

# Child Welfare

Shaping a child welfare system that is oriented towards the health and wellbeing of children, families, and communities.

## HOW WE'RE THINKING ABOUT THIS

We believe the outcomes of the child welfare system can be improved by strengthening social services and providing families with essential financial resources and support. Protecting children from harm requires a tiered preventative support system that places the health and wellbeing of children and their families at the centre. This is fundamental to a healthy society.

Addressing the root causes of poverty and ensuring that families and communities have stable sources of income are key to improving conditions for all. We must also acknowledge and right the historical harms caused by the child welfare system, and implement the changes necessary to protect children and their families from future harm.

We envision a child welfare system where the “duty to report” becomes a “duty to support.” The BC Greens will adopt a rights-based approach, focusing on prevention rather than apprehension, to create a system that truly protects and uplifts children and their families.

**The child welfare system needs to be severed from its colonial roots**

**in order for it to stop being a mechanism of harm, particularly for Indigenous families and communities.**

## PROBLEM DEFINITION

Since the creation of residential schools, the governments of BC and Canada have been separating children from their families and communities. While the reasons may have shifted, the current child welfare system remains rooted in the colonial policies of the past. Regardless of intentions, the outcomes are clear: the system is broken and has had a horrendous impact. Far too many children die in government care, and far too many youth go missing from the system. Despite numerous reports, investigations, and recommendations, the system continues to fail children and families across BC.

Indigenous children and youth are disproportionately affected by our system. Although they make up just 10% of the child population, 68% of those in government care are Indigenous. Centuries of government policies have left Indigenous communities grappling with poverty, discrimination, violence, and disconnection from land and culture—creating deeply unstable conditions for them to thrive.

The social determinants of health for Indigenous people in BC remain largely unaddressed. Indigenous communities are overrepresented in government care, incarceration, suicide and drug poisoning deaths. Indigenous people face lower graduation rates, higher poverty, lower life expectancies and are 6 to 12 times more likely to be missing or murdered than the general population. These outcomes reflect the systemic issues that continue to create and perpetuate such conditions—not individual failings.

The impact of the child welfare system is not limited to Indigenous families. Over 60% of people experiencing homelessness in Canada have had contact with child protection services. BC's current child welfare system is not effective, efficient or ethical in many cases. It is in critical need of reform, and the status quo is simply not enough to achieve the changes that are desperately needed.

**POLICIES FOR ANNOUNCEMENT**

**Ensure that all social work practices within the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) are aligned with professional standards and increase accountability through legislative reform.**

- Implement legislative changes requiring anyone using the title “Social Worker” to be registered with the BC College of Social Workers.
- Mandate a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree in Social Work and BC College of Social Workers registration for any MCFD employee conducting child protection work. A timeline will be provided to accommodate workforce adjustments.
- Require anti-racism and anti-stigma education for all Ministry staff, informed by the Provincial Committee on Anti-Racism and individuals with lived experience in the child welfare system.
- Establish a comprehensive oversight system for MCFD staff and senior leadership, addressing systemic failures rather than focusing on individual social workers.

**Shift the child welfare system’s focus from reactive interventions to preventive measures, ensuring families receive the support they need before crises arise.**

- Enact legislative reforms ensuring families are provided with the necessary resources and services, as guided by the RCY.
- Implement a public health framework with tiered prevention levels:
  - **Primary Prevention:** Family strengthening programs, resource access, and public awareness campaigns.
  - **Secondary Prevention:** Home visits, respite care, and family resource centers.
  - **Tertiary Prevention:** Wrap-around supports for children and parents affected by violence.

- Create a non-punitive environment where families can discuss struggles without fear of consequences.
- Redirect Ministry funds to provide families with financial resources, addressing poverty-related neglect and empowering parents to better care for their children.

**Advance Indigenous jurisdiction over child welfare to ensure culturally appropriate services and promote reconciliation in alignment with the Supreme Court of Canada’s rulings.**

- Recognize full Indigenous jurisdiction over child welfare, with appropriate funding to support culturally relevant services.
- Promote community-oriented, family-centered care where extended family plays a vital role, ensuring conditions for children to thrive.
- Encourage the broader system to learn from Indigenous approaches, fostering a shift in intention and practice within child welfare services.

**Reorient child welfare practices to be trauma-informed, emphasizing safety, collaboration, and cultural recognition, particularly for Indigenous children and families.**

- Shift the focus to trauma awareness, safety, collaboration, and strength-based approaches.
- Acknowledge the past and ongoing impacts of colonialism, incorporating cultural safety into all child welfare practices.

**Ensure that families raising children in kinship care receive equitable financial and social support comparable to that provided to foster families.**

- Provide families in kinship care with the same financial and social resources that foster families receive.
- Address the insufficient financial support currently provided, recognizing the importance of familial and kinship care in child welfare.