



**OFIFC**

Ontario Federation of  
Indigenous Friendship Centres

OFIFC's Submission to the Women, Peace and Security  
Network – Canada on Canada's National Action Plan for  
Women, Peace and Security

June 2022

## Introduction

The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) is providing this brief in response to Women, Peace and Security Network – Canada’s (WPSN-C) request for input into the creation of Canada’s third National Action Plan (C-NAP) on women, peace and security (WPS).

## About the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres

Founded in 1971, the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) works to support, advocate for, and build the capacity of member Friendship Centres across Ontario.

Emerging from a nation-wide, grass-roots movement dating back to the 1950’s, Friendship Centres are community hubs where Indigenous people living in towns, cities, and urban centres can access culturally-based and culturally-appropriate programs and services every day. Today, Friendship Centres are dynamic hubs of economic and social convergence that create space for Indigenous communities to thrive. Friendship Centres are idea incubators for young Indigenous people attaining their education and employment goals, they are sites of cultural resurgence for Indigenous families who want to raise their children to be proud of who they are, and they are safe havens for Indigenous community members requiring supports.

In Ontario more than 85 per cent of Indigenous people live in cities, towns, and rural areas.<sup>1</sup> The OFIFC is the largest urban Indigenous service network in the province supporting this vibrant, diverse, and quickly growing population through programs and initiatives that span justice, health, family support, long-term care, healing and wellness, employment and training, education, research, and more.

Friendship Centres receive their mandate from their communities, and they are inclusive of all Indigenous people – First Nation, Status/Non-Status, Métis, Inuit, and those who self-identify as Indigenous.

## The OFIFC and Ending Violence

The OFIFC has been at the forefront of work to end all forms of violence in urban Indigenous communities, while recognizing how widespread the disproportionate rate of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ community members is, as well as the rate of violence against Indigenous men and boys. The OFIFC has promoted a preventative, strengths-based approach to addressing violence that is wholistic, culture-based, and focused on addressing the root causes of violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, Census 2016 Results, Data Table: Aboriginal Identity (9), Dwelling Condition (4), Registered or Treaty Indian Status (3), Residence by Aboriginal Geography (10), Age (12) and Sex (3) for the Population in Private Households (Catalogue number 98-400-X2016164).

The release of the *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women*,<sup>2</sup> a seminal policy document co-authored by the OFIFC and the Ontario Native Women's Association of Ontario (ONWA), following the provincial Summit to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women in 2007, changed the landscape in Ontario. The *Strategic Framework* guided the work of the provincial Joint Working Group on Violence Against Aboriginal Women, which was co-chaired by the OFIFC. In 2016, the OFIFC marked an historic achievement in the province of Ontario with the launch of the provincial *Walking Together Strategy*,<sup>3</sup> a whole-of-government collaborative approach to ending violence by working collaboratively with Indigenous partners and provincial ministries, cross-sectorally. The strategy breathed life into a new committee structure known as the Executive Committee to End Violence Against Indigenous Women. Today, the OFIFC is a member of Ontario's Indigenous Women's Advisory Council alongside other Indigenous provincial partners.

The OFIFC was also an official party with institutional standing at the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG) and participated in the creation of Canada's National Action Plan in response to the Inquiry. Specifically, the OFIFC participates on the National 2SLGBTQQIA Working Group and the National Urban and Core Working Group, contributing to the final Urban Action Plan titled the 'Urban Indigenous Path to Reclaiming Power and Place, Regardless of Residency'<sup>4</sup> and monitoring the federal government's progress on implementation.

At the international level, the OFIFC provided input into the second meeting of the Trilateral Working Group on Violence Against Indigenous Women with representatives from the United States, Canada and Mexico. The OFIFC has met with the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women in 2019 as part of their visit to Canada. This visit resulted in a report examining gaps and challenges in fulfilling Canada's obligations to eliminate violence against women along with recommended measures for preventing and combating violence against women.

