PolicyWise for Children & Families

2021-2023 STRATEGIC PLAN

INTRODUCTION

PolicyWise for Children & Families works to ensure that children, youth, and families thrive in respectful, safe, and supportive environments shaped by wise decisions. We inform, identify, and promote effective social policy and practice to improve the well-being of children, youth, families, and communities.

Our approach is built on trusted relationships, processes, and evidence. We promote and inspire a shared vision and action for change; generate evidence-informed, context-based recommendations; and, support meaningful cross-sector connection, alignment, and learning. We ensure that the knowledge we produce and mobilize is credible, contextual, and comprehensive. We measure our impact through:

- Inspiring **collaborative action** and receptivity for knowledge and wisdom
- Building a **comprehensive understanding** of child, family, and community well-being
- Advancing the **use and generation of knowledge** to improve policy and practice

OUR VALUES

- Learning, insight, and understanding
- Partnership and collaboration
- Contribution and impact
- Service and generosity
- Equity, diversity, and inclusion

AT POLICYWISE, WELL-BEING IS THE FOUNDATION OF EVERYTHING WE DO

We understand well-being to be a holistic concept characterized by balance and interconnection of the social, physical, emotional, cognitive, environmental, and spiritual elements of life for children and youth, families, and communities. We have learned that well-being includes:

Well-Being Dimension	Description
Meaningful Relationships and Supportive Environments	Fulfilling, stable, and lifelong relationships and connections to family and community within nurturing and supportive environments. Connected to this concept is the sense of belonging, security, purpose, and identity that emerges from these connections and environments.
Cultural Connection, Identity, and Autonomy	Lasting connection to culture and cultural identity through respect and engagement with traditions, practices, spirituality, and language. Respect for the strengths and expertise inherent in different approaches to family and raising children.
Healthy Development and Growth	Opportunities for intellectual, cognitive, emotional, and social development and growth. Children and youth develop coping skills and thrive. Healthy learning and development, play, and participation enable children and youth to meet their full potential through the building of self-confidence, self-awareness, self-esteem, and a strong sense of identity.
Protection and Freedom from Harm	Protection and freedom from harm at home, in school, at work, in community, and online. This includes prevention of and interventions for physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse and neglect. This also includes freedom from self-inflicted harm and harm associated with mental health challenges.
Recognition and Healing from Trauma	Recognition of the impact of individual and systemic trauma on development. Promotion of safe connections to facilitate grieving, healing, and resilience. Support for lifelong healing journeys of decolonization and recovery from the effects of ongoing and historical trauma.
Physical Health and Access to Necessities	Equal access to necessities of life, physical health, and economic well-being. Freedom from poverty, neglect, and the impacts of climate change. This includes health care, child care, adequate and affordable housing, food security, and environmental security.

WHY DOES WELL-BEING MATTER NOW MORE THAN EVER?

Child and youth well-being is associated with being physically and emotionally safe. It includes: secure, healthy relationships; connections to culture and community; and, opportunities to thrive. The onset of the pandemic resulted in significant life changes for children, youth, and their caregivers, which impacted various aspects of their well-being. Public health measures to stem the spread of COVID-19 affected almost all aspects of daily life: routines were upheaved; social interactions were lost; access to programs and resources decreased; and, general distress increased.[1]

COVID-19 exacerbated existing factors and disparities that negatively impact the well-being of children and youth. Youth aged 15-24 years were already experiencing perpetually high rates of distress prior to the pandemic. They are also the least likely age category to access services[2]. Youth already faced barriers to receiving appropriate mental health care, and these only increased during COVID-19. In addition to youth, the pandemic had disproportionate and inequitable effects on families, particularly single-parent and low-income families, and racialized persons.[3,4,5,6]

Family connections were strengthened during the pandemic in some households. Natural supports provide a good opportunity to mitigate the social impacts of the pandemic. Yet, not all children and youth have a supportive environment around them. Recognizing the importance of social supports is critical to post-pandemic recovery and building sustained mental and physical well-being.

WHY DOES WELL-BEING MATTER NOW MORE THAN EVER?

Further, the pandemic has devastated the non-profit, social-serving sector due to increased service demand, decreased revenue, and diminished organizational capacity. The toll has been especially hard on social services organizations for women, children, seniors, people who experience disability, and those that experience homelessness. As these organizations struggle to maintain service under extreme pressures, they are unable to focus on improving their organizational strength and future viability.

There is increasing recognition that prioritizing organizational resilience in the non-profit sector results in better outcomes for staff and the clients they serve. Emphasizing and promoting organizational resilience means that organizations are better equipped to provide services.[7,8,9] They are also able to respond better to community and individual needs during times of need.

