

Canadian Child Welfare Administrative Data Knowledge Exchange Summary Report

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Table of Contents

- I. Context for the data exchange project 3
 - Introduction 3
 - Background 3
 - Project objectives..... 6
- II. Summary of 2020 meeting..... 8
 - Agenda 8
 - Attendance..... 13
 - Presentation Summaries..... 15
- III. Considerations in working with child welfare administrative data 25
- IV. Next steps 30
- V. References 32
- Appendix 36

I. Context for the data exchange project

Introduction

In Canada, the development of health and social services—including child welfare policy and practice—is done at the provincial, territorial, and band level. As a result, child welfare systems vary across jurisdiction. These differences in practice and policy extend to the collection, management, storage, and use of administrative data. Some provinces have centralized databases that are managed at the provincial level to warehouse data extractions from regional agency offices (e.g., British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec), and other provinces leave data collection and management to the mandated child welfare agencies with whom they have data-sharing agreements (e.g., Manitoba). Indigenous child welfare agencies serving children and families on and off reserve are responsible for collecting and storing their data, however Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) centralizes the data for purposes of quality assurance and program development, particularly as it relates to overrepresentation of First Nations children in child welfare. Some Indigenous child and family services also have data-sharing agreements with provinces that incorporate their traditional territories as a part of provincial monitoring and surveillance of child welfare populations and services.

The Child Welfare Administrative Data Knowledge Meeting, held in Montreal on February 10 and 11th, 2020, included stakeholders from Canadian and American universities, child welfare agencies, Indigenous health and social service agencies, and provincial and federal government representatives who shared their experiences working with child welfare administrative data. What follows is a summary report on the context in which this collaboration developed, the goals of the meeting, and the information meeting participants shared with the group.

This meeting was supported through Professor Tonino Esposito’s Canada Research Chair in Social Services for Vulnerable Children, Professor Nico Trocmé’s SSHRC partnership grant, and Professor Barbara Fallon’s Canada Research Chair in Child Welfare. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has also generously supported this meeting and we extend our sincere gratitude to our partners at PHAC for their collaboration and support. We also thank the 40 meeting participants¹ who gave their time sharing valuable insights on working with child welfare administrative data.

Background

The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) is currently the only Canada-wide data source on child maltreatment investigations and out-of-home care placements. To date, there have been three CIS cycles at the federal level, using data from 1998, 2003, and 2008. CIS data is drawn from a representative sample of child welfare agencies

¹ See pages 12-13 for a full list of participants.

from across Canada. Child welfare cases are sampled over a three-month period, and from there, cases meeting inclusion criteria are analyzed to arrive at an annual estimate of maltreatment rates and types. The CIS provides a point-in-time *estimate* of the number of child welfare investigations in Canada and case-level characteristics, such as maltreatment type, duration of maltreatment, child characteristics, and caregiver characteristics. The CIS is an invaluable source of information about the landscape of child welfare in Canada during the sampling frame, which is generalized to support child welfare research and policy making in Canada between cycles. However, while the CIS is the most powerful source of information on child welfare in the pan-Canadian context, it is not longitudinal, nor does it derive from administrative data, and therefore represents a gap in what we know about the wellbeing of children in Canada's child welfare systems.

Some provinces and territories have conducted their own CIS cycles, typically sampling child welfare data from select agencies within the given jurisdiction. Since 1993, Ontario has completed 6 cycles (Fallon, et al. 2020; Fallon, et al. 2015; Fallon, et al. 2010; Fallon, et al. 2005; Trocmé, et al. 2002; "Ontario", 1998). Quebec completed child welfare incidence studies in 2008 and 2014 (Hélie, et al, 2017; Hélie, 2012). Incidence studies have been conducted in Saskatchewan and British Columbia (MacLaurin, et al. 2011; MacLaurin, et al. 2011). Alberta conducted incidence studies in 2003 and 2008 (MacLaurin, et al. 2005, 2013). Finally, in 2003, the Northwest Territories completed an incidence study (MacLaurin, et al. 2005). There have also been First Nations Incidence Studies, which is a component of the Canadian Incidence Study and has been instrumental in understanding the overrepresentation of First Nations children in Canada's child welfare systems (Trocmé, et al., 2005; Sinha, et al., 2011). While these jurisdiction- and population-specific studies are quite robust in providing point-in-time information, they do not capture longitudinal processes and change over time for children and families involved with child welfare systems.

Administrative data is needed to better understand the long-term outcomes for children and families involved in Canada's child welfare systems, particularly regarding service outcomes across service trajectories. While some provinces, jurisdictions, and agencies have administrative data that can be used to study change over time, this Child Welfare Data Exchange Meeting highlighted that the capacity, rules governing accesses to said data, and differences in data collection and child welfare organization is quite variable across jurisdictions. Therefore, conducting cross-jurisdictional analysis for comparative or national purposes is limited.

Although there is growing recognition that child welfare services must be based on best practice, there is currently no Canada-wide monitoring entity in place to track the most basic information about the effectiveness of these services over time. This is primarily, but not solely, because there is very limited capacity to conduct the type of research that is sorely needed to understand the long-term service trajectories and outcomes for children and their families receiving child welfare services. Although there is a wealth of clinical administrative child welfare and Canadian census data available that could inform service planning and policy making for vulnerable children and families, social work scholars and child welfare authorities

have not had the longitudinal analytic tools or programming expertise required to make effective use of these data. As a result, child welfare authorities often make program and policy decisions based on practice intuition, negative public outcries about ineffective services, descriptive cross-sectional annual service statistics (which tend to disproportionately over-represent long-term service provision and under-represent short-term services), and research evidence drawn primarily from other countries (United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia) that have child welfare systems that are structurally different from those in Canada.

One federal level proposal submitted by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and Statistics Canada is a pan-Canadian longitudinal dataset on child welfare in Canada. This dataset, currently titled the Canadian Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS), is not yet operational (a full summary of the presentation on the CCWIS can be found on pp. 22-23 of this report). While there were several obstacles discussed among meeting participants with regards to building a nation-wide longitudinal child welfare database, a resource like the CCWIS would allow for pan-Canadian analysis as well as for cross-jurisdictional comparison, and better understanding of Canada's child welfare infrastructure and outcomes. Currently, significant intra-jurisdictional discrepancies in data collection and differences in child welfare practice (e.g., placement, permanence, and follow-up), makes it difficult to have accurate and up-to-date statistics on children and youth in care on a pan-Canadian level. Further, definitional differences in legislation, as well as policy changes that impact indicators between and among the provinces and territories (e.g., how "neglect" or "behavioral problems" are defined from one jurisdiction to the next), also create challenges in comparing and collating provincial/territorial data for purposes of longitudinal analysis. However, tangible examples from outside Canada with similar challenges may help inform Canadian longitudinal child welfare data infrastructure.

Like Canada, the United States is a large country with many different jurisdictions mandated to implement welfare programs. The U.S. opted to solve some of these data collection problems and create longitudinal datasets at the federal or state level. Child welfare administrative data in the U.S. is collected by states and consolidated at a national level in several databases. It is reported on by the federal government and reinforced by federal legislation requiring and refining data collection regulations. National databases in the United States provide one model of integrating and creating longitudinal administrative child welfare data from a large number of smaller jurisdictions. Cross-jurisdictional and national administrative child welfare databases in the U.S. have been developed over the past decades to support comparative analyses on a national level. Some federal funding is conditional upon state reporting to these centralized databases.² The U.S. has published a series of comprehensive outcome studies on children and youth in care over the last several decades (examples of outcome studies from 1998 to 2016 available through the Children's Bureau, 2020). These studies are possible through increased

² The National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) houses and distributes national level data sets including the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), the National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS), the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW), the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), and the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2020).

technological advances in national longitudinal administrative child welfare data collection as well as national legislative changes related to data collection and analysis since the late 1970s. Several pieces of federal U.S. legislation, starting with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in 1974, have articulated priority areas for data collection and research, founded and funded centralized data collection and storage infrastructure, and mandated that information resulting from these data be shared with practitioners and policymakers (see also: Child Abuse Prevention, Adoption, and Family Services Act, 1988; Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Amendments, 1996; CAPTA Reauthorization Act, 2010).

A move towards longitudinal national child welfare data infrastructure in Canada may require legislative and policy action at the federal level as seen in the American context, and/or data sharing agreements amongst provinces and territories. It will also require collaboration among child welfare service providers to streamline the way administrative data is collected, organized, and shared with government and academic partners. In a vision paper on the future of advanced nation-wide data collection, Statistics Canada recently suggested that gaps in administrative data collection need to be identified and opportunities to design new outputs should be explored via open innovation, targeted coalitions, and strategic partnerships (Salemink, Dufour, & van der Steen, 2019). To achieve those goals, a partnership among government, academic, and civil stakeholders would be beneficial for increasing data collection and organization capacity at the agency-level and developing sharing agreements, secure warehousing, and powerful analytic tools. A national longitudinal child welfare administrative data network—whether administered through government, a university, a private third-party, or a mix of all three—creates an opportunity to drive evidenced-based scholarship that fosters grounded public policy more likely to lead to better outcomes for child welfare-involved children and families (Jensen & Kainz, 2019).

