

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Inaugural National Child Welfare Dialogue:**

Supporting Children, Youth & Families with Immigration and Settlement Needs

January 27-28, 2020  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada



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**PEEL CHILDREN'S AID**  
**FOUNDATION**



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## Introduction

Inaugural National Child Welfare Dialogue: Supporting Children, Youth & Families with Immigration and Settlement Needs

January 27-28, 2020  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada  
Senate of Canada and Westin Ottawa Hotel

The Inaugural National Child Welfare Dialogue conference, hosted by Peel CAS and The Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (CWICE), gathered 42 representatives of 12 provinces, territories and federal organizations together. On January 27, 2020, the Honourable Senator Victor Oh hosted a Senate Tour and Reception. Our speakers on the second day discussed the intersection of child welfare, immigration, settlement and international borders. Through a national roundtable dialogue, the focus remained on collective learning, awareness raising, partnership building and innovation in child welfare practice.

This significant event marked the first time senior child welfare leaders across Canada came together to discuss unresolved immigration and settlement needs for children, youth, and families within the child welfare sector. From legislation amendments, to innovative practices and collaborative service approaches, this executive summary provides an overview of the information presented across the two-day conference.

## Event Goals

The purpose of the gathering was to share information about current trends in the intersection of child welfare and immigration; seek expert feedback; and develop collaborative service practices. This was an opportunity to review the current trends, and identify opportunities for collaboration and partnership. Overall, our hope was to raise our collective understanding of the issues facing these very vulnerable children and youth, to ensure we are doing everything possible to meet their needs.



Senator Victor Oh (right) welcomes Rav Bains to the Senate of Canada building.

## Welcoming Remarks

### The Honourable Senator Victor Oh

“I have been an advocate for youth for some time. As a legislator, I have tried to do my part for our young people by making amendments to the federal Citizenship Act through Bill C6. I’ve been told by the CWICE that over 50 children, youth, and young adults, with the help of children’s aid societies, were able to achieve Canadian citizenship. This is wonderful news.

As a Senator, I will continue to support the hard work of Peel Children’s Aid Society and the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence. It is my hope that together we can make a positive impact across Canada, and that we all learn, so children and youth everywhere have access to the same outcome of citizenship.”

### Rav Bains, CEO, Peel CAS

“We at Peel CAS and CWICE are delighted to host this inaugural National Child Welfare Dialogue. Families involved with child welfare who have unresolved immigration status or

other citizenship issues, face unique challenges. With Canada’s busiest airport being located in our region, Peel CAS has developed considerable expertise over the years. We are often called to assist children and families who have just arrived in the country, and those who settle in our diverse region. We have worked hard over the past two decades to bring visibility to immigration status, to ensure these children and youth are visible in our child welfare system. It has taken many years to raise the profile of these very vulnerable children. Provincial and Federal coordination is critical to ensuring equitable outcomes for all children and youth, and we are pleased to support this important work with our colleagues from across the country. I would also like to recognize the incredible work of Danielle Ungara, Liz Okai, and Mary Beth Moellenkamp in organizing this first-of-its-kind National Dialogue.”

#### Key Messages:

- Your values, vision and mission are key to transforming
- Use data to inform your service delivery
- Focus on outcomes for children, youth and families
- Help make these invisible children and youth visible

**Overview of Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (CWICE)**



Mary Beth Moellenkamp, Service Director, Peel CAS

Established in 2018, CWICE is the first of its kind in Canada, focusing on service, research and sector-wide capacity building. As the centralized service in Ontario, CWICE supports child welfare organizations on cases involving immigration matters.

CWICE's role is to:

- assist the sector to better understand the impact of immigration/settlement issues on the children, youth and families we serve;
- ensure children and youth have immigration plans and pathways;
- promote proactive and responsive service to emerging immigration and settlement trends;
- encourage the sector to be accountable in ensuring equitable outcomes for children and youth;
- collaborate on research; and
- serve as a knowledge management centre to inform and build capacity in the sector.

We recognize that the issues faced in Ontario's child welfare system may be similar to those in other provinces – particularly surrounding providing services that meet the unique needs of children, youth, and families involved in child welfare with unresolved immigration and settlement needs.

