

## FACTSHEET

# TAKE 5: KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM ONTARIO'S CHILD, YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES ACT REVIEW



In 2023, the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community & Social Services conducted the first legislative review of the [Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017](#) (CYFSA). The CYFSA governs many of the child, youth, and family services that are delivered by the Ministry. The CYFSA requires a review of the legislation every five years.

The review process focused on **six key areas**: child and youth rights, Indigenous peoples, equity and anti-racism, prevention and community-based care, quality services, and accountability.

**Engagement** included:

- Participation from **230** service providers and sector experts across **16** online cross-sector roundtables (two discussions were specifically designed for those who work with Black communities, one for those who work with LGBT2SQ+ communities, and one for those who work with newcomers).
- Participation from **454** children, youth, and family members across **39** sessions with community agencies, including children and youth living with disabilities, newcomers, and Black, Indigenous, Francophone, and LGBT2SQ+ communities.
- Individual interviews with **74** youth in **11** youth justice facilities.
- **11** written submissions, facilitated through distinct engagement with First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and urban Indigenous representatives and service providers through Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy Technical Tables.
- **203** responses to an online survey and **25** written submissions by email.
- **Consultations** with members/representatives from:
  - Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies
  - Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario
  - Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity
  - Ontario Ombudsman's Office
  - Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario
  - Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario
  - private adoption sector

In October 2024, [the Ministry released a report](#) providing an overview of the main themes that emerged. This factsheet summarizes **five key takeaways** from the report.

## 01. Centre youth voices and experiences.

Discussions highlighted the importance of prioritizing youth's voices in decisions related to their care, and of incorporating young people's experiences in strengthening and improving services. To centre youth voice, there need to be regular opportunities for youth to provide feedback on their workers and on their experiences in navigating systems.

The need to improve the quality of – and coordinated access to – services when youth leave care (including counselling, employment supports, and housing), and to strengthen the CYFSA's focus on supporting these youth, was identified.

Addressing disparities for youth with intersecting identities was emphasized, including Black and Indigenous youth, gender and sexually diverse youth, youth living with disabilities, and youth living in rural or remote communities. Specifically, the CYFSA needs to enhance requirements for collaboration, consultation, and co-development with Indigenous communities before making any changes that impact Indigenous youth and families.

## 02. Ensure that youth understand their rights and can access supports.

The CYFSA must ensure consistent and meaningful openness across and within children's aid societies. Youth need their rights to be communicated and discussed in an ongoing way to advocate for improvements to their care. This includes having access to adult allies and supportive practitioners. The importance of accessible, age-appropriate, and youth-friendly information was highlighted, as was the need to provide youth with access to critical supports, such as counselling, before they become involved in the system. The distinct rights of Indigenous youth must also be explained and respected.

Young people not only need to know how to advocate for themselves, but they must also believe that their voices will be heard, respected, and acted upon. This requires improving and simplifying the complaints process and listening to feedback from youth and families. Feedback mechanisms must be consistent across service providers, and workers must be supported to create safe spaces for young people to speak up about their experiences.



## 03. Ensure access to identity-affirming and culturally appropriate care, services, and supports.

Determining the needs of a young person must include considering cultural identity. Participation in cultural activities should be recognized as a need *and* a right; ensuring access to identity-affirming and culturally appropriate care is of critical importance. Cultural connections should be a priority in decision-making, and youth should have a say in whether they maintain relationships with their birth families and communities.



For Indigenous youth, this includes supporting Indigenous-led models of child and family services and strengthening collaborations to rebuild trust and ensure the alignment of cultural, ethical, and community values, focusing on the best interests of families and collective healing. These practices adhere to [the federal government's Bill C-92](#), affirming the inherent right of self-government, which includes jurisdiction over child and family services.

The CYFSA's focus on family wellbeing and the prioritization of early intervention, family preservation, and family reunification must be strengthened. Placements should be prioritized, where appropriate, with kin or other individuals from a young person's community. For youth involved in the justice system, recognizing the importance of meaningful and culturally appropriate supports is crucial.

Cultural services must be meaningful and led by communities. Further clarification on the requirements for access to extended family and community, meaningful cultural engagement opportunities, or services and resources that are responsive to youth's needs and identities is necessary. The least disruptive course of action should be the priority.

The CYFSA should ensure mandatory training for workers on cultural competency and trauma-informed care, and adopt new and stronger requirements for training on colonialism, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-racism, and barriers faced by equity-deserving communities.

**04. Advance equity and reduce overrepresentation.**

The recognition of historic and present-day systemic racism is critical in understanding the disproportionate risk of involvement in child welfare and youth justice for some youth and families – including past discriminatory policies for Indigenous communities and the inequitable outcomes experienced by Black communities.

The review specifically refers to the importance of integrating frameworks that respond to anti-Black racism and anti-Indigenous racism in the delivery of services, particularly in efforts to do more to address the overrepresentation of Black, Indigenous, and gender and sexually diverse communities – starting at the point of referral and across the service continuum.



Acknowledging the impacts of systemic barriers and biases is crucial, as is the requirement for routine reviews of equity-focused tools. Decision-makers must be better supported to mitigate the personal biases of frontline workers, judges, and other practitioners, which can impact overrepresentation.



To reduce unwarranted child protection reports, more clarity is required on reporting guidelines and strengthening accountability forms. This could include requirements to make reasonable efforts to connect families with support services in addition to making a report to a children's aid society. Stronger distinctions between 'unmet needs' and 'neglect' are needed; these distinctions should stipulate that poverty does not constitute grounds for child protection, and that children should not be removed from their homes for socio-economic reasons.

#### **05. Prioritize consent and commit to privacy and confidentiality.**

Youth need to understand how their personal information is being used, and access to this information must be improved. Informed consent is critical, and regulations can be modernized to consider individual capacity rather than age alone. The privacy of youth in care, and formerly in care, must be protected. Increasing the oversight of frontline workers was referenced.

The importance of improving data collection, specifically identity-based data collection, was discussed, as was enabling better information sharing with Indigenous communities that align with principles of Indigenous data sovereignty.

Reducing unnecessary administrative requirements can include streamlining reporting requirements in the CYFSA – focusing on tracking, measuring, and driving performance – and strengthening provisions for sharing information across sectors.

#### **LEARN MORE**

In 2021, YouthREX and Practice & Research Together (PART) co-presented [Transforming Ontario's Child Welfare System to Improve Outcomes for Youth and Their Families: Challenges and Opportunities.](#)

This critical conversation featured a presentation by the Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Children, Community & Social Services, about Ontario's Child Welfare Redesign Strategy, followed by an engaging discussion on the issues, challenges, and opportunities of transforming the child welfare system with special guests.

