

**Summary of the
Survey of Recipients of the
Alberta Child Health Benefit**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Alberta Child Health Benefit (ACHB) is administered by Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE) and provides premium-free dental, optical, emergency ambulance, diabetic and prescription drug coverage for children in low-income families in the province. The program pays 100% of the costs of eligible services and products.
2. A comprehensive evaluation of the program conducted in January, 2001 found that clients were quite satisfied with the program and that it was making it possible for some breadwinners to become more attached to the work force.
3. In order to monitor the extent to which the program is continuing to meet the needs of its clients, the department commissioned a follow-up survey of ACHB clients that was conducted over a three-week period ending in early March, 2003.
4. Single parent families dominate the Alberta Child Health Benefit client group. Many of these families, therefore, already confront a barrier of sorts in developing a full attachment to the work force by virtue of being lone parents. The ACHB is intended to remove one further barrier -- the health care costs associated with meeting the health needs of some children -- which can sometimes encourage families to remain on or seek social assistance in order to access the health benefits that are available to social assistance clients.
5. Clients learn about the program from a variety of sources but the most important ones are word-of-mouth and pamphlets and posters. Family and friends and to a lesser extent government workers and medical practitioners are the source of the word-of-mouth exposure to the program. Posters and pamphlets available in government and medical offices and on transit vehicles provide another key source of program awareness.
6. Respondents attached the same levels of importance to key program features as were found in the 2001 survey. Dental exams and cleanings and prescribed drugs are the two services that are valued most by clients.
7. While there were numerous suggestions as to how to enhance the program, the vast majority (97%) of program clients feel that the program meets their most critical needs. This is an increase from 93% in 2001.
8. A total of 86% of clients indicate that they had experienced no other barriers to accessing health services for their children.
9. Satisfaction levels with various aspects of the program -- the application form, enrolment process, assistance provided, etc. -- are unchanged from 2001 and are at a very high level (94% "somewhat satisfied" or "very satisfied"). At the same time, satisfaction with having to make a cash outlay to a medical service provider and then seek reimbursement through the program is low (49% dissatisfied) but consistent with 2001 findings. There

are indications that satisfaction with the information that is available about the program has waned from 84% satisfied in 2001 to 75% satisfied in 2003.

10. Regardless of these expressions of modest concern with the ACHB, when viewed in aggregate, the program is well accepted by its clients. Virtually all clients (99.5%) are either "somewhat satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the program. They particularly value the prescription drug and the dental services available through the program.
11. Survey results demonstrate that the program is making a difference to many Alberta families. A total of 26% of respondents indicated that the assurances that the program provides with regard to health care for children has allowed adults in the family to either seek employment, stay at their current job or move to a full-time job. All of these activities reduce the social assistance caseload and result in a greater attachment to the work force for the adults in the household and arguably for the children in the household as well.
12. High satisfaction ratings combined with the success that the program is demonstrating in creating greater attachment to the work force suggest that the program initiative is a valuable part of the services available to Albertans with low incomes.