



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

The Friendship Centre Movement & Canada's Distinctions-Based Approach to Indigenous Self-Determination

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In Friendship.



About NAFC

The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) is a national not-for-profit organization that represents 101 local Friendship Centres (FCs) and six Provincial and Territorial Associations (PTAs) across Canada. For more than 50 years, Friendship Centres have aided First Nations (status and non-status), Inuit, and Métis people living in rural, remote, northern, and large urban environments. Increasingly, Friendship Centres are being recognized as the community hubs that they have always been and are often a first and consistently main point of contact for Indigenous people seeking a wide range of supports, referrals, and services.

Guided by volunteers, Friendship Centres are grassroots organizations that provide services to all members of their respective communities, regardless of their legal status as an Indigenous person, and have done so since their inception. Last year, 93 Friendship Centres served approximately 1.4 million First Nations, Inuit, Métis and non-Indigenous people across over 1200 programs in 238 buildings across Canada and employing over 2,700 staff.

These programs and services span a range of areas, including health, housing, education, recreation, language, justice, employment, economic development, culture and community wellness, Friendship centres are known within urban Indigenous communities for creating much-needed support structures that are not available anywhere else.

Background

The Government of Canada initiated “*Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self-determination Discussion Tables*” in July 2015, with the stated aim of “[bringing] greater flexibility to negotiations based on the recognition of rights, respect, cooperation and partnership”. Since then, the number of discussion tables has grown to 80 and includes tribal councils, First Nations, Métis nations, and Inuit.

In 2016, the Prime Minister established “permanent bi-lateral mechanisms” with the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and the Métis National Council. These tables were designed as a “Kelowna-like process” in which the leaders could meet to “develop policy on shared priorities and monitor our progress going forward”, and include meetings with key Cabinet Ministers bi-annually.ⁱ Throughout 2017, the Government of Canada met with and co-developed priorities with self-governing First Nations, leaders from Inuit Nunangat, and leaders from the Métis National Council.ⁱⁱ

2015: *The Government of Canada initiates self-determination discussion tables with Indigenous Peoples*

2016: *The Government of Canada establishes a “Permanent Bilateral Mechanism” with AFN, ITK, and MNC*

2017: *Establishment of the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee; signing of the Canada-Métis Nation Accord*

2018: *Development of Indigenous Rights, Recognition and Implementation Framework; Canada begins signing MOUs to facilitate non-binding discussions; INAC is split into Indigenous Services Canada and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada*

In 2018, Prime Minister Trudeau announced the development of a new framework that would govern Canada’s negotiations and rights advancements in the years to come. The Indigenous Rights, Recognition and Implementation Framework, a sprawling policy and legislation initiative meant to properly enshrine section 35 of the Constitution in federal law.ⁱⁱⁱ Part of this framework included splitting Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada into two ministries, establishing a National Reconciliation Council, and establishing a Working Group of Ministers to Review Laws and Policies Related to Indigenous Peoples.

The “Principles respecting the Government of Canada’s Relationship with Indigenous peoples”, released as part of the new framework, states that:

a distinctions-based approach is needed to ensure that the unique rights, interests and circumstances of the First Nations, the Métis Nation and Inuit are acknowledged, affirmed, and implemented.^{iv}

Analysis

Where Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous governments have to work together to create solutions and deliver services, it must be in true partnership that respects Indigenous self-determination in all matters. Within this, we maintain that solutions should stem from Indigenous communities and Nations, and that these solutions must be prioritized and sustainably and equitably resourced.^v

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.

As people living with diverse identities, urban Indigenous people also experience multiple and intersecting challenges, due in part from (and at the very least, not alleviated by) their Indigeneity. In addition to experiencing racism and discrimination, urban Indigenous people generally experience higher rates of poverty, unemployment, precarious housing or no housing, violence, and

overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. These issues are further heightened for Indigenous children, youth, people with disabilities and Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+^{vi} individuals.

Upholding rights and addressing the challenges of urban Indigenous people requires equally diverse supports and responses from multiple stakeholders.

As service delivery community hubs, Friendship Centres observe that the federal government's distinctions-based approach has allowed urban Indigenous people to become "unseen" by current government policy approaches that results in inadequate resourcing for urban Indigenous services. Further, the federal government has not engaged an effective mechanism to be able to "see" urban Indigenous people or the organizations that serve them across Canada.

By prioritizing only the distinctions between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, the Government of Canada will never be able to appropriately respond to the full spectrum of Indigenous people and compromises the quality of services and quality of life of Indigenous people with intersecting identities.

