

SHINING THE SPOTLIGHT

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA NEWSLETTER

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A Message from the CEO

In November and December, NWAC loudly advocated for Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people during our #16DaysOfActivism campaign.

ENGAGING IN ADVOCACY

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence is an annual campaign that calls for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

NWAC launched a #16DaysOfActivism campaign to advocate for the implementation of every Call for Justice outlined in the National Inquiry into MMIWG. Over the course of the campaign, we outlined eight calls the government must respond to, eight calls all Canadians can act upon, and 16 calls that NWAC has already responded to. It was an effective campaign that saw strong engagement.



Our work doesn't end here. NWAC will continue to be a strong voice advocating for full implementation of the National Inquiry into MMIWG's Calls for Justice.

BUILDING RESILIENCY LODGES AND BUILDING PTMA CAPACITY

Already in operation in Algonquin Territory (Quebec), and with a location opening in the Wabanaki Territory (New Brunswick) in the fall of 2022, our Resiliency Lodge program model has been a resounding success. We identified a need to expand program availability online and in-person so we acted.

In collaboration with the PTMAs, NWAC has begun the process of securing funding to open new Resiliency Lodges. Our ultimate goal is to have in-person programming available in each province and territory. PTMAs play a central role in the success of

the Resiliency Lodge model—providing much-needed insight into unique community needs, developing grassroots partners, and ultimately taking charge of service delivery.

The Elder-led support provided through the Resiliency Lodge must be accessible to Indigenous women and gender-diverse people across the country. We look forward to working towards this goal by continuing our work with PTMAs to expand Resiliency Lodge programming.

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

Over the course of 2021, NWAC has worked hard to finish the construction of our new Social and Economic Innovation Centre (SEIC). In December, we finally received the keys to our building and are now furnishing and preparing spaces for the launch in early 2022. This would not have been possible without the support of our partner, the Bank of Montreal (BMO).

There is no doubt that the SEIC will become an economic hub for Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people. We look forward to opening our doors with new programs to support Indigenous entrepreneurship and to build economic resiliency.

NWAC TEAM

As we began to wind down the year, welcoming a number of new staff and continuing to support our existing staff, we held small gatherings at the Resiliency Lodge for team members. Sharing a meal together, NWAC staff celebrated their many accomplishments over the past year.

To further show our appreciation for the hard work NWAC's staff accomplished over the course of 2021, staff were given two weeks off to relax, recharge, and spend quality time with their families and loved ones.

IN THIS EDITION

In this edition of Shining the Spotlight, we feature many accomplishments and projects. Read an article from NWAC's Legal Team about ongoing litigation against Indigenous children and about the many projects our policy department is working on as we enter the new year. Also in this issue, take a peek into the Resiliency Lodge to see our beautiful holiday tree decorated with Indigenous ornaments.

We hope you enjoy reading about the work NWAC has done in this issue of Shining the Spotlight.

Miigwetch, Thank you, Merci,

Lynne Groulx

CIHR Cannabis and Mental Health

This month, we are shining a spotlight on a project called **Establishing Research Priorities: An Exploration of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Women and Gender-Diverse People's Needs in Cannabis and Mental Health**. Funded by Canadian Institute of Health Research and Mental Health Commission of Canada, this project lies within NWAC's cannabis and health program area.



CIHR Cannabis and Mental Health

NWAC has identified the need for quality, culturally safe, and distinctions-based research to be undertaken in order to close long-standing gaps and ensure the voices, experiences, and realities of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people are heard.

The project has three objectives/goals:

1. effectively connect community leaders and groups that serve Indigenous women and gender-diverse people to help facilitate knowledge-sharing around cannabis and mental health;
2. enhance discussion and dialogue between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit on the relationship between mental health issues and cannabis use; and
3. inform policy, programming, and best practices to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women and gender-diverse people living with mental health issues.

One of the key objectives of the project is to fill existing gaps by establishing a network of experts who would work closely with Indigenous people regarding mental health and cannabis. Through this network, we want to identify research priorities, which will inform the development of larger research projects to fill some of the identified gaps. As current research indicates, mental health services developed by Indigenous communities are most effective (Nelson and Wilson, 2017).