## Wise Practices

The OFIFC has always understood that addressing intimate partner and domestic violence must occur within a wholistic understanding of violence which impacts the entire community. Wise practices and initiatives have therefore been developed within a larger framework for ending violence that considers the wellbeing of all in the

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<sup>2</sup> OFIFC, ONWA. (2007). 'A Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women.' Retrieved from: <https://ofifc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Strategic-Framework-to-End-Violence-Against-Aboriginal-Women-.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Government of Ontario. (2016). 'Archived – Walking Together Strategy.' Retrieved from: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/walking-together-ontarios-long-term-strategy-end-violence-against-indigenous-women#:~:text=Page%20archived-.Walking%20Together%3A%20Ontario's%20Long%2DTerm%20Strategy%20to%20End%20Violence%20Against,deserve%20%E2%80%94%20with%20safety%20and%20respect.>

<sup>4</sup> Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA National Action Plan. (2020). 'Urban Indigenous Path to Reclaiming Power and Place, Regardless of Residency.' Retrieved from: [https://mimiwg2splus-nationalactionplan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NAP-Urban-Framework\\_EN.pdf](https://mimiwg2splus-nationalactionplan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NAP-Urban-Framework_EN.pdf)

community and emphasizes the importance of healing through culture and prevention. The OFIFC has worked alongside Indigenous partners and government to support ending violence strategies that have been multi-sectoral, intersectional, and supportive of culture-based approaches to prevention that are aimed at community healing and family wellbeing. Sustained, evergreen provincial funding for culture-based, preventative programs designed by the OFIFC has been of significant benefit for advancing ending violence initiatives across the Friendship Centre Movement in Ontario.

The *Indigenous Healing and Wellness Strategy* (IHWS) is a monumental achievement in Ontario. It was launched provincially in 1994 to address the increase in intimate partner violence and domestic violence in Indigenous communities. The IHWS supports Indigenous-led programs and services to reinstate the healing journey in a holistic manner that is aimed at better outcomes at the community-level. Since 2019, Friendship Centres have collectively supported over 12,000 clients through IHWS-funded programs, reflecting the sustained need for programs that heal and prevent violence.

The OFIFC's *Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin* program (which translates from Anishinaabemowin to 'I am a Kind Man') is a leading wise practice which empowers Indigenous men and youth to take part in ending violence by reclaiming their traditional roles and responsibilities as protectors of their communities. The program provides wrap-around care for self-identifying Indigenous men and youth who are ready to embark on their healing path or become advocates for their community to end all forms of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. The program is in high demand across Canada yet has only been supported through unsustainable provincial funding sources.

The OFIFC's *Indigenous Community Justice Program* (ICJP) is a culturally appropriate alternative to the mainstream justice system that supports the prevention of violence through diversion programming. The program is based on Indigenous legal principles by involving community members, victims, survivors of intimate partner violence, and Elders in the creation of healing plans which seek to restore balance and mitigate further harm. The pre- and post-charge diversion program keeps the individual rooted in community, stabilized, connected to long-term healing, and subsequently, reduces the risk of recidivism<sup>5</sup>.

The ICJP was recently designated as an Indigenous-Specific Intimate Partner Violence Program (IS-IPVP) by the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General and the Ministry of the Solicitor General. This is a milestone which demonstrates the program's power in addressing offending behaviour through culture-based approaches to justice that reduce Indigenous people's involvement in the justice system.

The OFIFC's *Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound Program* (UIHB) is an employment and training program that includes housing stability as a main component of the initiative. Participants in the program, who are Indigenous sole-parent women, are provided housing stabilization supports while they access training and post-secondary

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<sup>5</sup> [Indigenous Community Justice Program Evaluation - OFIFC](#)

education. Upon completion of the program, participants have the skills to enter a career in a field that will provide a decent living wage and into a permanent housing situation. A process evaluation of the program has revealed that UIHB has been a positive life-changing program for participants who have experienced violence or are fleeing violent situations. The OFIFC has advocated for the expansion of UIHB as a key pillar in response to the NIMMIWG, recognizing that the Inquiry found that economic marginalization and exclusion, including the lack of adequate housing, featured prominently as a root cause of violence<sup>6</sup> and that the program supports a high number of Indigenous women and children who have experienced or are fleeing violence.

