



Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies



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2022 Pre-Budget Submission

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The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) is a provincial membership organization representing 48 of Ontario's 50 Children's Aid Societies and Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies, and two pre-mandated agencies. We work with our members to ensure they have the necessary tools, educational opportunities, training, and conditions to fulfill their statutory mandate to deliver child protection services and achieve equitable outcomes for children, youth, and families across the province.

This is our second pre-budget submission during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we would like to applaud child welfare professionals across Ontario who have worked tirelessly to ensure the safety and well-being of children, youth, and families. Their commitment to providing high-quality services and supports during these unprecedented times is commendable.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to exacerbate social determinants of health that are inextricably linked to the child welfare sector. We commend the provincial government for recognizing the need to strengthen services and supports for vulnerable Ontarians. Post-pandemic recovery in the province of Ontario will require long-term, sustainable policy and financial investments to ensure that all children, youth, and families have the opportunity to thrive.

This submission recommends four fiscally responsible and critical priority areas of investment to improve the lives of Ontario children, youth, and families.

This submission proudly reflects the advocacy and diverse perspectives of child welfare professionals and those with lived system experience from across Ontario. It is an honour to elevate their voices to ensure that long-term, systemic child welfare change reflects personal and professional expertise.

The voices of lived system experience must be "respected and...heard" (Child, Youth, and Family Services Act, 2017, Preamble) in child welfare policy and system redesign.

Four Priority Areas of Investment for the Child Welfare Sector



Recommendation 1:

Invest in kinship families to ensure children remain connected to their culture and communities when they cannot live at home.



Recommendation 2:

Invest in Reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion supports to help repair the harm done by decades of systemic racism.



Recommendation 3:

Strengthen services and supports for older youth and youth aging out of care to allow them to succeed and not be disadvantaged by having been in the system.



Recommendation 4:

Prioritize admission prevention, early intervention, and community supports to help avoid entry to the child welfare system, where possible.

Recommendation 1:

Invest in kinship families to ensure children remain connected to their culture and communities when they cannot live at home.

“Most families require some type of support for basic needs such as assistance with a larger vehicle, adjustments to the home to accommodate an additional child or children, furniture, a larger apartment resulting in increased rent. These things must be considered in order to support kinship service placements.

– Stéphane Chalifour, Family and Children’s Services of Guelph and Wellington County

When it is unsafe for children or youth to live with their primary caregiver(s), Children’s Aid Societies strive to keep them connected to their families and communities through kinship placements, which allow someone with a significant relationship with the young person to care for them. Kin can be biologically related, such as a grandparent or a cousin, or can be someone with an emotional connection, like a family friend or a member of the community.

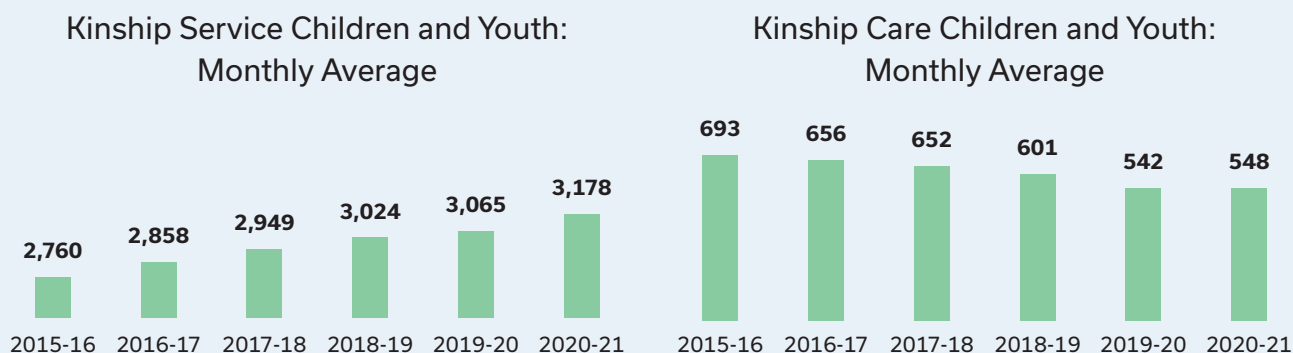
In 2020-21, thirty-eight non-Indigenous Children’s Aid Societies placed an average of 548 children and youth in kinship care placements per month. That same year, an average of 3,178 children and youth were in

kinship service placements, where children are placed with families but with less formal intervention than in a kinship care placement (Figure 1 and 2). [Research](#) has consistently shown that children and youth feel safer and happier when extended kin networks are involved in their lives and that kin connections lead to improved outcomes for children and youth in care. Kinship placements are also a more cost-effective and sustainable care option compared to foster or residential care.

