

Office of the Chief Coroner, Child and Youth Death Review and Analysis (CYDRA)

Child and Youth Death Review:
First Nations Children and Youth

Prepared for Discussion Purposes
November 2022

Purpose

To provide an overview of:

- The Child and Youth Death and Analysis (CYDRA) unit's collaborative transformation of death review processes for Indigenous children and youth.

- Discussion of critical elements of collaborative transformation including:
 - Collaboration with First Nations;
 - Learning to respect the sacredness of the work and the spirit of the young people through safer trauma-informed processes that humanize death; and
 - Wholistically transforming all aspects of the review process from initial child death reporting and involvement of the Nation, the review process, to development of the final report and recommendation development.

- CYDRA's interim Indigenous specific death review committee and local death review processes.

Purpose and Scope of Child and Youth Death Reviews

- The Office of the Chief Coroner (OCC) has different forms of death investigation (e.g. inquests, Local Death Review Tables). The OCC identifies deaths of concern and identifies where additional information is needed. When information is received, a further review may be requested to discuss broader systemic issues that impacted the young person.

Purpose of Child and Youth Death Reviews

The purpose of child and youth death reviews is to explore the circumstances related to the child or youth's death in order to honour their lives, learn from them, and make recommendations to prevent further deaths.

- The goal of child and youth death review is to reduce youth deaths, make service-level, systemic recommendations aimed to prevent further deaths, and to contribute to public safety by supporting recommendations that enhance the overall well-being of children, youth, their families, and communities.

Need for Collaborative Transformation with First Nations

The language of collaborative transformation signals the intent to work collaboratively with First Nations

Several concerns led to a recognition that the historical processes of pediatric death review in a child welfare context needed to be transformed in collaboration with First Nations, agencies and leadership:

Attempts to make the process culturally responsive to First Nation realities was challenging given previous structure/model. It was challenging to incorporate systemic realities into recommendation development and committee processes (e.g. historical and intergenerational trauma, colonization, and racism)

Lack of a wholistic model that accounts for the impacts of intersecting systems and how inequities across service sectors impact First Nations children, youth, and families – the process was almost exclusively focused on child welfare sector.

Committee discussion focused heavily on perspectives of those working within systems and structures (e.g. policing, mainstream child welfare, and coroner).

Limited consideration of the voices and perspectives First Nations, family, and youth.

Learning Through Collaboration

Early discussion has highlighted the importance in making changes to all aspects of the child and youth death review (e.g. review processes, reports and recommendations, report distribution, First Nations access and ownership to information)

Spirit and Culture:

- Recognition that child and youth death review is sacred
- Need for ceremony and protocols specific to the customs and traditions of the First Nations
- Need for closure for families and communities
- Importance of trauma informed death review and First Nations specific supports to help
- First Nations families and communities

Systemic Inequities:

- Impacts of the discovery of unmarked burials
- Overrepresentation of First Nations children and youth in child welfare
- Lack of information of First Nations identity and culture within mainstream child welfare
- Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the ongoing current realities for First Nation women, children and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals

Transformed PDRC:

- Collaborative transformation should support approaches so that First Nations can engage internally on new process(es)
- First Nations jurisdiction, governance and access to information
- Children, youth, and family at the centre of review process(es)
- Trauma informed death review and First Nations specific wellness supports
- Strengthen recommendation development and implementation

Connection to Family and Community:

- Inclusion of family and community voices
- Reviews cannot take a pan-Indigenous approach
- First Nations specific protocols and realities must be incorporated

Collaborative Transformation of Child and Youth Death Review

- The collaborative transformation process provides opportunities for the development of child and youth death review processes that will result in reports and recommendations reflective of community realities, a structure that incorporates an understanding of systemic realities (historical and intergenerational trauma, colonization, racism, and their intersections with child and youth death), and the development of local First Nations led protocols and processes.

CYDRA's Commitment

- Listening, learning, participating and taking action
- Participating in learning opportunities and integrating into practice
- Sharing early, collaboration and transparency
- Constantly examining westernized, Eurocentric, and colonial practices
- Reflecting on how to incorporate learning and knowledge into the review process
- Training to understand First Nations ownership and governance over data and how these principles should be applied to CYDRA work

Taking Action

- Learning about cultural practices
- Where invited, attending cultural and learning events
- Sharing policy perspectives and co-development of processes

