

# **NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION**

BARRIERS TO ID: PRIORITIES AND  
PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

**2023-2024**



Nishnawbe Aski Nation  
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# Barriers to Identification in Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Territory

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### ISSUE STATEMENT

NAN members continue to experience barriers to birth registration and obtaining birth certificates resulting in challenges in accessing health, social, education, employment and housing programs, federal and provincial benefits and obtaining status cards, driver's licenses, bank accounts and air transportation.

In 2019, in a letter to former Minister of Government and Consumer Services (MGCS), NAN identified the following barriers in obtaining ID:

- Lack of dedicated hospital staff to facilitate birth registrations
- Both parents needing to be present to register a live birth online
- Online registration process and internet accessibility
- Legal guardianship is required to apply for a child's birth certificate
- Cost of payment and method of payment
- Mismatched dates between different forms or supporting identification
- Misspelled names due to translation errors and/or anglicized names and language
- Language and wording of instructions on applications, online webpages, over the telephone and through correspondence from Vital Statistic Registry Branch

NAN has identified the following priority areas for action:

- Improving access to ServiceOntario services
- Eliminating fee barriers for delayed birth registrations and birth certificates
- Recognition and acceptance of kinship arrangements and First Nation adoption practices
- Supporting NAN First Nation led solutions to build long term success and positive outcomes



## TIMELINE OF COMMITMENTS AND WORK TO DATE

2019

NAN urged the former Minister of Government and Consumer Services to act on systemic barriers resulting in a significant number of children in NAN communities without a registered birth and subsequent birth certificate.

In response, the former Minister committed to working with NAN to find long term and sustainable solutions to the challenges facing NAN members.

2020

A multi-party table was formed with nine department leads from federal/provincial governments, NAN and Tribal Councils to develop a collaborative approach to address barriers to ID.

A staff-level sub-working group of the multi-party table was created between Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery (MPBSD), Indigenous Affairs Ontario (IAO) and NAN to develop joint recommendations for ministerial review based on the data and information gathered through the work of the multi-party table.

2022

IAO committed funding to host ID clinics as an interim measure and to provide further data on the effectiveness of First Nation-led processes.

MPBSD provided training and support to community based workers.

NAN successfully hosted ID clinics in seven NAN communities, resulting in a significant number of birth registrations, delayed birth registrations, birth certificates, and health cards.

## PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

### 1. EXPAND NAN FIRST NATION-LED COMMUNITY ID CLINICS

To address the barriers of access to services, pilot ID clinics were hosted by NAN, Matawa Tribal Council and Keewaytinook Okimakanak Board of Education (KOBÉ) and supported by the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery's (MPBSD) Vital Statistic Registry Branch and Indigenous Affairs Ontario (IAO). The ID clinics were highly successful and resulted in 948 applications being completed within seven NAN First Nation communities. NAN received positive feedback by both the ID clinic teams and community members. Even though a high number of applications were completed, most of the communities requested additional clinics as not all members were available. There was a need to provide follow up clinics to assist community members who received a request from the Vital Statistic Registry Branch regarding incomplete applications.

*NAN expects that ongoing community ID Clinics will be a critical component of the long-term solutions to addressing the barriers to ID and that these clinics should be cost-free for NAN and NAN community members.*

The Pilot ID Clinic Report 2022-2023 is attached and provides further details on lessons learned and recommendations to expand the ID clinics to all 49 NAN First Nations; however, additional clinics are needed to help address the “backlog” and that processes must be First Nation-led with the necessary capacity and culturally appropriate supports in place.

The success of the pilot ID clinics is due to the collaboration of all the partners and communities and the commitment to explore new approaches through First Nation led models that provide opportunities for increased capacity and culturally appropriate supports. There is great potential to further build on the work of all the partners and leverage additional partnerships within other ministries and organizations.

## **2. ELIMINATE FEES**

Although fees associated with birth certificates and delayed birth certificates may seem minimal, payment of fees continues to have a significant impact on families living in NAN territory. In addition, many individuals do not have access to a bank account or credit card, which is required for online birth certificate applications, or cheques required for mail-in applications. Fees associated with identity documents were covered through funding from IAO, rather than placing the financial burden on parents and families. A fee waiver is critical to overcome barriers to access, as part of future ID clinics and beyond.

