



CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND ACTION PLAN 2023-2028

SERVICES AUX ENFANTS, AUX ADOLESCENTS ET AUX FAMILLES

ORIENTATION STRATÉGIQUE ET PLAN D'ACTION 2023-2028

Le présent document contient un sommaire en français.

Government of Northwest Territories
Gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest



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Message from the Minister



Honourable Julie Green
*Minister of Health and
Social Services*

The overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the Child and Family Services (CFS) system across the Northwest Territories compels us to take a different approach to service delivery. The CFS system provides services that promote the safety of children and youth.

We, as a society, have collective responsibility to ensure every child and youth has opportunities to live and grow in safe, secure, and enriching environments. Children and youth have a right to be connected to their families, communities and cultures, and to develop a sense of belonging. This environment is what all families want for their children, and it must be the central focus in implementing the Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction and Action Plan (2023-2028).

While progress has been made, there remains much work to be done in transforming CFS into a culturally safe system that supports children and youth in a meaningful way, and ensures that more families stay together. Addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the CFS system requires the examination of past and current practices, as well as shifting the way services are designed and delivered. The CFS system will lead the priorities outlined in the Strategic Direction and Action Plan and is accountable for them. But this work must also include support and commitment within and outside the Government of the Northwest Territories to create sustainable change. Access to safe housing, mental wellness supports, recreational opportunities, and pre-and post-natal care are the building blocks supporting families and communities. As highlighted by the Standing Committee on Social Development, we need to work together to provide a broader continuum of care that meets the needs of children, youth, and families in the Northwest Territories.

I would like to thank the Child and Family Services staff, caregivers, care providers, community partners, Indigenous governments and community leaders for their passion and steadfast dedication to the wellbeing of children, youth, and families.

Message de la ministre

La surreprésentation d'enfants et d'adolescents autochtones dans le système des Services à l'enfance et à la famille (SEF) des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (TNO) nous indique qu'il faut adopter une approche différente de la prestation de services. Le système des SEF fournit des services qui favorisent la sécurité des enfants et des adolescents.

En tant que société, nous avons la responsabilité collective de veiller à ce que chaque enfant et chaque adolescent ait l'occasion de vivre et de grandir dans un environnement sûr et enrichissant. Les enfants et les adolescents ont le droit d'être proches de leur famille, de leur collectivité et de leur culture, et de développer un sentiment d'appartenance. C'est un tel environnement que toutes les familles souhaitent pour leurs enfants et qui doit être au cœur de la mise en œuvre de l'orientation stratégique et du plan d'action des services aux enfants, aux adolescents et aux familles (2023-2028).

Bien que des progrès aient été réalisés, il reste encore beaucoup à faire pour transformer les SEF en un système culturellement sûr qui accompagne les enfants et les adolescents et qui permet à un plus grand nombre de familles de rester unies. Pour remédier à la surreprésentation des enfants et des adolescents autochtones dans le système des SEF, il faut examiner les pratiques passées et actuelles et modifier la manière dont les services sont conçus et fournis. Le système des SEF dirigera les priorités décrites dans l'orientation stratégique et le plan d'action et en sera responsable. Toutefois, ce travail doit également inclure un soutien et un engagement à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur du gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest afin de créer un changement pérenne. L'accès à un logement sûr, à des services de soutien en santé mentale, à des possibilités de loisirs et à des soins prénataux et postnataux est fondamental au bien-être des familles et des collectivités. Comme l'a souligné le Comité permanent des affaires sociales, nous devons travailler ensemble pour offrir un continuum de soins plus large qui réponde aux besoins des enfants, des adolescents et des familles des Territoires du Nord-Ouest.

Je tiens à remercier le personnel des Services à l'enfance et à la famille, les parents, tuteurs et aidants, les fournisseurs de soins, les partenaires communautaires, les gouvernements autochtones et les dirigeants communautaires pour leur passion et leur dévouement inébranlable en faveur du bien-être des enfants, des adolescents et des familles.



L'honorable Julie Green
*Ministre de la Santé et des
Services sociaux*

Executive Summary

The overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the Child and Family Services (CFS) system in the Northwest Territories (NWT) and across Canada serves as evidence that the CFS system needs to shift the delivery of services. It is important to acknowledge the ongoing impacts of colonial systems and systemic racism that maintain inequities for Indigenous families.

To address the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth involved with CFS and to create a system that promotes cultural safety and anti-racism, we must examine past and current practices, engage with Indigenous governments and other partners, and be open to shifting the way services are designed and delivered. It is through this lens that the Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction and Action Plan was developed. The development of the Strategic Direction and Action Plan was also informed by a variety of guiding documents, focused discussions, internal reviews, and key recommendations of the Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Social Development.

The Strategic Direction identifies seven priority areas in its vision for CFS that will guide the implementation of a five-year Action Plan. The seven priority areas are:

- Work Collaboratively with Indigenous Governments and Organizations
- Care Rooted in Indigenous Practices
- Support to Care Providers and Caregivers
- Strengthen Youth Supports and Transition to Adulthood
- Specialized Services Closer to Home
- Strengthen Human Resources Recruitment and Retention Efforts for an Inclusive and Representative Workforce
- Reduce Administrative Demands for Increased Opportunities to Connect with Families

The Strategic Direction provides the foundation for outreach and engagement with Indigenous governments and other partners, to ensure that the CFS system meets the needs of children, youth, and families in the NWT.

The Action Plan outlines how we plan on making progress towards the goals of the Strategic Direction through the identification of key activities and deliverables. The Action Plan also describes how CFS is going to measure and report short-, medium- and long-term outcomes.

