Defining Child Well-Being Across the Continuum of Children's Services

Environmental Scan Report

ALIGN
Association of
Community Services

PolicyWise
for Children & Families

Acknowledgments

Suggested Citation

Luig, T., Pritchard, C., Medagedara, K., Medlock, J., Ayis, D., Glenn, N. & Parker, N. (2022). *Defining Child Well-Being Across the Continuum of Children's Services: Environmental Scan Report.* Edmonton: PolicyWise for Children & Families.

Executive Summary

What is the meaning of child and youth well-being?

"Asking the question, 'what is well-being?' is a very western question. When I think about the Indigenous universe, I wonder how we can respond?" - Talking Circle Participant

The way we define and understand child and youth well-being matters. In the Indigenous universe, for example, well-being is a way of being and doing. It is an action intertwined with others, the land, animals, plants, and the cosmos – it is vast. As such, it is not a thing that can be easily summarized, defined, and measured. Well-being is about balance, happiness, joy, and moving forward *in a good way* learned through responsibility, reciprocity, language, and ceremony. It is about connection, belonging, and rootedness in community, land, and among other beings. According to Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, well-being in an Indigenous universe is about moving from survival mode to a time where things can grow again for Indigenous children and their children's children.

Government and non-governmental agencies exist in a universe parallel to the Indigenous one. They rely on a definition of well-being to direct services and programs for children, youth, and families. They also employ the definition in their assessments – to understand what is needed, what is working, and where there are opportunities for change. **To ensure programs and services are equitable and culturally responsive, it is vital we define and understand child and youth well-being based on the perspectives and values of culturally diverse communities.** That is the goal of this project.

Defining well-being

ALIGN Association of Community Services (ALIGN) contracted us at PolicyWise for Children & Families (PolicyWise) to develop a definition of child and youth well-being for child welfare practice in Alberta to optimize well-being across the continuum of care. Our goal was a definition that resonated with diverse cultural communities across the province and prioritized Indigenous peoples' perspectives. We undertook this task with an understanding of the challenge of developing a shared language of well-being that represented Indigenous and non-Indigenous universes. We were particularly mindful of the dominance of the non-Indigenous 'Western' worldview within definitions of well-being that frequently shape the health, social, and child welfare sectors. As we heard from a Talking Circle participant:

"We didn't have permission to talk about wellness. We had non-Indigenous doctors, nurses, teachers, and missionaries come and tell us. They used their own words and perspectives."

To conduct this work, we reviewed the relevant literature and interviewed thought leaders, leading practitioners in the child welfare sector, Indigenous practitioners, and wellness scholars. We contextualized what we learned by engaging members of diverse communities from across Alberta. This included ALIGN member agencies, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders, and youth. **We identified four foundational principles and seven domains of child and youth well-being relevant to the child welfare continuum in Alberta.**

Foundational principles of child and youth well-being

We identified four principles that are foundational to the seven domains of well-being.

Principle 1: Multidimensional and interconnected

Child and youth well-being is holistic. It has multiple dimensions that reflect unique meanings for people, families, and communities. Well-being is inextricably tied to cultural ways of being in and understanding the world. It is contextual, interconnected with others, the land, and the broader society. Well-being shifts in response to age and stage of development.

Principle 2: Ecological and relational

Child and youth well-being is shaped by and emerges from relationships. It is embedded in families and develops in relation to natural supports, communities, institutions, and the larger social, economic, political, and natural environment. While child and youth well-being are at the centre, strengthening relationships with and supporting caregivers, families, and communities are key factors in child and youth well-being.

Principle 3: Equitable access and social structures

Child and youth well-being exists within broader social structures. There are social patterns that determine access to basic needs, resources, and supports. Equitable social structures promote and ensure equitable access to basic needs, employment opportunities, education, social services and supports, health care, justice, and other social and economic determinants of health required for child, youth, family, and community well-being.

Principle 4: Strengths-based and trauma-informed

Child and youth well-being is nurtured by acknowledging, celebrating, and developing strengths of children, youth, families, and communities. It is about the presence of protective factors, supportive relationships, and possibilities for growth, joy, and thriving. Recognizing and healing trauma is essential to child and youth well-being. This involves acknowledging and addressing the root causes of intergenerational trauma, structural racism, colonialism, and systemic exclusion.

Domains of child and youth well-being

We identified seven domains of child and youth well-being. To facilitate understanding and clarity, we have presented the domains separately. In practice they are intertwined and overlapping.

Caring and stable relationships

Caring relationships describe supportive, meaningful, and reciprocal relationships between children and their natural supports like family members and teachers as well as formalized supports like caseworkers. Family composition, caregiving roles, and relationships with children are culturally rooted and diverse across communities. Relationship stability is key for child and youth well-being. Children and youth need a consistent person who they can trust and on whom they can depend. Reciprocal relationships are ones where children also contribute. In this way they build healthy connections and self-esteem.

Supportive and safe environments

Supportive and safe environments describe children's social and physical circumstances. They include and go beyond basic needs to provide equitable access to material goods, activities, services, and education. Safe environments include protective factors such as well-resourced and skilled caregivers, service providers, and social supports. They are underpinned by principles of equity, respect, recognition, and empowerment. Accessible, universally available, and culturally responsive services, supports, and care providers are key to supportive and safe environments.

Sense of identity and autonomy

Identity describes a sense of self as well as how a person is perceived by others. It is multifaceted and fluid. Identity emerges and is dynamically shaped in relationship to others, the land, and community. Autonomy describes the ability to make choices toward self-determination and self-directed action. For children and youth, a strong identity and autonomy are reflected in confidence, belonging, and a sense of purpose. Pursuing interests and activities that bring joy can build identity among children and youth.

Cultural connection

Cultural connection describes a positive relationship to cultural identity. It includes access to cultural resources and community such as language, ceremonies, teachings, and relations. Supporting well-being in newcomer and immigrant children and youth includes fostering healthy bi-cultural identities and intercultural competency. A culturally safe environment is characterized by humility, curiosity, respect, and the recognition that children may have different relationships and experiences of their culture.

Healthy development and growth

Healthy development and growth encompass physical, emotional, cognitive, mental, and spiritual well-being at different ages and stages. For example, making friends, pursuing interests, getting enough sleep, learning, and regulating emotions. Children need to develop skills, play, explore interests and gifts, think critically, and be curious about the world. Healthy development is conceptualized in multiple, culturally specific ways. Indigenous perspectives highlighted a balance of physical, mental, spiritual, and

emotional realms. Child and youth development and growth is frequently marked by rites of passage that include teachings to support and prepare children and youth for roles or stages in life.

Connection to the land

Connection to the land means cultivating relationships with the land, water, food sources, and the natural environment. For Indigenous communities, connection to the land and the opportunity to practice land-based activities are essential to identity. They also support living in a good way, which includes connecting with positive aspects of life and gratitude for the land. For children from immigrant, migrant, and refugee communities, connecting to the land builds a relationship and a sense of belonging to their new homeland. For all children and youth connection to land is vital for well-being and builds awareness about environmental health, which in turn is necessary for life and well-being.

Meaningful knowledge

Meaningful knowledge can include formal and informal education and learning opportunities that are culturally responsive and safe. It requires a flexible approach to knowledge development that accounts for a child's unique way of learning, their life circumstances, and their needs. It can include reflective learning where children can reflect on and learn from their actions. Meaningful knowledge includes the knowledge passed from family, role models, Elders, community teachings, ceremony and the land, and life skills. It supports identity formation, pride, sense of belonging, healing, and joy.

A summary of next steps

In the next phase of this project, we will build on what we learned to develop measurement tools that align with well-being as we have defined it. In preparation for this work, we conducted a preliminary scan of existing well-being measurement tools and approaches. Through this work, we identified five measurement principles to guide the next phase of the project:

1. Strengths-based: Focus on what is present rather than what is absent.

2. Context-informed: Recognize the unique needs and circumstances of each child and family.

3. Qualitative: Capture experiential information through stories, experience, and perceptions.

4. Accountable: Ensure children, youth, and families have opportunities to give feedback.

5. Holistic and longitudinal: Include all aspects of well-being and how it is influenced over time.

Reflections on a learning journey

This report marks the end of a year-long collaborative learning journey to better understand and define well-being for use in the child welfare practice in Alberta. Our goal was to describe well-being in a way that resonated with diverse cultural communities and prioritized Indigenous peoples' perspectives. Through our engagement we learned the importance of creating a definition that was flexible, culturally

responsive, self-determined, strengths-based, meaningful, and grounded in family, community, culture, and land. We learned that child and youth well-being is not a single thing. Instead, it is an action that shifts in response to life stage, age, and community values, practices, and beliefs. What we learned is that vital to supporting the well-being of children and youth is listening with curiosity and humility.

Our hope is that the definition of well-being that we have outlined in this report – including the four foundational principles and seven domains – sparks continued conversation and deep reflection on how child welfare practice can best support children, youth, families, and communities along their unique pathways to being well and thriving.

Table of Contents

What does well-being mean?

This was the central question of our one-year project to define child and youth well-being across the continuum of services for children, youth, and families in Alberta. ALIGN Association of Community Services (ALIGN) contracted PolicyWise for Children & Families (PolicyWise) to undertake this work with the purpose of creating a definition that was meaningful and appropriate to diverse communities across the province and reflects the excellent work of ALIGN agencies. ALIGN also asked us to begin exploring how the definition can be measured in child welfare practice.

The way child and youth well-being is defined matters. It provides the foundation for service design, standards of practice, and measurement of impact. As such, it is essential that the definition is meaningful and reflects the diversity of communities impacted by those services. Applying the dominant version of reality – often called a 'Western' perspective – to communities for whom it does not resonate risks causing real and lasting harm[1]. It also misses an opportunity to create equitable and appropriate services that celebrate and build on community strengths and capacities toward achieving their own versions of well-being. With this in mind, we purposefully centred the perspectives of diverse communities and stakeholders while undertaking this work. We engaged Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, the Well-Being Advisory Committee, practitioners serving diverse communities, and youth to develop a shared language of child and youth well-being. In this report, we summarize what we found. We begin by describing *living in a good way* – well-being or wellness from an Indigenous perspective or universe – as we heard from Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Living in a good way

The Indigenous universe is parallel to the one that dominates Canadian institutions, policies, services, and programs. In the Indigenous universe, storytelling is central to knowledge and wisdom sharing. How to live in a good way is something Elders may spend years and generations practising and teaching. We acknowledge the impossible task of capturing such wisdom in written form, particularly within the short space of this report. Yet, we know that sharing is essential to building understanding. And understanding is needed to ensure that policy, services, and supports are appropriate and meaningful for Indigenous communities. Our hope is that the text that follows highlights the parallel Indigenous universe to evoke reflection and deeper understanding.

Wellness doesn't have a separate category like it does in English. When I think about wellness, it's all the people, animals, plants, and the cosmos – it's vast.

Where I come from, we didn't have permission to talk about wellness. We had non-Indigenous doctors, nurses, teachers, and missionaries come and tell us. They used their own words and perspectives.

---

[1] From the book *ohpikinâwasowin / Growing a child: Implementing Indigenous ways of knowing with Indigenous families,* recommended by one of the thought leaders. This text introduced an important shift in our thinking and language, from "there is a significant over-representation of Indigenous Peoples in child welfare" to "there is a significant over-representation of the Western universe in Indigenous child welfare" (29, p.111).

