

# CHILD WELFARE REPORT 2013

**MODERNIZING OUR CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM:  
MARKING OUR PROGRESS: MOVING FORWARD**



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

[www.oacas.org](http://www.oacas.org)



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# INTRODUCTION TO OACAS

## THE ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

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.

OACAS and its member agencies are constantly developing ways of helping families effectively parent their children, keep them safe and help them reach their full potential. Guided by the values of collaboration, accountability, courage, innovation and transparency, OACAS works with its members in developing an ever evolving and improving system while maintaining a unique Ontario approach to child welfare. Ontario is the only province in Canada where Children's Aid Societies are governed by community Boards of Directors, and are locally as well as provincially accountable.

Through OACAS, people involved in child welfare from many areas and perspectives come together to discuss important issues, develop a common direction and influence change. The result is improvement in the ability of Children's Aid Societies to make a difference in the lives of children, youth and families in their communities.

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**“Ontario’s model of local, independently governed CASs {is} an asset to be maintained.”<sup>1</sup>**

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### OACASs WORK IS FOCUSED ON AND GUIDED BY FOUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS:

- 1** Lead members and engage with partners in the development of a seamless, integrated children services system that responds effectively and respectfully to the diverse realities of children, youth and families across Ontario.
- 2** Build the public's confidence in and engagement with child welfare through an accountable and transparent system.
- 3** Along with its member agencies, OACAS will support and collaborate with the Aboriginal communities in bettering the health, well-being and life chance of Aboriginal children in Ontario.
- 4** Strengthen the capacity of the association and its member agencies to fulfill their mandates.

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<sup>1</sup> Realizing A Sustainable Child Welfare System In Ontario – Final Report, (2012)

# THE WORK OF CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

At the heart of every Children's Aid Society's work, mission, and values lies the protection of vulnerable children, youth and families. Children's Aid Societies (CASs) are proud of their deep connections to their communities. Numerous CASs have been working for over a hundred years in their regions and have long-term relationships to community partners which enhance their ability to do things based on local understanding.

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>2</sup> This legislation requires Children's Aid to:

- Investigate allegations or evidence that children who are under the age of sixteen years are in need of protection
- Protect children who are under the age of sixteen 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

Protecting children from risk and harm is essential, yet both difficult and complex. Children's Aid Societies provide a safety net for infants, children, and youth who are experiencing or are at risk of physical, sexual, emotional abuse, neglect, or abandonment. Although Children's Aid may often be known for more intrusive roles - such as removing children from unsafe conditions and taking them into its care - the vast majority of Children's Aid work is about finding the balance between protecting children and supporting families to stay together where possible. Great effort is focussed on addressing risk so that children can stay with their families and be safe and thrive.

<sup>1</sup> Realizing A Sustainable Child Welfare System In Ontario – Final Report, (2012)

<sup>2</sup> For the complete mandated functions of a Children's Aid Society, see Child and Family Services Act, 15.3.



“It is important work – and often very difficult. It is sometimes invasive and it is not always welcome. Families...often face a complex array of issues ... poverty, addiction, racism, poor health, inadequate housing, unemployment and social isolation.”<sup>1</sup>



# TRENDS IN CHILD WELFARE

Children's Aid Societies are always working to improve service delivery and create a better child welfare system. Continuous improvement and reflective practice is a core part of their job. The child welfare system in Ontario has been in a state of constant change for over fifteen years. Each wave of change has been comprehensive, and was guided by external expert advice. Each wave of change also set out ambitious plans for changes in the system. As engaged partners of **Child Welfare Reform** (2000), the **Transformation Agenda** (2005) and the **Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare** (2012), Children's Aid Societies have increased provincial standardization and developed excellence in service delivery.

