

Ontario Association of  
Children's Aid Societies  
The voice of child welfare in Ontario

Ontario Child

# Welfare Report

2014



## Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies

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The voice of child welfare in Ontario

### Who is OACAS?

OACAS has been the voice of child welfare in Ontario for over 100 years, enhancing and promoting the welfare and well-being of children, youth and families. OACAS works to create a highly effective system of services for children which has the confidence of Ontario families and communities.

On behalf of 44 Children's Aid Societies and six Aboriginal organizations who are associate members, OACAS provides advocacy and government relations, public education, training, information and knowledge management, and event planning. OACAS is governed by a voluntary board of directors which works with the member agencies and with government to bring positive change to child welfare services. This report was written by OACAS on behalf of their member agencies.

# Ontario Child Welfare Report 2014

The protection of vulnerable children and their families is at the heart of child welfare work. Every year, the child welfare sector in Ontario looks at the systemic issues that affect the people in their communities, and works to advance priorities that enhance the lives of the people they serve.

Within each community and across the province, Children's Aid Societies have developed long-term relationships with other social services who share the same goals. Consultations with children, youth, and family service providers, with children and families themselves, and discussions with government, help inform the priorities and recommendations outlined in this Child Welfare Report. This report is intended to highlight the work of Children's Aid Societies, and more importantly, to urge you to join them in improving the system that supports the children and families who are most in need in our communities.

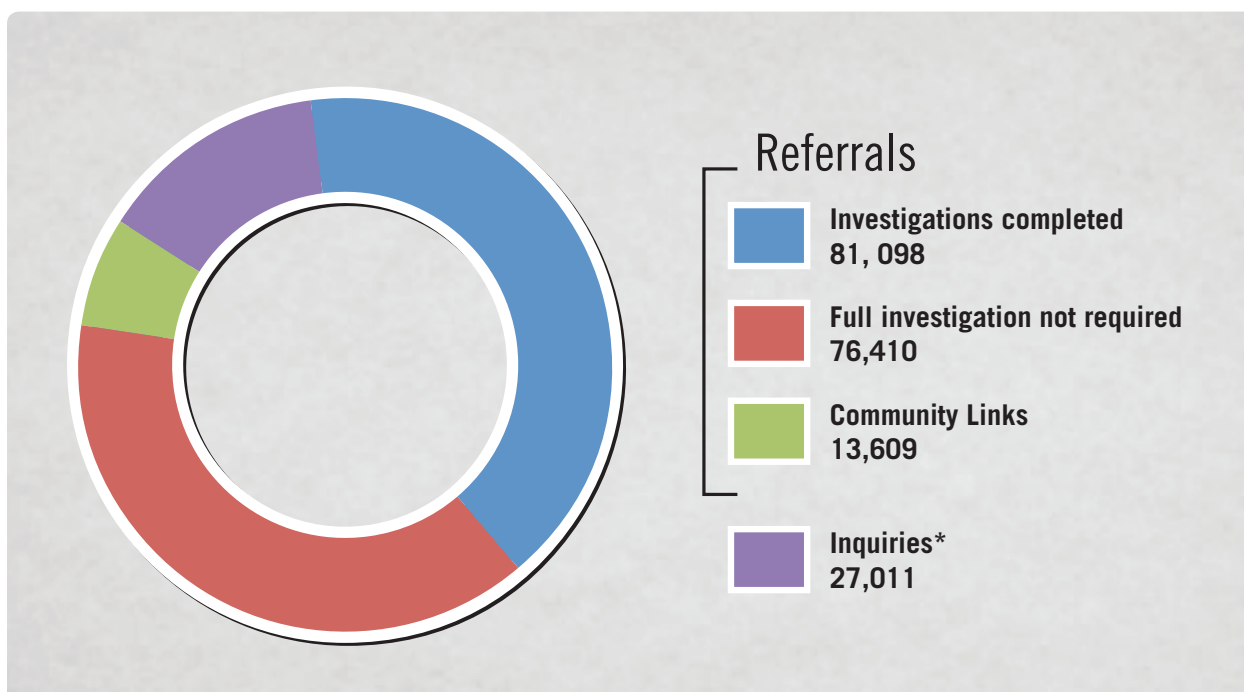
This year the sector identified six areas as the focus for change. They reflect specific issues that affect the work of Children's Aid Societies, impact the service and supports provided to children, families and communities, and are part of continuous transformation and service improvement. We are calling on government, other social service organizations, and the public to support the priorities outlined in this report. All of us must work together to continue the movement to evolve our social safety network to keep communities thriving with the care of their most vulnerable members. With this in mind, the 2014 Child Welfare Report is highlighting the following as significant priorities:

