



Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies



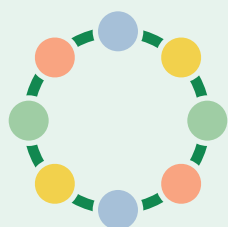
The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies
2021 Pre-Budget Submission

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The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) is a provincial membership organization representing 47 of Ontario's 50 Children's Aid Societies and Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies and three pre-mandated agencies. We work with our member Societies to ensure they have the necessary tools, educational opportunities, training, and conditions to fulfill their statutory mandate to deliver child protection services and to achieve equitable outcomes for children, youth, and families across the province.

We commend the government for their leadership throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to strengthen child welfare service delivery in Ontario. We applaud the government's work to deem child protection an essential service and fully support their decision to extend the moratorium on youth aging out of care. There has been considerable leadership by this government to elevate, support, and stabilize child welfare, which is a vital social net for many vulnerable Ontario children, youth and families, during this unprecedented period.

But the pandemic has highlighted areas of vulnerability in the child welfare sector that require both policy and financial investments to ensure improved outcomes for children, youth, and families. As such, we recommend that the provincial government address the following four fiscally responsible and critical priority areas of investment to improve outcomes for Ontario children, youth, and families.



This submission reflects the collaborative efforts of many individuals, including those who work in Societies, those from the community who care for children who come into care, and those with lived experience in the child welfare system. We acknowledge their important contributions to this submission, as it is their voices and expertise that strengthen the child welfare system.

Four Priority Areas of Investment for the Child Welfare Sector



Recommendation 1:

Invest directly in strong Reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion supports for the child welfare sector.



Recommendation 2:

Extend the moratorium on youth aging out of care until a needs-based system is developed and in place.



Recommendation 3:

Invest in kinship service and family-based care.



Recommendation 4:

Develop a funding formula that addresses funding pressures, prioritizes prevention, early intervention and the use of community support, and creates a sustainable child welfare system.

OACAS Recommendation 1:

Invest directly in strong Reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion supports for the child welfare sector.



Reconciliation is a lofty idea and without meaningful actions it falls flat. For this work to be actualized, it needs to be fully resourced.

– Micheal Miller, Executive Director, Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO)

Over the past year, the Ontario child welfare sector has taken great strides to acknowledge, name, disrupt, and dismantle deep-rooted systemic inequities that exist within the child welfare system.

Child welfare leadership across Ontario has demonstrated commitment to tangible change, with a focus on exploring ways to minimize overrepresentation, structural inequities, racism, and disproportionate outcomes for children, youth, and families served by child welfare in Ontario.

We acknowledge systemic racism and oppression in child welfare service delivery. The data is clear about who we serve and the differing outcomes they achieve. These disproportionate outcomes for racialized children, youth, and families, as well as child welfare staff, are both alarming and problematic.

A factor in these sustained, inequitable practices may be how child welfare in Ontario is funded. The current child welfare funding envelope does not allocate financial resources for equity work. This lack of multi-year, stabilized funding to address the inequities and systemic racism in child welfare has created infrastructural barriers to a coordinated provincial response to systemic change.

Why now is the time to invest in Reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion supports in child welfare:

Compared to white children, Black children in Ontario were:



Figure 1. Bonnie, N., Facey, K., Fallon, B. Understanding the Over-representation of Black children in Ontario welfare services (2020).

There is compounding evidence and have been systemic calls for this work. Child welfare agencies in Ontario have federal and provincial obligations to uphold the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* and to eradicate systemic racism and oppression. Additionally, the Truth and Reconciliation Report – Commission of Canada: *Child Welfare Calls to Action*,¹ the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*,² recent provincial governmental reviews,³ and data on the overrepresentation of children and youth in care illustrate the urgent and critical need to build an infrastructure that supports a collaborative and consistent approach to this work.

To date, there has been no multi-year, long-term, sustained funding allocated to the sector to support Reconciliation and child welfare practices to improve equity, diversity, and inclusion. A funded year-over-year approach will allow for mutual Society and government accountability and help to support new interventions that address overrepresentation.

A funded approach to Reconciliation and equity is critical to improving services and supports, as it will allow for a formalized approach to analyze the standards, compliance mechanisms, and policies that perpetuate and reinforce overrepresentation, and anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism.

