



National Association  
of Friendship Centres  
Association nationale  
des centres d'amitié

# **CANADA: Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 132nd Session, 27 June – 23 July 2021, in preparation for Canada's 7th Periodic Review**

Contact:

Jocelyn Formsma, H.B.Soc.Sci, J.D.

Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres

275 MacLaren Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0L9 CANADA

1 (613) 563-4844 ext. 318

[www.nafc.ca](http://www.nafc.ca)

[jwformsma@nafc.ca](mailto:jwformsma@nafc.ca)

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In Friendship.

# About NAFC

The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) is a national network of Indigenous owned and operated civil society, not for profit, and service delivery organizations across Canada. Collectively, we refer to our network of over 100-member local Friendship Centres (FCs) and Provincial/Territorial Associations (PTAs) as the Friendship Centre Movement (FCM). The FCM is the most significant urban Indigenous service delivery infrastructure. For over half a century, Friendship Centres have been developed and advanced by Indigenous peoples<sup>1</sup> living in urban<sup>2</sup> environments and helped individuals access the vital culturally appropriate services they need to succeed in urban settings across Canada.

Over half of the Indigenous population in Canada lives in urban environments. Friendship Centres work to ensure urban Indigenous people have access to culturally grounded programs and services that are not available elsewhere. Friendship Centres deliver approximately 1,300 programs annually to over 1 million people. For many Indigenous peoples, Friendship Centres are the first point of contact to access culturally based socioeconomic programs and services.

The FCM spans across every region in Canada. We are democratically governed, status-inclusive, and accountable to our membership. Our core mission is to support Friendship Centres and PTAs in achieving their diverse missions and visions within their urban Indigenous communities. Ultimately, the NAFC envisions a future that is mindful of the past and is rooted in our cultures to improve the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples living in urban environments.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Indigenous” will be used to include peoples in Canada who are First Nations, Métis and Inuit, regardless of their legal status with the government of Canada.

<sup>2</sup> The term “urban” encompasses Indigenous peoples who are living in large metropolitan cities, rural, remote and northern communities. Specifically, First Nations who are living off-reserve, Métis living outside of Métis homelands, and Inuit living outside of Inuit Nunangat (Inuit homelands).

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# Introduction

The National Association of Friendship Centres submits this briefing to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee in advance of its preparation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights List of Issues Prior to Reporting in June-July 2021. This submission is intended to provide perspectives based on urban Indigenous realities in Canada.

## The Friendship Centre Movement

Friendship Centres are the most significant urban Indigenous service delivery infrastructure and are the primary providers of culturally enhanced programs and services to urban Indigenous residents in Canada.

Friendship Centres began in the mid-1950s as the number of Indigenous people moving into urban areas increased. Indigenous people in Canada are largely urban based. The reasons for the increasingly urban reality for Indigenous people vary, including being born and raised in the city. Other factors for moving to urban centres include: employment opportunities, marriage, colonial approaches to removal of Indigenous children through the residential school systems<sup>3</sup>, the Sixties Scoop<sup>4</sup> and racist child welfare practices resulting in the ongoing removal Indigenous children from their homes and communities<sup>5</sup>, systemic and structural lack of employment opportunities in their respective home communities, lack of access to healthcare due to underfunding of healthcare infrastructure, escaping intimate partner violence, bullying, structural violence, or homophobia. While the reasons for Indigenous people living urban settings are many, there remains a gap between the availability of services and the accessibility of those services for urban Indigenous community members.

Friendship Centres wield an advantage over non-Indigenous service providers in urban environments because they recognize the whole of a person, holistic wrap around supports, alongside broader kinship and community needs. Furthermore, they contextualize care from the vantage point of a shared history and understanding. Friendship Centres are born from community and kinship lines and have created inclusive spaces to share, learn, and support urban Indigenous peoples. Friendship Centres provide referrals and offer counselling on matters of employment, housing, education, health, and liaison with other community organizations.

Friendship Centres work tirelessly to meet the needs of urban Indigenous peoples, including women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, and help ensure responsive outcomes for those who seek their services. Nonetheless, Friendship Centres have faced systemic barriers to accessing funding

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<sup>3</sup>Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. <http://www.trc.ca/>

<sup>4</sup>About the Sixties Scoop. <https://www.cbc.ca/cbcdocspov/features/the-sixties-scoop-explained>; Sixties Scoop Class Action. <https://sixtiesscoopsettlement.info/>

<sup>5</sup>About the “Millennial Scoop”. <https://www.aptnnews.ca/the-disappearance-of-natasha-lynn-starr/>

to support their programming and services to address issues such as food security, early learning and childcare, housing and homelessness and systemic racism in the Canadian healthcare system.

## Overview of urban Indigenous peoples and realities in Canada

In an attempt at rapid and efficient assimilation, the Canadian government introduced the *Indian Act*<sup>6</sup> as the primary law to administer Indian status, First Nations governments and to manage reserve land. This legislation, then and now, outlines responsibilities for the government, assigns legislative jurisdiction to Parliament over “Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians” and applies to First Nations people who have Indian Status – as defined within the *Indian Act*. The *Indian Act* does not apply to non-status First Nations people, Métis or Inuit. The legislation has resulted in numerous issues including, but not limited to; residential schools, discriminatory and patriarchal provisions within the *Indian Act* and jurisdictional limbo for Indigenous people who do not fit within the strict confines of the *Indian Act*.