We must find ways to advance change now, but we must also work towards large scale initiatives that will enable a fundamental shift in our approach to best meet the needs of children, youth, families, and communities. This requires continued engagement with Indigenous governments, communities, and other partners. To remain accountable and transparent, we will report on our progress through a public action plan tracker and service delivery trends through the CFS Director's Annual Report.

Sommaire

La surreprésentation d'enfants et d'adolescents autochtones dans le système des Services à l'enfance et à la famille des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (TNO) et dans l'ensemble du Canada témoigne du besoin d'apporter des changements au système en matière de prestation des services. Il est important de reconnaître les répercussions continues qui découlent de systèmes coloniaux et du racisme systémique ayant pour effet de perpétuer les inégalités pour les familles autochtones.

Afin de remédier à la surreprésentation d'enfants et d'adolescents autochtones dans le système des Services à l'enfance et à la famille, et pour créer un système qui favorise la sécurité culturelle et la lutte contre le racisme, nous devons examiner les pratiques passées et actuelles, mobiliser les gouvernements autochtones et d'autres partenaires et être disposés à modifier la façon dont les services sont conçus et fournis. C'est dans cette optique que l'on a élaboré l'orientation stratégique et le plan d'action des services aux enfants, aux adolescents et aux familles. L'élaboration de cette orientation stratégique et du plan d'action a aussi été éclairée par divers documents d'orientation, des discussions ciblées, des examens internes et des recommandations clés du Comité permanent des affaires sociales de l'Assemblée législative.

L'orientation stratégique définit sept domaines prioritaires dans ses ambitions pour les Services à l'enfance et à la famille, qui orienteront la mise en œuvre d'un plan d'action quinquennal. Les sept domaines prioritaires sont les suivants :

- Collaborer avec les gouvernements et les organisations autochtones;
- Fournir des soins ancrés dans les pratiques autochtones;
- Soutenir les fournisseurs de soins et les proches aidants;
- Renforcer le soutien aux adolescents et la transition vers l'âge adulte;

- Fournir des services spécialisés plus près de chez les clients;
- Renforcer les efforts de recrutement et de maintien en poste des ressources humaines pour un effectif inclusif et représentatif;
- Réduire les contraintes administratives pour accroître les possibilités de communiquer avec les familles.

L'orientation stratégique jette les bases de la sensibilisation et de la mobilisation des gouvernements autochtones et d'autres partenaires afin de veiller à ce que le système des Services à l'enfance et à la famille réponde aux besoins des enfants, des adolescents et des familles des TNO.

Le plan d'action, qui détermine les activités et les produits livrables clés, décrit la façon dont nous comptons réaliser des progrès vers l'atteinte des objectifs de l'orientation stratégique. Le plan d'action décrit également la façon dont les Services à l'enfance et à la famille mesureront les résultats à court, moyen et long terme, et produiront les rapports connexes.

Nous devons trouver des solutions pour faire avancer ce changement dès maintenant, et nous devons aussi travailler à la mise en œuvre d'initiatives à grande échelle qui permettront de modifier notre approche de façon fondamentale pour mieux répondre aux besoins des enfants, des adolescents, des familles et des collectivités. Pour ce faire, il faut continuer à mobiliser les gouvernements, les collectivités et les autres partenaires autochtones. À des fins de responsabilisation et de transparence, nous rendrons compte de nos progrès en assurant un suivi public du plan d'action et grâce à l'évaluation des tendances en matière de prestation de services dans le rapport annuel du directeur des Services à l'enfance et à la famille.

Introduction

The overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the Child and Family Services (CFS) system in the Northwest Territories (NWT) and across Canada serves as evidence that the CFS system needs to shift the delivery of services. It is important to acknowledge the ongoing impacts of colonial systems and systemic racism that maintain inequities for Indigenous families. As such, creating and sustaining meaningful change within the CFS system means that careful efforts must be made to repair relationships and build trust with Indigenous people and communities.

With this lens, the NWT Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction was developed with the aim to build a CFS system that ensures more families stay together, and provides support to children and youth in a way that promotes their overall safety and wellbeing so they can thrive. This document sets out the Strategic Direction for the CFS system, and provides an Action Plan to guide the work of the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority (NTHSSA), Hay River Health and Social Services Authority (HRHSSA) and Tłı̨chq Community Services Agency (TCSA) over the next five years.

The Strategic Direction and Action Plan envision a broader and deeper change to fundamentally shift the CFS system towards the goal of a culturally safe health and social services system. This requires continued engagement with Indigenous governments, communities, and other partners. To remain accountable and transparent, we will report on our progress through a public action plan tracker and service delivery trends through the CFS Director's Annual Report.



Acknowledgement: The images used throughout this document were created by the Community, Culture and Innovation Division in the Department of Health and Social Services. The images represent the themes of safety, permanence, support, and wellbeing.

As we move forward, we will continue to build on the progress made through the Quality Improvement Plans (2019-2021 and 2022-2023). Through four strategic pillars (as shown in Figure 1), these plans have laid the foundation for system transformation through the advancement and integration of numerous initiatives within the CFS system, including but not limited to:

- Introduction of 56 new positions, including the Family Preservation Program
- Introduction of a new electronic case management information system in 2017
- Ongoing training and professional development
- Data monitoring and reporting
- Introduction of clinical supervision
- Mechanisms for staff engagement and feedback
- Enhancements to standards and procedures
- Cycle of audits and quality reviews
- Regular cycle of legislative amendments for the *Child and Family Services Act*¹



¹ Linkage to Recommendation 16 from the [Standing Committee on Social Development \(SCOSD\) Review on the CFS Act](#).