The project meeting summarized below represents one of many steps towards the creation of a cohesive and collaborative pan-Canadian child welfare data network.

Project objectives

The jurisdictional variations in child maltreatment definitions, data gathering, extraction, and analytical methodologies represent roadblocks to overcome in the effort to establish a national level understanding of child welfare service trajectories. These gaps formed the basis for the present Child Welfare Data Knowledge Exchange Project. Our objective was to bring together agency and government level stakeholders from across Canada, as well as experts in child welfare data science from the academic setting in Canada and the United States, in a discussion of studies and projects using longitudinal child welfare administrative data with a long-term goal of creating a pan-Canadian collaboration to support child welfare administrative data initiatives. This child welfare administrative data knowledge exchange meeting followed a highly constructive child welfare administrative data panel held at the 2017 International Society for Child Indicators conference.

A growing number of initiatives using case-level provincial, territorial, and Indigenous child welfare administrative data are providing insights on the needs of children and families. These initiatives have promising applications for longitudinal research and further implications for empirically-informed policy development. The two-day meeting in Montreal included representatives from Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, British Columbia, Alberta, and First Nations organizations who were invited to share information on various regional, provincial, inter-territorial, and national child welfare data initiatives currently underway. In addition, experts gave presentations on several initiatives in the U.S. states of New Jersey, Colorado, and California to describe best practices and lessons learned related to longitudinal child welfare data collection and analysis in the U.S., where federal legislation and funded reporting mandates shape a different context than in Canada.

Specifically, the goals of this data exchange meeting were as follows: (1) to share new results from these initiatives; (2) to examine the methodological issues linked to the extraction, cleaning, and analysis of these data; (3) to discuss governance, ethical, and partnership dimensions of these initiatives; and (4) to explore possibilities for collaborations and comparison across jurisdictions.

This project provided the opportunity to document the lessons shared by participants from child welfare and data science domains to understand the challenges and opportunities associated with longitudinal child welfare research. With this project, our hope was to deepen national level connections among stakeholders in child welfare administrative data by sharing innovative projects, ideas, results, and methods for using administrative data and to explore possibilities for knowledge sharing collaborations between and among jurisdictions.

The subsequent sections of this report provide a summary of the child welfare administrative data knowledge exchange meetings which took place in Montreal, Quebec, on February 10th and 11th, 2020. In **Section II** we include the agenda of topics addressed and a list of the multi-sectoral group of researchers, policymakers, data scientists, public health officials, and child welfare practitioners in attendance. Also in section II readers will find summaries of the presentations focusing on methods, challenges, and the products (policy change, reports, service changes) of longitudinal analysis. These summaries were written based on detailed notes taken by four note takers working simultaneously through the two-day meeting. These summaries were then validated by the presenters in the weeks following the event. **Section III** provides a longer thematic narrative report of the topics discussed. **Section IV** concludes the report with an overview of the next steps we plan to take to move this collaborative initiative forward.

II. Summary of 2020 meeting

Agenda

Day 1: February 10, 2020

Theme: Provincial/territorial child welfare administrative data systems. Provincial/territorial delegates are asked to present information related to their child welfare data collection system. In addition to presenting results of longitudinal analyses, presenters will describe: **(1)** describe the structure of the administrative data the agency uses, **(2)** discuss issues arising from their data analysis efforts, and **(3)** describe the governance, ethics, and access mechanisms related to the data.

MORNING

8:00 – 8:30 Continental breakfast served in the Mount Royal room

8:30 – 9:00: Nico Trocmé and Tonino Esposito welcome and overview 9:00 – 10:30: Quebec administrative data

- 1) **9 – 9:30: Tonino Esposito, CRC in Social Services for Vulnerable Children, Université de Montréal. *Focusing in on disparities in socioeconomic disadvantages and child protection services: Exploring the use of Quebec’s child protection administrative data.* This presentation focuses on the extraction and manipulation of Quebec’s clinical administrative child protection data while providing examples of the extent to which regional variations in poverty and health and social services spending impact the risk of placement and regional latent differences in delivery of child protection services.**
- 2) **9:30 – 9:50: Sonia Hélie, Institut Universitaire Jeunes en Difficulté. *Cumulative time-in-care and permanency for Quebec’s children placed in substitute care.* This presentation focuses on the use of Quebec clinical administrative data to monitor changes in placement trajectories following the child protection policy reform in 2007. Time to permanency and permanency outcomes will be presented along with the challenges of working with said data.**
- 3) **9:50 – 10:10: Derek Montour, Blair Armstrong, and Dr. Colleen Fuller, Kahnawake Shakotia'takehnhas Community Services (KSCS). *Penelope data system and longitudinal analysis of KSCS child welfare data.* This presentation will describe the child welfare administrative data program used by KSCS known as Penelope and its capacity for longitudinal analysis.**
- 4) **10:10 – 10:30: Nancy Gros-Louis McHugh and Patricia Montambault, Commission de la santé et des services sociaux des Premières Nations du Québec et du Labrador / First**

Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission. *This presentation provides information on research initiatives that were developed based on federal and provincial administrative data in collaboration with McGill University and Université de Montréal. We will briefly describe the research projects carried out since 2008, the issues related to access to databases, and the desired perspective to better understand the trajectories of First Nations youth and their living environment. The goal is to direct decision-makers towards renewed strategies governed by First Nations.*

10:30 – 10:45 Break

12:00: Ontario administrative data

- 1) **10:45 – 11:15: Barbara Fallon, Tara Black, and Bryn King, University of Toronto.** ***Ontario Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (OCANDS).*** *OCANDS extracts administrative data from participating child protection agencies across Ontario. We have individual data sharing agreements with each participating agency. Methodological issues encountered with data extraction, cleaning, and analysis will be discussed. Ethics for the project are held with the University of Toronto; privacy and data security are also monitored by departments of the University of Toronto. OCANDS has developed tools for participating agencies, which include the calculation of indicators as well as the "Top Ten." The research team has developed an entry cohort, which included all families investigated in consenting participating agencies, and used results to generate a generalized linear model. Past and present partnerships as well as future possible collaborations will be discussed.*

- 2) **11:15 – 11:45: Tanya Morton, Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto.** ***Longitudinal Analysis: Major Considerations from Catholic Children's Aid Society.*** *At the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto, we have extracted longitudinal child welfare data from our administrative data system. The question posed to the data is if children first come into contact with the agency through an investigation, what is the likelihood that they will become progressively more known to the agency based on race. Are children more likely to be verified, transferred, or admitted within one year based on race? Previous results at the agency demonstrated disproportionate representation and disparity at certain child welfare decision points. The methodological considerations related to extraction, cleaning, and analysis of these data are discussed.*

11:45 – 12:15 Debrief and open discussion

12:15 – 1:00 Lunch served in the Mount Royal room

AFTERNOON

1:00 -2:00: Marni Brownell, University of Manitoba. ***Manitoba's cross-over kids: examining the overlap between child welfare and youth justice system involvement using linked***

administrative data. *Using population-wide data available in the Manitoba Population Research Data Repository, we linked together information on child welfare services, justice contacts, health service use, and education services and outcomes to examine the overlap between child welfare and youth criminal justice involvement. We also identified factors associated with involvement in both systems.*

2:00 – 3:00: Steven Yong, Executive Director, Modelling, Analysis and Information Management Branch, British Columbia. *Tracking interactions and outcomes with child welfare services in British Columbia.* *Using caseload information to learn about the flow of client interactions with British Columbia’s child welfare services. Our ability to use this information to describe the experience of children and youth in care and their outcomes provides opportunities to understanding more about our clients.*

3:00 – 3:15 Break

3:15 – 4:15: Alanah Jansen, Cheuk Pan, Bryn King, John Fluke, Adam Filleul, and Lil Tonmyr, Government of Northwest Territories, Pan-Northern Project. *The development of a northern administrative data system and its implications for longitudinal child welfare research.* *The Pan- Northern Child Welfare Administrative Data Development Project is a collaborative initiative across the territorial governments, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and external researchers. The social services divisions of the Government of Northwest Territories, the Government of Yukon and the Government of Nunavut have agreed to collaborate on their child welfare information systems to strive for data uniformity across the territories in order to capture a Northern perspective. The development of a recurrence of maltreatment indicator has begun. Methodological issues linked to the development of the recurrence indicator, initial results from analyses, and lessons learned will be shared.*

4:15 – 4:30 Debrief and open discussion

Day 2: February 11th 2020

Themes: 1) Examples of child welfare administrative data systems and analysis from jurisdictions outside Canada, 2) Canadian national-level initiatives for data collection and longitudinal research in child welfare, and 3) Opening opportunities for ongoing collaboration on national-level child welfare administrative data projects and points of consideration.

