

SAFETY DEFINITIONS

Report



Native Women's Association of Canada

L'Association des femmes autochtones du Canada



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This report, prepared by the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) for and with funding from Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), is comprised of knowledge and perspectives regarding community-led definitions of safety from family members and survivors of the genocide of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, Transgender, and Gender-Diverse Peoples (MMIWG2S+)¹.

To ascertain community-led definitions of safety pertaining to MMIWG2S+, NWAC hosted and facilitated a Sharing Circle with fifteen MMIWG2S+ family members and survivors. The gathering was held at our Resiliency Lodge in Chelsea, QC, on June 20, 2022, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. The primary purpose of this Sharing Circle was to further understand how MMIWG2S+ survivors and families define safety, and to subsequently identify safety indicators to monitor ongoing safety concerns—including, but not limited to: Physical, emotional, spiritual, and institutional safety.

The Knowledge, views, and perspectives shared with NWAC during this Sharing Circle serves as the basis for the nine recommendations included in this report. Importantly, these recommendations echo the National Inquiry’s 231 Calls for Justice and NWAC’s Action Plan. They will aid the government in its commitments to ending the MMIWG2S+ genocide and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

¹ “Indigenous Women” in this report is inclusive of Indigenous women, Two Spirit, trans, and gender-diverse individuals.



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The list below briefly highlights four key safety themes that emerged during the Sharing Circle, resulting in nine recommendations.

THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Emotional Safety:

- 👉 Funding must be allocated to increase existing capacity and further growth of trauma-informed healing spaces, such as NWAC's Resiliency Lodges, to ensure Indigenous Women can meet, share, and expand their support and care networks.
- 👉 Accelerate implementations of Calls for Justice and NWAC's Action Plan to ensure Indigenous Women do not have to reiterate their safety concerns.
- 👉 Increase Indigenous employment representation in the criminal justice and health care systems, and systemically integrate cultural and humility training for non-Indigenous individuals in these spaces.

Recommendations for Safe Housing:

- 👉 Invest in Indigenous-led housing solutions.
- 👉 Increase long-term and sustainable investments for Indigenous-led safe spaces and low-barrier shelters.

Recommendations for Cultural Safety:

- 👉 Invest in Indigenous-led, land-based, and trauma-informed, cultural and language programs where Indigenous Women can have meaningful access to culture in a safe space.
- 👉 Dedicate space to allow for smudging, and other ceremonial practices, within the health care system.

Recommendations for Safety for the 2SLGBTQQIA+ Community:

- 👉 Invest in an Indigenous-led awareness toolkit and campaign to raise awareness about 2SLGBTQQIA+ issues and experiences.
- 👉 Increase 2SLGBTQQIA+ sensitivity training in public service—particularly in law enforcement and the health care system—to combat sexual and gender orientation discrimination.



INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND SAFETY:

Rooted in Canada’s history and ongoing colonization of Indigenous Peoples and lands, Indigenous Women and girls in Canada face significantly higher rates of violence than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Indigenous Women were traditionally held in high regard as leaders and life-givers pre-colonial contact. However, Canada’s past and ongoing racist, sexist, and colonial policies have devalued and displaced Indigenous Women’s sacred roles in their communities, contributing to disproportionately higher rates of experienced violence, spousal assault, family violence, and sexual assault.²

Indigenous Women are 12-times more likely to be murdered or go missing than other women in Canada, and are 16-times more likely than Caucasian women.³ The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls’ (National Inquiry) Final Report concluded that government policies and programs, as well as, “Persistent and deliberate human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses,” directly contribute to staggering rates of violence against Indigenous Women and girls.⁴

Themes emerged during this project’s Sharing Circle echo those presented in the Final Report of the National Inquiry, as well as the Calls for Justice, by highlighting gaps that create safety issues for Indigenous Women, and conditions resulting in high rates of gender-based violence experienced. Sharing Circle participants identified issues relating to emotional safety, safe housing, cultural safety, 2SLGBTQQIA+ safety, and interconnectedness to MMIWG2S+ genocide through firsthand accounts of safety, and unsafety, in their lives. Indigenous Women are experts on their own safety and hold Knowledge rooted in Indigenous Ways of Knowing about safety, which include being in community both physically and spiritually. As one participant stated, “Our communities are the blueprints for safety. Safety is in community care. We experience it so naturally within ourselves.”

