

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

(Section 3.02, 2003 Annual Report of the Provincial Auditor)

1st Session, 38th Parliament
53 Elizabeth II

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

The Honourable Alvin Curling, M.P.P.,
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

Sir,

Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts has the honour to present its Report
and commends it to the House.

Norman Sterling, M.P.P.,
Chair.

Queen's Park
July 2004

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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PREAMBLE

The Provincial Auditor reported on Children's Mental Health Services in Section 3.02 of his *2003 Annual Report*. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts held hearings on this audit report on February 10, 2004, with representation from the Ministry of Children's Services, now the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. (At the time of the audit, these services fell under the Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services.)

The Committee endorses the Provincial Auditor's 2003 report on Children's Mental Health Services and recommends the implementation of his recommendations by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. The Committee has prepared supplementary recommendations based on its findings during the hearings. This report is a record of those findings and the Committee's recommendations.

The Committee extends its appreciation to the officials from the Ministry for their attendance at the hearings. Furthermore, the Committee acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings by the Office of the Provincial Auditor, the Clerk of the Committee, and staff of the Legislative Library's Research and Information Services.

Ministry Response to Committee Report

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts requests that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services provide the Committee Clerk with a written response within 120 calendar days of the tabling of this report with the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, unless otherwise specified in a recommendation.

1. OVERVIEW

The nine regional offices of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services contract to and monitor approximately 250 community-based transfer payment agencies that provide community (e.g. assessment, counselling, crisis intervention) and residential-based mental health services to children under the age of 18. Services are not mandatory; their provision is limited by the availability of funding rather than the level of need.

The Provincial Auditor last examined Children's Mental Health Services, specifically the Child and Family Intervention Program, in 1997. At that time, expenditures were \$213 million. By 2002/03, they had risen to \$315 million. Most of the increase was due to new initiatives that provide intensive services to relatively few individuals with complex needs (e.g. intensive behavioural intervention – IBI – for autism, early child development).¹

1.1 New Ministry

With the October 23, 2003 swearing-in of the new Liberal cabinet, the Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services reverted to an earlier name, Community and Social Services, and a new Ministry of Children's Services was created.

On November 24, 2003, the Minister of Children's Services announced the responsibilities her new ministry would be assuming from existing ministries:

- all children's programs, including early years, child care and services for children with special needs (from Community and Social Services);
- programs and services affecting the early years and special treatment programs (from Health and Long-Term Care); and
- youth justice services for young people aged 12 to 17 in conflict with the law (from Community Safety and Correctional Services).²

The new ministry was renamed Children and Youth Services in March 2004.³

Committee Hearings

Ministry staff provided the Committee with an update on their progress in creating the new ministry. It is their intent to develop a policy framework and directions that will help children and their families through the various stages of a young person's life. They hope to unbundle the maze of services that until recently had been available from a number of ministries and is still provided through various programs.

Formation of the new ministry has created positive opportunities. It had been understood for some time that a number of ministries needed to work better together at directing the children's services system. Another advantage is the prospect of examining funding alignments to determine if there are alternative ways to allocate through new or improved delivery systems.

Time will be given to looking at the experience of other jurisdictions, as well as infrastructure components such as accountability and funding frameworks, and service monitoring and evaluation.

At the time of the hearings, the Minister and ministerial staff were meeting with parents, providers and experts across the province to discuss future directions, best practices, measurable outcomes, and research. These meetings were to be ongoing over the following months. The Ministry hoped to complete a longer-term strategic plan in the late spring or early summer.

The legal transfer of the social service components (child welfare, children's mental health, day care, and children's treatment services) had been completed. Discussions continued with the Ministry of Community Safety and Corrections for the transfer of youth justice services. The Ministry was also engaged in

dialogue with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care with respect to its children's programs and services.

