

2017 – 2019
ALBERTA FAMILY WELLNESS INITIATIVE

EMBEDDING THE BRAIN STORY

To Catalyze Sustainable Change For Children And Families

AUTHORS



Nathaniel Foote: Chairman, TruePoint

Nathaniel is the Chairman of TruePoint, a founding Board member of the Center for Higher Ambition Leadership, a Senior Fellow of the Harvard Center on the Developing Child, and Board Chair of Activate Healthcare, a private equity backed provider of employer health clinics. During his 35-year career in management consulting, Nathaniel has helped dozens of companies improve performance and accelerate growth through more effective strategy development and greater organizational alignment and commitment. He has also led a number of major, multi-constituency projects to improve innovation, collaboration and outcomes in the not-for-profit sector.

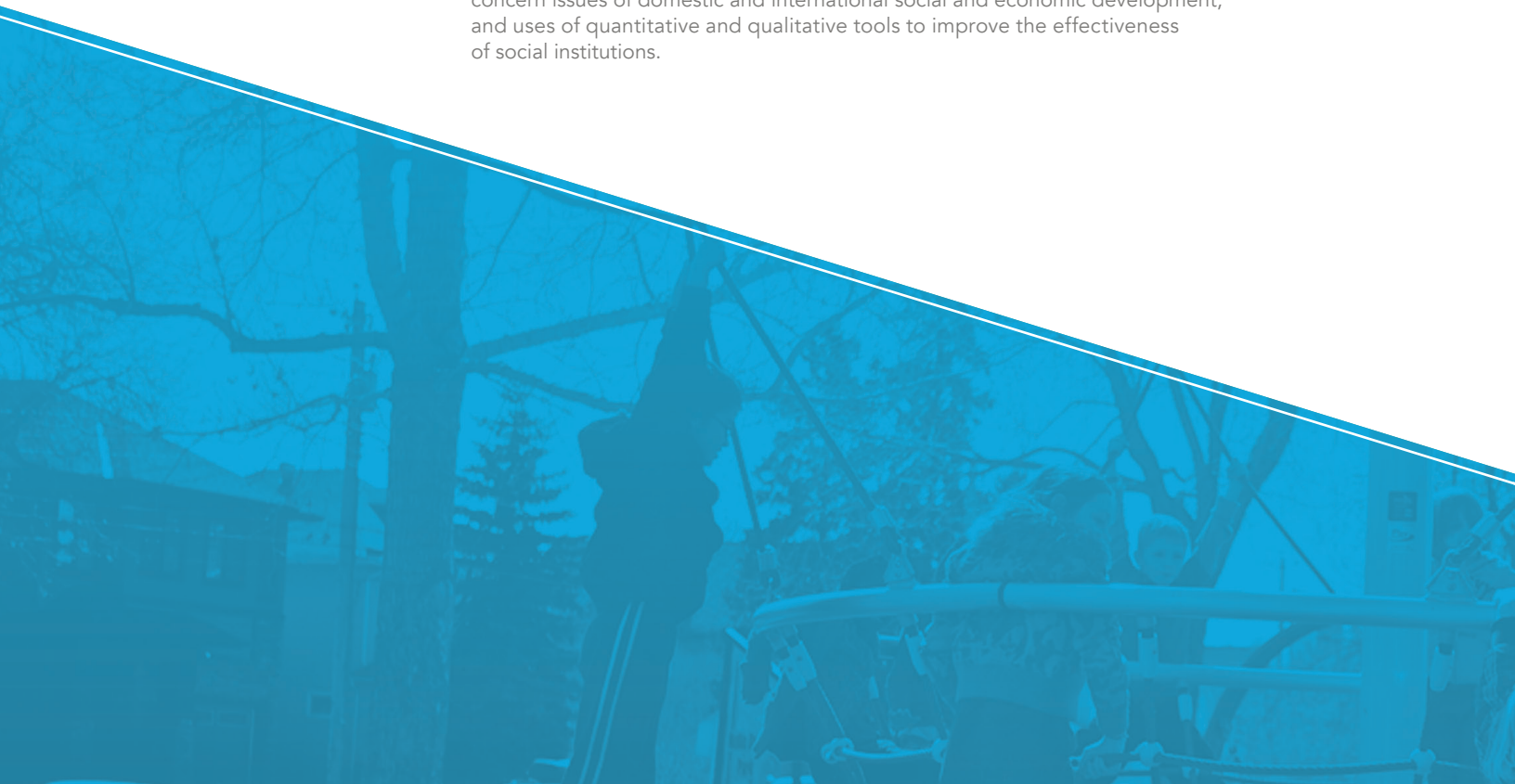
Nathaniel is a co-author of *Higher Ambition: How Great Leaders Create Economic and Social Value*, based on a four-year research study, including interviews with 36 CEOs. He also was a collaborator with Mike Beer on *High Commitment, High Performance* and has written extensively on the role of superior strategy, organization design and knowledge management in achieving high performance.