However, there continues to be inadequate and inconsistent funding and resource supports for kinship services and family-based care—per diems vary across the province and there is no standardization of approach. A recent OACAS report determined that “most families involved in child welfare live in poverty, which is often intergenerational. Some kin caregivers are often on a fixed income or with limited additional resources and caring for a child can be costly. To help properly support and help a child thrive, financial and resource support must be made available.”¹ Economic status should not be a caregiving barrier.

¹ Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies. *What to Expect when you’re not expecting: Report on Kinship Service for Child Welfare Professionals*. 2021.

Figure 1 and 2. Kinship Service and Kinship Care Monthly Averages.



Source: MCCSS. Q4 2020-21 Ministry Quarterly Report of 38 non-Indigenous agencies.
October 13, 2021.

OACAS strongly urges the provincial government to invest in a cohesive, consistent, and equitable approach to kinship service, as it will allow children and youth to ["reach their potential in a safe, nurturing and secure home environment."](#)

Kinship is improving child welfare because:

- It reduces the stress associated with coming into care, as in many cases the child/youth already knows what it is like to be in their kin's home.
- Family and community relationships are preserved.
- Children and youth can maintain their cultural, religious, and emotional ties.
- It supports the government's goal of system sustainability as a cost-effective option for children who cannot remain in their family of origin.

Recommendation 2:

Invest in Reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion supports to help repair the harm done by decades of systemic racism.



Many Indigenous children and families will be hurting more than ever now that we've uncovered mass graves of residential schools.

Please prioritize access to supports for Indigenous youth and families.

– Youth from Care

The Ontario child welfare sector continues to build momentum to prioritize Reconciliation and equity to ensure equitable outcomes for all children, youth, and families. And yet, service gaps exist, and intersectional, marginalized communities continue to face risks, harm, and poor outcomes.

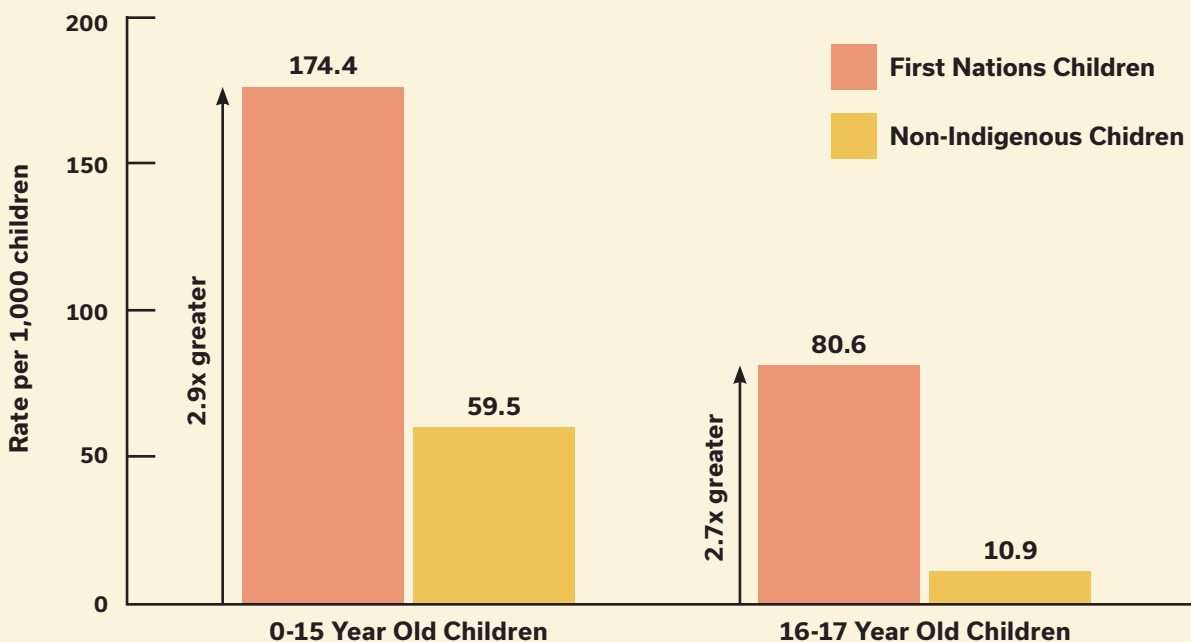
The [current data](#) is clear that there is much work to be done to address issues of disproportionality and disparity for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children, youth, and families (*Figure 3*). Despite the recent settlement announcement from the Federal government, many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children, youth, and families continue to be served off-reserve by both non-Indigenous Children's Aid Societies and Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies. These organizations need adequate resources to ensure they can

