambitious and activist agenda, and with a focus on implementing our economic plan, we will continue to forge partnerships with businesses, educators, labour, communities, the not-for-profit sector and with all Ontarians to foster economic growth and to make a genuine, positive difference in people's lives.

Collaboration and active listening remain at the heart of the work we undertake on behalf of the people of Ontario — these are values that ensure a common purpose, stimulate positive change and help achieve desired outcomes. With this in mind, I ask that you work closely with your Cabinet colleagues to deliver positive results on initiatives that cut across several ministries, such as our Climate Change Action Plan, Business Growth Initiative, and the Highly Skilled Workforce Strategy. I also ask you to collaborate with the Minister Responsible for Digital Government to drive digital transformation across government and modernize public service delivery.

We have made tangible progress and we have achieved the following key results:

- Doubled the number of adoptions and permanency placements in recent years, and introduced new subsidies and supports to ensure even more children have access to forever families. During the same period, the number of children in permanent care of children's aid societies decreased by almost 40 per cent.
- Enhanced the Ontario Youth Action Plan with an investment of \$55 million to support more high-risk youth and additional high-needs communities across the province.
- Contributed to the 46 per cent decline of the youth crime rate between 2003 and 2015 through a range of investments and opportunities for at-risk youth.
- Expanded our Student Nutrition program to create 340 new programs in schools, as well as 120 First Nation program sites, to ensure that kids start their day ready to learn.
- Worked with Indigenous partners to co-develop the Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy.
- More than doubled the maximum annual Ontario Child Benefit since it was introduced in 2008 and, indexed future increases to inflation to ensure the benefit keeps pace with the cost of living now and in the future.
- Invested over \$49 million since 2014 to repair and upgrade facilities in community agencies serving children and youth in Ontario.

Your mandate is to work on giving children the best start in life, preparing youth to become productive adults and making it easier for families to get key services at all stages of a child's development. Your specific priorities include:

## **Connecting Children and Youth With Special Needs to Evidence-based, Child- and Family-Centred Services**

- Working with the Minister of Education and Minister of Community and Social Services, implement the new Ontario Autism Program beginning in 2017, a year earlier than originally planned and supported by enhanced supports during this transition period, so that children with autism spectrum disorder receive individualized and evidence-based interventions with a continuum of support at home, at school, in the community, and as they prepare for adulthood.
- Working to support children, youth and families affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and to increase awareness about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, how it can be prevented, and how to best support people impacted by the condition, in partnership with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.
- Building on the life promotion supports included in the Youth Suicide Prevention Plan, with particular attention to work with Indigenous partners, to provide culturally specific supports for Indigenous youth.
- Implementing the three pillars of the Special Needs Strategy (the developmental screen, co-ordinated service planning and the integrated delivery of rehabilitation services) in 2017, in partnership with the ministers of Community and Social Services, Education, and Health and Long-Term Care.
- Working with the ministers of Community and Social Services, Education, and Health and Long-Term Care to support smooth, timely transitions for young adults with special needs moving from children to adult services and develop a plan for action by fall 2017.

## **Improving Outcomes for Children and Youth In and Leaving Care**

- Introducing legislation in fall 2016 to further transform the child welfare and family services sector so that it delivers services that are accountable, culturally appropriate and, above all, focused on achieving the best outcomes for children, youth and families.
- Continuing to implement an adoption and permanency strategy and expanded supports for youth leaving care. As part of this work, continue to explore options to improve the way adoption services are delivered to make it easier for families who want to adopt and to increase the number of children matched with adoptive families. This includes examining the approaches Ontario currently takes to deliver public, private and inter-country adoption services.
- Developing a blueprint for residential services reform by spring 2017 that incorporates the voice of youth and focuses on improving the quality of care, enhancing oversight of licensed residential settings and using data to inform decision-making at all levels.

## **Improving Outcomes and Advancing the Well-being of Indigenous Youth**

- Continuing to work with Indigenous partners to implement the Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy by co-developing culturally appropriate services and working towards the recognition of jurisdiction and control.
- Working with Indigenous communities to implement the Family Well-Being Program beginning in 2017 to support strong, resilient communities and meet the goals of Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women.
- Continuing to work with Indigenous organizations as they build capacity to become designated children's aid societies.

