



Alliance nationale pour les enfants

National Children's Alliance

**BRIEF TO FINANCE COMMITTEE
NATIONAL CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE
OCTOBER 2005**

“A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION”

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1 – NATIONAL CHILDRENS ALLIANCE

The National Children's Alliance is a coalition of 67 national organizations working collectively to enhance the well-being of children, youth and families in Canada. It is a model for collaboration across disciplines and sectors. Building on the strengths of hundreds of thousands of people working on the front lines in our communities and their combined research capacity, the National Children's Alliance works to build consensus on its policy development by mobilizing and linking practice and research to policy.

Since its inception in 1996, the National Children's Alliance has worked to:

- Promote the development and implementation of the National Children's Agenda;
- Develop policy recommendations;
- Facilitate dialogue on children's issues among all sectors;
- Engage provincial/territorial/regional constituent groups; and
- Strengthen its pan-Canadian networks of voluntary organizations and NGO's.

The members of the National Children's Alliance are:

- Active Healthy Kids
- Allergy Asthma Information Association
- Adoption Council of Canada
- Big Brothers and Sisters of Canada
- Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada
- Canadian Adolescents at Risk Research Network
- Canadian Association for Community Living
- Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs
- Canadian Association of Food Banks
- Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance
- Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
- Canadian Association of Paediatric Health Centres
- Canadian Association of Social Workers
- Canadian Child Care Federation
- Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children
- Canadian Council for Refugees

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- Canadian Council on Social Development
- Canadian Institute of Child Health
- Canadian Living Foundation - Breakfast for learning
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Canadian Nurses Association
- Canadian Paediatric Society
- Canadian Parents for French
- Canadian Parks & Recreation Association
- Canadian Psychological Association
- Canadian Public Health Association
- Canadian School Boards Association
- Canadian Teachers' Federation
- Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada
- Child Welfare League of Canada
- Children's Aid Society
- Family Service Canada
- Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada
- First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada
- Frontier College
- Hospital for Sick Children Foundation
- Invest in Kids
- Kids Help Phone
- La Commission nationale des parents francophone
- Laidlaw Foundation
- Learning Disabilities Association of Canada
- Métis National Council of Women
- Movement for Canadian Literacy
- National Anti-Poverty Organization
- National Association of Friendship Centres
- National Youth In Care Network
- Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association
- Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada
- Pollution Probe
- Power Camp national
- Safe Kids Canada
- Save the Children Canada
- Scouts Canada
- SOS Children's Villages Canada
- SpeciaLink: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion
- Street Kids International
- The Student's Commission
- Thrive! The Canadian Centre for Positive Youth Development
- UNICEF Canada
- United Way of Canada - Centraide Canada
- Vanier Institute of the Family
- YOUCAN
- YWCA of Canada
- YMCA Canada

2 – RATIONALE

Measuring, understanding and promoting productivity growth becomes increasingly complex in the global, knowledge-based economy. Economists recognize the limitations of traditional approaches to measurement of productivity. "A simple and often-used measure of productivity is real GDP per person-hour worked in the economy. However, while real GDP is a good and comprehensive measure of total output, person-hours worked are, for many purposes, an inadequate measure of inputs because it neglects variations in the quality of labour and ignores other inputs, notably capital goods."¹ International studies point to the development of a high quality labour market as a critical component to economic growth and therefore a necessary focal point for public policy.

In our brief we make the case that human capital will be the key driver of productivity growth over the coming decades. In knowledge-based economies, such as ours in Canada, competitive advantage in global markets will require long-term approaches and policies. The marginally better productivity gains experienced by the United States are at risk in the longer term as the positive short term impacts of capital investment on GDP due to the war in Iraq and the re-building after the hurricanes will likely be outrun in the longer term by the negative economic consequences of rising debt to GDP ratio and the depth of marginalization in the labour market.

Medium and longer term approaches to labour market development means that the policy focus needs to be upstream. The demographic shift of an aging population points to the necessity of a policy emphasis on our younger populations. On the supply side, there is tremendous unmet capacity for increasing labour market participation with preventive policies that address

Issues such as underemployment, lack of relevant skills, literacy challenges and health problems. On the demand side, there are issues such as poor quality jobs, low wages, access to training and education, lack of professional development opportunities and recognition of foreign credentials.

