

Summary Report

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KIDS COUNT

3rd National Child Welfare Data Exchange Meeting

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) provided funding to support this meeting. Research funds from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and Canada Research Chairs further supported the event and expanded participation in the meeting. The 2024 Child Welfare Data Exchange Meeting followed two prior pan-Canadian meetings held in 2020 and 2023 in partnership with the University of Montreal, McGill University, the University of Toronto, and collaborating child welfare agencies and institutions from across Turtle Island and abroad.

In March 2023, over 50 stakeholders gathered in Montreal to discuss strategies for strengthening the network of researchers, administrators and advocates interested in using child welfare administrative data to monitor and improve child welfare services in Canada. Participants explored methodological, contextual, ethical and policy issues relevant to the interpretation of data as it pertains to disparities in the provision of child welfare services for children, families, and communities of different ethno-racial, Indigenous, and socio-economic backgrounds; and identified needs for Indigenous child welfare agencies seeking to develop information systems that support decolonized approaches to child welfare.

The key conclusion coming out of the 2023 meeting was a need to move beyond the analysis and documentation of known disparities in child welfare systems to identify actionable ways to reduce them. This call was the driving purpose of the 2024 meeting, which again gathered over 50 stakeholders in Montreal to discuss relevant opportunities across three Canadian jurisdictions – Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia – with supplemental examples from the United States and Australia. More specifically, the objectives of the 2024 meeting were to:

1. Identify methodological opportunities to access and optimize existing child welfare data and identify gaps in data that, if filled, could support programs and policies designed to reduce child welfare disparities.
2. Examine data governance considerations related to determining research questions; accessing, retrieving, analysing and interpreting data; and disseminating findings on child welfare disparities.
3. Consolidate the methodological and governance priorities identified at the meeting to inform a follow-up data exchange.

In the remainder of this report, you will find summaries of the complete set of presentations that took place during the meeting (**Section II**) and a reflection on the meeting themes and resulting future priorities (**Section III**). Please refer to **Appendix A** for the meeting agenda and **Appendix B** for a list of meeting participants and their affiliations.

II. PRESENTATIONS

The summaries provided in this section are drawn from the presentation content and notes taken during the question-and-answer sessions. Any resources cited herein are listed in the references section at the end of the report.

DAY 1: METHODS

Day 1 focused on identifying 1) methodological opportunities to access and optimize existing child welfare data and 2) gaps in data that, if filled, could support programs and policies designed to reduce child welfare disparities. A summary of day 1 presentations now follows.

- **The use of clinical administrative data in understanding placement trajectories of Black youth**

Presented by: Alicia Boatswain-Kyte, McGill University

This presentation explored the role of clinical administrative data in mitigating racial disparities in reunification outcomes for Black youth in Montreal. While we tend to prioritize prevention services for Black families, the research considered here indicates that attention needs to be paid to services received throughout Black children's child welfare trajectory. From 2007-2018, Black children in Montreal were less likely than White children to experience an attempted and subsequently successful return home.

While this administrative data affords a signal into what we need to pay attention to, it does not illustrate why these disparities exist. Instead, it raises crucial questions around trauma and bias that need to be examined through further study and kept at the forefront of our work. For example, why is reunification not attempted? What makes it not possible?

Community-based care models that aim to centre Black voices and address racial disparities in child welfare are emerging. Across the three models that Dr. Boatswain-Kyte discussed – in Ontario, Quebec and Alberta – there is appreciation for the models on the part of Black families and community and child welfare workers. They believe that services must be culturally adapted and that considerations should be given to the equitable distribution of resources, the level of community and individual agency, and proximity to the child welfare system.

- **Poverty-informed child welfare practice**

Presented by: Rachael Lefebvre, University of Toronto

This presentation described the use of latent class analysis to distinguish profiles of adversity among child protection investigations in Ontario. The core question under consideration is, "what are the needs of the family and how can we address these needs?" While this analysis was not conducted using administrative data, the approach is highly applicable to administrative datasets.

The researchers used cross-sectional data from the 2018 Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect and identified 15 indicators of adversity for the latent class analysis (e.g., child disability, caregiver substance abuse, caregiver mental health concern, food hardship, and housing instability). These indicators were set within the dimensions of the child, the primary caregiver, and the environment. The analysis found evidence for 8 distinct classes of family adversity among the sample of child protection investigations. The classes were compared to understand associated rates of case closures, service referrals, ongoing service delivery, and out-of-home placement.

The findings underscore the complex and co-occurring nature of adversities and the importance of child welfare services being tailored to distinct profiles of need. Notably, the 2020 enactment of *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* (previously Bill C-92) affirmed that a child must not be placed in out of home care solely based on their family's "socio-economic conditions, including poverty, lack of adequate housing or infrastructure or the state of health of his or her parent or the care provider." Families that experience poverty could benefit from interventions that go beyond services aimed at increasing parental capacities to include a range of economic and material supports. Crucially, *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* does not address funding to provide and improve these types of supports.

- **Opportunities and challenges in accessing administrative data to better understand disparities in child protection involvement**

Presented by: Tonino Esposito, Université de Montréal, Sonia Hélie, Institute Universitaire Jeunesse en Difficulté

This presentation provided an analytic example of the opportunity that administrative data affords in making initial predictions of the differential association of socioeconomic vulnerabilities and child protection involvement across geographies in Quebec. Here again, it's important to keep the legislative requirements under *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* in mind.

