

FRAMEWORK AND ACTION PLAN FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS SERVICES IN SASKATCHEWAN

FALL 2008



**Ministry of
Health**

OVERVIEW

The *Framework and Action Plan for Autism Spectrum Disorders Services in Saskatchewan* is the result of a comprehensive review of provincial Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) services and supports conducted in 2008 by the Ministry of Health. The review was informed by information gathered from a number of sources, including the Provincial Autism Advisory Committee, parent and caregiver questionnaires, as well as on-site visits with several stakeholders, including regional health authorities and community-based organizations.

In the 2008 provincial budget, the Government of Saskatchewan announced \$3 million in annualized funding for ASD services in Saskatchewan. Given this new annualized funding, the Ministry of Health felt that the development of a plan for the delivery of services and supports to the ASD population, that is equitable and accessible throughout the province, was needed.

The *Framework and Action Plan for Autism Spectrum Disorders Services in Saskatchewan*:

- Builds on existing services and supports;
- Focuses on evidence-supported intervention, treatment, and support services;
- Emphasizes individualized services and supports;
- Encourages partnerships at the local, regional and provincial levels in order to build capacity and foster collaboration amongst stakeholders; and
- Supports the Government of Saskatchewan's vision of building a quality of life that supports healthy people, families, neighbourhoods, communities and full citizenship and equal participation of individuals with disabilities.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRAMEWORK AND ACTION PLAN

A Provincial Autism Advisory Committee (PAAC) was formed in May 2008 for the purpose of providing the Ministry of Health with information about current ASD services and supports, identifying gaps in service delivery, and informing the development of a plan for accessible and equitable services and supports provincially. The PAAC consisted of a cross section of service providers, clinicians, community based organizations, parents and ministries working with the ASD population throughout the province.

The Ministry of Health developed a vision statement, set of guiding principles and strategic directions for ASD services and supports within the province in consultation with the PAAC. This provided the foundation for the *Framework and Action Plan for Autism Spectrum Disorders Services in Saskatchewan*.

The Framework and Action Plan is designed to support individuals affected by ASD by enhancing access to effective and efficient services and supports and enhancing their capacity to function in the community. Many of the initiatives outlined in the Framework and Action Plan are designed to address current gaps in the continuum of care, and focus on providing a coordinated approach to services and supports, realigning existing services to increase access and enhance efficiency, and increasing capacity amongst health care professionals, service providers and other key stakeholders to provide evidence-supported intervention and treatment services to the ASD population.

The overall direction of the Framework and Action Plan is to enhance capacity to provide accessible and equitable supports and services to individuals with ASD, and their families, throughout Saskatchewan.

VISION STATEMENT

Individuals affected by Autism Spectrum Disorders, and their families, have coordinated access to effective and efficient services and supports that meet their needs and enhance their capacity to function in, and contribute to, the community.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Services and supports are individualized to meet the unique and specific biological, emotional, developmental and social needs of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.
2. The intensity of services and supports match the level of individual needs.
3. Services and supports are available to reduce the impairment and improve the functioning of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.
4. Early intervention is critical in reducing impairment and improving the functioning of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.
5. Intervention, treatment and support services are evidence-supported, and on-going research and evaluation informs decision-making by policy-makers, service providers and community members.
6. Strategies, initiatives and services are developed using an integrated, comprehensive and coordinated approach to planning and implementation.
7. Transitional supports are available to assist the client population and their families.
8. A continuum of services, including assessment, intervention, treatment, consultation, respite, transitional services, education, training and evaluation is available to support individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders, and their families.
9. Collaboration takes place among all levels of government, and between government and non-government partners. Mechanisms are in place to support information sharing and collaboration among services and community groups to effectively support the delivery of Autism Spectrum Disorders services across the province.
10. Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders have equitable access to services and supports throughout the province.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1. Screening and Early Supports

Provide training and education around early indicators of Autism Spectrum Disorders to service providers who are likely to be the initial contact for individuals suspected of having Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Detection of early indicators will result in timely referrals to appropriate diagnostic centres.

2. Assessment and Diagnosis

Enhance timely access to appropriate health care professionals for assessment and diagnosis.

Early diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders has been shown to play a significant role in the planning and provision of appropriate interventions and supports.

3. Intervention and Treatment

Expand and enhance evidence-supported intervention and treatment services for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Evidence-supported intervention and treatment for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders has been shown to improve functioning.

4. Respite and Family/Caregiver Supports

Enhance respite and other supports to assist families and caregivers of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Relief from care giving helps families and caregivers to cope.

