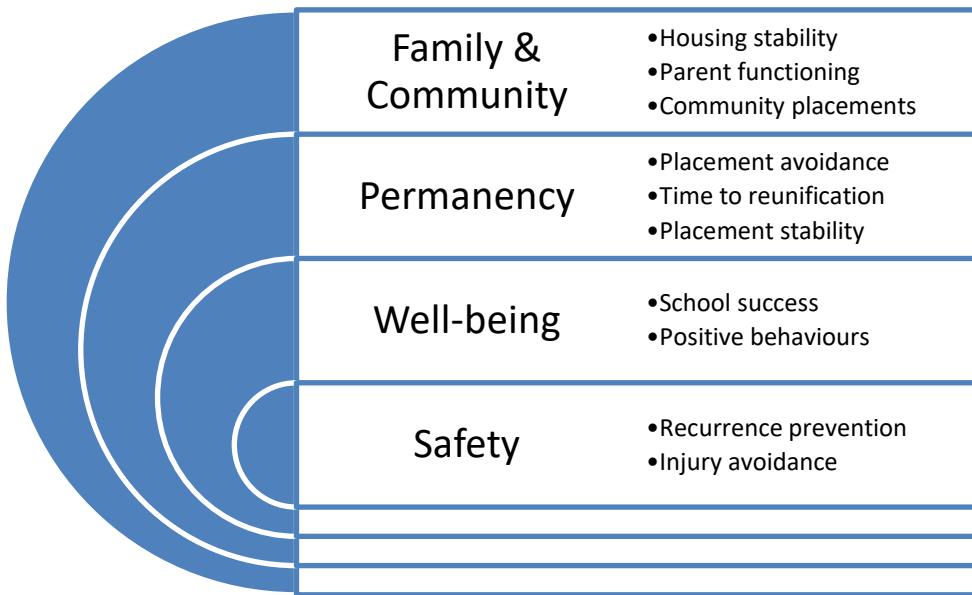# The National Child Welfare Outcome Matrix (NOM): Fundamental Information to Support Public Accountability

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The National Child Welfare Outcome Matrix (NOM[i]) was developed in consultation with provincial, territorial and First Nations service providers as an initiative of the Provincial/Territorial Directors of Child Welfare (DCW) and Human Resources Development Canada to provide a common framework for reporting on outcomes for children and families receiving child welfare services.

The NOM framework was designed to reflect the complex balance that child welfare authorities maintain between a child's immediate need for protection: a child's long-term requirement for a nurturing and stable home; a family's potential for growth; and the community's capacity to meet a child's needs. The framework tracks 10 indicators designed to reflect four nested domains: family and community support, permanence, child well-being and child safety. The indicators were selected to use readily available data from existing child welfare clinical administrative information systems. The first version of the framework was released in 1999,[ii] and an updated version in 2009.[iii]

NOM 1996-2012

Development: The initial phase of the NOM initiative (1996-1999) involved a comprehensive review of existing child welfare outcome tools, from which 10 indicators were selected through a consensus building process, including a national roundtable meeting with provincial, territorial and First Nations child welfare policy and service organizations.

Feasibility Assessment: The second phase of the initiative (2000-2002) was designed to further develop and test operational definitions for the NOM outcome indicators. The primary objective of this phase was to assess the capacity of provincial and territorial child welfare information systems (CWIS) to track and export key service data that could be used to calculate outcome indicators. Phase II was particularly interested in CWIS' capacities to move beyond year-end case counts to report case-flow statistics.

Operationalization: Building on the feasibility assessment analysis of information systems, the NOM research team collaborated with provincial and territorial officials to operationalize, test and contextualize the NOM indicators (2005-2009). A first set of results was presented to the DCW, invited researchers and First Nations and federal officials at a roundtable meeting in Montreal in October 2009.

Pilot Testing: A series of technical meetings was held with DCW representatives in 2011 and 2012 to pilot test and revise the NOM operational definitions using aggregate data from participating provinces and territories. The results demonstrated that most provinces and territories could report accurately on three of the 10 indicators and had the capacity to address another six indicators without having to make changes to their information systems.

Completion: Several options for a national infrastructure to collect, analyze and publicly report the indicators were presented to the DCW, but the provincial/territorial table was not prepared to proceed. In the absence of a clear mandate, the NOM research team terminated this national project in 2012.

OTHER INITIATIVES

Working directly with provincial child welfare agencies, the NOM research teams at the universities of McGill, Montreal and Toronto used the NOM framework to document service outcomes in Quebec and Ontario.