James Radner: Director of Research, TruePoint

James M. Radner, M.Phil., is the Director of Research at TruePoint and a Senior Fellow at the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. He is also an assistant professor in the School of Public Policy & Governance at the University of Toronto (Canada), where he is the executive director and co-founder of The Boreal Institute for Civil Society. He is also a senior fellow at the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto, where he directs the International Program on Social Entrepreneurship and Civil Society.

Since 2009, James has worked closely with the Center on the Developing Child as part of the Frontiers of Innovation initiative. His teaching and action research concern issues of domestic and international social and economic development, and uses of quantitative and qualitative tools to improve the effectiveness of social institutions.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As we understand the results from the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative (AFWI) developmental evaluation, its theory of philanthropy,¹ and its ongoing work, the AFWI has achieved remarkable success in its core knowledge-mobilization strategy. We believe that the AFWI is now in a position to carry out a “phase shift” in the way it applies that strategy to change systems for better results for Alberta families. As these efforts mature, the Palix Foundation and the AFWI are poised for a significant shift to focus “downstream”—mobilizing knowledge with individual change agents, catalyzing organizational and systems change, building on that success, and embedding knowledge at the front lines—all to catalyze direct change for children and families.

In particular, a deep focus on professional development and training, as well as embedding the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) tool as a standard in front-line practice, can provide a robust platform for improving practices and outcomes, as well as for continuing to influence policy and organizational change.

¹ Radner, James; Foote, Nathaniel; and Quinn Patton, Michael (2015) “The Theory of Philanthropy of the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative,” *The Foundation Review*: Vol. 7: Iss. 4, Article 5.

“The AFWI has targeted key leverage points across all the major systems, addressing early childhood development and its connection to later physical and mental health outcomes, including addiction.”

CONTEXT: 10 YEARS OF SUSTAINED KNOWLEDGE-MOBILIZATION INITIATIVES ARE BEARING FRUIT

A simple way to describe the AFWI’s approach in recent years is to note how it has played the three roles in its theory of philanthropy—knowledge entrepreneur, catalytic convenor, and learning partner for public and community systems—to engage around the core story with selected “change agents” who would then be in a position to use the core story to change their own work and to effect organizational and systems changes as well. (Illustration 1)

The developmental evaluation highlighted the way the AFWI’s work had energized change agents playing multiple roles in Alberta’s systems, and noted the way that the work had catalyzed not only substantial individual change but also, though to a lesser extent, organizational and systems change. The most distal outcomes in the strategy—direct effects on families—were starting to come into view in specific cases at the time of the developmental evaluation, but this was not yet ready for systematic review.

