

Poor day-care record-keeping hampers Alberta gov't ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Alberta day-care and day-home inspectors keep poor records that make it impossible for Children's Services to know whether child-care programs meet provincial standards, the auditor general says.

In a 238-page report released Tuesday, Merwan Saher criticized the ministry for failing to make sure inspectors consistently document and enforce low-risk breaches.

"Improvements are needed in documenting ... monitoring results, including enforcement action taken to remedy non-compliance," Saher wrote. "Without improving documentation processes, the system will not operate as intended."

A low-risk breach happens when day-care operators fail to maintain accurate emergency contact records for a child, for example, or when they fail to post food menus.

Saher said parents should take comfort in the fact that serious problems - ones that could affect the health and safety of a child - were addressed promptly and effectively across the province.

However, failing to document low-risk problems can allow small problems to fester and grow.

The auditor's report contained 41 recommendations, including 30 new ones and 11 that were repeated because they had not yet been implemented. He also chastised the government for moving too slowly to clear up more than 200 recommendations from past reports.

Liberal Leader David Swann criticized the government for failing to pay attention to details, which he said puts people at risk.

"It means we have a government that is not prepared to do the fine details of management and checks, and monitoring and enforcement, which is the basic rule and role of government. Set in place standards, monitor the standards, enforce those standards. Again, we are being reminded that this government fails to do that - even with such a precious issue as child care."

Saher also chastised Service Alberta for failing to show the government is adequately protecting the "highly sensitive and confidential" information it collects about Albertans, including health information and financial data. "The risk of there being corruption of the system, inappropriate entry into the system, is real, it's not imaginary, so Albertans should be concerned."

NDP Leader Brian Mason said this isn't a new issue. "This has been something he has flagged, and yet we are still not all the way there."

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<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7859> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/quality> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/staff>

[5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/unregulated>