Social

Issues and Options for Change:

Social Services for the 21st Century

Services Project

This report has a double purpose: to provide Albertans with a starting point from which to debate the ongoing changes to Alberta's social service sector; and to suggest directions that these changes might usefully take. On both counts, open discussion and critical reaction are welcomed as part of a constructive dialogue about the future of our social service system.

Social services in the 1990s are pulled three different ways. First, we as a society would like to offer the "perfect" set of social programs with immediate adequate and flexible support for all who require it. However, neither Alberta nor anyone else has ever managed to define, let alone deliver, such a "perfect" package. Some programs are criticized for failing to achieve their intended goals, others for the rigidities and inflexibilities that exclude people in need, still others for unanticipated "second order" problems. Fine-tuning the existing system is an ongoing challenge.

Second, we are shooting at a moving target. We no longer live in the world of the 1970s, let alone that of the 1940s to the 60s when many of the current social programs were born. Society is being transformed: the family has been transformed by changing demographics – fewer single-income families, more single-parent families – and by the social, legal and financial complexities of divorce and remarriage. The workplace is being transformed by the shift to part-time work and the decline of the life-long job. Government itself changes: the move from a government-centred "welfare state" toward a community centred "welfare society," and the First Nations assertiveness evidenced by the demands for aboriginal self-government, both affect existing social programs and the structures through which they are delivered.

Third, debt and deficit reduction have emerged as a dominant public policy theme across Canada. Increasing concerns over sustainable levels of spending have resulted in fewer dollars for the delivery of social programs. But these reductions may mean that increasing numbers of individuals are falling through what initially appear to be widening cracks in our social service system. Some of these might be affected so severely as to be rightly identified as "victims of cutbacks." Citizens will disagree about the magnitude, appropriate targets, or even the need for these dramatic spending cuts because of ideological or other grounds, but there is no avoiding the fact that reductions in government spending are changing

Canada West Foundation

Executive Summary

Background

The fundamental restructuring of social services in Canada is a recent phenomenon having taken form predominantly in the 1990s. The restructuring involves the ongoing refinement of existing social service policies and continuous adjustments to a changing society, as well as debt and deficit-driven reductions to government spending. The basic doctrines underlying social policy have changed substantially, and provision of benefits and services is struggling to adjust to these changes.

The changes can be generally conceptualized as a shift away from the welfare state to a welfare society. Welfare states are characterized by a sense of collective responsibility for social welfare, highly developed, universal social services, and strong centralization of fiscal and decision-making responsibility for social programs. Welfare societies, conversely, are based upon ideals of individual responsibility, and decentralization of both decision-making and provision of social services. Government assumes a more restricted role in social programs and focuses on providing only core services, strategic planning of the service delivery system and maintaining standards for service delivery.

In Canada, this shift has been strong and rapid. As a result, this has created a mood of crisis in many parts of the social service sector. This new role features reductions to centrally planned and delivered services, restrictions on basic income support, and changes to areas such as education and health care that are related to social services.

The reality in Alberta, and across Canada, is that there is no comprehensive planning or review process for social services. This is, in part, the result of a very limited knowledge-base about the sector. This lack of a knowledge-base makes adequate goal-setting, planning, delivery, and evaluation of social services extremely difficult. It is aggravated by the fact that in the social services sector, as in any activity involving a multiplicity of established organizations (including governments) driven by individuals characterized by different outlooks and priorities, there are a number of important and unavoidable barriers to change. This report, therefore, is directed toward offering suggestions for developing and implementing a stronger framework for shaping social services and addresses the challenge on the two fronts of **information** and **innovation**.

It is now time to develop a collaborative, shared vision for Alberta's social services for the 21st century. The vision must entail a practical framework for the future of social services in Alberta, outlining priorities, responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms for the social service sector.

Recommendations

1. Build a meaningful information-base

There is a limited formal knowledge-base underlying much of social services; this embraces both the social needs that we are attempting to remedy and the variety of organizations that are working toward this purpose. Building such a knowledge-base must become a priority of the sector by:

1. developing consistent reporting criteria and procedures among social service funders;
2. regularly publishing a report card on social services; and
3. routinely conducting a systematic population survey of Albertans to collect information related to social policy.

Executive Summary - continued

2. Build a rigorous set of "social benchmarks"

Benchmarks serve as statements of goals, priorities and desired outcomes for social services.

The government of Alberta has already made a start on this process: Its "Measuring Up" initiative has created an initial framework to assess the performance of government; and the "round table" process that accompanied spending reductions is a first step toward the collaborative measures essential in the benchmarking process. These initial efforts, however, need to be refined and developed into clear statements of Alberta's social goals.

3. Identify and encourage alternative service delivery models

Current directions in social services hold potential for improving the system. Promising initiatives include:

1. cooperation between numerous government departments;
2. preventive or early intervention programs;
3. local control of decision-making for service delivery;
4. collaborations with businesses; and
5. partnerships and collaboration among multiple social service stakeholders.

4. Create a Social Services Investment Fund (SSIF)

A SSIF could facilitate development of solutions to current problems in social services, and create a positive incentive for innovation. It would:

1. operate for a fixed and limited term (perhaps three years);
2. be managed by a broadly-based, representative board, consisting of government representatives, service providers, community representatives, and client group representatives;
3. review grants annually;
4. be allocated the equivalent of 1.5% of the annual AFSS budget; and
5. allocate new money to the non-profit sector.

Additional Materials

In addition to this report, the project has produced a number of other resources. These materials are available from the Canada West Foundation directly or through the Internet at http://www.cwf.ca These include:

- **Restructuring Impact Reports**: A series of short reports that describe specific components of the social service system, and the current issues and changes to that part of the system specifically: seniors, women, income support, persons with disabilities and children.
- **Income Security in Canada: A Statistical Profile**: An interprovincial comparison of income support and labour market statistics.
- **Case Study Reports**: A series of six examinations of innovative social programs in Calgary with an eye toward what we can learn about building effective social service delivery programs.

the very structure of social services throughout Alberta, and indeed in most of the western industrialized world.

The combination of these three elements is a major challenge to our society and our governments. We need to do a better job of providing existing services; we need to provide different services in new ways; and we need to do all of this in the context of fiscal restraint. To state the obvious, these three goals will often be in conflict. The question is: how are the roles of government, of non-government social service organizations, and of the community itself evolving under this triple impact? And the challenge is: how can social service stakeholders understand and manage this evolution so to cope, not just with today's changes, but also with tomorrow's?

To help inform the debate on these critical topics, the Social Services Project was initiated to examine the social service sector in order to:

■ provide an overview of the nature and the scope of social need in Alberta;

■ better understand the delivery of social services in the province;

■ address the barriers to change that threaten successful and productive restructuring;

■ examine social service success stories and trouble spots; and

■ outline and appraise alternative approaches to the delivery of social services by government and/or the non-government sector.

These objectives would be addressed through the consideration of the following five research questions:

1. *How does the social service system actually work?*

2. *Who delivers what services to which individuals, and how does this mesh with the needs that actually exist in the community?*

3. *What are the core principles and ideas that inform the debate over the delivery of social services?*

4. *What is really changing? What are the goals of the evolving system and how can the transition to new arrangements and procedures be achieved?*

5. *How can we minimize the pain the changes may have on vulnerable members of society?*

The Social Services Project has employed a range of research methods to address these questions. In order to maximize resources available to this project, data collection methods were largely secondary in nature and included:

■ reviewing relevant reports, books, articles and other literature of social/human services delivery alternatives;

■ contacting researchers and organizations working on this issue such as university and government researchers, policy institutes, and non-profit organizations;

■ analyzing statistics related to social services as published by a variety of government and non-government sources;

■ interviewing a cross-section of individuals involved in social service policy development and service delivery; and

■ conducting focus groups with social service providers (including non-profit agencies, educators, health workers, government, etc.) to discuss the future of social services in Alberta.

The Challenge: Social Services in Transition

Over the last three decades, Canadian governments have been instrumental in the development of Canada's welfare state. This has been a major achievement, and one of which Canadians are justly proud. At the same time, however, we must recognize that not just in Canada but on a global level, the welfare state is in trouble. As a consequence, we who live in the last decade of the century are witnessing a major change in the delivery of social services – the progression toward the welfare society.