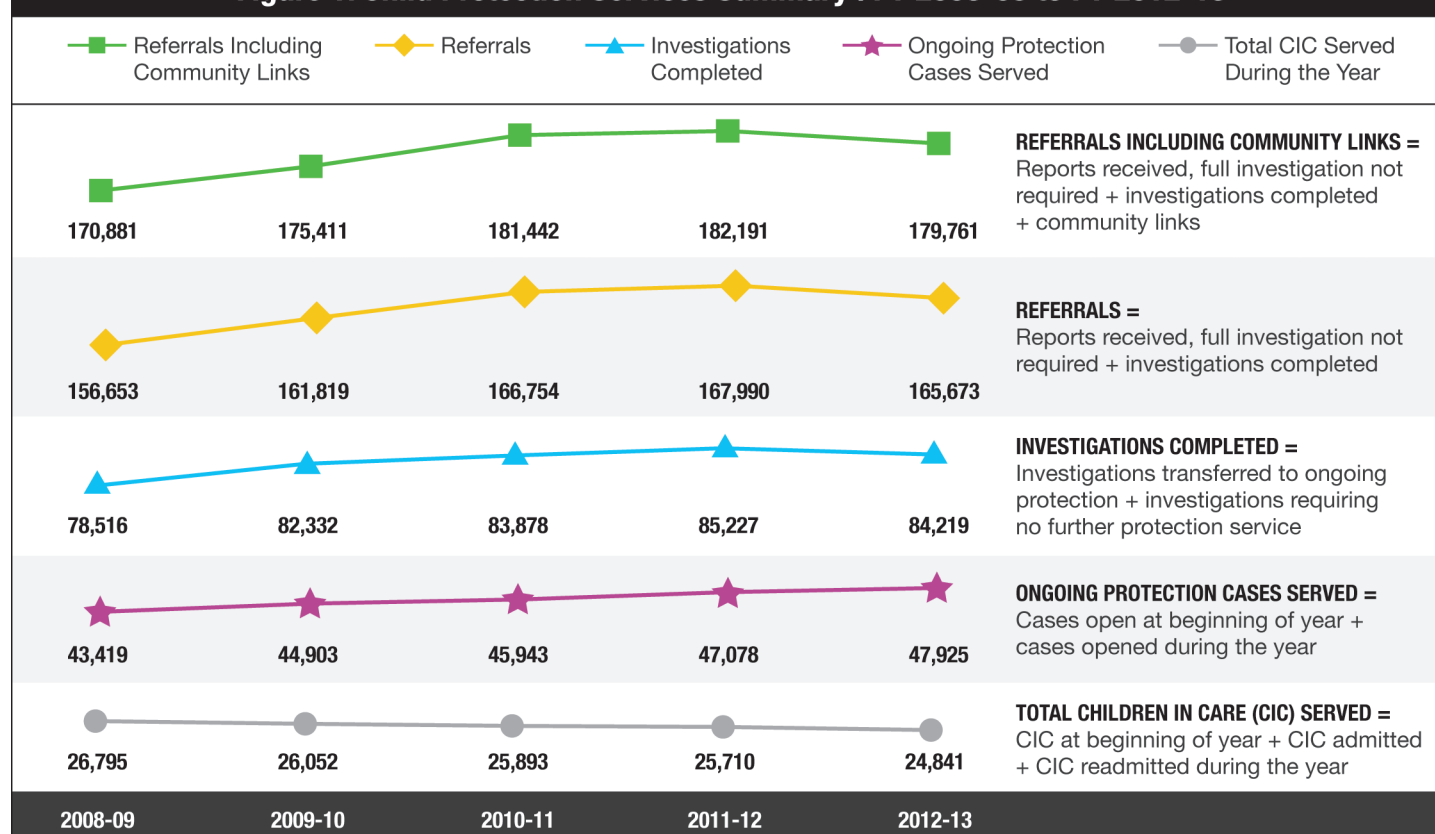
The **Transformation Agenda** focused on a better balance between protecting children by removing them from their families and an individual approach which still focused on safety.

**Transformation** sought to have fewer children in care by finding solutions within the family, including kin. It also aimed to find faster permanent family solutions for those children who did need to come into state care. Building on this, the Commission's work sought to find greater efficiency through structural change, to increase accountability and transparency and find a more rational approach to funding.

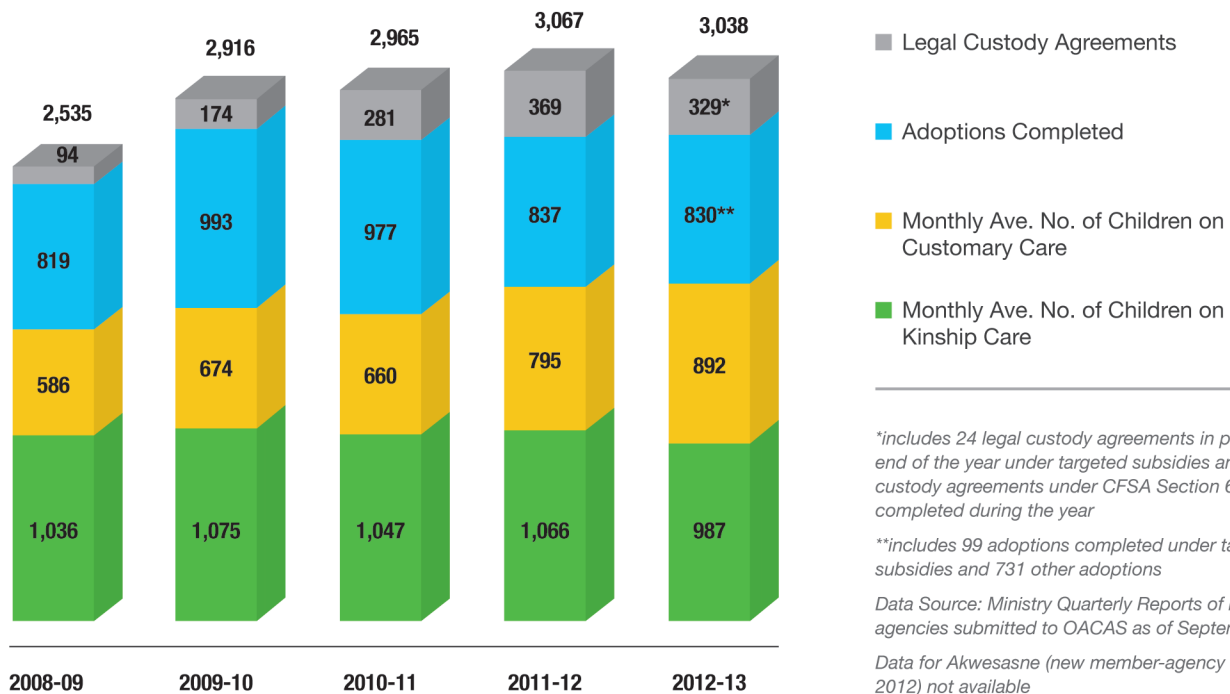
Clear markers of success have been seen in all these areas. As seen in Figure 1, the number of children who have come into CAS care has declined in each of the past five years, while ongoing protection service has increased. This is a testament to the commitment of Children's Aid Societies to work with families to keep children safe in their own homes.

