



# WHAT WE HEARD

## An Executive Summary of 2022 Engagement Themes for Legislative Change

## OVERVIEW

Throughout 2022, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD/the ministry) engaged on two separate but related initiatives to support transformation to the child and family service system: engagement on broad systemic reform, and engagement on upholding Indigenous jurisdiction that led to the development of legislative amendments. The purpose of this report is to share a summary of what we heard and provide an opportunity for partners to validate what we heard through these engagements.

Please visit our [Engage BC Webpage](#) to view the full report. After the release of this report, we will compare what we heard to work that is already completed, underway or planned through the [Ministry's transformation initiatives](#). The ministry will report back on further actions to address what we heard through the engagements.



Ministry of  
Children and Family  
Development

# BACKGROUND

The first set of engagements were intended to seek broad feedback on the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* (CFCSA) with the intent of systemic legislative reform. This work was driven by the need to bring child welfare legislation into alignment with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and to support further shifts in child welfare towards prevention and family preservation.

The second set of engagements was initiated to create space for the full exercise of Indigenous jurisdiction within provincial legislation. Through engagement on the scope and content of legislation needed to support Indigenous jurisdiction, partners raised the need to align legislation with UNDRIP and further implement the federal Act.

The result of this work was Bill 38: [Indigenous Self-Government in Child and Family Services Amendment Act](#). The amendments also responded to many of the issues that were raised regarding systemic reform during the Broad Reform Engagement. These amendments:

- Upholds Indigenous communities' inherent right of self-government with respect to child and family services.
- Enable Indigenous Governing Bodies (IGBs) to assume jurisdiction over child and family services.
- Strengthen collaboration on adoptions for Indigenous children.
- Ensure that Treaty First Nations can exercise full jurisdiction over child and family services.
- Enable information sharing between the Province and IGBs.
- Establish a new Indigenous Child Welfare Director position within MCFD to support practice in a multi-jurisdictional child and family services model.
- Enable joint and consent-based agreements in accordance with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.

The themes shared in this summary are an overview of what emerged through the engagements, written submissions, and surveys that occurred throughout 2022.



## WHAT WE HEARD – SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES

These themes represent a decades-long call for systemic reform of child and family services. The experiences and insights that were shared in these engagements build on recommendations and calls to action that the ministry has heard from many sources. We would like to acknowledge with gratitude the time, energy, and courage that every person who participated in these engagements showed. We hope that this report honours the gift that you have shared with us and serves as a positive vehicle for systemic change.

### Colonialism, Inequity, & Fear

Systemic racism and inequality are embedded in the child and family service system, which creates stigma and fear. Significant shifts in resourcing and decision-making power are required to work more effectively with communities.

Being in care has adverse impacts on individuals, families, and communities that are felt over lifetimes and generations.

The child and family service system is punitive and fear based, and does not work in a way that is trauma informed.

The relationship between the ministry and Indigenous communities needs to be rebuilt on a rights and distinctions-based approach.

### Keeping Children Connected to Family, Community, & Culture

Cultural continuity is deeply connected to positive outcomes for children, youth and communities and needs to be meaningfully upheld in ministry policies and practice. Collaboration needs to occur with all cultural communities to ensure that positive connections are built and maintained.

Historically, the ministry has not taken a family-centred approach; services need to focus on prevention and building up the family and community before a crisis occurs.

## Services that Work for Children, Families & Communities

Currently, ministry services are experienced as reactionary, and community agencies are left to fill in the gaps and provide prevention services with inadequate resources.

Children and youth need to be centred in all ministry services and their voices need to be heard and respected in decision-making.

Youth and young adults who experience care need to be better supported to transition into adulthood, which includes long-term, individualized planning and supports.

Both foster parents and kinship caregivers need additional supports and resources to care for children and youth in holistic and culturally-connected ways.

Greater resources need to be allocated towards Indigenous communities to exercise their jurisdiction, and to care for children in their own families and communities.

Services and supports need to be low-barrier to access so families can effectively navigate all that is available to them.

Ministry staff need more supports and resources to reduce burnout and turnover to support consistent provision of services to communities. More training needs to be provided to all staff to support them to practice in trauma-informed, culturally appropriate ways, and more Indigenous staff need to be recruited and retained.

## Accountability & Systemic Reform

Radical honesty and accountability are needed from the ministry in order to move forward from systemic harms. Increased oversight is needed to ensure that shifts in practice are meaningfully implemented and ensure that harms are redressed. Rebuilding trust occurs only through meaningful action.

Indigenous communities need greater autonomy over decision making, and alternatives to court processes need to be provided. When the legal system does become involved, families and communities need greater supports to participate meaningfully.

Systemic change needs to occur in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and community partners. This starts with the recognition that communities know what is best for their own families and children.

Legislation needs to be shifted away from protection and towards prevention. Strong language is needed to ensure that children are supported to stay with their families and communities. Legislation needs to reflect a multi-jurisdictional and distinctions-based approach to working with Indigenous peoples.

The approach to sharing information needs to be shifted to one that is proactive and transparent. Data collection processes need to better reflect the cultural diversity of the children and families that the ministry serves.