
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2016CFD0056-002461
Nov. 21, 2016

Ministry of Children and Family Development

Special advisor delivers report on Indigenous child welfare

VICTORIA – A final report from the Ministry of Children and Family Development’s special advisor provides 85 recommendations to overhaul British Columbia’s Indigenous child welfare system and improve outcomes for Indigenous children and youth by changing focus from intervention and separation to strengthening families.

Grand Chief Edward John’s final report, Indigenous Resilience, Connectedness and Reunification – From Root Causes to Root Solutions, summarizes his activities and engagement over the past year and provides a detailed analysis of Indigenous child protection in B.C.

The report’s 85 recommendations are themed to focus on:

- reducing the need for Indigenous children and youth to come into care;
- increasing support services that help keep families together;
- enabling greater access to judicial services;
- creating a more equitable funding formula between the Province and the federal government;
- increasing early intervention services; and,
- specifically targeting more Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) staff within First Nations communities.

The recommendations are directed variously to MCFD, B.C.’s delegated Aboriginal agencies (DAAs), First Nations leadership and the federal government.

Of the recommendations directed at MCFD, work on 40 of them is either being wrapped into the ministry’s multi-year operations plan or is currently underway. For instance:

- A commitment to regular regional meetings with Métis and First Nations leaders.
- Job performance measures for the ministry’s regional directors that explicitly reflect a commitment to strengthening relationships with Indigenous leaders, families and communities.
- Incorporating a stronger Indigenous voice within the Youth Advisory Council.
- Developing a plan to recruit and retain Indigenous individuals for social work and leadership positions within MCFD.
- Providing enhanced training to DAAs around permanency plans for children and youth.
- Working with the First Nations and Métis Nation BC to better inform Indigenous people about the child welfare system, the assistance available to them and their rights under child welfare legislation.
- Working with INAC to finalize policy to protect the rights to cultural and family connections for all Indigenous children who are adopted in B.C.

- Working with staff and adoptive parents to strengthen cultural safety agreements.

Addressing the remaining recommendations from Grand Chief John's report will require a significant injection of funding – often in co-ordination with the federal government. Alterations will also need to be made to existing legislation. Ultimately, this report demands a shift in practice and a broader reassessment of how MCFD and DAAs engage with the federal government and with Indigenous communities to mitigate and address Indigenous child welfare concerns.

Grand Chief Edward John was appointed to the special advisor position in September 2015 with a mandate to: engage with Aboriginal, First Nation and Métis communities on permanency discussions; review policy and legislation within the ministry to find ways to improve the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care; and provide Early Years advice to the minister. His initial term was set to end March 31, 2016, but was extended to allow for a more thorough consultation process. In his role as senior advisor, Grand Chief John met with 86 First Nations, 10 Delegated Aboriginal Agencies and 12 organizations or interest groups over a 14-month span.

For a summary of recommendations, visit: <http://fns.bc.ca/pdf/Special-Advisor-Indigenous-Child-Welfare-Report-2016-Summary-of-Recommendations.pdf>

Read the full report at: <http://fns.bc.ca/pdf/Final-Report-of-Grand-Chief-Ed-John-re-Indig-Child-Welfare-in-BC-November-2016.pdf>

Quotes:

Christy Clark, Premier of British Columbia –

“I want to thank Grand Chief Ed John for his thoughtful, heartfelt, and comprehensive report. Right now, Indigenous children are 15 times more likely than others to be in foster care – that must change, and it will. Chief John's recommendations mean systemic, wide-scale change, and a shift in thinking from intervention to protecting families. We can't do it alone, and it can't happen overnight, but it must happen. We are committed to working with our federal, provincial and First Nations partners to do what is necessary to give Indigenous families better supports and help create a brighter future for their kids.”

Grand Chief Edward John, special advisor to the Minister of Children and Family Development on Indigenous children in care –

“We will not see the desired change without strong and sustained leadership and action by Canada, B.C. and Indigenous parents and communities. I know the willingness is there and I hope that this report helps advance an understanding of the steps required to both address the root causes of the existing ills of the child welfare system and practices, and work with Indigenous peoples to support root solutions.”

Stephanie Cadieux, Minister of Children and Family Development –

“We don't accept the over-representation of Indigenous children in government care as a simple matter of course. That's why we brought in Grand Chief John to undertake this work and help us improve our child and family-supporting system. His report gives us the basis on which to advance our efforts and expand them with support from the federal government and

working hand-in-hand with B.C.'s Indigenous communities and leadership.”

