



RESTORING THE SACRED BOND  
INITIATIVE

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# *News Release*

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January 7, 2019

## MANITOBA ANNOUNCES FIRST SOCIAL IMPACT BOND

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### **Doula Project Aims to Strengthen Bonds Between Indigenous Mothers and Infants and Reduce the Number of Days Infants Spend in Care: Stefanson**

The Manitoba government has entered a partnership with the Southern First Nations Network of Care (SFNNC) to deliver the province's first-ever Social Impact Bond (SIB), Families Minister Heather Stefanson announced today.

"We want to help strengthen the bond between mothers and children to reduce the number of infants apprehended into the child welfare system," said Stefanson. "Social impact bonds are an innovative way for government to work together with the private sector and community groups to find new solutions to pressing social challenges. Our landmark SIB in child welfare encourages a multi-sector relationship to meet a common goal of preventing the apprehension of infants and reducing the amount of time children spend in care."

The two-year pilot project, *Restoring the Sacred Bond*, will match doulas with Indigenous mothers who are at risk of having their infant apprehended into the child welfare system.

"The Indigenous doulas will support those mothers through pregnancy, birth and the first months of their children's lives," said Tara Petti, chief executive officer of SFNNC. "The program will seek to reduce the number of infants apprehended in the days and months after birth – an event far too common in Manitoba today. We will continue to work closely with the non-profit agency Until the Last Child to create a strong foundation for this project, as they share our goal of long term stable outcomes for children in care."

The doula pilot will support up to 200 at-risk expectant mothers. SFNNC will lead the project and work with the doula service provider, Wijiidiwag Ikwewag, to identify expectant mothers who may not have resources to effectively parent their baby. These mothers will then be connected to doulas, who are women trained to help with childbirth and early care.

“We will identify and take referrals of expectant mothers across southern Manitoba and connect them with a doula to provide support before, during and after the birth of her child for up to one year,” said Jolene Mercer of Wijiidiwag Ikwewag. “Part of the process will help the mother reconnect with traditional cultural practices and strengthen her support system.”

Program success will be measured on reduced days in care of children in the program compared to children outside the program.

“Our Indigenous grandmothers (Nokoomuk) have taught us that the soul of sovereignty lies in birthing,” said Jerry Daniels, Grand Chief of the Southern Chiefs Organization. “Restoring the Sacred Bond is a very important first step towards this end.”

SIBs rely on private investors to fund projects and government will repay investors if the project meets targeted outcomes proven through a third-party validation process. The province has budgeted up to \$3 million for investor repayment if the SIB reaches success on its key metrics. The province has also worked with leading Canadian social finance consultant MaRS Centre for Impact Investing to guide its SIB strategy, and MaRS will work with the Southern Network to identify and secure private investors for the project.

“The Southern Network and Manitoba have a long history of working together on child welfare in the province,” said Adam Jagelewski, Executive Lead of the MaRS Centre for Impact Investing. “This new model puts mothers and their needs first, reframing the partnership to customize supports and incentivize results. It's fitting that the landmark SIB is an Indigenous designed and led program, a made-in-Manitoba partnership that holds significant potential.”

The project is now open for investment and investors may contact [sibs@gov.mb.ca](mailto:sibs@gov.mb.ca) or visit [www.gov.mb.ca/sib/index.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/sib/index.html) for more information.

While this is the province's first SIB, the minister noted the Manitoba government will proceed with submissions in other areas of government in the coming months.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ATTACHED

## THE RESTORING THE SACRED BOND PILOT PROJECT

Each doula will serve up to 12 mothers at a time for nine to 12 months per mother. A doula will:

- **Build a relationship based on trust.** The doula will visit regularly with the goal to become a reliable, trustworthy, non-judgmental support to the mother.
- **Co-write a support plan.** The doula and the mother will articulate the mother's goals for her birth and for the early days of her child's life. The doula and the mother will write a plan to work toward those goals.
- **Refer to resources.** The doula will connect the mother to prenatal care and classes. The doula will also connect the mother to other social supports, such as income or housing assistance. The doula may accompany the mother to appointments or help her apply for supports.
- **Educate on pregnancy and parenting.** The doula will explain the stages of pregnancy. She will help the mother understand what she should expect and how to cope with physical discomfort. The doula will teach the mother parenting skills and help the mother use those skills in the first weeks after birth.
- **Introduce to Indigenous ceremonies.** The doula will introduce the mother to Indigenous ceremonies to mark prenatal, birth and postnatal milestones. The doula may introduce the mother to elders and others to conduct or take part in the ceremonies.
- **Give emotional, physical and spiritual support during labour.** The doula will stay with the mother throughout labour. She will ease the mother's physical discomfort, help the mother articulate her preferences, advocate on the mother's behalf and conduct or facilitate Indigenous ceremonies.
- **Guide through CFS processes.** If necessary, the doula will explain to the mother how CFS agencies decide to apprehend and reunify children. The doula will help the mother complete any steps that CFS requires of her to be reunified with her child.
- **Build a circle of support.** The doula will work with the Family Community Liaison (a member of the doula support staff) to help the mother establish or re-establish relationships with family members and friends.
- **Link to mental illness or addiction treatment.** The doula will work with the Clinical Supervisor (a member of the doula support staff) to help mothers access mental illness or addiction treatment. (The program will not pay for private treatment but will assist mothers who wish to access public treatment.)

### **Southern First Nations Network of Care (Southern Network)**

Since 2003, the Southern Network, in collaboration with its 10 member agencies, has been delivering culturally-appropriate child and family services to First Nations members (and others who choose the Southern Network) throughout Manitoba. The Southern Network receives its mandate through the Southern Chiefs Organization pursuant to The Child and Family Services Authorities Act (CFSAA).

The Southern Network, along with the other three Child and Family Services Authorities, is responsible for the establishment and management of a province-wide service delivery system. This includes ensuring that services are delivered to Southern First Nation citizens throughout the province, as well as people who choose the Southern Network. The Southern Network is the largest child welfare service provider in the province, providing more than 40 per cent of the total child welfare services in Manitoba, including nearly 5,000 children in care and children and families receiving services from an agency.

### **Wijjii'idiwag Ikwewag**

Wijjii'idiwag Ikwewag, formerly the Manitoba Indigenous Doula Initiative, is the direct service provider. Its responsibilities include the recruitment and training of Indigenous doulas and to provide Indigenous doula services.

Wijjii'idiwag Ikwewag is a non-profit organization that trains and deploys Indigenous doulas to improve health and social outcomes for Indigenous mothers and children. It was founded by four women in consultation with families, service providers and Knowledge Keepers to fill a gap in how Indigenous families access birth supports and prenatal care.

This organization promotes traditional Indigenous child birth and parenting teachings and integrates them into training for Indigenous doulas.

In partnership with the Winnipeg Boldness Project, Wijjii'idiwag Ikwewag introduced Indigenous doulas to Winnipeg's Point Douglas neighborhood in 2017. Wijjii'idiwag Ikwewag is now delivering doula services through a number of projects in Cross Lake, Nelson House, Grand Rapids and other Manitoba communities.