To ask this question from an Indigenous perspective, you flip this entire thing inside out. We have barely started to scratch the surface of what we mean by well-being from an Indigenous perspective. It's so personal. I am just starting to think about this for myself – the journey is long.

If I were to ask an Elder about well-being they would have to think about their stories. It's a big question. After hearing their stories, I would need to decipher them: what is that story telling me about happiness or well-being? I would need to work with that story for years. I expect to never fully understand it. I wonder what would happen if the story were told in the Indigenous language?

Well-being is balance, happiness, joy, and moving forward in a good way learned through responsibility, reciprocity, and ceremony.

Balance of mind-body-spirit brings happiness to your life. When you have that happiness, you don't stress out as easily – you can move forward in a good way. That is wellness.

In ceremony, with Elders, feeling connected, going into lodges with other young people, being out on the land, being part of it – this creates a feeling of safety as an Indigenous person. Having duties, work to do for the family – doing the washing, hunting, fishing, picking berries – it is what we had to do to survive. It gives you purpose. Doing this with my family. This is happiness.

I went to a ceremony when I was a kid. It was a gathering of clans. There was singing, one group followed the other. I loved it. My uncle told me: "now that you know these songs and these ceremonies, you have obligations to pass them on." As a kid, it didn't feel so fun anymore. I know now that it's about responsibility. It's how we promote well-being.

Child well-being is evolving. It was against the law to practice many of the parts of our culture that we are now able to practice. It was all about fun. It was the system of joy. If your joy system is strong, you can buffer challenges more easily. Well-being is all about joy that helps us to move forward.

Well-being is connection, belonging, and rootedness to community, land, and other beings.

For children it's more than getting 'everything you need'. It's more than a warm bed. It is about belonging. It's about rootedness. It's about kin and relations.

When I lost my mother, I was young. My dad decided we would stay with our family in Ontario. It was the best thing he could have done for us. I had that balm – my grandparents, my aunties, everyone around me. I had moments of pure joy in that month. I remember thinking I should not have felt joy. But I did. I had that because of my kin and my relations. It's what I needed most at that time. Now it's my job to do that for my little ones.

The relationships give us ways to create well-being for children.

Babies need connection to feel calm and secure. Among our ancestors it wasn't just one person. The village is there to support the baby. Nowadays we are led to believe we are not enough. Ceremony and Elders are there to let us know that we are enough. Everything they need will be there. The village will provide.

When my grandson was young, he'd ask: "tell me stories about when I was little." He loved to hear how he had become. That is part of well-being – knowing our universe is based on relationships. There is lots of reciprocity in these relationships.

It's about moving from survival mode to a time where we can grow things again – for our children and our children's children.

Many of our children don't yet have a home for their spirits. This is particularly true of children who are in care without access to kin relations or Elders. How do we create a trail of breadcrumbs for them to find belonging? Maybe we bring in more storytelling where children can hear and see others who look like them to build relations. People need to be open to creating space for Indigenous children to understand where they belong. To be an ally will mean making space.

If a child can't be with his kin or her people, they at least have access to Elders and Knowledge Keepers to create a pathway for a child to understand the language, the prayers, the stories, the teachings, the four realms.

It's not about removing – this removal creates more trauma. Focus instead on immersion, taking the family in, immerse them in traditional teachings, traditional parenting, culture, creation stories. Healing occurs together, in community.

Project Approach

In this section we describe the activities that we undertook to facilitate our learning journey and achieve the project purpose. For a detailed description of methods, see **Appendix A**. Our goal was to describe child and youth well-being for use among diverse communities across the continuum of child welfare services and programs in Alberta. See **Figure 1** for an overview of our activities and timelines.

Figure 1. Project timeline and activities.

Relationship building and planning

In the early weeks of the project, we built relationships with the Project Team, which included ALIGN leadership and an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper who consults for ALIGN. Together we planned the project. ALIGN created an Advisory Community to guide us throughout the project. It included practitioners from ALIGN member agencies and representatives from the Ministry of Children's Services. We also participated in Indigenous ceremony and teachings. An Elder opened and closed all engagement sessions with ALIGN agencies and Advisory Committee meetings. We have depicted these in **Figure 1** as purple dots. This created a space for learning together in a way that honours and acknowledges our connectedness, our intention, the land, and relations. It centred the work in our shared aim to better support children, youth, and families from diverse communities.

In listening, synthesizing, and sharing knowledge, we were mindful to:

- Recognize the interconnectedness of individuals, communities, and the social, political, economic, and natural environment;

- Recognize power relationships, historical and current colonial oppression, and systemic barriers;

- Resist reformulating Indigenous ways of seeing and being in the world to fit preconceived categories or structures; and,

- Value reciprocity in the work together and be oriented towards transformative change.

Environmental scan

We conducted an environmental scan to answer the following research questions:

1. How is well-being described across the continuum of services and programs for children and youth across Alberta, Canada, and internationally?

2. How is well-being described for Indigenous children and youth across child welfare services in Alberta, Canada, and internationally?

3. How can practice and measurement reflect the evolving definition and domains of child and youth well-being?

To answer these questions, we conducted:

- a review of academic and practice-based literature, including foundational documents[1,2,3,4] provided by project advisors and thought leaders;

- a jurisdictional review of government-funded programs and services in Canada and internationally (see **Appendix C** for results); and,

- semi-structured interviews with thought leaders and leading practitioners in the child welfare sector and Indigenous wellness research and practice in Canada. See **Appendix E** for the interview guide.

We extracted and synthesized the core components, or 'domains', that were part of the conceptualizations of well-being in the literature and interviews, to create a preliminary definition of well-being. For a list of all documents reviewed see **Appendix D**.

The heart of the work was our engagement with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, practitioners from ALIGN member agencies, and youth with lived experience with services and child welfare interventions. Our goal was to contextualize the findings from the literature and interviews to ensure our definition of well-being reflected the diversity of experiences, cultural values, and perspectives of agencies providing services and communities from across Alberta, including Indigenous communities. To achieve this goal, we conducted:

- Two Talking Circles with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers;

- Focus group sessions and regular meetings with the Advisory Committee;

- Three engagement sessions with youth and youth and family councils; one representing youth with lived experience with child intervention and/or youth justice system in Alberta, one representing Indigenous youth, and one representing youth and families with experience accessing mental health services in Alberta; and,

- Two engagements sessions with 26 attendees from a total of 20 ALIGN agencies. Our discussion focused on: 1) How do the domains resonate with your practice? 2) What are some ways you

---

Out of the documents provided by project advisors and thought leaders, four reports provided the greatest foundation for this project. These were:

[1] *Well-being and resiliency: A framework for supporting safe and healthy children and families* (1)*.* Published by Government of Alberta Children's Services in 2019, this framework described how to promote well-being and resiliency for children in Alberta, incorporating both Indigenous and western perspectives.

[2] *Well-being and resiliency: The miyo resource - kâ-nâkatohkêhk miyo-ohpikinawâwasowin* (2). Also published by Government of Alberta Children's Services in 2019, this framework was complementary to the Well-being and Resiliency Framework. It outlines an evaluative process that honours an Indigenous worldview, with an emphasis on culturally-based practice and meaningful assessment.

[3] *Funding First Nations child and family services (FNCFS): A performance budget approach to well-being* (3). Published by the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD) in 2020, this report contained the Measuring to Thrive performance framework which emphasized a culturally-informed approach to understanding the well-being of First Nations children, families, and communities.

[4] *Developing Measures for Safety and Well-being in Children's Services* (4). Published by PolicyWise for Children & Families in 2020, this report developed a common definition of safety and well-being, and identified outcomes, measures, and indicators being used across Children's Services.

support child and youth well-being in each domain in your practice? 3) What does success look like in your practice for each of the domains?

Through these conversations, we scrutinized the preliminary foundations and domains of well-being that we had identified through the environmental scan. We revised and expanded the foundational principles as well as domain titles and their descriptions to capture the multidimensional and dynamic nature of well-being as reflected in the practice of ALIGN member agencies. Overall, the domains and foundations aligned with ALIGN members' visions and existing efforts to support positive outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Foundational principles and domains of child and youth well-being in child welfare practice

In this section we describe the four foundational principles and seven domains of child and youth well-being that we identified through the project activities. See **Figure 2** below for a visual depiction of the foundations and domains. For each domain, we provide examples of how practitioners support well-being in "**In Practice**" boxes. Examples of programs for each domain across the child welfare continuum are in **Appendix C**.
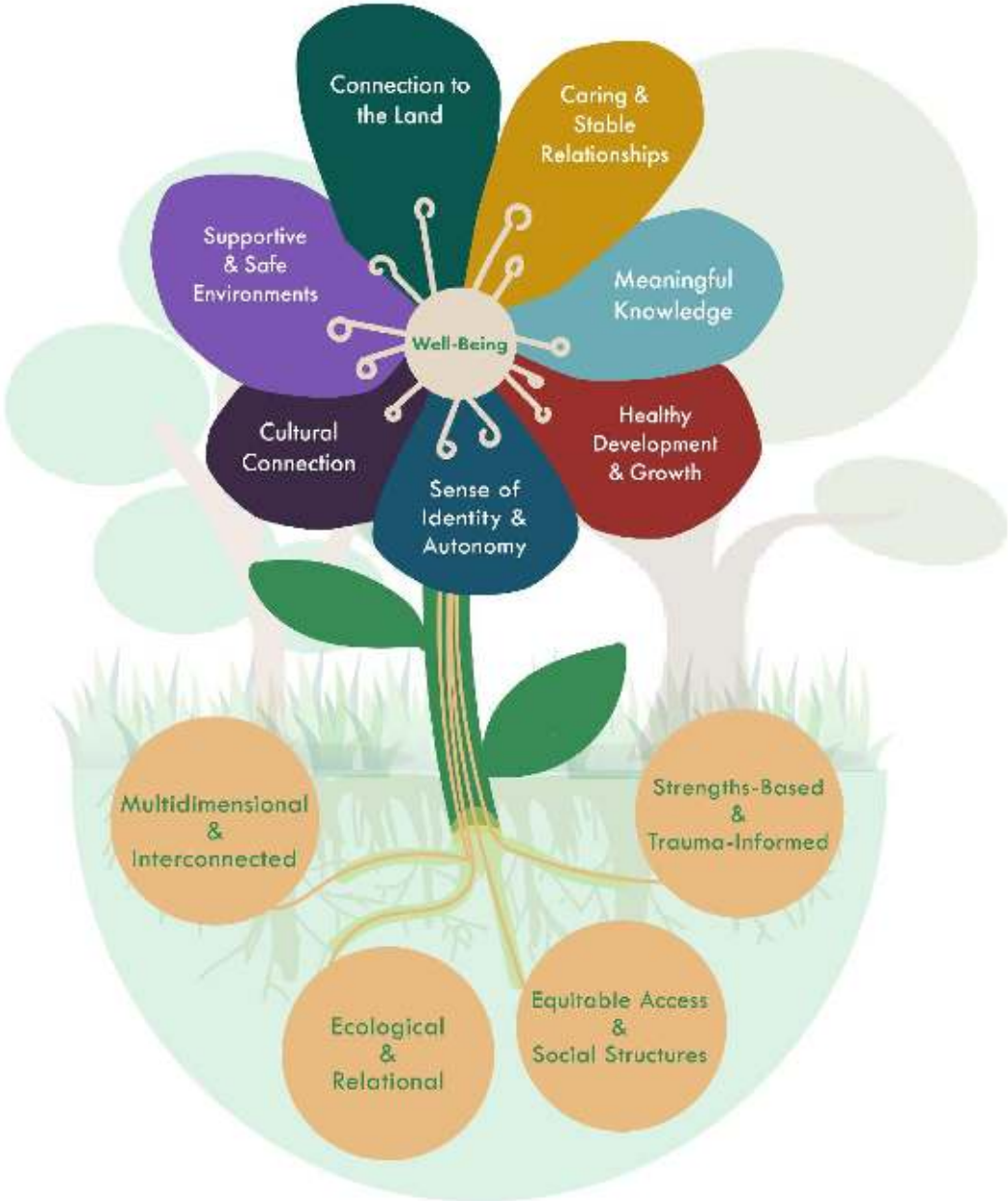

Figure 2. Model of child and youth well-being for child welfare practice.

