

Report to the Legislative Assembly

Services to Support Young Adults Transitioning to Adulthood

Auditor General OF ALBERTA

November 2026

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OF ALBERTA

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Brandon Lunty, MLA
Chair, Standing Committee on Legislative Offices
Standing Committee on Legislative Offices
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Dear Chair:

It is an honour, on behalf of my office, to submit my report, *Services to Support Young Adults Transitioning to Adulthood Performance Audit*, to the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, in accordance with the *Auditor General Act*.

Respectfully,



Phillip D. Peters FCPA, FCA, KC
Auditor General of Alberta

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Related Reports

- Systems to Deliver Child and Family Services to Indigenous Children in Alberta (July 2016 and July 2025)

Appointed under Alberta's *Auditor General Act*, the Auditor General is the legislated auditor of the Consolidated Financial Statements of the Province of Alberta and most provincial agencies, boards, commissions, and regulated funds. The audits conducted by the Office of the Auditor General report on how government is managing its responsibilities and the province's resources. Through our audit reports, we provide independent assurance to the 87 Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, and the people of Alberta, that public money is properly accounted for and provides value.

Report Highlights

Why We Did This Audit

The transition to adulthood is a critical period that can have lasting effects on a young person's future well-being and independence. For young adults formerly in government care, this stage in life can be especially challenging as they navigate the transition to independence with fewer supports and resources. The Transition to Adulthood Program supports these young adults as they move toward independence.

The program provides both financial and non-financial support intended to help young adults achieve stability, pursue education or employment, build supportive relationships, and develop the skills needed for independent living.

Given the importance of these supports and intended outcomes, it is important to assess whether the program effectively meets young adults' needs, provides appropriate supports, and measures whether it is achieving its intended results.

What We Looked At

We assessed whether the Department of Children and Family Services (the department) has effective processes to:

- identify the needs of young adults and provide eligible supports
- measure and report on program performance

We did not examine the adequacy of the design of the program. According to the department, program design was informed through engagement with interested parties, reviews of Office of the Child and Youth Advocate reports, and a cross-jurisdictional scan of similar programs.

We Found

The department does not consistently demonstrate:

- young adults have current and complete transition plans
- service agreements that list financial and non-financial supports align with transition plans
- engagement with young adults occurred as required
- monitoring reports are accurate

The department has clearly defined program objectives, but does not have:

- performance measures to track achievement of program objectives
- effective processes to analyze results
- reporting on program effectiveness

We Recommend

We recommend that the Department of Children and Family Services improve its:

- processes to identify and respond to young adults' needs by ensuring transition to independence plans are current, complete, and reflected in transition to adulthood agreements
- processes to demonstrate compliance with the Transition to Adulthood Program Policy Manual regarding meetings with young adults
- performance management processes to analyze results and report on the effectiveness of the Transition to Adulthood Program

Conclusion

We conclude, based on our audit criteria, that the Department of Children and Family Services does not have effective processes for its Transition to Adulthood program to identify the needs of young adults and provide eligible supports, and to measure and report on program performance, and that improvements can be made.

Why our Findings Matter to Albertans

Young adults leaving government care face major life transitions and need support to build stability, pursue education or employment, and establish strong community connections. Because program participation is voluntary, effective planning and ongoing engagement are essential to ensuring supports align with their goals and evolving needs.

Without outcome reporting, the department cannot assess whether the program is effective in providing vulnerable young adults with the support they need to successfully transition to adulthood. As a result, young adults may not receive timely and effective supports, increasing the risk of poorer long-term outcomes.

Background

The Department of Children and Family Services business plan outlines a desired outcome of ensuring its services and supports are accessible and responsive to the children, youth, families, and individuals who need them. A key objective supporting this outcome is to provide targeted supports to young adults transitioning from care to adulthood by promoting health, supporting education and skill development, and improving employment opportunities.[1]

Transitioning from government care to adulthood can be challenging. According to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, many young adults leaving government care face significant adversity and are profoundly impacted by trauma, grief, and loss, requiring ongoing assistance to access supports.[2]

The Transition to Adulthood Program became operational in 2022-2023 and is designed to help young adults in achieving a successful transition from government care to full independence through individualized services tailored to their unique goals and needs. The program assists participants with emotional and social well-being, securing stable housing, pursuing education and employment, building relationships, and accessing resources that promote successful independent living.