The welfare state is characterized by a sense of collective responsibility for social welfare, and by highly developed universal social services. In Canada, this was accompanied by a strong centralization of fiscal and decision-making responsibility for social programs, and the development of a means for over-

riding constitutional division of powers that gave primary responsibility for social programs to the provinces. Government in general, and the federal government in particular, emerged as the primary funder of social services, as the cornerstone of the "social safety net."
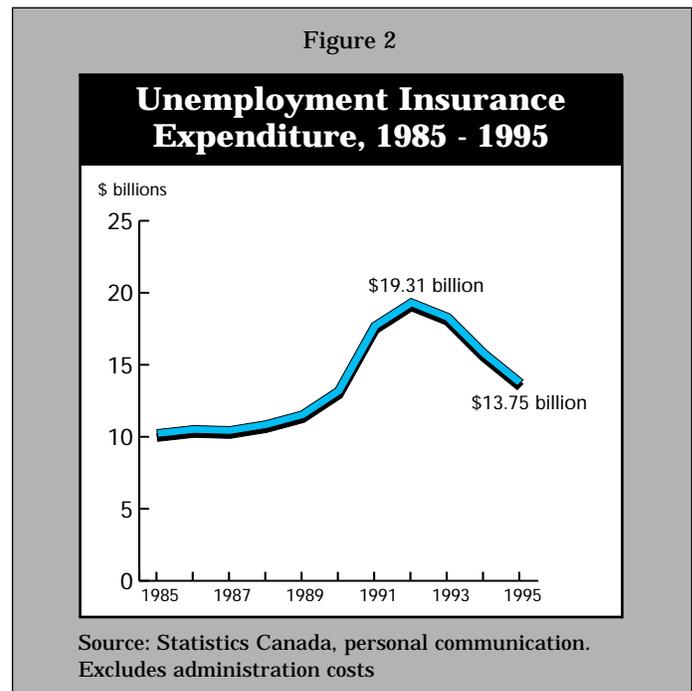
By contrast, the welfare society is based upon ideals of individual responsibility. It features the decentralization of both decision-making and the provision of social services. Government assumes a more restricted role in social programs. It focuses on providing core services, on strategic planning for the service delivery system, and on the maintenance of standards for service delivery. Strong emphasis is placed on families, individuals and communities in the role of social care, and there is an emerging opposition to the state provision of universal comprehensive services based on the argument that such services foster dependency and encourage bureaucratic inefficiency. The ideas that are guiding the restructuring of social services are decentralization, devolution, community-based care, and rationalization; all are aspects of this shift along the continuum from a welfare state to a welfare society.

Evidence of what this transition looks like in practice can be seen in the 1995 Federal Budget which outlined a new role for the federal government in delivering social programs. The most obvious change was a reduction in the budgets of departments responsible for social programs (as shown in Figure 1); over a three-year period, the Human Resources Development budget is to fall by 34.8%. But the dollar reduction is only part of the story. At the same time, the federal government indicated the termination of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) which historically provided the structure for federal-provincial cost-sharing of social services funding. In
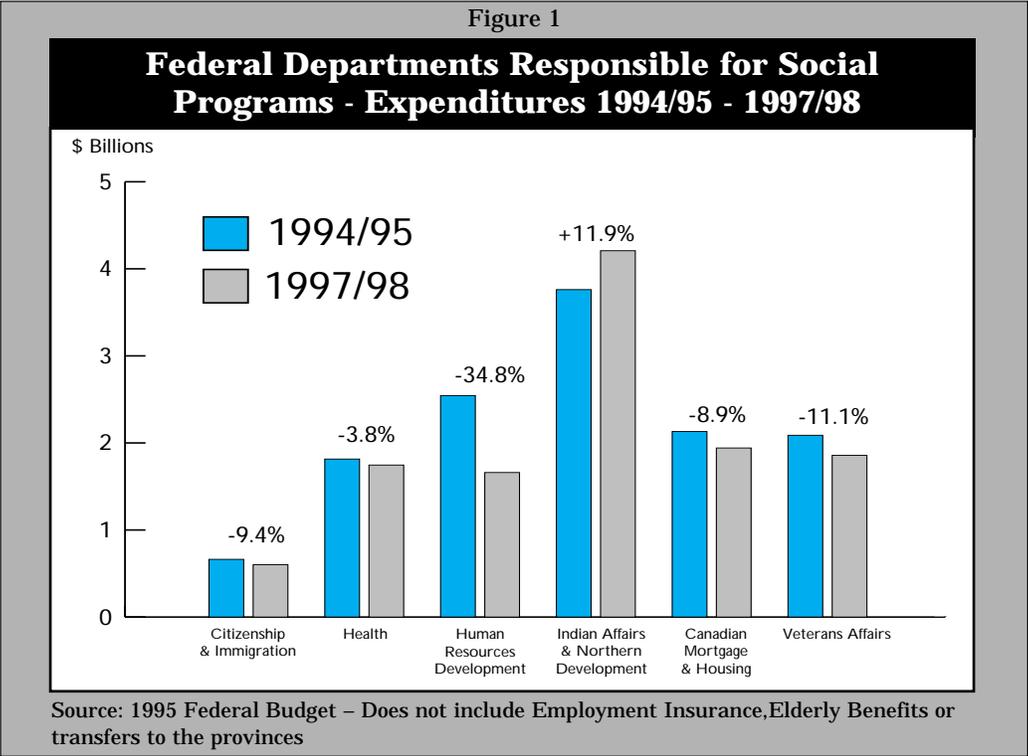
its place, the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) was implemented on April 1, 1996 as a block funding arrangement for federal transfer payments to the provinces for health, post-secondary education, welfare and social services. Within fairly general parameters (a prohibition on residency requirements for social assistance, requirements for universal access for health care, etc.) each province has the authority to allocate the funds as it deems appropriate. This represents a contrast with the more

Figure 1

Federal Departments Responsible for Social Programs - Expenditures 1994/95 - 1997/98

Source: 1995 Federal Budget – Does not include Employment Insurance, Elderly Benefits or transfers to the provinces

Figure 2

Unemployment Insurance Expenditure, 1985 - 1995

Source: Statistics Canada, personal communication. Excludes administration costs
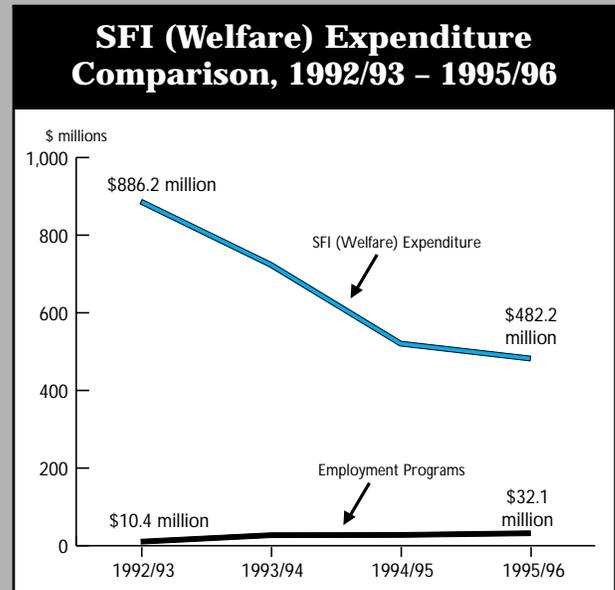
detailed federal control that characterized the post-war conditional grant programs in which most modern Canadian social programs have their origins.

At the same time, changes have taken place in Canada's Unemployment Insurance (UI) program. A chronically high unemployment rate fuelled long-term increases in both UI expenditures and the numbers of recipients, both of which peaked during the recession (Figure 2). But UI has been replaced by Employment Insurance (EI), a system which places increased emphasis on employability, job training and individual responsibility.

These federal actions to cope with escalating costs of social programs are mirrored by recent actions taken by the province of Alberta. In 1993, the province elected the Conservative government of Ralph Klein with a mandate to gain control of the province's deficit (then at $3.8 billion per year) and accumulated debt (about $23 billion). Through a series of major spending reductions, and aided by a sharp increase in resource revenues, the Klein government achieved an annual budget surplus within three years. In the process, it transformed the nature of social services within the province – between 1992/93 and 1994/95, the budget of Alberta Family and Social Services (AFSS) was reduced 21.4%, from $1,722.3 million to 1,353.4 million (1996 Budget).

Figure 3

SFI (Welfare) Expenditure Comparison, 1992/93 – 1995/96

Welfare expenditures include grants to individuals and delivery costs. Employment program expenditures do not include spending by Advanced Education and Career Development.
Source: Alberta Family & Social Services and Public Accounts

a more active support system focused on temporary assistance, self-sufficiency, and labour market training. Welfare caseloads fell by 57% in just over three years (see Figure 4), the benefit rates for some categories were cut, and many supplemental benefits were reduced (eg., the prescription drug program) or eliminated (allowances for rental deposits of furniture purchase).

