



UNDERSTANDING PARENT AND GUARDIAN Experiences with Mental Health Services FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

HIGHLIGHTS

JUNE 2021



During the fall of 2019, the Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) conducted **in-depth interviews** to capture the experiences of parents and guardians while navigating their child's/youth's addiction or mental health (AMH) journey in Alberta.

The GOAL - The work was completed in partnership with Alberta Health, and is intended to inform improvements in the **flow of care** and **connections to supports in the community** during the AMH journey for children and youth.

WHO was interviewed - 30 parents and guardians with a child or youth between the ages of eight and 22, who required AMH services in the last three years.

WHERE - Parents and guardians were selected from: **Grande Prairie, St. Albert, Red Deer, Airdrie, and Lethbridge.**

WHAT we learned - Parents and guardians frequently used the word **journey** to describe their experience, because often obtaining AMH services for their child or youth went on for as long as 20 years, or is still ongoing. The common goal of this journey was to obtain appropriate AMH services, which supported their child's well-being and created positive outcomes for their family.

OVERARCHING CONCEPTS found in each journey



Access to addiction and mental health services:

Factors that contributed to more or less effective access to AMH services included:

- availability of appropriate and/or qualified service providers
- length of referral period
- insurance coverage
- attitudes of service providers and school staff



Teamwork and communication:

Factors that contributed to a positive flow of care for the child or youth included:

- school involvement and support
- communication within the family
- establishing a trusted relationship with a service provider
- information sharing between service providers



Coordination of care and follow-up:

Factors that contributed to the parents' or guardians' ability to navigate AMH services and supports included:

- providers ensuring referrals and transitions go smoothly, and circling back with families
- parents and guardians acting as an advocate for their child's or youth's care
- planning for transition to adult mental health system

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"I was successfully able to help my [my child] out of that really, really, really dark and lonely path that [the child] was on. I don't think the system works very well and so, yes, I am speaking for the other parents and families that are affected by this and may not have resources, and may not know what to do."

[Co-parenting parent/guardian]

HOW the journey can be IMPROVED

Parents and guardians shared what would have made their journey easier. Their suggested improvements include:



Support to help parents and guardians navigate and access services - for example, providing one consistent resource or person to help parents and guardians navigate the system, and ensuring providers are aware of available resources.



Increased availability of age-appropriate resources and providers - such as child psychiatrists and hospital beds specifically for youth AMH patients.



Greater public education - including education that reduces the stigma around mental health and promotes valuable resources such as support groups and parent groups.

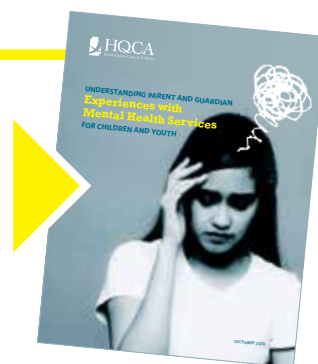


Encouraging service providers to:

- not show judgement towards parents and guardians
- improve communication with the family, and increase follow-ups on referrals and appointments
- consider the family unit, including the wellbeing of parents or guardians and siblings

Want more DETAILS?

Download the *Understanding Parent and Guardian Experiences with Mental Health Services for Children and Youth* report by visiting <http://www.hqca.ca/mentalhealth>.



ABOUT the HQCA

The HQCA is a provincial agency that pursues opportunities to improve patient safety, person-centred care, and health service quality for Albertans. The HQCA engages with Albertans, gathers and analyzes information, and collaborates with Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, health professions, academia, and other stakeholders to drive actionable improvements.