

**CARING ACROSS BOUNDARIES:
A PAN-CANADIAN INFRASTRUCTURE FUND
FOR ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

(April 2004)

Urgent action needed:

There are more than 320,000 Aboriginal children in Canada. The majority of Aboriginal children are not enjoying the benefits of living in one of the richest countries in the world. This is true for Aboriginal children both on and off reserve.

Aboriginal children in Canada are not doing nearly as well as non-aboriginal children. Twice as many babies will be born prematurely, underweight or die within the first year of life. Three or four times as many babies will die of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Three to four times as many children will die by injury, poisoning or violence. Five times as many of our Aboriginal young people will commit suicide. In five years (1996 – 2001) the number of Aboriginal children in care of the state increased by more than seventy percent. There are more children in care today than there were children in residential schools. Canada has a crisis situation with our Aboriginal children and youth.

The Solution:

Community programs that support Aboriginal children, youth and their families are critical. Research has demonstrated over and over again the effectiveness of responsive services and supports delivered by community agencies. Innovative programs such as the Yellowhead Tribal Services custom adoption program in Alberta or Manitoba's Child Welfare Initiative are celebrations of the success that can be achieved when funding is directed to local agencies. In Canada, we know that services for Aboriginal children, both on and off reserve, are underfunded. The commitment of the current federal government to make a contribution to the lives of our Aboriginal peoples provides an opportunity for equalizing the investments targeted to Aboriginal children and youth. It is time to put

resources into the hands of community agencies that already have the knowledge and expertise to make a difference.

Aboriginal children in Canada need access to community based initiatives that are responsive, co-ordinated and integrated. Community agencies need funding to build upon their existing capacities in order to meet these needs.

What we are recommending is that the federal government launch “Caring Across Boundaries: An Aboriginal Children’s Infrastructure Fund”. The Fund would provide resources directly to community based initiatives. This fund would build upon existing capacities of established community services and supports wherever possible to:

- Build family and community capacity by targeting funding to partnerships and coordinated programming.
- Promote responsiveness to unique community needs by providing funding that is flexible. (to support diversity from preventive health to recreation)
- Improve access for children, youth and families that are marginalized through new initiatives.
- Create linkages among health, education, social and community services with dedicated resources for front-line community coordination.

Research evidence is clear (for example see Chandler and Lalonde 1998). The introduction of responsive community services and supports improves the outcomes of children, youth and their families.

We are asking that the federal government commit substantial resources in order to meet the urgent need for community services in the short term.