



# Quebec's Child Welfare System

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This CWRP Information Sheet provides an overview of the child welfare service delivery system in Quebec. The summary is based on the authors' synthesis of information collected from publicly available documents. The summary presented in this information sheet were prepared by the authors with funding from a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Partnership Grant and a gift from the Royal Bank of Canada foundation to support the McGill Centre for Research on Children and Families' Children's Services Research and Training Program.

## Background

The Quebec [Ministry of Health and Social Services](#) (Ministère de la Santé et Services Sociaux) is responsible for providing protection services to children and youth in accordance with the mandate outlined in the [Youth Protection Act](#). There are currently [16 Youth Centres](#) (YC) and three multi-mission centres across the province. Both of these centres are responsible for services under the *Youth Protection Act* as well as the [Youth Criminal Justice Act](#) (2002). In each centre, there is a director of youth protection (DYP) who is responsible for enforcing the *Youth Protection Act*. The DYP also has the powers of a provincial director under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. In the youth protection system in Quebec, the intervention process consists of the following stages: receiving and processing a report (intake), evaluating the situation (investigation), orienting the child (intervention planning), and implementing interventions and reviewing the situation. These stages are carried out in separate administrative units, except for the evaluation and orientation stages which are carried out by the same workers.

There are 55 First Nations communities in Québec. The provincial government assumes responsibility for the funding and provision of social services for 24 of the 55 Aboriginal communities under the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement involving Inuit, Cree and Naskapi Nations. The remaining 31 communities' social services are funded primarily by the federal government (Ministère de la Santé et Services Sociaux, 2007). As with other provinces, the responsibility for funding services to First Nations children and families living on reserve rests with the Federal government under the Indian Act, while the delivery of services falls under the authority of the Québec Ministry of Health and Social Services. In some First Nations communities, all youth protection services are provided by the local YC. However, 16 First Nations communities have negotiated bipartite agreements with their local YC which allow the community to directly provide their own implementation of measures services, and in some

instances the communities also assume some of the DYP's other functions such as evaluation (First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission [FNQLHSSC], n.d.).

The [\*Youth Protection Act\*](#), first introduced in 1979, underwent various amendments in 2006 (Turcotte and Helie, 2010). These amendments were introduced in an effort to ensure that children would benefit from continuity of care leading to stable relationships for children and stable living conditions with respect to a child's individual level of need. Additional goals were to encourage participation of children and families in decision-making processes and to improve stability in placements by preserving relationships between children and their families or significant persons in their lives through promoting out-of-home placement with family kin. For children placed outside of their homes, goals were to decrease the number of placement disruptions and decrease the maximum length of placement outside the home. Finally, the formal definitions of maltreatment were broadened and clarified (Turcotte and Helie, 2010). In 2012, foster parents, including some of the families that have kinship ties to the children in their care, became unionized, which has led to changes to placement policies and procedures (Fédération des familles d'accueil et des ressources intermédiaires du Québec, n.d.).

## **Child in Need of Protection**

Child protection services in Quebec are provided to children aged 0-18. Section 38 of the *Youth Protection Act* stipulates a child's security and development are considered compromised if:

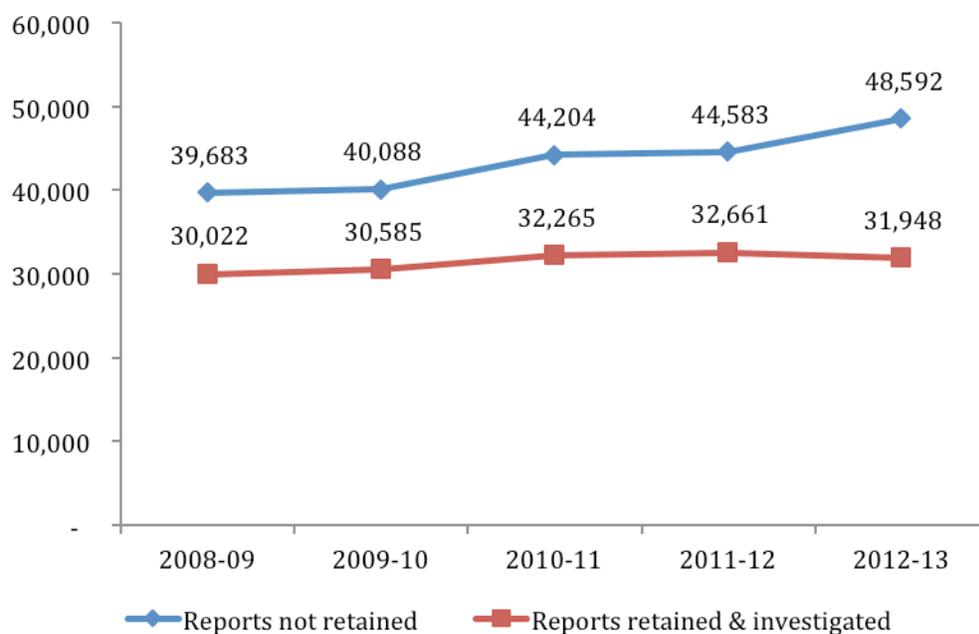
- The child has been abandoned by a parent or guardian;
- The child has suffered or is likely to suffer from physical, health-related or educational neglect;
- The child has suffered or is likely to suffer from physical harm or injury;
- The child has suffered from emotional maltreatment, including exposure to intimate partner violence or family violence;
- The child has suffered or is likely to suffer from sexual abuse, including sexual exploitation; and
- The child has been exhibiting behavioural problems and the parents have failed to take necessary steps to correct the situation or the child 14 years old or over objects to such steps.

