



**Niijaansinaanik**  
Child and Family Services

# Orange Standard Initiative Discussion Papers





# Niijaansinaanik

## Child and Family Services



## Executive Summary

This series of “Discussion Papers” have been developed as part of the Niijaansinaanik Child and Family Services (“NCFS”) *Orange Standard Initiative*. They are living documents that reflect an up-to-date picture of the many considerations that have gone into the *Orange Standard Initiative*’s development. They also will continuously reflect the feedback that has been received through our community engagement process regarding the *Orange Standard*.

Each of the individual Papers included in this document is a starting point for discussion on themes or topics that are integral to the *Orange Standard Initiative*. The Papers are each divided into the following five sections:

1. “Key Soundbites”, offers a three point summary of the information in each Paper;
2. “What you Need to Know”, which functions as a plain language summary of the most important information for the Paper;
3. “Further Reading”, which gives the reader additional information about the topic;
4. “References”, which indicates where information has been sourced; and
5. “NCFS Discussion Notes / Summaries / Input”, which will serve as a form for tracking changes to each Discussion Paper over time

Each Discussion Paper will be edited as community feedback is received through our community engagement process, and throughout the entirety of the *Orange Standard Initiative* project development.

These Discussion Papers will also be made publicly available throughout the *Orange Standard Initiative* project development, to demonstrate how the project team is meeting deliverables, and engaging with topics relevant to child wellbeing.

Please note, key terms throughout these documents have been standardized for ease of reference and brevity. Readers will encounter the term “member First Nations” throughout the Discussion Papers, this term refers to Wasauksing First Nation, Shawanaga First Nation, Magnetawan First Nation, Henvey Inlet First Nation, Dokis First Nation and Wahnapiatae First Nation, all of which govern and receive services from NCFS.

We welcome your comments, insights and feedback to help deepen our understanding of these topics and build our collective vision for the *Orange Standard Initiative*.



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## Background

In April of 2021, Niijaansinaanik Child and Family Services (NCFS) became a designated Child Well-Being Agency, and began to assert our member-First Nations jurisdiction over Child Well-being. NCFS is mandated to provide both protection and prevention services.

Our member-First Nations, and leadership have also determined that it is important to move beyond the status-quo and the current provincial standards model, towards a higher degree of First Nations Child and Family Services community identity and aspiration.

In October of 2021, NCFS embarked on a strategic planning process that is focused on two fronts. Firstly, to accelerate agency plans to move beyond a 'delegated authority' model from the Province of Ontario, to a First Nation-directed model of service excellence. Secondly, to obtain critical feedback from our member-First Nations as to the delivery of First Nations Child and Family Services.

The Strategic Plan developed to date brings us to the current development of the Orange Standard Initiative.

**Purpose:** This document is intended to assist various as a starting point for discussions on the strategic planning priorities, and as a record of those priorities as the Orange Standard Initiative develops.

**Key considerations:** the following key considerations are important toward achieving a strong level of input to the overall strategic plan implementation process:

- Consultation of families in the member First-Nations we serve;
- Input from other stakeholders, including Elders, knowledge keepers, experts in Child and Family services and leadership is central;
- All information must be gathered and published in simple, clear and concise terms to make the discussion papers as widely accessible as possible.

**Research:** each discussion paper includes information gathered from the following sources:

- Primary and secondary source published materials (academic articles, studies, reports, commission findings) that have bearing on the overall project;
- Historic NCFS information, including plans, policies and positions from member-First Nations;
- Notes from engagement meetings, individual oral input and written submissions;
- Resolutions, motions, and other decisions from member-First Nations

**Function:** the discussion papers will continue to exist as evolving, "living" documents to reflect the information obtained through engagement and will be available throughout the duration of the NCFS Strategic Plan.





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## 1. Discussion papers and redesigning child and family services

### Key Soundbites

1. **“Grounded in community, guided by strategy.”**  
NCFS uses discussion papers to gather insight from First Nations voices and align our service delivery with each community’s unique needs, as identified in the Strategic Plan.
2. **“Culturally safe care starts with listening.”**  
Through research, engagement, and collaboration, NCFS is enhancing access to trauma-informed, culturally safe prevention and protection services for our children, youth, and families.
3. **“From barriers to breakthroughs.”**  
Discussion papers identify service gaps and recommend innovative, community-driven solutions to improve quality, increase cultural competency, and strengthen partnerships across all levels.

### What you need to know

An important part of Niijaansinaanik’s Child and Family Services (NCFS) development of the “Orange Standard” are the discussions which are happening within our member First Nations, between community members, leadership, knowledge keepers, elders and experts in child welfare. These discussion papers are a tool to help gather and publish information from community members about our process, and what they expect to see in the Orange Standard.

The discussion papers are a starting point for conversations, and they will evolve as our engagement with our member First Nations goes ahead. The goal is for the discussion papers to help us work better with each community based on what they need. We have five steps to do this: (1) clarify the agency’s mandate; (2) research each community’s needs; (3) gather input from our executive team; (4) engage our communities; and (5) update our draft working documents in accordance with identified goals and recommendations.

As a starting point, these papers cover topics such as Child and Family Services history, current important issues to address, foundational principles, goals, and visions for the future. It is important that we hear from everyone so that we can work together and include all voices in what will become the Orange Standard.

### Further reading

NCFS is utilizing “discussion papers” to assist in publishing information, as well as in gathering the input and feedback from valued stakeholders, including experts, knowledge keepers and elders, leadership and citizenship of member-First Nations, NCFS staff, NCFS board and NCFS executive team. The objective of these discussion papers is to enhance the







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agency's efforts in addressing the specific needs of each member-First Nation, as identified through our strategic planning exercise.

The methodology for this process involves five steps, beginning with 1) the clarification of the agency's mandate; (2) extensive research on each community's needs; (3) input from the executive team; (4) engagement with the community; and (5) drafting of working documents in accordance with strategic goals and recommendations.

The goal is to initiate the implementation of the NCFS priority list identified in the Strategic Plan, and this is an important process to ensure that our time in community engagement is efficiently used to identify the most relevant and pressing issues in each of the NCFS member First Nations, and to ensure alignment between NCFS services and community needs and expectations.

NCFS aims to improve access to culturally safe prevention and protection services to the children youth and families of its member First Nations, while cultivating a shared understanding of what it means to promote leading and innovative practices in Child Well-Being. The discussion papers identify barriers to access and will serve as a means to provide recommendations for overcoming those barriers.

Another NCFS priority is improving the quality and effectiveness of service provision. By improving service quality, NCFS can better meet the needs of the children, youth and families of member First Nations and support them in achieving their goals. The discussion papers identify areas for improvement, such as enhancing cultural competency among service providers, implementing evidence-based practices, and increasing collaboration with community partners.

Discussion papers also address trauma-informed care for Indigenous children and families. Trauma-informed care recognizes the impact of trauma on individuals and seeks to create a safe and supportive environment for healing. NCFS aims to implement trauma-informed practices and provide training for service providers to better support Indigenous children and families who have experienced trauma.

Lastly, the discussion papers will identify strategies for promoting community involvement and engagement. By involving the community in the decision-making process, the NCFS can better align its services with community needs and expectations. Strategies may include establishing community advisory committees, hosting community events and workshops, and providing regular updates on agency activities.

In conclusion, the NCFS discussion paper list is a critical step in improving the agency's efforts towards the specific needs of each community as identified through the strategic planning exercise. By gathering feedback and input from various stakeholders, the NCFS can better align its services with community needs and expectations, improve access to services,





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enhance service quality, provide trauma-informed care, and promote community involvement and engagement. The goal is to provide culturally safe prevention and protection services to children, youth, and families while cultivating a shared understanding of what it means to promote leading and innovative practices in Child Well-Being.

### References:

N/A

### NCFS Discussion Notes / Summaries / Input:

Source	Sub-source	Notes	Feedback received	Edit approved
<b>Document research</b>	Report title			
<b>Community engagements</b>	Report Title			
<b>Governance Edits</b>	Discussion Paper Leadership Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suggestion to make each paper more readable resulted in addition of "Key Soundbites"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>January 28, 2025</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>March 29, 2025</li> </ul>
	<i>Anishinaabewin Nikayaa Nkoobnigay</i> Discussion Paper Review Panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>				



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## 2. NCFS Orange Standard Development

### Key Soundbites

1. **“A new standard rooted in culture and rights.”**

The Orange Standard redefines Indigenous child welfare through a culturally grounded, rights-based model that prioritizes community voices and the well-being of every child.

2. **“Equity isn’t optional—it’s foundational.”**

By addressing funding disparities and aligning with UNDRIP and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, NCFS is building a future where Indigenous children receive fair, dignified, and culturally safe care.

3. **“Every Child Matters—now and always.”**

The Orange Standard acknowledges the legacy of colonial harm and moves toward healing by empowering families, reconnecting children with their communities, and delivering services defined by Indigenous values and excellence.

### What you need to know

Niijaansinaanik Child and Family Services (NCFS) is developing the Orange Standard Service Delivery Model to support our children, youth, and families through the provision of culturally safe services. The Orange Standard is based on four pillars: 1) Rights of the Child; 2) fair funding for First Nation Child and Family Services; 3) Indigenous history heritage, and culture; and 4) an “Every Child Matters” principle.

NCFS aims to provide prevention and protection services with reference to the Orange Standard, which will reflect community-defined best practices. A plan has been developed which includes collaboration with government partners, child well-being experts, and other collaborators to help create new standards that break away from colonial approaches.

### Further reading

Niijaansinaanik Child and Family Services (“NCFS”) has begun developing a new standardized approach to providing Indigenous Child, Youth, and Family Well-Being services through the development of the Orange Standard Service Delivery Model (“Orange Standard”). The Orange Standard approach aims to cultivate a shared understanding of what it means to provide culturally safe prevention and protection services to children, youth, and families. It is guided by four pillars which, include 1) the Rights of the Child; 2) First Nation Child and Family Funding Equity; 3) Indigenous History, Heritage and Culture; and 4) an “Every Child Matters” Framework of Operational Excellence.

The Orange Standard’s principles are community and culturally defined to best reflect the needs of the communities we serve. The central focus of the Orange Standard is on the







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best interests of the child, and what supports will be needed to contribute to the child's well-being. The process utilized to develop the Orange Standard involves outreach to government officials, experts in child-welfare, families or our member First Nations, leadership of our member First Nations and other collaborators who can bring new structure and standards to the current system of child-welfare.

The Orange Standard aligns with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDRIP), which was endorsed by Canada for implementation and brought into force in Canada in 2021 with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. Articles 5, 20, 21 and 23 of UNDRIP affirms the right of Indigenous peoples to maintain, develop and administer social programs which impact them.

