

Rethinking the Front Door: Insights from the Ontario and First Nations Incidence Studies 2023

Presented by: Dr. Barbara Fallon & Amber Crowe

Friday, May 22, 2026

1:00 pm – 2:30 p.m. ET

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Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse & Neglect 2023

Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children (CREVAWC) Webinar

May 2026

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Bryn King, University of Toronto

Delphine Collin-Vézina, McGill University

Tonino Esposito, University of Montreal

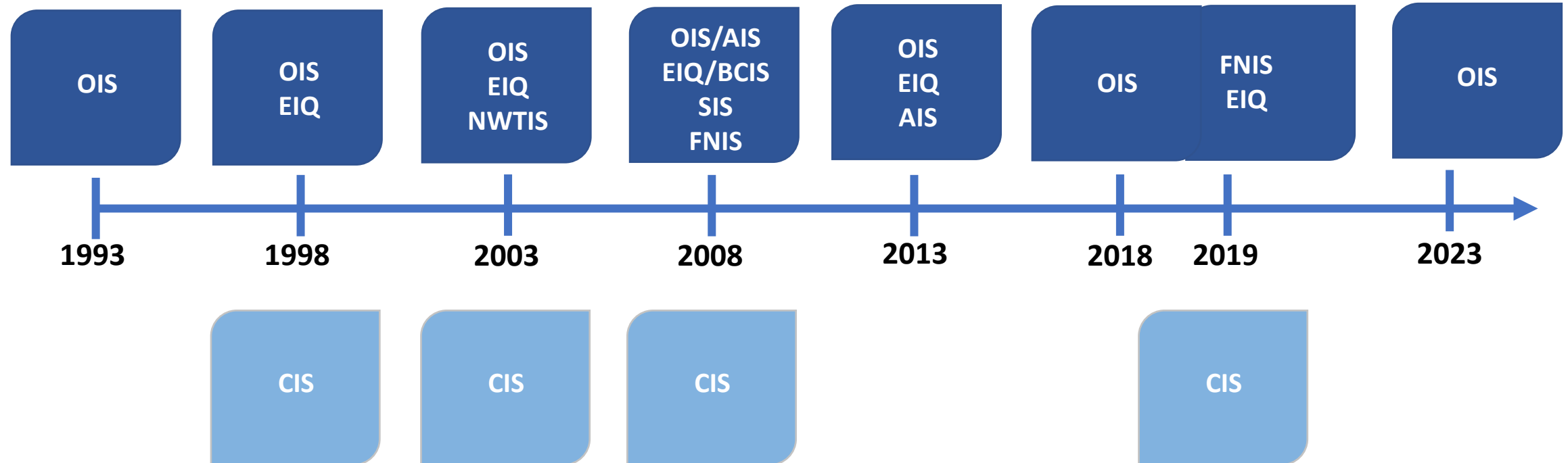
Presentation Agenda

- OIS-2023 Objectives & Methodology
- OIS Findings Over Time (1993 to 2023)
- OIS-2023 Major Findings
- Policy Efficacy and Child Welfare Services

Introduction

- The OIS-2023 is the **seventh** provincial study of child maltreatment-related investigations
- Cross-sectional representative data collected every 5 years since 1993
- Major Findings Report will be available at cwrp.ca March 2025
- Additional reports to be produced with ANCFSAO, OVOV and Latin American partners

7th Provincial Cycle for Ontario



Acknowledgements

Funding

- Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

In-kind Support

- Over 900 child welfare workers, managers & admin staff
- Researchers from Universities, Governments & Agencies
- OIS-2023 Steering Committee

OIS-2023 Advisory Committee

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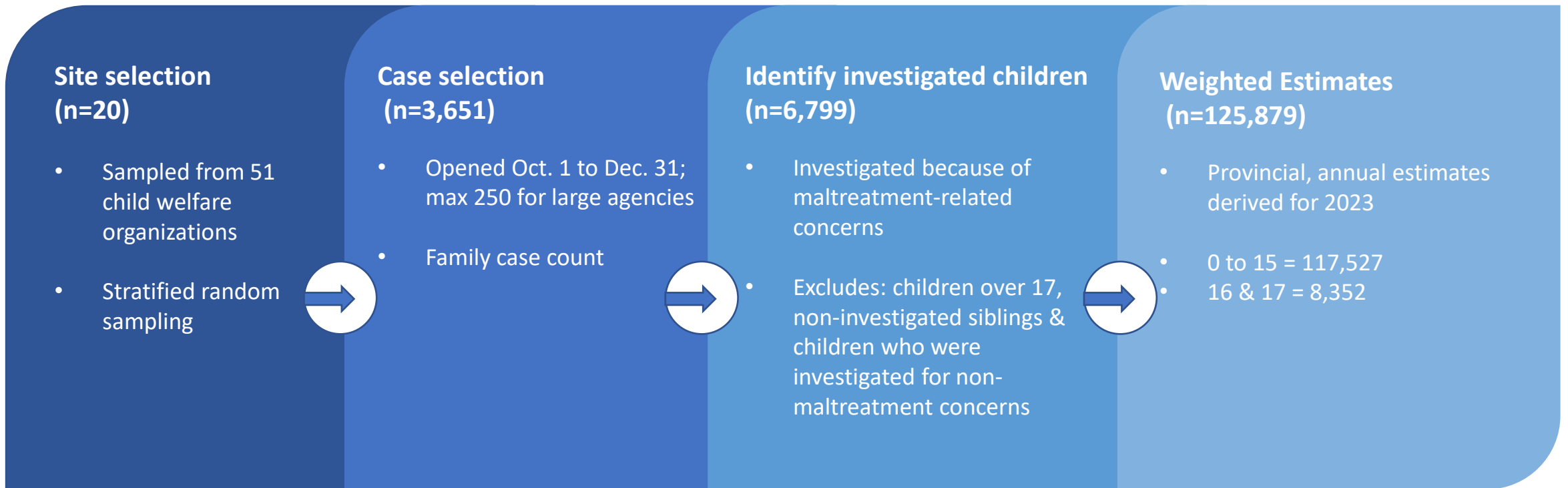
LEYCO WILSON

Supervisor of Quality Improvement and Evaluation, Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region

OIS Objectives

1. Determine rates of investigated and substantiated maltreatment
2. Document forms and severity of maltreatment
3. Examine selected health determinants
4. Monitor short-term investigation outcomes
5. Compare rates and characteristics across cycles (93, 98, 03, 08, 13, 18, 23)

OIS-2023 Sample



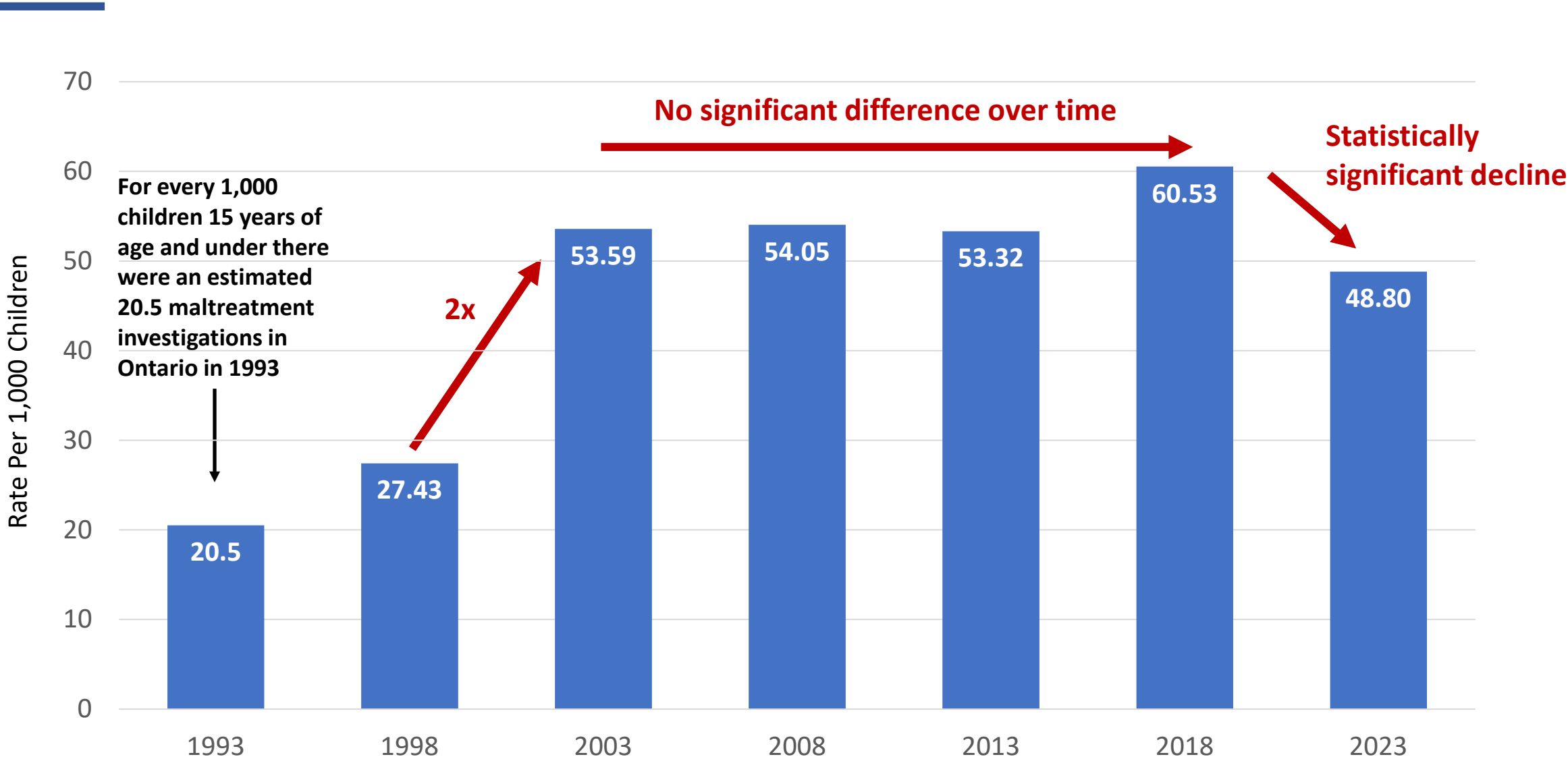
Methodological Considerations

1. Limited to reports investigated by child welfare
2. Information collected directly from investigating child welfare workers
3. No post-investigation follow-up
4. Not designed to evaluate services
5. Methodological changes across cycles
6. Weighted provincial annual estimates

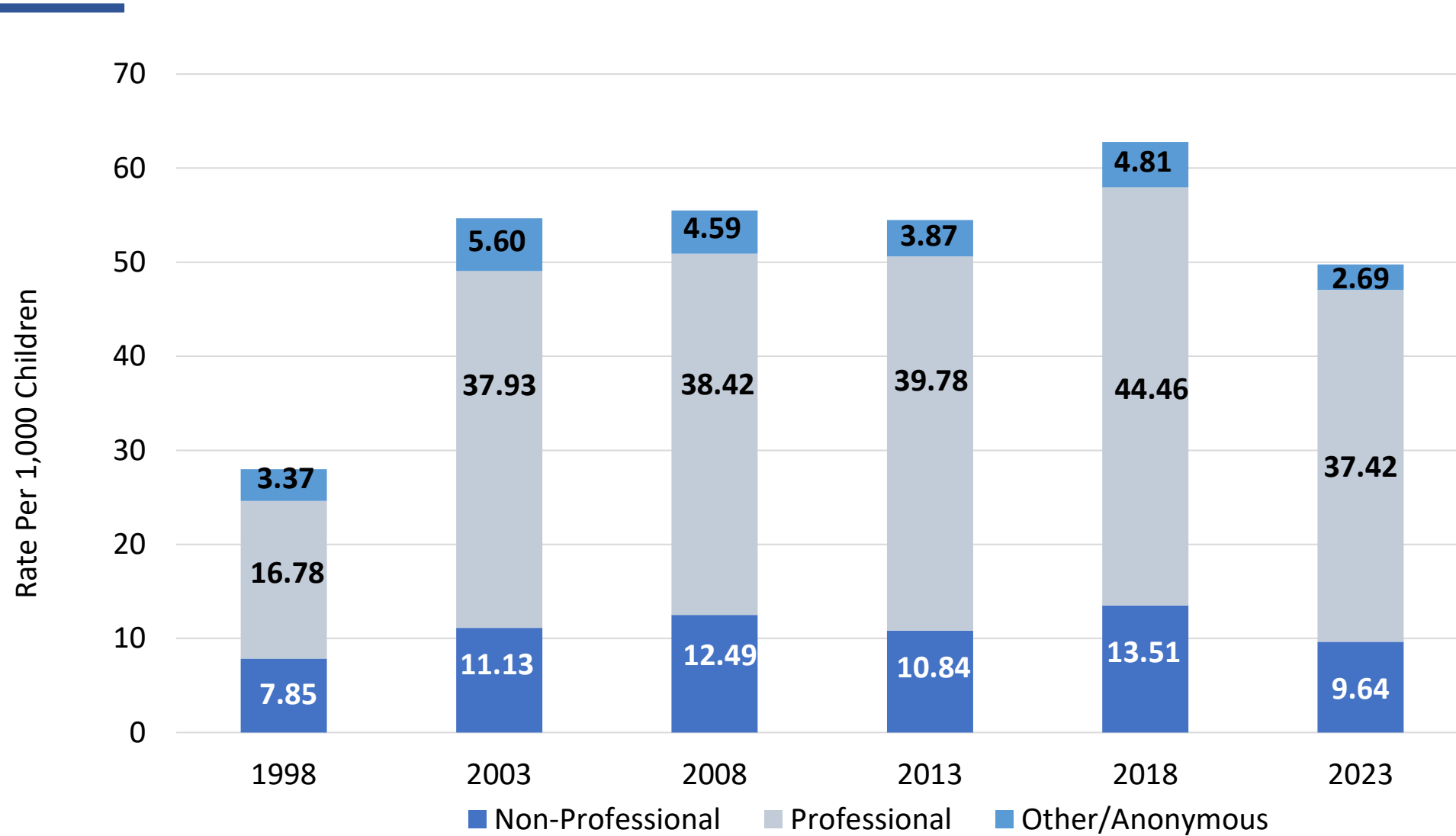
Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect

Findings Over Time

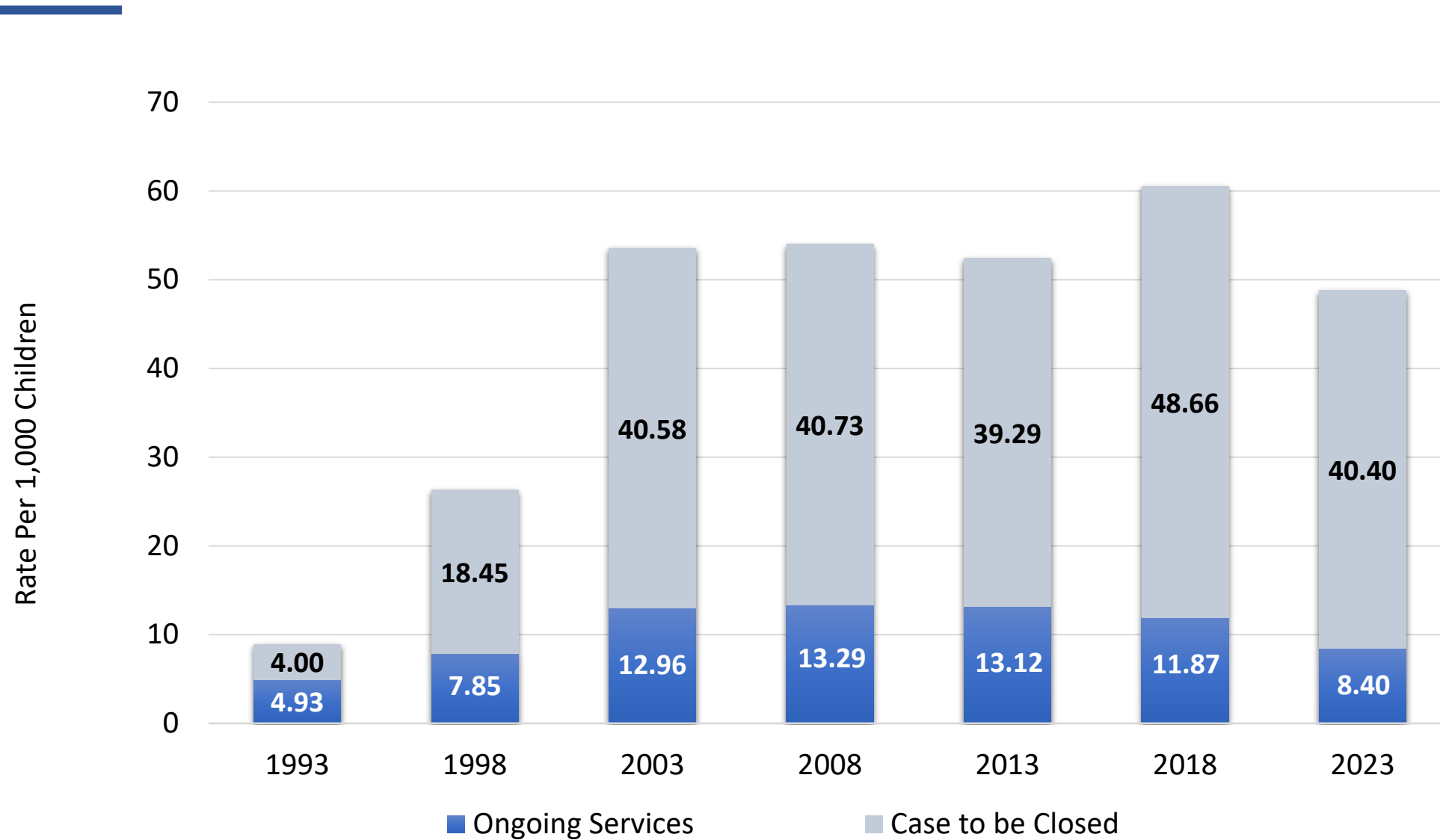
Incidence of Maltreatment-Related Investigations