MORNING

8:00 – 8:30 Continental breakfast served in the Mount Royal room

8:30 – 9:30: John Fluke and Dana Hollinshead, University of Denver Kempe Centre for the Treatment and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. *How longitudinal analysis of administrative data can inform child welfare policy.*

9:30 – 10:30: Bryn King, University of Toronto. *California's child welfare administrative data system and longitudinal research.* This presentation will describe the development, governance, and use (both public access and research) of California's child welfare administrative data, held by the California Child Welfare Indicators Project at the University of California, Berkeley in partnership with the California Department of Social Services. The linkage of these data to additional administrative data will also be discussed, and results from population-based studies will be described.

10:30 – 11:00 Break

11:00– 12:00: Michael MacKenzie, McGill University. *Building University-Child Welfare Agency Data Partnerships: An example from New Jersey.* *Public child welfare authorities are under increasing pressure from legislative and public oversight efforts to provide greater data transparency, while simultaneously pursuing efforts to improve their foundation for data-informed decision-making and policy. Partnerships with university-based researchers provide an opportunity for child welfare agencies to gain support and expertise in management and assessment of administrative data, and for researchers to gain opportunity to address questions that can inform future policy and practice. These partnerships, however, are often fraught with challenges stemming from divergent goals and needs of the partners. An example from the state of New Jersey is presented to contribute to discussions on how researchers can better address the direct questions of need for agency partners, and the potential value to agencies of a deeper embrace of research.*

12:00 – 1:00 lunch served in the Mount Royal room

1:00 – 2:00: Wendy Hovdestad and Yannick Fortin, Public Health Agency of Canada and Statistics Canada. *Presenting the Canadian Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) Methodological challenges inherent in processing cross-jurisdictional administrative data.* *CCWIS is a Public Health Agency of Canada project aimed at developing a record-level administrative data surveillance system to meet evolving data needs of child welfare stakeholders across Canada. Its development will require ongoing partnerships with Statistics Canada, the Provinces and Territories, as well as Indigenous partners. The objectives of the presentation will be to: 1) describe the CCWIS goals, proposed timeline, key actors and current state; and 2) solicit input from meeting participants to help solve challenging technical questions.*

2:00 – 3:00: Data exchange roundtable

Guiding question: What are the perceived major considerations for accessing and analyzing data cross- jurisdictionally as identified by the presentations?

Points of consideration:

- Data access and processing issues

- Analytic issues
- Ethical issues

3:00 – 3:15 Break

3:15 – 4:30: Next Steps and future considerations:

- Possible sources of funding to continue a cross jurisdictional collaboration
- Considerations for next year's meeting
- Who is missing at this table?
- Summary report – deliverable for PHAC
- Possible publications (Child Welfare Research Portal (CWRP), etc.)

Attendance

Attendee	Affiliation	Jurisdiction
Bruce MacLaurin	University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work	Alberta
Steven Yong	British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development	British Columbia
Dana Hollinshead	Kempe Center, University of Colorado	Colorado, USA
John D Fluke	Kempe Center, University of Colorado School of Medicine	Colorado, USA
Lil Tonmyr	Public Health Agency of Canada	Government of Canada
Lindsay Crompton	Public Health Agency of Canada	Government of Canada
Wendy Hovdestad	Public Health Agency of Canada	Government of Canada
Yannick Fortin	Statistics Canada	Government of Canada
Marni Brownell	Manitoba Centre for Health Policy & University of Manitoba	Manitoba
Alanah Jansen	Pan-Northern Project	Northwest Territories
Cheuk Kin Pang	Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority	Northwest Territories
Adam Filleul	Pan-Northern Project	Nunavut
Amber Crowe	Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child & Family Services	Ontario
Barbara Fallon	University of Toronto	Ontario
Bryn King	University of Toronto	Ontario
Jill K Stoddart	Family & Children's Services of Waterloo Region	Ontario
Tanya Rosemary Morton	Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto	Ontario
Tara Black	University of Toronto	Ontario
Alicia Boatswain-Kyte	McGill University, School of Social Work	Quebec
Ashleigh Delaye	Researcher, Canada Research Chair, Social Services for Vulnerable Children	Quebec
Colleen Fuller	Onkwata'karitáhtshera, Kahnawà:ke	Quebec

Delphine Collin-Vézina	Canada Research Chair, Child Welfare; Director, Centre for Research on Children & Families, McGill University	Quebec
Derek Montour	Kahnawake Shakotiiia'takehnhas Community Services	Quebec
Hanna Caldwell	Researcher, Canada Research Chair, Social Services for Vulnerable Children	Quebec
Lesley Hill	Commission spéciale sur les droits des enfants et la protection de la jeunesse	Quebec
Marie Saint-Girons	Canadian Incidence Study (CIS), University of Toronto	Quebec
Melanie Doucet	McGill University, School of Social Work (PhD Candidate)	Quebec
Michael MacKenzie	McGill University, School of Social Work	Quebec
Mireille de la Sablonnière-Griffin	McGill University, School of Social Work (PhD Candidate)	Quebec
Nico Trocmé	Director, School of Social Work; Philip Fisher Chair in Social Work; McGill University	Quebec
Nancy Gros-Louis McHugh	La Commission de la santé et des services sociaux des Premières Nations du Québec et du Labrador	Quebec
Patricia Montambault	La Commission de la santé et des services sociaux des Premières Nations du Québec et du Labrador	Quebec
Sonia Hélie	Institut Universitaire Jeunes en Difficulté	Quebec
Tonino Esposito	Canada Research Chair, Social Services for Vulnerable Children; Associate Professor, University of Montreal	Quebec

Presentation Summaries

Tonino Esposito PhD, Canada Research Chair in Social Services for Vulnerable Children, Université de Montréal. *Focusing on disparities in socioeconomic disadvantages and child protection services: Exploring the use of Quebec's child protection administrative data.* Dr. Esposito presented longitudinal research that used clinical administrative child protection data for the entire child welfare population in Quebec from the years 2002 to 2013. The clinical data was extracted from Quebec's child welfare, youth justice, adoption databases and from databases tracking payment for health and social services, specifically the Projet Intégration Jeunesse (PIJ) and the Système Information Ressources Type Familial (SIRTF). The result of this data was 22 tables of youth data that was then sorted into four trajectory cohorts: recurrence, service, placement, and reunification. These data tables were linked with a socioeconomic vulnerability index, which is weighted by child population, and created by using census data and mapped by postal code resulting in a visual representation of "hot spots" for child vulnerabilities in Quebec's neighbourhoods. These child vulnerability maps were developed for a publicly available report for the Foundation Dr. Julien to advocate for the improvement of accessibility of social pediatric centers in Quebec. These data have also been used to (a) better understand the dynamics of child protection services in QC and to (b) support the organization's capacity to bring questions of evidence to the forefront of management and service delivery decisions. A common set of longitudinal service outcome indicators were developed that provide an overview of the complex issues common to families involved with child protection services in the last 20 years. These indicators are nested within 4 ecological domains: (1) child safety; (2) child well-being; (3) permanence; and (4) family and community support. These indicators measure the rate of (a) recurrence of maltreatment; (b) placement in out-of-home care; (c) placement instability; (d) family reunification; (e) youth criminal services; and (f) family court appearances. These indicators are designed to reflect the complex balance of ecologies that child protection 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. There has been uptake of these findings, notably through the proliferation of social pediatrics clinics in Quebec. While this has been a positive development, Professor Esposito noted that restructuring of health and social services and policy goals by the previous provincial government created obstacles to implementing practice and policy recommendations based on this and other longitudinal analysis.