Foundational principles

Practitioners emphasized that the domains of well-being relevant for child welfare practice need to be grounded in **foundational principles.** The four foundational principles outline the lens through which to understand and use the domains in practice. As such, they apply to all domains.

Principle 1: Multidimensional and interconnected

We heard from people working in practice that a single definition could not capture the multidimensional nature of well-being. Well-being has unique meanings and multiple dimensions for different people and communities. Well-being occurs on a continuum with outcomes that are dynamic and dependent on context, age, and life-stage (5).

We noted overlapping and diverging aspects of well-being across sources. For example, many conceptualizations of well-being included supporting children to reach their potential. We found other conceptualizations of well-being that focused on system-level factors like positive supports and resources in the social environment. Sources differed in how aspects of well-being and related outcomes were arranged into categories, and which aspects were prioritized.

Well-being is inextricably tied to cultural ways of being and understanding the world. Indigenous youth and Elders talked about wellness instead of well-being. They described wellness as balance between physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional dimensions. These were grounded in ceremony and teachings for each stage of life (1,2). We heard from Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers about the parallel universe where ceremonies, teachings, and relations are there to guide young people within their communities to live in a good way. We learned how well-being is a way of doing and being that includes the community, the earth, and other beings. Indigenous practitioners described wellness as a "thousand possibilities" – that is, a thousand ways to strive for balance and a sense of wellness every day.

Practitioners working with immigrant and refugee communities highlighted the danger of universalizing meanings of well-being to all communities. This risked discounting the unique realities of people's lives. They recommend instead approaching well-being from a place of cultural humility and responsiveness. This means exploring the concept of well-being with children and families, learning from their experiences and perspectives how to best support their well-being. This echoed what we heard from Indigenous practitioners – well-being must be defined by families and communities for themselves. Practitioners serving Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee communities agreed that there was a need to critically examine how established definitions of well-being were failing to reflect and support communities. Our findings were clear that trust, relationships, cultural humility, and ongoing dialogue with diverse populations and communities were required to understand how to best support well-being in a particular context, with specific communities, and in response to evolving circumstances and needs.

Principle 2: Ecological and relational

We noted that an ecological, relational, and holistic perspective of child and youth well-being is vital to shape services and supports for children and youth that include caregivers, families, communities, and the structures within which they exist. Across the sources that we reviewed we saw child and youth well-being as relational and embedded within ecological layers. Child and youth well-being was at the centre of nested circles including family, natural supports, communities, institutions, and the larger social, political, and natural environment. We heard from practitioners that well-being is created in systems where multiple, interconnected resources contribute to emotional, social, and physical well-being. To support well-being, the focus must be on fostering and improving relationships and connections across ecological levels rather than targeting the child and families in isolation. Understanding the differing support roles as they related to culture and community practices was key. For example, within Indigenous communities ideas of a 'nuclear' family are not culturally appropriate. In the Cree language the terms for mother and father are verbs that can apply to multiple people in caring roles regardless of "blood relationships".

We found the theme of holism across literature that we reviewed (6). This was particularly true of research with Indigenous communities and our engagement with agencies and youth. For example, in a study of the meaning of well-being among Indigenous communities in British Columbia the authors reported "holism, ecological contextualism, and community-embeddedness" as key themes (6). They went on to recommend that well-being required "creating safe spaces (free from racism, culturally respectful) for parents to be involved with their children's care and to participate in activities and seek support as needed" (6). The work to support child well-being requires supporting parents, caregivers, and communities in their well-being, capacity, health, and development.

Principle 3: Equitable access and social structures

A key foundation for child and family well-being is equitable social structures and access to basic needs, resources, and supports. Access to basic needs and related supports and resources directly affected well-being. Child and youth well-being was interconnected with the resources and strengths of their families, communities, the environment, the larger society, and the institutions with which they interact. As such, inequities in access to basic needs, employment, education, justice, and other social and economic determinants of health were relevant to well-being. For example, youth leaving care described not being able to afford counselling and therapy to address root causes and support them in regulating emotions. Agency staff explained that they were often too busy addressing inequitable access to basic needs that there was little space to build capacity, relationships, and support children, youth, and family well-being.

The topic of equity was a frequent and pressing issue in our conversations with agency staff, youth, and thought leaders. We found that equitable access to mental health supports was a common theme. Youth discussed how inadequate funding impacted the consistency and the quality of the support they received from agencies.

They felt "hung out to dry" when programs they relied on were discontinued. They wanted a voice in deciding which programs would continue, and which would not. Agencies and case workers needed a voice in these decisions as well. We heard that supporting staff wellness needed to be a priority to ensure they could provide quality support to children and youth. Burn out and turnover among social workers and agency staff were key challenges to child and youth well-being related to inadequate wages and funding. As one youth explained, "kids in care deserve the same well-being as others. Case workers get the kid in care a gift from Value Village [Thrift Store], thinking they don't deserve or knew any better. Other kids get to go outside and play, play sports, and get toys that aren't hand-me-downs." Inequities such as these had an impact on children and youth's self-worth and identity.

Agency staff emphasized equity as an underlying value in their work. They highlighted the importance of understanding and responding to diverse populations' complex realities and gaps in access to basic needs, services, and resources. A one-size-fits-all approach would not work. This point was also reflected in the Report of the Auditor General of Alberta, which argued that to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, supports needed to recognize the unique needs of Indigenous communities rather than employing a "blanket strategy" for all children (7).

Key to this work was building equitable social structures that address institutional racism, building intercultural spaces and cultural safety in schools and society at large. That is, recognizing the harm caused by institutions on children, youth, and families and making decisions based on a recognition of diverse realities rather than one dominant cultural perspective. Thought leaders highlighted how biases in systems and among frontline workers impacted which families were reported and investigated by child welfare. They also spoke about discrimination and stigma in accessing and using services. Stigma and discrimination impacted relationships within families and communities and created barriers to seeking help. These larger systemic issues, like institutional racism, required a system level strategy including policy and adequate funding based on data that can identify gaps and inequity.

Practitioners felt strongly that universal programs and wraparound supports were required to support families' capacity and strength in holistic ways. Universal programs are where everyone in a community receives support. These can reduce stigma and discrimination associated with access. The literature and practitioners pointed to shift in the sector's focus towards prevention and early intervention as a proactive alternative to intervention (1,5,7,8). We saw that key to supporting child and youth well-being was the integration and interrelatedness of prevention and intervention services. A thought leader explained: "Think about wellness from the perspective of wraparound services, that's when it becomes most effective because it's part of the natural fabric of the community."

Overall, we noted that while community agencies play a key role in promoting equity in access and reducing barriers, there were many structural changes needed beyond their scope of practice.

Principle 4: Strengths-based and trauma-informed

We saw well-being defined in two opposing ways: as an absence of risk, harm, or maltreatment; or, presence of protective factors, growth, and thriving. Centring the perspectives of diverse communities, including Indigenous communities, it was clear that our approach to well-being needed to focus on

nurturing strengths, capacity, and joy. As one Indigenous thought leader said: "You can keep anybody safe, but you can't make anyone well by keeping people safe."

Several of government and legal sources that we reviewed included safety and protection from abuse and neglect within their definition of well-being, such as the Well-being and Resiliency Framework (1,3,9). The child welfare field also began with a focus on safety from physical harm, although has since shifted to expand beyond this definition. In Alberta, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act "provides authority for Child and Youth Services to provide services in support of children who are abused, neglected or otherwise in need of intervention" (10). In Alberta, an early intervention framework for Indigenous children was developed by the 2017 all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, resulting in Bill 18: The Child Protection and Accountability Act (11). Some of the panel recommendations included "family violence prevention, and poverty reduction" which reflects a harm prevention perspective and shapes the work of child intervention services in Alberta. We saw that the child welfare continuum from prevention to intervention was conceptualized around harm prevention and intervention.

Indigenous advisors and practitioners explained that discourses of protection and freedom from harm were rooted in colonialism and racism and led to inequities, discrimination, and harm. The rhetoric of protection and freedom from harm were behind government policies and practices, including residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and ongoing child removals from Indigenous communities and families. Such policies and practices have created and continue to perpetuate intergenerational trauma – that is trauma that is passed through families. We heard from Indigenous youth how such trauma continues to disrupt families and kinship. Practitioners working with immigrant and refugee communities pointed out the importance of recognizing the trauma families have experienced pre- and post-migration as well as in interaction with Canadian institutions and services. While practice must be trauma-informed, well-being cannot be defined by the recognition or absence of harm (12). Indigenous Elders, practitioners working with diverse communities, youth, and researchers agreed that well-being support needed to shift away from the freedom from harm rhetoric. Instead, it required a centring of relationships, natural and cultural resources of families and communities for well-being.

Domains of child well-being in child welfare practice

In this section, we name and describe the seven domains of child and youth well-being that we identified through our project activities. In the practice boxes, we provide practical examples given by ALIGN member agencies on how they support the domains of child and youth well-being in their day-to-day practice. The domains constitute a definition of child and youth well-being that is integrated across the levels of the child welfare continuum. For detail on data sources synthesized in each domain, see **Appendix B**. For examples of programs across the service continuum from Alberta and other jurisdictions, see **Appendix C.** Note that we present the domains as separate to provide clarity and facilitate understanding, but in practice they are overlapping and interconnected.

Caring & stable relationships

Relationships are key for child and youth well-being, with this domain being emphasized across nearly all data sources. Caring relationships describe supportive, meaningful, and reciprocal relationships between children and youth and their natural supports. Natural supports can include family, caregivers, peers, teachers, mentors, and others in the community. We also saw formalized supports described as caring relationships. These can include service providers such as practitioners, caseworkers, and social workers. We heard from multiple thought leaders that for many communities the meaning of family is broader than the dominant Western view of parents and children. Extended family members or kin and

In practice:

- Educating about what healthy and safe relationships look like.
- Helping children and their caregivers identify and reach out to natural supports in their life, such as family, friends, or members of their cultural community.
- Being available for children and families to reach out even after completing the program.
- Having a consistent staff member as part of the child, youth, or family's care.
- Advocating for multigenerational living to support relationships between youth and Elders.

community also played an essential role in caring for children and youth by supporting the parents as well as the child. This was particularly true in Indigenous and other ethno-cultural communities. Thought leaders, Talking Circle participants, Indigenous youth, and the literature also identified that relationships with kin and community members support well-being through enhancing cultural connection (13, 14, 15).