To be eligible for the program, young adults must be between 18 and 23 years old and have an open child intervention file with the department on their 18th birthday. The program offers two types of support:

- Financial supports until age 22: Funding to help cover essential living costs, including housing, food, toiletries, utilities, communication, and transportation.
- Non-financial supports until age 24: Guidance and connections to services that promote independence and well-being, including housing search assistance, employment and training supports, mentorship, addictions support, life skills training, and cultural connections.

Although the program is voluntary, its success depends on the participation and commitment of the young adults. Young adults work with practitioners to assess their needs, identify goals, and access available services and supports.

In 2025–2026, the department spent $59 million on the program, including $44 million for financial supports and $15 million in service delivery for non-financial supports. As at March 31, 2026, the program supported just over 2,200 young adults, representing 91 per cent of eligible young adults transitioning out of government care.[3]

1 Ministry of Children and Family Services 2025–2028 Business Plan, page 35.

2 Office of the Child and Youth Advocate: 2024–25 Calling for Change.

3 Ministry of Children and Family Services 2025–2026 Annual Report, page 15.

Detailed Findings and Recommendations

Improve Processes to Identify and Respond to Young Adults' Needs

Context

Transition to Adulthood Program practitioners work with young adults who often face significant and complex barriers that can affect participation in planning activities and meetings. As needs and circumstances can change over time, maintaining engagement and providing appropriate supports may be challenging. Given these circumstances, reliable information and effective monitoring processes are important to help practitioners identify issues, respond to changing needs, and ensure program requirements are met.

The Transition to Adulthood Program Policy Manual (manual) requires practitioners to work with young adults to develop a transition to independence plan that identifies and documents their goals, needs, and planned supports. According to the manual, practitioners must review the plan with the young adult monthly, and update it at least every three months.

Every six months, practitioners must establish a transition to adulthood agreement (service agreement) that outlines the financial and non-financial supports the young adult will receive based on the needs and supports identified in the latest plan. The manual also outlines requirements for ongoing collaboration meetings between practitioners and young adults to review progress and adjust their supports as needs change.

Criteria

The department should have processes to assess young adults' needs and deliver required supports. The department should:

- develop and maintain a transition plan that reflects the young adult's needs, goals, and capabilities
- develop and approve a service agreement that includes financial and non-financial supports that align with the transition plan
- meet with the young adults regularly to review transition plans and service agreements and adjust them as needed

Our findings

Key findings

The department does not consistently demonstrate:

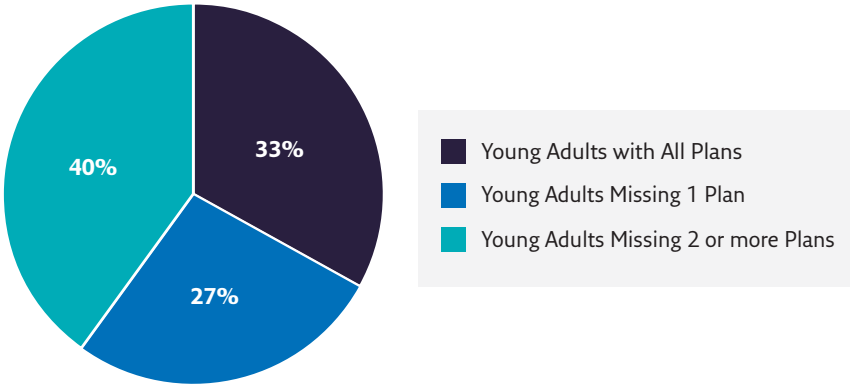
- young adults have current and complete transition plans
- service agreements that list financial and non-financial supports align with transition plans
- engagement with young adults occurred as required
- monitoring reports are accurate

Transition plans are missing or incomplete

Transition plans are the primary tool practitioners use to assess young adults' needs, identify supports and services, and monitor progress toward independence. Practitioners must document interactions with young adults in the department's case management system and update the plans accordingly.

We selected a sample of young adult files and reviewed their plans and supporting service agreements completed during the first six months and the last six months of the 21-month period we audited.

Percentage of Plans in Place



Based on the requirements set out in the department's program manual, each young adult in our sample should have had four transition plans during this period—one for each three-month interval. However, we found that two-thirds of the young adults did not have all four plans in place.

