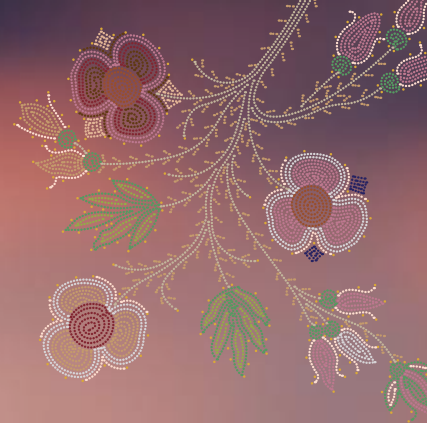


Family Violence Prevention

Recommendations on Supporting Family Violence
Prevention and Mental Wellness for Remote and
Isolated Indigenous Communities



2023

Task Group on Mental Wellness

Foreword

The Task Group on Mental Wellness (Task Group) was assembled to provide insight and recommendations on how best to support and promote mental health and wellness, and to identify wise practices for family violence prevention during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, with a focus on northern communities and recognizing that their realities are often different from those in the rest of Canada.

As the co-chairs of the COVID-19 Public Health Working Group on Remote and Isolated Communities, we would like to express our gratitude to the members of the Task Group for their efforts and for producing this document. These dedicated people volunteered their time and expertise during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has already put extraordinary pressure on those involved with the health care system and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis organizations. Below are the Public Health Working Group on Remote and Isolated Communities member organizations, health authorities, and government partners who extend their thanks to the Task Group.

| | |
|---|---|
| Assembly of First Nations | Indigenous Services Canada |
| Council of Yukon First Nations | Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami |
| Dene Nation | Métis National Council |
| Department of National Defence | National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health |
| First Nations Health Authority | Northwest Territory Métis Nation |
| Government of Newfoundland and Labrador | Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services |
| Government of Northwest Territories | Public Health Agency of Canada |
| Government of Nunavut | |
| Government of Yukon | |

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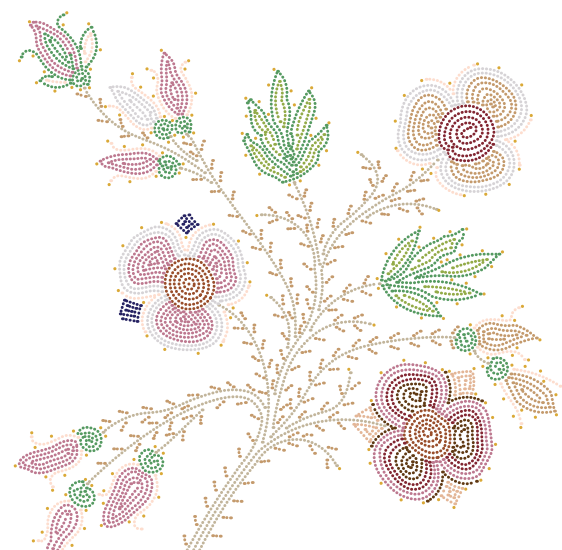




Introduction

The Task Group on Mental Wellness (Task Group) was assembled to provide insight and recommendations on wise practices that government and partners can take for preventing family violence and supporting the well-being of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The data and information used for this report come from presentations delivered by government agencies and community organizations, including supplementary reports and data. Many presenters indicated that data on family violence before and during COVID-19 is limited and/or anecdotal, and improvements in how data is collected and evaluated are needed. The pandemic also highlighted the complexity of the family violence sector and how it requires collaboration between multiple sectors (child welfare services, the justice system, etc.). COVID-19 also intensifies gaps in the family violence sector, particularly around limited workforce capacity, unmet needs for services, and the need for sustainable, equitable and flexible government funding for programs and supports. While this report works to highlight gaps and complexities in the family violence sector, it also identifies innovative approaches that arose during the pandemic. This report strives to take a strength-based approach while also recognizing the weight and impacts of family violence on individuals, families, and communities.

The Task Group members (listed in [Appendix A](#)) hope that these recommendations may be of use to Federal, Provincial, and Territorial governments; First Nations, Inuit, and Métis governments; and members of the Public Health Working Group on Northern and Isolated Communities in their respective spheres of influence to act on the recommendations presented in this report. The Task Group's goal is to set a foundation to support family violence prevention among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis from coast to coast to coast.




Family Violence Prevention

Prior to colonization, many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis societies were matriarchal. Women were respected leaders and occupied important roles in their society. Women still hold the matriarchal line and continue to help shape and lead healthy and vibrant communities and families. Issues with family violence that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people experience in current society stem from the impacts of colonization, a legacy of colonial policies, the socio-economic conditions resulting from those policies, and the loss of traditional gender roles, family, and community networks (National Inquiry on MMIWG, 2019c:44,147; Holmes & Hunt, 2017).

Family violence is also strongly linked to mental wellness and substance use issues (Moffitt et al., 2013; Andersson & Nahwegahbow, 2010; Berger, 1980). These issues are perpetuated by the historical and ongoing trauma and harms of colonialism. While the pandemic has heightened risk factors, these are not new issues (Moffitt et al. 2022, Berger, 1980). A government report from 1980 identified an “alarming phenomenon” in which 30 – 60 per cent of Indigenous¹ deaths from violence and accidents were associated with alcohol and drug use (Berger, 1980). If the government and partners do not pay attention and act on the recommendations put forward by this report, the ongoing cycle of harm from mental wellness issues, substance misuse and family violence will likely continue.

¹ First Nations, Inuit, or Métis distinction could not be confirmed in this instance. This report uses the term “Indigenous” only when it is used with a statistic, or not identified in an original source. Otherwise, this report uses “First Nations, Inuit, and Métis” throughout to acknowledge distinctions.






Throughout the country, First Nations, Inuit, Métis women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people face disproportionately high rates of violence. National data shows that Indigenous women are more likely than non-Indigenous women to report experiencing violence since the age of 15 (62% versus 44%) (Statistics Canada, 2022). In 2016, Nunavut had the highest rate of women affected by family violence in Canada (these were instances reported by police, other occurrences may not have been recorded) (Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada & Comack, 2020). While 2SLGBTQIA+ people are often left out of national statistics (National Inquiry on MMIWG, 2019c), one Ontario study found that 73% of 2SLGBTQIA+ people had experienced violence due to transphobia, and 43% had experienced physical and/or sexual abuse (Schein et al., 2013).

Family violence also interrupts important aspects of childhood, such as emotional and physical safety, family bonding, and socialization (National Inquiry on MMIWG, 2019a:330). Studies show that children who are exposed to violence and/or have experienced abuse themselves are more likely to be involved in family violence in adulthood (Brownridge et al., 2016; Statistics Canada, 2022). A recent study (Statistics Canada, 2022) showed that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women who grew up in the government child welfare system had a greater lifetime likelihood of being assaulted (Statistics Canada, 2022). Approximately 81% of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women who grew up in the child welfare system have experienced sexual or physical assault during their lifetime (Statistics Canada, 2022). Providing cultural continuity and community-based supports and programs for children, as well as self-governance over child welfare is critical to preventing family violence.


While men are most commonly identified as the perpetrators of family violence, they are also affected by family violence (Holmes & Hunt, 2017; Rizkalla et al., 2021; Brownridge, 2010). Men face unique barriers to accessing supports, such as underreporting because of shame or stigma and not being believed by police, as women are stereotypically the victims of family violence (Rizkalla et al., 2021). Recognizing First Nations, Inuit, and Métis men's experience being affected by family violence highlights the complexities of colonialism and gendered issues such as non-Western concepts of masculinity, loss of traditional gender roles, violent stereotypes, and systemic discrimination (Rizkalla et al., 2021; Brownridge, 2010; Innes, 2015; Moffitt et al., 2013). While the focus on family violence programs and services tends to be centred around women and children, there is also a significant need for further understanding and knowledge about men's experiences with family violence, as well as culturally-based programs and supports that are designed specifically for men.




Family and extended family networks are the cornerstones of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis societies and foundational sources of wellness and self-determination. Colonialism and the imposition of hetero-patriarchal values disrupted and eradicated traditional family structures, focusing solely on the nuclear heterosexual family (husband/wife, man/woman) at the exclusion of 2SLGBTQIA+ people (Holmes & Hunt, 2017). Scientific literature and government data often portray family violence among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities from a settler domestic violence (heterosexual nuclear family) perspective, rather than including sexual diversity or First Nations, Inuit, and Métis family dynamics (Holmes & Hunt, 2017). This primary focus on individual behaviour occurring between two people overlooks broader social contexts that caused and continues to perpetuate family violence, such as intergenerational trauma, loss of land, forced relocation, eradication of traditional family structures and gender roles, systemic oppression, and inequity as well as loss of self-determination (Holmes & Hunt, 2017; Moffitt et al., 2013; Campbell, 2007). A focus on heterosexual individuals also encompasses a limited definition of family violence, which when considering broader family networks within First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities can be extended to

“...all forms of violence directed against someone based on their residence or family ties. It includes the physical dimension implicit in domestic abuse, spousal abuse, child abuse, elder abuse, intimate partner violence and other violent acts between family members” (Andersson & Nahwegahbow, 2010:9).