Figure 1. Four Strategic Pillars that Guided the Quality Improvement Plans (2019-2021 and 2022-2023)

Building on Partnerships and Connecting to Other Initiatives²

Addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the CFS system requires a whole-of-government approach, including engagement and pathways for community and Indigenous government participation. The Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction and Action Plan fits alongside many other GNWT initiatives that also aim to support children, youth, families, communities, and those who serve them including, but not limited to:

- Caring for Our People: Cultural Safety Action Plan
- Changing the Relationship Action Plan: In Response to the Calls for Justice on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People
- A Way Home: A Comprehensive Strategy to Address Homelessness in the Northwest Territories
- Strong Cultures, Strong Territory: GNWT Culture and Heritage Strategic Framework
- Sustainable Livelihoods Action Plan
- An Alcohol Strategy for the NWT
- Addictions Prevention and Recovery Services Work Plan
- GNWT Human Resources Strategic Plan
- Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Action Plan
- Northwest Territories Health and Social Services System Human Resources Plan

Working with partners with shared interests will strengthen the design, delivery, and access of CFS services. We will continue to seek out new opportunities for integration with NWT and GNWT initiatives; actively participate on existing Interdepartmental Working Groups; and have continued participation with the Indigenous Advisory Body³.

Communication will be key in advancing this Strategic Direction and Action Plan. We have heard from the Indigenous Advisory Body, Indigenous governments, and the Standing Committee on Social Development that we need to communicate better – lose the jargon and use plain language. We must communicate with communities, families and staff in a way that is accessible, meets their needs, and clearly communicates the right to legal counsel throughout protection service processes⁴. Finding opportunities for knowledge exchange will also ensure that CFS is learning and growing based on what we hear from communities, families, and staff.

² Linkage to Recommendations 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13 and 17 from the [SCOSD Review on CFS Act](#).

³ The Indigenous Advisory Body was established to provide guidance and advice on incorporating Indigenous tradition, culture, and healing practices within the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services system. Membership is comprised of Indigenous Government appointees, and staff from the DHSS, NTHSSA, TCSA and HRHSSA.

⁴ Linkage to Recommendations 14 and 15 from the [SCOSD Review on CFS Act](#).

Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction and Action Plan Development

The Strategic Direction and Action Plan was developed and informed by a variety of guiding documents, focused discussions, and key recommendations:

Guiding Documents and Recommendations	Focused Discussions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The federal government’s <i>Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families</i> • <i>Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls</i>, and Calls for Justice • <i>The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada</i> and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action • Recommendations from the Standing Committee on Social Development’s reports on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Child and Family Services Act</i> • Suicide Prevention • Homelessness Prevention • Recommendations from the <i>2018 Report of the Auditor General of Canada on Child and Family Services in the Northwest Territories</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child and Family Services Coordinating Committee, which includes leadership from the DHSS, NTHSSA, TCSA and HRHSSA • Indigenous Advisory Body • Foster Family Coalition of the NWT • Youth Interdepartmental Working Group • Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism and Community, Culture, and Innovation Divisions within the Department of Health and Social Services • Focused Staff Discussions

Embedding Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism Principles

Indigenous people have always cared for their children using their own systems of care. Canada's history of racism and colonialism - enacted through cultural genocide, the residential school system, the Sixties Scoop, and the modern-day child and family services systems - intentionally interrupted and denied communities from accessing Indigenous systems of care⁵. Systemic racism, which is racism that manifests within organizations through policies and practices, maintains inequities for Indigenous families. One key indicator of systemic racism is the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the Child and Family Services (CFS) system in the NWT and across Canada. In 2022-2023, 97% of children and youth receiving CFS in the NWT identified as Indigenous, despite only representing 57% of children and youth in the NWT. Community members have voiced their concern about the historical and current delivery of CFS, and overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the CFS system, particularly within protection services.

The NWT health and social services system is committed to addressing and eliminating systemic racism by promoting cultural safety and anti-racism. To ensure a unified approach, CFS will work closely with the Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism Division leading this work to embed cultural safety and anti-racism principles in the implementation of the Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction and Action Plan.

The Child and Family Services system is committed to embedding cultural safety and anti-racism principles in the implementation of the Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction and Action Plan.

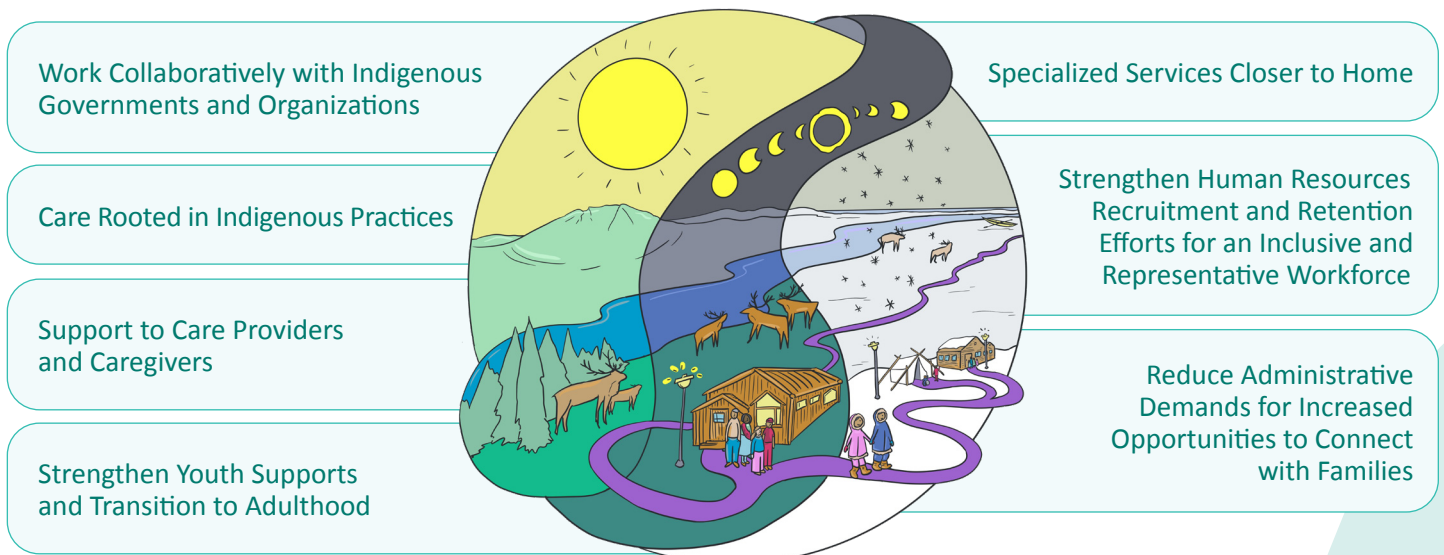
⁵ Blackstock, C., Cross, T., George, J., Brown, I., & Formsma, J. (2006). *Reconciliation in Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth, and Families*. Ottawa, Canada: First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada/Portland, USA: National Indian Child Welfare Association, p.6

