



# JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE SUMMIT

**Sharing, Learning and Growing: Imagining  
the Future of Jordan's Principle**

**September 12 – 13, 2018  
Winnipeg, Manitoba | Treaty One Territory**



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## Executive Summary

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The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) hosted the first ever national Jordan's Principle Summit on September 12-13, 2018, at the RBC Convention Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Treaty One Territory. More than 850 First Nations citizens, family members, leaders, service coordinators, health directors and technicians, health, social, and education practitioners, service providers and innovators gathered under the theme of **Sharing, Learning, and Growing: Imagining the Future of Jordan's Principle**. The Summit objectives were:

- **Sharing:** Making space for those who have experience in accessing, coordinating and implementing Jordan's Principle to share their insight, lessons learned and best practices.
- **Learning:** Providing an opportunity to learn about the history and legacy of Jordan River Anderson and Jordan's Principle, what it means for First Nations families, and First Nations children's rights under the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal rulings on Jordan's Principle.
- **Growing:** Ensuring that First Nations determine the long-term approach to implementing Jordan's Principle as a legal principle that will continue to exist and enable First Nations children and families to thrive.

## Summit Proceedings

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The Jordan's Principle Summit was comprised of opening comments, a keynote address, six plenary sessions, and two concurrent workshop sessions that each featured four workshops. The Summit opened and closed with honour songs performed by the Spirit Sands Drum Group. In addition, the Summit included two social/ceremonial gatherings. The Summit also accommodated some information booths to share information on Jordan's Principle.

## Opening Ceremonies

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Elder Madeline Gamblin Walker and Elder Elmer Courchene provided prayers and welcoming comments to the delegation.

Elder Gamblin Walker recounted her time as a caseworker for the late Jordan River Anderson while he was in the hospital in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She spoke firsthand of



the jurisdictional challenges facing Jordan and children like him, with governments refusing to work together for the good of the children. Elder Gamblin Walker expressed gratitude to Jordan's family for persevering throughout the hardships and she gave thanks for the Jordan's Principle programs that are being rolled-out across Canada. Elder Gamblin Walker ended with a prayer in her language.

Elder Courchene introduced himself by his traditional name meaning Standing Strong Man and as a member of the Eagle Clan from Treaty One territory. Elder Courchene began by thanking Dr. Cindy Blackstock who fought so hard for Jordan's Principle. Elder Courchene recalled meeting Jordan and his caregivers in 2004. He felt Jordan's humanity when he looked into his eyes. Elder Courchene shared that Jordan was born for a purpose – he was born to take care of our little ones, who are our teachers. Children teach us about responsibility, honesty, love, kindness, courage, faith and compassion. Children offer these teachings as a great gift. Elder Courchene also said that we have to speak, as our ancestors spoke for us and fought for us. Now it is our time to take care of things and take our own responsibility.

Elder Courchene said that Jordan was present at the gathering in spirit and that he accompanied each participant, and that he will accompany each participant home. He called on the delegation to come together and speak as family members and as the first peoples of this land. Elder Courchene ended his comments with a prayer in his language.

Spirit Sands Drum opened the Jordan's Principle Summit with an honour song.

## **Welcoming Remarks and Context Setting**

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Manitoba Regional Chief Kevin Hart, as the AFN national portfolio holder for Jordan's Principle and child welfare, began by welcoming all of the delegates to Treaty One territory and to the first National Summit on Jordan's Principle. He noted the appropriateness of holding the event in Manitoba, the home of Jordan River Anderson. He asked the delegation to stand for a moment of silence in honour of Jordan.

Regional Chief Hart noted the overwhelming interest in the Summit from all areas including academics, health, social and education professionals and practitioners, and even law students. Although a few people had to be turned away due to space capacity and limitations, he noted that this was indicative of the importance of Jordan's Principle.

Regional Chief Hart recounted the 2016 win at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT), led by Dr. Blackstock, which found that Canada was discriminating against First Nations children within the child welfare system and failed to implement Jordan's Principle. This was an historic victory for First Nations. Jordan's Principle is now



entrenched in Canadian law and is now a legal principle. Since that time, we have seen many children get the supports that they deserve. Regional Chief Hart noted that this Summit was designed to honour where we came from and to develop the vision for where we are going. The Summit will highlight First Nations-led approaches to implementing Jordan's Principle in line with the Summit theme of sharing, learning and growing.

### **Grand Chief Arlen Dumas, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs**

Grand Chief Dumas began by welcoming participants, thanking the organizers and bringing greetings on behalf of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. Grand Chief Dumas explained that we were gathering on Treaty One territory, the ancestral and sovereign homelands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Dene and Dakota peoples. Grand Chief Dumas detailed the importance of gatherings such as the Summit as it allows us to reflect on the work being done, and validate our work. He also recognized that alongside celebrating the successes of the implementation of Jordan's Principle, he had the sobering reflection that Jordan never got to celebrate in these ways, and his family did not get to witness this with him.

Grand Chief Dumas further noted that it was recently announced that Jordan's home, Norway House Cree Nation, through commitment and tireless advocacy, is building a new hospital. Certainly Jordan played a role in that happening today.

Grand Chief Dumas also recognized the many trailblazers in the room including Dr. Cindy Blackstock and filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin. These women showed us that we can strive to achieve our dreams despite the difficulties placed in our paths.

Grand Chief Dumas ended with words of hope and caution. He noted that, though the signs have been positive, there remains no official commitment to continue the funding for Jordan's Principle beyond this fiscal year. He encouraged the delegation to continue to advocate for that formal commitment to Jordan's Principle and to hold the Prime Minister and the federal ministers accountable to their words.

### **Grand Chief Garrison Settee, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak**

Grand Chief Settee welcomed participants to the gathering and acknowledged Treaty One territory. He shared that he felt honoured to have been asked to share some observations. He noted that it took the life and tragic death of one of our own young warriors, Jordan River Anderson, to move the rights of children forward. He recognized and honoured Jordan's family for their resilience, determination and courage. He called on First Nations leaders to commit to remembering and honouring Jordan for generations to come.