Government and partners need to acknowledge, understand, and incorporate First Nations, Inuit, and Métis definitions of family into family violence programs and services. Many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities have extended family networks that may include aunts, uncles, grandparents, as well as a broader community, clan, and Nation (Riggs, 2012). Family networks can act to help protect individuals in their community against violence, or they may be complacent, further perpetuating violence. The influence of extended families in violence prevention needs to be recognized and included in programs and services, which requires a different approach than focusing solely on individuals within a nuclear family.



If the government and partners do not pay attention and act on the recommendations put forward by this report, the ongoing cycle of harm from mental wellness issues, substance misuse and family violence will likely continue.




Family violence is also strongly linked to social determinants of health, defined as “complex interactions between social and economic factors, the physical environment, and individual behaviours” (Assembly of First Nations & Health Canada, 2015). They include, but are not limited to income, education, housing, employment, food security, poverty, and the environment (NCCIH, 2019; Riggs, 2012). Many remote and isolated communities cannot access affordable housing, education, stable employment, and other social determinants of health due to a lack of equitable funding, services, and programming (Sultana & Ravanera, 2020). This is further compounded by the ongoing impacts of colonialism and intergenerational trauma, which have had long-term consequences on the health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis families and communities (Riggs, 2012).

Social determinants of health overlap in complex ways, family violence prevention requires multiple government sectors to collaborate to develop and deliver programs and services. While there are initiatives that work to remove jurisdictional complexities in other mental wellness sectors, such as for youth and children (i.e., Jordan’s Principle,² the Inuit Child First Initiative, Bill C-92, An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth and Families), services and programs for family violence are not always easily accessible. Jurisdictional complexities impact affected individuals and their families who face additional risks to their social determinants of health when they cannot access services, such as not being able to go to work or school. Family violence prevention requires that government sectors work collaboratively and addresses multiple social determinants of health, and the underlying factors that create and exacerbate conditions for violence.


In remote and isolated communities, colonial policies and practices such as forced relocation have also laid a foundation for family violence. Forced relocation can have significant social, cultural, and economic costs which contribute to the social context and increased risk of family violence. The impacts of forced relocation can include loss of self-determination, loss of relationship to the land, loss of traditional gathering places and hunting grounds, disruption of family networks and increased access to drugs and alcohol (Campbell, 2007; Moffitt et al., 2013). Returning to the land through traditional land-based teachings and participating in land-based healing are central to recovering from and changing behaviours towards violence (Holmes & Hunt, 2017).

² Services covered by Jordan’s Principle include individual or group respite care (Assembly of First Nations, 2018)




The geographic location of remote and isolated communities also presents unique challenges for family violence prevention, including less access to resources and services (Campbell, 2007; Moffitt et al., 2013). Remote and isolated communities have smaller and more isolated networks of people which can result in reduced anonymity, and frequently have inadequate housing. Both circumstances can limit opportunities for affected individuals to remove themselves from their perpetrator without leaving their community (Moffitt et al., 2013). In addition, there are significant gaps in the criminal justice system for remote and isolated communities, such as decision-makers (e.g., lawyers, probation officers, police, judges) not being part of or knowing the cultural context of the community for which they are making decisions (Moffitt et al., 2013).

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities have their own wise practices for providing justice and managing perpetrators, which can be at odds with the Western justice system. The Western system often involves a long separation of the individual from their community and culture, which can further exacerbate problems of violence (Campbell, 2007). Perpetrators who remain or return to their communities for culturally and community-based justice programs can make reparations and take responsibility for their actions in meaningful ways (National Inquiry on MMIWG, 2019b:160). Family violence prevention needs to be rooted in cultural practices and include everyone within the family unit, including the broader community. Culture is the only impactful and long-term intervention that can fully support changing people’s behaviours and relationships with others.



“Within families and within communities, women and 2SLGBTQQIA people have held roles as mothers, grandmothers, and caregivers who work to educate future generations, and to preserve knowledge and traditions, alongside but distinctive of men. In many societies, women’s roles in governance roles as chiefs, Elders, clan mothers, and advisors help strengthen and maintain collective identity”

(National Inquiry MMIWG, 2019a:146)

The page features a background image of a sunlit forest with tall trees. A decorative vertical strip runs down the center, containing a repeating geometric pattern of stylized hearts and arrows in shades of brown and orange. The text is arranged in two columns on either side of this strip.

The pandemic exacerbated family violence. Shelters have reported either being overwhelmed or being required to limit families' access to shelters because of COVID-19 restrictions. The pandemic also led to people being isolated, resulting in less contact between family and friends and greater opportunities for violence to occur. A recent survey conducted by Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (2022a) asked participants (n=1,792) to identify how COVID-19 impacted their lives and their community. Results showed that 39% of adults and 21% of youth who participated identified an increase in family violence (Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2022a). A survey conducted by the Native Women's Association of Canada (2020) on the impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous women³ revealed the same results. Participants (n=750) identified that they were experiencing an increase in domestic violence, with the main perpetrator being current or past romantic partners. The study indicated that the most vulnerable women lived in the North (Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon) (27% of participants), were under 35 years old (26% of participants) and were financially impacted by COVID-19 (34% of participants) (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2020). Financial hardship is associated with a heightened risk of domestic violence (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2020; Piquero et al., 2021), and Indigenous women have been impacted harder financially (46%) compared to the general Canadian population (34%), which places them at greater risk (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2020). The survey also revealed that Indigenous women were more concerned about domestic violence than other issues related to the pandemic (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2020).

The Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (2022a) survey found other issues exacerbated by the pandemic. Data indicated that of the participants, 77% of adults and 66% of youth identified an increase in depression and anxiety, and 59% of adults and 35% of youth identified a rise in substance use (Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2022a). Other significant issues regarding social determinants of health were also identified. For example, 77% of adults and 66% of youth identified that unemployment was exacerbated by the pandemic, while 26% of adults and 14% of youth identified an increase in homelessness (Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2022a). These resulting impacts increased the risk of family violence.

³ The Native Women's Association of Canada (2020)'s report uses the terminology "Indigenous women" to encompass First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women, as well as gender diverse and Two Spirit people.

In the workforce, the pandemic resulted in increased staff burnout and turnover. In another recent survey by Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (2020), community workers identified significant concerns related to the pandemic, such as a resurgence of cases and the inability to address long waitlists due to closures or limited access to services. Participants also identified increased anxiety around being in groups and safely attending social gatherings and ceremonies. Some positive outcomes were that workers identified a noticeable increase in community innovation, virtual telehealth approaches, land-based activities, and cultural events (Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2020).

This report examines data and context and works to understand the experiences of family violence organizations to provide recommendations and guidance on how government and partners can support family violence prevention during and post-pandemic. While there are significant gaps and challenges in the family violence sector, innovative approaches also arose from the pandemic that could help enhance programs and services. A resurgence of the roles of aunties and grandmothers across many communities is also strengthening family violence prevention. This resurgence is helping to heal families and instill cultural values, which prevents future incidences of violence while promoting health and well-being.

For example, this was evident during the pandemic through the Grandmother Ribbon Campaign, which offered support to over 2,500 participants. Progress can also be seen in the ongoing work done by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis organizations leading the implementation of the National Inquiry's 231 Calls to Justice.

The issue of family violence does not stem from an individual's capacity for violence, but from living within a historical and ongoing colonial system that works to dismantle First Nations, Inuit, and Métis societies and eradicate traditional family networks. To deconstruct harmful colonial systems, enhanced system-level mechanisms for self-determination and self-governance are needed, including the revitalization and government recognition of traditional and customary laws (Assembly of First Nations, 2021:9). Family violence prevention programs and services must also bolster individual and community autonomy as well as capacity for addressing family violence through traditional methods (Holmes & Hunt, 2017). In order to support wholistic individual and community health and well-being and to change relationships to violence, it is vital to strengthen the connection to culture and facilitate self-determination and self-governance (Holmes & Hunt, 2017).

