Closing the Circle

a case for reinvesting in Aboriginal child, youth and family services in British Columbia

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CLOSING THE CIRCLE: A CASE FOR REINVESTING IN ABORIGINAL CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

October 8, 2015

A report prepared by the British Columbia Government and Service Employees’ Union (BCGEU) as part of the Choose Children campaign.

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The BCGEU wishes to acknowledge the significant contributions of Aboriginal child, youth, and family workers from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs) and workers from Community Social Services (CSS) throughout the province in the preparation of this report.

Appreciation, in particular, to the dedicated workers who provided vital information to the union through survey responses, and/or by participating in the member engagement meetings around the province.
Clearly, Aboriginal children and families are our future. Indeed, in many ways, they represent the future of this province.

As Aboriginal people, we enjoy and exercise our inherent right of jurisdiction over our children and families. We absolutely need and deserve culturally appropriate and adequately funded Aboriginal child, youth and family services. As we all know too well, the existing system is broken, and desperately needs to be fixed.

I welcome this report because it clearly shows how and where the system is broken, and makes concrete recommendations on how to move forward. Our social services system is overly complex and under resourced. It completely ignores our culture and history. It needs greater transparency and accountability. It needs to be fully revised with the joint planning of Aboriginal peoples, and as a measure toward reaching reconciliation.

Addressing the legacy of residential schools is intricately linked to the importance of supporting culturally appropriate care.

The provincial government can no longer ignore its moral responsibility to recognize that Aboriginal people must be supported in exercising their jurisdiction over their children.

It’s time to close the circle.

It’s time for the provincial government to fully embrace and act on this report’s findings, and ensure that Aboriginal children and families are receiving the supports they need and deserve.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip
President of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs

“Caseload is not about individuals, but entire communities.”
Aboriginal child, youth and family worker from a Delegated Aboriginal Agency

"It’s strange that it’s called Aboriginal Services. There’s really nothing that feels particularly Aboriginal about it.”
Aboriginal Services worker from the Ministry of Children and Family Development
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INTRODUCTION

The B.C. government is failing to prioritize responsive, culturally appropriate and properly funded child welfare services for Aboriginal children, youth and their families. B.C.’s Aboriginal child welfare system requires a major investment in resources, staffing, and cultural training with better oversight and reporting mechanisms.

Services and supports for vulnerable Aboriginal children, youth, families and their communities are being compromised by a patchwork welfare system that is largely culturally unsuitable, under-resourced, severely under-staffed and struggles under its own complexity.

This report gives voice to frontline workers to draw a comprehensive picture of the systemic failures in the province’s Aboriginal child welfare system. The themes highlighted include: historical and cultural factors; mistrust; systemic administrative complexity; lack of culturally appropriate services and staffing; and insufficient funding to ensure culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal children, youth, families and their communities. Further, the continuous removal of Aboriginal children and youth from their homes is reminiscent of the traumatic experiences of the residential schools.

B.C. is home to the second largest Aboriginal population in Canada stemming from approximately 200 First Nations, about one-third of all First Nations across Canada. They speak 32 different languages, with distinct identities and cultures. This diversity must be recognized and accommodated in B.C.’s Aboriginal welfare system: what is culturally appropriate for one First Nation is not necessarily culturally appropriate for another. For the purposes of this report, “Aboriginal” refers to First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

Aboriginal children and youth are the most disadvantaged population in our province. B.C.’s poverty rate for non-Aboriginal children is around 17%. For Aboriginal children, it’s 28%. Aboriginal youth face far more violence, poverty, emotional abuse and neglect, social exclusion, substance misuse and addiction issues, and mental health problems than their non-Aboriginal peers. They are also greatly overrepresented within the social welfare system.

At any time, more than half of the 8,100 children and youth in government care are Aboriginal. Roughly one in five Aboriginal children will require at least some level of care from B.C.’s child welfare system during her or his lifetime. A highly disproportionate number of Aboriginal children and youth leave their parental home temporarily or permanently during their childhood.

More than half of the 1,173 cases of critical injuries and deaths reviewed by B.C.’s Representative for Children and Youth since 2007 have involved Aboriginal children and youth. The Representative has conducted several high-profile investigations and released reports highlighting the systemic failures of the province’s Aboriginal child welfare system, including When Talk Trumped Service (2013), Lost in the Shadows (2014) and most recently, Paige’s Story (2015).

Paige was a young Aboriginal woman who died of an overdose at age 19 in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside after a lifetime of involvement in the social welfare system. Paige’s Story: Abuse, Indifference and a Young Life Discarded paints a distressing picture of a broken system that is chronically unable to see the big picture of Paige’s difficult life circumstances, and that repeatedly fails to intervene forcefully to protect her.

The report documents the failure of the entire provincial Aboriginal child protection system, and the failure to integrate its key components, including the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), community-based outreach programs, but also the healthcare system, law enforcement and the education system.

At any one time, there are 100 to 150 Aboriginal youth facing
similar life circumstances to Paige and require immediate and urgent intervention, the Representative believes.

“It is beyond deplorable that we continue to have Aboriginal children and Aboriginal families falling through the cracks. Paige’s story is heart-wrenching. She was a child who never received the stability, encouragement and guardianship that she so desperately deserved.”

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) as quoted in “First Nations Leadership Council Supports Paige’s Story Report.”

The B.C. Government and Service Employees’ Union (BCGEU) asserts that the political leadership of our province must take responsibility for properly prioritizing and resourcing B.C.’s Aboriginal child, youth and family welfare system to avoid any further tragedies.

Through its Choose Children campaign, the BCGEU has highlighted some of the major systemic challenges faced by the provincial child protection system by giving voice to the frustrated and despairing frontline workers who support vulnerable children, youth and families.

In British Columbia, Aboriginal services are social and welfare services provided directly by the provincial government through MCFD or by social workers in one of 23 Delegated Aboriginal Agencies across the province. The BCGEU represents these workers, including through the Social, Information and Health Component (MCFD) and the Community Social Services Component (Delegated Aboriginal Agency workers, other community-based social services).

Aboriginal child, youth and family workers provide critical services such as child protection, family preservation/reunification, foster care, guardianship, and more. In addition, community-based social service agencies offer a wide variety of supportive services to Aboriginal clients, including family programs, parenting support, counselling, and support for substance misuse and addictions.

Aboriginal child, youth and family workers provide an important, frontline perspective on the failings of the province’s social and welfare system. BCGEU gathered their valuable input through in-person member meetings and consultations, online surveys, worksite visits and one-on-one meetings. The union also consulted with former clients and the provincial Aboriginal leadership from across B.C.’s Aboriginal communities and child and family welfare system.

This report builds on the findings from BCGEU’s November 2014 report, Choose Children: A Case for Reinvesting in Child, Youth, and Family Services in British Columbia which focused on child protection services outside of Aboriginal Services. That report evidenced clear problems in B.C.’s child protection system, including inadequate resources, overwhelming worker caseloads, severe staff recruitment and retention problems, and lack of oversight of cases and coordination with other agencies.