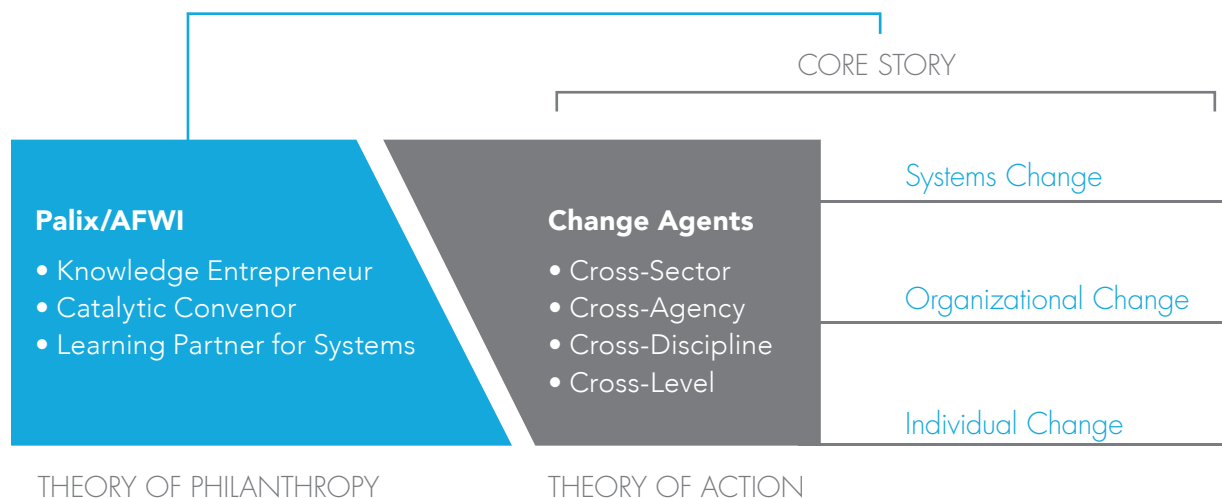


ILLUSTRATION 1

The AFWI in Recent Years: Theory of Philanthropy and Theory of Action.

THE AFWI IS POISED FOR A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT TO FOCUS 'DOWNSTREAM'

As the work has continued to unfold, the AFWI has targeted key leverage points across all the major systems, addressing early childhood development and its connection to later physical and mental health, including addiction, and, in each area, sought to identify a high-impact agenda. (Illustration 2)

While organizational and systems changes will continue to be a work in progress, specific success since the time of the developmental

evaluation, along with feedback reported to the Foundation Patron after the latest Symposia, suggests that there is now sufficient activity around the core story within key systems. Change agents are able to continue promoting the core story, with the AFWI in more of a supportive role, rather than a fully proactive role. This implies that the AFWI could continue to engage with change agents, but in a less intensive way, while shifting its more intensive focus to catalyzing the final or distal phase of its