Notwithstanding overall improvements, the circumstances experienced by Aboriginal children, families and communities is dire and requires a mutual process and immediate action.

**Figure 1. Child Protection Services Summary | FY 2008-09 to FY 2012-13**



**Figure 2. Permanency: A Five-Year Trend**



Greater attention to **family settings** has allowed more children who do come into care to find homes in family settings rather than group or institutional settings. (Figure 2)

During this time of constant change, CASs have also demonstrated results on effective fiscal management. Funding trends show a steady decline in the rate of growth in CAS funding even as CASs have continued with ambitious reform agendas.

The approved child welfare budget has been essentially flat-lined for three years. Yet in each of these years, the provincial government recognized legitimate cost increases and addressed these during the fiscal year, allowing for financial stability and the ability to plan important, long-term programs. (Figure 3)

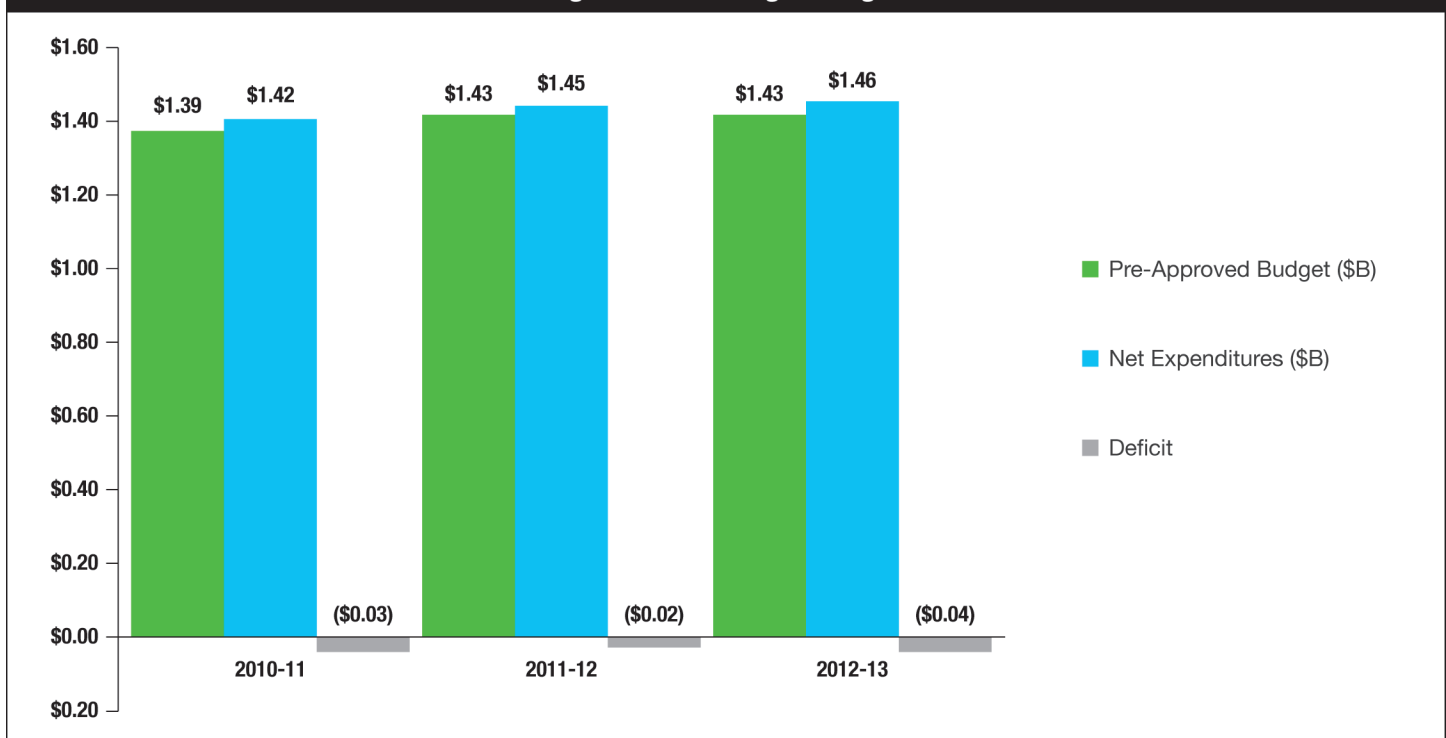
The amount provided this year by the government is less than in previous years, yet the needs are generally sustained. In fact, due to measures taken by CASs to decrease

their expenditures, they are forecasting to spend approximately \$10M less than in past years, while still moving ahead with massive system changes.