**Demographics in Ontario and Peel Region**

Ontario	Peel Region
Population - 14.5 million	Over 1.4 million in Peel
47% of all migrants to Canada settle in Ontario	Over 50% of residents are racialized and over 50% are immigrants
Ontario has 2.3 million children	Peel has 11.8% of Ontario's children
50 child welfare organizations across Ontario	52% of neighbourhoods are low income
145,000 calls/referrals	English is a second language to 39% of residents
79,000 investigations	Approximately 1 in 5 people in Peel are children
10,000 children and youth in care	Approximately 210 children and youth in care; lowest per capita in province

Sources: Region of Peel: <https://www.peelregion.ca/planning/pdc/data/>  
 Government of Ontario: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-demographic-quarterly-highlights-first-quarter-2020>  
 OACAS: <http://www.oacas.org/childrens-aid-child-protection/facts-and-figures/>

**Key Messages:**

- Families don't come to our attention because of an immigration issue, however it can be a complicating factor in a family's ability to meet the needs of their children
- CWICE hopes all children and youth eligible for citizenship receive it - so they can finally feel like Canada is home
- Children and youth already face barriers in the child welfare system; unresolved status should not be one of them
- Child welfare must "think globally and act locally" to support these children and youth



**Panel Presentation & Discussion**

Moderated by: Danielle Ungara, CWICE Team Leader

Panelists (as pictured, L-R):

The distinguished panelists provided an overview of the work of their organizations. They were asked to identify the pressing issues facing children, youth, and families today and explore the intersection between child welfare and immigration/settlement or international borders. Presenters spoke about current trends, while highlighting issues on the horizon related to children, youth, and families.

- Global Affairs Canada (Sarah Filotas, Giuseppe Basile)
- Canada Border Services Agency (James Martin, John Helsdon)
- International Social Services (Sylvie Lapointe)
- Peel CAS (Mary Beth Moellenkamp)
- Indus Community Services (Gurpreet Malhotra)
- Ryerson University (Dr. Henry Parada)





## Global Affairs Canada



Sarah Filotas and Giuseppe Basile (Sarah Filotas pictured)

Global Affairs Canada provides timely and appropriate consular services for Canadians abroad, contributing to their safety and security.

Children and youth repatriated to Canada might be in various situations, such as:

- International parental abduction
- Children arrested or detained abroad
- Forced marriages or female genital mutilation/cutting abroad
- Youth and families in distress abroad
- Abandoned or orphaned children abroad
- Maltreatment of children abroad

### Current Trends:

- Diversity of Canada's population leading to more dual citizens and maintaining contact with countries of origin
- "Re-acculturation" facilities (also known as "boarding schools" in some countries)
- Canadian children who have never lived in Canada
- Canadians travelling with little access to mental health services
- 2SLGBTQ+ rights not being recognized in countries Canadians travel to
- Rapid technological changes impacting the complexity of consular work

