



Nova Scotia's Child Welfare System

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

Background

In Nova Scotia, the Minister of Community Services provides child welfare services under the mandate of the [Children and Family Services Act](#) (1990). The [Children and Family Services Regulations](#) also relates to the protection and well-being of children. In addition, the [Children in Care and Custody Manual](#) provides guidance on delivering children in care services in Nova Scotia. There are 18 provincial offices within four regions of the province and one First Nations child welfare agency. These agencies receive reports of child abuse and neglect and offer child protection and support services to children and families within the district.

One First Nations child welfare agency serves all on-reserve children and families in Nova Scotia. This agency, the Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services of Nova Scotia (MFCSNS), was established in 1985 with the signing of a tripartite agreement between the Canadian Government, the Department of Community Services and First Nations communities. The MFCSNS serves all 13 Mi'kmaw communities in Nova Scotia (Kozlowski, Sinha, Glode & MacDonald, 2012). The agreement mandates that MFCSNS adhere to provincial legislation and the policies, procedures and standards set by the Department of Community Services (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2008). Although MFCSNS is bound by the same provincial legislation as non-First Nations agencies, the agency has implemented culturally appropriate child welfare practices by consulting First Nations Chiefs and community members (Kozlowski et al., 2012). For detailed information on First Nations child welfare services in Nova Scotia, please review the information sheet "[First Nations Child Welfare in Nova Scotia](#)" (Kozlowski, et al., 2012).

A number of reforms in the structure and delivery of child welfare services have occurred over the past 10 years. For instance, the Department of Community Services began the

implementation of a multi-year child welfare placement redesign in 2006 (Nova Scotia Department of Community Services, n.d.-a). This initiative involved the streamlining and strengthening of programs delivered by placement services.

Child in need of protection

In Nova Scotia, the *Children and Family Services Act* specifies child protection and child welfare services for children under the age of 16. Where special needs are identified, the Act allows for services to be provided for children 16 to 18 years of age. Section 22 of the Act defines a child in need of protection, as a result of action or omission to act or threat by the child's parent or guardian, when:

- the child has suffered, or is at substantial risk of, physical harm;
- the child has been, or is at substantial risk of being, sexually abused;
- the child requires medical treatment;
- the child has suffered, or is at substantial risk of, emotional harm;
- the child suffers from a mental, emotional or developmental condition;
- the child has suffered physical or emotional harm by exposure to domestic violence;
- the child has suffered, or is at substantial risk of, physical harm caused by neglect;
- the child has been abandoned.

While there is limited data on the incidence and characteristics of child maltreatment publicly available in Nova Scotia, there is aggregate data on child maltreatment across Canada. The 2008 cycle of the [Canadian Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect](#) (CIS) has the most recent and detailed information on reports of child maltreatment in Canada. Across Canada, the most frequently investigated forms of maltreatment are neglect, exposure to intimate partner violence and physical abuse, and most investigations involve situations where physical harm has not yet occurred. Unfortunately, we were unable to locate specific information about the types of child maltreatment that were investigations in Nova Scotia.

Spectrum of services

The primary function of Nova Scotia's child welfare agencies is to protect children from harm. Agencies are mandated to carry out this function by investigating allegations of abuse and neglect and providing protective services to children and support services to families. The range of services provided to children and families under the *Children and Family Services Act* include protective and placement services as well as services to support parents to be able to keep their children safe at home. The *Children and Family Services Act* sets out key principles to guide these services; these include using the least intrusive means of intervention in order to promote the integrity of the family while maintaining the safety and well-being of the child, and providing services in a manner that preserves a child's "cultural, racial and linguistic heritage."

In Nova Scotia, all persons have the duty to report a suspicion of abuse or neglect of a child under the age of 16. Child protection social workers assess all reports to determine whether there are enough grounds to warrant a full investigation, or whether a referral should be made to other community services or should simply be closed. In 2012-2013, a total of 9,935 child protection

referrals were made. These referrals resulted in 6,601 child protection investigations of which 1,229 cases were open for ongoing services (Nova Scotia Department of Community Services, n.d.-b). Children who cannot remain safely in their own homes can be placed in the care and custody of the Minister of Community Services either on a voluntarily basis or mandated by the court. Out of home placements should only occur after services have been offered to remedy the situation with the child remaining in their own home. Of the 6,601 child protection investigations made in 2012-2013, 534 led to a child being placed in out-of-home care, either under a Voluntary Care agreement, a Temporary Care & Custody Agreement, a Special Needs Agreement or Specified Adoption Placements (Nova Scotia Department of Community Services, n.d.-b). In addition to the placement services described above, Nova Scotia's child welfare system provides home-based services including counseling, homemaking and parenting skills and child-care. The Department of Community Services also funds many community-based services for children and families including [Women's Centres](#), [Family/Parenting Resource Centres](#), as well as services offered by the [Transition House Association of Nova Scotia](#) and the [Native Council of Nova Scotia](#).

Additional information about child welfare services in Nova Scotia is available on the [Department of Community Services](#) website and on the [Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal](#).

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