Overrepresentation builds across the investigation cycle

Rate of First Nations child investigations involving than the rate of child investigations involving non-First Nations children

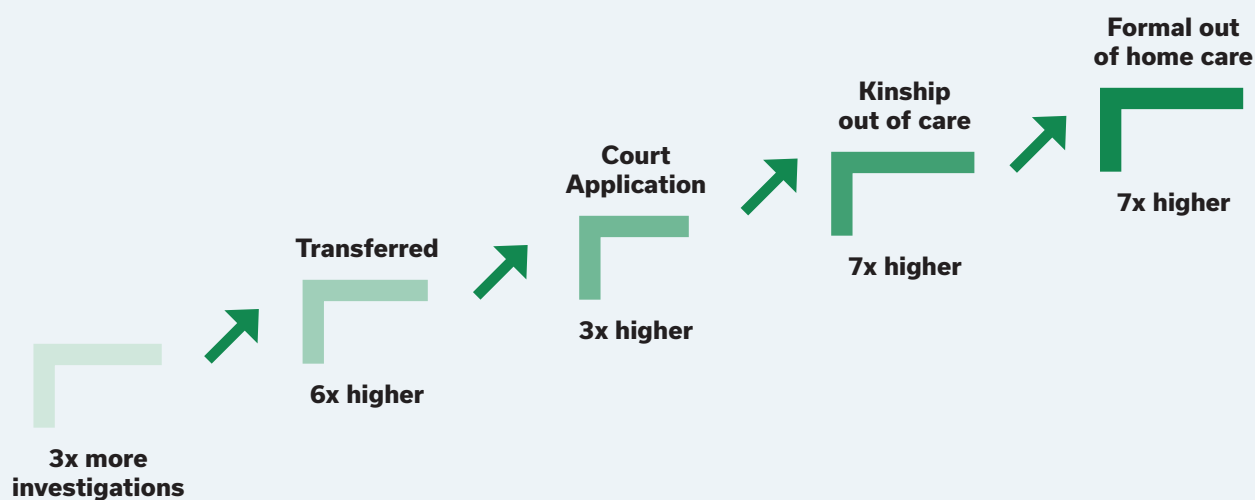


Figure 2. Crowe, A., Schiffer, J., Fallon, B. *Understanding the Overrepresentation of First Nations Children in Ontario's Child Welfare System* (2020).

We support the government's "zero tolerance for racism"⁴ approach, which is why we urgently call on the Ontario government to fund a multi-year Reconciliation, equity, and diversity initiative to ensure this work is a core service within child welfare. This work must be a funding priority embedded into child welfare redesign. Credible and equitable change can only take place when it is measured, monitored, benchmarked, and funded.

To facilitate equity work that supports all levels of child welfare — including service delivery, community partnerships, staff development, and service user capacity building — multi-year, long-term funding must be allocated to Children's Aid Societies and Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies.

Fund sustained anti-oppressive and anti-racist clinical projects:

“ Let's continue to build on the strategy to address Anti-Black Racism and commit to a multi-year, year-over-year funding strategy that helps to build, sustain, and support the One Vision One Voice practice framework, ensuring that all Societies are equipped with anti-oppressive and anti-racist clinical practice guidelines that focus on anti-Black racism. Now is the time to accelerate change.

– Keishia Facey, Project Manager,
One Vision One Voice

OACAS is committed to innovative equity and diversity work by:

1. Hosting, with ANCFSAO, a two-day intensive learning session on Reconciliation and equity, with the participation of board governors, Executive Directors, Directors of Service, and Human Resources and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion leads to support change in child welfare practice and governance.
2. Progressive hiring practices to recruit a provincial child welfare practice transformation lead, with a focus on equity and service leadership expertise.
3. Hosting province-wide meetings for Black child welfare staff to ensure their voices are elevated and supported, and that they are given the opportunity to lead and contribute to sector change.

1. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to Action – Child Welfare* (2015), http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

2. National Inquiry into Missing Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Deeper Dive: The Need for a Systems-Level Approach to Transforming Child Welfare* (2019): 344, https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final_Report_Vol_1a-1.pdf

3. Ministry of Children, Community and Social Service, *Operational Review: Final Report – York Region Children's Aid Society* (October 2020), http://www.yorkcas.org/pdfs/operational_review_Nov2020.pdf

4. Ibid.

OACAS Recommendation 2:

Extend the moratorium on youth aging out of care until a needs-based system is developed and in place. We strongly encourage the government to continue working in partnership with youth advocates to design a comprehensive approach that supports the long-term well-being of all youth aging out of care.