The federal government has argued that they are responsible for funding mainly on-reserve services and that off-reserve services ought to be the responsibility of Provincial governments. As a result, federal funding has mainly been allocated to Indigenous governments. Urban Indigenous organizations and people have been left in a jurisdictional wrangling between two levels of government in the federation that is Canada. However, Indigenous peoples in urban settings<sup>7</sup> and lack access to culturally specific programming and services. Provincial governments have abdicated responsibility to address these gaps and contend that the federal government is constitutionally responsible for “Indians”, which includes Indigenous people both on- and off-reserve.<sup>8</sup> This debate is ongoing and affects all aspects of Indigenous life, including health care, child welfare, education, legal services, and correctional facilities. This issue of jurisdictional limbo continues to have a profound impact for Indigenous people living in Canada as funding for services considered to be basic human rights such as healthcare, education and housing, continue to be the subject of legal debate.

The Government of Canada has adopted a “distinctions-based approach” to its federal policy and decision making. Distinctions-based means the three federally recognized Indigenous groupings in Canada: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. The distinctions-based approach was intended to remedy the previous “pan-Aboriginal” or “one size fits all” approach to Indigenous policy and decision making. While it is important to ensure that Canadian government approaches with respect to Indigenous peoples are reflective and responsive to the unique realities and rights held by distinct Indigenous groups, it is also important to recognize the complexities of Indigenous

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<sup>6</sup> *Indian Act* (R.S.C., 1985, c. I-5), online:<<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-5/>>

<sup>7</sup> “Results from the 2016 Census: Housing, Income and Residential Dissimilarity among Indigenous People in Canadian Cities.” *Government of Canada, Statistics Canada*, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2019001/article/00018-eng.htm>. Accessed 18 May 2021.

<sup>8</sup> See “[Truth and Reconciliation Report](#)” (2015) Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada at 142.

identities and the role of the Indigenous civil society in upholding the rights of Indigenous peoples who are unable to be in their home territories and have varying levels of engagement with their respective Indigenous governments. The NAFC has been critical of the Distinctions Based Approach with respect to federal funding for Indigenous peoples because the funds are also divided along these distinctions. Based on this approach, Indigenous peoples who are urban based and the urban Indigenous civil society organizations do not have the same mechanisms available to them to influence public policy, participate in decision making, or even have their realities considered. Rights are held by Indigenous peoples, as individuals and collectives. Indigenous civil society organizations are an expression of self-determination by Indigenous people as individuals to meet specific needs.

In keeping with the findings of Canada's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry, NAFC holds that distinctions ought to be defined with an intersectional lens, not just including First Nations, Métis and Inuit, but also considering the residence of Indigenous people, the province or territory that they're in, whether they're remote or northern residents, their physical and mental abilities, and their sex, gender identity and sexual orientation. Including an intersectional lens to distinctions will better position the Government of Canada to provide urban Indigenous community members with the supports they require.

Twenty-five years in the making, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was formally adopted at the UN in 2007. At the time, four nations refused to adopt the Declaration – Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia. Canada specifically expressed concerns with issues around Free, Prior and Informed Consent. In 2016, Canada officially removed their “objector status” citing their commitment to implement the declaration in accordance with the Canadian Constitution.<sup>9</sup>

UN DRIP affirms the inherent or pre-existing collective human rights of Indigenous peoples, as well as the human rights of Indigenous individuals. UN DRIP does not create new or special rights for Indigenous peoples. Instead, it elaborates upon existing international human rights instruments and clarifies how those rights apply to Indigenous peoples. This is done irrespective of an Indigenous person's physical residence or affiliation with an Indigenous government.

Understanding urban Indigenous realities is vital to effective public policy, program and funding decisions and should inform legislative development and changes in Canada. Today, over half of the Indigenous population in Canada lives in urban settings.<sup>10</sup> Indigenous peoples who live in urban settings, including rural, remote, or northern settings, will have varying engagement with their respective First Nations, Inuit, or Métis governments, and some people may have little to no affiliation or even be excluded from the decision-making process of their governments due to their residency or location. The result is that urban Indigenous organizations, while not

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<sup>9</sup> Morin, Brandi. “Where Does Canada Sit 10 Years after the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?” CBC News, 2017, [www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/where-does-canada-sit-10-years-after-undrip-1.4288480](http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/where-does-canada-sit-10-years-after-undrip-1.4288480)

<sup>10</sup> “Results from the 2016 Census: Housing, Income and Residential Dissimilarity among Indigenous People in Canadian Cities.” *Government of Canada, Statistics Canada*, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2019001/article/00018-eng.htm>. Accessed 18 May 2021.

governments or formal representative entities, have information that is vital to consider when making decisions about Indigenous matters.

In Canada, there have been strides to ensure that there are federal government-to-Indigenous governments and nation-to-nation relationships. However, there is still a strong role for Indigenous civil society organizations that are made up of collectives of Indigenous individuals to play in advancing the rights of Indigenous peoples. Friendship Centres do not politically represent Indigenous peoples, nor does the NAFC elect representatives on behalf of Indigenous peoples, in the way that First Nations, Inuit and Métis governments do. However, we provide services to hundreds of thousands of Indigenous peoples every day, work with them to navigate services, support communication and relationships with multiple governments, provide important education and information to Indigenous peoples, and we often are a first point of contact or last stop in seeking assistance. In this way, Friendship Centres play a key role in assisting Indigenous peoples in urban settings to uphold and realize their rights as Indigenous peoples, including their intersecting rights based on their diverse and layered identities.