The Choose Children report concluded that B.C.’s child protection system requires a major investment in resources and staffing, the introduction of caseload standards and improved training. The provincial government partly recognized the scale of these problems when it committed to hiring 200 new social workers on November 6, the same day the report was released. Recommendations in other areas, including developing caseload standards, remain unaddressed.

**B.C. ABORIGINAL CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY WORKERS CONSULTED FOR THIS REPORT**

- Aboriginal child, youth and family workers at delegated and partially delegated Aboriginal agencies, represented through BCGEU’s Community Social Services Component (Component 3);
- MCFD Aboriginal Services and workers with Aboriginal clients, represented through BCGEU’s Social, Information and Health Component (Component 6);
- MCFD Administrative workers, represented through BCGEU’s Administrative Services Component (Component 12);
- Community-based social service workers offering support programs, counselling, parenting programs, and more. These workers are a part of BCGEU’s Community Social Services Component (Component 3)
More than half of the 8,100 children and youth in government care at any time are Aboriginal. That disproportionate representation can partly be attributed to a toxic historic legacy characterized by discrimination. The residential school system and forced assimilation policies of the past were intended to eradicate Aboriginal languages, culture and traditions. This amounted to nothing less than “cultural genocide,” in the words of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Government and church-run residential schools tore Aboriginal families and communities apart. They were characterized by forced cultural assimilation, neglect, and often emotional, physical and sexual abuse. The traumatic experiences of residential schools have had profound, lasting effects on Aboriginal communities and families. Generations of Aboriginal people have grown up either without parental support or guidance, with damaged parental role models, or with the egregious notion that Aboriginal parents are somehow unsuited to caring for their own children.

“The numbers of First Nations and Aboriginal children in care exceed the number of children taken to residential schools.”

Grand Chief Doug Kelly, President of the Stó:lō Tribal Council, Chair of the First Nations Health Council. Quoted with permission.

The traumatic legacy of the residential school system is the foundation of a deep layer of mistrust in the minds of Aboriginal families and communities. This mistrust continues to permeate the delivery of Aboriginal welfare services today. MCDF child protection and apprehension is viewed as continuing the pattern of removing Aboriginal children from their communities, their families and their indigenous culture. Long after the residential school system has been dismantled, its residual damage remains.

“There is a constant struggle with historical mistrust. I still feel as though I walk on eggshells at times when working alongside MCDF. I feel there is conflict between MCDF and loyalty to families.”

DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker

“Aboriginal communities mostly would not enter my office for child and youth mental health services. They are afraid to enter the MCDF building.”

MCDF mental health clinician

In B.C., services for Aboriginal children, youth and families have evolved in a way that only partially accounts for these important historical, cultural and contextual factors. Intrusive notions of how to approach welfare services for Aboriginal children are still deeply embedded and reflected in the current system. B.C.’s child welfare system formulates intervention primarily through a euro-centric lens that relies on a variety of non-indigenous assessment models and modalities of treatment.

Fundamentally, the continuous removal of Aboriginal children and youth from their homes is reminiscent of the trauma of residential schools, and this must be addressed. The province has adopted a less intrusive child protection approach known as “family development response.” It focuses on keeping children safe even as the child’s family stays together and works through the challenges. The use of investigations and removals remains an aversive and confrontational issue for Aboriginal children and their communities.

“Practice standards developed in urban environs for non-Native populations don’t reflect the needs or structural realities of remote, rural, under-resourced First Nations communities nor their populations.”

DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker
Given the historical context, building trust and cultural understanding between Aboriginal child, youth and family workers and the communities where they work are fundamental prerequisites for delivering effective child welfare services. Frontline workers need to develop trust with families, extended relatives and communities that play a central role in supporting Aboriginal children facing difficult life circumstances.

To build trust and to provide the necessary support, many frontline workers make a significant investment of time to accommodate a wider range of influencers. They learn about the community’s cultural setting. They develop relationships with elders, with extended family members of children in their caseload, and with the broader community. Consultations and worksite visits with Aboriginal child, youth and family workers confirm this unanimously and unambiguously.

However, workers are not afforded the necessary time to build this trust. Regulations, protocols, and limited staffing levels impede the full development of these needed interactions with relatives, family members and the community. With limited time and resources, the preconditions of building community trust is secondary to the demands of urgent frontline service delivery but both are critical elements of effective social work for Aboriginal children and families.

“In Aboriginal Services, there’s always a premium on building trust, working and maintaining key relationships, and getting stable access to the community or the reserve.”
MCFD Aboriginal Services worker

“’It takes a village.’ We’re not just talking about parents or the Ministry; it’s the whole community that determines success in the delivery of Aboriginal services.”
MCFD Aboriginal Services worker

“MCFD social workers do not take on clients who may be related or live close to them. We are from this small community. It’s not always possible to observe these rules.”
DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker
B.C.’s child, youth and family services system is fraught with administrative complexities that impact the performance of programs and the delivery of services. For Aboriginal children, youth and families, the system is made more complicated by the inclusion of multiple additional service providers and agencies that are relied upon for the delivery of services.

Key figures in the service delivery continuum for Aboriginal welfare services include:

- **B.C.’s Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD)**, including several dedicated Aboriginal Services teams, but also child protection workers with Aboriginal children, youth and families in their caseload. MCFD also funds a range of programs and services for children and youth with mental health issues and special needs and their families.

- **Twenty-three Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs)** charged with delivering welfare services to Aboriginal communities both on-reserve and off-reserve, of which five are unionized and represented by the BCGEU.

- **Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC)**. The Canadian federal government through AANDC is responsible for funding, but not the delivery, of services for status First Nations.

- **Community-based social service agencies** offering a wide variety of support services and programs, including counselling, violence prevention and cessation programs, parenting and more. BCGEU is the lead union in this sector.

**DELEGATED ABORIGINAL AGENCIES**

The B.C. government recognized in principle that Aboriginal people can best address the needs of their own children and has begun to return historic responsibilities for child protection and family support to Aboriginal communities.

Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs) are contracted by the provincial government to provide child, youth and family welfare services in their communities. Responsibilities that normally reside with MCFD are granted to the DAAs in their communities.

DAAs are community-based Aboriginal welfare services that provide a wide variety of services such as child protection, family preservation and reunification, foster care, guardianship, and more. Aboriginal child, youth and family workers are social workers, but also violence prevention and cessation counsellors, program managers, community support workers, behavioural therapists, and more.

There are currently 23 DAAs that serve British Columbia’s Aboriginal populations, with a further eight in the early stages of development. They were responsible for almost 47% of Aboriginal children in care as of March 31, 2013. Three DAAs are urban Aboriginal agencies operating in Vancouver, Victoria, and Surrey. One provides dedicated services to Métis communities. Twenty DAAs are associated with bands serving 116 of the approximately 200 First Nations in the province.