The research agenda on cannabis and mental health within the Indigenous population must be community-led and -driven. NWAC's cannabis and mental health project is addressing these gaps by holding engagement sessions and conducting surveys to gain further insight into the needs and research priorities of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people across Canada.

The engagement portion is central to the project and ensures the inclusion of Indigenous opinions, needs and priorities when it comes to informing future research and policy. The participants receive information and perspectives on cannabis and mental health and have an opportunity to talk with other Indigenous participants who may be having similar experiences. Using a distinctions-based approach, we are grouping the engagement sessions into sub-groups for Métis, First Nations, Inuit, Northern, and 2SLGBTQ+ participants. This approach will give us unique perspectives from each group at the community level and highlight the similarities and differences among them.



#BeTheDrum for Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs

If you aren't already familiar with NWAC's Indigenous women's entrepreneur navigation program called #BeTheDrum, you can check out our website.

#BeTheDrum for Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs

Those who join our program will be greeted by a team of dedicated entrepreneur navigators and mentors, and have access to relevant workshops, networking events, peer-to-peer groups, and live social media Q&A sessions.

Our bi-weekly workshops are one of our most attended activities. The workshops cover a range of topics from self-confidence and resilience, to financial capabilities, and tips and tricks on how to look professional. All of our topics pertain to Indigenous women's economic development. Any BeTheDrum members get an early bird sign-up opportunity.



IT apprenticeships, gender advocacy, and gender-based analysis projects add up to a busy November

The social development team has had a busy November continuing some ongoing projects and securing funding for new ones.

We team recently completed four webinar sessions to gather feedback on the IT Apprenticeships Program for Indigenous Peoples. This program, overseen by Employment and Social Development Canada, aims to bring Indigenous people into careers in IT based on their passion and experience, not their credentials.

Through these sessions, our team learned that Indigenous women and gender-diverse people have tremendous interest in participating in this program and in serving as mentors. The IT engagement sessions also highlighted how the program can be best designed to meet the needs of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people. Our team heard that the program's online application should be short and simple, and applications should be accepted several times per year. This would increase access while maintaining a sense of community among participants. Participants also suggested that the program should have stringent standards for self-reporting Indigenous identity, which could involve providing documentation such as status cards, band cards, or community referrals.

IT apprenticeships, gender advocacy, and gender-based analysis projects add up to a busy November

We also hosted our third workshop in the Generation4Equality series, on Online Gender Advocacy for Indigenous Youth. Shelby Lisk, an Indigenous hub reporter and writer, and Julianna Peter-Paul, an Indigenous scholar and technology specialist, led the event. They addressed several topics, including how to share your story on digital platforms and how to advocate for gender equality using the skills you already possess. They also gave advice on pursuing a career in communication and media. The event was attended by 13 Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people aged 15 to 30.

To continue to equip Indigenous youth with the tools they need to combat gender inequality, the social development team is planning creative engagement pieces that will empower Indigenous youth to advocate for gender equality.

The team has also begun preliminary work to plan and execute a “Did You Know” social media campaign for culturally relevant gender-based analysis (CRGBA). This social media campaign and strategy also complements the initial CRGBA Strategic Plan that NWAC commissioned in early 2021. This plan envisioned a two-pronged approach consisting of both internal and external advocacy to increase awareness



and facilitate the consistent implementation of CRGBA in our own projects and among relevant stakeholders. The aim of this campaign is to raise public and stakeholder awareness around the CRGBA framework and to position NWAC as leaders in CRGBA-informed best practices.

Given the upcoming holiday break, we hope to initiate the campaign in January and will have ongoing CRGBA content scheduled for release throughout the year. The upcoming months are going to be

an exciting time for the CRGBA project. We hope that by both publishing and raising awareness of our incredible work around CRGBA, we will see increased engagement, with NWAC as experts in the field. We are very excited to begin this initial work and see how the project unfolds.

