



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
Child and Youth
ADVOCATE

STRATEGIC PLAN

2025- 2026

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|--|
|  <p>1</p> <p>DEFINITION OF A CHILD</p> |  <p>2</p> <p>NO DISCRIMINATION</p> |  <p>3</p> <p>BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD</p> |  <p>4</p> <p>MAKING RIGHTS REAL</p> |  <p>5</p> <p>FAMILY GUIDANCE AS CHILDREN DEVELOP</p> |  <p>6</p> <p>LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT</p> |  <p>7</p> <p>NAME AND NATIONALITY</p> |
|  <p>8</p> <p>IDENTITY</p> |  <p>9</p> <p>KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER</p> |  <p>10</p> <p>CONTACT WITH PARENTS ACROSS COUNTRIES</p> |  <p>11</p> <p>PROTECTION FROM KIDNAPPING</p> |  <p>12</p> <p>RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S VIEWS</p> |  <p>13</p> <p>SHARING THOUGHTS FREELY</p> |  <p>14</p> <p>FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND RELIGION</p> |
|  <p>15</p> <p>SETTING UP OR JOINING GROUPS</p> |  <p>16</p> <p>PROTECTION OF PRIVACY</p> |  <p>17</p> <p>ACCESS TO INFORMATION</p> |  <p>18</p> <p>RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS</p> |  <p>19</p> <p>PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE</p> |  <p>20</p> <p>CHILDREN WITHOUT FAMILIES</p> |  <p>21</p> <p>CHILDREN WHO ARE ADOPTED</p> |
|  <p>22</p> <p>REFUGEE CHILDREN</p> |  <p>23</p> <p>CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES</p> |  <p>24</p> <p>HEALTH, WATER, FOOD, ENVIRONMENT</p> |  <p>25</p> <p>REVIEW OF A CHILD'S PLACEMENT</p> |  <p>26</p> <p>SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HELP</p> |  <p>27</p> <p>FOOD, CLOTHING, A SAFE HOME</p> |  <p>28</p> <p>ACCESS TO EDUCATION</p> |
|  <p>29</p> <p>AIMS OF EDUCATION</p> |  <p>30</p> <p>MINORITY CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND RELIGION</p> |  <p>31</p> <p>REST, PLAY, CULTURE, ARTS</p> |  <p>32</p> <p>PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL WORK</p> |  <p>33</p> <p>PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL DRUGS</p> |  <p>34</p> <p>PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL ABUSE</p> |  <p>35</p> <p>PREVENTION OF SALE AND TRAFFICKING</p> |
|  <p>36</p> <p>PROTECTION FROM EXPLOITATION</p> |  <p>37</p> <p>CHILDREN IN DETENTION</p> |  <p>38</p> <p>PROTECTION IN WAR</p> |  <p>39</p> <p>RECOVERY AND REINTEGRATION</p> |  <p>40</p> <p>CHILDREN WHO BREAK THE LAW</p> |  <p>41</p> <p>BEST LAW FOR CHILDREN APPLIES</p> |  <p>42</p> <p>EVERYONE MUST KNOW CHILDREN'S RIGHTS</p> |

