



# SHINING THE SPOTLIGHT

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA NEWSLETTER



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>A Message from the CEO</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>The Resiliency Lodge Chelsea</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>MMIWG Department:</b> Safe Passage work continues .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Community Support Worker Training</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>RCMP body worn cameras:</b> Balancing transparency and privacy .....	<b>10</b>
<b>International advocacy as a tool</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Health Policy Team:</b> The Indigenous Maternity Experiences Project .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Executive Policy Team:</b> Implementing Culturally Relevant Gender Based Analysis .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Environment Department:</b> The impact of global warming .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Heritage Language Project:</b> Acknowledging Métis Identity .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Economic Development Department:</b> Identifying data about the most vulnerable Indigenous people .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Communications Department:</b> Bringing attention to MMIWG2S .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Health Team:</b> Project to increase Indigenous-led health service delivery .....	<b>21</b>

## A Message from the CEO

Spring is a time of new beginnings and growth. Birds and butterflies have arrived; trees have donned their greenery; flowers are blooming.

NWAC, too, is growing as an organization. We have moved into our new building in Gatineau. The building will not only house our offices but act as an incubator space for our revenue generating businesses (boutique and café) and welcome government departments, national non-profit organizations, and other groups to gather in our culturally designed meeting spaces. The space that is occupied by more than 200 Indigenous art pieces in our new building, made by Indigenous artists from across the country, is designed to honour and bring awareness about Indigenous women and girls in Canada.



With awareness comes understanding, and understanding leads to reconciliation. As we grow in staff numbers and departments, we are also growing as an advocacy voice for Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people. The work we are doing always has a focus on inclusivity and respect for all the Indigenous people we represent—on and off-reserve; with or without disabilities; First Nations, Inuit, and Métis; urban and rural.

This issue of *Shining the Spotlight* offers a glimpse into some of the projects and programs we are working on related to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG); the economic marginalization of women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people; and the environment.

### THE ROAD TO HEALING

With the opening of our Resiliency Lodge, Indigenous women who have been marked by settler-colonialism policies and programs, racism, and discrimination now have a welcoming, culturally safe space to come to as guests. You'll read about this, as well as our work on the MMIWG file. Supported by our

### A Message from the CEO (CONT.)

communications department, we are partnering with Facebook's Metaverse and with TikTok to bring attention to this crisis. We have also revamped the Safe Passage website, which reflects the geographic regions and instances where individuals have felt unsafe, and are working on a report on community safety as well as a training program to help Indigenous people and communities deal with intergenerational trauma, mental health crises, and gender-based violence.

Indigenous women's negative interactions with the police, including the RCMP, are another concern. NWAC welcomes that the RCMP is planning to equip frontline police officers with body cameras, and we are providing feedback. Balancing transparency and the right to privacy with the need to record police-Indigenous people's interactions will be critical.

## THE ECONOMIC FILE

As always, NWAC continues to focus on the economic marginalization of the people we represent. This issue carries stories about the national survey that Nanos Research conducted for us on the most vulnerable Indigenous people in Canada—those with mental, physical, cultural, and spiritual barriers. The comprehensive data will be used to help remove barriers to employment.

Just as federally regulated employers will be given the tools to advance equity among Indigenous people with disabilities, so too will they be informed by our work on culturally relevant, gender-based research and policy analysis, which will foster inclusivity and equity across government policies and programs.

## THE CLIMATE FILE

Last but not least, Indigenous women are the water keepers. In this period of global warming, it is critical to have our voices heard. To this end, you'll read about our participation on the international stage through forums like COP56 and I invite all of you to visit our new Water Carriers website, where we share stories about Indigenous women's relationship with water.

Leaving no one out or behind ... that's the central focus of all of our work, and that work is increasing as we continue to expand our programming and reach. We hope you enjoy reading this month's issue of Shining the Spotlight.

Miigwetch, thank you, merci.

*Lynne Groulx*



## The Resiliency Lodge Chelsea

The Resiliency Lodge has opened its doors! We kicked this month off with our blossom teachings, overnight retreats, and tours for local Indigenous organizations and communities. Our goal is to create a welcoming, culturally safe space for indigenous community members, who will benefit first-hand from the lodge's healing experience, which incorporates Traditional Knowledge, teachings, and ceremonies.

The Resiliency Lodge encourages indigenous women to not only explore all the healing elements the lodge has to offer. We also encourage our guests to take part in other cultural activities, which include crafting and a variety of traditional teachings. They will be culturally revitalized and experience a connection to the land.