The changes were the greatest in the area of welfare (Supports for Independence, or SFI) and particularly for direct support of those considered "single employable persons." Funding for these programs fell by more than 45% – more than double that of the department as a whole (Figure 3). Reforms were directed to making the program
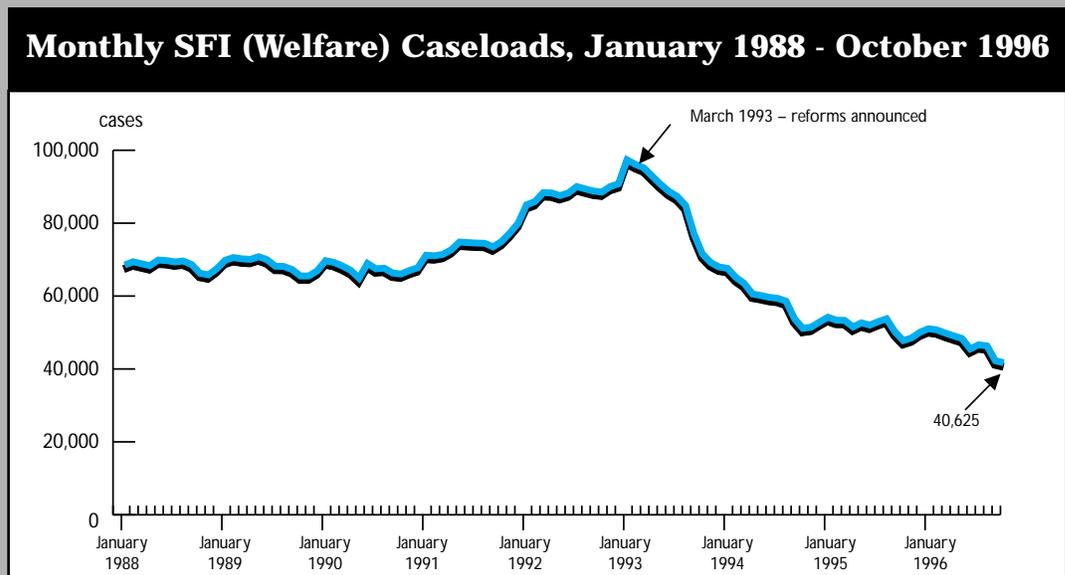

Figure 4

Monthly SFI (Welfare) Caseloads, January 1988 - October 1996

Starting in January 1993, figures refer to the caseload at the end of the month. Figures prior to 1993 are mid-month counts.   Source: Alberta Family & Social Services, personal communication

At the same time, some provincial programs were maintained or increased. The funding for Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) saw a modest increase, while AFSS expenditures on Employment Programs more than tripled ($10.4 million to $32.1 million per year). To some extent, of course, these represent the same individuals being supported from a different account (eg., a transfer from SFI to the Student's Finance Board), but the fact that they were being supported on a different basis and with a different rationale represents an important change.

Summary

As can be seen in both the federal and provincial changes to social welfare spending and program structures, the last three years have produced a different role for government in social services, as well as a different balance between the two levels of government. This new role features reductions to centrally planned and delivered services, restrictions on basic income support, and changes to areas such as education and health care that are related to social services. Together, these provide the recent social and historical context for the following analysis and recommendations.

The Information Problem

The simple reality is that we in Alberta have a lack of useful information about social services (see Box 1); we really do not know very much about how well our social service system meets the needs of Albertans. The fragments of information are like the pieces of a very large puzzle. What is missing is the picture which tells us what the puzzle will look like when we finish putting it together.

In reality, the metaphor of a single puzzle is too generous: we have many pieces of many different puzzles, but no one of the puzzles is complete and no clear or reliable overall picture emerges. The various social service providers provide voluminous information to government, to their funders, and to their clients; but different providers are required or expected or willing to provide different sets of information based on different sets of assumptions or models. Making sense out of it is like being an air traffic controller who knows the altitude of one aircraft, the speed of a second, the course direction of a third, the destination of a fourth, and the fuel status of a fifth – you do a lot of guessing and you keep your fingers crossed. Adding more fragments of information is not in itself the solution, because it is the fragmentation, not the volume, of information that is the problem.

We know, for example, that in the city of Calgary there are at least 700 community organizations delivering social services. But we do not know:

1. how well these organizations, collectively or individually, are meeting the needs of abused children, or teens on drugs, or the homeless, or seniors;

2. to what extent their activities overlap, conflict, duplicate and whether this overlap is beneficial or wasteful;

3. how much money in total these organizations collect, or how much they spend, or what the balance is between administration costs and benefits going to persons in need; or

4. how many people they serve – partly because they measure what they do in different ways which may count several people as one service or may not keep track of one person receiving multiple services, and partly because there is no way of knowing how many individuals in need are accessing more than one service provider. If a crisis centre gets ten phone calls, and a women's shelter gets ten requests, and a drop-in centre estimates that there are ten more homeless people on the street, and a food bank dispenses ten more hampers, does this represent ten people in need, ten families in need, or forty, or some number in between?

If we do not have this information about service providers, it is also true that they often do not have the information about each other. Sometimes this is because of vested interests or "turf wars"; sometimes it is because of accidents of personal acquaintanceship or animosities; sometimes it is because they conceptualize problems in different ways, or "count"

what they are doing in a different fashion; sometimes it is the product of deeper philosophical or moral disagreement. For example: Birthright (pro-life) and Calgary Birth Control Association (pro-choice) would both agree that a homeless teenager with an unplanned pregnancy is a person in need while disagreeing fundamentally on what should be done to help her. These deeper disagreements about the nature of people in need and the appropriate way of dealing with them are one reason why many people are suspicious about changes in the social service system.

At one level, diversity and fragmentation is an enormous strength because it implies flexibility in coping with changing circumstances or unusual single cases

that a tightly organized system might well be unable to match. But it is also true that this semi-planned variety in the provision of services risks a double wastefulness: first by duplicating services to some categories of people in need, and second by omitting others almost completely. The lack of a **comprehensive and objective knowledge-base** about people in need on the one hand, and about service providers on the other, severely hampers any attempt at adequate goal-setting, planning, delivery, and evaluation of social services.

The need for comprehensive information was problematic enough when we thought of social services in terms of a comprehensive universal centrally-managed process – the model of the welfare state. The problem becomes even more critical with the shift to a more decentralized community-based system that puts more emphasis on the individual – the model of the welfare society. There are some functions (such as income support, the provision of the basic essentials of survival) which must remain government-centered and top down – but knowing where to draw the boundaries for this category can be done only with extensive information. There are other functions that are perhaps better left to the diverse social

> ## Social Benchmarks:
> - quantifiable indicators that assess the extent of social problems
> - concrete operationalization of social service goals and priorities
> - outcome-based measurements of social goals, rather than the more traditional effort- or input-based measurements
> - comparative indicators that can be used to assess success over time or to measure performance in relation to other jurisdictions
>
> ### Useful social benchmarks share a number of characteristics:
> - they must be defined by a collaborative process
> - they must focus on results rather than efforts or inputs
> - they must be based on data that is both reliable and capable of being collected periodically
> - the use of benchmarks implies a long-term process. Longer than those appropriate for routine program monitoring and evaluation

> ## Some Useful Social Benchmarks
> - Number of children living in low-income families
> - Birth rate per 100 females aged 12-17
> - Number of abused/neglected children per 100,000 population
> - Children in custody of child welfare per 100,000 population
> - Adult literacy rate
> - Number of homeless individuals per 100,000 population

service organizations acting within a general framework – but drawing and redrawing this framework, and knowing when the mesh between peoples' needs and services requires the redrawing, again requires accurate and up-to-date information.

The paradox remains: the diversity of social service providers in a free society constantly defies perfect mapping; and the definition and measurement of social need is a moving target whose parameters are themselves always and necessarily controversial. This being the case, what sort of information can we realistically expect, and how can we use it to fine-tune an effective and flexible social service system? In a variety of jurisdictions around the world, the mechanism that has been used for these purposes is the notion of "social benchmarks." The more thoroughly documented examples include Oregon's "Oregon Option" and Florida's "Government Accountable to the People" Project (more information is available on these topics by visiting their websites on the Internet). Alberta itself embarked on a similar process with its "Measuring Up" initiative.

The Measuring Up Initiative

The government of Alberta began the process of benchmarking in the form of its 1995 "Measuring Up" initiative. This established an initial framework to assess the performance of government, and includes 23 core measures as the basis for tracking the results of service delivery, developing intervention strategies, and modifying programs to achieve success. In 1995/96, these core measures focused on educational attainment, literacy and numeracy, life

