

Report slams child care [CA-BC] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Provincial government criticized over its care of aboriginal children

More than half the children in its care are aboriginal, yet the B.C. government has no idea how they're doing, Auditor-General John Doyle said in a report released Tuesday.

Doyle said the disproportionate number of aboriginal children in need of protection likely indicates that government programs are falling short.

But rather than scrutinizing those programs and making changes, the government has little information on what's working and what isn't, he said.

"Neither the federal nor the B.C. government knows enough about the outcomes," Doyle said. "What happens to these children who receive child welfare services? Are they better off?

"Our legislatures and aboriginal and first nations communities need to know if the services being provided make a difference."

Doyle's report also found that the B.C. government has no clear idea what services aboriginal children need, nor how many social workers and other employees are required to deliver them. As a result, the ministry hasn't been able to make a strong case at the cabinet table for more money and in turn faces "funding gaps."

The issue is of major concern because aboriginal children account for only eight per cent of the population, but make up 51 per cent of children in the province's care.

Children's Minister Tom Christensen was unable to explain why B.C.'s numbers are so much higher than other provinces.

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"We recognize that we need to do a better job of identifying what are the outcomes that we are seeking to achieve," Christensen said, adding he expects "significant progress" this year.

NDP children's critic Nicholas Simons said the auditor's report shows the government has little to show for its efforts after seven years in office and numerous scathing reviews.

"In 2001, 42 per cent of the children in care were aboriginal children," he told the legislature. "In 2008, 52 per cent are aboriginal children. The minister refers to doing what they're doing well. I fail to see any evidence that this ministry is addressing the issues at hand. This report simply confirms that."

In a separate audit released Tuesday, federal Auditor-General Sheila Fraser examined the federal First Nations Child and Family Services Program that assists children on reserves. She concluded that Indian and Northern Affairs Canada is using an outdated funding formula.

- reprinted from The Vancouver Sun

Region: British Columbia ^[2]

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aboriginal ^[4]

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