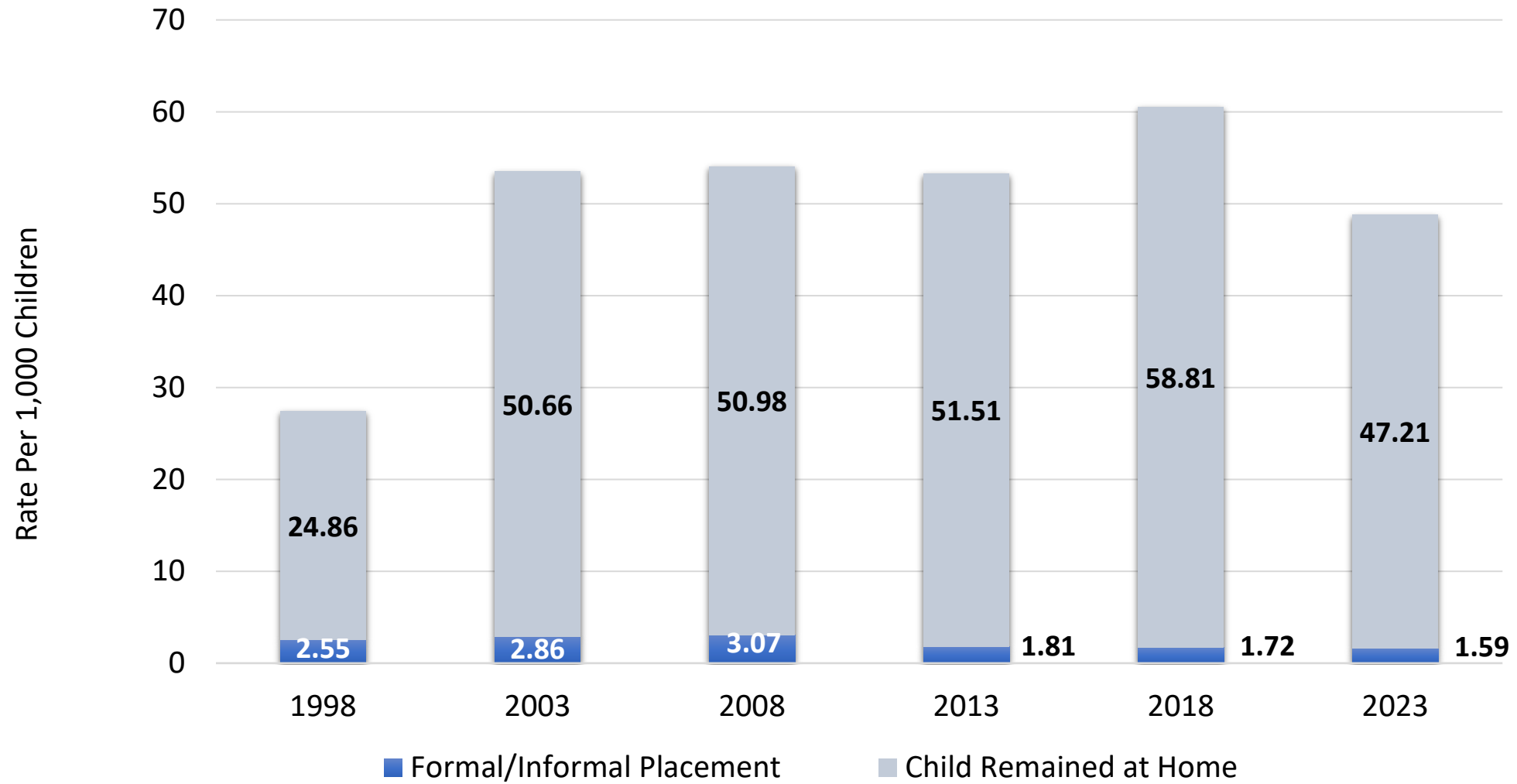
Referral Source in Maltreatment-Related Investigations



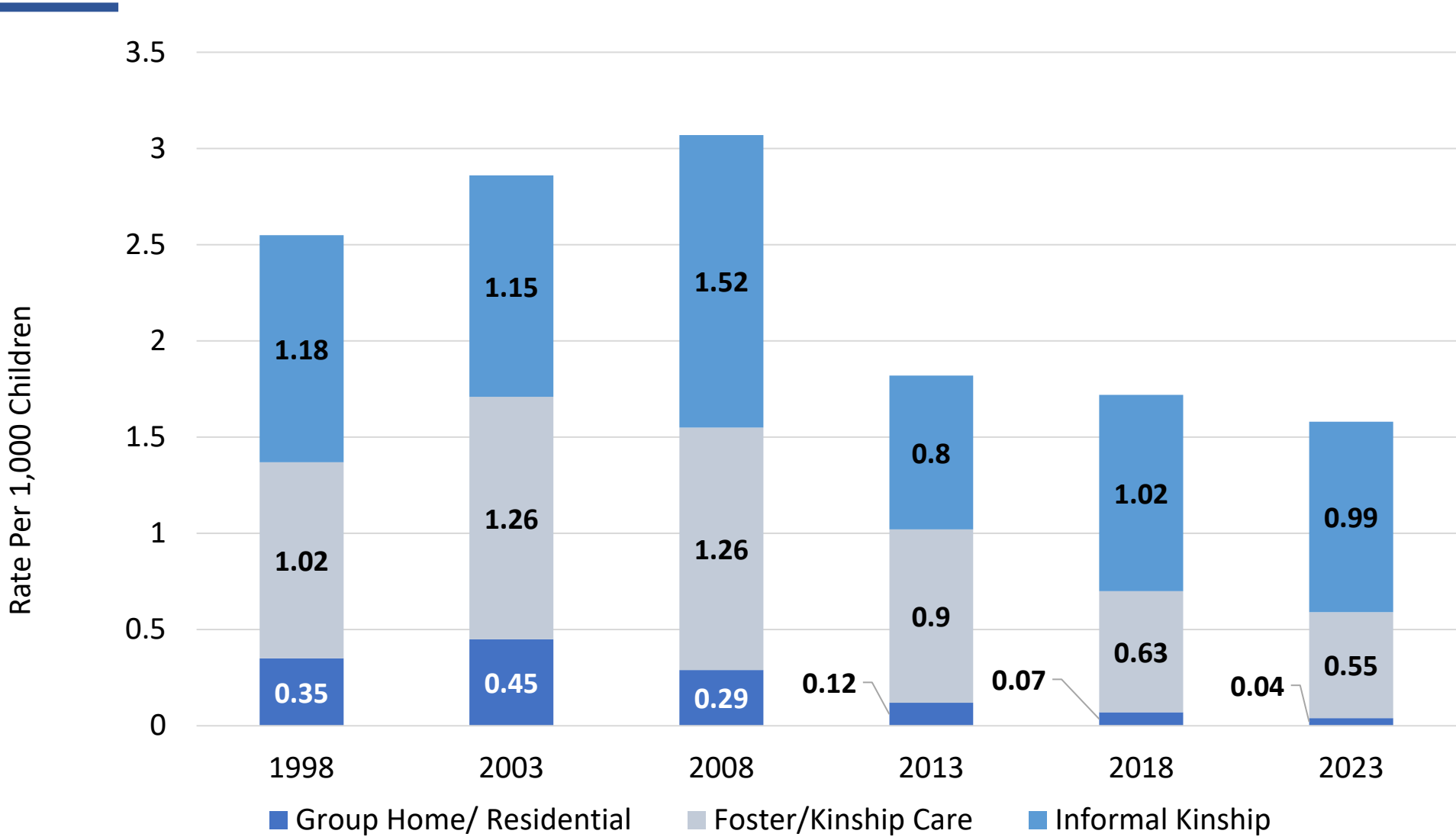
Ongoing Services in Maltreatment-Related Investigations



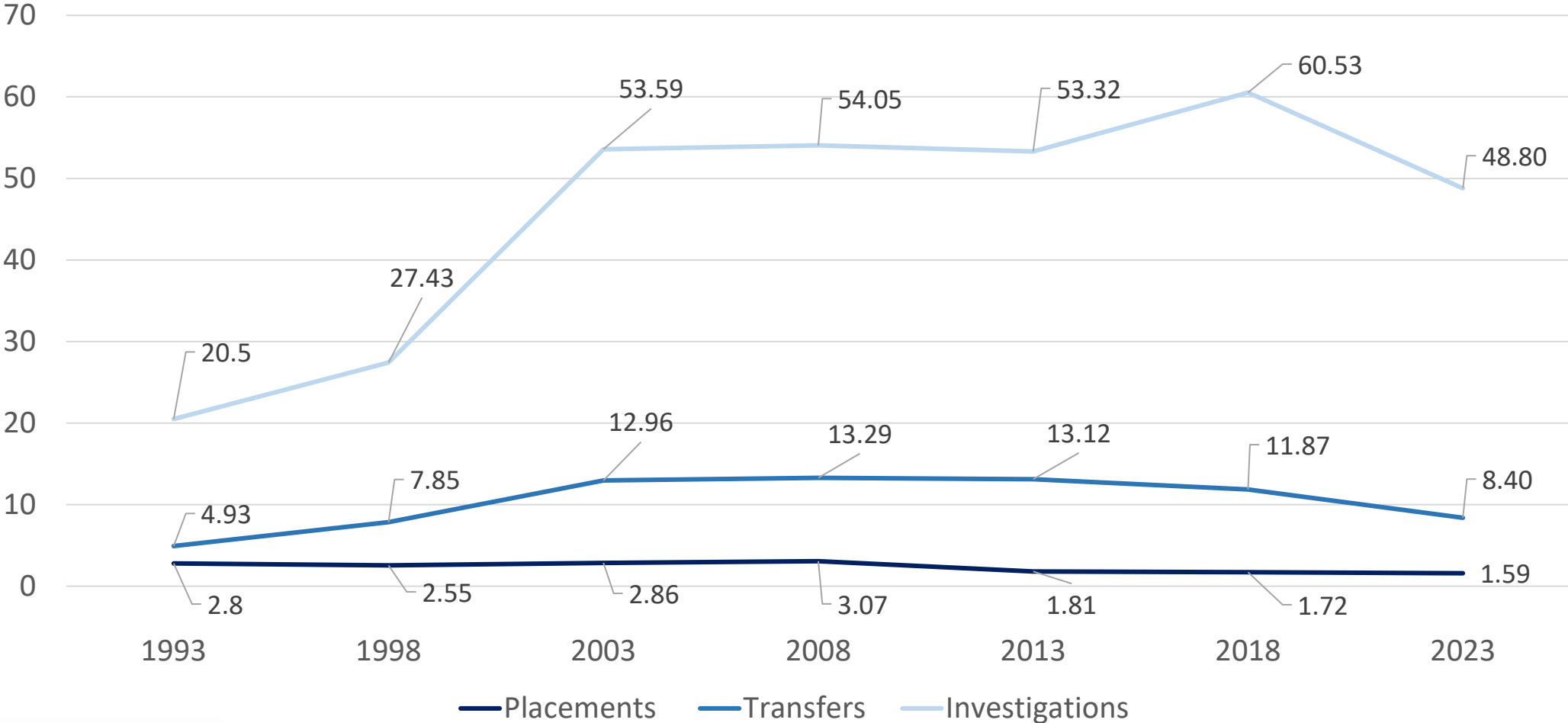
Formal & Informal Out-of-Home Placements in Maltreatment-Related Investigations



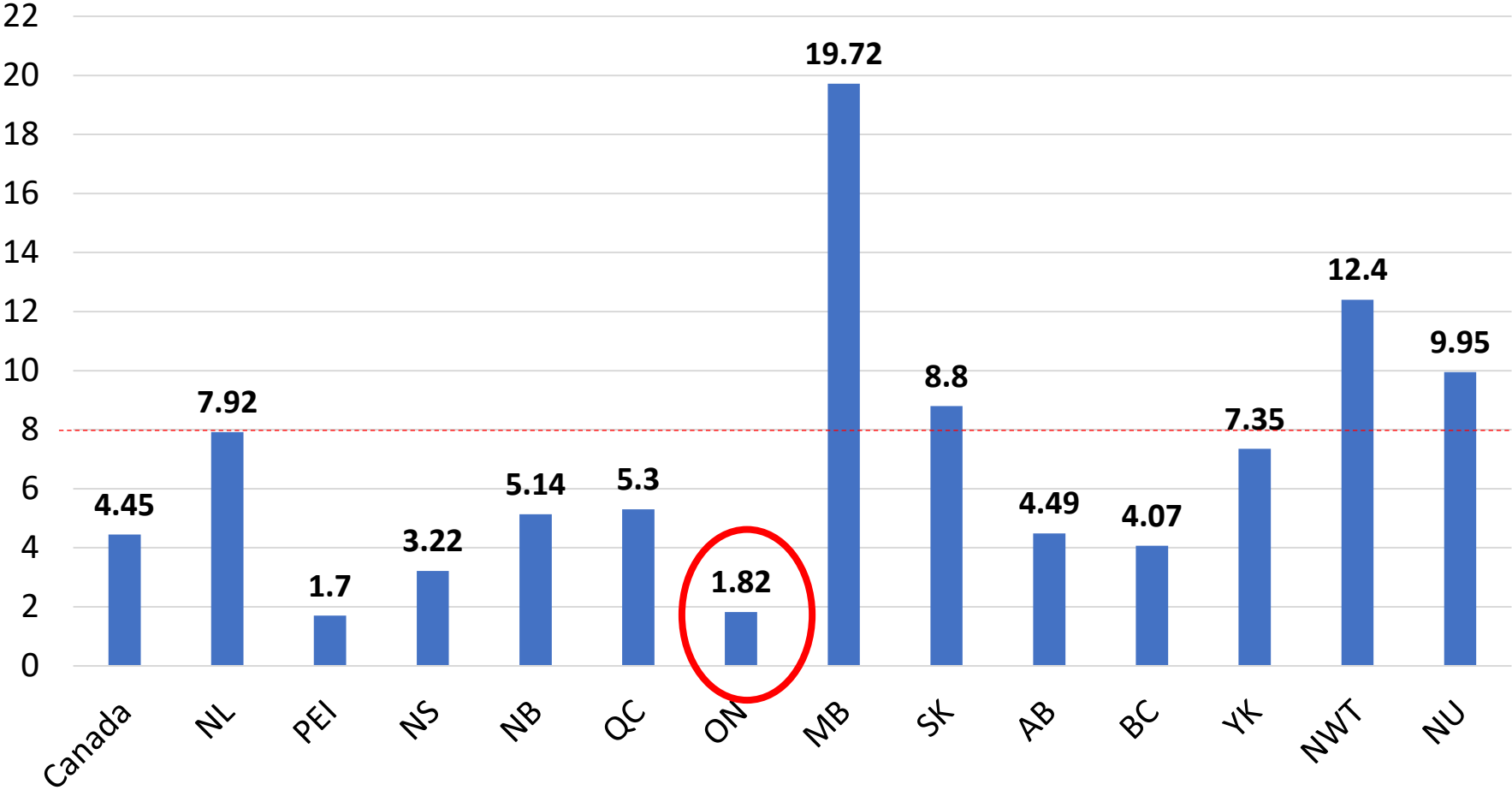
Type of Out-of-Home Placements in Maltreatment-Related Investigations



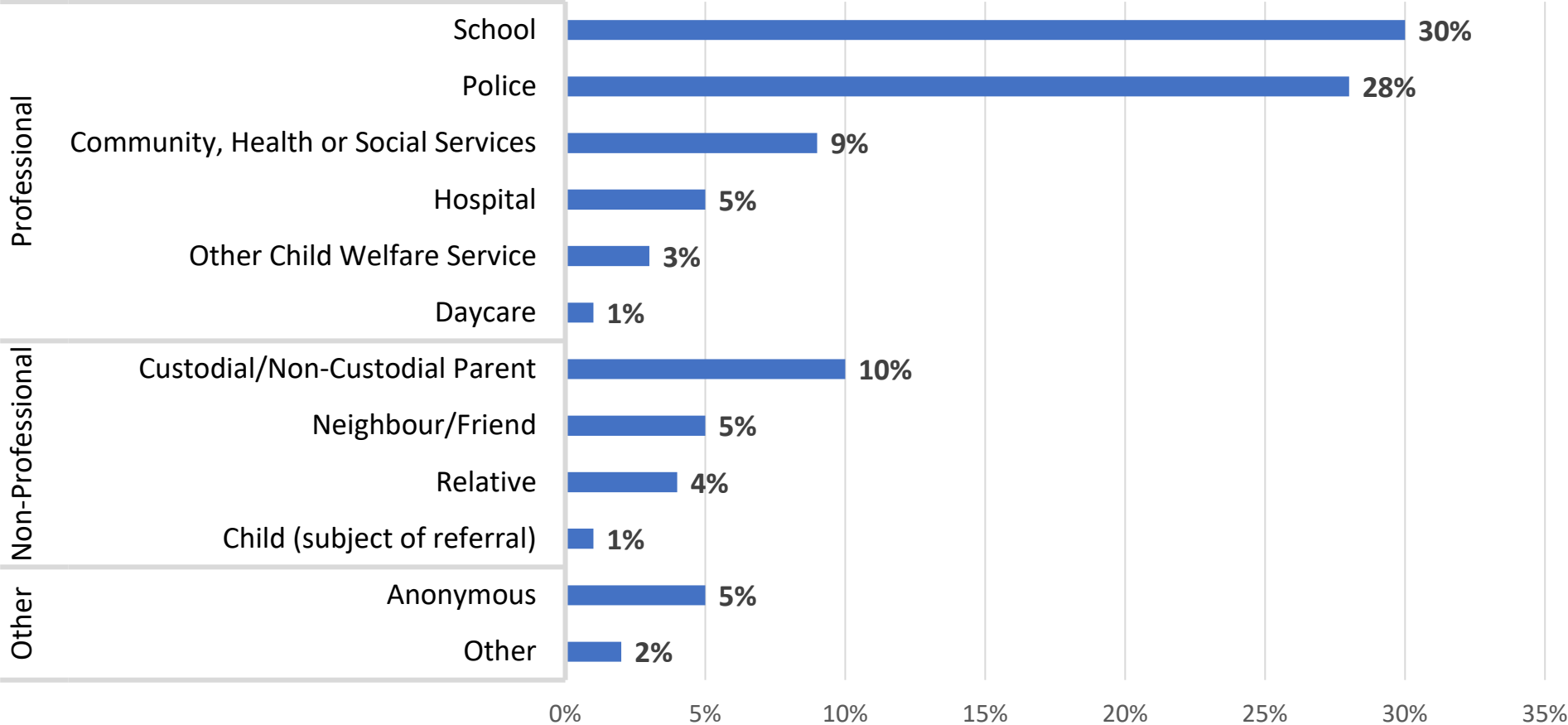
Incidence of Investigations, Transfers to Ongoing Services & Placement