The Rights of the Child pillar in the Orange Standard is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of every child. This pillar ensures that the rights of Indigenous children are protected and that their best interests are always prioritized. The Orange Standard also aligns with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDRIP) which asserts Indigenous children's rights to education (Article 14), protection from economic exploitation (Article 17), right to improvement of economic and social conditions (Article 21) and right to protection against violence and discrimination (Article 22).

The NCFS Orange Standards initiative is part of a larger movement towards implementing Indigenous-led child welfare services in Canada. This movement is driven by the recognition that Indigenous children have been disproportionately affected by the child welfare system and that Canada's current system does not reflect Indigenous values, culture and traditions. The Orange Standard also reflects an "every child matters" principle, which recognizes that the *Indian Act* and other colonial interventions have infringed upon family integrity within the member First Nations we serve, through displacement and de-registration. This history causes a need for families to reconnect and for children to return to their home communities. The member First Nations we serve must be able to recognize and equitably support the children who belong to their community.

The First Nation Child and Family Funding Equity pillar aims to address the ongoing inequities in funding for First Nation Child and Family Services. The Orange Standard aims to ensure that funding is allocated equitably, and that Indigenous organizations are not financially disadvantaged compared to non-Indigenous organizations.

In addition to NCFS's development of the Orange Standard, other initiatives and programs developed by the Federal Government are supporting Indigenous-led child welfare services in Canada. For example, the First Nations Child and Family Services Program (FNCFS) provides funding to Indigenous organizations to deliver child welfare services on reserve. The program is currently being reformed by Canada following decisions by the





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Canadian Human Rights Tribunal which found that Canada was discriminating against First Nations youth and families by underfunding the FNCFS program.

The development and implementation of the Orange Standard represents an important step towards ensuring that our children and youth have access to culturally appropriate and equitable services. These initiatives reflect a commitment to reconciliation and the recognition of the inherent rights and dignity of Indigenous peoples.

### **References:**

- Nijjaansinaanik Child and Family Services, “Orange Standard” online: <https://perma.cc/9FA5-JGGZ>
- United Nations, “UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”, online: <https://perma.cc/CSW6-WWYD>
- UN General Assembly, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, A/RES/61/295, 2 October 2007, <https://perma.cc/LG8Y-GCLA>
- Convention on the rights of the child (1989) Treaty no. 27531. United Nations Treaty Series, 1577, pp online: <https://perma.cc/WA2J-2CDC>
- Government of Canada, “First Nations Child and Family Services Program”, February 2024, online: <https://perma.cc/8WD5-UW4Y>

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<b>Other</b>				





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### 3. NCFS History

#### Key Soundbites

1. **“Children are gifts from the Creator, and community is their first caregiver.”**  
For generations, our cultures have nurtured our children with holistic care rooted in tradition. NCFS honors this by building services that reflect the strength of community and the sacred responsibility of parents and extended family.
2. **“Colonialism disrupted, but the healing begins with us.”**  
From residential schools to the Sixties Scoop, colonial systems tried to sever the bonds between our children and their communities. Today, NCFS is reclaiming control and rebuilding child welfare based on our own values, practices, and the principles of healing.
3. **“From resilience to self-determination—NCFS leads the way.”**  
Since its foundation, NCFS has been a beacon of Indigenous-led child welfare, prioritizing prevention, family support, and cultural healing. Our designation as a Child Well-Being Agency is a step toward ensuring that our children grow up grounded in culture, supported by community, and free from the legacies of colonialism.

#### What you need to know

Canada’s policies and programs for the care of our children have, in the past, been harmful to our communities in many ways. The Indian Residential Schools, Indian Day Schools and Sixties Scoop programs and policies all had terrible impacts because they separated our young people from their families, cultures and identities.

Because of the serious issues that this has caused, and because of the efforts of Indigenous advocates across Canada, child and family services are now moving towards the provision of culturally appropriate services to Indigenous families and youth. Niijaansinaanik is part of this new history and is building its ability to provide services that reflect the vision and needs of our member-First Nations

#### Further reading

We have always cared for our children based on our own cultural practices, laws, and traditions. Children are gifts from the Creator, and it is the parents' responsibility to raise the spirit of the child. Extended family members play an essential role in the child's upbringing, and the community as a whole is responsible for ensuring the well-being of our children. The traditional approach to child rearing is holistic, incorporating physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of a child's development.

However, colonial policies and institutions such as the *Indian Act* and the Indian Residential School system aimed to disrupt traditional child-rearing practices, the bonds





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between parents and children, and weaken our communities by extension. The *Indian Act* imposed a colonial legal framework on Indigenous peoples, including the regulation of child welfare. In 1894 the Government of Canada empowered itself through the *Indian Act* to remove Indigenous children from their homes and communities, sending them to residential schools.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada found that these schools were established with the goal of assimilating Indigenous children into European-Canadian culture, which involved severing their ties to their culture, language, and families. Residential schools operated in Canada from the 1870s until the 1990s and have had a lasting impact on Indigenous peoples.

When the residential school system began to phase out during the second half of the 20th century, responsibility for Indigenous child welfare shifted to provincial and territorial child welfare systems. In 1951, an amendment to the *Indian Act* allowed provincial and territorial child welfare legislation to be applied on reserves. This change resulted in a massive removal of Indigenous children from their homes and communities into foster care or adoptions. This period is known as "The Sixties Scoop" and it is estimated that 20,000 Indigenous children were removed from their families and placed in non-Indigenous homes.

The term "Sixties Scoop" was first used by Patrick Johnston in his 1983 report *Aboriginal Children and the Child Welfare System*, which described the process of adoption that was being used to address issues in child welfare, primarily for Indigenous children. During the time period from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s, Indigenous children were disproportionately being adopted into non-Indigenous homes.

In response to the Sixties Scoop and the need for Indigenous-led initiatives, Indigenous groups began exploring the development of their own on-reserve child welfare agencies. The first Indigenous organization to receive its child welfare mandate was Weechi-it-te-win Family Services in Northern Ontario in 1983. Since then, many other First Nations Child Welfare Organizations have been established across Canada, with a focus on providing culturally relevant services that prioritize prevention, family support, and cultural healing over protection intervention when possible.

Between 1992 and 1995, the predecessor to NCFS operated as Gzaa-Gaah-Naa-Nic Child and Family Services. Funding changes at the level of the provincial government caused the organization to cease operations. In 2016, the Waabnoong Bemjiwang Association of First Nations initiated a project to establish an organization to be designated as a Child Well-Being Agency for the First Nations of Wasauksing, Shawanaga, Magnatawan, Henvey Inlet, Dokis and Wahnapiatae. The project moved into the capacity building phase in 2018, when the organization was given the name Niijaansinaanik Child and Family Services by Elders and language speakers. In 2018 NCFS was also incorporated as a non-profit and stand-alone organization.



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On April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, NCFS received ministerial designation as a Child Well-Being Agency, and our real work of serving our families began.

### References:

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Volume 1 Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939", at p 254-256, 161 and 201, available online: <https://perma.cc/3GYG-V7Q3>
- Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, "Consolidation of Indian Legislation Volume II: Indian Acts and Amendments, 1868-1975", at p 164, available online: <https://perma.cc/KS8N-QTVF>
- Sinclair, Raven "Identity lost and found: Lessons from the sixties scoop". *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 3, no. 1 (2007) : 65-82. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1069527ar>
- Niijaansinaanik Child and Family Services "Our History", online: <https://perma.cc/EH2R-SUCW>

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Other				







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## 4. Child well-being Jurisdiction

### Key Soundbites

**1. "Our children, our jurisdiction."**

First Nations never gave up the right to care for our children, this is our inherent right, gifted to us by Creator. Through Treaty, or otherwise, we have always held the authority—and responsibility—to protect our children's well-being, identity, and connection to community.

**2. "When we lead, our children thrive."**

Asserting First Nation Child Well-being Jurisdiction means decisions are made by us, for us—ensuring our children receive the care they need while staying rooted in culture, family, and identity.

**3. "The Orange Standard is our declaration: we set the standard for care."**

This isn't just about services—it's about reclaiming our right to decide how our children are supported, protected, and raised. We're not asking for permission. We're exercising authority.

### What you need to know

Child Well-being Jurisdiction means having the right to make decisions for our own selves about what is best for our children and families. First Nations inherently have the jurisdiction over our own children and families. This jurisdiction has never been given up, through the Treaties or otherwise. The Robinson Huron Treaty is the source of our member-Nation's relationships with the Crown, and that agreement did not cede the jurisdiction over child well-being. Niijaansinaanik is developing the "Orange Standard" which sets out rules for how our children, youth and families should be treated. This is one important part of our child well-being jurisdiction.

### Further Reading

Child Well-being Jurisdiction refers to the official, legal authority to make decisions and determinations regarding the safety, protection and well-being of an identifiable group of children. First Nations children have unique a historical, social and cultural experience which must be accounted for when planning for their safety, protection and well-being. Therefore, the exercise of First Nation Child Well-being Jurisdiction involves special legal and cultural considerations.

As First Nations, we inherently have Child Well-being Jurisdiction and it has never been ceded through Treaties or any other means. In 1850, our Nations became signatories to the Robinson Huron Treaty, which established a Nation-to-Nation relationship with the Crown. This Treaty is the key agreement that governs our relationship with Canada today and in no part of it did we give over our jurisdiction to care for our own children and families.





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Asserting our jurisdiction over children and families recognizes the deep importance of maintaining familial, cultural and identity-based connections for our children and families. The Supreme Court of Canada, in cases like *R v Van Der Peet* has agreed that Indigenous societies which pre-existed the Canada have protections under the Canadian constitution. In the Supreme Court of Canada's decision *Reference re An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families*, the Supreme Court concluded that this includes protections over the ability to care for and raise children in the manner deemed appropriate by the Nations. By asserting our jurisdiction we also can avoid jurisdictional issues between the Federal and Provincial governments. These jurisdictional issues have negative impacts on the development of our children, and their sense of identity as they can cause delays, denials or disruptions of services that our children require to flourish.

To address these issues, the federal government has passed *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families*, ("Federal Act"). The *Federal Act* creates a pathway for Indigenous Nations to enact our own Child and Family Services laws and assert their Jurisdiction. Ontario's provincial child and family services legislation also recognizes the importance of Nations exercising jurisdiction over our own children. Under sections 15, 16 and 17 of the Ontario *Child and Family Services Act*, allows for organizations to be designated as Children's Aid Societies, to provide child and family services within a specific territory.