## **Service Delivery**

There is a wide range of services for children and their families who require assistance under the *Youth Protection Act*. When child maltreatment or serious behavioural problems are suspected, a report (called a *signalement* in Quebec) is made to the regional YC. The intake department briefly analyzes the report and makes a decision regarding whether to retain (carry out further action) and investigate or not retain the report (take no action). As shown in Figure 1, less than half of all reports received in Quebec are retained each year. Once a report is retained, the report is given to a worker for further investigation. The investigating worker is required to conduct an evaluation, which involves speaking with the child, family members and relevant sources to

determine if the child’s security or development is compromised (concerns reported are substantiated). At the conclusion of the investigation, the security or development of the child is either deemed as compromised or not compromised (i.e. the maltreatment investigation is either substantiated or not substantiated).

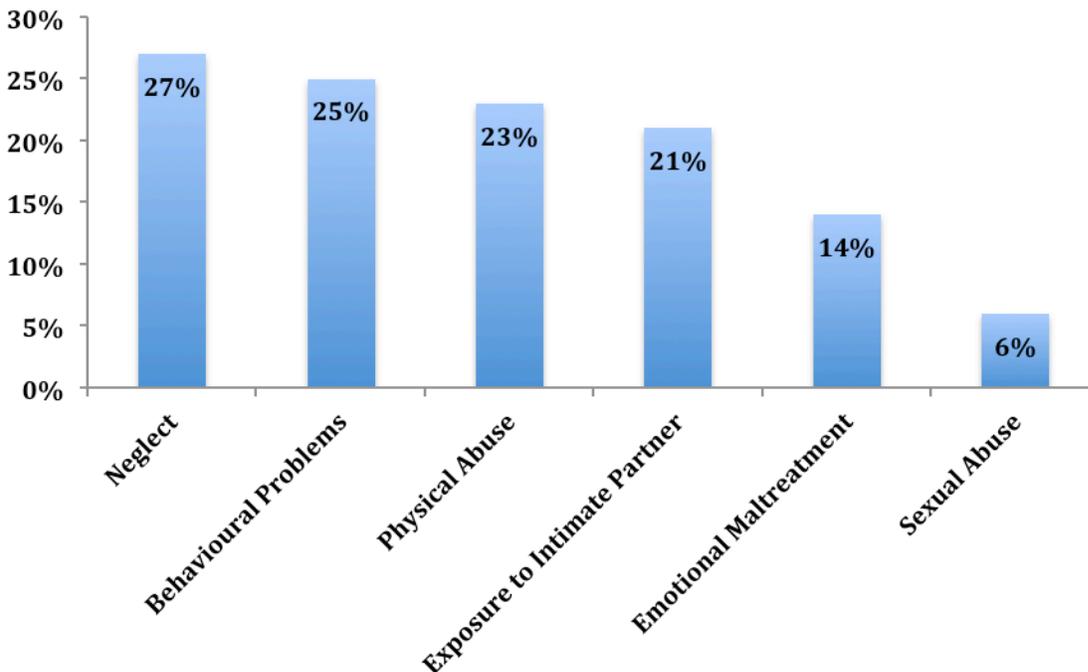
Figure 1.  
*Reports Received in Quebec, 2008-2013\**



\* **Sources:** *Association des centres jeunesse de Québec (ACJQ) 2009; 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013 with the exception of regions 17 and 18.*

The Quebec Incidence Study (EIQ-2008) tracks the forms of maltreatment and serious behavioural problems reported for each child investigated by child welfare services. To ensure compatibility with the Canadian Incidence Study (CIS; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010) the definitions of maltreatment in the EIQ differed somewhat from the terminology used in Quebec. As shown in Figure 2, findings from the EIQ-2008 indicate that the most common type of substantiated maltreatment in Quebec was highest for neglect (27 %), followed by behavioural problems, physical abuse, exposure to intimate partner violence, emotional maltreatment and sexual abuse. Given that some children are reported for multiple forms of maltreatment, the information is additive rather than mutually exclusive.