Our goal is to create a safe and positive environment for our guests—providing a home away from home.

Although our lodge has opened, we are also continuing to reach Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people through our online workshops on Indigenous crafts. We provide all the materials, as well as a safe environment that nurtures a sense of sisterhood in a fun and interactive way.





## MMIWG Department: Safe Passage work continues



include a community safety resource map alongside the MMIWG2S+ map, so individuals can view and access safety resources in their communities.

In addition to revising and expanding the reporting tool and map, we will be providing support to those who report cases of MMIWG2S+ or unsafe areas on the platform. Individuals

will receive increased Elder support through the Resiliency Lodge and Faceless Dolls healing workshops, which will be held throughout the year.

All the website updates, along with future changes, are being overseen by the Safe Passage Indigenous Women's Safety Council. The Council's membership includes NWAC's provincial and territorial member associations (PTMAs) and four sharing circles represented by Indigenous women, gender-diverse, and Two-Spirit people. The four sharing circles will be held in late May and the Safety Council will meet regularly to advise and guide the Safe Passage website.

The MMIWG department is also working on a similar project related to community-led definitions of safety. This month, our team has been busy planning an engagement session, in partnership with the Resiliency Lodge, for MMIWG2S+ families and survivors to understand their views, knowledge, and concerns related to safety. After the engagement session, we will be producing a report that includes the information shared during the session. The report will contain recommendations on how to incorporate community-led definitions of safety into various safety resources.

Our team has also been planning an MMIWG art installation on the first floor of NWAC's new head office. The installation, which will be in the "vault," will consist of art pieces made by community members across the country that commemorate, honour, and bring awareness to MMIWG. The installation will be on display in June, the third anniversary of the release of the Inquiry's final report.



## Community Support Worker Training

Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse (WG2STGD) people are disproportionately influenced by the effects of intergenerational trauma caused by the residential school system, Indian day schools, and the ongoing crisis of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls. NWAC created a special training program to benefit those who are on this healing journey. The program is designed to provide tools, methods, and self-care strategies to community support workers (CSWs) and their staff who support individuals on these healing journeys.

After conducting a sharing circle, the research team, along with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and CSWs, developed two- and six-hour training sessions for community support workers and their staff based on their recommendations.

Each training session consisted of three parts:

- eugenics, genocide, and settler colonialism
- Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and well-being; free, informed, prior consent; trauma-informed care; and integrating Western and Indigenous methods using Two-Eyed seeing approaches
- allyship, reconciliation, and self-care

The section on the history of eugenics, genocide, and Canada's involvement is emotionally and spiritually difficult. It explains how Indigenous Peoples became the target of settler colonialism policies and practices, but the content is an essential piece.

By giving CSWs and their staff information on the histories and legacies of settler colonialism and how this has impacted Indigenous communities, we hope to help CSWs support those who are experiencing intergenerational trauma, mental health crises, and gender-based violence. Our goal is to also integrate Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and well-being into their toolkit.



## RCMP body worn cameras: Balancing transparency and privacy

The RCMP are planning to equip up to 15,000 frontline police officers with body cameras, and asked NWAC for our input.

Body cams may improve federal police relations with Indigenous Peoples, but only if the RCMP reduces the privacy risks associated with collecting and storing these videos. NWAC suggests the RCMP develop and implement strict and effective policy for managing these videos.



Body cams can improve evidence collection against those who perpetrate violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people. They can also ensure officers check their behaviour when interacting with Indigenous people by recording interactions.

Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately subjected to police intimidation and brutality, so more officers wearing body cameras may validate victims who cry foul. Nevertheless, privacy breach risks are a serious concern that demand strict and efficient policy to limit such risks.

Privacy breaches related to police body cams may expose Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people to increased risks of violence and social harm. The RCMP has been working with privacy law experts and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner to develop a policy that ensures privacy rights are not infringed. This policy includes ensuring that video is not recorded without consent where there is a high expectation of privacy. It also ensures information related to the videos is not released to the public without first conforming to the rules in the *Privacy Act* and the *Access to Information Act*.

The potential benefits that come with having more RCMP officers wearing body cams are significant, but they must not come at the further expense of safety, especially among society's most vulnerable populations. The RCMP must not only develop body cam policies that properly account for these privacy interests, but they must also make sure these policies are properly implemented.





## International advocacy as a tool

International advocacy is a tool at NWAC's disposal—a tool to monitor Canada's progress (or lack thereof) related to their international commitments. Canada is a party to human right declarations and other conventions such as the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.



