

Funding Considerations for Jurisdiction and Reform in First Nations Child and Family Services

April 28, 2025, | Webinar Q & A with Dr. Helaina Gaspard

1. How would you see Nations or individual service providers being able to adapt the Measuring to Thrive framework to align with their worldviews and norms while still maintaining the ability to tell collective stories across Nations / service providers?

- This question gets back to the idea of what we are looking at when we are measuring. We are often trying to answer two questions: a.) What are we seeing (what are the trends? What are the changes?) and b.) why are we seeing them?
- Measuring to Thrive can help us monitor the ‘what’ – what are we seeing in terms of community baselines? Can we set a starting point for a community? How does our community change over time? How are our children doing? That helps us to see what is happening and what elements are changing from that set of indicators looking at them quantitatively. But *why* those things are happening has to come from the stories of First Nations.
- From where we sit, we don’t see those two things as separate at all— we see them working together; and we hope that you see that in our work. We use a lot of quantitative data that comes from First Nation organizations, First Nations and other sources, but it is the stories and the sense making that give meaning to those numbers; because those trends mean nothing if we don’t know why.
- For instance, if we see family reunification rates increasing – why is that happening? What is happening in community? Are our economics a bit more stable? Are parents feeling more confident? Are service providers equipped with tools to do more, to do things differently? Asking those questions means having people share stories— and that comes from staff, from community members, from people who are actually engaging with those services. That is where we hope that there will be the connection between the ‘what’ and the ‘why’.

2. So much of our work locally depends on good partnerships with federal and provincial governments, and them upholding their accountabilities. What do you see as their obligations to report publicly on their parts of the work?

- Sometimes the best place to start is what they are accountable for right now. For example, the Federal Government every year has to report on the outcomes for its programs. There are policies in place for the Federal Government that require that the way money is spent and the results that are generated from programs are presented to Parliament (meaning it is made public for Canadians). They don’t do a very good job of

that, as far as we are concerned, when it comes to CFS. Having them uphold their obligations, we think, can start with the obligations that they impose on themselves—so getting clarity on what is being spent, where, how and with what result, is really important.

- The BC government talks a lot about reconciliation and has taken important steps in that regard, but again when you ask the question ‘How are First Nations children if they are in care?’ or ‘How are First Nations children being funded if they are in care?’, we can’t find the answers to those questions.
- There is an important consideration of linking the narrative or the commitment to what is actually being done in practice or behind the scenes.

3. The reality is that a lot of help is needed on the ground with systems development, indicator development, and data collection. This can also benefit from economies of scale for efficiency purposes. What do you see as the potential solutions to help Nations build capacity locally but also collaborate on these common practical needs?

- This is something we have seen as a current in the work since phase one. From where we sit, we think there needs to be some kind of Secretariat or a place that has the capacity to support First Nations and agencies in two different ways: on one side data gathering/data analysis and on another side, practice.
- Data Gathering Side:
 - Chapin Hall and the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation are helpful examples of ways that separate organizations can support service providers, not in doing the data gathering for them, not in taking their information, but in helping them make sense of their information. From our perspective that is a very important place for leverage, because lots of organizations are asking the same question; and whether that can be done on a regional basis, or whether that’s done both at a regional basis and at a national level, those we think are really helpful things that that should be reflected on as reform continues to move forward.
- Practice Side:
 - A Secretariat could be a holder of best practices where you could go to and ask ‘who’s working on family preservation?’, ‘Can they tell us about what results they had?’, ‘Can they tell us about the number of people they needed?’, ‘How did they train their staff?’.

4. Is the 5 to 6% of operating budget yearly?

- The 5 to 6% is for an allocation; there are different ways we can apply the estimate in the funding approach. When the IFSD does it in its own work, we do it on a yearly basis relative to the agency’s operating budget.

5. In Phase 1 for prevention, the per capita funding from [an ICFSA] was rounded down from \$2,563.46 to \$2,500. Why was that done?