Grandmother Ribbon Campaign

The Grandmother Ribbon Campaign sent out over 2,500 purple ribbons to those who requested them, and the campaign has reached as far as Métis families in Australia. Purple is the colour for Métis Grandmothers. It was one of the more expensive colours to make and represents the mixing of the colour blue (stability) and red (passion). The ribbons offered encouragement and hope for others living through the difficulties of the pandemic. The ribbons could be hung wherever the recipient chose - windows, gardens, doors, or pictures online – to create visual support for all who saw them.

(Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak, 2022a)

MMIWG Action Plans

In response to the findings of the National Inquiry's report into MMIWs, non-government organizations have developed community-led action plans to augment and support the implementation of National Inquiry's 231 Calls for Justice.

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN)'s Women's Council completed an engagement process with affected First Nations individuals, families, and grassroots organizations to develop a community-based, trauma-informed National Action Plan that prioritizes the needs of First Nations women. **Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice, An Action Plan to End Violence Against First Nations Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People** outlines priority action items to support the implementation of the 231 Calls for Justice in AFN Regions. Beyond supporting women and girls, the report also acknowledges the importance of involving men and boys in the healing process, a process which "should be guided by the wisdom of our grandmothers" (Assembly of First Nations, 2021:5).

The Pauktuutit Women of Canada and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami led the development of an Inuit-specific action plan called the **National Inuit Action Plan on Missing and Murdered Inuit Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ People**. The purpose of the National Inuit Action Plan is to guide the implementation of the 46 Inuit-specific Calls for Justice as outlined by the National Inquiry. The National Inuit Action Plan contains both government-led actions, which take a rights-based approach to implementation and Inuit-led actions, led by Inuit Land Claims Organizations.

Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak released the report, **Weaving Miskotahâ, The Métis Nation's Journey to Ending Missing and Murdered Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA+**. This report outlines the Métis Nation's implementation framework for 62 Métis-specific Calls for Change, or Miskotahâ, to augment the National Inquiry's 231 Calls for Justice. The Calls to Miskotahâ were developed through an extensive engagement process of over 300 Métis leaders and community members. The engagement identified Métis-specific needs, priorities, and the targeted actions to address MMIWG issues for Métis women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people

(Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak, 2021a; Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak, 2022b).

Methodology

The Task Group met during the spring and summer of 2022 in a series of afternoon meetings that alternated between Tuesdays and Thursdays. A virtual conferencing tool was used to connect members across the nation, allowing full participation. Meetings were scheduled for two hours which The Task Group Secretariat supported by preparing summaries of each of the meetings, assisting with developing a forward agenda, and facilitating invitations to speakers. The Task Group members were responsible for reviewing documents and briefs before meetings and discussing and engaging with the presentations to inform recommendations.

Agendas for the meetings generally followed a similar pattern, with an administrative opening to capture Task Group members' participation, and presentations from selected community organizations and government partners with an opportunity for Task Group members to ask questions. This discussion focused on the information presented, the implications for recommendations, and the identification of resources and wise practice examples. Presenters were then invited to join future meetings on family violence prevention to support continuous learning through other presentations and to inform recommendations and the final report.

Context and Data

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were significant gaps in the family violence sector that kept affected individuals and their families in vulnerable situations. The pandemic exacerbated the strain within the sector and highlighted key areas of insufficiency and limited capacity. The limited capacity of the workforce surrounding the family violence sector was evident in the development of the report, where fewer community organizations had the ability to participate in the sessions in comparison to other reports developed by the Task Group.

Throughout the pandemic, the government's response to the family violence sector has been an ongoing challenge for communities. Limited amounts of immediate funding were available, with no opportunities for long-term sustainable funding. A lack of workforce capacity at shelters and other family violence organizations directly impacted the ability to prioritize data collection and evaluation of supports and services. This puts family violence organizations at a disadvantage because they are not able to identify and quantify their needs in alignment with government policies, which affects their ability to secure adequate funding. Workforce capacity is impacted by the delivery of government funding to shelters and family violence organizations, which is often complex and siloed. Multi-sectoral collaboration and additional navigational support for family violence organizations are needed.

The efforts made by the government throughout the pandemic to support and provide necessities to shelters were insubstantial. Many shelters were not able to provide their basic services because they did not have access to personal protective equipment (PPE). The lack of available PPE limited shelters' abilities to stay open and/or to provide services to individuals and families affected by family violence. The lack of services coincided with an increase in family violence during the pandemic. The YWCA Agvik Nunavut (which operates an emergency women's shelter and homeless shelter for women in Nunavut) reported an increased risk of violence for affected individuals as they could not leave their homes, or their violent partner was at home for longer periods of time. The YWCA Agvik Nunavut also reported that due to government limitations on the number of people who could gather, there were fewer opportunities for affected individuals to stay with friends or families. Affected individuals who had opportunities to access a shelter often needed to stay for longer periods of time because of delays in court proceedings due to the pandemic. These delays impacted reintegration by making it difficult for affected individuals to return safely to their communities. The organization Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak also discussed their experience of increased risk of family violence during the pandemic. People could not connect with their communities in the same way, which led to increased isolation, and those closest to the affected individual were unable to see signs of violence and offer their support. These examples further compound the importance of the government providing shelters with the necessary resources to meet demands and stay fully operational during and post-COVID-19.

“Indigenous women (17%) were more than twice as likely to report having not very much or no confidence in the police, compared with non-Indigenous women (8.2%)”

(Statistics Canada, 2022:3)

First Nations-Led Wise Practice Example

60 x 60 Commitment

At the end of February 2022, the Tsow-Tun Le Lum Society launched an online campaign to raise awareness of MMIWG and to honour and remember lost loved ones. This campaign was called the 60 x 60 Commitment and asked people to join by going outside and getting active 60 days before the National MMIWG Awareness Day on May 6th. People were encouraged to be active for 60 minutes a day, and to share their activities with others over social media. People walked, ran, and biked in honour of MMIWG and to remember lost loved ones. Over 3,000 people registered for the campaign and participants received a T-shirt and masks. The apparel helped to raise awareness of the campaign and facilitated conversation between participants and others in the community. The 60 x 60 team also looked after lost loved ones through the sacred Coast Salish food burning tradition. (Tsow-Tun Le Lum Society, 2022).

Accessibility to services and support is a significant issue in the family violence sector that was exacerbated due to the pandemic. Accessibility in relation to the navigation of services and the ability to physically access services, which can be at a significant distance from an individual's home community. The logistics of accessing shelters and services can be further complicated for individuals with disabilities or who require supports for accessibility. 2SLGBTQIA+ people and youth may also face unique challenges and barriers to accessing services, due to safety and added layers of marginalization. Men are also affected by family violence but may not have access to supports and services that are developed for them.

Accessing services can be further complicated by relationships with the gatekeepers of the family violence sector. For example, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and local police are the main sources of referrals for perpetrators to access their community and culturally-based justice programs (Department of Justice Canada, 2017). However, because of the involvement of the RCMP and police in colonization, establishing relationships and trust can be challenging (Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada & Comack, 2020). In Nunavut, there are unique pathways in the family violence system where individuals must be referred to shelters. Navigating this pathway can be a challenging process for northern communities where there is a lack of trust with government agencies because of the history of colonial harms. For example, the YWCA Agvik Nunavut organization noticed that many referrals are made by community nurses instead of family service agencies. This lack of trust limits the number of referrals and points of access to the shelter system, highlighting the need for increased relationship-building between government agencies and the communities they serve. During the pandemic, there was also less police presence, and less presence of other referral agents to support access to the shelter system.

Across First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, family violence services and workers are operating over capacity. Accessing family violence services is also challenging due to the insufficient number of services available to meet the needs of individuals and communities. When referrals are made, there are often significant wait times with no opportunities for wrap-around support. The inability to meet the needs of affected individuals can be further complicated by federal government funding structures, which may require organizations to choose which health services will be prioritized. In these instances, family violence services may be deprioritized for other health-related needs and programs. The provision of sustainable and flexible government funding for programs and services, as well as capital funding, such as the Indigenous Shelter and Housing Initiative (CMHC, 2022) for the construction and operations of shelters and transitional housing is critical.

The pandemic was and continues to be challenging. However, the resourcefulness of communities and workers led to wise practices that should be leveraged for enhancing programs and accessibility. For example, a shift to virtual formats led to higher participation rates for some programs. Virtual formats for programs and services can enhance accessibility by removing barriers to transportation or the ability to be physically present at an organization to participate in programs. There was also considerable success with online campaigns that raised awareness of important initiatives, such as the work with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), as well as virtual anti-racism campaigns. The increase in virtual opportunities also brings forth considerations that need to be taken into account (e.g., ensuring community members have access to the internet and internet devices). Different innovative approaches utilized throughout the pandemic could enhance accessibility to family violence programs and promote cultural awareness and cultural safety.