Beyond these specific wise practices, there is a sustained need for programs and initiatives which reduce conflict and coercion through culture-based preventative strategies. Additionally, programs and initiatives that address the structural barriers to accessing protections for Indigenous women, men, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ community members are a persistent need at the community-level. The introduction of a universal guaranteed basic income across Canada remains a critical Call for Justice of the NIMMIWG<sup>7</sup> that the OFIFC recommends as a federal priority to address deeply entrenched socio-economic barriers to safety, wellbeing, and community connection. Through living wage and decent work legislation, coupled with universal basic income, Indigenous families, seniors, and young people can be lifted out of poverty and supported to be connected to community.

## Opportunities to Embed Urban Indigenous Priorities within the C-NAP

Canada's previous C-NAPs have failed to include reconciliation and the security of Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit people in the WPS agenda.<sup>8</sup> The C-NAP also fails to include structural violence due to its narrow definition of security.<sup>9</sup> Canada's attempts to apply the C-NAP domestically by requesting steps be taken by various Departments have not gone far enough, as the steps taken by the Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) do not recognize their responsibility to urban Indigenous communities.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Canada must strengthen its commitment to the peace and security of

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<sup>6</sup> The Final Report for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. (2019). Volume 1a. (439-445) Accessed: [https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final\\_Report\\_Vol\\_1a.pdf](https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final_Report_Vol_1a.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> See Call For Justice 4.5. National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. (2019). 'Calls for Justice.' 11. Retrieved from: <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Calls-Web-Version-EN.docx>

<sup>8</sup> Woroniuk, Leclerc and St-Pierre, eds. 2021, p.1

<sup>9</sup> Kim Beaulieu (2022). Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security: What We Heard from our Dialogue with Civil Society, Public Servants, and Scholars.

[https://www.mcgill.ca/rnwps/files/rnwps/wwh\\_paper\\_-\\_rn-wps1.pdf](https://www.mcgill.ca/rnwps/files/rnwps/wwh_paper_-_rn-wps1.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2017-2022 - Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, and Indigenous Services Canada - Progress report for fiscal year 2017/2018 \(international.gc.ca\)](https://www.international.gc.ca/canada-national-action-plan-women-peace-security-2017-2022-crown-indigenous-relations-northern-affairs-canada-indigenous-services-canada-progress-report-fiscal-year-2017-2018-international.gc.ca)

Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ urban Indigenous communities domestically.

### *Building New Relationships*

As Canada embarks on the drafting of its third C-NAP, the OFIFC recommends an overall new approach to Indigenous policy development which establishes a new relationship with Indigenous people, communities, and organisations that reflects the lived reality in our communities. Urban Indigenous communities are growing and thriving. Across Canada today, the majority of Indigenous people live in cities, towns, and urban areas. In Ontario the proportion is 85%.<sup>11</sup> The lack of a federal strategy to support urban Indigenous communities directly impedes improving outcomes across social determinants of safety and health. Furthermore, it contributes to the erasure of Indigenous women’s leadership, as a large majority of urban Indigenous organisations including the Friendship Centre Movement, are led by Indigenous women.

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ National Action Plan identified the lack of federal relationship with urban Indigenous communities as damaging, stating that:

“Reconciliation cannot be achieved by continuing to rely on outmoded approaches that systematically undermine and ignore the presence of diverse and growing urban Indigenous communities.”<sup>2</sup>

A whole-of-government approach is required that supports self-determination and sustainability as critical to safety and wellbeing. Friendship Centres and other urban Indigenous organisations and communities have been instrumental in developing operating standards and norms around the provision of services and programs. Yet, many urban Indigenous communities still face unacceptable service gaps, insufficient core, operating, and capacity funding, and social and economic disparities. The National Inquiry’s Final Report found that funding that is insufficient, short-term or time-limited, represents a violation of inherent rights to self-governance.<sup>3</sup> The failure to provide funding equitably, substantively, and stably harms urban Indigenous communities. A December 2020 Parliamentary background paper on services for Indigenous people living in urban areas, identified large service gaps, jurisdictional disputes, and chronic underfunding as persistent issues affecting Indigenous communities.<sup>12</sup> The MMIWG Urban Action Plan identified as an immediate priority the provision of:

