

## Foster Care Disparity for First Nations Children in 2011

This information sheet presents data on foster children which was, for the first time, collected by the National Household Survey (NHS) in 2011. We extend earlier analyses, which focused more broadly on disparities between the rates of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal foster children (Wray & Sinha, 2015). We more closely examine the rates of First Nations foster children, the disparity in these rates in comparison with non-Aboriginal foster children, and the rates of First Nations children living in foster homes on and off reserve. Data from the NHS suggests that, when Canada as a whole is considered, First Nations children are more highly overrepresented in foster care than other Aboriginal identity children, and that they are overrepresented in every Canadian province/territory. It also shows that there is pronounced variation across provinces/territories in the disparity in First Nations and non-Aboriginal foster child rates. Finally, this data shows that, in the western provinces, the rate of First Nations children living off reserve is much higher than the on-reserve First Nations foster child rate. However, because NHS data records information about children's foster families, rather than their families of origin, it is not possible to rule out the possibility that the elevated off-reserve rates are driven by First Nations children from on-reserve families who were placed in off-reserve foster homes.

### THE NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY (NHS-2011)

The National Household Survey (NHS-2011) is a nationally representative survey administered to 4.5 million dwellings in Canada. In 2011, for the first time, 'foster child' was included among responses to a question asking respondents to identify their relationship to persons regularly resident within their home. No definition of foster child was provided, and it is not clear whether respondents counted children in informal kinship care arrangements as foster children, or identified them using other response options, such as 'grandchild', or 'other (specify)' (Statistics Canada, 2011).

NHS-2011 also included three questions on Aboriginal identity. Responses to these questions allow us to categorize foster children by single-identity Aboriginal categories: 'Non-Aboriginal', 'First Nations', 'Metis', and 'Inuit'. A final category, 'other Aboriginal' includes both those children

### **Foster Child Rates and Disparity Statistics**

Foster child rates represent the number of foster children with a particular Aboriginal identity category per every 1000 children in the population sharing that Aboriginal identity. These rates are calculated by dividing the number of foster children in an Aboriginal identity category by the population of children in that category, and multiplying by 1000.

Disparity statistics are used to compare Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal foster child rates. They are calculated by dividing the foster child rate for an Aboriginal identity category by the non-Aboriginal foster child rate. A disparity value of 6 indicates that the rate of foster children within a specific Aboriginal identity category is 6 times higher than the foster child rate for non-Aboriginal children.

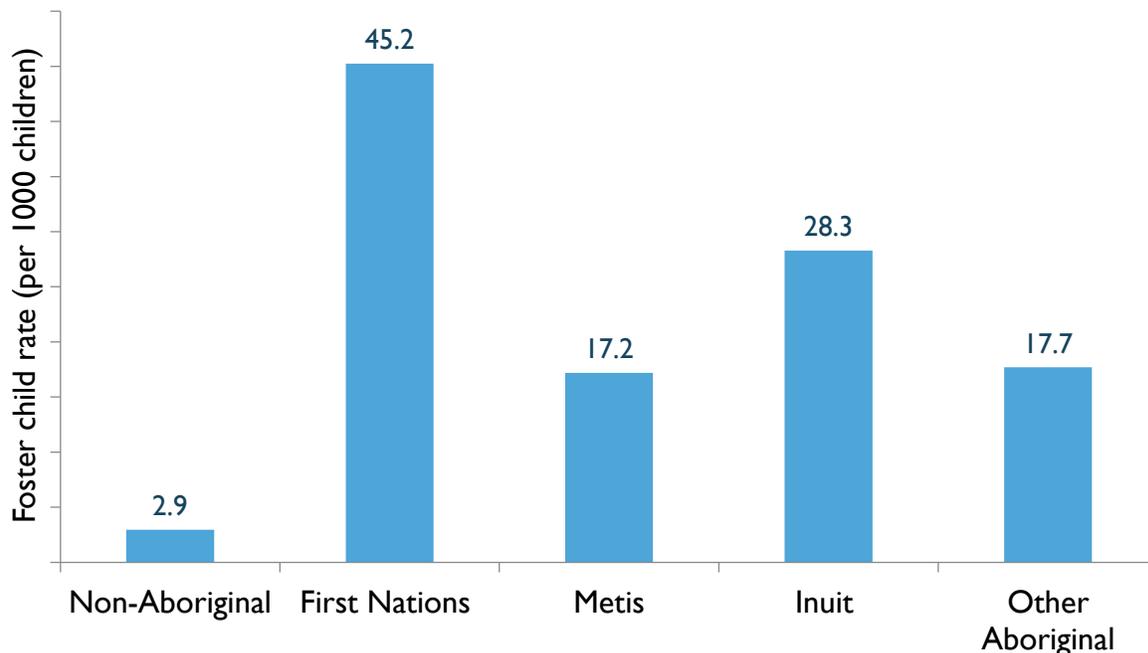
identified with multiple Aboriginal categories and children falling into a NHS ‘Other Aboriginal’ category.