The children's mental health system is an integral component of the children's services system and an important early intervention system for the child welfare, education and youth justice systems. Bringing these services together through integration or closer co-ordination will create opportunities to better understand their interdependencies.⁴

Committee Comments

The Committee commends the efforts and intent of the new ministry and its staff. Positive outcomes are anticipated from the Ministry's integration of children's services from three existing ministries and closer contacts with other ministries that continue to work with children and their families. It is hoped that with these changes, the Ministry will be better able to respond to the Auditor's recommendations with respect to children's mental health services in this and earlier audits.

The Committee also wishes to recognize the invaluable work of transfer payment agencies and their boards of directors, who are required to develop immediate responses to changing needs and expectations within limited resources.

2. AUDIT OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The audit's objectives were to assess whether the Ministry's administrative procedures were adequate to ensure that:

- the quality and outcome of services provided by the community-based agencies was monitored and assessed; and
- transfer payments to agencies were reasonable and satisfactorily controlled.

Most of the audit work was conducted from November 2002 to March 2003. Work on program expenditures and procedures focused on the fiscal years 2001/02 and 2002/03.⁵

2.1 Overall Audit Conclusions

The audit found that the Ministry was not adequately monitoring and assessing the quality of the services provided by agencies. It also concluded that the Ministry's administrative procedures were not adequate to ensure that transfer payments to agencies were reasonable and satisfactorily controlled.

Many of the audit's conclusions and findings dealt with issues raised in the 1997 audit of the Child and Family Intervention Program. Of the seven recommendations contained in that audit report, three had not been implemented, three had not been fully implemented and one noted improvement.⁶

Some of the changes to the social services system proposed by the Ministry of Community and Social Services' April 1997 document *Making Services Work for People* had been implemented since the 1997 audit. (The document outlined steps the Ministry was taking to improve services for children and persons with developmental disabilities.⁷) These included centralized points of access for residential-based services, the co-ordination of services for highly complex cases and case resolution functions within each region.⁸

Committee Hearings

Ministry staff acknowledged that not all of the Auditor's recommendations had been implemented but stated their commitment to using those from 1997 as a base for broader system change. They felt their ability to fully respond stood an improved chance because of the new ministry. The reasons for this optimism included the Ministry's focus on children, an appreciation of the needs to examine relevant research and work cooperatively with other ministries, and a more focussed approach to information systems and data collection.⁹

The *Making Services Work for People* process was credited with introducing significant change to the way children's services are planned, coordinated and delivered. Reference was made to the work of the former government's Minister without Portfolio (responsible for Children). Her review of children's mental health services was said to have guided her government's decision to invest in four key areas: enhancements to intensive children and family services; tele-psychiatry; mobile crisis units; and intake and assessment tools. The introduction of standardized intake and assessment tools was considered a particularly significant accomplishment.* They were implemented in 2000 to help transfer payment agencies identify those children whose needs were most complex.¹⁰

Committee Recommendation

The Committee appreciates the Ministry's optimism about the future and its ability to implement all of the Provincial Auditor's 1997 recommendations. It also remembers that the Ministry of Community and Social Services agreed with a number of similar recommendations at the time of the 1997 audit and said it would introduce the necessary corrective actions.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

- 1. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services report to the Committee on its progress in implementing the recommendations contained in the Provincial Auditor's 2003 audit within six months of the tabling of this report.**

* These tools are the Brief Child and Family Phone Interview, and the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale.

3. MONITORING OF SERVICES PROVIDED

3.1 Quality of Service

The vast majority of programs funded were found to have neither standards defining acceptable service nor criteria for evaluating service quality. This had resulted in the Ministry not having adequate assurance that funded programs met client needs or represented value for money spent. The Auditor did find that service guidelines had been developed for several of the newly established programs. However, he noted that head office staff considered compliance with these guidelines to be mandatory while staff in regional offices, in most cases, did not.

The Auditor recommended establishing standards for acceptable service quality and criteria for evaluating service quality. He also saw benefit in periodic evaluations of the quality of services and working with partner agencies to take corrective action where necessary.