Sonia Hélie, Institut Universitaire Jeunes en Difficulté at the Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux (CIUSSS) du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal. *Cumulative time-in-care and permanency for Quebec's children placed in substitute care: Mandatory use of admin data to monitor changes in placement trajectories.* Dr. Hélie presented longitudinal study analyzing cumulative time in care and permanency for children placed in substitute care in Québec. The project collected and analyzed administrative data from the Projet Intégration Jeunesse (PIJ) system across 3 cycles (2008-2020) as part of mandatory monitoring of changes in placement trajectories after the reform of the Quebec Youth Protection Act in 2007, which in

part aimed to improve placement stability. The presentation focused on Cycle 2 (2013-2015) data analysis, which included data from across all 16 Integrated Health Centers/Child Protection Services (CPS) agencies of Quebec and followed cohorts of children in care between the ages of 0 and 17 years for three to four years following the legislative reform (2009-2013). Significant challenges related to data extraction and analysis arose related to a lack of unique ID for the same child across the various CPS agencies. This can lead to overestimation of the rate of children reported to child protection, underestimation of repeated reports and recurrence, and a fragmented trajectory for children who move from agency to agency. Data entry procedures may change while normative data entry frameworks are not always up to date. There is a lack of reliability for some variables and clinical dimensions are difficult to extract on a large scale. Additional challenges in conducting this kind of study relate to multiple, unintegrated health and social services administrative databases (e.g., related to clinical services received for physical health and impairment, intellectual disability and pervasive developmental disorders, youth difficulties, substance dependencies, and mental health) being housed within the same Integrated Health Center (CIUSSS/CISSS). The large amount of resources it would take to provide a larger picture by connecting these data sets is a further barrier. Significant governance challenges arose during the institutional approval process, given the multiple stakeholders that needed to be engaged, including 16 integrated health centers and 18 child protection services agencies. Further, unlike the ethics approval, which is now centralized, the institutional approval process is still fragmented (requiring up to 22 different forms in some health centers) and delayed (over six months for approval) due to a provincial health and social services reform in 2015 which dissolved the a centralized body which previously would have facilitated ethics and feasibility approvals for this type of study. In conclusion, lessons have been learned from this use of admin data. Very close partnership need to be established with CPS agencies in order to make an appropriate use of the data. Admin data are at their maximal potential when used complementary or in combination with other sources of data, like population surveys and incidence studies conducted with CPS workers.

Derek Montour and Dr. Colleen Fuller, Kahnawake Shakotiiia'takehnhas Community Services (KSCS). *Penelope data system and longitudinal analysis of KSCS child welfare data.* Derek Montour and Dr. Colleen Fuller from Kahnawake Shakotiiia'takehnhas Community Services (KSCS) presented Penelope, their health and social service client database. Penelope captures all the Kahnawake's health and social service administrative data, including pre-natal health, health, mental health, home and community care, day programs, and end-of-life care, as well as youth protection. KSCS does not use Quebec's shared youth data network, Projet Intégration Jeunesse (PIJ), for reasons of self-governance. The community does not participate in the Canada census and other sources of population data are less reliable, rendering the development of community-based statistics in Kahnawake important. KSCS began developing their administrative data tools to understand their program outcomes and to compare results with other Nations and comparable communities. In partnership with McGill University, KSCS has developed resources for extracting raw data and analyzing the output for descriptive statistics in order to understand service outcomes. KSCS presenters identified next steps in working with their administrative data, the most important of which is to develop a narrower set of questions to "ask the data," and develop a clear set of child indicators. The KSCS

presenters identified several challenges of implementing these tasks, including frequent staff turnover, challenges of balancing several research projects with clinical tasks, and adjustments to the new database software. The longitudinal analysis that KSCS has done with their administrative data has been used to understand overall family and community wellness and other factors related to kids going into care or returning to care.

Nancy Gros-Louis McHugh and Patricia Montambault, Commission de la santé et des services sociaux des Premières Nations du Québec et du Labrador / First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC). *Database Analysis: Quebec First Nations Issues and Emerging Perspectives.* Nancy Gros-Louis McHugh and Patricia

Montambault presented an overview of the child welfare data management systems and governance structures in the jurisdiction of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador. They described the international, federal, and local contexts shaping information gathering and data use regarding child welfare involvement, including local First Nations governance protocols. They noted two significant challenges in collecting and using administrative data for longitudinal child welfare analysis. First, a diversity of information systems used in these communities makes amalgamating data across jurisdictions challenging. Second, a lack of official agreements to access information can limit the availability of data from local First Nations communities. The Commission relies on a plethora of information management systems in Quebec to obtain data for child welfare analysis: I-CLSC (provincial health and social services), the electronic medical record, PIJ (used with youth protection centers), SI-PMI (the Quebec vaccination registry), and the Quebec health record. A recent project used Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) data to quantitatively analyze the reasons for First Nations involvement in child welfare in Quebec. This analysis has prompted a qualitative follow-up component looking specifically at community understandings of neglect, which was shown to be overwhelmingly the most common reason for involvement with child welfare. The presenters noted a variety of benefits associated with having reliable data: improvement of the wellbeing of First Nations children; informed decision-making and improved child and family services through self-determination of local communities; and policymaking at provincial and federal levels that incorporates First Nations information governance.

Barbara Fallon, Tara Black, and Bryn King, University of Toronto. *Ontario Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (OCANDS).* OCANDS is a data system that integrates administrative data from partnering Ontario Children's Aid Societies (CAS) systems through a method of mapping (linking agency codes with OCANDS codes), harmonization (ensuring coding consistency across the platform), and website mapping (generating aggregate data for the reporting of agency-level service performance indicators). The utility of OCANDS for CAS partners is that it provides administrative data tools to build customized program and performance reports using the "10 answers" framework, a set of basic service descriptions that presenters noted every agency should be able to provide for purposes of public reporting, as well as policy and program development. Research using OCANDS data has provided location specific data on service populations and service descriptors through geo-mapping. OCANDS has the capacity to track the service trajectories of children and families to better understand systems pathways, performance, and practice. Presenters shared longitudinal data generated from a 2013 entry

cohort and included administrative data from 14 agencies to measure the likelihood of being transferred to ongoing services within 12 months of an investigation. Explanatory variables included demographic, eligibility, safety, and risk indicators, as well as other case-level data. The presenters drew specific attention to some of the data-based challenges in determining this risk, including : 1) transforming eligibility spectrum, safety assessment, and risk assessment data into useful variables; 2) limits of family-level data (rather than child-level data) informing some decision-making; 3) missing data in certain non-random categories (e.g., omission of race/ethnicity) and missing data across the spectrum of files; and 4) necessity of dropping some variables which were inconsistent across agencies in order to make sense of the data.

Tanya Morton, Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto. *Longitudinal Analysis: Major Considerations for Catholic Children's Aid Society.* This presentation focused on the Catholic Children's Aid Society (CCAS) of Toronto's longitudinal race-based analysis. CCAS received support from OCANDS to extract child-level longitudinal data from their own databases. The first investigation children had in 2011-12 was tracked forward to the point of case closure or to 36 months from referral. The question was: Are there differences by race at key child welfare decision points in the agency? Using 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) data, the proportion of Black Catholic children in Toronto's general population was compared with that of CCAS's service population. Conclusions are that disproportionality begins at the point of referral, with referral sources referring Black children at a rate substantially higher than their representation in the general population. That disproportionality continued across the service trajectory. There were also findings that Black children experienced service disparity at key decision-making points (investigation and admission). There were policy and practice changes corresponding with these findings; specifically, the creation of an Afrocentric Wraparound program and community-based partnerships to address disproportionality and disparity and improve the experience of Black families in contact with the child welfare system.

The presenter described some of the limitations and methodological challenges in doing this analysis. Some of the challenges were around missing race data at the point of referral and data entered based on worker's perception of client's race rather than self-identification. These were limitations of the data stored in CCAS's legacy database, however as noted elsewhere in this summary, Ontario has moved to the CPIN data system, which is a province wide administrative data system. New analyses involve extracting and analyzing CPIN data, which the presenter noted, are procedures protected in an amendment of the Child, Youth, and Family Act – Part X, which promotes the collection and use of administrative data by agencies for research and quality assurance purposes. The new analysis asks when children are investigated by CCAS in 2017-18, what is the likelihood that they will become progressively more known to the agency (i.e., verified, transferred, admitted) through that investigation or any investigation within one year, by race.

Marni Brownell, PhD, University of Manitoba, Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP). *Manitoba's cross-over kids: examining the overlap between child welfare and youth justice system involvement using linked administrative data.* Dr. Brownell described the Manitoba Population Research Data Repository, which is a collection of over 90 databases from multiple

sectors, that are de-identified prior to being deposited in the Repository held at MCHP. Memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and data sharing agreements (DSAs) have been signed with the various organizations from which the Repository data are sourced, which Dr. Brownell noted can sometimes take years to develop. All studies using data in the Repository must receive approval from the University of Manitoba Health Research Ethics Board, the Manitoba Health Information Privacy Committee (HIPC), as well as from data providers whose data will be used. Many studies, such as the one Dr. Brownell presented, also require approval from the Health Information Research Governance Committee (HIRGC) of the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba, as well as from the Manitoba Metis Federation. Dr. Brownell presented a yet-to-be-published* longitudinal study analyzing the overlapping involvement of youth in the child welfare and justice systems in the province of Manitoba. developed The project linked several different population-wide administrative data sets from the health, education, social services, and justice sectors, as well as vital statistics, and population registries (including the Manitoba Health Insurance Registry, the Manitoba Metis Registry, and the First Nations Research File).³

Steven Yong, Executive Director Modelling, Analysis and Information Management Branch, British Columbia. *Tracking interactions and outcomes with child welfare services in British Columbia.* Steven Yong presented on BC's administrative data with a focus on front line level data entry. All ministry offices and most Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs) in BC use the Integrated Case Management (ICM) system (a handful of DAAs use an alternative case management system which is integrated into ICM). At the office or agency level, workers enter administrative data into ICM as a part of a multi-step assessment process. Following a report made to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, information on the type of protection concern and the recommended response is assessed and entered. If a safety concern is assessed, an investigation or a family development response (an alternate response model to increase parental capacity with community services) is undertaken and the responding social worker will collect and input data on the following: 1) action taken/services offered; 2) whether protection services are required; 3) the specific safety concerns; and 4) assessment information on factors affecting vulnerability and safety. Though it was demonstrated that half of the protection reports were assessed with a safety concern, a small percent (10%) of those Incidents resulted in children or youth coming into the care of the province. When a child is taken into care, the following information is collected: 1) whether the child is coming into care for protection reasons (as opposed a voluntary care agreement or special needs agreement); 2) the reasons for having come into care; 3) the legal authority under which the province has brought the child into care; 4) the placement type; 5) indicators that the child has special needs; and, 6) whether there was a serious incident, injury, or fatality. This data is collected at the individual child level and can be used to follow the trajectory of the child throughout the health and social service system via data linking initiatives.