In the context of the productivity agenda, investing in children and youth builds the foundation for a competitive labour market. For members of the National Children's Alliance there is a much more compelling reason. As one of the wealthiest countries in the world, we have no excuse for ignoring our moral commitment to children and youth as our most vulnerable citizens. As an international leader in the work that led to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, Canada again can take leadership by honouring its commitments.

The recommendations contained in this report build upon the Government of Canada's commitments to children, youth and their families:

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991);
- National Children's Agenda (1999);
- Early Childhood Development agreement (2000);
- UN Special Session on Children "A World Fit for Children" (2002);
- Multi-lateral Framework on Early Learning and Care (2003);
- National Plan of Action for Children "A Canada Fit for Children"; 2004 and
- Bi-lateral Early Learning and Child Care Agreements (2005).

The National Children's Alliance member organizations are particularly concerned with Canada's untapped human potential. There is an enormous opportunity to develop a policy mix that supports our most vulnerable and marginalized populations to participate fully in all aspects of community life. Supporting children and youth to reach their potential is fundamental to their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. But we

also know that optimizing their health and well-being promotes their capacity to make positive contributions to society.

3 – INVESTING IN HUMAN CAPITAL

Economic research points to the quality of the labour market as a key driver for productivity. “Labour productivity growth can be increased in several ways...The composition of the labour force is the first of these, and plays a key role in labour productivity growth”.² Investing in people through education, family literacy, training and experiential learning opportunities improves the quality of labour market and enhances productivity growth.

Productivity growth is also driven by the quality of jobs. In Canada, there is cause for concern. “A 2-income, 2-child family, working full-time earning minimum wage and living in a large Canadian city lives below the poverty line”.³ A recent study by Canadian Policy Research Networks concludes, “The Canadian economy has come to depend on paying poverty level wages to almost 2 million full-time workers”.⁴ “Our failure to generate higher wages relieves the pressure on employers to take steps to boost productivity and become more efficient” says Saunders. “That’s bad for workers and it’s bad for the economy”.⁵

As Peter Nicholson states in an article in the International Productivity Monitor “When it comes to quality of life, it is not only average income that matters, but also its distribution.”⁶ Today in Canada, 24% of jobs for people aged 17-64 paid below \$10 per hour.⁷ Canada’s system of income support helps to mitigate some of the negative productivity effects of the low wage economy but there is a need to do more. With one quarter of our jobs in the low-wage economy, both income support and social programs are necessary to keep families out of poverty and to ensure their capacity for full participation.

Children living in poverty are at risk of not having their fundamental needs met. There are 1 in 6 children living in poverty Canada, this means there are more than 1 million children whose healthy development is jeopardized. In 2004, 317,000 children in Canada used food banks. As the "Make Poverty History Campaign" continues to gain momentum worldwide and here in Canada, there is an opportunity for the federal government to show leadership. The National Anti-Poverty Organization has recently launched a youth poverty initiative. The National Child Tax Benefit has proven to be an effective program – now it is time to deepen the investment.

Recommended Actions:

- **Increase the National Child Tax Benefit to a maximum of \$4,900 per child available to all low, modest and middle income families, without clawbacks for families on social assistance**
- **Increase federal minimum wage to \$10 per hour**
- **Increase access to parental leave benefits for part-time, self-employed and seasonal workers**
- **Increase parental leave benefits to 75% of earnings and eliminate the waiting period**
- **Expand family leave provisions within the Employment Insurance program to include paid leave for a parent who must temporarily or periodically care for a child with disability-related needs**
- **Create a cross-departmental policy priority on literacy in the context of lifelong learning**

INVESTING IN SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

While physical infrastructure is commonly recognized as an enabler of productivity, in the global knowledge-based economy, social infrastructure is proving to be equally if not more important. "Social infrastructure encompasses the inter-dependent mix of places and spaces, programs and networks at all levels".⁸ Social infrastructure supports human development and contributes to community life. "Quality of life matters to business location decisions, especially for the advanced knowledge based businesses that Canadian cities are trying to attract. These businesses are based on people."⁹

"Research is clear that an adequate family income, while important, is not sufficient to ensure that children reach their potential. In fact, there are more children living in middle class families that are at risk than there are children living in poor families".¹⁰ Jacques van der Gaag of the World Bank estimates that every dollar invested in children returns three dollars in future health savings. Economists are recognizing that the "...strategic use of our social programs, especially programs that invest in children, is the best, most cost-effective way to promote productivity growth and prosperity".¹¹