Grand Chief Settee closed by thanking all of the advocates, leaders and organizations for fighting so hard to make Jordan's Principle implementation a reality.



### **Grand Chief Jerry Daniels, Southern Chiefs' Organization**

Grand Chief Daniels began by acknowledging the drum and the singers from Swan Lake. He thanked the Elders for their words and prayers and for the Summit organizers for their hard work. He also thanked the First Nations leadership who have fought tirelessly for the implementation of Jordan's Principle. Grand Chief Daniels also recognized the frontline workers that are doing sacred work of building better communities.

Grand Chief Daniels expressed thanks for being able to come together and identify and expand community-focused and delivered programs and services. He called on everyone to continue to fight to provide First Nations people the opportunity to live fulfilling and prosperous lives.

### **Minister Jane Philpott, Minister of Indigenous Services Canada**

Minister Jane Philpott provided opening remarks via video message. She opened by recognizing Jordan River Anderson and his legacy, which will live on in Canada for generations. She noted that Jordan's Principle has no end date and asked delegates to reflect on where we were on this initiative just a year ago. While much has been accomplished, there remains much to be done. She concluded by thanking the AFN for making the Summit a reality.

### **National Chief Perry Bellegarde, Assembly of First Nations**

National Chief Perry Bellegarde provided opening remarks via video message. He began by welcoming the delegation and thanking them for their participation, for honouring Jordan's legacy, and for working to improve the lives of First Nations children. He thanked participants for coming together to support and advocate for families and to share their wisdom, learnings and insights on how to implement Jordan's Principle. He concluded by committing the AFN to continuing to support First Nations families in advocacy and sharing.

## **Keynote Address – The History and Legacy of Jordan's Principle**

*Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada*

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Dr. Blackstock began by asking the delegation to stand, just as the House of Commons did in 2007 when they unanimously pledged to honour Jordan's Principle, to honour the family of Jordan River Anderson and to pledge a commitment to fight for Jordan's Principle in its full definition.

Dr. Blackstock recounted that on the night when the Jordan's Principle motion was



passed, Jordan's father said something very important. He asked that this victory not just be a moral victory. It is everyone's obligation to fight to make this not just a moral or partial victory. Jordan's spirit is calling on each of us to be ambassadors for a movement for justice for First Nations children. She suggests that we must honour this obligation by always using Jordan's full name. Implementing Jordan's Principle is a sacred obligation and a privilege.

Dr. Blackstock reminded the delegation that the Jordan's Principle motion unanimously passed in the House of Commons in 2007 and that this should have been enough. It represented a political promise made to children that money or bureaucracy would not get in the way of a childhood. However, the government created a definition of Jordan's Principle so narrow that no child ever qualified. Dr. Blackstock asked all the audience members who have been touched by Jordan's Principle to raise their hands. These are the people who have been helped by Jordan.

Dr. Blackstock spoke of another person she considers a hero, a force of nature, Mi'kmaq Elder Maurina Beadle. Her son Jeremy has special needs and Maurina looked after him with no supports; she did it because she loved him. When Jeremy was sixteen, Maurina had a stroke so severe that she could not hold a glass of water; however, the government would not cover the actual costs of his care and instead provided only a fixed amount of funding that was inadequate. The government determined that this was not a Jordan's Principle case. The government would, however, pay if Jeremy was put into the child welfare system or if he was committed to an institution. The only other option was for Maurina, after suffering a double stroke and caring for a child with special needs, to fundraise for his much needed supports. Maurina also took the Canadian government to court. She did it, not just for Jeremy, but also for Jordan and every First Nations child who needs help. Dr. Blackstock recounted that after their win in court, at a celebration in Pictou Landing, as his mother began to drum and sing, Jeremy reached over to grab the drumstick and began to play. The government would have rather separated this mother and son. Canada appealed the decision and sought court costs from Maurina Beadle. Though Canada eventually dropped its appeal, it did not change its approach to Jordan's Principle.

Dr. Blackstock spoke about another family, that of Josey and her mother Stacy Shiner. Josey needed medical orthodontics as she could not eat or talk without chronic pain. They were denied at all three levels of appeal with Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) for the orthodontics that would cost \$4000.00. Josey's mother took Canada to court. Canada did not argue that Josey was not in pain or required the orthodontics, they simply argued that her claim does not meet their policy – and the court agreed. However, because of Jordan's Principle, and the CHRT decision, a settlement was reached which included a policy change that considers pain as criteria for NIHB coverage.



These are the courageous families who have moved Jordan's Principle forward.

Dr. Blackstock recounted that during the recent CHRT case, there was a lot of evidence heard. We heard that, not only did the government of Canada know about the problem, they knew that children died waiting for services and they knew that children were experiencing irreparable harm. The government chose to put bureaucratic red tape ahead of the well-being of these children.

Dr. Blackstock pointed to another truth that must be acknowledged – that too often First Nations parents have become accustomed to getting less for their children. Inequality has been so normalized and sometimes we just accept it. Our children are worth the money. If Canada can come up with \$4.5 billion for a pipeline, they can afford culturally-based programming for our children.

Since the CHRT ruling, Canada has been issued five orders of non-compliance. One of the compliance orders was because the CHRT was not satisfied with Canada's implementation of Jordan's Principle. The order also notes that Canada had contributed to the deaths of two children from Wapekeka First Nation who were denied mental health services. Since that time there has been some progress, but we are still not satisfied with the progress.

The CHRT said that Jordan's Principle applies to First Nations children both on- and off-reserve, based on the best interests of the children, to make sure their needs are met. Programs and services must meet the cultural needs of the child. In addition, the CHRT ruled that Jordan's Principle is not just about gaps in government services, but about meeting the needs of the child. Further, the CHRT orders call on the government to put children before any kind of red tape; policy and processes cannot get in the way. In urgent cases, the government has to turn the case around in twelve hours, whereas non-urgent cases have forty-eight hours and group requests have seven days. Dr. Blackstock also noted that Jordan's Principle now covers costs going back to 2009.

