

Child Welfare Redesign

**Ministry of Children,
Community and Social Services**

November 2020

Purpose

- Provide an overview of the Child Welfare Redesign Strategy, including opportunities for collaboration moving forward.

Context

- On July 29, 2020, the Ontario government released its plan to redesign the child welfare system.
- The strategy focuses on strengthening families and communities through prevention, early intervention and seeking more permanent homes for children and youth in care when they cannot stay in their own homes or communities.
- The new child welfare strategy was developed with input from youth, families, caregivers, First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, lawyers, community organizations, frontline workers and child welfare sector leaders. They participated in over 100 engagement sessions over the past year and provided over 3,000 responses to an online survey.

“We are committed to taking the time to get this right and keep children and youth at the heart of everything we do. Their safety, well-being and future success is of utmost importance.” - Minister Dunlop

Child Welfare Redesign Strategy

Vision

An Ontario where every child and youth has the supports they need to succeed and thrive.

Goal and Scope

Working in partnership with the child welfare, residential and community-based services to build a coordinated range of services that strengthen families, focusing on community-based prevention and early intervention services. These will be high quality, culturally appropriate and truly responsive to the needs of children, youth and families. When children and youth cannot remain at home, they will be supported through family-based placements wherever possible. We are improving the overall quality of care they receive from children's aid societies and residential services, such as foster care or group homes. Our system will provide children and youth in care with the supports they need to be safe, succeed and thrive as they transition from care to adulthood.

Distinct Indigenous Approach (1/2)

The work will be guided by the ongoing implementation of the co-developed Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy (OICYS).

- First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples are constitutionally recognized peoples in Canada, with their **own laws, and distinct cultural, political and historical ties** to the Province of Ontario. This, along with their unique relationships to Ontario, is acknowledged in the Preamble of the CYFSA.
- The provincial legislative regime under the CYFSA includes a **variety of provisions that are unique to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis** children and youth, as well as bands and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.
- First Nations and Ontario have taken steps toward helping ensure greater control over child and family services for communities: **12 of 50 societies in Ontario are Indigenous societies**, and 2,710 (~22%) of 12,056 children in care in Ontario are in the care of Indigenous societies. Additionally, in 2019-20, there were 1,636 children in ministry-funded customary care arrangements.
- The ministry has continued to **maintain collaborative relationships with First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and urban Indigenous partners**, guided by the OICYS, an established strategic framework built on partner perspectives that is well-positioned to transform service delivery.
- **Self-determination can be important to well-being outcomes.** Research demonstrates that children and communities can significantly benefit when their communities and nations pursue and exercise effective self-governance.

Distinct Indigenous Approach (2/2)

The ministry continues to implement the **Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy (OICYS)**, the strategic framework co-developed with First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and urban Indigenous partners across Ontario to improve outcomes for Indigenous children and youth. The distinct Indigenous approach to the Child Welfare Redesign Strategy will also advance as part of the OICYS.

The Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy

VISION

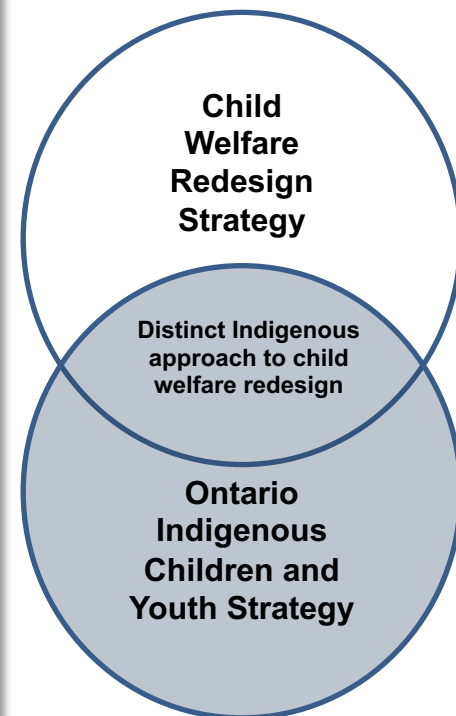
First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous children and youth are healthy, happy, resilient, grounded in their cultures and languages and thriving as individuals and as members of their families and Nations/communities

