



Ontario Association of  
Children's Aid Societies

# Pre-Budget Consultation

Submission to the Standing Committee  
on Finance and Economic Affairs

Revised February 23, 2018

## Executive Summary

Children's aid and indigenous child well-being societies are an essential element of Ontario's social safety network. They are critical to the social cohesion of Ontario's communities and the overall prosperity of the province and well-being of Ontarians.

Throughout the past five years, the child welfare system has undergone significant and continual service and operational transformation. It has responded to critical client and stakeholder voices on issues of system fragmentation and inequitable service outcomes. In partnership with Indigenous leadership, it has begun the work of acknowledging historic and ongoing harm to Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities, and actively participated in the restoration to Indigenous communities of the child protection mandate.

Child welfare has also moved forward to improve child welfare services to African-Canadian children, youth, and families and to address disproportionality of African-Canadians in child welfare. It has made further system-level changes to address coroner's recommendations and calls for improvement by oversight bodies.

Over this same period, the child welfare budget has been flatlined. Efforts to promote system modernization are evidence that the child protection system needs further investment. Ontario's leaders must understand the critical role that children's aid and indigenous wellbeing societies, together with robust social and health services, play in promoting the prosperity of every community in the province.

To ensure this vital safety net is a fiscal priority, OACAS respectfully makes the following recommendations to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs:

### **1. Indigenous Child Welfare Services and Reconciliation**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, along with the federal Human Rights Tribunal, have provided the evidence and moral direction for all provinces to improve the lives of Indigenous people. This includes equitably resourced child protection services so that Indigenous communities can look after their own children. In Ontario, this means appropriately funding the restoration of the child protection mandate to Indigenous communities, as well as health and social services, housing, and other social infrastructure unacceptably lacking in many communities. It also means stepping up to acknowledge the province's role in the Sixties Scoop and the ongoing harm to Indigenous children, youth, and families.

### **2. New legislation - *The Child, Youth, and Family Services Act***

The child welfare sector has advocated for decades for changes that will soon become law. These include raising the age of eligibility for protection services from age 16 to 18 and establishing an information governance and privacy regime for child welfare agencies. These initiatives represent

significant change management for the sector, which will require new funding. Other public sectors are properly resourced to make this scale of change, and child welfare should be no different.

### **3. Sector Modernization**

Investment is required in the child welfare sector's system modernization efforts, most prominently the Child Protection Information System, or CPIN, which will be fully implemented by 2020. However, costs for full deployment, sustainment, and system adaptations are currently outpacing available resources. Critical decisions for children's safety depend on a fully capable and resourced enterprise system.

### **4. Funding for the Broader Service System for Children, Youth, and Families**

The child protection system depends on a robust social and health infrastructure in communities across the province. Services for both children, youth, and adults are needed in the areas of health, addictions, counselling, housing support, domestic violence, and poverty mitigation are needed to ensure the same level of safety and well-being for all Ontario communities. Children and adult mental health require particular attention as key drivers of child protection involvement.

## **What is OACAS?**

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) is a membership organization that represents thirty-eight children's aid societies (CASs), seven indigenous child well-being societies, and three indigenous agencies seeking designation to provide child protection services.

For over one hundred years, OACAS has provided advocacy and member services, public education, and leadership on priority issues for the child welfare system. OACAS works to ensure its member societies have the necessary tools, training, and conditions to fulfill their statutory mandate to deliver protection services and to achieve equitable outcomes for children, youth, and families across the province.

## **What are Children's Aid Societies?**

Children's aid and indigenous child well-being societies (CASs) in Ontario are independent, not-for-profit corporations governed by locally-elected, community-based volunteer boards of directors (except Akwesasne Child and Family Services, which is run by the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne).

CASs have the exclusive legal responsibility to provide child protection services to children and youth who are experiencing or are at risk of experiencing abuse or neglect. They also provide help to families who are seeking extra support and assistance.

In Ontario, **CASs provide mandated child and youth protection services 365 days a year, 24 hours a day.** Most of their work involves keeping children safe within their families. A smaller, critical component of their work involves looking after children and youth in their care. In addition to child protection, some CASs are also funded to provide other services to their community,



**IN ONTARIO THERE ARE 49  
DESIGNATED CHILD PROTECTION  
AGENCIES:**

- **38 NON-INDIGENOUS CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES (3 FAITH-BASED)**
- **11 INDIGENOUS**

which may include children's mental health and developmental services, as well as parenting and youth programs.