Recent survey results indicate that there are 2 million workers in the voluntary non-profit sector and that more than one quarter of the organizations in the sector delivers services to children, youth and their families, most at the local level.¹² This data does not include the participation of volunteers. Communities are playing a key role in supporting children, youth and families. However, there is a fundamental role for governments in the delivery of community services and in the support of community organizations to ensure a vibrant and healthy social infrastructure. A recent study by United Way of Toronto urged that "governments at all levels must make a commitment to reverse the spiral of growing neighbourhood distress by delivering improved economic prospects and jobs,

safer neighbourhoods, decent and affordable housing, accessible community programs and services,"¹³

Housing is a fundamental need for healthy child and youth development. "There are more than 700,000 Canadian households in severe housing need, more than all the households of PEI, NB and NS combined".¹⁴ Continued national leadership is needed through implementation of a National Housing Strategy. Adequate funding for housing is fundamental in making a difference to our most disadvantaged children and youth. The negative impact to children's health of inadequate housing is exacerbated by the effects on mental health and educational attainment due to frequent moves.

Community matters. "Family enabling environments are required in order to provide much-needed support for parents and children, ensure positive and nurturing experiences to children and help parents cope with the stresses of raising children."¹⁵ The ecological model of human development emphasizes the importance of taking into account the rich and inter-connected influences of parent, family, neighbourhood, community, public services and public policies. Inclusion of all children and youth, irrespective of ability, cultural group, socio-economic status or geography, is dependent upon vibrant communities.

There is an opportunity for federal leadership through the Cities/Communities Agenda to promote social development. The federal government has a longstanding role in creating enabling environments. "In a highly globalized market place where workers may locate almost anywhere, the community infrastructure built by Canada's nonprofit and voluntary organizations provides a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining the creative talent that underpins successful modern economies".¹⁶ Expanding the dialogue and policy initiatives to foster the development of social infrastructure would provide a

platform to build local multi-sectoral partnerships with all levels of governments and the voluntary and non-profit sector.

“The social infrastructure of urban communities is a new frontier of federal responsibility. Social infrastructure priorities include serious contributions to affordable housing and public transit, strengthening services and programs for immigrants and refugees, recognizing recreation as an essential urban amenity for health promotion and civic cohesion, facilitating the transitions of urban aboriginal peoples and developing effective preventive approaches to community safety and security”.¹⁷ Funding for social infrastructure should not just be about “bricks and mortar” but should foster inclusive programs, services and community networks as well as to build and sustain the capacity of existing successful child and youth serving organizations.

Recommendations:

- **Develop a federally funded community social infrastructure initiatives program as part of the Cities/Communities Agenda**
- **As part of a national housing and homelessness initiative allocate the \$1.6 billion promised in the 2005 Budget for affordable housing**
- **Implement the Voluntary Sector Initiatives' Code of Good Funding practice in order to better support organizational costs to promote the role of the voluntary and non-profit sector in the provision of Canada's social infrastructure**

YOUTH

Canada's youth are not doing as well as they should be. The consequences are critical to our success as a country. Democratic renewal is dependent upon the engagement and participation of youth. Labour market and demographic trends indicate that our current generation of young people is needed to ensure a competitive economy. Internationally, Canada lags behind other industrialized nations, the World Health Organization and the European Union in the development of a comprehensive youth policy agenda.

Maintaining the effectiveness our investment in the early years depends upon the continuation of services and supports through school-age to youth. There are many parallels between adolescence and the early years. "Adolescent development involves complex changes in neuro-behavioural systems underpinning control of emotions and behavior. The adolescent transition is often difficult – morbidity and mortality increase 300%" ¹⁸ "The early years and adolescence may represent opportunities for society to have the greatest impact for its investments and where the consequences of not addressing problem areas may be especially far-reaching".¹⁹

Too many of our youth are living in poverty – nearly eighteen percent of Canada's youth are poor. Most young people in the labour market experience low wages and precarious jobs. Particularly at risk for depth of poverty are young single mothers. Poor youth are less likely to finish school and enjoy good health. "Adolescents are the most under-funded, under-serviced sector of the population" ²⁰