THE NATIVE WOMEN’S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA:

The Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) is the largest national Indigenous organization advocating for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people in Canada. Incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in 1974, NWAC works to enhance, promote, and foster social, economic, cultural, and political well-being of Indigenous Women within their respective communities—and in large Canadian society—through advocacy, education, research, and policy.

- 2 “The Justice System and Aboriginal People,” The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, accessed July 19, 2022, at: <http://www.ajic.mb.ca/volumel/chapter13.html>.
- 3 “Trends and Patterns in Femicide,” Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, accessed July 20, 2022, at: [Trends & Patterns in Femicide | Femicide in Canada.](#)
- 4 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous women* (Ottawa: Privy Council Office, 2019), 174.



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For over 47 years, NWAC has applied an intersectional, trauma-informed, culturally safe, gendered approach to support the needs of Indigenous Women and girls. As a result, NWAC has in-depth understandings of intersectional factors impacting health—specifically, nuanced and holistic understandings of mental wellness amongst Indigenous communities. NWAC has established strong and lasting governance structures, decision-making processes, financial policies, and procedures, as well as networks and grassroots connections.

Importantly for this project in defining and measuring safety as it pertains to MMIWG2S+, NWAC has a long and sustained history of advocacy relating to safety and well-being of Indigenous Women and girls, notably through redressing the MMIWG2S+ genocide. Indeed, NWAC's Sisters in Spirit initiative created the first MMIWG2S+ database and was a catalyst for advocacy that led to the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S+. Today, NWAC continues its commitment to developing concrete actions to end the cycle of violence that affects Indigenous communities—particularly violence leading to the disappearance, or death, of Indigenous Women and girls. These initiatives include violence prevention services, both virtually and in-person, at our Resiliency Lodges.

METHODOLOGY:

Recommendations included in this report are derived from Knowledge and perspectives shared with NWAC by MMIWG2S+ family members and survivors during a Sharing Circle about safety, as it pertains to the MMIWG2S+ genocide. An internal, or external, ethics approval process was not required for this project; however, all NWAC projects strictly adhere to the First Nations Principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP), as well as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).⁵

All individuals included in this project were Indigenous Women over the age 18. Importantly, five participants in the Sharing Circle were youth—under the age of 30. The Sharing Circle was held in person on June 20, 2022, at the NWAC Resiliency Lodge, in Chelsea, QC, with fifteen participants. Participants were invited by NWAC's Resiliency Lodge manager to partake in the Sharing Circle.

The Sharing Circle focused on defining safety for Indigenous Women, based on the participants' experiences with feelings of safety and unsafety. The discussion was guided in a trauma-informed manner. Aftercare was offered following the Sharing Circle, which included a shared meal, providing opportunity to debrief with one another and/or utilize various wellness services, including massages, manicures, pedicures, hair braiding, and time on the land to ensure they felt enveloped and cared for. Participants were paid an honorarium of \$200 to acknowledge their time and Knowledge offerings. Childcare, meals, and transportation costs were also paid. Annex A details questions participants were asked.

⁵ [The First Nations Principles of OCAP® - The First Nations Information Governance Centre \(fnigc.ca\)](#); [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples | United Nations For Indigenous Peoples.](#)



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SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following section explains in detail nine recommendations that define and measure safety. The section is organized into four key themes that emerged during the Sharing Circle. This section also details how each recommendation can be used to support the National Inquiry's Calls for Justice.