A New Path Forward - Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction

The NWT Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction aims to build a CFS system that ensures more families stay together, and provides support to children and youth in a way that promotes their overall safety and wellbeing so they can thrive.

The Strategic Direction sets the long-term vision of the CFS system with a focus on [seven priority areas](#) (shown in **Figure 2**) to guide the development and implementation of specific actions to work towards the long-term vision.

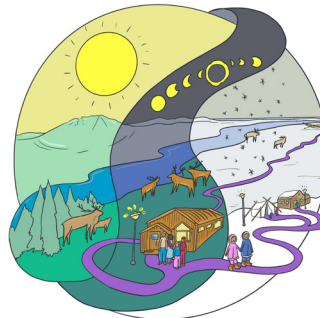
**Figure 2. Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction
Seven Priority Areas**



Child, Youth and Family Services Action Plan (2023-2028)

The Child, Youth and Family Services Action Plan is shaped by the Strategic Direction presented on **page 13**. The seven priority areas frame the activities that will be focused on over the next **five years**. Activities described in this Action Plan include both those that can be achieved with existing resources, and those that are contingent upon approvals or funding outside of the Child and Family Services (CFS) system. We must find ways to advance change now, but we must also work towards large scale initiatives that will enable a fundamental shift in our approach to best meet the needs of children, youth, families, and communities.

The landscape of CFS across Canada is quickly evolving as more Indigenous governments are pursuing responsibility for CFS service delivery to their members. We must remain open and flexible to new approaches and innovative ideas. Actions may be re-prioritized or added as we work collaboratively to implement this plan.



Priority Area #1: Work Collaboratively with Indigenous Governments and Organizations

Children, youth, and families receiving Child and Family Services (CFS) are often better supported when there is engagement and pathways for community and Indigenous government participation. To improve services and supports, collaboration with Indigenous governments and organizations must be at all levels of the CFS system, including leadership and frontline staff at the DHSS, TCSA, NTHSSA and HRHSSA. We are also working collaboratively with Indigenous governments who are developing and enacting child and family services laws under the *Federal Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* (Federal Act) or through a final self-government agreement.

Since January 2020, the GNWT has been working to advance the mandate of the *Federal Act* by implementing the national principles and standards in the delivery of CFS in the NWT. The implementation of the *Federal Act* advances reconciliation and supports program and service delivery by Indigenous governments.

Activities	Deliverable	Lead	Timeline
Work collaboratively with Indigenous governments in guiding or providing CFS delivery to their communities.	Active participation alongside Indigenous governments in collaboration tables, coordination agreement tables, and/or ongoing discussions about CFS service delivery in communities. Pathways to invite Indigenous governments into existing service delivery processes will be identified.	DHSS	Ongoing
Continue to engage with Indigenous governments to share information and discuss overall CFS service delivery in communities.	Offer opportunities for continued engagement with Indigenous governments. Continue to share information and data on an ongoing basis with interested Indigenous governments.	DHSS	Ongoing
Provide information to applicable NWT Indigenous governments and organizations on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the purpose of providing notice of court documents; and how this information can be used to support children, youth, and families. 	Provide letters to applicable NWT Indigenous governments and organizations, with an invitation for further dialogue.	DHSS	March 2024

Priority Area #2: Care Rooted in Indigenous Practices

Home, family, community, and cultural connections are all important parts of a person’s identity and wellbeing. Indigenous systems of care enable safe, stable, and nurturing relationships between children/youth and their culture, community, family, and caregivers. Given that 97% of children and youth who receive child and family services identify as Indigenous, it is of particular importance that Indigenous practices and supports that nurture healing and empowerment are incorporated within our care services. For example, this may include expanding connections with grandparents or Elders to share encouragement, child-rearing practices, and Indigenous knowledge⁶.

Through this Action Plan, Child and Family Services will establish multiple pathways for children and youth to be better connected to their home, family, community, and culture. For example, we will re-design care models, and work with communities to understand and reflect important Indigenous practices that contribute to keeping children and youth safe.

