



Strategic Priorities and Service Plan 2021-22 & 2022-23

we listen... we care

Approved by the Peel CAS Board of Directors
Thursday, April 29, 2021

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STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & SERVICE PLAN 2021-22 & 2022-23

INTRODUCTION

This document, the *Strategic Priorities and Service Plan: 2021-22 & 2022-23*, provides the Peel CAS Board of Directors with a means to understand what the organization intends to achieve in the next two years given the current context. It is produced annually, with a primary focus on the coming fiscal year, while incorporating more general directions for the subsequent fiscal year. A confidential *Balanced Budget Plan 2021-22* has also been developed, which articulates the budget that aligns with this plan.

Our organizational values drive us, and we use evidence and data to support our work and to make improvements. We have worked hard to demonstrate that we are an organization that is helpful to clients and integral to the community. We are now viewed more positively by our partners and our clients (e.g., our most recent client satisfaction rating—for services during the pandemic—was 83%). We are innovative, as evidenced by some of our collaborative service models (e.g., Akoma and Saath). We appreciate the many communities we serve, and work to respond differentially based on how they define their needs.

Moving forward, we will not allow ourselves to lose ground, despite the numerous demands in the environment, some of which are not easily predicted. We remain unwavering in our commitment to children and youth and will do everything we can to ensure that the COVID-19 pandemic will not compromise service to them. We are implementing all necessary measures recommended by public health experts to keep our people and the public safe. At the same time, we remain dedicated to fairness and equity in our relationship with our staff. We have agreed with the Ministry that it would be helpful to have a comprehensive review of workplace culture, financial management, service practices and governance. In addition, as part of our ongoing efforts, we are identifying what improvements will be made to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion and to combat racism and discrimination in all its forms.

Successfully navigating through the future requires a solid plan, but also flexibility and agility to respond to changing requirements. Leading the agency to success requires that the Board be well-informed, not only in terms of this plan, but in terms of potential changes to it. The Board relies on staff to: a) deliver on the plan, b) make decisions (in terms of time, resources, importance, and potential re-prioritization) regarding our response to new pressures, and c) involve the Board in substantive changes to the plan.

Respectfully submitted to the Board of Directors

RAV BAINS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The following planning framework is used to set strategic priorities and to develop the service plan. It consists of three main areas:

- Where we are going
 - External context
 - Values and Vision
 - Strategic goals
- What we do
 - Mission
- How we do it



The following key enablers support the mission:

- Engaged people
- Beneficial partnerships
- Effective policies, procedures & practices
- Resources that support the work (i.e., Finance & Technology)

Together these three components inform two key areas: the delivery of **core operations**, as well as **key strategic priorities**.

WHERE WE ARE GOING

External Context

BROADER ENVIRONMENT

- Continued impact of COVID-19

COVID-19, which was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on 11 March 2020, continues to be a global health crisis. COVID-19 is not only a health crisis, but a human, economic and social crisis. While it impacts all segments of the population, it is particularly detrimental on those who are most vulnerable. It also exacerbates inequality, exclusion, and discrimination. The impact on social determinants of health including mental health, education and development, employment, and social relationships is an immediate concern. Perhaps more significantly are concerns for the medium and long-term—and the potential impact that a return to visibility may

have on reports of child welfare concerns. Despite the initial roll outs of a vaccine, Ontario is currently facing the most significant challenges yet in terms of number of cases and hospitalizations. Peel Region is one of the hotspots in Ontario.

- Discrimination and bias^{1,2}

Failing to consider many perspectives, or not planning to include all people, may result in barriers, which even if unintended, are discrimination. Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, discrimination is unlawful based on 17 different grounds: citizenship, race, place of origin, ethnic origin, colour, ancestry, disability, age, creed, sex/pregnancy, family status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, receipt of public assistance (in housing) and record of offences (in employment).

Even if not obvious, everyone has biases, and they have a profound impact on how we view, interact with, and treat others. Biases come from various sources, including background, upbringing, experiences, identities, cultural environment, and representations in media. Biases are also created and reinforced by ideologies (e.g., racist, sexist), as well as societal inequities. There are many types of bias, including affinity, attribution, confirmation, and stereotype.

- Anti-Black racism³

Black Ontarians of all backgrounds, whether recent immigrants or descendants of people who were enslaved, live a shared present-day experience of anti-Black racism. The stigma and stereotypes Black Ontarians and communities face have impacted public policies, decision-making and services. Anti-Black racism is widespread and a significant societal issue, requiring urgent and permanent change. Ontario's Anti-Black Racism Strategy is about targeting systemic racism in policies, decisions, and programs, and helping move toward long-term systemic change.