Key findings that support the recommendations

Data collection and evaluation:

Data helps strengthen government funding proposals, identify opportunities and gaps, and track the efficacy of programs and services. It also informs the continuation and/or development of new services, policies, and programs. Collecting and evaluating data is challenging due to several complexities in the family violence sector. Staff at shelters and family violence organizations have limited capacity due to their high workload which impacts their abilities to gather and evaluate data. Family violence is often underreported due to fear and lack of confidentiality, among other reasons. It can also be challenging to track the long-term effectiveness of family violence prevention programs due to the uncertainty of funding coupled with the inability to enhance capacity of organizations to complete the work. For example, presenters from the Public Safety Canada government agency discussed the difficulty of performing longitudinal studies (longer than five years) on youth who participated in preventative programs because of a lack of funding and program stability.

Need for equitable, long-term, and flexible funding:

During the pandemic, some enhanced funding was available from the federal government. However, a significant amount of this funding was given directly to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis governments and organizations responsible for the distribution. As a result, many shelters did not receive extra funding due to competing priorities. When some organizations did receive funding, it was only for a limited amount of time making it difficult for organizations to fully utilize it. For example, Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak was given additional pandemic-related funding, however, they were operating in emergency mode and could not take full advantage of the additional funds before the funding was abruptly cut-off.

The way in which the government funds programs and services in the family violence sector is complex and confusing. It would be beneficial for family violence organizations to have a coordinated or one-door approach to the funding models offered to them. Changes to the funding process would also include enhancing the way federal funding is provided to and coordinated with the provinces and territories.

Funding tends to be siloed, which makes it challenging as the family violence sector relies on collaboration between different partners. In particular, there is added challenges for communities north of 60°, which have different funding agreements than communities in the southern regions (south of 60°). Northern communities do not always have the same funding structures or levers as a result of colonial government regional jurisdictions. The jurisdictional barriers are often overlooked when governmental policies and programs are being developed and often lead to service inequities.

One option for additional program support is funding offered by the federal government to support programming for individuals and families affected by MMIWG. For example, the British Columbia First Nations Health Authority (BC FNHA) received additional funding through the initiative and have engaged their regions to explore which programs supporting mental wellness require additional supports. The BC FNHA stated their goal is to “ensure survivors and family have access to appropriate health and wellness services and that we can provide appropriate measures for MMIWG services.” The additional funding for affected individuals and families of MMIWG could be helpful for other programs across all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis organizations.

There is a significant need for an increase in funding in the family violence sector, not only for programs and services but also to support building capacity in the workforce. Workforce funding often relies on outdated funding formulas and models which result in community workers being underpaid in comparison to their colleagues working in comparable Western roles. Due to the federal government often only providing short-term funding for programming, the uncertainty of job security creates precarious working conditions for workers. This job insecurity puts increased stress on workers, expediting burnout and high rates of staff turnover. Enhanced and equitable funding is needed to ensure wage parity, job security for workers, and to reduce burnout. Investments into developing infrastructure need to be made to support workers in providing long-term support within their roles, particularly for capacity development, ongoing training, and mentorship, and enhanced cultural supports.

Key findings that support the recommendations

Multi-sectoral collaboration:

Family violence is complex and intersects with multiple sectors including the justice system, child welfare system, mental health, and addictions services, among others. It is imperative for different sectors to work collaboratively to attain funding and to develop and deliver programs and services. It is imperative to develop a strengths-based path forward that supports wholistic, wrap-around services for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis individuals, their families and communities experiencing family violence.

Enhanced support for affected individuals:

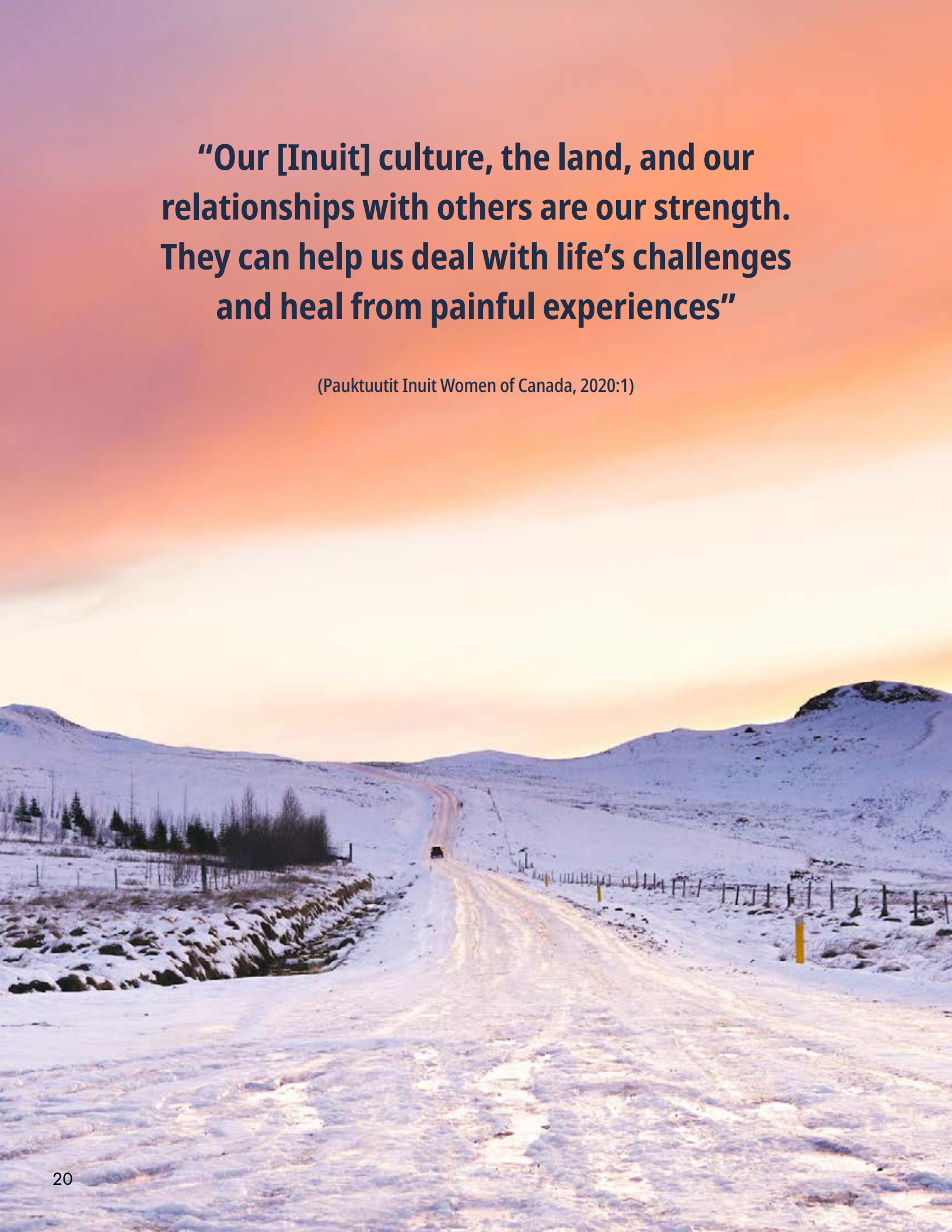
There is a need to take the responsibility for action off affected individuals and put more responsibility for action on the perpetrator. Affected individuals are often forced to leave their homes, community, and culture to find safety. Northern and isolated communities face increased challenges as support is often offered at a significant distance from their home communities. These practices do not uphold the child welfare legislation passed in 2020, Bill C-92 An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth and Families. This law was developed out of recognition of the historical and ongoing colonial policies and practices that separate children from their families, cultures, and communities. The law recognizes the right for self-determination and self-governance for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people, including the care of their children. Bill C-92 states that the child's physical, emotional, and psychological safety and security, as well as their connection to culture and community, are the priority when decisions are being made on their behalf (An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth and Families, 2019). Bill C-92 also works to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) Act which outlines First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples' right to access, transmit and revitalize their culture and the protection of women and children (UN General Assembly, 2007).⁴ The lack of available shelters and services, including a lack of coordination of services in remote and isolated regions does not uphold the law that works to ensure ongoing access of and cultural continuity for children and their families.

The shelter system is complex and confusing to navigate, adding stress for those affected by violence in a time of vulnerability. Staying at a shelter can be an isolating experience due to geographical distance, being alone and physically separated from family, community, and culture. A person seeking safety and support at a shelter may decide to move back to their community and risk their safety due to the isolation they experience at the shelter. Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak (2021a:17,18,79) also state that beyond needing more shelters, having transportation services that are accessible and affordable is critical to ensure affected individuals can travel to find safety. The need for affordable and accessible transportation is evident across all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, particularly for those in isolated and remote communities, where access to affordable transportation can be the main barrier to accessing a shelter and attaining safety.

