



Policy Wise
for Children & Families

A CHILD RIGHTS APPROACH TO RESOURCE ALLOCATION

November 21, 2019

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a human rights treaty to ensure that the rights of children are protected by governing bodies. This requires that governing bodies implement legislation and social policies that protect children's rights. In addition, governing bodies have a responsibility to ensure adequate funds are available to provide human, economic, and organizational resources for the safety and development of the child (Gore, 2004). However, in doing so, most governing bodies face one major challenge: limited resources with competing needs. Recognizing this, there are three key considerations that could guide resource allocation to ensure that fiscal decisions do not constrain the resources required to realize children's rights:

1. Prioritize resource allocation to promote children's rights and protect it from being withdrawn

A child rights approach to resource allocation involves increasing the allocation of resources to improve the health and development of children. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that all children, especially the vulnerable and marginalized, have equitable access to quality health care, social services, education, and safety. Most importantly, these resources must be protected from being withdrawn or losing its value over the years. For example, during budget reallocation, funds that have been allocated to improving services to children must be protected from being decreased. Furthermore, without accounting for the impact of population growth and increasing prices, funds allocated over a number of years will not be sufficient to meet growing demands.

2. Parents, families and communities are key to realizing children's rights

Fundamental to child development and realizing children's rights is ensuring that parents and/or caregivers have access to supports and services that will enable them provide the best care for their children. Articles 18 and 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Assembly, 1989) particularly calls on governing bodies to provide financial support for families to avoid child poverty, develop accessible institutions and facilities for the care of children, implement social programs that address the needs of and provide support for parents/caregivers, and provide affordable child-care services for eligible working parents and/or caregivers.

3. All rights are equal and interrelated

The principle of indivisibility and interdependence of rights implies that all rights are equal and each contributes to the realization of the other (Gore, 2004). Promoting children’s rights through resource allocation does not only mean allocating resources to sectors or programs directly related to children, but ensuring that resource allocation in other sectors complement or do not hinder the realization of children’s rights. Different sectors contribute to the well-being of children. Investing in services for children only, for example, may improve children’s health and development; however, lack of investment in complementary sectors, such as education, may have adverse implications on child safety and development. Similarly, implementing policies to encourage new parents to go back to work may not be successful without providing access to affordable quality child care services and supports to these working parents.

Alberta Context

The 2019-2023 Alberta Fiscal Plan announced on October 24th 2019 highlights key priority areas aimed at improving the well-being of children and youth, such as increasing funding for children services, mental health and addiction, and opioid response (Government of Alberta, 2019). The budget also specifies changes to financial support programs, such as the Alberta Child Benefit and the Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit, which are replaced by the Alberta Child and Family Benefit (ACFB), as well as changes to the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) (Assembly, 1989). The Government of Alberta has a difficult task of reallocating available resources for services while considering the well-being of Albertans. In doing so, some fiscal measures aimed at balancing the budget might have unintended consequences on children and families in Alberta. For instance, the ACFB was introduced to provide more support for lower income families and reduce administrative cost. However, initial analysis of the ACFB shows that many vulnerable families who need financial support will receive less than they previously did (Cameron, Petit, & Tedds, 2019). As another example, AISH has been de-indexed, which means the benefits provided will not be adjusted for increased prices in subsequent years ultimately reducing the purchasing power of recipients in the next three years. Other budget reallocation that reduces, maintains, or de-indexes funding reduces/eliminates supports and services for vulnerable populations needs to be reconsidered.

Overall, a child rights approach to resource allocation guarantees and protects the resources available to realizing children’s rights. In order to do this, a holistic framework that considers the different factors that promote or hinder the fulfilment of children’s rights must shape resource allocation. It is therefore important that the budget process is kept transparent, participatory, and accountable (Gore, 2004).

REFERENCES

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