While the NAFC supports the Canadian government's initiatives to support Indigenous peoples on reserve, we want to ensure that the perspectives and engagement of all Indigenous people are reflected in decision making. This is to ensure that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis regardless of residency, can fully engage with their civil and political rights. Residency, geographic location, including forced relocation should not negatively affect Indigenous peoples' ability to participate in decisions that affect them, their families, and their nations.

## **Anti-Violence and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+**

In 2013, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous People observed that Canada has an "epidemic" of murdered and missing Indigenous women. As later noted by the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, "Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to be murdered or missing than any other women in Canada, and 16 times more likely than Caucasian women." Many deaths have resulted without investigation or conviction challenging Canada's fundamental values of justice.

After years of steadily increasing pressure, the Government of Canada launched a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in August 2016 with a mandate to investigate the systemic causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls. The inquiry's scope expanded to include two-spirited, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual and non-binary people (2SLGBTQQIA+). Over 3 years, the Inquiry engaged over 2,300 participants in 15 community hearings across Canada before releasing its findings. The final report stated that the national tragedy of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls amounts to a genocide, sparking significant domestic and international attention and equally significant debate.

In 2019 the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Inquiry released its final report that touched on almost every aspect of Canadian society. The Canadian government has received consistent and ongoing advice to support Indigenous-led initiatives to ending violence against urban Indigenous peoples. The 2019 *Final Report of the National Inquiry on MMIWG* proposed 231 Calls for Justice (CFJs), a set of imperatives rooted in international and domestic Indigenous and human rights law. These imperatives provide a pathway “to end the genocide and to transform systemic and societal values that have worked to maintain colonial violence.”

The Inquiry’s Calls for Justice pose a broader, pressing call on the Canadian government to establish a National Action Plan on Violence Against Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+. Currently the National Action Plan outlined in the *Final Report of the National Inquiry on MMIWG* is still in development with a timeline of late spring 2021 for release. The federal government of Canada also announced funding to implement the Action Plan. It is still unclear how urban Indigenous organizations and people will be able to access funds to assist with the implementation of the action plan.

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls inquiry final report did not contain much reference to urban Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+. The National Association of Friendship Centres has had to undertake identification of where the urban Indigenous perspective can be found in the inquiry’s final report. The Canadian government defaulted by using a distinctions-based approach that often ignores the unique realities of urban Indigenous communities.

NAFC has been a part of the Urban Sub Working Group on the Action Plan for the MMIWG Inquiry Report. The report is expected to come out in June 2021. It will be equally important to ensure that the implementation of the action plan fully includes Indigenous peoples living in urban settings.

## Food Security

Food security is a significant issue for urban Indigenous peoples. Before the COVID-19 Pandemic, 1 in 5 (20%) First Nations people living off reserve, Métis and Inuit children and adults who are 15 or older, have been in a household that has experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months compared with 8% of the non-Indigenous population.<sup>11</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has created uncertainty around employment and has further increased food insecurity for many urban Indigenous peoples.

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<sup>11</sup> Statistics Canada. (2012). Aboriginal Peoples Survey.



There is a perception that Indigenous people living in urban settings may have increased access to food security programs based on their location, however, we know that is not necessarily true in all circumstances. The federal government's distinctions-based approach has helped ensure that First Nations governments on-reserve are consulted about different policies such as addressing food security. However, the distinctions-based approach does not capture the needs of Indigenous peoples living off reserve who may not have Indian Status, Métis Nation citizenship, or are Inuit living in the South or are not Inuit beneficiaries. Organizations like Friendship Centres help mitigate and advocate in urban settings to ensure that Indigenous people can access services and programs that they may otherwise not have access to and do so in a culturally relevant way.

Friendship Centre efforts to go beyond in-house programming to offer in-person deliveries of food hampers, traditional medicines, and elder and family check-ins. This allows Friendship Centres to meet our community where they are at and provides opportunities for Friendship Centres to understand and address persistent food insecurities and put in place long term solutions. An example of this includes identifying the need for and providing access to working household appliances as well as navigating medical, financial, social, and judicial supports.

The NAFC has dedicated resources towards addressing food security through the Indigenous Community Support Fund and Aboriginal Head Start. The Indigenous Community Support Fund (ICSF) has been a helpful federal government financial support. Friendship Centres across the country have accessed the ICSF to provide food security initiatives to help address increased needs in urban Indigenous communities due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To date, the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) has received nearly \$43 million in COVID-19 funding, \$6 million of which was earmarked to support food security. The Indigenous Community Support Fund (ICSF) is a short-term funding program until 2022 and no long-term investments have been made to address urban Indigenous food security. The Government of Canada's support to address increased food insecurity caused by the pandemic has helped alleviate a pre-existing issue. However, flexible, and long-term funding for food security programs and services for urban Indigenous peoples is needed. Without the announcement of new funding, it is possible that urban Indigenous people will lose their main source of food security support.

At this crucial time, Friendship Centre funding needs to be secure and long-term to assist and empower urban Indigenous communities to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The NAFC's network of Friendship Centres and Provincial and Territorial Associations have an excellent track record of filling gaps in programs and services for urban Indigenous people by providing critical wrap-around services. Friendship Centres save lives and keep people safe. We ask the federal government to continue to invest in these efforts.