Finally, the NHS also makes it possible to distinguish between on and off reserve households. However, with respect to foster children, these data are available only for the household of *placement* (the foster home); the NHS offers no information about household of *origin* (the child’s family home). Thus, for example, it is not possible to determine whether a foster child living in an off-reserve household lived on or off reserve prior to foster placement.

**FOSTER CHILD RATES BY ABORIGINAL IDENTITY CATEGORY**

Figure 1 presents the rate of foster children, by Aboriginal identity category, for Canada. The national non-Aboriginal foster child rate was 2.9 for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal children in the population. In contrast, the rates of Aboriginal foster children were in the double digits across all Aboriginal identity categories. At the national level, First Nations children were most highly overrepresented in the foster child population; there were 45.2 First Nations foster children for every 1,000 First Nations children in the Canadian population. Stated differently, 1 in every 22 First Nations children was a foster child in 2011. The rate of Metis foster children was 17.2 per 1000 children in the population (or 1 foster child for every 58 Metis children) and the rate of Inuit foster children was 28.3/1000 (or 1 foster child for every 33 Inuit children).

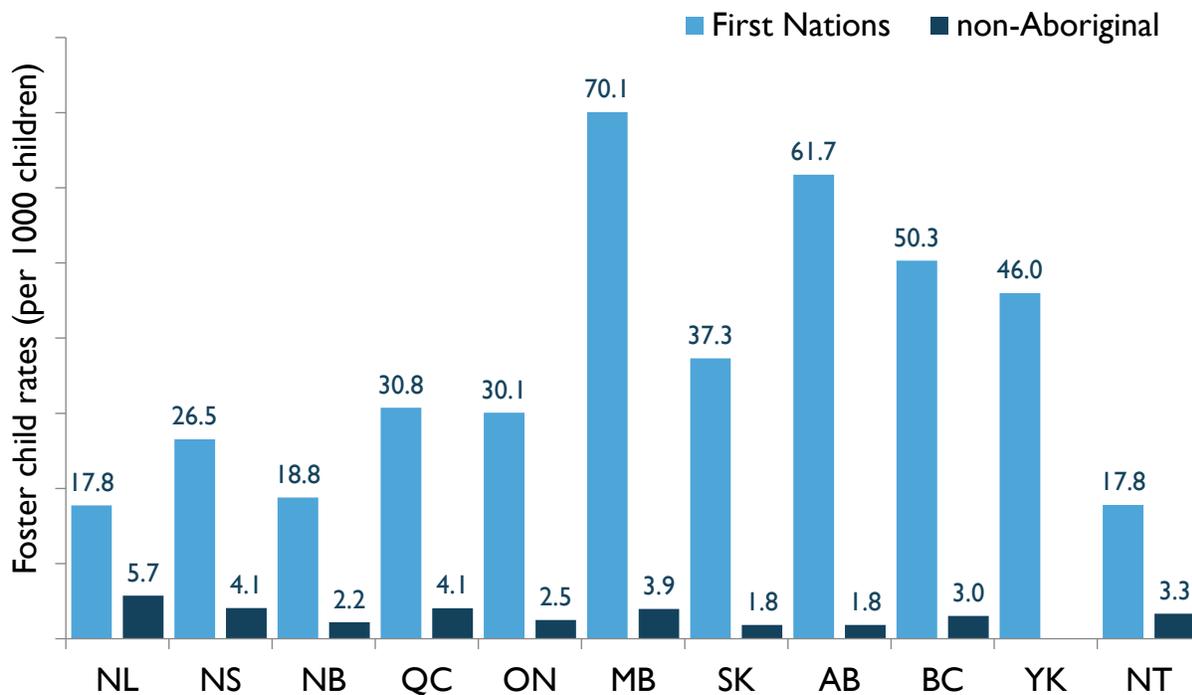
**FIGURE 1: RATE OF FOSTER CHILDREN (PER 1000 CHILDREN IN THE POPULATION), BY ABORIGINAL IDENTITY CATEGORY (STATISTICS CANADA, 2011)**



