



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Métis child and youth injuries and deaths focus of new collaborative report

VICTORIA – Utilizing a new collaborative approach to research, Representative for Children and Youth Jennifer Charlesworth today released a report examining critical injuries and deaths of Métis children and youth. *Invisible Children: A Descriptive Analysis of Injury and Death Reports for Métis Children and Youth in British Columbia, 2015 to 2017* recognizes that Métis children and youth and their data have historically been categorized as “Indigenous” and actively aims to redress that practice with targeted research into Métis-specific data.

“Our goal was both to rectify a situation that had gone unaddressed for too long – the issue of including Métis peoples into a broader pan-Indigenous category for research – and also to produce research that would serve Métis communities,” said Representative for Children and Youth Jennifer Charlesworth. “We are keenly aware that historically, much of the research done since colonization involving First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples has not benefitted those communities. With this report, we are deliberately and intentionally working to change that.”

The shift in approach to a more collaborative practice follows the principle of “*nothing about us, without us.*” Among others, RCY consulted extensively with Métis Nation BC (MNBC), the Métis Commission for Children and Families of BC and Métis-specific Delegated Aboriginal Agencies both to share the data and hear their ideas for analysis that would make it useful to them.

“We were very pleased to work with the Representative and her staff on this report,” said MNBC Director of Children and Families Judy Smith. “For far too long, no one has looked specifically at what’s happening with our children and youth, nor have they consulted with us on how data could best be used to improve outcomes for our children. We appreciate being included as partners in this research, as opposed to as “subjects” because it shows respect and means we actually get something that is useful to us and that can help us reverse negative outcomes for Métis children and families. It’s a promising start and we look forward to collaborating further with RCY in future.”

Among the findings:

- 183 injuries were reported to the RCY for 117 Métis children and youth, representing nine per cent of all in-mandate injuries reported during the period. Of those, 95 children were in government care at the time of their injury.

- The issue of misidentification was evident within the data and included gaps in social worker knowledge and ability to identify Métis children, as well as misconceptions regarding Métis identity.
- The most common type of injury was sexualized violence, with 44 of the 183 injuries falling into this category.
- Suicide attempts were the second-most commonly reported injury type, representing 33 of the youth files examined. Four were completed suicides.
- Caregiver mistreatment was the third most commonly reported critical injury type, with 21 injuries falling into this category. These injuries were most prevalent for children under 13 and those placed in foster homes or staffed resources.
- Métis children and youth in care who experienced critical injuries were rarely placed with Métis families – only two youth in the cases reviewed were living in Métis placements.
- Overwhelmingly, the records reviewed showed insufficient opportunities for Métis youth to learn about who they are and where they come from.

“When examined through a Métis-specific lens, these data reveal some troubling facts and highlight areas for improvement,” said Charlesworth. “For example, it is clear that Métis children and youth haven’t been well-served in terms of cultural planning and connecting them with their cultural communities. We know that culture is a protective factor for young people, and so this is an issue I am very concerned about, as are the Métis groups we consulted with.”

The data also raise questions such as: would better recruitment and retention of Métis foster families lead to improved health and well-being of Métis children and youth? How can B.C.’s child-serving systems best facilitate Métis-specific cultural planning for all Métis children receiving government services?

While some progress has been made since the data were collected for this report, the information contained here creates a useful baseline of information, as well as highlighting areas for improvement. This is particularly important as Métis communities, along with First Nations communities, prepare to resume jurisdiction over their own child welfare matters.

A second report for the same time period will be released in the coming months examining similar data relating to First Nations and non-Indigenous children and youth.

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