

# PROGRAMS ADRIFT

## Complaints to the Ombudsman Reveal Systemic Issues

Investigation Seeks Fair Treatment for Families with Health Needs



### What are the Alberta Adult and Child Health Benefit programs?

Two government of Alberta benefit programs designed to help low-income adults and children with their health-related expenses.

### What is Covered?

- Dental care
- Eye exams & glasses
- Prescription drugs
- Diabetic supplies
- Ambulance services
- Essential over-the-counter medication



### Case Example

#### What Happened

- Father of two young children with serious health problems applied to the Alberta Adult Health Benefit program (AAHB or family program).
- He felt discriminated against and complained to the Ombudsman after he applied three times and faced numerous obstacles.
- This complaint and others raised concerns about lost applications, lengthy wait times, inadequate communication and poor service delivery.



#### What We Did

- Opened an investigation into the program and expanded it to include the Alberta Child Health Benefit program.
- Determined that responsibility for the programs lies with two ministries.
- Researched health benefit programs from across Canada—Alberta's programs are unique and generous.
- Discovered key issues within the programs such as inadequate information, an unfair application process, ineffective technology, no policy for service complaints and a lack of accountability.
- Made 28 recommendations and five observations for improvement.



#### Why This Matters

**People who need help from the programs cannot get it.**

The investigation revealed widespread issues affecting applicants' access to essential health benefits. Early on, we shared preliminary findings affecting thousands of Albertans; however, many issues still have not been rectified. We will continue to monitor progress so people who are eligible to receive benefits are treated fairly.

  
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