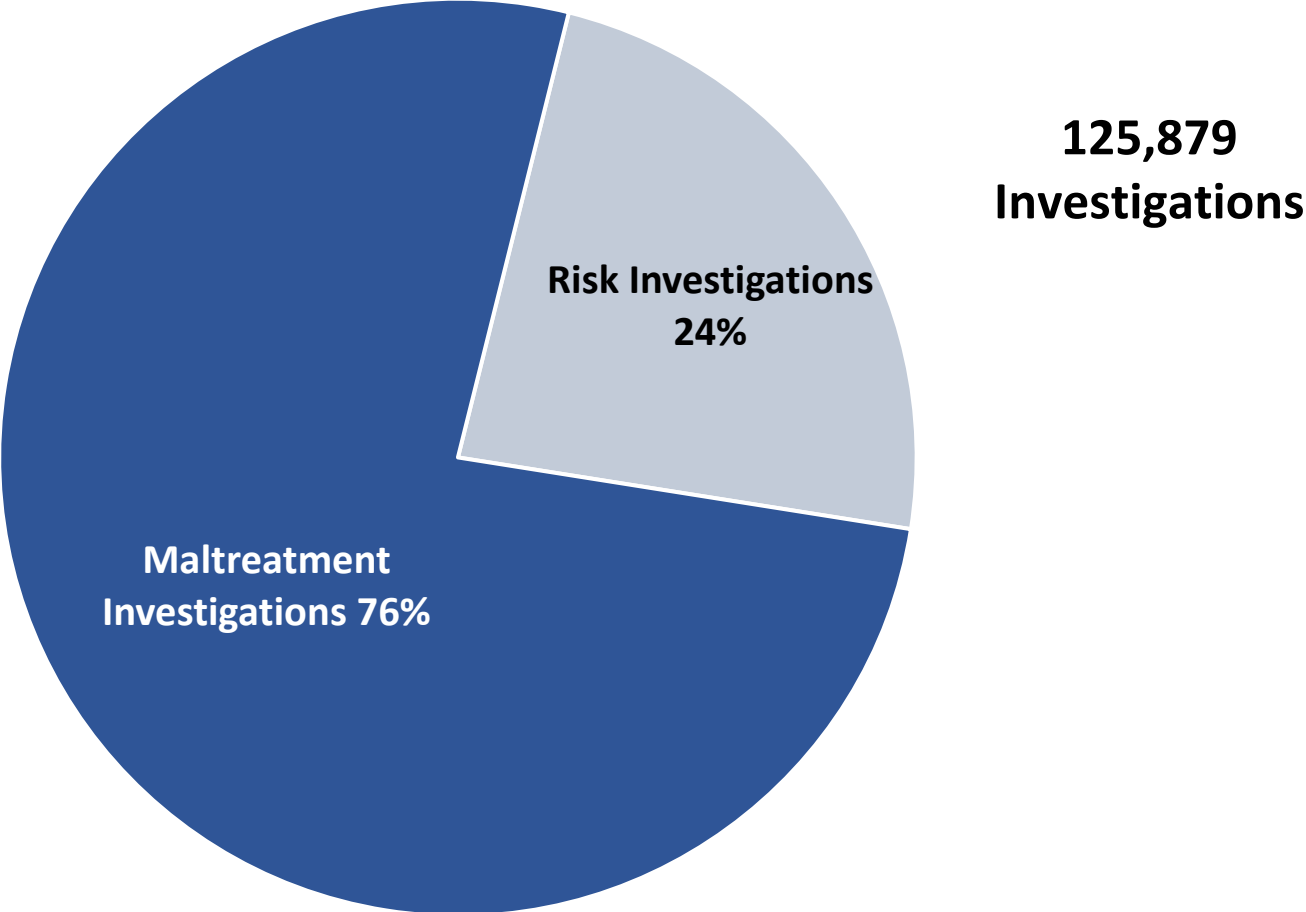
Children 0-14 in foster Care on Census day across Canada per 1,000 children (2021)



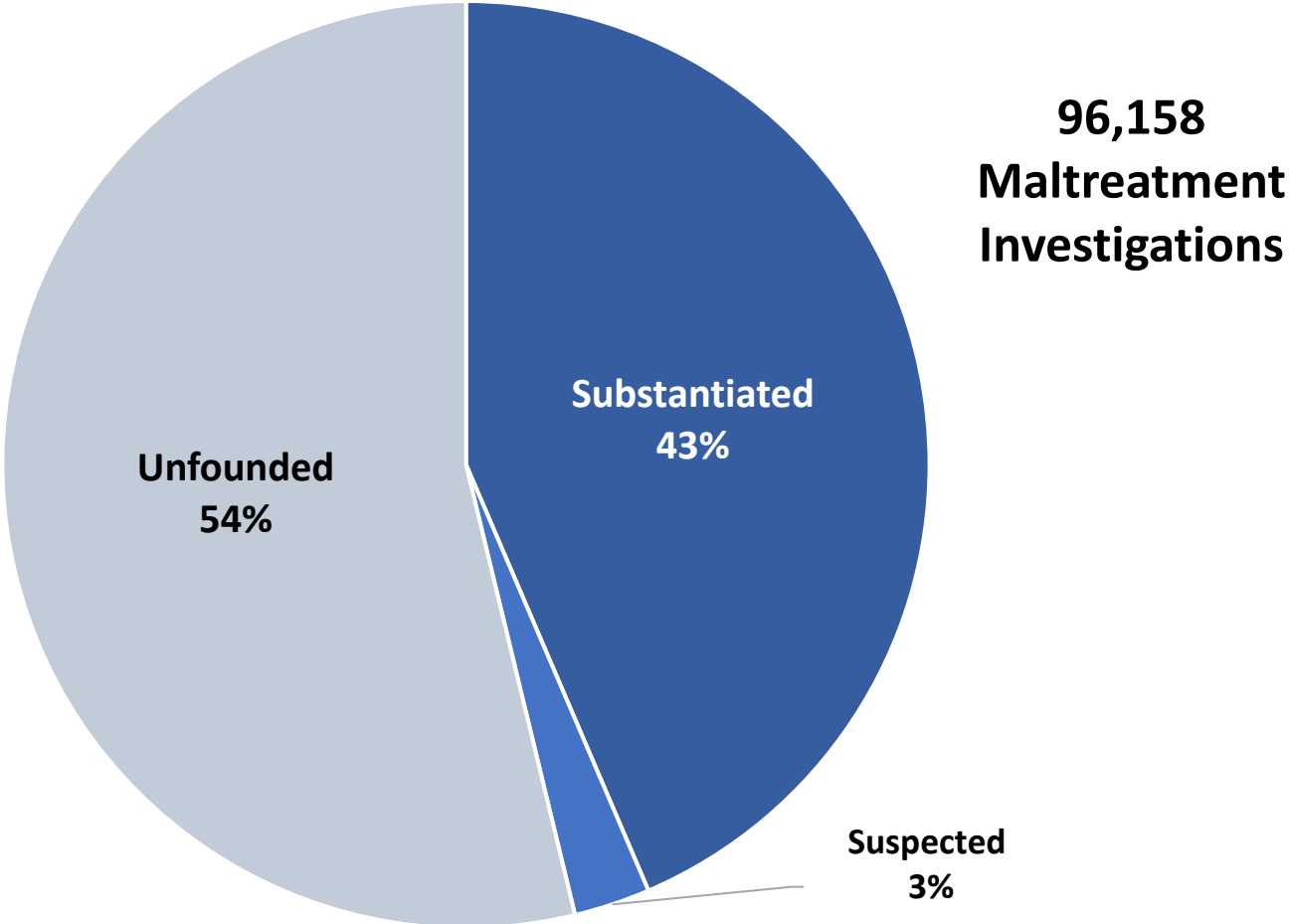
Specific Referral Source in Maltreatment-Related Investigations in the OIS-2023



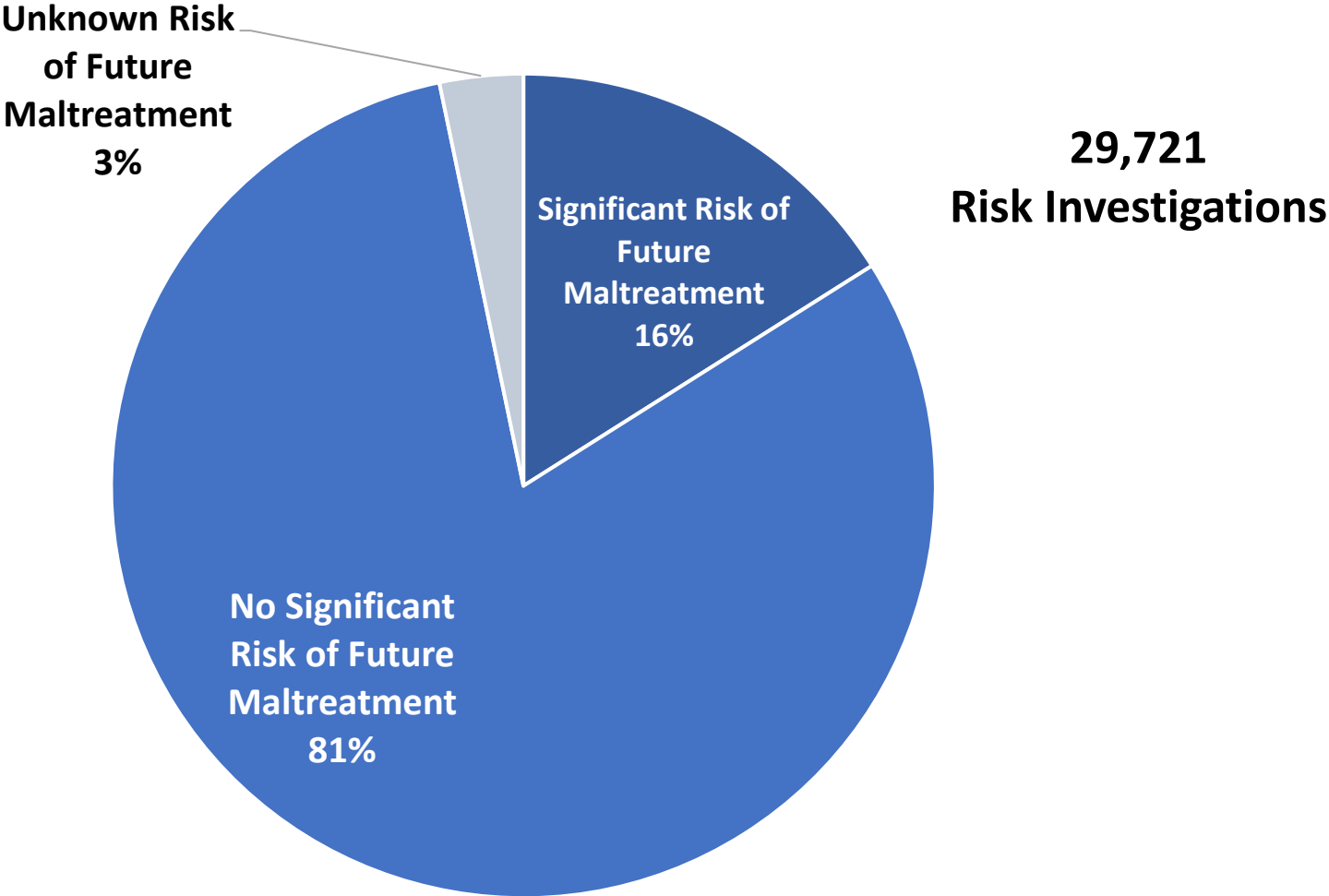
Type of Investigation in the OIS-2023



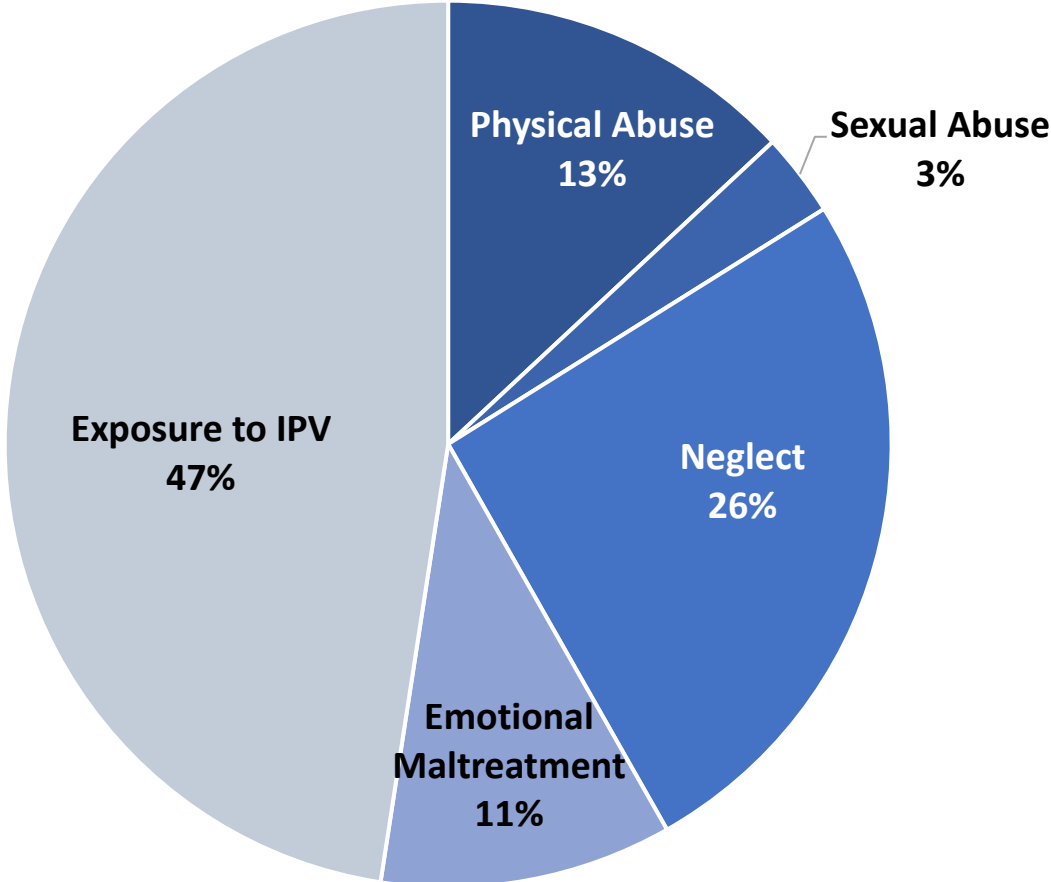
Level of Substantiation for Maltreatment Investigations in the OIS-2023



Risk-Only Investigations and Level of Substantiation in the OIS-2023



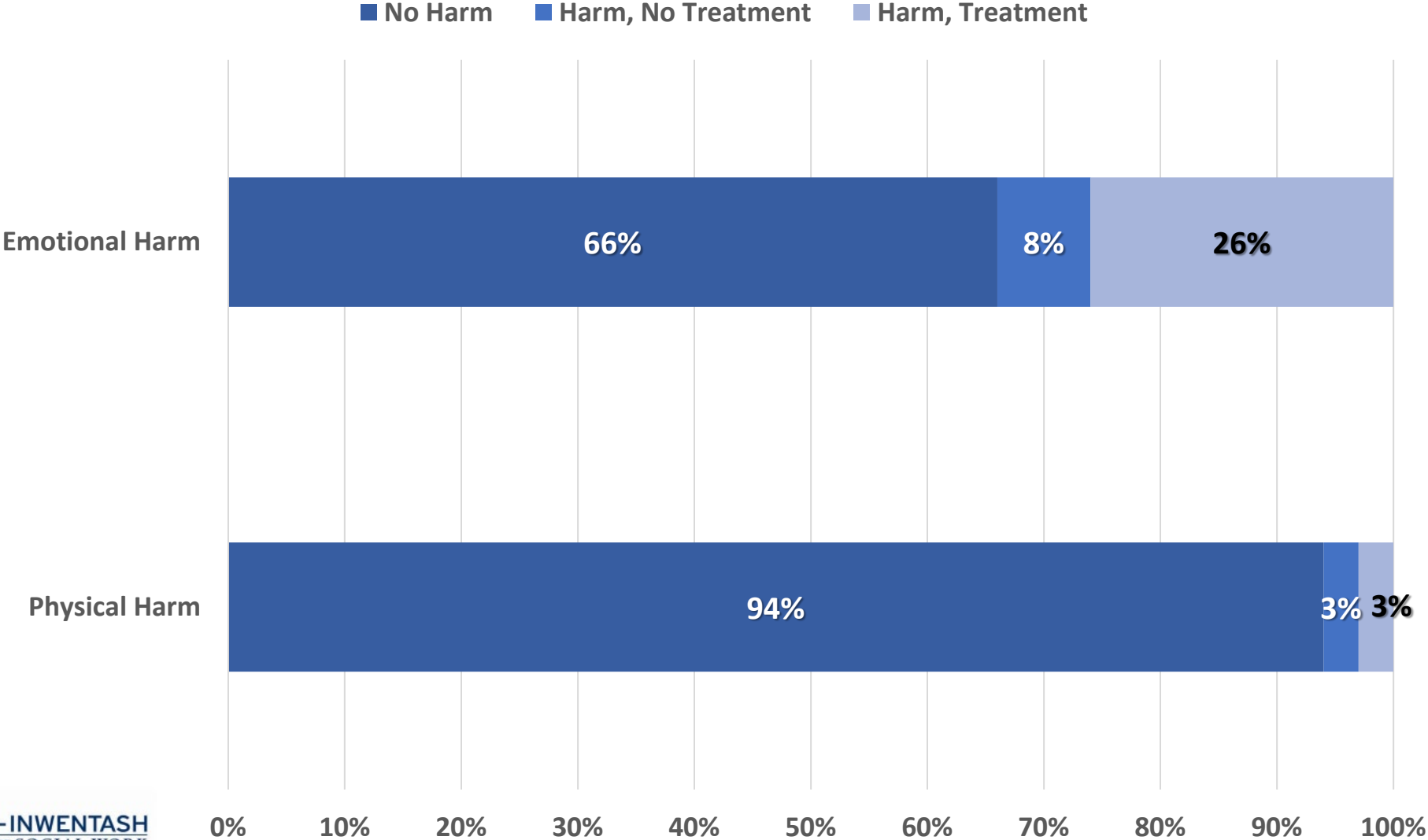
Primary Category of Substantiated Maltreatment in the OIS-2023



