



**Assembly of First Nations (AFN)
National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak**

**Reflections on the Regional Engagements on
Long-Term Reform of First Nations Child and
Family Services Program**



Introduction

Over the past few months, I've had the honour of being welcomed by Chiefs across the country to discuss, dialogue and gather invaluable perspectives on the historic \$47.8 billion Draft Agreement on the Long-Term Reform of First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) Program. Thank you, Chiefs, for participating and making recommendations on how to better improve this agreement. Everywhere we travelled, Chiefs have said it is time to empower First Nations families to care for our own children. It's time to put First Nations in charge, once and for all.

Meegwetch.



National Chief
Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak

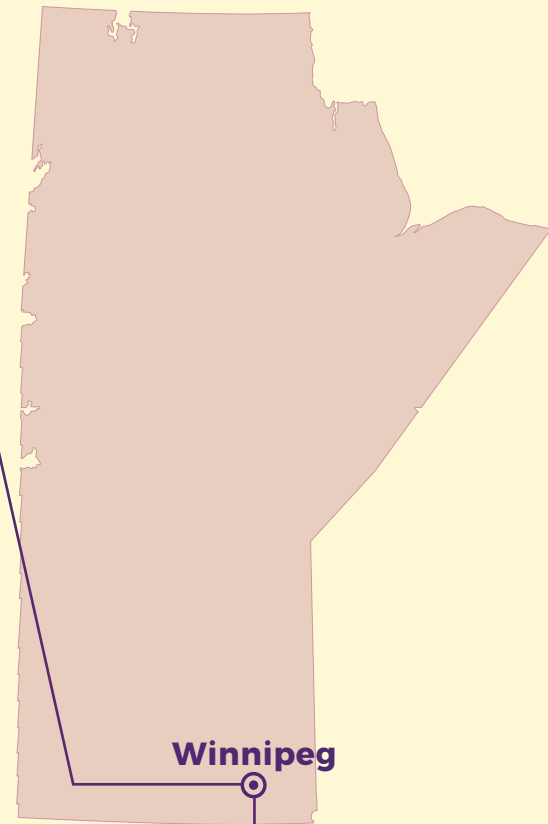


Manitoba



Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak

I thank the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) and Grand Chief Garrison Settee for their warm hospitality and for hosting dialogues on the Draft Agreement. Our meeting focused on important aspects of the proposed reforms, including the need to prevent children from being apprehended due to poverty—a concern highlighted by many Chiefs. I am grateful to all the Chiefs and community leaders for their participation and shared commitment to a better future for our children.

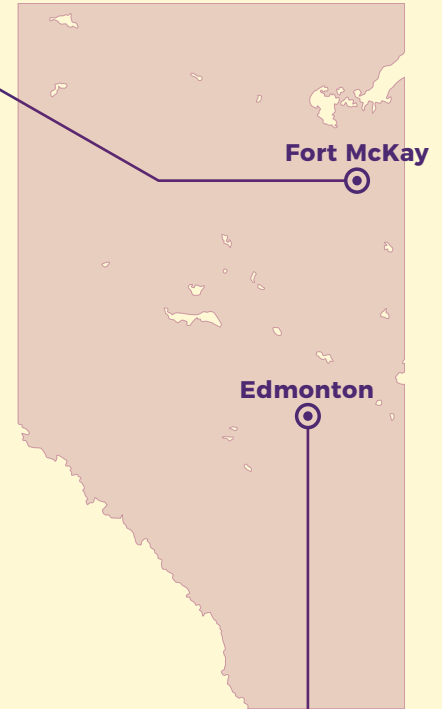


Southern Chiefs Organization

In Southern Manitoba, our discussions about the future of child and family services were valuable. I extend my thanks to Knowledge Keeper Emery Stagg for leading us in prayer and to the War Time Drum Group for their performance on September 16. I also acknowledge the contributions of Grand Chief Jerry Daniels, Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Ovide Mercredi, Minister Nahanni Fontaine, and all the guest speakers and Chiefs who shared their perspectives.

Fort McKay First Nation

Our visit to Fort McKay First Nation on August 2 was a significant event, marking the 125th Anniversary of the Signing of Treaty No. 8. The signing of Treaty No. 8 on June 21, 1899, marked a commitment to peace and friendship between the First Nations and the Crown. I thank Fort McKay First Nation Chief Raymond Powder and his council for welcoming me to their community for taking part in your celebrations and also dialoguing on Reform to First Nations Child and Family Services.