## **Systemic Racism in Healthcare**

On September 28, 2020, Joyce Echaquan, a 37-year-old Atikamekw woman and mother of seven died in Centre Hospitalier de Lanaudière, in Joliette, Quebec. The horrendous and degrading

moments before Joyce Echaquan's death were captured by her cellphone via Facebook Live. Her bravery in recording these harrowing moments called the world to bear witness to the deplorable racism, abuse and inhumane treatment Ms. Echaquan was subjected to prior to her death, all at the hands of healthcare workers entrusted and sworn to care for her. Inexcusably and deplorably, the racism Ms. Echaquan was subjected to is a common reality for many Indigenous persons accessing their right to healthcare.

Anti-Indigenous racism in health care exists and stories about Indigenous health experiences in Canada are not generally authored by Indigenous people themselves. Unfortunately, the current landscape of data specifically relating to urban Indigenous peoples is minimal, out-of-date, and not a reflection of present-day urban Indigenous experience with sparse insight into the unique healthcare needs of the 2SLGBTQIA urban Indigenous population. Without disaggregated data, Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations alike are hard pressed to develop targeted programming addressing issues of systemic racism. In essence, a systemic response is needed to address the systemic issue of Indigenous specific racism in healthcare. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people living in urban settings have multiple intersecting diversities that make up their respective identities. These diversities correspond with rights that are enshrined in both domestic and international law.

In addition, little to no disaggregated data is available to support programming and policy positions addressing Indigenous specific systemic racism in health care. The multifaceted jurisdictional landscape plagues interactions that urban Indigenous people have with the healthcare system. The debate over which level of government is responsible for Indigenous persons living within urban areas has impeded Indigenous access to health services. An intersectional approach with multiple stakeholders is required to appropriately measure the experiences of urban Indigenous peoples within the healthcare system and to uphold the right to access health care with dignity and respect.

In terms of forms of redress once discrimination is experienced, Indigenous people are subjected to working within a legal system that is historically oppressive for Indigenous peoples. Currently, there is no Indigenous specific ground of discrimination within provincially or federally regulated human rights law. Instead, an Indigenous person is required to apply to the respective tribunal within their province or territory, select several grounds of discrimination such as race, ancestry, creed, and gender, and then make written submissions for each of the code grounds and explain how they relate to the unique circumstances of experiencing discrimination as an Indigenous person. While this may not prevent an Indigenous person from accessing the human rights system in Canada, it may impede their success within the system and ultimately their access to justice.

As service delivery community hubs, Friendship Centres observe that the federal and provincial government's approach to consultations only with Indigenous governing bodies has allowed urban Indigenous people to become "unseen" by current government policy. These approaches result in inadequate resourcing for urban Indigenous services. Furthermore, the federal government has not engaged in an effective mechanism to be able to "see" and engage First

Nations, Inuit and Métis who are urban-based or to appropriately engage the organizations that work with them and serve them in decision making venues.

The answers to healthcare systems by and for Indigenous communities lies within Indigenous communities. The approach to Indigenous healthcare services in an urban context must feature a dual approach, facilitation of Indigenous specific spaces within non-Indigenous organizations in combination with Indigenous specific clinics and services within Indigenous organizations. Without a dual approach we, as a country, run the risk of promoting and propelling the existing apartheid system for health services in Canada.

## **COVID-19 Response**

During the COVID-19 pandemic Friendship Centres and Provincial and Territorial Associations identified urban Indigenous community members that were particularly negatively impacted by reduced programs and services disrupted by social distancing and a scaling down of services. These include vulnerable and marginalized elderly urban Indigenous people, children, youth, and youth-in-care who urgently require food security, families experiencing violence, Indigenous women in need of childcare and employment, and homeless urban Indigenous people in need of shelter.

With respective governments and public health authorities limiting in person services and programming, Friendship Centres have adapted their programs and services for community members. Staff continue to provide services at Friendship Centres even if offices are closed to the public. Many services have gone virtual with staff working from home. Renovations were undertaken to provide in person services that could not be moved online keeping both staff and community members safe. Urban Indigenous people continue to require holistic responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Friendship Centres are best equipped to provide this support due to the diversified range of services they collectively provide.

Friendship Centres received short term funding from the Canadian Government ensuring programs and service delivery addressing challenges of the pandemic. NAFC demonstrated the ability to coordinate pandemic planning and vaccine rollout to urban Indigenous communities. Currently, urban Indigenous community organizations such as Friendship Centres have no guarantee of ongoing support even as Canada navigates both COVID-19 lockdowns and vaccine roll out. Securing longer-term federal funding from the Canadian Government is essential to helping urban Indigenous people recover from the pandemic. Urban Indigenous community organizations play a key role in reducing instances of racism and mistreatment. Friendship centres can reach urban Indigenous community members in a way that mainstream organizations and health providers are not be able to.

The Canadian Government 2021 budget allocates \$760.8 million additional funding for the Indigenous Community Support Fund (ICSF). ICSF is crucial in helping urban Indigenous communities navigate COVID-19 lockdowns, access vaccines and build capacity for success in a

post-pandemic world. Ongoing funding must be made available to support vital urban Indigenous programming that has been stretched during the pandemic. Friendship Centres will need long term sustainable support in recovering and advancing responsive programming to meet the needs of urban Indigenous communities.