Activities	Deliverable	Lead	Timeline
<p>Pending available resources, implement a family, community, and culture connection project for children/youth in the permanent custody of the Director of Child and Family Services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 1: Develop model(s) and related standards. Phase 2: Pilot Family, Community, and Culture Connection Worker Position. Phase 3: Determine pathways to sustain project. 	Development and implementation of the family, community, and culture connection project.	DHSS	<p>Phase 1: September 2024</p> <p>Phase 2: December 2024-2027</p> <p>Phase 3: December 2027</p>
<p>Pending available resources, examine and re-design care model(s) for families receiving prevention and protection services. Care includes “respite” and “foster care.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 1: Care Model(s) Scoping. Phase 2: Service Design and Standard Development. Phase 3: Implementation Plan Development. Phase 4: Complete business case, if required. 	<p>Development of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care model(s) and related standards. Implementation plan. Business Case, if required. 	DHSS and NTHSSA	<p>Phase 1: August 2024</p> <p>Phase 2: August 2025</p> <p>Phase 3 & 4: March 2026</p>
Review and examine opportunities to better support families through custom adoption.	Options paper is developed that outlines how more supports could be made available to families and extended families who are caring for children and youth.	DHSS	September 2024
<p>Work with Indigenous communities to communicate important Indigenous practices that contribute to keeping children and youth safe, with a focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing awareness and education about the impact of custom adoption practices on child and family wellbeing; and Increasing the number of Indigenous caregivers⁷. 	Creation of public-facing mediums that showcase Indigenous systems of care.	DHSS	March 2025

⁶ Linkage to Recommendation 7 from the [SCOSD Review on CFS Act](#).

⁷ Linkage to Recommendation 11 from the [SCOSD Review on CFS Act](#).

Priority Area #3: Support to Care Providers and Caregivers

Care providers⁸ and caregivers⁹ can profoundly influence the lives of children and youth who are required to enter out-of-home care temporarily or permanently. When children/youth stay in the care of their family and extended support network, they remain rooted in their community and culture. While the percentage of extended family caregivers is steadily increasing (33% in 2018-2019 to 44% in 2022-2023), we must continue to remove barriers for extended family members who express interest in caring for children/youth when they need to be supported outside their family home.

We will also implement training to increase understanding of the individual cultural needs of the child/youth, as well as resources that support the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of children and youth. The CFS system has a critical role in supporting care providers and caregivers to offer care with compassion, and consistency. Improving the funding structure and supports will be imperative for the recruitment and retention of caregivers to improve stability of out-of-home care for children and youth.

Activities	Deliverable	Lead	Timeline
Review the funding structure for care providers and caregivers to remove barriers to care and better meet the needs of children and youth ¹⁰ . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 1: Adjust the foster care daily rate. Phase 2: Comprehensive review of the foster care funding structure. 	Areas of improvement are identified and integrated into the business planning process.	DHSS, TCSA, HRHSSA and NTHSSA	Phase 1: March 2024 Phase 2: July 2025
Adapt and implement the HEART and SPIRIT ¹¹ Training to meet the needs of foster caregivers and First Nation, Métis, and Inuit children/youth in the NWT ¹² .	Culturally safe and trauma-informed training is provided to foster caregivers.	DHSS and NTHSSA	March 2024

⁸ As per the *Federal Act*, a care provider means a person who has primary responsibility for providing the day-to-day care of an Indigenous child/youth, other than the child/youth's parent, including in accordance with the customs or traditions of the Indigenous group, community, or people to which the child/youth belongs.

⁹ A caregiver is an individual providing a service on behalf of the Director of Child and Family Services, such as a placement resource for the child or youth when they must be placed outside of the home.

¹⁰ Linkage to Recommendation 11 from the [SCOSD Review on CFS Act](#).

¹¹ HEART: Helping Establish Able Resource-Homes Together. SPIRIT: the Strong Parent Indigenous Relationships Information

¹² Linkage to Recommendation 10 from the [SCOSD Review on CFS Act](#).

Priority Area #4: Strengthen Youth Supports and Transition to Adulthood¹³

Youth must receive adequate support and guidance, as they play a crucial role in a healthy development. This development can be disrupted by various factors, particularly when youth are involved with Child and Family Services (CFS). Former youth in care “are at a much higher risk of facing multiple challenges than their peers who were not in care, including homelessness; under-education; unemployment or under-employment; poverty; mental health issues; post-traumatic stress; and substance misuse”¹⁴ (p.2). Systemic inequities further these challenges for First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth, Black and racialized youth, youth with disabilities and 2SLGBTQIA+ youth¹⁴.

The CFS system must continuously examine ways to increase the readiness of youth when they transition to adulthood, such as supports for housing sustainability, mental wellness, and healthy ways of coping with life stressors. This work includes CFS actively participating in the GNWT’s Integrated Service Model and implementation of [A Way Home: A Comprehensive Strategy to Address Homelessness in the NWT](#). Additionally, **Priority Area #6** outlines an activity to pilot specialized positions including a Youth Transition and Navigation Worker, pending available funding.

Activities	Deliverable	Lead	Timeline
Participate in the Child Welfare League of Canada’s pilot project on the Equitable Standards for Transitions to Adulthood for Youth in Care ¹⁵ .	<p>A completed baseline assessment of services for youth in care using the CWLC evaluation tool.</p> <p>Establish a Youth In/From Care Steering Committee.</p> <p>Action plan is developed to support youth in care as they transition to adulthood.</p>	DHSS, NTHSSA, TCSA and HRHSSA	December 2024

¹³ Linkage to Recommendations 4, 6, and 17 from the [SCOSD Review on CFS Act](#) and Recommendation 2 from the [SCOSD Review on Homelessness Prevention](#)

¹⁴ Child Welfare League of Canada. (2021). *Equitable Standards for Transitions to Adulthood for Youth in Care*. Retrieved from: www.cwlc.ca/_files/ugd/f54667_45d7b4d41270453e8d720296d22edc6c.pdf

¹⁵ Project includes eight transition-to-adulthood pillars: Educational and Professional Development; Financial; Housing; Relationships; Culture and Spirituality; Health & Wellbeing; Advocacy & Rights; Emerging Adulthood Development

Priority Area #5: Specialized Services Closer to Home

Community-based programming is the first option to assist children and youth with their individual placement and mental wellness needs. When these needs cannot be met in the NWT, out-of-territory service providers are available to provide continuity of care for a range of specialized needs. These options are explored with the child/youth, family, and/or caregivers. Despite the specialized supports and services provided through out-of-territory service providers, it can be challenging for children and youth to be far away from their family, friends and community supports.