It was noted that Jordan's Principle is not a policy and it is not just the Child First Initiative. Jordan's Principle is a law that Canada is responsible for upholding. Everyone is responsible for increasing awareness around the proper definition of Jordan's Principle; it is not just for children with disabilities, not just for health or social services and not just for children with critical health needs, although it covers that. It covers all government services and all First Nations children. There have been over 90,000 services approved under Jordan's Principle thus far. Jordan's Principle is not going to end on March 31, 2019. Dr. Blackstock committed that if there is no announcement on a renewal, then Canada will be brought back before the CHRT.

Dr. Blackstock noted that there are challenges that remain. Canada has taken a view that Jordan's Principle applies to registered Indian children. The Caring Society



disagrees with this position. In contrast, the Caring Society position is that the principle applies to all First Nations children, as well as their families. It applies to children that First Nations recognize as their members. This recognizes the right of Nations to determine whom their people are.

Dr. Blackstock also noted that she has seen rejection letters that state the claim does not meet the standard of “substantive equality.” It is unclear what test Canada is using to determine this. Dr. Blackstock also argued that there is no clear process for addressing urgent cases, and twelve hours is too long for a child with suicidal ideation. Dr. Blackstock also pointed to challenges related to inconsistent criteria across the country for coverage under Jordan’s Principle. Things that are approved in one region are rejected in another region and compliance timeframes are not the same. This does not serve children in need.

In order to ensure this never happens again, Dr. Blackstock highlighted the need to implement the Spirit Bear Plan. Step one of the Spirit Bear Plan is for the Parliamentary Budget Officer to provide a costing of all of the issues affecting First Nations children including water, housing and youth mental health. We need to understand what the shortfall is. And then we need a Marshall Plan for making up these shortfalls. Secondly, governments, including the provinces, need to reform themselves. They need to be independently evaluated and reformed. We need to be confident that the colonial way of thinking that got us here is gone. It is not enough to say ‘sorry’; we need to work to ensure that it never happens again.

Dr. Blackstock ended her remarks by returning to her pledge to Jordan River Anderson. Jordan was put on this earth to teach us to stop accepting that our children are not worth the money. There is nothing more important than our children. Dr. Blackstock pledged in the memory of Jordan, to never let up until the racial discrimination in this county ends and Jordan’s legacy and vision for children in this country are realized.

## **Panel Discussion – A Family Perspective**

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The Summit’s first panel session was comprised of families from across Canada that shared their first-hand experiences with accessing care for their children both before and after the implementation of Jordan’s Principle. The families shared the profound impact that Jordan’s Principle has had on their lives and offered suggestions for the future of Jordan’s Principle implementation.

Manitoba Regional Chief Kevin Hart acted as the panel moderator. He began by thanking the panel participants for traveling great distances to share their stories. He noted that these families represent the over 90,000 cases which have been supported



through Jordan's Principle implementation. Regional Chief Hart asked the families to reflect on what has worked for them in accessing Jordan's Principle, where did they struggle, and how they envision Jordan's Principle in the future.

### **Neegangwedgin Family**

The panel of four began with the Neeganagwedgin family. The Neegangwedgin family shared that prior to getting the request to participate at the Jordan's Principle Summit, they felt a need to share their story of the difference Jordan's Principle has made in their lives. The family recounted the challenges in accessing services just two years ago. They found that many organizations claimed to be able to help their family, but in reality there were many barriers to accessing supports. Some organizations had intelligence quotient (IQ) requirements, while other organizations pushed them to reach out to First Nations organizations specifically.

The family shared that they spent many hours searching for help that only came with the implementation of Jordan's Principle. They recalled how they were hesitant to make that first call initially because they feared another rejection. The family called the Jordan's Principle number and was bounced around a number of times, however, after contacting the office of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, it only took two days to receive approvals. The family shared that the positive impact that Jordan's Principle has had for the family has been profound. Through Jordan's Principle, the family is now able to access an educational assistant, which has transformed their child's school experience.

The family however noted that Jordan's Principle implementation has not been perfect. Though many services were approved quickly, accessing beds for her children, for example, has been slow. The family also suggested that there is a need for ongoing education for those working within the government on Jordan's Principle in order to understand its spirit and intent.

The Neegangwedgin family shared that they are well aware of Jordan's story, they celebrate Jordan's birthday and know that it is because of Jordan River Anderson that they are finally receiving the services they need. They also shared that this serves as an education function including the teachers who were not aware of the legacy of Jordan River Anderson. They added that their family is finally 'living' now and their quality of life has improved tremendously. They are truly thankful to everyone who fought so hard, especially Jordan's family.

### **Sumner Family**

The Sumner family from Manitoba, spoke about their 17-year-old son who lives with cervical spinal stenosis. The Sumner family described the challenges of accessing services prior to the opening of a Jordan's Principle program in her community (in October of 2017). Access to products the family needed on a daily basis such as gloves



was limited and difficult to access. The family had to borrow supplies from the local health centre, and even a specialized bed was taken away from the family. The annual limitations placed on goods and services through existing federal programs did not meet the needs of the family.

The Sumner family shared that they met a representative from the local Jordan's Principle program who assured the family that their needs would be met. The local program was much easier to navigate and the staff were kind and welcoming. This has made a big difference in their lives.

The Sumner family also identified a number of ways in which the Jordan's Principle implementation could be improved. For example, they suggested that there be more inclusion of the program staff in the community itself and more inclusion of clients and community members in the program. The family said that communities also have to become more accessible for all children. They also found that there are some challenges around communications, particularly when it involves appointments and approvals from primary care physicians, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and the health director, for example. Establishing relationships and streamlining communications processes is still required.