While service levels have remained relatively stable, the system re-engineering is extensive. It requires investments in capacity to facilitate systemic and structural change, especially through this transition period.

CASs have worked hard to “manage from within” for the past three years, absorbing costs related to wage settlements (guided by the Provincial Discussion Table agreement), preparation for the implementation of the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN), and provincial participation in development and testing of accountability and performance initiatives. On top of this, CASs have had to absorb new charges related to a Revenue Canada ruling which now applies HST to costs of children’s group homes, an impact assessed at approximately \$16M.

Figure 3. Funding Changes



Emerging and less intrusive service approaches such as kin services were not funded under the previous funding model. These less intrusive approaches require high levels of service, yet until now past funding models have not included provisions for these services so the real cost of kin services has been understated.

Increased focus and success related to supporting youth has resulted in more youth in care staying longer. Ideally these youth would remain in foster care (or if necessary group care) until they complete high school. However this mode of service is generally more costly, which adds further pressure on CASs.

CASs are stretched to manage this while also filling in gaps in the broader children's service system. Constraints in the broader children's service system have brought more children with complex needs to the door of Children's Aid: For example children with extreme mental and/or developmental health needs, medically fragile children, and young adults with developmental service needs who have not yet been accepted into the adult system are often placed in the care of CASs.

**“Tears come to my eyes, as I write, for all the care and generosity of those whom I have come into contact through the years. I came into care at age 15. Without the help, love and support of my foster parents I’m not sure if I would be the same person I am today. Thank you.”**









# THE COMMISSION TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE CHILD WELFARE

The Commission's mandate from November 2009 to September 2012 was to develop and implement changes to ensure a sustainable child welfare system in Ontario.

## **THE COMMISSION DEFINED SUSTAINABLE CHILD WELFARE AS A SYSTEM THAT:**

- Constantly adapts to evolving challenges, needs and knowledge
- Leverages available resources to maximise positive outcomes for children and youth; and
- Balances current needs and demands while building a strong system for tomorrow

Their vision for modernization is based on two overarching priorities - broader integration and Aboriginal services - and four system design tiers.

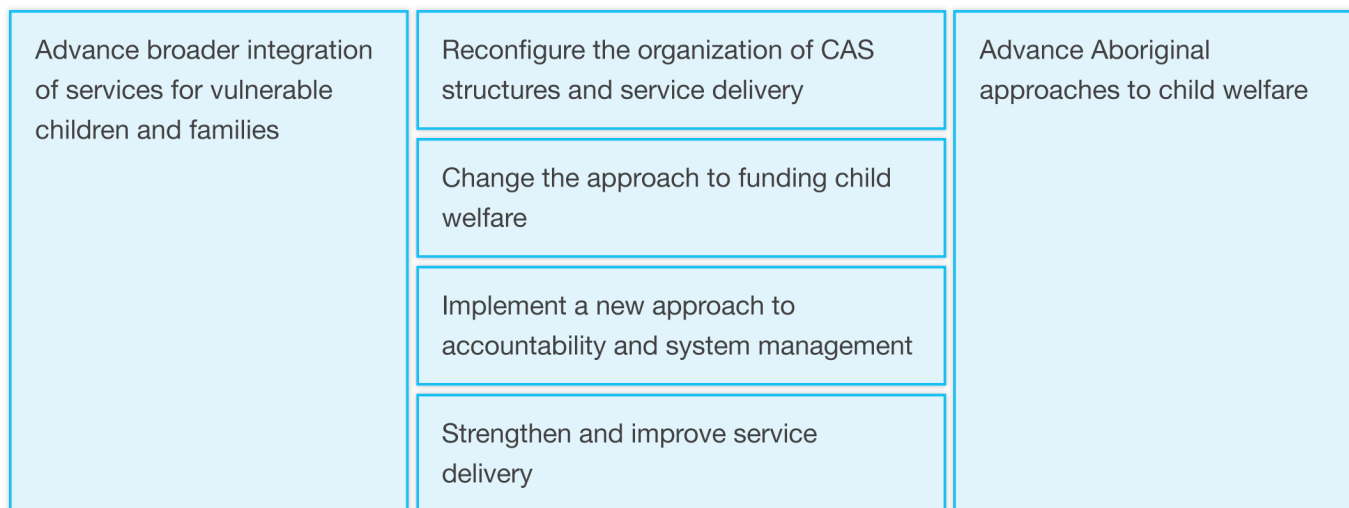
During its three-year term, OACAS and CASs worked closely with the Commission. OACAS coordinated consultations with its members and facilitated feedback from the sector.