This analysis explored the lifetime risk of involvement with the child protection system and variation in rates across neighborhoods according to socioeconomic status, child population density, and worker turnover. The findings indicate that 1 in 10 children in Quebec will be placed in out-of-home care. This statistic mirrors probability rates in the United States, where there are much fewer social safety supports.

In Quebec, poverty drastically increases the likelihood of child maltreatment substantiation and out-of-home placement, with additional risk for those living in rural areas. The reasons behind these disparities are unsubstantiated, however, a working hypothesis is that the risk threshold in these geographies is altered by lower service levels, including fewer caseworkers and diminished access to culturally based supports.

While this type of research holds promise in understanding how to tailor services to proactively meet the needs of families and communities that are over-represented in child welfare, this

promise falls apart in the emerging legislative landscape in Quebec. Recent policy modifications to privacy laws under Bill 3 and Law 25 are hindering researchers' ability to continue their work.

- **Current and planned use of administrative data to reduce disparities in child welfare**
Presented by: Steven Yong, Government of British Columbia

The Ministry of Children and Family Development's primary focus is to support all children and youth in British Columbia to live in safe, healthy and nurturing families and be strongly connected to their communities and culture. This presentation looked at the Ministry's ongoing efforts to highlight and address systemic disparities using administrative data.

Importantly, all child protection data in the province has historically been provided through the Ministry. This is beginning to shift under *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, as Indigenous communities in the province transfer jurisdiction over child and family services to an Indigenous authority according to Indigenous laws.

The presenter noted that the Ministry holds quality disaggregated data on Indigenous disparities in child welfare, including information on protection reports, safety assessments, placement rates, placement lengths, and programming uptake. This data enables the Ministry to have critical insight into the persistent over-representation of Indigenous children and families in the system while also considering and acting on immediate indicators of positive change. For example, the Ministry was able to demonstrate increased service reach across an Indigeneity and gender combination for a pandemic related programming change. These results were used to secure permanent funding for the revised program.

The Ministry uses information from its own case management and other administrative systems to analyze and report on data pertaining to service outputs, uptake, and costs. It is also increasingly using linked administrative information to look at down-stream outcomes for Ministry-involved children and youth. This includes analyses of income assistance use, health services, and homelessness and shelter episodes.

Through the structure of a well-being framework, the Ministry expects to develop a better understanding of the drivers of well-being outcomes and the overall well-being of the children, youth and families that it serves. This effort is focused on systematically identifying and addressing material information gaps with internal and external partners. It seeks to bring innovative analytical approaches to light to leverage under-utilized information, such as unstructured case notes.

- **Estimating rates of out-of-home care among children in Canada: An analysis of national administrative child welfare data**
Presented by: Alexandra Ouedraogo, Public Health Agency of Canada

As part of the public health approach to child welfare, data about children placed in out-of-home care is needed to assess population trends, understand drivers of social and health

inequities, and examine outcomes for children and families. In this presentation, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) shared the results of an analysis of national data on children in out-of-home care ([Pollock et al., 2024](#)). The data were compiled by PHAC in collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, researchers, and other child welfare partners. This work is part of the development of the Canadian Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS). CCWIS is envisioned as an evidence hub to collaborate on, analyze, and share national-level child welfare data.

The current study examines rates of out-of-home care in Canada in 2021-2022 by gender, age group, placement type, province or territory, and year. To account for gaps in coverage for specific populations in four provinces (e.g. First Nations children on reserve or under the jurisdiction of First Nations agencies), a sensitivity analysis was conducted to estimate a maximum national rate using publicly reported numbers from Indigenous Services Canada. Based on the analysis, there were an estimated 61,104 children in out-of-home care in Canada as of March 31, 2022. Factoring in the sensitivity analysis, there was a maximum estimate of 70,434. Most of the children in out-of-home care (84.3%) were placed in a family-based care setting such as a foster home or with extended family (e.g. in a kinship home). The rate of out-of-home care varied by province or territory from 2.72 to 29.60 per 1,000 children. A broadened indicator base could help to explain some of the reasons behind these rate variations. For example, indicators could be added to consider placement type and length, geographic location, and socioeconomic conditions.

Further work is needed to address gaps in data and corresponding definitional challenges. Terminology pertaining to out-of-home care, kinship placement, etc. can be used interchangeably across jurisdictions when their meanings and the related patterns of placement are very different. Moving forward, partnership development will be key to resolving these challenges, as well as enabling the inclusion of some disaggregated race-based data.

- **Screening Threshold Analysis: A tool to interrogate disparities in child welfare services**
Presented by: Kate Schumaker, Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto, Leyco Wilson, Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region, Barbara Fallon, University of Toronto, John Fluke, Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect

Child welfare agencies across Canada and the United States investigate a high number of reports of maltreatment with low rates of ongoing intervention and confirmation. The Screening Threshold Analysis (STA) approach uses principles of decision making to allow agencies to produce and monitor the outcomes of intake decisions in the context of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).

This presentation examined how STA has been used in Minnesota and Ontario to help identify and reduce disparities in child welfare service provision. Drawing on Signal Detection Theory, the presenters illustrated how intake investigations can be screened through a decision tree, with four possible results: True positive (equals a finding or outcome of maltreatment); false positive (no finding or outcome of maltreatment); false negative (no initial finding or outcome

of maltreatment, however, the child returns to the system); or true negative (no finding or outcome of maltreatment and the child does not return to the system). Here, it is important to keep in mind that definitions of child maltreatment are socially constructed. The inability to access the cultural and caregiver context in some scenarios results in high false positives.

