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Assistance Recovery



OFIFC

Ontario Federation of
Indigenous Friendship Centres

Written Submission to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women on the study of intimate partner and domestic violence in Canada

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The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) is providing this brief in response to the federal Standing Committee on the Status of Women's request for input into the study of intimate partner and domestic violence in Canada.

About the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres

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

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

In Ontario more than 85 per cent of Indigenous people live in cities, towns, and rural areas. The OFIFC is the largest urban Indigenous service network in the province

supporting this vibrant, diverse, and quickly growing population through programs and initiatives that span justice, health, family support, long-term care, healing and wellness, employment and training, education, research, and more.

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

Understanding Intimate Partner Violence and Domestic Violence in Context

The roots of violence in Indigenous communities have been well documented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The violence of colonization has resulted in layered, inter-generational experiences of the dispossession of Indigenous people's societies, governance systems, ceremonies, teachings, languages, roles and responsibilities, relationships, and knowledge systems tied intimately to the natural world. Through violent state and religious intervention using force, settlement, laws, and colonial regimes such as the Residential School system, Canada attempted to eradicate Indigenous culture. The inter-generational effects of colonialism remain intact through contemporary policies, systems, and laws that apprehend Indigenous children, and victimize, incarcerate, and discriminate against Indigenous people at disproportionate rates. Additionally, experiences of homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of gender and sexual discrimination reinforce colonial actions and assimilation.¹ The violence experienced by Indigenous communities heard throughout the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls amounts to:

a race-based genocide of Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, which especially targets women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. This genocide has been empowered by colonial structures, evidenced notably by the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools and breaches of human and Indigenous rights, leading directly to the current increased rates of violence, death, and suicide in Indigenous populations.²

This is the framework for understanding Indigenous experiences of intimate partner violence and domestic violence and it is why it is inappropriate to frame the issue too narrowly in the Indigenous context. In many cases, intimate partner violence and domestic violence are symptoms of broader experiences of violence, abuse, and trauma which are multi-generational and cyclical. The interconnected nature of violence in Indigenous communities is very unique, and particularly lethal.³ That is why the

¹ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. (2019). 'Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.' 447. Retrieved from: https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final_Report_Vol_1a-1.pdf

² National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. (2019). 'A Legal Analysis of Genocide.' 1. Retrieved from: https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Supplementary-Report_Genocide.pdf

³ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. (2019). 'Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.' 125. Retrieved from: https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final_Report_Vol_1a-1.pdf

complexity is important to acknowledge, as it provides deep insight into how our solutions must be equally multifaceted.

The OFIFC and Ending Violence

The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres has been at the forefront of work to end violence in our communities, recognizing how widespread the disproportionate rate of violence and abuse is against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA community members, as well as Indigenous men and boys. The OFIFC has promoted a preventative approach to addressing violence that is wholistic, culture-based, and focused on the roots of violence.

The release of the *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women*,⁴ a seminal policy document co-authored by the OFIFC and the Ontario Native Women's Association of Ontario, following the provincial Summit to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women in 2007, changed the landscape in Ontario. The *Strategic Framework* guided the work of the provincial Joint Working Group on Violence Against Aboriginal Women, which was co-chaired by the OFIFC. In 2016, the OFIFC marked an historic achievement in the province of Ontario with the launch of the provincial *Walking Together Strategy*,⁵ a whole of government collaborative approach to ending violence by working collaboratively with Indigenous partners over a three-year mandate with a financial commitment of \$100 million toward culture-based programming and initiatives. The strategy breathed life into a new committee structure known as the Executive Committee to End Violence Against Indigenous Women. Today, the OFIFC is a member of Ontario's Indigenous Women's Advisory Council alongside provincial partners.

The OFIFC was also an official party with standing throughout the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and participated in the creation of Canada's National Action Plan in response to the Inquiry, specifically the National 2SLGBTQQIA Working Group and the National Urban and Core Working Group, contributing to the final Urban Action Plan titled the 'Urban Indigenous Path to Reclaiming Power and Place, Regardless of Residency'.⁶

Wise Practices

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

⁴ OFIFC, ONWA. (2007). 'A Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women.' Retrieved from: <https://ofifc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Strategic-Framework-to-End-Violence-Against-Aboriginal-Women-.pdf>

⁵ Government of Ontario. (2016). 'Archived – Walking Together Strategy.' Retrieved from: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/walking-together-ontarios-long-term-strategy-end-violence-against-indigenous-women#:~:text=Page%20archived-,Walking%20Together%3A%20Ontario's%20Long%2DTerm%20Strategy%20to%20End%20Violence%20Against,deserve%20%E2%80%94%20with%20safety%20and%20respect.>

⁶ Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA National Action Plan. (2020). 'Urban Indigenous Path to Reclaiming Power and Place, Regardless of Residency.' Retrieved from: https://mmiwg2splus-nationalactionplan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NAP-Urban-Framework_EN.pdf

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

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

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

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

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

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

provided housing stabilization supports while they access training and post-secondary education. Upon completion of the program, participants have the skills to enter a career in a field that will provide a decent living wage and into a permanent housing situation. A process evaluation of the program has revealed that UIHB has been a positive life-changing program for participants who have experienced violence or are fleeing violent situations. The OFIFC has advocated for the expansion of UIHB as a key pillar in response to the National Inquiry into MMIWG, recognising that the Inquiry found that economic marginalization and exclusion, including the lack of adequate housing, featured prominently as a root cause of violence⁷ and that the program supports a high number of Indigenous women and children who have experienced or are fleeing violence.