5. Consultation and Collaboration

Expand and enhance timely consultation and collaboration amongst stakeholders regarding the assessment, diagnosis, intervention and treatment of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Timely consultation and collaboration, including information sharing, is needed to support the development of a comprehensive care plan for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

6. Training and Education

Provide opportunities for formal education, pre-service and in-service training programs to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders, their families, health care and human service professionals, and community-based service providers who work with the client population and their families. Training and education services are culturally appropriate and relevant to Aboriginal and other populations.

Knowledgeable, skilled care providers and informed clients are essential components of a comprehensive care plan.

7. Transitional Services

Provide services that facilitate transitions between critical stages in the individual's life, thereby enabling the individual to reach their full potential.

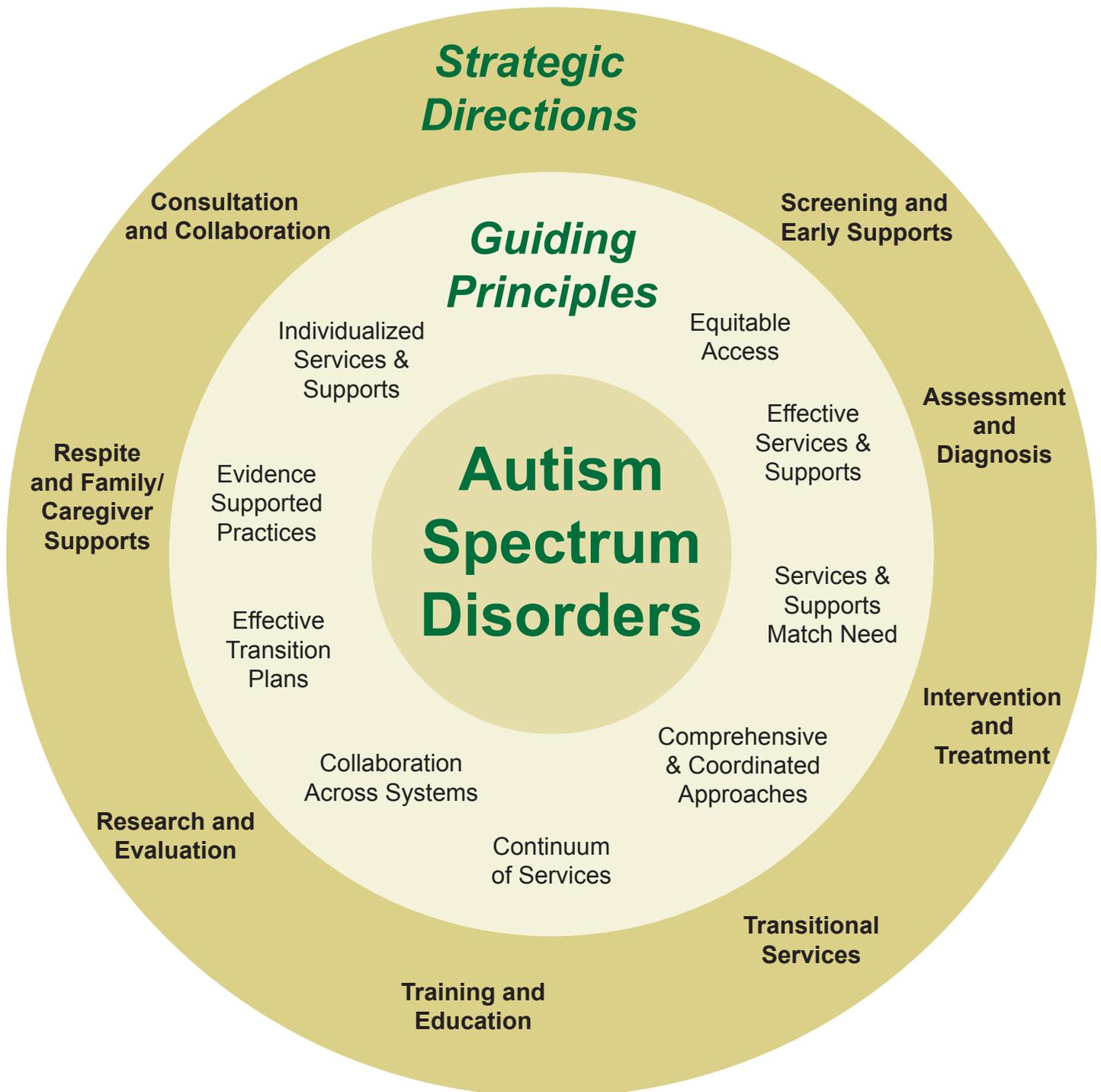
Transitions tend to be very challenging for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

8. Research and Evaluation

Monitor and evaluate Autism Spectrum Disorders intervention and treatment services in Saskatchewan. Identify evidence-supported practices in the intervention and treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders, and develop or adopt standards to guide the delivery of clinical services and Autism Spectrum Disorders programming.