The Orange Standard is an expression of jurisdiction: we are setting the standards for the delivery of care for our own children, youth and families. Overall, the move towards Child Well-being Jurisdiction is intended to ensure that decisions regarding our children are made by our community so that our children receive the care and protection they need while maintaining their cultural identity and connections to their community. This movement recognizes of the importance of our decision-making, knowledge and perspective on child welfare and reflects our inherent right to make decisions for our children and families.

### **References:**

- Robinson Huron Treaty, 1850
- *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families*, SC 2019 c 24
- *Child and Family Services Act*, RSO 1990 c C.11
- *R v Van Der Peet*, [1996] 2 S.C.R. 507
- *Reference re An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families*





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### NCFS Discussion Notes / Summaries / Input:

Source	Sub-source	Notes	Feedback received	Edit approved
<b>Document research</b>	Report title			
<b>Community engagements</b>	Report Title			
<b>Governance Edits</b>	Discussion Paper Leadership Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reference to First Nation's inherent right of jurisdiction which has never been ceded.</li> <li>Reference to the Robinson-Huron Treaty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>January 28, 2025</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>
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	<i>Anishinaabewin Nikayaa Nkoobnigay</i> Discussion Paper Review Panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reference to sections 15-17 of the Ontario Child and Family Services Act</li> <li>Reference to Supreme court cases <i>Van der Peet</i> and the <i>Reference re An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>November 11, 2024</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>January 28, 2025</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>				





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## **5. The Orange Standard, Community Leadership and Governance**

### **Key Soundbites**

**1. "Our laws, our leaders, our way."**

First Nations child welfare must be led by our own governance systems and community voices—rooted in our laws, values, and the realities of our families.

**2. "Good governance is culture in action."**

Building strong First Nations child welfare systems starts with decision-making that honours our inherent rights, traditions, and community control.

**3. "Leadership at every level means children thrive at every stage."**

From Elders to youth, our community leaders carry the knowledge needed to shape services that truly reflect who we are and what our children need.

### **What you need to know**

Community leaders are important guides for helping Niijaansinaanik develop an Orange Standard that works with our member First Nations' own ways of being. These leaders can include Elders, knowledge keepers, elected officials including Chiefs and Councillors, as well as community advocates.

Strong governance systems are also important. Governance systems are the ways that formal decisions are made for a community. Strong governance systems help give a clear process for leadership to work within. Niijaansinaanik is and will continue to rely on the governance systems of its member First Nations, and on their excellent leadership.

### **Further reading**

First Nations child welfare requires a holistic approach that recognizes the importance of family, community, and culture. Governance and community leadership are essential components in creating child welfare systems that are grounded in our member First Nations' own laws, ways of knowing and being, and that address the ongoing legacy of colonialism and its impacts on our families and communities.

Both strong leadership and governance are essential in the process of establishing and building functional First Nation child welfare systems.





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Governance refers to the systems and structures through which decisions are made regarding the delivery of child welfare services and includes policies, legislation, and funding structures. For First Nations child welfare, governance must be grounded in the principles of inherent rights, self-determination, community control, and Aboriginal rights. This means that our communities must have the authority and resources to develop and deliver child welfare services that are culturally appropriate, responsive to community needs, and accountable to the community.

Community leadership is also crucial in changing First Nation Child and Family Services for the better. Community leaders, including Elders, Knowledge Keepers, elected officials, and youth leaders have a deep understanding of the governance system, culture and traditions of the community, and can provide guidance on how best to develop child welfare systems that are grounded in Nations' own laws, ways of knowing and being. They can also provide insights into the needs and priorities of their Nation's families and help to create programs and services that meet these needs.

The Orange Standard recognizes that strong relationships between community leaders and child welfare agencies, as well as a strong understanding of Nations' governance systems make agencies responsive and accountable to the First Nations they serve. By working together, we can develop child welfare systems that are culturally appropriate, responsive to community needs, and accountable to our communities.

## References:

N/A

## NCFS Discussion Notes / Summaries / Input:

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	Paper Review Panel			
Other				

## 6. Community Support Systems and Partnerships

### Key Soundbites

1. **"Healing starts with us—and it starts with planning."**  
Community-led planning is key to addressing historical trauma and building child welfare systems rooted in our realities, values, and strengths.
2. **"Our stories shape our solutions."**  
To truly support Indigenous families, child welfare must be informed by our knowledge keepers, traditions, and the lived experiences of our communities.
3. **"Community care is the path to breaking cycles."**  
By tackling root causes like poverty, housing, and systemic bias through community-led approaches, we protect our children and strengthen our Nations.

### What you need to know

Historical colonial policies, practices and programs of the Federal and Provincial governments like the Residential School Program and the Sixties Scoop have caused significant trauma that is still being experienced by members of the First Nations that Niijaansinaanik Child and Family Services (NCFS) serves.

The effects of this trauma can be passed down from generation to generation, which is known as "inter-generational trauma". NCFS aims to be a part of the solution to addressing inter-generational trauma, and healing our communities. This is an important project that can only succeed through careful planning with other community supports, and with the assistance and leadership of community members and leaders.

### Further reading

Indigenous child welfare is a complex issue that requires a holistic and community-centered approach to address historical trauma. Historical trauma refers to the intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples due to the negative experiences of historical and ongoing colonialism, including the Indian Residential and Day Schools projects, the Sixties Scoop, discriminatory rules in the *Indian Act* and other governmental practices of forced assimilation.





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This trauma has had a profoundly disrupting impact on Indigenous families, communities and Nations, including those nations served by NCFCS. It has and has led to disproportionately high rates of Indigenous child apprehension through the child welfare system.

Community planning is an essential tool for recognizing and addressing the ongoing legacy of intergenerational trauma, family disruption and over-involvement of child welfare agencies to move towards a state of healing. This process involves collaboration between Indigenous communities, organizations, and government agencies to identify the needs and priorities of the community and develop strategies to address them. This process is essential to ensure that Indigenous voices and perspectives are heard and that solutions are culturally appropriate and tailored to the specific needs of the community.

Community planning, may also be useful in addressing other systemic issues that contribute to the disproportionate rates of Indigenous child apprehension. These include items such as tackling the root causes of poverty, addressing unemployment, dealing with inadequate housing on-reserve and preventing discriminatory biases and practices from having a place within the child welfare system.

In the context of Indigenous child welfare, community planning can take many forms. One approach is to establish community-led child welfare agencies that are responsible for delivering culturally appropriate and locally informed services to Indigenous families. These agencies should be staffed by Indigenous community members who are able to provide support that is sensitive to the realities, practices culture and traditions of the community and that meets the needs of the families they serve.

Other Nations may choose to establish community healing centres, in addition to or instead of taking on the responsibility for establishing community-led child welfare agencies. Community healing centres provide support for Indigenous families to heal from historical traumas and build strong, healthy relationships with their children. To ensure that community planning is effective, it is essential to engage with Indigenous knowledge keepers, elders, and community members throughout the process. These individuals have a deep understanding of the culture and traditions of the community and can provide invaluable insights into the needs and priorities of Indigenous families.

Overall, community planning is an essential tool for addressing historical trauma in Indigenous child welfare. By working together, Indigenous communities and their partners can develop culturally appropriate and effective solutions that support the healing and well-being of Indigenous families.

### **References:**

N/A





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Other				





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## 7. Community Engagement

### Key Soundbites

1. **"The best solutions come from within."**  
Real change in First Nation Child and Family Services begins with listening—honouring every voice, from youth to Elders, in shaping the future of care.
2. **"Everyone's story matters."**  
Inclusive engagement means hearing from all corners of the community—parents, youth, LGBTQ2S+ members, and caregivers—because each perspective builds a stronger system.
3. **"Community-led means community-heard."**  
When we plan *with* our people—not just *for* them—we create child welfare services that truly reflect who we are and what our children need.

### What you need to know

First Nation Child and Family Services delivery is changing and community input is needed to understand how these should be changed to benefit each Nation. Different groups should be consulted with as a rule, to get the perspectives of different groups within the Indigenous community in question, and different formats of engagement can be used to help all those participating feel comfortable to share.

### Further Reading

First Nation Child and Family Services (FNCFS) is a complex and sensitive issue that requires a holistic and community-centered approach to for any changes going forward. Adopting a community-centered approach requires deep and thorough advocacy with community members regarding how they want their services to support their children, youth and families.

Community engagement and planning involves collaboration between Indigenous communities, organizations, and government agencies to identify the needs and priorities of the community and develop strategies to address them. This process is essential to ensure that Indigenous voices and perspectives are heard and involvement is encouraged so that solutions can be tailored to the specific needs of the community.





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Different identifiable groups within relevant communities should be able to have their unique perspectives heard. This includes, for example: youth (both those in care and not), elders, members of the LGBTQ2S\*+ community, parents (including those who have had involvement with the FNCFS system and those who have not), leadership, and FNCFS staff.

Bringing together as many perspectives as possible will ensure that engagement is thorough and robust, and that the collected information will be useful for developing a plan for delivering services to the community as intended.

Engagement may be facilitated through various formats including sharing circles, surveys, focus groups, narrative testimonial recordings and large community events such as feasts, camps and festivals.

### References:

N/A

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<b>Other</b>				







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## 8. Community Planning

### Key Soundbites

**1. "Healing our families starts with hearing our voices."**

Community planning grounded in our culture, knowledge keepers, and lived experiences is essential to building services that truly support our children and families.

**2. "We are the experts in our own healing."**

Culturally-rooted agencies and healing programs—created by us, for us—are key to restoring wellness, family unity, and community strength.

**3. "Leadership at every level means children thrive at every stage."**

From Elders to youth, our community leaders carry the knowledge needed to shape services that truly reflect who we are and what our children need.

### What you need to know

Community planning in the context of family wellbeing involves a collaborative approach between our communities, local organizations, and government bodies to ensure that families receive culturally appropriate and community-designed supports that promote and sustain wellbeing. This process must acknowledge the impacts of historical trauma and lingering effects of the harms caused by colonial laws and policies while simultaneously seeking insights from community members, including elders and knowledge keepers to ensure that service delivery planning is inclusive of our communities' culture and perspectives.

In the context of community planning for family wellness, it is essential to incorporate the planning for 1) community-led agencies that deliver culturally appropriate services; and 2) establish community healing programming with a variety of services aimed at helping community members improve and restore health and wellbeing. Community planning for family wellbeing is optimized when service providers recognize and understand the effects of historical trauma of First Nations communities, as well as the significance of using the input of community members to develop effective service delivery and programming.

### Further Reading

Community planning is essential to ensure that children and families receive culturally appropriate and effective support and involves collaboration between our communities,





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local organizations, and our government bodies to identify the needs and priorities of the community and develop strategies to address them. This process is essential to ensure that our voices and perspectives are heard and that solutions are tailored to the specific needs of our communities.