## **A GREAT DEAL OF WORK BEGAN ON IMPORTANT STRATEGIC CHANGE INITIATIVES UNDER EACH OF THE FOUR TIERS, INCLUDING:**

- Amalgamation of CASs and developing an approach to a shared services business model
- Input and comment on the funding model
- Accountability, strengthening governance and development of provincial performance indicators
- Service improvements including strengthening family-based care and improvements to youth services

## A Four-Tiered Strategy for Sustainable Child Welfare

A modernized child welfare system providing integrated child-focussed services fully aligned with the broader network of children's services to improve outcomes for children and youth.



### THE COMMISSION CONCLUDED THAT:

- The Ontario child welfare system has many strengths
- The Transformation Agenda was the right path, but had some obstacles
- More value could be realized from the investments being made by the government in the system
- More work is needed to address needs of Aboriginal and other diverse populations
- Broader integration of the system of children's services is essential

OACAS welcomed the Commission's final report, and recognized the significant efforts made by the Commissioners. The report highlighted the many strengths of the child welfare system in Ontario – including community governance, a sound policy direction, experienced staff and committed volunteers. The Commissioners also noted that there are several barriers to further improvements in the system. These include deficiencies in the funding approach, lack of coherence in how accountability is practiced, and mixed messages from the government regarding its commitment to the Transformation Agenda

policy framework. The Commission noted the impact of years of constrained funding in related parts of the children's services system. This has had a negative effect on the access to specialized programs needed for children and youth served by CASs. The Commission also signalled a need for advancing Aboriginal approaches to child welfare, including a separate funding approach for designated Aboriginal agencies.

OACAS and CASs support many of the recommendations made by the Commission. CASs had already made progress in many areas including: reconfiguration of their services, agency amalgamations, accountability, governance, and measuring performance.

OACAS voiced concerns about the approach to funding put forward by the Commission. OACAS was specifically concerned about how the proposed funding model would address the need to account for volume of service within communities, and the absence of an analysis of the long-term consequences of its use.

## Progress We Have Made

**A modernized child welfare system providing integrated child-focussed services fully aligned with the broader network of children's services to improve outcomes for children and youth.**

### Broader Sector Integration

- High-level advocacy related to child welfare funding needs
- Protocols developed between Ministry of Education and Ministry of Children and Youth Services on information sharing
- Children and youth strategic direction developed by MCYS

### Structural Change

- Shared services initiative
- CAS Amalgamations
- Devolution of services to Aboriginal Agencies
- Collaboration with other Children's Services system partners

### Accountability

- Strengthened local governance
- Accountability agreements
- Performance Indicators
- Cyclical Ministry reviews

### Funding

- Implementation of new funding model
- Funding efficiencies achieved across all agencies

### Service Excellence

- Provincial service framework
- CPIN development and implementation
- Service excellence in: family based care, permanency, supports to youth, early help: providing the right protection services at the right time

### Aboriginal services

- Culturally adapted training
- Framework on Reconciliation
- Support for Aboriginal agencies to achieve designation

## What is needed?

**A modernized child welfare system providing integrated child-focussed services fully aligned with the broader network of children's services to improve outcomes for children and youth.**

### Broader Sector Integration

Engage all children's services stakeholders in an active dialogue about **broader service integration**, developing a vision and possible paths to provide the best services for children and families in their communities.

### Structural Change

Invest in **structural change** including specialized services and shared services

### Accountability

Provide continued support and resources to phase in new **accountability** mechanisms and strengthen governance, and have sector participation in the development of the mechanisms

### Funding

Commit to review the newly introduced **funding model**, accelerate implementation of the full model for those agencies identified as needing the resources and provide transitional support and time for those expecting funding reductions to implement new service models

### Service Excellence

- Contribute to, and recognize the new **service delivery framework**, including strengthening family based care, protection services at the right time, adoption and youth supports and where needed, modify policy and standards
- Resources for the implementation of the Child Protection Information Network

### Aboriginal services

- Act immediately on longstanding recommendations to implement **Aboriginal service** models supported by a specific funding model and standards
- Support the devolution of services process from non-Aboriginal to Aboriginal service providers



# MARKING OUR PROGRESS: MOVING FORWARD

As noted by the Commission, much has been achieved to date, but more work is needed. OACAS has continued to work with its members to carry forward the themes raised by the Commission. Major milestones have been achieved in all of the areas of the Commission's focus. The commitment of the child welfare sector to innovate and change is long-standing, however, the government plays a crucial role in this change agenda. Building on the specific themes and tier's found in the Commission's framework, OACAS and member agencies are calling for specific support from the government in a number of key areas in order to build a sustainable child welfare system in Ontario.

## STRUCTURAL CHANGE

The child welfare sector needs strategic leadership and support to deliver structural change and re-engineer child welfare and other children's services across the Province of Ontario.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The OACAS and Ontario's Children's Aid Societies call on the government to promote a comprehensive multi-year vision and plan for structural change to **re-engineer the children's services system** and improve service outcomes for families, children and communities.