Poverty is not the whole story. Aboriginal and immigrant/newcomer youth as well as youth with disabilities face barriers in reaching their potential. Mental and

physical health issues cut across socio-economic status with increasing rates of obesity, diabetes, respiratory, cardio-vascular and mental health issues. Too many of our youth are dropping out of school system that is designed for the minority who go on to university. "In an aging society it will be more important than ever to ensure full participation of young Canadians in order to promote economic and social development".²¹

Over the past six months the National Children's Alliance has been consulting youth from across Canada. Six key themes were identified as a framework for the issues facing youth today: education; physical and social environments; teen sexuality; aboriginal issues; physical and mental health; and, social injustice and discrimination. The development of policy recommendations was started and included:

- Need for anti-bullying curricula and programming;
- Increase access to post-secondary education;
- Enhancing capacity of guidance departments for career counseling in schools;
- Raising social assistance above poverty rates;
- Implement restorative justice initiatives for youth in conflict with the law;
- Provision of housing to ensure no youth is homeless;
- Expand programs to serve aboriginal youth;
- Improve access to information and support for sexual health;
- Include youth in decision-making; and
- Establish community-based support services with mentorship models.

This does not reflect the breadth and depth of dialogue and policy options that resulted from the NCA's youth engagement so far. A consistent outcome of the consultations is resounding support for the development of a national youth agenda in Canada.

Recommendations:

- **Federal government take a leadership role in the development of a National Youth Agenda that is cross-departmental and includes youth engagement**

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

In Canada today there is a policy void for our school-aged children 6-12 years old. Many people assume that the schools are able to meet all of their needs. "Children in their middle years are developing no less dynamically than those 0 to 6. They move from being one hundred percent dependent upon their families to becoming autonomous".²²

Building resilience during the school years makes important contributions to long-term well-being. Children who have caring adults in their lives are "more resilient towards some of the risk factors that can put child development in jeopardy". "Through mentoring, modeling positive behaviors and being supportive a caring adult can make a tremendous difference in a child's life".²³ Community based programs such as Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters and YM/YWCA's are critical preventive services and fundamental components of community social infrastructure.

There is cause for concern about the health of Canada's school-aged children. "It is estimated that 30-40% of children and families experience poverty, family breakdown, violence, child neglect, abuse or substance abuse. These experiences can act as risk factors for healthy development and make it difficult for children to develop into caring, competent adults".²⁴ The need for positive peer relationships during this stage and the negative consequences of bullying for growth and development are increasingly being recognized given that "approximately 23% of Canadian young people in Grades 6 through 10 reported that they bullied others".²⁵

Competence in the arts and sports is shown to be an important factor in protecting children against the occurrence of emotional and behavioral problems where children are at risk. Participation in recreation is linked to better school

outcomes, decreased participation in negative behaviors and better physical and mental health.

A recent study concludes that “recreation maintains the competence of children with emotional, conduct, hyperactive disorders to be equal to non-disordered children. This results in reductions in parental mental health problems such as sleep disorders and worry, and there is a ten percent greater exit from social assistance, as shown in economic adjustment scores and the use of food bank services.”²⁶

Physical inactivity is a serious public health issue. One quarter of Canada's children and youth are not active enough for healthy growth and development and contributes to increasing childhood obesity. Physical activity increases resistance to heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, arthritis and mental health disorders. Some conservative estimates suggest that illness due to physical inactivity is costing the Canadian health care system \$2.1 billion annually in direct health care costs.²⁷ “For every dollar that is invested in physical activity, there is a long term savings of \$11 in health care costs”.²⁸

It is estimated that less than 4% of schools in Canada offer quality daily physical education programs”.²⁹ Children and youth often face barriers to participating in recreation. The most common barrier is cost, with today's highest fees for programs, sport group membership and admission to recreation centres.³⁰ Other barriers include physical disability, transportation, language and culture. For the more than one million children and youth in Canada that live in poverty, their rates of participation in recreation and physical activity is much lower than for others.

