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## News release

For immediate release

### Founding First Nations, Canada and Alberta sign a historic agreement to support First Nations child and family well-being services

April 11, 2023 — Peerless Trout First Nation, Alberta, Treaty 8 Territory — Indigenous Services Canada

First Nations children thrive when they can stay with their families, and communities, surrounded by their cultures. As part of the Government of Canada's commitment to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we will continue to work towards self-determination for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

Today, at a ceremony at Kateri School in Trout Lake, Alberta, Chief Ivan Sawan, Chief Billy Joe Laboucan, and Chief Gilbert Okemow; the Honourable Marc Miller, Federal Minister of Crown–Indigenous Relations on behalf of the Honourable Patty Hajdu, Federal Minister of Indigenous Services; and the Honourable Mickey Amery, Alberta's Minister of Children's Services, celebrated the signing of a historic coordination agreement pursuant to *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*. This agreement enables the implementation and will bring life to *Awašak Wiyasiwêwin (Cree for Children's Law)*, and the exercise of child and family services control and jurisdiction by Loon River First Nation, Lubicon Lake Band and Peerless Trout First Nation, otherwise known as the Founding First Nations (FFNs), for their Members and future generations.

On November 20, 2021, members of each of the Founding First Nations voted overwhelmingly in favour of *Awašak Wiyasiwêwin*, a collaboratively developed, community-driven law that reflects the histories, cultural practices, and unique aspirations of each community to determine the best ways to care for their children, youth, and families. The law creates the office of the Onikanew (Cree for leader) to oversee and delegate powers and authorities created under the new law; with a focus at all times on prevention to ensure that culturally appropriate, wrap-around, community-driven supports and services are available, including prenatal care for expectant mothers, so that children can stay with their families and their communities.

This coordination agreement sets out how all parties will work together, including roles and responsibilities, processes and coordination of services. This will ensure a smooth and effective transfer to the Founding First Nation jurisdiction, governed by *Awašak Wiyasiwêwin*. The associated fiscal agreement establishes funding from the federal government to ensure that the necessary financial resources are in place. Over the next

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five years, the agreement will transfer \$149.4 million from the federal government to the FFNs to support their law implementation.

This agreement is significant as it demonstrates that meaningful reconciliation can be achieved when First Nations and their Crown partners in both the federal and provincial governments work hand-in-hand together to help First Nations determine their own futures. Ultimately, it sets the stage for First Nations to build a brighter, more enriched and more hopeful tomorrow for their children, their most precious assets.

As more and more coordination agreements are signed, more Indigenous children will be able to grow up in their communities. They will be immersed in their cultures and surrounded by loved ones.

## Quotes

“This coordination agreement marks another historic milestone for Peerless Trout First Nation on our continuing path to regain our rights and secure control over our own future. This agreement will deliver a complete transformation in the services and supports that we can provide for our Nation’s children and families, guided by our own First Nation law and our community’s collective vision for the well-being of our families.”

Chief Gilbert Okemow

“For generations, federal and provincial governments have systemically asserted policies that caused pain, hardship, and intergenerational trauma for First Nation children and their families. That’s finally starting to change. Today’s announcement represents another turning point for current and future generations of the Lubicon Lake Band, setting the stage for a brighter future grounded in our own law, our own vision, and our own path to heal our children and families.”

Chief Billy Joe Laboucan

“This agreement is truly groundbreaking. It enables Loon River First Nation to exit the provincial system and implement our own law, control our own funding at a level that ends decades of discrimination, and deliver a one-of-a-kind new child & family services program – one that was designed from the ground up by members of the Founding First Nations, and will be led by the Onikanew. Now we can truly focus on prevention, culture, language, health, wellness, and meaningful First Nation led services that help our families stay together, wherever they live, right across the province.

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Chief Ivan Sawan

“Founding First Nations are leading the way for their children and families by implementing their law, *Awaśak Wiyasiwêwin*. Historically, decades of colonial and racist policies have pulled families apart and undermined their ability to take care of their own children. By signing a trilateral coordination agreement with Alberta and Canada, Peerless Trout, Lubicon Lake, and Loon River will be able to take care of their children, as they have done for centuries, while remaining close to their family, culture and communities. Keeping children connected to their family, language and culture is foundational to getting the best start in life, and that is exactly what this coordination agreement does. Congratulations Founding First Nations on this exceptional work.”

The Honourable Patty Hajdu  
Minister of Indigenous Services

“This coordination agreement is an important step recognizing the Founding First Nations’ right to self-determination and their jurisdiction over childcare. First Nations know best how to care for their loved ones, and First Nations children should grow up in their home communities surrounded by their family, culture, and language. Singing this agreement not only promotes FFN’s sovereign rights, but also supports the protection of their children and cultures, so their communities thrive for generations to come. I would like to congratulate everyone who worked tirelessly to make this significant day possible. By working together, we are helping Indigenous children have the best chance in life, which all children in Canada deserve.”

The Honourable Marc Miller  
Minister of Crown–Indigenous Relations

“Children and youth flourish best when they have family and cultural connections. This historic agreement, led by the Founding First Nations, reinforces our mutual commitment to the safety and well-being of Indigenous children, youth and families.”

Mickey Amery  
Minister of Children’s Services

### Quick facts

- For most Indigenous children, Child and Family Services are provided under the legislation of the province or territory where the children and families reside.

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- On January 1, 2020, *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* (the Act) came into force. The Act affirms the inherent right to self-government of Indigenous Peoples, which includes jurisdiction over child and family services, provides a pathway for Indigenous communities to exercise jurisdiction over child and family services and sets out principles applicable, on a national level, to the provision of child and family services to Indigenous children.
- In November 2020, the Prime Minister announced over \$542 million in funding to advance First Nations, Inuit, and Métis engagement to co-develop the implementation of the Act and to support Indigenous communities and groups in building the capacity to establish their own child and family services systems.
- Through Budget 2021, the Government of Canada invested an additional \$73.6 million to be used over four years, starting in 2021–22, for additional resources to implement the Act.
- Through Budget 2022, the Government of Canada invested an additional \$87.3 million over three years, starting in 2022–23, to increase capacity building and funding for coordination agreement discussion tables to support the exercise of First Nations, Inuit and Métis jurisdiction in relation to child and family services.
- With funding announced in the *2022 Fall Economic Statement*, Budget 2023 also provides \$444.2 million over three years, starting in 2022–23, to support Peguis First Nation in Manitoba and Louis Bull Tribe in Alberta to exercise jurisdiction over their child welfare systems and make decisions about what is best for their children and families.

### Associated links

- [Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families](#)
- [Reducing the number of Indigenous children in care](#)
- [Notices and requests related to An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families](#)
- [More support to advance reform of services for Indigenous children and families](#)

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