In its initial response to the audit, the Ministry reported that it had undertaken a number of initiatives to improve services. These included piloting a mental health assessment tool for children under six in 2003/04, identifying and implementing common assessment tools for children with autism, and identifying methods to measure child improvements as part of the autism strategy announced in November 2002.¹¹

Committee Hearings

The Auditor's findings were said to support the Ministry's decision to undertake a review of the effectiveness and efficiency of children's mental health services. The review will confirm service outcomes, more clearly verify the nature and scope of these services, and assess the overall effectiveness and efficiency of delivery as it relates to the roles and responsibilities of agencies.

New strategic policy directions will be developed within a broader policy context for children's services. These policy directions will confirm expectations of children's mental health service providers, identify core services and establish a common policy platform for all children's mental health services currently provided by different ministries.

The Committee was told that a new centre of excellence for child and youth mental health is being established at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario in Ottawa. It will act as a clearinghouse for the dissemination of best practice information and help build a coordinated provincial capacity in the children's mental health sector.¹²

Core Services

Committee members recounted stories of inconsistency between geographic areas and mental health issues. Ministry staff acknowledged these inconsistencies and said they were due in part to the fact that the government had not been clear about

the core services it will fund. They recognized that the situation created feelings of discontinuity on the part of children and their families.

The Committee was told that identifying core services would be made easier with the review of children's mental health services. It was important that parents know what base of services will be provided at the local level, what will be provided regionally and what will be available on a province-wide basis. With that alignment, the responsibilities of local agencies, hospitals and other service providers will be clarified.¹³

Committee Recommendation

The new ministry will need time to conduct its review of children's mental health services and develop new strategic policy directions. However, due to the critical nature of these services, it is important that work on the review and the policy directions be completed in an expeditious yet thorough manner.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

2. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services provide the Committee with an interim report on its progress in completing its review of children's mental health services and developing new policy directions, as well as its identification of core services, and the development of service standards and guidelines.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within 120 days of the tabling of this report in the Legislature.

3.2 Waiting Lists

The audit found that standards for access to services had not been established. With the exception of the autism program, information about waiting lists and times was not normally provided to the Ministry. A review of available information by the Auditor's staff indicated that waiting times were often lengthy.

The Auditor recommended establishing standards for access to service and assessing the extent to which standards were complied with. He also called for the development of strategies to monitor and remedy situations where waiting times were too lengthy.

The Ministry's initial response to the audit acknowledged the lengthy waiting times but added that services were discretionary under the *Child and Family Services Act* and were provided to the level of available resources. Service providers prioritize need while considering Ministry guidelines for those most in need. Standardized common intake and assessment tools, and access mechanisms had been implemented, but capacity was an issue. New funding had been provided since 1999 but was designated to address specific services and gaps rather than capacity issues such as staffing.

In 2001 and 2002, service providers were asked to submit information on numbers waiting for autism services. This was used to identify the additional funding required to meet need. The autism strategy announced in 2002 involved spending about \$100 million by 2006/07.* Based on waiting list information, the budget for intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) was doubled.¹⁴

Committee Hearings

Like the predecessor Ministry, Ministry staff acknowledged that waiting times are lengthy in many parts of the province. They also made a commitment to having a better grasp of the waiting list issue and capacity. That commitment was considered one of the starting points needed before the Ministry can understand whether existing resources are working and what new investments, if opportunities develop, need to be made.

Since the 1997 audit, the Ministry has implemented a number of initiatives to help agencies prioritize services for children “who need them the most.” Reference was once again made to *Making Services Work for People*, which had resulted in locally-based approaches to address clients’ specific needs.

The Ministry will develop policies that provide better direction to agencies about access to services. It will continue to work with providers to improve and better coordinate services so they can be prioritized for those “who need them most.”