³ Much of the information on Manitoba's Cross-over Kids is under embargo pending the release of the report. Please follow up with The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy for the full report once it becomes available.

Concerning the administrative databases, Yong described 18 core systems that his branch extracts from and the results of this extract is stored the main Corporate Data Warehouse (CDW) and analyzed for various reporting and statistical purposes. The CDW contains data back to 1990. Child services administrative data includes child welfare/adoption, child and youth mental health, and child and youth with special needs services. Health, education, and other social service information is accessed via data sharing agreements with other ministries, or through cross-government data repository. Data extracts from these systems occur variously on a nightly, weekly, and monthly basis. The data from the extracts are used in analysis to support program and policy development and to support the program and funding approvals via our Cabinet and Treasury Board approval processes. This data is also used in internal reports and tools provided to ministry and DAA staff via a CDW reporting portal and for public reporting, program audits, etc. Additionally, BC's Office of the Representative for Children and Youth (RCYBC), which is mandated to provide oversight to BC's child welfare system has access to reports developed on MCFD's CDW portal, and accordingly uses these data to create reports and make recommendations. Because these data are linked to the individual, different outcomes can be tracked for children and youth in care, such as understanding employment and financial outcomes for youth who have aged out of care by linking financial assistance data with these youth. BC is working on innovations in data including the development of a central repository of linked administrative data tables including medical and prescription datum, vital statistics (health status and age of parents at birth), and educational attainment for individuals in BC. The province is also exploring predictive analytics. Challenges noted by this presenter in working with administrative data were technical failures during the extraction process, which leads to time consuming troubleshooting and data cleaning, mismatched business rules in related information systems, and data entry problems. Additional challenges exist with contracted services where financial and payment data is collected rather than information on client access, duration of service, intensity of use, goals, and outcomes.

Alanah Jansen, Cheuk Pan, Bryn King, John Fluke, Adam Filleul, and Lil Tonmyr, Government of Northwest Territories, Pan-Northern Project. *The development of a northern administrative data system and its implications for longitudinal child welfare research.* Alanah Jansen, Social Epidemiologist, and Cheuk Pan, Senior Systems Analyst of the Government of Northwest Territories presented information on the Canadian Pan-Northern Project, a cross-territorial project whose goal is to develop and maintain a Pan-Northern Minimum Data Set (MDS) which can inform national surveillance and contribute to territorial policy and program efforts to improve the health and wellbeing of children and families. It is a partnership between the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the Governments of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and Nunavut (GN), the Yukon Government (YG), and contracted external researchers.

The project developed a list of child welfare indicators based upon best practice reporting in Canada, the United States, and Australia. Seventeen indicators were drawn from the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010), the National Child Welfare Outcomes Indicator Matrix (NOM; Trocmé et al., 2009), Child Maltreatment United States (NCANDS; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017), and Child Protection Australia (AIHW; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016). Six

unique Pan-Northern indicators (PAN) were drafted based upon documented lessons learned from the four afore-mentioned sources. Together the resulting 23 child welfare indicators are referred to as the *Pan-Northern Indicators*.

The three territorial governments are engaged in the process of replacing their territorial social services information systems. A requirement of each system replacement project is the capacity to produce the Pan-Northern MDS. GNWT launched phase one of its information system in October of 2017. The GN and YG systems have not yet been implemented. The GN system is scheduled to begin implementation in July of 2020. The YG system is scheduled to begin implementation in October of 2020. The Pan-Northern Project is extracting Pan-Northern MDS data from the GNWT system. Data definitions were created for the available MDS data. The data definitions are referred to as the *Pan-Northern Data Dictionary*. Extract scripts were written to extract the Pan-Northern MDS from the GNWT information system in accordance with the specifications of the dictionary. The first GNWT extract of live administrative data was completed on May 1, 2018. The GNWT extract code successfully demonstrated the capacity to produce the anticipated MDS data; inclusive of 19 Units of Analysis and 65 unique data elements. GNWT has extracted 30 months of administrative data. Two indicators are being built.

One of the major strengths of the project is the small and agile nature of the territorial governments, which enables efficient communication and system modifications. The systems replacement projects in Newfoundland, Northwest Territories and Nunavut were each delayed 4-6 months. Data migration in Northwest Territories and Nunavut did not yield the required data or quality to enable extraction and analysis, as such only post go-live system replacement data is being extracted and analyzed.

John Fluke, PhD and Dana Hollinshead, PhD, University of Colorado Kempe Center for the Treatment and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. *How longitudinal analysis of administrative data combined with workforce data can inform child welfare policy.* Dr. Fluke and Dr. Hollinshead presented a multilevel longitudinal administrative data analysis project that combined case characteristics captured in administrative data (level I), and self-reported worker characteristics data (level II) collected by survey, to provide insights into associations between worker characteristics and patterns in their child welfare decision-making. This study used the Decision Making Ecology (DME) model by Baumann and colleagues (2011) to understand the environment in which placement decisions were made by child protective service workers working in an unnamed southeastern U.S. state. The multilevel analysis found an interaction between level I variables and level II variables that affected decision-making along the child welfare trajectory, including the decision to place a child in out-of-home care and types of planned permanency exits. The results indicate that outcomes are not simply by-products of case characteristics and/or events and that systematic staff biases and perceptions of support may enhance or suppress the likelihood of particular types of decisions.

In a separate study conducted in Minnesota, trajectories of families associated with different CPS report screening decisions were followed longitudinally for re-referral rates in order to

identify the extent to which the original decisions made were associated with decisional outcomes (true positive, false positive, true negative, or false negative). The presenters noted that these findings indicate the potential for administrative data linkage to improve our understanding of child welfare worker decision-making processes along “the continuum of intervention,” including prevention, screening, assessment, placement, and reunification.

The methodological challenges particular to this project were difficulties in matching child protection response data with a placement decision, particularly when multiple staff were assigned to the case at the same time or when a spell occurred with no near term CPS report; balancing scientific rigor with the parsimony of surveys; and understanding the degree to which the agency organization may influence results, specifically, who is responsible for decision-making, may vary across a service region. The researchers also found challenges in controlling for family-level effects on level I variables (case characteristics) in the multilevel analysis. Along with the specific outcomes of this study that identified connections between placement decisions and worker characteristics, Drs. Fluke and Hollinshead also proposed that policymaking be improved through a better understanding of the drivers of decision-making in child welfare and other types of systems research. However, the capacity needed to sustain this rather resource intensive type of administrative data research may limit the feasibility for some organizations. Additionally, in other research, these researchers faced a surprising challenge in the timeframes for the study because the jurisdiction of focus had legislation mandating a three-year expungement cycle of inactive child welfare records. (Further discussion on the detail of record expungement indicated no such issue in Canadian longitudinal research with administrative data, however not every jurisdiction in Canada was represented.)

Bryn King, PhD, University of Toronto, California Child Welfare Child Indicators Project (CCWIP), and the Children’s Data Network (CDN). *California’s child welfare administrative data system and longitudinal research.* Dr. King presented information on the California child welfare administrative data system and ongoing longitudinal research using these data. CCWIP is housed at the University of California at Berkeley and relies on data extraction from the California Child Welfare Services/Case Management System, which is supported through an interagency data sharing agreement with California Department of Social Services (CDSS). On a quarterly basis, CCWIP receives a complete extract dating back to 1999 for the state (58 counties). CCWIP conducts a robust quality assurance (QA) process, involving correction of data entry issues, database problems, and programming glitches. This is to improve the credibility and utility of the data in research, to collaborate with county administrative partners, and to aggregate and structure data for public reporting. These data are reported publicly in part due to California legislation mandating all 58 counties in the state to do so. Dr. King noted that this mandate has been reinforced through a demonstrated utility of data sharing via the CCWIP partnership: operational data assists with programmatic improvement at the county administrative level, which in turn provides incentive for accurate and timely data sharing beyond what is legislatively mandated. Case-level are linked with additional data through a partnership with the Children’s Data Network (CDN) at the University of Southern California. Through this data linking process, CDN linked birth, child welfare, and death records data in

2011, and more recently has linked additional state- and county-level administrative data sets, including those from hospitals, the juvenile justice and education systems, and social services.

