

Community Report

Government Engagement Mechanisms

An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families



A Message from Métis Nation–Saskatchewan (MN–S) Vice President and Justice Minister Michelle LeClair

What a monumental year it has been for Métis families across our Homeland. With a Supreme Court Ruling affirming our inherent right to care for our own under Bill C-92, the Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families, the Métis Nation government is working with communities across Saskatchewan to determine what services are required to ensure the best outcomes for our children.

The passage of the Bill and subsequent court ruling confirms what we have always known – one size does not fit all. Our children should be raised in their Métis culture with respect to values, tradition and language. That is how we will adapt child and family services – to fit the community they serve and improve the health and well-being of generations of Métis children and youth to come.

This is a new chapter for Métis in Canada and comes amid another historical change. Our MN–S government is moving toward a self-government model that solely reflects Métis in Saskatchewan. It has never been more important to hear from our citizens as we shape the future of our Nation and introduce services that strengthen our Métis families.

Sincerely,

Michelle LeClair

Vice President & Justice Minister, Métis Nation–Saskatchewan



A message from Métis Nation–Saskatchewan (MN–S) Child and Family Services Minister Kathie Pruden-Nansel

As Métis people, we've always had the inherent right to care for our own children, in our own communities, in our own culture. This year, the Supreme Court of Canada loudly affirmed that with its decision regarding Bill C-92, the Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families.

In anticipation of that decision, the MN–S government Ministry of Child & Family Services and Ministry of Justice began a series of province-wide citizen engagements in 2023. These conversations will help us develop culturally Metis distinct services and programs that serve our communities' needs and provide the best possible outcomes for our children.

The perspectives and voices that have been shared outline some of strengths and challenges that will be faced moving forward. However with continued consultation in the north, central, and south regions of the province, our MN–S government will create an adaptable yet unified Child and Family service approach developed with our communities and citizens for Saskatchewan Métis families.

I look forward to continuing this good work with all of you, my colleagues, our leaders, and our citizens.

Sincerely,

Kathie Pruden-Nansel

MN–S Child and Family Services Minister



Community Report



- Federal legislation passed on January 1, 2020, recognizes our Nation's right to exercise inherent jurisdiction over child and family services.
- MN-S successfully obtained funding from Canada to gather input on development of a Métis distinct child and family services program, the process of which is overseen by MN-S's Ministry of Child and Family Services.
- In 2023 MN-S's Ministry of Child and Family Services established a team composed of Elders and Knowledge Keepers, leaders in child welfare, trauma therapists and program staff to gather input from our citizens, stakeholders and focus groups.
- Focus groups included Elders, governance leaders, caregivers, women, Survivors of Residential and Day Schools and the Sixties Scoop, subject experts (including researchers and practitioners), youth, those aging out of care, and 2SLGBTQ1A+ individuals.
- From May through November 2023, the MN-S team hosted 35 Engagement sessions in Saskatchewan, attending small community gatherings, five virtual meetings, and three large conferences.
- At each Engagement, MN-S recorded the problems our families face, and recommendations for development of a Métis distinct child and family services program.
- Collectively, the comments and recommendations are set forth in our final report.

Inherent Jurisdiction

- Our Métis Nation has the inherent right to deliver culturally appropriate child and family services to our citizens.
- Since 1982, federal, provincial and international laws have recognized and respected Indigenous inherent rights (including section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Saskatchewan Métis Act, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, and An Act respecting First Nation, Métis and Inuit child, youth and family services).
- The first five Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action in 2015 relate directly to child and family services and called for all levels of government to reduce the number of Métis children in out-of-home care.
- We have the inherent right to protect our children and to choose our own solutions for our families.

Our children hold a sacred place in our Métis Nation and with that, comes a sacred responsibility to care for them.

Métis in Saskatchewan

As of the latest update, MN-S has 27,764 registered citizens, with a further 5,302 applications in progress, and 800 applications awaiting entry into the data base. In total, the community, both present and potential citizens, now reaches 33,766, however the 2021 Census of Population reports 62,800 Métis people in Saskatchewan. Greater efforts must be made to register our citizens.