The integration of children's services will improve access. The previously-mentioned review and the development of strategic policy directions will help to better identify core services and provide agencies with direction on prioritizing needs.¹⁵

Ministry staff were asked for the number of children waiting for community and residential placements. They told the Committee that the Ministry did not collect either type of placement information; it does not allocate funds according to waiting lists. Agencies are expected to measure and understand demand year over year within their own areas in order to align funding. The data might be compiled through a survey of agencies but that was not done on a regular basis. Estimates put forward at the hearings ranged from 8,000 to 12,000.¹⁶

Capacity Issues

Agencies and Children’s Mental Health Ontario (CMHO) have made submissions to the Ministry about budget and capacity issues. Agencies are making

* On March 26, 2004, the Liberal government announced expanded support for children with autism. A few days later, the Minister of Children and Youth Services told the Legislature that the government was spending an additional \$40 million per year in this area. See Ontario, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, “McGuinty Government Expands Support for Children and Youth with Autism,” *News Release*, 26 March 2004; and Ontario, Legislative Assembly, *Official Report of Debates (Hansard)*, 38th Parliament, 1st Session (30 March 2004):1093.

determinations about capacity by continually realigning programs to reach those most in need and the “broadest possible number” of those children.¹⁷

Information examining salaries, provided to the Ministry by individual agencies and CMHO, has indicated that some agencies are finding related pressures (e.g., recruitment and retention) difficult to manage. The Ministry has anecdotal evidence that those who work with children in developmental services can move within that area and into the adult system to find work that is more financially rewarding. Staff said the Ministry needed a better understanding of these particular pressures in order to determine how to encourage more Ontarians and others to pursue careers in this field.¹⁸

Capacity is further compromised in some instances by children waiting for service at one agency while in receipt of service at another.¹⁹

Assessment

Agencies are contracted to provide assessments, largely against what they have contracted to provide in the past. The Ministry has not looked at whether the capacity in agencies, regions or the province meets demand. Children do not appear on a list if they have not been assessed.

Smaller communities lack the resources to assess. The Ministry’s expectation is that there is a relationship between agencies, so that in communities with limited capacity, expertise will be brought in from other areas.

The lack of assessment capacity was one of the reasons why the tele-psychiatry initiative was begun. It has grown to 26 sites in remote and rural communities that are accessing psychiatrists through the Hospital for Sick Children.

Ministry staff recognized that it is important for families to have confidence that the base assessment is sound and trusted by all who will be asked to deliberate on a plan of care. They told the Committee that until recently, parents had not experienced a system of providers who agreed on the best determination of need and the best plan of care.

A frequent complaint is that families are over-assessed. The Brief Child and Family Phone Interview (BCFPI) was introduced to overcome that concern. It is conducted with the assistance of a computer, and assesses a child and a family’s needs and strengths to determine the appropriate service and assess priority of need. If the child is not in need of a mental health service, the BCFPI can refer the family to another service.

The Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale is used to measure the effectiveness of interventions and how a child progresses. The intent was that the information from this assessment would be available on a stand-alone system to prevent families from having to repeat their stories. The system was expected to enable the Ministry to track outcomes as a result of services provided. That has not occurred due to the lack of technical supports.²⁰

Autism - IBI Waiting List

The Auditor reported that 1,105 children were on the province-wide waiting list for the autism program and 453 were receiving service as of December 2002. These figures led to a discussion with Ministry staff about the number of children assessed for intensive behavioural intervention (IBI), a therapy provided to children up to the age of six, and the number discharged.²¹ During the course of these discussions and in the context of clarification requests made by the Committee, the accuracy and reliability of the Ministry's data with respect to waiting lists was brought into question. Accordingly, the Committee has concerns about the lack of reliable data available at the time of the hearings.