¹ From <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/iii-principles-and-concepts/2-what-discrimination>

² From <https://oacas.libguides.com/equity-AOP/bias>

³ From https://files.ontario.ca/ar-2002_anti-black_racism_strategy_en.pdf

■ Truth & Reconciliation^{4,5}

Imposing Western models and systems of caring for First Nation, Inuit and Métis children is a key aspect of colonialism. These models have not been successful as they do not consider the historical disadvantage imposed on Indigenous communities nor do they allow for culturally relevant practices and policies to emerge. As a result, there continues to be disproportionate rates of Indigenous children in care. Actions of the past, such as placing First Nation, Inuit and Métis children in residential schools and the 60s Scoop, played and continue to play a significant role in the state of child welfare in First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities.

Reconciliation in child welfare involves building mutually respectful relationships between children's aid societies and the First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities they serve. These relationships will allow First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities and children's aid societies to work together in ways that consider everyone's best interests while meeting the needs of and protecting children and families. Achieving reconciliation involves raising awareness and knowledge of First Nation, Inuit and Métis history and culture, changing attitudes that are often based on myths and misunderstandings, and encouraging action to build better relationships.

CHILD WELFARE REDESIGN

The vision of Child Welfare Redesign is an Ontario where every child and youth has the supports they need to succeed and thrive. The intent of redesign is to shift the focus of child welfare policies, programs and existing resources over time towards an integrated continuum of child, youth and family services. A phased and measured approach to this shift is needed to bring various sectors along as partners to the transformation journey, and to mitigate potential risks to child safety during the shift. Redesign is anchored around five pillars:

1. Child, Youth, Family and Community Well-Being
 - Shifting to prevention
 - Indigenous children, youth and families
2. Quality of Care
 - Quality and oversight
 - Prioritize family-based care
3. Strengthening Youth Supports
 - Amplifying youth voice

⁴ From https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/how-to_guide_-_reconciliation_in_child_welfare_2019.pdf

⁵ From <https://www.oacas.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/RECONCILIATION-FRAMEWORK-final.pdf>

- Enhancing youth supports
- 4. Improving Stability and Permanency
 - Family-based supports
 - Consistent adoption services
- 5. System Accountability and Sustainability
 - Accountability and efficiency
 - Financial sustainability

PEEL REGION

Demographics

Peel CAS provides child welfare services throughout the Region of Peel, which consists of the cities of Mississauga and Brampton as well as the town of Caledon. The Region is comprised of 1,247 km². The following provides are some key socio-demographic information that characterizes the Region.

- Population
 - One in ten Ontarians live in Peel - it is home to slightly over 1.5 million people. Over the last five years the population grew by 6.5%.
 - Peel has 11.6% of Ontario's children and youth ages 0-19—approximately 1 in 5 people in Peel are children or youth.
- Language
 - 39% of Peel residents, most often at home, speak a language other than English.
 - Of the non-official languages (neither English nor French) spoken in Peel, Punjabi was most often spoken at home.
 - 12.6% of Peel's population speaks more than one language at home.
- Visible minorities
 - 32% of Peel's residents are South Asian, 10% are Black, 5% are Chinese, 4% are Filipino, and 3% are Arab.
 - 62.3% of Peel's population identified as a visible minority. This is more than two times higher than that for Ontario.
 - 71% of Peel's children and youth ages 0-19 identify as a visible minority.

- Immigration
 - Immigrants comprise more than half of Peel’s total population (51.5%), which is 1.8 times higher than that for Ontario.
 - The top country of birth for immigrants in Peel was India (25.7%).
- Poverty
 - 16% of racialized (visible minority) populations experience low income in Peel.
 - Peel has 13.2% of Ontario’s low-income families.
 - 18% of Peel’s children ages 0-17 live in low-income households.

COMMUNITY SAFETY & WELL-BEING PLAN 2020-2024⁶

Community safety and well-being plans are provincially legislated for municipalities in Ontario under the Police Services Act, 1990. The development of Peel’s Community Safety and Well-being Plan 2020-2024 brought together over 25 organizations, including emergency services, school boards, social service providers, cultural organizations, and governments. The Plan provides a roadmap for how partners can work collaboratively across different sectors towards a shared commitment to making Peel a safer, and more inclusive and connected community where all residents thrive. There are three main areas of focus in the Plan: family violence, mental health and addictions, and systemic discrimination.

SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION & ANTI-BLACK RACISM⁷

Several events over the past year have highlighted the longstanding impacts of systemic racism and the need to address anti-Black racism. While not new, these events have served to reinforce the need to eradicate systemic racism and discrimination, as well as creating urgency for action. In June 2020, the City of Brampton, City of Mississauga and the Region of Peel declared anti-Black racism a crisis in Peel. A key priority of Peel’s Community Safety and Well-being Plan is to address systemic discrimination. Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities, LGBTQ2S+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning and Two-Spirit) communities, immigrants and refugees, people living with disabilities and other marginalized groups continue to face stigma and systemic discrimination that negatively impacts their overall safety and well-being.

