

## Indicators for testing in 2023

The Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD) is working with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Caring Society to support the long-term reform of First Nations child and family services (FNCFS). Part of this work is focused on building budgets, understanding capital needs, and testing performance measurement approaches in anticipation of a reformed program, known as Phase 3.

IFSD's work builds on previous work in FNCFS since 2018. Phase 1 was a cost and gap analysis of the FNCFS system. Phase 2 proposed an approach to funding FNCFS based on differentiated needs, including the Measuring to Thrive framework developed with FNCFS agency leadership and other experts (an overview of the framework is on p. 39-116 of the Phase 2 report, [Funding First Nations child and family services \(FNCFS\): A performance budget approach to well-being](#)). Phase 3 leverages these findings and builds on the approaches by putting the ideas and models from Phase 2 into practice.

There are 20 collaborators (a mix of FNCFS agencies, First Nations exercising jurisdiction, and FNCFS agencies exercising jurisdiction with their First Nation) working with IFSD on Phase 3. IFSD is grateful to the community of collaborators for continuing to share their time, knowledge, and experiences to improve FNCFS.

Phase 3 collaborators convened on November 8-9, 2022, in Ottawa to define indicators to pilot in 2023, as well as to identify indicators for Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) to consider in a reformed program. The workshop was attended by 18 of the 20 collaborators for Phase 3, with 44 participants contributing to the discussion.

The workshop had three goals:

- 1) Build consensus on the Measuring to Thrive indicators to test in the 2023 pilot.
- 2) Build consensus on the Measuring to Thrive indicators to propose to Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) for a reformed FNCFS program (possibly, same indicators as #1).
- 3) Learn and exchange among colleagues on practices and lessons in data collection, measurement, and evidence generation.

The collaborators identified 15 potential indicators to pilot with their agency or First Nation in 2023, and proposed 5 indicators for Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) to use to measure performance in a reformed program.

A summary of the proceedings (which followed the Chatham House Rule), as well as the list of selected indicators is included below. The collaborators should be commended for their intensive efforts over two days. They have laid the foundations for the measurement pilot in 2023.

## Summary of proceedings

Over two days, 44 participants from 18 collaborating FNCFS agencies and First Nations shared practices, perspectives, and established a starting point to pilot the measure of well-being in 2023.

Working from the 75-indicators in the Measuring to Thrive framework, collaborators worked in small groups to first, assess information availability of different indicators, and second, to identify the indicators they considered most relevant to measuring well-being in FNCFS. Following the small group work, the workshop would convene in plenary to report on findings and prepare for next steps.

The small group discussions were fruitful and highlighted the different starting points of collaborators. From those actively collecting and analyzing data to those working to define their mandate, the deliberations highlighted at once their diversity and commonalities in confronting similar challenges. It was evident that multiple approaches to delivering FNCFS will emerge (are already emerging) in a reformed system.

The plenary discussions were an opportunity to express differences and build consensus. As the discussions proceeded, collaborators worked to identify common areas of measurement relevant to well-being. For some collaborators, the premise of starting from the Measuring to Thrive framework was imperfect. They would have preferred starting from scratch with their First Nations. For example, some collaborators expressed a sense of inadequacy of existing indicators to measure spiritual, cultural, and community-based well-being of their communities. Their position was recognized, and collaborators added spirituality as an indicator to measure well-being. It was highlighted, by collaborators that the measures, albeit imperfect, were developed with contributions from FNCFS agencies and experts, with the goal of broad applicability and use.

With Measuring to Thrive as a starting point, the collaborators identified 15 indicators to pilot with their FNCFS agency or First Nation. Collaborators agreed to select as few or as many indicators as they considered feasible from the 15.

The proposed indicators for ISC were a subset of the 15 indicators. There was debate among collaborators as to what ISC should collect or what information it should be entitled to access. ISC is not the service provider, they are the funder. As funder, they have constitutional obligations to report to Parliament (and through Parliament, Canadians) on the application of public funds and their results. To this end, the indicators selected for ISC emphasize the contextual considerations that shape an environment, e.g., housing, potable water, and access to services, along with child and family services-specific indicators, e.g., family (re)unification, that serve as proxies for the overall well-being of communities.

Measurement, as highlighted by two presentations from collaborators, is not a linear exercise. There is constant learning and reworking of practices to address unexpected

challenges while celebrating unanticipated learnings along the way. This will be a challenging exercise but that is the point. Collaborators generously committed to working in their own contexts and together to learn and support others on the journey to long-term reform.

The purpose of the pilot exercise is to:

- 1) Learn about the measurement process and share practices, tools, and approaches;
- 2) Leverage learnings to define a well-being focused approach to measurement with First Nations care and control of delivery.

The list of selected indicators for collaborator testing and those to be proposed to ISC are reviewed below. IFSD will work with the collaborators' selections to prepare draft definitions for operationalization, i.e., define the indicator and explain how to collect information about it. Collaborators recognized that important information may not be available to populate the indicators but nonetheless chose to highlight their relevance for long-term measurement.

In February 2023, collaborators will convene again to review the testing framework, tools, and prepare for the pilot exercise.

The purpose of a monitoring system focused on well-being is to capture if discrimination exists. This is a crucial form of accountability. Measuring well-being through a framework will generate a truth, and one that may run counter to what is held to be true. We should be prepared to learn from the exercise. The data generated from the exercise and evidence produced may run counter to what we know now. That is an expected and accepted part of this exercise. Measurement is about accountability, but it does not make the entity measuring the only one accountable for the result. Environment Canada may measure the weather, but it is not accountable for the forecast.

This is an exciting and challenging opportunity for FNCFS agencies and First Nations to lead in the measurement of well-being.

IFSD is tasked with populating a framework to operationalize the indicators. There are certain indicators, e.g., livable income, for which IFSD will propose a range of potential approaches for measurement. IFSD will prepare the analysis for collaborators to review, refine, and prepare for implementation during the test phase.

**Service provider indicators**

Indicator	Purpose	Definition for operationalization	Notes/considerations
1) Knowledge of Indigenous language			
2) Connection (access) to land			
3) Community-based activities			
4) Spirituality			
5) Family (re)unification			
6) Placement within community (kin and kith)			
7) Stability (i.e., moves in care)			
8) Family violence			
9) Substance misuse			
10) Access to mental health and specialized services within the community			
11) Livable income			
12) Access to early childhood education			
13) Meeting numeracy and literacy targets a. Elementary b. Secondary			
14) Secondary school completion rate			

15) Access to post-secondary education			
--	--	--	--

**Indicators for ISC**

Indicator	Purpose	Definition for operationalization	Notes/considerations
1) Safe and suitable housing			
2) Sufficient and safe water from source to tap			
3) Family reunification			
4) Livable income			
5) Access to mental health and specialized services within the community			