



Fast

# FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

there is an alternative.

May 17, 2016

## Manitoba Ranked Highest for Indigenous Child Poverty

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**C**hildren need to feel and see they are important members of their communities and treated as such. A new study out Tuesday finds that Manitoba has the highest number of on-reserve First Nations children in poverty in the country at 76 per cent and the highest indigenous children in poverty off-reserve at 39 per cent. This number is rising and the situation is getting worse. There is no excuse for this in a wealthy country like Canada — this is a state of emergency.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) accurately named report “Shameful Neglect: Indigenous Poverty in Canada” lays out the unequal treatment indigenous children have faced and continue to face in this country, with the numbers pointing to governments’ failure to address child poverty responsibly.

The report measures poverty by measuring income, but the reality is many other conditions contribute to poverty in First Nations and indigenous communities. On reserve, these conditions include persistent underfunding of schools and child welfare services, overcrowded housing and undrinkable water. All these conditions have kept and continue to keep First Nations and all indigenous children from achieving their full potential.

The Manitoba Pimicikimak Cree Nation suicide crisis is just one example of

government failing children. First Nations children lose hope when denied meaningful and effective opportunities to grow and learn.

Child poverty rates in Manitoba at 76 per cent and Saskatchewan at 69 per cent are the highest in Canada. The lowest is in Quebec among the children of Eeyou Itschee (James Bay Cree) who benefit from a resource sharing agreement — it sits at 23 per cent. This is still higher than the overall Canadian average for child poverty at 18 per cent and among the worst of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.

Extreme poverty in Manitoba First Nations is linked to Manitoba having the highest child apprehension rate in the western world. There are over 11,000 children in the child welfare system. Ninety percent of these children are indigenous. Children apprehended because of third-world conditions on reserves become commodities within the child welfare system, providing employment in communities with little to no own-source revenue and economic opportunities. Poverty conditions increase the likelihood of children to be apprehended by child welfare agencies. Addressing the root causes

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of poverty empowers families to care for children, this along with supports to families and customary care would reduce the number of children in care. At present, children under apprehension in many cases age out of child welfare into poverty, hospitalization, homelessness, or incarceration. Poverty is linked to murdered and missing Aboriginal people. It is a cycle.

The recent finding of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal earlier this year that the federal government discriminates against First Nations children on reserve by failing to provide the same level of child welfare services that are provided elsewhere underscores the discriminatory practices. Less funding for family support means more children end up in the child welfare system.

In indigenous traditional understanding, children are our center. Since the imposition of the Indian Act and its numerous amendments, the family unit has never been the same. Residential schools decimated families, with the effects of removing our communities' centers still felt today. Historically, First Nations children were viewed as the most integral part of a community and valued as such. First Nations communities have never escaped from the removal of children. The Sixties Scoop replaced the Residential School and the most contemporary form is the child welfare system. Our First Nations communities have had children taken for over a century. This has greatly contributed to the rampant social issues, further exacerbated by the extremely high levels of poverty within First Nations communities.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, the recent Human Rights Tribunal decision and now the "Shameful Neglect" report all point to historical and current discrimination of First Nations and indigenous children. Action is needed to improve direct income support both on and off reserve, work with communities to bolster economic and social development and invest in long-term solutions. Both the federal and provincial governments must provide meaningful measures to turn this

crisis around. First Nations families and communities want our children home, families together and communities thriving.

*Cora Morgan is the First Nations Family Advocate at the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.*