Furthermore, for the transition plans that were in place, we identified several quality issues:

- Key planning and assessment elements were missing, including:
  - young adults' goals, such as education or employment (24 per cent of plans)
  - significant barriers facing young adults, such as mental health challenges or a lack of a support system (30 per cent of plans)
  - achievements and progress updates (11 per cent of plans)
- Required sign-offs were missing, including those of the young adult (35 per cent of plans) and the practitioner (38 per cent of plans). These sign-offs confirm that information in the plan is complete and accurate.

Management indicated that updating the transition plans is intended to be driven by the young adult and that elements are completed at their discretion, together with the practitioner. However, where elements were missing, we found no indication that they had been omitted intentionally. As a result, the department does not know whether all available supports were discussed with the young adult.

Where consecutive plans were available for comparison, we noted that most practitioners carried forward more than half of the information from one plan to the next without documenting that they had reviewed and confirmed the information remained current with the young adult. Management stated that, in these instances, practitioners are having the discussions as intended, but the corresponding documentation in the plan is not always updated to reflect them.

Service agreements not aligned with transition plans

Transition to Adulthood Program agreements formalize the services and supports young adults will receive based on the needs identified in their transition plans.

Of the young adult files we sampled that had plans in place, all required service agreements were in place and signed. However, our testing found that for one quarter of young adult files, at least one of their agreements did not include supports identified in the corresponding plan. These omitted supports included important services, such as housing and mental health supports. When identified needs are not reflected in agreements, there is an increased risk that young adults will not receive the supports they need.

We also tested core financial supports provided to young adults and found they were paid in amounts consistent with policy.

Meetings with young adults were missed

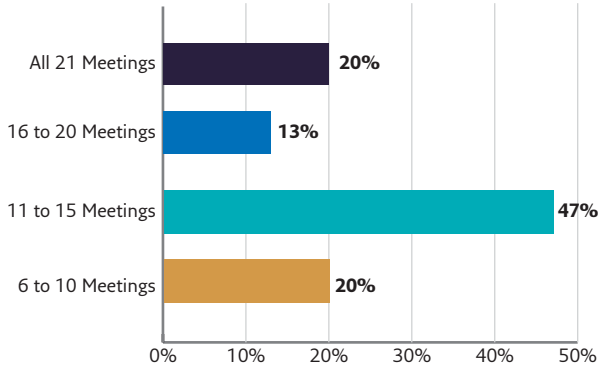
The Transition to Adulthood Program requires practitioners to meet regularly with young adults to review and update transition plans to assess progress, update goals, and revise supports. Per the program's policy manual, practitioners must hold:

- one-on-one meetings with the young adult every 30 days, and
- network meetings every 90 days. Network meetings involve individuals identified by the young adult as part of their support network.

Practitioners must document in the department's system when these meetings occur. For our sampled young adults, we reviewed the number of meetings held over the full 21 months we audited. According to the manual, each young adult should have had 21 one-on-one meetings and seven network meetings during this period. In addition, practitioners must make a minimum of three attempts to contact a young adult who cannot be located for more than three months before potentially removing them from the program.

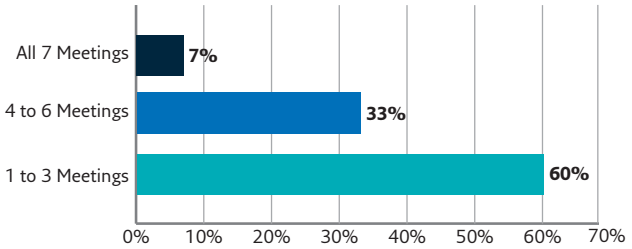
Our analysis of system information for our samples found that practitioners did not consistently hold the required number of meetings with young adults and their support networks, as shown in the following two figures.

Figure 1: One-on-One Meetings Held with Young Adults:



We found that 20 per cent of young adults had all 21 required one-on-one monthly meetings with their practitioner; 20 per cent had fewer than half the required meetings.

Figure 2: Network Meetings Held with Young Adults



Seven per cent of young adults had all seven required quarterly network meetings with their practitioner; 60 per cent had fewer than half the required meetings.