Using STA, agencies can run sensitivity and specificity analyses to assess how well they are identifying problems and screening out non-protection cases. In Minnesota, for example, this type of analysis found that 4% and 26% of intake decisions in 2021 were false negative and false positives, respectively. Researchers then determined that education neglect allegations were among the most likely to result in false positives (where involvement was not needed), with Black and Asian children and families the most likely to be impacted.

In Canada, from 2012-2017, Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region (FACS) found a false positive rate of 36.4% with 98% of these cases closed. This knowledge presented an opportunity for the agency to rethink how it responds to these investigations. The question became, "how do we keep children at home"? Subsequent work has been done to increase equity and diversity training and hiring amongst the FACS team. This has been followed by a marked decrease in disparity rates for Indigenous and Black children and youth from 2019-2022, including the number of ongoing investigations and out-of-home admissions.

Comparable work is happening at the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CCAS). Through STA, the agency discovered that education sector referrals from 2010-2013 were resulting in high rates of false positives, particularly for Black children and families. Working with the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, CCAS piloted Africentric wrap-around programming in 2018-2019, leading to reduced intrusion into Black communities without an increase in false negatives. Holistically, the initiatives presented here demonstrate how data collection over the long-term can be harnessed to reduce disparities in the child welfare system.

- **The integrated administrative data system (RAPIDS) and examples of its use or potential use for monitoring and reducing disparate child welfare involvement**
Presented by: John Fluke and Dana Hollinshead, Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect

Two administrative data systems, NCANDS and AFCARS, compose the heart of national child welfare data collection in the United States. NCANDS reporting is voluntary and focuses on incidents of child maltreatment, whereas AFCARS reporting is mandatory and focuses on foster care and adoption events. A team of researchers has successfully linked records from the two datasets to generate a longitudinal data file, called RAPIDS, that is capable of robust analyses examining factors affecting outcomes and disparities.

RAPIDS includes varying levels of usable data from 50 U.S. states, D.C. and Puerto Rico. Agency files from NCANDS and AFCARS adoption files are not included in RAPIDS. Combining the AFCARS and NCANDS files requires a variety of harmonizing steps, such as aligning data across different reporting periods and frequencies.

Through RAPIDS, researchers are beginning to leverage child welfare administrative data to better understand systemic disparities. A recent analysis used 14 years of longitudinal data to consider differences between anonymous and non-anonymous incident reports, both in terms of who they happen to and how they move through the system. The findings show that anonymous reports are not key drivers of ethno-racial disparities in the United States and that they are the least likely to be substantiated or result in immediate out-of-home placement. Further, anonymous reports are as likely as reports from other sources to be associated with re-reports and placements into out-of-home care within 90 days of the index report.

The RAPIDS team is now aiming to integrate U.S. census data and child welfare policy data into its dataset. This will allow for an assessment of policy patterns that may help to reduce disparities. The core questions under consideration are: 1) What community and policy factors predict county rates of child maltreatment reports? and 2) What individual, community and policy factors predict pathways through the child protection system? The overarching goal of RAPIDS is to facilitate increased data use in diverse environments. This includes making code available through open-source software.

- **Why measuring matters: The policy and public finance dimensions of measurement in child welfare in Canada; and Measurement, event-oriented narratives, and the role of national data systems in the pursuit of justice**

Presented by: Helaina Gaspard, Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy and Fred Wulczyn, University of Chicago

To uphold the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) ruling to end discrimination and ensure that it does not reoccur in First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS), information about how children are doing is necessary. Currently, there is no outcome data available to inform decision-making on service design and delivery. We are unable to answer the question, “how are First Nations children doing?”

As an alternative to program indicators developed by Indigenous Services Canada, the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD) engaged with FNCFS agencies to define a set of indicators that focus on the structural drivers of contact with protective services. A combination of case-level and community-level well-being indicators were also developed relevant to the delivery of FNCFS.

An ensuing review of FNCFS agency data systems indicates that some case-level information is available, particularly as it pertains to protection services. Other data, such as knowledge of Indigenous languages, spirituality, and cultural indicators could be retrieved from case notes, but is not readily accessible through existing systems. An alternative approach to organizing information was required to build a common base for analysis with the collaborator group and test a subset of the indicators. Using an event-based format from the Center for State Child Welfare Data (Chapin Hall, University of Chicago), the collaborators pre-coded up to 100 closed files in Excel, free from any child identifiers.

This test proved important because it illustrates what can be done with both potential and existing child welfare data. Future work is needed to incentivize ongoing community-led measurement, including the delivery of capacity building support for collaborators to ask questions as they code and analyze data.

In addition to moving towards community-led measurement frameworks, it's important to interrogate the underlying causal effects of social vulnerability. Here, a consideration of corresponding child welfare placement rates and probabilities can advance working hypotheses or causal inference. In the United States, analyses have considered how social funding is distributed from a race-based perspective. For example, is money generally flowing to low-income Black neighbourhoods or low-income White neighbourhoods? The lines between bias, compassion, and politics are often blurred. Therefore, measurement is central to the pursuit of justice.

- **Using evidence and data to inform policy: Trials and tribulations**
Presented by: Leah Bromfield, Australian Centre for Child Protection

In this presentation, Dr. Leah Bromfield shared details of the Australian Centre for Child Protection's approach to child welfare programming and policy development. The centre's work is rooted in a 5-step research and community engagement model: 1) epidemiology and optimal intervention windows; 2) evidence reviews and program & policy selection; 3) co-design & development; 4) testing & evaluation and 5) workforce training, implementation support and scale-up.