*A fee waiver is proposed for delayed registrations of birth and birth certificates for members of Northern First Nations. NAN is proposing that this fee waiver be in place permanently for all NAN members.*

## **3. RECOGNIZE CUSTOM ADOPTION**

During the pilot ID clinics several kinship and First Nation adoption practices were encountered which provided additional hardships on families. Kinship and First Nation adoption practices must be recognized and accepted as integral to the culture, values and traditions of NAN First Nations and protocols need to be put in place to ensure those families can secure a child’s identity documents and access associated benefits.

*Customary/kinship care and First Nation adoption protocols must be recognized and accepted through a letter from the Chief of the First Nation as an interim measure until government policies are in place.*

## **NEED FOR FIRST NATION LED SOLUTIONS**

To ensure that ID services are culturally appropriate and account for unique situations not commonly experienced outside of remote First Nations, it is essential to support community-led approaches and provide direct ID services in communities. This includes ensuring support for individuals' first languages and understanding of complex situations, such as births occurring on planes, parent/parents who are deceased, grandparents as caregivers and impacts of ongoing trauma.

Feedback from the seven NAN communities participating in the pilot ID Clinics indicated members were grateful and appreciative of being able to access clinics in their own community and were very happy when they received ID, such as their child's birth certificate.

## **NAN'S OVERALL PERSPECTIVES**

The additional program and policy support contemplated in this paper, including implementing elimination of fees, and taking the necessary steps to recognize custom adoption, will enable further improved access to identity documents in NAN communities.

The support and commitment of MPBSD and IAO has been instrumental in the development of the Proposed Action Plan. The MPBSD's Vital Statistic Registry Branch was key to the success of the pilot ID clinics and worked with NAN and the ID Navigators at Matawa and KOBE to ensure NAN members were able to secure ID. The relationships that have been developed and opportunities to learn from each other needs to be recognized as a successful and effective approach to finding solutions and eliminating barriers.



# Proposed Action Plan to Address Barriers to Ontario Birth Registration and Certificates in Nishnawbe Aski Nation Territory

## CONTEXT

Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) is a political territorial organization representing 49 First Nation communities within northern Ontario. It represents the legitimate, socioeconomic, and political aspirations of its First Nation members of Northern Ontario to all levels of government to allow local self-determination while establishing spiritual, cultural, social, and economic independence.

First Nations members living on reserve, especially in Northern Ontario communities, continue to experience barriers to birth registration and access to birth certificates. This results in challenges in accessing a range of health, social, education, employment and housing programs, services, and benefits as well as challenges to obtaining status cards, driver's licences, bank accounts and air transportation.

The barriers identified in this document are based on the lived experiences of NAN members living in northern Ontario First Nation communities and create drivers for change. For example, the experience of NAN members is that the modernization of the online birth registration process and other online services do not reflect the unique impacts to remote First Nations and has resulted in a disconnect with the cultural approaches within First Nation communities, and unnecessary hardships for parents, caregivers, and their children. Ontario's commitments to modernizing service delivery in the province and ensuring all people who live in Ontario have access to improved, consistent, and safe services cannot be achieved so long as some of the most vulnerable people living in Ontario are not able to access the ID they need and the services to which they are entitled.

This document provides additional context, details the collaborative work undertaken by NAN and the Ministries of Public and Business Service Delivery (MPBSD) and Indigenous Affairs (IAO) and identifies key actions to address the barriers to ID. Recognizing the unique challenges that NAN communities face, it is essential that any actions taken to address the barriers to ID be First Nation-led and align with the cultures, customs, and traditions of each affected community.



## HISTORY

Barriers to accessing government issued identification (ID) is a long-standing issue in NAN territory. In 1995, NAN Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 95/12 Delayed Birth Registration mandating NAN Executive Council to enter into discussions with the Office of the Registrar General to access resources to deal with the issue. In 2007, NAN Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 07/42 Birth Registration/Document Blitz to address systemic barriers and develop strategies to address the situation.