THEME 1: EMOTIONAL SAFETY:

One of the most prominent themes that emerged during the Sharing Circle was emotional safety. MMIWG2S+ families and survivors feel safe when they are understood, seen, heard, and valued as Indigenous Women. Indeed, all participants said they felt safest when surrounded by individuals who have an implicit understanding of their lived experiences. For example, individuals shared they feel emotionally safe in the passenger's seat of their mother's van, or at their grandmother's house, or with family members and friends, and/or in youth groups with others who shared similar backgrounds.

For MMIWG2S+ families and survivors, emotional safety is achieved when they can express their feelings, speak freely, and connect based on a shared understanding. As one Algonquian youth explained:

I feel the most me ... with my Creator and with people who understand me. I feel safe back home, being with people with similar experiences, where everyone understands how you feel ... when I am away from home, there is comfort in being in a youth group I am part of, where we all understand each other as people from Turtle Island. I have no need to explain myself.

In contrast, many participants said their emotional safety was compromised when they lost someone who could hold space, listen, and offer support for them. For one participant, losing her Kokum,⁶ the matriarch of her family, significantly decreased her emotional safety and support.



⁶ "Kokum" is the Cree word for grandmother.

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To ensure emotional safety and well-being of Indigenous Women, NWAC proposes the following three recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Funding must be allocated to increase existing capacity and further growth of trauma-informed healing spaces, such as NWAC’s Resiliency Lodges, to ensure Indigenous Women can meet, share, and expand their support and care networks.

Notably, when asked to describe an experience where they felt safe, many participants said they currently felt safe in the Sharing Circle because they were surrounded by other MMIWG2S+ family members and survivors with whom they shared a bond. As one participant shared, “I have always doubted myself but being here in this Circle feels safe.” Many other participants shared similar sentiments, noting the Sharing Circle made them feel safe because they felt heard and understood.

All participants explicitly expressed a need for additional Sharing Circles, and more opportunities where Indigenous Women can spend time together to empower each other in a trauma-informed space, guided by Elders and Knowledge Keepers. As participants engaged with one another before the Sharing Circle began, many said they felt a sense of comfort and joy hearing from other Indigenous Women—laughing and talking—noting that it was an essential part of healing to experience togetherness and hold space for each other. In contrast, participants said many of their unsafe experiences were made worse when they did not have access to community. When asked if anything could have made them feel safer during an unsafe experience, one participant stated, “Being in a space like this” would have provided comfort. NWAC’s Resiliency Lodges provide an opportunity to build relationships, directly increasing emotional safety for Indigenous Women.

To ensure Indigenous Women feel emotionally safe—which is significant contributes to overall safety—funding must be allocated to support existing capacity and further growth of NWAC’s Resiliency Lodges. NWAC’s Resiliency Lodge model facilitates in-person gatherings to deliver distinctions-based, trauma-informed, healing and violence prevention programming for Indigenous Women to participate in communally, while engaging in peer support. “Community is the blueprint for safety,” and healing happens in the community. The expansion of NWAC’s Resiliency Lodges would increase community care networks and mutual peer support.

This recommendation supports Calls for Justice 2.3, 3.2, 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3, relating to the expertise of Indigenous Peoples caring for, and healing, themselves. In addition, health, wellness, and violence prevention services are most effective when designed according to Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being and delivered by Indigenous people. It also aligns with the goals of the National Action Plan, including providing concrete support



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to survivors and families of the MMIWG2S+ genocide, and for the delivery of programs and services by Indigenous organizations to address all forms of gender- and race-based violence.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Accelerate implementations of Calls for Justice and NWAC's Action Plan to ensure Indigenous Women do not have to reiterate their safety concerns.

We heard from multiple participants that continuous requests to discuss their experiences with violence and unsafe encounters to inform government recommendations makes them feel both unheard and unsafe. Particularly, when urgent and sustained action to implement existing recommendations to address root causes of the MMIWG2S+ crisis has not been considered. Participants shared that continually explaining their safety concerns is both hurtful and frustrating because the Calls to Justice, which outlines in detail concrete actions needed to increase Indigenous Women's safety, are not being implemented.