⁶ https://www.peelregion.ca/community-safety-wellbeing-plan/_media/cswb-plan.pdf

⁷ From Peel’s Community Safety and Well-being Plan 2020-2024

Values

Collaboration and diversity

Accountability to the children, families and community we serve

Respect and compassion

Excellence, learning and innovation

In a supportive working environment...

We CARE

Vision

Every child cherished

Strategic Goals

1. Ensure that we are meeting the needs of all children and families in Peel that need us.
2. Provide the children and youth in our care with opportunities to enable them to achieve their full potential.
3. Provide an environment where people are engaged and thrive in a healthy workplace.
4. Use a continuous quality improvement approach for policies, procedures and practices.
5. Build and sustain partnerships for the benefit of the children and families we serve.
6. Ensure that resources are in place and effectively managed to support services to children and families.

WHAT WE DO – CORE OPERATIONS

Mission

At the heart of everything we do, is a focus on our mission: *To ensure the safety and well-being of children and strengthen families through partnership.*

Our work is complex and involves dealing with various social issues such as domestic violence, custody and access, poverty, social isolation, mental health, and substance abuse. It also involves dealing with multiple service systems such as education, police, health, youth justice, and immigration.

At a high level, our core operations focus on the following four main types of activities.

- When a concern for a child's safety and well-being is first reported to us it is a **referral**. When calls about a child come to us, the caller is asked a series of questions to help us determine how much support a family may need. Sometimes we can provide assistance over the phone.

11,603 referrals are projected for 2021-22

- Other times, we will recommend that one of our workers set up a time to visit with a family to see if there are any other ways we can help. If a child is at risk, a worker may visit a family right away. When a visit is involved with a family, it generally moves to **investigation/assessment**.

6,833 completed child protection investigations are projected for 2021-22

- After the investigation/assessment is completed, we determine if we can be of further assistance to the family. As much as possible, this is done in consultation with the family. Ongoing work with the child and family is referred to as **ongoing protection**.

An average of 1,305 ongoing protection cases are projected for 2021-22

- We recognize that children do best when they are at home with their families. Our priority is always to give parents the support they need to create a stable home. In a small number of instances, children need to be removed from their family to keep them safe. When this happens, we first look for a family member or friend to care for the child without bringing the child into care (this is known as kin service). If necessary, we bring a child into our care (referred to as **children and youth in care**).



Projections 2021-22	Average	Days Care
Children in care	188	68,620
Voluntary youth service agreement	17	6,023
Continued care & support for youth (under 21)	55	20,257
Continued care & support for youth (over 21)	35	12,775
Home for School	12	4,380
<i>Total</i>	307	112,055

HOW WE DO IT

To accomplish our mission, we require the following key enablers:

Engaged People

It is important to create a culture of engagement that aligns with Peel CAS values and where staff feel supported and committed to the agency's mission. Research has shown that when staff are more engaged, they do better work, they are less likely to leave the organization, and they provide better client service.

Beneficial Community Partnerships

In isolation, Peel CAS cannot ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families, or address the myriad of complex issues our service users face. Working in partnership, through building and sustaining positive, collaborative relationships is core to the work we do and is anchored in our mission.

A number of our partners are major referral sources and are essential in the administration of child protection including police, schools, justice, children's mental health, and health. These organizations have a professional responsibility for the care of children and with whom we interact on a daily basis. We also have partners where the relationship is outlined in a contract or a memorandum of understanding (e.g., outside purchased resource providers (OPRs), interpreter services, etc.). Instrumental to our work are partnerships with a wide variety of agencies in the Peel community (e.g., settlement, ethno-cultural, family service, development service, shelters, etc.), as well as those beyond our Region (e.g., Canada Border Services Agency, Global Affairs Canada, etc.).

Effective Policies, Procedures, and Practices

- A *policy* is a high-level statement of guiding principles and standards that articulates the organization's values and communicates behavioural expectations and requirements related to a specific topic or area. Policies are the broad rules and principles that provide a framework for compliance.
- A *procedure* is set of instructions that clarifies how certain policies are applied at Peel CAS and provides steps on how an action may be completed in an authorized way.
- *Best practice* is an aspect of service delivery proved to be superior to other alternatives, which provides guidance on how an employee at Peel CAS should carry out their duties. While best practices are not binding, they are based on evidence-based research or best organizational practice and should be followed.