# 1. Support families to protect children at home

## What does this mean?

Some families need help to keep their children safely at home. Access to support programs, counselling, information, and referrals to community services may be the only help that they need. But if they don't receive this help, a problem or issue could turn into a serious situation down the road, requiring more intense involvement with either child welfare or other social services. For example, a parent with

mental health problems, in the midst of a crisis affecting their ability to care for a child, may need short-term service for their children while they are receiving help. A referral to Children's Aid for some intensive short-term help when they most need it would allow them to focus on recovery while knowing that their children will be safe and well.



**Figure 1: Total Referrals and Inquiries FY 2013-2014<sup>1</sup>**

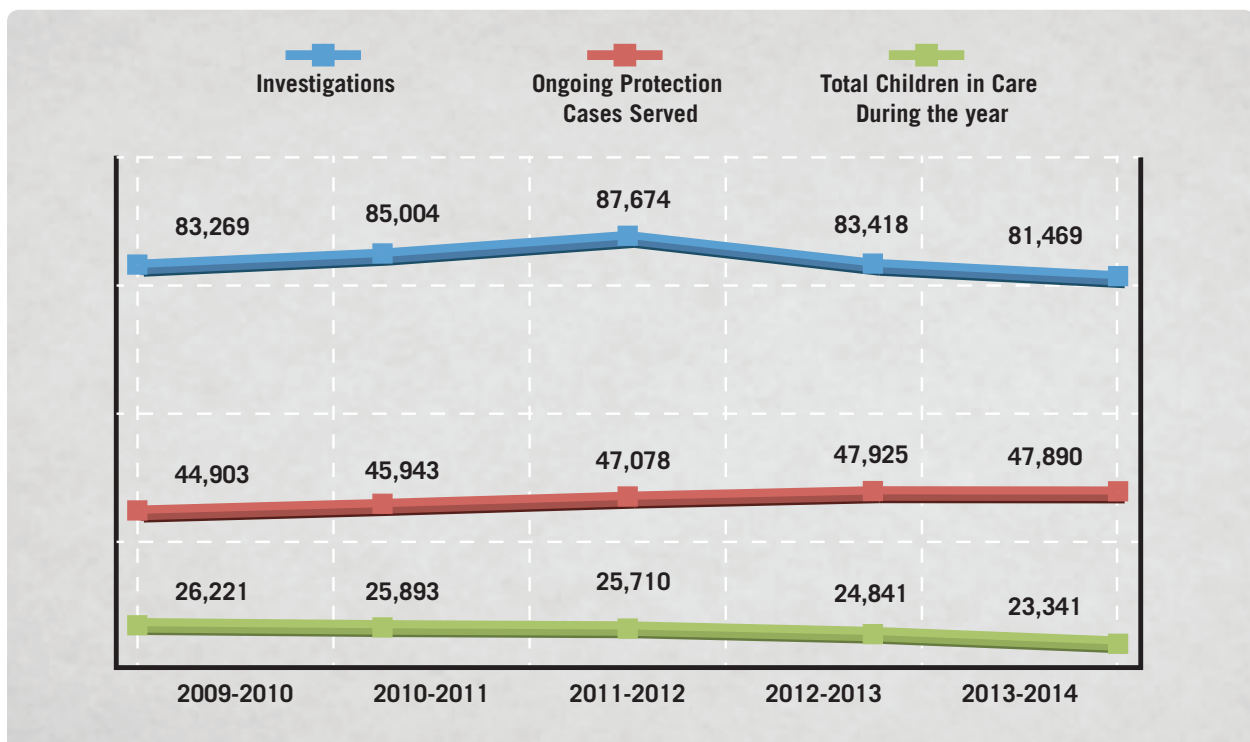
More than 198,000 inquiries and referrals came to the attention of Children's Aid Societies in 2013-2014. Inquiries include calls to find community programs and questions about child rearing, while referrals are calls about the safety or well-being of a child or referrals from other children's services.

\*As reporting general inquiries is discretionary, not all Children's Aid Societies report the number of general inquiries they receive in a year resulting in underrepresented data.