> *"Good well-being means there's an Elder or an Auntie around." – Indigenous youth from council*

We heard from youth that feeling connected to friends and family, however they defined it, was an important aspect of their well-being and helped them manage during times of stress. This was corroborated in the literature where we noted relationships with natural supports were connected to well-being and related outcomes such as happiness and self-esteem (1,3,5). Practitioners and parents of youth who accessed mental health services shared the importance of caregivers also having access to support and resources to facilitate healthy connections of their own.

Youth with experiences of child intervention services highlighted the importance of stability in relationships and having someone consistent on whom they could depend. This could be a family member, foster parent, friend, or social worker. Practitioners also recognized the need for building trusting and stable relationships between service providers and children, families, and communities. Across sources we saw a connection between stable living situations and the establishment of secure relationships with caregivers and peers (1,3,4,9). Stability in relationships was also linked to children and youth's sense of belonging (3,4). For example, stable relationships with kin from their culture provided opportunities for children to learn about and participate in the community they are from, even if they did not live there permanently.

Reciprocal and caring relationships help children and youth develop healthy, strong, and emotional connections with their support systems. Reciprocity in relationships means children and youth can

contribute time and skill for the benefit of others and receive support and care. We heard from Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers the importance of feeling connected and working together in reciprocal relationships to support community and individual well-being. In the Measuring to Thrive framework, social engagement was associated with social competence and self-esteem (3). Caring and stable relationships are key for well-being throughout childhood and into adulthood.

Supportive and safe environments

Supportive and safe environments describe the social and physical circumstances within which children and youth live, learn, and grow. Nearly all sources we reviewed highlighted the need for safe and supportive environments. A main aspect of safe and supportive environments is access to necessities for life, or basic needs, including access to food, water, safe housing, medical and mental health care (1, 16, 17, 18). Thought leaders, Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and agency staff spoke of the importance of providing holistic and wraparound services that address the basic needs of children and families. They suggested that access to necessities could prevent the need for services further along the continuum of care. In the literature, we saw freedom from poverty and neglect as key aspects of supportive environments (4, 19).

In practice:

- Providing food, especially food that is comforting, culturally relevant, or healthy.
- Connecting families to resources for basic needs (e.g., safe housing).
- Providing access to activities relevant to the child or youth's interests.
- Replacing or repairing broken items in group homes to make it more welcoming.
- Listening to clients and providing a safe space to share their thoughts and experiences.
- Providing opportunities to visit a new environment before the child or youth is moved there.

Safe environments are free from physical harm or abuse. This is a foundational concept in the child welfare sector (1,9). However, thought leaders and Talking Circle participants identified a shift in focus towards non-physical aspects of well-being. Essential to child well-being is an environment that is also socially, psychologically, and culturally safe (1,4, 13). Socially and psychologically safe environments are structured with kindness, equity, and justice. We heard from one study that it was important for youth's sense of safety to know that abuse and other injustices would be believed and swiftly dealt with (20). We heard from youth and parents with experience accessing mental health and child intervention services that service providers needed to be caring and understanding. There was a desire among thought leaders for enhanced support from community that builds on existing resources and removes a sense of surveillance, punishment, or shame.

Another key aspect of psychologically safe environments is creating a sense of belonging and supporting children, youth, and families during transitions. Practitioners identified a need for better transition planning for children and youth in care. This was particularly pressing for youth 'aging out' of services, as this transition is associated with greater risk for mental and physical health problems and other outcomes such as homelessness (21).

Supportive environments promote thriving rather than surviving among children and youth. Thought leaders and the literature gave examples of access to materials, goods, education, and activities "that reflect their interests, needs and abilities and help them meet their developmental potential" (1, p.11), such as sports and cultural activities (1,16,17,18,22). Well-resourced caregivers are also a key resource in supportive environments for children and youth. We heard from youth, practitioners, and the literature that parents and caregivers need to have awareness of, capacity for, and equitable access to resources that support their knowledge and skills (1,2,3,17,23).

Sense of identity and autonomy

Identity describes a sense of who we are now, who we were, and who we are becoming. Identity is multifaceted and fluid. It is tied to culture and community. It includes aspects of how we perceive ourselves and are perceived by others and society more broadly. Identity emerges and is dynamically shaped in relationships throughout our lives. Autonomy is an interrelated concept. It describes the ability to make choices for oneself and have self-determination. For children and youth, a strong identity and autonomy are reflected in confidence, belonging, and a sense of purpose. A strong personal identity and autonomy are connected to optimal well-being among children and youth (24).

Purpose and meaning are ideas related to identity and autonomy. The human ability to make meaning is rooted in being connected to others, activities, and goals that align with personal and collective values. One thought leader pointed to research that demonstrated how having purpose – meaningful projects – was vital for coping with hardship. Others

In practice:

- Being attentive to and nurturing a child's gift.
- Sharing stories about mistakes, learning, and moving forward.
- Supporting volunteer activities to help youth feel connected, link them to community and multiple generations, gain confidence, and experience appreciation.
- Having youth set their own goals and desired outcomes.
- Having children and youth bring their personal belongings from home to decorate their room.
- Hiring staff with a diversity of ethnocultural identities.
- Planning fun activities to gain confidence and experience joy without focusing on solving a problem.
- Strengthening bi-cultural identities in immigrant and newcomer children and youth to support family relationships, sense of belonging, identity, and well-being.

highlighted the importance of recognizing children and youth's spirit – that is their unique ability to make independent choices, make mistakes, and reflect on these mistakes to learn from them. An Indigenous thought leader explained how this involves storytelling and "sharing stories with them about the mistakes we've made and how we've learned so they can carry on."

Teachings about the Indigenous parallel universe gave us insights into the importance of identity and autonomy to well-being. For example, Blackfoot teachings consider self-actualization, or the full development of an individual's potential and abilities, to be instrumental to personal and community well-being. This sense of rootedness in purpose and community is what can carry people through when life is difficult. Indigenous practitioners explained their role in uncovering a child's unique gift and

supporting and nurturing this gift as the child grows. In the Indigenous parallel universe purpose and identity are ultimately directed towards and include the community and the earth (20).

Youth with lived experience of child intervention services felt strongly that they needed to feel respected for who they were. In absence of such recognition, they risked the label of "being a kid in care" and all the related negative associations that came along with it. The youth pointed out that having opportunities to explore interests and activities that bring them joy helped them to build their own unique identity.

We learned that the land is an essential aspect of identity for Indigenous children, youth, and families. As one Indigenous thought leader explained, it is: "where we were born, and where we're grounded to the lands and the waters." Another described how identity and belonging was connected to the land and knowing "who our people are." Storytelling was another way of strengthening identity and belonging among Indigenous children. An Indigenous researcher explained: "telling young children about their birth story is such an important thing. And for an older child, you talk about what they used to do when they were three, four years old. All of these stories really build a child's sense of belonging."

We heard from practitioners that they saw their role as supporting children's identity and belonging in a way that instilled pride rather than shame. This was particularly relevant for Indigenous children and children from immigrant and refugee communities who have experienced cultural genocide, systemic oppression, and discrimination due to colonialism and racism, among others. This might include the ability to reflect on questions such as: "Who am I in connection to spirit? Who am I in connection to trauma? Who am I in connection to present relationships?" For immigrant and refugee serving practitioners building positive bi-cultural identities was a key mechanism of supporting children and youth in strengthening their identity, sense of belonging, and well-being.

Cultural connection

Cultural connection describes a positive relationship to cultural identity. It includes a connection to resources that are unique to the child's community such as language, ceremonies, teachings, and relations. Opportunities for children and youth to feel connected to and actively practice their culture are essential to child well-being. Leveraging cultural wealth, including knowledge, skills, and experiences unique to a community, helps children and youth recognize, value, and build their strengths.

Research on well-being and mental health with Indigenous peoples across the world illustrates that strengthening cultural identity, cultural continuity, incorporating culture, and developing culturally relevant interventions are key components of successful child and youth services (16, 25, 26). Thought leaders and Indigenous practitioners explained how child well-being is grounded in teachings and ceremony that guide children, youth, and families through the stages of their life embedded in and supported by community. Everything is done with intention and with the outcome in sight of raising a person who is well and lives well: "The outcome you want is wellness, goodness, and ability to live to full potential. You're setting the conditions for that to happen" (Indigenous thought leader).

Ceremonies connect children and youth with their personal and cultural identity, with their ancestors, with the land, and with their role in life and their purpose: "and then they become part of that nation. And then they have a job. Everything has meaning." Ceremonies teach roles and purpose, healthy relationships, and the balance of the four realms, which include the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional. A sense of well-being in the Indigenous universe comes from "being in relationship with all things." (Indigenous thought leader). Removing children and youth from these interrelationships causes harm. Well-being is rooted in connections to community, spirits, the land and everything in it. We heard from youth about their experiences with ceremony. One said it made them feel like the connection of their body and spirit. Others discussed the importance of cultural connection for urban youth. They shared their experiences of Indigenous art therapy, programs picking berries and medicines on the land, and learning Indigenous hand games and the positive impact these had on their well-being.

In practice:

- Having opportunities for youth to share their values, practices, and teachings.
- Training staff to be knowledgeable, respectful, and inquisitive about culture.
- Integrating family circles and community events into practice.
- Inviting Elders or community leaders for prayers and ceremonies.
- Creating safety and authenticity around exploring connection to Nations and communities.
- Reaching out to community leaders for advice. Using help of a cultural liaison worker, broker, Indigenous support person, and staff with different cultural backgrounds.
- Using storytelling and validation by Elders to inform practice.
  Showing respect through listening to families without notebook and computer. Ensuring everyone enters a home with the best intentions.

During our discussions with practitioners, all emphasized how important it is to them and their agencies to incorporate cultural practices, connections to Elders and Knowledge Keepers, cultural foods and crafts into their services. Many voiced that hiring Indigenous staff or staff from diverse cultural backgrounds, training staff to enhance understanding of Indigenous ceremonies, practices, and governance models, and staff participation in cultural activities were strategic priorities for agencies. They aimed to help their staff "move from knowing to doing." Agencies also spoke of connecting children and families of diverse backgrounds to culturally relevant resources and supports. At the same time, practitioners noted that supporting this domain was challenging. Many children and youth resisted participating in cultural activities. Practitioners explained that in these situations their focus is on "opening the door" and creating safe spaces for children and youth to go at their own pace. Youth emphasized the importance of authenticity and respect when given opportunities to take part in ceremony or cultural practices. One youth explained: "Let's not take the easy way out and watch a movie. Reach out to someone and see if we can talk to an Elder."