Beyond these specific wise practices, there is a sustained need for programs and initiatives which reduce conflict and coercion through culture-based preventative strategies. Additionally, programs and initiatives that address the structural barriers to accessing protections for Indigenous women, men, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ community members are a persistent need at the community-level. The introduction of a universal guaranteed basic income across Canada remains a critical Call for Justice of the National Inquiry into MMIWG⁸ that the OFIFC recommends as a federal priority to address deeply entrenched socio-economic barriers to safety, wellbeing, and community connection. Through living wage and decent work legislation, coupled with universal basic income, Indigenous families, seniors, and young people can be lifted out of poverty and supported to be connected to community.

Federal Opportunities

As the Standing Committee considers new approaches to ending violence through its current study, the OFIFC recommends an overall new approach to Indigenous policy development which establishes a new relationship with Indigenous people, communities, and organisations that reflects the lived reality in our communities. Urban Indigenous communities are growing and thriving. Across Canada today, the majority of Indigenous people live in cities, towns, and urban areas. In Ontario the proportion is 85%.⁹ The lack of federal strategy to support urban Indigenous communities directly impedes improving outcomes across social determinants of safety and health.

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

⁷ The Final Report for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. (2019). Volume 1a. (439-445) Accessed: https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Final_Report_Vol_1a.pdf

⁸ See Call For Justice 4.5. National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. (2019). 'Calls for Justice.' 11. Retrieved from: <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Calls-Web-Version-EN.docx>

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

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

A whole-of-government approach is required that supports self-determination and sustainability as critical to safety and wellbeing. Friendship Centres and other urban Indigenous organisations and communities have been instrumental in developing operating standards and norms around the provision of services and programs. Yet, many urban Indigenous communities still face unacceptable service gaps, insufficient core and operating funding, and social and economic disparities. The National Inquiry's Final Report found that funding that is insufficient, short-term or time-limited, represents a violation of inherent rights to self-governance.³ The failure to provide funding equitably, substantively, and stably harms our communities. A December 2020 Parliamentary background paper on services for Indigenous people living in urban areas identified large service gaps, jurisdictional disputes, and chronic underfunding as persistent issues affecting Indigenous communities.¹⁰ The MMIWG Urban Action Plan identified as an immediate priority the provision of:

“sustainable and long-term/evergreen core funding for urban Indigenous organizations and programs relevant to the safety of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people”.⁴

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

Recommendations

The OFIFC recommends federal advancements on ending violence which respect the diversity of Indigenous people and communities and the importance of building new relationships at the federal level in resistance to colonial constructs.

As the Standing Committee on the Status of Women completes its study, it is recommended that Canada:

- Reorient the federal relationship with Indigenous people to one in which UNDRIP serves as the basis for any federal framework regarding the recognition and implementation of Indigenous rights, recognising the rights of urban Indigenous communities and organisations.
- Adopt a whole-of-government approach that ensures self-determination and sustainability as critical to safety and wellbeing, supporting sustainable, long-term

¹⁰ Collier, Brittany. (December 2020). ‘Services for Indigenous People Living in Urban Areas.’ Library of Parliament, Ottawa. No. 2020-66-E. Retrieved from: <https://lop.parl.ca/staticfiles/PublicWebsite/Home/ResearchPublications/BackgroundPapers/PDF/2020-66-e.pdf>

funding agreements, dedicated co-developed urban Indigenous strategies, and capacity development.

- Resolve jurisdictional disputes that contribute to service gaps and chronic underfunding of programs and services that support safety and wellbeing in urban Indigenous communities.
- Support Bill C-223, *A National Framework for a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income Act*¹¹ and the implementation of a national universal guaranteed basic income program to address deeply entrenched socio-economic circumstances which remain barriers to safety, health, wellbeing, and community connection.
- Recognize that Indigenous-designed, developed, and led, culture-based programming is protective against violence. A range of programs, supports, and services that connect Indigenous people to culture must be prioritized through increased federal investments for urban Indigenous communities and organisations including Friendship Centres.
- Support the national expansion of Indigenous-led wise practices in ending violence and promoting protective, culture-based approaches such as the OFIFC's Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin Program and the Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound Program.
- Establish a national program to ensure victim service workers are integrated within urban Indigenous community service provider networks and employed within organisations like Friendship Centres. The program should ensure sustainable investments in victim services across urban Indigenous communities to ensure adequate intervention programming is coupled with preventative approaches at the community-level.
- Increase capacity for urban Indigenous innovation, program design, and evaluation to support new creative approaches to finding new wise practices in ending violence and reducing conflict through culture-based preventative strategies that are informed by those most impacted.

¹¹ Parliament of Canada. (December 2021). 'Bill C-223 An Act to develop a national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income.' 44th Parliament, 1st session. Retrieved from: <https://www.parl.ca/legisinfo/en/bill/44-1/c-223>