In 2009, with the assistance of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, a table was convened to develop and implement long term and sustainable solutions to improve access to government services in remote communities, beginning with birth registration and birth certificates. With the assistance of Service Canada, between August 2009 and July 2010, 68 birth registrations, 1,432 birth certificates and 170 delayed birth registrations were completed. In 2013, changes to ministry leads resulted in the table no longer continuing. In October 2019, former NAN Deputy Grand Chief Walter Naveau wrote to the former Minister of Government and Consumer Services urging the Minister to act on systemic barriers resulting in a significant number of children in NAN communities without a registered birth and subsequent birth certificate. He identified the following barriers:

- Lack of dedicated hospital staff to facilitate birth registrations
- Both parents needing to be present to register a live birth (online)
- Online registration process and internet accessibility
- Legal guardianship is required to apply for a child's birth certificate
- Cost of payment and method of payment
- Mismatched dates between different forms of supporting identification
- Misspelled names due to translation errors or anglicized names and language
- Language and wording of instructions on forms, online webpages, over the telephone, and through correspondence

In response, the former Minister committed to working with NAN to find long term and sustainable solutions to the challenges facing NAN members.

**As well, there was an urgency to address Seven Youth Inquest (SYI) Recommendation 78, whereby youth experience barriers due to lack of appropriate ID.**

*"In order to assist First Nations students who move to Thunder Bay to attend secondary school, the Ontario Ministries of Education, Children and Youth, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Health and Long-Term Care and Community and Social Services should work with Canada, the Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board, the City of Thunder Bay and First Nation communities and organizations to support a well-coordinated suite of housing, income, recreation and health services and supports to assist students in accessing supports and services."*



In 2020, a multi-party technical table was formed with nine leads from federal/ provincial governments, NAN, and Tribal Councils to undertake an in-depth analysis of the barriers to accessing ID. A staff-level sub-working group of the multi-party table was also created between the MPBSD, IAO, and NAN to develop joint recommendations for Ministerial review based on the data and information gathered through the work of the multi-party table.

### **KEY ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE MULTI-PARTY TABLE INCLUDE:**

- Building and fostering relationships with First Nation partners and across government to explore practical, sustainable solutions to address the unique needs of Northern Ontario communities.
- Sharing information and updates related to Ontario services that modeled successful services in communities, such as the Ministry of Transportation's G1 Driver's test available in three Indigenous languages and ServiceOntario's Newborn Registration Refresh.
- Collaborating on research such as a jurisdictional scan on birth registration and birth certificate processes across Canada.
- Co-developing options for data analysis to support evidence-based decision making and to better determine population data for NAN communities.

To address these barriers, NAN identified the following priority areas. These priorities align with the unique circumstances in remote First Nations communities, as well as adhere to cultural approaches within First Nation communities, where it is a foundational principle that families are directly supported by the community in accessing government services. Given the range of barriers identified, the solutions will require a combination of different options, supported by a range of ministries:

- 1. Improving access to ServiceOntario services (online, in-person, and by telephone)**
- 2. Eliminating fee barriers for delayed registrations of birth and birth certificates**
- 3. Recognizing customary care/ kinship service/ First Nation custom adoption caregivers when applying for birth certificates**
- 4. Supporting local, First Nation-led initiatives, such as community, Tribal Council and NAN ID navigators**

In 2022, NAN Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum met with Deputy Ministers from IAO and MPBSD to discuss continued commitment to support ongoing work. At this time, IAO committed funding to host ID clinics as an interim measure and to provide further data on the effectiveness of these First Nation-led processes. The ID Clinic pilot project was funded by IAO and fully supported by MPBSD. MPBSD and NAN worked together to provide training to community based/Tribal Council staff in preparation for hosting ID clinics in seven communities to support families in registering births and applying for identification documents. The ID clinics provided an opportunity for further learning of the effectiveness of on the ground solutions to addressing barriers to ID. Overall, the ID clinics were successful due to the following:

- The two Tribal Councils had ID navigator positions in place who were also commissioners and could sign affidavits for delayed birth registrations.
- MPBSD Vital Statistics Registry Branch staff were available via phone during the community clinics to answer questions and assist with complex applications.
- MPBSD Vital Statistics Registry Branch staff screened children/youth prior to the clinics to determine if they were already registered, which circumvented delays.
- Trained community-based workers provided translation services when required and assisted in providing family background information because they knew the families.
- All fees associated with birth registrations, ID applications, and travel costs were paid through IAO funding.
- Community-led and designed approaches were implemented which were reflective of each community's unique culture and traditions.