Another social media campaign is under way to recruit staff of federally regulated employers who wish to participate in the pilot training engagement sessions for our Employment Equity Act project. These engagement sessions will build upon the earlier work our team has done to build capacity around training employers subject to the Employment Equity Act in their efforts to improve representation of Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people with disabilities in areas of low representation in their workplace. Our team will also be holding four more engagement sessions with Indigenous women and gender-diverse people early in the new year to allow for wider participation from this sector.

In addition to all the work our team is doing on our current projects, we have also been looking ahead to start work on future projects. This month, we have been in discussions with various federal departments to secure funding for two new projects. The first new project, to be funded by Human Resources Development Canada, will work to promote the changes that have been recently amended in the Accessible Canada Act. This project will promote the new legislative changes on disability and will be translated into Cree, Inuktitut, and Ojibway. The outreach will be accomplished through PTMA partnerships, four regional virtual education and engagement sessions, social media communication products, and an awareness campaign.

Kci-Niwesq: The Female Side Of All Life

For almost a year, NWAC's communications team has been producing regular editions of our e-zine, Kci-Niwesq, to uplift the voices of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

In our December edition, we focused on the strength and resiliency of Indigenous youth. With articles featuring TikTok star Michelle Chubb (aka Indigenous Baddie), and the hosts of the sci-fi podcast Metis in Space, Chelsea Vowel and Molly Swain, this edition highlights how Indigenous youth are sharing their culture.



Kci-Niwesq: The Female Side Of All Life

Also in this issue, we spoke about the experiences of Indigenous students. In an interview with former Prime Minister Paul Martin, we heard about the work of his foundation and his role in supporting Indigenous students. In a piece by Carleton University student Catriona Koenig, we also heard about the need for universities to provide increased support to Indigenous students.

Read our new issue of Kci-Niwesq and subscribe so you never miss an issue!

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Holiday Season In The Resiliency Lodge

Many Indigenous people decorate a tree at this time of year to celebrate the holidays. And, thanks to a resurgence of crafting among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women, the holiday trees in many homes are taking on a truly Indigenous flare.

In NWAC's Resiliency Lodge, a large tree is adorned with traditional Indigenous decorations curated by Ramona Nichols, an archeologist on NWAC's staff who is also an Elder and traditional knowledge holder.

Holiday Season In The Resiliency Lodge

Not long ago, it was difficult to find Indigenous ornaments. But because so many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people are returning to traditional crafting, tree decorations that reflect their cultures can now be found in abundance.

NWAC's Resiliency Lodge is helping to promote this resurgence through virtual arts-based workshops that engage Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people across the country in a wide variety of traditional crafts.

With the resurgence of Indigenous traditional crafting, we know our tree will be filled with beautiful Indigenous decorations for many years to come.



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NWAC Stands in Solidarity with Indigenous Children

It is one thing for Canada to discriminate against Indigenous women, mothers, grandmothers, and aunts. It is quite another to discriminate against Indigenous kids. NWAC opposes Canada's ongoing litigation against Indigenous kids.

Canada has been fighting kids in court since 2007. That year, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society (Caring Society) filed a discrimination complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission, arguing Canada discriminated against Indigenous kids by underfunding their health and social services.

NWAC Stands in Solidarity with Indigenous Children

This underfunding denied Indigenous kids the health services other kids could access. Canada would argue with the provinces over who would pay for the services while kids hung in the balance, suffering as they waited. Often, those kids would be removed from their families for no other reason than to be able to access health and social services available to all other, non-Indigenous children.

The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal received testimony and hundreds of pages of evidence detailing how Canada was discriminating against these kids for no other reason than because they were Indigenous.

Canada defended against the allegations, but the tribunal ruled against the government in 2016, finding its conduct to be willfully and recklessly racist against Indigenous kids. Since then, Canada continues to argue, in the tribunal and in federal court, against orders to compensate the kids and families harmed by its discrimination.

"The very purpose of the compensation award is to compensate a biological parent or grandparent for the loss of their child to a system that discriminated against them because they are First Nations," wrote Federal Court Justice Paul Favel (Poundmaker Cree Nation).

This fall, Justice Favel struck down Canada's latest refusal to compensate Indigenous kids and their families. He upheld the tribunal's compensation and eligibility decisions as reasonable. He challenged Canada to resolve its discrimination against Indigenous kids, once and for all.