Practitioners in our engagement sessions spoke about their work with families from many different ethno-cultural backgrounds. Families often navigated the tension between the cultural identity, practices, and values of their country of origin and the desire to adapt and fit into their new environment. Practitioners explained that relationships between parents and children were often strained because of this tension along with internalized oppression. Fostering healthy bi-cultural

identities is essential for improving family relationships and well-being. To do this, agencies built capacity among staff for intercultural competency. This means being able to identify dominant ways of knowing and being, using curiosity and humility to learning about diverse perspectives with an equity lens. They created welcoming and responsive services, worked with community partners, and adapted their practice to create safe spaces and support healthy bi-cultural identity. Practitioners described the key role of cultural brokers in supporting diverse children and youth's cultural connection.

Healthy development and growth

Nearly all sources that we explored, discussed healthy development and growth. This encompassed many aspects of physical, emotional, cognitive, mental, social, and spiritual health across ages and stages of childhood. Healthy development is conceptualized in multiple, culturally specific ways.

Indigenous thought leaders and advisors explained how ceremony and teachings support healthy development, strength, and achieving a good life through balance in the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional realms (1,2, 13). The youth we spoke with emphasized a whole-child approach to well-being, including the mind, body, and soul. This was echoed in the literature, which highlighted the concept of the 'strong child' grounded in the realms of well-being and culture (13).

In practice:

- "Building the rails" as opposed to "getting back on track" for children who may develop differently.
- Providing recreational activities for children and youth to attain social developmental milestones.
- Incorporating elements of play between caregivers and children and youth.
- Developing programs that are holistic, balanced, and support physical, social, emotional, spiritual, cognitive health.

Child and youth development and growth is frequently marked by rites of passage that include teachings to support and prepare children and youth for roles or stages in life. In the Indigenous universe, these developmental imperatives can include learning, playing, emulating adult skills, receiving stories and skills, acquiring language, caring for self and others, taking on apprenticeship, and going through rituals that prepare for coming of age (20). A thought leader explained:

> "If you have an Indigenous child [and] the ancestors [are] preparing that spirit for a human journey, then that spirit being sung into the world, and then the naming ceremony, the moss bag and the swing; then the walking out ceremony, I mean, all the ceremonies that are associated with those stages, that's, going to guarantee you an amazing child."

Thought leaders and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers described the teachings and rites of passage as running parallel to Western theories on psychosocial stages of development. These theories outline how secure attachments formed in early childhood are linked to positive identity formation in adulthood. Similarly, some Indigenous developmental teachings indicated that there are ceremonies for each stage of development for children and youth. A thought leader described:

> "And then you have a feast ceremony, and an offering. And that offering basically has got a lot of teachings about our connection to our ancestors that have gone on before us. So we're feeding those spirits, and then

we call our children *awâsis*, "awa" is something with spirit, "sis" is small. So *awâsis* is basically a small spirit. And so you're, you're feeding their spirit also by coming together."

Non-Indigenous thought leaders also emphasized physical well-being, cognitive development, and psychological development as being pertinent to child well-being. For example, they described how psychosocial development was connected to socialization, making friends, developing interests and joy, having healthy sleep and eating habits, being engaged in learning, and developing emotional regulation. From the sources we reviewed we noted that remembering, problem solving, decision making, the ability to self-regulate emotions, healthy self-esteem, hope, resilience, and healthy self-perceptions were key aspects of child and youth development.

Connection to the land

Connection to the land means cultivating relationships with the land, water, food sources, the natural environment, and all beings within it. Connection to the land and land-based activities were highlighted in the literature as key components of services supporting well-being of Indigenous communities (2,3). Land-based activities are opportunities to connect with culture and community, supporting sense of identity and belonging. The miyo resource highlighted the importance of respecting and valuing the land and all living things for their contribution to survival (2).

In practice:

- Taking learning out on the land.
- Incorporating natural materials in activities, such as stone or wood.
- Exploring opportunities to plant and grow food.
- Going camping for youth to learn to be safe and comfortable in nature.
- Practicing land acknowledgement where appropriate.

When we discussed connection to the land with practitioners and the Advisory Committee, they emphasized that being comfortable and feeling competent in nature was key for all children and youth's well-being and confidence. We heard from Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and youth that for Indigenous communities the land is part of identity. It is part of "where the heart is." They expressed that connection to the land and the opportunity to practice land-based activities and ceremony is essential to physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. It supports healing, gratitude, and connection with positive aspects of life: "Taking your shoes and socks off and reconnecting with the land. Feeling the land and the connection to mother earth – that's healing" (Indigenous youth council member).

Practitioners also shared that for children and youth from immigrant, migrant, and refugee communities, connecting to the land supports building a relationship and a sense of belonging to their new homeland. Growing food was highlighted as one way of supporting this connection while also contributing to food security for families.

From engagement sessions, we noted that being out in nature was vital for well-being of children and youth. This connection to land builds awareness about environmental health, which in turn is necessary

for life and well-being. Connection to the land thereby supports well-being both directly and indirectly (16).

Meaningful knowledge

Meaningful knowledge describes the knowledge and skills children and youth require to thrive and reach their full potential personally, spiritually, and as members of society. All of the sources we reviewed highlighted that access to culturally safe education and learning opportunities, formal and informal, were vital to child well-being. Meaningful knowledge requires a flexible approach to knowledge development that accounts for a child's unique way of learning, their life circumstances, and their needs.

In practice:

- Flexible school and activity programming.
- 1:1 tailored programming to meet individual needs.
- Learning through storytelling and cultural teachings.
- Collaborative learning environments.
- Hosting environments, activities, or shared meals where knowledge can be passed from Elders and other cultural leaders.
- Active learning outside of the classroom, including activities on the land and in nature.

We noted that formal education and educational attainment were commonly assessed in the literature as outcomes of child welfare interventions (27). The Advisory Committee cautioned, however, that formalized educational attainment excludes other ways of learning, knowing, and key aspects of child and youth well-being such as the child's learning engagement and their caregivers' engagement with the child's education. They suggested the concept of knowledge as a domain of well-being that incorporates Indigenous and other cultural ways of knowing including formal and informal learning through generations.

Formal education can support well-being and meaningful knowledge by directly challenging dominant, colonial practices that are common in education curricula today. For example, by reframing the role of European exploration or balancing written history with a validation of Indigenous oral history (20). Practitioners emphasized that children and youth do better when they have access to education that is tailored to their needs, capacity, and learning styles. Agencies and youth also emphasized supporting learning and development through the provision of play, access to different art media and alternative therapies such as equine-assisted, recreation programming, and building life-skills through workshops and mentorship.

Thought leaders and practitioners explained that meaningful knowledge can be passed from family, role models, Elders, community, teachings, ceremony, the land, and life skills. A commitment to learning, having positive values, and social competencies were a key part of meaningful knowledge. They support identity formation, pride, sense of belonging, healing, and joy. Reflective learning is one approach where children and youth are supported in learning from their own actions. Youth and practitioners emphasized the importance of skills gained outside of the formal education system. These include employment skills, conflict management, and "street smarts." For youth with lived experience accessing

mental health services, a key aspect of meaningful knowledge was understanding mental wellness and health. This included learning about warning signs of deteriorating mental health and how to seek help.

Indigenous thought leaders emphasized that meaningful knowledge includes experiential knowledge. It is part of a life-long process toward acquiring wisdom tied to the land and language. Practitioners explained that traditional knowledge was passed to children and youth through ceremonies, Talking Circles, and land-based activities such as hunting, picking berries, and fishing salmon. Indigenous youth emphasised that storytelling and Indigenous games are meaningful to their well-being. An Indigenous youth explained:

> "Hands on learning resonates better with Indigenous people. Whereas instead of sitting there and listening for hours you don't really retain that information, right? Whereas if you go and do it you do the teachings when you come talk but you can talk about it from experience, right? You can be like yeah, we did this, we did this, and like it sticks in your mind more."

Practitioners felt strongly that meaningful knowledge for child and youth well-being requires a focus on the parents and caregivers in addition to the children. This can include building the knowledge and skills of parents and caregivers and supporting their engagement in their child's education. For example, parent-as-teacher programming equips parents to better support their child's development and growth and build their child's stress management skills.

Preliminary considerations for measuring well-being

As part of this project, we explored how measurement approaches can align with the evolving definition of child well-being. This work was preliminary and discovery-oriented. Our goal was to lay the foundation for the next phase of the project where the focus will be on developing measurement tools for child welfare practice. We identified five preliminary principles for designing measurement in a way that reflects the perspectives of children and youth, practitioners, and researchers, and aligns with the domains and foundations of child well-being. The five principles included:

Strengths-based. A strengths-based approach to measurement highlights what is present and working well rather than what is absent and / or not working. The goal is to empower families and children by focusing on increasing their skills, knowledge, and capacity. This approach was highlighted in foundational documents such as the Measuring to Thrive framework and the Early Prevention and Intervention framework (3, 12).

Context-informed. A tailored approach to measurement recognizes the unique needs, circumstances, and context of each child and family that are relevant to well-being. Including the child, family, or community in the defining of goals and indicators of success can help honour their personal context and understanding of well-being. Researchers and practitioners pointed out that different children and families will have varying perspectives on what is "relevant, reasonable, and possible for them" and this should be considered in measurement. The literature also supports the concept of child- and family-focused approaches to measurement that recognize the subjectivity of well-being (3, 28). It is also important to account for greater societal factors, such as race and other social determinants of health, to bring an equity lens to measuring well-being.

Qualitative. Using qualitative measures can promote a nuanced and meaningful understanding of a child's well-being. They can also capture any changes that result from a program, support, or intervention. Qualitative approaches to data collection may also align better with people's cultural practices and ways of knowing. Many of the example measures we heard from practitioners were qualitative and reflected a desire to better understand how the child or family felt. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous thought leaders spoke of the importance of using qualitative data such as stories to avoid measurement being reduced to a 'checklist' that misses nuance. For example, looking at the quality of connections formed by a child, and how they were formed, rather than simply the number of connections. Stories can be used to reflect the learning of children and families and allow them to share their experiences.

Accountable. Ensuring that children, youth, and families receiving services have an opportunity to give feedback promotes accountability within interventions and in measurement of their impact. Accountability also entails valuing feedback and changing practices in response. Youth and practitioners emphasized the need for children and families to be able to give feedback on whether their needs were met by the services they received.

Holistic and longitudinal. Researchers and Indigenous practitioners spoke about the importance of looking at data in a more holistic way, including all aspects of a child's well-being and the multivariate ways it can be influenced. Practitioners identified the need to look beyond imposed timelines in care.

They suggested using longitudinal data collected over longer periods of time to better understand the experiences and outcomes of the children and families they serve. Longitudinal data can also prompt considerations of context.

As an example, indicators for the domain *Cultural Connection* that follow these principles may include whether individuals and agencies providing services have consistent access to and relationship with Elders, as suggested by Advisory Committee members and thought leaders. Strengths-based indicators could look at if children or youth feel empowered to learn their traditional language, as suggested by youth council members, or if they have the opportunity to participate in cultural activities. Qualitatively, integrating storytelling and narrative as a source of data may align with cultural values and allow for more nuanced understanding of cultural connection. The miyo resource suggested using as an indicator whether staff have an understanding of the child's culture and its history, teachings, and ceremonies (2). This could be assessed not only by staff but also by the children and families they serve, to increase accountability.