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

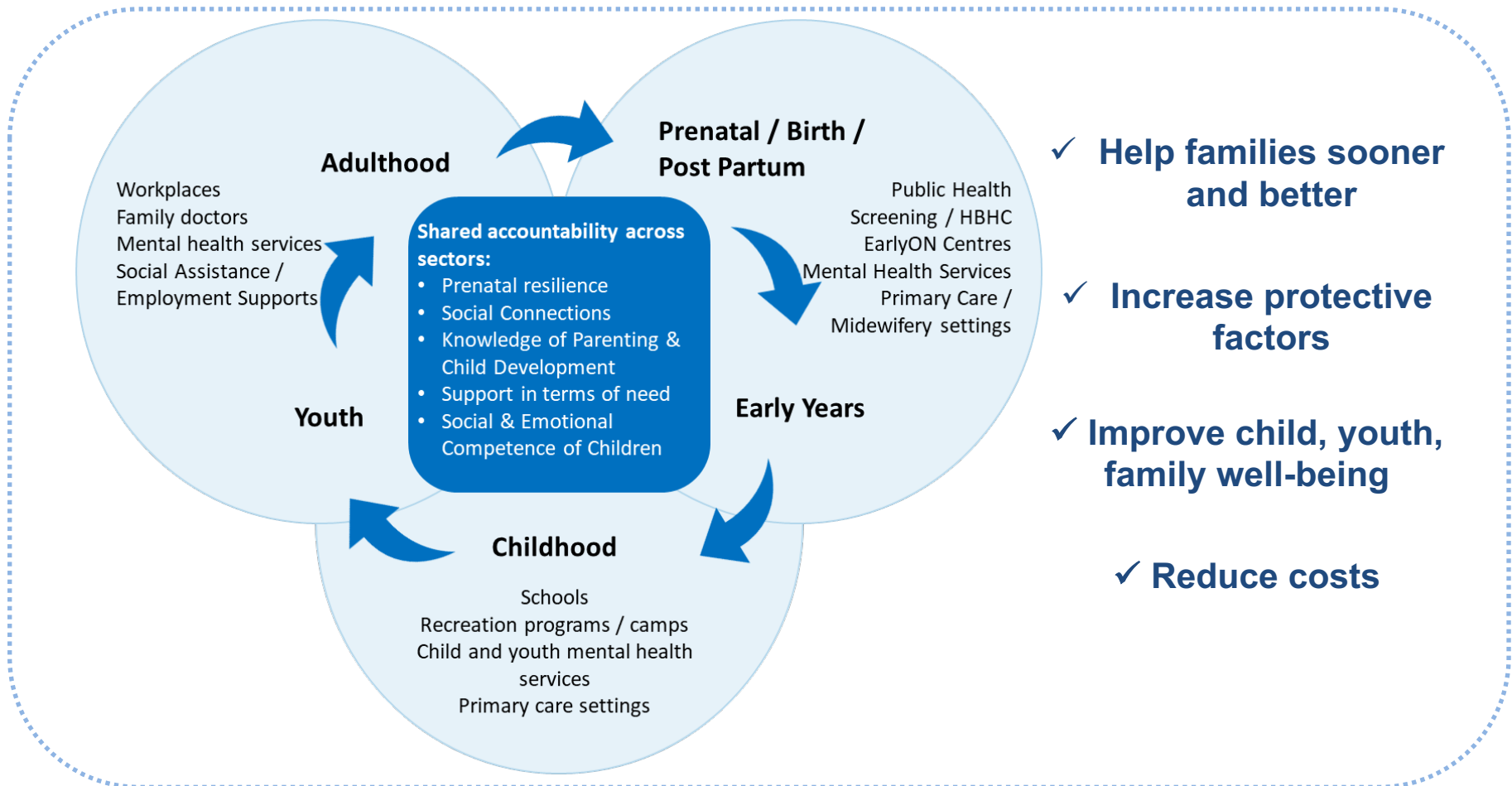
- ▶ Children and youth centred
- ▶ Culture and identity as foundational
- ▶ Respect rights and jurisdictional aspirations
- ▶ Co-development and partnership
- ▶ Outcomes focus
- ▶ Responsive to youth voice
- ▶ Flexibility
- ▶ Shared accountability
- ▶ Reconciliation (acknowledge the past, act now, and look to the future)

