



ASK AN EXPERT

Going “0-60” with prevention services

*By: First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC)**

In non-agreement communities¹, prevention social services and youth protection are generally funded entirely by the federal government, through the First Nations Child and Family Services Program of Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). Since the late 1990s, research has highlighted the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the youth protection system, as well as the inadequacy, and even inaccessibility, of first-line social services within First Nations communities. Insufficient funding meant that first-line social services in communities were virtually non-existent, and youth protection services were for a long time the only gateway to services. It wasn't until 2009 that ISC granted long-term funding for the Enhanced Prevention Focused Approach to all First Nations communities in Quebec for the implementation of their prevention services.

Currently, all non-agreement communities in Quebec offer their residents prevention services under funding agreements with ISC. The goal of these services is to support parents, youth, and families in the communities by offering services based on culturally sensitive practices developed by and for First Nations. The communities share a common desire to improve the living conditions and wellness of children and families by offering services that respect Indigenous knowledge, cultures, and traditional practices.

The Big Three:

What do First Nations need to know about prevention services?

- Ensure the wellness of children, families, and communities by promoting and guaranteeing the accessibility of first-line prevention services aimed at providing a safe, appropriate environment conducive to healthy development.
- Offer high-quality front-line services based on practices that respect First Nations cultures.
- Engage and empower individuals, families, and the community in the deployment of services, and ensure effective communication and cooperation between all partners².

¹ All First Nations in Quebec, with the exception of the Cree and Naskapi nations.

² In 2019, the FNQLHSSC, in partnership with the health and social services directors of the First Nations communities, developed the First-Line Prevention Services Framework. To consult the framework: <https://cssspnql.com/en/produit/first-line-preventionservices-frameworka-prevention-framework-developed-by-first-nations-for-first-nations/>

What’s the evidence?

How do we know if prevention services really work for First Nations kids?

With the implementation of community-based prevention services for children, youth, and families, First Nations have defined wellness-focused, comprehensive, relevant, and culturally safe support and intervention measures. These services are consistent with First Nations values, beliefs, and practices. The manner in which services are offered varies from one community to another.

Cultural and traditional practices, such as the transmission of knowledge and ceremonies, as well as the use and appreciation of the land, have positive effects on the wellness of First Nations, and are considered protective factors in the fight against child neglect. The land is seen as a place of education, socialization, and healing. It serves as a reference point for the transmission of knowledge and cultures, individual and collective identity, and the enhancement of family and community relationships.

Myth-busting:

What are the common misperceptions, practices, or assumptions regarding prevention services and why should they be considered myths?

Vision of the family

Compared to the Western vision and definition of the (nuclear) family, First Nations consider that the close bond of the immediate family (parents and children) extends to the extended family, which includes grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc. In this sense, although parents are considered to be primarily responsible for their children, the education and wellness of children is a responsibility shared with extended family members, who play an active and significant role in the search for solutions and in intervention.

A different concept of negligence

The Youth Protection Act (YPA) defines neglect as the failure of parents to meet a child’s basic physical, health, and/or educational needs. It has been shown that First Nations do not adhere to the YPA’s definition of neglect, and that this concept has no equivalent in traditional First Nations social structures. The report *Better understanding the phenomenon of neglect in the context of First Nations in Quebec*³ highlights the fact that parents do not deliberately neglect their children, but that it is the psychosocial, financial, and other problems they face and for which they do not receive the necessary help that lead them to be neglectful. It is therefore important to rely on the involvement and collaboration of prevention services in the communities and organizations concerned. This will enable an adequate response to the needs of families at risk or in highly vulnerable situations, and thus compensate for the systematic application of the YPA.

The overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the youth protection system

In terms of youth protection, it has been demonstrated that the current application of the YPA—without considering the effects of assimilation laws and policies on First Nations parenting and the different visions of child education and protection—generates negative and discriminatory effects on families, and consequently contributes to the overrepresentation of First Nations children in the youth protection system. To improve

³ Research Report *Better understanding the phenomenon of child neglect in the context of First Nations in Quebec*: <https://cssspnql.com/en/produit/research-report-better-understanding-the-phenomenon-of-child-neglect-in-the-context-of-first-nations-in-quebec/>.

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wellness and reduce the number of First Nations children in youth protection, it is important to focus on revitalizing culture, reaffirming self-determination, and taking charge of first- and second-line social services as protective factors (see Figure 1).