Edmonton

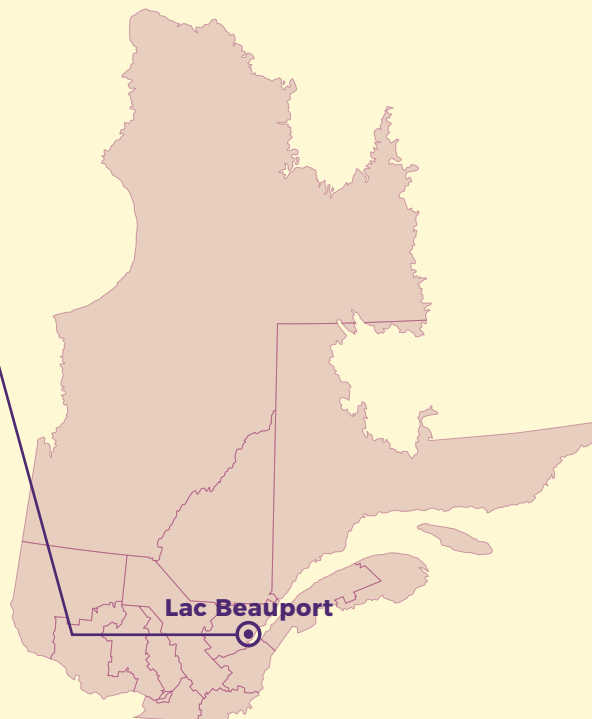
At the Indigenous Child Welfare Conference in Edmonton on September 16, I was honoured to spend time in Treaty No. 6 Territory. I deeply appreciate the hospitality of the Host Nation, Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation Chief Sheldon Sunshine, Treaty No. 8 Grand Chief Trevor Mercredi, and all other dignitaries. The conference was a vibrant forum for sharing ideas and goals to uphold the rights and well-being of our children for future generations.

Quebec



Lac Beauport

The full-day engagement session at Lac Beauport on the territory of the Huron-Wendat Nation was important, bringing together 10 Nations from across Quebec. I extend my special thanks to Elder Edith Picard for her prayers and to AFN Regional Chief Ghislain Picard for his leadership. Our discussions were valuable as we explored how the Draft Agreement supports the future and needs of our children in Quebec.



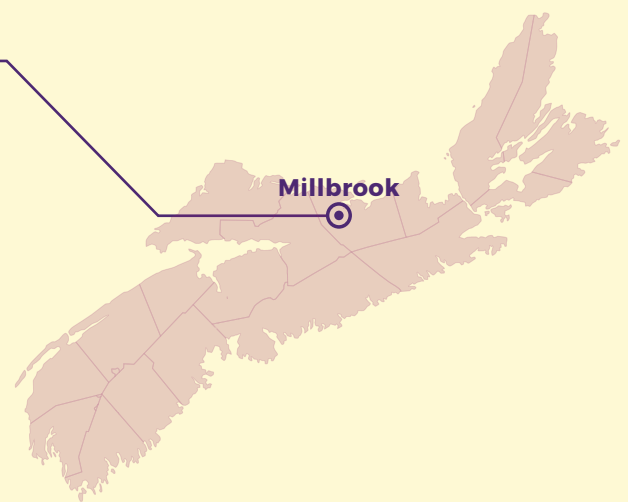
East Coast



Thank you New Brunswick Regional Chief Joanna Bernard and New Brunswick and Nova Scotia Chiefs for hosting us on the east coast while we spoke about building a positive and healthy future for our children and families. And thank you Dr. Cindy Blackstock for attending.

Millbrook First Nation

On August 13, I had the privilege of visiting Millbrook First Nation in Nova Scotia. I extend my gratitude to their leadership for welcoming me into the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People, governed by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship. During our meeting, we engaged in dialogue and shared information on the Draft Agreement and how it can improve the well-being of our families and children across the Nova Scotia.



