

NWAC President's Report

This publication highlights the various activities the President has undertaken throughout the month of February.



LORRAINE WHITMAN

Lorraine Whitman was elected as the President of the Native Women's Association of Canada on September 14, 2019. Prior to her presidency at NWAC, Ms. Whitman served as President of the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association and has been advocating for Indigenous women's rights over the past 45 years.

My Dear Friends,

Family Day is for celebrating and appreciating everything that we have. Given the ongoing pandemic along with the current war between Russia and Ukraine, which is displacing families, let's celebrate love and connectedness. Let's also remember those family members who have gone into the Spirit World. By continuing to celebrate their life and their memories, we keep them alive in our hearts.

Valentine's Day is another day for celebration. North Americans began exchanging hand-made valentines in the early 1700s, and in the 1840s, the first valentines were being mass-produced. Today, according to the Greeting Card Association, an estimated 145 million Valentine's Day cards are sent each year, making Valentine's Day the second largest card-sending holiday of the year. Everyone can celebrate this day in their own way, just by celebrating with those that are close to us—friends, family, spouse, children, partner, all of our loved ones. My love goes out to everyone!

On this Valentine's Day, many in-person and online events were held across the country as part of the annual Women's Memorial Day Walk, held to honour missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. To honour our loved ones who have gone on to the Spirit World, we continue to commemorate and remember those we are missing or murdered. They are not lost or forgotten.

This month we also celebrated International Mother Language Day. By recognizing that languages and multilingualism advance inclusion, we meet the Sustainable Development Goals to leave no one behind. We must teach our first language or mother tongue to our children in their early years, as early childhood care and education is the foundation of learning. A large part of our identity and our mother tongue is based on our identity, and without our language we have no culture or heritage. As the International Year of Indigenous Languages comes to an end, the United Nations has declared that the International Decade of Indigenous Languages will begin in 2022 and end in 2032. The Government of Canada has already announced it will recognize, raise awareness of, and celebrate the richness and diversity of Indigenous languages throughout this decade. It is important that NWAC be invited to sit at the table with the government and other national Indigenous organizations in this important initiative.

NWAC attended the meeting with the federal-provincial-territorial ministers responsible for transportation and highway safety. Transportation affects Indigenous women in Canada every day, in so many ways. As I said last year, it is one of those issues that hits us where we live. At this meeting, I stated the following:

“Attaining access to safe, accessible, affordable, and reliable transportation for all Indigenous women and gender-diverse people is one of my organization's top priorities. The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls concludes that the lack of safe and affordable transportation is a key contributor to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in this country. That is

particularly true in Northern and remote communities. When Indigenous women scramble for rides, it increases their vulnerability and exposure to violence.

Perhaps you will say that the number of Indigenous women who have been murdered or who have disappeared while hitchhiking along dangerous routes, like the Highway of Tears in British Columbia, should convince them not to engage in that risky behaviour. But in too many cases, there is just no other option.

Many Indigenous women do not have the luxury of owning their own car. Where there is inadequate public transportation—or no public transportation—how do we expect them to travel to another community to attend a doctor’s appointment? How are they to get to school or work outside their own town or village? Are we asking them to forego those things?

When a woman is fleeing a violent partner, do you think he hands her the keys to the car? Do you think his family in their village offer her a lift? No wonder then that the lack of safe and affordable transportation is correlated with increased rates of domestic violence.

And we hear much these days about human trafficking. You may already know, Ministers, that the number of human trafficking incidents reported in 2019 marked a 44 per cent increase from the previous year, and that most of the girls who are trafficked are under the age of 18.

It has also been estimated that 51 per cent of trafficked women in Canada are Indigenous, despite the fact that we make up less than five per cent of Canada’s overall population.

What better way is there for predators to connect with the Indigenous girls they want to snare into sexual slavery than by scouting for them along unsafe highways?

We at NWAC know that the transportation industry intersects with human trafficking. We know these crimes often start at restaurants and motels near major highways. That is why NWAC has launched a campaign called Safe Passage, part of which includes training for transportation and hospitality workers that will help them identify traffickers and their victims.

We have partnered with Truckers Against Trafficking to raise awareness and fight trafficking in Indigenous communities. Our Safe Passage campaign includes an interactive map to show where in Canada Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people have been murdered or gone missing. It is our hope that it will alert the women we represent to places that are especially dangerous.

And the national action plan that we released in June of last year called “Our Calls, Our Actions” outlines specific recommendations to address transportation needs and human trafficking.

But safety is not our only interest when it comes to transportation.