Box 2
Examples of Alberta's Current Social Health Measures

Benchmark	Assessment	Rationale	Alternative Measures
Percentage of students completing high school within six years of entering grade 9	Good	This provides a measure of high school completion, which is associated with better life outcomes in later years	
Percentage of grade 9 students demonstrating acceptable literacy standards	Poor	Literacy in grade 9 does not ensure literacy as an adult. Adult literacy helps to determine outcomes such as employment	Adult literacy rates (math and text)
Births to mothers under age 18 per 100,000 population	Good	Teen mothers are at risk for dropping out of school, and becoming welfare dependent. This is in addition to poor pregnancy outcomes and other negative impacts for the child	
Family income distribution (compared to national and provincial averages)	Poor	Based on averages, this measure does not accurately reflect the number of families and individuals who experience low-income in Alberta, nor their financially-driven needs and problems	Number of families surveyed that indicate that basic needs are not being met.
Violent crime rate per 100,000 population	Good	A useful societal-level indicator	
Property crime rate per 100,000 population	Good	A useful societal-level indicator	
Youth violent crime rate per 100,000 population	Good	A useful societal-level indicator	
Youth property crime rate per 100,000 population	Good	A useful societal-level indicator	
Percentage of day care centres meeting government standards	Poor	This does not measure the number of available day care centre openings, or the affordability of such openings	Number of spaces, or ratio of spaces to total number funded
Percentage of children who stay free from injury or neglect following ministry intervention	Good	A basic and appropriate measure of the effectiveness of child welfare intervention. Should be supplemented with other measures	
Percentage of children in the custody of child welfare whose needs are being satisfactorily met in their placement	Poor	The operationalization of this measure is unclear. Satisfactorily meeting needs can be interpreted in any number of ways	Children in custody of child welfare per 100,000 population
Proportion of welfare cases remaining closed after 12 months	Poor	Eligibility criteria should not be confused with need	# of former recipients now above poverty line
Percentage of agencies serving the disabled that meet government standards	Poor	This does not indicate the availability of appropriate services, nor the effectiveness of those services	Disabled persons satisfaction with services provided
Expected to work clients per 1,000 working age population	Poor	Reflects eligibility and other program criteria, rather than availability or ability to work	# of welfare applicants per 1000 working age population
Proportion of employment initiative graduates not receiving welfare benefits 12 months after graduation or placement	Poor	Reflects eligibility criteria rather than need. Monitoring the proportion of those who re-apply for assistance is a better measure	# of former recipients who reapply for assistance
Duration of welfare for clients expected to work	Poor	Duration of welfare does not necessarily reflect the effectiveness of services designed to assist clients in getting off welfare	Proportion of employment training recipients who secure adequate employment
Proportion of single-parent welfare cases with Child Support Orders or Agreements	Good	A rough but useful measure of parent-child disruption. It helps to indicate the need for professional intervention	

Source: Measuring Up, 1996 and Alberta Family and Social Services

expectancy, health status, births to children, and family income distribution (*Measuring Up*, June 1996). In addition to the core measures, each provincial ministry has generated a more specific set of 6-10 performance measures that track progress toward achieving the government's stated goals. These more specific measures also provide a context for understanding the priorities and business plans of both the ministry and government in general.

Box 2 on the previous page summarizes some of the social benchmarks adopted by the government of Alberta. These benchmarks include core measures established by the province, and measures specific to Alberta Family and Social Services. As can be seen in Box 2, our assessment of the benchmarks is that some are useful, while others are problematic. Some initial suggestions for improving these benchmarks, based on lessons from other jurisdictions, are shown on the following pages.

Barriers to Change

The restructuring of any major service delivery system is a complex, long-term task, and doubly so when that system has been in place for decades and has been expanded, contracted and reformed in an incremental way. Interviews, focus groups and the literature identify a number of significant barriers to change that must be overcome if we are to successfully restructure the way we deliver social services. These barriers are summarized in Figure 5.

System Complexity

The social service delivery system in Alberta can best be described as a complicated patchwork of government services, non-profit organizations, private for-profit enterprises, and interest groups. No comprehensive map of this system exists, nor does any single individual or organization maintain the knowledge base that would make it possible to generate such a map. The sheer number of organizations, the varying sizes of the client populations they serve, the range of services and criteria and procedures they employ, combine to form a major barrier to the development of a comprehensive, integrated system.

Organizational Autonomy

Autonomy is a fundamental organizational goal of most professionals and service organizations, and the social service sector is no exception. Any restructuring that undermines or severely qualifies this autonomy will be met with both overt and covert resistance. Organizations will also be reluctant to engage in collaborations and partnerships if such efforts have the potential to impinge on their autonomy; such relationships will succeed only if each organization enters voluntarily and can see sufficient benefit to warrant continuing it.

Figure 5

Barriers to Changing the Social Service Delivery System

System Complexity
The number of service organizations and the vast range of clients form integration barriers

Organizational Autonomy
Restructuring that threatens autonomy would likely meet resistance

Lack of Incentives
Administrators have a personal vested interest in the growth of their organization

Political Context
Restructuring becomes a tool that stakeholders can use to control scarce resource distribution

Limited Vision
Professionals may lack a broad systemic view because of the focus on their own areas

Funding Realities
Competition for funds and restrictions in spending hinder restructuring

Professional Ideologies
Disciplines may hold contrary opinions about clients and services

Political Context

Public funding of social services necessarily involves political considerations and carries ideological implications. Each stakeholder in the social service sector holds a unique perspective and agenda, and will strive to see that agenda given a high priority. The result is that restructuring initiatives (and indeed the basic information on which the restructuring process proceeds) can become tools by which various stakeholders can control scarce resources. Political struggles will therefore occur, as stakeholders promote or resist change according to their own organizational advantage, their own values, their own conceptualization of the problems and the optimal response. Facts are not just facts; they can also be weapons. Moreover, these conflicts will often revolve, not just around the specific policy area or restructuring initiative in itself, but also around the way these are seen to fit into larger agendas.

Lack of Incentives

A natural phenomenon in any organization is the development of a culture that enhances the integrity and preservation of its services. Both administrators and personnel have a personal vested interest in the continuation and the growth of their organization – to feel otherwise would be to devalue their own past and current efforts. This phenomenon leads to "turf wars"; competition for funding sources, staff and clients; and competition rather than cooperation with other service organizations that have overlapping activities or interests. It can also reduce the actual dollars spent on direct service provision, as multiple organizations may maintain similar administrative structures. Currently, there are few organizational and administrative incentives to negate this protective mentality.

Limited Vision and Expertise

Related to competition and organizational survival is the role of the restricted vision engendered by expertise and experience within social service organizations. When they must focus on their own area of practice, it is often difficult for organizations to develop a broader, systemic perspective, and overcome the tendency to define the broader system as revolving around their own activities within it. Moreover, the restructuring of a large, complex system requires strong leadership skills that are possessed by few individuals. In order to redesign our social service system, a means must be found to bring together a broad range of individuals with a variety of expertise and skills to engage in a systematic and strategic planning process; such a development will not occur on its own.

Professional Ideologies

Social services in Alberta are delivered by a multitude of professional disciplines each of which is by definition committed to a unique set of special values and principles which they will defend against outsiders (because they believe that outsiders simply cannot understand the importance of these principles). These disciplines may hold contrary or even conflicting assumptions or ideologies about clients and about the nature of optimal service delivery. As well, professionals often see their own area of expertise as the key factor in achieving client success. Ways must be found to increase professional recognition and acceptance of other disciplines within the system.

Funding Realities

Funding for social services in Alberta is characterized by a patchwork of sources, competition for scarce dollars, and restrictions in the ways in which these dollars can be spent. Together, these considerations can hinder the development of a comprehensive and integrated social service delivery system. For example, treatment may not be delivered by the most cost-effective service provider, but by a service provider that meets the funding criteria. As well, restructuring will itself require considerable resources. This means that unless additional funding is available for the purpose, it will tend to displace some of the activities to which social service providers are committed.

Recommendation 1: Improve Systematic Information Collection

Imagine that the circle in Figure 6 represents everything that we would, in an ideal world, need to know about the social aspects of human need and the way that social service organizations respond to these needs. Only a small proportion of that data are actually available to social service decision-makers today in the form of departmental records and agency case files and the program evaluations that have accumulated on a variety of policies; we guess, based on our research to date, that this proportion might be about 20% of the information picture.

Figure 6

How Much Do We Know About Social Services?

what we now know

what we will never know about social need/services

what we can and should know

At the other extreme, there is much that we cannot know. We will never know, for example, precisely how many children are physically or sexually abused, or how many homeless individuals there are in our cities, how many women experience domestic violence, or how prevalent drug use is among teens. We do not know the best way to reduce (let alone to prevent) unwanted teenage pregnancies. And we will probably never know how many social service

clients are served in Calgary or Edmonton in a one-year period, or how many of these individuals receive services from more than one social organization in a year, or even how much revenue is generated by all of Alberta's social service organizations in one year. Either because of the complexity of social programs, or the expense of collecting solid data, or the constraints of individual privacy rights, or the difficulty in comparing the data collected by different social service providers, much of the data that would make planning and evaluation of social services easier and more efficient will never be available. We "guesstimate" that this could be as high as 50% of the total information needed.

In between these two extremes, however, lies a range of information that we could collect – information that would facilitate understanding and decision-making and yet is not routinely collected or disseminated in a useful fashion. We estimate that this constitutes about 30% of the whole.

For example, this Project identified a number of questions (Box 3) and attempted to collect the neces-

Box 3
What kinds of information do we need?

1. How many people, not cases, actually benefit from or rely on the social service system?

2. Where are the "cracks" in the system, and who is falling through them?

3. How are changes to social services affecting people in need of help?

4. How large is the informal support system that underlies our formal safety net? Who is involved in informal support activities, and how do they contribute to social well-being?

5. How large is the non-profit sector in social services? What are the primary roles played by the sector?

6. If services are to be community-based, what is the capacity of communities to take over specific components of social services?

7. How are stakeholder roles, responsibilities and relationships changing as the social services system evolves?

sary data for at least a first approximation answer. Official government sources provided considerable material, but not in a way that could be systematically compiled and compared. Reporting criteria and formats change – often from year to year. Expenditures are regularly shifted from one budget area or one budget line to another without sufficient explanation. Social program boundaries and responsibilities change regularly making consistency a problem. Finally, data for many key issues (such as the number of different families who benefit from social assistance benefits, or the number of people living in subsidized housing) are either not collected or not publicly reported.