### **Buffalo-Jackson Family**

The Buffalo-Jackson family of Samson Cree Nation, Alberta, shared their family's story and challenges they faced to get the supports and services needed for their son Noah.

The Buffalo-Jackson family shared that their son Noah was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at a very young age and the family was informed that he would require long-term rehabilitative treatment and would likely need a wheelchair for his whole life. The family recounted a number of challenges they faced in accessing supports for Noah. For example, the family had to fight for Noah's nutritional supplements, mobility devices, and other doctor-prescribed treatments. The family expressed that it should not have taken health professionals and threats from a lawyer to receive supports, particularly when it is something a non-First Nations child would receive immediately.

The Buffalo-Jackson family also described being in the House of Commons for the vote on the private members' motion calling for the immediate adoption of Jordan's Principle. Also present was the National Chief and Regional Chiefs, Jordan's family, and children in wheelchairs with their aides, some from Norway House Cree Nation. Every single Member of Parliament stood to support the motion. There was tremendous hope and expectations that they would no longer have to struggle to get their children care. However, their hope was betrayed when government bureaucrats narrowed the definition of Jordan's Principle, effectively rendering it meaningless.

Meanwhile, the family had submitted a human rights case to the CHRT based on the



refusal to provide bussing for Noah to attend a school that supports his unique needs. The First Nation-operated school tried their best to support Noah, but they were themselves profoundly underfunded. During this time, in January of 2013, the family submitted a letter of complaint to the Alberta Human Rights Commission. The Commission argued that their submission, which was directed towards the federal government, had to include a complaint against their First Nation as it is the body that received the funding for community bussing. However, the family argued that the First Nation was not the source of the problem because they were never provided adequate resources from the federal government. In Alberta, a child with Noah's needs living off-reserve would be provided \$7,500.00 under the Residential Access Modification Program (RAMP) but as a First Nations child Noah was only able to access \$1,135.00. When the time came for mediation, the Commission's mediator was not interested in sitting down with the federal government, however, it was the First Nation that had gone into deficit trying to help the family. Subsequently, the family withdrew their complaint against the First Nation. By withdrawing the complaint against the First Nation, the Commission was left to deal with the complaint against the federal government. Canada provided inaccurate information to the mediator, and as a result the mediator recommended the complaint against Canada be dismissed and not be referred to the CHRT. This was devastating for the family who had been fighting for so long, on their own.

It was at this stage that the Buffalo-Jackson family contacted Dr. Cindy Blackstock at the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society. The family sent the Commission report to Dr. Blackstock who, in turn, sent it to the Caring Society lawyers. After reading the report the legal team agreed to take on Noah's case pro bono. Ms. Buffalo recounts how the legal team cautioned her optimism because in 90% of cases the commission adheres to the recommendations of their investigators. Despite this caution, Noah's case was strong and the commissioners ruled in the family's favour. After initially refusing to negotiate a settlement, the parties eventually reached a settlement for Noah.

### **Nibby-Woods Family**

The Nibby-Woods from Indian Brook First Nation in Nova Scotia shared the moving story of tragedy and resilience in their family and the role that Jordan's Principle has played in their lives.

The Nibby-Woods family experienced a very traumatic event that severely impacted their family. The family turned to many organizations to try to find help, and it was through their search for help that they heard of Jordan's Principle. The local Jordan's Principle organization (through the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq) sent a caseworker to their home and met with the family. Almost immediately they developed a plan and set it in motion. Jordan's Principle supported psychiatric evaluations, psychologist visits, and assessments for private school attendance. The family shared that the Jordan's Principle workers continue to check in on their family, which has made



them feel cared for.

The Nibby-Woods family noted that when the Jordan's Principle caseworkers first began working with the family, they wrote a letter to the federal and provincial governments detailing the situation and their needs. While the Jordan's Principle team involved Health Canada, there has never been a response from government otherwise. If it was not for Jordan's Principle, they would not have received any supports and services.

Because of Jordan's Principle, the Nibby-Woods family have been able to lead happy and productive lives and are looking forward to the future. The family shared that they are thankful for Jordan's Principle, and it has given them something to live for, because they felt like they were going nowhere. The family thanked Jordan's family for everything they went through, which has helped them in their own lives.

### **Laponsee Family**

The Laponsee family from the remote First Nation of Pukatawagan (Mathias Colomb First Nation) shared their experiences and challenges of trying to access services while residing in a First Nation that can only be reached by plane, train, boat or by winter road.

The Laponsee family shared that they had to fight for appointments with doctors and dentists due to administrative difficulties and few service providers. Because of this, parents have to become advocates for their families and it can be a difficult and exhausting effort. They also noted that politicians must listen to parents and caregivers who alone understand their own needs. The family further added that First Nations politicians must not forget to represent their citizens who are living in urban areas out of necessity to access healthcare.

The Laponsee family shared that they moved to an urban centre so they could access services. The family thought their struggles of finding resources and accessing services would be over when they moved to an urban centre, however, they found that this was not the case. They noted that there must be a clearer process developed for families coming from remote First Nations into urban settings as each family should not have to start from scratch each time they arrive in the city. However, despite all of their challenges, the Laponsee family refused to give up parental rights to child welfare services, despite being pushed to do so. The family argued that First Nations people have the right to raise their children, just as they have rights to the land and water.

It was only recently that the family connected with Eagle Urban Transition Centre, who have helped them navigate and access services through Jordan's Principle. The family expressed optimism that they may have easier access to what the family needs in the future because of Jordan's Principle.



## Questions and Discussion

Panel moderator Regional Chief Kevin Hart provided an opportunity for a few questions from the delegation.

A clear theme that emerged was gratitude to Jordan River Anderson and his family for their struggle and sacrifice. When asked what advice they would give to other families with children in need, the panel encouraged the delegation to not be afraid to fight for access to Jordan's Principle and to never give up. First Nations children have a right to the highest level of care possible. They also recommended seeking out advocates and allies to support them in their journeys.