The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a mechanism of the overall human rights situation in all UN Member States such as Canada. Child rights issues are included in the UPR. The UN Committee on the *Rights of the Child* will review Canada on May 17. NWAC submitted recommendations on how Canada can better protect the rights of Indigenous children and will be closely monitoring the review.

This is a priority for NWAC since Indigenous children face significantly worse outcomes than non-Indigenous children in Canada. They experience disproportionate poverty rates, domestic violence rates, food insecurity, lower education attainment, significant health conditions, and systemic discrimination. Every child matters.

NWAC virtually participated in and monitored the **United Nations Permanent Forum on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNPFII)**, which took place from April 25 to May 6 at the United Nations headquarters in New York. This year's theme was "Indigenous peoples, business, autonomy and the human rights principles of due diligence including free, prior and informed consent."

International advocacy as a tool (CONT.)

NWAC provided a written submission highlighting the urgency of implementing the MMIWG Calls for Justice, among other things.

To this end, we hosted four sharing circles with NWAC's Elders, Resiliency Lodge staff, and Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people who have attended virtual Elder-led support services during the pandemic.

Preliminary research analysis is already showing quite clearly that Elder-led support services are essential—and yet many barriers to accessing support continue to exist. Over the next month and a half, our teams will continue to work diligently on this research project. We look forward to sharing research findings with you soon!



## Health Policy Team: The Indigenous Maternity Experiences Project



In 2009, the Public Health Agency of Canada released the Canadian Maternity Experiences Survey. The survey was a population health and surveillance research project that was designed to provide evidence-based improvements in maternity care and infant health. It included over 300 questions on topics related to women's perceptions, practices, and experiences before pregnancy; during pregnancy, labour and birth, and in the early months of parenthood. Unfortunately, the survey excluded First Nations women living on-reserve, institutionalized (incarcerated) women, and women whose children were not living with them (apprehended) at the time of the survey. Therefore, the survey did not fully capture the maternity experiences of Indigenous women.

Using Indigenous and decolonized methodologies, it became our goal to engage Indigenous peoples and communities in the interior of British Columbia to create an Indigenous Maternity Experiences Survey (IMES). By identifying the unique and complex context of Indigenous women's maternity experiences as well as the gaps and barriers that Indigenous women face and that contribute to maternal-child

Health Policy Team: The Indigenous Maternity Experiences Project (CONT.)

health disparities and associated inequities, this project aims to improve prenatal and postpartum health among Indigenous women. From this, the Maternal-Child Gathering project was born.

The University of Calgary partnered with NWAC to engage in a more robust information-gathering project among communities across Turtle Island. The purpose of the gatherings was to bring together interested Indigenous women, birth partners, Elders, and health care workers. We wanted to create a space where individuals could share their stories and experiences with maternal-child wellness programs and practices within their communities and from their individual perspectives. We held engagement sessions with parents, health care professionals, and community members. Our goal is to develop research that captures Indigenous women's experiences, needs, gaps, strengths, and priorities for prenatal, labour/birth, and postpartum wellness and health care. By using this information, we can advance and advocate for what is needed or can be developed in our communities.

From the 2021 engagement sessions, we are in the process of developing digital stories. These will be used as a resource to highlight some of the success and disparities in the health care system when it comes to Indigenous maternity issues. We also wish to highlight how a Two-Eyed seeing approach can be applied to Western medicine and traditional wellness.





## Executive Policy Team: Implementing Culturally Relevant Gender Based Analysis



During the months of March and April 2022, the Executive Policy Team received ongoing capacity-building funding from Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada to increase NWAC's internal capacity around implementing culturally relevant, gender-based research and policy analysis (CRGBA). For the first year of this funding, we sought feedback on the CRGBA framework from Indigenous community members, advocates, researchers, and policy experts. To do this, NWAC conducted three sharing circles: two with grassroots Indigenous advocates and community members, and one with Indigenous policy experts and researchers. Overall, feedback was positive, and participants agreed that the framework is a useful tool to foster inclusivity and gender equality for advocacy and policy initiatives. Suggestions from participants included:

- Develop further training, workshops, and other resources that are tailored to informing people about Indigenous issues to facilitate cultural sharing and understanding
- Develop cultural competency training for non-Indigenous people to better inform and develop policies that are culturally relevant and trauma-informed
- Provide more information to communities on accessible, compassionate, and culturally relevant resources, especially around Indigenous health services