The BCGEU represents over 400 Aboriginal child, youth and family workers at five delegated and partially delegated Aboriginal agencies. They belong to BCGEU’s Community Social Services component that represents approximately 8,000 community-based social service workers, including members in community living, family services and more. The remaining DAAs are not unionized.
DAAs operate in principle at arm’s length from MCFD, but they are operationally tied to the Ministry in many ways. DAA program funding for welfare services that are usually provided by MCFD, such as guardianship and child protection for example, depend entirely on the Ministry. DAAs often have multiple funding sources. Delegated agencies often provide programs outside the Ministry’s scope of practice such as cultural programming or child care, using funding sources from outside the Ministry.

DAAs are also required to follow protocols and procedures developed by the Ministry. DAAs must report their progress to the community and to MCFD, but there is a lack of oversight and reporting to track their success. The Ministry audits DAA actions according to MCFD standards.

DAAs assume their responsibilities through special agreements known as “delegation agreements.” Through a delegation agreement, the government’s Provincial Director of Child Protection gives authority to an Aboriginal agency - and by extension to Aboriginal child, youth and family workers - to undertake administration of all or parts of the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA), the provincial law that governs child welfare services. The amount or degree of responsibility is negotiated between the Ministry and the Aboriginal community served by the agencies.

Aboriginal agencies go through three tiers of delegation to acquire full authority over child protection services. As a result, DAAs have different levels of delegation, and by extension, differing levels of legal authority to perform Aboriginal welfare services.

The process of acquiring full delegation status is long and time consuming: it can take up to 10 years to establish full delegation status. This represents a significant impediment to delivering required services in a timely and appropriate manner.

DAAs with limited delegation lack capacity: they can only provide partial services. Most critically, DAA workers who are not fully delegated are dependent on MCFD social workers to accompany them to provide full child protection services, such as child apprehension. Currently less than half of all DAAs – 11 of 23 – are fully delegated, and thereby equipped and authorized to provide full child protection services.

"Our agency isn’t fully delegated. We have guardianship level, and are still working toward full delegation. This means that social workers are dependent on MCFD to fulfill any role that requires fully delegated social workers. This also hinders their ability to arrange supervised access."

DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker

The lack of formal coordination mechanisms between MCFD and DAA lead to significant delays in assisting vulnerable Aboriginal children and youth.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT CANADA (AANDC)

The federal government has responsibility to fund services for status First Nations through Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC).

The division of funding between federal and provincial jurisdictions may make sense in the context of the division of responsibilities between provincial and federal levels of government. However, this situation has significant implications for the provision of welfare services.

There is lack of clarity over the type and level of services that the federal government supports, the Auditor General of Canada found in a 2011 status report to the House of Commons. There is also a troubling divergence in the quality of services provided on-reserve versus off-reserve, the same report says.

The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada along with the Assembly of First Nations filed a human rights complaint against the federal government in 2007, which alleges that Canada discriminates against First Nations children by consistently underfunding on-reserve child welfare services compared to provincial funding for off-reserve services. The case remains before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

In a landmark ruling in June 2015, the Tribunal concluded
that the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada retaliated against Dr. Cindy Blackstock of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada because of the discrimination complaint filed by that organization and awarded Dr. Blackstock financial compensation.

Over time, the federal government has largely off-loaded its responsibility onto provincial governments. Most recently, AANDC decided to remove itself from tripartite agreements between MCFD and Delegated First Nation and family service agencies. AANDC concluded that it has no legislative authority over child welfare activities, but affirmed its continued legal and financial responsibility.

The federal government’s stance further obscures the line between responsibility for providing funding and resources and managing service delivery, and ultimately, for ensuring safe outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth and families.

COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL SERVICES

Aboriginal children, youth and families are regularly referred to community-based social services and supports, such as family programs, parenting support, counselling, violence prevention and cessation programs, and substance misuse and addictions programs.

These are provided by not-for-profit community-based agencies that are contracted by MCFD, but also Community Living BC, other ministries, and other funding sources. Community social services support people with physical, mental and developmental disabilities, at-risk youth, women and children experiencing family violence, and children with special needs, among others. Most community social service agencies do not have a particular mandate or expertise in delivering Aboriginal services.

Community-based social service agencies are severely underfunded, having seen over $300 million in service cuts over the past decade, leading to longer waitlists for service.
B.C.’s Aboriginal welfare system remains a complex patchwork of relationships and arrangements between agencies defined by systemic complexity. An extremely diverse range of agencies and parties share responsibility in ways that lack definition and formality. That complexity compromises responsiveness.

The Aboriginal welfare system is not structured in the best interests of at-risk children, youth and families. The ability of MCFD and DAA workers to discharge their duties is being hindered.

Aboriginal child, youth and family workers have to navigate and consult with multiple organizations, agencies and communities to facilitate services. In the absence of a coherent and consolidated policy framework, the existing system’s development and implementation, and resulting administrative and institutional complexity, contributes directly to failures in service delivery and intervention.

Frontline workers highlighted specific service delivery challenges that are a direct result of the systemic administrative complexity and failure to coordinate work between DAAs, MCFD, AANDC and referrals to community-based social service agencies. The challenges include:

- Knowing who needs to be contacted, consulted and involved;
- Highly inconsistent working relationships between MCFD offices and DAAs;
- Working practices that differ significantly between MCFD offices and DAAs, and that are a source of friction;
- Lack of clarity, delays and difficulties related to information sharing, coordination of cases, file sharing and file transfers between agencies and/or with MCFD;
- Lack of funding and extensive waitlists at community-based social service agencies providing support services, such as family counselling, violence cessation, substance misuse, and other programs.

Frontline workers also voiced substantial concerns over the general lack of clarity around key policies and procedures governing MCFD and DAA relationships. Aboriginal child, youth and family workers are often preoccupied with understanding bureaucratic procedures and protocols rather than providing direct services. Consultations with DAAs also revealed confusion over MCFD’s policy direction and frequent changes in protocols.

"Provincial Policy does not work for B.C. children and families. Provincial standards are not being met by MCDF, yet MCFD evaluates the performance of Delegated Agencies."

Grand Chief Doug Kelly, President of the Stó:lō Tribal Council, Chair of the First Nations Health Council. Quoted with permission.

The Representative for Children and Youth has been highly critical of these structural and administrative deficiencies as they result in programs, practices and initiatives that are largely disconnected from the needs and interests of children. In her 2013 report When Talk Trumped Service, the Representative focused heavily on the impacts of introducing ambitious governance and systems reforms in the absence of a clear policy framework, describing the situation as “planning for implementation without a clear blueprint for the desired end-state of the change process.”
There is no operational definition of "culturally appropriate" Aboriginal welfare services. MCFD staff and DAAs have varying interpretations, with no clear goals and objectives around how these services will facilitate good outcomes for Aboriginal children and youth. DAAs are invariably concerned that their service delivery will be restricted if they define what is culturally appropriate.