The recovery of Alberta's social and economic well-being relies on the social-serving sector's ability to adapt in an ever-changing, uncertain, and increasingly restrictive environment. Sustaining the status quo, or surviving a crisis, are no longer sufficient when needs are becoming more complex, and change happens unpredictably, and drastically. A resilient social-serving sector is more adaptable and innovative, and better able to cope with and recover from crisis.
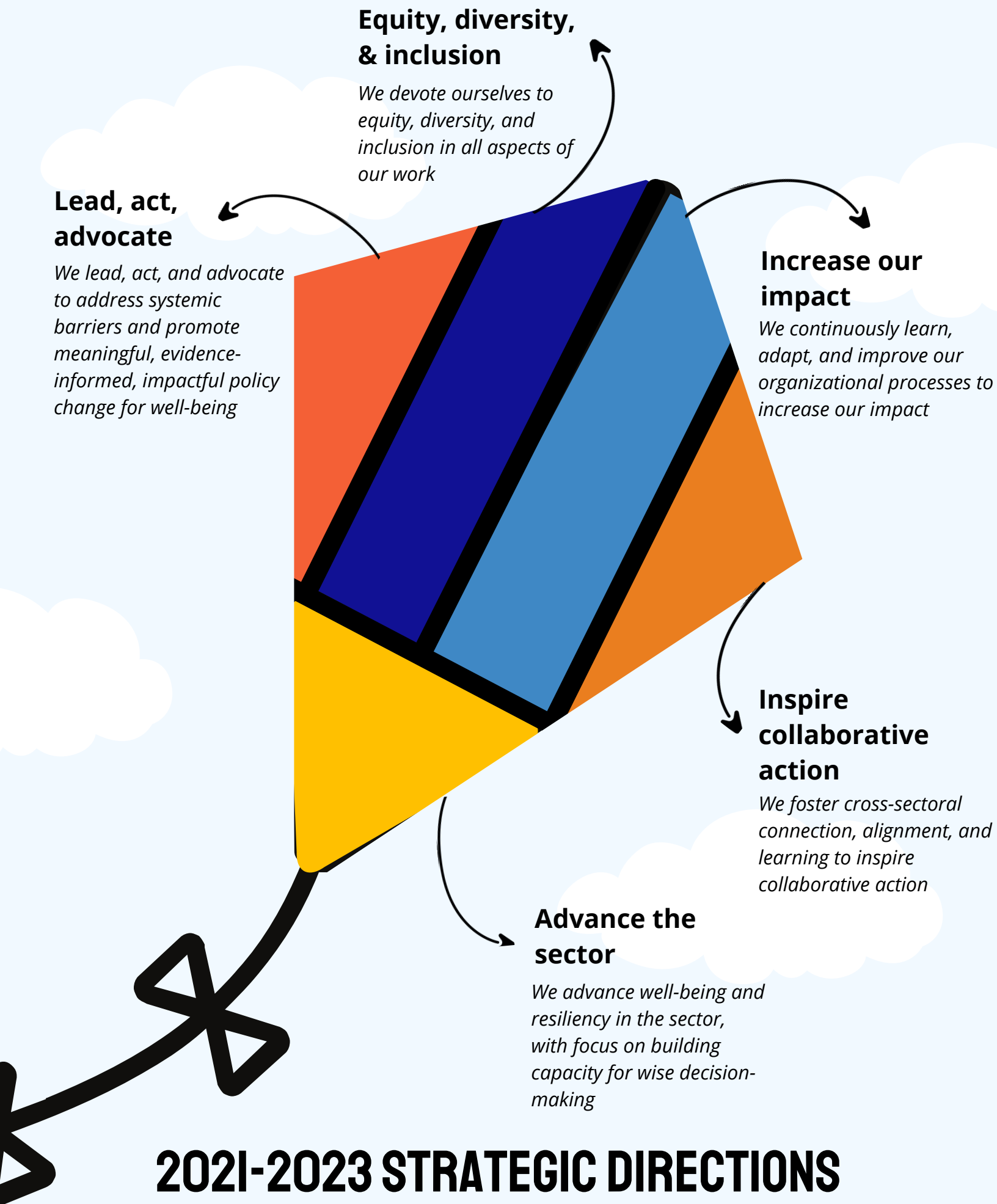
OUR 2021-2023 STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Our 2021-2023 strategic directions are embedded in our approach and ongoing commitment to generating evidence, mobilizing knowledge, and leadership in the sector. We developed these strategic directions from a comprehensive review, and with robust discussion with our staff, board, and stakeholders. We believe these directions are responsive to the broader ecosystem, leverage our partnerships, explore new ways of working together, and make a stronger commitment to real collaboration. In the next years we will redouble our efforts toward meaningful, impactful change through evidence-informed, context-based recommendations.