582 birth related applications and 366 children and adult health cards were completed in seven NAN First Nation communities, resulting in a total of 948 applications. The largest community had a population of 865 members according to the 2016 Census.

There continues to be a demand for additional clinics from the participating communities as some members were not able to attend the initial clinic and/or did not have the required documentation. Several applications were not processed by MPBSD's Vital Statistic Registry Branch as applications required further information and follow-up clinics are required. As well, several applications were sent to Manitoba Vital Statistics and, to date, it has been difficult to follow up on the status of these applications.

## **BIRTH REGISTRATION AND BIRTH CERTIFICATES**

### **BACKGROUND**

Birth registration in Ontario is typically a self-serve process that is completed by the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) online using Ontario's Newborn Registration Service, or by mail or courier using a paper Ontario Statement of Live Birth form. Birth registration is foundational to access other documents and services. This service is offered free of charge if the registration is completed within the first year of the child's birth.

Currently in Ontario, to register the birth of a child, an applicant must be:

- the child's parent(s); or
- the person(s) with lawful custody of the child (person with decision-making responsibility).

If a child's birth is not registered within one year, the registration is considered delayed, regardless of the amount of time that has elapsed beyond the one year. This requires a different application form, and a \$50 fee applies.

A birth certificate is an extract of the birth registration and has a fee of \$25-\$35 (for regular service), depending on the type of certificate ordered (i.e., birth certificate, birth certificate with parental information, or certified copy of a birth registration).

### **TO APPLY FOR AN ONTARIO BIRTH CERTIFICATE, A PERSON MUST BE:**

- the subject of the registration (at least 13 years old).
- a parent named on the birth registration.
- a person with lawful custody of the child (proof of custody is required – i.e., court order); or
- have care for the child where a Children's Aid Society (CAS) has set up a kinship service or formal customary care arrangement for kin/community members to care for a child on a temporary basis and the birth parent signed a third-party authorization form.

Online transactions, such as a birth certificate application or the Newborn Registration Service with birth certificate, can only be completed using an electronic payment by Visa, Visa Debit, Mastercard, Debit Mastercard, or Interac Online. Cheques or Money Orders are only accepted for applications submitted by mail. Without a birth registration and a birth certificate, an individual cannot access federal benefits such as the Canada Child Tax benefit, Canada Education Savings Program, Canada Pension, or Old Age Security. In addition, an individual cannot obtain documents that prove eligibility to access privileges or programs, such as a driver's licence, health card or securing a status card which limits access to essential services, education, employment, benefits and supports.

There have been instances where Ontario has waived the fees associated with an identification product. To date, this has included the fee for changing sex designation on a birth registration, which has been permanently eliminated to make it easier for trans, non-binary, and two-spirit individuals to ensure that their foundational identification aligns with their identity. As well, the Birth Certificate Fee Waiver Program supports individuals who are marginally housed or experiencing homelessness to apply for a birth certificate at no cost. The program is administered by not-for-profit organizations across the province that serve this population, including several in First Nation communities. Further, fee waivers are currently in place for five years, ending July 2027, for Residential School Survivors and their families seeking to reclaim traditional names that were changed by the residential school system in response to a Call to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

# NAN IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES AND PROPOSED ACTIONS

## 1. Improving access to ServiceOntario services (online, in-person, and by telephone)

A significant number of NAN members are not able to apply for birth certificates, and therefore status cards, and other identity-related products and services. Exact numbers are difficult to determine. However, the *Nishnawbe Aski Nation Barriers to ID Analysis Report, January 2021* from the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis (a socio-economic research, and data firm) estimated 1,939 NAN members without birth certificates and \$2.1 million in lost federal child benefits.

MPBSD and IAO also conducted analysis of regional birth registration data trends using Forward Sortation Areas (FSAs) in NAN communities as part of an evidence base to better understand resource implications of various potential policy options related to the work. The trends indicated that between 2006-2019, the number of incomplete registrations increased by over 200%. Additional analysis was conducted on census population data to establish that this increase was not driven by population growth within NAN FSAs. The trend highlights unique challenges in accessing ID faced by parents within NAN FSAs.