Regional Chief Hart closed by acknowledging the love, frustration and resiliency of the families who shared their stories. He also recommitted himself to fighting for these families and for Jordan's Principle.

## Manitoba's Implementation of Jordan's Principle

*Jaron Hart, Policy Analyst, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs; Ryan McKay, Eagle Urban Transition Centre; Don Shackle, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre; and Pam Smith, Regional Executive Officer, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Manitoba Region*

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The next session of the day was started with a presentation from Jaron Hart, Policy Analyst from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) on Manitoba's implementation of Jordan's Principle. The presentation began with a description of the engagement process undertaken by AMC, called *Keewaywin: Our Way Home*, to inform the regional response to the CHRT ruling, including reforming the child welfare system and implementing Jordan's Principle. When it comes to Jordan's Principle implementation, the engagement supported the development of a comprehensive approach grounded in First Nations self-determination and responding to the social determinants of health, governance, culture, and holistic wellness. This approach includes putting the needs of children first, ensuring access to services on-reserve, enhanced First Nations capacity, and stable, long-term funding.

Ryan McKay, Lead Special Needs Advocate at the Eagle Urban Transition Centre presented on their child-centered, family focused and community-based model for implementation of Jordan's Principle within an urban context in downtown Winnipeg. The Eagle Urban Transition Centre shared some of the many services they provide, including referral services, supporting and assisting families with services providers and system navigation, and case management.

Don Shackle, Manager of Clinical Support Services & Special Education at the



Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, presented on the services his organization is now able to provide First Nations children in Manitoba because of Jordan's Principle. Services provided include: American Sign Language, educational audiology, literacy coaching, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, school psychology, speech-language pathology, student support, and referral support. It was further shared that this is the first time First Nations children have had consistent, comprehensive and community-based clinical supports and services with appropriate follow up.

Finally, Pam Smith, Manitoba Regional Executive Officer for the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) of Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) presented on the development of Manitoba's circle of care model and the role of the federal government in supporting its development. The circle of care model places the child at the centre, with support for physical development, speech and language development, cognitive development, social and emotional development, healthy support family unit, spiritual development and cultural identity, and self-determination.

## **Panel Discussion – A Doctor's Perspective**

*Dr. Marcia Anderson (MB); Dr. Michael Moffatt (MB)*

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A panel discussion featured Dr. Marcia Anderson and Dr. Michael Moffatt, two physicians who have seen firsthand the challenges faced by First Nations within healthcare systems including jurisdictional barriers and racism. As a First Nations woman and mother, Dr. Anderson made the powerful connection between health outcomes and historical disadvantages rooted in colonialism. She recounted how these historical facts have become so embedded in systems that the institutional and interpersonal racism has been normalized. Dr. Anderson reflected that her view of Jordan's Principle is embedded in the rights of First Nations children: First Nations children's international Indigenous rights as well as within Treaty and inherent rights, and the rights stated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our children are rights bearers, and this is how we should be approaching the planning and structures to provide equitable services to First Nations children. For Dr. Anderson, Jordan's Principle is fully realized not only when all services are available to First Nations children when they are needed, but when there is no gap in life expectancy at birth because our children are born into a society where they have the equal right to the highest attainable standard of health, where there is fair and full access to equitable education, where every child has safe and affordable housing, where they have access to recreation, and where there is no food insecurity – because these are all rights that children possess.

Dr. Moffatt identified a number of complex barriers that continue to impede healthcare access for First Nations families and potential avenues for transformation.



Transformation is required in how health care services are delivered to First Nations, including breaking down silos, ensuring that all First Nations have access to comprehensive primary care, more Indigenous people working within the health care system, in addition to better cultural competency training for those that will be working with First Nations. Dr. Moffatt views Jordan's Principle as a first step, but Jordan's Principle must be fully applied so that no First Nations child ever faces a barrier when they have a health care need.

## **Social Gathering: Honouring the Legacy of Jordan River Anderson**

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To close the first day of the Jordan's Principle Summit, AFN Manitoba Regional Chief Kevin Hart hosted a social gathering to honour the legacy of Jordan River Anderson. The event included a special ceremony for Jordan's family members and screening of the trailer for Alanis Obomsawin's upcoming film on Jordan's Principle. The event also included entertainment from the Wanipigow Fiddle Band, singer Don Amero, and Buffalo Gals drum group.

## **Update from Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs on Disabilities**

*Jaron Hart, Policy Analyst, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (MB)*

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On the morning of day two Jaron Hart, Policy Analyst for the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, presented on the comprehensive work being undertaken in advocating for the specific needs of children living with disabilities. The advocacy positions spoke to the need to address the determinants of health in building environments that are safe, respectful, welcoming and supportive for all.

It was outlined that increasing access means changing attitudes within our First Nations or First Nations organizations, changing the way we communicate with others, and changing physical things, such as the structure of the spaces we use and the formats in which we present information. First Nations persons living with disabilities must be able to live fully accessible and barrier free lives while remaining an integral part of their First Nations through participation and engagement. This can be achieved through advocacy for increased funding from the federal government with respect to operations and management to retrofit many of the aging existing infrastructure. This would be in addition to advocacy for increased infrastructure budgets to accommodate the growing requirements of First Nations to accommodate fully accessible built environments.

Lastly, it was outlined that Jordan's Principle reaches its full realization when service gaps no longer exist in First Nations, when First Nations children, youth and their families that have previously had to leave their First Nations to access basic services will be able to relocate back to their First Nation to live among familiar faces, family and friends.