To meaningfully uphold rights and address the challenges of Indigenous people, federal approaches must go beyond the simple distinction of First Nations, Inuit and Métis. The NAFC recalls, supports, and advances the findings of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls final report that noted that implementing solutions (in this case the Report's Calls to Justice) must address "*the needs of distinct Indigenous Peoples, and taking into account factors that make them distinct*" including but not limited to:

- Self-identification
 - First Nation
 - Inuit
 - Métis
- Geographical- or regional-specific information
 - North, South, East, West
 - Proximity to urban centres, oceans, water, and natural resources
 - Locations of traditional territories and homelands
 - Municipal, provincial, and territorial boundaries
- Residency
 - On-reserve/off-reserve
 - Rural/urban
 - Remote and northern
 - Communities and settlements
- A gendered lens and framework that ensures that impacts on women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals are considered.
- Understanding the differences and diversity among 2SLGBTQQIA people
- Understanding that the needs, within communities of individuals, may not necessarily be the same.^{vii}

Intersectionality and Imposing Distinctions

"Intersectionality" is a term created by African-American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991. It refers to the idea that identity and oppression create complex, compounding, and interlocking barriers that marginalize people and keep them from social and economic wellbeing. These systemic barriers translate to disproportionately high rates of homelessness, unemployment, poverty, violence, and low rates of educational attainment, and health outcomes.

Intersectionality as a theory is often used to critique and enhance feminist theory and praxis, which has been criticized for being dominated by the concerns of white, cis-gendered, able-bodied, heterosexual women.^{viii} Métis scholar Emma Larocque notes that feminism provides only the tools to analyze "how social systems work to privilege men and disadvantage women".^{ix} Indigenous and LGBTQ+ academics, activists, and writers have worked for decades to queer and decolonize feminist thought through nuanced applications of intersectionality.

"If I am the object of some form of discrimination, it is very difficult for me to separate what happens to me because of my gender and what happens to me because of my race and culture. My world is not experienced in a linear and compartmentalized way. I experience the world simultaneously as Mohawk and as woman."

- Patricia Monture-Angus, *Thunder in My Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks* (1995)

With "I experience the world simultaneously as Mohawk and as woman", Patricia Monture-Angus succinctly articulated why applying an intersectional lens to Indigenous policy and discussions about rights is necessary. In Canada, the ongoing effects of colonialism have been well-studied through public inquests

"Colonization has involved the appropriation of sovereignty, lands, resources and agency, and has included the imposition of western and Christian patriarchy on Aboriginal peoples. Patriarchy is not the only form of oppression experienced by Aboriginal people, but it is certainly a part of that oppression."

- Verna St. Denis, *Feminism is For Everybody* (2007)

and inquiries like the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which concluded that the legacy of colonialism is violence and genocide. These symptoms of colonialism cannot be studied independent of sexism, homophobia, and other forms of systemic discrimination tied to ableism, residency, and geography.

Among and within Indigenous communities, colonialism and the imposition of Western ideologies disrupted governance structures, kinship systems, and traditional belief systems, including those tied to gender and sexuality. Pre-contact, many Indigenous communities in North America held distinct understandings of gender roles, gender identity, sexuality and the norms tied to these aspects of identity. The resulting prejudices about non-normative sexualities and gender identities were internalized by many, meaning that today, many Indigenous and queer individuals find themselves marginalized both within their own communities and in mainstream society.

Marginalization decreases both the availability and accessibility of supports and services. We can highlight these gaps when we consider the needs of individuals living at the intersections of multiple forms of marginalization, such as for queer Two-Spirit youth aging out of care and needing safe mental health supports.

