

The Honourable Jane Philpott
Minister of Indigenous Services
10 Wellington, North Tower
Gatineau, Quebec
K1A0H4

December 7, 2018

Dear Minister Philpott,

On behalf of Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO), I would like to offer my full support for the newly announced federal plan to transition responsibility of child welfare for Indigenous children and youth, to Indigenous governments.

This is a powerful and necessary move that goes beyond symbolic gestures and demonstrates an exceptional level of humility and determination in repairing the traumas of over a century of discrimination and structural violence against First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. The new legislation also sets an important precedent for the continued establishment of healthier, mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous systems of government.

CMHO has been working with partners in the child welfare system to address the complex needs of child welfare-involved children and youth who also require mental health care and treatment. As we've delved into this complex issue, it has become clear that as vulnerable as all children and youth in care are, Indigenous children and youth are disproportionately victimized by failures in the system.

CMHO recognizes the strength of Indigenous communities in addressing the mental health needs of their populations in ways that are appropriate and responsive to Indigenous cultures and traditional teachings. We urge the federal government to capitalize on these strengths and support the expansion of capacity and resources for Indigenous service providers to respond to the mental health needs of kids in care. In Ontario, approximately 25-30 per cent of children and youth over the age of five who have spent over a year in care have been diagnosed with an emotional, psychological or nervous disorder. These statistics are compounded in Indigenous populations when considering the rates of unresolved intergenerational trauma caused by the residential school system, the 60s scoop, and ongoing institutional racism and marginalization.

There are serious mental health risks associated with children and youth who are involved with child welfare as demonstrated by the [expert panel report](#) on the deaths of 12 children in care in Ontario. It is an inherently traumatizing experience for a child to be taken away from their home regardless of whether there is just cause or not. CMHO strongly believes that these risks are not well addressed by the current system.

The lack of availability of appropriate mental health services for adults and children, particularly for Indigenous populations, affects the rates at which children enter the child welfare system. If parents do not have access to mental health services that respond to their needs, their mental health can impact not only the mental health of their children but also the stability of the family structure and surrounding community. In recent consultations with Indigenous and Northern partners, we heard countless times that the most just and effective solution to the mental health disparities experienced by Indigenous families is to keep kids at home and in their own communities. In the event that the family structure is so ruptured by mental illness that children must be seized from their homes, there absolutely must be mental health supports in place for both

those children while involved with child-welfare, and their families to ensure that they are supported in welcoming their children home.

It is my hope that the federal government and the Department of Indigenous Services will create a supportive environment for Indigenous governments during this period of transition that enables them to apply their expertise and succeed in their new mandate. It is equally important that the federal government supports the prioritization of, and development of capacity for, the mental health needs of Indigenous children and youth in care by supporting the development of a robust mental health system. CMHO is well-positioned to contribute to this work and would be honored to serve as allies for Indigenous governments and service providers as they lead the development and delivery of culturally responsive mental health services.

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and Indigenous partners in the near future to discuss the mental health aspects of child welfare, further.

Sincerely,



Kim Moran
CEO
Children's Mental Health Ontario