Each of NAN's 49 communities have distinct challenges and considerations when it comes to access to services. In remote communities, access and availability challenges are present across the continuum of care and impact all levels and types of services, including core services, specialized services, and culturally relevant services. Chronic underfunding of services for First Nations children and families has contributed to stark inequities and a lack of supports. Large travel distances and lack of affordable transportation poses another barrier for children, youth, and families in accessing services. Significant travel distances also can contribute to geographic and social isolation. Service frameworks that are designed for Southern and/or urban contexts do not reflect the realities of Northern, rural, and remote First Nations. Where traditional languages are spoken and English is not the first language, comprehension and understanding of the application process both paper and online becomes yet another barrier. Some examples of unique challenges include:

### REQUIRED TRAVEL TO OTHER COMMUNITIES TO GIVE BIRTH

In Ontario, when using the Newborn Registration System, all parents must be present at the computer or device to certify the birth and agree they are a parent of the child and that their particulars will be included on the child's birth registration. Similarly, with a paper Statement of Live Birth form, all parents must physically sign the form.

People who live in NAN communities often need to access medical birthing facilities in an urban centre. In some cases, only the birth parent can travel to the urban centre, while the other parent(s) sometimes must stay in the community due to policies within Non-Insured Health benefits, space limitations on the airplane, employment requirements, or childcare needs of other children. As a result, the birth parent leaves the urban medical facility and returns to the community with their newborn having either certified the birth without the other parent(s) (and related particulars) or without certifying the birth at all.

If another parent(s) needs to be added to a birth registration after the birth has been registered, an application to add a parent to a registration must be filed by both parents. The fee to add a parent to a birth registration is \$22.

## LIMITED ACCESS TO PAPER FORMS

Ontario's online Newborn Registration Service is used by most parents to register the birth of their child. Parents can also complete a paper application and submit it by mail. The Vital Statistics Registry Branch within MPBSD does not regularly provide communities, municipalities, or organizations with a supply of printed versions of the forms required to register a birth or apply for a birth certificate. Paper forms are available upon request by telephone which need to be mailed out and are also available for download/print at Ontario's Central Forms Repository. Where First Nations have limited internet access or limited access to a printer this can create barriers to access.

## INTERNET LIMITATIONS

Per IAO's Business Intelligence and Data Analytics Unit, "62% of households in NAN communities have access to only 5 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload internet speeds". These internet speeds are considered slow and are far below the minimum 50 Mbps download threshold established by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission. Many NAN households do not have access to internet in their primary residence or devices required to connect to the internet.

While the province has made investments and commitments to improving access to reliable, highspeed internet, there are still areas of the province that remain underserved, including communities in NAN.

## LACK OF IN-PERSON SUPPORT AND ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

Follow-up correspondence sent via post from MPBSD's Vital Statistics Registry Branch is also a challenge for individuals or families who do not have a fixed address or where English is not the first language. The current ServiceOntario Customer Care Call Centre escalation process for vital events inquiries also involves many steps, multiple staff, and callbacks for most escalations. This process is a challenge for anyone who does not have access to a personal or residential telephone.

Additionally, regulatory evidentiary requirements can pose challenges. For example, a delayed registration of birth requires the services of a commissioner, and to register a birth that occurred without a physician or registered midwife present, additional information may be required.

Spelling of names on applications not matching other documents has been cited as a frequent issue, often due to changes in how family members spell names over time, or due to translation errors or anglicized names and language, resulting in challenges when offering corroborating evidence for birth registration and birth certificates.

**Proposed Action #1-1:** NAN is proposing full implementation of the ID clinics based on the learnings and successful outcomes of the Pilot ID clinics. Continued partnerships and collaboration with MPBSD, IAO and other partners will be key for continued success. First Nation led and regionally specific approaches will be more responsive to the needs of children and families and enhance capacity within communities for efficient and effective access and delivery of ID services.

**Proposed Action #1-2:** MPBSD is proposing to partner with organizations such as NAN to explore sustainable, community-based alternative service delivery solutions to bring ServiceOntario services directly into various First Nation communities. This will build on work that is underway in partnership with organizations such as the Kenora District Services Board, the Township of Pickle Lake, and North Shore Tribal Council, taking a community-based approach in co-designing a service delivery solution that fits the community's needs.