Data on the non-government sector are even more problematic. Information on the impacts of social services reform on clients, for instance, is often anecdotal in nature. The data that do exist are rarely aggregated or reported for more than a single organization. When such data are collected, they also suffer from definitional and measurement problems. A food bank may tell you how many hampers of groceries they distributed, but not report how many different individuals they distributed them to, let alone whether these individuals were unemployed or receiving social assistance. (The temptation to assume the obvious answers to these questions is only one of the ways that incomplete information can distort the basis for decision-making.) A women's shelter can tell you how many requests for assistance they received, but not how many of those represent repeat calls from a single person, let alone how many of those individuals also called other centres or other services. Finally, most data from non-profit services do not employ a time series perspective; this makes the identification and interpretation of trends very difficult.

One of the most basic sets of information not readily available for planning and decision-making is financial information for the sector. Much of the financial data related to government and non-profit agencies are difficult or even impossible to locate; and, once they are located, differences in budgeting years and techniques form a confusing puzzle. Problems associated with reporting within the sector include:

■ Reporting of financial data is often based on constantly changing program definitions and parameters. This makes the process of establishing financial trends for specific components of the system very difficult.

■ Financial data for government-funded services often become clouded by frequent changes in programs, transfers between levels of government and departments, regular changes to reporting procedures, and a marked lack of details. Much of this financial data are unavailable without special procedures (eg., freedom of information requests) which impose time and cost restraints.

■ Financial data are often double-counted when resources pass through multiple levels of funders and service providers.

■ Social service-specific financial data are often grouped with data of other types in ways which makes it difficult to isolate – for example, in reports on the revenues and expenditures of welfare charities.

■ Information regarding how much is spent on administration versus service delivery is sometimes not calculated, or is calculated differently by various service providers.

The point here is not to criticize government or the non-profit social service sector, because both collect and report the information that is directly relevant to their own immediate activities. They count what they do, and because different organizations are doing different things, the data they collect tend not to be comparable. As a result, knowing more about each of the parts does not necessarily let us know more about the whole.

So how can we achieve a better knowledge-base for decision-making in social services? There are a number of options that must be explored. They include:

1. *Developing consistent reporting criteria and procedures among social service funders.*

Current reporting mechanisms use varying year ends, different definitions for things such as "client" and "unit of service," and often ask for entirely different details and data in their applications. Funders should work together to enhance consistency to the extent possible, and then to formulate a database that aids broader understanding of those they fund.

2. *Developing an ongoing data set describing the sector in terms of a standard aggregated format.*

This would involve combining the information from existing statistical sources such as Statistics Canada and Alberta Family & Social Services. This could be funded and directed by the province itself, or by the federal government, or as a collaborative effort between all governments since all are under similar pressures. The province of Saskatchewan's quarterly statistical report on its social services (see Box 4) is one useful example. It publically reports extensive information on a wide range of social assistance activity. The benefits to government policy planning and to research analysis are obvious.

3. *Encouraging funders (including government) to work together to generate reliable information on their activities.*

This would involve agreement on a basic and consistent set of categories for service delivery, revenue and expenditure, and administrative expenses; consistent reporting procedures for this information;

and a centralized database which aggregates this information in an accessible way.

4. *Routinely conducting a systematic survey of Albertans to collect information related to social policy and social needs.*

This survey could be conducted every 2-4 years, either by government or contracted polling firms. It would provide time-series information on demographic changes among Albertans, on changes to economic and social well-being, and on opinions about future directions for Alberta's social services. One example of such a project, the Oregon Population Survey, is a random telephone survey of approximately 6000 Oregonians conducted every two years. It examines variables such as migration, household expenditures, income/poverty, cross-cultural experiences, employment (skills, aspirations and job satisfaction), household composition, crime and drug usage. □

**Recommendation 2:
Develop and Implement Alberta
Social Benchmarks**

The process of prioritizing and refining benchmarks is best done via a collaborative process. The impetus to create an improved set of provincial benchmarks must of course come from the provincial government. Creation of particular benchmarks, however, is best

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Box 4
An Example of Saskatchewan's Publically Available Social Service Reporting:
Saskatchewan Assistance Plan - Cases by age and family structure, June 1995

Age of family head	One Person Cases		Family Cases	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Under 25	3,480	2,101	607	4,340
25-34	3,420	1,415	1,368	5,595
35-44	2,546	1,379	1,325	2,936
45-54	1,940	1,511	775	791
55-64	1,572	1,378	584	242
65 and over	69	92	41	6
Unknown	142	65	86	119
Provincial Total	**13,169**	**7,941**	**4,786**	**14,029**

Source: Saskatchewan Social Services, Quarterly Statistical Report, September 1995

conducted via a consultative process that includes key stakeholders relevant to each particular indicator selected for ongoing measurement. Selection of social benchmarks related to child poverty and child abuse, for example, should be done in conjunction with social agencies experienced in those areas. This is essential for two reasons: (1) we need the knowledge and expertise of stakeholders to develop meaningful benchmarks; (2) because they are increasing the means through which social policy is delivered, stakeholders need to have real input into designing the standards by which practice will be guided and assessed.

In conceptualizing a process to develop social benchmarks, the State of Oregon again provides a useful model. Oregon adopted an inclusionary model of benchmark development using input from government, social service providers, service recipients, and the general public. Through this process they were not only able to develop their 272 benchmarks, but also to prioritize them, to develop local and community indicators of success, to identify useful sources of data, and to develop an idea of what new data needed to be collected. The same relatively open input process is being used to refine the benchmarks and the data sources relevant to their achievement. The Alberta round-tables on finances, health care and education are a partial example of how this process might be operationalized.

The key to achieving a similar process – a collaborative exercise mobilizing support behind useful measures – lies in the realization of six principles:
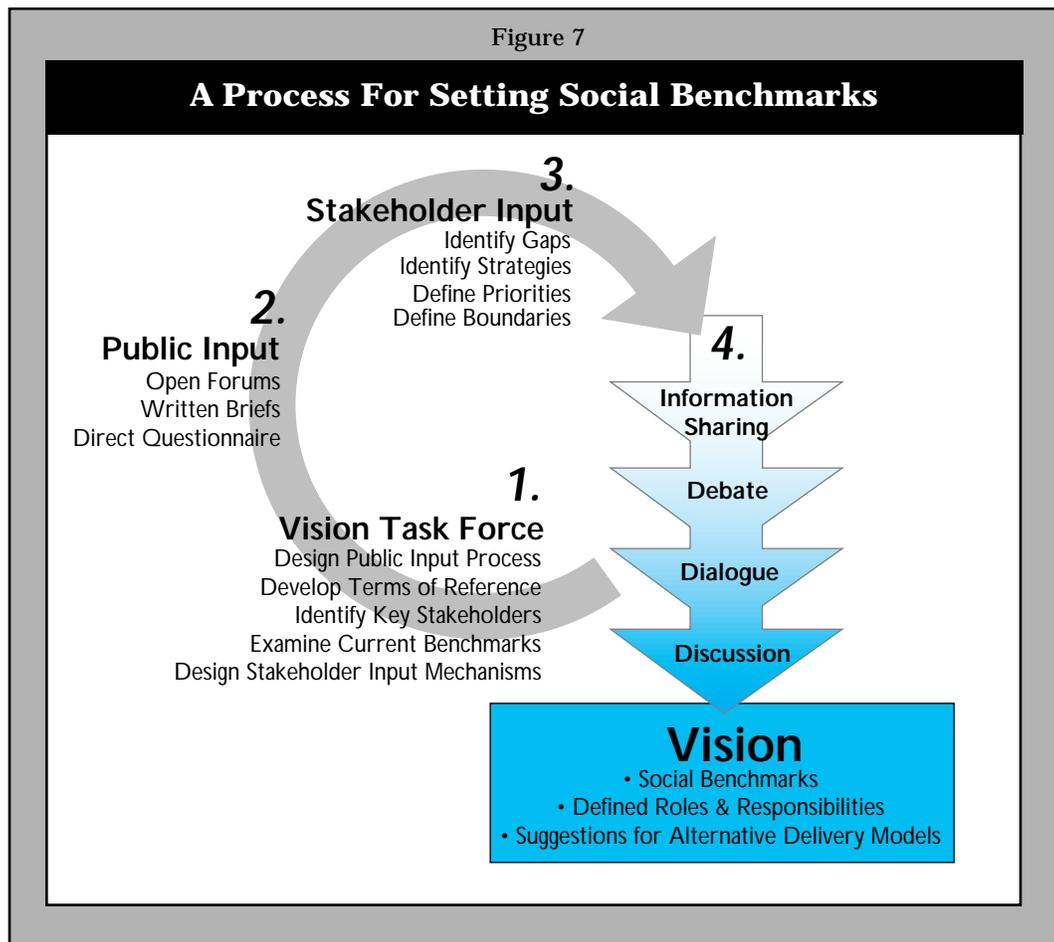
- **Collaboration**. A process of joint planning, pooling of resources and talents, and cooperation. While the process should be initiated and fostered by government, stakeholders must be involved at all points. It requires that they too build a commitment to creating useful benchmarks and innovative mechanisms to implement and monitor them.