43-54



HOW THE
CONVENTION
WORKS

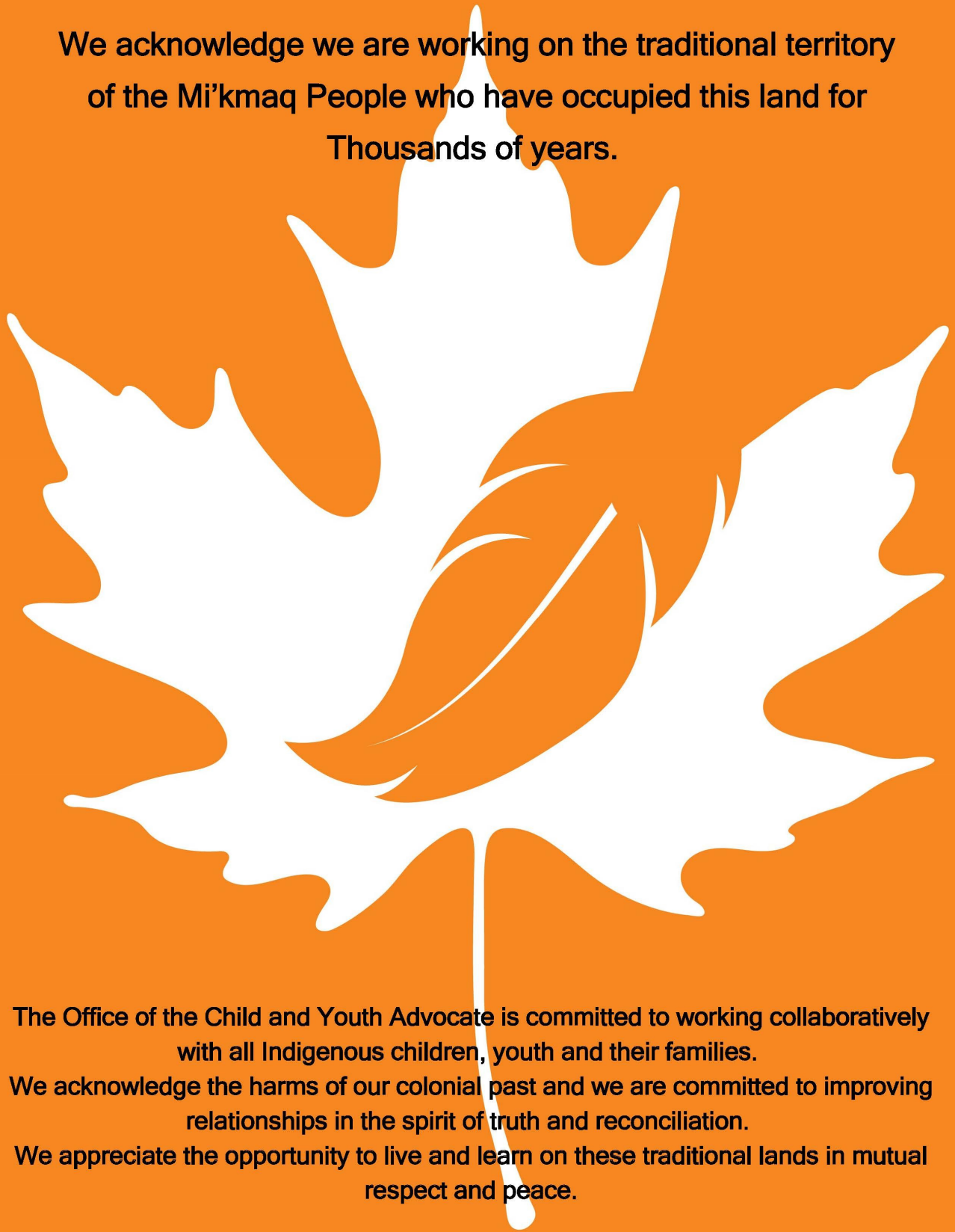
CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



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**We acknowledge we are working on the traditional territory
of the Mi'kmaq People who have occupied this land for
Thousands of years.**



**The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is committed to working collaboratively
with all Indigenous children, youth and their families.**

**We acknowledge the harms of our colonial past and we are committed to improving
relationships in the spirit of truth and reconciliation.**

**We appreciate the opportunity to live and learn on these traditional lands in mutual
respect and peace.**

MESSAGE FROM THE CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCATE



It is a privilege to serve as Child and Youth Advocate for Prince Edward Island and to bring forward our Office's Strategic Plan for the period April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026.

Our strategic plan is organized around six priorities linked to the mandated and discretionary provisions of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*. These priorities identify our goals for the forthcoming year and the indicators for success.

At the heart of our work are the children and youth of PEI, and our commitment to upholding their rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), as it affects the rights of children and youth. Our mandate directs us to amplify the voices of children and youth and hold reviewable services to account, through individual and systemic advocacy; public education and youth engagement; research; reviews and investigations; and the monitoring of recommendations made to reviewable services.

With the recruitment of two new Systemic Advocacy Representatives, we now have greater capacity to examine systemic issues that are reported to our Office. Through recommendations to government child-serving departments, we seek to protect and promote the rights of children and youth. There is always room for improvement, and through critical reflection and review, we can all work together to ensure the best outcomes for island children and youth.