The Ministry was later able to confirm the following:

- as of August 28, 2003, 561 children were removed from the waiting list without receiving IBI service when they turned six;
- as of September 30, 2003, 695 children graduated from the program having received IBI services; and
- as of December 2003, 516 children were receiving IBI services.²²

Committee Recommendations

Without a better grasp of the numbers of children waiting for mental health services, the Ministry is limited in what it can do to improve access. The Committee also appreciates that the issue of waiting lists is in part a function of the availability of funding. However, it feels there are certain initiatives that could be undertaken without requiring a great infusion of new funding.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

3. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services direct its regional offices to request waiting list information from the agencies in their regions and to develop consolidated waiting lists for community-based and residential children's mental health services which should ensure that children are not on more than one list.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within 120 days of the tabling of this report in the Legislature.

4. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services require its regional offices to provide information about their consolidated waiting lists to the Ministry's corporate offices on a quarterly basis.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within 120 days of the tabling of this report in the Legislature.

5. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services investigate the feasibility of developing a system whereby waiting lists are ensured to be accurate and reflective of the actual number of children waiting for services.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within 120 days of the tabling of this report in the Legislature.

4. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

The Ministry did not effectively monitor performance against measurable and meaningful targets for either program/client outcomes or program outputs. Similar findings had been identified in the 1993 and 1997 Child and Family Intervention Program audits. Some progress had been made though and the Deputy Minister stated that the new ministry would be focusing a significant amount of time and energy on outcomes. An intake assessment tool and a performance measurement tool were in the process of being implemented in some agencies. However, it had yet to be determined whether any of the information they provided would be given to the Ministry and then used to assess care outcomes. The Ministry also requested quarterly reports from its agencies on actual versus budgeted expenditures as well as planned versus actual output information. This process was found to be ineffective.

The Auditor recommended that the Ministry regularly obtain and assess information about the level and outcomes of the services provided by agencies and take the necessary steps to ensure that the existing quarterly reporting process is effective in providing reliable and useful information on expenditures and service outputs.²³

Committee Hearings

The Ministry had begun to introduce a ministry-wide strategy to focus on outcomes and indicators that reflect program effectiveness but has to balance the requirements for this type of information with the inherent sensitivity of personal health information. The children's mental health services review will allow for better definitions of outcomes and assessments of overall effectiveness. The Ministry will continue to develop outcome-based performance measures and use these to guide and direct agencies in the provision of services.²⁴

Committee Recommendation

The Committee acknowledges the initiatives the Ministry has undertaken to improve performance measurement. However, the Auditor remains concerned about the information that is not being provided to the Ministry, invaluable information about individual agencies.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

6. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services develop key outcome measures for the services being provided and the outcomes achieved, and that these measures be reported quarterly and take into account agencies' manpower limitations and capabilities.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within 120 of days of the tabling of this report in the Legislature.

5. CONTROL OF TRANSFER PAYMENTS TO AGENCIES

5.1 Agency Funding Requests and Approvals

The Auditor once again expressed concerns about agency budget submissions and subsequent service agreements. Most agencies continued to be provided with the same amount of base funding as provided in the previous year. Funding for new initiatives was routinely provided without any needs assessment. The audit noted that many agencies had reduced services in order to operate within their historical base funding allocation. Ministry staff acknowledged the importance of ensuring that agency funding was reasonable and commensurate with the services received, but said there were practical difficulties involved with linking funding to need for services.

The Auditor recommended that the Ministry ensure that all agencies include sufficiently detailed, reliable and relevant information in their program budget submissions, assess all requests for funding, and ensure that amounts approved are commensurate with the demand for and value of the services to be provided. He called on the Ministry to ensure that funding is spent for the purposes intended.²⁵

Committee Hearings

The Ministry will reconfirm requirements for agency funding requests and approvals through the annual transfer payment budget package. It has already introduced ongoing improvements including a continued emphasis on contract management, yearly training for regional office staff on the use of the budget package, accrual accounting training, and financial management. The implementation of strategic policy directions will help the Ministry to strengthen its ability to monitor expectations associated with the funding provided to agencies.²⁶

The Committee also heard that the Ministry needs to step back from its traditional method of funding which has been based on a mix of history and demographic change. A more equitable approach was one of its objectives. The Ministry had yet to complete or fully define its examination of funding. A range of variables would be considered as would recent experience in human services funding in Ontario, as well as experiences in other jurisdictions.