The Quebec GFISC project (Gestion fondée sur les indicateurs de suivi clinique) tracked five of the NOM indicators and developed a province-wide report for four of the indicators for 2002/03 to 2013/14.[iv] Using the same methodology, the indicators were used to examine the dynamics associated with the overrepresentation of First Nations children in Quebec's child welfare system.[v]

Although public reporting on the GFISC indicators ceased, following a major restructuring of the Quebec child welfare system, the research team has extended the analyses focusing on socioeconomic and geographic factors.[vi,vii]

The Ontario Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (OCANDS) extracts administrative data from participating child welfare agencies and standardizes these data to better understand the service trajectories and outcomes. OCANDS was used to derive Service Performance Indicators (SPIs)[viii] for Ontario child welfare agencies based on the NOM framework.[ix] Although OCANDS is no longer being funded as a province-wide data system, the project continues to support a number of agencies (see for example Native Child and Family Services of Toronto[x]).

A number of other provinces report regularly on child welfare service outcome indicators. For instance, British Columbia reports on protection and permanence indicators, providing comparative data between jurisdictions over significant periods of time and broken down by Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.[xi] At the national level, the Public Health Agency of Canada is developing a Canadian Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) that is being designed to use aggregate or case-level data to report on population-level child welfare service indicators[xii] and Statistics Canada has expanded census reports to include information about foster children that can be analysed by provincial and First Nations, Métis and Inuit status.[xiii]

The NOM initiative demonstrated that child welfare service providers could be reporting on a common set of indicators that would provide a foundation to ensure public accountability for services to the most vulnerable communities. These indicators do not require the development of costly new information systems; they simply require a commitment to transparency.

Endnotes

[i] NOM is also referred to in some documents as the National Child Welfare Outcome Measures.

[ii] Trocmé, N., Nutter, B., MacLaurin B., & Fallon, B. (1999). *Child welfare outcome indicator matrix*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto, Faculty of Social Work, Bell Canada Child Welfare Research Unit. https://cwrp.ca/publications/child-welfare-outcome-indicator-matrix

[iii] Trocmé, N., MacLaurin, B., Fallon, B., Shlonsky, A., Mulcahy, M., Esposito, T. (2009). *National Child Welfare Outcomes Indicator Matrix (NOM)*. Montreal, QC: McGill University: Centre for Research on Children and Families. https://cwrp.ca/publications/national-child-welfare-outcomes-indicator-matrix-nom

[iv] Esposito, T., Trocmé, N., Chabot, M., Gates-Panneton, G, Léveillé, S., & Robichaud, M.J. (2019). Mieux comprendre pour mieux servir : Une démarche de mobilisation de connaissance en protection de la jeunesse au Québec. *Intervention 150*, 5-24.

[v] De La Sablonnière-Griffin, M., Sinha, V. Esposito, T., Chabot, M., & Trocmé, N. (2106). T*rajectories of First Nations youths subject to the Youth Protection Act (Component 3): Analysis of mainstream youth protection agencies*

administrative data. Wendake, QC: First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission, pages 1-77.

vi Esposito, T., Caldwell, J., Chabot, M., Blumenthal, A., Trocmé, N., Hélie, S., Fallon, B., & Précourt, S. (2024). Socioeconomic risk and the longitudinal child lifetime prevalence of child protection involvement. *Child Abuse and Neglect (154)*, 1-9.

vii Esposito, T., Chabot, M., Calwell, J., Webb, C., Delaye, A., Fluke, J. Trocmé, N., & Bywaters, P. (2022.) The differential effects of localized disparities in socioeconomic vulnerabilities and child protection involvement for reasons of neglect: Mutilevel structural equation modeling. *Chid and Youth Services Review, 138*, 106505.

viii Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services: Ontario's Children's Aid Societies performance indicators. https://www.ontario.ca/document/ontarios-childrens-aid-societies-performance-indicators.

ix Fallon, B., Trocmé, N., Black, T., Ekins, A., O'Connor, C., & Betito, P. (2017). *Recurrence rates by child protection concern*. CWRP Information Sheet #189E. Toronto, ON: Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal.

x https://nativechild.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/NCFST-Annual-Report-to-Community-LR-1.pdf

xi https://mcfd.gov.bc.ca/reporting/services/child-protection/services-to-children-in-need-of-protection/performance-indicators

xii Pollock, N., Ouédraogo, A., Trocmé, N., Hovdestad, W., Miskie, A., Crompton, L., Campeau, A., Tanaka, M., Zhang, C., Laprise, C., Tonmyr, L. (2024). Rates of out-of-home care among children in Canada: An analysis of national administrative child welfare data. *Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada (44)*4. 152-165

xiii https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/41-20-0002/412000022024001-eng.htm