Métis citizens reside in 571 municipalities across Saskatchewan. Considering that Saskatchewan has a total of 774 municipalities, this attests to the widespread presence of Métis citizens throughout the province.

At the Engagements, we heard loud and clear that Métis people in Saskatchewan share a common history and a culture demonstrated by:

- kinship connections,
- food,
- traditions,
- dance,
- language (Michif and regional dialects),
- ideology, and
- respect for Métis symbols including the sash, red river cart and the flag.



A Métis child and family services program must build on this vibrant identity. It must offer programming that is wherever possible community-led, and which reflects our unique culture and traditions.

We also need to expand the reach of the Citizen Registry to ensure every Métis child, youth and family receives appropriate services.

Some of the suggestions we heard for Métis distinct programming include:

- focusing on prevention,
- encouraging community gatherings,
- promoting cultural camps and land-based teachings,
- helping citizens regain our language,
- offering traditional parenting programs and life skill training,
- establishing affordable housing,
- providing accessible Métis based treatment programs for addictions and mental health,
- building capacity in our communities,
- addressing food insecurity,
- overcoming the roots of poverty.

Despite our shared identity, however, we heard there are distinct social, cultural, and economic dynamics in each of our 12 MN-S regions. These characteristics, strengths and challenges must be reflected in the programming offered.



Métis Nation-Saskatchewan

Under the Act, MN-S is recognized as the Indigenous Governing Body for our citizens in Saskatchewan. MN-S is well situated to move forward with the design and eventual implementation of a distinct Métis child and family services program because of the robust governmental structure of MN-S, and its long-history of providing successful programs that benefit our communities.

MN-S has served Notice on Canada and Saskatchewan of our intention to eventually take control of our own child and family services.

The Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families

The federal Act was passed in January 2020. It sets out principles and minimum national standards for providing Indigenous child and family services.

The Act prioritizes:

- kinship placement,
- preventative services, and
- maintaining a child's connection to their family, community, culture, language and traditions.

The Act also promises substantial equality.

The Act requires Canada to work collaboratively with MN-S to remedy the harms of the past.

The Act builds on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations and recognizes that colonization (including Residential and Day schools, AIM, the Sixties Scoop and discriminatory child welfare practices) led to trauma and cultural devastation that continues today.

The Act also creates a renewed nation-to-nation relationship. Once MN-S has completed our consultations and designed a Métis distinct child and family services program, we will negotiate a coordination agreement with Canada and the Province. That agreement will confirm the transition plan, funding arrangements, reporting requirements and review timelines.



Although our citizens support many of the standards and principles in the Act, some of the concerns raised are as follows:

1. There must be adequate, flexible and long-term funding for prevention programs and supportive institutions so that communities can build capacity.
2. Substantial equality is guaranteed in the Act. Jordan's Principle is to apply, and there should be equality for all children despite differences based on Indigenous identity, disability, sex or gender identity. But substantial equality and reasonable efforts to keep children with family are only possible if our communities have sufficient infrastructure, programming, and resources available.
3. Children, youth and families need a stronger voice in decision making than promised by the Act, and kinship care providers need greater supports and services. Some of the supports needed for kinship care providers were identified as:
 - access to daycare,
 - financial assistance,
 - supportive living arrangements,
 - respite care,
 - timely access to behavioral assessments,
 - funding for healthy leisure activities, and
 - visiting assistance.
4. Some terms used in the Act are ambiguous (such as "significant measure" and "reasonable efforts"), others may infringe upon our inherent rights and in the Act, our citizens believe Canada is granted too much oversight. Additionally, some of the timelines set out in the Act are too tight for a Nation as large as ours. All these concerns will need to be addressed in MN-S legislation and when MN-S negotiates with Canada and the Province.
5. No Regulations have been passed yet and there are no clear directions for data management and information sharing. This too will need to be included in the coordination agreement discussions.



The Engagement Process

The 35 Engagements hosted by MN-S's Ministry of Child and Family Services included large conferences, virtual sessions, and community sessions, reaching into every MN-S region.