The new ministry provides the potential to bring funding for services provided through the school and health care systems into its sphere of influence. Equity at the local level was said to sometimes be created when agencies funded by different ministries work more collaboratively.²⁷

Early Intervention Services

The Auditor reported that one regional office had paid four agencies \$1.9 million to provide early intervention services for children with autism. The money was spent without the contracted-for services being provided. The Ministry did not have information to explain what services had actually been provided.²⁸ When asked for an explanation, Ministry staff told the Committee that the money had been spent to train the staff who were going to provide the services. Those services could not be provided until a child had been assessed and a plan of service had been developed.²⁹

The Committee received further clarification following the hearings. According to the regional office in question, the four agencies received \$1.9 million in 2001/02 to go towards the following start-up costs: staff recruitment for IBI; staff training and orientation for IBI; criminal reference checks; program development; program supplies; office set-up and supplies; travel; and the development of JumpStart (program and services for families waiting for IBI).³⁰

Committee Recommendation

The Committee is very mindful of the relationship between the Ministry's funding mechanism and the Auditor's concerns with respect to quality of service, waiting lists and performance measurement.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

7. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services fully investigate and report back to the Committee on a new funding model that pays greater heed to the demand for all services in a region and individual agencies' capacities to respond to waiting lists and times.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within 120 days of the tabling of this report in the Legislature.

5.2 Information Systems

FINANCIAL AND SERVICE INFORMATION SYSTEM

A new management information system that captures annual and quarterly financial service information was implemented in August 1998. The audit found that it was not being used to analyze consistency of funding across the province or if the Ministry was receiving value for money for services provided by agencies. In those instances where it was being used for that type of analysis, the system was of limited usefulness.

AUTISM PROGRAM INFORMATION SYSTEM

An information system that contains financial and client information for the nine regional autism programs was developed in 2000/01. The information is used to help develop new policies. The audit noted that it provides only consolidated province-wide information and that Ministry staff said they were uncertain about the accuracy and completeness of the information.

The Auditor recommended that the Ministry ensure that its management information systems provide sufficiently detailed, relevant and accurate information in order to help determine whether services provided by transfer payment agencies are effective and represent value for money spent.³¹

Committee Hearings

Ministry staff expressed their commitment to having information systems that determine the service effectiveness and value provided by agencies. Investments in information technology (IT) were considered critical if the restructuring of the children's services system is to be monitored, assessed and evaluated. Improvements to the management information system are being implemented to allow for the development of data quality assurance tools and methodologies, and refinement of the transfer payment budget package to ensure clarity and consistency.

Steps are being taken to modify databases so that information is sufficiently detailed, relevant and accurate. By September 2004, the Ministry hopes to have introduced a number of initiatives:

- the development of data quality assurance tools and methodologies;
- the refinement of the transfer payment budget package to ensure clarity and consistency of data elements and definitions;
- the communication to regional offices of business practices that govern the management of transfer payment data in the service management information system;
- the prioritising and execution of system changes; and
- functional improvements and additions to ensure IT systems will have the capacity to provide the Ministry and regional offices with the information required to understand the quality of services being provided and where there may be gaps, and to develop improvements to those services.³²

The new ministry must come to terms with the number of systems it now has. IT assets need to be mapped as do the kinds of information they generate. Two types of investments would then be considered: incremental improvements around existing systems or determining which parts of the system are not well supported by IT and gauging where new investments might give the best return.