MMIWG2S+ families and survivors are often retriggered when asked to reopen emotional wounds by discussing abuse and the loss of loved ones. Indigenous Women have already shared their Knowledge during the National Inquiry and other research projects, regarding what action is needed to end the MMIWG2S+ genocide. Many participants we engaged with feel overstudied and that their data is harvested without their leadership, input, or advancement in their safety. As one participant said, "We have been saying this stuff for years, but no one is listening. The problem is that we are being dismissed, and this needs to stop. We know what we need as a people."

However, the participants we engaged with in the Sharing Circle felt that it was important and empowering to establish safety definitions in a trauma-informed, cultural space. Many felt the act of coming together in community during a Sharing Circle can increase security and well-being for Indigenous Women. Further, many participants said the expansion of this project's engagement with community members was necessary to gather a broader variety of perspectives, as well as to provide concrete recommendations to assist the government with implementing the Calls for Justice.

To date, there has been minimal action in response to the Calls to Justice,⁷ yet there continues to be missing and be murdered Indigenous Women and girls at an alarming rate.⁸ The continued violence against Indigenous Women is a direct result of the absence of a costed, measurable, and actionable implementation plan for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, which would address each of the 231 Calls for Justice.

7 Native Women's Association of Canada, Canada's MMIWG2S+ National Action Plan Annual Scorecard (Gatineau: Native Women's Association of Canada, 2022), accessed at: https://nwac.ca/assets-knowledge-centre/FEDERAL_ANNUAL_SCORECARD_ACTIONPLAN_2022_2022-06-03-132116_mfnq.pdf, page 3.

8 Shari Narine, "Numbers of murdered Indigenous women climb as Alberta studies provincial MMIWG report," Toronto Star, February 16, 2022, acc <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2022/02/16/numbers-of-murdered-indigenous-women-climb-as-alberta-studies-provincial-mmiwg-report.html>.



RECOMMENDATION 3:

Increase Indigenous employment representation in criminal justice and health care systems, as well as systemically integrate cultural and humility training for non-Indigenous individuals in these spaces.

Many participants felt emotionally unsafe during encounters they have had in criminal justice and health care systems—both of which the Inquiry found are related to the MMIWG2S+ genocide.^{9 10} Participants explained that although the criminal justice system and health care system are inherently unsafe spaces for Indigenous Women, they feel safer when Indigenous representation is in these spaces as officers, and health and social care providers. One participant said, “Working in the health care sector, [she] saw how these systems were not helping.” The same participant shared that when caring for an Indigenous male patient living with dementia, “his face lit up” when she spoke to him in his Traditional Algonquian language.

In inherently unsafe spaces—such as the criminal justice and health care system—feeling safe can arise from compassion and recognition of shared experiences. However, most non-Indigenous Canadians do not have a deep understanding of Indigenous Peoples’ history or perspectives, systemic anti-Indigenous racism, or cultural safety.¹¹ This can have a profound impact on the quality of care Indigenous patients receive, and thus also their safety when accessing services in the health care system.¹²

Insufficient representation of Indigenous Peoples as employees in criminal justice, health care, and other public service systems, increases the risk of experiencing racism and violence.^{13 14} Increasing equitable Indigenous representation through recruitment, training, and retaining in health care and criminal justice systems would support Calls for Justice 5.7, 5.12, 16.33, and 16.34.



9 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous women* (Ottawa: Privy Council Office, 2019), 674.

10 Ibid, 414.

11 Government of British Columbia, *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C Health Care* (Victoria: Government of British Columbia, 2019), 36.

12 Ibid, 36.

13 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Calls for Justice* (Ottawa: Privy Council Office, 2019), 184.

14 Ibid, 190.

THEME 2: SAFE HOUSING:

Access to housing is a fundamental human right and a necessary step in addressing the ongoing MMIWG2S+ genocide in Canada. Safety for Indigenous Women requires access to safe, affordable, and culturally relevant housing that, “Can support ... the practices that define our cultural identities.” This includes being properly designed, and adapted, to allow cultural practices such as gathering, ceremony, and alternative family structures—for example, intergenerational families.¹⁵ Inadequate housing and experiences of homelessness are key social determinants of health. As such, it impacts other social issues relating to MMIWG2S+ genocide, such as potential exposure to intimate partner and domestic violence, human-trafficking, substance misuse, and addiction.

