



Indian and Northern Affairs Canada / Affaires Indiennes et du Nord Canada



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First Nations Child and Family Services

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First Nations children are the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population. Historically there has been no federal child welfare legislation and as a result the Government of Canada, through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), formed agreements with provincial governments to deliver child welfare services on-reserve. INAC would then reimburse the provinces for services which were provided.

In the 1970's and early 1980's it was recognized that the majority of First Nations children on-reserve did not have access to culturally appropriate, First Nations-managed child welfare services, although they were four to six times more likely to come into care than other Canadian children. Many First Nations communities raised concerns about the lack of welfare services on-reserve and the lack of culturally sensitive services available from provinces and territories.

In 1991, a national First Nations Child and Family Services program was established by INAC under the authority of Cabinet. Under this program, First Nations Child and Family Services agencies provide services for children who are registered and ordinarily resident on reserve. They receive their mandate and authority from their respective provincial/territorial government and function as agencies of these governments, while receiving their funding through INAC. Agencies are accountable to the provinces and territories for their standards and quality of care and to the federal government for their funds. In addition, First Nations Child and Family Services agencies are strongly encouraged to develop and incorporate additional First Nations standards for service delivery. Services offered through child and family service programs usually include protection, prevention and adoption services. Over the past several years there has been a shift in focus, as child and family service programs are putting an emphasis on preventive services that are directed at the whole family.

The goal of the First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) program is to support First Nations communities in providing culturally sensitive child welfare services comparable to those available to other provincial residents in similar circumstances. The FNCFS program is one of many Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) programs and services dedicated to individual and family well-being.

Since the creation of this program, there has been a significant increase in the number of FNCFS Agencies from 34 in 1989 to 105 in 2000.

A national policy review involving INAC, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), and First Nations child and family service agencies was completed in June 2000. The review produced 17 recommendations for improvement of the current program. An advisory committee, with representatives from

INAC, AFN and First Nations agencies, is currently in the process of reviewing the recommendations and developing a proposed plan of implementation.

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