



# ASK AN EXPERT

## Funding and Measurement Reform for First Nations Child and Family Services: Promoting Thriving Communities

By: *The Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD)\**

### INTRODUCTION:

In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (Tribunal) found Canada to be discriminating against 165,000 First Nations children in its approach to funding the First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) program, and flawed, narrow implementation of the scope of Jordan's Principle.

The Tribunal had two main messages in its rulings for First Nations child and family services (FNCFS): 1) end discrimination; 2) ensure discrimination does not reoccur.

This information sheet and accompanying podcast with Dr. Helaina Gaspard of the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD) discusses how, in order to uphold the rulings, reform in FNCFS should address funding amounts, system structure, and accountability.

### The Big Three:

What do First Nations need to know about funding and measurement reform in FNCFS?

- **Funding:** service providers need resources (including money) to take care of children and families. Funding should be connected to the different realities, e.g., geography/remoteness, housing, potable water, income-based poverty, etc. of First Nations and should be sufficient to meet needs.
- **Structure:** The incentives, rules, and conditions that determine when and how funding moves in a system should support flexible decision-making in First Nations and agencies who know how to best take care of their children and families. These are the terms that shape how funding is transferred to a recipient and how they can use it. The terms should promote local decision-making to meet the needs of communities.
- **Accountability:** data and evidence can be a proactive strategy for First Nations. Owning, and analyzing your own information can be used for planning, decision-making, advocacy, and crucially, reporting to your community. By analyzing your own information, you might start to see patterns or early warning signs of when extra support might be needed or when

community indicators are improving. This means First Nations control their own narrative when it comes to demonstrating and communicating results.

### What's the evidence?

How do we know if changes to funding and structure really work for First Nations kids?

The overwhelming evidence that the parties put forward to the Tribunal pointed to the fact that the previous approach to funding First Nations child and family services was insufficient, and that change is needed in order to prevent the discrimination from reoccurring.

Information is power; good information for First Nations by First Nations can support better planning, advocacy, and service delivery.

Parties to the Tribunal had a lot of information they compiled and presented. This is an opportunity to build your own information systems, build your own data, and generate your own evidence. First Nations can lead with evidence on what works for their children by measuring what matters in their communities.

### Myth-busting:

What are the common misperceptions, practices, or assumptions regarding funding and measurement reform and why should they be considered myths?

**Assumption:** *Change is easy.*

**Reality:** Transition takes time. First Nations and agencies should consider their visions, starting points, resources, tools, needs, etc. to plan for changes to funding and measurement. There are experienced leaders and practitioners who can offer insight. A former FNCFS agency director that managed a funding change shared their experiences in the Phase 2 report<sup>1</sup>.

**Assumption:** *Measuring something makes me accountable for the result.*

**Reality:** Measurement is an important form of accountability. Measuring does not give you a solution, but it helps you to monitor and raise flags, offering an early warning sign that something might need your attention (or is working well). Measurement does not give you all of the answers immediately, but it lets you know when something is changing so you can plan or seek out the needed supports.

Measuring and monitoring income-based poverty levels, housing, access to potable water, etc. for CFS, does not make you accountable for addressing them all. Being aware of them, however, can help to inform your service delivery approach. Without measurement, First Nations will let others decide whether things are getting better or whether programs and funding should change.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix R and Part IV of *Funding First Nations child and family services (FNCFS): A performance budget approach to well-being*: [https://ifsd.ca/web/default/files/FNCFS/2020-09-09\\_Final%20report\\_Funding%20First%20Nations%20child%20and%20family%20services%5B1%5D.pdf](https://ifsd.ca/web/default/files/FNCFS/2020-09-09_Final%20report_Funding%20First%20Nations%20child%20and%20family%20services%5B1%5D.pdf)

### What works?

What are some key implications for child welfare policy and practice when it comes to funding and performance measurement?

We know that additional funding alone, may not lead to better CFS outcomes. CFS is interconnected with the realities of a community. For instance, adequate housing, access to potable water from the tap, internet connectivity, etc., can all impact the realities of children and families. Getting to better outcomes in CFS means building well-being across the community.

We also know that early intervention has positive long-term results. Dr. James Heckman won a Nobel Prize in economics for his research on the value of early intervention and the benefits not only for children but for families too. Additional information is available from the Heckman Equation website.

Governance and capacity-building are also key success factors for large-scale transformation as is being planned for CFS. Without a solid foundation, it's difficult to imagine that additional funding can lead to better results for children and families on a long-term sustainable basis.

Positive and sustainable change takes time. It took decades to get to this point and will likely take many years to recover. Ultimately, this is about cultural change. This means that practice must now follow policy with deeper integration of culture; programming tightly linked to results; better training and support for staff; funding and structure tied to outcomes; and measurement to drive a narrative owned by First Nations.

### Additional resources:

IFSD shares monthly updates on its research work to support FNCFS reform. You can read them on our website or email [info@ifsd.ca](mailto:info@ifsd.ca) to receive them via email.

For more information on IFSD's work on funding approaches and measurement for FNCFS, see the full report mentioned above, Funding First Nations child and family services (FNCFS): A performance budget approach to well-being.

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