Cindy Blackstock (Gitxsan), executive director of the Caring Society, expressed joy when Justice Favel ruled in favour of compensating Indigenous children, but hesitated to declare it a victory. In her decades advocating for Indigenous children, she has seen Canada take up the sword every step of the way, and continually refuse to compensate the kids.

NWAC stands in solidarity with Ms. Blackstock's tireless efforts to seek equality for Indigenous children. Those children are raised by Indigenous mothers, grandmothers, aunties, and other women who have lived under Canada's gender-based discrimination for generations. CEO Lynne Groulx recently told reporters when Indigenous kids receive less than non-Indigenous kids, there is only one word for it: systemic discrimination. That needs to stop.

Justice Favel's ruling acknowledges the long journey and multiple court decisions this case has endured. He wrote that Canada has sat beside the path to reconciliation and must now decide whether to move forward or continue to sit idly.

Indigenous women know the path well. They have faced discrimination under Canada's colonial policies for as long as Canada has declared itself a country. The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) inquiry's final report connects colonialism's intergenerational harms to the violence that Indigenous women and girls experience today. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's reports connect Indian residential schools to Canada's ongoing racism against Indigenous kids, who today are removed from their homes at rates far beyond non-Indigenous kids.

NWAC's legal unit continues to integrate these intersections between colonial harms, MMIWG, reconciliation, and ongoing discrimination in its advocacy work.



From Sexual and Reproductive Health to Dementia Care, Emphasis on Being informed

With funding from the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Indigenous Services Canada (FNIHB), NWAC was able to conduct research on forced sterilization. Our work included conducting a thematic analysis of recommendations on forced sterilization and holding engagement sessions with Indigenous women to explore sexual and reproductive health needs and priorities.

In these sessions, participants highlighted a gap in sexual health education and a need to empower and raise awareness among Indigenous women on their rights within the health care system; their understanding of their options when it comes to sexual and reproductive health; and the need for information on what to do when those rights are abused. We also heard of a lack of trust between Indigenous community members and mainstream health services, which leads to hesitancy on the part of Indigenous community members to use these services—and, ultimately, to poorer health outcomes.

From Sexual and Reproductive Health to Dementia Care, Emphasis on Being informed Participants stressed the importance of providing training and education for health care providers on cultural safety as well as informed consent, informed choice, health education for patients of varying literacy levels, and freedom of choice and bodily autonomy.

To address this gap, NWAC will develop an information campaign on the sexual and reproductive health needs and priorities of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people. Central to this campaign is a toolkit that aims to educate, empower, and offer justice in the context of sexual and reproductive health for Indigenous women. The toolkit includes information on free, prior, and informed consent, informed choice, an informed choice decision-making tool, patient rights, how to file a complaint, and an overview of birth control methods.

While providing care for a loved one can be rewarding and offer an opportunity to become closer, it can be demanding on the caregiver's mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Caregivers frequently report sleep issues, anxiety, depression, burnout, feelings of frustration, financial challenges, and social isolation. Further, Indigenous caregivers may lack essential information and knowledge on dementia. They may not know how to access culturally safe supports and services to assist them



with providing care and coping with the stresses of caregiving. Our project, through the toolkit and support groups, aims to improve the knowledge and experience of the caregiver and, in turn, improve the care provided to people living with dementia and their quality of life.

The engagement portion of the Circle of Care at the centre of the project ensures that Indigenous values, beliefs, and traditions will be included. The peer support group sessions have allowed caregivers to learn about dementia and discuss problems of caregiving. The participants receive traditional information and perspectives on dementia and caregiving and have an opportunity to talk with other Indigenous caregivers who may be having similar experiences.

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Creating transformative change to save lives and achieve health equity

One of the projects that the NWAC health team is working on is researching the co-development of distinctions-based Indigenous health legislation.

Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people are disproportionately affected by inequities in Canadian health care systems. Using a culturally relevant gender-based lens, NWAC's Co-development of Distinctions-based Indigenous Health Legislation project will encourage government policy that responds to the Indigenous social determinants of health. This project will highlight Indigenous rights and gender-based rights as foundational to creating the transformative change that is required to save lives and achieve health equity.