"Child protection standards and policies are culturally biased — not neutral — and sometimes unfriendly to Aboriginal cultural norms."  
DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker

However, varying interpretations inevitably lead to different levels of integration of cultural activities. This creates not only inconsistencies in the delivery of culturally appropriate services but also impacts the types of services provided by different agencies and departments, as well as the evaluation of whether these services are meeting the needs of Aboriginal children.

MCFD maintains a patchwork approach to integrating Aboriginal culture within its own child welfare services. Most of the responsibility in this area has been devolved to regional DAAs, as discussed above. Dedicated MCFD Aboriginal Services teams have been created, but are primarily staffed by non-Aboriginal workers. They consistently seek to apply “mainstream,” non-Aboriginal models of assessment and intervention, and are not afforded the needed time or human resources to make required investments in cultural learning, community trust and capacity building.

MCFD’s performance measures for assessing culturally appropriate services are also problematic. Currently, the Ministry has opted for a measure that simply counts the number of Aboriginal children serviced through DAAs. Unfortunately, this performance measure in no way reveals whether these vulnerable children and youths experience improved outcomes.

"Our agency serves the most diverse array of First Nations. Honouring their culture and identity is difficult at times because we do not have the staff that are knowledgeable in the history of the peoples to be able to understand clients’ present day circumstances. The resources we have in-house seem to only touch the surface of the issues that our families face."  
DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker

“In Aboriginal Services, it’s not just about dealing with the parents or nuclear family, but the entire extended family, and in most cases, the community as a whole. It’s a much more complex web of social relations that impacts the delivery of services, and ultimately the outcomes.”  
MCFD Aboriginal Services worker

MCFD staff who are dedicated to working with Aboriginal communities receive inadequate cultural training. Survey findings showed that the training received, in practice, only assisted a handful of frontline workers. Approximately, 84% of MCFD workers received cultural training but only 49% agreed that it assisted them in performing their duties. Similar findings were noted among DAA workers where 83% received training but about 58% respondents found it helpful.
“As a cultural worker, I often find that my work is minimized by MCFD. There is a lack of understanding of our clients. The majority of MCFD social workers are from a different culture.”
DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker

“Social work is never easy, but the issues in this setting are simply that much more complex and multifaceted.”
MCFD Aboriginal Services worker

“As an Aboriginal person, cultural training was ridiculous. MCFD is attempting to be politically correct, but there is no understanding of what is appropriate and not for cultural training at the highest levels of government.”
DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker

Dialogues and consultations with frontline workers demonstrate that many involved in the design and delivery of Aboriginal child welfare services hold problematic assumptions about Aboriginal culture. The most troubling involves simply assisting Aboriginal children in the same manner a social worker deals with non-Aboriginals, for instance by failing to account for the critical role of extended family or the role of elders. Some social workers also carry culturally inaccurate assumptions about the heritage of a child. For instance, if a child has a non-Aboriginal parent, there is often an automatic conclusion that they are Métis. However, DAAs have asserted that some of these children in fact have status. Offloading these cases to DAAs without proper understanding demonstrates a lack of knowledge of Aboriginal heritage amongst many MCFD teams. These issues are exacerbated in cases where a child’s father or lineage are unknown.

“MCFD just assumes if a child has a non-Aboriginal parent, they are Métis. But some of these kids have status.”
DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker

“I never knew I was Aboriginal until my file was being transferred to Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society. I was 16.”
Former Aboriginal youth in care

In summary, MCFD acknowledges the need for culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal children. In practice, however, there has been negligible improvement in the Ministry’s approach and allocation of resources to accommodate the needs of Aboriginal children and families.
The B.C. government has failed to prioritize proper funding for services and supports for vulnerable children and their families over the last decade, the 2014 BCGEU Choose Children report showed. Since 2008, MCFD funding has been cut by $44 million before inflation. Choose Children called on the government to restore funding and to commit new funding to better support core business areas, including special needs, mental health, and other services.

According to research by the B.C. Representative for Children and Youth, total combined funding to DAAs from the provincial and federal governments increased by nearly 50% between 2006/2007 and 2011/12 – from $37.7 million to $56.7 million.

However, demand for DAAs services grew by an almost equal amount over the same period of time. For instance, the number of Aboriginal children, youth and families receiving some level of service from DAAs increased by 46% during this same period. The total number of Aboriginal children in care in DAAs increased by 40% – from 1,433 to 2,010.

DAA funding increases appear to have been matched by a growing client base and increased service demand pressures. “Although both federal and provincial funding has increased during the past few years, funding is not considered adequate to support the delivery of a full range of quality child welfare services by Aboriginal communities,” the Representative concluded.

In our consultations and surveys, Aboriginal child, youth and family workers consistently and unanimously highlighted cuts to programs and the inadequacy of existing resources. Lack of proper funding for specialized support programs and services was identified as a leading concern, especially around mental health, special needs and parenting programs. In some cases, waitlists topped two years. Increased funding for services and a broad spectrum of supports for vulnerable Aboriginal children, youth and families is a top priority.

“Community services for Aboriginal families are inaccessible. There is a two-year waitlist for an Aboriginal parenting program, and a similar wait for Aboriginal child and youth mental health.”

MCFD Aboriginal Services worker

Funding for Aboriginal child, youth and family welfare services lack transparency. In her report When Talk Trumped Service, the Representative also pointed to costly DAA “governance” initiatives that lead to little or no improvement in processes and procedures and may come at the expense of financing direct service delivery.

Key budgetary allocations for Aboriginal welfare services, including funding allocations and disbursements to MCFD Aboriginal Services teams and to DAAs from provincial or federal sources are not publicly available. Ministry service plans do not break out allocations for Aboriginal services. There is no ability to track funding changes for Aboriginal welfare services year-over-year.

The current lack of financial transparency amounts to a lack of accountability of the entire Aboriginal welfare system, the BCGEU believes. The disproportionate number of Aboriginal youth and families within B.C’s social welfare system justifies a distinct budget under the Ministry.

The structural complexity around funding and resourcing also hampers service delivery. Vulnerable Aboriginal children and youth are affected by the slow transferability of funding between on-reserve and off-reserve communities. BCGEU consultations with DAAs reveal that Aboriginal children face difficulties...
in accessing services based on their heritage. Location tends to determine the funding source.

If the child has First Nations status, then the federal government is responsible. If the Aboriginal child does not have First Nations status, the province is placed in charge of funding-required services. The situation is rarely clear-cut, especially for vulnerable Aboriginal children and youth who no longer live on reserve.