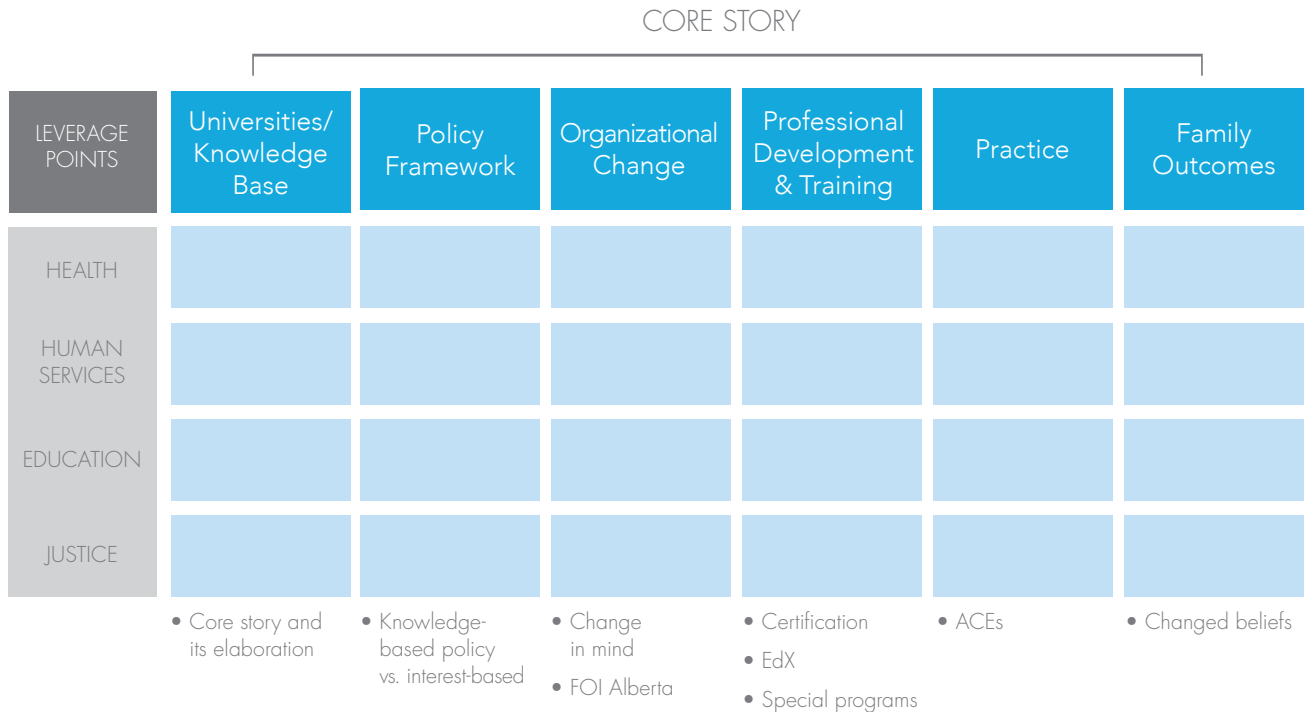


ILLUSTRATION 2

The AFWI has targeted a broad range of leverage points across all the major systems, addressing early childhood development, mental health and addiction.

Theory of Action: front-line benefits for families.

This proposed shift in focus is depicted in the illustration below as a move from primary attention on the “upstream” level to increased attention on the “downstream.” Although such a shift would not mean abandoning the AFWI’s opportunity-based activity at the upstream level, it would suggest that such upstream activity be increasingly viewed in the light of how it supports, informs, and is informed by the downstream strategy. So, the full picture is as follows:

Major current AFWI activities that directly fit the proposed downstream

focus include embedding the ACEs tool as a standard across the province, as a direct way to apply “core story” knowledge to front-line practice (fitting the “Changing front-line practices” box below) and the development of curricula and certification for front-line professionals (fitting the “Professional development & training” box below; note that by including training in this overall category, we mean to include workforce development generally, but without limiting the effort on professional development as such).

“There is now sufficient activity around the Core Story within key systems that change agents are able to continue promoting it.”

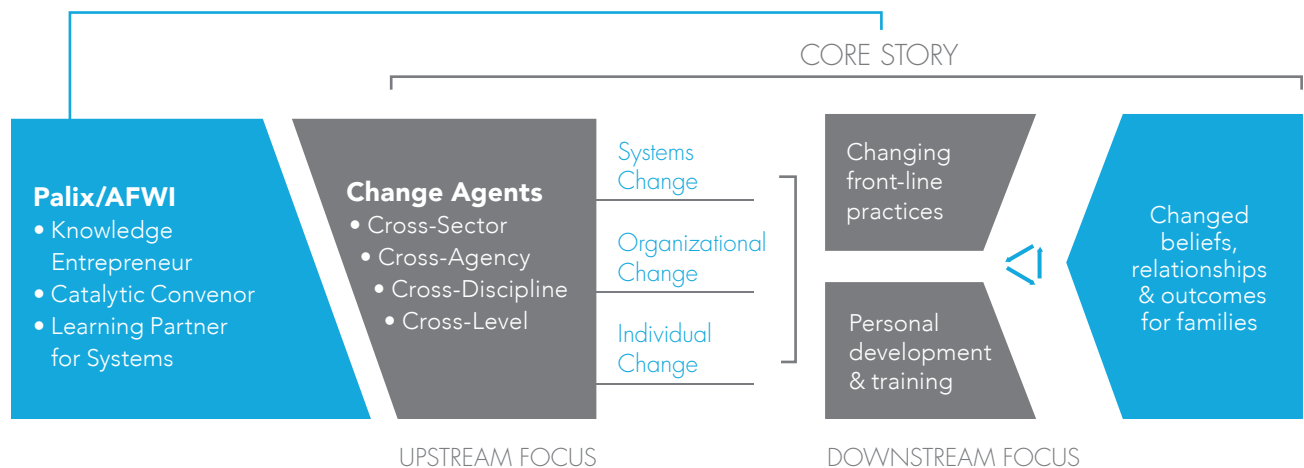


ILLUSTRATION 3

AFWI shift from “upstream” focus on change agents to “downstream” focus on front-line professionals and practices.