It is essential to engage with our knowledge keepers, elders, and community members throughout the process to make community planning regarding family wellbeing effective. These individuals have a deep understanding of the culture and traditions of the community and can provide invaluable insights are integrated service delivery and programming.

### **Culturally appropriate agencies**

With regards to providing child and family services, one approach to community planning is to establish community-led child welfare agencies that are responsible for delivering culturally appropriate services to our families. These agencies should be staffed by local experts, who understand the culture and traditions of the community and can provide support and resources that are sensitive to the needs of the families they serve.

### **Community healing programming**

Another consideration regarding community planning for child and family wellbeing is to establish healing programming that aims at providing counseling, traditional healing, and parenting programs. Such programming can promote wellbeing and restoring healthy family units that have been disrupted by discriminatory systems, laws and policies.

In addition to community planning, it is also essential to recognize and attempt to mitigate the systemic issues that have led to high rates of child apprehension and placement in the child welfare system. This includes addressing the root causes of poverty, unemployment, and inadequate housing that often contribute to child welfare concerns. It also involves addressing the biases and discriminatory practices that exist within the child welfare system itself.

Colonial laws, policies and programs such as the Indian Act and the forced removal of children from their homes into residential schools or non-Indigenous homes or orphanages (known as the "Sixties Scoop") have been key contributors to historical and intergenerational traumas. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has identified the residential school system as a central tool of assimilation and cultural genocide, and a cause of intergenerational trauma for Indigenous communities.

Overall, community planning is a critical aspect of improving service delivery and programming for our children and families. By prioritizing our voices and perspectives, we can develop solutions that are culturally appropriate, effective, and sustainable. Similarly, recognizing and mitigating historical trauma and systemic issues ensures that our children and families receive the support they need to thrive. Services and programs must reflect the





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collective experiences, realities and aspirations of our communities to meaningfully work toward healing and restoring healthy family units within our communities.

## References:

- Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (2018), "First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework: Implementation Guide", online: <https://perma.cc/N6N6-6NTP>
- BC Tripartite First Nations and Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health Working Group (2015), "Promising Practices in First Nations and Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health Programs: Community Perspectives on What Works", at page 32, online: <https://perma.cc/WK7H-576M>
- Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux & Magdalena Smolewski, "Historical Trauma and Aboriginal Healing" The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2004), online: <https://perma.cc/MP72-2A8F>
- New Mexico CARES Health Disparities Centre, "Shouldering Grief: Validating Native American Historical Trauma" online: <https://perma.cc/MX9V-5NBL>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), "Canada's Residential Schools: The Legacy", online: <https://perma.cc/BGE8-E8L3>
- National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health (July 2024), "Considerations, Implications, and Best Practices for Public Health Surveillance in Indigenous Communities, online: <https://perma.cc/ETQ3-QS2D>

## NCFS Discussion Notes / Summaries / Input:

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	Paper Review Panel			
Other				

## 9. CFS Infrastructure and Capital Projects

### Key Soundbites

1. **"Justice means funding our kids—fully and fairly."**  
The Caring Society case showed what we've always known: underfunding our children's services is discrimination. Real justice means funding that meets the needs of our kids, now and into the future.
2. **"Jordan's Principle is more than a policy—it's a legal principle and promise."**  
No child should be caught in a jurisdictional fight. Jordan's Principle ensures First Nations children get the care they need, when they need it—without delay.
3. **"Infrastructure is care."**  
Safe buildings, healing spaces, and culturally-rooted services are not extras—they're essential. Funding for on-reserve infrastructure is critical to preventing harm and building strong futures.

### What you need to know

Funding for the provision of First Nations Child and Family Services is a constantly evolving topic, with the Federal government having been involved with court cases and negotiations on this topic since 2016.

A new proposed agreement for the funding of First Nations Child and Family Services has been released in 2024, and is expected to take effect in 2025. This new agreement includes funding for Infrastructure and Capital projects, and this is the result of a long history of advocacy, by Indigenous-led organizations, to obtain fair and equitable funding for First Nations Child and Family Services.

### Further Reading

In 2007, the First Nations Caring Society and the Assembly of First Nations launched a complaint at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) which asserted that Canada was discriminating against First Nations youth and families by failing to adequately fund the federal First Nations Child and Family Services program, which provides funding to First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) agencies across Canada, and by failing to fully implement the Jordan's Principle (known as the *"Caring Society v Canada"* case).

In 2016, the CHRT sided with underfunding of the FNCFS program and failure to implement Jordan's Principle. Since then, the parties to the complaint have been in negotiations to end the discrimination and ensure it does not re-occur in the future.





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The Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (the IFSD) was hired to undertake studies of the FNCFS and Jordan's Principle programs, and propose how new funding structures can be put in place, and to cost out what it will take to end discrimination. The IFSD's reports, which have been central to the negotiation process, have proposed significant increases to the budget for the FNCFS program, and for funding to the FNCFS program to be protected within the federal budget, so that money cannot be appropriated by federal departments for projects other than FNCFS.

In 2021, the CHRT issued a further order in the *Caring Society v Canada* case, which required that Canada provide funding for on-reserve capital assets, such as for the construction of new service buildings for FNCFS providers, or rec centres where youth can gather and make use of facilities. The funding captured in this order must also be accounted for in the final agreement which will be negotiated between the parties to the *Caring Society v Canada* case, and which will set the course for how FNCFS and Jordan's Principle are funded for the next ten years, at least.

In addition to governmental funding, FNCFS providers can be funded in a variety of ways, depending on the specific context and needs of the community:

**Own-source revenue:** Communities raise funds through their own resources or revenue streams which provides more control over the funding use and delivery of services, and can lead to greater community ownership and participation. Self-funding can include revenue from community-owned businesses, investments, or through community fundraising and donations.

**Partnerships with Non-Profit Organizations:** Indigenous communities can partner with non-profit organizations to access additional funding and support for FNCFS. These partnerships can provide access to expertise, resources, and funding that may not be available otherwise. Non-profit organizations can also provide support in program development, service delivery, and capacity building.

**Grants and Funding from Foundations:** Indigenous communities can apply for grants and funding from various foundations and philanthropic organizations. These funding opportunities can provide a source of funding for FNCFS programs and initiatives that are aligned with the goals and priorities of the funding organization.

### **Jordan's Principle Funding**

Jordan's Principle is a Canadian legal principle that was first recognized by the Canadian House of Commons in 2007. Jordan's Principle was named after Jordan River Anderson, a First Nations child from Norway House Cree Nation who was denied proper medical care because of a jurisdictional dispute between the Federal and Provincial governments. Jordan eventually died at the age of two, without being able to leave the hospital for his home







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community. Jordan's Principle requires that supports be provided to First Nations children in need by the first-contacted government, without delays or barriers.

In the *Caring Society v Canada* decisions, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found, in 2016, that Canada was discriminating against First Nations youth by failing to fully implement Jordan's Principle. This case is ongoing, and the process towards full implementation of Jordan's Principle is still incomplete.

Funding is available through Jordan's Principle for necessary infrastructure projects that can support Indigenous children and their families. These projects can include building or renovating facilities such as community centers, schools, and health clinics. By providing the necessary infrastructure to support the health and well-being of Indigenous children, Jordan's Principle can help prevent the need for child welfare intervention.

In addition to providing infrastructure funding, Jordan's Principle also supports the provision of culturally appropriate services for Indigenous children and families. This includes access to traditional healing practices and language and cultural programs that can help to address the root causes of Indigenous children's overrepresentation in the child welfare system.

Since the implementation of Jordan's Principle, numerous on-reserve infrastructure projects that have been funded. For example, in 2018, the federal government announced \$1.4 billion in funding over six years to support the construction of new schools on reserves and the renovation of existing ones. This funding will help to improve the quality of education for Indigenous children and provide them with the same opportunities as other Canadian children.

Today, Jordan's Principle is a vital program that creates a stop-gap to prevent children from falling through the funding gaps, and provides infrastructure funding for child welfare in Indigenous communities. By supporting the provision of culturally appropriate services and facilities, Jordan's Principle can help prevent the need for child welfare intervention and improve the overall health and well-being of Indigenous children and families.

### **References:**

- *First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada et al. v Attorney General of Canada (for the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada)*, 2016 CHRT 2.
- *First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada et al. v Attorney General of Canada (for the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada)*, 2021 CHRT 41.
- Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (2020) "Funding First Nations child and family services (FNCFS): A performance budget approach to well-being", online: <https://perma.cc/HD74-QJGW>





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- Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (2018) “Enabling First Nations children to thrive”, online: <https://perma.cc/9EEW-WMUP>
- Government of Canada, (July 2024), Jordan’s Principle, online: <https://perma.cc/85ZZ-NLMK>

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Other				





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## **10. Balancing technology use, data management, and protecting privacy and access rights for youth, families and member First Nations**

### **Key Soundbites**

#### **1. "Smart tools, stronger services."**

By embracing new technologies, we streamline our work, reduce errors, and deliver better outcomes for our children and families—while keeping their stories safe and their needs first.

#### **2. "Your data, your rights."**

Everyone has the right to access their personal information—and to know it's being protected. Privacy isn't optional, it's a legal and moral responsibility.

#### **3. "Data sovereignty is self-determination."**

Our Nations have the right to govern our own data, just as we do our families and communities. This isn't new—it's inherent, and it's time it's fully respected.

### **What you need to know**

The use of modern technological tools is fundamental for enhancing the management and delivery of First Nations Child and Family Services. As an Agency with delegated responsibility to provide child and family services, Niijaansinaanik Child and Family Services (NCFS) carefully uses new technology and systems to safely store data, manage caseloads, develop programming and to help with planning based on the needs identified from data, and for communication purposes.

Collecting data is necessary for planning services and communicating with agencies, families and Nations, where appropriate. It is also necessary that those whose data is collected are able to access information about their privacy rights. Child and Family Services Agencies must respect provincial privacy laws, and our families are entitled to be informed of how their personal information is stored and how to access it, if needed.

### **Further reading**

Implementing new technological tools and systems for data storage and communication purposes is significant in helping us provide effective services. NCFS has a responsibility to manage a wide range of data to administer the delivery of child and family services. This data includes demographic information, reasons for children being brought into care, and each child's history of involvement with different agencies. Digital tools and technologies





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streamline data collection processes, reduce human errors, and ensure a high standard of data quality.

