



ASK AN EXPERT

Jordan's Principle: Are kids getting what they need?

By: *The Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD)*

INTRODUCTION:

Jordan's Principle, a child-first initiative and legal obligation named in honour of Jordan River Anderson, who was a young First Nations boy who died in hospital because the provincial and federal government could not agree on who would pay for his care, has supported many other children.

However, the current available data on the way Jordan's Principle is delivered does not help us understand if it is addressing gaps in substantive equality. This would require linking why the claim was being made, i.e., the shortfall being addressed, and what happened to the child's/group's wellness after the claim.

Neither Indigenous Services Canada's (ISC) public reporting nor its internal data enable IFSD to observe if substantive equality is being achieved by Jordan's Principle.

This information sheet and accompanying podcast with Dr. Helaina Gaspard of the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD) discusses what we can learn from assessing the available information on Jordan's Principle and what else is being done to help ensure First Nations kids are getting what they need.

The Big Three:

What does the available data tell us about Jordan's Principle?

- **What we know:** Jordan's Principle is addressing children's needs.
- **What we don't know:** the root causes of requests to Jordan's Principle. Why are children in need? We know inequalities exist, but what are they? How are they affecting children?
- **Why does this matter?** Jordan's Principle is concealing gaps in existing program areas. Understanding the root causes of need is critical to developing informed policy and funding decisions to support well-being over the long-term.

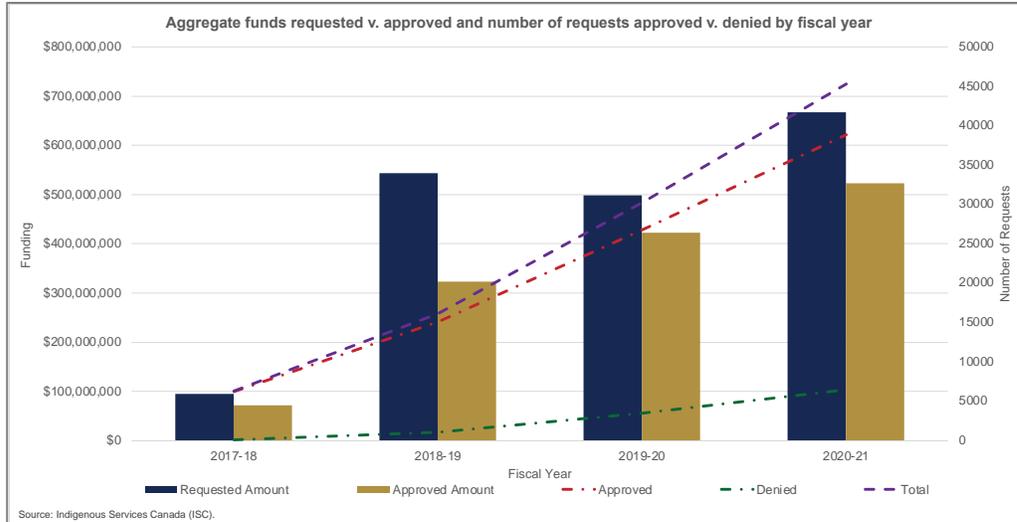
What's the evidence?

In November 2021, IFSD was asked by the Caring Society to assess available data on the application of Jordan's Principle and its utility in evaluating responses to matters of substantive equality and equality. IFSD worked with Indigenous Services Canada's publicly accessible data and its internal data on Jordan's Principle.

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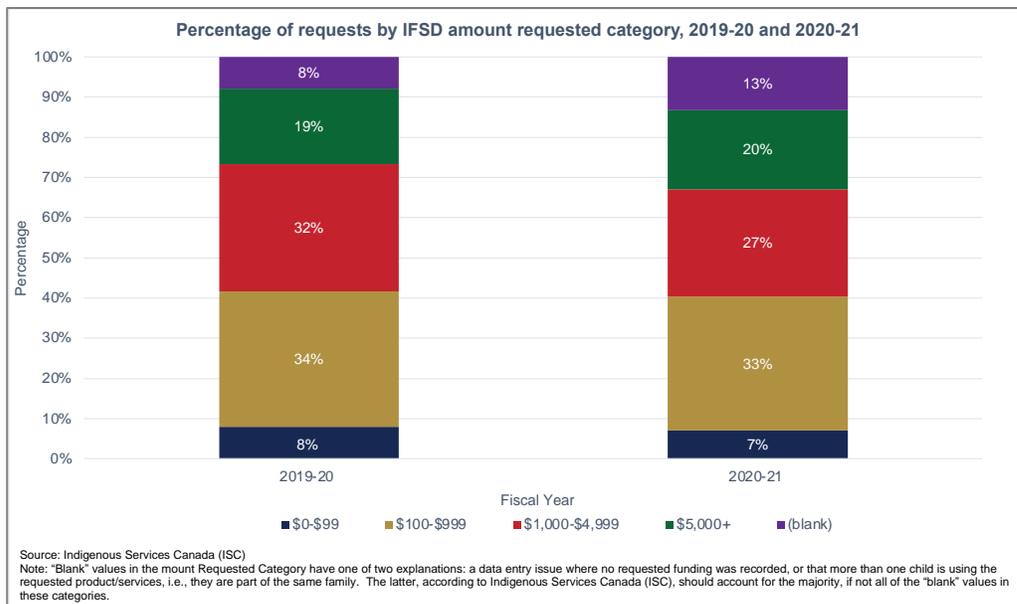
This work was undertaken to support the ongoing negotiations on First Nations child and family services, including the long-term reform and sustainability of Jordan's Principle.

