



NEWS RELEASE

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Directors Forum

Safest place for kids is with family, close to home

Analysis of deaths and critical injuries of First Nations children and youth in BC illustrates the importance of permanent connections to family, community and culture

Coast Salish Territory- A report released today by the Representative for Children and Youth concludes that the safest place for First Nations kids is with their own families and connected to their own communities.

Mary Teegee, Directors Forum Chair states “The Directors Forum is saddened by the troubling statistics of deaths and critical injuries among First Nations children and youth. Reports such as this must drive the transformation of Indigenous child and family services.”

[*illuminating Service Experience: A descriptive analysis of injury and death reports for First Nations children and youth in B.C., 2015-2017*](#) examined 87 deaths and 1,067 injuries among First Nations kids involved with BC’s child welfare system between 2015-2017. Report authors also reviewed a sample of 200 care plans to learn more about the circumstances of injured children and youth.

The report concludes that more than half of injured children and youth were placed in foster care permanently (as part of continuing custody orders (CCO’s). Children and youth who had their care plans examined had experienced an average of 7 different foster placements at the time of injury. The report also found that:

- Sexualized violence is the most commonly reported injury for First Nations children and youth, with female identified youth experiencing the highest rates.
- Caregiver mistreatment injuries were more often reported for male children. There were more caregiver mistreatment injuries reported for children and youth living in rural areas than anticipated.
- 59% of injured children and youth who had their care plans examined had experienced complex trauma. Anxiety and depression are the most commonly reported mental health concerns.

When children and youth are moved away from their home communities, their access to cultural connections and community involvement suffers. Fewer than 10% of First Nations kids from out of province had their home community involved in their care plan, while 1/3 of kids from B.C. had community involvement in their care plans.

Delegated Indigenous agencies have seen, while supporting thousands of First Nations children and youth, that belonging to a community and being culturally connected contribute enormously to the well-

being of First Nations children and youth. Keeping children and youth close to home where they can maintain family, community, and cultural connections must be a priority. The new federal legislation An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth and Families requires child welfare systems to actively involve a First Nations' child's or youth's family and community in the planning for the child or youth.

This report provides key information about the well-being of First Nations children and youth. It is necessary to examine the circumstances around tragic outcomes, but it is equally important to understand how to support well-being among First Nations children and youth—how to change the trajectory from harm and death to healing and wellness.

“It is time to broaden our inquiry to become curious about the ways in which Indigenous child and family services are making a positive difference for First Nations children. Learning from the experience of those providing Indigenous child and family services is a key step in the pathway to improved outcomes for Indigenous children and youth” stated Mary Teegee.

About the Directors Forum

The Directors Forum, a coalition of executives responsible for managing the 24 delegated Aboriginal Agencies in BC, agencies representing 60% of First Nations in the province. As a collective and expert voice on child welfare matters, the Directors Forum bring decades of frontline experience working with Indigenous children and families.

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