British Columbia

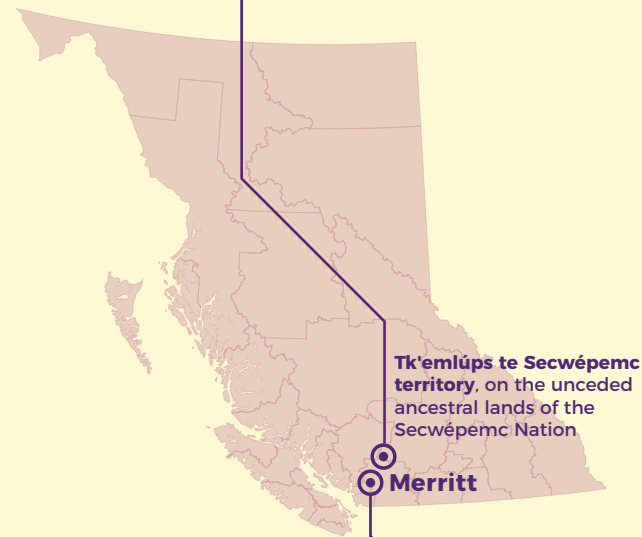


Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Tsawassen

Throughout September, I had the opportunity to meet with the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Tsawassen Chiefs to discuss the Draft Agreement.

While in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc territory, on the unceded ancestral lands of the Secwépemc Nation, I was grateful for the opportunity to meet with the Council of Chiefs. Special thanks to Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir, Tribal Chief, and BC AFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee, as well as the Chiefs who were present to discuss the Draft Agreement and its importance for our children and families.

I also had the chance to meet with Chiefs, councillors, and representatives of the Okanagan Nation Alliance, including Rosalie Wilson-Yazzie, Councillor Donna Goodwater, Chief Byron Louis, Chief Greg Gabriel, Councillor Jordan Coble, Councillor Andrea Alexander, and Executive Director Pauline Terbasket.



Nicola Valley Nation

During our engagement with Nicola Valley Nation Chiefs, councillors, and technicians at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in Merritt, we carefully listened to their perspectives. These meetings allowed us to hear directly from the leadership about the needs and priorities of their communities.



We also visited Kamloops, Kelowna and Vancouver, and held a presentation to the BCAFN Annual General Assembly on Oct. 8. Through unity and respect, we developed strong bonds that created lasting impacts and built upon the vision of our Nations, Chiefs and Elders who came before us. They wanted us to be in this together and recognized our voice is more powerful when we stand together to advance our shared goals and rights.

Saskatchewan



Saskatoon

In August, I had the opportunity to visit Saskatoon in Treaty No. 6 territory to discuss the Draft Agreement. During our meeting, we heard important feedback about the need to ensure we build a system that will serve our children and families for generations to come and to support a future where our communities have greater control over services that truly reflect our values and priorities. I thank the Chiefs, technicians, and other attendees for their participation and sharing their perspectives and feedback on the Draft Agreement.

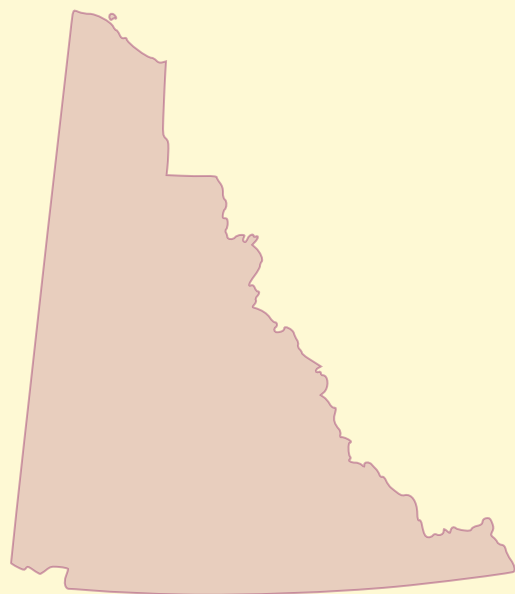


Qu'Appelle Valley

It was a privilege to make a virtual presentation to Treaty No. 4 Chiefs, who gathered in Qu' Appelle Valley on September 13. Thank you to everyone who attended for the successful engagement session.