On-going research and evaluation ensures that individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders have access to evidence-supported intervention and treatment services.

OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND
GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE FRAMEWORK
AND ACTION PLAN FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS
SERVICES IN SASKATCHEWAN



PUTTING THE FRAMEWORK INTO ACTION

The *Framework and Action Plan for Autism Spectrum Disorders Services in Saskatchewan* builds on existing services and supports, provides evidence-supported intervention options, focuses on individualized programming for each child, and encourages partnerships at the local, regional and provincial level while building capacity and fostering collaboration amongst the stakeholders and service providers.

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS CONSULTANTS

A total of 15 ASD Consultants will be located throughout the province, providing service to each of the Regional Health Authorities. The services of the ASD Consultant will be available to all clients who are suspected of presenting with ASD ages 0 to 19 years. A confirmed diagnosis is not necessary to access these services.

Functions of the ASD Consultants will include:

- Acting as one of the first points of contact for families seeking ASD services in the province;
- Receiving and processing referrals from parents, doctors and other sources;
- Administering an initial screening to identify clients with suspected ASD (clients who are not suspected will be referred to more appropriate services and supports);
- Coordinating assessment, treatment and programming as provided through the ASD Support Workers, and facilitating the alignment of this work with existing services provided by health authorities, community-based organizations, or other stakeholders;
- Designing, monitoring and regularly evaluating personal intervention programs;
- Assisting families in linking to other appropriate programs and resources, such as the Cognitive Disabilities Strategy or the Community Living Division (Ministry of Social Services);
- Providing clinical supervision of the ASD Support Workers; and
- Case managing clients up to 19 years of age.

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS SUPPORT WORKERS

A total of 18 ASD Support Workers will be located throughout the province, providing direct intervention to clients in each of the Regional Health Authorities. The services of the ASD Support Workers will be available to all clients, from birth to school transition, which have been screened by the ASD Consultant and appear to be presenting with ASD. A confirmed diagnosis is not necessary to access these services.

Functions of the ASD Support Workers will include:

- Working directly with individuals presenting with ASD, their families and other service providers;
- Delivering the personal intervention plan, as designed by the ASD Consultant or other qualified health care professional;
- Providing a variety of intervention strategies, in collaboration with parents, to meet the goals of the personal intervention plan;
- Training parents to utilize intervention strategies with their child on a day-to-day basis;
- Gathering and maintaining contact records and summative evaluations; and
- Working with the client until transitions to school are successfully completed.

SUMMER PROGRAMMING AND RESPITE

Funding will be made available to health regions to support summer programming and respite options to best meet the needs of the client(s) in each region within allocated resources. A range of programming and respite options will be available and accessible to families throughout the province requiring these supports.

PROVINCE-WIDE TRAINING

Funding will be made available to support on-going province wide training opportunities for parents, caregivers, professionals and paraprofessionals. Training may be provided in a variety of evidence-supported ASD intervention strategies, including Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA), and will be targeted to anyone who may be in regular contact with individuals presenting with ASD. Access to on-going training will ensure that a pool of trained individuals, who are qualified to deliver a variety of intervention strategies, exists within the province.

WEBSITE AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The Ministry of Health will develop a number of resources designed to provide parents, professionals, and other stakeholders with information regarding ASD, including how to access available services and supports and contact information. All of these resources will be made available for download on the Ministry of Health website.

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

The Ministry of Health will request on-going evaluations of all components of the *Framework and Action Plan for Autism Spectrum Disorders Services in Saskatchewan* to ensure that services and supports are consistent with the guiding principles and strategic directions. In addition, the Ministry of Health will continue to review current literature and research in the field of ASD in order to provide leadership and policy guidance in this area.

ADDITIONAL SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

In 2007-08, funding was provided for enhanced diagnostic, assessment and consultation services. Annual funding was targeted to support a multidisciplinary assessment team in the Saskatoon Health Region, as well as a Rural Developmental Consultant to provide consultation services to the five southern health regions.

For more information about ASD services, visit the Ministry's website:
www.health.gov.sk.ca/autism