Traditional academic knowledge creation to inform policy making tends to focus on steps 1, 2 and 4. However, in Dr. Bromfield's work, co-designed community programming is crucial to achieving generative outcomes. Here, there are four knowledge creation pillars – research, practice, cultural knowledge, and lived experience. Knowledge creation is governed by first voice and Indigenous advisors that give direction across the lifecycle of each project, including problem identification. Following problem identification, researchers examine how data can be used to inform intervention co-design. Key to each project's success is relationship building and reciprocity between researchers, advisors, and practitioners. Dr. Bromfield cautioned that the time it takes to build meaningful relationships is often longer than desired government timelines.

Ms. Bromfield noted that the centre has achieved significant impacts in policy and practice through a partnered, value-based approach with government, a dual focus on problem and solution identification, and a project governance framework that engages decision makers.

DAY 2: ETHICS & GOVERNANCE

Day 2 focused on discussing governance models that facilitate access to and use of diverse sources of data while respecting data sovereignty and community voice. A summary of day 2 presentations now follows.

- **First Nations in Quebec: The main regional initiatives surrounding information governance, capacity building in self-evaluation, and monitoring population well-being**
Presented by: Alexandra Gilbert and Patricia Montambault, First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission

Presenters Alexandra Gilbert and Patricia Montambault provided an overview of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC). The FNQLHSSC was created by the Chiefs of Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador to defend the interests of First Nations and support their priorities in the areas of health and social services. FNQLHSSC offers a wide range of support to First Nations communities and organizations, including participating in the development of social programs designed by and for First Nations; and promoting the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness of First Nations families and communities.

From a data governance standpoint, FNQLHSSC is endeavouring to co-develop an information governance strategy with community actors that will make it possible to implement the principles found in the Quebec First Nations Information Governance Framework ([Grantham, 2019](#)). The framework arises from a call from First Nations for such principles to guide its efforts to regain control of its information. Currently, communities are unable to freely access their data from the Canadian and provincial government. FNQLHSSC is seeking to monitor population wellness at regional and community levels. Here, the concept of wellness is rooted in First Nations worldviews and is framed around six strengths-based components: 1) land; 2) cultural identity; 3) inner peace; 4) empowerment; 5) social network and 6) safety.

FNQLHSSC collaborates and conducts research to better understand the over-representation of First Nations children in the youth protection system. Research results are used to make necessary representations to government partners and address child protection disparities. Additional related work includes evaluating the long-term reform of the First Nations Child and Family Services Program and Jordan's Principle, as well as supporting communities in the implementation of *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*.

- **Addressing First Nations child well-being disparities through research and data governance**
Presented by: Michael Miller and Lorraine Hill, Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario

Michael Miller and Lorraine Hill presented the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario's (ANCFSAO's) approach to designing and delivering services

to their communities. ANCFSAO represents 13 of the 14 First Nations agencies in Ontario and remains collaborative with the one agency that is not an ANCFSAO member. ANCFSAO builds trusting relationships with its members to centre and amplify the voices of those with lived experience in child well-being/welfare and non-Indigenous service delivery. ANCFSAO's approach follows five key pillars: 1) research with an impact; 2) relationship building; 3) holistic engagement; 4) traditional co-development from beginning to end and 5) continued stakeholder involvement post project completion.

ANCFSAO employs an Elder in Residence and has an Elder Advisory Council and Indigenous Youth Advisory Circle (IYAC) to ensure that program development is led and co-developed by lived experts. Relationship building between youth and Elders is prioritized and critical to ensuring that youth have robust supports and opportunities to hear and engage with cultural teachings. The presenters shared guidance on how to engage with youth in a good way, including: 1) use youth-centred language (e.g. stories vs. data, youth words vs. researcher interpretation); 2) provide a supportive, trauma-informed and culturally safe environment, as defined by youth and 3) focus on relationship-building. Related examples were then shared from two ANCFSAO projects, as outlined below.

IYAC is involved in the design of a First Nations information system, including providing feedback on how to create appropriate measures of success. IYAC has advised that current measures established by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (e.g. pertaining to high school graduation rates) are not grounded in First Nations, Métis and Inuit worldviews. A new system will need to account for Indigenous worldviews and ensure that there are opportunities for youth in care to tell their stories in a good way. A related ANCFSAO project is endeavouring to better understand the transition from child well-being/welfare to homelessness. IYAC has designed the research questions and identified key informants or interviewees. Youth voices are being centred throughout every step of the project, laying the foundation for their lived experience to create change.

- **An Indigenous approach to integrated services: Addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and families in the child welfare system at Native Child and Family Services of Toronto**

Presented by: Jeffrey Schiffer and Melissa Hamonic, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto

Jeffrey Schiffer and Melissa Hamonic presented the service model at Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST), with a focus on how prevention and early intervention services are integrated into its practice. NCFST's guiding principles are grounded in Indigenous worldviews and include Land, Kinship and Teachings. These principles serve as primary modes for intervention and healing. NCFST employs an integrated service model, with half of the organization's operating budget used for prevention services. It recently implemented an Indigenous governance model, transitioning away from mainstream hierarchical leadership structures. From a research standpoint, NCFST is also shifting away from deficits-based thinking and centering strengths-based practice through a well-being mandate.