If a few trucks of food could not reach Toronto or Montreal or Vancouver on any given day, no one would starve. The same is not true of our remote fly-in communities. These are places where food insecurity is real, and where the planes that bring supplies are essential services.

But they cost money. Lots of money. Our people already suffer disproportionately from obesity and chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease because it costs a lot to get healthy food to their local stores.

I urge you to put thought to this issue and to find—and fund—reliable and reasonably priced ways of getting essential goods like food to the Indigenous communities within your jurisdictions.

We were heartened last year when the federal government put \$40 million to safeguard transportation in Northern Manitoba.

We were pleased to hear that a Rural Transit Solutions Fund will make \$250 million over five years to support the development of locally driven transit solutions that will help people living in rural communities.

We know there have been other transportation initiatives at all levels of government that are aimed at Indigenous women. But we still need help. Our transportation needs are many, and we need to ensure that the gaps are filled and the essential changes are made to improve the lives of Indigenous women across Canada. We spoke of this a year ago. What tangible changes have truly been made since a year ago?

Let's continue to work together to continue to make changes. Let's continue to move forward to remove barriers for all women, not just in the North and remote areas, but across the country. It is time for action. There are many issues and concerns and it is time for action."

To end on a lighter note, people look forward to Groundhog Day to see if his shadow will be shown: will spring come early; will the groundhog come out of his burrow early? Children look for it and we do too. This tradition began in Pennsylvania in the 1800s; in Canada in 1956, Wiarton Willie became a household name for his early February weather predictions. Wiarton's Groundhog Day festival grew as Willie's fame





increased. It became one of the largest winter festivals in Bruce County, Canada. It's a fun tradition to look forward to!

I look forward to celebrating spring after our cold winter.

May spring come early for us this year!

Wela'lin


President Lorraine Whitman
 [@LWhitman_NWAC](https://twitter.com/LWhitman_NWAC)



My February Agenda

Some important dates to note in February:

Inuktitut Language Month – It's nice to see the commitment to keeping many Indigenous languages alive, including Inuktitut, the Inuit language, which is the mother tongue of our Governor General.

February 10 – International Day of Women and Girls in Science

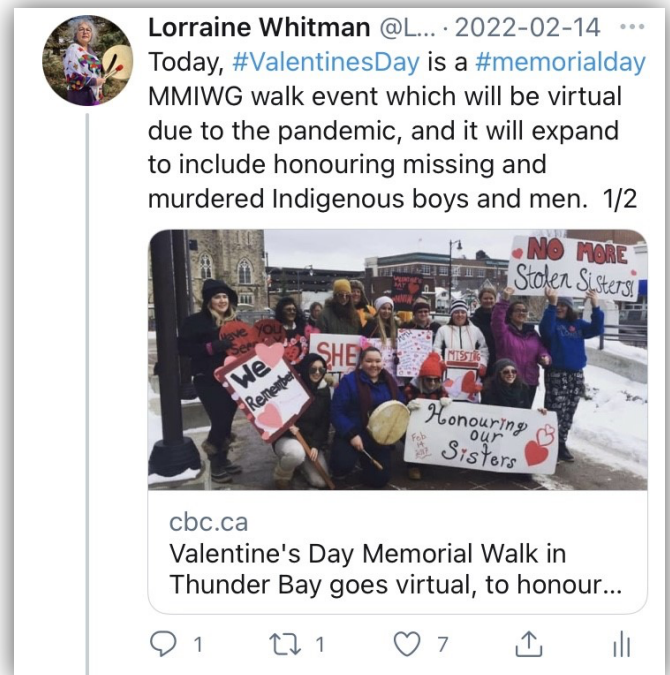
February 13 – World Day of Social Justice

February 14 – Women's Memorial Day Walk. This event is held very Valentine's Day. Families and friends of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people plan marches and online events to honour their loved ones.

February 15 – National Accessibility Week

February 21 – International Mother Language Day

February 21 – Louis Riel Day. As the Métis leader of the Red River Resistance of 1869–1870, Louis Riel was the driving force behind Manitoba becoming Canada's fifth province. Riel fought for the Métis people and their way of life. #LouisRielDay #Métis



February 23 – Pink Shirt Day. This day is used to promote zero tolerance towards bullying.