## Why is this a priority?

Providing early and intensive help, at the right time, can help avert the need for long-term and/or more intensive services. Certain social indicators suggest that some children may be at a higher risk of requiring services from the child welfare system. Mental health, substance abuse, and family violence are the common reasons behind referrals

to Children's Aid. Poverty and isolation often mean that these parents have few options for informal help. If they receive assistance when the child protection concerns first emerge, they can avoid long-term and intensive services. The outcomes for the child and family are improved, and the long-term costs are likely to be less.



**Figure 2: Child Protection Service Summary FY 2009-2010 to FY 2013-2014<sup>2</sup>**

As seen in Figure 2, the number of ongoing cases has plateaued over the last two years. A strong focus on working with families and kin has resulted in a decline in the number of children who are cared through Children's Aid in each of the past five years.

2. Ministry Quarterly reports submitted by member agencies to OACAS as of September 30, 2014

Children's Aid Societies provide a safety net for infants, children and youth who are experiencing or at risk of physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect or abandonment. They also provide help for families in need of extra support and to those who self-identify as needing assistance. A great emphasis is placed on addressing risk so that children can stay with their families and be safe and thrive. Children's Aid may be known for more intrusive roles – such as removing children from unsafe conditions and taking them into its care – though the vast majority of Children's Aid work is about protecting children by supporting families to stay together.

Families often face many issues, such as poverty, addiction, unemployment, mental health challenges and/or inadequate housing that can create stress or complications that affect their ability to care for their children. A child may be suffering from neglect because of their family's financial and housing situation or a family may need intervention supports because a parent has mental health issues that caused them to abandon their children.

## What steps have been taken?

Children's Aid Societies work to help families be strong and keep children safe. For almost 10 years, the government and the child welfare sector have been implementing change – transformation – that includes more focus on working with families to reduce risks through intervention, such as programs to improve parenting skills, assistance in finding appropriate housing or connecting with community resources. In almost 90%<sup>3</sup> of cases served by Children's Aid, the children stay with their family and they are supported together as a family unit. Changes to policy allow different

– and tailored – approaches to serving families, intensive assessments and service plans, contacts with numerous other professionals and service providers, arranging help from extended family members, as well as frequent visits with the family of the children while they remain in the family home.<sup>4</sup> Work has been done with other children's social service providers on protocols and programs to help address child welfare issues early on and to increase awareness of how to and when to report suspicions of abuse and neglect.

3. Based on the 2013-2014 Children's Aid Society data reported to OACAS and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services

4. OACAS 2014-15 Pre-Budget Consultation: Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. January 2014



## What needs to be done?

There needs to be continued focus on early involvement with families, and investment in the right services at the right time. This means not only ongoing support for Children's Aid Societies to engage early and effectively with families but also that those services are available in communities in a timely and sufficient manner to those families who need them. It means having a comprehensive and strategic approach to supporting those families known to be vulnerable. This requires that government must have a continued commitment to providing a broader range of social services, including addressing the underlying causes such as poverty, isolation, substance abuse, and violence.

## Recommendations

- Continue to recognize the importance of the early intervention approaches as important investments for children identified as requiring protection from Children's Aid.
- Increase investments in critical services, such as youth and adult mental health, partner violence supports, and substance abuse treatment, so that the services are there when needed to prevent escalation of family problems to the point where child protection concerns increase.

## Early help for those who need it can make a difference

Nadya and her children came to Canada as refugees, escaping violence and persecution in her home country. Arriving in Ontario she had no family or friends to help, but was determined to support herself and her children. Working three different jobs almost made ends meet, but left her stressed and depressed, and her children to take care of each other for long periods of time without supervision. After a neighbour called with concerns about the children being left alone, Children's Aid learned how much Nadya was struggling – to feed, clothe and care for her children, especially without any help from friends or family. Children's Aid made referrals to Newcomer services, Ontario Works, counselling and to community programs, which provided her children with mentoring and activities. Nadya was able to build a positive network of friends, make better arrangements for child care and supervision, and receive counselling to help with her depression.



## Interconnected Social Services

Children's Aid Societies embody the interconnectedness of Ontario's social services. It is uncommon that a child or family comes to the attention of Children's Aid without having had contact or involvement with other services in the community. Families often face many issues - such as poverty, addiction, unemployment, mental health challenges, and/or inadequate housing - that lead them to needing support from Children's Aid.

The reverse is also true – when a child or family becomes involved with Children's Aid they often need the help of multiple services to get back to a safe place. Addiction support, mental health services, and housing aid are just a few examples of the service providers that could be involved in getting a family back to a healthy and safe situation.