When describing experiences that have made them feel safe, multiple participants explained the importance of having access to a space where they could experience physical, emotional, cultural, and spiritual safety. However, it is well documented that Indigenous communities face challenges and barriers in, “Developing, constructing, and maintaining adequate housing.”¹⁶ Unfortunately, Indigenous Women are more likely than non-Indigenous women to experience homelessness, especially invisible homelessness—which can leave them vulnerable to human trafficking, substance and addiction issues, and other forms of gendered violence.¹⁷

One participant said a lack of available housing made it difficult for her to leave her abuser. In addition to the precariousness Indigenous Women experience in unsafe housing, they are also victim to unsafe experiences when outside of their homes, facing increased risks of human-trafficking, racism, and sexism in health care and criminal justice systems. The simultaneous violence Indigenous Women experience, both in and outside their homes, further demonstrates the importance of access to safe and affordable housing. One participant said having a place that feels like home is foundational for autonomy, sovereignty, and caring for oneself and their loved ones. The same participant explained,

“I have created my own safe place in my home. I decide who can come and go, who knows where I live.”

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Invest in Indigenous-led housing solutions:

Indigenous-led housing solutions—where Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being guides the establishment of affordable, safe, and cultural housing units, can bring community

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- 15 Halina Rachelson et al, An Exploration of Approaches to Advance Culturally-Appropriate Housing in Canada (School of Community and Regional Planning, 2019), accessed at: <https://housingresearchcollaborative.scarp.ubc.ca/files/2019/06/Culturally-Appropriate-Housing-2019PLAN530-CMHC.pdf>, page 10.
 - 16 Native Women's Association of Canada, *First Nations Housing Strategy*, (Ottawa: Native Women's Association of Canada, 2018), accessed at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Housing/IndigenousPeoples/CSO/NWAC_-_First_Nations_Housing_Strategy.pdf, page 2.
 - 17 “Violent victimization and perceptions of safety among First Nations, Métis and Inuit women and women living in remote areas of Canada,” Statistics Canada, accessed July 19, 2022, at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220426/dq220426b-eng.htm>.

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together to ensure all Indigenous Women have a home that is safe from physical, cultural, spiritual, and emotional abuse.¹⁸ To achieve this, there must be increased funding for new housing on reserves, in remote communities, and in urban centres. In addition, funding must be allocated for repairs to existing housing, particularly in northern communities.

Many participants shared barriers and struggles experienced in accessing, and maintaining, safe housing. As one participant said, “We struggle to meet our basic needs. Affordable housing is treated like a luxury. We need to put people before profit and create safety and comfort.” Many participants expressed that no Indigenous person should ever experience housing precarity on their Traditional land. One participant said, “We should never be homeless on what is our own land.”

Limited or no access to housing creates and perpetuates cycles of poverty, food insecurity, and health issues—all of which are factors contributing to MMIWG2S+ genocide.¹⁹ As one participant explained, “If you do not have a comfortable home and are able to feed your family, you cannot feel safe. If you do not feel worthy, it is hard to look for a job.” Individuals experiencing social and economic marginalization are more likely to be targeted for further violence.²⁰

Investing in Indigenous led-housing solutions supports Bill C-92, an *Act Respecting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Children, Youth, and Families*, as well as meets Canada’s promises in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, UNDRIP, and the Final Report of the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S+—specifically Calls for Justice 4.1, 4.6, 12.4, 16.1, 16.18, and 18.25.²¹

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Increase long-term and sustainable investments for Indigenous-led, low-barrier shelters, and transitional housing services.