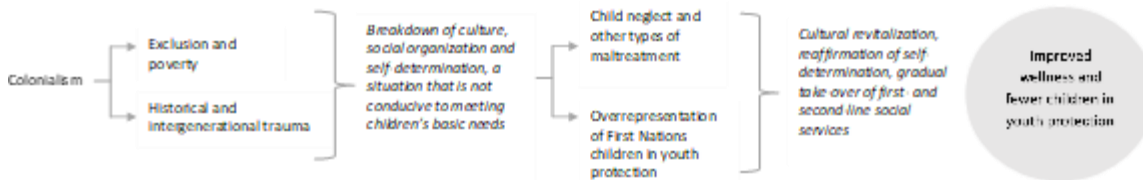


Figure 1: Structural risk factors and protective factors for First Nations child neglect⁴

Lack of knowledge about First Nations

Lack of knowledge about cultural differences and the impact of intergenerational trauma can lead to discrimination against First Nations children. Thus, understanding the history, culture, and realities of First Nations must be central to the approach of professionals who work with First Nations children, youth, and families. Approaches must strive to value First Nations knowledge and perspectives, the cultural safety approach, and the holistic model. It is up to First Nations to develop, assess, and provide training that is relevant to their history, cultures, and realities.

What works?

What are some key implications for child welfare policy and practice when it comes to prevention services?

Prior to colonization, First Nations cultures, practices, and knowledge ensured the development and wellness of their children from one generation to the next. To improve wellness and reduce the number of First Nations children placed in the care of youth protection services, it is important to focus on revitalizing culture, reaffirming self-determination, and taking over first- and second-line social services as protective factors⁵.

First Nations are in the best position to determine the needs of their populations and adopt the appropriate measures to meet them. They must be stakeholders in the entire decision-making process that affects them. Cultural safety for and governance by First Nations are important protective factors against neglect and poverty. As a result, culturally safe services must be part of a self-determination perspective, within a framework defined by First Nations themselves, and in keeping with their vision of the best ways to meet the needs of children and families. It is important to review and improve the services provided in conjunction with First Nations, and to do so in a culturally safe approach, where workers are trained in the realities and contexts of First Nations. A concrete example is An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth, and families, which establishes the inherent right of self-government for First Nations, including the power to legislate in matters of child and family services. Self-determination is considered one of the most

⁴ Montambault, Ostiguy-Lauzon, Paul, Lacharité and Esposito, *Poverty and the Overrepresentation of First Nations Children in the Quebec Youth Protection System*, 2021. https://travail-social.umontreal.ca/public/FAS/travail_social/Images/Nouvelles/Pauvrete_vulnerabilite_colonialisme_Premieres_Nations_TONINO_EXPOSITO.pdf

⁵ Ibid

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important determinants of health and wellness for First Nations⁶.

Additional resources:

FN/QIS-2019: First Nations Component of the Quebec Incidence Study of Child Maltreatment and Serious Behaviour Problems Investigated by Child Protection Services in 2019 (2019)⁷

Better Understanding the phenomenon of child neglect in the context of First Nations in Quebec (2022)⁸

First-line Prevention Services Framework: Prevention Framework Developed By First Nations For First Nations (2019)⁹

* First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC)

The FNQLHSSC is a non-profit association created in 1994 by resolution of the Chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador. It is responsible for supporting the efforts of First Nations in Quebec to plan and offer culturally appropriate and preventive health and social services programs, among other things. Its mission is to accompany Quebec First Nations in achieving their health, wellness, culture, and self-determination goals. Its main fields of intervention are related to governance, early childhood, health, social services, social development, research, and information resources.

Visit <https://cssspnql.com/> to find out more.

⁶ United Nations, 2007 ([Research Report *Better understanding the phenomenon of child neglect in the context of First Nations in Quebec*](#)).

⁷ <https://cssspnql.com/en/produit/eiq-pn-2019-volet-premieres-nations-de-letude-dincidence-quebecoise-sur-les-situations-evaluees-en-protection-de-la-jeunesse-en-2019/>

⁸ <https://cssspnql.com/en/produit/research-report-better-understanding-the-phenomenon-of-child-neglect-in-the-context-of-first-nations-in-quebec/>

⁹ <https://cssspnql.com/en/produit/first-line-preventionservices-frameworka-prevention-framework-developed-by-first-nations-for-first-nations/>