WHAT WE AIM FOR	PROGRESS SO FAR		WHAT MORE IS NEEDED?
	LOCAL LEVEL	PROVINCIAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shared services where appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many CASs have collaborated with each other to share business and service approaches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numerous services are being delivered at a provincial level</li> <li>OACAS developed a Shared Services proposal to explore a model and governance with CASs committed to support this work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government commitment to resource <b>shared service</b> work</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amalgamation of organizations and services where appropriate for the community, including across the children's service sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13 CASs worked to realign themselves, resulting in 8 fewer agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lessons learned from the amalgamations have been shared across the province</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with CASs to develop a plan for organizational structures within logical geographic jurisdictions</li> <li>Support and encourage restructuring with other children's service providers where it is in the best interest of the community</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to special services for high needs children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some CASs have developed promising locally tailored models</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Special approach for <b>high needs children</b> without protection needs, including resources</li> <li>Recognition of the limited resources to support the <b>unique needs of Aboriginal children and youth</b>, especially in the North.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aboriginal Service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many CASs have developed local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partnerships in support of new designation plans.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased collaboration among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal agencies through the OACAS Aboriginal Advisory Committee.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government <b>commitment to devolution</b>, including resources to undertake and sustain the project and an inclusive process to address immediate and long-term issues.</li> <li>Review of <b>funding</b>, needs and existing resources</li> </ul>

# FUNDING

While CASs embrace change, they need stability through the change process so that services are able to be provided without disruption.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The OACAS and Ontario's Children's Aid Societies ask that the government provide sufficient resources to ensure that agencies can respond immediately to every allegation of abuse or neglect and to help children, youth and families in crisis regardless of where they are in Ontario, and equally for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and families.

WHAT WE AIM FOR	PROGRESS SO FAR		WHAT MORE IS NEEDED?
	LOCAL LEVEL	PROVINCIAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sufficient funding to meet child protection needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many CASs have undertaken internal reorganization to ensure that funds are available to meet child protection needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OACAS review and analysis of annual funding levels and patterns shared with members and government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Child Welfare Funding envelope that ensures that children's services are able to be delivered in all communities across Ontario including specific populations such as Aboriginal people, and Francophone Ontarians</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stability in services as the system transitions to a new model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reconfiguration of services, assessment of interim need</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With CASs, identification of the types of interventions needed to ensure service continuity during implementation of the new funding model.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources to support <b>transition</b> to a future state, stabilization funding to prevent service disruption, special funding to support those agencies which do not "fit" the new approach until an alternate or modified model is established</li> <li>Support Aboriginal agencies that require resources to see them through to the development of the proposed Aboriginal Strategy</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fiscal responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CASs have demonstrated significant efficiencies and within the first year most agencies have been able to adapt to the new funding model and achieve a balanced budget per new regulations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The sector is currently projecting \$10 million less in expenditures than last year.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognition that the pace of change and the need to balance both the fiscal and service bottom line will require some CASs to have more time to restructure within the new model</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A fair and equitable model which addresses community needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As CASs review the provincial model against local and census indicators they have raised questions about the model design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial recognition of themes related to gaps in the model.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transparent <b>review of the model</b>, which includes CAS representatives, and a commitment to change where needed, including recognition of the diversity in Ontario.</li> <li>Aboriginal Child Welfare agencies require a distinct approach to funding, with opportunity to participate in the development of this approach</li> </ul>

# ACCOUNTABILITY

CASs are committed to the best possible services for children and families which achieve results, are effectively governed by leaders in their communities, demonstrate value and are accountable to the public. At the core of accountability is transparency, a key feature of this approach.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The OACAS and Ontario's Children's Aid Societies call on the government to recognize the strength of the community governance model, and the commitment of CASs to transparency and accountability and to support the participation of CASs to have continued participation in the development of the full Accountability framework and have the resources required to implement the framework.

WHAT WE AIM FOR	PROGRESS SO FAR		WHAT MORE IS NEEDED?
	LOCAL LEVEL	PROVINCIAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality services that achieve positive outcomes for children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CASs participated in developing <b>Performance Indicators</b>, tracking data, pilot testing and refining.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OACAS implementation of a provincial project for common indicators, to be used to communicate about and improve service delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commitment to continue work on <b>Performance Indicators</b> in a collaborative and measured way which builds and enhances agency capacity</li> <li>Active participation in the selection of the Performance Indicators chosen for public reporting</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong local governance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive CAS participation in board development training, completion of baseline agency surveys related to governance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OACAS project to enhance governance through increased clarity of roles, indicators of good governance, a board toolkit, a webinar series for training and collaboration, development of an information portal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued support of the <b>governance project</b> to launch governance resource portal, develop further resources and assist with change management</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transparency and accountability to communities about how agencies are held accountable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CAS participation in refinements to draft <b>Accountability Agreements</b></li> <li>Discussion at local Boards about the implications of the <b>Accountability Agreements</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OACAS engaged agencies in discussions about <b>Accountability Agreements</b> to provide input into the revision of the Agreements and to ensure that Boards were well-informed about their use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sufficient time and a phased approach which accommodates the challenge of submitting balanced budgets in first year of this process</li> <li>Active and immediate participation in the second phase of the Accountability Agreements</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Processes for continuous improvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CASs have developed organizational <b>quality assurance</b> systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordination of input through provincial networks and committees working on Outcomes and Accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The ongoing opportunity to participate in the development of the <b>cyclical review</b> process and its roll-out, and sufficient time and resources to do the work</li> </ul>