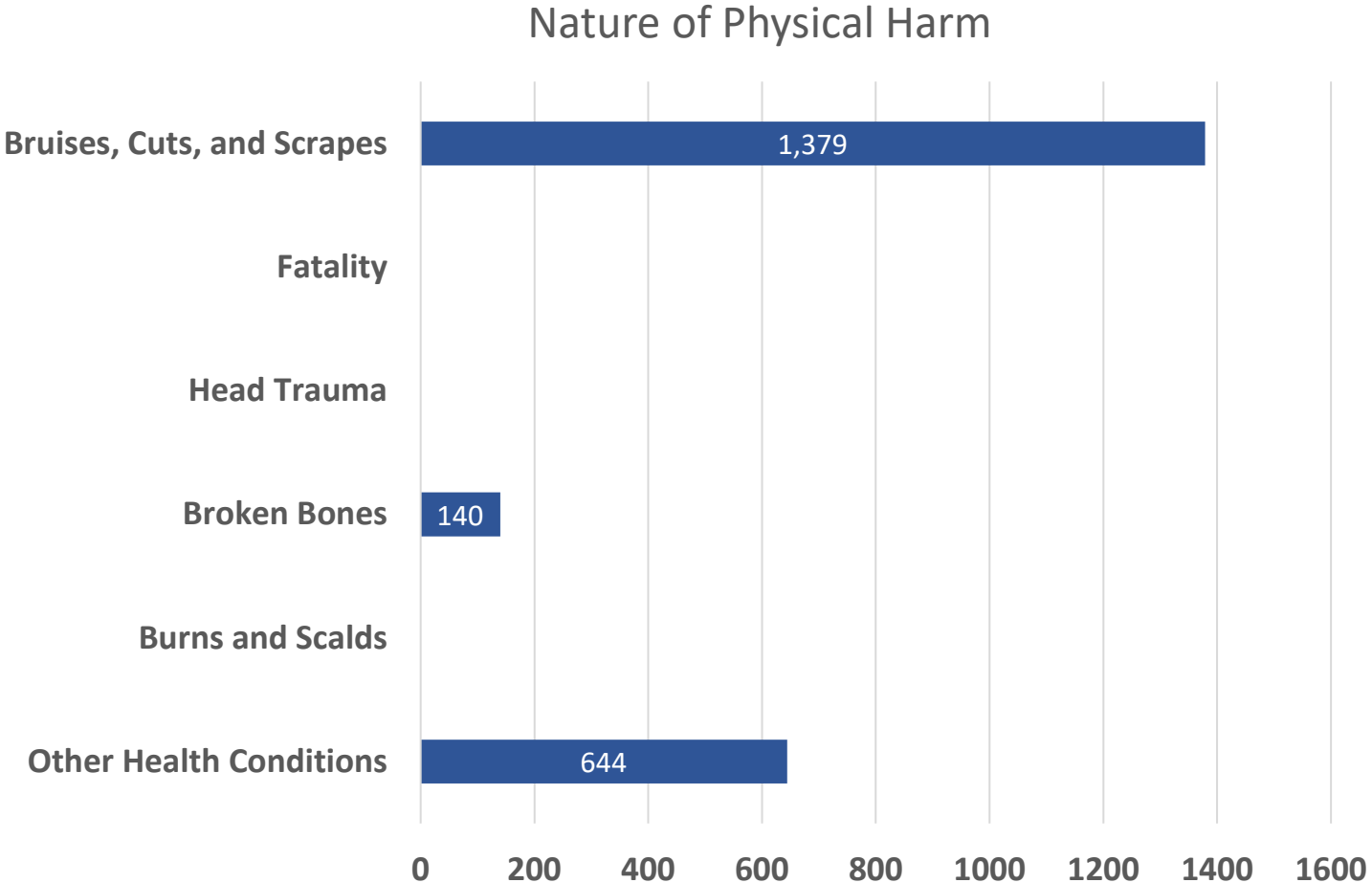
OIS tracks 33 forms of maltreatment within the 5 primary categories

Multiple forms documented in 15% of cases

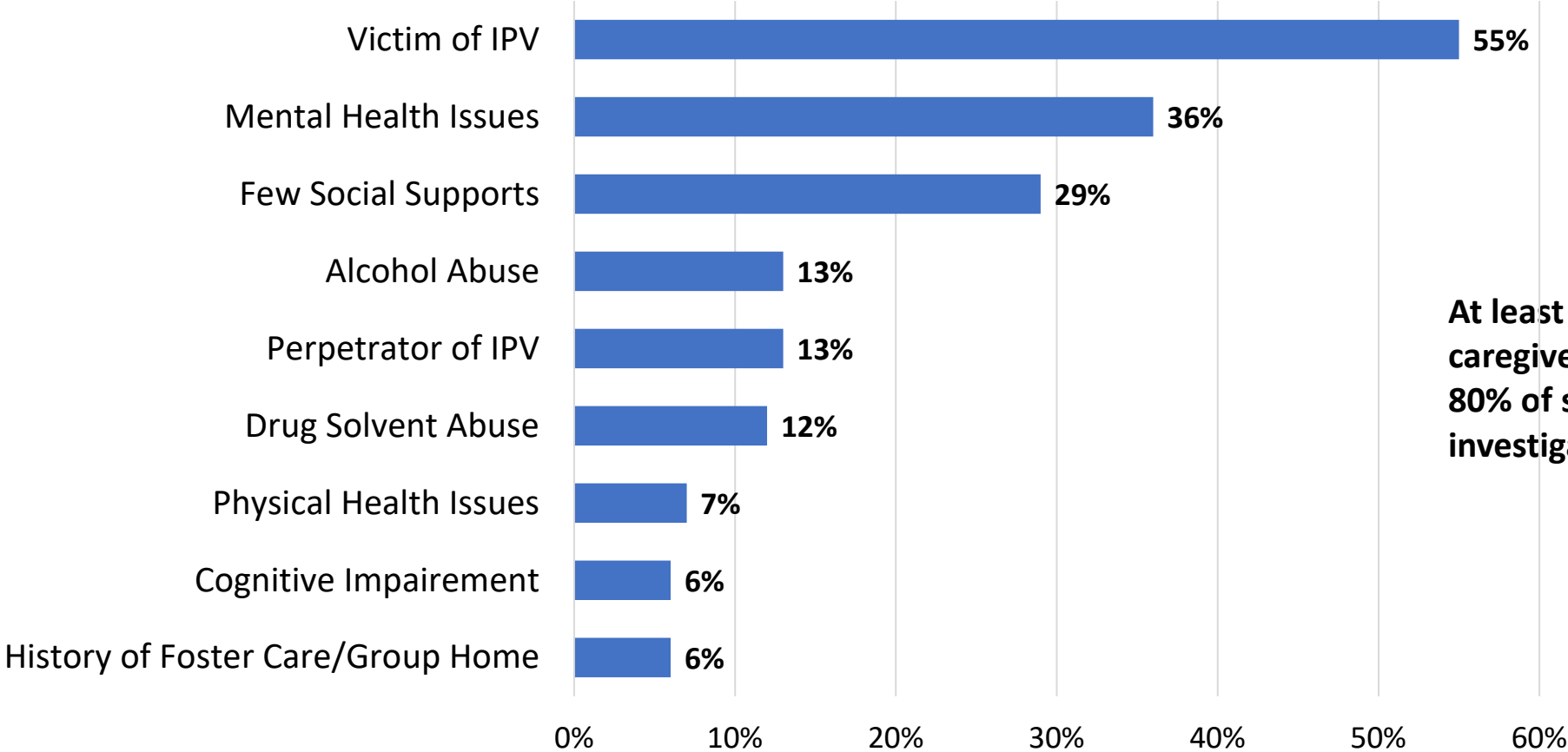
Physical and Emotional Harm: Substantiated Investigations in the OIS-2023



Nature of Physical Harm: Substantiated Investigations in the OIS-2023

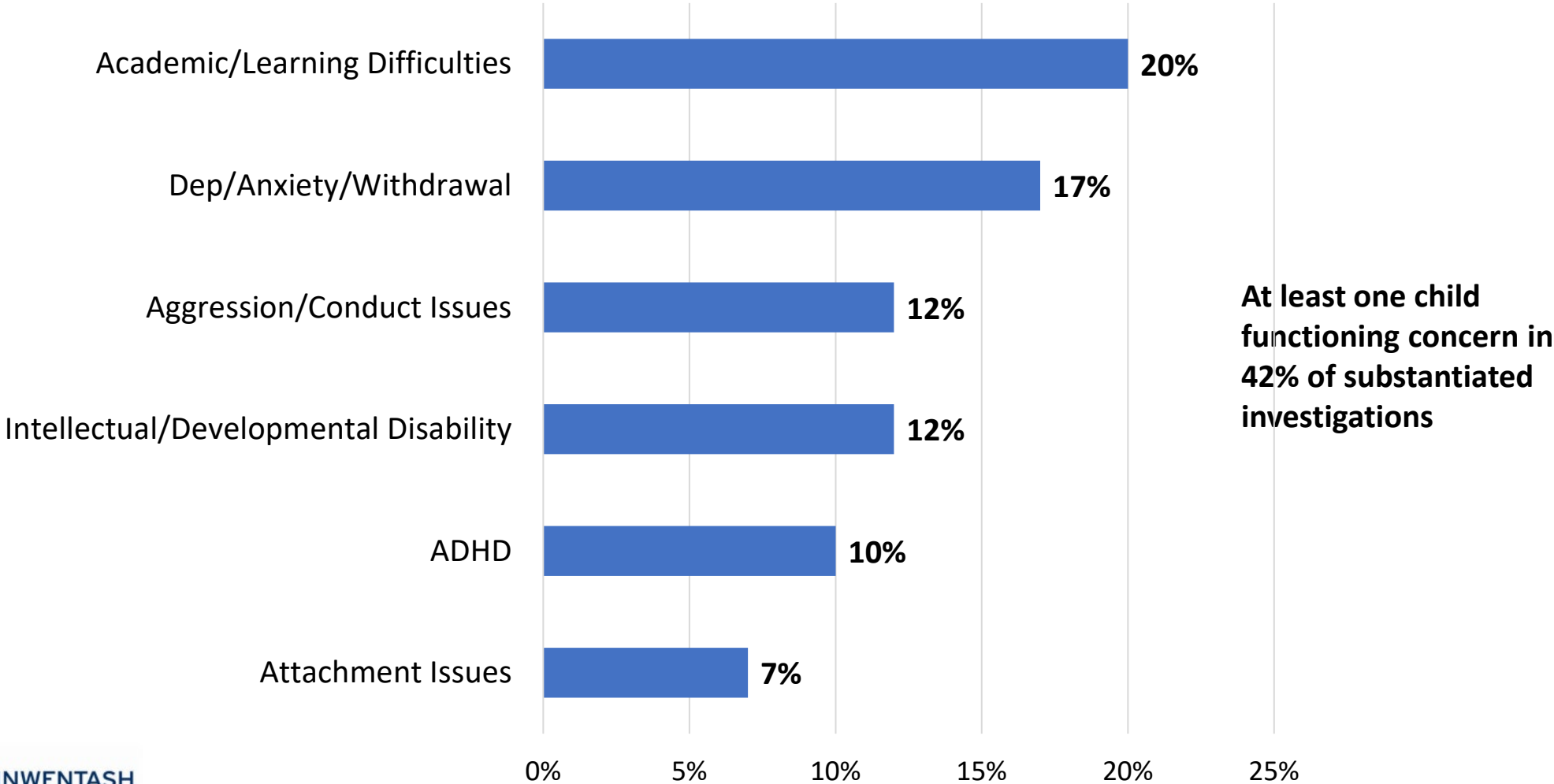


Primary Caregiver Functioning Concerns: Substantiated Investigations in the OIS-2023

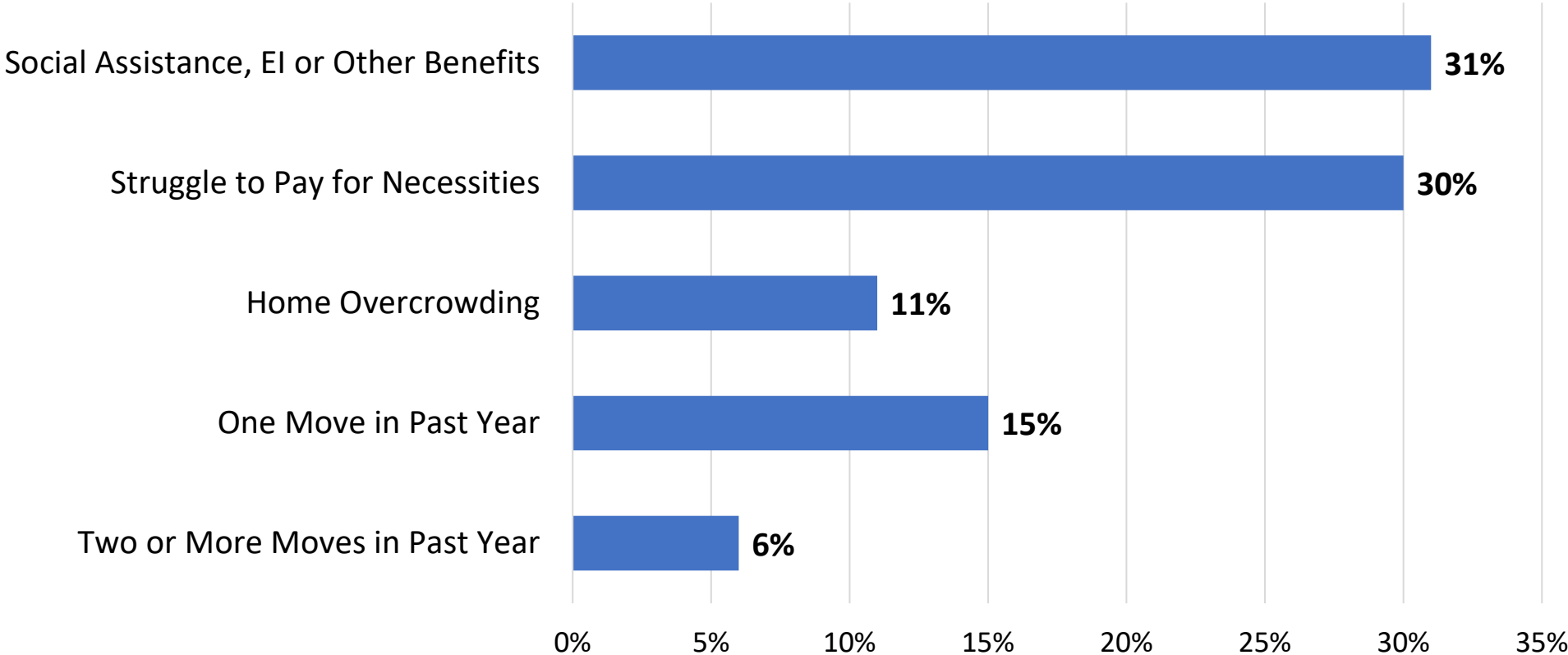


At least one primary caregiver risk factor in 80% of substantiated investigations

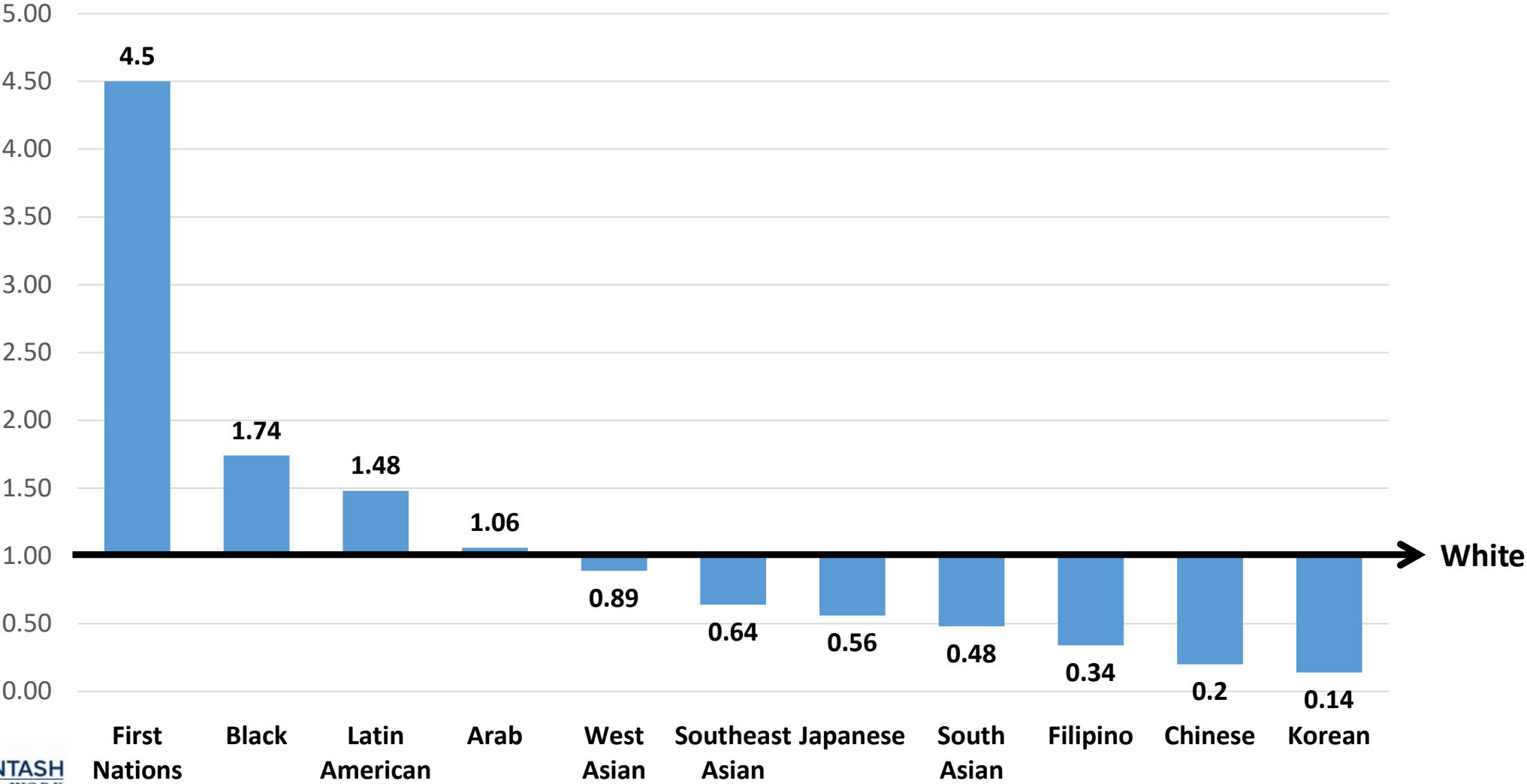
Child Functioning Concerns: Substantiated Investigations in the OIS-2023



