

November 24, 2016

Open Letter from the Minister of Human Services to Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) Service Providers

Thank you for your continued dedication to helping Albertans with disabilities to live safe, inclusive and supported lives in communities.

I am writing to let you know about work that our ministry is doing – in consultation with the disability services sector – to promote service quality, support informed choice for Albertans, and increase consistency, transparency and accountability in our contracting processes.

I know that these topics are of interest to you, and it is important to me that you have clear and up-to-date information from our ministry. I will also be sending a letter to families, guardians and self-advocates with this information.

When several ministries combined to form Human Services in 2011, the approaches used to contract with service providers to deliver services to Albertans were inconsistent across our various programs and regions.

We have been working to address these concerns with the goal of better integrating our contracting approaches so that we can better meet the needs of Albertans, while continuing to be accountable and transparent. To date, work includes:

- creating Pre-Qualified Resource (PQR) lists of service providers that meet minimum requirements to provide services to clients across a range of programs, including disability services;
- working together with disability sector representatives to jointly develop a new Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) contract template that will form the foundation of future service agreements; and

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- establishing an Advisory Table to make recommendations about the contracting processes that support service providers and the ministry in delivering quality services and supports for Albertans.

PQR Lists

Some service providers have expressed concern and uncertainty about steps the ministry took earlier this year to create a PQR list of service providers, which I would like to clarify.

The PQR list identifies the service providers that are engaged by the ministry to serve Albertans' needs; ensuring access to a variety of service providers, small and large, with a range of service approaches is important to ensure that we can be inclusive while supporting the unique and complex needs of Alberta's diverse population.

The PQR list enables the individuals and families to make informed choices about the service provider that best meets their needs. The PQR list also promotes transparency and helps to increase public confidence in service quality, access and safety by ensuring all providers on the list meet ministry qualifications. Further, in order for the ministry to continue awarding sole-source contracts for direct client-facing social services to a single service provider, we will be using the pre-qualified list so Albertans can see who we are contracting with.

To date, more than 500 distinct service providers have been qualified under the Disability Services PQR, including all of the service providers that we have historically contracted with in PDD.

Tendering Contracts

I want to state very clearly, and for the record: Our government has not and will not implement competitive contract tendering for front-line services and supports for Albertans with developmental disabilities.

Many Albertans have received tremendous support from the same service providers for years, and they will be able to continue to receive those supports. We want to help preserve and strengthen those relationships, as they are critical for the continued well-being and safety of Albertans with disabilities.

At the same time, we will ensure that Albertans receiving PDD supports continue to have choice in selecting the qualified service provider that best meets their unique needs. This will never change under our government.

Competitive tendering has been and will continue to be used for non-direct services such as administering surveys, business consulting services, research and analysis. On rare occasions, our service delivery regions may need to competitively tender to develop new services where existing providers are not able to meet the demand for services.

New contract template

Since April 2016, we have been working with PDD sector representatives, through the PDD Contract Template Committee, to create a new, consistent contract template for the PDD sector. This template will more clearly reflect expectations and requirements for service delivery. It will also help to enhance transparency and accountability for Albertans, and bring our agreements in line with government standards and practice.

I am pleased to let you know that these discussions have been productive and collaborative. Work on the template is progressing, and we should be able to share it with you in early 2017. A clear benefit of the new template will be supports for multi-year agreements with PDD service providers. This will bring more stability and predictability for these service providers, government and most importantly for Albertans with disabilities who are receiving supports.

Advisory Table

An Advisory Table, which includes representatives from various Human Services partner groups and Human Services staff, has been working on recommendations on contracting for the Ministry of Human Services as a whole. I will share these recommendations with you in the coming weeks along with what actions we will be taking following the receipt of their final report.

Listening and working together with the disability community

Our government is committed to listening to and working with the disability community in contracting and all other areas that affect their daily lives, so we can effectively and respectfully assist Albertans with disabilities to live as independently as possible in our communities.

We heard the community clearly, when they told us that the PDD Safety Standards and the Supports Intensity Scale brought in by the previous government did not properly uphold the rights and dignity of Albertans with disabilities. We took decisive action to respond to these concerns, by repealing both of these policies and promising to work with you on all issues that relate to your supports and needs.

I want to build on the goodwill and spirit of collaboration from the PDD Safety Standards public consultation this past year, in which more than 2,000 Albertans provided input through town halls and surveys. And I want to continue to have open, meaningful communication between the PDD program and the disability community that will build trust and support a positive relationship. As Minister, I am fully committed to ensuring this occurs. The Team's full report, *Supporting Safe and Inclusive Lives*, and their recommendations are available on humanservices.alberta.ca/pddsafetystandards. We are considering all of the recommendations and will work in collaboration with the disability community to promote the safety and inclusion of Albertans with disabilities.

On behalf of Premier Notley and our colleagues, thank you once again for the positive difference you make in the lives of Albertans with disabilities and their families.

Sincerely,



Irfan Sabir
Minister