PILLARS

First Nations Jurisdiction and Control / Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous Control	Prevention, Culture and Opportunities	Coordinated and Responsive Circle of Care	Monitoring, Evaluation and Shared Accountability	Transformed Relationships and Collaborative, Holistic Action
First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous communities/ organizations have authority to care for their children and youth.	First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous children and youth have access to preventive services focused on well-being, culture and opportunities	The child and youth service workforce is equipped to provide high quality, integrated and culturally appropriate services	Progress is tracked through culturally and contextually appropriate monitoring and evaluation approaches	Systemic change through collaborative action and transformed relationships with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous partners



Collaborative: Redesigning the child welfare system is a significant undertaking. It will take time and continued partnership with the child welfare sector, Indigenous communities and other health and social services partners to be successful.



Child Welfare Redesign Strategy Overview

The strategy to redesign the child welfare system has [five pillars](#):

1. **Child, Youth, Family and Community Wellbeing** – Strengthening family well-being with higher quality, culturally appropriate and responsive community-based prevention and early intervention services that keep children safe in family-based settings;
 2. **Quality of Care** – Improving the quality of residential care provided to children and youth, including enhanced training for caregivers;
 3. **Strengthening Youth Supports** – Promoting the development of stable and lifelong connections and supports for youth, with a focus on education and employment opportunities;
 4. **Improving Stability and Permanence** – Improving the adoption experience for children, youth and prospective parents and focusing on family-based options over group care where appropriate; and
 5. **System Accountability and Sustainability** – Creating a more efficient and effective child welfare system that is financially sustainable.
- All pillars of the child welfare redesign are supported by the co-developed ***Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy***.

Strategic Pillars (1/5)



Pillar 1: Child, Youth & Family Well-Being

Shifting to Prevention

- The redesign will address the need for improved coordination and consistency across systems by shifting to a model focusing on a collaborative and holistic approach.
- A new, shared responsibility across sectors to work together to enhance child, youth and family well-being among all children, youth and families and help keep families together.
- Service providers and community organizations will work together to identify and respond to the needs of families early-on, including schools, early-years programs, parenting programs and health and mental health services.
- Families will be connected more quickly to appropriate and effective social supports or know how and where to access the right supports in times of need.

Indigenous Children, Youth and Families

- Indigenous children, youth and families, through the Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy (OICYS), will be able to access community-based prevention and early intervention supports, including through expanded access to customary care, that are culturally appropriate and reflect their customs, heritages and traditions. Child protection will be a last resort.
- Supporting the implementation of Indigenous-led models and systems for child and family services.

Strategic Pillars (2/5)



Pillar 2: Quality of Care

Quality and Oversight

- Implementing *Ontario's Quality Standards Framework – A Resource Guide to Improve the Quality of Care for Children and Young Persons in Licensed Residential Settings* to support residential service providers in delivering high-quality residential care.
- Launching the *Children and Young Persons' Rights Resource* to support children and young persons receiving services under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017* to know and understand their rights.
- Enhancing training and qualifications requirements for persons providing residential care, including staff and caregivers.

Prioritize Family-Based Care

- Focusing on family-based placements, like kinship and foster care, over group homes, where appropriate, to increase stability and culturally appropriate options for children and youth in care.

Strategic Pillars (3/5)



Pillar 3: Strengthening Youth Supports

Amplifying Youth Voice

- Ensuring children, youth and families have a strong voice in decisions about their care, including increasing access to education and employment resources, information and supports to improve transitions from care.

Enhancing Youth Supports

- Expanding and increasing access to education and employment supports for youth (e.g. postsecondary, employment and apprenticeship programs).
- Providing youth with dedicated, targeted supports to meet their distinct needs and respond to their cultural identities. This includes those with disabilities and mental health needs as well as specific supports for Indigenous, Black, racialized and LGBTQ2S children and youth.
- Supporting youth to transition successfully to adulthood.

Strategic Pillars (4/5)



Pillar 4: Improving Stability & Permanency

Family-based Supports

- Improving access to resources for all types of family-based caregivers (e.g. kinship, customary and adoptive).
- Expanding post-adoption parent training and peer supports.
- Implementing a public education campaign to recruit new, diverse caregivers and adoptive parents, and working with stakeholders on initiatives to recruit and retain foster and kinship caregivers.