Creating transformative change to save lives and achieve health equity

There are many distinctions-based, community-based, and needs-based considerations regarding the health of Indigenous peoples in Canada. NWAC's culturally relevant gender-based analysis shows that Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people face unique forms of oppression in Canadian health care systems, including racism, gender-based discrimination, medical violence, and neglect. Long-standing health inequities between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people have been the subject of several inquiries and reports in Canada. These inequities disproportionately affect Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people.

Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people need urgent access to Indigenous-led treatment for generational trauma and mental health that is rooted in distinct ways of knowing. Métis women and gender-diverse people are largely excluded from Canadian Indigenous health policy. Inuit pregnant people urgently require access to community-based childbirth and midwifery services, no matter where they live in Canada. Indigenous people living in remote areas routinely travel long distances to access health care. These and other long-standing health inequities have worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To help us with this work, NWAC hosted a series of virtual roundtables with Indigenous experts to discuss research questions about the co-development of distinctions-based Indigenous health legislation. These experts shared their first-hand knowledge, experiences, and ideas for transformative change in Canada's health care system.

We heard that transformative change is rooted in the needs of people. We heard that transformative change is self-determination for Indigenous Peoples. We heard that transformative change is a shift in health care systems to include Indigenous practices from birth onward throughout the life cycle.



In 2019, Prime Minister Trudeau mandated the Minister of Indigenous Services to “co-develop distinctions-based Indigenous health legislation, backed with the investments needed to deliver high-quality, health care for all Indigenous Peoples.” Funded by Indigenous Services Canada, NWAC’s Co-development of Distinctions-based Indigenous Health Legislation project will inform our advocacy, direction, and guidance efforts on this issue.

Through research, education, and policy, the NWAC health team works to advocate for the highest attainable standard of health and well-being of all Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. NWAC’s Co-development of Distinctions-based Indigenous Health Legislation project is addressing the unique and intersectional needs of Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people in Canada. Our final report and recommendations— informed by the voices of Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people—to the federal government will be published in early 2022.

Shining a Spotlight: Environment

NWAC's environment team continues to work on important projects related to water, climate change, biodiversity and transportation issues.

Most of our team's energy in November focused on implementing the next phase of our two largest projects funded by Transport Canada, the Indigenous Knowledge Framework (IKF) and Canadian Navigable Waters Act (CNWA). Following our engagement sessions with Indigenous women and gender-diverse people about the CNWA and the IKF in October, the environment team has been busy organizing two national expert engagement symposiums. The CNWA symposium will be held on December 6, 2021, and will bring together 8 to 10 Indigenous women and gender-diverse people to share their knowledge and expertise about how the government should engage with Indigenous women and gender-diverse people on issues related to water and navigation. Similarly, the IKF symposium scheduled for December 13, 2021, will bring together 6 to 8 Indigenous women and gender-diverse people to get their input on how the IKF should consider Indigenous women and gender-diverse people's knowledge and how this can be implemented in the government's current IKF.



Shining a Spotlight: Environment

Our team also spent the month of November organizing and preparing for the next phase of the Fish and Fish Habitat Protection (FFHP) project. In the upcoming months, we will be holding three engagement sessions with 15 Indigenous women and gender-diverse people per session to understand how the FFHP provisions under the Fisheries Act impact them. Our team is also continuing to update and maintain the FFHP portal, which is the central communication hub on issues related to the FFHP for Indigenous women and gender-diverse people.

Lastly, our team continued to support four of NWAC's provincial and territorial member associations (PTMAs) in conducting a Climate Change Survey at the regional and grassroots level. In November, we held three engagement sessions with 15 Indigenous women, gender-diverse, and Two-Spirit people on climate change, conservation, and biodiversity. We have also started to write a 20-page report summarizing the key findings from the engagement sessions.

We also have been working with the PTMAs to develop their report writing and research skills to create a uniform moderator's guide, background project document, and template of the engagement sessions to ensure that all regions are using the same methodology.

Our team is excited to see all of our November preparation come to fruition in the coming months!



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