“[S]ustainable and long-term/evergreen core funding for urban Indigenous organizations and programs relevant to the safety of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people”.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Statistics Canada, Census 2016 Results, Data Table: Aboriginal Identity (9), Dwelling Condition (4), Registered or Treaty Indian Status (3), Residence by Aboriginal Geography (10), Age (12) and Sex (3) for the Population in Private Households (Catalogue number 98-400-X2016164).

<sup>12</sup> Collier, Brittany. (December 2020). ‘Services for Indigenous People Living in Urban Areas.’ Library of Parliament, Ottawa. No. 2020-66-E. Retrieved from: <https://lop.parl.ca/staticfiles/PublicWebsite/Home/ResearchPublications/BackgroundPapers/PDF/2020-66-e.pdf>

This includes dependable and stabilized supports toward the development of our own Indigenous-led solutions to the housing crisis, to health and healing, and to community development. Friendship Centres, as urban Indigenous community hubs, offer opportunities for new approaches to safety and healing that are grounded in Indigenous cultures, focused on prevention and intervention, and adaptable to community needs.

### *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*

Commitment to implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (the Declaration) must be meaningfully articulated within the C-NAP with respect to Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in Canada. Friendship Centres have embodied the spirit of the Declaration since their inception.<sup>13</sup> Indigenous women leaders have adapted to changing social and economic circumstances, engaged in diplomacy and negotiation, made homes for Indigenous people in cities, and used these experiences to develop Friendship Centre governing principles. This history of taking up responsibilities for the community is well ahead of, but consistent with, the Declaration.

### *Leadership Capacity*

WPS acknowledges that “women and girls play a key role in preserving their communities”.<sup>14</sup> Women in urban Indigenous communities must have the support to reclaim and strengthen their roles and responsibilities as leaders in their communities. Building the leadership capacity of women in urban Indigenous communities means creating supportive, safe, inclusive environments where Indigenous women are not forced to navigate and overcome colonial or patriarchal views about their lives.<sup>15</sup> Evidence of this can be seen across Friendship Centre communities, where Indigenous women take on leadership roles across sectors in community economic development, advocacy, service delivery, and Traditional Knowledge, in culturally-safe environments that seek to empower women.

## Recommendations

The OFIFC recommends that Canada take further steps in the C-NAP to reorient its work domestically by committing to actions aligned with the National Action Plan: Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People. Such a commitment should prioritize a new relationship at the federal level in resistance to colonial constructs which respects the diversity of Indigenous people and communities.

It is therefore recommended that Canada:

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<sup>13</sup> The OFIFC Position on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> [Women, peace and security \(international.gc.ca\)](https://www.international.gc.ca/women-peace-and-security)

<sup>15</sup> OFIFC Closing Submission National Inquiry into MMIWG

- Include measures and activities within the C-NAP that will advance domestic priorities, focusing on ending violence and promoting the security of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in urban Indigenous communities in Canada.
- Recognize the realities of urban Indigenous communities within CIRNAC and ISC's responses to the C-NAP.
- Adopt a whole-of-government approach that ensures self-determination and sustainability as critical to safety and wellbeing, supporting sustainable, long-term funding agreements, dedicated co-developed urban Indigenous strategies, and capacity development.
- Resolve jurisdictional disputes that contribute to service gaps and chronic underfunding of programs and services that support safety and wellbeing in urban Indigenous communities.
- Recognize and affirm that Indigenous-designed, developed, and led, culture-based programming is protective against violence. A range of programs, supports, and services that connect Indigenous people to culture must be prioritized through increased federal investments for urban Indigenous communities and organisations including Friendship Centres; and
- Increase capacity for urban Indigenous innovation, program design, and evaluation to support new creative approaches to finding new wise practices in ending violence and reducing conflict through culture-based preventative strategies that are informed by those most impacted.