Long-term and sustainable funding is needed for Indigenous-led, safe low-barrier shelters²² and transitional housing services for individuals leaving abusive partners, or whom are at risk of becoming houseless, particularly on reserves and within home communities. This is necessary to ensure Indigenous Women can remain where they are living and have made their roots. Failed attempts in accessing distinctions-based, culturally safe shelters and transitional housing services can increase risks of violence for Indigenous Women and their children. For example, one participant shared, “I had to leave an abusive relationship, so there is no safe place right now. I am scrambling for a safe place with my children, a

18 Katjìà (Catherine) Lafferty, “The need for Indigenous-led housing,” *Policy Options*, July 13, 2022, The need for Indigenous-led housing (irpp.org).

19 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous women* (Ottawa: Privy Council Office, 2019), 114.

20 Ibid, 114.

21 Lafferty, “The need for Indigenous-led housing,” *Policy Options*, July 13, 2022, accessed at: [The need for Indigenous-led housing \(irpp.org\)](https://www.irpp.org/en/2022/07/13/the-need-for-indigenous-led-housing/).

22 A low-barrier service aims to remove as many barriers as possible in accessing the service, while still offering appropriate support and structure to service users. Low-barrier practices can include hosting a supervised consumption site within the service, offering harm reduction education, and/or not requiring service users to report their whereabouts, adhere to a curfew, or maintain sobriety to access service(s).



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place where I will feel culturally safe. We need a place where there is no violence and no name-calling, where it is quiet, and I can say who comes into my home.”

The absence of shelters and safe spaces can force Indigenous Women to leave their communities, which significantly impacts their support systems and impedes access to culture. Additionally, when Indigenous Women are forced to leave their communities, their children cannot be raised in proximity to their culture, teachings, and kin. Increasing long-term and sustainable investments for Indigenous-led safe spaces, and low barrier shelters, supports Calls for Justice 4.7, 16.19, and 18.25.

THEME 3: CULTURAL SAFETY:

Sharing Circle participants spoke about the importance culture holds for their overall safety. They said culture helps them feel grounded and connected to the Creator, family, and community. One participant said medicines are empowering and help them to feel protected. “I have made my house safe, with cedar all around it, and by growing sweetgrass and sage—so I have medicines that make my house feel safe.” We also heard that culture and language foster a sense of belonging and understanding—a fundamental component of emotional safety. As one participant shared, “In ceremony is when I feel the most me. I am there with my Creator and with people who understand me.”

Participants also shared that they often encounter barriers preventing them from accessing culture, including the many institutions and systems that limit cultural practices such as smudging, singing, and drumming. Recommendations presented below seek to increase access to Traditional Knowledge, language, and cultural practices, which are core to the “way of life” of Indigenous Women. These recommendations also support the government in fulfilling public and international obligations to redress the MMIWG2S+ genocide.²³

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Invest in Indigenous-led, land-based, cultural and language programs, where Indigenous Women can have meaningful access to culture in safe spaces.

NWAC’s Resiliency Lodge model provides virtual and in-person Elder-led healing. These services include violence prevention workshops where Indigenous Women are welcomed into a culturally safe space, allowing them to benefit first-hand from the Lodge’s healing experience. These services and experiences are built upon Traditional Knowledge, teachings, and ceremonies. Beyond positive feedback from participants, we heard during the Sharing Circle that many communities have identified a need to expand the Resiliency Lodge model. Our plan is to have Resiliency Lodges across Canada to provide regional distinctions-based programming, teachings, and ceremonies, where Indigenous Women

²³ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous women* (Ottawa: Privy Council Office, 2019), 406.



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can gather, feel safe, and heal together. The Sharing Circle we held for this project is an excellent example of how culture can be meaningfully incorporated into trauma-informed programming, aimed to redress the MMWIG2S+ genocide. In addition, it reiterates why more culturally safe spaces, such as NWAC's Resiliency Lodges, are imperative for safety.