## SERVICE DELIVERY

The Commission recommended further work on “core services” to enable a standardized suite of services in all communities across the province, and that work be advanced to strengthen family based care.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The OACAS and Ontario’s Children Aid Societies ask the government to acknowledge and support the innovative work done by CASs in developing a comprehensive framework, improving early help services, expanding family based care, adoption, services to youth and Aboriginal services. Specific resourcing of these initiatives is warranted, particularly with respect to Aboriginal services. *(please also see the Aboriginal Service recommendation).*

WHAT WE AIM FOR	PROGRESS SO FAR		WHAT MORE IS NEEDED?
	LOCAL LEVEL	PROVINCIAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standardized services, tailored to needs of local community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agencies deliver protection services according to government standards, some have additional programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of a <b>Service Framework</b> with common philosophy, identifying the services required to provide the core protection mandate with opportunities for customization to suit the needs of local communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognition of the framework, including standardized core service but also flexibility for local agencies to tailor or add services to meet local needs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The right protection services at the right time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group of CASs and researchers developed approach for <b>“Early help: the right services at the right time”</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Importance of this approach approved with provincial local directors; orientation and training is in progress provincially</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognition of the importance of child protection work providing the right services at the right time to assist families so that issues don’t escalate and children are not seriously harmed.</li> <li>Support to implement these approaches including potential provincial policy changes.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children grow up in <b>family settings</b>, living as “normal” a childhood as possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group of CASs collaborating on guide to enhance local agency planning to achieve the goal of every child living in a family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Strengthening family based care</b> initiative is creating tools to support case and agency planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognition of Strengthening Family Based Care, with support to implement including consideration to potential provincial policy changes.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Healthy safe <b>transition from youth to adulthood</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numerous CASs provide programs for youth in and from care, peer support, mentors, post-secondary scholarships.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Province-wide availability of post-care programs for counselling, changes to insurance coverage to allow teens to “stay at home” until they finish school, proposal developed for health and dental care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changing age limits for protection services (to 18 years), health and dental care (to 25).</li> <li>Leadership to modernize all services for youth in alignment of 2013 societal values.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong provincial <b>adoption system</b> helping children and youth to be matched to lifelong families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use some common tools developed by provincial project to determine optimal CAS capacity to find permanent homes for children and youth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focussed approach to tracking results, provincial, local and regional capacity assessments, stronger ties to other provincial organizations supporting adoption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued support for adoption, addressing policy and program gaps which impact older youth adoption, subsidies to 21 years aligning with youth in care supports.</li> <li>Post adoption supports for parents who need help.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A strong provincial child protection service system, connected, linked, supported by technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CASs are in intensive preparation for phased implementation of <b>Child Protection Information Network (CPIN)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With MCYS, planning and support to CASs to implement CPIN</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dedicated resources to facilitate phase in, including data transfer, staff training</li> <li>Implementation of CPIN in all CASs</li> </ul>

# ABORIGINAL SERVICES

The Commission specifically called for the advancement of Aboriginal approaches to child welfare. This is also a key strategic focus for OACAS.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The OACAS and Ontario's Children's Aid Societies ask the government to commit to develop a comprehensive strategy for Aboriginal child welfare that recognizes the historical injustices committed against Aboriginal communities, disparities and expert advice. This plan must address the unique cultural needs of Aboriginal communities and to adequately resource the sector to move forward on devolution.

WHAT WE AIM FOR	PROGRESS SO FAR		WHAT MORE IS NEEDED?
	LOCAL LEVEL	PROVINCIAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance the capacity of Aboriginal Agencies to achieve designation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many CASs participate in local partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal CASs with common goal of having Aboriginal families and children being served by Aboriginal agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Six pre-mandated CASs are associate members of OACAS, giving access to training, governance and other capacity building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government commitment to move forward on designation with flexibility to service standards and adequate resources</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A clear and transparent process for devolution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Several local CASs working with developing Aboriginal CASs</li> <li>Non-Aboriginal agencies preparing for future transition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal CASs collaborating to identify priorities, share tools and expertise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government commitment to designation and to resources to enable both the development of new Aboriginal CASs and support to stabilize the non-Aboriginal partner CASs who will transfer resources.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal children and families regardless of where they live</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some CASs working in partnership with pre-mandated Aboriginal CASs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changes to provincial training curriculum, increased collaboration across Aboriginal agencies</li> <li>OACAS hosted an Aboriginal Youth Gathering, an opportunity for Aboriginal youth to develop positive peer relationships, and be supported by adults and elders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government support for unique Aboriginal approaches, including service models, standards, funding; engage Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal agencies in the process.</li> <li>Recognition of the increased workload associated with supporting the child welfare needs of Aboriginal children and families due to their complex, multi-generational needs</li> <li>Broader engagement with First Nations leadership in how that service is delivered.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reconciliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CAS leaders participated in "clearing in the woods" awareness and sensitivity training about history and current reality of Aboriginal peoples</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Framework developed by Aboriginal consultants, guided by the OACAS Aboriginal Advisory Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A public commitment from Government to reconciliation including an acknowledgement of history, and a plan for change</li> <li>Support to agencies in enhancing their relationship and collaboration with First Nations around the delivery of child welfare service</li> </ul>