As a small jurisdiction, with widely held agreement about the importance of delivering services where all children can reach their full potential, we have the ability to lead the way in children's rights in Canada. We have already seen great progress in embedding children's rights in provincial legislation, through the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*. Our office will continue to advocate for the inclusion of children's rights in legislation across reviewable services, and monitor how paper rights are translated into lived rights for every child and youth in PEI.

Marvin M. Bernstein

Marvin M. Bernstein, B.A., J.D., LL.M. (ADR)
Child and Youth Advocate
Province of Prince Edward Island



"Thank you for your support with this situation. We are so grateful for the work your office does in supporting students."

Professional

"Thank you so much for your efforts and advocacy with this, I have no doubt that without your intervention things would still be at a standstill"

Professional

"It was so nice to speak with you and feel 'heard'. We haven't experienced that much lately."

Parent

"We are just kids. Some adults don't listen to us. Thank you for helping us."

Child

"The moment I saw you I felt inside that you wanted to help us as much as possible. Your initiative and your professionalism make you an amazing person and a hard worker."

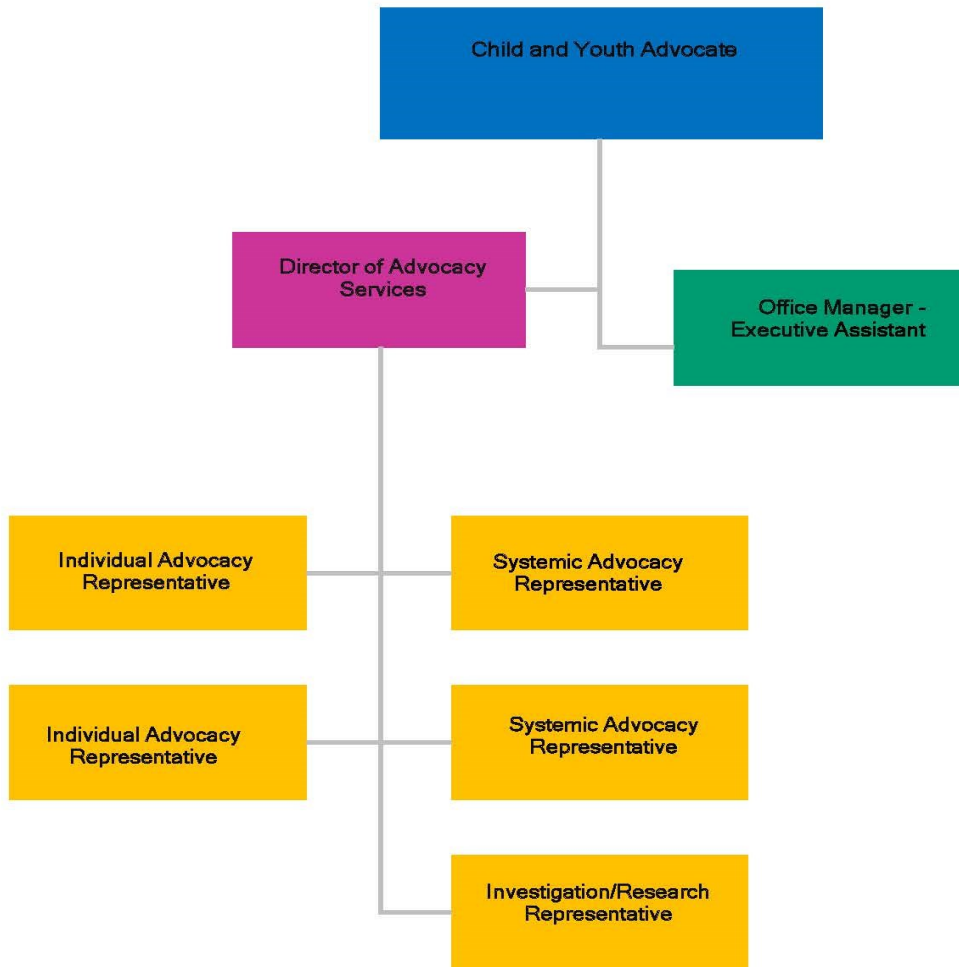
Parent

"I am very glad that you are involved as well. There have been some hurdles, and you have been great to pull a team of professionals together."