As the child welfare field moves forward in finding more effective and efficient ways to protect children and keep them safe, they are working with their community partners and social service providers to elevate child well-being across the province. All of Ontario's social service resources for families and children need to be supported by the government and public in an effort to shift the process and focus of child safety and well-being to front of mind. It is after all the responsibility of everyone to protect children.

### Jeffrey Baldwin Inquest

Children's Aid Societies work with a wide range of service providers and partners to keep families together and children safe. Recently, there was an inquest into the circumstances surrounding the death in 2002 of Jeffrey Baldwin, a child who fell through the cracks of a number of social services, leaving him vulnerable to fatal abuse from his grandparents. The Coroner's Jury Verdict from the inquest outlined a series of recommendations that stress the importance of working together to keep children safe. Since the tragic death of Jeffrey many changes have been made to not only the child welfare system but also other social services who work in the community and the interaction of these social service providers with each other.

## 2. Extend the age of protection to 18

### What does this mean?

Currently in Ontario, the laws which protect children from abuse and neglect do not extend to children once they turn 16 years old. Most social and legal constructs consider someone an adult when they turn 18. You must be 18 before you can apply for a credit card, apply for a marriage license or social assistance. Changes to the *Education Act* in 2006 made it mandatory to stay in school until 18, unless students have graduated. Despite these statutes, in Ontario the current child welfare legislation suggests a child is old enough to protect themselves or find help on their own once they turn 16 - two years before otherwise being considered an adult.

### Why is this a priority?

Youth who are 16 to 17 and feel unsafe in their family situations are not able to access protection services. They either suffer abuse or leave home with no support. Even if they approach social services for financial assistance, their parents may be contacted – which might put them at further risk. Many become homeless. Ontario is one of the few provinces in Canada that does not provide protection services up to the age of 18. Not only is this out of step with societal norms, it runs counter to the United Nations Convention on Children and Youth. The mandate needs to shift to ensure that all children and youth are protected.

### What steps have been taken?

In 2008, the Government of Ontario made changes so that 16 year olds who had been in Children's Aid care could come back and resume receiving help. At that time, there was a realization of the vulnerability of these young people.

Since then, government has made other announcements and investments for youth in care and former youth in care; however, those young people who have not already been in the care of a Children's Aid Society cannot access protection or support services after they turn 16.

### What needs to be done?

The public needs to stand up and speak out on behalf of the youth who need help and protection but are not able to receive it under the current mandate. Government needs to revise legislation to provide this critical protection.

### Recommendations

- Enact legislative, regulatory and/or policy changes to offer protection services to youth up to the age of 18 years, and provide the required resources.

## Legal Mandate

In Ontario, Children's Aid Societies have the exclusive legal responsibility to provide child protection services. The activities and purpose of a Children's Aid Society are set out in the *Child and Family Services Act*.<sup>5</sup> This legislation requires Children's Aid to:

- Investigate allegations or evidence that children who are under the age of 16 years are in need of protection
- Protect children who are under the age of 16 years
- Provide guidance, counselling and other services to families for protecting children or for the prevention of circumstances requiring the protection of children
- Provide care for children assigned to its care
- Supervise children assigned to its supervision
- Place children for adoption

The legislation governing Children's Aid Societies also includes providing protection for children who have been harmed or are at risk of harm.



## Monica's story

"I was brought into care when I was 15 because of serious abuse in my family home. My teacher called Children's Aid, which meant that I got to go and live in safety with a foster family. My sister was 16 and they couldn't help her. I hope that the government makes changes to protect all youth. My sister deserved to be helped just as much as me."

<sup>5</sup>.For the complete mandated functions of a Children's Aid Society, see *Child and Family Services Act*, 15.3

### 3. Broaden subsidy programs to give all children and youth a chance settle in a permanent family

#### What does this mean?

The current subsidy program offers monthly allowances for parents who adopt or take legal custody of Crown wards 10-17 years of age, and/or sibling groups. While this aids in finding homes for children who are more difficult to place, there are gaps. The targeted subsidies are only available until the adopted child turns 18, meaning that they, or the adoptive parents, will lose supports they would otherwise have had until the youth turned 21 or 25 if the youth stayed in foster care.<sup>6</sup>

Youth who are developmentally or physically challenged lose the supports that Children's Aid can provide, and more importantly the families lose access to Children's Aid advocacy to help them access services provided by other specialized programs.