A FOCUS ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING CAN PROVIDE A ROBUST PLATFORM FOR THE FULL SPECTRUM OF AFWI INITIATIVES

The illustration on the facing page depicts our suggestion that a focus on professional development and training can, through feedback loops based on continued learning, reinforce and energize the AFWI’s “upstream activities” while at the same time allowing the AFWI to directly learn from the impact of the core story on the front lines—on family outcomes. The proposed agenda, then, includes both a series of professional development and training activities along with complementary efforts to support cross-spectrum feedback loops and learning.

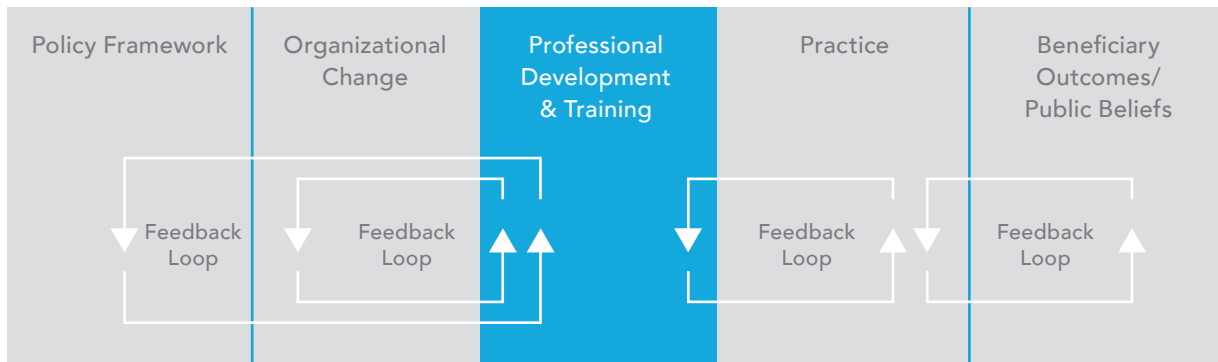
As this illustration very roughly suggests, the professional development and training work could form the core of the AFWI’s ongoing knowledge entrepreneurship—its active approach to embedding knowledge in systems—while on an opportunity-driven

basis, it could continue to act as a catalytic convenor with policy-makers, and, finally, to encourage and support on-the-ground learning at the front lines in its learning partner role.

In sum, we suggest that, if the AFWI adopts an active focus on professional development and training, it could deepen its engagement with Alberta’s systems at the very level where action directly affects families—the front lines—while continuing to advance its entire Theory of Action. Such an approach seems to us an ideal way to capitalize on the specific successes of the AFWI’s change agent strategy and to systematize that success, ensuring ongoing progress even in, for example, hard economic or turbulent governmental periods of time.



CORE STORY



POTENTIAL AGENDA ELEMENTS

- Forums to share perspectives from professionals on supports/barriers to improved practices
- Certification
- Basic competency curriculum
- Extended curricula tailored to specific professional groups
- Targeted workforce development programming
- Supplemental materials to support sharing and the spread of best practices and evidence of a link to improved outcomes
- Practice advisory councils
 - By professional group
 - Overseeing curriculum
 - Curating best practices
 - Supporting/distilling evolutions of links to improved outcomes
 - Highlighting supports/barriers to improved practices

CATALYTIC CONVENOR

KNOWLEDGE ENTREPRENEUR

LEARNING PARTNER FOR SYSTEMS

ILLUSTRATION 4

A deep AFWI focus on professional development and training can provide a robust platform for improving practices and outcomes, as well as for continuing to influence policy and organizational change in accordance with the theory of philanthropy.



LOOKING BEYOND ALBERTA

The final illustration looks briefly beyond the province to the potential for the AFWI to expand their national and international influence. This adds a third dimension (depicted as depth) to the picture we have been describing: the dimension of other jurisdictions. Here, once again, we suggest that, while the full

spectrum of activities is relevant as a national and international model, the concreteness and relative portability of programs like the proposed Brain Story Certification course make the AFWI's professional development and training program a natural leading edge for sharing learning beyond Alberta.