In addition to enhancing organization, communication, and overall service delivery, using technology assists child and family service providers in the three following areas:

1. **Enhancing Data Sharing:** Digital tools such as data sharing platforms and integrated case management systems can help facilitate this process while ensuring data privacy and security.
2. **Supporting decision-making:** Data can be utilized to inform decision-making related to child welfare, including identifying risk factors, developing prevention strategies, and evaluating program effectiveness. Digital tools such as predictive analytics and machine learning algorithms can help analyze large volumes of data and identify patterns and trends.
3. **Connect our communities:** Digital technologies can inform and connect citizens of our member First Nations in the services provided to children and families. For example, the creation of online portals, a mobile app, or an online directory can enable our communities to locate culturally appropriate services, resources, and supports.

## Data and Privacy Rights

The protection of privacy rights must be carefully planned and considered in the delivery of child and family services. It is important for our community members to be informed of their rights to privacy, and who has responsibility to protect their privacy. There are laws and policies in place that ensure the protection of privacy for everyone, but this is especially true in the context of children and families who have sensitive information that is collected and stored by a child and family service provider. For example, part X of Ontario's *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, establishes the rules on how data can be collected, stored and disclosed by child and family services providers.

## Accessing your personal information from an Agency

When a person has personal information stored with a child and family service provider, that person has a right to access the record of personal information, subject to certain restrictions found in section 312 of Ontario's *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*. Written requests for personal information should contain enough details for the child and family agency to locate their information, and Agencies have legal obligations to respond to requests for information. Timelines apply to an Agency's response to requests for information, and the law provides complaint mechanisms where requests are not addressed within applicable timelines (see section 316 of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*).

## Responsibilities on the Agency regarding Personal Information

Child and family service providers have legal responsibilities to protect the privacy and data of the children and families they serve. Agencies also have a responsibility to follow





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established processes for releasing information to authorized individuals who make a requests for their personal information. The laws governing child and family services providers' use, access, and sharing of personal information for system planning, managing, evaluating and delivering services ensures that personal information is handled safely, and that agencies follow the laws set out to uphold the privacy rights of children and families.

## Data Sovereignty

Our member First Nations are sovereign and have the right to self-govern regarding their children and families. This is an inherent right that is not delegated by Canada, or Ontario, but that has always existed and continues to exist. The Government of Canada has recently recognized this inherent right in law through *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families*, and the Supreme Court of Canada has also acknowledged the existence of this inherent right. NCFS must therefore work with our member First Nations to facilitate the exercise of this inherent right to self-government, while upholding our legal responsibilities, including as it relates to the data relevant to our member-First Nations.

## References:

- *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, 2017, S.O. 2017, c. 14, Sched. 1
- Government of Ontario (May 2023) "Privacy rules in the child and youth sector", online: <https://perma.cc/C85J-RFNA>
- *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families*, SC 2019 c 24.

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Other

## 11. Capacity development and recruiting for success

### Key Soundbites

1. **"Strong teams build strong futures."**

When we invest in our people—through training, support, and fair pay—we build services that reflect our values and meet the real needs of our families.

2. **"Our people, our strength."**

Bringing community members into child and family services brings culture, trust, and understanding to every decision that's made. That's what success looks like.

3. **"The Orange Standard means moving forward together."**

By building capacity and recruiting from within, we're turning systems of harm into systems of healing—rooted in respect, knowledge, and community strength.

### What you need to know

An important part of supporting the youth and families we serve through the Orange Standard is providing adequate supports to the staff who deliver services to them. Recruiting staff from the communities we serve and focusing on developing the capacity of those staff persons are priorities that must be focused on to provide excellent service to our families.

### Further reading

The Orange Standard is a framework designed to support the Nations we serve, and others, in their journey towards self-determination and decolonization. One of the main objectives of the Orange Standard is to improve First Nations child and family services, which have historically caused harm and trauma to our communities. To achieve this goal, staff capacity development and recruiting for success are critical components that must be prioritized.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD) studied First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies, and has noted that workers in within these Agencies are often overwhelmed and overburdened, particularly due to the complex cases that they must address, and the additional contextual complications such as poverty, and intergenerational trauma that disproportionately impact Indigenous communities.

Capacity development aims to counter these issues by building the knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees and organizations to enable them to effectively fulfill their roles and responsibilities. In the context of child and family services, capacity development is crucial for ensuring that our people have the knowledge and skills necessary to provide culturally appropriate services that meet the needs of our communities. This includes understanding the impacts of colonization and the legacy of the Residential Schools, Sixties





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Scoop, as well as other policies and programs of the federal and provincial governments. It is also important for staff to fully understand the strengths and resilience of our families and communities.

Recruiting for success is also important for improving First Nation Child and Family Services delivery. This involves actively recruiting members of our communities to work in child and family services, and providing them with the necessary support to succeed in their roles. This aligns with the IFSD's study recommendations, which recommend that First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies provide their employees with access to professional support and development.

Our people bring a unique perspective and understanding to the work of delivering child and family services. Their leadership in decision-making and service delivery allows relationships of trust to be developed and strengthened with the families and Nations we serve. Therefore, it is critical that they be involved at every level of the delivery of child and family services, and that they be adequately supported to do that work. Several strategies can be employed to effectively implement capacity development and recruiting for success under the Orange Standard, including:

- Providing ongoing training and professional development opportunities for child and family services staff, with a particular focus on Indigenous cultural competency and trauma-informed care;
- Developing mentorship and coaching programs to support the career growth and development of staff;
- Establishing partnerships with local organizations to identify potential candidates for employment;
- Providing competitive compensation and benefits packages that reflect the value of the work being done, and the comparative challenges of working in the context of First Nations Child and Family Services;
- Creating a supportive and inclusive workplace culture that values diversity, equity, and inclusion, and that actively works to address the impacts of colonization and intergenerational trauma.

The Orange Standard's prioritization of capacity development and recruiting for success can help move child and family services away from the harmful and colonial practices of the past and towards a more positive and empowering future for our children, families, and communities.

### **References:**

- Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (2018), *Enabling First Nations Children to Thrive*, University of Ottawa, at pages 102-106 online: <https://perma.cc/9EEW-WMUP>







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- First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (2019), *First-Line Prevention Services Framework: A prevention framework developed by First Nations for First Nations*, online: <https://perma.cc/KB2X-K67Y>

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<b>Document research</b>	Report title			
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<b>Governance Edits</b>	Discussion Paper Leadership Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggestion to make each paper more readable resulted in addition of "Key Soundbites"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• January 28, 2025</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• March 29, 2025</li> </ul>
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## 12. Operational Excellence and Child Welfare Policy Success

### Key Soundbites

1. **"Our ways, our governance, our future."**  
When Indigenous Nations lead their own child and family services, grounded in our laws and knowledge, the results are stronger, safer futures for our children.
2. **"Care that reflects who we are, and what we've been through."**  
Culturally responsive, trauma-informed care isn't a bonus—it's the foundation for healing and long-term wellness in our communities.
3. **"Equity isn't just fair—it's necessary."**  
Remote communities and under-resourced Nations need consistent, long-term funding to deliver services that match the realities on the ground.

### What you need to know

Operational excellence and successful child welfare policies in First Nations Child and Family Services require a comprehensive approach that recognizes the unique needs and experiences of our children and families. Here are some key considerations for achieving operational excellence and policy success in this context:

1. **First Nations-led governance and decision-making:** Our member-First Nations must have a central role in designing, implementing, and evaluating child welfare policies and services. This includes empowering our member-First Nations leadership and ensuring that policies and practices are grounded in our own knowledge, values, and ways of knowing.
2. **Collaborative partnerships:** Collaboration between child and family services providers, community organizations, government and families is essential for ensuring that policies and services are integrated, coordinated, and responsive to the needs of our communities children and families. Effective partnerships involve building trust, sharing knowledge and resources, and respecting each other's expertise.
3. **Culturally responsive services:** Child welfare services must be culturally safe, meaning that they are delivered in a way that is respectful of our culture, traditions, and languages. This includes recognizing the importance of extended family, kin and community networks in our child rearing practices, and providing services that are designed to support these networks.
4. **Holistic approach:** Effective child welfare policies and services must recognize that First Nations children, families and communities may face a range of complex and





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contextual challenges, including a higher likelihood of experiencing poverty, poor health outcomes, and intergenerational trauma. A holistic approach means addressing not only immediate child protection concerns but also recognizing the broader social, economic, and historical factors that contribute to family and community well-being.

5. **Trauma-informed care:** The long history of systemic oppression faced by First Nations communities in Canada, including as a result of the Indian Residential School programs, causes a higher likelihood that First Nations youth carry first hand or inherited trauma. Policies and services must be designed to recognize and respond to the impact of trauma on individuals and communities, and to support healing and recovery.
6. **Equitable resourcing:** Equitable resourcing is essential for providing effective child welfare services. This includes sufficient funding for staffing, training, infrastructure, and programs that are designed to meet the specific needs of Indigenous children and families.
7. **Data and evaluation:** Policies and services must be grounded in evidence and evaluated regularly to ensure that they are achieving their intended outcomes. This includes collecting data on service delivery, outcomes, and client satisfaction, as well as engaging in ongoing dialogue with Indigenous communities and stakeholders to ensure that policies and services remain relevant and responsive to their needs.

### **Further Reading**

**Indigenous-led governance and decision-making** is essential for success in First Nation Child and Family Services (FNCFS); this model can only succeed through a recognition of the unique cultural and historical context of Indigenous peoples and our inherent right to self-determination. It is important to note that FNCFS refers to the provision of services and support for Indigenous children and families in a manner that is culturally appropriate and sensitive to the unique needs of our communities.

Indigenous-led governance and decision-making is an expression of the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples to self-determination and to control over our own affairs. This means Indigenous communities leading the design, delivery, and evaluation of FNCFS policies and programs.

Indigenous-led governance and decision-making in FNCFS grounds policies and practices in Indigenous laws, knowledge, values, and ways of knowing to make service delivery more culturally responsive and appropriate, ensuring that services are better able to meet the needs of Indigenous children and families.





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**Collaborative Partnerships** between First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) and other community service providers involves working together towards a shared goal, sharing knowledge and resources, and respecting each other's expertise, perspectives, mandates and legal obligations.

Collaborative partnerships between FNCFS providers and other community services such as health care providers, educational institutions, and social services can help to ensure that policies and practices are integrated and coordinated across different sectors and levels of government. These collaborative partnerships can also help to build capacity within Indigenous communities and organizations through training and resource pooling and exposure to other aspects of service delivery.

**Culturally Responsive Services** are designed and delivered in a way that is respectful of the unique cultural heritage, traditions, and beliefs of Indigenous peoples. They account for cultural diversity, including languages, are delivered responsively to the needs and desires of the communities served.