## **2. Eliminating fee barriers for delayed registrations of birth and birth certificates**

NAN has made several calls to action and state of emergency requests regarding housing, health, social, and education crises. Of the First Nation peoples living in Ontario in 2021, 17% lived in a low-income household, compared with 9.9% of the non-First Nation population. First Nation people were also more likely than the non-First Nation population to be living in a dwelling that needed major repairs (14.4% versus 5.4%) or live in crowded housing (13.2% versus 11.7%). Many First Nations families live below the poverty line and recent increases in fuel, food, and utility costs has only exacerbated the issue, making it even harder to meet basic needs. Although fees may seem minimal to most, they have a significant impact on families. Many individuals do not have access to a bank account and by extension a credit card, which is required for online birth certificate applications, or cheques required for mail-in applications.

**Proposed Action #2:** Waive fees associated with delayed birth registration and birth certificate applications for Northern First Nations communities indefinitely.

MPBSD acknowledges that many Northern First Nations residents face a barrier to accessing birth certificates or delayed birth registrations due to the associated fees and payment options. The Ministry is committed to undertaking a review of a potential fee waiver and as indicated in the next steps section, notes that changes to fees (including waivers and elimination) are subject to approval by the Government of Ontario.

## **3. Recognizing customary care/ kinship service/ First Nation custom adoption caregivers when applying for birth certificates**

Customary care is an important care option for First Nations children who are not able to remain with their immediate family. It is a family-based care model reflective of the culture, values and traditions of the child's parents and community. It recognizes that members of the child's immediate and extended family and community share responsibility in the provision of care to a child, who needs or may need protection.

Unfortunately, due to impacts of residential schools and intergenerational trauma, many grandparents are caring for one or more children. The 2021 Census found that 2.5% of First Nation children in Ontario (aged 14 and under) were living with at least one grandparent and without parents, compared to just 0.5% of non-First Nation children.

Understanding the enormity of the process and cost in applying for a parenting order and/or decision-making responsibility order within the context of families living in remote First Nations is a significant barrier and understandably deters a grandparent or family member from pursuing legal custody.

**Proposed Action #3:** Customary/kinship care and First Nation adoption protocols must be recognized and accepted through a process identified by the First Nation as an interim measure until longer term policy change is in place. NAN and the federal government have signed an Agreement-in-Principle regarding long-term reform of First Nation Child Welfare which can assist in informing the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) and MPBSD of potential longer-term policy changes within the scope of the existing vital events legislation.

MCCSS administers the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA), which is an Ontario law that governs child welfare, residential care, adoption, Indigenous child and family services, among other programs and services. MPBSD will work with MCCSS, NAN and IAO to identify and implement short and longer-term changes for eligibility requirements for birth certificate applications for children in customary/kinship care and First Nation adoptions.

#### **4. Supporting local, First Nations-led initiatives, such as community and Tribal Council ID navigation**

As aligned with the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and informed by the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action, there is an underscored need for the implementation of a NAN-specific approach for pathways to safe communities within NAN Territory and putting in place effective mechanisms to support the transition away from colonial systems of administration and governance. Through the collaborative work of NAN, IAO and MPBSD, creative and innovative mechanisms will help build deeper collaboration, consensus, and new ways of working together.

Based on the success of the pilot community ID clinics, NAN is seeking to further develop the community ID clinic initiative based on learnings and recommendations from the pilot project and to scale up ID clinics to all NAN Tribal Councils and Independent First Nations.

The success of the pilots is directly linked to having dedicated ID Navigators. To expand access to ID clinics across NAN communities, NAN is proposing to establish ID Navigators at each Tribal Council who will be responsible for holding ID clinics within their affiliated First Nations and providing follow-up support. Additionally, a dedicated position at NAN will be required to coordinate training and support Tribal Council ID Navigators as well as to provide ID clinics in Independent First Nations as an essential part of the solution. NAN will act as a liaison between Tribal Councils and MPBSD/Vital Statistic Registry Branch. These positions involve extensive logistics planning, coordination, communications, and follow-up work that will be a full-time requirement.