In practice, the time taken to determine a child’s eligibility for status causes month-long delays in access to funding, and therefore access to services. Those delays are compounded when vulnerable children and youth move frequently due to unstable family situations. Workers at one particular agency noted that when files are transferred from MCFD, the continuity of provided funding is inconsistent, frequently interrupted, or sometimes abruptly cancelled leaving agencies without the ability to continue needed services for children, youth and families.

Similar challenges and administrative complexities were discussed at length during BCGEU consultations. In Victoria, several groups described significant problems with establishing “family status” and “lineage” for clients, and therefore funding eligibility for particular programs. Members also discussed the difficulty navigating the complex Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards and Indicators (AOPSI) framework. AOPSI standards inform social work practice in an Aboriginal agency context and provide a guide for operations and practice for Aboriginal agencies.

Consultations with workers from a partially delegated agency in B.C.’s north revealed a stifling disparity in their resources and funding versus MCFD teams, caused by the agency’s limited delegation status. The agency is the primary point of contact for services and intervention, but is effectively prevented from taking urgent action, especially in remote communities where direct Ministry services and staff are frequently unavailable or inaccessible.

For First Nations, access to sufficient funding and budgetary resources is made more complicated by jurisdictional gaps between the provincial and federal governments. Attempts to resolve financial disputes have been pursued through a child-first approach known as “Jordan’s principle.” Jordan’s principle is an agreement that aims to resolve jurisdictional disputes between federal and provincial governments concerning funding of services for a status Indian child. The government of first contact pays for the service and the governments agree to work out jurisdiction and financial responsibility later.

The application of Jordan’s principle lacks clarity. Anecdotal evidence from consultations reveals that the principle is often either disregarded or applied slowly and unevenly, which jeopardizes the response time to help vulnerable children.

Frontline workers pointed to the complex inefficiency of drawing funding from multiple sources and under different protocols—provincial versus federal—and how the provincial policy is typically much more rigid in its capacity to release needed funding and resources in a timely manner. These agencies report:

a) their need to constantly manoeuvre politically to acquire needed resources;
b) troubling disparities in access to services that take root for those on, as opposed to off-reserve; and
c) the overall lack of responsiveness in a critical area of public service delivery as a result of these institutional arrangements.

“It’s really about getting on the reserve in the first place — reaching all of the various people, partners and organizations that need to be contacted, and also just knowing who needs to be contacted and involved in each case.”

MCFD Aboriginal Services worker

Aboriginal child, youth and family workers at DAAs point out a constant struggle to manage funds that support cultural activities. Under the current funding model, DAAs cannot support cultural programming as part of their core services. As we have seen, Aboriginal child, youth and family workers believe that cultural understanding is a prerequisite to proper service provision.

Funding to support cultural activities has gotten worse since the Ministry’s January 2014 decision to cut off funds for the “Indigenous Approaches” program. In her When Talk
Trumped Service report, the Representative for Children and Youth rightly criticized “Indigenous Approaches” for its lack of strategic direction and over-emphasis on research into service-delivery and governance models that lead to wasteful spending in Aboriginal welfare services.

However, “Indigenous Approaches“ also provided funding for community-based projects that identified and filled perceived cultural gaps in Aboriginal welfare services, including training social workers in the culture, history, and traditions of the First Nations they work with. Aboriginal welfare services require proper funding for cultural competency training and cultural activities that support clients and improve understanding with Aboriginal communities. Funding for cultural programs are sorely lacking, Aboriginal child, youth and family workers say.

"When services are taken away we struggle to support our families. We need further support to build bridges with Indigenous Bands and communities. We need more funding for services that are culturally relevant such as healing circles, elders, and mentors."
DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker

"Response from management was that we were to stop spending time with children in care making moccasins, stop being a liaison to an assigned school, were not allowed to participate in Aboriginal community functions."
DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker

Aboriginal child, youth and family workers refer their clients to community-based social service programs operated by not-for-profit societies, as needed. This might include family programs, counselling, parenting support, violence prevention and cessation counsellors, addiction services, early childhood education, and more.

Community social services referrals appear to be encouraged by MCFD management as a way to manage Ministry work volume. At the same time, consultation between Ministries and community service agencies—for a more comprehensive case management plan or referral purposes—is strictly prohibited.

To summarize, BCGEU’s research and consultations on the issue of funding and resources for Aboriginal services to vulnerable children, youth and families, highlight the following:

- Widespread reports of overall funding shortages and the related impacts on service delivery quality and timeliness;
- Lack of information about budgets and budgeting practices at MCFD, as well as transfers to DAAs from both the provincial and federal governments;
- Complicated funding arrangements due to federal and provincial jurisdictions;
- Discrepancies in funding for Aboriginal children and youth depending on their on-reserve or off-reserve situation;
- Disparities in available resources for DAAs as opposed to MCFD teams, especially for agencies which hold only partial delegation;
- Complex governance protocols for funding and disbursements;
- Insufficient funding for community-based social service programs for family counselling, early childhood education, violence cessation, substance misuse, and more.

"Grossly oversized caseloads; minimal vacation relief; minimal sick relief; all-but-a-joke professional development. For 25 years. Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose."
MCFD Aboriginal Service worker

"Many clients are treated like case files, not people. I remain for the children."
DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker
Frontline workers face unmanageable workloads and poor caseload management that directly impact the availability, timeliness and quality of support for those most in need. In our surveys and consultations with MCFD and DAAs Aboriginal child, youth and family workers, workload was identified as the number-one issue affecting their ability to perform primary duties and provide quality services to those in need.

“Our concerns regarding high caseloads do not seem to be heard, until something has happened: a new incident, lapsed court orders, or complaints from the family that their needs are not being addressed.”

DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker

Caseloads tend to be marginally smaller in Aboriginal Services than in other areas of child and family welfare, but the level of complexity increases — sometimes significantly. A range of factors unique to the setting of Aboriginal children, youth and communities create rigorous and significant time demands for these workers and limit their ability to provide the highest quality and most responsive levels of care.

“On the whole, it’s a much more labour intensive time investment going through the very necessary cultural process of listening to more voices before you can assist and take action.”

MCFD Aboriginal Services worker

Factors and variables contributing to high workloads for MCFD and DAA workers and support services through community social service agencies include:

- Larger family units that require substantial additional in-person time and attention;
- Highly complex files requiring more time and a more extensive range of services;
- Case files that are open and active for much longer periods;
- Cases that extend beyond the particular child and nuclear family and that involve the broader community as a whole, and its complex web of social relations;
- Significant time and staff resources required for attending cultural events and ceremonies in order to build trust and shared capacity;
- Extensive waitlists for intake as well as specialized services, such as mental health and special needs;
- Rural and remote locations that require workers to spend substantial time in transit and away from other clients and the pressing follow-up work that remains at the office;
- Caseload volumes that remain high and beyond best practices;
- Prohibitive time investments in navigating complex protocols and coordinating with other involved parties;
- Coordination of supports with other bands or First Nations or DAAs in other provinces.