More funding is needed to retrofit and renovate FCs to meet safety standards for COVID-19, be more energy efficient, increase accessibility, and complete important repairs. The Canadian Government's 2021 budget does not recognize the hard work being done by Friendship Centres housing initiatives such as the operation of both anti-violence and homeless shelters and housing services. The budget does not mention the creation of an urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing strategy which was a commitment in the Prime Minister's Mandate Letters.

## Housing and Homelessness

Due to systemic discrimination and the legacy of colonialism, Indigenous people are more likely to be homeless or live-in substandard housing. This poses various physical and mental health risks. Western definitions of homelessness do not accurately represent what homelessness means for Indigenous peoples.<sup>12</sup> Homelessness must be understood as “a lack of housing, but also as the isolation or separation of Indigenous Peoples from their connections to land, place, water, family, each other, animals, languages, cultures, and identities.”<sup>13</sup>

Indigenous peoples living in Canada are overrepresented in emergency shelters and in unsafe and substandard housing. 1 in 5 urban Indigenous persons is likely to be homeless on any given night compared to 1 in 128 non-Indigenous persons in Canada.<sup>14</sup> 14.4% of First Nations off-reserve, 27% of Inuit, and 11.9% of Métis children under the age of 15 live in homes that require major repairs.<sup>15</sup> Only 6.6% of non-Indigenous children live in the same conditions.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, nearly one third of First Nations (31.1%), half of Inuit (49.2%), and over 10% of Métis (12.3%) children under 15 do not live in adequately sized homes for the size and composition of the family.<sup>17</sup>

Statistics show that substandard housing affects the health and wellness of Indigenous children in Canada detrimentally. For example, physical illness and mental health issues can stem from substandard housing, and, in Canada, 14.4% of First Nations in urban and rural settings (off First Nations reservations), 27% Inuit and 11.9% of Métis children under the age of 15 live in homes that require major repairs in Canada, whereas, only 6% of non-Indigenous children in Canada live

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<sup>12</sup> Rodrigues, C., Henderson, R., Lucas, K., Bristowe, S., Ramage, K., Milaney, K. (2020). Developing Gendered and Culturally Safe Interventions for Urban Indigenous Families Experiencing Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. 3-4

<sup>13</sup> Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness, 2012; Thistle, 2017

<sup>14</sup> Distasio, J., Zell, S., & Snyder, M. (2018). At Home in Winnipeg: Localizing Housing First as a Culturally Responsive Approach to Understanding and Addressing Urban Indigenous Homelessness. Winnipeg: Institute of Urban Studies.

<sup>15</sup> Regine Halseth and Margo Greenwood, “Indigenous Early Childhood Development in Canada: Current state of knowledge and future directions” (2019) National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, online: <<https://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/docs/health/RPT-ECD-PHAC-Greenwood-Halseth-EN.pdf>> at 10 and 14

<sup>16</sup> Indigenous Early Childhood Development, supra note 10 at 14.

<sup>17</sup> Indigenous Early Childhood Development, supra note 10 at 14.

in similar poor conditions. Due to a lack of disaggregated data, we do not have a clear picture of how urban Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA people are disproportionately affected. Poverty continues to afflict urban Indigenous children and families in Canada today; and this poverty is exacerbated uniquely by lack of funding due to jurisdictional disagreements between municipal, provincial, and federal governments.<sup>18</sup>

Friendship Centres reach communities and Indigenous adults and children through programs and services offered across Canada. This includes urban Indigenous people who find themselves within the child welfare system, who are homeless/ or between-homes, and/or urban Indigenous children and youth needing urban Indigenous supports to access information and their rights to health, education, employment, and social services that are culturally appropriate as outlined by UN DRIP.

The Canadian government's 2021 budget did not go far enough in investing in the housing needs of urban Indigenous peoples. The 2021 budget includes \$3 billion for Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness. While many Friendship Centres access Reaching Home, it is not available or accessible to all Friendship Centres. The prior commitment by Indigenous Services Canada to increase infrastructure funds for FCs over the next 4 years is not sufficient.

## Indigenous Languages

Indigenous languages are seen as living and embodied; they contain the cultures, stories, songs, and Indigenous ways of being that connect Indigenous people to their history, their identity and to the land itself. Indigenous language is medicine and has healing powers for those who know or are learning it; there is an indelible link between Indigenous languages and wellness. Languages are an integral part of social cohesion and individual well-being.

Indigenous language revitalization is not only urgent and necessary but entirely possible, if it is Indigenous-led and there is adequate support (financial, political, and human resource) from all levels of government. Friendship Centres are uniquely positioned to support language revitalization efforts in urban centres and can do so with the support of its wide network of Elders, Senators, Youth, Policy experts, teachers and instructors, researchers, curriculum, and policy developers. NAFC is a leader in urban Indigenous service delivery and link between Indigenous languages and wellness. Languages are an integral part of social cohesion and individual well-being.