## **Creating Conditions for Youth to Achieve their Full Potential**

- Reporting on the outcomes of the Ontario Youth Action Plan at its mid-point in summer 2017.
- Reporting on the outcomes of the disaggregated data feasibility study and pilots (the collection of demographic data). As part of this strategy, work with children's aid societies to collect identity-based data in order to better plan culturally appropriate services and inform work to address over-representation of racialized children and youth in care.
- Developing a Middle Years Strategy by working with the Minister of Education, Associate Minister of Education (Early Years and Child Care), and Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport and other partners, to support children between six and 12 years old to successfully transition into their teen years by summer 2017.
- Working with other ministries, develop a plan to more specifically target the needs and improve outcomes of Black youth in the Greater Toronto Region.
- Implementing Collective Impact demonstrations sites by fall 2017 to showcase innovative solutions for youth who are disconnected and not in employment, education or training.

In addition to the priority activities above, I ask that you also deliver results for Ontarians by driving progress in the following areas:

- Continue our internationally recognized work on the use of diversion, rehabilitation and reintegration for youth in, or at risk of, conflict with the law and continue to work to reduce the number of youth in custody.
- Work with other ministries to address the over-representation of racialized communities in the youth justice system.
- Support improved co-ordination between children's aid societies, school boards, and other agencies serving children and youth, working with partner ministries.
- Continue reporting on progress in supporting Ontario youth in the *Stepping Up Annual Report* so that the government can monitor how we are enacting our evidence-based strategic framework for improving

youth outcomes.

- Continue to work with providers to create a transformed child and youth mental health system that connects youth and their families to high quality, easy to access supports.
- Continue work with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to align child and youth mental health services with adult mental health services so young adults experience smooth transitions.
- Continue to work with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Mental Health and Addictions Leadership Advisory Council to explore evidence-based options on how to improve addictions programming for children and youth.
- Continue to work with the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities to engage with youth, young professionals and community partners to provide advice to government to ensure that young people across the province have a voice in the services and supports they need to help them succeed and to identify groups of youth who are at risk and may benefit from additional supports.

As you know, taking action on the recommendations contained in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report is a priority for our government. That is why we released *The Journey Together*, a document that serves as a blueprint for making our government's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples a reality. As we move forward with the implementation of the report, I ask you and your fellow Cabinet members to work together, in co-operation with our Indigenous partners, to help achieve real and measurable change for Indigenous communities.

Having made significant progress over the past year in implementing our community hubs strategy, I encourage you and your Cabinet colleagues to ensure that the Premier's Special Advisor on Community Hubs and the Community Hubs Secretariat, at the Ministry of Infrastructure, are given the support they need to continue their vital cross-government work aimed at making better use of public properties, encouraging multi-use spaces and helping communities create financially sustainable hub models.

Responsible fiscal management remains an overarching priority for our government — a priority echoed strongly in our 2016 Budget. Thanks to our disciplined approach to the province's finances over the past two years, we are on track to balance the budget next year, in 2017–18, which will also lower the province's debt-to-GDP ratio. Yet this is not the moment to rest on our past accomplishments: it is essential that we work collaboratively across every sector of government to support evidence-based decision-making to ensure programs and services are effective, efficient and sustainable, in order to balance the budget by 2017–18, maintain balance in 2018–19, and position the province for longer-term fiscal sustainability.

Marathon runners will tell you that an event's halfway mark is an opportunity to reflect on progress made — but they will also tell you that it is the ideal moment to concentrate more intently and to move decisively forward. At this halfway mark of this government's mandate, I encourage you to build on the momentum that we have successfully achieved over the past two years, to work in tandem with your fellow ministers to advance our economic plan and to ensure that Ontario remains a great place to live, work and raise a family.

I look forward to working together with you to build opportunity and prosperity for all Ontarians.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Wynne  
Premier

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[Ministry website \(http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/index.aspx\)](http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/index.aspx)

[Read all 2016 mandate letters \(https://www.ontario.ca/page/mandate-letters-2016\)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/mandate-letters-2016)