This Sharing Circle was held outdoors on the patio of our Chelsea Resiliency Lodge. It was a sunny day, filled with sounds of drums and the smells of medicines. Participants settled slowly into an emotionally and culturally safe space to share experiences. Throughout the Sharing Circle, teachings and medicine were offered by the participants, Elder, and Resiliency Lodge manager, all of whom were present. Following the discussion, our Elder shared a prayer and smudge. Participants were invited for a meal where they could connect with one another and participate in various wellness services and spend time on the land. Many Sharing Circle participants said the entire experience made them feel supported and grounded, which are essential elements of safety.

Positive feedback and support provided by the fifteen individuals we engaged with for this project must be expanded to offer culturally-relevant healing across Turtle Island and Inuit Nunangat. More community members NWAC serves need to be able to experience participating in cultural programming in a safe space with other Indigenous Women. This recommendation supports Calls for Justice 2.3, 7.5, and 16.2.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Dedicate space to allow for smudging and other ceremonial practices in health care systems:

For Indigenous Women, safety includes feeling that cultural protocols are respected, as well as having the ability to practice and participate in culture in the health care system.²⁴ One participant shared what that looks like in their experience: "I see a non-Native psychologist who facilitates sessions with me with a pipe ceremony outside her building. She also offers smudging. This keeps me grounded. When we have people who offer this, we are lucky to have these spaces."

Creating space for cultural practices so Indigenous Women can use Traditional medicines and engage in cultural protocols, alongside allopathic medicine, further supports health and wellness. These implementations of holistic and cultural care must be implemented in all health care facilities across the country. This recommendation echoes Recommendation Number 10 from 2021 *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in BC Health Care*, which states: "Health authorities create culturally-appropriate, dedicated physical spaces in health facilities for ceremony and cultural protocols."²⁵

²⁴ Government of British Columbia, *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C Health Care*, (Victoria: Government of British Columbia, 2019), 22.

²⁵ Government of British Columbia, *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C Health Care*, (Victoria: Government of



THEME 4: SAFETY FOR THE 2SLGBTQQIA+ COMMUNITY:

Sharing Circle participants, who also identify as members of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community, said they felt safe when they experienced acceptance for their sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. One participant said, "I'm around people 'who see me for who I am.'" In contrast, when asked about experiences that made them feel unsafe, one 2SLGBTQQIA+ identifying individual said they feel unsafe when discriminated against and/or excluded from ceremony, or other spaces, due to gender requirements and/or homophobic and transphobic attitudes. These experiences persist even though pre-colonization Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+ people were honoured as leaders and healers in their communities. One participant explained, "As a Two-Spirit person, I am not included in every space; I am expected to conform to gender binaries ... I am not always safe in every ceremony; I have to know who is going to be there."

We also heard from Sharing Circle participants who experienced bigotry and prejudice when interacting with law enforcement. A Two-Spirit participant shared that when they reported a woman raped them, police laughed at them. They said they could not press charges because their case was not taken seriously. This participant said they believe police misidentified their gender and did not believe a woman could be raped by another woman. This participant's experience highlights a need for 2SLGBTQQIA+ sensibility training in public service, which was presented in the Final Report of the National Inquiry, NWAC's Action Plan, and the MMIWG2S+ National Action Plan, which will be considered further under Recommendation 8, below.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

Invest in an Indigenous-led awareness campaign, including a toolkit on 2SLGBTQQIA+ issues and experiences:

Immediate and long-term funding is required to combat sex- and gender-based discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia through an Indigenous-led awareness campaign. This should be done in collaboration with grassroots organizations and service providers to highlight challenges and barriers 2SLGBTQQIA+ people face. Participants said a significant barrier to their safety is a lack of understanding around 2SLGBTQQIA+ issues and experiences, adding that further education for the public should be prioritized. This recommendation echoes Call for Justice 18.17, which states: "To fund and support the re-education of communities and individuals who have learned to reject 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, or who deny their importance in history and in contemporary place within communities and in ceremony."

The goal of such a campaign would be to ensure a higher level of safety through increasing public understanding of lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples identifying as

British Columbia, 2019), 62.