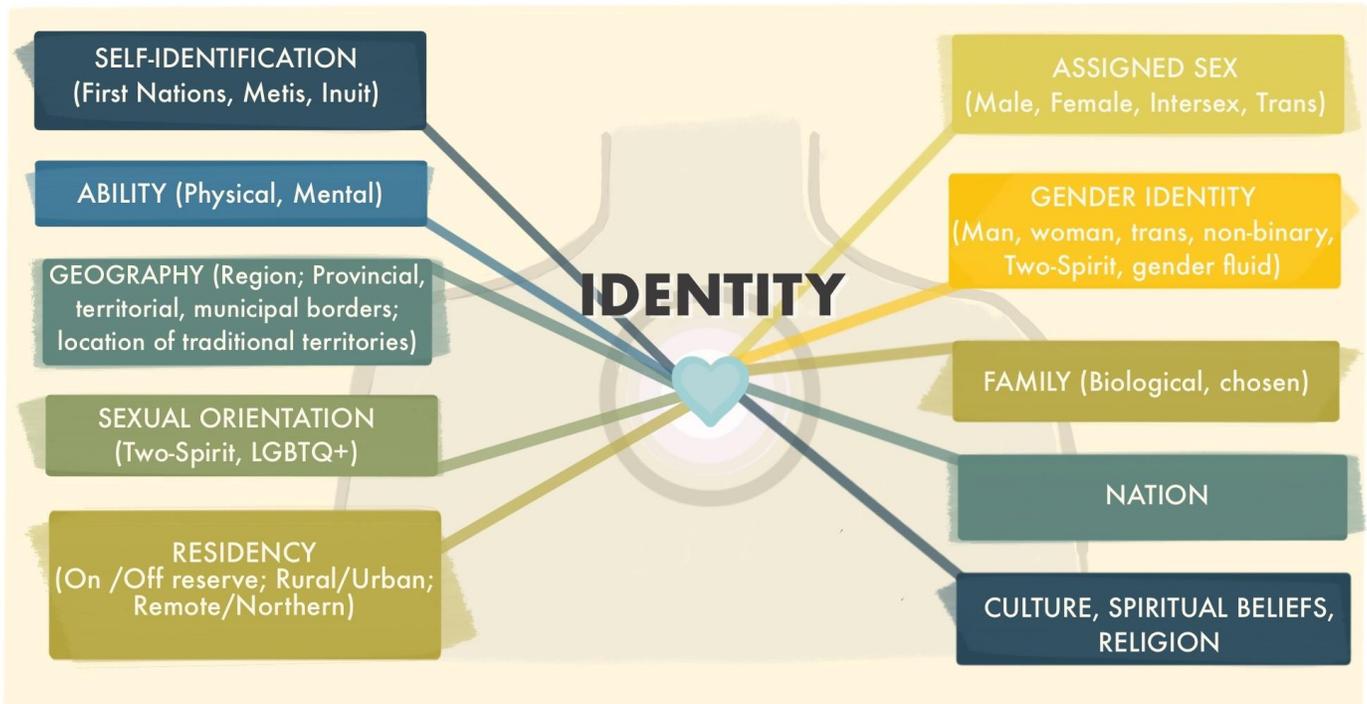
An intersectional approach with multiple stakeholders is required to appropriately measure and advance the quality of life for urban Indigenous community members who are experiencing intersectional barriers and meaningfully address adjacent matters impacting 2SLGBTQ+ young Indigenous people such as housing and homelessness, poverty, mental wellness, violence, and the suicide epidemic.

NAFC Position

National policy discussions and debates about the rights and needs of Indigenous peoples must make space for the many intersecting factors that make up the identities and lived experiences of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, especially for those living in urban settings. NAFC sees this as crucial to making way for more self-determined and Indigenous-led services and solutions.

The impact of not accounting for these distinct histories and the resulting barriers is grave, as people can be rendered invisible in conversations about rights and safety, making it difficult to develop effective policy to serve them. Despite living off-reserve and/or away from their traditional homelands, urban Indigenous people are entitled to supports and services that are culturally-safe and holistic.

NAFC holds that the following factors must be accounted for in any decision-making that impacts Indigenous people's lives and access to services.



Recommendations

1. That the federal government immediately expand its “Distinctions Based Approach” to include sex, gender, residency, geography, ability and age;
2. That the federal government establish an urban Indigenous multi-lateral working group that includes Friendship Centres to co-design policies and programs and work towards closing current policy, program, service delivery and funding gaps;
3. That the federal government provide an adequate level of support to Friendship Centres so they can continue to serve as effective community hubs for urban Indigenous communities;
4. That the federal government provide the NAFC and its provincial and territorial associations with the financial support necessary to ensure that they can work to inform policies that affect the people that they serve; and
5. That the federal government provide the NAFC and its provincial and territorial associations with adequate resources to ensure that Indigenous people who live in urban centres can be engaged in discussions concerning their futures.

ⁱ Office of the Prime Minister, “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples” (15 December 2016), retrieved online <<https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2016/12/15/statement-prime-minister-canada-advancing-reconciliation-indigenous>>

ⁱⁱ Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, “New permanent bilateral mechanisms”, online <<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1499711968320/1529105436687>>

ⁱⁱⁱ Prime Minister’s Office (2018). “Remarks by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons on the Recognition and Implementation of Rights Framework”, retrieved online <<https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2018/02/14/remarks-prime-minister-house-commons-recognition-and-implementation-rights>>

^{iv} Department of Justice Canada (2018). *Principles respecting the Government of Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples*, retrieved online <<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cs/sjc/principles-principes.html>>

^v National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019). *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, p. 172, retrieved online

^{vi} The term Two-Spirit is a translation of the Anishinaabemowin term *niizh manidoowag*, and is a term some Indigenous people use to reflect their culture and gender identity and/or sexuality. LGBTQQIA+ refers to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Transsexual, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual communities, while the plus encompasses all those on the spectrum who do not adopt the labels listed above.

^{vii} National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019). *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, p. 172, retrieved online

^{viii} See Joyce Green, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (2007); Grace Oulette, *The fourth world: An Indigenous perspective on feminism and Aboriginal women’s activism* (2002); Patricia Monture-Angus, *Thunder in My Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks* (1995).

^{ix} Emma Larocque, “Métis and Feminist” in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2007), 57