The *Cultural Connection* domain is one where current measures and evaluation tools do not align with what matters for families and communities. For this domain in particular, thought leaders and practitioners had valuable reflections about how measurement and assessing success could better reflect cultural values for Indigenous communities. Moving forward, work needs to be done to identify and develop measures and evaluation approaches that align more closely with the foundations and domains of child and youth well-being in this report. This will ensure agencies are able to understand their impact on child and youth well-being in a way that is culturally responsive and contextualized.

In year two of this project, we will shift our focus to measurement. Our goal will be to identify measures useful to the child welfare sector that align with the domains of child and youth well-being and respond to the preliminary principles of measurement we identified. To undertake this work, we will review relevant literature and leading practices. We will also engage with Elders, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, practitioners, and youth. Specifically, we will explore:

- How can we measure impact and outcomes in child welfare practice considering that well-being is relational, multidimensional, context-dependent, and fluid? How can we re-imagine learning about impact to make better decisions for action and investment?

    - What does taking a strengths-based orientation mean for measurement and assessing impact? What tools and approaches exist that focus on growing strength and capacity?

    - How can we ensure measures prioritize equitable access and social structures in child welfare services and are accountable to the children, youth, and families involved?

- How can we learn about the impact of child and youth programs and services that is meaningful for Indigenous children, youth, and family well-being?

    - How can we aggregate this understanding into a provincial impact story and bridge this knowledge for decision-makers?

- What tools and approaches are suitable to assessing change and outcomes in the seven domains of well-being?

o   How do measurement approaches compare and contrast across the continuum of services?

o   How do measurement approaches compare across different ages and stages?

o   What is enabling and what is challenging in using qualitative, longitudinal, strengths-based, and accountable approaches to measurement?

Concluding thoughts

Throughout this project we have been on a learning journey. Our understanding of child and youth well-being in the child welfare sector has shifted in response to our deep conversations, research, and collaboration. What we found underlines the importance of a definition of child and youth well-being for child welfare practice that reflects the diverse cultural communities in Alberta. Families and communities define what well-being is, grounded in their relationships, teachings, values, and practices. We shift the focus from the absence of risk or trauma to ways of being and doing that support joy, connection, community, and growth. To support well-being child welfare services must be responsive to what matters for children, youth, and families. This must include listening with curiosity and humility, and partnering with families and communities to design and evaluate programs in a culturally responsive manner.

Going forward, well-being lived and supported in the way that we have described in this report, requires approaches to validation and assessing impact that align with this multidimensional, relational, and strengths-based perspective. When programs are assessed based on the dominant perspective, the risk is that meaningful and impactful services do not meet these standards. The consequence of this is that these programs and services do not receive the support and funding they need to best serve the children and youth in their communities. It is vital for measures of well-being to reflect what matters for children, youth, and families from diverse communities. Developing a shared language to define the meaning and foundations of well-being is the first step. Our next step is aligning measures of impact and practice evaluation with this definition.

Appendix A: Methods

We took an iterative approach to defining the domains of child and youth well-being. To gain an initial understanding of how well-being is defined and measured, we conducted a literature review, a jurisdictional review, and interviews with thought leaders and leading practitioners. We then validated, contextualized, and expanded the domains and our preliminary understanding of measurement through Talking Circles with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers and engagement sessions with the Advisory Committee, ALIGN practitioners, and youth.

Literature and Jurisdictional Review

We conducted a review of academic and practice-based literature to answer the following research questions:

1. How is well-being described across the continuum of services and programs for children and youth across Alberta, Canada, and internationally?

2. How is well-being described for Indigenous children and youth across child welfare services in Alberta, Canada, and internationally?

3. How can practice and measurement reflect the evolving definition and domains of child and youth well-being?

We searched databases such as Academic Search Complete, ERIC, CINAHL Plus, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Indigenous Informit, and Google Scholar for empirical evidence for conceptual foundations of the core components of programs and services for children and youth. We focused our search on literature relating to Indigenous children and communities to better understand what well-being means from an Indigenous perspective and how that can be reflected in a definition and model of well-being. We also identified some additional documents from reviewing the references of included documents. Furthermore, we reviewed documents that project advisors and thought leaders provided and recommended as foundational to this work.

Search terms included:

- children or adolescents or youth or child

- wellbeing or well-being or well being or safety or mental health

- services or programs or intervention or resources

- prevention or intervention or early intervention or treatment

- primary or secondary or tertiary

- maltreatment or child abuse or neglect

- evaluation or measures or indicators

- Indigenous or Aboriginal

Jurisdictions included:

- Alberta

- Canada

- United States

- Europe

- New Zealand

- Australia

We reviewed titles and abstracts of search results to determine inclusion. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were used as follows:

Inclusion Criteria

- Publications or organizational documents that describe maltreatment of children by caregivers

- Publications or organizational documents that focus on support services available to Alberta children and families by community agencies

- Publications or organizational documents that focus on primary prevention

- Publications or organizational documents that focus on and early intervention (secondary prevention)

- Publications or organizational documents that focus on intervention or treatment (tertiary prevention or targeted interventions)

- Publications or organizational documents that focus on evaluation of system approach to Prevention and Intervention

- Publications or organizational documents published in English and after 2010

Exclusion Criteria

- Publications focused on maltreatment perpetrated by non-caregivers

- Publications focused on evaluation of single programs (i.e. home visitation)

- Publication or organizational documents not in English and published before 2010

The final selection of literature consisted of 40 documents, including intervention studies, systematic reviews, measurement frameworks, and strategic policy documents. We extracted information from this literature regarding the document purpose, definitions and aspects of child well-being, target population, and outcomes or measures.

In addition, for the jurisdictional review we reviewed provincial government websites across Canada to identify the government-funded services and programs available across the continuum of prevention to intervention for the well-being of children and youth. Program funding was categorized into specific types of programs (e.g. youth centers, perinatal education services), which were used to inform a practice table listing examples of programs across the continuum of child welfare services (**See Appendix C**).

Interviews

For thought leader interviews, we identified leading practitioners and researchers through the literature, recommendations from Talking Circle participants, and snowball sampling. We conducted semi-structured interviews (for interview guide see **Appendix D**) to understand how leaders in research and practice define child well-being in their work, what they view as key concepts related to well-being, and what their approaches and considerations are for measuring child and youth well-being. We audio recorded and transcribed the interviews with participants' consent.

Talking Circles

We organized two Talking Circles with the intention of better understanding Indigenous perspectives on well-being to develop a definition of child and youth well-being for culturally responsive child welfare practice. ALIGN and PolicyWise approached Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and individuals with specialized knowledge around Indigenous approaches and considerations towards well-being. We hosted two virtual sessions, opened and closed with prayer, to listen to Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Discussions with the Advisory Committee

In addition to our regular Advisory Committee sessions, we held a virtual focus group with the Advisory Committee to gather feedback on our initially developed draft domains based on the literature review. Our purpose was to understand how the domains and their definitions resonated with the committee members based on their extensive knowledge and work in the child welfare sector. We facilitated a discussion for each of the draft domains. Some domains sparked important discussions that we followed up with two additional meetings: one with Indigenous members of the Advisory Committee to better understand their concerns and feedback, one with staff from an immigrant and refugee serving agency to better incorporate an intercultural perspective into the domains and descriptions of well-being. Based on these discussions, we made revisions resulting in a reduction from nine to seven domains and the addition of foundational principles that either apply across all domains or highlight conditions for child and youth well-being that are beyond the scope of child welfare practice.

Youth Council Sessions

We held three virtual focus group sessions with three different youth councils: the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) Youth Council, the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association (ANFCA)'s

Alberta Aboriginal Youth Council (AAYC), and the CASA Youth and Family Advisory Council (YFAC). Youth council members were required to be between 13 to 25 years old. Participating youth were from diverse cultural backgrounds, with nearly half of participants identifying as Indigenous. OCYA participants had lived experience with child intervention and/or youth justice systems. YFAC participants included youth and family members with lived experience in accessing children and youth mental health services. ANFCA participants were all urban Indigenous youth from across Alberta who had accessed Friendship Centre programs. Our purpose for these sessions was to hear from youth themselves how they conceptualize and define well-being, and how programs and services can best support their well-being. We took detailed notes during the sessions to identify commonalities and differences in themes in comparison to the domains and descriptions of well-being developed through the other sources of knowledge.

Engagement Sessions with Practitioners from ALIGN Agencies

We invited all member agencies to take part in 2-hour sessions to explore how the seven domains of child and youth well-being resonated with frontline child welfare practice. We held two virtual engagement sessions with staff from a total of 20 ALIGN agencies. We facilitated the sessions using a World Café methodology, modified for a virtual environment. Participants were split into three breakout rooms for three discussion periods, each with a different facilitator. In each breakout room, participants discussed two to three domain definitions and shared how they support these domains in their practice. We used a virtual whiteboard to capture and visualize how concepts and practice examples were related. Each time a group of participants rotated to a new breakout room, the facilitator summarized the previous group's key points so that discussions could build on each other. Finally, we had a summary discussion as a whole group for participants to highlight and exchange key ideas.

Analysis

We analyzed our data in two main stages. First, we coded foundational documents, literature, and jurisdictional review in NVivo qualitative analysis software. Examining patterns and themes, we drafted initial domains of well-being and a preliminary understanding of practices and programs to support child and youth well-being. This informed our questions for thought leaders and leading practitioners (for interview guide see **Appendix D**).

We coded the interview transcripts, first using a deductive approach based on our interview guide and the well-being domains from one of our foundational documents for the project (4). We then used inductive coding to identify additional aspects of well-being and other relevant themes beyond what we found in the literature. We synthesized the themes we found in all the components of the preliminary environmental scan into a draft definition of child and youth well-being including nine domains, or core components of well-being.

In the second stage, we contextualized, validated, and adapted the domains based on engagement with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, practitioners, youth, and the Advisory Committee. We used our notes and virtual whiteboard data to code deductively using the initial draft of domains as our coding framework.

We then coded inductively to identify any new or conflicting themes and further tease out meanings within each domain of well-being. Based on this analysis, we further revised the domains of well-being and their components, resulting in our final seven domains of child and youth well-being in child welfare practice, examples of practice for each domain, and examples for programs across the continuum (for program examples see **Appendix E**).

Appendix B: Domain Synthesis Table

In this table, we indicate the sources of data that support each aspect of the seven domains.

Domain	Domain Aspect	Foundational Documents	Literature Review	Advisory Committee & Talking Circles	ALIGN Practitioners	Youth
Caring & Stable Relationships	Supportive, stable, and reciprocal relationships	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Family, kinship, and community	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Supportive & Safe Environments	Basic needs are met including access to food, water, safe housing, medical care, mental health care	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Resources to thrive, including well-resourced caregivers, service providers, and social supports	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Structured with care and justice		✓		✓	
	Safe and kind communities	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Cultural Connection	Cultural wealth and continuity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Connection to cultural resources unique to child's cultural identity: language, ceremony, teachings, community, and relations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Sense of belonging	✓	✓		✓	

Category	Dimension	1	2	3	4	5
Sense of Identity & Autonomy	Self-determination and purpose	✓	✓		✓	
	Confidence	✓			✓	✓
	Cultural identity	✓	✓		✓	✓
Healthy Development & Growth	Balance of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Rites of passage and developmental milestones	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Developing skill through exploring interests and engaging in activities that bring joy	✓	✓		✓	✓
Connection to the Land	Cultivating relationships with the land, water, and natural environment		✓	✓	✓	
	Environmental health		✓		✓	
Meaningful Knowledge	Access to tailored and meaningful education			✓	✓	✓
	Knowledge passed from family, community teaching, ceremony, and the land	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Engaged and supported in learning and reflection				✓	

Appendix C: Example Programs Across the Child Welfare Continuum

In this table, we give examples of programs across the continuum of child welfare services.