Michael MacKenzie, PhD & Full Professor, McGill University School of Social Work. *Building University-Child Welfare Agency Data Partnerships: An example from New Jersey.* Dr.

MacKenzie presented information on the State of New Jersey child welfare data partnerships between universities and child welfare agencies. A class action lawsuit concerning child welfare against the state of New Jersey in the early 2000s put pressure on the government to monitor data and outcomes more closely, as a result, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) appointed a Federal Monitor in 2006 who required a list of child welfare targets for the State of NJ to comply with. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was established between academic, government and local agency partners to allow for data sharing and transparency, and a Strategic Engagement Team was established. A data portal across service regions was established accompanied by a data dictionary, and a data map was developed to allow for the illustration of aggregate-level trends per service delivery region. Academic data fellow positions were also created to work closely with local agency staff to develop locally relevant projects, annual needs assessment reports. Some of the challenges encountered entailed relationship building barriers between academics and local child protection agencies due to competing priorities and interests; data measuring limitations (e.g., snapshot data vs. measuring bidirectional processes); and time limitations for data analysis due to inactive case files being expunged after 3 years. Despite these challenges and limitations, advocacy groups are using this initiative as a model to drive policy change at the state level.

Wendy Hovdestad, PhD and Yannick Fortin PhD, Public Health Agency of Canada and Statistics Canada. *Presenting the Canadian Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) Methodological challenges inherent in processing cross-jurisdictional administrative data.* Dr.

Hovdestad, Research Analyst and (Acting) Team Lead of the Public Health Agency of Canada's (PHAC) Family Violence Surveillance Section, and Dr. Yannick Fortin, Chief at Statistics Canada's Centre for Social Data Integration and Development, presented information on the Canadian Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS), which is currently under development and in the stakeholder consultations phase. The CCWIS will be a partnership between PHAC, Statistics Canada, Provincial, Territorial and Indigenous Governments, child welfare agencies, academic researchers, and NGOs across the country. The project seeks to: 1) capture and standardize child welfare administrative data across provincial, territorial and Indigenous jurisdictions; 2) produce data on the number of children and their families involved in child welfare and their trajectories within the systems from the point of report and screening up to referral for services; and 3) produce regular national reports on key health and child welfare indicators. Another goal is to partner with academic researchers to share de-identified CCWIS data for further secondary analyses. The project aims to build upon lessons learned from other child welfare data initiatives, such as the Canadian Incidence Study (CIS) and First Nations Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse & Neglect (FNCIS), the Pan-Northern Project, the National Outcomes Matrix, as well as related work underway in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia. The potential of linkages to other databases, within a secure environment housed at Statistics Canada, is also being explored. The complexity of operationalizing two indicators of

Referral to Services - as a Population Health Indicator (federal level) and as a Practice Indicator (agency and provincial/territorial level) - was discussed for illustrative purposes. However, the process of establishing uniform indicators is a challenge, given that jurisdictions across Canada do not collect child welfare reports and assessments in the same way. The presenters noted that ethical limitations, in addition to technical and legal limitations, need to be considered moving forward.

III. Considerations in working with child welfare administrative data

One of the goals of this meeting was to create an informal setting for participants from a variety of child welfare backgrounds to openly discuss important considerations in working with child welfare administrative data. In addition to the presentations summarized above, debriefing and roundtable discussions took place on both days of this meeting. In these discussions participants spoke to their unique challenges in working with child welfare administrative data, and provided commentary and feedback on the administrative data problems that appeared to be common to the group. In these discussions, collaborators of this project raised points related to 1) administrative data quality; 2) accessing data for longitudinal child welfare research; 3) unique considerations working with child welfare data; and 4) the use of child welfare administrative data in public reporting and policy development.

Administrative data quality

The quality of child welfare administrative data was a problem described by many of the participants engaged in longitudinal child welfare research. Administrative data is collected at the agency level by caseworkers, entered into data management systems as a form of case/incident reporting and note taking, as well as a tool for structured decision-making. However, as participants explained, data extracted from agency software often suffers from quality problems due to incomplete case files and empty data fields. Participants with experience working in child welfare agencies noted possible reasons for errors in data entry at the agency level, such as time pressure, insufficient knowledge of the data system, lack of understanding of the importance of data entry, and inadequate oversight. To manage data quality problems in child welfare administrative data, meeting participants described the process of having to “sit with workers” to understand what is happening at the data input level to interpret what particular variables mean, so that data extract can be cleaned and organized more efficiently. Participants discussed the need for workers to have increased data literacy so they can appreciate the importance of careful and thorough data entry to increase the quality of data.

Discussions of data quality problems often centered on missing racial or ethnicity descriptors. Participants described having to drop ethno-racial identifiers as a variable in their analytical models due to the pervasiveness of this missing data, making the analysis of the scope of key child welfare issues such as overrepresentation of Indigenous and Black children difficult to perform. Missing ethno-racial data often indicates that the child and family may not have

received ongoing child welfare services,⁴ making this empty data field non-random throughout a given dataset, and which is difficult to substitute using imputation techniques in analytical models. Other data entry issues posing methodological challenges noted in our discussion was the over-use of the “other” category to describe case-level characteristics when the agency’s software did not provide mutually exclusive and comprehensive options that aligned with workers’ clinical judgement. A participant noted that data quality seems to improve when tied to service payment systems (e.g., Quebec’s SIRTF database, see p. 14). However, some participants described systems relying on financial and payment data as prone to obscuring important clinical information, such as duration and intensity of service use, goals of the family using services, and case outcomes. Pairing case-level and payment data, where possible, was discussed as a method for constructing higher quality child welfare administrative data.

Accessing child welfare administrative data

Our discussions touched on certain challenges related to access to administrative data itself. The core conversation related to data access had to do with the gaps in centralized, publicly available child welfare data at the national level. The Public Health Agency of Canada and Statistics Canada presented a project that is moving towards a national surveillance and monitoring data system for incidence of child maltreatment that aims to standardize pan-Canadian child welfare administrative data (the Canadian Child Welfare Information System [CCWIS], summarized on p. 23). The ultimate benefit of a cross-jurisdictional child welfare administrative database is that it could provide access to national level data for researchers and policymakers whose goal is to improve the lives of vulnerable children and families involved in Canada’s child welfare systems.

Additional presenters focusing on the development of child welfare administrative databases or research datasets described a laborious and lengthy process of brokering data sharing agreements (DSAs) or memoranda of understandings (MOU) to access data held by multiple child and youth services agencies. For example, one presenter (see: Manitoba’s cross-over kids, pp. 17-18) noted that the extensive DSAs and MOUs needed to do longitudinal research on youth involved in both Manitoba’s youth protection and youth justice systems took years to develop because numerous data agencies were implicated in the lives of these youth. Other presentations on longitudinal child welfare administrative data initiatives provided some examples of attempts to improve data quality and accessibility, such as the Ontario Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (OCANDS; see pp. 16-17) and California’s Child Welfare Indicator Project (CCWIP; see p. 22). These initiatives aim to improve data quality and increase research and quality assurance capacity for agencies, but also can reduce barriers for accessing longitudinal data for child welfare researchers. Initiatives such as OCANDS and CCWIP require ongoing DSAs and MOUs, but these initiatives are supported with long-term financial investment and are managed by teams in university settings with extensive ethical and legal

⁴ The reason for this is that for clients with ongoing cases, the worker is more likely to eventually fill in these data fields, but for cases which are not retained for ongoing services, they are more likely to be left blank.

guidance, research expertise, warehousing infrastructure, and analytic capacity. The reasonable accessibility of such databases can eliminate the logistically burdensome and expensive process for individual researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to obtain clinical data. Further, they can increase access to important longitudinal clinical information, which is crucial for child welfare stakeholders to improve programming, and ultimately outcomes, for children and families involved in child welfare systems.

Working with child welfare data in research

Developing child welfare administrative datasets to the extent that they can be used for research purposes is an extensive process that requires a high level of investment of financial and time resources. For example, the Quebec-based presentation on socioeconomic disadvantage and child protection (see p. 14) described a programming development process that took over five years and cost \$1,300,000. In Ontario, the development of OCANDS cost approximately \$2,000,000. The high cost of developing such data initiatives is a major barrier in working with child welfare administrative data, especially for systems like OCANDS, where mapping of agency data was especially complex and time intensive due to the variety of databases used by partnering agencies at the time. Because of data quality problems, and complicated technical fixes after agency data extractions, data “cleaning” is a necessary, and often time-consuming and resource-heavy, step in any rigorous longitudinal study. This often means communicating directly with clinical level workers or managers, requiring time and expertise that individual researchers are not always able to allocate. Pan-Northern participants described the process of sitting with workers to clarify data entry questions and to increase worker capacity for data entry as less of a challenge to cleaning their data because of the smaller scale of child welfare operations in the North. However, in larger service populations, such as Ontario, creating a database such as OCANDS required the consolidation and mapping of 48 unique child welfare agency datasets across multiple data platforms, so the process of sitting with workers to clarify data entry is a much larger undertaking to consider.

