

# Information Sheet

## *First Nations Child Poverty: A Literature Review and Analysis* Summary of Chapter Four

First Nations Child & Family  
Caring Society of Canada



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### **Enduring Legacies: Child Welfare, Underfunding & Socio-Economic Impacts**

The socio-economic impacts of over 140 years of colonialism and impoverishment are multiple and overlapping, with poverty shaping “almost every aspect of the lives of Aboriginal children and families who experience it.”<sup>1</sup> Chapter Four documents how enduring colonial practices of assimilation and impoverishment place First Nations children at risk and exacerbate historical and intergenerational traumas of the earlier colonial and residential school eras.

#### **Poverty as rationale for child removal**

Historical documents indicate that residential schools were the earliest form of child welfare. As residential schools began to close in the 1950s, the child welfare system grew, and the removal of First Nations children continued at an accelerated pace. The newly-formed Canadian Association of Social Workers declared that their services would ensure “the full assimilation of Indians into Canadian life.”<sup>2</sup>

Just as government administrators removed Aboriginal children they deemed “not properly cared for” to residential schools beginning in the late 1800s, social workers use the rationale of “neglect” to remove record numbers of Aboriginal children from their family homes. In the realm of child welfare, “neglect” refers to a caregiver’s failure to provide “adequate clothing, food, or shelter, deliberately or otherwise.”<sup>3</sup> The

government’s chronic underfunding of essential services for First Nations communities, along with the high levels of poverty resulting from centuries of colonialism and attempted assimilation, contribute to conditions of “neglect” that rationalize the removal of First Nations children from their homes at unprecedented rates.

#### **Multiple and overlapping impacts**

Inequitable funding for education and lack of culturally appropriate programs contribute to the continued displacement of First Nations children from their communities, and to the lowest levels of high school graduation in Canada. Barriers to equitable education and health services put First Nations children at a disadvantage from the start, contributing to the highest unemployment and lowest-income levels as adults.

Underfunding of housing on reserves results in substandard and inadequate housing, which is both a cause and effect of poverty, and is linked to high stress levels, low educational attainment, poor health, high unemployment rates, increased child welfare intervention, and increased risk of violence, homelessness and sexual exploitation. There is an inextricable link between poverty and ill health, as well as between poverty and emotional stress, suicide, food insecurity, and criminalization. Aboriginal peoples are massively overrepresented in the prison population, and research links high incarceration rates to poverty and previous involvement in the child welfare system.

**[Click here to download \*First Nations Child Poverty: A Literature Review and Analysis\*](#)**

<sup>1</sup> Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, D’Hondt, Formsmma, 2004, *Keeping the Promise*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> CASW as cited in Jennissen, T. & Lundy, C. (n.d.). Keeping sight of social justice: 80 years of building CASW.

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal, 2011.