In the absence of a First Nations information system that is rooted in Indigenous worldviews, NCFST has employed the use of two data systems (OIS-OCANDS and CPIN) to consider how its services are decreasing admissions into care. While there have been many challenges in merging these two datasets, the analysis conducted indicates that NCFST's prevention focus is correlated with a decrease in the number of recurrent child welfare investigations. The presenters stressed that First Nations families are often harmed during mainstream child protection investigations and that corresponding risk assessments need to be re-thought.

The presenters also highlighted the importance of relationship building in looking to improve data analysis capacity across sectors. Research is needed to support the transformation of interconnected systems of oppression. First Nations communities experience oppression from multiple interrelated sectors (e.g., child protection, education, justice) and these sectors must collaborate for change to occur. Funding formulas in Ontario require updating to enable innovative, agency-level prevention work.

- **Charting a course through the ocean of data: A deep dive into what we measure, how and why**

Presented by: Amber Crowe, Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child & Family Services

Amber Crowe presented the service delivery model at Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child & Family Services (DBCFS) and the specific variables it considers as part of its Indigenous child and family well-being practice. Ms. Crowe highlighted the core findings from the First Nations Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, *Mashkiwenmi-daa Noojimowin: Let's have strong minds for the healing* ([Crowe et al., 2021](#)). These findings indicate that, as of 2018, a First Nations child is three times as likely as a non-Indigenous child in Ontario to be investigated for a child protection concern and seven times as likely to be placed in out of home care.

Ms. Crowe spoke to the differences between non-Indigenous and Indigenous child welfare service delivery approaches, using an ocean analogy. In this analogy, the ocean represents the entire context of the child's holistic well-being. The conventional child welfare worker, or diver, approaches the assessment (investigation) primarily with their own needs and checklists in mind. Such an assessment is centred on a child's physical safety, with limited acknowledgement of the child's emotional safety. Like a diver, the worker is checking their own oxygen, dive plan, goggles and training, focusing on a microscopic amount of the "ocean." By contrast, a worker using an Indigenous holistic approach equally acknowledges a child's physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual safety. The "diver" enters the ocean with a different lens, seeking to assess the entire ecosystem, with more of a focus on the environment than their own needs. An Indigenous holistic approach acknowledges the importance of the child, their family, community and nation.

Currently, mandated provincial-level reporting measures are used to assess parents' caregiving capacity in isolation from their environment. These measures do not result in outcomes-level data, therefore the well-being of children and families who are investigated by child services is not known. As an alternative, DBCFS has developed a measurement approach that is rooted

in its holistic service delivery model and considers how services can strengthen the family environment (e.g., quality and level of engagement, cultural service levels, service levels on and off reserves).

The systemic and root causes of inequities in the child protection system need to be addressed with concurrent changes to corresponding social systems. The system is not presently designed to support caregivers with intergenerational trauma, addictions and mental health issues, housing issues, or economic hardship. A First Nations data system would support First Nations data governance and provide opportunities to collect information related to a holistic view of well-being and engagement with families.

- **National study on the health care use of children who lived in foster homes**
Presented by: Andrea Evans, CHEO Research Institute, Ashley Quinn, University of Toronto, Nico Tromc , McGill University

In this presentation, Andrea Evans and Ashley Quinn spoke to the scarcity of data on the health of children in foster care. The health and well-being of children in care needs to be monitored and evaluated. Health care service delivery for children with child welfare involvement is fragmented, crisis-driven and inadequate. Drs. Evans, Quinn and Tromc  have conducted a retrospective cohort study comparing health outcomes of census-identified children who did and did not live in foster homes in 2011. The researchers use linked 2011 Canadian census data (i.e. identification of foster child), national household survey data (i.e. foster child characteristics and foster household characteristics) and hospital data (i.e. emergency room visits, admissions, and cause of death health data).

The presenters discussed the limitations of the available data related to data gaps, outcomes, and governance. The proxy for identifying a child in foster care comes from the household census and strictly captures children living in residential homes, where caregivers self-identify as a foster parent. This means that some children living in out-of-home care are missing from the dataset (i.e. children living in groups homes, involved with the justice system, or living in kinship care arrangements). Indicators looking at whether children in out-of-home care are receiving adequate health and mental health services are not available. The researchers' preliminary findings show that a child under 18 years of age living in a foster home was twice as likely than a non-foster child to be admitted to hospital in Canada between March 2011 and March 2018. As a next step, the researchers are seeking to build strong relationships with Black, First Nations, M tis, and Inuit communities to analyze the data and findings.

III. THEMES & NEXT STEPS

SYNTHESIS OF MEETING THEMES

Some cross-cutting themes emerged from the presentations and group discussions that were held over the course of the meeting. These themes focus on administrative data, current gaps in data, data governance, and future network opportunities. Each theme is discussed in detail below.

THEME 1: How can we use admin data to work towards reducing disparities in policy and practice?

The collection and analysis of administrative data can be used to identify disparities throughout the child welfare continuum, signaling where to triage efforts and expand research. As highlighted above, administrative data was recently used to show reunification disparities for Black children in Montreal. Further community-based research is now needed to pinpoint the reasons behind this disparity.

When coupled with specificity and sensitivity analysis and/or associated datasets, administrative data can also create opportunities to shift programs and policies towards risk prediction and prevention. At both an agency (Ontario) and jurisdictional (Minnesota) level, sensitivity and specificity analysis has been used in conjunction with administrative data. Here, we learned that researchers and agency workers found disproportionately high rates of false positives for racialized children and families, linked to the reporting source (i.e. the education sector). Through community collaboration and engagement, programming has been designed and implemented in Ontario to reduce this disparity without an increase in false negatives.