Presenters with experience building administrative data sets provided examples of what the architecture of administrative data sets can look like. Detailed presentations from British Columbia, Ontario, Manitoba, The Pan-North, and Quebec illustrated a degree of complexity and sophistication in these datasets, as well as a high level of data science expertise required to work with them. Some of the discussion pertaining to these datasets centered on lack of training that social science researchers have in working with and understanding administrative data systems, which are structured quite differently than research datasets. Whereas research datasets are typically built around a primary ‘unit of analysis’ (e.g. a case or individual), which is structured in a data file with one case per row and variables (e.g., case characteristics, observations, and event counts), child welfare administrative datasets center around administrative activities, where the unit of analysis is the activity rather than an individual. Administrative data systems are composed of multiple data platforms, tables and records connected through a network of client, resource, staff, event, and payment identifiers, all of which create what is known as a ‘relational dataset.’ Linking the information in a relational

dataset to one individual requires extensive coding scripts, and these linked data generate enormous amounts of information that require analytical skills outside the specialization of social science. For example, child welfare service dataset developed in Quebec, produced a data file with 7 million lines of data that required several hundred lines of programming. The skills needed to build and analyze a dataset as large as this required the onboarding of computer programmers to work with child welfare researchers who have the methodological and theoretical expertise to interpret and apply child welfare data for longitudinal research purposes and policy implications. Longitudinal child welfare administrative data projects such as these require such intensive financial, personnel, management, research, and analytical resources that building the dataset before any child welfare research can be done is a considerable challenge.

The use of administrative data in public reporting and policy

In discussion of how administrative data is used in the areas of public reporting and policy development, focus shifted to British Columbia, where public reporting on child welfare is uniquely robust due to Ministry policies requiring public reporting. British Columbia's Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) manages extensive databases (see Table 1 in the Appendix) of child welfare administrative data, including legacy data dating back to 1990. The MCFD centralizes the province's administrative data and uses it to produce open datasets and public reports accessible on government websites. Service delivery areas (SDA) are MCFD regional offices that oversee the local child welfare agency offices. The SDAs are required to publically post yearly practice audits that in part consolidate administrative data from the region's local offices to report on how policy and practice align. Further, business proposals made by MCFD agencies must include data to support their funding requests. Additionally, the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth (ORCY) has a strong oversight mandate protected by legislation in B.C. The ORCY has direct access to the provincial child welfare administrative database and uses that data to provide independent public reporting on child welfare in the province. This includes putting forth policy recommendations directly to the Ministry and other government offices involved in child services.

Other jurisdictions have legislation that regulates public reporting of child welfare data. For example, the CCWIP is unique in that California legislation requires public reporting of child welfare data at the county level, creating incentives to streamline the data collection, warehousing, and reporting processes in that U.S. state (see p. 22). Similarly, presenters from Ontario described legislation governing the use of personal information for purposes of quality assurance and risk management, which opened research possibilities with greater access and use of administrative data. At the agency level, presenters described longitudinal research using administrative data that lead to policy changes within their agencies, such as the Afrocentric Wraparound service created by CCAS Toronto (see p. 17).

Participants representing First Nations child and family service organizations raised important concerns about how data is used in research, public policy, and reporting. First Nations research

ethics frameworks such the principles of Ownership, Access, Control and Possession (OCAP) govern access and use of data for research, public policy, and reporting purposes and many First Nations data holders apply these or similar frameworks to ensure that data is not used to harm First Nations communities and people. The First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) have developed data sharing agreements with First Nations and provide data warehousing and some oversight of the use of First Nations data. The FNIGC has been particularly active in developing data research capacity and First Nations research ethics. Discussions about OCAP principles and the use of First Nations data indicate wide acceptance of the need for this framework, however research policies from university and government institutions are sometimes at odds with OCAP principles. More work is needed to fully integrate First Nations research ethics into policy, research, and public reporting using First Nations child welfare administrative data.

IV. Next steps

Activities following the meetings held in February, 2020, will support ongoing connection and cooperation among these and other partners to improve the ways in which longitudinal child welfare administrative data can be used to improve outcomes for children in Canada. By coming together to discuss considerations, challenges, and successful data initiatives we are improving research capacity at the pan-Canadian level. As one agency based participant noted, this gathering proved that they were “not alone” in their data challenges and that better data collection and analysis can lead to improved outcomes for the children and families their agency serves.

Participants of the child welfare data knowledge exchange meeting expressed interest in ongoing collaboration to deepen and expand this project. The organizers circulated a “Statement of Engagement” for attendees to formally indicate their intention to participate in a meeting convened next year (2021) to facilitate further information sharing on longitudinal research, data collection, management, and use of child welfare administrative data in research and policy development. Participants discussed the possibility of growing the scale and scope of the meeting, but keeping its informality and discussion-based format. The organizers of this meeting have committed to gathering the resources to convene future meetings and have asked participants to keep note of potential stakeholders in child welfare administrative data that may have interest in attending and contributing to follow-up meetings.

In order to fund further collaboration among this multifaceted group, the organizers have begun to explore funding possibilities, including, but not limited to, a 2020 Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Connection grant, the application for which will be submitted later this year. Currently, the Connection grant program is funding projects through a Research Data Management Capacity Building Initiative, which is particularly well-aligned with the goals of this child welfare administrative data project. It aims to support “development, adoption, and dissemination of research data management standards, practices, tools, and skills” relevant to various fields (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, 2020). This grant would catalyze our overall project goals of disseminating results from recent longitudinal child welfare data analysis projects, examining related methodological, governance, and ethical considerations, and exploring further support for cross-jurisdictional collaboration. This next step, and the additional learning and collaboration it would spur, will ensure the momentum from the 2020 meeting in Montreal continues to leverage data to improve long-term outcomes for vulnerable children across Canada.

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Appendix

The information provided in Table 1 is synthesized from government websites, reports, and audits and is subject to change.

Table 1: Canadian Child Welfare Administrative Data Systems

Prov	Ministry, name of minister	Ministry roles and responsibilities in child protection oversight and management	Service administration and provision	Number of authorities and/or agencies	Nature and structure of child welfare administrative data system(s) and data flow
BC	Ministry of child and family development (MCFD): Hon. Allison Bond	Ministry responsible for funding youth and child protection and linked services (e.g. mental health, services for children with special needs and adoption)	Services are offered at the local level by local MCFD offices, DAAs, or by contractors.	13 service delivery areas (SDAs), with 47 local service area agencies, and 24 DAA offices.	Integrated Case Management system used by all 13 SDAs, with some exceptions among the DAAs who use other software and have a limited data sharing agreement with the MCFD
AB	Ministry of Children's Services: Hon. Rebecca Shultz	Ministry responsible for funding child protection and linked services (foster care homes, child benefit, supports)	7 service regions administrate the local service offices. Service offices provide child and family supports.	87 local offices 17 additional delegated FN and Metis agencies	All agencies use Child Intervention Case Information Online (CICIO) for case management. The Ministry uses the Child Information Data Management System to manage administrative data for quality assurance purposes.
SK	Ministry of Social Services: Hon. Paul Merriman	Child and family services, including child protection is provided by the Ministry of Social Services	Service area offices administrate and direct the local agency offices. Indigenous agencies are delegated and administered by band-level offices and organized by treaty/region.	3 service area offices administrating 20 local agency offices. There are 17 Indigenous agencies with services to 15 reserve communities.	Agencies use a Structured Decision Making tool provided by Linkin Case Management. The Ministry of Social Services uses an extract software, Automated Client Index (ACI), to extract from data Linkin databases monthly. At least some First Nations agencies use Linkin.
MB	Department of Families: Hon. Heather Stefanson	Child and Youth Services	A network of mandated authorities providing child and family support services ranging from counselling, to emergency support, in home services, and foster/residential care.	Four child services authorities grouped by service population: First Nations (North and South division), Metis, and a General Authority (non-FN, non-Metis). Many communities are served by each authority.	Multiple case management/admin systems are used across the agencies. It is unclear if or how data is extracted from agency/authority databases.
ON	Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services; Hon Todd Smith	The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has an Assistant Deputy Minister's office overseeing Child Welfare and Protection with multiple directors in charge of different aspects of protection and wellbeing.	Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) is the mandated overseer to local agencies run by community boards, bound to uphold and enforce the Child, Youth and Family Services Act	48 agencies within the umbrella of OACAS	All OACAS agencies use Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) network
QC	Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux	The MSSS oversees the Directors of Youth Protection (DYP)/directeur de la protection de la jeunesse (DPJ), who lead child protection and youth rehabilitations operations in each region	Youth protection services are provided at the integrated health and social services offices located throughout the province.	21 integrated health and social service offices	All DYPs use the Système de Soutien à la Pratique (SSP) for case management and decision making. The province uses an integrated data system, the Projet intégration jeunesse