Another gap exists for some of the kin families that step in to help their young relatives. There are two kin options – one that is highly structured and is funded, and the other is less formal and the family receives little, if any ongoing financial help.

Broadening subsidies means a new way in supporting children and youth who are cared for through Children's Aid by ensuring all have access to resources, such as those that would be provided in foster care. This allows families to make lifelong commitments to parent youth who would otherwise be in foster or group care. This applies to adoption, legal custody or guardianship, kin family arrangements and Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) customary care.

#### The role of the government in child welfare

Child welfare in Ontario is governed by the *Child and Family Services Act*, which is set by the government of Ontario. The role of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) is to fund and monitor Children's Aid Societies, develop policy to support the provincial child welfare program and license children's group homes and foster homes.

6. Numerous programs are now available for non-adopted youth 18 – 21, including financial and counselling support, access to post-secondary supports, health and dental program – some of which are available to the age of 25

## Why is this a priority?

All children and youth who are cared for through Children's Aid Societies should have the best chance to have a permanent family. A standard provincial subsidy program, which supports all children and youth to the age of 21, would provide the best opportunity for permanent families.

## What steps have been taken?

As noted above, the government introduced a new targeted adoption subsidy program for youth aged 10–17, and for sibling groups. This has resulted in some progress in the proportion of children being placed in permanent homes.

Children's Aid Societies have made progress in ensuring that more children who do come into care find homes in family settings rather than group or institutional settings. For those children who are in permanent care (Crown wards), the emphasis has been on helping them to find permanent families. The number of children who come into care, as well as those who have become Crown wards, has steadily declined over the past five years. The monthly average number of children in care has declined from 17,674 in 2009-2010 to 15,895 in 2013-2014<sup>7</sup> and similarly the trend for Crown wards has also declined - from 9,126 to 6,980<sup>8</sup> in the same five year period.

## What needs to be done?

While Children's Aid Societies continue to focus on finding homes and families for children in care, the subsidy programs need to be extended to adoption

or other permanent relationships for older children and children with special needs. This would include not only adoption and legal custody/guardianship but also kin or family arrangements and customary care arrangements for Aboriginal, FNMI children.

## Recommendations

- Review the subsidy programs to ensure they enable families to make the lifelong commitment to adopt older children and sibling groups, as well as younger children with exceptional needs.
- Provide supports and subsidies for adopted youth for the same duration as youth who would have been in foster care – up to 21 or 25.
- Apply subsidies to all forms of lifelong family relationships – kin, legal custody, adoption and customary care.



7. Ministry Quarterly reports submitted to OACAS by member agencies as of September 30, 2014

8. Ministry Quarterly reports submitted to OACAS by member agencies as of September 30, 2014

## 4. 'Staying Put' changing the culture of care so that youth stay at home until they are finished school

### What does this mean?

Despite many positive changes, the Ontario child welfare system still expects 17 year olds to be preparing for independence so that they can leave their foster care home at 18 years of age – before the age most youth complete high school. As of March 2013, there were approximately 5,600 children and youth in care aged 16 or over.<sup>9</sup> While adoption may be an option for some of these young people, others would prefer to stay with their foster family while trying to maintain safe relationships with members of their families of origin. They need strong supports to successfully navigate to adulthood.



## Why is this a priority?

Research has demonstrated that youth have better chances of completing school if they remain at home until 21. In the United Kingdom, the ‘Staying Put’ program has shown that young people in care, who stayed with foster carers, were twice as likely to be in full-time education as those who had not.<sup>10</sup> Most parents would not expect their own child to move out of the family home at the age of 17 or 18. Youth who have been in care, who have greater challenges, should have at least the same access to family support as their peers.

The emphasis on leaving home at 18 is even more profound for youth with disabilities. As these youth turn 18, they often lose access to supports they had as a Crown ward, leaving the youth to try and find supports in the community through social service programs. Staying at home is critical to helping them complete their education and make the best plans for adulthood.

## What steps have been taken?

The recent *Youth Leaving Care Hearings* (2011), *My Real Life Book* (2012) and the *Blueprint for Change* (2013) are strong steps in the right direction. There has been recognition by government of the challenges youth face as Crown wards, especially when leaving care. Progress has been made over the last few years in the form of education assistance, medical benefits, financial, and other supports for this vulnerable group.

## What needs to be done?

Government must provide leadership to modernize the service philosophy for youth, giving them the

same opportunities and supports as their peers who are not in care.