WHAT WE AIM FOR	PROGRESS SO FAR		WHAT MORE IS NEEDED?
	LOCAL LEVEL	PROVINCIAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adequate funding, model tailored to Aboriginal needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognition and continued identification of need, and development of specific service models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing advocacy about specific needs of all Aboriginal communities – rural, remote and urban</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A funding model that recognizes the real needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A full Aboriginal strategy that includes policy, programs, funding, service model and accountability as defined by communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local adapted service models that merit consideration for broader implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Ministry of Children and Youth Services has started work on an Aboriginal Services strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inclusion of stakeholders including child welfare experts in the process of developing the strategy</li> <li>A timetable for implementation that recognizes the urgent situation of First Nations and Aboriginal communities</li> </ul>

## BROADER INTEGRATION OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES SYSTEM

The Commission recommended advancing the broad integration of the services available for vulnerable children and families. This is also one of the four key strategic areas of the work of OACAS.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The OACAS and Ontario's Children's Aid Societies asks the government to commit to the development of a seamless system of children's services that includes child welfare and is sustainably resourced to meet community driven needs.

WHAT WE AIM FOR	PROGRESS SO FAR		WHAT MORE IS NEEDED?
	LOCAL LEVEL	PROVINCIAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seamless accessible services for children and families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some CASs are engaging their communities in dialogue and planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MCYS has developed a Strategic direction which is related to children and youth</li> <li>The Children's mental health sector is moving forward with a significant reorganization of its services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A broader vision for the scope of change that is needed and a recognition of this key recommendation of the Commission</li> <li>An approach to serve children with special needs, funded by providers other than CAS</li> <li>The flexibility to allow CASs to consider partnerships and amalgamations with other service sectors.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better coordination of services for children and families served by CASs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numerous protocols exist among service providers in local communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work continues across Ministries to facilitate information sharing and partnerships in support of children in care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A more comprehensive coordination across other Ministries such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Community and Social Services</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adequate resources to address community needs</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High-level advocacy related to child welfare funding needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A more comprehensive understanding of needs and cost of service</li> </ul>

# CONCLUSION

The Children's Aid Societies in Ontario have embraced continuous change while being active agents in a series of fundamental and comprehensive reform and transformation agendas over the past fifteen years. Their commitment to modernization and moving forward continues.

In 2013, the child welfare sector continues to advance service improvement guided by the framework proposed by the Commission for Sustainable Child Welfare. Progress is being made on the restructuring of agencies, amalgamating and developing shared services to improve capacity, and reviewing practice to streamline internal processes.

Significant progress has also been made to improve accountability and transparency, with agreement on performance indicators, accountability agreements and improving the ability of local community Boards to effectively govern. Through the collaboration of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal agencies, the foundation is being laid for the future where Aboriginal children and families are served by members of their own communities. Across the province, experts have come together to evolve excellent service delivery models to provide the right services at the right time to reduce risks in families and to make sure that children who do come into care have the chance of a normal happy childhood. All this has progressed while CASs have exercised fiscal responsibility and actively participated with the province in containing costs.

After three years of flat-line budgets, CASs need support to continue service excellence and build a stronger system. The current funding model, while providing more fairness, needs to move immediately to provide the resources indicated by the model. Agencies need time and transitional resources to stabilize the system during a time of very significant redistribution of funds.

Children's Aid Societies cannot do this alone. Even with strong local partnerships, the service system cannot continue to move forward without a genuine vision and strong leadership from government.

## CASs CALL ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- Invest in **structural change** including specialized services and shared services
- Provide continued support and resources to phase in new **accountability** mechanisms and strengthen governance, and have sector participation in the development of the mechanisms
- Commit to review the newly introduced **funding model**, accelerate implementation of the full model for those agencies identified as needing the resources and provide transitional support and time for those expecting funding reductions to implement new service models
- Contribute to, and recognize the new **service delivery framework**, including strengthening family based care, protection services at the right time, adoption and youth supports and where needed, modify policy and standards
- Resources for the implementation of the Child Protection Information Network
- Act immediately on longstanding recommendations to implement **Aboriginal service** models supported by a specific funding model and standards
- Support the devolution of services process from non-Aboriginal to Aboriginal service providers
- Engage all children's services stakeholders in an active dialogue about **broader service integration**, developing a vision and possible paths to provide the best services for children and families in their communities.

We have momentum. CASs call for this critical commitment to move forward with modernization.

“After living the first thirteen years of my life filled with violence...I was finally saved by Children's Aid. I was put in a wonderful foster home, with people who taught me what a family was supposed to be like.”