In Quebec, we learned that researchers have used linked administrative and socioeconomic data to demonstrate that children living in low-income rural areas are at heightened risk of maltreatment substantiation. The researchers hypothesized that the risk threshold in these geographies is altered by lower service levels, including fewer caseworkers and diminished access to culturally based supports. Additional research is required to explore this hypothesis and develop corresponding community-based programs. As illustrated through the presentation summaries, numerous other linked-data initiatives and studies are underway in the United States and Canada, including the use of health systems information to understand the health status and health care utilization of children who live in foster homes across Canada.

THEME 2: What gaps in data could help to reduce disparities, if filled?

While administrative data is useful for documenting disparities, on its own, it is absent of the reasons behind disparity, such as structural inequity, racism, unmet child, family and community need, etc. As illustrated in theme 1, sensitivity and specificity analysis and linked datasets, including sociodemographic and health statistics, are being used to move beyond the limits of administrative data.

As we move forward, inter-jurisdictional terminology issues and data gaps need to be better understood and accounted for. For example, the presentations highlight gaps in coverage for specific populations (e.g. First Nations children on reserve), gaps and varied approaches to kinship and customary care placements, and a lack of distinction or race-based data. These types of gaps can result in an inaccurate understanding of disparities and the under-allocation of supports for hard-to-reach populations.

Theme 3 below offers additional insight into data gaps that can be filled as part of work to reduce child welfare disparities.

THEME 3: What are the core data governance considerations when conducting research and evaluation that seeks to help redress child welfare disparities?

The use of administrative data as a tool for decreasing disparities in child welfare must be underpinned by an examination of related governance factors. We can view the governance factors discussed at the 2024 Data Exchange Meeting through the lens of ethical, political, and operational considerations. These considerations are not mutually exclusive.

Ethical considerations

Those who are engaged in determining and delivering child welfare practice and policy need to enable data sovereignty for communities that are over-represented in the system; these communities have a right to create, own and tell their stories. This includes sovereignty across the full trajectory of the research or measurement lifecycle – from determining research questions; to accessing, retrieving, analysing, and interpreting data; and sharing findings. Current analyses of trends in data largely exclude the worldviews and experiences of over-represented populations. At a minimum, data findings and interpretations need to be validated with the communities in focus.

The overarching call is for “research” and “measurement” to be done by, for and with impacted communities. Here, it is vital for researchers and agencies to develop trusting and reciprocal relationships with first voice experts – and to centre first voice experience, cultural knowledge, and language – while respecting related consent and privacy needs.

Mainstream concepts and terminology, including research and measurement, can be highly triggering for youth and former youth in care. Community-defined notions of well-being are increasingly being shared as an antidote to “compliance-based” reporting metrics. Compliance-based metrics are a form of administrative data that tends to be defined at Canadian federal and jurisdictional levels. Here again, this data can provide entry points into understanding child welfare trends, yet it does not facilitate culturally rooted, preventative assessments of how kids are doing. For example, when linked with race-based data, placement counts can show where over-representation exists, however, they do little to facilitate knowledge of corresponding service inequities.

Political considerations

As community-led approaches to research and measurement come to the fore, so does increasing pushback on compliance frameworks, most markedly as they pertain to fee-for-service funding models. Using fee-for-service models, agencies have been incentivized to remove children from their families, thereby unlocking resources to continue their work.

Again, these models have been absent of outcomes-level evaluation and highlight the need for a concrete, holistic sense of child health and well-being across Canada. This reality stands in contrast to the United States, where the Children's Bureau gathers national-level data on children and families in partnership with federal, state, tribal and local agencies. With an annual budget of almost \$10 billion, the Children's Bureau gives support and guidance to programs that focus on prevention, permanency, and well-being.

As the Canadian child welfare system seeks to move forward in ways that redress disparities, it has an opportunity to rethink service incentivization and impact tracking through the lens of family preservation and well-being. In First Nations, Inuit, and Métis contexts, this work goes hand-in-hand with supporting the devolution of child welfare services under *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*. The inherent right of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities to deliver their own child welfare services is inclusive of data sovereignty (i.e., the First Nations Principles of OCAP®).

Operational considerations

Capacity building supports are needed to enable the work ahead – from partnership building to funding and resourcing, including accounting for increasing cases of worker burnout and fatigue. Given the present lack of a national infrastructure, it may make sense to heighten investment in pre-existing regional approaches.

Moving forward, it will be important to champion community-led services and data systems in ways that capitalize on near-term opportunities to expand action on child welfare disparities. As highlighted in theme 1 above, these opportunities include the ongoing use and exploration of linked datasets and agency or jurisdiction-level performance measures. To fully unlock these opportunities, data governance challenges across the country need to be addressed; for example, in Quebec mainstream and First Nations institutions and agencies. These challenges pertain to accessing, analyzing and ensuring culturally appropriate datasets; and to managing data privacy and confidentiality against the potential (unintentional) identification of service users.

In looking to foster evidence-based program and policy development, it's helpful to consider the 5-step approach shared by Leah Bromfield. This model includes cultural and first voice governance at every step of the process: 1) epidemiology and optimal intervention windows; 2) evidence reviews and program and policy selection; 3) co-design & development; 4) testing & evaluation and 5) workforce training, implementation support and scale-up. This type of framework requires multi-year development timelines and a dedicated national-level evaluation infrastructure.