Public parks and community centres are good for cities and communities as they revitalize urban cores and attract residents, helping to limit urban sprawl. Even small lots, when developed into a public space can transform a neighborhood. Opportunities for recreation and outdoor play help ease the pressures on families and contribute to healthy relationships, within the family and community. More indoor and outdoor public recreation spaces and family places will help build healthier children, youth, families and communities. Research shows that “72% of children living in civic communities are in organized sports, compared to 42% in non-civic communities”.³¹

The federal government has some established models for investing in communities such as the Homelessness Initiative. The National Children's Alliance has worked the Federation of Canadian Municipalities on the issue of community infrastructure for recreation and participation. An initiative for “Public Spaces – Family Places” could support development and maintenance of inclusive community play and recreation spaces, programs and centres and to fund programs for increasing access to recreation and development opportunities associated that lever community partnerships and support.

“In 1999 the Government of Canada made a commitment to the National Children's Agenda – and, in partnership with the provinces and territories launched the Early Childhood Development Initiative. In 2004, the first group of young children to benefit from that initiative is now turning 5. It is time to act”.³² Today these children are six years old. This is an opportunity to continue to build the National Children's Agenda Canada's children in middle childhood.

Recommendations:

- **An investment in a community infrastructure fund of \$300 million over 3 years in “Public Spaces – Family Places”.**
- **Establish a “Child and Youth Centre” within Canada’s new Public Health Agency with a focus on community-based prevention.**

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Since beginning in 1996, the National Children's Alliance has supported the National Children's Agenda and advocated for the early years to be the first priority. It has been a very exciting time as the federal government has progressively invested in early childhood development. The federal government plan to put in place a "truly national system of early learning and child care" is long overdue and the commitment to the principles of quality, accessibility, universality and development are most encouraging.

There is still much to be done when "only 12% of children in Canada have access to regulated child care even though close to 70% of mothers are in the labour market".³³ The five billion dollars committed in the last budget provides a foundation for moving towards a truly national system within a regulated framework. Canadians look forward to seeing future investments by all levels of governments to meet the needs of children and their families.

A solid foundation for the system needs to include:

- Development and investment in a broad and integrated range of supports and services including family child care, family resource programs, pre-school and after school care for children up to age 12;
- Regulation and licensing for services;
- Inclusivity to ensure access for all children regardless of ability, geography, linguistic or ethnic background;
- Adequate wages and working conditions;
- Appropriate infrastructure, both local and pan-Canadian; and
- Accountability framework that is responsive to the needs of the communities.

The National Children's Alliance continues to be supportive of the public policy emphasis on early learning and childcare. We are "encouraged by the federal government's statement that the system will focus on results, build on best practices and report on progress".³⁴ The allocation in the last federal budget for accountability is an important first step. It is important to understand, however, that the success of any accountability framework will be put to the test by its relevance to communities. In order to achieve this, the active engagement and participation of the voluntary and non-profit sector is crucial to bring expertise, research and front-line knowledge to any accountability initiative. Early learning and child care crosses jurisdictions and in order build bridges the voluntary and non-profit sector needs to be at the table with a recognized, sustained and supported role in monitoring progress, reviewing results and reporting to Canadians.

Recommendations:

- **The federal government continue to invest in early learning and child care towards a "truly national system"**
- **Increase funding for Aboriginal early development programs to ensure access both on and off reserve**
- **Develop a mechanism for accountability that includes leadership from the voluntary and non-profit sector**

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND YOUTH

There are more than 320,000 Aboriginal children in Canada. First Nations children living on reserve have a quality of life that measures only 78th on the United Nations Human Development Index (similar to Peru and Brazil), when Canada was at the top. As the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has repeatedly noted, the majority of Aboriginal children are not enjoying the benefits of living in one of the richest countries in the world.

Aboriginal children, on and off reserve are not doing nearly as well as non-Aboriginal children. Over half of Aboriginal children live in poverty. Twice as many Aboriginal 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 Aboriginal young people will commit suicide. All this in a country reporting repeated surplus budgets and having signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child giving children first call on the nation's resources.

Community programs that support Aboriginal children, youth and their families are critical to turning the tide. Research has demonstrated over and over again that sustainable socio-economic outcomes for Aboriginal peoples pivot on community based decision making and equitable access to resources. The effectiveness of culturally and community based services is evidenced by innovative programs such as the Yellowhead Tribal Services custom adoption program in Alberta or Manitoba's Child Welfare Initiative. Both of these programs are being cited internationally for their efficacy and innovation, celebrations of the success that can be achieved when funding is directed to local agencies. In Canada, we know that funding levels for services for Aboriginal children on and off reserve is almost exclusively less than that provided to non Aboriginal

