



FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT

NEWS RELEASE

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First Nations respond to startling Canada and BC Auditor General Reports on Aboriginal Child Protection Services

Coast Salish Traditional Territory/West Vancouver, B.C. – The First Nations Summit acknowledges the startling findings and welcomes the strong recommendations issued today by the Auditor General of B.C., John Doyle, and the Auditor General of Canada, Sheila Fraser, in their respective reports on Aboriginal child protection services.

“Combined, these reports reveal a startling picture of how the welfare of vulnerable Aboriginal children is often subjected to government whimsy. This is totally unacceptable. Both governments must move with the highest priority and extreme diligence to address the important recommendations and findings contained in these reports, which, among other things, found our children do not receive appropriate in-care services comparable to other children, nationally or provincially,” said Grand Chief Edward John, member of the First Nations Summit political executive.

“When it’s found that our children suffer and our families are unduly impacted due to systemic indifference, then this revelation is an embarrassment in this country. These reports have to persuade both governments to move quickly and to work meaningfully with our communities to address these vital issues,” added Grand Chief John.

“It is well understood that the federal government is responsible for contributions to the provincial system to address on-reserve Aboriginal children at risk, and that the ministry wants more funding from Ottawa in order to improve outcomes for those children,” said Chief Judith Sayers, a member of the Summit’s political executive. “But, as the provincial auditor general found, the ministry has been lax in not developing a persuasive business case in which to negotiate for adequate funding. That recommendation and all others seem fairly sensible and they all must be acted on swiftly in consultation with First Nations.”

“In light of the respective auditor general reports, we urge the federal and provincial governments to take the findings and recommendations to heart and to act with conviction in order to deal decisively with the serious gaps identified,” said Dave Porter, a member of the First Nations Summit political executive.

Of great concern to First Nations communities and their leadership is the provincial auditor general’s finding of fact “that while Aboriginal children account for only 8% of children in British Columbia, they make up 51% of children in the province’s care. This is considerably higher than the national average of 30-40%.”

B.C. Auditor General's Key Findings

- The Ministry of Children and Family Development has attempted to work collaboratively with Aboriginal organizations and the federal government to deliver effective, culturally appropriate and equitably accessible child protection services, mainly through Aboriginal agencies to Aboriginal children and their families. However, several challenges (some anticipated, some not) have slowed the transfer to Aboriginal agencies of responsibility for delivering services.
- As a result, many of the child protection needs of Aboriginal children and their families continue to remain unmet. A more strategic approach is needed if Aboriginal child protection goals in British Columbia are to be met.
- Although access to good child welfare services alone cannot resolve some of the problems faced by Aboriginal and First Nations children and families, whether on or off reserves, the services are essential to protect these children from abuse or neglect.
- The overrepresentation of Aboriginal and First Nation's children in care – and the indications that outcomes are poor – call for all parties involved in the child welfare system to find better ways of meeting their needs.

Auditor General of Canada's key findings

- The funding INAC provides to First Nations child welfare agencies for operating child welfare services is not based on the actual cost of delivering those services. It is based on a funding formula that the Department applies nationwide. The formula dates from 1988. It has not been changed to reflect variations in legislation and in child welfare services from province to province, or the actual number of children in care. The use of the formula has led to inequities. Under a new formula the Department has developed to take into account current legislation in Alberta, funding to First Nations agencies in that province for the operations and prevention components of child welfare services will have increased by 74 percent when the formula is fully implemented in 2010.
- The Department has not defined key policy requirements related to comparability and cultural appropriateness of services. In addition, it has insufficient assurance that the services provided by First Nations agencies to children on reserves are meeting provincial legislation and standards.
- INAC has not identified and collected the kind of information it would need to determine whether the program that supports child welfare services on reserves is achieving positive outcomes for children. The information the Department collects is mostly for program budgeting purposes.

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The First Nations Summit speaks on behalf of First Nations involved in the treaty negotiation process in British Columbia and on other issues of common concern. Background information on the Summit may be found at www.fns.bc.ca.

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