provide accessible, culturally appropriate services and supports.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to reveal the structural and systemic inequities in Ontario communities. 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth have faced increased social isolation and a heightened risk of self-harm or suicide and are often living in homes with little to no family or peer support. [Sector research](#) has highlighted the need for gender-affirming health care and services that affirm a child or youth's sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE). Resources are needed for Children's Aid Societies and Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies to integrate critical data frameworks that inform, manage, and improve service delivery for 2SLGBTQ+ families (*Figure 4*).

We commend the government's decision to fund the One Vision One Voice (OVOV) program on an ongoing basis and to prioritize dismantling anti-Black racism and addressing the overrepresentation of African Canadians in child welfare. The Ontario child welfare sector is committed to implementing the Race Equity Practices and supporting initiatives that promote better outcomes for Black children, youth, and families. OVOV should serve as a model for other marginalized communities

Figure 3. Rates of First Nations and non-Indigenous Child Investigations in Ontario in 2018.



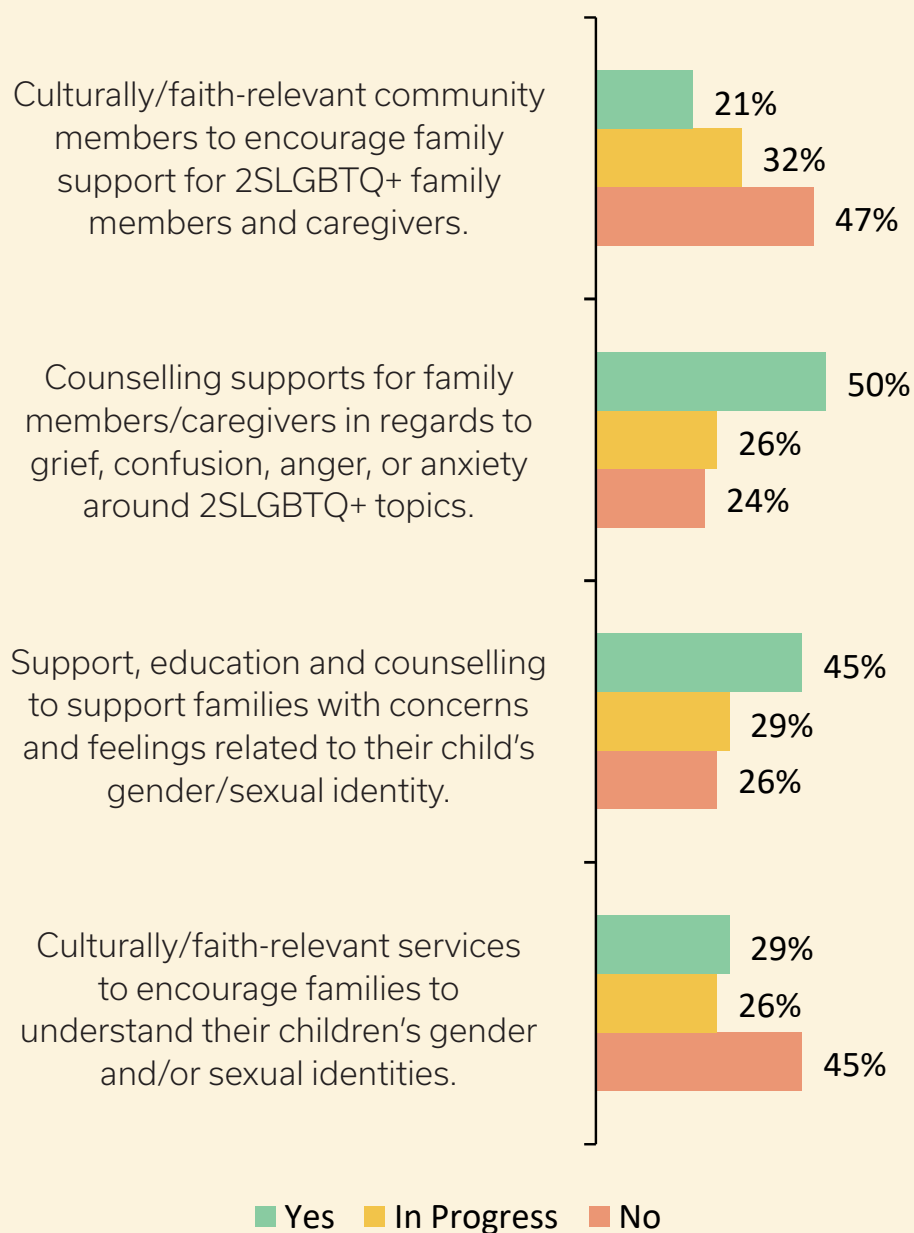
Source: Crowe, A., Schiffer, J., with support from Fallon, B., Houston, E., Black, T., Lefebvre, R., Filippelli, J., JohCarnella, N., and Trocmé, N. *Mashkiwenmi-daa Noojimowin: Let's Have Strong Minds for the Healing (First Nations Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2018)*. 2021. Toronto, ON: Child Welfare Research Portal. [Retrieved online](#).