Liard Aboriginal Women's Society is an organization that provides supports for affected individuals who have experienced physical and sexual abuse related to residential schools, as well as providing other programming. The organization discussed the importance of utilizing First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages in supporting affected individuals. Misrepresentation of events (both verbal and written) is common in cases of reported violence. Liard Aboriginal Women's Society highlighted how use of ancestral languages in testimonies is critical for the affected individual, and understanding what happened (e.g., revealing violence and clarifying the responsibility of the perpetrator).

The Indian Residential School Survivor Society described how they are including men and boys in their MMIWG work. They had received a significant number of inquiries on how and when missing and murdered First Nations, Inuit, and Métis boys and men will be acknowledged. In response, they have created a database of missing and murdered boys and men, and held a food burning to honour those who have passed.

⁴ UNDRIP articles 7(1)(2), 13, 21(1)(2), 22(2)



“Our [Inuit] culture, the land, and our relationships with others are our strength. They can help us deal with life’s challenges and heal from painful experiences”

(Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, 2020:1)

Key findings that support the recommendations

Virtual platforms:

The pandemic brought a shift to virtual platforms for many organizations, programs, and services within the family violence sector. Many community groups were creative and innovative in the ways they used virtual platforms to advance their work. For example, the Indian Residential School Survivor Society and Tsow-Tun Le Lum Healing House moved different workshops such as sharing circles, drum making, cedar weaving and wool weaving online. Packages with the necessary materials were sent to community members in advance of the event, and upon receiving their packages, participants could sit and work together virtually. Ceremonies, when appropriate, were also moved online (e.g., smudging ceremonies, Elder teachings and virtual forest walks). Indian Residential School Survivor Society and Tsow-Tun Le Lum Healing House described how they provided iPads for cultural workers and training over Zoom. The organizations also successfully applied for a grant that allowed them to provide refurbished iPads to community members.

Other programs were able to shift to a virtual format with positive and innovative results. For example, Justice Canada described how they had increased participation in their restorative justice programs for affected individuals when the program was offered online. The pandemic influenced many organizations to expand virtual services and programs. Whitehorse Aboriginal Women’s Circle, who provide programs and services aimed at uplifting all Aboriginal women in the Yukon, are launching a new Virtual Resource Centre to provide online cultural resources. However, not all programs in northern and isolated regions could easily pivot to a virtual format. For example, Liard Aboriginal Women’s Society described how a shift to virtual training resulted in decreased participation in their advocacy training program. While a virtual format did not support all programs, some creative and innovative practices should be expanded on to enhance all applicable programs and services.

Workforce support:

Workers whose jobs are to support individuals and families affected by family violence, such as shelter workers, Elders, and counselors, among others, are a vital part of the family violence sector. The pandemic has highlighted ongoing workforce issues in remote and isolated communities, such as high rates of staff burnout and turnover, limited long-term funding and job security for staff, and workers from outside communities who may lack cultural understanding and cultural safety being brought in to help on a short-term basis. At the beginning of the pandemic, many practitioners and service providers who were from outside the community returned to the south. This created additional staff shortages and put increased strain on the administration of supports and services. For Inuit communities, the pandemic exacerbated staff shortages when many non-community employees left, highlighting the need for workers from within the community as essential for maintaining the delivery and continuity of programs and services. For example, community members from Baker Lake, Nunavut, who participated in the Mianiqsijit program (a program that has offered counselling services to the community for over 30 years), expressed they were most comfortable when speaking with workers from their own community and in their own language (Radio Canada International, 2017). Workers from the community can easily understand the cultural context within stories from clients and relate to community members seeking support. Having a high turnover rate of workers from outside of communities impedes healing. Baker Lake residents also stated that there was an increased sense of stability when there was a one-door approach to services through system navigators (Radio Canada International, 2017).

Key findings that support the recommendations

Community-based justice and prevention:

The focus of family violence prevention should not be solely on the affected individual; perpetrators also need support to build and strengthen their cultural values by respecting and empowering women. It is also imperative to reduce risk factors surrounding family violence, such as poverty reduction and enhancing education attainment. Partnerships between different sectors linked to reducing risk factors for family violence can help support a shift to preventative efforts. Providing supports and working to enhance all social determinants of health aligns with cultural values and wholism.

It is critical for crime prevention and restorative justice programs to have equitable funding and to be culturally-based and community-driven. Communities have their own methods for justice, and it is important that culturally-based approaches to justice are used to help heal the affected individual, perpetrator, and community. Data indicates that community-based justice programs have been highly successful in helping participants transform their lives, reduce reoffences, and improve community safety while lowering costs for the justice system (Department of Justice Canada, 2017:iii,v). Community-based justice and prevention programs benefit the community as a whole because they recognize community priorities, facilitate engagement from community members and build community capacity.

“In the criminal justice system, judges must consider Gladue Principles. These principles help identify unique experiences and challenges First Nation, Inuit and Métis people have faced because of colonialism, and how it has led to inequities and overrepresentation in the justice system.”

(Native Women’s Association of Canada, n.d.; Legal Aid BC, 2022)

Inuit-Led Wise Practice Examples:

Gender-Based Violence Prevention Programs by Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada have a variety of programs and tools to help prevent and educate Inuit individuals and their communities on domestic and gender-based violence. These programs not only focus on and include women, but also men and youth. (Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, 2022b)

Meeting Survivor’s Needs: Gender-Based Violence and the Criminal Justice System in Inuit Nunangat:

A research project that analyses the criminal justice system’s response to gender-based violence in Inuvialuit, Nunavut, and Nunavik. This research focuses on collecting diverse experiences of Inuit women who sought the help of the criminal justice system. The research works to identify the needs, gaps, and challenges Inuit women face, and to advance crime prevention and criminal justice system strategies to prevent revictimization. (Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, 2022c)

National Conversation on Gender Equality with Young Canadians:

This project is divided into two different streams, one working with youth across Canada, and the other is an Indigenous⁵ youth stream that focuses on promoting conversations about promoting and working towards social change for gender equality (Government of Canada, 2020). Through this program, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada support the engagement of Inuit youth in creating conversations and developing an understanding of colonial gender-equality issues in their communities. Traditional Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principles (Inuit Social Values) show how gender equality is a part of Inuit life. (Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, 2022e)

Ikajuqatigiiniq: Inuit Youth Pathways to Violence Prevention, Youth Initiatives Toolkit:

Ikajuqatigiiniq is a youth leadership camp that utilizes sports and art in inclusive and accessible ways in an effort to teach youth about violence-free living, healthy relationships, and coping mechanisms. The Toolkit focuses on instilling pride in the participants for their community and culture and is guided by Qaujimajatuqangit (Inuit Social Values). The Toolkit encourages and provides supports and guidance for youth to plan camps and lead activities in their own communities. (Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, 2021; Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, 2022a)

Engaging Men and Boys in Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls:

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada has a department of Violence & Abuse Prevention, Justice that provides programming to increase awareness and enhance coping skills for Inuit men and boys in an effort to challenge gender-based violence in Inuit communities. The project facilitates conversations with young men around topics such as masculinity, violence, healthy lifestyles, and life skills. The program also focuses on celebrating Inuit traditions that promote pride in culture and increase self-esteem for the individuals attending. (Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, 2022d)

⁵ The term ‘Indigenous’ is used by the program to encompass First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.



Key Principles in Approaches to Supporting Family Violence Prevention

Use culture as foundation and intervention

Culturally-based approaches need to inform all aspects of family violence prevention programs and services. Colonialism, including the dismantling of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis cultures, families, and traditional practices, the removal of people from their traditional lands, and ongoing systemic racism is at the root of modern family violence issues. To help communities heal, culture should be used as an intervention and to inform the work in the family violence sector.

Enhance equitable, long-term, flexible funding

While some immediate government funding was available to help family violence organizations through the pandemic, ongoing and equitable funding is required to sustainably support family violence programs, services, and the workforce. This includes support for family violence organizations to help enhance data collection and evaluation so they can quantify their needs for government funding proposals.

Use multi-sectoral, collaborative approaches

Family violence is complex, intersects with multiple sectors, and requires a collaborative multi-sectoral approach. Enhanced collaboration between different government sectors and partners is needed to advance sustainable funding options, enhance system navigation, and to provide stable and consistent wrap-around programs and services.