Domain	Example programs across the continuum of child welfare services		
	Primary Prevention	**Early Intervention**	**Intervention**
Caring & Stable Relationships	Family well-being workshops, positive parenting programs	Early childhood development programming, parent-screening services (e.g. depression, parental stress, childhood trauma), 1:1 parenting	Parent/family-centered intervention, foster care, kinship care, family-time programs
Supportive & Safe Environments	Maternal knowledge and prenatal skill workshops, Nurse-Family Partnerships, Universal support programs for adequate housing, water, food	Youth centres, early childcare head-start programs, Indigenous head-start on Reserve, Nurse-Family Partnerships, home visitation programs	Food bank referrals Foster care, kinship care
Cultural Connection	Parent- and family- focused cultural workshops-rearticulation of tradition: sweat lodges, traditional medicine, ceremony, music, language, land	Youth centres, culture camps	Kinship care, Parent/family-centered intervention
Sense of Identity & Autonomy	Self-positivity, self-esteem, and identity programming for parents	Youth centres, youth self-esteem and cultural identity building programs	Volunteer opportunities The Good Life Plan
Healthy Development & Growth	Suicide prevention programs, youth mental health hotlines, Parent-as-teacher programming	Early childhood mental health screening services, parent-screening services (e.g. depression, parental stress, childhood trauma, substance use); stress management & coping for youth	Specialist services: FASD, speech-language therapy, Cognitive-behavioural therapy; trauma-formed care Kinship care, Parent/family-centered intervention
Connection to the Land	Opportunities for hunting, gathering, and land-based activities	Opportunities for hunting, gathering, and land-based activities	Land-based healing
Meaningful Knowledge	Decolonized, culturally informed curriculum, alternative education streams, Learn-through-play programs, traditional teachings, mentorship programming	Tailored educational programs; psychological-education programs, Learn-through-play programs, traditional teachings, mentorship programming	Art-media and equine-assisted therapies, Learn-through-play programs, traditional teachings, mentorship programming

Appendix D: Inventory of Reviewed Documents

Documents provided by project advisors and thought leaders

Author, Year	Title	Context (Location)	Summary
Alberta Human Services, 2016 (30)	Procurement Advisory Table - Final Report	Alberta	This report is a result of the Procurement Advisory Table's deliberation of the best ways to achieve shared service goals for Albertans and support the improvement of the relationship between the Ministry of Human Services and contracted providers.
Alberta Human Services, 2012 (12)	Prevention and Early Intervention Framework	Alberta	This framework provides guidelines for establishing a continuum of evidence-based prevention and early intervention services in Alberta.
Children's Services, Government of Alberta, 2019 (1)	Well-being and Resiliency Framework	Alberta	This framework for well-being and resiliency of children in Alberta built on the Prevention and Early Intervention Framework to outline the importance of policies, services, and programs that prevent and/or aim to reduce the impacts of early adversity by promoting the development of well-being and resiliency.
Children's Services, Government of Alberta, 2019 (2)	Well-being and Resiliency: the miyo resource	Alberta	This framework complements the Well-being and Resiliency Framework by outlining an evaluative process that honours an Indigenous worldview.
Duebel et al., 2020 (4)	Developing Measures for Safety and Well-being in Children's Services	Alberta	This report by PolicyWise developed common definition of safety and well-being, defined outcomes, measures, and indicators integrated with the Children's Services Quality Assurance Strategy.
Edmonton Region Child and Family Services, 2016 (15)	Collaborative Service Delivery (CSD) Practice Manual	Alberta	This practice manual outlines practices for child intervention and service delivery, using the Collaborative Service Delivery (CSD) model.
Institute of Fiscal Studies & Democracy (IFSD), 2020 (3)	FNCFS Report - Measuring to Thrive Framework	Canada	This performance framework is a tool to promote better understanding of community, in order to ensure an agency has the resources required to meet the needs of the First Nations children, families, and communities it serves.
Makokis et al., 2020 (29)	*ohpikinâwasowin* / Growing a child: Implementing Indigenous ways of knowing with	Alberta	This collection of chapters discusses wisdom-seeking journeys and service-provision changes in Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8 territory to learn Turtle Lodge Teachings and to undo the colonial trappings of Canada's current child welfare system.

	Indigenous families		
Nutter, B., 2011 (38)	Outcomes Based Service Delivery In Alberta Child Welfare: Is It Headed for Failure?	Alberta	This unpublished document provided commentary on outcomes-based services delivery, including criticism of the NOM.
Trocme et al., 2009 (9)	National Child Welfare Outcomes Indicator Matrix (NOM)	Canada	This framework provides tracking outcomes for children and families receiving child welfare services, to be used as a common set of indicators across jurisdictions in Canada.

Documents identified from the literature search

Author (Last, First), Year	Article Title	Context (location)
Ball, 2005 (6)	Early Childhood Care and Development Programs As 'Hook' And 'Hub' For Inter-Sectoral Service Delivery In First Nations Communities	Canada
Carriere & Richardson, 2020 (20)	Relationship Is Everything: Holistic Approaches to Aboriginal Child And Youth Mental Health	Canada
Moore et al., 2016 (5)	Child Well-Being: Constructs to Measure Child Well-Being And Risk And Protective Factors That Affect The Development Of Young Children	USA
Collier & Bryce, 2021 (8)	Addressing Cumulative Harm: Responding to Chronic Child Maltreatment In The Context Of An Intensive Family Support Service	Australia
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019 (16)	Child And Youth Wellbeing Strategy	New Zealand
Fallon et al., 2013 (31)	Opportunities For Prevention and Intervention With Young Children: Lessons From The Canadian Incidence Study Of Reported Child Abuse And Neglect	Canada
Government of Canada, 2018 (33)	Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework	Canada
Hinton et al., 2015 (22)	Developing A Best Practice Pathway to Support Improvements In Indigenous Australians' Mental Health And Well-Being: A Qualitative Study	Australia
Howarth et al, 2015 (28)	The Effectiveness of Targeted Interventions For Children Exposed To Domestic Violence: Measuring Success In Ways That Matter To Children, Parents And Professionals	UK
Ingemann & Larsen, 2018 (25)	A Scoping Review: Well-Being Among Indigenous Children and Youth in The Arctic – With A Focus On Sami And Greenland Inuit	Global (Arctic-Inuit)
Kinchin et al., 2015 (34)	An Empowerment Intervention for Indigenous Communities: An Outcome Assessment	Australia

Kirmayer et al., 2003 (35)	Healing Traditions: Culture, Community and Mental Health Promotion With Canadian Aboriginal Peoples	Canada
Kirmayer et al., 2016 (36)	Mental Health Promotion for Indigenous Youth	Canada and global
Kral, 2016 (37)	Suicide And Suicide Prevention Among Inuit In Canada	Canada
Lopez-Carmen et al., 2019 (23)	Working Together to Improve The Mental Health Of Indigenous Children: A Systematic Review	Global
McCalman et al., 2017 (17)	Family-Centred Interventions by Primary Healthcare Services For Indigenous Early Childhood Wellbeing In Australia, Canada, New Zealand And The United States: A Systematic Scoping Review	Australia, Canada, New Zealand, US
Mussell et al., 2004 (24)	The Mental Health and Well-Being Of Aboriginal Children And Youth: Guidance For New Approaches And Services	Canada, BC
OECD, 2021 (18)	Measuring What Matters for Child Well-Being And Policies	Global
Office of the Auditor General, 2016 (7)	Report Of the Auditor General Of Alberta July 2016 Human Services—Systems To Deliver Child And Family Services To Indigenous Children In Alberta	Alberta
Priest et al., 2012 (13)	Aboriginal Perspectives of Child Health And Wellbeing In An Urban Setting: Developing A Conceptual Framework	Australia
Smith et al., 2015 (41)	Supporting Parenting to Promote Children's Social And Emotional Well-Being	Canada
Rountree & Smith, 2016 (39)	Strength-Based Well-Being Indicators for Indigenous Children And Families: A Literature Review Of Indigenous Communities' Identified Well-Being Indicators	Global
Ruiz-Casares et al., 2013 (40)	Cultural Roots of Well-Being and Resilience in Child Mental Health	Canada
Taylor et al., 2021 (21)	Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Of Policies, Programmes And Interventions That Improve Outcomes For Young People Leaving The Out-Of-Home Care System	UK
Thompson et al., 2013 (14)	Walking The Red Road: The Role of First Nations Grandparents In Promoting Cultural Well-Being	Canada
UNICEF Innocenti, 2020 (42)	Worlds Of Influence: Understanding What Shapes Child Well-Being In Rich Countries	Global
Venugopal et al., 2021 (43)	A Scoping Review of Evaluated Indigenous Community-Based Mental Wellness Initiatives	International (USA, Australia, NZ) & Canada
Vine & Saini, 2009 (44)	Becoming Dynamic Facilitators of Change: Acting To Advance The Well-Being Of Ontario's Children And Youth	Canada, ON
Winokur et al., 2015 (27)	Systematic Review of Kinship Care Effects On Safety, Permanency, And Well-Being Outcomes	USA

Appendix E: Thought-Leader Interview Guide

The following is the interview guide used to engage with academic thought-leaders and leading practitioners in the field of child well-being.

"Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview. We greatly value your time and feedback.

I/we work for PolicyWise for Children & Families, which is a provincial not-for-profit organization that aims to inform, identify and promote effective social policy and practice to improve the well-being of children, youth, families and communities.

*PolicyWise is conducting an environmental scan, which includes an academic and grey literature review, and jurisdictional review. Well-being is considered from prevention to intervention, and we are looking to outline approaches to measure well-being, and socialize and engage the sector in implementation and evaluation. This includes developing a better understanding of child well-being in specific contexts and with specific populations including Indigenous peoples. **The goal of this interview is to better understand how the concept of well-being is defined, operationalized, and measured across the continuum of services for children and families.***

We estimate that this interview will take approximately one hour. Participation in this interview is voluntary and you can end the conversation at any time or choose not to answer certain questions. Your answers are confidential and will only be used for project purposes.

With your permission, we would like to record the interview. The recording of our conversation will be kept on a secured, locked and protected site, and nobody outside the project will have access to it. Are you comfortable with this interview being recorded?

Do you have any questions for us before we get started?