## Panel Discussion – The Role of Service Coordinators

*Julia Knott, First Nations Health Consortium (AB); Jessie Messier, First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (QC); Tara Levi, Mawiw Council (NB); Gwen Traverse, Pinaymootang First Nation (MB); and April Sanderson, Pinaymootang First Nation (MB)*

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The second plenary session included a panel comprised of representatives from five Jordan's Principle Service Coordinator models from across the country. Each participant highlighted their own unique First Nations-directed service coordination structures and processes, lessons learned and recommendations for the future of Jordan's Principle.

The First Nations Health Consortium (FNHC) of Alberta outlined that they have four Jordan's Principle access workers that are the first point of contact and provide intake services for the region, along with nine regional service coordinators who are situated throughout Alberta. The FNHC coordinators navigate federal and provincial systems for First Nations children, youth and families to improve their access to education, social and health services.

The Mawiw Council Inc. detailed that they provide Jordan's Principle service coordination to eight First Nations in New Brunswick, which encompasses ninety percent of the First Nations population, and includes four service coordinators and four community-based workers. Front line community-based coordinators are the first point of contact and provide assistance to families with navigating systems, including follow-up and outreach.

The First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission utilized their health directors' network to create a model for Jordan's Principle service coordination of one service coordinator in every First Nation. The role of the local service coordinator varies among First Nations and is dependent on the particular First Nation's needs. Service coordinators aim to improve awareness among First Nations regarding existing programs and support, establish relationships with First Nations resources and collaborate with existing First Nations and governmental programs and services, collaborate and identify opportunities to build relationships with service providers to facilitate access to necessary support and services. Local service coordinators also ensure cultural safety to ensure that First Nations are treated with respect, compassion and cultural understanding, and facilitate the acquisition of cultural competence within the region and the broader health and social services system.

Pinaymootang First Nation of Manitoba, outlined their initiative, Niniijaanis Nide "My Child, My Heart." The program provides supports to families with children with complex needs and to help enhance the child's life and facilitate health care interventions and developmental stimulation. Through engagement with families and First Nations, the



program aims to improve services and contribute to quality of life ensuring that children, young people and their families are enabled to experience a life that is as full and as normal as possible.

## **Dialogue – Imagining the Future of Jordan's Principle**

*Valerie Gideon, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Indigenous Services Canada; and Jonathan Thompson, Director, Social Development, Assembly of First Nations*

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Valerie Gideon and Jonathan Thompson outlined the engagement process that came out of the CHRT ruling and the movement towards securing policy and financial authorities for Jordan's Principle into the future. The vision for the future of Jordan's Principle that has emerged from engagement is that First Nations must have greater control over Jordan's Principle.

Engagement has unearthed that enhanced funding for child-centered, needs-based and First Nations-based programs and services is required. The current request-based process requires First Nations to go to Canada for funding, and this does not foster First Nations control. Funding should go directly to First Nations. Additionally, it became evident that First Nations need support for community-based capacity; and many have said that every First Nation should have a Jordan's Principle worker, and First Nations require resources to train their own local people.

Additional highlights included outlining the idea of an innovation fund for First Nations that are ready to develop and test new ideas and innovations in service delivery, and funding to address infrastructure needs. Further identified needs and actions include the creation of an integrated holistic Jordan's Principle children's policy authority, and funding for First Nations-led dialogue to support First Nations discussion on how they want to organize to deliver services and how they want to implement Jordan's Principle for themselves. Additionally, it was outlined that provinces and territories have a role to play in the full implementation of Jordan's Principle and, therefore, a strategy for provincial/territorial engagement is needed as well as the development of regional trilateral tables. Lastly, it was outlined that Canada must continue to meet its legal obligation for Jordan's Principle and, therefore, funding will need to continue to ensure implementation of the current federal response to individual requests where exceptions or persistent gaps exist.

## **Closing Comments and Next Steps**

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Manitoba Regional Chief Kevin Hart closed the Summit proceedings by recognizing and thanking Treaty One territory for hosting the event and all of the delegates and speakers for participating and sharing. He recommitted to strongly advocating for First Nations



children and Jordan's Principle implementation.

### **Elder Madeline Gamblin Walker and Elder Elmer Courchene**

Both Elders reminded the delegation of the sacredness of children. Each child is a gift from the Creator and it is the responsibility of adults to protect, care for and love children. The Elders also thanked Jordan River Anderson and his family for their efforts that led this fight. Finally, they wished the delegation safe journeys home.

Spirit Sands Drum closed the Jordan's Principle Summit with an honour song.

## **Overview of Concurrent Workshops**

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The Jordan's Principle Summit included five workshops, which ran throughout the two days of the Summit. A high-level description of each workshop is found below.

### **A Family Perspective on Jordan's Principle: Firsthand Experiences of Accessing Jordan's Principle**

*The Buffalo-Jackson Family (AB); the Neeganagwedgin Family (ON); the Nibby-Woods Family (NS); the Sumner Family (MB); and the Laponsee family (MB)*

This panel-based workshop brought together a diverse group of families who have navigated the complex systems of care both before and after the implementation of Jordan's Principle. The panelists shared moving examples of struggle, strength, resilience and hope.

### **Service Coordinators: Information Sharing, Innovation, and Best Practices for Jordan's Principle Delivery**

*Julia Knott, First Nations Health Consortium (AB); Jessie Messier, First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (QC); Tara Levi, Mawiw Council (NB); Gwen Traverse, Pinaymootang First Nation (MB); and April Sanderson, Pinaymootang First Nation (MB). Moderated by: Kirsten Sware, First Nations Health Consortium (AB)*

This workshop highlighted the role that First Nations-led service coordination models have played in Jordan's Principle implementation. Though different across the regions, the models highlighted in this workshop demonstrate the need for and success of community-led systems and expertise in the delivery of programs and services.



## **Understanding the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal Ruling: Defining Jordan's Principle and Knowing Your Rights**

*David Taylor, Conway Litigation, Legal Counsel for First Nations Child and Family Caring Society*

Led by a member of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society's legal team at the CHRT, this workshop provided detailed background and explanation of the full CHRT decision and the implications for Jordan's Principle. In addition, the workshop detailed the steps being undertaken, both by First Nations and the federal government, to ensure compliance with the CHRT ruling.