Our analysis also found significant time had elapsed between required meetings:

- 60 per cent of young adults had a gap of three months or more between one-on-one meetings
- 33 per cent of young adults had a one-year or more gap between network meetings

It is important to note program participation is voluntary and designed to help young adults direct their own transition. However, many of these young adults face significant social, economic, mental health, or other challenges that can make it difficult to advocate for themselves to access available supports. Reports issued by the Child and Youth Advocate have identified that developing stable relationships and connections with trusted adults are important protective factors that contribute to resilience, engagement with services, and positive outcomes for young people.[4]

Management stated that challenges engaging young adults are the primary cause of missed meetings, as young adults place a high value on autonomy when they turn 18 and may need time, flexibility, and choice in how they engage with practitioners. We heard from two practitioners that workloads can also impact whether meetings are occurring as required.

We found the department does not have a process to track reasons for missed meetings or followup attempts by practitioners. For three quarters of the missed one-on-one meetings in our testing, we found no evidence that assigned practitioners

[4] Office of the Child and Youth Advocate: 2023-2024 Calling for Change; 2024-2025 Calling for Change; and A Place to Belong.

attempted to reschedule the meeting. Management indicated through discussions with practitioners that followup efforts to reschedule meetings are occurring, however these efforts are not always documented. As a result, the department does not know the extent to which missed meetings are attributable to young adults not attending, practitioner workloads, or other factors. Given the importance of stable relationships and connections for these young adults, the department should determine whether consistent efforts are being made by practitioners to re-engage young adults when meetings are missed.

Ineffective monitoring reports

The department generates monthly Practice Standard Reports (reports) to track completion rates for key program activities, such as whether current plans and agreements are in place, and practitioner meetings are occurring. These reports are distributed to managers and team leads to highlight compliance rates and trends. However, we noted the reports are not an effective monitoring tool due to data discrepancies.

For example, the reports showed compliance rates and trends for current transition plans being in place were considerably higher than what we observed in our testing. We determined the discrepancy arose from an error in how data was compiled, dating back to April 2025. Management was unaware of the issue. As a result, they relied on inaccurate compliance results that overstated the number of young adults with current transition plans. We also noted that, when the reports accurately calculated plans in place, the results showed only half of the plans were current, which aligns with our testing results described on page 5.

In addition, reported compliance rates for overdue one-one-one meetings and overdue network meetings were lower than indicated by our testing. We determined this was because practitioners did not properly code meetings in the system. We observed higher meeting rates because we were able to assess other available information, while the department's report captures only limited system data.

The reports are intended to support management's followup with practitioners when the rates are low, demonstrating that required activities are not being completed. However, inaccurate and incomplete report results make it difficult to identify and resolve issues and hold practitioners accountable for completing required activities.

NEW Recommendation:
Improve processes to respond to the needs of young adults

We recommend that the Department of Children and Family Services improve its processes to identify and respond to young adults' needs by ensuring transition to independence plans are current, complete, and reflected in transition to adulthood agreements.

NEW Recommendation:
Improve processes to engage with young adults

We recommend that the Department of Children and Family Services improve its processes to demonstrate compliance with the Transition to Adulthood Program Policy Manual regarding meetings with young adults.

CONSEQUENCES OF NOT TAKING ACTION

Without current and complete transition plans, supports offered may not accurately reflect young adults' needs, increasing the risk that they will not achieve stability, acquire life skills, and build positive connections with their community.

Regular engagement with the practitioner is the primary mechanism for ensuring young adults are accessing services and progressing. Missed meetings can hinder these efforts and represent lost opportunities to build meaningful relationships between the young adult, their support networks, and the practitioner.

As a result, vulnerable young adults may not receive the support they need to successfully transition out of government care into adulthood.

Improve Performance Management Processes

Context

Supporting young adults transitioning from government care is inherently complex, as outcomes are influenced by factors such as a young adult's engagement, housing stability, and personal circumstances that may be outside the department's direct control. The department remains responsible for defining program outcomes, monitoring results, and reporting on program effectiveness. To do so, it requires clear measures, reliable data, and processes to analyze results and inform program delivery and decision-making. Best practice includes setting measurable objectives and targets as part of annual planning for program delivery.

Criteria

The department should have performance metrics and processes to report on program effectiveness. The department should:

- clearly define the program's objectives and establish performance measures to track progress
- analyze results and implement improvements
- report on the effectiveness of the program

Our findings

Key findings

The department has clearly defined program objectives, but does not have:

- performance measures to track achievement of program objectives
- effective processes to analyze results
- reporting on program effectiveness

Lack of outcome measures

The department has established the following objectives for young adults in the program:

- achieve interdependence
- maintain stable lifelong connections
- develop autonomy
- pursue education and employment

However, the department does not currently have performance measures to track progress toward achieving these program objectives. At the time of writing this report, the department was working to implement a performance indicator: a survey designed to capture self-reported progress from young adult participants toward achieving the program objectives while they are in the program.