The governing legislation for Children's Aid Societies is currently the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA). This legislation is soon to be replaced by the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 (CYFSA). As of January 1, 2018, some provisions of the CYFSA have come into force, specifically to raise the age of protection from age 16 to 18.

## Why does Ontario need Children's Aid Societies?

Because children at risk of harm cannot be put on a waiting list

Children's aid and indigenous child well-being societies are an essential element of the children's services system in Ontario. They are uniquely mandated, in legislation, to deliver protection services to children and to keep them safe from abuse and neglect. Unlike other social services, they cannot make wait lists and are available when all other services have closed for the day.

There is a wide misconception about the nature of child maltreatment in Ontario. Child welfare research shows that the majority of substantiated investigations (close to 90%) involve children living in families that are struggling with chronic needs, such as trauma, mental health challenges, addiction, social isolation, food and housing insecurity, and extreme poverty. Ontario's child welfare indicators show that most families that return to child welfare after receiving services continue struggling with these chronic issues. Research also tells us about the impact of these chronic issues, as well as neglect, on child development and well-being: it can be more damaging than any other kind of abuse.

It is important to know that, when child protection services are needed, it means other services have not been successful or even available to address these chronic health and social issues. Children's aid must step in when these have eroded parenting capacity and put children at risk. Child protection is the last line of defense for children and families in crisis.

Agency staff work intensely with families whose children are found in need of protection to ensure they have the necessary skills and help to safely care for their children at home. When children

cannot be safe at home, child protection agencies step in to care for children and youth. As the result of this intensive work by CAS staff, Ontario has one of the lowest rates of children in care in Canada.

The majority of children (85%) are able to return to their families within 36 months. Children’s aid societies have long recognized the importance of keeping children within their extended families, communities, and culture when they need to be taken from their family home for safety reasons.

Of particular importance is the fact that lengthy wait times and lack of social service infrastructure in rural, remote, and Northern communities make it challenging for families to access early supports and services that keep children living safely with their families. The lack of mental health services in remote communities, the North, and in First Nations means that many Indigenous children have to travel far from their communities, culture, and language to receive mental health services and supports.

## Public Investment in Children's Aid Societies is an investment in Ontario’s Future

Strong families are vital to the success of Ontario communities

**TABLE 1. CHILD WELFARE AT A GLANCE**

<b>167,733</b>	<b>CALLS AND REFERRALS</b>
<b>82,687</b>	<b>CHILD PROTECTION INVESTIGATIONS</b>
<b>43, 129</b>	<b>FAMILIES PROVIDED WITH ONGOING SERVICES</b>
<b>12,794</b>	<b>MONTHLY AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN CARE</b>
<b>4,861</b>	<b>CHILDREN WERE CROWN WARDS MONTHLY AVERAGE</b>
<b>3,604</b>	<b>MONTHLY AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING WITH KIN FAMILIES</b>
<b>775</b>	<b>ADOPTIONS COMPLETED</b>
<b>422</b>	<b>LEGAL CUSTODY AGREEMENTS COMPLETED</b>
<b>705</b>	<b>CHILDREN IN CUSTOMARY CARE MONTHLY AVERAGE</b>

(FY 2016-17). Data Source: Ministry Quarterly Reports of 43 member-agencies

Table 1 provides information about how many children and families were helped by children's aid societies in 2016/17. It is important to note that, in alignment with government policy, more children are being cared for by kith and kin (family and other close adults) and fewer children are coming into the care of children's aid societies.

The child welfare sector operates in a dynamic climate of continuous change, a natural consequence of the high stakes involved. However, for the past five years, since 2013/14, the funding available for children's aid society operating budgets has been flat-lined, except for targeted investments to support specific policy priorities. Despite this fact, children's aid societies have continued to move forward with significant system transformation initiatives which include:

- a province-wide information management system put in place
- three new agencies designated
- a Shared Service program established to effect system efficiencies, reduce system fragmentation, and promote equitable outcomes for children, youth, and families
- significant resources dedicated to service improvements in response to communities, critics, and oversight bodies; these include reconciliation efforts with respect to Indigenous communities and a historic apology on behalf of child welfare, in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action; and efforts to address disproportional involvement of Black and African-Canadian children, youth, and families in the child welfare system
- efforts to 'raise the bar' on workforce competencies, with a new worker training curriculum and standardized authorization process, as well as targeted efforts to improve local board governance capacity
- collection and public reporting of child welfare performance indicators and provincial data collection and analysis to determine progress and program efficiency and effectiveness.