Culturally responsive services help build ownership of FNCFS service provision by the Nations served, they can lead to better outcomes for children and families by accounting for the unique perspectives and experiences of the children and families served, they can help promote and preserve the unique cultures that they are responsive to, and their delivery aligns with the inherent rights to self-determination of Indigenous peoples.

**Trauma-informed care** is vital in First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) delivery due to the deeply felt effects of intergenerational trauma that continue to impact many communities and community members. Trauma-informed care recognizes the impact of trauma on individuals and communities, and seeks to promote healing, empowerment, and resilience through a recognition of that trauma. It involves creating a safe and supportive environment, providing information and education about trauma, and delivering services in a way that is respectful, collaborative, and empowering.

Providing trauma-informed care in FNCFS can help to reduce the risk of re-traumatization by creating a safe and supportive environment that promotes healing and resilience. Trauma-informed care can also help to improve the quality and effectiveness of FNCFS by recognizing and addressing the impact of trauma on Indigenous children and families services will be better tailored to the needs and preferences of Indigenous communities. This can lead to better outcomes for Indigenous children and families, including improved health and well-being, increased family stability and resilience, and greater success in education and employment.

**Equitable resourcing** refers to the provision of sufficient financial, human, and material resources to support the delivery of high-quality FNCFS. Many Indigenous communities face





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significant challenges related to geographic isolation and limited infrastructure. Equitable resourcing recognizes this starting point and funds sufficiently to address these challenges.

Equitable resourcing ensures that service provision is predictable and sustainable over the long term. FNCFS is a complex and multifaceted system that requires ongoing investment and support to operate effectively, and to allow FNCFS providers to adapt to changing circumstances and emerging needs. Equitable resourcing is essential for countering a long history of disinvestment in Indigenous communities, and therefore in promoting reconciliation and social justice.

**Data collection and evaluation** enable FNCFS service providers to monitor and assess the impact of their interventions on the children and families we serve, to identify areas for improvement, and to make evidence-based decisions to improve service delivery.

Data collection is particularly important for monitoring the effectiveness of FNCFS interventions, and may involve tracking changes in outcomes such as child well-being, family stability, school enrollment, employment success, criminalization rates, and other community engagement indicators over time.

Data collection and evaluation should also lead to continuous quality improvement in FNCFS, as well as accountability. By regularly monitoring, analyzing and reporting on the data on service delivery, service providers can identify areas for improvement and build trust with service recipients.

### **References:**

- Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (2018), *Enabling First Nations Children to Thrive*, University of Ottawa, online: <https://perma.cc/9EEW-WMUP>
- Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (2020), *Funding First Nations child and family services (FNCFS): A performance budget approach to well-being*, University of Ottawa, online: <https://perma.cc/HD74-QJGW>





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<b>Other</b>				





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## 13. Funding Equity for First Nations child well-being

### Key Soundbites

1. **"Funding justice is child welfare justice."**

Underfunding First Nations services isn't just a budget issue—it's discrimination. Equitable funding is the foundation of fairness.

2. **"We can't plan for the future with unstable funding."**

Predictable, long-term funding allows our agencies to build programs that work, hire people who stay, and serve families with consistency and care.

3. **"No more patchwork solutions."**

Our kids deserve strong, well-resourced services—not quick fixes or short-term projects. Real infrastructure needs real investment.

### What you need to know

Delivering child and family services to Indigenous children and families requires that providers have access to equitable and dependable funding. The funding of First Nation Child and Family Services has historically not been enough, which has contributed to the over-representation of First Nations children in the child welfare system. Predictable and equitable funding ensures that service providers and communities can operate effectively, hire and maintain staff, and provide adequate services.

The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has ordered Canada to fix its discriminatory funding of First Nations Child and Family Services, and the process of making those changes to prevent further discrimination is ongoing.

### Further Reading

Funding Equity and Fiscal Stability are crucial components in supporting First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) in providing effective and sustainable support to our children and families. The importance of these factors can be understood in the context of the historical and ongoing systemic barriers that our communities have faced in accessing resources and support.

In the past, funding for FNCFS has been inadequate and inconsistent. This lack of resources and capacity has led to failures in the provision of necessary support to First Nations children and families, the result of which has been a significant over-representation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system, as well as high rates of poverty and social issues within Indigenous communities. In 2016, following a complaint launched by the First Nations Caring Society and the Assembly of First Nations (the *Caring Society v Canada*), the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) found that Canada was discriminating against First Nations youth and families living on reserve and in the Yukon, by underfunding the First







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Nations Child and Family Services program, and inadequately implementing Jordan's Principle.

The *Caring Society v Canada* is an ongoing case, and the CHRT has made several additional orders since 2016 to rectify the discrimination. In 2021 the CHRT ordered the Federal Government to provide funding to First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies to acquire or construct infrastructure needed to deliver their programming, or for the delivery of Jordan's Principle programming.

A new funding arrangement is now being negotiated by the parties to the *Caring Society v Canada* decision, to work towards ending the discrimination experienced by First Nations youth and Families, and making sure it does not re-occur in the future. The parties are working towards funding equity for First Nations Child and Family Services providers to be able to reliably plan for the creation and delivery of community-specific, culturally sensitive protection and prevention preventative services designed meet the unique needs of Indigenous children and families, and to keep children connected to their families and home communities. Despite this progress, there continue to be struggles with accessing adequate funding for infrastructure and capital projects.

Stable and predictable funding allows FNCFS agencies to maintain operations, hire and retain staff, provide consistent and reliable services and for planning and developing long-term strategies to monitor and improve outcomes for Indigenous children and families.

### **References:**

- *First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada et al. v Attorney General of Canada (for the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada)*, 2016 CHRT 2 (Canlii).
- *First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada et al. v Attorney General of Canada (for the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada)*, 2021 CHRT 41 (Canlii).
- Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (2018), *Enabling First Nations Children to Thrive*, University of Ottawa, online: <https://perma.cc/9EEW-WMUP>
- Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (2020), *Funding First Nations child and family services (FNCFS): A performance budget approach to well-being*, University of Ottawa, online: <https://perma.cc/HD74-QJGW>





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<b>Other</b>				





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## 14. The “Measuring to Thrive” framework

### Key Soundbites

1. **"Measurement is the first step toward meaningful change."**  
Tracking outcomes isn't just about numbers—it's about understanding what works and improving futures for our children and families.
2. **"Accountability starts with outcomes."**  
We can no longer afford to act without knowing the true impact. The Measuring to Thrive framework ensures that every service delivered is improving lives.
3. **"Investing in what works, based on real outcomes."**  
The Measuring to Thrive framework provides adaptable tools to ensure our programs are achieving tangible results for First Nations children, families, and communities.

### What you need to know

Measuring outcomes of First Nations Child and Family Services is important to understand how our efforts are impacting the lives of the youth, families and member-First Nations we serve. The Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD) has developed a framework for measuring outcomes of our work, and we propose to use this framework as part of the Orange Standard, to be able to track our efforts and better make evidence-based decisions for how to spend limited resources.

### Further Reading

In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) determined that Canada had been discriminating against First Nations living on reserve, and in the Yukon, for its underfunding of the First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) program, and for its failure to fully implement the Jordan's Principle. Canada was ordered by the CHRT to cease the discrimination, and to implement changes to ensure that this discrimination would not re-occur.

As part of the process of ensuring that discrimination would not re-occur, the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD), of the University of Ottawa, was engaged to study the First Nations Child and Family Services program and make recommendations for systemic changes that should be made to prevent future discrimination.

One of the important recommendations from the IFSD, is to ensure that *outcomes* for youth and families involved with FNCFS are tracked, so that those who are responsible for delivering FNCFS programming can determine the effectiveness of the efforts made, and ensure that services are improving the lives of the youth and families they serve.





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The IFSD also developed an adaptable measurement framework called “Measuring to Thrive”, which aims to support efforts to measure outcomes for youth and families. In contrast to prior practices, where very few outcomes have been monitored, the IFSD recommends the measurement of 75 different outcome “indicators”, in three different categories; families, children and communities. This can include indicators such as incidences of reports of family violence, youth reporting ties to elders and high school graduation rates.

The Measuring to Thrive framework is adaptable to the needs of each FNCFS provider, based on community feedback and needs. FNCFS providers can choose which of the indicators it needs to be tracking, and can choose its own indicators that have not been described by the IFSD.

NCFS proposes to adopt and adapt the Measuring to Thrive framework as part of the Orange Standard. Measuring community-identified outcomes in the three defined categories should allow for evaluation of how our delivery of FNCFS is impacting on individuals, families and the member-First Nations we serve, so that we can make evidence-informed decisions about how best to spend limited resources.

## References

- Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (2020) “Funding First Nations child and family services (FNCFS): A performance budget approach to well-being”, online: <https://perma.cc/HD74-QJGW>

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## 15. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

### Key Soundbites

1. **"Indigenous children thrive when we are in control."** Ensuring Indigenous children stay connected to their culture, family, and community begins with self-governance and Indigenous-led decision-making in child welfare.
2. **"Reconciliation begins with respecting our rights."** Implementing UNDRIP empowers Indigenous communities to lead in child and family services, fostering a future where our children grow in culturally rich environments.
3. **"Indigenous children thrive when we are in control."** Ensuring Indigenous children stay connected to their culture, family, and community begins with self-governance and Indigenous-led decision-making in child welfare.

### What you need to know

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was developed through a collaboration of Indigenous peoples around the world, and expresses the inherent rights of Indigenous people. UNDRIP is now a part of Canadian law, and has been promoted by organizations such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

UNDRIP is foundational for the delivery of First Nation Child and Family Services in Canada, and to the development of the Orange Standard, because of the clear and internationally well-supported expression of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

### Further Reading

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) contains an expression of the collective and individual rights of Indigenous peoples around the world. UNDRIP is the result of a collective effort by Indigenous peoples to create a document that affirms our inherent rights to self-determination and self-government. UNDRIP is a foundational document for the Orange Standard.

UNDRIP was developed with the participation of Indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations, and governments from around the world. The declaration was initially proposed in 1977 by Indigenous representatives at the United Nations and ultimately adopted in 2007.

While the implementation of UNDRIP has met challenges in many countries UNDRIP has provided a framework for advocacy, dialogue, cooperation and collaboration between





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Indigenous peoples and governments, and it has inspired the development of national and regional policies to advance Indigenous rights and promote their full participation in society.

### **UNDRIP and Jurisdiction for Indigenous People**

UNDRIP recognizes the right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination and to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development. This includes the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social, and cultural institutions, as well as the right to participate fully in all matters that concern them. In this context, jurisdiction for Indigenous peoples refers to their authority to make decisions and implement policies within their territories based on their own laws, customs, and traditions.

