



# News Release

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## **MCFD MUST STOP THE TALK AND START THE ACTION TO CLOSE GAPS FOR ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

VICTORIA – The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) should get back to the basics of serving Aboriginal children and their families and stop spending money on questionable change initiatives, British Columbia’s Representative for Children and Youth Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond concludes in an extensive report on Aboriginal child welfare spending and service delivery released today.

*When Talk Trumped Service: A Decade of Lost Opportunity for Aboriginal Children and Youth in B.C.* details how MCFD spent \$66 million over the past dozen years on Aboriginal service-delivery discussions and projects, with no evidence of a single Aboriginal child or family receiving better services as a result.

“There has been a significant amount of money spent on talking – on endless meetings without any tangible results,” Turpel-Lafond said. “MCFD has supported these big, blue-sky initiatives which were neither clearly articulated nor properly scrutinized. The ministry has been overly focused on transferring the responsibility to provide services instead of ensuring Aboriginal children and youth are getting the help they desperately need.”

MCFD spent over \$34 million between 2002 and 2009 on a Regional Aboriginal Authorities initiative, designed to devolve responsibility for child welfare services to Aboriginal Authorities to be delivered at the community level. In the end, despite this expenditure, no change was made and no children received additional or enhanced services.

MCFD immediately proceeded to spend nearly \$32 million more on what it initially called its Nation-to-Nation initiative – now known as Indigenous Approaches – which is supposed to support the transfer of authority over child welfare services to individual First Nations communities by providing them direct funding for various projects. The report shows that this initiative has been marked by a lack of overarching policy and direction and has, in fact, been merely a series of ad hoc contracts.

“These initiatives have clearly failed to improve Aboriginal child welfare services and outcomes for children,” Turpel-Lafond said. “In fact, we can only conclude that the drain of time, energy and resources has resulted in a negative impact on services. For example, while millions have been spent on these initiatives, B.C. still lacks a system of therapeutic residential care, a comprehensive province-wide response to domestic violence and an effective child and youth mental health system.”

The report also concludes that the overall funding of Aboriginal child welfare services in B.C. is complex and uneven, hampering the effective and equitable delivery of services. The province currently funds 23 delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs) at approximately \$90 million annually to deliver services to Aboriginal children in B.C. But there has been no comprehensive assessment of the impact of this delegation to DAAs. The report finds that funding to DAAs is inconsistent and offers little incentive for good work or clear reporting on outcomes. It also finds that DAAs are often ignored as they struggle to provide services.

Whether a B.C. child is a Status Indian or lives on- or off-reserve has a significant bearing on services received, and whether these services are prevention- or protection-based. Clouding the issue further is a confusing system of federal government funding and the fact MCFD has not effectively engaged the federal government to address child welfare needs of B.C.’s Aboriginal people on-reserve.

The B.C. government still lacks a basic cross-ministry plan to close the significant outcomes gaps for Aboriginal children and youth in the province, Turpel-Lafond said. She recommends that MCFD focus on that specific task while the Attorney General should lead development of an explicit policy for any future negotiation of jurisdictional transfer of authority over Aboriginal child welfare.

The report also recommends that MCFD review its senior leadership structure to ensure that the level of Aboriginal representation on the ministry leadership team and in its decision-making process reflects the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system. As well, it recommends that MCFD begin reporting publicly on a semi-annual basis on the safety, health and well-being of all Aboriginal children receiving its services, either directly or through a DAA.

“Aboriginal children and youth in B.C. deserve better,” Turpel-Lafond said. “MCFD must make a real effort to improve the outcomes for those children by actually knowing what they require and what works to support them. Government needs to stop directing money into the big theoretical fixes, and instead shore up the front lines of the system.”

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