Attendees included specific focus groups: Elders, governance leaders, caregivers, women, Survivors of Residential and Day Schools and the Sixties Scoop, subject experts (including researchers and practitioners), youth, those aging out of care, and 2SLGBTQ1A+ individuals.

The community sessions followed a standard process with an overview of the new Act, specific questions to the attendees, and each concluded with evaluations to ensure every voice was heard. The questions asked at the community engagements were as follows:

1. As Métis people, we have inherent rights, including the inherent right to provide for the well-being of our children, our youth, and our families. What Métis distinct traditions or cultural practices did we use in the past that you consider to be important for our children, our youth and our families going forward?
2. Prevention is when certain conditions in families and communities when present increase the health and well-being of children, youth, and families. They are attributes that serve as buffers, helping parents who might otherwise be at risk of abusing or neglecting their children to find resources, support or coping strategies that allow them to parent effectively, even under stress.
 - (a) What is currently working for our children, youth, and families in your home/community?
 - (b) What prevention services should be available to reduce the risks that our children, youth and families face in their home/community?
3. How might a Métis child, youth and family services approach better ensure the safety and well-being of children, youth, and families in need of support and protection?
4. Who should be involved in prevention and child protection decisions?
5. If there is a disagreement about a child's/youth's care, how should it be resolved?
6. What suggestions and/or opportunities should we consider as we develop a child, youth and family services approach for our children?
7. Why is exercising our inherent rights and helping our own families so important?



Some engagements were held with experts and stakeholders including the Ministry of Social Services, regulatory service providers, and these community-based organizations: Hope's Home - which offers supportive living and daycare programs for children with complex medical needs and their siblings;

Ranch Ehrlo - a multi-service agency offering accredited mental health services to children and youth with complex behavioral issues;

CUMFI - the Central Urban Métis Federation Inc. which partners with the province to provide child and family services, supports for persons with disabilities and affordable housing;

Street Culture - which provides services to youth in crisis or who are experiencing homelessness.

At the three large conferences, hundreds of our citizens participated in each. These conferences included expert presentations and break out rooms with discussions on critical child welfare topics.

Note-takers recorded comments and recommendations at all Engagements, and interim task reports were completed for ISC. The MN-S full report contains a listing of some of the critical comments arising from each engagement held.



The Engagements took place as follows:

DATE	ENGAGEMENT	REGION
May 5, 2023	MRC UNDRIP CFS	Province Wide
May 26, 2023	MNLA Dialogue Forums	Province Wide
June 14, 2023	Cadmus Delorme	Expert
June 22, 2023	Pinehouse Elders	NR3
June 23, 2023	Street Culture	Expert
June 26, 2023	Ministry of Social Services	Expert
June 26, 2023	SASW	Expert
June 26, 2023	Ranch Ehrlo	Expert
August 15, 2023	CUMFI	Expert
August 24, 2023	Hope's Home	Expert
September 8, 2023	Cumberland House	ER1
September 11, 2023	La Loche	NR2
September 12, 2023	Buffalo Narrows	NR2
September 13, 2023	Pinehouse	NR3
September 25, 2023	Sandy Bay	ER1
September 26, 2023	La Ronge	NR1
September 27, 2023	Melville	ER2A
September 28, 2023	Yorkton	ER2A
October 3, 2023	Virtual	Province Wide
October 5, 2023	Lloydminster	WR1A
October 6, 2023	North Battleford	WR1A
October 12, 2023	Melfort	ER2
October 13, 2023	Nipawin	ER2
October 16, 2023	Meadow Lake	WR1
October 24, 2023	Big River	WR2
October 25, 2023	Prince Albert	WR2
October 27, 2023	Swift Current	WR3
October 28, 2023	Regina	WR3
October 29, 2023	Indian Head	ER3
October 30, 2023	Estevan	ER3
November 1, 2023	Saskatoon	WR2A
November 6, 2023	Ile-a-la-Crosse	NR3
November 7, 2023	La Loche – cancelled	NR2
November 8, 2023	Buffalo Narrows	NR2
November 9, 2023	Beauval – cancelled	NR2
November 15, 2023	Biggar	WR2A
November 22 and 23	Saskatoon CFS Conference	Province Wide

The Need for Change

Historically, Métis people raised responsible children with strong cultural identities. Families and communities worked together to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the children. All of this changed with colonization.