Workload related feedback from MCFD Aboriginal Services workers include:

- Frontline workers frequently being required to cover
administrative services duties due to short staffing and unfilled vacancies;

- Loss of efficiency and specialization due to excessive multitasking and the assumption of mixed duties (for example, workers simultaneously performing child protection, guardianship, adoptions, mental health and special needs functions);

- General workload pressures preventing workers from meeting certain protocols and standards of care.

Workload related feedback from DAA workers include specific challenges such as:

- Extensive community development work and cultural facilitation, both over and above the regular scope of duties, and often requiring workers to commit their weekends and time off;

- Complex caseloads that typically involve working with the community as a whole, and addressing broader systemic issues;

- Significant time required for travel, sometimes including boat and seaplane, as well as associated weather factors that prevent workers from doing on-the-ground work;

- Covering additional caseloads of workers on leave, or those tied to unfilled vacancies;

- Accompanying MCFD staff, which by protocol, requires Agency workers to temporarily drop other work obligations and priorities;

- Complex risk assessments and procedural administrative requirements that prevent in-person work;

- A combination of the above challenges, which keeps workers from spending much needed one-on-one time with children and families.

These findings complement the Choose Children report, which found that 80% of B.C.’s child, youth and family workers at MCFD have caseloads beyond the recommended best practice of 20 child protection cases per month.
WORKING CONDITIONS

Turning to overall staffing levels and workload, nearly three-quarters (72%) of MCFD Aboriginal Service workers surveyed disagreed somewhat or strongly with the statement “my office is adequately staffed and resourced,” with nearly half (44%) disagreeing “strongly.” Aboriginal child, youth and family workers point to:

- Positions cut in adoptions;
- No backfill provided for predictable leaves and temporary vacancies;
- High turnover and frequent staff changes;
- Shortages of administrative staff;
- Longstanding, unfilled vacancies;
- Staff burnout;
- Loss of staff to retirement and attrition without succession planning, and positions left unfilled;
- Long-standing, unaddressed staff shortages in “hard-to-recruit” locations.

Two-thirds (64%) of DAAs child, youth and family workers disagreed somewhat or strongly with the statement “my office is adequately staffed and resourced,” with two-fifths (38%) disagreeing “strongly.” Respondents identified many of the same problems, including high turnover, offices that are never fully staffed, and the occurrence of new and inexperienced workers frequently being assigned highly complex cases.

These workload pressures affect services and supports for Aboriginal children, youth and families, but also the mental and physical health of frontline workers themselves. In our meetings, consultations, and surveys, participants frequently reported burnout, debilitating stress, and in some cases, physical ailments as a result of inordinate workload demands—sometimes resulting in high rates of illness and sick leave.

“There is no attempt to help workers manage all the demands placed on them.”
MCFD Aboriginal Services worker

“Problems and stress are swept under the rug rather than dealt with. Management is extremely disconnected from the front line of workers.”
DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker
Many Aboriginal child, youth and family workers describe a range of health and safety issues that remain prevalent in the workplace and unaddressed by employers. These workers suffer personal mental and physical impacts as a result of their working conditions. They are regularly put in harms way as a result of inadequate safety planning, staffing and work pressures, and insufficient resources. Frontline workers are being placed at unacceptable risk.

Aboriginal child, youth and family workers employed by DAAs and at MCFD Aboriginal Services, identified four overarching health and safety issues regularly encountered in their work:

- Exposure to high-risk clients and frequent violence without adequate staff support and safety protocol;
- Regular travel to remote or isolated communities without adequate communications technology, and sometimes using improperly equipped vehicles;
- Risks associated with working alone;
- Risks associated with working in smaller communities where Aboriginal child, youth and family workers may be known or related to their clients.

"In a large urban setting, we don’t get a quick response from RCMP when we need accompaniment for an investigation or apprehension. Sometimes after waiting for police for an hour or so, I’ve just gone in because of the urgency of the matter."

DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker

"In child protection, you are expected to go to homes alone even if there may be a risk."

MCFD Aboriginal Services worker

"I am concerned about clients who are high risk seeing me in my own vehicle, having my license plate number and being able to figure out where I live."

MCFD Aboriginal Services worker
Recruitment and retention of frontline child, youth and family workers continues to be a major problem and impacts service delivery, the 2014 Choose Children report found. Similar findings were gathered in surveys for Aboriginal child, youth and family workers in DAAs and in Aboriginal Services teams within MCFD.

Frontline workers ranked recruitment and retention as one of the top three challenges faced in performing their core duties. An informed and culturally attuned system of care depends on the effective training, recruitment and retention of qualified and knowledgeable Aboriginal workers. Aboriginal agencies, even fully delegated agencies, remain disproportionately staffed by non-Aboriginal workers. In our surveys, more than four-fifths (84%) of MCFD Aboriginal Service workers identified as “Non-Aboriginal.” Nearly half (46%) of DAA child, youth and family survey respondents identified as “Non-Aboriginal.”

Survey responses revealed lengthy delays in hiring new workers; a high turnover; and the quick loss of Aboriginal welfare workers. This situation means existing frontline workers pick up the slack, leading to excessive and unmanageable workloads. Evidence gathered from surveys as well as member outreach and consultation events reveal that turnover is particularly acute in DAAs, leading to significant problems with continuity of care and gaps in service.

Differences in employment conditions exacerbate recruitment and retention problems at Aboriginal agencies. Aboriginal child, youth and family workers employed at DAAs have inferior employment conditions compared to Ministry workers.

Fully delegated social workers in DAAs perform comparable child protection work to their colleagues at MCFD. These DAA workers have wage parity with government, but receive inferior extended health, sick leave and other benefits. Complete parity is justified, but would require improving MCFD’s funding formula for DAAs.

Workers in DAAs or programs that are partly delegated (or not delegated at all) earn significantly inferior wages. They fall into the community social services wage grid, which is considerably lower than MCFD. Benefits are inferior as well. Real wages in this sector declined over the last decade because of major funding cuts by government. In the last round of bargaining for the community social services sector, BCGEU negotiated wage increases of up to 11.5% by 2019. However, this increase applies to wages that are often below living wage levels.

The significant delays that Aboriginal agencies face in acquiring full delegation status – and improved wage grids – only compound the recruitment and retention problem.

“MCFD comes to us for advice, training, facilitation – but we’re not treated as equals.”
DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker

"The word on the street from graduating students is to go work for MCFD. They have better benefits and more resources to do the job."
DAA Aboriginal child, youth and family worker

Staffing is a particularly severe problem in remote First Nations communities. Consultations with partially delegated DAAs pointed out how MCFD’s protocols impact agency staffing. For example, if MCFD is required to visit a family or child in care, a social worker from the partially delegated agency must accompany
them. However by adhering to this protocol, the agency’s capacity to respond to other children’s needs and service requirements are often immediately compromised.