Context

1. *Please briefly describe your experience within the field of child well-being.*

2. *Through our ongoing data collection, we have noticed that practitioners and academics define the concept of child well-being in varying ways. How do you define the concept of child well-being in your work?*

3. *From your perspective, what are the key concepts that need to be understood in relation to defining child-wellbeing?*

Outcomes

4. *So far in our literature review, we are seeing a gap in research related to:*

   - *Primary prevention strategies for Indigenous communities*

Measurement (early understanding)

5. *What do you think needs to be considered when measuring child well-being?*

6. *What monitoring tools do you have experience with or knowledge of?*

7. *It is well known that tools have strengths and limitations. Can you share with us your thoughts on the strengths and limitations of using monitoring tools?*

- *With different populations*
- *In different settings*

Conclusion

8. *Is there anything else that you would like to share with us?*

9. *Are there any other people that you think would be important for us to speak to, either from an academic or practice perspective? Are there any specific resources or evidence you think would be important for us to review?"*

References

1. Children's Services. Well-being and resiliency: A framework for supporting safe and healthy children and families [internet]. Government of Alberta; 2019 [cited 2022 March 11]. Available from: https://open.alberta.ca/publications/9781460141939

2. Children's Services. Well-being and resiliency: The miyo resource kâ-nâkatohkêhk miyo-ohpikinawâwasowin [internet]. Government of Alberta; 2019 [cited 2022 March 11]. Available from https://open.alberta.ca/publications/9781460143384

3. Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD). FNCFS Report - Measuring to Thrive Framework [internet]; 2020.

4. Duebel K, Parker N, Leavitt K, Anugom I, Salt V, Scott C. Developing Measures for Safety and Well-being in Children's Services. Edmonton: PolicyWise for Children & Families; 2020.

5. Moore K, Murphey D, Beltz M, Martin M, Bartlett J, Caal S. Child well-being: Constructs to measure child well-being and risk and protective factors that affect the development of young children [Internet]. ChildTrends. 2016 [cited 2021Nov20]. Available from: https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2016-61ConstructsMeasureChildWellbeing.pdf

6. Ball J. Early childhood care and development programs as 'hook' and 'hub' for inter-sectoral service delivery in First Nations communities. International Journal of Indigenous Health. 2005 [cited 2021 Nov 27]; 2(1): 36-50. Available from: https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijih/article/view/28942

7. Office of the Auditor General of Alberta. Report on care of Indigenous children [internet]. 2016 [cited 2022 January 10]. Available from: https://www.oag.ab.ca/reports/human-services-report-care-indigenous-children-july-2016/

8. Collier S, Bryce I. Addressing cumulative harm: Responding to chronic child maltreatment in the context of an intensive family support service [internet]. Journal of Children's Services. 2021; 16(3): 249-266. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1108/JCS-10-2020-0058

9. Trocme N, MacLaurin B, Fallon B, Shlonsky A, Mulcahy M, Esposito T. National Child Welfare Outcomes Indicator Matrix (NOM) [internet]. Montreal: McGill University: Centre for Research on Children and Families; 2009 [cited 2022 March 11]. Available from: https://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/NOM_Sept09.pdf

10. Government of Alberta. Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act [Internet]. Alberta Open Source. Alberta Human Services; 2012 [cited 2021 Nov 20]. Available from: https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/c12/resource/c0a489af-a144-46b9-89e6-bf832b6c71ec

11. Government of Alberta. Ministerial panel on child intervention [Internet]. Alberta.ca. 2017 [cited 2022 Jul 26]. Available from: https://www.alberta.ca/child-intervention-panel.aspx

12. Government of Alberta. Prevention and early intervention framework for children, youth, families [Internet]. Alberta Open Source. Alberta Human Services; 2012 [cited 2021 Nov 20]. Available from: https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/fb65db4b-4cda-484a-87ce-a7241b36af79/resource/50a517c8-a71a-441f-b9e8-464ea6f6a49b/download/2012-prev-interventionframeworkfinal1.pdf

13. Priest N, Mackean T, Davis E, Briggs L, Waters E. Aboriginal perspectives of Child Health and Wellbeing in an urban setting: Developing a conceptual framework [internet]. Health Sociology Review. 2012;21(2):180–95. Available from: https://doi.org/10.5172/hesr.2012.21.2.180

14. Thompson GE, Cameron RE, Fuller-Thomson E. Walking the Red Road: The role of first nations grandparents in promoting cultural well-being [internet]. The International Journal of Aging and Human Development. 2013;76(1):55–78. Available from: https://doi.org/10.2190/AG.76.1.c

15. Edmonton Region Child and Family Services. Collaborative Service Delivery (CSD) Practice Manual [internet]. ALIGN Alberta; 2016. Available from: https://alignab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CSD-Practice-Manual-Edmonton-Region-The-Family-Centre-May-30-2017.pdf

16. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Child and youth wellbeing strategy [internet]. Government of New Zealand; 2019 [cited 2021 November 20]. Available from: https://www.childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2019-08/child-youth-wellbeing-strategy-2019.pdf

17. McCalman J, Heyeres M, Campbell S, Bainbridge R, Chamberlain C, Strobel N, et al. Family-centred interventions by primary healthcare services for indigenous early childhood wellbeing in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States: A systematic scoping review [internet]. BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth. 2017;17(1). Available from: https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-017-1247-2

18. OECD. Measuring what matters for child well-being and policies [internet]. OECD iLibrary. 2021. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1787/e82fded1-en

19. Jordan E, Vandivere S, Gross E. Alignment between early childhood and child welfare [Internet]. Childtrends. 2022. [cited 2022Jun]. Available from: https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CW-ECEalignment_ChildTrends_June2022.pdf

20. Carriere J, Richardson C. Relationship is everything: Holistic approaches to Aboriginal child and youth mental health. First Peoples Child & Family Review. 2013; 7(2): 8-26. Available from: https://doi.org/10.7202/1068837ar

21. Taylor D, Albers B, Mann G, Chakraborty S, Lewis J, Mendes P, Macdonald G, Williams K, Shlonsky A. Systematic review and meta-analysis of policies, programmes and interventions that improve outcomes for young people leaving the out-of-home care system [internet]. What Works for Children's Social Care. 2021 [cited 2021Nov20]. Available from: https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WWCSC_-Systematic_Review_YP_Leaving_OOH_Care_July2021_FINAL.pdf

22. Hinton R, Kavanagh DJ, Barclay L, Chenhall R, Nagel T. Developing a best practice pathway to support improvements in Indigenous Australians' mental health and well-being: A qualitative study [internet]. BMJ Open. 2015. Available from: https://doi.org/10.5172/hesr.2012.21.2.180

23. Lopez-Carmen V, McCalman J, Benveniste T, Askew D, Spurling G, Langham E, et al. Working together to improve the mental health of Indigenous Children: A systematic review [internet]. Children and Youth Services Review. 2019;104:104408. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104408

24. Mussell B, Cardiff K, White J. The mental health and well-being of Aboriginal children and youth: Guidance for new approaches and services [internet]. Sal'i'shan Institute & University of British Columbia. 2004 [cited 2021 November 20]. Available from: https://childhealthpolicy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/RR-8-04-full-report.pdf

25. Ingemann C, Larsen C. A scoping review: Well-being among indigenous children and youth in the Arctic – with a focus on Sami and Greenland Inuit [internet]. Nordic Council of Ministers. 2018. Available from: http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-5151

26. Chandler MJ, Lalonde C. Cultural continuity as a hedge against suicide in Canada's First Nations. Transcultural Psychiatry. 1998;35(2):191–219. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1177%2F136346159803500202

27. Winokur MA, Holtan A, Batchelder KE. Systematic review of Kinship Care Effects on safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes [internet]. Research on Social Work Practice. 2015;28(1):19–32. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731515620843

28. Howarth E, Moore TH, Shaw AR, Welton NJ, Feder GS, Hester M, et al. The effectiveness of targeted interventions for children exposed to domestic violence: Measuring success in ways that matter to children, parents and professionals [internet]. Child Abuse Review. 2015;24(4):297–310. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2408

29. Makokis L, Bodor R, Calhoun A, Tyler S. ohpikinâwasowin / Growing a child: Implementing Indigenous ways of knowing with Indigenous families [edited book]. Fernwood Publishing. 2020.

30. Agency and Alberta Human Services. Procurement Advisory Table [Final Report and Recommendations]. Alberta: Government of Alberta; 2016 [Cited 2022 March 11]. Available from: http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/procurement-advisory-table-final-report.pdf

31. Fallon B, Ma J, Allan K, Pillhofer M, Trocme N, Jud A. Opportunities for prevention and intervention with young children: Lessons from the Canadian incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect [internet]. Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health. 2013; 7(4). Available from: https://doi.org/10.1186/1753-2000-7-4

32. Framework for Prevention of Child Maltreatment [Internet]. Child Welfare Information Gateway. 2021 [cited 2022Mar11]. Available from: https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/overview/framework/

33. Government of Canada. Indigenous early learning and child care framework [internet]; 2018 [cited 2022 January 10]. Available from: https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/canada/employment-social-development/programs/indigenous-early-learning/1352-IELCC_Report-EN.pdf

34. Kinchin I, Jacups S, Tsey K, Lines K. An empowerment intervention for indigenous communities: An outcome assessment [internet]. BMC Psychology. 2015;3(1). Available from: https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-015-0086-z

35. Kirmayer L, Simpson C, Cargo M. Healing traditions: Culture, community and Mental Health Promotion with Canadian aboriginal peoples [internet]. Australasian Psychiatry. 2003;11(1):S15–S23. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1038-5282.2003.02010.x

36. Kirmayer LJ, Sheiner E, Geoffroy D. Mental Health Promotion for Indigenous Youth. Positive Mental Health, Fighting Stigma and Promoting Resiliency for Children and Adolescents [internet]. 2016: 111–40. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-804394-3.00006-1

37. Kral MJ. Suicide and suicide prevention among Inuit in Canada [internet]. The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry. 2016;61(11):688–95. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743716661329

38. Nutter B. Outcomes Based Service Delivery In Alberta Child Welfare: Is It Headed for Failure? [draft comment]. 2011. (Unpublished)

39. Rountree J, Smith A. Strength-based well-being indicators for indigenous children and families: A literature review of indigenous communities' identified well-being indicators [internet]. American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research. 2016; 23(3):206–20. Available from: https://doi.org/10.5820/aian.2303.2016.206

40. Ruiz-Casares M, Guzder J, Rousseau C, Kirmayer LJ. Cultural roots of well-being and resilience in child mental health [internet]. In: Ben-Arieh, A., Casas, F., Frønes, I., Korbin, J. (eds) Handbook of Child Well-Being. 2014: 2379–407. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-9063-8_93

41. Smith PB, Brown J, Feldgaier S, Lee CM. Supporting parenting to promote children's social and emotional well-being [internet]. Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health. 2015;34(4):129–42. Available from: https://doi.org/10.7870/cjcmh-2015-013

42. UNICEF Innocenti. Worlds of influence: Understanding what shapes child well-being in rich countries [internet]. 2020 [cited 2022 January 10]. Available from: https://www.unicef.org/media/77571/file/Worlds-of-Influence-understanding-what-shapes-child-well-being-in-rich-countries-2020.pdf

43. Venugopal J, Morton Ninomiya M, Green N, Peach L, Linklater R, George PN, et al. A scoping review of evaluated indigenous community-based mental wellness initiatives [internet]. Rural and Remote Health. 2021; Available from: https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH6203

44. Vine C, Saini M. Becoming dynamic facilitators of change: Acting to advance the well-being of Ontario's children and youth [internet]. Journal of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. 2009; 53(3): 2-5. Available from: https://hdl.handle.net/1807/95336