Professional



Office of the Child and Youth Advocate



VISION

A province where every child and youth experiences the realization of all their human rights and has every opportunity to reach their full potential.

MANDATE

To empower and promote the human rights of all PEI children and youth through advocacy, reviews, investigations, public education, research and child/youth engagement in accordance with the authority and responsibilities set out in the *PEI Child and Youth Advocate Act*.

MISSION

To raise awareness and uphold the child rights principles expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, while amplifying the voices of children and youth, modelling dignity and respect for children, youth and their families in all aspects of our work.



WHAT THE CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCATE DOES



The Child and Youth Advocate is an independent statutory officer of the PEI Legislative Assembly appointed under the PEI *Child and Youth Advocate Act*. The Child and Youth Advocate is responsible to provide oversight of government-funded reviewable programs and services delivered to children, youth and their families. Staff of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate support the Child and Youth Advocate's mandate to promote the human rights of all PEI children and youth.

The Child and Youth Advisory Committee of the PEI Office of the Child and Youth Advocate reports directly to the Child and Youth Advocate, in an advisory role, to help inform the work of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate on matters of importance to children and youth.

WHO WE SERVE

We advocate for the rights of children and youth in PEI when they are accessing government funded, reviewable services. We provide individual advocacy for children and youth aged birth to 18 years, and to young adults (up to age 25) who are accessing extended services through the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*. Children and youth are human rights holders. The *Child and Youth Advocate Act* is underpinned by the principles expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), for which Canada is a signatory. The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate plays a vital role in holding the provincial government to account, to ensure services delivered to children and youth are compliant with the rights established in the UNCRC.

Individual Advocacy

The four pillars of Individual Advocacy are:

- Individual Advocacy is **voluntary**.
- Individual Advocacy is **confidential**.
- Individual Advocacy is **child/youth led**.
- Individual Advocacy is **rooted in children's rights**, as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Individual Advocacy may include providing information and advice; representing the rights, interests and viewpoints of the child or youth; assisting children and youth to initiate and participate in case conferences, service reviews, mediations, or other processes in which decisions are made about the provision of a reviewable service; and supporting children and youth to develop self-advocacy skills. Through individual advocacy, systemic trends impacting the rights of children and youth are identified.

Systemic Advocacy

The four elements of systemic advocacy are:

- Systemic Advocacy involves a group of children/youth receiving or eligible to receive a reviewable service.
- Systemic Advocacy involves reviewing and/or investigating laws, regulations, policies, protocols, procedures and/or practices inherent to reviewable programs and services delivered to children, youth and their families.
- Systemic Advocacy recommendations are informed by research, evidence and a child rights analysis.
- Systemic Advocacy recommendations are intended to make improvements to reviewable services to advance the human rights of children/youth consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Child and Youth Serious Injury and Death

The *Child and Youth Advocate Act* highlights the mandatory legal requirement for all child and youth serious injuries and deaths in PEI to be reported to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

The purpose of mandatory reporting of child and youth serious injuries and deaths is to review the circumstances surrounding the serious injury or death through a child rights lens. Where appropriate, the Child and Youth Advocate may make recommendations about how to prevent serious injuries and deaths in the future. The *Child and Youth Advocate Act* stipulates there can be no finding of legal responsibility. The goal of reviews and investigations conducted by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is always to apply a child rights lens to help inform opportunities to prevent future child and youth serious injuries and deaths. It is never to ascribe legal responsibility to any person.

Public Education, Research, Reports, Child and Youth Engagement

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate has responsibility to promote and provide public education and advocacy respecting the:

- Rights, interests, and well-being of children and youth;
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; and
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as it affects children and youth.

The voices of children and youth are of critical importance in advocacy. The staff of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate strive to engage directly with children and youth in a flexible, approachable, and child-led manner. Staff are available to connect one-to-one with children and youth, in groups with children and youth, and through the membership of the Office's Child and Youth Advisory Committee.

PEI *Child and Youth Advocate Act*

The intent of the legislation is to be consistent with and build upon the principles expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as ratified by Canada;

Government acknowledgement that formative childhood experiences have long-term implications for the individual and for society;

Government acknowledgement that children and youth are able to reach their highest potential when provided with positive life experiences that encourage healthy development and early support when facing challenges;

Government recognition of the importance of continual improvement in the provision of programs and services to children and youth through a collaborative approach that is inclusive of the views of children and youth;

Government recognition of the importance of the preservation and promotion of cultural identity for Indigenous children and youth; and

Government commitment to ensuring that the rights, interests and viewpoints of children and youth are considered in matters affecting them.