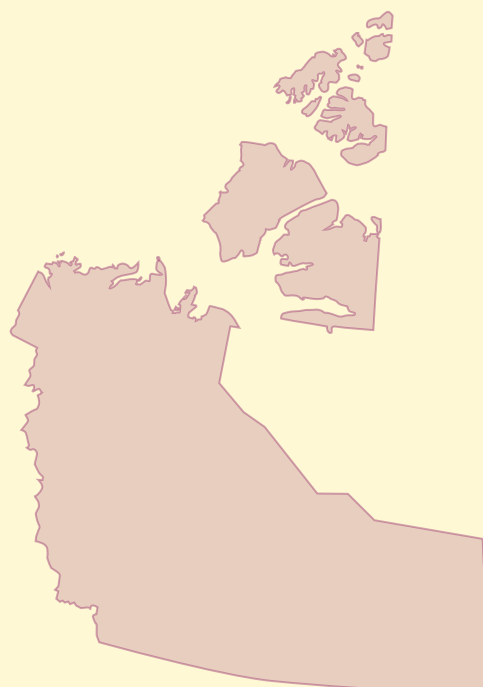
Yukon Region

I acknowledge Regional Chief Kluane Adamek and the Yukon Chiefs for the invitation October 1 to discuss and deliberate on the Child Family Services Draft Agreement. Together we are finally starting to create a child welfare system in Canada that promotes prevention instead of rewarding the apprehension of First Nations children.



NWT Region

It was great to hear from Dene National Chief and Northwest Territories Regional Chief George Mackenzie on October 1. The AFN stands behind Dene Nation and we offer our support as the Nation moves towards reaching their own agreement. And I call on the Government of Canada to come to the table ready to work with our Nations in the Northwest Territories on this important reform.



National Virtual Information Sessions

July 25, 2024 – Chapter 1: Overview of the Draft Agreement

Participants learned about the Draft Agreement on Long-Term Reform of FNCFS, which was announced on July 11, 2024, valued at over \$47.8 billion over the next ten years. This included an overview of the Draft Agreement, the reformed funding model components, and a summary of the forthcoming virtual and in-person engagements on the Draft Agreement.

August 8, 2024 – Chapter 2: Protection Funding in the Draft Agreement

Participants learned about protection funding in the Draft Agreement, including sections of the agreement focused on Agencies offering protection services. This included an overview of the Operations and Maintenance funding for intake and investigation, child service purchase, legal fees, etc., as well as an overview of least disruptive measures, which are actions or services mandated through provincial or Yukon legislation that seek to prevent separation or support reunification.

August 22, 2024 – Chapter 3: Prevention in the Draft Agreement

Participants learned about elements of the Draft Agreement that are focused on prevention, including least disruptive measures. This included funding for prevention services, housing, remoteness, First Nations Representative Services (formerly known as Band Representative Services), household supports, and post-majority.

September 5, 2024 – Chapter 4: Governance and Accountability

Participants learned about key governance, accountability and performance measurement tools in the Draft Agreement. The session provided an overview of the governance of the agreement, dispute resolution, enforcement, and the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's jurisdiction. The session also included performance measurement information, including national and regional secretariats, additional research on remoteness, and program assessments.

National Virtual Information and Dialogue Session

September 18, 2024 – Virtual Information and Dialogue Session on the Draft Agreement on Long-Term Reform of First Nations Child and Family Services

The AFN hosted a Virtual Information and Dialogue Session on September 18, 2025. Participants received an overview of the Draft Agreement, followed by presentations on key elements such as baseline funding, governance, accountability, and agency funding, and from Indigenous Services Canada on the implementation of the Draft Agreement. The session also highlighted feedback from regional engagement sessions, discussing the strengths, concerns, and recommended amendments to the Draft Agreement.

Chiefs and proxies engaged in discussions, asking questions, and providing input throughout the session. The session was also open to technicians, agency representatives, service providers, and others interested in the Draft Agreement.

What We're Doing – Closing Reflections

Throughout our discussions, I heard from many Chiefs that they are in support of the Draft Agreement's potential to transform child and family services in First Nations. The focus on prevention services, housing, and post-majority supports shows that we are moving in the right direction. At the same time, there were important concerns raised—about the need for regional representation in governance and ensuring long-term funding stability.

In response to the feedback we received, the AFN has already begun taking steps to address these concerns. We are advocating for regional representation to be included in the Reform Implementation Committee, ensuring that each region's unique needs are reflected in governance. We are also pushing for the Dispute Resolution Tribunal to be led by a bilingual First Nations person and ensuring that population data, including off-reserve members, is properly accounted for. To give everyone more time for review and engagement, we've postponed the Special Chiefs Assembly to October and have provided several resources, including virtual information sessions, to support Chiefs and technicians in their understanding of the Draft Agreement.

We are working hard to ensure we are building a system that not only supports our children today but provides a foundation for generations to come. Thank you to everyone who participated, shared their insights, and contributed to this process. Together, we are building a stronger future for our children and families.

Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak
National Chief



**50 O'Connor Street
Suite 200, Ottawa
Ontario K1P 6L5
Tel: 613.241.6789
Fax: 613.241.5808**

Questions? Email:
social.development@afn.ca