### Top 5 countries with the most consular cases (2018 - 2019)

USA: 940

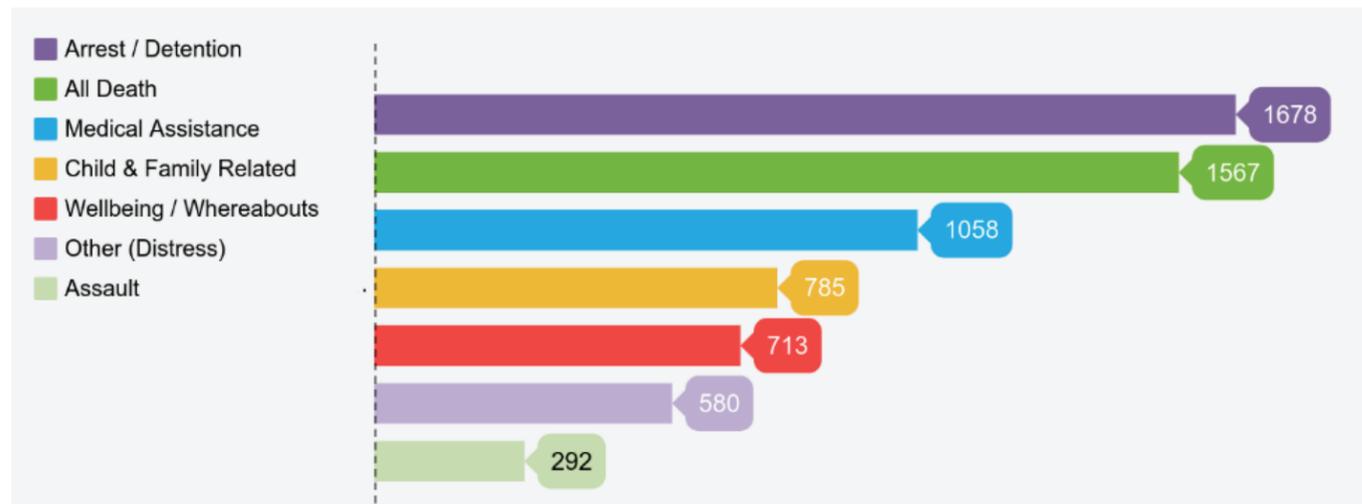
Mexico: 687

China: 400

Cuba: 270

Thailand: 214

### CONSULAR CASES – by type



Source: Global Affairs Canada (PowerPoint presentation)



## Canada Border Services Agency



James Martin and John Helsdon (James Martin pictured)

The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) is responsible for providing integrated border services that support national security and public safety.

The CBSA's mission is to ensure the security and prosperity of Canada by managing the access of people and goods to and from Canada. CBSA is dedicated to providing a safe and secure environment in cases involving unaccompanied migrant children.

### Key Messages: Removal Program

- The best interests of the child, the Hague Convention and the UN Rights of the Child provisions are considered even when removal is imminent.
- CBSA makes every effort to keep family units intact during the removal process.
- When an unaccompanied minor arrives at a point of entry, the primary concern of the officer is the safety of the minor.
- The CBSA will verify if the minor has family in Canada that is willing, able and capable of safely caring for the minor. If not, the unaccompanied minor will be referred to the provincial authorities and taken under the care of the youth protection services while they are being processed for immigration purposes.

### Key Messages: Detention System

- Fewer minors have been housed or detained since the release of the National Directive for the Detention or Housing of Minors (2017).
- When parents are detained, CBSA officers work with parents and child welfare authorities (as required) to assess what is in the best interests of the child.
- While alternatives to detention are always considered first, the vast majority of parents prefer their children to be housed with them at CBSA operated Immigration Holding Centres for families that have separate living and sleeping quarters; various needs are accommodated such as education, cribs, booster seats and diapers for families with very young children.

Detention statistics for 2012-2019 on minors are posted on the CBSA website.

<https://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/security-securite/detent/qstat-2018-2019-eng.html>





International Social Service Canada

Service Social International Canada

### International Social Services

Sylvie Lapointe



ISS Canada is a nonprofit organization which, for over 40 years, has mobilized our international network of social services agencies to protect and reunite children, individuals and families separated by borders.

ISS Canada has over 120 partners world wide and works with organizations across Canada. In 2018/19, ISS Canada received 571 referrals from across Canada and around the world.

ISS provides services that include:

- Inter-country casework (child welfare/protection)
- Child welfare checks (employment, adoption and foster care)
- Kinship assessments for overseas placements
- Guardianship (biological parent) assessments
- Documentation (birth and death certificates, previous files, etc.)
- Intercountry adoptions (when non-Hague)
- Deportation (arrange for services overseas)
- Search for roots (post adoption and wardship)

#### Key messages:

- ISS Canada identified future needs, including:
  - Continue data collection
  - Training workers
  - Collaboration between sectors to focus on the best interest of the child and/or their families



### Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (CWICE), Peel CAS

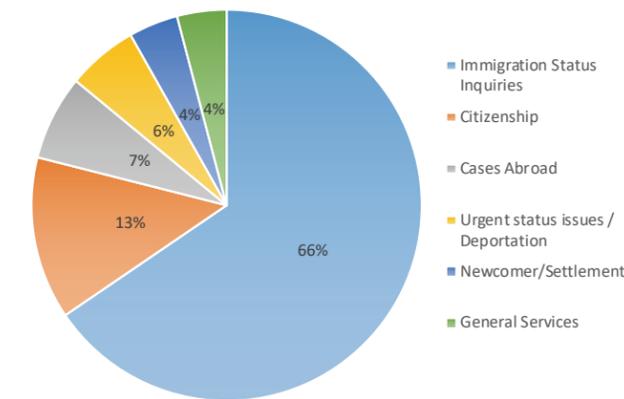
Mary Beth Moellenkamp

CWICE receives referrals for consultations and services, from across Ontario, on matters involving the intersection of child welfare and immigration/settlement issues.