## Recommendations

- Actively encourage a policy agenda of “stay at home” to allow youth the opportunity to complete high school and decide on a career path while being supported by family (including foster and kin) up to and including the age of 21.

### Aftercare Benefits Initiative

Recently, the provincial government extended health and dental benefits for former youth in care (Aftercare Benefits Initiative). This was a significant step forward. OACAS and youth in care had been advocating for this change since 2006. This initiative helps put former youth in care on an even playing field with their peers and will give youth a greater chance of experiencing a smoother transition to adulthood, increased resiliency, and improved self-care. For some youth, the benefits will help mitigate this high-risk population’s entry into adult poverty. This year almost 1,000 youth who will be turning 21 will have access to the Aftercare Benefits Initiative.

10. Her Majesty’s Government. “STAYING PUT” Arrangements for Care Leavers aged 18 and above to stay on with their former foster carers, DWP and HMRC Guidance. May 2013

## 5. Support an agenda for sustainable Aboriginal and First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) child welfare services defined by Aboriginal and FNMI communities

### What does this mean?

Historically, the child welfare system has provided services based on a Euro-centric approach to child welfare. These forms of involvement have not been helpful to many Aboriginal and First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) people and in many cases have caused harm. The effects of inter-generational trauma from residential schools and colonization still impact Aboriginal and FNMI child welfare today.

While legislation enables government to designate Aboriginal and FNMI child welfare organizations to serve Aboriginal and FNMI children, families and communities, the resources have not been provided to sustain this work. These agencies are new, and are still being established. They face very different challenges and additional requirements, yet they are funded in the same way as their non-Aboriginal, FNMI counterparts. Each year they struggle to provide services to the same level as provided in other communities. This is further compounded by inadequate social supports for Aboriginal and FNMI communities such as children's mental health supports, addiction services, and justice programs.

Aboriginal and FNMI people are defining their needs and designing the services that will help. Because many different factors are involved, a

different approach is needed. The public and decision makers need to understand the history and what roles they should play in standing with Aboriginal, FNMI people to advance solutions.

### Why is this a priority?

Aboriginal, FNMI children and youth are overrepresented in the number of children in care, representing 3% of the population but more than 18% of children in care in Ontario.<sup>11, 12, 13, 14</sup> The number of FNMI people in Canada is growing at a much higher rate than other population groups, the population is younger, and Ontario has the largest Aboriginal, FNMI population of any province in Canada. These factors point to a growing need, but also tell us that the time to act is now.

The rates of poverty, over-crowded homes, teen pregnancy, suicide, child abuse and involvement with Children's Aid are all exponentially higher than in the general population.<sup>15, 16</sup> The isolation and high cost of living on remote and northern First Nations communities, challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, and even the lack of internet connectivity in many remote areas make the work of child welfare even more difficult.

11. Ontario Aboriginal and First Nations, Métis, Inuit children ages 0-15

12. OACAS Ontario Child Welfare Funding and Services Report: Fiscal Year 2012-13. February 2014

13. 2011 Census. Statistics Canada



## What steps have been taken?

The Government of Ontario has made investments in services for Aboriginal, FNMI children and youth, including additional mental health workers and community programs for youth and teens. In January 2103, the government announced a strategy and is in the process of engaging Aboriginal, FNMI partners to transform services. Communities await the results. In the area of child welfare, some First Nations are preparing to take on a formal child welfare mandate, and anticipate being able to move forward soon, depending on government approval and resources. The issue of funding for Aboriginal, FNMI child welfare service is a long-standing issue. The government has responded with time-limited solutions, but the long-term sustainability has yet to be addressed.

## What needs to be done?

There are two major issues which require immediate attention. First, the rights of Aboriginal, FNMI communities to determine and deliver services to their own people, as set out in the *Child and Family Services Act* in 1985, have yet to be realized. Decades of experience in delivering “mainstream model” services with the standardized funding model have resulted in continued poor outcomes. Second, the needs of these communities are different. The need is significant and they must be funded accordingly.

These factors point to a need for a different approach to funding services for Aboriginal, FNMI communities. The Aboriginal and FNMI right to develop and deliver services to their own people has yet to be respected. Aboriginal and FNMI communities have developed their own models, and these have greater chances of working if supported and acknowledged.

