

**2023-2028 Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction and Action Plan**

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories remains committed to transforming the child and family services system to better serve children, families, and communities. Our primary concern is addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth within the Child and Family Services system. We have made progress on this issue through Quality Improvement Plans starting in 2019 but there is still more to do to ensure the Child and Family Services system is culturally safe, that it supports children and youth in a meaningful way, and it helps more families stay together.

Later today, I will be tabling the 2023-2028 Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction and Action Plan. This plan will guide the work to fundamentally shift the Child and Family Services system towards the goal of cultural safety. Achieving this vision will require sustained engagement with Indigenous governments, communities, and other partners. To uphold transparency and accountability, we will continue to report on our progress through a public action plan tracker and on service delivery trends that appear in the Child and Family Services Director's Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, it is vital to ensure children and youth feel connected to their family, community, and culture. As a society, we share a collective responsibility to ensure that each child and youth is nurtured in a safe and secure environment that enables them to reach their full potential.

The stark overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth within the Child and Family Services system demands we make a paradigm shift in our approach. A transformation is required. We need to think differently and act collectively to create a service framework that responds to the needs of Indigenous children, youth, and families.

The Plan lays out seven priority areas that will guide our transformation. They are ,working collaboratively with Indigenous Governments and organizations; designing, implementing Care Rooted in Indigenous Practices; providing support to care providers and caregivers; strengthening youth supports and transition to adulthood; providing specialized services closer to home; strengthening human resources recruitment and retention efforts for an inclusive and representative workforce; and finally, reducing administrative demands for increased opportunities to connect with families.

Mr. Speaker, the development of the Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction and Action Plan was informed through a comprehensive approach. It drew insights from a diverse range of guiding documents, focused discussions, internal reviews, and recommendations of the Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Social Development.

The onus to lead these strategic priorities within the Child and Family Services system falls upon the Department of Health and Social Services. A collaborative effort and commitment from both within and outside the Government of the Northwest Territories is required to create sustainable change to address the diverse needs of children and youth.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Child and Family Services staff, caregivers, care providers, community partners, Indigenous governments and community leaders for their passion and dedication to the wellbeing of children, youth, and families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.