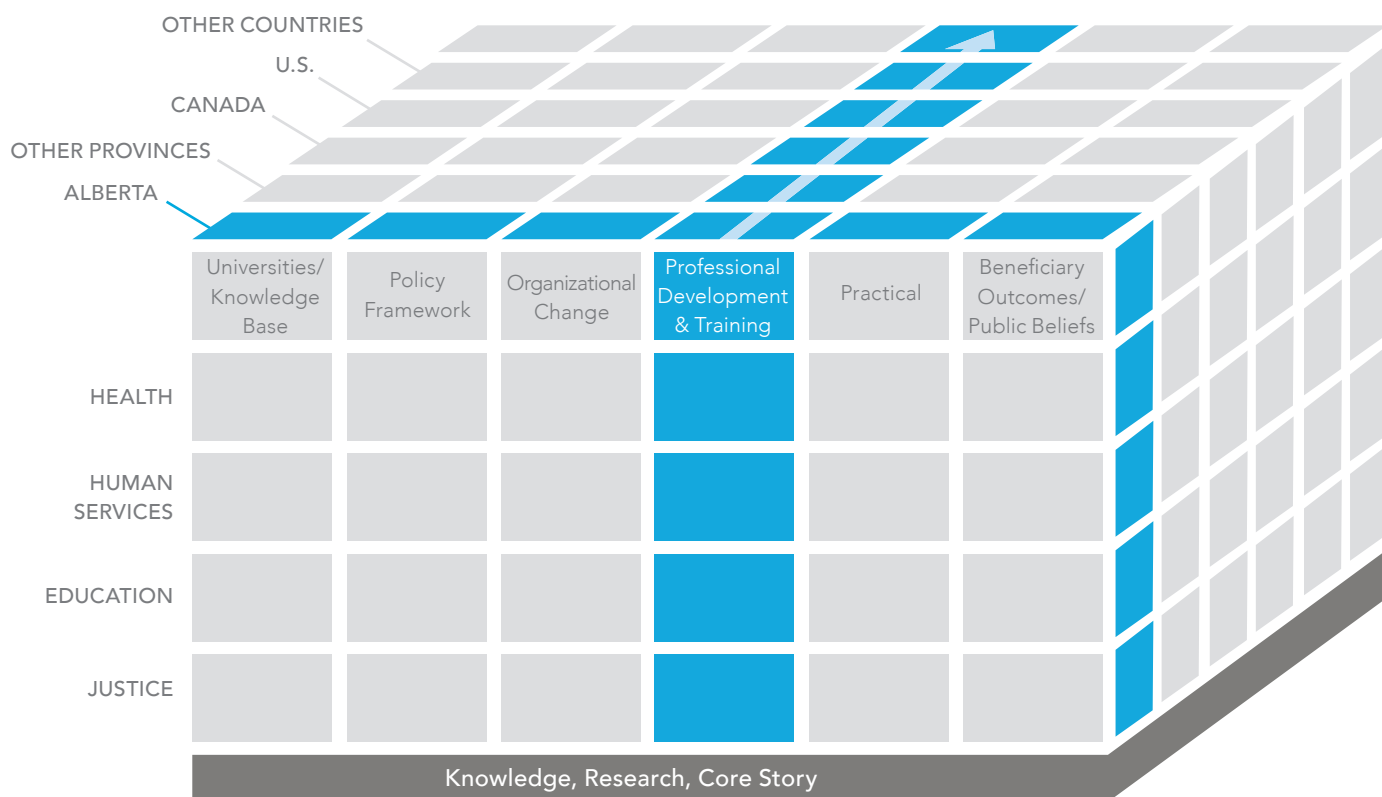


ILLUSTRATION 5

A focus on professional development and training also provides the clearest path to impact beyond Alberta.

CONCLUSION

By focusing the AFWI's next phase on embedding the Brain Story as a core knowledge competency for all those in the workforce who engage with and care for children and families, the AFWI is poised to make a significant and long-lasting contribution to change, leading to better health and wellness outcomes. This next phase, undertaken with a wide array of partners, holds unprecedented promise for preventing and buffering ACEs and for strengthening mental health and well-being across the lifecourse for the benefit of current and future generations.



Better health and well-being for
Alberta families is within reach.
By empowering change agents to
understand and act upon the Brain Story,
the AFWI is sharing tools to improve
lifelong outcomes for physical and
mental health, including addiction.



PALIXFOUNDATION.ORG