



Communities Working Together: Saskatchewan's Action Plan for Citizens with Cognitive Disabilities

Communities Working Together: Saskatchewan's Action Plan for Citizens with Cognitive Disabilities provides a framework for supporting individuals with cognitive disabilities who have significant behavioural and developmental challenges. The strategy is a result of a comprehensive review conducted in 2003 by an interdepartmental working group. The review considered information gathered from a number of sources, including the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Community Discussions that took place in 2003.

The Government of Saskatchewan has committed \$1.65 million in 2005-06 for a range of new initiatives that will better meet the needs of children and youth with cognitive disabilities, including Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), so that they remain with their family, succeed at school, find work, and stay employed. The annualized budget of \$4.15M in 2006-07 will allow further enhancements to the initiatives resulting in more timely provincial access to assessments, supports, and prevention programs.

This initiative builds on a seven-year \$68 million commitment for family support and **Early Childhood Development** investments including *KidsFirst*. The government also provides \$2 million annually for long-term employment supports for persons with disabilities as part of the **Building Independence** initiative. More than \$12 million of additional funding is available to school boards for **School^{PLUS}**.

For 2005-06, this strategy includes:

- ◆ Improvements to the knowledge and skills of individuals, families, care providers and organizations providing services with the hiring of four Cognitive Disability Consultants in Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert and La Ronge;
- ◆ Establishment of a flexible funding pool to supplement or extend existing programs that support individuals and their families throughout the province. Services such as respite care, parent aides and independent living support will become available to a wider population;
- ◆ Better access to assessment and diagnostic services;
- ◆ Strengthened Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder prevention and intervention initiatives; and
- ◆ Planning for enhanced services in 2006-07.

The new funding targets children and youth with cognitive disabilities primarily between the ages of 6 and 24 years whose needs are not being met through existing services and supports in their community.

Why is a strategy needed?

This strategy will ensure that children and youth with cognitive disabilities will have well-coordinated supports for their growth and development. A cognitive disability is typically a long-term condition that involves significant limitations in the ability to learn and to process information from the environment. For example, a person may have difficulty with remembering, decision making, problem solving and abstract reasoning.

The school years are critical for all children; however, many children and youth with cognitive disabilities, such as FASD, Autism or Acquired Brain Injury, do not always experience success while growing up. Because their needs are complex, they require ongoing and continuous supports throughout their lives. People with these types of disabilities display cognitive impairments that affect their daily life in a number of ways. They may have:

- ◆ difficulty forming relationships;
- ◆ an inability to understand the limits of personal space of others;
- ◆ poor judgement when making decisions;
- ◆ impulsive behaviour;
- ◆ an incomplete appreciation of right or wrong;
- ◆ a reduced ability to transfer learned skills from one situation to another.

These impairments often stretch the capacities of families, teachers and caregivers to cope. For example, some children's behavioural response to subtle changes in minor daily routines, like meal times, television schedules, unexpected loud noises or the commotion of a crowded classroom, can be unsettling to others around them, causing harm to themselves or others.

Some children become estranged from their parents at a young age and become wards of the Minister. Others leave home at a young age to live on the street or in highly unstable

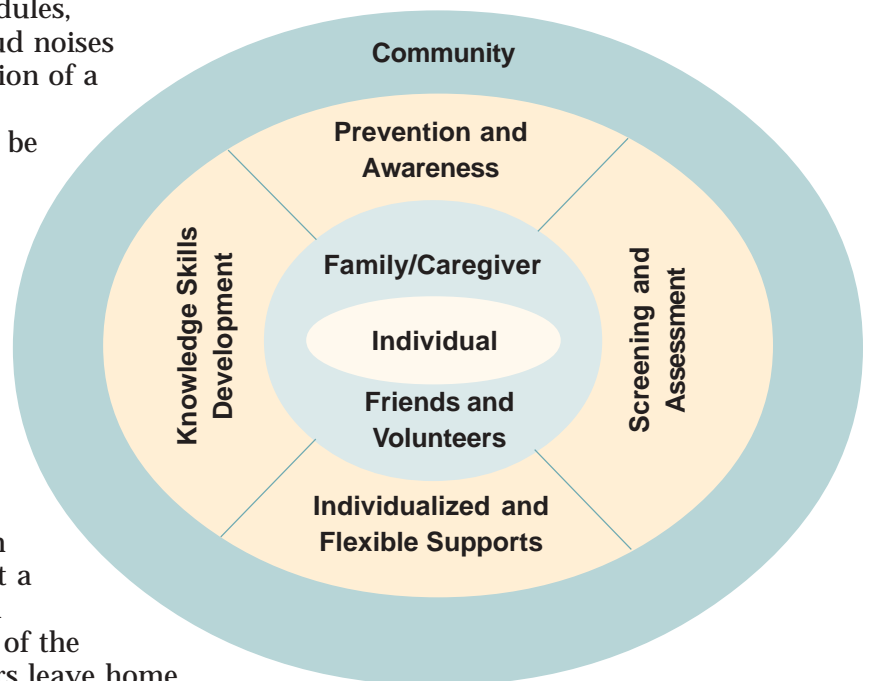
living situations. Many leave school long before completing Grade 12. As a result, finding and keeping a job can be difficult. This can lead the individual into poverty or conflict with the law in an attempt to make ends meet.