- We use the \$2500 because that captured the activities associated to the elements that we were concerned with. We also presented the \$2500 with two other cases— one case where a First Nation didn't have an agency talked about their prevention activities; and we also asked them to generate a case and estimate the costs with us of what they could do if they had everything they needed and they got to approximately \$2000 per person. For us that \$2500 is a good reflection of the activities that were being undertaken by the agency.
- It is important to keep in mind that the \$2500 sits on top of an existing operating baseline. We are not saying take that the \$2500 in isolation – which I understand is happening now, where the \$2500 is being split up between different entities.
- Prevention resources were also adjusted annually for inflation to help keep those dollars relevant.

6. In your extensive research what are the priority service areas for family preservation?

- Dr. Gaspard would be happy to point to service providers who are doing this work and who have shared these practices.
- Regarding priority service areas for family preservation, that's a great example of something a Secretariat could support. If it was a holder of best practices, you could look to the Secretariat and say, "Okay, who's working on family preservation? Does Carrier Sekani still have their intensive family reunification support program? Does NCN (Nisichawayashik Cree Nation- Family and Community Wellness Centre) in Northern Manitoba still have the removal of parents program? Can they tell us about what results they had? Can they tell us about the number of people they needed, how they trained their staff, all of those sorts of things? That- to us- is one way a Secretariat could help.
- The other way is on the data gathering and analysis side. I mentioned [earlier] those two examples of Chapin Hall and the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation. Those to us are very helpful examples of ways that separate organizations can support service providers. Not in doing the data gathering for them, not in taking their information, but in *helping them make sense of their information*, and that, from our perspective is a very important place for leverage, because lots of organizations are asking the same questions. Whether that can be done on a regional basis, or whether that's done both at a regional basis and at a national level, those are, we think, really helpful things that should be reflected on as reform continues to move forward.

7. Building on your first slide that recognizes that laws and policies have to take us outside of the mainstream service framework, around the costing tool that identifies the holistic range of services that are required...If we are going to get out of the mold of the *Child Family and Community Services Act (CFCSA)*, or the child protection framework for Indigenous families [in other provinces] because it locks us into a specific focus of intervention...it's not just the life cycle of the child that we're looking at. We're looking at an *intergenerational life cycle approach* because the parents have been harmed by the system already. And the social workers are harmed. And First Nations Agencies are limited in their framework if they continue to work within the confines of the legislation. I'm just wondering about when you did your research and consultation if there were any priorities

for the type of services that First Nations could develop in their own communities?

Because we can't look to specialists trained outside of that context.

- I'll answer your question from the work that we did and the work we were asked to do. What I hear you saying is, **“How do you apply resources to get different results for children and families done in your own way- whatever way that might be- to best meet the needs of kids and families?”** And we see that when a service provider can apply resources in the way they see fit, that we do actually see a difference in results.
- We have an example here from West Region Child and Family Services who actually did a block prevention pilot years ago. They could show that kids and families were better off when they, as the service provider, could determine how to allocate their resources. So that example, and examples from other jurisdictions, as well as our own work from a public financial management perspective, that's why we make the recommendation for a block fund approach.
- If resources in the block are sufficient to discharge a mandate, it should be up to the service provider to use those resources to fulfill its obligation. That obligation might be different in a reformed system to promote the well-being of children and families and communities. That's why we think a block approach can be helpful, because at the end of the day the service provider, whoever is delivering the services and holds all of the risk, we think that that service provider should also be empowered to help make, or to make decisions in the best interests of children and families, and to help ensure that they're designing and delivering services in ways that best meet the needs of their communities.

8. In regard to implementation and transition have other First Nations organizations seen a growth in their organizations to be able to support this good work? Was capacity building needed from the beginning?