Quick Facts:

- Though the number Indigenous children and youth in government care has declined by 21% since 2007 (from 63.6 to 55.3 per 1,000 Indigenous 0-18 year olds), the trend for non-Indigenous children in care numbers is even stronger – a 45% decline over the same time frame. Consequently, Indigenous children and youth represent 61.2% of all children and youth in government care in British Columbia.
- Evidence shows that, where it is safe and appropriate to do so, keeping families together rather than placing a child into care results in better outcomes overall for these children. Increasingly, MCFD's practice has emphasized family preservation, keeping Aboriginal children and youth from coming into government care.
- In circumstances where a child needs to be placed in care, evidence stresses the importance of finding permanency through either reunification with parents, adoption or permanent transfer of guardianship to another caring adult or adults.
- When permanency is being planned for Indigenous children or youth, the child or youth's Indigenous community must be involved. The priority is always for an Indigenous child or youth to be placed with family, extended family or clan, or a family that is part of the same community or nation.

Learn More:

For information on key ministry programs and services available to Indigenous children, youth and families in British Columbia, visit:

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/aboriginal-people/supporting-communities/child-family-development>

For more on Grand Chief John's work with the First Nations Summit, visit:

<http://www.fns.bc.ca/>

A backgrounder follows.

Media Contact:

Ministry of Children and Family Development
Government Communications and Public
Engagement
250 356-1639

Connect with the Province of B.C. at: www.gov.bc.ca/connect

BACKGROUND

For Immediate Release
2016CFD0056-002461
Nov. 21, 2016

Ministry of Children and Family Development

Indigenous Resilience, Connectedness and Reunification – From Root Causes to Root Solutions

Grand Chief Edward John was contracted in September 2015 as Special Advisor to Children and Family Development Minister Stephanie Cadieux on Indigenous children in care, Permanency and Early years. Since that time, the Grand Chief has led discussion with First Nations leaders, Delegated Aboriginal Agencies and the ministry throughout B.C., as well as with federal government representatives.

Concluding his mandate, he has produced his final report, Indigenous Resilience, Connectedness and Reunification – From Root Causes to Root Solutions, which provides a detailed analysis of Aboriginal Child Welfare in British Columbia. The report is based on the Grand Chief's personal experiences meeting with families, leaders in Indigenous communities and other stakeholders all across the province, as well as his past experiences and understanding of B.C.'s legal and legislative landscape.

In his report, Grand Chief John stresses the need for targeted resources to help build capacity for Indigenous peoples and communities, enabling them to better exercise their inherent rights concerning child and family services. It also points the need to provide stronger, more-sustained support to Indigenous families and parents so that Indigenous children have a better opportunity to remain at home, connected to their family and community.

There are 85 recommendations, with an additional 92 sub recommendations and clarifying statements. The recommendations are divided into ten areas for focused action:

- Direct Support for Indigenous Children, Parents and Families in all Indigenous Communities
- Access to Justice and Child and Family Services
- A New Fiscal Relationship – Investing in Patterns of Connectedness
- Prevention Services – Keeping Families Connected
- Re-unification and Permanency Planning
- Nurturing a Sense of Belonging and Prioritizing Culture and Language – Care Plans as a tool for building connectedness
- Early Years – Early Investment in Establishing Patterns of Connectedness
- Indigenous Peoples and Jurisdiction Over Child Welfare
- The Existing Policy Framework – Shifting Towards Patterns of Connectedness
- A National Strategy for Indigenous Child Welfare

Recommendations are directed to MCFD, Canada, DAA's and First Nation leadership, directing all parties to work collectively towards an Indigenous, community-led Child Welfare system – work that has begun since the BC First Nations Children and Family Gathering in May 2016.

Some of the key recommendations for the ministry include:

- That MCFD and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) invest an additional \$8 million annually to increase the number of social workers, support workers and others serving First Nations in B.C. by at least 92 full-time equivalent positions over the next two years, while ensuring that frontline staff are placed directly in First Nations communities and that each community is funded for a child and family liaison/advocate;
- That MCFD regularly provide to each First Nation a list of all their children currently in government care;
- That MCFD and INAC ensure funds are provided to Indigenous communities for their participation in child protection hearings;
- That MCFD jointly commit with First Nations to alternative dispute resolution – such as family counselling or the provision of other family supports – as a the default approach in advance of any child removal order;
- That MCFD, DAAs and INAC partner with Indigenous communities to expand parenting programs and services, as well as other professional expertise to help Indigenous parents;
- That the Province address issues of wage parity for DAAs;
- That the Province amend the Child Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) to include mandatory permanency planning for all children in care and that MCFD require an independent review of permanency plans on an annual basis;
- That the Province commit to the creation of an Indigenous custom adoption registry as those that exist in Nunavut and Northwest Territories;
- That MCFD and the federal government work to immediately expand Indigenous early years programming;
- That MCFD designate an Indigenous Director equipped to make decisions under the authority of the CFCSA that are based in cultural knowledge and better account for historical circumstances; and,
- That MCFD commit to immediate actions to recruit and retain Indigenous individuals for leadership positions within MCFDs and ensure that there are plans in place, developed in partnership with Indigenous leaders and Indigenous organizations, to support the success of those individuals.

Media Contact:

Ministry of Children and Family Development
Government Communications and Public
Engagement
250 356-1639

Connect with the Province of B.C. at: www.gov.bc.ca/connect