## **Sharing Circle on Children with Disabilities: Special Needs Across the Life Course**

*Doreen Demas (MB), Marie Frawley-Henry (AFN), Jaron Hart (AMC), Stephanie Wellman (AFN), and Donovan Fontaine (ISC)*

This workshop highlighted regional and national priorities and activities related to supporting First Nations youth with disabilities, and potential implications for the future of Jordan's Principle implementation.

## **Mental Wellness: Maamo-Wiidaanookiimiidiwin – All of Us Working Together (Choose Life)**

*Connie Gray McKay, Mishkeegogamang First Nation, Ontario*

Connie Gray McKay described the development and implementation of the Mishkeegogamang First Nation's Maamo-Wiidaanookiimiidiwin project, which provides land-based programs and teachings for children and youth to support life promotion. This project is an important example of shifting from 'intervention to prevention' utilizing Jordan's Principle funding.

## **Summit Key Themes**

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Discussion at the Jordan's Principle Summit was diverse and wide-ranging, spanning from personal narratives to high-level political and policy discussions. The following section outlines a number of the key themes that were discussed.

### **Community-Based Funding**

First Nations know best how to support their children and families. If adequately funded, First Nations can meet needs of their children and families, rather than having to seek federal approval on requests for services and supports for children under Jordan's Principle. First Nations-based solutions require stable and long-term financial and human resources, and flexibility in the administration of policy.



### Key Points

- Funding must be invested in First Nations to build systems and expertise at the community-level in a transparent way. First Nations-based programs and services can break down silos, provide services that are culturally relevant and are grounded in Indigenous languages.
- Funding must be long-term, predictable, flexible, stable, and include capital expenditures.
- Funding should also better support First Nations-based workers, as these individuals are in the best position to build trust with families and First Nations and ensure cultural safety.
- Though a great deal of the discussion at the Summit focused on community-based solutions, it was reiterated that the federal government's ongoing obligation towards Jordan's Principle must not be forgotten.

### Shifting From Intervention to Prevention

First Nations families and communities should be provided the supports to foster healthy communities in order to raise healthy children. While Jordan's Principle can be understood as primarily reactive for when a child needs supports, there was a demonstrated desire to move towards a prevention focus.

### Key Points

- The workshop from Mishkeegogamang First Nation, Ontario on the Maamo-Wiidaanookiimiidiwin project demonstrated the power of incorporating Elders within culturally-based programming in order to transmit knowledge. It was identified that there must be specific mechanisms within funding schemes to recognize and support the vital role of Elders.
- Language programming **is** mental wellness programming.
- Culture-based and land-based activities and programming can include hunting, fishing, sweat lodges, dancing, ceremonies, etc., all of which support mental wellness, and also require capital investments.
- Parents and families must also be supported via mechanisms that are rooted in culture. Many parents are also working to reconnect with their culture and, therefore, need support so that children are living in supportive families.
- Schools were identified as providing an opportunity to administer culture-based projects. To date, the accumulative underfunding in schools has largely prevented this from happening on a large scale. In addition, this would require planning across silos to ensure attention is paid to mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health.
- Efforts must be made to include urban youth in culturally-based interventions, and there must be a mechanism to get urban youth out onto the land.
- Within prevention initiatives, attention must be paid to ensure that the initiatives are inclusive of people with disabilities. Program design must consider how a hunting or fishing trip can accommodate a child in a wheelchair, for example. This will require additional funding and planning.



- Prevention programming and interventions rooted in culture should start from pre-birth through early childhood, rooted in motherhood teachings and ceremonies. This should also include programming for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) prevention.
- There is a clear need for social media and gaming addictions programming. The irresponsible use of social media has the potential to negatively impact youth mental health. This has been cited in many mental wellness crises across the country. It is worth considering how social media can be harnessed to connect youth to culture.
- If prevention investments are not made, the dollars will be spent in provincial child welfare agencies later.
- One commentator offered a word of caution in shifting Jordan's Principle from intervention to prevention, as it may let the federal government off the hook for underfunding other programs. The federal government, for example, should already properly fund mental wellness.

### **Impacts/Implications for Other Federal Programs**

A number of Summit participants, while pleased with the availability of services via the Jordan's Principle funding, expressed concern that many of these costs should be rightly assumed by other federal programs.

#### **Key Points**

- Jordan's Principle is covering expenses that should normally be covered by Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB).
- Child and Family Services (CFS) programming continues to be underfunded, despite the ruling of the CHRT ruling(s). CFS organizations also have a role to play in prevention, but given their own budget constraints, it is often that funding for prevention within CFS organizations is currently being shouldered by the Jordan's Principle fund.
- The dialogue session on disabilities demonstrated that certain built environments have the effect of disabling people, whereas adequate and safe housing, schools, and First Nations infrastructure allow people with all abilities to be participating members of their First Nations.
- Inadequate housing renders some people disabled. With the proper investments and supports, people with disabilities can be full members of their First Nations.

### **The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal Ruling and First Nations Control**

First Nations control over services, supports and activities within First Nations is the ultimate goal; however, more work is needed to fully understand the implications for First Nations who assume jurisdiction over the implementation of Jordan's Principle in their First Nations.



### **Key Points**

- Off-reserve cases are getting denied, despite the definition of the CHRT to include all First Nations children. More information and clarity is needed regarding the definition of First Nations children, whether they be status, non-status, on- and off-reserve, etc., and their eligibility to access Jordan's Principle services.
- There is a need for greater accountability from provinces/territories in service provision. In some provinces/territories, waitlists are eight months for some services. Although the CHRT only applies to the federal government, it should also apply to the provinces/territories.
- Access to services in remote First Nations is an issue. There is a need for funding to provide training and develop infrastructure within First Nations for services, so as not to rely solely on provincial/territorial services.