### Executive Policy Team: Implementing Culturally Relevant Gender Based Analysis (CONT.)

- Increase accessibility of information about Indigenous, First Nations, and gender-diverse people using social media and other online platforms (for example, develop podcasts or community newsletters to promote, discuss, and share knowledge on the CRGBA framework)
- Increase communication between Indigenous communities and municipal, provincial, and federal governments
- Encourage communities to work collaboratively to become more inclusive and to foster collaboration and information-sharing across Indigenous cultures
- Continue to lobby the government to commit to reconciliation and appropriately address the impacts of residential schools on community members today (we cannot wait any longer)
- Encourage discussion by community members and provide further information on the topic of Indigenous intersectionality

NWAC has used feedback received from participants to inform further work around the CRGBA framework, including planning future training and tools to help build the capacity of communities to self-advocate. NWAC is also continuing to develop tools and training to help key stakeholders, including federal policy-makers and researchers across Turtle Island, apply the framework.

Further to this, the Executive Policy Team is excited to announce the publication of Culturally Relevant Gender-Based Analysis: A Roadmap for Policy Development. This roadmap is a comprehensive and accessible guide to applying the CRGBA framework in policy. It contains detailed case studies and interactive activities and thought exercises to encourage critical analysis and self-reflection. We hope this tool will help support state actors, researchers, and advocacy groups in their work to foster inclusivity and equity across government policies and programs.

As we embark on the new fiscal year, we are looking forward to all the possibilities that our CRGBA framework will provide. We are already planning how to best use the framework to foster empowerment and agency in the communities we represent. To this end, we are planning further engagement sessions in the upcoming months to help us develop potential training and tools for community organizers and advocates, with the aim of supporting our Indigenous siblings in taking action in their own communities.

A key takeaway from our work so far is that Indigenous voices don't just need to be at the table. Our voices must also be heard and actively engaged in issues that impact our communities. We hope our future CRGBA work will facilitate just that.



## Environment Department: The impact of global warming

The environment department and two Indigenous women delegates participated virtually in the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Conference of Parties (COP)56, held from March 21 to April 4, 2022. IPCC COP56 is a United Nations gathering of 195 member governments of the IPCC. The goal was to come to a consensus on the Summary for Policymakers Working Group 3 report entitled *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change*, which was approved on April 4. The key highlight of the report was that without immediate and deep emissions reductions across all economic sectors, limiting global warming to 1.5 Celsius is beyond reach.

The Native Women's Association of Canada launched the [Water Carriers website](#) on March 22, 2022, on World Water Day to celebrate Indigenous women's role in protecting our water. The website illustrates the holistic worldview of Indigenous women's relationship with water through sharing, storytelling, and art. Its purpose is to help bring a greater understanding on how freshwater issues affect Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people and their communities.



## Heritage Language Project: Acknowledging Métis Identity

Marie Schoenthal is a Heritage Michif Language Keeper who continues to share her experiences and her culture with the Native Women's Association of Canada through published YouTube videos, funded by Heritage Canada. Marie's native language, referred to as the Classic Michif, derives from the Cree and French languages and is mostly spoken by Métis people. The 84-year-old Red River, Manitoba, native remembers speaking heritage Michif in her home and community when she was a child.

When she began elementary school at age six, Marie remembers being embarrassed that she could not speak English. Her classmates made fun of non-English speakers, and the teachers made it clear that only English was to be spoken in the classroom. Marie said, "I was intimidated at school and then became so ashamed of my culture" due to being forced to adapt to Euro-Canadian society.

Now a grandmother who has lived in Alberta for most of her adult life, Marie used to conceal her identity from coworkers and the community. She said that "she wanted to be known as anything but Métis." Marie admitted she even referred to her children as German because her father-in-law was of that background. She assimilated with Western society, losing her Métis identity, in order to escape the judgment of society. With her family's support, Marie Schoenthal is now breathing life back into heritage Michif. She no longer discounts the importance of her culture.



## Economic Development Department: Identifying data about the most vulnerable Indigenous people



Among various initiatives to facilitate the integration of Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people with disabilities in the job market, NWAC's economic development team is proud to announce the conclusion of a large-scale national survey focusing on the most vulnerable Indigenous people in Canada.

The survey identified quantitative and qualitative data about their mental and/or physical disorders, the physical, cultural, and spiritual barriers when seeking employment, and the reasons for leaving or wanting to leave a job. It identified the main challenges to adapting and accommodating people with disabilities into the workplace, with a view to promoting healing and empowerment.