Expand on the work done by the National Inquiry on MMIWG

During the pandemic, all shelters within First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities operated from the lens of MMIWG and protecting women. There is a need to expand this work throughout remote and isolated communities by learning from the success of other organizations on how to best operationalize funding and other opportunities that arose from the National Inquiry into MMIWG.

Prioritize accessibility

The need for increased support and funding to ensure accessibility to programs and services was highlighted as a key issue within the family violence sector across First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. Remote and isolated communities need additional support from government and partners to enhance the navigation of and accessibility to supports and shelters for affected individuals. It can be challenging to access shelters and services due to the limited understanding of the available services and the lack of available shelters. Accessibility is also an important consideration for individuals with disabilities. Additional funding for supports and/or navigators is needed to ensure people with disabilities have equitable access to services. Navigation needs to be inclusive of 2SLGBTQIA+ people, and men, who may not be the traditional population at a shelter, may have issues navigating and accessing the support and safety they need.

Recommendations to Support Family Violence Prevention

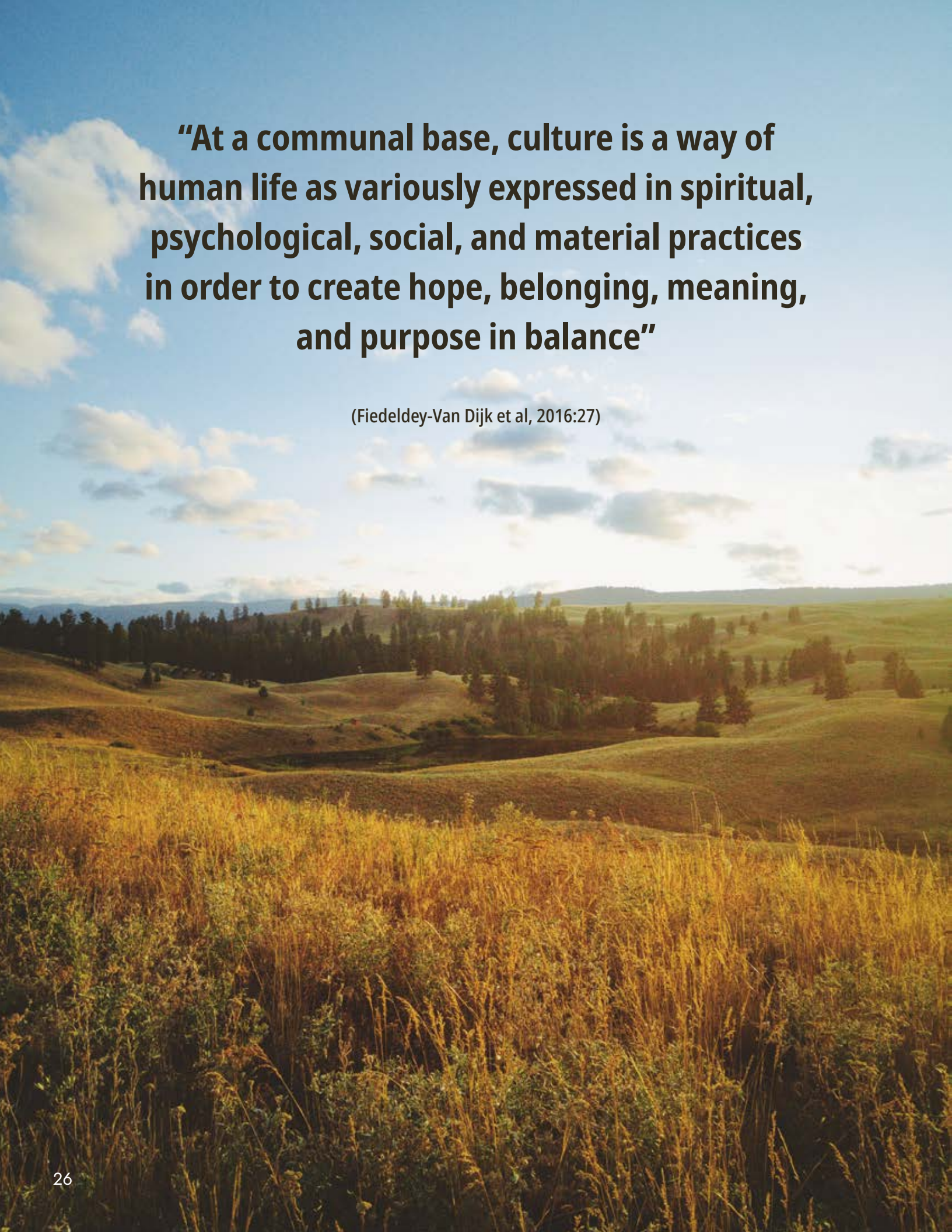
Culture as Intervention:

1. The root of family violence is founded within the legacy of colonialism and violence perpetrated through ongoing colonial systems. The intervention to these impacts is returning to and revitalizing culture for individuals and their communities.
 - a) Family violence prevention and the healing of individuals, families, and communities must use culture as an intervention and a health promotion approach (Dell et al., 2011). This includes using strength-based approaches rooted in traditional knowledge, values, and practices. These approaches need to be recognized and utilized within the family violence sector by government and partners.
 - b) Using culture as intervention is part of national cultural revitalization and reconciliation efforts. Governments, Western organizations, practitioners, and workers have an obligation to support reconciliation and revitalization efforts as outlined in the laws, policies, and recommendations such as, but not limited to, the UNDRIP Act, Bill C-92, the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC)'s Calls to Action, the National Inquiry's Calls for Justice, Joyce's Principle, and the National Dialogues on anti-Indigenous racism, among others.
 - c) In accordance with the TRC's Calls to Action, the National Inquiry Calls for Justice,⁶ Joyce's Principle, and the National Dialogues on anti-Indigenous racism, the government needs to provide sustainable and equitable funding for ongoing cultural competency and cultural safety training for Western practitioners and workers.
 - i. Training should include self-reflection on potential biases, including anti-racism training, an understanding of historical and ongoing colonial systems and harms, and knowledge of community members' cultural realities and environments (Assembly of First Nations & Health Canada, 2015:34).
 - ii. Training should also include an understanding of the fundamental differences between Western and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis approaches to wellness and healing. Western approaches tend to be deficits and diagnosis-based and focus on the individual. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis approaches acknowledge the importance of healing in the context of relationships with others, such as with one's family, community, land, and beings of creation (Dell et al., 2011).

⁶ National Inquiry Calls for Justice #7.6; TRC Calls to Action #23(iii)

“When culture is considered the foundation, all First Nations health services can be delivered in a culturally relevant and safe way”

(Assembly of First Nations & Health Canada, 2015:33)



“At a communal base, culture is a way of human life as variously expressed in spiritual, psychological, social, and material practices in order to create hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose in balance”

(Fiedeldey-Van Dijk et al, 2016:27)

Recommendations to Support Family Violence Prevention

Culture as Intervention (Continued):

- d) In accordance with the National Inquiry’s Calls for Justice and the UNDRIP Act,⁷ Western practitioners and workers need to recognize that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people are experts in their own culture and cultural needs. The cultural knowledge First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people hold needs to be included in the development of their program of care.
- e) Integrated care between Western and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis practitioners and services is rooted in reconciliation and tied to the TRC’s Calls to Action and the UNDRIP Act.⁸ To facilitate integrated care, Western practitioners need to work to enhance reciprocal respect, cooperation, and referrals to cultural practitioners (e.g., psychologists working with, and referring to Elders).
 - i. This can be accomplished by Western practitioners providing additional referrals to Mental Wellness Teams, cultural practitioners and cultural programs that use traditional healing approaches such as land-based healing, sweat lodges, traditional medicine etc.
 - ii. Cultural practitioners require the same work infrastructure as workers within Western organizations. The government should provide enhanced sustainable, flexible, and equitable funding to help support workforce capacity and infrastructure. This includes additional support for cultural practitioners with job placement, access to a larger team, inclusion within broader Mental Wellness Teams, involvement with planning programs of care, and the opportunity to work with and make referrals to other service providers.
- f) As part of community self-determination and ensuring community safety, the community must be given the opportunity to accept and approve both Western and cultural workers supporting family violence programs and services.
 - i. Community approval of cultural and Western workers is part of an integrated care model that prioritizes the community’s worldview and priorities. It also helps ensure that all workers work from a culturally safe approach.
- g) Government and partners need to ensure that the inclusion of culture as a foundation for intervention within family violence programs and services is guided by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis-led frameworks and action plans. This includes the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework, the Métis Life Promotion Framework, the National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy, the National Inquiry into MMIWG, the TRC’s Calls to Action, and the priorities identified through National Dialogues on anti-Indigenous racism.
- h) The government needs to fund and support the development of national life promotion and suicide prevention strategies for Métis people across the country. These strategies must be developed to support Métis-specific family violence programs and services.