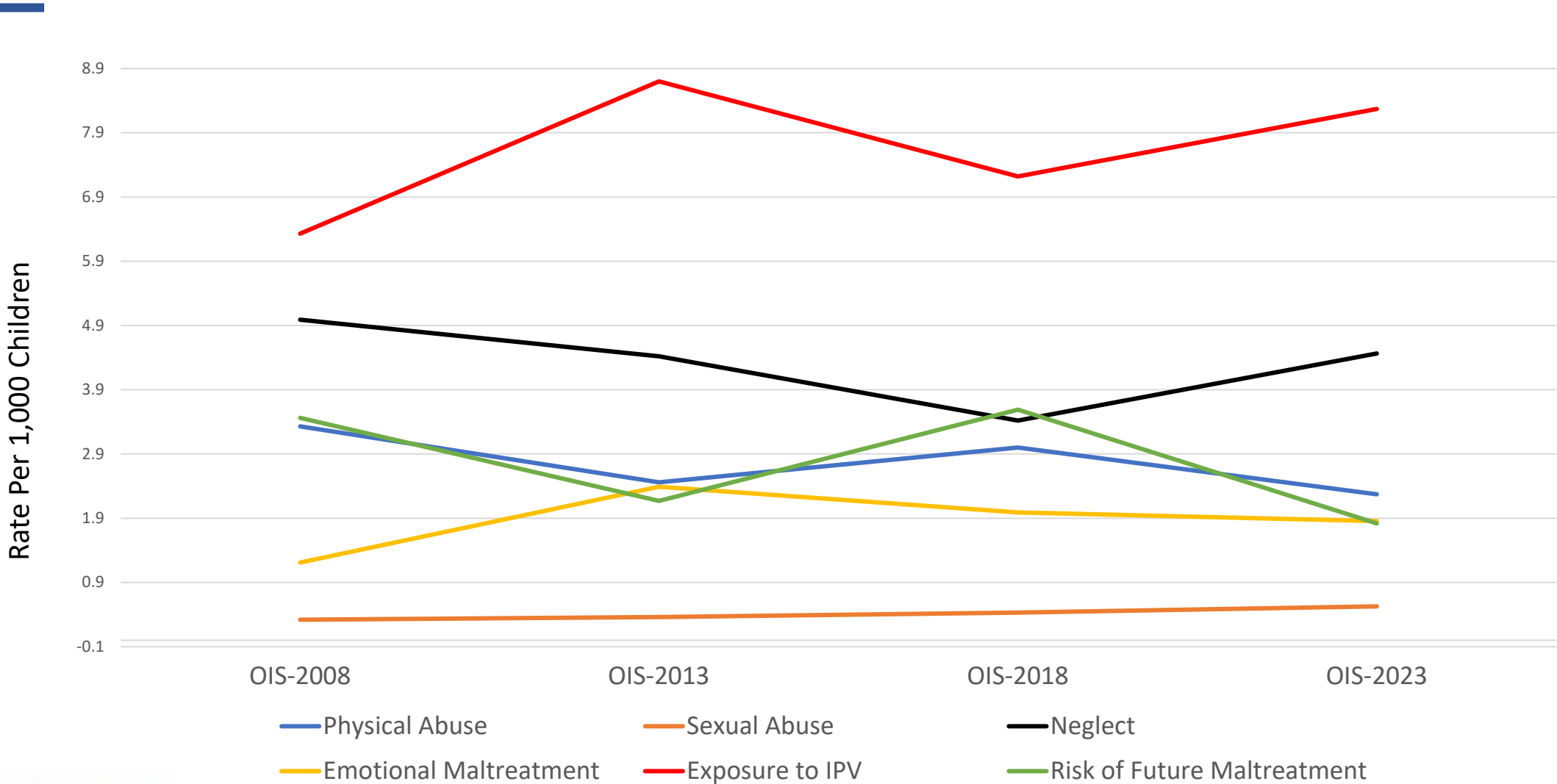
Household Factors, Substantiated Maltreatment Investigations in the OIS-2023



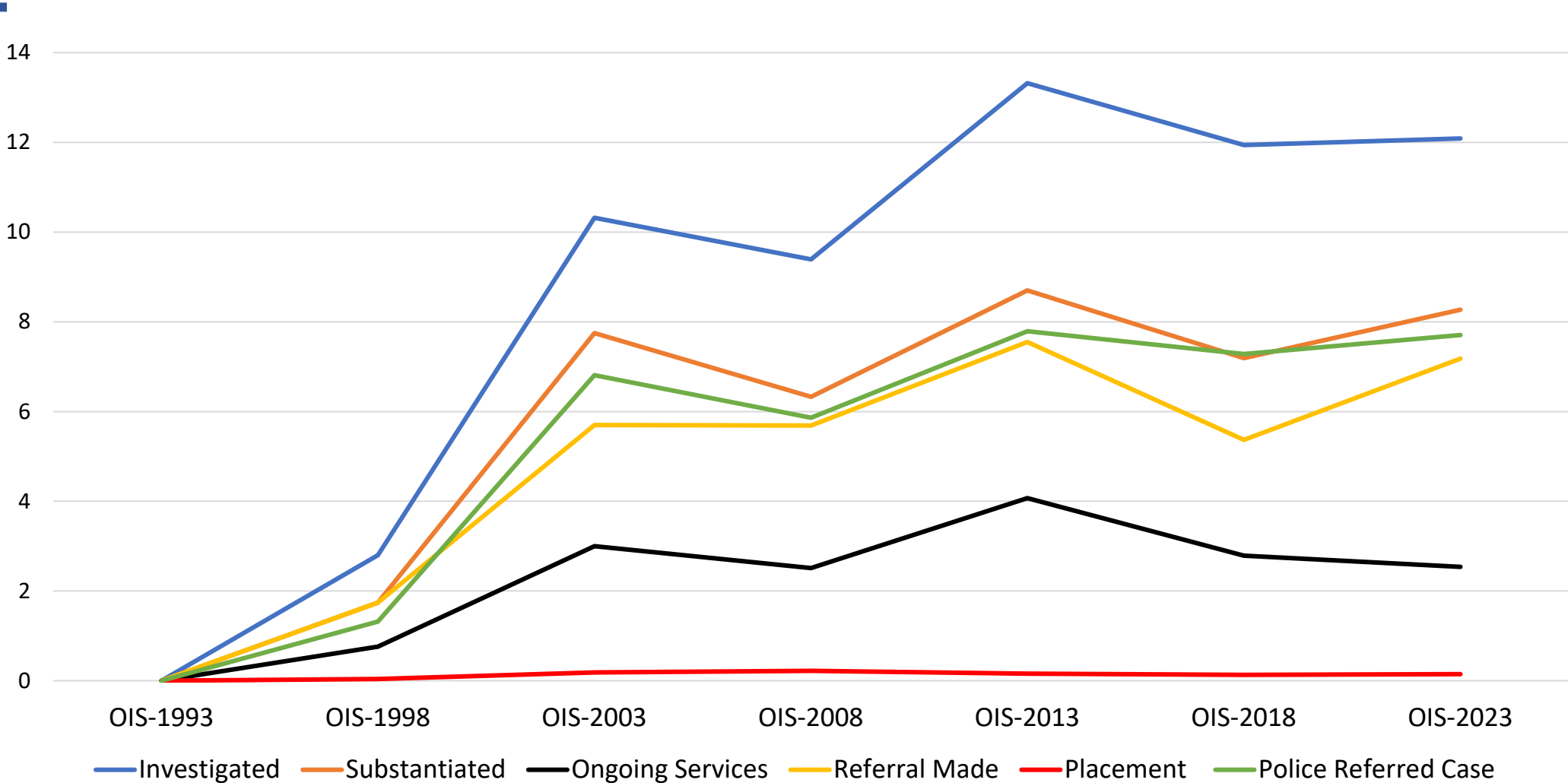
Disparity Index for Investigations by Ethno-racial Category for Children (0-17yrs) in Ontario in 2023



Primary Category of Substantiated Maltreatment: OIS-2008 to OIS-2023



Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence in Ontario: Changes Over Time (OIS-1993 to OIS-2023)



Dual Mandate of Child Welfare

Key distinction in child welfare is acute harm vs. long term chronic harm:

Acute Harm	Chronic long-term psychological harm
Severe physical abuse	Chronic neglect
Sexual abuse	Emotional maltreatment
Neglect of young children	Less severe physical abuse

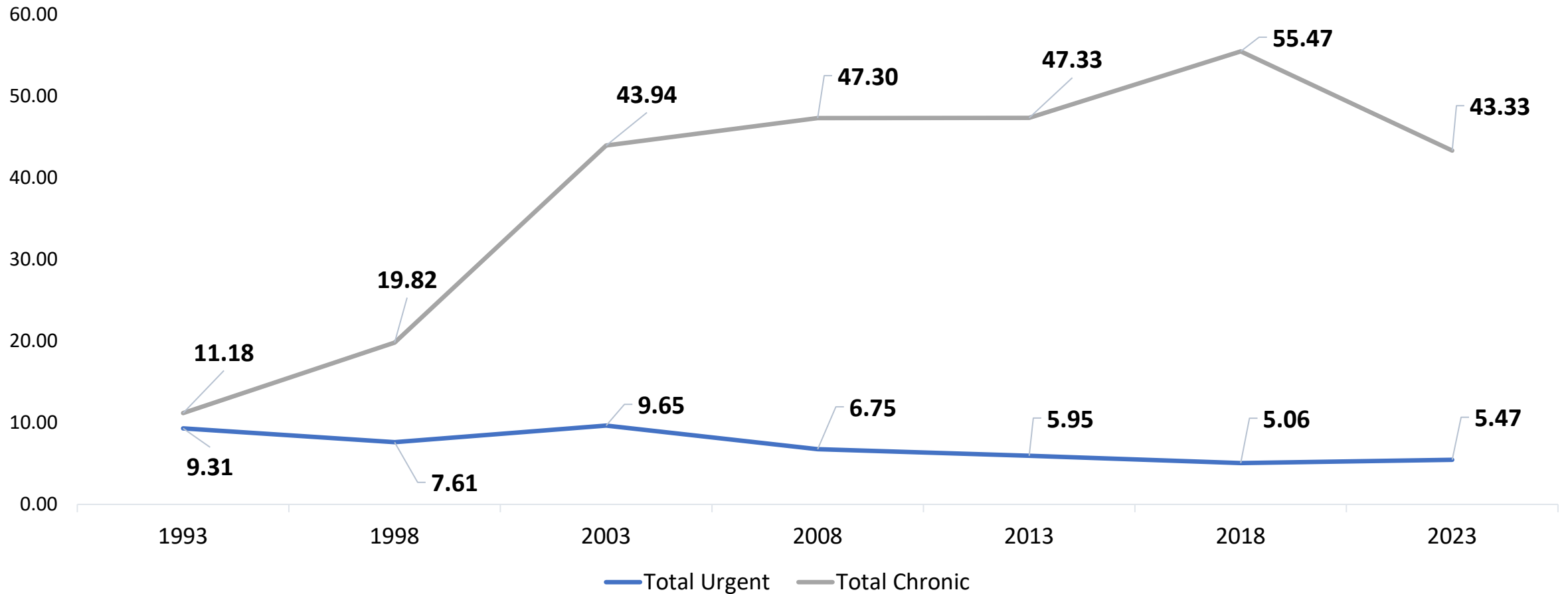
The dual mandate of child welfare to address acute safety risks and long-term well-being is recognized in legislation

“The paramount purpose of this Act is to promote the best interests, protection and well-being of children...” (OCFSA5, 2002, Section 1(1))

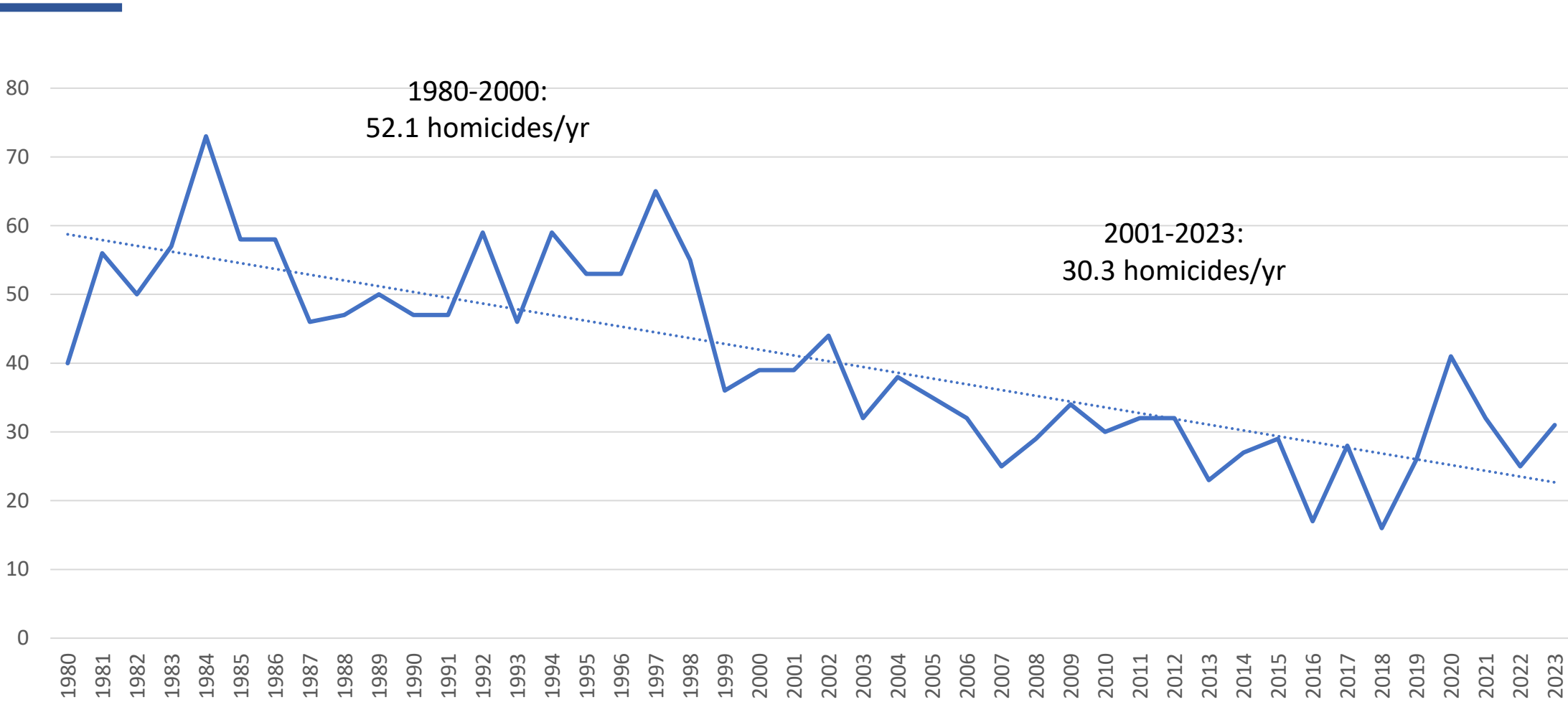
Source: Trocmé, N., A. Kyte, V. Sinha and B. Fallon (2014)

Total Incidence of Urgent Protection and Chronic Need Investigations in Ontario 1993-2023

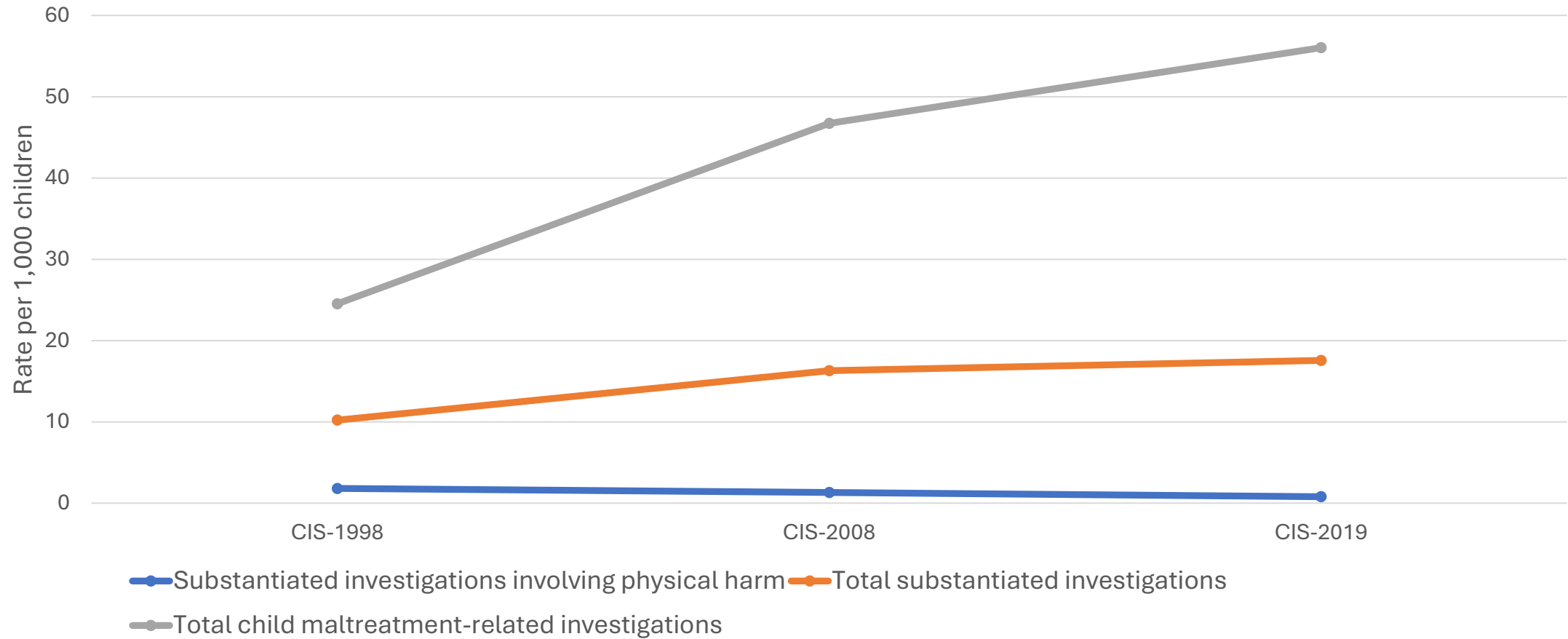
Rate Per 1,000 Children



Number of homicide victims (0-11) in Canada: 1980-2023



Substantiated child maltreatment investigations involving physical harm in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 1998, 2008, and 2019



Type of physical harm and requirement of medical treatment in substantiated child maltreatment investigations involving physical harm in Canada, excluding Quebec, in 1998, 2008, and 2019

	CIS-1998			CIS-2008			CIS-2019		
	#	Rate per		#	Rate per		#	Rate per	
		1,000	%		1,000	%		1,000	%
Bruises, cuts, and scrapes	6,134	1.27	70%	4,138	0.89	67%	2,960	0.62	78%
Burns/scalds	458	0.09	5%	135	0.03	2%	141	0.03	4%
Broken bones	176	0.04	2%	155	0.03	3%	-	-	-
Head trauma	390	0.08	4%	314	0.07	5%	102	0.02	3%
Fatal	0	0.00	0%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other health condition	2,172	0.45	25%	1,736	0.37	28%	574	0.12	15%
Medical treatment required	2,139	0.44	24%	2,162	0.46	35%	1,147	0.24	30%
Total substantiated investigations involving physical harm	8,736	1.81	100%	6,147	1.32	100%	3,799	0.79	100%

Based on a sample of 366 substantiated investigations in 1998, 440 substantiated investigations in 2008, and 213 substantiated investigations in 2019 involving physical harm to the investigated child.

- Estimate was < 100 investigations.

Thank You!