- This is a helpful question because things will change as your service practices and parameters are changing. What we have learned from collaborators is that capacity development is always needed, but it is not just in the moment. It is actually being able to anticipate what those capacity changes might be— what those changing needs might be from a staffing perspective and also to providing opportunities to develop those capacities within your own communities.
- There are some really interesting examples of how different communities have supported this kind of capacity development, whether it is through existing social work programs or working with elders in the community to help support children and families who might need a little bit of extra wraparound supports or services or who might benefit from a cultural intervention. Those are considerations that we think merit attention, capacity and staffing is definitely needed from the beginning, but not necessarily all at once depending on the types of services you're delivering, and how those activities are being rolled out over time.

9. With services being provided both by First Nations and Agencies under current CHRT orders for a few years, has IFSD been part of any data collection to assess the impacts of this changed approach to service delivery using the Measuring to Thrive Indicators?

- Phase Three tested out those indicators. In the Phase Three report there are different examples of agencies who are using to Measuring to Thrive in different ways. In the report you can see how they have applied the tool in different ways— sometimes it is to establish a baseline or to help them inform their own data gathering tools for change.

10. Do you have any recommendations on how to use the IFSD reports in negotiating coordination agreements under C-92?

- There are a few different parts of the work, especially in the Transition section of the Phase Three report – we have a number of tables and examples of how the information can be used. There are examples, for instance, in the funding and the transition sections of how you would use the funding approach. We walk through step by step how you would take IFSD’s funding approach; and how you could generate your own estimate, whether you are an existing agency or whether you are a First Nation exercising jurisdiction.
- When you are a First Nation exercising jurisdiction, in IFSD’s approach, you need a baseline; and the report walks through ways you might build/generate a baseline.
- From a funding perspective, it could be useful as a secondary data point to help put into context what we think would be relevant when we are thinking about the design and delivery of child and family services.
- In the Transition section of the Phase 3 Report, there are a series of tables where we present the different components of transition – we walk through components (i.e., strategy, processes, systems, people) for both existing FNCFS agencies as well as First Nations exercising jurisdiction and we ask a series of questions and offer guiding questions to help those that are planning for these transitions.
- Many of our collaborators generously shared their entire workbook or their entire profile as part of the report. Other examples include draft budgets, transition assessments, context profiles that were developed as part of this project and appended.
- Further the appendices includes: lists of things you might want to consider at the start of a transition process – legal considerations, accounting considerations; program examples from prevention and protection that come from different service providers, agencies and First Nations.

Resources Shared

1. IFSD Resources & Reports

- <https://ifsd.ca/>

- First Nations not affiliated to an FNCFS agency report: https://ifsd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/2024-07_en_first-nations-not-affiliated-to-an-fncfs-agency-final-report.pdf
- Phase 3 Full pre-production report: https://ifsd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2025-02-28_Pre-Production-Draft.pdf
- Phase 3 Executive summary EN: https://ifsd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2025-02-28_Executive-Summary_Pre-Production-Draft.pdf
- Phase 3 Executive summary FR: https://ifsd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2025-02-28_Resume_FR_Pre-production-rapport-final.pdf
- Funding First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS): A performance budget approach to well-being: <https://ifsd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/ifsd-report-2020-07-funding-first-nations-child-and-family-services-fncfs.pdf>

2. Our Children Our Way Society Resources & Upcoming Events

- Jurisdiction Funding Model Resource Package (OCOW Analysis) – Concerns and Considerations; Lessons learned from the IFSD and CHRT Orders: <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:va6c2:a4824def-55eb-4aba-a059-e1d641dba283>
- <https://ourchildrenourway.ca/>
- [Our Children Our Way Society YouTube Channel](#)
- [May 09 “Jordan River Anderson – The Messenger” Observing the 20th Anniversary of Jordan’s Principle on May 10](#)
- [Loving Justice Conference 2025, Sep 8-11, 2025](#)
- [Our Children Our Way: A National Forum for Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being, Nov 2-5, 2025](#)

IFSD April 28, 2025 OCOW Webinar Slides:

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:VA6C2:37d27ea8-49b9-454f-a4b9-7a8a4f16608c>

OCOW April 28, 2025 Webinar Slides (including questions submitted in advance):

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:VA6C2:c4d60ce3-4a6e-486f-8306-1a41f3718edc>