children. 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 and designed services that are responsive, co-coordinated and integrated. Language and culture need to be critical components of all programming. Community agencies need funding to build upon their existing capacities in order to meet these needs. Research evidence is clear that the introduction of responsive community services and supports improves the outcomes of children, youth and their families. The federal government has supported the delivery of effective programs for 0-6 through the Aboriginal Head Start and CAP-C initiatives, yet, there are many children not able to access these excellent programs due to lack of funding. Aboriginal children in their middle years have even fewer supports. "Throughout the 1990's, federal and provincial governments slashed program budgets for those programs dedicated to urban Aboriginal children aged 6-12 years"³⁵ We know what works, it is time to make substantive investments in service delivery on successful programs such as Li'l Beavers delivered by the Friendship Centres. Lack of services and supports to children and their families has serious consequences for child welfare.

In five years (1996 – 2001) the number of First Nations children resident on reserve in the care of the state increased by more than seventy percent. Today, there are more children in the child welfare system and not with their families than there were children in residential schools at their height. "In three sample provinces one in ten Status Indian children were in care as of May 2005 as compared to just one in 200 for other children".³⁶ These are shocking statistics. The situation of other Aboriginal children in child welfare care is not well documented as the quality of provincial data collection systems vary widely.

Evidence suggests Aboriginal children are also drastically over represented in the child welfare system off reserve. Residential schools may have closed but, at best estimate, we are raising between 22,500 and 28,000 Aboriginal children in state care today.

The primary reason why Aboriginal children come into care is neglect. When researchers looked closely at the definition of neglect – poverty, inadequate housing and substance misuse are the key drivers. It is important to note that two of the three factors are largely outside of parental control. Under-investment by the federal government in child welfare services for children on reserve is contributing to the large numbers of children entering child welfare care. Initial indications point to a pattern of under-funding services for Aboriginal children off reserve in some provinces as well.

Overall child welfare services for Aboriginal children and families are inadequate with significant gaps in funding for First Nations child and family service agencies. Compounding this are problems with jurisdiction documented in a recent research study, "The First Nations child and family service agencies in the study sample reported an aggregate of 393 jurisdictional disputes that took an average of 54.25 person hours to resolve."³⁷ This same study found that jurisdictional disputes within and between federal and provincial governments routinely result in Status Indian children being denied services that are otherwise available to other Canadian children. In effect governments put their needs before the needs of vulnerable children. The consequences can be tragic as demonstrated by the case of Jordan.

Jordan was a young First Nations child with complex medical needs who lived in Manitoba. His family made the difficult choice to place him in foster care because there were so very few supports for families to care for special needs children at home on reserve. Jordan remained in hospital for the first two years of his life while his medical condition stabilized. His family and the First Nations

child welfare agency worked during this time to find Jordan a medically trained family home and to raise funds to refit a van for his special needs. Everything was in place for the day that doctors said Jordan could go home – shortly after his second birthday. If Jordan was not First Nations, on that day he would have gone home but instead he found himself in the middle of a dispute between two federal government departments who could not agree on who should pay for his at home care. While these departmental officials argued over who would pay for showerheads and special dietary needs – Jordan remained in hospital – for over two years. The community began trying to mediate the dispute but in the end turned to the courts and only then was the jurisdictional dispute between these two departments settled. But not in time – just a few days later Jordan accidentally pulled out his breathing tube and died in hospital – never having spent a day in a family home. This happened in 2005 – the year of Canada's 8 billion dollar surplus – Jordan never had a chance because Canada put itself first.

In Jordan's memory we are calling for all provincial/territorial and federal governments to adopt Jordan's principle to jurisdictional disputes. Under this child first principle, if a jurisdictional dispute arises over payment of services to a Status Indian child for services that are otherwise available to other Canadian children – the provincial or federal government of first contact must pay for the child's service without delay or disruption. The matter would then be referred to a dispute resolution mechanism.

Aboriginal children and youth can wait no longer to get what every other child in Canada already receives – Canada can do more and must do more.

Recommendations:

- **Canada and all provinces and territories to adopt Jordan's Principle for Jurisdictional Disputes³⁸ ensuring no other Status Indian child is denied or delayed services which are otherwise available to other**

Canadian children due to conflicts between governments. Put children first.