We recognize that children and youth are better supported when they can receive specialized services in the NWT, and can remain close to the families, friends, community, and culture. We are exploring a range of options that better meet the needs of children and youth and can be sustainably delivered. We will also pilot a land-based healing youth program to meet the immediate need resulting from the closures of the NWT residential treatment centres for children and youth.

Activities	Deliverable	Lead	Timeline
Develop a framework to guide the continuum of specialized services necessary to support the diverse needs of children, youth, families ¹⁶ .	A pathway is established to provide services to children, youth and families for short-term supports and longer term, specialized services to address complex needs.	NTHSSA	December 2024
Implement a pilot project for a land-based healing youth program ¹⁷ to provide immediate services ¹⁸ .	An in-territory land-based healing program rooted in Indigenous practices are available to youth.	NTHSSA	October 2023

¹⁶ Linkage to Recommendations 3 from the [SCOSD Review on CFS Act](#) and Recommendation 3 from the [SCOSD Review on Suicide Prevention](#)

¹⁷ Programming will include both traditional, Indigenous teachings with a focus on healing as well as incorporation of psycho-educational processes and 1:1 counselling, as required. After care services will be provided to support ongoing healing and recovery of participants.

¹⁸ Linkage to Recommendation 8 from the [SCOSD Review on CFS Act](#) and Recommendation 3 from the [SCOSD Review on Suicide Prevention](#).

Priority Area #6: Strengthen Human Resources Recruitment and Retention Efforts for an Inclusive and Representative Workforce

The recruitment and retention of social workers continues to be a significant challenge in the NWT and across Canada. In the NWT, the vacancy rate for Child and Family Services (CFS) staff has steadily increased over the past three years, from 6.3% in May 2020 to 22.2% in July 2023. Creating a workforce representative of the NWT population is another challenge in health and social services. While 97% of individuals served through CFS identify as Indigenous, only 29.7% of the CFS workforce identify as Indigenous.

A representative workforce has direct impacts on the support provided to children, youth, and families. Immediate, and creative solutions are required in the recruitment and retention of CFS staff across the NWT. This includes examining and addressing systemic racism in the CFS system generally, including impacts and barriers specific to the recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff. Addressing systemic racism experienced by Indigenous employees in the CFS system will strengthen capacity building, reduce staff turnover, and improve service delivery.

Activities	Deliverable	Lead	Timeline
Hiring managers in CFS to review and revise job descriptions and hiring tools (e.g., assignments, interview questions) to address systemic hiring barriers experienced by Indigenous candidates interested in working in CFS.	All CFS job descriptions and interview questions are reviewed.	DHSS, NTHSSA, TCSA and HRHSSA	March 2025

Priority Area #6 (Continued): Strengthen Human Resources Recruitment and Retention Efforts for an Inclusive and Representative Workforce

Activities	Deliverable	Lead	Timeline
Establish a Community of Practice for Indigenous employees, to provide a supportive peer network, raise issues, and share innovations to address anti-Indigenous racism.	Community of practice is established.	DHSS, NTHSSA, TCSA and HRHSSA	September 2024
Introduce surveys to better understand the attraction, recruitment, and retention experiences of Indigenous employees.	Analysis of survey results.	DHSS, NTHSSA, TCSA and HRHSSA	May 2025
Promote the use of transfer assignments and cross training to encourage mobility and development for Indigenous employees.	Number of Indigenous employees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On transfer assignments or secondments. Within middle and senior management roles. 	DHSS, NTHSSA, TCSA and HRHSSA	Ongoing
Ensure all CFS Staff complete: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equitable Workplace: Cultivating Attitudes of Anti-Racism and Allyship Training; and Living Well Together: Indigenous Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity Training. 	Percentage of CFS staff who have completed the required training.	DHSS, NTHSSA, TCSA and HRHSSA	Ongoing
Offer the CFS-Specific HSS Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism Training.	Annual delivery of training to CFS Staff.	DHSS	Annually
Provide training on anti-oppressive practices to be used when mentoring of frontline managers, supervisors, and staff.	Development of training to guide mentorship with frontline managers, supervisors, and staff. Ongoing mentorship with frontline managers, supervisors, and staff.	NTHSSA, HRHSSA and TCSA	January 2025

Priority Area #7: Reduce Administrative Demands for Increased Opportunities to Connect with Families

Clear and thorough documentation is important to ensure the accountability of service delivery and to maintain the integrity of historical records for individuals who have received services through the Child and Family Services (CFS) system. These requirements create high levels of administrative demand for frontline workers who must balance competing pressures. Community Social Services Workers too often face difficult decisions in balancing paperwork and time spent connecting with children, youth, and families. We must find efficiencies throughout the system to allow staff the time required to provide necessary supports and attention to best meet the needs of families.

The CFS system will continually explore ways of removing administrative pressures from frontline workers, while also ensuring that legal obligations are met. Enhancing the experience of CFS staff can also contribute positively to retention and recruitment.