- **Transparency**. A process that is governed by clear and explicit parameters and procedures. This includes sharing of information regarding who contributes to relevant decisions, who makes the final decision, and what criteria are used to make decisions.

- **Openness**. A frank sharing of information and communication that explores the costs and benefits of social service decisions. The objective is to develop a broad understanding of the complexities and scope of the problems to be addressed.

- **Representativeness**. All stakeholders have a right and responsibility to contribute to the process of setting social goals and benchmarks. This includes groups and individuals such as government, communities, social service providers, funders, business, clients, and the public.

- **Accountability**. Above all else the process of benchmarking must be built into an ongoing decision-making process. This implies that we must measure whether desired results have been achieved, and take responsibility for adjusting services when results fail to live up to expectations.

- **Self-review**. The process must include a means by which the same set of participants can reflect upon the benchmarks and the measures that go along with them and to learn from their experience within the new system. They must be invited to see themselves, not as one-time participants in a process which generates external goals and standards, but as ongoing partners in a dynamic rational scheme to direct social service policy toward concrete and realizable human objectives.

It is important to remember that there is nothing magic or talismanic about social benchmarks. They serve as useful targets or priorities of the overall social service system – a practical focus for specific activities and for long-term planning. To be directly useful for setting policy, guiding program development and evaluating effectiveness, however, benchmarks must be linked to concrete and short term service delivery in a rational and consistent fashion. A model that conceptualizes these linkages is shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7

A Process For Setting Social Benchmarks

3. Stakeholder Input
Identify Gaps
Identify Strategies
Define Priorities
Define Boundaries

2. Public Input
Open Forums
Written Briefs
Direct Questionnaire

1. Vision Task Force
Design Public Input Process
Develop Terms of Reference
Identify Key Stakeholders
Examine Current Benchmarks
Design Stakeholder Input Mechanisms

4.
Information Sharing
Debate
Dialogue
Discussion

Vision
• Social Benchmarks
• Defined Roles & Responsibilities
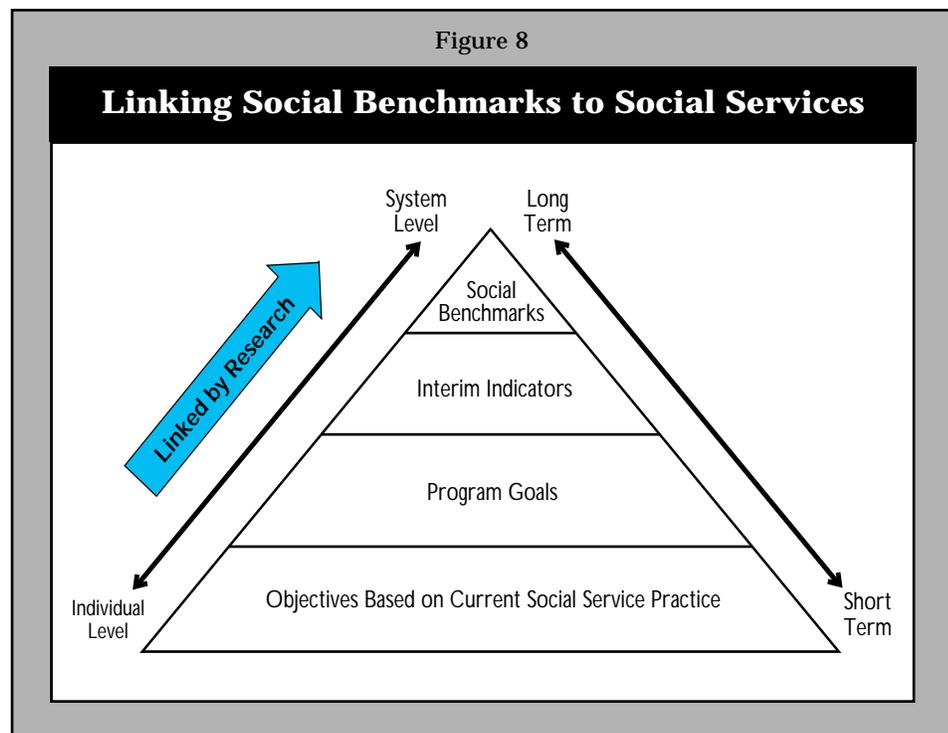• Suggestions for Alternative Delivery Models

cess and long term achievement of benchmarks. Take, for example, the problem of unplanned teen pregnancy concretized in a social benchmark such as "births to mothers under age 18 per 100,000 of population." Useful interim indicators of movement toward this long-term benchmark would include such things as the reduction in early sexual activity or the promotion of positive life planning; and these interim indicators in turn would permit the design of specific concrete program goals and directions, such as developing or expanding programs directed at sex education for children of a certain age.

This model shows the way that social benchmarks serve as goals for the system. It may take years to achieve any significant change on these benchmarks, and measuring short-term progress toward benchmarks is often highly problematic. Nor does the notion of benchmarks in itself offer concrete guidance in developing and evaluating services at the program level. While benchmarks state our social goals, they do not automatically provide the knowledge-base required for establishing short term success measures or shaping individual programs.

To link benchmarks, programs and practice level operations, a series of interim indicators are necessary. These indicators serve as more responsive measures that indicate our progress toward achieving benchmarks. In essence, they fill the gap between short term measures of practice and program suc-

This logical and practical progression from social benchmarks to interim indicators to program goals to practice-level operations is outlined in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Linking Social Benchmarks to Social Services

System Level — Long Term

Social Benchmarks

Interim Indicators

Program Goals

Objectives Based on Current Social Service Practice

Linked by Research

Individual Level — Short Term

It is of course essential that the same open and on-going consultation process direct the formulation and modification of these more concrete and practical dimensions of the benchmarking process. □

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Recommendation 3:
Encourage Alternative Social
Services Delivery Models

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In Alberta, as in other jurisdictions in North America and elsewhere, the nature of social services is changing very quickly. Governments everywhere are questioning the assumptions on which social policy has traditionally been based. Great emphasis is placed on decentralization and the development of community-based services, and governments are urging significant reductions in spending.

Many have portrayed these changes as totally negative for the system and disadvantaged Albertans. This is the obvious reaction for two reasons: First, given a long tradition of measuring government effort in any policy area in terms of the resources it deploys to deal with the issues (you demonstrate greater concern for a problem by spending more money on it), a reduction in resources in itself carries a strong negative overtone. And second, any dramatic change to a policy area must necessarily destabilize both the service providers and their established clients. This occurs by devaluing the way service providers have long done their job and by undercutting a client's entitlements at least relative to other claimants and possibly in absolute terms.

As with most change, however, there are in reality both positive and negative implications. Governments in Alberta and elsewhere have frequently been criticized for bureaucratic rigidities and inefficiencies that hindered the development of an effective social service system. The area of child welfare services is one such example. It has long been said that organizational flaws inherent in government-based services inevitably lead to a classic bureaucratic, control-oriented, inflexible, and highly centralized model of services – one that is slow to react to changing circumstances and often apparently indifferent to the real-life difficulties of its clients. The shift away from strongly-centralized services, therefore, holds some potential for improving the system, if it is used as an opportunity to make sure that roles and responsibilities are adequately and appropriately redefined and redeployed. At the same time, the shift opens doors to development of innovative and creative service delivery structures – not just a cost-shaving and scaling down of the old way of doing things, but a genuine (if partly cost-driven) interest in finding new ways of doing the same things, or finding new ways of doing new things.

Five Principles to Guide Innovation

During the course of the Social Services Project, many examples and ideas for alternative service delivery mechanisms were identified from interviews, focus groups and case studies. The ideas briefly described in Box 5 (on page 19) are presented as examples of things that might prove useful to the development of alternative delivery models in social services. They are valuable, not just as specific examples to be copied in their details, but as demonstrating one or more of the five principles:

1. Link social service policies to economic, health care and labour policies. For example: as social assistance is moved toward an active employment focus, changes in tax reductions for lower-income individuals would benefit former recipients striving to become self sufficient. Similarly, the working relationship between the Departments of AFSS and Advanced Education and Career Development should be commended and expanded.

2. Build a "social health promotion" or preventive perspective. A concrete way to accomplish this, for example, is to emphasize with even more vigour programs that focus on early childhood intervention, teen substance abuse, employment related education, and outreach programs for domestic violence.

3. Community-based services. These services can be more responsive, more effective, and more

Box 5

Lessons from the field - what we learned from selected case studies.