The number of Jordan's Principle requests, approvals, and expenditures has increased. Between 2019-20 and 2020-21, there was approximately a 50% change in the number of requests.



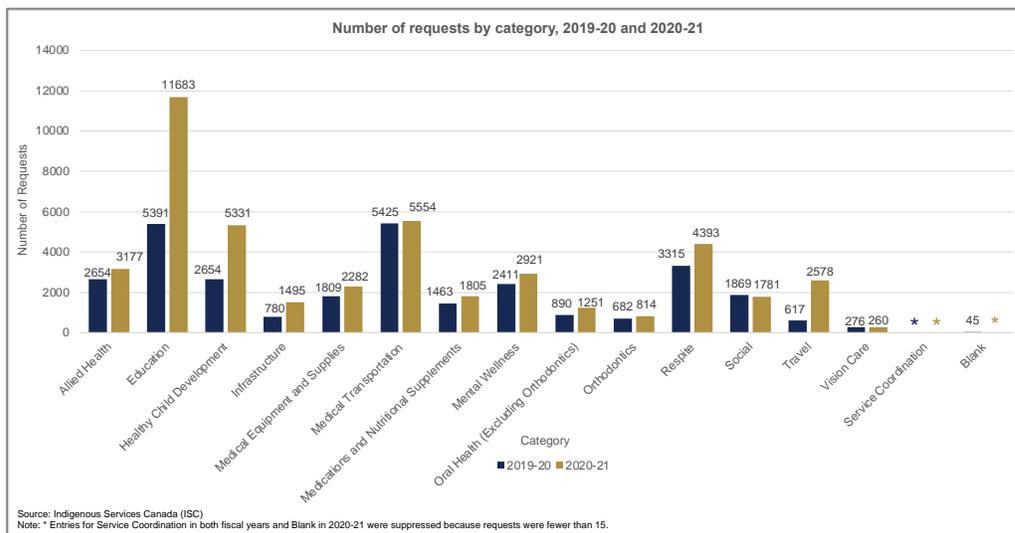
Most requests were for products and services for amounts lower than \$5,000 (the trend is consistent for approved requests). The frequency and small amount of the requests suggests that Jordan's Principle is addressing needs on the ground for basic items and services, rather than addressing exceptional needs in exceptional circumstances.

No matter how big or small the request, they go through the same review and adjudication process. This means that approvals for basic items or services, e.g., formula, educational support tool, can take as long as approval for expensive items, e.g., medical device, long-term care, etc.



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Most requests in fiscal year 2019-20 came from education and medical transportation. In 2020-21, the request categories remained consistent, with healthy child development following closely behind medical transportation.



Myth-busting:

What are the common misperceptions, practices, or assumptions regarding Jordan's Principle?

Assumption: Increased demand in Jordan's Principle is due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Reality:** Only a small share of requests were identified as being COVID-19 related. In 2019-20, roughly 1% of requests were flagged for COVID-19, which grew to approximately 10% in 2020-21. Over half of the COVID-19 related requests in 2020-21 were for products and services with costs between \$100-\$999.

Assumption: Spending more through Jordan's Principle means progress on substantive equality.

- **Reality:** The number and modest size of individual requests suggest that funding for Jordan's Principle is addressing needs on the ground. Reducing the funding could pose a hardship for access to basic needs/services. Addressing individual needs – as real as they are – does not mean that you are making progress on substantive equality. You are more likely closing gaps from existing program areas.

How can we understand if Jordan's Principle is meeting the needs of kids?

Jordan's Principle is delivering funding where there is need. However, it is also funding what appear to be gaps in other program areas, i.e., large numbers of small disbursements. Jordan's Principle was meant to address exceptional needs in exceptional circumstances in pursuit of substantive equality. The numerous requests for small amounts suggest that other programs and services are not working.

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We can review how Jordan's Principle is being monitored and evaluated:

GC Case (ISC's current data collection system) is collecting a lot of information, but not the right information. (There's a focus on inputs, i.e., amount disbursed, and outputs, i.e., products/services purchased, rather than outcomes, i.e., substantive equality).

The implementation of Jordan's Principle conceals gaps rather than identifying and addressing gaps in related program areas. Better information would tell us why a family is seeking support through Jordan's Principle, e.g., geographic access challenge, lack of financial resources/cannot afford it, existing program would not cover, etc. and what happened after the claim, e.g., was issue resolved, is issue ongoing, did child improve, etc.

We can learn from those involved with and supporting Jordan's Principle about ways of making it more accessible, e.g., Service Coordinators, Community Navigators, First Nations, families, etc.

We can try to better understand the programs and services for which Jordan's Principle is compensating by asking why recourse was sought through Jordan's Principle and not an existing program or service

Additional resources:

For more information on IFSD's work on Jordan's Principle, see its report, Data assessment and framing of an analysis of substantive equality through the application of Jordan's Principle.

IFSD welcomes suggestions of practitioners and other experts that may wish to share their professional experiences/work experiences with Jordan's Principle.

There are different ways to contribute these experiences:

- Share reports/publications, research etc.
- One-on-one discussions with IFSD
- Group discussions with IFSD
- Written Q&A

Interested parties can contact Dr. Helaina Gaspard by email (helaina.gaspard@ifsd.ca).