The survey's key findings form the basis for raising awareness and transferring knowledge on our team's work among federally regulated employers who are subject to the *Employment Equity Act*. The data will serve to better inform employers about the needs of Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people with disabilities. The findings will also be used to develop solutions to remove barriers to equity before, during, and after one is hired, thus supporting their full integration in the workplace.

This initiative places NWAC as a one of the few knowledge holders with reliable disaggregated data about these three Indigenous vulnerable groups. It will contribute to improving knowledge on this topic and help to identify policy priorities at the local, regional, and national levels.

people, as well as engage with them through surveys on all matters related to fish and fish habitats.



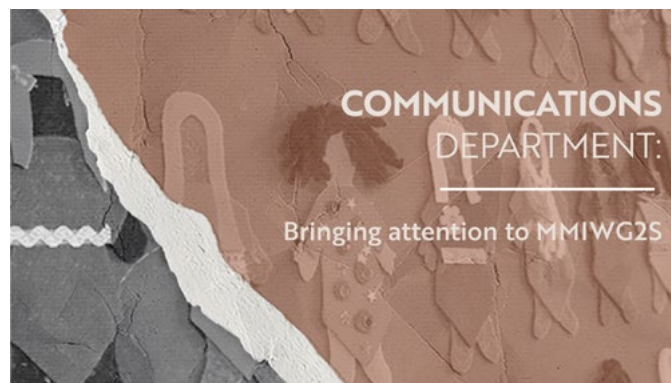
## Communications Department: Bringing attention to MMIWG2S

This month, the communications team launched a far-reaching social media campaign to bring attention to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people (MMIWG2S).

In this campaign, NWAC partnered with Facebook's Metaverse to launch an augmented reality 3D filter for photos on May 5, known as Red Dress Day. Through this partnership, NWAC's Instagram channel has become a permanent host for this filter, which enables social media users to digitally place a red handprint over their mouth—a powerful symbol showing solidarity with MMIWG2S.

Our organization has also **partnered with TikTok** to commemorate Red Dress Day and honour the lives, memories, and communities of MMIWG2S—

During the month of May, the team produced the 11th edition of **Kci-Niwesq**, NWAC's flagship magazine. We explored the lives of women in the North and featured an interview with Her Excellency Mary Simon, the Governor General of Canada.



The communications team also polished and packaged a wide range of publications and marketing material to support the ongoing projects of the other departments. These include reports on the Indigenous Artisan Women's Business Network, content on the Faceless Doll Project for Amnesty International, posters to promote several workshops and webinars organized by NWAC, and a report on recommendations for Indigenous housing strategies.





## Health Team: Project to increase Indigenous-led health service delivery



The health team recently finished NWAC's Co-development of Distinctions-based Indigenous Health Legislation project, funded by Indigenous Services Canada. This project is part of the Government of Canada's efforts to support the transformation of health service delivery by collaborating with Indigenous organizations to develop, provide, and improve services in order to increase Indigenous-led health service delivery.

NWAC advocates for equitable and accessible health care for all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people, regardless of where they live. We apply an intersectional, culturally relevant, gender-based lens to all our work, and we are well-positioned to ensure that the perspectives of Indigenous women, girls, Two Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people are included in the government's current engagement.

For this project, NWAC recruited Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people with expert knowledge in a variety of areas, from Canadian constitution and legislation to the administration and regulation of health care systems in Canada. We successfully recruited 12 Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people from British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories, and Ontario.

We then held three roundtable sessions in October and November of 2021. The NWAC team transcribed the data collected at the roundtables and conducted an analysis. External consultants helped with the analysis and report writing. The findings inform NWAC's advocacy, direction, and guidance on Indigenous health legislation.

There are many distinctions-based, community-based, and needs-based considerations to acknowledge regarding the health of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. NWAC's culturally relevant gender-based analysis shows that Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, 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 and non-Indigenous people have been the subject of several inquiries and reports in Canada. These inequities disproportionately affect Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people.

Below is a summary of our findings, collected from the responses that expert participants provided to the project research questions:

- Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people are distinct
- Indigenous health legislation must provide for equality in funding
- Indigenous health legislation must provide for educational needs within health systems and in Indigenous communities
- Principles of equality and inclusion in co-development need to be developed
- Co-development must be meaningful and transparent
- Indigenous people have a right to safe care
- Binding accountability mechanisms on government are required
- Indigenous quality standards must be incorporated in health service delivery
- Better data are needed
- An Indigenous-led authority for oversight must be created

Indigenous health legislation has the potential to impact all Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people are caregivers in their families. As community leaders who provide balance and health, it is important that Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people are the ones to lead transformative change in Canadian health systems.