## **FIRST NATIONS AND NON-ABORIGINAL FOSTER CHILD RATES BY PROVINCE/TERRITORY**

Figure 2 presents the rates of First Nations and non-Aboriginal foster children, for each province/territory. It shows that First Nations children were overrepresented in foster care across Canadian jurisdictions, but also that the rate of First Nations foster children varied dramatically across provinces/territories. The rates of First Nations foster children ranged from a low of 17.8 foster children per every 1000 First Nations children in Newfoundland/Labrador and Northwest Territories, to a high of 70.1/1000 in Manitoba and 61.7 in Alberta. The variation in First Nations foster child rates across jurisdictions may reflect diverse factors, including (but not limited to) variations in: child welfare mandates/legislation, the scope and scale of child welfare services delivered by First Nations and Urban Aboriginal child welfare agencies, funding for prevention and in-home support services, child welfare practice models, and underlying socioeconomic conditions.

**FIGURE 2: RATE OF FIRST NATIONS AND NON-ABORIGINAL FOSTER CHILDREN (PER 1000 CHILDREN IN THE POPULATION), BY PROVINCE/TERRITORY (STATISTICS CANADA, 2011)**

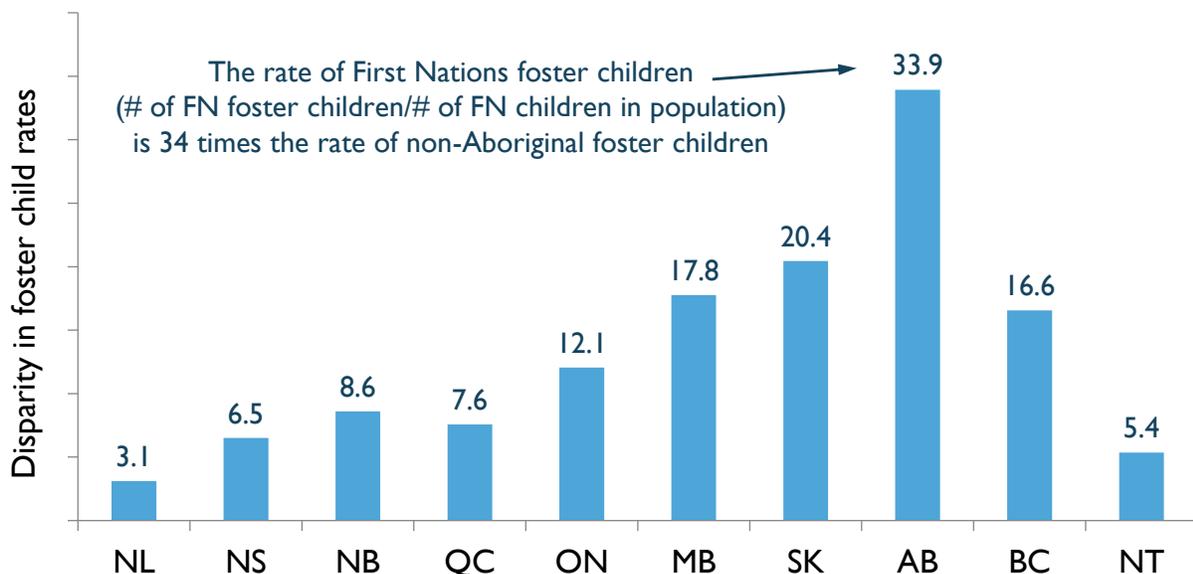


## **DISPARITY IN FIRST NATIONS AND NON-ABORIGINAL FOSTER CHILD RATES BY PROVINCE/TERRITORY**

Figure 3 more formally compares the provincial/territorial foster care rates for First Nations and non-Aboriginal children, presenting disparity statistics for each jurisdiction. These disparity statistics are calculated by dividing the rate of First Nations foster children in a jurisdiction by

the rate of non-Aboriginal foster children in the same jurisdiction. Accordingly, as indicated in the figure, the 33.9 value for Alberta indicates that, the First Nations foster child rate in Alberta was 34 times higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal children. The smallest disparity was in Newfoundland/Labrador, where the First Nations foster child rate was 3.1 times the non-Aboriginal rate. Note that the disparity in Newfoundland/Labrador is smaller than that in Northwest Territories (5.4), even though the First Nations foster child rate in both territories is 17.8 (see Figure 2). This is because the disparity statistics presented in Figure 3 factor in the cross-jurisdictional variation in both First Nations and non-Aboriginal foster child rates, and the non-Aboriginal foster child rate in Newfoundland Labrador (5.7) was higher than in Northwest Territories (3.3). Similarly, while the rate of First Nations foster children was highest in Manitoba, the non-Aboriginal foster child rate in Manitoba was also elevated in comparison with Alberta, and Alberta has the highest disparity in First Nations and non-Aboriginal foster child rates.