served by child welfare, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit and 2SLGBTQ+. There is an opportunity to pilot and fund similar community-informed projects that can address the service gaps and unique needs of these communities. Funded year-over-year approaches will allow for mutual Society and government accountability and help to support new interventions that address overrepresentation.

OACAS urges the government to consider a consistent, funded approach to Reconciliation and equity, diversity, and inclusion to improve services and supports, but also to integrate accountability measures that centre Reconciliation and equitable practices into all aspects of child welfare work and directly link them to improved outcomes.

Figure 4. Services to 2SLGBTQ+ Families.

Does your agency provide the following as part of its services to families?



Source: Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. *Ontario Child Welfare LGBT2SQ+ Organizational Self-Assessment: Provincial Report*. February 2021. [Retrieved online](#).

Recommendation 3:

Strengthen services and supports for older youth and youth aging out of care to allow them to succeed and not be disadvantaged by having been in the system.

“ Every single person I have encountered in the system has had great potential to succeed. It is social barriers that are to blame for many of the problems they face.

– Youth from Care

OACAS and the Ontario child welfare sector strongly support the government's commitment to strengthen supports for youth and to implement a readiness strategy for youth transitioning out of care. The poor outcomes of youth from child welfare are [well documented](#). They include higher rates of academic under-achievement, unemployment, homelessness, criminal justice involvement, vulnerability to human trafficking, early parenthood, and reliance on social assistance. These pre-existing risks and challenges for youth in and from care have been compounded during the COVID-19 pandemic. Investments in their safety and well-being are more necessary than ever to ensure they do not fall further behind their peers. Their physical and mental health, developmental maturity, educational success, and employment opportunities require unique consideration in a comprehensive government readiness plan.

Youth from the child welfare system have consistently articulated their concerns and named their demands for a successful transition from the child welfare system. They include:

- **Investments in well-being** that address the social determinants of health: Free/affordable housing, access to public transit, health and dental benefits, employment assistance (such as job finding help, career counselling, and livable wages), cultural services and supports, and childcare for dependent children. This also includes consideration for the needs of diverse populations and identities, including youth who are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system.
- **Better preparation for adulthood and independence:** Financial literacy, household management skills, access to mentors, and financial supports
- **Mental health supports and programming:** Accessible and free therapy, mental health resources, and rehabilitation supports and services

And all of this needs to be done in collaboration with first voice advocates from across the province, with diverse perspectives and experiences to ensure a

coordinated, comprehensive, and equitable policy and implementation approach.