	(MSSS); Mme Danielle McCann	in the province.			(PIJ), to store administrative services data and the Système Information Ressources Type Familial (SIRTF) to store payment data related to placement.
NB	Ministry of Social Development ; Hon. Dorothy Shephard	The Division of Children, Families and Seniors oversees Child Welfare and Youth Services branch, which is divided into two units: Child Welfare and Youth Services unit and Clinical Auditing and Child Welfare Training unit.	Services provided by 15 child welfare and youth services local offices and Mi'gmaq Child and Family Services of NB (incorporated non-profit child and family services)	8 regional child protection offices 1 main administrative office for Mi'gmaq Child and Family Services.	Agencies use a structured decision making tool for case management called New Brunswick Families. The province's clinical auditing department extracts service information from the agency level.
NS	Department of Community Services; Hon. Kelly Regan	The department of Community Services oversees Child, Youth and Family Supports which is responsible for adoption, foster care, child maltreatment intervention, prevention and early intervention, residential care	Child protection services provided at county level Community Services offices and by the Mi'kmaw Family & Children's Services agency (incorporated non-profit child and family services)	21 child protection offices 2 Mi'kmaw Family and Child Service offices	Child, Youth, and Family support offices uses Integrated Case Management (ICM) to store child welfare administrative data.
PEI	Minister of Social Development and Housing; Hon. Ernie Hudson	Child and Family Services oversees Child Protection Services which has a narrow mandate for child protection	Services provided at the Child and Family Services offices and a Mi'kmaq Director Child and Family Services which works in concert with the province.	8 Child and Family Services offices 1 Mi'kmaq Child and Family Service office	PEI uses Integrated Service Management System (ISM) and Child and Family Services maintains data stored by ISM
NFLD	Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development ; Hon. Lisa Dempster	The Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development (CSSD) oversees Child Protection Services which provides child protection intervention and out of home care, as well as foster care and youth services	Child protection services are offered by CSSD offices are in several regions and in the semi-devolved Inuit territories of Nunatsiavut	37 regional offices	NFLD uses Integrated Service Management (ISM) and the CSSD extracts data from this service management system.
NU	Minister of Family Services; Hon. Elisapee Sheutiapiik	Ministry oversees Child and Family Services, which operates regional offices that administrate to local offices	Child and Family Service Offices provide child services in the community. Citizens wanting to report/seeking service either call the office directly, emergency numbers, or RCMP	3 regional offices 26 local offices	See pgs 19-20 for a full summary of the Pan-Northern Child Welfare Administrative Data and Child Indicators project. Nunavut is in the process of replacing its child welfare information systems and is scheduled to implement the Pan-Northern Project in July 2020.
NWT	Department of Health and Social Services; Hon. Diane Thom	Department of Health and Social Services oversees Child and Family Services, which operates child welfare	Agencies operate regionally under one of the three authorities (NT Health and Social Services Authority (NTHSSA), the Hay River Health and Social Services Authority, and the Tlicho Community Services Agency) to provide health, community, and social services including child welfare	5 regions operate under NTHSSA, and the two other authorities each cover 1 region. Local offices situated regionally.	See pgs 19-20 for a full summary of the Pan-Northern Child Welfare Administrative Data and Child Indicators project. GNWT uses Matrix-NT Case Management and the Pan-Northern Project is already extracting data from Matrix-NT in NWT.

YK	Department of Health and Social Services; Hon. Pauline Frost	The Minister of Health and Social Services Child oversees Family and Children's Services, which operates child welfare	Centralized Family and Children's Services office and regionally deployed child welfare workers; RCMP is also listed as a child protection resource	10 regional offices	See pgs 19-20 for a full summary of the Pan-Northern Child Welfare Administrative Data and Child Indicators project. Yukon Territory is the in process of replacing its child welfare information systems and is scheduled to implement the Pan-Northern Project in in October 2020.
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Table 1 : Continued from previous page

Prov	Department(s) responsible for child welfare administrative data	Open data province*?	Scope of public reporting and web availability	Independent child welfare oversight (e.g. advocate or ombudsmen office)
BC	Modelling, Analysis, and Information Management (MAIM) department responsible for extracting and analyzing data from the ICM system. MAIM provides analysis for public reporting.	Yes: https://data.gov.bc.ca/	Extensive and regular public reporting by the ministry and open data website in the form of statistics, reports, and audits. Each LSA is also required to conduct practice audits each year and those are posted on ministry sites.	Office of the Representative of Children and Youth (ORCY) with a very strong mandate to oversee, investigate, and make recommendations for improvements in the child protection system. ORCY has direct access to MCFD child welfare administrative databases.
AB	Performance Analysis and Improvement	Yes: https://open.alberta.ca/opendata	Extensive and regular public reporting by the ministry and on the open data website in the form of quarterly and annual statistics, yearly reports, and open data sets with customizable data tools. Alberta has a unique data tool that allows users to see historical and current data on children in the care of the province - we have not seen this tool elsewhere.	Office of the Child and Youth Advocate has a strong mandate in Alberta to advocate for individual youth and families in the child welfare system and advocate for systems improvements. They provide legal representation for youth and investigate serious injury and death of children in the care of the province. The OCYA has the mandate request data from any provincial data custodian and that custodian must supply the data.
SK	Ministry of Social Services	No	Public reporting seemingly limited to quarterly statistics on children in the care of the province and placement type.	The Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth is active and focuses on investigating serious injury and death of children in care, fairness investigations, and program and service investigations. The SK Advocate does not have direct access to child welfare administrative data, but has the mandate to request data.
MB	Department of proactive disclosure departmental statistics and reports	Yes: https://www.gov.mb.ca/openmb/index.html	Limited public reporting	Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth and the First Nations Family Advocate and Child and Youth Advocate provide independent oversight of CFS. The Ministry provides the Advocates with data at regular intervals and when the need arises.

ON	OACAS is responsible for data and statistics relating to the children in their care. OACAS is evaluated via performance statistics by the Ministry.	Yes: https://data.ontario.ca/ Also see OACAS: http://www.oacas.org/data-results/	OACAS is primarily responsible for publishing performance indicators specifically focusing on safety, permanence, and well-being; child protection data under review to "determine if it can be made open"	Child Advocates office Closed as of May 1, 2019. Ombudsman's office has taken up some child advocate/investigation duties. There is no independent watchdog with access to data.
QC	MSSS	Yes: https://www.donneesquebec.ca/fr/	Public reporting limited to yearly provincial reports (Bilan DPJ)	Qubec's Commission des droits de la personne et droits de la jeunesse have a department responsible for helping youth in involved by the DYP, however there is no independent entity with access to child protection data.
NB	Clinical Auditing & Training Unit of the Child welfare & disabilities support services branch of the Children & Families Division	Yes: https://gnb.socrata.com/	Limited to quarterly bed counts and some special reports	The New Brunswick Child and Youth Advocate does not have direct access to child welfare administrative data, however has the mandate to request and receive any relevant data for reporting and investigation.
NS	Research & Statistics section, Department of Community Services	Yes: https://data.novascotia.ca/	No specific data or reporting structure for child welfare, some department audits are available and include some basic statistics about children in the care of province.	Ombudsman's office with no specific mandate to investigate the child welfare system in Nova Scotia or access to administrative data.
PEI	Department of Family and Human Services	Yes: https://data.princeedwardisland.ca/	Limited data from 2011-2016 info on open data site but none available directly from PEI government	Newly opened PEI Children's Commissioner & Advocate, no information available as scope of data access.
NFLD	Child Protection & In-Care section of Children, Seniors and Social Development	Yes: https://opendata.gov.nl.ca/	Limited to quarterly reporting of basic statistics on children in care.	Newfoundland Child and Youth Advocate recently established with a focus on individual and systemic advocacy, it has the mandate to request data but has not direct access to child welfare administrative data.
NU	Department of Statistics	No	Limited to annual reports from Child and Family Services containing basic statistics on children in care.	No Child Advocate
NWT	Department of Health and Social Services	Yes: https://www.opennwt.ca/	Limited to annual reports from the Child and Family Services Director and contains basic statistics on children in care	No Child Advocate
YK	Department of Health and Social Services	Yes: https://open.yukon.ca/data/	Limited to annual reports from Family and Children's Services and contains basic statistics on children in care	Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office (YCAO) focuses mainly on service to children and families but does annual reporting. The Advocate has the mandate to request information including data, but does not have any direct access to data.