Activities	Deliverable	Lead	Timeline
<p>Pending available resources, pilot specialized positions to better support children, youth and families and optimize the scope of current positions. Types of positions being considered are, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Transition and Navigation Worker¹⁹. Family, Community and Culture Connection Worker. Legal Assistant. Mobile/Float Positions. 	<p>A diversified mix of skills in the CFS workforce is available to better support children, youth, and families.</p>	<p>DHSS, NTHSSA, TCSA and HRHSSA</p>	<p>2023-2028</p>

¹⁹ Linkage to Recommendation 2 from the [SCOSD Review on Homelessness Prevention](#)

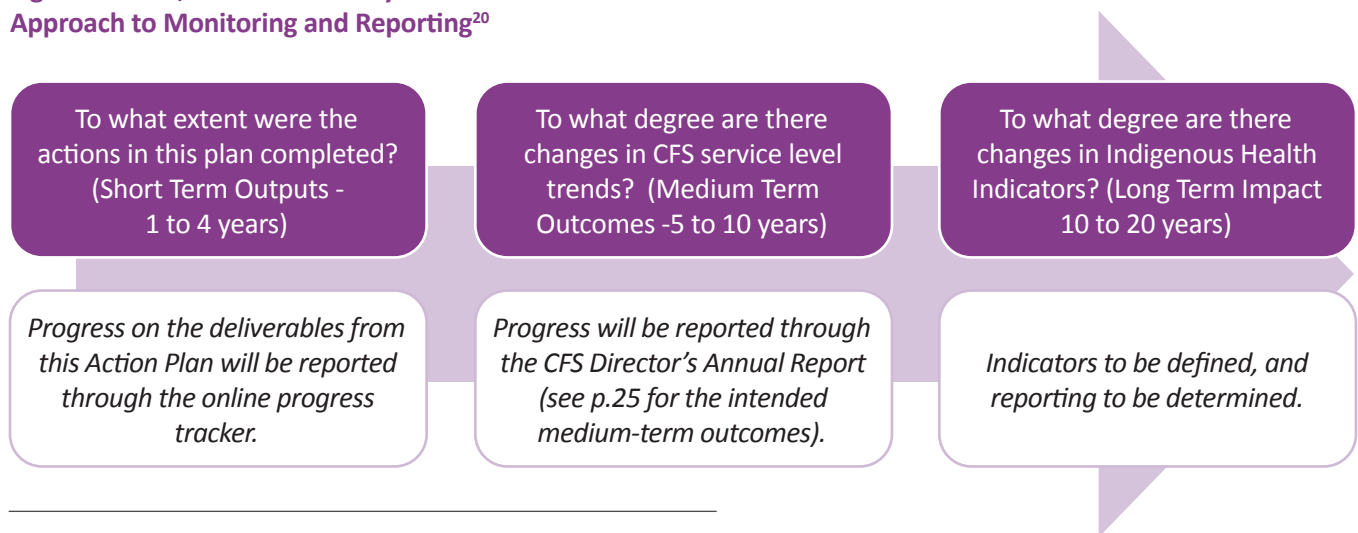
Priority Area #7 (Continued): Reduce Administrative Demands for Increased Opportunities to Connect with Families

Activities	Deliverable	Lead	Timeline
Modernize the approach to standards development and accessibility of the Adoptions Standards and Procedure Manual.	Standards and procedure manual is clear, concise, and accessible.	DHSS	December 2024
Phased approach to modernize standards development and accessibility of the Child and Family Services Standards and Procedure Manual.	Standards and procedure manual is clear, concise, and accessible.	DHSS	2024-2027
Further examine the Structured Decision Making® (SDM) Model for its capacity to effectively support Indigenous individuals and families.	Decision on if/how to proceed with the implementation of the remaining two SDM® tools that aid decision-making in risk assessments and family reunification assessments.	DHSS	March 2025
Single Electronic File System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building off the work completed in 2022-23, complete an analysis on the feasibility, considerations, and barriers of a Single Electronic File System. Depending on the outcome of the analysis, complete an implementation plan and business case. 	Business, human, financial, and technology requirements and considerations are outlined.	DHSS	March 2027
Centralized Intake Model for CFS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete an analysis on the feasibility, considerations, and constraints of a centralized intake model. Depending on the outcome of the analysis, complete an implementation plan and business case. 	Business, human, financial, and technology requirements and considerations are outlined.	NTHSSA	March 2028

Accountability and Measuring Impact

The activities collectively described in this Action Plan are intended to support more families to stay together, and to provide support to children and youth that promotes their overall safety and wellbeing so they can thrive. We must take the time to carefully develop and implement initiatives alongside communities to better meet the needs of children, youth, and families. These wider changes will take time to demonstrate their impact on children, youth, families, and communities. It will be important to have a monitoring plan that reflects different levels of information to measure to what extent we are making progress on implementing activities under the seven priority areas and achieving our intended outcomes. **Figure 3** describes how we will measure and report on short-, medium- and long-term outcomes.

Figure 3. Child, Youth and Family Services Action Plan - Approach to Monitoring and Reporting²⁰



²⁰ Linkage to Recommendation 12 from the [SCOSD Review on CFS Act](#).

The intended outcomes of the Child, Youth and Family Services Action Plan are:

- Increased percentage of children/youth receiving support in their family home
- Increased percentage of prevention services
- Increased percentage of extended family caregivers
- Increased representation of Indigenous staff
- Decreased vacancy and turnover rates for staff
- Decreased recurrence of maltreatment
- Decreased rate of Indigenous children requiring protection services
- Fewer children/youth in the permanent care and custody of the Director of CFS

Additional measures and refinements may be made as we work more closely with Indigenous governments and communities in the way the CFS system collects, analyzes, and reports on data.

