

# **CBC News Indigenous Ottawa to increase funding for First Nations child welfare services**

**Indigenous Services Minister Jane Philpott says Ottawa moving to immediately increase funding**

By Jorge Barrera, [CBC News](#) Posted: Feb 01, 2018 10:26 AM ET Last Updated: Feb 01, 2018 2:45 PM ET



Indigenous Services Minister Jane Philpott said the federal government is moving to immediately provide additional funding for First Nation child welfare services. (Adrian Wyld/Canadian Press)

## **Related Stories**

- [Reuniting Indigenous families takes spotlight of proposed foster system reforms](#)
- [Provinces hold off signing agreement on Indigenous child welfare](#)
- [Philpott unveils 6-point plan to improve 'perverse' First Nations child welfare system](#)
- [We must disrupt the foster care system and remove perverse incentives, says Minister Jane Philpott](#)

Indigenous Services Minister Jane Philpott says her department would immediately move to increase funding for First Nation child welfare services following another compliance order from the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found Ottawa fails to grasp the "seriousness and emergency of the issues."

The tribunal issued its fourth compliance order against the federal government Thursday morning, again finding that First Nation children continue to face discrimination as a result of inadequate funding for child welfare services.

"While the necessity to account for public funds is certainly legitimate, it becomes troubling when used as an argument to justify the mass removal of children rather than preventing it," said the ruling. "There is a need to shift this right now to cease discrimination."

The tribunal said it was "incorrect for Canada to say it did everything that it could do and everything that was asked of it in the immediate term, which has now become the mid-term."

The tribunal issued several orders directed at Ottawa, including covering the actual cost of services provided by First Nation child welfare agencies, and the actual cost of mental health services for First Nations children and youth in Ontario.

The tribunal also ordered Ottawa to enter into a consultation protocol with the Assembly of First Nations, the Chiefs of Ontario, Nishnawbe Aski Nation and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society.

The tribunal ruled in January 2016 that Ottawa discriminated against First Nation children by underfunding child welfare services. The tribunal ordered Canada to immediately overhaul the system and increase funding.

## **Ottawa pledges immediate funding**

Ottawa moved quickly to respond to some of the tribunal's orders.

Philpott told reporters in Ottawa that officials sent letters Thursday morning to 105 First Nation child welfare agencies informing them that Ottawa would be funding their "actual costs" for prevention, intake legal fees, building repairs and other associated costs. Philpott said the department would also cover these costs retroactively to Jan. 26, 2016.

**Philpott: 'government to cover costs for indigenous Child and Family Services'**<sup>2:36</sup>

Ottawa is also moving immediately to comply with the order on funding First Nation children and youth mental health services in Ontario.

Philpott said the department would also stop relocating funds from other social programs for child welfare services.

"We absolutely welcome the decision of the tribunal," said Philpott. "We have taken action immediately on the orders."

She said more funding for First Nation child welfare services would be included in the upcoming federal budget.

## **Latest ruling a 'victory'**

First Nation children's advocate Cindy Blackstock called the ruling "another complete victory." Blackstock, with the support of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), filed a human rights complaint in 2007 that led to last January's ruling.

"The tribunal found that Canada's focus has been on financial considerations and not the best interests of children," said Blackstock, who heads the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society. "The government has treated some of the tribunal's rulings like recommendations. They are not recommendations; they are legally binding."



Cindy Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, says the latest ruling is a 'victory.' (Sean Kilpatrick/Canadian Press)

Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler said in a statement he was pleased the tribunal found that Ottawa's "business as usual approach" was a "conscious choice to perpetuate discrimination." Fiddler said the tribunal had "broken new ground in raising the bar."

Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians Grand Chief Joel Abram said the tribunal's most recent ruling is just a first step.

"This is still a short-term remedy. We need to work together with Canada and Ontario towards a long-term plan to bring our children back to their communities and back to their families," said Abram, in a statement.

The tribunal's ruling took issue with Canada's perceived focus on holding meetings and negotiations with provinces and First Nations before moving to implement serious changes.

"Canada simply cannot hide behind the provinces' responsibilities to shield itself from its own responsibilities," said the tribunal.

Philpott held an "emergency meeting" last week with provinces and Indigenous representatives on child welfare that ended with the provinces' refusing to sign off on a final statement that had been circulated before the gathering.

All the parties involved in the case — Ottawa, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, the AFN, the Chiefs of Ontario and Nishnawbe Aski Nation — on Dec. 18 were provided an advanced confidential copy of the ruling to allow for consultations and suggestions.

During this process, Ottawa sent a letter to the tribunal indicating that "Canada is fully committed to implement all the orders in this ruling and understands that its funding approach needs to change."

The tribunal said it was "delighted to read Canada's commitment and openness" and it was "very encouraging and fosters hope to a higher degree" that the ongoing discrimination would soon end.

"When we successfully shift the focus from the apprehension of children from their families toward preventing the apprehension and the reunification of families that is, in fact, what the tribunal describes as a channel of reconciliation," said Philpott.