Our 2021-2023 strategic directions are:

- We lead, act, and advocate to address systemic barriers and promote meaningful, evidence-informed, impactful policy change for well-being

- We foster cross-sectoral connection, alignment, and learning to inspire collaborative action

- We advance well-being and resiliency in the non-profit sector, with focus on building capacity for wise decision-making

- We devote ourselves to equity, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of our work

- We continuously learn, adapt, innovate, and improve our organizational processes to increase our impact

Equity, diversity, & inclusion

We devote ourselves to equity, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of our work

Lead, act, advocate

We lead, act, and advocate to address systemic barriers and promote meaningful, evidence-informed, impactful policy change for well-being

Increase our impact

We continuously learn, adapt, and improve our organizational processes to increase our impact

Inspire collaborative action

We foster cross-sectoral connection, alignment, and learning to inspire collaborative action

Advance the sector

We advance well-being and resiliency in the sector, with focus on building capacity for wise decision-making

2021-2023 STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

LEAD, ACT, ADVOCATE

What are we going to do?

- Pursue projects that directly inform policy and practice to improve the well-being of children, youth, and families
- Focus on projects related to equity-seeking children, youth, and families
- Create a shareable body of knowledge that builds well-being in children, youth, and families most vulnerable to the impacts of systematic exclusion
- Embed context-specific actions, recommendations, and opportunities for action in our reports and deliverables

What is the difference we will make?

- There will be an enhanced understanding of systemic barriers to well-being in Alberta
- Decision-makers will have enhanced access to evidence-informed, context-based policy recommendations on well-being
- There will be a shared understanding of the dimensions of well-being
- There will be improvements in measures of child and family well-being
- There will be an equity-focus to policies targeting recovery from COVID-19

What will we see?

- Improvements in how child, youth, and family well-being is measured in Alberta
- Alignment in well-being language used by government ministries and social serving sectors
- A broad, cross-sectoral network engaged in addressing systemic barriers and inequities related to well-being

INSPIRE COLLABORATIVE ACTION

What are we going to do?

- Facilitate policy discussions and broadly share lessons learned and leading practices to promote innovation among and across sectors
- Implement and evaluate promising and emerging practices to promote sharing and learning
- Partner with stakeholders and organizations who reflect our values, and who share our vision and commitment to impactful and meaningful change
- Strengthen our relationships with Alberta's knowledge system, including creating advisory and knowledge-sharing opportunities with academics, policy makers, practitioners, persons with lived experience, and cultural knowledge-keepers

What is the difference we will make?

- There will be more opportunities for stakeholders across sectors to engage and collaborate on policy solutions related to well-being
- There will be new cross-sector policy advocacy initiatives informed by our recommendations and research

What will we see?

- Strong / shared understanding of actions required to improve well-being across sectors and within our own team
- Improved services for people with complex service needs
- Increased sharing and reduced duplication across organizations

ADVANCE THE SECTOR

What are we going to do?

- Share what we have learned about organizational resiliency in a way that is timely and accessible
- Build capacity among non-profits to improve the way data is collected and used to measure and improve well-being
- Focus on organizational resilience to promote recovery and sustainability in the non-profit sector
- Raise awarness among decision-makers about the needs and impact of the social-serving sector

What is the difference we will make?

- The sector will use trusted data to inform decision-making and guide service delivery
- There will be a comprehensive understanding of the non-profit sector's resilience, which will support COVID-19 recovery
- There will be resilient and robust social-serving organizations to improve their client outcomes

What will we see?

- Improvements in measures of organizational resilience in the non-profit sector
- Increased capacity for collecting, using, and sharing meaningful data among non-profits
- Improved support from decision-makers and better policies that address the root causes of the barriers to well-being among the people / populations they serve

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, & INCLUSION

What are we going to do?

- Engage people with diverse lived experiences in the design, development, and delivery of all our projects
- Define and make public our position and commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Audit and adapt our recruitment efforts and operational practices

What is the difference we will make?

- There will be meaningful input of diverse groups to inform policy and practice recommendations
- There will be the voices, experiences, and perspectives of children, youth, and families in the understanding of the meaning of well-being in Alberta
- PolicyWise staff and board members will feel valued for the unique perspectives, experiences, and wisdom that they bring

What will we see?

- Measurements of cultural safety, equity, and belonging included in well-being
- Improved inclusion of population groups that are based on age, race, gender, sexuality, location of residence, citizenship status, ability, etc.
- Increased inclusion and diversity among our network of partners to reflect the communities we serve
- Equity, diversity, and inclusion are central to our knowledge mobilization strategies and project delivery processes

INCREASE OUR IMPACT

What are we going to do?

- Evolve our governance and organizational structure to reflect our new entrepreneurial business model
- Define and monitor our impact
- Invest in our welcoming, psychologically safe team culture to facilitate learning, improvement, and innovation
- Articulate our approach to comprehensive sustainability in our business model
- Implement a knowledge mobilization strategy to gather and share knowledge, gain influence, enhance impact, and engage with broader audiences

What is the difference we will make?

- We will have diverse, responsive, transparent, and accountable governance
- We will have an efficient, sustainable, proactive approach to our work
- We will have an engaged, passionate, autonomous workforce
- We will demonstrate continual improvement, learning, and responsiveness throughout projects

What will we see?

- Supported and engaged employees
- High quality and consistent approach to project delivery
- Broad, diverse funding sources
- Engaged, knowledgeable Board Directors, Advisors, and Members

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