It is important to acknowledge that data reflects the lived experiences of children, youth, and families in the NWT. Monitoring data can help to identify where the CFS system can be enhanced and where there has been a positive impact on the people served. The way information is analyzed and presented is a powerful tool in countering deficit narratives by refocusing on required structural changes²¹.

CFS is committed to being a good custodian of data about children, youth, and families by creating pathways to include them in decisions about CFS programs and services that directly impact their lives and communities.



²¹ British Columbia's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner. (2020). Disaggregated demographic data collection in British Columbia: The grandmother perspective. Retrieved from: https://bchumanrights.ca/wp-content/uploads/BCOHR Sep2020_Disaggregated-Data-Report_FINAL.pdf.

Key Definitions

- *Definition is from the Department of Health and Social Services' Caring for Our People: Cultural Safety Action Plan (2019).*
- *Definition is in accordance with the federal Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth, and families.*
- ◆ *Definition is based on the current Child and Family Services Act, and the CFS Standards and Procedures Manual. Definitions will continue to be examined and updated as we adapt to a changing system, particularly through the implementation of this Strategic Direction and Action Plan.*

Anti-racism

Anti-racism is the ongoing action to identify, address and prevent racism in all its form²².

Care Provider ●

A care provider means a person who has primary responsibility for providing the day-to-day care of an Indigenous child/youth, other than the child/youth's parent, including in accordance with the customs or traditions of the Indigenous group, community, or people to which the child/youth belongs.

Caregiver (placement resource) ◆

A caregiver is an individual providing a service on behalf of the Director of Child and Family Services, such as a placement resource for the child or youth when they must be placed outside of the home. A caregiver can be:

- Extended Family Caregiver: the child/youth's extended family
- Provisional Caregiver: a community member who is known to the child/youth/family
- Regular caregiver: someone who is not known to the child/youth/family

Child ◆

A child means a person who is under 16 years of age (i.e., 0-15 years, inclusive).

Community Social Services Worker ◆

Community Social Services Workers support children, youth, and families in the NWT. Community Social Services Workers receive specialized training to become statutorily appointed as "Child Protection Workers" under the *Child and Family Services Act*. Foster Care and Adoption Workers are also Community Social Services Workers who receive specialized training and are appointed under the *Adoption Act*. Once appointed, they have very specific duties and responsibilities when providing child and family services.

Director of Child and Family Services ◆

Director of Child and Family Services is appointed by the Minister of Health and Social Services under the NWT's *Child and Family Services Act*. Duties and powers of the Director of Child and Family Services are set out under the Act.

²² Berman, G. & Paradies, Y. (2008). Racism, disadvantage and multiculturalism: towards effective anti-racist praxis. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33 (2), p.214-232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870802302272>.

Cultural Safety ■

Cultural safety is defined as an outcome where Indigenous peoples feel safe and respected, free of racism and discrimination when accessing health and social services.

Equity ■

Equity in health means that everyone has the opportunity to be healthy and recognize that differences in social determinants of health impact peoples' ability to achieve their highest potential of health. Achieving equity requires allocation of resources and designing policies and programs that target populations with the most disproportionate disparities.

Family •

When providing services to an Indigenous child or youth, family includes a person whom a child/youth considers to be a close relative or whom the Indigenous group, community, or people to which the child/ youth belongs considers, in accordance with the customs, traditions, or customary adoption practices of that Indigenous group, community, or people, to be a close relative of the child/youth. This broad definition of "family" is also being applied, where applicable, when providing services to non-Indigenous children/youth.

HEART and SPIRIT Training

The [Association of Native Child and Family Service Agencies in Ontario](#) developed the "Heart and Spirit" Training to meet the demand for more culturally safe and respectful caregiver trainings. The program's focus is on healing and storytelling, while incorporating Indigenous values and perspectives to engage caregivers. The goal of the program is to train potential and current caregivers in a way that promotes and preserves Indigenous cultures and identities of children and youth they care for.

Social Determinants of Health ■

Social Determinants of Health are economic and social conditions that influence the health of people and communities. These conditions are shaped by the amount of money, power and resources that people have, all of which are influenced by policy choices. Social determinants of health affect factors that are related to health outcomes and include early childhood experiences; level of education; being able to keep a job; the kind of work a person does; having food, or being able to get enough food; access to health services and the quality of those services; housing status and physical environments; amount of money earned; gender; and discrimination and social support.

Systemic Racism²³

Systemic racism describes how mainstream institutions, including the public service, normalize and condone, often unintentionally, long standing racist ideas and beliefs into policies, practices, and norms. This results in a system that inherently privileges the ideas and needs of the dominant white population while disadvantaging non-white racial groups, like Indigenous peoples. In turn, systemic racism contributes to inequities for Indigenous peoples. Within health and social services, these inequities impact access to services and quality of care received by Indigenous clients, resulting in inadequate outcomes. Systemic Racism occurs when institutions, such as health and social services, give space to discrimination whether it is intentional or not.

Youth ♦

Youth means a person who has attained 16 years of age but not attained the age of majority (i.e., 16 – 18 years, inclusive).

²³ Government of the Northwest Territories. (2021). Northwest Territories Health and Social Services System Human Resources Plan. Retrieved from: www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/nwt-human-resources-plan-2021-2024.pdf. (p,13).



CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES
STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND ACTION PLAN 2023-2028

**SERVICES AUX ENFANTS, AUX
ADOLESCENTS ET AUX FAMILLES**

ORIENTATION STRATÉGIQUE ET PLAN D'ACTION 2023-2028

Le présent document contient un sommaire en français.