



Information Sheet

First Nations Child Poverty: A Literature Review and Analysis

Summary of Chapter 5



Chapter 5 – Poverty interventions: Ensuring First Nations child well-being

Chapter 5 of *First Nations Child Poverty* describes three main existing and proposed poverty interventions and outlines criteria necessary for interventions to be successful in ways that ensure First Nations child well-being. Although specific components will vary according to a child's distinct cultural, traditional, spiritual and linguistic context, research indicates that there are three overarching components necessary for First Nations child well-being: the opportunity to grow up safely with their families; the assurance that children will enjoy high levels of health and wellness; and the opportunity to receive an equitable education that provides access to learning their languages and cultures.

Government-imposed solutions

Existing government-imposed poverty interventions include 'Comprehensive Land Claims' or 'Modern Treaties,' which are government-designed economic development frameworks; the government claims they will enable greater economic development for First Nations. Critics of the framework argue that these agreements modify or extinguish land title, dissolve land claims, and convert reserves into private property. While a number of First Nations have signed on, others caution that the agreements violate traditional laws of collective rights to the land as well as guarantees by the Indian Act that reserve lands are held for the benefit of all band members. Critics also argue that these modern treaties effectively offload Canada's fiduciary obligations to First Nations on to First Nations and the provinces.

First Nations and economic development

A goal of many First Nations is to move away from dependency

on government funding and become economically self-reliant. Many communities have already become more self-reliant by engaging in mainstream economic development activities like natural resource development, retail ventures, green energy projects and ecotourism, to name a few. Bands often use generated revenue to supplement community services such as water and waste infrastructure, playgrounds, school buses and wellness centres, creating benefits for all community members.

Increased economic self-reliance seems to be on everyone's agenda, and many First Nations communities are committed to promoting and preserving traditional culture, identity and values alongside capitalist economic development. However, others caution against adopting capitalist economic strategies that caused the destruction of Indigenous land-based economies and political autonomy in the first place. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) asserted that First Nations would only achieve economic self-reliance through a large-scale reallocation of lands wholly owned by and controlled by First Nations. Many say that this framework would enable a land- and culture-based resurgence approach that would transform the colonial economic structure, revitalizing sustainable local economies to benefit the local community while reinvigorating an intimate relationship with land and culture.

Closing the funding gap

Half of First Nations children live in poverty, and they are six to eight times more likely to be removed by child welfare than non-Indigenous children, mainly due to poverty-related issues. First Nations children receive significantly less public funding than other children, and children living on reserves fare much worse than others, largely because the federal government underfunds education, health care and social services on reserve.¹ The social costs to First Nations children and the

¹ In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's ruling called for the federal government to end its discrimination against First Nations children, including providing funding for equitable Child and Family Services and

fully implementing Jordan's Principle. Efforts to ensure that the Government of Canada adheres to the ruling are ongoing.
<https://decisions.chrt-tcdp.gc.ca/chrt->

financial costs to Canada of this underfunding are enormous. Research shows that equitable funding across key areas like child welfare, health, education and housing would go a long way towards improving child well-being and outcomes. Those working to close the funding gap argue that interventions must guard against the assimilative agenda that is woven into government (under)funding while working to alleviate food, water and housing insecurity and unsafe housing. Interventions must also provide equitable access to services grounded in First Nations cultural values and practices.

Poverty intervention criteria

Poverty interventions in First Nations communities will only be viable if they are guided by the overarching components of child well-being (outlined above) and created in respectful partnership with First Nations communities. Government-imposed solutions must be abolished in favour of interventions that are self-determined, address specific community needs, build on the strengths of First Nations cultures and communities, and take into account the historic and ongoing factors that contribute to the current poverty crisis. Successful interventions will be adequately funded, holistic and comprehensive, and will be designed by First Nations communities based on a revitalized tradition of self-governance.

Great care must be taken to ensure that whatever course is taken, the well-being of First Nations children remains front and center. Ending poverty for First Nations children is not a problem with a lack of solutions; it is a result of ongoing colonial discrimination and a lack of political will to change it.

Read more by downloading the full document: [*First Nations Child Poverty: A Literature Review and Analysis*](#)