BCGEU Aboriginal child, youth and family workers at MCFD and among DAAs consistently pointed to problems with a real lack of basic training and education. They drew particular attention to the specialized and highly contextual elements of knowledge and training required for properly serving each unique Aboriginal community.

While challenges associated with recruitment and retention, staffing and training are common across all child, youth and family services in B.C., the cultural and issue-based diversity that exists in Aboriginal Services makes the transferability of workers and their skills uniquely challenging and problematic.
B.C.’s Aboriginal child welfare system requires a major investment in resources, staffing, cultural training, improved transparency and financial accountability, as well as improved coordination across the sector and better oversight and reporting mechanisms.

Services and supports for vulnerable Aboriginal children, youth, families and their communities are being compromised by a patchwork welfare system that is largely culturally unsuitable, under-resourced, severely under-staffed and struggles under its own complexity.

Aboriginal child, youth and family workers provide an important, frontline perspective on the failings of the province’s social and welfare system. This report draws a comprehensive picture of the systemic failures. The themes highlighted include: historical and cultural factors; mistrust; systemic administrative complexity; lack of culturally appropriate services and staffing; and insufficient funding to ensure culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal children, youth, families and their communities.

The BCGEU asserts that the political leadership of our province must take responsibility for properly prioritizing and resourcing B.C.’s Aboriginal child, youth and family welfare system to avoid any further tragedies. As the union representing dedicated Aboriginal child, youth and family workers, BCGEU makes the following recommendations to the government of British Columbia:

B.C.’s Aboriginal child welfare system should be reformed to address cultural sensitivities and historical injustices, and define a new culturally appropriate operational framework and service delivery model. This could be achieved by convening a strategic planning roundtable involving all actors, including Aboriginal leadership.

The province must recognize that the continued removal of Aboriginal children and youth from their homes is a strong reminder of the legacies of the residential schools. Removals and investigations foster mistrust among Aboriginal families and communities and ultimately impede the delivery of services. The proposed strategic roundtable would help develop an operational definition and framework for culturally appropriate Aboriginal welfare service delivery, which would help build trust. Building trust and cultural understanding are fundamental prerequisites for delivering effective Aboriginal welfare services and help redress past historical injustices.

Funding for Aboriginal child, youth and family welfare services must be transparent, accountable and meet actual needs. Current funding levels are inadequate to support the delivery of a full range of quality child welfare services in Aboriginal communities. Resources are insufficient to address existing service gaps for vulnerable Aboriginal children, youth and families.

Funding disparities between MCFD Aboriginal Services and DAAs must be addressed. Even though DAAs come into contact with highly vulnerable children who require immediate assistance, they operate under restrictive stipulations and policies that limit their ability to take action. MCFD protocols place significant pressure on DAAs and detract from their ability to exercise their responsibility towards Aboriginal children and youth in care. Partial delegation designation further constrains DAA resources and responsibilities.

Delays in determining an Aboriginal child’s status leads to month-long delays for support services, placing vulnerable Aboriginal children and youth at risk.

Funding is also urgently needed for mental health, special needs and parenting programs that have wait times in excess of years, effectively depriving children and families in need of the support services required.

Aboriginal child, youth and family workers rank workload as their number one issue. Their workloads are characterized
by complexity, staffing shortages, lack of cultural awareness and knowledge, and insufficient allocation of time for cultural activities and community trust building. The government should help define best practices for caseload and workload in Aboriginal welfare services that account for caseload complexity and cultural appropriateness.

Workers also face clear health and safety problems, including violence, working alone without adequate safety protocol, and regular travel to remote or isolated communities. These challenges must be addressed through a comprehensive health and safety review.

Recruitment and retention, including a rapid loss of Aboriginal workers among MCFD Aboriginal Services teams and in DDAs, is a serious challenge. Turnover is particularly acute in DAAs. Differences in employment conditions between MCFD workers and community-based DAAs exacerbate these problems. Complete parity of employment conditions between MCFD and fully delegated DAA workers is needed. A revision to MCFD’s funding formula for DAAs would be required in this case. Government also needs to address severe staffing shortages in remote First Nations communities.

Government should address recruitment and retention problems associated with Aboriginal child, youth and family workers by focusing on wages, training and skills development. Wage levels for non-delegated and partially delegated DAA workers in Aboriginal services must be revisited, as must the near-poverty wages in the entire community social services sector. Aboriginal welfare services training should focus on specialized services, complex cases, cultural issues, and peer support. Sufficient funding must be granted for cultural competency training.

B.C.’s Aboriginal child welfare system is characterized by systemic administrative complexity and failure to coordinate work between the actors and agencies involved, including Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs), the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD), and the federal government. This must be resolved. The province must also address jurisdictional gaps in funding that remain with the federal government, despite the adoption of Jordan’s principle.

The province must develop, adopt, and publicly disclose a clear and comprehensive policy framework for Aboriginal child, youth and family services that clarifies roles and responsibilities, reduces administrative complexity and ambiguity, and firmly establishes ministry end responsibility for service delivery outcome in the province.

MCFD should perform an immediate and full public evaluation of Aboriginal Services teams and offices review any existing policy frameworks, and present clear action plans with appropriate financial resources and achievable timelines. This evaluation must touch on key areas that include: workload, existing financing models, performance evaluation measures and metrics, current staffing levels, and regional service demands.

MCFD should review and evaluate DAA delegation agreements for effectiveness and help develop coordination capacity. Vulnerable Aboriginal children and youth are left in a position of increased vulnerability due to the fragmentation of authority and responsibility, and serious gaps in capacity.

The lack of coordination and communication between MCFD’s Aboriginal Services teams and Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs) must be addressed. The delivery of services has become slow, dysfunctional and unresponsive due to competing administrative protocols and delays in establishing DAA delegation credentials. Improved coordination is also required with community-based not-for-profit agencies that provide important programs and support services.

British Columbia’s Aboriginal welfare system lacks transparency and accountability towards its clients and towards taxpayers. BCGEU believes that funding allocations for Aboriginal welfare services must be public. The disproportionate number of Aboriginal youth and families within B.C’s social welfare system justifies a distinct service plan and budgetary allocation within the Ministry.
BCGEU believes that the government should establish a core MCFD business area for Aboriginal Services. The Ministry should develop a yearly “Operational Performance and Strategic Management Report” specific to Aboriginal Services. By using service delivery indicators and performance outcomes, the report would improve accountability and transparency in the Aboriginal welfare system.