Although baseline data collection began in 2025, the survey is still in the early stages and has not produced sufficient results for the department to evaluate. In addition, because participation is voluntary, the results may not be representative of all program participants. As a result, the department has limited information to assess program effectiveness, including whether positive outcomes are sustained after young adults leave the program.

No results analysis

Since the department has not implemented performance measures related to the achievement of program objectives, there is no process to analyze results and then implement improvements.

No reporting on program effectiveness

The department does not report on overall effectiveness in achieving program objectives. The department's 2025-2026 annual report only included output information, such as a breakdown of the number of program participants by Indigenous status, type of agreement, and chosen pathway.[5]

[5] Agreement types include financial supports, non-financial supports, and agreements with foster parents. Program pathways include adult services, education, employment, and stability.

Each quarter, management reviews reports containing program activity information, such as the number of young adult intakes, caseloads (by region, age, pathway, and Indigenous status), and case closure reasons. While this information supports program operations, including workload planning, and contributes to the department's annual external reporting, it does not provide management with information on whether the program is achieving its stated objectives.

NEW Recommendation: Improve Performance Management Processes

We recommend that the Department of Children and Family Services improve its performance management processes to analyze results and report on the effectiveness of the Transition to Adulthood Program.

CONSEQUENCES OF NOT TAKING ACTION

Without effective performance measurement processes, the department cannot assess or demonstrate whether the program is achieving its intended outcomes. This also limits management's ability to resolve program weaknesses and continuously improve the program.

As a result, vulnerable young adults who rely on the program may not receive the support needed to successfully transition to adulthood. This increases the risk of adverse outcomes, including housing instability, unemployment, mental health and addiction challenges, and interactions with the justice system.

About This Audit

Objective and Scope

The objective of our audit was to determine whether the Department of Children and Family Services has effective processes for its Transition to Adulthood Program to:

- identify the needs of young adults and provide eligible supports
- measure and report on program performance

We audited the department's processes to support young adults participating in the Transition to Adulthood Program. We examined the processes used to identify young adults' needs, develop transition plans, establish support agreements, and monitor ongoing engagement with young adults. We selected a sample of 15 young adult files that covered 30 service agreements, 60 transition plans, 315 one-on-one meetings, and 105 network meetings. We tested the documentation available to support transition plans, service agreements, and practitioner engagement. We also examined the department's processes to measure and report on program effectiveness.

We did not examine the adequacy of the design of the program. According to the department, program design was informed through engagement with interested parties, reviews of Office of the Child and Youth Advocate reports, and a cross-jurisdictional scan of similar programs.

We also did not examine the initial eligibility determination, as the process is straightforward. Practitioners work from a list of young adults transitioning out of government care to move them into the program if the young adult chooses. This approach reduces the likelihood of gaps or delays in eligibility determination.

Our examination included an evaluation of the department's processes in place during the 21-month period of April 1, 2024, to December 31, 2025.

Criteria

We established the criteria based on best practices used in audits done in other jurisdictions and from department documentation, including the Transition to Adulthood Program Policy Manual and Practice Guide.

Management of the Department of Children and Family Services acknowledged the suitability of the audit criteria on February 5, 2026.

Audit Responsibilities and Quality Assurance Statement

Management of the Department of Children and Family Services is responsible for the processes to support young adults formerly in government care transition to adulthood successfully.

Our responsibility is to express an independent conclusion on whether the Department of Children and Family Services has effective processes for its Transition to Adulthood Program.

All work in this audit was performed to a reasonable level of assurance in accordance with the Canadian Standard on Assurance Engagements (CSAE) 3001—Direct Engagements, set out in the CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance. The Office of the Auditor General applies Canadian Standard on Quality Management 1, which requires the Office to design, implement and operate a system of quality management, including policies and procedures regarding compliance with ethical requirements, professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements. The office complies with the independence and other ethical requirements of the Chartered Professional Accountants of Alberta Rules of Professional Conduct, which are founded on fundamental principles of integrity and due care, objectivity, professional competence, confidentiality and professional behaviour.

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