We receive referrals from child welfare agencies, immigration and settlement partners or community members.

Service inquiries have included children/youth in kinship placements, former Crown Wards, adoption inquiries, and children/youth in extended society care (formerly called crown wardship).

CWICE Provincial Referrals by Type of Referral April 2019 to January 2020



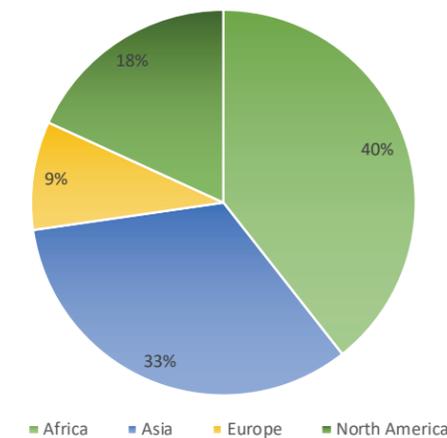
By the numbers (June 2018-January 2020):

- Actively assisting over 50 children, youth, and young adults regarding Canadian citizenship
- Responded to over 740 requests for CWICE service
- Delivered presentations to more than 2,400 individuals

#### Key messages

- As the leading program, and the first of its kind in Canada, CWICE is heavily grounded in child welfare practice.
- CWICE provides centralized services for child welfare in Ontario, short-term interventions where child welfare and immigration/settlement intersect.
- CWICE will continue to develop partnerships and protocols, collect data to facilitate research, and develop resources to build capacity across the sector.

Continent of Origin for Unaccompanied & Separated Minors April 2019-January 2020



## Indus Community Services



**Gurpreet Malhotra**

Indus Community Services provides culturally appropriate services to newcomers, families, women, and seniors.

Newcomer Services, such as language training classes, offer ideal opportunities to explain Canadian parenting values to newcomers in a safe environment. Many newcomers have difficulty finding appropriate child care, and barriers may include employment, discrimination and unresolved immigration status. Family service

counsellors routinely deal with newcomers trying to balance starting a new life with the demands of child welfare and related institutions.

“Silos between society’s support systems create delivery inefficiencies and inflict human pain. We see the problems on a regular basis but rarely can find anyone to listen.”

Cultural sensitivity is key to providing helpful supports for newcomers. For example, mental health resources provided by mainstream organizations often fail newcomers, refugees and their children – many cultures and languages do not have a term for mental health issues and therefore it is difficult to quantify.

International students are at risk when they lack well-funded programs and support systems. For example: a young couple, both aged 21, are away from home, marry and become pregnant. The local hospital charged them \$15,000 for the birth in cash upfront. They obtained support from their landlord, however no health department was able to offer post-partum or newborn care. As a result, both parents have dropped out and are now undocumented. Imagine their trajectory two or 10 years into the future.

Engaging residents, who are taxpayers and may be voters in provincial and federal elections is key to creating change. The 2016 Census found 434,000 South Asians lived in Peel Region (31%), with almost 1M across the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area. These eleven seats represent the balance of power in Ontario, and Brampton & Mississauga continue to be “key battle grounds” during elections.

### Key messages:

- Child welfare, health systems, and the settlement sector must understand that the best outcome for the child, family, and community lies in cross-sectoral supports that both ensure the best outcome and cost effectiveness.
  - Cross-sector example: On January 17, 2020, the SAATH-Together Project was endorsed by 90 local human service professionals across sectors. The SAATH project ties Indus’ Settlement and Family Counselling programs to the child welfare system, including its intake and processing systems.
- In many cultures, family is much more involved in decision making, and this may challenge our notion of individualism and privacy. Our systems must understand this to build trust and increase success.