## Recommendations

- Include Aboriginal, FNMI communities and the Aboriginal, FNMI service providers in the development of a cohesive Aboriginal, FNMI strategy to address the gaps in the system.
- Engage and work with FNMI child welfare experts to map a clear plan, with resources, to support the designation of Aboriginal, FNMI agencies that are now ready to take on the child protection mandate.
- Continue with legislative and policy work to ensure that the mandate for the care of Aboriginal and FNMI children is with the Aboriginal and FNMI communities.
- Address the limitations of the funding model for Children’s Aid Societies serving Aboriginal, FNMI children and families, including the resources required to meet the cultural and healing needs of the children and families, and the resources required to build an appropriate infrastructure for service provision.
- Increase public awareness and education on the current situation of Ontario’s Aboriginal, FNMI communities.



14. 2011 National Household Survey

15. Statistics Canada, 2005 Projections of the Aboriginal populations, Canada, provinces and territories, 2001-2017

16. Kiskisik Awasisak – Understanding the Over-Representation of First Nations Children in Child Welfare, pp.67 - 89

## 6. Continue to develop a sustainable, accountable and transparent child welfare system

Over the past five years, beginning with the work of the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare, the child welfare system has undergone significant change to improve accountability and transparency and to ensure it is sustainable. While there has been forward movement, there is more to be done particularly in the areas of building strong governance models, further developing the performance measurement system, strengthening human resource practices, ensuring a sound funding model and supporting and aligning social services for children and families.

### Community Governance

Children's Aid Society Boards of Directors are made up of volunteers from the community. This model of community governance puts the onus on the Board for the functioning and financial well-being of their agency. Currently, there is no legislation to protect community Board members from liability if a Children's Aid runs into issues relating to the provision of mandated services. With the continued funding challenges being faced by Children's Aid Societies, Boards are working to operate in an accountable and transparent manner within a tight funding envelope while delivering the quality and quantity of service needed by the community. The lack of legislative supports potentially discourages community members from stepping forward and limits the flexibility and adaptability of the Boards.

### Performance Management

Based on recommendations from the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare, Children's Aid Societies have been working with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services on developing and analysing a comprehensive set of performance indicators. These indicators, which over the next few years will be publically reported, provide data and will allow for further analysis, accountability, and transparency. Children's Aid Societies, in partnership with the government, are moving forward with a performance management system that will allow for: effective organizational planning, governance oversight, improving services, and the public reporting of outcomes. While work is underway, for the indicators to be meaningful there needs to be support from the government to provide resources for individual Children's Aid Societies to collect, analyze and report on these measures. This project is strategically linked to the provincial government's implementation of the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN). CPIN will link data from all of Ontario's Children's Aid Societies and will allow for outcome analysis and management in numerous enhanced ways, both at a community and provincial level.

## Healthy Workforce

There are over 8,000 professionals who work in the child welfare sector. Their dedication and passion is an essential dimension to the sustainability of the sector. Over the last year, Children's Aid Societies have been working with their labour unions on a comprehensive study of worker safety in the delivery of child welfare services. Significant issues of safety have been identified, and together, the parties have jointly analyzed practices and developed recommendations to ensure a strong and healthy work force. While some of the recommendations require action at a local level, the majority of the recommendations are at a system level and will require the support of government, along with adequate resourcing to ensure a high standard of safety for staff in the child welfare sector.

## Appropriate Funding Model

A new funding model for Children's Aid Societies was put in place in 2013. While this model addresses the funding needs of many communities, it has limitations in some communities that may affect the safety and well-being of children. The new funding model needs to be examined to ensure that it is having the intended effect and that it is enhancing the sustainability of the sector and not contributing to unintended negative impacts. Initial indications are that the model may not adequately address issues in northern agencies and communities. The more geographically dispersed and remote Children's Aid Societies are working within communities that are more compromised, where the geography is huge, and a more extensive social services structure is needed to help support child and family well-being. There are also additional challenges, such as

recruiting and retaining qualified staff and inflated transportation costs to serve children and families. More specialized populations such as Ontario's Francophone population also may not be adequately served through the current funding model.

## Community Supports

For child welfare to continue to operate effectively there must be community social services available to supplement the work of child protection. Lack of sufficient services results in major delays in the assistance needed to keep families healthy, safe, and whole, and increases the chances of children and families falling through the cracks. This could also mean that a family moves more deeply into the child welfare system. Long wait times for children's mental health services, limited addiction services, access to support services for domestic violence, and a lack of public housing are examples of situations that affect the ability of communities as a whole to keep children and families thriving.