**FIGURE 3: DISPARITY IN FIRST NATIONS AND NON-ABORIGINAL RATES OF FOSTER CHILDREN (PER 1000 CHILDREN IN THE POPULATION), BY PROVINCE/TERRITORY (STATISTICS CANADA, 2011)**

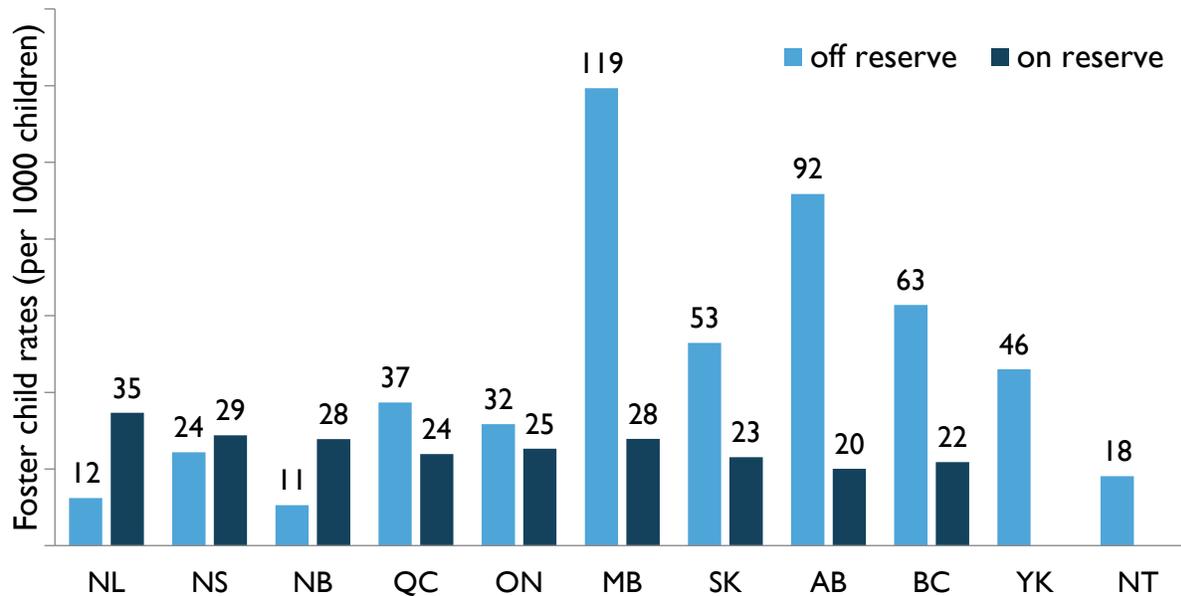


**FIRST NATIONS FOSTER CHILD RATES BY PROVINCE/TERRITORY AND ON/OFF RESERVE RESIDENCE OF FOSTER FAMILY**

Figure 4 gives the rates of First Nations foster children, living on and off- reserve, for each province and territory. It shows that First Nations children are overrepresented both on and off reserve across jurisdictions. It also shows that, in the western provinces the rate of foster children living off reserve was several times higher than the rate of First Nations foster children living on reserve. In Manitoba, there were 119 foster children for every 1000 off-reserve First Nations children; stated differently, 1 in 8 First Nations children living off reserve was a foster

child in 2011. In comparison, there were 28 foster children for every 1000 on-reserve First Nations children (1 in 36 on-reserve First Nations children were in foster care). Similarly in Alberta, there were 92 foster children for every 1000 off-reserve First Nations children (1 in 11 off-reserve First Nations children were in foster care). There were 20 foster children for every 1000 on-reserve First Nations children in Alberta (1 in 50 on-reserve First Nations children were in foster care). Note that a child who lived on-reserve with his family, but was placed in an off-reserve foster home is counted as off-reserve in the NHS. Accordingly, we cannot rule out the possibility that the elevated off-reserve rates are driven by First Nations children from on-reserve families who were placed in off-reserve foster homes. Other potential explanations include (but are not limited to) the possibilities that large numbers of off-reserve children are being placed in off-reserve foster care because of underlying socioeconomic conditions which place them at risk, or because of a lack of culturally appropriate prevention, support, and child welfare services. A mix of these factors could also be possible. Additional research is needed to better explain the patterns in and reasons for foster child rates for on and off-reserve First Nations children.

**FIGURE 4: RATE OF FIRST NATIONS FOSTER CHILDREN (PER 1000 CHILDREN IN THE POPULATION), BY PROVINCE/TERRITORY AND ON/OFF RESERVE RESIDENCE (STATISTICS CANADA, 2011)**



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