PEI *Child and Youth Advocate Act* PROCESS and ACCOUNTABILITY

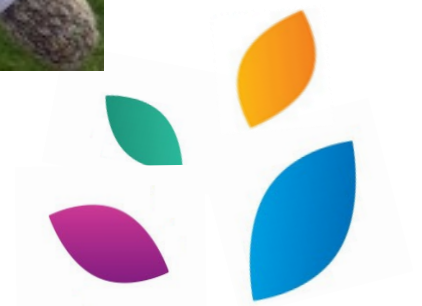
The 2025-2026 strategic plan priorities reflect the statutory requirements and nature of advocacy issues presenting to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

Process

The strategic plan has been prepared with the input of staff and serves as a guide for individual and confidential internal staff work plans in the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

Accountability

The strategic plan is publicly available at www.childandyouthadvocatepei.ca. The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate's Annual Report fulfills a mandatory provision to report on the activities, outcomes and results achieved by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate in the previous fiscal year. The strategic plan serves to guide operational priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.





Priority 1: PROMOTE and EDUCATE

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is mandated to promote the rights of children and youth.

Goal: Between April 1, 2025 and March 31, 2026, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will promote awareness of the role and function of the PEI *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as it affects children and youth and advocacy supports available to children, youth and their families by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

Indicators:

- Provide educational sessions for children, youth, adults and professionals on the role and function of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as it affects children and youth
- Respond to media inquiries and requests for interviews relevant to child rights and government funded reviewable services delivered to children and youth in PEI
- Provide presentations/recommendations to PEI Legislative Assembly Standing Committees, as requested
- Participate, as a member in good standing, on the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates and participate in related meetings/working groups
- Participate in meetings with Ministers/Deputy Ministers of child serving government departments
- Participate in regular meetings with the Clerk and Deputy Clerk of Executive Council
- Participate in meetings with Opposition Party Critics
- Facilitate monthly meetings of the Office's Child and Youth Advisory Committee
- Carry out recruitment plan to welcome 3 new members to the Child and Youth Advisory Committee
- Participate in meetings of the National Child and Provincial Child and Youth Law Section of the Canadian Bar Association
- Use OCYA publications as an opportunity to provide public education on children's rights and the UNCRC, including the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comments and Concluding Observations to Canada

Priority 2: ADVOCATE

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is mandated to advocate for children, youth and their families respecting reviewable services.



Goal: Between April 1, 2025 and March 31, 2026, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will advocate for children, youth and their families respecting reviewable services.

Indicators:

- Receive and assess individual advocacy requests involving children and youth respecting reviewable services
- Provide information and navigational support to adult family members and persons concerned about the rights and best interests of children and youth engaged with reviewable services or eligible to receive reviewable services
- Provide individual advocacy support on behalf of, or with a child or youth, including newborns, very young children and children/youth with complex needs
- Empower and educate children and youth about their rights and responsibilities
- Assist children and youth to initiate and participate in processes in which decisions are made about them in the provision of reviewable services
- Identify systemic issues impacting the rights of children and youth
- Provide child rights advocacy expertise to inform recommendations of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate
- Enable children and youth through individual advocacy support to participate and achieve positive resolution and outcomes from reviewable service decisions being made about them
- Empower children and youth to engage in self-advocacy
- Review document management system and implement changes to ensure robust office documentation processes
- Review and update data collection processes to ensure the robust gathering of data associated with the delivery of advocacy activities

Priority 3: RECEIVE and REVIEW

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is mandated to receive and review any matter in relation to a reviewable service.



Goal: Between April 1, 2025 and March 31, 2026, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will receive and review matters in relation to reviewable services.

Indicators:

- Receive, review, research and provide written submissions, with recommendations, on matters relating to a reviewable service for a child or youth or group of children or youth, such as government proposed new and/or amended legislation, regulations, Ministerial Directives and policies
- Conduct individual and systemic advocacy reviews and investigations
- Provide recommendations, informed by reviews, based on a child-rights analysis



Priority 4: RESEARCH

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is mandated to undertake or collaborate in research related to improving reviewable services.



