

**Question and Answer Briefing Note -Spring 2005**  
**Department of Health and Community Services**

**Title:** Child Protection in Labrador

**Issue:** The media and the Child and Youth Advocate have raised questions about the enforcement of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* in Labrador. In May 2004, a [REDACTED] year old girl was held in a tent and assaulted in [REDACTED]. The Health Labrador Corporation Operational Review in 2003 identified the need for an additional 25 social workers in the region. Innu leadership have called for a greater focus on the needs of children in their communities.

**Anticipated Question(s):**

- What is Government doing to ensure that children and youth in Labrador are safe?
- Is Government enforcing the *Child, Youth & Family Services Act* to its full extent in aboriginal communities?
- What has Government done to address the need for social workers in Labrador:

**Key message:**

- Government is very concerned about the needs of Innu children. The Department of Health and Community Services (DHCS) and the Health Labrador Corporation (HLC) are working with the community service providers and leaders, as well as federal partners, including Health Canada (HC) and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC) to address the unique social and cultural challenges of delivering child protection services in aboriginal communities.
- *Government recently announced an additional \$250,000 to permanently hire three additional social workers in Natuashish and other aboriginal communities.*
- *This builds on the \$500,000 commitment made in Budget 2004 for an additional five social work positions.* New social worker positions have been filled in Hopedale, Makovik, Nain and Happy Valley-Goose Bay.
- The region has hired a Director of Child, Youth & Family Services for the communities of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish. The Director is working with staff, other service agencies and community leaders to improve the delivery of Child, Youth & Family Services in the Innu communities.
- In 2003, the HLC recruited two social workers to reside and work in the community of Natuashish. This was the first time in four years that social workers were resident in the community.
- Two additional social workers were also added to the staff complement in the Sheshatshiu office.
- The Province renewed the bilateral agreement with the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs for funding to provide child, youth and family services to Natuashish and Sheshatshiu. The Province continues to actively pursue additional monies from the federal government to improve services in these communities.



**Other Suggested Response(s):**

- My Department is working to promote cooperation and collaboration among all partners including the community, HLC, and other provincial and federal partners to achieve both short and long term solutions.
- My Department and the HLC are working with the community of Sheshatshiu to re-develop a group home in the community to serve the needs of youth involved in the youth corrections and child, youth and family services programs.
- Representatives of the two Innu communities, including both Chief Qupee and Chief Pokue met with the Minister's Advisory Committee on the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* to discuss the needs of children in their communities.
- The HLC is working to provide training for social workers and access to the client tracking and information system used in other parts of the province by social workers.
- Government plans to continue building on the progress to date as it works with all partners in addressing the complex issues of providing services to children and youth in the Labrador region.

**Background:**

- The provision of child, youth and family services in Labrador presents challenges due to the unique social, cultural and language differences in the region. Geography and isolation, as well as acceptance of social workers in some communities, has made recruitment and retention of social workers difficult.
- In 2003, the Operational Review of the HLC identified the need for 25 additional social workers in the region. Additional resources have been introduced on an incremental basis and HLC has been successful in its recruitment efforts to date. Government will continue to build on these resources.
- HLC, DHCS, DLAA and other Government Departments meet with HC and INAC on a regular basis to continue discussions on the Innu Comprehensive Healing Strategy. Key focus areas include: addictions, mental health, maternal/child health, community health planning and rural secretariat initiatives.
- Work on the devolution of child, youth and family services to the Innu have not moved forward since the 2004 Band Councils and Innu Nation elections.