The impacts of language loss have been profound and devastating. Through various historic and ongoing events such as colonialism, enforced European education, disease, forced relocations and Indian Residential Schools<sup>19</sup>, Indigenous languages were taken from Indigenous peoples, thus severing their ability to transmit cultural knowledge and the worldviews that are embedded in

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<sup>18</sup> Indigenous Services Canada. Jordan's Principle. Accessed online on February 21, 2021 at: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1568396042341/1568396159824>

<sup>19</sup> McIvor, Onawa. "Building the Nests: Indigenous Language Revitalization in Canada (Master of Arts). University of Victoria, 1998.

language. It is estimated that prior to contact with Europeans, there were approximately 450 languages and dialects spoken by Indigenous peoples throughout the lands that now encompass Canada.<sup>20</sup> In 2016, Statistics Canada data suggested that there are now around 70 that remain.<sup>21</sup> This decrease is devastating and prompts the assertion that, “Indigenous languages in Canada are critically endangered and urgent action is required.”<sup>22</sup>

It is important to note, however, that some Indigenous languages are more endangered than others. According to Statistics Canada’s Census of Population 2016, the language family with the most concentration of speakers was Algonquian (175, 825) with Cree, Ojibway and Oji-Cree speakers being the most often reported.<sup>23</sup> On this current trajectory, it is anticipated that in Canada, only three Indigenous languages are expected to survive: Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut.<sup>24</sup>

Despite these bleak statistics and predictions, it is interesting to note that the number of Indigenous language speakers increased (and exceeded the number who reported an Indigenous language as a mother tongue) since the last Census in 2011, which suggests the acquisition of second-language speaking as a relatively successful pursuit.<sup>25</sup> However, despite an overall increase in the number of Indigenous peoples learning Indigenous languages, it is reported that less than 2% of Métis people speak an Indigenous language. Furthermore, the majority of Métis people speak Cree languages (5,960), then Dene (1,555), followed by Michif (1,030).<sup>26</sup> This suggests that the Michif language is more likely to disappear given the small number of people who speak it. It is important to note that Métis peoples generally tend to also speak other Indigenous languages.

Nearly two in three Inuit can speak Inuktitut; however, many speakers are concentrated in Inuit Nunangat - the Inuit homelands. Outside of Inuit Nunangat, 10.9% of Inuit reported being able to speak enough Inuit language to conduct a conversation.<sup>27</sup> Relative access and closeness to one’s Indigenous homeland (i.e., First Nation reserves, Métis settlements and Inuit hamlets) increases the chances for an Indigenous language to survive. As asserted by Valerie Galley et al., “[i]t is important for the language homelands to ensure accessibility to the off-reserve population.”<sup>28</sup> Jurisdictional issues and scarce resources in urban areas are punctuated by the challenge of determining which Indigenous languages to offer<sup>29</sup> in areas inhabited and visited by

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<sup>20</sup> McIvor, Onawa. *Building the Nests: Indigenous Language Revitalization in Canada* (Master of Arts). University of Victoria, 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Statistics Canada. *Aboriginal Languages in Canada*. 2011, [www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-314-x/98-314-x2011003\\_3-eng.pdf](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-314-x/98-314-x2011003_3-eng.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Galley, Valerie et al. *Indigenous Languages Recognition, Preservation and Revitalization: A Report on the National Dialogue Session on Indigenous Languages June 24-26, 2016* Victoria, British Columbia. [www.fpcc.ca/files/PDF/General/FPCC\\_\\_National\\_Dialogue\\_Session\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.fpcc.ca/files/PDF/General/FPCC__National_Dialogue_Session_Report_Final.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Statistics Canada. *The Aboriginal Languages of First Nations People, Métis and Inuit*. 2016, [www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016022/98-200-x2016022-eng.pdf](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016022/98-200-x2016022-eng.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Fontaine, Shirley. *First Nations Languages and Improving Student Outcomes*. The Assembly of First Nations, 2012, [www.afn.ca/uploads/files/education/improvingstudentoutcomes.pdf](http://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/education/improvingstudentoutcomes.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Statistics Canada. *The Aboriginal Languages of First Nations People, Métis and Inuit*. 2016, [www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016022/98-200-x2016022-eng.pdf](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016022/98-200-x2016022-eng.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Galley, Valerie et al. “Indigenous Languages Recognition, Preservation and Revitalization: A Report on the National Dialogue Session on Indigenous Languages June 24-26, 2016” Victoria, British Columbia.” [www.fpcc.ca/files/PDF/General/FPCC\\_\\_National\\_Dialogue\\_Session\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.fpcc.ca/files/PDF/General/FPCC__National_Dialogue_Session_Report_Final.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

a diversity of Indigenous peoples. Given the statistics and the challenges outlined above, a compelling case is made that the state of Indigenous languages is even more dire in urban areas.<sup>30</sup>

There are still considerable challenges to Indigenous language revitalization, particularly in urban settings across Canada. Elders are passing on every day and taking their knowledge and wisdom with them. There is a critical need to record and capture that knowledge, but capacity and resources are scarce. There are not enough language resources, teachers, or curriculum for all of the Indigenous languages in danger across the country and in most cases, there is not a critical mass of learners in each city to offer relevant language learning in all of the dozens of languages spoken by urban Indigenous people. Young people are frustrated and acutely aware of a sense of shame because they do not speak their Indigenous language yet are desperate to learn it, only to find that there are few places and spaces where they can learn in a safe, immersive, and holistic way.