The sector remains committed to these initiatives going forward.

## Rationale for Further Investment

### Funding hasn't increased, but increased services are needed

Funding for children's aid society operating budgets has not increased since 2013/14. Children's aid societies have increasing difficulty delivering a mandated service where waiting lists are not permitted within a flat-lined envelope given significant labour costs,<sup>1</sup> and increased costs associated with addressing the complex needs of children youth and families. The child welfare sector has been engaged in the recent review of the child welfare funding model, commissioned

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<sup>1</sup> 22 CASs will be negotiating with CUPE/OPSEU in early 2018

by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. The OACAS and its member CASs are hopeful that systemic issues related to equitable allocation of funding will be addressed through this process.

Targeted investments are needed in the following areas:

### **1. Indigenous Child Welfare Services and Reconciliation**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, along with the federal Human Rights Tribunal, have provided the necessary evidence and moral direction for all provinces to improve the lives of Indigenous people. This includes equitably resourced child protection services so that Indigenous communities can look after their own children. In Ontario, this means properly funding the restoration of the child protection mandate to Indigenous communities, as well as the health and social services, housing, and other social infrastructure unacceptably lacking in many communities. It also means stepping up to acknowledge the province's role in the Sixties Scoop and ongoing harm to Indigenous children, youth, and families.

Specifically, child welfare investments are needed for the following:

- Restoration of the child protection mandate
- Sustainability of newly designated agencies
- Funding for pre-mandated agencies:
- Transition from legacy agencies
- Community, health, social infrastructure in northern communities,
- Government apology for role in 60s Scoop, historic and ongoing harm to Indigenous people

With respect to the needs of Indigenous child well-being societies, we echo the requests of ANCFSAO and its members, as well as Indigenous leaders, that the funding model must be reviewed to ensure equity of funding and sustainability, such that it supports seamless delivery of services. Currently, agencies are using child welfare operating dollars to address child protection concerns arising from lack of infrastructure to address basic needs, as well as significant complex care and treatment needs of children and families in their community. Areas of infrastructure requiring government support include, but are not limited to:

- Clean water, functioning plumbing and heating
- Better access to healthy and affordable food
- Transportation
- Reliable internet connectivity
- Cultural resources (Elders, cultural workers, language interpreters)
- Separate and discrete prevention funding with clear guidelines for its use

The lack of these and other infrastructure supports have resulted in an inability to bring much needed treatment resources to Indigenous children, youth and families. For example, a youth requiring mental health services may need to travel and be placed over 2,000 kilometers from their home, family, community, culture and traditions. It is especially traumatic for Indigenous

children and families to be removed from their culture and language, given the legacies of residential school and the Sixties Scoop. Additionally, Indigenous CASs have difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified staff given the lack of appropriate accommodation for staff in fly-in communities and the danger involved in travelling to remote and northern areas of the province.

## **2. New Legislation - *The Child, Youth, and Family Services Act***

The child welfare sector has advocated for decades for changes that will soon become law. These include raising the age of eligibility for protection services from age 16 to 18, and establishing an information governance and privacy regime for child welfare agencies. These initiatives represent significant change management for the sector, which will require new funding. Other public sectors are properly resourced to make this scale of change, and child welfare should be no different.

- CYFSA
  - Services to 16/17s - staffing and service costs under new consent-based service model (risks to older youth)
  - Part X (information management/governance framework) - transition to a new system

## **3. Sector Modernization**

Investment is required in the child welfare sector's system modernization efforts, most prominently the Child Protection Information System, or CPIN, which will be fully implemented by 2020. Costs for full deployment, sustainment, and system adaptations are currently outpacing available resources. Critical decisions for children's safety depend on a fully capable and resourced enterprise system.