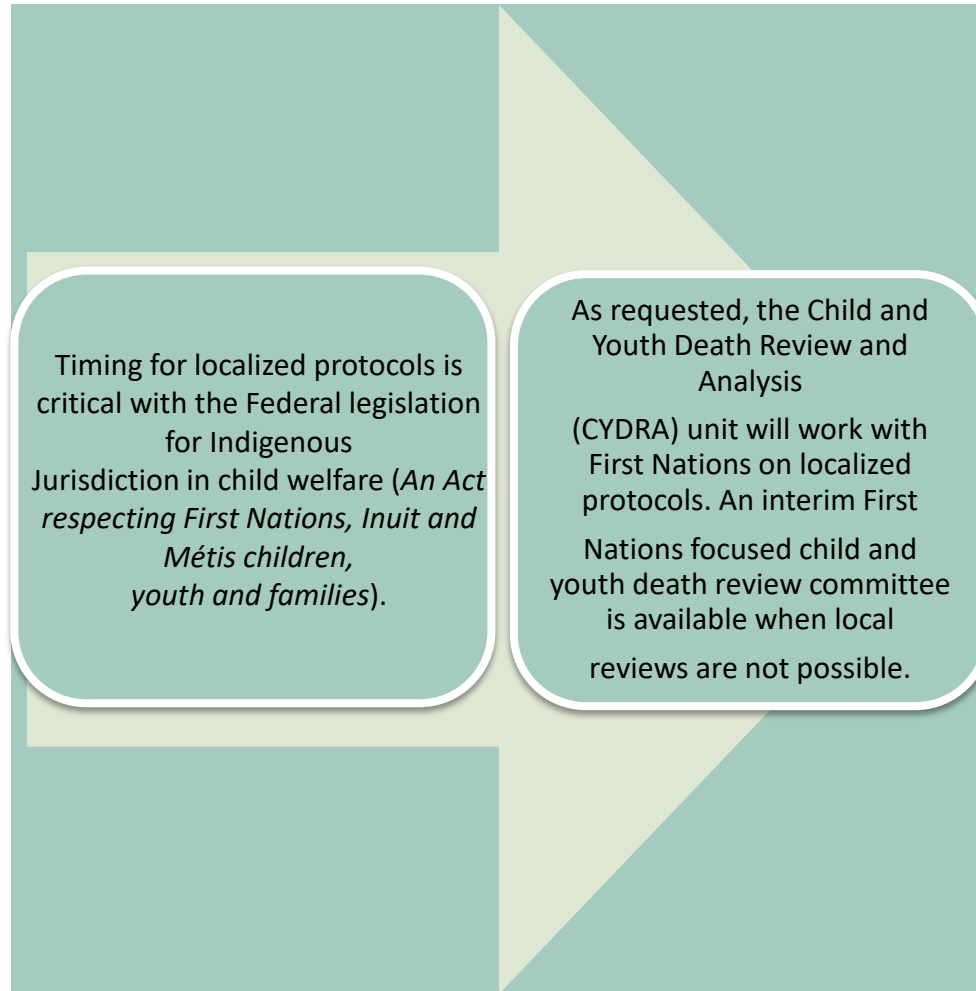
Interim Indigenous Pediatric Death Review Committee for Children and Youth

BACKGROUND

The Interim Pediatric Death Review Committee (PDRC) for Indigenous children and youth replaces the previous PDRC that was focused on child welfare involvement. The interim process allows for discussion beyond child welfare such as education, children's mental health, and youth justice. Current reviews are focused on First Nations young people. The interim committee includes:

- Elder / Knowledge Keeper
- Indigenous Justice Division, Ontario Government
- Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario
- Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies
- Office of the Children's Lawyer, Ontario Government
- Indigenous legal counsel
- Members of the CYDRA unit
- Others are invited as needed (e.g. specialized advice)
- The meeting is conducted through a circle process. Elders are included for ceremony, knowledge of child and youth serving systems and their knowledge
- CYDRA prepares committee material, summarizes records and shares preliminary information on the death to not perpetuate inequities from system records
- Reports are written through a collaborative process with a focus on strengths, systemic recommendations, and recommendations that benefit First Nations. The final draft is shared with the full committee for input and recommendation responses are shared with the committee members.

Current Work and Future Directions



Several versions of local reviews have taken place or are underway. The most recent was in September of 2022 :

- The review took place in a teaching Lodge in the First Nation with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, cultural team from Indigenous child and family well-being agency, agency social workers, and broader community representatives.
- One day of protocol and teachings took place on the land prior to the review. Teachings targeted learning on the sacredness of the work. including an introduction to the Spirits Journey.
- Provided an opportunity for CYDRA to learn what was being shared in engagements.
- CYDRA used records and agency's internal review to compile systemic issues and themes in advance.
- Discussion was through a circle process that was facilitated by a community Knowledge Keeper. CYDRA facilitated the discussion on themes and gathered information on possible future recommendations.
- Draft report shared with community and child and family well-being agency for input.