A better understanding of these issues can improve community support for children and youth with cognitive disabilities.

What do we expect to accomplish through the strategy?

Our goals are for children with cognitive disabilities to:

- ◆ remain at home and in their home community;
- ◆ stay in school;
- ◆ experience success in school;
- ◆ find and keep a job;
- ◆ live independently in the community as adults;
- ◆ be understood by those around them.



Family Support Model

Services for children and families will be improved in a number of ways:

- ◆ Additional investments will build on existing FASD prevention and early intervention initiatives, such as education programs for young people and those providing direct services to vulnerable families.
- ◆ Resources will be increased for needs-based assessment and diagnostic services.
- ◆ Access to services will be based on individual need rather than just a diagnosis.
- ◆ Cognitive Disability Consultants will provide advice to caseworkers, service providers and families, and will help develop behavioural support strategies and techniques that can be used in the home, school and community.
- ◆ Individuals and families with needs that cannot be met by existing services will be able to access a flexible funding pool to further assist them.

How will the strategy make a difference?

This approach puts individuals and families at the centre of the process. Parents of children with cognitive disabilities or others, like teachers or caregivers, who are experiencing difficulties will be able to contact someone locally, and can expect to get help understanding their child's needs and addressing them. If funds or services are required, parents can also expect to be treated fairly and equitably in getting access to these resources.

Based on their child's needs, families will be able to customize their support plan. They may:

- ◆ hire staff to assist with supervision in the home;

- ◆ use respite care to relieve parents or caregivers from the stress of caring for their child with a disability; access staff to work with youth as they transition from home to independent living;
- ◆ identify any other supports deemed necessary.

We know from experience that people with very complex needs can successfully live in the community. This new approach will increase knowledge about the care, development and treatment of people with cognitive disabilities. Parents, front line caseworkers, caregivers, foster parents and teachers will learn about successful approaches to managing challenging behaviours and how to maintain a supportive environment.

What have we been doing already?

The Government of Saskatchewan invests in a number of other provincial initiatives targeted to our most vulnerable citizens. The strategy is directly linked to each of them. Examples of some of the key initiatives are included below.

KidsFirst provides screening for risk, intensive home-visiting, early learning, child care, parenting supports, mental health and addictions services in nine targeted communities for vulnerable families with children up to age five. The program also includes a prevention and public awareness component on a broad number of health issues, including addictions and FASD.

Building Independence is a group of eight programs offered by Saskatchewan Community Resources and Employment designed to help people make the move from social assistance to jobs. Through employment supports, people with disabilities, including those with

cognitive disabilities, can receive funding for a range of services such as workplace accommodations and job coaches.

School^{PLUS} aims to provide every child with the opportunity and supports they need for healthy development, success in school and in their adult life. New local structures developed as part of **School^{PLUS}** provide improved accountability of integrated services and make assistance and resources more available to families. In this way, the strategy is one example of **School^{PLUS}** in action.

Saskatchewan Learning provides funding recognition for programs and support services for students with exceptional learning and behavioural needs to ensure equal access to the curriculum.

School divisions, regional health authorities and community service providers currently provide **assessment and diagnostic services** for a wide range of disabilities, including FASD. This strategy will expand the capacity for needs-based assessment.

A number of initiatives are targeted to the **prevention of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder** across the province. Regional FAS Committees are located in a number of communities, including North Battleford, Prince Albert, Saskatoon, Regina, La Ronge, Beauval, Meadow Lake, and Yorkton. These committees work to build public awareness through community activities. The province also funds a provincial FASD Prevention Program offered by the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute.

The Saskatchewan Fetal Alcohol Support Network, a provincial non-profit organization, supports parents and caregivers of persons with FASD

and provides education and training programs to practitioners and the general public.

This new strategy will build on the success of these existing programs and take an important next step in government's support for people with cognitive disabilities.

How the money will be spent

	2005/06
Direct Supports	\$ 869,000
Diagnosis and Assessment	298,000
Prevention and Early Intervention	483,000
	\$1,650,000

Where are we going?

The launch of this strategy is a first step, laying the foundation for improving the lives of individuals and families affected by cognitive disabilities through better understanding, needs assessment and enhanced supports.

This first phase of the strategy extends support to families and children in the four communities with the highest numbers of children and youth with cognitive disabilities.

This sets the groundwork for continued improvements in coordination and integration of the planning and support services available in Saskatchewan.

Planning with stakeholders for future enhancements will begin in 2005-06 so that provincial access to cognitive disabilities services will become a reality in 2006-07.

For more information, go to: www.gov.sk.ca.