

9. CHILD WELFARE

Ensure child safety and the best possible outcomes for all Manitoba children.

9-1. Implement the recommendations in *The Legacy of Phoenix Sinclair: Achieving the Best for All Our Children* by Hon. Ted Hughes to improve the child welfare system and address the underlying issues of poverty that can lead to contact with the child welfare system.

Poverty creates conditions that can lead to involvement in the child welfare system.¹⁵² Colonial policies have contributed directly to higher rates of poverty amongst Aboriginal people, and as a result Aboriginal children are over-represented in the child welfare system.¹⁵³ In Manitoba, 87 percent of children in care are Aboriginal.¹⁵⁴ The province devolved responsibility for child welfare to Aboriginal authorities in 2002, an important step toward self-determination, however Aboriginal community-based organizations wish to be more involved in providing preventative services to Indigenous children.¹⁵⁵ Addressing the conditions of poverty and providing supports to families is key to preventing the apprehension of children into the care of the child welfare system and to the reunifications of families.¹⁵⁶

The number of children in care is costly socially and financially. Manitoba has seen an increase in the number of children in care, from 6,118 children in 2005 to 10,293 children in 2014.¹⁵⁷ At the current rate there could be more than 22,000 children in care in Manitoba by 2030, doubling the current government expenditures of \$0.5 to \$1 billion, with further cost implications for social assistance, health care and other public expenditures.¹⁵⁸ These costs will become a long-term cost driver for the Manitoba budget. Beyond the cost implications, our province has a moral obligation to support the best possible outcomes for all children, especially the most vulnerable.

Children who grow up in foster care fall behind other children: they are less likely to graduate from high school and have a greater likelihood of suffering from mental health problems, chronic unemployment, homelessness and incarceration.¹⁵⁹ A child “aging out” of foster care today will earn \$326,000 less income over his or her lifespan and cost all levels of government more than \$126,000 in the form of higher social assistance payments and lower tax revenues.¹⁶⁰ Children aging out of care require adequate supports in order to transition to independence.

The Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry was a comprehensive process investigating the circumstances of the tragic death of this young girl failed by the child welfare system. Phase three of the Inquiry looked at the systemic reasons why families have contact with the child welfare system and the program, policy and legislative changes needed to improve supports to families and children. Commissioner Ted Hughes concluded the Inquiry in December 2013 with the release of his report, *The Legacy of Phoenix Sinclair: Achieving the Best for All Our Children*. The Inquiry made a total of 62 recommendations to improve the welfare of children in Manitoba. One recommendation cites *The View from Here 2009*: “That the province closely examine the 2009 report, *The View from Here: Manitobans Call for a Poverty Reduction Plan*, with a view to implementing the outstanding recommendations, paying particular attention to the area of adult education.”¹⁶¹

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