OACAS urges the government to consider the full scope of supports and services young people from the child welfare system need to survive and thrive and ensure that they are prioritized immediately. There are young people right now who will suffer the consequences of inaction.

Youth Transitioning from Care

In Ontario's child welfare system, youth formally leave care at the age of 18. However, they have the option of accessing ongoing supports until they turn 21.*

As of March 31, 2021, there were:

- 836 19-year-olds receiving services and supports
- 1,385 20-year-olds and over receiving services and supports

** Important note: Children's Aid Societies and Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies have continued to provide services and supports to youth whose care arrangements were scheduled to expire during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to reporting limitations, the numbers above do not include all youth 21 years of age and older who may have been actively receiving supports from their child welfare agency.*

Source: MCCSS. Q4 2020-21 Ministry Quarterly Report of 38 non-Indigenous agencies. October 13, 2021. Includes youth receiving Continued Care and Support for Youth (CCSY), Voluntary Youth Services Agreement (VYSA), and Extended Society Care.

Recommendation 4:

Prioritize admission prevention, early intervention, and community supports to help avoid entry to the child welfare system, where possible.

“ There are too many examples of children/youth having to enter the child welfare system who present with complex needs, with no child protection issues present in the family other than the lack of appropriate mental health services which makes the home situation untenable.

– Child Welfare Staff

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the systemic challenges and social inequities that have long strained local communities and the service providers working within them, including child welfare. We know that most families that come into contact with the child welfare system are not cases of extreme abuse or neglect. In 96% of child welfare investigations, children and youth remain in the home while their caregivers receive the support they need (*Figure 5*). Instead, most caregivers are struggling to meet the basic needs of their family. As the pandemic wears on, Ontarians continue to face challenges — like financial hardship, lack of social supports, and increased mental health concerns — that put them at risk of crises.

OACAS supports the focus of the Ontario government's Child Welfare Redesign Strategy on prevention and the need for coordinated, consistent services across social systems. Families are often connected to the child welfare system because of a lack of community supports, such as adult and children mental health services, intimate partner violence services, addiction help, residential and treatment facilities, and developmental services. Parents and caregivers need better, accessible, local services to ensure the safety and well-being of themselves and their children. In particular, there is a need for concrete strategies and robust resources to address and support the complex special and mental health needs of children and youth. Government support for barrier-free, better cross-system collaboration, stronger community partnerships, and policies that allow for creative service delivery models should also be a priority. The funding formula, as well as child welfare assessment tools, must reflect the shift toward admission prevention services.

Finally, parents and caregivers need [fundamental supports](#) such as access to financial stability, employment opportunities, accessible childcare, safe and affordable housing, and food security so they can provide the best and safest environment for their children.

OACAS encourages the prioritization of admission prevention, early intervention, and community supports to ensure that Ontario children, youth, and families can access the full scope of social services they need, where and when they need them.

Figure 5. Placement in child maltreatment investigations in Ontario, 2018.

Placement Status	#	2018	
		Rate per 1,000 children	%
No Placement Required	142,729	60.43	96%
Placement Considered	1,621	0.69	1%
Kinship Out of Care	2,422	1.03	2%
Customary Care	–	–	0%
Kinship in Care	130	0.06	0%
Foster Care	1,388	0.59	1%
Group Home	147	0.06	0%
Residential/Secure Treatment	–	–	0%
Total Investigations	148,536	62.89	100%

Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2018

Based on a sample of 7,115 investigations in 2018. Columns may not add up to total because low frequency estimates are not reported but are in total.

- Estimate was < 100 investigations.

Source: Fallon, B., Filippelli, J., Lefebvre, R., Joh-Carnella, N., Trocmé, N., Black, T., ... Stoddart, J. *Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2018 (OIS-2018)*. 2020. Toronto, ON: Child Welfare Research Portal. [Retrieved online](#).

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