## Rights of the Child

Canada ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991 which enshrines the safety and well-being of all children as individuals and collectively within their communities. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has specified in its past reports that Indigenous children's rights have often been "obscured by other issues of broader concern to Indigenous peoples".<sup>31</sup> As such, the Committee asserted that special attention must be given to ensure that the best interests of the child are not neglected in favour of the best interests of the group.<sup>32</sup>

Urban Indigenous children in Canada often face barriers accessing culturally safe programs and services, media and language education that reflects their best interests as both Indigenous peoples and as children. As a federation, Canada and its provinces feature jurisdictional discrepancies. Government funding and provision of services leaves some urban Indigenous children and families to navigate at least two levels of government when accessing sometimes crucial and lifesaving services.

Canada has recognized the discrimination that can occur with jurisdictional wrangling in different provinces, specifically in healthcare settings. Jordan's Principle was introduced after a long and ongoing legal battle launched by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations in 2007.<sup>33</sup> Jordan's Principle aims to prevent a situation where an Indigenous child might be placed in limbo by various levels of government funding while seeking

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<sup>30</sup> Norris, Mary Jane. "Aboriginal Languages in Selected Cities in Canada: A Decade Review, 1996 to 2006, Part 2." *Aboriginal Policy Studies*, vol. 1 no. 3, 2011, pp. 3-28.

<sup>31</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child 'General Comment 11' (2009), CRC/C/GC/11 at 1 [General Comment 11].

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> First Nations Child and Family Caring Society. *I am a Witness: Tribunal Timeline and Documents*. Accessed online on February 21, 2021 at: <https://fncaringsociety.com/i-am-witness-tribunal-timeline-and-documents> See FNCFCS's website for more information, including a timeline of this Indigenous organization's work with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and around obtaining compensation for victims of the Canadian government's underfunding of the child welfare system in Canada.

healthcare in Canada. Although support now exists, Indigenous families often need guidance to know about and access help available under Jordan's Principle.

The Canadian Government's 2021 budget includes an investment of \$126.7 million over three years, beginning in 2021-22, to address anti-Indigenous racism in health care systems. This will include funding for Indigenous health navigators and Jordan's Principle workers to increase the safety and accessibility of Indigenous people accessing health services. Indigenous governments in Canada often will often hire a health navigator whose role is to assist families in accessing healthcare programs and services. There still exists a need to expand Jordan's Principle-like approaches for all age groups of Indigenous people in all sectors (including justice and education). Urban Indigenous civil society organizations like Friendship Centres are a critically important point of contact for urban Indigenous children to learn about their rights and access them in a timely and culturally relevant manner. The NAFC is currently seeking support to expand the number of Jordan's Principle workers across Canada who can assist urban Indigenous families to navigate available supports and, if appropriate, provide them in a culturally-relevant manner.<sup>34</sup>

There is no comprehensive national action plan to eliminate discrimination against urban Indigenous children, youth, and families in Canada. Urban Indigenous peoples have to piece together what services are available to them within a disjointed system in order to survive. The larger Canadian system often does not have culturally appropriate services for urban Indigenous people. For example, the Canadian government's programs outside of Indigenous communities might be perceived as harmful because of an association with Canada's history of cultural negation and the removal of Indigenous children from their families through a legislated system steeped in racism. Today, Canada is still repairing its system to promote UN DRIP implementation to fully consider the valid experiences of urban Indigenous people. Various supports for urban Indigenous children often still include the promise for future implementation of policies, programming, and services to support reconciliation and the elimination of systemic racism and discrimination.

Many Indigenous people in Canada report that "maintaining strong cultural ties is an integral part of how they managed the transition into city life".<sup>35</sup> NAFC utilizes its national profile for advocacy purposes at the federal level and with appropriate federal departments for continued and enhanced funding for urban programming. NAFC member Provincial and Territorial Associations do similar advocacy at the grassroots level. NAFC asserts that there remains a need for permanent and increased funding for programming and services in all service areas that reach urban Indigenous children.<sup>36</sup> Friendship Centres offer a wide variety of services for families and

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<sup>34</sup> Indigenous Services Canada. Jordan's Principle. Accessed online on February 21, 2021 at: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1568396042341/1568396159824> [Jordan's Principle]

<sup>35</sup> Tungasuvvingat Inuit, "National Urban Inuit Community Dialogue" (2016), online: <<http://tungasuvvingatinuit.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/National-Urban-Inuit-Community-Dialogue-EN.pdf>> at 3 [National Urban Inuit Community Dialogue].

<sup>36</sup> "Friendship Centre infrastructure" refers to over 100 physical urban Indigenous spaces located in urban settings across Canada where the National Association of Friendship Centres' regional offices and spaces offers urban Indigenous programs and services to FNIM peoples in Canada. For more information on Friendship Centres (FCs) please visit NAFC's website at [www.nafc.ca](http://www.nafc.ca)



are seen as “‘key resources’ for urban Aboriginal families when accessing child welfare services”.<sup>37</sup>

## Education and Early Learning and Childcare

Access to quality education, health, and child welfare systems for Indigenous children and families increases healthy child development but such systems are often underfunded, inadequate, or non-existent.<sup>38</sup> Racism and discrimination within systems also contribute to a lack of access to essential services for urban Indigenous populations.<sup>39</sup> There have been multiple policies, directives, and laws introduced since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was ratified in Canada. However, many of the commitments outlined in the UNCRC and other legally binding documents are currently not being met in Canada.