Ministry staff expect to find a lack of compatibility between what agencies are using to track service and financial information, what the Ministry is using, and

what is being used in other parts of the children's services system. While still respecting privacy, there is a need for the disciplines that provide children's services to share information.³³

Autism Program Information System

Ministry staff were asked what IT investment could be made to assist with the autism program information system. IT investments were not considered the highest priority in terms of immediate improvements, complements or supplements to services. Of greater importance are definitional work, training regional providers to understand the data elements the Ministry wants, and giving providers the resources to collect and input these elements.³⁴

The Auditor had noted that the Ministry was unable to relate data such as lengthy waiting lists and long waiting times to specific agencies. Staff were asked if this was a function of agencies not taking the time to input data or if software did not allow them to input it on a regional basis. The Committee was told that the software allows agencies to input data on a regional basis, but the information is available at an aggregate provincial level only.

The preceding situation was thought to be in part responsible for the Auditor reporting that Ministry staff were uncertain about the accuracy and completeness of information in the system. Also responsible were training issues related to ISCIS* (integrated services for children information system), an early version of which supports autism providers.³⁵

Committee Recommendations

The anticipated lack of compatibility between the systems used by agencies, the Ministry and other parts of the children's services system does not bode well for the new ministry and its hopes to unbundle the maze of services available to families.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

8. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services report to the Committee within a year of the tabling of this report on the implementation of a compatible information system to track service and financial information for the use of all involved in the delivery of children's mental health services.

The growing incidence of autism emphasizes the need for the collection and dissemination of clear and accurate information at the agency, regional and corporate levels.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

* ISCIS is used by public health units delivering the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program.

9. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services provide its regional staff with the training necessary to make the Autism Program Information System (APIS) a more useful and reliable tool.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within 120 days of the tabling of this report in the Legislature.

10. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services ensure that the APIS is funded to a level that allows agency, regional and corporate staff to input and access data in an effective and efficient manner.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to this recommendation within 120 days of the tabling of this report in the Legislature.

6. LIST OF COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee requests that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to the following recommendations within 120 calendar days of the tabling of this report, unless otherwise specified in a recommendation.

1. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services report to the Committee on its progress in implementing the recommendations contained in the Provincial Auditor's 2003 audit within six months of the tabling of this report.
2. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services provide the Committee with an interim report on its progress in completing its review of children's mental health services and developing new policy directions, as well as its identification of core services, and the development of service standards and guidelines.
3. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services direct its regional offices to request waiting list information from the agencies in their regions and to develop consolidated waiting lists for community-based and residential children's mental health services which should ensure that children are not on more than one list.
4. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services require its regional offices to provide information about their consolidated waiting lists to the Ministry's corporate offices on a quarterly basis.
5. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services investigate the feasibility of developing a system whereby waiting lists are ensured to be accurate and reflective of the actual number of children waiting for services.

6. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services develop key outcome measures for the services being provided and the outcomes achieved, and that these measures be reported quarterly and take into account agencies' manpower limitations and capabilities.
7. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services fully investigate and report back to the Committee on a new funding model that pays greater heed to the demand for all services in a region and individual agencies' capacities to respond to waiting lists and times.
8. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services report to the Committee within a year of the tabling of this report on the implementation of a compatible information system to track service and financial information for the use of all involved in the delivery of children's mental health services.
9. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services provide its regional staff with the training necessary to make the Autism Program Information System (APIS) a more useful and reliable tool.
10. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services ensure that the APIS is funded to a level that allows agency, regional and corporate staff to input and access data in an effective and efficient manner.

NOTES

- ¹ Ontario, Office of the Provincial Auditor, *2003 Annual Report* (Toronto: The Office, 2003), pp. 52-53.
- ² Ontario, Ministry of Children's Services, "Ministry of Children's Services Unveils Ministry Mandate," *News Release*, 24 November 2003. Internet site at <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/CS/en/newsRoom/newsReleases/031124.htm> accessed on 22 June 2004.
- ³ Ontario, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, "McGuinty Government brings services for children and youth under one roof," *Canada NewsWire*, 19 March 2004. Internet site at <http://www.newswire.ca/en/releases/archive/March2004/19/c2170.html?view=print> accessed on 22 June 2004.
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