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Fact Sheet

First Nations Child and Family Services

The First Nations Child and Family Services Program is one component of a suite of Social Programs that addresses the well-being of children and families. The main objective of the Program is to assist First Nations in providing access to culturally sensitive child and family services in their communities, and to ensure that the services provided to them are comparable to those available to other provincial residents in similar circumstances.

- The First Nations Child and Family Services Program supports 105 First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies to deliver child and family services to approximately 160,000 children and youth in approximately 447 out of 573 First Nation communities.
- Last year, approximately \$33.5 million was allocated to Quebec for the First Nations Child and Family Services Program.

First Nations Child and Family Services Program and provincial link: The program funds and promotes the development and expansion of child and family services agencies designed, managed and controlled by First Nations. Since child and family services is an area of provincial jurisdiction, these First Nation agencies receive their mandate and authorities from provincial or territorial governments and function in a manner consistent with existing provincial or territorial child and family services legislation. In areas where First Nations Child & Family Services agencies do not exist, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada funds service which is provided by provincial or territorial organizations or departments.

Mandate of First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies: First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies are mandated by the provinces and territories to provide protection (through foster care, institutional care and group homes services) and prevention services (family supports and in-home services) for First Nation children and families at risk on reserve. Service standards must be in accordance with provincial / territorial legislation and

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standards. Currently, Program funding is largely based on protection services, which encourage Agencies to remove First Nation children from their parental homes, rather than providing prevention services, which could allow children to remain safely in their homes.

- Program expenditures were \$417 million in 2005-2006 and are expected to grow to \$540 million by 2010-11 if the program continues to operate under the protection-based model.
- From 1996-97 to 2004-05, the number of First Nation children in care increased by 64.34%.
- Approximately 5.8% of First Nation children living on reserve are in care out of their parental homes.

Current Issues: First Nation children are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. Placement rates on reserve reflect a lack of available prevention services to mitigate family crisis.

- The current Program also lacks the authority to provide adoption subsidies and supports and less costly placement options such as kinship care, which are more effective for the child.
- The reimbursement regime for high cost placements out of the parental home combined with the lack of resources for least disruptive measures/prevention services is contributing to escalating program costs.

Changes in the landscape: Provinces and territories have introduced new policy approaches to child welfare and a broader continuum of services and programs that First Nations Child and Family Services must deliver to retain their provincial mandates as service providers. However, the current federal funding approach to child and family services has not let First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies keep pace with the provincial and territorial policy changes, and therefore, the First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies are unable to deliver the full continuum of services offered by the provinces and territories to other Canadians. A fundamental change in the funding approach of First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies to child welfare is required in order to reverse the growth rate of children coming into care, and in order for the agencies to meet their mandated responsibilities.

The Future: A Joint National Policy Review on First Nations Child and Family Services, completed in 2000, recommended that the federal government increase prevention services for children at risk - services that must be provided before considering the removal of the child and placement in out of home care - and that it provide adequate funding for this purpose.

- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada funded research undertaken by the

First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada in 2004 and 2005. The reports: *WEN:DE: We are coming to the light of day*, and *WEN:DE: The journey continues*, included recommendations for investments and policy adjustments required to address the shortcomings of the current system. This research will form the basis of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's request for investments and policy renewal.

- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Alberta First Nations, and the province of Alberta are working in partnership to support the opportunity for First Nations to implement the Alberta Response Model on reserve. The Alberta Response Model is a differential response model that emphasizes early assessment of families to identify children at risk and provides services to facilitate either keeping the child safely in the parental home or, if they are removed, to allow for their early return. This proactive service delivery model has been successful in Alberta both on (in First Nation communities where the province delivers the service) and off reserve. Alberta's experience has been that 85.2% of the families receiving family support services have not required further child intervention services within the following year. This has led to a 22% decrease in caseloads since implementing this model in 2001. Likewise, in 7 First Nations where the Province provides child and family services on reserve, caseloads have decreased by 10% since 2001 resulting in better outcomes for children.
- The Government of Canada is committed to working with First Nations, provincial / territorial, and federal partners and agencies to implement a modernized vision of the First Nations Child and Family Services Program, a program that strives for safe and strong children and youth supported by healthy parents.
- The strategy is to refocus the program from a protection-based approach towards a preventive-based model, promote a variety of care options to provide children and youth with safe, nurturing and permanent homes, and build on partnerships and implement practical solutions to improve child intervention services.

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