THEME 4: What opportunities exist for collaboration and partnership in working to reduce disparities?

A diverse network of agency leaders and managers, researchers, and advocates is emerging vis-à-vis the Data Exchange meetings that is committed to disparity reduction in child welfare. Organic collaborations have already taken shape through connections forged at the 2020-2024 gatherings.

At the 2024 meeting, participants raised potential opportunities for network advocacy, particularly as they relate to sharing the “shape of the system” and re-defining the issues underpinning disparity. In this work, metaphors can serve as a potent illustration of the state of child welfare across Turtle Island. Consider, for example, Amber Crowe’s likening of child and family well-being to a boat that we seek to set sail. To sail successfully, the boat needs to be taken off the rocks of social oppression and vulnerability. These rocks include multi-faceted, complex factors, such as racism, poverty, mental health challenges, intergenerational trauma, substance abuse and addiction, and capacity constraints. A failure to move towards setting sail is a collective choice.

As a network, we need to consider which voices and perspectives should be added and/or amplified at future gatherings, including lived, cultural, and technical expertise. Here, it’s crucial for leadership to emanate from the communities most impacted by systemic disparity. We can also move towards distilling the opportunities discussed at the 2024 meeting into a co-designed group purpose and action plan. For this kind of an exercise to be fruitful, however, it needs to come complete with a well-funded infrastructure and mandate. This group requires sustained, long-term funding and resources to generate significant impact.

IV. REFERENCES

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V. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MEETING AGENDA

Kids Count: 3rd National Child Welfare Data Exchange Meeting AGENDA

Date: February 29 & March 1, 2024

Meeting location: Billiard Room, McGill Faculty Club (3450 McTavish Street, Montreal, QC)

Hotel location: Hotel Omni Mont-Royal (1050 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, QC)

Day 1: Methods

Identify methodological opportunities to access and optimize existing child welfare data and identify gaps in data that, if filled, could support programs and policies designed to reduce child welfare disparities.

- Examine methodological opportunities and challenges related to understanding the multitude of factors that lead to the over-use of child welfare interventions, particularly for Black, Latin American and Indigenous children, and those living in conditions of poverty.
- Identify gaps in data and analysis that, if filled, could support program and policy change.
- Highlight cross-jurisdictional comparisons of programs and policies designed to reduce disparities in child welfare involvement.
- Presentations are typically 15 minutes in length with 5 minutes for questions; timing will be strictly enforced.

8:30-9:00 *Registration and Breakfast*

9:00-9:20 **Welcome & introduction**

Hosts: Tonino Esposito, Nico Trocmé, Barbara Fallon

Opening remarks: Amber Crowe, Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child & Family Services

9:20-9:40 **The use of clinical administrative data in understanding placement trajectories of Black youth (15 min presentation; 5 min Q&A)**

Presented by: Alicia Boatswain-Kyte, McGill University

9:40-10:00 **Poverty-informed child welfare practice (15 min presentation; 5 min Q&A)**

Presented by: Barbara Fallon and Rachael Lefebvre, University of Toronto

10:00-10:20 **Opportunities and challenges in accessing administrative data to better understand disparities in child protection involvement (15 min presentation; 5 min Q&A)**

Presented by: Tonino Esposito, University of Montreal, Sonia Hélie, Institute universitaire Jeunesse en Difficulté

- 10:20-10:40** **Current and planned use of administrative data to reduce disparities in child welfare (15 min presentation; 5 min Q&A)**
Presented by: Steven Yong, Government of British Columbia
- 10:40-11:00** *Break*
- 11:00-12:00** **Full group roundtable discussion**
1. First Nations, Metis, Inuit, Black, and Latin American communities are all engaged at different levels in redressing child welfare service disparities. While there are many differences in their experiences, what are the opportunities for collaboration between them?
 2. Given the considerable variations in child welfare structures, policies and legislation, how do we make sense of differences across jurisdictions?
- 12:00-1:00** *Lunch*
- 1:10-1:40** **Estimating rates of out-of-home care among children in Canada: An analysis of national administrative child welfare data (20 min presentation; 10 min Q&A)**
Presented by: Alexandra Ouedraogo, Public Health Agency of Canada
- 1:40-2:00** **Screening Threshold Analysis: A tool to interrogate disparities in child welfare services (15 min presentation; 5 min Q&A)**
Presented by: Kate Schumaker, Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto, Leyco Wilson, Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region, Barbara Fallon, University of Toronto, John Fluke, Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect
- 2:00-2:20** **The integrated administrative data system (RAPIDS) and examples of its use or potential use for monitoring and reducing disparate child welfare involvement (15 min presentation; 5 min Q&A)**
Presented by: John Fluke and Dana Hollinshead, Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect
- 2:20-2:40** **Why measuring matters: The policy and public finance dimensions of measurement in child welfare in Canada (15 min presentation; 5 min Q&A)**
Presented by: Helaina Gaspard, Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy
- 2:40-3:00** **Measurement, event oriented narratives, and the role of national data systems in the pursuit of justice (15 min presentation; 5 min Q&A)**
Presented by: Fred Wulczyn, University of Chicago
- 3:00-3:20** *Break*
- 3:20-4:00** **Using evidence and data to inform policy: Trials and tribulations (30 min virtual presentation; 10 min Q&A)**
Presented by: Leah Bromfield, Australian Centre for Child Protection

4:00-5:00 Full group roundtable discussion and day 1 wrap-up

1. Can you share experiences of when child welfare data have (or have not) had their intended impact?
2. What needs to be taken into consideration when analysing and reporting on disparities to avoid unintended consequences?