Consistent Adoption Services

- Offering more consistent and responsive adoption experiences for children, youth and prospective adoptive parents.
- Developing a centralized adoption intake service and adoption service standards.
- Launching and implementing centralized adoption matching.

Strategic Pillars (5/5)



Pillar 5: System Accountability & Sustainability

Accountability and Efficiency

- Developing a new accountability framework focused on outcomes.
- Releasing an enhanced service collaboration to improve services and equity for children, youth and families.

Financial Sustainability

- Implementing shared services and shared back office functions (HR, IT and finance) to achieve a more efficient and effective child welfare system.
- Developing options for new system structures, including a new funding model, to ensure the system is financially sustainable in the long term and children's aid societies can balance their budgets.

Outcomes

Safety

Children and youth are safe and safety is achieved by the least intrusive means.

Voice

Children, youth and families are respected, and have their voices heard and their needs met.

Permanency & Stability

Children and youth are safely connected to their family, communities and culture.

Sustainability

The sector is sustainable, efficient, effective, accountable and flexible enough to adjust to the new reality following COVID-19.

Well-Being

Children, youth and families are supported in their communities to succeed and thrive, and meet key developmental milestones.

Equity

Outcome disparities are reduced

Quality

Children and youth are supported to grow through high quality, consistent services that meet their needs.

FCSLLG Statement of Equity

- Our internal EDI committee has worked for months to craft statement of equity.
- This is an effort to ground our work in the principles of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity

The good news is we are well positioned

- Our strategic plan's three pillars of engagement, resiliency, and inclusivity are well aligned with re-design
- We have a strong vision to move towards a family-based care **only** approach – and we're getting there!
- Signs of Safety has been referred to by the Ministry and across the sector as the practice framework that makes sense to achieve the outcomes of re-design
- We are making a thrust to genuinely commit to equitable and culturally appropriate service
- We have (out of necessity) been looking at and implementing ways to provide services more efficiently so that we can be sustainable (as per pillar 5)

Discussion Questions that the Ministry has posed to us....

- What are some of the innovative service delivery strategies that our organization has implemented that aligns with the child welfare redesign goals / outcomes? What are the results you have achieved and how are you measuring them?
e.g. Service model (keeping the child/family at the center of planning), Signs of Safety, EDI, some shared services re: IT and CPIN
- What do you see as a high priority in your service area that will result in a significant improvement in the lives of children, youth and families and aligns with the child welfare redesign goals/outcomes?
e.g. readiness for independence programs/resources, kinship supports, more support for addictions/mental health for families
- Delivering on the goals and outcomes of the redesign strategy will require collaboration and partnership across sectors to support children and families using a holistic and life course approach. How do you envision working with your communities and partners in new ways to achieve this transformation?
what are some existing opportunities to build upon? Some current examples partnerships to promote prevention, Parents First, IDP, Transition House, Connections

Some Next Steps

- Key stakeholder discussions – school, police, other partners
- Data collection – we MUST know who we serve to deliver on the pillars of redesign
- Lead table discussions – how ready is the community to live “protection is everybody’s business”

Questions for EKIOC

- What does “child protection is everyone’s business” mean to you? Can you envision this concept expanded beyond a person’s duty to report? What does it/would it look like? What are some barriers that you might encounter in expanding beyond duty to report? How can we work together as a community to address these barriers?
- Tell us about a time when your organization was able to help a youth or family achieve safety without needing child protection involvement? What conditions were in place?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is your organization is well positioned to provide support families to prevent serious harm to children such that child protection may not be necessary and 0 is your agency is not at all positioned to provide such services, where would you rate yourself?

Questions for EKIOC

- Families who currently come in the child welfare door, have sometimes not had success accessing other community services for a variety of reasons (could be due to long wait lists, canceled services because they missed too many appointments, canceled services b/c they were too volatile/not voluntary to work with, etc.), what is our collective role in breaking down or addressing some of these barriers? What benefits might this bring for families?
- Sometimes referral sources have “weaponized” the CAS in their interactions with families (e.g. if you don’t do a, b, or c...we’re going to have to call CAS). How can we change this approach in our community?