There is currently no comprehensive national strategy with a focus on the needs and experiences of urban Indigenous children. The Canadian government’s up to \$30 billion investment in their 2021 budget to establish a Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System may provide opportunities for Friendship Centres to build capacity and provide high quality and affordable childcare for First Nations, Métis and Inuit living in urban communities. The budget’s commitment that childcare will cost \$10 a day by 2025-2026 will directly benefit many urban Indigenous people. Alleviating the cost of childcare for urban Indigenous families allows families to opt to place their children in extra-curricular sport, tutoring and music lessons or to offer families a reliable opportunity of food security and ultimately an overall enhanced quality of life. The NAFC welcomes the investment of \$2.5 billion over the next five years in Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care. Friendship Centres’ programming for children will benefit from the budget’s promise for new investments in Aboriginal Head Start in Urban communities.

There currently is no national Indigenous youth program in Canada. The NAFC previously administered the Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centres initiative and the Cultural Connections for Aboriginal Youth. These programs were hugely successful and essential for supporting generations of young people, providing crucial support in their early ages, and providing health mentors and role models. The previous youth programs were tailored to the needs of the communities, but they often included: recreation, arts, culture, language, mental health, life skills, life promotion/suicide prevention, peer supports, health and sexual health education, and leadership development.

Canada will not succeed without the success of Indigenous children and youth. For decades, Friendship Centres have provided critical support for the fastest growing segment of the

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<sup>37</sup> Patsy McKinney et al. (2018) *Urban Aboriginal Families with Children in Care: Understanding the Experiences and Needs of Parents Living in Fredericton and Halifax*. UAKN final report November 2018. Online: <[https://uakn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/UAKN-Atlantic-Final-Paper\\_Urban-Aboriginal-Families-with-Children-in-Care\\_2018.pdf](https://uakn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/UAKN-Atlantic-Final-Paper_Urban-Aboriginal-Families-with-Children-in-Care_2018.pdf)> at 6 [Urban Aboriginal Families with Children in Care].

<sup>38</sup> Regine Halseh and Margo Greenwood, “Indigenous Early Childhood Development in Canada: Current state of knowledge and future directions” (2019) National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, online: <<https://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/docs/health/RPT-ECD-PHAC-Greenwood-Halseh-EN.pdf>> at 18 [Indigenous Early Childhood Development].

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Canadian population. A Canada that builds back better will not do so unless there are significant and predictable investments in urban Indigenous children and youth.

## **Conclusion**

We thank the committee for the opportunity to provide these questions and our submission for consideration. The NAFC stands ready to respond to any questions or any matter that requires further clarification.

# Summary of List of Questions

## **Overview of urban Indigenous peoples and realities in Canada**

- How will the government of Canada ensure that Indigenous people, regardless of residency, are appropriately and meaningfully engaged throughout the domestic adoption and implementation of UN DRIP?

## **Anti-Violence and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+**

- How will the Canadian Government ensure that urban Indigenous peoples are engaged on an ongoing basis in the implementation of the National Action Plan on violence against Indigenous women, girls, 2SLGBTQQIA+?
- What mechanisms has the Canadian government put in place to ensure that both the National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and the National Action Plan on Violence against Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-spirit Persons are coordinated to address the needs of urban Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+?
- How will the Canadian Government respond to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls call for justice by creating a national task force to review and reopen the cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ that have not been properly investigated?

## **Food Security**

- What measures will the Canadian Government put in place to ensure that funding dedicated to the Aboriginal Head Start program goes to addressing food insecurity in urban Indigenous communities?
- How will Canada ensure that urban Indigenous people have equitable access to food security?

## **Systemic Racism in Healthcare**

- How does Canada collect disaggregated data on Indigenous health care experiences within urban settings?
- In what ways is Canada addressing racism and discrimination experienced by Indigenous peoples when accessing health care?
- How will the federal government support methods of redress and access to justice for Indigenous people once they've experienced racism?
- What is the federal government's timeline for the creation of a national urban Indigenous health framework?

## **COVID-19 Response**

- How will Canada ensure that urban Indigenous people are included in “building back better” post COVID-19?
- How will the Canadian Government ensure that data concerning the COVID-19 pandemic is collected appropriately and shared with urban Indigenous community organizations?
- How will the Canadian Government facilitate urban Indigenous entities to be able to collect and analyze their own data?

## **Housing and Homelessness**

- What is the Canadian government’s timeline for implementing a by Indigenous for Indigenous urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing strategy?
- How will the federal government ensure that the distinctions-based approach to policy will not adversely impact urban Indigenous communities in dire need of housing supports?

## **Indigenous Languages**

- What is the Canadian government’s timeline for the creation of a National Institute of Indigenous Languages and/or archive and/or database?
- What has the Canadian government done to promote the recognition of all Indigenous languages as official languages?
- How would the Canadian government implement a federal department of Indigenous languages and education?

## **Rights of the Child**

- What steps is the Canadian government taking to ensure Indigenous families and children can navigate a complex jurisdictional landscape when seeking care for their children?
- What is the Canadian government’s timeline to create a national network of Jordan's Principle workers in collaboration with Indigenous organizations to ensure that all Indigenous children have equitable access to health care, regardless of residency and status?

## **Education and Early Learning and Childcare**

- What mechanisms will the Canadian Government put in place to ensure the lived experiences of urban Indigenous children and youth inform the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System?
- How is the Canadian Government prepared to support the creation and implementation of a national Indigenous youth program?