For more information, please visit the
Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal at www.cwrp.ca



First Nations Children in Ontario's Child Welfare System

May 2026

Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children (CREVAWC) Webinar

Amber Crowe & Barbara Fallon

Today we will:

- Provide an overview of the First Nations Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse & Neglect (FN-OIS) 2023
- Highlight some of the Major Findings
- Review profiles of children and families; highlighting differences for investigations involving First Nations (FN) children
- Clear argument for systems change

REMINDER / CONTEXT

TRC: First Call for Immediate Action (2015)

- We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and First Nations, Metis, Inuit governments to commit to reducing the number of First Nations, Metis, Inuit children in care by:
 - Monitoring and assessing neglect investigations.
 - Providing adequate resources to enable First Nations, Metis, Inuit communities and child-welfare organizations to keep First Nations, Metis, Inuit families together where it is safe to do so, and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments, regardless of where they reside.

TRC: First Call for Immediate Action (2015)

- We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, to prepare and publish annual reports on the number of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis who are in care, compared with non-Aboriginal children, as well as the reasons for apprehension, the total spending on preventive and care services by child-welfare agencies, and the effectiveness of various interventions.

First Nations Component of the OIS-2023 (FNOIS-23)

- Collaborative effort by OIS research team and Indigenous Child and Family Well Being Agencies organizations to:
 - Support participation of Indigenous Child and Family Well Being Agencies in the OIS – Representative sample in 2023 for 1st time
- Continue to analyze data on investigations involving First Nations children
 - FNCIS-2019 documented overrepresentation of First Nations children in the Canadian child welfare system
- Ensure appropriate contextualization of findings
- Disseminate research results
- Increase the capacity for First Nations child welfare research



FIRST NATIONS ONTARIO INCIDENCE STUDY OF REPORTED CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT – 2023

MAJOR FINDINGS

Amber Crowe, MSW, J.D. and Micheal Miller, MBA

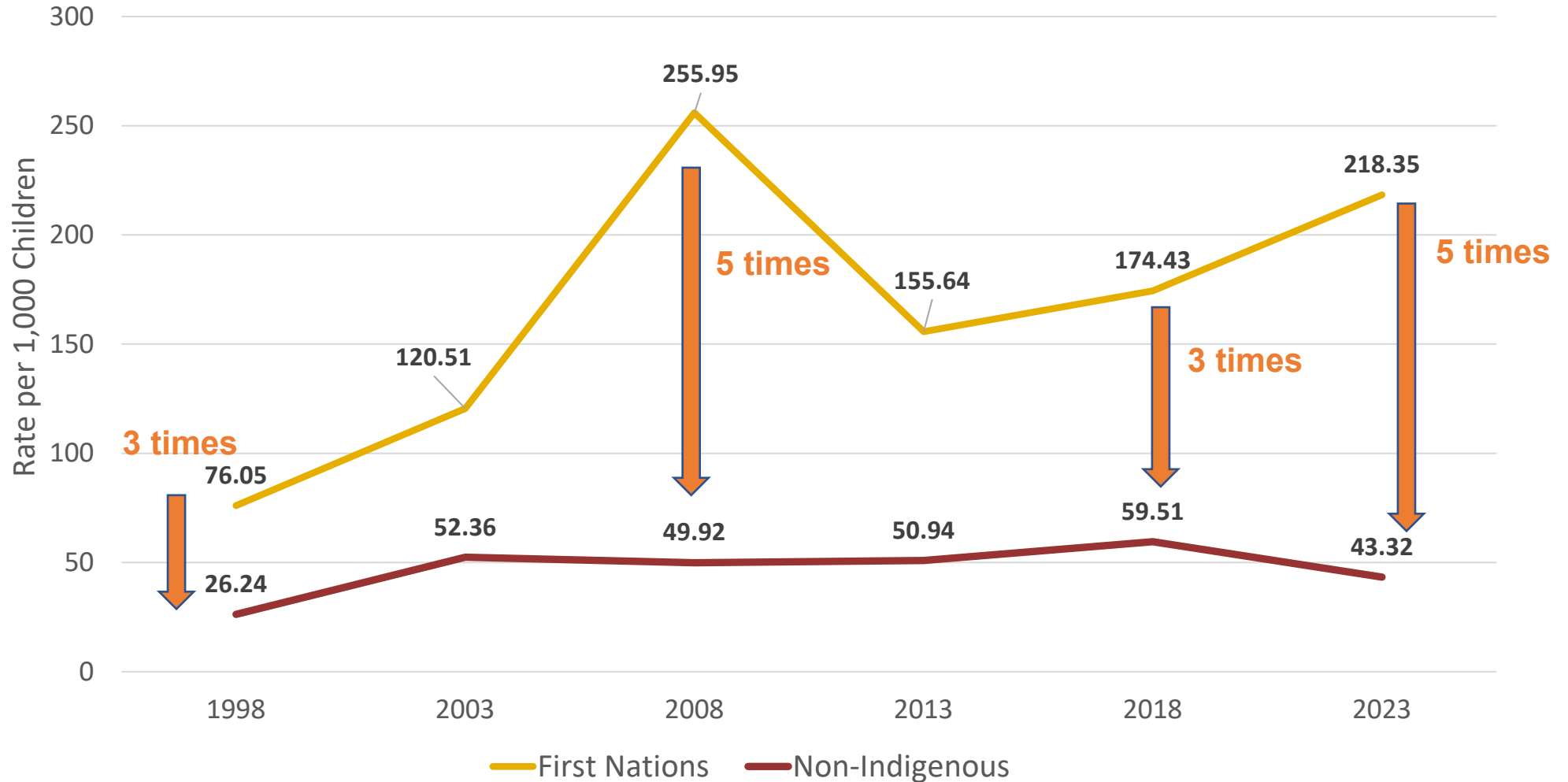
With support from: Barbara Fallon, Rachael Lefebvre, Tara Black, Nico Trocmé, Sonia Hélie, Bryn King, Tonino Esposito, John Fluke, Delphine Collin-Vézina, Henry Parada, Lorraine Hill and Mark Kartusch

FNOIS-2023 and
other reports
available at
www.cwrp.ca

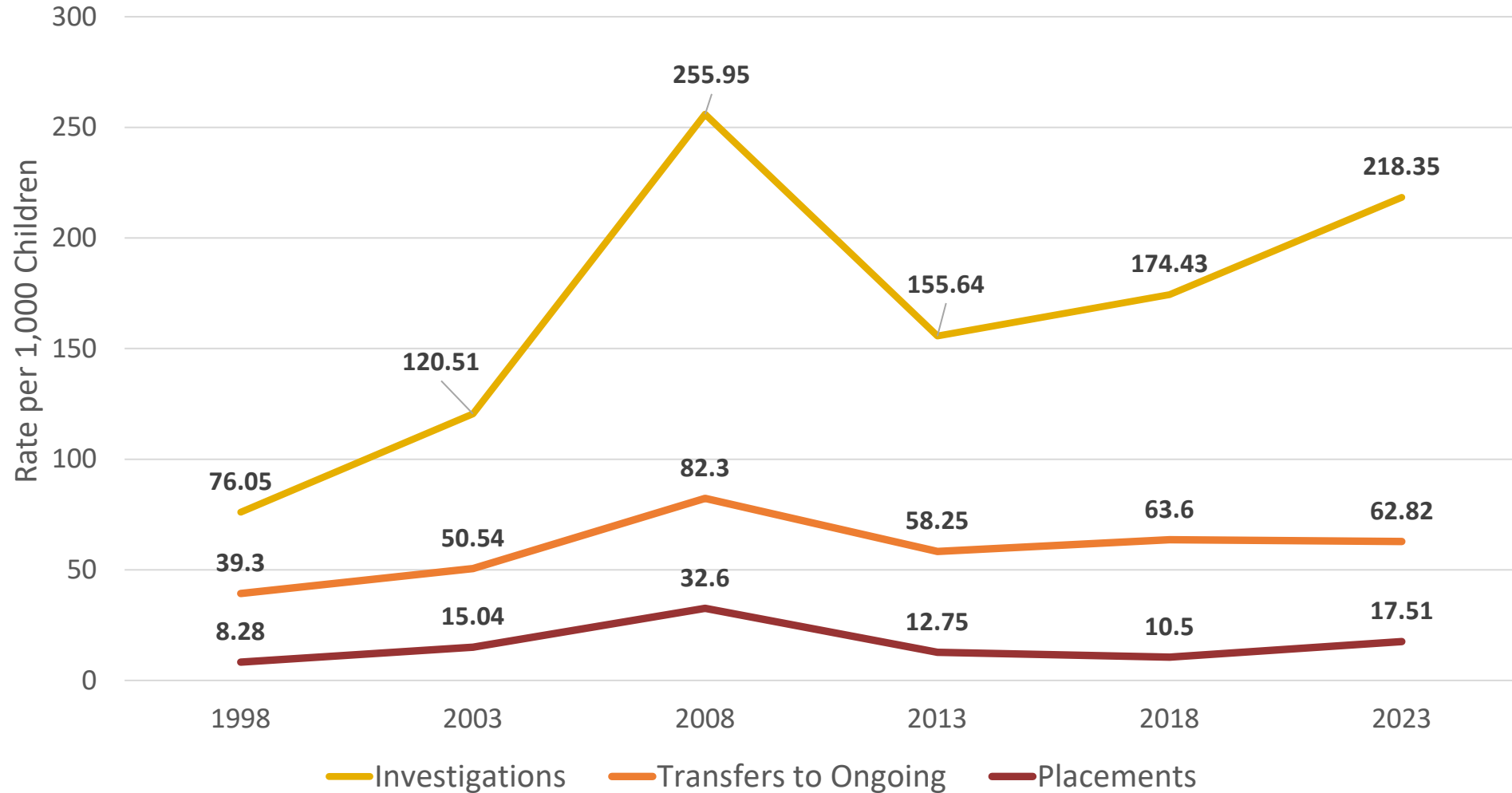
Historical Context

- **First Nations children have a history of being separated from their families/communities over generations**
 - Individual, family, and community level, intergenerational impacts
 - Residential Schools
 - Forced assimilation of First Nations peoples into colonial society
 - “Sixties Scoop”
 - Provincial/territorial child welfare systems were extended to include on-reserve communities in the 1950s
 - By the 1980s, the overrepresentation of First Nations children in the child welfare system was clearly documented

Rates of Investigations for First Nations Children Over Time (Children 0 – 15)

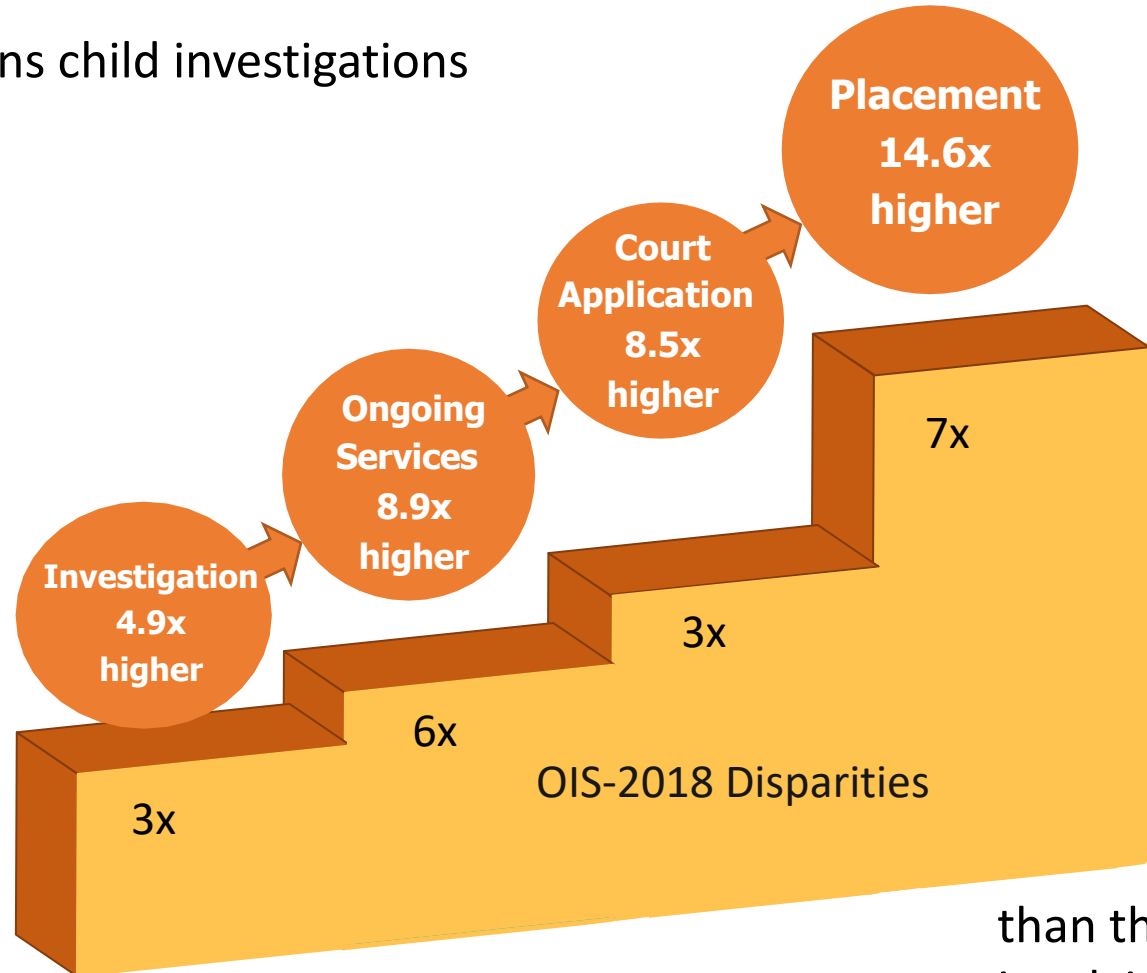


Rates of Investigations, Transfers to Ongoing Services, and Placements for First Nations Children Over Time (Children 0 – 15)



Key Disparities: FNOIS-2023

Rate of First Nations child investigations
(0-17):



Placement after substantiated maltreatment or confirmed risk investigation

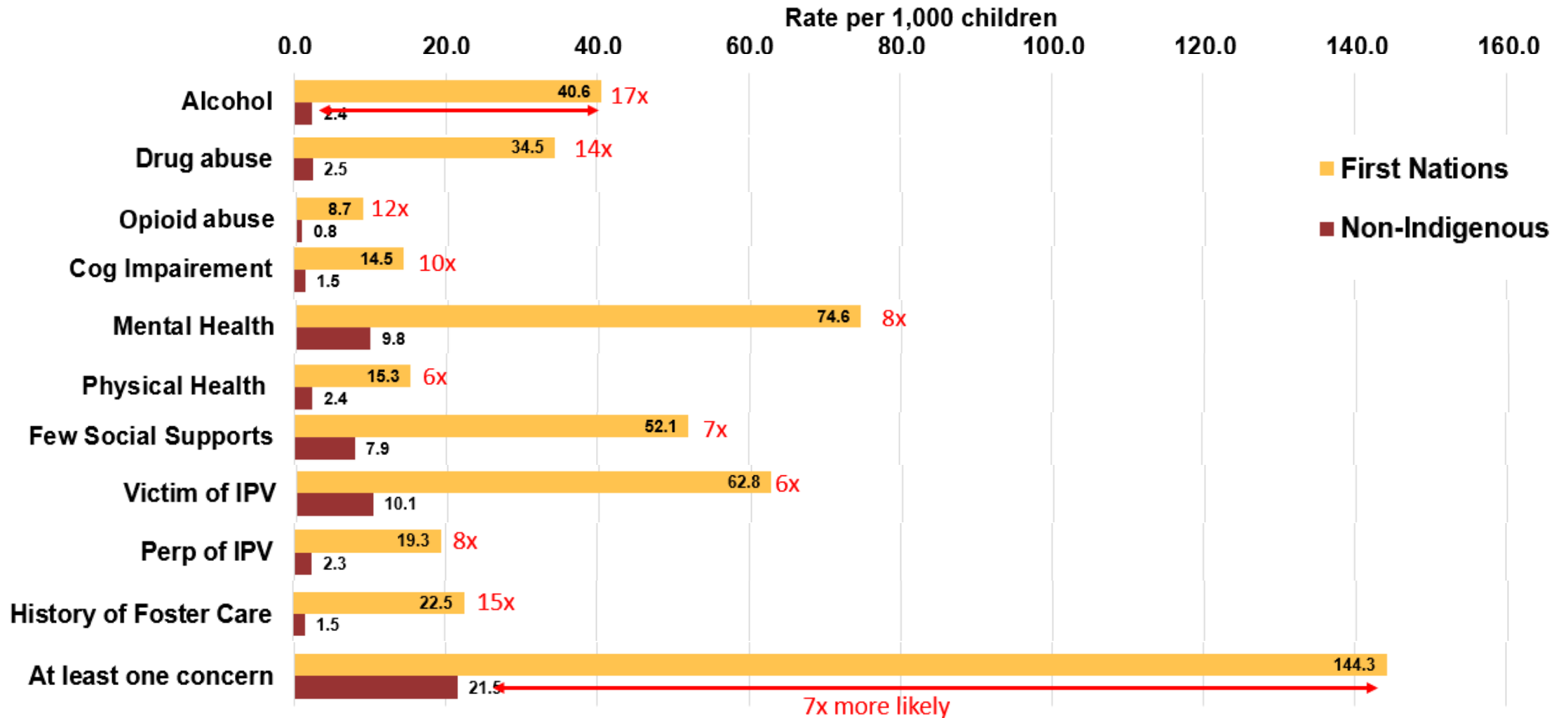
17.3x higher
for First Nations children

than the rate of child investigations involving non-Indigenous children (0-17)