⁷ National Inquiry Calls for Justice #7.1, #12.2; UNDRIP Article #24(1)(2)

⁸ UNDRIP Article #24(1)(2); TRC Call to Action #22



Recommendations to Support Family Violence Prevention

Data Collection and Evaluation:

2. The shift to evidence-based funding highlights the important role data plays in accessing available government funding. The inability to meet the need for data collection and evaluation within the family violence sector is evident in the chronic underfunding of services and supports. To support the shift into evidence-based funding, government and partners need to provide additional support to family violence organizations to increase their capacity to enhance short and long-term data collection and evaluation.
 - a) Increased support from government and partners for data collection and evaluation are imperative to provide an accurate depiction of the needs within the family violence sector and advocate for enhanced financial support and investments from the government.
 - i. Increased support for data collection and evaluation includes support for additional staff that can gather, evaluate, and present data to highlight the impactful work being done by shelters, practitioners, and service providers to support affected individuals and 2SLGBTQIA+ people in improving their overall health and well-being.
 - b) Implications from the pandemic need to be better understood and require further data collection and evaluation. The government needs to support ongoing data collection, and evaluation should include the impacts of the pandemic on affected individuals, their families, and communities, as well as the efficacy of programs and services. The impacts of the pandemic will have long-term effects that are not currently well understood.
 - c) More support for data and research is needed from government and partners to understand the unique experiences and impacts of systemic violence on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis men, and men being affected by family violence. There is currently limited knowledge of the violence that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis men experience (Rizkalla et al., 2021; Moffitt et al., 2013; Holmes & Hunt, 2017).
 3. Government data on family violence (e.g., statistics) is often portrayed from a settler domestic violence perspective between two individuals, most often men as perpetrators and women as victims. This focus on individual behaviour and heteronormative dynamics overlooks broader social contexts and the intergenerational trauma of colonialism that causes and perpetuates family violence. This also overlooks sexually diverse families, men as victims, and broader family networks (Holmes & Hunt, 2017).
 - a) Government and partners need to acknowledge and include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis definitions of family in government and non-government reports and data. Additional work needs to be done to understand the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis family networks and how family violence services and programs can support these networks.
 - b) Government and partners need to acknowledge colonialism and experiences of assimilation as risk factors for family violence (Holmes & Hunt, 2017).
 4. All data collection and evaluation completed by the government or partners must be done in a culturally safe and respectful way. It is imperative for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis data collection to be rooted in the principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP®)/ Ownership Control Access and Stewardship (OCAS) and include meaningful stewardship such as co-analysis of data, and ensuring that data is used in ways that is beneficial for communities.

Recommendations to Support Family Violence Prevention

Enhanced Funding:

5. Government funding needs to be equitable, long-term, and flexible to better support the family violence sector in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis remote and isolated communities.
 - a) Any immediate or short-term government funding provided to family violence organizations because of the pandemic should gradually ramp down instead of abruptly terminate. This would allow organizations to adjust their operations and help provide continuous services and programs.
 - b) Due to differences in funding structures between communities north and south of 60°, a northern context always needs to be considered when the government is developing policies that impact the family violence sector (i.e., funding for child and family services).
 - i. Funding gaps between communities north and south of 60° should be highlighted, recognized, and discussed at partnership tables as they can impact funding opportunities and the efficacy of services.
 - c) There are enhanced federal funding opportunities to support programming for affected individuals and families of MMIWG. Family violence programs and services across First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities can work to align themselves with these opportunities and build off the success of other organizations that have secured additional funding. For example, some ongoing funding, such as the Pathways to Safe Indigenous Communities Program, focuses specifically on enhancing violence prevention and safety (Government of Canada, 2022).
 - d) As a sector that relies on collaboration between different partners, it would help family violence organizations to have a more coordinated or a one-door approach to their funding models and streams.
 - i. This includes providing additional system navigational support to help organizations optimize their funding opportunities.
 - e) The government needs to provide family violence organizations with enhanced and equitable funding that is proactive instead of reactive.
 - i. This includes additional funding for investing in the workforce, community capacity programs, capital funding for shelter and transitional housing infrastructure (i.e., implementation of the Indigenous Shelter and Transitional Housing Initiative [CMHC, 2022]), youth empowerment programs, or other programming that helps instill cultural values and reduces risk factors.
 - ii. Proactive funding also includes working to reduce risk factors for family violence by providing equitable and beneficial supports for health and wellness. While Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) provide federal funding to support medical expenses for Inuit and First Nations people, there needs to be a review of these policies to understand whether clients can fully and easily access these programs and if there are gaps in service delivery.
 - f) Government funding models for children and youth (i.e., Jordan's Principle, Inuit Child First Initiative) need to be sustainable and expanded to ensure that all First Nations and Inuit children and youth have ongoing equitable access to services.
 - g) The government needs to work to ensure that Métis people have equitable access to services provided through NIHB and Jordan's Principle, which they are currently excluded from.
 - h) The government must consider the high cost of living in isolated and remote communities when providing equitable funding for family violence services, supports, and programs.



Recommendations to Support Family Violence Prevention

Multi-Sectoral Collaboration:

6. The family violence sector requires multi-sectoral collaboration between different levels and sectors of government and between partners.
 - a) In accordance with the law, Bill C-92, Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth and Families, and the UNDRIP Act, the justice system, child welfare services, and other government sectors need to work collaboratively to ensure affected individuals and children have ongoing cultural continuity and uninterrupted access to their family, community, and culture.
 - i. Communities' right to define their own child welfare and cultural continuity laws must be met with equitable and adequate resources.
 - b) Enhanced collaboration and partnership is needed between other sectors that impact family violence (e.g., education, child and family services, health and social services, mental health, and addictions) to help address social determinants of health, develop youth programming to reduce risk factors, and build community capacity. Programming that is already operational in other sectors could also be expanded upon.
 - c) All levels of government (federal, provincial/territorial) need to work to enhance their coordination for family violence prevention-related services and address service delivery and funding gaps.
 - d) The family violence sector is connected to multiple social determinants of health and associated sectors such as housing, child welfare, education, and employment. While initiatives such as Jordan's Principle, the Inuit Child First Initiative and Bill C-92 are in place to support youth and children, jurisdictional complexities between different government sectors continue to impede access to and delivery of family violence services and programs. Other sectors need to further define how family violence intersects with their work and continue to work together on supporting areas of overlap to help ensure ongoing access to services and programs for affected individuals, their families, and communities.

Recommendations to Support Family Violence Prevention

Enhanced Support for Affected Individuals:

7. Family violence prevention should focus on helping to create stability for families, which includes enhanced accessibility to supports and services for affected individuals.
 - a) Additional supports are needed from government and partners to help families in remote and isolated communities access shelters and services.
 - i. This includes additional funding and support from government to enhance access to transitional housing options for affected individuals once they have left the emergency shelter or a family shelter.
 - ii. The government should ensure accessible and affordable public transportation is available so affected individuals in northern and remote communities can seek safety when needed.
 - iii. The government needs to identify and remove barriers to accessing supports and services for affected individuals who reside off-reserve.
 - iv. The government needs to provide funding for and support the development of a more organized shelter system and additional navigational supports for affected individuals experiencing family violence at all stages of their journey.
 - v. Government and partners need to work to ensure that information provided for affected individuals about shelters and the supports they offer are in the language of the community, and English should be in plain language.
 - b) Due to the limited number of shelters available in northern and isolated regions, affected individuals and their children often need to leave their homes, families, communities, and culture to seek safety at shelters. As stated by Bill C-92, An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth and Families and the UNDRIP Act, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children and their families have a right to cultural continuity, which is being disrupted due to a lack of accessible services.
 - i. The government needs to prioritize building additional shelters in northern and isolated regions. Shelter infrastructure should focus on providing housing for affected individuals while delivering culturally appropriate services in one location.
 - ii. Government and partners need to support community-based interventions and rehabilitation programs, including considering options for removing the perpetrator from the home when supporting affected individuals.
 - iii. Ongoing government funding and support should be provided for virtual platforms (e.g., internet and devices) for individuals staying at shelters to connect with their family and friends to help reduce any isolation that may be experienced with being away from their community.