Continued direct support from MPBSD's Vital Statistics Registry Branch is critical to the success and establishing an equivalent relationship with Manitoba will be required.

To support this work, it is essential that any fees associated with birth registrations or ID applications will be covered or waived.

Continued clinics could also create a venue to distribute other key information for community members related to other critical services for families and children. For example, this could include federal status cards, driver's licenses and OHIP applications.

NAN is proposing an investment of \$4.5M - \$562,500 for each of the seven Tribal Councils and NAN - each year for the next five years. NAN, MPBSD, and IAO can support attainable and proven approaches for NAN communities.

**Proposed Action #4:** Expand and further develop the community ID Clinic initiative.

MPBSD agrees that the use of ID clinics was an effective First Nation-led, on-the-ground approach that assisted NAN members overcome barriers to registering births and applying for birth certificates. The Ministry looks forward to partnering with NAN, and potentially other organizations, to explore other innovative and sustainable solutions to augment the ID clinic approach.

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Proposed Action #1: Secure funding to fully implement ID clinics in NAN territory and continue dialogue with MPBSD, and potentially other organizations, to explore further sustainable, community-based alternative service delivery solutions to bring ServiceOntario services directly into NAN communities.
- Proposed Action #2: MPBSD, working with NAN and IAO as appropriate, will develop an approach to establish permanent fee waivers for delayed registrations of birth and birth certificates for members of Northern First Nations as a key solution to overcoming barriers to access. Solutions are subject to approval by the Government of Ontario.
- Proposed Action #3: MPBSD, working with MCCSS, IAO, and NAN as appropriate, will identify and review potential changes to existing eligibility criteria for birth certificates and policy approaches for government consideration that would enable certain caregivers to apply for a birth certificate for a child who is in their care as a result of First Nation custom adoption, kinship, or customary care when the parent(s) is/are not available.
- Proposed Action #4: In the short-term, MPBSD will continue to support ID clinics by providing training to ID Navigators in NAN communities and direct access to Office of the Registrar General staff for subject matter expertise, confirming whether births have been registered and processing applications for birth certificates and registrations once received. In the medium to longer-term, per Proposed Action #1, MPBSD, NAN and potentially other organizations will work together to explore sustainable, community-based alternative service delivery solutions to bring ServiceOntario services directly into NAN communities. Experience will be leveraged from previous ID clinics and other MPBSD partnerships taking a community-based approach in co-designing a service delivery solution that fits the community's needs. Opportunities to expand service offerings and supports in the future will also be explored.
- The parties will determine and seek required funding to support the implementation of longer-term, First Nation-led innovative solutions that provide ongoing assistance to NAN community members in registering births, applying for foundational identity documents, and solving complex cases. NAN will also engage Canada and Manitoba for alignment and cost-share as appropriate.



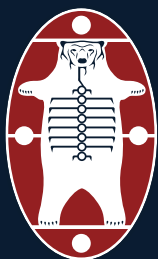
## CONCLUSION

Individuals and families living in First Nations communities continue to experience barriers when registering the birth of a child or applying for a birth certificate in Ontario. NAN, MPBSD, and IAO have undertaken a strong collaborative process to identify a set of solutions that will alleviate these barriers. These solutions will require continued work between Ontario and NAN, in proceeding with options, seeking approvals, and developing implementation plans. Ontario needs to continue to collaboratively engage with NAN to address the immediate needs of First Nations and to co-develop solutions to make sustainable changes for future generations.


The co-authors agree that specific actions are subject to the necessary approvals. For clarity, the next steps identified above do not commit the government of Ontario, including MPBSD or IAO, to developing or implementing a particular policy or program or to providing any funding nor do these next steps necessarily represent the position of NAN on the sufficiency of these steps to address barriers to Ontario birth registration and certificates. The co-authors will continue to provide status updates to the Deputy Ministers and Deputy Grand Chief every 6 months to report on progress in closing this important gap.

This is without prejudice to any initiatives or work being undertaken by First Nations, First Nations organizations, or Tribal Councils on these issues or related issues, and it is without prejudice to the inherent and Treaty rights of all First Nations in Ontario.





Nishnawbe Aski Nation  
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