

On Sept. 23, 2017, an MCFD spokesperson replied to questions reporter Brielle Morgan sent on Aug. 9, 2017. Morgan's questions are in bold.

What is the ministry doing to address caseloads that exceed AOPSI requirements at DAAs (particularly Xyolhemeylh)? A report released in March by the RCY's office found that social workers at B.C.'s Delegated Aboriginal Agencies are getting slammed. Workers they interviewed were carrying "an average of 30 cases at a time — 50 per cent more than is recommended by the Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards and Indicators (AOPSI) guidelines.

Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs) benefit from increased support from the ministry in the important work that they do to support Indigenous children, youth and families — and we are doing that by continually reviewing caseload averages, AOPSI standards, social worker pay, recruitment and retention strategies. We're also working with DAAs throughout the province to ensure they have the tools, funding and supports they need in order to make a difference in the lives of the families they serve.

September's Budget update re-commits \$14.4 million to help ensure that DAAs are funded at levels equitable to the ministry, and provides a further \$24.2 million for family supports, culturally appropriate services and to place additional staff — both from DAAs and MCFD — within Indigenous communities.

The ministry is also committed to working with our federal, provincial and Indigenous partners to address the remaining recommendations from Grand Chief Ed John's report and we're making progress, including:

- o Working on a standardized funding approach to ensure that Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs) have equal funding to MCFD for child protection services and to enable wage parity.
- o Funding to improve cultural planning to ensure a lifelong connection of children and youth in care to their identified language and culture.
- o MCFD has begun implementing a new recruitment and retention strategy intended to increase the number of Aboriginal employees across all service lines through improved hiring practices, culturally safe work places and enhanced cultural agility in all staff.
- o MCFD is developing online information for Indigenous communities on options under the Child Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) to protect the cultural identity and heritage of Aboriginal children that come into the ministry's care.
- o MCFD is currently engaged with First Nations and the federal government through the Tripartite Working Group to consider new approaches to jurisdiction, self-governance and funding in the area of child welfare.

True and lasting reconciliation is a priority for this government. With this in mind, this government will be fully adopting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and addressing the recommendations set out by the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. We are committed to working with Indigenous, Métis and Inuit partners and communities to understand what they need most and how we can work together to improve the lives of Indigenous children and families.

In recognition of this, both the Confidence and Supply Agreement between the Green Party and the NDP, and the Minister's mandate letter included commitments to hire more social workers — particularly in rural and underserved regions — and to implement the recommendations from

Grand Chief Ed John's report to provide better supports to keep Indigenous children at home and out of care.

I'd like to speak about retention challenges: The Ministry announced last November that "Between November 2014 and April 2016, the ministry hired 200 new front-line staff and has committed to hiring 100 more by the end of this fiscal year." In February, Justine Hunter reported, "The net result of last year's hiring spree is that B.C. has just as many child-protection workers now as there were a year ago." Minister Cadieux told Justine Hunter: "There are new hires on the way, with 45 social workers expected to start by the end of March."

Government has heard directly from social workers that they need more support to help manage the increasingly complex cases they are facing today. To that end, the ministry will add even more front-line staff to the ministry over the next three years – that's in addition to the new staff hired since March 2016, for a net increase of 143 new social workers. We anticipate that these new hires will help offset staffing losses through retiring social workers or those who choose to leave the field for a variety of other reasons.

The ministry is also working to develop a hiring strategy that will target high-need areas of the province and help best support B.C. children, families and communities. In April 2017, front-line ministry social workers in hard-to-recruit areas received pay increases of \$3,000 to \$6,000 per year as a result of an agreement between government and the BC Government Employees' Union.

The ministry has also been changing the way it does business in order to free up social workers' time to focus on things that require their expertise, like one-on-one work with the children and families they serve. Ultimately, we're working to build on these steps as we continue to add social workers to the front line even as the number of children and youth in care is decreasing.