Elements of Localized Processes

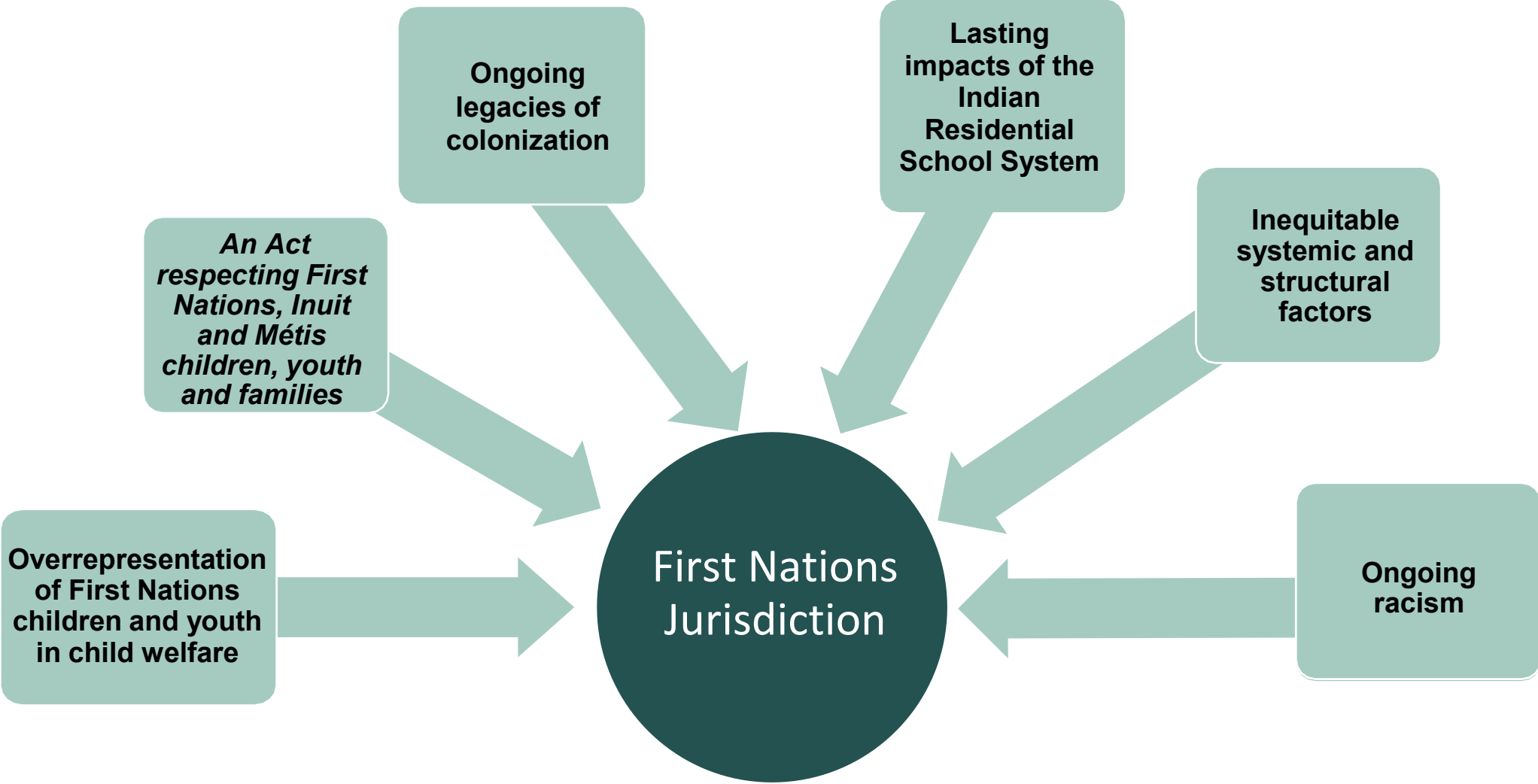
Benefits of First Nations Process(es)

- First Nations specific and driven
- Opportunity for integration of systemic and structural inequities crossing sectors
- Ability to bring forward issues of inequity
- An approach that challenges traditional westernized, Eurocentric, and colonial approaches that may not result in relevant recommendations for community

Early Discussions Regarding First Nation Child and Youth Death Review Process(es)

- Role of ceremony and protocol is First Nation specific
- Opportunity for the early reporting of information by agencies and First Nations on the child death
- Collaboration on the role of the family in the review and selection of the best approach to bring the family perspective
- Gathering of records from the CYDRA unit and collaboration with the First Nation on who attends the community review and the overall approach
- Use local processes that allow time for discussion of the issues Actively look for ways to not contribute to grief and trauma Reports and recommendations shared for collaboration prior to being finalized

The Importance of First Nations Jurisdiction



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