



Saskatchewan's Child Welfare System

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This CWRP Information Sheet provides an overview of the child welfare service delivery system in Saskatchewan. 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 Saskatchewan, the Ministry of Social Services is responsible for providing protection services for children under the age of 16 (and in exceptional cases to youth under 18 years of age) under the mandate of the [Child and Family Services Act](#) (1989-90). There are 19 Child Protection offices across the province, within three service areas. Alleged maltreatment is reported directly to the child welfare offices in each of the three service areas that serve children off-reserve. The [Adoption Act](#) (1998) and [The Emergency Protection for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Act](#) (2002) are other pieces of legislation related to the well-being and protection of children in Saskatchewan (MacLaurin et al., 2011).

First Nations Child and Family Service (FNCFS) Agencies have delegated authority to provide child protection services to children and families on-reserve and in some areas off-reserve. There are 17 First Nations agencies across the province that provide mandated child protection services (MacLaurin et al., 2011). For more information on First Nations child welfare in Saskatchewan, see the information sheet "[First Nations Child Welfare in Saskatchewan](#)" (Kozlowski, Sinha, Hartsook, Thomas Prokop, & Montgomery, 2011).

In 2009, the government announced a full review of the child welfare system when the Department of Social Services sought to address concerns with the child welfare system such as foster home overcrowding, rapid out of home caseload increases, and safety concerns. This initiative involved the diversion of families at risk of child welfare involvement to services outside the child protection system, reserving child protection involvement for cases of substantiated child maltreatment. In response to the continued increase in numbers of children in out of home care and a lack of foster home resources, the government announced a full review of the child welfare system (MacLaurin et al., 2011). On December 16, 2010, the report: "For the

Good of Our Children and Youth” was released and contained 12 non-binding recommendations, including improved support for families living in poverty, more widespread access to parenting resources and better supports for youth leaving the foster care system (Pringle, 2010). Several initiatives were implemented to help transform the child welfare system including the development of intensive family support models in targeted areas across the province to provide support and counseling to families in times of crisis, and the piloting of a flexible response model, among others. These are intended to support and preserve the family unit, and allow children to remain safely in the family home (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012).

Child in need of protection

Under *The Child and Family Services Act* in Saskatchewan (Section 11) a child is in need of protection where as a result of action or omission by the child’s parent or guardian:

- the child has suffered or is likely to suffer physical harm;
- the child has suffered or is likely to suffer a serious impairment of mental or emotional functioning;
- the child has been or is likely to be exposed to harmful interaction for a sexual purpose,
- medical care or treatment that is considered essential and has not been or is not likely to be provided to the child;
- the child’s development is likely to be seriously impaired by failure to remedy a mental, emotional or developmental condition; or
- the child has been exposed to domestic violence or severe domestic disharmony that is likely to result in physical or emotional harm to the child;
- there is no adult person who is able and willing to provide for the child’s needs, and physical or emotional harm to the child has occurred;
- or the child is less than 12 years of age and the child has committed an act that would constitute an offence under the Criminal Code, and family services are necessary to prevent a recurrence.

The 2008 Saskatchewan Incidence Study (SIS) tracked the primary forms of maltreatment reported for each child investigated by child welfare services. To ensure compatibility with the Canadian Incidence Study (Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC], 2010) the definitions of maltreatment in the SIS differ somewhat from the terminology used in Saskatchewan (MacLaurin et al., 2011). In 2008 there were an estimated 8,933 child maltreatment investigations in Saskatchewan. Of these investigations, 64% concerned an allegation of abuse or neglect and the remaining 36% concerned situations where there was a risk of maltreatment. Of the situations involving allegations of abuse or neglect, 56% were substantiated. Over half of all cases of substantiated maltreatment involved some form of neglect; approximately one fifth of all investigations were substantiated for exposure to intimate partner violence, and the remainder for physical abuse, emotional maltreatment, or sexual abuse (see Figure 1 below).