1. The province should develop, adopt, and publicly disclose a clear and comprehensive policy framework for Aboriginal child, youth and family services, including:

   I. A formalized and intelligible assignment of roles and responsibilities

   II. Established end responsibility and accountability for service delivery outcomes throughout the province.

   III. Funding for welfare services that is transparent, accountable and meets needs.

2. The government should establish a core MCFD business area for Aboriginal Services that includes:

   I. Publicly appropriated and disclosed funding through the provincial budget estimates process;

   II. Specially designated mental health (CYMH) and special needs (CYSN) funding for Aboriginal children, youth and families;

   III. Expanded performance accounting in the annual Ministry Service Plan related to Aboriginal Services.

3. The province should convene a strategic planning roundtable that would develop an operational framework for culturally appropriate Aboriginal child, youth and family welfare services and service delivery. The roundtable should involve provincial Aboriginal leadership, MCFD, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. The strategic roundtable should develop formal recommendations on:

   I. Successor policy framework on funding after federal withdrawal from “Tripartite Agreements;”

   II. New protocols and standards for improving the consistency of funding and resources available to on- and off-reserve populations;

   III. Integration and rationalization of program responsibilities and service delivery;

4. MCFD should develop a yearly “Operational Performance and Strategic Management Report” specific to Aboriginal Services with indicators and statistics pertaining to service delivery and performance outcomes. The report should be publicly released and incorporate:

   I. Full disclosure of staffing levels, funding, service delivery statistics, service demand indicators, caseloads, and waitlists;

   II. Full disclosure of annual funding to DAAs and other agencies from all sources (i.e. federal and provincial governments);

   III. Full transparency on funding and transfers to
DAAs and other organizations providing services;

IV. Annual performance measures review, suitably designed to address heterogeneity of Aboriginal communities;

V. Status updates on year-to-year Ministry-DAA relationships, file sharing and transfers, and performance audits;

VI. Agency delegation reviews and updates;

VII. Recommendations for increases to staffing and financial resources based on report findings and demand for services and supports.

5. MCFD should perform an immediate, public evaluation of MCFD Aboriginal Services teams and DAAs reviewing existing policy frameworks, presenting clear action steps with clear timelines, including:

I. Clarification of Aboriginal Services mandates and objectives;

II. Definition of best practices for caseload and workload that accounts for caseload complexity and cultural appropriateness;

III. Current funding models;

IV. Special attention to mental health (CYMH) and special needs (CYSN) program delivery and access;

V. Performance evaluation measures and metrics;

VI. Current service demand and delivery by Service Delivery Area (SDA);

VII. Human resources management accounting and review, including allocation and distribution of specific job classifications and positions (for example, the ratio of Child Protection Workers to Guardianship workers, mental health clinicians, etc., within Aboriginal Services teams and offices);

VIII. Assessment of recruitment and retention challenges for both Ministry offices and DAAs;

IX. Identification of communities and regions that are underserved, without a local Aboriginal Services team or office, understaffed and otherwise under-resourced.

X. Ongoing review conducted regularly on a three-year cycle.

6. MCFD must perform an immediate evaluation of all provincial DAA Delegation Agreements and processes with proposed recommendations, reforms, and clear actions, including:

I. Full inventory and accounting of current delegation statuses for all B.C. DAAs;

II. Longitudinal review of timelines and durations for delegation applications and approvals across all agencies;

III. Investigation into the impacts of recruitment and retention variables, high turnover of workers in DAAs, and how low staffing thresholds may delay or impede the delegation process for certain agencies;

IV. Development of a new framework aimed at: a) reducing bureaucratic obstacles to acquiring full delegation and required resources; b) provision of more responsive education and accreditation processes and procedures; c) overall efficiency and accountability improvements;

V. Ongoing review conducted regularly on a three-year cycle.
7. **MCFD undertake a comprehensive province-wide health and safety review, including:**

I. Full public disclosure of ministry occupational health and safety (OHS) policies and frameworks for Aboriginal Services workers operating on- and off-reserve;

II. Reporting on agency OHS policies (including travel, working alone, cellular and satellite communications devices, and vehicles);

III. Review of communications devices, such as the current distribution of satellite phones and other required devices for frontline workers;

IV. Province-wide inventory and identification of so-called “no-go zones”—disclosing whether these exist “officially,” or if there are areas that workers are actively discouraged from visiting.
APPENDIX 1
LIST OF SURVEYS AND CONSULTATION MEETINGS

Surveys
- BCGEU members in delegated Aboriginal agencies
- BCGEU members in non-delegated Aboriginal agencies
- MCFD workers with Aboriginal caseloads
- MCFD Administrative support staff

BCGEU Choose Children Aboriginal outreach meetings
- Vancouver, May 14, 2015 – 13 participants
- Victoria, June 3, 2015 – 18 participants
- Terrace (conference call), June 17, 2015 – 6 participants
- Surrey – La Société de les Enfants Michif (Métis Family Services), June 24, 2015 – 16 participants
- Kamloops – Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family & Community Services – 6 participants

Consultations
- Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), March 25, 2015
- Grand Chief Doug Kelly, President of the Stó:lo Tribal Council, Chair of the First Nations Health Council, February 24, 2015
- Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society (VACFSS) Youth Advisory Committee, August 12 & 19, 2015
- Former youth in care, June 19, 2015
The BCGEU is one of the most diverse labour unions in the province, representing 65,000 workers at 550 different employers across British Columbia.

BCGEU represents workers in the provincial government service, including at the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and specifically:

- MCFD Aboriginal Services workers and social workers with Aboriginal clients. They are a part of BCGEU’s Social, Information and Health Component (Component 6);
- MCFD Administrative workers. They are a part of BCGEU’s Administrative Services Component (Component 12).

BCGEU represents over 400 Aboriginal child, youth and family workers at delegated and partially delegated Aboriginal agencies, including:

- Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society (VACFSS),
- La société de les Enfants Michif (Métis Family Services) in Surrey,
- Island Métis Family and Community Services Society (Victoria),
- Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family & Community Services (Kamloops),
- Haida Child and Family Services Society (Masset and Skidegate) and
- Northwest Inter-Nation Child and Community Service Society (Prince Rupert and Terrace).

These BCGEU Aboriginal child, youth and family workers are represented through the Community Social Services Component (Component 3).

Overall, BCGEU represents workers at 18 employers that are considered Aboriginal by nature due to their employer and service base. The union also represents workers at the following Aboriginal worksites:

**Vancouver and surrounding area:**
- Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Center
- Native Courtworkers and Counselling Association of British Columbia
- Native Education College

**Victoria/Vancouver Island:**
- Victoria Native Friendship Center
- Wsa´ nec´ School Board
- BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society
- Tla’min Community Health Services (Powell River)

**North:**
- Kitimat Village Education Department (Haisla First Nation)
- Dawson Creek Aboriginal Resources Society

BCGEU employs an Aboriginal Liaison staff person to advise and liaise with Aboriginal leadership and organizations.

In April 2014, the BCGEU developed a vision document focused on expanding servicing for existing and new Aboriginal Service members through education, improved representation and political action. The recommendations stem from an Aboriginal Roundtable that brought together workers from most of our Aboriginal certifications.
APPENDIX 3

SOURCES


Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) http://cwrp.ca/fr/infosheets/first-nations-child-welfare-british-columbia