“All levels of government must have a moratorium on youth transitions out of child welfare and commit to maintaining that moratorium until a plan is in place to ensure youth can make life transitions in safety, with dignity and respect.

– Child Welfare League of Canada (2020)

Youth in care currently “age out” of the child welfare system when they turn 18, and subsequently lose most of their supports, both financial and social. This inevitably contributes to their susceptibility to homelessness, poverty, the criminal justice system, and financial, educational, and familial insecurity. Additionally, this harm disproportionately impacts youth from historically marginalized populations, including African Canadian, Indigenous, LGBT2SQ+, and those living with disabilities. The current process for aging out does not consider each youth’s readiness to leave the system.

We support and applaud the government’s decision to place a moratorium on youth aging out of care during the pandemic, and its most recent extension to March 31, 2021. However, more needs to be done.

OACAS stands alongside youth with lived experience in the child welfare system. We support youth advocates who are asking the provincial government to design a process of exiting care that utilizes readiness indicators rather than age-based cut-offs. A policy must be designed and implemented so that youth are not deprived of the opportunity to thrive, obtain an education, secure safe housing, and safely transition to independence.

OACAS urges the provincial government to extend the moratorium on youth aging out of care until a new readiness-based system is in place. We ask that this system be put in the next fiscal budget, and for it to include dedicated funding. This will facilitate a cohesive and equitable financial approach so that all Societies are best prepared to support youth transitioning out of care.

We applaud the incredible work of youth advocates and their collaborative efforts with government to redesign the transition from care process. The time is now to innovate and update the approach to ensure youth leaving the system have every opportunity to succeed.



“ All levels of government must have a moratorium on youth transitions out of child welfare and commit to maintaining that moratorium until a plan is in place to ensure youth can make life transitions in safety, with dignity and respect.

– Child Welfare League of Canada (2020)

Youth Advocate Leadership

“ Youth in and from care are forced to adapt to constantly changing environments, but this doesn't mean we do so successfully.

2020 exposed gaps with our system that revealed there is not enough support for youth in cases of large-scale emergencies.

The responses from youth to our current age-out system is one filled with fear and feelings of abandonment. By giving youth a choice to decide when they are ready to be independent, you are sending us the message that we are supported, and our stability is more important than our age.

– Chanice McAnuff

Youth in Care in Ontario

For children and youth receiving supports from a Society (formerly known as Crown Wards) under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, the government is the official parent/guardian.

Fact: On March 31, 2020 there were 728 youth aged 20 years or older and 802 19-year-olds receiving supports from a Society.

(Source: Ministry Quarterly Reports, Q4, 2019–2020. Definition applies to receiving continued care support for youth, renewed youth supports, or under Voluntary Youth Services Agreement.)

OACAS Recommendation 3:

Prioritize and invest in kinship service and family-based care.

“ We have always been involved in our grandchild's life. We feel that the benefits of children being placed with their families allows for healthier growth and overall well-being. They grow up with a feeling of belonging and being connected to an extended family.

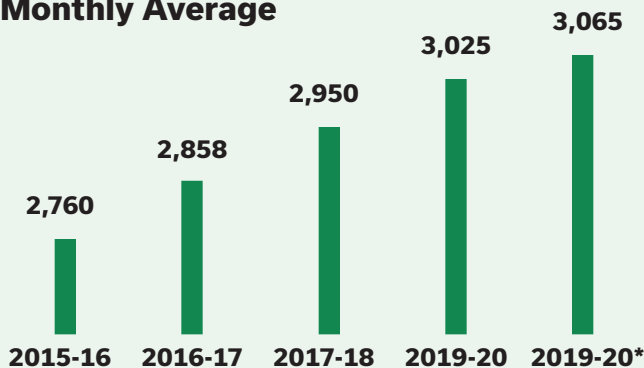
– Anonymous Kin Family

When it is unsafe for children or youth to live with their immediate families, Children's Aid Societies focus on keeping them connected to their families and communities through kinship placements. When kinship placements are not possible, family-based foster care is used and preferred over group care.