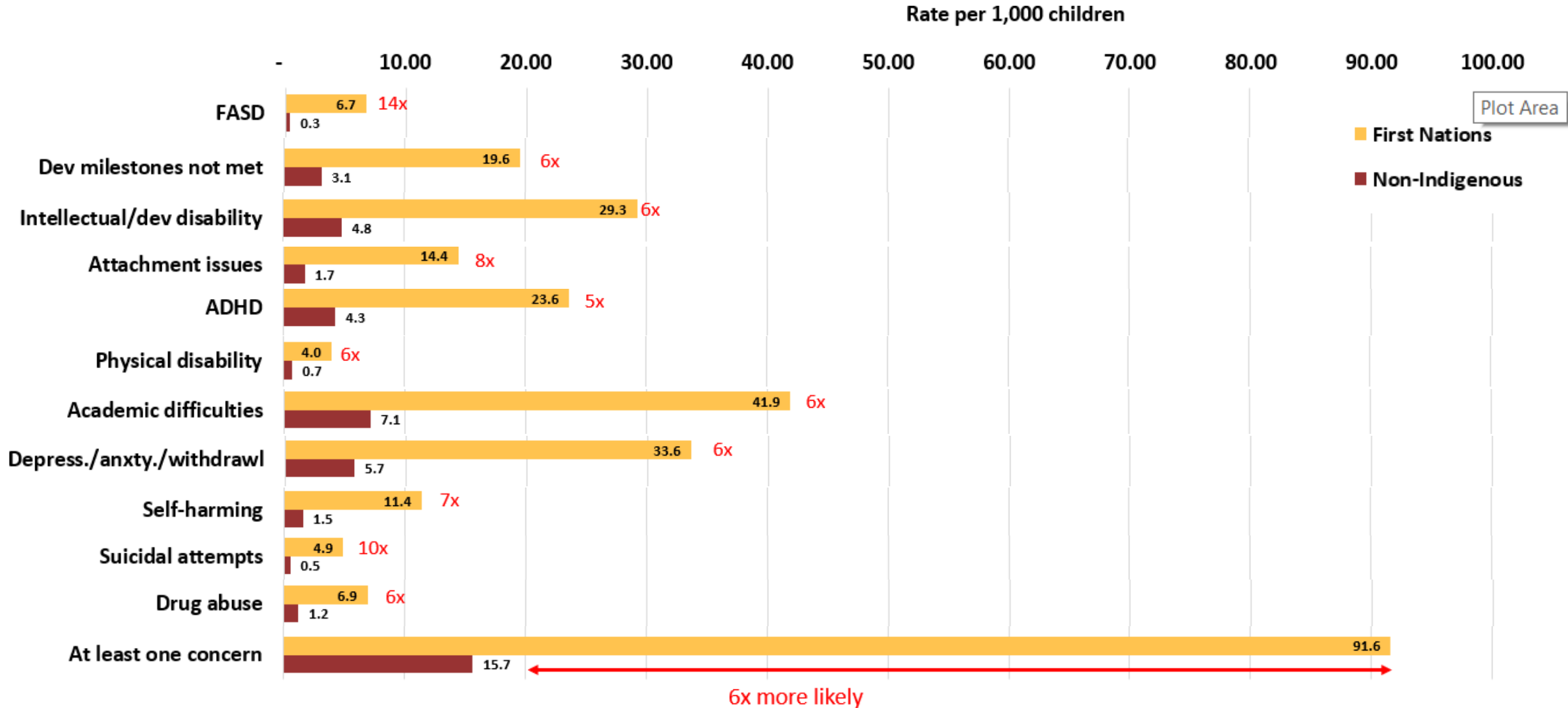
**What is the context for higher rates
of investigation, transfer and
placement into out of home care?**

**Significant disparities in
child, caregiver and housing concerns**

Primary Caregiver Functioning Concerns: FNOIS-2023

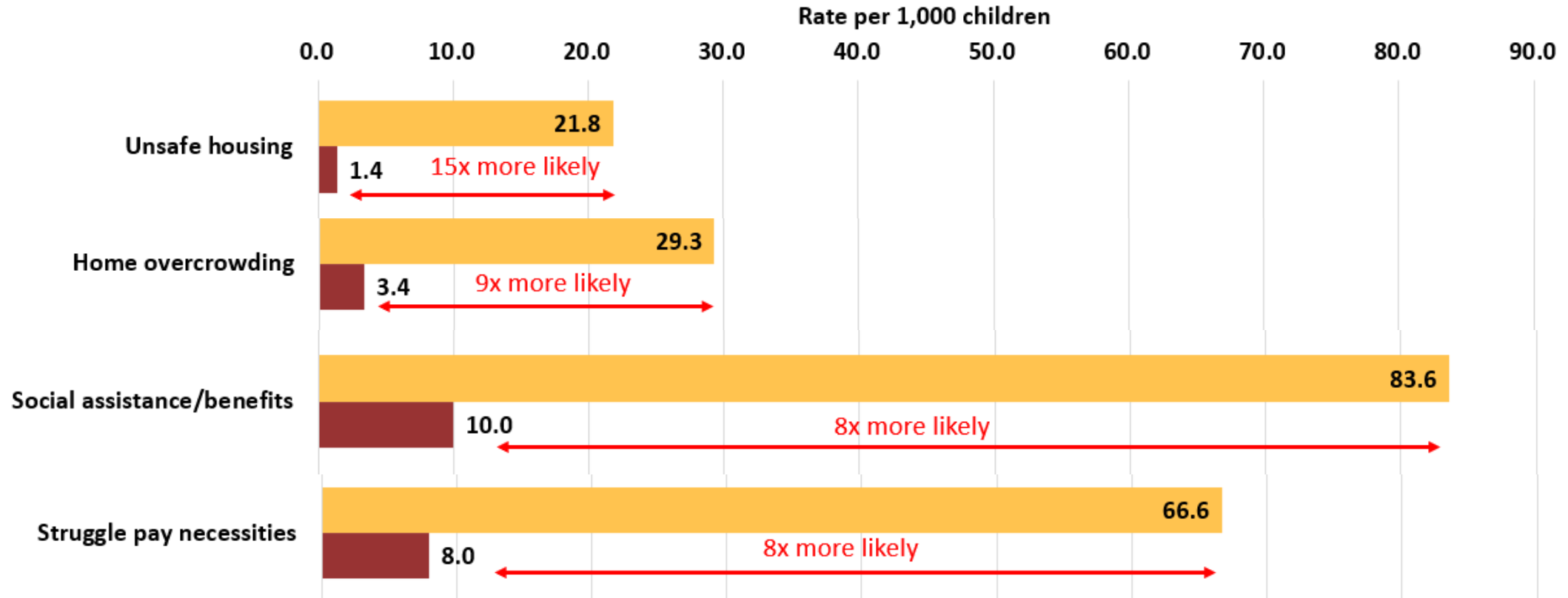


Child Functioning Concerns: FNOIS-2023

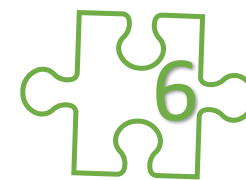
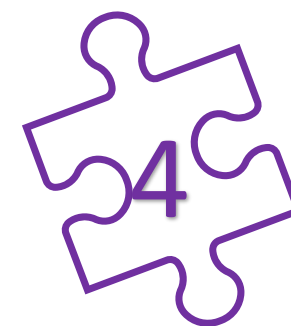
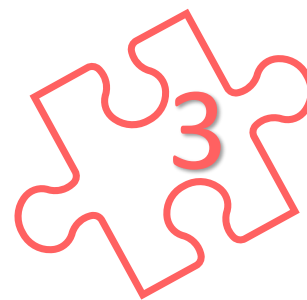
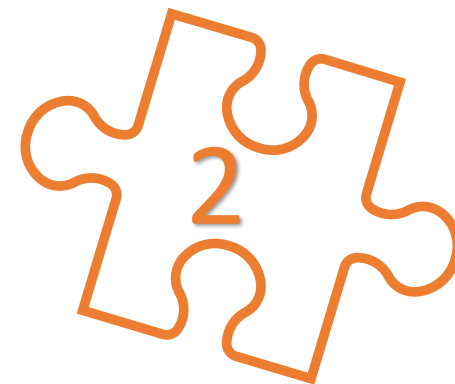
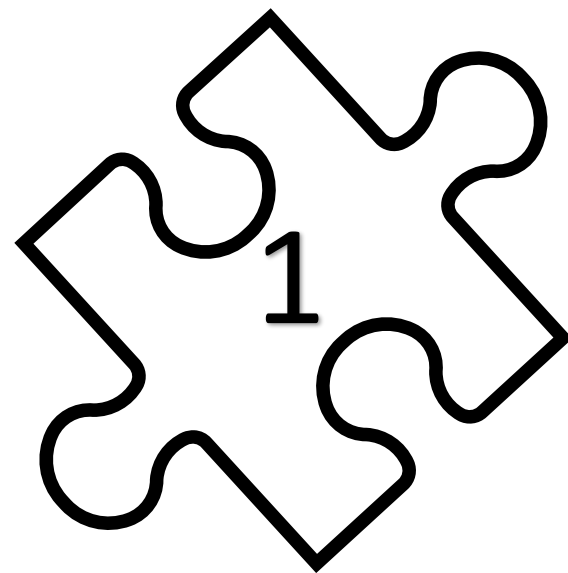


Household Factors: FNOIS-2023

■ First Nations ■ Non-Indigenous



How many
different
groups are
there among
Ontario
investigations?



What are the groups based on?

**CHILD
CONCERNS**



Neurodevelopmental
Mental health
Behavioural

**PRIMARY
CAREGIVER
CONCERNS**



Alcohol misuse
Drug misuse
Mental health
Physical health
Social isolation
IPV in home

POVERTY



Economic hardship
Housing instability

What are the profiles of need in each group?

Group 1:

Incident reported,
majority not a child
protection matter

Group 2:

Substance misuse,
mental health concerns
and IPV

Group 3:

Poverty and IPV

Group 4:

Only child needs, may be
complex

Group 5:

Child needs, caregiver
health needs and poverty

Group 6:

Substance misuse,
mental health, social
isolation, poverty and
IPV

Size of groups look different for investigations involving a First Nations child

Group 1: Incident reported, majority not a child protection matter

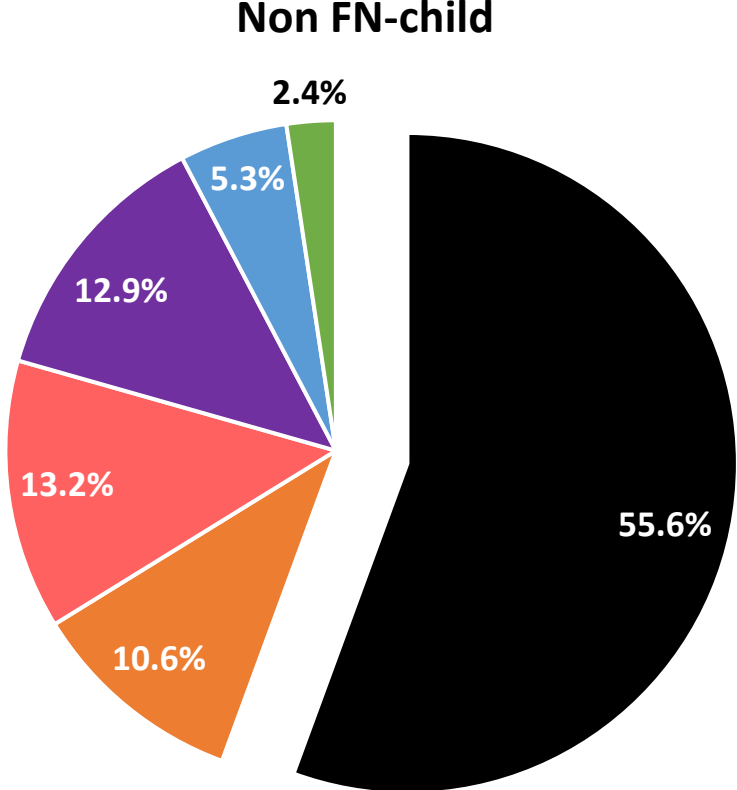
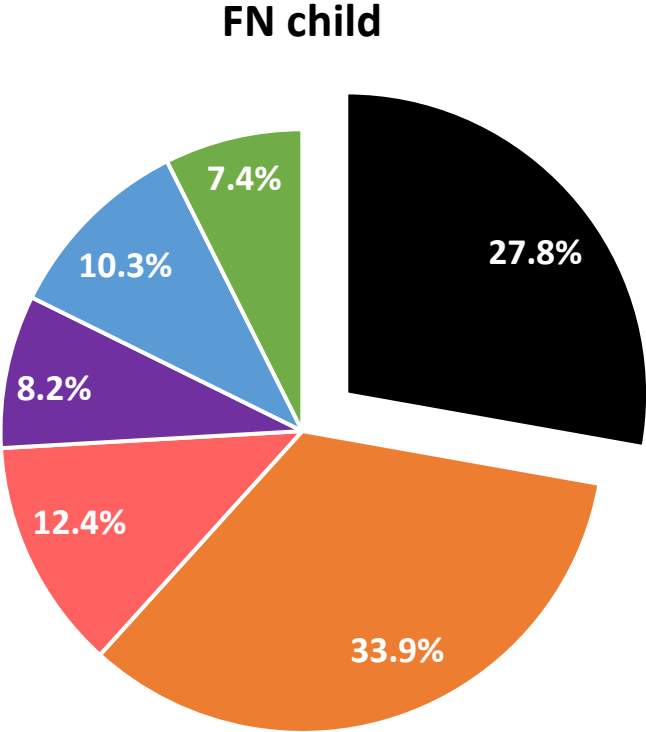
Group 2: Substance misuse, mental health concerns and IPV

Group 3: Poverty and IPV

Group 4: Only child needs, may be complex

Group 5: Child needs, caregiver health needs and poverty

Group 6: Substance misuse, mental health, social isolation, poverty and IPV



Ongoing Services by Group

Group 1: Incident reported, majority not a child protection matter

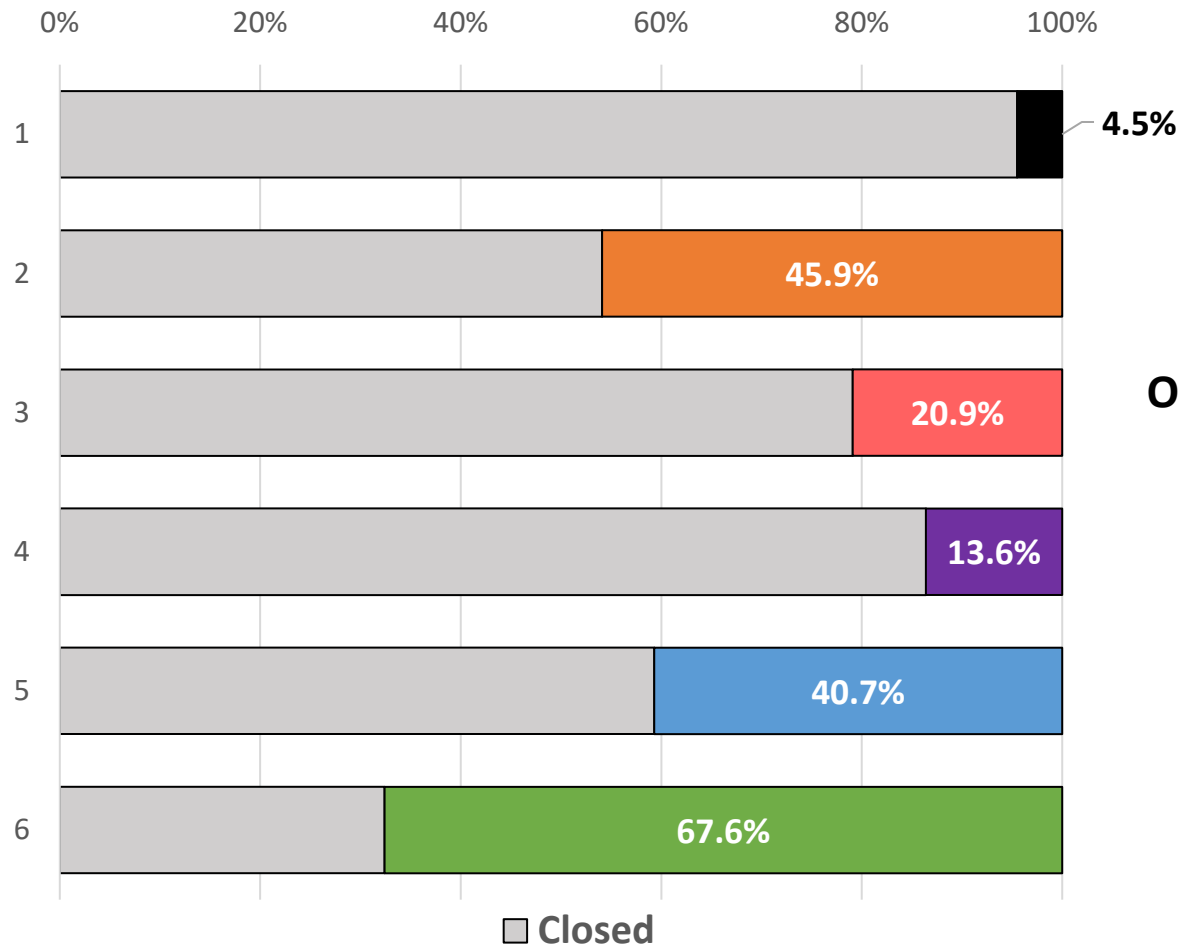
Group 2: Substance misuse, mental health concerns and IPV

Group 3: Poverty and IPV

Group 4: Only child needs, may be complex

Group 5: Child needs, caregiver health needs and poverty

Group 6: Substance misuse, mental health, social isolation, poverty and IPV



Transfer to Ongoing Services in 17% of Investigations Overall

Placement by Group

Group 1: Incident reported, majority not a child protection matter

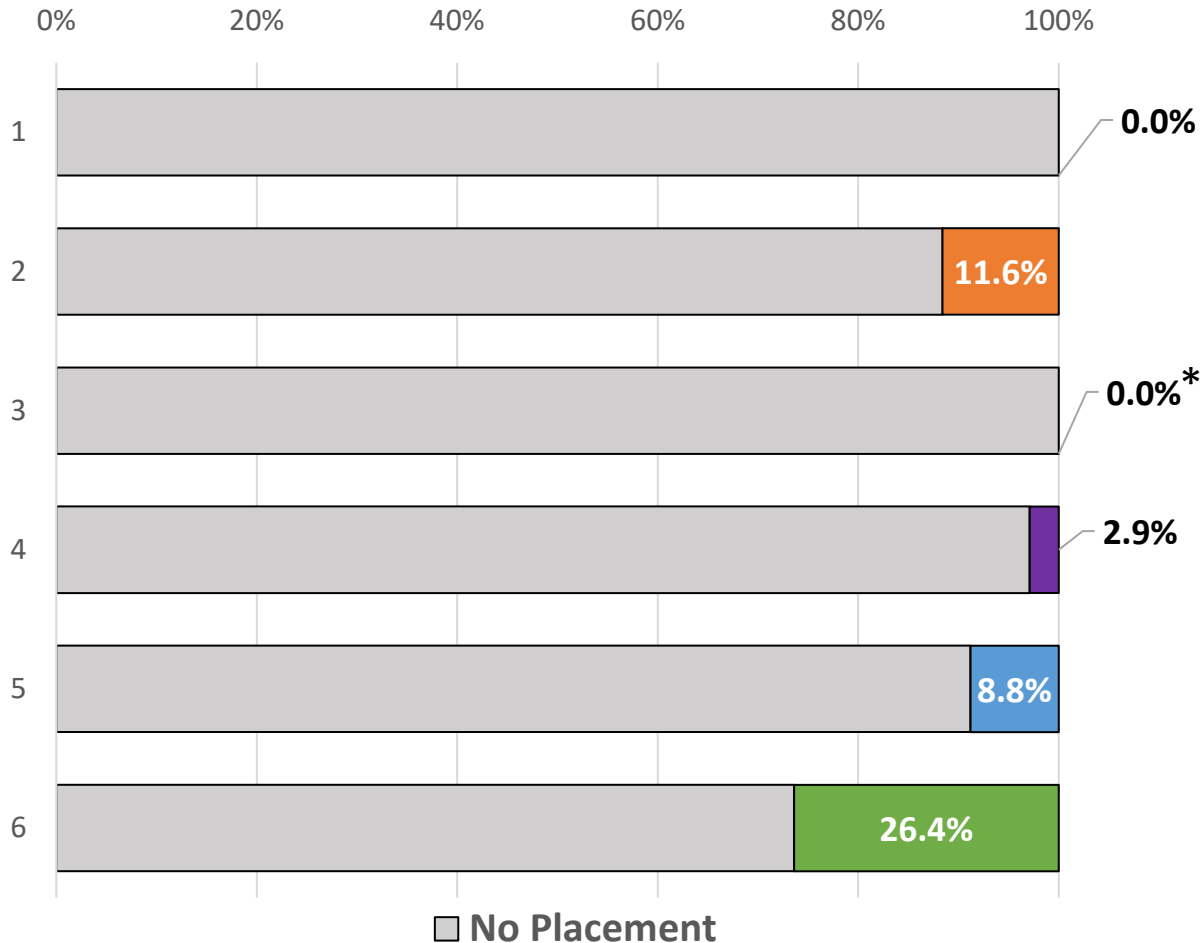
Group 2: Substance misuse, mental health concerns and IPV