Indigenous peoples have historically been excluded from decision-making processes that affect their lands and resources, and have often faced discrimination and violence when asserting their rights. UNDRIP affirms the importance of recognizing and respecting the jurisdiction of Indigenous peoples, and provides a framework for governments and societies to engage with them in a spirit of cooperation and partnership.

### **Background: Canada and UNDRIP**

When UNDRIP was first ratified at the United Nations in 2007, Canada voted against its adoption. However, in 2016, Canada officially became a full supporter of UNDRIP.

Since then, the Canadian government has taken steps towards the implementation of UNDRIP. These have included the establishment of a working group to review federal laws and policies, and the launch of a national engagement process with Indigenous peoples to co-develop a national action plan for the implementation of UNDRIP.

On June 21, 2019 An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families was passed into law at the federal level. In its preamble, this law recognizes the Government of Canada's commitment to implementing UNDRIP. On June 21 of 2021 the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act received Royal Assent and became law in Canada. This legislation affirms the interpretive value of UNDRIP for Canadian law, and provides a framework to advance the implementation of UNDRIP at the federal level.

Despite these efforts, Indigenous peoples in Canada continue to face significant challenges in the realization of their rights, including issues related to land and resource development, access to health and education services, and the administration of justice. Indigenous peoples in Canada have been particularly critical of the lack of progress in implementing the UNDRIP principle of free, prior and informed consent, which requires governments to consult and seek the consent of Indigenous peoples before making decisions that may affect their rights and interests.





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Overall, while Canada has taken steps to engage with Indigenous peoples and implement UNDRIP, there is still much work to be done to address the ongoing legacy of colonialism and promote reconciliation. The implementation of UNDRIP will require significant changes in policies, laws, and societal attitudes, as well as a commitment to genuine partnership and meaningful dialogue between Indigenous peoples and governments at all levels.

### **How Does UNDRIP Impact Child and Family Welfare?**

UNDRIP has significant implications for child and family welfare in Indigenous communities. One of the key provisions of UNDRIP is the recognition of the right of Indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, including their traditional child-rearing practices and systems of justice.

UNDRIP also recognizes the importance of ensuring that Indigenous children can maintain their cultural identity, language, and traditions, and remain connected to their families and communities. This includes the right of Indigenous peoples to determine their own priorities for the development of child and family welfare programs and services, to participate fully in all decisions that affect their children and families, and to exercise autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, and the means of financing their autonomous functions.

In Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission called for the implementation of UNDRIP as a key step towards addressing the legacy of residential schools and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. The Supreme Court of Canada has also recognized that signing parties have obligations under UNDRIP. Overall, UNDRIP provides a framework for recognizing and respecting the unique rights and needs of Indigenous children and families, and for working towards greater self-determination and control over child welfare decisions and services.

### **References:**

- United Nations, "UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples", online: <https://perma.cc/CSW6-WWYD>
- UN General Assembly, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, A/RES/61/295, 2 October 2007, <https://perma.cc/LG8Y-GCLA>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). Calls to Action, online: <https://perma.cc/AU6F-E6TR>







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<b>Other</b>				





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## 16. Decolonizing Child Well-being Systems

### Key Soundbites

1. **"Rebuilding starts with us—the strength of our communities, the wisdom of our ancestors."**  
Reclaiming and revitalizing our traditional knowledge is essential to building a future where Indigenous children thrive in the care of their families and communities.
2. **"Self-determination is the foundation of our healing."**  
By leading the design and delivery of our own child welfare systems, we empower our communities to heal and grow in a way that honors our cultural teachings.
3. **"Our knowledge, our future—grounded in tradition, driven by self-determination."**  
Restoring the power to make decisions within our communities enables us to rebuild our capacity to care for and nurture the well-being of our children and families.

### What you need to know

First Nation Child and Family Services (FNCFS) provision requires that Indigenous knowledge be centered when implementing child welfare models. This means strengthening our communities' capacities to lead programs to address the root causes of child welfare involvement, such as poverty and inadequate housing.

Indigenous communities have well established knowledge and skills in child-rearing and family support systems and the re-building of capacity should draw from these strong foundations while providing resources and supports to implement child welfare services that are designed to reclaim traditional practices and respond to the needs of children and families.

Indigenous people must be in leadership roles in Child-Well-being Systems as they are best suited to offer Indigenous expertise and perspective in the policies and programming. Indigenous communities pursuing ownership of child welfare services and programs that are rooted in Indigenous knowledge should be understood as exercising their self-determination.

### Further Reading

**Re-centering Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing** is a critical starting point for decolonizing Indigenous Child Well-Being Systems. Indigenous knowledge must be valued and integrated into all aspects of child welfare policy and practice. This means recognizing and respecting the diverse Indigenous knowledge systems that exist and acknowledging the expertise of Indigenous elders and knowledge holders.





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For example, traditional healing practices, such as sweat lodges or smudging ceremonies, can be incorporated into child welfare programs to support the healing of Indigenous children and families who have experienced trauma. Traditional child-rearing practices, such as extended family networks or community-based decision-making, can also be integrated into child welfare policies and practices to better support Indigenous children and families.

Indigenous leaders must also be in decision-making roles within Child Well-Being Systems so that their perspectives and expertise can be reflected in the services that the program delivers, and that staff internal to the organization understand how to respectfully and appropriately incorporate Indigenous cultural practices and knowledge into the provision of services.

**Re-building Community Capacity** involves recognizing and supporting the unique strengths and knowledge that Indigenous communities possess in caring for their children and families.

Community capacity-building recognizes that Indigenous communities have long-standing, inherent knowledge and skills related to child-rearing and family support. Historically, these skills were passed down through generations, with grandparents, extended family members, and community elders playing important roles in the care and upbringing of children. However, colonization, residential schools, and other forms of systemic oppression have disrupted these practices, leading to a loss of knowledge and skills.

Re-building community capacity involves providing resources and support to Indigenous communities to revitalize and strengthen their traditional knowledge and practices related to child and family care. This may involve supporting community-led initiatives to reclaim traditional practices, such as language and cultural revitalization programs, land-based learning initiatives, and intergenerational mentorship programs.

Additionally, community capacity-building means supporting the development of community-led child and family services that are grounded in Indigenous knowledge and values. This may involve partnering with Indigenous communities to design and implement child welfare policies and services that reflect the unique needs and experiences of their children and families.

Moreover, community capacity-building also involves investing in the capacity of Indigenous organizations and leaders to play a central role in decision-making related to child welfare policies and services. This may involve supporting Indigenous-led governance structures, providing training and professional development opportunities to Indigenous leaders and service providers, and ensuring that Indigenous voices are represented and respected in policy development and decision-making processes.





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Through re-building community capacity, Indigenous communities can reclaim their traditional knowledge and practices related to child and family care and assert their rightful place as leaders in the development and delivery of child welfare policies and services.

**Self-Determination** refers to the ability of specific people and communities to make decisions about their own lives, including their cultural, social, and economic development, without external interference or control.

Self-determination can promote the well-being of our children by through our development of culturally appropriate education programs. Studies have shown that Indigenous children who receive an education that is grounded in their language and culture have better academic outcomes and are more likely to maintain a strong connection to their cultural heritage.

Better outcomes for our children can also be obtained by taking ownership of and building child welfare services and developing programs that are rooted in our knowledge and ways of knowing.

Finally, our self-determination can promote economic development which can have positive impacts on the well-being of our children. When we have control over our own economic development, we are better able to create jobs and provide services. This leads to improved socio-economic outcomes for our families, which in turn can support the well-being of our children.

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## 17. Indigenous Family Systems

### Key Soundbites

1. **"Our families, our systems, our strength."**

Indigenous Family Systems, rooted in cultural, spiritual, and legal traditions, were built on interconnectedness—prioritizing the well-being of all generations in the community.

2. **"Healing begins with reclaiming what was lost."**

By restoring our traditional family and kinship systems, we rebuild the bonds fractured by colonialism and reclaim the wisdom and practices that have sustained our people for generations.

3. **"Our families thrive when we honor our ancestors."**

Re-centering our traditional roles, values, and practices is key to healing from the trauma of colonial policies and nurturing future generations grounded in cultural resilience and community strength.

### What you need to know

Indigenous Family Systems are an expression of how we have always governed ourselves, and made decisions regarding our children, youth and families. These systems have suffered because of colonial programs and policies such as the Residential Schools, Sixties Scoop and *Indian Act* rules. The harms to these family systems have negatively impacted our communities and people, and continues to have impacts. However, efforts are now underway to revive our family systems and assert our inherent rights to make decisions about our own children, youth and families.

### Further Reading

Indigenous Family Systems are deeply rooted in the cultural, spiritual, legal and historical traditions of Indigenous peoples. Prior to contact with Europeans, our Family Systems were diverse and complex, reflecting the unique ways in which we organized ourselves, related to each other, and cared for our children and Elders.

These systems were often based on extended family networks and a recognition of humanity's place within the broader system of the natural world. They included traditional child-rearing practices that emphasized the importance of collective well-being, intergenerational relationships, and the transmission of cultural knowledge and language from elders to younger generations. Clan systems were essential to Anishinaabeg identities and political structures, as a way to assign roles to different individuals and bring order to community. Clan and kinship systems also structured relationships between Anishinaabe Nations, through obligations and responsibilities of family and treaties.





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Other Indigenous Nations also made use of clan systems, with their own particularities, rules and expressions of responsibilities. When working with Indigenous families, a holistic and community-focused approach is necessary. This means taking into account historical and contemporary contexts; colonial approaches to child-care have historically ignored the systems through which family and community were organized in our Nations.

Cultural alienation and intergenerational trauma caused by policies such as the Indian Residential School System, the Sixties Scoop and others have impacted Indigenous familial relationships, and have contributed to familial and community breakdown. In many cases, our families were forced to abandon their traditional ways of life and adopt the nuclear family structure as a result of these colonial policies and programs. Religious and other institutional impositions also played a major role in the breakdown of Indigenous family structures.

The *Indian Act* of 1876 further complicated Indigenous family structures by introducing new legal definitions of "Indian" and "Status" based on patrilineal descent and nuclear family structures instead of matrilineal-led clan societies. Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men lost their "Status" and were no longer considered "Indians", and therefore lost the ability to pass on and assert their rights as First Nations persons. The *Indian Act* has since been amended to fix this discriminatory distinction so that a person's marriage no longer affects his or her Indian Status, though issues persist in the ways that Status may be passed on.

All these factors contributed to the breakdown of Indigenous family structures and kinship networks, leading to a loss of traditional knowledge, language and practices, and a loss of community cohesion and support. The effects of this legacy are still felt today in our communities, where many families continue to struggle with the intergenerational trauma resulting from these policies and practices.