Figure 2.  
*Substantiated Maltreatment in Quebec, 2008\*\**

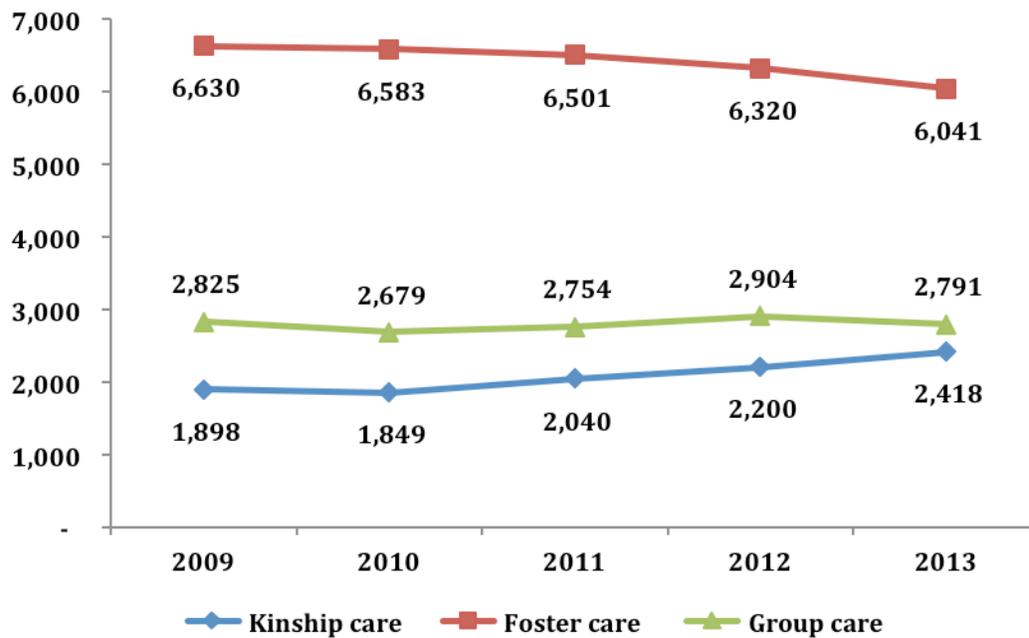


\* Source: *EIQ-2008* (Hélie, et al., 2012)

In cases where the security or development of the child is compromised, services are provided on a voluntary or court-ordered basis. Once the initial orientation (intervention plan) is complete, the case is transferred to a caseworker (deemed an implementation or “application” of measures worker) to ensure that the voluntary or court-ordered measures are carried out. An action plan is created in collaboration with the family in order to ensure that concerns of maltreatment or serious behavioural problems are adequately addressed. Once the timeframe for the service delivery plan comes to an end, all cases at the “application of measures” stage are reviewed by an internal reviewer at the agency (external to the department), who makes a decision to either close the file or continue involvement and create a new service plan.

Although a large part of youth protection services are provided to the child within their family home, there are circumstances where ensuring the safety and development of the child requires placement in out-of-home care. Youth protection workers are required to make every attempt to contact extended family and significant people in the child’s life for a kinship care placement (which can be informal or ordered by a tribunal). When a kinship placement is not available, the child will be placed in a formal resource comprised of a foster home or a residential centre (including a group home and an intermediary resource). Figure 3 provides a snapshot of the total number of children in out-of-home care on March 31 of each year by placement type in Quebec at the “ application of measures stage”. Since 2009, there has been a decrease in the number of children placed in foster care, while the number of children in kinship care has increased.

Figure 3.  
*Children in Out-of-Home Care in Quebec, 2009-2013\**



\* Sources: Association des centres jeunesse de Québec (ACJQ) 2009; 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013

Additional information about child welfare services in Quebec is available on the [Association des centres jeunesse](#) website, as well as the [Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal](#).

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