At the Engagements, citizens reflected on the trauma wrought by: Residential and Day Schools, the Adopt Indian Métis (AIM) program, the Sixties Scoop, and devastating provincial child welfare policies. Racism and these experiences resulted in our citizens experiencing higher rates of suicide, addictions as a coping mechanism, impairment of physical and mental health, poverty, and loss of identity.

Intergenerational trauma has resulted from the colonial past however, our citizens are wanting to move forward, beyond the trauma. And as one expert at our November conference explained, “Positive experiences, nurturing environments and supportive relationships help overcome the impact of trauma and empower individuals to reshape their lives and break the cycle of trauma for future generations”. Identifying how to move beyond the trauma effectively will be critical to our child and family services program.

Métis Children in Out-of-Home Care

Out-of-home care means the child is either a ward of the Minister of Social Services or placed in the custody of a person of sufficient interest. More than 80% of the children in care are Indigenous – not only is this overrepresentation continuing, it is increasing due in part to failure by the province to effectively address substance abuse. 2023 statistics indicate:

- Almost 10% of the Indigenous children in out-of-home care are Métis.
- 60% of those Métis children are currently wards of the Minister of Social Services.
- 40% of those Métis children are placed indefinitely with persons of sufficient interest.
- Less than 15% of the Métis children in care have been fully registered.

The Ministry of Social Services divides Saskatchewan into three regions: North, Central and South. Of the Métis children in out-of-home care (including children registered and eligible to be registered), 41% are from the North, 41% from the Centre region, and only 18% from the South. The lower numbers reported for the South region may reflect the significant loss of Métis identity identified in that area.



Key Findings

The 35 Engagements resulted in nine consistent topics of paramount concern for the provision of child, youth, and family services:

1. Program delivery. Preliminary options were discussed for potential service delivery of the child and family services program including:

- comprehensive (where MN-S would provide protection and prevention, as dispute resolution mechanisms),
- incremental (with MN-S gradually increasing responsibility as capacity expanded) and
- guiding (where MN-S would not provide services but would direct how the province should do so until such time as capacity increased).

At every engagement, citizens recommended that delivery of the program be comprehensive.

2. Cultural continuity. For Métis people, our culture defines who we are, and who we belong to. It is our stories, our language, our traditions, our values, our history, our kinship ties.

Maintaining cultural continuity is not only in the child's best interests, but important to the family and the community. Two aspects of cultural continuity continually were raised by our citizens:

- the need to reconnect families to the land, and
- recovering our language.

We heard that land-based programs will help children, youth and families understand cultural stories, and strengthen self-esteem, cultural pride, resilience, interpersonal relationships, food security, healing, and knowledge transmission.

Cultural programs must be available province wide and barriers to participation removed.

We also heard that the loss of the Michif language has prevented youth from hearing stories of the Elders told with cultural integrity and context. Valuable teachings have been lost, and our Knowledge-Keepers have been unable to share philosophies with our families that are inherent to our cultural identity.

Regaining our language was identified as critically important.



3. Substantive equality is needed that will promote equal outcomes and opportunities for all children.

This will require increased support for families, particularly when caring for a child with a disability.

Barriers to success must be eliminated including lack of equitable funding, inability to access services timely, and institutional bias.

4. Priority must be given to preventative care with MN-S overseeing community-led and locally delivered programming wherever possible.

The programming must reflect Métis values and traditions and treat people with dignity and respect.

Each community identified the types of support services that could be provided to improve the wellness of their families and ensure children were able to remain safely in parental or kinship care.

5. Accessible treatment for mental health and addictions is needed as citizens saw these problems as often together, linked to poverty and linked to higher incidents of suicide, interpersonal violence, crime, abuse, and isolation, threatening the safety of our children, our families, and our communities.

Citizens recommended a variety of addiction treatment programs in the community for youth and for families including:

- day programs,
- residential programs,
- workshops, and
- support groups.