## What needs to be done?

Strategic and timely investments need to be made in the areas identified. This will enable the sector to build an accountable, transparent, effective, and sustainable system that is supported by and helps support other social and children's services. Without adequate legislative, financial, staffing, and community supports the child welfare system will not be able to meet the needs of its diverse populations. Short-term strategies and fragmented funding do not take Ontario's demographics into consideration and do not provide a stable foundation for such an essential service.

## Recommendations

- Continue support to Children's Aid Boards through enhanced governance training and by providing Children's Aid Society Board members with the liability protection afforded to Board members in other community based organizations.
- Correct the unintended consequences of the funding model, which may compromise the ability of agencies to provide necessary services and do sound, multi-year financial planning.
- Invest in the further development of performance indicators and the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) and ensure Children's Aid Societies have the resources necessary to collect and analyse the information.
- Support the child welfare system and local agencies to address the safety issues that are encountered by child protection staff in their daily work with children and families.
- Restructure the system to focus on supports for the northern and Aboriginal, FNMI agencies, including a northern strategy and supports for the process of devolution.
- Continue to build community-based resources in areas such as children's mental health, addictions treatment and domestic violence prevention initiatives.

Some Children's Aid Societies in Ontario are approved and funded to provide multiple supports for families and children that extend past child protection. These could include services such as children's mental health supports, developmental support services, or counselling. Agencies providing these additional supports may be blended organizations that have amalgamated with other social services to provide support to families in one location. Others end up performing more services than they are funded or mandated for due to a lack of community supports. Sometimes these Children's Aid receive funding from the government to provide these additional services - from budgets that are specific to the service being offered - and other times the Children's Aid works with the community to receive donations and funding to provide these supports.

## Multi-service agencies

## Community partners

There is a team of organizations and individuals working in each community to keep children and families healthy, safe and whole. Children's Aid Societies work with a wide range of service providers and partners to keep families together and children safe. Partners include, but are not limited to:

- Police
- Public health
- Firefighters
- Cultural and religious centres
- Addiction services
- Schools and teachers
- Children's and adult mental health
- Domestic abuse services
- New settlement groups
- Housing programs

While each of these organizations provides a valuable service on their own, they don't operate in a vacuum. The organizations in place to keep children and families safe rely on each other to do the best work possible to encourage and maintain safety.



# Conclusion

The priorities and recommendations outlined in the 2014 Child Welfare Report call on the government and public to support the continued improvement of the system that protects the most vulnerable members of our communities. While there has been significant change in the sector, there are still areas of focus that need attention. Families need more support, youth need protection, children and youth need permanent families, and Aboriginal, FNMI communities need to be able to define what they need to keep their children and families safe. To do this there need to be supports in place to continue to develop a sustainable, accountable and transparent system that can adapt and respond to the needs of Ontario's diverse population.

The six priorities in the report provide direction as to where the change should start. They focus on issues and gaps that have been identified not only by Children's Aid Societies but by the communities they serve and the social service partners they work with to create a safety net for Ontario's family and children. The priorities highlight the need for a comprehensive strategy to approach the evolution of the sector - not only to address the current situation but also to look towards the course it should take. Children's Aid Societies call on the government to:

- **Support families to protect children at home.** Continue to focus on early involvement with families and provide additional investments for supporting social services so that they are available to help prevent escalation of family problems to the point where child protection concerns increase.
- **Extend the age of protection to 18.** Revise legislation to allow for Ontario's child welfare agencies to protect children up to the age of 18, bringing the age of protection in line with the rest of Canada.
- **Broaden subsidy programs to give all children and youth a chance settle in a permanent family.** Extend a standard provincial subsidy program, which supports all children and youth to the age of 21 to afford the best opportunity for permanent families.
- **'Staying Put' – changing the culture of care so that youth stay at home until they are finished school.** Modernize policy for youth, giving them the same opportunities and supports as their peers who are not in care.
- **Support an agenda for sustainable Aboriginal and First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) child welfare services defined by Aboriginal and FNMI communities.** Realize the right for Aboriginal and FNMI communities to deliver and determine services to their own people and acknowledge and address the specialized needs of these communities.
- **Continue to develop a sustainable, accountable and transparent child welfare system.** Support and resources to build strong governance models, further develop the performance measurement system, strengthen human resource practices, ensure a sound funding model, and align and fund social services for children and families.



**It is time to act on these priorities. The children, youth and families who rely on our services deserve to have a sustainable, continuously improving system that protects them and stands up for their needs.**