- **Develop a cross-departmental strategy to address the complex policy issues for Aboriginal children and youth.**
- **Increase funding for community-based programs for Aboriginal children ages 6-12 to contribute to their health, well-being and success at school.**
- **Give First Nations children an equitable chance to stay safely at home. Develop a new and equitable funding formula for First Nations child and family service agencies.**
- **Compel provincial governments to ensure that funding levels for Aboriginal child welfare agencies off reserve are equitably funded.**

TRACKING PROGRESS

“The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child criticized Canada for its lack of a systematic mechanism for monitoring how Canada’s children are doing”.³⁹ It is an acknowledged role for the third sector (voluntary and non-profit) to be involved in ensuring public accountability through the monitoring of domestic and international agreements and commitments that relate to the progress of Canada’s children.

In Canada and internationally there is growing recognition and understanding of the intersecting roles of governments and the voluntary and non-profit sector as partners in service delivery and policy development. The voluntary and non-profit sector is the cornerstone of vibrant communities and works at all levels to form Canada’s social infrastructure. Being responsive to community needs is one of the great strengths of the sector. Governments and the sector as critical to community-based service delivery recognize the need for evidence-based decision-making and policy development.

The National Children’s Alliance believes that we have a collective responsibility for children and youth in Canada reaching their potential. To be responsible we first need to understand the influences that impact on the well-being of all Canada’s children and youth. Telling the stories of Canada’s children illuminates their lives. To ensure that they do well we must:

- Understand the critical influences on children’s lives and development;
- Gather the “best” evidence (quantitative and qualitative research, voices of children and youth);
- Share research, knowledge and practice to promote continuous learning; and
- Track progress over time.

The National Children's Alliance believes Canada needs a comprehensive model for telling the story of Canada's children that is inclusive of:

Children – What is the progress of Canada's children and youth in reaching their potential?

Families – How well are families in Canada able to contribute to the optimal development of their children?

Communities – What are communities doing to support children, youth and families?

Governments – How are governments sustaining the capacities of communities, families, children and youth?

Canada lags behind other countries in our ability to report on Canada's children. There are gaps in quantitative and qualitative research. A lack of evidence base on the critical trends in child well-being is exacerbated by the problems with accessibility of data and research. There is a need for a holistic approach to indicator to contribute to consistency in reporting at all levels. Within both governments and the voluntary and non-profit sector there is limited capacity for knowledge transfer.

The federal government has invested multi-millions of dollars in tracking health and health care through such mechanisms as the Canadian Institute of Health Information and Canadian Institute for Health Research. The determinants of health indicate that it is preventive services and social supports that have the most impact health and are the most cost-effective for the health care system. Upstream investments in children and youth pay off over and over again in decreased health care costs for decades to come. But in order to make better decisions about preventive services we need to invest in mechanisms for tracking and reporting on children and youth.

Monitoring and reporting requires capacity within the federal government and in the voluntary and non-profit sector. Over the past decade these capacities have declined. The National Children's Alliance recognizes that the federal government has an important role, particularly in data collection, dissemination and policy development. It is time to ramp up its internal capacity by investing in a cross-departmental mechanism for research, reporting and policy development on children and youth. This is one leg of the stool. The National Children's Alliance agrees with Senator Landon Pearson that Canada needs a national arms-length centre for children, youth and citizenship that would take on roles such as: acting as an advocate for children's rights; federal policy; ensuring Canada's international reporting commitments including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; and facilitating child and youth engagement. This is the second leg of the stool.

The third leg of the stool is the role of the voluntary and non-profit sector. Sustainable third sector mechanisms are needed that would: improve the capacity of communities to support children and youth; increase knowledge and understanding of the influences on child and youth development; build an evidence-base for policymaking; and contribute to monitoring and reporting. The critical roles that the sector is a unique position to assume are to enable communities to monitor and report over time, to act as knowledge broker and facilitator in gathering critical evidence. The National Children's Alliance supports the development of a "Council of Communities for Children and Youth in Canada" that would act as network (hub and spokes model) to build the needed collective capacity of the third sector.

Recommendation:

- **To develop sustainable mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on the progress of Canada's children and youth using a tri-partite model**

that includes: research, monitoring and reporting capacity within the federal government; a centre and commissioner for children, youth and citizenship; and a voluntary and non-profit sector council of communities.

- **To deepen investment in federal data collection, specifically the National Longitudinal Study on Children and Youth**

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