Effective policies, procedures and practices help ensure that work is done consistently across the organization. To ensure that policies and procedures are effective, clear, compliant, and up-to-date, Peel CAS adheres to the following principles in developing policies and procedures:

- Compliant with legislation, regulation, directives, and standards, and provide clarification and interpretation for these if required.
- Clear ownership and approval to promote accountability and transparency.
- Easy to access and understand.

Resources that Support the Work

Both financial and technological resources provide supports necessary for work to be done. Financial resources provide the needed funds for staffing, service provision, and training. A vast array of technological resources (phones, servers, computers, software, cybersecurity, etc.) provide systems and tools that facilitate the work getting done.

KEY STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

For the coming year, in addition to our core operations, we will focus on five key strategic priorities.

Organizational Improvement

This year will be focused on the active pursuit of improvement across all aspects of the organization. A key source of opportunities for improvement will arise from participating in, implementing recommendations from, and engaging in restoration and healing processes as a result of the Ministry-led **Operational Review**.

People Plan

Entering year two of the People Plan, with a focus on:

- Staff Engagement & Inclusion
 - A culture of engagement that aligns with Peel CAS values and where staff feel supported, included, and committed to the agency's mission.
- Health, Wellness & Safety
 - Supporting the health, safety, and well-being of our people in a healthy workplace environment.
- Learning & Development
 - Ensuring that staff at all levels have opportunities to grow and develop. Strengthening our culture of career long learning and development.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Anti-Racism Action Plan

Our values drive our commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and we believe that it is not just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do to achieve positive outcomes for the children, youth, families, and communities that we serve. There is a broad Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism Action Plan which will continue to be implemented this year. The plan includes but is not limited to:

- Anti-Black Racism
- Further advancing our work related to Truth & Reconciliation
- Developing, implementing, and sustaining Ethno-Specific Service Models in collaboration with our community partners (e.g., Akoma, Saath, and Ma'an).

Service Strategies

EARLY HELP & INTERVENTION PROJECT

The new Early Help and Intervention Project is focused on identifying and responding to the needs of families early on, and to connect them more quickly to appropriate and effective community-based supports. In Child Welfare Redesign, shifting to prevention is a focus under the Child, Youth, Family & Community Well-Being pillar, promoting a shared responsibility to work together across sectors to enhance child, youth, and family well-being and to help keep families together.

MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

Given the prevalence of mental health concerns for children and youth served by the child welfare system, as well as the increase in mental concerns due to COVID-19, we are in the process of developing a Mental Health Strategy that focuses on internal best practices for service to children and youth experiencing mental health concerns.

YOUTH SUCCESS CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

This is a multi-year project to create an innovative and equitable service delivery model for all youth and families in the Region of Peel, combining exceptional child welfare services, with exceptional youth programming through the development of a space for youth to thrive, belong, and build lifelong connections. This work is very much in line with the Strengthening Youth Supports pillar of Child Welfare Redesign.

Balanced Budget

In Child Welfare Redesign, under the financial sustainability part of the System Accountability & Sustainability pillar, there is the continued expectation that each children's aid society will balance their budget through 2025.

HOW WELL WE DO

Performance will be measured through various sources of data and information and the use of analytical tools. Performance reports will be provided to the Board through the Board's Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Committee at least twice a year: in the Annual Agency Performance Report in October, and in the Interim Agency Performance Report in February. The purpose of the reports is twofold:

- To monitor core operations,
- To report progress on key priorities.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The past year has presented many and varied challenges to our organization. We continue to address these challenges while remaining focused on our purpose, and our values. Moving ahead in 2021-22, we will do everything we can to ensure that the COVID-19 pandemic will not compromise our services to children, youth, and families. We will continue to implement all necessary measures recommended by public health experts to keep our people and the public safe. At the same time, we remain dedicated to fairness and equity in our relationship with our staff. We have agreed with the Ministry that it would be helpful to have a comprehensive review of workplace culture, financial management, service practices and governance. In addition, as part of our ongoing efforts, we are identifying what improvements will be made to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion and to combat racism and discrimination in all its forms.

We will carry forward our efforts to collaborate with others, implement our strength-based model of service, be innovative, and focus on the "front end" of service to provide access to all children and families who require, and can benefit from our service. This allows us to emphasize early intervention to ameliorate situations that could otherwise increase child safety concerns. As well, we are committed to the principles of Child Welfare Redesign. We value the members of our organization (staff, volunteers, foster and kin caregivers, Board of Directors) and our community partners and the collective contributions made for our agency, our clients, and our community.

We will not only fulfil our obligations; we will continue the positive directions we have adopted in recent years, remaining steadfast in our commitment to children, youth, and families. We will approach the unknown with a spirit of planned opportunism, proactively and courageously implementing new ideas and adapting to change.