## Ryerson University



**Dr. Henry Parada**

Intersecting Mandates for the Best Interest of the Child

It is important to build into child welfare policy a holistic understanding of immigration and settlement that makes families, rather than individuals, the unit of analysis and practice. This could occur through adopting a family-centered approach when conceiving, designing, and delivering settlement services and in child welfare.

To map institutional practices, determine the entry points for families in settlement processes, child protection systems, mental health processes and educational systems. Identify rules and regulations (laws, standards); administrative practices (how to implement regulations), resources available, linkages (within the institution and with other institutions); accountability; education and training; concepts and theories (including language, categories, assumptions, and philosophical frameworks that impact the way employees think, talk and write about cases).

### Key Messages:

- Use cultural brokers to mediate between newcomers and institutions of different cultural backgrounds, and to facilitate service provision in school settings.
- Develop an evaluation and outcomes measurement framework in collaboration with the service sector.
- Approach and deliver health and mental health services in a gender, race, and culture sensitive framework that allows for intersectionality.



## Child Welfare National Roundtable Dialogue

Facilitated by Danielle Ungara and Liz Okai, CWICE Team Leaders



### Roundtable Discussion

The afternoon roundtable included senior child welfare representatives from 12 of 13 provinces and territories. This first-ever national dialogue, on the intersection of child welfare and immigration, was a coast-to-coast review of child welfare service structure currently, an assessment of trends and challenges, and a discussion on strategies, opportunities and commitments to lead us into the future collectively.

Representatives attempted to identify opportunities for collaboration and partnership on a national scale.

### Summary of roundtable updates from the provinces and territories:

- Yukon** has been seeing increasing diversity in communities and they are moving from protection to enhancement. They have implemented a new computer system and will begin focusing on data. Challenges include families with different parenting approaches, and newcomers to the community arriving through employer sponsorship programs. They support moving beyond structured planning to use cross cultural understanding.
- British Columbia** has seen many immigration trends over the decades, particularly with their ports. These situations have often been unplanned and required large scale responses by communities. Trends include international adoptions between Japan and Canada; re-homing adoptions; and repatriation of Canadian citizens. Some of these have intersected with child welfare due to forced marriages, honour crimes, or deportations. Additionally, there are cases involving the USA, which can be complex. They support the idea of gathering more data on foreign nationals and identifying trends.
- North West Territories** offer service in 11 official languages, with people from 33 distinct Indigenous communities. They are seeing increasing immigration and trends suggest that these families are being referred for service. There are no policies at this time, and they are in need of interpretation, cultural awareness training and legal expertise.
- Alberta** is the designated authority under the Hague Convention to delegate and mandate referrals. They work with federal agencies for child welfare case management or international adoptions. The challenges they've encountered surround: placements of children or youth abroad who return due to abuse/neglect, children not having immigration status or citizenship, challenges in collecting data, and supporting placements with family – considering adoption versus kinship placements.
- Saskatchewan** child welfare works well with one settlement organization and have implemented the SWIS program (Settlement Workers In Schools). Their communities are becoming more diverse, with larger families and may have placement challenges. Overall, they identify they will need more supports, particularly with languages, and increasing knowledge for child welfare workers.
- Nunavut** has 25 fly-in communities and many regional offices providing child welfare services across the territory. Their population is predominantly Inuit, however there is visible diversity within the community. The trend is an absence of data, however in practice, they are also seeing international adoptions across the polar regions (ie. Russia, Denmark, USA, Canada).
- Manitoba** identified they had newcomer teams in 2011, after assessing the intersection between immigration and child welfare. Through evaluation of the program, it was determined that capacity was centralized and so the teams were disbanded in 2019. The service needs continue and will determine how to share knowledge versus specialization.
- Ontario** has a unique approach – the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) and Peel CAS formed the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence in 2018. The CWICE is a centralized consultation centre for matters involving the intersection of child welfare and immigration. As the first of its kind, CWICE is a thought leader in Canada on these matters and is developing training for the child welfare sector and partner sectors.
- PRAIDA in Quebec** provided an overview of the services for children and families arriving in the province. They provide immigration support and work alongside their counterparts in child welfare. PRAIDA worked with 72 unaccompanied and separated minors in 2018. They offer temporary housing due to increasing flows of migration over their border from the USA. Training and education, when dealing with refugees or separated minors, is needed. They support the idea of building a national protocol.
- Nova Scotia** updated that the province has seen increasing migration, particularly in Halifax. They have worked to build community engagement and networks with African Nova Scotians. There are Indigenous child welfare organizations with dedicated services. They see the need for language and legal services, and gathering of information earlier, particularly from out of country as needed. They recently updated their internal practices – regulations and policies – regarding identity needs of children and youth.
- Prince Edward Island** has been seeing increased immigration in the community. It is not having a significant impact on service, with staff seeing the intersection between the sectors every few months. They spoke about these cases involving a lot of learning 'as-you-go' and educating families on the recommended parenting approaches in Canada.
- Newfoundland** noted that there is no tracking or data that is collected or available for the immigration status for children and youth in care. Currently, even ethnicity reporting is considered optional in practice unless children or youth are Indigenous.