Group 3: Poverty and IPV

Group 4: Only child needs, may be complex

Group 5: Child needs, caregiver health needs and poverty

Group 6: Substance misuse, mental health, social isolation, poverty and IPV

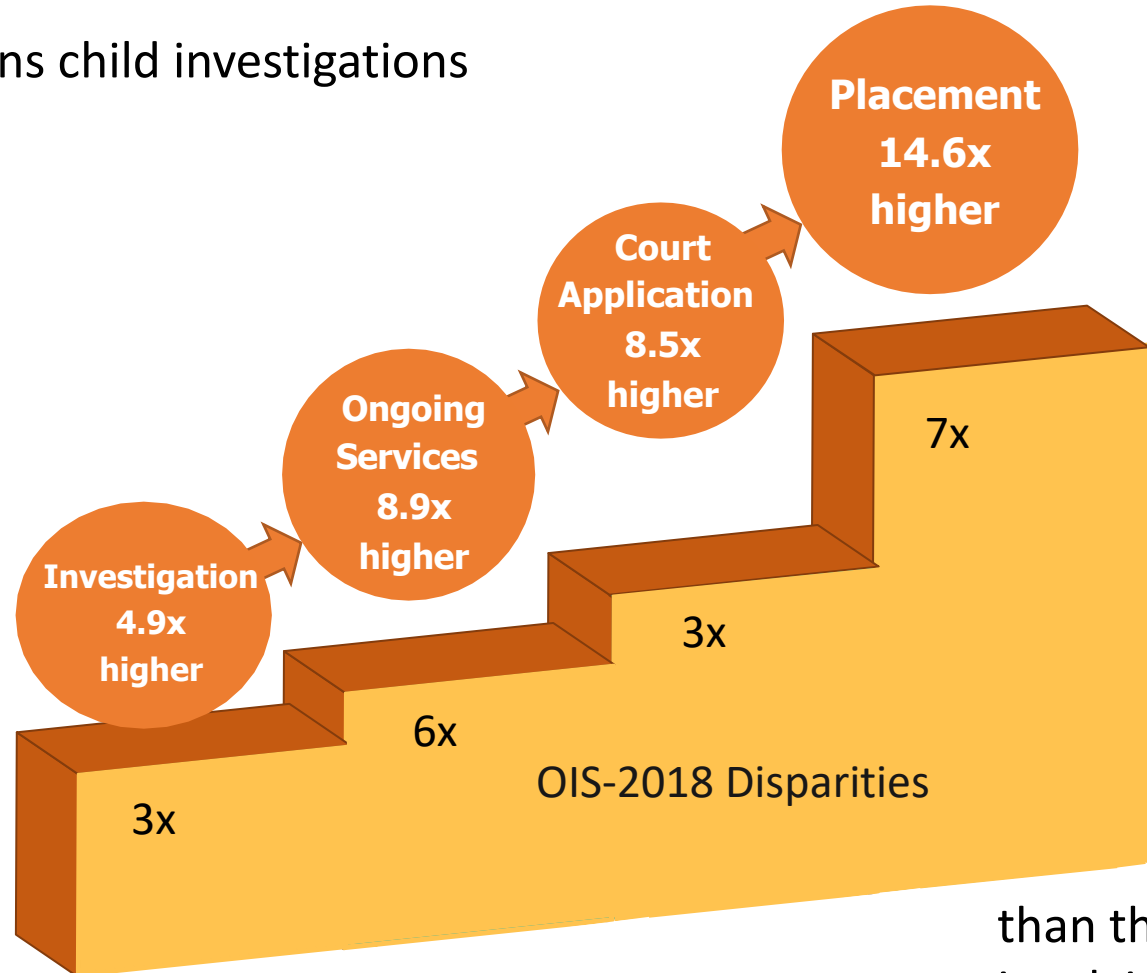


**Placement Made
in 3.5% of
Investigations
Overall**

*BCH estimate was unstable due to very few events

Key Disparities: FNOIS-2023

Rate of First Nations child investigations
(0-17):



Placement after substantiated maltreatment or confirmed risk investigation

17.3x higher
for First Nations children

than the rate of child investigations involving non-Indigenous children (0-17)

More Differences

Our services require more time and resources:

- All our children and youth have identity factors to consider in service
- Most of our families are coping with intergenerational trauma
- Providing culturally grounded services requires more time, effort, resources, training, and cost
- Given the clinical profiles just discussed, most of our children/families are “complex”
- Our files require extensive engagement with FN communities (time/cost)
- Almost all our court files include an additional party (Band Reps) adds time/cost
- We use customary care where possible – longer process, time/cost
- Add these facts: Indigenous = 5x more likely to be investigated, 9x more likely to be opened for service, 8x more likely to be in court, 14x more likely to be in out of home care

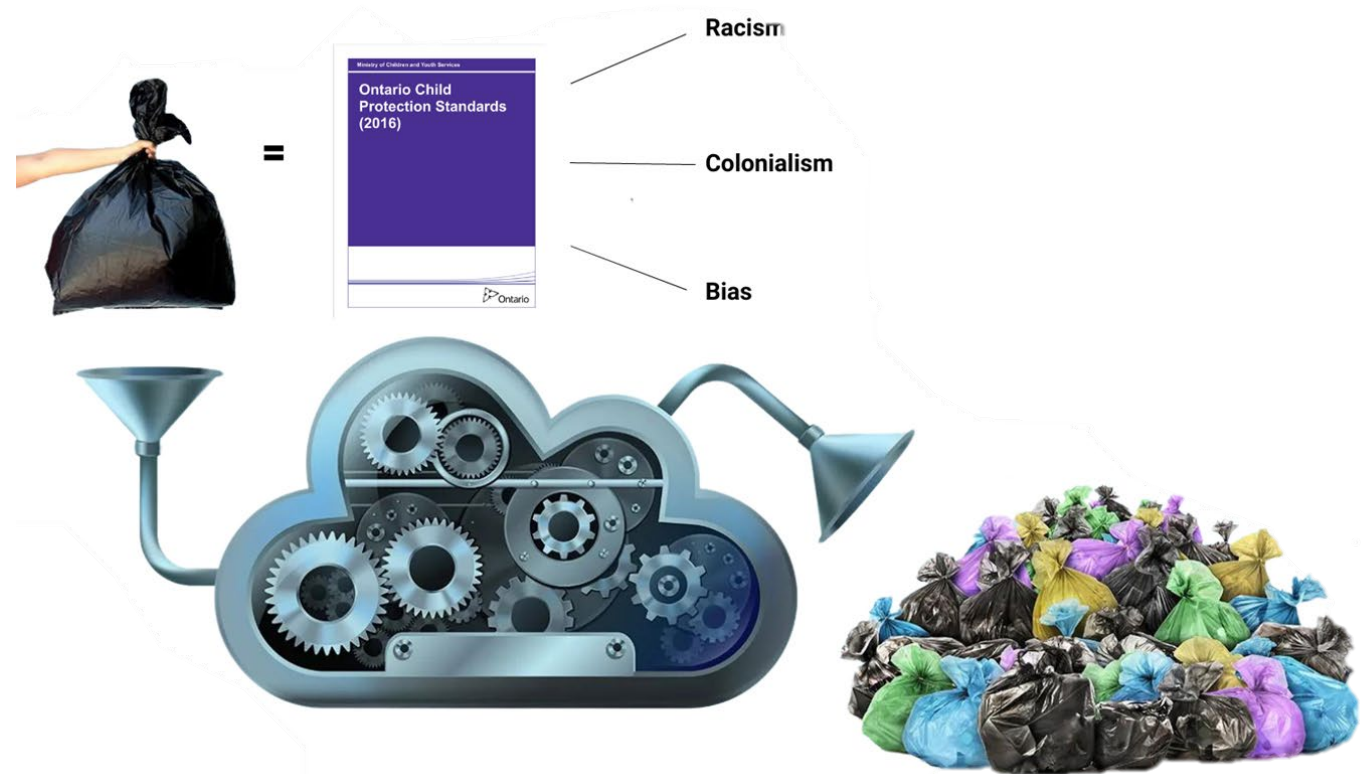
Does anyone wonder...

- Why staff providing First Nations child and family well-being services need lower caseloads?
- Why our investigations take longer?
- Why we need more supports and more admission prevention?
- Why our children's needs are more difficult and more expensive to meet?
- Why our care providers need more support and respite?
- Why our files stay open longer?

- WHY we are funded with the same funding formula as mainstream CASs?
- WHY anyone would use the provincial funding levels to determine what should be received for First Nations to deliver services?

Performance Measures

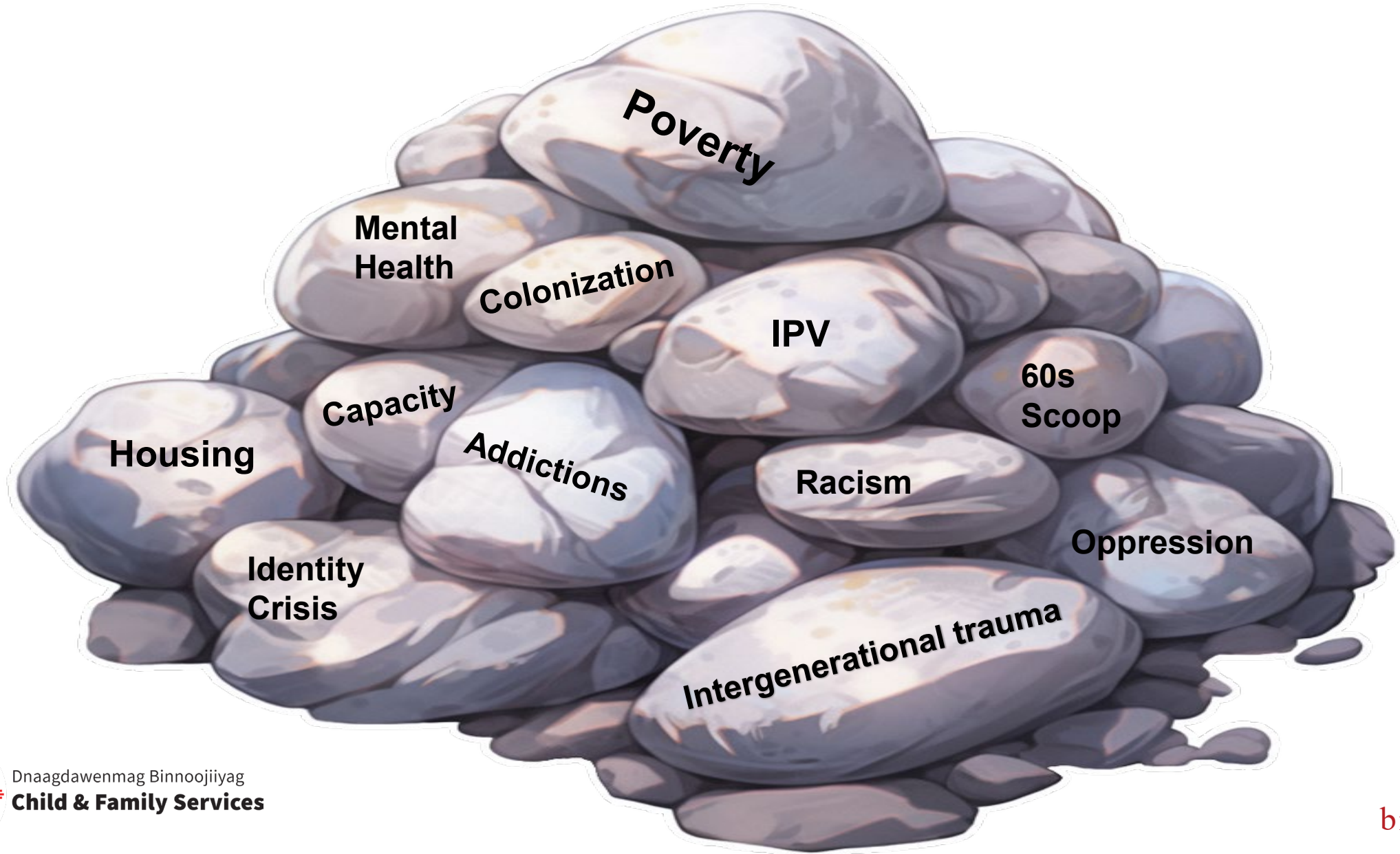
- What gets measured gets done
- Compliance in compliance out



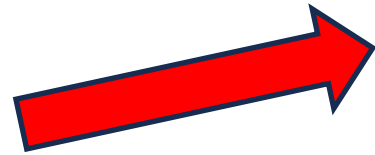
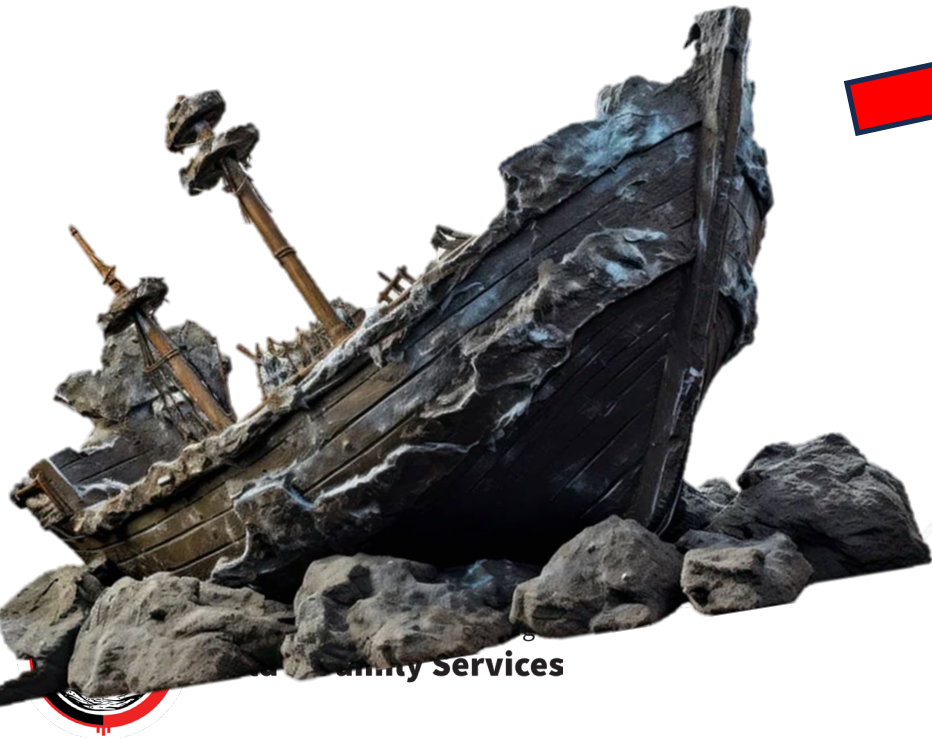
Design your laws and your performance measures around outcomes!

Current state

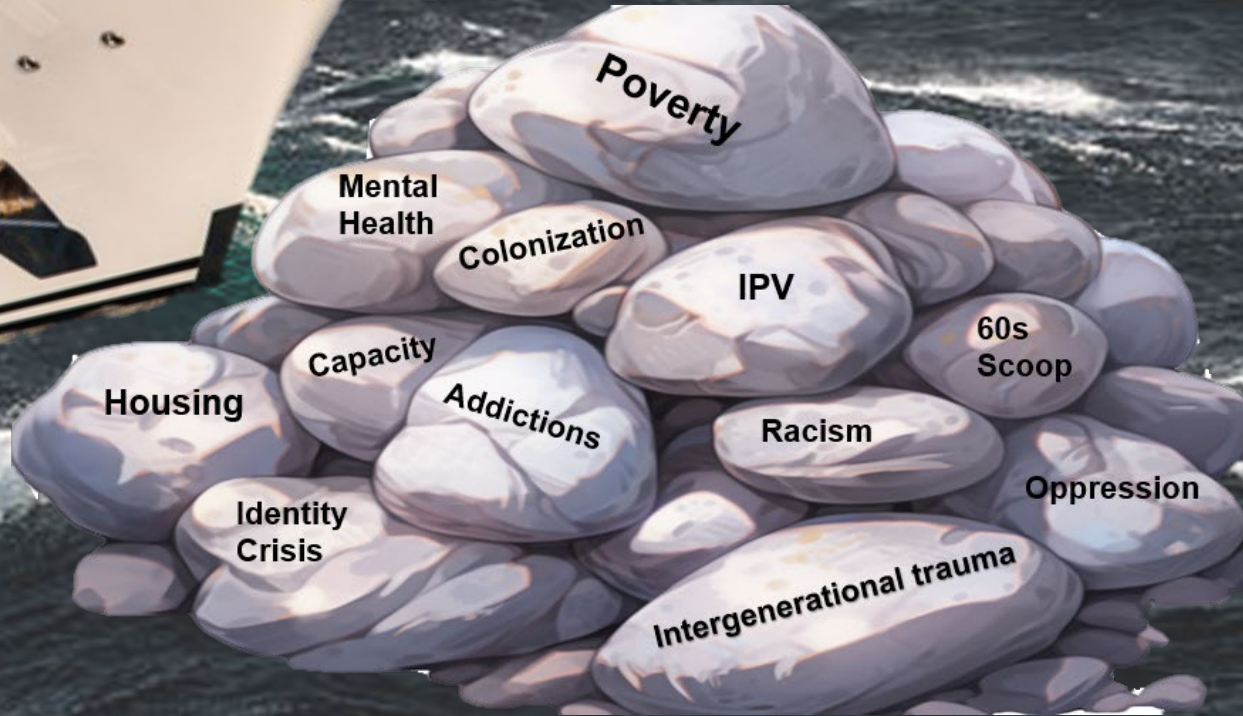




Build our perfect system!



BUT we are still HERE



Müigwetch

- Questions, comments, discussion