### **Integrated, Holistic Jordan's Principle Children's Policy Authority**

Jordan's Principle implementation involves ensuring access to programs and services across the social determinants of health; however, current federal funding structures and authorities are challenged in supporting the necessary flexibility to work across silos. A single Jordan's Principle authority could ensure that First Nations are not limited by current program authorities and eligibility criteria. It would be a means to facilitate a single transfer of funding to First Nations to plan for and realize their vision for children and families, in an effort to have policy follow practice.

### **Key Points**

- Many participants noted community-level implementation of Jordan's Principle has demonstrated what can happen when silos are broken down. Moving forward, there is an opportunity to bring this learning to the federal policy context.
- Numerous presentations and commentators demonstrated the complexity of adequately delivering programming for First Nations children on-reserve. Adequate federal policy authority must be capable of accounting for health, social, education, cultural programming, infrastructure, and capital costs, among others.
- The federal structure of Jordan's Principle implementation moving forward must support First Nations where they are at. Many First Nations have the capacity to comprehensively implement Jordan's Principle and have been operating in this way without supports for years. However, many First Nations need support in developing internal capacity. Federal policy must account for both of these realities.

### **Innovation Fund**

The development of First Nations-led service delivery models requires investment for implementation. The following examples reflect some innovative projects occurring across the country that were discussed at the Summit.



### **Key Points**

- One First Nation in Quebec wanted to raise awareness of Jordan's Principle in a nearby Francophone community, so they purchased 700 build-a-bears, one for every child in school within that community. The First Nations coordinator worked with every classroom and as they were building their bears, the coordinator spoke about Jordan's life and what Jordan's Principle was about. This information was passed on to the children, to the teachers and to the rest of the families when the children brought their bears home.
- In Manitoba, Pinaymootang Health Centre developed a toolkit that includes the following five modules: interagency collaboration; program development; work plan development and performance indicators; program evaluation and monitoring; and information governance and data management. The toolkit can be used and adapted by First Nations to reflect their own realities and is available online at <https://www.pfnhealth.com/copy-of-home-community-care-program>.
- In Ontario, Mishkeegogamang First Nation's Maamo-Wiidaanookiimiidiwin project provides land-based programs and teachings for children and youth to support life promotion. The project includes five counselors, a psychologist, a psychometrist, a case manager, two expressive arts therapists, and an arts therapist. The project also allows for the program to bring in Elders and Traditional people to work with the participants to teach them language, on-the-land survival and traditional skills, as well as provide a stabilizing force for young people.

### **First Nations-Led Dialogue**

Jordan's Principle has opened up welcome opportunities for First Nations to develop community-driven solutions. However, First Nations-driven solutions take time and investment.

### **Key Points**

- Many participants noted that, to date, they have not had the time, support or resources to thoughtfully map out their programs. One participant called it "building a plane as you fly it."
- Just as First Nations say "nothing about us, without us," people with disabilities must also be provided the opportunity to impact policy, programs, legislation, etc., as they alone can offer that perspective.

### **Provincial/Territorial Engagement**

By its very definition, Jordan's Principle implementation requires action from provinces and territories. Many Summit participants identified the lack of provincial/territorial engagement as a barrier for full implementation.



### **Key Points**

- Many participants shared concern that the provinces and territories have used the CHRT decision and the federal response to it as an excuse to even further delegate their responsibility for providing services to First Nations children.
- It was noted that it is the job of the federal government to press provinces/territories to live up to their obligations.
- Some provinces/territories continue to perpetuate the myth that provincial and territorial authorities cannot provide services on-reserve.
- The provinces and territories should work with the federal government and First Nations to develop long-term solutions to the shortage of service providers, in particular, by building supports for First Nations learners in the health and wellness fields.
- Addressing the lack of access to therapists could include working with provincial and territorial health systems to improve communications generally and to create service pathways for First Nations children seeking services.
- There is a shortage of providers to the general population as well and this shortage is exacerbated by the increased needs of First Nations as well as the remoteness factor, in some cases.
- One participant noted that their First Nation had identified a need for 18 therapists and they were having trouble staffing 2-3 therapists.

### **Continued Supports for Children Who Age Out**

Participants indicated that supports are still required for children who 'age out' of eligibility for Jordan's Principles services. Disabilities and needs for special services do not stop when an individual turns the age of majority.

### **Key Points**

- The concern about children aging out of Jordan's Principle funding was raised a number of times. Participants spoke to the need for Adult Day Programming available on-reserve.
- Basic Income for caregivers is needed. Participants spoke to the stress and anxiety that many families experience when they think of the primary caregiver no longer being able to care for their child/children due to health reasons, death, etc.

### **Communications and Sharing**

Summit participants spoke about communications, sharing and networking as keys to success for the implementation of Jordan's Principle within First Nations.

### **Key Points**

- Many participants noted the key role that communication plays in the success of Jordan's Principle both in terms of promoting its use but also in terms of sharing best practices.
- Efforts must be made to promote Jordan's Principle including what it means, where it



came from and what is available. This point resonates with the comments of Dr. Blackstock in her keynote address that First Nations families have been conditioned to accept less for themselves. Communications through a wide variety of means is required to begin to counter that conditioning.

- Summit participants indicated that all communication strategies must take into account the unique accessibility needs of First Nations.
- First Nations-based workers indicated that it would be beneficial to learn from other First Nations on how they are implementing Jordan's Principle, including practical tools such as sharing materials, resources, job descriptions, salary grids, protecting privacy of clients including the legal and ethical requirements.
- Numerous participants noted that regular Summits such as this one should occur annually. They have the potential as forums of sharing best practices, but also for front-line workers to build community in the face of their stressful day-to-day work.
- There is the potential for a national service coordination network. However, some questions would need to be discussed, such as who would coordinate the network.
- A number of participants noted the continued need for an avenue for families not connected to their First Nation to connect to Jordan's Principle.