## Key Commitments: Pull Together, Work Together

Throughout the discussion about next steps, each province and territory agreed to key commitments to implement over the upcoming year.

In addition, several themes emerged and enabled collective commitments. Of the utmost significance, there were 3 areas of overlap resulting in key commitments and 3 unanimous commitments led to endorsement by all delegates.

### Key Commitments and Endorsements:

#### 1. Support for streamlining a national child welfare practice response

- Several provinces and territories requested that CWICE support the sector through advocacy, and assist in streamlining processes across provinces to deal with collective service needs and challenges.

#### 2. Support for increased use of identity data collection

- Several provinces spoke of the lack of identity-based data, particularly surrounding immigration and citizenship status.

#### 3. Child welfare sector knowledge and capacity building

- Several provinces and territories supported sharing resources and information to increase knowledge. CWICE committed to sharing a conference summary for all delegates and participants, and will communicate future opportunities for learning and knowledge sharing.

#### 4. Endorsement for CWICE consultation and service

- Several provinces and territories decided to explore using CWICE services to support their work with children, youth and families experiencing the intersection with child welfare and immigration.

#### 5. Endorsement: All provincial and territorial delegates reviewed and endorsed use of the UNHCR's definition for Unaccompanied and Separated Minors:

- “Unaccompanied Minors” are children under 18 years of age who have been separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible to do so<sup>1</sup>. “Separated children” are defined as children under 18 years of age who are separated from both parents or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver<sup>2</sup>. (November 2001. Trends in Unaccompanied and Separated Children Seeking Asylum in Europe, 2000. Division of Operational Support, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org>).
- <sup>1</sup> Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care, UNHCR Geneva, 1994.
- <sup>2</sup> Report of the Secretary-General to the United Nations General Assembly on Protection and assistance to unaccompanied and separated refugee children, 7 September 2001 (A/56/333).

#### 6. Endorsement: All provincial and territorial delegates unanimously decided to return to discuss updates and progress toward individual provincial goals annually.

*Thanks to participants, delegates, panelists and speakers!*

## Survey feedback from participants

At the end of the event, 18 participants provided feedback in an online survey. Press the Play button below for a video with more participant feedback.

### 100% of participants felt:

- CWICE has expertise in unresolved immigration and settlement needs in the child welfare sector
- The information presented in the panel discussion was timely and relevant to their work
- The round table discussion represented voices from various organizations, provinces, and territories
- They would attend a similar dialogue event, or/and would bring a colleague

### The information presented that was most helpful in their work:

- Understanding the capacity CWICE has for providing services and knowledge about child welfare, immigration and associated issues
- The national resources, and common themes across all provinces
- How complicated this subject is, and the range of expertise required
- Sharing information that helps us understand where we are, and ideas of what could be done
- The diverse background of the panelists, all experiencing common program delivery challenges
- The variety of agencies helping Unaccompanied and Separated Minors, which reveals the necessity of a centralized service such as CWICE

### Examples of participants' commitments from this session:

- Bring back policies and resources presented by CWICE
- Maintain relationships and seek assistance from CWICE
- Raise awareness at their organization/provincial and national tables using CWICE resources
- Work towards development of national and provincial protocols, policies and service models, continuing conversations that started at this panel
- Advocate for collection of better and more standardized data and information



## **CWICE Contact**

To learn more or to make a referral

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