Recommendations to Support Family Violence Prevention

Enhanced Support for Affected Individuals (Continued):

- c) Shelters need additional government support and funding to increase cultural and vulnerable population training for staff to ensure they are equipped with the skills to support the unique needs, challenges, and access barriers experienced by vulnerable populations.
 - i. Shelters are traditionally created for women and children and may only have limited supports for 2SLGBTQIA+ people and men seeking safety from violence. Additional funding and support from government and partners is needed to help ensure that shelters can accommodate men and 2SLGBTQIA+ people (e.g., separate space for men and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, increased training for workers on how to support the unique needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ people and men experiencing violence).
 - ii. Individuals with disabilities experience added barriers to accessing and navigating services, supports, and shelters. Shelters need additional funding and support from government and partners to help become fully accessible for individuals with disabilities (e.g., shelter information should be provided in accessible formats for those with impaired vision or hearing, physical accessibility considerations such as ramps and accessible bathrooms etc.).
 - iii. Additional support is needed from government and partners for youth, who may also encounter unique barriers and challenges when accessing shelters and require additional support. They may be separated from their family and friends, and their schooling may also be impacted.
- d) Programs and services related to family violence need sustainable, flexible, and equitable government funding and support to provide both acute emergency response efforts and long-term supports and services. This includes preventative measures that support culturally appropriate healing and the well-being of the affected individuals and their families.
 - i. The government needs ensure that family violence programs and services are equitable and recognize the unique cultural needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.
 - ii. Enhanced government funding is needed to provide affected individuals and their families access to Elders, cultural practitioners, counselling, and land-based healing, among other culturally-based programs and services.



Recommendations to Support Family Violence Prevention

Enhanced Support for Affected Individuals (Continued):

- e) Family violence prevention programs and services need to work from a social determinants of health perspective and address needs related to multiple inequities.
 - i. There is a need for increased access to daycare services, particularly in northern Inuit communities where people must travel significant distances for medical and other appointments or commitments. Overcrowded housing in the north can also mean that extended families do not have the capacity to care for children, which can put additional stress on relatives and Elders.
 - ii. Governments should work towards the implementation of the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (Government of Canada, 2018), which describes priorities and strategic actions to develop high-quality and culturally-based early childcare programming within First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.
 - iii. Many Northern communities face inadequate housing, which goes against Canadian law, and the National Housing Strategy (NHS) Act. The NHS Act states that adequate housing is a “fundamental human right affirmed in international law” and “essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person” (National Housing Strategy Act, 2019). The National Inquiry’s Calls for Justice also call on governments to ensure that all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people have access to safe housing.⁹ Governments need to work towards further implementation of the NHS Act and the accompanying federal National Housing Strategy to provide ongoing and sustainable housing solutions.

⁹ National Inquiry Calls for Justice #4.1, 4.6

Recommendations to Support Family Violence Prevention

Innovative use of Virtual Platforms:

- 8. Shifting to a virtual platform can enhance some services and participation in programs. Efforts should be made to mitigate the challenges associated with accessing virtual services and supports for community members while building off the strengths of providing virtual platforms.
- a) Programs that received enhanced participation in a virtual format could leverage the opportunity and continue to offer services virtually moving forward.
 - i. The government needs to provide community members with enhanced and equitable access to the internet and internet devices.
 - ii. Government funding should be allocated for navigators to help community members access and use additional technological services and platforms.

Workforce Wellness and Support:

- 9. The well-being of the workforce that supports family violence (shelter workers, community workers, counsellors etc.) needs to be prioritized to help facilitate personal wellness and reduce staff turnover and burnout.
 - a) The community workforce needs to be paid equitably, in alignment with the standards within their fields. Wage parity remains an ongoing and resolvable challenge facing service delivery.
 - b) Additional resources should be provided by the government to support staff development. This includes ongoing funding and support for training, capacity development, burnout management and relief, and continuing education.
 - i. The government and partners should also seek opportunities with post-secondary institutions to help support recent graduates navigate entry into the family violence workforce.
 - c) More opportunities must be created by the government and partners to help community members join the family violence workforce.
 - d) Additional government funding is needed to enhance workforce infrastructure, such as improving hiring processes, providing ongoing training, mentorship, and to recruit and retain staff.
 - e) The federal government needs to provide equitable access to PPE and any other necessary resources required to maintain the safe operation of family violence shelters, programs, and services.

Recommendations to Support Family Violence Prevention

Mitigating Risk Factors by Providing Support for Children and Youth:

- 10. Family violence prevention requires equitable funding and support from the government for culturally-based programming for children and youth, helping them to develop healthy coping mechanisms and reducing risk factors associated with becoming an affected individual or perpetrator of violence.
 - a) The government needs to prioritize ongoing and long-term funding for community-tailored and culturally appropriate programming for youth.
 - i. Youth should be included in the development, delivery, and implementation of these programs.
 - b) The government needs to provide funding and support for culturally safe programming within communities to address safety for children. For example, Nunavut’s “good touch/bad touch” program helps children understand what appropriate touching is, to talk about abuse and learn who in their community can help them (Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, 2018).

Community-Led Justice Programs:

- 11. While community justice programs that provide culturally relevant programming have been shown to be effective (Department of Justice Canada, 2017:iii), the majority of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities do not receive support from these programs (Department of Justice Canada, 2017:iv). The government needs to expand support and access opportunities for community justice programs (i.e., the Indigenous Justice Support program) to ensure more communities benefit from culturally relevant justice and crime prevention programs.
 - a) Communities that receive community-based justice programs are often selected on a referral basis by Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the local police. The relationships between communities and these entities differ from place to place and can lead to access barriers if good relationships do not exist. Government and partners need to work towards relationship building between the RCMP/ local police (as well as other gatekeepers to the community justice programs) and communities, and to mitigate access barriers for community-based justice programs.

First Nations-Led Wise Practice Example

Buffalo Riders Early Intervention Program

The Buffalo Riders Early Intervention program is led by the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation and focuses on substance misuse intervention programs for youth ages 11-13. Substance misuse and addiction are risk factors for family violence, and this program works to help protect and empower youth to avoid these risks. As a strengths-based and culturally-centred program, Buffalo Riders helps youth learn about the impacts of colonialism and the current realities of how they are personally affected. The program works to increase positive identity and resilience, teaches youth how to resist peer pressure and enhances social and emotional competencies. The program can be run in various settings, such as an after-school, summer, community, or cultural program.

Buffalo Riders also provide training for facilitators within the community, increasing community capacity to address and mitigate substance misuse risk factors. Community members can take a 5-day training course through the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation to learn how to deliver the courses. Increasing community capacity helps provide youth with long-term substance misuse prevention strategies and solutions.

(Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2022b; Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2017; Thunderbird Partnership Foundation & First Peoples Wellness Circle, 2023)

Appendix A

Co-Chairs and Members of the Task Group on Mental Wellness

CO-CHAIRS

| | |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| Dr. Brenda Restoule | First Peoples Wellness Circle |
| Dr. Carol Hopkins | Thunderbird Partnership Foundation |

MEMBERS

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Nelson Alisappi | Assembly of First Nations |
| Dr. Lloyd Douglas | Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority |
| Dr. Sharon Cirone | Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority |
| Eduardo Vides | Métis National Council |
| Mae Katt | Nishnawbe Aski Nation |
| Wendy Stuart | Métis Nation of Ontario |
| Joanne Meyer | Métis Nation of Ontario |
| Jenny Tierney | Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami |
| Alana Kronstal | Government of Northwest Territories |
| Sara Chorostkowski | Government of Northwest Territories |
| Camilla Sehti | Government of Nunavut |
| Sara Taylor | Indigenous Services Canada |
| Kate Guse | Indigenous Services Canada |
| Alisar Ibrahim | Indigenous Services Canada |
| Dr. Andre Corriveau | Indigenous Services Canada |

Appendix B

Community voices, organizations and government partners that were heard from that also contributed to the development of this document

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Farah Dossa | Indigenous Services Canada |
| Ruth Iawancewicz | Indigenous Services Canada |
| Natalie Taylor | Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle |
| Ann Raider | Liard Aboriginal Women's Society |
| Amanda Buffalo | Liard Aboriginal Women's Society |
| Virginia Toulouse | British Columbia First Nations Health Authority |
| Nola Jeffrey | Tsow-Tun Le Lum Healing House |
| Angela White | Indian Residential School Survivor Society |
| Wanda Good | Gyets Gitxsan Indian Residential School Program |
| Jodi August | Tsow-Tun Le Lum Healing House |
| Shauna Young | Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada |
| Rebecca Kudloo | Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada |
| Rosemary Cooper | Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada |
| Sherri Robertson | YWCA Agvik Nunavut |
| Claudia Zuccolo | Public Safety Canada |
| Lisa Pigeau | Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak |
| Tamsin Fitzgerald | Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak |
| Jacqueline Cuffley | Justice Canada |

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