This month, NWAC held the following meetings:

Anti-Bullying Day, or [#PinkShirtDay](#), is held each year to stand against bullying. At NWAC, we have a zero tolerance for bullying. We believe in lifting each other up, amplifying Indigenous voices, and standing strong together.

bit.ly/2n0b8ll



Governance Meeting – Discuss proposed bylaws for our AGA

Executive Council Meeting

Personnel Committee Meeting – Review bylaws and terms of reference; discuss conditions as a result of the pandemic and work-related issues

AGA Committee Meeting – Discuss location, date, and theme of upcoming AGA

Finance Committee Meeting

Also this month:

Employment and Social Development

Canada's Accessible Canada Directorate (ESDC) Webinar

The ESDC launched a webinar series on community-based projects receiving funding under the disability component of ESDC's Social Development Partnerships Program (SDPP-D). The goal of these webinars is to raise awareness of accessibility-focused projects undertaken by community organizations. The local projects celebrate the contributions of people with disabilities and promote accessibility and inclusion in communities and workplaces in every province and territory. This month's webinar included presentations from the following organizations:

- Voice of Albertans with Disabilities
- Social Planning and Research Council of BC
- Nunavummi Disabilities Makinnasuaqtiit Society



Lorraine Whitman @L... · 2022-02-15 ...

It's [#NationalAccessibilityWeek](#) - let's celebrate the contributions of those with disabilities & promote accessibility and inclusion in communities and workplaces in every province & territory!



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Women, Peace, and Security Awards Program Ceremony

This online event was hosted by the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and held virtually on the Zoom webinar platform. Also participating to honour this year's impressive winners and shortlisted candidates were:

- the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations
- Jean Lebel, President of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
- Jacqueline O'Neill, Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security

The event celebrated the achievements of women peacebuilders worldwide. On hand were the winners of the IDRC's Research Award and Global Affairs Canada's Civil Society Leadership Award.

"Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Public Transportation and Vulnerabilities in Rural and Remote Canada" Webinar

Compared to the rest of Canada, there is increased vulnerability and inequality experienced by Indigenous people living in rural and remote places. Social exclusion, reduced capabilities, and transportation disadvantages are products of the structural impacts of unequal mobility. Insufficient or no access to mobility—especially affordable public transportation—is a factor in whether individuals and communities can achieve sustainable livelihoods, participate fully in society, feel safe on a personal and collective basis, and be able to access essential and non-essential services, resources, opportunities, and rights. The webinar highlighted the findings and recommendations of the *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Public Transportation and Vulnerabilities in Rural and Remote Canada* study.

Black History Month 2022 Virtual Celebration by Government of Canada

Every February, people across Canada participate in Black History Month events and festivities that honour the legacy of Black Canadians and their communities. The 2022 theme "February and Forever: Celebrating Black History Today and Every Day" focuses on recognizing the daily contributions that Black Canadians make to Canada. No matter where you live, we invite all Canadians to learn more about these communities and how they continue to help shape the story of Canada.



International Mother Language Day Virtual Event, United Nations

The theme of the 2022 International Mother Language Day was "Using Technology for Multilingual Learning: Challenges and Opportunities." The virtual event looked at the potential role of technology to advance multilingual education and support the development of quality teaching and learning for all. Watch the [event on YouTube](#).

As the Métis leader of the Red River Resistance of 1869-70, Louis Riel was the driving force behind Manitoba becoming Canada's fifth province. Riel fought for the Métis people and their way of life, and continues to be a pillar to the community. #LouisRielDay #Métis



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The @UN has declared that 2022 will begin the decade of Indigenous Languages! For Donna Pratt, a Dakota language instructor at Dakota Plains School in Manitoba, preserving and teaching her family's language to new generations is business as usual.



cbc.ca
Language revitalization efforts continue as UN Decade of Indigeno...

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NWAC @NWAC_CA · 2022-02-02 ...
For many communities, language is inextricably linked to the land and wellness, and requires different ways of learning. It is amazing to see how artificial intelligence can be used as a tool to revive languages and create learning resources.
bit.ly/3IIMzyi

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NWAC @NWAC_CA · 2022-02-02 ...
Falling midway between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox, February 2 is #GroundhogDay! While we wait to find out if the groundhog will see its shadow, we look forward to welcoming the Spring Equinox, a time recognized by many as symbolic of new beginnings and rebirth.

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Lorraine Whitman @L... · 2022-02-21 ...
Grandmother, Krista Fox from Treaty 6 territory, BC has started her walk across Canada in honour of #MMIWG. We will be watching Krista's journey as she makes her way across Canada. Our prayers and thoughts are with you Krista!
transition.meltwater.com/paywall/redire...



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Lorraine Whitman @L... · 2022-02-17 ...
Today is #RandomActsofKindnessDay Let's show an act of kindness; genuinely give of yourself, show human kindness, thank people for what they do, smile and pay it forward! An act of kindness goes a very long way...

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Native Women's
Association of Canada



L'Association des
femmes autochtones
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