Case Study*	Description	Lessons for the Sector...
Alexandra Community Health Centre	A partnership of over 20 social service providers who deliver community health services, community development, research and education.	The process of community development is slow, and must be given time to mature. We must trust in the process, and be willing to relinquish control over structure and delivery of services. If we do so, participants' skills and resources will emerge and contribute strongly to the process.
Calgary Opening Doors	An integration of formerly autonomous services for children & families requiring multiple agency involvement.	A focus on community capacities and strengths may offer much more than a focus on needs alone. Services can benefit greatly from local control centered in the community, recognition of different forms of leadership, and from shifting decision-making power to front-line staff of agencies. Sufficient time and resources must be allocated to sustain an effort to integrate services.
Employment Leadership Council for Youth	A collaboration of non profit and for-profit agencies to promote coordinated employment and/or training services for youth.	Trust building is a critical component of any change process. This requires open communication and attention to both the vision to be achieved and the details of implementing this vision. Agreement on mandates, roles and relationships is particularly important to any successful effort at coordinating services.
Habitat for Humanity	A partnership of families, volunteers, and donor organizations to provide basic housing for low-income families.	A focus on basic needs of clients is important, as is the involvement of clients in services that affect them. The process of involving clients helps create connections with services aiding them and with the community in general.
Mennonite Central Committee Start-Up Program	A community economic development initiative to assist low-income people to start their own business.	Community economic development is not well understood in the social service sector. It offers a viable option for conceptualizing and delivering services. In the CED framework, community involvement in determining issues and designing solutions is critical. The community must take ownership of social services to be effective, but support of all major stakeholders (such as government, service organizations and residents) is also important.
Project Safe Haven	A collaborative effort in which existing organizations contribute resources to help girls 16 years and under who are involved or at risk of involvement in prostitution.	Agencies and professionals must be willing to relinquish some control over services. This is especially critical in implementing collaborative efforts or integrated services. The principle also applies, however, to being willing to relinquish control over service delivery to communities and individuals when appropriate. Again, equality of decision-making authority, a focus on strengths, and trust in change processes are critical to success.

* A full report on these case studies is available from the Canada West Foundation.

efficient in many areas than centralized government services. Local, northern-based child welfare or women's shelter programs, for instance, would be more aware and more responsive to conditions and circumstances unique to an isolated rural community. Such a shift to community-based services, however, must be accompanied by adequate definition of roles, sufficient resources to implement quality services, and clearly enforced standards.

4. Develop partnerships with business. Some stakeholders from the business sector have long been active in developing caring solutions in their communities and in supporting social service providers. With changing social responsibilities and roles, however, it is necessary to make business a routine rather than a sporadic partner in developing solutions to social problems. Businesses not previously involved should be encouraged to respond to the demands of changing social responsibilities. New corporate sponsors might, for example, directly fund or sponsor a non-profit social service agency that deals with an issue of concern to the company. Alternatively, the corporation might offer manager's time and skills to the non-profit agency or develop incentives for employees to volunteer in social service agencies.

5. Encourage partnerships and collaboration. This offers advantages in dealing with issues larger than any single organization can deal with alone. Results include: improved economies related to elimination of duplication in services, development of better information sharing, and increased potential for effective structuring of services. Both the Alexandra Community Health Centre and the Employment Leadership Council for Youth are examples of this approach (see Box 5).

Many potential solutions to problems already exist within the Calgary community. Some have already begun to take shape as pilot projects or new collaborative efforts. What this implies is a three part message: First, useful ideas to improve the system are already operating within some sectors or agencies. Second, the budget reductions make it all the more

imperative to use these new ideas to off set what would otherwise be flat across the board reductions. And third, because the reduction/restructuring of social service programs is both a threat and an opportunity, it is important to make it the latter – not just a bureaucratic retreat to a smaller bridgehead, but a chance to build a flexible decentralized community-based social service system that will better suit Canadian society in the 1990s and beyond. Inevitably, some of the innovations will fail; but this is still better than foregoing the opportunity to innovate. ☐

> ## Recommendation 4:
> ## Create a Social Services
> ## Investment Fund

This report has outlined a number of issues facing social services and made recommendations about how to begin resolving some of those issues. Focus group participants have suggested, however, that some social service organizations are struggling to provide services on shrinking budgets. Agencies have indicated that they are already doing as much as they can with their current resources. In addition, they feel threatened by the very process of change. As a result, they are increasingly unable to participate in a major change process.

At the same time, the recommendations offered in this report will not simply develop on their own as a natural process. Nor should they occur without significant input from relevant stakeholders from the social service sector. The processes of setting social service goals, benchmarking, improving information collection, evaluation of services, and exploration of alternative models of service delivery are all expensive and draining in terms of finances, time, energy, and personal commitment.

To break this impasse, a means must be found of nurturing, encouraging, and implementing positive change. One mechanism that could help answer this challenge is the allocation of additional resources for

Box 6

Examples of Existing Investment/Innovation Funds

Fund	General Description	Goals, Targets and Eligibility Criteria
Access Fund	A $47 million, three year fund to increase the enrollment of adult Albertans in educational programs, and to improve performance of the adult learning system through innovative initiatives. The central consideration in awarding funds was creation of new learning opportunities that improved students' chances for employment.	The Access Fund was designed to increase enrollment of adult Albertans in basic education and skills training, career and technical programs and degree programs. Emphasis was placed on enhancing: Access to educational programs; Employability of learners; Cost-effectiveness of educational efforts; and Quality educational initiatives, with the use of non-traditional and/or creative adaptations of existing methods for delivering skills and knowledge.
City of Calgary Innovative/ Preventive Fund	A $200,000 fund (1% of the FCSS budget) meant to facilitate positive change to the social service delivery system and to pilot innovative/preventive social services in the community. Community funding is intended to lead to self sufficiency and independence from City funding. Funding is restricted to a maximum of 24 months.	Eligible programs must demonstrate available community funding or support in-kind to a minimum of 20% of the total cost of the program/project. Projects must demonstrate: An experimental or exploratory nature and/or utilize an alternative approach to social problems. New agencies are eligible only if formal operational and program effectiveness can be established. Collaboration between relevant organizations to build capacity and sustainability is a key for funding.
Muttart Foundation Funding	Grants are made available to assist in restructuring of the human services component of the charitable sector. In 1993, the Foundation allocated $1.3 million through 47 grants.	Grants are available to assist social service agencies in four areas: Forming alliances and mergers with other organizations; Sharing of resources or integration of services; Evaluation of social service programs; Bursaries for short term training of personnel.
The Urban Institute (Indiana, USA)	The Urban Institute offers 15 grants of up to $30,000 US to support innovative service programs, disseminate information on exemplary programs and expand knowledge through policy analysis and research.	Five of the grants are targeted toward supporting public, private and non-profit agencies and institutions that assist low-income individuals and families to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Five more of the grants are designed to recognize and disseminate information regarding exemplary state and local social service programs and models that are already under way. A final five grants support research and analysis in areas of poverty, welfare, self-sufficiency and labor market activity.
John Heinz Neighborhood Development Program (Appalachia, USA)	Federally funded incentives to encourage local neighborhood development initiatives. The fund is designed to nurture a community's ability to find solutions to local problems, through shared leadership, local investment, and broad-based involvement in decision-making, planning and implementation.	Grants up to a maximum of $75,000 US for one or more of the following activities: Creating permanent jobs in the neighborhood; Establishing or expanding businesses within the neighborhood; Developing new housing, or rehabilitating existing housing; Delivering essential services with lasting benefit to neighborhoods; Planning, promoting or financing neighborhood improvement. Initiatives must incorporate cooperative efforts and monetary contributions from local sources.

the development and implementation of innovative practices. Toward this end, the last recommendation of the Social Services Project is for the Government of Alberta to create a Social Services Investment Fund (SSIF).

The SSIF would not be unique or unprecedented. There are already examples of such funds (described in Box 6 on page 21) from whose common themes and principles the province can learn. Such funds are typically based upon improving the performance of a system through innovation or adaptations to existing ways of doing things. They focus on improving access, performance and accountability of the system in question, and have a strong emphasis on achieving outcomes. Typically the funds also feature many of the characteristics of a reformed system mentioned in this report: extensive community involvement and commitment, development of local initiatives and solutions, and integration or collaboration among services.

The SSIF would be a fixed- but limited-term pilot fund established by the province to facilitate the development and implementation of practical change in social services for the coming century. It would operate for three years, and would allow both ongoing funding of large-scale projects and more limited funding for a single fiscal year.

The fund's basic purpose would be to provide resources for goal setting, establishment of social benchmarks or indicators, development of systematic information collection, evaluation activities, and piloting of innovative service delivery models.

It would be best managed by a broadly-based, representative board, consisting of government representatives, service providers, community representatives, and client group representatives. The Board would receive and assess applications, and then would review grants annually.

In particular the SSIF would be targeted toward three primary activities:

■ Initiatives to assess social need and set social goals in Alberta through benchmarking;

■ Evaluation of service delivery in Alberta; and

■ Development and implementation of innovative service delivery models in Alberta.