Goal: Between April 1, 2025 and March 31, 2026, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will identify and consider external subject matter experts as needed.

Indicators:

- Analyze aggregate data of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate to identify research priorities
- Conduct research to inform recommendations of the Child and Youth Advocate
- Identify issues requiring external expertise
- Identify external subject matter experts
- Contract with external subject matter experts, as appropriate
- Make recommendations informed by external subject matter experts, as appropriate
- Conduct research to inform position statements, submissions, recommendations and reports



Priority 5: MONITOR

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is mandated to monitor implementation of and compliance with recommendations made by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate.



Goal: Between April 1, 2025 and March 31, 2026, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate will monitor implementation and compliance with recommendations made by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate to reviewable services.

Indicators:

- Utilize the newly developed recommendation monitoring scale and process to track and publicly report on progress made by reviewable services in implementing recommendations made by the Child and Youth Advocate
- Engage in administrative fairness processes with child-serving departments to clarify progress made in implementing recommendations
- Continue to monitor implementation of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* by the Department of Social Development and Seniors to ensure child rights are actualized from “paper rights to lived rights” for children and youth in receipt of service and children and youth in care
- Monitor compliance status of recommendations of the Child and Youth Advocate specific to the Department of Education and Early Learning and Education Authorities
- Monitor status of recommendations from investigations completed by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate
- Document, monitor and prioritize systemic issues and trends identified through the provision of individual advocacy



Priority 6: The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate may choose to engage in additional discretionary strategic priority provisions of the PEI *Child and Youth Advocate Act*



The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate may receive and investigate any matter that comes to the Child and Youth Advocate's attention from any source concerning a child or youth who receives or is eligible to receive a reviewable service or a group of children or youth who receive or are eligible to receive a reviewable service.

Goal: Between April 1, 2025 and March 31, 2026, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate may engage in discretionary advocacy matters related to reviewable services.

Indicators:

- Receive and investigate any matter that comes to the attention of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate from any source concerning a child or youth and/or a group of children or youth who receive or are eligible to receive a reviewable service
- Assist in appealing or reviewing a decision relating to a reviewable service either on the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate's own initiative or at the request of a child or youth
- Apply negotiation, conciliation, mediation or other non-adversarial approaches in provision of advocacy to children, youth and their families
- Make recommendations, as appropriate, to reviewable services
- Receive, review, investigate and report on child and youth serious injuries or deaths
- Conduct reviews of academic and grey literature to identify risk factors for child and youth serious injury and death to include review of promising practices to identify potential opportunities for improvements in reviewable services to prevent future child and youth serious injuries and deaths
- Conduct research to inform individual advocacy and systemic advocacy issues impacting child rights
- Identify matters relating to the rights, interests and well-being of children and youth receiving or eligible to receive reviewable services
- Respond to requests for consultations and provide recommendations
- Issue Position Statements on reviewable service matters impacting child rights
- Advise or make recommendations to any reviewable service on any matter relating to the rights, interests and well-being of children and youth

CONCLUSION

As we continue on our pathway to realizing the vision, mission and mandate of our Office, we recognize the importance of engaging with children and youth to ensure our actions meet their expectations and achieve success in promoting and protecting their rights. Children and youth we meet through individual advocacy, and members of the Child and Youth Advisory Committee, guide our staff to stay grounded in the priorities of island children and youth, and ensure we continue to position the perspectives of children and youth at the centre of our work. Children, youth and their families put their trust in our Office, and in turn we promise to demonstrate the highest levels of commitment to our work.

We also recognize that the work of upholding children's rights in PEI cannot be done by our Office in isolation. It requires a collective effort, where all adults embrace opportunities to put the wellbeing of children at the heart of decision making. We observe everyday that government services are staffed by dedicated frontline workers who promote and protect the interests of children and youth and respectfully collaborate with our staff in advocating for the children and youth they serve. When we share the same goals to value and protect the rights of children and youth, as established in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, we can make more effective progress in bringing these rights to reality for all children and youth.

We look forward to continued efforts to work along side children, youth, families, professionals and government representatives in the advancement of the rights, interests and well-being of Island children and youth.





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