Today growing numbers of our communities, groups and families are working to regain and restore the values systems once held as a means of restoring Indigenous Family Systems.

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## 18. Nationhood and Child Well-being

### Key Soundbites

1. **"Kinship is our first law, and our deepest strength."**  
For Anishinaabe Nations, family is more than blood—it's the foundation of identity, belonging, and our collective responsibility to care for one another.
2. **"Strong Nations begin with strong families."**  
Upholding nationhood means reclaiming our right to care for our children in ways that reflect our laws, our cultures, and the power of our kinship systems.
3. **"Our Nationhood lives through our children."**  
When we design child and family services rooted in our values and teachings, we affirm our sovereignty and ensure the next generation grows up proud, connected, and whole.

### What you need to know

The concept of nationhood implies that as Anishinaabe Nations, we have distinctive cultures and historical heritages, and distinct entities that should rightfully exercise control over our own internal affairs. Exercising control over our own internal affairs extends to how we care for our children and families, which includes the providing child and family services and programming intended to promote the health of our families and communities.

We have a collective responsibility to ensure that the wellbeing of our Nations' children is a priority. A key part of this responsibility is to recognize that children have several rights that must be upheld and nurtured through the provision of child and family services, such as their right to safety, care, supports, and the rights to maintain their familial ties and engage in their culture.

### Further Reading

#### **Kinship as a Feature of Nationhood**

The concept of nationhood implies that as Anishinaabe Nations, we have distinctive cultures and historical heritages, and distinct entities that should rightfully exercise control over our own internal affairs. Exercising control over our own internal affairs extends to how we care for our children and families, which includes autonomy in how we provide child and family services and programming intended to support and promote the health of our families and communities.

A significant feature that defines nationhood is kinship. In the scope of child and family wellbeing, kinship consists of family and community. Because family and identity are so inextricably linked together, it is essential that providing child and family services accounts





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for this integral part of our communities' nationhood. As described by Tanya Talaga, kinship informs our identity:

Kinship, and family tell us who we are and where we come from. They give us a sense of dignity, a sense of belonging, right from birth. In Indigenous cultures, family units go beyond the traditional nuclear family living together in one house. Families are extensive networks of strong, connective kinship; they are often entire communities. (Tanya Talaga, "The Power of Indigenous Kinship" (2019)

With this understanding of kinship, it is apparent that when considering nationhood in the context of providing services and programs to children and families, it is critical to consider how closely connected family and identity are. These are considerations that must be implemented into service delivery and program design to ensure that all supports are culturally appropriate.

### **Child Wellbeing within Anishinaabe Nationhood**

Culturally appropriate services and programming that are provided by an agency are integral in ensuring that children who are affected by the child welfare system are still guaranteed a connection, wherever possible, to their culture, families and communities.

Nijjaansinaanik Child and Family Services has developed guiding principles in the *Children & Youth Bill of Rights* which is described as a sacred promise to ensure the well-being of our people. The Bill itself acknowledges the rights of Anishinaabe children and youth which include, among others, the right to their culture, heritage, and language; as well as the right to maintain their family name, familial ties, and relations within their community. Such rights align with the importance of strengthening kinship and identity – instrumental components of upholding nationhood for our communities.

### **TRC Calls to Action and the Federal Law**

There are emerging sources to draw from that advocate for and encourage the exercise of nationhood and First Nations autonomy in the context of child and family wellbeing. For example, the in their 94 Calls to Action, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada called upon all levels of government to commit to reducing the number of children in care. Some of the Calls to Action related to child welfare include:

- 1) Providing adequate resources to enable Aboriginal communities and child-welfare organizations to keep Aboriginal families together where it is safe to do so, and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments, regardless of where they reside.
- 2) Enact Aboriginal child-welfare legislation that establishes national standards for Aboriginal child apprehension and custody cases and includes principles that:





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- i. Affirm the right of Aboriginal governments to establish and maintain their own child-welfare agencies.
  - ii. Require all child-welfare agencies and courts to take the residential school legacy into account in their decision making.
  - iii. Establish, as an important priority, a requirement that placements of Aboriginal children into temporary and permanent care be culturally appropriate.
- 3) Develop culturally appropriate parenting programs for Aboriginal families.

More recently, the federal government enacted a law titled *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* (2020) for the purpose of providing national standards that must be considered by courts and all service providers when Indigenous children are subject to child protection proceedings. Additionally, this law affirms that Indigenous communities can exercise jurisdiction over child and family services for their Nation members. The Supreme Court of Canada agreed, in early 2024, that this law for Indigenous children is entirely valid and that as Nations, we have the inherent right to make decisions for our own youth and families.

Though there is more progress to be made in the context of recognizing First Nations autonomy, especially relating to child welfare, the developments that have occurred over the last decade have been a positive influence on promoting nationhood for Anishinaabe families and communities.

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**Niijaansinaanik**  
Child and Family Services



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## 19. Community support systems and child well-being redesign

### Key Soundbites

1. **"Prevention is protection when it's rooted in our ways."**  
Redesigning child and family services means shifting from crisis response to early care—led by our teachings, strengths, and the supports our families truly need.
2. **"Wraparound care starts with wraparound community."**  
From birth helpers to family mediators, culturally grounded support systems restore our families and reduce the need for child apprehension.
3. **"To keep our children safe, we must keep our communities strong."**  
Real solutions come from addressing poverty, housing, and health—through holistic, Nation-driven services that honour who we are.

### What you need to know

Reducing the number of Indigenous children in care is a goal of the current efforts to redesign the delivery of First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS). These efforts are prioritizing Indigenous knowledge, looking to address the root causes of FNCFS involvement, including poverty, housing insecurity and poor healthcare and educational access. FNCFS is also shifting towards a preventative, rather than protection-oriented care model.

### Further Reading

Redesigns of First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) to reduce the number of our children in care cycle must prioritize our own knowledge, values, and culture and recognize the root causes of child welfare involvement, including poverty, housing insecurity, as well as inadequate access to healthcare and education.

The delivery of FNCFS must also shift from being reactive and protection-oriented to providing preventative care and early intervention supports. This involves identifying and addressing risk factors early on, such as housing instability, substance abuse, and mental health issues amongst caregivers and youth.

For example, some communities have developed programs that focus on strengthening family connections, promoting traditional parenting practices, and providing culturally appropriate support services. Research shows that programs providing early intervention support to families can help prevent child welfare involvement and reduce the number of Indigenous children who are apprehended.

Carrier Sekani Family Services, in British Columbia, is an important example of providing services that focus on prevention, and that address various risk factors for families





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coming into care. The organization has been a designated Child Welfare Agency since the 1990s, and began training First Nations mediators and providing culturally relevant dispute resolution services to its service users in the early 2000s. The organization also provides primary healthcare services, with physicians on-staff, and has its own research branch regarding its member-First Nations.

The Southern First Nations Network of Care, in Manitoba, has developed the “Restoring the Sacred Bond Initiative” program, which is aimed at improving maternal and child health by providing families with access to culturally appropriate “birth helpers.” Among other supports, these Indigenous birth helpers can provide families with education on pregnancy, access to ceremony, emotional, physical and spiritual support during labour, help build up support circles, and provide access to resources.

These holistic, wraparound supports are just two good examples of how organizations like Niijaansinaanik Child and Family Services can be of service by redesigning FNCFS to focus on prevention supports that are culturally relevant and that address underlying factors. We aim to develop holistic services which can truly respond to the complex and varied needs of the community members we serve.

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## **20. Safeguarding Cyber Access and First Nation Children's Digital Footprint Protection**

### **Key Soundbites**

4. **"Our children carry stories—not data points."**

Protecting the digital presence of Anishinaabe children means respecting their privacy, their identity, and their right to move through the world (online and off) with dignity and safety.

5. **"Safe connection begins with community protection."**

Creating culturally grounded digital safety means building systems of care that understand our values, support our parents, and teach our youth to navigate technology with strength.

6. **"Digital access is a right—and a responsibility."**

Ensuring access to the internet must go hand-in-hand with safeguards that prevent harm, preserve culture, and keep our children's data in our control.

### **What you need to know**

As Anishinaabe children increasingly live in both physical and digital worlds, it is essential that community-driven systems are in place to safeguard their access, presence, and privacy online. This includes ensuring safe and equitable internet access while also protecting children from digital harms such as surveillance, cyberbullying, and exploitative data collection. The call to action aligns with the Orange Standard and the Anishinabewin Nikayaa Nkoobnigay model, which uphold the right of Anishinaabe children to grow up safe, connected, and culturally grounded—even online.

### **Further Reading**

As digital access becomes a basic part of daily life for Anishinaabe children, safeguarding their online presence has become a key part of upholding child well-being. Online experiences can bring opportunity—but they also come with serious risks. From exposure to harmful content and cyberbullying, to having their personal data extracted and monetized without consent, Indigenous children face unique vulnerabilities in the digital world.

The report *What We Heard: Online Safety* highlights that Indigenous peoples, and especially youth, are disproportionately exposed to racism, exploitation, and online harm. At the same time, barriers to reliable internet and technology access persist in many First Nations, creating a double bind of digital exclusion and digital risk.

The Orange Standard and Anishinabewin Nikayaa Nkoobnigay model call for solutions that are grounded in our teachings and protective of our children's whole well-being—including





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their digital lives. Protecting the cyber access and digital footprints of Anishinaabe children requires:

- **Equitable Digital Access:** Ensuring all families have access to affordable, reliable internet and devices without relying on harmful or extractive platforms.
- 
- **Culturally Appropriate Cyber Education:** Supporting youth and caregivers to learn about digital safety through Indigenous-led programs that include teachings on identity, privacy, and community care.
- 
- **Community-Controlled Data:** Building tools and policies that ensure any data generated by Anishinaabe children is owned and governed by their communities—not by corporations or external institutions.
- 
- **Digital Well-Being Strategies:** Designing online environments that support mental, emotional, and cultural health—including safe online spaces where Anishinaabe languages, teachings, and creativity can thrive.
- 

Efforts like the *Measuring to Thrive* report by IFSD point to the importance of creating our own measurement frameworks—ones that reflect Indigenous values and include digital well-being as a core component. Similarly, *Culture is Healing* reminds us that digital tools can also be used to support connection, language revitalization, and healing—if we shape them with care and purpose.

Protecting children in the digital world is an extension of protecting them in the physical one. As we walk forward in this work, Anishinaabe families, educators, and service providers must be supported to develop our own cyber safety strategies that reflect who we are, what we value, and how we keep each other safe.

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