Eligible recipients would be existing social service organizations who are legally registered as charitable or non-profit organizations. Grants would be restricted to projects/activities that are not funded from current funding sources (see Figure 9, following page for more detail on the SSIF).
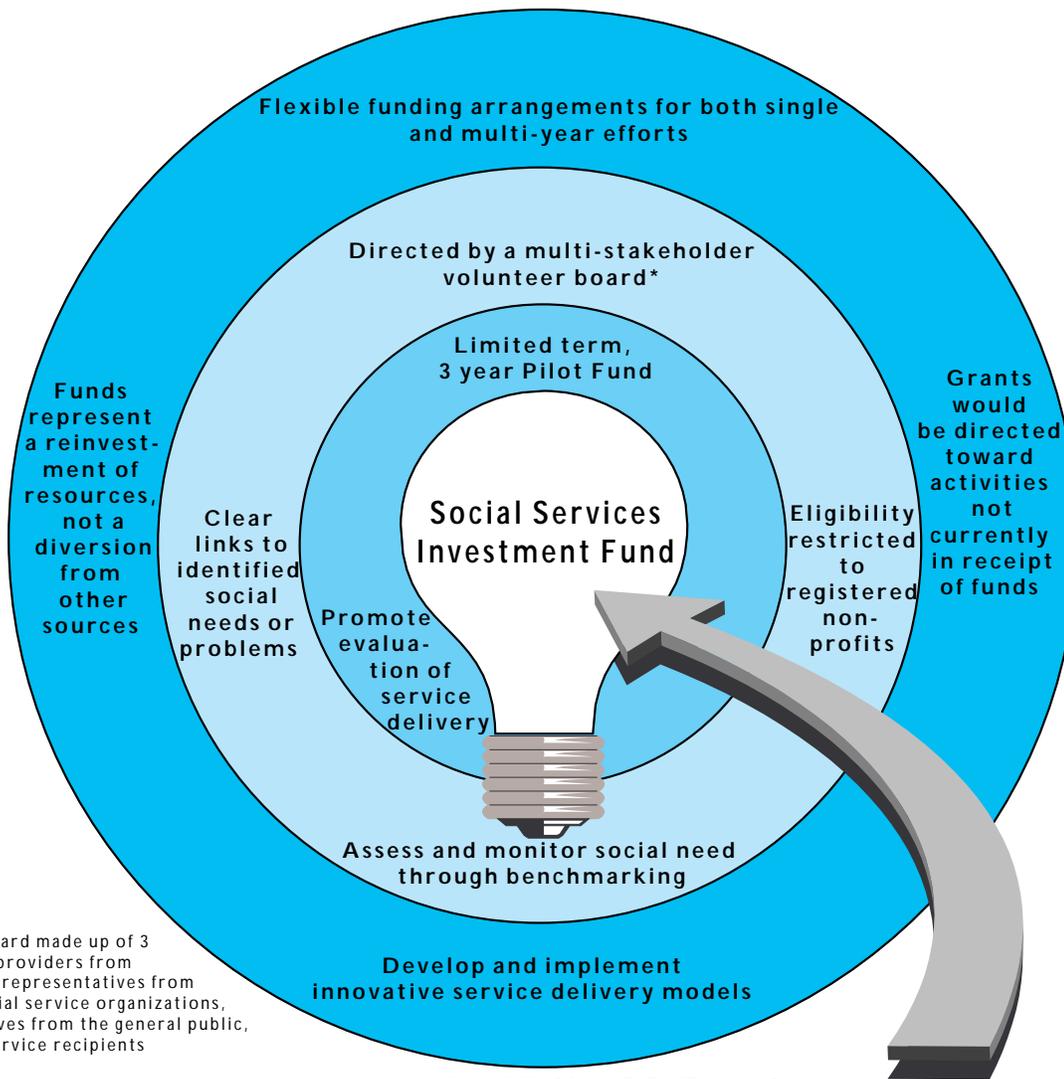
Funds would potentially cover limited capital purchases, personnel costs, and other ongoing operational costs. Priority would be given to projects/activities that include:

■ Clear linkages to identified social needs or problems;

■ Use or creation of ongoing benchmarks related to service delivery areas;

■ Plans for securing ongoing community participation and funding;

■ A goal of self-sufficiency and independence from the SSIF;

■ An innovative or unique approach to service delivery;

■ Collaboration and partnerships between existing agencies and communities; or

■ Evaluation of outcomes achieved by the project/activity.

Two critical SSIF questions to address are: (1) how much the fund will cost, and (2) where the money will come from. Our recommendation is that the equivalent of approximately 1.5% of the annual Alberta Family and Social Services Budget be allocated for the SSIF. At the 1996/97 funding level of $1,393.9 million (1996 Budget data), this would translate into approximately $21 million per year. Over a three year period, the total cost would be approximately $63 million. We also recommend that the funds should not be drawn from the existing Alberta Family and Social Services budget, but should instead represent a reinvestment of funds in addition to current social service spending. There is

Figure 9

Characteristics of the Social Services Investment Fund (SSIF)

Flexible funding arrangements for both single and multi-year efforts

Directed by a multi-stakeholder volunteer board*

Limited term, 3 year Pilot Fund

Funds represent a reinvestment of resources, not a diversion from other sources

Clear links to identified social needs or problems

Social Services Investment Fund

Promote evaluation of service delivery

Eligibility restricted to registered non-profits

Grants would be directed toward activities not currently in receipt of funds

Assess and monitor social need through benchmarking

* Volunteer board made up of 3 social service providers from government, 2 representatives from non-profit social service organizations, 2 representatives from the general public, and 2 social service recipients

Develop and implement innovative service delivery models

How much will the SSIF cost?

It is recommended that the equivalent of 1.5% of the annual AFSS budget be allocated for the SSIF. At current funding levels, this would equate to approximately $21 million per year, for a total of $63 million over three years. Funds should be allocated in addition to the current AFSS budget, not diverted from it.

a double rationale for this suggestion. The first comes from the realization that provincial social service spending has already absorbed a significant portion of the overall spending reductions. Diverting more funds away from this stream would inhibit the realization of the recommended changes. The second is the effect on the morale of social service providers, who could be expected to respond positively to the chance to compete for "new" money that is directed toward finding creative solutions for the sector. If the point is to recruit some enthusiasm for new ideas through innovation, it is counterproductive to begin by taking funding away.

The social policy reforms implemented over the last three years have been instrumental in promoting the "Alberta Advantage" and the elimination of Alberta's deficit. It makes sense then to use some portion of the funds saved to establish better information systems, better benchmarking processes, better procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of services, and innovative new service delivery models. □

Conclusion

The issues and challenges facing the social service sector are complex, subject to vastly different interpretations based on ideology, and clouded by a tremendous gap in the knowledge-base that informs planning and decision-making.

The challenges are confounded by the fact that social services are characterized by a myriad of government, non-profit, for-profit, and informal groups and mechanisms, driven by diverse and even conflicting interests and priorities. Together these stakeholders form a complicated and confusing puzzle. We have little knowledge or data regarding the social service sector; this is particularly true for the non-profit component of the sector. In short, the lack of data mean that drawing an accurate picture of social services is frustrating and difficult.

This report recognizes the difficulties associated with making sense of social services. As a result, it is difficult to conclude in what direction they must move. It is certain that considerable change is needed within the sector, but the deficiencies in the knowledge-base mean that no one is certain what exact changes are needed. What this report offers is therefore not a set of definitive answers about how to repair a system in upheaval but rather recommendations that lead to the process whereby these answers will be explored.

The four major recommendations of the Social Services Project can therefore be conceptualized as providing the two pillars on which a reconstructed social service system must be built.

The first pillar is information. We need to **develop better mechanisms for establishing a firm knowledge-base** for social service decision-making. These take the form of improved collection of systematic data, and fostering better follow-up and outcome evaluation of services. This can occur with a commitment to: (1) develop consistent reporting criteria and procedures among social service funders; (2) regularly publish and dissem-

inate sector related data to act as a report card on social services; and (3) routinely conducting a systematic population survey of Albertans to collect information related to social policy.

In addition, we need to develop a clearer vision of where we are headed – of what success looks like – through a process of setting social goals via the **creation of social benchmarks.** The Alberta government's "Measuring Up" initiative has created an initial framework to assess the performance of government. These initial efforts, however, need to be refined and developed into clear statements of Alberta's social goals.

The second pillar is innovation. It is important to identify the sources of innovation within the system, and to **build on the restructuring initiatives that are already taking place.** Particularly initiatives that focus on: (1) cooperation between numerous government departments; (2) preventive or early intervention programs; (3) local control of decision-making for service delivery; (4) collaborations with businesses; and (5) partnerships and collaboration among social service stakeholders.

It is important to put in place funding (in the form of the **Social Services Investment Fund**) that will allow promising new initiatives to go forward in a way that does not further undercut the work that is already being done. This fund will help us to identify the problems and strengths of the social service system, develop benchmarks, establish accountability mechanisms, and nurture innovation. The key characteristics of the fund would include: (1) limited terms; (2) managed by a broadly-based, representative board; (3) review grants annually; (4) be allocated the equivalent of 1.5% of the annual AFSS budget; and (5) allocate new money to the non-profit sector.

With these measures in place, Alberta can forge a more effective and efficient social service system. We can remain leaders in setting social policies, and contribute substantially to the lives of disadvantaged Albertans. ∎