2SLGBTQQIA+. This would be done by encouraging the public to learn more about sexual orientation and gender identities, as well as how they relate to Indigenous Ways of Being and Knowing. The awareness campaign could take the form of a social media campaign, or toolkit, grounded in research on pre-colonial roles of 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, which could be directed at various audiences. A toolkit is an appropriate medium for this type of awareness. NWAC has produced many successful toolkits on a variety of social justice issues that provide educational information, resources, and strategies in accessible ways for communities we serve, as well as the broader public.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

Increase 2SLGBTQQIA+ sensitivity training in public services—particularly in law enforcement and health care systems—to combat gender and sexual orientation discrimination.

Investments must be made for trauma-informed, culturally safe, and distinctions-based sensitivity training within public services, which must be both meaningful and ongoing. This training must be integrated into mandatory education for all new, and existing, employees in public services, and must be reviewed annually, at minimum.

A participant said,

“That is a huge barrier: Misunderstanding. Start with understanding, and there can begin to be progress.”

However, training and knowledge regarding Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+ community is only a first step to ensuring safety of Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+ people—accountability mechanisms, including but not limited to disciplinary measures, must also be established to ensure training is appropriately applied and practiced.

Sensitivity training must be designed by Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. It must target gender and sexual discrimination by educating service providers on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and histories and contemporary roles of Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in their communities. Training must include specific practices and policies in law enforcement and health care systems identified as harmful by Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, as well as provide actionable solutions to contribute to safety and needs. This recommendation speaks to Calls for Justice 18.5, 18.11, 18.13, and 18.19.



CONCLUSION:

Immediate, ongoing, and long-term safety of Indigenous Women and girls must be developed for, and by, Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Women are experts on their own lives and safety. Any meaningful attempt to redress the MMIWG2S+ genocide, and advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, must be informed by Indigenous Women's vast and distinct Knowledge. This report, and its recommendations, are derived from a Sharing Circle comprised of 15 MMIWG2S+ families and survivors. Participants shared their experiences regarding emotional safety, safe housing, cultural safety, and safety for 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, as well as identified preliminary pathways toward establishing safety definitions.

This Sharing Circle served as a basis for beginning to define, and measure, safety and how it applies to the MMIWG2S+ genocide. We note the small number of local participants limits the scope of our findings. The recommendations included in this report are preliminary and will require a broader Knowledge-gathering process, including additional Sharing Circles in multiple regions, as well as other methods of decolonized data methods. Participants acknowledged a need for a deeper investigation into how MMIWG2S+ family members and survivors define safety, and identified a broader engagement process with Indigenous Women from various regions. This must be done in a way that is culturally relevant, trauma-informed, and grounded in principles of reciprocity to ensure participants feel supported and cared for, while sharing their experiences and Knowledge.

This report's initial findings, as well as feedback received from participants, demonstrate further engagements are necessary to gather distinctions-based perspectives to incorporate regional Knowledge with a greater number of participants from across Turtle Island and Inuit Nunangat. Doing so would further understanding of safety in relation to the MMIWG2S+ genocide, as well as create immediate and long-term safety indicators to be adapted for monitoring ongoing safety and wellbeing of Indigenous Women.



APPENDIX A:

ENGAGEMENT SESSION QUESTIONS:

- ✎ When was a time you felt safe (this can be physically safe, emotionally safe, spiritually safe, etc.)? What about this experience made you feel safe?
- ✎ When was a time you felt unsafe? What about this experience made you feel unsafe?
- ✎ How would you define safety?
- ✎ In instances where you have felt unsafe, were there any barriers that prevented you from feeling safe?
- ✎ In instances where you have felt unsafe, was there anything that would have made you feel safer?
- ✎ What are indicators to consider when measuring feelings of safety?
- ✎ How can we best measure, and assess, perceptions of safety (using a 1-10 scale, checklist, survey etc.) based on these indicators, to monitor ongoing safety and wellbeing?





SAFETY DEFINITIONS

Report



Native Women's Association of Canada

L'Association des femmes autochtones du Canada