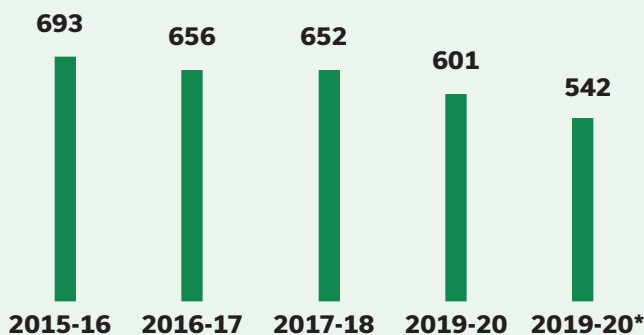
Children and youth in need of protection can be placed with their kin by child welfare agencies. Kin providers can be family members — for example a grandparent, aunt, or cousin — or may be someone with an emotional connection to the child or youth, like a family friend or teacher. In 2018, 26% of children and youth needing temporary out of home placements in Ontario lived with kin families. In Ontario in 2019–2020, Societies placed an average of 542 children and youth in kinship care

placements per month. In the same year, an average of 3,065 children per month were in kinship service placements, where children are placed with families, but with less formal intervention than in a kinship care placement (see figures 3 and 4).

Kinship Service Children and Youth: Monthly Average



Kinship Care Children and Youth: Monthly Average



Figures 3 and 4. Referenced from CW Connects, Ministry Quarterly Reports (Data as of November 15, 2020)

Research shows that children and youth in the child welfare system who are supported by community members or live with families, extended family, or friends feel safer, happier, and have better long-term outcomes. They also experience fewer behavioural problems, mental health distress, and fewer placement disruptions.⁵

This approach is also a recommendation that stems from the OACAS *One Vision One Voice Race Equity Practices Framework*⁶ and builds on the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Service's mandate to improve stability, permanency, and quality of care for children and youth with the least intrusive care option.

OACAS supports the Ministry's direction to use group care placements only when intentional and on a time-limited basis when kinship and family-based care options are unavailable. **To best support this, a focused kinship service and family-based care strategy must be a priority in the next fiscal year. In addition, we urge the government to increase financial supports for kinship services.**

“ *Kinship families do not plan financially to have to raise their immediate families' children, and thus it becomes a strain and an overall stress to the family in meeting the family's day to day needs.* ”

– Anonymous Kin Family

5. Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, *What to Expect When You're Not Expecting: A Kinship Service Guide for Child Welfare Professional* (2021).

6. Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, *One Vision: One Voice – Practice Framework Part 2: Race Equity Practices* (September 2016): 19, http://www.oacas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/One-Vision-One-Voice-Part-2_digital_english-May-2019.pdf.



Improved supports for kinship service and family-based care to support family unification and stability look like:

Daycare: Access to flexible and subsidized daycare options. Daycare provides critical support for children, as well as respite for kin caregivers. Daycare also offers an enriching environment for children who may have additional socialization needs due to previous circumstances of neglect and limited learning through play.

Start-up Supports: Often kin do not expect to become caregivers, and yet when they do, there is an immediate need to set up care for children and youth. Therefore, coverage for the purchase of bedroom furniture, cribs, car seats, clothes, baby gates, and safe feeding chairs is required as a one-time investment for kin families.

Legal Support: Often kin families require legal support and guidance. Access to timely pro bono legal support for kin families is essential as they may need expert help to navigate often unexpected caregiving circumstances.

Additional Supports: Providing care is often unexpected for kin families. As a result, they may need ongoing or additional supports toward clothing, recreation activities, camps, tutoring, educational supports, and youth mentoring programs to help their socialization and well-being.



OACAS Recommendation 4:

Develop a funding formula that addresses funding pressures, prioritizes prevention, early intervention and the use of community support, and creates a sustainable child welfare system.

The current funding formula for child welfare is dated and does not align with the service principles of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, nor those of Children's Aid Societies and Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies across the province. We believe that amendments to the funding formula should focus on:

- Better alignment of the funding formula to service principles, including reducing the weighting of factors such as children in care and focusing instead on factors such as protection cases screened and permanency;
- Giving Societies a clear mandate to direct funding to areas of early intervention and prevention;
- Over the longer-term, developing outcomes-based metrics and furnishing a portion of funding based on achievement of outcomes, similar to the funding formula for Ontario hospitals;
- Enhancing the Transitional Funding Model where jurisdiction is being restored between non-Indigenous and Indigenous agencies; and

- Addressing funding pressures faced by smaller and rural agencies by better recognizing the core operating costs of these agencies given the typically larger geographic areas they serve.

In addition, as part of the government's redesign work, we recommend that the government further invest in the development of culturally appropriate services and provide enhanced funding for adoption and kin services.



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