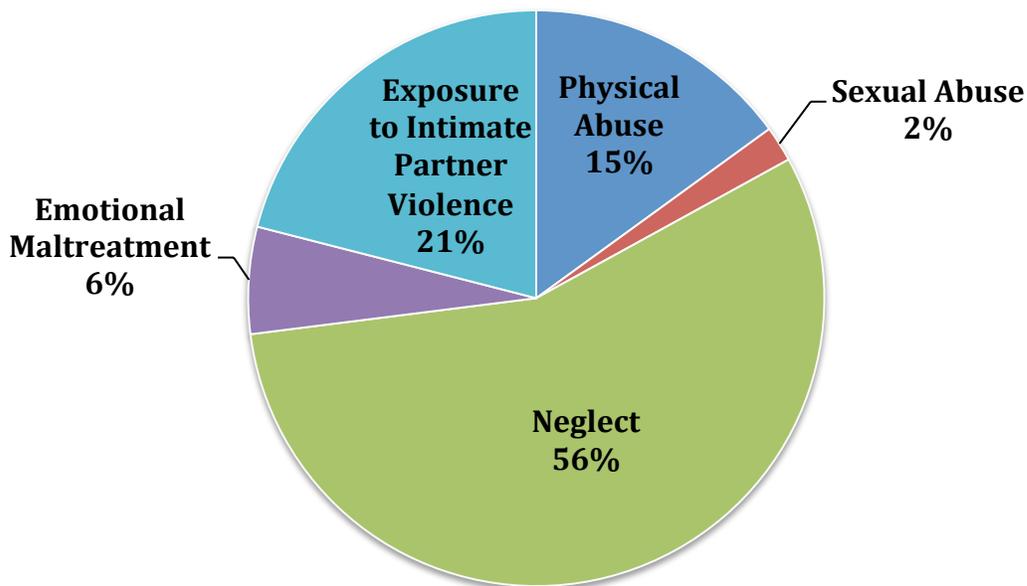
Spectrum of services

The range of services provided to children and families under the Saskatchewan *Child and Family Services Act* include: investigation, provision of family services (referrals to community-

based services for counselling, addictions treatment, parenting courses), and placement in out of home care. As in most provinces, these services are a combination of community services, contract services and services provided by the child protection office. After an initial referral to a child protection office, a child protection worker evaluates the allegation using a “Structured Decision-Making System” (Children's Research Centre, 2012). This tool provides guidelines for assessing the immediate safety of the child or children under investigation and guidelines for a family strengths and risk assessment.

Figure 1.

*Primary category of substantiated maltreatment in Saskatchewan, 2008**



* **Source:** *SIS-2008*, (MacLaurin et al., 2011)

In 2008, an estimated 4% of children in the province were referred to a child and family services agency for a child maltreatment investigation (MacLaurin et al., 2011). Approximately 40% received ongoing services from a child and family services agency and 19% of children were placed in out-of-home care during the course of the investigation (MacLaurin et al., 2011).

In the event that a child is placed outside of their home, “permanency planning” guidelines seek to ensure that children have a plan in place to ensure safe and stable environment in which to live (Children's Research Centre, 2012). Table 1 shows the number of children in out-of-home care by year in Saskatchewan, from 2007-2011. The column “Number of children in care” differs from the column “Children in out-of-home care” because the former only includes children that have been determined by the courts to be wards or those that have “apprehended status”. Approximately 80% of the children in out-of-home care in Saskatchewan identified as

Aboriginal in 2007-2011 (Government of Saskatchewan, 2011). The latter column includes all children that had been placed with relatives, in foster homes or group homes and includes both temporary and permanent placements (Government of Saskatchewan, 2011).

Table 1.

Children in Out-of-Home Care in Saskatchewan 2007-2012[^]

Fiscal year end	Non-wards*	Children in care - First Nations Agencies**	Children in care***	Children in out-of-home care****	Population of children 0-19 years	Percentage of children in out-of-home care (%)
2007	1,045	1,159	3,243	5,447	269,415	2.02
2008	1,103	1,166	3,336	5,605	272,954	2.05
2009	1,297	1,206	3,593	6,096	272,019	2.24
2010	1,428	1,176	3,348	5,952	278,072	2.14
2011	1,538	1,124	3,217	5,879	N/A	N/A
2012	1,660	1,117	3,961	6,738	N/A	N/A

* Includes non wards living in out-of-home care.

**Reflects reconciled stats from INAC as of March of each year. INAC stats are usually received in June.

*** Includes wards and children with apprehended status.

**** Includes all children who are placed in out-of-home care and are involved with the Ministry and children who were apprehended by the Ministry off-reserve and placed on reserve. Placements for these children include foster homes, group homes, assessment and stabilization centres, and placement with extended family.

***** 2011 data not yet available (<http://population.health.gov.sk.ca/csv.htm>).

[^] Source: Government of Saskatchewan (2011, 2013)

Additional information about child welfare services in Saskatchewan is available on the [Ministry of Social Services](#) website, as well as the [Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal](#).

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