



NATIVE CHILD
AND FAMILY SERVICES
OF TORONTO

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2024 Federal Budget

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About Native Child and Family Services of Toronto

Established in 1986 by Elders, knowledge keepers, grassroots leaders, and community members, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) has supported Indigenous children and families in Toronto for over three decades. In 2004, NCFST was directed by the Indigenous community to accept a child welfare mandate to decolonize Indigenous Child and Family Services (CFS) in the City of Toronto. NCFST provides holistic, culturally based prevention services that are child-centred, family-focused, and community-driven. Today, NCFST has over 385 staff who work across 20 locations delivering more than 140 different programs and services to 8,000 unique individuals annually. NCFST has an annual budget of \$58M and receives funding from all three levels of government alongside various foundations and other philanthropic sources.

Mission

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto strives to provide a life of quality, well-being, caring and healing for our children and families in the Indigenous community in the City of Toronto. We do this by creating a culture-based service model that respects the values of Native people, the extended family, and the right to self-determination.

Service Model

NCFST's service model was developed through four days of ceremony by Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers and community leaders. It directs us to develop a holistic and sustainable multi-service organization to support the quality of life of Indigenous children and their families in Toronto. The community created NCFST in response to the lasting impacts of residential schools and a westernized model of child welfare on Indigenous children and families.

Our service model emphasizes the development and delivery of integrated services for healing, wellness, and family supports sufficient to provide Indigenous children and their families with multiple pathways to a quality life. Our programs and services are grounded in Indigenous values, knowledge, best practices, and worldviews. Such programs include treatment and healing services, early years programs, youth programs, cultural and recreational programs, education and employment programs, transitional housing, violence against women, anti-human trafficking, and legislated child welfare.

NCFST's Concern's and Recommendation

Gaps created in distinctions-based funding formulas employed by the federal government are leaving the majority of Indigenous people who live in urban centers out of critical discussions around much needed funding resources for housing, child and family well-being programs, and other programs designed to address the health and well-being inequities we know that Indigenous people in Canada experience.

Through mechanisms such as Jordan's Principle, Indigenous Services Canada's Urban Indigenous Peoples Program, and First Nations Child and Family Wellbeing Program, as well as the settlements associated with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto has been able to access some funding to help us begin to provide Indigenous people in Toronto and Peel region with equitable access to the high quality culture-based health and well-being services they deserve. This has been a corrective to the chronic underfunding that Indigenous agencies have historically been subject to. However, the need for this funding is growing, and the existing funding we do receive is precarious, unpredictable, and in constant jeopardy.

Through Jordan's Principle NCFST has been able to support families access to much needed resources totaling \$712,594 in 2023-24 so far. Ongoing under-resourcing of this program, however, results in significant wait times for families ultimately reducing the amount of funding that families can access and putting both Indigenous families and the agencies that serve them at financial risk. Native Child and Family Services of Toronto requests that the budget include the proper, ongoing funding of this program to ensure it will continue to meet the needs of Indigenous people across Canada now and well into the future.

Through Indigenous Services Canada's First Nations Child and Family Wellbeing Program NCFST has been able to secure \$7+ million dollars in annual funding for critical programs designed to decrease the number of Indigenous children coming into the care of Child and Family Well-Being agencies. However, this funding is only guaranteed until 2026, with no information shared to date about if or how this funding will continue. Native Child and Family Services of Toronto requests that the budget ensure the proper, ongoing funding of our prevention and child and family wellbeing programs, and that these resources be distributed equitably, including to Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, to ensure that all Indigenous people, regardless of Status or residence, can access the programs and services they need to increase their health and wellbeing and maintain the integrity of their families.

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto also requests that the budget address the inequities experienced by Indigenous people across Canada, including those living in urban centers, by ensuring that other funding mechanisms, such as Indigenous Services Canada's Urban Indigenous People Program or the Urban, Rural, Northern and Indigenous Housing Strategy are properly resourced both to ensure that there are sufficient time and funds available to properly consult Indigenous communities about their diverse needs and to ensure that these diverse needs are met with sufficient funding. It is currently unclear how much funding will be available to urban Indigenous people via these kinds of programs, NCFST's need regarding housing for our community members alone totals almost \$5 million which we currently cobbled together from multiple funding sources. Some commitment from the federal government to properly fund programs offered for urban Indigenous people would be welcome.

Recommendation for Budget 2024

That the Government of Canada continue to provide Native Child and Family Services of Toronto with \$9 million in ongoing, renewable, annual funding to ensure that 140+ programs and services can be delivered to the over 8,000 unique community members we serve.

Conclusion

Indigenous child and family services have been chronically underfunded with successive provincial and federal governments having ignored this sector for decades. Federal programs and departments should provide more opportunities for Indigenous children and families and the agencies that serve them; instead, NCFST is left scrambling to maintain service levels, putting Indigenous children at risk.

Budget 2024 presents an opportunity for the federal government to ensure its commitment to decolonize Child and Family Well-Being and ensure other programs are applied universally to all Indigenous people and the agencies that serve them. We hope the government will consider our requests and provide NCFST with the support it needs to continue its work.

NCFST thanks the Standing Committee on Finance for the opportunity to participate in these consultations. We are happy to assist the Committee and Members of Cabinet by providing additional information its members may need.