

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Budget



August 2020

RECOMMENDATION: That the Government of Canada invest \$6.75 million over three years to enable the adoption and implementation of the *Child Search Network* to police services on a national scale, including in Indigenous communities.

About the Missing Children Society of Canada

The Missing Children Society of Canada (MCSC) is a non-profit national organization dedicated to returning missing children to a safe environment. For the last 34 years, the Missing Children Society of Canada has been providing unique and comprehensive programs to support police and protect children. The organization's mandate is to find missing children faster, thereby reducing the acute risk of abuse, sexual exploitation, or human trafficking, and preventing further victimization or possibly death.

MCSC is also a key resource for police, acting as their voice in the community by distributing critical information to phones, tablets and computers of the public through its innovative technology, helping with investigations, and also working to support the families in crisis. MSCC also collaborates with business partners who bring their unique skills and assets into the search for missing children.

Introduction

There are over 40,000 children reported missing in Canada annually, with a disproportionate number of those cases being Indigenous children and youth. Children who go missing, run away, or are abducted are often exposed to, or suffer sexual exploitation, trafficking in persons, and prostitution, illegal/unsafe employment and involvement in criminal activity, both as a victim and as a perpetrator.

At present, the only national network available to assist police agencies in the search for missing children is the AMBER Alert system – which has specific criteria to enable activation. **In 2019, there were 40,425 reported cases of missing children/youth in Canada; however, only 12 AMBER alerts were issued** as not every case qualifies for the stringent criteria required for its use.¹ Police face a gap of response to reach Canadians with information for missing and vulnerable children cases that do not meet the criteria of an AMBER Alert activation.

Police in Canada face increasing challenges in efforts to find missing children to reduce the amount of missing children cases. They require new technology and assistance to aid their response.

MCSC also recognizes the particular vulnerability that Indigenous Canadians face. Indigenous communities require supports that address specific needs and challenges from pre-existing trauma, cultural bias, geographic isolation and racism. When an Indigenous child is reported missing on reserve versus in an urban centre, jurisdiction boundaries, as well as the number of services/agencies, can complicate existing response. **Police require a new and highly configurable solution framework to respond to Indigenous missing children cases.**

Child Search Network

With the help of tech giants such as Microsoft and ESRI Inc., MCSC has created a network explicitly built to bridge the gap of response identified above. Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police members, alongside the RCMP, guided the development and execution of processes enabling the MCSC Child Search Network to support police in resolving their missing children investigations, including in Indigenous communities.

¹ Statistics Canada, <https://www.canadasmissing.ca/pubs/2019/index-eng.htm>

The [*MCSC Child Search Network*](#) is a turn-key technology system with the capabilities for data management, visualization, analytics and collaboration. It is the complementary tool and national system to be used in the search for all cases of missing children and youth that do not meet the strict criteria for the AMBER Alert national strategy for missing children in Canada.

This network is the only one of its kind that empowers members of the public to join in an active search to locate missing children immediately. Part of this network is the MCSC Rescu app. Through this app, you can view open and active cases by region via interactive story maps, submit tips and register to receive SMS text alerts about new cases in your area.

It is important to recognize that the *MCSC Child Search Network* has been endorsed by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police Board. MCSC and the RCMP have signed a memorandum of understanding and are an identified program of the RCMP's National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains (NCMPUR).

MCSC's technology partners include Microsoft, ESRI Canada and Kijiji. Other large organizations such as WestJet, Via Rail Canada, and TransCanada have partnered with MCSC to conduct meaningful and ground-breaking work.

Recently, MCSC received unanimous support from the Calgary City Council when they endorsed the Child Search Network or 'MCSC Rescu' to empower their citizens to assist police agencies in locating those missing children faster. Calgary Councillor Jeromy Farkas said, "Today Council came together to demonstrate that the City of Calgary can lead the charge in endorsing a revolutionary technology that will help save lives."

Recommendation: Government Support for the MCSC Child Search Network

There are four existing problems or gaps that the *Child Search Network* will help solve:

1. Reducing the growing number of missing and vulnerable children cases through a coordinated community response;
2. Reducing police resource costs for missing children investigations;
3. Developing a safety initiative that responds to indigenous communities' unique cultural, traditional and socio-economic needs and realities; and
4. Demonstrate how enabling vulnerable children with proactive safety and prevention technology at the "Acutely Elevated Risk" stage will reduce the higher risk of harm and prevent further victimization.

This partnership between the private sector, police, and MCSC has created a best-in-class technology network that bridges the identified gap of response for police enabling missing children information to be shared across the country.

MCSC and its partners have done the initial work to build the tool and make it ready for a nation-wide scale-up approach. However, MCSC is now looking to work together with the Government of Canada to bring this critical technology to life and help save thousands of young lives each year.

Therefore, MCSC is recommending the following:

RECOMMENDATION: that in Budget 2021, the Government of Canada invest \$6.75 million over three years to enable the adoption and implementation of the *Child Search Network* to police services on a national scale, including in Indigenous communities.

There will be additional opportunity for the federal government to expand its investment in both the future development of the *Child Search Network's* capabilities and in the delivery of unique Indigenous police supports. MCSC is happy to discuss what these additional opportunities may look like and work to determine additional investment opportunity costs.