- CPIN - Fully fund deployment, sustainment and system 'fixes'
- How much time/what resources does CPIN take from service to children, families
- Understanding current issues in funding allocations
- Enhanced use of and access to data for evidence and research-based services to children, youth, and families

CASs have been actively engaged with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services in both the system development and design process, as well as actively planning deployment, issues identification and resolution. As of November 30, 2017:

- 22 CASs are currently using CPIN
- 53% of all cases are now completed through CPIN
- 56% of all frontline CAS staff now use CPIN everyday
- Over 57 million records now exist in CPIN

By May 14, 2018, an additional six CASs will go-live on CPIN.



While we have been working closely with MCYS on deployment and sustainment of the CPIN application, the funding provided to CASs has not been adequate to fund these activities fully. As a result, CASs are required to redirect operating funds from direct service to support CPIN activities. This was noted by the Auditor General for Ontario in her 2015 Value-for-Money Audit of the Child Protection Program.

Additionally, funding to support system upgrades, fixes and bugs has not been adequate to address the number of system issues identified by end-users of the system.

#### **4. Funding for the Broader Service System for Children, Youth, and Families**

The child protection system depends on a robust social and health infrastructure in communities across the province. Services for both children and adults are needed in the areas of health, addictions, counselling, housing support, domestic violence, and poverty mitigation to ensure the same level of safety and well-being for all Ontario communities.

Resources needed for children to stay safely at home or in their community include the following:

- Health/Mental Health
- Treatment
- Residential services, including women’s shelters
- Developmental and rehabilitation
- Housing
- Counselling
- Addictions treatment
- Subsidized day care
- Early help
- Specific reference to above services in Indigenous context:
  - Exponentially greater impact on northern, Indigenous communities
  - Lack of services, lack of transportation to get to services (and training, recreation, etc.) outside of First Nations - operating budgets of Child Well-Being Societies used to cover these costs
  - Residential services: not available in north, not culturally safe in south, agencies send workers south with kids at great expense

Adult mental health challenges are a key driver of child welfare investigations. Approximately 46% of investigations are related to adult mental health, which includes addictions. A recent survey done by Children’s Mental Health Ontario shows that 76% of families experiencing mental health issues say it is difficult to know where to get help. This represents a severe shortage of mental health services, including culturally sensitive mental health services in remote and northern communities.

Income inequality and child poverty rates have been found to be positively and significantly correlated with child maltreatment rates. Research shows that over half of maltreatment-related

investigations (53%)<sup>2</sup> in Ontario in 2013 involved a primary caregiver living in socioeconomic hardship. Indigenous children, at a child poverty rate of 40%,<sup>3</sup> are in child welfare placements because their families are a higher risk of social exclusion, poverty, and inadequate housing.

The trauma associated with residential schools and the Sixties Scoop has cascaded through generations of Indigenous families. **There is an urgent need for culturally appropriate, accessible treatment and specialized care services in Indigenous communities.** The lack of mental health services in remote communities, the North and on reserve means that many Indigenous children have been moved far from their home communities, culture, and language to receive mental health services.

Children served by CAS are particularly vulnerable to mental health issues because of the impact of adverse childhood experiences on mental and physical health. Without help and support, children develop negative coping responses to traumatic stress.<sup>4</sup> Research shows that children in care have a very high probability of not finishing high-school, experiencing homelessness, and ending up involved in the criminal justice system. The right resources at the right time could help to transform the trajectory of children and youth receiving services from children's aid societies.

In rare instances (3%), CASs will remove children from their family home while their caregivers address the issues impacting child safety.

## Conclusion

Child welfare works best when communities are well resourced with the right services to help families get better and bolster their capacity to care for their children safely, at home. Ironically, these are often the very services that are failing families when child protection steps in. Ontario's leaders need to understand that the province's well-being and prosperity depend on making child welfare and its companion social and health services a fiscal priority.

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<sup>2</sup> Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2013 Information Sheet (2017): "[Poverty and Ontario's Child Welfare Involved Population](#)" (Barbara Fallon, Melissa Van Wert).

<sup>3</sup> Brittain, M. & Blackstock, C. (2015). [First Nations child poverty: A literature review and analysis](#). First Nations Children's Action Research and Education Service (FNCARES).

<sup>4</sup> University of Ottawa OnLAC research shows that 29 percent of child and youth over the age of 10 who have been in care for more than one year in Ontario have been diagnosed with an emotional, psychological, or nervous disorder.