Our citizens also recommended mental health services for children and youth that offer:

- individual and group therapy,
- crisis intervention,
- life skills teaching,
- role-modelling,
- cultural teachings;
- at risk youth outreach services;
- family mental health counselling,
- support groups and educational programs; and
- emergency homes and safe shelters.



6. Services for children aging out of care are needed because a young person exiting the child welfare system often has greater emotional and other challenges as well as less financial, family, and other support to draw on. These children and youth are then highly susceptible to addictions, homelessness, and involvement in the street culture.

Our citizens recommended providing supports that would help the youth to succeed independently in adulthood, and which would increase the likelihood of positive outcomes such as:

- navigators,
- money management and life skills training,
- employment opportunities,
- post-secondary education funding,
- housing, and
- culturally based interventions.

Citizens also recommended that while the child or youth is in care, that ongoing and frequent contact with family be maintained, and exposure to cultural activities that will strengthen his or her sense of identity be provided.

7. Prenatal Care: The Act requires that priority be given to prenatal care, when likely to be in the best interest of the child, to prevent apprehension at birth.

At the engagements, we heard that women should also be entitled to birthing choices so that children can be born into their home community and develop a clear sense of identity, strengthening family and community bonds.

Other suggestions for prenatal care services included:

- addressing homelessness and food insecurity;
- providing supplies to help the family;
- offering training programs for birth workers/midwives held in the communities;
- providing adequate funding to attract and retain service providers and parent aides; extending prenatal and educational supports;
- harm reduction strategies to help stabilize the family;
- involving Elders and members of the community in planning for the child;
- offering traditional parenting programs,
- childcare and respite care,
- providing educational opportunities and support groups for fathers;
- offering supportive placements for mother and baby; and
- parenting mentor programming.

8. Addressing the root causes of poverty is necessary to build capacity and to provide services that will meet all the social determinants of Métis health and wellness. This will require community development and engagement.

We heard that poverty is imposing a heavy burden on our families and communities to cope, particularly for women, children, single parent led families, marginalized groups and persons with disability.

Poverty is a critical determinant of health and wellness and determinants such as socio-economic status, access to medical care, education, employment and working conditions, social supports, housing, elimination of racism and violence within the home or community are all important in overcoming trauma and in having healthy communities, families and children.

In each of the 12 regions across the province, our citizens provided hundreds of innovative and supportive recommendations for how a Métis child and family services program might help to address the negative social and economic disadvantages that have resulted from colonization.

Collectively, our citizens recommended:

- investment and expanded benefits for education, health care and affordable safe housing,
- family supports where needed,
- children's programming such as HeadStart,
- providing community activities for children,
- outdoor camps to reconnect our children with the land,
- opportunities for training and employment,
- community gardens to educate families on harvesting and sharing food,
- providing financial and debt counselling, and
- extending Jordan's Principle.

9. Timely and collaborative resolution processes for child welfare disputes are needed based upon Métis views and values.

The process citizens identified must be fair and avoid the delay, costs and formalities associated with the current provincial justice system.

Suggestions were made for tribunals composed of Elders and experts, hearing from all involved.

Our citizens also called for a Métis Child and Youth Advocate in Saskatchewan, and supported the possibility of an independent expert resource that would provide assistance upon request when disputes arose with the federal or provincial government, or another Indigenous Governing Body.



Next Steps

In the next few years, MN-S will:

- explore necessary legislative changes,
- expand consultations,
- consider data strategies,
- develop approaches for intake systems,
- identify existing gaps,
- address risk management,
- focus on staff development and capacity building,
- consider collaborative partnerships,
- consider a community development approach,
- establish protocols, and
- gain access to expert knowledge in preparation for entering into Coordination

Agreement discussions with Canada and the Government of Saskatchewan. MN-S (as our Nation's IGB) will be responsible for developing regulations, standards, licensing requirements, training and employment of personnel and shall be responsible for monitoring quality and compliance throughout MN-S. The community shall work with to ensure standards are met, the community interests are considered, and quality services are delivered to our children, youth and families.