5:00 Networking dinner**Day 2: Ethics & governance**

Discuss governance models that facilitate access to and use of diverse sources of data while respecting data sovereignty and community voice in defining research questions and the interpretation of results for data dissemination, including:

- Community partnership approaches that address data- and research-governance concerns related to child welfare disparities.
- Questions regarding ethics and data sovereignty when multiple sources of data are linked, such as:
 - Best practices in managing case-level information when individual consent for use of data is not available.
 - Examples of community ethics review procedures and governance models for information management.
 - Implications of First Nations OCAP® principles when linking multiple data sources.
- Gaps in existing data governance models related to the use of jurisdictional-level data.
- Opportunities for community-informed data interpretation and dissemination efforts to inform advocacy for policy change.

8:30-9:00 Breakfast**9:00-9:15 Welcome & review of day 2 agenda**

Nico Trocmé, Barbara Fallon, Tonino Esposito

9:15-9:45 First Nations in Quebec: The main regional initiatives surrounding information governance, capacity building in self-evaluation, and monitoring population well-being (20 min presentation; 10 min Q&A)

Presented by: Nancy Gros-Louis McHugh, Patricia Montambault and Alexandra Gilbert, First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission

9:45-10:15 Addressing First Nations child well-being disparities through research and data governance (20 min presentation; 10 min Q&A)

Presented by: Michael Miller and Lorraine Hill, Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario

10:15-10:45 An Indigenous approach to integrated services: Addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and families in the child welfare system at Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) (20 min presentation; 10 min Q&A)

Presented by: Jeffrey Schiffer and Melissa Hamonic, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto

10:45-11:00 *Break*

11:00-11:30 **Charting a course through the ocean of data: A deep dive into what we measure, how and why (20 min presentation; 10 min Q&A)**

Presented by: Amber Crowe, Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child & Family Services

11:30-12:00 **National study on the health care use of children who lived in foster homes (20 min presentation; 10 min Q&A)**

Presented by: Andrea Evans, CHEO Research Institute, Ashley Quinn, University of Toronto, Nico Tromé, McGill University

12:00-1:00 *Lunch*

1:00-2:30 **Full group roundtable discussion**

1. Based on our discussions yesterday and this morning, what is needed to move the identified opportunities into action? Think about:
 - Infrastructure
 - Training
 - Child welfare services
2. If a national approach was taken, what infrastructure would be needed? What organizations would be involved in the governance of this infrastructure?
3. What are the key priorities that we should be thinking about for a next meeting?

2:30-2:45 *Break*

2:45-3:00 **Wrap-up and closing**

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT LIST

Jurisdiction	Name	Institution
Presenters		
Quebec	Alicia Boatswain-Kyte	McGill University
	Alexandra Gilbert	First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health & Social Services Commission
	Nico Trocmé	McGill University
	Patricia Montambault	First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health & Social Services Commission
	Sonia Hélie	l'Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté
	Tonino Esposito	Université de Montréal
Ontario	Amber Crowe	Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child & Family Services
	Andrea Evans	CHEO Research Institute
	Ashley Quinn	University of Toronto
	Barbara Fallon	University of Toronto
	Jeffrey Schiffer	Native Child & Family Services of Toronto
	Kate Schumaker	Children's Aid Society of Toronto
	Leyco Wilson	Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region
	Lorraine Hill	Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario
	Melissa Hamonic	Native Child & Family Services of Toronto
	Michael Miller	Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario
	Rachael Lefebvre	University of Toronto
British Columbia	Steven Yong	Government of British Columbia
USA and Australia	Dana Hollinshead	Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect
	Fred Wulczyn	University of Chicago
	John Fluke	Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect
	Leah Bromfield	Australian Centre for Child Protection
National and/or federal	Alexandra Ouedraogo	Public Health Agency of Canada
	Helaina Gaspard	Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy
Other attendees		
Quebec	Annie Labonté	Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec
	Blair Armstrong	Kahnawake Shakotiaa'takehnhas Community Services
	Catherine Lemay	Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
	Chloe Ferguson	The Martin Family Initiative
	Delphine Collin-Vezina	Canadian Consortium on Child & Youth Trauma

Jurisdiction	Name	Institution
Quebec cont'd	Mireille De La Sablonniere-Griffin	Institut National de la Recherche Scientifique
	Nancy Gros-Louis	First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission
	McHugh	Université de Montréal
	Stéphanie Précourt	
Ontario	Ashleigh Egerton	Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies
	Bryn King	University of Toronto
	Cara McGonegal	Independent Collaborator & Researcher
	Emmaline Houston	University of Toronto
	Jo Rasteniene	Peel Children's Aid Society
	Kofi-Antwi Boasiako	Western University
	Nicole Bonnie	Independent Consultant
	Tara Black	University of Toronto
	Valerie McMurtry	Children's Aid Foundation of Canada
	Vania Patrick-Drakes	Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies
Northwest Territories	Amada White	Government of Northwest Territories
National and/or federal	Aimée Campeau	Public Health Agency of Canada
	Donna Lyons	First Nations Information Governance Centre
	Isabelle Quintal	Indigenous Services Canada
	James Allen	First Nations Information Governance Centre
	Kyla Marcoux	First Nations Information Governance Centre
	Masako Tanaka	Public Health Agency of Canada
	Pierre-Jean Alasset	Indigenous Services Canada
	Prateek Sharma	Public Health Agency of Canada